

Murders in SYDNEY

Stuart Gustafson

America's International Travel Expert®

Murders in SYDNEY

(previously published as *Sydney Murders—SOLVED!*)

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Mathematics Professor Alfred Dunningham, PhD series

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Murders in SYDNEY (previously published as *Sydney Murders—SOLVED!*)

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Questions to Bring You Closer to Dad

Questions to Bring You Closer to Mom

Questions to Bring You Closer to Grandma & Grandpa

Remembering Our Parents . . . Stories and Sayings from Mom & Dad

PREFACE

Most people who know me know that I really do like to travel. As an author and *America's International Travel Expert*[®], I definitely enjoy traveling to exciting places all over the world. I'm asked at times what location is on my "travel bucket list." My response is simple: I don't have a bucket list; I just go to places that I like. Some of the places are new to me, while other are very familiar because I've been there many times (such as Manhattan in New York City; Los Cabos on Mexico's Baja peninsula; Paris, France; Sydney, Australia). It is this intimate familiarity that I like to explore and develop in my writing.

Missing in Mexico was my debut mystery novel, and I chose San José del Cabo as the primary setting because I've been going to Los Cabos every year since 2003. What started as a one-week trip has now become two to four weeks (or more) a year. I find the area of Los Cabos to be exciting, yet peaceful; friendly, yet quiet, and it has delicious, yet reasonably priced, food. Thanks to its isolated location, and its reliance on tourism, it also happens to be THE safest place for tourists in Mexico. There are other great vacation spots in Mexico; I just happen to really like Los Cabos—I hope you'll have the opportunity to visit it someday.

As title to this book so clearly states, this mystery novel is set in Sydney, Australia. I don't get to Sydney as often as I do to Mexico, in part primarily due to the 21-hour set of flights from my home to there. But I have been there numerous times (including five times in just one year), and I find the city to be quite vibrant, yet manageable. Transportation around the area is quite good, and I still have to remind my-

self to “Look Right” when I’m walking and I approach an intersection; I’m still not used to vehicles driving on the left side of the road. As you read the book and recall your own visits to Sydney, some of the places will be familiar. If you’ve not been there yet, I certainly invite you to visit Australia’s largest city.

The language in this book, all clean, of course, is from the position of the person involved. This includes, for example, the spelling of words like “colour” instead of “color.” Australians also have common sayings that don’t necessarily mean the same things to people in the USA. They also use understood abbreviations, just as New Yorkers use “SoHo” instead of saying, “the area South of Houston Street.” Although not a comprehensive “translation of Australian to American English” (nor is it intended to be), the following is a list of some of the more common expressions used in this book:

- Mate—a colloquial reference to the other person, male or female, whether a close acquaintance or not.
- No worries—instead of saying “You’re welcome,” many Australians will say, “No worries, mate.”
- G’day—literally means “Good day,” and is typically used as a morning greeting, although it can be used at any time.
- CBD—Central Business District, the primary financial and business area in downtown Sydney.
- Sheila—a common slang name given to a young female.

Enjoy your time in Sydney!

Stuart Gustafson

America's International Travel Expert[®]

Boise, Idaho, USA



1



Early morning

Monday, 30 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

“**K**iller arrested!” exclaimed the street corner newspaper vendor. “Read the full details of the arrest for the killings in the Prince Albert, the Tooley Rocks, and on the Bridge. It’s exclusive only in the *Tribune*!” The hawker continued his routine of showing the headlines, taking the dollar coin, and then targeting some new customers. If a driver showed interest, the newsman would venture out into the traffic to make a sale, but he tended to stay mostly on the sidewalk near his dwindling stack of newspapers. It was a good day to be selling newspapers. Headlines always sold more papers, and sensational headlines sold them even faster.

The headlines on the morning’s *Sydney Tribune* shouted in celebration **Killer Arrested in 3 “Famous Sites” Murders!** The continuing front-page article was intended to be sensational, contain exclusive information, and deliver a sense of relief to the inhabitants of Sydney and the outlying areas of New South Wales. Whether the article achieved its intended results would remain unknown, but most news-

stands sold out of all their copies before 0830 hours, even with more copies printed than on a normal Monday morning. But, then, this wasn't a normal Monday morning.

The article continued,

In a televised press conference last evening, New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin Martin announced the arrest of Harold Steinberg, a 42-year old man from Landeen Bush, a small community in northwest New South Wales. Steinberg is being held without bond for the three "Famous Sites" murders as they've been called because of where the bodies were found: Prince Albert Winery, Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It's not clear if Steinberg has retained the services of a defence lawyer, and a motive has not yet been released.

Commissioner Martin was tight-lipped on details, but he did say that more information would be released following Steinberg's arraignment in NSW Supreme Court today. The Commissioner did say, "The fine residents of Sydney and all of New South Wales can sleep comfortably knowing that the perpetrator of these heinous crimes has been apprehended and is in custody."

Full accounts of the murders, previously well-publicized in all the media, were once again provided in case there was a reader who had not yet heard about them. The locals knew the details, as the murders had commanded front page news in the papers and they'd also been the lead-in reports on the radio and the television. The grisly details of the sinister crimes added to the appeal for many readers, and the reporters were more than willing to cater to that desire. This morning's newspaper also contained additional advertisements as the publisher knew that more copies would be sold,

and he was certainly eager to cash in on the increased advertising revenues.

Foot traffic was expected to be extraordinarily busy around the Supreme Court offices later today between Philip and Macquarie Streets where Harold Steinberg would be arraigned. Although the three “Famous Sites” murder victims were complete unknowns and not famous in their own right, the crusty residents of Sydney were not appreciative of anyone misusing or desecrating places they considered sacred. And the locations of the three murders—the Prince Albert Winery, the Tooley Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge—fit into the category of sacred sites.

As the sun climbed higher into the morning sky, the pleasant November day began to give way to a day filled with intrigue and drama. The projected high temperature for the downtown Sydney area was a picture-postcard 31° Celsius (86° Fahrenheit); Bondi Beach was to be a little warmer with mild onshore breezes. There was a high level of security already in place on Philip Street, Macquarie Street, and all around Hyde Park to the south. Barricades had been set up the day before, and both uniformed and plain-clothes police officers were afoot on many blocks around the area. Bomb-sniffing dogs would surprise an occasional person as the dogs seemed to be attracted toward certain types of sandwiches that were inside the office workers’ totes. The startled workers received a calming look from the K-9 officers as the “suspicious” item was revealed.

There were other articles on the inside pages of the newspaper that were essentially a re-hash of previous reports of the murder victims. A sidebar article based on information

from published, as well as anonymous, sources chronicled USA Professor Alfred Dunningham's approach to solving the crime. The article was titled "By the Numbers," and it re-counted other investigations in which the eccentric math professor had been used by police forces around the world to help them solve mysterious crimes. There was even some mention of his international seminar series titled, "Detective Work Made Easier Through Mathematics"—free publicity, so it seemed. It appeared that the noted professor had once again been able to assist the police in solving the crime.



2



Early morning

Two Weeks earlier—Monday, 16 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

Residents of Sydney and the outreaches of New South Wales woke to shocking headlines in the morning's *Sydney Tribune*, **Hanging in Famous Winery**. Fewer than one-fifth of Sydney's 1.2 million households actually took delivery of the paper, but many workers—from secretary to lawyer to labourer to corporate executive—would grab a copy on the way to work, either from an automated box, a street corner vendor, or from a newsstand that sold papers, magazines, and assorted food items. Some would get the paper before taking the train into the city, and others would wait until they exited the station on the way to the office.

"Can you believe the nerve to hang the bloke in the Prince Albert?" the newspaper vendor said as one of his regulars snatched up a copy of the *Tribune*. "I mean, right there in the middle of the grape fields," he continued. "When do you think he could've done it?" The Prince Albert that the vendor referred to was the Prince Albert Winery, one of the most famous wineries in all of Australia that was started with

vines hand-carried by the Prince himself in 1850 on his trip to commemorate the opening of the University of Sydney. The winery was originally royalty property, but it was sold off at auction 85 years ago to add money to the local coffers and because the royals really didn't know how to properly manage a winery. They knew how to drink the stuff, but they didn't know how to properly run it as a business, as if the royals were ever concerned about that part of any financial activity.

"Don't know, mate. I've got to read it first. Who was it?"

"The bloke's name was Rory Allen, but that's not a name I've ever heard, and I've lived here all my life." The vendor always wanted a lively conversation, and it appeared that he now had one going.

"So what do the Police have to say about it? Do they have any idea on why the chap was hanged? And how could they do it in the Prince Albert? Didn't anybody see it?" The businessman was one of the few who would spend time to say more than just "G'day" to the vendor as they grabbed a morning paper on their way to work.

"They're not saying much right now; they're being a bit mum about it. Even the managers at the Prince Albert are confused on how it could've been done without being seen. The Police are hoping they've got something from their surveillance cameras." The vendor was now in his element—he knew more about the story than did his customer, and that gave him a power that he reveled in. He would occasionally add a little more detail than what was actually in the paper; but he didn't feel that there was any harm in that. After all, his customers expected him to be almost as knowledgeable

as the newscasters on the telly because news was his business, along with a little gossip, and the occasional action on the ponies or the footy games.

“That is a bit of a frightful sight, isn’t it?” the customer asked, not really expecting an answer as he looked at the photograph of the hanged man. Fortunately, the newspaper had the decency to block out the victim’s face and other potentially identifying features. The picture was still a shocking sight—the body of a lifeless man strung up in the Prince Albert Winery. What was the killer trying to prove? “Any ideas on the motive or why in the Prince Albert?”

“Nothing yet,” the vendor replied. “It just happened yesterday, but I heard that the Police are jumping all over this one.”

“No doubt. What are you hearing?” the customer asked as he pointed to the vendor’s earpiece.

“They’re a bit tight-lipped on the details, although I’ve just heard a lot of traffic on the scanner. No one likes it when someone does something like that in one of our top spots.” The street vendor kept an earpiece in as he listened continuously on the police scanner; he liked being in the know, and especially if he knew it before anyone else.

“You’re dead set on that one, mate. I remember when some crazy fool tried to pour paint all over the top of the Opera House. They attacked that one like a swarm of bees on a new queenie. Gotta get to the office, now. See you tomorrow.”

“Right, mate.” The vendor immediately switched his attention and conversation to another regular who just arrived at his stand. “G’day, mate. Ya gotta see this,” he said as he

handed the newspaper to the approaching customer. "Can you believe the nerve to hang the bloke in the Prince Albert?"

And the morning cycle continued in Australia's largest city.



3



0900 hours

Monday, 16 November

Prince Albert Winery—Hunter Valley Wine Region,
north of Sydney

The police had returned to the scene of the crime at Prince Albert Winery while many Sydneysiders were still making their way to work. Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth brought photos of the awful hanging with him since the man's body had been mercifully taken down and sent to the Regional Morgue. He wasn't sure who'd leaked that photo to the *Tribune* because he'd given strict orders that all photos had to be cleared through him before being released to the media. He swore he'd find out, even if it meant pressing hard on the publisher, something he didn't particularly like to do because he typically needed the paper's help more than they needed his.

"Good morning to you, sir," the winery manager offered as Farnsworth and his group left their cars and were walking toward the winery office. The rock pathway was a pleasant change from the dusty rows of the vineyard where they encountered the body strung up in a hangman's noose last

evening. But they'd be back out there soon enough, a good reason for most of the police to not wear their best black shoes on this morning.

"G'day, Mr. Russell. I trust you were able to grab some restful sleep last night?"

"Not much of it, mate. I wanted to make sure I wrote down everything I could think of that might have any relevance to the murder." Lindsay Russell assumed the leadership reins of the Prince Albert Winery five years earlier and he took great pride in everything that took place there. That all changed yesterday, of course, as no one can be proud of a murder that takes place at your establishment—especially when it is one of Eastern Australia's famous sites. Queen Elizabeth II would even make a special point to visit the winery on her occasional trips to Australia. The murder was a horrific event, but it wouldn't change Russell's outlook and demeanour. The employees needed his resolute strength; so did the visitors to the winery.

"Is it okay for the boys to go back to the spot and poke around a bit?" As Detective Chief Inspector, Farnsworth knew he didn't actually have to ask for permission. But he also knew that his courtesy would be repaid; maybe not on this investigation, but it wouldn't be lost on the winery manager.

"Anything they want," replied the manager.

"Thanks, mate," Farnsworth said as he gestured for his men to go out into the vines and resume their investigation that had been cut short last night due to the darkness.

"No worries, sir. I'll do anything I can to help find the buggers who desecrated these lands." The winery manager

turned to walk back toward the office. "Let me show you what I wrote down from what I could recall yesterday." Farnsworth followed the winery manager to the office where the two men sat down and Lindsay Russell shared his collected notes with the police detective who was the most respected inspector on the New South Wales Police Force. The two men pored over paper after paper, detail by detail, while the other detectives were in the vineyard.

"I scanned through the tapes of all the vehicles entering the grounds, but the tapes run on a two-hour loop," the manager said. "I pulled off all of the tapes as soon we saw the body. I didn't see anything that looked out of the ordinary, but I might have overlooked something. You're free to take them if you'd like."

"Thanks, Lindsay," the Chief Inspector replied on a more casual note now that they were separated from the others. "I'll have one of my men gather them up, and I'll let you know if we see anything suspicious on them. By the way, when was the last time anyone was out there in that part of the land?"

"Friday at the latest," the manager replied. "No one was working the vines on the weekend."

"So we don't know for sure that it was yesterday, do we?" Farnsworth asked.

"No we don't."

"I guess we'll have to let the Medical Examiner tell us when he was strung up," the Chief Inspector responded as he now realized that the crime could have been committed two days ago. "Well, it's a good thing you don't have any dingos

or wild dogs out here, or we would've really had an ugly sight on our hands."

"That's if there'd been anything left of him. Pour you another tea, Chief?"

"Thanks, mate. No sugar as my wife thinks I'm adding a bit too much around the waist. I tell her that's because she doesn't allow me to play rugby anymore. And you know what she's got the nerve to say? She says that even if I did play that I couldn't run hard enough to work up a sweat. Women—what can you do?"

"Obviously I don't know," the manager replied in an attempt to be conversational yet wanting to change the subject back to the reason for the visit.

"I'm sorry; I forgot," the detective said as he realized that Lindsay Russell and his wife divorced earlier in the year after she'd had an affair with a television newscaster.

"That's okay, Chief. That chapter's closed. Right now I consider myself married to the winery. Too bad it's named after a man, because I think she's about as fickle as any woman I've ever met."

"You'll find yourself a good sheila, Lindsay. You're too good of a fellow to stay single for long." Switching back to the matter at hand, Farnsworth continued, "I'll let you know if the Crime Lab turns up anything from the pole or the rope."

"How could the fellow carry that much out there and get his victim there too?" The winery manager was beginning to think like a detective. The crime scene just didn't make sense to him.

“That’s a good question that I hope the men in the field will be able to answer for me and for the Commissioner. He’s already pushing on me, and it’s been less than 24 hours since we found the body.”

The two men continued to review Lindsay Russell’s notes in the comfort his office. Nothing seemed especially outstanding, but neither man wanted to overlook any potential detail.

The day’s heat was beginning to increase its pressure on the detectives out in the rows of vines, but they’d all had worse assignments. At least this was a fairly clean crime scene; they could deal with the heat and the dry conditions. And there weren’t any body parts rotting in the sun, or scavenging animals or nuisance flies to deal with. A murder investigation—yes, it was; but at least it was a clean one. And the men and women in blue always appreciated that.

They took photographs of the area, including all the footprints. But with all the excitement that accompanied the finding of the body yesterday, the workers and the media trampled all through the area, forgetting that it was a crime scene that they were disturbing. By the time the coroner’s office arrived to retrieve the body, all possible evidence on the ground had probably been obliterated.

“Where’s the nearest access that doesn’t require going through the public areas?” Detective Inspector Langdon McBride asked.

“Back down this row about a kilometre,” a junior detective replied. “The Sergeant and I just went down there, and the tracks have already been brushed away.”

"They couldn't have walked in from the city," McBride continued. "What about tire tracks?"

"They've been brushed also, Inspector. All the way to the paved road, about a half a kilometre. The brush is gone, too; must've have taken it with him."

"So we've got nothing to tell Farnsworth, do we?" McBride asked in frustration. "Dozens of footprints around the pole area, but probably none are the perpetrator's because the area from the crime scene to the road has been brushed. Has anyone turned up anything else?"

Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth's right-hand man looked around to see a bunch of heads nodding sideways. "Chins up, lads. It's not your fault we're dealing with a smart one. Gather up your stuff and let's go get some morning tea."

The detectives' faces suddenly perked up and their energy levels returned. They'd done their work. They certainly couldn't find evidence if there was none to be found. "Do you think the Tasting Room is open?" asked one of the men.

"I'm sure it is," McBride answered. "But they have a 'No Uniforms' rule. Sorry, mate."

"I've got a change of clothes in the car, Inspector. Does that count?"

"I'm not even going to ask why you've got that change in the car, Larsen," McBride answered good naturedly. All the other men chuckled as they knew that Larsen was quite the party man. "I think that tea will be fine for all of us," the Inspector continued.

"Yes, Inspector," Larsen quipped. "It'll help dilute the rest of what's in there."



4



1330 hours

Monday, 16 November

New South Wales Regional Morgue

The drive back into Sydney along Route 2 was easier than the drive out to the winery because the morning traffic from the northern suburbs had already made its way into the city. Farnsworth and McBride were headed directly to the morgue; two of the other detectives were going to the Crime Lab and the others back to headquarters. Detective Inspector McBride usually drove the Chief Inspector's car, but this time Graeme Farnsworth wanted to drive—it actually helped him think when he was driving. McBride filled his chief in on the findings which, given that the men were out in the vines for several hours, were quite unsubstantial except for the apparent neatness of the killer. But both men knew that every crime scene had information left behind—there was no such thing as a “perfect crime.”

The cool temperature and low humidity of the morgue were a welcome relief from the warm musty fields of the Hunter Valley. Graeme Farnsworth didn't like to run the car's A/C unless it was really necessary—the cold air blowing

on him was a distraction that he preferred to avoid. But he'd been inside the winery's office while Langdon McBride and the other men were out in the vineyard under the sun. McBride knew his place, and he'd learned to go along with Farnsworth's habits.

"Good Morning, Dr. Grantham," Farnsworth offered as the two men were acknowledged by the Chief Medical Examiner as they entered her glass-walled office.

"G'day, Chief Inspector Farnsworth, Inspector McBride. How was your visit to the winery?" Alkira Grantham was a highly educated and detail-oriented medical examiner, but those weren't the only reasons she was the Chief Medical Examiner. Of Aboriginal descent (Alkira meaning "the sky"), she had earned graduate degrees in archeology and anthropology before going to medical school for her M.D. degree. Having a female in such a visible position was always a good political move, but Alkira Grantham, B.S., M.S., PhD, and M.D., would have been most deserving of the role regardless of gender, race, or any other classification.

Knowing his position, and knowing that he would be called upon by his superior for the details, Langdon McBride waited for Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth to respond. For now, McBride was enjoying the respite from the outside warmth and humidity.

"It's always a lovely trip going to the Hunter Valley, but I'd rather do it on a weekend with my wife and some friends," Farnsworth responded. "Besides, it was a bit early for the sampling, don't you agree, Langdon?"

"I do, sir, but the boys were getting a bit warm in the field, and I think one or two of them might have enjoyed

a sip just to cool down. I do like a nice red, but a chilled white would have tasted mighty nice." Turning his attention, in more ways than one, to the attractive Medical Examiner, McBride continued, "How was your weekend, Dr. Grantham?"

"It was a good weekend until this young man showed up. Gents, is it okay if we dispense with the formalities whilst it's just us?" Alkira Grantham's rosy lips and white teeth were a perfect complement to her reddish-tanned skin. She preferred wearing earth tone colors that didn't draw attention to her natural color, but the white lab coat and pants were standard items for her job. She was proud of her ancestry, but she wanted people to see her as Alkira Grantham, not as that woman of Aboriginal descent. Her name already told people of her heritage; it was her personality and professional skills that she preferred to be seen.

"Certainly, Alkira." It was Graeme who once again took the lead in responding. "Shall we take a look at the lad and you can tell us what you've found?"

"Of course; let's go."

Langdon McBride's eyes stayed focused on the intellectual, attractive, and charming Chief Medical Examiner as she arose from her chair. She felt the attention, one of her natural instincts, and she looked at him and smiled. Was that a quick wink from her? He opened the door and dutifully followed her and Graeme out to the examining rooms.

"Why don't you two put on a cap, gloves and a coat since the body is still considered evidence?" The M.E. was sounding like a detective now, but she had not yet completed her

investigation, and so she didn't want to have any of her findings tainted.

The two detectives knew the procedure; they had done it many times before. They each put on a hair cap, scrubbed their hands, and then helped each other with gloves and a coat. Alkira donned her items and led them into the cold room where the hanging victim's body lay covered with a sheet. The extra items the men had put on helped to offset the effects of the examining room where it was just a few degrees above freezing.

Lifting the clipboard, the medical examiner began to read some of the details. "The victim's name is Rory Allen, age 25, and the information from your men is that there was no attempt to hide his identification. He was fully clothed and the apparent cause of death is strangulation by hanging. I say 'apparent cause of death' because I would've expected to see some indication of a struggle, but I haven't found any. Do you have anything yet from the Crime Lab on the rope or any other physical evidence?"

Farnsworth looked to McBride who took the cue from his boss. "Nothing conclusive yet," Langdon began. "And the crime scene looked pretty clean, too. It appears that someone, most likely the killer, used some brush to wipe away all the footprints and the tire tracks from the dirtways. Even if the Lab could find fingerprints on the hanging pole, I'm betting right now that they aren't the killer's."

"What else do you have for us, Alkira?" the Chief Inspector asked.

"The most noticeable thing," she began as she pulled back the sheet to expose the head and upper torso, "is this

tattoo.” She pulled a pen from her coat pocket and pointed at the left shoulder area. The tattoo was a triangle with the number 16 inside it. “I removed a small amount of the skin and tattoo and ran a few tests. The tattoo is recent, within one to three days. There aren’t any other tattoos or body piercings, so I don’t know right now if that tattoo is indicative of anything particular.”

“Who knows with kids these days,” Farnsworth said. “We’ll run it by the gang squad to see if they’ve seen this on the streets. What about toxicology?”

“We won’t have reports back until tomorrow or possibly Wednesday morning, but it appears that he may have been drunk. The quick-tox screens indicate alcohol, such as vodka. We’ll know more, including the actual blood-alcohol count, once we have the full toxicology report. Plus I’m having the tattooed area analysed. I’ll send you the full reports as soon as I have them.”

“Are there needle marks anywhere to indicate a drug user?” McBride asked.

“Not in the typical places, Langdon. He appears to be a fairly clean kid as you look at him. Most of the druggies we get in here look like they’ve had a rough life, things like dirty teeth, ragged fingernails. But this kid doesn’t look that way. Also his scalp was clean and his overall appearance was that of a good decent kid.”

“What about time of death?” McBride continued.

“Inconclusive right now. The full reports will help me pin that down more. You see, the strangulation inhibited the blood flow, so the normal time-of-death indicators could give us a false-positive result. There could be up to a twelve-

hour window, but the results of the blood work will help to narrow that. I was also hoping that your investigation would give me some leads for that timeframe.”

Farnsworth started up before McBride could get the first word out of his opening mouth. “The winery manager was as helpful as he could be, but the video tapes showed nothing substantial as they’re on a 2-hour loop. And the hanging took place in an area that’s only visited during the week days. So our victim could’ve been strung up on Friday evening as far as we know. That’s almost a 48-hour window for you, Alkira, but that’s all the information we have.”

“I understand, Graeme. My job is to tell you when and how he died, and yours is to find out who did it and why. Wouldn’t it be nice if there were a note in the pocket saying who did it, why, how, and when?”

The three of them got a chuckle out of that. Alkira had a good sense of humor; she just didn’t display it openly for fear of not being taken seriously.

“I don’t know about you, Alkira, but I know that Langdon and I would be out of a job. So maybe it’s a good thing our killer didn’t give us all the answers.”

“You’re right, Graeme, but it does bother me to see young people like this killed. They’ve got a whole life in front of them, and then it’s snuffed.” That was the one part of Alkira’s job that she didn’t like; trying to make sense of what appeared to be a senseless killing. Of course, Graeme and Langdon also had a tough part of their job when they had to talk with the parents who wanted to know “Why,” among other things. Alkira continued, “What if he had a special girl and

they were planning a life together? It hurts her, too, and then there are the parents. What a shame.”

“Thanks, Alkira. Would you give Langdon a call when you have some more that you can share? I have a feeling I’ll be tied up with the Commissioner for a while. Do you have Langdon’s mobile number?”

Langdon took a quick look at Alkira whose face revealed a slight smile. “I’m sure I do,” she said. “Let me check,” she added as she pulled her phone from the coat pocket and scrolled through her Contacts list. She knew Langdon’s number was in there, and she had it memorized anyway, but she went through the effort to keep her professional demeanour. “Here it is,” she finally said. “I’ll call you later today,” she said to Langdon as she pulled the sheet back up to cover Rory Allen’s lifeless body.

“Okay, thanks,” Langdon replied and then added, “And I’ll let you know if we come up with anything else that might help with time of death or the cause.”

“Thanks. Anyone for a cup of tea to warm up?” Alkira asked as the three of them were leaving the chilled room.

“Sounds good to me,” replied the Detective Chief Inspector. “Do you have time, Langdon?” he continued.

“Sounds good, boss,” Langdon answered as they removed their examination room garments.

Following his boss and the Chief Medical Examiner down the hall to get some warm tea, Detective Inspector Langdon McBride already had a warm feeling as he thought about her calling him for a change. He looked forward to that phone call.



5



1700 hours

Monday, 16 November

New South Wales Police Force Headquarters—Sydney

“**O**kay, everyone. Let’s get settled in and get started here.” Police Commissioner Colin Martin said into the podium’s microphone. The Investigative Team continued with some of their usual chatter and movement knowing that this was just Martin’s first attempt at pulling together the team in an orderly manner. He was the Commissioner, but it was the uniformed officers who did the hard work. His job was mainly political, keeping the government officials and the media in check during high profile situations such as the one they were in right now. “I know it’s already been a long day for many of you, so the sooner we get started, the sooner we can all head out of here.”

Silence slowly moved about the room as everyone began to settle in and focus their attention to the front of the room. “Thank you,” Commissioner Martin replied in acknowledgement. “As you know, we’ve been hit with an ordinary murder that’s unfortunately taken place in a high profile location, the Prince Albert Winery. You are on this team be-

cause you are the best and because I know you will ensure that Detective Chief Inspector Farnsworth brings the killer to me soon. Are there any questions before the Detective C.I. takes over?"

"Commissioner," a wearied voice from the back started. "Is it true that the Prince Albert is giving each of us a case of their best Shiraz once we nail the bugger?"

"I don't have that answer, Boorman, but I'll personally buy you one if you nab him," the Commissioner replied.

Cheers erupted with that response as if Patrolman Boorman was suddenly their hero.

"Any other questions that actually have to do with the case?" Martin paused, but only briefly just in case there might be another Boorman-type question. "I'll now turn it over to DCI Farnsworth who will brief you on your assignments." The Commissioner was given a polite applause as he left for his evening of peace and quiet, one that would hardly be descriptive of those still in the room.

Graeme Farnsworth received a more genuine applause as he got out of his front-row seat and headed to the podium. He tried to focus on walking steadily and without the limp from his rugby days with the Manly Marlins. The surgery on his snapped right ankle was called "successful," but the nagging limp told him otherwise. Everyone on the New South Wales Police Force knew of his playing days and why he had to leave the game, yet he felt that his position as Detective Chief Inspector meant that he should walk steadfastly and evenly. But the men and women beneath him didn't care; Graeme Farnsworth was their DCI, and they would do anything he asked them to do.

“Thank you for being here,” Farnsworth began as the investigative team responded with some laughter and remarks. “Ladies and Gentlemen,” he continued in a more somber tone, “we do have a serious case that we need to address.” The room was in absolute silence as everyone recognized that tone, one that he reserved for only the most critical situations. “As you know, the media is all over the Commissioner because of the hanging at the Prince Albert. And when they’re on the Commissioner,” he paused for effect, “he and they are all over us. Shall we start with what we already know, and then we can head into next steps and who’s going to do what?”

Graeme Farnsworth had been well respected in New South Wales long before he rose to the position of Detective Chief Inspector of the New South Wales Police Force. As an award-winning winger for the Manly Marlins, he’d been the “cover boy” of numerous rugby championship matches in local papers and magazines as well as a few international printings. A cheap tackle broke his right ankle in a regionals match, and his attempt to come back to the game the following season was filled with numerous disappointments and excessive times on the bench. He loved the game, but the game had told him, “Goodbye.” Fortunately, the New South Wales Police Force extended him a warm “Hello.”

Farnsworth sat back down as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride took over at the podium and reviewed the details that, while informational, were hardly substantial. They knew the victim’s name and age, but not why he would have been at the Prince Albert Winery. They knew he died from strangulation, but they didn’t know exactly when he died or

how he got to the place where he was hanged. They knew from the Medical Examiner that he was intoxicated, but they didn't know exactly what he drank or how much. The victim had a recent tattoo, his only one, on his left shoulder, and he didn't appear to be a drug user. McBride noticed that the men and women he was addressing were starting to show some disbelieving looks—it seemed there was a lot more they didn't know than what they did know.

“So you see what we're up against, don't you?” McBride asked in recognition of what he saw on their faces. “While we do have some good information, there's obviously a lot more that we don't know. And that's where you're going to help. Roberts?”

“Sir,” replied Glen Roberts, a 15-year veteran of the force.

“Roberts, I want your team to set up surveillance around the Prince Albert and to install cameras and other devices so that the entire area around the hanging spot is covered and saturated. Let's see if our perp is going to return to the scene to retrieve anything he left behind. Get your gear and I want you to be in place and sending hourly reports to me by 1900 hours. Any questions?”

“No, sir,” replied Roberts as he arose, almost at attention. “Alpha Team, let's go!”

With that order, the senior-most third of the New South Wales Police Force Investigative Team got out of their chairs and followed their leader out the door. A calm settled back over the room as McBride allowed the rest of the group to exchange quizzical looks—what will be their assignments?

“McPherson, I want your team to check out any activity—gangs or otherwise—that might be associated with that tattoo. Kings Cross is a likely area, but also put a gentle push on tattoo parlours in the areas that might be frequented by a decent-looking young man in his mid-20s. Do you have any questions?”

“None at all, Detective Inspector,” responded Lisa McPherson as she stood from her chair. “I’ll be submitting reports hourly just the same as Alpha Team.” Her Bravo Team responded immediately, rose and followed her silently from the room.

The remaining Charlie Team looked dejected as they were usually left with the mop-up work. They were the junior members, but they wouldn’t be on the Investigative Team if they had not already proven their abilities to solve crimes and contribute to the overall teamwork. “What’s left for us, sir?” Roland Thatcher asked as his team looked to him for leadership.

“Thatcher,” McBride began. “Here’s what I have for your team.” He continued to lay out the work for the Charlie Team as all of its members listened attentively, surprised to hear what they were being asked to do. No longer were they being asked to do last-place work. Theirs was an important task, one that could totally shape the outcome of the investigation. “What I’ve just told you is absolutely top secret. If any word of it leaks out, you’ll all be on report. Is that perfectly clear?”

“Yes, sir,” was the synchronous response.

“Well, Thatcher, what do you think? Is your team up to the challenge? And don’t forget what I said about keeping

this completely quiet because if any of this gets out, I'll be kicked off the force. Got that?" McBride wanted to make sure that they fully understood the seriousness and the confidential nature of their task.

"Yes, sir!" again was the response, this time with even more excitement, from the entire team as they sprung from their chairs. No longer were they being tasked with the mundane chores of the investigation—their work could bring headlines this time. Smiles were abundant as Charlie Team gathered around their leader in anticipation of delivering substantial contributions on this important case.

"Thank you, Detective Inspector McBride. You can be assured that Charlie Team will do everything you've asked. And thank you for your confidence, sir." Inspector Thatcher was proud of his team and was confident in their abilities to provide the expected results, as challenging as they were. The proud group of men and women smartly filed out of the briefing room behind their leader as if they were suddenly being carried along on clouds.



6



1855 hours

Monday, 16 November

New South Wales Police Force Headquarters—Sydney

“**M**cBride here,” the D.I. spoke into his mobile phone as he was expecting the first report from Glen Roberts and his Alpha Team, but not for a few more minutes. “What do you have for me, Roberts?”

“It’s McPherson, sir. Bravo Team is completely deployed with an initial concentration in Kings Cross, Darling Harbour, and Milsons Point. No positives to report at this time, but every half hour I’ll be sending updated maps with areas covered. I’ve implemented a dispersion approach so the teams are not wasting time in transit from one location to the next. The Kings Cross team will primarily go east and south; the Darling Harbour team will go west and south with a small group north into The Rocks, and the Milsons Point team will be fanning out into the northern parts of the city. Any questions for me, sir?”

“No questions, McPherson. That’s a most sound approach; just keep an ear out for any fatigue from your team. We need all the focus we can get,” Langdon McBride replied

as he was quite impressed with the organizational skills of the most senior female detective on the New South Wales Police Force.

“Thank you for your confidence, sir,” she responded. “I’ll report again in an hour, sir, and the first set of maps will be in your inbox in thirty minutes. I’ll let you get to your next call,” McPherson said as she hung up knowing that her call was before the call from Alpha Team’s leader Roberts. She also knew that if McBride had anything more to say to her he would have already said it.

As soon as the Detective Inspector had shut his phone, it rang again. “McBride here,” he spoke into the phone.

“Roberts reporting for the Alpha Team right on time, sir.” A slight smile came across the D.I.’s face as the Alpha Team had just been beaten by the Bravo Team, but the Alpha Team leader didn’t have a clue that he wasn’t the first to call in with the initial report. “We encountered a bit of heavy traffic on the way up here, and so we’re just now starting to install the surveillance devices. They should all be in place and functioning, as well as the area swept clear of our tracks, by my next call. We’ve placed our monitoring van down a sideway that’s two roads from that back entrance, so we should be well out of view.”

“Very well, Roberts. Make sure you rotate your team so everyone’s on full alert. We don’t want to miss even the slightest movement in that area.”

“Already set up, sir. Nothing will slip by us. I’ll call in at 2000 hours with my next report. Anything else for me?”

“Nothing else, Roberts. Just don’t go jumping at shadows out there. Remember, all you are there to do is to capture in-

formation, not to snag a body. Is that clear?" McBride wanted to make sure that the Alpha Team didn't blow their cover by approaching anyone who was in the area. They were there to gather information; that was all.

"Perfectly clear, Detective Inspector. I've made sure that all of the team knows that," Roberts said as he closed up his phone. He was a little miffed that McBride reminded him of what their primary mission was; after all, this wasn't the first stake-out-and-record mission that he'd led.

The calls and other updates continued into the night until midnight when McBride told the team leaders to send email updates as he had to do one of his least-liked jobs in the morning—talk to the parents of the victim. No, it was more than just being one of his least-liked jobs; he hated doing it. Not because it was something he would rather delegate, but because it meant the senseless loss of life of a young person. He hated that. He would find the killer so that Rory Allen's parents could see swift justice carried out, even though that would not bring their son back to them.



7



0930 hours

Tuesday, 17 November

Home of Robert and Ryna Allen—North Willoughby

“At least *The Tribune* was a little nicer to us this morning,” Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth used as an opening line as he and Detective Inspector Langdon McBride started their drive north from the main Police Headquarters. McBride was driving this time while his boss read through the reports that came in all evening and morning right up until they left their offices and rode the lift down to the basement garage. Farnsworth’s forehead was filled with several lines of frustration as he was not finding any positive leads in the reports.

“That’s good,” McBride responded. “And I saw that the only articles were a few pages in and they were mostly a rehash of yesterday’s paper. I spoke with the three team leaders just a bit ago; I’m afraid there’s not much progress as far as getting any leads.”

“So I see,” Farnsworth replied. “It appears that the only thing that Alpha Team has seen is a few wild pigs rooting through the area. And Bravo Team hasn’t had any better suc-

cess in tracking down that tattoo. What's Charlie Team doing? I thought they were supposed to be on the streets chatting it up with any strangers or newbies to the area. But Thatcher's reporting 'No positives on level one; one possible positive on level two.' What's that supposed to mean?"

Before he could answer his boss's question, McBride had to slow down as the traffic exiting Warringham Freeway onto Willoughby Road was jammed up due to construction in the right lane. He didn't want to tell Farnsworth what Thatcher and Charlie Team were doing, so he didn't mind the temporary distraction on the road. "This must be what slowed down Roberts and his team last night going up to Hunter Valley," McBride used as an initial deflection. The driving along Willoughby Road with its stop lights and side traffic was another main reason why Langdon typically drove—Graeme found it hard to concentrate on business matters when he also had to be on top alert along the streets.

McBride continued driving north in silence, focusing on his driving rather than disclosing the actual assignment that he gave to Charlie Team. A sport ball came flying over the fence and into traffic as they reached the stop light at Mowbray Road. Off to the right were a primary school and a girls' high school. "She must've gotten her toes under the ball and kicked up rather than forward," McBride offered out as he turned left and then a quick right onto Penshurst Street, knowing that they had just a few more lights until they were at their destination.

Parking the car in front of the house of Rory Allen's parents, McBride picked up the microphone for the police radio. "This is McBride to all units. Farnsworth and I are go-

ing dark. Out.” He replaced the microphone and opened his door and stepped out into Bedford Street. Farnsworth was already out of the car and walking up the sidewalk to the Allen’s front door. McBride got to the door just as it was opening.

“Hello, Mr. Allen. I’m Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth and this is Detective Inspector Langdon McBride. We’re really sorry for your loss. As I said on the phone yesterday, there are a few questions we’d like to ask you and Mrs. Allen as we work to find your son’s killer.”

“Come on in, gentlemen,” Robert Allen said as he pushed open the screen door, inviting them inside. “Shall we sit at the table over there?” he continued as he pointed to the smartly draped dining table that was topped with several bouquets of fresh flowers. “My wife will be out in a few minutes; she had to lie down for a brief spell.” Mr. Allen carefully picked up each flower arrangement and moved it to the living room. The man was visibly nervous, either from the sudden and tragic loss of his only son, from seeing a picture of his dead boy on the front page of the newspaper, or from the presence of these top two police officers. Most likely it was a combination of the three. “Cup of tea?” he asked.

“Yes, please, with cream,” Farnsworth answered.

“Same for me,” Langdon echoed.

Both men sat in silence as they could hear the cups being rattled about as Mr. Allen was nervously putting together cups of tea, wanting to postpone the questioning as long as possible. He wasn’t concerned about the questions themselves; he just hadn’t yet accepted his son’s death and he didn’t want to talk about him in the past tense. Farnsworth

opened a file folder and continued looking over the reports. That last one from Roland Thatcher still had him puzzled; what did 'one possible positive on level two' mean? He was ready to ask McBride again about Charlie Team when Mr. Allen re-entered the dining room carrying a tray with three cups of tea.

"Thank you," the Detective Chief Inspector said as the tea was set in front of him. Mr. Allen had brought out the family's best china; the tea cups had little pink flowers on them and the edges were rimmed in gold. Some of the tea had splashed out into the matching saucers, either while Mr. Allen was pouring it or while he was carrying the tray out from the kitchen.

"Yes, thank you," McBride said. "It smells quite lovely; Earl Grey?" he asked.

"Yes it is. My wife got absolutely hooked on it when we lived outside of London for a few years." Color and life seemed to reappear in Mr. Allen's face as he was able to have some normal conversation with these two police officers. "Would you like a biscuit? My wife just baked them this morning."

"I'll wait for now; perhaps a little later," Farnsworth said as McBride nodded in agreement.

The sound of a door knob turning and the creak of the door's hinges got all three men's attention as they turned their heads to look down the hallway. Robert Allen immediately stood up to go to his wife. The other two men also got out of their chairs. "These are the two police officers I said were coming today," Mr. Allen quietly said to his wife as he approached her.

"Yes, I remember," she replied in a faint and quivering voice, shuffling her cushioned slippers slowly across the wooden flooring. Her husband held her arm as they made their way into the dining room.

Farnsworth spoke first. "Hello, Mrs. Allen. I'm Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth and this is Detective Inspector Langdon McBride. We're sorry for your loss, and we're sorry we have to come here to ask you a few questions about Rory."

Nodding her head was about all that Mrs. Allen could do as she struggled to hold back the tears that were making their way out of her eyes and starting to roll down her cheeks. Graeme pulled his neatly pressed handkerchief out of his pocket and offered it to her. "Thank you," she said softly as she took a tissue from her robe pocket and dabbed her cheeks and then wiped her nose. "Do I smell some tea?"

"Yes, dear. Shall I pour a cup for you?" Mr. Allen asked. The two men in suits waited until the woman whose only son had just been killed was helped into the chair by her able husband. The officers then sat back down, but they were waiting until she had her tea before they took a sip of theirs.

"I was just telling them how much you like Earl Grey tea, and that it was your favourite when we lived outside London," Mr. Allen said to his wife as he brought her a cup of steaming tea from the kitchen. He'd dutifully put in some cream along with a spoon of sugar; she liked it that way.

"Thank you," she said in her soft voice as he set it in front of her and then returned to his chair and sat down. All four of them sat in awkward silence, sipping their tea from the seldom-used china tea cups.

Graeme Farnsworth broke the silence as he said, "I know this will be hard, but the sooner we get started, the sooner we can leave you two alone." McBride knew the cue and he pulled a pad of paper out of his folder and a pen from his shirt pocket. "We don't know much about your son, but the Medical Examiner said he appeared to be a very clean-cut young man. What can you tell us about him—did he go to school; did he work; who were his friends; what was he doing this past weekend?"

"Rory's our only child, and his name is taken from our two first names." Robert Allen was the man of the house, so of course he would be the one to take the lead. In this case it didn't really make much difference, however, as Ryna was in no shape to do much talking, let alone talk about their now-deceased son; she was drained both physically and emotionally. Mr. Allen continued, "He spent two years at the University, but the formal schooling wasn't much to his liking. He's really good at computers, and so he got a job down at Australian First Bank at their main office in the CBD. He had some friends from Chatswood High School that he still got together with, plus a few of the chaps from the bank. He's a good kid, so we rarely ask him where he's going or who he's going to be with. Tell me now, why would someone want to do that to him, let alone string him up in a winery?"

"That's what we're working on right now as our top priority, Mr. Allen." The DCI had just as many questions, perhaps even more, as the Allens did, and that's why he and McBride were at their house. He would try to answer their questions, but he was certainly hoping he could get a few answers of his own. "The first thought on the winery is that the

killer wanted to make some sort of statement, and it didn't have to have anything to do with Rory. As far as we know right now, Rory just happened to be the person that the killer picked. It could have been anyone, but unfortunately it wasn't. And I'm sorry for that."

Hearing that was too much for Robert's wife and she broke out into loud sobs, nearly into hysteria. Her elbows were on the table, her face squarely planted in the palms of her hands, and two rivers of tears had made their way from her eyes across her cheeks and hands and were now working their way down her forearms. Her nostrils were dripping from the pain and the tears, and she didn't even have the energy or the cognizance to use the tissues to wipe her nose. Farnsworth and McBride sat there in silence as Mr. Allen observed his wife in a complete emotional breakdown; the table cloth could be washed later.

"Excuse me, please," Robert Allen said as he arose from his chair and bent down to help his wife get up out of hers.

"May we offer some assistance?" Langdon asked as he stood and made an initial step toward the Allens, but not wanting to invade their personal space.

"Thanks, mate, but I think I've got it," the husband replied as he placed his right arm around his wife's waist and gently gave her some help as she slowly stood. He helped her turn around, and then he guided her back down the hallway to the room from which she had just recently appeared. A searing cry came from the room as the husband set his wife on the bed and lifted her legs up so she was in a lying position. She would soon be asleep from exhaustion. Robert gave

her a reassuring kiss on the forehead as he whispered "I love you" to her.

Wanting to show some strength, Mr. Allen spoke right out once he was seated again at the table. "Now where were we? Oh yes, the winery."

"Correct," Farnsworth replied. "Before we get back to that, when was the last time that you saw or spoke with Rory?"

"It was Saturday shortly after lunch," Mr. Allen answered. "He said that he and a few of the boys were going to watch a footy scrimmage."

Langdon McBride's eyes perked up a bit as he heard this; it was the first piece of information that could point to the timing of the death. At least now they knew that Rory Allen had not been killed on Friday; that could help with the information from the lab reports. He would make sure that Alkira Grantham got this bit of news as soon as they left.

Farnsworth continued, "Were the boys here, or do you know who they were?"

"No, they weren't here. But a quick phone call to Jamie MacFarlane will tell you who they are." Robert Allen was becoming more engaged in the conversation now and was able to talk about his son with some detachment.

"Do you have Jamie's number?" McBride asked as he was writing down the name.

