

**DAVE
WARNER
SUMMER
OF BLOOD**



FREMANTLE PRESS

This book is dedicated to my teenage garage-band mates Michael O'Rourke and the late Alan Howard, and to all those artists who made 1967 the greatest music summer of them all.

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1 TALES OF BRAVE ULYSSES

A Chippendale terrace. The street narrow as John's tie. Number 18 a bullied child permanently in the shade of the factory opposite. Fifty yards either end, a typical Sydney day for May; short or long sleeves a balancing act, a light breeze. The call had come in: possible homicide in progress. John midway through a sausage roll, a vanilla slice waiting in its brown bag, the Coke bottle he was nursing between his knees glinting with windscreen sun. An instant prior Detective Sergeant John Gordon's only thought: Could the Bunnies make it seventeen premierships in '67. All changed in an instant by that barking despatch, skolling the Coke, tossing the bottle in the back, gunning the Falcon here quick. Pure luck they were in the area. A visit to Sydney Uni for a dental professor to examine teeth of a skull unearthed by a curious fido in Botany.

Barker, his partner, mouth full of pie, sputtering back, 'On our way.'

Now here at 18, grimy bricks, sunshine starved, some unidentifiable smell from the factory over the road. Already workers in hairnets gathered under its roller door, curious. A uniform standing outside, neighbours pulling cardigans tighter. No ambulance, but a siren was closing. The constable could have been John himself, two years back when he found Sally Prescott, prostitute, butchered. Back before he made detective sergeant. John doubted the uniform was legal drinking age, white as the tablecloths in the kind of restaurant Denise's old man still took them for dinner most weekends.

'She's inside with O'Neil,' the kid stammering.



The interior lighter than a cave's but not by much even with a standard lamp glowing. O'Neil, presumably the senior constable, standing in the gloom of the lounge room. John steeling himself. The first knife murder he'd had since he and Denise had been prepared for ritualistic slaughter themselves. Already he could feel his veins tightening.

'Jesus Christ,' Barker catching sight of the sprawled victim on the carpet behind the couch. Colour leached in the gloom, just black and grey, but you knew what the dark splotches were, and the stink of death was vivid.

'Gordon and Barker, Homicide,' said John. 'You check her?'

'Dead as a doornail.'

'What happened?' John knelt beside the body, a deep pool of blood. He felt for a pulse anyway. Nothing. The body still warm.

The siren was howling now right outside the house.

'Constable Everett was in Broadway when a woman came racing down the street screaming "He's killing her."'

Everett, presumably the young pasty cop out front.

'He got the address and called it in. I was up at the park on a break. We both raced here. Door was open. We found her like that. No sign of anybody else.'

'The knife?'

'Didn't see one. I checked upstairs. No-one here. Told Everett to speak to the witness while I held the fort. From what Everett caught on the way from the neighbour, the husband killed her.'

'Names?'

Head shake.

'And I didn't want to touch anything.' O'Neil righteous, and smarter than John had been that first time violent death had shoved its face in his. Maybe O'Neil would get lucky, maybe his life wouldn't be defined like John's had been by what he'd found in that Kings Cross bedroom. Innocent and guilty alike carried along in a whirlpool of blood, until you crawled out knowing you could never identify yourself again as one of the pure.

‘Electricity bill for Mr and Mrs Rentich.’ Barker hovering at the kitchen doorway fanning an envelope.

The ambulance crew bustling in.

John said, ‘Mike, upstairs. Look for the knife.’ Barker moved. John already heading outside. The knot of bodies out front had expanded. ‘Is the neighbour here?’ John to Everett who had improved from white to cream. A nod at a stocky woman, forties, a frizz of black hair, in conversation with two other women and a man, all sucking Rothmans.

‘Excuse me,’ John crooked his finger at her.

‘How is she?’ the woman’s lip trembling.

John ignored that, looked for privacy. ‘Which is your place?’ The woman signalled. Bugger, right where the crowd was. John led her to the car, the doors still open how they’d left it astride the footpath.

‘You are?’

‘Liz Hawkley.’

‘What did you see?’

‘First I heard them. Rowing. A bad one this time, I could tell. Then there was a scream. I ran out the front. He rushed past me—’

‘He?’

