

1

Sydney

SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

At first the female passport official had beamed: ‘How are ya, mate?’

‘I’m fine,’ Harry Hole had lied. It was more than thirty hours since he had taken off from Oslo via London, and after the change of planes in Bahrain he had sat in the same bloody seat by the emergency exit. For security reasons it could only be tipped back a little, and his lumbar region had almost crumbled by the time they reached Singapore.

And now the woman behind the counter was no longer smiling.

She had scrutinised his passport with conspicuous interest. Whether it was the photograph or his name that had initially put her in such a cheery mood was hard to say.

‘Business?’

Harry Hole had a suspicion that passport officials in most places in the world would have added a ‘sir’, but he

had read that this type of formal pleasantry wasn't especially widespread in Australia. It didn't really matter; Harry wasn't particularly accustomed to foreign travel or snobbish – all he wanted was a hotel room and a bed as quickly as possible.

'Yes,' he had replied, drumming his fingers on the counter.

And that was when her lips had pursed, turned ugly and articulated, with a pointed tone: 'Why isn't there a visa in your passport, sir?'

His heart sank, as it invariably did when there was a hint of a catastrophe in the offing. Perhaps 'sir' was used only when situations became critical?

'Sorry, I forgot,' Harry mumbled, searching feverishly through his inside pockets. Why had they not been able to pin a special visa in his passport as they do with standard visas? Behind him in the queue he heard the faint drone of a Walkman and realised it was his travelling companion from the plane. He had been playing the same cassette the whole flight. Why the hell could he never remember which pocket he put things in? It was hot as well, even though it was getting on for ten o'clock at night. Harry could feel his scalp beginning to itch.

At last he found the document and placed it on the counter, to his great relief.

'Police officer, are you?'

The passport official looked up from the special visa and studied him, but the pursed mouth was gone.

'I hope no Norwegian blondes have been murdered?'

She chuckled and smacked the stamp down hard on the special visa.

'Well, just the one,' Harry Hole answered.

* * *

The arrivals hall was crowded with travel reps and limousine drivers, holding up signs with names on, but not a Hole in sight. He was on the point of grabbing a taxi when a black man wearing light blue jeans and a Hawaiian shirt, and with an unusually broad nose and dark, curly hair ploughed a furrow between the signs and came striding towards him.

‘Mr Holy, I presume!’ he declared triumphantly.

Harry Hole considered his options. He had decided to spend the first days in Australia correcting the pronunciation of his surname so that he wouldn’t be confused with apertures or orifices. Mr Holy however, was infinitely preferable.

‘Andrew Kensington. How are ya?’ the man grinned and stuck out an enormous fist.

It was nothing less than a juice extractor.

‘Welcome to Sydney. Hope you enjoyed the flight,’ the stranger said with evident sincerity, like an echo of the air hostess’s announcement twenty minutes earlier. He took Harry’s battered suitcase and began to walk towards the exit without a backward glance. Harry kept close to him.

‘Do you work for Sydney police?’ he initiated.

‘Sure do, mate. Watch out!’

The swing door hit Harry in the face, right on the hooter, and made his eyes water. A bad slapstick sketch could not have started worse. He rubbed his nose and swore in Norwegian. Kensington sent him a sympathetic look.

‘Bloody doors, eh?’ he said.

Harry didn’t answer. He didn’t know how to answer that sort of comment down under.

In the car park Kensington unlocked the boot of a

small, well-used Toyota and shoved in the suitcase. 'Do you wanna drive, mate?' he asked in surprise.

Harry realised he was sitting in the driver's seat. Of course, they drove on the bloody left in Australia. However, the passenger seat was so full of papers, cassettes and general rubbish that Harry squeezed into the back.

'You must be an Aboriginal,' he said as they turned onto the motorway.

'Guess there's no fooling you, Officer,' Kensington answered, glancing in the mirror.

'In Norway we call you Australian Negroes.'

Kensington kept his eyes trained on the mirror. 'Really?'

Harry began to feel ill at ease. 'Er, by that I just mean that your forefathers obviously didn't belong to the convicts sent here from England two hundred years ago.' He wanted to show he had at least a modicum of knowledge about the country's history.

'That's right, Holy. My forefathers were here a bit before them. Forty thousand years, to be precise.'

Kensington grinned into the mirror. Harry vowed to keep his mouth shut for a while.

'I see. Call me Harry.'

'OK, Harry. I'm Andrew.'

Andrew ran the conversation for the rest of the ride. He drove Harry to King's Cross, holding forth the whole way: this area was Sydney's red-light district and the centre for the drugs trade and to a large extent all the other shady dealings in town. Every second scandal seemed to have a connection with some hotel or strip joint inside this square kilometre.

'Here we are,' Andrew said suddenly. He pulled into the kerb, jumped out and took Harry's suitcase from the boot.

'See you tomorrow,' Andrew said, and with that he and the car were gone. With a stiff back and jet lag beginning to announce its presence, Harry and his suitcase were now alone on a pavement in a town boasting a population roughly equivalent to the whole of Norway, outside the splendid Crescent Hotel. The name was printed on the door next to three stars. Oslo's Chief Constable was not known for largesse with regards to accommodation for her employees. But perhaps this one was not going to be too bad after all. There must have been a civil service discount and it was probably the hotel's smallest room, Harry reflected.

