

***Severance Packages: A Crime Paranormal Novel and  
Exegesis focussing on the Electronic and Digital  
Publication of Creative Writing***

Submitted by

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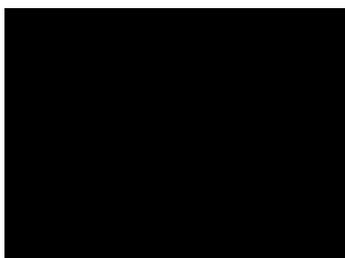
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## Student declaration

"I, Wendy Laing, declare that the Master by Research thesis entitled '*Severance Packages: A Crime/Paranormal Novel and Exegesis focussing on the Electronic and Digital Publication of Creative Writing*' is no more than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work."

Signed:



Date: 13/12/04

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# ***SEVERANCE PACKAGES***

**By**

**Wendy Laing**

## **Author's note**

*Severance Packages* is the second book in the mystery/paranormal series featuring Inspector Jane Doe, head of the Victoria Police homicide squad. This book follows on from the end of the first novel *Flowers from the Grave*.

In this novel, Inspector Jane Doe is on the trail of a serial rapist/murderer, who attacks and nearly kills her. After Jane's release from hospital, she goes to Cliff Cottage on the Victorian Shipwreck Coast to convalesce. While there, Jane begins to unravel the baffling serial murder case. Although Jane's near fatal head injuries have caused no permanent damage, she finds that she can communicate with the spirit world. She soon realizes that her chief source of help and inspiration into the serial murder case, and into another long-unsolved murder, is a ghost. The ghost's wife died at the hands of the man who is now apparently trying to kill Jane herself.

A wreath of dead flowers, lighthouses, and the spirit world all figure prominently in this novel.

An E-book CD of *Flowers from the Grave* is included in Appendix H.

# **SEVERANCE PACKAGES**

## **Prologue**

"What the –? Damn people dumping their dead dogs at this tip. Don't worry mate, I'll bury you with the others in the lower paddock."

The driver turned off the earthmover's engine. He climbed down from the cabin, and walked around to the huge bucket at the front to take a closer look.

"Oh my God!" Vomit rose into his mouth. He leaned against the machine and shivered. It was some minutes before his fingers were steady enough to call the police.

\* \* \*

Senior Sergeant Frank Stubbs strode around to the bucket, peered in, and shook his head. He looked at Senior Constable Marion Moore and said softly, "Looks like it's a serial killer now."

Stubbs blew his nose hard into his handkerchief. Marion Moore joined him at the side of the bucket and looked in. A foul stench emanated from the tear in the plastic. The constable put her hand over her nose and mouth. She waved her free hand in a vain attempt to brush away the flies buzzing around the parcel.

"Well at least we know one thing, Sarge."

"What's that?"

"It's a male."

The sergeant was unimpressed.

"I'm going to get Doe and her new Special Crime Squad. It's the same M.O. as her Malloy murder."

"But Sarge, it might be a copy cat. There were enough details in the papers."

Stubbs stared at the gruesome parcel.

"Marion, we need to secure the area. This tip is closed until further notice, or I should say until we find the rest of this poor sod's body."

Senior Constable Moore walked over to the car and joined two ashen-faced young constables who had retreated to the police car.

Senior Sergeant Stubbs stood transfixed. The plastic parcel had an old-fashioned cardboard tag attached with rough heavy-duty string. The cold evening breeze flicked the card from side to side. It read: SEVERANCE PACKAGE, 1 of 6.

\* \* \*

Detective Inspector Jane Doe shuffled the pile of papers on her desk. She sorted them into the In, Pending, and Out trays. Stretching her arms above her head, Jane yawned. She swung around on her swivel chair, looked out the window behind her desk, and let her thoughts drift for a moment.

*It's still a bit of an effort to get up so early after all those weeks of sleeping in. I'm glad my new office is on the fifth floor. The view's fantastic.*

*I must go for a walk in the gardens at lunchtime. I might even go up to the top of the Shrine of Remembrance. A good way to keep fit.*

She gazed at the gardens across St. Kilda Road, she frowned, and blinked.

*Damn, the last thing I need is a headache. The specialist did say I'd still get them for some time. Better take a couple of pain killers or I won't be able to think clearly.*

Jane looked at the sparkling solitaire diamond ring on the fourth finger of her left hand.

*Why did I accept your ring, Oliver? I love you and want to live with you but I can't agree to be a full time housewife, not yet.*

She rummaged through her hand bag and retrieved a packet of tablets.

*Heck, is it only eight weeks? No, don't think back. Think forward. Headache or not, it's good to be back at work.*

The phone rang. She reached across the files on her desk and picked up the receiver.

"Doe speaking. Hello, Frank. What? Damn. Yes, you're right. I need to check this one out." She glanced at her watch.

"Don't move the parcel yet, Frank. I'll send Doc Harvey to you straight away. Steve Ho and I'll be there as soon as we can, say in forty minutes."

Jane replaced the receiver, her thoughts racing.

*First week back and what do I have? One chopped up body of a retired MP and no suspects. Now there's the first parcel of another identically packed body-part found at the Sunbury tip. What's the connection to Sunbury?*

Jane popped out two painkillers from their foil package and swilled them down with cold coffee from the mug on her desk. Grimacing, she dialled Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Ho's extension.

"Steve? There's a neatly wrapped parcel waiting for us."

"Another severance package?"

"Looks like it."

"Sunbury?"

"Yep. But, this one's at the tip, not the vineyard."

"Pieces of garbage? This killer is some son of a bitch, Boss."

"Sick and dangerous, Steve. I'll meet you out front."

Jane hung up. She put on her parka and picked up her murder kit. The fragrance of *Chanel No. 5* drifted back into her office as the door slammed shut.

## Day One

Jane couldn't get the image out of her head. She walked away from the earthmover's huge bucket.

*Damn! We need the rest of you mate, and fast. What's your connection to Malloy? If only the dead could speak! No, I can't think about ghosts.*

She looked around the immediate area of the tip, where she stood. Huge mounds of waste surrounded her; plastic bags, both sealed and torn, bulging with putrid garbage, dwarfing her in mountainous piles. Some bits and pieces caught her eye. An old twisted hand bag, a frayed ladies blouse, and a summer straw hat without any crown, oddly out of place in the rain-sodden winter setting.

*A collector's paradise, if one is interested in peoples' discarded rubbish and junk. Thank God it's winter. This place would really stink in summer. Phew, the odours are still pretty bad though.*

"Boss?"

Jane, jolted from her thoughts, looked up at the handsome face of her sergeant, Steve Ho.

"Steve?"

"Can the Doc let the mortuary van take the trunk back to the morgue?"

"Yes, I don't see why not." She looked towards the western horizon.

"Damn, it's getting dark."

"Yeah, it's going to be difficult to find the other parts by spotlight. I'm presuming you want to keep searching?"

"Of course. The sooner we find the rest of the packages, the better."

Steve walked away from her. He moved with care across the sticky clay to join three men standing near the earthmover. One of the men was Doctor Fred Harvey, the chief forensic pathologist from the Melbourne Coroner's Office. Steve nodded at Doctor Harvey.

"The trunk's all yours Doc. Are you staying?"

Doctor Harvey's deep brown eyes stared directly at Steve Ho.

"Yes, I'm as keen as you and Jane to find the rest of this poor man's body. On first observations, this looks like the same killer. I won't know for sure until I get the whole body and compare everything with my autopsy on Malloy."

The doctor wiped raindrops from his beard with the back of his hand.

"Malloy's murder certainly caused a real stir last week. This one will only add fuel to the tabloids' headlines." He looked across to Jane in the distance.

"By the way Steve, how's Jane coping?"

"Like the professional that she is, Doc. She still gets bad headaches. But she never complains. She's still married to her job."

The doctor knew that Detective Senior Sergeant Ho held Jane in the highest esteem.

"Steve, is there any truth in the rumour that Jane can now communicate with the dead?"

"What?" A frown swept over Ho's face. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his nose. His expression was now blank. "What *are* you talking about Doc?"

"Come on, Steve, I know Jane's fiancé Oliver. He recently mentioned something about Jane communicating with a ghost called Ryan. A ghost who might have saved her life. Mind you, it was at an alumni night and Oliver and I had had a few beers. But he said it happened when she was on R and R, down at the coast. Surely, you know what happened there. Oliver reckoned he doesn't know whether to accept it as fact or fantasy. As for myself, I like to think laterally. By that, I mean that research shows that some people, with head injuries, who haven't sustained permanent brain damage, actually gain new mental powers. Quite the opposite from loss of functions." Harvey smiled at Ho. "A Hong Kong lad like you would believe in karma. Am I right?"

Steve frowned again and cleared his throat.

"Doc, I wouldn't mention what you've just told me, when you talk to Inspector Doe. She believes in the strength of facts to solve a murder investigation, just as I do. Cold, wind-swept, dark nights on a cliff top can certainly heighten one's imagination. As for myself, I believe karma, or what you call fate, guides our destiny. A ghost didn't save her life. Oliver just happened to be in the right place at the right time."

Ho and Harvey stopped their conversation as Jane approached. The parka's hood concealed her face. She pulled out her right hand from her pocket and shook Harvey's hand.

"Hello, Doc. Thanks for coming so quickly. Hell, it's freezing up here. Let's go up to the tip office." Jane pointed to a large portable shed on the far side of the dumping area. "The manager's topped up the urn and the local police are organising some refreshments to keep everyone going all night, if necessary." She led them across the sticky clay. Steve Ho opened the door. He followed Jane and Doctor Harvey into the warmth of the portable.

"What do you think, Doc?" asked Jane as she took off her parka and placed it on a chair next to the table.

"Inspector, you know I can't give you an accurate answer until I've investigated all the body in a PM. But off the record, I share your gut feeling, that it's the same killer. The wounds appear to be clean and concise. The cuts are like those on Malloy's neck. The printing on the label could be written by the same person."

"Done by a professional, Doc?" Ho jotted notes as he spoke. "Someone within the medical fraternity?"

"Not necessarily, Sergeant. Vivisectionists, scientists, nurses, mortuary assistants, butchers, fisherman, and many other jobs all utilize the knife as a tool of their trade."

Jane paced around the room. "Unfortunately, Steve," she said, "there are plenty of medical books, informative diagrams, and videos, in libraries and of course on the Internet, to give any layman an idea of how to dissect a body. Coffee anyone?"

"Yes, Boss."

"Thanks, Inspector."

Jane was grateful that Doc Harvey had used her title. This kept his friendship between herself and Oliver Tarrant at a professional distance. She spooned instant coffee into three polystyrene cups, pressed the tap on the side of the urn and filled each cup with hot water. Only then did Jane look directly at Harvey.

"We haven't found any real motive for Malloy's killing yet, Doc. The only link we have between the two victims is that their bodies were found in Sunbury." She handed over the coffees and watched as the Doctor stirred in milk and sugar.

Ho sipped his coffee.

"Boss, the killer has a sense of the macabre. He put the first victim's body pieces into six different wine barrels, at the front of Malloy's vineyard. He's dumped this one at the tip. Each label, *Severance Packages*, is almost like issuing a statement. Maybe a threat, or warning of sorts."

Neither Jane nor Doc Harvey responded to Steve's comments. In mutual silence, the trio savoured the warming effect of the steaming coffee.

A loud knock at the portable door disturbed them, and Steve Ho opened the door. A young constable from the Sunbury station stood to attention outside. She was shivering, despite being heavily rugged up against the cold.

"Sir, we've just found the – um – the right leg."

Jane, Harvey, and Ho dumped their half-empty cups on the table and grabbed their parkas. Jane caught her breath as the cold wind outside slapped against her. They made their way down the pile of trash, stepping with care over split and soggy bags, vegetable peelings, and other unidentifiable, rotting matter

that seemed to smell worse when trodden on. Jane fell behind. She screwed up her face.

*Hell, if smells were music, this would make a ghastly symphony!*

Jane was getting breathless, so she took a quick dose from her inhaler, and moved down through the rubbish.

*Damn my asthma. Damn the smell. Damn the weather.*

"There it is, Inspector." The constable pointed to a small depression down in the pile ahead. Jane's feet squelched and slipped. To prevent a fall, she leaned back but her feet lost traction and she landed on her backside in a heap of muck. *Oomph.*

"Need help, Boss?"

Jane saw the broad grin on Ho's face. She snapped back at him.

"No, I'm all right." She struggled to her feet, and shook her hands in a vain effort to flick off the sticky mud from her gloves. She joined the sombre group standing around the second parcel.

They watched in silence as Doctor Harvey carefully measured the leg and dictated pertinent remarks into his recorder. Then he stood up.

"At a rough guess, I'd put him around six foot or so. Of course, I'll know when I get the head. In the meantime, fingerprints from an arm will help. At least we have two of the six pieces."

Senior Constable Marion Moore called from the top of the trash pile. "Hello down there. Food's ready. Come and get it before it goes cold. Hamburgers and chips." Moore disappeared from their view.

At the bottom of the trash pile, Doctor Harvey looked at Jane and Ho.

"Go on," he said. "I'll join you up there in a few minutes. I only need a couple more photographs, and then this can go to the morgue."

Jane touched Ho on his shoulder.

"Come on, Steve." She moved up through the trash. "Don't be too long Doc," she called back, "I might eat your share."

Ho rubbed his neck, shrugged his shoulders, and then pulled up the collar of his parka against the icy wind. He followed Jane back to the portable.

"Nothing like eating a bit of mince meat," he muttered, "when looking for a chopped up body!"

\* \* \*

Jane was devouring her hamburger when Doctor Harvey entered the office and helped himself to a bag of chips. Jane allowed herself the luxury of a second cup of coffee. She glanced at her watch.

*Only seven-thirty and it's pitch black out there.*

Doc Harvey licked his salty fingers clean. "Mmm, I needed this." He emptied the bag's contents. "That was nice of Senior Constable Moore to bring us some tucker."

"She's got a heart of gold, Doc. Marion works with Frank for the youth in this area. They run the local blue light disco." Jane stopped as Marion entered the office hut carrying a large box full of takeaway.

"I've organised more food for the rest of the crew."

Jane checked her watch again. "Thanks, Marion. Steve, call in the others in groups for a break, will you?"

"Right, Boss." Steve grabbed his parka and stepped outside with Senior Constable Moore into the now howling wind.

Doctor Harvey and Jane were alone in the shed. Harvey stood up and started to put on his warm gear. "Congratulations!"

"What?"

"I was referring to the sparkler on your fourth finger."

"Oh, Oliver caught me in a weak moment."

"He's a lucky man. Guess you'll retire eventually, eh?"

"It's only an engagement, Doc. Goodness knows when we'll find time to get married."

*Why does everyone think that I'll retire?*

Jane had done up the wrong press-studs on her parka. She pulled them open and started again.

"Jane? Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine." She opened the door. "Come on. Let's go, Doc."

By nine o'clock, there had been no sighting of the left leg, or the arms or the head amongst the piles of rubbish, and the searchers were slowing down because of deteriorating weather conditions. Jane called another twenty-minute coffee break, in the hope that a heavy shower of rain would pass. To her relief the rain abated. Everyone, including Jane, continued the hand-sifting through soggy bags, parcels, and decomposing food scraps.

\* \* \*

At eleven-thirty, after a slow scramble up the pile of rubbish, Jane made a decision.

"Steve, let's call it quits. It will be much easier in the morning. My boots have at least three inches of clay stuck to them."

*Damn this rain. Damn this killer. Damn this job. I'd kill for a glass of scotch.*

"I'll tell everyone, Boss, they'll be glad to get home."

"Inspector." It was the same pasty-faced, shivering constable.

"Yes? Constable Nguyen, isn't it?"

Angela Nguyen's boots sloshed through the mud as she moved closer.

"Yes Ma'am – I – I've just found the right arm. It's down there." She pointed to the base of the pile, fifty feet down the slope. Jane and Steve, with Doctor Harvey close behind, followed Nguyen to the spot. A mud-spattered hand stuck out of some plastic. The rest of the arm lay half-submerged in a pool of muddy water.

"I didn't move anything, Doctor. As soon as I saw it below me in the light of my torch, I went to tell Inspector Doe."

"Just what I wanted you to do, Constable," said Harvey, bending down. His gloved hands reached down into the water for the rest of the parcel. A brief smile flicked across his face as he looked up at Jane.

"False alarm, folks." Harvey held up an arm from a store dummy. He looked at Nguyen. "Dinna fret, lassie." Jane loved to hear Harvey slip into his

native Scottish brogue. He patted the red-faced Constable Nguyen on the shoulder.

Jane said, "It's time to quit for the night. Bloody impossible conditions."

By midnight, Jane and the search team were ready to leave. Senior Sergeant Stubbs had organised a roster to guard the tip overnight.

"Thanks, Frank, your assistance is always appreciated," she said. "Until I say otherwise, the tip remains closed."

Frank nodded acknowledgment, then stood back as Ho started the car.

Senior Sergeant Ho drove along the slippery track that led to the main road back to Sunbury. Jane sat huddled up in the passenger seat.

"Frank has organised accommodation at the local motel in Gap Road, Steve."

"I know, he gave me the instructions to get there."

"Good. Ooh, I need a hot shower." Jane struggled to keep her eyes open as Steve motored down the winding road into the township. Her head started to nod and she drifted off.

"Boss, your hand bag's ringing."

"Hmm? Oh Hell. I was going out to dinner tonight with Oliver."

Ho grinned. Jane scrounged around her bag and retrieved her mobile phone.

"Hello? Oliver, I'm sorry. What's the time?"

*I know the time. Why am I lying to him?*

"Heck, it's that late? So you know where I am?"

*Of course, you would know. You're our police profiler, after all.*

"Just doing my job."

Oliver's voice was loud enough for Steve to hear.

"Damn your job, Jane. It's always your bloody job."

Jane feigned nonchalance as she responded.

"I'm sorry about dinner. You know what it's like when I'm on a case. I'll give you a ring. Okay?"

She kept the phone to her ear. Although Oliver had hung up, she spoke to the dial tone.

"I'll call you in the morning. Night."

*Damn.*

## Day Two AM

Jane yawned as she opened her motel room door.

"Morning, Boss." Steve smiled at her grumpy face.

"The sun isn't up." She walked over to the mirror on the wall in her room. Steve waited as Jane flicked her hair back from her shoulders and tucked the strands expertly into a ponytail. She grabbed her bag, shut the door, and joined him outside. They walked through the crisp air to the police car.

"At least the rain has stopped, Boss. I hope we find the rest of the body today."

"Me, too."

Ten minutes later, Steve steered the car along the slimy, muddy track inside the tip's compound. He parked next to the manager's shed. Outside, Jane looked across the surrounding hills to the eastern sky. Pale pink streaks etched the horizon.

*Good, I just hope it doesn't rain again.*

"Steve, I'm just going to walk over to the area which wasn't searched last night. You never know, I might see something. You'd better stay near the shed and greet the search squad."