‘Alan, the husband. He was carrying a bread knife. He headed that way.’

She pointed south. The radio crackled: a man armed with a knife had just entered the brewery. Two hundred yards from here. No coincidence. Easier on foot. John ran.



It wasn’t till he got there that the terror gripped him, a Killer Kowalski claw-hold in his gut. Workers were leaking out of a side entrance.

‘Anybody see him?’ John fighting panic by yelling.

‘Looked like he was heading for the barrel room.’

John got directions, stepped into darkness, a few stragglers passing him the opposite way, running. His ears humming now.

He fought it, crossed through the first room, just an open space storeroom with crates and metal machinery. His hand went to his revolver. That should've helped but it didn't. All he could think of was the last time he tried to play hero, winding up bound, naked, a madman's plaything.

He took a right down the corridor, then cut left, didn't pass anybody this time. The sounds of fellow humans grew distant. The corridor ended, the keg room to his right. Cavernous and dark, just one big overhead fluoro mid-room that didn't lick the darkest reaches. Concrete floor, wooden beams, the smell of hops and mouldy timber and stacks of steel kegs like the bared teeth of an Alsatian. Rows of them. The gun was in John's shaky hand. More than a year but he still wasn't ready for this, edging ahead.

'Rentich! Police.' Pleased his voice sounded stronger than he would have guessed. No idea if there was a way out of the room besides the way he'd entered. 'Come out now with your hands up. I am armed and ready to use my gun if necessary. Just come on out, throw down your weapon and we can sort this out.' Inching forward, steel kegs on his right floor to ceiling, to his left pallets and forklifts. That side, enough light to show as clear. He crept towards the blackest pools near the wall opposite where he had entered. He stopped. Listened.

'Alan, come on.' Nothing. Moving deeper now so the only light was on his back. His eyes growing more accustomed. A metallic sound somewhere to his right behind this first row of kegs. He moved fast to the end of the line, stopped, tensed, took a breath and swung round the end barrel, revolver pointing the way. Another row of barrels on his left, a narrow valley path between the two walls of metal kegs now. Very dark.

'Come out, Al, come on.' Slowly advancing. One step, two ...

Movement to his left, a shape. His finger started to pull the trigger ... Stopped.

'Did I kill her?'

Too dark to see anything but a darker mass at the heart of the darkness. He hadn't expected that reaction, almost timid.

‘No, mate. You cut her up bad, but she can make it. The ambos got there quick.’

He could see just enough to make out the knife. He was getting dizzy now. Shit.

‘Throw it down, Al.’ Real dizzy, sweating. He was going to have to shoot, he couldn’t face a knife again.

A clang, steel on concrete. He breathed easier.

‘Arms high, now.’

He could smell fear, not sure it wasn’t his own.



Geary’s office. Louvre windows, streaked in grime, a sill of pigeon poop and discarded butts. From here, the only vista available for entrapped damsels desperate for a glimpse of their rescuer was slate tiles and a wedge of an adjacent park’s green grass.

Geary’s back was to him as the Homicide chief fiddled in the second filing cabinet. Swinging around with a bottle of something the colour of tea and two beer glasses, the kind with a frosted band around the outside. Very thin glass snapped easy but kept the beer cool.

‘Rum’s my poison. It’s in the blood of this force.’

Traces of John’s old social studies still embedded in memory. The original soldiers, the police in the colony paid in rum shots. Geary poured a generous amount in each glass, didn’t ask his permission. Handed him one. They clinked then sipped.

‘Good work, Sergeant. You had every right to shoot the bastard, but then we’d have had those Surry Hills pricks up our backside.’

Geary’s reference to the press, quartered nearby. The older cops like Geary hadn’t quite got around to considering television relevant. Newsprint was the battleground that had to be won. John wasn’t sure Geary even had a TV at home.

