



**JON
CLEARY**

**WINTER
CHILL**

A SCOBIE MALONE STORY

JON CLEARY

Winter Chill



HarperCollins *Publishers*

Dedication

For Cate

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Chapter One

1

The four carriages of the Harbourlink monorail softly whirred their way above the three-o'clock-in-the-morning city streets. An occasional car or taxi sped down the glistening wet cross streets; in two of the main north-south thoroughfares garbage trucks banged and rattled at the quiet. The monorail with its metallic whisper, drifted by dark upper-storey windows of department stores and offices, moved down the slope of Market Street, over Pymont Bridge and into the sharp curve that led above the Darling Harbour exhibition complex. It did not stop at the station there but continued on, a ghostly train of the future, and swung back to head up into the city again, looking even more ghostly in the sudden squall of rain, going round and round on its endless circuit.

There was no driver and there was only one passenger. To those who knew the painting he was the spitting image (though he had never been known to spit) of the farmer in Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. Tall, gaunt, face weathered (not from farming but from sailing), the first impression of those who had met him was that he was humourless and forbidding. Yet the gaunt face could break into the most Channing smile and his friendliness, though not legendary, was sincere and surprising. He had enough perceived contradictions to make him a good lawyer, which he was – or had been. Witnesses and judges and juries had never been quite sure whom and what they were dealing with till he had delivered his final argument. His name was Orville Brame, he was one of two senior partners in one of New York's most prestigious law firms and he was the incumbent president of the American Bar Association. Or he would have been incumbent if he had not died in the past hour.

He sat in the compartment immediately behind the driver's cabin, held upright with his thin arms pushed into the handrail beside him. His dark eyes were open and had any other passengers boarded the carriage at that out-of-schedule hour they might have mistaken him for a man who had drunk himself into a glassy-eyed stupor at some professionals' dinner. Except for the dark red stain on the front of his white shirt and the twist of agony that had turned down one corner of his thin-lipped mouth.

The monorail slipped along its track, over the street-lights, past the black mirrors of the windows down and across the oily finger of harbour, along the front of the exhibition centre. The sightless eyes of Orville Brame stared out at the city he had left thirty years ago and to which he had never returned until now. And now he was past memories and regret, past the anger and trepidation he had brought home with him.

2

It had stopped raining when Scobie Malone got up at six o'clock for his regular morning walk. He went into the bathroom for the ritual start-to-the-day leak, splashed some water in his face, ran his hand through his dark hair, which always curled during the night. He went back to the bedroom, pulled on his track-suit and trainers, went out to the front door and opened it. Despite the rain the weather

had got colder; a cold wind sprang up out of nowhere and blew through his bones. He went back in the bedroom and pulled on a sweater.

‘Come back to bed,’ Lisa murmured sleepily.

‘Go back to sleep,’ he said, resisting temptation.

Leaving the house he turned, like a trained dog, to the usual route, which took him down through several side streets to Randwick racecourse. The wind had blown the clouds away and the stars looked like frozen fireworks in the still-dark sky. He shivered as the cold bit at him. Of course *cold* was comparative; the Norwegians at February’s Winter Olympics would consider this morning the beginning of a summer’s day. But he was not a Norwegian nor a Siberian nor an Inuit; he was an Aussie who knew when it was bloody cold and no argument. Comparing climate was like comparing one woman with another. An opinion he would not have quoted to Lisa.

Once out of bed and on his way Malone was always glad to be walking. His mind, like the cooling engine of the nine-year-old Holden Commodore back in the garage, always took a little time to get started; the five-kilometre walk each morning eased him into the day. The racecourse provided a convenient circuit.

He walked briskly round the outer rail of the outside track, while the horses began appearing out of the lightening darkness, waiting for enough light for them to begin their training gallops. There was an occasional shout or obscenity from the jockeys and strappers as a horse played up, but the morning was too cold for any sustained burst of temper. On the far side of the course, away from the grandstands, Malone was alone. He began to run over in his mind the day that lay ahead of him. Homicide, the five murders that he hoped would be wiped from the computer by the end of the week. There had been a spate of murders in Sydney in the past month, some of them without obvious motive but all of them with suspects reasonably certain of committal. The eighteen detectives under Malone as their inspector in charge, were usually not so fortunate in the cases that occupied them. With a bit of luck Malone might have a clean computer, nothing on the running sheets, when he went on leave for two weeks’ time. At the thought of the holiday coming up, two weeks in the Queensland sunshine, he almost broke into a jog, but reason slowed his legs before they got out of hand. Jogging, he believed, was the invention of orthopaedic surgeons and urologists looking for future trade.

An hour after leaving the front door he was back at the Federation-style house that was home. As he opened the door again he heard the phone ringing on the small table in the hall. Claire, his seventeen-year-old, came out of her bedroom, picked up the phone and handed it to him as he came down the hallway.

‘How do you know it’s not for you?’

‘Dad, civilized people don’t ring at seven o’clock in the morning. It has to be someone from Homicide.’

She went on into the bathroom she shared with Maureen, the fifteen-year-old, and Tom, going on twelve. He looked after her, marvelling again at how much she resembled her mother in looks and temperament. There was no Irish in her, only Dutch.

‘Scobie?’ Russ Clements, sergeant and second in command, was on the other end of the line.

‘Where are you, this hour of the morning?’

‘Still at home. Peta Smith called me, she’s just come back from Darling Harbour. She’s got on she thinks you and I should handle.’

In his mind’s eye the computer screen all at once began to mock him: the running sheets were on and running again. ‘Why me? I have eighteen of you supposed to be working for me—’

‘This guy was found in the monorail at three-thirty this morning, a single bullet wound in his

heart.'

'In the *monorail*? At three-thirty?' Lisa, up and dressed, passed him in the hallway, raised her eyebrows and he nodded, equally puzzled.

'Peta said she'll explain it all when we see her. The point is, she thinks you and I should handle it. The dead man is – was the president of the American Bar Association. They're in town for an international law convention, you've read about it. I've put the morning conference off till ten-thirty. The monorail car, the scene of the crime, has been moved on to a siding.' He gave Malone instructions on how to get there. 'I'll see you at eight-thirty.'

Malone put down the phone, turned to find Lisa standing immediately behind him. He looked at her. 'Why all dressed up?'

'I'm going to the dentist.'

'You didn't tell me.'

'You weren't listening, as usual. Well, anyway—' She headed back towards the kitchen. 'Have your shower.'

She seemed quiet, not inclined to talk, and he wondered how much trouble her teeth were giving her; she had excellent teeth and her visits to the dentist were usually no more than routine. He went to shower and to get dressed, his mind slipping off in another direction. Murder was always a distraction, even though it was, for him, routine.

When he came out into the kitchen fifteen minutes later the three children, dressed for school, were at the breakfast table. 'You've got another murder,' said Maureen. 'It was on the radio.'

'I thought you only listened to Rod Stewart and other screamers?'

'Sometimes they interrupt with some news, if it's juicy enough.' He suspected that she would grow up to be that bane of all cops, a reporter. Till then he would love her.

'Who's dead? A politician?' Tom had just begun social studies and looked like following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps, politician-haters both.

'No, they said he was a lawyer,' Maureen told him. 'An American lawyer. Do many lawyers get murdered, Dad?'