"Okay. Doc Harvey said he'd be here around eight." Ho grinned as Jane squelched and slipped along the wet clay in her boots. "Take care, I don't want to have to pick you up out of one of those muddy pools."

"You won't have to. Anyway I've got my trusty torch." Jane laughed to herself.

*Steve, my minder. What would I do without you? Ooh it's freezing.*

She reached the edge of the flattened area, adjacent to the earthmover, stopped and stared, unseeing, at the pile of rubbish that stretched out into the darkness down the steep slope.

*God, what a place to be dumped.*

"Hello."

Jane spun around, and gasped. "Wha – ?"

"They're looking in the wrong area."

"What? How do you know? Who are you?" She peered at the tall shadowy figure, then the pale face with blue eyes and ginger hair.

"Eddie – Eddie – um – " He rubbed his hands together.

*Nerves? Or is he simply cold? Damn, the wind is blowing away from where Steve is waiting. He won't hear me. This might be the killer. Hell, why do I always put myself in a vulnerable position?*

Jane took a slight step towards Eddie and tried to appear relaxed as she spoke.

"Been up here long?"

"I don't know. All I know is that you are looking in the wrong area."

"Looking for what, Eddie?"

"The body."

"Whose body, Eddie?"

"I – I – don't know."

*I must keep him talking.*

"Eddie, how did you know we are looking for a body?"

"I don't know – I don't know why I'm here. I feel weird. Jeez, I don't know what I feel at all."

*Is he a spirit, like Ryan O'Byrne, my ghost from the coast? I wonder if – no, he couldn't be. Then again, how did he get in to the tip, past the security guard?*

"Eddie, do you work here?"

"No. I – I haven't the foggiest – I mean, I've no idea why I'm here at all. I've been here all night. All I know is that I've got to find the body. No, I'm wrong, it's bits of chopped up meat – next to a creek."

*He's a witness, not the killer.*

"I – God, I feel weird, almost giddy. You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"No, I don't think you're crazy Eddie. Confused maybe, but not crazy. What do you mean by 'chopped up meat'?"

"Did I say that? I don't remember. Wait a minute, he was short. I couldn't see his face." He shook his head. "He was wrapping up bits of body. Oh God – my body. This is a nightmare!" Jane noted the wrenching anguish in his voice.

*He's not a witness. Am I communicating with a ghost again? I must make sure.*

"Eddie, could you hold out your hand?"

"Why?"

"I just want to shake hands, that's all. My name's Jane." She put out her hand and Eddie reached out his hand in response. Her fingers groped into thin air.

"God, you can't feel me. Tell me this is a nightmare and I'm going to wake up. Please."

*He's different from Ryan, the first ghost I met. I could feel Ryan.*

Eddie's form quivered before her eyes, then steadied.

"Are you okay?"

"Just feel a bit sick. I keep remembering things, but it's all muddled. I've spent all night wandering around this tip. I couldn't work out why the two police officers on watch didn't see me." Eddie rubbed his hands together again. He stared wide-eyed at Jane. "It's my body you're looking for, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I – I'm dead."

"Eddie, I don't know how to explain this."

"But how can you see me? I mean, you can talk to spirits?"

"Yes, once before."

"Really?"

"Yes. But we mustn't let anyone else know."

"Why?"

"I have my reasons."

"You must find – you know, the parcels. I can't rest until they're found."

Eddie's form started to shimmer in the early dawn light. "I – I'm dead." And then

Jane realised that he was almost transparent when he was confused, but solid when they talked.

"Eddie, we fully intend to find them. Where do you think we should be looking?"

Eddie pointed to the far right of the current search area.

"I don't know why."

"Thanks, Eddie. This chat's our secret, okay?"

"If that's what you want. No one else seems to be able to see or hear me anyway."

"Do you remember your surname?" Jane held her breath. But Eddie didn't respond. He just stood in front of Jane, his eyes scanning the area. Jane's mind was in overdrive.

*A perfect witness. The victim. Goodness knows how I'll be able to use this information without revealing my ghostly chats.*

"Where are you?" Steve Ho's voice floated up the slope. "The search squad and Doctor Harvey are on their way in. Boss?" Steve was walking up the steep track towards her. Jane signalled with her hand.

"Stay there! I'm coming down, Steve." She looked back briefly to the spot where Eddie had been standing. His image had vanished.

*Damn!*

Jane walked down the slope towards Ho. They went and stood next to the tip's office. In the half-light of dawn, headlights were flashing along the winding track that led from the main gate to the portable in the compound.

"I was beginning to think that you'd lost yourself in amongst the crap up there. Hey, are you all right? You look as though you've seen a ghost."

"Just lack of sleep."

*How can I tell Steve that I've seen the victim's ghost? He'll think I've flipped*

They watched as the cars parked next to the portable shed, and then Jane let Steve greet the search squad and issue instructions. Doctor Harvey had driven from Melbourne in his own car. Jane watched as Harvey put on his rubber work boots and slipped a warm parka over his tall, lean frame. He pulled a woollen cap over his thick silver hair, and wrapped a tartan scarf around his neck, before zipping the parka closed. He then walked gingerly towards Jane across the slippery mud.

"Morning, Doc." She smiled. "Did you get much sleep?"

"Enough to keep me going, Jane. Now if we can only find the rest of the body."

"Yes."

"I'm going to get a cup of coffee. Want to join me?"

"Thanks Doc, but it's time I got started. I'll speak to you later."

Harvey disappeared into the portable and Jane went across to Ho.

"Just a moment Steve. We need to increase the search area."

"What, straight away? Why don't we check the newest rubbish first?" The dawn light reflected in pink across the frown on Steve's face.

"I'm sorry Steve. I – I've just had a sudden feeling that we should include the area over there." Jane pointed.

"Okay, will do."

*Thank God Steve's pliant. I wish Oliver were so cooperative when I contradict him. How can I tell Steve or Doc, that I've been chatting to the ghost of the victim?*

Jane rolled up the cuffs of her parka and pulled on her latex gloves. She squelched over the spongy rubbish, and joined a group of searchers. Her nose wrinkled as she picked up bags and moved items in the trash aside. Steve Ho also searched through the debris. He briefly stopped to watch Jane. Her face screwed up as she lifted a rotting sack and looked underneath. Steve smiled for a moment, and then continued.

\* \* \*

By late morning, Jane stopped briefly for a quick cup of hot coffee and biscuit, and chatted with members of the search squad, who were taking a break. Then, instead of re-joining the search, she distanced herself from everyone and walked back up the same tractor-made path, to the top of the hill, overlooking the main tip area. She deliberately stood in the same spot where she had first met Eddie.

*Will you contact me again, mate?*

Only when she was certain no-one could hear her, she softly called out, "Eddie? I know you're still here somewhere. Please show yourself. I need your help."

*Darn it, I need to talk with him again.*

"Inspector?"

Jane spun around. She was shocked to see the clear features of what looked like a normal human being. But she knew in her heart that he was not truly human anymore. Eddie's deep blue eyes were almost transparent in the glow of the soft winter's sun.

*Doc was right. About six foot one, around a hundred kilos with a shock of ginger hair. Damn, where's a camera when you need one? Then again, would a camera pick up his image? I must remember every detail of his face.*

"Jane, call me Jane, Eddie. I thought I'd lost you. Thanks for showing yourself to me again."

"It's not easy."

"I can't begin to imagine how you feel Eddie."

"That's putting it mildly. I must be dead. I have to be. I saw the man chopping my body up. At least I think I did And you seem to be the only person who can see me."

"Eddie, can you remember your full name?"

"No, I can't. I've tried – but – can't." He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, don't worry about your name for the moment. Can you tell me anything else that you've remembered?"

"I remembered that I have – um – had a girlfriend called Elsa. Elsa Carmody." Eddie smiled. "Hey, I remembered her full name!"

"Where does she live?"

"Sunbury."

"Thanks."

*Good. I'll be able to do a check through missing persons to see if Elsa has reported you missing, I'll find out your surname.*

Jane smiled at the ghostly image. "Eddie, do you recall anything else?"

"Yes, I remember that I got an urgent phone call to meet someone. No name was given. I was to meet him at a shed next to a creek. I'm sorry, I can't remember where, but it wasn't at the tip.

Jane's mobile rang. "Boss? Where are you? Can you come back?"

"I'll be right down." She pressed the end call button, and then looked at Eddie.

"Will you promise to keep showing yourself to me? I have so many unanswered questions."

"I promise. I'll try. Just call me. Thanks, Jane. I'm glad you're here."

*Ryan's almost identical words, 'Thank you for being here'. God, this is weird.*

"Eddie, I'm glad we've met and can talk. I must go, or they'll think I've gone walkabout. Don't go away."

"I won't."

Jane walked back to the search area. Ho was standing waiting for her next to the manager's hut.

"We're getting nowhere."

"We will. We must keep searching. I know we'll find the rest of Ed – of him, head and all."

A car door slammed shut behind them. Frank Stubbs was pulling a woollen cap over his bald head. He walked over to join them. His portly frame

seemed too heavy for his legs, yet he was very nimble on his feet. Jane remembered that Frank and Marion went to ballroom dancing competitions. A brief image of the two plump friends, tip-toeing around a dance floor, came to her.

*I wonder why you two haven't married yet.*

"Jane, you looked bushed. Guess you didn't get a decent sleep."

"Enough to keep going, Frank."

He looked at her quizzically.

"The new search area's a long way from where we found the first two packages, Jane."

"I know. But we'll probably end up searching the whole tip, Frank."

"Hmm, it's your call. Coming?"

"Not at the moment Frank. I've got to make a phone call. You two go."

Frank and Steve strode off.

Jane pulled out her mobile phone and dialled Doctor Oliver Tarrant's university office number. There was no answer. She tried his flat, still no response.

*Damn.*

Finally, she got an answering machine via his mobile phone and left a request for him to phone her.

\* \* \*

At midday, Jane slipped away from Steve Ho and Doc Harvey who were still working in the search area and went back to the spot where she had met Eddie.

"Did you see where the Inspector went, Doc?"

"No, sorry, Steve."

"I'll be back in a moment. Damn her. Why *does* she keep disappearing?"

Ho caught sight of Jane; standing alone on the top of the hill above the tip, too far away to hear him.

"What *is* she up to?" He muttered and dialled her mobile number on his phone. "Boss, we've found the left leg."

"Where?"

"In the new search area. Lucky hunch of yours."

"We needed some luck, Steve. I'll be there in a few minutes." Jane hesitated for a moment.

"Eddie?"

"I'm here, Jane."

"Eddie? I've some news for you."

"Yes?"

"They've found the left leg." To her horror, Eddie's image shook, and faded slightly.

"Oh God! I wish I were dreaming. Hell, I feel weird."

"Eddie, we'll find the murderer, I promise."

Jane started to walk down the tractor path. Eddie stayed next to her.

*How can he be all right? He's dead. I must keep him calm. I can't lose contact.*

"Eddie, your image seemed to fade when I told you."

"I know, Jane. The same thing happened before, when, you found the first two – um – parcels. I hate this. I don't want to stay in this weird state."

"I know. But I need more information from you. Do you understand?"

Jane was now halfway down the slope and wary that the others at the search area might hear her seemingly talking to herself.

"Eddie, you can help me find your killer."

"I don't know if I can. His name was a secret, like the company. All I remember is going into a shed. There was a note and a bottle of opened wine, with an invitation to have a drink, until the man arrived. I did. After two glasses, I was drowsy, and I think I fell asleep, or passed out."

"Your drink was spiked, Eddie."

*So that's how the killer did it!*

Jane had almost reached Steve and Doc Harvey. She lowered her voice, and then whispered.

"Eddie, just hang in. I need you! I have to join my squad for now."

She walked down the last section of the bulldozer made ramp towards Steve and glanced briefly back up the steep incline at Eddie.

"Boss, what are you looking at?"

"Nothing." Eddie's image dissolved.

*Damn. No one would believe me if I did tell them. If Eddie disappears once we've found everything, I'll lose my perfect witness – forever.*

## Day Two PM

After the mortuary van took away the left leg, Jane stayed with the search, pausing only briefly to eat a bag of chips. Marion Moore had organised the delivery as individual serves. Jane smiled as Marion fussed around the police officers, offering them vinegar and sauce.

*Just like a mother hen with her brood of chicks. Some of these officers still look like kids. They probably think I'm old. Heck, I am old. I'll be thirty-eight, in November.*

"Another coffee Inspector?"

"No, thanks Marion, I have to get back outside."

\* \* \*

At 3pm, Frank Stubbs was pacing around the trash. He lifted the corner of a soggy hessian sack with his left foot and peered underneath. Then his mobile phone rang. As soon as he finished the call, he walked over to Jane.

"Inspector, one of the local drunks has found a body in a log."

"Where?"

"Next to a creek that runs through the back area of Malloy's vineyard. I'm going over to take a look."

*A creek? Eddie's creek?*

"Another severance package?"

"Dunno yet. No mention of a plastic package, so there's no point in getting you involved, at the moment." Stubbs waddled off to the waiting police car. He called out through the car's open window as he drove past. Jane. "I'll phone you from the site."

\* \* \*

The search of the tip was complete by 3.30pm, without further success. Jane and Steve were standing next to their police car.

"Damn it, Steve, I'm beginning to wonder if we'll ever find the rest of him." Jane's mobile rang. "Doe. Yes Frank? What? Oh my God! That's all we need. Ho and I will be there in ten minutes."

"More severance packages?"

"That's what Frank reckons. And I've never known Frank to make a mistake."

"Where's the body, or should I say bits of body?"

"Next to a creek that runs through the back of Malloy's vineyard."

"Looks like the vineyard is a common factor."

"Only if the tip body can also be connected to the winery, Steve. Let's take this case one step at a time."

Jane and Steve slipped into their shoes, and put the muddied boots into plastic bags in the back of the police car. They stepped carefully around the

side of the car. Steve opened the passenger door for Jane, then got in the driver's side, but didn't start the car. He turned to Jane.

"As I stated in your office, this killer is a sick son of a bitch. He could have murdered a dozen or so people. We'd never find them all in a place like this."

"Let's hope you're wrong, Steve. Come on. We need to look at this new body as soon as possible."

As they drove out from the tip compound, Jane peered through the passenger window towards the top of the hill to the left side of the car. She hoped to catch a glimpse of Eddie, but he wasn't there.

"Looking for something?"

"Nothing, Steve, nothing at all."

*If I tell Steve about Eddie, he'll really think I've stepped over the edge.*

\* \* \*

The large barrels along the front fence of Malloy's vineyard came into view. As they drove past the barrels, Jane phoned Sunbury police station on her mobile.

"Constable Nguyen, it's Detective Inspector Doe. I need you to run a check through missing persons." Jane was careful not to mention Elsa's name. By the time Steve turned into the long drive up to the vineyard's cellar, Jane had finished her call.

"You're hoping our tip body has been missed by his family or girlfriend?"

"Yes. While we're here, we can have another chat to the manager of the winery. There could be something he has remembered."

"The two bodies found since Malloy's murder just might cure the amnesia we've been encountering."

"Exactly what I'm banking on."

A uniformed policeman was standing near the cellar door. Steve wound down his window.

"Which way, Constable?"

"Follow the track at the back of the car park, Sir. You'll find Senior Sergeant Stubbs down the end of the path next to the creek."

"Thanks, Constable." Steve closed the window and peered through the windscreen as the car ascended the steep track.

"Boss, maybe the drunk found the rest of our body."

"Hope you're right." The *Pink Panther* theme chimed from Jane's hand bag and she rummaged for her mobile. "Doe speaking. So it's definitely another victim. We've just reached the parking area. See you in a minute." She pressed the off button. "Sorry to disappoint you, Steve but it's another victim. The parcel contains a male trunk."

They descended the steep, slippery pathway to one side of the parking area, and joined Senior Sergeant Frank Stubbs at the edge of the creek. He pointed to each spot as he spoke.

"There's one male trunk in that log. The arms and legs are in that tree hollow and just a few moments ago, the head was found in that clump of weeds next to the creek. I took the liberty of asking Doctor Harvey to come over,

Inspector. That's why the parcels haven't been moved, even though forensics have checked the scene."

"Thanks, Frank. Poor Doc now has two and a half bodies to inspect. I don't envy him his job."

Jane looked around the place where they stood. A magpie yodelled a song from a red river gum to their right. The creek was crystal clear, its water gurgling around the rocks at the edge of the bank in front of them. Jane looked upstream. The creek disappeared around a bend further around the hill.

"Quite a pretty spot. Nice place for a picnic – for a murder, I mean."

Frank looked at Jane, shook his head, and grunted.

"My, Jane, you have been hardened by the murder squad. The last thing I'm thinking about is a picnic."

"Sorry, Frank, perhaps you're right. Then again, maybe I'm getting cynical in my old age."

"An observation, for what it's worth."

"Steve?"

"Malloy's body *and* this body *and* the body parts at the tip have all been neatly wrapped up in plastic and labelled. The killer put Malloy's body in the wine barrels along the front fence of the vineyard. And these body parcels have been placed in a small area too, almost like jigsaw puzzles he wants us to find. So why can't we find the body parts at the tip?"

"The only thing I can think of, Steve, is that the missing parts, at the tip were originally near each other, but were accidentally scattered by the earthmover."

Stubbs scratched his bald head.

"Or, were the parcels at the tip originally in another area?" He scratched harder. "Maybe the killer dumped the packages into an industrial bin, or separate bins somewhere. The normal rubbish collectors then took them, with the rest of the trash, to the tip."

Jane nodded.

"Possibly, Frank, but it'll be almost impossible to tell once the rubbish is dumped at the tip."

Steve was pacing around them.

"Frank, you could be onto something. We know that by first observations, it's probably the same killer. Sunbury is the common factor for all three victims. Two of them are located in the Malloy vineyard. What if they were all originally here?"

"Good point Steve," responded Jane. "In fact, it would make sense, especially if we can find a more tenable connection between the three men."

"Once we know the identity of all three bodies, Boss." Ho sighed. "What hatred this killer has."

Frank Stubbs nodded. "At least we can get an identikit of this one. Ah Doc Harvey has arrived."

\* \* \*

Jane stood back and watched as Doctor Harvey carefully checked each package. He didn't open the bags to inspect the gruesome contents, but simply viewed the contents through the clear plastic.

"I'll open these back at the morgue. I don't want to lose any of the fluids in these bags. The killer has done me a favour really."

"What?"

"Like the bags at the tip, these have been expertly wrapped, Jane. But the tip bags had been torn or damaged, whereas these are in excellent condition. This time, forensic evidence is still intact from the moment the killer sealed the contents. Rather like a time capsule, you might say."

One by one, the forensic team laid each bag onto a stretcher. They covered the grisly parcels with a rug and carried the stretcher up the path. Jane and Steve followed. The constables put the stretcher on the ground directly behind the mortuary van.

Finally, curiosity forced Jane to move closer. They were just like the previous packages. Each consisted of heavy-duty clear plastic bags, pulled tightly around each body part, sealed with a tight plastic tie and a handwritten tag attached with a rough piece of string. The rain had washed off most of the mud, revealing the grizzly body part. As she looked down at the bags, she took in an image of the contents.