"Just a minute," Mr. Allen replied. "Let me check it in the book for you."

"Thank you," McBride said. As Mr. Allen went into the kitchen, McBride said to his boss, "Well, that piece of news should help the M.E. a little bit." Farnsworth nodded in re-

ply just as Mr. Allen was returning with the telephone book held open between his hands.

"Jamie's number is 2472 7923." He closed the book, took it back to the kitchen, and then returned to the table where Langdon McBride was circling the number he had just written down.

Farnsworth resumed the questions. "Have you spoken with Jamie or any of the other chaps since the weekend?"

"Yes," Mr. Allen replied. "We heard from several of the boys on Monday after the paper came out. Jamie called and so did a few others; I just can't remember their names right now."

"That's okay," Farnsworth said. "Do you know if Rory and his chums would have a particular reason to be up in the Hunter Valley? Or did Jamie or any of the other ones say anything about going up there?"

Graeme Farnsworth kept asking questions, Robert Allen kept answering them, and Langdon McBride kept writing down the relevant pieces of information. But after one hour and two cups of tea plus a biscuit, Farnsworth knew there wasn't much else to gain by continuing. As he began to get out of his chair, he thanked Mr. Allen for his hospitality. "And if you think of anything else, please write it down."

"I will," Mr. Allen responded.

"Here's my card, Mr. Allen. Feel free to call me if you have any more questions. Thank you for the tea, and please tell your wife that the biscuits were most tasty." McBride handed a business card to the man, and he and Farnsworth headed toward the front door.

“I hope you get the fiend who did this. My poor wife is hurting more than you can know.”

“I understand, Mr. Allen,” Farnsworth said. “We have every available person working on this, and we want to nab him, too.”

Mr. Allen shook hands with the men and they walked down the sidewalk and got back in the DCI’s car. McBride would drive again.



8



1200 hours

Tuesday, 17 November

New South Wales Regional Morgue

The two men drove in silence for the first few minutes after leaving the Allens' home. "They're going to be wondering for a long time why their son was murdered, and in such a public way," Detective Inspector McBride said as he, too, tried to make sense of it. "Having your son murdered is one thing, but to have his photo on the front page of the *Tribune*—that alone is going to haunt them forever."

"You're right, Langdon," offered the Detective Chief Inspector as he let his left arm hang out the open window, perhaps hoping to feel a message in the wind as they headed down Penshurst Street to Willoughby Road and finally on to Highway 1 into Sydney. As he gazed longingly at the houses in the distance, he wondered how many more parents were suffering like the Allens, just not in such a visible way.

Sensing his boss's quiet demeanour, a manner seldom displayed and certainly never in public view, Langdon focused on his driving and the stream of traffic ahead of him. But knowing that there would be questions asked once they

returned to headquarters, he stole a few glances at his Blackberry to read some emails from Teams Alpha and Bravo. "Sir, Alpha has reported nothing unusual in their surveillance at the Albert. They've asked the manager to keep his workers out of the area for a few days while the surveillance is under way." He paused as he looked up again at the road and the cars. "And Bravo hasn't uncovered anything with the tattoo. No one seems to recognise it either as one of theirs or as one used by any of the gangs." McBride stole one more glance down toward his left hand and then set the Blackberry on the console.

"That's not going to please the Commissioner. What about Charlie? Are you keeping Thatcher's group busy?" Farnsworth's dislike of Roland Thatcher again came through in his questioning voice.

"Yes, sir," McBride answered in a formal tone. He hadn't told his boss about the assignment he'd given to Thatcher's team, an assignment that would certainly ruffle more than a few feathers if any word leaked out about it. He was about to give a general description of Charlie Team's work, one that he knew his boss would believe, when his mobile phone rang. Although he didn't like to talk on the phone while driving, he felt a sense of relief this time—he wouldn't have to tell an actual lie to his DCI.

McBride saw the Caller ID but still answered in his general professional manner. "This is Detective Inspector Langdon McBride."

"So the boss is there with you, isn't he?" the female voice responded.

“Ah, yes, good afternoon to you too, Dr. Grantham,” Langdon replied with just a little extra emphasis on the “yes.”

Farnsworth looked over at McBride as the Medical Examiner was saying something that got a non-verbal nodding response from McBride as the two men were approaching the Harbour Bridge. “Okay, I’ll be there in a little bit,” McBride replied to the M.E.

“Sir,” he continued. “Dr. Grantham has the toxicology results back. Shall I just drop you off at Headquarters, and then I’ll go review them before heading back?” McBride knew what his boss would say, but he also knew to not make any assumptions right now that Farnsworth was under pressure from the Police Commissioner who was under pressure from several fronts.

“Certainly, Langdon. When will we have our first full reports from the teams? And are you going to get something to eat before going to the morgue? That’s not a place I like to go to on an empty stomach. In fact why don’t you stop by the Pie Face and we’ll each grab a pie to go.” Graeme Farnsworth was back in his leadership role as they headed east on Cahill Expressway toward Police Headquarters.

“Good idea about the pie; my stomach is a little hungry right now. Teams Alpha and Bravo will give reports at 1700 hours, but I’ve told Thatcher to keep Charlie out in the field.” McBride wasn’t sure when or what he’d be able to tell his boss about the actual work that Roland Thatcher’s team was doing. It was a risky move to give them that covert assignment, but some investigations required taking actions that weren’t strictly by the book. And McBride felt that this was indeed one of those investigations. Of course, if he was

wrong, his own job was on the line. "Gutsy," he thought to himself of the call he made to give that assignment to Thatcher's team.

"What was that?" Farnsworth asked.

McBride realized his last remark wasn't totally silent. "Gusty, I said. It seems a little gusty coming off the water today."

"Ah, so it does," his boss responded.

The day was actually quite a calm day, but such was the way of seemingly obvious remarks—they seemed natural and truthful even when they're completely untrue.

"Chunky steak?" McBride asked as he stopped the car in front of the Pie Face shop on Phillip Street. "And a Start My Heart coffee?" He continued as he was opening the door ready to step onto the sidewalk.

"You've got it, mate. Here I've got it covered," Farnsworth said as he extended his hand with a ten dollar note in it.

"Thanks," McBride said as he grabbed the note, closed the door, and walked swiftly up to the counter.

"G'day, luv. The usual?" the young lass behind the counter asked as she recognized Langdon McBride.

"Right, plus a chunky steak and a Start My Heart for the boss."

"What's the word about that killing in the Prince Albert?" she asked as she put the pies into the bags and poured the two cups of coffee.

"Oh," Langdon added as he thought about going to the morgue and seeing Alkira. "Why don't you add a chicken

curry and a Tingle My Toes. I'd better not walk in there empty-handed."

"Headed to the morgue again?"

"You ask too many questions, and you know I can't answer them." He put the boss's ten into his pocket and pulled out a twenty of his own to pay for the three meals. "Keep the change," he said as he started to leave. He turned back to the counter and added, "And stay in school!"

"Love you, too, Dad," she replied.

"So, how's Maggie? She seems as sassy as ever," the DCI said as McBride handed him his lunch while putting the other two on the floor in the back seat.

"She's still in school, and that's the main thing," McBride answered. "You know, I don't know how some of these single parents keep it all together. Raising one is hard enough and she is pretty easy, but what about those moms who have two or three young 'uns? That's got to be pretty tough."

"Uh-huh," his boss responded as he took a bite out of the meat pie.

Pulling into the Police Headquarters garage a few minutes later, McBride stayed silent as he parked the car, grabbed the bag of pies and coffee from the back seat, and tossed the keys to his boss. "I'll call you if she's got anything for us," he said as he opened his car door and set the bag in the passenger seat. McBride felt some relief as he dodged another bullet, not having to explain to the second in command of the New South Wales Police Force what the least experienced detective team was doing.

As he arrived at the morgue, he saw that Alkira's car was in the lot and he parked in the spot with the sign, "Re-

served—NSWP.” He grabbed his briefcase and the lunches and bounded up the steps and through the double glass doors. “G’day, Roger,” he said to the guard as he showed him his ID, a mere formality as Detective Inspector McBride was known by all in the building.

“And a good afternoon to you, Mr. McBride. We’re making some progress on the hanging, are we?” the guard responded.

“I’m headed to see the M.E. right now,” Langdon replied. He felt they had learned a few new things while talking to Mr. Allen, but the lab reports and other findings here at the morgue would provide more conclusive information. He kept walking down the hall to her office and saw her sitting at her desk. She was so engrossed in what she saw on the computer screen that she didn’t notice Langdon standing at the doorway. “Pie and coffee?” he asked.

Startled, she looked up and saw him smiling and holding up a Pie Face bag. She looked at her watch and realized that it was about time for lunch. “Sounds lovely. Please come in.” She returned her attention to the computer screen and minimized the current window. “How did it go at the Allens’?” she asked as Langdon set the bag on the desk.

He sensed a slight uneasiness, but it could have been just the tension from the case. “Mrs. Allen isn’t doing very well. The poor lady seems headed for a nervous breakdown. But Mr. Allen gave us some good information, a key contact, and what the young man was doing that day. He also said that he last saw him on Saturday, so we can get a little closer on the timeframe. How about if we have the pie and coffee, and then talk about the case after that?” Langdon McBride liked

his meat pies, but he also wanted a few moments that weren't work-related while he was here with Alkira Grantham.

And so they sat in quiet, except for their chewing the pies and drinking the coffees, for a few minutes. They finished about the same time, wiped their faces, and put the trash in the bag. "That was good," Alkira said to break the silence. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Langdon replied. "Dinner tonight?"

"I'd love to but I can't," she answered. "I've got the New South Wales Women's Charity Fundraiser to attend. They've asked me give a short talk on the role of opals in our history, and then they're auctioning off some pieces of my jewelry. Rain check?"

"Sure. I'd forgotten about the Fundraiser, but then most things have been a blur since yesterday."

"Believe me, I know," the M.E. replied. "Now that we're back on the case, let me tell you what we've found from the tox screens and other reports."

Langdon pulled a chair to her side of the desk and sat down as she opened a folder. "Toxicology shows an elevated blood-alcohol count of 0.12; he was pretty drunk. He certainly wouldn't have been able to walk there in that condition. The odd thing, however, is that he didn't seem to have a lot of fluids in his stomach where you'd expect them to be. So without that, we can't really tell what he drank, although that's not the most important thing."

"Could he have vomited and cleared his stomach that way?" McBride asked.

"That would be about the only way to have consumed that much alcohol but not have it physically within his system at the time of death."

"What else have you found? No signs of struggle at all, you say? What about the tattoo?"

"No signs of struggle," the M.E. responded. "His fingernails were clean; there was no dirt or skin or anything to show that he fought his assailant. There was a smudge of tomato sauce on his right middle finger; perhaps he'd had a pie earlier in the day. There was a small residue of food in his stomach, but not enough to tell us anything significant."

McBride interrupted her before she could finish answering his questions. "So if there wasn't much in his stomach, then it seems he must've vomited. Otherwise where would it all be? Right?"

"Exactly," she replied. "Have your men found any vomit at the winery?"

"No; they haven't found anything helpful at all. But let me give them a quick ring to look in places where a drunk person might want to go to vomit." McBride stepped back into the hallway to call Glen Roberts and have his team do a vomit search. "Vomit patrol under way," McBride said as he re-entered the M.E.'s office.

"I'll bet the boys are really excited about that one," Grantham said in a mildly sarcastic tone.

"Oh, the tattoo," she resumed. "The inks are standard inks you can get at almost any tat shop in town. That's the first time I've seen this one, though—black 16 enclosed within a yellow triangle." She stopped; she didn't have to ask the question.

“Nothing from the tattoo shops or from the gang units that can positively ID it,” McBride offered. “His dad didn’t think the lad was involved in any street activity, and he didn’t even know about the tattoo.”

“One thought is that it might have been part of some initiation—lots of drinking, perhaps some other activity, and then a mock hanging. But something must have gone wrong, and that could’ve frightened them all away.” The Chief Medical Examiner was developing some reasoning based on her history of many other cases.

“Don’t you think they would’ve just run as fast as they could and not worry about cleaning up the area?” The Detective Inspector and the Chief Medical Examiner were now quickly processing the information and formulating possibilities.

“That’s a question you can ask when you have them in custody,” the M.E. said.

“Right,” McBride replied. “They must’ve thought their shoes or motorcycle tracks could have been identified. Who knows? Maybe they dropped things on the ground, and in picking them up they were too paranoid that their fingerprints would have been left behind in the dirt. If they’d had enough alcohol or drugs, they could’ve thought almost anything. On the tox report, you said alcohol only; no drugs?”

“None. As I said yesterday, this was a clean young man. I think he just stepped into something that he wasn’t quite prepared for.”

“Well, anything else for me before I head back to relieve Farnsworth of the heat he’s getting from the Commissioner?”

"Nothing," she replied.

"Okay, thanks for the information. And have fun at the fundraiser tonight. I hope your jewelry sells for a lot. Too bad I can't be there to bid the prices up."

"It's a great event; I'm glad I can help support it."

"See you tomorrow," he said as he headed out of the office and back to the front where Roger was still reading his sports paper. "Be careful of the ponies, Roger. They are fickle things."

"Gotcha, mate. Just like some women I know," the guard replied.

"Right," Langdon answered as he went through the glass doors and felt the warmth of the sun beating down. But the heat was mild compared to what he'd feel back at the office.



9



2100 hours

Tuesday, 17 November

Macquarie Ballroom, Lord Nelson Hotel—Sydney

“Thank you for that warm introduction, Mrs. Wool-
tinsworth. It is indeed a pleasure to be here this evening as we show our support for the many women and children of New South Wales who through various circumstances can really use a helping hand. Seeing the pictures of those who’ve been able to go to the university, to start a business, to move into a professional career,” Alkira Grantham paused as she was caught up in the emotion of the moment. “Sorry,” she continued. “Just seeing those pictures makes me more determined to help even more of them. What do you say? Would you like to make an even bigger difference for next year?”

The audience rose as one and applauded and enthusiastically cheered as the highly attractive speaker smiled and joined them in applause. Stepping back to the microphone, Alkira then gave a short but powerful presentation of the history of opals and their importance in Australia. After the last slide was shown and she turned the projector off, the au-

dience again clapped, this time more of a polite and professional response. "I never know if that applause is for the talk or the fact that it's over," she said with a slight smile on her face, eliciting many chuckles and a few more claps from the group of well-dressed and moneyed women.

She turned on the projector again; this time the picture was of a necklace made up of some of the finest opals you could find. "This necklace is one that I made and it will be the first one that is auctioned this evening. Remember that every dollar received goes for those women and children whose pictures we saw earlier. Ladies, don't forget that you can use your husband's credit card if you want." This brought forth a roar from the crowd. "Although," she continued, "I'm sure that many of you have higher limits than he does." Another roar. "How about a nice round of applause for one of the best auctioneers in all of Australia, Miss Robyn Chapman?"

As the auctioneer walked up the side steps onto the stage, the crowd gave her a polite welcoming. The two ladies shook hands, and Alkira handed her the square box that contained the opal necklace she had just shown on the screen. "Thank you, Dr. Grantham," Miss Chapman spoke into the microphone. "Thank you for your awesome support of our Foundation and for being such an inspiration for all the women of Australia." She then looked directly at the audience as she continued, "Do you feel like buying some opals tonight?" As the crowd gave their second-loudest cheers of the evening, the auctioneer and the Chief Medical Examiner hugged and then Alkira exited the stage to give the auctioneer the spotlight.

Walking to her front center table, Alkira Grantham was greeted with handshakes and a few hugs as the audience again stood as they continued their applause. Once Alkira had finally reached her table and sat down, the auctioneer began her job. "Okay, ladies, let's start the bidding on this absolutely beautiful opal necklace at one thousand dollars. We've got a thousand," she said as she pointed to a table to the left. "Who says two thousand? Thank you. How about three? three thousand?"

"Five thousand," came from the rear of the room.

"That's five thousand from Mrs. Watterby. Thank you. How about seventy-five hundred? Did I tell you that this one-of-a-kind piece was made by our own Chief Medical Examiner who is also an opals expert?" A bidding paddle was raised at one of the front tables. "Seventy-five hundred. Thank you. "Who's ready to make the jump to ten thousand dollars? You married women can just tell your husband that you already bought your Christmas present so you've saved him the bother of going shopping. Thank you, Mrs. Watterby; we've got ten thousand."

"I think she came here with a vengeance because she didn't get anything last year," Alkira whispered to the lady on her right at the table. "Spending money at high social events is quite important for her. So I have a feeling that she's winning something big tonight."

"No doubt," her neighbor replied.

Alkira continued. "And the more she bids, the more money we'll raise. Too bad I only have four pieces here."

"Alkira, you're too generous and you're too modest. With your jewelry and the other items in the auction, we're

bound to raise over a hundred fifty thousand. That's pretty good for just this one dinner."

"Thanks."

The bidding continued until the fabulous necklace sold, but not to Mrs. Watterby, for eighteen thousand five hundred dollars. After the applause and congratulatory remarks died down, the auctioneer announced, "We're going to take a short break now if you need to go to the powder room. During the break, however, Dr. Grantham will be walking through the room showing you the next item up for bid—a matching bracelet and ring, another one of her fabulous creations. The bidding will start in fifteen minutes."

Most of the women stood, and a few of them headed to the open doorway at the back of the room. "Oh," the auctioneer said into the microphone. "She'll be coming by each of your tables, so you don't need to crowd around the front of the room."

Alkira got up out of her chair and slowly walked around her table, displaying the white opals and gold bracelet and ring that stood out brilliantly on her skin. As she held out her hand, her fingernails were expertly manicured with aboriginal designs painted on to each one of the nails. "These are the five signs of health, age, prosperity, happiness, and love," she said to one of the women who asked about her nails.

"Absolutely gorgeous" several of the women remarked.

"Thank you," Alkira replied.

She worked her way around all the tables in the room, ensuring that she was there long enough for each woman, at least those who were there, to see the bracelet and ring. The

compliments continued at each table, compliments on the jewelry as well as her fingernails.

Fifteen minutes came and went as the auctioneer knew that it was more important for the ladies to see the jewelry so they'd feel more like bidding and feel like bidding more. Once Alkira had visited every table, she walked up on the stage, showed the items to the auctioneer, and then took them off and handed them to her. "Thank you, they're gorgeous."

"You're welcome." Then in a hushed tone away from the microphone, Alkira said to her, "I think Mrs. Watterby really wants these."

"Let's hope so."

There was a smattering of polite applause as Alkira left the stage and went to her table. "Okay," the auctioneer began, "you've all had the chance to see this drop-dead gorgeous bracelet and matching ring. Here's a picture for you all to drool over while you're figuring out how much you want your husband to spend on you this year. Once you have that amount, double it and let's start the bidding at two thousand dollars."

"Four thousand," was the cry from the back of the room.

"Thank you, Mrs. Watterby. We have four thousand; now, who'll bid six thousand? Dr. Grantham even said she'd tell the winner where to get your nails done just like hers. Do I hear six? Ah, six thousand, thank you" she said as she pointed to the middle left of the room. "How about eight thousand? Come on, you know your hubby thinks you're worth a lot more than that."

“Ten thousand dollars!” Mrs. Watterby was bidding as if she truly did want that bracelet and ring.

“Ten thousand from Mrs. Watterby, thank you. How about twelve five from one of you ladies? You know this will look so stunning at your next dinner party. Do I hear twelve thousand five hundred dollars?”

“Twenty-five thousand dollars and not a bloomin’ penny more!”

The audience turned their heads to the back of the room and saw portly Mrs. Watterby standing up and furiously waving her bidding paddle in the air. An exuberant applause broke out as Mrs. Watterby continued to wave her paddle.

“Sold to Mrs. Watterby for twenty-five thousand dollars,” the auctioneer exclaimed into the microphone. “And not a bloomin’ penny more,” she added to the laughter of the ladies in the room.

As Mrs. Watterby made her way up to the front of the room to get her new jewelry, the audience continued to clap for one of the Foundation’s more generous donors. While she was sincerely generous with her donations, she also liked it when the other donors knew that she could, and would, pay more just so she could have bragging rights. After she slipped the bracelet on, she was having some trouble fitting the ring on her finger. Alkira stepped over to her, hugged her, and whispered, “Just put it on your pinky, dear; I can re-size it later for you.” Mrs. Watterby was all smiles as she slowly walked back, proudly displaying her bracelet and ring along the way.

“We’ll let Mrs. Watterby enjoy her new jewelry for a while as we move to some other items up for bid this

evening. But don't worry; we still have two more of Dr. Grantham's exquisite pieces of jewelry to come up for bid a little later on. We just want to make sure you stay around to the end. The next item is a case of 1996 Penfolds "Grange" Shiraz. This meticulously stored case has a retail value of a little over two thousand dollars. Who'll start the bidding at fifteen hundred?" There was some chatter in the room, but no bidding paddles were being raised.

A beeping sound in Alkira's purse startled the ladies at her table. "Sorry," she said in an apologetic voice. She pulled out the distracting device and looked at it. "Uh oh," she said. "I have to leave."

One problem of sitting at the table in the front center of the room is that everyone noticed when she got up from her table and walked briskly toward the back of the room. But they also knew that her job as New South Wales Chief Medical Examiner meant that she was called in at all hours of the day. The room was silent as she left.

"Well, we know that Dr. Grantham's full-time job is our state's Chief Medical Examiner. Making jewelry for our fundraisers is only her part-time job," the auctioneer said, and the tension seemed to ease. "Now, we're bidding on some very fine wine. Who wants to start the bidding at a steal-price of just one thousand dollars?" She paused nervously hoping that the enthusiasm in the room hadn't left just because one of their most generous donors had left. "Yes," she said with relief. "One thousand dollars over here," she continued as she motioned to the right. "Good, now how about one thousand five hundred? You know that a bottle like this will run you close to four hundred or more when

you go out, so why not show your friends that you do like good wine? Fifteen hundred?"

A paddle was raised at Alkira's table. The one with the paddle in the air whispered to her left, "Alkira said she'd bid up to three thousand for the case. She must be planning a pretty nice dinner party. Maybe she and that police officer are planning to make a special announcement and they want a really nice wine."

"Thank you for the bid of fifteen hundred from our hostess table. Now how about two thousand dollars? Who wants to bid two thousand?"

Flushed with excitement of having won the opals and gold bracelet and ring, along with consuming several glasses of the house wine on the table, Mrs. Watterby shouted, "Two thousand five hundred."

The crowd turned, surprised to hear Mrs. Watterby's voice again. "Thank you, Mrs. Watterby. That's two thousand five hundred. Now we're moving. How about three thousand?"

Silence came over the room. No one wanted to move for fear of having that motion being considered a bidding motion. "Well, then we have two thousand five hundred going once. Two thousand five hundred going twice. Two thousand five."

"Three thousand dollars," was the bid from the front table just in time before the bidding was closed. "And not a bloomin' penny more" brought more laughter. But the bidder actually meant it because she was bidding with Alkira's money, not her own.

The proxy bid for the wine held and Alkira's tablemate sent her a text message that she'd won the wine. But Alkira didn't get the message right away.

Bidding, laughter, and cheers continued throughout the evening as more house wine was brought out and each table with a winning bidder received two open bottles of champagne. The champagne and the wine opened the bidding purses even wider, and the auctioneer's job was a little easier as she didn't have to prod as much for bids. At the end of the evening, Dr. Alkira Grantham's jewelry received three of the top five bids, and the Foundation received a total of one hundred sixty-three thousand five hundred dollars. There would be many more deserving and excited recipients of the Foundation's generous gifts next year. It had been a very good evening; well, for most people at least.



10



1020 hours

Wednesday, 18 November

Throughout New South Wales

“**W**e’re interrupting the regularly scheduled program to bring you this breaking news from outside Windsor,” the television announcer reported in an urgent and professional voice. “New South Wales Police have just confirmed the death of a young man in the Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve about 45 kilometres northwest of Sydney. Their spokesperson said the man was buried up to his neck in a dirt grave, but they’ve not provided any other details. This is the second murder in the last few days in one of New South Wales’ famous sites and more popular visitor locations.” The announcer, or rather his producer, threw that last line in to add some sensationalism to the story.

The announcer continued, “We’ve asked the police for more information, but they’ve told us that they have no more to give us at this point, and all media have been removed from the immediate area whilst they continue with their investigation. They have confirmed that the body of the victim has been taken to the New South Wales Regional

Morgue where, we understand, there is a police perimeter to keep all onlookers as well as the media a far distance away. We'll have more for you on our News at Noon. Reporting live in the SkyView 12 Newsroom, this is Andrew Langstrom."



11



0930 hours

Wednesday, 18 November

Tooeys Rocks Nature Preserve—Northwest of Sydney

Sitting in his air-conditioned police car, Detective Inspector Langdon McBride opened his notebook and took out a pen as he turned the fan down one level. “I know you’ve already told some of this to the first officers on the scene, Mr. Claremore, but my job as Detective Inspector is to make sure we have all the information because the Commissioner doesn’t like surprises. Are you okay with that?”

“Of course I am, Mr. McBride,” William Claremore replied. He felt a little nervous sitting inside a police car, but McBride wanted him secluded for the time being.

“That’s good, mate. Now tell me, what time did you come out here and what was your purpose? Do you work out near Windsor?” McBride looked squarely at the man so he knew it was serious business.

“I’m an amateur rock collector and I come through here occasionally to look at the formations and to see if there are any new geodes that have come to the surface. But, I’m speaking honestly to you, sir, that I’ve not taken any rocks

from here—ever. I've lived in New South Wales all my life and I wouldn't take anything from a Nature Preserve. You can open the boot of my car and see. I left my home in Castle Hill about quarter past seven, and it's about a twenty minute drive for me. Actually I was on my way to Richmond to the library at the University of West Sydney. I had two books out on loan that I needed to return, and if I didn't get them back today I would owe them a late fine. I can show them to you if you'd like."

"That's not necessary," McBride said to calm his passenger. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, but I cut lawns."

"Why would you be embarrassed? Someone's got to do it."

"Because I have a degree from the university, and my mother thinks I should do more with my life." Claremore paused for a moment before continuing. "But I don't like being stuck inside the confines of an office; it makes me fidgety. So I cut lawns; that way I can be outside and enjoy the fresh air." The young man paused for a moment and then continued. "Did I do something wrong?"

Sensing uneasiness, McBride asked, "Would you be more comfortable outdoors? I ride in one of these things every day and I forget that it does make some people nervous." He didn't wait for a response; he opened his car door and stepped out. As he did he saw the relief on the man's face; being outdoors was where William Claremore was most comfortable. McBride allowed him to walk over to his side of the car; it was less intimidating that way.

"Well," McBride continued. "I guess you'd have to tell me if you did anything wrong. Let's go over to your car, and why don't you re-create, to the best of your memory, everything you did once you got out of your car."

"Sure," William Claremore said as he started toward his car. "I like this road through the Preserve because the morning sunlight creates such impressive shadows around these rock formations. That's why I came this way." He paused and then he noticed some activity around his vehicle. "What are they doing?" he asked.

"It appears they are taking plaster impressions of footprints in the dirt. Are those shoes you have on the only ones you have with you?"

"No," the young man responded. "I usually have a pair of work shoes in the boot in case I need to do some work when I don't have my truck with me. Why?"

"Are these the only shoes you've had on out here?"

"Yes," the man answered. William Claremore was beginning to get nervous. Was he being questioned for the murder of the man he found buried out here at Tooey Rocks? Certainly the police didn't think that he would've killed the man and then called it in. No, they wouldn't think that, would they?

"Would you mind opening the boot so they can take an impression of your other shoes?" Detective Inspector McBride didn't think this young man was the killer, but he also wasn't going to overlook any possible evidence that he couldn't recover later.

"No problem, mate; I've got nothing to hide," Claremore replied.

"Thanks," McBride said. "That's exactly what I was thinking."

"No worries," was the response.

As the young man opened up the car's boot to get out his other pair of work shoes, McBride took advantage of the situation to look inside it. There were no digging tools and there was no sign of any dirt inside. So if this man had been the killer, he would have to have been very neat and tidy, or else he would have to have hidden everything somewhere else. That didn't make sense: why would someone go to all that trouble and then phone it in? He's not the guy.

"Roberts?" McBride called out to the Alpha Team leader.

"Yes, sir," came the quick response.

"Have you combed the area over there? Is it okay if we walk through?" McBride asked.

"We're all done here. As soon as they take those impressions, we're going into the van to do our write-ups. Do you want to see them before we head back?" Glen Roberts was being followed by three other officers. Two of them must have done the digging as they were sweating profusely and their uniforms were covered in the red silty dirt of the area. The photographer managed to avoid all the hard work this morning.

"Yes, I do," McBride responded. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

The two officers at Claremore's car pulled the work shoes out of the boot, swept away a smooth area of dirt along the pathway leading from the car, and pressed the work shoes in the dirt. Satisfied with the impressions, they knocked the

dirt off the shoes, and put them back into the car. "Thank you," one of them said as he returned to assist making the plaster impressions.

After the young man closed the boot, McBride said, "You said you came out this way because of the shadows. Once you got here, show me what you did."

"This is where I parked the car," he began. "I walked along this path," he continued as he and McBride walked about 10 metres down the pathway. "And then I turned right to look at the sun coming up over those hills," he said as he pointed east toward some hills about half the distance to the Tasman Sea. "I didn't look down right away, but when I did I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me from looking at the sun. I had to rub them to make sure that's what I saw. This man's head was sticking out of the dirt, and I wasn't sure what to do. I yelled something at him at first; I don't have a recollection of what I said. But he didn't answer, of course. And so I went over and gave the top of his head a little tussle, and it moved slightly, and that shocked me. I remember looking around to see if anyone else was around here, but I saw no one, so I ran back to my car and got out my mobile phone and rang the police." William Claremore's voice was excited as he recounted his story, as best as he could recall it, to the Detective Inspector. He wanted to give every detail exactly as it had happened; he hoped he had.

"So you saw nothing else here," McBride said although the statement was also a question.

"No, sir. I was a bit frightened if I say so myself, so I didn't go scouting around the rocks at all looking for any clues."

"You did the right thing, mate. Now what did the police tell you after you reported what you found?"

"They said to stay right by my car until the officers arrived," Claremore replied.

"And you did? Or did you go back out just to take one more peek?"

"No, I'm telling you the honest truth, sir. I stayed right here by my car until the officers arrived," William Claremore said defiantly.

Langdon McBride started walking back toward the young man's car, and Claremore followed along. Half way back along the trail a lizard darted across the path between the men startling William Claremore once again. This would be a day he would long remember. Back at the car, McBride asked, "When was the last time before today that you were out this way?"

"Tooey Rocks or in this particular area?" Claremore replied.

"Tooey Rocks," McBride answered.

"A week, last Wednesday it was."

"How are you so sure it was last Wednesday?" McBride asked.

"Because I don't cut any lawns on Wednesday mornings. I keep that morning free so I can run my errands."

"Like it or not, you are now part of a police investigation into the death of that young man. You're not considered a suspect, so don't go worrying about that. However, you are not to say anything to anyone about this. Is that clear? Let me repeat that. You are not to say anything to anyone about

what you saw, what you did, or even the fact that you were here at Tooey Rocks today. Do you understand?"

"I guess I do," Claremore responded. "But it's going to be on the news so what's the harm if the news people are already going to be reporting it?"

"The harm," McBride responded, "is that you know more about the situation than the news people do, and it would be quite natural for you to just say something like what you've already told me. This is a very serious matter, and the less information that gets out the better. Let me make my request a little clearer for you. Now I don't mean this to sound threatening, but you must understand the seriousness of it. You are not to say anything to anyone about this, period. Where were you today? You were at the University library returning a couple books that you had out on loan, and then you were checking out a couple more. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," was the firm response.

"And if I find out that you've told anyone anything, repeat anything, then I will pull you in and lock you up. Now go return your books and check out a couple more. Here's my card in case you think of anything else. You don't talk with any other police officer about this other than me. You got that?" Detective Inspector McBride was pressing hard on William Claremore because he needed to make sure that the young man fully understood the need to keep quiet. McBride was fairly sure he'd gotten his point across to him.

"No, sir. I mean yes, sir. It's crystal clear. I'm going to return my books to the library and check out two more. Then I return to my apartment as if nothing has happened because as far as I know, nothing has happened."

"Thank you," McBride said as he patted the man on the shoulder as he was getting into his car. "Too bad I live near the Bridge or I could have you cut my grass."

"I've got your card, maybe I can give you a call if I'm ever going to be in your area." William Claremore pulled the door closed, rolled down his window, and started the engine. As much as he loved the Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, it was a relief for him to be leaving the area and to have the wind blowing in on his sweating face.

McBride watched as the young man drove off, knowing that he was glad to be leaving. Continuing his walk toward the police van, Langdon wondered what sort of person would bury another man out here in this nature preserve. He had the same question about Rory Allen's murderer. Murders weren't that uncommon, but the graphical nature of the winery hanging and now the burial here were way out of the norm; not that any murder was normal.

The cool air was a welcome relief to McBride as he stepped inside the van. "Well, what do we have Roberts? Sorry I wasn't able to get out here earlier when you retrieved the body. Please tell me you found something other than the foot prints of the young fellow who just left."

"I'd love to, sir, but it's another clean scene. The dirt pathway was brushed clean, just like at the winery, and there's nothing to get from the road. The asphalt's not hot enough to pull any rubber from the tires, plus I'm guessing that the killer did this at night. Are you ready for this? The vic was buried standing up in a narrow grave with just his head sticking out. There were strangulation marks on his neck, but we didn't find a rope or anything else in the area.

He was a young man with his ID on him; his name's Ethan Taylor, age 25, and he lived in Artarmon. Of course we'll check the footprints from the area, but they appear to be all from the same set of shoes, the young man who just left here. So I don't think we've got anything else. We'll just have to wait to see what the M.E. comes up with." Glen Roberts wished he had more concrete information to give to the D.I., but it just wasn't there.

"Okay," was about all McBride could answer with. He knew it was going to be another long day and evening; here was a new high-visibility crime scene, and they still hadn't made much progress yet on the one at the winery. "Ever get anything from the surveillance at the Albert?"

"None at all," Roberts replied. "And if you don't mind my saying, sir, I think this is the same killer. I think it's just one, or it's a group doing them. There's no tracks left behind, and they want to leave a message by doing them first in the Prince Albert and now here in Tooey Rocks."

"I'm with you on that, Glen," Langdon responded. "We'll see what the M.E. says; perhaps she'll find something that will either positively link the two murders or definitely say they're not the same. But either way, I know the Commissioner is going to be breathing down Graeme's neck, and you know what that means."

"My neck's warm already," Roberts replied.

"I didn't mean that, Glen. You know I'll do my best to protect you and your team. We just need to find something that gives away the secret of the killer before the media does. Anyway, finish up here; I'll head into the morgue and see what the M.E. has found so far. You and your team are doing

good work; thanks.” Langdon McBride extended his hand in a sincere gesture to Glen Roberts.



12



1130 hours

Wednesday, 18 November

New South Wales Regional Morgue

Detective Inspector Langdon McBride had hoped that his interview with William Claremore would yield some clues about the killing at Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve. But the young man who cut lawns rather than work in an office just happened to stop by that area because of the shadows formed by the unique rock formations. The investigation team didn't have much more to offer; Detective Glen Roberts said the area was cleaner than the way nature left an area. When taken in combination with the murder at the Prince Albert Winery, the two murders certainly pointed to a very meticulous killer or group of killers.

Driving back into Sydney, McBride thought about the consistencies between the two recent murders: both were young men, age 25; one was hanged, the other strangled and mostly buried; the dirtways were all brushed clean leaving no footprints. "Maybe Grantham's found something that'll tell us we have two different killers," he thought out loud to himself. Langdon would normally listen to the radio or to music

when he was driving alone, but he preferred to think today, and the quiet in the car helped him do that.

As much as he didn't think there was any excuse for murder, he always felt there were different ways that a murder could be done, and in different places. What he couldn't understand was why someone would go to all the trouble of stringing up a body on a pole in a public winery, or bury someone up to his head out in a nature preserve. The killer (or killers, he kept reminding himself) must have wanted to prove a point. There had to be a statement that he (or they) was making. Figure out that statement and he might find the path to the killer (or killers). Easier said than done, he thought to himself.

Glen Roberts had told him that Alpha Team's surveillance at the winery had not resulted in any suspicious activity. McBride wasn't surprised at that given the neatness of the killing area. A killer is not going to clean up after himself and then return to the scene of the crime; maybe on a TV show, but not in real life. And Lisa McPherson said that Bravo Team was spreading out and canvassing more areas, but their few leads had gone nowhere. A tattoo of a number inside a triangle was unknown to the tattoo parlours and the drug informants.

Traffic near the morgue was at a near standstill with all the media trucks trying to scoop a story from the latest murder. McBride turned on his flashing roof-top lights and hit the siren switch; there wasn't much movement in front of him. He turned off the engine, got out of the car, and walked to the first media person blocking his way. "Who's in charge here?" he asked.

"Don't know, mate. I'm just doing my job," came the surly reply.

"Then I'll just be doing my job by taking you to the station in handcuffs. Let's go," McBride barked out as he pulled the cuffs from his belt.

"Hold on, boss. We're just trying to get a story at the morgue. Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"No, but when I turn on my lights and siren and you don't move, and I'm on my way to the morgue, then you are guilty of obstructing an ongoing investigation. Now are you going to move that truck, or am I fitting you with some nice new bracelets?" McBride was never fond of the media even on good days, and today certainly wouldn't qualify as a good day.

"Don't get so testy; I'm moving it," the man replied. "But you've got more in front of me to deal with."

"They'll move; don't you worry about that, mate," McBride barked back as the media man climbed into his truck and pulled it out of McBride's way.

Langdon McBride got back into his car, started the engine, turned on his overhead lights and siren. He then spoke into the loudspeaker, "This is Detective Inspector Langdon McBride of the New South Wales Police Force. My lights and siren are on indicating that you are to immediately give way so that I can get through on official police business. If you don't move immediately, your picture is already being taken, and you will be hauled away to jail in cuffs and your station will be heavily fined. Now move out of my way!" McBride added emphasis on the last statement. As the trucks started moving, some slower than others, he silenced the

siren as a way of acknowledging their compliance with his order. He ignored the comments tossed his way; he wasn't going to lower himself to their level.

As he got to the parking lot, he turned off his lights as the guard raised the tape for him to drive under. "Thanks, mate," he said as he nodded to the security guard. The guard gave him his version of a salute as Langdon went by. "Are they giving you any troubles?" McBride asked as he stepped out of the car.

"No more than normal. They're trying to do their job, but at least they are respecting the lines we've put up," the guard replied.

"That's good," McBride replied. "Don't hesitate to give us a ring if they get unruly on you."

"Thanks, but I think we'll be okay."

"Well, I'd better get inside and see what the M.E.'s got for me," McBride said as he grabbed his briefcase from the passenger side, closed up the car, and headed up the stairs.

"Hello, Roger. I bet you're glad you don't have outside duty today," McBride said to the familiar guard at the front desk.

"G'day to you, Mr. McBride. You're right on that one. But Johnny's a good mate, and he'll keep them under control. Besides I wouldn't be able to handicap the ponies if I was out there, and that wouldn't be right, would it?"

"I don't have a good answer for you there, Roger. I'll see you later."

"Not if I see you first," the guard replied as he chuckled.

McBride just shook his head as he walked down the hall to Alkira Grantham's office. Her door was closed, and he saw

the hanging sign “Lab.” That’s where he expected she would be, working on their newest murder victim, Ethan Taylor.

As he washed his hands he was shocked to see the young man’s clothing lying on a table; it was all covered with the dirt from the nature preserve. Who would do such a thing? McBride finished prepping himself, and put on a gown, cap, and gloves. As he backed into the cold room where the Chief Medical Examiner was standing over the body, all Langdon could say was, “Well?”

“G’day to you, too, McBride,” was her sarcastic response.

“Sorry, it’s not been a good start to the day,” he replied.

“Nor for me either,” she retorted.

“I did see that the Fundraiser was wildly successful last evening due in no small part to, how did the paper say it, ‘the stunning jewelry and the equally stunning Dr. Alkira Grantham.’ Or some marvelous words to that effect.” Langdon was trying to backtrack from his brusque entry.

“Yes, it was good last night. Do you remember my telling you about portly Mrs. Watterby and how she always wants to be the belle of the ball? Well she definitely got everyone’s attention when she jumped her own bid from ten thousand to twenty-five thousand for my white opal and gold bracelet and ring. The poor dear, the ring barely fit onto her pinky finger; I’ll have to have it re-sized for her.” Alkira had now calmed back down from her initial response to Langdon’s opening remarks.

“The paper did say it was a lively evening. So how are you today?”

"I'm fine," the M.E. replied. "I'd be a whole lot better if you boys would stop bringing in these 25 year-olds for me to examine. They said he was buried out at Tooey Rocks?"

"I don't get it, either," McBride said. "A fellow about thirty went out this morning to watch the morning shadows in the rock formations and found him buried out there. The poor lad must've been scared half out of his wits. I spoke with him for a while, but there was nothing else he could add."

"Did the detectives find anything like footprints or a piece of rope? Anything that could help pinpoint the killer?"

"Nope," McBride answered in frustration. "Just like the one the other day at the Prince Albert, the area was brushed clean. There were the footprints of the chap who found him, but our boys don't think there's anything else to be found. Whoever's doing this is smart. But why? And why in those places?"

"You're right, Langdon. If you're going to kill someone, why go to the extra bother to cart him out there and bury him?"

"I wish I had that answer, Alkira. So have you been able to find anything about this one except for the strangulation marks?"

"Yes," she exclaimed. "I almost forgot. There's a tattoo on his left shoulder that's similar to the one on the winery victim's shoulder. This one is also a yellow triangle, but the number inside it is a 9; the other was a 16. Do you think there's some significance there? With the numbers, I mean." The Medical Examiner had pulled the white sheet down to mid-torso and it was apparent that the tattoo was new. The man's

shirt sleeves had covered his shoulders so the tattoo was still fresh even though he'd been buried up to his neck.

"What about cause of death?" McBride asked. "Was it strangulation or could being buried up to his neck have caused enough pressure to suffocate him even though his mouth and nose weren't covered?"

"I'd say strangulation right now," she responded. "Your men said he was in a vertical position in a narrow grave, kind of like he was standing up; that wouldn't have been enough pressure on his chest to kill him. If he'd been lying down, perhaps, but not the way they say he was found."

"Was there anything in his pockets or his wallet to give any indication of where he'd been or if he'd been with anyone?"

"Nothing," the M.E. responded. "His pockets were empty when they brought him in, empty except for the piece of paper in his shirt pocket where they'd written his name so we had an ID for him. I guess you'd have to ask your detectives about that."

"Do you mind?" McBride asked as he indicated that he wanted to pull the sheet further down the lifeless body.

"Go right ahead." Alkira Grantham was used to seeing corpses every day. At least this one had all its body parts intact, and there were no gaping wounds. She didn't know what he thought he would gain by seeing the entire body, but there was nothing wrong with looking at it.

"Thanks," he replied as he slowly and respectfully pulled the sheet down until its top was at the waist. McBride brushed his gloved hands along the torso, not knowing what he thought he might feel. He then gently twisted the left

hand to look at the fingers, the palm, and the forearm up to the elbow. "It's all clean," he remarked essentially to himself.

"Just like the lad at the winery," Grantham remarked.

He showed intentions of raising the sheet and said, "Anything in the, uh,"

"Nothing in the genital area or in the rectal area. I've checked it all. Feel free to look at the legs and the feet if you like," the M.E. continued. "I've sent blood out for tox screens, and I'll let you know as soon as I get them back. I need them back so I can also work up the time of death. Is there anything else I can do for you, Detective Inspector?"

Choosing to ignore the caustic remark, Langdon McBride replied, "You could treat me to a cup of tea in your office. If you have the time, that is."

"Sure," she replied, but not in the tone that Langdon was used to hearing. She then pulled the sheet back over the body, and like closing a filing cabinet drawer, she pushed the gurney into its place and closed the door. Langdon waited for her and then he opened the door as they exited the lab into an area that was at least fifteen degrees warmer.

"Oh, this feels nice," he said as he relished the warmer room.

"I know," she replied. "But I also like the cool temperature of the lab; it's just different, and it's a place where I can go and find solace."

The M.E. and the D.I. helped each other off with their gloves and their gowns, and they headed back toward Alkira Grantham's office. Once inside her office, she started the water to heat and pulled out two cups and two bags of tea.

Once the water came to a boil, Alkira poured water into each cup that held a tea bag.

"Thank you for the tea," Langdon said. And then noticing something that seemed odd, he added, "What happened to your nails?"

"Oh," Alkira laughed as she looked down at her fingers. "I was working in the garden this morning. I thought I was only going to work for a few minutes and so I didn't put on my gloves. I ended up working on those silly plants for over thirty minutes, and look what it did to them."

"Precisely why I get my vegetables from the local market," McBride added.

The warm tea provided a welcome relief to both of them.

"I'll let you know as soon as I get back the results," the M.E. said as she relaxed in her chair and slowly sipped the warm, soothing tea.

