

International Bestseller!

*Seven Days*  
*in*  
*Tasmania*

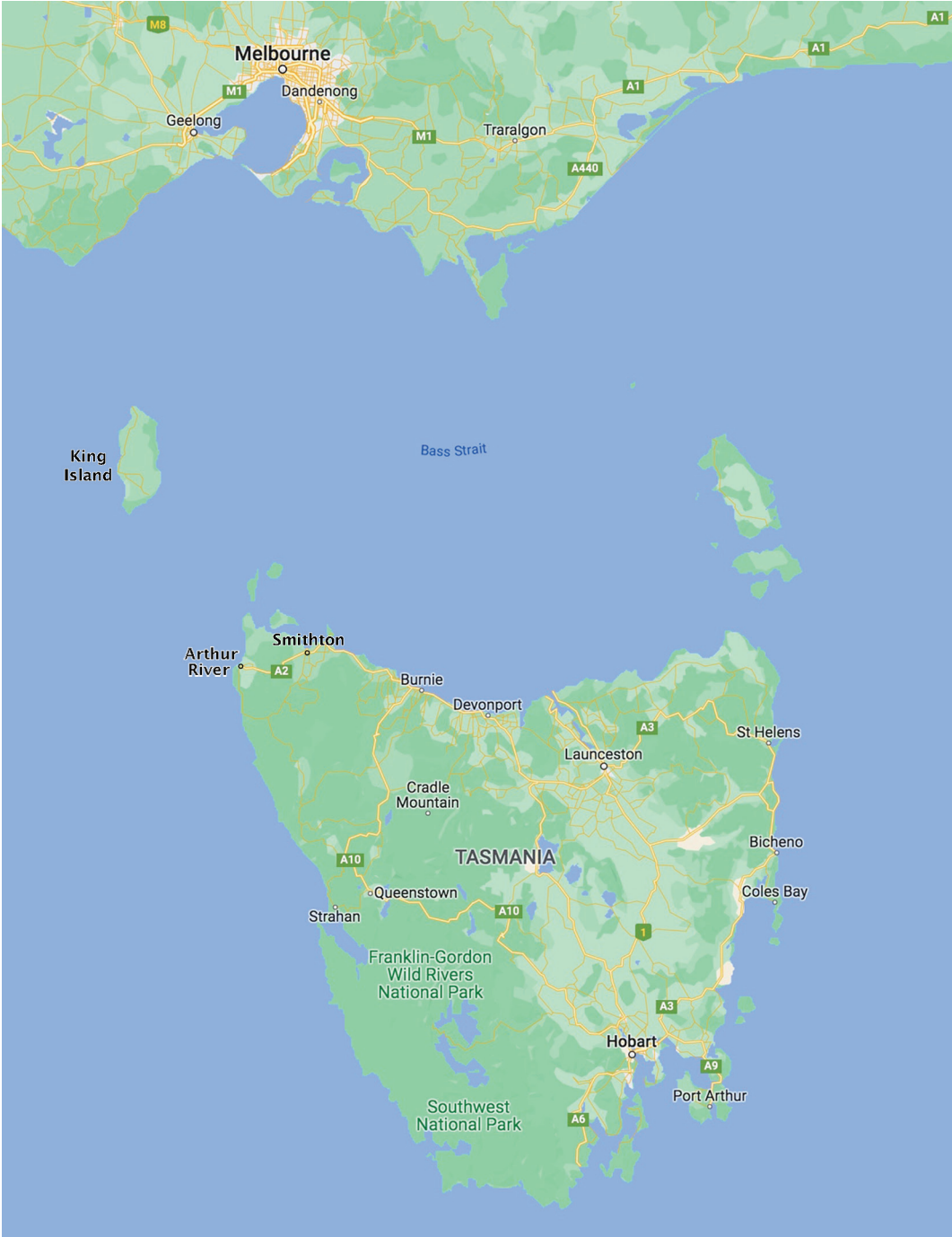
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# *Thursday*

I keep a diary. It's short, with only a few cryptic notes on each day. It's to remind me of the past. Occasionally I delve into it, when something triggers a memory, as it did today.

The trigger was waking up to pain in my right shoulder. Normally it wasn't a problem and I'd got used to the occasional dull ache. But I must have slept in an awkward position. I got up, put on my dressing gown and padded to the kitchen, the tiles cold on my bare feet. I made myself a black coffee. I prefer cappuccinos but it's too difficult to make milk froth and flat white coffees don't taste the same. Something to do with heating the milk I suppose. Although I have a logical mind I'm not a scientist so I didn't look into it.

Carrying my coffee I went to the sitting room, where the carpet was kinder on my feet, and looked at the book case where my diaries were. They are held upright by a bookend made from bright, shiny knuckle dusters and two pieces of Tasmanian Huon pine. They weren't in order, so I searched the dates and took the correct year out of the bookcase.

Sitting in my arm chair I flicked through its pages to find the right one. Marmalade was in her usual place, the rug in front of the wood heater. She woke up ... stretched ... yawned ... stretched with her tail in the air ... yawned ... and came quietly over. She lent on me and asked me to fondle her ears.

At the bottom of the entry for the Monday, the day my shoulder was fucked and had to be rebuilt, was a note:

*Began last Wednesday.*

I flicked the pages back to the Wednesday and saw:

*[DP Geelong]*

And on the opposite page for the Thursday was:

*B meth lab. VISIT!*

I use brackets for significant events that I wasn't involved in and only heard about later. I rarely use brackets. I have a good memory, except for dates, so the abbreviations were all that I needed.

Even though the events on that Wednesday were very important and had decided my fate, they were far away in Victoria and didn't involve me directly. So I'll begin my story on the Thursday.

My alarm sounded a tad before seven in the morning. I'd never got used to twenty-four hour time, so it wasn't zero seven hundred hours. I was already awake, but the alarm was protection. Just in case.

I got up, showered, shaved and dressed respectably in a suit and tie. There was a meeting today. And a court appearance. But my suit was for the meeting as I had to be respectably dressed when in front of my senior officers.

I opened the front door and retrieved the Mercury. It was a cold morning with just a hint of frost. The paper was wrapped in plastic cling-film which I cut with scissors and put in the soft-plastic recycling bag.

Ages ago I had tried to unwrap the newspaper, but the film had stubbornly resisted my attempts to remove it in one piece. I tried a few more times and then, yelling "fuck!" I had resorted to cutting it. I've cut it ever since.

A leisurely breakfast followed, toast, English breakfast marmalade and black coffee, while I did the cryptic crossword.

At work Becky would admire my ability.

"I just can't fathom how you get the answers Sir."

"And I can't do sudokus Rebecca. I tried a while ago, but I couldn't see which number went where. Crosswords are easy."

Well, the crosswords I do are easy! I can't do the Times crosswords for love or money. A wise person once said to me:

"Do crosswords by the same setter, and if you can't do them look at the answers and work out why the clues make sense. Then you'll learn the style of the setter and get better at them."

Wise words!

I used to buy the Australian. Not to read but do the crosswords. I failed miserably at first, but I learnt the setter's style and they became quite easy. Now I get only the local rag.

I do the cryptic every day and I am used to the style. Mainly anagrams with a few others. In today's crossword the clue for seventeen down is:

*Come to Port Lincoln for a start or I'll force you to!*

Obviously an anagram of *come*, *P* and *L*, so the answer's *compel*.

I had a bit of trouble with:

*This doctor stays in on winter nights!*

Before I saw the light; w-inter n-ights has *intern* in it.

And three down stumped me for a while:

*You are able to bid your farewells to such compositions.*

But I eventually saw that "you are able" is *can*, and "farewells" is *tatas*, so the answer is *cantatas*.

Looking at my watch proved that it was time to go. I'm a tad old fashioned. I know that my phone has a clock and it's much more accurate than my mechanical watch, which was on my right wrist. But my Dad had given me his watch so I was proud to wear it.

"Its slow. Maybe it needs cleaning," I thought. "Must take it to a watchmaker."

I cut the sudoku out of the paper and put it in my pocket for Becky to do. After cleaning my teeth I locked the door behind me. It was overcast with a chilly breeze as I walked through the reserve, a shortcut to the bus stop at the *park and ride* car park.

The reserve is a patch of bush and has lots of trees, mainly eucalypts, dotted around, so there were green gum leaves and twigs scattered on the ground. There were a few paths in different directions, trodden grey dirt and sand crossed occasionally by the tripping hazards of half exposed tree roots. Nothing fancy. About the middle of the path I usually took there was a clump of trees and a seat with a back, for three perhaps four people. Next to it was a wattle tree. Actually it was an acacia *shrub* as it was no more than one point two metres tall, maybe four feet. Will it grow into a tree?

I caught the bus into the city, which was as usual on time, and strolled the few metres to the building.

My office was off a large room, usually busy, with several desks, magnetic white boards and a large printer that served all the computers, including mine. I walked through it, saying "hi" to the detectives who were there, and unlocked the door that had a name plate:

*Detective Inspector Felix Oliver*

Rebecca Newton knocked on my open door before I'd time to sit down:

"Hi Sir."

"Grrrr! You are never going to learn, Rebecca, that I want to be called by my name. So try to say *Hi Helix ... Felix*."

She blushed! And not because I'd mispronounced my name.

"No, Sir. It's because I respect you. Anyway, protocol requires it."

I clenched my teeth and exclaimed "Grrrr" when I was frustrated, which happened too often. It was my way of dealing with my emotions and it seemed to work. Anyway, after I had vented my feelings I was calmer, and it was better than yelling out "*Fuck!*" at the top of my voice which, unfortunately, I also did too often.

I didn't need to say "Rebecca" because she was the only other person in my office.

“So why do you call people by their names when it isn’t necessary?” Becky once asked.

“A habit. I think a good one.

“At school almost everyone knew my name was Felix, or Moggy if they used my nickname.”

“Why call you Moggy?”

“Because there was a comic strip about Felix the cat. And there’s a cat food.

“But I couldn’t remember other people’s names because I didn’t associate names with faces. It came to head when at school I called a girl I liked “Susan” when her name was Riannah. She dropped me like a ton of bricks! So I realised I had to do something, and started using names excessively, to remember them and associate them with faces. It seemed to help me, but became a habit even if I knew them. Most of the time it doesn’t matter, but some people looked at me oddly.”

I’d known Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton for a while. When I was a Detective Sergeant and she was a Detective Constable we shared a desk. And then I started working with her.

She was about my age, thirty, perhaps seventy five millimetres shorter than me, that’s three inches in the old measurements, and pretty in my eyes. She had a sometimes unruly mop of dark brown hair, slightly wavy, down to her neck. Occasionally she tied it back in a short pony tail. She wore only a little makeup, or none at all quite often. She didn’t need it. I don’t know why women doll themselves up. To attract men? To feel good? To look good to other women?

The only things I had seen her wear were slacks, demure blouses, practical shoes and, when it was cold, a floppy jumper that was too big for her. She wasn’t one for high fashion, thank God.

Her body? Slim, but not so slim her bones were visible. Almost stocky, probably because she told me that she jogs before breakfast and is muscular. Not someone I would like to mess with!

“Anything for me Sir?” Becky asked.

“No Rebecca, other than the cases you’re working on. Later, I’m in court for a hearing on a case you weren’t involved in. Hopefully he’ll plead guilty and it will be short. Then a meeting with the Commander, all about money and resource allocation. Grrrr, I’ll hate it. And if I’ve time I’ve lots of paper work cluttering up my desk and I’ll try to make it go away.”

“Better you than me!”

Becky had just left my office when I got a phone call.

“Sir, I’m Detective Constable Bartholomew. There’s been a murder suicide. Two children and the mother stabbed in their bedrooms and the man shot himself in the kitchen.”

“I know you. Weren’t you the PC involved with lurching Tom and the dog hairs?”

“Yes Sir. You have a good memory.”

“I do. And you were involved in the Pasqual Martínez murder, weren’t you?”

Bartholomew laughed.

“You remember everything!”

“Why isn’t your DS involved?”

“He’s too busy, so I thought I’d call you.”

“OK, I’ll come.”

As Becky was busy I went alone, driving a station car.

“I’ll look at the scene before I get other detectives involved,” I thought. “Might not need to.”

When I got there I saw a nice house in a nice street cordoned off by tape, a patrol car and three other cars. One Bartholomew’s and the others press because I recognised a reporter from the newspaper talking to a neighbour and a woman from a TV station was holding up her phone sideways, probably recording a video. The two uniformed officers were standing about chatting. There wasn’t anything to do now they’d secured the site. There were no ambulances, an indication that none of the people inside was alive.

I got out and was immediately accosted by the reporter.

“Hi DI Oliver, I hear there’s been a murder? A shotgun death?”

“Sorry John, but you know too well that I can’t say anything. Wait until we’ve investigated.”

“How long’s that going to take?”

“I have no idea. We might know something this afternoon, or we might not.”

DC Bartholomew was waiting at the front door in plain clothes. His face was chubby, with short blonde hair, and his tall body stout, as though he hadn’t done much exercise, but I sensed rather than saw that he was probably athletic. He was neatly dressed but no tie.

I put on disposable booties, disposable gloves and a blue mask, noting that Bartholomew was wearing them.

“Hi Sir, the bodies are this way,” beckoning me to enter.

“What’s your given name?”

“I think you know it’s Bart. But I hate it and don’t use it. I insist you call me Bartholomew.”

I inwardly smiled because it’s one given name I wouldn’t have to remember.

“You’re a new detective?”

“Yes Sir.”

“So something I learned when I was a DS. After you have seen the bodies, look around you and note the house and garden. Might be something out of the ordinary. I assume they’re dead?”

“Yes Sir, so there was no hurry getting ambulances.”

“You checked thoroughly?”

“Yes, breathing, pulse, eyes, except for one and you’ll understand why.”

“OK. Nice street, nice, well-kept front garden with rose bushes, nothing unusual. We can enter.”



Bartholomew first took me to the children's bedroom. They were under doonas, but the bedding had been drawn back carefully and they had been stabbed multiple times in the chest. Bunk beds. Lots of blood. I wanted to scream and look away:

"How could anyone do this. I could kill the bastard," I thought.

But I'm a detective and looking at the small bodies covered in red was an essential part of the job.

"Probably had to step on the lower bed to get himself high enough," I said out loud. "Probably the child in the upper bed heard something because he's facing the wall. On his right side so the heart's exposed. Probably crying. Where's the mother Bartholomew?"

He led me to the main bedroom. She had a pillow over her head but I suspected that she was about thirty.

"Muffled the cries so the children wouldn't wake up? He got out of bed quietly, got a knife and stabbed her first.

"OK, where's the perpetrator?"

We went into the kitchen. I nearly puked, but held it down. A man sitting in a kitchen chair sideways to the table with his head blown off, a sawn-off shotgun between his legs. A bottle of American whisky on the table looked as though it was empty.

"Sorry Sir, I'm going to chuck up," and Bartholomew ran from the room. When he came back he was wearing a different white mask. I smiled because he apparently hadn't taken off his mask when he knelt at the toilet and was sick. But he had the foresight to have another mask in his pocket.

"Did you touch anything Par ... Bartholomew?"

"Mispronouncing words seems to happen when I'm stressed," I thought.

"No Sir, nothing."

"Did you first come into the house wearing disposables?"

"Yes. I spoke to the neighbour who called it in. He told me that someone was dead, and so he dialled triple-oh. When I arrived I checked the bodies."

"The doors?"

"Back door, that I entered, unlocked. Front door locked and I opened it from the inside."

I went out the back door. Nicely kept lawn dominated by a huge trampoline and monkey-bars. I walked to the side of the house and noted that there was no security, it was open to the street.

Back inside the kitchen I turned to Bartholomew and asked:

"Anything strange?"

"I don't think so Sir."

"Blood and brains splatter. If he held the shotgun between his legs then almost everything would be on the ceiling. But most of it is on the wall behind him. So the gun was nearly horizontal when the trigger was pulled."

It wasn't a put-down, just continuing the education of a young DC. So I smiled.



Bartholomew thought a bit and said:

“So it could be murder?”

“Probably ... probably. I think if he held the shotgun about horizontal and pulled the trigger then the recoil would have sent it across the room. But someone made it look like suicide.”

“I haven’t interviewed the neighbour yet. Maybe someone else was here?”

“Have you called forensics and the morgue?”

“Yes.”

“OK, when they arrive tell them to make it a priority. We want the results tomorrow if possible. Another thing, when did this happen?”

“Sometime last night.”

“Why the delay?”

“It was only reported this morning.

“Now we go and interview the neighbour. You can ask the questions.”

“Thank you Sir.”

“Is anyone supervising your work?”

“Not really. I’m on probation and meant to be under a DS, but he’s busy most of the time and largely ignores me.”

“Mentoring is essential. DI Rosalind Baker was my mentor and she taught me just about everything I know. So I’ll do the same for you, if you like?”

“I know DI Baker, she’s one of my teachers at the academy. And I’d like you to help me. But what if I stuff up in this case? It’s my first big one.”

“You won’t stuff up. OK, we all do sometimes. I once left a car at a crime scene and didn’t impound it for forensics to look it over. Fortunately, other than being late, it sorted itself out OK. Learn by your mistakes and don’t get depressed about them. I’ve made many mistakes in my life and I’m sure that I’ll repeat them all again!

“Oh, and don’t mention to the DS that I’m helping. Best keep him on side.”

We went outside, got out of our protective gear and extracted the neighbour from the journalist’s grasp. We went inside his home and sat in the lounge room.

“This is Detective Inspector Oliver,” said Bartholomew, “and you know I am Detective Constable Bartholomew. In your own words tell us what you know.”

“Last night I heard a loud bang. It might have been a car back-firing, so I didn’t do anything about. This morning I noticed that lights were on next door, so I went to the front door and knocked. No answer so I went around the side and looked in the kitchen window. I immediately rang triple-oh.”

“What happened then?”

“You arrived followed by an ambulance.”

“I didn’t see an ambulance,” I interrupted.

“The police officer went inside, Mr Oliver, and a few minutes later came out, had a conversation with the paramedics who drove away.”

“They had a more urgent call,” said Bartholomew. “Last night, did you hear or see anything else?”

“No, just the bang.”

“No vehicles?”

“Double glazing in the front, so I didn’t hear anything else.”

“OK. I have your name an address. We will want to formally interview you, probably tomorrow. Is that OK?”

“Yes. I do shift work and I have a couple of days off.”

“Did you call the press?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Both TV and the newspaper?”

“Yes.”

We left.

“Good interview Bartholomew, you let him answer in his own words and didn’t ask too many questions. But I’ve a court appearance and meetings today, so I’ll be off and leave you to tidy up. I’ll let you deal with the reports, but come and see me and I’ll go through them with you.”

“Thank you Sir. But the other detectives?”

“Not needed. It’s a simple case and you’ll handle this OK by yourself. Oh Bartholomew, we need to swap phone numbers. We’ll need to contact each other about progress.”

“That would be good,” he said.

He gave me his phone number and I reciprocated. It was fortuitous as it turned out.

By the time I got back to my office I'd only a few minutes to get to the court.

I collected the papers I might need and ran to the magistrates court building a few blocks away. The magistrate sat in a lofty, high position away from the riffraff down in the court below.

I sat and waited while other matters were dealt with that didn't involve me. A man who smashed the windows in a neighbour's car. He had to pay the cost of repairs but didn't have a conviction recorded because it was the first time he had been before a court. And a woman caught shoplifting in a grocery shop. She pleaded with the magistrate:

"I have no money, I'm on the dole, which is only enough to pay the rent. I'm a single mother trying to feed three kids and didn't have enough to buy food."

A representative of a charity stood up and said his organisation would help her.

The judge sighed, it wasn't the first time, but he ordered a non-custodial sentence and referred the woman to a legal service that would help her. And the charity.

Then Tom Smith was lead into the dock, staggering because one leg was shorter than the other. Which is why he was called *lurching Tom*. He wasn't handcuffed.

The magistrate was reading, and then he raised his head, spoke to his clerk and looked at Tom over his glasses.

"Tom Smith, you are charged with entering a property and stealing two watches, a Rolex watch and a Patek Phillippe watch. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, Your Honour."

My heart sank, because I knew what the outcome would be. I expected him to

plead guilty and then I probably wouldn't have been called as the prosecution's star witness, at least to say that it was an open and shut case, and it would be over with.

"Where is his legal representative?" as the magistrate looked around the court.

"Not got a lawyer," Tom said.

"Why?"

"Don't trust em. Never av."

"You will have to be represented if you plead not guilty."

"Nah. I'll do it on my own."

The magistrate looked down and thought for a few seconds before he said:

"These are serious charges. I will notify the Legal Aid Service and they can appoint a barrister to represent you."

"I won't pay," said Tom sullenly.

"You don't have to, the service is free. I will remand you in custody until the date of your appearance in the supreme court. Matter dismissed."

Tom Smith was taken down.

It would probably be several months before his next court appearance at which I was duty bound to attend, because I would be called as a witness. I have no idea why he pled not guilty. The evidence was meticulous and damning. Especially the DNA of the dog hairs that proved he had been in the house.

But I had wasted my time. Oh well, that often happened. So I stood up, bowed, and left.

I looked at my watch. Plenty of time before the meeting, so I walked to a cafe, sat outside and ordered a cappuccino and a carrot cake with a thick layer of soft icing. I needed a sugar hit, or that's my excuse. I have a sweet tooth. I ate and drank slowly. Whiled away some spare time. I thought:

"Maybe the domestic violence case will be interesting."

So I called Bartholomew.

"Bartholomew, have you opened a case for the domestic violence murders and written it up? I'll read it and comment if I need to. I think you'll be working on it for a few days."

"I've done it."

I got up, paid and headed back to go to the meeting with a feeling of impending doom.

I won't bore you with the details of the meeting. It was the part of being a Detective Inspector that I hated. With a passion. As well as the mountains of paper-work I was meant to do. Someone had to do it and it wasn't something I could delegate.

I don't know why I was there. My eyes glazed over as I sat silently, hoping no one would ask me a question. I was asked to contribute very rarely, because most of the committee members were beating their own drums. Grandiose plans for allocating resources and money so that they would look important. Unless they tried to take resources from my department, and then I spoke up and put a logical argument why they shouldn't do that. But logic seemed to be alien to most the committee members,

so I rarely succeeded and they reduced my budget anyway. So I sat with downcast eyes praying for the chairman to wind the meeting up. Maybe it was because there were so few women in the committee? The bad decisions that is.

But the meeting dragged on and on, with seemingly interminable reports and statistics. How many arrests, the conviction rates, how different departments needed more staff, especially managers and secretaries in lieu of front-line officers because of the work load writing reports! Eventually it wound up and the date and time of the next meeting was decided upon. I left feeling despondent.

Back in my office I sighed and looked at the paper-work I had to get through.

Some of it was interesting. Like the Department of Public Prosecution files on the likelihood of getting a conviction in cases that were still active because we hadn't arrested someone, let alone charged them. But most were reports from Detective Constables stating what they had done and what they thought of particular cases. Some were OK, but some were a waste of time. I fervently wished that some of them were taken to task by their Detective Sergeants and stop putting half-baked summaries on my desk. I had thought seriously of running a course to teach them, but that was the prerogative of the Rokeby police academy and not my job. So I didn't. Instead, I highlighted a few sentences and wrote comments in the margins and hoped that would be enough to make them think.

I sat back in my chair, hands at the back of my head, and felt depressed.

Until a ray of light entered my office. There was a knock on my always open door and:

"Sir, there's a case that you'll be interested in," said DS Rebecca Newton.

I smiled, because I liked her. And also if she thought it was interesting, then it was.

I liked her appearance, but I was more interested in her mind. When I was a Detective Sergeant and she was a Detective Constable, I'd met her at my birthday party when she was groped by Detective Inspector Vincent Glover. Although we shared a desk we hadn't worked together until I wanted someone else to be at an interview of Francesca Martínez whose husband had been stabbed, part of the three *church murders* as they were called. Becky proved to me that she was intelligent, industrious and a very good detective. And she had my style of humour!

We made a good team, so we started working together regularly, The church murders was our first case; they were never solved, not for dint of trying. When I was promoted to DI, well before my time I should add, I made sure she was promoted to DS, because I wanted to work with her permanently. That was no problem as she had already done the exams and training to be a sergeant, but wasn't motivated enough. So I forced the issue by saying that I wouldn't be a DI unless she was made a DS.

My private name for her was Becky, but publicly I called her Rebecca and she called me Sir. Maybe time will break down conventions and protocols?

"You have made my day Rebecca! Tell me about it."

"OK Sir. A DC, who you haven't worked with, came to me with a story. He's friends with a man who works in Customs. They race mountain bikes and drink at

the same pub. And they're vaguely related by marriage and sometimes go to the same birthday parties."

A couple of DIs I know would be bored by this story and demand it stop. But I know that Rebecca doesn't say anything unless it's important. And so I let her tell her tale in her own words.

"The customs man phoned the DC and said that he might be interested. Two boxes of chemical glassware from China came through customs a couple of weeks ago. Retorts and other equipment that could be used in a crystal meth lab. There was nothing suspicious about the shipment, so he let it through, but told his mate about it. The DC was interested, got the details and came to me."

"Shouldn't the Drugs' Squad be handling this and not you?"

"You don't think I'm competent to handle this?"

"No! Quite the contrary. I just asked."

"I contacted them. But they've had an outbreak of Covid and are three men down, isolating, and probably more. So they left it to me to handle with a DC from their team."

"OK. Go on."

"It wasn't worth bothering you at that time, but I got the DC and another to surveil the address in plain clothes. They're good at surveillance and eventually noticed a known crystal meth's dealer go to the address. They also saw a delivery at the address that they think contained precursors to crystal meth, probably ephedrine. So I think it's time to strike."

"When?" I asked.

"I pulled one man out, too risky to have two. He'll phone me when he thinks it's time. Probably tonight or tomorrow night."

"Can you get a team together, or should I do it?"

"I can. But I'd like you to come along too. Figure of authority Sir."

"OK, Rebecca, do it. And I'll be in."

Alone in my office I didn't have time to get back to work because my phone rang.

"DI Felix Oliver." I always answered my phone with my name.

"AC Susanne Fischer. Can you come to my office?"

"Yes, Ma'am. Immediately?"

"Yes."

It was turning out to be a very busy afternoon.

I got a lift to the Assistant Commissioner's office, knocked and was greeted by:

"Come."

So I went in and sat down.

"It concerns Vincent Glover, Felix."

"Grrrr," I uttered, and immediately got depressed.

Vincent Glover was on bail charged with destroying evidence, the recording of an interview involving DC Martin Campbell, where Martin abused his position by hitting and threatening a suspect.

Nowadays hitting a suspect is a definite no-no, unlike earlier years. And even threatening a suspect in an interview with physical violence was an offence. So when Martin slapped lurching Tom Smith, being interviewed about the theft of two expensive watches, I took the two recordings of the interview to my senior officer DI Vincent Glover and he would then start proceedings against Campbell. But he didn't. He destroyed one recording and I suspect he kept one to have a hold over Martin.

So *I did not want* to have anything to do with Glover.

"It concerns the sexual harassment claims. Up until now there hasn't been enough evidence to charge him, although he'd been arrested on suspicion of that crime too. I haven't done anything with that, because the charge of suppressing evidence is enough to send him down for a few years.

"However, I've heard a whisper that WPC Jennifer Mullins has been stalked by Glover. So I want you to interview her and, if her evidence is strong enough, then arrest Glover for breach of his bail conditions and get him remanded in custody."

"Can't someone else deal with it? I've worked with DI Glover and I'm too close to him, especially because I work with DS Newton. And I don't know Jennifer Mullins. I know nothing about her."

"I'll send you an email of my private notes about Vincent Glover. Read it tonight and trash it."

"Surely someone else can do it?" I asked.

"I've thought about that and have decided that you are the best person for the job. And I have read your reports to the finance committee. They're very good."

"Thank you. I'll read your email and talk to Jennifer Mullins and then report back."

At that I stood up and left.

I'd said "yes" mainly because it was an order. But I also said "yes" for a personal reason. Because DI Glover had touched Becky in a sexually explicit way. OK, she could handle it herself and didn't need me to do anything. But it rankled and I wanted to do anything I could to that bastard.



At about five I packed up, locked my office, said “see ya tomorrow” to those present and I walked to the bus stop and caught my usual bus.

I got off at the shopping centre and went to the supermarket to buy a few things and the bottle shop next door to get some bottles of beer. I rarely drank wine, but I saw some litre bottles of shiraz for only eight dollars! Too good a bargain to miss so I bought one.

“Maybe I’ll try it,” I thought.

It was a nice, warm evening, unlike this morning, and the clouds had dispersed leaving a teal blue sky, a pleasant walk through the reserve. It was rectangular, about a third longer than it was wide, and had a diagonal path that I usually took. As I strolled I saw a couple of people taking their dogs for a walk and a man sitting on the seat; not many people sit on it. The dogs approached each other, their tails tentatively wagging. One, a poodle cross, wanted to play, so he got down on his elbows, rear legs straight, unbending, and barked wagging his tail furiously. But the other dog, older and sedate, was not interested and wandered passed the invitation to smell a pee-mail in a clump of grass.

At the end of the path there was an extension, lined with trees and sandwiched between two playing fields, that led to some streets and my unit.

I opened the front door. It was the front one of three on a block of land, and small, only a kitchen, a lounge room to sit in and relax, one bedroom and a small, dark utilities room that housed my clothes washer and drier, and a door that went to the side of the house. It was big enough for me.

I made a beeline for the fridge, sensing rather than seeing someone else was in the kitchen, sitting at the kitchen table which was to one side.

I turned around, my hands still full of shopping bags, and saw a big, bulky man. Tall, cropped hair, maybe brown, clean shaven, full lips. He was wearing a suit, neatly pressed, a tie with a tie pin and he had studs in his shirt cuffs instead of buttons. He looked well to do. He smiled at me.

“Hiya Felix, I’m Buck. I’ve come for my parcel.”

“I don’t know what the Hell you are talking about,” I said, puzzled.

He got up from the chair he was in, came over, crowded me against the fridge and his left hand went around my neck and squeezed. He said, a tad menacingly:

“You know what I mean.”

I dropped my shopping, later discovering I had smashed two eggs in the process, and my hands gripped his forearm and tried to get his hand away from my neck. But he was strong and all that happened was he tightened his grip on my neck.

“Honest to God, I don’t Puck ... Buck,” I got out in a strangled voice. I was perplexed.

He punched me with his right hand in my ribs. Viciously. I let out a gasp, both of surprise and pain.

“Left-handed, like me, a southpaw,” I thought irrelevantly through the agony.

So I kicked him, my left foot striking his shin bone.

“*Shit!*” Buck roared.

But otherwise the only effect was that he head butted me and lifted me up with his hand under my chin, so my feet weren’t touching the floor, and punched me again in my ribs before letting me down again.

“Where is it?” Buck demanded.

“Not here,” I said in a nasal voice with blood dripping from my nose onto his hand.

I meant I didn’t know where it was, but fortunately Buck took it as in another place.

“Tomorrow. Get it and give it too me.”

He released his grip on my neck, punched me in the ribs again. Then he went to the sink, still watching me, got a damp cloth and wiped the blood off his hand, before he went through the utilities room and out the side door, closing it softly.

“Fuck!” was all that I could ventiliate and sat down, holding a kitchen paper towel to my nostrils. I gingerly felt my nose.

“At least he didn’t break it,” I thought.

“What was that about? What did Buck expect me to have? Why?”

I reached behind me and grabbed a bottle of beer out of a shopping bag. I didn’t have an opener and, rather than get up, I pushed the cap into the edge of the table and brought my palm down rapidly, forcing the cap off. It was a crap table so the dent didn’t matter. I took a long gulp as I massaged my neck.

I was bewildered.

“Maybe someone else will help me think it through?”

So I called Becky.

“Hi Sir. What can I do?”

“Rebecca, Can you come to my place? Soon.”

“Your voice is strange.”

“Blood nose. I’ll explain later.”

“OK, I’ll come. I’m in town getting Thai takeaway. Will I get something for you?”

“Yes please. Laksa curry and I’ll bay ... pay you back.”

“It’s my shout, so you won’t. OK? About half an hour, maybe a little more. Oh, what’s your address?”

I gave it to her, ended the call and got bowls to warm up on the cook-top. That done I sat at the kitchen table, sniffed and a blood clot went down my throat.

“Mispronouncing words is getting worse,” I thought. “I know what to say, but sometimes my mouth produces a different sound. So I think *pay* but I say *bay*. Why? Am I loosing it? Have I had a stroke?”

I drank more beer and meditated about my intruder, so I’d had some ideas when the door bell rang.

I ushered Becky to the lounge room sofa, got the bowls and cutlery and put them on the coffee table. She was dressed in a white blouse, perhaps a man’s shirt, and light brown slacks. Her matching dark brown hair was pulled back into a short ponytail. I thought I’d seen her with blonde hair once, but maybe that was dyed.

As I sat beside her I said:

“Only comfortable seat in the house Rebecca. I must do the kitchen up, then we could sit at a proper table. Oh, do you drink beer?”

“Yes, but I prefer red wine.”

“God has smiled on me!” I thought as I got the bottle of shiraz and a glass.

“What’s it like?” I asked after she had taken a couple of sips.

“Very good. I’ve drunk a lot worse wines in the past.”

I didn’t reveal the price!

We were both hungry and my Laksa and Becky’s Tom Yum soup was eaten rapidly. I sighed.

“OK, you are here, Rebecca, because I want to talk it over with someone I can trust. At the moment only you and I need to know and I want to keep it that way.”

“Alright Sir. Are you going to explain the redness around your neck and on your cheek? And your blood nose?”

The nose was obvious, but she was observant and that was a plus because she might come up with suggestions I hadn’t thought of.

“When I got home I had a visitor. Don’t know how he got into the house. He said his name was Buck and he was here to collect a parcel from me. When I explained I had no knowledge of any parcel he grabbed my throat, head butted me and hit me in the chest. A couple times, hard. He said he would come back tomorrow and left.”

“How did he get in Sir?”

“I don’t know. The side door?”

Becky got up and said “show me.”

We went to the side door and she looked at it and smiled.

“Only an ordinary mortise lock with a simple key! I could open that in thirty seconds. Aren’t you concerned about security?”

“Not really, and no one has broken in in the ten years I’ve been here.”

She looked out and saw a fold-out clothes’ line and a walkway to the front of the unit.

“I’m surprised you haven’t been burgled Sir. I’ll sort out the door later.”

We returned to the lounge room, sat down and Becky asked:

“You have called the local police and you are getting the place dusted for fingerprints?”

I fidgeted and said:

“No Rebecca. You need to understand a few things and then you’ll see why I don’t want anyone else, *anyone*, involved.”