‘You’ll go a long way, son.’ Geary took another sip. ‘Now I didn’t call you here just to piss in your pocket—’ Breaking off suddenly. Cocking an ear to what was drifting in through the window. What John at first thought was a two-way from the vans in the compound below but he now identified as a megaphone. He moved alongside

Geary and looked out. In the narrow keyhole formed by rooflines, buildings' corners, heavy tree boughs, the eye focused on the park. A parade of coloured scarves, beards, skivvies, a lopsided banner at the mercy of students who'd never done a day's work. A few letters only visible but enough: NAM. The megaphone words indecipherable up in this eyrie and likely no better on the ground.

'Uni students and draft dodgers.' Geary pulled the window in, twisted the clasp, said, 'You missed out?'

'I did, yes.' At the time he would have been happy to do national service. A lottery barrel, marbles representing birthdates. Your marble got pulled, it was dungarees, rifle drills and short back and sides for a couple of years. Vietnam had raised the stakes though. Now it might be real bullets coming your way.

'You were in the war, sir?' Of course, John knew he had been. You always knew stuff about your superior officers.

'Air force. I was colourblind, shouldn't have been allowed to fly but my mates told me the sequences on the lights test and I got through.' Casting one last glance outside. It might have been equally rueful as wistful. 'Bit of military service is a good thing. I'm not saying I'd send them to war, mind you. But a couple of years away from the television, not a bad thing.' Sitting down behind his desk, indicating John sit opposite. 'You've been going fifteen months solid. How would you like a break?'

Panic shooting through him, thinking he'd covered his tracks, hidden that he was strung taut as a guitar string. Just coming down now a week on since the Rentich arrest. He'd told nobody. Except Denise. Shivering in her arms that night.

He started to stammer something, didn't know what.

Geary smiled. 'How about some time stateside.'

That clean bowled him. 'I don't follow—'

Geary leaning forward on his elbows breaching the space between them. He always spoke quietly but right now more so.

'The Commissioner is obviously thick with the minister who is best friends with the Minister of Transport.'

John racking his brains as to who that might be. Clueless on the

state cabinet outside of the Premier, the Police Minister and the Attorney-General.

Geary coughed. Too many Turf fags. ‘Eric Davis ...’

The name ringing bells: Minister of Transport, right.

‘... has a son, Martin. Smart kid. Got into Berkeley, San Francisco, doing maths. Five weeks ago, the kid disappeared, only his parents didn’t know until a fortnight ago. The San Francisco PD did your standard piss-poor bullshit look-see and wrote it off as a kid bailing out of college. The Commissioner got a request from our Police Minister to have a word to San Fran PD. They’ve done a second investigation and listed Martin Davis as a missing person, but they have hit a brick wall. Apparently, Berkeley is a hotbed of this shit ...’ gesturing at the window. ‘The kids hate cops. Call them pigs. Out of their mind on LSD. My day, LSD was pounds shillings and pence.’ A crooked grin. ‘Still can’t get my head around this dollars-and-cents business. So ...’ the rolling mall of words came to a stop. ‘Long and the short of it is the Commissioner wants one of our own there doing our own investigation. Got to be a smart young cop. If this goes bad, and it might, we need somebody who has been there.’ Not meaning the US. A meaningful look. Death, blood, spilled guts was what he was saying. Yes, John had been there.

‘I said John Gordon is the best.’ Shooting his cuffs. ‘The job is yours if you want.’

John trying to stumble through smoke. ‘When?’ he managed.

‘Yesterday. Soon as you can. There’s a new flight to San Fran direct with a couple of stops in the Pacific. We’ll organise that for you, passports and so on.’

John gulped rum. Shit. The US. San Francisco. A dream. But common sense regrouping.

‘When you say “our investigation” ...’

‘Unofficially sanctioned by the heads of San Francisco and Los Angeles police departments. Davis had met a girl. She disappeared. His roommates said he wouldn’t believe she’d just dumped him and lit out. He reported her missing. The San Francisco PD told

him they had better things to do. He decided to look for her himself. He cleared out from his student house, and nobody has heard from him since. There's a big chance the kid is in LA. So, we need LAPD in too.' Geary rocking back in closer. 'The key word is "unofficial". That applies to both sides of the Pacific. The taxpayers can't know we're looking for a minister's missing kid using their money.' Miming zipping his mouth. 'You'll have no police status in the US. They will issue you with a private investigator's licence. You can carry a gun.'