'That's enough,' said Lisa. 'I won't have murder as a topic at breakfast.'

She had spoken in her formal voice, her Dutch voice as Malone and the children called it. He looked along the table at her. 'Your teeth hurting?'

'What? Yes, a little. Let's skip talk about murder and trips to the dentist, shall we?'

'My, we are touchy this morning,' said Maureen.

'Easy,' Malone warned her. He glanced again at Lisa, but she had bent her blond head and seemed engrossed in ensuring that she put the right amount of butter on her toast. He caught Claire's eye and she shook her head as if giving *him* a warning. He wondered if Claire, now on the verge of womanhood, was privy to confidences that Lisa was not giving him.

When he was leaving the house Lisa came to the front door to give him her usual farewell kiss. 'What's the matter, darl?' he said.

'Nothing. I'm going to the dentist at the wrong time of the month.' She kissed him. 'Drive carefully. Will you be home this evening at the usual time?'

'I'll call you.' He patted her behind. 'I love you.'

'Not just for *that*, I hope.'

He noticed she didn't smile when she said it.

He drove into the city under a polished sky. He always liked the light of Sydney; it seemed to add another dimension to whatever one looked at, but, of course, that was an illusion. He passed a Soci

Security office where a line of people had already gathered; no amount of bright light altered the plight, they stood there becalmed in the doldrums. The economy had begun its climb out of the past few years' recession, but it was accepted now that there would always be some who would never again get a foothold on the slope. It didn't make him comfortable to know that too many of them were men and women of his own age.

He found his way to Darling Harbour through the maze of one-way streets that always seemed to lead in the wrong direction. He parked the car in a No Parking zone and got out, shivering a little at the wind that sprang at him. Clements was waiting at the foot of a flight of steps. The big man, now married for a year now, was a well-dressed shadow of the untidy bachelor he had been for so many years; well, almost well-dressed. To have made him sartorially smooth would have been like landscaping a landslide.

'Do your collar up,' said Malone. 'You're not one of those Pommy detectives in *The Bill*.'

Clements did up his collar, arranged his silk tie. 'There, how's that? Are we supposed to be impressing the Americans this morning?'

'I dunno. They haven't impressed *us*, killing their top lawyer.'

'We dunno *they* did it.' They climbed the steps and came out on to a narrow pavement that ran round a siding where a single monorail car was parked. Blue-and-white crime scene tapes had been strung round it, cracking in the wind like carnival stockwhips. Members of the Physical Evidence team were working inside and outside the car. They had once been known as Crime Scene members but it was Malone's convinced belief that the New South Wales Police Service, once known as the Police Force and before that as the Police Department, had a secret body called the Police Name Changing Team whose sole purpose was to confuse everyone, including the police.

Peta Smith stepped out of the car and came towards them. 'Morning, sir.' She was always meticulously correct when it came to protocol in front of strangers; besides the PE team there were four men in overalls standing close by. 'The body's been taken to the morgue. I've got all the particulars.'

'Anyone else here?'

'Phil Truach is inside with the PE team. And there are some uniformed guys.'

'What have you come up with?'

'Nothing so far.'

She had blond hair, cut short, and a pale complexion that freckled in the summer; outdoors she almost always wore a broad-brimmed hat; it upset some crims to be interrogated by a woman who looked to be on her way to one of the more conservative churches. Today she wore a navy-blue trenchcoat against the south wind and a matching rain-hat. She was better computer-educated than any of her male colleagues and had taken over most of the research duties, but she was as efficient and painstaking as any of the men when out on an actual job. She had a good figure, the result of diet and exercise, but she would always have to watch her weight. She was attractive and coolly friendly in a predominantly male environment and, as far as Malone could judge, not overly ambitious. He had remarked all these points about her, but it had taken time. He was not averse to working with women but he was reluctant to be responsible for them. In them he saw his own daughters and the weight of responsibility there.

'Anything on the body?'

'Just some loose change and his convention name-tag. No wallet, no keys, nothing.'

One of the men in overalls approached them and Peta Smith introduced him. 'This is Mr Kord, the technical manager. He took the phone call from the security guard who found the dead man. The

he called Police Central.'

Korda was young, ginger-haired, with a frank open face that suggested he took the world at its own valuation. At the moment he looked bemused and resentful, as if murders shouldn't happen or anything with which he was connected. 'I just couldn't believe it when Murray, our security guard, that's him back there on his own—' He jerked his head over his thin shoulder at a thickset man in uniform who stood about ten metres from them. 'When he rang me. Who expects to get a call like that, three a.m. in the morning?'

'It happens all the time,' said Malone. 'To us.'

Korda ducked his head apologetically. 'Oh sure, I guess so. Sorry. Only ... Well, when Murray called me, I got down here right away, I been here ever since. The cars were still going around with him, the dead guy I mean, sitting up there like a tourist. It passed me just's I got here, we hadda stand and wait till it come around again. It's not something I'm used to, standing there three o'clock in the morning freezing my butt off, waiting for a dead guy to arrive. I cut off the main power, got aboard and ran it in here to the siding after Murray had switched the power back on again.'

'There was nobody else on board?'

Korda shook his head. 'Murray was back there on the Convention station, that one in front of the Novotel. We were on our mobiles to each other. While he was waiting for me, it went around five or six times. He said there was no one in it but the dead guy.'

Malone looked at Peta Smith. 'You talked to the security man?'

She nodded. 'His name's Murray Rockman. He bears out what Mr Korda has just told us.'

Malone beckoned to the security guard, who came towards them, nodding affably to both Malone and Clements. He was almost as tall as Malone at six feet but looked shorter because of the thickness of his body; the thickness was muscle, not fat. He had a broad-cheeked face, very fair hair and almost white eyelashes; he carried his peaked cap under his arm, like a serviceman or a police officer. Malone guessed that he was the sort of security guard who took his job seriously, with a lot of his spare time spent keeping fit.

'What time did you come on duty, Mr Rockman?'

'Eleven last night, sir. I was on the shift that knocks off at six.' He had a deep voice, every word almost perfectly articulated. He had no accent, but Malone was certain he had not been born in Australia. He was one of those immigrants who had learned to speak English with more respect than the local voters showed. 'My beat is this side of the water.'

'Who employs you?'

'I'm with ABS Security, we do contract work for TNT.'

The alphabet was taking over the commercial world, Malone thought: TNT was the transport corporation that ran the monorail. 'When did you first notice the monorail was still running?'

'Three-oh-eight, sir.' Security men were usually not this polite; many were ex-cops glad to be free of what they looked upon as serfdom. Rockman, on the other hand, sounded like a man who would be in service all his life and would never resent it. 'I noted it in my book. I was down below—' he nodded at the pavement beneath their feet '—when I heard it go over the first time. Then I came up here and waited for it to come round again. That was when I saw the dead man in it.' He blinked, the white eyelashes catching the sunlight. 'I didn't know he was dead, of course. I thought maybe he was drunk who'd been put in there by some of his friends. There was a lot of merriment last night over the hotel, the lawyers settling in.'

'You saw nothing suspicious?'

'You mean did I see anyone else? No, sir.'

‘Do you know how to drive the monorail?’ asked Clements.

