

*The Path To*

*Domestic*

*Harmony*

*is paved with the bones of the*

*dead*

*Richard Paul Watkins*

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# 1

Detective Inspector Noah Watt sighs.

It could have been anguish because, despite the cushion, his buttocks squirm uncomfortably on the rocks he's sitting on. But he sighs with smiling anticipation as he looks at the small brown-paper bag.

It is Tuesday, early in April, and Noah is fishing at Kingston Beach.

He leaves home, saying to his wife Abigail "I'll be back for lunch."

Instead of driving to the beach, he goes in the opposite direction for about 11 kilometres, mostly on pot-holed gravel roads, enters a bakery and comes out with a small brown-paper bag, which he puts lovingly in his tackle basket of fishing gear. He then drives the 11 kilometres back to the beach.

Kingston Beach, not far from Noah's home, is nestled between two low cliffs. At the northern end Browns River enters the bay, and this is the more populated end because dogs are allowed off lead.

At the southern end of the beach there's the sailing club, a boat ramp, a breakwater protecting it and, during the week it is normally deserted. However on hot summer days there are often sailing races for children in small dinghies, with their sails flapping in the breeze, overseen by adults in motor boats. Noah doesn't know the proper name for these tiny one-man or one-girl crafts because he has never been interested in sailing.

Noah parks his car at the southern end of Kingston Beach and walks past the sailing club. Beyond the breakwater there's the start of a wide, rough, sandstone platform at the foot of the cliffs. Extending for about 200 metres, sometimes partly covered at high tide and, although requiring eyes down to avoid tripping, it is an easy stroll. He chooses a spot in the morning sun where there are no people, carefully arranging his fishing gear around him, he sits on the cushion, settles in.

Noah is short and stout, inherited from his father, and wears a hat to stop his nose and head, once covered with luxuriant dark brown hair, from being sunburnt. He has had cataract surgery on both his eyes and can see clearly distant objects, but close-up work, like putting a fishing hook on a line or reading and writing, requires him to wear cheap magnifying glasses. It is warm and sunny with an imperceptible breeze, and his fishing line running from the tip of the rod moves languidly before it enters the water lapping gently beneath his feet. There are no fish, or none that bite on his lure. But it is the excuse that Noah uses to escape from the house and spend some time by himself. So he has baited the hook and cast only once, as the objective isn't to catch anything, although that would be an unlikely bonus.

The small paper bag beckons. Carefully ripping it open he sees a rectangle of snow-

white icing sugar with random lines of chocolate, beneath which is a solid, pale-yellow vanilla custard (made with real vanilla beans), all supported and held in place by a thin layer of pastry. He prefers the French name *mille feuille*, but he's happy to call it a vanilla slice.

Abigail has admonished him several times, declaring "Eat it slowly, love! Savour it!" He has tried, but he has failed ignominiously. And so after only a little while he licks his fingers and sighs again.

Noah should have bought three *mille feuilles*, one to eat now and two to take home and share. However it is, hopefully, his secret indulgence and he wouldn't tell Abigail.

Actually he's a very bad liar and Abigail can see through him. Time and again, when he told a little white-lie to avoid embarrassment, she has confronted him and requested that he be honest, leading to even more embarrassment than if he'd been forthright and admitted his sin! So it is necessary to destroy all the evidence to escape interrogation when he arrives home, and he runs his tongue over his upper lip in case some stray bits of the white icing have lodged there.

Noah's phone rings, disrupting his reveries.

"It's Tuesday James, and I'm taking the day off in lieu of Sunday. Don't bother me."

"But Sir, I think this will interest you, and DI Baker is unavailable," replies his sergeant, James Hunter, "and also I need a senior officer with me."

Noah sighs, this time with irritation, both from the interruption and the failure of James to use his given name. And also because Rosalind Baker is in Sydney; she has gone up there for a police conference and would be away for a week.

"Call me Noah, please. What is it James?"

"A murder, Sir. A man has been stabbed."

"Where are you?" Noah asks James.

"At the back of the Anglican church at Colebrook."

Noah knows that for his sergeant to request his presence means that there is something special about the case and it is no ordinary murder.

Fortunately he has a pen in a pocket and a scrap of paper in his wallet.

"Can you give me the address so that I can put into the GPS? I'll be about an hour. Can the ambulance wait?"

After he's provided with the information, Noah winds in his fishing line, but it snags as usual. After moving the rod this way and that, a final tug frees it, with the expected result of no sinker and no hook.

He packs up, walks to his car, throwing the evidence of the paper bag into a rubbish bin, and puts the rod with its forlorn, limp line in the back with his tackle basket.

He sets the GPS to the given address and waits for it to work out a route. It is combined with a dash-cam, but Noah has never been in an accident where it was needed. The only *accident* that the dash cam has recorded was when it fell off the windscreen and filmed the gear-change lever and its surrounds for a few minutes.

He also rings his wife Abigail.

"A case has come up about an hour North of Hobart, so I'll be late for lunch. You'd

better eat without me.”

That done, Noah starts his car and heads north up the Southern Outlet.

Some years ago, Noah had been curious about some of the strange names in the area, including the Jordan River, Jericho and Bagdad.

‘I don’t know anything about the Jordan river, but there’s Jericho that isn’t too far from Colebrook,’ Noah thought and, during the easy drive to Hobart, he chants tunelessly:

“Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho, Noah fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.”

But the thought of going to a church, albeit for a murder, triggers Noah’s memories and, after has left Hobart behind, he reminiscences.

He was raised by his parents in the now-defunct Presbyterian church, in which he was both baptised and confirmed.

On Sunday mornings the family donned their best clothes and his father, Gideon, gave his child a small silver coin to be placed in the collection bowl as an offering, and they drove to the austere church. It was a red-brick rectangle with a pitched roof of red tiles and a cross at one end. It had no clock and, as far as Noah knew, there was no bell to call parishioners to their duty. Behind, down a driveway, there was another substantial, brick clad rectangle, the hall where the Sunday school was conducted. On one long side it had little cubicles where students of different ages would learn about God and Jesus.

The church ceremonies were boring. Noah doesn’t like singing hymns, both because he has a flat, tuneless voice and because he dislikes the simplistic music. And Christmas carols are even worse. There is one hymn he likes, beginning *And did those feet in ancient time...*, but he has forgotten the words. Later in life he discovered that religious music could be passionate and uplifting, when he became aware of J.S. Bach and Handel’s oratorios. But by then Christianity had deserted him and the joy he has listening to them are simply a reflection of their beauty and power.

As a child, at church he prayed with the others, eyes closed and head bowed while the minister uttered words from a prayer book, and joined in whispering “Amen” out loud, even though he didn’t understand the meaning of the word. After putting his coin in the bowl that was passed from worshiper to worshiper, he sat, raising one cheek and then the other of his childish bottom on the cushionless hard wood of the pew, while the sermon droned on, and on, and on.

After the service, Noah was made to go to the Sunday school, which was equally dull and passionless, until he was old enough and found it to be an unexpected place of pleasure. He discovered that the Sunday school teachers put on a musical every year loosely adapted from a stage show. Perhaps religious institutions were exempt from paying copyright? Despite his voice he got quite large speaking and singing roles, which flattered him and gave him a purpose. And got him out of the house.

Make-up was a problem then as now. He went to a theatrical shop and bought a basic make-up kit and a slim book that explained how to apply it. But he didn’t

progress from the basics, probably because he didn't understand emotions and the human face. Later in life, women who are heavily made up don't attract him and he prefers none or very little.

Back at home, after Sunday school, lunch passed silently. Gideon's wife, Elizabeth, had prepared the food and set the table the night before, so as to abide by her husband's edict that no work be done on the sabbath day. Gideon sat at the head of the table. He was, as is Noah now, short, plump, verging on fat, and his grey hair was sparse. His wife was lean, with brown hair and breasts that drooped from breast feeding. He insisted on deathly silence as he read from the Holy Bible that was placed beside his food. Not that he read out loud. Indeed he was as silent as the rest of his family, and the only noise to puncture Noah's gloom was the occasional scrape of a knife or fork upon the china plates, which elicited stern looks from the master and occasionally, when loud or persistent, a beating after the meal. No one could get up, let alone speak, until the master of the house had risen from his chair.

The beatings happened for many reasons. Noah thought that Gideon's favourite passage in the Holy Bible must be Proverbs 13:24:

*Spare the rod and spoil the child.*

Not having a birch tree nearby, Gideon used a willow branch on Noah's bare buttocks, hard enough to cause great pain but not hard enough to leave permanent scarring. He also occasionally assaulted Noah's hands and he appeared to get pleasure from both, praying out loud with the faintest whisper of a smile on his face. As far as Noah is aware, his father never hit his mother, instead restricting his anger to verbal abuse and incessant exhortations from the Old Testament that his family had to endure with bowed heads and follow to the letter.

When he arrives in Colebrook, Noah parks on the verge behind the police cars and a motor bike surrounded by *do not cross* tape, and looks around, familiarising himself with the landscape. There is some rudimentary fencing but the church is easily accessible. It is built of sandstone in the late nineteenth century, has a bell at one end of the nave, and sits in the middle of a large, flat block of land of about a hectare. There are several trees dotted over the land, but otherwise it is bare, with stunted or dead grass, the monotony relieved by a few daisies whose snow-white petals and rich orange centres sought the sun's rays. Surprising to Noah is that there are no graves, although he later learns that they're in a separate plot across a road. He also learns later that attendances had dropped so low that the church had closed several years ago and is up for sale.

The fact that the land is arid is no surprise.

Despite it being Tuesday in early April, about eight weeks until winter, there has been no useful rain for some time. Other than a torrential downpour which lasted just a few minutes, there were only a few showers when the regular cold fronts crossed Tasmania from the west. But the wind had dried the ground in a few moments before the rain could soak in and do any good. The regular high pressure systems to the north directed warm air over the land and the weather was balmy, with a light breeze,

unlike yesterday which was very hot.

Looking from the main road, there is one house to the left, three houses to the right on a side street, and only one house at the back beyond the railway line that formed the fourth boundary. Opposite there is a row of four houses.

Being out in the country, there is no CCTV.

Noah gently kicks and scuffs the verge, causing a tiny flurry of ochre-coloured dust to rise and then settle back, and he sees a faint mark in the hard clay and sand. He walks a few steps and looks back, but he's unable to see the mark he'd made, and it is indistinguishable from the rest of the verge even if you were looking for it. It is obvious that footprints on it are nonexistent. As are useful tyre tracks. Noah knows that even if there had been usable tracks, which there aren't, they couldn't check most of the cars in Tasmania to find a match, and usually there would be many matches. But they might be useful if there was a firm suspect.

Noah walks up the gravel path to the church, his eyes flitting back and forth to survey the scene, and he goes to the back of the church where there is the body of a man on his back in a corner formed by the nave of the church and a room that Noah guesses is the vestry beside the altar. The immediate area around the body has been cordoned off with *do not cross* tape.

He's about 40 years old, slim and dressed in a shirt, leather trousers and boots. He has tousled, nondescript blonde hair and an ordinary, clean-shaven face, except his lips were rather full, and he appeared to be of ordinary height. An unremarkable person except for his ears that jutted out like the handles of a jug. A knife handle and its invisible blade is angled up below his left ribs. Noah knows enough about anatomy to realise the knife has probably penetrated the heart or at least severed an artery. Death would have been almost instantaneous.

"Sorry to bring you out here, Sir. You have something white in the left corner of your lips," was the greeting of James Hunter.

A lick and it was gone, but Noah is very thankful for his sergeant bringing it to his attention as Abigail would surely have noticed!

"How was he found?" asks Noah.

"A man was walking his dog off lead, Sir, he lives in the house over there," states the local constable, pointing. "He checked the pulse, but the body was cold. Also, the man walked his dog early last evening and the body wasn't here."

"Do we know anything about him?" asks Noah.

"Just about everything," replies James. "His name is Michael Preston and his wallet is in his back pocket, with driver's license, credit card, Medicare card and about \$200 in cash. In a front pocket there are his keys for the motor-bike that is parked on the road with his helmet, leather jacket and gloves, and his mobile phone is in a saddle bag."

"Interesting! Another motor-bike or car for the murderer," meditated Noah out loud, "does the deed and drives off. It is obviously a prearranged meeting, but why here? And obviously not for robbery," he adds unnecessarily.

“James, look at the mobile phone, but unless the murderer is a crass amateur we’ll find nothing on it.”

“Yes Sir, but that can’t be examined until forensics have gone over it and the motor bike.”

“So tomorrow at the earliest. I presume there’s a widow that you can inform?” And, upon the assent, Noah leaves the scene and goes home.

Some forensic investigators arrive in a van. They’re wearing white overalls and carrying expensive cameras with ring lights around the lens, to avoid shadows, and other equipment to mark, photograph and measure the scene. The body and the motor bike are taken away, and the investigators search the surrounding area, but nothing is found in the hard earth, held together by dead or dying grass and weeds, except a few samples of dog poo and some light plastic supermarket bags that have been deposited there by the wind.

At the same time, James and another police officer start knocking on the doors of the nine houses that overlooked the church. There is no answer from some of the properties, necessitating return visits but, as Noah has predicted, nothing is learned:

“We had the curtains drawn and we were watching TV,” is the response from nearly all the residents, and “we were at the pub” or “because it was a nice night, we were in the back yard having a BBQ” is the meagre information gleaned from the others.

Even if someone had seen the motor bike or another car, and another car or a motor bike had to have been there, a person wouldn’t have thought that it was suspicious and wouldn’t have given a second glance, let alone note down the vehicle makes or registration plates.

Later, DS Hunter informs Noah of the unsatisfactory results.

“It is easier not to get involved in anything,” Noah remarks, “so even if people are curious they rarely act on their interest. And when they do, often what they say is vague and incorrect.”

Noah is aware of the research which shows that when several people watch the same event they have markedly different memories of it. When asked to recall the event, they frequently have errors in colours, the sequence of actions and in the actual actions that occurred.

But, as there are no witnesses, forensics and the autopsy must be used to catch the killer.

## 2

Two days after the murder at Colebrook, DI Noah Watt rings the pathologist and the forensic investigators and both say their reports would be sent to him early on Friday.

James organises a broadcast to appeal for witnesses. There is no police station in Colebrook, and so a woman rings the closest police station at Richmond.

“I was driving past and saw a motor bike parked on the road outside the church.”

The police constable on duty asks:

“What time was it?”

“After eight, about quarter past I think.

“Did you see the registration plates?”

“No. I don't like driving after dark, so I keep my eyes on the road.”

“Do you have a dash-cam?”

“No.”

“Can I get your name, address and phone number in case we need to follow it up?”

“Yes,” and she provides them.

Noah listens attentively to the recording of the call but, as he already knows about the motor bike, her evidence is almost useless. She might have seen the motor bike before the other person had arrived, or after he had left, so other than helping to pin down the time of the murder at somewhere around 8 pm, it doesn't add much.

On Friday morning Noah and James read the reports.

The forensic report is interesting by reason of its complete lack of useful information. Preston's motor-bike has lots of his fingerprints and DNA and, as expected, for no one else. The mobile phone only has text messages and call logs to and from his wife and work, and the other numbers, that needed to be checked, were presumably friends. Also, the forensic investigators had combed the area and found nothing relevant.

The autopsy report similarly lacks useful information. The knife, an ordinary kitchen knife. It has a 120 mm blade and has penetrated the heart so that death between the hours of 18:00 and 24:00 would have been almost instantaneous. The blade is sharp and pointed and it enters the body just to the left of the sternum and is angled steeply up. The only DNA on the blade is the victim's.

The chest cavity is full of blood but, because the knife hasn't been removed, there is only a slight seepage around the wound where it coagulated. That area has some sodium hypochlorite on it. The knife handle has been wiped clean with sodium hypochlorite, and there are no fingerprints or DNA. The hands have remnants of sodium hypochlorite on them and there is no DNA other than the victim's.

The clothing has some fibres on it, but they're nondescript, what you would find

on any clothing after it has been washed and tumble-dried. There is no evidence of interesting DNA.

Finally, there is a low level of methamphetamine in his blood, and a small bag of cocaine in his pocket, not enough to suggest Preston was dealing, and nothing in his motor bike's saddle bags.

Noah has read somewhere that analysis has advanced to the point where usable DNA could be extracted from a single cell. However the problem is: can that one cell be found on clothing or a body where there are millions of other uninteresting cells? Searching under fingernails, on palms and other particular places is relatively easy, and there are usually many cells to find. But DNA elsewhere would be very hard to locate, probably impossible.

That is, the report states that there is no direct evidence that might lead to the perpetrator. Noah and James are frustrated. If there had been some evidence of the killer left on the body then he might be found on the police files. Or if an unknown person, perhaps soon or years later, DNA from another crime might link someone to the earlier murder.

"So the murderer seems to be professional and he knows enough to use a silent weapon and to decontaminate the scene," Noah mutters to himself, and says to James:

"But what was the motive? And how did the murderer lure Michael Preston to that remote spot? Drugs? Money? Something else? Maybe the murderer took something from his saddle bags?"

Sergeant Hunter can't add much:

"I went to the family home which is in a northern suburb of Hobart. Michael Preston's wife Anne was there and I told her that he'd died. I showed her a photograph of the deceased and she confirmed that it is Michael Preston. Later I took her to the morgue where she formally identified him.

"She appears to be genuinely distressed. I asked her about their relationship and she stated that she loved him. But at one point she moved in her chair as though uncomfortable and winced. So I asked her why, and she said that she'd slipped and fallen against the kitchen table.

"She declined my offer of help and said she and her children would manage. I said that she would have to come in for further questioning and left.

"Later I checked our data bases and there's no record of Michael Preston or Anne Preston, and no mention of domestic violence, although I think that is a possibility. But she was wearing long sleeves and trousers, so I couldn't see if she had bruises.

"Although there need to be checks, I think it is very unlikely that she was involved in the murder. After all, she wouldn't drive to an out-of-the-way place to meet him. She could easily stab him in the kitchen and later plead self defence or an accident."

At this point Noah and James can see no way forward, and James, sighing, summarises:

"The means is a common kitchen knife that could be bought by anyone almost anywhere.

“The opportunity is persuading Preston to go to a secluded place a long way from his home and, at the moment, there’s no explanation of why or how this was done. Surely there are other, much more convenient places to hand over drugs or money?”

“And there’s no clear motive, although drugs had to be on top of the list. The fact that Preston doesn’t have a record isn’t important. As we both know, many drugs are imported or made here, sold and used undetected. And those that the police do find are only a small fraction of the drugs that are circulating in the community.

“The crime could have been committed by anyone who knew Preston and, as all three of *means*, *opportunity* and *motive* must be established, there is no suspect.”

“OK, James, get Anne Preston in for an interview on Monday. DI Rosalind Baker will be back and I want her to sit in and hand it over to her capable hands as it is in her patch.”

So Noah rings Rosalind and forewarns her of the interview.

On Monday, a week after the murder of her husband, Anne Preston comes in for her interview. She’s unremarkable, of average height and average build, with a forgettable round face, ears that have no lobes, surmounted by forgettable straight, thin and mousey hair, and ending in a double chin. She’s wearing a long-sleeved top and jeans. Noah has insisted on a comfortable chair.

“This interview,” Noah says, “is being recorded on DVD. Anne Preston, DI Noah Watt, DI Rosalind Baker and DS James Hunter present.

“You are not a suspect and we think someone else murdered your husband. We are recording this interview by the camera up there,” pointing, “in case you heard or saw something that later we find interesting and that might lead us to the killer.

“Also, at the end of the interview we would like to take your fingerprints and a DNA sample. This is for elimination purposes.”

“OK,” replies Anne.

“Did Michael have any enemies?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Did he owe money to anyone?”

“Not that I know of. Mike always paid the rent on time and he never asked me for any.”

“What about food and clothes?”

“I paid for the food and clothes.”

“What do you do for money?”

“I work part time at the supermarket. I do shifts so as I can look after the kids. Mike uses his bike and I have the car to take the kids to school and go to the supermarket.”

“Why did he go out that Monday night?”

“I don’t know. He often went out at night and didn’t tell me where he was going. I assumed he was going to a pub. I stayed at home, washing dishes and putting the kids in bed.”

“Did he drink regularly in a particular hotel?”

“Yes, the Diemen. But I think he went to other pubs as well.”

(There is a check of local hotels, asking staff if they knew him by name or recognised his photograph. A couple of people at two different hotels recognise him, but they say they're just acquaintances and not friends, although he drank with them, threw darts and sometimes played pool.)

"Where did he work?"

"At a butcher's shop; he's done most of an apprenticeship there."

(Later the butcher confirms that Preston worked five and a half days a week. He was reliable and his relationships with customers were very good; he would often chat to them and make them welcome.)

"What did he do before the butchery job?"

"He drove trucks for a quarry."

"Did you go anywhere together?"

"Sometimes he would take me out for a Chinese, but most of the time I cooked or we got take-away pizzas and KFC."

"Do you know any of his friends?"

"Not really, cause he almost never brought them home. I think the bikies he knew met somewhere. Occasionally another bikie would visit him. They would go out into the garage to talk about bikes and drink beer."

"Was he a bikie, a member of a gang such as the Bandidos?"

"No, he just had a couple of friends who were in bikie clubs. I don't know which club, cause Mike never talked to me about it."

"Do you go out at night?"

"Almost never. I look after the kids, do washing, and get clothes and lunches ready for the next day."

"What about the weekends?"

"Most Saturday mornings Mike worked and in the afternoon he usually tinkered with his bike or went to see a footy match. Sundays I go to church and to a pub for lunch, and I play the pokies."

"Do you play the pokies during the week?"

"Sometimes, when I have enough money and Mike lets me. I play at the pub around the corner."

"Did Michael stalk you?"

"I don't know what a stalker is, but if you mean Mike kept a close eye on me then he did that. Every day he grilled me about what I done and where I'd been. I had to give him my wages and he gave me enough for shopping and petrol."

"Was Michael ever physically or emotionally violent towards you?"

"Not really. We had occasional rows, every marriage has. I loved him and he was a good provider."

"Are you willing for a police doctor to examine you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I just don't. I'm not a suspect so you can't force me."

“Do you or he use drugs?”

“In the past I have had the odd joint, but it wasn’t regular. I think Mike must have used something, but so long as it wasn’t a problem I didn’t care.”

“What drugs did he use?”

“I think he might have used ice sometimes. And once I found a small bag of white powder, cocaine maybe? I’ve never used ice or cocaine.”

“Where did he get the drugs from?”

“I don’t know.” (There was, of course, no point in asking at the hotels or elsewhere as everyone would deny possession of or dealing in drugs.)

“Do you or Michael know Colebrook?”

“I’ve never been there. Mike might have, but I don’t know.”

“So you have no idea who murdered Michael?”

“No. I wish he hadn’t ’cause I don’t know what I’ll do for money for the rent now. He wasn’t a bad person.”

There are a lot more questions, but the answers don’t produce any interesting information, and so Anne Preston leaves after getting her fingerprints taken and giving a DNA sample.

Having got Preston’s mobile phone back from forensics, a police officer telephones the numbers stored in it. Other than his wife, the butcher for whom he’d worked and take-away food shops, all Preston’s contacts are friends. And, when they’re interviewed, most produce strong alibis for the night he was murdered and there is nothing to link the others to Preston’s murder.

Noah and Rosalind also go to visit the pathologist who had done the autopsy a few days before, Victoria Chan, who is professor of forensic medicine and surgery. Noah asks her:

“Professor, your report explains what happened but not why.”

“It’s not my job. I present the evidence and it’s up to you to interpret the data.”

“Have you left out anything from the autopsy?”

“Yes, but only unimportant details. I took blood and urine samples and tested them, but other than the methamphetamine that I reported, they were normal. Which is what you would expect from a healthy young male.”

“What is sodium hypochlorite?”

“It’s bleach. I use it all the time to remove any old DNA that might contaminate my examinations. I use a 10 percent solution, one part commercial bleach to nine parts water, and at that dilution it can safely be used to clean hands and work surfaces.”

“I thought I could smell something at the crime scene, but it was very faint.”

“Bleach has a pungent odour, but in the open air with a slight breeze the smell will dissipate in a few hours.”

“How could the murderer know that bleach removes DNA?”

“It’s common knowledge. He didn’t have to be that clever to do an internet search for DNA removal.”

“I think,” Rosalind suggests, “that you would have to be very precise in order for

the blade to miss the ribs and penetrate the heart.”

“Not really,” Professor Chan replies. She puts her right index finger on Rosalind’s lowest rib and says:

“I just have to be a little below that and, as the heart is relatively large, it isn’t difficult. Most humans have identical anatomy and it would be quite easy for him to judge the right spot, adjusting for height. I have no trouble with you, although I have never been interested in your body; you are too young for me!”

“But!” exclaims Rosalind, “you are an expert! For an amateur like me it is a different matter.”

“You could do it. All you have to do is go to *Doctor Google* and you will find plenty of information about the right spot. Two or three centimetres to the side and maybe two centimetres below the rib so that the tip of the angled-up knife will go behind the rib. Then most of the ten centimetres of the blade remaining will penetrate the heart. I’d demonstrate, but you’ll be dead and I’ll be in jail.”

“And,” she adds, “the heart and the brain are the only places where catastrophic damage will kill instantly. Anywhere else isn’t usually fatal and if it results in death it would be relatively slow, or very bloody.”

“What is clever,” Victoria continues, “is that the murderer didn’t thrust the blade horizontally, when the chances of hitting a rib is very high. Or from above, when the blade would be stopped by a rib or glance off the ribs and make a superficial cut. I suspect you would have only one go at it. And note that the grip is different; to stab down the blade has to protrude from the little finger, whereas to stab up the blade comes from your thumb and forefinger.”

And she demonstrates the action.

“But I expected more blood around the knife,” Noah remarks.

“No. The heart had stopped pumping blood around the body immediately and gravity made it settle in the lowest positions. As he was on his back there is marked lividity on the back, the buttocks and the backs of the legs and arms. That also shows that he wasn’t moved after death and put in the church grounds. I’m confident that he died where he was found.

“So as the knife wound was uppermost there was minimal seepage around it. There would be a lot more if the knife had been removed, and if body was face down or on his left side. If the heart hadn’t stopped immediately, as when an artery or a vein is severed, blood would have gushed out.”

“Why is there bleach on his hands?”

“The hands are the obvious point of contact with the killer, maybe shaking hands or other touching. So the killer erased any DNA on them.”

“Would he have died quickly?”

“Ah,” sighed Victoria with a grin, “you’ll have to ask God. I think his brain functioned for a few seconds after he was stabbed, but the conscious brain? I doubt it. Of course I could stab you while you are reciting a poem and wired up to an electroencephalograph and find out, but I would rather not do that.”

Noah and Rosalind walk back to the police station and tell James Hunter what they have learned.

“No fingerprints, no DNA, no CCTV, and no obvious motive,” says Noah. “So we have nothing and we have got nowhere.”

“But we have a body,” James interrupted.

“Which is very strange,” Rosalind muses. “Crimes of passion usually leave lots of evidence and a body. But this is premeditated, because the murderer took a knife and a bottle of bleach with him. And carefully planned murders usually involve the disposal of the body, hopefully where it won’t be found. One murder in which I was involved, the body wasn’t found, but there was a conviction on other evidence. Later we learned that the body had been cut up, after the blood had congealed, put into black plastic bags and deposited in general rubbish bins. Then it was taken to tips and dumped with tons of other rubbish. There wasn’t a snowball’s hope in Hell of finding it.”

After that, Noah and Rosalind reluctantly instruct the pathologist to release the body.

In spite of everything, Anne Preston loved Michael Preston, and she wants to give him the best funeral that she can afford.

Fortunately Mike had been sucked in by an advertisement on television for death insurance and he’d made regular payments to the insurance company. If he’d died when expected, at a ripe old age, the payments would have far exceeded the payout, but being young the company has to stomach its loss. Although the contract excluded suicide, there was nothing about murder and the company pays up. So Anne, with the prospect of a quite large sum coming to her, can give Michael a good send-off and not worry about the rent for a while.

She goes to a local funeral parlour to make arrangements for his cremation. Going in the front door she’s greeted by a sombre décor and hushed music. At the end of the wide hall is the reception and offices. To the left is a closed door with a brass plate telling her it is the chapel, and to the right is an open door with coffins and caskets visible. The dark carpet has crucifixes on it.

Matching the décor, a sombre man in a black suit comes up to her and she says:

“I’m here to arrange the cremation of my husband.”

Which is met with expressions of sorrow for someone so young.

Anne is led into the room on the right. In front of her is a display of coffins and caskets. The most expensive and opulent are at eye level and the lesser valued containers are above and below them; there are no cheap caskets because these are out of sight. To the left and right of her there are displays of urns and other paraphernalia for her to purchase. There are no price tags.

“I want a simple service in your chapel and then cremation without anyone present. How much will that cost?”

“It depends on the casket, flowers and urn you choose. But we have our own crematorium and that will reduce the costs.”

Anne chooses a casket in front of her, but on being told the price decides to lower her eyes and the cost to something more reasonable. She chooses an urn and, by looking through an illustrated catalogue, the flowers. All up, about \$6,000.

‘Burning the casket is a waste,’ she thinks, ‘but maybe they only burn the body and the padded lining and reuse the coffin?’

After organising the date and newspaper advertisements, and signing a contract, Anne leaves to organise the wake, which will be held in the Diemen’s dining room with the hotel’s kitchen providing the food. And she tells the pastor at her church so that he can inform the congregation of the service in the chapel and ask them to attend.

The day of the funeral is overcast with a few showers. Not many show up. A few bikies arrive, revving their engines, a few from the church including the pastor, and two people from the butcher’s shop. As no one else offers, the funeral director makes a short speech with the usual platitudes:

“We are gathered here to commemorate the life of our dear departed Michael Preston, who shall surely be admitted into Heaven to sit beside God.

“Michael was taken before his allotted time and leaves behind him a grieving widow, and his children grieving for their father.”

At which point the children, who got the day off school, squirm in their seats and look about them with an embarrassing lack of comprehension.

“Michael was a good father and an industrious worker who provided for his family. He will be sorely missed by all those who knew him. Let us pray:

“Dear Lord, we are so grateful that you have made us all in your own image, giving us gifts and talents with which to serve you. Thank You for Michael’s life, and all the years we shared with him. We lift him up to You today, in honour of the good we saw in him and the love we felt from him. Please give us the strength to leave Michael in Your care, in the knowledge of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

“And so we consign his soul to God.”

And, at the touch of a button, the casket slowly descends from view to the fires in the basement.

The mourners go to the pub. There the guests mill around with nothing much to talk about and, after a few drinks and sandwiches, they leave, some going only a few steps to the public bar.

A few days later, Anne collects the urn from the funeral parlour. She has no idea what to do with Michael’s ashes and they sit on the kitchen table for several days while she thinks about where to spread them. Eventually she goes to a bridge near the mouth of the River Jordan and, with some prayers to God, she sprinkles them on the water where they’re slowly wafted away by the current.

Noah doesn’t attend the funeral of Michael, because nothing would be learned, but mainly because he doesn’t like funerals.

He remembers his mother’s cremation after she’d passed away from fighting breast cancer.

'*Fighting* is an absurd word,' Noah thinks, 'people put up with sickness and cope, or don't cope, with it. *Passed away* is also absurd. Why not say she died?'

The day of the funeral, he and his father attended a service in the funeral parlour's chapel. He had to sit through a eulogy given by a man dressed in black who had never known his mother and spouted meaningless platitudes.

Then they rode in a black car behind a black hearse to the crematorium. There, as it was a busy day for funerals, they joined a queue of other black cars following other black hearses. One by one they disgorged the casket and the mourners into a chapel, had a ceremony, brief so as to not hold up the following bodies, and then vacated the room for the next service.

When it was their turn, Noah had to sit while more meaningless words were spoken until, at the press of a button, the casket dropped slowly out of sight, to join the other caskets lined up for the furnaces.

The wake was uninspiring. They went to an aunt's house, and a few relatives gathered in a room and ate ham, white-bread sandwiches and sponge cakes with cream while speaking of nothing much in hushed voices. Fortunately it was soon over.

He has no idea where his mother's ashes are spread or kept; in a cemetery somewhere?

Noah has attended other wakes and sometimes they were good. A crowd of people enjoying themselves while remembering the best and worst points of the deceased honestly.

His father's death was as equally unpleasant as his mother's. Gideon had simply faded away, losing interest in all things except his beloved Holy Bible, until he was eventually sent to a hospital. There, nurses fussed around him to make him more comfortable, but their attentions were only increasing his discomfort until, after many hours, he died in mild torment but with the expectation of going to Heaven. Noah didn't go to the funeral.

Noah is much more affected by grief when an animal dies. When his much-loved dog Emma died she was probably in pain. The night before she wouldn't eat anything and early the next morning it was obvious that she didn't have long to go. So Noah called a vet and, despite it being Sunday, she came around to the home and she administered a lethal dose of Nembutal. Then she got a towel from her car, wrapped the still warm body in it and took the sleeping body away to organise the cremation. For weeks after, Noah grieved and was morose, and resorted to too much brandy.

When Emma's ashes arrived they included a poem:

*If it should be that I grow frail and weak, and pain should keep me from my sleep,  
then you must do what must be done, for this last battle cannot be won.*

*You will be sad I understand, don't let your grief then stay your hand, for this day  
more than all the rest, your love and friendship stand the test.*

*We've had so many happy years, what is to come can hold no fears, you'd not want  
me to suffer so, when the time comes please let me go.*

*Take me where my needs they'll tend, only stay with me right to the end and hold  
me firm and speak to me, until my eyes no longer see.*

*I know in time, you will see, it is a kindness you do to me although my tail its last was waved, from pain and suffering I've been saved.*

*Don't grieve. It should be you, who decides this thing you do, we've been so close, we two these years, don't let your heart hold any tears.*

*Smile: for we walked together for a little while.*

Noah put her ashes on his desk at home, together with her collar and the poem, as he'd no idea what to do with them.

Over the years there are moments when he remembers her. Initially he often had imaginary conversations with her, but they faded. But the memories didn't fade and sometimes, unexpectedly, he's reminded of Emma and tears well up into his eyes.

Her ashes, her collar and the poem remain on his desk, probably until Noah dies. Occasionally he thinks about what would happen to them realising that, after the last person who remembered Emma has gone, they would be meaningless detritus and would be thrown away. But perhaps if there is a considerate Heaven he would meet her in the after-life?

### 3

It is Saturday, early in May.

“Fuck!” Noah screams as he flings the screwdriver down the hall.

“Don’t do that, love!” responds Abigail in an equally loud voice, “You are scaring Gryphon and she’s shivering. Come and tell her it’s alright.”

Trying to suppress his rage, Noah goes to Abigail, who is sitting with Gryphon on her lap, and angrily says “sorry,” to Abigail and pats Gryphon and mutters perfunctorily “It’s OK.”

Gryphon loves Noah, ‘whatever that means,’ he thinks, and sometimes Abigail is jealous. But ever since Gryphon come home Noah had fed her, taken her for walks and played with her, so the dog’s bias was to be expected. She also loves Abigail, but when she needs anything she will go to her *dad* rather than her *mum*.

But Gryphon is very sensitive to Noah’s moods and she seems to think that loud voices and temper tantrums are directed at her, when they aren’t. There was only one occasion in many years that Noah has lost his temper with her. It was when, going for a walk, they met another dog and Gryphon attacked it. It wasn’t vicious, just a lot of barking and growling with no intent to harm, but Noah had yelled, grabbed Gryphon by the scruff of her neck and dragged her away. Other than that he was patient and gentle with her. But her reaction to his frequent frustrations is to go to Abigail, jump onto her lap and tremble with anxiety, looking at him.

The reason for this particular outburst is that Noah is trying to put up two spice racks inside the pantry door. Abigail had bought them and asked him to install them. He knew that he needed special hollow-door anchors and went to the local hardware store to get them. Confronted by a large array of possibilities, he looked at them and meditated for a few minutes before choosing. On the back of the packet was written that a special tool was necessary, but a screwdriver could be used, to fold out two wings after they’d been put in the hole in the door. So a screwdriver was OK.

At home he got Abigail to show him the height to put them and then carefully measured the widths of the door and the racks so that he could calculate where to drill the holes. Initially his calculations are wrong, which is obvious when he marked the door (using a pencil so that he could rub out the marks later). After about thirty minutes he’s satisfied and he drills a single hole, puts the anchor in it and tries using a screwdriver to force the wings out. No success as the whole anchor simply rotated! He tries again, with the same result, and loses his temper.

A short while later a friend drops in and Abigail asks if he could help.

“Sure,” he replies, and puts both racks up in about five minutes.

Noah has calmed down in the evening, mainly due to brandy, and they watch

a program that has several guests commentating on current affairs. One guest is a woman with a lean, angular face, a broad mouth, and perfect teeth that she shows when she grins, which is quite a lot. Noah is taken by her face and the cascading hair that frames it, and thinks:

“If I was thirty years younger I could have a bit of that.”

Unfortunately he voices it out loud and Abigail bursts into unkindly laughter:

“You! In your dreams! She’s way out of your league!”

Somewhat miffed, Noah retorts “But you married me.”

To mollify him, Abigail reaches over, holds his hand, and says:

“That was over thirty years ago. You were handsome then. *And* I love you.”

Suitably stroked, he kisses his wife and murmurs:

“Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean.”

“What on earth does that mean, love?” Abigail asks, genuinely mystified.

“I have no idea why that nursery rhyme came into my head, but it has to do with beauty.”

“Explain. I’m all ears,” replies Abigail intently.

“Jack Sprat can only eat lean, and his wife can only eat fat. And I find lean faces more beautiful than fat ones, like your face.”

“Me, fat!”

“Sorry,” says Noah, blushing. “Badly worded. You have a lean face.”

“I was probably brought up with a subconscious idea of beauty based on western society’s norms. So I prefer triangular faces with hair cascading around them, not tied back. And well defined jaw bones without fat jowls.”

“I’m afraid that fat jowls are inevitable as you grow older,” remarks Abigail.

“And I don’t like excessive make-up,” adds Noah, “just a bit judiciously applied to highlight the cheek bones. And I hate bright red lipstick!”

“I’m relieved!” Abigail responds.

“And I like lean bodies, like your’s, but not anorexic. I don’t know why, but I like legs.”

“Maybe because they’re wrapped around you when you have sex?”

And with that, Abigail pecks him on his cheek and says:

“I’m glad you have got over your tantrum.”

In the past, sex was a problem for the pubescent Noah.

Gideon Watt refused to let his son anywhere near girls. As well as going to an all boys’ school, Noah wasn’t allowed to bring any girls to the house and his awakening desires had to be satisfied in other ways.

Gideon also refused to teach him anything about sex. The only compromise was when his father took him to a film night where a documentary, directed at children, was shown that explained the mechanics of sex and pregnancy. Obviously, in line with Noah’s religious education, there was no mention of love, lust or contraception, let alone pleasure, and sex only occurred with marriage.

It was many years before Noah learned of the clitoris, and he was sure that his

father would have thought it to be the one useless part of the body.

Despite his childhood introduction to Christianity, Noah became an ardent follower of *our Lord*.

Which came first, Jesus or girls, is a moot point. Actually, if he's honest, religious belief was simply a means to an end, and that end was female companionship. So Noah joined a student Christian group and his father, not being aware of the real reason, supported his new-found piety.

Two problems emerged fairly early on. First, all that he could do was look and imagine the soft breasts under clothing, and his fumbling attempts to hold hands were spurned. Second, the group focused on the most lyrical parts of the King James version of the New Testament, and Noah couldn't help but to be moved by the poetic passages about love. As his sexual love, lust as he now understands it to be, was rejected, his brain found a new passion in platonic love. And so he became a fervent Christian. Not that it involved Bible studies, but he did read occasional verses, including parts of Genesis, and fragments of the Gospels and Revelation. And his immature mind naturally turned to inerrancy and he viewed what he read as the literal truth.

Purely by accident, Noah stumbled upon the Song of Solomon and there he made a momentous discovery in Chapter 7 verses 7-10 (with Noah's interpretation of some words in brackets):

*This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes [to be fondled and grasped]. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs [arms and/or legs] thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved [whose tongue has gone into her mouth], that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips [the labia] of those that are asleep to speak [to swell and open]. I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me.*

And he found in Chapter 5 verse 4:

*My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door [her clitoris], and my bowels were moved for him [she had an orgasm].*

Is it pornography? Perhaps, but without the photographs of nude, desirable women. So apparently God approved of lust!

Noah's religious epiphany came to an abrupt end, to be replaced by an even more fervent agnosticism.

The event that triggered Noah's awakening happened at a weekend camp organised by his Christian group. He mightn't have gone to the camp, but it was a mixed group and the opportunity to be with girls, even if he could only look and have lustful thoughts, was too hard to resist. The Friday evening, the whole of Saturday and the Sunday morning were spent in Bible studies. And in the evening, after they'd washed and dried the dishes (Noah can't remember who cooked for them), they sang hymns and prayed around the camp fire. Afterwards, they went to sleep in the two segregated dormitories, in sleeping bags on lumpy mattresses.

After lunch on Sunday, the minister who was the group leader held a service that

included communion. When Noah, who was a confirmed member of the Presbyterian church, stood up and went to partake of bread and wine, the minister refused him.

“Are you an Anglican?”

“No, I’m a Presbyterian.”

“As you aren’t an Anglican I can’t give you communion. Go and sit down.”

At that moment his animosity towards churches was rekindled. He might still have been a Christian, but he couldn’t accept the divisive teachings of the various sects into which Christianity had fragmented. And so, with his spiritual world crumbling, he became an agnostic.

Having been rejected both sexually and spiritually, what happened next was probably self punishment or, more to the point, self flagellation. He offered to stay on after all the others had left, and alone and lonely he tidied up, emptied the *dunny cans* into the cess pit and rinsed them with black, smelly antiseptic, before he went by himself to an empty station and took a train back to his home.

“Christianity has four gods; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and Satan,” he pontificated out loud, although there was no one to hear him in the empty carriage.

“And that is three too many. And if God is perfect he would have made the year exactly 336 days so that there are four weeks in each of the twelve months composed of seven days, as Genesis requires. No leap years, no leap seconds and every month would begin on the same day of the week. God, if he exists, is having a joke on us.”

Over the ensuing years Noah eventually became an atheist. One evening he was watching the news and there was a report about a car smash. The fire brigade were there and cut a man out of the crushed, overturned vehicle. Paramedics kept him alive while an ambulance took him to the emergency department and immediately into surgery. There his wife was beside his bed as he died.

Outside, the grieving widow was confronted by a cameraman and she said:

“I prayed to God to save him, but God had other plans.”

Noah thought that it was a feeble excuse for her prayers being unanswered, and often Christians resorted to such platitudes to explain why God hadn’t done what they wanted.

‘But maybe religion helps her in some way,’ he pondered.

Noah has, rather late in life, realised that such problems, as happened with the screwdriver and the pantry shelves, occurred because he has poor hand-eye coordination.

With a few exceptions, Noah’s childhood and adult years were taken up by intellectual pursuits.

Noah learned to play golf. Gideon, his father, had decided it was a gentleman’s game that important people played, and during which met other important people and made deals. He bought his son a basic set of clubs and arranged some lessons. But from the beginning he sprayed balls seemingly randomly all over the course, and putting was an art he never mastered. He played occasionally and spasmodically over

many years and, if anything, his lack of ability was enhanced with each passing day. Until one day, when he was on the second hole, and swearing frequently and loudly, he threw his clubs and balls away and finally gave up.

Even a simple task took him a long time. He always visualised different ways of doing it, before deciding on a particular method and purchasing what was necessary. He meticulously measured everything and carefully planned the sequence of steps before he started. Sometimes this worked, but quite often it ended up in a temper tantrum.

However Noah never questioned why he had these difficulties and assumed he was just clumsy.

Late in May the murder at Colebrook continues to fester in Noah's mind. So he goes to work to review the case with James Hunter and Rosalind Baker, in a place where his lack of coordination isn't a problem, normally.

"It is interesting, particularly because there has been no attempt to hide the body," Noah says. "It seems as though whoever killed Preston wanted his body found. To show us how good he is? It is as though he's saying *catch me if you can*."

"He's clever," admits James. "He's intelligent enough to know that telling the truth is the best option, because lies will trip a person up faster. If we interviewed him, he would tell us that he didn't have an alibi, knowing full well that we don't have any other evidence against him. And lacking an alibi isn't enough to arrest him on suspicion of murder, let alone convict him."

"You are right," agrees Rosalind, "but we should review the evidence that we have, and the interviews, in case we have missed anything."

Reviewing the evidence doesn't take long, as there is precious little of it. No DNA, no fingerprints, no useful fibres, and nothing to indicate a motive, other than a small amount of drugs that they were sure were for personal use. The area had been meticulously photographed and searched, and they were sure that no evidence has been missed.

They think of explanations that will make sense of the information that they have. Drugs? A falling out of a bikie gang? A robbery gone wrong? But all their suggestions are far-fetched and unrealistic. There simply is no explanation for Michael Preston's murder at a far-away disused church, either a far-fetched or a credible explanation.

Reviewing the interviews is also easy, because the only extensive interview has been with Preston's wife, and there are only short notes on the computer files about people who have been contacted.

"Surely there should be more?" Noah asks.

So Rosalind finds Anne Preston's phone number and contacts her.

"Hi, Anne. I'm DI Rosalind Baker. We have a few questions. Can we come to your house?"

"No, I'm in Queenstown."

"Oh. For a holiday?"

"No, I'm living here."

“OK. We have come to a dead end, so we are seeing if there’s anything that we have missed.”

“I don’t think I can help.”

“Can you give us a list of his friends and acquaintances and their addresses?”

“I don’t know. As I stated in my interview, I don’t know most of them. And I don’t know where they live.”

Anne offers them some Christian names, which James writes down, but most of them have been contacted in April and the few other names would be impossible to track down without their surnames and if they didn’t have police records.

“Do you know the names of any of his bikie friends?”

“Well Buck and David visited him, but I don’t know their surnames. There were a couple of other men, but he didn’t introduce them to me and I can’t tell you their names. They just drank and talked in the garage.”

“Anyone else?”

“I don’t think so. Well, we knew the pastor at the church I go to, and a couple of members of the congregation, but I wouldn’t call them friends.”

They contact all the people that had been interviewed before. As it was still fresh in their minds, they have no trouble recollecting what they’d done on that Monday night. Most gave the alibis that they’d given before. Some were married and had partners to confirm their stories, and a few had gone to places where the CCTV confirmed their presence. So Noah and James focus on the very few men without alibis, making appointments with them, seeing them, and asking about their movements. All of them say that they were friends of Mike and they seem to be genuinely sorry that he’d died. They’re single or divorced, living by themselves and were at home watching television. There is simply no reason to doubt them and no reason to suspect them.