John trying to process. 'And I would be on normal pay?'

'Plus expenses. Three-star hotels, car, petrol, food and a small slush fund. You can't threaten anybody with arrest so you might have to buy favours. If you need more money, request it through me. No official paperwork. Davis has promised a hundred quid – sorry dollars – of his own. More if necessary.'

'Will the American cops cooperate?'

'They'll be ordered to.'

That didn't mean they would. John wasn't green. An overseas cop poking his nose in would not go down well. Geary finished his rum.

'Verdict?'

John sat back. 'Does the Commissioner know you are approaching me about this?'

Geary nodded. They both knew that meant John's balls were in a vice. If he refused, he could forget advancement.

'Sorry, Sergeant, but I had to pick someone, and I reckon you can do this on your ear. You'll be Inspector within two years.' He tapped a file by his hand. 'Sounds like the kid is chasing this wild sheila but the cops have more to do than run after stray students. They've got Black Power, drugs, Vietnam. It's the chance of a lifetime.'

Sounding like a hire-purchase salesman now. But he was right. Problem, if John didn't find Davis or the kid was dead ...

'I know what you're thinking. You do a solid job I will back you to the hilt. So will the Commissioner.'

He would have to tell Denise. No way out of it.

'I'll have to speak to my wife.'

'Of course.'

To these blokes, speaking to a wife meant telling them how it was going to be. They weren't used to women as strong-willed as Denise.

'These expenses. They are for two, right?'

Geary cracked the crooked smile again. 'They were thinking one cop could work with one of theirs.'

'You know that's not going to play.'

A grin. Of course, he did. 'I told them. I'm not sending one of my men on his own. Two-man team. One hotel room though. You want Barker?'

John said, 'I have somebody else in mind.'

2 CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

The turf at 5.00 a.m. silver as if gelatine crystals lay on top. The image coming to Ray's mind because toddler Cassandra loved sprinkling them all over the sparkling lino Marie had just mopped and polished. The domesticated Ray Shearer. Who'd have thought it? Not Ray. Two years back he was sure he was destined to see out his days in front bars with other single men. He'd blown his chance already, thought there could be no reprise. Yet here he was, folding highchairs and strapping tiny feet into tiny shoes. Two horses thundered by close to the rail, Ray forced back as clods flew. The big man, Granite didn't flinch. Mind you, his suit was cheaper. Granite had insisted Ray come here before breakfast. Ray couldn't refuse, he needed his help. Hell, even if didn't, he would have turned up. He'd always enjoyed Granite's company. The two strong-arm lieutenants for the late George Shaloub's empire: the cop and the crim.

Ray wondered if Granite had really forgiven him for putting a gun to his head that time. More than a year ago now but a different ice-age since George's passing.

'Isn't she pretty?' Granite nodding at disappearing hindquarters.

'The bay or the chestnut?'

'The chestnut.'

'Yeah, she's got a cuter rump than Marie has these days.'

The big man grinned. 'She's mine.'

'As in you've backed her?'

'As in I own her. Two-year old filly. Georgie Moore helped me pick her out.'

Moore, the greatest rider Ray had seen but Ray's take: hoops were no great judges of horseflesh. Then again, what did he know?

His on-the-side job for Shaloub had been collecting from reluctant gamblers and that had quashed his appetite for chance. He was saying nothing anyway. Keep Granite happy.

‘You can afford it? I thought you were out of the game.’

‘I am.’ Granite had run Shaloub’s prostitutes and helped on the illegal gambling joints. ‘But I put away money for a rainy day. And George left me almost as much as he did you.’

Ray hadn’t wanted the money, but with a kid on the way he wasn’t tossing it away. Now they owned a nice little place in Paddington. Nothing flash but his inspector salary at Arson meant Marie didn’t have to go back to dancing. He wanted Cassie to have her parents with her, knew firsthand how sharp the world’s teeth were on orphans. Granite started ambling away towards the stalls.

‘I’ll just say goodbye to Shiloh. Then you can buy me breakfast.’ Trudging over sludgy ground. ‘You like the name? Shiloh? It’s a combination – Shaloub after George and Hi-Lo after the hi-lo game ‘cause George cut me in for ten percent of the casino take.’

