

A dark, ornate arched doorway with a large red splatter on the door. The doorway is set in a stone wall with intricate carvings. The door is dark and has a small, dark, three-lobed hole near the top. A large, bright red splatter, resembling blood, is smeared across the center of the door, with some red liquid dripping down from the bottom. The overall atmosphere is dark and ominous.

Dare the Dark

Bruce Mitchell

DARE
THE DARK

BRUCE MITCHELL

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This is a work of fiction. Names and characters are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover photo – Jf Korpa

The one exception to the above is the character of Sir Henry Parkes; colonial Australian politician and longest serving non-consecutive Premier of the Colony of New South Wales. Sir Henry did in fact open the new railway link to Orange in 1877, but the attempted assassination contained herein is entirely a product of my own imagination. The same applies to the Fenian Brotherhood and White Lotus groups, whose inclusion in the plot is entirely fictitious, as is Sir Henry's association with the story.

I am greatly indebted to Ian Thom, Chairman of the Henry Parkes Foundation and Great-Great Grandson of Sir Henry, for his permission to use Sir Henry's name in this book.



*To my wife, Marilyn. Thank you for
your help and patience.*



With sincere thanks to Bronnyn and Robert for their feedback and suggestions.

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Chapter 1

Death in Tempe

Sydney, Sunday morning, January 5, 1879.

Fanning Street slumbered through the first glimmer of dawn. Fingers of sunlight would soon creep across its ramshackle workers' cottages, but for now the only sign of life was a scrawny tomcat loping down an alleyway.

An old man rounded the corner with a black terrier at his heels. The dog picked up a scent and darted ahead, sniffing at something in the gutter. The man called, 'Angus, here boy!' but it ignored him. As the man neared, the dark mass slowly merged into a shape. At first he thought it was an abandoned overcoat, but then he stopped dead in his tracks, realising what the terrier had found.

It was a man's body, face up to a morning sky he would never witness. His arms were flung out as if falling from a great height. His mouth gaped open in a soundless scream, terrified of something or someone, but beyond the grimacing mouth, nothing more could be told; his eyes were cut from his face. The grisly head stared up at the old man from two grotesque sockets streaked with dried blood.

The old man doubled over, and retched.

~ ~ ~

Detective 1st Class Liam Kennedy swam slowly along the Coogee Beach tidal pool, his stroke parting the water like a would-be Moses. It was early and he had the pool to himself, but later, day-trippers from the 'big smoke' would clatter down the hill in their carriages, drop their shoes on the sand and paddle into the shallows.

He hoisted himself from the water and the sun slapped him on the back like an old friend. He was tall; over six feet, with dark good looks and piercing blue eyes. His ramrod-straight posture and square shoulders hinted at a military background.

Coogee was in no hurry to rouse itself from Sunday slumber. The sun shone from a cloudless blue sky, and as Kennedy headed down a sandy path, a blue-tongued lizard ambled into the undergrowth. Up the rise in Randwick, the bells of St. Jude's Church called the faithful to Sunday services. A few locals were about, some making their way to church, others out for a morning stroll. A group of young boys emerged from a shadowy lane, splitting the air with their banter. A knot of modest shops; a general store, butcher, blacksmith, and a pub, were closed for Sunday, their owners enjoying a well-earned day off.

By the time Kennedy reached his modest brick bungalow a mile up the hill in Randwick he'd worked up a healthy appetite, and as he trotted up the front steps to the veranda, the door swung open and his wife Mary appeared. 'You're late, detective.' She said in mock rebuke. 'Come and have your breakfast or we'll be late for church.' 'Yes, sir!' answered Kennedy, and pulled off his boots. Mary was four years younger than her husband, of medium height with a narrow waist, thick auburn hair and deep brown eyes that flashed when she was either angry or happy; luckily for Kennedy, 'happy' was the usual emotion. She was a woman of strong conviction, and an active campaigner for women's rights.

The small house had a comfortable feel. A short hallway opened to a sitting room with welcoming armchairs and a brick fireplace. A tall bookcase flanked a small mahogany writing desk, the titles on its shelves telling something of Liam and Mary; ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ - Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘Les Misérables’ - Victor Hugo, and ‘On War’ - Carl von Clausewitz. A rag doll leaned against a large red cushion in a wicker basket.

The Kennedy girls, 13-year-old Sarah and 8-year-old Lily, were eating breakfast in the kitchen. Sarah’s shiny-dark hair was tied back in a braid. She had an air of mock confidence common with girls her age, but under the guise of sophistication was an impressionable young girl, soon to be a woman. Lily had her mother’s auburn locks and dark, piercing eyes that seemed to penetrate one’s thoughts. Kennedy kissed his girls and helped Mary serve the fried eggs. He reached into his pocket and produced a handful of seashells carefully selected from the beach.

‘I found these, Lily, new colours for your collection.’

‘Thank you, Father!’

‘Where’s my present, Father?’ said Sarah with a playful pout.

Kennedy delved back into his pocket and produced a deep yellow string of rough beads.

‘Neptune’s necklace.’ He announced as he draped it around Sarah’s neck. ‘Something for you to study; those beads are full of water, so they don’t die when the tide goes out.’

Sarah had shown an interest in science from an early age, and devoured books on the subject like a pauper at a banquet. She had her mother’s passion and single focus, and dreamed of studying at Sydney University one day. The catch was that the university was a ‘male only’ bastion, something that sent Mary’s eyes flashing.

Sarah's generation was approaching an age in this new land where change would soon escalate. Young women like her were standing on their tiptoes, peeking over the wall of 1879 through a mist of hope and promise. The university would open its doors to women within a few years, and Sarah hoped to be among the first.

~ ~ ~

The New South Wales Criminal Investigation Branch was headquartered at 109 Phillip Street in a modest three-storey building. It was 9am on Monday, January 6 when Kennedy arrived at the office of his CO, Inspector Colin Buckley. The room was simply furnished, with bay windows ushering in the morning sunlight. Horses' hooves and the occasional shout from a newspaper boy echoed from the street, and a breeze billowed curtains into the room. One wall was lined with books, and a large map of the city and inner suburbs hung over the desk. The Inspector was a stocky man with a generous grey beard and dark eyes. He gestured Kennedy to a chair.

'Have a seat, Liam.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Buckley got straight to the point. 'I'm afraid we have a murder on our hands. Yesterday morning a mutilated male body was discovered in Tempe, in.....(consulting a report on his desk) Fanning Street, by a man walking his dog. The victim was middle-aged and carrying no identification. Apparently, his eyes had been removed.'

Kennedy sat forward. 'Is the body still at the scene?'

Buckley shook his head. 'No. The idiot local coppers moved it to the Dead House.'

'Not surprising, but it makes our job a little harder.'

‘I know.’ Answered Buckley with a sigh. ‘We’ll keep on trying to educate the local constabulary with this sort of thing, but you can imagine the good residents of Fanning Street not being happy with a rotting corpse next to their petunias.’

Kennedy stifled a smile. ‘Yes, I can see that, sir.’

‘Two local constables door-knocked the street; nobody heard or saw anything out of the ordinary during the night.’

Buckley picked up a brass letter-opener from his desk. The handle was worn like an old penny and it gleamed in the sunlight. He twirled it through his fingers, lost for a moment in his own thoughts.

‘I have a bad feeling about this, Liam. I think there’ll be more.’

Both men let the silence speak for itself.

‘This case is yours, detective. Drop whatever you’re working on and let me know what resources you need.’

‘Yes, sir. I’ll get down to the Dead House and examine the body, then out to Tempe to see what I can find there.’

‘Very good. Please keep me informed.’

~ ~ ~

Liam Kennedy was born in Lancashire in 1835, the eldest of five children from a poor farming family that had worked the land for generations. At 15, yearning for a better life, he handed the plough over to his younger brother and enlisted in the British Army.