*Long trunk – slim build – blond curly chest hairs.*

The last item on the stretcher held her attention. It was the head. She squatted down and scrutinized it carefully.

*Oh, my God – ginger hair! It's Eddie's head, we've got two bodies here.  
But how can I say anything without revealing that I've been communicating with  
this head's ghost?*

"Boss? Something's wrong? What is it?" Steve was now standing next to her. She slowly stood up, looking directly at Steve.

*It'll be safe to state the obvious – what I can see.*

"I think we might have found two bodies here, Steve."

"What?" He squatted down and took a close look at all the packages.

"Bloody Hell."

Doctor Harvey walked up the path from the creek and joined them.

"Ah, glad you've noticed." Harvey stood on the opposite side of the stretcher. "Wrong head, isn't it?"

"The ginger hair doesn't seem to match the rest of the body parts," said Jane.

"Correct, Inspector. We'll get you interested in forensics yet." Harvey winked at her.

"Never, Doc." Jane shook her head. "So where's this man's head?"

"At a rough guess, somewhere in the piles of rubbish at the tip, with the other man's missing arms. I think our killer got careless, and mixed up the heads."

"Which means Doc, that he possibly killed them at the same time," remarked Steve.

"No, not necessarily. But he could have stored them in the same place before dispersing the bits, lad." Doc Harvey rubbed his beard. "I'd suggest that

they were all chopped up somewhere near the creek, Inspector. He's clever in that he's been able to move body parts around this winery without being noticed. It wouldn't take much to put parcels in a boot and take them to the Sunbury tip. Certainly, no-one would take any notice of a person dumping bags there."

"That's true, Doc," said Jane, adjusting her ponytail. "The only witness so far has been a priest, who thought he saw someone near the wine barrels as he drove past on his way home from the city. His sighting is too vague to be much use."

"But Boss, the priest's statement does at least prove that someone was near the barrels along the front fence, the night before Malloy's body packages were found in them."

"Possibly. More to the point, it supports Doc's theory about the bodies all being killed nearby and left at this winery. Let's hope that missing persons come up with something for us." Jane shivered in the cold air. "Ooh, I'm freezing!" She pulled her parka's hood over her head again.

Five minutes later, Jane stood in silence in the car park outside the wine cellar with Steve, Senior Sergeant Stubbs and Doctor Harvey. They watched as the mortuary van inched down the steep gravel driveway, and out the gates.

Harvey blew his nose.

"Well Inspector, I'm surer than ever that it's the same killer. Pity we don't have the rest of the tip body, and the right head for this body. This killer has a definite technique."

Steve looked horrified. "Technique? Doc, you make it sound like an art form!"

"It is, in a bizarre way. Every surgeon has a special technique in the operating theatre. I think I've found the basis for a routine way the killer used his knife or whatever he used."

"He?" Jane raised an eyebrow.

"If it's a woman, she'd have to be exceptionally strong. I think the killer used a very sharp hatchet or cleaver to take off Malloy's head. That takes strength, lass. But, I always leave every possibility open." Harvey put his bag into the back of his car. "Now, I'd better get back to the city. The sooner I do the PM, the better. You can contact me via my mobile. With luck, I'll have the preliminary PM notes ready by the morning. I'll chat to you then." Harvey shook their hands, got into his sleek Jaguar, and left.

Jane sighed. "I know I've said that I wouldn't like his job, but I wouldn't mind a bit of his money."

"I certainly wouldn't mind his car. I'm going back to the tip," said Stubbs. "The sooner we find the head for this body and the arms for the tip body, the better."

"Okay, Frank," replied Jane. "Ring me if there are any leads."

"I will." Stubbs stomped over to his police car and departed.

Jane then trod up the few steps and opened the door into the vineyard's restaurant. Ho followed close enough to be her shadow.

\* \* \*

Simon Grey, the manager spun around from his position at the side window next to the entrance. His face flushed as the curtain swung back behind him. The air inside was overly warm. Jane and Steve pulled off their parkas and draped them over their left arms as Grey rushed towards them, his face red. They shook hands.

"Good afternoon Inspector Doe, Sergeant Ho." Grey talked in a fast staccato. "Dreadful mess, simply dreadful. Hardly good for business – Mrs Malloy has collapsed in shock. Her doctor's given her sedation." To the left, just inside the eating area, a young couple were talking in earnest to Grey's assistant manager. They were the only people in the restaurant. Grey smiled. "They're finalizing arrangements for their wedding reception in November."

"Mr Grey, we need to ask you some more questions." Jane looked over to the office doors to the right side near the entrance at the back of the bluestone building. "Can we go somewhere where we won't be interrupted?"

"Of course, we can use my office." He ushered them to the first door, labelled as the Restaurant Manager's office. The adjacent door still had Malloy's name on it as the proprietor. As they walked through into Grey's office, Grey sat on his ergonomic chair behind his small desk. The office was small and cramped. Jane sat on a chair opposite Grey, and Steve moved a chair out from behind the door and sat next to her. Jane watched every movement and each facial expression that Grey made.

*Nervous, shocked, or excited?*

"Mr Grey, we have your statement regarding Mr Malloy's murder. We will endeavour not to interrupt the normal work of the vineyard. As you must realise, another body at the vineyard can't be accidental."

"Of course, I understand, Inspector. The dead person can't be one of the staff. I've checked."

Ho sat back and said nothing. Jane let Grey ramble on, in the hope that he might give out new information.

"Inspector, I keep thinking that it *must* be something to do with the vineyard. But I can't find a reason yet. Believe me, like your good selves, I want to find an answer." Grey picked up a pen off the desk and fiddled with it. "My job's at stake here, and my reputation. Mrs Malloy has renewed my contract to manage the vineyard. Strangely enough, I planned to start going through Mr Malloy's office things later this week. It's almost as if someone has a vendetta against the vineyard or Mr Malloy. I really don't know what to do." Grey put the pen down, as shoulders sagged and eyes filled with tears. "Please, what can I do or say to help you?"

"I'm not sure myself, Mr Grey. Perhaps once we know the identity of the body found at the creek, we might be able to find some connections."

*Heck, I'm not going to get far with Grey. He's still in the clear so far. Time to change tactics.*

"Mr Grey, can we have a look at Mr Malloy's office once again?"

"Of course. Come with me."

*No fear or nervous twitches at all.*

Grey stood up, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked an internal door, which connected his office to the one behind it. Mike Malloy's office was huge and furnished with antiques. Paintings of the vineyard hung on the wall behind the enormous desk, trophies and plaques won at wine shows adorned the shelves on the opposite wall. Jane had stood in the same spot, one week earlier, in front of the desk, observing whilst forensics laboriously dusted for fingerprints, opened drawers, cupboards and checked the filing cabinets. She became aware of Grey's eyes staring at her.

"As you can see Inspector, no-one has been in the room. It hasn't been cleaned since your visit." He pointed to the fingerprint dust marks made by the forensic people. "I locked up the room. I couldn't bear to come in on my own. Mrs Malloy hasn't even been down to the cellar or restaurant since then." He rubbed his hands together, sat down on a swivel chair in front of the huge desk, and pointed to the high-backed leather chair behind it.

"She wants me to use his office. How can I possibly sit in his chair? It's a terrible business, terrible."

Steve Ho interrupted. "Mr Grey, we'd like you to stay here whilst we look in Mr Malloy's desk."

"Again? Why? I haven't a clue what he kept in there. Do I have to be here?"

"Yes, just in case," added Jane, in a smooth tone. "Although forensics checked this room, we want to have another look ourselves. You may know something about what we find. You'd be a great help."

"All right, I'll stay."

The detectives both put on their latex gloves and started the search through the two desk drawers.

"This drawer's not very deep," said Ho. "Hold on, there's a hidden compartment at the back." He pulled the right drawer out completely and laid it on the leather desktop. He retrieved a gold pen, an empty foolscap notepad, and a diary from the secret compartment and put them into seal-top plastic evidence bags retrieved from his pocket.

"There's a hidden compartment in back of the left drawer too," remarked Jane. She pulled out two bundles of business cards. "Now why were these cards hidden?" She pulled a card from each bundle and laid them in her gloved hand. "Do you know these companies, Mr Grey?" He leant forward and peered at the cards, then reached out to pick them up. "No, please don't touch them."

Grey looked at Jane and shook his head. "Sorry, but I don't know either of these men, or their companies, Inspector, honest I don't. A city jeweller and a city finance advisor? That's strange, because the Malloys use local companies. Perhaps they were given to Mr Malloy by clients, who were hoping for a referral?"

*That's good thinking Mr Grey. But why hide them in a hidden compartment?*

They stopped talking. Grey rubbed his hands and Steve wrote notes in his notebook. Jane bagged the cards in a plastic evidence envelope and wrote the contents on the label. She was privately thrilled to find this new evidence.

The ornately carved clock on the wall opposite the desk sprang to life as a wooden bird popped out and cuckooed five times. Jane stood up, took off the latex gloves, and carefully put them into her bag.

"Thanks for your cooperation, Mr Grey. We'll let you get on with your work."

"When will you be back?" Grey fiddled with his tie.

"I'm not sure, Mr Grey. Thanks again." Jane shook his hand and left the room with Steve close behind. Grey remained in the room, closing the door behind them.

"Back to the tip?"

"Yes, Steve."

\* \* \*

Senior Sergeant Ho glanced in his rear-view mirror, as the car climbed the steep winding road that led to the tip on the northern fringe of the Sunbury township.

"Frank Stubbs is following us."

"Good. He should have a copy of the drunk's statement with him."

"I wonder why Malloy hid those business cards."

"Secret business dealings? Goodness knows."

"Want me to check them out?"

"Tomorrow, Steve. You wouldn't get anyone now." She looked at the cards in the plastic evidence sleeve. "And there are no after hours numbers on them."

"All right, I'll phone them tomorrow and get an appointment with each. Well, well, well, look who's here." Ho grinned briefly at Jane.

Jane frowned.

"What the hell is *he* doing here?"

"You can only ask him." Ho parked the car next to the familiar silver convertible Saab. "I'll see how the search is going. Two's company and –"

"Quite right, Steve, three's a crowd." Jane grabbed her hand bag from the floor of the car in front of her, slammed the door, changed into her boots, and tossed her shoes into the boot. She squished through the mud towards the tall handsome figure leaning against the Saab. "Oliver, what *are* you here for?"

"I could say that I've come to lend my expert advice, or I could be more honest and say that I'm simply checking up on my fiancé."

"Oliver, I'm in the middle of a serial murder investigation. Have you something new to give me in the way of a killer profile?"

"You're not pleased to see me?"

"No. I mean yes. I wasn't expecting to see you here, that's all."

"That's all?" Oliver laughed. His bright blue eyes glistened in the twilight. "You look bushed."

"I'm busy, Oliver. What are you here for?"

"I'm going up to spend a few days at the property in Macedon." He pouted and looked at the ground.

"Thought you might like to stay with me, rather than at the motel."

"What? Oliver, I'm busy. And don't start ranting about my bloody job again."

"No intention of doing so. God, you're beautiful when you're angry."

"Oliver, what a cliché." Jane twisted the end of her ponytail. She looked down at the pile of trash.

*I can't mix business and pleasure at the moment. I need to contact Eddie. Damn you turning up, Oliver.*

"Jane, is everything all right?"

"Of course, Oliver. I'm just preoccupied, that's all. I'm tense. You know what I'm like when I'm working."

"A good reason to take a good break tonight, Jane."

"Boss?"

"Steve?" Jane turned her back on Oliver to face Steve Ho.

*Thank God, you've interrupted that conversation.*

"Found something, Steve?"

"Yes. The arms."

"Good!"

*Or not so good, if Eddie finds out. He must be around somewhere.*

As if in answer to her thoughts, Jane suddenly saw the image of Eddie, about two meters away from Ho.

*Don't look surprised. I can't let Steve know that I can see something near him.*

Ho's face was in shadow from the setting sun, whilst Eddie's face almost seemed to glow.

*He has no shadow. Control yourself.*

She took a long slow breath.

"Only the arms? No head?" she asked, as calmly as she could, knowing they'd already found the head.

"Only the arms. I'll show you."

"Lead on, Macduff." Jane gestured to Ho to lead her to the spot.

*There I go quoting dumb cliché's again. I must stop doing that.*

She noted that Eddie's image had faded further, but he stayed where he was.

*Good, I mustn't let Eddie know that we've found his head. Not yet.*

She turned back to her open-mouthed fiancé. "Coming, Oliver?"

\* \* \*

Half an hour later, Jane, Ho, and Oliver Tarrant watched the forensic squad car and the mortuary van move through the entrance of the tip and disappear down the road. Frank Stubbs and his team had also left. It was now too dark to search either the tip or the creek site at the winery for the missing head. Ho broke the silence.

"I'm going back to the city tonight. I can check the PM results with Doc Harvey in the morning and contact the jeweller and the financial advisor as well."

"Good, Steve."

"I presume you'll be staying at Macedon then, Jane?" said Oliver.

"I – yes, I will. It's one way of saving on the accommodation budget."

*No need to look so smug, mate.*

She caught Ho winking at Oliver, and she shook her head.

*Men behaving like boys.*

"I'll get my shoes from the car before you leave." Jane went with Steve to the car. "I'll see you tomorrow, after you've finished in the city, Steve. You can contact me via my mobile when you're leaving for Sunbury, or earlier if you have anything interesting to report. I'll be at the Sunbury police station first, then at the vineyard."

"Okay, Boss. See you tomorrow." Steve got into the police car and departed, leaving Oliver and Jane alone.

"Jane, we'll need to call into Macedon township to pick up some takeaway."

"I could murder for some fish and chips."

"Consider that wish granted, with the exception of the murder bit, Jane."

"We'll need to get my gear from the motel first, Oliver."

"Already done."

Jane frowned.

"Oops My fault Don't blame Steve."

"Oliver, please stop trying to organise my leisure time."

"I'm not, Jane. I had a brief call from Fred Harvey, who said you were looking tired. He also thought it might be a good idea for me to discuss a profile on the serial killer that he requested."

"Nice of Doc Harvey to tell me what he was doing."

"Jane, we are all only trying to help you."

"Help? Coddle me, more like it. I'm not sick or injured any more, Oliver. The medics have cleared me for full-time work. You know what I'm like when I'm in the middle of an investigation."

Oliver put up his hands in mock surrender.

"All right, Inspector Doe, you don't have to convince me about anything."

He opened the car door for her.

Jane looked briefly back across the tip.

*Damn it, where are you Eddie?*

"Now it's time to enjoy the countryside. Jane? Are you okay? What are you looking for?"

Eddie's shimmering image appeared near the car.

*I must reassure Eddie.*

"Nothing, Oliver. I was only wondering where the body's head is that's all."

"Hey, you don't have to speak so loud, I'm not deaf, love."

"Sorry Oliver, it's just that this is such a cold and calculated killer. I need to come back. I'm sure there's more information here." Jane got into the car. She smiled at Eddie, and he smiled back.

"That's my girl. Did I tell you how attractive you are when you smile like that?"

Jane blushed in the darkness as they drove out through the tip's entrance past the security guard.

\* \* \*

Jane peered through the windscreen at the house at the end of the drive.

"Oh Oliver, what a lovely place. Why have you kept this a secret?"

Oliver parked his car next to the steps that led up to the colonial-style veranda. He smiled.

"Welcome to Wyndales, Jane. I know that I should have brought you up here months ago when I first asked you to marry me. But, there was your accident then you went down to the coast to recover."

"Oliver, I know you've been patient with me. Especially when I couldn't make a decision down at the coast. At that time I didn't even know if I wanted to stay in the force."

"I knew that."

"You did?"

"Jane, my late parents were determined that I keep this house after they died. I rented the property out for a couple of years and then decided that I might come and live here. But not by myself."

"It's beautiful, Oliver. Does the veranda go all the way round?"

"Yes. And before you ask, that creeper is wisteria. It provides a lovely shade of lilac and green in summer time."

"Pity it's too cold to sit out here for a pre-dinner drink."

"That's a pleasure you can look forward to, Jane."

Half an hour later, Jane and Oliver sat on a couch, opposite the open wood fire, which crackled in the grate. Jane licked her salty fingers and dipped them back into the paper wrapping for some more chips.

"Yum." The warm glow of the fire and the almost hypnotic effect of the flames gradually eased all the tensions from her body. She sipped from her wine glass and looked at Oliver.

"Now tell me about this profile that you've done of the killer."

"Later, Jane."

"Why later?"

"I want to tell you about my new project first."

"What project? What's happened to your book on police profiling?"

"Finished and at the publisher. I've decided to explore a new field of research."

"What about your job as a profiler?"

"All fixed. I'll still do profiles, but for special cases only. I've got a research grant. I've been organising this research project for the last month or so since our ghostly encounter at the cottage on the coast."

Jane grabbed the paper napkin and wiped her mouth.

"I thought you didn't believe in Ryan's ghost!"

"I only said that to put you off the topic after we returned to Melbourne, Jane."

"Oliver, what *are* you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to say that I believe that I *did* see Ryan or at least his ghost, apparition, spirit, or whatever you'd like to call it. I think that his communication with you was so strong that he formed a close bond and that through his concern for you, he was able to communicate briefly with me."

"Why didn't you say so at the time?"

"Jane, like you, I didn't think people would believe me. Also, I can understand why you don't want the force to know of your newfound ability after your near death experience."

"Oliver, if I can communicate with the dead and the force hears about it, I – I'd –"

"Lose your job? Be laughed at behind your back? Be certified as unfit for service? Come on, Jane, I'm not that insensitive. I certainly wouldn't tell anyone. This would be between the two of us."

"And your precious new research project."

"My research is purely about the paranormal and sightings in relation to murders and violent deaths, Jane. You won't come into it at all. I promise."

Jane frowned, looked at the fire, and said nothing.

*But could I trust you not to accidentally reveal this ability?*

"Jane, don't tell me that you can't trust me. For Christ's sake, we're engaged. This is a two-way bond, friendship, partnership, and all that goes with it. We must trust each other."

"Oliver, it's not that at all. I'm naturally hesitant, for the reasons that you first cited. I love my job. I don't want to risk losing it. I don't want to be known as a police officer who also can communicate with the third dimension. The two worlds can't mix."

"Oh, I think they can, Jane. But as long as we keep it between the two of us. Trust me. You know I'm a good listener."

"Tell me how they can mix. Bear in mind I'm making this a patient-analyst discussion, Oliver."

"Aha, pleading patient confidentiality? Okay, if that's what you want, I'll treat this discussion as such."

"Good. I don't want to see my name even mentioned vaguely in your research."

Oliver got up, knelt in front of the fire, added a piece of wood, then went out to the kitchen and turned on the electric jug. He returned to the couch, but sat on the edge, and looked directly at Jane.

"Are you still able to see or communicate with the dead?"

"Oliver, this must be confidential as agreed."

"Of course."

"I'll never trust you again if you tell anyone else."

"Agreed."

