
CHAPTER NINE

Quarter to eleven, almost 20 hours since Spud Murphy had been pronounced dead. Jodie Briggs, transferred from the Frankston to the Alfred over night. Critical but stable. Metho had spent the day speaking to the Accident Investigation Squad followed by the Internal Investigations Division. Although they'd been the ones doing most of the talking. Then it was a trip to the Force psychologist, where she did most of the listening. After that it was some pills, three shots of Johnny Walker and sleep about 8.00 p.m. Night shift would have to do without him for the rest of the week. No-one blamed him for not coming in. No-one blamed him for the accident either.

'It was just that ... ,' said Badger, standing in the Sweet Chariot with a can in his hand and a jacket over his uniform, '... an accident.'

Wallace was out there too. So were another nine of the Kingston police, including what was left of the night shift crew: Andy Carter, and Dave Gully, who thought it was the only way he could stop the nightmares that came when ever he closed his eyes.

'Thanks for coming in, Brian,' said Senior Sergeant Miller whose wife had said it would be good if he showed a bit of support.

'These are the times when we've got to stick together,' said Badger. 'When I heard about the prang on the news this morning, it was all I could do, ring up and volunteer to finish the night shift. I knew there was no way Metho could finish the week. I know I couldn't if it had happened to me.'

'Such a fucking hero,' Twang whispered to Fats Griffen, both of whom had hung around since knocking off at four.

Wallace heard. He looked at Twang who winked back. He turned towards Badger who was finishing his can. When they rang him, Wallace had said yes with no hesitation either. The accident had been on his mind all day. He hadn't even met Spud but he still felt for him. And Jodie... When he'd heard the news it was like someone had ripped the bottom of his stomach out with a giant pair of pliers.

The third last of the up trains rattled along. It's horn piercing the air. Strongy wiped a tear from his eye. 'Remember that time me and Spud spent half an hour directing traffic around the boom-gates at Station Street? If Spud was ever going to die on the job it should have been that night. There he was, the stringy git, waving the cars through and then all of a sudden he yells out, "Strongy, I've got me foot stuck in the fucking tracks." Well, what the fuck was I supposed to do? The 7.45 from Frankston was rattling down and I wasn't going to jump out and stop it. Then all of a sudden, Spud's leapt at me, out of the path of the train. Well, I said, "That was fucking lucky, Spud." And he said, "Get fucked Strongy! Have you seen what happened to me boot?"

‘Then I looked over and there’s Spud, standing there with only one shoe on. On his other foot there was a bloody black sock with a fat toe sticking out the end, then halfway down the track I see his missing boot, torn in half by the Met. Spud hopped down to pick up the pieces and I’ve almost pissed meself.

‘But, you know what? The prick couldn’t see the funny side of it, just ‘cause he reckons they were new boots and he wasn’t due for another pair for another eighteen months. He coulda got run over by that fucking train but that’s all he cared about. A new pair of fucking boots that we get for nothing anyway.’

Peace Piper had heard the story before but still laughed. Then Fats Griffen gave Peace a nudge. ‘Hey, Peace,’ he said, ‘how about the time you sticky-taped up the shit-house?’

‘Me?’ said Peace. ‘More like you.’

‘Okay,’ said Fats, ‘I did it but you were there.’

‘What happened?’ asked Wallace. He somehow felt like he was allowed to ask. And they let him.

‘Spud had gone to the thinking room with the paper and when he does that you know he’s gonna be out of action for at least half an hour,’ said Peace.

‘Nothing wrong with that,’ said Fats as he grabbed another can.

Peace moved with laughter as he wiped a tear from his eye.

Fats cracked his can and started talking with well lubricated lips, ‘I’ll take over from here because Peace tends to leave the good bits out,’ he said.

‘Go right ahead,’ said Peace. He knew Fats wanted to tell the story. Peace just wanted to remember.

‘Alright,’ said Fats. ‘So, Spud’s locked himself in the shit-house and me and Peace have grabbed the sticky-tape and put it all over the doorway from the toilet to the mess room. Sticky side inwards. Then we’ve got one of the stink bombs for fumigating the cells, lit it and slid it under the door. About five seconds later and out runs Spud, hitching at his pants, slap-bang into the sticky-tape. Looked like some kind of spastic spider as he tried to free himself.’

Wallace laughed like the others. It was hurting inside, the laughter was helping. And somehow Wallace felt like he knew Spud. He wanted to hear the stories. But he also wanted to hear about Jodie. There wasn’t much Jodie talk, she’d only been a part of them a short time. And anyway, she was just Jodie—and alive. But he wouldn’t forget.

‘C’mon, young Wally,’ said Badger. ‘Five past, we better get inside and get to work.’

‘Yeah, go for it,’ Twang said to Wallace. ‘Just be careful, mate.’