The next task that they have set themselves is, with a good photograph of Mike, going to the hotels that he drank at. As customers come and go, and the staff aren’t on every night, they visit the same hotel several times, and aren’t surprised at the reactions. The bar men and women and waitresses serving food recognise him, but they all say that they were too busy to see who he talked to, although one knew what he drank. Most of the customers don’t know him, but a few knew him and drank, played darts and pool with him. The usual alibi for that Monday night was that they were in the pub and CCTV confirmed those statements, although it took Noah, James and other police officers several hours watching videos to verify them.

While visiting the hotels, they also ask about bikies with the name Buck and David. And in the Diemen Hotel a drinker admits to knowing Buck and David and the name the gang they belonged to. Buck is there. He’s dressed in leathers with the sleeves of his jacket removed so that the colourful tattoos on his arms are obvious, as well as the tattoos on his neck and his face. His name and the gang he belongs to are in large, bold letters on the back of his jacket. He’s a big, fit man.

‘Bugger,’ Noah thinks, and his heart sinks.

He knows that Buck and David will refuse to talk to the police and, even if they

talked, they would give alibis, probably saying that they were in the club rooms. And other bikies will back them up and it will be impossible to know whether they're lying or not.

Noah knows the club rooms in a suburb of Hobart. The building had been a warehouse and it isn't remarkable, except for the steel shutters on the windows, the reinforced, impenetrable door, and the video cameras. Once, a while ago, he went there to talk with Trevor, more commonly known as Hitman. Hitman isn't appropriately named because he has never killed anything in his life, except for a few hapless mice. That visit was pointless.

"I know you," Hitman snarls, "you're fuzz. Bog off!"

And they were the only words that he uttered before he slammed the door shut in Noah's face.

Not that bikies are all bad. Noah has to admire the toy run before Christmas, when a cavalcade of motor bikes go from a northern suburb into the centre of Hobart, each bike bearing gifts for underprivileged children

Noah and James also see where Michael Preston's phone has been, from the towers it has *pinged*, by getting a court order to require the service provider to give the information. Not surprisingly they find that the phone has taken the obvious route from Preston's home to Colebrook.

"Should we check what other phones were in the area," James suggests. "It is a quiet area and on Monday night most of the phones will be local residents. So we can see if there are any strange phone numbers and one might be the murderer's."

"Don't bother trying. The magistrate will undoubtedly say that it is a fishing trip and refuse permission. We need some evidence, a suspect and his phone number before that will be possible."

## 4

Wendy Davis, nee Parata, has spent all her life in Auckland, New Zealand. Her parent's house is close to Mount Eden, an extinct volcano in the middle of Auckland.

She's attractive, about 168 centimetres tall with blonde hair, that is usually tied back into a pony-tail, and blue eyes under surprisingly black, arched eyebrows. She normally wears shirts and skirts over her shapely body and her legs are shod with practical, low-heeled shoes. Her upper teeth protrude, obvious when she smiled, and she has dimples in her cheeks.

When Wendy left school, she went to the University of Auckland and did an Arts degree majoring in education.

The North Island of New Zealand has about eleven active volcanoes and Tongariro National Park is host to three of them. It is in the middle of the North Island.

One summer holiday a fellow student, Jenny, wanted to climb Mount Ngauruhoe, and she persuaded Wendy to go with her. It is a young active volcano, about 3,000 years old, and is an almost perfect cone over 2,000 metres high. It is covered with snow in winter and some intrepid people take skis to the top and ski down it; more conventional skiing is done elsewhere in the park.

So they packed their ruck-sacks and set out during the week.

They took a train from Auckland to National Park, which took about six hours of the *clickety-clack, clickety-clack* of the train wheels on the tracks. Most of the journey was through cultivated land, and the most exciting feature is the *Raurimu Spiral*, where the train line has three horseshoe bends and does a complete loop, with a couple of tunnels, so that it can rise up the steep escarpment of the volcanic plateau. A couple of times, as they ascended, Wendy glimpsed far below them the train line that they'd traversed.

Then a bus took them to about six kilometres from the volcano.

As it was early evening, they decided to walk, find a site to pitch their tent and climb the mountain next morning. But the weather changed; clouds blackened the sky and the rain pelted down. It was pitch black and impossible to see anything, so they put up the tent where they stood, crawled inside, and huddled together for the warmth of two damp bodies.

The next morning the sun shone from a cloudless sky. Jenny and Wendy got up and looked around them, only to discover that there was a hut only metres away from them, where they could have spent the night in comfort!

Not deterred, they had breakfast and set out to climb Ngauruhoe. Being young, Ngauruhoe's steep cone is made of dark grey volcanic cinders and ash, with boulders strewn on it, and it is a difficult climb because the surface gives way underfoot.

Wendy doesn't know why she went there. Part way through the climb she bent down and took a hand-full of the ground, watched it trickling through her fingers, and remembers.

A beach. Spindly legs climbing a sand dune, running down, hair mane-like behind her, yelling "look, Mummy, I'm flying!"

Another beach, wandering off in the dunes, admiring the flowers, looking up, lost! Panic stricken, running about, sobbing, screaming "Mummy! Mummy!" Then a figure appears and, running to Mummy, she embraces a leg with spindly arms, fingers locked together, crying fitfully with relief.

"It's OK, I'll look after you," reassuringly.

Wendy, motionless on the side of the volcano, felt the same knot of anxiety in her stomach:

"What if it erupts? What if we fall and injure ourselves?" she asked tremulously.

But Jenny, silently scoffing at her insecurity, said consolingly, like her mother:

"You'll be fine. I'll look after you."

And, of course, Wendy had no problems.

At the summit, there are a few meters of roughly level ash, and you can look out over the Tongariro National Park and the many lava flows that make up much of the surface, one on top of the other. In the other direction there is the large crater. The crater changes with each eruption, but when Jenny and Wendy looked down into it there was a black, circular hole in the middle and wisps of smoke or steam coming from it.

They stayed there for a while, taking photographs and admiring the views, and then descended rapidly, the surface giving way so that they took giant steps. It took a total of about four hours.

Wendy's experiences with the more abstract aspects of education made her want to become a teacher and so, after she had graduated, she did a Bachelor of Education which, with credit for her previous studies, took another two years.

At a party Wendy met Victor Davis, who was a couple of years younger than her, but looked older, and who was doing a degree in accountancy. In contrast to her, he's so slim as to be verging on anorexic and, although it doesn't show, he's quite muscular. His eyes are steely grey.

They met several times, fell in love, and move into a shared house together. They both graduated at the same time and Victor got a job working for the university's administration department.

"I want to marry you, now that I earn enough," said Victor, "And I want to father a family with you."

Wendy smiled and told him "yes."

Not being religious, and with their parent's blessing, they married outdoors at the Auckland Domain, and moved into a rented house in Auckland together, where they were happy and contented with their life. The years pass and they have three children.

It is now the start of June and Auckland is fanned by a bitterly cold breeze. Wendy

and Victor's three children are older; the twins, Bruce and Sam, are eight and their daughter, Angela, is five. Wendy is thirty years old and bored. Over the years she has found Victor to be uninteresting and sex with him dull. Although they still love each other and smile a lot, there is a hole in her heart that she yearns to fill. She found that rearing children was satisfying and she was happy to be a stay-at-home mum, but now that they went to school and kindergarten Wendy has gone back to work as a teacher. The money isn't needed as Victor earns enough for their lifestyle, but the job gives her a purpose to an otherwise unfulfilled life.

After she collects them and takes them home, she feeds the children and makes dinner for herself and Victor. She's in the kitchen when Victor comes home, kisses her and puts a newspaper on the bench and declares:

"Look at that. I've applied."

Wendy looks at the circled advertisement. It is for a senior accountant at the University of Tasmania with a corresponding rise in salary. Another knot of anxiety forms in her stomach.

After dinner, she pushes her half-finished meal away and pleads:

"But it's so far away. The children will miss their grandparents."

"It's only three and a half hours by plane," retorts Victor, "so you and the children can visit Auckland as often as you want. And Tasmania is similar to New Zealand with much the same weather. You and the children will love it. Anyway, I haven't got the job yet."

They don't have to wait long for the university to contact Victor and invite him for an interview. He flies to Hobart, is interviewed and stays overnight, all at the university's expense, and flies home.

It is a week later when Victor is notified that he has got the job and he will start work in August. He goes home, lifts Wendy up, twirls her around and, laughing, yells:

"I've got the job! We go in August!"

Wendy is delighted at his news, but her stomach is queasy with panic.

"Only two months, and so much to do," she says practically.

"No problems," smiles Victor, "I'll tell the estate agent, and there's plenty of time to get a house in Hobart and pack."

"What about all the children's things?"

"Just pack everything. We can afford our move."

"Where will I work?"

"Don't worry! You'll be fine and find a job. Good teachers are in short supply, and you are very good! It won't be hard for you to find a job at a school."

Victor skis but Wendy doesn't. He has skied regularly in the Tongariro National Park but he isn't brave enough to climb up to the crater on Ngauruhoe and ski down. As it is Friday, he gets his skis, packs a few clothes and heads out to the nearest ski resort.

Wendy is a bit put out by his thoughtlessness:

‘He should stay home and help me with the kids,’ she thinks.

But he does this every weekend when there is enough snow, and so she’s prepared for a lonely few days without him.

In June, as well as working, Victor and Wendy organise the move to Tasmania. They have enough cash in the bank and so, with the grandparents looking after the children, they fly over to Hobart and look around for a house to buy. They hire a car and go around the estate agents in areas which they can afford. Wendy is flattered by the attention they receive, although Victor is a bit more cynical:

“He wants us to choose one of his properties,” he remarks, “but houses here sell quite quickly so we have to decide on a house very soon.”

Although it is quite a long way from the university, they choose a house in Bridgewater, mainly because it is relatively inexpensive and they sign the contract; the owners are quite happy with less than the usual 90 days to settlement. Because Victor and Wendy don’t like being in debt they pay much more than the usual deposit and take out a correspondingly smaller mortgage.

“Its OK,” says Wendy a bit doubtfully, “but it is close to schools for the children, although they aren’t the schools I would have chosen.”

“We can afford to do it up a bit and revamp the kitchen,” Victor replies. “When we are settled and know our way around, we can look for somewhere else to live, near better schools, and I won’t mind the journey to the university. Maybe I’ll take buses instead of driving?”

In July, Wendy sees an advertisement for a teacher at a Steiner school, applies, and flies over by herself for an interview.

The Principal shows her around the classrooms and other amenities and explains the philosophy of their education system:

“Normally we only appoint new staff in the summer holidays, but a teacher has unexpectedly left. Teachers are allocated a class of year one students. Then in the next year, the students and their teacher move to a year two classroom together, and so they’re taught by the same teacher at the year two level. And so it progresses, with the same teacher teaching the same students as they progress until they leave. Then the teacher goes back to a year one class, and so on.

“So we need teachers who are well grounded in all levels of education and can teach most subjects. We do have a couple of specialised teachers to help with the higher levels, and we have physical education and language teachers. Also, there’s a strong bond between all the teachers, and they’ll be happy to help you with any problems you might have.”

Wendy is quite comfortable with this approach as she has taught at several levels in New Zealand, and the Principal is quite comfortable with Wendy’s abilities and her qualifications, although she doesn’t know much about mathematics. It is after school and most of the children have gone home, so Wendy is ushered into the staff room and meets some of the other teachers. She asks some questions about preferred teaching methods and she likes them and what she hears. Saying good bye, she goes

back to the hotel she's staying at, crossing her fingers and hoping.

In a week she's notified that she has the job, which will start about a week after she has arrived in Hobart and, with a big grin on her face, she tells Victor:

"I want to pick you up and twirl you around! And next year the children can move to the Steiner school for their education. It is so much better!"

July is hectic. Victor makes lists in spreadsheets on his computer, which he prints out and shows to Wendy and the twins for their comments and amendments. The children are mainly interested in the lists of their toys, books and clothes, and they're both excited about seeing new places and apprehensive of being separated from their friends.

"You'll make new friends," their mother says consolingly, wiping the tears from Angela's eyes, "and we can come back here every year."

After an early dinner, they sit around the table and cull the lists:

"You don't play with that any more."

"We don't need to take that, we'll buy a new one in Hobart."

"You don't use the electric fry-pan."

"I don't wear that now."

And they collect together most of the culled items and take them to a charity shop.

But there are still lots of things, including large things like the lounge suite that they'd just bought.

"We'll get removalists in to pack and transport what we can't carry," says Victor.

"What about the cars?" Wendy asks, as there are two of them.

"We'll ship my car across and get you a new car."

Which placates Wendy and she allows Victor to cull things that otherwise she would take with her.

"But what about Lucy?" Angela wails.

At that there is a flurry of internet searches and a phone call to Australia which fortunately results in the answer:

"You can take your pet rabbit, and she can fly with us in the pet cargo hold!"

Angela is delighted that her fluffy, angora friend will travel with her.

Fortunately their dog, a placid and aged golden retriever called Folly, could also relocate to their new home, and an entry was added to the *first shopping list* for dog food. He's called Folly because, when they were at the dog's home, they should have chosen the poodle cross rather than a dog who shed copious amounts of hair and gave slobbery kisses to everyone, including unwary visitors.

Eventually, by everyone walking around the house and looking at the things that they had, the culling is completed. The removalists arrive and made their own list and give them a quote for the transport to Hobart.

The actual move, at the end of July, is quite easy. The removalists arrive, pack everything and take their possessions and Victor's car away. They'd rented the house unfurnished, and so they had beds, chairs, sofas and white goods to take with them; their fridge, dishwasher, clothes washer and drier are almost new, as they'd been

replaced only the year before. Fortunately the voltage and the power plugs are the same as in Australia.

The family moves into Wendy's parent's house for two days, which is just large enough to hold them. Then they're driven to the airport, where there are lots of tears and hugging and, with "we'll see you soon," they board the flight for the short trip to Hobart.

In Hobart it is sunny and the sky is cloudless, so that the children, with their noses pressed to the glass, see Hobart huddling to both banks of the River Derwent and the towering Mount Wellington behind it.

"Are there any volcanoes in Tasmania?" asks Sam.

"No," replies Victor, "and there's not much snow either."

When they land, they collect their voluminous baggage, put it in the pre-booked hire car and drive into Hobart and to the hotel where they're staying for the night. After dropping some bags and Angela's rabbit, the GPS guides them to the estate agent where they pick up the keys to their house. A short drive and they're at their new home. The children scurry about looking at everything while the parents deposit more suitcases and call the removalists.

"We must get new SIM cards. It's expensive for international calls on our New Zealand phones!"

The next day is overcast and wet. But the removalists come and fill the house with their possessions. While they're doing that, the family goes to the airport and pick up Folly. They go to a supermarket to buy food, including dog and rabbit food. They arrive at their home and spend many hours sorting through the boxes and putting things away while Wendy makes beds and cooks an evening meal. Exhausted, they watch a bit of television and go to bed early.

There is a week before Victor starts his new job and, as there is some snow around he decides to spend a day or two skiing and he goes to Ben Lomond, about a 3 hour's drive from Hobart. He gets to the foot of Jacobs Ladder, a steep road with 6 hairpin bends that climbs up the escarpment to the plateau. He has planned for the trip and so he has snow chains in the back. But even with them he has some anxious moments and he can't view the scenery because he has to keep his eyes on the narrow gravel road in case he slips off the edge and rolls down hundreds of metres.

When he gets back home he doesn't hide his disappointment:

"Not only aren't there any volcanoes for Sam to look at, the snow is poor and it wasn't worth the drive. When I want to ski I'll have to go further afield, maybe to Victoria or back to New Zealand."

After a week and a half, when they have settled in, Wendy starts her new job at the Steiner school. She's catapulted into a year four class, and uses the first few days to get to know her students and for them to get to know her and tell her what they have already learned. They're good and diligent pupils and they like their new teacher, so she has no problems settling in. Except for the laughter at her accent and how she says "fush and chups," instead of "fish and chips."

A few weeks pass and Wendy has some problems teaching her students algebra, so in the staff room she asks if she can get any help and she's told to see the specialist mathematics teacher Andrew Xenakis.

"Andrew lost his wife nearly a year ago to cancer, so he has been a bit down. But helping you might cheer him up."

So she's introduced to Andrew. He's a solid man, about 10 centimetres taller than her, with a mop of unruly black hair and crow's feet smile lines in the corners of his dark eyes. He's two years older than her.

They smile at each other and Wendy is attracted to him.

"I'm not sure how I should teach algebra to my students." Wendy explains, "What is the method you use?"

"It's a bit hard to explain," Andrew replies, "so maybe if you can come to my house we can go through it together?"

"OK. Is Saturday morning convenient?"

They agree on a time and Andrew gives her his address. Despite his recent bereavement he likes her, especially her face.

At home Wendy explains to Victor, who is happy to look after the children for a few hours.

On Saturday Wendy drives to Tarooma and Andrew ushers her into the living room which has large windows overlooking the River Derwent.

"It's beautiful!" Wendy exclaims, "How can you afford to live here?"

"It was my parents' house. I'm their only child and when I married they gave it to me and moved into a smaller house, assuming we would have children. They're quite wealthy."

And, rather sadly, he adds "You know my wife died of cancer?"

They sit at a table and Andrew explained the basic method he uses to teach algebra and then, over coffee and biscuits, they talk generally about the school and the students.

"Perhaps you can come again and we can do some more maths?" he asks.

"I would like that," with butterflies in her tummy.

At home Wendy tells Victor about her morning and Victor tells her about taking the children to a local playground and why Bruce has a bandage on one of his knees.

Two weeks later Wendy visits Andrew again on the pretext of getting help with mathematics and, over coffee, he says hesitantly:

"I would like to get to know you better. Will that be possible?"

And Wendy replies:

"I would like that, but I don't know. Maybe we can meet again and see where that takes us? Perhaps in the school holidays?"

# 5

Over five months have passed since the murder of Michael Preston at Colebrook. After a flurry of activity it had been shelved because it looked like being unsolvable. Noah and the other detectives had enough to occupy themselves and, unless there was some sort of breakthrough, it seemed destined to become a cold case.

It is Tuesday in early September, at the start of spring. As there is the possibility of a drug's bust, Noah is at work in the morning when there is a phone call from the Huonville police station. There has been the stabbing death of a man behind the Anglican Church at Franklin, and the local police and an ambulance are there. Noah tells them to wait while he and DS James Hunter make the journey of about forty minutes to Franklin.

St John's Anglican church is in the middle of a large block of land, about 90 metres by 190 metres. Looking from the main road, where there is a large parking area, the nave is parallel to the road with a path leading to the entrance on the left, and the altar and a vestry room are on the right. The nave is stone, but the entrance with a belfry, the altar area and the vestry are timber.

'Maybe they ran out of money?' Noah thinks.

There is a small cemetery to the right of the altar area. Church Street runs up the left boundary to the manse that is about 50 metres behind the church. There are no houses overlooking the church. To the left is a primary school and, on the main road, a cafe. The manse and three houses to the right have their views of the church obstructed by hedges of established trees. That is, there are no views of the back of the church.

Noah stops in the car park with other cars and he and James walk up the drive, looking around them. Succulent, new-mown grass. Behind the church, some steps away from it, a broad line of yellow daffodils, in their bed of green, waved to the visitors.

"An indication of another, long-departed building. Perhaps a wooden church replaced by the present stone one?"

At the back of the church another car is parked as well as the ambulance.

The murder is very interesting.

The body is on its back behind the nave and close to the vestry, hemmed in by a triangle of *do not cross* tape. He's quite tall and pudgy, but obviously muscular. His face, under sandy hair with a hint of red in it, is clean shaven except for a well-manicured 10 mm wide strip of ginger hair running from his lower lip to his chin.

"A smoker," says James, pointing to the fingers of his right hand which were stained yellow.

The death appears to be identical to the death of Michael Preston, although they would have to wait for the autopsy report. But a kitchen knife has gone up from below the left ribs and presumably has penetrated the heart.

The local police constable and the paramedics haven't touched the body, leaving it up to the detectives Noah and James.

"How was he found?" Noah asks.

"The gentleman in the car," states the local constable, pointing, "he came to fix a leak in the vestry."

The previous night had been clear and surprisingly warm for spring. A high pressure system over the mainland had led to a relatively hot day and the gentle breezes took the warm air to Tasmania. Although it wasn't as warm as in summer, people had adjusted to the temperature and it felt warmer than it was. So the deceased only has a light cotton top, which has emblazoned across the front *Tigers For Ever* in big yellow letters, and shorts.

But now a cold front has come from the west and it is cool and overcast with a light sprinkling of rain to annoy the detectives and the daffodils.

Noah and James, with gloves on their hands, carefully extract a wallet and car keys from his pocket and discover that he's James Anderson and his twin-cab ute, with locked tool boxes on the back, is parked in the car park on the main road; they immediately secure it by *do not cross* tape. In it is a GPS with dash-cam, his mobile phone and an open packet of cigarettes with a lighter. The forensic investigators arrive, put up a tent over the body, do their magic with cameras and markers, and search the immediate area around the body and the ute. The short grass makes the search quick, but nothing is found.

During the search, the body is put in the ambulance, the ute on the back of a smash-repair truck and both are taken away.

Noah and James go to the manse and are told that the occupants haven't seen or heard anything. As the other properties don't overlook the back of the church, Noah gets the local police to question the residents but, as he expected, nothing is learned.

Back in his office, Noah decides to publicly appeal for anyone who might have witnessed something or someone the night of the murder. But over the next few days no one contacts them, because no one has seen anything out of place or unusual.

The appeal organised, Noah rings DI Rosalind Baker:

"I have another stabbing death in Franklin and I would like your opinions of it."

"The same MO?" asks Rosalind.

"Yes, but the knife is different. This one has a steel handle. Otherwise it appears identical to the first murder. But there's a gap between them of over five months which is extraordinary!"

"Can I bring DS Felix Oliver? He's newly promoted and the experience will be good for him."

"Please do, the more brains the better."

So Rosalind and Noah organise a meeting, including DS Hunter and DS Oliver,

much the junior to James, in Noah's office in two days' time.

With the help of a couple of detectives, Noah and James go back to Franklin to see if there are any CCTV cameras, and they find three that might be useful, at the cafe, the Wooden Boat Centre, that is on the opposite side of the main road and, probably too far away, at the Living Boat Trust. The videos from Monday night are watched, but they don't show anything out of the ordinary. All three cameras are trained on the entrances and they don't cover anything of the streets outside the buildings, and so they don't show cars driving or people walking past.

When the four detectives meet, they carefully read the forensic report and the autopsy before talking about the case.

The forensic report comes up with nothing useful. The dash-cam only shows him arriving at the church, where he parked on the main road, before it was turned off by Anderson removing the ute keys and locking his vehicle. There are no other cars or motor bikes in the video. The ute is dirty and messy, with scraps of paper and biros on the dash and the back seats. There is no unusual DNA or fingerprints. And the mobile phone only has fingerprints and DNA from Anderson.

The autopsy report is exactly the same as the autopsy on Michael Preston.

The knife is stainless steel with the blade and handle in a single piece of metal. It has a 120 mm blade and has penetrated the heart and Anderson has died immediately. It is sharp and pointed, and it would be easy for anyone to thrust it in through the cotton top that the victim was wearing. As in the previous murder, the blade entered the body just to the left of the sternum and is angled steeply up. The only DNA on the blade is the victim's.

Again the knife hadn't been removed and there is only a slight seepage of blood around the wound where it coagulated. That area has traces of sodium hypochlorite (household bleach) and there is no DNA where the blade morphed into the handle. The knife handle has been wiped clean with sodium hypochlorite, so there are no fingerprints and no DNA. The clothing has some nondescript fibres on it, and there is no evidence of interesting DNA or fingerprints.

After they have read the reports, James Hunter tells of his visit to the family home:

"Phillippa Anderson, his wife, was at home. I informed her of the death of her husband James Anderson and asked her to come with me to identify the body; which she did after I'd finished the interview.

"Mrs Anderson told me that she wasn't sorry he'd died, but she would miss him. She didn't volunteer any other information. She said she didn't need any help, because her children had left home, and she would manage. I stated that she would have to come in for further questioning, fingerprinting and giving a DNA sample, and after that I took her to identify the body.

"Later I checked our data bases. A couple of years ago a neighbour had rung triple-zero to report yelling and smashing of things at the Anderson's house. Police attended and questioned Phillippa and James Anderson, but there were no charges, although their names were flagged as possible domestic violence.

“Although it is probably irrelevant, the weatherboard house is run down and needs painting. The front and back are just dry weeds and grass, and there’s a lot of rubbish strewn around, including broken toys and an old mattress.”

During James’s report, Noah has been doodling on a piece of paper.

“A bit rude of you Noah,” Rosalind interrupts testily, but with the hint of a smile as she rather likes him and enjoys working with him.

“Sorry James, I have been listening. It’s a Venn diagram,” and he pushes it over to Rosalind. There are two rough circles that overlapped. One was labelled *Preston* and the other *Anderson* and Noah has coloured in the area where they overlapped.

“As far as I know, the media have just reported that Preston and Anderson were stabbed, without any details. So Anderson can’t have been a copy-cat murder. His murder is either accidentally identical in every detail, or the same person murdered both men.

“So my diagram represents the people who know Preston, the left circle, and the people who know Anderson, the right circle. The overlapping part is *the people who knew both men*.”

“I’m sure you all have thought of it, so we all know that we must focus on the shaded part and find out who is in there. So we need to interview Anne Preston and Phillipa Anderson with that in mind.

‘Clever,’ thinks DS Oliver.

“As well,” adds Noah, “I can label the circles with the two churches, both Anglican, and ask who is common to both. But as they both closed their doors ages ago I suspect that may be a red herring.”

“We can’t re-interview Anne Preston,” responds Rosalind “because she’d moved to Queenstown. Maybe we can phone her?”

Phillippa Anderson is obese, and her buttocks overflow the seat and hang down on either side, while her black stockinged legs protrude like beached whales beneath her far too short skirt.

Her hair is brown, but it has been dyed blonde and tinged with pale pink (the dark roots are obvious as it has grown), and she has studs in her lips and her left eyebrow, an affectation that looks stupid on her. Her brown eyes are too close together and her excessive makeup includes too much bright-red lipstick on her narrow mouth and badly applied false eyelashes. When she smiles there is a gap in her front upper teeth. Her ears are too small.

Phillippa reminds Noah of a book that he’d read, Campbell’s *The London Tradesman*, that was first published in 1747. It had been recommended by a friend and Noah had managed to find an original of the 1757 edition. The rare reprint wasn’t available and Noah had to pay more than he likes to have it. It has a description of the trade of stay-maker with this apposite text:

*The delicate easy shape we so much admire is entirely the workmanship of the stay-maker; to him she reveals all her natural deformity, which she industriously conceals from the fond lord, who was caught by her slender waist. Her shape she*

*owes to steel and whalebone, her black locks to the tirewoman, and her florid complexion to paint and pomatum. Her natural self, when deposited in the bridal-bed, is a mere lump of animated deformity, fitter far for the undertaker than to be initiated in the mysteries of connubial joy. But the work of stay-making is too hard for women, it requires more strength than they are capable of, to raise walls of defence about a lady's shape.*

Not that stays were always worn for that reason. When Noah was young, he'd met a woman who wasn't unshapely but had worn stays over her hips. Although she was reserved she didn't resist his fumbings under her costume. But it wasn't until many years later that he realised that she'd probably been sexually abused and wore stays to protect her vagina.

Phillippa obviously doesn't wear stays.

"This interview is being recorded on DVD. Phillippa Anderson, DI Noah Watt, DI Rosalind Baker and DS James Hunter present."

"You aren't a suspect," says Noah, "and we think someone else murdered your husband. We are recording this interview in case you heard or saw something that later we find interesting that might lead us to the killer. Also, at the end of the interview we would like to take your fingerprints and a DNA sample. This is for elimination purposes."

"OK."

"Did James Anderson have any enemies?"

"Not that I'm aware of. James seemed to get on with most people, you know."

"Do you know any of his friends?"

"Not really. If he brought anyone home they would drink and watch TV and ignore me, you know. Other times he got a slab of beer, a carton of 24 small bottles you know, from a bottle shop and we drank them at home."

"Did he know Michael or Anne Preston?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Do you know Michael or Anne Preston?"

"No, I've never met them."

"Did your husband owe money to anyone?"

"Other than paying off the ute and the TV, not that I know of. James was very careful with money."

"What about rent?"

"We own the house we live in, you know. Well, I live in as it's mine now, you know."

"What about food and clothes?"

"James paid for food and clothes. And he insisted on going to supermarkets with me."

"Why did he go out that night?"

"I don't know. He sometimes went out at night and didn't tell me where he was going. I assumed he was going to a girlfriend, you know."

“He had girlfriends?”

“Lately he wasn’t interested in me, you know, so I assumed he’d a bit on the side.”

“How did you feel about that?”

“Not much. He was very rough in bed and I was glad if he took his feelings out on someone else. So I didn’t mind so long as he didn’t catch any diseases, you know.”

“Was James ever physically or emotionally abusive towards you?”

“If I complained about anything he would smack me. And he continually criticised my weight and appearance. Sometimes he raped me with a beer bottle, you know.”

At that, although she has heard about violent rape, Rosalind is nauseous, thinking ‘how can someone do that?’

“Where did he hit you?”

“My tummy, my chest, my back, you know. Usually anywhere where it wouldn’t show, but he knocked a tooth out punching me, see,” opening her mouth.

“Sometimes my legs, so I wear black stockings, you know. Look, I’ll show you,” and Phillippa lifts her top as far as the bottom of her huge, drooping breasts and displays several bruises on her blubbery stomach, a couple fading away, but others obviously recent.

‘Where does she buy bras?’ muses Noah to himself silently. ‘You could split her down the middle and make two normal people.’

“Why didn’t you complain to the police?”

“Once the police came to our house, but they were useless, so there was no point complaining to them. And anyway, if I got an order or something James would have ignored it, you know. So it’s a waste of time coming to you. I said to him once that if he didn’t leave off I would go to the police, but he just laughed and grabbed me by the throat and snarled if I did that he would strangle me. He was serious, so I couldn’t do anything. He was a control freak and he said he hit me to get me back in line, you know.”

“Did you go anywhere together?”

“We always went together, cause he didn’t want to let me out of his sight. Sometimes he would take me and the children out to Macca’s, but not since they have left home.”

“Where did he work?”

“He was a tradie, a builder, you know, and worked for other builders and sometimes for himself.”

“Where do you work?”

“When the kids were home I wasn’t allowed to work so, as I didn’t have a car, I was stuck at home doing chores. I have a car now, ever since the kids went to school, and I do light cleaning jobs, you know.”

“Did you go out at night?”

“Never, unless it was with him.”

“What about the weekends?”

“Most Saturdays James played footy or we watched TV. Sundays, we watched TV and he took me to church.”

At that, Noah's ears pricked up.

"Where did you go to church?"

Phillippa gives the street and suburb of a southern church.

"Are you both religious?"

"I am. I think James only went to keep an eye on me, you know."

"Do you or he use drugs?"

"In the past maybe we did, but we don't now."

"Do you or James know Franklin?"

"I have been there a couple of times, and driven through it. Maybe James had a job there, but he never said."

"Do you or James know Colebrook?"

"I know it exists, but I don't think James or me have been there, it's a bit out of the way, you know."

Did you or James go to the Diemen Hotel?"

"I didn't, I don't know where it is. Maybe James did, but he never told me."

Which was predictable because the hotel is in a northern suburb.

There were a number of other questions, but they were equally uninformative, and the interview ends with:

"OK, we'll get your DNA and take your fingerprints, and then you can go. But we might have to interview you again."

And at that Phillippa Anderson gets up, squeezes through the door and waddles out.

There is a break for tea and coffee, during which the detectives discuss what they have learnt, which is nothing much.

Then Anne Preston is telephoned by Rosalind.

"Did Michael Preston know James or Phillippa Anderson?"

"No, I have never heard of them."

"In your first interview you stated that you go to church. Where is it?"

Anne gives a different address to the church that Phillippa Anderson attended.

'Not the same church, unsurprisingly,' Noah thinks.

"Do you or Michael know Franklin?"

"South of Huonville? I've been there, but it was years ago. I have to go back to work."

"OK, you can go."

Having got Anderson's mobile phone back from forensics, the numbers stored in it are telephoned. Other than his wife and take-away food shops, most of Anderson's contacts were builders and other people for whom he'd done or was about to do work. The remaining were men who were friends. Most of them have alibis for that night and the others are very unlikely to have murdered him, so there are no credible leads.

Noah also sees where Anderson's phone has been, from the towers it has pinged. He isn't surprised when he finds that the phone has taken the direct route from Anderson's home to Franklin. They also find a tracker app that was used to find the

locations of Phillippa's mobile phone.

Then Preston's and Anderson's mobile phones are compared, but they have nothing in common except for the number of a take-away pizza chain.

At this point Noah and Rosalind have two murders that are apparently linked by the same MO, and both were behind disused Anglican churches.

But there is not one shred of evidence linking Preston and Anderson. And there is no evidence that links the two churches.

The four detectives, Rosalind, Noah, James and Felix, agree that, if they have some spare time from other crimes that are more likely to be solved, they will work together and, rather arbitrarily, they decide that Noah will be the main contact. But, as there are no leads and no lines of investigation to work on, they have nothing to do.

So, over five months after the murder of Michael Preston, they reluctantly shelve the two cases. The paper-work and DVD's are boxed up and stored and, although the computer files are there for anyone to look through, no one bothered.

In contrast to Anne Preston, Phillippa Anderson hated James, in death as well as in life. In addition, James had no insurance and almost no self-managed superannuation and, as Phillippa had almost no money, the funeral expenses would be a serious burden on her.

Again, there are a few days to plan before the body is released, and she contacts the pastor at her church, Patrick Trainer. After commiserating with her and being told of her perilous financial situation, Patrick says:

"I know the people at one funeral home and I'll help you organise James's funeral. The service and wake can be in our church hall and so your only expenses will be the coffin, the funeral parlour's transport and the cremation."

Patrick and Phillippa go to the parlour for her to choose a casket, but she's horrified at the prices.

'That bastard's not going to get anything good,' she thinks to herself:

Demanding to use the cheapest pine coffin, which isn't on display, and the cheapest urn, the eventual price was too much at \$3,500, but affordable, because the congregation has had a whip-round.

Saturday morning is chosen for the service. A trestle table covered with white linen serves as the altar for the coffin and members of the congregation decorate it and the hall with flowers. Other tables are decorated and hold refreshments donated by some of the parishioners, including cakes, wine and beer.

The service begins with the pastor announcing:

"In the Holy Bible it is written in Job 14:5:

*God has decided the length of our lives. He alone knows how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer.*

"And so God has ordained that James would be taken prematurely, when he was in his prime.

"Although death is sombre, we should rejoice because our brother James will surely go to heaven, because he was amongst the gentlest and most respected men to walk

upon this Earth. And so I have chosen our most rousing hymns and prayers.”

At which Phillipa privately thought:

‘The pastor doesn’t know what a bastard he was, and I won’t enlighten him.’

“We shall begin with *Swing low, sweet chariot*,” and the swaying congregation and the electronic organ erupted into music.

“And now we shall pray together:

“Dear sweet Jesus, who forgives us of all our sins, accept our brother James and fold him in your bosom and protect him from this day henceforth, so that when the time comes his loving wife Phillipa shall be reunited with him in Heaven. We will all be changed, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

And the congregation chanted:

“For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. Hallelujah, Ay-men.”

“And now we shall sing *Amazing Grace*.”

After a gleeful and roof-lifting rendition, the pastor continues:

“Phillippa doesn’t want to talk to us, so I take it upon myself to say a few words about James.

“Although he wasn’t a member of our congregation and didn’t attend our services, James drove Phillipa to and from our church so that she could participate and pray with us. And sometimes he would join us after the service. He’ll be sorely missed.

“In addition to being a loving husband and father, James played football for his local team, where he was a half-forward and a prominent goal scorer. Before they went away to other states in Australia, James trained his children and they were permanent members on the under-age sides, although their penchant for bruising tackles suited them more to rugby rather than Australian rules. (A bit of quiet laughter.)

“He was an excellent builder and carpenter, and all those who worked with him complemented him on his skills.”

When the service has ended, the body is put into the funeral director’s hearse and taken to the crematorium. Then those present move to the other half of the hall for the wake, helping Phillipa to waddle from the chair she sat in near the altar for the service, to another chair for the wake.

There she’s ministered to by those present, who commiserate with her and offer to get her wine and cakes, and where the pastor says some consoling words to her.

A few days later the pastor Patrick Trainer delivers the urn to Phillipa’s house and asks “What are you going to do with the ashes? I can help if you need me.”

She responds “I don’t know. I’ll think about it.”

That is a lie. After Patrick leaves she puts the unopened urn in the rubbish bin to be collected by the council and taken to the tip. But when they meet, she tells her pastor that she has spread his ashes at the football ground where he’d played.

## 6

Noah Watt is a private person, who keeps his home life separate from his work life. And so Abigail has to badger him repeatedly:

“You ought to invite some of the people you work with to dinner. *And* Peter Taggart.”

He prevaricates and does nothing about it for a long time, but eventually she wears him down and he, rather reluctantly, agrees:

“But no more than four or five other people. I know the table will seat ten, but six people, including you and me, is all that I can cope with.”

It is late September when Noah eventually gets around to inviting James Hunter, and his partner, and Peter and Mary Taggart to dinner on the next Saturday evening. But he has to include Rosalind Baker and is relieved when she tells him her husband has a prior engagement. He has the foresight to ask them what they eat and, on hearing that Mary is a vegetarian, he and Abigail decide on spanakopita, two salads and a dessert of fruit and cheese.

James Hunter is intelligent and capable. He is tall and lean, with an angular, bony face and inquisitive eyes under a large brow and black hair. His ears are flat against his head. He has coloured skin, looking as though he has a tan, and a wider than normal nose, both the result of his Aboriginal heritage, but otherwise he looks and sounds like an anglo-saxon.

After he left school he did an Arts degree, but found there were no jobs that suited his qualifications. So he signed up at a Police Academy and, not having a partner, he lived in. Training was hard and the discipline demanding, starting with physical training that included boxing and team work, followed by academic tasks and learning police procedures. Also there were observation shifts where the *Special Constables* were posted to various stations all over state to give them hands-on experience in policing and by learning from other officers going about their daily work.

But James enjoyed the challenge, especially studying law and procedures, and he did well.

Not long after graduating, he applied to be a detective and, after more training, he became a detective constable and later a sergeant. He was in that role when he moved to be under Noah.

Although gender diversity has come to be accepted, except amongst some of the older folk and the religious, James didn't *come out* to his fellow police officers, because he was very wary of being labelled a *homo* or a *queer*, in spite of other officers who had made their gender preferences known. And he didn't mention it to his boss, the aged Noah, because he thought that Noah was an old man, and his greying hair was

an indication of intolerance.

Actually, Noah has a problem with male homosexuals but, interestingly, not with lesbians. He'd been brought up by his father to believe that homosexuals and other unnatural persons of that ilk will be condemned for all eternity to Hell-fire and damnation. Even though he became an atheist and accepted diversity, for some reason he finds men holding hands or kissing repugnant, and for him being hugged by a man is unpleasant. But he can't think of a reason, or remember a source for his qualms.

Rosalind Baker is attractive. Her short, blonde hair with a fringe frames a round (perhaps plump?) face, with a wide nose and full lips, above a stocky body clad in practical clothes and practical shoes. She had trained in New South Wales and came to Tasmania with her husband when he was offered a job that was too good to miss. Their three children had left home, the youngest of whom was touring the world for a year before starting a university course. For a few months Rosalind was unemployed and then she got her present job. Most important to Noah is that she's competent and intelligent.

Peter and Mary Taggart work for the Department of Public Prosecutions, he's a lawyer and she's a senior manager. Mary earns more than Peter, but it isn't a problem to him.

Mary has long blonde hair, usually in a bun, green eyes with smile lines in the corners, and her face is unadorned with make-up. Her nose is large, narrow and curved like the beak of a parrot. She usually wears demure but colourful frocks that come down to just above her pretty ankles. When she goes out, other than to work, she wears leather sandals, but at home the sandals are swapped for steel-capped boots or gumboots, depending on the weather.

Peter has wild, curly hair of a nondescript brown to suit his eyes and is most often garbed in a cotton shirt and khaki shorts that show off his bony and hairy legs. He'd seen Mary at a farmer's market, some distance from him, and was immediately struck by her face, her hair and then her body. She saw him and smiled, so Peter came over and greeted her. For him it was love at first sight and, as the feeling was mutual, it wasn't long before Mary changed her family name to Taggart.

They bought a hobby farm of about seven acres, nestled at the bottom of a valley between the fork in two roads, which had a small but permanent stream flowing through it. The land slopes gently down from one road and the bank has been cut out to form the level ground that the house sits on. The fertile ground continues down to the creek and then rises steeply to the other road. There are no internal fences, but none are needed as there are no large animals. They lived there for a few years until they had their second child and moved to a more spacious house closer to Hobart, with enough room for the intended four children.

James and his partner Adam Patterson arrive, and Noah accepts them hesitantly but with good grace. Only a few minutes later, Peter and Mary Taggart arrive and they're introduced:

“James, I’m Peter Taggart,” shaking Hunter’s hand, “and this is my wife Mary. We work at the DPP.”

The last to arrive is Rosalind and she’s ushered into the sitting room by Abigail and they have pre-dinner drinks and dips.

“Rosalind, what are you working on at the moment?” Peter asks.

“No talking about work, please,” Abigail admonishes.

“It’ll only take a few seconds, Abigail,” placates Rosalind, and Abigail, with a meaningful look at Noah for him to change the subject, goes to the kitchen.

“Noah, I and James have two murders that are frustrating us, Peter.”

“Why?”

“Both men were knifed to death, probably by the same person, but we have no evidence to point us to a suspect, let alone what the DPP will require to charge him.”

“That’s strange. Usually the police find at least some evidence to point to a suspect and question him or her.”

Noah butts in:

“So far we have found nothing, but I expect we’ll find something that leads to a breakthrough.”

Abigail appears and ushers them to the dining room table.

During dinner, a lull in the conversation gives the opportunity for James to sit back and ask:

“Noah, how do you know Peter and Mary?”

“Before becoming a DI, when I was young, I graduated with a law degree and started working in the Department of Public Prosecutions. I met Peter and Mary there.”

“Whoa! Stop right there! If I understand you correctly, you never trained at a police academy or worked as a police officer before you became a DI?”

“No, is that a problem?”

“Not really, you are a very good detective. But I assumed that you must have been a DI, or at least a DS somewhere else. Not in the DPP.”

Abigail grins at Noah and eggs him on:

“You need to spill the beans, love.”

Noah sighs, smiles and explains:

“My appointment as a DI was the result of chance and I remember it well. I don’t know why I looked at the employment pages of the newspaper on that day, but I saw an advertisement for a person with a university degree, the ability to analyse information and the ability to work with a team to problem-solve. The appointment would be at a salary equivalent to a Detective Inspector and would be provisional, depending on having the required skills or completing some study out-of-hours. There were only basic health and fitness requirements because it was primarily a desk job. That suited me! And applicants would be expected to have some knowledge of policing. But, very strangely, there was no mention of the applications being restricted to police officers and it seemed that anyone with the right qualifications could apply!

“Working at the DPP I learned a lot about police methods and, naturally, a great deal about criminal law. As I’d the right experience, despite having never trained as a police officer, I applied.”

After a sip of his wine, Noah continued:

“Much to my surprise, a week after the closing date, I got a phone call inviting me to a meeting with the selection panel! When I arrived for the job interview I found that the selection panel was composed of bureaucrats and there were no police officers. They asked me the obvious questions and then wanted my opinions of the job. I told them that if I got the job I would be working with other police officers, so I thought the appointment should actually be as a Detective Inspector and not just the equivalent of that rank.

“A week or so later I was offered the job and I would be made a Detective Inspector.”

James shakes his head and mutters “bizarre.”

“I later learned that my appointment was the result of an administrative blunder. Apparently, a junior bureaucrat was tasked with writing the advertisement and appointing an interview panel, which he did. It was only afterwards that a supervisor noticed the errors, but by then it was too late. Rather than tell me I was sacked before I’d even started in the job, and advertise again, which would be embarrassing and suggest he was incompetent, the supervisor did nothing and hoped that it would go away. Which is why, James, I’m your DI.”

“I knew some of that,” adds Peter, “but Noah made me swear to keep it secret.”

“So, Peter, do you and Mary have any secrets to tell us?” James asks.

“Only if it is off the record,” answers Peter, blushing. “But it was a while ago and all the evidence has vanished. So if you arrest me, James, I’ll deny it.”

“Everything you say will be noted down and may be used as evidence!” James retorts, laughing.

“Anyway, a few years ago Mary and I lived on a small hobby farm.”

“We had bought it because it has good Feng Shui,” Mary interrupts.

“What is Feng Shui?” Abigail asks.

“It is the Chinese practice which focuses on balancing and harmonizing the energies in the home. It is used to orient and design buildings and ensure there’s a good energy flow.”

“The one improvement that we actually made,” continues Peter, “was that I built a 2.4 by 4.8 metre glass house. Actually it used imperial measurements and so it was 8 feet by 16 feet. We intended growing tomatoes, cucumbers and capsicums in it.

“I don’t remember how or where, but I’d been given a matchbox full of cannabis seed, so I planted it. The plants grew and grew until the glass house was full to the gable roof with luxurious, happy plants. Then they flowered and the air became thick and yellow with pollen!”

“Unfortunately my story of our one and only crop of pot has a sad ending. The flowers and leaves were gathered and put in the oven to dry. They were then sealed in a plastic bag which was placed in a large coffee tin. I hasten to add, not to be sold or

smoked but to be admired. But upon opening it a month or so later we found that the drying was incomplete and the harvest had gone mouldy. So we had to throw it out and put it on the compost heap.”

“Blissful worms! You didn’t smoke any, or make marijuana cookies?” Noah asks.

“No. The only time I tried pot smoking I vomited up my dinner outside, but our dog ate it. I haven’t used drugs ever since, but I have been tempted frequently after having children!”

“Are you ever called Pete?”

“Occasionally, but I hate it. Do you ever get called No?”

Noah laughs. “Frequently when I ask Abigail or James to do something and they reply *No! No!*”

It wasn’t until dessert that Mary turned to James and asks:

“OK, James and Adam, its your turn.” How did you meet?”

“I play rhythm guitar in a band that has a regular Friday night gig in a local hotel.” James responds.

“I learnt to play classical guitar as a child and that was a blessing, because I learnt how to pick out single notes rather than just strum chords. Classical music doesn’t interest me and I gravitated to jazz and popular music. As the band already had a lead guitarist I was happy to provide the back-up.

“We have a singer, Maddie. She’s a short, plump woman with long, wavy ginger hair that cascades from her head like a waterfall, and pale, almost albino, skin. She has a good, powerful voice and a penchant for jazz music and American Negro soul music. If I was heterosexual I would make a pass at her! And I suspect she would be responsive.