Private Liam Kennedy quickly fell into step with army life. He was tall and strong, not afraid of hard work and not short on courage. In September 1854 the regiment landed on the Black Sea’s northern shore as part of a force of over 40,000 British troops fighting the Crimean War. At the Battle of the Alma River he had

his first taste of close combat, despatching two attackers before he received a bayonet wound in his right leg that would give him a pronounced limp for the rest of his life.

In 1857 the regiment fought in the Indian Rebellion, and in the battle to capture the city of Lucknow, Kennedy tasted of war a second time; but unlike the Crimea, the Lucknow campaign was fought in narrow alleyways against well-concealed assassins. He quickly learned to move lightly and watch his back.

After ten years in the army he resigned his commission at the rank of Sergeant. Tales of the exotic Far East had bewitched him, and he yearned to discover what lay beyond the horizon. Hitching rides through West Bengal to India's east coast, he learned to speak Hindi, absorbed the mysteries of Buddhism and found an entire universe beyond the confines of the British Army.

In Calcutta he found work on a steamer bound for South East Asia, and for a month shovelled coal into a roaring furnace. He jumped ship in Batavia and for a few months worked for the Dutch East India Company as a security guard, then worked his passage on a clipper to Sydney, docking at Circular Quay on a cool afternoon in April 1862.

In his 27 years the young man had seen much of life. He'd seen the horrors of war where death sat on one's shoulder. He'd seen men blown to pieces and sliced to shreds, and some who sobbed for their mothers as they fixed bayonets for the charge. He'd sweated and ached, gotten drunk and smoked himself stupid on opium, but his thirst for adventure was as keen as the day he left the plough behind in Lancashire.

When Kennedy applied to join the New South Wales Police his British Army service record attracted attention, as it was just the type of professionalism the force was looking for in their quest to turn what was a ragged group of ex-convicts into a disciplined police

force. He started at the rank of Constable, pounding a beat in Woolloomooloo. He quickly rose to the rank of Special Constable specialising in security assignments, and was immediately earmarked for the detective force.

Kennedy had proven himself to be a man of steady resolve who showed great calm and courage, even when his own life was under threat. Within a few years however, he was to face his most difficult and dangerous challenge; one that would push his abilities to the limit, and perhaps beyond.

~ ~ ~

The 'Dead House' was aptly named. It was a small, ugly building squatting in lower George Street, a stone's throw from the waters of Sydney Cove. It was the city's first official morgue, built to hold unidentified dead bodies or those scheduled for a coronial inquest. People crossed to the other side of the street rather than venture near the House. It was said that at night, one could hear tortured spirits cry out.

Kennedy made the short walk down Philip Street and was admitted to the building by a Water Police Constable. No sooner was he inside the door when it was hastily slammed shut behind him, plunging the room into darkness. The putrid smell of rotting flesh hit him like a sledgehammer, and he hastily tied a handkerchief around his face.

Muffled sounds of life filtered in from outside; horse's hooves, street vendors' shouts, a ship's bell, contrasting sharply with the silence of death surrounding him. It was as though he had entered a wormhole leading to Hell itself, and he had no intention of overstaying his visit.

He put on a pair of kid leather gloves and lit a lantern, turning up the wick to maximum. Stepping toward the body on a raised

stone slab, he shivered involuntarily. The dead face managed to stare at him from empty eye sockets. It was as if the man was screaming from an unfathomable depth of pain and terror. Kennedy tore his attention away and concentrated on the body. Removing the shoes and stockings, he noticed the flesh on the feet was a deep purple colour, indicating post mortem skin lividity was well advanced.

An anchor was tattooed on the right forearm and he made a rough sketch of it. The limbs were still rigid with rigor mortis, but some flexibility had returned. The front of the neck displayed severe swelling and deep purple abrasions, consistent with strangulation from behind with a rope or garotte. He reluctantly returned to the eye sockets. This was no surgical procedure. The muscle and sinew had been hacked away in a frenzied attack. After checking the pockets were empty and there were no name tags on the clothes, he opened the door and stepped back into the light, absently brushing the smell of death from his nostrils. He quickened his pace into the vibrant life of George Street.

~ ~ ~

Rows of terrace houses slipped by the window like a revolving carousel as his cab returned to the city through Newtown. He'd examined the spot at Tempe where the body was found and discovered nothing out of the ordinary. He scanned his notes. It appeared the victim was strangled from behind. There was some blood on the street, but the amount was not consistent with the mutilation being carried out on-site. There was no sign of a struggle, no wounds to the torso or limbs, no blood or skin beneath fingernails. It appeared the victim was taken by surprise, died quickly and was mutilated elsewhere.

Based on the amount of decay and rigor mortis, he estimated the man had been dead at least 36 hours, putting the time of death at around 10pm on Saturday night. Nobody in Fanning Street heard

anything, so it was safe to assume the murder took place elsewhere and the body dumped afterward. So, the question was, why dump the body there? Did the murder take place nearby? Perhaps. But if so, why not dump it further away? The next step was to uncover the identity of the Fanning Street corpse. Perhaps that would provide more evidence.

Chapter 2

What's in a Name?

Detective 2nd Class Henry Walsh listened intently as Kennedy briefed him on the case, then leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head, composing his thoughts.

‘Something’s a bit odd here. Why wouldn’t the killer just dump the body somewhere in the bush? Why do it in the middle of a suburban street?’

Kennedy shook his head in thought. ‘I know, that’s bothering me as well.’

A knock at the door interrupted their thoughts and a police constable entered clutching a slip of paper. ‘Excuse me sir, we’ve had a positive identification of the Fanning Street victim. The deceased was Edward Fitsimmons, aged 52, a shopkeeper living at 38 Ormond Street Paddington. The body was identified by the victim’s wife. She’d reported him missing after he failed to return home from a Lodge meeting on Saturday night.’

Kennedy looked at his partner. ‘Feel like a walk to Paddo, Henry?’

~ ~ ~

Henry Walsh was a good-looking 30-year-old of medium height with jet black hair, brown eyes and olive skin. He had an easy-going demeanour and an engaging smile; many a young woman had looked twice at the young detective as they passed him in the streets of Sydney.

He also harboured a secret. His actual name was not Walsh, but Wong. Henry (Zhang Wei) Wong was born in Hong Kong in 1849. His grandmother was an Englishwoman, and he'd inherited her Caucasian features. At the age of four he sailed with his parents and grandfather to join thousands of other pilgrims across the world seeking their fortune on the Victorian goldfields. The ship docked in Melbourne at the height of the gold rush when roads were clogged with fortune seekers. The Wong's joined the exodus and walked north-west for 70 miles.

Black crows circling above the diggings terrified Henry's mother, Wong Yu Yan. In Chinese culture, the call of the crow is a herald of ill fortune, and she held a strong sense of foreboding about this strange new place. Within a year, the omens were proved correct. When the Eureka Rebellion erupted, Henry's father was shot and killed in the British attack on the stockade.

After observing the required 100 days of mourning, Yu Yan purchased a hand cart, and packing the family's meagre belongings, set her sights on Sydney, 500 miles to the north. They walked and begged rides through heat, flies and driving rain on their trek through the high country into New South Wales, across the Riverina plains to Goulburn and up the dusty Sydney Road. They'd camp on the roadside for the night or occasionally spend a couple of pence on a room at some wayward inn. It was more than a month before the city finally announced itself with a smudge of brown smoke on the horizon.

With their few meagre gold nuggets from Ballarat and a sizeable loan from the Chinese community, Yu Yan opened a boarding house

in the Haymarket. Chinese farmers regularly travelled to the markets to sell their produce, and soon the reputation of 'Wongs' for vermin-free beds and good cooking attracted a steady clientele, and the family prospered.

Henry's grandfather Wong Li Qiang was a great influence on the boy, and introduced him to the legends and culture of China. The old man was also a master of the Chinese martial art 'Wing Chun', and passed onto Henry everything he knew. Long hours were spent in the garbage-piled alley-way behind the boarding house practicing Wing Chun. Local street urchins would scale the fence and call out insults at the boy and his grandfather: 'Chinky chinky Chinaman, monkey boy, monkey boy.' Li Qiang maintained his composure and continued Henry's lessons, forbidding his grandson to retaliate. All Henry could do was simmer and grind his teeth, not daring to disobey his grandfather.