“OK, go on Sir.”

“First, how did Buck know my name and address? You didn’t and we work together. Other than banks and utility companies, and a charity I donate to, the only people that should know are the police and the Australian Electoral Commission, I’m on the roll. OK, Buck might have got the information somewhere else, but my gut feeling is that is someone in the police. Which is why you *must not* talk about it and why I didn’t report the entering.”

“A criminal?”

“I don’t think so. How would he find my address?”

“Do you have any suspicions?”

“No. It is reasonably easy for a policeman, or woman, to access the details of other employees. So it could be anyone.”

“Not anyone. It will have to be someone you have crossed paths with.”

“Maybe. More to the point, why was my name used? Someone has the parcel and has used my name and address. Why?”

“He wanted to steal the parcel and gave a false name and address to throw Buck off the scent?”

“Likely, Rebecca. But second, what is in the parcel? It must be valuable or why else give a false name? My bet is drugs.”

“Lots of cash?”

“No. It’s easy to move cash around and it wouldn’t require subterfuge. But drugs are another matter.”

“What are going to do?”

“I can’t *do* anything or it might get back to Buck and all Hell will break loose. But tomorrow morning I am going to make discrete inquiries about drug shipments to Tasmania, off the record hopefully, and see if that throws anything up.”

“Do you want me involved Sir?”

“Yes Rebecca, I do. I have to talk it over with someone and I know I can trust you.”

“OK. But now I’m off to the hardware shop to see about your door. Do you have a hammer and drill and screwdrivers?”

“I think so, I’ll ferret them out.”

I found the screwdrivers and drill, put the battery on to charge, it hadn’t been used for a long time, and looked at the back door. I sniffed and swallowed another warm clot of blood.

Becky was back in half an hour, carrying a more vastly secure mortise lock and two bolts with their screws. It was a tad fiddly, and we had to improvise a bit, using a screwdriver as a rather blunt chisel and a Stanley knife, but we managed and put in the new lock and the bolts at the top and the bottom of the door.

“Now Sir, tell me you are going to lock up properly when you leave the house.”

“Scout’s honour,” and I crossed myself.

Becky collected the food detritus from the lounge room while I made coffee. We sat at the kitchen table and meditated about Buck.

“Probably a false name,” I said, “but maybe not. I’ll check in the morning.”

Becky stretched and yawned, with her arms above her head.

“I must go. Busy day tomorrow.”

I walked Becky to the front door, said “goodbye” and watched her go to her car and drive away.

I washed the mugs and left them to dry.

“I like Becky,” I mused out loud. “We’re a good team together.”

I shouldn’t have had a coffee at bed time and I was wide awake. So I sorted out breakfast, but found I had no bread and a miniscule quantity of butter. No problems. I picked up a bag, went to my car and drove to the local supermarket. I raced to the store and slammed headlong into the sliding doors. They didn’t open.

“Puck, closed!” I yelled banging them, and walked forlornly back to my car.

A man was at a large waste bin, taking things out of it. I was curious.

“What are you doing?”

He looked at me.

“Why?”

“Just curious.”

The anxiety in his eyes was replaced by calm.

“I thought you were a cop in plain clothes.”

I laughed.

“I am actually, but I don’t think you are doing anything illegal and I’m not going to stop you.”

“I’m a dumpster diver. Supermarkets throw out a lot of good food. Things past their best-before date but are perfectly alright. Egg cartons when one egg is broken and the rest are OK. Things that customers collect and change their minds and leave on shelves. Hundreds of dollars of good food. So I collect some. What do you want?”

“I’ve run out of bread and butter.”

“No worries. Here’s the butter, a corner of the wrapping is torn and you’ll have to cut a bit off, but the rest’s OK. Sorry no bread, but plenty of hot cross buns.”

I took the butter and a packet of buns and put them in my bag.

“Don’t you want them?”

“Nah, there are heaps of buns, more than I can eat. Do you want anything else?”

I looked into the bin. Lots of eggs and a couple of fresh chickens. I picked up a parcel, obviously from the deli, and read that it contained ten dollars eighty two of hot salami. And a large piece of Spanish cheese priced at forty-five dollars!

I looked at a packet of mint biscuits.

“What’s wrong with these?”

“A small split in the wrapping, that’s all. Help yourself.”

I quickly thought about how much space was in my freezer.

“Really, I can afford to buy stuff,” I muttered.

“It’s just going to land fill. My motto is waste not want not.”

So I took a chicken, the biscuits, chocolate with a white, mint filling, and the Spanish cheese. I looked in a carton of eggs, found only one broken and took that as well, because I like boiled eggs and toast for breakfast.

“How often do you come?” I asked.

“A couple of times a week, but the bins are replenished every night. Plenty for everybody.”

I waved goodbye and thought “maybe I’ll come back.”

At home I put my ill-gotten gains away and set the table for breakfast with fruit buns, butter and cheese. I had tasted it and it was excellent. Past it’s best before date, but most cheeses are better if they’re out of date. Especially Brie.

Then, having burnt off the coffee hit, I’d another coffee because I needed to read my diary. I didn’t know where to look, so I turned the pages from the start to see any references to *DIVG*, DI Vincent Glover, or *WPCJM*, Jennifer Mullins. I had to refresh my vague memories of the unsavoury events. But there were no entries.

I knew about Vincent squeezing Becky’s bum. I was there when it happened and I knew the date because it was my birthday. But Jennifer Mullins? I didn’t know her.

I put my laptop on the kitchen table, logged in to the police network and got my emails; I use my phone as a hotspot. In AC Fischer’s email I read about Vincent’s attempted rape of Jennifer.

He’d talked to her and asked her home on the pretext of making her a detective. When he got her in his unit he tried to rape her, but she managed to push him off her and escape.

There was also a note of the sexual harassment of another WPC, Sandra. He’d put his hands on her buttocks and whispered sexual comments in her ear and she’d made a complaint to Fischer. But Jennifer had refused to make a formal complaint and so the sexual harassment and rape charges were put on the back burner. Anyway, the charge of destroying evidence was enough. Until now.

After making a lot of notes, I destroyed the email and looked at the files on Vincent

Glover. I watched the record interview of him being arrested some months ago and read the bail conditions. They included not going within three hundred metres of a police station or Jennifer's place of residence.

I stretched, yawned and went to bed. I slept soundly for the rest of the night.



# *Friday*

There was some pain when I got up and moved, and the bedroom mirror showed a large patch of dark red in the middle of my ribs.

“I don’t think I’ve a cracked rib,” I thought. “Nothing worse than being hit by a cricket ball.”

But I took a couple of paracetamol, because it was verging on bad, with a breakfast of hot cross buns and expensive, tasty cheese.

I didn’t like taking pain killers. Most pain was minor and went away without any help, so I preferred discomfort to drugs. Even mild ones like paracetamol and anti-inflammatories.

Once my doctor prescribed an opioid and I dutifully took them. When the pain had gone away I stopped. Big mistake! Sweats, trouble sleeping, restlessness, irritability, you name it and I had it. Withdrawal lasted about two weeks and during that time I swore to avoid painkillers like the plague.

There were no meetings today, so I dressed in casual clothes. Neat, tidy and with a tie. Slip on black shoes, matching socks.

Outside the sun shined wanly through a light mist, a harbinger of a sunny, cloudless day. I took the usual bus to work, taking the Mercury with me. I hadn’t done the crossword because my mind was in turmoil thinking about last night.

At the police station there was a dull but uncomfortable ache from my chest as I sat down behind my desk. I got my phone out of my pocket, contacted the duty sergeant and arranged for Jennifer Mullins to come to me.

I had four problems festering in my mind. First drugs. Second Jennifer. Third Buck. And fourth moving Becky.

I called the local Drugs' Squad with my first problem.

"DI David Andrews."

"Hi David, it's Felix Oliver here. Were you expecting any drugs' shipments yesterday?"

"Hi Felix. No. But I'll check and get back to you."

I shuffled some papers and sorted them into order of priority. He came back to me in a couple of minutes.

"OK, none yesterday, but we are expecting a shipment tonight."

"Can you tell me about it?"

"For your ears only."

"Can I tell my sergeant?"

"If you trust him not to talk about it."

"No problems David."

"This is information from Melbourne. We are interested in a yacht called the *Dark Princess*. The skipper Marcus Bryant was seen talking to a drugs' wholesaler and we think he gave Bryant a box. We assume it was in his supermarket bags that he took on board. "The *Dark Princess* left at ten hundred hours on Wednesday. We are expecting it to dock in Hobart tonight."

"Have you arrested the wholesaler?"

"Not yet. We want confirmation that the yacht is carrying before arresting him."

"Are you tracking the boat?"

"No. For several days at least one person has been on board and there was no opportunity to plant a tracker. We didn't use a diver because that would seem suspicious and the deal might have fallen through and other arrangements made. With staff shortages we can't watch every boat that may be used, but we had a couple of discrete people watching. We decided it was better to let the *Dark Princess* think it wasn't observed.

"The *Dark Princess*, as its name indicates, is very well camouflaged and a spotter plane would not be able to pick it out in the open sea, so we didn't use one. Anyway, it would warn those on board and they might ditch the cargo."

"They're unlikely to ditch it, it's probably too valuable. But I see your point. Is everything ready in Hobart?"

"Yes. We have a mobile drugs' testing lab and a very good sniffer dog."

"OK. Now it's a waiting game until the yacht comes into port. Keep me informed of what's happening."

"Yes, Felix, will do."

I didn't tell him about my visitation last night. Like him I was working on a need to know basis and I didn't want to alert anyone.

I went to the door of my office and called Becky over. Making sure there was no one listening, I said:

“Rebecca, can you come to dinner at my place?”

“Why Sir?”

“Last night, I’ve had a few thoughts.”

I hadn’t, but that’s my excuse. I just wanted to see her again.

“OK. Six? What are we having?”

“I’ll get Indian takeaway. OK? And yeah, six’ll be fine.”

“I’ll let you choose my meal. See you then. Oh, can I take the newspaper and do the sudoku?”

“Yes,” handing the still wrapped paper over, “but I haven’t done ... done the crossword so return it. I need you in my office in quarter of an hour. Is that OK?”

“Yes, but why?”

“You remember Vincent Glover?”

Becky scowled.

“Of course. Why?”

“He has possibly broken a bail condition. I am supposed to interview Jennifer Mullins this morning. But she might open up with a woman and I need you to be there and ask the questions.”

“I don’t know Jennifer, so I can’t help.”

“I’ll fill you in on some of the details,” and then I told Becky about the attempted rape. “But I want you to draw it out from her. If you can’t get her to tell her story then there’s no chance of arresting Glover.”

“OK. But I want you to sit in Sir. And shut up, just listen.”

“Alright,” with a smile. “Here are my notes about Vincent and Jennifer.”

Becky left and not long after my phone rang again.

“Felix Oliver.”

“Marine Traffic Control. We have just received a call from the yacht *Dark Princess* that there was a man overboard yesterday. We thought that you’d want to interview the crew.”

I was flummoxed!

“What the Hell was going on on that yacht?” I muttered.

“Um, yes, I’ll interview them.”

“Due in Hobart tomorrow morning. I will call you to let you know when. Bye.”

“Hold on. What are you doing?”

“We have notified the wife, but we have kept it out of the press for the moment, except for a vague mention, while we are searching. We have a plane up, but it is very unlikely that we’ll spot him.”

“Can you send me the recording of your conversation with the *Dark Princess*?”

“Yeah, I’ll send it to your phone.”

I didn’t tell him about the drugs. Need to know you see, and I couldn’t trust anyone. Paranoia? Maybe.

A few minutes later Becky returned and said:

“I doubt if Jennifer Mullins will open up, even to me.”

“Perhaps. If so concentrate on the stalking. But it might not be true as it’s only an unconfirmed comment. However ...” my voice trailed off because at that moment Jennifer was escorted into my office.

“I’m DI Oliver and this is DS Rebecca Newton. You two can sit in the comfy chairs and I’ll sit behind my desk. If you’re not happy with a man being present then I’ll leave.”

“It’s OK,” Jennifer said, “so long as it’s not being recorded.”

“Definitely not recorded. It’s an informal chat with you unless you are happy to make it official. Over to you, Rebecca,” as I sat in my chair.

“Would you prefer Jennifer or Jenny?” Becky asked once we were settled.

“I like to be called Jennifer.”

“Can you tell us about the events leading up to your visit to DI Glover’s unit?”

“Vincent came into the station room where I was and came up to me. He put his hand on my hip and then my buttocks, telling me I could be a detective.”

“Why do you call him Vincent after what he did?”

“I like him. I think he’s handsome and clever.”

“OK.”

“He invited me to his office and arranged that I could be there. That afternoon Vincent talked about detective work and invited me to his unit that evening.”

“Did he do anything while you were in his office?”

“He put his hand on my thigh.”

“Did you say anything?”

“No. I liked Vincent and the attention, so I wanted him to ask me out. I did nothing because thought it was him seeing how I would react, and I liked it.”

“Do you know Glover is married?”

“No,” with downcast eyes, almost tearful.

“Tell me about what happened at Glover’s unit.”

“I dressed up a bit and put on lipstick which I never wear at work. I wanted to be attractive. I drove to the address he gave me. Vincent took me into the lounge room where he had a pizza in its carton and a couple of bottles of beer. I don’t like either and was expecting something more fancy, but I ate and drank some to please him while he told me about the work and exams that I’d have to do to become a detective. We sat on a sofa together and then he put his arms around me and said ‘I like your breasts,’ the exact words. I tried to push him away and said it’s too soon.”

“What happened then?”

“Vincent lay on top of me, kissing me and trying to take his trousers down. I screamed, pushed him off me, ran to the door and drove home.”

At that Jennifer sobbed openly and Becky got a box of tissues and handed it to her. Becky stood behind her with one arm around Jennifer’s shoulders, comforting her. And she looked at me pointedly, indicating I should stay silent. Apparently Jennifer had forgotten that I was in the room.

After a while the sobs died down. Becky resumed her seat and asked, with both of

her hands on Jennifer's knees:

"Jennifer, do you want to make a formal complaint?"

"No," with a look of panic. "Vincent will say that it's all my fault, that I led him on, I was asking for sex. And he'll get off and I will lose my job. As he said next morning, 'If you know what's good for you, girly, you'll shut up about last night.' His exact words. So I won't make a complaint."

"Even if we have other women who are willing to testify?"

"Sandra? Who else?"

"Glover's wife, Beatrice, who suffered domestic abuse. And he raped her."

"No. Vincent might be convicted but my life'll be ruined. So no."

Becky sat back in her chair and, after a little while, said:

"I have heard a rumour that Glover is stalking you Jennifer. Is that true?"

"Perhaps. I've seen him outside where I live and I have seen him outside the station when I come to work. But maybe Vincent has a good explanation."

"Even if he has, he's broken his bail conditions and we can have him arrested."

"But I'll have to testify and it'd be the same result."

Becky waited for a few moments to imply she was thinking, even though she'd decided what she would say next.

"What if you wouldn't have to testify?"

"How can you do it?"

"There is CCTV at the station and we can put a plain clothes man outside where you live."

"How can you put a man at my place?"

"Easy. If we have CCTV evidence, then that justifies putting someone to observe your house. Then we can arrest Glover and you won't be involved. What shift were you on for the last few days?"

"Day shift. I'm on days till next Friday."

"How do you get home?"

"I catch a bus on the other side of the road, opposite the station. It comes just after I leave."

"Do you change first?"

"No, I wear my uniform."

"Does he come to your house every night?"

"I don't know. Probably."

"OK. We'll do it tonight."

"Are you sure Vincent's married?"

"Yes."

"He didn't tell me that. I won't be anyone's bit on the side, even for Vincent. So you can go ahead and do what you like."

"Thank you," Becky said with relief, and I spoke up for the first time:

"You won't regret being honest with us."

Jennifer looked confused.

“Oh, you’re here too. I’d forgotten about you.”

“We are both on your side, Jennifer.”

After Jennifer had left I said to Becky:

“We need to act fast, Rebecca, if possible. I know the perfect DC to stake out Jennifer’s house. Bartholomew. If you haven’t any objections I’ll sound him out.”

“That’s not a problem. I’ll leave it to you Sir. I have other matters I need to attend to.”

So I phoned Bartholomew and asked him to come to my office asap.

When he turned up I said:

“This is a need to know situation Bartholomew, and I need to know that you won’t talk about it. To anyone.”

“No problems Sir. My lips are sealed.”

I quickly told him the gist of the case against Vincent Glover.

“So, if you don’t mind doing a bit of overtime, I would like you to observe Jennifer Mullins house tonight and photograph anyone loitering there. This is a photo of Vincent Glover.”

“I can do that. When?”

Be there before the end of the shift today and before Mullins gets home.”

“No problems. My phone takes good photos. I’ll get on the bus and follow her.”

“No you won’t!” I exclaimed. “You were present when Glover was interviewed and arrested, so he might recognise you.”

“OK, I’ll make my own way there. I’ll call you tonight if anything happens.”

After Bartholomew had left I went to the communications room and asked for the CCTV from last night. I was shown to a desk with a computer on it and was told:

“Better you than me!”

There are three exits from the station. As well as the front door there was a side and a back entrance, both locked with numeric codes. They were accessed by an alley beside the building. I hadn’t been a PC at this station and I had no idea what door was used by PCs at the end of their shifts.

I started with the cameras that had a view of the front door and footpaths in both directions and scrolled through the afternoon and early evening. I couldn’t go too fast or I’d miss something, so it was a slow process. I saw nothing, except a lot of pedestrians passing by and a few people entering and leaving the building. None of them was identifiable as Jennifer Mullins. I wasn’t surprised that Vincent wasn’t visible as would be well aware of the CCTV and would hide somewhere.

The alley had a camera at the street so I watched that next. I stopped the video whenever it showed a woman. Bingo! Jennifer Mullins was in the alley with another WPC and she looked directly at the camera, so there was no mistaking her. I noted the time and returned to the front cameras, scrolling to that time. I saw a couple of WPCs come out of the alley and walk away. One of them must be Jennifer Mullins.

I collared someone and asked:

“Is there a view of the other side of the street?”



“Yep, I’ll bring it up on your monitor.”

I scrolled to a time a few minutes earlier. There were a few people standing around and the usual passing traffic, including people crossing the street. Then a bus arrived, obscuring my view. It stayed for a minute and then drove off. So I concentrated on the before and after shots and watched them repeatedly. Before a WPC crossing the street, after no WPC. Must be Jennifer Mullins. Before the people standing around, after most of them had gone. I suppose they got on the bus. Before a hooded figure looking into a shop window, after no hooded figure. I suspected it was Vincent, but I couldn’t see his face. I needed to get the CCTV from the bus and see if the WPC and the hooded figure got off at the same bus stop, so I noted the time the bus left.

I scrolled to before the bus arrived and concentrated on the hooded figure. Fortunately the camera was new and showed the scene in glorious colour. And in detail. I made a note of what the hooded figure was wearing. Short brown coat with hood, jeans and white running shoes, maybe white socks. I estimated the height from the shop door and other people around him, about one hundred and ninety five centimetres. About Vincent’s height.

After saying “thanks” I went back to my office and phoned the metro bus company. I identified myself and asked:

“Can I get the CCTV from a specific bus yesterday?”

“Yes, but they are large files. Can you narrow it down?”

So I specified which bus and the times I was interested in.

“I think you need a search warrant.”

“I’ll get it, but I need the video this afternoon.”

“I spose it’s OK, but make sure you do.”

“Can you email the video now?”

“Still a big file.”

“We both have fast internet, so that won’t be a problem.”

“OK, give me your email address. It’ll be after lunch.”



Not long after lunch I got the black and white video from the metro bus. I played it and found that it began about fifteen minutes before the time I was interested in. The camera must have been above the windscreen and showed the length of the bus. I scrolled to the time when it arrived at the bus stop. A few people getting off before anyone got on. The WPC got on with others by the front folding doors and it was clearly Jennifer Mullins. And just before the bus departed the hooded figure got on by the rear doors. He kept his head down and when he looked up he held the hood around his face so that I could only see his eyes. Fast forward to the time when Jennifer Mullins got off at her stop. She got off first and the hooded figure got off last, a few seconds behind her. Then the bus drove away.

I phoned the magistrates' court to get a warrant for the CCTV and was told that none of them were available until four. So I couldn't get a search warrant till then.

So to my third problem. I got up and I asked around:

"Anyone heard of a man called Buck?"

A DC thought he knew.

"I know a Buck. He's a bikie with one of the gangs."

"Do you know what he looks like?"

"Um, big, tall, tats all over his body, wears a leather jacket with the arms cut off. Not to be messed with. Clean shaven, closed cropped dark hair. Seems OK and nothing except a couple of speeding fines."

Maybe my Buck. The description fits. But my Buck wore a suit and spoke good

English, unlike most bikie drug dealers I know. Although the suit might be hiding tats.

I called the Drugs' Squad.

"David, Felix here. Do you know a Buck?"

"The bikie? Yes."

"Why?"

"The motorcycle gang he belongs to has some drugs' dealers, so we try to keep an eye on the members. But we have no evidence on Buck. Once we thought he might be dealing and arrested him, but he was clean and other bikies gave him a cast-iron alibi. We don't know if alibi was fabricated or not. Recently, no one has named him, so he's off our radar at the moment."

"Thanks."

So perhaps my deduction was right and Buck's parcel probably contained drugs. No wonder he was keen to get it. But why me?

Becky looked in and it was an opportune moment to solve my fourth problem. So I said:

"Come and sit down Rebecca. I want to make a change."

"What change Sir?" She was puzzled.

"This office is too big," as I swept my arms around. "So I have organised for another desk to be brought in and you'll move in here. I hope that's OK?"

"I would like that," she purred.

Well, that's the only way I can describe it. Like a cat. Sometimes Becky would half close her eyes, the tone of her voice would drop and she would speak softly. Usually with a whisper of a smile. She purred. It wasn't a conscious thing, but part of her personality, like my saying *Grrrr*.

I smiled.

"I'm relieved. Later today. I'll help you move."

"But first target practice Sir."

"But we are detectives and it isn't necessary," I protested.

She insisted on it.

"But one day you might need the skills and you need to practice."

"Grrrr! OK then Rebecca, get it over with."

Part of the basement in the building was the gun store and shooting range. It housed rifles as well as pistols, and was walled off from the car park and only accessible by an internal staircase.

We went down the stairs past a heavy security door and into a room where the officer in charge was filling out a form. Once we'd identified ourselves, pistols, ear muffs and a box of ammunition were put on the counter and we signed for them. Detectives don't have their own pistols, only police officers. They're all the same make and model, but with small differences that have to be compensated for. Or that's my excuse for not being perfect!

Ear muffs on, we went through a padded door to the gallery. A couple of PCs were

already there. The ear muffs weren't really necessary because the pistols were designed to make little noise. A silencer built in? But several firing at once were loud.

I checked the safety catch was on and there wasn't a live round in the chamber, before I removed the magazine and loaded it. I looked at Becky. She was meticulously stripping down her weapon into its component parts and she checked everything before she put it back together and loaded it. Maybe justified, because once she was given a pistol that hadn't been oiled and insisted she got another one.

Then we turned to the targets. Arms outstretched, two hands gripping the pistol, sighting along the barrel, then firing. I fired rapidly and I was pleased, but most of the holes in the target were close enough to the bulls-eye but obviously to the left. Perhaps my borrowed pistol was at fault? Becky was better, the holes neatly grouped in a rough circle close to the centre. Probably deliberate. She smiled, satisfied.

Then new targets and new rounds of ammunition. I fired slowly, deliberately, but the results were much the same. Even though I'd tried to correct the aim the holes were still to the left.

"My eyesight?" I thought. "Possibly."

But Becky had neatly drilled a hole in the exact centre of the target. On purpose? Probably.

I signalled to her that I wanted to speak and, with our muffs around our necks, I slid my pistol towards her and said:

"Swap, but don't pull it apart."

"OK," shrugging her shoulders.

Fresh targets, fresh, good pistol, but it was the same result of holes to the left. I looked at Becky's target. Holes neatly around the centre. So it was something in me. Maybe the pistol jerked my hand?

She smiled and said something to me that I couldn't hear because of the muffs.

After we'd finished we put the safety catches on, removed the magazines and checked the chambers. I forgot to ask Becky what she'd said.

We returned the gear. The officer in charge noticed the serial numbers and that we'd swapped. He rechecked the pistols before we signed the forms and left. We went back to my office, now our office.

I had a new name plate made, I'd been thinking of the move for a few days, and I fixed it to the door:

*Detective Inspector Felix Oliver*  
*Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton*

The desk was there, so I helped her to move her things. I took the computer and her chair while she sorted out the paper work and other stuff. Then I remembered that her computer had to be connected to the network. There was a free Ethernet socket in the wall near my desk, so I roughly paced out the distance, went to an IT person and asked for a cable. She rummaged about and came back with one.

In our office Becky had swivelled her desk around so that one end was against the wall but slightly angled out. And she'd moved the monitor to be next to the wall.

“We can see each other and talk with it in this position Sir,” she said.

“It’s better Rebecca,” I smiled.

And it was better for the ethernet cable which I draped on the floor against the wall so that it wasn’t a tripping hazard.

I went into *our* office and Becky was mumbling:

“Shit, shit, shit.”

She was sitting at her desk with a pair of scissors cutting a small hole in a new bra. It was white, strapless, with a frill of lace.

“What’s the matter?”

“I can’t get the wire out,” she complained. “It’s too tight. I don’t need wire to support my breasts, they’re fine as it is.”

“Can I help?”

“I don’t know how,” as she threw the bra over to me and it landed on my desk.

I felt the wires and tracked one to the end where there was a neat hole in the material. No wire visible. I rucked up the material and the end of the wire appeared, covered with plastic. I pulled. No go. So I slowly moved the rucked material to the other end and repeated. More wire protruded, and more. Then I pulled and out it came. It was flat, shiny, tempered steel and when I bent it, it sprang back into shape.

I did the same with the other wire, got up and returned the three, separated, to Becky.

“How’d you do it Sir?”

“Thought about it Rebecca,” as I smiled and touched my nose knowingly. “And if I can ask, why do wear strapless bras?”

“If the straps are tight enough they dig into my shoulders. And if they are loose then they don’t work. So I don’t bother with them. Anyway, I like this bra, which is why I bought it. Satisfied?”

“Completely.”

Becky’s phone rang and, after a short conversation she said:

“Jennifer Mullins wants to talk with me. Just a chat because she likes me. And I like her, so it’ll be good if she unburdens.”

Becky departed and I got down to work, but I was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Come in Bartholomew.”

There was a low table and a couple of comfy chairs in a corner in our office, so we sat in them.

“You got the reports on the murders?”

“Yes Sir,” handing over the printed reports.

“Well give me the details first, and I’ll go through them later.”

“First, I think a bit of background is needed.

“The mother and her partner are Margaret Hurst and Byron Gibbs. Byron’s not the father of the kids, and they’re flagged for domestic violence and they have been cautioned. The autopsies on the mother and kids reveal several recent bruises

committed by the partner, but maybe those on the children by the mother as well.

“The father Damian Hurst, they were married, has been in trouble for domestic violence before, and a Family Violence Order was taken out six months ago by the mother through her solicitor. About the time when her partner moved into the house. So we have fingerprints and DNA from all three.”

“Who owns the house?” I asked.

“Don’t know. I’ll do some digging.”

“Continue.”

“The FVO was the result of the father breaking a couple of ribs in the mother and generally using her as a punching bag. He also assaulted the kids regularly.

“I’ve done a door knock but I learned nothing except there was a lot of shouting and swearing coming from the house for at least a year. I’ve interviewed the neighbour, but he doesn’t know anything more than he said when we first interviewed him at his home. I can give you the recording if you want it,” holding out a disc.

“I’ll look at it,” taking it from him and putting it on the table.

“That’s the background. Now to the autopsies.

“The knife used was on the kitchen floor, covered in the fingerprints and DNA of the partner Gibbs. He stabbed the mother and kids multiple times and they were dead in only a few seconds. They were murdered about twenty-two hundred hours on Tuesday night. Professor Victoria Chan, who did the autopsies, was a bit vague, but the time ties in with what the neighbour heard. Although he didn’t hear much, so it could’ve been earlier or later.

“The partner’s body is interesting, because there was a lot of alcohol in his blood. I don’t know how fast a person can drink spirits, but it means he died of a shotgun wound maybe an hour later.”

“Go back to the interview, Bartholomew, what did the neighbour say?”

“Lots of shouting about twenty-one hundred hours and then all was quiet until the gun shot about twenty-three hundred hours. But the neighbour was a bit vague and said he’d become immune to the noises so he didn’t note the times.”

“OK. So what’s made the partner interesting?”

“The sawn-off shotgun. Obviously it’s not licensed and the barrel has been cut off with a hacksaw and filed smooth. A back yard job, but no one involved has been flagged on the police computers as a potential armed robbery suspect. So I have no idea why it was there.

“You pointed out the discrepancy of where it was Sir, so I got forensics to examine it closely. There are two sets of fingerprints on it, the partner’s and the father’s. And the father’s overlaid the fingerprints of the partner. And the cartridge only has Hurst’s fingerprints on it. So it’s murder.”

I laughed.

“I’m glad my inference was right!”

“And you were right about the angle. The father shot the partner, with the gun held horizontally, and then put it between the victim’s legs to make it look like suicide.

I presume he thought that we wouldn't discover the discrepancy and think it was suicide. It's all down to you that I requested detailed forensics."

"No Bartholomew. You listened and followed advice. You'll make a good detective. So, what's next?"

"Damian Hurst will be arrested and interviewed. And then charged with murder."

"I'll sit in on the interview. You have to go to the DPP, the Department of Public Prosecutions, to see if he can be charged. I'll leave it up to you if you go to them before or after the interview. But there's no hurry, he's not going to go anywhere. Except back to a cell. Tomorrow?"

"Possibly. We don't know his address, but as soon as we locate him I'll arrest him and put him in a cell until we're ready."

"OK. Do it."

"Oh, by the way, it was on the TV news last night and a front page story in today's newspaper reporting four deaths."

I rang John.

"I haven't released any details, so how do you know there were four deaths?"

"I stayed behind, after the woman from the TV station had left, and I saw four stretchers being carried out with bodies on them, in black plastic bags like rubbish bags. Two were the size of children. Are they children?"

John was an old school journalist and I could trust him.

"In confidence, an embargo on you publishing this information. Mother and her two children murdered. A man with a shotgun blast to the head, as you know. But the investigation is ongoing, we haven't arrested anyone and we don't want to alert the person."

"OK, no problems."

As I was working tomorrow and there was nothing much to do, I decided to leave early. But before I could go Becky appeared frowning. She put the neatly folded, intact cling-film and the newspaper open at the puzzle page on my desk and said:

"Jennifer needed a shoulder to cry on. She wanted the support of another woman and as we like each other I'll be there for her when needed. She just needs to rebuild her confidence."

And, shaking her head:

"But no less important, I simply don't know how you do cryptic crosswords Sir, I can't get any words."

I was stunned!

"How did you do that?"

"What Sir?"

"Remove the cling-film without cutting it!"

"Thought about it Sir," as she smiled and touched her nose knowingly. "But the crossword ..."

"OK," I sighed, "tell me one clue."

"Lair is back round opening denied."



I doodled for a few seconds and then said:

“Negated.”

Astonishment in her face!

“How!”

“OK. A *Lair* is a den and it is *back*, so three of the letters are *NED*. *Round opening* means *NED* is around a word meaning opening, *GATE*. So ...?”

“I understand,” shaking her head, “but I couldn’t do that! You’re clever.”

“You’re also clever, Rebecca. I looked at a couple of sudokus and I don’t no where to begin, let alone find the solution.”

“It’s easy Sir.”

“Not for me.”

“OK, what’s an opening for a variety of quartz?”

I sat back grinning.

“Simple after the previous clue. Agate because an opening is a gate.”

She shook her head and wandered off to do something more productive.

I was desk bound for a while, reading reports of cases, and then I left about an hour early.

I went to the magistrates’ court and, after explaining that the case was sexual harassment by a DI, I had no problem getting a search warrant for the bus company’s CCTV.

As I was leaving, much to my surprise, I heard lurching Tom Smith called, so I turned around to see him struggle into the witness box. A barrister stood up and said:

I represent Tom Smith, Your Honour. My client wishes to change his plea.

“OK, so how do you plead Mr Smith?”

“Guilty Your Honour.”

“Take him down and I’ll fix a date and time for your sentencing.”

I collared the barrister, who worked for Legal Aid and who I knew.

“Why the change of mind?”

“Hello Felix. I persuaded him that the evidence was compelling and he’d be looking at a prison sentence. So if he pled guilty he might receive a lower sentence. Is that a problem?”

“No,” I said. “I’ll have to appear for the pre-sentencing, but that’s better than giving evidence and being cross examined.”

I left and went to the bus stop, to get take away Indian and then home.



I caught a bus, but got off early at the shopping centre. I passed a bakery with a cafe, one person being served at the counter. A fast food shop which prided itself on its sandwiches and rolls. Then a pizza restaurant, no one in it but most of their orders would be delivered. The Indian restaurant that I frequented, with a display case of precooked meals ready to be doled out into take away containers. There were two other people waiting for orders, but the seated dining area was empty. But it's early. I picked up a large butter chicken, a large prawn malai and two garlic naan breads that I'd ordered before I left work. Plenty of time to reheat them, and I ordered large meals because I didn't know how hungry Becky would be. I paid, got a bag and walked the short distance to the *park and ride*. It was where Martin Campbell had arrested Allan Hobson for stealing from cars, and given him a broken nose in the process; it led to Campbell's downfall.

While I walked through the reserve I saw a black dog off lead. Not allowed here, but I didn't intervene. The wattle shrub beside the seat was in full bloom, a mass of yellow that contrasted sharply with the dark grey, trodden dirt and the rich green of the eucalyptus leaves. The dog ran under the bush and its coat was immediately transformed into radiance. It didn't care and shook itself, leaving scattered yellow points like a myriad of stars blinking in a dark sky.

I was concentrating, looking down to avoid being tripped up by the tree roots and I was thinking about last night and Becky fixing the door. And that she is compassionate and not hard as nails like some women sergeants. So when Buck came up behind me, swung me around and put me up against a gum tree trunk I wasn't

expecting it. He was wearing gloves and his left hand squeezed my neck hard so I couldn't look around, but no one came up to us. Even if they'd seen they'd probably do nothing.

"Hiya Oliver. You've changed the locks. Sensible. But where's my parcel?"

"Take way," I tried to say, but I only made guttural sounds.

But Buck understood and did the quite unexpected. His gloved hand moved down to allow me to bend my knees and place the bag on the ground.