"All right." Jane drew in a deep breath. "A murder victim has contacted me."

"One of the severance packages victims?"

"Yes. A ghost called Eddie has been communicating with me at the tip. It's his body that we have been looking for."

"Are you sure he's a ghost?"

"Oliver!" Jane squeezed the paper parcel containing the last remnants of the chips and sauce. The sauce oozed out the bottom and onto her lap. "Hell."

"Hang on, I'll get a dish cloth." Oliver dashed out to the kitchen and returned with a damp cloth and a towel. "Here you go."

"Thanks." She wiped herself down. Oliver returned to the kitchen and a few moments later carried in a tray containing a coffee plunger and mugs.

"In answer to your question," said Jane, "yes, I'm positive that he's a ghost. He doesn't cast a shadow and I can't touch him. But his image differs from the first ghost that communicated with me."

"You're referring to Ryan O'Byrne, down at the coast, two months ago."

"Yes. He's the only ghost that I've met, until this case." Jane took another sip of red wine. "Ryan presented a strong and steady image and I could feel his body. Eddie's image tends to fade in and out. And when I tried to shake hands, I clutched thin air."

"That *is* spooky."

"Oliver, he fades further when parts of his body are found."

"So that's why you made the point back at the tip that only the arms had been found?"

"Exactly. I couldn't let him know that we'd found his head at the vineyard today. He still thinks the missing head is his."

"Oh God, so the killer mixed up the heads. What a mess."

"Oliver, I need more information from him. He remembers bits and pieces  
No, that's the wrong expression. He remembers in fragments or flashes."

"So you want to try and keep him around for another day or so?"

"Yes. If I can. He told me about seeing a stocky man in a balaclava  
chopping up a body, his body to be precise, next to a creek."

"My God, Jane, you've got the perfect witness, a spirit who's seen his  
own murderer."

"I know. And he mentioned a secret company. I need to find out more.  
But at the same time I can't let any of this slip out, or I'll be pensioned off as  
mentally unfit."

"I agree, Jane. But I still think that we might be able to use our combined  
analysis of Eddie's information to help solve the case without revealing your  
secret to anyone else."

"How?"

"That's why I've brought you here. Coffee?"

"Yes, thanks."

Oliver poured two strong mugs of coffee. "Now my love, even if this takes  
all night, let's start at the beginning. When did this particular ghost Eddie or  
whoever you call him, first appeared to you."

"I didn't make up the name. Eddie told me his name. So far, he can't  
remember his surname. The weird thing is, but can't make it official." Jane  
paused and sipped her coffee. Oliver picked up his note pad from the coffee  
table.

"Go on, my love, I'm listening."

Jane spent the next hour telling Oliver everything she could about Eddie. He was particularly interested that the ghost had apparently seen his murderer.

"Jane, what extraordinary access to evidence. Pity it wouldn't be recognised by the courts, or the force. His girlfriend's name, Elsa Carmody, is a way of proving that you've actually communicated with a ghost."

"What? You mean you don't believe me?"

"Calm down, Jane, of course I do. But don't you see that once we know Eddie's surname, we can then check out names of his family, including his girlfriend. There's no possible way that you could know this information, without having met Eddie, I mean, Eddie's ghost. It would prove that you can communicate with spirits."

Oliver's eyes were wide open. Jane sipped her coffee.

"That's my dilemma. I know the name of the victim's girlfriend, and I also know that the killer is strong and has a stocky build. But I can't *tell* anyone."

"You've just told me, my love. And I for one believe you. Now all we have to do is work together to find an orthodox way of finding this killer."

"Well, for a start, you can give me your updated profile."

"All right, Inspector. As I stated in the first profile, after Malloy's death, this killer is sending out a definite message."

"That's bloody obvious. He writes notes."

"What I mean is, that it is a message of fear. I reckon that the killer is trying to stop others from revealing something."

"The secret company?"

"Possibly. But we are the only two people, apart from the three victims, who know about the company, so I can't mention it in my profile."

Jane yawned. "I'm sorry, Oliver, but I need some decent sleep."

"The main bed's made up, love."

"I meant sleep, Oliver."

"Of course. Come on, I'll show you to the room. I need to stay up for a while and write some notes. I hope you meet Eddie again tomorrow. You're right, we need more information. I wonder if he would show himself to me."

Ten minutes later, Jane curled up and drifted into a fitful sleep, her thoughts still churning.

*What else can Eddie tell me before he disappears? Will Oliver be able to keep this information secret? Am I doing the right thing? What would happen to me, if the force finds out?*

## Day Three

A crash from the kitchen jolted Jane awake. She got up, peered around the bedroom door, and saw Oliver walking down the hall towards her.

"What was that?"

"Just one less plate. Sorry I woke you. You could have had another half hour kip."

"That's okay. Anyway I'm up now."

"Go and have a nice warm shower, my love. Now breakfast will be served in ten minutes."

Jane pouted. "God, why are you so chirpy in the mornings?"

"Best time of the day."

She blew a loud raspberry and returned to the bedroom.

"Ten minutes, Jane." Oliver's voice echoed up the hall. "Any longer, and you'll get a hard-boiled egg instead of a soft poached one."

\* \* \*

Jane leaned back in the leather seat of Oliver's Saab. The soft, soothing tones of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and the warmth of the car heater made her feel drowsy. She was glad that Oliver was not chatting as he drove.

*Thank goodness, he's sensitive to my morning grumps. I guess we can't be compatible in everything.*

A few seconds later, she dozed off.

"Time for work, Inspector."

"What? Hell, I slept all the way, didn't I?"

"You obviously needed the extra twenty minutes," said Oliver. He steered into the Sunbury police station car park.

"I've brought my new profile with me, Jane. It will give me an excuse to come in with you."

"I'll get Marion to do some copies. They can be given to the staff searching the tip and the area along the creek. You can be my official advisor today." She got out of the car. With shoulders back and chin out, she assumed her work persona. Jane marched to the entrance of the station, leaving Oliver following in her wake.

The sliding doors opened automatically. Jane went straight to the reception desk at the far end of the lobby and banged the bell for attention. A sleepy-eyed constable appeared. He glanced at his watch.

"Eight o'clock? Inspector Doe, we weren't expecting you until nine."

"Morning, constable. Normal office hours are not part of my job. Is Senior Sergeant Stubbs in?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"This is Doctor Oliver Tarrant, chief police profiler. He's with me."

The constable opened the side door that led into the main office area behind reception. Jane and Oliver went in. Frank Stubbs saw them through the glass partition of his office situated at the rear of the main room, and called out.

"Hello Inspector! Come in."

Marion Moore was standing next to Senior Sergeant Stubbs's desk.

"Good morning Inspector, Doctor Tarrant," said Marion. "Coffee is coming. And Frank's already got the muffins." She pointed at a plate on the desk. "Both with a dash of milk and no sugar, correct?" She called as she left the room.

"Thanks, Marion," Jane and Oliver chorused.

Stubbs leaned back on his chair, hands tucked into the top of his belt. His tummy bounced as he spoke.

"You look a lot better this morning, Jane. Country air obviously does you good."

"All I needed was a solid night's sleep, Frank." snapped Jane. "I'm expecting a call from Ho later this morning. He's chasing up possible leads with the two business card holders."

"Good. I'm not happy that my forensic people didn't find the hidden compartments."

"Water under the bridge, Frank."

*Damn it, I'm quoting again."*

"Oliver has an updated profile on the killer for us. I want copies to be distributed to the searchers."

"Consider it done."

Oliver put the folder on Frank's desk as Marion appeared, carrying two cups of steaming coffee. She raised her neatly plucked eyebrows.

"Not eating the muffins?"

"We've only just had breakfast, Marion."

"All the more for me then." Marion winked, picked up the plate, and left the room.

\* \* \*

Frank Stubbs called a briefing of the search squads at nine in the main room outside his office. Jane and Oliver sat listening as Stubbs told the search squad about the body parts found so far, and the areas to focus on that morning. He ended the briefing with a reference to Oliver's updated profile.

"I'd like everyone to read this before searching today. The killer's threatening notes and mode of killing could mean that others might be in danger, especially if they knew these victims. Keep an eye out for anything suspicious."

As the squad filed out of the muster room, Jane pulled out her mobile phone and dialled Steve Ho's number.

"Steve? Any news? All right, give me a call as soon as you've finished."

She looked at Frank and Oliver.

"Steve's still talking to the jeweller's staff."

"Patience, Jane."

"I know how to do my job, Oliver."

There was an awkward silence. Frank Stubbs smiled.

"I'm going to the tip," he said. "Then the vineyard to set up the searches. Let's hope we find the head today." He waddled out towards reception.

Jane sat at a desk in the back left corner of the main office. Stubbs had allocated the area for her use during the investigation. Oliver sat down opposite her. He picked up one of the morning papers from the desk and gave a low whistle as he held up the front page of the *Age* newspaper.

"Look, you've made the front page again."

Jane raised an eyebrow. "Good, we need the publicity. Someone must know something." She got up and started to pace up and down behind the desk.

"Why don't you sit down for a while?" Oliver grinned.

Jane glared at him, then sighed, sat down, and picked a newspaper. Less than five minutes later, she put it aside. Oliver picked up the discarded paper and read it. Jane started up her laptop computer and added comments to her reports, then connected to the Internet and sent the files to her secretary at the murder squad's headquarters in St Kilda Road.

Jane's mobile rang and she snatched it out of her bag.

"Steve, what have you found? Really? Damn. Huh-huh – huh-huh – excellent. Give me a call as soon as you've spoken to Fallon." She pressed the disconnect button and looked at Oliver.

"The jeweller, Lewis Lee, is currently in Hong Kong, on business. But his staff say he's a friend of the financial advisor George Fallon. Apparently Lee had clients referred to him from the late Mike Malloy, *and* these clients only dealt in cash."

"Jewellers and financial advisors have one big thing in common, and that's money, my love," said Oliver.

"Well, we'll have to wait for another half hour or so until Steve phones. He's about to speak to George Fallon." Jane started to pace around the desk again. "Waiting is the worst part of my job." She looked at her watch. "Right, it's time to go to Malloy's vineyard again. I want to have another look at the area where the third body was found."

"I presume I'm your chauffeur until Steve comes back to Sunbury?" Oliver did a mock salute and clicked his heels. "The car is ready, Ma'am."

Jane zipped up her parka, hitched her bag onto her left shoulder, and strode to the security door that led to reception.

"Hurry up," she called behind her, and swiped the security card Marion had given her previously. By the time she opened the door, Oliver stood behind her. They walked through the large reception area and left the police station through the automatic sliding doors.

Oliver unlocked his car and they got in. They drove out onto the road, crossed the break in the median strip, and turned right. Oliver laughed, glancing at her.

"I'm getting to know Sunbury better than Macedon."

She grinned.

"It's good to see you haven't lost your sense of humour, Jane."

\* \* \*

"What's taking Steve so long?" Jane looked at her watch and frowned as Oliver turned his car to the right past the huge wine barrels, and steered through the vineyard gates. She pulled out her mobile, but it rang before she touched the first button. She dropped the phone in her lap, retrieved it, and pressed the answer button. "Doe. Steve? Tell me. Hmm – great. I'll see you when you get to the station. I should be back from the vineyard by then. Good work, Steve."

"What's up?"

"Tell you everything later." Jane rang Frank Stubbs and updated him with Steve Ho's interview findings, as Oliver stopped the car near the cellar door and kept the engine running. Oliver waited, drumming his fingers on the dashboard. She finished the call and then looked at him.

"Drive around the right side of the cellar and up the track to the top of the hill. We can park there."

"Right, Ma'am."

"Stop it."

"What?"

"Calling me, 'Ma'am'. I hate being called that."

"And I don't like being treated like one of your staff, my love."

Jane sighed.

"Sorry – you're right, Oliver. I won't snap at you again. I really appreciate your help and your company at the moment."

"You're welcome, Inspector." Oliver grinned as he turned off the car's engine. "From what I've overheard I wouldn't be surprised if the third victim is George Fallon's lackey, Jason Gee."

"You're probably right. Steve said Fallon is only the owner in name. He reckons that Fallon appears to be in the early stages of dementia and doesn't seem to know much about what is going on in the day-to-day running of the place. He only pops in every now and then for a coffee, and he's driven to and fro by his chauffeur."

They got out of the car and pulled up their parka hoods to protect their heads from the icy wind.

"Where do we go now, Jane?"

She pointed to the track that led to the crime scene beside to the creek. "Down that path." Oliver followed her through the bush, down the narrow gravel pathway. As they reached the creek, a pale-faced young constable, guarding the crime scene, saluted as Jane approached. She nodded acknowledgement, lifted the police tape and carefully ducked under. Jane briefly peered inside the makeshift tents erected by Forensic to protect the ground where the body parcels had been found. Oliver sat on a log, watching the water run downstream. He called over to Jane as she left the cordoned-off area.

"Nice spot for a picnic."

"That's exactly what I said to Frank Stubbs." She looked upstream.

"Come on, Oliver. Time for a walk."

Oliver walked behind her as she moved off along the path beside the creek. They continued for over fifteen minutes and covered, in Jane's estimation, about half a kilometre. Oliver ducked under an overhanging branch, at the spot where the creek went around a sharp bend.

"I know I've asked before, but what else are you looking for?"

"I don't know yet. Oh, by the way, I think you're right about the identity of the third victim. Jason Gee had blond curly hair, which could mean it's his body that was found here and is missing it's head."

"What about the money laundering?"

"Steve says all the cash clients came from Asia, most of them from Hong Kong. They paid cash for very expensive jewellery, blocks of land, and other financial investments in Australia." She stopped in her tracks so fast Oliver bumped into her. "Oliver, it's a shed!"

"Let's take a look."

"No. Stay here." Jane's voice was now a harsh whisper. "Can you see him?"

"See who?"

"Eddie's ghost. He's standing next to the shed."

"You'd better go and talk. – I mean communicate with him, Jane. I'll sit on this rock and wait."

\* \* \*

Jane walked slowly towards the image of Eddie. "It's all right, Eddie."

"Jane, who's that?"

"It's my fiancé, Doctor Oliver Tarrant. He's also a police profiler. Can you show yourself to him?"

"I'm a ghost, not a magician. I've no idea why you can see me and others can't, I'm sorry." He looked at the ground.

"I've asked Oliver to stay where he is, Eddie."

"Thanks."

Jane pointed to the shack. "Is this the shed that you told me about?"

"Yes. I remember getting a message in my letterbox. I was to meet an unnamed person at this shed."

"Was any reason given for this meeting?" Jane looked at his mop of ginger hair and remembered the severed head in the plastic parcel found in reeds next to the creek. She shivered as cold air enveloped her.

*I always seem to feel colder in Eddie's presence.*

"Jane, are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Eddie. It's just a bit cold here, that's all. What else can you remember?"

"The note said something about *Avaritia*. That's the company name given to me when I was first contacted via email."

"Yes? Eddie, this could be important."

"I would get cash delivered in my post office box in an envelope to accept so-called special groups travelling from Asia to Melbourne. The cash was too good not to accept. Besides it was tax free, and I didn't earn that much from my bus tours."

Jane tucked her cold hands in her parka pockets.

"Go on."

"Where was I? That's right, I'd get the names and where they were staying in the city."

"How did you receive the lists and tour dates?"

"Via email, to my private email address. The messages always came from different addresses. My job was simply to take them for a drive up to the wine region around Sunbury. A special stopover was always made at Malloy's."

"Did you organise the itineraries?"

"No. *Avaritia* prepared and booked special group itineraries. I simply followed their itinerary. I did the meet-and-greet at Melbourne Airport, hotel transfers and the trip to Malloy's winery where they had tastings, and lunch. Then I took them back to their hotel. Then they had a week's free time and I took them back to the airport on departure day. I received cash in a large envelope in my post office box a week after each tour departed Australia."

Eddie's image was now almost transparent. Jane shuddered; she could see the surrounding bushes and outline of the shed door through his ghostly outline.

"How long did you do these tours, Eddie?"

"I took groups from Hong Kong up to Malloy's once a week for over a year. I couldn't stop once I started."

"Money that good?"

"Yes. I got around two thousand dollars a week. But that's not why I couldn't stop. The contract stated that I would not know who else worked for *Avaritia* and if I tried to find out, or tell anyone what was going on, I'd receive a severance package – a package from which I'd never recover. That's what the contract said. And I'm a coward – *was* a coward."

Jane swallowed hard and took a couple of quick breaths to stop the queasy feeling that Eddie's words evoked.

"So you found out something? Or told someone something?"

"I – I think it was when I accidentally bumped into Mike Malloy secretly handing out business cards to one of my groups. We chatted for a while, by ourselves, whilst I waited for my group to buy wine from the cellar. We realised then that we both worked for *Avaritia*. Malloy was frightened. He told me not to say anything about the cards. They were part of his contract with *Avaritia*. His job was to introduce my special groups to the city businesses via business cards, which he received at his post office box each month. I didn't say anything to anyone about our chat, because the contract was so threatening. It stated that I was not to know of or contact any other employee. I was never to mention *Avaritia*, or my secret job to anyone. Malloy and I talked about money laundering. However, we couldn't break our contract, or we'd be killed. So we swore each other to secrecy about our chat that day. Honestly, Jane, after that meeting, I was scared for my life, especially after Malloy's macabre package killing was in the newspapers."

"Why did you accept such a contract in the first place?"

"It was the cash. Neither of us knew about the 'Severance Package' clause until after we had completed handling our first group. Like me, Malloy got his first job and payment, before receiving the written contract, with the severance package clause." Eddie rubbed his hands together and looked at the shed. He then turned and faced Jane. "You're the first person that I've told about this."

"Can we get a copy of your contract from your unit?"

"No, we had to read it and then destroy it. I felt so threatened. We both did. *Avaritia* was like a greedy spider. Once you were in its web, you couldn't escape – only by death."

"Did anyone else, apart from the group, see you and Malloy talking that day?"

"Not that I remember. Grey, the manager was busy inside the cellar after lunch. Regular clients and members of my group were buying some expensive bottles of the best wine. I recognised one guy and his wife. He'd sat near the window, next to one of my group tables."

"Why do you remember him in particular, Eddie?"

"Just that I had a feeling the man could understand Chinese."

"Really?"

"Yes, he always laughed or smiled when someone on my table said something funny in Chinese. I don't speak much Chinese. But he appeared to understand. I thought it was unusual at the time. That's why I remember him."

"Eddie, had you seen this man before?"

"Oh yes, he was a regular diner at the winery. Sorry, but I don't know his name."

Jane leaned against the side of the shed, hoping that she looked relaxed before asking her next question.

"What did this man look like?"

"He had a stocky build, dark short curly hair and a gold-capped front tooth." Eddie's eyes bulged. "Oh God, he's the same build as the man, wearing the balaclava, chopping up – or am I imagining this?"

"Perhaps not, Eddie. Do you remember anything else?"

"No – yes – he washed his hands in the creek. When he took off his parka, there was a tattoo on his upper right arm. It was a dragon with the word *Maria* under it. I'm sorry nothing else."