Things came to a head when one afternoon he was set upon by two older boys while returning from an errand, and when the dust settled, one nursed a broken nose and the other managed to limp away down the alley. No-one insulted him from then on, and he was to carry his enthusiasm for Wing Chun into adulthood.

The late 19th century was not a good time for Chinese in Australia. On the southern New South Wales goldfields they'd arrived in their thousands, seeking riches in the ground or wealth through business, and ill feeling grew over mining territory and perceived loss of opportunity for the white population. In 1860 violence broke out at Lambing Flat, with Chinese beaten, degraded and driven from the goldfields. Colonial authorities introduced laws imposing limitations and special taxes on Chinese immigration, and the sentiment of 'White Australia' gained purchase.

Henry's father had been a policeman in Hong Kong, and the young man harboured a passion to follow in his footsteps. Although the New South Wales police did not officially prohibit non-whites,

it was clear, at least to Henry, that his race would be a barrier to his ambitions, and because his features were not obviously Oriental, to his mother's eternal sorrow he assumed the name of 'Henry Walsh'.

He joined the Sydney Foot Police as a Constable in 1873, and it wasn't long before he was promoted to Detective 2nd class. Early in their partnership Kennedy dispensed with the military-like rituals of the police. He'd been around long enough to know that 'sir' was just a three-letter word. As far as Kennedy was concerned, he and Walsh were just two men with a job to do. Their worth was not in their words or how smartly they saluted, but in their deeds and loyalty to each other.

It was on a missing person case that Kennedy accidentally learned of his partner's ethnic origins. The detectives found themselves in the murky world of the drug trade, and became embroiled in a gang war. Lured one night to a fake rendezvous in an abandoned warehouse, they faced off against four Chinese men armed with clubs and blades.

'Why don't we have pistols? We really should have pistols, Liam.' Walsh muttered from the side of his mouth.

'Not regulation issue mate, but they bloody-well should be.' Said Kennedy as he drew his Army bayonet.

'You wouldn't happen to have another one of those, would you?'

'Sorry Henry, just this one. Stay close to me and we'll try backing away slowly.'

As they moved, the leader of the thugs yelled.

'Xianzai shale tamen!' ('Kill them now!')

'Zhe bing bu rongyi' ('It won't be easy') replied Walsh evenly, as Kennedy shot a surprised glance at his partner.

The room erupts into a whirl of violence. Kennedy tries to keep Walsh behind him but two assailants come at him in a blur from both sides and his attention is fully occupied with his own survival. A club whistles past his ear; he dodges and brings his blade down across the man's face and chest, cutting him deeply. The second man is in mid-charge with a machete; Kennedy dances away out of range and the man comes at him again. Kennedy feints with his blade, drawing his attacker's arm up in defence, then lunges forward with a deep thrust to his shoulder, dropping him like a stone. He stays low and spins round to see Walsh in a furious blur of strange, overhand circular punches, snapping his attacker's head back and reducing his face to a bloody pulp. A second man lies unconscious on the ground.

The panting from both men was the only sound breaking the silence. Kennedy spoke first.

'You didn't tell me you spoke Chinese.'

'You didn't ask me.'

Kennedy looked over at the two men his partner had disarmed and obliterated. Henry didn't have a mark on him.

'That wasn't Marquess of Queensbury I saw just now.'

'No, Marquess of Hong Kong.'

Later, Wong opened up to Kennedy about his background and motives for changing identity, imploring him to stay silent.

'I know you have the right to dob me in to the CIB, but I'm asking you to re-consider.'

Kennedy shrugged. 'Mate, I couldn't give a rat's arse whether you come from Hong Kong or Wollongong.' Kennedy said. 'I've never informed on one of my own, and I'm not about to start now. And besides, I've never heard of any Henry Wong.'

~ ~ ~

Walsh crossed Hyde Park through afternoon shadows stretching across the grass like fingers on a billiard table. A strengthening north east wind carried salt air from the harbour and he breathed it in deeply. He thought of the Fanning Street victim's wife, how, in an instant, one's entire world can be completely upended. His mother was the same. One minute she's a gold miner's wife, the next she's a widow looking after an old man and a boy. 'My father was always one to join a worthy cause', he thought to himself, 'Some would call him a silly bastard; a Don Quixote character with stars in his eyes and a heart like the sky. But he joined the rebellion because he believed in fighting for his rights, and it cost him his life. *I'm just like my father*', he mused with a degree of pride and regret at the same time. *'One of these days I'm just as likely to get myself killed for the same reason.'*

38 Ormond Street was a tailor's shop. A 'closed' sign hung crookedly inside the glass door as if someone had slapped it there in a hurry to shut out the world. Walsh followed a narrow side passage past moss-covered brick walls. He found a side entrance and knocked. Approaching footsteps sounded from inside and the door opened to a middle-aged woman with greying hair. She was tall and thin, perhaps in her fifties. Her eyes were tired and her shoulders sagged as if under an unseen weight.

'Mrs. Fitsimmons?' Henry asked as he showed his police identification. 'Detective Walsh from the CIB. I'm aware this may be a bad time for you, but I wonder if you might be able to spare a few minutes to answer some questions regarding your late husband.'

The last two words seemed to sting her, and for a millisecond Walsh hated his job. She looked away for an instant, then back at Walsh with a certain clarity as if suddenly seeing things in a new light. Henry realised it was probably the first time she'd heard her husband being referred to as anything but alive and well. 'Of course,

Detective, they told me someone would be coming. Won't you please come in?'

She led him down a short corridor to a sitting room. Ornately carved and upholstered oak chairs stood at its centre, their deep woodgrain catching the afternoon light. A window overlooked a well-tended garden, and a meerschaum pipe lay on an armchair in the corner. The ghost of Edward Fitsimmons seemed to linger in the room.

'Can I offer you a cup of tea?'

'Thank you, no; I won't take up too much of your time.'

'How can I help you?'

Walsh produced his notebook and pencil. 'When did you last see your husband, Mrs Fitsimmons?'

She paused for a moment and looked away to the garden in reflection. 'It was when he left for a lodge meeting in the city on Saturday evening, at about 6.30pm.'

'Which lodge did he belong to?'

'My husband was a Freemason. They meet at the Masonic Hall in lower Pitt Street.'

'I see. And what time did you expect him home?'

'He normally returned no later than 10pm.'

'Did he walk from here to the city?'

'No, my husband had a hip problem; long walks exhausted him. He always took a cab.'

'Can you tell me what type of cab he took to the city that evening?'

‘No, I didn’t see him board one. They come past our shop on the way up to Oxford Street. There’s a horse trough on the corner and they often stop there, mostly Hansoms or Landaus I think.’

‘And when did you become concerned about his welfare?’

‘I kept his supper warm on the stove, and when he hadn’t arrived home by 11.30pm I started to worry, and walked up to the police watch house in Oxford Street to inform the Constable.’

‘Did your husband have any enemies, anyone that would wish him harm?’

She hinted at a smile. ‘No. Edward was well liked and respected. We’ve had this shop for over 20 years, and our customers are long-standing regulars. Many of them have become good friends.’

Walsh was experienced at interviewing people. He could usually tell if they were hiding something or evading issues. This woman wasn’t faltering in her answers. Her eye contact was steady and her mannerisms gave no hint of deception.

‘Had your husband behaved unusually in any way recently, for example, keeping odd hours, being stressed, or moody?’

‘Detective, my husband was the mildest, most predictable man you could ever meet. We’ve..... we were married for over thirty years, and in all that time I’ve never seen him behave any differently.’