"Thanks," McBride replied, almost automatically.



13



1500 hours

Wednesday, 18 November

Home of Trevor and Nicole Taylor—Artarmon

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor. My name is Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth, and this is Detective Inspector Langdon McBride. We’re truly sorry for your loss, and we appreciate your letting us come to ask you a few questions at this awful time and on such short notice.” The two officers displayed their badges and picture IDs to the man in his neatly pressed company shirt who’d come home from work after receiving the horrifying call from his wife about their son Ethan.

“Certainly,” Mr. Trevor Taylor said as he stepped aside and motioned for the two men to come into their home on Tindale Road. “Would you like to sit over there on the sofa?” Mr. Taylor continued with slightly slurred speech. Mr. Taylor extended his right hand to the officers as they entered, and as they did, they recognized why his speech was slurred. “Oh, I had a drink of whiskey to calm my nerves,” he said. “But I’m not driving anywhere.”

The Taylors sat in their recliners, and then DCI Farnsworth and D.I. McBride sat on the sofa as suggested. The phone rang just as Farnsworth was ready to talk. "We'll let it go to the machine," Mrs. Taylor said. "It's been pretty non-stop ever since the news broke about Ethan this morning." Mr. and Mrs. Taylor seemed quite calm compared to the Allens; perhaps that drink of whiskey did have a calming effect, but for how long would it hold?

"We know you have questions that you want to ask us, and we'll do our best to answer them if we can," Farnsworth began. "We also have some questions for you, and our questions don't mean that Ethan did anything wrong. Okay?" He looked first to Mrs. Taylor to give her some reassurance, and then to Mr. Taylor. Many times in a situation like this the parents would feel that their child had done something wrong—certainly a possibility, but there was no reason to start right off with that in mind.

The DCI continued. "Do you know why Ethan would be out at Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve? Is it a place he went to frequently that you know of? Did he ever even mention the place?"

Mr. Taylor paused before speaking. "You can tell by our house and where we live that I don't work in one of those tall fancy buildings down in the Sydney CBD. But our boys have always been good lads and never been in a spot of trouble. Ethan didn't deserve this and whoever did it to him needs to answer to me."

He would have continued on but Mrs. Taylor broke in, "No, sir. Ethan never mentioned going to the Nature Preserve. Besides his work, he liked to surf a bit, but I never

heard him talk about going up to Tooeey Rocks." It appeared that Mrs. Taylor was the solid one in the family, or maybe she just hadn't had any of the whiskey along with her husband.

"What type of work did Ethan do?" Farnsworth asked.

"A nurse's assistant at the Royal North Shore Hospital just down in St. Leonards," the wife answered. "He was proud of what he did, able to help people every day. He talked about going back to school someday, and then settling down and having a family."

Farnsworth glanced over to McBride who took over. "Do you know if he was seeing anyone in particular then, or did you meet any of his lady friends?"

"Kids these days, you can't tell if they're serious or not," Mr. Taylor chimed back in. "There would be friends here occasionally, guys and gals, but there was no way to know if anyone was steady with anyone else or not. So if Ethan had a steady, he certainly didn't let us know."

"What about yesterday? Was there anything different in terms of his work or his schedule or other activities?" Langdon McBride glanced at both parents.

"No," Mrs. Taylor began. "It was just like most other days except he didn't come home last night. But then there would be some nights that he would stay with one of his mates, but that would normally be on a weekend night since he had to work today. As I think about it now, that does seem odd, but I didn't think much about it last night."

"Would he call if he wasn't coming home?"

"No," Mr. Taylor answered. "The boys these days are a bit too grown for that. I wish we'd insisted on it, though," he continued wistfully as he looked at his wife.

"So when he didn't come home last night, you just thought he was staying with a friend, and that he would be home this morning to go to work, right? And what time did he have to be at work?" McBride continued with the questions.

"His shift didn't start until 9:00 this morning, so when he wasn't home by eight, I thought he was just going right to work. Or he would have been rushing in here to grab a quick shower and bite to eat. And then that's when the phone rang," Mrs. Taylor paused and sighed. The room was quiet. All four occupants of the room knew what that phone call was about, but it still had to be said out loud. "And then that's when the phone rang," she repeated herself, slower and deliberately this time, as if postponing saying it would change the outcome. "I thought it was Ethan calling to say he was going right to work or could I fix him something for breakfast. No, it was the coroner's office saying they'd found Ethan's body out at Tooey Rocks." She stopped talking.

No one talked for several minutes. It was a painful silence, but a necessary one.

"You have two other boys, is that right?" DCI Farnsworth asked to break the silence.

"Roger and William," Mr. Taylor answered. "Roger's in the USA working in construction, and William's down in Melbourne working for the Parks Department. I called William on his mobile, and he's on his way up here. I haven't been able to reach Roger yet. The boys weren't all that close, but they were still brothers, and it's going to hurt them just as it's hurting us."

“What can you tell us?” Mrs. Taylor asked. “Ethan was a good boy, was never in any trouble. Why would someone do this to him?”

“Those are honest questions, Mrs. Taylor,” DCI Graeme Farnsworth began. “I wish we had all the answers to tell you right now, but we don’t. I will tell you that as soon as we heard about Ethan, we deployed our top investigative team to the area.” Farnsworth and McBride both knew that there were right times to use the victim’s name and then there were times to de-personalize the situation. The parents needed personalization right now in the early stages because it hadn’t even been twelve hours since they’d been told of their son’s death. “Here’s what we do know,” and Farnsworth continued to tell the parents some of the investigative results. There were some details that they didn’t need to know right away, and there were some that needed to be kept secret while the murder was still being investigated.

The parents looked at each other in disbelief as they heard some of the details—what would they think if they’d heard them all?

Langdon McBride sensed a proper pause and asked, “Do you know if Ethan knew Rory Allen?”

“Ethan had lots of friends,” Mrs. Taylor answered. “We didn’t know all their names. Who’s he?”

“Rory Allen’s the young man who was hanged at the Prince Albert Winery last weekend; he was the same age as Ethan, and we just want to look into all possible angles. Rory’s family lives in North Willoughby, and Rory went to Chatswood High School. Is that where Ethan went?”

"Why, yes it is," Mr. Taylor said excitedly. "This Rory fellow; you say he was 25. The same age as Ethan?"

"Yes, he was 25," McBride continued. "I don't know what years he was at Chatswood High, but we can certainly find it out. The school is a big one, so even if the chaps were in the same grade, it's possible they didn't even know each other."

"But maybe they did," Mrs. Taylor chimed in.

"Yes, maybe they did," McBride echoed. Feeling a renewed level of energy from the parents, he decided to probe with a few more questions. "Did Ethan ever talk about getting a tattoo?"

"Never," Mr. Taylor responded. "I didn't raise any sailor boys to fill up their arms with that crap." It was quite clear how Mr. Taylor felt about tattoos.

Mrs. Taylor was a little more rational in her response. "Working in the hospital he knew of the dangers of tattoos as well as the lifestyle of most people who had them. We never talked about them because we never had to."

"Are you saying that Ethan had a tattoo?" Mr. Taylor's voice was becoming elevated as learning of a tattoo on his son added to the strain of the day.

"Yes, he had a tattoo," McBride answered. "It wasn't a sailor's tattoo, Mr. Taylor, but right now we can't say much more about it as we are still conducting an investigation into the cause of his death. And because of that, there's some information that we just don't want out to the public. But rest assured, you'll know before anyone else does. I've never lost a family member this way, so I don't know how it feels to you, but I want you to know that finding Ethan's killer is a top priority."

Mr. Taylor abruptly got up out of his chair and went into the kitchen. The unscrewing sound of metal on glass could only mean one thing—another drink of whiskey.

“I’m sorry,” Nicole Taylor said apologetically. “Trevor’s worked hard to try to make a better life for our sons, and now this. I wish we had family close by.”

Langdon McBride gave her a reassuring nod and said, “If you’d like, we can send a counselor to work with you through this. Just please don’t let him go out at all tonight, even if you’re driving. Okay?”

“Of course,” she replied.

“Thank you,” McBride said as he started to get up from the sofa. “If you can put together a list of Ethan’s friends and their numbers and give me a call, we’ll give them a ring and see if there’s anything they can tell us.” He handed her a card as she got out of her chair and stepped toward the two men.

“He really is a good man,” Mrs. Taylor said as she glanced back toward the kitchen.

“We understand, Mrs. Taylor,” DCI Farnsworth said as the three of them reached the front door. “We’ll keep you informed as much as we can for now. But as Detective Inspector McBride said, there is some information we have to keep quiet because it is an investigation and we want to nab the killer just as much as you and your husband do.”

“I know,” she replied.

“Don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions,” McBride added as the two men stepped out to the front porch. As they walked to their car, another car pulled up in front.

1800 hours

Wednesday, 18 November

New South Wales Police Force Headquarters—Sydney

“**A**lright. Let’s settle it down a bit,” Detective Inspector Langdon McBride spoke into the hand-held microphone at the front of the conference room. “I know you’ve all been working hard, and these last two murders have really added a lot of stress. I’m not going to ask you to pull an all-nighter tonight.” Thunderous applause broke out throughout the room. “But I do want us to invest just a little more time going over the Tooey Rocks case and then seeing how it might compare—notice I said might—to the Prince Albert case. Detective Roberts will get us started.”

As Glen Roberts, Alpha Team lead, walked to the front of the room, the normal chatter resumed among the men and women. But this was now Roberts’ time to show leadership; McBride sat down and looked over some of his own notes. It had been quite a day—interviewing the man who found Ethan Taylor at Tooey Rocks; spending some time in the morgue; talking to Mr. and Mrs. Taylor who just lost their eldest son, and now this review of “what’s known so

far.” This was actually the hardest part of the day for him, just sitting. But he couldn’t be in charge and lead every operation and activity.

“Thank you, Detective Inspector McBride,” Detective Roberts said as he stepped to the side of the room and dimmed the lights. “Just because the lights are going dim doesn’t mean that your eyes need to go dim also.” That got a few chuckles from the group. “Okay, let’s start with what we do know because, quite frankly, that’s a much smaller list of items when we’re looking at both of these vics.” Roberts pointed a laser light at the screen showing a table of information about the two young men:

	Victim #1	Victim #2
<i>Name</i>	Rory Allen	Ethan Taylor
<i>Age</i>	25	25
<i>Home Address</i>	North Willoughby	Artarmon
<i>High School</i>	Chatswood High School	Chatswood High School
<i>Occupation</i>	Computer Technician	Nurse's Assistant
<i>Location of Body</i>	Prince Albert Winery	Tooeys Rocks Nature Preserve
<i>Date Found</i>	Sunday 15 November	Wednesday 18 November
<i>Apparent Cause of Death</i>	Hanging	Burying
<i>Contributing Factors</i>	Intoxication	Possible Intoxication
<i>Other</i>	Area completely cleaned up	Area completely cleaned up
<i>Tattoos, piercings, etc.</i>	Fresh tattoo; number 16 inside yellow triangle	Fresh tattoo; number 9 inside yellow triangle

Roberts continued as he used the light to encircle items on the screen. "Both of the men were twenty-five, lived near each other, and went to the same high school. We don't know yet if they knew each other in school or if they'd kept in touch after school. But it is something we'll want to look into. Notice that we have apparent cause of death for both of them, while it appears that they may have also been in-

toxicated. The hanging victim had nothing in his stomach and yet his blood-alcohol count was 0.12%. That seems a little strange, doesn't it? And we don't have enough information back yet on the second victim. The area around both crime scenes was completely cleaned; that reflects more on the killer than the victim, but it's something to keep in mind as you're working each case. Finally, both victims had fresh tattoos, and there is some similarity there. McPherson, did anything ever show up on the tattoo?"

Detective Lisa McPherson, Bravo Team lead, stood up and loudly responded, "No positive ID on the first tattoo, Detective. We asked about similar ones and not just the number 16, so I wouldn't expect to have any positive hits on one with a number 9 in it." Lisa sat back down in her chair.

"That's what we know about the two vics and how they compare." Glen Roberts resumed. "Now what we're not saying to the public is anything about the tattoos, the intoxication, or the clean crime scenes. We all know there's no such thing as a perfect crime, so by keeping some of the information to ourselves, perhaps the killer will trip up and show himself. Are there any questions?"

"You said killer. Is the thinking that the same person is responsible for both murders?" came a question from the middle of the room.

"Good question," Roberts began as he glanced toward McBride who looked straight back at him. "At this time, we are treating each murder as a separate crime and so we are looking for two suspects." McBride gently nodded his head in affirmation of Roberts' response. "Any other questions before I give the microphone back to Detective Inspector

McBride?” Knowing that more questions would just make their night even longer than it already was, the police officers amazingly had no more questions.

“Thank you, Detective Roberts,” Langdon McBride said as he stepped back up to the podium. “As you just heard, some of this information is not being released to the public so you keep it quiet also. Now I don’t expect anyone in this room to work twenty-four hours a day, so I’m not looking for any heroes out there. But here’s what I want you to do. If you catch wind of anything that you think plays into either or both of these cases, take it up the chain of command until you get someone to personally respond to you. If you think it’s that important, then voicemail doesn’t cut it. If you can’t reach your superior officer, move up to the next level, and to the next level, and to the next level. My phone is on all the time and I will always take your call. Always. But if you call me, I’ll ask why you’re not first telling your superior officer rather than me. The answer had better be that he or she isn’t answering the phone. And that’s an okay answer because none of you are paid to work round-the-clock.”

McBride paused for effect. “Neither am I, but my boss thinks I am. Your team leads know the assignments, so check with them before leaving. If there are no more questions, have a good evening.”

The teams scurried into their respective war rooms to review their assignments. Langdon McBride waited in his office to get a final briefing from his team leads before they went home for the night. He then went over his paperwork, and wondered, once again, how the lone killer thought he could continue to avoid arrest.

Early morning

Thursday, 19 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

The headline of the morning's *Sydney Tribune* once again told of the recent murder in Australia's largest metropolis, **Burial at Nature Preserve**. While the story itself was still shocking, it wasn't quite as newsworthy as it had already been on the radio and on the television most of Wednesday following the early morning discovery of the body in the Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve. Thanks to the remoteness of the area and the relationship that the police had with the paper, many details were kept away from the public; some of them were even kept from the paper itself.

Comparisons were drawn between this murder and the one in the Prince Albert Winery, including the ages of the male victims, where they lived, and where they'd gone to school. No information had been released about the tattoo on each victim, or that the crime scenes had been neatly cleaned by the killer or killers; these were still closely kept secrets within the police force. The article stated that the police responded to an anonymous tip of an apparent murder

in the area, and that's when they discovered the body of 25 year-old Ethan Taylor buried up to his neck.

"We're investigating all possible leads," the article quoted Detective Inspector Langdon McBride in reference to a query if the police thought that the tipster might be the killer. "And at this time, we don't know what a possible motive might be. This young man appeared to be a nice clean-cut young man with a lot of friends. If anyone has information that might be helpful in our investigation, we have a confidential line that you can call; its 4678 TIPS or 4678 8477. We're doing what we can to find the killer or killers, but sometimes these investigations take longer than we'd like."

An adjacent article re-hashed the pertinent details from Monday's newspaper article on the hanging in the winery plus it included some additional history of the winery. It was clear that this second article was a kinder article; perhaps Lindsay Russell, the Prince Albert Winery's Manager, had a word or two with the newspaper's publisher about the treatment he'd received in earlier articles. The paper was just doing its job, but the winery was a noble institution somewhat like the royal family in Great Britain. The press can take a shot at them, but it needs to remember at whom they're shooting. A small article on page five of today's paper had an "unconfirmed report" that this year's harvest at the Prince Albert Winery was one of the finest on records and the "weather cooperated spectacularly to deliver exceptional flavors." Lindsay Russell, nor anyone at the winery, had ever made any such statements.

0900 hours

Thursday, 19 November

Home of Robert and Ryna Allen—North Willoughby

Langdon McBride normally picked up a newspaper on his way into work, and he would read parts of it throughout the day. *The Tribune* was getting more liberal, and its publisher seemed to be injecting more commentary into the articles, making it harder to know what was fact and what was fiction. Even the headlines at times seemed to be pulled right from the tabloids. McBride knew, however, what today's headlines were going to be even before he saw the paper; maybe not the exact words, but certainly the story—yesterday's killing at Tooev Rocks Nature Preserve.

"Detective Inspector Langdon McBride here," he said into his mobile phone as he answered the familiar number and kept walking toward his desk. "Right, I rather expected that anyway so I'd already asked Roberts to go with me this morning to the Allens' house." He continued walking while listening. "Yes, you can tell the Commissioner that we have a very methodical approach, and that many of the chaps have already volunteered to work extra hours. We haven't over-

looked anything; our killer is smart and he's just got the jump on us, but we'll find him; we always do." Langdon stopped at his desk, set the unopened paper on the stack of papers, nodded his head a couple times, and then responded, "Yes, I know he's pressing on you, Graeme, but a rugby match isn't played in just one quarter either." That last remark got a few heads turned toward him, and McBride realized he shouldn't have mentioned his boss's name. "Yes, sir. Hourly reports, you'll get them. I'll have Bravo Team submit them since I'm taking Alpha's leader with me to see the first victim's parents." There was no point to say "Good bye" as his boss had already closed off the call.

It was still early in the morning, but many of the detectives were already in the office working on cases. Roland Thatcher, Charlie Team Lead, was approaching as McBride was walking down the aisle toward Lisa McPherson's area. "Good morning, Thatcher."

"Good morning, Detective Inspector. When you have some time I'd like to talk with you in private about our team's assignment on the Prince Albert Winery case." Thatcher lowered his voice as he continued. "We have some information, but it's highly sensitive as you said it might be. Is this a good time to talk with you privately?"

"Actually, right now's not a good time. I've got to find McPherson, and then Roberts and I have to go meet with the parents of the winery victim. Is time of the essence, or can it wait a little bit?" McBride did want to know what Thatcher knew, but he didn't want to appear too eager, plus he did have to meet with Roberts and go see Mr. and Mrs. Allen.

"It's not that time critical, Detective Inspector. If you let me know when it's convenient for you, that'll work for me," Thatcher responded.

"That's a good sport," McBride said as he slapped him on the shoulder and then continued on to Lisa McPherson's area where he informed her of the hourly reports that the DCI wanted. She acknowledged the request, wrote it down, and then went to assemble a small team to gather the necessary information. McBride knew it wouldn't be long before Detective McPherson became Detective Inspector McPherson; good news for the department even though it meant he would be losing an outstanding detective.

As he was circling back to his desk, McBride saw Glen Roberts coming through the doorway and heading toward McBride's desk. Roberts had definitely earned his stripes to become a detective, but the Bravo and Charlie Team leads seemed to have more drive than Roberts, the Alpha Team lead. Maybe they could talk about that on the way back from the Allens' house. Langdon had heard that Glen and his wife had been having some marital issues, definitely not uncommon in police families. Asking him to take a desk job or have his number two take over for him was out of the question; Langdon would have to figure out some other way to get Glen motivated again.

"Good morning, boss," Roberts said as he extended his right hand that held a cup of coffee, possibly a peace offering of sorts.

"G'day, Glen. Thanks, I can certainly use this. I'm ready to head out to the Allens' as soon as you drop the things at your desk. I've got the paper in case you haven't had time to

read it already, you can read it in the car while I drive since I've been there before."

"Give me ten, boss," Roberts replied. "It was rough morning at home, I'm sorry to say, and I'm sorry that I haven't been the leader that I should be for you and my team." Grim-faced and sullen, Glen Roberts strode to his desk with the resolve to show strong leadership even though he wasn't sure where it would come from.

"I've got you covered, Glen," Langdon replied, showing that he was indeed a strong leader and that he supported his people because after all, they were people, not machines.

"Thanks," Roberts said as he was already half-way down the aisle.

McBride sat down, removed the coffee lid, and enjoyed the first sip of the hot coffee. He started reading reports that had come in through the night, while sipping the coffee, not realizing that Glen Roberts had returned.

"Ready any time you are, boss," Roberts said gently.

"Of course," McBride responded as he arose from his chair, grabbed his briefcase, other papers, and the newspaper. The two men walked in relative silence toward the stairs to the parking—there were too many ears eager to hear any possible tidbit from these two. Silence from them was necessary, or what they said, or some convolution of what they might have said, would make its way around the station in no time flat. A police station was no different from any other office building; people loved to tell stories, no matter how much, or how little, truth was in those stories. Silence was even more critical in the stairways and garages where the sound would be echoed and carried. They would have time

to talk while driving to the Allens' home in North Willoughby.

Walking through the garage, McBride could sense the tenseness in Roberts as he walked next to him. Did Glen think that Langdon was going to give him a verbal warning or some other administrative punishment; was that why he was "invited" along at the last minute? Langdon wanted to say something to calm Glen, but he, too, knew not to say anything in the openness of the garage. It wasn't paranoia; it was just being smart. Too many people had been overheard, had been recorded, had been mis-quoted; Detective Inspector Langdon McBride wasn't going to make an elementary mistake. He felt sorry for Roberts, but he would be able to ease that fear in a matter of minutes.

When the two men were within ten metres of McBride's car, Langdon stopped without saying anything and put out his right arm to motion Roberts to also stop, which he did without saying a word. McBride indicated for Roberts to step behind a block wall as Langdon removed the set of keys from his pocket and pressed the button on one of the fobs. There was a high-pitched "beep-beep-beep-beep-beep" noise, followed by one longer low-pitched "beeeep."

"All clear," McBride said as he stepped back out into the walkway and pressed another button and the car doors opened. The men got in the car, fastened their safety belts, locked the doors, and headed out of the police garage. "That was to make sure there were no bombs or other attachments we wouldn't want riding with us," McBride said as they were safely on their way to Bedford Street in North Willoughby.

Glen Roberts read some of the reports and most of the newspaper as his boss drove north from the city across the Harbour Bridge to Willoughby Road, Penshurst Street, and finally to Bedford Street. As he pulled up in front of the familiar home where he'd been just two days earlier, McBride glanced at Roberts and said, "You ready, mate? The lady was a bit fragile two days ago. There's no telling what we'll find today."

"I'll follow your lead, boss," Roberts replied as he put the newspaper on the floor, the other papers in his satchel, and stepped out of the door.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen were expecting the men, so the front door was open, and Mr. Allen was at the door as they approached. "Hello Mr. McBride," Mr. Allen said as he opened the screen door for them.

"G'day. Mr. Allen. I'd like you to meet my lead detective. This is Detective Glen Roberts."

As those two men shook hands and exchanged pleasantries, Langdon McBride stepped into the living room to say hello to Mrs. Allen; she was much more composed today. The other two men then stepped in from the entryway.

"Mrs. Allen, may I introduce Detective Glen Roberts. Glen, this is Mrs. Allen." McBride used a soft voice as he introduced them to keep the intensity at a low level.

"Hello, Mrs. Allen," Roberts said as he extended his hand in a warm handshake.

"Please sit down," Mr. Allen said.

"Thank you," McBride replied as he and Roberts sat on the sofa. "Thanks for letting us come out here again so soon. As I told you on the phone yesterday, and as you've seen

on the news and in the paper, there's been another murder, and there are some similarities to Rory's." McBride thought about pausing but he knew that if he did that it would only give Mrs. Allen the opportunity to start crying. If she's going to start crying, she's going to anyway, so no need to give her any extra reason. "I wanted to come back out and ask you just a few questions, plus see if any questions had popped up for you."

Mrs. Allen spoke up, "When are you going to arrest Rory's killer? That's our main question."

"We understand that, Mrs. Allen," Glen Roberts responded. "As Detective Inspector McBride has probably told you, this case is our top priority, and we do have people working on it every hour of the day. I wish I could tell you when we're going to arrest that killer, but I don't know when that is. But believe me, as much as if Rory were my boy, or if that chap we found out at Tooey Rocks were my boy, I'd want the killer found just as much as you do. But we can't promise any more than that."

"You said you had more questions for us," Mr. Allen said.

"Yes," Langdon McBride responded. "Does the name Ethan Taylor sound familiar to you? He's the young man from yesterday's killing. It appears that he's the same age as Rory and they both went to Chatswood High. We don't know right now if that's just a coincidence, or if there's some sort of connection. We talked with Ethan's parents yesterday, and they didn't seem to know of Rory."

"I don't think I've heard of the name," Mr. Allen replied. "Have you checked with Jamie MacFarlane? Maybe he's heard of him. Where do the Taylors live?"

"They live in Artarmon, and we haven't had a chance to check with Jamie yet, but we will on the way back into town." McBride continued, "Do you know if Rory had a favorite drink that he liked? I'm sure most chaps his age drink beer when they go to a footy game or a rugby match. But if he's out for a social evening, do you know what he'd ask for?"

Mr. Allen again did the answering; at least Mrs. Allen had the composure to stay in the living room this time. "Rory didn't drink much at home, and I don't know if he drank much when he went out. It was pretty much whatever we had here and was available. Again, you'd have to ask Jamie. Does that really matter now?"

"We don't know, Mr. Allen," Glen Roberts stepped in. "We're looking into many aspects of the case, and sometimes we find that one small piece of information ties in with something else later on. Or that it links up with another piece of the puzzle, perhaps it might tie in with this other murder. We don't know, but as a parent myself I know that I'd prefer not to have the police coming around all the time. So if we can ask the questions now, and not have to come back later; we think that would be better, don't you agree?"

"Sure, I guess so," Mr. Allen said reluctantly even though it would have been hard for him to disagree with the detective's logic.

"We have just one more question." It was McBride this time. "This question involves information that hasn't been released to the public, a tactic that's quite common in most investigations. Will you keep this information to yourselves, not mentioning any of it even to other family members?"

“Why?” Mrs. Allen asked. “If it has to do with finding Rory’s killer, why does it have to be kept a secret?”

“For precisely that reason, Mrs. Allen,” McBride responded. There’s some information that only the police and the killer know. So if someone who’s not the police mentions one of those things, then that person must be the killer because how else would he know that information? Do you see?”

“Oh, okay,” Mrs. Allen responded, not quite sure that she fully grasped the concept, but knowing that she should.

“We’re with you, Mr. McBride,” Mr. Allen said.

“Rory had a tattoo on his left arm when he was found, and it was quite fresh. Do you know if he had recently joined any organization that would have some initiation ritual?”

Mrs. Allen just sat in her chair, completely befuddled. Mr. Allen spoke up, “I’d have no idea, but a tattoo’s not something that sounds like Rory. Again, Jaime’s your best bet on that one.”

“That’s all of our questions,” Langdon McBride said. “Do you have any more for us?”

“No, not really,” Mr. Allen said. “We know you’re doing your job. Ryna’s still just having a hard time accepting it all.”

“I wish there were more we could tell you right now,” McBride continued as he stood from the sofa. Glen Roberts took the cue and also stood. The three men exchanged handshakes and then the two officers offered a polite goodbye to Mrs. Allen who sat there in a daze. “We’ll stay in touch, Mr. Allen.” McBride said as he and Roberts walked out the front door.

“Thank you,” Robert Allen said as he closed the screen door and returned to comfort his wife.



17



Early morning

Friday, 20 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

The *Sydney Tribune* once again delivered shocking news to the residents of Sydney and New South Wales with its headlines and lead story that demanded full attention on the front page. Yesterday's headlines of the burial at Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve was still fresh news; the hanging at the Prince Albert Winery had been overshadowed but not forgotten, and now this morning's paper went a bit over the top. Its headlines took a ghastly story and sensationalized it into a possible serial killing: **Man Stabbed on Harbour Bridge! #3?**

Deaths on, or around, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, although infrequent, were not completely uncommon. Unfortunately, people over the years have picked high-profile locations such as San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, Tokyo's Ginza shopping district, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, as well as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, for places to commit murder and suicide. The local officials usually tried to keep the news to a minimum as it's not good for the tourist business. But

whether the offenders (or the victims themselves in the cases of suicides) chose the locations because of their spectacular nature, or because of some reason that's rooted in the nature of the crime, those answers were typically never discovered. Major media didn't particularly care what the reasons were; their primary concern was how big of a splash they could get, and if they could be the first ones to report the headlines. That's all that really mattered—to them, anyway.

"Hi, Maggie. Aren't you getting ready for school?" Detective Inspector Langdon McBride asked as he opened up his mobile phone.

"Good morning to you, too, Dad," his daughter responded in the tone that only a father's daughter can use. "It's Friday in case you didn't know, and I don't go to school on Fridays."

"I guess it wouldn't do any good to say that I knew that, would it?" McBride replied, not sure why his daughter called or how he was going to backpedal from this latest foot-in-the-mouth blunder.

"No, Dad," she said with resignation apparent in her voice. "I tried to call you last night to see if you wanted to go out for a late coffee, but your phone was turned off. Did you have a hot date with the M.E.?"

Langdon hesitated just long enough before answering that his daughter knew something was going on. But she was also smart enough to not push the matter. She quickly changed the subject to today's hot news item. "What's with another murder? And this one's on the Bridge? I thought they had some pretty tight security there with cameras and walkers. This is getting a bit crazy, isn't it, Dad?"

"Yes, Maggie. It certainly is crazy, and I don't know much more than what the paper is saying about the murder on the Bridge. I'm not even sure if I'd believe half of what they say, but you know I couldn't tell you anything anyway. Sorry about last night, but we'll make it up soon, okay?"

"Sure, Dad. That's okay," Maggie said reluctantly into the phone.

"I've got to run, dear. Things were already hot down at the station this week with the other two murders. I hate to think what kind of a mood the Commissioner is going to be in after this latest one."

"Dad?" Maggie started her question.

"Yes, dear," Langdon replied.

"Why does the Commissioner always yell at the police officers when there's a murder or some other crime like this? I mean, it's not like it's your fault or you guys did it. Right?"

"You're right, Maggie. I think it's more of a sense of frustration on his part and wanting to make sure that we understand the importance of working the case to show the public that the police force is dedicated to solving the crime."

"But you do that anyway, don't you?" Maggie asked, thinking that she already knew the answer.

"Of course we do," McBride answered.

"That's what I thought. I guess it will take me a while to understand management," she replied.

"When you do," her dad responded, "how about if you let me know also."

"I hope you have a good day, Dad. I love you," Maggie said.

"I love you, too, Maggie," Langdon replied as he closed his phone to finish getting ready for work. He heard the radio announcer say it was seven eighteen.

0830 hours

Friday, 20 November

New South Wales Police Force Headquarters—Sydney

Langdon McBride drove to work in silence. He knew what the radio stations would be broadcasting, and some of what they would be saying would actually be true, just like the stories in the newspapers. He didn't feel like listening to music either; his soul was deeply troubled by the events of this past week, and the peaceful drive into the station might help. Besides, he knew that all hell was going to break loose once he got there, and nothing was going to change that situation. "I wonder why Maggie actually called," he thought out loud to himself. He'd forgotten to check to see what time she'd called last night.

The Detectives' squad room was abuzz when McBride came through the doorway and headed straightaway toward his desk. He was, however, approached by several officers who queued up based on their order of rank. Detective Roland Thatcher was first and he once again wanted to know when he and the Detective Inspector could speak in private

about Charlie Team's findings from the winery investigation. Thatcher was again rebuffed by McBride.

A senior personnel officer had some annual review forms that McBride had to complete and sign before the end of the month. McBride took the sealed envelopes from him and said he'd return them to him by next week. A young officer from the Traffic Department had a "routine question" about the use of McBride's department vehicle on personal time. "Really?" McBride exploded. "We've got three major murders that we're trying to solve and this is the best use of your time and mine? How about if you come back when the newspapers aren't printing 'Murder' as their main headline, and then I'll be happy to sit down and tell you where every mile I've driven has been. And if your superior officer isn't happy with that answer, then tell him to get out on the streets and help us find these killers. Now get out of my sight!"

There wasn't a person on the entire floor who didn't hear Detective Inspector Langdon McBride completely lose his cool with his fellow police officer who was only doing his duty. Based on that outburst, calling McBride stressed out would have been an understatement. That behavior, however, was uncharacteristic for McBride, which meant that something else was going on to cause him to react that way.

The young traffic officer, feeling as isolated as on a lonely island, turned quietly and began to walk away. As he headed toward the stairwell, several of the detectives offered comforting words such as, "He's under a lot of stress," "Don't take it personally," "He's really not a bad guy."

The chatter that had been going on when McBride entered the area was now gone; no one dared break the silence. The one person who could talk with him did get up out of her chair and began to approach McBride. The clock on the wall said it was now eight twenty. The room was still drop-dead quiet as Lisa McPherson walked up to Langdon McBride.

"Good morning, boss," she said. "How about if we drop this off at your desk and we get a cup of coffee before we head into the Commissioner's meeting in a few minutes?" Detective McPherson had a way of dealing with McBride that few others had. Maybe it was because she was a female that she could get away with certain things, or perhaps it was because she knew just how assertive she could be in certain situations, and then when to back off in others. But one thing was for sure, she knew how to manage her manager.

"Thanks, Lisa," Langdon said. "I kind of lost it back there, didn't I?"

"Let's just say it's a good thing the poor chap wasn't a sheila or you'd be down in Personnel already just for yelling at her," Lisa replied. Once again, Lisa showed that she could respond to her boss in precisely the way that he needed to hear it.

As McBride and McPherson were approaching the conference room, Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth managed to catch McBride's attention. "Go on in," Langdon told Lisa. "I think word has traveled fast."

"Well, Langdon, it seems your morning has not started off well. Anything we need to talk about before we get our

heads handed to us in there?” Graeme Farnsworth was a pure team player and he didn't like surprises, especially bad ones.

“Sorry, boss. There was no reason for me to lose my cool with that traffic officer. I'll go apologize to him and to his superior right after this.”

“I'm not as worried about them as I am about all of your people who saw you lose it. That can't be changed, and I think we need to talk about it. But let's get inside before we're late.”

“Gotcha, boss,” Langdon replied, and the two senior officers made their way into the Police Commissioner's conference room and sat in the front row alongside Detectives Roberts, McPherson, and Thatcher. They made it with one minute to spare.

First to enter from the front left of the room, and the cue for everyone to rise, was the New South Wales Police Force Press Secretary, a gentleman in a dark blue suit with a crisp white shirt and a blue and gold diagonally striped tie. He was followed by the Police Commissioner's secretary, a smartly dressed female, in a sharp gray suit. They were followed by New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin Martin in his Full Dress uniform, complete with medals and his Star of Courage. Polite applause continued until Commissioner Martin took two steps to the podium, switched on the microphone, said, “Thank You,” and motioned for everyone to be seated. “This is not the way I like to start off a Friday morning,” he continued. “Because when I have to meet with you like this on a Friday morning, it means that I have to meet with the media later on in the day. And that meeting with the media is not going to be a pleasant one.

They're going to want some answers." He stopped. The room was silent, as silent as the squad room was when McBride stopped yelling at the traffic officer only ten minutes earlier. This was a different silence, but it felt eerily similar to the other one.

Up to this point, Police Commissioner Martin had been calm, the picture that he typically portrayed when he was on the evening news. Langdon McBride knew the calm wouldn't last; Colin Martin wouldn't call them into his conference room for a pleasant chit-chat right after the third major murder in less than a week. The explosion would come; it was just a matter of when, and for how long.

The "when" became now. "What's going on out there, folks?" Martin's voice was now at that raging level that they were expecting to hear. "I want more information. I need more information!" He exclaimed as he slammed his fist on the podium for emphasis, an action that had to hurt a mere mortal of a man; but then Police Commissioner Colin Martin wasn't a mere mortal of a man. "These aren't ordinary murders I have to answer questions about. There's a hanging in the Prince Albert Winery, a burial at Toocy Rocks Nature Preserve, and now a stabbing on the Harbour Bridge. How many more bodies are going to be turning up out there?" The Commissioner's booming voice echoed through the room as no one dared to move, and barely a breath was taken.

Seeing that no answers were forthcoming, and not really expecting any anyway, Police Commissioner Martin looked directly at Detective Chief Inspective Graeme Farnsworth. "Detective Chief Inspector, when will you have a report to my Press Secretary on this latest murder, plus an arrest sus-

pect or suspects for these three murders?" Commissioner Martin's voice level had decreased, but its intensity had not.

Graeme Farnsworth stood to answer the Commissioner, grimacing slightly as he put pressure on his right leg when he got out of the chair. "Good morning, Commissioner. Because of the importance to have all the detectives here at this meeting, we've not yet been able to send an investigation team to the scene of the crime on the Bridge. The area's been secured, but it will be several hours at a minimum until the detectives are able to process the area." Farnsworth knew that statement would not sit well with the Commissioner, but it was Martin's office who called the meeting, so Martin had to live with the consequences. Also, Farnsworth wasn't going to pause long enough to let the Commissioner interrupt him, so he kept going.

"Based on results from the Chief Medical Examiner from the last two victims," Farnsworth continued, "it will be late into the day until we have even some preliminary results. So for this unfortunate victim, I think the best thing to say right now is that there has been a stabbing on the Bridge as the media have already reported, and that the New South Wales Police Force is committing all its resources to finding the perpetrator. As far as bringing you a suspect, you know as well as all of us here in this room know, we could get a break five minutes from now, or it could be another five days from now. And, with all due respect, sir, we won't find our killer while we're sitting here in this room." With that last less-than-sincere remark, Detective Chief Inspector Farnsworth sat back down. He didn't really care if he irritated the Police

Commissioner; he was more concerned about standing up for his officers.

“Thank you for your opinion, Graeme, but that kind of a remark is not what the public wants to hear. They want to hear that you're on the edge of solving the crime. And that's what I want to hear. I want the main detective teams back here at 1730 hours this evening with a full report on all three of these murders. And no excuses!” Martin yelled as he slammed his fist on the podium one more time, and then he and his small entourage left the room. No one bothered to stand.

1000 hours

Friday, 20 November

Sydney Harbour Bridge—Sydney

Lisa McPherson said she'd drive, not to try to show a power play, but to let Langdon McBride relax. As they approached The Rocks area, she said, "How about if we park here along George Street? It'll be a little longer walk to the Bridge from here, but we can stop at a pub for lunch on the way back. And then our car's right here."

"Sounds great to me," Langdon replied. "I'm almost ready to pop into the pub right now." He opened his door and then the rear door to get his briefcase. Wave after wave of kitchen smells hit him in the face as they made their way up the sidewalk toward the intersection with Gloucester Walk. And those smells reminded him of last night.

Detective McPherson stayed silent for most of the walk; she knew her position, and she knew that if Langdon wanted to discuss his blow-up less than two hours ago, then he'd find a way to bring up the subject. For now, her role was to be the lead detective on the latest murder investigation—a stabbing on the city's most iconic feature, the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

But she also knew that she was here because McBride implicitly trusted her, more than he could say about some of the others on his team.

Once they reached the taped-off winding flights of stairs near Argyle Street, they were met by both a New South Wales Police officer and a Sydney Harbour Bridge Security officer. McBride and McPherson were recognized by the police officer, but since the area was technically Bridge property, they had to show their IDs to the security officer. This procedure might have irritated others, but these two were used to it by now, having investigated crimes in other jurisdictions. The security officer spoke first, wanting to show a sense of authority. "Young male, several stab wounds, south-east pylon. There's a team of your people up there already."

Detective Lisa McPherson stayed silent; the chain of command dictated that she not say anything unless asked for something by her superior officer since she was in the presence of other police officers.

"Thank you," McBride said. "Have you had any issues with civilians?"

"None at all, Detective," the police officer responded. "Many of them have seen the paper or heard the news on the radio, so of course they're curious."

"Of course," McBride repeated. "Don't hesitate to call for back up if there's any sign of trouble. We don't need any civilians up there right now, tampering with the crime scene. Either of you have any questions?"

"No," replied the security officer.

"None at all, Detective," replied the police sergeant.

As they climbed up the flights of stairs and were out of hearing distance of the two men below, McBride asked, "What's your gut telling you about these murders, Lisa? Three of them in less than a week. All in high-profile locations. It's got to be a single murderer, right?"

"Just between us, McBride," Lisa began, "it's one killer who's on a mission to make a very strong statement. I don't have a clue what that statement is, but that's what my gut tells me. What about you; what's your instinct telling you?"

They reached the top of the stairs and stepped out onto normally noisy Cahill Walk that was much quieter this morning due to the restricted lanes in the southbound direction. Instead of the normal four north- and four south-bound lanes, there were only two south-bound this morning with the two lanes nearest the eastern side of the Bridge closed while the Police and the Bridge Security were conducting their investigations. The backup on the Bradfield Highway, named after the Bridge's first Chief Engineer, was horrendous. McBride and McPherson could only image how far back the cars were lined up into Milsons Point and North Sydney. But the two open lanes next to them did make it easier to hear each other without having to shout.

"So far," he started, "it certainly does seem like one killer. The two tattoos seem similar enough that unless it were some initiation ritual, I don't see how two unrelated killings would each have a tattoo like that."

"Agreed," McPherson added. "So here's what I don't get about this one. The security is so tight on the walkway, I don't see how a stabbing could take place without one of their security cameras or officers seeing it."

“That’s exactly what my daughter said to me this morning,” Langdon replied. “They claim that they’ve got every square metre between the pylons, plus a hundred metres before them, watched twenty-four by seven. So how could they have a stabbing at one of the pylons? I can’t wait to hear their answer on that one.” The intensity in McBride’s voice caused him to pick up the pace of his walk, naturally pulling along that of Detective McPherson’s.

“Right, that should be good, although it probably won’t be anything that’ll help us have an answer for the Commissioner by 1730 today.” Changing topics, she continued, “It’s kind of nice not having all those cars spewing out those fumes right to us, isn’t it?” Detective Lisa McPherson paused mentally as she thought about the three murders—a hanging, a burial, and a stabbing. “So if it’s one killer, why would he hang the first victim, then bury the next one, and now stab one? Don’t most serial killers use the same method? Isn’t that safer for them?”

“Maybe it’s not a serial killer in the same way as we know serial killers,” McBride responded.

As they neared the south-east pylon, they were again met by a police officer and a security officer. It seemed that the Sydney Harbour Bridge Security was quite territorial and was not going to let even the New South Wales Police Force have free reign to conduct an investigation on “their bridge.” “Good morning, Detective Inspector McBride. Detective McPherson. This is Chief of Security Michael Brannan. His men secured the area and are the ones who called the police as soon as the victim was found.”

All four of them shook hands out of courtesy.

“Thank you, Senior Sergeant Kelly. Good morning, Mr. Brannan. I’m sorry that something like this has had to happen on your bridge, but please extend our thanks to your men for securing the area once they found the vic. I don’t see any forensic flags on the walkway; are there footprints or other signs of evidence?” Langdon McBride addressed that question to the police sergeant, feeling, however, that he already knew what the answer was going to be.

“We don’t have anything yet,” Kelly said. He continued as he made a quick glance with his eyes toward the Sydney Harbour Bridge Chief of Security. “Let’s go take a look over here; I think you’ll find this rather interesting.” The four of them walked to the pylon, where it was taped off from both sides.

As he ducked under the tape, McBride saw a forensics team working in the southern corner.

“That’s where our vic was tied into the corner,” Senior Sergeant Kelly began. “And it gets even more interesting. Apparently, this corner is the only place on the bridge between the pylons that is not caught on camera. And that’s where we think the stabbing took place because there’s no footage of any stabbing at all.”

“Chief Brannan,” McBride used the man’s formal title to give him a sense of empowerment. “Is that true? I thought that every square metre between the pylons, and even outside the pylons for about a hundred metres, was covered by video.”

“Well,” the security chief began haltingly. “I know we don’t have coverage inside the towers, but they’re closed at

night." Brannan managed to avoid directly responding to McBride's statement about the bridge's video coverage.

"Do we have the video from last night we can look at, Kelly?" Lisa McPherson asked as more of a statement than a question.

"Yes, Detective. We've set up a portable player on the other side in the shade so we have a better viewing," Kelly responded. As an afterthought, he added, "The chief was kind enough to provide the player and the tape for us."

"Thanks, chief," McBride said.

"No worries, mate," replied the Chief of Security as the four of them stepped to the other side of the pylon where there was a small table set up with a video player and a monitor.

"So give us a preview of what we're going to see," McBride said as Kelly began to power on the video equipment.

"Yes, sir," Kelly replied. "What you'll see are two people, presumably a male and a female, coming up Cahill Walk as they're being captured by this camera that's above us right here." Kelly paused as he pointed to the standard bulbous video monitoring device directly above them. "They appear friendly, but not overly friendly, and then they head directly for that corner over there. They must know that it's not viewable by this camera, or at least the killer knows it. Seven minutes later the man re-appears and calmly strolls back down Cahill Walk the same way he entered as if nothing happened. Now here's the strange part. You'll see the man is the one who leaves, yet it's a man who's the victim. So was it two gay

men who came in here? Or a man and a transvestite? Take a look.” Kelly then started the video.

“2120—We see the two of them coming up Cahill Walk; it’s too dark to make out many details, but the walking appears to be a man and a woman. Notice that they are holding on to each other quite snugly and the coats are pulled up around their faces more than what you’d expect for a November evening. Don’t you think?”