‘Mr Korda has given us some brief instruction, just in case of emergency.’

‘You didn’t think this was an emergency?’

‘Blame me for that,’ Korda interjected. ‘The instructions are they aren’t to touch the cars without permission. When Murray called I told him to leave it alone till I got here. I live over in Birchgrove and that time of the morning it took me less than ten minutes to get here.’

‘Righto, thank you, Mr Rockman. We have your work and home address?’ He looked at Peter Smith, who nodded. Then as the security guard turned away, he said, ‘What service were you in, Mr Rockman?’

The white eyelashes blinked again. ‘You’re observant, sir. The United States Marine Corps.’

‘You’re American?’

‘Yes, sir, but I’ve been out here twelve years. I’ve become Australianized – I hope.’ He smiled for the first time, showing strong white teeth. American teeth, Malone thought.

‘You’re still too polite.’ Malone smiled in return. ‘But there’s time.’

Rockman smiled again, nodded and went off, not marching but walking briskly. Malone in his mind heard the cadence song of the Marines and it matched Rockman’s step. He looked at the other man. ‘He didn’t *sound* American.’

‘He’s a good man,’ said Korda. ‘One of the best.’

‘You said you cut off the power. How come the train – is that what you call it? – how come it kept moving if there was no one at the controls?’

‘Doesn’t it have a dead man’s handle?’ Clements was a grab-bag of trivia that often produced an essential key. ‘They used to have it on electric trains. Probably still do.’

‘We have something that works on the same principle, a power button that cuts out after a certain number of seconds if the driver hasn’t activated it. In this case someone – the murderer?’ He said the word as if it were alien to his tongue, with a note of disbelief that he could actually be talking about a *murderer*. ‘Well, someone had taped the button down and then must of jumped off. These trains only do about fifteen ks an hour. The door to the driver’s section was still open when I pulled it up.’

‘So you would suggest that whoever committed the murder, he knew how to run one of these trains?’

‘Well, I’m no detective—’ Then he ducked his ginger head again, gave an apologetic grin which the three detectives gave him smiles that told him he was right, he was no detective. ‘Sorry. Yeah, I can say that. You don’t have to be a mechanical genius to drive one of these, but it’d help if you knew about the dead man’s handle principle. Dead man’s handle – that’s pretty funny ... Well, not *funny* exactly. You know what I mean, the dead guy ...’ His voice trailed off.

‘Let’s have a look at the scene of the crime,’ suggested Malone. ‘Thanks, Mr Korda. Detective Peter Smith will be in touch with you again.’ Then, as he and Clements walked along to the parked carriage, he said, ‘First time I think we’ve had a mobile scene of the crime, isn’t it?’

‘It narrows the field a bit. We start looking for someone who knows how to operate a train like this. Would you know how?’

‘It takes me all my time to start our lawnmower.’

‘Who is your lawnmower – Lisa?’

They grinned at each other, two old married men; then they grinned at Phil Truach, another old married man, who stood in the carriage doorway. He was their age, but he would not make sergeant or higher until he transferred to another section of the Police Service; he had been in Homicide twelve years and had twice refused promotion or transfer. Murder, he said, was a crossword puzzle, and he

was addicted to puzzles, he also said, though neither Malone nor Clements had ever seen him indulging his addiction. He was tall and bony with a lean, gullied face; he smoked forty cigarettes a day and he had a smoker's cough like the bark of a gun. Somehow he had so far avoided lung cancer, emphysema and the Homicide joke was that the Tobacco Institute paid him a monthly stipend for staying alive and on his feet. He was one of the best detectives on Malone's roster.

'Not a skerrick, Scobie.' He never worried about protocol, no matter who was around. 'No prints, nothing – everything's been wiped clean.'

'No shoeprints? It rained last night.'

'There's a welter of muddy prints on the floor, you could never sort 'em out. The monorail was packed all day yesterday, I gather – all the Yank lawyers and their wives. The cleaners don't start work on the car till five a.m. By then we'd taken over this one.'

'How many bullets?'

'Just the one. It's still in the body.' Truach stamped out the cigarette he had been smoking; he knew how much the habit annoyed Malone, a lifelong non-smoker. 'This bloke Brame, he's top of the ladder, they tell me.'

'Where's the media, then?' said Clements, though he looked relieved that none was in sight.

'They've been and gone from here. Now they're all along at the Novotel interviewing the thousand Yank lawyers.'

'How many?'

Truach looked at Peta Smith, who had come up behind Malone and Clements. 'There's a thousand of them,' she said. 'Spread around every hotel in Sydney. This is the first international convention that's been in Australia and it seems everyone wanted to come. Plus their wives and girlfriends. And boyfriends, too, I guess,' she added, and Malone wondered if there was a note of prejudice in her voice.

'Who's home minding the store?'

'There are eight hundred thousand lawyers in the United States,' said Clements, grabbing in his mental bag again. 'I was reading the Law Society's Journal one day. One lawyer for every three and half thousand of the population. There'll be enough left home to mind the store and change ambulances.'

'Eight hundred thousand!' Malone shook his head. 'We don't have that many crims registered on here.'

The four detectives were silent a moment, aghast at the thought of the legal poison ivy spreading across the US. Malone had few prejudices, but one of them, as with most cops, was an aversion to lawyers.

He stepped past Truach into the carriage and looked around. There were three blue-upholstered seats facing three similar seats in the small compartment. There was none of the disorder one so often found at a murder scene; the compartment was neat and tidy, with none of the vandalism that occurred on the city's urban trains.

'When can we have the car?' said Korda, behind him. 'I wanna get it cleaned. We'll need it today, all the traffic.'

'Not today,' said Clements. 'Maybe tomorrow.'

The technical manager's face closed up, but if he was annoyed he kept it to himself. 'Well, okay, you say so ... But you know what a head office is like – at the end of the day all they're interested in is the bottom line.'

'You should work for the government,' said Clements. 'It's even worse. They can't *find* the

bottom line.'

'Let's go along and talk to the thousand lawyers,' said Malone. 'If we can get one of them to confess, you can have the carriage back today.'

He and Clements went down to his car. On the opposite side of the road, atop a low cliff, was a row of warehouses, some of them now converted into apartment complexes; these had been the wool storerooms when wool had been the wealth of the country, but those days were gone, probably for ever.

The two detectives drove along to the hotel. It was French-owned and was one of the many-roomed hotels that had been built in the city in the past five or six years, completed just as the recession had begun and hotel rooms became as much a glut as wool and wheat. Malone gave the Commodore over to a parking valet who, though Australian, had a Frenchman's hauteur, especially when it came to cars that should have been traded in years ago.

'Leave it up here on the ramp,' said Malone, showing his badge. 'It'll give the place some tone.'

The two men walked, or were blown, in through glass doors to the concierge's desk; the architect whoever they were, had not allowed for winter's south-west winds. The concierge referred them to Reception on the first level. They travelled up on an escalator and stepped off into the big lobby which was crowded and echoed to the clamour of voices, all of them American. They squeezed their way through the throng, asked for the manager and were directed to his office.

He was a small neat man, French and polite; the owners back in France had realized that it would be pointless sending French arrogance to handle the native barbarians. With him were two Americans, both grey-haired, both grey with concern.