“Anyway, one night as we set up, our drummer, who had eaten a dubious chicken sandwich at lunchtime, suddenly went to the toilets and chucked up. When he came back it was obvious that he wasn’t in a fit state to play, so Maddie stepped up to the microphone and explained that we would have to play without drums.”

“At this point,” Adam intrudes, “I got up, I was in the audience, went up to the stage and said *I’m Adam Patterson, I can play drums and I can fill in*, and I sat down in the drummer’s seat.”

“Much to our surprise,” adds James, “Adam is a very good drummer and, as he’d been listening to the band on past nights, he knew the tunes and the way we played. When the band took a break, I and Adam met and talked, and we swapped phone numbers. We have been together ever since. Adam, take over.”

“I have been playing drums for many years, ever since my parents had given me a set for my twelfth birthday, a present that they rued!

“When I was fourteen I told my parents that I wanted to enter the Eisteddfod. They were delighted. And I slipped into the conversation that I was gay, hoping it wouldn’t be noticed. That stunned them, but to my surprise they were fine about it.

“The night before the Eisteddfod I practiced with my window open, because it was hot. Which was fine until the police knocked on the door and told us that a

neighbour had complained about the noise.”

“I would have arrested you,” interrupts Noah emphatically.

“A good thing you weren’t there! My parents explained about the competition and agreed to reduce the level of the sound as much as possible. The police went to the complainant’s house, explained about the Eisteddfod, and was the noise level now OK? Now they understood the situation, they decided that the racket was justified, but asked me to stop at 11 pm.”

“Did you win? Abigail asks.

“No, but I got a special mention. Do you play an instrument, Noah?”

“No, but I did try. I like classical music and when I was a uni student I fell in love with some recorder music. So I bought a descant recorder and a beginner’s book and started to learn how to play it. I did manage some simple ditties, and bought a tenor recorder as well. But my fingers and brain refused to manage anything more complex than *twinkle, twinkle little star*.

“Then I bought a book on the rudiments of music with example recordings on a CD. But despite reading the first chapter and listening to the CD over and over again I couldn’t correlate the sounds with the notes on the staves. Eventually I gave up. Can we talk about something else?”

“Rosalind, what can you add to the conversation?” Peter asks.

“Birds.”

“Women PC’s?” ventures James.

“Models?” Noah suggests.

“No and no, No. Flying birds.”

“Ah!” Peter exclaims, “airline hostesses!”

Rosalind laughs.

“Excellent try, but not even close. I’m thinking of a crow.”

“A crow? A scarecrow?” James asks.

“No! I’m not scared of him,” Rosalind replies frustratedly, “I have a bird bath.”

“I have a bath,” says Noah, “but I don’t think Abigail will like being called a bird.”

After the laughter subsides, Rosalind continues:

“I have a bird bath. It is a large dish about 60 centimetres across, but shallow, mounted on a fluted pedestal and I think made of concrete rather than carved out of sandstone. At some stage in its life the dish has broken in half and has been glued back together. And it leaks, necessitating waterproofing it with sandstone-coloured pond paint.

“Anyway, it came from Sydney with us and now is in a prominent position in our back garden. It is located under an olive tree. In the first year the olive tree had borne copious amounts of green, hard olives. I found out about how they should be harvested and prepared and decided it was too much work. But I didn’t have to contemplate that for long, because some birds stripped the tree bare of fruit before it had ripened. Since then it has never borne fruit, but nevertheless the olive tree gives shelter and a sense of safety for birds. Birds with feathers I mean.”

“I once went to a night club,” Noah interrupted, “and there were several birds wearing nothing but feathers.”

“I never thought that I would have to say this to a DI, but ... *shut ... up!*”

“Feathered and *winged* birds, and don’t say anything! Birds love the bird bath and sometimes several birds would have a communal bath in it, so it has to be cleaned and refilled regularly.

“The most absurd sight is a jet black crow or raven. I have no idea why, but a single raven has started coming. Apparently it didn’t have a mate, although I later saw it with another, hopefully female raven. Its length from beak to tail is slightly greater than the diameter of the bird bath and its wingspan is much greater, but it regularly takes a bath, splashing about for a minute or more before standing on the lip and preening its feathers. It washes about four times before it flies off. Naturally the bath has to be refilled after every visit.

“But birds are strange. One day there was heavy rain, lightning and thunder, with one clap directly overhead. I looked out and saw a blackbird standing on the rim of the bird bath, instead of sheltering in a tree. Not satisfied with the rain drops on its feathers, it took a bath, splashing around before it preened its feathers and flew away.

After an animated and extensive conversation over the dessert, the guests arose, thanked the hosts for a delightful evening and an excellent repast, and wended their assorted ways home.

# 7

It is early October, the second month of spring, and over a week since the murder at Franklin. It is almost 6 months since the murder at Colebrook.

On the Sunday morning there is a light mist and the sun shines wanly through it. It is cold, although later in the day it warms up, the mist evaporates and bright sunlight bathes the land and the people.

There is a knock at the door and Detective Sergeant James Hunter opens it to find two men dressed in black suits, one holding a Holy Bible and the other some leaflets. He hasn't seen them before.

"Would you like to read this?" the shorter person asks and gives him a leaflet.

James is polite and he quite likes religious people visiting so that he can ask them difficult questions. So he takes the proffered piece of paper and reads:

*For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27)*

"People," the taller man pontificates while James is reading, "who commit unnatural acts will go to Hell and burn in eternal damnation."

Politeness is replaced by rage and James, tearing up the leaflet and throwing the scraps of paper at them, yells "Fuck off!" and slams the door in their faces.

He goes into the living room and throws himself into an arm chair glowering. Adam asks calmly:

"Who was that?"

"Bloody religious people," answers James angrily.

"Calm down. They're only expressing their views. Which we know are wrong."

A phone rang.

"It's yours," Adam says unnecessarily, as James answers it.

After a short conversation, he explains:

"Adam, I have to go in to work. Remember on the news late last night there was a hold-up in a general store reported and a woman got cut with a knife? Well, they have caught the suspect and I have interview him."

"I shouldn't be too long."

And after a hug and a kiss, James goes out to his car and drives into work.

As reported on the news, a young man held up a store at knife-point demanding money and cigarettes. It'd gone wrong when the shop assistant tried to reason with him and got stabbed. Only a superficial wound on her bare arm that required a couple of stitches, but the copious blood caused the perpetrator to panic, drop the

knife and run.

PC Bart Bartholomew, who hates his Christian name and always uses his surname, meets James in an interview room.

“How did you catch him?” James asks.

“I recognised him from the CCTV that I viewed at the shop; he’s on the system and I have met him before. His name is Tom Smith, commonly known as *lurching Tom*.”

“You’re kidding,” exclaims James astonished. “Did the parents want a cat?”

“Unlikely as it sounds, that is his birth name. And we have his home address, so I went and picked him up, arresting him on suspicion of GBH. He wasn’t wearing gloves so his finger prints will be on the fishing knife he used. I have sent it for testing.”

“Have you got the CCTV?”

“Yeah. Here’s the disk.”

After James had seen the relevant parts of the video, he says:

“OK, get him and we can interview him.”

When Tom arrives and sits down, he’s fidgeting, his brown eyes dart around and his right leg, which is shorter than the other causing him to lurch, is rapidly twitching. He’s wearing a top, emblazoned with an American football team player and the number 5, and torn jeans. He’s too skinny and his black hair is tousled.

“Have you seen a doctor?” James asks.

“No.”

“Do you want a lawyer?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“The last one screwed me man.”

James, still irritated from the visit at home, but trying hard to be pleasant, states:

“Bartholomew, get the on-call doctor and take Tom to the medical room and wait with him. Report back to me after he has seen a doctor.”

Having watched the CCTV of the attempted robbery, James has nothing to do, so he goes to the detectives’ room he occupies and sees Noah Watt in his office with the door open. He knocks and asks:

“What are you doing here, Sir?”

“I’m trying to make sense of the Franklin murder,” replies Noah. “Well, both of them. What are you doing?”

“The hold-up at the general store last night. Should be easy and it shouldn’t take long, so can I join you afterwards?”

“Yes,” Noah smiles. “But what about Adam?”

“He won’t mind. And he’s cooking tonight so I have plenty of time. After the interview I’m getting lunch. Can I get you anything, Sir?”

“Yes, please. Are you going to the cafe we use? Is it open?”

“Yes and yes.”

“Then a piece of quiche and piece of banana cake, please.”

James waits in the interview room and it isn't long before Tom, Bartholomew and the doctor come in. Tom is less agitated although his leg still twitches.

James starts the recording and announces:

“Interview with Tom Smith. DS Hunter, PC Bartholomew and the duty doctor present. Is Tom fit to be interviewed, doctor?”

“Yes. He's a heroin addict, but I have stabilised him by giving him a dose of methadone. I have also taken bloods and I'll tell you the results as soon as they come back.”

“OK,” replies James and the doctor leaves.

“So Tom,” requests James, “are you OK to be interviewed?”

“Spouse.”

“You have only two previous convictions for shop lifting. This is a step up.”

“It was an accident, man, I didn't mean to cut her.”

“OK. Tell me what happened.”

“I needed a hit, man, so I went to get money and fags. I was agitated, waving the knife about, man, she must have put her arm in the road.”

“That tallies with the CCTV.”

“Don't call him *man*, have some respect,” Bartholomew interrupts.

“Please don't interrupt,” James commands Bartholomew, and says to Tom:

“It's OK Tom. So why did you take a knife with you?”

“Just to scare her, didn't mean to use it.”

“Where do you get your drugs from?”

“I'm no snitch, man, I won't say.”

“As a matter of interest, why don't you wear a built up shoe? If you did you could walk nearly normally.”

“Nah man, cost too much, can't afford it.”

“OK. I'm going to hold you here in custody until tomorrow morning when you'll be formally charged in front of a magistrate.”

Bartholomew, under the directions of James, duplicates the CCTV disk and sends it, with the recording of the interview and other information, to the DPP marked *attention Peter Taggart*.

James goes out and, as well as Noah's order, gets a salad roll and a vanilla slice.

‘It isn't as nice as Noah's mille feuilles,’ he thinks.

When he gets back he goes into DI Watt's office. At the door he sees Noah repeatedly slam his mouse into the desk and yell:

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” at the top of his voice.

“What is the matter, Sir?”

“Sorry, James, I didn't think anyone was here or I would have screamed silently.

“I'm frustrated because I can't make sense of the murders, and when I'm frustrated things go wrong. This time it is my *fucking* coordination! I can't use a track-pad because my fingers won't do the right thing, and when I click on the mouse it's in the

wrong position. Let's go and eat."

They sit in the dining room.

"OK, James," begins the now calmed down Noah while getting a cappuccino from the automatic machine, "give me your take on the murders."

"After the Colebrook murder," James meditates, "we thought that it might be related to bikies and or drugs. We interviewed lots of people, but everything came to a dead end.

"Actually I don't think a bikie or a dealer killed him. The murderer is professional, and the murder was premeditated, and I don't think a bikie or a drug dealer would have the skills to do it. Anyway, why a church miles from anywhere? It just doesn't gel.

"But after the second murder at Franklin we had to go back to the start, because Anderson has no link to bikies or drugs. So if we'd known what we know now, then we wouldn't have bothered with that line of inquiry.

"Anderson's mobile phone locations are normal and, as Franklin is busy with lots of passing traffic, we would have a snowball's chance in Hell convincing a magistrate to let us go on a fishing trip. Anyway, it would be impossible to check the large numbers of phones in the area.

"At the moment we know the murders were committed by the same person, but we have no evidence to narrow down possible suspects. Indeed we don't have any suspects."

"So who killed them?" Noah asks.

"Both women have suffered domestic violence, so that's a link."

"But it probably doesn't mean anything," Noah retorts. "After all, about one woman in four has suffered domestic violence and a woman is killed every nine days in Australia. So it is probably just coincidence. Anyway, Anne Preston wouldn't be examined by a doctor and maybe she didn't suffer domestic violence. We only assume she did."

"But what if it is relevant? Maybe they hired a killer?" James asks.

"Extremely unlikely! First, Mrs Preston and Mrs Anderson are broke and don't have enough money. Second, they wouldn't know how to look for one. Third, what are the chances that they both use the same hired killer? Fourth, hired killers normally use guns, because they're much more reliable than knives which mightn't kill, and they would execute the husbands in a local place and not churches miles away."

"Well the churches are significant."

"But there are no links to Anglican churches and we have no idea why they were used, so at the moment it's a dead end. Also, in Tasmania there are seven unsolved murders and over 150 missing persons, and I'm sure some of the missing persons have been murdered, but there are no bodies and no evidence. So lots of murderers go scot free. What about Victoria Cafasso who was murdered on the east coast in 1995? It's over 20 years ago and we still haven't got a clue about who killed her. This is the same."

And Noah shakes his head and adds:

“No evidence, no leads, nothing.”

“We should talk to the pathologist who did the autopsy.”

“No point. She’s the same one that did the autopsy on Preston and if there was anything interesting then she would have told us.”

“One thing we haven’t done, because we thought it was pointless, is to get a list of the people Anderson knew and check them.”

Noah sighs, and mutters:

“I think it won’t produce anything, but we may as well do it.”

When he arrives at work on Monday, James rings the DPP and asks for Peter Taggart.

“Hi Peter,” James says, “Have you got the file and the CCTV disk regarding Tom Smith?”

“Hi James, yes. I’ve looked at it but I don’t think a charge of GBH is appropriate.”

“I agree and I’m thinking of downgrading the arrest to assault.”

“That’s better,” agrees Peter, “I’ll work with that charge. Have you got the fingerprints back?”

“No, but I’ll send them to you when I get them. I want to ask for bail.”

“That is OK by me, James, but bail isn’t in my remit and it is up to you or a magistrate.”

James organises a duty solicitor to represent Tom, but he refuses point blank to have a lawyer and so James tells him:

“I’m going to downgrade the arrest to one of on suspicion of assault. I’ll also arrest you on suspicion of attempted robbery, which PC Bartholomew should have added to the arrest. There’s a magistrate sitting next door, so we’ll get you before her now. Is there anything else you want to say?”

“Nah man.”

The three men walk next door to the court house and sit waiting for the magistrate to finish the matter before her. It isn’t long before she looks over her glasses and asks:

“Why are you here? Where is the solicitor?”

James introduces himself and explains:

“I know this is irregular, but Mr Smith is adamant that he doesn’t want a solicitor to represent him.”

“Alright, if I must. Carry on.”

James outlines the case and the DPP’s opinion, stressing that Tom Smith is a drug addict and that the assault was accidental. Then he argues:

“Mr Smith isn’t dangerous and he has only one conviction for shop lifting a couple of years ago. I think that being on remand in custody would be detrimental to him. Considering the back-log of cases, it’ll be several months before Mr Smith’s case would be heard and that wouldn’t be good for his health. So I recommend that you bail him, your honour, with appropriate conditions.”

“That is sensible reasoning,” says the magistrate who, unlike some others, is a kind,

gentle person. "So you are passing the buck to me?"

"No, your honour!" James exclaims, somewhat aghast at the thought. "But the charges are serious and normally Mr Smith would be remanded in custody. I don't think that would be the best approach to take under the circumstances."

"OK," and the magistrate pronounces, "I'll bail you, Mr Smith, on condition that you are of good behaviour, you report weekly to a police station and that you are put on the methadone program to treat you addiction."

"Thank you, man," replies Tom humbly, "I'll be good."

They go back to the police station and James orders Bartholomew:

"Take him back, process him and release him. And hurry up the fingerprint analysis and, when you get it, send it to Peter Taggart."

Noah has telephoned Phillippa Anderson and, as she isn't being formally interviewed, gets her to come to his office.

James is present as Noah asks:

"Can you give us a list of James Anderson's friends and acquaintances and their addresses?"

The reply is much the same as the reply of Anne Preston to the same question.

Phillippa gives a few Christian names, but only a couple of surnames and addresses.

"Anyone else?" James asks.

"No. I know a couple of people at the church and I chat to the people at the cleaning jobs I do, but they aren't friends and James doesn't know them."

As the cleaning jobs are irrelevant, the information is useless. But Noah and James contact the few people that they can and get nowhere, because they find the people to be completely different to the list gleaned from Anne Preston, and so it meant that they can't be suspects. There is simply nothing to link the two murders.

Despite pouring cold water on it, Noah and James decide to visit the pathologist who had done the autopsy.

"Nice to see you back. Where is the other DI, Rosalind?" Professor Victoria Chan asks.

"Busy," responds Noah, "and she isn't involved in this murder. Is there anything you have left out of the report? It doesn't matter how minor, because at the moment we have no leads, nothing."

"I don't think so. But, ah! The tip of the knife nicked the rib that it was passing under. Not a serious problem for the murderer, as he probably wouldn't have felt it."

"Nothing else?"

"No. No drugs or anything. Just a perfectly normal healthy man. Oh, maybe I didn't put it in my report, but there was no bleach on his hands. It didn't matter because I couldn't find any unusual DNA on them. So if he touched something on the killer then it was clean of DNA. But that means that they didn't shake hands. Is that important?"

Noah sighs and mumbles:

"No, not really. The killer probably wore gloves anyway."

When they get back to Noah's office, James comments, rather hopelessly:

"We have several detectives who have nothing much to do, so we can recruit them."

"But what would they do?" Noah replies. "We have no witnesses and door-to-door questioning is pointless as there are no doors to knock on."

After a few moments of silence, Noah chants tunelessly:

*"There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza, there's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole."*

"I'm sorry, Sir, you have lost me," says James, mystified by the irrelevance of the song.

"I don't know why I thought of that song," answers Noah, "but it is appropriate.

"I can't remember all the verses, but it is a circular song. Liza tells Henry to fix the bucket using something and, at each stage, Henry asks how to do it and Liza responds using something else. It ends with Liza telling Henry to fetch some water in his bucket to hone his axe on a whetstone, and Henry repeats the first verse. It is a never ending story with no solution, and it is like our murders.

"At the moment we have no fingerprints, no DNA, no witnesses, no CCTV, no mobile phone data, no tyre tracks or footprints, nothing. And, consequently, we have no suspects.

"The only thing we are sure about is that the killer is the same person who committed the Colebrook murder almost six months ago. I don't think a serial killer would wait so long to get his psyché satisfied, but he has done it again and then vanished, as he did after the Colebrook murder. And as far as we know he didn't take anything away with him, as serial killers usually do."

"Perhaps we should concentrate on finding a motive?" James asks.

"Can you think of a motive? I can't."

Noah puts his head in his hands, sighs and murmurs:

"I'm losing it. I'm too old and my mind is going. I should retire and let someone else handle the case."

## 8

In November the winds of change blow.

DI Noah Watt retires.

“I think,” he says to Abigail, “I’m getting tired of solving crimes or, actually, getting other people to solve them. And my brain has slowed down. So maybe it is time to be pensioned off.”

Abigail agrees. For many years she has found, on his days at home, that they get on well and don’t interfere with each other’s hobbies. So Noah writes a letter of resignation, in both senses of the word, to the administration and tells the people he works with. He stays on for a few weeks until, in late November, DI Noah Watt is replaced by DI Matthew Watson.

One bureaucrat in Hobart remembered the debacle of Noah Watt’s appointment. So the advertisement for a detective inspector was published correctly, insisting on only serving police detectives of the rank of sergeant or above applying, and getting together a selection panel of appropriate people, including Noah. DI Watson was the obvious choice and he was appointed. Noah has to chuckle at the name. He’s *the son of Watt*, and has moved from the Old Testament, *Noah*, to the New Testament *Matthew*.

Matthew was born in Launceston, went to school there, married and had three children there, and was a newly promoted detective inspector.

Originally he was slender with dark brown hair, almost black. He’s jovial and good company, and consequently is invited to lots of parties where he drinks rather too much white wine; he has an hiatus hernia that won’t tolerate red wine or cream. As well as being careful and methodical, his temperament means that all who work above and below him like him, and those new to the job find him both approachable and wise.

However detective work doesn’t involve much running or other exercise, so he became a bit rotund in middle age. His golfing prowess doesn’t suffer and most Saturdays are spent at the local course.

Perhaps that was why his wife had an affair with a man from where she worked? She moved out, taking the children with her, and sued for divorce. Matthew, as well as being a little overweight, was stoical, and he sold the family home and moved into a small flat. His ex wife got the lion’s share of the proceeds, but they were still friends and she didn’t want a share of his superannuation. And she allowed as much access to the children as he and they wanted.

Despite developing *salt and pepper* hair, Matthew was still handsome and, after coming to grips with the permanency of his separation, he’d little trouble finding

a new partner to share his life with. Not surprisingly Judy plays golf, and they met one Saturday when he helped her find her ball in the rough. After a short romance, involving cuddles whilst pretending to help each other's putting, he moved his golf clubs into her house.

Judy also has three children. Her husband was adventurous and went by himself to explore India and the Himalayas while Judy looked after the children. But he disappeared and was never heard of again. His assets were frozen until some time in the future when a coroner would pronounce him "missing presumably dead." Fortunately the house was in Judy's name only and wasn't a part of her husband's assets.

Both Matthew and Judy liked children so having six in the house regularly wasn't a problem, and the children got on with very little bickering other than who could have the shower. Anyway, the children soon spread their wings and departed. One of Matthew's sons and one of Judy's daughters fell in love and moved in together, which helped cement the relationship of the parents.

Judy's parents, who lived in Hobart, became elderly and frail and so Judy wanted to move to be near them in their last years. Matthew was a little hesitant until he saw the DI position advertised in Hobart. So Judy sold her house in Launceston and they bought a house in Hobart together, with Matthew paying off a small mortgage.

When Noah finally leaves he's adamant:

"No fuss! No farewell parties," Noah tells James Hunter.

But he forgets to tell Rosalind Baker, so there is a gathering of a few people in the dining room, and he's both embarrassed and delighted that they have thought enough of him, and relieved that there are no presents.

On that note Noah takes a small cardboard box of personal possessions from his office and vows never to enter the building again.

A few days later DI Rosalind Baker telephones Noah at home:

"I also have an announcement to make. I have got the job of teaching the detective training course at the Rokeby Police Academy."

Noah is chuffed. "You'll be brilliant! It's about time your abilities were recognised."

It is almost Christmas before the last of the team, DS James Hunter, moves on.

"Adam, my partner, has got a job in Canberra in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade," he told DI Watson. "I wasn't sure about it until I found out there was a vacancy in the ACT police force, so we are moving together."

If James is honest he probably wouldn't have left Hobart if the *old man* was still in the job, and he would have tried to persuade Adam to stay; although he likes Matthew he hasn't had time to bond with the new DI. He also regrets the move because he will have to sever ties with the band and their singer Maddie and he doesn't know if he and Adam could join a group in Canberra.

So the team that had investigated the *church murders*, as they were called, have retired or moved and, consequently, no one is interested in them.

Except for DS Felix Oliver. He remembers them, mainly because they were handled

by DI Rosalind Baker, and she's someone special in his eyes.

Felix is short, just sufficiently tall to be a policeman, and weedy. From his birth he was a placid child who cringed when there were loud voices or a fight. He smiled frequently, apparently to ingratiate himself with his parents and siblings. The former made him do chores and the latter took toys from him, so he felt victimised.

From his first day at school he was bullied. He was called *Moggy* (a reference to cat food or the comic strip perhaps?) and suffered some minor violence, such as having things knocked out of his hands, and his bag turned upside down to empty out the contents.

So he became quiet and deferential, carefully avoiding drawing attention to himself and avoiding participating in discussions. Consequently he was silent in class and, although not gifted, he managed to pass all the subjects that he did. His teachers, who thought that the behaviour of his class-mates wasn't untoward and would strengthen him, considered Felix to be a model student.

Then Felix discovered cricket. Sports are an essential part of the curriculum at that school and he was expected to play football. His class-mates revelled in physical contact and made Felix's life hell on the field, deliberately tackling and kicking him. So he played in a back pocket and carefully stayed away from the ball. It was obvious that his shyness, or so his teachers considered it, made contact sports impossible, and he was drafted into a *beginners* cricket team, a polite word for *no-hopers*.

Felix discovered that he'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 him, but either he would duck out of the way or catch the ball. The members of his team soon tired of the game, and the coaches realised that he was good and promoted him to a better team. There the bullying stopped as the other players were interested in winning and performing as well as they could. He was quickly promoted to opening the batting, and sometimes he'd the chance to use his spin bowling to confuse the batsmen. So he helped propel the team to near the top of the table.

Cricket gave Felix a boost to his confidence and, although he's still introverted, he developed a technique of being outgoing.

Partly because of his mother, who is a chemist working in forensic medicine, when he left school he went to the Rokeby Police Academy.

He never married. Not because women think he's too weak to be a good partner and father, but because having a partner doesn't interest him, and he's content living alone in the unit he'd bought, with some cricket trophies on a shelf of the bookcase.

Not long before, Detective Constable Oliver had thought that it was unlikely for him to be promoted because, even if he has some talent, his personality is self-deprecating and he felt that in the future he would have little opportunity to further himself, let alone voice his opinions. So he was resigned to being a DC for ever. However, DI Rosalind Baker nurtured him, and helped him to do the theoretical and practical work. To his surprise, but not Rosalind's, he passed.

'He has earned his three stripes,' she thinks.

Also before Christmas, DI Rosalind Baker is formally replaced by DI Vincent Glover, although the changeover won't occur until he arrives in the new year.

Helen and Edward Glover met at work, where he was a store manager and she was a secretary. After they'd married, both continued to work until they'd saved up enough money to buy a small house with a not too large mortgage. Being settled, they decided to start a family, and in the next year their first son, Vincent, was born. And, two years later, they had their second and final child, Richard.

The contrast between the siblings is stark.

Even as early as two years old, if Vincent didn't get his way he screamed and scratched until he drew blood. The parents were kind and patient, assuming he would grow out of his behaviour, and they wondered if the arrival of Richard had something to do with it.

But Richard was a smiling child, who never broke his toys, except by accident, and never had a temper tantrum.

As a four year old child Vincent was nasty. He kicked and punched if he was opposed in any way. The wrong food, the wrong toy, the wrong bedtime, anything that he didn't like.

And Vincent was big. He was taller and more solid than most children of his age, and so he became a bully. Sometimes he would stomp on Richard's toys and when Richard, crying with anguish, tried to retaliate, Vincent held him at arm's length and sniggered as Richard tried unsuccessfully to punch or kick him, his blows landing in mid air, well short of their intended mark.

Helen and Edward were perplexed. They were kind, they never hit their sons, and never scolded them without explaining why they were doing that. But nothing changed Vincent's or Richard's behaviour. So they reluctantly put the contrast between them down to a random quirk of nature, or an unlucky combination of genes, and put up with the temper tantrums.

But Vincent is intelligent. At kindergarten he learned to curb his behaviour while teachers were around and he mainly wreaked his havoc surreptitiously. And at school he restricted his verbal and physical punishments enough not to be expelled.

Of course he was good at winter sports. Summer sports, such as cricket, were too gentlemanly and too subtle for him, and he preferred rugby or Australian rules football matches, where there are plenty of opportunities to punch, elbow and kick opponents. Again he was careful and, although being sent off occasionally, he developed the skill of making such contacts look accidental, and he even appeared to be apologetic while inwardly he was gleeful, especially when he struck an opponent in the head and concussed him. He spurned soccer which he thinks is a namby-pamby sport and openly pours scorn on the system of yellow and red cards.

He went to school by train and looked at the other people around him. And of the few he admired, most were policemen. In his eyes they strutted around the streets and the railway stations and kept ordinary citizens under control. And if a citizen couldn't be controlled, they would arrest and handcuff the offender and drag him away.

So when he finished year twelve successfully, he'd decided on his future career; he would become a policeman.

When he was fully grown, Vincent was well over six feet tall, bulky and muscular.

And his success in bullying and physical violence led to him become arrogant. All around him were fools that have to be tolerated, so long as they don't get in his way.

He was in many ways the ideal candidate for a police constable and he sailed through the training, both physical and academic. But he especially liked hand-to-hand wrestling and shooting practice, and he excelled at both.

As a trainee constable he was assigned to a suburban police station for on-the-job experience. Although he wasn't allowed to carry the full kit on his way to work, he was allowed to wear his uniform. So he swaggered onto the train and sat in the middle of two seats with his legs splayed out forming a V to show off his ample manhood barely hidden by his trousers. He was the boss and other people had to make way for him. Most of the police officers he met disliked him, but they trained him as best as they could, trying unsuccessfully to quell his violent nature. Vincent was careful to hide his arrogance and instead he displayed a feigned considerateness. As his teachers at the police academy knew little about his personality it was never questioned, let alone dealt with.

The passing out parade, attended by his parents who had immense pride in him, was viewed by Vincent as the culmination of his life. He could, at last, demonstrate his nasty, bullying arrogance with impunity. The members of the public he meets will cower down and be submissive before his strutting bulk!

And at last he could bedeck himself with the badges of authority; the truncheon, pistol, handcuffs, radio, Taser, pepper-spray and steel capped boots. At last he's in control!

Work as a police constable was satisfying, until the police force introduced body cameras that videoed encounters with the public.

Although the policemen he worked with have never discussed, let alone done anything about his arrogance and violence, they were well aware of his failings and saw body cameras as good, with the possibility of making him accountable.

But Vincent is intelligent and he knew that his behaviour would be frowned upon if documented. So he decided that his life as a police constable had ended and he applied for the courses and training necessary to become a detective. His only reason for the shift is because detectives don't wear body cameras and perhaps he will have the opportunity to occasionally cultivate his violent nature, disguised as self defence. He graduated as a detective and his supervisors thought that he was excellent and would go far. However, Vincent knows he will go far because he's arrogant, sly and can work the system, sucking up to those above him and quietly bullying his equals and those below him.

It isn't surprising when he married Beatrice who is a Roman Catholic. She's beautiful and could have become a fashion model if her personality was more outgoing.

Although what is beautiful changes over time and in different cultures, Vincent

has an innate sense of what he likes, and he was infatuated with her face. She's slim and has a perfectly formed face with well-defined cheek-bones, a triangular jaw and a small chin below a generous mouth that often revealed a captivating smile. Her eyebrows are dark and neat, and not too close to her brown eyes. Her clear, smooth skin is slightly toned with makeup and her light brown hair is lustrous, gleaming in the sunlight. And she moves gracefully.

Vincent wanted her. And she admired him, for his strength, stature and rugged handsomeness.

When they met he took her wherever she wanted to go, and he praised her beauty and asked her questions and attentively listened to her answers. He learned that she loved cooking and thought of herself as a home-maker.

He met her parents at their house for a dinner cooked by Beatrice; he didn't like the food but, after swallowing the last nauseous mouthful, he praised the meal. He was considerate and chatted with the parents and telling them about his steady, well-paying job. They're impressed and like him.

It isn't surprising that after a while Beatrice fell in love with him and, when he proposed to her, she instantly said "yes."

When they married, they moved into a rented unit and Vincent slowly revealed his true character. He often ordered her to do things but, often enough to placate her, he complimented her. Her Christian upbringing made her a dutiful wife, and she saw his bullying nature as a strength.

Vincent quickly turned the living room into a home gym, relegating his wife to the kitchen. Although there was still a television and sofa in the living room, they were primarily for Vincent to watch sport. And he viewed her as a beautiful ornament, to be on his arm or a step behind him when he wanted to show off to his superiors.

His attitude to sex is that women should submit to men, and so he and Beatrice copulated frequently, mainly to satisfy his lust, but also because he wants a son to bring up as a likeness of him. She sometimes felt raped and occasionally said:

"I don't want to have sex."

But he told her that she would enjoy it and went ahead anyway.

Beatrice doesn't want to have children and, before they married and unknown to him, she had an intra-uterine device fitted. Vincent was disappointed that she didn't get pregnant and, after searching the house for contraceptive pills and finding none, he assumed his wife was sterile. In fact the IUD isn't needed, because if Vincent had been tested, and that is impossible because, in his eyes, he's perfect, he would have discovered that he's sterile; he has a low sperm count and most of the remaining sperm are headless.

It isn't long before Vincent's dominating personality moulded Beatrice into a shy, reclusive person who rarely smiled.

From the moment he graduated as a detective constable he started studying for promotion and, after the requisite experience, he was made a detective sergeant.

In that position his work was awe inspiring. In part that was because of his ability,

but in part it was because he focused on the easy cases, delegating anything difficult to those under him:

“You need the experience,” was his usual reason.

Of course if a DC managed to solve a case he or she had to advise Vincent, and he would ingratiate himself with his seniors by telling them that:

“The DC has done the leg-work under my supervision and with my guidance.”

The Inspectors at the station hadn't discussed DS Glover, but they all independently came to the same conclusion, that he wasn't a nice person to work with, and 'the sooner we are rid of him the better,' was a common thought. But the thought was based on intuition rather than fact, until DI Susan Trainor had a woman DC come into her office, tears in her eyes, with a letter of resignation in her hand, and a tale of bullying and inappropriate touching. Susan didn't want to lose her.

“I'll do something about it,” Susan said emphatically, “and in the mean time you can work with me.”

“I want her to do some administration work for me,” was her excuse to Vincent.

Fortunately the advertisement for a DI in Tasmania appeared only a few days later and Susan Trainor, scarcely able to hide her glee, told DS Glover about it:

“OK, it is in Tasmania, but it'll be an excellent stepping-stone to a DI in a more important station,” argued his superior officer, “and I'll happily give you a reference.”

Vincent's vanity was stroked sufficiently by DI Trainor for him to apply, and all his superiors gave him undeserved, but glowing references in the hope that he would go away. Which was quite easy, as he's intelligent and diligent, and so all they had to do was to ignore his bad points to make their references very appealing.

So, after flying down for a face-to-face interview, he was appointed to the post.

Susan Trainor telephoned Rosalind Baker; they'd met at a conference and instantly took a liking for each other. Susan forewarned Rosalind of Vincent's imminent arrival but, as she's now at the police academy, there was nothing she could do other than watch and hope. She thought of contacting DS Felix Oliver with the news, but she was confident that he could handle the situation, particularly as she thinks that he's observant and intelligent.

And so, with the reshuffle caused by DS Hunter's departure and the move of another sergeant between stations, DS Oliver isn't transferred and stays at his own police station, and he's there when DI Glover arrives.

As Beatrice and Vincent Glover have few possessions, and the lease on their unit had expired, moving to Hobart was easy, only complicated by transporting Vincent's expensive exercise paraphernalia, and by finding a suitable unit to live in. Before they leave for Hobart, he bought two new suits and, to go with them, new shirts, ties, socks and patent leather shoes.

So only a month after accepting the job, DI Vincent Glover walks into the office that had been previously occupied by DI Rosalind Baker; it has a new office chair that Vincent has ordered. He arranges the desk top, on which he puts a photograph of himself with bulging muscles and a fake tan, and in the top right hand drawer a

bottle of very nice whisky and a single glass. When he pontificates to others beneath him, he will pour himself a drink and skull it; but he never offers the whisky to anyone else, even his superiors.

He sits back in his chair, legs straight out under the desk, and smiles with satisfaction.

Of the detectives under him, he immediately notices DS Felix Oliver and innately sees an opportunity for his bullying personality.

‘I can use Oliver,’ he thinks.

Vincent also notices DC Martin Campbell, who joined the station as a police constable and has just become a detective. He’s a brash, confident person who always thinks that he’s right. He wears a suit, colourful ties and, when the weather is cold, a stylish overcoat. His main characteristic is that he’s easily led if someone superior to him strokes his ego and makes him feel wanted. And his thinking is often superficial, so that he sometimes draws obviously wrong conclusions. Indeed, he always takes the man’s side in cases involving a woman.

Not long before Martin became a detective, he and his junior partner were called out to a suburban home because a young woman, Kate, had rung the emergency telephone number and claimed that her boyfriend, Chris, had just beaten her with his fists, he’d head-butted her, and he’d thrown her things out onto the street.

Before going to the home, Martin learns that Chris already has two Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) against him, one for domestic violence, but neither taken out by Kate; AVOs are court orders made to protect someone from further violence, intimidation or harassment.

When Martin and his partner arrive, they’re ushered in by Chris’s parents because it is their home. Martin asks Chris:

“Kate has accused you of head-butting her?”

And Chris calmly replies:

“She bumped her head against mine, but maybe it was accidental.”

“So *she* head-butted *you*?”

“I suppose so,” was his bland reply.

“You should take an AVO out against Kate and formally start criminal charges against her. I can help you with that. What about the scratch on your face, Chris?”

“I got it shaving.”

As he and his parents are calm and helpful, Martin believes them and, without talking to Kate for her side of the story, decides that Chris hasn’t been violent and that he has no case to answer.

He gets Kate into the room and asks her:

Have you been assaulted today?

And, in tears, she thinks ‘the police can’t do anything,’ but she says:

“It’s ..., it’s fine, ... it’s nothing.”

And then, almost hysterically, she asks plaintively in front of the family:

“How do I stop him hitting me?”

“You can make a statement,” replies Martin, and adds firmly and very pointedly

“but if you make false allegations you’ll be in very deep trouble. As these people own the house, if they don’t want you living here and having the police repeatedly visit, then they can tell you to leave.”

At this Kate is silent, because she knows that she won’t be believed.

But Chris’s mother adds:

“It would be better if she lives somewhere else. You know that she’s aboriginal?”

“That explains a lot,” Martin says, nodding. “She should be sitting around a camp fire and having kids with a blackfella. Chris, how could you have sex with an aboriginal missus?”

“Well, she’s good looking for what she is,” Chris replies. “Can you do something?”

Martin arrests her for assault and trespass, puts her in the back of the paddy wagon and takes her to a cell. He and his partner go to a hotel and congratulate themselves on a job well done.

A few days later, with Martin’s help and testimony, Chris get an AVO taken out on Kate, so that she can’t go within 200 metres of him or his parent’s house. At the same time, a lawyer gets the charges against Kate dropped, but she has nowhere to go so she ends up at a refuge for women who have suffered domestic violence. There she finds out that she isn’t alone, and several women have had AVO’s falsely taken out by their partners.

Vincent Glover hears of this case, when Kate makes a complaint against Martin Campbell and, as he’s asked to investigate, calls DC Campbell in to tell his side of the story. In a few words it is that Kate had been violent against her partner and had been thrown out of the parent’s home, but refused to leave. It isn’t surprising that Vincent decides that the complaint should be dropped.

Being a man after his own heart, and no threat to him, Vincent befriends Martin and secretly hopes that Felix Oliver will leave and then he can promote DC Campbell.

Just as DI Trainor had stroked Glover’s ego, he deliberately does the same to Martin Campbell. Neither man realises what is being done to them.

## 9

It is January and Victor Davis is at work, because he takes his annual leave in winter so that he can go skiing. Next winter, he intends to drive to the Victorian alpine region, taking the ferry across Bass Strait. Sometimes he thinks that he will fly over to the South Island of New Zealand and ski at his favourite resort.

He likes the summer when most other people are away on holidays, because he can work uninterrupted by the questions he's often asked and there are no committee meetings, which are long and boring, and usually unproductive.

Wendy rings Andrew Xenakis to see if they can meet to discuss mathematics problems and he, with obvious pleasure in his voice responds:

"I would like that very much. I'm at home and any time that suits you will be fine with me."

On Wednesday morning Wendy takes the twins Sam and Bruce to a play group and leaves Angela at a friend's house before driving to Taroona.

It is hot and she wears a light top and a short skirt. Andrew has bare feet beneath his shorts and she kicks off her shoes and he leads her into the sitting room.

Wendy is nervous and goes to the window to admire the view.

"What is that?"

Andrew comes over and puts his hand on her shoulder and asks:

"What are you looking at?"

She tilts her head so that it is closer to his and points:

"Is that a lighthouse?"

"Yes, it is the Iron Pot lighthouse," and he turns his head and tentatively brushes his lips against her cheek, smelling her natural scent.

Wendy turns, puts her hands on Andrew's waist and they look questioningly into each other's eyes.

"I'm married and have three children."

He frowns.

"I'm sorry. I thought ..." and his voice trails off.

"No, don't be sorry. And I'm not putting you off. I just thought that you should know."

And she puts her arms around his neck, stands on tiptoes and kisses him.

Andrew puts his arms around her waist and they kiss before he moves his hands to her breasts, realises from her warm softness that she isn't wearing a bra.

She smiles and looks down as he unbuttons her shirt.

"Not here, it is too exposed!"

He leads her by the hand to the bedroom where they stand, removing their shirts,

and he presses her against him, feeling her breasts against his bare skin, and says simply:

“I want you.”

Wendy sits on the edge of the bed with Andrew standing in front of her, removes his shorts.

She lies back on the bed and giggles as he removes her skirt and underwear. He parts her legs and looks wonderingly at her body.

“I should get a condom.”

“No, please don’t. It isn’t necessary because I’m on the pill. Anyway, I want your skin touching mine.”

A little while later she has an orgasm, the first for many years.

Afterwards Andrew, supporting himself on one elbow, looks with amazement at her body.

They stay that way for a long time, talking, before they get up and dress.

While kissing him, Wendy says:

“I want to do that again, but it may be difficult finding someone to look after my children. And I don’t want my husband Victor to know.”

“It was wonderful,” Andrew replies, smiling. “I hope it is soon, because I can’t wait too long.”

Wendy drives home, collecting the children on the way. Victor comes home from work and sees her smiling and laughing as she cooks dinner. She allows him to kiss her, but pushes him away:

“It’ll burn if I don’t stir it,” she explains.

Victor is curious:

“You are very happy. Did you have a good day?”

“Yes,” inwardly smiling at the memory, but she can’t hide her pleasure. “It was good and I learnt a lot. How was your day?”

After the children have been put to bed they watch television for a while and then go to bed themselves. Victor wants sex, but Wendy rolls over and pushes him away.

“You smell differently.”

“It’s the perfume I’m wearing. Shush, go to sleep.”

But she thinks:

‘I didn’t want to wash the smell of Andrew off me, but I should have.’

So Victor gets up, frustrated, goes to the bathroom wondering why she’s so happy.

A week passes. Wendy has organised someone to look after the children and so she phones Andrew:

“Is tomorrow OK?”

“Any day is OK! I can’t wait to hold you again.”

That night she tells Victor:

“I’m going to sort out a problem I have with the help of the maths teacher, Andrew Xenakis. It won’t take long.”

As she has let him have sex with her, he’s in a good mood and doesn’t think anything

of it.

In the morning she has a shower, dresses, but doesn't put any makeup or perfume on. After she drops off the children she drives to Tarooma where she's welcomed with open arms. She smiles, takes his hand and leads him into the bedroom.

"You aren't wearing perfume."

"No,"

"It's nice. I prefer your natural body scent."

They lie naked on the bed and, as he kneels over her, she implores:

"I want you inside me."

Later, while they're dressing, Wendy says:

"We'd better do some maths problems before I go so that I don't have to lie to Victor. Anyway, I need help with two of them."

When Victor gets home he finds a bubbly, happy partner who has had a shower and shampooed her hair in case there is any lingering smell of sex and Andrew. He has forgotten her mood of last week and suddenly he's reminded of it.

'Has Wendy got a lover?' he asks himself silently, and asks her:

"What did you do today?"

"Andrew helped me solve some maths problems. Look, I can show you what we did," getting her notebook.

Victor grips Wendy's arm, tightly enough to cause light bruises, and demands:

"Did you do anything else?"

Wendy stops smiling and winces with pain.

"No, we didn't do anything. I promise."

Wendy goes to bed, but Victor stays up:

"I have some work to do. I won't be long."

He gets her phone and looks through it. There are the stored numbers for the school's office and several teachers, including Andrew Xenakis. Also there are numbers for the child care centre and some friends. The call log has nothing out of the ordinary in it.

He's angry and jealous. He looks in the telephone directory, but there is no Andrew Xenakis listed, although there are phone numbers for other people called Xenakis.

"Related?" he asks himself.

Victor goes to bed, wakes up Wendy and has sex with her. She's reluctant, but she submits, imagining Andrew inside her until it is over.

'Maybe she has a lover,' Victor thinks, 'but perhaps she's just tired.'

Two weeks pass and Wendy, although she doesn't show it, pines for Andrew. He telephones her:

"I miss you. I must see you."

"I miss you too, but I haven't been able to find someone to look after the children. It'll be easier when school is back in February and they're occupied. I can have a day off and we can spend the day together."

"I can't wait until then. Can you come here this week?"

"I'll see if I can organise a day."

A few days later Wendy is in the arms of Andrew. He lies on the bed and she kneels above him, shaking her head so that her blonde hair forms a shimmering curtain around their faces, and smiles with pleasure. As she has an orgasm she proclaims:

“I love you, Andrew!”

At home, after a shower and deleting the call log on her phone, Wendy tries to hide her happiness from her children and her husband, but it is impossible to keep it secret completely. At dinner Victor’s jealousy overcomes him and he shouts:

“You are seeing another man. Stop! Or I’ll divorce you and take the children away.”

And, reaching over the table, he slaps her face in front of the children, who burst into tears and shrink back at the outburst of rage. At the threat Wendy’s mood changes instantly. She can’t be separated from her children and her love for them takes precedence over her love for Andrew.

She wants both, but she can’t have both. So she morosely decides to be honest.

“Yes, I have been with another man.”

“It’s Andrew Xenakis, isn’t it?”

“Yes. But I’ll stop seeing him, except at school where I can’t avoid him.”

“How can I tell if you are telling the truth?”

“You’ll know. ... I don’t love you. I find you boring and sex uninteresting. I should have realised that when you became an accountant and worked in a boring job. But I didn’t and I have to put up with my decision to marry you. I’ll stay with you for the sake of the children, at least until they’re grown up and leave home. They need both of us.”

“I can’t trust you,” exclaims Victor exasperated, and goes into the living room to think.

Wendy comforts her children and wipes the tears from Angela’s face, before she puts them to bed.

“Daddy isn’t angry with you. Curl up and go to sleep. It all will be better in the morning.”

She goes into the living room and sullenly asks Victor:

“What are you going to do?”

“Get your phone and ring him in my presence,” he orders.

She gets her phone and, with Victor listening, she calls Andrew, with the speaker on so that Victor can hear him:

“Andrew, its Wendy. Victor my husband knows about you, and he’s listening. I have to stop seeing you or he’ll divorce me take my children away from me, and I can’t cope with that. So I won’t see you again except at school.”

“Has he hurt you?”

“No.”

“Are you going to keep on teaching?”

“Yes, so I’ll see you at the school, but only about school work and with other people present.”

“Can I speak to Victor?”

“No. He doesn’t want to speak with you,” looking at Victor who is shaking his head.

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes. You’ll get over me and hopefully things will return to normal.”

Wendy ends the conversation and Victor tells her to hand over her phone to him. A few days ago at work he’d researched mobile phones and has come up with a way to keep her under control. And so he put an app on Wendy’s phone.