"Eddie, I'm going to get this shed searched by Forensic. Please promise that you'll keep in contact with me. I'd like to talk to you again."

"I promise. Please help me, Jane. I hate this weird state."

*Hell, his image is beginning to fade in and out.*

"I'll do my best, Eddie. Thanks for all this information. Please try and keep in touch."

"I can't promise. But I'll certainly try."

Jane smiled at the shimmering image. She turned and walked back to where Oliver patiently sat.

*Once Eddie knows that his head's been found, he'll fade away completely. Damn.*

Jane reached Oliver.

"Could you see him?"

"No. Did you find out anything else?"

"Lots that I can't tell anyone, such as this is the shed where the killer chopped up his victims, and that Eddie got cash payments from a secret company called *Avaritia*. The company contacted him via email with the group itineraries and names."

"That's good, Jane, you can get the IT boffins to look at his computer's hard drive to see where the emails originated."

"But I can only do that, Oliver, once Eddie's name is officially known via conventional detection."

They walked back along the path, beside the creek, and Jane updated Oliver with Eddie's latest information.

"Eddie's killer has a tattoo a dragon and the word *Maria* on the upper right arm, Oliver."

"Jane, this inside information is invaluable."

"Yes, but I can't use it at the moment. Eddie also told me that he had quite a chat with Malloy at the vineyard one day. They realised during their conversation that they were both working for the same secret company, *Avaritia*. Someone must have seen Eddie that day. He mentioned that a regular, a stocky man, dark curly hair, and gold-capped tooth seemed to understand the adjacent table's Chinese conversations. That man could be a suspect."

"You could be right, Jane."

"Maybe, but I can't tell anyone officially about my suspicions."

"I think both Eddie and Malloy were put onto the severance packages list from the time they communicated."

"I agree, Oliver. The trouble will be to prove who, in particular, saw them talking to each other and decided that they had broken the code of silence."

As Jane and Oliver rounded the last bend, they saw the search squad had arrived, with Frank Stubbs in charge.

"Hello, you two," said Frank as they reached the cordoned-off murder site at the edge of the creek. "Enjoy your walk?"

"Frank, we've found a shed about a half kilometre downstream. I need Forensics to check the area over."

"Consider it done, Jane. I didn't know there was a shed there. Maybe that's where the killer hid the bodies?"

"That's what I'm hoping."

"It's almost spooky how Jane finds things." Oliver winked at Jane. She frowned back at him.

"Oliver has a warped view of detection, Frank."

"Okay, I'll stick to my profiling. I was only trying to pay a compliment, Jane."

The awkward moment of silence ended as Frank laughed.

"You two have a great sense of humour, I must say."

Jane glowered and tweaked her ponytail.

*Hell, should I have confided in you, Oliver?*

\* \* \*

A new search area was set up around the shed. The forensics team arrived from Sunbury, and within half an hour were sifting through the shed and the adjacent area.

Jane and Oliver stood nearby as the search went on.

"I've learned one thing about your job today," remarked Oliver.

"What?"

"That you need heaps of patience. Talk about standing around all day."

The forensics leader approached Jane. She took a deep breath and grimaced.

"Did you find anything?"

"An attempt had been made to wipe the shed clean, Inspector, but we've found a few spots of blood and a couple of bits of flesh, possibly human, lodged between the floorboards. And, even better news, we found a bloodied left-hand index print, in good condition on the underside of the table, which the killer missed when he wiped the table."

"Great."

"We'll re-check the shed and surrounding area again, Inspector, but I'm sending the blood and flesh samples to be cross-checked with the victims straight away. The fingerprint will be checked against current files, here and with Interpol."

"Thanks."

One of the forensic team left with a sealed box containing the evidence, and disappeared up the path, which led to the car park.

A broad grin spread on Oliver's face. "Thank goodness you found the shed, Jane."

Before Jane could respond, her mobile chimed in her hand bag. She grabbed it and answered.

"Steve? Excellent. I'll meet you at the station." Frank Stubbs joined them, and Jane turned to Oliver and Frank. "Ho has organised a fax of a photo and description of Jason Gee from the missing persons list. A friend who worked

with him at Fallon's Financial Advisers, reported him missing an hour ago. Gee had curly fair hair."

"So he could be this victim?" responded Stubbs.

"Yes."

As Jane, Oliver, and Senior Sergeant Stubbs reached the vineyard car park at the top of the path, an excited Marion Moore greeted them.

"I just *had* to come and tell you myself." She paused a moment to catch her breath. "A girl called Elsa Carmody has contacted the station regarding her missing boyfriend, Eddie Grant."

Jane and Oliver glanced briefly at each other. Jane took a slow deep breath before she spoke.

"Marion, has Elsa Carmody got a picture of Eddie Grant?"

"Yep, first thing, I asked her. She's bringing it with her when she comes to the station." Marion looked at her watch. "She should be there in about ten minutes." Jane looked at Stubbs.

"Frank, I'm, going back to the station."

"Good, I'll come too."

Jane then beckoned at Oliver.

"Come on, Oliver, we need to talk to Elsa Carmody."

\* \* \*

They parked the cars next to each other back at the station. Frank slammed his car door shut and waddled through the side door. Marion and Jane went

through the front door, Oliver close behind. Constable Nguyen, standing at the reception counter, motioned with her hand, beckoning them over.

"I've just put Elsa Carmody in interview room one and given her a strong cup of black coffee. She's expecting the worst." Angela Nguyen punched the code to open a side door, next to the counter. "Please come in, and I'll take you to her."

"Thanks, Angela." Jane and Oliver followed her through the side door and down the passage. Jane stopped as they approached the first interview room. "Angela, I'd like to look at the photo first, if I may."

"Of course, Ma'am. Here it is." She handed over the picture.

A glance at the image in the gold frame was enough. Jane handed the photo back to Angela. "Please make a colour copy of this photo for our files, and then return the original back to Elsa Carmody."

"Yes, Ma'am." Nguyen walked down the passage and went into a door near the end. Jane pulled Oliver a short distance down the corridor. She kept her voice to a whisper.

"It was Eddie!"

"I gathered that by the expression on your face when you looked at the photo. Pardon the pun, but you looked like you'd seen a ghost."

Jane nodded, then sighed.

"It was a weird feeling to look at the actual photo of the ghost that I've been talking to."

Angela Nguyen returned down the passage and handed a copy of the photo to Jane.

"Thanks, Angela. I'm taking Doctor Tarrant in with me to listen to the interview. I'd like you to be the second interviewer."

"Thank you, Ma'am." Angela was obviously thrilled at getting such an important job.

Jane paused outside the interview room.

"Angela, could you go in first, and tell Elsa that we are coming in shortly. Make sure that she's as calm as possible."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Constable Nguyen entered the room and closed the door behind her. Jane whispered to Oliver.

"Now all we need to do is to get his body officially identified, and get some DNA samples from Eddie's home. I hope that Elsa has the key. Thank God, his name is now officially known." Her voice returned to normal. "Let's talk to Elsa."

They walked in and sat down in front of the petite, blond-haired woman.

*I should tell Eddie that we've found all his body. But I don't want to lose contact with him.*

\* \* \*

Half an hour later, a pale Elsa Carmody had signed her statement. She looked directly into Jane's eyes.

"Can I identify him?" she pleaded.

"It should be done by the next of kin."

"But that's me. I mean, his parents are both dead, and the only other relative is his younger brother, who left home to live on the streets over five years ago. Eddie hasn't, I mean Eddie hadn't heard from him since that time. I have a fair idea what to expect inspector. I'm a theatre nurse."

"Very well, you can identify him for the records. Thanks for the spare key to the flat. I promise we won't make a mess. I'll return the key as soon as we've checked everything."

Jane noticed Steve Ho walking in from the reception area. He came into the main office.

"Morning, Boss, Oliver. Here are my transcripts of the interviews this morning." He glanced over at Elsa. "Hello."

"Elsa Carmody, this is Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Ho." Jane handed Steve a copy of Eddie's photo. "Elsa reported her boyfriend, Eddie Grant, as a missing person. She's volunteered to do the identification."

Steve then smiled at Elsa. "I'll take you," he said. "I need to get back to the city anyway."

"Thanks, Steve. You can check with Forensics to see if the fingerprint that was found at the shed is on police files."

"I'll also chase up my Hong Kong friends, Boss. I'll contact you later."

Jane and Oliver watched them leave the station through the one-way mirror that looked into the reception area from the main office.

"I love this one-way mirror, Oliver. Perhaps I could budget for a similar one in my office."

"What on earth for? You have heaps of security in that building already, my love."

"You can never have enough security. Police officers are always vulnerable."

Senior Constable Moore came out of Frank Stubbs's office, dabbing a tissue to her mouth to wipe off remnants of food. She pointed back into the office, behind her.

"I put a couple of salad sandwiches and a cup of coffee in there for you both. You must be hungry."

"Thanks, Marion," they chorused. Jane walked through the open door of Frank's empty office, followed by Oliver.

Jane sighed. "I can only manage a sandwich, what about you?"

"The sandwich will be enough for me, too." Oliver leaned forward in his chair and lowered his voice.

"Now while we are alone, How are you going to investigate this secret company *Avaritia*? The second and third victim's identities will be confirmed shortly through normal channels, but I don't see how you can investigate *Avaritia* without revealing your secret source of information?"

"I think I know a way."

"How?"

"My source can be an anonymous tip. But I still would like you to do some research for me. After all Oliver, you are supposedly on a week's leave. You'll have all the time in the world to look up company names. to – "

"Get out of your way?" he interrupted.

"Not at all, Oliver."

"All right, I'll do it for you, on one condition."

"What?"

"That you continue to stay at Macedon each night."

Jane tapped her fingers on the desk.

"Well, Jane, is it a deal?"

"Talk about emotional blackmail. All right, yes." Jane got up and grabbed her parka and hand bag. "Could you drop me off at the tip? I thought that I might be able to see Eddie again. I just hope that he hasn't tweaked to the fact that we've found his head, and not the other victim's."

"Okay and while you're at the tip, I'll go and start my research for you. I can do a check on *Avaritia* through a contact of mine at the Australian Business registry." Jane nodded her approval.

"Good. And in the meantime, Oliver, could you also read through this?" She pulled Malloy's diary from a file on the desk. "I've read it twice, and I haven't found anything. But you never know, perhaps you might find that Malloy wrote down something that I misinterpreted."

\* \* \*

Jane and Oliver went out to the car park beside the station. To her dismay, a fog now blanketed Sunbury and its outskirts.

"Damn it. One day it's rain, the next it's fog." She scowled.

Oliver laughed.

"As least old man weather is giving a bit of variety."

Fifteen minutes later, Oliver pulled the car up next to the manager's office. He gave Jane a quick kiss. "Give me a buzz on the mobile when you want to be picked up," he called through the open window as he drove off.

Jane walked over to Frank Stubbs, who was now co-ordinating the search for the missing head.

"Jane? I thought you'd stay in the warmth of the station."

"You know me, Frank. I don't like keeping the seat warm. No head yet?"

"Nope. I've got the manager to organise the removal of that pile over there." He pointed to his right.

"What's so special about that pile, Frank?"

"It was the last pile dumped by the man who found the trunk. I'm crossing my pinkies that I'm right and the head was buried underneath somewhere."

"I hope you're right. I'm going for a little walkabout."

"Be careful, Jane. The fog's clearing now with the wind change, but I don't want to have to look for you in all this muck."

"I'm not going far, Frank. I'll keep to the bulldozer track."

Jane walked up the hill along the track at the back of the tip. It was the area where she had first met Eddie. At the top, she walked out into clear air.

*Just like being in a plane coming out of the clouds.*

She looked across the clouds that hid the tip and valley below.

"Hello, Jane."

"Eddie. I thought I'd find you again."

"I haven't remembered anything else, Jane. I'm sorry." Eddie's image was now semi-transparent. "I gather you still haven't found the – last parcel."

"Not yet, but we will, I promise. I spoke to Elsa this morning. She reported you as a missing person."

"You did? How is she?"

"Naturally she's very upset., She expected the worst. But I think she'll be all right."

"She will. She's one tough little nurse. She doesn't know about *Avaritia*."

"I know. But she's been very helpful. Forensics are checking your flat as we speak."

"They won't find anything. I burnt the notes. Everything else was in my head. I lied to Elsa and told her that I'd put large amounts of cash into my account, which I said were tips from people on my tours. You'll find the regular amounts going into my account, which was the cash delivered to my post office box each week. You'll also find a list of my business associates, but they're all legit."

"Eddie, did you suspect that you might have known another secret employee of *Avaritia*, before that chat with Malloy?"

"Well, I suspected that Mr Malloy was doing something not related to the winery or my bus tour, the day I accidentally saw him handing out business cards that he could have been a recruit. Then our chat confirmed my thoughts."

"I agree. Malloy also received his severance package around the same time as you."

"Hell."

"Eddie, did you know a Jason Gee?"

"No. Is he another victim?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

Jane's mobile phone rang.

"Doe. Really? So there's no company registered by that name? Damn. Yes they're still searching." Jane looked at her watch. "It's 3 o'clock. I need more time here. I'll phone you when I'm ready to be picked up. What?" Jane blushed, lowered her voice and said, "Love you too. Bye."

Eddie smiled at her.

"I could have told you that *Avaritia* is not registered, because I checked myself, the day before I – I – " He shrugged his shoulders.

Jane's phone rang again.

"Sorry about this. Doe. Yes? What? Frank's back at the station? Why? What? All right I'll come down straight away."

She disconnected the call. Eddie looked at her.

"They've found it?"

"No, I'm sorry, Eddie," she lied. "I've been called back to the station to check an email. I'll try and catch up with you later."

"I'm not going anywhere."

She turned and walked downhill through the now light mist. Angela Nguyen was standing next to a police car, waiting for her.

As Angela drove the car out through the entrance of the tip, she briefly glanced at Jane.

"I don't know the email contents, but I've a feeling that it's not good news, Inspector."

"Let's go." As Constable Nguyen drove down the hill into Sunbury, Jane stared blankly through the windscreen.

\* \* \*

Frank Stubbs stood at the front door of the station. He ushered Jane inside.

"What's the panic, Frank?"

"Come in and I'll show you the printout. I've already got Forensics tracing the sender."

Frank sat Jane at his desk and handed over the copy of the email, sent to her. The email was copied and sent to the Sunbury station. She read it quietly for a few moments, and then re-read it, before looking up at Frank.

"Hell."

"I've taken the liberty of calling Oliver."

"You did what? What has Oliver got to do with it?"

"I think it best that you go with him back to Macedon for the rest of the day. I can coordinate things here. I've also organised a patrol car to keep an eye on Oliver's property, just in case."

"Where's the bloody email!" The office door swung open as Oliver stormed into Frank's office. "I'll kill the bastard if he lays a hand on you, Jane."

Stubbs stood up.

"Steady, Oliver, it's not an open threat, but it's a close contact which I'm taking seriously."

"You don't need to see this email, Oliver," said Jane. Oliver grabbed the sheet from her hand, read it, then looked up at Jane and said,

"Frank's right. I'll take you to *Wyndales* straight away. You'll be safe there."

"Oliver, an unmarked car will follow you both at a discrete distance. to see if anyone is following," said Stubbs. "And I've rostered a patrol of your property tonight, just in case."

"Would you both please stop?" Jane stood up and smacked her hand on Frank's desk. "I won't run and hide! If that's what this sick sod wants me to do. I won't give him the satisfaction."

Frank held up both of his hands.

"Take it easy, Jane. I'm simply following police procedure. You know the drill. By tomorrow morning, you can rejoin the investigation, but with a subtle guard rostered round the boundary of Oliver's property, for your protection. All right?"

"Yes, police procedure." Jane shook her head, and then looked at Oliver and laughed softly. "All right, I give up. Let's go to *Wyndales*."

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, Jane and Oliver departed up the back road to his property in Macedon.

"I have to admit it's comforting to know that there's a patrol tonight, especially as the killer knows my email, and it's source hasn't been traced, Oliver."

"Me too. I just keep wondering how close you've got to revealing the killer. "

"I honestly don't think I have. I think this person is only doing this to scare me."

"Well, they have certainly sent you running for cover, Jane, which I for one feel is justified."

"He knows my email address, so will hopefully send me another, if I don't reply. I'm glad you have your laptop with you. I left mine at your house. By the way, did you find anything in Malloy's diary?"

"Nope. Like you, I couldn't find anything relating to any secret dealings. It all related to the Winery such as wedding dates, functions and reminders about such things as checking the change of menu and such mundane stuff."

"Malloy must have kept everything about Avaritia literally in his head, like Eddie did. The severance package clause was obviously frightening enough to keep every employee quiet. As Eddie told me, Malloy's vicious killing with packages of body parts confirmed the threat and added to his fear."

"Yes, the fear of a nasty death being in reality a sadistic severance package."

"Although they didn't know other so-called employees, the tabloid's account of Malloy's death would certainly keep every other employee in line. As I've already said, Eddie, indicated to me that he was terrified after Malloy died."

Oliver put on a CD and within seconds the melodic tones of a Bach fugue sounded through the car. Jane leaned back in her seat.

"Ah, thanks, a nice distraction from work."

They drove the next few miles into the countryside in silence. As they approached the small township of Gisborne, Oliver glanced at Jane and said,

"When we get to *Wyndales*, I'll barbecue the steaks and you can toss a salad. Then we can sit down and note everything that you've learned about these victims, including the information given to you by Eddie's ghost. There must be something that this killer does or doesn't want you to find out."

"I agree, but what?"

"Whatever the information is, it's most likely something that seems unimportant at this stage. But as an analyst, I'd say the message is an oblique call for help."

"Help?"

"I need to think about it more, with all the facts in front of me. But I keep getting the impression that the email is more of a riddle than a threat. I think the killer wants to be caught."

"Perhaps, but it's only your theory, not a fact, Oliver."

*Am I that close to finding a link to the killer? If so, what's the link? Oliver's right in that it must be something that I've heard or seen, but dismissed as being unimportant – but what?*

She looked at the email again. A shiver went through her. The message was precise, but clear in its intent:

The email was from [chopper@hotmail.com](mailto:chopper@hotmail.com). It read: *Attention, Inspector Jane Doe. Do you like dissecting things?*

## Day Four

Jane poured another cup of coffee. Oliver sat opposite her. She gave a deep sigh, and then tapped her ball point pen on the pad next to her now empty breakfast plate.

"Can we just go over and clarify what we discussed last night?"

"Okay, go ahead, you have my attention." Oliver, wiped toast crumbs from the table onto his plate.

"So far, we have three victims. Victim one, Mike Malloy, was a retired MP and the owner of the vineyard. Victim two, Eddie Grant, was an inbound tour operator, and recruited by the secret company *Avaritia* to bring selected groups to the vineyard. Victim three, Jason Gee, was a financial advisor. Malloy gave the selected groups business cards for *Fallon's Financial Advisors*."

"Malloy also gave them cards to *Lewis Lee, Jeweller*," added Oliver, now stacking the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher.