'I am Charles Champlain. This is Mr Zoehrer, vice-president of the American Bar Association, and this is Mr Novack, the American Consul-General.'

'A terrible tragedy, terrible!' Zoehrer was a big man with a big voice and big gestures; he flung his hands about, addressed Malone and Clements as if he were addressing a jury. 'His wife's due in today – God, what a way to greet her! *Orville's been murdered!*'

'She's on her way in from the airport now.' Novack, a short bulky man, had the calm air of a man who had, innumerable times, had to convey bad news. In a way, Malone guessed, a consul's job was not unlike a policeman's: you were everybody's target. 'Do you want me to handle it, Karl, or will you?'

'We'd better do it together,' said Zoehrer. 'I've only met her once before, at Clinton's inauguration. She's not a lawyer's wife, you know what I mean? Not one for conventions, stuff like that.' Then he seemed to remember that he was talking in front of strangers, non-Americans. He looked at Malone. 'You getting anywhere with your investigations, sir? Inspector, is that right?'

Malone nodded. 'Sergeant Clements and I've just come on the case. Our Crime Scene team tell me they've come up with nothing. The only thing we can say is that it doesn't look like a mugging or something unpremeditated. He was lured on to the monorail, or forced on, by someone who knew where they were about. Or maybe he was shot beforehand and carried on to the monorail. At this stage we don't know. I have to ask this – would you know if Mr Brame had any enemies, someone who might've followed him from the United States? Was he working on some big case? I'm asking the obvious – the Mafia?'

The big hands were spread wide. 'Not as far as I know. Orville wasn't a criminal lawyer, at least he hadn't been in years. We lived and worked on opposite sides of the country. He was New York, I'm from San Francisco and LA. Los Angeles. I guess all lawyers – civil as well as criminal – I guess we all collect enemies as we go along.'

There was a knock on the office door and a young woman put her head in. 'Mr Champlain, M

Brame has arrived. We've taken her up to her suite.'

'How is she?' asked the manager.

'It was hard to tell. Upset, I suppose, but she seemed to be holding herself together. Someone met her at the airport and told her on the way in.'

'Well, we better go up,' said Novack. 'Will you excuse us, Inspector?'

'Mr Novack, this is a murder case, on our turf.'

'Of course, how stupid of me. Let's go. I just hope she can handle it, four strange men coming on her like this.'

When the four men stepped out of the manager's office into the lobby, a sudden silence fell on the crowd still there. The throng opened up and they went through and stepped into a waiting lift. As the doors closed they heard the clamour start up again and Malone glimpsed photographers and reporters trying to break through.

'I hope they didn't shut up like that when Mrs Brame came in,' said Zoehrer.

'They did, sir,' said the girl who was escorting them to the upper floor. 'It was eerie.'

'When you go back downstairs,' said Malone, 'see that none of the media get up to this floor.'

'Can I tell them you'll be making a statement later?' This girl had dealt with reporters before; hospitality management had taught her they were a necessary evil.

Malone sighed. 'They'll expect it. We never tell 'em anything, but they always write it down anyway.'

'The media,' said Zoehrer. 'Bless 'em, they think we can't do without them.'

He sounded sincere, as a good lawyer should, but Malone had the distinct impression that the boss man would wring everything he could out of the media.

The four men entered the Brame suite, doing their best not to look like a threatening phalanx. Vases, large and small, of flowers decorated the big main room, an intended welcome for the wife of the president of the ABA; no one had remembered to remove them and they now supplied the wrong note, like a laugh at a funeral. Even the bright airiness of the room itself seemed out of place.

Joanna Brame was sitting in a chair, staring out of the big picture window at the city skyline on the opposite side of the narrow strip of Darling Harbour. As she sat there the monorail train came into view and slid round the curve beneath her like a pale metal caterpillar. She turned her head as the four men came in, but did not immediately rise. When she did at last stand up she did so with slow grace; there was none of the stiff angularity that Malone knew shock could bring. She was dressed in a beige knitted suit that showed no untoward bulges in her figure; a brown vicuna coat had been dropped on a nearby couch. She was tall with short grey-blond hair, the patrician look that came of a special mix of flesh and bone, and large grey eyes that had a touch of hauteur to them; Malone had the quick thought that Mrs Brame would not suffer fools gladly, if at all. She was also someone who could hide her grief and shock like an accomplished actor.

'Mrs Brame!' Zoehrer strode across the room, hands outstretched. 'I'm Karl Zoehrer, we met at the White House—'

She gave him her hand, held a little high, almost as if she waited for it to be kissed. 'Of course, Mr Zoehrer.' Then she looked at the other three men, waiting for them to introduce themselves.

Novack did so. 'There are no words to express our feelings over what's happened—'

'No,' she said and looked at Malone and Clements. 'Is it too soon to ask who killed my husband?'

'I'm afraid so, Mrs Brame. May we ask you some questions?'

'Can't the questions wait—?' Zoehrer all at once had become a heavyweight guardian angel.

'It's all right.' Joanna Brame held up a hand; Malone had seen judges call for quiet with the same

gesture. She might not be a lawyer's wife, you know what I mean, but she would hold a jurist's view of things, she would ask questions as well as answer them. She had a low deep voice with some edge to it that, Malone guessed, usually got her what she asked for. 'Where is my husband? His – *body*?'

'At the city morgue.' Malone saw an excuse to get her away from the interruptions and interference he felt sure would be coming from Zoehrer. 'We'll need you to identify him. It has to be done by a relative.'

'Has his brother been informed?'

'His *brother*?' said Zoehrer. 'He has a brother here at the convention?'

'No, he's Australian, not American. He is a partner in a law firm here in Sydney. Rodney Channing. You may know him, Inspector?'

Malone looked at Clements and left the answer to him. 'We've heard of him, Mrs Brame. But he's not in our line of work, he's not a criminal lawyer. It's a different name – are they stepbrothers?'

'No, brothers.' She reached for her coat; Novack helped her on with it. 'Shall we go?'

'I'll come, too,' said Novack. 'Your husband is an American citizen, I take it?'

'Naturalized. He was born here in Australia. Do you have a car? Thank you, Mr Zoehrer, I'll be more hospitable when I've done this – this duty.'

'Sure, sure.' Zoehrer looked as if it was the first time in years he had been dismissed. 'I'll be taking over the convention – I'll see there is someone to take care of you, Mrs Brame—'

She turned back in the doorway of the suite; Malone, immediately behind her, had to pull up sharply. 'I'll be perfectly all right, Mr Zoehrer. Thank you, though, for your concern.'

When Malone led the way out of the lift down in the lobby the crowd there had thinned out. There were still clusters of people around the lobby; they all turned their faces towards the lift as the door opened. Even those with mobile phones grafted to their ears, the new street performers, the new clowns and mimes, said *Hold it* and stopped speaking to stare at the new widow. Cameramen and reporters swept in a wave towards Malone and the others, but he moved quickly towards them before they could get too close to Joanna Brame.

'Not now. There'll be a full statement later, but at the moment we have nothing definite.'

'How's Mrs Brame taking the murder?' That was from a fresh-faced television reporter, not one of Malone's favourite breeds.