"I know. After I'd been to your unit I saw you in the Indian and followed you. I wouldn't want to spoil your meal," he said smiling before he raised me up again.

Protest was useless. So I pushed him away a tad and I brought my left knee up smartly to his groin.

"Fuck!" I tried to yell as I felt my kneecap hit something hard enough to bruise it. He laughed and tightened his grip.

"Don't be stupid Oliver, course I've protected my balls! How's your nose?"

Then after that threat to my nostrils, he squeezed my neck and repeated:

"Where's my parcel?"

I wanted to put him off, rather than him breaking bones in my body or killing me, so I said in a strangled voice:

"I'll get it Buck."

"See that you do. I'm losing patience."

He punched me in the ribs, covering the bruise that was already there, tripling the pain I felt from it. I grimaced, yelling "fuck" through clenched teeth.

He just laughed.

"Knuckle dusters, Felix. Made to measure and I wouldn't be without them."

Then he loosened his grip and took off his left glove revealing polished, shiny metal that fitted his hand perfectly. He slowly put his glove back on, smiled at me and walked away.

I went home and during the short walk I thought:

"He's not going to kill me if he thinks that I've got it. I'm too valuable alive."

I emptied out the meal in saucepans and set them on the stove-top to heat. The naan bread was in a bag lined with foil and, as I like it soft, I put the bag in the oven and turned it on. Low.

Then a couple of paracetamols.

"Buck is making them necessary," I thought.

I put bowls, spoons and plates on the kitchen table, with a pair of scissors to cut the naan bread and mats for the saucepans.

As I put my laptop on the coffee table, my phone insistently called for my attention. It was Bartholomew.

"No probs Sir. There are a couple of large shrubs on the nature strip, so I was hidden. WPC Mullins came and went into her house, followed a few seconds later by the hooded man, hood down. He stood under a street light and used his phone. I got some photos and I am sure it's Glover."

“Can you sent me the photos?” I asked.

“OK. They will be on your phone in a few secs.”

The photos arrived and they were very good portraits of an unshaven Vincent Glover. I immediately phoned Jennifer Mullins.

“DI Felix Oliver, Jennifer. Have you received a phone call?”

“Yes, it was Vincent and he said *look out the window, girly, you can't hide from me.*”

She was very distressed, near to sobbing out loud.

“It's alright. I have enough evidence and I'll have Vincent Glover arrested tonight or tomorrow. He won't bother you again.”

I called the sergeant on duty.

“Find Vincent Glover and arrest him for breaking his bail conditions. Then put him in a cell and inform me tomorrow. He'll probably be at home later tonight. I'll give you his address.”

Then I waited.

I didn't have to wait long as Becky arrived promptly on the dot of six. I let her in the front door and showed her to the kitchen. For the first time, that I'd seen, she was dressed in a skirt, just above her bare knees, and a blouse that showed off her figure.

“Have you had another run-in with Buck?”

“How do you know?”

“You have fresh red marks on your neck and you are limping slightly.”

“Observant Rebecca. But he didn't head butt me again so my nose is OK. As you'll have noticed.”

“Well I *am* a detective Sir.”

“I'll tell you about Buck later. What'll you drink?”

“Do I have a choice? Smiling.

“Yes, white wine, red wine or beer.”

“Red wine, obviously.”

I put the food on the kitchen table and a new bottle of wine and sat down opposite her.

“I hadn't finished the last one. Where is it?”

“I thought red wine went off.”

“So long that the screw cap is on tightly it'll be fine.”

So I got the half full bottle and poured her a drink.

“Yummy,” she said, as she tucked in. “Save the new bottle till later.”

We ate slowly, savouring the food. And when we had finished I said:

“Rebecca, go into the lounge room while I tidy up.”

“No Sir, I'll help you.”

So we put the left-overs in the fridge and washed up. The kitchen was as clean as when I came home.

We went to the lounge room and sat on the sofa. Because I am left-handed, I grabbed the left end.

When you're facing the sofa.

“One thing stuck with me from school,” I meditated after we’d sat down. “A teacher asked us how to describe left and right, and clockwise and anti-clockwise without any diagrams, just speech. It can’t be done! What is the right end of a sofa? Either end, depending on where you are facing. And clock hands go anti-clockwise if you view the dial in a mirror. It’s like love. Not everything can be explained.”

“OK,” said Becky laughing, “to distract you from your very interesting thoughts, tell me what happened this evening.”

I then narrated the story, leaving nothing out, and she nodded when I said Buck wouldn’t kill me because I was more useful alive than dead.

“So have you thought any more about the parcel?” she asked.

I opened the laptop to show a map of the bottom part of Victoria, the Bass Strait and all of Tasmania, and then sat back.

“Two things happened today that you don’t know about. I called the Drugs’ Squad and the Marine Police called me.

“The Drugs’ Squad told me that they don’t know of any drugs that came into Tasmania on Wednesday to Friday. But they *do* know of a likely shipment arriving tomorrow. It’s on a yacht, the *Dark Princess*.

“Then Marine Police called and told me that a man had gone overboard southwest of Arthur River on Thursday. The *same* yacht. They sent me a recording. Want to hear it? It’s on my phone.”

“Yes please.”

So I got my phone out and set it to play the conversation:

*“Victoria seven eight five two zero, the Dark Princess.”*

*“Go ahead Dark Princess.”*

*“I am Prandeep Singh. We have lost a man overboard southwest of Arthur River.”*

*“Who?”*

*“The skipper, Marcus Bryant.”*

*“When?”*

*“About twelve thirty hours yesterday.”*

*“Why didn’t you call us when it happened?”*

*“I tried to contact you, but the transmitter was not working and we were out of range of phone coverage. There was a squall yesterday and we had our hands full with the boat. So I have just got to the transmitter. The power plug had come out of the back.”*

*“Did you set off an EPIRB?”*

*“No. It would be of no use because it would show our position on the yacht and not the position that he went overboard. We were having breakfast in the cabin and Marcus was on deck. We did not hear anything and did not realise he had gone overboard until we had finished and went on deck. She was doing about ten knots and he was not wearing a life jacket, so we did not know where to search.”*

*“Why didn’t you dock in Strahan?”*

*“You are in the mainland?”*

"Yes, Melbourne. Why?"

"Strahan is in Macquarie harbour and the entrance is named Hells Gates for a good reason. It is narrow with rough water and any yacht going through there is doomed, flung against the rocks and broken up."

"So when will you be in port?"

"In Hobart? Sometime tomorrow morning."

"OK Dark Princess. You will be met by the police and questioned. Later there will be an inquest."

"Impeccable English," I said, "and pronounced perfectly. "Indian or Pakistani."

I drew a large breath in, exhaled slowly and continued:

"Look at the map. The *Dark Princess* left Geelong in the morning on Wednesday."

Becky leaned towards me so that our heads were nearly touching and traced her left index finger from Port Phillip Bay to Arthur River, then went on to the southern tip of Tasmania. Our thighs were touching lightly, I felt her hand brush mine and I couldn't help smelling her body scent.

"No perfume, I like her scent," I thought.

She turned to me and said:

"She should have arrived tonight Sir."

"No, there was a storm that delayed her. It had petered out by the time it came to Hobart so we didn't know about it, except if you'd watched the TV weather reports."

"So?"

"Thursday morning she was off the north-west coast and the only likely place is Arthur River. Otherwise there's only Strahan and it's too far south for the yacht to have reached it. And the man overboard message confirms it.

"Arthur River's about six hours from Hobart, but if you go the scenic route then it's about seven hours. Stop for lunch on the way and you could be in Hobart about four or five in the afternoon."

"And you found Buck in your kitchen when you got home."

"Yes. It all ties in. I think the *Dark Princess* off-loaded drugs at Arthur River, and they were brought by car to Hobart. Buck thinks I was the courier, so someone must have given him my name and address. The real courier probably has the drugs. But we don't know who he or she is."

"Which is why you don't want to talk about it."

"Exactly. It might be someone in the Drugs' Squad or elsewhere in the police force."

I sat back and gritted my teeth.

"Grrrr."

"Could be anyone," said Becky. "If the courier is in Hobart he could have driven up the night before. But he could be in the north of the state and the drugs are somewhere up there. So what do we do?"

"I don't know, Rebecca, I have no idea. We can't investigate normally or we might alert the courier. So we are on our own."

She shrugged, looking perplexed.

"I think," she said eventually, "It's probably someone you know."

"It needn't be. Maybe my name was chosen randomly?"

"I don't think so. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that you need to be *very* careful until it's resolved in some way."

We sat side by side on the sofa with Becky looking down at the laptop. My thoughts were about her, and I had to drag myself back from that very pleasant meditation to the task at hand.

I exhaled sharply.

"Grrrr. I suppose we have to wait until someone gets in touch with me again. I don't think it will be long."

"By the way, any news about Jennifer Mullins?" Becky asked.

"Buck made it slip from my mind. It's all good. I went through the CCTV this afternoon. First, the camera that showed the other side of the street to the station and I found a hooded man that seemed to be stalking her. Then the CCTV on the bus she boarded and the hooded man boarded too and both got off at the same stop.

"Bartholomew phoned me before you arrived and sent me some photos of the hooded man outside Jennifer's home. Here, look," as I gave Becky my phone.

Becky looked and smiled.

"That's excellent. Proof positive that it's Vincent Glover. What are you going to do?"

"Arrest him and put him behind bars. Coffee?" I asked.

"Yes please, black no sugar."

Becky prowled about my unit while I made coffee, percolated with ground coffee beans.

When I returned with our drinks she said:

"Do you have a car Sir?"

"Yes. Parked out the front on the street. Traffic's terrible in Hobart so I take buses to work and only drive locally or at weekends."

"What do you do at weekends?"

I was flattered by her interest.

"In season I play cricket for the Kingborough team. I've a match on Saturday, fifty over game. Out of season I'm at a loose end, except for indoor cricket. I wish I had a dog, but this place is too small."

"Bat or bowl?"

"Bat. But I do bowl occasionally. Spinners. Why?"

"My Dad played cricket. He was in the state side a couple of times, so I'm interested."

"Ah, that explains it. I recognised the name Newton, but I didn't know that you're his daughter."

"Cricket's a bit rough. Do you ever get hurt?"

"A few times, when I missed a fast bowler's ball. Had a couple of ribs cracked."

"What about your heart?" with concern in her voice.



“Remember, Rebecca, I’m left-handed, so most of the bruising’s on my right side. Anyway, at my level bowlers are not good with left-handers and most of the time I can shoulder arms or hit the ball. Hopefully not to slips!”

And I grinned.

“What do you do out of work, Rebecca?”

“I don’t have a hobby, if that’s what you mean. I run, both exercise and for pleasure. And I swim. I’ve done the Hobart to Bellerive across the Derwent a few times.”

She smiled.

“You should come and watch Sir, but it’s not a spectator sport.”

“I might do that. Walk to the middle of the Tasman bridge and watch from up there.”

I dropped my head and was silent.

After a few seconds Becky asked:

“What are you thinking about?”

I don’t know why, but as you know I’m a tad impetuous and I was caught off guard. So I blurted out:

“Your knees.”

She positively chortled! She straightened her legs, wiggled her toes and tried to say through the laughter:

“My *knees!* I have heard of foot fetishes, but never knees! *And* coupled with your unhealthy interest in my bras today!”

*She’d laughed at me.* I should’ve let it go, but I looked up, with my face reddening, and blundered on.

“I have only seen you in trousers. It’s the first time that I’ve seen your legs.”

She looked at me grinning:

“What about my breasts?”

*She’d laughed at me.* And I had a snowball’s chance in Hell of seeing them, let alone touching them. I wanted to dig a deep hole, crawl into it and bury myself. But what is done is done, and I couldn’t undo my words. So I gritted my teeth and said:

“Lets get back to the drugs Rebecca.”

She frowned.

“But ...”

“Puck! Fuck! Drop it Rebecca. It doesn’t matter and Buck’s more important.”

“OK Sir. But I’ll say that if I call you Felix then you’ll know I want a relationship with you. Outside work.”

I shrugged, knowing it wouldn’t happen.

“I need to go,” she said flatly she got up.

I washed up, put the left-overs in the fridge and went to bed, setting the alarm by habit, even though it wasn’t necessary.

I was devastated, depressed. I lay on my back looking at the ceiling, regretting my faux pas.

“Fuck,” I yelled.



I grabbed the alarm clock from the bedside table and threw it across the room. The battery came out as it crashed into the wall and the incessant ticking stopped.

Could I work with her after that? Probably, if both of us avoided anything personal and concentrated on work.

“It was a bad idea, moving her into my office,” I thought.

# *Saturday*

If you want a nine to five, five days a week job then detective work is certainly not the job for you. We work when some case requires it, maybe twelve or fourteen hours straight on weekends, hoping to get some down time in the next week. But that's not always possible.

On a dull Saturday morning I woke to an overcast, drizzling day and I got two text messages. One was expected, putting off the cricket match until tomorrow, and one from Marine Traffic Control, telling me that the yacht was due to dock at 10 am.

Earlier than I expected, so I had to get a hurry on if I was going to get in to work and then to the docks. There wasn't a bus at the right time so I called Becky:

"Rebecca, it's raining, so can you come to my place and pick me up?"

"About my knees?" she teased.

"Drop it," I said in a voice echoing the weather. "It's work. Can we go together to the docks. Is that OK?"

"Yes, I'll come over," in a business like voice.

While I was dressing and I was just drinking a second coffee before I went out, my phone told me I had another text message:

*Leave parcel under seat in reserve at 4 or your dead.*

Buck knows my phone number! How?

I replied:

*Can't I'm busy, but I will get it and text you. Monday?*

I hoped that would put him off for a day or two.

He replied:

*See that you do its your last chance.*

Becky arrived alone wearing slacks and she said:

“The police are in the other car. What’s wrong?”

“Buck has upped the ante, but I’ll tell you about it later,” as I received another text message:

*Glover arrested last night. Bartholomew.*

I got in passenger’s seat and said:

“Vincent’s been arrested, so I’ll interview him this afternoon and get him in custody. Thanks for chauffeuring me.”

“All in the service Sir,” she said dourly.

About ten in the morning the *Dark Princess* limped into harbour. She was OK, but the two crew members were battered and bruised after the storm that they had endured.

She had been shadowed all the way up Storm Bay by unmarked police boats, apparently out for a spot of fishing, but actually to see that nothing happened during her slow progress to the port under motor power.

There was a welcoming party for her arrival.

I and Becky were there with our two cars, to question the crew members about the death of Marcus Bryant. We were set to whisk them away to an interview room. The Drugs’ Squad and DI David Andrews were there with two cars, a mobile testing lab in a van, a sniffer dog and a search warrant. And someone had noticed and called the press, so John, a couple other reporters and a cameraman arrived.

So the dock was crowded! And no one, certainly not me, had informed the Drugs’ Squad that other police would be there. They were understandably bemused!

Prandeep Singh and Kent Clarke, the other crew member, expected someone to meet them, but they were a bit put out to see so many. The senior officer of the Drugs’ Squad boarded first, with his search warrant.

The search of the yacht was thorough, painstakingly looking everywhere and swabbing everything. The police and the sniffer dog found nothing. And the diver found lots of rubbish, but nothing that could hold drugs. The yacht was clean! No trace of drugs on the boat.

During the search, the police took out the radio and found that it was in two parts and both the receiver and the transmitter had plug-in power cables. Behind the transmitter there was a thousand dollars which was given to me in a forensic’s bag.

“You can have this Felix,” said David Andrews, “but I need to check the crew for drugs before I hand them over to you for interviews.”

I waved them on and then waited patiently to be given the two crewmen.

They were searched, the sniffer dog ran her nose over them, and they were swabbed, the samples taken to the van.

Nothing, so they were handed over to me. John came up:

“You are busy DI Oliver! It’s drugs is it?”

I laughed.

“At the moment, John, you know as much as I do. Talk to the senior officer,” pointing at him.

The senior officer phoned his counter-part in the marine police and told him the news. And then DI David Andrews called the Melbourne Drug’s Squad and informed them of the results, telling me afterwards:

“They asked if there could be some mistake? They were sure that the *Dark Princess* carried drugs, probably crystal meth, and they can’t arrest the wholesaler if we don’t find something. I was a bit miffed and said that they can come down here and do their own search, but we haven’t found anything. Zilch. That yacht was *not* carrying drugs and, as far as I can tell, it has *never* had drugs on board. But we’ll search again and hold the yacht with a police guard on her until they tell us what to do.”

At that moment, the sniffer dog bounded up to me, tail wagging and a big grin on her face. Her handler followed behind her and exasperatedly yelled:

“Stop Marmalade! Sit!” shaking his head. “If she wasn’t an excellent sniffer dog I would pension her off and rehouse her, because some of the time she doesn’t follow orders. But she’s the best.”

“Why is she called Marmalade? That’s an unusual name.”

“Because of her colour, light tan shot through with darker orange.”

“I’d take her,” fondling her ears, “would you like to live with me, Marmalade? But where I live at the moment is not suitable for dogs,” said to her handler.

“She’s your’s if you move, I’m training replacements.”

And he put her lead on and both went away, Marmalade wagging her tail happily.

The two crewmen were in my hands. Becky and I had a day to prepare for this. I decided that they would be taken to two interview rooms and questioned separately, in the hope of them telling contradictory stories. The first to be questioned was Prandeep. Tall, lean, swarthy, with a turban concealing his hair and a jet black beard.

I introduced us:

“Recorded interview with Detective Inspector Felix Oliver and Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton. Your full name?”

“Prandeep Gupta Singh.”

“An Indian name?”

“My father is an Indian, but he was born in Australia. My mother is white. My skin colour takes after my father.”

“Why the turban?”

“I am a Sikh and like all Sikh’s I am not allowed to cut my hair. So I wear a turban.”

“When did you learn to sail?”

“My father sailed and when I was a child I learned to sail in dinghies. I became interested and managed to get a job on an ocean going yacht. I have been sailing ever since then.”

“Do you do it full time?”

“No. I work full time as a cook in an Indian restaurant. I sail when I am hired by someone and the manager gives me time off.”

“How does that work?”

“The staff at the marinas know me. It is where I met Kent Clarke. And when they hear of a job they put the skipper or the owner in touch with me.”

“Have you been on the *Dark Princess* before?”

“Yes. A couple of trips including a Melbourne to Hobart race last year.”

“So you know the yacht?”

“Yes.”

“I have been told that the *Dark Princess* is built for four crew, but there were only three of you. Why?”

“The skipper Marcus wanted to try her out and the weather forecast was for fine weather, so he decided to see how three crewmen would manage her.”

“Tell me about the trip before Marcus went overboard.”

“We set out on Wednesday mid-morning. There were fair winds, so we made good time over Bass Strait. She went well and we had no problems. We headed south and passed King Island in the night.

“The next morning we were off the coast of Tasmania about ten miles from the coast.”

“Miles?”

“Nautical miles.”

“Why so far?”

“There were better winds. And if she drifted to the east we would not hit anything.”

“Did you stop anywhere?”

“No.”

“What happened that morning?”

“Marcus had his breakfast and then took over while I and Kent had something to eat.”

“Only one man on deck?”

“Yes. There was nothing to do except check the bearing. She was sailing by herself.”

“Go on.”

“Kent and I had breakfast and when I finished, it was half an hour at least, I went up to see if there was anything I could do. That was when I found there was no one on deck. Marcus must have gone overboard.”

“Was he wearing a life jacket?”

“No. He only wore a life jacket in bad weather.”

“Did you wear one?”

“Sometimes, but not always.”

“Did you hear anything?”

“No. We had the radio on and we were listening to music.”

“What then?”

“I called Kent up on deck. He searched with his binoculars and did not see anything. We think that Marcus had gone overboard at least a few minutes before.”

“Did you turn around and search?”

“There was no point. She was doing over ten knots so he might have been five or six nautical miles away.”

“I’m not a sailor, so what’s that in kilometres?”

“About ten kilometres, perhaps more depending on the time Kent and I were in the cabin. Do you know how hard to see a man in the ocean? Unless we happened to be very close to him we would not see him. A million to one chance. And the water was very cold so he would not have lasted long.”

“What was he wearing?”

“Shirt and slacks, no wet weather gear and no life jacket.”

“You didn’t set off the EPIRB. Why?”

“There was no point. It would show where the yacht was and we were a long way from where he went in. So it would not have helped.”

“Not *wouldn’t* but *would not*,” I thought and said:

“Next?”

“I decided to radio for help. I could give the rough coordinates of the spot and maybe a plane would spot him. Then I found the transmitter was not working and we were too far out to phone triple zero. And every minute ...” his voice trailed off. “It was useless.”

“Why didn’t you check the transmitter immediately?”

“Have you ever sailed an ocean going racing yacht?”

I shook my head.

“I did not think so. Only two men on board a yacht meant for four men. A storm was brewing and we had our hands full getting on wet weather gear, reefing the sails and lashing the wheel. There was not the time to check the transmitter. Anyway, it was not a priority.”

“OK. Go on. What happened then?”

“The storm arrived, with heaving seas and a southwesterly squall. While it was light and we could see, if the coast of Tasmania was visible we knew that we’d been blown off course. At night there was nothing on the port side, just blackness, because most of the coastline is unoccupied. So we relied on the GPS system which displayed a map of our position. We could not go below deck and rest. The yacht was buffeted by the seas and with only two crew, instead of the four she was built for, we had our hands full. It was a wet, sleepless night before the winds abated and the seas calmed down.”

“Weren’t you worried that you or Kent would be swept overboard?”

“No. She has cables around the deck, so we wore belts and clipped ourselves onto the cables.”

“But it was calm when Marcus went overboard, and he was an experienced sailor. So how could it happen?”

“I do not know. But there were coils of rope on the deck and perhaps he was not looking and tripped up on a rope. One coil of rope was tangled. Maybe by him?”

“Is your turban a problem when you’re wearing wet weather gear?”

“A bit. My turban got sopping wet. But I had another one and I dried my hair and put on the spare turban, praying to Waheguru that Kent would not see.”

“Who?”

“Waheguru, the wondrous enlightener in Sikhism.”

“What happened after the storm?”

“Yesterday morning the *Dark Princess* was off the Southwest Conservation area and a long way from Hobart. It would take a day to round the tip and travel up Storm Bay, even in the nicer conditions we were experiencing. It was not until then that the weather had calmed down enough for me to look at the transmitter.”

“What did you find?”

“The receiver worked, it was fine. But when I took the transmitter out the power plug was not in place. I put it in and radioed for help.”

“Why was the plug out?”

“I have no idea. Marcus must have moved it and accidentally unplugged it. There is a space behind it where sometimes he put valuables or keys.”

“There was a thousand dollars there. Why?”

Prandeep shrugged.

“Why didn’t you take it?”

“It was not mine. It was the property of Marcus. Give it to his widow.”

“OK. Wait here while we interview Kent.”

We left the room, went to the other room and sat down.

“Recorded interview with Detective Inspector Felix Oliver and Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton. Your full name?”

“Kent Clarke.” He smiled.

“When I was born Mum wanted to call me Russell, but Dad insisted on Kent. He’s mad keen on superman comics, ever since he was a kid.”

“When did you learn to sail?”

“When I was old enough I joined the navy and we had training trips on a four-master. I had an accident and was discharged.”

“What happened?”

“I broke my leg. But it’s healed and I can do just about anything. But I loved sailing and got a job at the marina where I met Marcus Bryant. I’m a professional sailor out at sea most of the time.”

“Have you been on the *Dark Princess* before?”

“Nah, first time. But she’s easy to handle. Nice boat.”

“What happened on Thursday morning?”

“Marcus told me we were too close to shore and to head out. He went into the cabin while me and Pran were on deck. Then he came up and told us to have breakfast, which we did. I had bread and jam and black tea. There’s no milk on board. After a while Pran went up and called down that Marcus wasn’t there. I went up with binoculars, but there was nothing I could see.”

“Did you hear anything while you were eating?”



“No. Anyway the radio was on playing heavy metal.”

“The receiver you mean?”

“No, I have a radio and we hooked it into the yacht’s aerial so we could listen to music.”

“Was Marcus wearing a life jacket?”

“No, he didn’t like them.”

“Did you wear one?”

“Always. My navy training see.”

“Why did he go overboard?”

“Don’t know. There were some ropes coiled up so I suppose he tripped on them. One coil was messy so it might have been that one.”

“What was he wearing?”

“Light clothes, it was fine except for a stiff breeze. Pran went down to radio for help, but the transmitter wasn’t working. Anyway there was a storm brewing and we had to prepare for very rough weather. It was a shit day and night. Next day Pran fixed the transmitter and sent out a message that Marcus had gone overboard.”

“OK. Wait here for a minute.”

We went out.

“Consistent stories Rebecca,” I said, “and the death of Marcus Bryant is accidental, misadventure.”

“I agree. What now?”

We got the two crewmen together and I said:

“We have your addresses and phone numbers if we want to interview you again. But for now you are free to go. You can’t go to the yacht and pick up your things, it’s still guarded by the Drugs’ Squad. Sorry. So where will you go?”

Prandeep looked at his watch.

“We have plenty of time to catch the afternoon plane back to Melbourne. We have enough money for a taxi and plane tickets.”

“OK. We have your details if we want to talk to you again. I’ll show you to the taxi rank.”

Prandeep grinned.

“Rather odd,” I thought.

And, while Becky got a call on her phone, I ushered them out.

After Prandeep and Kent were released, I returned and said:

“Time to interview Vincent.”

“No it’s not. He can cool his heels in a cell. I’ve got a call about the *ice* factory. The raid’s on. After lunch. I’ll chauffeur you and then we can come back here.”

“Let’s get lunch together Sir,” Becky said. “There’s a Japanese restaurant near here that’s good.”

I didn’t want to go out with her, *she laughed at me*, but I hadn’t eaten Japanese food and I wanted to try it.

“OK Rebecca,” and I got up without a smile.

The day, as expected, overcast and cold, and the drizzle hadn’t let up. I’d done nothing about Vincent Glover.

“Let him seethe in a cell for a while longer,” I thought.

We went to the restaurant and ate an interesting meal, sharing so that we could sample different dishes. It was delicious as well as interesting, but I’d never eaten Japanese food before and the textures and flavours were novel. Miso soup, with seaweed, tempura mushroom, unagi avocado roll, with eel, and octopus okonomiyaki, a pancake. Too much food and we left some of the pancake. But there was not enough to get a doggy bag with the left overs to take home.

As we were eating, Becky filled me in on her plan.

“I’ve got a uniformed police team together, a police van and forensics. I’ll be with the police. I don’t expect any trouble, but the police will be armed as usual. We’ll have to hit immediately when the DC says so.”

“You trust him?”

“Yes, he’s good. Also, a few men will be stationed near the back and sides of the house if anyone tries to escape.”

I had to admire the planning and the methodology. Becky had everything in hand.

I sighed glumly.

“We have over an hour Rebecca,” I mumbled, looking at my watch. “I’ll go and buy some things I need. Then I’ll meet you back at the station.”

I went shopping by myself. An attempt to cheer myself up. In my favourite shoe shop I bought a nice pair of slip-on shoes. Soft, black patent leather, comfortable, with heels that are a tad high. I could use them as dress shoes if I didn’t scuff them.

I’m tall and lean. And handsome, or so I think.

Actually I’m not as tall as I would like to be, but the heels help. And at school I was weedy, but I’ve filled out a tad. I’ve cropped black hair over a high brow. Clean shaven, thanks to an electric shaver that is excellent. I’m not that much taller than Becky, maybe seventy millimetres. But I’m quite strong, the result of playing cricket, though I wouldn’t be a match in a fight with Becky.

Then in a large department store I got two shirts. One a pale red. Not pink, I don’t like pink, but I like red. I put it back on the rack because, at that moment, I didn’t care what I looked like. But maybe I’ll wear it later? So I retrieved and bought it. The bag they gave me at the shoe shop held everything.

I wandered around the department store, looking at ties and coats. I tried on a coat that I liked and looked at myself in a mirror. My right eyebrow was larger than the other and if I’d been a woman I would’ve probably plucked it to the same size. However I felt that it gave character to my handsomeness. Not that that mattered after *she laughed at me*. I swirled around in the coat to see the effect, but I put it back on the rack as I had a perfectly good coat at home. But I bought a tie that went with my new, red shirt. At work I always wore ties. I think they make a positive impression on the people I work with.

It was time and Becky drove me.

Becky’s phone rang. It was hooked into the car’s bluetooth and answered the call automatically.

“What’s up?”

“An explosion, Sarge, the place is on fire.”

We both knew that crystal meth production was dangerous, so the news didn’t surprise us.

“OK. Get the uniformed men controlling the vicinity. I’ll be there shortly.”

There was a thick blanket of clouds covering the sun and the light, reflecting my mood, was gloomy. But it had stopped raining.

When we arrived we had to park down the street. A run-down street in a run-down suburb. Outside the weatherboard house the street was blocked by fire trucks and ambulances, all with their headlights on and their warning lights flashing. And a small crowd had gathered, people from the near-by houses and journalists, holding their phones up to get a video of the fire.

As we were walking down an explosion shook us and I saw a cloud of red-hot embers and flames shoot up. We showed our warrant cards to a fireman.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Probably a gas bottle.”

A DC came over.

“Hiya Sarge,” addressed to Becky.

“Anyone hurt?”

“Nah. The first explosion and fire were small, so the two men got out and started to hose it down. Paramedics are treating them for a few burns over there. They have been arrested and a couple of uniformed are making sure they don’t run off. I warned the firemen that there was probably a gas bottle in the kitchen, so they took precautions.”

I watched, absorbed, as the fire was contained and reduced to smouldering embers. I’d always been fascinated with fires. John came over and stood beside me.

“Suspected *ice* lab John.” I said quietly. No harm in telling him, as it was obvious something was happening.

“Nothing to do here Sir,” said Becky, snapping me out of my pleasure.

“Oh, ah ... orry, sorry Rebecca, I didn’t catch that.”

“There’s nothing to do here,” she repeated. “The men from the house are going to be taken to hospital as a precaution. Then when they’re released they’ll be processed and put in cells to be interviewed tomorrow or Monday.”

“Why not tonight?”

“We’ll have to wait until the firemen give the all clear for forensics to search for evidence of meth manufacture. And they’ll have to work with the fire forensics team who want to establish the cause of the fire. Can we go?”

“Um, OK.”

I reluctantly tore my eyes from the scene and, as I followed Becky to her car, I was accosted.

“We meet again! Any news on the domestic violence murders?”

“Hi John, I’ll call you about them when I can give you any information.”

In her car I said:

“Let’s interview Vincent, I can’t put it off any longer.”

While she was driving she asked:

“I had to drag you away. Why?”

I sighed. No point telling her. No point in not telling her either. So I did. Slowly and deliberately so that I didn’t mispronounce any words.

“Ever since I was a young kid I had a fascination with fires and firemen, probably because my Mum and Dad gave me a toy fire truck one Christmas. It had tiny firemen and a ladder that extended and rotated. The only things it didn’t have was a fire. And water.

“One day I found a box of matches so I went outside, put some twigs in a pile, lit them and zoomed the fire truck around, yelling commands to the fire men. Dad saw what I’d doon ... done and put the fire out with a garden hose, much to my anguish. I was told off, but Mum had a smile on her face. I think she was proud of my imagination. And my fire truck was a tad worse for wear as I’d burnt some paint off its ladder.

“Next Christmas I was given two toy police cars. Maybe that’s why I became a policeman.”

I looked at Becky and she had her eyes on the road ahead, but was smiling. Was she laughing at me? Probably.

While she drove us back to the station I thought about the missing drugs. I went over everything that had happened, trying to explain the events by all sorts of scenarios. I couldn’t.

I arranged for Vincent Glover to be brought to an interview room and I’d lined up Becky to be there. But before that I phoned the DPP:

“Peter Taggart.”

“Hi Peter, it’s Felix Oliver. Why are you working on Saturday?”

“Hello Felix, how are you? I’m on call throughout the weekend. But I’m working from home with the DPP phone. What’s the problem?”

“I’m investigating a breach of bail. I’ve got CCTV videos that show a hooded man in the right places at the right times, tracking him from one location to another.”

“No blank spots?”

“No, and the time stamps prove that.”

“Do you definitely know who this person is?”

“Yes. A plain clothes constable was in a location where if the hooded man appeared he would be in breach of bail. The hooded man took off his hood and a clear photo of him was taken. My question is, is that entrapment or something else a lawyer could use?”

“Did he do things or go to places of his own free will?”

“Yes.”

“Then I am certain the evidence is admissible and you can charge that man. Who is it?”

“Someone I know and used to work with.”

Peter laughed:

“I suspect I know. Go for it.”

Vincent was brought in by a couple of PCs who stayed in the interview room. He was scruffily dressed, had a two-day stubble on his face, and he was livid!

“Recorded interview with Vincent Glover, present DI Felix Oliver and DS Rebecca Newton. Do you want a solicitor present?”

“No! Go fuck yourself, both of you!”

I momentarily misunderstood him and thought “that’s what I want to do, but it isn’t going to happen,” before I dragged myself back to the task at hand.

“OK. You are charged with breaching bail conditions. Namely being within three hundred metres of a police station without due cause. And being within three hundred metres of the address of WPC Jennifer Mullins. We have CCTV and photographic evidence that links you to these places. Do you dispute that?”

Vincent scowled but was silent. I waited for about thirty seconds to give him time to reply.

“OK. You will be handcuffed by the two PCs behind you and taken to a magistrate’s court by DS Newton to remanded in custody until the date of your court appearance on the charges of suppressing evidence and of attempted rape.”

“You *won’t* handcuff me! And that shit Newton won’t take me anywhere!”

I thought of hitting him, but I shrugged.

“OK, we’ll take you without handcuffs. You realise that attempting to run off would be useless?”

“Fuck you Oliver!” was all that he said as I got up and motioned to the two PCs to accompany us.

We went to a magistrate’s court where I presented the evidence, photos extracted from the CCTV videos and Bartholomew’s photos.

“I can’t see his face in most of the photographs, so it could be another person.”

“It *is* Vincent Glover, Your Honour,” I said, handing over a single sheet of paper. “This is the time line that links all the photos together and the search warrant for the bus’s CCTV. From that we know for certain that the hooded man in the first photos is Vincent Glover. In addition I’ve contacted the DPP and, although the decision is entirely your’s, the DPP says that there is enough evidence to charge Glover.”

The magistrate read the time line, looked at the photos, which had time and date stamps on them, and nodded.

“OK. Vincent Glover, you have breached your bail conditions and so I order that you be held in custody until the date and time of your court appearance. Take him to a cell.”

We went back to the station, minus Vincent, and to our office where I wrote up reports on Prandeep, Kent and Vincent. It didn’t take long as most of the information was in the recorded interviews.

I sat back, hands behind my head, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

“What’s wrong Sir?”