"Correct." Jane sucked the end of the biro meditatively. "The winery is the connecting link between the three victims. We now also know that they all lived in the north west of Melbourne, since Jason Gee lived in Taylor's Lakes. We also now know that Gee had his own office in North Melbourne."

"I reckon that puts a bit of a spanner in the works, Jane."

"Why?"

"Well if everyone was living in Sunbury, it would mean that the killer was also a Sunbury resident."

"Ha. That's why you're not a police officer, Oliver. The killer may have lived outside Sunbury, but like Gee, may have had a connection with Sunbury, and the winery."

"Okay, Jason Gee's work mate fits that bill, because you told me last night that he used to live in Sunbury."

"Right, except he gave us permission to have full access to their house in Taylor's Lakes, a killer wouldn't normally do that."

Oliver leaned back against the kitchen bench, his arms folded.

"On the negative side, neither Eddie Grant nor Jason Gee kept written records. But on the plus side, you now have access to their bank files, which show large amounts of cash being paid in to their accounts."

"Oliver, it's a typical money laundering connection. Illegal money being put into something legitimate, such as a bank account, or to buy jewellery, or property."

Jane sucked the end of her ball-point again.

"I'm glad that I'm not the police, in that case, trying to follow the laundered money paper trail. What else have you jotted down there, Jane?"

She took the pen from her mouth.

"I've added your dictionary meaning of 'Avaritia' – *Reprehensible acquisitiveness; insatiable desire for wealth; personified as one of the deadly sins*. This could be a clue to the mentality of the person behind this secret

organisation. I'm also hoping that Steve might come up with something from his Hong Kong police friends."

Oliver walked across to the table and peered over Jane's shoulder.

"I see you've put a ring around Malloy and Eddie's accidental meeting."

"Yes Oliver, I think that someone at the winery saw them."

"Who?"

"I don't know, but I'm certainly going to try and find out. Perhaps it might be that man in the restaurant that Eddie thought knew Chinese. I must find out."

Jane glanced at her watch, grabbed her laptop and hurriedly stowed her notepad in her hand bag. "Come on Oliver, we'll be late."

"As you command, my love. I am your knight in shining armour, I'm bound to protect you."

"How many times do I need to say it? I don't need your protection. And I'll tell Frank I don't need his protection either."

\* \* \*

Jane and Oliver walked into the main office at the rear of the police station.

Steve was in Frank's office, sipping a cup of hot herbal tea. He looked up, and grinned.

"Would you like a doughnut?"

"No thanks." Jane smiled. "I see that Marion is looking after you."

"She's such a caring person," responded Steve. "She'll make a nice wife for someone."

"You'd have to line up after Frank, Steve," remarked Oliver. "What about Angela Nguyen, though?"

"Oliver, stop matchmaking!" Jane grabbed a chair and sat at Frank's desk. "Now give me an update, Steve."

"Right. First, Elsa Carmody identified Eddie Grant's body. She's one tough little lady. Jason Gee's boyfriend is standing by to make identification, once the head has been found, of course." Steve paused, and pulled out some papers from his satchel. "Here's the most interesting result I've had. I received a fax this morning from my ex-boss in Hong Kong. He's given us two names, linked to Australia, in a current Interpol money laundering investigation. So far, they have no concrete evidence against these men. But we know one already."

Jane rocked forward on the edge of her chair.

"Who?"

"Lewis Lee, Australian jeweller, visiting Hong Kong, now reported missing!"

Oliver gave a low whistle. "Well, well, well."

"The other name?" asked Jane.

"The other is Jo Vincenti, a Melbourne-based exporter. These are the Interpol photos and descriptions. Jo Vincenti is a regular visitor to Hong Kong. And by the way, Interpol's code name for this investigation is *Avaritia*, which one anonymous contact in Hong Kong mentioned as the secret company name, involved in this money laundering."

"That's the company."

Jane glared at Oliver.

"It's ironic, Boss."

"Why, Steve?"

"Avaritia means greed for money."

Jane smiled.

"What's so amusing,"

"Oliver and I were talking about greed and the lust for money this morning, that's all."

A constable knocked and entered, carrying a folder. "This is for you, Inspector." The officer left the room and Jane opened the folder.

"They've traced the source of that email, back to the local Sunbury Internet café, but the owner can't give a description. The customers who use the Internet usually pay by cash, so he doesn't know most of their names. Quote, *People come and go all the time. I don't keep tabs on everyone*, end quote. Damn."

"I'll get someone to take pictures of the customers, Boss, if you think it will help. All undercover, of course."

"Good idea, Steve."

There was a loud knock at the door. Before Jane had time to respond, Marion Moore rushed in, her face flushed.

"The third victim's head has just been found at the tip." Marion gasped, then took a hasty breath. "Frank's hunch was right. Forensic are taking photos right now." She paused to inhale again. "Doctor Harvey has asked for the head to be sent direct to him at the morgue – of course, after you've had a look, Inspector."

\* \* \*

Steve drove ahead of Jane and Oliver up the hill to the tip. Jane sat in the passenger seat next to Oliver, looking at the Interpol photos and descriptions of Lewis Lee and Jo Vincenti.

"Damn, the descriptions are very general. I think they're taken direct from their passports."

"No mention of a tattoo? Pity. But even if there was, you couldn't use it as proof."

"I know that!"

"No need to snap at me."

"I'm sorry, but I'm scared about the possibility of not seeing Eddie again. I guess I'm still hoping that he might be able to confirm that he knew Jo Vincenti."

"That's a bit of wishful thinking."

"Yes, but at least *Avaritia* is officially known about, and I can add it to my investigation."

They drove down the muddied road inside the tip compound. Oliver parked next to Steve's car. The mortuary van was waiting, a covered stretcher on the ground, next to the open back door. Jane walked over with Steve. One of the forensic team lifted the cover to reveal the severance package. The head had curly fair hair. Jane pulled out the photo of Jason Gee, which his friend had provided. Steve peered at the photo, then at the grim contents in the package.

"It looks like Gee, Boss."

"Yes it does. Steve, you can phone Doc Harvey to organise identification once the autopsy is complete."

"Okay."

Jane then stood back from the parcel and nodded at the mortuary van driver.

"You can take it to the morgue now," she said.

\* \* \*

Jane and Oliver moved away and stood on their own. The search squad were clearing their equipment from the area to allow the tip to be re-opened. Steve was supervising.

"Do you want me to come with you?" asked Oliver.

"No, it's best that I meet Eddie alone."

Jane walked up the tractor track to the top of the hill.

"Eddie? Eddie, are you here?"

"Yes, Jane. Is the search still going?"

"Yes," she lied. "Eddie, I need to ask you if you know a Jo Vincenti."

"Jo Vincenti? No, but I've heard the name. I think he's one of the regulars at the vineyard." Eddie pointed down the hill. "You've got company."

Constable Nguyen was coming up the track. She waved her hand as Jane turned and faced her.

"Inspector?"

*Damn, the last thing I need right now is Angela Nguyen. or anyone else for that matter.*

"Yes, Constable?" Jane was relieved that Eddie's semi-transparent form was invisible to Angela.

"Inspector, Senior Sergeant Stubbs wants to know if we can now release more information to the media."

"Constable, I'll talk to him in a minute. Ask him to wait until then."

*Please go away, Angela.*

"But he has the reporters on the line now. They've heard that we've just found the last of the body parts and that we know the victims names, Ma'am."

Eddie's image quivered. He looked at Jane.

"Thank you. I'll never be able to repay you."

Nguyen stared at Jane.

"What are you looking at, Ma'am?"

Jane ignored her, and clenched her teeth.

*Shut up Constable. Go away. Leave us alone.*

Eddie smiled and said,

"Keep using your gift."

His image started to shimmer, like a mirage, and then disappeared.

*Damn it. Damn it to hell!*

\* \* \*

Jane stomped down the track with Frances Nguyen struggling to keep up with her. Steve and Oliver were standing next to the police car that had brought Frank Stubbs to the tip.

"Okay, Jane. What's the problem?" asked Stubbs.

"I just wanted to make sure that we only release the fact that all body parts have been found. I don't want to release any names until the I Ds are completed, Frank."

"Right, Inspector. Come on Angela. Let's go back to the station."

Steve looked at Jane frowning.

"What were you doing up on the hill, Boss?"

"Just admiring the view over Sunbury, that's all. Steve, I'd like you to check up on this Jo Vincenti. Tread carefully. We don't want to scare him. Try and see if he deals in cash."

"Okay, I need to go back to the city office. I'll check him out. And I'll also let Interpol know that we're interested before I go."

"Thanks. We don't want to put Interpol offside. Contact me as soon as you've seen this Jo Vincenti. Oh, and Steve, please check for any distinguishing marks."

*I can't very well ask him to look for a tattooed dragon with the word 'Maria' on the upper left arm - when this information comes from a ghost!*

\* \* \*

Jane sighed and shook her head as Oliver drove back to the Sunbury police station together.

"He's gone, Oliver. I think he's disappeared for good."

"Possibly he has. I tried to stop Nguyen, but short of tackling her, I didn't see a way. Just think how much you've learnt about the killer from your spiritual source. So far, all factual evidence has confirmed Eddie's information."

"Yes, you're right. I need to work out how to move this investigation in the right direction." Jane looked at her notes once again. Oliver glanced at her.

"Found anything?"

"No." She pulled out her laptop "I should get a signal here. Hell, the battery's low."

"You'd better plug it into the cigarette lighter."

Jane logged on and started to retrieve her emails. She quickly scanned the first message and deleted it, but paused at the second one.

"Here we go."

"Another email from the killer?"

"Yes."

Ten minutes later, Oliver parked the car outside the police station. Jane closed the laptop.

"We need to log on to this email inside the station and print copies as soon as possible."

"A warning?"

"Not really. But this person is clever, that's for sure." Jane got out of the car. "Come on, slow coach!"

*Darn, I'm using clichés again.*

They rushed inside and went straight through the lobby to the main office. They asked Angela to log on to a terminal and Jane signed in to her email host. Frank Stubbs came into the room to have a look.

"Jane, this is serious."

The email was sent different identity. [packages@hotmail.com](mailto:packages@hotmail.com) .It simply read; *Pieces of dead meat can't talk.*

"Another riddle?"

"Yes, I think you're right about the emails being a type of riddle, Oliver. This bastard is playing with us." Jane turned to Senior Sergeant Stubbs. "I need a check on the source of this email, Frank. But I won't be surprised if this one was sent from a different Internet café."

Jane's mobile chimed in her hand bag.

"Steve? Not available today, huh? That figures. If we get the same answer in the morning, I'll get a search warrant if necessary. Oh? We have an appointment tomorrow at ten. Good work, Steve. Have you booked into the motel in Sunbury? Okay, I'll meet you at nine tomorrow morning at the station. That will give us plenty of time to get the North Melbourne." Jane put her mobile back into her bag and turned to Oliver. "Now its time we went over that profile of the killer again." She turned to Stubbs. "Frank, I can be contacted on my mobile, if you want me. Otherwise, I'm not available for the rest of the day."

\* \* \*

Jane gazed out the windscreen as Oliver drove through the gates that led into *Wyndales*. He grinned.

"I must say, Inspector, that I'm delighted that you've decided to take the rest of the day off to spend some time with me."

"Did I give that impression?"

"Yes." The smile faded from Oliver's face.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm simply taking some time to catch up on some paper work."

As soon as Oliver parked the car, Jane grabbed her hand bag and laptop and rushed up the steps onto the veranda.

"Hurry up, Oliver."

"I'm coming. Talk about impatient." Oliver carried the groceries up the steps, unlocked the door, then stepped back. "You first, I don't want to get in your way."

After the shopping was unpacked and stored, Oliver boiled a kettle and poured two cups of coffee. He brought them to the kitchen table, where Jane was busy sorting out her paperwork into chronological order. He leaned over her shoulder.

"Very methodical."

"All part of my training," said Jane. "I like to put everything in its right place, it's like solving a jigsaw puzzle. I find that a repeated overview of a case can sometimes help put things in perspective. For instance, I'm finding that I keep going back to the moment when Eddie saw Malloy handing out those business cards."

"Jane, I reckon that's the time that both men were put on the severance packages list." Oliver pulled a chair up and sat down next to her. "Can I help?"

"Yes. Keep thinking aloud. Tell me what you think about this investigation so far. I need your viewpoint, especially as you are the only person who knows about my communications with Eddie."

"Okay. Well, the facts that have come forward to date, for example, the name of Eddie's girlfriend, and finding the shed, certainly confirm that you have been in touch with Eddie's ghost. The factual evidence that's still needed, of course, is finding the man with the tattoo that Eddie described." Jane was jotting notes on a pad as Oliver talked.

"I know, but I can't afford to sit around and wait for that evidence to emerge, or more likely not emerge ever. Steve has organised a meeting with this Jo Vincenti tomorrow morning. I'm hoping he might add a piece to this puzzle."

"Well, here's another observation. Steve Ho's Hong Kong connections have shown that both this Jo Vincenti and Lewis Lee went to Hong Kong."

"Correct. But so far, there is no evidence that they met in Hong Kong. However, I agree that this proves that money laundering was happening between Hong Kong and Melbourne. Anything else?"

"Both these men were in Australia when the three victims were killed."

"Meaning that either or both of them could be the killers?"

"Perhaps. Although one of them has disappeared."

"Yes, Lewis Lee. Let me see." She flicked through her files. "Here it is. Lee went to Hong Kong two weeks ago, according to Steve's report. He was reported missing by the hotel clerk, two days after his arrival in Hong Kong."

"Jane, that means Jo Vincenti couldn't have met him."

"Not unless Vincenti was in Hong Kong earlier, on another trip. Heck I'm clutching at straws here."

Jane's mobile chimed.

"Doe. Yes, Steve? Good." She took notes as Steve talked. "Good work. Some facts at last. Okay, keep in touch." She pressed the off button.

"What news?" said Oliver.

"Firstly, Jason Gee's body has been positively identified. Secondly, Jason's friend says that Jason received cash payments each week. But Jason didn't reveal where it was coming from. And, the last email that I received from this anonymous person came from another Internet café in the city. This means he's moving around, using different email addresses via Hotmail."

"That means the emails aren't going to help?"

"Not necessarily. The computer boffins at Forensic have a wonderful program that might be able to trace the sender, or at least give a bit of a profile. So far, the sender has been clever, using different email identities. One good thing is that the Hotmail people have advised the sign-in details used for each email. Hopefully this is the beginning of an interesting electronic profile."

"Now you're talking my field, Jane. Tell me, what are the email addresses he's used so far?"

"The first email address, [chopper@hotmail.com](mailto:chopper@hotmail.com) has a user name of 'chopper', and the second email address [packages@hotmail.com](mailto:packages@hotmail.com) has the user name 'packages'."

"That certainly ties in with the dismembered bodies, the way they were wrapped and –"

"Hang on, you haven't heard the rest of it. The password for both users is the same. 'Avaritia.' Interesting, isn't it?"

"This e-mailer sounds more and more like the killer, Jane. I'll add this information to my current profile. He's skilled in dissecting, possibly a loner, and now, clever, even highly intelligent."

"I don't know about the clever bit. He's used the same password. Steve told me that it will make it easier to track the next email."

"Jane, it's like I suspected before. Remember I said that this killer may be trying to get caught?"

"What? You mean deliberately leaving a trail amongst the riddles?"

"Yes."

"I can't agree with that theory, well not at the moment, anyway. I still think that this sod is deliberately playing with us. I think that he's a psychopath and he's enjoying the kill and the tease."

"No, not a psychopath, Jane, I'm now convinced with this latest information that he's a disassociative personality. One personality decides employees have to be killed and drugs them. The alter ego carries out the killing. The alter ego is taunting the police."

Jane jotted down more notes on her file.

"Your new profile makes sense, if he doesn't know that he's killed them."

"But he's a dangerous person, Jane, and needs to be handled with care."

Oliver picked up his briefcase, from the floor next to the table, pulled out some files, and started to write his own notes. Jane then set up her laptop on the kitchen bench. Both Jane and Oliver continued writing and reading. The grandfather clock in the hall chimed six times. Jane yawned.

"Heck, six o'clock already. That explains why my tummy is rumbling."

"All right, my love, I'll cook up some meat. Could you toss a salad?"

\* \* \*

Jane stayed inside in the warmth of the kitchen. She tossed a simple salad, topped with a handful of fresh button tomatoes and a dash of olive oil. Oliver cooked hamburgers and slices of onion on the portable barbecue on the back verandah. Jane walked out to join him with two glasses of red wine.

"Just what the doctor ordered, Jane. Thanks." He sipped from the glass and turned the hamburgers.

"Is it nearly ready? I'm starving."

"I thought you were worried that you were eating too much the last couple of days?"

"I was only talking about junk food - like doughnuts." Although the verandah was sheltered from the evening breeze, Jane started to shiver. "Brr, I need to go back in and thaw out again. The table's set, and I'm waiting."

"Yes, Ma'am." Oliver gave a mock salute with his barbecue tongs. "I'll only be another ten or fifteen minutes."

Jane walked through the kitchen, into the living room. She wandered into Oliver's study, which was next to the lounge. He had told her earlier that this room was where his late father liked to spend time away from everyone. Hundreds of books were stacked from floor to ceiling on shelves mounted against the walls.

She stopped at the desk. Oliver's files were open.

*I'm sure he won't mind me peeking. After all the file contains facts from my murder inquiry.*

She picked up the file and started to scan the contents. The first sheet was headed, "Paranormal, and sudden death – A case study." She picked up the next paper headed 'Contract Offered'. As Jane's eyes moved down the page, a frown formed on her forehead. By the end of the next page, she was beginning to mutter to herself.

"This isn't fair. He can't do this. He promised me." She clenched her fists. "Bastard!"

She heard Oliver's voice coming from the direction of the kitchen.

"Dinner's ready to eat, O starving one. Where are you?"

Jane quickly went back to the kitchen.

"What's up, Jane? You look a little flushed."

"Nothing, it's just nice and warm inside here, that's all," she lied. "I've been admiring the paintings in the lounge," she lied again. She sat down at the table and Oliver started to top up her wine glass. She put her hand up. "Not too much wine for me tonight, thanks."

"Oh?"

"I need a clear head for tomorrow."

They ate the hamburgers in silence. Jane avoided direct contact with Oliver's eyes.

*Why did you break your promise? I have to ask you about that contract.*

Jane wiped her hands on the paper napkin, sipped a little wine, then asked,

"How's your work going?"

"My research?"

"Yes."

"Good. Why do you ask?"

"Have you mentioned me?"

"What?"

There was a few moments silence. Jane glared at Oliver.

"You've obviously been snooping in the study, Jane."

"Yes, well, no – I mean I went in to have a look at all the books, and just happened to notice the contract offer on your desk."

"Jane, it's only an offer."

"You promised me that my name would not be used." Jane stood up and paced around the kitchen. "If you accept this contract, you'll agree to a full expose, which will that my name will be published in this bloody research."

"Jane, I'm not accepting the offer. Calm down. You're staying here under my protection."