“Good observation, Kelly,” McPherson said. “What’s next?”

“2122—There’s no real change in the pattern of their walking, although the one in the long coat does appear to need some help as if he’s intoxicated. At this point, it just looks like two lovers out for a stroll on the Bridge, and there’s usually nothing wrong with that. It happens every day and evening of the year. Now we see that the one who appears to be the female leads them over to the obscured corner. Notice the time stamp, 2123. This camera captures nothing in that area for the next seven minutes until we see someone emerge from that corner.”

“2130—Notice that it’s someone in the long coat who’s coming out of that corner, but it’s only one person. Obviously it’s only one person because Bridge Security found the other person tied to the corner and stabbed to death. So the person in the long coat had seven minutes to stab the victim and then leave the corner. But why take so long if you know the camera can’t see you in the corner?” Kelly asked.

“Perhaps,” Detective McPherson offered, “the person in the long coat who left the scene isn’t the same person who came here in the long coat, and that’s why it took seven min-

utes to switch clothes after the murder. Think about it, and I don't have all the details. A guy and his sheila come out here, but she has plans to knife him. She gets him drunk, just drunk enough, but so he can still walk. They come here to this corner where she knows the camera can't see them. She takes off his coat; ties him to the corner, and perhaps he thinks it's a sex game. Then she stabs him, puts on his coat, and calmly walks back to The Rocks. The camera doesn't see the killing, and she gets away with it. What do you think?"

"I think you've been reading too many mystery novels, Lisa," McBride said. "But I don't know what else to think right now. What thoughts do you have, Chief Brannan?"

"Without any solid evidence, which is something you and your forensic teams develop, I'd have to go along with your detective. That seems like the most plausible idea right now." As Chief of Security for Sydney's most identifiable tourist attraction and a transportation artery for about 200,000 vehicles on a daily basis, Michael Brannan had a plush job most of the time. Unfortunately, this was not one of those times because the NSW Police were certain to expose the flaw in the "foolproof security" of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Truth be told, Brannan wasn't aware that their security cameras didn't cover every square metre over the bridge's walkway. This was going to prove to be an embarrassment, unless there was some other way out of the situation.

"What do we have over at the corner, Kelly, that's going to give us any clues?" McBride asked.

Powering off the video equipment, Senior Sergeant Kelly made a one-eighty turn toward the crime-scene corner,

and the other three naturally followed him. As they approached the area, two white-gloved forensics specialists stepped aside. "He was right here," Kelly said, motioning to the corner. "There was a bungee cord around his legs and one around his torso to keep him standing upright. Have you guys found anything else?"

The forensics specialists both nodded "No."

"No doubt we're dealing with a smart cookie," McBride said. "Coming into this corner where the camera can't see you; not looking up at the camera at all coming in or going out; tying up the victim so he can't fall into the view of the camera. This is someone who's no doubt scouted out this area before and who knows what he's doing."

"Are you sure the killer's a man?" McPherson asked.

"I don't know what I'm sure of right now," McBride answered. "Say, how about that pub you promised me for lunch? These guys will bring the forensics back when they're done. I'm a bit hungry. How about you?"

"Sounds good, boss," McPherson replied as she realized there was nothing else they could do while the forensics team did its work. As the two of them started to leave the area, Lisa noticed that Langdon took one more glance up at the overhead security camera.

1300 hours

Friday, 20 November

New South Wales Regional Morgue

“Your bridge victim suffered multiple stab wounds that caused him to lose a significant amount of blood,” Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham said in a matter-of-fact voice as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride entered her office after knocking on the door and she motioned for him to come on in.

McBride took the news in stride as his body was still digesting the lunch that he and Detective McPherson had at the Ships Ahoy Pub on George Street. He’d been tempted to have a draught beer, but not with a subordinate officer present during working hours. “Anything else?” He was curious about a possible tattoo, but he didn’t want to ask the leading question.

“Yes, it appears he may have been drunk and there’s a tattoo, similar to the other two recent killings. This one’s a number four.”

“Same location?” McBride asked.

"Yes," the M.E. replied. "Same location; same shapes and colors. If you'd ask me, I'd say you're looking at one killer. Or at least one group of killers who have something in common, but these tattoos are too similar to be done by random killers."

"I agree," McBride replied. "Does anyone else know about the tattoos?"

The Chief Medical Examiner looked startled and then she paused for a moment before she answered. "No one besides me in the morgue has had access to the bodies or to the information about the victims, so I have to turn that question back to you, McBride. I know that no one else here knows about the tattoos, so how many people on the force know about them, and how well do you trust each and every one of those people?"

"That's a good question, Alkira, and I don't have a solid answer for you," Langdon replied.

He felt as if he were being put on the defensive, but he wasn't sure either why he felt that way or why Alkira would do that to him. Admittedly, their relationship had cooled down recently, but was that his fault? She was the one who was always busy with her charity work, and then these recent murders had added extra tension for both of them. Maybe Maggie was right; perhaps he should take things a little slower with Alkira. Or was Maggie just saying that because she didn't want a "replacement Mom"?

Alkira noticed the distant look in Langdon's eyes. "Something wrong?" she asked.

"Just a phone call from Maggie this morning," he started. "I couldn't quite figure out why she called, but then I'm al-

ways glad when she does.” Langdon McBride the man and the dad turned back into Langdon McBride the Detective Inspector. “And as if you couldn’t guess, the heat is really being turned up now. The Commissioner is screaming hot for us to come up with something, to come up with anything. He thinks we can just magically come up with suspects, but Farnsworth is running interference just like his old rugby days. Unfortunately, that’s going to last for only so long.”

Alkira pushed back in her chair, took in a deep breath, and then let it out slowly through her pursed lips. She looked directly into Langdon’s eyes and asked, “I feel bad for you. How can I help? Is there some sort of medical information that I can release that might entice our killer?”

“You’re the doc, so we’d be taking that advice from you,” McBride replied. He continued, “I’m not sure if it’s medical information that’s going to be the thing that brings him in anyway.”

“And you’re the detective, Langdon, so I trust what your instinct says,” Alkira responded.

“Thanks. Do you mind if I take a quick look at our latest victim? I’m going to meet with his parents at 1500 hours and I’d like to be able to tell them what I can, up to a point.”

“Who’s your lead detective on this one?” Alkira asked as she arose from her chair to lead Langdon down to look at the body.

“Lisa McPherson,” Langdon replied.

“Oh,” was the curt reply from the M.E. as she walked out her door and into the hallway.

Sensing something amiss, Langdon attempted to query Alkira on the issue as they looked at the lifeless body of

twenty-six year old Randall Williams. There was “no issue” as far as she was concerned; she just meant that she felt that the female detectives were not as impartial to male victims and male subjects as were the male detectives. McBride was not about to tell Alkira that Detective McPherson actually thought that the primary subject in at least this case was a female.

After Mr. Williams’ body was covered and returned to its locking storage, the two left the area in stilled silence. As Alkira was walking back into her office, and Langdon was going to back to his office, he had a thought. “You know. If you think that leaking some medical or other information that’s not actually too critical to our cases might help draw out the killer, let me know what it might be, and I’ll run it by Farnsworth.”

“I’ll give it some thought over the weekend, and let you know on Monday,” she replied.

“Sounds good. Would you like to have dinner tomorrow night?”

“Actually, I’d really love to, but I do have another event. Sorry,” Alkira’s voice sounded genuinely sad that she wasn’t able to have dinner with Langdon—again. “Rain check?” she asked.

“Sure,” he replied. “See you Monday.” He turned and walked toward the exit of the regional morgue. “Another rain check,” he said to himself. “It could rain for a solid fortnight and I still wouldn’t use up all my rain checks,” he continued to mutter as he walked out the front door. He was so consumed with his own thoughts that he didn’t hear Roger the guard tell him about the evening’s races.



21



1500 hours

Friday, 20 November

Home of Terrell and Kim Williams—Paddington

“**T**here’s still a bit of a buzz going around the office from this morning’s dust-up with that traffic officer,” Detective Lisa McPherson said once she and Detective Inspector Langdon McBride had exited the parking garage. They weren’t paranoid, but they had heard stories of super powerful audio and video cameras inside and even near the garage, cameras that had recorded police conversations, whose information was then used in illicit manners. No, it was better to play it safe and wait until they were out into the open areas.

“Whatever you can do to help me is appreciated, Lisa,” McBride said as he drove toward Oxford Street. They had only a short drive to the parents’ home of the latest victim; that was about the only good thing going for him today.

“Fortunately, today’s a Friday, so it’ll all be gone by Monday. I’ve placed a call to his supervisor and patched things with him already. You do have a lunch with the young officer next Wednesday; I figured that would be a good showing not

just for Traffic, but also for our people to see you doing that. I hope you don't mind." Once again, Detective McPherson displayed her strong people skills; not in just what she did, but in how she communicated it to her boss.

"Mind?" McBride asked. "Heck, no. Thank you. You know that you're making yourself much too valuable around this department to allow me to let you leave."

"I'm not planning on leaving," Lisa responded.

"Look," McBride started. "You're a mighty strong detective, and you're definitely Detective Inspector material. So you have to move to another department, I have to switch departments, or I have to retire. Right now I don't plan to do either of my two choices. Of course, if I keep going like this morning, I might have the decision made for me."

"You're going to be fine, Langdon, so long as you turn left here on Oxford," Lisa said as she noticed that Langdon was not paying complete attention to where he was going. "You're a little stressed out right now, but your career's okay; don't worry about it. And quite honestly, I've seen some of the other DCIs out there, and I would rather stay as a detective under you than become a D.I. under them. I know you've got my back, but I don't know that I'd trust them the way I trust you and Farnsworth."

"That means a lot to me, Lisa," Langdon said as they made their way through Darlington and into Paddington. "I wish I could say that every police officer on this force was 100% honest, but we know that's not true. And, it's not written on their badge or the medals on their chest. It takes years to figure it out, and the wrong step can be fatal, literally. I know I can trust you, and I know I can trust Graeme. I'm

not saying anything bad about other detectives, about other DCIs, or about other officers on the force.”

McBride was slowing to turn left on Glenmore Street when McPherson asked, “May I ask a question if you don’t think it’s too personal?”

“Sure go ahead,” McBride replied. “I can always say I’d rather not answer.”

“The Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Grantham. You two seem to have a spark between you, but you never seem to display it. Is there something there, or you just don’t want it out in the open for everyone to know?” Lisa asked, knowing it was personal, but also feeling that Langdon did want it out in the open, that he did want an open relationship. So perhaps it was the M.E. who wanted to keep it away from public view. “Hmmm, why would that be?” she mused to herself.

“Lisa, you are pretty observant. But then we already knew that. The only thing I can say right now is that it’s complicated. She’s quite busy with her charity work, and now these three murders have really muddled things up. Maybe things will change after we get our guy arrested.”

“Or,” Lisa corrected him, “maybe things will change after we get our gal arrested.”

“Touché,” McBride replied.

“Right turn here, boss,” Lisa said just in time or McBride would have gone too far.

“Thanks. Maybe these parents can tell us something that the other parents haven’t been able to. Since the others hadn’t known about the tattoo, let’s not say anything about this one for now.”

"Let's go do this," she replied. "You want me to take the lead; maybe see if the softer female touch can do us any better?"

"Good idea," McBride said. "I think that's something that we might want to incorporate into more of our talks and interviews." As they got out of the car and walked to the front door, Lisa saw a woman pull the sheers back to take a quick peek at who was walking up to their house.

Anticipating the knock on the door and knowing that the police officers were going to be there at 1500 hours, Terrell Williams opened the front door just as Langdon McBride was going to rap on it. McBride displayed his badge and introduced himself. "Mr. Williams, I'm Detective Inspector Langdon McBride." He allowed McPherson to introduce herself since she was going to be doing most of the interviewing.

She showed her badge. "And I'm Detective Lisa McPherson. We are very sorry for the loss of your son, Randall."

"Thank you," Mr. Williams said as he stepped out of the doorway. "Please come in."

"Thank you," Lisa said as she entered first and went directly to Mrs. Williams who was seated on the divan opposite the main windows. As she extended her hand to the grieving mother, she continued, "Mrs. Williams, I'm Detective Lisa McPherson and this is Detective Inspector McBride. Please accept our sincerest sympathies and know that the New South Wales Police Force are working 100% to find Randall's killer." To help establish a female-to-female bond, she asked, "May I sit here?" as she indicated next to the mother.

"Yes, that's fine," Mrs. Williams said in a soft voice that indicated she'd been crying. But there was no more energy to cry even though the pain and the anguish were still there.

"Thank you," Lisa said as she looked Mrs. Williams directly in the eyes to show respect.

"Coffee or tea for either of you?" Mr. Williams asked after he closed the front door and stepped back into the middle of the room.

"If you have some coffee already made, I'll take a cup, thank you," Langdon replied first as it was clear to him that Mr. Williams had targeted the question at him, the male police officer in the room.

"Cream and sugar?" Mr. Williams asked. "You may sit down there if you'd like," he said to McBride as he motioned to a chair next to the divan.

"Just cream, please," McBride answered as he moved toward the indicated chair.

"Detective?" Mr. Williams now asked Lisa if she wanted any.

Lisa McPherson was one of the smartest detectives on the force in many ways, and intuition was one of those ways. Even though she would've liked a cup of coffee, she understood the game being played by Mr. Williams, and she was not going to give him the satisfaction of male superiority, even for just a cup of coffee. "No, thanks," she replied, but with a modest smile on her face.

Knowing that Lisa would have normally had a cup of coffee, but also sensing the game that was being played, Langdon stole a quick glance over at Lisa and saw that slight smile. He knew; she won. She usually did win.

Lisa observed etiquette and waited for Mr. Williams to return with the coffee before diving into the hard questions. Meanwhile she looked around the room to observe family photos and other items that would indicate patterns and family habits. "You have a daughter?" she asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Williams said softly. "Her name's Phoebe; she's two years older than Randall, and she lives over in Perth. Her father called her this morning, and she'll be in on a flight tomorrow."

"What type of work does she do in Perth?" Lisa continued.

"She works in a travel agency, so she was able to book a flight and it's not too dear a price for short notice." Mrs. Williams was opening up; Lisa's touch was working, not that Langdon doubted that it would.

"Here you go, Detective Inspector," Mr. Williams said as he re-entered the room with a tray of three coffees.

"Thank you," McBride said. "It smells very good."

After he delivered the coffees to McBride and then to his wife, Mr. Williams sat down in his customary chair.

"Mr. Williams," Lisa began as a way to draw him 'into the circle.' "Your wife said that your daughter is able to come home as early as tomorrow. That must be quite a relief for you."

"It would be a lot better if she stayed here in New South Wales where she already had a good job," Mr. Williams replied in a brusque tone. He continued, "Why she had to go off to the other side of no-man's land to chase some dream is something I'll never understand. Everything she ever needed was right here."

Lisa saw the need to either let Langdon take over or for her to start the questioning and direct it at Mrs. Williams. Mr. Williams had a combination of anger and gender issues that would not allow her to properly administer an interview and collect meaningful information from him. Moving right along as if he'd never said anything, Lisa continued, "Mrs. Williams, we know this will be painful, but the details that you tell us are very important. Will you try to help us as much as you can?"

Just knowing the types of questions that were going to be coming her way started the flow of emotions, and the beginning of some tears from Mrs. Williams' eyes. "I'll do my best, even though I know it won't bring Randall back to us," she said.

"Thank you," Lisa said softly and slowly as she looked right at Mrs. Williams. She wasn't going to completely avoid Mr. Williams, but it was his wife who was going to receive the majority of Lisa's focus and attention. "Was yesterday a typical day in the way it started out? What I mean is, what can you tell me about Randall's morning here at the house, what was his mood like, and how did he seem when he left here?"

The soft questioning continued for an hour while Langdon took notes as Lisa asked the questions. Lisa was a pro at asking the right questions, and for developing the proper relationship with this mother who had just lost her only son in a brutal stabbing that would be mainly remembered for where it took place. That's not the legacy that any son should have, but that would be the legacy of Randall Williams, age 26, of Paddington, New South Wales, Australia.

Early into the questions, Langdon knew that the answers they were hearing were not much different from the answers he'd heard from the parents of the other victims. These young men who were killed had each started their final living day no differently than any other day in the last year of their respective lives. No, there was something else involved. Did that knowledge make it easier or harder? Langdon would have to think about that. For now, however, it was back to the Commissioner's meeting at 1730 hours.

1730 hours

Monday, 16 November

Office of New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin
Martin—Sydney

It wasn't much of a dinner, but Detective Inspector Langdon McBride did buy dinner for Detective Lisa McPherson on their way back to Police Headquarters. They both knew it was going to be a long night, and anything they could grab along the way back to HQ would be a "good dinner."

"Thanks, boss," Lisa said as she offered to pay her share but Langdon refused.

"No worries, Lisa. You work enough, and you know the department doesn't pay for extra hours. So the least I can do is to buy some dinner for you on our way in to get chewed out by the Commissioner. Sure sounds encouraging, doesn't it?" McBride wasn't painting a very colorful picture of management for his star detective. Was it because he was being selfish and he didn't want to lose her? Or was it because he was trying to warn her of the evils of management, and was afraid that she might leave the force once she accepted a pro-

motion to Detective Inspector, and then found out how bad it was? How bad would he feel then if the New South Wales Police Force lost one of its absolutely best detectives? Terrible, that's how he'd feel.

As they walked into the Detectives area with fifteen minutes to spare before the Commissioner's meeting, McBride and McPherson were met by Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth. "Anything new with the parents?" Farnsworth asked.

"Nothing new," McBride replied. "None of these victims entered their last day with any knowledge that it was going to be the last day for them."

"Nothing new," Farnsworth repeated. "The Commissioner's not going to like hearing that."

"What would you like us to do?" McBride said in a somewhat exasperated tone. Detective McPherson stood silently by his side. McBride continued. "Make up something that you and I and all our teams know is patently false? Make up something just so he can look good on the telly? He can have my badge long before that's going to happen. Remind me, Graeme, what it was that Colin Martin did to earn that Star of Courage. It was some relative's niece, right?"

"You've made your point quite clear, Langdon," DCI Farnsworth said. "But you know we can't make a spectacle in there. You've got ten minutes to go over your approach in my office; let's go."

"See you inside. Great job today with Mrs. Williams," McBride said to Detective McPherson as he and his boss headed to the office. "She's too top-notch to lose," McBride said to Farnsworth once they were inside his office. "Let's

find a way to reward her without promoting her to D.I.; that will only kill her drive.”

“That’s another issue,” Graeme said. “Right now, Martin’s breathing down my neck harder than I hope you’ll ever know. Tell me how you see approaching and solving these three murders. First of all, do you see them as being three separate killers, or is it a serial killer?”

That ten minutes went by quickly.

The detective teams were assembled in the Commissioner’s Office conference room promptly at 1730 hours when he and his personal secretary rushed in, as if they had somewhere else to go. “Probably on a date,” more than one of the officers would’ve been heard saying if they’d each been hooked to a microphone. It was late in the day, and it was late in the week. The typical decorum that should have been given to the Police Commissioner was slow in developing as the officers were tired, tired for several reasons. Not the least of those reasons was the Commissioner’s yelling at them just nine hours earlier.

“Good afternoon, officers,” Commissioner Martin began.

“His P.R. guy must’ve given him a few pointers on starting out slowly,” one of the officers near the back told a neighboring officer in a low voice. A nodding head acknowledged agreement. A few other heads turned with eyebrows raised.

“Thank you for being prompt,” the Commissioner continued. “I know that on a Friday afternoon many of you had plans for a weekend with the family or with your significant other, and so being here is quite an inconvenience. I apologize for that. I’ve spoken with your Detective Chief Inspec-

tor who's given me the background information on the investigations so far. He's also told me that he has the utmost trust in the detectives and the other officers on the teams, which means, of course, that I don't need to worry about it. Right?"

That brought a subdued chuckle from the group. It seemed like a line that was supposed to draw a laugh, but were they then laughing at themselves? The three Detectives, Roberts, McPherson, and Thatcher, along with Detective Inspector McBride, naturally looked at Farnsworth who managed to hold a stalwart look despite knowing nothing about what the Commissioner had just said. Martin had not talked with him about the investigations. The officers in the back rows were right. The Commissioner and his secretary had a hot date that they wanted to get going to, and he could always deflect the investigation business to Farnsworth later anyway. So all of this was merely a sham; what a waste of everyone's time. The only unsolved business on the Commissioner's mind right now was how quickly could he and his secretary get out of there.

"So unless there are any questions, I'll turn it over to DCI Farnsworth who'll fill you in on your assignments. Thank you." Not waiting to see if there were any questions, Martin immediately left so that he and his secretary could sneak out for dinner and

Even though he had just been blindsided by the Police Commissioner, Graeme Farnsworth couldn't let on; he still had to show support for his superior officer. He took his time, presumably for his right knee, but also to develop his strategy as he was approaching the podium. McBride had

seen the startled look in Farnsworth's eyes, and that coupled with the talk the two of them had just had told him that Martin had just sidetracked Graeme. Langdon was right about Martin: he played games in more ways than one, and that didn't set well with Langdon.

The buzz amongst the officers had built back up a bit by the time Graeme had reached the podium, but it quickly died out of respect for their DCI. "It's a beautiful November afternoon out there, and I'd rather be enjoying a beer. How about you?" the Detective Chief Inspector began.

The officers cheered and hollered. There were shouts of "Bring me a pint now" and "I'd thought you'd never ask."

Farnsworth let them enjoy their moment of revelry; after all, the Commissioner was gone. Graeme continued, "I said I'd rather be out there enjoying it, but I can't right now, and unfortunately, neither can you."

A few "Boo's" were heard, but they were quickly squelched.

"I know that all of you are doing what you can to find our killers, so no matter what the Commissioner or anyone else says, you've got my support." Detective Chief Inspector Farnsworth continued, "Here's our plan so hopefully we don't all have to work the entire weekend and then start back up on Monday morning. Detective Inspector McBride will review with his detectives right now what their findings are so far. Then each detective team will re-assemble here at 2130 hours to analyze its separate and combined findings. I know this throws your Friday evening plans amok, but maybe it can salvage some of the rest of the weekend. So each of you get with your detective, while D.I. McBride goes over

the plans, and then work those plans for the next four hours. Questions?”

“What if we don’t have four hours of work?” came a question near the back of the room.

“Then your detective isn’t pressing you hard enough to dig for information,” was the brusque response from a not-too-happy DCI Farnsworth. “Any more questions?”

There would be no more questions.

As Graeme stepped away from the podium and Langdon stepped toward him, Langdon said, “Quick thinking.”

“I’m used to it,” Graeme replied. “Do you have it covered for these guys for what they need? Is there anything you need from me?”

“I’ve got it, thanks,” Langdon replied. “You go have a good dinner. I’ll see you in four hours. Do we expect the Commissioner back here at 2130 hours?”

The look from Graeme’s eyes and the scowl on his face told Langdon everything he needed to know.

The detective teams quickly assembled around their respective Detective, and Detective Inspector McBride hurriedly made his way around the room listening and briefing each team on their activities for the next four hours. He stole a quick look at his watch.

Farnsworth came back in, looked around for McBride, and not seeing him, went up to Alpha Team Detective Glen Roberts. “Have you seen McBride around?” he asked.

“It wasn’t more than thirty seconds ago that I saw him head out that door,” Roberts replied as he pointed toward the doorway leading to the garage staircase.

“Thanks, mate,” Farnsworth nodded as he started to walk to the windows with the best views of the parking garage exit.

“No worries, chief,” Roberts replied.

Farnsworth shook his head back and forth a few times as he saw a car that looked like Langdon McBride’s car pulled out of the police parking garage and head south on Cahill Expressway. “I hope he’s not going to Canterbury Park for the ponies tonight,” Graeme thought to himself as he turned and walked back toward the center of the beehive of activity. He pulled out his mobile and called his wife to tell her that he wouldn’t be home for dinner tonight; there was pressing business he had to attend to here at the office.

2130 hours

Friday, 20 November

New South Wales Police Force Headquarters—Sydney

Opened and emptied food and drink containers were scattered about the room. Lots of talking was going on at the same time; it was hard to tell how much was discussion, how much was conversation, and how much was just energy being verbalized. It was clear that there was a definite lack of order and direction. Was this because Detective Inspector Langdon McBride wasn't present to provide that guidance, or was it because of their frustration of minimal evidence and a seemingly smart killer or set of killers?

The mayhem, or non-directional information analysis as some highly paid consultants liked to call what was going on, sounded like utter noise to DCI Graeme Farnsworth when he stepped back into the room. He knew that there was a time and a place for unstructured processing of information, but he was expecting that they would have been past that step and would be developing their next steps by now. After all, it had been four hours since Langdon McBride had talked with each team and they had agreed on a game plan.

"Where's Langdon?" Graeme thought to himself. "Did he come back and work with the teams, or has he been gone this entire time?" he continued to wonder.

Seeing Detective Roberts midway across the room, Farnsworth weaved his way through the pack of officers, charts, and question marks. "Roberts," he had to almost yell to get his attention.

"Good evening, chief," Roberts replied. "Sorry it's gotten a little noisy in here."

"That's okay," Farnsworth answered. "Is McBride around?"

"Haven't seen him in a little while. Want me to pull the teams together?" Glen Roberts was being very diplomatic in not saying that he hadn't seen Langdon McBride in over four hours, and would the Detective Chief Inspector like him to take over what the missing Detective Inspector should be doing at the moment.

"Thanks, Glen," Graeme said as he patted him on the shoulder. "Give me just a minute to get over to the side," he continued as he turned and walked toward the main doorway leading in from the parking garage stairs. He winced as he turned; the right ankle was bothering him again. He hoped he wouldn't have to have another surgery; the doctor said that depending on the outcome of the surgery and rehabilitation, Graeme might have to consider a medical retirement from the force. And while there would be no disgrace attached to that, it certainly would be distasteful to a proud man like Graeme Farnsworth to have to leave the New South Wales Police Force under such conditions.

Glen Roberts stood on a chair, put his right thumb and forefinger into his mouth and made a loud piercing whistle sound. The mayhem dropped to a ruckus, to a chatter, and then to a near-silent buzz. It wasn't that Roberts would normally demand that quick of a response and respect, but most of the officers knew their DCI was in the room, and their quieting was also out of respect for him. Most of them would have expected Detective Inspector McBride to bring them to order; maybe he had something else going on.

"Thank you," Detective Glen Roberts began. "I know it's been a long evening, so the sooner we bring this together and be organised, the earlier that most of us can get going home to our own beds at a reasonable hour." Roberts was showing exceptional spur-of-the-moment organizational skills. He typically didn't have to do much ad-hoc thinking and planning in situations like this because his Detective Inspector had not placed him in situations like this before. "Where is McBride?" Roberts thought silently to himself as he quickly pulled together a game plan. He knew this was not his responsibility, but he wanted to look good in front of his officers and also in front of his DCI.

"Here's how we'll do it," Roberts continued. After he explained the process, each of the three detective teams took turns going over the highlights of their findings. Team Charlie was vague about their findings on the winery murder, and it was obvious when compared with the findings of the second and third killings that they were either hiding something or didn't have much of an assignment on the first case.

"Our team has not yet delivered our complete findings, which are confidential in nature, on the Prince Albert Win-

ery to Detective Inspector McBride,” Roland Thatcher began. As lead Detective for Team Charlie, he’d made numerous attempts to present his team’s finding to McBride, but he’d not been able to secure an appointment to do so. He was not about to divulge the purpose of his team’s activities before reporting the team’s results to his boss. Seeing that DCI Farnsworth was in the room, Thatcher knew that discretion was important. “Due to the recent number of crimes and the amount of involvement that our Detective Inspector has had in them, Mr. McBride and I have not been able to arrange a mutual time to meet. But I assure you that as soon as he’s available, I will present the information to him.” Thatcher sat down without taking any questions.

Detective Thatcher’s little explanation suddenly reignited the curiosity that Graeme Farnsworth had a few days earlier, but that Langdon McBride had deftly sidestepped. As Thatcher began to walk back to his team, Farnsworth started in his direction. Thatcher noticed Farnsworth coming toward him, and as they made eye contact, Graeme pointed with his head over to a relatively quiet corner. Thatcher acknowledged and followed his chief’s direction.

“Good evening, chief,” Thatcher said to Farnsworth as they got to a private area.

“Thatcher,” Farnsworth replied. “Tell me about this secretive little project you and your team worked on for the Prince Albert Winery hanging. McBride started to tell me about it on Tuesday, but it seemed we would always get sidetracked. Or maybe it’s because he was finding convenient reasons to sidetrack me. But for some reason, he’s not here right now, and I want to know what your team was doing

regarding the winery investigation. Don't worry about confidentiality, because as his superior officer, I could make it a direct order."

"That's not necessary, sir," Thatcher began. "Our team has nothing to hide. In fact, if I may say so without talking ill against my D.I., I've tried several times to talk with Mr. McBride, but he's been quite busy."

"Well, I'm not busy now, Detective. Fill me in."

"Yes, sir," Thatcher replied. He spent the next twenty-five minutes going over his set of confidential reports that on more than one occasion caused Graeme Farnsworth's eyebrows to rise in disbelief.

"He specifically tasked you to obtain this information?" the DCI asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll take this, and as far as you're concerned you've done your work and you've completed your task. Are you okay with that?" Farnsworth asked the question in a reassuring tone, not in a threatening manner.

"I'm fine with that, chief. What if McBride asks me about it?" Thatcher asked.

"You tell him the truth," Farnsworth started. "The teams were giving their reports, and since yours was confidential and he wasn't here to receive it, I asked for it from you. Tell your team they did a great job. Now, go back and join them."

"Thank you, sir. I hope you have a good weekend." Roland Thatcher said, knowing that the DCI would be working all weekend long, especially now that he'd received the confidential information from him.

“What else is there? Is there anyone who can help us?” Glen Roberts asked. No, it was more of an imploring plea for help because he didn’t know what else to do. The teams had done all they could do, and they hadn’t developed any new leads. It was as if someone had appeared out of thin air, done a killing—or two or three—and then disappeared once again. But how could that be possible?

Graeme Farnsworth had kept out of the way of their discussions for the most part as the detective teams were the ones with the information, and so it was they who had the knowledge. But it was clear that the investigations had now stalled, and a new approach was needed. “And how come I can’t reach McBride on his mobile?” Graeme mumbled to himself as he approached Detective Roberts.

“Detective Chief Inspector,” Roberts began. “You’ve heard what evidence we have, and I feel our teams have gone down all the right paths. Do you have any suggestions? Do you know anyone else we can contact who might possibly give us a lead to get us back underway?” There had been the normal fraternal chatter among the officers while Roberts had been talking, but it all ceased once Farnsworth started talking.

“Detectives Roberts, McPherson, and Thatcher; you and your teams have all done outstanding jobs this week under tremendous pressure.” Applause broke out spontaneously along with pats on the back from their teams as DCI Farnsworth began to speak. He let it continue until it subsided naturally. “I’d like to see the lead detectives for five minutes with your final reports, and then I want everyone to

go home for the weekend; see you Monday. Thank you. Any questions?"

"Is there something wrong with Detective Inspector McBride?" came a question from the back of the room.

"Why do you ask?" replied Farnsworth.

"He rushed out of here a while back and we've not seen him since," came the response.

"He's fine, thanks," Farnsworth responded. "Any more before you get out of here? Drive safely, and remember that most of what you know about these cases has not been leaked to the press or the public, so keep mum about it. And if you need to talk with anyone at all, call your Detective, and if that call doesn't go through, call my mobile. Now go; get out of here!"

The area turned into chaos again, but this time it was a more joyous chaos as the officers completed any necessary paperwork and then headed home for the weekend. Roberts, McPherson, and Thatcher met with Farnsworth to give him one final overview of their reports, and they knew not to ask about their boss McBride.

After everyone else had left, Graeme went into his quiet office. Roberts' question kept playing over and over in his mind: "Is there anyone who can help us?"

11:00 A.M.

Friday, November 20th

Home of Alfred Dunningham—Napa Valley, California,
USA

(0600 hours; Saturday, 21 November—Sydney, NSW, Aus-
tralia)

“Sylvia.” The first call went unheeded, as it usually did. He would have to raise both the pitch and the volume. “Sylvia.” Still no response. Being outside while she was inside did create its own additional issues. It was now time to add intensity to his pleading, “Sylvia!” Three times was the charm, as it always was.

“Yes, Alfred,” was the standard and gentle response from his wife of forty years as she would calmly stop whatever she was doing and see what he needed. As she opened the patio door, she saw that he was walking through the rows of rose bushes inspecting the leaves instead of sipping his tea. “Aren’t you going to drink your tea, dear?” she asked as she continued on her way out to him.

“I would,” he began, “if it were properly prepared. Did you allow the tea to steep precisely for the length of time

it takes for the First Movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata?" Alfred barely looked up from the bushes as he asked the question.

"No, Alfred," she replied. "Most teas say to steep from three to five minutes and so I set the timer for five minutes. I might've gone a little over this time, but only a few seconds. Certainly a few seconds doesn't matter." Being married forty years to Professor Alfred Dunningham, PhD, Sylvia should have realized a long time ago that all numbers—even a few seconds when steeping tea—did matter to Alfred.

In addition to being a Professor of Mathematics and Statistics at University of Northern California, Alfred Dunningham was frequently invited to speak at conferences worldwide on a favorite subject of his, "Detective Work Made Easier Through Mathematics." Another of his favorite subjects was the shiraz grape, which was why their house was in the middle of five acres of the crop. The deal he made with one vintner was that Alfred would give him all of the grapes so long as the vintner kept Alfred "well supplied" all year long and "surprised" him with a piece of modern art at Christmas if the bottling turned out to be a good year. The Dunninghams' art collection had steadily increased every year since that deal was struck.

"Dear," Alfred began patiently enough. "The length of the First Movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata is six minutes and twenty-nine seconds, the exact amount of time that the ball of the Orange and Spices Blend Tea should steep in almost boiling water. Too little time and the hibiscus flowers will not completely open and release their aromas. Too much time and the clove becomes overpowering." He

was explaining this in much the same way that a guide at the art museums explained a fine painting or sculpture. "That is why I installed the iPod system in the kitchen so all you have to do is to press Playlist 1 once you start steeping the tea. I've explained this to you before." He had, and yet he was still being very patient.

"I'm sorry, dear. The kettle is still warm. I'll make you a new cup," his endearing wife said as she picked up his mostly full cup and returned toward the house.

"Thank you," Alfred said as he went back to inspecting his rose bushes. A few minutes later he heard the beginning of Piano Sonata #14 by Ludwig von Beethoven. The unmistakable and unforgettable first movement, known by all piano students, and loved by all music lovers, began to flow from the kitchen out through the opened windows to the sanctuary of their rose garden. It was a bittersweet ending to the movement as he was drawn from his reverie, but he knew that it also meant that his tea was now steeped just perfectly—by the numbers.

Sylvia had barely brought him the fresh cup of tea, and Alfred was sitting down amongst the rose bushes to savor the delightful flavor and its aroma when the telephone began to ring in the house. "I'll get it, dear," Sylvia said as she scurried back into the house.

Alfred exhaled a sigh of delight as the perfectly steeped tea was an ideal match for the beautiful November morning. The crisp morning air was yielding to the warming sun, and it seemed like an excellent day to visit some neighboring orchards to buy apples for pies and cider. He was truly enjoying his semester away from teaching. It wasn't really a sabbat-

ical; it was more of a “thinking time” away from school. He was thinking about more analytical projects, but not on the weekends. The weekends were reserved for rest, just like in the “old days.” And resting was what he was enjoying now.

“Telephone call, Alfred,” Sylvia called from the screen door.

“Please take a message. I’m enjoying my tea right now, and it’s done so perfectly.” He was relaxed; why did someone have to bother him right now?

“He says it’s quite important,” his wife said.

“They all say that,” he retorted.

“Alfred. This man says he’s from the police force in Australia and it’s critical that he talk to you. Can’t you show him a little courtesy?” Sylva Dunningham rarely got exasperated, especially at her husband, but there were times when his sanctimonious way of doing things got a little overbearing. And this was one of those times.

“Can’t I have a morning tea in peace? Is that too much to ask?” Alfred queried out loud to no one in particular as he got up out of his chair and headed toward the house. “Did he say what he wanted?”

“No,” Sylvia replied. “He just asked to talk with you.”

“Okay. Thank you, dear.” Alfred continued into the house and into his study so he could use a speakerphone.

As he sat down in the well-worn brown leather chair, he pressed the Speaker button. “This is Alfred Dunningham.”

“Hello, Professor,” came the Aussie voice on the other end of the phone. Alfred quickly tried to recognize the voice, but it wasn’t one that he’d heard before. “Sir, my name is Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth, and I report to

Commissioner Colin Martin of the New South Wales Police Force here in Sydney, Australia. I'm sorry to bother you on a Saturday morning, but we're really in a jam here, and the Police Commissioner told me to give you a ring."

Part of that was a lie. The police were certainly in a jam over the recent murders, but Commissioner Martin hadn't told DCI Farnsworth to call Professor Dunningham. Why not? No one knew where the Commissioner was. Many, including Farnsworth, had a good idea who he was with, and possibly where he was, but no one would dare contact him late at night. Graeme had done some digging around after everyone else had left last evening, and found that Martin had met Dunningham at a conference in Singapore in March. Dunningham's approach to solving difficult cases using mathematics was unorthodox, but it brought results. And Farnsworth needed results! So he was willing to lie to get them.

The silence told Graeme to either continue or that there wasn't any recognition yet. He continued, "Martin said you two met in Singapore earlier this year, and he was highly impressed with your skills at solving seemingly impossible cases through the use of mathematics."

That opened up the channel of recognition. "Oh yes, I remember your Police Commissioner," the professor began. "He's quite the party man, isn't he? In fact one night the hotel security had to remove him from the swimming pool when he was making some highly suggestive actions with one of the female guests." Alfred Dunningham seemed willing to tell any number of stories, but that wasn't why Graeme

was calling. He was already well aware of the indiscretions of Colin Martin; they certainly weren't secrets.

Graeme chose not to continue that discussion even though it's what opened up the communication. He had a critical purpose for his call, and he didn't want its value diluted through other conversation. "Professor, please allow me to get right to the primary purpose of my call to you this morning. I'll apologize in advance for my abruptness, but time is of the absolute importance." Graeme described the deaths of Rory Allen, Ethan Taylor, and Randall Williams; where they were killed, and then the triangle and number on each victim. "So you see, Professor Dunningham, the New South Wales Police Force greatly needs your assistance in helping us to solve these heinous crimes. And in the kindest way that I can ask, we would like you to fly to Sydney as soon as possible."

Professor Dunningham sipped his tea as he listened to the details. When the Australian was finished, the professor remarked, "Yes, I do see that you have yourself quite a problem, Mr. Farnsworth. But I'm not sure that I would be of much help as I think the numbers on your victims are probably just some gang marking, especially since they're inside a triangle."

"We thought that too," Farnsworth began. "And our gang unit found no recent activity that would indicate that."

"I'm not interested anyway," Dunningham said. "I'm thoroughly enjoying my semester away from teaching so I can tend my roses. You can tell Colin that I'm flattered that he thought of me, but the answer's 'No,' and especially on

such short notice." Professor Dunningham took the final sip of his tea as he leaned back in his chair.

"Professor," Graeme began. "Colin has to deal with the Mayor and all the media on these cases, and that's his issue. But my officers and I have to deal with three sets of parents who are grieving because their sons, twenty-five and twenty-six year old boys, are dead. And we have nothing to tell them. Whoever did these was smart, cleaned up his tracks, but was trying to say something. We're fairly sure it was just one killer. Professor, I'll beg if that's what it takes. But I know that this case is about numbers, and I also know you're the best in the world. Name your price, and think about those three mums and dads." Farnsworth stopped and let the silence do the rest of the talking for him.

Dunningham's chair squeaked several times as he moved from one uncomfortable position to another; uncomfortable because he didn't like being put into this position. He was enjoying his peaceful time at home in his five-acre cocoon. And now this phone call shattered the peaceful setting. He could say 'No' one more time, hang up the phone, and return to his roses and his perfectly brewed teas. But would the peace return? Probably not. Instinctively he picked up the tea cup, but it was empty; he'd have to do something else. Or say something. He wasn't used to silence on the phone.

Farnsworth could hear all the little noises on the other end of the phone: the chair squeaks; the fiddling with the tea cup; the fingers tapping on the desks; the heavy sighs. The sighs. He could tell that Professor Dunningham was wrestling with a dilemma, a moral dilemma. Was he going

to put his personal pleasure in front of helping to possibly ease the heart-wrenching pain of three sets of parents? There were dilemmas in mathematics, but none of them had this sort of weight of consequence. What would he do?

Alfred Dunningham tried to clear his throat as quietly as possible, but he might as well been doing it into a stage microphone; it sounded that loud to him. The silence had finally been broken, and he had broken it, meaning he was the one to make the concession. "Detective Chief Inspector Farnsworth," the professor began in a measured voice. "You've hit the one soft spot that I have. Sylvia and I lost our son when he was twenty-three; he was serving in the U.S. Army at the time. So even though it's not the same circumstances, I know those parents are looking for answers that even a conviction might not bring. So, yes, I'll help you." Professor Dunningham slumped back into the chair that knew him so well as he finished the sentence.

"Thank you, Professor. Regardless of the outcome, I know that the parents will be most grateful to you for your assistance. Here are the flight details. It's short notice, but you'll be on United flight 863 from San Francisco to Sydney tonight in Business Class. It departs SFO at 10:37 PM and arrives in Sydney 8:10 AM on Sunday morning the 22nd. If you'll give me your email address, I'll include it in the reservations I'm making right now. You normally need a visa to travel to Australia, but if you email me a PDF copy of your passport page, we'll take care of those visa details for you. Also, I'll personally be there to meet you at the airport on Sunday. Thank you very much again, sir. Do you have any questions for me?"

“Who’s on your team, and what are you going to send to me so I can work on the plane?” Dunningham replied, apparently re-energized.

“Commissioner Martin fancies himself on the team,” Farnsworth started, “but I think you and I both know his investigative skills are long past. The other key person is my right-hand man, Detective Inspector Langdon McBride. I’ve told you all the basic information; we’re still awaiting some of the lab results, including tox screens, so we don’t have complete details on all three of the victims at this time yet. The flight’s a long one, so I think the best thing is for you to get as much rest as you can on the plane, and be ready to hit the ground running once you get here. Hopefully, we’ll have some more information from our Chief Medical Examiner by the time you get here.”

“Okay then,” Dunningham said. “I’d better tell my wife and start packing,” continued the professor as he prepared to hang up the phone. “I’ll see you on Sunday morning.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Farnsworth replied. “Thank you very much,” he added with increased emphasis.

1000 hours

Saturday, 21 November

Office of New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin
Martin—Sydney

“Graeme,” the Commissioner began. “What did your teams come up with last night? Tell me you’ve got something because the Mayor’s calls to me are not to ask how the kids are doing.”

Graeme Farnsworth paused before he spoke. He would deliver certain messages at certain times, and he would speak very deliberately. “Commissioner, you have said many times that you are proud to have the finest men and women in all of Australia working for you here in New South Wales. I take that message to heart, and use it when I talk to them as they are facing difficult times. These very same officers you praise in the media have dug into every detail of these murders, and I’m very confident that they have not overlooked any item in their investigations. At this very moment, however, we’re still waiting for more results from the Medical Examiner’s office from our latest victim. Perhaps Dr. Grantham can give us an update.”

As he was sitting down next to Langdon McBride, Graeme whispered to him, "What happened to you last night?"

"Something I ate didn't agree with my stomach. I didn't want to empty my belly all over the floor there," McBride said. "It wouldn't be good for morale, you know."

"Right," Farnsworth agreed. "You still live up north in Neutral Bay?"

"Sure do, why?" Langdon asked.

"Nothing particular," Graeme replied. "I'd heard there'd been a water main breakage up there the other day, and I wondered if it affected you."

Langdon paused for a moment, then he replied, "Not in my part."

"That's good," Graeme replied.

As Chief Medical Officer Alkira Grantham made her way to the front, she handed out stapled sets of pages of information about each victim: vital statistics; cause of death; markings; quick tox screen. It would take another week for the complete toxicology report, something that was highlighted in yellow on the fourth page. The fourth page included a table with one column for each of the three victims. This table made a very compelling case for a single killer.

"If you look at the last page," Dr. Grantham began, "you'll see that I've taken the relevant information for each of the victims and compiled it into a table. Notice the highlighted cells: the tattoo numerals inside each of the similar tattoos; the clean murder scenes; no signs of apparent struggle; the blood-alcohol counts." She paused to let the small audience of Police Commissioner Colin Martin, Detective

Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth, and Detective Inspector Langdon McBride look at those items in the table and let the impact sink in.

"Just from that information, what conclusion would you draw?" she asked.

"One killer," Farnsworth offered out.

"A hefty one to do all that work, too," McBride added.