‘You sly cock. I never knew that.’

Granite smirked.

‘Course, he gave me ten percent of the roulette.’

Granite stopped, stunned. Then smiled. ‘Bullshit. George would never give anybody anything of the cards or the wheel.’

Ray laughed. ‘No, he would not.’



Instant coffee, bacon and eggs, laminex chairs in the greeny pattern, the sweep of Bondi Beach across the road, the sky stubbornly steel. Winter heading in slow like a punter with a winning ticket wanting to savour his triumph over summer its old enemy. Surfers filleted slices of the Pacific.

‘You like Arson?’

Yes, he did. Easiest fucking job in the whole force. The firies did all the hard work.

‘I do.’

‘You seem a lot more relaxed now, Ray, if you don’t mind me saying.’ Granite disappeared a whole slice of bacon and toast. His

throat didn't even seem to move as it slid down. The guy was like that big fucking Indonesian lizard Ray had seen pictures of. 'You still looking for the shit who killed your mum and dad?'

No. But I'm not telling you that. Instead, Ray said, 'I think he's probably dead by now. But you know, I never forgive and never forget.' That was after all why he was here. 'What about you, Granite? You forgive me?'

'It's old news, Ray. You got a little kid now. A top sheila. I can imagine if somebody burned my parents alive how I'd feel – well, actually, I'd happily burn my father alive if he hadn't walked in front of a diesel. But I'm saying, comes a time ...'

'We'll see.'

'You are looking relaxed, though.' He poked another slice of toast at Ray before that vanished. 'So, you said you needed my help.'

'Matt Dempsey.'

Granite looked skywards like one of those saints on a holy card, thinking, said, 'Ex-cop. Stakeout specialist.'

'That's the guy. I can't find him.'

'You're a fucking superintendent or whatever.'

'Chief inspector. I think he's hiding from the ex-wife. No driver's licence, no electoral roll.'

'And you think I can find him?'

'I know you can find him. Nobody ever hid from George when you were on the case. Well, not for long.'

He could tell Granite enjoyed the flattery.

'You're not going to knock him? 'Cause I don't want any part of that. Unless you're paying a shitload of money but given the tight-arse you are—'

'I don't want to kill him. I want to use his services. I have a target and I absolutely need the best.'

'Your guys aren't good enough?'

It's too close to home, thought Ray, but didn't say that.

'It suits me to have somebody who has been out of circulation for a while.'

Granite seemed to accept that. 'How much?'

'A hundred.'

'Quid or dollars?'

'Quid.'

'Two hundred dollars.'

'Yes.'

'That's my fee? Not his.' Clarifying.

'All for you. You're going to need it if you've got a horse.'

Granite daintily dabbed his mouth with his serviette. 'Because we're like brothers. Okay. If I come up with nix, you don't have to pay a zack except what I might have to lay out for information. And as a special favour because you're shouting breakfast, I'm telling you: Georgie Moore is heading back to England. He's riding Royal Palace in the Epsom next month and it's a stone bonker.'



Feet up on his desk, Shearer jotting a reminder in his diary for June: *Royal Palace*. The diary empty except for Marie's birthday and mates' weddings. He sensed someone enter, sighted over the toes of his Windsor Smiths.

'Bloody hell. I am graced with a visit by the prodigy.'

Not much trace of the nervous young cop John Gordon had been a couple of years back. No need to shake hands, they knew one another too well, though lately their meetings had been sparse as outback petrol stations.

'How's Denise?'

'Doing her second year at art school. Loving it.'

Shearer gestured at his neck with his finger. 'Your hair's longer than Ringo's. They let you get away with that?'

Gordon sat down opposite, shrugged. 'Long as I do the job.'

The Windsor Smiths came down. 'Geary must love you.'

'How's Cassandra?'

'Cute as a button.'

'We should get together. You and Marie, Denise and me.'

'You tried the new place? The Bourbon and Beefsteak? It's terrific. As long as you don't mind the Yanks. They're everywhere.'

GIs, sailors. Poor old George would be kicking himself. He'd be making money hand over fist. Not that he ever went short.' Ray trying to read Gordon. It wasn't a social call.