"Protection? I thought we're here to enjoy each other's company." Jane clenched her hands by her side. "I told you, don't need a bloody minder."

"Jane, be sensible. The email message was threatening. You need protection."

"Forget it, Oliver. I can look after myself. I don't want you watching over me all the time. I'm going to get Steve to come and get me. He's back in Sunbury. "

"But, Jane, you don't understand."

"Oh, I understand perfectly well, mate. You want everything *your way*, with no give and take or sharing! I don't mind the 'Love and honour,' Oliver. It's the 'Obey' and 'for the rest of your life' bit that I'm worried about. I don't want to be protected by anyone!"

She twisted the ring off her left hand and tossed it onto the table, then rushed out the room, slamming the kitchen door behind her. Oliver followed, but stopped halfway down the hallway when he heard her talking on the phone.

"No, Steve, everything just fine. Engagement's off by the way. I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

\* \* \*

Jane scowled and stared through the windscreen as Steve drove south to Sunbury. They didn't speak until Steve parked the car outside the Sunbury motel.

"You've got the same room."

"Good." She yawned. "I need a decent sleep."

They got out of the car, Steve opened the boot and retrieved the luggage, and Jane took her overnight bag from him. Steve pulled out the keys from his pocket and handed across her key.

"Boss?"

"What?"

"You can tell me that it's none of my business, but I think that it's a shame that the engagement's broken off."

Jane didn't respond. "I really think you are made for each other. Okay, you have your differences, that's part of the marriage game, isn't it?"

Jane turned her back on Steve and walked over to her room. She unlocked the door, turned, and said,

"Steve, you were right the first time. It's none of your business."

## Day Five

Jane had finished her breakfast when Steve knocked on her motel room door. Her parka was on, hand bag slung over her left shoulder and the laptop in her right hand.

"Morning, Boss."

"Morning, Steve." She peered up at the sky. "Good. Not a cloud anywhere. I have a good feeling about today."

"Hoping that some problems will be solved?"

"Business problems, not personal ones." She got into the passenger seat and pulled out a notepad from her bag. "I did a lot of reading last night."

"I gathered that. Your light was on when I finished watching the rugby at one this morning." Steve smiled. "Found any new insights into this case?"

"Nothing yet, but I'm sure that we are close to finding a direct link to the killer."

"What makes you think that?"

"I'm sure the emails I've received are from the killer. There was no new email when I checked half an hour ago. But I'm hopeful of receiving another one today."

They got in the car and Steve started the engine. Jane settled back in her seat as they left the motel behind. Although the trip was only a short one from one side of the township to the other, they made slow progress. Mothers

with cars laden with children had caused traffic gridlocks at school crossings and roundabouts.

"We should have left twenty minutes earlier." Jane laughed. "Heck, most of them look grumpy. I wonder if that's what all mothers get to look like."

"Don't let their expressions put you off. I'm looking forward to the day that I find the right person to marry, and I intend to have lots of kids too."

"At the moment, I don't really share your sentiments."

"I think you should keep an open mind."

Jane frowned. "Our opinions currently differ on marriage. Let's agree to disagree."

Steve turned left into the Sunbury police station car park and said,

"Well, we're about to find out if there are any more emails."

Jane went inside the police station with Steve close behind. Marion Moore stood behind the reception desk, sorting out some files. She looked up and grinned at them.

"Good morning. Looks like a nice day, at last. Inspector, another email came five minutes ago for you. The paperwork is inside."

"Thanks, Marion." Jane hurried through the security door and stepped into the large room concealed from the reception area by the huge one-way mirror. She quickly scanned the uniformed police seated at their stations against the walls. Everyone was busy typing up reports, collecting files or talking on the phone.

*Like worker bees in a hive,* thought Jane.

She spotted Constable Angela Nguyen carefully collating some paperwork . Nguyen looked up, nodded, and walked over to Jane with a folder. "The top file is your copy of the email, which arrived five minutes ago, Ma'am. The second file is a fax, hot off the press, as you might say. It came through as you were parking your car."

"Thanks, Constable Nguyen."

Steve laughed. "There are no secrets around this place." Jane walked over to the desk assigned to the Special Crime Squad and sat down. Steve sat next to her and watched as she read the email, while Constable Nguyen waited nearby.

"Well, Boss?"

Jane read it out aloud.

*"Packages are floating, in a far away place."* She looked at Steve. "The email address of the sender this time is [severance@hotmail.com](mailto:severance@hotmail.com)."

Nguyen moved across to the desk.

"Inspector, the Internet people are already tracing where this came from, they should have the result for us in a few minutes."

"Thanks, Angela."

"Let me know if you need me, Inspector."

"I will. Thanks."

Nguyen then left them and went across to her desk on the other side of the room.

Steve looked at Jane.

"Another riddle. What's this person trying to achieve?"

Jane was intent on reading the fax that Nguyen had given her earlier, and only looked up when she had finished.

"The riddle has just been answered by this fax, Steve. Look." It was from Hong Kong Interpol.

Steve whistled, and then read the fax out aloud.

*A severed head, wrapped in plastic, with a tag attached with the words 'Severance Package – 1 of 6 ' was found by local fishermen early this morning in Hong Kong Harbour. The preliminary post mortem provisionally identifies the head as belonging to Lewis Lee, via the missing persons files. Copies of the preliminary report and photographs have been sent to Doctor Fred Harvey at the Melbourne Coroner's office for comparison with the PM's done on the bodies located in Sunbury, Australia.*

"Steve, as Oliver has pointed out to me several times, this killer seems to be not only teasing us, but appears to be laying a trail as if he wants to be caught. What do you think?"

"This tells us that Lewis Lee was not the killer, if nothing else. Lee was simply another greedy secret employee of *Avaritia*. But, Oliver could be right about the killer wanting to be caught."

"Yes, but this time the killer threw the head, and possibly the rest of the packages into Hong Kong Harbour. It was pure luck that anyone found the head. It'll be almost impossible to find the rest of the body."

"I agree, but I reckon the killer knew that when he killed this victim. There are many currents. Lots of bodies have floated in that harbour in the past,

and I dare say, they will in the future. But a severed head with a label stating 'Severance Packages - 1 of 6 ' is rather unique to our case."

"Agreed!"

"But I think he was still making a statement, Boss. Hell, this killer is going on an international killing spree."

"Money laundering is an international game. I'm not surprised that he's committed a murder overseas. Hong Kong's a perfect place of origin for people wanting to launder illegal money."

"I thought at one stage that Grey could be a suspect, being in charge of the winery, but now it could be Jo Vincenti, the man we are about to meet."

"Hopefully, it will be an enlightening chat, Steve." Jane looked at her watch. "We'd better get moving. This is one appointment that I don't want to be late for."

Jane walked over to the main office security door and swiped her temporary security card through the special latch. Steve followed her through the door as soon as it opened. They went over to Marion Moore, who was still at the reception counter.

"Could you please contact me on my mobile Marion, as soon as you know where this last email came from? And I need to know the password used. If the password was *Avaritia*, it will confirm the same person sent it."

"Leave it with me, Inspector."

Jane and Steve strode through the reception area, out through the sliding doors and over to the car park.

\* \* \*

Jane mused over the case, as Steve drove down the tollway that led into the outskirts of the city of Melbourne.

"Steve, I can't help thinking that the name of this secret company is a play on words or, if you like, a riddle to be solved."

"You mean he's giving us some sort of information about himself?"

"Yes, I'm beginning to think that the person sending me the emails is not only the killer, but perhaps the head and sole proprietor of *Avaritia*."

"An interesting theory –" Steve stopped talking as Jane's mobile chimed.

"Yes, Marion? So the same password was used? Good, at least the sender is consistent. Really? Now that *is* interesting." Jane jotted down notes as Marion spoke, then ended the call. Steve glanced at her.

"Don't keep me in suspense."

"A couple of updated faxes have arrived from Hong Kong regarding the PM on the head. It's definitely Lewis Lee's head. They've matched it against the police photos. DNA from fingerprints taken from his hotel room will eventually reconfirm the ID. And the printing on the tag also been done by the same person who killed our three victims."

"They'll be lucky to find the rest of his body."

"I know, but one very interesting point made in the PM is that the head had been in the water for over two weeks, which means that Lee was killed in Hong Kong, before Malloy, Grant and Gee were killed in Australia."

"We should get Immigration to check if this Jo Vincenti has been to Hong Kong on other occasions."

"Interpol are already checking, Steve."

"We're getting closer."

"To finding the killer?"

"Well, maybe that too. I meant closer to Vincenti's."

Steve turned off the tollway into the suburb of North Melbourne. A few blocks down a side street brought them to a huge warehouse. A large sign, *Vincenti Meat Exports* was displayed above the front entrance. Steve parked directly outside, and Jane got out as soon as Steve turned off the engine. She slung her tote bag over her shoulder and walked to the front door with Steve in her wake.

\* \* \*

An attractive young woman sat at reception. She smiled, showing a set of perfect teeth.

"I'm Anna, may I help you?"

"Detective Inspector Jane Doe and Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Ho."

They showed their warrant cards.

"Oh yes, of course. You have an appointment at ten with Mr Vincenti. As you are ten minutes early, would you like a cup of coffee or tea whilst you wait?"

"Coffee, thank you," replied Jane.

"Chinese tea, please," responded Steve.

"Please take a seat. I won't be a moment." The receptionist left the room.

"She's very attractive, Steve." Jane shed her parka in the warmth of the centrally heated building.

"Are you matchmaking?"

Jane grinned. "Not at all."

"I think she has Chinese ancestry. Possibly a second generation removed. By that, I mean that one of her grandparents was Chinese. My guess anyway, for what it's worth. And she *is* beautiful."

Steve also took off his parka. Anna came back in, carrying a tray. She placed it on the table in between Jane and Steve, then went back and sat at her desk and started to type industriously on her computer keyboard.

"He's cute, making us wait," whispered Jane

"A control technique." After passing the cup of coffee to Jane, Steve picked up his cup in two hands and started to slurp the tea noisily. Jane's mobile rang.

"Yes Marion, that *is* interesting. Thanks." She looked at Steve and whispered. "The email was sent from an Internet shop in North Melbourne," Steve also kept his voice low.

"Well, as you said to Marion, that's *very* interesting."

Jane glanced at her watch. It was now ten minutes after ten. She looked over to the reception desk.

"Will we be kept waiting much longer?"

"I'm very sorry Madam, but Mr Vincenti is a busy man. He shouldn't be much longer."

The intercom buzzed. The words on the intercom were too soft for Jane or Steve to understand.

"Yes Sir? I'll show them in." Anna got up and ushered Jane and Steve into the adjacent room.

Ornate furniture cluttered the office. A large oil painting of a Venetian gondola floating on a canal hung behind the huge desk. The big wooden cabinet along the sidewall had several small marble statues, including Venus de Milo and David. A heavyset man sat behind the desk, his right arm in a sling. Vincenti got up as Jane and Steve entered, and held up his left hand.

"I'd normally shake hands. Sorry to keep you waiting. I've just had an international call, which I had to take. Please take a seat. Now how can I assist the police?"

\* \* \*

By habit, Jane scanned Jo Vincenti and formed an identikit image in her mind for later reference.

*Caucasian, around 5 foot 8 inches, or 172 centimetres tall, stocky build, brown eyes and. almond-shaped eyes.*

"Mr Vincenti, I'd like to tape our talk, if I may." She pulled out her small tape recorder. "Nothing formal. It's just easier than taking notes and trying to talk at the same time. Is that all right?"

"Of course, Inspector, anything that can assist you is fine with me." He smiled and settled himself back in a large, high-backed, leather chair.

"When did you break your arm, Mr Vincenti?"

"Three days ago, Inspector. I fell off my trail bike when I was riding around in the back paddock on my farm. Stupid, really. My wife took me to casualty at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. It was X-rayed and a crack was found in the upper arm bone and near the wrist." He pointed to the spots as he spoke. Steve looked up from his notebook.

"May we have the name of the doctor that examined you at the hospital, sir."

"Oh I don't remember his name, sergeant. I was in pain. He was Indian, or maybe or Pakistani. They all look alike don't they?" Steve glared at him.

"Don't worry. We can check the hospital records."

Jane deliberately sat back and let Steve continue the questioning.

*I don't want him to feel that he's important because an Inspector is asking all the questions.*

Steve waited for a few seconds, and instinctively took the brief silence from Jane as a cue to take over the interview.

"Mr Vincenti, do you know a Mr Mike Malloy?"

"Yes, of course. I read about him in the papers. Nasty business, wasn't it? Mind you, a parliamentarian could have lots of enemies."

"Did you know him personally?"

"No, but I've met him, when I've dined with my wife at his winery."

"Did you eat there often?"

"At least once a month. My property is at Woodend, it's only a twenty minute trip away."

"Do the names Eddie Grant or Jason Gee mean anything to you?"

"Hum, not really." Vincenti screwed up his face. "No, neither of them rings a bell, Sergeant. Mind you, I meet many people in my trade. Should I know them?"

Steve ignored the last remark.

"Mr Vincenti, do you know a jeweller called Lewis Lee?"

"I bought the wife a gold necklace from his shop last year. It was for our wedding anniversary. But I could hardly say that makes us friends." Jo Vincenti fiddled with his sling. "The arm is still painful. Must be the healing pains, I guess." He looked at Jane. She remained silent, showing no expression of sympathy. Steve continued.

"When do you get the plaster off, sir?"

"Not for five weeks. I have to go back to the hospital for more X-rays first. If everything's okay, the plaster comes off. It's a bloody nuisance. As you can see, it goes from my armpit to my fingers, so I can't move my elbow, write, or sign cheques."

"Do you live at your property Mr Vincenti, or do you have a flat near to work?"

"I have a small terrace house, two blocks away from here. Now, I'm walking to work. The wife drives me up to Woodend each weekend."

"Where do you export your meat to?"

"Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but most goes to Hong Kong. I have a good market for Australian beef up there."

"Been to Hong Kong recently?"

"I go there about once every two months or so, Sergeant. One trip seems to blend into another. I've lost count. But to answer your question, I went there last month for five days."

"Which hotel did you stay at?"

"The Hong Kong Hotel. That's the one adjacent to the ocean terminal in Kowloon, sergeant."

"Yes, I know sir, I was born in Kowloon." Steve sat back in his chair and folded his arms. There was silence for over a minute.

Jane continued to sit quietly. She pretended to look at her notebook, occasionally flicking over a page.

Steve suddenly unfolded his arms, and leaned forward in his chair.

"Mr Vincenti, do you have your passport with you?"

"It's in my safe."

"Could you get it, please?"

Vincenti pushed his intercom.

"Anna, could you get my passport from the safe and bring it in?"

Vincenti's face showed no expression.

"Anything else I can do for you, Sergeant?"

"Do you use the Internet?"

"For business only. I send emails to my clients. They send orders to me either via fax or via the post, and sometimes by email. I really don't know much about the Internet." He started to wriggle in his chair and rub his arm. "I'm due to take some painkillers in the next few minutes."

The door opened, and Anna walked in carrying the passport. She gave it to Vincenti, and then departed. Vincenti pushed the passport over the desk towards Steve.

"So you're from Hong Kong. I find that Asians all look alike, I can't tell a Chinese from a Vietnamese or Japanese. They say we Europeans all look alike."

"Really? I never had that problem, Mr Vincenti. For instance, your receptionist has Chinese ancestry. Which grandparent was Chinese?"

"My, you are observant, Sergeant. Her grandmother emigrated from Hong Kong fifty years ago. Married an Australian of Italian descent."

As Steve listened, he jotted down the passport number, date of issue, date of birth, and quickly noted the dates of the Immigration stamps given in Hong Kong and Australia. He handed the passport back.

"Thank you, Mr Vincenti." Steve then sat back in his chair and was silent. Jane immediately took Steve's cue that the interview was finished. She clicked off the tape recorder, put it into her bag, and got up. Steve also stood up.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Mr Vincenti. We may need to contact you again," said Jane.

Vincenti nodded and remained seated.

"My pleasure Inspector, Sergeant." He pressed the intercom. "Anna, could you show out my visitors please, then bring in my medication." A few seconds later, Anna came in, then ushered Jane and Steve out to the front door of the office. Jane and Steve put on their parkas and stepped into the cold air outside. The door closed behind them.

"What dates were in the passport, Steve?"

"That's the odd thing. The last visit to Hong Kong was from the 25<sup>th</sup> July to the 30<sup>th</sup> July."

"But Vincenti said he went last month."

"Exactly. Either Vincenti's memory is bad, or he got a knock on the head when he fell off his bike."

"I grabbed one of his business cards at reception to check his email address, but then again he wouldn't be that stupid."

They got into the car.

"Royal Melbourne Hospital casualty?"

"Yes. Let's go."

There was heavy traffic in the city streets. Jane contemplated the parkland that ran along the left side of Flemington Road.

"You know Steve, I now realise that I enjoy the open places more than inner city areas. Sunbury seems to have the best of worlds, with mains water, a hospital, and a good shopping centre. Marion Moore reckons the train trip to the city is only forty minutes."

"Macedon is a lovely spot."

Jane frowned.

"Stop trying to organise my private life."

Steve raised an eyebrow. They made the rest of the trip in silence.

Jane's mind was running at top speed.

*Darn it, I still love Oliver. I'd happily learn to survive on tank water at Wyndales. But I can't let my personal life take priority. Not yet.*

Steve pulled up in the hospital car park ten minutes later. Jane got out, flicked the strap of her tote bag over her shoulder, and shut the passenger door. Steve locked the car and walked by Jane's side to the casualty entrance. They walked through the automatic doors into the stuffy warmth inside.

\* \* \*

Jane and Steve immediately took off their parkas. An assortment of patients occupied all the available seats. Some had temporary bandages, others slings, and every third person had crutches

*I hate hospitals. I can't stand the smells of antiseptic, moaning people, and vomit.* Jane shuddered.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, Steve. It's just that –"

"You don't like hospitals. I can't blame you after your long stay in June."

Steve put a hand on her shoulder and guided her to the left.

"Come on, we may as well stand in the queue over there."

Half an hour later, Jane and Steve stood at the reception counter, waiting for a middle-aged administrative assistant as she answered a phone call. As soon as the call was finished, she squinted at them through thick glasses.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting. We have staff away today. Everyone seems to have the flu." She pulled out a form, clicked her pen.

"Now who's the patient?"

Jane showed her warrant card.

"Neither of us, I'm glad to say. Could we please speak to someone about a patient, Mr Jo Vincenti? He came into casualty three days ago with a broken arm."

"Mr Jo Vincenti? I'll check our computer records." Her fingers tapped on the keyboard. She peered at the monitor, her nose nearly touching the screen. "Ah, yes." She looked up. "Mr Joseph Vincenti, of, Martin Street North Melbourne?"

Steve nodded. "That's the man."

"He had an accident on his trail bike on his property in Woodend?"

"Correct." Jane smiled.