“I have put a tracker on your phone and it’ll tell me where you are at any time of the day or night. And if I find out that you have been lying and continue to see Andrew, then I *will* punish you and take the children away from you. And I want you to find a job at a different school so that you can’t see him.”

“OK. But I can’t leave the school straight away and it’ll take a few months to sort out a new job.”

I accept that, but you *will* do it.”

Victor goes into the children’s bedrooms and they aren’t asleep. As he comes over, Sam and Bruce recoil from him with a look of fear in their eyes. He sits on Sam’s bed and tells them:

“I love you and I love Mummy. I’m sorry I slapped her, but I was angry. I promise that I’ll never hit her again.”

He kisses them on their foreheads, turns out the light and gently closes the door.

In bed that night Victor hits her again, hard, in her ribs. Then he rolls over and goes to sleep while she cries silently, both from the pain of the bruise and from not seeing Andrew again.

Victor is normally a gentle man, but the jealousy that he can’t control makes him angry. He goes to work, slamming the front door of their house closed, but he can’t muster up any interest for the finances of the university. He broods at his desk and is curt when fellow workers interrupt his fantasies about Wendy being with another man.

He goes home and at the least misdemeanour he shouts at his children so that they keep away from him. He picks at his dinner, even though he likes what Wendy cooks for the family.

Afterwards he demands that she hands him her phone and he checks it, and he checks his phone to see where she has been during the day. There is nothing on both phones to suggest she has contacted Andrew, but his jealousy isn’t abated by the negative data. In bed he’s revolted by the idea of having sex with her and so, after hitting her again, he tries to go to sleep. But he’s paranoid and fantasies keep him awake until he falls asleep exhausted.

After a few days Victor calms down, but jealousy still plagues his mind and rules his behaviour. At the weekend he takes his children to a playground. At first they’re reluctant and he has to suppress his anger and smile at them. It works. It is a good day and gradually the children accept him and laugh while they’re playing.

But he’s suspicious of Wendy and he fantasises that when school classes start again

she will resume her relationship with Andrew. So he jealously watches her and checks her phone every night. He stops hitting her regularly, but when his anger boils over he shouts at her, making her cringe, and hits her that night and forces her to have sex with him.

‘He has raped me,’ thought Wendy, as she rolls over and tries to go to sleep.

Victor still loves her, or that is how he describes his feeling, and when he hits her he’s immediately remorseful, cries, puts his arms around her and says:

“I’m sorry.”

But Wendy stiffens at his touch and states, with her back to him:

“Well stop hitting me.”

But he doesn’t.

In late January Wendy drops off her children at the home of a carer, and goes to her school for a staff meeting and to prepare for when the students come back in February.

She sits away from Andrew and tries to avoid eye contact with him by looking at the pieces of paper that have been handed out by the head teacher. But one is about a change to the mathematics curriculum and Andrew is asked to speak about it. He talks lucidly and, after that, he asks:

“Wendy, as it affects you, do you have any comments?”

She looks up and their eyes meet. He smiles at her, but she doesn’t respond, thinking:

‘Victor will kill me or take the children away.’

Instead she hastily looks down and mumbles:

“It’s fine with me. I can do it.”

After the meeting, Wendy puts the papers in a folder, not noticing that the other teachers have moved away except for Andrew.

“I want to see you,” he implores. “Please find a way.”

With downcast eyes Wendy replies:

“It isn’t possible. Maybe after a while, maybe in a few months time. I don’t know.”

And, putting the folder in her bag, she leaves, goes shopping at a supermarket and goes home. It is too early to pick up the children, and she’s alone in the house. She sits at the kitchen table and cries.

In the evening, Victor checks his phone to see where she has been. He knows she has been at the school but asks her:

“Where did you go before you went home?”

“Shopping for food,” she mumbles, as her spirit is broken.

“Did you meet Xenakis, did you speak to him,” he demands.

“Shit,” she screams, “I had to speak with him! I can’t avoid him.”

And going to her bag, she flings the folder at him, yelling:

“Look! That’s what we talked about. Nothing else.”

Victor inwardly smiles and, handing her three pages, he calmly replies:

“Here is a letter I have written for your immediate resignation. Sign it and I’ll post

it to the school. And here is a job advertisement for a teacher at the local state school. I have written an application for you to sign.”

“I *will not* sign and I *will not* resign,” Wendy pronounces emphatically and coldly. “My love for my children and my love for the children I teach is greater than my love for Andrew, and vastly greater than any vestige of love for you.”

“You’ll do as your told,” Victor states placidly. “If you don’t get another job then you can stay at home and I’ll drive the children to school on my way to work.”

As depression takes over her mind, Wendy slumps in her arm chair and mutters flatly:

“I won’t sign it. And you can’t force me. You can hit me, you can degrade me, but I won’t sign.”

That night she lies on her side with her back to Victor, crosses her feet and clamps her legs together. He tries to have sex with her, attempting to part her legs, but gives up saying:

“You are my wife and it is my right to have sex with you. I’m stronger than you and next time I’ll force you, whether you like it or not.”

The next day, while Victor is at work, Wendy is busy. There is a spare mattress on Bruce’s bed and she lugs it into Angela’s room, putting it on the floor in a space she has cleared of toys. Then she finds sheets, pillows and a doona and makes up the bed before cooking the evening meal. When Victor comes home, she announces:

“From now on I’ll be sleeping in Angela’s room and not with you.”

Victor grabs her arm and shouts in a jealous rage:

“You are still seeing him, aren’t you!”

“No, I’m not,” she replies. “Let go, you are hurting me.”

He lets go, punches her in the stomach and yells:

“Liar! Liar! Liar!”

She goes to her children who are crying, puts her arms around them and reassures them:

“I’ll protect you.”

Later that evening Wendy puts the children in bed, kisses them and turns out the lights. Victor doesn’t say *good night* to them, because he’s sitting in the lounge room seething with rage. Wendy comes in and sits in an arm chair away from him. They don’t talk, but stare into space preoccupied with their thoughts and fantasies.

Wendy dreams of being with Andrew on a sunny day. They’re walking and holding hands on a beach, and listening to the sounds of waves breaking. He writes in large letters in the sand *I LOVE YOU*.

Victor also fantasises about Andrew. He’s going to his house with a cricket bat and he beaks Andrew’s legs before smashing his skull and killing him. He smiles at the thought.



# 10

DI Matthew Watson delays contacting DI Glover until the middle of January so that he, like Matthew, will have time to settle in. Unfortunately no one has forewarned Matthew of the personality of Vincent, and he finds that the telephone conversation is rather alarming:

“Hi, Vincent, I’m Matthew Watson, your counterpart next door. How are you?”

“What do you want?”

“Just to get to know you. Perhaps we can go out for lunch soon?”

“My wife provides me with lunch or I get take-aways.”

“OK,” rather nonplussed!

“There are two stabbing murders,” Matthew continues, “one in your jurisdiction and one in mine. I think it would be good to discuss them, two heads being better than one. When can I come over to you?”

“I’m busy. Anyway, mine is in hand and I don’t need any help with it. When I solve my murder and arrest him I’ll tell you, because it’ll solve your murder as well. Good bye.”

And Vincent terminates the call.

‘That went well!’ Matthew thinks, and realises that if he wants any cooperation it will have to be with one of the other detectives.

Vincent is busy because he’s at his computer going through the current cases to see which he could muscle in on and claim the credit. He has already told those under him that they must bring cases to him, using the pretext that he needs to sign off everything. The most promising is a house burglary, dealt with by Felix Oliver and Martin Campbell.

Although the house has CCTV it is surprisingly insecure. There is an alarm system, but it is turned off because the family has a golden retriever called Ralph and he keeps setting the alarms off. Also, because it is hot, a window is open, to allow a cool breeze into the room. And a door unlocked. The occupiers of the house think that the blue alarm light in the eaves and the signs telling visitors that the house is monitored is enough deterrent. So the robber has no trouble getting in and stealing two expensive wristwatches, a Rolex and a Patek Phillippe watch which were sitting on a bedside table. PC Bartholomew is first on the scene and views the CCTV that shows a hooded, gloved figure who didn’t expose his face, but he’s recognised by Bartholomew because of his lurching gait. While Bartholomew is there, Ralph follows him about and leans on him, looking for some attention, leaving golden hairs on him as well as the floors.

Bartholomew reports to Felix:

“It’s Tom Smith. I would know that limp anywhere. The family have a stupid dog

that licks you rather than barking,” brushing hairs off his trousers, “and useless as a guard dog.”

“Are you sure it’s him?” Felix asks.

And, after getting an explanation of *lurching Tom*, he gets a search warrant and Felix and Martin Campbell go with Bartholomew and his partner to the house and search it. It isn’t long before the Patek Phillippe watch is found in a shoe, but the Rolex is nowhere to be seen. Also they found a small quantity of heroin, about \$600 in cash, and a couple of used needles and syringes.

Tom’s clothes litter the floor of his bedroom and Felix, seeing that Tom’s jeans have dog hairs on them, has a bright idea. Most detective work is boring, requiring methodical attention to detail. But sometimes there is an inspiring thought, and this is one of those moments.

“Ah,” Felix smiles, “Bartholomew, tell me more about the dog in the burgled house.”

Bartholomew describes Ralph and his behaviour, and Felix makes a decision:

“OK. Put the jeans in an evidence bag, but handle them carefully by the waist band and don’t shake them.

“Then go to the house and get some dog hairs from Ralph, getting some follicles, bag them and take both bags for DNA analysis of the hairs.”

Although Tom is docile, having shot up a short time before the police arrived, Martin roughly pushes him against a wall and handcuffs him before arresting him on suspicion of burglary and dragging him out to the car.

At the interview Felix starts by announcing:

“Interview with Tom Smith. DS Felix Oliver and DC Martin Campbell present.

“Tom, you are on bail for another offence and so you’ll be remanded in custody. The Patek Phillippe watch we found at your house has a serial number that proves it was stolen from that house, and it has your finger prints on it. What do you have to say?”

“Oh man, I know nothing about it. A friend brought it to my house and I looked at it. He gave me the watch, man.”

“What’s the name of your friend?”

“I aren’t a snitch, man. I won’t dob him in.”

“What did you do with the Rolex watch?”

“Nothing, man. I didn’t do the house and I never seen it.”

“But we have CCTV that shows a man with a limp outside coming in to the property, he disappears from view for about five minutes and then reappears and leaves. And we know it’s you. Do you want to view the CCTV video?”

“No, man.”

“OK. Do you have a dog?”

Tom is surprised at this irrelevant question, but he answers:

“Nah. Me mum has a cat but.”

“In addition to the watch we found at your place,” Felix continues, “we took your

jeans, because they have dog hairs on them that match the golden retriever in the house that was burgled. We are doing a DNA analysis on the hairs which will prove that the person is you.”

“Youse shitting me, man!

“No, Tom,” replies Felix. “DNA is found in dogs as well as humans and, like humans, the DNA of dogs is unique to each dog.”

Tom makes a fist of his right hand, but with the index finger straight out, and he taps the table while stating defiantly:

“That’s bullshit, man. It isn’t me, man.”

At this point Martin, who is becoming increasingly frustrated, loses it. Standing up and leaning over, he bangs his fists on the table, slaps Tom’s face, grabs Tom’s shirt front in both hands, pulling him closer, and shouts in his face:

“Fuckin tell the truth, you little shit! Where is the other watch.”

At this both Felix and Tom cringe, Tom refuses to say anything else, and demands to see a lawyer. And Felix thinks:

‘If a senior officer saw the video of this interview, Martin will probably be seriously reprimanded and may be demoted back to a PC. Perhaps that’ll be good for him and make him change his behaviour, but I doubt it.’

Felix and Martin go to Vincent’s office and Felix tells him about the case that, in his mind, is an open and shut one. He doesn’t mention Martin’s outburst and aggression, but he hands Vincent the two recordings of the interview.

Vincent is standing by the window and, after he has been informed and is given the disks, he puts them on his desk and says:

“I’ll take over now. With me, Martin.”

“What about me?” asks Felix plaintively, “I have done most of the work. And I think we should wait and see if we can find the other watch.”

Vincent, with scorn and contempt in his voice, replies:

“You won’t find it Oliver. Smith’s sold it for drugs. And you are here to follow my orders. If you don’t like it you can get a job elsewhere.”

And with that, Vincent leaves with Martin to move Tom Smith from the interview room to a cell. Felix, now by himself, mutters out loud before leaving Vincent’s office:

“Vincent will find out about Martin soon enough, if he hasn’t already done so. But it isn’t my problem.”

Returning to his office, Vincent changes the computer file so that he’s the lead investigator, and then he looks at the recording of the interview and calls Martin in.

“You are good and don’t mess about,” he says to Martin, “unlike Oliver. But this mightn’t go down well with my superiors.”

And, in Martin’s presence, he carefully scrubs the surface of one of the disks so that it is unplayable, leaves it on his desk, and throws the other disk in his rubbish bin.

“That should solve your problem.”

“Are you married, Martin?” Vincent asks.

“No. Why?”

“Make sure you choose a woman who can cook, clean, wash, shop and doesn’t wear expensive clothes.”

“What about in bed?”

“Ah, and she must be docile. No point marrying someone who knows her own mind.”

After Martin has gone, Vincent retrieves the good disk from his rubbish bin and puts it in a drawer of his desk, thinking:

‘Now I have a hold over you, Martin.’

He telephones the DPP and gets put through to Peter Taggart.

“Open and shut robbery of some valuable watches, Taggart. I’ll send you the paper work.”

“But,” Peter replies, “its up to us to decide whether to prosecute or not. Is there a recorded interview?”

“Yes, but I tried to watch it and it’s bad so it’s no use to you. I have binned it.”

“Get it out of the bin and send it to me. I need to see it and confirm that it is unplayable. Anyway there should be another recording for the accused.”

“Stupid DS Oliver didn’t make a copy, so there’s only the one.”

And Vincent abruptly terminates the call.

Then there is a knock on his door. It the duty solicitor who has heard Tom’s account of the interview, and he states:

“DS Oliver has told me that you have taken over the case. I want the recording of the interview.”

“Stupid Oliver didn’t make a duplicate, so there’s only the one. It is unplayable and, anyway, I’ve sent it to the DPP. You can get it from them if you want it. I have reprimanded Oliver.”

The duty solicitor, who is young and has only been working for the police for a few days, doesn’t know DI Glover and accepts his statement, grumbling:

“I hope Oliver learns a lesson from it,” and goes back to his client.

Two days later Vincent gets the results of the DNA analysis of the dog hairs, and the two samples are a perfect match. So he emails the results to the DPP:

*Taggart, I had the clever idea to test the dog hairs found on Smith’s trousers with the dog at the burgled house and the DNA matches. The results are attached. DI Glover.*

Being satisfied with a good day’s work, Vincent smiles, pours himself a whisky and drinks it in one gulp before going home.

During the night a house has burnt down and the fire investigators discovered two bodies in it. After carefully picking through the debris, the fire investigators decided it was arson.

A few days later, the autopsy report finds the bodies to be a woman and a child and there are sufficient remains to show that they’d been clubbed to death. Vincent is informed and, as lead officer, he gets DC Campbell to investigate.

Martin gathers together the evidence and presents it to Vincent for his approval:

“We know the names of the two people,” Martin explains. “The woman and her child lived in the house with the father of the kid who, when I located him, I arrested on suspicion of murder. He’s in an interview room with a lawyer. The lawyer wants at least half an hour to talk to his client and he’ll tell us when he’s ready.”

“I wish that there were no lawyers,” Vincent groaned. “We’ll have to be polite and careful not to give him any ammunition he can use later.”

The interview with Vincent and Martin is unproductive because, on advice from the lawyer, the suspect answers all questions by:

“No comment.”

As there is no problem with time and only a few hours have elapsed after his arrest, he’s taken to a cell while Vincent and Martin decide what to do. As there are no other interesting links, Martin telephones the DPP and they tentatively agree to prosecute. And so the man is formally charged with murder and, as he isn’t granted bail, he’s locked up in remand for a few months until the court case.

In January there are also two thefts from cars on consecutive days. After the second theft, a police constable tells DS Felix Oliver and he asks DC Martin Campbell to look into them. And, late in the morning two days later, Martin brings a young man, Allan Hobson, into the police station, arrested on suspicion of burglary. Felix sees that the man has a bloodied and bent nose and insists on him seeing a doctor, who confirms that the suspect has a broken nose. Felix wants to hear the story of the arrest before Allan is interviewed, but Martin has seen DI Glover and Vincent insists the meeting is held in his office.

“I have been informed about the case,” Vincent tells Martin, “but I want you to tell me in your own words about how you arrested him.”

“OK. There’s a *park then ride* place for commuters to leave their vehicles and take buses to their city offices, and two people have reported to the police that their cars have been broken into and valuables stolen, a mobile phone and wallet from one car, and a purse and a camera from another.”

“How could he get away with that in a public place?” Felix asks.

“The car park is usually deserted during the day and it is between a quiet street and a bit of undeveloped bush land with a few walking tracks through it, so most of the day there’s no one around. I don’t know why people are stupid enough to leave valuables in cars, most of the time in plain sight, and leave their cars unlocked. They’re asking to be robbed.

“Having nothing urgent to look into, in the morning I took an unmarked police vehicle to the car park. But there were three workmen putting down speed bumps. Apparently three men were needed, because I watched for a while and one person put down the lengths of the speed bump, another person drilled the holes in the road surface, and the third man put in the bolts and screwed them down! It was obvious that the robber wasn’t going to show up, so I returned to the station.

Yesterday I went there again, reverse-parked my car beside a large SUV and left it unlocked with my wallet on the front passenger’s seat. I parked it so that the thief

would face the car or the street when he got the wallet and I wouldn't be seen."

"Clever," Vincent mutters, trying to hide his admiration.

"I stood in the bush and waited. About 9:30 am I saw a man in a hi vis jacket come into the car park and, starting at one end, he looked into the cars. He never walked around the bush end of the cars, just both sides. He tried a couple of doors, but apparently they were locked. After a while he saw me and, as I didn't want him to leave before he got to my car, I yelled *Have you seen a dog? I have lost my dog.* He called back *No* and I turned my back on him and yelled out *Ralph, Ralph.*"

'Clever,' Vincent thinks, 'but I'm not going to praise you too much.'

"When he was looking the other way, I crouched down behind the SUV and waited. The hi vis jacket was obvious and I could follow his progress. He came to my car and looked in the driver's side windows. Then he went round to the passenger side and opened the door. He immediately put my wallet in his pocket and, with his head in the car, opened the glove box. I moved in, handcuffed him and arrested him.

"Back at the station he emptied his pockets and the wallet was put in an evidence bag to be fingerprinted. I didn't handle it, but inside it there are my fingerprints and a folded piece of paper with my details on it, and so he couldn't claim it was his. He hasn't got a record, so he was fingerprinted and had a DNA sample taken."

"But that doesn't explain the broken nose," Felix interrupts.

"I was coming to that," Martin spits out testily. "He was facing the car when I put handcuffs on him, and he deliberately bashed his face against the car roof with enough force to break his nose. I didn't want blood on the car seat, so I stuffed a couple of tissues up his nostrils to stem the bleeding."

"Why were you alone? Felix asks. "At the moment it is your word against his."

"Two men would have looked suspicious and he probably would have left. Anyway, he deserved it, the little shit. I'm going to interrogate him. You coming, Oliver?"

The interview with Allan Hobson is short, because the first thing Allan says is:

"OK, I done the robbery, but arrest him," pointing at Martin, "cause he broke my nose."

"Well, as you have admitted it," replies Felix, "we can get you charged and bailed."

After Felix stops the recording and tells Martin to take Hobson to be charged, the solicitor says:

"I'll make a formal complaint against DC Campbell who assaulted my client. I thought that police brutality was a thing of the past, but it seems it still flourishes."

The solicitor writes out his complaint, they go to Vincent's office and Hobson's lawyer deposits the complaint on Vincent's desk.

"This is a formal complaint against Detective Constable Martin Campbell," the lawyer announces. "I want it dealt with promptly."

"I promise I'll look into it," Vincent tells him.

And when he and Felix have gone, Vincent puts the complaint in his desk drawer with the disk of the interview with Tom Smith, and thinks gleefully:

'That's good!'

Later, Vincent calls Martin back into his office and explains:

“Campbell, the lawyer has made a complaint, because he thinks you broke his client’s nose deliberately. That would be a black mark on your record and, with the interview of Tom Smith it is very likely you’ll be sacked. The best you can expect is that you’ll be demoted and very unlikely that you’ll be promoted in the future. I certainly wouldn’t want to work with someone that I couldn’t depend on.

“But even if you did, and its Hobson’s word against yours, I think it was justified. So I’ll shred the complaint and take it no further. You are lucky that you have an understanding boss.”

“Thank you, Sir,” says Martin. “I appreciate that.”

“But in future,” Vincent adds, “be careful or something will backfire on you. Now go.”

Alone, Vincent opens the computer file on the robbery and adds his name to it as the lead investigator.

Despite Martin’s protestations, when Allan Hobson is taken in front of a magistrate he’s bailed to appear in two months’ time.

A few days later it is Felix Oliver’s birthday, and at lunch time the detectives gather together in their room to celebrate with cakes, non-alcoholic drinks and a black forest birthday cake that has a hint of brandy in it. Peter Taggart is invited and turns up because, as Noah Watt has taught him, the DPP shouldn’t be seen as an enemy.

Vincent swaggers out of his office, surveys the scene and decides to join in, although he can’t abide Felix. With a drink in hand, he looks around the room and sees on one side Detective Constable Rebecca Newton.

Rebecca’s parents wanted a boy whom they could name Isaac and educate to be a famous scientist, but the ultrasound scans showed they were having a girl. They named her Rebecca because she was the wife of Isaac in the Old Testament. At school she was good at sports as well as her subjects, and she loved running and exercise and, as a result, was lean and muscular. She runs every day before breakfast. After school she trained and got a job in the police force. Being diligent and meticulous, after a number of years she saw an internal advertisement for detective constables, applied and passed. She could have been promoted, and had the ability to be a DI, but she was satisfied with her job and was happy to remain a constable until she retired.

She’s about thirty years old when DI Glover approaches her from behind, and she’s attractive. Vincent leers at her, gropes her buttocks and squeezes, whispering:

“You have a nice bum.”

Rebecca turns around to see who had abused her and, seeing Vincent leering, declares loudly with venom in her voice:

“Do that again and I’ll kick you in the balls.”

She thinks of adding “Fuck off” but, as discretion is the better part of valour, she whispers to him:

“If you have any.”

“There goes any hope of promotion, my girly,” Vincent says vindictively, and he

moves away.

Felix comes up to her and asks:

“I heard you. What did he do or say?”

“He put his hand on me. He’s a creep, but I can deal with him if anything happens again.”

# 11

Summer is unrelentingly hot, interspersed with a very few light showers. Apparently most criminals have taken holidays at the beaches because, other than petty thefts and the occasional brawl, there is nothing much to do.

Until on a Tuesday in February, when DS Oliver knocks on DI Glover's door.

"Jeez you annoy me! Go away."

"I'm sorry to bother you, Sir," replies Felix in a deferential voice, "but there has been a murder. I thought you might want to see it in situ."

"Where?"

"Richmond, Sir. It's in your territory."

"OK. You can drive me there."

DI Glover has no idea where Richmond is, or that it is an historic town on the Coal River, which is noted for its fishing. But sitting in the passenger seat of his preferred car, he can view the passing scenery as Felix is allowed to chauffeur him for the 25 minutes it takes to get to Richmond. They don't enter the town, but turn south to St Luke's Anglican church and stop in the car park off Church Street, where there is a police car and one other car.

The church has effectively closed years ago and only infrequent services are held there; the Anglican church has listed it for sale. It is a sandstone building dating from 1836 and later had a clock installed in the tower. Within it there is a small pipe organ. On one side, Church Street, there is a car park and on the other side and both ends there are trees. The only two houses nearby don't face the church.

Felix wants to look around, but he's commanded:

"Come on, show me. Where is the body. Hurry up."

Felix leads Vincent around the tower to a buttress behind it. There is an area marked off by *do not cross* tape, draped on the ground as there is no handy post to string it up, and where the local police constable stands, with head bowed, over a body with a knife protruding from it.

"Why did you bring me all the way out here just to see that?" Vincent explodes. "There'll be fingerprints on the knife and I won't have any trouble finding the culprit. But you know that I'll have to wait for the autopsy to do anything. And why is *plod* standing there, trampling down the scene and corrupting the evidence! Get him out of there!"

"Sorry," as the constable moves out of the way thinking:

"I wouldn't want to work with him!"

"Well, as you are here now, you and *plod* over there can search the scene and," sarcastically, "as you have bought a camera with you, you may as well photograph

the area and the body. I'll go back in the car. I expect *plod* can bring you back to the station after you have wasted your time at the scene. And don't bother me unless we can make an arrest."

And so DI Glover gets the car keys, storms off and, after setting the GPS, as he has no idea where he is, drives away.

Felix squats and, with gloved hands, carefully extracts the wallet from a pocket of the body's jeans. He finds, from a credit card, that the victim's name is Pasqual Martínez.

Not long after, a team of white-coated forensic investigators arrives and carefully examine and photograph the scene.

"How was he found?" Felix asks the police constable.

"A woman doing some gardening around the church," replies the constable. "I have her name and details for you," handing over a piece of paper.

"Also, a woman came into the Bridgewater station this morning, Francesca Martínez, saying that her husband is missing. If it is OK with you, I'll take her to formally identify that the body is Pasqual Martínez. I'll also tell her that she'll have to be interviewed as soon as a meeting is arranged.

"By the way, she's European and I think her English is pretty poor. But I don't think an interpreter will be needed."

Eventually an ambulance arrives for the body. As it wasn't an emergency, and the ambulances have to deal with more urgent calls, it is some time before one is allocated to the job of picking up a body. Felix has anticipated the ambulance's delay.

Felix rings PC Bartholomew and asks Bart to collect him, before checking the immediate area, starting with the parking area.

Hard, compact gravel, with a few patches of green, yielding up nothing. A flower bed, red, blue and mauve poking out from a green background, offsetting the drab colour of the church. A tap to water the plants. Then stunted, seemingly dead grass around the building, yielding up nothing. A hay field, long ago close-cropped to feed cattle and sheep in winter, a bare, monotonous expanse bounded by a simple wire fence. A hay shed, a derelict house and more close-cropped stubble.

There is no CCTV, except at the primary school, and its CCTV doesn't show the church. Because the church is on the edge of the town, there are only a few houses around it and Felix later discovers that the residents saw and heard nothing and they have no security systems, let alone CCTV.

After a fruitless search by the crime scene investigators, Felix is taken back to Hobart by Bartholomew and, during the short drive, he talks. He tells Felix about his only trip in an ambulance.

"Although I'm young, not long ago I experienced some unusual and quite severe chest pain. I went to the local medical practice and was seen instantly by a doctor whom I didn't know. She wired me up to a heart monitor, looked at the graphs that it produced, repeated the test and got new graphs, and then said *I don't think there's anything wrong with your heart. But just in case I have missed something I'm getting you*

*taken to the emergency department by ambulance.*

“The ambulance arrived without much delay, simply because there’s an ambulance station near by and one was available. The paramedics got me to walk into the ambulance and lie down, and they inserted a cannula into my arm and wired him up to the monitors in case I had a heart attack. Apparently the paramedics didn’t think anything serious was about to happen because the ambulance made the trip without sirens and observing all speed limits.

“When we arrived at the emergency department we joined the queue of other ambulances and waited until the patents in front of us had been disgorged into the emergency department and been seen by the triage nurses. After about five minutes a paramedic asked me if I could stand and walk, to which I answered *yes*. So after being decoupled from the machinery, we stood in a driveway for about twenty minutes before the paramedic told me *Sorry, we have to go. We have another job.*

“I waited, standing in the driveway, and eventually a nurse came, led me into a ward and told me to undress and get into a bed. Then another wait, punctuated by being given some inedible sandwiches and tasteless, hot, brown liquid with too much sugar in it, before another nurse told me to go! I presume that the lengthy wait ended when a doctor looked at my scans from the medical practice and decided that there was nothing wrong with me.”

When he has been driven back to the station, Felix has a sudden attack of bravery, beards the lion’s den and tells DI Glover the news.

“I told you not to bother me until you have got the murderer, Oliver,” said with naked anger, “so you sort it.”

DI Matthew Watson first hears about the murder at Richmond by a television news bulletin. The next day he telephones DI Glover:

“Hi Vincent, it’s Matthew Watson. There has been another stabbing murder on your patch. Can I speak to the officer in charge of investigations?”

“It isn’t necessary, because I’m in charge and I have it in hand. I’ll solve it without any help from you, and then in a couple of weeks you can read all the details on the computer file that I’ll create. Anyway, DS Oliver, who is doing the leg-work for me, is busy at the moment on another of my cases, so you’ll have to wait.”

Via Noah and Rosalind, Matthew has heard that Felix is very competent. So he rings Felix:

“Is it OK if you tell me about the murder, Felix? Can we meet and discuss it?”

“I would like that, Sir,” replies Felix. “It’s a bit premature as I haven’t got the forensic and autopsy reports and the wife of the murdered man hasn’t been interviewed, but it seems identical to the other two murders. Maybe over lunch next Wednesday? Is that OK?”

“Yes, fine. Given your DI’s reaction on the phone, we should probably meet in a cafe.”

Felix wholeheartedly agrees and they fix a place and time.

The autopsy report lands in Vincent email inbox on Thursday. He commands Felix

to come into his office, hands the now printed report over to him, that he has only glanced through, and tells him:

“You deal with this, if you are capable of it.”

“OK. Can you also email it to me, please?”

Which Vincent does not.

Back at the desk he shares with DC Rebecca Newton (Vincent doesn't think that Felix deserves a desk on his own) he reads the report.

The man is about 35 years old, slim and dressed in a shirt, jeans and runners. He has short-cut black hair a clean-shaven face, and is 183 cm tall. The knife has a 120 mm blade and had penetrated the heart; death between the hours of 18:00 and 24:00 would have been almost instantaneous. The knife is sharp and pointed and, because it has been hot on that night, the victim is wearing only a shirt and shorts. It would be easy for anyone to thrust the knife through the shirt, provided the blade didn't hit the rib just above it.

The blade enters the body just to the left of the sternum and is angled steeply up. The only DNA on the blade is the victim's.

Although the chest cavity is full of blood, because the knife hadn't been removed there is only a slight seepage around the wound where it coagulated. That area has been doused in sodium hypochlorite and there is no DNA where the blade fitted into the wooden handle but, anyway, a person wouldn't normally touch that area.

The knife handle has been wiped clean with sodium hypochlorite, so there are no fingerprints and no DNA.

The clothing has some fibres on it, but they're nondescript. There is no evidence of interesting DNA.

The pockets of the jeans have in them a wallet and neatly folded handkerchiefs. The wallet contains a credit card, Medicare card, about \$85 in cash and, in amongst the notes, a driver's license. The only fingerprints on them are of the victim.

“Oh, shit,” Felix exclaims to himself. “Grrrr! The driver's license! I completely forgot about his car! There was a car outside the church and it couldn't possibly be the gardener's, as she must have gone away before I looked at the scene.”

He quickly rings Francesca Martínez and asks:

“Mrs Martínez, is Pasqual's car at home?”

“No, I thought you did have it.”

As he doesn't want to inform DI Glover, who would pour invective and scorn over him and probably try to demote him, instead he contacts PC Bartholomew and they drive to Richmond together in a car from the pool; it definitely isn't DI Glover's preferred vehicle.

At St Luke's church in Richmond there is only one car in the parking area, and it is unlocked with the keys in the ignition. The keys have a tag on them on which is written Pasqual's name and phone number.

“Thank God no one has stolen it!” Felix mutters out loud.

Not wanting to incur any more of Glover's wrath, Felix contacts forensics to take

the car away and examine it. While they're waiting for a tow-truck to arrive Felix tells Bartholomew about the autopsy report and that it is, to all intents and purposes, identical to two other murders.

"I like working with you, Sergeant. You respect me and don't put me down."

After the car has been taken away, Felix arranges that Bartholomew will bring Francesca to the police station on the next day to be formally questioned.

That evening, Bartholomew rings Felix's mobile phone:

"I'm bringing Francesca to you tomorrow afternoon when she finishes work. During the conversation I found that her English is OK, so an interpreter isn't necessary.

So, as DI Glover can't be bothered, Felix decides he can handle the interview himself. After all, DI Baker has confidence in his ability.

Before Francesca arrives, Felix reads the forensic report on the car that has just been emailed to him. There is no dash-cam, but the last address in the GPS is the church. The interior has DNA and fingerprints from Martínez and, as is later confirmed, his wife. There is a mobile phone in the glove box, but it only has fingerprints and DNA from Martínez.

As a matter of courtesy, Felix asks DI Glover if he wants to lead the interview.

Vincent sits back in his chair, with his thumbs under the *real leather* belt. His suit jacket is hanging on a special coat hanger on a special stand, and he's just in an immaculately ironed shirt with its perfectly knotted silk tie.

"No. When you have something interesting then tell me. The murderer is obviously a pro, and the murder is probably drugs related. The angle of the knife is to be expected," imitating thrusting a knife into an imaginary person and, as Vincent hasn't looked at the other related cases, "the church is irrelevant, just a red herring to throw us off the scent."

'I'm good at delegating,' thinks Vincent as Felix leaves, 'that should help my promotion. And when Oliver finds something I'll take over and get the credit.'

Felix wants to be prepared by watching the DVD's of the other interviews, but that isn't possible. He can't take evidence home and DI Glover has him fully occupied with running errands and minor cases.

So he has to wing it.

Needing a partner, Felix thinks first of Detective Constable Martin Campbell, but dismisses him. Whenever they have worked together Felix found that Martin's brashness and confidence meant that sometimes he came up with statements that were simply wrong. And he was a liability in interviews, often being very aggressive and asking irrelevant questions. He was much more interested in being seen and admired than doing the necessary leg-work that was a prelude to an arrest. Felix was patient with him and tried to help him, thinking:

'Maybe I can mould Martin into something better?'

But he realises that this interview might be difficult and DC Campbell would be out of his depth.

Then he sounds out Detective Constable Rebecca Newton, who he hasn't worked

with. She willingly accepts as she doesn't mind working for a young sergeant whom she respects. But she has one proviso:

"I would prefer it if DI Glover isn't involved."

Felix is happy to agree.

Francesca Martínez is beautiful. She is tall and slender with long, jet-black hair. She has a triangular face with high cheek bones and an aquiline nose. Her jaw bones, running from her ears to her chin, are only covered by a thin layer of skin and she doesn't have any fat on her jowls. For the interview she's clad in an embellished shirt, an embellished skirt and high heel shoes that added about 10 centimetres to her height. Simply stunning.

"Recorded interview with Francesca Martínez. DS Oliver, DC Newton present.

"At the end of the interview we would like to take your fingerprints and a DNA sample. This is for elimination purposes."

"What is ... *elimination*?"

"We think you didn't murder Pasqual. Your fingerprints and DNA may prove that."

"OK."

"You are Francesca Martínez?"

"Si."

"You are the wife of Pasqual Martínez?"

"Si."

"What country are you from?"

"Espania."

"Are you an Australian citizen?"

"Pasqual, yes. Me, I am applying."

"Did Pasqual have any enemies?"

"Not that I know."

"Where did Pasqual work?"

"He fork-lift driver in warehouse."

"Do you work?"

"I work at child care centre. I have car and Pasqual have car."

"Do you have children?"

"No."

"Do you rent your house?"

"No, we own house we live in."

"Why did Pasqual go out on Monday night?"

"I not know. He sometimes did go out at night without me, but I know not where. Maybe a woman? I assume he was going to hotel to meet friends and drink. He usually go out with me."

"What hotel?"

"I not know. Maybe in Pontville?"

"Do you know any of his friends?"

“Si, I think all of them. We sometimes eat together. I very good cook.”

“After the interview, will you give us a list of the people he knew?”

“Si, of course.”

“What did you do on the weekends?”

“Saturday, Pasqual watch soccer on TV and I go to English classes, but I not very good,” flashing a smile. “Sunday we go to church and hotel for lunch. Then Pasqual watch more soccer and I practice English.”

Felix, interested, asks “Which church do you go to?”

“Ah, how do you say it, pentacost?”

“Pentecostal. The address?”

Francesca gives the address.

“You have bruises on your neck. Why?”

“Pasqual sometimes did hit me, sometimes did grab me here,” pointing to her neck. “How do you say it, it will fade.”

“Did you tell the police?”

“No, not important. And you can not do anything.”

“How long has the abuse been going on for?”

“It did start not long after we married.”

“Did you think of leaving him?”

“No. Where would I go?”

“OK. Do you or Pasqual use drugs?”

“No, never, unless prescribed by doctor.”

“You don’t know who murdered Pasqual?”

“No. I wish he hadn’t because we did love each other.”

“Despite the abuse?”

“He did not abuse me all the time. Most of the time we were happy. He is jealous because I beautiful, but I never did do anything for Pasqual to be jealous of.”

“Do you or Pasqual know Richmond?”

“Of course! Is famous town, and sometimes we go to the park there for lunch.”

There are a few more questions, but the answers don’t produce any interesting information, and so the interview is terminated and the recording turned off.

After Francesca has given a list of friends, her fingerprints and DNA sample, she leaves.

Having got Martínez’s mobile phone back from forensics, Felix telephones the numbers stored in it. Other than his wife, the foreman for whom he’d worked and take-away food shops, the few other contacts were friends of both he and his wife. Most of them have alibis for the night he was murdered, and the others were very unlikely to have killed him. Most of the names on Francesca’s list are on Pasqual’s phone. Felix and Rebecca contact the other names and draw a blank. There is nothing to suggest that there is a suspect among them.

“An appeal for witnesses?” Rebecca asks.

“No,” Felix replies, “the church is out of the way with no passing traffic, so an appeal

will be pointless. And we have knocked on doors and learned nothing. Nobody saw or heard anything.”

Felix feels duty bound to see his DI and he goes to Vincent’s office and explains:

“Sir, I think there might be an element of domestic violence in the relationship. Do you want me to take it to the domestic violence unit?”

Uncharacteristically Vincent seems to squirm in his seat although it is well padded. Not looking at Felix, he says:

“No, I’ll deal with it. Give me what you have got and stick to the murder investigation.”

Felix is a bit uncomfortable about this, but his introverted and deferential personality makes him shrug his shoulders and accept the command. After all, he has enough work on his plate already.

Vincent has no intention of contacting the domestic violence unit. He thinks that most domestic violence cases accuse men of asserting their rightful authority over their women and they should be applauded and not punished. Even if a man kills his wife it is probably justified.

Felix and Rebecca Newton meet over several lunches and discuss the three cases. That involves both of them viewing the DVD’s and reading the reports. Suddenly Felix remembers the Venn diagram drawn by DI Noah Watt.

“Rebecca, which church did Anne Preston go to?”

“We have only got the address,” and she reads it out.

“It’s the same address of the church Francesca goes to! So they’re both Pentecostals.”

Felix shuffles through the papers and finds what he’s looking for. Then he enters the address in his computer and exclaims elatedly:

“Eureka! Philippa Anderson went to a different church, but it is also Pentecostal. So the three couples are of the same religion and that is a link. Maybe it’s worth investigating. We haven’t got any other leads.”

“Perhaps,” mumbles Rebecca flatly.

“I sense that you are a bit reluctant to do anything, Rebecca. Why?”

“I think, from the interviews, that there’s a physical or sexual abuse thread. And if that is the main motivation for the murders then I would quite like to *let sleeping dogs lie*.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“I would rather not, but it has to do with abuse” as Rebecca also squirms in her seat.

“OK. I can’t pretend to empathise, because I have never experienced abuse, but I know how damaging verbal abuse can be. However we have to investigate and see where that leads us. Maybe in the end we’ll decide to shelve the cases because of not enough evidence, or something like that?”

After a while discussing the cases, they decide to visit the two Pentecostal churches on the next two Sundays and see what can be learned.

Finally, with his elbows on the table and holding his head with his hands under his

chin, Felix groans:

“Grrrr, I wish I was at the other station,” and Rebecca agrees wholeheartedly.

It is only a few days later that Francesca Martínez farewells her husband Pasqual.

As she has a job and no children, she copes with his death relatively easily. Also, although Pasqual had no death insurance, he’d worked for the same company for many years and the superannuation payout will cover all expenses with much left over.

Her relative wealth is the result of Francesca’s decisions about the funeral.

First, the obligatory newspaper advertisement read *family only*, and in the telephone calls she receives from his friends, she states:

“It will be, how do you say it, no public service.”

In fact there is no service at all, and no wake. Francesca organises a cheap coffin for direct cremation, costing a total of about \$2,500.

When she gets his ashes, and in stark contrast to what she told the police, she puts the urn on a grate in the fire place and lights a fire, pronouncing:

“May you burn in Hell Pasqual.”

Unfortunately the urn is cheap plastic and it melts, so that Pasqual’s ashes mingle with the ashes of the fire.

The house has a gravel path from the front door to the street. After the fire has cooled, Francesca uses a dust-pan and brush to gather the ashes and, as she spreads them on the path, she says:

“I and other people will tread you under foot. It what you deserve.”

Then she gathers most of the melted urn and puts it in the rubbish bin. A few pieces of melted plastic can’t be detached from the grate, and so she lays kindling and wood together with a fire-lighter:

“Another fire will burn them, and they and you will go up the chimney in acrid smoke.”

# 12

On Wednesday, DS Felix Oliver meets DI Matthew Watson in the cafe.

“It’s good to meet you, Sir.”

“Matthew, Felix, Matthew!”

“DI Noah Watt tried to get people to use his given name, Sir, but I’m more comfortable with *Sir*. Anyway, nobody can call DI Glover by his given name or the wrath of God will smite the person down!”

“OK, I’ll accept the formality. Perhaps that is the reason for my unsuccessful phone call to Vincent. Anyway, can you give me a summary of the three murders?”

Felix explains what he knows, which is a lot, and eventually adds:

“So I’m certain all three murders were committed by the same man and all three murders have a link to the Pentecostal and Anglican churches. But we have no suspects. In case it might provide leads, I and DC Rebecca Newton, with whom I have been working, will go to the Pentecostal churches and ask around. But even if we get some lead to the killer, we can’t interview him, let alone arrest him, without some evidence. But I’ll let you know either way.”

“Are you happy, working under DI Glover?”

Felix grimaces at the thought of Vincent abusing Rebecca and replies:

“That is a question I would rather not answer, Sir.”

“I ask because I may have a vacancy for a DS.”

“I would rather not move unless DC Newton comes with me.”

“Loyalty?”

“Only part loyalty. She’s very good and we work well together.”

“Maybe I can arrange that. Think about it.”

The first Sunday after their meeting, Felix Oliver and Rebecca Newton get dressed in respectable clothes and go to the northern Pentecostal church service, which is in a nice, red-brick church. Felix has checked the time of the service on the internet. They arrive separately at the church just as the service is starting at 11:30 and stay at the back. The congregation stand, there being only a few chairs for the infirm. They don’t acknowledge each other and are, to all intents and purposes, strangers.

There are more women than men, and some of the women have white gloves and carry Bibles; all the women wear skirts or frocks. When the pastor appears, most of the congregation erupts, shouting out:

“Hosanna, Lord, save us, hallelujah, Ay-men,” with the stress on the first syllable.

“If any of you have brought a phone with you, contrary to God’s commandments, turn it off *now*.”

After which, the service appears to be quite chaotic, a mixture of shouted prayers,

very loud singing with rhythmical clapping, and swaying and dancing. All is accompanied by strident piano music from an electronic keyboard.

Often one of the worshipers will yell out something and the rest of the congregation will follow that lead. As when someone screams “Amazing Grace” and everyone starts singing that Negro spiritual. Or a person will speak the first words of a well known prayer and the rest join in.

During the service the pastor appears to have some control, or at least the congregation quietens for a bit while he shouts exhortations or prayers, punctuated with frequent *Ay-mens* and *Hallelujahs*. He also goes around laying his hands on people’s heads and praying that their ailments will be healed and their sins forgiven:

“God will bless you, sister, and make you whole again.”

“Hallelujah.”

“If you follow the straight and narrow path to salvation,”

“Hallelujah.”

“And pray with me for your redemption, Lord bless this sinner and cure her of her sickness.”

“Ay-men,” the whole accompanied by loud clapping.

Occasionally someone drops prostrate on the floor and writhes, apparently in ecstasy, and another person speaks in tongues.

This apparent bedlam is punctuated by the pastor giving a short sermon which Felix understands to be more of a tirade against the sinful and how the Lord will forgive all who come to him.

Eventually the service ends, not soon enough for DC Newton, who, despite her running, has mild back pain and can’t stand still for a long time, and everyone mills about talking. Rebecca is struck by the joyousness and fervour, which contrasts with her own experiences of church services when she was a child being stultifying boring.

The congregation and the pastor move into the adjacent hall. The young separate from the older and talk about school and television programs and boy friends and girl friends, and turn on their phones. Their thumbs dance rapidly over the keyboards as they send text messages and update their internet profiles.

Some of the worshipers set up a trestle table and serve drinks and cakes, and the adults move around talking to each other.

Francesca Martínez is there and, to Felix’s and Rebecca’s surprise, Francesca performs a solo flamenco dance, clapping to the beat of imagined music and singing.

‘It seems you are glad that Pasqual is dead, despite saying you loved him,’ thinks Felix. ‘Very strange behaviour for a recently widowed woman.’

“Welcome sister,” says the pastor coming up to DC Newton, “I haven’t seen you here before.”

The pastor is a dapper man, dressed in a black suit with a white shirt and a white tie with the monogram *Jesus Saves Us*. And he has white socks and black shoes.

“I’m Rebecca.”

“Praise to the Lord! Hallelujah! That is a fine name for you to be blessed with! I’m

John Knight.”

“Do you know Mrs. Preston?”

“Ah, sister Rebecca, we don’t use surnames here, only Christian names. Point her out to me.”

“Anne,” looking around, “but she isn’t here.”

“Ah, if I know who you mean, she used to come regularly, but I haven’t seen her for a while. I heard of the terrible death of Michael, bless him Lord. He didn’t come to our meetings, but he came afterwards to pick up Anne. He would have a drink and talk to others.”

“Do all the people here come regularly?”

“No, some people like you, sister Rebecca, only come occasionally.”

“Do people regularly speak in tongues?”

“No sister. You are talking about our dear sister Linda. But only occasionally is she blessed with that gift from God. You are lucky that you heard her today.”

DC Newton doesn’t want to reveal that she’s a police officer, and so, with a “thank you, I’ll get a cup of tea,” she extricates herself, thankful that Francesca hadn’t wavered and smiled at her. After a tea and a cake, Rebecca leaves without any indication that she knows Felix Oliver.