'C'mon, how would you take it if your girlfriend was murdered?' It was not the sort of reply that the police manual recommended, but it stopped the questions long enough for Malone to make his escape.

Down on the lower level the doors opened and a gale blew in. Joanna Brame produced a brown beret from her coat pocket and jammed it on her head. A grey Cadillac with DC plates and a chauffeur was waiting for Novack. 'Will you ride with us, Inspector?'

'That's my car over there, sir. You know where the morgue is?' Novack shook his head. 'Sorry, why should you? You'd better follow us.'

It was a ten-minute drive out to the morgue near Sydney University. When the attendant on the front desk phoned through to Romy's office, she came out to greet them. 'This is Dr Keller,' said Clements and added with the pride that Malone had noticed since their marriage, 'my wife.'

Joanna Brame and Novack hid any surprise they may have felt and made no comment. Which surprised Malone, whose experience of Americans was that they commented on everything.

'I'll have your husband brought out. If you would go into that room there?'

Malone ushered Joanna Brame into the side room where the body could be viewed through a window. As he touched her elbow he could feel the trembling in her arm and, involuntarily, he pressed

the elbow sympathetically. She looked sideways at him. 'I have done this before, Inspector. My first husband—'

Romy came into the small room as, on the other side of the window, a white-coated attendant wheeled in a trolley on which lay a green-shrouded body. A zip was pulled and Orville Brame's face was exposed, the mouth open, the eyes shut. It would be Malone's only glimpse of the murdered man and, as always, he wondered what events would pile on the death of this man about whom he knew nothing and would certainly never learn everything.

Joanna Brame drew a deep shuddering breath, took off her beret. 'Yes, that's my husband.'

'Orville William Brame?' said Romy.

'Yes.' She watched while the shroud was zipped up again and the trolley wheeled away; then she turned her back on the window and looked at Romy. 'Will there be an autopsy or anything?'

'It's a homicide, so yes, there has to be. We have to take out the bullet that killed him.' Romy's voice was soft, sympathetic; there was no hint of officialdom about her, though she was the deputy director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine. In her white coat and with her dark hair pulled back she looked severe, but for the compassion in her dark blue eyes. 'We have to wait on HIV tests—'

'HIV? AIDS tests? For my husband?'

'It's standard practice these days, Mrs Brame, for every autopsy. It's no reflection on your husband.'

'He would be amused. He always tried to be beyond reproach.' But she said it with affection.

Malone thanked Romy and left Clements with her while he escorted Joanna Brame out into the street, where Novack joined them. They stood in the weak winter sunlight and the wind, coming up the street, tore at their hair so that they looked, to a passer-by, like mourners who had gone wild in their grief. Joanna Brame pulled on her beret again and Malone settled his pork-pie hat on his head. Novack evidently used a strong hair-spray, for his hair was set like concrete.

'You said you wanted to ask me questions, Inspector. Could it wait till this afternoon, say five o'clock? I'm really not in any fit condition—'

Malone hated any sort of delay in an investigation, but there would be others he would have to ask. 'Five o'clock then, Mrs Brame.'

'Thank you, Inspector.' Novack took her arm and led her across to the Cadillac. He opened the rear door for her, but she paused and looked back at Malone. The wind whipped away her words, but he thought she said, 'I may be able to help you.'

3

Driving back to the Hat Factory, which had indeed once been a hat factory turning out trilbies, fedoras and even bowlers once upon a time, and now housed Homicide, Clements said, 'Have you got the feeling there's a thousand lawyers sitting on your back?'

'I hope they're not all like that cove Zoehrer. I've just placed him. He's one of those big damage lawyers from California – Melvin Belli's another one. They invented that palimony thing. The way you used to play around, it's a wonder you didn't cop a palimony suit.'

'You know none of the girls ever stayed long enough. But let's drop that, I'm a married man now. So how do we handle this Brame case?'

'We're spread thin. Keep Phil and Peta on it and maybe we can spare John Kagal. I'll load the re

of the calendar on to the other fellers. At least three of the cases should be wound up this week or Gr
Random will want to know why.’ Random was the Chief Superintendent, Regional Crime Squa
South Region. ‘I suppose we’ll have to officially let the New York PD and maybe the FBI, I dunno
we’ll have to let them know what’s happened. I’ll check it out with the Consul-General. In th
meantime ...’

‘Yes?’

‘Put Peta on to questioning Zoehrer and any other of the lawyers who might give us some light o
why Brame was done in.’

‘She’s a bit young – inexperienced, I mean—’

‘She’s all right, Russ. And she’s better-looking than you or me. All these lawyers haven’t come a
this way just to discuss the law. Junkets like this one, for lawyers or doctors or politicians, they’re a
excuse for a tax-deductible holiday. A young lawyer on holiday, who’s he going to let his hair down
for – a good-looking sort like Peta or you and me?’

‘You’re sexist.’

‘Only in a good cause.’

Back at his office, in the glass-walled cubicle that passed for the Homicide commander’s domain
he ran through the computer sheets that had been neatly laid on his desk. There had been last-minu
hitches in two of the murder cases; the other three on the list would be wrapped up and sent to th
Director of Public Prosecutions by the end of the week. The Brame homicide looked as if it would g
the full-scale investigation that the Americans would expect. It was going to be a round-the-clock job

He reached for the phone to tell Lisa he would not be home for dinner. The phone at Randwick ha
rung four times before he remembered she would be at the dentist’s. He waited for the answerin
machine to take over, but when it came on all he got was Maureen’s voice saying, ‘This is—’ Then h
voice cut out and he knew the machine had gone on the blink again, as it had twice in the past mont
It was supposed to have been fixed and he wondered why Lisa, usually so meticulous in running th
household, had neglected to call a technician.

He flipped through his small personal notebook, found the number of their dentist. ‘May I leave
message for Mrs Malone? This is her husband.’

‘Mr Malone, your wife isn’t here.’

‘Oh, she’s left already?’

‘She hasn’t been in at all. She had no appointment—’

He thanked the receptionist and hung up. He sat back in his chair, puzzled and a little angry: wh
had Lisa lied to him? Was she planning some surprise? Then a memory came back, like a spasm o
pain, and he felt a hollow sense of dread. Years ago, before any of the children were born, he and sh
had been in New York on a round-the-world honeymoon financed by a lottery win; an extravaganc
one of his last, that he had insisted upon. Lisa, suffering a lost filling, had left their hotel and go
looking for a dentist. She had been kidnapped along with the wife of the then Mayor of New York an
held to ransom by terrorists. It was ridiculous that history could repeat itself, but the agony of th
search for her came back like new pain.

Then reason, the hook on which hope hangs, sometimes weakly, took over. Lisa had not gone t
the dentist. So where had she gone and why had she lied to him, something she had never done before
He trusted her so absolutely that the thought did not enter his mind that she might have gone to me
another man. But where was she?

Chapter Two

1

He got her at home at four o'clock in the afternoon. 'Where have you been? I've called half a dozen times – you said you were going to the dentist's, I tried there—' There was silence at the other end of the line. 'Darl, for Chrissake, what's going on?'

Something that sounded like a long sigh came down the line. 'I'll tell you when you come home—'

'Tell me now. I'll probably be late – not before seven or eight, anyway—'

'No, I'll tell you when you come home.' There was a pause, then she said, 'I love you,' and hung up.