“I don’t want to go home in case Buck is waiting for me. But I have to at some stage, to get my gear. And I need some sleep before tomorrow’s cricket match.”

“Can’t you cancel it?”

“No way!” with an expression of horror. “Its the semi final and if we win we’ll be in the final. So I’ve got to be there.”

“OK, Dinner at my place,” Becky replied matter-of-factly.

“No thank you, I’ll go to a restaurant in town.”

“Don’t argue Sir. I cooked a meal last night and it only has to be heated up. There’s plenty of time to do that. I’ll drive you back home later. If Buck comes he won’t hang around if you’re not there, so later in the evening should be fine.”

“Alright, you win. I’ll be ready to leave after I’ve made a phone call.”

I called Bartholomew.

“Bartholomew. Good news. Your photos did the trick, and now Glover’s behind bars.”

“Thank you Sir. Not so good news on the other case I’m following up.”

“What is it?”

“The domestic murders. We decided to arrest Damian Hurst ...”

“*You* did,” I interrupted. “It’s your case and I’m just helping you. What’s the problem.”

“I can’t find him. I got his last known address from the Family Violence Order and went there. It’s a rental and someone different is living there now. And the estate agent told me that he’d been evicted a few weeks ago and there’s no forwarding address. Oh, and the house where the murders were committed, it’s rented from the Housing Commission. I was a bit surprised because most of the Commission’s houses are rough and not looked after. But I’m working by myself on this case, so I don’t know when I’ll get the time to locate Hurst. ”

“Difficult. Let me think,” .... “OK, I think this will work. I’ll arrange for you to work with me one day a week.”

“My Sarge won’t like that because his rosters will be mucked up.”

“If you’re needed then I’ll give you overtime, if you’re willing to work a few extra hours.”

“That’s OK by me. I hope you can swing it.”

“I will. Contacts in high places!” I said laughing, thinking of AC Susanne Fischer. “So find Hurst.”

“Thank you Sir. I’m not working for a couple of days so I’ll track him down.”

“Let me know your progress. Oh, you can work in the room that my detectives use. There’s a spare desk and computer.”

Although I couldn’t see him, I knew he’d be chuffed.

“I’ll see you tomorrow hopefully?”

“No Bartholomew, I’ll be playing cricket.”

Becky had been listening in to my side of the conversation.

“Bartholomew’s good Sir?”

“Definitely, he’s a good detective, Rebecca. He thinks before he acts. Unlike me.”

She smiled.

“I’ve only seen you be impulsive once. Last night. Maybe I’ll see it again Sir?” she added cryptically.

“Probably not,” I replied, emotionless. “It was an unfortunate faux pas.”



So I was driven to Becky's flat. She rented it and it was nice.

I was sombre, but she was happy, until her phone insisted on her attention. She put her hand over the mouthpiece and said:

"It's Jennifer Mullins. You can go and poke your nose in everything Sir, while I talk to her."

So I looked around.

Lounge/dining room with a table and four chairs, and two big armchairs facing the TV with a low, blackwood coffee table and a standard lamp between them. The remote was on the arm of one of them.

Two bedrooms, one unused and one with a double bed and a dressing table with a mirror that was littered with female paraphernalia. One wardrobe door was open revealing a full length mirror and neatly arranged women's clothes.

A small bathroom with only one tooth brush and a half used tube of toothpaste in a mug.

A separate toilet with a spray bottle of orange oil air freshener and a nickel plated post on the floor that held five unused rolls of toilet paper.

I went into the kitchen. No table or chairs but a bench, where Becky was making a salad, with a raised counter filling the opening into the dining room. It was newer than mine, more modern.

I couldn't afford to buy it, which might explain why she was renting.

"Sir, fridge, beer," she said, pointing, after the call had ended.

I did as I was told, opened a stubby and took a large swig. Becky was drinking red

wine and her glass was nearly empty, so I filled it up from the open bottle standing on the bench.

“Thanks,” as she took a sip. “Jennifer was upset and needed someone to talk to. We chatted and then I told her that Vincent is locked up in remand and I heard a sigh of relief. I should’ve phoned her this afternoon, but it slipped my mind.

“Now, are you going to tell me what happened to you?”

“Nothing physical, but Buck has my phone number.”

Becky turned around with a look of surprise.

“How do you know?”

“He sent me a text message,” and I showed it to her and my reply. “I seem to have bought some time.”

“How on earth did he get it?”

“That’s what I want to know.”

“OK. Your name and address is possible. But where would he get your phone number from?”

“Police records.”

She turned around to cut up tomatoes and muttered, half to herself:

“I hope not. Anywhere else?”

I lent against the bench, which was long enough for me to be out of her way, and took a sip of my beer.

“I don’t think so. The detectives know each other’s phone numbers, and maybe some of the police. And admin. Also the personnel records aren’t particularly secure, so someone with access to a police compooter could find it out.

“And I have a couple of friends outside the force who know my number, but they can’t be involved.”

I paused.

“I can only think of one person.”

She was silent, but frowning, as she broke up an iceberg lettuce and put part of it in the bowl with some olives. I was looking at her. Face crowned with wavy dark brown hair. When she smiled laughter lines appeared either side of her eyes. Beautiful? Lips that I wanted to kiss. Neat breasts above a slim waist. I wished she was wearing a skirt.

“Just sex,” I thought, “but it won’t be for me, it’ll be for some other man.”

I dragged myself back, reluctantly, to Buck and said in a flat voice:

“I was sure it was Martin Campbell.”

She didn’t reply, but cut up radishes, cucumber and an avocado. Then she looked at a large, simmering pot and turned up the heat.

“Can we eat early?” she asked.

“Yes, I’m hungry.”

Still frowning Becky got salad dressing out of the fridge and poured it over the salad and put it on the counter with two wooden spoons.

“Make yourself useful and put this on the table. Oh, I should asked, is gluten OK? I’ve got bread rolls as well as spaghetti.”

“Yes, I don’t have any food allergies. But you knew that when we ate naan bed.”

When I’d put the salad on the table I stood on the other side of the counter and watched. Becky was putting spaghetti in the pot, now boiling. She set a kitchen timer for eleven minutes and checked the oven that had the sauce in it. Bolognese.

The timer went off and startled us out of our unspoken thoughts.

She deftly drained the pasta, put it on the counter with the hot plates and told me to take them to the table. She followed me with the steaming sauce. Grated Parmesan cheese and butter for the rolls were already on the table. I went back to the kitchen to fetch our drinks.

During dinner, which was excellent, we chatted about nothing in particular. Crosswords, sudokus, the weather, how much the rent was, and other things of no consequence. It was obvious she didn’t want to talk about Buck. She seemed preoccupied.

When we had finished she said “Sorry, no desserts” and cleared the table.

I got up to help.

“Sit! Stay! No washing up,” she said firmly. “I have a dish washer.”

She returned and sat in one of the arm chairs, the one with the TV remote, beckoning me to sit in the other. She was pensive, her hands in the prayer position under her chin. Despite everything I wanted her, but she was well out of reach. So I looked at the TV and said morosely:

“Grrrr, my theory is in tatters, Rebecca. It depended on the *Dark Princess* dropping off the drugs at Arthur River, but there weren’t any drugs on board the yacht and there never have been. Everything fits, but it’s impossible. So we are back to square one and there must have been some other reason why Buck visited me. And I’ve absolutely no idea what that is.”

“Could there be another yacht?”

“No. No other yachts came from Melbourne to Hobart down the west coast. And it’s not the *Dark Princess*. So it’s impossible. ”

“What if a yacht left Melbourne, came to Arthur River, and returned to Melbourne and didn’t travel on to Hobart? That’s possible.”

“I suppose,” I said depressingly looking down with my hands on my thighs.

She sighed.

“OK Sir, what if your theory is correct, and I think it is, and I think the boat doesn’t matter, then why Martin Campbell?”

“First Rebecca, I’m certain it is a serving bolice officer, because he has my details, probably by accessing the police personnel records.”

“You said *bolice*.”

“Sorry. Slip of the tongue, police” said slowly and deliberately so that I didn’t mess it up. “You didn’t notice compooter instead of computer?”

“No, my mind must have interpreted it correctly. And?”

“Second, I was one of the causes of Campbell’s demotion from detective constable to police constable. Third, he knows me. Fourth, I wouldn’t be surprised if he has a

grudge against me. Fifth, I was one of the people who caused him to be moved from Hobart to Smithton.”

“Where?”

“A town less than sixty five kilometres from Arthur River, less than an hour’s drive. He’s stationed there.

“I know ... there’s no evidence of drugs on the *Dark Princess*, not a scrap. So she wasn’t the carrier and I can’t prove anything. After all, the drugs might have been on board the Melbourne to Devonport ferry. It’s a shorter drive to Hobart, but it would fit in. In that case the courier would have brought the drugs from Melbourne to Hobart and it can’t be Campbell.”

“OK, it’s possible.”

“Arthur River is irrelevant, so Martin’s irrelevant.”

“That’s enough,” she interrupted. “I’m convinced you’re right and Campbell has taken the drugs and stashed them somewhere. And he has deliberately sent Buck chasing after you. But we don’t know where the drugs are. Where does he live in Smithton?”

“I don’t know Rebecca, but it’s a red herring.”

“Well I’ll find out.”

“Without alerting anyone?”

“If possible. I’ll go to work tomorrow and see what’s on the police computers,” she said definitely. “Will I see you tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. I’ve got a cricket match.”

“I saw the trophies at your place, but I didn’t know what they were for.”

“Nothing special. I play first grade cricket for the local team. I’m not good enough for the state team. Well, I maybe I am, but I’ve never been selected.”

Becky smiled:

“So you have a cricketer’s box. I hope you wear it!”

I ignored her comment so she shrugged.

“Oh well, I will call you if I find anything out at work Sir.”

She thought for a while, with prayer fingers and then she decided. Without saying anything, she came over, sat on my lap, put her arms around my neck and kissed me softly, with a slightly open mouth. I put my arms and hands on the arm rest, and tried not to respond.

“Just sex,” I thought.

She looked at me, puzzled.

“Knees?” she asked.

“We work together Rebecca, so it’s not appropriate.”

“But ...”

I shook my head.

She got off me and returned to her seat.

“OK, you’ve rebuffed me,” she said quietly. “I like you very much, but if it’s not reciprocated then I’ll have to live with that.”

A bolt of lightning struck me. I loved her. I yearned to say “I love you,” but didn’t. Was I punishing myself? I don’t think so. *She’d laughed at me.*

Instead I said:

“And I don’t know why I mispronounce words. I’m worried that it’s a brain tumour.”

“Is anything else affected?”

“No, I don’t think so. I can think and write and read.”

“Then it’s not a problem. After all, deaf and blind people cope perfectly well, and you speech defect is minor compared with them. Any more objections?”

“No, that’s enough.”

She sighed.

“OK Felix, what’s wrong?”

“She used my name,” I thought. “Just a slip up.”

“Othing ... nothing.”

“But you’ve changed so it’s something. Is it anything that I’ve done?”

“Just leave it,” thinking about self-flagellation.

“Sorry Felix, I won’t. Tell me please. ... Is it because I tried to kiss you?”

I shook my head with my mouth closed tightly.

“Something I said?”

Again I shook my head.

“I’m angry. I’m frustrated. You won’t be honest with me.

“On Monday we go to work in the same office and I don’t want this hanging over us. I’m serious. If you don’t tell me I might have to go and work with someone else. So tell me. *Please.*”

That shocked me. I didn’t have any alternative.

“You laughed at me Rebecca.”

“Laughed at you? When?”

I looked at the TV.

“Last night when I blundered and said I like your knees.”

“Felix, look at me!”

I looked down.

“Felix, look at me! *Please!*”

I looked at her.

“*I ... did ... not ... laugh ... at ... you.* I laughed because what you said was strange, funny, and I liked it! I was glad I’d worn a skirt. I was glad you liked me enough to say what you did.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said glumly, shrugging.

“It does matter! OK, can we wind the clock back and start again?”

“Why? Nothing will change.”

“Can you *please* do what your emotions want and not what your brain thinks?”

I nodded, a tad reluctantly.

So she came over, sat on my lap and placed my left hand on her knees and my right arm around her waist.

“I’m sorry I’m wearing slacks Felix,” she purred as she took my face in both hands and kissed me.

A couple of tears of relief dripped from my eyes as I kissed her back, her mouth open.

Becky curled up in my lap, put her head on my shoulder and kissed my neck. I caressed her knees, breathed in the sweet scent of her hair and felt at home. I wanted to caress her breasts, but something stopped me. Caution? Prudery? Maybe this is not real?

“No,” I thought, “it’s too soon.”

We stayed there for a long time, silently, while I caressed her cheek, her hair and held her against me. I wanted this moment to go on for ever.

Until I had to move.

“Orry ... sorry Becky, I have cramp in one leg.”

She laughed, realising I hadn’t called her Rebecca, and got off.

“And I have to go. I’m playing tomorrow and need to sleep.”

Becky pouted and exclaimed:

“You love cricket more than me!”

I went to the door and she put her arms around my neck and kissed me. I felt her breasts against my chest.

“Um, you’re forgetting something.”

A look of horror suffused her face as she said:

“Of course! I’ll drive you home.”

“No. I can get a bus or a taxi.”

“No way!”

So she drove me home and came in to make sure Buck wasn’t around. Then, on tip toes with her arms around my neck, she kissed me and drove away. I wanted her to stay the night, but that wasn’t practical. Or sensible.

I still wasn’t sure.

I retrieved the blameless clock and put the battery back. To my surprise it ticked, so I set it to the right time, put it back on the bedside table and went to bed.

In bed I cuddled a pillow and thought of running my fingers through Becky’s hair.

But soon I was back to the missing drugs. I went over everything that had happened, trying to explain the events by all sorts of scenarios. I couldn’t. The only realistic one involved Martin Campbell.

But was he working alone? I wasn’t sure, so I would play it safe and only involve Becky.

But how did the drugs’ organisation get in touch with him? Who did he know? Buck? Or someone else? There were no answers to these questions, so I rolled over and went to sleep.

# *Sunday*

I was tired from lack of sleep. But I got dressed in whites. As I put in my cricketer's box I smiled. It was a fifty over, one day match. A semi final. If we won we would in the final.

I picked up the Mercury and put it on the kitchen table. A hasty breakfast and cups of strong coffee helped open my eyes. In the bathroom, splashing cold water on my face and then out the door. I was whistling, not a care in the world, thinking of Becky.

My car was parked on the street. There was a drive to the other two units on the block and they had parking places for one car. But mine didn't. That was part of the reason I could afford it and pay it off. So I parked on the street.

I slung my bag of cricketing gear on the back seat, Tossed my phone onto the passenger's seat and sat in the driver's seat. I looked, and my phone had slipped off the seat and dropped to the floor. So I bent over to pick it up.

The driver's window exploded and I was showered with glass fragments.

Panic.

Some sixth sense made me not raise my head. And, although I wanted to yell "Fuck!" I was silent. I twisted my head around and looked. The passenger's window was missing.

"Not a rock," I thought, "and unlikely to be a shotgun. So a bullet."

I didn't move. If he came over I hoped that it would look as though I was dead. I lay there for what seemed ages. Then I heard a car. Driving off or stopping? No door closing, so driving off.



My left arm was pinned underneath me, so with my right hand I got my phone, I clumsily got into contacts and called Becky.

“Hello Felix.”

“Come to my place as quickly as you can. Use sirens and lights if you can.”

She sensed the urgency and just hung up on me.

I don't know how long. Ten minutes maybe. I know the hand brake was digging into my side, but I didn't move. I played dead in case someone came over. Then I heard a screech of brakes.

I didn't move until I heard Becky's voice.

“Felix, can you get up? Shit, you're hurt!”

I gingerly pulled myself erect. My left arm had pins and needles in it that didn't last long, but the pain in my side from the hand brake didn't go away for a couple of hours.

She opened the driver's door and helped me out. Her car was parked the wrong way in front of mine. It was a quiet street, but a couple of people looked curiously at us and my car. We ignored them.

“Where are your car keys?”

“In the ignition Becky. Don't worry about them, no one is going to steal it now,”

We went inside. Becky was wearing a short skirt and had bare legs. I couldn't help being distracted by them. A good thing?

I sat at the kitchen table while she stood behind me and examined my head. With concern.

“You have a straight line of blood on your head.”

She got a bowl of water and a tea towel and I said:

“Don't clean the wound, let the blood clot.”

She followed my advice and only cleaned around it.

“What happened?”

“A bullet. I think it was meant to kill me. I think Buck's lost patience. He's decided he won't get his drugs and has lost a lot of money, so he wants vengeance.”

“You can't stay here. You're coming to my place.” Said definitely in a stern voice. “Change your clothes.”

“I have to call the captain first. Fuck! My phone's in the car.”

“I'll get it.”

Becky was gone for a few seconds, returned and put my phone in my hands. I called the captain. She could only hear my side of the conversation.

“... Sorry, you'll have to play without me ... Not possible, I have been called into work urgently ... But the twelfth man is as good as I am ... Yes, I know, but ... Sorry ... OK I'll come if I can, but don't count on me.”

I went to the bedroom and got changed. Becky came in as I was putting on my red shirt.

“Nice!” she smiled, and I don't think she was talking about the shirt.

“Put some clothes in a bag while I make coffee. You're not staying here.”

I did as I was told, adding a toothbrush and a comb. Just in case.

We got in her car, with the newspaper that she had collected on the way out, and she drove me to her flat. On the way she said:

“We need to get service pistols in case there is any trouble. And handcuffs.”

“And a search warrant,” I added.

“To search where?”

“Where Martin Campbell lives. He can’t be involved, but we better make sure.”

“I’ll look it up.”

“At the same time can you look at Martin’s contacts? Cases he’s worked on? That sort of thing?”

“I’ll trawl through the data base.”

I dumped my bag at Becky’s in the spare bedroom and we went to the police station. We went to our office and Becky sat at her desk and turned her computer on. Lazy people left their computers on, but Becky knew of a fire started late at night by a monitor, and she was always meticulous.

I called the magistrates court.

“It’s DI Felix Oliver. Is anyone sitting today? ... OK. Can I see her in her chambers? ... I can’t tell you ... Sorry, but it’s urgent ... OK, when can she see me? ... Can you find out?” A pause and then “... OK, I’ll be there.”

“At eleven,” I said to Becky, “we meet Justice Shepherd”.

I half heartedly looked at the papers on my desk, but my mind was elsewhere. After a while I asked impatiently:

“Have you found anything about Campbell?”

Becky looked up. She was on the phone, her hand cupped over the mouth piece, and all that she said was:

“Shush!”

So I waited until she was off the phone and looked at me.

“Well?”

“He lives in the sergeant’s house behind the police station in Smithton.”

“You have the address?”

She nodded.

“What about links?”

“That’s *much* more interesting,” she said. “And the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are fitting together nicely. Do you know that you’re a drugs’ dealer Felix?”

“Fuck! Where’s that come from?”

“I’ll explain, but bear with me. With regard to Martin Campbell. He’s originally from Melbourne, where his family is, before he moved over here as a PC based in Launceston. And then he moved to Hobart where he became a DC. He’s been involved with a few cases of drugs’ use, but nothing out of the ordinary and all with other PCs. Recently there is a mention that he accosted an *ice* user in Smithton, but there’s no outcome, so Martin’s probably let him off with a warning. Then I phoned the Federal Police.”

“Why not the Victorian police?”

“Felix,” she replied a bit testily, “you said it’s a need to know investigation, so I didn’t call the Victorian police or their drugs’ squad in case I alerted someone. I called the Feds and I was vague. Did they know of a person by the name of Martin Campbell? He asked why? I said he’s come up in one of our investigations. He said no. I asked is there any reference to him? No.

“But I had a light-bulb moment and asked if he knew of a person by the name of Felix Oliver. Why? The same reason. There was a bit of reluctance, but I said *pretty please* and that did it.”

I was curious:

“Did you purr at him?”

“*Purr!* What do you mean?”

“I can’t describe it, but sometimes you purr. It’s nice.”

“Maybe, because I’m a woman. But he didn’t tell me much ... Oliver is Tasmanian, visits Melbourne, known to be associated with a wholesale drugs’ dealer in Melbourne although no evidence of drugs’ dealing. Did he have a photo of Oliver? Yes, only one but it’s useless. Can you send it to me? Yes. But did I know something? I said I knew nothing concrete, but if I found anything I would tell him. So he gave me his phone number.

This is the photo he sent,” holding up her phone.

I looked at a figure wearing a hoodie, with the hood up, side on to the camera with the hood covering his face. It could have been anyone.

“Poor photo of no use.”

“But I’m sure Martin Campbell is using your name. It’s the only lead we have, so we should investigate it.”

Getting firearms was a tad difficult, but my rank made it easier. We went to the gun store, that was open twenty-four seven, filled in forms and handed them over with our warrant cards. The duty officer looked doubtful, but he went away, returned, and put two pistols in holsters, a box of ammunition and the register book on the bench. We checked the pistols, they were OK of course, and he wrote down the serial numbers, our names and ranks, and the time and date, and we signed for them. Becky put her pistol in her bag, which was practical rather than ornamental, and I asked:

I strapped my holster around my waist, with the pistol on the right side facing back, so I could get it out with my left hand.

Eventually it was time for our appointment with the magistrate.

We went down the side of the court building and up the back stairs. I knocked on the door and heard “Come.” We went in. Justice Shepherd looked up over her glasses, surprised.

“I thought I was only meeting you, DI Oliver?”

“This is DS Rebecca Newton. She is my partner in this case.”

“And I hope my partner in life,” I thought.

“Sit. Why meet me in my chambers? Why hush-hush?”

We sat and the pistol dug into my ribs.

“Must move it to my shoulder,” I thought.

“Your Honour, I won’t go into the details unless you need them. We believe that there is a corrupt policeman who has stolen a large quantity of drugs. We want a search warrant for his house.”

“You can get one from a justice of the peace. So why me?”

“I am aware of that. But because it involves a police officer and I think that you are more appropriate under the circumstances.”

She sighed and sat back.

“I need much more detail. You are going to have to explain and give me some evidence.”

I thought and decided that plain speaking was required.

“OK, Your Honour. But what I tell you now never leaves this room until we have settled this investigation.”

She nodded.

“In order of events, not in order of our involvement.”

So I started with the drugs off-loaded from a yacht at Arthur River destined for Buck, and Martin stealing them and using my name, address and phone number. Then Buck’s visits culminating in my being shot at this morning. I didn’t mention the *Dark Princess* because she was clean.

“You are sure of all this?”

“Yes, Your Honour, I am,” although I was thinking “No, I’m not.”

“Despite not knowing the yacht?”

“Yes, Your Honour. Because there is at least one corrupt policeman involved, and I didn’t know who he was until yesterday, I have made sure that no one knows of my investigation, except DS Newton. I don’t want anything getting back PC Campbell or Buck.”

“You don’t know that it *is* Martin Campbell. You’re just guessing.”

I thought “you’re right Your Honour,” but ploughed on regardless.

“Not guessing Your Honour. The trail of circumstantial evidence points to only one person, and that person is Campbell. Maybe there are other people involved, although I don’t think so. So I’ve kept the investigation secret, which is why we are meeting in chambers instead of the court room. I think this matter is urgent and any delay might play into their hands.”

“Why haven’t you reported this to a more senior police officer?”

“I thought about talking to Assistant Commissioner Fischer, but I decided that the less people who knew the better. Anyway, I don’t want to delay any longer.”

“OK, but I will have to involve the clerk. Give me the address. That’s all I need.”

The clerk came in, was instructed and went away, returning later with a search warrant in his hand that he handed to the magistrate. There was no name on it. She looked it through, signed it and handed it to me, saying:

“If you are wrong you’ll be in deep shit.”

I was very surprised at the turn of phrase, but it proved she was human, not a legal textbook. But I glumly said:

“Without a paddle, Your Honour.”

I handed the warrant over to Becky and she put it in her bag.

When we left, Becky said:

“I have to interview the meths lab men today. Under the forty eight hour rule we have to interrogate and charge them or they’ll have to be released.”

“So we search Martin’s place tomorrow as early as we can, I said. “I need to talk with Bartholomew and I need to eat something before that.”

Most shops weren't open, but a cafe was; it was at a busy bus stop so there was enough traffic to warrant being open on Sunday.

I got carrot cake and a cappuccino, because I needed a sugar hit. Or that's my excuse. I drink black coffee when I can't get a proper cappuccino, and at home. No point in drinking white coffee without proper milk froth. Becky got a salad sandwich with avocado and tasty cheese, and tea. The tea was served properly in a pot with a separate jug of milk, and there was another pot with hot water.

"You're ambidextrous," I said with a smile.

"What? No I'm not. Why?"

"You drink both coffee and tea Becky."

She laughed.

"I like tea if it's made properly, with tea leaves and not tea bags. And I saw a waiter making proper tea as we came in."

We enjoyed our snacks and went back to our office.

Becky's phone rang and, after a short conversation she said:

"I'm off to interview the men we caught yesterday. The meth's lab. Their burns are not serious. The paramedics put burns dressings on them and the hospital let them go. They'll be treated by the prison GPs."

"Forensics?"

"Just in. Lots of evidence of a meth's lab, so the interviews will be a formality and they'll be charged, taken before a magistrate and from there to the remand unit. They won't be bailed, I hope."

Becky departed to be replaced by Bartholomew.

“Sorry to disturb you Sir, but can I use one of the computers here?”

“Certainly. There’s a spare desk and computer so you can move here. It’ll be more convenient as you’re working for me.”

“Thanks.”

A few minutes later I looked out at the detectives room. Regimented rows of desks, the even spacing dictated by the architect and where he drew power points and ethernet sockets on the plan. It seemed the detectives were as regimented as the room, each desk neat a tidy. Except for one that was skew-whiff, with papers scattered on it and a full waste paper basket. I envisioned a sergeant major punishing the DC with running on the spot and other exhausting drills on the way to the shredder. But it looked like my desk so I couldn’t criticise.

The room was empty except for Bartholomew, his glasses glued to the monitor. He was so tall that he had to hunch over it.

I went to the desk he was using.

“Hi Partholomew ... grrrr ... sorry ... Bartholomew,” said deliberately. “How’s your chest pain?”

He looked up, over his glasses. The lenses were large and round, held by rims that were tiny and the colour of his hair. He was surprised.

“Why?”

“You told me ages ago, when you were a PC, that you were taken to hospital in an ambulance with a suspected heart attack.”

He grinned.

“You remember that trivia? I think you know that it was a false alarm. Anyway, my heart’s been fine ever since.”

“Any progress on Hurst?”

“Not much,” he sighed. “I’m trying to locate his car.”

I was interested.

“Why?”

“As far as I can work out, the place Hurst was evicted from is his last known address. So I think he’s sleeping rough or couch surfing. I contacted a mate in traffic and got Hurst’s registration details. It’s an old Holden commodore and the registration’s expired last month. So I’ve alerted patrol cars to look out for it, but nothing so far.”

“Maybe he’s off woad ... sorry, road. I’ve got a speech impediment.”

“I didn’t notice Sir. I understood what you were saying.”

“So you think he’s sleeping in it?”

“Yes Sir.”

“You look worn out. Getting enough sleep?”

“Not really.”

“Go home, go to bed and rest. Hurst isn’t going to go away.”

“I would if I could,” his eyes glued to the keyboard.

I pulled up another chair and sat down.



“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t sleep Sir.”

“Forget about the *Sir* and talk to me as a friend.”

He looked up then.

“I keep seeing the dead children, and Gibbs with his head blown off.”

“Have you seen anyone about it?”

“It’s only been three days and I haven’t had the time.”

“Well make time. You probably have Acute Stress Disorder. Too early for PTSD, but the ASD might morph into it. You need to talk about it to a counsellor. You’re no use to anyone if you can’t sleep.”

“I don’t think I can do the job any more. I should resign and get another job.”

“No, don’t do that. Go and see someone and if, after that, you still can’t cope then reconsider. But before you do talk to me.

“When I was a PC I was called to an accident. A car had gone off the woad and smashed into a tree. The female passenger was dead. No seat belt and she was thrown through the windscreen and her head was caved in. The male driver had to be cut out and both his legs were amputated to do it. He was drunk.

“I had nightmares for a long time after that and I was ordered to see a counsellor. She helped. I still have visions of the scene occasionally, but I can cope. When we went into that kitchen and saw Gibbs I nearly puked.”

“But you didn’t Sir, and I did.”

“I’ve puked at other scenes. Nurses, doctors, paramedics and pathologists see mangled bodies almost every day and they cope. They have strategies to deal with their emotions. Some people don’t, and they can be shielded from what they can’t handle.

“I think you are too good to lose. So if you need to talk with someone I’ll be here for you. One strategy is to avoid such scenes. And as most cases don’t involve mangled bodies there are plenty of others that you can work on and solve.”

There was a silence, broken by me asking:

“Can you look at the scene another way?”

“Well, I think the painter has his job cut out. Might be easier to get a builder in to replace the plaster board?”

I laughed.

“You have my sense of oomour. Tell me about yourself? You’re long sighted?”

“Yes,” as he put his glasses on top of his head. “I’m going to try ordinary magnifying glasses to see if they work. They’re much cheaper and it doesn’t matter if I break or lose them. But they’re usually ugly!

“I’m twenty six, born in Smithton, in the north west of the state.”

Alarm bells went off in my head. Loudly and persistently. Maybe Martin Campbell wasn’t working alone and maybe Bartholomew was an associate? Or a coincidence? But I and Becky hadn’t said anything to him, so even if he was he wouldn’t know about our plans. But *I must be careful*, so I said:

“I haven’t been there for ages.”

“Father is a doctor at the hospital and Mother is a nurse, part time now that she’s got children. I’m the oldest, a lot older than my brothers. I went to school there, primary and secondary, and then trained to be a police officer.”

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” and he shrugged. I was OK at school but never wanted to be an apprentice or go to uni, and the other options weren’t appealing. So I became a policeman.

“I’m in two minds about it because all I meet are criminals and offenders and I don’t get to see ordinary people often enough.”

I smiled.

“Unfortunately it goes with the job. Sport?”

“I’m tall, so at school I was in the basketball team. I liked it and I’m good so I’ve continued playing. It’s an all year round sport so I’m involved the whole year.”

“Girlfriend?”

Surprisingly he blushed.

“Yes. I’d like to marry her but haven’t popped the question.

“Other than that, I like Italian food, its a lot more interesting than spaghetti and pizza. I like jazz and I play the piano in a jazz band. Oh, and I like cats and their arrogance. But the hairs are a bit of a nuisance. Almost as bad as golden retriever hairs.”

I laughed.

“Maybe we’ll catch a crim because of cat hairs.”

Becky came back and motioned me to come into our office. So I stood up, squeezed Bartholomew’s shoulder and left him with:

“You’re good and I don’t want to lose you.”

“What’s the problem ... problem, Becky?”

“The meth’s lab men. They have a duty solicitor who insists that they be interviewed together and that there’s a senior officer present. So can you join me? It won’t take long.”

“OK. But you can do the interview. As they were together and on the same charge I suppose we can interview them together.”

In the interview room there were five of us. The solicitor pointed looked at his watch and I had to say:

“It’s been only just one day since your clients were arrested ... arrested, and you know perfectly ... perfectly well that we have forty eight hours to charge or release.”

I started proceedings, telling them our names and then:

“You have been arrested on suspicion of the manufacture illegal drugs. As you’ll have noticed, I have a speech defect at the moment, so DS Newton ... will ... ask ... the questions.

“First,” said Becky, “there has not been enough time to give you the forensic report, I only got it this afternoon. But here is a copy,” handing it over to the solicitor.

“Most irregular,” the solicitor said angrily. “I’ve a good mind to put a stop to this farce.”

“Before you do, I will inform you that the report is unequivocal. There are ample traces of chemicals that show that methamphetamine was made on the site where you were arrested.

“Further we have evidence that, before the fire and your arrest, two boxes of chemical glassware from China came through customs and were delivered to your address. They included retorts and other equipment that could be used to manufacture methamphetamine, otherwise known as *ice*.

“Do you have anything to say?”

“I was not involved,” one started. “A friend came to the house a couple of weeks ago and asked me if he could use the kitchen. I said *won't the garden shed do, it's empty?*

He said no, because he needed running cold water. So I let him. I don't know what he did.”

“That's right,” agreed the other.

“But we observed your house over several weeks and only you two and a woman were seen entering the property.”

Becky had overlooked the *ice* dealer who had been seen. An accident or deliberate? But I wouldn't interrupt until I had to.

“Sorry, mistake. It was a woman who asked to use the kitchen.”

“So who is that woman? Or man?”

“Don't know her name.”

“So you let a stranger use your kitchen? I find that hard to believe.”

The solicitor, far too late, intervened. So:

“No comment” from both of them.

Becky shrugged.

“OK. I've contacted the DPP and there is enough evidence to charge you. I'll take you before a magistrate and oppose bail. You'll be remanded in custody. That's all for now.”

Later, when Becky returned to our office, she said:

“Bail refused, so that's OK. But you're looking glum. What is it?”

“I'll be honest.”

“I know you will, after last night,” smiling. “So?”

“I've got apaxia ... apraxia of peech. A ... P ... R ... A ... X ... I ... A.”

“How do you know?”

“Self diagnosis using the internet.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I'll read to you:

“Groping for sounds. People with Apaxia ... Apraxia of Speech often appear to be groping for the ight ... right sound or word, and may try saying a word several times before they say it correctly.

“Which I do. I'll say the next bit slowly and deliberately so I don't mess it up.

“Acquired AOS can affect someone at any age, although it most typically occurs in adults. Acquired AOS is caused by damage to the parts of the brain that are involved in speaking and involves the loss or impairment of existing speech abilities. It may result from a stroke, head injury, tumor, or other illness affecting the brain. Sounds, especially vowels, are often distorted. Because the speaker may not place the speech structures (e.g., tongue, jaw) quite in the right place, the sound comes out wrong. Longer or more complex words are usually harder to say than shorter or simpler words.

“That describes what I do, and so I have it.”

“Isn’t there another problem with speech?”

“Yes, Aphasia. I’ve looked that up and I don’t have any of the symptoms listed for aphasia so I don’t think I have it. There’s a third condition called dysarthria, but that’s impossible. So it’s apraxia.

“But I’m pissed off ... pissed off with medical research. Almost every description and symptom is prefixed by *may* or *might have* or some such words, and some of them are so vague that anyone can have them.”

At that moment Bartholomew appeared.

“Sorry to interrupt Sir, but my DS has just given me a home invasion to oversee.”

“OK, tell me about it.”