And it was.

2

Gap Park

HARRY KNOCKED WARILY ON THE door of the Head of Crime Squad for Surry Hills.

‘Come in,’ boomed a voice from inside.

A tall, broad man with a stomach designed to impress was standing by the window, behind an oak desk. Beneath a thinning mane protruded grey bushy eyebrows, but the wrinkles around his eyes smiled.

‘Harry Holy from Oslo, Norway, sir.’

‘Take a pew, Holy. You look bloody fit for this time of the morning. I hope you haven’t been to see any of the boys in Narc, have you?’ Neil McCormack let out a huge laugh.

‘Jet lag. I’ve been awake since four this morning, sir,’ Harry explained.

‘Of course. Just an in-joke. We had a pretty high-profile corruption case here a couple of years back, you see. Ten officers were convicted, among other things for selling drugs – to one another. Suspicion was raised because a

couple of them were so alert – round the clock. No joke really.’ He chuckled contentedly, put on his glasses and flicked through the papers in front of him.

‘So you’ve been sent here to assist us with our investigation into the murder of Inger Holter, a Norwegian citizen with a permit to work in Australia. Blonde, good-looking girl, according to the photos. Twenty-three years old, wasn’t she?’

Harry nodded. McCormack was serious now.

‘Found by fishermen on the ocean side of Watson’s Bay – to be more precise, Gap Park. Semi-naked. Bruising suggested she had been raped first and then strangled, but no semen was found. Later transported at the dead of night to the park where the body was dumped off the cliff.’

He pulled a face.

‘Had the weather been a little worse the waves would definitely have carried her out, but instead she lay among the rocks until she was found. As I said, there was no semen present, and the reason for that is that the vagina was sliced up like a filleted fish and the seawater did a thorough job of washing this girl clean. Therefore we have no fingerprints either, though we do have a rough estimate of time of death . . .’ McCormack removed his glasses and rubbed his face. ‘But we don’t have a murderer. And what the hell are you gonna do about that, Mr Holy?’

Harry was about to answer but was interrupted.

‘What you’re gonna do is watch carefully while we haul the bastard in, tell the Norwegian press along the way what a wonderful job we’re doing together – making sure we don’t offend anyone at the Norwegian Embassy,

or relatives – and otherwise enjoy a break and send a card or two to your dear Chief Constable. How is she by the way?’

‘Fine, as far as I know.’

‘Great woman, she is. I s’pose she explained to you what’s expected of you?’

‘To some extent. I’m taking part in an invest—’

‘Great. Forget all that. Here are the new rules. Number one: from now on you listen to me, me and me alone. Number two: you don’t take part in anything you haven’t been instructed to do by me. And number three: one toe out of line and you’ll be on the first plane home.’

This was delivered with a smile, but the message was clear: paws off, he was here as an observer. He might just as well have brought his swimming things and a camera along.

‘I gather that Inger Holter was some kind of TV celeb in Norway?’

‘A minor celeb, sir. She hosted a children’s programme broadcast a couple of years ago. I suppose before this happened she was on her way into oblivion.’

‘Yeah, I’ve been told that your papers are making a big thing of this murder. Couple of them have sent people here already. We’ve given ’em what we’ve got, and that’s not a great deal, so they’ll soon be bored and bugger off home. They don’t know you’re here. We’ve got our own nannies, so you won’t have to take care of them.’

‘Thank you for that, sir,’ Harry said, and he meant it. The thought of panting Norwegian journalists looking over his shoulder was not a welcome one.

‘OK, Holy, I’ll be honest with you and tell you how the land lies. I’ve been told in no uncertain terms by my

governor that councillors in Sydney would like to see this case cleared up as soon as possible. As usual, it's all about politics and dosh.'

'Dosh?'

'Well, we reckon unemployment in Sydney will rise to over ten per cent this year, and the town needs every cent we can get from the tourists. We've got the Olympic Games just round the corner, in 2000, and tourism from Scandinavia's on the up. Murder, especially one which hasn't been cleared up, isn't a good advert for the town, so we're doing what we can. We have a team of four detectives on the case plus high-priority access to the force's resources – all the computers, forensic staff, lab people. And so on.'

McCormack pulled out a sheet of paper which he studied with a frown.

'In fact, you should be working with Watkins, but since you specifically asked for Kensington, I see no reason to refuse your request.'

'Sir, to my knowledge I haven't—'

'Kensington's a good man. There are not many Indigenous officers who have come up through the ranks like him.'

'No?'

McCormack shrugged. 'That's just the way it is. Well, Holy, if there's anything else, you know where I hang out. Any questions?'

'Er, just a formality, sir. I was wondering whether *sir* was the right mode of address to a superior officer in this country, or whether it was a little too . . .'

'Formal? Stiff? Yes, I guess it probably is. But I like it. It reminds me that I am in fact the boss of this outfit.'

McCormack burst out laughing and concluded the meeting with a bone-crunching handshake.

'January's the tourist season in Australia,' Andrew explained as they lurched forward in the traffic around Circular Quay.