Gordon leaned back. 'So, you like American stuff? Bourbon, steaks ...'

'Mate, sometimes I even like Americans. I prefer them to fucking banana-benders that's for sure.'

'What about that song, "California Dreamin"'?

Shearer knew the one he meant. It's winter and somebody's dropping into a church. Soft and a little mournful. Ray liked to jive. Little Richard, Johnny O'Keefe, Chuck Berry more his style. Or cool stuff, a soft piano tinkling background, smoky-voiced chicks in dark sequins. Ray wondering why the kid was smiling, all teeth on display.

'God, they're not going to know what to make of you.'

'Who?'

'The hippies, mate. You're coming to San Francisco with me.'

Ray knew the kid wasn't bullshitting. 'When?'

'Day after tomorrow.'

'How long?'

'Till the job's done I guess.'

Ray didn't ask what the job was. He already knew it would be for somebody important.



John had never heard Anything Fucking Like It. The guitar this groaning, yawning, wailing monster. Drums tumbling. Was that fucking waltz time? You couldn't *think* the rhythm, but it throbbed in your balls. Urgent as death-row prisoners on the run. Denise naked astride him. Too long without this. So much stolen from them. Denise a vampire. Her wailing matching the guitar's. He was about to come, rolled her till he was on top. What did the Yanks call it? Balling. He came with a gush, a flash of the Rentich Chippendale lounge room, life spilled over the floor. Denise's mouth found his. Life flowed back into him.

'Jimi Hendrix,' he was reading the album cover now under a sputtering candle. A slow blues dawdling. Something about a red house.

'Stephanie, this new chick from London, just started at the school. It came out a week ago. She said The Beatles, Stones, everybody there digs him.'

Stretched out on the floor, a rug on dark boards, the old man's money getting them into this Dover Heights two-bedroom.

'Maybe you'll get to see him in San Francisco.'

'You sure you don't mind?'

'Why would I? Wish I was going. Haight-Ashbury, that's going to be a trip.'

'Don't know if we'll get to hear much music.'

'You won't be able to avoid it.' She started laughing.

'What's so funny?'

'I'm just thinking about what the hippies are going to make of Ray.'

That made him smile too.

'Be careful, hun.' She stroked his hair.

'It's a simple job. I just find the kid. Hopefully alive.'

She pressed her lips to his. He had no idea how strong he might be without her. Or her without him. Supposed they would find out.

3 SAN FRANCISCO

Seemed to John his world was still vibrating. Thirty hours give or take, BOAC out of Sydney. Nandi a blur. No real sleep. Champagne, glam stewardesses heavy on Gossamer, passengers stamping their 'international passport to smoking pleasure' puffing the whole way. Shearer loving the leigh ceremony on the Honolulu tarmac. And now San Francisco; warm, skirts short and legs bare. A cab to downtown, asking the driver, a Chinese guy who sounded like Dick Van Dyke, to swing via Haight-Ashbury. He took them through slow, though the traffic was choked anyway. Paisley shirts, floppy hats, fringe suede jackets, bull-cops in dark helmets scanning streets like John Wayne looking for Injuns across a treacherous open plain.

'It's quiet for now,' the cabby gesturing loosely. 'Hour or two it will be packed. There was a big concert in the park yesterday. Right now they're still tripping or sleeping it off. Come alive tonight.'

The driver looked late twenties. Short-sleeve white shirt, grey pants.

'What do you think of the hippies?' Shearer lighting up.

'Not so bad except they fuck up the traffic with these walk-ins, the protest marches. It's shit driving these last few months. I wouldn't care if they used cabs, but they don't. They use the trolley car, the bus. The cops beat up on them. I mean I don't like that, but they do fuck the traffic flow. So, Australia, huh?'

Shearer said. 'Yeah.'

'I hear you got these kangaroos in the main street.'

'That's right, just like your hippies. They slow down the traffic and they don't use cabs.'

The driver showed teeth. 'What are you guys doing here? You on holiday?'

'I'm his manager,' Shearer nodding at John.

The cabby looking in the rear-vision, found John's eyes. 'What do you do?'