Assistant Commissioner Robin Goodfellow felt the moist veins at the side of his head. They needed a rub. His whole body needed a rub. He felt like shit. It had been a day that felt about as long as sitting through a Kevin Kostner film. It started at 4.30 a.m. when Reg Nicholls, Assistant Commissioner, Operations and the night shift duty commissioner, had rung to let him know there'd been a fatal collision involving a police pursuit. Just a courtesy call he'd said. Also managing to throw in that at least it wasn't another police shooting. Goodfellow hadn't laughed. Not even a curl of the lips.

Next, and promptly at 8.30 as requested, Superintendent Rich delivered his briefing paper on the missing firearm from Bayside. Goodfellow took it and might as well have used it to wipe the dags from his hairy backside. But he knew he wouldn't get anymore so he didn't bother asking. What he had would be good enough to please the Chief Commissioner, although that incident would probably take second fiddle to the pursuit now.

At 9.00, he got the call from the Chief's office that a conference had been called for all members of Command. At 9.45 he arrived at police headquarters and went straight to the top floor. No time for coffee and no Arnott's Cream Assorted on white saucers either.

At 11.00, Goodfellow had been tasked to handle all press inquiries regarding the firearm and accident. Not because the responsibility for investigation fell under his command and definitely not because he could play the press like a clarinet, but because they had both happened in the Kingston sub-division. It hadn't taken long for the whispers to reach the Chief that maybe that sub-division was suffering from bad management. Things like that the Chief didn't need and he needed someone to tell the press that.

At 12.15, Goodfellow received a call from the secretary of the Police Association. Just another courtesy call, but one that implied it would be in the best interests of everyone if Force Command took the side of the membership and not that of the civil libertarians.

At 1.00 he managed a cup-a-soup. At 1.18 he was called to the Media Director's office and told he'd been booked to appear on *Speak the Truth*. At 2.30, after driving around the city blocks thinking to himself that maybe he should have stayed a Chief Superintendent, he got back to his office. There, he rang his wife and said he wouldn't be home until late.

Between 4.00 and 5.00 he tried ringing Rich—all he got was a computerised voice mail. He'd gone over and over the notes the media director had given him on the dangers of police pursuits. That was to be the topic for the night and Pedigrew had gladly supplied a list of questions—he always did—but Goodfellow also knew there'd be more up Pedigrew's sleeve—there always was.

And after 7.30 a white and sweaty Goodfellow took a breather in front of the green room mirror. He'd just learnt what had been up the sleeve: the Bayside gun, police shootings, bikie wars, and the death of a fellow police officer after a chase where the offender still eluded apprehension. The words of Pedigrew ran through his head like a clockwork train: "Assistant Commissioner Goodfellow, I ask you, on behalf of the people of Melbourne, if Victoria Police cannot even look after their own, then who the hell is going to look after the public?" Toot-toot, all aboard.

It was 11.21 and those words were still stuck in his aching head. The Chief and already rung, and so had the secretary of the Association. Goodfellow needed to lie down, with his eyes closed. And what he didn't need were any more early morning courtesy calls.

Wallace wasn't going to sleep. Almost half past eleven and Badger decided that he should work the car with him. Inside would be Chicken, who had been volunteered to make up the numbers by Peace. It'd be the best way to keep his head out of a bottle of scotch or bottle of sleeping pills, or both Peace had reckoned. Chicken needed something to keep his mind off his missus and kids and hadn't really argued, just so long as he could stay indoors. Andy Carter and Dave Gully were on the van—a replacement for the one that was still on a flat-top at the Transport Branch workshops. The mechanics would take it and put it in the corner of the yard, out of harm's way at least until after the inquest. But that wouldn't stop people looking at it, thinking. They were the things that would be keeping Wallace awake.

And things like Sergeant Badger.

Badger lit a cigarette and almost straight away the grey ash started to fall from the end, forming little mountains amongst the creases of his uniform. 'It was good you came in like you have, young Wally. You know, doing stuff like this is what impresses your work mates.'

Wallace wanted to tell him the real reason, but he didn't think his dead father had anything to do with some policeman he'd only known for three days. 'I just wanted to help out, sergeant.'

'Don't have to call me that, young Wally. Brian'll do.' Badger turned the car onto Beach Road, heading north. The nicotine mist making his eyes squint and water.

They drove past the car park where they'd watched the incoming tide threaten the soles of Bulldog's Blundstones. Wallace stared out the window. It was dark and everything looked so cold.

Things were cold in the rear yard of the Diablos' chicken wired fortress. That was until Hedgeburner threw another pile of wood into the half 44 gallon drum. Orange sparks spluttered and spun their way towards the stars. There were twelve Diablos out there, drinking from bottles and cans, talking, thinking about the Devil's Eagles. Another five were inside, behind the locked door and the newly hung chicken wire. Beside the front door was a loaded shot gun, and beneath the lounge window was a semi-automatic—loaded and with a spare magazine at the ready beside the burnt candle on the shelf.