“Late last night the resident Paul Murphy answered his front door and Allan Hobson pushed in brandishing a knife and yelling for him to give him all the money in the house. Mr Murphy is a restaurant owner and the takings were in the house. He was complying when his wife stabbed Hobson in the leg and buttock. Mr Murphy called triple oh and an ambulance and police attended. Hobson was arrested for demanding property with menaces with intent to steal. And then he was taken to hospital.”

“You know he’s on bail?”

“Yes, so he’ll be remanded in custody when he leaves the hospital.”

“What about Mrs Murphy?”

“She’s at home. I’ll interview her tomorrow.”

“Reporters?”

“No, surprisingly. The neighbours didn’t call them.”

I sighed, because I couldn’t say nothing.

“I know Hobson,” I said. I didn’t add that DC Martin Campbell arrested him for stealing from cars. Open and shut case, but Hobson also received a broken nose from Campbell, which is partly why he was demoted to PC.

“But it’s getting late Bartholomew. We’ll deal with it tomorrow morning. Early, before you interview Mrs Murphy. So can you be in at eight?”

“Yes Sir.”

“And read the Criminal Code Act before we meet. I think you’re going to need it.”

After he had left, Becky said “If you’re going to work first thing then we’d better go to my flat Felix, and check we have everything in hand.”

We got to Becky's place in the afternoon. She made coffee while I put my holster and pistol on the end of the kitchen bench, out of the way. Then we settled at the dining table to talk.

We went over the case from the beginning checking what evidence we knew for certain and what we surmised.

Then we played Devil's Advocate and tried to think up other plausible reasons for the events.

I drew Venn diagrams as DI Noah Watt, now retired, had taught me a while ago. Two overlapping circles, both labelled, and the overlapping part was those things or people who had both characteristics. But I didn't know how to label the circles so that they would be meaningful. I tried with one circle being people in the north of Tasmania and the other policemen, but it didn't help.

I stretched my legs out under the table, put my hands behind my head and said:

"Grrrr. We keep coming back to Martin Campbell."

She stretched her legs too. They touched mine, but neither of us moved away.

"He is far and away the front runner," Becky said, and then sighed. "So we go to Smithton tomorrow?"

"Yes, we have to. If I'm wrong shit will fall on me from on high and I'll be reprimanded or sacked."

"You're not wrong Felix. Even if we find nothing and have to get the Drugs' Squad in with a sniffer dog. You'll be proved right in the end."

And, changing the subject, "OK, it's time to eat."

Becky went to the fridge and said:

“I’ll cook us something. Do you like eggs?”

“Yes, but don’t bother. Do you like pizzas? Sorry, pizzas?”

She nodded.

“I’ll order one. What do you like?”

“Don’t order one Felix. I think I have all the ingredients here, including a base. So we can make one.

Becky turned the oven on, very hot, and her skirt swished around the kitchen while she gathered ingredients. Then we worked together, side by side with the base in between us. It was topped very sparingly but we would cure that!

Becky smeared tomato paste while I cut up hot salami and added it. She added slices of onions and I added lots of pitted black olives. She added some garlic and slices of tomato while I grated tasty cheese, lots of it. The pizza was transformed from a flat, boring landscape to a yellow capped mountain. Then into the oven with the timer set for fifteen minutes.

Becky got a bottle of beer out of the fridge and a new bottle of red wine, while we waited for the timer bell to ring. I drank out of the bottle and Becky drank out of a glass with a long stem.

We took the pizza and drinks to the dining room table and ate everything, even the last crumb that Becky prised off the plate with her finger nails.

“I’ll do the dishes tomorrow,” she said, and we moved into the more comfortable arm chairs.

“Tell me about you,” Becky asked. “I know you were called Moggy at school, but that’s about all.”

“Born in Obart ... Hobart. I’m shy, introverted ...”

“No you’re not!”

“I am, ever since I was a toddler. But I’ve developed a technique of being outgoing to mask it. I was bullied at school, having things knocked out of my hands, my bag turned upside down to empty out the contents and kicked. So I avoided the other kids and didn’t talk in class so I wouldn’t be noticed.

“Sport was an essential part of the curriculum at school and I was expected to play football. But my class made my life hell, deliberately tackling and kicking me. And anyway I’m too short.”

Becky laughed.

“That’s why the heels on your shoes are almost as high as mine!”

“That’s not the reason,” as I blushed. “I don’t know why but I like you standing on tip toes when we kiss.

“Anyway, then I was drafted into a beginners’ cricket team. I discovered that I’d a good eye and could both bat and bowl. At the beginning there was some bullying, by throwing the ball with the intention of hitting me, but either I would duck out of the way or catch the ball. The other members of the team soon tired of the game. Then I was promoted to a better team. There the bullying stopped as the other players



were interested in winning and performing as well as they could. I was promoted to opening the batting, and sometimes I'd the chance to bowl. It boosted my confidence.

"But this is boring."

"No it isn't! I want to know all about you."

"OK. In winter, out of season, I play indoor cricket. It's fun, but proper cricket is better.

"There's not much else to tell you. Mum is a chemist working in forensic medicine, so when I left school I went to the Rokeby Police Academy."

"Don't forget the toy police cars you were given."

I smiled because Becky had remembered.

"It wasn't long after that I passed the exams and practical work and became a detective constable. I worked under DI Rosalind Baker and she persuaded me to do the sergeant's exams and, to my surprise, I passed. Then I met you. At first I was attracted to you by your ability and then I found that we worked well together. You're intelligent, industrious and a very good detective. And you have my style of oomour! Then, slowly, I looked at you as a woman and decided I wanted more. But being introverted I didn't do anything about it. Until my faux pas about your knees."

"That was *not* a faux pas! My reply was a faux pas! Anyway, pets?"

"We had a dog, Bob, a black cocker spaniel, that I played with. Then he died and we got a tan labradoodle cross, Bess. So I've always been around dogs. Actually I might've loved them more than my parents!

"But what about you Becky?"

Becky put her hands in the prayer position under her chin and thought for a tad.

"I'm just normal, so there isn't much to tell you.

"I was born in Adelaide. South Australia if you want to know," smiling at me. "My parents wanted a boy whom they could name Isaac Newton and educate to be a famous scientist, but the ultrasound scans showed they were having a girl. They went to church and had read the Bible, so they named me Rebecca because she was the wife of Isaac in the Old Testament.

"And we had dogs too. A black and white border collie named Ani, *ANI*, or that's how we spelt it. Then later a three legged dog called Anouk."

"Why three legged?"

"A car accident. I was on one side of a street and she was on the other side and spotted me. She bounced off a couple of cars and had to have one hind leg amputated. She was OK after that, but had to be put down quite young when hopping gave her serious back problems.

"At school I was good at sports as well as academic subjects. An all rounder. When I was in primary school I played soccer for a couple of years and then I played hockey and net ball. I love running and run most days before breakfast. And I go to a gym and exercise. As a result I'm muscular, so don't get in a fight with me, I'll win!

"At school I had a girlfriend who came to school one day with bruises all over her body. She told me during recess that her father had beaten her. I wanted to help her



and kids like her, so when I left school I trained and got a job in the police force. After a few of years I saw an internal advertisement for detective constables, and applied and passed the exams.

“There was a job advertised in Tasmania and so I moved. Not because of the police work, but I loved the scenery, the ruggedness and the forest tracks that I could run on. I was content with my life and didn’t need to change it.

“But a handsome detective came up to me and wanted me for an interview. I said yes, and so I met you. ‘No problems,’ I thought, ‘he won’t be attracted to a plain woman with scruffy hair.’ But it seems I was wrong. And I’m glad!”

“You are *definitely* attractive and you have wonderful hair. Don’t put yourself down.”

There was silence for a couple of minutes until Becky broke it.

“I’m going to the toilet.”

I slumped back in my chair and thought about Becky.

I became increasingly frustrated.

She came back in a minute, her bare legs swishing past me and she curled up in her chair with her knees exposed for me to see.

My frustration reached an unbearable peak.

“Grrrr,” I said loudly, through clenched teeth.

She was half smiling, with a question mark on her face.

“Are you over the misunderstanding about my knees?”

“Yes.”

I got up, anxiety filling my stomach, pulled Becky out of her arm chair, gently, and kissed her. Hard and long.

Afterwards she grinned, her hands around my waist.

“Softer next time,” she purred. “Like this.”

Gentle and long, mouths open with closed eyes, breathing our scents.

Then she looked at me, smiling, and asked:

“What are we going to do about our frustration Felix?”

I didn’t say anything. I just took her hand and led her into her bedroom, willingly, and we stood by the bed facing each other. I put her arms around my neck and my hands on her cheeks and kissed her again. Softly.

Her head on one side, she looked at me quizzically and then smiled as my hands unbuttoned her blouse. She shook her arms and her blouse dropped off her shoulders to the floor behind her.

I fumbled with her bra. White, no shoulder straps, frilly lace. I’d seen it before and removed the wires from it.

“Later I will teach you how to undo bras,” she said.

She reached behind her and unhooked her bra and it fell to the floor over her toes to join her blouse and then on tip toes she kissed me again.

She moved the doona to one side and, sitting on the edge of the bed, she helped me take off my clothes and her skirt.

“My God, Felix, you’re all skin and bones! I’ll have to put some fat on you, so that you’re comfortable to lie on!”

Then our bodies were entangled, arms and legs around each another.

Then her face buried in my shoulder. I couldn’t see her smile but I heard her purr with contentment:

“Mmm, that was beautiful.”

I inhaled through my nose and her natural scent made me close my eyes. I was happier than I’d been in a long, long time.

I dragged the doona over us and we went to sleep, but I woke up during the night, or what was left of it. I lightly touched her cheek and she sighed, opened her eyes, looked at me and muttered:

“No, it wasn’t a dream. Now I’m going to pleasure you Felix, as you did me,” she said softly, her mouth on mine.

Afterwards, Becky lay on me and our heads side by side. I caressed her back and I whispered:

“I love you Becky.”

“Mmmm,” she purred.

This time we slept through until the alarm went off. But it was only a short time.

# *Monday*

Becky's alarm went off at six thirty. We hadn't had enough sleep.

I was already awake, and there was enough light filtering through the curtains to see. She was facing me, with her hair tousled, the doona down below her shoulders and one arm over me. I could see the top of her breasts. I sighed.

Becky woke up, smiled at me and said:

"I love you Felix."

She got out of bed and I watched her naked body go to the bathroom. A few minutes later she came back and, standing facing me, she stretched her arms above her head and said:

"I'll get coffee. Lots of it. We didn't get much sleep last night and we have a busy day ahead of us. But showers first."

"Oh, sorry, I was miles away Becky," I said, "I'm amiring ... admiring your body."

She struck a pose, with both hands on her hips, and slowly rotated. Then she poked her tongue out and dragged me out of the bed.

We showered together, lathering each others bodies and shampooing each others hair. There was a lot of cuddling and kissing as the warm water flowed over us. Then we towelled each other dry.

We dressed in slacks and light jumpers because it was cool, and forecast to be cool all day. We ignored the discarded clothes on the bedroom floor.

"We'll pick them up tonight or tomorrow," I thought.

My jumper was loose and I put my holster on my left side attached to my belt. Becky carried a functional bag for the search warrant and her pistol.

We sat at the dining room table, side by side with my hand on her thigh, drinking coffees and loaded our pistols with ammunition. There was a lot of smiling, kissing and touching. I didn't want to leave and I would have been happier to spend the day with her in bed. But needs must and we had to go up north, whether we wanted to or not. It was our duty.

"Grrrr," I said with a sigh.

All we had was coffee. Neither of us could eat. We washed and dried the mugs, side by side with Becky's head on my shoulder.

We kissed, went out of the flat and drove to our office. We arrived there a tad before eight. Bartholomew was waiting and I sat at his desk.

"OK, the home avasion ... invasion. What are you going to charge Hobson with?"

"Aggravated burglary."

"Why?"

"Clauses 244 and 245 of the Criminal Code Act. Anyone who enters with intent has committed burglary. And as Hobson had an offensive weapon it is aggravated burglary."

"What about robbery?"

"Hobson didn't steal anything and robbery requires something to have been stolen."

"That's good. Do you know what Hobson was on bail for?"

"No, I didn't need to know the bail conditions because committing another crime automatically gets him in custody. Do you know why he was on bail Sir?"

I knew, but the case involved Martin Campbell and was one of the reasons he was demoted and sent to Smithton, because he deliberately injured Hobson and his solicitor made a formal complaint. But maybe Bartholomew knows Martin? Perhaps Bartholomew is in on the drugs theft because he was from Smithton? I didn't know and I needed to tread very carefully.

"Yes, I was involved. The case doesn't matter, so you don't need to look into it, but Hobson was charged with stealing from cars, see the Criminal Code Act clauses 226 onwards. He was observed going around the cars in a *park then ride* carpark near my home, and if a car was unlocked, which quite often happened, he would steal any valuables from it. I think it was his first offence so he was bailed to appear in court. Now he'll face two charges."

I hoped that would satisfy Bartholomew's curiosity.

"When are you going to interview him?"

"If you are available Sir, tomorrow sometime. Just call me when you're ready."

I changed the subject:

"And anything else ...?"

"I think that's all."

"Mrs Murphy?"

"I think I'll release her."

"I hope you won't! Clause 43 of the Criminal Code Act reads," and I spoke slowly and deliberately:

*It is lawful for any person in peaceable possession of any movable property, and for any person lawfully assisting him or acting by his authority, to use such force as he believes on reasonable grounds to be necessary to resist the taking of such property by a trespasser, or to retake it from a trespasser; provided that such force is not intended and is not likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm to the trespasser.*

“So you have to arrest Mrs Murphy on the charge of causing grievous bodily harm. I don’t think a charge of wounding is appropriate, because she might have hit an artery or severed nerves, but the DPP will guide you on that.”

Bartholomew shifted uncomfortably in his seat and muttered:

“I’d rather not arrest Mrs Murphy.”

“Sorry Bartholomew, there’s no discretion and you must. Also you don’t have the authority to grant bail and you need to go before a magistrate with a bail application. She’ll probably be released from custody. Then it’s up to the Supreme Court to decide whether she’s guilty or not. Hopefully she’ll get off.”

“A bail form has to include the date of the hearing and I don’t know what it is.”

I wished I could be open, but the news that Bartholomew was from Smithton made me very cautious. I liked him, but ...

“After the press conference, I’m off all day on other business so you’ll have a day by yourself to sort it out. You needn’t charge and bail her right away, she’s not going anywhere. So talk to the DPP about the charge and bail and they’ll help you out. Probably they’ll organise for a mention in the Court of Petty Sessions to tide you over. Now I have to go. But keep me informed of progress and if you have any questions.”

“One question Sir. Clause 50 of the Criminal Code Act reads:

*It is lawful for a parent or a person in the place of a parent to use, by way of correction, any force towards a child in his or her care that is reasonable in the circumstances.*

“What is *reasonable*?”

I sighed.

“It is not defined and it’s up to the judge or magistrate to decide whether or not the force used was reasonable in the circumstances. It’s the same with *intends*. If you don’t *intend* to harm someone but you do, it’s up to the judge or a jury to decide.”

Bartholomew, with a sombre expression, said:

“Much of life is irrational Sir. Did you know that the correlation between the number of deaths from bed sheet tangles and the consumption of cheese is ninety four point seven percent? So if you eat lots of cheese the chances of dying in bed increases. And there are more chest feeding persons than non chest feeding persons.”

I laughed and he smiled. I looked at my watch, mentally calculating the right time from the time it displayed on its hands.

“Now I have to go to a press conference.”

The room where press conferences were held had a few tables and chairs, but most journalists stood. It was fairly full today as a lot had happened over the last few days. I spoke slowly and deliberately so I get the words out right.

“As most of you know, I’m Detective Inspector Felix Oliver. Unfortunately Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer is indisposed so she cannot come and she handed this press conference over to me.

“I will update you on three cases, in chronological order.

“First, regarding the domestic violence incident that we attended on Thursday morning. I can tell you that a mother and her two children were stabbed and died at the scene. And a man also died from a shotgun blast to the head. The investigation is ongoing so I cannot give you any more details.

“Second, on Saturday there was a fire in the kitchen of a suburban home at which some of you attended, as was shown on a TV news bulletin. A forensic examination of the scene showed that the house had been involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine or *ice*. Two men arrested at the scene were interviewed yesterday and then charged with the manufacture of an illegal substance. They have been remanded in custody and their names will be available after this press conference.

“Third, I want to inform you of a home invasion that occurred on Saturday night that you don’t know about. In it one man was wounded and was taken to hospital with non life threatening injuries. The investigation is in its early stages and the only thing that I can say to you is that the injured person is helping us with our inquiries. As yet no charges have been laid.

“I don’t have any more information to share with you, so any questions?”

“Have you arrested anyone for the domestic violence murders?”

“No, but we’re hopeful of a speedy outcome. I should be able to tell you more tomorrow.”

There were no more questions so I went to our office and said:

“Sorry about that Becky. We can go.”

“I’ll drive,” Becky said. “I hope it’s not a wasted trip.”

It is about four and a half hours from Hobart to Smithton on good roads. In the passenger’s seat I nodded off and was sleeping while Becky drove up the Midland Highway to Perth, a boring trip. Perth is a popular refreshment stop and Becky parked the car.

She woke me up, we got out and stretched our legs.

“I’d like something to eat,” said Becky.

“Are you inviting me?”

She grinned and said:

“OK, my shout.”

We went into the store, half of which was a cafe and got two hamburgers with the lot, and cappuccino for me and black coffee for Becky.

“Well at least you didn’t forget.”

She looked puzzled.

“Inviting me,” I clarified.

“How could I? Its only been a couple of minutes!”

“I’ll explain ... explain. A while ago, before I met you Becky, I was invited by some

friends for dinner. I completely forgot about it and went out to a Chinese restaurant to have dinner. About nine I remembered!”

“What happened?”

“I went to their ome ... home, and apologised. It was about nine thirty. They were furious and said so. But after they’d berated me they calmed down and invited me for desserts and cheese.”

“I would’ve told you to piss off! Don’t ever do that to me.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. And don’t ever do that to me!” I parroted. “Did you notice? Only one mispronounced word ... three mispronounced words. I think if I choose words carefully I’ll be able to speak without stuffing things up.”

She smiled, reached across the table and took my hand.

“I didn’t notice anything. I love you.”

We finished our drinks and went back to the car to fill up with petrol. I took over the driving while Becky slept.

The views from Perth to Smithton are more interesting. The highway runs north-west to Devonport, where the passenger ferries arrive. From there it runs close to the north coast to Burnie and the turn-off to Stanley, where the road turns inland to Smithton. It’s a nice scenic drive, if you’re the passenger. But I had to keep my eyes on the road and didn’t see as much as I would’ve liked.

“Must go for a weekend with Becky,” I thought. “Share the driving and look at scenery. And share the bed and the bath. Lots of Irish coffees. Maybe around Penguin and walk to the beach?”

The highway entered Smithton to the south, passing the Smithton District Hospital and the ambulance station, and then, five hundred metres later, it passed the police station a couple of doors down on a side road.

It was before the middle of the afternoon when we stopped outside the police station. Becky was fast asleep, her eyes closed and head sideways, turned towards me. I didn’t want to wake her, so I looked at her for a couple of minutes before I gently ran my fingers through her hair. She yawned and stretched, hands touching the roof.

“Sit here Becky,” I said in my sternest voice, which wasn’t very stern.

She smiled, reached over and kissed me.

“Yes *Sir*.”

“And give me the search warrant.”

It was handed over, I folded it and put it in the back pocket of my slacks.

I got out, and raised my hand in a stop sign. Becky nodded.



I went to the police station and walked through the open front door.

“Sergeant Keith Miller?” I asked the man behind the counter.

“Yes.”

I showed him my warrant card and said:

“DI Felix Oliver. We haven’t met, but I want a word with Martin Campbell and ask a couple of questions. And I will need to talk with you after that.”

“Over the phone would have been easier.”

“I prefer face to face. ”

“OK. He’s out the back. Go out the front door, turn left and down the side.”

I followed the directions and found a large secluded space, hemmed in by a wing of the police station, the house behind it and a double garage. And on the open side there was a little-used lane leading nowhere, with the blank sides of buildings that faced in other directions. Smooth, level dirt with mown weeds and grass, warmed by the sun light streaming down.

In the middle there was an old kitchen table. A yellowing laminex top edged by a wide and decorative anodised aluminium strip held by small nails. The table sat on four tubular, nickel plated legs that were beginning to rust, terminating in three rubber boots. One boot was missing so the table slanted as that leg had bored into the earth.

I recognised Martin who was leaning on the table, half sitting with his buttocks on the laminex above that leg, so that the table slanted even more under his weight and the opposite leg was above the ground.

He was in full uniform and having something to drink from a fluted, brown china mug.

“PC Martin Campbell?” I asked as I went up to him.

He got up and faced me.

“Yeah ... I know who you are. Useless Oliver.”

“I think you might be able to help me. With a missing parcel of drugs.”

If he was not involved then he'd talk with me. But if he was involved then I'd expected some resistance and I'd thought that I might have to arrest him, so I had handcuffs. After all, nothing much could happen behind a police station other than a bit of a struggle. But what happened next was a total surprise.

Martin used his right hand to get his pistol out of its holster and at the same time flicked the safety catch to off. There was a quiet *crack* as he shot me in the right shoulder.

“Fuck!” I screamed with the searing pain in my shoulder. But apparently no one heard.

“Missed!” Martin chuckled. “Deliberately. But I won't miss next time.”

I fell to my knees and went face down in the dirt. In that position I couldn't get my pistol in my left hand, but I scabbled about and tried. I also, completely irrelevantly, called out:

“You haven't thought this through, Martin.”

But my words were muffled by the ground.

Martin came over to me. He was laughing.

My right hand was pinned underneath me with my gun. Agony as though a red hot poker had been driven into right shoulder. His left arm waved about, pointing out that the space we were in was effectively sound proofed by the buildings around it, and he said very quietly:

“No one can hear and if they did they'll think you're just angry and do nothing. Say your prayers because I'm going to kill you. You got a pistol?”

I don't know why, but I nodded and then I buried my face in the dirt.

“Oliver, I'm not going to shoot you in the back of you head. That would be stupid,” as he put his left boot under my right shoulder and turned me onto my left side.

“And I'll get your pistol out, carefully, so it'll look as though you were going to shoot me.”

He stood with his boot on my shoulder and grinned. Through the pain I looked at his face and moaned, terror this time. He was serious, so I tried to scream again:

“You haven't thought this through, Martin,” but I could only mumble.

He didn't know it, but his actions had incapacitated my left arm and I had no hope of defending myself.

It was only a few seconds after he fired at me. It takes longer to tell because the events overlapped.

Martin looked puzzled because he couldn't see my pistol in its usual place on the left side. I was moaning continuously, and looking down the barrel of Martin's pistol,

so I didn't hear the soft *crack*. But I saw a neat hole appear in Martin's left temple and some blood and bone dribble down above his right ear. He looked surprised before he dropped to the ground. A pool of liquid slowly spread around his head, staining the grass and the earth a dull red before it hardened and turned brown.

I closed my eyes thinking that might ease the pain. It didn't.

And then there was bedlam.

I heard Becky scream:

*"Felix! Oh God! Please don't die on me!"*

She must have rung triple oh because the next thing I heard her say, in a loud voice full of panic, was:

*"Ambulance! Hurry! A shooting behind the police station in Smithton!"*

If one was available it wouldn't take long to drive the half a kilometre from the ambulance station to here.

She dropped her pistol, knelt beside me, her face screwed up with tears running down her cheeks.

I looked at her. The sun was directly behind her head and shone through her hair making a halo that I'd seen in pictures of saints.

"She's an angel," I thought, "taking me to heaven."

Then a man's calm voice:

"Stand up slowly, move away from your pistol and put your hands up. Or I'll kill you."

She stood up, put her hands up and screamed:

"I'm DS Rebecca Newton. Let me get my identification out."

The man, out of my vision, must have nodded because she took her warrant card out of a hip pocket and showed it to him.

I moaned bringing their attention back to me. Keith Miller went over to Martin, knelt down and his fingers searched for a pulse in his neck. He shook his head. At the same time Becky got two handkerchiefs from her bag and stemmed the bleeding from my shoulder.

"Why has she got two?" I thought irrationally. "And they're plain, large mens' hankies, not small frilly ladies' hankies with roses embroidered on them."

The next thing I heard was the siren of an ambulance as it drove into the yard. I looked at it as a paramedic jumped out with a bag and ran over to me. He pushed Becky out of the way and looked at my injury before he got a syringe and injected something into me. Fast acting painkiller? Probably morphine, because I no longer wanted to scream. There had been enough screaming and moaning for one day.

The other paramedic got a wheeled stretcher, brought it over and lowered it. Then the two paramedics got me onto it, painfully, elevated it and walked me to the ambulance.

The ride to the hospital was fast, sirens blaring while one paramedic talked on his phone. Bundling me from the ambulance into the hospital had me moaning again, despite the pain killers. All I could see were the ceiling lights flashing past and then I

was moved onto a hospital bed. I was in the Smithton District Hospital Emergency Department. Despite the pain killers I was in agony.

The bed was rolled into a room, the bed tilted up and a hard, cold x-ray plate was put behind my back and an x-ray of my shoulder was taken. Two more x-rays later I was transferred to a cubicle, partitioned off from other cubicles by folding blue curtains. My jumper and shirt were cut off, leaving me cold and shivering and moaning, and I was hooked up to monitors.

There was a muffled conversation and then a white-coated woman came into view and examined me.

“How do you feel?”

“Bain ... pain.”

She became alert, concentrating.

“How much?”

“Seven out of ten espite ... despite the pain killers.”

“Anything else?”

“The bread’s a tad hard. And I’m cod.”

She turned around and stated, emphatically:

“CT scan of the brain *immediately*. Then take him into the operating theatre.”

I was disconnected from the machinery, wheeled into another room and transferred to the scanner bed. Despite the care I felt a stab of pain and moaned “fuck!” As the bed moved silently into the scanner I saw a ring of rectangles rotate clockwise around me. I was automatically moved out and in again, to see the rectangles rotate anti-clockwise. Once more and then the machine stopped.

A few minutes later I was wheeled into an operating theatre and onto a narrow bed under multiple, very bright lights while the white-coated woman, now dressed in scrubs looked at a large computer screen. She didn’t touch anything with her gloved hands. Other scrubbed-up people busied themselves about trollies of instruments and hooked me up to a different monitor. Then the woman came over and asked me:

“How long have you trouble speaking?”

I shook my head.

“I don’t know. Occasionally I have ... broblems ... problems pronouncing words, but it’s not often. I cope. Why?”

“I think you have aphasia. Basically slurring or mispronouncing words. It’s an indication that the speech parts of your brain are malfunctioning. It doesn’t affect anything else, so your ability to think and write are not affected. Likely causes are a stroke, a blood clot in the brain, or a tumour.”

“I think it’s apaxia”

“I hate people who self diagnose. Leave it to the experts.”

“But a blood plot? A tumour?”

“Yes. But the CT scan didn’t show anything and so it might be psychological. Which is good because I don’t have to use a clot busting drug on you. It might’ve made operating on you difficult.

“Do you know that you have mispronounced words three or four times while you’ve been here?”

“No ... maybe. I don’t normally do that.”

“You’re stressed out at the moment which could explain it. However I’ll refer you to get you thoroughly examined. Now your shoulder needs my attention.”

A cheerful man came over:

“Hi Felix, what have you been doing? Now its time for bye-byes for you,” and injected me.

I woke up with a splitting headache, but no pain from my shoulder. I looked to my right and saw Becky, her makeup smudged with tears. The clock above her was at just after six thirty. I had been out of it for a few hours.

Becky smiled and said:

“I love you. Don’t *ever* do that again.”

I tried to sit up but I couldn’t. Becky called a nurse and my bed was elevated to a more comfortable position. I couldn’t move my right arm so I looked down. All I could see were a sling and a pearl white bandage around my waist holding the sling in place. I moved my fingers.

“Good,” I thought, “they didn’t amputate.”

Then I realised that amputees can still feel their limbs and twiddle their fingers, which depressed me.

“What have they done?” I asked Becky feebly.

“They removed a bullet from your shoulder blade. It had made a mess of a rib as it passed through and you’ll have to have a few titanium plates and screws inserted. That will be done in Hobart, so for now your arm’s in a plaster cast. But they say it will be OK after a while of physiotherapy.”

“Can you touch my fingers please?”

“Why?”

“Just do it.”

She smiled, put her hand under the bandage, with difficulty, and caressed my fingers. I breathed a sigh of relief.

“So I’m intact. Who shot Martin?”

“I did. Nice aim, uh?”

She wasn’t gloating, obvious from the tears. It was relief that made her say that.

“Did you have to kill him?”

“Yes. He was side on to me and I could only see his left side and the barrel of his gun. I knew I would only have one shot and I couldn’t disable him, so I aimed for the head. If I hadn’t you would be dead.”

Becky was shivering, near to tears and her voice was jerky.

“She will have PTSD,” I thought. “So will I.”

Making an effort I said:

“Thank God you persuaded me to have shooting practice. If it wasn’t for that you might’ve missed.”

Then I smiled:

“You’ll have to tell the nice person in the Feds that I’m dead.”

She laughed through her tears.

That brought my mind into focus and I struggled in the bed saying:

“I’ve got to get up, search Martin’s place, ...”

I trailed off because I just couldn’t do it and slumped back down.

“It’s already been done. I searched with the help of Sergeant Miller and we found the *ice* under his bed in a suitcase with ten thousand dollars in fifty dollar notes. The box had been opened and probably Martin’s fingerprints are all over it. I don’t think he was clever enough to wear gloves.”

“Buck?”

“At the moment the parcel of *ice* is on its way to Hobart by police helicopter. I used your phone to send Buck a message that you have his parcel and will meet him at the seat in the reserve tomorrow. He replied *why not now?* and I sent back *I have to go to Launceston*. I hope that works.”

I smiled.

“It will. He wouldn’t want over three million dollars slipping through his fingers.”

She gently stroked my face.

Then I gritted my teeth, swung my legs out and stood up. Dizzy for a few seconds, but it, like the headache had gone as I said:

“Grrrrr.”

“Get back into bed darling. You’ll feel better in the morning.”

“I have to be there, give Buck his box personally. So I am going to Hobart. Are you up to driving me? And I need my phone.”

“You’re not going until the morning at the earliest,” said Becky adamantly. “Anyway, you’ll need to be interviewed here tonight.”

She helped me back into bed and handed me what the hospital administration thought was food. Inedible white-bread sandwiches and a plastic cup of brown liquid. I wasn’t hungry, but I ate a mouthful and had one sip before I got Becky to take the tray away and said:



“The only thing that I could eat is your spag bog.”

She laughed and then left, and a man with a portable recorder came in.

“Are you up to being interviewed?” he asked.

I shrugged my left shoulder and said “OK. Where’s Becky?”

“Being interviewed separately. Recorded interview of DI Felix Oliver, DS Graeme Hicks present.”

“I don’t mind being interviewed by a sergeant, not at all, but I thought that someone above my rank would do it.”

“No one else is available and this is just a preliminary interview. You’ll be interviewed again in more detail.

“So, tell me in your own words the events of today.”

So I told him from when we arrived at the Smithton police station. I knew what to say and gave all the details that an investigating officer would want. Just the facts. He didn’t interrupt.

“Why did you go to Smithton? he asked. “Just a summary.”

“Can I ask you a question first?”

“OK.”

“Has the search warrant been executed?”

“Yes, this afternoon. Detective Sergeant Newton and Police Sergeant Miller searched Martin Campbell’s bed room and found a box under the bed holding what we thought was a large amount of crystal meth. Tests have confirmed that it’s *ice*, about three kilograms, and preliminary results indicate that Campbell’s fingerprints are on it.”

I was puzzled. I thought that Becky had told me the news, but I didn’t remember it. Maybe a side effect of the anaesthetic? I shook my head, as if to clear it, and answered the question “why Smithton?”

I told him the outline of what I knew, leading up to getting the warrant yesterday and driving to Smithton. In conclusion I said:

“There but for the grace of God go I.”

“Why?”

“It could have been me that died, not Martin Campbell.”

“You were acting on a hunch?”

“Why?”

“The Dark Princess was completely negative for drugs, so your decision that the drugs were off loaded at Arthur River was a hunch, not supported by any evidence.”

I tried to shrug, but I couldn’t.

“Maybe, but the time line of the other events pointed to that town and to Campbell.”

DS Hicks was satisfied, ended the recording and went away.

I closed my eyes and dozed until Becky returned with DS Keith Miller.

“What happened,” I asked.

“We’ve been interviewed at length” said Keith, “and forensics have combed the back yard of the police station for evidence. They got fragments of bullets from the

scene, and from you, and they will be matched up to the hand guns, your's and mine included. They've confiscated them to do tests."

"But what happened," I insisted.

"I didn't hear anything, but I looked up after you'd gone out and saw a woman get out of a car in front of the station, draw a pistol and head down the back. Naturally I got my pistol out and followed her. I arrived just as she fired and ran to you, calling for an ambulance. She put down her pistol and knelt beside you, screaming, so I ordered her to get up and away from her pistol. Then she showed me her warrant card and I took the search warrant out of your pocket. DS Newton was shivering, so first I took her into the station through the back door and got a PC to look after her. Later the PC brought her here. Then I called DS Hicks and forensics, and cordoned off the area."

"Press reporters?"

"We've put an embargo on the case, so there won't be any reports on TV or in the newspapers until your say so."

A phone rang, and Becky passed my phone over to me from the bedside locker.

"DI Felix Oliver."

"Hi Sir, its Bartholomew. I've just arrested Damian Hurst on suspicion of murder."

"Hi. Where was he?"

"A patrol called in and said they'd seen Hurst's car off the road near Ferntree. So I went up, looked in the car and he was asleep on the back seat. He was a bit angry and tried to fight us off, but he was handcuffed and is now in a cell."

"What about the car?"

"I'll get forensics to tow it away and run a fine tooth-comb over it."

"Good work. But get me to tell you the difference between a fine tooth-comb and a fine-tooth comb. I'm smiling in case you think I'm criticising."

"I had nits when I was at school, so I know the difference," in a wounded voice. "And I'm smiling in case you thought I was serious!"

"How are you coping? OK I think?"

"Yes Sir. I still have nightmares but talking with you has helped.

"And someone told me about *Post Traumatic Strength* or *Post Traumatic Growth*, and it's possible to be more resilient and handle the emotions so that they become less of a hindrance. I think that will happen to me. And it's only been four days, not long. But if possible I would like to avoid gory scenes."

"Good and I'll do what I can. But keep me informed of your progress."

Becky was frowning at me as I terminated the call.

"Ah, you only heard my side of the conversation. That was Bartholomew. He's arrested the man accused of the shotgun death of his wife's live-in partner."