He put the phone back in the cradle and looked up to see Clements standing in the doorway. 'You look as if you've been talking to one of the Yank lawyers. Mr Zoehrer?'

'No, Lisa.'

'Oh?' Clements waited for further comment, but when none came he went on, 'Ballistics just called. They haven't got the bullet that killed Brame yet. The morgue's snowed under, dead 'uns everywhere.'

'The natural place for them.' His mind was still on Lisa.

'You want me to come with you to see Mrs Brame?'

'Who else?'

'I thought you might prefer Peta. The good-looking one.'

They left half an hour later to go to the Novotel. As they were leaving the big main room Peter Smith, taking off her trenchcoat and her hat, came in. 'Nothing, Scobie, nothing worthwhile. Brame was at a reception at the Darling Harbour convention centre last night, but no one noticed anything out of the ordinary about him, I mean how he behaved. Nobody remembers seeing him after eleven o'clock, when someone saw him in the hotel coffee lounge with a guy.'

'Who?'

She shrugged. 'Who knows? Like I told you, there are a thousand lawyers in town – most of 'em are strangers to each other. Except the guys at the top.'

'Are they being co-operative?'

She smiled. 'I've had four invitations to dinner, six to drinks and two to mind your own business.'

Malone looked at Clements. 'Could you have done as well? Thanks, Peta. Get Andy Graham to help you set up the flow charts. Don't work late.'

'I wasn't going to. I accepted one of the dinner dates. That okay?'

'Just so long as you feed it into the running sheets.' But he grinned. 'Not with Karl Zoehrer, hope? I don't want him suing Homicide for palimony.'

When he and Clements drove into the Novotel at a few minutes to five, the lawyers were filtering back from their afternoon session at the convention. Malone saw Zoehrer holding court in the lobby but the big man did not see the two detectives and they escaped into the lift and rode up to Mrs Brame's floor.

She was waiting for them in her suite, in a rose silk dress and looking much fresher than she had

this morning. With her was a handsome young man with thinning blond hair and the awkward look of a courtier new to serving the queen. And Malone knew now that Joanna Brame was the queen of whichever circle she ruled back home in the States.

‘Adam, would you get the gentlemen a drink? This is Adam Tallis, an associate in our firm.’

Malone and Clements shook hands with Tallis and gave him their drink preferences. Then Malone sat down opposite Joanna Brame. ‘Our firm? You’re a lawyer, too, Mrs Brame?’

She smiled at that, a pleasant smile, then sipped the cocktail she had been holding when the two detectives had entered the room. ‘Only by osmosis. I said *our* firm out of habit. My great-grandfather founded it back in – when was it, Adam?’

‘1888.’ Malone was certain that Joanna Brame had known the date, but she had neatly drawn Tallis into the conversation. ‘Mrs Brame is a Schuyler.’

‘Of Schuyler, Dr Vries and Barrymore,’ said Malone and smiled at the surprise of the two Americans. ‘I looked it up, Mr Brame’s firm, I mean. I just didn’t know you were related to it, Mrs Brame.’

‘My great-grandfather, my grandfather, my father. And my husband.’ She looked at her drink as if she saw reflections in it. Malone wondered if her first husband had belonged to the firm, but now was not the time to ask her. ‘Somehow, I’ve never been able to escape it, the law. Even my first husband was a lawyer ...’ Then she looked up, threw off the introspection that had veiled her for a moment. ‘Well, how can I help? Sit down here beside me, Adam. You may be able to help, too.’

‘First, we have to establish what Mr Brame was doing out so late last night.’

‘He may have gone for a walk. He did that every night, to unwind, he said. Whether we were at our apartment in Manhattan or at our place in Connecticut. I used to worry, especially in New York, but he told me he always kept to the well-lit streets.’

‘Darling Harbour is reasonably well-lit,’ said Clements. ‘There just aren’t too many people around at two or three o’clock in the morning.’

Malone said gently, ‘Did your husband have any enemies?’

‘Here?’ She put down her empty glass. ‘He hadn’t been home for thirty years.’

‘Not necessarily here. In the United States.’

‘None that I know of. He was highly respected.’

‘Popular?’ He knew that popularity could breed enmity. That skater Nancy Kerrigan had been popular and she had had enemies.

‘Well, perhaps not *popular*. My husband never courted that sort of thing. He used to quote somebody, I forget who. The more one pleases everybody, the less one pleases profoundly.’

‘Stendhal,’ said Tallis.

Malone didn’t know who Stendhal was, but guessed he was a lawyer: he sounded like one. ‘Would you know if he had any enemies, Mr Tallis? People he’d had business dealings with? Ex-clients?’

Tallis was handsome now, but one could already see the plumpness, like clouds of flesh, gathering around the cheeks and jowls, that would dim his looks and turn him into a fat middle-aged man. His voice was soft but reedy, unassertive, but at least his gaze was direct and Malone had the feeling he could be trusted. ‘I had only just begun to work with Mr Brame, to assist him personally, I mean. I’ve been with the firm four years, ever since I came out of law school, but I was in a section that Mr Brame had nothing to do with. Clients’ tax problems.’

‘How big is the firm?’

‘All told, I think we have about four hundred and fifty people on staff, including the partners and senior men.’

‘So what were you assisting Mr Brame on?’

‘Mr Brame handled half a dozen or so of our top clients.’

‘Such as?’

Tallis named three corporations that even Malone, no student of American business circles, knew. ‘You’d know those, I’m sure, Inspector. There were others, not so public, but all of them highly capitalized. There were times – well, I – I was out of my league, the first month or so. Perhaps, like me, Inspector, you don’t realize how much hidden money – well, not *hidden* – *unpublicized* money there is in our country. Mr Brame, in a way, was – *connected* to a lot of wealth. Riches.’

‘No names, Adam.’ Joanna Brame smiled, but there was no mistaking the fact that she was warning Tallis.

‘Are you suggesting money might be behind his murder?’

Tallis was abruptly cautious. ‘Well, no ... I think we should wait till Mr De Vries arrives. He’s the other joint senior partner. I called him first thing this morning, when we – when we got the bad news. He was leaving immediately, as soon as he could get aboard a plane. Fortunately he was in Seattle on business, on the West Coast. I think I should leave him to answer all questions about the firm.’

‘Mr Tallis, we’re investigating a murder here. We don’t want the trail to go cold while we pay our respects to company protocol.’ Crumbs, he thought, I’m starting to sound like a lawyer, God forgive me.

Joanna Brame interrupted, politely: ‘Inspector, I don’t think Mr Tallis is trying to obstruct your investigations. Though he was my husband’s assistant, he was not privy to everything that Orville would have been involved with. I know – *knew* my husband. He carried everything very close to his chest. I think it would be advisable to wait for Mr De Vries.’

‘Did he ever confide in you?’

Her gaze, like Tallis’s, was direct. ‘No, nor did I encourage him to.’

Why do I have the feeling I’m facing hurdles here? Is it because lawyers, even lawyers’ wives can’t help blowing smoke? Or was it just a cop’s prejudice? ‘You mentioned Mr Brame had a brother here in Sydney. Were they close?’