'Everyone comes to see the Sydney Opera House and go on boat trips round the harbour and admire the women on Bondi Beach. Shame you've got to work.'

Harry shook his head. 'Doesn't matter. I break out in a cold sweat around tourist traps.'

They emerged onto New South Head Road where the Toyota sped eastwards to Watson's Bay.

'The East Side of Sydney's not exactly like the East End of London,' Andrew explained as they passed one fashionable house after another. 'This district's called Double Bay. We call it Double Pay.'

'Where did Inger Holter live?'

'She lived with her boyfriend in Newtown for a while before they split up and she moved to a little one-room flat in Glebe.'

'Boyfriend?'

Andrew shrugged. 'He's Australian, a computer engineer and met her when she came here on holiday two years ago. He's got an alibi for the night of the murder and is not exactly the prototype of a murderer. But you never know, do you?'

They parked below Gap Park, one of Sydney's many green lungs. Steep stone steps led up to the windblown park that lay high above Watson's Bay to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the east. The heat hit them when they opened the car doors. Andrew put on a big pair

of shades, which made Harry think of a laid-back porn king. For some reason his Australian colleague was wearing a tight suit today, and Harry thought the broad-shouldered black man looked a bit comical as he rolled and pitched up the path in front of him to the viewpoint.

Harry looked around. To the west he saw the city centre with the Harbour Bridge, to the north the beach and yachts in Watson's Bay and, further in the distance, verdant Manly, the suburb on the northern side of the bay. To the east the horizon curved in a spectrum of various shades of blue. The cliffs plunged down in front of them, and way below the ocean breakers ended their long voyage in a thunderous crescendo among the rocks.

Harry felt a bead of sweat running down between his shoulder blades. This heat was giving him goose pimples.

'You can see the Pacific Ocean from here, Harry. Next stop New Zealand, after about twelve hundred wet miles,' Andrew said, spitting a thick gobbet off the edge of the cliff. They followed it down for a while until the wind dispersed it.

'Good job she wasn't alive when she fell,' he said. 'She must have hit the cliffs on the way down; there were large chunks of flesh torn from her body when they found her.'

'How long had she been dead before she was found?'

Andrew pulled a grimace. 'The police doctor said forty-eight hours. But he . . .'

He put a backward-facing thumb in front of his mouth. Harry nodded. So the doctor was a thirsty soul.

'And you become sceptical when the figures are too rounded?'

‘She was found on a Friday morning, so let’s say she died some time during Wednesday night.’

‘Any clues here?’

‘As you can see, cars can park down below and the area is unlit at night and relatively deserted. We haven’t got any reports from witnesses, and to be frank, we don’t reckon we’ll get any.’

‘So what do we do now?’

‘Now we do what the boss told me, we go to a restaurant and spend a bit of the force’s entertainment budget. After all, you’re Norway’s highest police rep in a radius of more than twelve hundred miles. At least.’

Andrew and Harry sat at a table with a white cloth. Doyle’s, a seafood restaurant, was situated at the furthest end of Watson’s Bay with only a strip of sand between itself and the sea.

‘Ridiculously beautiful, isn’t it?’ Andrew said.

‘Picture postcard.’ A small boy and a girl were building sandcastles on the beach in front of them, against a background of a deep blue sea and luxuriant green hills with Sydney’s proud skyline in the distance.

Harry chose scallops and Tasmanian trout, Andrew an Australian flatfish which Harry, quite reasonably, had never heard of. Andrew ordered a bottle of Chardonnay Rosemount, ‘quite wrong for this meal, but it’s white, it’s good and it’s smack on budget’, and looked mildly surprised when Harry said he didn’t drink.

‘Quaker?’

‘No, nothing like that,’ Harry said.

Doyle’s was an old family-run restaurant and considered one of Sydney’s best, Andrew informed Harry. It

was peak season and packed to the rafters and Harry presumed that was why it was so difficult to gain eye contact with the waiters.

‘The waiters here are like the Planet Pluto,’ Andrew said. ‘They orbit on the periphery, only making an appearance every twentieth year, and even then are impossible to glimpse with the naked eye.’

Harry couldn’t work up any indignation and leaned back in his chair with a contented sigh. ‘But they have excellent food,’ he said. ‘So that explains the suit.’

‘Yes and no. As you can see, it’s not exactly formal here. But it’s better for me *not* to wear jeans and a T-shirt in places like this. Because of my appearance I have to make an effort.’

‘What do you mean?’

Andrew stared at Harry. ‘Aboriginal people don’t have very high status in this country, as you may perhaps appreciate. Years ago the English wrote home that the natives had a weakness for alcohol and property crime.’

Harry listened with interest.

‘They thought it was in our genes. “All they were good for was making a hell of a racket blowing through long pieces of hollow wood, which they call didgeridoos,” one of them wrote. Well, this country boasts that it’s managed to integrate several cultures into one cohesive society. But cohesive for who? The problem, or the advantage, according to your perspective, is that the natives aren’t seen any more.’

‘Aboriginal folks are as good as totally absent from social life in Australia, apart from political debates that affect Indigenous interests and culture. Australians pay lip-service by having Aboriginal art hanging on the walls

of their houses. However, we Blackfellas are well represented in the dole queues, suicide statistics and prisons. If you're Aboriginal the chances of ending up in prison are twenty-six times greater than for any other Australian. Chew on that, Harry Holy.'