Walsh flipped his notebook closed and capped his pen. ‘Thank you for your time, Mrs. Fitsimmons. He shook her hand. Please accept my condolences. Rest assured we’ll do our best to find the person responsible for your husband’s death.’

The woman held onto his hand in an unexpectedly firm grip and riveted Walsh’s eyes with a penetrating look. ‘My husband was a good man, Detective. He was taken from me too soon, murdered by a crazed animal. I intend to be at the gallows to watch that animal hang.’

As he headed across Hyde Park, the woman's words rang in his ears. He too had a deep and demanding need to track the murderer down, just as if he was hunting a wild animal with a taste for human flesh. In his career he'd seen more than a few bodies, but none that had been butchered so brutally, then discarded in the street like so much garbage. He quickened his pace through the trees.

He headed for the Masonic Lodge in Pitt Street. The burning question was, what happened to Fitsimmons between the time he left his home in Paddington on Saturday evening and the discovery of the body the next morning? Did he attend the lodge meeting, or head somewhere else? How did he end up in Tempe? They needed answers.

He reached the non-descript stone building with the square and compasses insignia above the entrance just as an elderly man was fishing keys from his pocket to lock the front doors. Walsh produced his ID and introduced himself.

'I'm looking for information about one of your members. Can you direct me to the right person?'

'My name is Herbert Sanderson. I'm the Secretary of the Lodge. I was just about to lock up for the day and go home.'

'I'm sure your time is valuable, Mr. Sanderson, but I'm investigating a serious matter and would appreciate a few minutes.'

Sanderson returned the keys to his pocket and gestured Walsh inside. 'Of course, Detective, please come in.' He was led to a small, spartan office with a desk and chairs of dark wood. The walls were lined with thick, leather-bound journals, and the room smelled of old parchment.

'I understand one of your members, Mr. Edward Fitsimmons, was at a meeting here last Saturday evening. Can you confirm his attendance?'

Sanderson opened a desk drawer and produced a thick leather-bound ledger. 'I know Mr. Fitsimmons normally attends, but I don't have such a good memory these days. I'll need to check the records.' Quickly flipping the pages, he ran his finger down a column.

'I keep the minutes of our meetings. Our weekly meeting held on Saturday evening January 4 was attended by Mr Fitsimmons.' He swung the book around to Walsh and pointed. 'Here's his signature. The meeting began at 7.05pm and concluded at 9.00 pm.' Walsh glanced at the signature. It was probably the last time Fitsimmons held a pen before his life was cut short. 'And how long would it have taken for the members to depart the building?'

'We conclude quite quickly. The doors would have been closed by about 9.15.'

'Did you happen to see Mr Fitsimmons leave the hall that night?'

'I'm afraid I can't recall. Most members hail cabs out in Pitt St. Is there something amiss?'

Walsh watched the man closely as he replied. 'Mr Fitsimmons passed away last weekend.'

Sanderson blanched for a moment and gripped the side of his desk. 'Edward is dead? How did it happen?'

'I'm afraid it's part of an ongoing investigation, Mr Sanderson, and I'm not at liberty to discuss the matter. I may be in touch with you again for additional information. Thank you for your time, you've been most helpful. I'll see myself out.'

~ ~ ~

Tom Webster's notebook and pencil were his shield and sword, and he never engaged the enemy unless fully armed. Senior crime reporter at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he had such persistence in

getting a story that it had earned him the nickname of 'The Hound'. He and Kennedy knew and respected each other, however, the relationship between police and the press could best be described as 'cordial'. The police knew the value of using newspapers for publicity, and the press recognised that police investigations made excellent copy; the more sensational the better. The relationship was a symbiotic matter of mutual need and mutual distrust. The police were wary of divulging too much information, and mistrusted the press to report it accurately. The press on the other hand always suspected the police weren't telling the whole story. It was a polite dance with stiletto blades behind the back. Webster was admitted to the CIB building and shown upstairs to Kennedy's office.

'Thanks for your time, Liam.'

Kennedy sat forward; hands clasped together on the desktop. 'My pleasure, Tom. What can I do for you?'

'I've obtained the coroner's report on the Fanning Street murder. It looks like a nasty business. Can you comment?'

'I've seen the report and the details are accurate. Mr Fitsimmons was murdered by person or persons unknown, on or about the night of January 4.'

'Apparently the body was mutilated. The eyes were cut out.'

'That's correct. It was not an attractive sight.'

'I can only imagine. Do you have any suspects?'

'Our investigations are at a very early stage. We're looking at a number of different possibilities, but we're unable to comment on that directly.'

'What about a motive for the murder?'

'As I said, it's early days yet, and by the way, we'd prefer it if the mutilation wasn't mentioned in the papers.'

‘Yes, of course, I understand that, but the coroner’s report is a public document, after all.’

‘That’s true, but we feel there’s not a lot to be gained by raising people’s fears over a grisly detail like that, besides of course, selling more newspapers.’ Kennedy smiled thinly.

‘The duty of a free press is to report what it sees, Detective. Our readers have a right to be informed about what happens in this city.’

Kennedy held Webster’s gaze, but remained silent.

‘Would you care to make an official comment?’

‘As I’ve said, Tom, The CIB is pursuing several lines of enquiry. As more information comes to hand, we’ll share what we’re able.’

‘Have you any idea whether Fitsimmons knew his killer?’

‘We’re not ruling out any possibility at this point.’

‘Is there any link between the Masonic Lodge and the murder?’

‘None that we’re aware of so far; the Lodge was the last known location of the deceased before his body was found the next morning. Now, if you’ll excuse me Tom, I’ve much work to do.’

~ ~ ~

A Moreton Bay Fig squatted in the moss like a sumo wrestler, it’s thick grey trunk and gnarled roots plunging into the soil with a fierce hold. A wide canopy of glossy leaves crowned the tree in a thatch of green. It looked ancient; perhaps hundreds of years, but it was less than fifteen years old and only one foot tall.

Kennedy sat at an old wooden table in the backyard contemplating the tiny tree standing in an earthenware pot. The warm night carried the tang from a backyard frangipani, and moths fluttered dangerously close to his oil lamp . With deft actions he

snipped at the foliage with his scissors, studying the shape from all sides. He'd learnt the art from a Javanese gardener years before, and had become immediately enthralled. A victim of recurring nightmares from his war experiences, he found the practice calming, especially before bedtime.

The murder had occupied his every waking moment, and although it was only three days since the body's discovery, it felt to him like weeks. Aside from identifying the victim, there'd been no further progress, despite he and Henry beating bushes and tuning into the jungle drums of Sydney's underworld. All they knew was that Fitsimmons had left the Masonic Lodge at around 9.15pm that Saturday night, but no-one actually saw him leave. It was assumed he caught a cab as per his usual practice, but nothing was certain. Kennedy was anxious for more information; anything that could point the way forward.

As he carefully plucked a tiny weed from the soil, he smiled to himself. The cultivation of Bonsai was reputed to teach one the art of patience, but he was proving to be an inadequate pupil. He remembered the Hindu aesthetics he'd seen in India who fasted and meditated in the mountains for years before they achieved the calm of enlightenment, so what hope did he have for reaching Nirvana while chasing madmen who butcher innocent people? He shrugged and replaced the fig on its stand.

Mary was at the desk in the sitting room, reviewing notes for a speech. He embraced her from behind; the scent of her hair was comforting.

'You've been working on your bonsai; a sure sign that you're in one of your pensive moods. I'm guessing you have an engrossing case on the boil.'

He chuckled. 'Am I really so transparent?'

Mary smiled. ‘Some say that only the pure in heart are so easily read.’

‘The pure in heart, or just the simpletons?’

‘Pure or simple, doesn’t matter to me, as long as you come through the door every night.’

