

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

When the three Devil's Eagles from the other side of the Yarra were contemplating picking up a few travellers before closing time, Gordon Artemis was riding his Yamaha 750 like the clackers down Wells Road. Mr Ferrari wouldn't like it, but Mr Ferrari wouldn't know either. Artemis hadn't had the bike long and it was a waste just letting it sit in a corner of the shed. It was there to be ridden, licence or not.

He would take the risk. The thrill was worth it and whenever he felt that throbbing motor between his legs he shut out the words the magistrate had said when he last fronted before him: "This is your last chance, Mr Artemis. Come before me one more time and I will see that you receive a custodial sentence. Are you clear on that?" He was clear. But as Ferrari had said, he was young and stupid, like a pup. So, instead of worrying about some crim sneaking up on him during the night to do more than just sniff his arse, he worried about whether he should do a uey and hammer it down the straight one more time or flick onto the freeway to see just how far that needle could get to the red-line.

He should have worried about the troubles he might have sitting down, or the fact that Angelo Ferrari wouldn't bother sneaking up, because parked off the side of the road were two traffic cops.

Constables Tony Peterson and Graeme Atkins had worries of their own. Namely, the night had been slow and they were down on the weekly quota. That was until ...

'Go, go, go!' yelled Peterson as the digital readout on the radar in his hand glowed a very satisfying 95.

The police car leapt from its hiding spot, back tyres squealing as they left gravel shoulder, hitting bitumen. Atkins gritted his teeth. He was confident. He'd never lost a speeder yet. 'Don't come up in pursuit just yet,' he said.

'She's cool,' said Peterson as he put the radar between his legs and flicked on the lights and siren.

Artemis was enjoying the wind hitting his face too much to notice the police car behind him until it was almost too late. Springvale Road was upon him and the lights were red—Shit! Stopping was for wimps so left it was. Suddenly. Hoping the foot pegs wouldn't gouge the road.

'The prick's seen us. Come up in pursuit!'

Wallace and Chicken were cruising through the car park of McDonalds when they heard Frankston 645 come up in pursuit. Chicken summed up the options before he said, 'Turn left, we better start heading that way, just be careful.'

Wallace listened, and with the adrenalin almost didn't make it out of the car park when he hit the speed hump at much faster than the recommended limit. Their heads bounced with the sudden thump, Chicken's touching the roof.

'No need to go that quick, we want to get there,' said Chicken as he turned the police radio up.

'Sorry.' Wallace thought he might be starting to shake, but he didn't have time to think about what might happen or how he should be driving. Once he hit the roadway, it was just happening. He listened as he drove, doing at least 85, then increasing to over 90 when Chicken turned the blue lights on.

'Right into ... right into Kinross ... left into ... oh, fuck ... left into Rae, and right again, onto Station Street. We're heading north along Station. It's a green Yamaha solo, one rider, no plates.'

Approaching Springvale Road, Wallace could sense Chicken thinking about which way to tell him to go. He knew if he went left they'd eventually end up behind the chase, if he went straight they'd be travelling parallel but a long way parallel at that, and he hoped he wouldn't be told to go right because that would take them nowhere near the action. 'Go left, it's quicker,' said Chicken.

Wallace looked straight ahead, his heart beat was racing, but he felt fine. He felt like a policeman.

'Kings 250, we're coming out of the station.' It sounded nothing like Badger, but it definitely wasn't Andy Carter, his partner for the night.

'Frankston 411, we're in Mentone, heading that way.'

'Cheltenham 311, we were told to come over to this channel.'

'Roger that units. Frankston 645, what's your location now?'

In a screeching voice that was hard to hear above the adrenalin, nerves and wailing siren, 'Yeah, 645, still heading north along Station Street, about 115 now,'

'Fuck it, they're going further away. Turn right at Wells Road, we'll go that way, towards Kingston,' said Chicken.

Wallace followed the directions, slowing to a stop when he saw the lights were red.

'Just go around,' said Chicken. Calm, but not as calm as usual.

Wallace felt a sudden surge when Chicken switched the siren on. He looked right, left, right and crashed the red. It felt good.

'Right into Retreat I think it was!'

'Fuck,' said Chicken. 'That's only a small street. He's either going to head into the school, double back or turn left again. Either way, we're not going to get there quick enough.'