Andrew drank the rest of his wine while Harry chewed on that. And the fact that he'd probably just eaten the best fish dish in his thirty-two years.

'And yet Australia's no more racist than any other country. After all, we're a multicultural nation with people from all over the world living here. It just means that dressing in a suit whenever you go to a restaurant is worth the trouble.'

Harry nodded again. There was no more to say on that subject.

'Inger Holter worked in a bar, didn't she?'

'Yes, she did. The Albury in Oxford Street, Paddington. I thought we could wander up there this evening.'

'Why not now?' Harry was beginning to be impatient with all this leisure.

'Because first we have to say hello to her landlord.'

Pluto appeared unbidden in the firmament.

3

A Tasmanian Devil

GLEBE POINT ROAD TURNED OUT to be a cosy, not too frenetic street where small, plain and, for the most part, ethnic restaurants from various parts of the world stood cheek by jowl.

‘This used to be Sydney’s bohemian quarter,’ Andrew explained. ‘I lived here as a student in the seventies. You can still find typical veggie restaurants for people with conservation on the brain and alternative lifestyles, bookshops for lesbians and so on. But the old hippies and acidheads have gone. As Glebe became an “in” place rent went up – I doubt if I’d be able to live here now, even on my police salary.’

They turned right, up Hereford Street and went through the gate to number 54. A small furry black animal came towards them, barking, and revealing a row of tiny, sharp teeth. The mini-monster looked seriously angry and bore a striking similarity to the picture in the tourist brochure of the Tasmanian Devil. Aggressive and

generally unpleasant to have hanging from your throat, it said. The species had been almost completely exterminated, which Harry sincerely hoped was true. As this specimen launched itself at him with jaws wide open, Andrew raised his foot and kicked the animal in mid-flight and volleyed it yelping into the bushes alongside the fence.

A man with a large gut who looked as though he had just got up was standing in the doorway with a sour expression on his face as they came up the steps.

‘What happened to the dog?’

‘It’s admiring the rose bushes,’ Andrew informed him with a smile. ‘We’re from the police. Crime Squad. Mr Robertson?’

‘Yeah, yeah. What do you lot want again? I told you I’ve told you everything I know.’

‘And now you’ve told us you’ve told us you’ve told us . . .’ A long silence developed as Andrew continued to smile and Harry shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

‘Apologies, Mr Robertson, we won’t try to kill you with our charm, but this is Inger Holter’s brother and he would like to see her room if that’s not too much trouble.’

Robertson’s attitude changed dramatically.

‘Sorry, I didn’t know . . . Come in!’ He opened the door and went ahead of them up the stairs.

‘Yeah, in fact I didn’t even know Inger had a brother. But now you say it of course I can see the family likeness.’

Behind him, Harry half turned to Andrew and rolled his eyes.

‘Inger was a lovely girl and a fantastic tenant – indeed,

a source of pride for the whole house and neighbourhood too, probably.' He smelt of beer and his diction was already a bit slurred.

No attempt had been made to tidy Inger's room. There were clothes, magazines, full ashtrays and empty wine bottles everywhere.

'Er, the police told me not to touch anything for the moment.'

'We understand.'

'She just didn't come back one night. Vanished into thin air.'

'Thank you, Mr Robertson, we've read your statement.'

'I told her not to take the route round Bridge Road and the fish market when she came home at night. It's dark there and there are loads of blacks and Chinks . . .'

He looked at Andrew Kensington in horror. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to . . .'

'That's fine. You can go now, Mr Robertson.'

Robertson padded down the stairs and they heard bottles clinking in the kitchen.

The room contained a bed, a few bookshelves and a desk. Harry looked around and tried to construct an impression of Inger Holter. Victimology: putting yourself in the victim's shoes. He could just about recall the impish girl off the TV screen with her well-meaning, youthful commitment and innocent blue eyes.

She was definitely not a home bird. There were no pictures on the walls, just a poster of *Braveheart* with Mel Gibson – which Harry remembered only because for some incomprehensible reason it won an Oscar for Best

Film. Bad taste, as far as films go, he thought. And men. Harry was one of those who felt personally let down when *Mad Max* made a Hollywood star out of him.

A photograph showed Inger sitting on a bench in front of some colourful Western-style houses with a gang of long-haired, bearded youths. She was wearing a loose, purple dress. Her blonde hair hung down flat against her pale, serious face. The young man whose hand she was holding had a baby in his lap.

On the shelf there was a pouch of tobacco. A few books about astrology and a roughly hewn wooden mask with a long, bent nose like a beak. Harry turned the mask over. *Made in Papua New Guinea*, it said on the price tag.

The clothes that weren't lying on the bed and floor hung in a small wardrobe. There wasn't much. A few cotton blouses, a worn coat and a large straw hat on the shelf.

Andrew picked up a packet of cigarette papers from the drawer in the desk.

'King Size Smoking Slim. She rolled herself some big cigarettes.'

'Did you find any drugs here?' Harry asked.

Andrew shook his head and pointed to the cigarette paper.

'But if we'd hoovered the ashtrays I wouldn't mind betting we'd have found traces of cannabis.'