Kennedy padded down the hall and eased open the girls’ bedroom door. The curtains were parted and a shaft of moonlight caressed the floor in a soft glow. Lily’s auburn hair fanned out across her pillow like a mermaid’s tresses. Sarah’s dark pigtail twisted behind her head and disappeared somewhere under the covers. Both girls were in a deep, contented sleep, their blankets rising and falling with their breathing like the undulations of a quiet sea. He felt a nudge at his elbow. Mary smiled up at him as if to say, *‘What a joy we have in two beautiful daughters.’* Kennedy eased the door shut and they made ready for bed.

~ ~ ~

The next morning he received word from a runner that Inspector Buckley wanted to see him. He entered the office to see his CO gazing out the bay windows, hands behind his back in contemplation. Buckley turned to him with a look of concern.

‘Good morning, Liam. This morning the Police Inspector General received an envelope. It contained this.’ He handed across a single sheet of paper with a few lines written in a cursive hand:

SUMMER SIMMERS WHILE LADIES SIT UNDER THE SHADE IN HOT, STILL AIR. THEIR PARASOLS ARE FURLED. WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE?

NO EYES WILL SEE WHAT FOLLOWS.

EACH SEASON, MORS WILL CALL THE TUNE.

ENJOY THE MUSIC.

Kennedy's mind focussed. In his army days he'd get the same feeling just before a battle as the adrenaline prepared him for what was to come. A sixth sense told him this note was written by the murderer. He read it several times, his mind whirling to find any kind of clue. He took a deep, calming breath. *'Remember the bonsai'*, he said to himself.

'This might have nothing to do with your case, Liam; it could well be from some lunatic who enjoys writing silly riddles to members of parliament; Lord knows we have enough loonies in this city already. Nobody has tried interpret the meaning yet, but it does seem like it may be pertinent to the Fitsimmons case.' He handed the envelope over to Kennedy. 'You might want to get some competent heads together and see if you can make some sense out of it. Let me know if you do.'

That afternoon Kennedy and Walsh did exactly that. They'd set up a chalkboard to record their thoughts.

Kennedy leant back in his chair. 'So, what do we have, Henry?'

Walsh turned the note over in his hands. 'Envelope and paper of average quality, handwriting and vocabulary suggest some education. Postmark on the stamp, Monday, 6 January. The day after the body was found.'

'Could be co-incidental.' Commented Kennedy.

'Possibly. The obvious thing is the third line, "No eyes see what will follow"'. It could be a reference to the mutilation.'

'Agreed, but let's see what else supports that. The first two lines. What the hell is he saying?' Asked Kennedy.

'Well, we have ladies getting out of the sun. They've had their parasols up, but furled them because they're already in the shade. So "what more can be done?" It doesn't make sense.'

There was a pause for a few moments while both men pondered the words.

‘What could be done if you had come out of the sun but were still hot?’ Asked Kennedy.

‘Oh, shit!’

‘Oh shit what?’

‘If you were in the shade and the air was hot and still, you’d be “FANNING” yourself.’

‘Jesus, you’re right, Henry. He’s establishing his bona fides. The knowledge of the mutilation and the name of the street makes it a strong possibility this is our man.’

‘Unless there’s been a leak, but we’re working on probabilities here.’ Said Walsh.

‘All right, the last two lines. I’ve no idea who “Mors” is, but I borrowed an encyclopedia from the office library.’ Kennedy thumbed through the book until he found the right page and ran his finger down to the entry. ‘Here it is; “Mors. The Roman god of death.”’

‘Each season, Mors will call the tune’. He’s predicting something. How would the god of death call the tune?’ Asked Walsh.

‘By killing someone.’

‘You’re right.’ Replied Walsh. ‘He’s telling us he’s going to commit murder in each season, starting with summer by the look of it.’

‘And he dumped the body in Fanning Street so we could figure out the puzzle.’

‘Exactly. Moreover, he appears to fancy himself as some kind of God. Our man is probably more than a little unhinged.’

The two men looked at their notes on the chalkboard:

KNEW OF MURDER WITHIN 24 HRS

KNEW OF MUTILATION

KNEW THE STREET

A LEAK?

GOD OF DEATH

MURDER BY SEASONS?

THINKS HE'S A GOD?

Kennedy spoke. 'If we're right, unless we can stop him, this maniac will lead us down a road lined with corpses.'

~ ~ ~

The Sydney Morning Herald—Thursday 9 January 1879

Early last Sunday morning in Fanning Street, Tempe, a resident was walking his dog in the early hours when he came upon a ghastly sight. In the lower part of the street from where Fanning Street meets the Cooks River Road, a dead body was slumped in the gutter. The body was that of a middle-aged man, and the resident was horrified to see that his eyes had been cut out. None will ever know the horrors that this man had seen in the last few dreadful seconds of his life. The police were summoned, duly arrived at the scene and removed the body to the Dead House where the coroner conducted a viewing. The residents of Fanning Street were of course horrified at what they had woken to on their day of rest, and according to police, none had seen or heard anything unusual during the previous night. The body was identified as Mr Edward Fitsimmons, resident of Paddington, who had been reported missing only the night before by his stricken wife when he failed to return from a Masonic Lodge meeting. The couple were long-term residents of Paddington and well respected in the community. For such a dreadful event to occur in a public place is unthinkable in our peaceful city, and a cause of great concern to residents everywhere. Detective Kennedy of the New

South Wales Criminal Investigation Branch has said that “several lines of inquiry are being followed to apprehend the person responsible.” Let us hope that their efforts will be swiftly rewarded. More to follow.’

Chapter 3

Permission to Board

At 6am a horse-drawn omnibus pulled to a halt at Circular Quay and Robert Sheaffer stepped down. A few carts rumbled along George Street and a flock of seagulls squabbled on the pavement for scraps. Somewhere a drunk cursed as he woke to an empty bottle, and a stray dog barked at nothing in particular. A solid wall of rain had lashed Sydney overnight, but the morning was clear as the sun spread across the city like a mother's arms. Shaeffer shouldered his bag and made for the Manly Ferry wharf

A few sleek clippers were moored on the western side of the quay and their timber spars shone bright amber in the morning sun. The bond stores lining Hickson Road had thrown their doors open, and soon the wharves would ring to the curses of watermen hauling cargo destined for ports across the world. Shaeffer had done some time on those same wharves, years before. 'I was fresh off the ship from England then,' he thought to himself, 'Broke and hungry. The pay was good, but it's a young man's game. Cleaning ferries is easier, and a lot less dangerous.'

He reached the wharf under the sign of the 'North Shore Steam Ferry Company'. The night watchman was coming off his shift and he nodded to Shaeffer as he opened the gate. Making his way to the

maintenance room, he gathered buckets and mops. The first ferry was scheduled for departure at 7.30am; he sighed in preparation for another day's work.

The ferry lay tethered to the wharf, its funnel rocking back and forth to the endless rhythm of the harbour. *'The stokers will be here before long to get a head of steam up for the trip'*, he thought. *'I'd better get a move on.'* He walked up the short gangplank, making his way toward the bow with a bucket and mop. Looking ahead at the outer deck seats curving away to the stern, he saw a shoe protruding from the ship's bulkhead. *'Someone's been careless'* he thought to himself. As he rounded the curve of the deck, he realised the shoe belonged to a young woman. She was sitting on a bench, looking out over the wharf. *'How the devil did she get here?'* he wondered as he approached her, then suddenly a loud crash echoed across the wharf as he dropped his equipment to the deck. The woman was dead. Sitting up, stone dead.

She'd been young; perhaps in her mid-20's, and may once have been attractive, but now, under her dark lace bonnet her glazed eyes bulged from a parchment grey face in utter terror. The mouth was pulled back in an animal-like rictus; her teeth and gums bared in a gaping skull-mouth. A deep-magenta bruise raked across her throat and her entire body arched backwards as if she was resisting some unimaginable terror. From each side of her head a trickle of dried blood cascaded down and pooled in the hollow of her collarbone. Her ears had been hacked off. Shaeffer had seen his share of dead bodies during his time in the army in Afghanistan, but he'd seen nothing like the corpse that sat before him on a Manly ferry. He was about to turn away when something briefly shone from the corpse's face. He looked closer. A pair of silver earrings protruded from the mouth, resting on parchment-grey lips.