As Felix is known to Francesca Martínez, when he meets the pastor he identifies himself:

“Hello pastor, I’m DS Felix Oliver and I would like to ask you a few questions, if I may?”

“Ah, brother Felix,” and, resting one hand on Felix’s head, “may the Lord bless you and save you from eternal damnation, Ay-men.”

Felix inwardly cringes and the pastor continues:

“I presume you are here because the deaths of Michael and Pasqual?”

“Yes. Do you have a list of names and addresses for your congregation?”

The pastor smiles and replies:

“Only a few, because we don’t use surnames here, only our Christian names. I know the details of our pianist and the ladies who help me set up and who serve the tea after the service, Jesus bless them. You are welcome to the addresses if they’re of any use to you. I’ll send them to you.”

“Thank you, that would be very helpful,” and Felix gives the pastor his card with his email address.

“In fact I don’t know the Christian names of most of my congregation and they don’t know many people by name. They’re simply *brothers* and *sisters*.”

Felix continues:

“After the service, did Michael talk to anyone other than his wife?”

“Yes. We are very friendly people and, although Michael wasn’t one of us, several people made him welcome and talked with him.”

“Did Michael talk to anyone in particular?”

“Perhaps, but I didn’t see anyone special. He did talk to young women although, to

be honest, most men talk to them as they're very beautiful. He didn't know Francesca because she joined our congregation recently. Maybe if he prayed with us he wouldn't have been so enamoured with earthly delights."

But in his private thoughts the pastor wistfully desires some women, but their voluptuous bodies were far out of reach.

"If you can point to someone I may be able to give you the Christian name of that person," John added.

"I presume you know the other Pentecostal church to the south? Are the churches related?"

"Yes I know it. And no, we aren't related even though we are of the same religion, although I'm firm friends with the pastor there."

"Do any of your members go there?"

"I don't know. Perhaps. But there's no point a brother or a sister going to both and I don't think that anyone from there has come to our meetings. Two or three times a year we have joint services and pray and sing together. However, other than the pastor I don't know anyone from that church."

"Why is the service late in the morning?"

"Ah, the Jehovah's Witnesses let us use their church for free, after their service."

Felix is a bit disappointed that nothing much is gained, so he leaves empty-handed.

On Monday, good to his word, John Knight sends Felix an email with a short list of names and addresses. They're contacted but, as expected, no one stands out, and the information is filed with the other meagre evidence.

When Felix and Rebecca meet later, they decide that, despite the negative outcome, they will continue with their plan and, on the next Sunday, they go in separate cars to the southern Pentecostal church, arriving after the meeting has started. It is in a hall, not a church.

The obvious difference with the other church is that everyone, including the pastor, wears casual clothes, the pastor mainly distinguished from the other worshipers by the fact that he stands in front of the congregation. The second difference is that there were two loud-speakers and the pastor has a microphone so that his voice dominates and echoes around the hall.

At the front, to one side, there are some chairs on one of which perches Phillippa Anderson, the chair groaning and threatening to collapse under the excessive load.

Because of the microphone, the service is more orderly than at the northern church and the pastor directed proceedings. His personality is somewhat charismatic, and his exhortations to pray and sing, accompanied by an electronic organ, whips up the same fervour from the worshipers.

Otherwise the service is much the same as in the northern church, the hymns and prayers punctuated with shouts of *Ay-men* and *Hallelujah* and accompanied by clapping and swaying. At one point a solo singer came to the front and, taking the pastor's microphone and accompanied by the organ, sings *Hosanna*, the first verse of which is:

*I see the King of Glory  
Coming on the clouds with fire  
The whole earth shakes, the whole earth shakes, yeah  
I see His love and mercy  
Washing over all our sin*

And then the congregation, with arms raised and swaying, join in to sing the chorus between the verses:

*Hosanna, Hosanna*

A few times the pastor puts his hand on a worshiper and loudly proclaims:

“Heal this sinner, Lord, and make him whole so that he will follow in the paths of righteousness until Thou shall take him by the hand and lead him into Heaven, Ay-men.”

At which point the worshiper appears to swoon and fall back into the waiting arms of those behind him and they lower him gently to the floor amidst cries of “Hallelujah.”

And at one time a woman grabs the microphone from the pastor and proclaims: “God has healed me! Hallelujah! Hosanna!”

But no one speaks in tongues.

As with the northern church, when the service has finished the congregation mingles and talks, with drinks and sandwiches provided by some of the worshipers. And, as at the other church, the young separate out, and there is sporadic laughter as one or another tells jokes, and as selfies are taken with favoured friends.

Phillippa Anderson isn't forgotten, and some people take refreshments to her and talk with her.

The pastor, now without the microphone, looks like anyone else in the hall and Felix had some trouble locating him.

“Hello pastor, I'm DS Felix Oliver and I would like to ask you a few questions, if I may?”

“May God be with you, Ay-men. I'm Patrick Trainer. What do you want to know?”

“One of your flock, James Anderson, was murdered a few months ago. You knew him?”

“You mean the husband of Phillippa? Yes I did know James. He used to sit beside Phillippa and we prayed together.”

“Do you have a list of names and addresses for your congregation?”

“We are a small congregation, because there's another, larger, *happy, clappy* church near by.”

“Isn't *happy, clappy* derogatory?”

“I don't mind. The worshipers are filled with joy and show it to Jesus.”

“We don't use family names, and we don't collect details of the people who come here. I know the addresses of a few, including Phillippa, may the Lord bless her.”

“She can't drive, because her car broke down a couple of months ago, and she can't afford to have it fixed. So some of the worshipers banded together to pick her up and

take her back home. I think they also take her to do her shopping.”

“Can I have the addresses that you do have, please?”

“Yes, I’ll send them to you.”

And Felix gives the pastor his card with his email address.

“After the service, did James talk to anyone, other than his wife?”

“Yes. He would get Phillippa a drink and a sandwich and then go and talk with others.”

“Did James talk to anyone in particular?”

“No, I don’t think so. He moved around the room and had conversations with most of the people. He would talk with people who were by themselves to make them feel at home and introduce them to other worshipers. But several members of our congregation do that.”

“I presume you know the other Pentecostal church to the north?”

“Yes, God bless them.”

“Do any of your members go there?”

“I don’t know. When I was sick about a year ago, some of my flock went there, but I don’t know anyone in particular except the pastor. ”

“Do any of their members come here?”

“Probably not. But I wouldn’t know unless they introduced themselves to me. Most of the regular worshipers I know, but some people come and go.”

“Why do you meet in a hall?”

“Ah, we are poor and can’t afford to build a church. But anywhere is good enough for God. The council lets us use this hall for a pepper-corn rent.”

During this conversation, Rebecca Newton joins a group and, as Phillippa doesn’t know her, she chats with them. But she learns nothing useful and, when it is polite, she leaves.

On the next day, Monday, Felix and Rebecca sit down to lunch.

“I got the address list this morning,” says Felix, “but there are no names or addresses in common with the northern church. We’ll contact them, but I’m not hopeful. If I’m right, whoever he was that attended both pentecostal churches, he has flown under the radar and we have got nowhere. What can you tell me?”

“Nothing. Just nothing. And as all the Anglican churches have closed,” adds Rebecca, “it is impossible to get any useful names from them. What lists they might have would be large and out of date, and so I think searching them wouldn’t be useful. Where do we go now?”

Felix groans.

“Grrrr. We don’t have any evidence pointing to anyone, therefore we don’t have any suspects. We do not know why Anglican churches were used, and we don’t know how the deceased were lured a long way from home to be murdered at them. The only thing we do know is that religion plays a very important role, but I have no idea how or why.”

After a minute’s silence while they both meditated:

“I want to ask you a question, Sergeant. Where were you on Monday night ten and a half months ago, and what did you do?”

“Why?”

“Just answer the question and all will be revealed.”

Felix suddenly understands why the question has been asked, and retorts:

“I have no idea, probably at home watching a stand-up comedy program on television. But I may have gone out for dinner as I fairly regularly go to a local Indian restaurant and sometimes go into town to a Thai restaurant. As it wasn't a special day, like an anniversary, I don't remember. So why?”

“There are about one hundred members of the two pentecostal churches, possibly more” explains Rebecca. “And we know that some people are casuals and don't turn up every week, and some people might have moved away, like Anne Preston, or they have decided to go to a different church, and some people might have come recently, like Francesca Martínez.

“So the only way to reduce the number of suspects is to ask them what they were doing months ago on a particular night and so getting alibis for some of them.

“Even if we restrict interviews to only men there are still a large number and we can't be certain that we have interviewed all of them, even if we go repeatedly to the churches and somehow find the new men that we haven't interviewed before.

“The result will inevitably be that most of them won't have a clue about a night so long ago and most won't be able to provide alibis, even if we include the wives in the interviews.

“And if we happen by chance to question the murderer, he's obviously intelligent and he'll be equally vague so that he won't stand out and just be another person without a good alibi.

“It is an impossible task.”

“I'm afraid the murderer, whoever he is, has beaten us,” a downcast Felix mutters. “I'm sorry, but unless you have some ideas, Rebecca, I just can't see any way forward.”

“Maybe DI Glover is right and he's a professional,” muses Rebecca. “But that only adds yet another factor which we can't explain as there's nothing to suggest a criminal link.”

“A meticulous serial killer more likely,” responds Felix. “It has all the hallmarks, the locations, the method, the victims, but he apparently didn't take anything away as a trophy.”

“But he did leave behind him clues in the form of the knives,” Rebecca said. “But a lot of good that has done us!”

As they were doing unpaid work in their own time, Felix and Rebecca decide to call it a day.

Although nothing that they have found out from the church visits is useful in any way whatsoever, they add the information to the existing files and simply stop working on the murders, effectively shelving them, there being other tasks that are more promising.

And, as DI Glover isn't in the slightest bit interested, the three cases are treated as unsolvable and destined to be ignored from that time forth.

Felix does think of arranging inquests into the three murders, but he decides against that action.

First, he thinks that the police inquiries have been very thorough and inquests would simply state *murdered by person or persons unknown* and add nothing useful.

Second, the courts are overloaded with other matters and any inquests wouldn't be held until at least a year had passed, which will be far too late. So not adding an unnecessary burden will be welcomed by the magistrates, and probably welcomed by the widows who may still be in mourning.

'If, later, new evidence is found then that will be the time for an inquest,' thinks Felix.

Then he rings DI Watson.

"It is as I predicted, Sir. Visiting the churches was unproductive and there are no good enough leads to follow up. So at the moment the cases remain unsolved."

"Anyway," Felix adds, "I have plenty of other work to keep me busy."

"OK," replies Matthew. "But please let me know if anything happens."

"About moving here, my sergeant has told me that he may be leaving. I think he's considering a DI post somewhere, but it isn't certain. If he does go, please apply for the job. You know about the stuff-up with appointing Noah Watt?"

"Yes, Sir," with a smile, "by accident they appointed the right person!"

"We agree on that! But in future advertisements and selection committees will be much more rigorous. So if you apply nothing will be certain, except that I'll put in a good word for you."

# 13

It is March and Detective Inspector and Beatrice Glover have settled into their new unit.

There is a second bedroom in which Vincent puts most of his exercise machines; the weight bench, rowing machine and treadmill. He puts his exercise bike in the living room in front of the television, because he uses it when watching programs. Beatrice, as a result, has to watch almost side-on in a lounge chair. It doesn't worry her too much, because only Vincent is allowed to use the remote and most of the programs he likes are sport and violence. He often watches female sport because their muscular and sweaty bodies excite him. And when he has sex with Beatrice later, he fantasises that she's a football player and ejaculates even sooner than normal.

But during the day when he's at work, Beatrice sometimes uses the remote and watches programs that interest her, carefully resetting the television to his channel and volume so that he won't know.

Not that she has much spare time. Vincent makes it clear that her role in the unequal partnership is to wash, iron, shop, cook, clean and serve him.

She thinks that she loves him and does try to make interesting meals, as well as the steak and chips that are mandatory every second dinner, but sometimes, even if he likes the food, he will push his plate away and sneer:

"This is muck!" and will go into the living room, watch sport and eat a packet of chips with a beer.

Or he will say:

"You haven't cooked the steak as I like it! You're useless."

A couple of times, on the right day, she serves a steak, which he smothers in salt, and he throws it at her and yells:

"I asked for a hamburger. Can't you get anything right? And the salt shaker is empty. You are useless, fill it!"

Every day, Beatrice dresses nicely and puts on a little makeup so that she will be attractive for Vincent. But he usually complains that she's ugly, no good in bed and he wishes that he has married someone else who was appealing and nice.

Vincent is pleased that Beatrice is separated from her parents.

One of the first things he does in Tasmania is buy her a new mobile phone, because he needs her to have an up-to-date one. From the internet he downloads some apps onto the new phone. One is a GPS tracker that sends data to his phone, and the other is an app to limit phone calls to a set number of minutes. He backs up the phone onto his computer so that if Beatrice deletes anything then he can restore it. He isn't worried about text messages, because he can read them.

He gives the phone to her and confiscates her old phone to be put in the rubbish bin in his office at work.

“You have to carry this phone everywhere that you go. I’m limiting calls to your parents to 10 minutes, and calls to other people to 5 minutes. I’ll confiscate your phone if you exceed the limits or if I have to pay extra.

“Every night you have to give me your phone so that I can check it.”

So every night after dinner, Beatrice dutifully hands over her phone to him and he checks where she has been, the phone call log and all the text messages, of which there are very few. He deletes them and hands the phone back.

Beatrice assumes everything is alright until the first time she chats too often to her parents, in multiple phone calls because of the time limit. Vincent takes her phone from her, put a password on it and hands it back.

“It’s locked and you can’t use it. If you are good I’ll unlock it in a few days. But I can still see where you have been and when, so don’t try to do anything that I won’t like.”

After a couple of days Beatrice, missing the contact with her parents, pleads with him that she’ll be good and do whatever he wants, and asks him to unlock her phone. So he removes the password and says:

“If you don’t do what I want, I’ll take it away for ever.”

As she doesn’t work and he has destroyed her credit card, Vincent gives her cash each day.

“You’ll give me the change and the receipts and I’ll check them. And if they don’t add up, or you buy anything I don’t approve of, I’ll deduct the amount from the next payment.”

When Beatrice wants to buy clothes or make-up, she has to do it on the weekend, because Vincent accompanies her and refuses to pay for anything he doesn’t like. Most of the time he takes her to opportunity shops to buy clothes because “it’s cheaper,” although he admits that when he takes her out she must be attractive and she’s allowed one or two glamorous outfits in her wardrobe.

One day, when they’re in a chemist shop, Vincent looks at the array of lipstick on display, and he buys a bright red lipstick, a colour that Beatrice never wears.

“What is that for?” Beatrice asks.

And with a smirk he replies:

“You’ll find out! And you’ll enjoy it.”

Although Vincent likes sex, he isn’t creative or adventurous. Every night he enters her, whether she’s ready or not, and less than a minute later he ejaculates, rolls off her and goes to sleep.

But when watching television and walking in shopping centres, he sometimes sees women with full lips and bright red lipstick. He’s excited by their mouths and eventually he realises that he thinks they look like horizontal, engorged labia. And so he decides to experiment.

The night after he has bought the lipstick, he gives it to Beatrice and demands she

put it on. He lies back, grabs her hair, pushed her head down and forces her to suck him off. Afterwards Beatrice goes to the toilet and he hears her vomit.

He looks contentedly at his lipstick smeared penis, smiles with satisfaction and calls out:

“I loved that, a brilliant way to get off! We’ll do that again, soon.”

When she comes back to bed, she puts on her pyjamas, curls up in a fetal position with her back to him and quietly cries herself to sleep.

It takes over a month for Vincent to break her completely. Then she becomes docile, only speaks when necessary, and her smiles are forced from a sad mind. She ceases to love him. He’s busy with work and exercise, and he sees a compliant and loving wife that he has moulded into the perfect partner.

In the middle of March, after dinner, Beatrice tells Vincent:

“I spoke with my parents today, as you know. My mother has cancer, and it is aggressive so she won’t live long. I want to see she her before she dies. So can I go and visit her for a few days? I won’t be away for long.”

Vincent wants to say “No,” but he thinks that would be a petty response and it might spark a rebellion, so he relents:

“Yes. Make sure you leave enough clean and pressed clothes for me to wear, and cook two meals and put them in the fridge for me.”

He books the air line tickets for her, the cheapest possible, going in the morning in a few days time, staying two nights and coming back in the afternoon. She has no part in the arrangements. After that, he puts a small suitcase in front her and says:

“You can take that on board as cabin luggage. Nothing else except your hand-bag. You don’t need anything else.”

The evening before she departs, Vincent gives her \$150 and puts the tickets on her phone.

“That is for the buses and trains. You can make your own way to the airport, because I’ll be at work. Go straight to your parent’s home and, when you get home, go shopping and cook me a meal.”

The next evening, he comes home from work to a dark and empty unit. Turning on the lights, he gets a bottle of beer and a meal from the fridge and puts the meal in the microwave to heat up; he knows how to work it because he uses the microwave at work. He would prefer steak and chips, but they can’t be reheated. After looking in a couple of kitchen drawers he finds a knife and fork, puts the meal on the kitchen table and sits down. It is luke warm, but it will have to do. He doesn’t bother with a glass and drinks the beer from the bottle.

He puts his mobile phone on the table and checks Beatrice’s movements. It shows her going to the airport, landing and going to her parent’s house.

“Good girl,” he mumbles.

He has liked the meal, but sends her a text message:

*The meal was shit. If the other one isn’t better I’ll put it in the rubbish bin and go out to a pub to eat.*

He leaves the dirty dish and cutlery in the sink, for Beatrice to wash when she gets back, and leaves the empty bottle on the kitchen table. He watches rugby match replays and then goes to bed, dropping his shirt on the floor, but hanging up his trousers.

The next morning he dresses in the clothes that Beatrice has prepared for him, and goes to work. He doesn't make the bed.

That evening begins as a repeat of the previous evening, although he heats the meal too much and it burns his mouth. He puts the dirty dish and cutlery in the sink with the others. He doesn't want to watch television, so he sits at the kitchen table with a bottle of beer and a packet of chips.

On the mainland, her parents have noticed the change in Beatrice. They ask her what is wrong, but she says nothing and turns the conversation to her siblings and her sick mother. For most of the two days, her parents worry about her and try to get her to tell them what is wrong. Beatrice refuses to tell them until, late in the afternoon on the second day she breaks down and sobs uncontrollably. Then she talks about her life in Tasmania and what Vincent has done to her.

"You *can't* go back to him. It isn't safe, and it might escalate into murdering you," replies her father.

"But where will I go? Where will I live? I don't have a job or any money, and Vincent says that if I leave him I'll be destitute and have to live on the streets."

Her mother implores her:

"You can stay here as long as you want, the house is big enough, and we'll look after you. And I want you home!"

They talk over dinner, but no one can eat much as all are anxious. Eventually Beatrice agrees to leave Vincent and stay with them. As she can't face talking to Vincent and wants to hide from him, her father takes her phone and tells her:

"I'll deal with it."

Vincent has drunk half of a second bottle of beer when, at eight exactly, he gets a text message from Beatrice's phone:

*I'm not coming home. I am leaving you.*

Seething with rage, Vincent screams "Fuck you," and throws the bottle at the fridge.

The bottle shatters, leaving a dent in the pristine white surface and dribbles of brown liquid flow down. At the base of the door the shards of glass are in a pool of beer froth.

He replies:

*If you don't come home immediately I will come and find you and kill you you slut. Don't try anything clever.*

He wants to get another bottle of beer from the fridge. But first he opens several cupboards until he finds a dust pan and brush and sweeps up most of the broken glass and empties it into the kitchen rubbish bin, putting the dust pan and brush into the sink. He doesn't mop up the beer and, as he's wearing shoes, the remaining glass

fragments don't worry him.

When Beatrice get the text message she cries:

"I told you Dad, he'll never let me leave."

"He has no choice," her father replies definitely, "and if he does anything I'll go with you to the police and have him arrested and charged."

"I don't want to go to the police. I don't want to be interviewed and have to tell them about the awful things he has done."

Her father thinks for a while and then states:

"Actually you have an advantage over him. If he allows you to leave and doesn't contact you again, then you needn't go to the police. But if he does anything you can threaten him with exposure for the nasty, abusive pervert that he is and he'll drummed out of the police force. Give me your phone and I'll do it."

Still shaking with anger, Vincent sits at the kitchen table, drinking beer. He telephones Beatrice to threaten her, but there is no answer. After a while he gets another text message from Beatrice's phone:

*If you come here or do anything I will write a statutory declaration and go to the police. They will arrest you for domestic violence and sexual abuse and get an AVO taken out against you. If you leave me alone I will do nothing. If you need to, you can send a text to my father's phone.*

Vincent goes into the living room, gets on his exercise bike and peddles furiously until he's exhausted. He knows, because Beatrice never lies, that she won't do anything unless he retaliates. And he knows that he can't do anything. His job is too important.

He goes to bed, but he carefully hangs up his shirt as he knows he'll have to wear it again, and gets a clean shirt from his wardrobe.

In the morning he showers and, as the shampoo bottle is empty, he washes his hair with soap. After drying himself with a dirty towel, he gets dressed and goes to work. He's surly all day and does nothing useful, except shuffle some papers around.

"I'm sick," he shouts to those that interrupt his solitude, "sort it out yourself."

As there is nothing to eat in his unit, after work he goes to a bottle shop and gets a slab of beer, a carton of 24 small bottles. He goes to McDonalds and gets a hamburger and chips from the drive-through counter. It is cold and dark in the unit. He sits, eating and drinking at the kitchen table, and checks his phone. Beatrice's phone has been turned off. He's still furious, but calmer, and watches some women's sport on the television, saying out loud:

"I'm better off without you, you moron. You can rot in Hell for all I care."

After a while, as Vincent doesn't know where anything is kept, he goes around opening doors to cupboards and drawers to see what is in them.

In the bathroom he finds another bottle of shampoo, soap, clean towels and some rolls of toilet paper. Opening a drawer he sees Beatrice's makeup and, in a fit of pique, he empties it into the rubbish bin, including the tube of bright red lipstick that he'd bought, and yells:

"Fuck you, you pig!"

In the laundry there is clothes' washing powder but, as he has no idea of how to operate the washing machine and clothes drier, it is useless knowledge. In a cupboard there are clean sheets, doona covers and pillow cases, also useless knowledge because, although years ago he'd been forced to make his bed in the police training school, he has never done that menial task since. And in the cupboard there is an ironing board and a steam iron.

"And I don't know how to iron clothes," he mumbles.

In the kitchen there are pots and pans under the hot-plates. The hot-plates have a smooth surface with symbols at the front and touch-sensitive controls. He jabs at them, but nothing happens. In a cupboard he finds an electric grill, but he doesn't know what it is for, or that Beatrice used it for his steaks. Although he looks carefully, he doesn't find any instruction manuals that would explain how to operate things.

"I don't know how to cook," he mutters out loud, "but I can go out or get take-away."

Except for his beer, the fridge contains a bottle of rancid milk and a few limp vegetables, which he leaves there and eventually they go mouldy.

The next day, Vincent showers and gets dressed, goes to work. He's in a better mood and discusses cases with the junior officers before going out and getting sandwiches for lunch. In the afternoon he's called out to a crime scene and he's glad that it is easily solved by DC Martin Campbell and he can take the credit for it.

That evening he goes straight home and orders a pizza to be delivered. When it arrives he eats it, but some of the cheese and topping drops onto his trousers. Instead of gently sponging the mark off, he rubs it with his handkerchief and rubs the grease into the material.

"No problem," he thinks, "I have a second pair."

He goes to his side of the wardrobe but doesn't find the second pair of trousers because, just before she left, Beatrice has taken them to a dry cleaners. He looks on her side, just in case they're there and, screaming, he empties it out onto the floor and tramples on the clothes:

"Damn you, you slut!"

He does the same to contents of her bedside table and then sits on the bed and, with his head in his hands and, uncharacteristically, he cries.

"Pull yourself together," he commands himself, "strong men don't cry and I'm a strong man."

The next day Felix Oliver sees Vincent Glover come in to work. It is 10 am. Vincent is wearing a crumpled shirt and there is a stain on his trousers. Vincent sees Felix looking at him and comes over, saying angrily:

"Beatrice is away visiting her parents and I have run out of ironed shirts," as he storms into his office and slams the door.

He spends some time finding a convenient dry cleaners and a clothing store. He leaves early, goes to a clothing store and buys a shirt and a pair of trousers. The trousers are a bit too short and expose too much of his socks. Then he goes to the dry

cleaners and leaves two shirts and his soiled trousers. When he gives his name, the woman serving gets his other, dry-cleaned trousers from a rack and asks:

“Are these yours?”

He collects and pays for them and goes to a hotel and orders a steak, chips and beer before going home.

On the way home he visits a supermarket and buys some large garbage bags and a couple of frozen ready-to-eat frozen meals. He puts the meals in the fridge and, out of curiosity, he opens a small door above the fridge door and discovers frozen chips, peas and sausages.

After having a bottle of beer, he puts Beatrice’s clothes and makeup into a garbage bag and puts it outside in the rubbish bin.

‘I don’t know when the rubbish is collected,’ he thinks.

Later, sitting at the kitchen table, it slowly dawns on him that he has serious problems.

And, with his head in his hands, he complains plaintively:

“I need another woman.”

# 14

It is the first Monday in April, exactly twelve months after the murder at Colebrook. Although not relevant, it is a hot evening after a very hot day when the temperature got to 32°C, about the record for Hobart in April.

Many years ago, before satellites and mobile phones, there was a telephone number that, when called, gave the time. A pleasant, but neutral voice would proclaim, for example:

“At the third stroke it will be six o’clock precisely.”

Followed by “pip ... pip ... pip” with each “pip” exactly a second apart.

Radio stations also broadcast the time signals and, in the evening loud speakers would sound “pip ... pip ... pip,” followed by an orchestra launching into the theme that preceded the seven o’clock news bulletin.

These days we have become lax and ignore the precise time. A few services are punctual, but most pay scant regard to the second’s and minute’s hands and are happy to begin and end a few minutes before or after the allotted time. And GP appointments are always at least 20 minutes late.

At exactly eight in the evening, on the third “pip,” Wendy Davis murders her husband Victor Davis.

She telephones the emergency number triple-zero:

“Emergency, do you want police, fire or ambulance?”

“Police and ambulance.”

“Why?”

“I have killed my husband.”

“Are you sure he’s dead?”

“Yes, I checked his breathing and pulse.”

“What part of Australia are you in?”

“Tasmania.”

“What suburb?”

“Bridgewater.”

“What address?” The caller gives her address.

“But please, please don’t use flashing lights or sirens, as my children are asleep.”

“What is your name?”

“Wendy Davis.”

“The police and an ambulance will be there shortly.”

“OK, I’ll wait.”

DC Rebecca Newton, who is on duty, is contacted and, as was becoming a tradition in Tasmania, arrives at the address long before the ambulance. She goes in

an unmarked car and knocks quietly on the front door. Wendy ushers her into the kitchen, limping, where Victor Davis lies on the floor with a knife protruding from him. He's wearing work clothes, a shirt with a University of Tasmania logo and neatly pressed trousers.

Rebecca confirms that he's dead and cautions Wendy, who has admitted to the killing. And then she contacts the forensic investigators to examine the scene, warning them to be very quiet.

'The same knife wound as the other three murders,' she thinks, 'but this time there's a murderess.'

"Mrs Davis, you'll have to come in and be interviewed."

"But what about my children?"

"How old are they?"

"The twins, Bruce and Sam, are nine and my daughter, Angela, is six."

"Can anyone else look after them?"

"No, I don't know of anyone."

"Surely you have some friends who could look after them?"

"We have only been here in Tasmania for a few months and not long enough to make many friends. I have a friend, but she does shift work and I can only leave Angela with her occasionally."

Rebecca is uncomfortable.

'Surely it is better if they're with their mother,' she thinks, and quickly comes to a decision.

"Do you have passports?"

"Yes," and getting them, "we went to Bali last year."

"OK, I'll take them." And looking at them adds "your passports are from New Zealand."

"Yes, I'm from Auckland. All my family are there."

Rebecca, who is uneasy, rings DS Felix Oliver:

"Sorry to bother you, Sergeant, but I'm not sure what to do. A mother, Wendy Davis, with three young children asleep, stabs her husband who dies. I don't want the children put into care tonight, so is it OK by you if we interview her tomorrow morning and then decide what to do?"

"Irregular, but I see your point," responded Felix. "Go with your gut feeling and I'll support you."

So Rebecca says to Wendy:

"Stay home tonight. And after you have got your children off to school, return here and I'll pick you up."

"I'm a teacher and the school won't like me being absent."

"Sorry, but you'll have to be formally interviewed tomorrow. And you have bruises on your neck, so you should also see a police doctor."

"OK," is all that Wendy can say.

Forensics arrive quietly, clad in white overalls and examined and photographed

the scene, before collecting fingerprints from the knife without removing it; it is an ordinary kitchen knife that has been obviously used to cut some food on the kitchen bench. Then Victor is taken away in the ambulance for an autopsy.

Early the next morning, Felix feels duty-bound to tell Vincent, so he knocks on the door of Vincent's office and, choosing his words carefully, he says:

"There has been a murder Sir, obviously a domestic violence case."

"I don't deal with domestic violence cases, so don't bother me with that crap," Vincent Glover replies sullenly. "You know that. Deal with it yourself."

"Yes, Sir," Felix says deferentially, while inwardly he's glad that he has elicited the desired response.

After living by himself for a couple of weeks, Vincent has yet to develop a routine at home, as a growing heap of clothes and bed sheets by the washing machine attest.

At nine in the morning, Wendy Davis is fingerprinted and DNA samples are taken. The fingerprints are an exact match to those on the knife. After which she's examined by a doctor and nurse who photograph and X-ray her. Afterwards she's taken into an interview room.

"Recorded interview with Wendy Davis. Present are DS Felix Oliver and DC Rebecca Newton. You have been arrested on suspicion of the murder of Victor Davis, and this interview may be used as evidence later. Do you want a solicitor present to advise you?"

"No."

"Describe what happened."

"I'd put the children in bed and I was cutting up cheese and fruit for their lunches.

"Victor came into the kitchen, closed the door, forcibly turned me around, stomped on my foot and said *you have a lover and you won't fuck me any more! I'm going to kill you.*

"He put his two hands around my neck and started strangling me," she continues. "I was choking and my only thought at that time was who would look after the children. I had the knife I'd been using in my hand and so I stabbed him."

"How far from you was Victor?"

"About thirty centimetres."

"Show us how you stabbed him. Here, use this biro as the knife."

Wendy stands up, puts the biro in her right hand, so that it extends from between her thumb and forefinger. Then she reaches behind her with her right hand and makes a sweeping motion with the biro pointing upwards.

"I don't know. Maybe my elbow was closer to my body."

Both Felix and Rebecca realise that the direction of the stab is natural and perhaps the similarity with the other three cases is just a matter of luck, a happy coincidence.

"What happened then?"

"I let go of the knife and pushed him away from me. He fell backwards, hitting his head on the kitchen table."

"Do you have a lover?"

“Recently? I used to, but only a couple of times. However Victor found out and he put a stop to it. I haven’t been with Andrew for a couple of months.”

“Has he been violent towards you in the past?”

“No. It’s only in the last couple of months that he has hit me. Because I’m a teacher he hits me in places that wouldn’t be seen. It is the first time that he has grabbed my throat or trodden on my foot.”

“Was he abusive in any other way?”

“Lately he has become controlling. He has put an app on my phone so he could see where I was and where I’d been. And he checked my phone every night in case I had deleted it.”

“Do you have your phone with you?”

“Yes, here it is.”

Felix checks it and finds the tracking app. Later he checks Victor’s phone and finds the app that links her phone to his.

“You admit to killing Victor?” Rebecca asks.

“Yes. I think the knife killed him, but I pushed him so the blow to his head might have done it. Either way I killed him.”

“Do you or Victor go to church?”

“No, we aren’t religious.”

“What did you say to your children?”

*“Daddy has died and gone to heaven, and you’ll miss him. He loved you lots. But I’m here for you, and you’ll be OK. They cried a bit and then I said you should go to school so that mummy can organise his funeral, and I took them to school.”*

“Do you teach your children?”

“No. I’m a teacher at the school Bruce and Sam attend, but they’re in a different class. Angela goes to a kindergarten.”

“What was Victor’s job?”

“He was an accountant. He worked in the finance department at the university.”

“Do you or Victor know Michael Preston?” Felix asked, not with any optimism.

“No.”

But having started down that track, “Do you or Victor know James Anderson?”

“No.”

“Or Pasqual Martínez?”

“No.”

The responses are what they expect. Later, Rebecca Newton telephones Anne Preston, Phillippa Anderson and Francesca Martínez and her questioning of them shows that Wendy is being honest and the three women don’t know her.

As Rebecca has no other questions and as Felix has nothing else to ask, he says:

“Normally at this stage we would take you to a magistrates court to be formally charged with murder. But I think that is unnecessary because I’m certain that you would be granted bail to look after your children. So I’ll allow you to go home, but on the condition that you don’t go anywhere and will be available for further interviews.

And, if you fail to oblige I'll have you put in jail."

Wendy is relieved and says "I promise not to go anywhere."

Rebecca Newton drives her home.

"How will you manage?" she asks.

"The house is almost paid off and I have a secure job, so we shall be alright," Wendy answers. "And thank you for trusting me."

"I feel sorry for you," Rebecca replies.

Fortunately, over the last few months Felix has been able to move from a table into an *office*, that he and Rebecca share. It isn't really an office, but a desk and three chairs in a corner of the room. They wait for a few days before meeting, so that they can read the autopsy, the forensic report and the doctor's assessment.

It is an unnecessary delay as the three reports simply confirm what they already know.

The only additional evidence in the autopsy and forensic report is that the DNA and fingerprints on the knife handle are Wendy's and that the knife has penetrated Victor's heart.

The doctor's report confirms physical abuse, including fractures to two ribs and some hairline breaks in Wendy's left foot that will heal themselves, but she has to wear a *moon boot* for a few weeks. In the light of the visible bruises Felix and Rebecca believe Wendy.

So Wendy has *done it*, as the English phrase would have it, and the only question was what to do next. But the delay has given them time to regularly check on Wendy, who is happily complying with their conditions.

When they meet, Felix says:

"Some time ago, Rebecca, you expressed reluctance to pursue matters of domestic violence. In this case I agree. To deprive three young children of both their mother and father is abhorrent to me. But if we do the *correct* thing and she goes to court, then that may be the outcome."

"I disagree, Sergeant," replies Rebecca. "Surely any decent counsel will get her to plead not guilty because of self defence, and I think the evidence would support such a plea."

"But a jury? There have been court cases where the evidence was weak and a not guilty verdict was appropriate, but they have found the person guilty. Do you want to risk that?"

"No. But the rules are clear. We have to go to the DPP with the evidence and leave it up to them and hope they conclude that prosecution is *not in the public interest*."

"But what would we do if we found the murderer in the other three unsolved cases?" asks Felix, "give him a medal or prosecute him?"

"I don't know," says Rebecca, shaking her head. "As detectives we can only act after a crime has been committed, and that is too late for the victims. And Wendy is a victim. She didn't kill him because she has a lover, but because he was strangling her and, from the bruises and fractures, with a lot of force. He meant business."

“But as detectives we are bound by the law and, unfortunately, need to act on the evidence, even if acting is repugnant. I agree wholeheartedly with your opinions, but what can we do?”

“OK. I’ll handle it, Rebecca. You get back to the other cases.”

Felix goes to the dining room, makes a cup of coffee and sits down, meditating:

‘I want to bury it. There are almost an infinite number of cases and documents on the computer servers, and there are warehouses full of paper-work and evidence. What is the chance of another detective happening upon this particular case? Zero. Unless he or she was looking specifically for it. So if we do nothing the case will be forgotten.

‘But Wendy would have a *Sword of Damocles* hanging over her for the rest of her life. Is it fair to subject her to that?’

Felix sighs and says to an empty room:

“OK, Felix, take a risk. I’ll lie, and I’ll tell her that the DPP has decided that prosecuting her is *not in the public interest*. Rebecca won’t be part of it, so if I’m caught out only my neck will be on the chopping block.”

‘Anyway,’ Felix thinks smiling, “she’ll probably get my job.’

As a consequence of this decision, on the following day Felix sits at his computer and brings up the file on Wendy Davis. He then commits, for a policeman, a cardinal sin and types:

*DPP: No further action (not in the public interest).*

He isn’t concerned about what God would do, but what his superiors would do if they find out that he has lied. He would be sacked, tried in a criminal court and probably jailed for a few months, if not years. And Wendy? So he crosses his fingers, silently utters a prayer, and hits the enter key.

Felix telephones Wendy Davis to set a time when he can visit her, and they both agree on six o’clock that evening.

When Felix is ushered in to the house, the three children are in the lounge room happily watching a DVD of *Shaun the Sheep*. So they sit at the kitchen table, surrounded by left-overs from dinner that Wendy hasn’t had time to clear up.

Unlike Noah Watt, Felix is a good liar and his face shows no tell-tale signs.

“I have contacted the Department of Public Prosecutions and discussed your case with them, and I pointed out that you have three young children who would have to go into foster care or be moved to New Zealand.”

Wendy starts crying, and says:

“I would rather they go to New Zealand. Although if I were in jail here then they wouldn’t be able to see me for a very long time. And I don’t know how they would cope with that. I’m not an evil or callous woman, but they may think that I am.”

“The Department of Public Prosecutions is well aware of the problems that the children would face, and their safety and life is of paramount importance, both to me and them.”

“But I killed Victor, and so I expect to be punished for that crime.”

“Perhaps you should be punished. I’m only a policeman and it’s not up to me to decide what punishment you should receive. Only the courts have that role.

“But your children shouldn’t be punished for something that you did. That would be grossly unfair. So it is a balancing act, how to judge you without judging your children.”

“Do you have children?”

Felix sighs:

“No. But I know how precious a stable family life is for children’s development. If it was up to me I know which side I would be on.”

Felix knows that telling the truth is always the best course of action, so his next statement to Wendy is carefully worded:

“On your file in the police computer system, it is written that the Department of Public Prosecutions has concluded that to prosecute you would *not be in the public interest*. That is, in the light of your family, the case against you’ll be dropped. Here are your passports.”

“What does that mean?” asks Wendy, with a glimmer of hope.

“It means that you aren’t under arrest and no action will be taken against you. Effectively it is as though you didn’t kill Victor. And, provided you don’t commit another criminal offence, in which case your file would be opened again, you are free.”

Wendy weeps with relief.

And, although not knowing what Felix has done, some sixth sense tells her to say:

“Thank you.”

DS Felix Oliver says “good bye” and is shown out of the house. He’s confident it will be the end of the matter, but crosses his fingers and silently prays his duplicity will never, ever be revealed.

After he has left, Sam comes into the kitchen, sits on his mother’s knees with his arms wrapped around her, and asks:

“Was that a police man?”

“Yes,” Wendy replied, “it was to do with Daddy’s death.”

“I want to be a detective when I grow up.”

Victor Davis was a well-paid accountant and he had a quite large superannuation account that included generous death insurance. In addition, their friends and the people he worked with would want to farewell him. So a lavish funeral was required.

Wendy goes to the first funeral parlour that she finds.

‘I expect they’re much the same, except for the cost which doesn’t matter,’ she thinks.

She chooses a very good casket and organises the services; there would be two, at the funeral parlour and at the crematorium. As she has a large house, she decides to have the wake there, and selects a caterer to provide the food and drinks. The total cost, including cards and newspaper advertisements, is a bit over \$10,000.

On the day a gratifying number of people turn up to see Victor off. The chapel is

bedecked with flowers and on the casket there is a wreath made of red roses.

Wendy wears a black dress that hides her neck, and she has a single red rose above her heart.

The lights are dimmed and gentle, quiet organ music fills the air from the loudspeakers at the front. As the chapel fills a work-mate carries a wreath to the casket and lays it with the other.

When all are seated a minister chosen by the funeral parlour stands up and says:

“Let us pray.

“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

“Let us sing together the hymn *Jerusalem. And did those feet in ancient time.*”

At the conclusion of the hymn, Wendy gets up, goes to the pulpit and speaks:

“As the attendance testifies, Victor was loved and respected. We had been married for twelve years and had three wonderful children to bless our home. Bruce, Sam and Angela aren’t with us because I decided that they’ll be grieving enough without the added burden of these services. But they’ll be at the wake, annoying the adults and stuffing their faces. (Laughter.) Victor was a loving and good father to them and they’ll miss him terribly.

“Through his diligence we have a good house to call home and he always provided for us so that we should want for nothing. He never forgot a birthday or an anniversary and his presents to us were always carefully chosen and appropriate, including breakfast in bed for the person celebrating. And once a year this was an onerous duty because we have twins. (Laughter.)

“Victor died suddenly at home. All those here will mourn his death.”

Wendy sits down and then the minister says:

“We’ll now sing Psalm 23, *The Lord is my shepherd.*”

Afterwards, Victor’s superior, a woman, goes to the pulpit, takes a piece of paper from her purse and reads from it:

“Victor was an industrious and considerate worker. He never criticised those under him, and he helped and guided them. In contrast, he would vent his frustration on me when things went wrong, but he always had suggestions, many of which were good and improved the workplace for everyone.

“Once, at a Christmas party he stepped out of line, and pinched me on the bum. (Some looks of disapproval.) However, when I turned round he said with a smile *Sorry, I was just attracting your attention*, and wished me all the best for the holiday season. He was a bit cheeky like that with all the women.

“We’ll miss him and I hope his replacement will be at least half as good as he was.”

As she sits, the minister says:

“Let us pray.

“I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. The pains

of death surrounded me. Gracious is the Lord, for You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.”

At this point, appropriately bored to death, Wendy stops listening. But the Minister drones on:

“What shall I render up to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you. Amen.

“We’ll now sing *Abide With Me* ...

“... And we shall finish with the Lord’s Prayer.”

At the end of the service some parlour staff carry the casket out to the waiting hearse. Wendy follows them out and she, and some chosen friends, get into the black cars that follow the hearse to the crematorium. There they follow the casket into a chapel and sat, hushed.

The service was very short. The celebrant started with:

“Let us pray. O God, Creator and Redeemer of all Your faithful people, grant to the soul of our faithful departed Your mercy, light and peace. Lord, we pray that those we love who have gone before us in faith may know Your forgiveness for their sins and the blessings of everlasting life in the company with the Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints in Heaven. Amen.”

Then doors open behind the casket and it slowly moves backwards and out of sight.

The mourners leave, get into the waiting cars and are driven back to the funeral parlour, where they get into their own cars and go to Wendy’s home.

The wake is a party. The caterers have provided very good food and a variety of drinks, and the muted loudspeakers broadcast the music that Victor loved. There is much laughter and a few short speeches replete with anecdotes about his life. The children, having filled their stomachs, go outside to play. Generally it is more about the living than the dear departed.

After a couple of hours, people start leaving, but the stragglers stay on for a while as the caterers clean up. Wendy has nothing to do but to put the children to bed and sit down to watch television. The many condolence cards on the mantle piece and on side tables are consigned to the rubbish bin the next day.

When the urn with Victor’s ashes is delivered by the funeral parlour she has no idea what to do with it.

‘Perhaps, one day, the children might want to spread them somewhere,’ she thinks. So she puts the urn in the back of a laundry cupboard and forgets about it.

# 15

Vincent Glover's despondency lasts for a couple weeks while he slowly adjusts to living by himself. He learns how to use the clothes washer and the other appliances, and gets into a routine whereby the chores of living, although still unpleasant, are manageable. He only washes dishes and cutlery occasionally, because he mainly eats take-away food from its containers. And he goes to work immaculately dressed, courtesy of the dry cleaners he frequents. He's still angry that Beatrice has left him. After all, when she married him, she promised to obey him, and so she's in the wrong because he has only done what all men should do.

It is early in May that he realises getting a new woman will be easy. So he's smiling when he goes and looks at young, women police constables with their lithe, muscular bodies.

'They're trained to obey orders,' he thinks, 'and they're ripe for the picking.'

So he sidles up to one good looking WPC, puts his hand on her hip and says quietly:

"I'm DI Glover, and I think you are detective material. I can help you."

"I'm Jennifer. Could I really be a detective, Sir?"

"Yes. You are intelligent."

She's flattered by his attentions and, although she's very uncomfortable when Vincent's hand caresses her buttocks, she wants to cultivate his friendship and so she smiles at him.

"You should come to my office and we can discuss your promotion," he says to her. "After lunch."

It is a command, not a question.

"I'll be out in a car."

"No problems, I'll sort it so you can come to me."

She's a bit troubled, but he's handsome and very much a superior officer.

True to his word, her sergeant tells her that he has been ordered to put someone else in the car, and so Jennifer Mullins goes to DI Glover's office. In his office, Vincent sits beside Jennifer, talking about detective work, his hand rubbing up and down her trouser-clad thigh. She likes the attention and doesn't move away, thinking:

'He's nice. And he'll help me.'

"We should talk about it more," states Vincent. "Come to my place this evening and I'll tell you how to achieve your ambitions."

'It'll be alright,' she thinks hesitantly and, with a smile replies "Yes."

Early that evening, Jennifer goes to Vincent's unit, dressed in nice clothes and with bright red lipstick. Vincent takes her into the lounge room, sits her on the sofa and

puts a pizza and two stubbies of beers on the coffee table. He sits beside her with his leg pressed up against her's and talks about detective work. She doesn't like pizza or beer, but eats and drinks some to please him.

Then Vincent puts his arms around her and mumbles:

"I like your breasts," and tries to kiss her.

She panics and tries to push Vincent away, saying:

"No, don't. It's too soon."

And she lies:

"And anyway I start my shift soon and need to go home and get changed."

He ignores her, lies on her and, with his mouth on her's, gropes for his trousers to pull them down.

She twists her head away, screams and pushes him off her so that he falls to the floor, hitting his head on the corner of the coffee table and knocking over a bottle of beer, so that it floods the pizza with foaming liquid and drips onto the carpet.

"Fuck!" he shouts, and tries to grab Jennifer as she hurriedly gets her bag and runs out of the front door and to her car.

Vincent takes his hand from his head and sees blood on it. He's furious.

The next morning Vincent finds Jennifer and whispers:

"If you know what's good for you, girly, you'll shut up about last night."

But she, trying not to cry, has already told her friend Sandra, who is also a WPC, so she just nods and gets as far away from him as she can.

Vincent, not deterred by his failure the night before, looks around and goes up to another WPC. It happens to be Sandra.

With his arm around her shoulders and his hand caressing her, he speaks to her quietly:

"I can make things happen for you, girl."

Sandra glowers at him and replies:

"Fuck off. I'm a lesbian."

"A waste of a beautiful body," Vincent sniggers. "But I can change your mind."