'Why wasn't it done? Didn't the SOC people come here?'

'First of all, there's no reason to believe that this was the scene of the crime. Second of all, smoking marijuana is nothing to shout about. Here in New South Wales we have a more pragmatic attitude to marijuana than in

certain other Australian states. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that the murder could be drugs-related, but the odd reefer or two is hardly relevant in this context. We can't know for sure if she used other drugs. There's a fair bit of coke and designer drugs on the go in the Albury, but no one we've spoken to has mentioned anything, and there wasn't a trace of anything in the blood tests. At any rate, she wasn't on the serious stuff. There were no needle marks, and we have a reasonable overview of the hard-core users.'

Harry looked at him. Andrew cleared his throat.

'That's the official version, anyway. There is one thing they thought you could help us with though.'

There was a letter in Norwegian. 'Dear Elisabeth,' it started and obviously wasn't finished. Harry skimmed through it.

Well, I'm just fine, and even more important, I'm in love! Of course, he's as handsome as a Greek God with long, curly brown hair, a pert bum and eyes that tell you what he's already whispered to you: he wants you now – this minute – behind the closest wall, in the loo, on the table, on the floor, anywhere. His name's Evans, he's 32, he's been married (surprise, surprise) and has a lovely little boy of 18 months called Tom-Tom. Right now he doesn't have a proper job, but drifts around doing things.

And, yes, I know you can smell trouble, and I promise not to let myself be dragged down. Not for the time being, anyway.

Enough about Evans. I'm still working at the Albury. 'Mr Bean' stopped inviting me out after

Evans was in the bar one night, and that at least is progress. But he still follows me with those slimy eyes of his. Yuk! Actually I'm beginning to get sick of this job, but I'll just have to hang on until I can have my residence permit extended. I've had a word with NRK – they're planning a follow-up to the TV series for next autumn and I can carry on if I want. Decisions, decisions!

The letter stopped there.

4

A Clown

‘WHERE ARE WE GOING NOW?’ Harry asked.

‘To the circus! I promised a friend I would pop by one day. And today is one day, isn’t it.’

At the Powerhouse a small circus troupe had already started the free afternoon performance for a sparse but young and enthusiastic audience. The building had been a power station and a tram hall when Sydney had trams, Andrew elucidated. Now it was functioning as a kind of contemporary museum. A couple of well-built girls had just completed a not very spectacular trapeze number, but had reaped a great round of friendly applause.

An enormous guillotine was rolled in as a clown entered the stage. He was wearing a brightly coloured uniform and a striped hat, obviously inspired by the French Revolution. He tripped and got up to all sorts of pranks to the huge amusement of the children. Then another clown came onto the stage wearing a long white wig, and

it gradually dawned on Harry that he was meant to be Louis XVI.

‘By unanimous vote, sentenced to death,’ announced the clown with the striped hat.

Soon the condemned man was led to the scaffold where he – still to the amusement of the children – laid his head, after much screaming and yelling, on the block below the blade. There was a brief roll of the drums, the blade fell and to everyone’s amazement, Harry’s included, it cut off the monarch’s head with a sound reminiscent of an axe blow in the forest on a bright winter’s morning. The head, still bearing the wig, fell and rolled into a basket. The lights went out, and when they were switched back on, the headless king stood in the spotlight with his head under his arm. Now the children’s cheering knew no bounds. Then the lights went out again, and when they came back on for the second time, the whole troupe was assembled and bowing, and the performance was over.

As people poured towards the exit, Andrew and Harry went backstage. In the makeshift dressing room the performers were already removing their costumes and make-up.

‘Otto, say hi to a friend from Norway,’ Andrew shouted.

A face turned. Louis XVI looked less majestic with make-up smeared over his face and without his wig. ‘Well, hello, it’s Tuka the Indian!’

‘Harry, this is Otto Rechnagel.’

Otto proffered his hand elegantly with a kink in the wrist and looked indignant when Harry, slightly perplexed, made do with a light press.

‘No kiss, handsome?’

‘Otto thinks he’s a woman. A woman of noble descent,’ Andrew said, to illuminate.

‘Stuff and nonsense, Tuka. Otto knows very well she’s a man. You look confused, handsome. Perhaps you’d like to check for yourself?’ Otto emitted a high-pitched chuckle.

Harry felt his earlobes go warm. Two false eyelashes fluttered accusingly at Andrew.

‘Your friend, does he talk?’

‘Sorry. My name’s Harry . . . er . . . Holy. Clever number out there. Nice costumes. Very . . . lifelike. And unusual.’

‘The Louise Seize number? Unusual? On the contrary. It’s an old classic. The first time it was done was by the Jandaschewsky clown family just two weeks after the real execution in January 1793. People loved it. People have always loved public executions. Do you know how many reruns there are of the Kennedy assassination on American TV stations every year?’

Harry shook his head.

Otto looked up at the ceiling pensively. ‘Quite a lot.’

‘Otto sees himself as the heir of the great Jandy Jandaschewsky,’ Andrew added.

‘Is that so?’ Famous clown families were not Harry’s area of expertise.