~ ~ ~

Kennedy got word of the body's discovery within the hour. It was just over a month since the Fanning Street murder, and despite his strong suspicion there would be more victims, he had dared to hope he was wrong. But now that it looked like victim number two had emerged, he dreaded what was in store. He hurried down Phillip Street through the morning commuter traffic and was at the quay within five minutes.

The wharf was closed and the ferry isolated from the public. A small crowd had gathered on the boardwalk as word had gotten round. A constable stood guard on the ferry and a temporary canvas screen had been erected around the corpse. By this time the sun was beating down on the deck, no doubt speeding up the body's decomposition process, Kennedy thought, and he lost no time in crossing the gangplank.

The body remained as it was found on the bench seat. It seemed incredulous to Kennedy, but from the body's position he wondered whether the woman may have died from pure shock. It was as though her muscles were frozen in a last act of desperate resistance. Her face told the horror of a grisly death; the only consolation was that her end had probably been quick.

He felt the skin; it was warm, but that was probably from the sun, negating any accurate estimate of time of death. The body was totally rigid with rigor mortis though, indicating there was somewhere between 12 and 36 hours since death. The colour of the skin and lack of any strong odour indicated just beyond the 12-hour mark. The deep bruising at the front of the neck mirrored the injuries sustained by victim number one. Again, from the lack of blood at the scene, she had probably been murdered and mutilated elsewhere. Kennedy produced a penknife and gently prised the mouth ajar, removing the earrings. A cold puff of putrid air reached his nostrils. It smelled like rotten pork.

He carefully ran his eyes over the body and noticed a laceration about six centimetres long on the left forearm. Dried blood surrounded the wound, which was obviously recent; he estimated less than 24 hours old. He produced a magnifying glass and inspected it closely, and at first could see nothing untoward, but then he spotted a sliver of glass embedded in the skin, and removed it with tweezers. *'This may be something that we can work with'* he hoped.

He checked the body and the surrounding area for the woman's belongings; a purse, wallet etc, but as he suspected, there was no identification. He walked around the deck searching for anything that might help tell a story, but found nothing. After interviewing the cleaner and night watchman and failing to add anything new to his sum of knowledge, he pocketed his notebook and headed back to Phillip Street.

~ ~ ~

Kennedy consulted his notes as he and Walsh reviewed the events of the morning. 'Victim number two. A body on the Manly Ferry, found just after six this morning.'

'The perfect place to define summer. A ferry ride to Manly beach.'

'This ferry was the last from Manly, and docked at 11pm last night, so the killer dumped the body sometime after that. The same strangulation, mutilation. This time it was the ears. One thing that puzzles me is how the murderer got the body onto the ferry. The security gate is about ten feet high and was closed all night. I interviewed the night watchman and he claims he saw nothing, but like most night watchmen, he could have been asleep.'

'So, did the killer just throw the corpse over his shoulder and casually stroll down to the quay, high-jump the security gate and dump her on the ferry? It doesn't add up.' Said Walsh.

‘There’s another access gate for maintenance not directly visible from the quay, but it’s also a high fence and securely padlocked, with no sign of forced entry. The watchman could be an accomplice. I’m having his background checked for any priors.’

‘The earrings. What do you think?’

‘I’m not sure. If we can confirm they belong to the victim, I’m guessing it was just the killer’s idea of a sick joke, or perhaps another riddle to figure out.’

‘What a delightful sense of humour this maniac of ours has. I have a constable checking missing person reports. I expect the woman would have someone looking for her by now.’

‘Good, let’s hope for a quick result.’ Kennedy took a folded handkerchief from his vest pocket. ‘I found this piece of glass embedded in a gash on her arm. It looks to me that there may have been a struggle. The age of the wound would coincide roughly with the time of the murder. See if you can find a glazier in this town who can identify what type of glass it is, and where it may have come from.’

‘Done.’ Said Walsh. ‘Another minor matter; this makes two murders for the summer. Let’s hope he doesn’t make it three for each season, or there’ll be no room left at the Dead House.’

~ ~ ~

Detective Clifford Henderson strode down the corridor. Of equal rank to Kennedy, he was a short, overweight man with a fleshy face and dark curly hair; a combination that had earned him the nickname ‘Nero’. He had joined the force several years before Kennedy, and his oversized ego totally eclipsed his chequered career and reputation. He was fond of deriding the successes of others as being pure luck, and if Kennedy had bothered to think about him at

all, he, like others in the CIB would have regarded Henderson as a pompous irritant who played office politics and could not be trusted.

He walked into the office without knocking.

‘Good morning, Kennedy.’ His smug presence seemed to dim the room.

Kennedy glanced up from his work. ‘Hello Clifford.’

‘I heard about the woman on the ferry. She’s a good looker, apparently.’

Kennedy grimaced at the tasteless remark. ‘Not when I last saw her.’

‘Looks like a sticky case to me; one that could easily bury you under a pile of bodies, ha ha ha.’

‘Ah, Clifford, is there something I can do for you?’

‘No, I was just passing and thought you could do with some expert advice from a fellow officer.’

‘Thanks Clifford, let me know if you find an expert around here.’

Henderson’s smug grin faded. ‘Very funny. You think you’re the only one who can solve this case, don’t you?’

Kennedy replaced his pen in the ink well and calmly looked into Henderson’s beady eyes.

‘No, Clifford, I don’t think I’m the only one, but I’m the one who’s got the job, and I’m doing my best. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a maniac to catch.’

‘Well, don’t come crying to me when you fall flat on your face.’

Henderson turned on his heels and marched back up the corridor, giving Walsh a look of disdain as he passed by.

‘What did Nero want?’

‘Just to wish us luck.’

‘Goodness, he’s changed.’

~ ~ ~

Mary Kennedy stood to polite applause as she climbed the three short steps to the small stage and took her place at the lectern. She glanced across the Sydney Progress Society audience, took a deep breath and began her address with a clear, well-modulated voice.

‘Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I’m honoured to speak with you briefly this evening on a subject that I believe is one of vital importance to our society; a woman’s right to vote.’ A murmur rippled through the audience like the roll of thunder from a retreating storm.

‘Since the First Fleet arrived on these shores many years ago, across several generations and in thousands of homes, women have raised and educated their children to become productive members of our society. At their mother’s knee they learned the value of truth, respect, honesty, contribution and love. Imagine then, those same children growing up knowing their mothers are denied a voice in the assemblies that govern this land. What message does this send our children on the value of what they learned from their mothers, and the value that is placed on women in our society? Will they look beyond the family home for their guidance and model themselves on what they see in the world? Pretence? Materialism? Violence?’

She paused for effect, letting her somewhat provocative opening linger like an inconvenient guest.

‘Men see the world differently from women, and that is as it should be. A man must provide for his family, make hard decisions, and sometimes fight for his place in the world. A woman’s role is to

look at the other things that are just as important; relationships, emotions, morals. I'm not suggesting that women aren't capable of making hard decisions, nor that men are immoral, but the importance here is in the balance of two sides. Look across the kingdoms and empires in this world. Do they see things in a balanced way, or do they doggedly adhere to a well-worn manifesto? Indeed, would we have seen as many wars in this world if women had been granted the right to vote?' A few seconds of silence allowed her words to sink in.

'Similar conversations on this subject, spoken among people of foresight, are taking place across the civilized world; in England, the United States, Canada and New Zealand, to name a few. The tide of opinion on female suffrage in our community is shifting as women begin to take a more prominent role in our society, are recognised for their differences and the value they bring. There are votes in the women's suffrage movement; valuable votes for politicians who are proactive in their support and recognise that change is inevitable.'

'Ladies and gentlemen, we are not asking for the right to vote because we are women. We are demanding the right to vote because we are citizens. Thank you.'