'Some of you already know each other,' said Lizard, speaking through his broken teeth and a White Ox, 'but for those who haven't had the chance, this is Murph, Skinny Arthur, Les, Bandit and Bingo from the west. Our sister Diablos have heard on the grapevine about the Devil's Eagles, and, well they were coming to town anyway.'

They may not have met before, but the way they were hugging it was like a family reunion.

'Yeah, well I heard on the grapevine that someone tried to fire bomb the Eagle's shit joint last night,' said Hedgeburner.

Mungo leered at him through the white smoke as it curled its way up. It didn't matter where you stood next to an open fire, the smoke always seemed to follow. But Mungo's eyes were different and he never even blinked. 'Anyone ever told you that you've got a fucking big mouth Hedgey.'

'Yeah, well I wish I was there to watch them burn to the fucking ground.'

'One day,' said Lizard, 'that may just come true. But first, I think we should have another drink.'

'I'll be in that,' yelled out Murph to whoever was listening.

'Why don't you go, Hedgey. And I'll tell you what, when you're in there turn up the Chisel. The next song's all about the burning of the Star Hotel,' said Lizard.

'I fucking love that song,' said one of the visiting Diablos. 'And you know why? Because I was fucking there!'

'Hedgey do this, Hedgey do that,' grumbled Hedgeburner as he scooped a few more beers from the bathtub of ice. The CD player was set with its speakers facing the rear yard; Hedgey gave the volume a swivel to the right. The guitar intro gave the other Diablos time to gather in a circle, arms around shoulders. The music of the man. They yelled out the words that only half knew and none were in tune. The noise blended well with the Cold Chisel but not with the cold air.

Fat Henry gave the dogs at his feet a pat. Everyone was behind the steel doors at Mac's that night. There was a funeral and wake to arrange. And at the same time they had to make sure no-one tried to fire bomb their place again.

Squeak and Tigger had first watch from security of the office where they could see what was happening outside through the window. Each had a loaded shot gun. Squeak also had a 9mm Browning, a souvenir from the war he reckoned. Tigger didn't have a hand gun, he had a large machete with the words "Headsplitter" roughly painted onto the blade. Much better to see the look in their eyes before splitting their skulls. Sure, he could blow their face away with the shot-gun, but it just wouldn't be the same.

'The dogs should be outside too,' said Spider.

Fat Henry looked up. One of the dogs licked at his hand.

'Well, they are supposed to be fucking guard dogs.'

'Yeah,' said Fat Henry, 'but never when there's someone here. You know they'll just sit at the door, trying to get back in.'

'They're only fucking dogs. They won't die if they're not inside.'

'He's probably right, you know,' said Razor. 'At least if someone did try to come near us again, we'll get a bit of warning from the dog's barking. You never know, they might like to grab a hunk of Diablo leg between their teeth.'

Fat Henry stood. He seemed tired. 'Okay,' he said as the dogs stood with him, 'I'll take 'em out.'

He walked through the steel door from clubrooms to workshop, pulling it shut behind him. Past the Harleys lined up inside, hitting the green button, lifting the rattly roller door.

Electric powered B&Ds were not renown for quietness and the noise drew Tigger from the office. In his hand was the "Headsplitter".

'Don't you fucking crack that across my skull,' said Fat Henry.

'She's cool. It's only for Diablos.'

'Fucking Diablos. You reckon they killed Bulldog Bob and tried to fire bomb us?'

'Don't you?' asked Tigger. He hadn't been a Devil's Eagle for long, not even long enough for the eagle and skull on the back of his leather jacket to fade with the dust, sun and wind, but he still reckoned he'd done enough time to hate the Diablos.

'I've been a Devil's Eagle for nearly twenty years,' said Fat Henry as he lit a smoke, 'and sure, we've had our run-ins with the Diablos before, but never nothing like this. I remember once we had this big blue in the car park of the Shamrock and two of the Diablos ended up in hospital, one with a knife in his guts. And they reckon half the blade's still there, but the only thing they ever did in return was steal one of our bikes. They're weak as piss, always have been.'

'Maybe you're just getting old,' said Tigger.

The cool air mixed with the hot nicotine as Fat Henry sucked it into his mouth, exhaling through his wide nostrils. He wanted to tell Tigger about Bulldog Bob, about how no-one really liked him much anyway, but he thought better of it. He'd been young once, but Tigger was right, he was getting old.

Angelo Ferrari was about to turn in, beside his wife, when from below he heard the deep gong of the front door chime. Almost midnight. Who the fuck?

He pulled open the door like it was a newly sealed Kelvinator and immediately recognised the late night caller. 'What the fuck are you doing here? Do you know what the fuck the time is? And I thought I told you before, I don't want you coming here.'

The late night caller stood there, saying nothing. Ferrari looked beyond them, out into the street, just in case. Three doors down a dog barked, muffling the ticking of a Holden as its engine cooled in the darkness.