"That's all fine," Martin interjected. "But even if that tells us what he did, it doesn't say why he did it, and it certainly doesn't get us any closer to finding the bloke now does it? How are you going to help us there, Grantham?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you there, Commissioner," Dr. Grantham replied in a calm voice. She wasn't about to get drawn into his game. "When I get the full tox report back, I'll be able to tell if the killer left any of his DNA behind. But otherwise right now, I can't add much more." She returned to her chair and sat down.

"So, that's it? We have to wait for a toxicology report?" Commissioner Martin exclaimed as he slammed down the papers on the floor. "What are you going to do then? And what are you going to do until then? Come on, Graeme, I need you out there investigating and asking questions." Commissioner Martin was getting heated, but not as heated as he was about to get.

"Commissioner Martin," Farnsworth began. Graeme used Martin's official title on purpose because he wanted to let him know that he was addressing him officially and not as his immediate superior officer. "Last night the investigative teams submitted their reports that indicated they had no suspects and there was no immediate prospect of a suspect

for these murders.” He paused to let that sink in, not to let the Commissioner ask any questions.

Farnsworth continued. “Based on the information that these teams brought in, the conclusion was similar to what our Chief Medical Examiner has just said: There was a single killer for the three murders. And we’ve concluded that the numbers in the triangles are also significant in the case, and so I’ve contacted your friend, mathematics Professor Alfred Dunningham.”

“You’ve done what?” Martin asked in surprise.

“I knew that Professor Dunningham was an expert in helping solve crimes through mathematics, so I called him, and asked him to help us,” Farnsworth replied.

“The guy’s a nut case,” Martin replied.

“Nut case or not,” Graeme started, “he will be here on the morning United flight from San Francisco. So let’s figure out our game plan for using him.”

The raging blood coursing through the veins in Police Commissioner Colin Martin’s neck caused them to bulge even though the shirt was opened at the top button. His face began to turn a shade only slightly lighter than beet red when he heard that Farnsworth had extended an invitation, essentially a contract, to Professor Alfred Dunningham, PhD, without his approval. “Who gave you permission to do that? Why didn’t you talk to me first?” Martin screamed.

“I tried to call you last night,” Farnsworth began. “In fact, I tried several times, including your home number, and I couldn’t reach you. You told me to solve the crimes and find the killer, and that’s what I’m doing. Now if you want

the media to get off your back, then get off mine right now. We're at a standstill, and we all think the tattoo numbers mean something. Dunningham is the best in the world at interpreting numbers to solve crimes. You've even said that yourself." Graeme Farnsworth was ready to go toe-to-toe with the Police Commissioner if that's what it took to get the job done.

"But does he have to fly all the way to Sydney to interpret 16, 9, and 4? Can't he just do that over the phone or via Skype?" Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham was skeptical about the need to have the noted professor travel all the way from northern California to Australia just to look at three similar tattoos with numbers in them. "It just seems like a waste of time and money to me," she continued.

"You might be right, Alkira," Graeme said. "But, since we don't have anything else right now, we have to do something. And Professor Dunningham brings a type of intuition and logic built upon a mathematics foundation that has been the tipping point for solving many difficult cases around the world. I'm confident in what he can do for us, and I'll take the blame if it doesn't work."

"Fill us in on the details then," the Police Commissioner said in a conciliatory tone.

0900 hours

Sunday, 22 November

Kingsford-Smith Airport/International Terminal—Sydney

“At least the traffic’s light this morning,” Detective Inspector Langdon McBride said in an attempt to break the chilled silence as he rode with his boss, Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth. Langdon couldn’t tell if Graeme was just being quiet as he was mentally processing the investigations; or was Langdon getting the “cold shoulder treatment” from Graeme? Langdon tried another approach. “I thought the Commissioner was going to have a heart attack yesterday when you told him that you were bringing Dunningham over here. His neck and face really turned a few shades of red, didn’t they?”

“That they did,” Graeme replied. “Martin did that just for show; he’s used to having more people in the room, and it’s his way of showing displeasure of not being a part of every decision that’s made around the station. Of course, he’ll take the credit when it all works out and Dunningham finds our man,” Farnsworth said as they continued their drive south

along Princes Highway toward Kingsford-Smith Airport to pick up Professor Alfred Dunningham.

"Lisa McPherson thinks it's a woman who's done it," Langdon said.

"A woman?" Graeme asked incredulously. "How could a woman have done those crimes and not left any traces of footprints, especially with all the heavy work involved? I know you've supported her feminine issues, and I personally think it's good for the department to have some different thoughts; we've been too male-centric way too long. But don't let your emotions get in the way here, Langdon. These cases are too important and they have a lot of exposure not just for you, but also for those parents." Graeme paused to let that sink in; he knew that Langdon's primary passion in solving these recent crimes was to give comfort to parents. But, based on recent events, Graeme also wanted to make sure that Langdon was staying focused. Graeme would make a personal and professional commitment to that end.

"She didn't want this out, and so you're the first one I've told," Langdon said. "She can't nail down all the details on her thinking right now, but based on the video from the Bridge stabbing, she thinks we are dealing with a female killer. There's a passion in each of the murders that's not blatantly displayed, but it's there, and so Lisa's intuition tells her that some sheila's done each of them." Langdon paused before continuing, "And I'm inclined to agree with her." Langdon stopped—just as Graeme stopped the car at the airport ticket booth.

Graeme eased the car forward a couple metres as he picked the ticket that popped from the box, not that he'd

need it. "We've got a lot to discuss, mate, once this is over," he said to Langdon. "But for now, our focus is on the three murders and the killer or killers, just in case there are more than one. Can you focus in on that?"

"Of course," Langdon replied somewhat indignantly, yet remaining professional. A short answer was definitely the best response in this case as he looked out to the left and saw two more planes queuing up to land.

Graeme turned to the right and wound his way around to the Commissioner's reserved parking spot near the front of the Arrivals terminal. "We should be able to make it in," Graeme said as he parked the car, "before the old Professor gets in a panic when Passport Control refuses to let him in because he doesn't have a visa."

"Although that would be a good sight to see," Langdon chuckled.

"I'm sure it would," Graeme agreed. "But those boys don't have much of a sense of humor, and I really don't want to have to explain one more thing to Martin, especially when it's one we can avoid."

Langdon felt a little foolish as he pulled the sign with the professor's name on it out of the back seat. Such were the tasks of being the junior officer. As the two men began to step away from the car, an airport security van pulled up to them. Graeme pulled his badge and picture identification from his jacket and showed it to the driver.

"Good morning, Chief Inspector," came the embarrassed reply along with a salute from the security officer who didn't recognize Graeme. It didn't faze him at all as the poor

chap was just doing his job in keeping moochers out of the Commissioner's reserved spot.

"G'day, mate," Graeme replied. "You boys are doing a fine job out here. Thanks," Graeme said as he took the time to shake each of the blokes' hand. Langdon followed suit.

"No worries, boss. Just doin' our part, you know," the other guard replied.

"It all helps to keep us safe," Langdon responded as he and Graeme continued their walk toward the terminal. The morning air was still cool, and the day was not expected to get too warm, although the impending heat from Commissioner Martin could warm up even the chilliest of June mornings on the Outback.

As they entered the terminal, they headed to the area where dozens of other people were holding signs for arriving passengers, but this wasn't where they'd greet Professor Dunningham. As they ignored the "Do Not Enter" signs and kept walking toward the large double doors, several people hollered at them. They ignored them, too. Four security guards quickly began to approach them, and Farnsworth and McBride quickly displayed their badges and picture IDs.

"Sorry, sirs," one of the guards said. "With the sign, we thought you were just trying to get a first glimpse of your mates coming through the doors. Is there anything we can help you with?"

"Thanks, mate," Graeme said. "We just need to get to Passport Control as we have an urgent visitor coming in who didn't have time get his visa."

"Right; let's go," the senior guard replied as he motioned for the others to go on about their duties in the Arrivals Hall.

He had important business to attend to; he had to accompany the number two man on the New South Wales Police Force into the Passport Control area, an area that even he typically didn't see. But he was going to let on, at least to the police officers, that he was in there all the time.

They knew otherwise, of course, but they weren't going to let him know it. Graeme also knew not to allow the man to embarrass himself, so he would step in at the right time. Such as when the first armed officers approached them. After he explained the situation to the officers, Graeme thanked the first guard and assured him that, "We can handle it from here."

The relieved guard turned and proudly left the area. He would have stories to tell, and some of them would even contain a bit of the truth.

Getting the visa exemption for Professor Dunningham was not as easy as Graeme said it would be. He had to make a call to a personal friend on his day off as no one at the airport was willing to make the exemption. Having the top-level manager call in to override a decision didn't endear Farnsworth or McBride to any of the Passport Control staff, but that was the least of their concerns for the day, or for the week. Once the exemption was granted and electronically applied to the professor's passport, the two police officers were politely asked to leave the area as this was not "their area."

They'd obviously stepped on some toes in there, but the Customs Officers allowed them to stay inside the double doors so McBride wouldn't have to hold up his sign like all the rest. Langdon and Graeme stood around nonchalantly as

the passengers from other arriving flights worked their way through Customs and the double glass doors into the awaiting groups of friends and family.

Once they heard the announcement of the arrival of United Airlines flight UA 863 from San Francisco, Langdon reluctantly held up the sign that simply said, "Professor Dunningham." It wasn't long until a man taking measured steps approached them. He "looked" like a professor: slightly unkempt graying hair; wire-rimmed glasses; brown tweed jacket; a satchel that looked as if he'd been carrying it to class for twenty years.

"I'm Professor Dunningham," the professor said as he extended his right hand.

Graeme shook his hand first. "Good morning, Professor. I'm Graeme Farnsworth, the one who strong-armed you the other day. Thank you again for coming on such short notice. This is my right-hand man, Detective Inspector Langdon McBride."

"Good morning, Mr. McBride."

"Good morning, Professor," Langdon said. "You don't want this sign as a souvenir, do you?"

"Not unless I could use it as a 'Get Out of Jail Free' card," Dunningham mused in reply.

"Thank you," Langdon in essence answered as he tore the sign into four pieces and put it in the nearest receptacle.

"I'll take that as a 'No,'" the professor said. "But you didn't have to be so blunt about it."

"I think Langdon was more interested in dumping the sign," Graeme said, not sure if Dunningham was serious or was kidding. "Besides, we're going to keep you so busy that

you won't have any time to get into any troubles, now will you?"

"Well, when are you going to start briefing me?"

"Not in open public places," Graeme said. He continued as if the question hadn't even been asked. "I know they fed you lots on the plane, but would you like to get a bite before we go to the hotel?"

"No, thanks," the professor replied. "I'm still quite stuffed actually. You know my wife says I eat too much when I travel," he said as they passed the Customs desk.

"I'll pull the bag for you," Langdon said as he reached for the rollerbag handle.

"I might be old, but I can mind my own things," Dunningham said. Again, it was hard to tell if he was being serious or not.

"No intentions meant, sir," Langdon began. "The side-walks are a little tricky, plus once we are in the parking lot, cars will be coming at you from the right side." He took the handle and the three men walked to Graeme's car.

"How are the roses?" Graeme asked as a way to start a conversation not related to the investigations.

"They were doing pretty well when you called on Friday morning. But our weather's getting a bit bleaker now, so it's hard to tell how they'll be when I return. Did you know that one of the rarest, and quite expensive, specimens of rose bushes was nicknamed 'Prime' because the number of petals in each fully developed rose was a prime number?" Professor Alfred Dunningham was now in his element.

"You said 'was' as if it's no longer around," Graeme said as they approached his car.

“You’re correct Graeme,” Dunningham replied. “Some fool tried to create a hybrid version where each rose on a plant contained the same number of petals. He ended up wiping out the entire family, as small as it was to begin with.”

As the three men left the airport, the roses discussion gave way to a cursory review of the murders at the Prince Albert Winery, the Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The thirty-minute drive into town to take Professor Dunningham to the Lord Nelson Hotel wasn’t sufficient time for much more than a brief summary of the crimes. As they all went up to his room, they were once again silent in the halls.

Room 1904 was a spacious room, a one-bedroom suite actually, that the New South Wales Police had “visited” earlier in the day. Their visit included an electronic sweep for any hidden microphone, cameras, or other recording devices. None were found, and none were planted—that was a strict order from Graeme Farnsworth.

In addition to having an unobstructed view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the occupants of the suite also had the advantage of visual privacy. There were no buildings within three hundred metres of the hotel with a window at or above the height of the suite. Also, the suite’s windows had an invisible coating that made it impossible to see inside. This was the perfect downtown Sydney hotel room for privacy, as Police Commissioner Colin Martin knew quite well.

Farnsworth and McBride went into further detail on each of the three murders, spending over two hours with Professor Dunningham in his hotel suite. The professor

asked a few questions, but his primary focus was on the three tattoos. "The numbers are definitely key," he said.

"That's what we thought, too," McBride replied. "But we couldn't find any tattoo shop that recognized the design."

"Maybe they weren't done at a shop; maybe it's a home job," Dunningham responded.

After Farnsworth and McBride left, Professor Dunningham worked into the evening, poring over the notes of each of the murders. There had to be more than just the numbers. What wasn't he seeing? He fell asleep on the front room sofa, something he often did at home.

0900 hours

Monday, 23 November

Office of New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin
Martin—Sydney

Alfred Dunningham wasn't surprised when he awakened to find himself on the sofa with a stapled set of papers on his chest. At first he thought he'd been reading a paper from the *Journal of International Mathematics*, because he typically found those articles to be somewhat tedious. Once he lifted the papers and saw what they were, his focus sharpened immediately. He sat up, looked at his watch, and saw that it was 4:40 in the morning. Even though it wasn't the bed, he still slept well because of the long flight from San Francisco. He straightened up the papers, put them back into their folders and boxes, placed a call for breakfast at 6:00, and then took a long invigorating shower. Professor Dunningham was now ready to start the day.

After breakfast, and after it had been a couple hours since he'd looked at any of the papers, Professor Alfred Dunningham started to write down some notes. He focused on the numbers—16, 09, and 04—but he knew there was more

to the murders than just those three numbers. What about the tattoos? Their shape? The color? The locations of the murders? The cleanliness of the areas post-murder? As with most investigations, there seemed to be more questions than answers. He was deeply engrossed in thought when a sharp knock on the door startled him. He looked at his watch—8:20. He went to the door, looked through the security peephole, and saw Langdon McBride fidgeting with his tie.

“Good morning, gents,” Dunningham said as he opened the door to see both Langdon McBride and Graeme Farnsworth in suit and tie. “Do I have to wear one of those awful things around my neck?” As he stepped aside, holding open the door, the two officers entered the room.

“G’day, Professor,” Farnsworth offered as he shook hands with the professor. McBride was silent as he then shook hands with Dunningham. “You won’t need the tie,” Farnsworth continued, but the jacket’s a good thing as we have a meeting with the Commissioner at nine o’clock.”

“How’d you sleep last night?” McBride asked as Dunningham was walking into the bedroom to retrieve his jacket.

“Quite well, and right here on the sofa,” Dunningham replied as he re-entered the front room. “I fell asleep as I often do at home while reading through a stack of papers. I must say these are interesting cases, and I wish I could tell Colin that I could name the killer right now, but I can’t. It’s just not that simple, as you, of course, know.”

“Well, we appreciate your confidence, Professor, but I’m afraid your friend Mr. Martin isn’t quite as open to seeing

that you just can't name a killer so you can put someone behind bars." Detective Chief Inspective Farnsworth wanted to ensure that Professor Dunningham knew what it would be like once they got to the Commissioner's office. The two men might be friends, or at least good acquaintances, but there was a lot of pressure from the Mayor and the media to find the killer or killers. And the pressure landed squarely on Police Commissioner Colin Martin, publicly at least. Once the doors were closed, however, it moved quickly down on DCI Farnsworth, who did his best to keep it from going any further down the chain of command. But they did need progress on the case. And they'd soon be reminded how quickly they needed it.

Langdon McBride picked up the two "Evidence" boxes and carried them down to the car, following his boss and Professor Dunningham down the hallway to the elevator. As McBride set the boxes down inside the elevator, Farnsworth pressed the G2 button for the parking garage. One couple joined them on the eighth floor, but they exited on the third floor. The next stop was G2. During the short ride to Police Headquarters, Professor Dunningham asked for a quick run-down of McBride's lead investigators.

"If there were one you had to say that you trusted the least, which one would that be?" Dunningham asked.

McBride's answer clearly surprised Farnsworth.

"But yet you implicitly trust each one of them one hundred percent?" Dunningham asked.

"I have to," McBride replied. "I answered your question the way you asked it. But if I don't trust my people absolutely, then I'd be doubting every decision they make and every

answer they give me." McBride paused momentarily just as they were entering the parking garage. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm not sure," Dunningham replied. "There was just something in one of the reports that made me think there might be something amiss between you and one of the detectives. But if you say there's not, then I'll drop it."

McBride didn't say anything, which Dunningham took as an indication to "drop the subject." Although it was a warm November morning, it had gotten slightly icy as the three men got out of Farnsworth's car and went up to Commissioner Martin's office. Once again, McBride carried the two boxes.

"He's expecting you," the Police Commissioner's secretary said as she saw DCI Farnsworth approach.

"Thank you," Graeme said as he knocked on the Commissioner's door, but didn't wait for a response before opening. He held the door open for Professor Dunningham and Langdon McBride who brought the two boxes with him.

"Well, Professor Dunningham," boomed the Police Commissioner. "Welcome to Sydney. I see these two are making sure you don't have an idle minute on your hands." Colin Martin walked from behind his desk to greet the American; that was a gesture rarely seen.

"Hello, Commissioner," Dunningham replied. "When we met in Singapore, you said I was welcome to come here anytime, but I didn't think you'd string together these murders to get me here."

No one laughed.

"Graeme," the Commissioner began. "Has he been given all the information about the murders? Everything?"

"Yes, sir," Farnsworth replied. "McBride and I spent several hours with him yesterday after we picked him up at the airport, and then we left copies of the primary evidence files with him."

"Well then, Professor, what math magic have you been able to come up with for us?" Police Commissioner Martin chuckled as he asked that; apparently he was the only one who thought it was funny.

"I don't do magic tricks, Commissioner," Professor Dunningham retorted. "My involvement with detective work is built on developing leads based on the mathematical information that is present. Based on what I've seen, I don't have any conclusions right now other than what your detective teams have already determined. You have an extremely smart killer out there, and I think he'll tip his hand soon so he can get some media coverage. I've only been here for twenty-four hours, and I slept some of those hours. So that's all I have for now."

"I need more than that," Martin exclaimed as he slammed his fist on his desk. He pushed back the chair, stood up, and walked over to the thick window curtains on the eastern side of the room. As he pulled down on the handle, the drapes began to open and the bright morning sun cascaded into the office. He paced back and forth in front of the window, casting a moving shadow across the room's occupants.

"I can't make up what's not there," Dunningham said, "just like your detectives can't make up evidence that doesn't exist. Something will come up; it just takes time."

"Tell those families that it takes time, or perhaps the Mayor," Martin replied, "but that's not a good enough..." The Commissioner's sentence was cut short by the buzzing of his speakerphone.

"Yes?" he said to his secretary.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Commissioner," she replied, "but there's an urgent letter addressed to you that was just brought up from the mailroom that I think you should see."

"Bring it in," Martin replied as he pushed the Speaker button to turn it off.

His secretary knocked on the door, opened it half-way, and then stepped into the room. Professor Dunningham was the only one who made any motion to get out of his chair as she entered the room. She handed the envelope to the Commissioner, turned around, and left the room, pulling the door closed as she left.

The envelope was addressed to the Police Commissioner as any normal letter would be. But this one also had imprinted on the left side of the envelope where a return address would typically be: "URGENT: CONTAINS INFORMATION ABOUT THE 3 MURDERS." Martin used his letter opener to slice open the envelope and removed the single sheet that was inside. It was also printed from a computer, and it read, "THEY GOT WHAT THEY DESERVE."

"They got what they deserve," Martin repeated. "You're right, Professor. Our killer has just upped the ante and is announcing himself as someone who's helping to repay a debt or a service."

"I hate to think of how many fingerprints other than the killer's are on that envelope," DCI Farnsworth said. "But

right now, Commissioner, you're the only other person who's touched the letter. So don't hand it to us. Put it back in the envelope, please." Before Farnsworth could ask him to get a large evidence envelope, Langdon McBride had one out and handed it to his boss. "Thanks, Langdon," Graeme said.

Langdon nodded his head; he knew his place. And right now his place was to keep a low profile.

Graeme placed the killer's envelope with the letter inside the evidence envelope, closed and sealed the evidence envelope, and then signed his name across the seal. He then wrote the contents of the envelope on the outside along with the time and date. He handed the envelope to McBride who then added his name and signature on the envelope.

"Want me to take this to the Crime Lab for analysis?" Langdon asked.

"Sure," Farnsworth replied. "I'll take care of the boxes for the professor."

Detective Inspector Langdon McBride stood up, excused himself, and left the Commissioner's office to take the evidence envelope to the Crime Lab. Did they finally have something—some DNA, some other evidence, anything—that could help them locate their killer?

1000 hours

Monday, 23 November

New South Wales Police Crime Lab—Sydney

“G’day, Detective Inspector McBride,” was the cheery greeting that Langdon McBride received as he entered the Crime Lab’s main reception hall. He’d been walking so briskly and had been concentrating so intently on the investigations that he hadn’t even noticed the young female police sergeant at the desk. He did, however, immediately recognize her voice and he looked up as he attempted to regain his focus. Sarah Hewitt was a young police officer with tremendous detective potential working under his command, but an out-of-wedlock pregnancy forced her to make two very difficult decisions. One was regarding her career, and the other involved personal and moral issues. She addressed both decisions with mature thought—she decided to have her baby, a beautiful little girl with her mother’s nose and sparkling eyes, and she transferred to a less stressful routine job that allowed her to manage both of her new jobs.

While he knew the voice, Langdon didn’t immediately recognize her face. As he stepped closer to the desk, he tried

to read her name badge, but its printing was too small. She stood up to greet him as she saw the struggle on his face. "It's Sarah Hewitt, McBride. I had to take a transfer so I could have my baby and work at a job where I knew I'd be home to see her every night and every weekend."

"You look great, Sarah," Langdon said as he closed the space between them and the two shook hands. "Now you can't tell me you don't have any pictures of the little beauty somewhere close by." For the moment, McBride forgot the reason—the compelling reason—why he'd come down to the Crime Lab.

Sarah stepped back to her desk and picked up a three-frame picture holder.

"Well, if she's not the exact image of her mother," Langdon said. "What an absolute cutie." He meant that, too. Both Sarah and her baby daughter were quite attractive.

"The Commissioner's office said you were coming down here," Sarah said as she sat in her chair and placed the picture frame back on the desk. "But she didn't say you were coming down to look at the pictures of my baby. She said it was a pretty hot case and something we have to process immediately."

"Right," McBride replied. "As soon as you sign it in, I'd like to follow it inside and see what the analyst comes up with." He paused; then he added. "Is that okay?"

"Of course it is for you, Detective Inspector." Sergeant Hewitt proceeded to take the Custody Log out of the second desk drawer and complete the entry information. McBride knew the procedure, so he signed that he was releasing custody of the envelope (technically of the larger envelope that

held the smaller envelope and single sheet of paper). Hewitt then signed to accept custody as McBride handed the large envelope to her. She placed the log back in the desk drawer, locked the desk, and stood up as she held the envelope that was now in her custody.

"This way," she said as she unlocked and opened a door that was marked CRIME LAB—AUTHORISED PERSONS ONLY.

"Thank you," McBride said as he stepped into the inner sanctum of one of the most secretive operations of the New South Wales Police Force. The work that went on in this Crime Lab was not like that shown on the television shows where computers did all the analysis and sorting of the data. The real work in this lab was done by the humans. Sure, they used computers to crunch numbers, look up and process information; but no computer had ever been able to replace the human brain for its pure intellect and reasoning ability.

As the door closed and automatically locked behind them, Sergeant Hewitt led the way to one of the work tables. As they approached the table, a handsome lad with a keen eye toward Sarah closed his lab book and stood up. "Daniel Harris," Sarah began. "I don't know if you've met Detective Inspector McBride, but he's got something that the Commissioner's office wants you to process right away."

McBride noticed the brief locking of eyes between Sarah and Daniel.

Sarah continued with her introduction. "Detective Inspector, this is Daniel Harris, one of the top analysts here in the lab."

McBride extended his hand. "Nice to meet you, Harris."

"Likewise, McBride," the analyst replied in a mildly cold tone.

Sensing a little resistance from the lab analyst, yet wanting to help McBride, Sarah tweaked the truth a bit as she handed the custody envelope to Harris. "Here's what the Commissioner's office wants processed, and because of its top priority, they would like the Detective Inspector to stay to offer any assistance he can. Is that okay, Harris?" She knew that Harris couldn't say 'No' with McBride standing there, but it also made it look as if she were following orders from upstairs.

"Sure, that's fine," Harris said as he took the envelope from her, put it on the table, and signed his name on it as having received it.

Sarah turned without saying anything more and headed out of the lab.

"So what do we have inside here?" Harris asked once the door had clicked shut behind Sarah. He put on gloves and began to open the Evidence envelope.

"It's a letter that just arrived at the Commissioner's Office," McBride began. "We don't know how many people handled the envelope, but the Commissioner is the only one to have touched the single sheet that's inside it. Three of us saw him open the envelope, so his fingerprints are the only ones on there that aren't from the sender."

"That's not necessarily true," the analyst responded. "This stationery could be from anywhere, and some clerk's prints could be all over it. So while it sounds as if a second set of prints, other than those of the Commissioner, will point

to the killer, we can't make that statement just yet." Daniel Harris was enjoying being the one in the know.

"Good point, Harris," McBride conceded. "So even if you were able to pull a print and find a match to it, all we can say is that we have a possible suspect. And that's if there's a match in the system. But even so, it's still not proof that the match is the one who wrote and sent the letter, right?"

"That's right, McBride," Harris responded, not acting like a detective. "It would, however, give you probable cause to focus in on the chap. And from what I hear, that's more than you've got right now."

Langdon McBride ignored that last zinger. "Everyone thinks they're a detective and they can do a better job," he thought to himself.

As Harris looked at the envelope and its single-sheet contents for any obvious information, McBride stared into his face trying to figure out if there was anything going on between him and Sarah. "I don't see anything particular that stands out right now," Harris began, "and it's going to take me at least two hours to do full scans and analysis of the paper and the envelope. I also need to see if I can pull any DNA if the sender licked the envelope to seal it. I'd also like to run it through a series of gas chromatography and mass spectrometry tests to determine the levels of gaseous concentrations that the envelope and the letter have been exposed to." Harris paused to let the highly scientific approach sink in with McBride. "You can stick around if you want, but it's boring work to just sit and watch. Or I can give you a call once all the results are back."

“What will those last tests you mentioned tell you?” McBride asked.

“Each area of the city has its own gaseous signature. Based on the concentration and the layering of the different gases on these items, we should be able to trace their routes. It’s not completely fool proof, but it should give you a little more information other than just trying to find a fingerprint that’s not the Commissioner’s. If you’ve got a card, I’ll give you a call.”

As McBride was retrieving one of his cards, Harris stepped away as if to attend to something else. McBride set his card on the lab table and turned for the door. “Thanks for your help, Harris,” he said as he checked the time on his watch.

“No problem, mate. I’ll give you a call as soon as I’ve got something for you,” Harris replied. He stood there as he waited for Langdon McBride to leave his lab, and he didn’t move until he heard the distinctive clicking of the door shutting. Once he knew he was alone in the lab, Daniel Harris picked up McBride’s card with tweezers and placed it safely inside a clear sterile envelope. “Let’s see what’s on this card and where it’s been,” he said softly.

1730 hours

Monday, 16 November

New South Wales Police Headquarters Conference

Room—Sydney

Slowly, two by two, they walked into the windowless conference room at police headquarters. They glanced around the room to see who else was there, what was posted that they could see, all the time wondering when they would learn more about their son's death. Robert and Ryna Allen were the first to enter the cavernous area as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride showed them the way after talking with them briefly in a small quiet meeting room. Mrs. Allen's sniffles echoed throughout the still room as if she had a wireless microphone pinned to her. Mr. Allen held her arm firmly as McBride led them to their seats; he sat next to Mr. Allen.

Detective Glen Roberts accompanied Trevor and Nicole Taylor after Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth had met with them and introduced Roberts to them. "Glen Roberts is our lead detective and is the best in all of New South Wales," Farnsworth had told the grieving parents in his office. After leading the Taylors to their seats, the detec-

tive sat in the chair next to Mr. Taylor. Last of the parents to come into the conference room were Terrell and Kim Williams, brought into the room by Detective Lisa McPherson; she stayed next to Mrs. Williams, even taking a seat next to her.

The six parents sat in silence, except for the occasional heavy breaths and sniffing. They looked around at each other, feeling a common bond. It wasn't a bond of friendship, but of kinship. They had all experienced the same thing—the loss of a son in a yet unexplained murder. If they'd ever met before, or even seen each other in the neighborhood or at a school event, there was no hint; the stares and the glances were blank looks. They were looks that were seeking answers, answers they'd not yet received.

The slamming of the door startled the occupants of the room, even the detectives. It sounded like a gun being shot, yet it was merely the hard closing of the heavy door and its reverberation throughout the nearly empty room. "Sorry," Graeme Farnsworth said as he noticed the reaction. The nine who were seated looked around to see what was happening; why the door was being closed. They saw four people entering the room, and what a different looking group it was.

Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth led the way as the other three followed him to the seats at the front of the room. Glen Roberts looked surprised when he saw Detective Roland Thatcher in that group of four. Lisa McPherson showed no reaction; she knew why he was there. As the other three sat down, Graeme stayed standing, trying his best not to give any indication of the pain in his right leg. "Thank you for coming down to headquarters," he be-

gan, “and as you’ve already been told, we’ve not yet found your sons’ killer.”

Several gasps were heard, even though each set of parents had already been told this in their private gathering just minutes earlier. However, the stark reality of hearing it from the number two officer in the New South Wales Police Force was still a shock to bear.

Farnsworth continued as he didn’t want any questions, just yet. “The reason we asked you here was so we could tell you what we do know and to also tell you what we are doing to find the killer. I know you have lots of questions, and they’ll probably be answered along the way. So I’d ask you to hold off on asking them, and maybe have the officer who’s with you write it down for later, just in case.” He paused to let that sink in. He knew that a barrage of questions from these parents, who did deserve to know the answers, would start building into an escalated screaming session. He’d seen it before, and it wasn’t productive. “Thank you for your patience, and I guarantee that we won’t leave until we’ve had a chance to answer every one of your questions. Is that fair?”

Heads nodded, and a few parents mumbled something.

“Over here,” Farnsworth said as he pointed to his left, “is the Chief Medical Examiner for New South Wales, Dr. Alkira Grantham.” As she nodded her head and mouthed a “Hello,” Farnsworth explained her role and what she’d be presenting. He then continued to introduce Professor Dunningham, along with an explanation of some of the worldwide cases he’d solved through mathematics. Roland Thatcher was introduced as the third detective on Langdon McBride’s team. The roles of the officers seated with the parents were

described as each set of parents were named. "Some of the information you're going to see and hear will be new to you," Farnsworth continued. "But don't worry, there are no photos. Also, some of this information has never been told to the media or been made public, so we're trusting you to keep it all private since only the killer would really know all of it. Is that agreeable?" Again, all the heads nodded. "Thanks," he said after a short pause.

As Graeme Farnsworth sat down, Alkira Grantham took the cue to stand. Roland Thatcher also stood as he went to dim the lights. "As DCI Farnsworth said, some of this will be new to you, and it might bother you. The reason you're hearing it is so you know what we know, and it might trigger something that you can tell us that will help us solve the murders." Alkira had begun in her normal straight-forward manner. She turned on the projector and brought the computer to life.

"This first slide is a table of the basic details surrounding each murder. Now you heard Mr. Farnsworth refer to a killer, meaning that our focus is on one person. Once you see this information, I think you'll understand why we think it's one person who's done all three of them. As you look at this table, the one thing that should stand out to you is the tattoo that was on each of the boys. While their ages, 25 and 26, are close, and how and where the murders took place are each different, it is the tattoo that has focused our search to one single killer." The Chief Medical Examiner let that sink in before continuing.

Each set of parents was concentrating on their son's name as they stared at the projector screen.

<i>Name</i>	Rory Allen	Ethan Taylor	Randall Williams
<i>Age</i>	25	25	26
<i>Location</i>	Prince Albert Winery	Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve	Sydney Harbour Bridge
<i>Cause</i>	Hanging	Strangulation	Stabbing
<i>Tattoo</i>	Black 16 inside yellow triangle	Black 09 inside yellow triangle	Black 04 inside yellow triangle

“The Police at first thought the tattoo might be a gang symbol, but a thorough investigation has not turned up any link of that tattoo with gang activity or any tattoo shops in all of New South Wales. And the conversations with you parents said that your boys had not recently joined a fraternity or anything that would have that type of an initiation. The triangle and the ink, they’re all from one killer. And the numbers 16, 09, 04—they had to be saying something, and that’s why the Police brought in the esteemed Professor Dunningham.” Dr. Grantham switched off the computer and the projector, and sat down.

“I know I speak with a bit of a funny accent,” Professor Dunningham started as he pushed back his chair and stood up. Sensing that his normal start with humor didn’t get a reaction, he continued up to the table and turned the computer and the projector back on. “There’s something peculiar about one detail in that table that I want you to see again,” he said as he waited for the M.E.’s slide to come back to life on the screen. As it went from just a blur of light to the information that the parents had been focusing on, Dunningham

clicked his laser pointer and started circling the tattoo numbers.

"See these numbers?" He paused. Most mathematicians and other people who play with numbers instinctively think of 16, 9, and 4 as a descending sequence of squares. In this case it would start with four-squared, or four times four," he added for clarification. "Then it continues with three times three, and then two times two. That's 16, 9, 4. But notice that the last two numbers have a zero as the first digit, making all of them two-digit numbers. That's pretty significant, because it means that the killer is trying to tell us something else."

"Or he's just trying to fool you!" blurted Mr. Taylor.

"Yes, sir," Professor Dunningham acknowledged. "That is a possibility, but we've solved more cases by focusing on what the evidence shows us rather than thinking that we're being tricked."

"What do those numbers mean then, and how are they going to help you find the killer?" Mr. Taylor continued.

"We're working on both of those items," Dunningham replied. "I just got into Sydney yesterday morning, and I'm still going through new information as it comes in. But I can assure you that we—the Police Force, the Chief Medical Examiner, and I—are doing everything we can, and as quickly as we can, to identify and bring the killer to justice."

"How much longer is that going to take?" Mrs. Williams asked.

Graeme Farnsworth stood up. "Please," he started. "I know you want more answers, and frankly, we don't have all the answers to your questions right now. If you'll let Professor Dunningham finish, we'll then take all your questions

once he's done. And as I promised you before, we won't leave here until we've answered every one of your questions with as much information that we currently have."

Farnsworth sat back down, and Professor Dunningham continued on for another fifteen minutes describing how he'd used mathematics to help the police solve other crimes. The thirteen of them were in the room for an additional forty minutes as the questions kept coming, many times being re-worded when the answer wasn't what the questioner wanted to hear.

Early morning

Tuesday, 24 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

The newspaper headline read, **Victims' Families Seek Answers!** Once again, the lead article in *The Sydney Tribune* was about the three recent murders. There had been reports in the paper every day since the first murder nine days earlier, but they'd been mostly relegated to inside sections. Today's main article, however, was the first time that the parents of the three young men were quoted in an article.

"The police had asked us not to talk with the media," the article quoted Robert Allen. "But we've all felt that we weren't getting any real answers to our questions. We know they can't bring our boys back; we just want to know why our boys were killed. And when are they going to arrest the killer?" The article continued with re-hashed background information gleaned from previous articles and other news reports.

Kim Williams was the next parent quoted. "They've brought in some math professor from the USA, and all he's

talked about is numbers. Why aren't the police doing their work and finding the killer?"

Graeme Farnsworth slammed a fist on his kitchen counter as he unfolded the paper and read the headlines. The telephone in Police Commissioner Martin's office was ringing incessantly, and it was still an hour before he or his secretary would arrive at work.



31



0930 hours

Tuesday, 24 November

Prince Albert Winery—Hunter Valley Wine Region,
north of Sydney

“If that’s Martin,” Graeme Farnsworth said as Langdon McBride’s mobile phone began to ring, “you haven’t seen me for a while.” The three men, including Professor Alfred Dunningham, continued their walk to the re-opened section in the winery where Rory Allen had been found hanging a week ago Sunday.

“Why would he call me instead of just calling you?” McBride asked as he viewed the number being displayed on the phone. “It’s Martin.”

“I turned my phone off as soon as I read this morning’s article in the Tribune,” Farnsworth replied. “I was afraid that bringing all them together and telling them everything we knew might backfire on us. I just hope they don’t say anything that drives the killer away.”

“Good morning, Commissioner Martin,” Langdon said as he flipped open his mobile and answered the incoming call. The Commissioner’s screaming voice was plainly heard

by all three men as Langdon quickly pulled the phone away from his ear and pushed the Down Volume button several times. Feeling that his ear drums were no longer in danger of being punctured, he put the phone back up to his ear. "No, sir. I haven't seen him in a while. I'm out here at the Prince Albert Winery with Professor Dunningham, and then we're going to Tooey Rocks and then to the Bridge."

McBride continued along the path with Farnsworth and Dunningham, nodding his head as he listened to the Commissioner through the lowered volume. "Yes, Commissioner. All the parents did agree to stay away from the media and to keep silent." McBride listened to more of the Commissioner's ranting. "Yes, sir. I'll tell him as soon as I see him," McBride said, and then closed his phone. "Oh," McBride continued. "You're supposed to call the Commissioner."

"Thanks, mate. I owe you one," Farnsworth said as the three men reached their destination.

"Well, I read the article, and I didn't think there was anything wrong with what the parents said," Professor Dunningham finally chimed in. "After all," he continued, "they do have a right to know why their boys were killed, not that it's a given that we'll even know why. But," he paused for a brief moment as he looked at the hole where the hanging post had been. "I'm confident we'll find the killer. They always leave tracks to a clue that does them in."

"I agree with you, Professor," Farnsworth said. "The problem is that the Mayor and the public also are clamouring for answers. And we haven't been able to give them any good ones so far."

"When was the last time you completely solved a murder case in a week or so?" Dunningham asked.

"Unfortunately, Professor," McBride responded, "logic isn't a factor in the emotion that's going on right now. These murders took place in some of Sydney's and New South Wales' most prestigious locations. The public view it as a slap in the face, and are wanting revenge. If it were just a drug deal gone bad, or a gang-related drive-by shooting, it would be forgotten by time the paper was put out to trash."

"And that is why emotion is not a part of my process," the professor replied. "When you inject emotion into the problem solving cycle, you start making decisions on false bases, rather than using only what is known for certain. That is why the departments that have installed computers to solve their crimes have such a low rate of conviction. They're adding pieces into the solution that don't belong there." He paused long enough to let that thought sink in—definite actions can be re-created or solved by re-enacting only the events that are known for certainty. "We'll find him; it just won't be on a timetable that's set by someone else."

"Langdon and I agree with you, Professor. The unfortunate part is that the Mayor gets irrational when the public starts hollering; it's all a political game to him. Once that happens, it starts heading downhill to the Commissioner, and then to us."

"I understand how the game works, Graeme," Dunningham replied. "But what they're doing isn't going to help us find the killer any sooner than we actually will. It may, in fact, drive the killer underground or out of the area."

"So you think the killer is still around?" McBride asked.

"Yes," Professor Dunningham replied. "My portrait of him is a loner, an introvert who's been rejected, and watching the frustration of the Police Force and the parents is what gives him satisfaction."

"But what about the tattoo numbers?" McBride followed up. "You said that the numbers had specific meaning. Why would he do that? Why would he give us information that would possibly lead us to him?"

"Arrogance and the belief that he can't be caught," Farnsworth answered even though the question wasn't for him. "Agree, Professor?"

"Precisely," Dunningham replied. "Our killer had a reason for choosing his victims, and it was necessary to kill them in highly public places, or else the police wouldn't make such a spectacle of the killings. And, he needed to mark each victim so that he could see the reason why he picked each one of them. He's smart; there's no question about that. But, we'll find him; I have no doubt about that either."

It was already starting to get warm in the fields, and they still had two more murder sites to visit. "Let's continue this conversation in the car," Farnsworth interjected. "Do you see anything here, Professor, that you'd associate with hanging the victim, or with the number 16? Couldn't he have just stabbed him and thrown him in to the fields, and still have had the same effect as the hanging?"

"That's all quite reasonable, Graeme," the professor responded. "But since we don't know yet why our victim was hung, or why the killer chose this particular place, or what the number 16 means, the only things I'll consider are the

cold hard facts. I won't speculate on why or why not, or if the impact might have been the same. But to answer your first question, I don't see anything here that gives me any more information than we already had."

"Shall we grab some cool water at the office, and then head down to Tooey Rocks?" McBride asked.

"Let's go," Farnsworth replied. "Our work's done here."

The men walked back to the winery office where they were met by Lindsay Russell, the winery's manager. "Some cold water?" he offered.

"You're a mind reader," Farnsworth replied. Then he continued, "Lindsay, this is Professor Alfred Dunningham from the USA that I've told you about. Professor, this is Lindsay Russell, the manager here at the Prince Albert."

"Welcome to Australia, Professor," Russell said. "Too bad you had to come here on a business matter like this."

"Yes, well, murders don't always happen at the most opportune times, now do they?" quipped the professor. "And, yes, I'd love some of that cold water." The two men shook hands, and then all four of them headed into the winery's Tasting Room where they were greeted with cool air and chilled bottles of water.

After enjoying the refreshing air and the water, the two police officers and the professor thanked their host and headed south to the site of the second murder, Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve. It, too, was remarkably unspectacular in terms of providing any additional information above what they already knew. "Our victim was facing west; would that hold any significance?" McBride asked.

"I don't know," Dunningham replied. "But I'll add it to the information we know for sure."

As the men left the dry and dusty Nature Preserve, McBride's mobile phone started ringing. He glanced at the number, and just let the ringing continue.

Traffic was light on Bradfield Highway as they approached the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Farnsworth got into the left lane, turned on his rear window and back flashing lights, and stopped the car adjacent to the southern pylon. "Let's just stop here and take a quick look rather than finding a spot down in The Rocks and walking back up," Farnsworth said as he checked the next lane of traffic before opening the car door.

"Good plan, boss," McBride responded, happy to not have to walk all the way back up here from down below the bridge. "I was just thinking of the same thing."

"Right," Farnsworth replied.

As they stepped over into the corner where Randall Williams' body was found strapped to the railing, McBride pointed out the overhead security camera that couldn't see into the corner. "From the video footage, it appears that our killer knew that this corner was blocked from the vision of the camera," he said.

"Maybe so," Professor Dunningham retorted. "But we don't know that for sure. We only know that the camera didn't pick up any activity over here; it's just speculation that the killer knew that." Once again, the mathematics professor was meticulous in considering only the items that were actual facts, and not highly probable speculations.

"Anything else, Professor?" Farnsworth asked.

“These doors; were they locked?” Dunningham asked.

“Yes,” McBride answered. “The video footage shows them closed, and the killer didn’t attempt to go open them.”

Professor Dunningham once again offered a correction. “You mean the video shows that the doors were closed, but do we know for sure that they were locked?”

“The Chief of Security says they were, but you’re right,” McBride responded. “The footage shows that they were closed, but maybe not locked. Is that relevant?”

“I don’t know,” replied the professor. “I was just thinking of anything else I should know before we leave here.”

That Evening

Tuesday, 24 November

The Rocks, Sydney Harbour—Sydney

“Anything particular you’d like to eat?” Detective Inspector Langdon McBride asked as he pushed the elevator button to take them to the lobby of the Lord Nelson Hotel.

“Just so long as there’s some red wine,” replied Professor Alfred Dunningham. “Oh, yes,” he interjected. “I’m not really in favor of kangaroo meat.”

“I’ve eaten it, and it doesn’t have much taste, pretty much like chicken,” McBride responded. “Is there anything else you don’t like, or do you have any allergies?”

“I’m game for about anything,” the professor replied just as the old elevator reached the lobby level and came to a jolting stop. “And I don’t mind walking if it’s close to the hotel, but it’s been a pretty long day already.”

“We’ll take my car and go to a funky place down in The Rocks area. We can sit upstairs and have a great view of both the Bridge and the Opera House,” McBride replied as they headed to the revolving front door. He handed his car tag to

the bellman who turned and stepped inside the booth to retrieve the keys.

"The room been okay?" McBride asked to make some small talk as they waited for the keys. It was a calm and warmish evening as the sun was beginning to drop lower and lower in the sky. Dinner at The Landing should be good.

"The room is quite nice, Langdon," the professor replied. "Service is definitely impeccable. And fast, too, I must say. I wouldn't mind having more time to just sit and enjoy the view. I would imagine that the Harbour Bridge looks really different depending on whether the sun is hitting it directly or coming at it from behind."