Mary stepped back from the lectern, and as she returned to the floor, listened closely to the applause; she was almost certain it was a little more enthusiastic than when she took the podium. *'One more small step forward, perhaps.'* She thought to herself.

Later, as the meeting was drawing to a close, the audience was served tea and coffee and she joined a small group. A rotund man with large whiskers and a gold fob chain spoke. 'I quite enjoyed your speech, Mrs. Kennedy, but I don't believe that a woman's life in the home educates her sufficiently in the complex issues facing the men of our colony.' Mary's eyes gave her customary flash of barely subdued anger as she paused and took a sip from her cup. She replied in an even tone, but none could miss the earnestness in her voice.

‘On the contrary, sir, does the home not teach women that their husbands’ wages are too low to stock the larder? Does it not teach them that their sewing work does not pay enough to close the gap? Does it not teach them that her daughters will reach the age of consent before they can complete a decent education?’ The man assumed an embarrassed look, glancing around the group and down at his teacup without making a reply.

Mary was preparing to leave when a tall, middle-aged man crossed the floor holding out his hand. ‘Mrs Kennedy? William Davis. I enjoyed your speech this evening.’ He was well dressed, with an air of quiet authority about him. His dark hair was greying at the temples and his eyes were intense under pronounced eyebrows. Mary shook hands. ‘Thank you, Mr. Davis. It’s pleasing to hear that from the opposite sex.’

‘Yes, I can see you’re outnumbered in this group.’ Said Davis. ‘Hopefully, we’ll see more women attend in the future. I was interested to hear you refer to the political aspects of your campaign, and the mention of votes. It’s an excellent tactic to use.’

Mary smiled. ‘I won’t deny it can catch attention, but I also believe it’s true. Forgive me, but your name is familiar. Are you not in public office? Davis smiled and bowed slightly. ‘Guilty as charged. Secretary for Crown Lands, at your service. Mrs Kennedy, I wonder if you’d be free to join me for lunch at some point. I’d be interested in discussing your campaign further.’

‘Yes, of course, I’d be happy to.’

‘Splendid. I’ll have my office contact you with likely dates.’ He bowed, and they shook hands again. ‘Until then.’ He said and made his way from the room.

‘Well now.’ Thought Mary. ‘Political support in the making, perhaps?’



The body of victim number two was identified as 24-year-old Bridget Dacey, a public servant who lived in a boarding house at 47 Wentworth Avenue, Surry Hills. She was identified by a Mrs. Gladys Stoker, the boarding house's owner, who had reported her missing. Kennedy decided to walk the kilometre and a half to Surry Hills, and set out southwards along Elizabeth Street past Hyde Park. The afternoon was warm. Bloated clouds on the southern horizon promised an afternoon storm to relieve the February heat, and the air itself seemed fitful. The roadway rang with the rhythm of horses' hooves and the rattle of carriages, and on the Hyde Park lawns a governess shepherded a noisy clutch of children toward an ice-cream vendor.

Kennedy's mind dwelt on the case. They were still beating the bushes, teasing out grains of evidence that might lead them forward in their hunt for the killer. The background check on the quay night watchman came up negative; he was as clean as a pauper's pantry, so the question of how the body was carried through locked gates and onto the ferry remained a mystery. Henry was researching similar unsolved murders from the past ten years, hoping suspects would emerge. The only physical evidence to go on was the shard of glass removed from Bridget Dacey's arm and the earrings that were now in Kennedy's pocket. He was eager for any news of what these mute witnesses to murder may tell him.

The Surry Hills boarding house was an old, two-storey timber building greying with age under the weight of too many hard luck stories. It rose shakily from Wentworth Avenue like an old man on a cane. He knocked on the door and was met by an elderly woman with grey hair and eyes that darted back and forth like a lizard tracking a fly.

'Good afternoon. I'm looking for Mrs. Stoker.'

The woman glared at him with unconcealed suspicion. ‘Is this about Bridget Dacey?’

‘Yes. I’m Detective Liam Kennedy, CIB.’ Kennedy showed his ID.

‘I’m Gladys Stoker.’ She looked up and down the street as if suspicious someone had seen her tattered underwear on the clothesline. ‘You’d better come in I suppose.’

‘Thank you.’

She led Kennedy down a narrow hallway to a small office furnished with a wooden desk strewn with papers.

‘I identified the body yesterday. She still owes me for the rent. Who do I see about getting my money?’

‘We’re looking for the woman’s next of kin, Mrs. Stoker. Can you tell me anything about her, where she was from, any family or friends?’

‘She came from somewhere out Dubbo way; her family’s on the land out there. She come to Sydney for a new life away from the bush.’ She chuckled. ‘That didn’t work out so well, did it?’

Kennedy ignored the question.

‘How long had she lived here?’

‘About three months.’

‘Did she work in the city?’

‘At the GPO in George Street, sorting mail. She’d walk there and back instead of taking the bus, to save money.’

‘Did Miss Dacey ever entertain friends here, or speak of anyone?’

The woman drew herself up with arms folded. ‘I don’t allow no visitors in my rooms, especially men with lady boarders. This is no

whose house. But that one, she kept to herself. I never seen anyone call on her.'

'Do you know of anyone who may have had reason to do Miss Dacey harm?'

Stoker wore a crooked grin. 'She was as shy as a dormouse and only half as brave. I don't think she said "boo" to anyone the entire time she lived here.'

Kennedy reached into his pocket and produced the earrings. 'They found these on the body. Can you identify them as belonging to Miss Dacey?'

Mrs. Stoker peered at them closely. 'Yes, I've seen her with those on. Can I have 'em as part payment of me rent?'

Kennedy closed his fist around the earrings before Stoker could make a grab for them, and rose from his chair. 'Thank you, Mrs. Stoker. I'll be sending a police constable over to interview your guests in the next couple of days.'

'What about me money?'

'When we locate Miss Dacey's next of kin you are entitled to apply for their contact details through your local police watch house. I'll see myself out.'

Stoker followed Kennedy's return down the hallway with cold beady eyes and a mouth set in a permanent frown.

~ ~ ~

The Sydney Morning Herald 15 February 1879

Last Tuesday another terrible murder cursed our city. Ferry worker Robert Sheaffer was preparing the first Manly ferry for the day when he happened on the corpse of a young woman that had been dumped on the outer deck of said ferry overnight. The murder victim has been identified as 24-year-old Bridget

Dacey, late of Surry Hills. Ms. Dacey's boarding house manager had reported her missing when she failed to return home from her place of work in the city. The victim had been strangled, and her ears had been cut from her head. One cannot imagine the horror that must have been experienced by the young victim as her life was cut short so early. Miss Dacey was from a well-respected grazing family in the Central West and was following a clerical career in the Postmaster General's Department. Her work colleagues are in shock over the news of her death. Readers will recall another terrible murder in Tempe last month under very similar circumstances. Does this mean there is a habitual murderer at large on our streets? Detective Liam Kennedy of the Criminal Investigation Branch has advised that police are examining every aspect of these two murders, and they are hopeful of making progress toward an arrest in the near future.'

~ ~ ~

Henry Walsh skirted St Mary's Cathedral and headed eastward down St James Road. It was a warm evening, and a thin crescent moon played hide and seek through drifting clouds. Walsh was on his way to the pub; the Fisherman's Arms in Woolloomooloo, but not for pleasure. He was on the trail of a possible suspect in the murders.

Woolloomooloo was a short walk from the city, if in fact one wanted to go there at all. In the first years of white settlement the area was set aside as a farm in an unsuccessful bid to grow food for a near-starving population, and later for a brief time it was a fashionable address. By the late 1870s, however, 'The Loo', as it was known, had descended from shabby elegance to downright dirty and dangerous. Its narrow laneways, rickety housing and dockyards were the breeding ground for poverty and crime, not to mention the smuggling of contraband goods from arriving ships. For most people, it was not a place to go unless you really had to.