'Don't answer that. You gotta ask me or he'll start to wonder why he needs a manager.' Shearer enjoying his role. Then, 'He's a surfer.'

The closest John had been to surf was the washing powder of that name.

'I wish I could surf,' the driver hitting a right turn. 'The chicks are freaking outtasight.' Then, nailing Shearer. 'I thought you were a cop.'

'Really?'

'Yeah, you got that look.'

Strip malls. A shopfront raced by, The Psychedelic Shop. A cluster of young people on a street corner around a bongo player. Chicks with flowers in their hair. A weird mix, pawn shops and cheap liquor stores alongside a candle store. Record shops. A bit like George Street, south end. Some streets tall houses with high windows, weatherboard. Others three-storey plus, terraced, stone step walk-ups. Nice architecture made you think of parasols, penny-farthing bikes, fob watches.

'We want a hotel. Close to here but clean. Not too exxy. You know a place like that?' Shearer doing all the running. John almost nodding off.

'No crabs, right?' the driver smiling.

'Right.'

'I know a good place. Close but not too close to the Panhandle.'



The Hotel Clarence looked like some of the hotels in Bondi, only bigger. Four storeys on a corner. They pulled in behind a VW van painted in flowers. Long-haired guys, pulling guitars and amplifiers out the back.

'They stay here not play here,' explained the cabbie. 'The Fillmore is only three blocks west. You heard of that?'

John recalled some vague party chat with Denise's crew.

'All the psychedelic bands play there. I don't know if somebody's playing tonight, but you want to see hippies, that's the place.'

Shearer dubiously scanned his fellow hotel guests milling around their truck.

The cabbie reading him. ‘Don’t worry. The bands that stay here have a record company, mainly from Los Angeles. The place is clean. No rats. And the soundproofing is good.’

They climbed out and grabbed their suitcases. Denise had told John you were expected to tip everybody. John peeled off an extra couple of bucks for the driver who seemed to expect more.



One step into the hotel out of the wafting marihuana and Ray knew the driver had done well by them. The Clarence at least one generation, more likely two since its glory days, but the faded burgundy carpet with the gold coat of arms was freshly vacuumed, the short reception desk a dull wooden mirror. The lobby was compact but the bank of six elevators off to the left, roomy. A businessman’s hotel back before stockbrokers leapt from windows. Suited Ray. He copped a look at the baggage captain. Like the carpet, his uniform worn but neat, cuffs white, no missing buttons. Early fifties, Ray figuring he’d had this job since the war, maybe before the war. Something said navy. Proud of his work, in it for life, a big tick.

Best of all was the clerk. A little rectangular badge said ‘Kitty’, a hairstyle from the Dusty Springfield school, hairspray but not too much, little blonde horns under the ears, a great smile, smoker’s lines but not many. Just three years too old to want to tune in and drop out, say thirty-one, perfect age for Ray, old enough to know who Tony Bennett was but young enough to own a few Beatles records, and definitely she would rock to Elvis. He let John enquire about the room, waited for Kitty to shoot a glance his way, which she did as she was asking if they would want a twin or two separate rooms.

‘Twin.’

That they were cheapskates didn’t put her off. Yes, they had a room available. Gordon said the price was fine.

‘So where are you gentlemen from?’

'Australia,' Ray muscling in, elbows on the polished wood lowering his chin to her level.

'Oh my. You're the first Australians we've had stay here.'

Ray felt no compunction to stay faithful to Marie while away from Sydney. He'd not be unfaithful to her there, ever. He'd provide for her and Cassandra. He'd lay down his life for them. But he knew life could be short. It was a foolish man turned his back on new experiences. Besides, he was Catholic and there was always confession.

'Are you on duty most days?' asked Ray.

'Except for Sunday.'

'Good.' Ray enjoyed the blush on her cheeks.



'Can't help yourself,' whispered Gordon, the lift rising. Newish, not one of those with the collapsible cage. A silent bellhop facing the doors, his back to them.

'God helps he who helps himself. Besides, unlike you, I'm not married.'

'I don't recall that stopping you when you were.'

'You requested me.' That shut him up. He liked poking Gordon's certainty.