"It definitely does," McBride responded just as the bellman was returning with his keys.

"Here you are, sir. Do you need any directions for dinner or some action?" the bellman asked as he handed the keys to McBride.

"No thanks, mate," he replied, while handing the young man a mauve-colored five-dollar note in exchange for his keys.

"Thank you, sir," the young man said as the other two stepped into the car. "Have a good evening."

"We will," Professor Dunningham said as the young man scurried to his side of the car to gently close the door.

"You don't worry about him having your keys to the car?" Dunningham asked as they drove from the hotel entrance area, turning left onto Pitt Street.

"This key only locks and unlocks the doors. He couldn't start the car, get in the boot, or do anything. And if he did, the sirens would go off, and the onboard computer would

tell me what he tried to get into. The other key is a duplicate for the locker at work.” Detective Inspector Langdon McBride continued to drive South on Pitt, turned right on Bond, and then right again on George Street. He was now headed back North, toward the Harbour Bridge and The Rocks.

“Where did you say we were going?” Dunningham asked.

“The place is called The Landing at The Rocks. We’ve got a great table on the upper deck; the food is really good, and they’ve promised to have some awesome red wines for you to sample and choose from.” McBride had picked the restaurant because he wanted to treat the professor to a nice meal, but he did have another reason in mind.

“So why’s the area called The Rocks?”

McBride began to slow the car as they approached the intersection at Alfred Street. The noise from the Cahill Expressway overhead and the trains entering and leaving the station at Circular Quay made it difficult to carry on a normal conversation, so he waited until the light turned green and they continued along George Street. “This area where we are right now is where the original settlers to Australia landed. The area was all rocky, and so it became known as The Rocks. Just to the left there is the oldest pub in Sydney; it’s called the Fortune of War, and it opened back in 1828.”

Dunningham looked to his left and saw the doorway leading into a very lively pub.

“Down there in the harbour area on the right,” McBride continued with his tour presentation as they drove slowly along George Street, “is where you get the ferries to take you

out into the harbour, across the harbour, or to the zoo on the north side.”

“Does the harbor get all filled up with boats when there’s something special going on down here?”

“It’s almost wall-to-wall boats, especially at New Years,” McBride replied. “The Harbour Police do a good job of keeping things calm, and they don’t allow any speeding boats, so it can be a pretty nice time out on the water.”

Traffic slowed to an almost-standstill as they approached Argyle Street. As McBride started his right-turn blinker, he said, “This area is always busy, even on a week night. Fortunately we don’t have to find a parking spot, or we’d be walking a few kilometres to get there.” Easing the car slowly up to the corner and turning right, they headed straight toward a barricaded parking lot that looked half deserted. A security officer began to approach, and McBride lowered his window as the uniformed man reached the car. McBride reached inside his coat, removed his ID and badge, and held it up with his left hand for the man to see.

“Good evening, sir,” the security officer said in acknowledgement of McBride’s identification as McBride began to put them back inside his coat pocket. “Park anywhere you want this evening.”

“Thank you,” McBride said as the security officer walked back to his post and raised the barricade arm for them to enter. As the car went past, McBride again thanked the man through his open window.

“A nice little perk,” Dunningham remarked. “Does it work everywhere?”

“Most places,” McBride replied. “There are a few where it gets super busy, and so you might have to do a little chatting up before they let you in.”

As they pulled into a parking spot and got out of the car, the sun was shining directly through the Sydney Harbour Bridge, making it a photographable moment. “That does look nice, doesn’t it?” McBride said as he allowed Professor Dunningham to take a couple photos of the iconic bridge and its sun-drenched beauty.

“The wife will love that shot,” Dunningham replied. “She said that photos should have more than just one item of focus; so this one will have the bridge and the sun coming through it.” He powered off his camera and slipped it back into his coat pocket.

“We’re going to go up over here,” McBride said as the two men walked away from the bridge toward a glass-and-pole two-story building. “This is more of a touristy landing area now; all the big ships, including the cruise lines, are on the other side of the Bridge in Darling Harbour. We could head over there one night if you’d like and visit the casino; it gets really lively on the weekends.” As they approached the stairs, McBride continued with his tour guide talk. “This place was originally a small fish house that was converted to a restaurant. And as it grew, customers wanted to see more of the spectacular views, so they re-built it with all this glass, and now you have a great view no matter where you’re sitting.”

“I see what you mean about the great views,” Dunningham remarked as he stopped to look around. His eyes took in the Harbour Bridge again, and then he looked right and

saw the setting sun shimmering off the cascading tiles of the Opera House. He continued to turn right and took in views of the quay, and then the stunning heights and shapes of the downtown buildings. "Truly amazing," he said.

"Right this way, please," the hostess said as she led the men to their corner table with its unobstructed views of the Bridge and the Opera House.

"Thanks, luv," McBride said as the young lady placed two menus on the table and then seated each of them.

"No worries. Enjoy your dinner," she replied.

"Thank you," Dunningham said as he watched her meander her way back to her main post.

"You want to look at the wine list?" McBride asked.

After scanning through the wine list, Dunningham put it down and said, "You'd said something about sampling some of the reds. I don't see that listed anywhere."

McBride nodded as he turned his head toward the center of the dining area. Catching the attention of an approaching waiter, McBride briefly raised his right hand and motioned the well-dressed man to the table.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the waiter said. "Welcome to Landing at The Rocks. May I start your evening with a drink from the bar, or perhaps a glass of wine?"

Before the professor could say anything, McBride said, "Would you ask the wine steward to bring a nice sampling of reds for us?"

"Any particular varietals, sir?" the waiter asked.

"Professor?" McBride passed the question off to him.

"Preferably in the Shiraz family," Professor Dunningham replied.

“Of course,” the waiter responded. “I’ll have him here right away,” he continued as he stepped away from the most desired table in the restaurant.

It wasn’t just the views from the table; the elegant table was also separated from the others with a little extra space, giving its diners additional privacy for their conversations. This was another reason Langdon McBride had specifically requested it tonight. As the two men sat in adjacent seats, the square table was angled so that each of them could view the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, essentially with their backs to the other patrons. The glass panels had a slight outward tilt so any reflecting conversations were bounced up to the sky rather than back to the other diners. McBride had this all figured out.

“What’s your thinking so far?” McBride asked, knowing that only his dining companion could hear him. “About the case, I mean.”

“It’s definitely a smart cookie,” replied the professor as McBride smiled slightly at the response. “He’s trying to tell us something,” he continued, “but he wants to make us work for it as if it’s a game, and he’s enjoying watching from the sidelines.”

McBride was about to say something when the wine steward and his assistant arrived, each carrying a tray of four red wine glasses. “Good evening, Mr. McBride. It’s nice to see you again,” the tuxedo-clad wine steward said. As he and his assistant set the trays on the opposite side of the table, he continued to explain the four types of Shiraz wine that they’d be sampling, and the best food pairing for each wine.

“Enjoy,” he said as he and his assistant walked away from the table.

“After you, Professor,” McBride offered as he waited for Dunningham to select the starting wine sample.

“Cheers, and thanks for the great evening,” the professor toasted as he raised the first glass of wine.

“Cheers,” McBride replied. He watched as the professor was clearly assessing and mentally taking notes about the wine. McBride liked his glass, but wouldn’t have been able to say whether it was fruity, if it had much nose, or its legs were too long. He just knew a wine that he liked because it tasted good. And he liked this one.

“Why do you think the killer wants to play games with us? Doesn’t that add to the risk of getting caught?” McBride had an agenda to follow, and he wanted to find out how much Professor Alfred Dunningham had already figured out about the killings.

“From our point of view it does,” the professor replied. “But it’s not the murders that are important to this person; it’s the message. And he wants us to figure that out.” Without skipping a beat, he continued, “Nice smooth wine, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, it was good,” McBride replied.

Dunningham took a small bite of bread before picking up the second glass. He did the same motions as with the first one. He gently swirled the wine in the glass before picking it up, tilting the glass, and then looking at its color and the patterns the wine left on the inside as it flowed back to the bottom. He then sniffed the wine, and took a small sip as it flowed over his tongue to gently savor the details of the

grapes that were used. "Hmmm," he said. "This one's from an area that doesn't get as much afternoon sun. Good, though, but not as powerful as the first one." He put the glass down, leaving a small amount of wine in it. "You don't think those boys were gay, do you?"

McBride had a startled look on his face. The Professor seemed to effortlessly float between tasting nice wines and discussing facts and conjectures about the murder cases. There didn't seem to be any difference between the two conversations. "Gay?" McBride asked. "I'd never thought of that. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing in particular," the professor replied as he reached for another piece of bread to cleanse his palate. "I was just wondering if there was anything in your discussions with their parents that would indicate sexual preference."

McBride just sat there, stunned, as the professor then went through his routine with the third glass of wine. "Uh, no," he stuttered. "They all seemed to be just average blokes with male and female friends. Do you think that's why they were killed?" McBride stared at the professor's face, looking for any clue.

"Oh, no," Dunningham replied. "I was just considering all angles. This third one is pretty good, and I think he said this would go well with a nice beef dinner. Which wine do you like the best?"

"I don't have a real taste for top-notch wines, Professor. I haven't tasted many I don't like, so I usually choose one by price."

"Well, that is an interesting way to select one. How about if we taste this last one, and then we can order our

dinner?" Professor Dunningham took a piece of bread, followed that with tasting the fourth glass, and then settled in on the third to go with the beef dinner. He continued to answer Langdon McBride's questions during dinner, while interspersing comments about the meal, the views, and his roses back home. The bottle of wine, sample number three, was indeed a great choice to go with their dinner.

As they left the parking area that was no longer blocked off, McBride drove back up George Street to Alfred Street, to Pitt Street, and then right on Pitt to the Lord Nelson Hotel. He was frustrated because he felt that there was something that Professor Dunningham wasn't telling him; something that might help identify the killer.



33



2230 hours

That Same Evening

Throughout New South Wales

“**W**e start this evening’s newscast with a plea from three families in a touching story in our ‘Only on SkyView 12’ segment,” said the television announcer as he opened up the evening news program.

“We’ve asked the police for information about these murders, and what they’re doing to find the killer or killers. But all we’re told is that they’re working on them and that we have to understand that they are devoting full resources. My brother is dead as are two of his mates, and the police are saying we should just sit back and let them do their job. Isn’t their job to find the bugger who done this? Then why aren’t they doing it?” Tears began to slowly stream down Roger Taylor’s face as he continued to express the frustrations that were felt over his brother Ethan’s death as well as the deaths of Rory Allen and Randall Williams. Roger hadn’t known Rory or Randall, but he now felt connected to them through the highly publicized deaths of the three young men.

The news producer changed shots from a close-up of Roger Taylor to an in-progress interview of Kim Williams. As she looked to the right of the camera, Kim repeated what had been quoted in the morning's *Sydney Tribune*. "The police keep talking about this math professor they've brung in from the USA; is he supposed to pull some magic card out of a hat? How come the police aren't doing their work to find the killer and pull him in? I've talked with the other parents, and none of us can understand why our boys, ages twenty-five and twenty-six, were murdered in such a fashion, and in such visible places."

"Those interviews were from earlier in the day," the on-screen news announcer said as the shot cut to him. "We contacted the New South Wales Police Force for a comment, and here's what they had to say."

"We certainly understand the frustration that the parents are feeling," Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth began. "Because of where these murders took place, and because of a particular similarity that we can't reveal at this moment, we, too, feel that same frustration. That's why we're reaching out to the public to ask them to contact us with any information they might have that will help apprehend the person or persons who committed these especially heinous crimes. Anyone with tips or other information can call the anonymous tips line . . ."

Langdon McBride pushed the power button on the remote control, silencing Farnsworth and his speech about how the police were seeking the public's help. "That's the same as admitting defeat," McBride muttered as he headed to his bedroom to get ready to retire for the evening.

0920 hours

Wednesday, 25 November

Office of New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin
Martin—Sydney

“I can’t do that,” the special delivery courier told the well-dressed secretary. “My strict instructions were to deliver this letter only to the Police Commissioner,” the courier continued despite the secretary’s protests.

“The commissioner has a very busy schedule,” the secretary replied, annoyed that this young man didn’t acknowledge her importance as the Commissioner’s gatekeeper.

“Then I hope you don’t mind if I just make myself comfortable,” came the courier’s retort as he walked over to the stylish divan and dropped down into it. The neatly arranged magazines and papers on the side table gave the aura of importance, something that neither fazed nor impressed the courier.

“You can’t just sit there,” she snapped with a surprised tone in her voice. “He has important people coming in to see him, and you shouldn’t be sitting there.” Her protestations

were being met with equal obstinacy from the courier. He'd obviously dealt with her type before.

"I was told that once he's read what's in here, that I would be considered the most important person to see him today." The courier held up the envelope as if to tease the secretary with something he had that she couldn't have. The back-and-forth game continued with neither side willing to give in.

"Don't you have other deliveries to make?" the secretary asked, trying a different approach.

"My instructions were quite clear," the determined courier responded, ignoring the obvious ploy. "I am to personally hand this to the Police Commissioner, to no one else, and I am to take as long as necessary to accomplish that straightforward task. Whether I have other deliveries is not a concern. I'll just read a magazine while I'm waiting."

"So you'd sit there and wait even if he was out for the whole week?" she asked incredulously.

"Since he's not out for the whole week, that doesn't really matter then, does it?" came the quick reply.

Exasperated, and realizing that she wasn't going to win the battle of will and wit, the secretary lifted the telephone receiver to her ear and pushed the number seven. "There's a special delivery courier out here," she began after the Commissioner answered the phone in his office. "He says it's important and his instructions are to personally hand it only to you," she continued.

"Who's it from?" the Commissioner asked.

"He won't tell me," she replied, and then she revealed what bothered her the most. "And he's taken up camp on

my new divan out here. Should I call Security?" The secretary looked with disdain over at the courier who was leisurely thumbing through the stack of magazines, in no apparent rush to get to his next assignment.

"No, we can't do that," the Commissioner said. "The media is already on us, and we don't need anything else to set them off. Give me a minute, and I'll be out there."

"Thank you," she said as she returned the telephone to its cradle, and went about her work as if nothing were bothering her. She was good at masking her emotions that way.

Suddenly, the door to the Police Commissioner's private office opened, and a big hulking man in a dark blue suit stood in the door frame. The noise caught the attention of the courier who'd been deeply engrossed in a sporting magazine article. He casually tossed the magazine to the table, and then used both hands to push himself up from the plush leather divan.

"Good morning, Commissioner Martin. I have a special delivery letter for you," the courier said as he held up the envelope.

"You can give it to my secretary," Martin said. "She reads all my mail before I get it."

"I'm sorry, sir," the courier replied. "My clear instructions were to personally hand this to you." The courier was standing his ground and delivering on the promise that all his customers received—exacting service to their expectations. Even if he didn't know who the customer was.

"How did you get in here?" the Commissioner asked.

The courier reached inside his jacket, pulled out an ID card, and started walking over to show it to the Commis-

sioner. "And, yes, the letter was scanned downstairs," he interjected, expecting a question about the letter.

The Commissioner looked at the courier's identification. "Okay, you can give it to me," he said as he held out his hand for the letter.

The computer-printed instructions on the envelope were in large capital letters: "FOR PERSONAL DELIVERY ONLY TO COMMISSIONER COLIN MARTIN."

"Who gave this to you?" Martin asked.

"I don't know, Commissioner. It was in my drop box this morning," replied the courier.

"Just this? Nothing else?" continued the questioning.

"There was two hundred dollars attached to it with a clip, but that's all."

"Isn't that a bit high for a delivery?"

"Well, it certainly got my attention and popped it right to the top of the stack, I must say," the courier replied.

The secretary opened a drawer and handed a letter opener to the Commissioner. As he opened the envelope, an eerie feeling came over him. He pulled out the single sheet of paper and read it: "WHY DO YOU NEED HELP? YOU HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION YOU NEED!" The Commissioner re-folded the page and put it back inside the envelope. "Call Farnsworth and McBride, and tell them to get over here immediately," he barked to his secretary. "And you," the Commissioner turned his focus to the courier. "You stay right there."

"But I've got other deliveries, Commissioner," the courier replied.

“You’re not going anywhere until I say so,” the Commissioner responded. “Got it?”

“Got it,” the courier answered as he went back to the divan, picked up the magazine from the table, and looked for the article he’d been reading.

0830 hours

Thursday, 26 November

Lord Nelson Hotel—Sydney

“It was very good, thank you,” Professor Alfred Dunningham replied to the hostess as he was finishing his breakfast in the dining room. He was hoping to get more accomplished today since yesterday’s activities ran into one obstacle after another. He’d done some digging into the back-grounds of the three young victims, but he didn’t find anything out of the ordinary. He wasn’t looking for anything in particular; he was just looking to see what he could find.

He picked up a copy of *The Sydney Tribune* on his way out of the dining room. He’d intended to read it during breakfast, but had been distracted on his way to the table. A quick glance at the headlines brought some relief: **Wine Industry Reports 22% Growth**. A further scan of the front page revealed no articles on the murder investigation that he’d been brought to Sydney to help solve. He folded the paper under his arm and walked toward the waiting elevator, and rode up to his floor. Once inside his room, he looked inside his pocket notebook for a particular phone number.

“Good morning, Langdon,” Professor Dunningham said as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride answered his mobile phone. “This is Dunningham here; did you see the morning headlines?”

“Yes, I did, Professor,” Langdon replied. “I don’t see any significance of that to our case, though. Do you?”

“Perhaps not directly,” the professor replied. “But since there weren’t any articles on the front page about the murders or the investigation, does that mean it’s the end of the murders?”

“I wish I had that answer, Professor,” replied McBride. “Given the note that was sent to the Commissioner yesterday, he called the publisher and asked him to stay away from the investigation for a while. As you said at dinner the other night, this guy seems to be feeding off our inability to find him. So if he wants to play a game with us, we’ll just change the rules and not feed him any more information.”

“So you’re sure it’s a ‘he,’ and not a ‘she’? What evidence do you have that identifies the killer’s gender?”

“We don’t have any DNA or other such evidence, as you’re aware of,” McBride responded. “It just seems unlikely that a female would be able to physically carry out those murders.”

“Aside from the bridge video,” Dunningham continued, “do we have anything convincing that it’s only one person? Could it be two people, or even three, who are working together to carry them out?”

“Again, Professor, we have nothing to the contrary,” McBride said reluctantly.

“Okay; I’ll see you around noon if you’re in the office,” said the professor. “I’ve got a meeting with your Chief Medical Examiner at ten o’clock to go over the toxicology reports and to see what else she’s got that can help us.”

“Want a ride to the morgue?”

“I don’t want to inconvenience you,” Dunningham replied. “I’ll just take a taxi over there, and then from there to the station. I’ll see you in a few hours.”

“Sounds good, Professor. Good luck at the morgue; just don’t stay too long there.”

“I’m not planning to take up residence there, if that’s what you mean, Langdon. I’ll see you later,” Dunningham said as he hung up the telephone and put the folded paper into his satchel.

Later That Morning
 Thursday, 26 November
 New South Wales Regional Morgue

He'd been in several countries where the cars were driven on the left side of the road, but it still felt strange to Alfred Dunningham as the taxi made its way out of the Lord Nelson Hotel onto Pitt Street. At least riding in the back seat was better than being in the front left passenger seat and making a right turn in an intersection. It always seemed like there was going to be an accident and he'd get the worst of it because he was sitting in the "wrong seat."

Despite his passenger's worries, the native Australian taxi driver arrived quite safely at the morgue. The Professor gave him a decent tip, grabbed his satchel, and then ambled up the steps toward the large glass doors. As he entered the building, a strange feeling came over him as if he were entering a house of the dead, which, in a way, he was.

"Good morning, sir," boomed Roger at the main desk. "Are you Professor Dunningham?"

"Why, yes I am," the professor replied.

"If you'll please sign in, and show me your ID, I'll get you a temporary badge and call Dr. Grantham for you."

Having worked with numerous police forces and other government bureaucracies around the world, Professor Dunningham was accustomed to these proceedings. He signed the Visitors' Log, then pulled the driver's license out of his wallet, and handed it to the guard.

"I'll be right back, Professor; I just need to go make a copy of your license," Roger said.

"That's fine; take your time," replied the professor.

"Just make sure no one sneaks out of here while I go to the back room; the copier up here is out of order again." Roger's attempt at an old joke fell flat—the professor was thinking about something else he would do while Roger was away from the desk.

As the guard opened the door to enter the back room, Professor Dunningham quickly began perusing through the pages of the Visitors' Log, looking for recurring names. It didn't take him long as his entry was on page three. He was standing nonchalantly at the desk as the guard re-entered the room, license and copy in hand.

"Here you are, Professor. Let me give Dr. Grantham a call as she's expecting you."

"Thank you," Dunningham said as he struggled to get his wallet out of his back pocket so he could return the driver's license to its proper place.

"No worries, mate," replied the guard as he picked up the telephone and punched in a four-digit number. "Yes, doctor; he's here now and all checked in." Roger hung up the phone, turned to Dunningham and said, "She'll be right up here."

"Thanks," said the professor as he stepped over to one of the wall displays explaining forensic medicine. He was intrigued with some of the detail when he heard a familiar voice.

"Good morning, Professor," Alkira Grantham said in a pleasant greeting. "Sorry I wasn't able to meet with you yesterday. What do you think about our forensics displays?"

"You certainly make it look more interesting than most people think it is," replied the professor as he noted how stunning she looked in the natural light that came through the glass doors and walls.

"I'd love to take the credit for all of that, but it was here even before I got here," replied the Chief Medical Examiner. Aside from the standard-issue white coat, Dr. Alkira Grantham dressed for work as if she were a business woman in a high-rise down in the Central Business District. Her pleated black pants drew focus to her stylish shoes with a moderate heel. And the earrings and matching necklace were definite eye-catchers. "Shall we go to my office?"

"Lead the way, doctor, and I'll follow," he replied. He followed her through the side door, which led them out of the wide-open entrance into a regular-looking office hallway. His longer stride allowed him to catch up with her. "So, how long have you been here at the morgue?" he asked.

"Just about four years now," she replied as they kept walking down the hallway. "I was working in Perth over in Western Australia after I got out of medical school. I was planning to continue my post-doctoral research in anthropology over there, but I couldn't pass up this opportunity when it came along. I had to pick one doctoral interest over

the other, and medicine definitely pays better than anthropology or archeology. Here we are," she said as they reached her glass-walled office. She entered the code on the cipher lock and opened the door.

"Thank you," Dunningham said as he followed her inside. "So where do you find more opals? Here in New South Wales or over in Western Australia?"

"Definitely over here," she replied. "There's some gold mining in W.A., but the opal deposits are primarily here in New South Wales, in Queensland, and in South Australia."

"W.A.?"

"Sorry. Western Australia." It's kind of like you people in the USA calling the District of Columbia D.C. We shorten Western Australia to W.A." Dr. Grantham was unusually chatty this morning, a trait that Dunningham felt could help him. "Some tea?" she asked.

"I'd love some, thanks," he replied.

As she was getting the tea bags and then filling the cups with hot water from the water stand, Professor Dunningham scanned her walls, just observing the types of charts and diagrams that were displayed. "Was your interest in forensics an off-shoot of your anthropology work, or had you always been interested in medicine?" he asked.

She paused for a moment as she carried the cups back to her desk. "I think I was always interested in medicine, even as a young child. But I didn't know what I'd do if I became a doctor. I knew I didn't want to work in a hospital, or even be in private practice. So it wasn't until I was completing my Masters in Archaeology on the way to the PhD in Anthropology that I realized how I could use medicine. And so I

stayed right in school, and got my M.D. with a specialty in forensics medicine. But enough about me. Let's enjoy our tea while it's hot." She handed him a spoon for the tea bag, and then took the spoon and bag, dropping the used tea bag in the trash receptacle. She repeated the process with her tea bag.

"Well, I find that all very interesting," Professor Dunningham said. "I guess I took the easy route, getting my PhD in only four years after my Bachelor's." He paused as he sipped the steaming tea. "Oh, this is quite nice, doctor," he said even though it hadn't steeped long enough for the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. "Is it Australian?"

"Yes, it is, and can we dispense with the formalities? Please call me Alkira."

"My pleasure, Alkira. I'm Alfred," he replied. "I'm named after my grandfather; do you know why your parents gave you that lovely name?"

"My parents believed that all good things came from the sky, and since Alkira is Aboriginal for 'the sky,' they thought it would be an appropriate name for me." Alkira got wistful as she spoke of her deceased parents.

"I think that's a beautiful little story," Alfred said. "That's how some of the Native Americans give names to their children; they call them something with a meaning that is specific to them."

The two sat in silence for a couple minutes as they enjoyed the tea and the quiet. Alfred cleared his throat when he finished his tea, indicating that it was "time for work."

"Langdon McBride said you'd like to see the reports on these victims," Alkira said as she handed him three folders, one for each young man.

As he scanned through the first folder, Alfred noticed that this information was essentially what she'd shared on Monday afternoon with the parents at Police Headquarters. He looked at the second one, and then the third one, just to see if perhaps one of them had more information.

"Is there something particular you're looking for?" Alkira asked.

"Yes, I'd like to see the full toxicology reports," he replied. "If that's not a problem," he added.

"No problem at all," she replied. "I just didn't have them in those folders because of their sensitive nature."

"Of course," Alfred responded. "That's not something you want to show the parents."

The Chief Medical Examiner opened a file drawer, and pulled out three sets of stapled pages and handed them to the professor. The top of each report was labeled, "NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE."

Dunningham put the reports in their respective folders, perused the first report, and then paused, with a quizzical look beginning to appear on his face.

"Is there something wrong?" Alkira asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "Rory Allen died from strangulation, the hanging, right?"

"Yes."

"It just seems a little odd that his blood-alcohol count is so high, but there were minimal traces of alcohol found

when you swabbed his mouth.” Professor Dunningham flipped through the pages again. “Hmmm,” he murmured.

“Well,” Alkira began, “he clearly died from strangulation. The rope marks on his neck were so deep that his larynx was almost crushed. And the BAC was checked several times; he was drunk.” Dr. Alkira Grantham’s demeanor had changed; she was now being challenged by a non-medical person.

Sensing the mood change, Alfred changed the course of the conversation. “Oh, I don’t doubt you, Alkira. I was just noticing something that seemed a little out of place. But I can see how the body out in the sun for a day in those vineyard conditions could remove the alcohol from the obvious places.”

“That’s quite possible,” Alkira added. The conditions are a bit arid up there,” she said as her left hand started fidgeting with the left earring. Her complexion started to show signs of flushing. “That tea warmed me up a bit; how about you?” she asked.

“Yes, indeed,” Alfred responded as he closed the open folder. Putting the three folders into his satchel, he arose from the chair. “I’ll keep all this information nice and quiet, and I’ll get them back to you as soon as I’ve had a chance to go through them.”

“Well,” she said with some relief. “Do let me know if there’s anything else you need. She brought up her right hand and grabbed the necklace as if she were grabbing a life-line.

“I think I have everything I need, Alkira,” he said as he extended his right hand to her. “I can find my way out,” he added as they shook hands.

“All right,” she said with a forced smile on her face.



1000 hours

Thursday, 26 November

Burningwood Cemetery—Landeen Bush, NSW

As he made the left turn into the narrow cemetery entrance, Harold Steinberg's mind wandered to the last time he'd been there. It was on a weekend, it must have been a Saturday because a funeral procession was slowly making its way along the road parallel to the entrance. He'd felt some frustration build up inside back then as he waited for the long line of cars, one after another, to snake its way into the normally quiet cemetery. But there was no activity today; there wasn't even enough of a breeze to move the branches in the trees, the few trees that were still alive and standing that is.

Harold parked the car and grabbed the flowers that were lying in the passenger seat. He left the car door open as he stepped out; he wasn't planning to be there very long. Besides, there might not be another cemetery visitor for a week or so; Landeen Bush was a fairly remote area in the north-west part of the state. He didn't see many fresh flowers on any of the graves as he walked slowly, yet purposefully, to-

ward his brother's grave. His parents were with him on the last visit; that was over six months ago. It had rained that day, somewhat fitting for a burial he'd thought at the time. The flowers they placed at Jacob's grave that Saturday were an assortment of bright colors, as if a cheerful bouquet of flowers would make a difference. That turned out to be the last time his parents would ever visit Jacob's grave.

The flowers that Harold brought with him today were anything but a cheerful bouquet. Stopping where his brother's body would lay in the ground for the rest of time, Harold knelt down and placed the three black roses directly against the vertical headstone. As he put his left hand on the marker, he said softly, "I'm so sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me the most." Fighting back tears as he sniffled, he continued, "But it's all over; you can rest in peace now." He leaned in and kissed the stone, pushed himself up from the ground, and walked back to the open car door. A sense of completion came over Harold as he drove away.



38



1330 hours

Thursday, 26 November

New South Wales Police Headquarters—Sydney

“I’ve only had time to scan through the reports,” Professor Alfred Dunningham replied to Detective Inspector Langdon McBride’s query. “There were a couple things I spotted that seemed a bit inconsistent, but we can go over those later. Something interesting is that she was quite a chatterbox at the beginning, but she got quiet as we talked about these boys.”

“She does get moody at times,” McBride said. “It’s as if she’s bearing the brunt of our criticism for not breaking the case open yet. She’s been a big help, though, and I know that she’ll do anything she can to find the killer. We had the initial tox reports back sooner than we’ve ever seen them before. It’s almost as if she feels a close tie to the victims.”

Dunningham placed the photos of the tattoos from each victim on the desk. He knew the sequence, but he wanted the visualization to help him think. He looked at the two-digit numeral inside each identical yellow-inked triangle: 16 09 04. “As a mathematician, I immediately see these as being

a descending series of squares, four-squared, three-squared, two-squared. Either these particular numbers are meaningless, or they're not a mathematical sequence since we've not uncovered anything that they would be tied to. Do you agree?"

"I wouldn't know what else to think, either, Professor," McBride answered. "But just between us, are you sure that the tattoos really are a clue to the killer, or could they just be something to throw us off track? I've never seen anything like this before, and it seems pretty bold of the killer to be giving us clues that he knows we'll eventually unwrap. Right?"

"You're absolutely right, Langdon. And that's where the paradox of the creative mind of a methodical killer comes into play. Let's say the killer is a male, just for the sake of making it easier to picture him. The creative aspect of this person is what we would call right-brained; he's artistic, and he's a visual thinker. However, the methodical nature of the killings would lead us to believe that he's a left-brained analytical person. It's quite rare to see someone with strong abilities in both of these areas. But that's what I see here. Do you see that?"

"We typically deal with just the facts that we have," replied McBride. "The killers on the telly might be artistic and creative, but not the ones that commit the real murders here in New South Wales. Unless it's a drug deal gone bad, most of the clean killings are done by family members. And while they try to clean up the mess, they certainly aren't as meticulous as this killer in removing all traces of activity from the crime scenes. I'm still not convinced."

"That's okay," Dunningham began. "Just like an artist likes to see the painting, or the sculpture, come to life, so does our killer. Instead of adding something to life, he's taking them. But the artistic nature is that he wants to show us how creative he is with the clues. And the meticulous crime scenes are from when his left brain is controlling him. This isn't a typical bi-polar person; he is otherwise quite a genius if he weren't also a killer."

"But why would he be giving us clues to solve, which will only lead to finding him, and locking him up for good?" Langdon McBride wanted to agree with the noted professor, but the logic he'd used for years to solve crimes was holding him back.

Professor Dunningham was used to hearing this question. "The right side of his brain tells him how to be different, how to be creative. He's an artist. The left side of his brain is the rational side, and so it tells him to be very meticulous and clean up the crime scenes so there are no traces. His logic tells him that even if he is arrested, there is no hard evidence against him; anything else would be purely circumstantial, and not enough to convict him, or possibly even hold him in jail for very long. He's thought this out quite well," Dunningham concluded as he picked up the photos once again. "These tattoos have to be what leads us to him."

"Well," McBride began, "if the numbers aren't your mathematical sequence, what are they? A combination lock sequence, a locker number, a street address?"

"You're on the right track, my dear boy," Dunningham interjected as if struck by a bolt of lightning. He leaned back in the chair, closed his eyes, and let the computational

processes take control of his brain. His eyes re-opened suddenly as if he'd been shocked, and he sat back up in the chair. "What if these numbers are the three numerals in a date? Follow this logic. We haven't had another murder in week now, and the Commissioner's received two letters, one through the mail, and the other one hand delivered. If our killer wasn't done yet, why would he be telling the Commissioner that he has all the information he needs? So the information we do have is these tattoos. In the States we put the month first, but you put the day of the month first. So what if 16 09 04 stands for the 16th day of the 9th month of the 4th year? In other words, 16 September 2004." He put the photos back on the desk, pleased at his own conclusion. He exhaled, as if this explanation brought relief.

"Three murders and a date," McBride said, essentially repeating Dunningham. "What significance do you think that date would have, and how would it be related to these murders?"

"What if," the professor began, "the murders are in retribution for something that happened on 16 September 2004? Off the top of your head, does that date have any special significance?"

"None that I can think of," McBride answered.

"Then, there must have been something bad enough that happened on that day that these three murders are meant to atone for." Professor Dunningham paused to let that thought sink in before continuing. "And what event or action would be horrible enough for our logic-minded killer to commit three murders?"

"Another murder," McBride said as if it were so obvious.

"That's absolutely right," Dunningham responded. "Someone was killed on 16 September 2004, and our killer took the life of each of these three boys to make up for that killing. So all we need to do now is find out who died that day, and work backwards."

McBride swung his chair back toward his computer, powered on the display, and keyed in his password to unlock the computer. He typed away and entered the date of 16 September 2004 into the Vital Records database for Australia. "We don't always have the newest equipment up here, but we do have access to tons and tons of information," he said as he watched the hour glass spin away. "Okay, there were 189 deaths in Australia on 16 September 2004. Of those, 63 were in New South Wales, and 47 were just in Sydney."

"Does that say how many of them were from natural causes, or is there a breakdown by age of death?" Being the consummate mathematician, Professor Dunningham was hoping for a finer slice of the data.

"No, that's not there. We'll have to look into each one, and that's not as easy as it might sound," McBride responded. "But even with that information, can we necessarily rule out any death, or do we have to consider every one of them as a potential clue?"

"I was initially thinking we could rule out the old folks who've died a natural death, but I think you're right. If we're going to do this, we'd better not overlook anything or we'll have the Commissioner all over of us if we miss something."

"Oh, you've got that right, Professor."

"And I don't think we can only look at the Sydney murders given that two of them took place outside the city limits," the professor commented. "We might be able to start with just the New South Wales' deaths that day, but we might have to expand it to include all of them. What do you need to do to pull all the information for those sixty-three in New South Wales, and when do you want to let Graeme know what we've come up with?"

"He's off for the afternoon; he's got a big trip out of town for the weekend, and he said he had to get a few things done at home first," McBride replied. "I'll get a couple of teams working on pulling this information together, but it's all manual digging, so it's going to take some time."

Dunningham looked surprised. "Really? You don't have all of this in an online database?"

"We used to," Langdon said sheepishly, "but our computers were infected with a horrific virus that ruined so much of the data, that it was no longer reliable. So we have to do all those searches by hand."

"Back to the Dark Ages, huh?"

"Yep," McBride said despondently. "There's not much else we can do right now until we get all those manual records found and duplicated."

"Speaking of duplicating records, would you have an issue with my copying these records that Dr. Grantham loaned to me?"

"Did she say they shouldn't be copied?"

"No," replied the professor.

"Not a problem then as far as I'm concerned," said McBride. "I'll show you the copy room, and then I'll have to

enter my code. The system keeps track of every copy made along with who made it.”

“Problems with reports being leaked to the outside?”

“Precisely,” McBride replied.

The professor followed McBride to the copy room, waited for him to enter his key code, and then he saw the green Copy light illuminate. He only made copies of the toxicology reports.

0930 hours

Friday, 27 November

New South Wales Police Headquarters—Sydney

The squad room was abuzz with numerous excited conversations going on all over the place. *Will this date lead us to the killer? How'd they come up this date? Sure wish we had all this in the computer.* All the questions were along the same lines, focusing on the date of 16 September 2004, and would that point them to the killer.

“That’s enough for now, ladies and gentlemen,” Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth said in a slightly raised voice as he stood on a stationary chair. It took a moment for the calm to spread through the entire room. Most people would get the same result by using their loudest voice; Graeme didn’t need to. In fact, as soon as he stood on the chair, the quiet had already begun. “Thank you,” he said to acknowledge their courtesy.

“You’re welcome, DCI,” came a shout out from the rear of the room, which was followed by a few chuckles, and then silence again.

"I've got some good news, and then I have some other news," Farnsworth began. There were a few snickers and some *I told you* remarks, but most of the police professionals stayed quiet out of respect for their #2 man on the force. "The good news," he continued, "is that there haven't been any more of the high-profile murders that have consumed this department. I want to commend all of you for your outstanding efforts and dedication. Now just because we're not seeing any murders on the front page of the *Tribune* or on the news, that doesn't mean we can take it easy this weekend. Some of you know that I had a special trip planned for this weekend; I've cancelled it. I can't expect you to be working diligently on our top-priority case if I'm not also willing to do it. As you've heard from your Detectives, Professor Dunningham and Detective Inspector McBride have focused in on 16 September 2004 as a key date in this investigation."

"If our computers had all the data that they used to have, this would all be a cinch, Chief," hollered one man from mid-way back in the room.

"I'm completely with you on that one, mate. But that data isn't in there, and so you'll have to dig it up the way it was done before computers. I know it's quite a laborious task, but that's what we have to do. I'm asking you to give all your support to your Detectives on anything they ask you to do. I'll be working, too, and your Detectives know they can call McBride or me any time they need to."

"How did the D.I. and the professor come up with this date?" was a question from the right side of the room.

"We're not releasing that information, but McBride and Dunningham are quite confident that it's a critical piece in

the puzzle. I know I shouldn't have to remind you, but you're not to tell anyone that we're focused in on that date. The press aren't being told, and so if no one in this room says anything, then the public won't know it." Farnsworth had an uneasy feeling that somehow it might get leaked to the outside; that was happening a bit more lately. "Get back with your Detectives, and take your own assignments."

The noise level began to rise as the crowd started to return to its pre-quiet activities.

"One more thing," Farnsworth said in a louder voice as he was still on the chair.

Groans and other utterances could be heard throughout the room.

"Thank you," Farnsworth said. "I know you're doing an outstanding job, and you've given me and all the leaders every reason to be extremely proud of you. We will have a celebration when we bring him in, and I expect that will be very soon. What do you say?"

Cheers erupted as Farnsworth carefully climbed down from his precarious position on the chair.

1300 hours

Friday, 27 November

New South Wales Police Headquarters—Sydney

The sound of the footsteps was unmistakable; the conversations ebbed and flowed in synch with the footsteps as they stormed down the main walkway. No one dared say anything to him as his eyes held a laser beam focus straight ahead. There were a few whispers and quizzical looks, but only after he was well out of hearing range; the *clunk clunk clunk* of his determined stride was the dominant noise heard throughout the room as the officers continued their search through the death records for 16 September 2004.

Only one person would enter his office without knocking, even if the door was open. The door was closed this time, but New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin Martin brusquely turned the handle, stormed inside, and threw the door shut behind him. The three men in the room stopped their conversation. The two officers stood up, as was expected when the Commissioner entered a room, even though that room happened to be the private office of Detective

Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth. He had been reviewing progress reports with Detective Inspector McBride and Professor Dunningham when the Commissioner barged in.

"Another letter!" Martin exclaimed as he held the large brown envelope in his raised right hand. Without waiting for any response, he continued. "This one is essentially a repeat of Wednesday's letter. Let me read it to you, just in case you fellows need a push to find this maniac." Commissioner Martin pulled the single sheet out of the envelope. *"I've already told you that you have all the information you need. What's the problem, Commissioner?"* Martin took the remaining few steps toward Farnsworth's desk and slammed the letter down on it.

"The Crime Lab," Langdon McBride began.

"Forget the Crime Lab, McBride," Martin interrupted. "They've found nothing on either of those first two letters you've taken them. They're not going to find anything on this one. Are you expecting them to solve this case for you?" Martin's neck and face were becoming reddish as his excitement level, and his anger, continued to escalate.

Quiet returned to the office, although there would be plenty to be heard if the reverberating sound waves made a noise as they bounced from one wall to another. "Commissioner," Farnsworth began in a calming voice. "If you'll take a seat, I'll fill you in on the progress, and our plan for wrapping this up."

"I'll take a seat, Graeme," Martin said in a calmer voice. "But, Dunningham, you were brought here because you're the best. You're able to do what Sherlock Holmes was never able to do. Figure it out, and give me some answers!" Mar-

tin's voice picked back up as he directed it, and his frustration, toward Professor Alfred Dunningham, who'd been seated the entire time.

"Commissioner, please," Farnsworth entreated.

"I'll take this, Graeme," Dunningham said. This wasn't the first time that he'd been the recipient of the frustration that came from the difficulties of solving an exquisitely planned crime. "Colin," he began in a soft, almost quieting, tone. "This young man here," he continued as he looked at Langdon McBride. "Well, he and I have determined that the numbers in the tattoos are representative of the date 16 September 2004. I hadn't even thought of its being a date because we start with the month in the States, and there are only twelve of them. But as he and I were brainstorming ideas on what the significance of those three numbers could be, we realized that it could be a date with particular significance. And the significance we feel is that the three murders are a retribution for a death that occurred on 16 September 2004." Professor Dunningham paused to let the weight of that information sink in.

"That's it?" Martin replied. "A date? That's all you've got?"

Professor Dunningham was about to respond, but Graeme Farnsworth cut him off. "The letters you've received have said that we have all the information we need; right? Our killer obviously knows about the tattoos; he did them. That's the only information we have, except that each victim was apparently drunk when killed. Being drunk doesn't tell us anything, but the numbers do."

“Well, if you’ve got the date, why aren’t you out there making an arrest?” Martin asked.

“There were 189 deaths in Australia on that date alone,” Dunningham began as he looked at his notes. “Sixty-three were in New South Wales, and forty-seven were in Sydney. That’s a lot of deaths to look into.”

“But,” Martin started.

“But, it’s going to take time to find all the information surrounding those deaths,” Farnsworth added. “The state’s computers were infected a couple years back, and the databases that held all that data are gone. We have the teams researching to get all the information on each death that occurred that day, and our initial focus is on the sixty-three that were here in New South Wales.”

“Why should that take so long?” Martin asked, indicating that he really didn’t know the pain-staking process of searching all the records to find out if there were a death on a given day, and then cross-referencing to dig into the details of that death.

“They’re doing their best, Commissioner,” an exasperated Langdon McBride blurted out. “You should try it. Just go to a library, and don’t use a computer or ask anyone for help. Then using just the books that are there, try to find a reference to a specific date or person. It’s that not that easy; it takes time.”

“What he’s saying, Commissioner,” Farnsworth said as he cut in, “is that we were able to find out how many deaths occurred that day because all that information was stored in the government’s systems, and those weren’t hit with the virus. But to find out who died that day requires looking into

the records of each locality, and it's a slow, manual process. This is finally the break we needed, and we don't want to overlook anything at this point. We'll get there; it's just going to take a little more time."

"Well, how long is it going to take for all sixty or so of those deaths?" the Commissioner asked.

"Don't know," Farnsworth responded. "It's not as if all the information is sitting there for us, and we just have to go through it. When we start in a given locality, we don't know if we'll find anything or not. But that doesn't mean we can't look there. We might spend one hour, or six hours, and not find anything; but if we didn't take the time to look, and there was something there, that would be bad." He stopped for a moment as he saw Martin mentally processing what he'd just heard. "Would you like to help us?" Farnsworth asked.

"You want my help?" Martin replied. "I don't have any more men to give you. What help can I possibly provide?"

"Just give us through the weekend. The teams are working on it, and I've cancelled my trip. So we're all on it. Also, avoid the media as there's nothing new to tell them that won't just stir it back up. Finally, when you leave here, Langdon will take you out so you can talk to a couple of the teams so it shows that you're interested in what they're doing. And tell them thanks, and that you appreciate what they're doing, and that you have all the confidence in them. That's how you can help us."

Graeme Farnsworth was the only one who could talk to Commissioner Martin that way and get away with it. Mar-

tin's wife did, and perhaps that's why he had affairs with other women.

"Well, I want results by Monday morning," Martin replied.

"Colin," Dunningham interjected, "asking, or telling, these men and women to have results subject to an artificial deadline doesn't work. You can't force time when it's not one of the inherent factors. This is like the computer programming issues at IBM in the 1970's that Fred Brooks summarized so well in his classic book *The Mythical Man-Month*. Adding resources to a project that's going to take a certain amount of time typically forces the project to take even longer. Just like it takes nine months for a baby to be born no matter how many men might participate, we'll have the information we need when we have it, and not one moment earlier."

Martin glared at Farnsworth, sending some silent message about bringing Dunningham in on the case. "Monday morning," he repeated as he got out of the chair and headed for the door.