A nurse turned up with some pills she insisted I take. I looked at Becky and then closed my eyes. That's all I remember of the Monday.

# *Tuesday*

I woke early. Despite my experiences I'd had a good night's sleep.

Becky turned up a tad before seven; she must have slept in a motel or somewhere, because she looked fresh.

She realised that I was adamant and if she didn't drive me to Hobart then I would make my way by some other means. So she had called a nurse and explained. The nurse went and came back a few minutes later.

"The surgeon thinks there's no problem, but you are booked in to be operated on in Hobart at four this afternoon. Provided you don't move your arm and be there on time then she doesn't care how you get there."

"I can't move my arm anyway. Becky, is there anything I can wear on top? My slacks are OK."

So she put her oversized, floppy jumper over the plaster cast and I signed out of the hospital.

I got in the passenger seat without much bother, Becky did up my seat belt, and then drove us to Hobart. I dozed to Perth where we stopped for petrol.

"I need a wee, and I'm ungru ... I'm hungry," I said and got out and went to the toilets. No problem there because I'm left-handed.

"Does Buck know I'm left-handed? I mused. "Probably not, so that's a plus."

After a delicious hamburger with the lot and two cappuccinos to wash down the paracetamol, I got back in Becky's car for the drive to Hobart.

"Becky, when will we get to Hobart?"

"About twelve, maybe a bit after. We're going to my place."

“I want a pistol.”

“Will you need it?”

“Perhaps, in case Buck is armed.”

“I’ll be there when you meet Buck.”

“No you won’t! There won’t be any trouble, I promise you.”

“You’ll need officers to be present to take him away, so I’ll be there.”

I sighed. She was adamant.

“Give me my phone.”

“It’s in the glove box.”

I had trouble holding the phone in my lap, but I managed to send a text message to Buck, reciting it out loud so that Becky knew what I was sending:

*Meet me reserve seat at 3. I’ll give you the parcel.*

A couple of minutes later I got a message. *OK* was all that it said.

I went to sleep.

I woke up, my shoulder aching and disoriented, with Becky gently shaking me.

“Where are we?”

“At my flat. I’ll help you in and then straight to the shower.”

“What time is it?”

“Twelve. We made good time.”

She helped in and took me straight to the bathroom. She stripped off my clothes and then her clothes.

“I like looking at your body Becky, but why have you taken off your clothes?”

“I’m going to give you a shower and I don’t want to get my clothes wet,” as she cuddled up against me, nuzzling my neck.

“I’m filthy,” I objected.

Answered by “I don’t care,” said emphatically.

“I don’t think I’m up for sex.”

She raised her head and smiled.

“I’m not surprised! Maybe tomorrow night?”

She got me in the shower, hand held the shower head, so she didn’t get the plaster cast wet, soaped me all over, shampooed my hair and then towelled my dry before helping me into my clothes that I’d left in her spare room.

Then into the kitchen for coffee, paracetamol and toast. I wanted butter, but there was only margarine.

“That’s something I must correct,” I thought.

My phone called me incessantly, so I answered it, putting it on speaker phone so that I didn’t have to hold it.

“I’m a clerk at the supreme court. Where are you?”

“At home.” Well, Becky’s flat felt like home. “Why”

“Tom Smith is going to be sentenced. I’ve sent you emails about it, but you haven’t answered.”

“Oh buck! When?”

“You’ve got an hour or else the judge is going to be livid.”

“I’ll drive,” said Becky unnecessarily.

We went to our office to pick up my notes and then walked to the court building, making it just in time.

“I’ve got some things to do, so I won’t come in with you. I’ll go to our office and meet you there. You’ll be OK alone?”

“Yes Becky,” I smiled. “No problems. Or is it problems?”

“Speak deliberately slowly when your in there or the judge might think you are mad!”

I went in and the judge scowled.

“What have you done to your arm?”

“A long story Your Honour,” I said rather slowly, “but I was in the Smithton hospital. In the north west of Tasmania.”

“I know where it is, thank you,” said patronisingly. “Tom Smith has pleaded not guilty and then changed his plea to guilty. So I must sentence him even though I find the evidence against him rather weak.”

“It’s not weak Your Honour, it is compelling.”

“Why?”

I remembered AC Fischer’s advice, to suck up to your superiors, so I said:

“As I am sure you are well aware, forensic science has advanced over the last few years. And, as I am also sure you are aware, DNA can be extracted from most living things and is unique from one thing to another, even of the same type. So dog DNA is specific to dogs but unique to each and every dog.”

“So? Get on with it.”

“We took a sample of dog hairs from Mr Smith’s jeans and from the dog at the house he burgled.”

“Whether he did or did not burgle that house is for me to decide, not you,” in a scathing voice.

“I apologise Your Honour. As you correctly say, at the house he *allegedly* robbed. The DNA from both samples was extracted and it was from the same dog, proving that Mr Smith had been in that house. Also, there is the CCTV of a lurching man outside that house. I know of only one person who lurches in that way, and that person is Tom Smith. That was enough for us to get a search warrant and we found a Patek Phillippe watch with the same serial number as was stolen from the house in Mr Smith’s bedroom and trousers covered in dog hair which, as I have explained, is proof of him being in the house. That was enough to arrest him and take him before you Your Honour.

“Mr Smith denied stealing the watch and said it was given to him by a friend. But the DNA evidence makes that statement clearly untrue. Without it the case against Mr Smith would be weak.”

The judge meditated for a few seconds and then said:

“Explain why Mr Smith is on bail.”

“Tom held up a general store, because he wanted money to buy drugs, and accidentally stabbed the owner. I say accidentally because he is not violent.”

“Tom Smith, stand up. As you have pled guilty, the only concern I had was what sentence I should pass. I note that you’ve been in remand for breach of bail conditions and that you’re a drug addict, which might explain your recidivism. But being a drug addict does not matter and I cannot condone your behaviour.

“You are sentenced to four years with a non parole period of three years. Take him down.”

As I left the court I breathed a sigh of relief that my apraxia or aphasia didn’t slow me up. And then I briskly walked back to the station where I got a pistol and ammunition from the gun store. I couldn’t put on a holster with one arm, so I put the pistol under my belt.

Then upstairs to our office and wait for Becky.

My thoughts about arresting Buck were interrupted by a phone call.

“Felix Oliver.”

“It’s Deputy Commissioner Andrew Peters.”

“Hello Sir.”

“As you know, your interview in Smithton was only preliminary and you’ll have to be interviewed about your role in the events on yesterday afternoon.”

“Yes.”

“I want to do it this afternoon.”

“Can you do it tomorrow?”

“Why?”

“The main reason is that I have to arrest the suspect in the drugs’ importation case.”

“Can you get another police officer to do it?”

“No, it has to be me, for reasons I’ll explain in the interview. And the second reason is that my shoulder is very painful and distracts ... distracts me. It will be operated on late this afternoon and I don’t think there is enough time. But tomorrow I will be much better. Hopefully.”

“OK, tomorrow afternoon. It’s probably better because I’ll have the forensics reports. After I’ve interviewed you I will set up an internal inquiry.”

I called Bartholomew:

“Can we interview Hobson now? Later I have to be out and I don’t want it left hanging.”

“That’s OK Sir, it’ll only be a formality. In five minutes?”

At the interview Hobson had a solicitor and, after the usual formalities, he said:

“Mr Hobson has been held too long, so I demand you release him.”

“Grrrr!” I exclaimed, “I’m orry ... sorry, but I think you don’t know the facts. Mr Hobson has broken his conditions of bail and we can hold him in custody for however long we like.”

“Hmmp. Mr Hobson wants to lay a charge of grievous bodily harm against Mrs Murphy who stabbed my client twice in the leg.”



I sighed. When will this pantomime end? But Bartholomew rescued me.

“Mrs Murphy has already been charged and released on bail. Anything else you want to say before we begin?”

Hobson’s solicitor glowered but remained silent, but Hobson spoke up:

“Have you charged that little shit Martin Campbell?”

“What for?” asked Bartholomew.

“Breaking my nose when he arrested me for stealing from cars. He knows,” pointing at me.

“I don’t know. I don’t know Campbell. Do you know?” Bartholomew asked, looking at me.

“He wasn’t formally charged, because the evidence was ambiguous, but he was demoted. It doesn’t matter now that he’s dead.”

That didn’t surprise Bartholomew but, as he didn’t know about Campbell’s death until now, I would’ve thought some expression would appear on his face if he had been working with Campbell. However nothing, expressionless, as he continued:

“This is a formality. On the evidence of two witnesses and fingerprints at the scene, and that you were carrying a knife, I’m charging you with aggravated burglary, and you will be held in custody until your appearance in the Supreme Court. Do you want to say anything?”

“I don’t want to say anything to you, you little shit!”

“Oh well, that concludes the interview.”

When we were alone Bartholomew asked:

“Sir, you just said a serving police officer is dead. Why?”

“First, you didn’t mind being called a little shit?”

Bartholomew shrugged.

“No, I’ve been called far worse. I simply won’t rise to the bait.”

“Did you know Martin Campbell?” I asked.

“No, I’ve never met him. I’m just curious.”

“There’s been a press embargo and only a few officers know about it.”

“Why?”

“I’m arresting a suspect this afternoon and we didn’t want to alert him, else he would’ve gone to ground.”

Bartholomew shrugged.

“Nothing to do with me, so I’ll get on with other jobs. Maybe you’ll tell me later?”

“I will. I promise. But now I have to go.”



“OK, Becky, what’s organised?”

“I have collected the box of *ice* from forensics. I’ll drive you to the reserve and you’ll take the box and go to the seat, putting the box under the seat under you. Then you’ll wait for Buck.”

“My pistol?”

She got up, went to her bag, got it out and handed it to me.

“I objected, but I was over-ruled, so you can have it.”

“Thank you. Can I wear your sloppy jumper to hide it?”

“Yes,” smiling at my practicality.

“I’ll meet him alone?”

“We’ll be there. But for God’s sake don’t let on by making eyes at me!”

“I can just manage that.”

I’d had a long sleep and a shower with Becky. Fortunately the shower cubicle was large enough for two people. So that with black coffee, meant that I was wide awake, and the drugs had got rid of any lingering pain. I was ready. And impatient.

Becky put the Mercury down on the table, opened to the crossword, and gave me a biro.

“Do that,” she ordered.

So I did, over a second coffee. But it was easy and I’d finished it after about half an hour. I looked at the sudoku, I got one number and then gave up.

“When we live together,” I thought, “I’ll teach her how to do crosswords and let her try to teach me about sudokus.”

So I read the rest of the paper, starting at the back to see if there was any cricketing news. We won! But I wouldn't be part of the team in the final next week. However I would be cheering from the boundary.

Then Becky came in with the box and said:

"I've rung the Department of Public Prosecutions and spoken to Peter Taggart. He's fine with our plan and it's not entrapment. But he wants to talk with you."

So I called him.

"Felix, Peter. You wanted to talk with me?"

"Hi Felix. Yes, but it's confidential. Can we meet tomorrow. It would be best if we meet at my home because I'm working from home."

I was puzzled.

"What about?"

"I'll tell you when you're here. About four tomorrow afternoon?"

"OK. Give me your address."

I shook my head as I terminated the call.

"What does he want?" Becky asked.

"I don't know and I can't think of anything." I shrugged. "I'll find out tomorrow."

Becky looked at her phone and said:

"It's time to go."

I was eagerly anticipating the moment when I would meet Buck, so I got up immediately. She helped me on with the holster, undone so I could get the pistol out easily, and her sloppy jumper to hide it. I followed her to the door, the box under her left arm.

I got into her car with no problems and did up the seat belt. Becky put the box on the back seat.

"Is it empty?" I asked.

"No, it's just as we found it. In case he looks at it."

"He will, I'll make sure."

We drove in silence. Becky stopped her car a street away from my unit and we got out in a deserted road. She handed me the box and kissed me.

"I love you," she said, "so don't do anything manly or stupid."

I kissed her back.

"No way! I expect sex tonight."

"In your dreams," with a broad grin. "You're in hospital tonight. Off you go."

I walked, the box under my left arm, feeling some aching as the drugs wore off. Small grey clouds, outlined in white, scurried across the sky. Past my unit with its low fence separating it from the footpath. Red bricks, about sixty centimetres high, and evenly spaced red brick columns that were twice as high. The columns had the threads of rusty bolts poking out signifying long removed wrought iron scrolled panels. Ages before I'd lived there.

Then by the usual route to the reserve. I'd quietly walked all the paths in it. The top path that met the diagonal path, close to the high mesh fence that separated it

from an out door basketball court with, half way along, a clear patch running from it to the middle path. Despite the fence I would occasionally see basket balls nestling under trees. And the bottom path, with its pond of water crowded out by bulrushes. Under the trees, most of the ground was covered with native grasses, plants with small flowers and tiny native orchids. But there were large areas of dense, dark green bracken ferns, smothering and killing the diminutive beauty. And some all-pervading blackberries, the bane of Australia.

I arrived there a tad early, several minutes to three, passing the wattle shrub, surrounded by a halo of rich yellow as its flowers had started dropping, and a person gathering dry twigs.

“She must have a wood fire and gets them for kindling.” I thought.

Thankfully the seat was unoccupied. I put the box under the seat at the right end, if you're facing the seat, and sat over it, angled so that I could rest my bad arm against the back. A carefully chosen spot so that my left arm and pistol were free. I brushed off a few tiny wattle flowers that the light breeze had dislodged and my jumper had collected.

I'd been vaccinated against flu, but I tried to keep my distance from people. The main reason was that one of my aunts died. She was vaccinated, but caught the flu and ended up getting pneumonia from it. She was in the Intensive Care Unit for a few days, slipped into a coma and died during the night. Sad, because she was young and had a couple of kids, but the flu doesn't distinguish.

Not that social distancing is any use. One time, it was calm with only the sigh of a breeze, I was going home and as I walked through the reserve I smelt the unpleasant odour of cigarette smoke. I looked around and saw a woman on the seat smoking. But I was about fifteen, maybe twenty metres from the seat. So if cigarette smoke can travel that far then the flu virus could. Anyway, most people were too selfish to care.

I waited. Patiently surveying in all directions.

A magpie called. Just a double high note, repeated after a while. Not a song. It was saying *I'm here*, hoping for company. I willed it to sing, but I'm not God and it didn't. I craned my neck in the direction of its call, peering at the branches, and spotted it, its mottled back facing me. A female. Males have plain backs.

I also spied a butcher bird, stout, strong beaked in contrast to the slim and delicately beaked magpie. They also sing beautifully but it was silent, looking intently around for prey. If it saw a mouse or a rat it would swoop down and inevitably catch its dinner.

But blackbirds are my favourite. When I walked through the reserve at dusk on a warm night I would sometimes sit on the seat and listen to their songs. As far as I can tell, every song is different, nothing repeated. But none were around as I waited for Buck. It was too early.

Buck appeared not long after I had heard the magpie call, I don't know, for the fifth time? He approached from my left. He wore a black suit, like I had seen him in, and sunglasses, not necessary in the dappled light. He looked around, decided that it was

safe and sat down on the left end of the seat, nodding at me. The only people around were a couple walking their dog. On lead so that the yellow wattle blooms were not a problem.

“Hiya Felix. What’s happened to your arm?”

“Broke it when I was up north. It’s lowed ... slowed me down because I have to have it in a plaster cast for two months. It’s a bummer. That’s why I’m a day late. Sorry.”

“I feel sorry for you,” Buck said, feigning mock concern. “You have my parcel?”

“Yep, under the seat.”

He looked underneath him and saw nothing. Then his gaze followed the seat and saw it. He grunted.

“Move your feet.”

I obliged and he retrieved the box and put it on his lap.

“It’s been opened before,” I said, tempting him.

Buck obligingly opened the box and drew the cut plastic away so that he could see the contents. He smiled as he examined the three bags and said:

“OK, it’s good. But if it isn’t then I’ll come after you. I’ve got your address. But I hope we never meet again.”

He turned to face me and saw the barrel of my pistol pointed at his lower left ribs, his heart.

“Put your arms up.”

He looked at the barrel pointed at him and decided that this was not a time for bravado, so he did as I’d ordered him.

“Orry, Buck, but you’ll see me again. I’m arresting you for possession of drugs with the intent to supply.”

“You wouldn’t ...” is all he got out.

“Just try me. I’d rather shoot you in the heart, two or more bullets, to make up for the beatings you’ve given me and the pot shot. Come on, what are you waiting for?”

He hesitated, the box of *ice* on his lap, his fingerprints all over it.

“Show me your warrant card,” he spat out.

“Sorry, I can’t do that. Dodgy arm you know. But they’ll show you theirs.”

The couple walking the dog had arrived a few seconds ago, in my sight but not in Buck’s, and stood their silently, listening. Marmalade, her Drugs’ Squad trainer and Becky. Becky moved behind the bench and handcuffed Buck’s upraised hands.

“You’ll rot in hell,” he said softly.

Becky was on her phone and moments afterwards a couple of police officers came and walked Buck to their waiting car. By the time that they’d arrived, Marmalade, on a leash, had dragged her handler over to me, sniffed the box and sat staring fixedly at it. When she’d got a reward from her handler she switched her attention to me and busily licked my hand. I put the pistol back in its holster and stroked her ears.

“Interview,” I said to Becky.

“No time. I have to get you to the hospital.”

“But ...”

“Don’t argue.”

We went back to her car and drove to the hospital.

I shivered a tad while we walked the short distance from where Becky had parked her car to the hospital. The weather? Or my state of mind?

Becky asked at reception and she led me to the right place where I was stripped out of my clothes and put into a bed wearing nothing but a hospital gown.

I didn't have long to wait before an orderly came and wheeled my bed out into the corridor and into a large room with the scanner in the middle.

"CT scan," he said, unnecessarily because I'd already been in the bowels of one at Smithton.

I was off-loaded and disappeared into the bowels of the scanner while a couple of people looked on from an adjacent room with a large window.

A nice, English woman's voice intoned:

"Breath in and hold your breath."

That was different. And then a few seconds later:

"Breath normally."

That happened twice before they, whoever they were, were satisfied. And then I was wheeled back to the ward from whence I'd come.

A long wait.

Punctuated by a nurse bringing me some undrinkable tea and inedible sandwiches that tasted of nothing much. I was hungry but left it mostly uneaten and undrunk.

To manage the boredom I looked out the window.

The view was of rusting corrugated iron roofs, air vents and two air conditioning units. But there was a gap, a lane way, and I could see a small portion of a busy road.

People moving slowly or scurrying about. Cars and trucks. Occasionally a bus would stop for a minute and then go away. It occupied me during the dreary waiting.

But I was exhausted by the day's events and soon dropped off to sleep.

There was no clock, so I don't know when I was awoken. The top of my gown was taken away, the bandage undone and the plaster cast sawn off. A nurse lifted the dressing and smiled.

"No infection."

Then a bandage was reapplied and I was taken to an operating theatre. There I was bundled onto a narrow operating table under blazing lights and stripped of my gown while nurses went around checking that all was in readiness on the stainless steel trollies with stainless steel implements, syringes and bottles. And there was another trolley with a small, blue plastic bag that had been cut open revealing a shiny piece of metal and some screws.

A man came in, dressed in a gown, gloves, face mask and a hair net. Presumably he was the surgeon and he said to me:

"OK, Felix, We've used the CT scan images and a three D printer to make you a new tungsten rib which I'll insert in a few minutes. I'll glue some fragments of your rib to it and hopefully they'll grow back. It shouldn't take long."

"Wha bout obese people? The table?" I asked.

"They flow over the edges. We have a bucket to catch any spillages."

"Dry sense of humour," I thought.

"When will I be able to use my arm?" I asked.

"Not my scene. Physiotherapists will tell you that."

An anaesthetist appeared in my limited view.

"OK Felix, it's time for you to go to sleep," as he injected me.

That's all I know.

I woke up in a ward, in a bed. I looked down. No plaster cast but a new bandage holding the sling against me. But my fingers were free. I twiddled them to check they were OK. I turned my head to see Becky in a chair. She came over and kissed me gently, her hair cascading like a dark brown waterfall around her face.

"No sex tonight," she said.

"Why not?" I asked grinning.

"You're staying in tonight. You'll be checked tomorrow and then you'll be let out."

"So soon?"

"As always they're short of beds and you'll be chucked out as soon as they can."

"The food's terrible, so I can't wait. A prawn laksa when I get home? And perhaps a massage?"

"Your wish is my command Sir! But where?" she whispered with her head next to mine so that I couldn't see her wicked grin.

"What time is it?" I asked, feeling her warm cheek against mine.

"About six thirty. The operation took about an hour and a half."

"What's happened?"



“David Martin, Buck, do you mean? He is in a police cell waiting to be interviewed.”

“As I’m going to be out tomorrow I can interview him with you.”

“If you feel well enough.”

“I should be. And the Deputy Commissioner wants to interview me tomorrow. You’ve been interviewed?”

“Yes, and I think all the other people involved. I think it’s a formality, but he did a thorough job.”

“What did he ask?”

“I’ve been told not to tell you. I think Deputy Commissioner doesn’t want any collusion and that’s difficult because of the delay in interviewing you. But he has to trust me. Maybe he will ask some questions about it.”

“Can you erect me please.”

Becky chortled.

“I can do that if you want me too, but maybe you mean the bed.”

So she demurely raised the end of the bed so that I was almost sitting up.

“I’m off to get something for dinner,” she said.

“Can you come back?”

She kissed me, said “yes” and walked out the door.

I closed my eyes but didn’t sleep. So I opened them again and looked out the window. I was in the same room with the same view, but now there were lights on in most of the windows in the building opposite.

Cleaners making ready for tomorrow? And the dimming light made the rusty roof-scape fade till the white of air conditioning units was all that remained. There was a street light in the now less busy road, with occasional pedestrians and vehicles going past, and a bus with all the passengers illuminated.

I looked at the triangular plastic box of two sandwiches cut in half diagonally. Standardised, square white bread with an inadequate smear of margarine and the soggy crusts cut off.

Standardised, square yellow slices of imitation cheese, a couple of millimetres smaller than the bread so that the soggy crusts can be cut off. Standardised, square processed ham identical in size to the cheese. Two, millimetre thin slices of tomato that had been grown in glasshouses so they were deliberately tasteless. And the now tepid, light brown liquid in its waxed paper mug with two small paper tubes containing standardised amounts of white sugar and a small wooden stick to stir them in the liquid.

I didn’t do anything with them.

Then, I don’t know why, memories of long ago filled my mind. So when Becky came back I wanted to talk.

“You haven’t touched you meal,” she admonished.

“Is that food? I thought it was a still life.”

She smiled, brought from her practical bag a warm, white paper bag.

“You need fattening up,” she said as she handed it to me.

I looked in it and a delicious aroma filled my nostrils. Two deep fried triangular samosas! Potatoes, green peas, herbs and spices held by an envelope of crunchy pastry.

Later, after tearing the bag open and using my fingers to catch any stray morsels, I sat back and smiled contentedly.

“Mmmm, ... but I want to tell you about some incidents in my past.”

“Why?”

“It’s to do with my peeche impediment. I’ve, naturally, been worried about it. But maybe it has been inevitable.

“I can read, write and sometimes speak English fluently, as you would expect. But I can’t learn other languages.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know, but it has curred ... occurred over a long time.

“When I was in primary school the class was taught the rudiments of French. I failed catastrophically. I couldn’t remember or cope with the common, irregular verbs, so I didn’t know what to say. I learnt a few nouns, because they are the same in English, but numbers and the days of the week I just couldn’t learn them. After a few weeks most of my class mates could converse in simple French with approximately the right accent. But if I was asked to say something I didn’t know what to say so I was silent.

“When I left school I travelled to France for a few weeks. I’d heard that the best way to learn a foreign language was to go somewhere it was spoken and you will pick it up naturally. My French teacher, who was an Australian, went to Germany for two years, to a place where English was not spoken, only German. When she came back she was fluent in the language.

“So I went to France and failed miserably. I just couldn’t make sense of what people were saying, and my few attempts at speaking was met with shrugs of incomprehension.

“OK, the ability to speak another language varies, but nearly all people learn enough to get by. I don’t.

“My point is that I suspect the language parts of my brain have always been under developed, probably since birth. And maybe my speech impediment is a symptom of that.”

“Not all people find languages easy,” said Becky, “especially verbs. Many people with English as a second language use *did* because they don’t know the past tense of many words. So they say *did find* instead of *found* and *did eat* instead of *ate*, et cetera.

“But it doesn’t matter. You can think, read and write. And you are an excellent detective. And you can drink beer! And you are physically very, very good! That’s all that matters. Who cares if you make slip ups while speaking. Everyone understands you. It’s like stuttering. My Dad stutters all the time, but we still love him and understand him.”

# *Wednesday*

It was early on Wednesday morning and I was checked by a doctor and given the all clear.

“Your shoulder will take time to heal properly,” she said, “so don’t do anything stupid or you might do more permanent damage. But you can move it gently.”

I wanted out, so I said:

“I’ll be careful. I’m left handed so I can avoid using it too much.”

Then a nurse came and checked the bandage. Then I was helped on with my clothes, sat in a chair and my arm was put in a sling.

I waited in the chair until the nurse came back with pills and forms.

“Sorry for the delay, we’re short staffed. Take the pills as directed on the boxes. The antibiotic is very important, so don’t skip any. Here are appointments with a radiographer and the surgeon; make sure you get your shoulder x-rayed the day before the appointment with the surgeon. And here are referrals to a physiotherapist and a speech therapist; probably won’t see them before six months, because there’s not enough specialists.

“You’re good to go,” with a smile.

I left.

When I went out the main doors of the hospital I breathed a sigh of relief and walked slowing back to the station with the sun warming me. The sparrows, pecking at the food discarded by humans, twittered joyously, and a couple of seagulls marched haughtily past me, pushing the sparrows out of their way. Nice, natural noises after the mechanical din of the hospital.

The security was tight. Anyone entering the police station had to have their possessions x-rayed and go through a metal detector gate. I'd done this countless times, so I knew the drill. But it was a tad more difficult with my arm strapped to my side, so I deliberately didn't have anything in my pockets other than my warrant card and wallet. I took the warrant card out of my pocket, showed it and put it in the tray with my wallet to go through the x-ray.

Then the metal detector. I waltzed through and was greeted by loud, high pitched sounds! I was momentarily stunned.

"Over here Sir," said the constable, who was carrying a hand-held detector.

He scanned my pockets and trousers and then my upper body. Loud, high pitched sounds! Then I realised.

"Sorry. I had metal plates and screws inserted in my shoulder last night. I'd forgotten about them."

"OK, you can go Sir."

"No, wait. You shouldn't do anything differently just because of my rank. So check me properly."

He checked the area around my shoulder, looked into my sling and then passed the scanner over the rest of my body.

"I'm satisfied Sir."

I went to the room outside our office and was greeted by "Hiya" and "what's the matter with your arm?"

Becky was in our office and scolded me:

"Felix! You were meant to call me and then I'd have collected you!"

"I enjoyed the walk in the sunshine, Becky."

She hugged and kissed me.

"Not here. People can see."

"I don't give a rat's arse what people think. And anyway it's personal and no business of theirs."

I sat at my desk and Becky brought me a cup of coffee and chocolate mint biscuits, which I devoured with unashamed pleasure. I looked at my in tray and it was empty.

"What's happened to all the reports I have to read?"

"AC Fischer got another DI to process them, so you can relax and do nothing while you mend."

It was about ten and I was going out of my mind with boredom when Bartholomew came to our office and said:

"Are you ready to interview Hurst Sir?"

"Oh joy to have something to do! But why the delay?"

"He has a legal aid lawyer with him, Mr Burns, and they were together for over an hour before we were told it was OK to proceed."

"OK, but you'll interview him."

"I don't think that's right Sir."

"I do. I'll open proceedings and butt in if I need to."

So we went to the interview room, sat down and I said:

“Recorded interview with Damian Hurst. I am Detective Inspector Felix Oliver and my partner is Detective Constable Bartholomew. Hurst’s solicitor Mr Burns present.”

“I insist that you release my client,” said Mr Burns. He has been in custody for too long without you charging him.”

I looked at my watch and then replied:

“Sorry, Mr Burns, but we have forty eight hours to charge Hurst or release him. He was arrested on Monday afternoon, so we are well within the forty eight hours.”

Hurst’s solicitor grumbled, but there was nothing he could do.

“He is trying it on,” I thought, “hoping that we’d release his client.”

I looked pointedly at Bartholomew. He squirmed a tad in his seat and then he said:

“Mr Hurst, you have been arrested on suspicion of the murder of Byron Gibbs. Can you take us through what you know of the events on last Tuesday night.”

“I went round to my house, ...” Damian started.

“In breach of the Family Violence Order.”

“Yes. I don’t give a shit about the FVO. I just wanted to talk to my kids.”

“At that time of night?”

“Well, if they were asleep I would just kiss them.”

“OK. Is it your house?”

“No, it’s rented from the Housing Commission, but I’m not allowed anywhere near there.”

“Are you allowed to see the kids?”

“Yeah, one day a fortnight. It’s not enough. The kids talked to me about how Gibbs was violent towards their mum. Ranting and raving and hitting her. And he sometimes hit the kids.”

“According to the FVO you were violent towards your wife and hit the kids.”

“Well, sometimes they provoked me. And I only hit them when they’d hit me.”

“So your violence was alright?”

“Not violence. I was teaching them how to behave proper.”

“You were teaching your wife?”

“Yeah. She sometimes got out of hand, screaming and scratching me, so I told her who was boss. I earned the money and she only had to do the house-work and shopping.”

“Are you divorced?”

“No. She’s a Catholic and doesn’t believe in divorce.”

“OK. Back to Tuesday night. What did you do?”

“I knocked on the front door and there was no answer, so I went round the back and got in. Looked in the kitchen and saw Byron with his brains blown out all over the place. He stank of alcohol. Obviously he’d suicided. But I panicked and went into the bedrooms where I found my wife and kids stabbed to death. So I scarpered. You can charge me with the FVO breach if you like, but nothing else.”

“So how come your fingerprints are on the shotgun used to kill Byron Gibbs?”

“It’s mine, so my dabs’ll be on it.”

“It is an unregistered, sawn-off shotgun, so why do you own it?”

“I must tell Bartholomew that I like his questioning,” I thought. “Not giving anything away but giving him enough rope to hang himself. May be it’ll confuse Damian? I hope so.”

“It was given me by a friend,” as Damian shrugged his shoulders.

“Your friend’s name?”

The solicitor attracted Damian’s attention and shook his head.

“Not saying.”

“OK,” said Bartholomew quietly, “I accept that. In the boot of your car we found a box of shotgun cartridges with one missing. ...”

Hurst just shrugged.

“So how did we find your shotgun in the kitchen?”

“I lent it to Byron Gibbs.”

“What did you do then?”

“As I said, I scarpered. Didn’t want the police to find me there and arrest me because of the FVO. He killed my wife and kids and then turned the gun on himself. Simple.”

“You are living in your car?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“For how long?”

“A week or two. I got thrown out of the flat I rented.”

“There’s something I don’t understand. The forensic’s report states that your fingerprints were over the fingerprints of Byron Gibbs. So you were that last person to handle the shotgun. And the cartridge in the shotgun only has your fingerprints on it. Can you tell me why?”

“Sorry to interrupt this questioning,” said Mr Burns, “but I need to talk to my client.”

“OK,” I said, “Bartholomew and I will leave. Call us in again when you have finished.”

I stopped the recording and we went out.

We waited, but it wasn’t long before Mr Burns was ready and we sat down opposite Hurst.

“Recorded interview continued,” I said and looked at his solicitor.

“Mr Hurst will not answer any more questions. I have a signed, written statement from him that I’ll read out:

“I lent my shotgun to Mr Gibbs with one cartridge in it. He wanted it to kill a snake that he’d seen in the back yard.

“When I went in the kitchen I picked up the gun and checked that it’d been fired. Then I put it down and left the house.”

Mr Burns then gave the statement to Bartholomew.



“I’ve contacted the DPP,” said Bartholomew, “so now I’m going to formally charge you Damian Hurst with the murder of Byron Gibbs. As you are of no fixed abode you will be detained in custody until the trial. Do you have any objections Mr Burns?”

He shook his head.

“Interview terminated.”

When Bartholomew had processed Hurst, he returned and I motioned him to sit in a comfy chair and I sat in the other one.

“Bartholomew, how are your nightmares?”

“I think they’re getting better. Or at least I can cope with the deaths because I don’t think any of them suffered for long.”

“So?”

“I’m not sure that I’ll ever be able to handle people who are injured.”

“Why not?”

“All around Australia statistics are gathered on how many deaths in motor vehicles there are. But the only mention of the injured people is occasionally to tell us whether they are life threatening or non life threatening.

“But the non life threatening injuries include amputations of limbs, quadriplegia, brain damage and broken bones that cause permanent damage and disability. Even catastrophic injuries can be non life threatening.

“I’ve seen a person whose body and brain were so mangled that he had to be wheeled around in a specially designed wheel chair, with his head on one side and spit dribbling from his twisted mouth. As he could only grunt I don’t know how much of his brain was working. But his life wasn’t threatened, so long as there were people to feed him, dress him and perform other essential tasks which he wasn’t capable of doing himself.

“Are you religious? Having a belief can enable people to cope.”

“No I’m not Sir. If God exists then he doesn’t interfere in people’s lives. Innocent adults and children die or are mutilated in car crashes, but God does nothing to prevent it. And innocent people are collateral damage in wars, but God does nothing about it.

“The same things would happen if there was no God and so belief in God is pointless. And being an atheist is also pointless.

“Do you believe in God Sir?”

“It’s irrelevant, because we are talking about you. But, as I’ve said before, you are a good detective and it would be a waste if you resigned. So I’ll get you reassigned so that you’ll be under my supervision. That way I’ll be able to control what cases are allotted to you.”

“My sergeant will be livid.”

“Not your problem. I’ll deal with any fallout. Were you alright with Hobson being stabbed?”

“Yes, I didn’t have a problem.”

“OK, so it’s only major injuries or deaths that you can’t handle. I can fix that.”



“One other thing Sir. It’s irrelevant, but I’m going to change my name. As you know, I hate my given name so at last I’m going to do something about it. The form has got to be witnessed by a Justice of Peace. Do you know one?”

“No, but there will be at least one JP in this station. Ask at the reception desk. What is your new name going to be?”

“Bartholomew was one of the twelve apostles, so I’m going to change it to Simon or Philip. Do you have a preference, because I don’t?”

“I like Simon.”

“Done! Simon Bartholomew it is.”

I laughed.

“Parents name their children, so am I your mother or your father?”

“My daddy,” he chuckled.

“Or you could have both and be called Simon Philip Bartholomew?”