In his research on unsolved murders Walsh had eliminated all but one as a potential lead on the killer. Three years before, in 1876,

the naked body of Clarissa Fry, a Woolloomooloo prostitute, was found washed up on the rocks of Shark Island in the harbour. She'd been strangled, and there were abrasions on the body that suggested torture. The chief suspect was her boyfriend Fred Harrigan, a well-known pimp and stand over man. He was suspected of stealing a large sum of cash from the deceased prior to her murder, but due to the lack of any witnesses, plus an alibi from Harrigan's brother, he was released without charge. Although he'd served prison time for assault in 1877, Police records showed he was back on the street and currently living in the 'The Loo'. Walsh's informants said Harrigan was a regular at the Fisherman's Arms, and Henry planned to have a quiet word with him.

The pub was in Dowling Street, a stone's throw from the docks. It was a run-down two storey building wheezing its last reluctant breaths. Dim lantern light from the bar struggled through dirty glass windows. Upstairs was a whorehouse where locals paid a reasonable price for their pleasure but took their change in genital herpes. Walsh climbed a couple of well-worn steps from the street and opened the door.

The room was thick with smoke. A portly barman with a belligerent face leant idly on the bar, a dirty towel thrown over one shoulder. Men lounged in rickety chairs or stood about in small groups, and he could feel eyes bore into him as he approached the bar. 'A tot of rum, thanks' he said to the barman, who eyed him with suspicion. As his drink was poured Walsh glanced around the room and quickly spotted Harrigan sitting alone in a corner. The police description was unusually accurate; he sported a scar running from the corner of his right eye across to his ear, and his right earlobe was missing, no doubt from the stroke of the same blade. Walsh paid for his drink and ambled over.

'Fred Harrigan?'

A sneer washed over Harrigan's unshaven face. 'You want something, copper?'

'Am I that obvious?'

'I could smell you before you walked through the door.'

Walsh pulled out a chair and sat opposite.

'Come on Fred, that's not very neighbourly, is it?'

'I didn't ask you to join me, did I copper? Anyway, you're outnumbered in here. In ten minutes you could be shark bait.'

'All right, Fred, that's the pissing contest out of the way. Where were you on January 4th this year?'

'Let's see. I was up at St. Mary's Cathedral, saying mass with the Pope.'

Wash's smile faded.

'Listen Fred, we can have an adult conversation here, or I can arrange for a comfortable interview for you in the cells of Darlinghurst jail, where they ask polite questions with a length of four-by-two. It's your decision.'

Harrigan sighed and took a pull from his beer.

'I was flat on my back in Sydney Hospital with scarlet fever. Check the records.'

'Ever dumped a body on the Manly Ferry?' Walsh was watching Harrigan's reaction like a hawk. He stared at Walsh with open hate. 'Jesus Christ, you bastards aren't gunna pin that shit on me!'

He shot a lightning-fast straight punch across the table toward Walsh's head. The detective twisted sideways at the last millisecond, evading the blow, and caught Harrigan's arm, slamming it down on the table and pinning him in a painful arm lock. Harrigan let out a stifled yelp of pain through gritted teeth. Walsh held him down,

glancing around the room for any other threats, but the patrons of the Fisherman's Arms were glued to their seats, staring at their drinks with great interest. He turned his attention back to Harrigan, red faced and writhing under the painful hold.

'Now Fred, in a few seconds I'm going to let you go. Your arm will be totally numb and useless for about half an hour, after which you can go and make trouble for someone else. Now, if your hospital alibi proves legitimate, you won't see me again. If it doesn't, I promise you'll wish you'd never met me. Do I make myself clear?' Harrigan nodded.

Walsh relaxed his hold while Harrigan stayed sprawled and panting on the tabletop. The Detective exited the pub, being careful to watch his back until he reached civilisation.

~ ~ ~

Detective Liam Kennedy,

CIB Headquarters

109 Phillip St.

Sydney

NUMBER TWO

THE PRETTY MAIDEN ROCKS TO AND FRO,

BUT IT'S NOT TO MANLY SHE WILL GO.

MORS HAS SPOKEN TO THE WINDS OF SUMMER,

AND IN THE DEAD HOUSE THE MAID SHALL EVER
SLUMBER.

The next afternoon the two detectives met to review their progress, and Kennedy tossed the note onto his desk. 'Another

message. Nothing new; same paper, same writing, same demented drama. He's delighting in his work.'

Walsh read the note. 'Sick sense of humour. If only we could match the handwriting.' He tossed the note onto the desk with disdain. 'On a lighter note, I had a beer with Fred Harrigan last night.'

'And how did that go?'

'We got on like a pair of old school chums. His alibi checks out with hospital records. It's too bad the fever didn't kill him. He wouldn't have been missed.'

'The victim's landlady was a real charmer too. I got nothing from her except an ID on the earrings and an overwhelming urge to push her under a train. The victim's work colleagues weren't much help either. She was last seen leaving work for the walk home on Monday evening. Nice country girl, God help her, no boyfriend, kept to herself, walked to work to save money.'

Walsh reached into his pocket and produced a fold of paper. 'I have one piece of good news. A report from the glazier on the shard of glass removed from the body.' He began to read.

'The fragment appears to be from a larger pane that has undergone a process of faceting, or tapering at the edges, to be fitted into a metal frame. It also appears to be a piece of industrial glass of a greater density and durability than standard window glass found in domestic dwellings. Although the sample is quite small, I am reasonably confident that it is from a fitting meant for repeated public use, such as a street lamp or industrial lantern.'

'Excellent! A break at last.' Said Kennedy.

Walsh continued. 'So, the victim has a rope around her neck. The immediate reaction is to grab the rope, then as she chokes, she flails her arms around in her desperation to escape.'

‘Correct, so she collides with a lantern...’ He paused and took a deep breath. ‘Let’s step back a minute and look at the pattern of both murders. Both victims were killed as they returned home from a familiar location. They could have been watched by the killer on several occasions, so he could plan when to strike.’ Said Kennedy.

‘Or, it was a random choice; an opportunity seized with no planning.’

‘Yes. A random choice would indicate that the killer acts on impulse.’ Kennedy looked up to the ceiling, searching for inspiration like a prophet on a mountaintop. ‘But a killer who tracks his victim and plans in advance would indicate there’s a motive beyond an insane urge to kill, like a vendetta.’

Walsh replied, ‘In which case, you would expect that both victims were in some way linked, but everything we’ve learned so far says the opposite.’

‘Agreed. So let’s assume the killer is mentally unbalanced and is obeying some kind of insane urge. That’s certainly consistent with his writing style, and it means he’ll keep killing.’

‘Both victims were killed at night. Fitsimmons sometime after 9pm. Bridget left work at 6pm, but it wasn’t dark at that hour.’ Said Walsh.

‘Both were strangled from behind. Both were mutilated. Both had their ID removed.’

‘And both bodies were dumped in another location.’

‘So, one victim leaves a meeting in the city, the other leaves work to walk home. How on earth are they murdered without being seen, and where were they mutilated afterward?’

‘Victim one normally hailed a cab. Could he have been strangled inside the cab, perhaps by an accomplice?’ Asked Walsh.

‘Plausible. But what about the girl? She always walked home to Surry Hills. Would the murderer follow her home and take a chance on being seen? Not likely.’

Both men were silent in thought.

Walsh sat forward with a start. ‘Wait a minute! The date of the second murder was.....Monday night, 10th of February, right? I remember that night because it was my mother’s birthday. I went to the markets to buy duck, and it was pissing down rain; a thunderstorm that lasted a couple of hours.’

‘Bridget Dacey comes out of the GPO as it’s pouring down and hails a cab instead of walking home.....’

‘Shit, Liam, our man could be a cab driver.’

‘He strangles his victim in the cab, out of sight, or perhaps has an accomplice inside the cab?’

‘Then he takes the body somewhere to mutilate it and then takes it somewhere else to dump it.’

‘His own travelling Death House. Let’s see if we can find out if Bridget did actually get a cab home that night.’ Said Kennedy.

‘Will do.’