After her shift, Sandra goes to the Assistant Commissioner's office.

"I want to report sexual harassment and an attempted rape, Ma'am."

"Who is the perpetrator?" AC Susanne Fischer asks.

"DI Glover."

Sandra explains what has happened to her and tells the AC what Jennifer has told her.

After Sandra has left, AC Fischer summons Jennifer Mullins to her office.

"Tell me what happened between you and DI Glover."

"Only if it is off the record, Ma'am. I don't want to make it official."

Jennifer tells her story and, after the AC has heard it, she asks:

"Did you consent?"

"No, I didn't."

"Jennifer, I want you to formally, on the record, bring a charge of attempted rape.

Then we can arrest him and punish him.”

“I won’t, Ma’am” says Jennifer definitely. “It’s my fault because I shouldn’t have gone to his home.

“And if it goes to court the defence lawyers will drag me through the mud. They’ll question me about my life. How many partners I have had? Do I like sex? What was I wearing? Make-up? Were my legs bare? Was I smiling? Was there a condom in my bag? They’ll make me look like I was leading him on by wearing alluring clothes and no stockings, and wanted to have sex with him. So he’ll be found not guilty and get off scot free.

“Where will that leave me? All the other men will think I’m an easy pick-up and I’ll have to resign.”

“Sandra will make a formal complaint. You should too.”

“No, Ma’am, it is better for me not to, because then I can continue working. Being a WPC I can avoid him and maybe get a posting to a different station.”

The AC shrugs her shoulders, knowing that Jennifer couldn’t be persuaded to change her mind and responds, with resignation in her voice:

“OK. But if you change your mind come to me.”

Immediately after Jennifer leaves, the Assistant Commissioner summons DI Glover to her office. Sensing a problem, Vincent tries to put her off:

“I’m very busy at the moment, Ma’am.”

“I insist. This can’t wait.”

The only thing that Vincent can think of is that it had to do with Sandra and Jennifer and he’s well prepared.

The AC confirms his surmises:

“A complaint has been made by a WPC named Sandra accusing you of sexual harassment.”

“I’m a tactile person, Ma’am” replies Vincent. “I touch people. I didn’t mean any harm and I’ll apologise to her. I didn’t know that she’s a lesbian.”

“That is irrelevant and doesn’t justify what you did. But I’ll see if an apology is enough or if Sandra wants to take it further. I have also been told of a much more serious charge of the attempted rape of WPC Jennifer Mullins.”

“She was asking for it, Ma’am. I did nothing wrong.”

“Did she consent?”

“Yes. Two consenting adults.”

“Did she say *yes*?”

“No. But she consented by coming to my place dressed up with bare legs and skimpy clothes. After she refused to have sex with me, I let her leave. Has Jennifer made a complaint?”

“Not yet. But if she does then nothing will save you. Aren’t you married?”

Yes, Ma’am, but my wife is away looking after her mother. We have an open relationship and she wouldn’t mind me have a fling with a WPC.”

The Assistant Commissioner loathes Vincent’s attitude, but there is nothing she

can do. At the moment.

'He'll do it again, and then he won't be able to get off lightly,' she thinks.

She decides to review past cases in which Vincent Glover was involved.

Vincent goes back to his office, sits down, and thinks.

"I'll have to be very careful," he mutters to himself.

He opens his desk drawer and takes out the disk of the interview involving Martin Campbell, but leaves the solicitor's complaint about him in it. Unobserved, he puts the disk in a pocket, takes it home. He carefully scrapes off the label identifying it as a police interview, and tries to cut it up with scissors, but disks are surprisingly hard and he isn't successful. Eventually, with a lot of effort, he manages to break it into four pieces, cutting his palm, and puts the fragments in the rubbish bin to be collected and taken to the dump.

A few days later, DS Felix Oliver and DC Rebecca Newton both get emails stating that they're to be transferred, effective immediately, and will be working under DI Matthew Watson. They promptly say their farewells to the other detectives, but not DI Vincent Glover or DC Martin Campbell, pack up their belongings and go to their new station. Vincent is livid with rage.

Felix and Rebecca go to Matthew's office and Felix asks:

"How did you wrangle it, Sir?"

"I have vacancies for a DS and a DC. I went to the Assistant Commissioner and explained the situation and she agreed to have you transferred. I also discussed cases with her and she has instructed me that you'll still have control of the investigation into the church murders."

And, with a big smile, he adds "So here you are."

"Thank you, Sir. We'll enjoy working with you," replies Felix. "But the church murders won't take up much of our time, because the investigation is at a stand still and we have no idea how to proceed. It's on the back burner at the moment."

"That doesn't matter. Felix, the AC wants to meet you and I'll take you there."

"Why does she want to meet me?" Felix asks, puzzled. "Rebecca and I haven't settled in yet."

"She'll explain."

They go to the Assistant Commissioner's office, knock, go in and Felix is introduced to her.

"First Felix," Susanne Fischer tells him, "I have spoken to DI Watson and DI Baker, who you know, and both have assured me that you can be trusted."

"Thank you, Ma'am. I hope I live up to your expectations."

"In January, when you were working under DI Vincent Glover, you were involved in two cases.

In the first one, you interviewed a robbery suspect, Tom Smith, with DC Martin Campbell. About a week later I got a confidential phone call from Mr Peter Taggart of the DPP. He told me that there was only one recording of the interview because of your negligence, and he had the disk, and he strongly suspects that it'd been

deliberately made unplayable by someone. Then I contacted the duty solicitor, who was appointed after the interview, and he told me that he didn't have a recording of the interview because DI Glover told him that there was only one and it was unplayable. Your comments, Felix?"

"I copied the recording of the interview, Ma'am" states Felix adamantly. "And I'm sure both copies were OK. I took them both to DI Glover and handed them over to him as my commanding officer. I don't know what he did with them."

"What was on the disks that couldn't be seen?"

"In the interview DC Campbell became very aggressive and threatened Tom Smith. His actions were far beyond what is acceptable and could have compromised him and any court hearing.

"Also DI Glover took over the case, even though I'd done all the work. And Peter Taggart told me that the DNA analysis of dog hair was Glover's idea, but it was mine. DI Glover has a habit of adding his name as the chief investigator even though he isn't involved in the case. It's *not* sour grapes, just the facts."

"Can you get DNA from hair?" Matthew asks.

"If you have enough of it, Sir, preferably with the follicles attached. One or two hairs aren't enough, but we had lots and the analysis was successful."

"In the second case," continues AC Fischer, "DC Campbell arrested a Mr Allan Hobson for theft from cars. The suspect had a broken nose and said, on record, that DC Campbell had broken it when he arrested Allan. Last week the lawyer representing Mr Hobson contacted me and asked what action I had taken against DC Campbell. I said that I'd no knowledge of the claim, but the lawyer told me that he'd made a formal complaint at the time. Comments?"

"There are two good recordings of the interview, Ma'am, where Mr Hobson accuses DC Campbell of breaking his nose. After the interview the lawyer wrote out a complaint in my presence and we both took it to DI Glover who said he would act on it. I don't know what happened after that."

"I accept your version of events, Felix," responds the Assistant Commissioner. "Which creates a serious problem. Both cases involve DC Campbell and DI Glover and suggest that DC Campbell should at least be reprimanded and that DI Glover is corrupt. But at the moment there isn't enough evidence to proceed against them."

"Which is why, Ma'am, I and DC Rebecca Newton wanted to relocate and be under DI Watson."

"There's a third reason for wanting you to meet me. There has been complaint by a young WPC of sexual harassment against DI Glover involving inappropriate touching and snide remarks. And she told me of an attempted rape by DI Glover of another WPC. Do you know anything about those events?"

"No, Ma'am. But DI Glover touched a DC inappropriately. I can see if she wants to make a formal complaint, but I doubt it."

"Ask her, please. At the moment I have got only one complaint and DI Glover will apologise to the WPC. It isn't enough to charge him for sexual harassment, but two

complaints may be enough. I'll deal with the unjustified violence cases."

The Assistant Commissioner commands DC Campbell and DI Glover to come to her office separately.

Vincent arrives first and, suspecting something was wrong, he comes prepared and puts a piece of paper on her desk.

"What is this?" the AC asks.

"The solicitor's complaint about the behaviour of DC Martin Campbell in the interview of Allan Hobson."

"Why are you bringing it to me now, four month's too late?"

"I can explain, Ma'am. I'd a lot on at the time and my desk was covered with files and notes. I put the complaint in a drawer and went on with other, more important, work. And then I forgot about it. Sorry, Ma'am. I hope it's not too late to act on it?"

"That is my problem. Also in January, relating to the interview of Mr Tom Smith, Mr Taggart of the DPP and a duty solicitor both state that there's only one, unplayable recording of the interview and both state that you told them it was because of the negligence of DS Oliver. However, DS Oliver has told me that there were two good recordings of the interview. Explain."

"I can't, Ma'am. As far as I can recall, and remember that I'd a lot on at the time, DS Oliver only gave me one copy of the disk which was unplayable. I don't know what he did with the other copy, or if there was only one. You are welcome to search my office and my home, but you won't find the other disk and I swear I didn't see it."

"So who should I believe, you or DS Oliver?"

"I suspect DS Oliver is confusing cases. I didn't reprimand him as I'm sure it was an honest mistake."

"I personally think you destroyed evidence, but I can't prove it. However, if you do anything that is brought to my notice, or another Commissioner, then you *will* be arrested and charged.

"I have arranged a meeting in my office at 2 pm tomorrow with you and the WPC you harassed. You'll apologise to her contritely, no *ifs* or *buts*. If I don't think you are sincere I'll have you arrested for sexual harassment."

"Thank you, Ma'am," says Vincent with a solemn face, hiding the glee at having got away with it.

"Go, before I change my mind."

An hour later, DC Martin Campbell arrives at her office.

"I'll make it short," starts the AC. "There's some evidence to show that you have been violent with suspects in our care, namely Tom Smith and Allan Hobson. I use the word *care* deliberately, because I don't think you understand your duties to the people you arrest or interview."

"But, Ma'am, I was only ...," began Martin.

"Do *not* interrupt me, or I'll sack you immediately. According to our records you aren't married and live in police quarters. Is that correct and do you have a girlfriend?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I have a girlfriend but I'm dumping her."

“OK. The evidence is probably enough for you to be charged with assault, but I’ll be lenient. As of today you revert to a Police Constable and you are posted to the police station at Smithton. It is as far away from Hobart I can put you, there being no vacancies on King Island. I also know the sergeant there, Keith Miller. He’s kind, but won’t hesitate to reprimand you if needed.

“Tomorrow bring your personal possessions to the station and the duty sergeant will give you your new warrant card and diary, and the keys to a police car. After that you’ll collect a uniform, if you haven’t got your old one. At 12 noon you’ll drive the car to Smithton, hand the keys to Sergeant Miller and he’ll give you your orders. The times and movements are to be entered in your diary. Go.”

Vincent Glover getting off rankles with AC Fischer. So she contacts the DPP and speaks with Peter Taggart:

“With regard to tampering with a disk, is there enough evidence to charge DI Glover?”

“Sorry, I can’t comment because of a possible conflict of interest. But I’ll hand it over to another person and get him to look at it.”

It isn’t long before AC Fischer gets a phone call from the DPP.

“I have examined the facts and I have decided that there isn’t enough evidence to charge DI Glover, because the chain of events hasn’t been established.

“At least four people have handled the disk and any one of them could have damaged it; in order DS Oliver, DI Glover, DC Campbell, and Peter Taggart. Any one of them, even Mr Taggart, could have a motive and have wiped the disk. So a conviction is very unlikely and I won’t waste the DPP’s time and resources in a trial that will certainly lead to a *not guilty* verdict.”

At the same time, DI Matthew Watson takes the morning off to see his doctor. He has high blood pressure and the doctor wants to do some tests, so he writes out a form for a pathology company and orders a comprehensive suit of blood tests to be analysed immediately. As some of them are fasting blood tests, at 7 am the next morning, Matthew goes to the local pathology company, get his blood taken and then goes into work.

It is 11 am when Matthew tells Felix:

“I’m feeling a bit peculiar, so I’m going to go home.”

But he immediately grimaces with pain and drops to the floor.

“My heart,” he gasps.

A detective rings for an ambulance and another gets a portable defibrillator while Felix performs CPR. The paramedics arrive and take over, but they’re unable to restore a heart beat and Matthew dies. His body is taken away in the ambulance and sent to the morgue for the compulsory identification and autopsy.

“Shit!” exclaims Felix. “Who is going to tell Judy?”

Felix goes to the office of the Assistant Commissioner, knocks on the door, and tells her what has happened.

“I’ll tell Mrs Watson.”

“Sorry, but all the detectives who work with him are devastated,” Felix tells her mournfully. “He was a great boss, Ma’am.”

“OK, you can leave early. Maybe go to a pub and drown your sorrows. But before you go, get Matthew’s phone and bring it to me.”

The AC checks Matthew’s phone and rings Judy on her phone:

“Hello.”

“Mrs Watson?”

“Yes.”

“I’m Assistant Commissioner Fischer. Are you at home?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Something has happened to Matthew. I’ll visit you in about fifteen minutes.”

“Is it serious?”

“Yes, but I have to talk with you face to face.”

“OK. Is he in hospital? I have to go to him,” Judy says hopefully.

“At the moment he isn’t allowed visitors. Just wait until I talk to you.”

Judy senses that it is more serious and her face crumbles and tears fill her eyes.

“OK. Please come quickly.”

At Judy’s home Susanne has no idea what to tell her, so she’s direct:

“Matthew passed away this morning,” she says flatly.

Judy sobs.

“How will I tell the children?”

“I don’t know. But I’ll support you if you need me.”

“Can I see him?”

“Yes, you can see him. Now?”

“Yes, please.”

The Assistant Commissioner rings ahead and drives Judy to the morgue where Professor Victoria Chan is waiting, and she shows Judy the head of Matthew.

“What happened?” Judy asks.

“I don’t know yet,” Victoria replies, “but I think he had a heart attack.”

“Can I be with him?”

Victoria nods and they leave the room so that Judy can mourn alone.

Late that afternoon, Matthew’s doctor rings his phone, but there is no answer. So he rings another number and, as the few detectives still at work don’t know how to deal with it, he gets put through to Assistant Commissioner Fischer.

“Sorry to bother you, but Matthew Watson’s blood tests have come back showing several anomalies. He needs to go to the hospital immediately for a scan and more tests.”

“Unfortunately it is too late, doctor. He died this morning.”

The next day, the Assistant Commissioner calls Felix into her office.

“I know you are grieving, but this can’t wait. As from now you are promoted to Acting Detective Inspector and will assume DI Watson’s duties until a new DI is appointed.”

“I don’t want the job Ma’am. I’m happy being a DS.”

“Sorry, but you have no say in the matter, and from what I know you’ll perform the duties excellently. Unless you apply for the DI job you’ll go back to being a DS, if that’s what you want.”

“It is, Ma’am. Can I still work with DC Rebecca Newton?”

“Yes. It is up to you who you work with and how you divide the work out.”

“What about the funeral?”

“It doesn’t need to be said, you and any other people who worked with him can go to the funeral and the wake.”

The funeral is a sombre affair attended by the Assistant Commissioner, the detectives that Matthew had worked with, and some other police officers. The coffin is carried into the chapel by six police officers in full dress uniform. Judy, and the children who had been able to come, weep openly. Then the family go with the hearse to the Cornelian Bay cemetery where Matthew’s body is interred.

The wake following the funeral is a dismal gathering. Everyone is sad and grieving and, although there are many positive memories, no one could shake off the depression following a premature death.

Felix Oliver is very uncomfortable when he moves into the office that Matthew Watson had used. But the AC had insisted because it is essential that he surrounds himself with the trappings befitting a DI to ensure he’ll be respected by the other detectives. Felix mollifies himself with the thought that Matthew would be looking down on him, smiling.

# 16

It is the middle of May and Felix is surprised when, sitting in his office, he has a visit from Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer.

He stands and says:

“I’m honoured, Ma’am.”

“Sit down Felix. You don’t have to be formal with me.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

“I have a problem that you can solve. The applications for the DI position here are to close tomorrow. It has been a rushed process with very little time due to the death of DI Watson. There are only a few candidates and, unfortunately, the most likely to be appointed is DI Glover.”

“Is he really in the running?” Felix asks softly, with butterflies in his stomach.

“Yes. He’ll be given the benefit of the doubt in the accusations made against him and otherwise, on paper, he’s the obvious candidate. But there’s a solution that I much prefer, and that is if you are appointed.”

“As I have told you, Ma’am, I don’t want the job.”

“And I *don’t* want Vincent Glover.” Susanne is adamant. “You’ll be very good and I want to persuade you to apply. I’m on the selection panel and will strenuously argue that you should get the job over DI Glover.”

“Although he has much more experience?”

“Yes. And it would be much more convenient if we promoted you rather than transfer DI Glover and have to fill the position he would vacate. *Please say Yes.*”

“Alright. But I have a favour to ask in return, Ma’am. Make Rebecca Newton a sergeant by an internal promotion.”

“But that isn’t possible, Felix. She would have to study and pass the exams and the practical work.”

“Rebecca has already done that, Ma’am, and passed with flying colours. Not to be promoted, but simply because she was interested. She told me that one day she might consider a sergeant’s job if a suitable position was available, and she would definitely like to work with me.”

“OK, I can swing that. I’ll go. Shut your door, write the application and submit it *immediately.*”

Smithton is a prosperous town in the north-west of Tasmania, with almost 4,000 people and a large number of pet dogs and cats. The area is noted for its rich, red-brown soils that support thriving dairy, forestry, fishing and other industries. So Smithton, about 5 kilometres from the coast because of the Duck River delta, is host to a large food processing factory, timber mills, a butter factory, and other industries.

It has two primary schools and one secondary school, a hospital with ambulance services, a fire brigade, and several churches.

On Tuesday, after a drive of four and a half hours, PC Martin Campbell arrives in the late afternoon and finds the police station with the car's GPS. When he gets to it he meets the sergeant standing at the front door.

"PC Martin Campbell reporting for duty."

"I'm Sergeant Keith Miller, and I live behind the police station. There's a spare bedroom, because our son has flown the nest, and you can use it while you are here. I'll help you with your bags and, after a cup of tea, you can put the car in the garage."

They walk into the house and deposit his luggage in his bedroom, with the bed already made. After he'd put the police car in the garage and unpacked, Martin goes into the dining room and sees Keith laying the table while his wife is busy in the kitchen. When his wife comes into the dining room, she puts the food onto the table and Keith introduces him to Miriam, whom Martin thinks looks like his mother. She hugs him and, smiling:

"Welcome to our home. I hope you like the meal, Martin."

He shudders inwardly and his face breaks into a grimace, but it isn't seen by the other two people in the room. He finds physical touch unpleasant, except for sex and manhandling suspects.

After a dinner that was generous and tasty, they sit in the lounge room and their tortoiseshell cat jumps into Martin's lap, curls up and starts to purr. He roughly shoves it off and says:

"I don't like cats, Mrs Miller."

"Don't call me Mrs Miller, call me Miriam, please. Tell us about yourself."

"There isn't much to tell," replies Martin. "I was born in Hobart and went to a government school. I was more interested in sport than studying, but passed everything. When I was in year 12 there was a police display at the school and, as I didn't have a plan for the future, I talked to the officers and decided I would become a policeman. "

"Miriam and I have both read the letter from Assistant Commissioner Fischer about you and she also phoned me. It seems that you are a bit hot-headed."

"No. Sometimes suspects need to be controlled by force," is the aggressive reply.

Keith stands up and, in an ordering voice:

"And you should call me *Sergeant*. Now it's time for you and me to wash the dishes. Do you want to wash or dry?"

The next morning, Martin is woken by the alarm clock, dresses and goes to the kitchen, where Keith is cooking a breakfast of toast, bacon and eggs. Miriam comes in, dressed and ready to work as the pharmacist in a Smithton pharmacy. They have breakfast, Martin is ordered to wash up, a thing that he'd thought he would *never* have to do, and Miriam hugs both men before leaving. The two policemen go and open up the police station.

"Why am I here?" Martin asks testily.

“I know the Assistant Commissioner” Keith replies, “and she has posted you here because I can keep an eye on you and maybe teach you some things.”

Martin bristles and says quite aggressively:

“I have been trained and you can’t teach me anything.”

“Keep calm, Martin. We can all learn, no matter how old we are.”

“How do you know the Assistant Commissioner?”

“We trained together and we have been friends ever since. But she has more *up and go*, whereas I’m happy being in a country police station.”

“I’m *not* happy to be in the country,” and Martin is adamant.

They go to the police station, already opened up by the other constable, and Martin is shown around it. Then Keith tells him:

“There’s an on-call roster on the notice board. When you are on, in a few days’ time, during the night have your phone and radio beside your bed and your uniform ready. It’s mainly quiet, except for a few traffic accidents and you might have to break up a row at a pub. But remember, no violence. Almost always you can settle it amicably. And the cell is definitely a last resort. It’s better to drive people home than arrest them.

“Once a week someone goes to Stanley, about 20 minutes away. The police station is unmanned, but we go there for a couple of hours to handle routine matters. So your task for today is to drive there and man the station. Afterwards, walk around the town and introduce yourself to the people you meet. Everyone will be friendly and want to meet you. You’ll be the centre of gossip for a few days until they get used to seeing you. But don’t swagger! If you do anything wrong you’ll be talked about and people won’t trust you. It’s very different from a city like Hobart.”

Martin doesn’t like Keith and Miriam and so he thinks it will be a really nice day doing nothing, although it would be icing on the cake if he’d arrested someone, and he’s cheerful during the short drive on a good road.

Stanley, a tiny town of less than 600 people, is on a small promontory about 7 kilometres from the main highway; it is the most northerly town in the state. The *Nut*, an ancient and steep volcanic plug, is a tourist attraction, and it has a chair lift, hiking trails and panoramic views.

When Martin gets there he finds the small police station. After sitting for two hours behind the counter with nothing to do, PC Martin Campbell sets out to explore the town and create a map of it in his mind. He tries to swagger and wanders about with his thumbs under his belt. What surprises Martin is that most of the people he meets smile and say *hello*, in stark contrast to Hobart where people are suspicious and wary of the police. He doesn’t respond because he honestly doesn’t care what people think of him. He finds that all of Stanley is less than a kilometre from the police station, so he has to slow down and amble along the streets so that he can avoid going back to Smithton until later. He stops to look at the shops and buildings and he has lunch of coffee and a pie at a cafe. Being a tourist town and being almost winter, there are few visitors and the local people dominate.

Over the next week, Martin settles in to a routine. But he's bored and craves for some excitement. He'd heard that crystal meth, or *ice* to give it its street name, was common, but he never comes across it, despite holding up a couple of likely users and searching them roughly; which doesn't go down well with his sergeant. And the few times when there is over excitement in a hotel, Keith insists on coming with him to break up the fight and Martin doesn't have the opportunity to show who is the boss in Smithton.

One morning, the frustration of being made to appear nice and kind overcomes Martin, and he spits out to Sergeant Miller:

"There's nothing to do in this god forsaken town, and Stanley is a shit-hole. How can you put up with it?"

"It's easy. Make friends with the locals and hope nothing happens to spoil the peace."

"I want five minutes with the lawyer that took his complaint to the AC and I'll make him regret it."

"I don't think it was him, I think it was a detective that reported you."

At that, Martin explodes.

"The fucking little shit!" he yells. "I need to use the phone."

Martin rings Hobart and demands to be put through to AC Fischer. His request is refused and he slams the phone down.

"Do you know AC Fischer's direct number?" Martin asks Keith Miller.

"Yes, but why?"

"I have evidence of a corrupt DI and I want to give it to her. He destroyed evidence in my presence."

After explaining, Keith gives Martin her private phone number.

"AC Fischer."

"It's Martin Campbell, Ma'am. I have evidence that DI Vincent Glover is corrupt."

"It had better be good. Are you willing to be formally interviewed?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"OK, I'll set up a recorded interview tomorrow afternoon. Put on Sergeant Miller."

Susanne wants someone not involved to be at the interview and Keith is her first choice, and he agrees to go to Hobart with Martin.

The next day, after sorting out the Smithton duty roster, Martin and Keith drive to Hobart and are taken straight into the interview room.

"Recorded interview with PC Martin Campbell, AC Susanne Fischer and PS Keith Miller present."

"OK Martin, tell us succinctly what evidence you have."

"Provided you don't use what I tell you against me."

"OK, you won't face any charges from what you tell us."

"In January I and DS Felix Oliver interviewed Tom Smith on a robbery and I admit that I was very aggressive with the suspect, but he deserved it."

"After the interview I went with DS Oliver to DI Glover's office and DS Oliver

handed two recordings of the interview to DI Glover. As far as I'm aware they were both good. Later, DI Glover called me into his office and told me that he'd watched the video and it would get me into a lot of trouble. And, in my presence he threw one disk in the rubbish bin, scrubbed the other disk to make it unplayable and sent it to the DPP."

"You are certain?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Do you know what happened to the other disk?"

"DI Glover probably kept it to blackmail me. There's another matter."

"Go on."

"First, a question for you, Ma'am. You busted me down to a PC because of a lawyer's complaint. Who gave you that complaint?"

"DI Glover."

"OK. Also in January, I arrested Allan Hobson. He accused me of breaking his nose, and his lawyer gave DI Glover a complaint against me. DI Glover called me into his office and said that the complaint would be bad for me. Then he told me that he would shred it and that would be the end of the matter. Obviously he didn't shred it and used it against me."

"Did you break Hobson's nose?"

"That's irrelevant."

"Are you willing to testify in court?"

"Yes."

After the interview, AC Fischer rings Felix Oliver and finds out that he also will be willing to testify in court.

"I want to interview Vincent Glover with another police officer present. Can you suggest someone?"

"You could use PC Bart Bartholomew. He's good, but he might be too junior."

"No, that doesn't matter. I'll be guided by you."

Susanne remembers that Glover is married and, on an off chance, she looks up the personnel records and rings Beatrice's phone number. It is disconnected. So she rings her parents, the number being in the records in case of an emergency. Her mother answers.

"I'm Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer. Is Beatrice Glover there?"

"Yes, I'll get her."

Beatrice comes to the phone and Susanne asks:

"Has Vincent Glover ever been violent towards you?"

"No."

"Has he sexually abused you?"

At that Beatrice sobs loudly.

"I'm sorry to bring it up. Are you willing to make a formal complaint?"

"I said to Vincent that if he left me alone I wouldn't take it any further. So, no."

"Even if other women have made complaints about him? And they have."

“In that case, perhaps, but I don’t want to see him and I don’t want to give evidence in a court case.”

“We can do a video interview with you, only women involved. It won’t come to court for many months and we’ll see if the judge allows video evidence, but I can’t guarantee that you won’t have to answer questions.”

“Maybe that will be OK, but I don’t want to.”

“Can you tell me what happened?”

“He made me fellate him.”

“So?”

“I didn’t want to and he forced me.”

“Will you do a video interview, on the record?”

“Perhaps, if it stops him doing it to other women. But I don’t want to. I want it to go away for ever.”

At that point Susanne Fischer contacts Vincent Glover and orders him to attend an interview with her. He smiles and happily goes, thinking:

‘She has noticed *me* and wants *me*. I can use the contact to my advantage.’

But when he arrives he sees AC Fischer and a police constable sitting at the table and two empty chairs. So he sits, splays his legs apart, smiles, and asks:

“What’s this meeting about?”

“This is a recorded interview with AC Susanne Fischer, PC Bart Bartholomew and DI Vincent Glover,” states AC Fischer.

“What has PC *Plod* done?” asks Vincent, grinning and looking at Bartholomew.

“Nothing,” replies Susanne. “I’m arresting you, Vincent Glover, on a charge of suppressing evidence and on suspicion of sexual harassment and sexual abuse.”

Vincent stands up, leans over the table and announces calmly in a threatening voice:

“No you’re not. You haven’t got any evidence and the WPC had it coming to her. If you don’t mind, I’ll go back to work.”

“*Sit ... down!*” Susanne commands loudly.

Vincent sits and, with his thumbs in his belt, smiles and remarks casually:

“You have nothing on me.”

“Oh, but we do,” says Susanne smiling back at him. “I have contacted the DPP and they’ll prepare a case against you of suppressing evidence. On the basis of that charge you’ll be bailed and suspended from your duties as a police officer on full pay until the case is heard. Your lawyer, or a duty solicitor, will be given the details of the evidence against you.”

“What evidence?” Vincent asks sullenly.

“The lawyer will explain. And your bail conditions will include that you won’t be allowed to go interstate or out of Australia, and you aren’t allowed to go near any police station except to report in once a week. If you do anything then you’ll be put on remand and held in the remand centre until the court case.”

“Fuck you,” Vincent sneers, gesturing with his finger.

“Now,” continues Susanne, ignoring the gesture, “I’ll be interviewing you again about the matter of harassment and abuse. This interview is terminated and PC Bartholomew and I’ll take you to be formally charged.”

After Vincent Glover is bailed, he goes home, gets a beer from the fridge and paces up and down the kitchen drinking it, seething with rage. He goes to the bedroom, passing the bathroom door and, yelling “Fuck you Beatrice!” he punches a hole in it and shakes his hand with the pain. He kicks off his shoes and takes off his trousers. Instead of hanging them up he yells:

“Fuck you Oliver! Fuck you, Campbell! Fuck you Fischer!” as he vigorously rips open the seams and throws the useless remnants onto the floor. He puts on a pair of jeans, goes to the kitchen and drinks and eats chips. He’s drunk when he throws himself on the bed and goes to sleep in his clothes.

It is the last day of May, and Felix is preoccupied with work and has forgotten about his meeting with Assistant Commissioner Susanne Fischer. Until an email arrives telling him that he has got the position of Detective Inspector. He’s ambivalent and both smiles and frowns at the news. There is a knock on his door and Rebecca Newton enters:

“I have got an email and I have been made a sergeant, but I didn’t apply for any positions.” She’s bewildered.

“Sorry,” Felix says, blushing, “I forgot to tell you about that. It goes with me being made a DI officially. So we’ll still be working together.”

“How did you swing it?”

“I didn’t, the AC wanted it. Except for the pay, it doesn’t make any difference.”

And, with a smile Felix adds:

“And you’ll be able to order constables around!”

# 17

It is early June and, as the funeral of Matthew Watson was a few weeks ago, the lives of the detectives have resumed their normal routine.

But Detective Inspector Felix Oliver still is uncomfortable with his new rank.

“It’s been only a few weeks, and you’ll get used to it,” consoles Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton, “like I’ll eventually get used to being a sergeant.”

Felix and Rebecca Newton haven’t thought much about the stabbing murders, because there isn’t much to think about. Until on one day, when Felix and Rebecca were having their morning break.

“I had a thought last night, Sir,” remarks Rebecca, interrupting a momentary silence. “It has probably been done, but has anyone asked the three wives who they told of their abuse?”

Felix puts his head in his hands, groans and exclaims:

“Grrr, shit! I don’t think anyone has. I should have thought of it. Really I’m not cut out to be a detective. I just don’t have the brains necessary for the job.”

“I definitely wouldn’t say that,” Rebecca replies. “I heard about your case and the dog’s DNA, which was just before I joined you. That was brilliant work. Anyway, finding out about the people who’d been told of abuse will probably lead nowhere.”

“It’s not the first mistake.”

But Felix doesn’t tell her that he forgot about Pasqual’s car.

“We should ask the wives who they told and question the people to see if that leads anywhere.”

“I can do that,” Rebecca responds, “and get you to interview them.”

Rebecca Newton has an ordered mind, and so she decides to telephone the wives in chronological order. So she looks at the files, gets Anne Preston’s phone number and rings it.

“Hello.”

“Mrs Anne Preston?”

“Yes. Who are you?”

“I’m Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton. My superior officer, Detective Inspector Felix Oliver, wants to ask you a couple of questions about the murder of your husband Michael.”

“I don’t want that dredged up again. It’s over a year now, so I want to let sleeping dogs lie.”

“It won’t take long. Can you come in at a time that is convenient for you?”

“No. I’m in Queenstown,” exasperated, “I said that to another woman police officer over a year ago.”

“Is it a permanent move?”

“After Mike had been cremated, there was nothing for me in Hobart. And, as the house we lived in was rented, I decided to go back to Queenstown, where rents are cheaper and my parents live. So I packed up and moved back to where I was born. At first the children refused to move, because they’d friends that they didn’t want to break up with, but I was adamant and forced them to move.

“We lived for a few days with my parents while I sorted out rental accommodation for us and organised the school. Then I got a job at the same hotel that I’d worked in before.”

“OK, when can DI Oliver ring you?”

“I’m at work. So he can ring at one.”

And Anne ends the call.

Rebecca tells Felix of her conversation and, instead of going out for lunch, he stays in and rings Anne, with Rebecca listening.

“This is DI Felix Oliver. I’m recording this phone conversation. Can I ask you a few questions?”

“Yes,” Anne replied, “but it’s a waste of time.”

“I know it is a long time ago, but can you think of anyone that you told of Michael’s abuse of you?”

“I told some policeman at the time that I wasn’t abused.”

“OK, roughness then?”

“I don’t know.”

“Anyone at the church you went to?”

“Probably not. I can’t remember.”

“Can you think of anyone?”

“No. Can I go now?”

“Yes,” and Felix terminates the recording.

“No luck there, but maybe the other two can tell us something,” Rebecca says brightly.

Next, Rebecca finds Phillippa Anderson’s phone number and rings her.

“Hello.”

“Mrs Phillippa Anderson?”

“Yes.”

“I’m Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton. My superior officer, Detective Inspector Felix Oliver, wants to ask you a couple of questions about the murder of your husband James.”

“OK.”

“Can you come in at a time that is convenient for you?”

“My car has broken down, you know. Anyway, driving and parking in Hobart is a nightmare, so I can’t come in.”

“We’ll pick you up and take you home again, so that’s no problem.”

They arrange a suitable time on Wednesday, when Phillippa has finished her

cleaning job, and she's delivered to the interview room where Felix and Rebecca are waiting.

"This interview is being recorded, Mrs Anderson," states Felix. "I have one question. Can you think of anyone that you told of James's abuse of you?"

"I don't think I told anyone."

"Girlfriends?"

"I might have mentioned it to a friend. But I was embarrassed and ashamed and I wanted it to be kept secret, you know. So if I said anything it was a vague remark, you know."

"Anyone at the church you go to?"

"The pastor probably guessed, you know, that something was wrong. I might have told someone else."

"The name?"

"I can't remember."

"Anyone else outside the church?"

"No. As I said, I was embarrassed, you know, and I didn't want me to be gossiped about. I want to forget it and now you are bringing it all up again. I don't like that."

"OK, I'll leave it there," says Felix and, as an afterthought, adds:

"How do you get about without a car? Must be difficult. Can we help in any way?"

"A couple of people at the church drive me sometimes, you know. And I shop for food at the local store instead of the supermarket. It's a bit more expensive, you know. And sometimes I get a taxi. I think the pastor is organising to get my car repaired. And thanks, but I don't need help from you."

"OK. I'll get someone to drive you home. Can you organise that Rebecca?"

When Phillippa has left, Rebecca Newton contacts Francesca Martínez.

"Mrs Francesca Martínez?"

"Si."

"I'm Detective Sergeant Rebecca Newton. My superior officer, Detective Inspector Felix Oliver, wants to ask you a couple of questions about the murder of your husband Pasqual."

"OK."

"Can you come in at a time that is convenient for you?"

"Si. After work I can come."

They arrange a date and time and Francesca arrives promptly and is shown into an interview room.

"You both did interview me after Pasqual die," remarks Francesca.

"Yes," replies Felix Oliver. "How are you?"

"I good. No problems. But I might go back to Espania if I cannot be Australian."

"This interview is being recorded. I have one question. Can you think of anyone that you told of Pasqual's abuse of you?"

"No one where I work," replies Francesca. "And I not make many friends to tell."

"Anyone at the church you attend?"

Francesca is a bit naive and doesn't think before speaking. But, anyway, she's sure Pasqual was murdered by a man. So she says:

"Ah, *si*. I tell Deborah when she came for dinner."

"Dinner?"

"*Si*. Sorry, I should say *yes* not *si*. We meet Deborah at church and I did invite her home for dinner."

"Do you know her surname?"

"Sorry. What is surname?"

"The family name. Your surname is Martínez."

"Ah, I understand. No, I don't know her surname. We only meet a few times."

"Do you know her address?"

With a big smile Francesca proffers up what may be gold:

"Yes! Pasqual and I invited to Deborah's house for dinner."

"Can you give it to me?"

"I not have it. But when I get home I will telephone you and give it to you."

"Did you tell anyone else of your abuse?"

"No, I not think so. I will think and if someone else I telephone you."

After Francesca has left, Felix smiles contentedly:

"At last a lead that we can look into."

"But a woman? Rebecca asks. "Surely that is unlikely? We, and all the detectives before us, have always thought that a man committed the murders."

"It is quite possible that a woman murdered the three men, as we have been shown by Wendy Davis who stabbed her husband, and Deborah ticks almost all the boxes. Most important is the link to the Pentecostal church and she attends the same church as Francesca and Anne Preston. OK, we haven't got a link to the other church, but this is the only lead we have got. I don't think she committed the murders, but she may have seen or heard something that will point to the culprit."

Good to her word, Francesca contacts Rebecca and gives her Deborah's address.

In the evening, Felix Oliver and Rebecca Newton drive to the address and ring the door bell.

It is answered by a young woman with a baby on her hip and a blouse stained with milk.

"Yes?"

"Are you Deborah?" Felix asks.

"No I'm Petra."

"Does Deborah live here?"

"No, only me and my partner Malcolm. We rent this house, so Deborah might have been the previous tenant."

"Who is the estate agent?"

Petra is a bit unsure, so she replies:

"Why do you ask?"

"Sorry, I should have told you. We are police officers. I'm DI Oliver and this is DS

Newton.”

“Is Deborah in trouble.”

“No, we want to contact her and ask her some questions, because she might have some information about a crime in February.”

“OK, I’ll get the name,” and Petra goes, comes back and hands Felix the address of the estate agent.

“Thank you,” and Felix and Rebecca leave.

So it is Tuesday morning at the start of the second week of June that Felix Oliver and Rebecca Newton and drive to the estate agent and are ushered into an office.

“I’m DI Oliver and this is DS Newton. We are investigating a crime and we want to interview a previous tenant in a property you manage.”

The estate agent looks at the address and gets the relevant file on her computer.

“There must be some mistake,” she says, puzzled, “Petra and Malcolm are the first tenants that we’ve had in the property.”

“Does the name Deborah mean anything to you?”

“Yes, the property is owned by Deborah McPherson and we are agents for her.”

“Can you give me her address?”

“She’s travelling in a mobile home. We put the rent in her bank account and when we need to communicate with her we use the phone or email.”

“OK. Can you give us her phone number and email address so that we can contact her?”

“I’m not sure that I should.”

“As far as we know,” Felix replies, “Deborah hasn’t committed a crime and we just want to talk with her to see if she can tell us something useful and follow that up.”

“Alright,” and the estate agent writes down the information and hands it to Felix.

“Thank you. Oh, when was the house let?”

The estate agent looks at her file and states:

“Tuesday in February,” and gives Felix the date.

Later, in his office with Rebecca present, Felix voices what both are thinking:

“The date when Deborah McPherson left was the day after the murder at Richmond. That must surely be suspicious. But we need to tread carefully as that is our only hard link with her.”

“I looked her up, but she doesn’t have a record so there are no fingerprints or DNA on record,” adds Rebecca, “and she isn’t on social media. I contacted Phillippa Anderson and the pastor, but they don’t remember anyone by the name of Deborah and Phillippa is sure that she has never met her. So there may not be a link to the southern Pentecostal church.”

“OK,” says Felix, “so it is probably not McPherson. But I’m going to telephone her anyway, and see if we can set up an appointment for an interview. I hope she’s not far away.”

Felix puts the loud speaker on and rings the number.

“Hello.”

“Is that Deborah McPherson?”

“Yes. Who are you?”

“I’m Detective Inspector Felix Oliver.”

“How can I help you.”

“I’m investigating a crime that happened in February and I think that you might be able to help us.”

After a slight pause, Deborah says:

“I doubt if I can, but I’m happy to help. But now isn’t convenient, because I’m about to go out. Can you ring me back later?”

“Where are you?”

“In Broken Hill. How did you get my phone number?”

“From the estate agent you use to let your house. When would be convenient to ring you again?”

“This afternoon about four?”

“I’ll ring back then. Good bye.”

Felix and Rebecca use the time to go to Felix’s boss, the Assistant Commissioner, and they tell her what has happened.

After explaining the situation, Felix states:

“I want to formally interview Deborah McPherson. But we don’t have much evidence, and what we know isn’t enough to arrest and extradite her to Hobart. Anyway, we don’t suspect her, but she might have information to lead us to the killer. You probably won’t sanction two officers to go to Broken Hill, so I think the best solution would be to have a recorded video conference with her, if she’s willing.”

“Will she be willing?”

“Almost certainly, because she has been helpful so far. And if she refuses then it’ll look bad for her.”

“Can’t the local police do the interview?”

“No. They don’t know about the three murders and they don’t know about the layout of Hobart and it’s surrounds. So they won’t know how to conduct the interview or the questions to ask.”

“OK, go ahead and report back to me if there are any problems.”

At exactly four Deborah’s phone rings.

“Hello.”

“It’s DI Felix Oliver again.”

“OK. How can I help?”

“I would like to set up a recorded interview with you. As you are a long way away I would like to use video conferencing. Preferably on a laptop if you have one, but your phone would do at a pinch.”

“Why?”

“We think that you may have seen or heard something that is important and might help us. So if we quiz you we may get a lead.”

“OK. I have a computer, but I don’t know anything about video conferencing apps

and you'll have to explain it to me. Do you have my email address?"

"Yes, the estate agent gave it to me."

"Well send me an email explaining what to do and I'll see if I can do it. I mightn't have the app. Also, I intend moving on tomorrow, to Longreach, but I won't get there until Friday and I don't think there's WiFi in any of the towns along the way. If you like I can call you?"

"You could use your phone."

"The reception is terrible here, except for the large towns, so I don't think that's possible."

"OK. I'll send you an email in a few minutes. Ring me on Friday. I'll ring you if I don't hear from you."

As *a person of interest*, Felix is able to get the records of Deborah's phone number, but not who she called or called her, just the locations.

"Very interesting, Rebecca. It must be a new number, because there's nothing before the middle of January. Then it pings the towers near her home, near the Martínez's house and other places around Hobart. On Tuesday in February the phone leaves Hobart and goes to Devonport and then Melbourne, confirming the day that she left. After that we can trace her journey around Australia, ending in Broken Hill where she was when I phoned her. But the trip details aren't interesting.

"However, in January and February the phone has pinged the towers closest to the Pentecostal church only once, and it hasn't pinged the tower closest to the church in Richmond. I would like to know why?"

"She must have had another phone number before January," replies Rebecca. "Can we get the number?"

"Not without her help."

"That is definitely something we should ask her about."

# 18

On that morning, when Deborah Margaret McPherson spoke to DI Felix Oliver for the first time, her heart skipped a beat and she had a sickening feeling in her stomach of impending doom. Fortunately Felix couldn't see her as she slumped in her seat in her mobile home, but she'd hesitated, taking a deep breath, and she hoped that DI Oliver had not noticed.

Deborah didn't lie, because she was about to go out to a supermarket. After shopping, Deborah sat in her mobile home and thought about the impending telephone call. For a year and a half, since that fateful day in April, she'd mused over what would happen if the police caught up with her, and she was slightly calmer when she telephoned Felix and heard that he wanted to interview her. She'd intended staying in Broken Hill for a few more days, but she had to put DI Oliver off so that she could quell the panic she felt and could gather her wits, and so she would gain a precious few days by moving on.

It is 1,215 kilometres from Broken Hill to Longreach. Deborah could have done the journey in two days, but she wasn't in a hurry. She needed time to think, to get her story perfect and visualise what lies she might have to tell.

That night Deborah remembered the events so long ago.

Deborah had been raised and baptised in the Anglican church, and went to church every Sunday. But the vicar desired her and he made friends with her family, so that he could often come to visit. He would put her on his lap with one hand holding her bare legs and say how clever she was and how he admired her sincerity, and he would pray with her. Deborah said to her parents:

"I don't like him. He puts his hands on my legs."

"But he's a man of the cloth," said her father, "and only wants to be friends with you. Don't fuss."

The vicar continued grooming her and eventually persuaded her to go into the vestry without her parents. And there he'd inappropriately touched her between her thighs and she felt defiled. She told her mother and, sitting on her knees, said:

"The vicar touches me, and I don't like it."

"He's a nice man," replied her mother, "he wouldn't do anything nasty."

"But he touched me here," Deborah said, crying and pointing.

"I'm sure it was an accident. It's not nice for you to make things up about him when he's only teaching you about God."

It happened several times before she would only be in his presence with other people to stop his hands from wandering.

When she was 16 years old Deborah left home and she immediately cut all ties

to the Anglican church. But, despite her experiences, she was a committed Christian and she found another church to worship at, the Pentecostal church. There the congregation, egged on by the pastor, enthusiastically yelled *Ay-men*, instead of the sedate whispers of *Ab-men* in other religions, and sang hymns with such gusto that they could be heard outside. So from then on Deborah found that believing in God and Jesus Christ gave her stability and a reason to exist, and she listened to and accepted the pastor's teachings.

As she's a Pentecostalist, she believes in the inerrancy of the Holy Bible, that every word in both the Old and New Testaments is true and the events, including miracles, all happened. And she avidly reads *the truth* in the Holy Bible.

But she prefers the Old Testament and the stories of a wrathful God. She believes in divine healing and wants to be chosen by God to do his work.

When she was 18 years old she met Saul, fancied him, and he got her pregnant, much to the disgust of her parents who promptly disowned her. They married and had two children in quick succession, after which she wanted no more babies and took precautions so that their frequent sex, which she enjoyed, didn't produce any more offspring.

From the day when Deborah had her first child, Saul became abusive. Usually it was punches that only bruised her body, together with verbal tirades and threats. But one day he threw her down onto the floor and she'd broken her collarbone and suffered mild concussion. Not that the hospital knew the cause.

"I slipped and fell awkwardly," was her explanation. A pin had to be inserted, after which she frequently has some mild pain from the badly knitted bone.

Deborah tolerated her husband's aggression simply because Saul was the bread winner while she raised the children, and she needed him. But inwardly she seethed with anger, until the moment came when she openly expressed it. Saul had hit her youngest son and, with a knife in her hand, she said simply, but in a compelling voice:

"If you do that again I'll kill you."

Saul realised that she was not joking and from then on reserved his punishments for his wife and in places where the bruises wouldn't show; his favourite place was her stomach. And he said to her:

"If you ever try to leave me, I'll find you and kill you."