“Nah, too much of a mouthful. Anyway I’ll have enough of a problem practicing my signature with only one.”

“Maybe you’ll be called Simple? But you’re far from simple.”

“I’ll have to put up with it, if it ever occurs. So I will fill out the form and submit it.”

“OK, Simon, but now I have to go to an interview. Oh, by the way, did you know Martin Campbell?”

“No, who’s he?”

“It doesn’t matter,” and I believed him.

“Where’s Buck?” I asked.

“David Martin? He’s been processed and finger printed. I’ll put him in interview room two.”

We went in and waited for a few minutes until Buck arrived. Becky started the recording.

“Recorded interview with David Martin. Present are Detective Inspector Felix Oliver and Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton,” I said.

It was the first time that he’d known my rank and he was surprised.

“S ... sorry about the delay. Do you want a lawyer?”

“Not at the moment.”

“It’s the first time that I’ve known your name is David.”

He shrugged.

“Do you want anything to drink?”

“Tea, white with one.”

We waited until the police officer had returned with three steaming mugs.

“Real tea, David, and real milk.”

“Thanks,” with a smile.

“You have been arrested for possessing drugs with the intent to supply, namely about three kilograms of crystal methamphetamine.”

“Entrapment,” Buck said taking a sip of his tea.

“No, the DPP says not and after this interview you’ll be formally charged.

Then I spoke deliberately, slowly, to avoid pronunciation mistakes.

“OK, where did the drugs come from?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“Melbourne?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“Who did you buy them off?”  
“I didn’t buy them.”  
“Where did they arrive in Tasmania?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“When did they arrive in Tasmania?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“The *Dark Princess*?” I asked, even that I knew the yacht wasn’t involved.  
“*Dark Princess*? What the shit are you talking about?” with an expression of surprise.  
“I’ve no idea what you mean.”  
“Do you know Martin Campbell?”  
“No,” with a puzzled look, “I’ve no idea who he is.”  
“OK. On Thursday, five days ago, you went to my home, waited until I came in and then asked me for a parcel. Why?”  
“No comment.”  
“What was in the parcel?”  
“I don’t know of any parcel.”  
“The next day, Friday, you intercepted me on my way home and demanded your parcel. Why and what was in the parcel?”  
“No comment.”  
“On Saturday you sent me a text message saying, and I quote, pushing a piece of paper over to him:  
*Leave parcel under seat in reserve at 4 or your dead.*  
“What was in the parcel?”  
“I don’t know.”  
“What made you think I had your parcel?”  
“No comment.”  
“On Sunday you tried to kill me with a gun. Why?”  
“I don’t know what you’re talking about. It wasn’t me. You’re not going to pin an attempted murder charge on me. I didn’t do it.”  
“And I didn’t steal your parcel,” I said and looked at him.  
Buck, alias David, frowned and looked puzzled.  
“But, ...” he started and then thought better of it. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”  
“You don’t know?”  
He shook his head and said:  
“No comment.”  
“Your parcel ...”  
“It’s *not* my parcel.”

“Your parcel was brought from Victoria to Tasmania. It arrived at Arthur River and given to the courier to take the parcel from there to Hobart. He was paid ten thousand dollars for his part. Unfortunately the courier had no intention of handing the drugs over to you and he kept them. And he used the alias of Felix Oliver, my name. Oh, and he’s dead.”

I looked at Buck’s face and saw the dawning of a vague comprehension.

“I ...” and he stopped, utterly confused by what he’d been told. “Do you mean this guy Campbell was the courier?”

“Yes.”

A frown, confusion, hesitation replaced the look of vague comprehension.

“No comment,” he said at last.

“There are three sets of fingerprints on the box. Your’s and Campbell’s, obviously, and one other, unknown person. Do you know who he or she is?”

“No idea, sorry.” He was deflated.

I shrugged and said:

“So you’ve beaten up and tried to kill the wrong man. I had no knowledge and nothing to do with you parcel of drugs until you came along and demanded it from me.”

I waited as the news sank in.

“I won’t answer any more questions. I want to see you alone Felix. Not in here or in a cell.”

The interview was terminated and David, alias Buck, Martin was charged.

“He’s not going to do anything stupid,” I told the officers around him, and led him off to a couple of chairs out of the way where we sat down.

“Off the record,” he demanded.

“OK, anything you say won’t be used. You have my word.”

He frowned.

“I don’t know why, but I trust you. I really thought you were the courier.”

“I know.”

“About the shooting. I didn’t want to kill you. If I did I could say goodbye to a lot of money, let alone the profits.”

“You nearly did. If I hadn’t ducked down I’d be dead. But I didn’t understand why you’d doon ... done it. Maybe frustration?”

“I was parked opposite and watched you get in your car. I’m left-handed, so no trouble holding a pistol. But I was cramped and couldn’t aim properly. I wanted to fire high up in the window, a warning shot. But I missed. Sorry.”

“Apology accepted!”

I grinned and held out my left hand which he took in his left hand.

“Are you going to plead not guilty?”

“Of course. My barrister will shred the evidence and it’s not much.”

I shrugged.

“I’ve done my job. The court will do the rest.”

“Why’s the courier dead?”

“He shot me, in the shoulder, and I’ve got titanium plates and screws to prove it. And then another police officer shot him, but didn’t miss. We got your parcel from where he’d hidden it.”

Buck sighed.

“If I’d known about you ... Oh, well, too late now.”

Buck was, of course, remanded in custody to await his trial in the Supreme Court.

“He’ll wait for months, Becky. But I can’t help admiring him. I know. He’s potentially a drug dealer peddling misery and death, so I shouldn’t sympathise. But the person I loathe is Martin Campbell.”

Then I was ushered into the same interview room.

“Recorded interview with Detective Inspector Felix Oliver, present are Deputy Commissioner Andrew Peters, Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer and Detective Inspector David Andrews.

“We have heard the recording of your first interview with DS Graeme Hicks. You were in hospital and the interview was intentionally short. So now we want to fill in the gaps. Obviously there’s going to be an internal investigation and, although you will be called to answer questions, this recording will be part of the evidence.

“Why did you think it was PC Martin Campbell?”

“The scanty evidence that we had pointed to him. And a gut feeling.”

“Gut feelings are not evidence. Explain in detail what led you to being shot.”

I frowned, concentrating.

“Um ... I’ll have to do it chronologically ... starting with last Thursday evening.”

I said it slowly and definitely so that my mispronunciation would not be apparent.

“Take your time.”

I smiled.

“Thank you.”

So I told them. Slowly so that I didn’t leave anything out. Buck’s first visit. Learning of drugs being imported into Tasmania. My suspicion that the drugs were on a yacht and had been off loaded at Arthur River. I thought it was the *Dark Princess* but later found out that the yacht was not involved. However that didn’t invalidate my suspicion about Arthur River. Then my suspicion that someone in the police might be involved and so I kept the investigation secret. My deduction that it was probably Martin Campbell. Getting a search warrant and going to Smithton and confronting Martin.

“I don’t think I’ve left anything out.”

“You were armed. Why?”

“DS Newton insisted. Just in case.”

“Did Campbell know you were armed?”

“Not until I told him after he’d shot me. But I couldn’t get my pistol out of the holster. I’m left-handed and it was on my right hip. And he rolled me over onto my right side. So I would’ve been killed if it wasn’t for DS Newton.”

“What if she’d missed?”

I smiled.

“I’d be dead. But we’d had target practice on Friday afternoon, and she is an excellent shot with one hand, lethal with two.”

“Did you know she shot one handed?”

“No! But if she hadn’t succeeded first time she would’ve shot rapidly until one felled him. I was probably safe.”

“What if Sergeant Miller had shot first and asked questions later?”

“He’s a good sergeant and he wouldn’t do that. And he had the situation under control.”

“What if Campbell was innocent and DS Newton killed an innocent man?”

“I knew from what he said that he had the drugs. DS Newton knew that he’d fired one shot and his pistol was pointed at my head.”

“But what if you died and no drugs were found?”

I shrugged.

“Can you answer please.”

“At that stage I and DS Newton were certain that Campbell was involved and DS Newton was certain that if she didn’t do anything then I’d die. We were right. And, to answer your next question, If I didn’t die and no drugs were found then I’d be in deep shit.”

It was Commissioner Peters turn to shrug.

“And DS Newton’d be in deeper shit. ...

“I don’t think you or DS Newton will get a commendation after the investigation, but probably you both should.

“Now to the forensics.

“Two bullet casings were found and two bullets, one from your shoulder and one on the ground behind Campbell. The four pistols involved were examined. Neither your’s or Sergeant Miller’s were fired. The bullet extracted from you was fired from Campbell’s pistol and the bullet that killed him was fired from DS Newton’s pistol. And the autopsy on Campbell showed conclusively that he died from one bullet passing through his brain.

“So the forensic evidence matches your evidence and that of Sergeants Miller and Newton. So you and DS Newton are in the clear and I’m sure the investigation will exonerate both of you.

“Recorded interview terminated.”

“David, what’s happening with the wholesaler in Melbourne?” I asked.

“Probably nothing because we haven’t got any hard evidence. Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine is the main ingredient in the manufacture of *ice*, and is difficult to import, except in asthma drugs and other clinical uses. So we suspect that there’s a reasonably large factory somewhere in Australia producing it. Perhaps growing the ephedra shrub or making it synthetically.”

“How is it made?”

“Quite easily by fermenting sugar with yeast and adding benzaldehyde to the vats. In this environment the yeast converts the ingredients to the precursor l-phenylacetylcarbinol, L-PAC. L-PAC is then chemically converted to pseudoephedrine.

But we have no idea where the factory is. The wholesaler has been very, very careful not to lead us to it.”

“OK. Um, if you don’t need me any longer, I’ve a press conference to go to.”

“No, you’re free to go.”

The press had been notified of a special briefing.

“Sorry to call you to a briefing so late in the day,” I said deliberately so that there were no slipups, “and I’ll explain shortly.

“But first, the domestic violence murders that occurred last Wednesday night. The mother, Margaret Hurst, ... sorry Hurst, and her two children were stabbed to death. The person who allegedly committed these crimes was Byron Gibbs, the partner of Mrs Hurst, and he was found dead in the kitchen with a gunshot wound to his head and the knife he used to stab Mrs Hurst and her two children. Fingerprint analysis of the shotgun used made it clear that the last person to handle the gun was the husband Damian Hurst, so it was unlikely to be suicide. We arrested Mr Hurst on Monday, interviewed him this morning and charged him with the murder of Byron Gibbs. He has been remanded in custody.

“Now to the embargoed investigation. Because of events last Thursday evening, we suspected that a sizable quantity of drugs had been imported to Tasmania, but we had no idea where the drugs were or the method of importation. In order not to alert anyone, including the importer, the investigation was carried out in secret by myself and Detective Sergeant Newton. On Monday we went to Smithton and I served a search warrant to search the most likely place for the drugs to be hidden. In the process I was shot by Police Constable Martin Campbell, which explains the sling, and he was shot dead. The subsequent search revealed about three kilograms of methamphetamine hidden in Constable Campbell’s bedroom. The embargo was not lifted because we had one further thing to do.

“Yesterday afternoon I arrested David Martin for importing and handling a trafficable quantity of *ice*. Just before this conference I interviewed Mr Martin and he has been charged and remanded in custody. As that concluded the investigation I have lifted the embargo.

“Any questions. ... John.”

“How were the drugs imported?”

“We are almost certain that they were on a yacht and off loaded at Arthur River.”

“What about the *Dark Princess*?”

“In a totally separate incident a man was lost overboard and I interviewed the remaining two crewmen. There was no evidence of foul play so the crewmen were allowed to go back to Melbourne. However, in the interviews and the SOS message, both men stated that the incident happened off Arthur River on Thursday morning



and we think that was where the drugs were off loaded. If so, and the drugs were taken to Hobart by road, they would have arrived some time Thursday evening, which ties in with the events last Thursday evening.

“I initially thought the yacht was the *Dark Princess*, but it has been ruled out. A drugs’ team searched her when she docked in Hobart on Saturday and found nothing, not even a positive swab. So it must have been some other yacht.”

“So how are you certain?” “What events?”

“A detailed explanation will have to wait until later, but I was asked to hand over the drugs. Also, Arthur River is about an hour’s drive from Smithton where we found the drugs. The importer thought that I was the courier meant to bring the drugs to Hobart. The only explanation that we can think of is that they were stolen by Constable Campbell instead of being delivered to Hobart and that he used my name.”

“Why wasn’t Damian Hurst arrested before Monday?”

I smiled.

“We couldn’t find him. When we arrested him he was sleeping rough in his car.”

“Detective Inspector Vincent Glover was remanded in custody on Saturday for breach of bail conditions. What is he charged with?”

“Suppression of evidence, stalking and attempted rape.

“Any more questions? ... No? ... OK that concludes this briefing.”

Becky drove me to Peter Taggart's house and insisted on coming in with me. Peter was a tad put out.

"Sorry, Rebecca, but this is confidential. Can you wait in the car?"

"Will it be long?"

"I don't know. An hour, maybe less?"

"OK, I'll go to the shopping centre we passed. Is there an opportunity shop?"

"Yes."

"Good. I can look for clothes and books."

"I'll ring you, Becky, when it's over," I said and she left.

Peter led me into his study and into his arm chairs.

"What has happened to your arm Felix?"

"I got shot. It's to do with another case, David Martin."

"I know that case. I was asked whether or not your actions were entrapment. What happened?"

"Oh, he was arrested and interviewed, and now he's in remand. So there were no problems."

"Good. But to the matter at hand. Felix, I will tell you what I know and then you can respond."

"At the moment they're aren't too many cases needing my attention. The new cases can be handled by other lawyers and the rest are in the hands of legal teams. So I've a lot of spare time."

“So I decided to go through past cases and see if there are any that need reviewing. And I came across Wendy Davis.”

At that I became very worried. And anxious.

“OK Speter ... Peter, what’s your problem?”

“I don’t know why, but Wendy Davis is on our data base. A single entry that she was arrested for murder and the date. Then nothing. There should have been entries for trial dates and who in the DPP had taken on the case. Or there should have been entries that explain why she wasn’t prosecuted. But nothing.”

I was going to interrupt, but thought better of it. So I just looked at Peter silently.

“As acting director of the DPP I have access to police records, without having to get a search warrant. So I looked up Wendy Davis on your data base. Guess what I found?”

I didn’t have to guess, I knew. But I kept silent.

“The two police officers involved were you, DS Felix Oliver, and DC Rebecca Newton. There is a recorded interview conducted by you and Newton where Wendy admits to murdering her husband Victor and you release her on the understanding that there will be further action. But the last entry on the file reads:

*DPP: No further action (not in the public interest).*

“Comments?”

“Rebecca Newton is *not* involved with that last entry and I alone am responsible. I suppose you’ll have to contact someone who ranks above and have me arrested. I suggest Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer. I can give you her phone number.”

Peter looked at me, frowning.

“Before I come to a decision, I want to hear you tell me why. You must’ve had a reason, surely?”

“Yes, I had a reason. But that does not condone ... condone what I did.”

“It might not condone it, but I want to hear it. So talk to me please, Felix.”

I shrugged. Unwise because of the pain in my shoulder. I might as well tell him, so I said:

“I’m sure you know most of this from the interview. Wendy and Victor Davis had three young children and had recently moved from New Zealand to Tasmania. He was a senior accountant at the university and she taught in a Steiner school. She had an affair, Victor found out and then he became abusive, physically violent and controlling. It came to a head when he said he was going to kill her and she stabbed him. I falsified the file entry and told Wendy that she was no longer under arrest. I don’t know where she is at the moment. I gave her back her passports so she might’ve returned New Zealand.”

“Why didn’t you contact the DPP? There is a good case for self defence?”

I shrugged again, again unwise.

“If I’d contacted you, you would have instigated proceedings for murder. And maybe a magistrate would consider her a flight risk and have remanded her in custody. Either way, she would have to stand trial and a jury might not have believed the self

defence argument. My judgement was swayed by the three children who would've effectively been orphaned. And the fact that Wendy is in no way a criminal.

"So I decided to play God. I put the welfare of the children uppermost and made it certain that she'd be released. Without charge. But I'm not God, so ..."

"A moral dilemma," Peter said. "Save the children or do what's legally correct."

"And if she hadn't had an affair then nothing would've happened."

"Asking *what ifs* doesn't get us anywhere. My moral dilemma is what to do about you Felix. Punish you for doing good or ..."

"You mightn't have to do anything, Speter. *Fuck!* My speech is getting worse, especially when I'm stressed, and one possibility is that I'll become mute. And then I'll have to resign. Or die. Perhaps that will be punishment enough?"

"Why die?"

I shrugged.

"If I'm useless, why not? But you're a Senior Counsel and so you don't have any choice."

"I have a choice, like you. And I decided what I'd do before you came here, but I needed to hear your side of the story.

"I've amended the DPP data base with:

*Case reassessed: No further action (not in the public interest). Peter Taggart.*

"That actually is my honest opinion. Some lawyers with the DPP would have a different opinion and would've brought Wendy Davis to trial. But if you'd come to me in the first place I would've listened and supported you. So I've done what I would've done ages ago.

"I admire you. Don't die because you have a lot to give, and the world would be a poorer place if you did.

"Thank you," I said softly, relieved.

I phoned Becky and she returned, drove me to her flat and sat me in the arm chair. Despite being given a reprieve by Peter Taggart I was depressed.

"I'm not going to miss this opportunity Felix. You are moving in with me. Permanently."

"I don't think that's wise Becky," I said, taking her hand. "I want to live with you. I love you. But my peech pobleem?"

"*FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!* I can't ponounce words correctly. I can't peak ... speak. It's getting worse."

She sat in the other arm chair and asked:

"Why isn't it wise? What about your speech? It's OK."

"No it isn't. And you won't want to live with me. But you'll orget ... *fuck!* forget me."

"No I won't. How can you say that?"

"Everyone is forgotten eventually.

"When I was doing my Special Constable training, before I became a constable, I was posted to a midland's town. I can't remember which one because I was only there

for a short and very uneventful time. Anyway, I was walking up the main street and saw a bronze statue of an elegant nineteenth century gentleman. It was on a pedestal and it was larger than life size. I went over and read the inscription, which, as far as I can remember, read:

*Brendon Quinn*  
*Councillor, Mayor, Justice of the Peace*  
*He will never be forgotten*

“There were dates but I don’t remember them.

“I didn’t have anything to do and I was curious. So I wandered up the street and said hello to the locals and asked them if they knew Brendon Quinn? Most people said no and a couple of people asked me who I was talking about. The famous councillor I said, and then they said no.

“So on my way back to the station I dropped into shops, the library and the council offices and asked the same question. And every time I got a frown and a no.

“A few people are remembered, but just if they are famous and for their deeds. Like your namesake Isaac Newton. Everyone remembers him. But what did he like to eat? How did he like to have sex? Did he sleep on his back or on his side? What did he wipe his arse with after having a poo? There are a hundred questions like this. We actually know nothing at all about the *man*, only what he did. And if he did nothing remarkable, he would vanish like all the other billions of people that have lived.

“When we are alive our children and grandchildren know us and will remember us. But our great grand children, and their offspring? They know nothing and they couldn’t care less. Except for DNA ancestry if they’re curious about their ethnic background. But that’s all.

“So if we die and don’t have children we will instantly be forgotten. Like Brendon Quinn.”

Becky got out of her chair and sat in my lap with her arms around me.

“You said that alright Felix. When you concentrate and speak slowly you’re fine. So we’ll find a way round it.”

“No,” I said flatly, trying to hold back the tears.

“I love you Felix. It’s not just sex, although that was brilliant, it’s *you*, all of you. The way you work, the way we cook pizza together, crosswords, your mind ... The last few days I’ve realised that I’ve loved you for a long time.”

She buried her head in my neck and her body convulsed slightly with her silent sobbing, her tears wetting my neck. I cried too, my tears running from my eyes to her brown hair. Then I sighed and with my hand under her chin made her look at me:

“I’m depressed but I’ll probably get over it. I love you too, for all the same reasons, but also because you are a good shot.”

She laughed, kissed me tenderly and said:

“I’m off to your unit to fetch your clothes. I’ve got your keys. Anything else?”

“My diaries on the bookcase. And my warrant card.”

“Your warrant card’s here on the coffee table.”

“So only my diaries. I can’t think of anything else at the moment. Oh, check my car is still there and intact, except for the windows. And get my bedside clock and see what’s in the fridge. There are a couple of shopping bags by the front door.”

“I’ll be about an hour,” and she was gone.

I was thirsty, so I got up and went to the fridge where I found a couple of bottles of beer, some smoked salmon, cream and fresh asparagus. I looked around and saw a bowl with fruit and a lemon and had an idea.

First a drink. I got a bottle opener from a drawer, sat at the table, held the bottle in my right hand to steady it and with my good, left arm took the top off. I smiled to myself as I took a gulp, and looked in the cupboards.

“No problems,” I muttered to myself. “But I haven’t got much time.”

Except for my speech I had a methodical mind, so I thought about what order to do things in.

Saucepan in the sink, fill it with water, put it on the stove, all with my left hand. As it boiled I put some pasta spirals in it and set the timer for eleven minutes. I usually cooked vegetables in the microwave, but I didn’t think that I could use it with one hand, so I cut up the asparagus and added it to the pasta. While it was cooking I cut up an onion and fried it with a tad of extra virgin olive oil in another, larger saucepan.

Now the salad while the pasta was cooking ...

Add the diced salmon to the onion, the cream and lemon juice. How could I drain the spirals? OK, it would be difficult but not impossible. Put the sieve in the sink, lift the saucepan off the stove with my right hand steadying it and empty the spirals into the sieve. It worked! Add the pasta and asparagus to the rest, and set the stove on low to keep it warm.

Now get ready!

When Becky came back, lugging my suitcase, she opened the door to a pitch black house.

“Felix? ... Are you there? ...

I replied in a sonorous voice:

“I am God. ... Let there be light!”

And I flicked the switch on the standard lamp revealing the dining room table was set for two, with a salad bowl, wine glass and a bottle of red wine the cost eight dollars. I decided to be genteel and had a beer glass instead of drinking it out of the bottle.

Becky was flabbergasted!

“Oh Felix!” as she wrapped her arms around me, laughing and crying at the same time.

“It is the least I could do for the woman that saved my life. And the *very* least I could do for the woman I love.”

“How did you do it?”

“No problems, although I had to bend over so that I could use my right hand to steady things on the bench.”

“Sit!” I commanded as I lit two candles on the table and went to get the smoked salmon pasta from the kitchen.

Over dinner I explained:

“Living by myself I learned most things. I can cook. I’m not just a pretty face. But my repertoire is limited because of my arm, so I probably can’t do a roast. But my sweet and sour lamb with rice and beans is to die for. Tomorrow night?”

After our meal, we left the dirty dishes on the dining room table and Becky went into the bedroom to unpack. Then she came back.

“Diaries,” she said as she put them on a shelf, “and here’s this year’s and a pen. I suspect you want to write something.”

She opened the diary and flicked through the pages to today’s date.

“Cryptic! You don’t write sentences.”

“It’s simply a reminder. So the Sunday entry I’ll simply write *B exclamation mark*. It’s enough to jog my memory.”

“I hope so, I don’t want you to forget our first screw!”

“First two screws,” I corrected. “And I hope I will be able to write *B exclamation mark* tomorrow.”

She grinned and, with her face close to mine and her lips brushed my lips, said:

“Perhaps it will be *B exclamation mark exclamation mark* tonight. I hope so.”

“I don’t know that I’m up for it. But if we miss one or two nights I’ll make a note in my diary to catch up!”

She laughed, straightened up and became the practical Becky I loved working with.

“I went to the supermarket on my way home. No one cares about social distancing, but the flu virus kills lots of people each year. They are happy to walk in the middle of the aisles so you can’t get past unless you brush up against them. And others stop to chat and block walking spaces completely. I don’t know whether it’s arrogance or stupidity, probably both. I’m thinking seriously about getting groceries delivered.

“Anyway, on a brighter note, I’ve got a quiche, tomatoes and salad greens, but they will keep. Also eggs, beer and stuff from your fridge.”

We sat in the arm chairs while we watched a TV news bulletin. The lead story was the press conference, the shooting in Smithton, with photos of the police station, and the discovery of the *ice*. Lots of video of me looking handsome and strong. Except for my shoulder!

We tried to watch more TV but we were both yawning, worn out. And, after I’d told Becky about my meeting with Peter Taggart, she bandaged my arm, so that I didn’t harm it during the night, I dutifully took my pills and we went to bed.

“We should christen your new home tomorrow, ” she said.

“Why not tonight?”

“Are you up for it?”

I took her hand and guided it.

“What do you think.”

She grinned.



She fell asleep immediately afterwards, my left arm gathering her naked body into a cuddle with mine. I lay back with open eyes because I wanted to be awake at midnight, at the final seconds of the last day of the week that started on the previous Thursday morning. So I tried to stay awake for about three more hours, but it was impossible. I extracted my arm from under Becky's neck, turned over and was asleep in a few seconds.

# *Buck's story*

This is Buck's story.

I'd only gleaned partial knowledge of the events narrated here, and there were many gaps. Buck told me what he knew, when I visited him after he'd been remanded in custody, and later after he had been sentenced.

I had taken a liking to him, despite his involvement in drugs' dealing and the harm it does to people. And his roughing me up! I don't know why, there was no reason and I'd only met him four times, but there was something about him that I liked.

There was no official reason to visit him in the remand prison. Obviously he didn't get bail. We chatted and he was honest and frank with me:

"I don't know why, Felix, but I like you," he said. "So one day I will tell you what I know leading to you being shot by the courier. Off the record."

"Off the record," I agreed.

"I'm mad as Hell!" Buck exclaimed. "And I've lost a lot of money. So I'll use my connections and get to the bottom of it."

"Thank you."

"No Felix. I'll find out for me and not for you. Telling you is unnecessary, but it will be a bonus."

"OK, Buck. Call me when you're ready."

"I'll need a phone."

"Impossible, I'm afraid. Can't you use the prison phone?"

"All the calls are recorded and monitored except to legal representatives."

"Your lawyer?"

“I have one, but he can't help because he's in Hobart not Melbourne and I want to talk to people in Melbourne.”

“Well get one who *will* help.”

“I'll think about it.”

We stood up and Buck went behind secure, closed doors and I walked out into the sunshine.

If I was to learn anything the place would have to be somewhere safe from eavesdropping. The remand centre was full, so a few people on remand were moved into the prison. I made sure that Buck was one of them and that he went into the medium security complex. Which was important for us because there was much more space. I could use my status as a DI so that we could sit outside, impossible in the remand centre, with his prison guards out of earshot.

A few days later Buck wanted me to visit him.

“There's a way that I can talk with my contacts, but I'll need your help Felix.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“First, write down this phone number.”

He recited it from memory as I got a biro out and wrote it on my right wrist.

“Send a text to that number telling the receiver to get his lawyer to phone me as my legal representative.”

So I did, signing the message David (Buck) Martin.

There was no reply.

But only a few days later, Buck called me on the prison phone and asked:

“Can you come in and visit me?”

“Yes. Why?”

“The first part of why you were shot. Before that Thursday when I met you for the first time.”

“Why not all?”

“I'm methodical and I haven't got all the information. Anyway, it would take too long to tell.”

So I visited Buck, setting off the metal detector. The supervisor looked at the recorder I had with me, saw there was nothing on it and begrudgingly let me have it.

When we sat down I asked:

“Did the lawyer call you?”

“Yes. There was a problem because he's in Melbourne, but he told the prison authorities that he had other clients in Tasmania and he regularly came here. He called me and passed the phone over to my contact so we could talk. ”

“Can I record our conversation?” I asked.

Buck was astonished!

“How?”

“I used my status as a DI and told them that you were supplying information to me. If there was any problems then call AC Fischer, I had forewarned her, and that did the trick. But I couldn't get a phone in, so I'm using a simple recorder.”

“No,” adamantly, “its evidence that can be used against me.”

So I put the recorder into my pocket and here is what he told me off the record; fortunately I’ve a good memory.

“I organised to buy three kilograms of *ice*, as crystal methamphetamine is known. The street value in Tasmania when it’s cut with fillers is about three and a half million dollars. If it was dumped on the market the price would go plummet, and I had no intention of allowing that to happen.

“It wasn’t for me. I sounded out several dealers and they were keen on having some, so I said I would get it and they would pay me for their shares. After it had been delivered. For my pains I marked up the price so that I would get something out of it.

“Transporting it to Tasmania was a problem. There were regular checks at the airports and ferry terminals. Some drugs got through undetected, but I wasn’t going to risk that. So I went to Melbourne and visited the wholesaler. I wore a very good quality suit, to hide my tats, and black patent leather shoes. Every bit a business man. I paid a lot of money in cash.”

I was curious.

“How much?”

Buck hesitated and looked down at his feet. He seemed sad.

“It doesn’t matter, but it was a lot,” he said before he continued.

“I asked what about shipping to Tasmania?”

“I was told the only way I could be certain is to use a small yacht and off load the cargo somewhere out of the way. The wholesaler knew someone who would be willing, but it would be expensive. How much? I asked and was told three crew so ninety thousand. I bucked at that and said I’ll pay the skipper but not the other two.

“He said no. All the crew will know when the yacht stops and off loads the cargo somewhere in Tasmania, so all three need to be paid. Up front. When I sold it I would get about three and a half million dollars.

“I asked where will it be off loaded? I was told that I didn’t need to know and it would be delivered to me the same day, by courier. And the courier needs to be paid ten thousand, so I owed him one hundred thousand. I didn’t like it, but I had no choice or else take the *ice* and work out my own way of transporting it.

“So I asked what is the yacht’s name? and was told that I didn’t need to know. The fewer people who knew the better.

“I haven’t got one hundred thousand dollars I said and he replied ‘I haven’t got the *ice* yet. So come back when I contact you, pay for it, and it will be sent to you. Express delivery!’ with a smile.

“So I agreed and went back to Melbourne a few days later with the cash for the shipping. In turn, I was given the name, address and telephone number of the courier.

“It was you, Felix, but I didn’t know you were a detective. I should have asked around, but I didn’t. A major oversight.”

“How did you raise the cash?” I asked.

“It wasn’t that hard. I demanded the other dealers gave me their share of the money up front. And I also had a lot in my superannuation account. I was a bit short, but I’d no intention of mortgaging the house, so I also borrowed some of the money from bkie friends. And, after I’d sold the *ice* then I could repay everyone with interest and bank the rest for my family. It was a risk worth taking. Until you stepped in!” The last with a smile.

“How did you know the wholesaler?”

“Ah,” Buck smiled. “This is definitely off the record. I had done a few drug deals before. Just small time, a few grams, to help out some friends. I was arrested once, but the drugs’ squad had no evidence so I wasn’t charged.

“A few hours afterwards the box of *ice* and one hundred thousand dollars in cash were delivered to Marcus Bryant, the yacht’s skipper. He was nervous and said what if the Drug’s Squad know about it and raid my boat in the marina?

“They don’t know, was the definite reply of the wholesaler. But they did know. They knew at the least that something was happening.”

Buck stretched and yawned.

“That’s the past. Now I’ll tell you what happened on the Wednesday.”

“Prandeep Singh told me what happened on Wednesday and the previous night.

“On Tuesday afternoon, Marcus drove to the marina near Geelong with the box and one hundred thousand dollars. He put his share of the cash, less two thousand in the foot well of the back seat and locked his car, putting the keys in his pocket. He went on board the yacht *Dark Princess* with the cash and the box, nestled at the bottom of supermarket bags containing last minute supplies, with bread and milk poking their heads out.”

“That’s impossible!” I exclaimed.

“Why?”

“The Drugs’ Squad searched her and took swabs when she docked in Hobart, and no traces of drugs were found. Zilch on the yacht and zilch on the crew. She and they were clean. So your information is wrong.”

“I’m correct Felix, it was the *Dark Princess*. The wholesaler was meticulous. He got three kilograms of *ice* and very carefully packaged it, ensuring there would be no DNA or fingerprints on it. Every step involved fresh, disposable latex gloves and very clean surfaces. First, the three packets of *ice* were put in a waterproof bag that had never been in contact with *ice*. Several more layers later, the now larger parcel was put in a small waterproof box and sealed, in case there was rough weather and the box got wet. Even the forecasts could be wrong. And the yacht was carefully chosen because there had never been drugs on board and the crew had never used drugs. He did the same with the money. So if the drugs or the cash were inspected then nothing would be found linking him to them. Anyway ...

“Marcus distributed forty thousand dollars to the crew, twenty each, telling them to go home, rest and get back that night, for the last minute checks.”

“That doesn’t add up. The money,” I interrupted.

“I know. I’ll find out about that. Where was I ...

“Prandeep asked Marcus where his twenty thousand dollars was and was told in a shopping bag in the back seat foot well of his car in the car park. Prandeep was concerned, but Marcus said that it was safe as there are CCTV and lights everywhere, so no one is going to be stupid enough to jemmy the driver’s side open or smash a window. Anyway, only the two crew knew about it.

“Prandeep shrugged and he and Kent went home to deposit their shares of the money in the backs of cupboards in two different houses in two different suburbs of Melbourne. And Marcus put two thousand behind the radio transmitter, in case he needed it.”

“Ah, we only found one thousand,” I said. “Prandeep and Kent must have stolen the other thousand.”

“And so that night, with LED lights blazing on the yacht and the generator thrumming to charge the batteries, Marcus carefully stowed the box and the ten thousand dollars in the cabin, made himself something to eat. Prandeep and Kent arrived, took their stuff on board and they and Marcus scurried about on deck, preparing the yacht to sail.”

“On Wednesday morning,” continued Buck, “about 10, the *Dark Princess* left her spot in the marina. The yacht motored to the middle of Port Philip Bay. There were three container ships and a bulk carrier strung out in the designated channel, heading for the port in Melbourne. The skipper, Marcus Bryant, had informed the Port Authority and was in contact with them by the yacht’s radio to see when he could go out the heads.

“*Dark Princess* is an apt name. The hull and the sails were a dark blue-green, and the only white is the yacht’s name and registration number. Out at sea she was invisible, and the racing yacht club objected. Marcus had said if we are close to another yacht then they would see us or our lights, and if we are not close to anyone then it doesn’t matter. Anyway, a super-maxi yacht is allowed to sail in the Sydney to Hobart race with a black hull and black sails. The club had to see the logic in this and, with a few protestations, allowed the colours to remain.

“The *Dark Princess* is a small, ocean-going yacht built for speed. She was designed for four sailors but all she needed were three and, depending on the weather, could be managed by two people. So they took it in turns to sleep. Although Marcus was the skipper, he, Prandeep Singh and Kent Clarke did the same duties on board, even down to the cooking.