‘I don’t think your friend here is quite with us, Tuka. The Jandaschewsky family, you see, was a travelling troupe of musical clowns who came to Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century and settled here. They ran the circus until Jandy died in 1971. I saw Jandy for the first time when I was six. From that moment I knew what I wanted to be. And now that’s what I am.’

Otto smiled a sad clown smile through the make-up.

‘How do you two know each other?’ Harry asked. Andrew and Otto exchanged glances. Harry saw their mouths twitch and knew he had committed a gaffe.

‘I mean . . . a policeman and a clown . . . that’s not exactly . . .’

‘It’s a long story,’ Andrew said. ‘I suppose you could say we grew up together. Otto would have sold his mother for a piece of my arse of course, but even at a young age I felt a strange attraction to girls and all those awful hetero things. It must have been something to do with genes and environment. What do you think, Otto?’

Andrew chuckled as he ducked away from Otto’s slap.

‘You have no style, you have no money and your arse is overrated,’ Otto squealed. Harry gazed round at the others in the troupe; they seemed quite unfazed by the performance. One of the well-built trapeze artists sent him an encouraging wink.

‘Harry and I are going up to the Albury tonight. Would you like to join us?’

‘You know very well I don’t go there any more, Tuka.’

‘You should be over that by now, Otto. Life goes on, you know.’

‘Everyone else’s life goes on, you mean. Mine stops here, right here. When love dies, I die.’

‘As you wish.’

‘Besides, I have to go home and feed Waldorf. You go, and I may come a bit later.’

‘See you soon,’ Harry said, putting his lips dutifully to Otto’s outstretched hand.

‘Looking forward to that, Handsome Harry.’

5

A Swede

THE SUN HAD GONE DOWN as they drove along Oxford Street in Paddington and pulled up by a small open space. 'Green Park' the sign said, but the grass was scorched brown, and the only green was a pavilion in the middle of the park. A man with Aboriginal blood in his veins lay on the grass between the trees. His clothes were in tatters and he was so dirty that he was more grey than black. On seeing Andrew, he raised his hand in a kind of greeting, but Andrew ignored him.

The Albury was so full they had to squeeze their way inside the glass doors. Harry stood still for a few seconds taking in the scene before him. The clientele was a motley collection, mostly young men: rockers in faded denim, suit-clad yuppies with slicked hair, arty types with goatees and champagne, blond and good-looking surfers with bleached smiles, and bikers – or *bikies* as Andrew called them – in black leathers. At the centre of the room, in

the very bar itself, the show was in full swing with long-legged, semi-naked women wearing purple, plunging tops. They were cavorting about and miming with wide, red-painted mouths to Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive'. The girls took turns so that those who were not performing served the customers with winks and outrageous flirting.

Harry elbowed his way to the bar and ordered.

'Coming up right away, blondie,' said the barmaid in the Roman helmet with a deep voice and a mischievous smile.

'Tell me, are you and I the only straight guys in this town?' Harry asked, returning with a beer and a glass of juice.

'After San Francisco Sydney has the biggest gay population in the world,' Andrew said. 'The Australian outback is not exactly known for its tolerance of sexual diversity, so it's not surprising that all the queer farmer boys in Australia want to come to Sydney. Not just from Australia, by the way, there are gay people from all over the world pouring into town every day.'

They went to another bar at the back of the room where Andrew called a girl behind the counter. She was standing with her back to them and had the reddest hair Harry had ever seen. It hung down to the rear pocket of her tight blue jeans, but was unable to conceal the willowy back and pleasingly rounded hips. She turned and a row of pearly-white teeth smiled from a slim, radiant face with two azure eyes and innumerable freckles. What a waste, if this isn't a woman, Harry thought.

'Remember me?' Andrew shouted above the noise of seventies disco music. 'I was here asking about Inger. Can we have a word?'

The redhead became serious. She nodded, passed on a message to one of the other girls and led the way to a little smoking room behind the kitchen.

‘Any news?’ she asked, and Harry needed no more to be able to determine with some certainty that she spoke better Swedish than English.

‘I met an old man once,’ Harry said in Norwegian. She glanced at him in surprise. ‘He was the captain of a boat on the Amazon River. Three words from him in Portuguese and I knew he was Swedish. He had lived there for thirty years. And I can’t speak a word of Portuguese.’

At first the redhead looked perplexed, but then she laughed. A trill of cheery laughter that reminded Harry of some rare forest bird.

‘Is it really so obvious?’ she said in Swedish. She had a deep, calm voice and softly rolled *rrrs*.

‘Intonation,’ Harry said. ‘You never completely get rid of intonation.’

‘Do you know each other?’ Andrew scrutinised them sceptically.

Harry looked at the redhead.

‘Nope,’ she answered.

And isn’t that a pity, Harry thought to himself.

The redhead’s name was Birgitta Enquist. She had been in Australia for four years and working at the Albury for one.

‘Of course we talked when we were working, but I didn’t really have any close contact with Inger. She kept herself to herself mostly. There’s a gang of us who go out together and she occasionally tagged along, but I

didn't know her that well. She had just left some guy in Newtown when she started here. The most personal detail I know about her is that the relationship became too intense for her in the long run. I suppose she needed a fresh start.'

'Do you know who she hung out with?' Andrew asked.