On the last of the frequent days that her husband got drunk, he tried to drive home, wandered from the lane he should have been in, and hit a truck head on. The truck driver was OK, but Saul's body was mangled and he died instantly.

The family went to the funeral and outwardly expressed grief, but inwardly Deborah was happy. She was also happy that he was cremated because she doesn't believe in cremation. When people died they should be put in shawls and placed in a tomb, as was her Lord Jesus Christ. So at the funeral she thought:

'May Satan take your soul to reside in Hell for all eternity, where your soul will be burnt by the everlasting fire, as your body has been burnt to ashes.'

Despite his violent nature, Saul was a good provider and Deborah now owned the

house outright. She got a job, she was capable, and raised her children until they left home. At which point she sold the house, bought a smaller house and, with some of the extra money, improved it. She lived by herself because she no longer trusted any man, even though she'd met some whom she thought were good.

Throughout her marriage she held onto her religion, even though Saul wouldn't allow her to go to church, and she often read the King James version of the Holy Bible. But after his death she rejoined a Pentecostal church and resumed her devotion.

But she was discontented. Another person in the Pentecostal congregation, Linda, could speak in tongues, and she wanted that ability herself. So she regularly prayed to God:

“Oh Lord, creator of all that exists, I am Your devoted servant. Grant unto me the ability to speak in tongues so that, by my example, others will see the light and come unto You and, like me, be commanded by You to do Your bidding.”

But she was disappointed and He didn't grant her wish. Perhaps God had other plans for her? However, Deborah didn't have to wait long for God's command.

Every Sunday when she goes to church, she dresses in rather demure tops and skirts, and puts on shoes with quite high heels so that she looks taller and slimmer than she is. Her only ornament is a small gold cross that hangs from her neck.

One day after the church service, Anne Preston talked with her. She was a woman in the congregation that Deborah did not know but had seen regularly.

Anne Preston, nee Stephens, was born and lived in Queenstown, not far from the west coast of Tasmania. That town had been created for the workers at the copper mine at Mount Lyell, but originally people came there for the small amount of alluvial gold. It was isolated, the only link to civilisation being the railway line that was used to transport the copper to the coast. It uses the Abt system, a rack and pinion, so that the trains could go up the steep hills that barred the way. Until a road link to Hobart was completed, it was the only access to Queenstown.

The railway line fell into disuse when the road was built and trucks were used to transport the copper, later to be reborn as a tourist attraction.

But when Anne was born Queenstown was run down, and most of the shops, hotels and houses were dilapidated. Her parents ran a cafe that sold instant coffee, pies and hot dogs to the locals and a few passing people and, as a child, she worked there on Saturdays. Then she left school and went to work as a waitress in a hotel on the main street. There she met Michael Preston. He had moved from Zeehan, another mining town, and was working as a truck driver, bring copper ore to the surface at the underground Mount Lyell mine and he was often in the pub drinking beer after a hard shift in the mine. He liked her, pursued her and, eventually, she agreed to marry him. They were both 25 years old.

They might have stayed in Queenstown, but Michael was laid off, with a month's notice. As there wasn't any work locally, he got a job in Hobart, driving trucks for a blue-metal quarry. They didn't have much money and so, when they moved, they rented a house.

They had four children and Anne was house-bound, looking after them and cooking meals for her husband, until her children were sent to school; they couldn't afford a kindergarten. Michael would often go out and come home late, smelling of beer and pub washrooms, and sometimes in the evening his anger and frustration would boil over, and then he hit her. The main reason was that, because of their fertility, they were poor. Michael paid the rent, gave money to Anne for shopping, and spent the rest on beer. The lack of money was the cause of him quitting truck driving and he went to work as an apprentice butcher, with the anticipation of earning more when he had done his time.

Anne did a weekly shop at a supermarket where she works part time to supplement their meagre income and, consequently, got a discount on her purchases. And, if there was a bit of money left over, she put some of it aside to feed the pokie machines at the local pub.

The supermarket is in a building that has a central aisle with shops on both sides, including a beauty salon, a newsagent and the butcher where Michael worked. The supermarket is at the end of the building and outside it there is an open space. One day when she went shopping, there were some Salvation Army people occupying the space, singing hymns to the beat of a tambourine. A uniformed woman came up to Anne, gave her a pamphlet and talked with her. Anne hadn't been religious, but she was struck by the woman's sincerity and tarried for a while, listening to the singing, before she shopped.

After shopping, pushing a trolley overfull with cheap goods, the Salvation Army woman came up to her and gave her a Holy Bible.

"I think you'll like this," she told her, "and there's a leaflet inside it that explains when and where we meet. I hope you'll come next Sunday."

Anne thanked her for her kindness, put the book in her trolley and left.

Anne was curious and the next Sunday, with Michael at a football match and the children old enough to amuse themselves for a couple of hours, she got in her car and went to the address that the Salvation Army woman had given her.

Unfortunately she turned left instead of right, but she saw a church down the street with many cars outside it and so she parked her car and went in.

She was surprised when she didn't see any Salvation Army uniforms, but she was immediately greeted by a woman about her age and, with a broad smile, she said:

"Hello! I haven't seen you before. Welcome! I'm Sue."

"I'm Anne Preston. I think I'm in the wrong place. Is this the Salvation Army?"

"No, but God has guided you to the right place. This is the Pentecostal church."

Sue looked at the Holy Bible that Anne was carrying and gave the one that she had, saying:

"You have the wrong one. It isn't the King James version. Have mine. You can keep it because I have another at home. The service is about to start."

And Sue put her Holy Bible in Anne's hands and guided her by the arm towards the pastor. Anne was, by nature polite, and she didn't know how to extricate herself,

so she went along with Sue.

The singing, the prayers and the joyousness of all around her led to a spiritual awakening and Anne resolved to come there again.

In the afternoon, when Michael had got home, she explained where she'd been and she would go again next Sunday.

Michael was furious:

As well as anger and frustration, he was jealous. He wanted to control her, but most of the time he couldn't. He didn't know about mobile phone apps but, anyway, their phones were too old. So he said:

"You are seeing someone!"

"I'm not. I'm just going to church."

"If that's true, I'll drive you and make sure you aren't doing anything else."

So the next Sunday, Michael drove Anne's car to the hall and came inside. Part way through the service he told Anne:

"I can't stand this praying and singing. I'll go and pick you up afterwards."

With that, he left and drove away. But every Sunday after that, to make sure she was telling the truth, he used her car to drop her at the church, and later he would come back to pick her up.

On the day that Anne talked with Deborah, she quietly admitted to living with a violent husband, who wasn't a member of the congregation. Her husband, who'd arrived to take Anne home, was captivated by Deborah, her smile won him over and, as he could see no harm in his wife being with a woman he desired, he allowed her to go to a cafe for coffee, and went home for more beers and popcorn, and watched television.

Deborah drove Anne to the cafe and, after ordering and nearly in tears, Anne told her story.

"Mike is a control freak. Everywhere I go he watches me, and when he can't watch me he makes me tell him what I have been doing. And if he doesn't like what I say or do he threatens me or actually hits me. Which is why I always cover up, to hide the bruises.

"The only place where I feel free is at the church. He'd stop me coming if he could. He came once to see what I did, and decided that prayers and *sing-songs*, as he calls them, are OK. But he drives me to church and picks me up afterwards so that I can't do anything he wouldn't know about and approve of.

"To be honest, I'm thinking I would be better off dead so he couldn't hurt me no more."

"He's a bully," Deborah exclaimed angrily, "can't you leave him?"

"Where would me and the kids go? There's nowhere safe that he couldn't find me and beat me up."

"But the police could help. Or you could move interstate."

"The police are useless, they just don't want to know. And if they did something, maybe lock him up, then how would I feed and clothe the kids? Anyway, he would

get out in a few months and come looking for me and probably kill me. But he won't kill me or rough me up too much, cause I'm too useful cooking and looking after the kids. But when they leave home I don't know what will happen. And I can't move because I don't have enough money. He makes sure of that. The work I do, I'm paid in cash and he takes what I earn from me, other than a few dollars for the pokies, and only gives me what is necessary."

"I wish I could help," said Deborah simply, but inwardly she was seething. I'll look out for you at church every Sunday, and make sure you are OK."

"Maybe you should kill him and go to the police and plead self-defence?" Deborah added.

"I would probably go to jail, and where would my kids be then?"

Deborah drove Anne home and came inside with her so that Michael could see that Anne was with a woman. Michael was placated by Deborah's words and her smile.

'I'm in with a chance there!' he thought.

That evening, Deborah thought about how she could help her friend. And she thought that how fortuitous Saul's death had been.

She sat down with her King James version of the Holy Bible, that she thought was the only true rendering of the Holy Bible in English and was inspired by God, and God couldn't lie. She got paper and a pen and, with the help of the internet, revised her knowledge of the possible punishments that could be meted out to Michael Preston.

She knows that the sixth Commandment states *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, and she found in Matthew 5:28:

*But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Which made sense of the ninth Commandment *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife*.

That is, as Michael had looked on her with desire he'd committed adultery.

The Commandments don't specify the punishment for breaking them, however Deborah found in Leviticus 20:10:

*And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, the adulterer and the adultrress shall surely be put to death.*

Her reliance on the inerrancy of the Holy Bible meant that, although Jesus showed compassion, He'd ordered Christians to follow the Old Testament's laws. In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus states:

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law. [the Old Testament] I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Till heaven and earth pass, one jot shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.*

So Deborah is still bound by the Old Testament and has to follow its edicts.

However, she was troubled, because if she put Michael to death then she would have sinned. But, as her acts would be doing God's will, Jesus would forgive her.

And so Deborah decided that she would be God's avenging angel, dressed in white and with a sword to smite down those who defied and defiled God's Word.

And she would put Michael to death.

But she didn't want to go to prison for breaching the secular laws of the country, and she needed to ensure that only God knew what she would do. And He would forgive her and see that her deeds were done in His name.

So she needed a plan. And not only that, she needed to plan meticulously and cater for every eventuality if she wasn't to go to jail.

As she was going to visit God's wrath on Michael, Deborah wanted his death to be in an appropriate place. She knew that if she could seduce him then he would go almost anywhere to satisfy his lust.

And, looking at a map of southern Tasmania on her laptop, she found that there is a place to the north of Hobart that is called Jericho. But she saw that it was a long way from Hobart. Could she entice Michael that far from home? Probably not. So what other Biblical place names appear close to Hobart?

She found the Jordan River. And she found Bagdad, but that city isn't mentioned in the Holy Bible.

Her internet search also came up with a book of place names in Tasmania, so Deborah downloaded it and looked up Bagdad in it. There she discovered that Hugh Germaine had named it, and another search provided some details:

*In the early 1800's, as much of Tasmania was still undergoing European settlement, a young marine, Private Hugh Germain, would travel into unexplored areas around Hobart Town to hunt wallaby for food for the townsfolk. In his saddle bags he carried two books, The Holy Bible and The Arabian Knights. He used these books to name many of the places where he would camp on his hunting expeditions. Hence within close proximity, you will find Jerusalem, Jericho, River Jordan, Lake Tiberius and of course Bagdad.*

At this point Deborah was a bit despondent. Jericho was too far away, Bagdad wasn't Biblical, and the River Jordan and Lake Tiberius weren't places.

But Jerusalem? She only knew of the Walls of Jerusalem, which was in the north of the state, and obviously too far away. So what is the place named by Germaine?

A quick look at the book of place names explained:

*Jerusalem: Changed to Colebrook about 1894.*

Using the map she found Colebrook was about three quarters of an hour away. Too far? Not really, a man will do anything for lust.

Years ago, not long before she met Saul, Deborah had had an affair with a man who lived in Cygnet. As they both urgently wanted sex together, he drove for an hour to be with her and satisfy their desires. And also she'd a girlfriend who told her:

"On one Friday, my lover drove me for over four hours from the south to Boat Harbour on the north coast of Tasmania, so that we could have sex in a motel where we wouldn't be recognised! We spent the weekend there and almost never went out of our room."

That was extreme devotion to lust, but it illustrates the lengths to which some men will go.

Deborah enlarged the map on her laptop and found that St James Anglican Church was in Colebrook, and she realised that she could kill two birds with one stone. It was possible for her to put Michael to death at an Anglican Church in Jerusalem! It was the ideal place, but only if she could persuade Michael to go there at night, and only if he didn't immediately grab her and rape her.

Having a location was one of a quartet of requirements. The other three were the method, the means of not being detected, and the weather.

The method was easy.

To slay with a sword would be ideal, but impractical. However a knife would be an acceptable substitute for a sword. Deborah had at some time learned that if a person is stabbed then the knife shouldn't be removed to prevent excessive blood loss. And she knew that for death to be very rapid, preferably instantaneous, the knife must penetrate the heart. So, to avoid the ribs, the blow would need to be upwards and on the left side, when only a short blade was necessary. Fortunately she's right-handed and if Michael was facing her it would be quite easy. A kitchen knife would be ideal.

Not to be detected was difficult, but internet searches provided most of the answers.

Fingerprints would only be where she touched something, but she found that even fabric clothing could be treated to reveal them. However, she thought that if she was very careful then they wouldn't be a problem. Except for the knife handle, which she could wipe. Of course, she could wear gloves, but would Michael accept that? If she distracted him gloves might be OK. Anyway, it had to be quick, only moments after they had met, so she could say that she would remove the gloves.

Deborah also found that DNA was removed by bleach so, provided she could put it on everything that she touched, the bleach would remove all traces of her. The knife could be treated with bleach before she left home, and only the handle might be a problem. So she would need to take a bottle of bleach with her and so a small spray bottle was required. But she already used such bottles in the toilet, containing natural air fresheners based on the oil of oranges, and one of those would be ideal.

She was about to write a list of things she needed, but realised that might be evidence, so she created a list in her mind:

'A new kitchen knife. Bleach and spray bottle. Freshly washed clothes that had been rinsed with bleach and new gloves.'

"Oh God, merciful Father," she said out loud, "you have reminded me that I have to carry the knife."

Some sort of scabbard to protect her from the sharp blade. She could wear a belt and make a holder for the blade.

'I should have time to get rid of them,' she thought, 'but they must be clean so that the only DNA on the knife will be Michael's.'

"And Jesus you have also reminded me that I have to wear alluring clothes. I need a blouse and a skirt that will outline the shape of my breasts and show my legs, and

make Michael believe that he has easy access to my body. After all, that is why women wear skirts and men wear trousers. And I need a pocket or bag for the bleach and my car keys, and a belt.”

Deborah had at least a week in which to buy and prepare and refine her plan of action.

She went to one outlet of a chain store that sold knives. Most she saw were too large. And the common size was almost too short and would require her to be accurate. But she'd a good sense of position and such a knife would be OK, so she bought one, paying in cash.

At different stores she got light, imitation leather gloves and a bottle of bleach.

And she bought thin disposable gloves that she could put on and spray them with bleach to remove any accidental DNA.

At home she marked the outline of the knife on its packaging before removing it. Then she washed the knife in bleach and, using disposable gloves, she put it into the dishwasher to be cleaned. She treated the gloves in a similar same way, putting bleach on them and leaving them to dry.

With one of her old knives, she practiced, holding the knife down low and thrusting it up so that it would, hopefully, go under the ribs. It was quite easy as it was a natural action.

As she'd seen a dressmaker's dummy in an opportunity shop, Deborah thought of buying it and marking the ribs and heart on it to help her practice.

‘But what if something leads the police to me?’ she thought, ‘I can't have anything at home that might make them suspect me. I can dispose of clothes if necessary, but a dressmaker's dummy is too large. Also, I can't use my mobile phone to talk to Michael, because there would be a record of my call on his phone, so there'll have to be face to face conversations.’

She made a scabbard out of some new material that she'd bought, paying in cash. The material was folded and she didn't have to touch what was to become the inside. Using the now cut-out shape of the knife, she cut and stitched the material, making two cuts in it so that she could put the scabbard on her belt.

Then she chose the clothes that she would wear. She wanted to wear only white to signify purity of the soul, but that was impractical. So she wore white undergarments and a white blouse with a floral skirt. She soaked them and the scabbard in bleach before washing them in the clothes washer. Wearing the disposable gloves, she put them in the dryer and then onto a clean surface, hoping that she'd eradicated all traces of her DNA and fingerprints.

And after preparing, she prayed and waited.

The next Sunday Deborah went to church in more alluring clothes and, after the service, she was surprised and gratified that Michael had come early. She smiled at him and, after a few minutes went to him and stood in front of him close enough for a faint waft of her perfume to reach his nose.

“Hello Michael. I'm glad to see you here.”

“You look and smell nice,” said Michael and, rather gauchely, added “I would like to get to know you.”

Deborah smiled and, fluttering her eyelashes, told him “That would be nice. But I have to go, I’m being beckoned.”

She moved away and talked some other people, but she carefully chose a position where Michael could see her bare, shaved legs that were smooth and soft from the skin lotion she had used.

After a while she returned to him and, pointedly brushing the back of her hand against his hand, said:

“I have to go now. I hope we can meet next week?” And as she left him she detected a slight quickening of his breathing.

During the next seven days, at home in the evening alone, she went over every bit of her plan, imagining every possible mishap that might happen and revising it as necessary.

And every night she prayed to God that she might succeed and do His will.

Fortunately the weather in Tasmania is predictable. The island is in the latitude where regular high and low pressure systems follow each other and exceptional weather is unusual. And, because of satellites and super-computers, the Bureau of Meteorology can predict the weather for over a week to come. So Deborah looked at the long-term forecasts and decided that the next week was propitious.

The next Sunday, Deborah went to church, and afterwards smiled at Michael but, before she went to him, she conversed with other people. Eventually, it was only a few minutes but it seemed hours to Michael, she went over to him and said hello.

A bit breathlessly he asked “Can we meet?”

“Tomorrow night? she asked.

“Yes. Where?”

“At the Colebrook Anglican church.”

“That’s a long way,” Michael said doubtfully, “How about I book a motel room?”

“That’s tawdry!” Deborah exclaimed with a look of horror.

“Anyway, I like doing it outdoors, it’ll be warm and it’ll be worth it!” she replied with a smile.

At that Michael agreed and, looking at her, imagined parting her legs and forcing himself inside her well-lubricated vagina.

Two other people joined them, and so the conversation turned to mundane things. But after a while they departed and Deborah, having a captive audience, explained briefly where the church was located and told him:

“I’ll be behind the church at eight. You’ll find me.” And she left.

It was the early evening on the first Monday in April. After a hot day, when the temperature reached 30°C, Deborah McPherson got out of the shower and looked at her body in the bedroom mirror. Her not too small breasts droop slightly.

She turned sideways and looked over her left shoulder. Her stomach had a slight but fetching bulge and her legs showed no signs of cellulite. But for her age, she’s 38

years old, she's petite, just over 152 centimetres tall, and very attractive. The only blot is that her shoulders are, on careful inspection, different.

One aspect of her life is a mystery to her, her ability to attract men. Almost all men, no matter what age, desired her and often made advances even though they knew they would be rebuffed. She wasn't classically beautiful, but there was something about her figure and more particularly her face that made men desire her. She'd read that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that true beauty lies in imperfections. Or so Zen Buddhism believes. And the Amish women always include an error in the clothes and quilts they make, because only God is perfect.

But neither can account for why some women could captivate and hold men in thrall.

As a consequence, Deborah has decided that it must be a gift from God.

She had prepared meticulously. She put on new disposable gloves and got dressed in the clothes laid out on a sanitised table, being very careful to not touch the front of her blouse. Going to the living room she collected her hand bag, checking that she has the bottle of bleach, and then she got in her car and drove to Colebrook.

The church is to the south of the town and she arrived early. She stopped and waited for a while and, when it was time, she drove past the church, turned around and parked on the opposite side of the main road. She checked that she had the knife and the bottle of bleach, locked her car and went to the back of the church. The sun had set at 5:53 pm and it was dark, but there was enough starlight from the cloudless sky and the moon for her to see.

When Michael Preston arrived, he saw a car parked on the opposite side of the road.

'Maybe it isn't her,' he thought with some anxiety. 'But maybe I'm early; I'll go to the church and wait.'

When he went behind the church, walking slowly in the gloom, he heaved a sigh of relief because Deborah was there. She stood with her right side nearest to the church wall so that when he stood in front of her, he would be where she wanted him to be. Michael wanted to grab her immediately, but he said:

"Why are you wearing gloves?"

She looked at him and quickly told him:

"I'll take them off, but I want you to feel my breasts first."

With the speed bestowed by lust he raised both arms and pressed his hands against her breasts. At the same time, she looked down at his shirt, reached behind her and, as she'd practiced, took the knife and stabbed him. A look of surprise appeared in his eyes, and then he grunted, dropped to his knees and died.

It was exactly eight in the evening and, from when he appeared, it took only a few seconds.

Deborah panicked. She shook. Momentarily she had no idea what to do. She looked around her, but all was peaceful and no one had seen.

"Control yourself," she whispers. "Remember the plan. What must I do next?"

She remembered her plan. Michael had fallen on his right side so that the knife was easily accessible. Taking the bottle of bleach from her pocket, she sprayed all the visible surfaces of the knife, including where it entered his shirt, and wiped it to clean any fingerprints from it. And, although she'd been careful not to get anything on her blouse, she rubbed a little bleach onto his hands.

She walked quickly back to her car, almost running, and discovered that Michael had come on a motor bike.

"Oh Mary, Mother of our Lord," she exclaimed, and panicked again. "What if he came in a car with a dash-cam?"

She got into her car and drove down the road to Hobart. But after about two kilometres she had to stop because she was shaking. She put the hand brake on, turned off the lights and stopped the engine, automatic actions. And then she started crying convulsively and banged her head gently against the steering wheel. Her car was lit up by the head-lights of a vehicle behind her, coming from Colebrook. It passed and she saw the tail-lights fading in the distance. She cried for about five minutes, the sobs intermingled with exhortations to God to save her. Eventually she'd relaxed enough to start the car and drive home.

At home Deborah did something out of character. She drinks wine but not spirits, but she had a bottle of brandy that her husband Saul had bought many years ago. So, sitting at the kitchen table, she opened it and took a gulp of the neat spirits. She coughed and spluttered, but took another gulp and after a while she found that the miracle drug alcohol, coursing through her veins, had made her somewhat tipsy but calmer.

She'd realised that her plan has a fatal flaw. It didn't consider how Michael would get there! What if he'd been driving a car with a dash-cam? Then the police might have a video of her car and its number plates and they would know that she was the murderer.

"God has smiled upon me. God has blessed my actions," she says out loud.

God might have smiled on Deborah, but she now doubted everything that she'd done.

"What if there are other flaws in my plan. What if I have left fingerprints or DNA at the church? What if the police link me and Michael to the Pentecostal church? What if ..."

And she continued on, rocking in the kitchen chair, like Jews rock when praying, and drinking the brandy.

Then she looked at her phone to check text messages and to see if she has missed any calls. She'd left her phone on the kitchen table and hadn't taken it with her, because she'd watched a program on television which showed that the police could trace a phone's movements by the towers it had *pinged*.

'If they think I'm where my phone is, they'll decide that I was at home,' she thought.

The next morning she telephoned her work place and said she was sick.

"Just a cold, I think," she told her manager.

And, as she's good at her job and rarely takes time off, her boss says:

"Take as long as you like," and doesn't want her to get a medical certificate.

She showered and scrubbed herself down to remove any stain of sin that might be upon her, and spent the rest of the day in her dressing gown.

Then she carefully washed the clothes that she'd worn, and took the knife scabbard, cutting the stitches so that it is a flat piece of material, and put it in the middle of a bag of household rubbish that was collected by the council on the next morning. There is an automatic mechanism to empty the standard bins into the truck and, later that day, Deborah's unopened bag of rubbish was deposited at the tip and buried with all the other tonnes of waste.

And afterwards, she waited.

There was no news of the murder until that evening, when the radio and the television announced that someone had been stabbed at Colebrook, without any details, and the police were investigating. Later there is an appeal from the police for witnesses who might have seen something. When hearing it, Deborah felt as though there was a lead weight in her stomach:

'What if someone has seen,' she thought, and panicked. 'I must have a plan for the interview.'

But then there was nothing.

It wasn't newsworthy until the police made an arrest and there were much more important stories to occupy the news bulletins, such as an earthquake in India and a pile-up of cars in the United States that killed a few people and injured many others.

Deborah slowly realised that she'd apparently got away with murder.

No one came knocking on her door, no one telephoned her and commanded that she came to a police station for an interview, and there were no further news bulletins reporting anything about the death of a man at Colebrook.

Nothing.

# 19

On Wednesday, the day after she'd spoken to Felix Oliver, Deborah McPherson had a breakfast of Meusli, yoghurt and coffee. Then, checking that she'd enough supplies and petrol, she drove out of Broken Hill, heading North. In the early afternoon, she arrived in Tibooburra where she would spend the night.

That evening, she had a meal left over from her last dinner in Broken Hill. After eating, she got out her altar and prayed, before meditating about the events of last year.

The Sunday following the day that she'd murdered Michael Preston, and it was fifteen months ago, Deborah McPherson got up and, in her dressing gown and sitting at the kitchen table having a cup of coffee, she realised that she couldn't face going to church. She didn't want to talk with any of the congregation, especially the pastor. And she definitely couldn't see, let alone talk to Anne Preston.

Deborah knew that she wasn't a theologian. She'd seen a book that was published in 1625, a mere fourteen years after the King James version of the Holy Bible was first printed. It was small, a little larger than four inches by three inches, but it had over four hundred and sixty pages. And it only contained an analysis of Psalm 23! That psalm, in six verses, contains one hundred and seventeen words of four hundred and sixty two alphabetical characters. So the book has one page for every character!

However, she'd read the Holy Bible and listened intently to those who knew more than she, and so she was quite confident in her Pentecostalism and her belief that the Holy Bible is inerrant.

That belief required her to accept that God created the universe less than 10,000 years ago. For some time her faith wavered, because scientists told her that the Earth was billions of years old and she had serious difficulty reconciling the truth of the Holy Bible and the facts of science. Eventually she found a way to unify these opposing views. God, when he created the Earth and the universe less than 10,000 years ago, deliberately fashioned them to appear to be billions of years old, making rocks, fossils and other artefacts, and far off galaxies appear to be very old. He did this deliberately to test mankind. The righteous amongst them would realise the deception, hold to God's word and be rewarded in Heaven.

On that Sunday, Deborah got dressed in white; white underwear, white blouse, white trousers and white shoes.

Then she went into her living room, moved the coffee table to the centre of the room and rearranged the chairs and a small side table so that she could still watch the television in comfort.

She covered the coffee table with a plain, white table cloth edged with lace. Finally,

she put her Holy Bible, in which she'd put book-marks, on the altar with her small gold cross, a small dry biscuit and a glass of red wine. She added a statue of Jesus on the cross that she'd bought off the internet.

She knelt down before them and made the sign of the cross over the bread and wine and, eating the biscuit and drinking the wine, she prayed out loud:

*“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. This is my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. I make humble prayer and petition through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord: that you accept and bless these holy and unblemished sacrifices, which I offer you.”*

Then she opened the Holy Bible at the first book-marked page and read aloud the text, and the text of subsequent book-marked pages:

*“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. And when he saw their faith, he said, ‘Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.’ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

After that, she prayed:

“God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, I submit myself before You, that I may do Your work on Earth humbly and with contrition in my heart; bless me and forgive my sins; deliver me from the power of darkness, so that when I die I might be transported into the kingdom of Your dear Son, and forever look upon You with awe. Amen.”

Deborah remained kneeling and praying for an hour and then she felt as if a weight had been lifted from her, and she saw that as a sign of forgiveness from God.

“Dear Father who sees all, I will go to church and praise You next Sunday, and every Sunday, unless something happens to stop me. But I shall also give thanks to You daily at the altar I have made to worship You. And I'll give thanks to You wherever I am. Amen.”

Deborah made two changes in her life. She stopped going to the church where she'd been a member and, instead, went to the southern Pentecostal church.

And she started using her middle name Margaret for the very few who asked her name. Two people in the congregation knew as Deborah, but she was insistent and they were happy to use her new name and welcomed her to their flock.

She didn't like the informality and said so to the pastor.

“God does not look at your outwardly appearance,” Pastor Patrick Trainer replied, “but looks into your heart. I wear casual clothes to remind the congregation of the fact that God is more concerned about their everlasting souls.”

But she did like the pastor's enthusiasm that carried the worshipers along with him, so that they prayed and sang loudly and danced with vigour.

It took several weeks before Deborah (who was known as Margaret) was truly comfortable with her new friends. And she became accustomed to the longer drive from her home and thought it a small sacrifice to be able to worship God.

She was well aware of the obese woman sitting at the front of the congregation.

‘Perhaps she has a genetic disorder? Perhaps she has some illness that is beyond the pastor to cure? Perhaps God has a plan for her?’ Deborah thought. And she made it her duty to talk to Phillippa Anderson and her husband James who sat beside her.

Phillippa Anderson, nee Hunter, isn’t related to DS James Hunter. She was born in one of the less desirable suburbs of Hobart. Her parents were fat, but she was unexpectedly a tiny baby when she left her mother’s womb by Caesarian section. But their fatness was mainly due to a diet of junk food and too much time sitting down in front of a television set.

As a baby, Phillippa was bottle-fed and then she graduated to the type of food that her parents ate, so she grew up to be chubby. She went to the local state-run school where, if she’d looked, James Anderson was two years above her. She left school as a fat, sixteen years old teenager and got a job as a kitchen hand in a fast food outlet, graduating to being on the counter. It was where she met and served James.

James was born in the adjoining suburb and, after he’d left school he became an apprentice carpenter and worked on house building sites. He enjoyed the training and he was very good at his trade. Through the builders he met he got jobs and decided to be a contract builder, kitting himself out with tools and a second-hand flat-tray vehicle. There were lots of houses being built and a shortage of good tradesmen, so there was plenty of well-paid work and he even had to turn down some jobs. Living at home meant that his bank balance grew quite rapidly.

James, although he didn’t know why, found plump girls with large breasts to be attractive. And on his visits to the fast food outlet he found Phillippa to be very enticing, and eventually he introduced himself and asked her out. He was 20 and she was 18 when he got her pregnant and, because he was a Christian, he married her.

James bought the cheapest house in a cheap area to the South of Hobart and they moved in together. He vowed that he would do it up and started on the inside, with the intention of working outwards. But he never got very far and his excuse was that he spent all his time working.

They had three children fairly rapidly and, perhaps as a result of her pregnancies or genetics, Phillippa became obese.

Or perhaps it was her style of cooking, which consisted of meat, potato chips covered in tomato sauce, lots of salt and white bread.

When their children started going to school, James bought her an automatic car to take them. It was a large gas-guzzler, chosen because there was enough room behind the steering wheel for her bulk. The seat wasn’t far from the front, so that her feet could reach the pedals, but the back was angled to allow her to fit in. Even so, her stomach was in contact with the steering wheel and her short arms meant that she would take sweeping curves when turning, usually involving the opposite side of the street. She tried to park in places where she could drive in and out without reversing, but that wasn’t always possible and the car had a few scrapes and dents. It was never insured and very rarely serviced.

When the children left school, James bought himself an almost new, twin-cab ute, although the seats in the back were never used. It was insured, because he could write it off in his tax returns.

James was religious, but initially Phillippa wasn't. He persuaded her to go to church with him and she gradually became a believer. If they'd thought about it, both of them found life to be pretty meaningless and belief in God was a way to think that there was some reason for why they were on Earth. He, following in his parents' footsteps, was a Pentecostalist and when they moved they started going to the southern Pentecostal church. Eventually Phillippa's girth and weight meant that she'd difficulty getting into James's high vehicle so she drove them to church in her car. The children refused point blank to go to church and they were left at home.

Before Phillippa became obese, James was enamoured of her. But her increasing bulk led to him realise that too much fat was bad, however he didn't leave her because he loved her and his children. Initially he was quite polite when telling her she should lose weight, but after a while, as Phillippa grew, the verbal abuse multiplied and eventually became physical abuse. She took his occasional punches without complaining and, when they increased in frequency, she was stoical about the bruises, simply covering them up. After all, if he left her then she thought that she would become destitute and shunned by society.

Phillippa likes sex, but not only didn't James like her obesity, it made sex with her almost impossible. One night, having drunk several stubbies, small bottles of beer, he came to bed with an almost empty one and he inserted the bottle instead of his penis. Phillippa grimaced with pain, but didn't utter anything. He interpreted her silence to mean agreement and, as he found it strangely stimulating, he occasionally repeated the experiment. The pastor at his church never spoke about abuse and God's attitude to it, and so James's beliefs didn't suffer. Phillippa's beliefs were sorely tested, but her response was limited to silent prayers asking God to stop James hurting her. But the abuse didn't stop.

About four months had passed since Deborah started going to the southern church. At church, Phillippa always wore tops with long sleeves and trousers so that her body was hidden. But it was winter and warm clothes were necessary, so Deborah thought nothing of it. After all, she was also covered up, although in clothes that showed off her figure.

One day, she saw that James wasn't at the service and so, taking a drink with her, she went to Phillippa, sat beside her and asked:

"Why isn't James here?"

"Hello. He has a cold, you know, and he didn't want to pass it on to anyone. He drove me here and he'll pick me up later."

Phillippa's left hand was in her lap, and she'd taken the cup and saucer in her right hand and put it on the empty chair beside her.

"What is wrong with your left arm?" Deborah asked.

Phillippa looked around, saw that nobody was near them and lifted up her sleeve

to reveal a large bruise and five small cuts.

“When he was hitting me, you know, he gripped my arm so tight that his fingernails cut my skin. It is painful to use it.”

“That’s terrible. Do you complain?”

“Sometimes, but he just laughs at me and hits me somewhere else, you know. Occasionally he laughs and puts a beer bottle up me, you know.”

At that, Deborah had a queasy sensation in her stomach and the thought entered her head that history was going to repeat itself. But it had been about four months since she’d killed Michael Preston, and no policemen had been interested in her, and nothing had appeared in newspapers or on television. Perhaps she was safe? Perhaps God had protected her?

When James arrived, Deborah went up to him and, looking up to his eyes and smiling, said:

“Hello James, I have been talking with your wife. She’s a nice woman.”

“I have come to take her home,” he told her, and added the unspoken thought:

‘Even though you aren’t stout, I could shag you!’

“I have to go too,” said Deborah and, with a smile, “but I’ll see you next week, I hope.”

Deborah went home and straight to her makeshift altar. She took off her gold cross and put it and her Holy Bible on the table. She went into the kitchen and made lunch, bread, cheese, ham, a banana, and a cup of coffee. And afterwards she washed up and put the cutlery and crockery away. Then she went back to her living room and, with her Holy Bible, sat in a chair and thought about Phillipa.

And she found in Deuteronomy 22:26:

*But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her; then the man only that lay with her shall die.*

“James has raped her and I should put him to death. I have succeeded once, with God’s help. Surely I can succeed again? It just takes planning and care, and whether I can entice James to meet me.

“But where?”

She got her laptop, put it on the kitchen table and searched for Biblical names to the south of Hobart. There were none. All the names were to the north of Hobart and too far away.

‘There’s a limit to how far my allure will reach,’ she thought.

‘What do I do now? Whatever place I choose has to be close enough to James’s home, and that rules out the Biblical places. So where?’

Then God, as she thought, put a word into her mind: *churches*.

“Not any churches, God, but Anglican churches!” she exclaimed excitedly.

An internet search brought up an article about Tasmanian Anglican properties to be sold off in order to pay reparation to those people who’d been sexually abused in the past by Anglican ministers. Deborah had never done anything about the abuse she’d suffered, because the hurt was inside her and no amount of money would

compensate for that. So the article was largely irrelevant until she saw that a three-page document was attached which listed the properties to be sold.

On the second page she saw:

*St James Church, 7 Richmond St, Colebrook.*

And beneath that entry she saw:

*St Johns Church and Cemetery, Franklin, 3328 Huon Hwy, Franklin.*

Switching to Google Maps and using the satellite view she saw that it was perfect! Only one overlooking house, probably the manse, that might be a problem, but as the church had closed it might be empty. There was plenty of parking, and it wasn't too far from where James and Phillippa lived. Deborah saw this as a sign from God and, kneeling down at her altar she gave thanks to the Lord her master:

“God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, I submit myself before you, that I may do Your work on Earth humbly and with contrition in my heart; deliver me from the power of darkness, so that I might have redemption through His blood, even unto the forgiveness of sins.

“You have given me a sign that my work for You is not yet done, and I shall faithfully carry out Your commands, so that You might bless me and forgive my sins, and allow my wicked soul to repose in Heaven when my life on Earth is done. Amen.”

So Deborah, absolutely certain that God would make James putty in her hands, started planning.

The one major change to her plan was:

“I must think about dash-cams!”

And the only thing she needed to buy was a new kitchen knife, so she went to a different shop that sold knives and bought one, paying in cash. It was made out of a single piece of stainless steel.

After the purchase, she went home and made all in readiness, meticulously cleaning everything and making sure she didn't handle anything with her fingers, using the thin disposable gloves. She wasn't concerned about any of James's DNA getting on her, because she could wash, rinse and decontaminate her clothes immediately after she arrived back home.

But she had to make sure none of her DNA would be on him. Deborah had never paid for her DNA to be analysed, to find ancestors or unknown relatives, and she'd never had samples taken by the police. But maybe a relative had, and it might show a familial link to her?

She went to Franklin, because her presence wouldn't be noticed amongst the many people there, and timed how long it took.

There was a cafe adjacent to the church, so she parked on the main road in front of the church, went in, and ate and drank. She had her phone with her, but she'd turned it off before she left home, in case the police found that she'd pinged the mobile phone towers in Franklin. She walked around and pretended to take photos, but filing away the scenes in her mind. By chance she spotted a video camera in the eaves of the cafe and realised that there might be CCTV on some of the buildings,

so she looked for tell-tale signs and knew that she shouldn't park or walk near them.

At home, using Google Maps, she found that she could park out of the way, in front of the primary school where there was no CCTV and James and his dash-cam, if he had one, wouldn't look. And it was only about 50 metres from the back of the church, so she could walk there easily.

Looking in her wardrobe she found a skirt that had a wide hem at the bottom that was a little larger than the width of the knife. She carefully cut off the hem and made a scabbard from the material. Then she got out her sewing machine and found, in a box of attachments, an adjustable hemmer. Using it she was able to make a new hem for the skirt and sew the scabbard onto the skirt so that it was almost invisible. The knife wouldn't stand out against the light coloured material.

Until Deborah went to church on the next Sunday she had no idea if she could seduce James. She shouldn't have worried.

After the service, James came up to her and said:

"Hello, that's nice perfume. What is your name?"

She smiled, both because she wanted James to be attracted to her, and because of relief that he'd come to her.

"Margaret. You are very strong, do you work out?" Deborah asked.

"Yes," with gratification because he could show off his muscles to her, "I go to a gym in the evening three times a week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

They talked a bit longer and then Deborah smiled and asked him:

"I'll see you next week, I hope?"

She made excuses and went to talk to other people, silently adding an afterthought: 'I mustn't be seen showing a preference for James, I must share my time between different people.'

The next week Deborah sat with Phillippa in the chair vacated by James, who was getting tea. He came back with two cups and, smiling at Deborah, said:

"You take this one and I'll get another."

"Thank you," replied Deborah with a smile that James thought was seductive.

When he came back, Deborah talked to Phillippa and, taking her leave, she smiled at James and went to another group to discuss sin and redemption. Then Deborah moved to other people and talked with them before she left.

Unfortunately it was cold and Deborah thought that she might have to wait for warmer weather. But the long-range forecast for early spring suggested that it would be warmer, sufficiently warm to entice someone out.

Deborah silently prayed:

'Dear God, give me a sign that You approve of what I am doing and that my actions are guided by Your hand. Bless me and help me to succeed.'

After the service Deborah went up to James at the table where people were serving tea and cakes.

She deliberately put her right hand on his left hand to attract his attention, but when he turned his head around to look at the person who'd touched him and realised

that it was Deborah, she didn't let go for a few seconds, instead smiling at him and saying:

"Hello, James, it *is* nice to see you."

She'd been careful to stand close to him so that it was very unlikely that anyone had seen her gesture.

"Um, ah, hello," he stammered.

"Maybe we can get together one day?"

And as an afterthought that was obviously contrived for any bystanders who were listening, she said:

"With Phillippa of course. Maybe Monday night?"

In contrast to the others around them who, if they'd heard, didn't think anything of it, James had no trouble interpreting her words.

"Yes, when?"

As it was cool and wet she said "Maybe next week? I'll see you here?"

"OK," he gasped, barely able to utter the two syllables.

On the Saturday before the fourth Sunday, Deborah went to a hairdresser and got her brown hair trimmed and some blonde streaks put in it.

The next day, as the Bureau of Meteorology had predicted, was nice, warm weather, and Deborah wore clothes that showed off her body to best advantage. A white blouse beneath which was a white bra so that it didn't show, but which enhanced her breasts. A short floral dress to show off her legs, and sandals with high heels to make her nice feet and toes visible.

She thought about white gloves, but decided against them as he might want to touch her skin. And she wore the same perfume that he'd commented on and, although she didn't like it that much, it added to her armoury.

When she went into the hall before the service, rather than standing at the front she waited further back and she was gratified to see that several times James looked behind him to see if she was there. And, when he saw her he was uncontrolled enough to give her a smile and a nod, to which she responded to with her own smile.

After the service and after talking to some other people, who commented on the sermon that day, Deborah stood a little way away from the others, but in full view of James who, of course, came over to her immediately.

"Hi. You are b-b-beautiful," he stammered.

"Can we meet tomorrow night, instead of you going to the gym?" asked Deborah.

"Yes. Where?"

"Seven o'clock in Franklin, behind the Anglican church. You can park on the road in front of the church."

And she quickly gave him directions.

"I, I, I'll be there," stammered James.

Deborah left him and, getting a second cup of tea, wandered around the hall talking to people and commenting on the fine weather, caused by a rogue high pressure system that sat over Tasmania for a few days and directed warm air and light

winds from the mainland over the state.

When she went home, Deborah knelt at her altar and prayed to God, thanking Him for helping her to seduce James and adding:

“Thank You, my Lord, for leading me to Your heart.”

The following day, the third Monday in September, Deborah McPherson felt uncomfortable because she was anxious and fearful, even though she'd done this before and she'd planned very carefully.

She'd been at work and it was about five thirty in the evening. She couldn't eat anything, but she drank one small glass of brandy.

‘It's not enough to put me over the limit,’ she thought.

She went into the living room and knelt at her makeshift altar. She put her hands on her Holy Bible, closed her eyes and silently prayed:

‘Dear God, the creator of all things, bless me and guide me so that I can successfully do Your bidding. And keep me safe from all misfortunes so that I can worship You for many years to come. Amen.’

Then she carefully laid out the things she would take with her:

White underwear signifying purity.

A light blouse, because the weather was hot.

The skirt with its built-in scabbard.

Perhaps light vinyl gloves?

Soft trainers for her feet.

The knife.

The small spray bottle of bleach.

A small bag with a shoulder-strap for the bottle of bleach and her car keys.

First, she put her hair in a pony tail. Then she put on disposable gloves, decontaminated them and dressed. She removed the disposable gloves and put on the gloves that she would wear, but she decided that they were unnecessary, took them off and discarded them.

She didn't bother with makeup thinking:

‘James will not notice.’

But she used a little of the perfume; as there was a light breeze the scent would waft to his nostrils.

After that, she put her mobile phone on the kitchen table.

Double checking that she had everything and, remembering her experience with Michael Preston, her last act was to put a newly-bought bottle of brandy and a glass on the kitchen table in case she needed it.

Then she went to her car and drove to Franklin She arrived a little early and hoped James wasn't there. She drove up the street beside the church and parked off the road at the primary school. She opened the driver's door, removed the car keys and put them in the bag. And, because her DNA would be on the seat-belt, steering wheel and gear lever, she rubbed bleach on her hands, got out, and closed the door with her elbow.

‘It’ll have to remain unlocked,’ she thought, ‘but that should be alright.’

The sun had set at 5:59 pm, but the twilight still lingered and there was a nearly full moon with the occasional small cloud, dark but tinged with red, scudding in front of it. Deborah walked to the back of the church and stood a bit away from the wall, but with her right side closest to it.

Then she waited.

James wasn’t sure where to stop, but the light from the moon illuminated the church for him. As he’d come a little early he wasn’t surprised that another car wasn’t there. He walked to the back of the church and was surprised to find Deborah waiting, and he immediately put his hands on her shoulders and tried to draw her to him, imagining his tongue in her mouth and her breasts pressing against him.

“Stop, not so fast,” she said quickly and pushed him away. “My breasts need to be touched by you ... please?”

James responded with alacrity, bringing both hands down to her breasts, feeling their warmth and softness and moaning with delight. But only for the few seconds that it took for Deborah to get the knife and, looking down so that she could judge the right position, stabbed him. He looked down at the knife protruding from under his left ribs, and mumbled:

“What the fu...”

His heart stopped, his brain shut down and he fell.

Dead.

“Careful, think,” whispers Deborah.

She got the spray bottle from her bag and sprayed her hands and rubbed them. She sprayed the knife and rubbed it clean of fingerprints and any DNA and put the spray bottle into her bag. She left, went to her car and drove away.

She managed to get home before panic set in. She sat in her kitchen and, after she’d downed a drink of neat spirits, she put her elbows on the table and her head in her hands and started shaking and sobbing uncontrollably.

“I forgot his hands!” she wails. “What if my blouse has my DNA on it? I should have put bleach on his hands.”

After what seemed to be an eternity, Deborah calmed down enough to go to her altar, kneel and pray:

“Dear Jesus, I have dedicated my life to You. I am Your devoted servant and I have always done Your bidding. Help me in my hour of need.

“Please, dear Jesus, if I have left something of myself on James’s hands, purify them so that there is no stain on them, so that I can continue to be Your faithful servant as I have been in the past. Amen”

She knelt silently for a while with her head in her hands, and then she undressed and put on a dressing gown. In the kitchen she unpicked the scabbard from her dress, put it in the middle of a bag of rubbish and threw the bag into the rubbish bin. She put her clothes in the washing machine with detergent and bleach, and started it.

Then she went to bed.

On Tuesday morning she was anxious and worried, with a churning sensation in her stomach. She got dressed, had two cups of coffee to wake her up, and went to work. It was an uneventful day.

That night the television news had only a brief report of a man being stabbed in Franklin. And, although Deborah didn't hear them, the next day there were two short reports on radio. However, on Wednesday her friends at work talked about the murder and she'd a little trouble keeping her composure:

"There has been a murder in Franklin. Don't you live near there?"

"Not really. I live in Cygnet, about an hour's drive away."

"It's no where near where I live," added Deborah.

Her speech was calm, but her heart was in turmoil.

As with the Colebrook murder, a few days later the police broadcasted an appeal for witnesses.

Afterwards, as the police only reported that they were investigating, nothing.