“Marcus cut the motor, and, checking the time, he and his two-man crew hoisted the sails and headed for the entrance and out of the bay.

“It was ostensibly a practice run for the Melbourne to Hobart yacht race, that began at the end of December.

“In case you don’t know, the Melbourne to Hobart yacht race is the little sister of the famous Sydney to Hobart race. In that race, the yachts go down the east coast of Tasmania, before entering Storm Bay and sailing up the River Derwent to Hobart. In contrast, the Melbourne to Hobart race went down the west coast of Tasmania, the weather side.

“If you went in a straight line directly west from Tasmania the first land that you hit would be South America. As Tasmania is in the *roaring forties*, the weather patterns went from the west to the east, and the west coast of Tasmania is normally buffeted by strong winds and waves almost all the time. So sailing down the west coast was much more challenging.

“The race record was a bit less than one day and eighteen hours. The *Dark Princess* had been part of the fleet a couple of times before and had done well, coming third in the handicap honours. Of course she was no threat to the super-maxis who vied for line honours, but she was well equipped.”

Buck continued:

“Marcus wasn’t interested in trialling his yacht, except that he needed to be in the right place tomorrow morning with their precious cargo of three kilograms of *ice*. The forecast was for northerly winds from a high to the north of Melbourne. Later it would shift to north-easterly winds before the next low arrived. So Marcus hoisted a spinnaker and the yacht was soon out of Port Philip Bay and in Bass Strait. If she was ahead of time he could slow down the boat. And if she was late he could use the engine. Because it wasn’t a race the engine hadn’t been locked by a yacht club seal.

“When they were out of Port Phillip Bay, steering directly due south, Marcus ordered the crew to not use any phones or the transmitter, because ‘we don’t want anyone knowing where we are.’ Kent was a bit put out and said ‘you think we are fools,’ to which Marcus replied ‘I’m the skipper, so while on my boat you will do as I tell you.’

“Kent wouldn’t let it rest and retorted ‘so, skip, why aren’t you wearing a life jacket like me?’ ‘Calm sailing so it isn’t needed,’ was his reply, ‘you wear one if you like, but I don’t need one unless the weather is rough.’

“The seas were calm and the breeze was stiff, so the *Dark Princess* sped along as though she was in a race. And it was in the evening when she was opposite the northern tip of King Island and well within Tasmanian waters. But Marcus kept about twenty five nautical miles from the land so that no one would see them. The breeze dropped, but it was enough for the yacht to be on time for the rendezvous.

“Marcus ordered Prandeep to drop the spinnaker, but some ropes had tangled. He was sorting it out when Marcus grabbed him from behind and pushed him to the deck, shouting ‘Fuckin niggers! You can’t get anything right! I wish I had never hired you.’

“Prandeep was furious. ‘I am *not* a nigger! I am *not* black! You can sort out the rope coils yourself.’ Like most Indians, Prandeep spoke impeccable English. Wordy, with no abbreviations, a bit old fashioned. He was also a Sikh who wore a turban.”



“I saw the turban when I interviewed him,” I said.

Buck shifted in his seat.

“That’s it for the Wednesday. I’ll tell you about the Thursday another time.”

I was curious:

“I want to know why did you import three kilograms of *ice*? Until now your record’s clean. So why?”

He shuffled in his seat and I thought he was on the point of telling me. But:

“That’s private Felix. You don’t need to know.”

And he beckoned the guards to take him inside.

The prison commander met me and said:

“You had a recorder with you. Why?”

“To record the conversation, but Mr Martin said I couldn’t use it He would clam up and refuse to give me the information that he knows.”

He begrudgingly let me go.

After I got home I told Becky where I’d been and my conversation with Buck.

“I’m not sure whether I like him or loathe him,” Becky said after she had finished. “I loathe the drug peddling, but otherwise he seems a decent guy. What did he mean by *that’s private*? I would like to know. And I must say in his defence that he inadvertently brought us together. I don’t know if we’d got past *Sir* and *Rebecca* without him and Martin Campbell. Maybe ...”

It was a couple of weeks before Buck called me again:

“Ready for the next instalment, Felix? The Thursday, the day when we met.”

So I visited him. My shoulder, as usual, set off the metal detector and I was frisked.

“What’s in your pocket?”

I pulled out a block of Lindt chocolate. The foil had set off the metal detector.

“I’ll have to confiscate that.”

I wanted to say “Don’t be fucking stupid,” but that would get up the guard’s nose and he’d destroy it, or eat it later. So instead:

“I’m a DI, I know the procedures. Please examine it and you’ll find it hasn’t been opened.”

He let it through and Buck and I sat down on the same bench in the open, away from other people.

“Do you like chocolate?” I asked.

“Yes. I love chocolate. Specially good ones.”

“That’s a relief,” and handed him the block of Lindt chocolate. “I had a Hell of a job getting them through prison security. But being a DI helped.”

He smiled.

“Thank you,” and he unwrapped the chocolate.

“We’ll have to eat it out here, no hope of me eating it later,” and he offered some squares to me.

“Why the delay in this instalment?” I asked as I ate a piece.

“Prandeep Singh was reluctant to talk, but one of my contacts got it out of him.

You know he murdered Marcus Bryant?”

“No,” with surprise in my voice. “We interviewed Prandeep and Kent Clarke and decided that the death of Marcus Bryant was an accident. He tripped and went overboard, and there were no suspicious circumstances.”

“Well Prandeep’s dead now, so it doesn’t matter. I can’t abide murderers. Good riddance I say.”

“How did Prandeep die?”

“Some accident at the marina where he worked. A fork lift carrying a couple of loaded pallets pinned him against a wall.”

“An accident?”

Buck smiled.

“That’s the official verdict.”

He paused.

“Anyway, this is what I’ve been told by Prandeep via my contact.”

“It was about 10 in the morning when the *Dark Princess* lowered her sails and drifted slowly with the tide, off Arthur River to the port side. There were no other yachts around, but Marcus was a stickler and put two lights on the port side close together, the agreed signal. ‘You, wait in the cabin,’ he ordered his two crewmen, ‘I won’t be long.’ Then he stood in the steering well and looked to shore.

“Prandeep and Kent knew what he was going to do. After all, they had twenty thousand dollars each. So they were quite happy to be out of the way and wait. But Prandeep was interested so he stood at the cabin door where he could watch and listen.

“It wasn’t long before a speed boat, hired for the day, came alongside. The lone occupant was dressed in a dark hoodie, which was up covering his head, and boots. No gloves.

“He asked ‘Marcus?’ ‘Yeah. What do you want?’ ‘You have a parcel on board for me.’ ‘Who’s it for?’ ‘Buck. In Hobart.’ ‘Who are you?’ ‘Felix Oliver.’ ‘You being paid?’ ‘Yep, ten grand. You have it?’

“The test over, Marcus grunted and went below, brushing past Prandeep. ‘Don’t move,’ he ordered his two crew, as he retrieved the box and a large brown envelope from his locker. ‘Just stay here.’ He returned to the deck and Prandeep resumed his viewing post by the cabin door.

“Marcus passed over the envelope first. ‘Check it.’ The man in the speed boat opened the envelope and saw ten neat bundles of fifty dollar notes. He flicked through one, counting to twenty, saw that the other nine were the same size and, putting it down, nodded. ‘It’s OK.’ ‘There’s no comeback if it isn’t,’ Marcus said and he passed down the box, which the speed boat driver stowed under a seat.”

“Ah,” I said, smiling, “that explains the third set of fingerprints on the box. And the same fingerprints were found on the thousand dollars that was found on the yacht.

They'll be Marcus's. But he doesn't have a record so his fingerprints are not on file. OK, Buck, continue."

"The courier said 'I'll take the scenic route to Hobart, less likely to be stopped. It'll take me about seven hours.'

"At that the speed boat driver waved and the outboard motor roared into life as he went quickly back to the town."

"I'll add," I interrupted, "that he put the box in a small suitcase under his bed, behind another, larger suitcase. That's where we found it."

"The little shit," Buck muttered, and then said to me "if I'd known that, I'd have got the *ice* and you'd never have known me. You mean Martin Campbell?"

"Yes," I said. "But how do you know so much detail?"

"Prandeeep was persuaded to tell all about it."

"Hopefully nicely!"

Buck laughed.

"I don't know because I was locked up here and didn't attend the debriefing."

"So if you weren't there ...?"

"A recording was made of his confession before he died."

"How did you get it?"

"On the prisoners' phone. An unrecorded and un-monitored call from my legal team! I've a good memory and I listened to it a couple of times."

"OK, just interested. Please, go on with your story."

So Buck continued:

"Marcus called me on a new phone bought for the purpose. 'Buck, your parcel will be in Hobart late afternoon. You know who's delivering it?' 'Yes, I know,' I replied. 'Bout seven hours from now.'

"Marcus terminated the conversation, tossed the phone overboard and called down 'OK, get the sails up while I steer. We'll go off shore. Better winds. Nor-easterly forecast. And we won't be spotted.' So Prandeeep and Kent got on deck and hoisted the mainsail and a spinnaker. Then Marcus said 'Prandeeep, steer while I have breakfast. I want to be eight to ten nautical miles out.'

"Having satisfied his appetite at his leisure and having two black coffees, Marcus went back on deck. 'Where are we Prandeeep?' 'South, about eight nautical miles out.' To which Marcus replied 'OK. You, Paki, and Kent get something to eat.'

"Prandeeep seethed and in the cabin he spat out 'Marcus is a *shit!* I am *not* from Pakistan, I am an Indian.' 'And I was born in Australia,' he added.

"The was no milk on board, only instant and tea bags. So they both washed their bread and jam down with black tea. Prandeeep got up and looked out the door to see Marcus by the wheel. He had an idea and went back to the bench and sat down again.

"Leaning over, he said in a soft, low voice 'Kent, how would you like to earn an extra ten thousand dollars?' 'Yeah, that'd be nice. But how?' 'Just do what I tell you

to do. Sit here and enjoy another tea in comfort. No hurry. And stay away from the transmitter and your phone. When you are asked, say that I was with you in the cabin having breakfast and we did not see or hear anything.’ ‘What are you going to do?’ Kent asked. ‘Just stick to your story and do not pry. You will learn soon enough.’

“So Prandeep went on deck and walked the few steps to Marcus and stood on his right side. ‘I don’t suppose you can, but try to keep us on this bearing,’ Marcus said in a belittling voice and pointed at the compass. ‘We are about ten out to sea, so I want to keep it that way as we run down the coast.’ Prandeep saluted and said in a loud but subservient voice ‘Yes *Sir*. Your command is my pleasurable duty *Sir*.’ ‘Cut the crap and steer,’ Marcus said, and stepped back from the wheel.

“Marcus didn’t see the fist coming. It landed squarely on his temple. He grunted and passed out. ‘He may be dead,’ Prandeep thought, ‘a blow to the temple sometimes results in death.’

“Prandeep had caught him before he fell and, with his arms under Marcus’s arm pits, dragged him over to the side. He put the upper third of Marcus out over the sea and lifted his feet so that he could levered him over the rails. There was a splash. And then nothing.

“He wasn’t wearing a life jacket.

“Prandeep grinned, muttered a prayer to Waheguru, his God, and added ‘Sweet dreams you little shit, may you burn in Hell.’ He checked the bearing, made sure the wheel was lashed, and went below. ‘I heard a splash. What happened?’ Kent asked. ‘Unfortunately Marcus has gone overboard. But we are not going to tell anyone for a while.’ ‘We should go about and search?’ ‘No point, he has sunk without a trace.’

“At that Kent went on deck with a pair of binoculars and scanned the sea behind him. He saw nothing. Just the swells undulating and the trail of air bubbles left in the wake of the yacht. He went below to find Prandeep searching through Marcus’s belongings. Prandeep gave a smile of satisfaction and held aloft a set of car keys.

“Kent was alarmed and said ‘You pushed him overboard.’ ‘No, Kent. I was with you in the cabin when Marcus went overboard. I went to look and Marcus was not there. There was no sign of him.’

“He grabbed Kent’s shoulders and stared into his eyes. ‘*Do not* tell the truth. If you do I will say that you were with me and *you* pushed him in. *And* I will tell them about the money and you will be in jail and can say bye-byes to your twenty thousand dollars.’

“Kent didn’t see the flaw in Prandeep’s statement, that they would both lose out, so he shrugged his shoulders and muttered ‘OK.’ Lying was a cheap way to get an extra ten grand.

“Prandeep let him go and grinned. ‘We will report his death later. I will sort that out. But we will be questioned when we arrive in Hobart, so we have a day to get our stories straight. It will be easy to convince them and they will let us fly back to Melbourne. All we have to do is go to the marina and get the twenty thousand dollars. And then dispose of the keys and say we do not know where they are.’

“Kent objected. ‘But there’s CCTV.’ ‘It is not a problem,’ Prandeep replied. ‘I will go in while you wait. No one knows about the money in the car and so no one will be watching. Anyway, there will be other people around, getting ready for the next day.’ ‘OK, I’m in.’

“Prandeep grinned again. ‘You will not regret it! But we will have to look lively. The *Dark Princess* will not sail herself. Just stay away from that transmitter.’

“And that’s all I know about the Thursday,” Buck finished. “And the Friday, I don’t know much.”

“I know enough about the Friday from other sources, Buck,” I said. “I got the audio of the SOS from the *Dark Princess*, and I’ve interviewed Kent and Prandeep. So there’s nothing much you can tell me about that day. But you’ve told me a lot, and you’ve explained several mysteries. Although not all.”

“Ah, well, maybe I’ll solve the other ones. But that’s for next time. But I want to hear your story. So, go on, tell me.”

“Grrrr, I suppose I’ll have to.”

“Over the week, from Thursday to Wednesday, I was involved in other police work that’s not relevant. So you were very important, but only a part of my life. And you know most of it as you were there, so my story won’t take long to tell.

“When you visited me on Thursday night I was bewildered. I had no idea what was in your parcel and why you thought I had it. So I got my sergeant, Becky Newton, to come over. She’s the person who handcuffed you and interviewed you with me. And she fixed my side door so you wouldn’t surprise me again.”

“Capable woman!”

“Yes, she is.

“You knew my name and address so I suspected that a police officer was involved and kept your visit hush hush, in case I might’ve alerted him or her.

“I had a suspicion it might be drugs and next day I was told that a shipment of drugs was expected in Hobart on Saturday. I thought that was too late to explain your visit. Until Friday night when you roughed me up again. Later that night Becky visited me again ...”

“So Becky is important?” Buck asked.

I laughed.

“Very important, but at that time we were only working together, nothing else.

“I’m a detective and used to working things out. So I deduced, correctly as it happens, that the drugs were off loaded at Arthur River on Thursday morning and meant to be taken by road to Hobart. That explains why you turned up at my unit. But it doesn’t explain who had the drugs or where. On Saturday, when you sent me a text message, I went to Becky’s flat and didn’t come home until late.”

“I wondered,” said Buck, “I called round but you weren’t home.”

“Until Sunday morning when you took a pot shot at me!”

“Sorry about that. I waited outside your unit because I was sure you’d show up.”

“It all began to fall into place. I was certain another police officer was involved, and by far the front runner was Martin Campbell.”

“The little shit,” Buck murmured, and I continued:

“So on Monday I went to arrest him and he shot me in the shoulder and disabled me, but he didn’t know I’m left-handed. Before he could finish me off Becky killed him. I was operated on at the Smithton hospital while Becky found the drugs in Martin’s bedroom.”

“I’m glad she killed him. Give her my thanks.”

“Becky drove me back to Hobart on Tuesday morning and then I arrested you. Three kilograms of *ice* was far too much to be lenient with you. You know the rest.”

“Is your arm going to get better?”

“Not completely. I’ll still have some pain in it, but most of the time I ignore it. And being a south paw like you helps.”

“Tell me more about Becky.”

“You were the one that brought us together. We had to work alone without any help, and spent a lot of time in each other’s company. Saturday night we were interested and Sunday night we slept together.”

“It’d happen anyway without me.”

“Probably, but your intervention made it a lot faster.”

Buck smiled:

“So something good came out of it. Love at first sight?”

“No! We’d worked together and I’ve known her for, I don’t know, some years now. So you definitely brought us together. Any questions?”

“How did you cotton on that it was Martin Campbell?”

“It had to be a policeman and Martin ticked all the boxes. I’d been involved in his demotion, so he’d a grudge against me, he lived Smithton near Arthur River, and he was originally from Melbourne and so could’ve known about the drugs’ scene there. No one else fitted the bill. So it wasn’t difficult. The big problem was that the *Dark Princess* had no traces of drugs when she docked in Hobart, not even the tiniest one. So it was possible that the drugs came in on the car ferry into Devonport. I didn’t know that Martin Campbell was involved and I went to meet him on the off chance he might know something.

“If anyone else had been used to ferry the drugs then you would’ve got your drugs and we would’ve never met. Just bad luck.”

“Can you give me a photo of him?”

“Why?”

“Just to get confirmation.”

“OK. I’ll bring it to you on my next visit. Shouldn’t you go inside?”

“Nah! It’s sunny, nice being outside with you.”

“Have you had any bother?”



Buck grinned.

“A bit at first, but not now. I’m fit. If we’d sat at a table and arm wrestled I’d win, no troubles. Can’t you fix the food? It’s terrible.”

“Sorry, can’t do that,” laughing. “But I can bring you something now and again. I really would like to know why you imported three kilograms of *ice*? So why?”

Buck looked down and seemed depressed, reluctant:

“That’s private Felix. As I said before, you don’t need to know.”

And that’s all he said on every occasion that I asked.

In the evening, I told Becky Buck’s story. She shrugged but didn’t say anything.

I finished and said:

“OK Becky, your comments?”

“Is Buck a regular dealer?”

“Puck! I’d forgotten to tell you Becky. On the Friday I asked around and apparently there is no evidence of drugs’ dealing. He told me he bought drugs occasionally, but it was small time, only for personal use. So he wasn’t caught. But this is the first time he’s trafficked on a large scale.”

Becky thought for a moment before she replied:

“I want to know why this time he got so much *ice*.”

“I tried to get it out of him, but he refused, saying that it was private.”

“If he wasn’t a regular dealer then I think that Buck maybe was hard done by. That doesn’t excuse him, but he’ll be convicted and jailed and that wipes the slate clean I would’ve thought. So I want to know.”

The following day I visited Buck and gave him the photo of Martin Campbell. He asked me to send a copy to a phone number that he provided and I complied.

David Martin, alias Buck, decided to plead guilty and that cut short the process. Maybe he had influence or maybe it was just luck. Anyway, the usual wait for sentencing was months but Buck's case was scheduled in a matter of weeks.

He went before a judge who held a pre-sentencing hearing.

His barrister pointed out:

"Mr Martin, Your Honour, is married with three teenage children, and he loves and provides for his family. Surely having a father at this crucial time in their lives must be of paramount importance?"

Much to Buck's surprise, I stood up and addressed the judge.

"I do not deny, Your Honour, that attempting to import three kilograms of crystal methamphetamine is a serious crime and David Martin must be imprisoned.

"However, I bring to your attention, Your Honour, that David Martin has never been charged with any crime before this matter in front of you. It is the first time that he will be convicted of an offence, especially a drugs' offence. Further, both as the arresting officer and as someone who has spent some time with Mr Martin, I can attest that he is, in every other respect, an impeccable citizen."

"In my experience, drug dealers are violent thugs."

"Then Mr Martin must be an exception. In my experience, Your Honour, every one of us can lash out when we are angry or frustrated. But most of us use words, not fists. And most of us calm down and apologise."

"Has Martin lashed out at you?"

“When he was extremely frustrated, but he has apologised. Might I add, Your Honour, that Mr Martin has not been brought to the attention of the police for domestic violence or sexual harassment. As his barrister has pointed out, he loves his family.”

Of course Buck was jailed. But not for the maximum sentence. Maybe my testimony had some influence?

So Buck was in jail when I visited him. Several times. Just for a chat and for me to see how he was coping, which was very well. He was a model prisoner and when it was time I'm sure he'd be paroled.

Then he called me again.

“Felix, do you want to hear the rest of my story?”

“Yes, please!” Eagerly.

“Visit me this afternoon.”

“I have a session with my physiotherapist.”

“Cancel,” was his abrupt reply and hung up.

So, like a good little boy, I did what I was told. It was a cold day and a gentle drizzle made us sit inside. But we found a spot out of earshot.

“Thanks for the photo Felix.”

“Did you find out anything about Campbell?”

“I'll tell you later. Where was I up to? The Saturday wasn't it? There's not much to add.”

“My contact in Victoria got the story out of Kent Clarke. After you'd interviewed them, Prandeep and Kent flew back to Melbourne. Before they docked in Hobart they made sure they had enough money to get back. Marcus had stowed away two thousand in cash on the yacht, so they took some of it to supplement their own money.

“Maybe his Sikh God smiled on Prandeep, because there was a localised storm over Tullamarine airport. The plane was bathed in sunlight until it entered its holding pattern where it was buffeted by vicious winds, rain and lightning. It circled a few times, with the passengers distraught, some screaming, until the captain told them they were running out of fuel and being diverted to the Avalon airport near Geelong. The possibility of running out of fuel and crashing made some passengers say prayers. Of course the plane landed at Avalon normally and they got off to be greeted by sunshine and cool breezes. The passengers were told that buses would be here in about an hour and take them back to Tullamarine. But Prandeep and Kent got a taxi for the short ride to the marina. They arrived earlier than expected and, with Kent watching, Prandeep went to Marcus's car, opened the driver's side rear door and collected a shopping bag.

“He was approached by a man who worked there. ‘Can I help you?’ he asked. ‘You know me,’ Prandeep said, ‘I am Prandeep Singh. Marcus has given me the keys to his car to collect some shopping he did for me.’ And the man went away while Prandeep got the bag and locked the car again.

“Returning to Kent, Prandeep opened the bag. ‘*Fucking little shit!*’ he exclaimed, ‘there’s more than twenty thousand dollars here, more like fifty.’ He counted the bundles and exclaimed ‘Forty eight thousand dollars! Instead of the bus we can get a taxi back to Melbourne and we will still have close to forty five thousand dollars each.’ Kent, ever practical, said ‘won’t you fingerprints be on the car?’ To which Prandeep replied ‘It is not a problem. Marcus has given me a lift to the marina and I was sitting in the back seat. Anyway, no one knows about the money.’

“Prandeep divvied the cash before they got a taxi back to Melbourne. In Melbourne they split up to go home. Prandeep went to Flinders Street station, buying a carrot cake on the way and eating it. Before he boarded his train he put the car keys in the white paper bag, sticky with icing, and tossed them a rubbish bin. They’re probably on a tip somewhere, buried under tons of other rubbish.”

“So, Felix, that’s all I know. Satisfied?”

Buck laughed and added:

“Even if you’re not, that’s all I’m telling you.”

I sat back and smiled.

“I’m contented. I know I shouldn’t, but I sympathise with you Buck. You have lost over three million dollars and been jailed through no fault of your own.”

“Except dealing in ice!”

“But what about the photo that I sent to Melbourne?”

“In the next conversation I was told that the photo was of Felix Oliver. The drugs’ wholesaler knew him as a small time user, maybe a dealer. He knew where Felix Oliver lived and when I put in a big order the wholesaler sounded him out as the courier from the north of Tasmania to Hobart. Felix Oliver was a bit reluctant until he was told that he’d earn ten thousand dollars for his trouble. That tipped the scales.”

Buck shrugged:

“And that’s all I know.”

I told Becky and she frowned.

“The only loose end, Felix, is why? Why did he try to import three kilograms of *ice*?”

“I don’t know and he won’t tell me. I think he’ll take that to his grave.”

That premonition was right.

Time passed. I visited Buck spasmodically, when he or I called and made a time for a visit. We were friends, but didn’t have a lot in common, except drugs, and dealing

was just about impossible in jail. But a few prisoners managed it a couple of times, as Buck told me off the record. I shrugged. They might be caught, if a screw was clever enough, but they weren't nabbed and I didn't let on.

There had been no contact for over a month when a black-edged envelope was put on my desk. Inside there was a black-edged card with gold lettering which read:

*Felix Oliver*  
*is invited to attend the funeral of*  
*David (Buck) Martin*  
*A celebration of his life will be held afterwards*  
*RSVP*

And then there were the dates of his life and the dates, times and places of his funeral and wake. He was fifty one, twenty one years older than me.

I didn't read the obituaries in the paper, so it came as shock. I retrieved the last few days of the Mercury and went through them. There were lots of messages of condolences. I rang the prison and got an explanation. He'd had a heart attack, the ambulance was called but the paramedics couldn't revive him. I pulled rank and managed to get his widow's phone number. I called her.

"Mrs Martin, I'm Felix Oliver. I received an invitation to Buck's funeral."

"I'm Jane, Buck's wife. I hope you can attend."

"Why? I put him in jail."

"He talked about you. He regarded you as one of his friends, despite you being a police officer and jailing him. I invited you because of that. Can you come?"

"Yes." I don't know why, but I added "But can I visit you before the funeral?"

"Yes, if you like. Tomorrow?"

I had never been to Buck's home. It was a not-to-large two story house in an affluent suburb with a large SUV parked in the driveway in front of an open double garage which housed a powerful Harley-Davidson motor bike and a BMW sedan. I knocked and Jane showed me into the living room.

She was tall, maybe taller than Buck, and elegant. Long silky light-brown hair cascading around her shoulders, her slim body housed in a white blouse and blue skirt. Black stockings above high stiletto shoes.

We talked.

"Buck has never explained to me why he imported three kilograms. All he would is *that's personal*, and shut up."

Jane sighed.

"I know why. He told me never to mention it because he thought others would look down on him, if they knew he was a pussy cat at heart. Which is why he's called Buck, more impressive than David. But now he's dead ..."

"We have three children. Paul, seventeen, Peter, sixteen, and Patricia who is fourteen. They loved their father and he loved them."

"David was an accountant, in a senior position at a large company, and well respected. He'd started working for them during his university studies and once he'd

graduated they offered him a position as an accountant. Before I met him he'd been promoted to a senior position because he was very good at his job and management. He earned good money and so our children go to a private school. And we have paid off the mortgage on our house. He was a good provider."

"I must have sensed that, he was basically a decent person underneath." I said.

"But he was also a bikie," continued Jane, "which is how I met him twenty years ago. His father rode motorbikes so he did too. But he joined a bikie gang. I was with another bikie, but he dumped me. So David came into my life. When I met him he occasionally took drugs, but he detoxed when we fell in love and married and he never took anything stronger than paracetamol from then on. And I don't think he dealt in drugs. Until recently.

"The company he worked for went into receivership and he lost his job. And at his age no one wanted to employ him. But we had enough money. We had a mortgage on our home, but I had a part time job in IT and I could work from home, we have a fast internet speed, so I could earn enough for us to get by and look after the children.

"But David fretted about our future, especially the children. So he sounded out his bikie contacts and he came home one day and said he would do one drugs' deal that would set us up for life."

And, through her tears, she added:

"And that's when it all went wrong. Badly wrong.

"I visited him in jail and he told me about it. And later he told me about you, Mr Oliver. And so I know about as much as you do, which is why I invited you. He'd want you to come and say farewell."

"I will. I liked Buck. Other than the drugs' deal I found him a sincere, decent man. So I want to say goodbye. But how are you coping? Buck has lost a lot of money, maybe about a million dollars."

Jane shrugged.

"We'll cope. Off the record?"

"Certainly."

"David put aside a little nest egg, a bank account in my name in case something happened to him. That and my job is enough to live on and finish the children's education. And, as it was a victimless crime, the courts can't touch the house or the money."

"He organised it well," and I smiled.

On the day of Buck's funeral I arrived at the church a tad early, parked my car beside Jane's SUV and got out. I was dressed in my best suit but I wore my pale red shirt and a rich red tie. I think that Buck would've smiled at that flamboyance and liked it.

I walked towards the door and stood and chatted with Jane and her children, dressed in black.

We heard a raucous roar and about twenty motor bikes filled the car park. Their riders got off and removed their helmets revealing many long beards, some silver as



their owners were as old or older than Buck. A few bikes had woman passengers. Wives probably?

One bikie came up to us and said menacingly:

“Get the shit out of here Oliver,” he said, “cops aren’t welcome, specially you.”

Jane moved between us and said in a quiet but commanding voice:

“He is my guest Hitman. If you don’t like it then you can go.”

Hitman gave me a one-finger salute and slouched back to his bike to deposit his helmet.

The funeral service was good, mainly because the priest didn’t say much and the prayers were mercifully short. And the music, played through loud speakers, was a mix of classical and rock. The priest was an orthodox Christian and he muttered about profaning the Church with heretical music and people dressed in bikie leathers, but he was over-ruled by Jane.

“If you don’t like it then we can go somewhere else,” she said, and he caved in.

But he insisted on two hymns, *Rock of Ages* and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*, and three readings from the Bible. And several prayers, mercifully short. The first was:

“In your hands, Oh Lord, we humbly entrust our brothers and sisters. In this life you embraced them with your tender love; deliver them now from every evil and bid them eternal rest. The old order has passed away: welcome them into paradise, where there will be no sorrow, no weeping, no pain, but fullness of peace and joy with your Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.”

Jane gave a short eulogy, just the usual platitudes about David being a model husband and a good father and that he was taken before his time. She didn’t mention prison and I’m sure the priest was totally ignorant of his criminal record. The service was concluded by the priest with a prayer:

“Into your hands, God of Mercy, we commend David Martin to your care. May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ bless and console us and gently wipe every tear from our eyes: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Then the mourners filed past the casket, adorned with Buck’s helmet and sleeveless leather jacket. Part of the lid was hinged so they could see his face. Jane and her children kissed his forehead, and some bikies bowed and touched it. All were silent.

Jane beckoned me to join the precession. When became my turn, I looked at the serene face and a few tears welled up in my eyes.

“Goodbye Buck,” I whispered. “We’ll all miss you.”

Then the casket was taken out to the hearse to be buried in the Cornelian Bay cemetery.

I went to the wake. There was some grumbling, but Jane must’ve put her foot down so there was no outright hostility, except from Hitman. So I got a drink and some nibblies and circulated. Everyone called Buck *Buck*, not *David* as he was referred to in the church service. Most of the bikies didn’t know me so I was accepted even if I wore a suit! All were friendly, but one asked:



“What do you do?”

“I’m in the state public service,” I replied, hoping that the ambiguity was OK.

With the bell-like summons of knives on drink’s glasses, Jane and Hitman gave the eulogies they wouldn’t dare give in the church, candidly revealing Buck’s character and talking about gang- and home-life, including many jokes. I learnt that he almost always smiled.

I enjoyed the wake, but I was a fish out of water so I left early after I’d said *goodbye* to Jane.

I never saw her again. There was no point.

It was a few weeks later. I was in our office when a constable delivered a box to me. A small post office mailing box with my address on it, but no sender’s name and address, just squiggles. I shook it and sensed something heavy inside it. I opened it and found something wrapped in tissue paper. Bright, shiny, knuckle dusters. There was no note.

I turned the knuckle dusters over in my hands. They were heavy! No wonder they bruised me when Buck punched me!

I showed them to Becky.

“They’re too heavy,” was all that she said in a definite tone of voice.

It piqued my interest, so I took the knuckle dusters to a jeweller’s shop.

“Do you service watches?”

“Yes.”

So I took my Dad’s watch off my wrist and gave it to him.

“Be a few weeks,” he said while writing out a tag and fixing it to the strap. “I’ll call you when it’s ready.”

I took the knuckle dusters out of my pocket and gave them to him.

“Gold coloured steel I think.”

He frowned as he took them. “Too heavy. I won’t be a minute.”

He took them into his workshop and after a little while came back, shaking his head.

“Look here,” he said, offering me his magnifying glass.

I saw four little stamps hiding away.

“They’re hallmarks. From left to right, the first mark is a hall mark for the city of London goldsmith’s guild, followed by a date mark, then a maker’s mark. The last is for nine carat gold. I can look the marks up in a book and be more specific.”

“So they’re gold plated,” I said.

“No, not plated, but solid gold all the way through. But who would make knuckle dusters out of solid gold? They’re worth about nine thousand dollars. Where did you get them?”

I smiled.

“A present from a gentleman who did nothing in half measures.”

# *And after ...*

On Thursday morning it was the dawn of a new era in our lives.

Becky agreed with me that we should buy a house together. So we went around looking at properties, hand in hand like lovers do, and found a small house with an enclosed back yard. Although it needed some work, it was perfect for us and we bought it. Fortunately houses sold quickly so my unit was only on the market for a week before it was sold. Then we had to wait for the regulation ninety days after signing contracts to pay and transfer the title to our joint names. Which was OK because Becky had to give notice to terminate the lease on her flat.

My car was repaired. It was insured and, as the insurance contract didn't mention bullet damage, and I never told them, the company coughed up.

My apraxia, or aphasia as the doctor called it, didn't go away and maybe I'll be stuck with it for the rest of my life. I did go to a speech therapist for a couple of sessions, but it didn't seem to be of any use, except for transferring a lot of money from me to her. The main thing that worked was to speak slowly and deliberately, consciously moving my mouth to form words. With Becky, friends, Peter Taggart and Bartholomew I just spoke naturally and mispronounced words. I yelled *FUCK!* sometimes when it got to me, but they understood and put up with the occasional tantrum. Also they had no trouble understanding me, so my dropping letters didn't bother them.

Over the three months that we had to wait to move into our house, my shoulder gradually got better. I dutifully went to physiotherapist sessions and did the exercises, so that when I went back to the surgeon after having been x-rayed she gave me the

all clear and didn't want to see me again. Although it still ached I got used to the dull pain and most of the time didn't notice it. But occasionally I needed to take paracetamol. Being left-handed is a godsend.

And over the three months, Becky and I sorted out what we'd move into our new house and what we'd have to buy.

The day on which we got the title, small furniture vans arrived at my unit and Becky's flat and transported our furniture and things. We went with them and told the removalists where we wanted everything to go. Then we unpacked what we needed and sat in Becky's arm chairs and ate delivered pizzas washed down with champagne.

Four days later we held a house warming party with lots of people from work, the cricket club and Becky's friends.

I thought of Buck and had just announced a toast to absent friends when there was a knock on the front door, which Becky answered. Then a dog came bounding up to me and almost pushed me over in her delight. It was Marmalade followed by her handler.

"I thought I would give her to you as a house warming present," he said, grinning. "She's five years old, spayed, micro chipped and vaccinated. Her collar is on her and here's her lead. And some dog food," handing me a shopping bag.

I was overwhelmed and had to hug him! Marmalade wasn't overwhelmed! She ran around surveying her new home, pushed a couple of people out of the way and settled down on the rug in front of the wood heater.

"Try to move me, I dare you," was what I thought she was saying. So that became her place, when she wasn't on our bed or the sofa.