'Not really. As I said, we talked, but she never gave me a full rundown of her life. Not that I asked her to. In October she went up north to Queensland and apparently fell in with a crowd from Sydney there who she stayed in contact with afterwards. I think she met a guy up there – he came by here one night. I've told you all this before though, haven't I?' she said with an enquiring glance.

'I know, my dear Miss Enquist, I just wanted my Norwegian colleague here to have a first-hand report and see where Inger worked. Harry Holy is regarded as Norway's best investigator after all and he may be able to put his finger on things we Sydney police have overlooked.'

Harry was overcome by a sudden fit of coughing.

'Who's Mr Bean?' he asked in a strange, constricted voice.

'Mr Bean?' Birgitta eyed them in bewilderment.

'Someone who looked like the English comedian . . . er, Rowan Atkinson, isn't that his name?'

'Oh, him!' Birgitta said with the same forest-bird laughter.

I like it, Harry thought. More.

'That's Alex, the bar manager. He won't be here till later.'

'We have reason to believe he was interested in Inger.'

'Alex had his eye on Inger, yes, he did. And not just

Inger, most girls in this bar have at one time or another been subjected to his desperate efforts. Or Fiddler Ray, as we call him. It was Inger who came up with Mr Bean. He doesn't have an easy time of it, poor thing. Over thirty, lives at home with his mum and doesn't seem to be going anywhere. But he's perfectly OK as a boss. And quite harmless, if that's what you're thinking.'

'How do you know?'

Birgitta patted the side of her nose. 'He hasn't got it in him.'

Harry pretended to jot notes down on his pad.

'Do you know if she knew or met someone who . . . er, had it in him?'

'Well, there are so many types of guy that drop in here. Not all of them are gay, and there were quite a few who noticed Inger – she's so attractive. Was. But off the top of my head I can't think of anyone. There was . . .'

'Yes?'

'No, nothing.'

'I read in the report that Inger was working here the night we assume she was killed. Do you know if she had a date after work or did she go straight home?'

'She took a few scraps from the kitchen, said they were for the mutt. I knew she didn't have a dog, so I asked her where she was going. She said home. That's all I know.'

'The Tasmanian Devil,' Harry muttered. She sent him a curious look. 'Her landlord has a dog,' he said. 'I suppose it had to be bribed so she could enter the house in one piece.'

Harry thanked her for talking to them. As they were about to leave, Birgitta said, 'We're really upset at the

Albury about what happened. How are her parents taking it?’

‘Not too well, I’m afraid,’ Harry said. ‘They’re in shock, of course. And blame themselves for letting her come here. The coffin’s being sent to Norway tomorrow. I can get hold of the address if you want to send flowers for the funeral.’

‘Thank you. That would be very kind of you.’

Harry was on the verge of asking something else, but couldn’t bring himself to do it with all the talk about death and funerals. On the way out her farewell smile was burning on his retina. He knew it was going to be there for a while.

‘Shit,’ he mumbled to himself. ‘Should I, shouldn’t I?’

In the club all the transvestites plus a fair number of the other customers were standing on the counter miming to Katrina & the Waves. ‘Walking on Sunshine’ boomed out of the speakers.

‘There’s not much time for grief and reflection at a place like the Albury,’ Andrew commented.

‘Suppose that’s the way it should be,’ Harry said. ‘Life goes on.’ He asked Andrew to hang on for a minute, went back to the bar and waved to Birgitta.

‘Sorry, just one last question.’

‘Yes?’

Harry took a deep breath. He was already regretting his decision, but it was too late. ‘Do you know a good Thai restaurant in town?’

Birgitta had a think. ‘Mmm, there’s one in Bent Street, in the city centre. Do you know where that is? It’s supposed to be pretty good, I’m told.’

‘So good you would go with me?’

That didn’t come out right, Harry thought. Besides, it was unprofessional. Very unprofessional, in fact. Birgitta gave a groan of despair, but the despair was not so convincing that Harry couldn’t see an opening. Anyway, the smile was still in residence.

‘That one of your more frequent lines, Officer?’

‘Fairly frequent.’

‘Does it work?’

‘Statistically speaking? Not really.’

She laughed, inclined her head and studied Harry with curiosity. Then she shrugged.

‘Why not? I’m free tomorrow. Nine o’clock. And you’re paying.’

6

A Bishop

HARRY JAMMED THE BLUE LIGHT on top of the car and got behind the wheel. The wind rushed through the car as he took the curves. Stiansen's voice. Then silence. A bent fence post. A hospital room, flowers. A photograph in the corridor, fading.

Harry sat bolt upright. The same dream again. It was still only four o'clock in the morning. He tried to go back to sleep, but his mind turned to Inger Holter's unknown murderer.

At six he reckoned he could get up. After an invigorating shower, he walked out to a pale blue sky with an ineffectual morning sun to find somewhere to go for breakfast. There was a buzz coming from the city centre, but the morning rush hour had not yet reached the red lamps and black mascara eyes here. King's Cross had a certain slapdash charm, a lived-in beauty that made him hum as he walked. Apart from a few late, slightly worse-for-wear night birds, a couple sleeping under a rug on

some steps and a wan, thinly clad prostitute on the early shift, the streets were empty for the moment.