'Want me to go—'

‘Sssh,’ said Chicken. He turned the radio up full volume. Wallace’s ears were starting to hurt.

Gordon Artemis just didn’t need to get caught by the cops. He also wasn’t too sure of the handling of his new motor bike, and he had no idea where he was, or that by turning right into some street near a school, he would be suddenly faced with a series of Dolly Parton sized speed humps.

With the police car not far behind, he hit the first, then the second, going over the third the handle bars felt a bit loose in his grip. He was about to mount the fourth when he saw a police car coming from in front of him. He looked over his shoulder and the one behind was bouncing over the humps. Looking back, the front tyre hit a wet patch of white reflective paint. It spun the wheel from his control and he had no option but to go down.

‘He’s come to grief! Laura Street, outside the school!’

‘Keep going,’ said Chicken. ‘If we could drive straight through this bloody paddock we’d be there.’

Artemis was still shaking his head when he felt a police fist strike his jaw. Another wrenched his helmet off, as a police boot struck him to the ribs. Gordon Artemis may not have been that good a motor bike rider but he had done a bit of kick-boxing in his time. He roared, and with a flail of his arms somehow managed to get to his feet. With a quick right foot he copped some policeman’s thigh, then followed with a left, right, left to another’s face. The baton across his shoulder brought him down, so did the second and the third to behind his knee. When he saw more and more police feet turning up, several helping themselves to his midriff, legs and groin, even one to his face, Gordon Artemis saw his good life go out the window with his anal virginity.

Wallace and Chicken turned into the street just as the handcuffs were being slapped on Artemis, who was still showing that he could struggle. There was blood on his face, and he looked like he’d been sleeping in his clothes for a week. Some young copper was standing off to one side, holding his nose, blood running through his fingers, dripping to the ground.

Wallace stopped behind one of the police cars already there. Chicken got out, moving quicker than Wallace thought he’d be capable of, and opened up the back. The metal and caged confines were dark like a hungry lion’s belly, fed with the handcuffed captor as he was tossed in. Thumping, rolling, not bothering to find the cold seat.

‘Back to the Kings,’ said Constable Peterson. Puffing, shaking, and looking kind of pale.

Artemis was being taken back to the police station, Fat Henry was having his guts stitched, Tigger was watching some medical documentary about shingles on the emergency ward waiting room TV, and three Devil's Eagles were in the car park of the Prince Albert, a slab of Vic Bitter cans beneath one of the tattooed arms of the tallest of the three.

'We'll grab a coupla travellers and chuck the rest in the back, under the tarp,' he said.

Pony Tail, still feeling a few of the bruises from before but now having sufficient alcohol in his system to not care, lifted a corner of the black tarpaulin used to cover up whatever was in the tray of the F-100. Beneath it he found three .22s, two shot-guns, two .303s and some other rifle that looked like something from a war film.

'Fuck me,' he said in a drunken slur.

'The Devil's Eagles fucking arsenal,' said the one with the car keys.

The one with the slab put it on the ground and selected a rifle from the tray.

'Be fucking careful,' said Key Holder.

'She's apples,' said Slab Man. He took hold of the bolt action Winchester.

'Fucking loaded. I thought Devil's Eagles rules said no loaded guns on premises.'

'Yeah,' said Key Holder, 'but not during times of trouble. You heard all the fucking talk tonight. This is a time of trouble.'

'It's that Diablo trash,' said Pony Tail.

Slab Man put the Winchester back and picked up what he thought was an M16. It too was loaded.

'Fucking Diablo trash,' said Pony Tail. He put his arm inside the tray, fishing for a lucky-dip and pulled out a shot gun. Loaded with a cartridge in the chamber and another eight in the magazine.

'Put the fucking things back,' said Key Holder.

'Only if you promise one thing,' said Pony Tail.

About fifteen minutes later they were driving down Parkers Road. They slowed when they came to the Californian bungalow with the half built six foot high brick fence. That gave Pony Tail enough time to aim the M16 out the side window. He squeezed the trigger and let off a short burst into the brick wall. It sounded like a Chinese New Year as thick slugs struck the wall, chipping red brick to the grey footpath. Dogs barked. Key Holder put the foot down and two doors down, an old lady pulled the blankets up tight.