The editors decided that without more detail it was no longer is newsworthy. Other events, such as an explosion at a factory in New South Wales that led to a fire and the evacuation of near-by residents, were more interesting and important.

## 20

On Thursday, two days after she'd spoken to Felix Oliver, Deborah drove out of Tibooburra and went to Eromanga, a tiny settlement that boasted it was the town in Australia located the farthest from any ocean. That night she cooked a meal, ate it and then settled down with her thoughts. She had to clearly remember what had happened so that she was prepared for the impending interview.

About nine months earlier, on the Sunday after she'd murdered James Anderson, Deborah McPherson went to church. During the service, the pastor said prayers for the dear, departed James Anderson, and the congregation sang an appropriate hymn. Deborah, although she didn't show it outwardly, was very uncomfortable and almost left during the prayers. But she thought that would look suspicious and stayed.

After the sermon, the pastor announced:

"Our dearly beloved Phillippa isn't present today. I know that she hasn't got much money and paying for the funeral of James will be a great burden on her. So I have decided that the funeral service will be held here on next Saturday morning, and I hope that most of you can come and celebrate the life of James.

"Also, I'll give today's collection to Phillippa to help her in her time of need. So when the plate is passed around, give generously."

The worshipers, including Deborah, opened their wallets and purses and put a large amount of money in the plate. Some, who hadn't much to give, came to the pastor during the week and donated more.

Deborah knew that she couldn't face the funeral service, so on the next Saturday she wasn't present. When she went to church on the following day, she apologised to everyone she spoke to, including the pastor and Phillippa, and told them that she was too unwell to attend. That surprised no one as several people had colds, and coughing and blowing noses was common amongst the people of Hobart, despite it being spring.

But Deborah's mind was full of anxiety. So she decided that she couldn't face the worshipers at the southern church and she went back to the first, northern church where she was welcomed with open arms:

"We have missed you, Deborah!"

"Where is Anne? Deborah asked.

"She has gone back to Queenstown with her children."

No one questioned her about her absence, but they did talk about the men who'd been slain, because one of them was associated with their Pentecostal church.

But, as she was demure and devout, no one linked Deborah to the two murders. Indeed, as a religious link was out of the question, because no God fearing Pentecostalist

would do such a thing, the murderer or murderers must have some other links to the two men.

It only took a short time for the gossip to die down and for church services to resume their usual course. With each passing day, the anxiety that Deborah felt quietened and her life returned to normalcy, and the months passed peacefully.

But she was still anxious and uneasy and thought:

‘Perhaps the police will put two and two together and come after me.’

So, in November, she decided to go away. Permanently, or so she thought.

She was frugal and had enough money in her bank account to put her ideas into action.

After looking on the internet at different designs and makes, she bought a small, second-hand mobile home.

It had enough head-room so that she could stand up in it and it had been converted by professionals. It had a gas stove, three-way refrigerator (gas, 12 volt and mains power), a sink, air conditioner, table, two single beds, solar panels to charge the 12 volt batteries and a twenty inch television with a blue-ray player in it. There was a complicated manual on the electrical system and how it could switch between the engine’s generator and batteries, solar panels and mains power. Also, there was a gap between the driver’s seat and the front passenger’s seat so that, if it was raining, she didn’t have to go outside.

She took a few days off work and drove around Tasmania to familiarise herself with it. She found it comfortable, practical and, most importantly, easy to drive.

Then Deborah went to an estate agent and asked about renting her house. He advised her and explained how he would manage the property. She read carefully and signed a contract for him to look after her house while she was away.

Although she knew what to do, she sensed that she wasn’t ready to make a complete break with Tasmania, and so she parked the mobile home in her driveway, that was beside her house and went all the way to the back of the property, and waited until God indicated that it was the right time.

Three months after Deborah had gone to Franklin, and two weeks before Christmas, the two pastors had organised a joint meeting of the their congregations, but Deborah didn’t attend the service because perhaps some people would call her Margaret and that would need explaining. Indeed, one worshiper said to another:

Do you know Margaret? She came to our church but stopped.”

“No, I don’t know her. Perhaps she has gone away.”

“The following Sunday Deborah explained her absence by saying she was unwell, and a few worshipers were concerned for her until she told them:

“It was nothing, just a tummy bug. I had diarrhoea for a day or so.”

In January the attendances dropped because many people were away on holidays, but Deborah continued to go to church. As did Pasqual and Francesca Martínez who had joined the congregation in November when they relocated to southern Tasmania. Naturally they knew nothing about the murders.

Francesca Martínez, nee Garcia, was born in Benifaraig, just outside Valencia in Spain, and she lived there until she was 31 years old. Her father had died not long after she was born, in an accident at work, and her mother remarried.

Pasqual Martínez was born in the same village and at the same time. They knew each other as children, and played hide-and-seek with the other children in the orchards. And both went to the Catholic church, Parroquia Santa María Magdalena. Their parents worked in an olive grove and sometimes had lunch together. But he wasn't interested in the gangly girl, who was a poor speller, because he was focused on his future.

When he was 18 years old, Pasqual got a visa and emigrated to Australia. He learnt the language very quickly and, because he could drive, he got licenses for driving fork lifts and trucks, and then a job as a fork-lift driver for a large retail hardware store. He worked there diligently for many years, while having another part-time job, and banked most of his wages. He eventually got Australian citizenship, which was his goal.

Francesca was also 18 years old when an event occurred that defined her life. While her mother was out of the house, she was raped by her drunken step-father. She knew that no one would believe her, especially the priest, and so she was silent. But as soon as she could, Francesca went to Valencia and worked in a night club as a waitress; she was hired because of her good looks. There she discovered flamenco dancing and that she'd the figure and the temperament to dance it. But she felt unsafe in the large city and, being reclusive as a result of her step-father's attentions, she went back to Benifaraig and worked in an orange orchard.

At age 31, Pasqual went back to Benifaraig to visit his parents. The Martínez and Garcia families had a reunion dinner in his honour, and he met Francesca. What a change! She'd grown into a tall, lithe woman with long, black hair down to her waist, and even demure clothes couldn't hide her beauty. He was smitten and immediately asked her parents if he could marry her, to which the reply was "yes." Francesca accepted the proposal from the handsome Pasqual, mainly because he would take her far away from her step-father, although she did have qualms about living in an English speaking country.

As there was little time, the wedding ceremony in the Catholic church was small and rushed, despite the priest's protestations, and the happy couple flew to Australia the next day.

Francesca used her time studying English and, despite her Spanish accent, she quickly learned enough, although she was never fluent. As she liked children, but not having them herself, she studied and, after about two years of diligence, she got a job at child care centre. The children loved her, especially when she read to them, and they tried to mimic her accent.

God was important to both Pasqual and Francesca. But having no real affinity to Catholicism, soon after arriving in Australia they found a Pentecostal church that was more to their liking and they worshipped there every Sunday.

Pasqual and Francesca were frugal and banked much of their wages and, with two incomes, their balance grew quite rapidly. The company Pasqual worked for had a branch in Hobart and, when an opening for a fork-lift driver came up, he applied for and got the job. So at 34 years old they moved. They bought an affordable house in Bagdad and, as Francesca had no difficulty getting work at a local child care centre, they bought two second-hand small cars for them to get to work. It wasn't long before they found the Pentecostal church in the northern suburbs of Hobart and went there.

Although outwardly they seemed a happy couple, their relationship had deteriorated. It wasn't long after they'd arrived in Australia that Pasqual discovered Francesca didn't enjoy sex. She tried to satisfy him, as she'd sworn to *love, honour and obey*, but she was frigid. She explained what her step-father had done and he thought that, in time, she would come to like having sex with him. But it never happened. He was frustrated, and of frustration is born abuse. So he began hitting her. Occasionally at first, but by the time that they'd moved to Tasmania it had become regular. He was always sorry and, crying, said he would change, but he never did.

Pasqual and Francesca liked Deborah, and so when they met her at church they invited her to their home for dinner. She accepted, and they gave her their address in Bagdad and arranged to meet on Thursday. Being summer, Thursday was predictably very hot and Deborah wore the least amount of clothing that would cover her body; a blue silk blouse, a short, light skirt and sandals. After all, Pasqual had a beautiful wife and he wouldn't be interested in her.

She drove to Bagdad and knocked on the front door which was answered by Pasqual:

"Welcome, Deborah."

She smiled at him and he put his arm across her shoulders and, caressing her slightly, guided her into the dining room.

Deborah inwardly shuddered, but her visible reaction was friendly. As she sat on a chair, he went to a sideboard with drinks on it and turned around.

"What'll you have to drink," he asked, not looking at her eyes, but instead fixing his gaze on her bare legs.

"White wine, please, if you have it."

Pasqual poured three glasses of chilled wine and gave one to her.

Francesca was in the kitchen making last-minute preparations, and called out "hello" to her. She's a very good cook and the meal was Spanish and excellent.

After dinner, Pasqual said "excuse me," and went out.

Deborah's quizzical look was answered by:

"He smoke. I not let him smoke inside, so he go out."

Deborah had noticed a bruise on her bare arm and asked:

"That looks nasty, how did you get it?"

Francesca shrugged, and said:

"Pasqual did grab me. He hit me sometimes. See," and she lifted her skirt and revealed another large bruise on her thigh.

“But he seems so nice. Why does he hit you?”

“I not good at sex. I don’t like it. Years ago I raped in Espania by my step-father. So if I not submit to Pasqual he swears and hits me.”

Pasqual came in smelling of tobacco and they talked about the weather, Francesca’s English lessons, and Deborah’s job.

After coffee, Deborah thanked both of them and left.

Every night, just before she went to bed, Deborah would go to her personal altar and pray. But her prayer that night was unusual:

“I will not, dear Lord” prayed Deborah decisively, while kneeling at her altar. “I must be angry at what Francesca has suffered, but I must not act. I have done Your bidding, oh Lord, but please, in Your infinite wisdom, don’t ask me to do it again.”

God didn’t answer.

On the next Sunday, after the church service, Deborah met Pasqual and Francesca and invited them to her place, and the invitation for dinner on Wednesday was accepted.

At home she put her Holy Bible on the altar and, kneeling, prayed:

“Dear Mary, mother of the Son of God, hear my prayer. I humbly pray that You will intercede with God so that He sends me a sign that I’m absolved of any and all sins and the merciful Father won’t again ask me to commit a sin in His name.”

She waited, but there was no sign.

“My Lord and Master Jesus Christ, give me a sign that You don’t want me to put Pasqual to death.”

There was no sign.

She continued waiting and praying, but there was still no sign from God.

So she crossed herself and she decided that God was asking her to act on His behalf and heap retribution upon Pasqual.

Preparation was more difficult that for the previous two murders.

The first thing that Deborah did was to go to work and resign, giving two week’s notice and hoping that the weather would be propitious.

Her mobile phone was a problem. So she bought a new SIM card with a different number and destroyed the old SIM card. But perhaps there was something on the phone, like a serial number, that could be used to trace it? So she bought a new phone, smashed the old phone and put it in the rubbish.

Then she went to the estate agent and organised the renting of her house fully furnished, with the money to be deposited into her bank account, and she gave him a set of keys, her email address and mobile telephone number. Her bank account had a debit card attached to it, so she could withdraw money anywhere in Australia. She told the estate agent that her house would be available in about three weeks, so that he could advertise. She also told him that if there were very few people interested in it, then he could drop the rent. As she didn’t want the hassle of anything mailed to her by the post office, she next organised to get bank statements and bills sent to her by email. And she created a government account so that she could pay tax and do other

transactions on line.

She knew that many places had free WiFi access, but she also learned how to connect her laptop to her mobile phone and use that to access the internet.

As the expiry date on her debit card was two years away she didn't worry about that. She didn't know where she would be, but she was sure she could organise for a new card to be sent to her wherever she was at the time.

Wednesday was also hot and Deborah wore flimsy clothes and had bare feet. She could cook, but her repertoire was limited, so she decided on something simple: Prosciutto, cold potatoes, and two types of salad, a Waldorf salad and a lettuce and tomato salad, one dressed with mayonnaise and the other in a vinaigrette. She put the food on the dining room table, with glasses, plates and cutlery, and a bottle of red wine; there was a bottle of white wine in the refrigerator.

Being uncertain to how they would respond to her altar, she put her Holy Bible on the side table and folded up the white table cloth and put it in a drawer with her statue of Jesus on the cross, so that her altar became a coffee table again. She wore her gold cross.

Francesca and Pasqual came and were delighted by the simple meal. Afterwards, Pasqual said:

"I smoke cigarettes, but not inside. Is there a place that I can smoke?"

"Actually, I used to smoke," replied Deborah smiling at him, "but I haven't had a cigarette for a long time. Will you give me one?"

"Yes, it will be a pleasure."

Deborah ushered Pasqual through the kitchen and out of the back door, where there was a small verandah, a table and chairs, and a clean ashtray on a window ledge. After they'd lit their cigarettes, Pasqual asked directly:

"Do you like me?"

"Yes, I do."

"I want you," was the simple and blunt reply.

"But your wife, she's far more beautiful than me."

"She doesn't love me. She makes excuses. But you are as beautiful as Francesca and I want you."

"I don't know that I like you *that* much," said Deborah smiling and, after butting out her cigarette which she didn't like, added:

"I'll think about it and tell you."

They went inside and joined Francesca, and they had a conversation about religion and why they went to a Pentecostal church. The reasons were superficial. Deborah didn't want to disclose her abuse by an Anglican minister, and her guests were equally vague.

After about an hour they left and Deborah called after them:

"See you in church on Sunday!"

Now alone, she resurrected her altar, but instead of kneeling in front of it, she sat in the chair that she used to watch television and meditated.

‘The chance of me getting away with another murder is very small. So I should tell God that I’m not going to do his bidding this time. But Francesca? I think she needs my help. So maybe I can do it.’

She got her laptop and looked at the three pages of Anglican properties to be sold. Then she listed the two or three that might be used and, using Google Maps, she researched them. One church stood out from the rest, St Luke’s Anglican church at Richmond.

It was out of the town, at the intersection of two streets, and there were several photographs of it. To one side there was the primary school and to the other a large paddock and, beyond the paddock, there was a shed and a derelict house. At one end there was a house across the intersection, but it faced the street and not the church. And at the other end there was a house that also faced a street and not the church. Looking at the photographs Deborah decided the best position for her was at the buttress behind the tower at the back of the church. The buttress protruded about a metre and would hide them from the street and houses.

Parking seemed to be a problem so, reluctantly, she drove to Richmond and past the church. She took her phone with her, in case of an emergency, but turned it off. There she discovered that the street in front of the church dropped down quite steeply, and that a car parked there would be hidden from the street beside the church and its area for the cars of the worshipers. Her visit was also an opportunity to see if there was any CCTV that might be a problem. But, other than within the primary school there were no cameras and, importantly, none on the church itself. Perhaps the Anglican church had faith that God would protect their properties?

Other than buying another knife, and she bought one with a dark handle from a different shop and paid cash, Deborah’s preparations were easy.

She would use the same clothes, but she had to make another scabbard. As she disliked waste she’d kept the unused hem that she had cut off the skirt, and made another scabbard and stitched it onto the skirt.

And she followed the same routine to rid everything of her DNA.

The next Sunday Deborah deliberately did not go to church, hoping that Pasqual would wait a week before seeing her.

But on the following Sunday she went to church and met Francesca and Pasqual. About half an hour later, when Deborah was by herself:

“I must thank Deborah for dinner,” Pasqual told Francesca.

Going over to her he said:

“Deborah, have you thought about what I said?”

“Yes, and I have decided that I like you *that* much,” she replied, smiling.

“I’ll come to your house on Monday night.”

“Sorry, Pasqual, that is impossible. I have my son staying with me and I don’t want him to know.”

Which was a lie as her son, Eric, was in the United States.

“So I come on another day.”

“He will still be with me. But I know a place where we can meet tomorrow and it is only about thirty minutes from your house.”

“I’ll come. Where is it?”

And Deborah explained, giving him basic directions to the church and telling him to be there at eight. She’d already checked the weather forecast and it predicted that there would be a fine, warm night.

After everyone had been ushered out and the hall closed, Deborah returned home to meditate and pray. She was surprisingly calm, probably because she’d done it twice before successfully, and knew by heart what she had to do.

On the second Monday in February it is summer in Tasmania. The skies are clear and the sun beats down upon the parched land until, late in the afternoon, a swathe of clouds appear and trap the hot air so that the night is uncomfortable and a time for shorts. People hope that autumn, in two week’s time, will bring some cooler weather.

As her last day of work had been the preceding Friday, early that morning Deborah went to a supermarket and stocked up on some basic food and other things, including dish- and clothes-washing liquid. She returned home, put the supplies into the mobile home and turned on the refrigerator to keep the milk, eggs and wine cold.

She put some of her clothes and shoes into the mobile home. It was quite spacious, so there was plenty of room for summer and winter clothes, including her clothes for church services. Back in the house, she filled some garbage bags with the rest of her clothes and shoes, squeezed them into her car and delivered them to a local opportunity shop. And then she checked that she’d enough crockery, cutlery, glasses, saucepans and fry pans, and other things to take away with her.

Early in the evening, Deborah went to the table where her sterilised clothes had been put and, using disposable gloves, she dressed carefully. She’d already put the knife in the scabbard on her skirt.

She had a list of things to do in her mind and she went through it methodically, mentally ticking off each step as she did it. Brandy and glass on the kitchen table. Mobile phone on, and on the same table. Bottle of bleach in her bag.

She drove to Richmond and, because she was a bit paranoid, she wore the gloves. The sun hadn’t set, but its rays were shielded by hills and the light was slowly fading. So when she parked her car out of sight Deborah had to hope that she wouldn’t be noticed as she walked the twenty or so metres to the church. But it was deserted and there were no overlooking houses, so it was safe enough.

She locked her car before she took off the gloves and put them in her bag with her car keys. She stood there for a moment, mentally checking that she was ready.

She went to the buttress and no one was there. Perhaps he wasn’t coming?

Pasqual Martínez arrived soon after. He parked where Deborah has suggested and, as there was no other car, he assumed she was behind her. So he walked around the back and was surprised when he saw her. Coming over, he asked:

“Why do you have a bag?”

“For my car keys,” she said and, smiling, added “and condoms,” as she put it on

the ground.

He immediately looked at her bare legs and the delight they held between them, and his jeans bulged in anticipation.

“There’s no hurry. Sex should be slow,” she told him and, making sure she was only a few centimetres from him, she looked down demurely and said, unnecessarily:

“I want to excite you. I’m not wearing a bra and my breasts are bare; feel them.”

And Pasqual’s lust made him do as he’d been told and, like a lamb to the slaughter, he died.

Deborah was calm as she drove home, stripped off her clothes, showered and put on a dressing gown.

She was meticulous, and put on another pair of disposable gloves to put the clothes, the shoulder bag and the rest of the disposable gloves into a garbage bag. And then very carefully she took off the gloves, washed her hands with bleach, and put the gloves and bleach into the garbage bag and sealed it with its string. Afterwards she took the bag out to her mobile home and put it in a concealed place under a seat. She would dispose of it later, somewhere in Australia.

Early on Tuesday morning the door bell rang. Deborah opened the door and saw a policeman standing there. She was stricken with panic, felt faint and had to hold on to the door knob to steady herself.

“Sorry to disturb you madam. Last night, two cars were damaged up the street and some tyres let down. We are doing a door-to-door in case anyone saw or heard something. Did you?”

A wave of relief passed over her and she smiled because the policeman hadn’t come to arrest her.

“No, I didn’t see or hear anything. My curtains were drawn and I was watching television,” she said. “I hope you catch the louts.”

Before Deborah put her laptop in the mobile home, she looked at it and realised that the only file on it that could link her to the murders was the list of Anglican churches. Knowing that experts could find deleted files, she opened the Word document, deleted all the text, added some innocuous text about the Holy Bible and saved it. Then she changed the name of the file.

‘Hopefully that has erased it,’ she thought.

A bit after 9 am, Deborah went to a used car yard.

“I want to sell my car,” and handed over the registration papers and proof of ownership. It wasn’t new, but it hadn’t done many kilometres, had been regularly serviced (as the manual attested) and was clean both inside and out.

“OK, I’ll look at it.”

After a test drive and looking up values on his computer, the car yard owner came back and offered her an amount. It was a bit less than Deborah had anticipated and she haggled, but in the end she said “yes,” because she didn’t want the trouble of going to another car yard. She signed the documents and walked away with a cheque.

A bus journey took her to the bank to deposit the cheque, and then another bus

journey took her back home and all was settled. She was ready to leave.

She put her laptop, altar cloth and Holy Bible in the mobile home. There would be plenty of places with free WiFi to connect her laptop to the internet to find churches to attend.

She telephoned the ferry company to book a one-way trip to Melbourne. Deborah was told that there were no spaces on the night ferry and she booked her passage for the next day on the day ferry. It wasn't a problem for her, because she could stay that night in a convenient caravan park.

Finally, she put the house keys in the letter box and telephoned the estate agent.

With a lingering glance at her house, Deborah got into the driver's seat and set the GPS to Devonport to test it; she knew which way to go and actually didn't need it. She backed out of the driveway and headed for Devonport and Melbourne, and wherever else she wanted to go.

As she drove north she was out of range of the Hobart radio stations and she didn't bother re-tuning the radio to local stations, and so she heard nothing about the murder. But that evening, the local radio and television reported it, and the police said they were investigating.

The days passed and Deborah was in Victoria, and a murder in Tasmania wasn't newsworthy, so she didn't know that there was no call for witnesses. And she didn't know that from then on there was silence.

Deborah McPherson didn't wander aimlessly around Australia. Instead she had a purpose and a destination in mind.

If the police were interested in Deborah, but DI Oliver and DS Newton weren't, her journey around Australia was mapped out for them to see, by the places where she'd used her debit card, the locations of her mobile phone and where she'd connected to the internet. They showed that, over about eight weeks, she went to Adelaide in South Australia and then drove up the middle of Australia to Darwin. After that, she went into Western Australia to Broome and Geraldton. And finally she drove down to Margaret River. The journey was about 8,250 kilometres and, at comfortable 300 kilometres per day, it could be done in four weeks with Deborah driving only about three and a half hours per day. And so she had over three weeks to stop along the way and see what interests her.

Whenever possible, she attended churches on Sundays and used her makeshift altar every night.

When Deborah saw one, she went into opportunity shops, usually run by charities like St. Vincent de Paul and the Red Cross. As she preferred to read rather than watch television, she got a couple of books and gave the staff the books that she'd bought from previous opportunity shops and had read. Occasionally she saw some nice clothes that she couldn't resist buying.

From Adelaide she visited the Barossa Valley vineyards for a few days, staying at Nurioopta and sampling the wine. At the supermarket she bought a handy device for removing tops from jars.

Then she took a detour to the Flinders Ranges where she tarried for a while.

After that, the landscape to Alice Springs is arid, largely flat and boring.

Deborah stayed in Coober Pedy, an opal mining town, for two nights. The monotonous land around the town is pockmarked with mine shafts and heaps of the earth that has been dug out. But the only opals she saw were in shops. Although there are many buildings, including a large supermarket, most of the residents live underground in *dugouts* to avoid the searing heat of the day. She went into one and found, even though there is only a tunnel with a front door on the surface, it was a modern home with many rooms.

She drove on to Alice Springs in the centre of Australia, and up the highway to Mataranka. She found it too commercial, which is why she didn't go to Ularu. But close by, at Elsie National Park, there was an unspoilt camp site on the banks of the Roper River, so she stayed there. In the night she was woken by a thundering noise outside. The next day she asked about it and found out that it was created by a mob of galloping, feral donkeys that lived in the bush.

From there to Darwin the land is more fertile. Although out of her way, Deborah went to the city to get her mobile home serviced and to worship at a Pentecostal church, where she was welcomed with open arms. After that there was another detour to the Litchfield National Park, where she admired the waterfall and swam in the pool below it. There are no crocodiles to worry about.

Then she back tracked to Katherine where she took the road into Western Australia. On the way to Broome, she went through Kununurra and the rice growing areas on the Ord River, and visited the dam at Lake Argyle.

From Broome, the road hugs the coast as it took her through Carnarvon and Geraldton to Perth. She stopped at Port Denison and walked on the beach and watched a glorious sunset over the sea before she dined out and went to bed.

Deborah didn't stop in Perth, because there are too many people and her life after Saul's death had taught her to be happy alone. So she used her GPS to get around the city and south to Margaret River.

She arrived in Margaret River at the end of March and spent a few days touring the wineries and scenic spots. Although she isn't interested in birds, she went to *Eagles Heritage*, said to be the largest collection of live eagles, hawks, falcons and owls in Australia. But seeing these birds of prey close up, and hearing that some die, because of the use of poison baits to kill rats and mice which the birds then eat, she found them beautiful and quickly developed a respect for them.

And on Sunday she went to church and prayed.

On the first Monday in April, Deborah booked a table at a nice restaurant and, a little before six in the evening, she ordered a meal and a bottle of wine. At exactly six, she took a sip of her wine and celebrated the anniversary of her first murder.

It was exactly eight in the evening in Tasmania.

# 21

In June, Deborah McPherson gets up early on Friday and sets out to go to Longreach, arriving there about 1:30 in the afternoon. After organising a site in a caravan park, she rings DI Felix Oliver:

“DI Oliver.”

“Hi, this is Deborah McPherson. I have arrived in Longreach. I got your email on Tuesday and I think I understand how the video conferencing app works. But we’d better test it.”

“OK. How about now?”

“Fine.”

Felix and Deborah went through the process of linking up and then, if by magic, they could see each other.

‘He’s young,’ thought Deborah, ‘and perhaps he’s inexperienced.’

“Can you hear me?” Felix asks.

“Yes, and I can see you.”

“OK. Can we set up the interview for tomorrow?”

“I would rather it was Monday. I planned on going to the Qantas museum and the Stockman’s Hall of Fame tomorrow, and Sunday is out because it is the Lord’s day of rest and I’ll be going to church and meditating.”

Felix sighs and Deborah thinks that he looks downcast. But she’s complying with his instructions and he doesn’t want to irritate her, so he asks:

“OK, Monday morning at 9:30 am?”

“Yes, that will be fine. I’ll see you then.”

And Deborah quits the app.

‘I have bought a couple of more days with God’s help,’ she thinks.

That night Deborah thinks about the interview and decides on how to tackle it.

First, she’ll tell the truth whenever possible so that if the police check her story they will find she hasn’t lied.

Second, she’ll answer the questions put to her succinctly and politely. Most importantly, she won’t be helpful and proffer up any information that isn’t required. And she won’t embellish her answers. It is up to the police to elicit information by their questions.

Third, the most difficult part is that she, at some point, must lie. Lying is most likely going to trip her up, if she gives answers that later turn out to be contradictory, and she needs to be confident that she doesn’t say anything, other than the truth, that could lead to her arrest. So her lies must be simple statements, apparently of fact, that give away the minimal amount of information.

Fourth, she should ask questions in the hope that the police would reveal some of the evidence which they had, so that she can tailor her answers appropriately.

So over the next two days she thinks about what she has done and the questions that the police might ask, specifically to focus on the lies she might have to tell and ensuring her story will be consistent.

Actually Felix Oliver also sees merit in the delay, because he can meet DS Rebecca Newton and go through the questions they want to ask. So he invites Rebecca to dinner at a Thai restaurant and, over Pad Thai with chicken and Laksa with prawns, they go through how they want to conduct the interview. It is difficult, because they have no evidence other than the Pentecostal church link and the date when Deborah McPherson went away. They both think that Deborah is intelligent and, even if she had committed the three murders or she was an accomplice, it is very unlikely that they would get a confession from her.

“Maybe we should ask leading questions,” Rebecca suggests, “and see what she says?”

“Even though it is unlikely,” Felix replies, “we should work on the assumption that she’s the murderer and see if we can trip her up and get her to make contradictory statements.”

“If we can get her to lie we might get somewhere. So I think the most promising questions will be about her knowing the victims and their wives, and the date when she left Tasmania. Either way, she might have some interesting information.”

“And we need to ask about her phones,” Rebecca adds.

“I think that should be near the end of the interview. We don’t mention phones and drop them into the questioning late as a bombshell, and then see if she contradicts herself.

They discuss the interview but in the end, other than the obvious questions, they decide that they will have to wing it and see where Deborah’s answers lead them.

“Perhaps she’ll tell us something that will open up a new line of enquiry,” says Rebecca hopefully.

“Not satisfactory, but it’ll have to do,” adds Felix. “I think you should lead the interview. She might be more comfortable and open up to another woman.”

On Monday morning Felix and Rebecca arrive at work early and set up in an interview room. The chairs opposite them are empty and, instead, there is a keyboard, a mouse and a large monitor on the table.

Then they wait.

At 9:30 am exactly Deborah McPherson’s face appears on the screen. All that they can see is her head and the tops of her shoulders.

“Can you move your computer further away from you?” Felix asks.

“No. I’m in my mobile home and there isn’t much room.”

Deborah could move the laptop further from her, but she doesn’t want them to see more of her, especially the Holy Bible clasped in her hands on the table. She has deliberately angled her laptop screen up so that they can’t see much of her. She’s

pleased that there are two officers conducting the interrogation, because her eyes can move from one to the other if she has to look away from the questioner. Looking down will only be alright if she's pondering a question.

"OK," Felix states, "I'll start the recording now. This is a recorded video conference. Present are DI Felix Oliver, DS Rebecca Newton and Mrs Deborah McPherson. You aren't under arrest and you can leave at any time.

"Sorry about the formal introduction, Deborah, but police protocol requires it. Basically we want to know if you have seen or heard anything that might point us in the direction of the perpetrator of three murders."

At that, Deborah inwardly smiles with relief, but her external demeanour is serious.

"Rebecca will interview you and I'll butt in when I have a question."

"Hi, Deborah," opens Rebecca, and asks:

"Are you religious?"

"Yes."

"What religion are you?"

"I'm a Pentecostalist."

There are two Pentecostal churches in Hobart. Which one did you go to?"

"The northern church."

"Do you know Anne Preston?"

"No. I have met her, but I don't *know* her."

"And her husband Michael?"

"I might have met him. I don't think he attended the church services."

"Do you know that Michael was murdered?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"The people that I worked with gossiped about it."

"Have you been to Colebrook?"

"No. I might have passed through it. Why?"

"It is where Michael was murdered. Do you know the church in Colebrook?"

"Which church?"

"The Anglican church."

"No."

"What were you doing on that Monday night?"

Deborah laughs.

"Sorry! But it is about one and a half years ago! I haven't a clue. I was probably at home reading the Holy Bible or watching television."

'Why did you ask? You knew the answer.' Felix thinks.

"Have you been to the southern Pentecostal church?"

For the few days Deborah has thought about her story, she has decided that the only weak link in it is if the police know that she went to the church and draw the connection between Deborah and Margaret. But she only said her name was Margaret to a few people. However, if she lies it could back fire on her. What has Phillippa

Anderson told them? And if their questions are leading she might trip herself up. She can't deny being there, so she replies honestly but vaguely:

"A few times."

"Why?"

"The churches sometimes held joint services."

"Did you go to that church for other services?"

"A few times. I wanted to see what it is like."

"And?"

"I didn't like it. The pastor is very casual."

"Do you know Phillippa Anderson?"

"No."

"And her husband James?"

"No."

"You aren't looking at me, Deborah?" Rebecca asks. "Why is that?"

"Sorry. I was looking at Inspector Oliver to see if he has a question."

The answer appears to satisfy the two detectives, because Deborah isn't looking away from them, which might be an indication of guilt. Although when Deborah shifts her gaze to Felix, he's looking down at his notes and she doesn't have to look into his eyes, which would be very uncomfortable and possibly reveal the turmoil in her heart. She looks back at Rebecca and, with a bland face, she asks:

"Can you describe the people you are referring to?"

"Phillippa is obese."

"Ah, I saw her."

'I was going to add that I didn't speak to her,' thinks Deborah, quickly. "This is getting difficult because I don't know what they know and I don't know how to answer the question. Rebecca isn't telling me much. I must keep my answers terse and vague, and not volunteer any information. It's up to her to ask the right questions.'

"Did you speak with her?"

"I might have said hello to her."

"Do you know that James was murdered?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"The people that I worked with talked about it. And before you ask, I have no idea what I was doing on whatever day he died."

"Have you been to Franklin?"

"Yes."

"When was the last time?"

"Last year."

"Why?"

"It was a sunny, autumn day so I went for a drive."

"Did you see the church?"

"I had lunch at a cafe and the window looked out onto a church. Is that the church

you mean?”

“Yes.”

“I only looked at it. Why are you asking?”

“We’ll get to that.”

Deborah is prepared for the next question. She has thought about how the police got her phone number and email address.

‘I’m not social,’ she thinks, ‘so no one other than the company I worked for, the estate agent and the government should know the information. But Francesca Martínez knows my address, and it would be easy for the police to contact the estate agent and get my details.’

“Do you know Francesca Martínez?” Rebecca asks.

“Yes.”

And her husband Pasqual?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“We met at church. And we had dinner together.”

Do you know that Pasqual was murdered?”

“No.”

“Do you know Richmond?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“I have been there a few times with my husband Saul, to have picnics and see the bridge.”

“Did you see the church?”

“Yes, the Catholic church.”

“The Anglican church.”

“No, where is it?”

Felix interrupts the questioning and says:

“It is strange that you know Michael and James have been murdered, but not Pasqual.”

“Why?” Deborah asks.

‘Like getting blood from a stone,’ Felix thought. He shrugs and asks:

“Surely you heard it on the TV news or read it in a newspaper?”

“I don’t watch the TV news or read newspapers, except on the weekend when I do the crosswords.”

“Well then, at work?”

“No one mentioned it.”

“The murder happened on the second Monday in February, four months ago,” states Rebecca.

“Ah,” with undisclosed relief, “that might explain it. It was about that time that I resigned from work and drove my mobile home to Devonport to catch the ferry to Melbourne.”

“Actually the murder was the day before you left.”

“How do you know that?”

Rebecca was about to say “from your phone records,” but caught herself in time, and she replies:

“From your estate agent. As well as proving us with your phone and email details, they told us when you left.”

“Then I know precisely what I was doing! I was at home packing to leave. And before you ask, I was alone. But when was the death announced?”

“The next afternoon.”

“Ah. I was on the road. I didn’t listen to the radio or watch TV so I didn’t know about it. I’m very sad, because Francesca and Pasqual are nice.”

“But I find it hard to believe that you drove in silence,” muses Felix.

“In the afternoon I was in the north of Tasmania, and I would have had to retune the radio and TV to get any stations. Anyway I listen to Classic FM. I didn’t bother, because I would be soon in Victoria and I would have to retune them again. So I listened to CDs of Mozart.”

“When did you buy your mobile home?”

“In November.”

“Why wait three months to set out?”

“I wanted to celebrate Christmas at my local church. And I was needed at work in January, when most people take their holidays. Also, I had to organise for my house to be let. I was in no hurry.”

“Why are you alone?” Rebecca asks.

“My husband Saul died years ago and, after the children had left home, I found that I’m satisfied with my own company.”

“How did he die?”

“He drank, sometimes to excess. One day he was drunk and drove his car into a truck. If you are interested I’m sure the police have a file on his death.”

“OK. Are you connected to the Anglican church?”

“No.”

Rebecca is irritated by Deborah and thinks:

‘She takes every question literally and only answers in monosyllables.’

Unable to hide her frustration, she glares at Deborah and asks aggressively:

“Have you *ever* been connected to the Anglican church?”

Deborah inwardly smiles at Rebecca’s loss of control, and senses that she has got the upper hand. But she looks demurely into Rebecca’s eyes and, with a bland face, says:

“No, Rebecca,” using her name deliberately, “not *connected*. But my parents were Anglican and I went to church as a child.”

“You know that the murders were committed in the grounds of Anglican churches?”

“I think someone at work mentioned that one murder was in an Anglican church, but I don’t know which one.”

Deborah doesn't elucidate whether she's talking about the places or the murders.

Exasperated, Rebecca asks with a sneer in her voice:

"Do you know that the murders were at decommissioned churches?"

"Deconsecrated I think you mean, Rebecca. No, I didn't know."

Felix, realising that Rebecca has lost control, says:

"I'll take over now. Deborah, did you know that Anne Preston suffered physical abuse from her husband?"

"No."

"That Phillippa Anderson suffered abuse from her husband?"

"No."

"That Francesca Martínez suffered abuse from her husband?"

"No."

"Did your husband abuse you?"

"No, and I haven't been abused by anyone else."

Deborah hasn't told anyone about her abuse as a child or Saul's behaviour, so she's confident that these lies won't be found out.

"Don't you think it is suspicious that all three men had abused their wives?" Felix asks.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Domestic violence is very common in Australia. I think it is just a coincidence. But it may not have been abuse."

"How can you possibly say that!"

"Felix, in the Holy Bible it is written *wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands and suffer not a woman to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*. So if a wife doesn't submit then it is right and proper for her husband to pull her into line."

"But physical violence?"

"That's going too far, Felix, but some castigation is alright. After all, the Holy Bible commands us that to *spare the rod is to spoil the child*."

Felix sighs and summarises:

"All three men went to Pentecostal churches. All three men abused their wives. All three men were murdered in the grounds of Anglican churches. And all three men were murdered by the same person."

"The same person? How do you know?" Deborah asks.

"Because of the way the murders were committed."

"What has that got to do with me?"

"You are a Pentecostalist, you have, admittedly, tenuous links with the Anglican church, and you knew the three wives and at least one of the men. So we are interested in what you might have seen or heard."

"I only *knew* two of the wives."

"It's splitting hairs," Felix says, exasperated.

"But lots of other people fit your criteria. For example, the pastors at the churches

and other members of the congregations.

Felix then asks a few pointless questions, designed to put Deborah at ease:

“Have you ever had any affairs?”

“No. Since my husband died I haven’t met anyone whom I like that much.”

And, with a big grin:

“But perhaps that person is you, Felix?”

Felix looks down, takes a deep breath and exhales slowly before he asks:

“Did you kill any of the three men?”

“No.”

Do you know who did?”

“No, I don’t know him.”

“Do you have any information that might help us find him?”

“No.”

Deborah is inwardly pleased with herself because Felix has taken the bait and referred to *him* not *the person*.

“OK. Now, about your phone number.”

A powerful anxiety overcomes her and she says:

“Sorry, my mouth is dry. I have to get a glass of water.”

And Felix and Rebecca see Deborah slide out of view. Getting a glass, filling it and returning gives Deborah time to think about her phone numbers, and the anxiety she feels subsides and is replaced by a quiet confidence. When she slides back into view, not exposing anything of her except her head and shoulders, she sips the water in her left hand and:

“About my phone number, Felix. What do you want to know?”

“We have traced the number and there’s nothing before the middle of January, so it’s a new number. It confirms the date that you left Hobart to go to Melbourne.”

“My old phone couldn’t do what I wanted and so I got a new phone and a new contract with a phone company. The phone came with a SIM card and I used that because my old SIM wouldn’t fit.

“Don’t you know that you could have transferred the old number to the new SIM?”

“No, I didn’t know that,” with a solemn expression hoping the lie would go unnoticed.

“What I found interesting is that your phone has only once pinged the tower closest to the church you attended. Why?”

“Because I go to church on Sunday.”

“Every Sunday?”

“Yes, unless I’m sick.”

“So why doesn’t your phone show that?”

“In Exodus 20 the Holy Bible says:

*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. In it thou shalt not do any work.*

“So I left my phone at home.”

“Can we have your old number,” rather despondently, “and your permission to

investigate where you have been?

“Yes, it is ...,” and Deborah recites the ten-digit number without hesitation.

“I noticed that you have a wedding band on your finger. Why?”

“I’m married to God.”

Felix asks Rebecca:

“Do you have any more questions?”

“No.”

“OK Deborah, I’ll terminate the recording.”

“Oh, before you go Deborah, can we have your fingerprints and a DNA sample?”

Deborah has a surge of panic and Felix and Rebecca see her hesitate and her eyes look down. She’s looking at the Holy Bible clasped in her hands, which the police officers can’t see, and praying silently.

After what seemed an eternity, but was only a couple of seconds, Felix says:

“Well?”

“I was thinking. I don’t know that it is allowed by my beliefs. If I remember, I think 1 Corinthians 6-19 prohibits it.”

Deborah’s mind is in turmoil, but one thought comes into her head, apparently from God:

‘If they have any fingerprints or DNA then they would have asked for mine at the beginning of the interview. So I’m sure they’re just ticking all the boxes and don’t have anything to compare mine with. Or Felix might be clever and he has left it to the end to allay my suspicions. But I don’t think that he’s *that* devious.’

So she raises her eyes, looks directly at Felix, and declares:

“But God will forgive me under the circumstances and you can take them. Can I do it at the local police station?”

“Almost certainly,” responds Felix, “but I’ll check and telephone you. In about ten minutes?”

“That’s fine.”

And Deborah quits the app that has been used for the interrogation.

Felix rings the Longreach police station and then rings Deborah:

“You can give your finger prints and DNA in Longreach,” and he gives her the phone number so that she can make an appointment.

“Are you going to want to talk with me again?” Deborah asks.

“If we have further questions for you. I have your phone number if we want to talk with you again. Where are going next?”

“Paronella Park in Queensland.”

Felix terminates the call and groans to Rebecca:

“Grrrr, nothing. Other than the phone number, not a bloody thing!”

“I agree.”

Having Deborah’s permission, it was easy to get the old phone number’s records and Rebecca goes through them.

“I started at January last year, before the first murder and went through to the last

entry in January this year. Every day her phone is at her home. During the week it is in the same location, presumably her work place. There are a lot of places in Hobart which are probably going shopping. On the Sundays there are only two close to the northern church and only one close to the southern church. Other than that it appears her phone was turned off, as she said.”

“Why turn it off on Sundays?” Felix muses.

“She’s a devout, fundamentalist Christian. We know that she went to church regularly, but there’s nothing on her phones. We could take a still photo from the video and see if it is recognised at the two churches.

“But, much more importantly, her phone is at her home on both of the Mondays of the first two murders and it definitely hasn’t pinged the towers at Colebrook. And, as she said, she visited Franklin in May, about three and a half months before the murder, too long a gap for her to be looking over the church as a possible crime scene. And, as far as I can see, every Monday night her phone is on. So there’s no link to the two deaths.”

Felix groans.

“Grrrr. We have nothing on Deborah McPherson. No evidence, no contradictions, nothing. Either she or someone she knows committed the murders and she has lied convincingly, or she’s innocent, told the truth, and she hasn’t seen or heard anything relevant. I think the latter is more likely, because of the way she answered all our questions. But it isn’t possible to tell.

“I don’t think we can interview her again, because she has a perfect right to say that she has said everything already and she doesn’t want to be questioned.”

“Do you think she was involved?”

“Probably not, but we’ll never find out. If we don’t get some evidence in the future, and that is very unlikely, the murderer has got away with it.”

“Maybe a fourth murder will be committed and he’ll leave some evidence behind.”

“I would rather that didn’t happen,” muses Felix, “three murders are more than enough.”

Deborah goes to the police station and gets her fingerprints and a DNA sample taken. They’re sent to DI Oliver and filed. Felix goes through the motions of checking them but, not surprisingly, they don’t match with any records, let alone crimes.

Although it is a forlorn hope, Felix arranges with Peter Taggart to view the video of the interview and confirm his depression. And after looking at it, Peter says:

“Sorry, but there isn’t enough circumstantial evidence to arrest McPherson and go to court. And she hasn’t given any other leads. You’ll have to find more hard evidence if you want to interview her again, let alone prosecute her.”

## 22

Deborah McPherson spends a few days in Longreach. She visits the Stockmen's Hall of Fame and she goes to the Qantas Museum, where she discovers that the name without a *U* is because the international airline began in 1920 as the *Queensland And Northern Territory Air Service*. She didn't lie to DI Felix Oliver, because she'd visited both of them briefly last weekend. She takes a cruise on the river.

Then she sets out in her mobile home to Townsville and Paronella Park. As there is no hurry she dawdles and takes a detour to Sapphire where she stays at the Big Bessie fossicking area for a few days looking for the precious gemstone. She doesn't find any, because countless miners and numerous tourists have got there first.

After that experience, she drives to and spends some time in Charters Towers before going to and settling in Townsville, where she has her mobile home serviced and visits Magnetic Island.

During the trip she thinks about the interview with Felix and Rebecca. She has no idea what information they could get from her computer, and she doesn't know what to do. Perhaps her service provider stores information, about which sites she has visited on her computer?

She prays at her altar, but her prayers don't resolve the problem.

"Perhaps I should buy a new laptop and trash the old one?" she says to herself. "I can afford it. But I can wait until the police call me again, if they do."

She goes to Paronella Park and spends a few days there, wandering around the fascinating castle and its gardens, built by an Italian immigrant.

One night she realises that she doesn't have a plan for where to go next, so she gets up a map on her laptop and looks at the possibilities. She arbitrarily chooses Nanum on the Gulf of Carpentaria. On the way there she has her first puncture, but she has planned for this eventuality and has no trouble replacing the tyre by herself, and she gets the bad one fixed when she arrives at Weipa, which exists to service the bauxite mining. On Sunday she goes to the Seventh Day Adventist church where she's welcomed by the congregation.

Deborah wanders aimlessly around the area and then heads to Jabiru in the Kakadu National Park. There is only one church and so she goes the Uniting Church service to pray. There are plenty of things to see and do in the national park, and she spends two weeks there. She's admiring crocodiles, with some trepidation, when she decides where to go next. She will go to Byron Bay in New South Wales.

'I'll exchange crocodiles for sharks!' she thinks, and sets out.

The trip takes her past Elsie National Park and she stays there again, because she has fond memories of her visit there in late February, but she's disappointed that

she doesn't hear the thunderous, galloping donkeys. Then, after a detour to Tennant Creek, she goes back to Longreach, and on to Roma and Toowoomba. She skirts Brisbane and crosses the Queensland border into New South Wales and to Byron Bay.

There she stops and waits. She swims, walks along the beaches, and visits the surrounding area and the lighthouse on Cape Byron. She takes a trip in a hot-air balloon, but she isn't brave enough to go hang-gliding. And she eats at night at some of the restaurants.

And she waits until the date is right.

Deborah hasn't heard from the police for about three months. Certainly they haven't asked for her phone or laptop, and so she decides that they were on a fishing trip and have no evidence or reasons for looking at them. She decides that her anxiety and buying a new laptop are unnecessary.

It is the third Monday in September and in the evening she goes to a nice restaurant in Byron Bay and orders. At exactly 8 pm she drinks a toast to Phillippa Anderson and her success with James.

"I wonder where I'll be in February? Maybe back in Tasmania? Or Margaret River?" she says out loud to the waiter, who is bringing her a meal of smoked salmon pasta, green beans and salad.

He doesn't understand, smiles, shrugs his shoulders and goes to another table to collect their order.