The elevator jerked to a stop. The 4 button glowing. The bellboy's heels leading the way, a bit scuffed. A Hilton bellboy's would have gleamed, but no complaints. The corridor, as with the lobby, tidy and well tended. Big brass key, tall door. The bellboy showed them into a wide, high-ceilinged room. A still life of fruit in a balsa frame hanging on flock wallpaper. Aqua and gold colour theme. A large bay-window, views of a street and sky. A bathroom boasting old faucets, deep tub and large green tiles.

Gordon swapped the bellboy a tip for their room key before he pulled the door shut.

'I'm bushed,' Gordon flopping on a bed beside folded towels and a miniature bar of soap.

Ray said, 'Change your shirt and let's get to police HQ. You sleep now, you'll wake at three in the morning.'



A big old building downtown, huge arched windows like a library's, long bannisters, a solid staircase, worn but, like the Clarence, still with dignity despite the inevitable chips off the rubber-lino mats. More museum than cop station. Put that down to the legal traffic here. Attorneys, secretaries and assistants looking like Debbie Reynolds. The deeper they headed into the second-floor jungle, the cops' lair, the more it became like every other police HQ Ray had ever known. It didn't matter where you put a police headquarters, its innate properties never altered: the smell of hair and gun-oil, overused corridor toilets, pencil shavings, the clatter of typewriters and jarring crash of a filing cabinet followed by a curse. 'Who took my ...' Didn't matter what it was, some prick always swiped it and you never learned who.

The lino dirtier here too. Rows of offices, doors shut with glass rectangles opaque as cloudy Osrams. Names stencilled in gold letters, standard fans. Their guide, a short-back-and-sides uniform knocked on a door that said *Deputy Chief of Police*.

A voice: 'Come in.'

The uniform opened the door, showed them in then closed it leaving himself outside. The man standing in the office in uniform was lean, about fifty with a crop of black hair Frankie Avalon would have been proud of.

'I'm not the Deputy Chief,' he said, 'I'm Captain Frank Spinetti, his assistant. Welcome to San Francisco, gentlemen.'

They shook hands. Gordon introduced them. Spinetti indicated they take a seat facing the desk, slid into his boss' chair. There was a flag behind him, a bear, with words: *California Republic*.

'The Deputy Chief apologises he's not here in person, but we've got kind of a lot on right now.' Smarmy smile. 'Black Panthers, hippies, you name it. But we are here to help our Australian brothers in whatever way we can.'

Clearly word had come from on high just like Geary had promised. Spinetti put his hand on a manila folder sitting on the desk. It was thick but not that thick.

‘What we have here is the case file worked by our Missing Persons and also the original investigation done by Berkeley. Don’t be too hard on them. We have hundreds of kids everyday disappearing then turning up, then disappearing.’ Picking up a sealed envelope, placing it on top. ‘Your California driver licences and private-detective licences.’

‘Can we carry weapons?’ asked Gordon.

Spinetti laughed. ‘Everybody here carries a weapon, but these permits give you the right to carry a concealed weapon. You brought weapons with you?’

Ray confirmed they had. ‘Smith and Wesson, snub-nose.’

‘Fine. You can buy ammo for them anywhere. You have a car accident, you get into any problem with law enforcement, you get the officers who attend to call me direct.’ Cards appeared magically in his fingers, one for each. ‘If you wind up in LA, you better go through the same process. You get in the shit, they won’t give a rat’s ass about our blessing. Your PI licences are good for anywhere in California, but you cross the state border you are on your own. Where are you staying?’

‘The Clarence,’ said Ray.

Spinetti nodded like it was a good choice.

Ray asked if they would have access to the investigating officers.

‘Of course, but please go through me, not direct.’

‘And Berkeley? Will they be pissed off?’

‘I’ll see they cooperate fully. Gentlemen, is there anything else you need?’

Gordon said, ‘I think we’re good.’

Spinetti stood. ‘In that case, let me wish you good luck.’ He handed over the file and licences and they shook hands. ‘Chances are the kid took a bad acid trip and is curled up in a ball somewhere. Sometimes they come out of it but not always.’ He opened the door for them. The uniform was waiting. ‘The officer will show you out. Remember, you need anything, don’t hesitate to call.’