‘No. Anything but.’ *Well, that was a direct answer, no smoke there.*

‘Have you ever met Mr – what was his name?’

‘Channing,’ said Clements. ‘Of Channing and Lazarus.’

‘Never,’ said Joanna Brame. ‘Their father, his name was Lester Brame, was in Sydney during World War Two. He was a sergeant in some company or something that spent all its time in Sydney. Having a good war, I think it was called. He met and married their mother. My husband was born in 1943, I think. His brother was born ten years later. In the years between, I gather, the marriage had been an on-and-off affair. Finally, my husband’s father went back to the United States – he was never a success here nor back home. My husband grew up and went to law school at Sydney University, then left immediately he’d got his degree and went to join his father. Lester Brame died the day after my husband graduated from Yale Law School. The brothers took sides in the marriage – it often happens. My – my brother-in-law took his mother’s name, Channing.’ She stopped suddenly, as if she had run out of breath, but it was surprise at how much she had revealed. She was, Malone guessed, not ordinarily given to opening family closets, not to strangers. He wondered if, though she was a lawyer’s wife, this was her first encounter with a police investigation. She reached for her glass, saw that it was empty but waved a dismissing hand when Tallis gestured that he would refill it for her. ‘I don’t think my brother-in-law would have a clue, as you call it, as to who might have killed my husband.’

‘I hadn’t suggested he might have, Mrs Brame.’ There was just a hint of stiffening in her face, but

that was all. But Malone saw Tallis straighten up and he turned to him: 'You thought of something, Mr Tallis?'

'Well, no, not really—'

'Try me. I'll tell you if it's something worthwhile.'

Tallis hesitated, glanced at Joanna Brame, then looked back at Malone. 'I saw two letters from Channing and Lazarus, both marked as strictly personal for Mr Brame. They came in in the last month. I gave them to him, but he never made any comment on them.'

'Did Mr Brame ever dictate any reply?'

'Not that I know of. He may have phoned his brother, but I wouldn't know about that. You'd have to check the office switch records.'

'Or he could have called from home?' said Clements, who had been taking notes.

'He could have,' said Joanna Brame. 'He often made business calls from home.'

'Has Mr Channing been in touch with you since you arrived?'

'No.'

'That's odd, don't you think? He'd know of the murder. Common courtesy should have made him call you.'

'He wouldn't know I'm here. He may have called Mr Zoehrer or someone else from the B Association.' She seemed unconcerned at her brother-in-law's lack of interest. 'When may I take my husband's body home?'

'That will be up to the coroner, Mrs Brame. The police can ask for a delay, but I don't think there'll be any need for that. Not if we get co-operation and we find the murderer soon.'

2

'You have only a faint resemblance to Orville.'

'I've got my mother's looks,' said Rodney Channing. 'Orville always looked like our father.'

He was as tall as Orville had been, but thicker-set. He was better-looking than Orville, but his looks were fleshy; he had thick wavy hair with streaks of grey along the temples; he wore a medium-thick moustache that was already grey. He had smooth, almost unlined skin, and she wondered if he used lotions on it, something Orville had never done. He had Orville's eyes: dark, giving nothing away, waiting for the other man (or woman) to tell secrets first.

He had phoned just after six, a few minutes after the two detectives had left. 'I've only just learned you are here. I'd have called earlier if I'd known.'

He had said *Mrs Brame*? when she had answered the phone, but he had given her no name at all after that, not even now, ten minutes after he had entered the suite. They were strangers, not even linked by a common surname.

'Did Orville mention we'd been in touch?' There was no hint of Orville's voice in his, but that could be because of the accent. She was looking for similarities, though she was not sure why.

'No.'

'It was just business.' *Did he sound relieved?* 'Very formal.'

'Did he plan to see you while he was in Sydney?'

He hesitated, sipped the whisky-and-water she had given him. 'We saw each other yesterday. He came to my office.'

‘Yesterday?’ She frowned, getting the day right in her mind; the international date line threw the calendar out of kilter. ‘Sunday?’

‘I’d rather you didn’t mention it to anyone – may I call you Joanna?’ She nodded, coolly, and he went on, ‘My wife and I have an understanding, I never bring my work home—’

‘Mr Channing?’

‘Rod.’

She nodded, but didn’t say his name. She had married beneath her when she had married Orville, which is not to say she could have done better; diamonds and gold are always found beneath one, and Orville had been pure gold. But, with the quick antennae of the born snob, she was beginning to suspect that Rodney Channing was pure dross. ‘I’m not expecting you to bring your work *here*. If you and Orville were engaged in something – *secret*, I don’t want to know. Though I’m curious—’ it hurt her to confess it ‘– what brought you together after all these years of – what do I call it? Did you hate each other?’

‘What did Orville tell you?’ He had a habit of stroking one side of his moustache, like an old silent film villain.

‘He never told me anything, just that he wanted this part of his life – the Australian part – put behind him.’

‘He’d become thoroughly American, hadn’t he?’

‘What does that mean?’

He back-tracked: ‘I don’t mean it in a pejorative sense. But he’d become American Establishment, hadn’t he? Ivy League, all that?’

He had indeed become Establishment, but only because she had led him by the hand into it. Even after ten years with Schuyler, De Vries and Barrymore there had been the rough edges of his father on him; at least, from what Orville had told her of his father, she had assumed the rough edges had been those of Lester Brame. Her first husband, Porter Greenway, had been dead two years when she had married Orville, taken him out of the small apartment on Central Park West and into the ten-room apartment on Park Avenue and the house on ten acres in Connecticut. And, more important than the addresses, into that part of American East Coast society that, come Republicans, come Democrats, come Roosevelt, come Reagan, or even Clinton, would be as rock-solid as Grant’s Tomb. Even though Grant himself would never have been admitted as a member to the circle.

‘Orville *proved* himself, Mr Channing. There was no lawyer in the Bar Association held in high regard. I’m sure they’ll tell you that, if you care to ask anyone in this hotel. The place is full of lawyers,’ she said testily, forgetting he was one.

He showed an unexpected solicitude. ‘Why don’t you move out, go to another hotel?’

‘Mr Tallis, one of my husband’s—’ She could not accustom herself to the thought that this man opposite her was *family*. ‘One of Orville’s associates, he tried to get me into another hotel, but no luck. Every hotel in town is booked out. Orville was booked in here to be close to the convention centre. We have to stay here amongst what I suppose the police would call the principal suspects.’

‘I’m not sure what the police would call them. I’m not a criminal lawyer, I’ve never had anything to do with murder.’ He spoke as if it were an unspeakable subject.

‘Have you no suspicions, Mr Channing?’

He didn’t correct her on the use of his name; he seemed to accept the fact that their relationship was going to be distant. She wondered why Orville had not told him yesterday that she was coming to Sydney and could only guess that Orville had wanted to distance her from his brother.

‘Suspicions? Why should I have any?’

For the first time she seemed at a loss. 'I don't know. I don't know why I asked that. I still can't accept that Orville was – *murdered*.' The word hung in the air like an obscenity. She looked away from him, out the window at the windswept night. 'I can't accept that he's *dead*.'