Langdon McBride scurried and got to the door first.



41



That Evening

Friday, 27 November

Art Gallery of New South Wales—Sydney

“I’m sorry, sir,” the attendant outside the underground Domain Carpark said as Langdon McBride pulled to its entrance on St. Mary’s Road and put down his window. “There’s a special event at the Art Gallery this evening, and we’re already chock full. There are some parking spaces down behind the Mint if you’re coming into the Domain.”

Detective Inspector McBride reached inside his jacket pocket, pulled out his badge and ID, and showed them to the uniformed attendant.

“Oh, good evening, sir,” the attendant said. “You’ll find a spot down the ramp to your left.”

“Thanks, mate,” McBride said as he put his credentials back in the jacket pocket, pushed the button for the window, and proceeded to drive down the ramp.

“Well, I guess we know we won’t be the only people there,” Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham said light-heartedly as McBride pulled into a space marked “Police Parking Only.”

“Well, maybe we can find an exhibit that no one else wants to see. Then we could be alone,” McBride answered. He was looking forward to this evening with Alkira, even though it wasn’t a private time together. At least they were going to be together, something that he hadn’t been able to arrange recently until tonight’s reception.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales sits on the west side of Art Gallery Road in the Domain, leading into The Royal Botanic Gardens. Most out-of-towners think the Domain is a part of the Gardens, but they are separate, yet adjacent, entities. Established in 1874, the gallery is one of the most popular in Australia, and it houses magnificent collections in stunning halls and sun-filled rooms. Unlike most top-rate galleries in the world, admission to the gallery is free. Tonight’s showing, however, came with a price tag of one hundred fifty dollars per couple. The charity event in the Bennelong Grand Court was for the benefit of its GalleryKids program, which enabled children of all ages to explore art through drama, storytelling, music, mime, and more.

As Langdon and Alkira exited the carpark lift, he reached for her right hand with his left hand. He felt a slight tenseness in her hand as he first held it, and then she relaxed. He looked at her and didn’t see the calm look in her eyes that she usually had when they were out together. “Would you rather just go for a walkabout here and in the Gardens?” he asked.

“That would be nice, Langdon,” she replied, “but some people are expecting that we’ll be there tonight.”

“The tickets are already paid for,” he countered.

“You know that appearance is everything at these events. How about a rain check once this case is all wrapped up.” Alkira tried to smile, but it just wasn’t there.

Another rain check, he thought. “You’re right,” Langdon said, trying to sound upbeat as they continued to walk hand-in-hand toward the Gallery.

As they neared the entrance steps, she gently eased her hand out of his and reached inside her clutch for her lipstick. It didn’t need touching up, but she used it as a non-verbal way to not be holding hands when they got around more people. In her role as the Chief Medical Examiner for New South Wales, she was highly visible in public functions such as tonight’s event. Her penchant for generosity to charities and other activities supporting underserved women and children also kept her visible. It wasn’t that she didn’t really like Langdon; she just didn’t want people to get the wrong idea, or think that some of her medical findings might be biased in favor of the police.

The Gallery was open to the public on Friday evening, so not everyone they saw entering or leaving was dressed for a cocktail party. As they entered the main hall, they turned left and began to hear the chamber music being played in the Bennelong Grand Court. “Any progress on the case?” Alkira asked softly as they reached the massive double-door entry for the evening’s soiree. Both doors were open, and a Gallery matron stood in the doorway.

“Good evening, Dr. Grantham. Good evening, sir. Do you have your tickets?” The matron asked. Even the matrons at the Gallery seemed to recognize Alkira; the matron was left to wonder who her companion was.

"Yes, we do," Langdon said as he reached inside his jacket and pulled out the envelope. He took the embossed card out of the envelope and handed it to the matron. "Lovely music," he said.

"Yes, it is. Enjoy the evening," she said as she added the card to the stack on the small table next to her.

"Thank you. We will," Alkira answered as she gently grabbed Langdon's elbow and escorted him into the center of the room. "I'll take a glass of Shiraz," she said once they were out of range of the entrance and the knowing matron. Alkira let go of Langdon's arm and smiled at him as he went to retrieve two glasses of wine.

Certainly no stranger to social functions, Alkira was chatting with a tuxedoed couple when Langdon walked back toward her with the wine. They turned and walked toward another couple moments before he approached. "Someone from one of your charity auctions?" he asked.

"No, just someone who recognized me," she replied.

"Well, cheers," Langdon said as he raised his glass. They touched their glasses together, and took a sip of the fine Shiraz from the Hunter Valley. "Lovely taste, don't you think?"

"Yes, it is," she replied. "You didn't say," she continued, "how you were doing on the case. Professor Dunningham seems a bit odd, doesn't he? It's like he's one of those who-dunit characters in the movies."

"He's a good bloke," Langdon replied. "I think it's that quirkiness that lends to his ability to solve the difficult cases. He's willing to ask the questions that others won't, and he's so established in his own field that he doesn't care if others find him odd." Langdon steered Alkira over toward a paint-

ing with a bench in front of it. Being the only two on the bench would assure them of a bit of privacy. As they both sat on the bench and appeared to be interested in the panoramic painting on the wall, he continued. "No one's supposed to know about this, but you're really one of us, just like the professor."

Alkira's eyebrows raised as she listened to Langdon tell her about the significance of the victims' tattoos. She nodded her head as if agreeing with everything he was saying. "Wow," she said after she took a sip of wine. "That's great," she continued. "How long do you think until you'll have your suspect?"

"According to the Commissioner, we have until Monday morning," Langdon replied.

"Well, good luck," Alkira said as she initiated the wine toast this time.

"Thanks; we'll probably need it." Actually, the large painting in front of them was quite interesting, so they stayed on the bench and took in its combination of colors as the entire landscape seemed to come to life right before their eyes. "Our killer seems to be pretty smart," Langdon said as he re-started the conversation. "But what else might he have done to make each killing a truly perfect murder? Wouldn't he want to do something else with the body so that its internal organs, or the toxicology report, wouldn't reveal so much about the victim at the time of death?"

Alkira's lips pursed into a slight smile as she looked at Langdon. "Are you thinking of a perfect murder scenario?"

"I, uh, was just wondering. It seems that our killer was smart, yet he might have left behind some clues. Don't you

think that would be a bit dangerous?" Langdon stared into her glistening eyes, awaiting her response.

She paused before answering Langdon's curious inquiry. "It looks to me that what we do have are three perfect murders. They appeared to be clean-cut kids who got involved in something new that they couldn't handle, so there's no history to be brought up. Each death seemed to be a fairly clean death with no telling marks of the killer. And, finally," Alkira concluded, "there weren't any tell-tale signs of the killer at any of the crime scenes. So unless you've uncovered something that I don't know about, in my opinion, at least medically speaking, these were all perfect murders."

"It still seems to me that the killer wouldn't want to leave the bodies in the condition they were in, and in such public places if he wanted to commit the perfect crimes. But, as you said, we don't have anything yet to point us to the killer, so you're right." Langdon's speech slowed as he said the next sentence. "These were the perfect murders." He took one last sip of the wine to empty the glass. The two of them continued to sit on the bench, and they just stared at the painting.

Alkira was first to break the silence, at least the silence between them. The room itself was abuzz with chatter, partly because of the wine, but also because of the event and the people attending it. "Let's grab another glass of wine and see who's here," she said as she stood up.

1630 hours

Saturday, 28 November

Hotel Room of Professor Alfred Dunningham—Sydney

After a day of seeing the sights and sounds of Sydney, Professor Alfred Dunningham was ready to sit back and relax. The harbour cruise was especially delightful as they almost got caught up in a sailing race. It must not have been a sanctioned race because his boat captain said that none had been scheduled with the Harbour Office. Even though they were cursed at by the people on several of the sailboats, he still enjoyed watching the boats glide through the water with their graceful lines.

The a/c unit in the hotel room hummed as it worked to keep the temperature at a constant 24° C. He didn't turn on his air conditioner at home unless the inside temperature reached 75° F, so he wanted the same temperature here. He slipped off his shoes, and walked into the bedroom to check his satchel; it had not been moved or touched while he was gone. He picked it up, and walked back into the living room, and set it on one end of the couch. Walking to the kitchen area, he found the cork screw, and began to open the bottle

of Malbec that he'd purchased at the nearby wine shop. After pouring a generous glass of wine, he took it and returned to the couch.

He eased onto the couch, and then took a taste of wine. "Hmmm, nice stuff, I must say." Dunningham appreciated red wine, even if it wasn't from his own grapes. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and allowed the flavor residue to grow inside his mouth. He would never be able to analyze a wine like the top experts and sommeliers—he knew what tastes he liked, and that was primarily what mattered to him. What he liked was a full, robust flavor, not too complex, and definitely not aged in oak barrels. Oak ruined the taste of red wine as far as he was concerned. He was happy when most of the wineries in the Napa and Sonoma area converted to stainless steel holding tanks and got rid of the oak barrels.

He reached for his satchel, pulled it next to him, and unlocked it. Pulling out a couple file folders, he looked first at the copied toxicology reports. He'd never had any formal training in forensic medicine, but he'd read plenty of tox reports, and he pretty much knew what to look for. Even if he didn't know what certain readings meant, he knew he could look them up online, but he also had a good feel for normal ranges of certain indicators. He looked through the first report, Rory Allen's, and didn't notice anything that seemed extraordinary or out of place. He took a sip of wine, and then looked at Ethan Taylor's; same thing, nothing unusual. The same for Randall Williams'. There were traces of alcohol, probably a vodka, in each of their systems, but there was no indication of long-term alcohol usage, and even the blood-alcohol levels weren't that elevated.

Something seemed to nag at him, but he didn't know what it was. Then he heard the high pitch of the a/c unit; *probably needs servicing*, he thought. He put the papers back into the folder, and picked up the wine glass. As he held it up high, he noticed the brilliant red that he might even describe as a blood red—what a timely thought. He set the glass back down on the table, and pulled a sheet protector out of the other folder. The sheet protector held one page, the page with the table of primary details that had been shown to the parents on Monday afternoon.

He pulled the page out of its protective cover, and set it on the table squarely in front of him. He looked at the table of details. *You're right here in front of me; I know it*, he thought.

<i>Name</i>	Rory Allen	Ethan Taylor	Randall Williams
<i>Age</i>	25	25	26
<i>Location</i>	Prince Albert Winery	Tooeys Rocks Nature Preserve	Sydney Harbour Bridge
<i>Cause</i>	Hanging	Strangulation	Stabbing
<i>Tattoo</i>	Black 16 inside yellow triangle	Black 09 inside yellow triangle	Black 04 inside yellow triangle

He'd played plenty of word scramble games, and so he looked at the initials of the names: R-A-E-T-R-W. The best he could come up with TRAWER, but that made no sense to him. If Randall's name began with a D instead, he'd have DRAWER, but what would that tell him? Whose drawer? Where is it? What's in it? Even having DRAWER wouldn't really help him, he decided. They'd already determined that

the numbers pointed to a date of a significant occurrence, probably a date for which these three young men died in retribution.

Nothing specific came to mind as he looked at the three causes of death. He couldn't think of a game where that combination or the sequence was material. Dunningham was thinking of games now because it appeared that the killer was trying to play a game with the New South Wales Police. He also saw no relevance in their ages. They were all about the same age, so perhaps they knew each other, although the parents and the friends didn't reveal anything to support that notion.

Location, he murmured, as he reached for the wine glass. *That's got to be it.* He took the last sip of wine, and went to the kitchen for a refill. As he returned with the replenished glass, he looked again at the page. The numbers in the tattoo were in a definite order, so the order of the locations must also be in a specific order, he reasoned. But what order? The order of their occurrence? Some order related to their geographical location? What about the order of the dates of their respective opening? Without anything else to go on, he decided that the specific order of the murder locations, Prince Albert Winery—Tooeys Rocks Nature Preserve—Sydney Harbour Bridge, held one more piece of the puzzle. Figure out what those locations meant, and he'd have something significant to go along with the date 16 September 2004. He took a sip of the wine, and leaned back in thought.

His mind drew a blank. He reached into his satchel and pulled out a folded map of Sydney and New South Wales.

He thought that if he looked at the map, mentally immersing himself into the area as much as possible, perhaps that would spark a thought. But nothing came to him. He stared at the page again. He was trying to play a charades-type game with himself to determine what a winery, followed by a rocky area, followed by a bridge, what all that meant. It wasn't just any bridge, he reminded himself; it was THE bridge, the Sydney Harbour Bridge. And what was it about the location on the bridge, the only place that could not be seen by the security cameras? How did that play into it?

He was getting nowhere, so he decided to look at word combinations. Prince Albert Winery was three words; Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve was four words, and Sydney Harbour Bridge was three words. By using one word from each location, he would have a total of three times four times three, or thirty-six possible combinations. Professor Dunningham pulled a tablet of paper out of the satchel, and began to write down all thirty-six combinations. He read each three-word combination aloud as he tried to think of another meaning for that combination.

"Prince Tooey Sydney," he started with the first combination. "No," he said. "Prince Tooey Harbour," he continued, eliciting another "No." "Prince Tooey Bridge." That almost sounded as if it could mean something, so he wrote that down on a different piece of paper. He continued with the next three combinations: "Prince Rocks Sydney"; "Prince Rocks Harbour"; "Prince Rocks Bridge." He wrote each of those down as well, wanting to see if the rock star Prince had been to Sydney. He continued the process until he came to the twenty-seventh combination "Winery Tooey Bridge."

He stopped, took a sip of wine, sensing that he'd heard it before. He repeated it out loud, "Winery Tooey Bridge." He took a separate piece of paper, and wrote that combination on that clean sheet of paper. "This is it," he said aloud, even though he was the only one in the room. "Now, what does it mean?"

Solving a riddle typically involves using word association, so that's what Professor Dunningham decided to do. He wrote down some words that meant "winery," but there weren't any he could think of for "Tooey." Perhaps it meant the number "two," or the preposition "to." And "Bridge" could be anything that connected things. As he played around with the words, one of the new three-word combinations was "Grapes to Bridge." "I've heard of that," he exclaimed, again only to himself.

He powered on his computer, and opened up his internet browser. He typed "Grapes to Bridge" in the search box, and saw entries in Wikipedia, and all the bookseller sites. His entry was changed slightly to become "Grapes to Bridges," a book about Sydney from author Langdon Bush. *Langdon?* he thought. Could this be pointing to Langdon McBride? The New South Wales map was still open, so he scanned through the index of towns and communities. He had just come to L when he saw it. He stopped, looked at the entry in amazement, and leaned back on the couch. He reached forward to the table to get his wine glass, and he drew a long, slow sip of the delicious red liquid into his mouth. He savored the flavor even more because he had now figured out the next piece of the puzzle. He looked back at

the map; Landeen Bush was a community in New South Wales.

“Someone died in Landeen Bush on 16 September 2004, and these three boys were killed because of that murder,” Professor Alfred Dunningham rejoiced. The puzzle wasn’t complete, but the pieces were quickly falling into place. Another sip of wine.

0900 hours

Sunday, 29 November

New South Wales Police Headquarters—Sydney

The normally quiet Detective floor was busy and noisy on this Sunday morning. To the casual observer, this day could be any other day—a Monday, a Wednesday, possibly even a Friday. But, this wasn't any normal workday for the detectives, officers, and other members of the New South Wales Police Force who'd been part of the "Famous Sites Murders" investigation. Police Commissioner Colin Martin had made it quite clear that he wanted a suspect named by Monday, and the painstaking searching was beginning to take its toll.

"I've already looked through there," one young uniformed officer yelled as another stack of folders was placed in front of him. "No one died in September of '04 there, so why are you bringing those towns back to me?" he asked. There wouldn't be any response.

Just like a mechanical clock that moved in a rhythmic motion, so did the men and women who were looking for answers to the question, "Who died on 16 September

2004?" An occasional scream of delight, "*I found one*," would indicate that one more of the sixty-three recorded deaths in the state of New South Wales on 16 September 2004 had just been found. But it was a slow process, one that never gave an indication of success, just voluminous reminders of failure. Page after page, book after book; the tedious search continued.

Their normal meeting place was one of the conference rooms in the corner of the Detectives' bullpen. Lisa McPherson was the first one in the room; she subscribed to the theory that high achievers were to the first to arrive, and the last to leave. Her fellow detectives, Glen Roberts and Roland Thatcher, arrived later; they were still a few minutes ahead of the scheduled meeting time. Detective Inspector Langdon McBride, accompanied by Professor Alfred Dunningham, arrived five minutes early. Showing up at two minutes before the hour were Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth and Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham. McBride's face took on a quizzical look as he saw Grantham arrive with Farnsworth.

Seeing that the key players were in the room, Graeme Farnsworth got up and stood behind the square table in the front part of the room. "Thank you for being here on a Sunday morning," Graeme began. "This is a Sunday morning when you should be enjoying it with family or friends, in a place more cheerful than here." The last statement drew a subdued chuckle from the group of six others in the room. "Langdon and Detectives, I hope you will let your people know that their work will not go unnoticed. I know they'd work this hard no matter what the case was; their extra ef-

forts on this case are a testament to your leadership and the trust that your men and women have in you." He paused as he pondered the coming question.

He continued, "Have any of your teams come across anything that's significant and pertinent to the date of 16 September 2004?" Three hands were raised: Roberts', McPherson's, and Thatcher's. But the one with the compelling news didn't raise his hand. He just spoke out.

"Graeme," Professor Dunningham began. "I know these Detectives and their teams have been working furiously to meet the completely unrealistic deadline imposed by your Commissioner." Dunningham paused, not intentionally for the effect it would have, but it had the effect anyway. "As I've labored over all the details, I've concluded that the numerals in the tattoos are only one piece of the information that we need. The other piece is in what the locations of the murders are telling us. In fact, I'd suggest that someone goes out there and tell them to stop doing whatever they're doing. There is only one town they should be looking in; everything else is a waste of time. Want to know what that town is?" Professor Dunningham paused again, intentionally for effect this time.

"Of course; what are you waiting for?" was the seemingly chorus reply.

"We all know, of course, the locations where the three murders took place," Dunningham began. "But it's not the actual site of each killing that matters; each of those sites was just another piece of the puzzle. Remember the letters to the Commissioner that said we had all the information?" The Professor paused.

"Well, what is it?" Detective Glen Roberts asked.

Professor Alfred Dunningham continued with his explanation, knowing that a couple more minutes was not going to affect the work in the other room. “I looked at the locations—the Winery, Tooey Rocks Nature Reserve, and the Harbour Bridge—and I asked myself how those locations could be telling us something else. What I ended up with was the Prince Albert Winery stood for the word ‘Grapes,’ Tooey Rocks Nature Reserve is just the word ‘to,’ and the Harbour Bridge stands for ‘Bridges.’ Putting these together results in *Grapes to Bridges*, an Australian book by Langdon Bush.”

All heads turned toward Langdon McBride as they heard, and focused on, his first name.

“But all of that still doesn’t lead us anywhere,” Dunningham continued, “until we see that there is a small community in New South Wales called Landeen Bush. My theory is that first efforts are to look to see who died in Landeen Bush on September 16th of 2004.”

The three Detectives—Glen Roberts, Lisa McPherson, and Roland Thatcher—left the room simultaneously. This new information would greatly accelerate the process and focus their search efforts to one small community. Perhaps they would be able to have a suspect named, and in custody, by Monday morning. That would certainly please the Commissioner.

“Well, Professor,” Farnsworth began. “That bit of information certainly lit a fire under those three. Do you honestly feel that Landeen Bush is the place? Or was this a brainstorm idea that came to you after a bottle of wine?”

There was already silence, but that accusatory question from the Detective Chief Inspector seemed to suck all the

air out of the room. The only other two people in the room, Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham and Detective Inspector Langdon McBride, immediately looked at the professor; he remained calm and resolute.

“My dear Mr. Farnsworth,” Professor Alfred Dunningham began with a touch of sarcasm. “You called me at my home and begged me to come here to help you on a case that your own elite group of officers couldn’t solve.” He paused to let his pointed remark settle in. “How I work to bring situations to a conclusion is obviously different from the way in which forces are required to operate. But I think you would agree, as would your Commissioner, that it’s the results that count, not the means. The tattoos were out in the open for your people, and for the esteemed Dr. Grantham, to see from the very beginning. If you recall, I am the one who pointed out the significance of the numbers in the tattoos. Now, in an effort to expedite the process of finding the people who died on September 16th of 2004, I engaged in an activity using two pieces of information—the locations of the murders, and the notes to the Commissioner saying all the information was there—to narrow the focus of the search. Did I have a glass of wine or two? Of course, I did. Red wine has been shown to stimulate the expansive thinking process, and it was that exact process that resulted in locating Landeen Bush. If you’ve got a better idea, then get your people working on it.”

The timing of the professor’s pausing at the conclusion of his stinging remarks to the number two man on the New South Wales Police Force coincided with the opening of the door at the back of the room. Detective Lisa McPherson

barged in. "We've got one!" she exclaimed. "There was a death in Landeen Bush on 16 September 2004; the professor was right!"

Alkira Grantham and Langdon McBride looked at each other; signs of relief, and even hints of a brief smile, came across their faces. Alfred Dunningham just sat there, composed as ever, as if to say, *I told you so*.

"Come on up, McPherson," Graeme Farnsworth replied. "What do you have?"

Lisa McPherson strode to the front of the room as Farnsworth sat down. "There was a young man named Jacob Steinberg who lived in Landeen Bush, and his date of death is 16 September 2004. We might have eventually found him, but it would have taken a long time. Thanks to the professor for narrowing down where we needed to look. We don't have the death certificate yet—that will take more time to retrieve—but we do know he's buried right there in Landeen Bush at Burningwood Cemetery."

"Anything else, Detective?" Farnsworth asked.

"That's all we have right now, sir," she replied.

"McBride," Farnsworth began. "Go check out that cemetery; see what you can find."

"Yes, sir," Langdon McBride responded. "Lisa, do you want to come with us?"

"I'd be happy to come with you, McBride, but I think I could be more help by staying here with the others." Lisa paused, and with a slight hesitation, added, "If I may say so, sir, perhaps some of the teams could be relieved to go home for the rest of the weekend."

“Excellent idea,” Langdon agreed. “Roberts, Thatcher—dismiss your teams but I want you two to come with the professor and me. Let’s go visit Landeen Bush.”

1145 hours

That Same Day

Burningwood Cemetery—Landeem Bush, NSW

Detectives Roberts and Thatcher got into the back seat of the car as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride opened the driver's door. Professor Dunningham sat in the front passenger seat, a location that still made him nervous as they drove through intersections, made turns, etc. He didn't think he would ever become accustomed to driving on the left side of the road, and the driver being in the right seat. *So how did Australians and the Brits seem to navigate driving in America?* He'd have to ponder that one for a while.

"Glen, make sure that Lisa knows to contact you as soon as she has any more information." McBride waited until they'd exited the parking garage before he said anything else. "Ask her if there are any relatives still living in the area."

"Right away, boss," Glen Roberts replied. He'd already thought of the relative angle. But why would someone wait so long if he was seeking retribution? *One thing at a time*, he thought.

"Was I too harsh on Graeme?" Dunningham asked.

"You were speaking your mind," McBride answered. "Candid responses are not heard that often on the force. Playing politics always seems to get in the way of people truly saying what's on their minds. I hope you didn't take it personally what he said about you and the wine; I think he was just expressing the frustration that we all feel, especially when the Commissioner has placed an artificial deadline on us. Fortunately, however, your brilliant insight and discovery of the meaning of what clues we had just might allow us to hand a suspect over to Martin by tomorrow." McBride looked over at Dunningham and gave him a quick approving nod.

There was peaceful silence in the car as they continued to drive north on Highway One toward Landeen Bush, a small town in a rather remote part of the state. Although he relished quiet time, Professor Alfred Dunningham broke the silence. "One of the things that most people know instinctively, but not openly, is the occurrence of three's. There's the Holy Trinity; we talk about learning our ABCs; most series of events are summarized in a grouping of three. Look at this case—we have three murders; three completely different locations; three tattoos—yet there is still a singularity that brings them all together, just like the three sides of the triangle that was common to all three tattoos. The number three is quite powerful, and I believe it is the most important number in the universe. What about you, detectives; is there anything special in your lives that has to do with the number three?"

"I'm not really a numbers guy, Professor," Glen Roberts went first, as dictated by his position. "I hadn't really

thought of it before, but I am one of three children, and my dad was the third in his family. Do you think that has any special relevance?"

"Not necessarily," Dunningham replied. "I'm going to speculate, however, that you aren't the third of three children. Based on your drive, I'd say that you're the eldest in the family, and so the number of children being three is really irrelevant. It was, of course, for your dad, and you, in essence, because if his parents had only two children, then he wouldn't have been born. And neither would you. The key to the number three is to recognize where all three pieces are needed to make something complete. A triangle just doesn't exist without a third side, and once you have all three sides, there is only one possible triangle that can be formed with those three distinctive sides." Alfred Dunningham was now in his element, talking about numbers and the importance they play in most things that are taken for granted.

"Are you saying, then, that the three murders, the three sides of the tattoo triangle, and the three different numbers in those tattoos are all part of a bigger scheme?" Detective Roberts was a logical person, and it was that logic that helped him in his work. It seemed to him that this numbers stuff was getting a little too mystical.

"Did you notice," the professor said with a slight grin on his face, "that you just said three things with the number three in them? It's hard to avoid, isn't it? But no, I'm not saying there's some grand conspiracy that this is all a part of. I'm just saying that it's easier for us to bring something to conclusion when three is central to it. Four just doesn't work. If something has four items, then piecing them together is

much harder. It can be done, but it takes significantly more effort and perseverance to bring it all together."

"Anything from Lisa, yet?" McBride asked as he finally saw a sign for Landeen Bush; they had seven more kilometres to go.

"Nothing yet," Roberts answered. "But I'll give her a quick ring."

"What about you, Roland? Anything significant with the number three for you?" Dunningham got the conversation back on track, for him, anyway.

"Not really, Professor," Thatcher replied. "I'm an only child, and so were my parents. They've lived in the same house for as long as I can remember; I just don't see it having anything particular to do with me." He paused. "Does that have any specific meaning?"

"Not everything has to have a specific meaning," Dunningham said. "All I was really saying was that the occurrence of the number three generally tidies things up a bit. But its absence doesn't mean the opposite."

"Here we are, gents," McBride interjected as they entered Landeen Bush.

"This is pretty remote, isn't it?" the professor added. "Is this how it looks in the Outback?"

"This is a big city compared to the Outback," McBride offered. "You can drive through areas and be lucky to see two houses in a day."

"Lisa says they're still working on any relatives for Jacob Steinberg," Glen Roberts said as he closed up his mobile phone.

"Thanks, mate," McBride said as they drove slowly down the central road through the town. "As small as this place is, they might not even have a sign for the cemetery. Everyone here would know where it was, so there'd be no reason to point it out."

"There's a sign, pointing to the left," Dunningham said.

McBride flipped the turn signal indicator far in advance of the target road. That alone, using the turn signal, probably would tell all the locals that they weren't from the area. But, as a police officer, McBride knew he had to follow all the rules if he expected others to do the same.

As they reached the narrow entrance to Burningwood Cemetery, Langdon McBride slowed the car to a near crawl pace. All four of the men looked around; there was nothing there but just the cemetery. There was no building for a caretaker, and they didn't see anyone else there. Perhaps it was too early, even though it was almost noon.

Dunningham asked the obvious question, "How are we going to find his grave?"

"Roberts," McBride began. "See if Lisa has anything on the location of the grave. If she doesn't have anything, we'll just divide it into quadrants, and each of us will walk one looking for Steinberg."

Fortunately, the heat of the day hadn't yet arrived, so walking through the cemetery looking for a specific grave wasn't terribly unbearable. But it was tedious work, and all the gravestones weren't in neat lines, something the professor thought was an awful sacrilege. They continued their searching for fifteen minutes, when Roland Thatcher stopped and hollered. "Here it is!" As soon as he yelled it

out, he looked quickly about to see if any others had come into the cemetery. Yelling wasn't typically proper decorum in a cemetery, even if they were police officers on a specific mission.

McBride and Roberts began to trot toward Thatcher. "What are they running for?" Professor Dunningham said out loud to no one as he ambled along on his walking pace; there weren't even any birds to hear him. "The boy's dead, and he's not going anywhere," he continued. The two officers were still panting when Dunningham arrived at the spot.

"Take a picture before we touch anything, Glen," McBride said. "There's your number three again, Professor; three black roses."

"Wow," Thatcher mumbled. "That's a little spooky, don't you think?"

As Glen Roberts took photos on his mobile phone, the four men stared at the grave and the three wilting flowers that looked as if they'd been placed there recently. "Just sixteen years old," the professor said as he read from the gravestone. "What a pity."

"Are we okay?" Thatcher asked as he reached down to collect the roses. McBride nodded, and Thatcher continued to pick up the roses carefully after wrapping his handkerchief around the stems. Several petals fell off and floated to the ground.

Dunningham reached down and retrieved the fallen petals. He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together against one petal as he closed his eyes and tried to take in any remaining scent. "These have been out of water for three days.

They've been shielded from the afternoon sun by the headstone; otherwise they'd be much drier."

"That's right; you're also a rose expert," McBride said.

"Yes, and I do hope mine are surviving without me there to take care of them," replied the professor. "You do know the meaning of the black rose, don't you, even though the color isn't truly black?" Without waiting for a response, he continued. "There are two meanings, but only one is relevant here. One is that giving a black rose is an indication of impending doom or death. But that wouldn't make any sense by putting a rose here at the grave. After all, he's already dead. The significance here is that the person putting the rose, or in this case, three roses, is saying that death has been atoned for. In other words, someone is telling Jacob Steinberg here that his death has been accounted for, and those responsible have paid the ultimate price."

"So, one rose for each murder that was just committed," Thatcher chimed in. "We have everything we need now except for the suspect."

Glen Roberts' mobile phone rang. "Roberts," he said into the phone. He listened intently as the signal strength was not the greatest in that remote part of the state. "Thanks, Lisa. We're at the gravesite right now; there were three black roses placed there about three days ago, according to the professor. Let me hand you to McBride." He covered the mouthpiece as he handed the phone to Langdon. "She found a relative in the area; the brother."

"Hello, Lisa," McBride said as he took the phone from Roberts. He repeated what Lisa was telling him, and what she'd already told Glen Roberts. "The brother is Harold

Steinberg, and he still lives here in Landeen Bush. Good work. You and your team can head home; I'll call you on your mobile if I need anything else. Tell your people 'Thanks' for me." McBride closed the phone and handed it back to Roberts, who put it into his pocket.

"Well," McBride began. "Jacob Steinberg has a brother, Harold, who lives here. Let's go pay him a visit." The four men walked back to the car, unaware of anyone watching them. Finding Harold Steinberg's house was easy; everyone knew everyone else in Landeen Bush.

1430 hours
That Same Day

Home of Harold Steinberg—Landeem Bush, NSW

Langdon McBride knocked on the wooden screen door at the pale yellow house where they were directed to by the fellow at the small store. An old dilapidated sofa was on the front porch; McBride wouldn't even allow a dog to get on that filthy thing. He knocked again, this time adding, "Harold Steinberg, are you there?"

"Yea, hang on a minute," came the reply. "I'm in the W.C."

"I do hope he washes his hands," Professor Dunningham commented.

"If they're dry, we'll know he didn't," remarked Glen Roberts.

Heavy steps on the bare wooden flooring could be heard as the man walked down the hallway toward the front room. As he turned toward the door, Harold Steinberg stopped at the sight of the four men through on his porch. "You didn't say there were four of you," he said.

"You didn't ask," McBride replied. "And I hope you washed your hands."

Steinberg ignored the last statement and walked to the door. "Are you lost and need directions somewhere, 'cause you sure aren't from these parts." He stopped at the door, with no apparent intention of opening it.

"I'm Detective Inspector Langdon McBride of the New South Wales Police Force," McBride began as he pulled out his identification, opened it, and held it up for the resident to see. "These other men are Detectives Roberts and Thatcher, and Professor Dunningham from the USA. We have a few questions we'd like to ask you. May we come in?" The four men on the porch certainly didn't want the man to come outside with them; where would they sit? Certainly not on that old sofa.

"Sure, why not," replied Steinberg as he opened the screen door and stepped aside. "And, yes, I did wash my hands," he continued as he held out his right hand. "Harold Steinberg's my name, and I don't think we've ever had so many of you types up here at one time. What's the special occasion?"

"We'll get to that," McBride answered. "Is there anyone else here in the house with you?"

"Nope," he replied. "Had a dog a while back, but he ran off with the wild pack. So it's just me here all alone. But I do enjoy the quiet. I bet that's something you don't have much of down in Sydney now, do ya?"

"You're right; Sydney's not the quietest of cities. Is it okay if we sit down?" McBride asked.

"Pardon my manners, officers," Steinberg replied. "Most folks around here just do what they please; no one asks if they can do things. We all just get along that way, ya know?"

Not hearing an actual answer to his question, McBride took the man's response as approval to sit down, and so he was the first to sit, in a wooden chair. The other three quickly looked around for a place that looked somewhat clean; that outside sofa made them a bit paranoid about sitting on cloth surfaces in the house.

Detective Glen Roberts thought of something before he sat down. Even though there were four of them, and three were armed, he knew the dangers of being surprised. He glanced at McBride, and then at Steinberg. "Mr. Steinberg," he began, "do you have any weapons on you right now?"

"Call me Harold, please. Mr. Steinberg was my dad's name. And no, I don't have anything on me. In fact, the only weapon I ever had was an old shotgun that I used to kill wild dingoes a while back. But I got rid of that gun; there's no need for one here. But I bet you're carrying something, aren't ya?"

McBride decided to take control of the conversation and the situation as Roberts sat down. "Mr. Steinberg, Harold, we're here to talk with you about some recent murders that took place in and around Sydney. Have you heard about them?"

"I don't have a telly, and so the only news that I hear is if someone passes it along. I might have heard something, but if so, I didn't pay much attention to it. What would some murder down there have to do with me?" he asked innocently.

"There were actually three murders, not just one," McBride answered. "Does the date 16 September 2004 mean anything to you?"

Harold Steinberg flinched; his body was frozen in its current position; he couldn't move. A moment later, he breathed noisily as a big breath escaped from his mouth. He started to talk, but with more deliberation than he had before. "Yes, 16 September 2004 means something to me. That was the day that my brother, the only person in the world who meant anything to me, that was the day he died." He closed his eyes, and the beginning droplets of tears formed in the corners of his eyes. "He was only sixteen," he continued; his eyes were still shut. "There was no reason for it." He let his head drop down as if all the energy had been pulled from his body.

The four men allowed him to have a peaceful moment before continuing the questions. Glen Roberts led out. "Harold, did you leave three black roses at your brother's grave?"

Harold Steinberg opened his eyes. "Yes," he said. Then realizing that the men had been at Jacob's grave, he said, "So you've been to my brother's grave, meaning that you knew when he died. Right? If that's so, why did you bother to ask me about the importance of that date? You already knew what it meant."

"Just standard procedure, Harold," Roberts replied. "Asking a question that we already know the answer to helps us to establish your truthfulness. Would you tell us where you were on the weekend of 13 to 15 November, just about two weeks ago?"

"Here," Steinberg replied.

"When you say, 'Here,' exactly where do you mean?" Roberts asked.

"I mean exactly here. Here in my house. Here in Landeen Bush. That's what I mean by 'Here.' Right here."

"How can you be so certain? Perhaps you went somewhere else, and then came back here," Roberts interjected.

"No, I haven't been anywhere outside Landeen Bush in several months," the man replied.

"Not even for a day, or a few hours?" Roberts kept asking questions.

"No," Steinberg answered as he began to get somewhat agitated. "I said I haven't been anywhere, and that's the honest truth. You want to strap me up to one of those machines and see if I'm lying?"

"That won't be necessary, Harold," McBride cut in. "We saw your car outside, and we thought that maybe you'd taken a drive into Sydney for the day, perhaps."

"I said I haven't been outside Landeen Bush for several months. Now why would I lie about a thing like that?" Steinberg's voice was getting louder as the questions kept coming at him.

Professor Dunningham answered Harold Steinberg. "I'm not a policeman; I'm a college professor from the USA, and I specialize in helping police forces solve crimes that are especially difficult for them to figure out. And that's what's going on here." Dunningham paused as he began a personal approach. "Your name, Harold Steinberg; that's a Jewish name, isn't it? I've worked with some Jewish people, and they told me what it felt like to them when someone would

ask them the same questions over and over again. It would be like someone asking me, over and over again, how much is two plus two? I'd tell them four, and then they'd ask me the same question again. I'd tell them four again, but they're never satisfied with that answer I gave them. Is that how you feel right now, Harold? That you're answering the questions, but no one believes you or hears your answers?"

"Yea, something like that," Steinberg replied. "Yes, I'm Jewish, but I don't see what that has to do with anything. People around here don't treat me any differently."

"Let's talk about those murders a couple weeks ago," Dunningham started. "There were some clues with each murder that led us up here. There were three young men killed, each one was twenty-five or twenty-six years old. That would have put them a few years older than your brother at the time of his death. But each one of them had a fresh tattoo on his arm, and that tattoo was a yellow triangle, the symbol that Jews were forced to wear during World War II. So do you see where being Jewish might be significant, especially if the killer wanted to indicate some sort of Jewish relationship?"

"I don't see it, but you're the professor," Steinberg replied.

"Also," Dunningham continued, "there were numbers in the tattoos that indicate a date of 16 September 2004; the date your brother died. Do you now see how this points to you? Those murders were a payback for someone Jewish who was killed on 16 September 2004. Perhaps someone named Jacob Steinberg?"

“Are you telling me that my brother Jacob was the only Jew who died on 16 September 2004?” Steinberg asked.

“We don’t know that answer right yet,” the professor replied. “But there is still one more piece of evidence that points those three murders right here to Landeen Bush. Now, unless you’re telling me that there was another Jewish person from Landeen Bush who was killed on 16 September 2004, then your brother’s death is tied to these three murders. And,” Dunningham paused for effect, “since you’ve already said you placed the three black roses at your brother’s grave, that means that you’re involved in those three murders as a way of making up for your brother’s own killing.”

“I think you’ve been watching too many of those mystery stories on the telly,” Steinberg countered. “Now I told you that I didn’t murder anyone; I don’t have a gun, and you can ask anyone around here if I’ve been away from this house for even an hour or two.”

McBride decided to take control again. “Harold,” he started, “None of these murders was committed with a gun, so not having one doesn’t exclude you. As you just heard, there is sufficient evidence to point to you as the killer, someone who was making up for your brother’s killing back in 2004. I might not blame you for what you did, but the law doesn’t work that way. We have a court system to take care of matters like that. You’re not allowed to take the law into your hands.”

Harold Steinberg continued to deny the accusations that he killed for revenge of his brother’s death. “I didn’t do it, I told you already.”

McBride got up from the chair, and the other three with him did the same. "Harold Steinberg," McBride said. "Based on what we've just told you, the New South Wales Police have sufficient evidence to take you in for further questioning. If you want to close up your house before we go, one of the Detectives will help you."

Harold Steinberg stood up. "No reason to close it up; I'll be back soon," he said.

1700 hours

That Same Day

New South Wales Police Headquarters—Sydney

Even though it was a Sunday afternoon, word had spread like wildfire through the informal networks within the New South Wales Police Force that a suspect was being brought in for further questioning—a highly probable suspect in the killings at the Prince Albert Winery, Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Car horns were honking and people were cheering as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride's vehicle approached the Police Station; somehow the news had been leaked outside, something that was sure to irritate the Commissioner. Harold Steinberg looked from one side to the other in amazement at the attention that was apparently being paid to him.

"What's all the fuss?" Steinberg asked as the car entered the relative safety and privacy of the Police Parking Garage.

"People are happy you're finally off the streets," Detective Glen Roberts replied in a rather matter-of-fact manner.

"Off what streets? The streets of Landeen Bush? Nothing much goes on out there, so I don't get it why people

would care if I'm not out 'n about there." Steinberg was incredulous; he was still not aware of the magnitude of attention that was to be given to him. "I bet most of 'em haven't even heard of Landeen Bush."

"They will by tomorrow," Roberts replied.

The puzzled look on Harold Steinberg's face took on an even more questioning look. He still didn't understand why he was being brought into Sydney to talk about his brother Jacob's death back in 2004. He'd been brought up to trust and to respect the police, and since he had nothing to hide, he did what they told him to do. Tell them whatever they wanted to know about Jacob, and he'd be back in Landeen Bush in no time at all. He figured the police would take him back, since they'd brought him down to Sydney, and he'd just go back into his unlocked house.

The questioning room was much smaller than he'd seen in a movie. He looked around for the two-way mirror that allowed people to see him, but he wouldn't be able to see them. That wasn't there; there was just a table and three chairs. Relief came across his wrists and his shoulders when Detective Roberts finally unlocked the handcuffs that had pulled his arms back and held his hands together behind his back. The cuffs had been tight around his wrists, and he rubbed each wrist with the opposite hand to ease the pain.

"Sit down," Roberts ordered in a gruff tone.

Harold Steinberg sat down in the closest chair.

"Not that one, you dimwit; the one on the other side of the table," Roberts yelled at him.

"You don't have to yell at me," Steinberg said as he complied with the detective's order. "You told me to sit down, and I did."

"Don't get smart, Steinberg. You're already in enough trouble as it is." Roberts' eyes displayed contempt for the murder suspect as he stared down at him.

The door opened, and Langdon McBride and Professor Dunningham entered the room. Steinberg switched his attention from Roberts to the two men who'd just come in. "I don't understand," he began. "I answered all your questions back at my house. If you wanted to know more, why didn't you just ask me there?" He looked at McBride for an answer to his simple question, but an answer wasn't offered. McBride continued to look at a paper inside the folder he was holding. He nodded his head a few times, closed the folder, and sat down directly opposite Harold Steinberg.

Detective Roberts looked at the professor, inquiring, without words, if he wanted to also sit down. Dunningham shook his head to indicate 'No.' Roberts sat in the final vacant chair in the small, clammy room. Whatever air was pumped into the room didn't do much to cool it down or keep it comfortable; that was planned.

"Tell me," McBride began, "about your brother's death. When did he die?"

"His name is Jacob, and he died on 16 September 2004." Harold had already told them this, so he wasn't sure why they were asking him again for the same information.

"Where did he die?" McBride continued, as he reopened the folder and looked at the top piece of paper, turning it over once for effect.

"In Landeen Bush," Steinberg replied. "I already told you all this; why am I here?"

"We'll get to that soon enough," McBride answered.

"Does that mean I'm under arrest? 'Cause I've done nothin' wrong," the suspect countered.

"We'll see about that," McBride replied. "How old was he when he died, and what was the cause of his unfortunate death?"

Harold Steinberg cleared his throat as he was about to re-live a difficult time in his life. "He was just sixteen, and, he, uh, died of a drug overdose." The last two words were barely audible as Steinberg struggled to say them out loud.

McBride looked down at the papers again. "Are you sure it was a drug overdose? The death certificate," he said as he held up the page, "calls it a 'Possible Homicide.'"

"I know," Steinberg acknowledged. "My Pa talked the doc into saying that so Ma would never have to know about Jacob's problems." Harold sniffled as he struggled with the harsh reality of a family that was now empty, except for him. Roberts pushed a box of tissues over toward him. "Thanks," Steinberg said to Roberts.

"You're telling us that the doctor lied on an official document?" Roberts asked.

"All I know is what I heard Pa say to the doc, and the doc nodded his head up and down as he listened to Pa. Jacob's dead, and so are Ma and Pa now, so what does it matter how he died?"

"It matters a lot," McBride answered. "The date of your brother's death, 16 September 2004, are the same numerals, sixteen, zero-nine, and zero-four, that play a significant role

in the three big murders that took place around here recently.”

“You told me about them, but how does that involve Jacob?” Steinberg asked naively.

Roberts interjected again; he was getting tired of the stupid questions being asked by the obvious suspect. “Not Jacob; you!” he exclaimed.

“Me? I told you I haven’t been to Sydney for several months. Besides, why would I want to kill someone who hasn’t done anything to me?” The puzzled look on Steinberg’s face turned to a questioning one as he pointed that question back to the belligerent detective.”

“Let’s go through this slowly, so maybe it will make sense to you,” McBride began in a paced manner. “Once you see how everything lines up, then maybe you’ll understand why you’re here.” He took a sip of water from a paper cup, and continued. “The Death Certificate says your brother’s death was possibly a homicide, right?” He didn’t wait for an answer; that wasn’t why he asked the obvious question. “Jacob died on 16 September 2004, which is written numerically as sixteen, zero-nine, zero-four. Let’s just say that your brother was, indeed, killed by someone back in ’04, and you decided to finally seek revenge for his death. So you seek out the three lads who killed him, and to make a public statement about why these three lads were killed, you put a tattoo on their arm. You put a sixteen on the first one, a zero-nine on the second one, and a zero-four on the third one. Once all of them were killed, the three tattoos indicated that the three lads were responsible for your brother’s death on six-

teen, zero-nine, zero-four." McBride closed the folder, and leaned against the back of the chair.