'Fuck!' was the simultaneous cry from behind the chicken wired fortress. Mungo came rushing out the front door, quickly followed by Lizard and Hedgeburner who was brandishing his .22 pistol. Mungo had a sawn-off. He hit the streets first and fired two rounds into the darkness. 'Fuck!'

Lizard got his troops and called them back inside. There was no more Devil's Eagles trash outside. And pretty soon, he vowed to the other Diablos, there would be no more Devil's Eagles full-fucking-stop.

About the same time Key Holder had made his promise to Pony Tail, Gordon Artemis had arrived at the Kingston Police Station. He was in the rear of the van, crouched in the shadows of the seat. Steel handcuffs digging into the fleshy parts of his wrist. The more he moved, the more they dug.

'We'll just wait until there's a few more here before we get him out,' said Chicken.

Through the grimy side window and wired protection, Wallace could see the darkened shape of Artemis. He looked like some zoo animal, wanting to get out, scheming how to get out, his eyes glowing in the darkness.

Wallace and Chicken were quickly joined by Dave Gully, Badger, and the two traffic cops who'd started it all. Instinctively, Wallace felt his hands sweating. He moved towards the rear of the van and put the Lockwood keys into their matching locks. To his right he could see Badger and Chicken, he knew the traffic guys were behind him. Dave Gully was on his left, holding a baton at the ready as he helped to unhinge the door. Wallace couldn't see Artemis anymore. The scheming was done. The wild animal was going to get out.

Suddenly. Rushing them. Growling. Wallace jumped back, the same kind of shock he remembered when he stuck his finger's in the Panther's cage at the zoo and the Panther wanted a piece of that pink finger. Wallace had a cage and fleet of feet on his side then, this time there was no cage and his feet stayed firm as a swing from Dave Gully's baton put Artemis to the ground like the spit from a wino. Chicken kicked him in the guts and Badger stood on his face. The traffic cops stood, puffing, looking pale. They'd had their bit back at the scene. Even sharks on a feeding frenzy could eat only so much. And Wallace still didn't move.

His legs were shaking. He could feel the tremors going through his body as he watched the handcuffed Artemis try and protect himself from any more police boots and fists.

'Fucking maggot, hitting one of my men,' said Badger who didn't even know the policeman from Cheltenham who was on his way to hospital with a busted nose.

Constable Atkins squeezed past Dave Gully and took hold of his prisoner by the hair, helping him to his feet. It was time to do something before he didn't have a prisoner left to interview. Grabbing his arms he started to walk him inside. Dave Gully took the opportunity to land one more quick right as police and prisoner passed him. 'Fucking scum-sucker,' said Dave.

Wallace was still shaking, so were Chicken and Dave. The traffic cops took Artemis upstairs to the interview room, each step on the stairway, taking a deep breath, to calm themselves. Badger casually lit a smoke and spat onto the concrete court yard.

‘Did you get one in young Wally?’ he asked.

Wallace rubbed his hands against the side of his pants. It was almost time to have something to eat but he wasn’t hungry. ‘No ...,’ he hesitantly answered.

Dave Gully was spinning his baton. ‘Fucking scum-sucker deserved what he got.’

‘What if he complains?’ asked Wallace. He couldn’t keep his insides still, they were pulsing like a Mix-master. He hoped no-one could tell.

Chicken heard and spoke up: ‘Come on Wally. Let’s hit the road again.’

Wallace took the keys from his pocket and walked back to the van. He couldn’t hear Artemis complaining, saying they shouldn’t have done what they had and that he would beat whatever charges they tried to lay against him. Because he had friends in high places. And that they were all fucking pissweak if that was the best they could do.

‘Still want to drive?’ asked Chicken.

Wallace thought about it. ‘Sure ... I’m okay,’ he answered. About as convincingly as the third interchange saying he didn’t mind not getting a run in the Grand Final.

It did the trick on Chicken who actually didn’t give a rats. ‘It doesn’t matter if you didn’t get one in,’ he said.

‘I couldn’t get near him. I tried ...’

Chicken knew that was bullshit too. ‘It doesn’t matter. Just so long as you remember to think about whatever you say if anyone asks you what happened. And if you go bragging about giving some bloke a flogging, make sure you do two things: number one, make the story sound good, and number two, be careful who you brag to.’

Wallace stared out through the finger smudged windscreen and headed north.