Outside a terrace cafe the owner stood hosing down the pavement and Harry smiled his way to an impromptu breakfast. As he was eating his toast and bacon, a teasing breeze tried to whisk away his serviette.

‘You’re up at sparrow’s fart, Holy,’ McCormack said. ‘It’s good. The brain works best between half past six and eleven. After that it’s mush, if you ask me. It’s also quiet here in the morning. I can hardly add two and two with the racket after nine. Can you? My boy claims he has to have the stereo on to do his homework. He gets so distracted if it’s bloody quiet. Can you understand that?’

‘Er—’

‘Anyway, yesterday I’d had enough and marched in and switched off the sodding machine. “I need it to think!” screamed the boy. I said he would have to read like normal folk. “People are different, Dad,” he said, pissed off. Yup, he’s at that age, you know.’

McCormack paused and looked at a photograph on the desk.

‘You got kids, Holy? No? Sometimes I wonder what the hell I’ve done. What rat-hole did they book you into, by the way?’

‘Crescent Hotel in King’s Cross, sir.’

‘King’s Cross, OK. You’re not the first Norwegian to have stayed there. A couple of years ago we had an official visit from the Bishop of Norway, or someone like that, can’t remember his name. Anyway, his staff in Oslo had booked a room for him at King’s Cross Hotel. Perhaps

the name had some biblical connotation or other. When the bishop arrived with his retinue one of the seasoned prostitutes caught sight of the clerical collar and harangued him with a few juicy suggestions. Think the bishop checked out before they'd even carried his bags up the stairs . . .'

McCormack laughed so much there were tears in his eyes.

'Yeah, well, Holy, what can we do for you today?'

'I was wondering if I could see Inger Holter's body before it's sent to Norway, sir.'

'Kensington can take you to the morgue when he comes in. But you've got a copy of the autopsy report, haven't you?'

'Yes, sir, I just . . .'

'You just?'

'Think better with the body in front of me, sir.'

McCormack turned to the window and mumbled something that Harry construed as 'fine'.

The temperature in the cellar of South Sydney Morgue was eight degrees, as opposed to twenty-eight degrees on the street outside.

'Any the wiser?' Andrew asked. He shivered and pulled his jacket tighter around him.

'Wiser, no,' Harry said, looking at the earthly remains of Inger Holter. Her face had survived the fall relatively well. On one side the nostril had been torn open and the cheekbone knocked into a deep hollow, but there was no doubt that the waxen face belonged to the same girl with the radiant smile on the photo in the police report. There were black marks around the neck. The rest of the body

was covered with bruises, wounds and some deep, deep cuts. In one of them you could see the white bone.

‘The parents wanted to see the photos. The Norwegian ambassador explained that it was inadvisable, but the solicitor insisted. A mother shouldn’t have to see her daughter like that.’ Andrew shook his head.

Harry studied the bruising on the neck with a magnifying glass.

‘Whoever strangled her used his bare hands. It’s difficult to kill someone with that method. The murderer must be either very strong or very motivated.’

‘Or have done it several times before.’

Harry looked at Andrew.

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘She has no fragments of skin under her nails, she has none of the murderer’s hair on her clothes and she has no grazing on her knuckles. She was killed so quickly and efficiently that she never had a chance to put up much of a fight.’

‘Does this remind you of anything you’ve seen before?’

Andrew shrugged. ‘When you’ve worked here long enough all murders remind you of something you’ve seen before.’

No, Harry thought. It’s the other way round. Work long enough and you see the tiny nuances each murder has, the details that distinguish one from another and make each one unique.

Andrew glanced at his watch. ‘The morning meeting starts in half an hour. We’d better get a move on.’

The leader of the investigative unit was Larry Watkins, a detective with a legal background, on a swift upward curve

through the ranks. He had narrow lips, thinning hair and spoke fast and efficiently without intonation or unnecessary adjectives.

‘Or social antennae,’ Andrew said, not mincing his words. ‘A very able investigator, but he’s not the person you ask to ring the parents when their daughter has been found dead. And then he starts swearing whenever he’s stressed,’ he added.

Watkins’s right-hand man was Sergey Lebie, a well-dressed, bald Yugoslav with a black goatee that made him look like Mephisto in a suit. Andrew said he was usually sceptical of men who were so fussy about their appearance.

‘But Lebie isn’t really a peacock, just very *meticulous*. Among other things he has a habit of studying his nails when anyone talks to him, but he doesn’t mean it to seem arrogant. And then he cleans his shoes after the lunch break. Don’t expect him to say much, not about himself or anything else.’

The youngest member of the team was Yong Sue, a small, skinny, pleasant guy who always wore a smile above his bird-like neck. Yong Sue’s family had come to Australia from China thirty years ago. Ten years ago, when Yong Sue was nineteen, his parents went back to China on a visit. They were never seen again. The grandfather reckoned the son had been involved in ‘something political’, but he wouldn’t venture any deeper. Yong Sue never found out what had happened. Now he provided for his grandparents and his two younger sisters, worked twelve-hour days and smiled for at least ten of them. ‘If you’ve got a bad joke, tell it to Yong Sue. He laughs at absolutely everything,’ Andrew had told him. Now they