"I don't know anything about those tattoos; I didn't kill them boys, and I told you I haven't been to Sydney for several months," rebutted Steinberg.

Roberts chimed in. "You said you and your brother were Jewish. Each of the tattoos was inside a yellow triangle, and we know that yellow triangles have been used for a long time to identify Jews."

"I still don't know what you're talking about," Steinberg said. "I've never killed anybody, and I don't even kill wild animals anymore."

"What about the three black roses at your brother's grave? Did you put them there?" McBride asked.

"Yea, but so what?" Steinberg replied. "That's no crime that I know of."

"Placing, or giving someone, a black rose typically means atonement for death," Professor Dunningham added in a calm voice.

"So the three black roses," Roberts continued, "mean that you're telling your brother that you've atoned for his death by killing three people. Don't you see how it all adds up?"

"No, I don't," Steinberg said as he continued to deny any involvement in the brutal and highly visible deaths of Rory Allen, Ethan Taylor, and Randall Williams.

"But you don't deny putting those black roses there," McBride stated.

"No, I don't," Steinberg said even though McBride's remark was a statement, and not a question. "People put flowers on graves all the time; that's no crime."

Sitting directly opposite the suspect, McBride looked at him squarely in the face, and said. "We've got the numbers in the tattoos that match the date of your brother's death, a death ruled a Possible Homicide; we've got the Jewish triangle symbol, and we've got the three black roses that you admit to putting on his grave. It all adds up to the simple fact that you killed those three young men as a way of retribution because they killed your brother."

"I didn't kill them, I've told you," Steinberg said adamantly. "The three roses meant two things. One of them was that each rose was a death flower—one for our Pa, one for our Ma, and one for Jacob. The other meaning was that there were three times when I knew Jacob needed help with his problem, and I didn't step in there to help him. He'd always looked up to me as his big brother, but I felt he needed to handle it himself. There were three times I could have stopped him, but I didn't. The fourth time was too late; that was 16 September 2004, and the drugs killed him that day. That's what the roses meant." Steinberg sniffled again; this time as he felt self-pity for not helping his brother when he needed it the most.

"Prove it," Roberts said defiantly.

"I can't prove it," Steinberg replied. "They're all dead now, even the doc who was there when Jacob drew his last breath."

Dunningham motioned with his head for McBride and Roberts to follow him out of the questioning room. Both

men looked at the professor with quizzical looks, but got up and followed him through the door.

"He's right," Dunningham said as the three men were outside the closed door. "He can't prove anything he's said, but that doesn't mean that he did, or didn't do, anything. I believe your judicial system here in Australia operates under the same burden of proof as we have in the States. It's up to the prosecution to prove guilt; it's not up to the defense to prove innocence. Just because this fellow can't prove that he didn't kill those lads doesn't mean that he did." Professor Dunningham had seen that there was circumstantial evidence against Harold Steinberg, but he also felt that he was telling the truth.

"I don't get it, Dunningham. First you tell us that the numbers in the tattoos and the places of the killings pointed to a death on a certain date in a certain place. That pointed to Steinberg's brother's death; but now you're saying that he didn't do it?"

"No, McBride. I'm not saying for sure he didn't do those murders; I'm just saying that you don't have any real proof yet," replied the professor.

"We do have hard evidence," responded McBride. "We have the tattoos, the numbers, and the triangles; those point to the date. We have the locations of the killings that you've translated to a certain town. We find a death that took place in that town, on that date, and the brother admits putting three black roses on the grave. That, in my mind, is enough proof to arrest him. And," he continued, "don't forget that the Commissioner made it very clear that he wanted a suspect in custody by tomorrow. You're the best, and you've pro-

vided all the markers that led us right to Harold Steinberg. I'm confident he's our man."

Dunningham stayed in the ante room as Detective Inspector Langdon McBride and Detective Glen Roberts went back inside and told Harold Steinberg that he was under arrest for the murders of Rory Allen, Ethan Taylor, and Randall Williams.

Steinberg was wrong; he wouldn't be returning to Landeen Bush that evening to close up his house.

Early morning

Monday, 30 November

Throughout New South Wales, Australia

“**K**iller arrested!” exclaimed the street corner newspaper vendor. “Read the full details of the arrest for the killings in the Prince Albert, the Tooey Rocks, and on the Bridge. It’s exclusive only in the *Tribune*!” The hawker continued his routine of showing the headlines, taking the dollar coin, and then targeting some new customers. If a driver showed interest, the newsman would venture out into the traffic to make a sale, but he tended to stay mostly on the sidewalk near his dwindling stack of newspapers. It was a good day to be selling newspapers. Headlines always sold more papers, and sensational headlines sold them even faster.

The headlines on the morning’s *Sydney Tribune* shouted in celebration **Killer Arrested in 3 “Famous Sites” Murders!** The continuing front-page article was intended to be sensational, contain exclusive information, and deliver a sense of relief to the inhabitants of Sydney and the outlying areas of New South Wales. Whether the article achieved its intended results would remain unknown, but most news-

stands sold out of all their copies before 0830 hours, even with more copies printed than on a normal Monday morning. But, then, this wasn't a normal Monday morning.

The article continued,

In a televised press conference last evening, New South Wales Police Commissioner Colin Martin announced the arrest of Harold Steinberg, a 42-year old man from Landeen Bush, a small community in northwest New South Wales. Steinberg is being held without bond for the three "Famous Sites" murders as they've been called because of where the bodies were found: Prince Albert Winery, Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It's not clear if Steinberg has retained the services of a defence lawyer, and a motive has not yet been released.

Commissioner Martin was tight-lipped on details, but he did say that more information would be released following Steinberg's arraignment in NSW Supreme Court today. The Commissioner did say, "The fine residents of Sydney and all of New South Wales can sleep comfortably knowing that the perpetrator of these heinous crimes has been apprehended and is in custody."

Full accounts of the murders, previously well-publicized in all the media, were once again provided in case there was a reader who had not yet heard about them. The locals knew the details, as the murders had commanded front page news in the papers and they'd also been the lead-in reports on the radio and the television. The grisly details of the sinister crimes added to the appeal for many readers, and the reporters were more than willing to cater to that desire. This morning's newspaper also contained additional advertisements as the publisher knew that more copies would be sold, and he was certainly eager to cash in on the increased advertising revenues.

Foot traffic was expected to be extraordinarily busy around the Supreme Court offices later today between

Philip and Macquarie Streets where Harold Steinberg would be arraigned. Although the three “Famous Sites” murder victims were complete unknowns and not famous in their own right, the crusty residents of Sydney were not appreciative of anyone misusing or desecrating places they considered sacred. And the locations of the three murders—the Prince Albert Winery, the Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge—fit into the category of sacred sites.

As the sun climbed higher into the morning sky, the pleasant November day began to give way to a day filled with intrigue and drama. The projected high temperature for the downtown Sydney area was a picture-postcard 31° Celsius (86° Fahrenheit); Bondi Beach was to be a little warmer with mild onshore breezes. There was a high level of security already in place on Philip Street, Macquarie Street, and all around Hyde Park to the south. Barricades had been set up the day before, and both uniformed and plain-clothes police officers were afoot on many blocks around the area. Bomb-sniffing dogs would surprise an occasional person as the dogs seemed to be attracted toward certain types of sandwiches that were inside the office workers’ totes. The startled workers received a calming look from the K-9 officers as the “suspicious” item was revealed.

There were other articles on the inside pages of the newspaper that were essentially a re-hash of previous reports of the murder victims. A sidebar article based on information from published, as well as anonymous, sources chronicled USA Professor Alfred Dunningham’s approach to solving the crime. The article was titled “By the Numbers,” and it re-counted other investigations in which the eccentric math

professor had been used by police forces around the world to help them solve mysterious crimes. There was even some mention of his international seminar series titled, "Detective Work Made Easier Through Mathematics"—free publicity, so it seemed. It appeared that the noted professor had once again been able to assist the police in solving the crime.

0845 hours

Monday, 30 November

Royal Botanic Gardens—Sydney

“**T**he traffic around Supreme Court’s going to be brutal today,” Jamie McDonald said as he and Peter Doogan walked out of the dark glass office building. The two office mates headed out for a smoke break, and they picked up their pace as they walked along Macquarie Street before turning right into the Royal Botanic Gardens. They quickly walked down the path toward their favorite spot. The Boy Extracting Thorn statue was a curious piece, no doubt, but it afforded them great views over the grass and Farm Cove, to the Opera House, and then the Harbour Bridge in the background. They chatted between puffs of smoke, and Jamie was about to comment on the sun shining off the Opera House panels when he noticed a shoe sticking out from a grouping of trees to their left.

“Some lucky chap must’ve been in a rush last night, and he left one of his shoes,” Jamie said as he walked over to it. He gave it a slight kick with his right foot, and was shocked

when it didn't go flying. "Peter, come here!" he exclaimed. "The shoe's not empty; it's still on the guy's foot!"

As Peter went to see what Jamie was excited about, Jamie lifted up the lower branches of the tree to see a shocking sight. "Don't touch anything; let's call the police," he said as he pulled a mobile phone out of his left front pants pocket. It was going to be a while until Jamie and Peter would be able to return to work. But they'd have a good one to tell, and they'd be able to spice up the story with the photos that they each took on their mobiles. They conveniently left the part about the photos out of their stories to the police. Maybe their newfound notoriety would help them out with one or two of the ladies in the office.



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1000 hours

Monday, 30 November

New South Wales Regional Morgue

Detective Inspector Langdon McBride and Professor Alfred Dunningham hurried down the stairs as soon as the word got to Police Headquarters. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Langdon?” the professor asked

McBride put his right index finger up to his pursed lips to remind Dunningham that there was to be no conversation inside the garage building. Dunningham acknowledged the forgotten rule with a nod of his head. As the two men headed out of the garage in the D.I.’s car, Langdon McBride spoke up. “I don’t know, Professor. I understand what you said about Steinberg and the fact that he can’t prove something he didn’t do. But you’ve got to admit that the evidence is heavily stacked against him. As for this one, I guess we’ll find out when we get to the Morgue.” Even though traffic was blocked at a couple intersections, McBride didn’t feel there was an urgency for him to use his siren to make his way through.

"What if this latest one shows a similar pattern?" Dunningham asked. "What will you do then? And what about Steinberg?"

"I stopped playing the 'What if' game a long time ago," McBride replied. "Personally, I hope there's no connection, so we can put all of this to rest. But professionally, we'll just handle it once we know what we have."

Dunningham nodded his head as he closed his eyes to think and to ponder. *'What if this one is connected to the others? Then what?'*

The car jerked to a stop as they arrived at the Morgue and McBride threw the car into Park. "What the?" McBride stopped mid-question.

"How'd the media get alerted?" Professor Dunningham whispered to McBride.

Shaking his head sideways, McBride headed toward the main steps, right towards the waiting news people and photographers.

"Is this another of those murders?" one man shouted.

"I thought you had the killer in jail," another one said.

"No comment," McBride responded. "Excuse us, please," he continued as he extended his arms and hands to make a path through the group of about fifteen folks from the media. Dunningham followed right behind McBride, not making eye contact with any of them.

"How'd the word get out, Roger?" McBride asked the guard as the two men entered the glass doors. He didn't really expect an answer, but it was also a way of greeting the familiar guard, and one of his horse racing pals.

"No idea, Mr. McBride. They just showed up about ten minutes ago, all of them coming at once." Roger picked his racing form back up and started looking at the ponies that were scheduled to run tonight.

"Thanks, Roger," McBride said as he and Dunningham turned right and continued their familiar way to the Lab.

"No worries, mate," the guard replied without taking his eyes off the fifth race. "NoFoolinMe," he mumbled under his breath. "Looking good to make me some money tonight," he continued.

McBride and Dunningham scrubbed and donned gowns, caps, and gloves before entering the chilled examination room. The sudden entrance of the two men surprised Dr. Alkira Grantham as she looked up to see what peripheral movement had caught her attention. "I wasn't expecting you so soon," she said as her heart raced and she caught her breath. As common as it was for someone to enter the normally quiet room while she was examining a body, it always seemed to catch the Chief Medical Examiner off-guard.

"Apparently, news travels fast," Langdon McBride said as he walked to the side of the body opposite to where she was standing. "Have you seen the group of reporters that are already outside? Who's leaked it to the press?"

"No idea," Dr. Grantham replied. "The body's been here for about twenty minutes, but a truck pulling up isn't big news. Plus, I'm the first one to see the body when it's here. Maybe the fellows who found the body made a call."

"Studies have shown that at least sixty percent of the people who've witnessed a crime, or found the evidence of a crime, have falsified their reports, and sent photos or text

messages of what they saw.” A student of numbers and their impact on detective work, Professor Alfred Dunningham had already reached the same conclusion as Dr. Grantham. “And I would bet that if you examined their cell phones, I mean their mobile phones, you would see that they also took pictures of the victim,” he continued.

“Good point,” McBride said as he walked out of the room to extract his mobile phone and place a call to the reporting crime scene officers.

“So, how’s your stay been so far, Professor?” the Chief Medical Officer asked, making small talk while Langdon McBride was still on his call outside the examining room.

“It’s been a lovely stay so far, Doctor,” Dunningham replied. “My only regret is not being able to see a display of your exquisite jewelry. I hear you’re quite the opal expert, and I’ve wanted to get something special for my wife while I’m here.” He paused, and then continued. “You see, she has to tend to all of my roses while I’m away, and I wanted to take a small gift to her. Are you doing any more charity auctions in the next week or so?” As he was asking this last question, Professor Dunningham noticed that she was wearing earrings, something that he’d not seen before in a morgue examining room. He tried to process the earring information, and then he realized that all of the medical examiners that he’d previously met were male; maybe it wasn’t unusual for females to wear them while examining bodies. They were interesting, though—the earrings, the square-shaped mix of opals dangling from her ears.

Fumbling with her instruments, Alkira Grantham appeared confused by the question and the statements from

the visiting professor. A refined and professional woman, she was never at a loss for words; but she was now.

Langdon McBride had finished his call and was about to re-enter the examining room when he looked through the glass door and saw the look on the M.E.'s face. He continued watching because it was a look he'd not seen before. She didn't seem to be as confident as she normally was—did Dunningham say something that bothered her?

"Well," Dr. Grantham began. "I don't do many auctions, Professor, but I'd be happy to go shopping with you to find just the right piece for your wife."

"Thank you," Dunningham responded, and then continued. "Let's dispense with the formalities again since we're both doctors, in a way? It's Alfred, remember? And I'd love the opportunity to have your expert knowledge help me find just the right thing for her."

"Sure," she replied. "How about tomorrow afternoon? That's assuming we don't have another young man come in here. Maybe about 1400 hours; I mean two o'clock."

"I'd love that," he replied just as Langdon McBride opened the door and returned to the examining room.

"You were right, Professor," McBride began as he approached him. "The two fellows who found the body admitted taking pictures of it, and posting them on Twitter. They're being taken in for further questioning." Sensing there was still something unfinished between the professor and the Chief Medical Examiner, Langdon hesitatingly asked, "Did I miss anything about our latest victim?"

"Uh, no; we were waiting for you," Alkira replied. "The Professor and I were talking about opals, and how he wants to find a nice piece for his wife before he leaves."

"That's a great idea," Langdon said. "Maybe you could take him shopping to find just the right thing for her."

"Would you mind?" Dunningham asked her innocently.

"Not at all," she replied. "Maybe about two o'clock tomorrow, if that works for you."

Dunningham glanced at McBride, who shrugged his shoulders. "Sounds good," continued the professor. "I'd pick you up, but I don't have a car."

"I'll pick you up in front of your hotel," Grantham said with a slight smile. "Besides," she continued, "we do drive on the other side of the road."

Langdon noticed the smile, furthering his suspicions of what went on inside the examining room while he was outside. As a student of body language, he waited to see who would make the next move—who would talk first, who would move or gesture first. Those movements were generally telling signs of a hidden behavior or emotion.

The silence in the room was betrayed by the absence of stillness; there was definitely a tension in the air, and Alkira Grantham was the first to respond to it. "Getting back to our victim here," she began. "He's a twenty-five year old white male who seems to have been healthy. His throat's been slashed; there wasn't a tremendous loss of blood, so I'm thinking right now that he was murdered at the spot where he was found." She paused before continuing, as she expected the next information to be impactful, which it was. "There are some similarities to the three previous mur-

ders—his quick tox screen shows an elevated level of alcohol, and,” she paused and then stopped.

“And?” McBride asked.

“And,” she re-started, “he has a tattoo on his left arm.” Her head lowered as if she was resigned to the next question.

“Like the other tattoos?” Dunningham asked before McBride could get those same words out of his mouth.

Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Alkira Grantham paused, looked at Detective Inspector Langdon McBride and Professor Alfred Dunningham, then looked back at the covered body, exhaled deeply and began. “Yes, the tattoo is the same pattern as before. It’s a yellow triangle with the numerals zero one inside.”

McBride and Dunningham looked at each other in surprise. The Professor wanted to say something, but he knew it wasn’t his place. “I’ve got to see it,” McBride said in disbelief.

As Dr. Grantham slowly pulled the sheet back, the neck wound was the first thing to catch the men’s attention; it was fairly horrifying, and it looked pretty brutal. But it was the tattoo on the left arm that dropped their jaws.

“Have you compared,” McBride began, but he was cut off before he could finish.

“Here are the photos from the first three tattoos, and you can see that this one is just like the others,” Grantham answered in anticipation of his question.

With his eyebrows raised in a questioning look, McBride looked at Professor Dunningham, who shrugged his shoulders and gave a responding *I don’t know* look. McBride refocused his look to Dr. Grantham. “This can’t be for real,” he said as he slowly shook his head in disbelief.

"I don't know what to tell you, McBride," she said. "I thought you had your killer. Everything seemed so solid, and then this chap shows up. With all that's been put out there on Twitter and who knows where else, there's no way you're going to be able to keep this quiet."

"I'm feeling a major headache coming on," McBride said as he closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. The pain was not going to go away because the real pain had not yet arrived. It would come, later.

Professor Dunningham stared at the victim's tattoo, seemingly in disbelief.

"What do we tell Farnsworth now," McBride asked. "And, what do we tell the judge who, at this very moment, is setting a trial date for Harold Steinberg?"

"Perhaps," the professor began in a measured voice, "the tattoos and numerology aren't about the date. Remember when I first mentioned the idea of descending squares, when the three we had were four-squared, three-squared, and two-squared? If we now include this new tattoo, we have four-squared, three-squared, two-squared, and one-squared."

"But," McBride began, "we had, I mean, we have a suspect already in court for the first three murders. What does this new sequence tell us?"

Alfred Dunningham, Professor Computer Science and a distinguished friend of numerous police forces, was about to say something that he really hated to say; he felt it was a sign of weakness to utter these words. "Maybe I was wrong," he began. "If the tattoo numbers are about descending squares instead of the date, maybe we don't have the killer in custody after all."

“No; don’t say that,” McBride said, not wanting to hear what he’d just heard.

0830 hours

Tuesday, 01 December

Lord Nelson Hotel, Sydney, Australia

The all-too familiar headlines on the *Sydney Tribune* once again announced another murder, but with an accusation this time—**Another One; Aren't We Done Yet?** The article covered the discovery of the young man's body found in the Royal Botanic Gardens, but the details of the murders were scant. There were no official comments, although the photos that had been posted on Twitter were included. Fortunately, for the police and the family, the quality of the mobile phone photos, combined with the shadows of the overhanging tree branches where the body was found, made it difficult to see the details of the slit throat or of the tattoo.

Professor Alfred Dunningham had read the article while having breakfast at the hotel. He was curious to see what connection would be made between the recent murder and Harold Steinberg, the man accused of the first three murders. The only mention of Steinberg seemed like an after-the-fact paragraph about his court hearing the previous day;

this told Professor Dunningham that nothing about the latest tattoo had been leaked to the media.

As he saw Langdon McBride's car approach the hotel, Dunningham wondered what the rest of the day would bring, including the shopping excursion with Dr. Grantham. Would there be any more surprises? What would they tell the judge who'd just bound Harold Steinberg over for trial? What would they tell the parents?

While those were police questions, Alfred Dunningham knew that he would be subject to some questioning of his own. If the first three tattoos weren't about a specific date, what did they mean? And how did this latest tattoo tie in? He felt the invisible presence of tension as he opened the car door, and he smiled as he sat down, attached his seat belt, and closed the door.

"You look happy," McBride said. "What do you know that I don't know?"

"Good morning to you, too," Dunningham responded. "I feel it's going to be a good day. Besides, I'm going shopping for opals for my wife. Let's go see what new information we have to put into this amazing puzzle that's been building."

McBride put the car into gear, and drove toward headquarters. He didn't know why the professor thought it was going to be a good day; it had already started out as a bad day for him, and he had a feeling it was going to get worse.

0900 hours

Wednesday, 02 December

New South Wales Police Headquarters

“My patience is just about all used up!” Police Commissioner Colin Martin began in his usual booming voice. A microphone wasn’t necessary as he could have been heard throughout the entire floor if the doors hadn’t been shut, but it was standard procedure to use a microphone so that a recording could be made. He continued. “You were so sure that you had the killer; the judge has set a trial date, and now you’re telling me that this latest murder fits the same pattern as the first three? What’s going on?” This last question wasn’t about getting an answer; it was to let the elite group know that he was frustrated, and angry, with the investigation and its results.

The handful of people in the room sat in silence as they knew Martin had more to say before any of them would, or should, say anything. “The mayor is going to give me a royal butt-chewing this afternoon because his office is getting tons of calls, and many of them are demanding that I be replaced. I want answers, solid undisputable answers. And I

want them right now!" The last exclamation was the signal that he was done, for now anyway. Colin Martin would, of course, have the last word.

Detective Chief Inspector Graeme Farnsworth waited until Martin sat down. Farnsworth grimaced slightly as he stood up and went to the podium. Knowing that the recording could be used for various internal purposes, he opened his notebook and began to lay out the sequence of events of the murders, the investigation, the evidence, the arrest of Harold Steinberg—everything, including the latest murder, that led up to that very moment. He expressed total confidence in his teams, and he acknowledged the insight and the direction from the noted Professor Alfred Dunningham. Farnsworth dealt in facts, nothing that could be disputed or argued. It was as if he was a court prosecutor laying out a case before the jury. In this situation, however, he wasn't leading up to a particular conclusion; he was just setting the stage for those who would follow.

The next to speak was Chief Medical Examiner Alkira Grantham. She wore a conservative black pantsuit, black flats, and accompanying jewelry of opals and black pearls. "These have been very difficult deaths for me to work on," she began. "Each of these young men," and she paused ever so briefly, "had a future life in front of him. Three of them were twenty-five, and one was twenty-six, when their lives were needlessly extinguished. There were similarities that make it appear to be the work of a single killer, or group of killers. And yet there are also some differences that make you ask the question, 'Was there some meaning behind that?' Let's go in to the details from my reports, and then Detective Inspector

McBride will report on what his teams have uncovered and determined as a result of their investigations.”

“The first murder was a hanging that took place in the Prince Albert Winery. I’ve determined that the time of death was approximately twelve to fifteen hours prior to the discovery of the body. The victim had a recent yellow tattoo in the shape of a triangle on his left upper arm, and the numerals one six were inside the tattoo. His blood-alcohol count was significant, although there was no other evidence of drinking. There were no signs of trauma on the body, nor were there any other tattoos or signs of drug use. Aside from the ligature marks on the neck, a photograph of the victim would look like he was just sleeping.

“The second murder victim apparently was buried alive at Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve. I say apparently because the strangulation marks on his neck were only minor surface bruises, his airway was unobstructed, and the lungs were normal. I’ve estimated his time of death to be about ten hours prior to discovery. He also had a tattoo that was a yellow triangle on his upper left arm, and it contained the numerals zero nine. There was a small amount of alcohol residue in his system, and being buried in that soil created some bruising.

“Victim number three was stabbed and tied to stay upright on the Harbour Bridge. He also had a yellow tattoo of a triangle on his left upper arm, and it contained the numerals zero four. Similar to the previous two victims, this man had some alcohol in his system, and there were no other abnormal markings on his body aside from the single stab wound. Also his time of death was about nine hours prior to the dis-

covery of the body.” Alkira paused, removed the cap on her bottle of water, and took a sip. She swallowed hard before she continued.

“The fourth victim’s throat was slashed and there were some particles of tree leaves that had become lodged in the blood. He had a yellow triangle tattoo that was similar to the one on the other victims, and his contained the numerals zero one. I estimated the time of his death to be ten to twelve hours prior to discovery. The rest of his body was clean, except for some indentations on his upper back area that might have been caused by pebbles on the ground where he was found. Alcohol was present in his system, but not in an excessive amount.”

Dr. Alkira Grantham closed her binder, and looked up to the others in the room. “Do you have any questions for me?” she asked.

“What was the composition of the ink or whatever was used on the tattoos and the numbers?” Police Commissioner Martin asked.

“Each of the yellow triangles was made with a soluble soy-based ink, and the black numerals were done with an ink similar to what you’d find for a fountain pen,” the Medical Examiner responded without consulting her notes.

“Was it the same ink in all four of the tattoos, and the same ink for all of the numbers?” the Commissioner continued.

“Yes,” Dr. Grantham replied immediately. She waited for another question from the Commissioner, but there was none. She looked at the others; none had a question, and so she went back to her seat.

Detective Inspector Langdon McBride felt the heat in the room as he stepped to the podium. His boss, DCI Farnsworth had given facts, as had the Chief Medical Examiner. He now had to give opinions and results of the investigations. The question that he knew he wouldn't have the answer for was sure to be asked: Did you arrest the wrong man? His approach was to diffuse that issue immediately.

"Based on the facts that we had at the time, we felt that the arrest of Harold Steinberg was the proper action. Let me walk you through the highlights of our investigations, and show you what we did, why we think we were right, and why Harold Steinberg is the perpetrator in all four of the killings." The audible gasps and the quizzical looks clearly indicated that announcement was indeed news to everyone else in the room. How could Steinberg possibly be the killer of victim number four when he'd been in custody?

"I know what you're thinking," McBride said. "You're thinking that there's no way for him to stab the latest victim when he was in custody at the time of death as stated by our M.E. Let me get you there, but first let's bring all the information into perspective." He paused, looked at Farnsworth, and continued. "Look at these photographs from each of the crime scenes." He let the photographs from each crime scene stay on the screen for about five seconds before moving to the next one. "Each crime scene was clean, with a slight exception to this latest one. The first three had been cleaned of all footprints and other signs of activity, while there were some traces of footprints, and a shred of ripped clothing at the fourth one."

Alkira Grantham's eyes widened as she heard that piece of information for the first time. It was also news to everyone else in the room. "Who all knows that piece of information about the piece of clothing there at the Gardens' crime scene?" asked Commissioner Martin. "Because I wasn't told that," he continued.

"My team, plus the people in this room now know that," McBride answered. "We kept that a secret on purpose because of possibly endangering the case against Steinberg."

"But," the Commissioner continued, "you said that Steinberg committed the fourth murder, and he's been in custody, or in your presence, since early Sunday afternoon. How could he have done it?"

"I'm getting to that, Commissioner," McBride said, and then he paused. "After we review the investigations that we did so the recording has all the main details." He then proceeded to lay out all the activities of Detective Teams Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. Graeme Farnsworth appeared to be surprised to hear of the surreptitious activities that Roland Thatcher and his Charlie Team did while looking into the activities of all the police officers who had in-depth knowledge of the medical examinations. McBride reported on the various activities that Lisa McPherson's Bravo Team did looking into all gang activities, tattoo parlours, and anything else that would shed light on the scant evidence that they had for each murder. And finally, he detailed what Detective Glen Roberts' Alpha Team did in conducting surveillance and background checks. None of these activities, he concluded, uncovered any organized crime involvement or any other reason to believe that the murders were committed by

more than one person. Langdon McBride was making his strong case for the single-killer theory. And a convincing theory it was.

He then introduced the numbers from the tattoos, and how distinguished Professor Alfred Dunningham, had discovered the link between the tattoo numbers and the locations of the murders, leading them to Landeen Bush. It was in Landeen Bush, at Burningwood Cemetery, that they saw the three black roses on the grave of young Jacob Steinberg, who had been murdered on 16 September 2004, whose date was equivalent to the three tattoo numbers 16, 09, and 04. Jacob's brother Harold Steinberg acknowledged placing the roses on the grave, but he'd fabricated a story for the reason behind the three roses, when it was quite clear that the three roses were to signify the three young men that Harold had murdered in revenge for his own brother's death.

Commissioner Colin Martin adjusted his position in his chair, looked at his watch, and cleared his throat. The quizzical look that he shot McBride clearly indicated his increasing lack of patience. He wanted answers, not long drawn-out stories.

"Yes, Harold Steinberg has been in police custody since Sunday afternoon, and the M.E.'s estimated time of death for victim number four was while he was in our custody. So how could he have done it? We have no hard physical evidence that Harold Steinberg actually committed the first three murders, but we do believe that he was involved. A couple minutes ago I said that Harold Steinberg had three men murdered, not that he murdered them. Our fourth victim, an acquaintance of each of the first three victims, was

the actual killer of those three young men. The tattoo numbers did signify Steinberg's brother's date of death, but it was this other young man who did the killing. Then, to clean everything up, Steinberg had already made arrangements to have him killed. He was the one thing standing in the way of having everything cleaned up. That is why his tattoo is number one. It was just coincidence that Harold Steinberg was in custody at the time of the killing; his plan was to be in Landeen Bush, where he'd been while the other three murders had taken place."

Commissioner Martin looked at his number two man, Graeme Farnsworth. "So you're saying that this Steinberg chap didn't actually kill the first three, but he hired someone to do them? And then he hired someone else to kill the killer? Are you expecting the judge, the Mayor, and me to believe that story? That fellow isn't smart enough to tie a shoe, let alone put together a plan like that!" he exclaimed.

"That's the information that we have, and the results of our investigations are consistent with that finding." Graeme Farnsworth didn't really believe what he'd just told the Commissioner, but he had to support Langdon McBride—he just wished that he'd heard this before now.

Martin turned to Professor Dunningham, who'd been sitting silently, taking it all in, and observing the body language that had been exhibited. "Is that what all your number mumbo-jumbo came up with? Three numbers become a date, and the locations turn into some remote bush town, and from that you pick this Steinberg fellow to be the killer?"

"Not exactly, Commissioner," Dunningham replied.



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0930 hours

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New South Wales Police Headquarters

“**W**hat do you mean by not exactly?” Commissioner Martin asked as the silence in the room became even more deafeningly quiet. The others in the room continued their fixated looks toward Professor Alfred Dunningham, the distinguished numbers man who’d been brought to Sydney to help solve the three “Famous Sites Murders” that had now become four.

“Well,” Dunningham began as he pushed back his chair, stood up, and walked purposefully to the podium. “I don’t have any photographs or fancy slides to show you, but I think I can give you all the information you need to be able to see what I have to say.” He paused, but it wasn’t necessary as no one was going to interrupt him or ask him any questions. He used the short verbal break to look at each person in the room, to look into their eyes, to notice any change in body language. What he saw reaffirmed his conclusions.

“As you know,” he continued, “I’m a strong believer in the value of mathematics to point the way for many things in

our universe, and one of those things is human behavior. We talk in patterns; we use sets of three in our descriptions, and we unknowingly mirror our thoughts and actions with numbers. Such has been the case here with these murders, and most of you in this room believe that, which is why you invited me here. You wanted me to peel away the mystery that was shrouded in the numbers, but you thought that the only relevant numbers were those in the tattoos on your victims. While they're important, and they're vitally important, they don't tell the entire story just by themselves. A number, you see, really has no meaning when it stands alone, without context. Is thirty-three percent a good number or a bad number? It's neither unless you're talking about the batting average of a baseball player, then it's a pretty good number. But if you're talking about the failure rate of electrical parts, then it's a bad number. So context is important, but it's not the only thing to consider.

"Take the numbers that were part of the four tattoos; you'll recall that they were the numbers sixteen, nine, four, and one, respectively. Again, by themselves, those numbers have no meaning. After the first three murders, the numbers sixteen, nine, and four looked like a pattern for the way you represent the date here in Australia—date, month, and year. A supposition that I gave was that there could be some significance to those numbers as in 16 September 2004. Then the locations of the murders—Prince Albert Winery, Tooey Rocks Nature Preserve, and your famous Sydney Harbor Bridge—seemed to be another set of clues. From this I developed a proposal that they could be translated to 'Grapes to Bridges,' which was the name of a book by author Langdon

Bush. Looking on one of your maps, I saw a place called Landeen Bush, and Mr. McBride's teams looked into the significance of 16 September 2004 in Landeen Bush. There was, indeed, a death that took place there that date, and it was a young lad named Jacob Steinberg."

As Dunningham stopped for a moment to take a breath, he noticed a slight smile on the face of Langdon McBride. It seemed as if the professor was restating the case that McBride had presented minutes earlier, that Harold Steinberg was the mastermind behind the killings as revenge for his brother's death. Dunningham noticed a quick glance from McBride to Dr. Grantham who gave a quick approval nod.

"But, there are some other numbers we should also look at," Dunningham said as he resumed his explanations. "The blood-alcohol counts referred to by your esteemed Medical Examiner were essentially insignificant. None of those counts were high enough to indicate an elevated level of intoxication for any of the victims. In layman's terms, they were not drunk, which raises the question 'How could seemingly fit young men be killed without any other visible signs of force or trauma?' Keep that thought in mind for a while longer.

"One question that Mr. Farnsworth and his detectives seem to have answered correctly was if the murders were all done by the same person. They were committed by the same person even though some of the evidence reported by Mr. McBride earlier might indicate otherwise. So, who did the killings?" He paused again, this time for effect. "Harold Steinberg is a very logical suspect. After all, his brother died

back on 16 September 2004, and so he definitely could have had motive, the motive of revenge. And the tattoo numbers in the first three murders clearly created that tight linkage with the date, and the murder locations could be translated to his brother's place of death. So, Mr. Steinberg got revenge by killing the three young men who'd killed his brother, and he was locked up, given a hearing before the judge, and was bound over for trial. All's well that ends well, right?

"The only problem is that fourth victim whose tattoo was strikingly similar to the first three. You heard Dr. Grantham say that the inks were the same, and so now there's a fourth killing, one that Mr. Steinberg couldn't have done because he was locked up at the stated time of death. You heard Mr. McBride's assertion that Harold Steinberg didn't do the actual killings, but that he orchestrated them—the first three being carried out by the fourth victim, who was then apparently killed by yet another accomplice of Mr. Steinberg. It doesn't fit, regardless of how much you want it to.

"Mr. Steinberg was arrested because of plenty of circumstantial evidence, yet there's no physical evidence linking him to any of the crimes. As he said, and as court defense attorneys say quite often, 'You can't prove something that didn't happen.' Even though you want to believe that he was involved in these killings, either directly or indirectly, Harold Steinberg is innocent of everything except perhaps not responding to his brother's need for help. But he did not kill any of these young men, nor did he have anything to do with their murders. All charges against him should be

dropped, and he should be released from custody, with an apology.”

“What!” screamed the Commissioner. “You’re the one who said those numbers were the date, and you gave us the name of the town where the original murder took place. You even said the evidence pointed directly at Harold Steinberg, and now you’re saying to release him? Farnsworth was right; you are crazy!” Colin Martin’s neck and face were flushed from his anger; there was no way he was going to tell the judge that his department had made a mistake, especially in this case of such high visibility.

“Commissioner Martin,” Dunningham began in a soft tone. “I am not a police officer, and I have no legal jurisdiction here or anywhere else in the world. But I am 100% confident that Mr. Steinberg had nothing to do with these murders. I know you want quick answers, but just wait a few more minutes, and I think you’ll have what you want.” Professor Dunningham stopped, wanting to allow the Commissioner to either respond or relax on his own terms; he relaxed.

“If not Harold Steinberg, then who could have done the killings? The neatness and the precision of these murders tell us that they were done by a very intelligent and powerful person. After all, each of the young victims, ages twenty-five and twenty-six, was not a weakling. Their parents said they had no enemies, no significant vices other than the typical partying, and there’d been no recent changes in their moods or behaviors. So these killings were situational and purposeful, and they were done by someone we know.” Audible gasps filled the almost-empty room as he made that accusation.

"Someone we know?" an incredulous Langdon McBride asked.

"Yes, indeed," Dunningham answered. "How about you, Mr. McBride? You have plenty of answers for how all four murders were done, and you were the lead detective on all four of them, right?"

"Right," McBride answered nervously. "But I've investigated plenty of murders; that doesn't mean anything."

"That's correct," Dunningham said. "It doesn't mean anything, taken by itself. But you have all the knowledge of the killings, thanks to your, how should we say it, personal relationship with Dr. Grantham." McBride and Grantham looked at each other in astonishment as the other eyes in the room ping-ponged between the two of them.

"Certainly that's not a big surprise to everyone, is it?" Apparently it was.

"So Dr. Grantham is able to feed information to you that only she would know, and you, of course, have knowledge that only the killer would know. That made it pretty convenient, didn't it?"

"You're crazy," Langdon McBride said in astonishment. "Why would I kill these young men; what would be in it for me?"

"Ah, good question," Dunningham answered. "Many men in their forties have been known to have various relationships, and some have felt the need to eliminate competition, or even lovers, when the situations became dicey or compromised. And what about the times that you were conveniently gone from the office, and the stories you told your boss were a little different from the truth? You see, just

like with Harold Steinberg, there are pieces of evidence that could be all drawn together to point to you as the killer.”

“This is absolute nonsense!” McBride yelled as he slammed his chair back and got up. “I’m not listening to this crap anymore.” He turned and hastily headed toward the door.

“Get back here,” Farnsworth ordered as he worked to get out of his chair, prepared to chase him if necessary. His right hand instinctively went to his gun belt.

“Hand off your weapon, Graeme!” barked the Commissioner. “Stop right there, McBride; you won’t get anywhere.”

Langdon McBride stopped, and turned around. “This guy’s insane,” he said. “Yes, Alkira and I have been seeing each other, but that’s it. And I’ve never been out with another man. What fantasy world do you live in, Professor, because it’s certainly not the real world?”

“I do, indeed, live in the real world, Mr. McBride, as do you. I never said you were the killer; I just said there was evidence to point to you, just as there’s evidence to point to Mr. Steinberg. But neither of you is the killer. So, please come back and have a seat. Your reaction, however, was quite informative.”

As Langdon McBride made his way back to his chair, Professor Dunningham cleared his throat and took a drink from his bottle of water. “Now,” he said, “let’s bring this messy matter to a conclusion. How many of you, besides Dr. Grantham, read the toxicology reports on each of the victims?” he asked as he opened a folder and pulled out four sheets of paper. “Exactly; that’s not your job. Remember what Dr. Grantham said about the alcohol levels in each of

the victims? It was an amount indicating some consumption, but not enough to be drunk. But there's more to it than that.

"The quick tox screens pointed to alcohol, specifically vodka, as being in the blood stream of each of the victims. The full report tells a different story. As we know, alcohol is composed of Carbon, Hydrogen, and Oxygen molecules. So the natural assumption is to say that vodka, or some other alcoholic drink, is present when there is the presence of this specific combination of Carbon, Hydrogen, and Oxygen in the blood. There were also traces of potassium and sulfur in each victim, and they were in amounts that are not normal. I sent a copy of these reports to one of my FBI friends in the States, and he confirmed what I had thought."

Professor Alfred Dunningham drew in a deep breath before continuing. "Here is what can give results that are consistent with each of these toxicology reports. The victim is first given an injection of phenylethyl benzylglyceride that blocks the reasoning and cognitive functions of the brain but does not impair physical functions. So the victim is actually able to walk on his own to the location of his death and not even know what's going on. That drug, by itself, is not fatal, and will eventually dissipate from the system within 36 hours. However, if an additional drug, potassium ketone sulfate, is given within 12 hours, it will mask the first drug, and the combination of the two drugs is fatal and will appear as an overdose of drinking too much alcohol. So while the result is a lower blood-alcohol count than normally considered for intoxication, the natural conclusion is that the victim was drunk. In reality, it was a combination of these two obscure drugs that killed each of these four men."

"But you said the killer was someone we know," Graeme Farnsworth injected. "Who would know about these drugs except for a chemist? And I don't know any chemists."

"But you do," Dunningham replied. "Let's continue. I had the pleasure yesterday of going shopping with your talented and intelligent Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Alkira Grantham. She was kind enough to help me pick out some nice opal jewelry for my wife. The truth is that my wife doesn't like opals, but I wanted to spend some time alone with her, without inviting any more jealousy from Mr. McBride. You see, I had this theory that Dr. Grantham's fantasy with opals has more to do than just with the jewels themselves; it also has to do with her heritage, the Aborigines. Yesterday, she wore a pair of square earrings that she said she designed, something I'd already surmised. The pattern on each earring was four, three, two, one, two, three, four. Remember the numbers in the tattoos? They were sixteen, nine, four, and one, which are equivalent to four-squared, three-squared, two-squared, and one-squared.

"I want you to also recall the way that Dr. Grantham referred to the numbers in the tattoos—she called them numerals, not numbers, and she cited them as one six, zero nine, zero four, and zero one. She was trying to disassociate the numbers with her own penchant for squares and numbers—squares as in her own earring design, and numbers as in the number of jewels she used in that same design. So let me tell you what happened."

He didn't pause this time; he just wanted to get to the final conclusion. "Your Dr. Grantham is highly proud, and extremely protective, of her Aboriginal background. There is

nothing wrong with that; in fact, I applaud it. However, in her zeal to keep a true heritage, she didn't want there to be any inter-mingling of non-Aborigines with her race, meaning that she objected to seeing male Caucasians dating female Aborigines. This angered her so much that she decided to put a stop to this inter-racial dating by killing the white men, and she did this by attracting them to her with her looks and her charm, and then injecting them with the first drug, the phenylethyl benzylglyceride. The men were able to walk, but didn't realize they were walking to their own death. Once they were in the place she'd pre-selected, she gave them the injection of the second drug, potassium ketone sulfate. This produced the fatal effect that would not be readily apparent in quick tox screens.

"Why she picked the locations she did other than to make sure that the deaths received their proper attention, I don't know. But, Alkira Grantham is the one who killed those four young men."

Langdon McBride's head snapped to the left to look at Alkira, whose right hand slipped into her purse, pulled something out, and popped it into her mouth. She then took a quick sip of water and swallowed. "Someone call the paramedics," McBride yelled as he rushed to her side.

"It's too late," Dunningham said, knowing what she had done.

As Langdon approached her chair, he saw the glimmer of her eyes fade as the life in them slipped away. He grasped her hand, but it was just a limp form of flesh and bone that he clutched so desperately as tears began to run down his cheeks.

About the Author

Stuart Gustafson loves to travel, and he channels this passion, as well as his vast knowledge of travel, into mystery novels set in exciting locations. The holder of the U.S. Registered Trademark *America's International Travel Expert*[®], he has visited over 55 countries, 149 cruise ports, and has his Million-Mile Flier card from a major U.S.-based airline. He's frequently invited by the cruise lines to sail with them to exotic locations to speak about the art, the history, and the culture of the cruise destinations. He makes the talks come alive, and thus the guests are more knowledgeable and comfortable as they venture out to new places.

With a BA in Mathematics and an MBA, Stuart worked in high technology fields for twenty-nine years in Southern California and in Idaho before taking early retirement in 2007. Since then, he's been able to spend more time writing and, of course, traveling. He even took his then 90-year-old mother on a 14-day New Zealand cruise, her last major trip. He and his wife Darlene spend two to four weeks each year in Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo, at the very tip of Mexico's Baja California peninsula, a delightful location that served as the basis for his Amazon Best Selling and Top Rated debut mystery novel *Missing in MEXICO*.

He and his wife, and their rescue dog, live in Boise, Idaho, when they're not traveling somewhere. Find out more about Stuart's books as well as travel information and tips at www.StuartGustafson.com¹.

1. <https://www.StuartGustafson.com>

What's Next for Professor Dunningham?

Having just helped another major police force solve a baffling mystery in Sydney, Australia, Alfred Dunningham, PhD, hopped on the next available non-stop flight back to San Francisco. The weather in the Napa Valley had gotten a little chillier, as he expected that it might given the time of year. His faithful wife Sylvia managed to keep most of his precious roses blooming while he was away—the sight and the aroma of the roses were the best present he could receive. She also had a perfectly brewed cup of tea for him just as he entered the house; he could tell she'd done it just right because the taste was exquisite.

He and Sylvia then will be heading to Paris, France, in the summer for one of the annual symposiums that he attends each year. They weren't able to spend the entire week there as he was once again called away, this time to solve a string of missing persons from a cruise ship. The entire story unfolds in Book #2 in the Mathematics Professor Alfred Dunningham, PhD series. You're invited to read the story in *Disappearances in the MEDITERRANEAN*.

Books by Stuart Gustafson

Fiction:

Missing in MEXICO

Mathematics Professor Alfred Dunningham, PhD series

The Math Professor, a short story introducing Professor Dunningham

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