There was an awkward silence. Channing half-rose from his chair, then sank back. She turned back to him, frowning, as if he had been on the verge of committing some familiarity that would have offended her. She was fending off grief as if it were physically attacking her; she felt physically exhausted, her muscles stiff under the strain. She said, 'You haven't commented at all on his murder.'

He stroked the side of his moustache; she recognized now that it was a nervous habit. 'I'm the son of a lawyer, Joanna, who doesn't venture an opinion till he knows all the facts. I know virtually nothing of what happened to Orville, other than that he was shot while riding on the monorail.' He stood up. 'I must be going. How long will you be staying?'

'Only until they release Orville's body for me to take home.'

'He was born here. Why not bury him here?'

She had stood up, very straight, 'it would seem that you are a rather insensitive man, Mr Channing. Not at all like your brother.'

3

'I have cancer,' said Lisa. 'Of the cervix.'

He had got home just before eight o'clock, after she and the children had had dinner. He had eaten alone, while she busied herself at the sink and the children had gone to their rooms to do their homework. Afterwards he and she had sat listlessly watching television, a sitcom where the situation was banal and the comedy even worse. The mood had been constrained, his by suspicion, hers with her secret. Now they were in bed, with the light out, lying side by side with a stiffness uncommon to them. Then she gave him her secret and, with a low moan, he reached for her.

'Jesus, why didn't you tell me before?'

'I didn't want to scare you, in case it proved to be nothing. I had a pap smear last week, then I had Wally Newton called me on Friday and asked me to come in today.'

'You kept it to yourself all weekend?' It had been a good weekend. Sunday, the children, for a change, had had no social engagements; in a rare fit of extravagance, his wallet turning blue at the prospect, he had taken the family to lunch at one of the better restaurants in The Rocks, where the prices were tourist prices and the waiters expected tourist tips, preferably American and not your lousy local 2 per cent. Lisa had been her usual self, drily cheerful, attentive to him and the children; so it had seemed. 'How bad is it?'

'If a woman is going to have cancer, the cervix is as good a place as any. There's a better than an even chance that it is localized and can be contained. I think I'd rather it's there than in my breast.'

He was still holding her to him. 'Don't start making comparisons, that's not going to make me feel any better. Is Wally Newton going to operate? When?'

'Soon's he can get me into St Sebastian's. He won't do the surgery, he's got a top man, Dr Hubble.' She freed her hand from between them, stroked his chin. 'Don't worry too much, darling. I'll make it.'

He rolled over on his back, his arm still under her. He could feel the life in her, the sensuousness that bound them together where love and lust merged; he shut his eyes against the thought of what

might be eating away at that body. The Celt in him took over: he squeezed his eyes even tighter against the thought that he had already lost her. He felt the winter chill of death: not his own but of loved one, which is worse.

‘Have you told anyone? Your mother? Claire?’

He felt her turn her head, heard the rebuke in her voice. ‘Do you think I’d have told anyone before I told you? I actually caught a cab down to the Hat Factory after I came out of the doctor’s. But I couldn’t bring myself to go in – I was looking for comfort, but it wouldn’t have been fair to give you the news there – cry on your shoulder in front of Russ and the others ... Then I thought I’d take myself shopping, I don’t know why, or what I was going to buy. I sat in David Jones for an hour listening to that pianist they have on the ground floor near the perfumery counters. I got very sentimental listening to him ...’ Then she put her face against his shoulder and began to weep.

He held her to him, silently cursing God, in whom he believed and who had been good to him, but who, like all gods, demanded repayment.

4

In the morning they told the children. Perhaps it was the wrong time of day. Bad news, unlike good news, does not improve with keeping. It burst out of him at breakfast; instantly he was sorry. He should have allowed the children to go off to school and then gathered them to him and Lisa in the evening and told them. But then he might not be home in time this evening: there were murders to be solved, to delay him. Bad news, he now realized, was endemic. The way the world was going showed him that.

Claire and Maureen got up from the table and went and put their arms round Lisa; Maureen, the one who jeered at the world, was the one who burst into tears. Tom sat looking from one parent to the other, frowning, an almost resentful expression on his face, as if both of them had hit him. Malorie reached out and put a hand on his son’s arm.

‘Mum’ll be all right, I promise you. But keep it to yourself at school, okay?’

‘Geez, d’you think I’d broadcast something like that?’

It was the second time he had been rebuked. Then the phone rang. He got up from the table, squeezed Maureen’s shoulder as he passed her, and went into the hallway. It was Clements.

‘There’s been another one, Scobie. The security guard who found Brame’s body. He’s just been fished out of Darling Harbour.’

Chapter Three

1

They were putting the body into an ambulance as Malone arrived. He parked his car and walked out to the broad expanse of promenade which fronted Cockle Bay, the headwater of Darling Harbour which itself was no more than a small arm of the main harbour. Cruiser ferries were anchored at the landing stages and across the water a sour screech of music came from the pleasure grounds. Someone tested the sound system. It was raining again, but the radio this morning had said there was still no rain west of the Blue Mountains, eighty kilometres from Sydney. Out there on the plain drought was breaking the hearts of farmers; there were some areas that had had no rain for two and half years. This was a tough country, where people on the land died by degrees, though the rate of murder and suicide had risen sharply in the past twelve months. Someone had once called Australia the Lucky Country: the irony of it was a bitter taste.

The rain, like bitterly cold glass darts, came from the south on squalls of wind; facing the wind one could see the squalls coming, like dark waves of swifts ahead of their usual seasonal migration. The wind made it pointless trying to put up an umbrella and Malone pulled his hat down hard, turned up his raincoat collar and showed his back to the squalls.

‘What happened?’

‘A bullet in the head, then he was dragged across there and dumped off the end of the jetty.’ Clements nodded to the crime scene tapes writhing and crackling in the wind like blue-and-white streaks of lightning. ‘It looks like close range, almost an execution job. There’s been a break-in over at the Convention Centre there. They’re still checking what’s been taken, they’re not sure if the computer’s gone.’

‘They’d kill him for that? A bullet in the head for a computer?’

‘The shit that’s around these days, they’d kill you for loose change.’ Clements turned his face into a squall of rain, as if to wash away his look of anger and disgust. He could be a charitable man but he had no illusions left.

‘A bit coincidental, isn’t it, two murders here in twenty-four hours?’

‘I think you’re stretching it a bit to connect this one with the Brame murder.’

Malone nodded. ‘I guess so. I’m not thinking too straight this morning.’

Clements looked at him through another gust of rain. ‘Something wrong at home? The kids?’ Malone loved them as if they were his own.

‘I’ll tell you later.’ Malone turned as Korda, the technical manager of the monorail, wrapped against the elements in a hooded wind-jacket with the monorail logo on the pocket, came toward them. ‘Morning, Mr Korda. We didn’t expect to be back so soon.’

‘Christ Almighty, what’s going on? Someone trying to fuck up the tourist business, drive all the lawyers outa town?’ He turned his face away as the rain hit it. ‘No, I take that back, that’s bloody tasteless. But shit ...’ He looked after the departing ambulance. ‘The ABS security guys are over there in the Convention Centre, you wanna talk to ‘em?’

‘Anything to get out of this rain and wind,’ said Malone: that, too, was a tasteless remark. But his mind really wasn’t here. ‘Let’s talk to ‘em.’

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