"I'll just check and see if the doctor who treated him is available." The fingers flashed over the keyboard once more. Jane leant forward and peered at the computer screen. "You're in luck. Doctor Palmer is in. Could you please take a seat?" The admin assistant leaned forward in her chair. "I'll give you a buzz over the intercom and call you in as if you are patients," she whispered. "I don't want to let people waiting here know that anyone is jumping the queue."

Jane winked. "Of course."

Another half hour passed before the voice announcement came.

"Patient Doe for Doctor Palmer? Please go to room five thank you."

Jane and Steve got up and went through the swing doors and down the corridor. Room five was halfway down on the left. Jane knocked on the door.

"Come in."

Doctor Palmer stood next to a filing cabinet. He placed a folder in the second drawer, closed it, and walked across the room. After glancing at Jane and Steve's warrant cards, he shook their hands.

*Vincenti was nearly correct in his description. I reckon Dr Palmer is of Indian descent.*

"Inspector, Sergeant, please make yourselves comfortable." He sat and rested his head on the back of the tall-backed chair his dark eyes scanning each of them in turn. "Now, how can I help the police?"

"Doctor, we are interested in an emergency patient who came in three days ago with his right arm broken in two places. His name is Jo Vincenti."

"Vincenti?" He moved forward, placed his hands on his desk. "That name's familiar. I presume that he is involved in your murder inquiry somehow, Inspector. Don't tell me, best I don't know. I've been following it in the newspapers." Palmer stood up. "I'll get his file."

The doctor went to the filing cabinet, opened the bottom drawer, and his long slender fingers flicked deftly through the dozens of files.

"Here it is." He scanned the first page. "He's due to come back in five weeks time to be X-rayed and then have the plaster taken off, all being well of course." He sat down and re-opened the file on his desk. "I believe in patient confidentiality, Inspector, but I can tell you certain information to help your investigation." He smiled. "Sorry, I should explain. I'm the first doctor in my family. My grandfather was a police officer in India, and my father was in the police force in England. In fact, my father spent a short time in homicide in New

Scotland Yard, before he retired and emigrated here, hence my interest in your current case."

Jane moved forward in her chair, and rested her elbows on the desk.

"What can you tell us?"

"His wife brought him in. She had used her scarf as a sling, but he was in a lot of pain. I gave him a painkiller, and got him X-rayed. The nurse took off his shirt, so I could put the plaster on. He was lucky, as both breaks were simple fractures. I didn't have to admit him for an anaesthetic to have anything reset."

Steve's hand was poised over his notepad. "Anything else?" Steve waited for the response to his question.

"He had a few battle scars on his hand. I remember asking him if he'd been in an accident. He laughed and said something like the scars being normal for an ex-butcher."

Jane's muscles tensed with anticipation.

"Were there any other distinguishing features that you noticed?"

"Oh yes, I won't forget it. His broken arm had a rather fancy tattoo of a dragon. A Chinese dragon, I think. It had a name underneath it. Sorry, I can't remember the name."

Excitement surged through Jane.

"Would this tattoo show in the X-ray?"

"Tiny tattoos are often used on serious cancer sufferers, to help the radiologists accurately identify the point of focus for multiple treatments. To answer your question, yes, clear enough for your forensic people to make out the name." Palmer sifted through the papers in the file. He looked up and said,

"I'm sorry, but the X-rays are now in special files in another department and building. Could I send a copy to you?"

"Yes, please." Jane handed him her card. "Could you send it to the Sunbury police station?"

"Of course."

Jane stood up.

"Thanks for all your help, Doctor. We really appreciate it."

"I only hope that it assists in some way. Such a vicious type of serial killer." He stood up and shook their hands. "You know I only relieve here when casualty is short-staffed, as they are at the moment. I normally work with trauma patients. My specialty is victims of crime. I've even dabbled into near death experiences. I've had cases where patients have experienced seeing close relatives at the time when the relative died in an accident. Interesting stuff. A friend and colleague is starting research into this subject. You would know him. He's the police chief profiler, Doctor Oliver Tarrant."

*Oh my God. I hope Oliver isn't going to tell him about me.*

Jane took a long deep breath, smiled.

"Yes, we know Doctor Tarrant. We mustn't keep you, Doctor. You're a busy man. Many thanks again for your help." She picked up her bag, turned, and opened the door. Steve followed.

Jane wove her way through the crowd of patients still waiting in the casualty and outpatients' waiting room. She didn't speak to Steve, but stared straight ahead. Steve kept silent. Jane's mind was in overdrive.

*It's the tattoo that Eddie described to me. I'm sure of it. But how can I use this clandestine knowledge? Damn it, Where can I get proof?*

\* \* \*

Jane jotted down dates on her notepad as Steve manoeuvred the unmarked police car through the midday traffic.

"I wish the tollway extended down to this area." He glanced at Jane.  
"What are you writing down?"

"I'm making a time graph of the victims' approximate death dates. We need to find if Vincenti has a second passport, possibly an illegal one, where we can then check his trip dates to Hong Kong against the victims' death dates." She looked at the list. "Lewis Lee died around the 7<sup>th</sup> July, Mike Malloy died approximately 14<sup>th</sup> August. Eddie Grant and Jason Gee's estimated deaths are around the same time between 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> August."

"Maybe we should get an official copy of his passport photo." Said Steve.

"Good idea. Hopefully, we can find if he has an alias."

"I think you're right, that Jo Vincenti could operate under an alias. The problem will be to prove it."

They were approaching the intersection where the tollway started. Jane's stomach rumbled.

"I'm hungry, Steve. Let's go through Moonee Ponds and Essendon instead of the tollway. I feel like taking a lunch break."

"Me too." Steve exited the tollway via the far left lane, into the suburban streets, away from the motorway.

\* \* \*

Jane glanced at her watch.

"It's two-thirty."

"Well, I for one enjoyed the lunch, Boss. I think it did us good to forget the case, even if it was only for an hour or so."

They left the café and drove towards Sunbury. Fifteen minutes later, Steve parked the car outside the Sunbury police station. They walked in unison to the front automatic double doors, and entered the reception area.

"Good afternoon, Inspector." Senior Constable Moore popped up from behind the front counter. "Faxes arrived for you from Immigration ten minutes ago."

"Thanks, Marion. Good news, I hope?"

"Not really, Inspector. That's why I didn't call you on your phone."

"Okay. Come on, Steve. We may as well check what Immigration has found so far."

They left Marion at the front desk and went through into the back office. Angela Nguyen immediately handed Jane a folder.

"These are the faxes from Immigration, Inspector."

"Thanks, Angela." Jane took the folder across to the Crime Squad desk. She sat down and spread the papers out. Steve pulled up a chair and started to scan the paperwork with her.

"Immigration has confirmed that Jo Vincenti last trip to Hong Kong was from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July, which supports the stamps I noted from his passport."

"This one's interesting." Jane picked up another fax and read it.

"Immigration is following up departures and arrivals from all ports. They are checking passports with people of the same height, description, and age."

"But you asked them to do that."

"I know, but I've just realised that perhaps our killer departed Australia from another port, Sydney, for example. That way, if our prime suspect, Jo Vincenti does have another passport and alias, he could easily go to Sydney on a domestic flight and depart the country the next day, on another ticket."

"Why are you so certain that Jo Vincenti is our killer?"

"A gut feeling, that's all." A flush of embarrassment coloured her face.

*I just know the X-rays will show the same tattoo. But how on earth can I find evidence to implicate Vincenti? I need proof that we can use in court.*

"Boss?"

"Yes?"

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, of course I am. Don't worry, I'm keeping an open mind on this. But I still feel that Jo Vincenti is the killer. Don't ask me why, but I do. And I don't want a comment about women's weird logic." She snatched up the papers from the desk and put them into her bag. "I'm going to phone Oliver."

"Good. You need to get back on speaking terms."

"I'm going to phone him, in private." Jane left the office and walked outside the station.

"Oliver? It's Jane. No, I'm not coming up there tonight. There's too much going on here at the moment. I just wanted to talk to you about the tattoo." Jane paced around the front lawn outside the police station as she spoke. "Steve and I talked to a doctor at the Royal Melbourne hospital this morning, regarding Jo Vincenti. He was an emergency patient three days ago. The doctor plastered Vincenti's right arm from the shoulder to his fingers. The X-rays showed a break in the upper arm and the wrist. How was it broken? Sorry, I forgot to tell you. He broke it when he fell off his trail bike at his farm. The interesting bit is that the doctor remembers that his upper right arm had a tattoo of a dragon and a name. Yes. I agree, but how can I possibly use this information? I need to verify the tattoo and name on the X-ray copies when they eventually arrive at Sunbury. That's one reason why I'm staying here. What's the other reason? I need a bit of space. I'll phone you as soon as I've seen the X-rays. I promise. Yes, I'm sorry about the argument too. What?" Jane blushed. "I – I love you too, Oliver Tarrant." She pressed the disconnect button. The cool breeze made her shiver.

*I won't tell you the doctor's name until we are face to face. I want to trust you. I must trust you. You're the only person who knows about Eddie and his killer's description.*

Jane went back inside the warmth of the station and rejoined Steve. They spent the next few hours typing up their reports on their laptops. Marion Moore came in several times, offering coffee, and biscuits, giving them a few minutes break from their monitors.

By five o'clock, Jane stretched and yawned.

"I've had enough for the day, Steve. Let's go and get some take-away and eat it back at the motel."

"Fish and chips?"

"I was thinking of pigging out on a Big Mac, actually."

Steve laughed. "All right, let's go."

\* \* \*

They ate in Jane's room, and watched the evening news on television.

"Only a mention that inquiries were continuing," remarked Steve.

"Don't worry. Once we make an arrest, the investigation will hit the headlines again."

"I'm going to have an early night, after watching a bit of rugby."

"See you in the morning, Steve."

Steve got up and opened the door.

"Good night. I'm glad you rang Oliver." He closed the door quickly, before Jane could reply. She watched television after he left, but by nine o'clock, was battling to keep her eyes open. She undressed, climbed into the bed, and turned off the light.

*I want to trust you, Oliver. But you must stop coddling me from any work problems or perceived danger. I can look after myself. Will the X-ray copies show the name Maria? Was Eddie telling me the truth?*

## Day Six

Jane and Steve arrived at Sunbury police station at nine. As they walked into the reception area, Marion Moore greeted them.

"Good morning. I'm glad to see that you took the advantage of a sleep in this morning, Inspector."

Jane laughed. "There was no point in coming in earlier, the X-rays aren't due until after nine. No faxes? No emails?"

"No, Inspector."

"I don't know if that's good or bad news." Jane walked over to the security door that led into the main office behind the reception area. Swiping her security card, Jane turned to Steve and winked. "Come on, Steve, it's time for my morning fix of caffeine."

Five minutes later, Jane sipped on a mug of coffee as she checked her emails.

"Damn. This killer has suddenly gone quiet, Steve."

Senior Constable Moore came into the office holding a courier envelope.

"Your X-ray copies have arrived, Inspector."

"Thanks, Marion." Jane opened the envelope and snatched out the two X-rays. She held them up against the window at the back of the office. "Damn it, the light's not even enough."

"Try that fluorescent desk lamp." Steve pointed to another desk.

She rushed over.

"Now it's too bright." Jane clicked her fingers, "I know." She opened the top drawer of the desk, pulled out her laptop, and turned it on. She opened MS Word, and the screen became a large white backlight. "Voila!" She laid the first X-ray against the white screen. Both detectives leaned forward. It was the third X-ray of the upper arm that held their attention.

"The tattoo is fairly clear, Boss."

Jane's eyes narrowed, her heart pounded fast, and she held her breath.

*Eddie's description!*

She cleared her throat, and breathed in slowly before replying.

"It's a dragon with the word that looks like *Maria* printed underneath."

Jane looked at Steve. "What do you think?"

"I agree."

"Okay, so now all we need is for Immigration to come up with Jo Vincenti's alias."

"Boss, you seem so sure about Vincenti having another name and passport."

"Just a gut feeling as they say in the force, Steve. Nothing else."

*How can I tell Steve that a victim's ghost told me about the tattoo?*

*Vincenti must have another name and passport. He must have visited Hong Kong on other occasions.*

"A penny for them?"

"My thoughts?" She frowned. "They're all scrambled at the moment."

Jane looked at the X-ray one more time before putting it in the envelope and labelling it for evidence. Steve sat at the spare desk and went through his notes, then checked on his laptop for emails from his contact in Hong Kong.

"Any news, Steve?"

"Yes. I think we might have a breakthrough, of sorts. My friend's an IT freak. He played around with a copy of the passport photo that I scanned and put into the files yesterday. I sent it to him late last night. Per my description of Jo Vincenti from our meeting, he aged the picture and added weight to the face."

"Of course, that's brilliant. The passport is eight years old. "

"Cheng ran it through the Hong Kong identikit computer program to search for possible clones this morning." Steve clicked on the attachment in the email received from his friend. A picture downloaded onto the screen. "Here's Cheng's possible match." They looked at the image. It was a police photo of a Jo Variti, arrested for drunkenness in Hong Kong on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

"Well, this man is heavy enough, but he has a mop of straight hair and a moustache, whereas Jo Vincenti's hair is short and curly."

"Cheng sent me two other pictures. The first image is the one he adjusted to make Jo Vincenti look slightly older and fatter in the face, as we know him." The picture appeared.

"That's almost identical to Jo Vincenti! Your friend is a gem. Quick, download and save the next picture. Steve pressed the button.

"I asked Cheng to remove the moustache and shortened the hair, then made it curly, like Jo Vincenti," Steve said. The picture appeared on the screen and they both gasped.

"Your friend Cheng got the desired reaction from both of us, Steve. It looks like one and the same person."

"Yes, it does. But this won't hold up in court. They can easily say that the police artist fiddled it to make it look like our suspect."

"You're right of course. Damn it."

Jane went out of the main office to the staff kitchen, poured herself another coffee, and then returned with a big grin and sat at the desk assigned to her squad.

"What's the smile for?" asked Steve.

"I'm just thinking of all the calories in the doughnuts stored in the fridge out the back." Jane settled back her chair and sipped coffee as she scanned the morning papers. A sudden draught made her shiver. She stopped reading, pulled out her note pad, and printed in capitals, JO VINCENTI AKA VARITI? Her eyes noticed the A VARITI.

*Add the letter 'A' to Variti and – yes, Avariti. Put another letter A on the end and I'll get Avaritia. Hang on, that's purely guesswork, or is it? Why did I feel compelled to write down those names?* She shivered again.

"Is there a door open?"

Steve looked around. "No, why?"

"I can feel a draught."

"Well, I reckon it's hot and stuffy in here."

*I always feel cold in Eddie's presence. Hell, don't tell me that his spirit is still around and he prompted me to write Avaritia? This case is getting weird. Still, if that was you Eddie, thanks for the suggestion. I'd like to meet you again one day.*

She studied the sheet of paper with the printed words once more.

"Boss?"

"Yes?"

"I hope you haven't caught a chill."

"Don't worry about me. I'm as fit as I can be."

*And as sane as I can be, I hope.*

\* \* \*

*I mustn't let a ghost dominate this investigation. I must concentrate on solid police procedure to find and evaluate physical evidence, to find this killer. But at the same time, Eddie's evidence is correct.*

Jane took a long slow breath in an effort to calm her inner turmoil, then picked up the phone and dialled the number of the supervisor's office in Immigration.

"This is Inspector Jane Doe of the special investigations squad. Oh yes, Bob, I spoke to you yesterday. Could you please check to see if a Jo Variti, spelt V-A-R-I-T-I, departed Australia to visit Hong Kong between 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August this year? Yes, ex any Australian port, not just Melbourne. Could you do

the same for Mr Jo Vincenti? Thanks. You can contact me on my mobile. Yes, that's the number. Thanks, Bob." Jane pressed the end call button.

Steve was looking at her and said, "We can only hope that they pull out something for us."

Jane tore off a fresh sheet from her notebook and handed it to Steve.

"Steve?"

"Yes?"

"Could you write down on this piece of paper in capitals, the words Jo Vincenti aka Variti."

Steve printed the letters. He looked up and asked. "Done. Now what?"

"Take a good look at the letters. Tell me if you notice anything." Steve studied his lettering. He looked up at Jane and grinned. "Hey, just add another letter A and –"

"Go on."

"Avaritia. The secret company."

"Exactly."

"That's spooky."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this killer seems to like word games. We have just found a link between Jo Variti and Avaritia, the secret company name by word association in a word game."

Jane laughed and said, "I don't think the DPP will approve of us resorting to children's games." She stood up and paced around the room. "The problem is that we need hard evidence to prove the result of these games."

The only sound heard in the office for the next ten minutes was the tip-tap of laptop keys as Jane and Steve added the latest findings to their report files.

"Your hand bag's ringing."

Jane rummaged in her bag and retrieved the mobile phone. "Doe speaking. Yes, Bob? That's terrific." She jotted down notes in her notepad. "Bob, can you fax me a copy of this file to Sunbury police station? Thanks." She pressed the end call button.

"Well? You look like you've just swallowed the canary."

"Immigration is sending file copies, complete with passport information and photos for Jo Vincenti and Jo Variti. Both men have the same birth date, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1950. They are the same height and both have dark brown eyes. Bob suggested that they are almond-shaped. The only difference, according to Bob is that Vincenti has short-cropped curly hair and is clean-shaven. Variti has longish straight hair and a moustache."

Jane went across to the fax machine.

"A watched fax machine will never send faxes."

"Was that a new addition to Steve's Chinese logic?"

Steve laughed. "Yep."

"Bob said that Jo Vincenti always went to Hong Kong from Melbourne. Jo Variti was also a regular visitor to Hong Kong. However, he always departed from Sydney. Variti last flew out of Sydney on the 1<sup>st</sup> August and left Hong Kong for Sydney on the 13<sup>th</sup> August. His international ticket was Sydney to Sydney. Could you –"

"I'm ahead of you. I'll contact the domestic airlines and see if either Jo Variti or Jo Vincenti bought and used a ticket Melbourne-Sydney-Melbourne."

"Thanks. He may have bought an open-dated ticket from an agency or an airline direct, and booked the flights at a different time. I've done that myself in the past."

Steve nodded at Jane. "If we find the airline, we can also find out how he paid for it. A copy of the payment details can be used as evidence."

"It's time we got lucky." Jane paced up and down the office floor adjacent to the fax machine. Steve went to the desk provided for their work in Sunbury and picked up a Yellow pages directory. Two minutes later, he was dialling the first domestic airline number.

Jane spun around when the fax machine started to feed out paper. She peered at the header page. "Great, it's from Immigration." She grabbed each page as soon as it fell into the tray, and read it. Jane took the last faxed sheet from the tray and carried the sheets across to the desk where Steve sat, talking on the phone. He hung up as she sat down next to him. "Any luck?" she asked.

"Well, a Mr Jo Vincenti bought a ticket from *Virgin Blue*. He booked an evening flight from Melbourne to Sydney on the 31<sup>st</sup> July. No return flight was booked. Jo Vincenti collected the ticket at Melbourne airport. The airline is sending us a printout from their computer of the booking file, which includes the payment information, and passenger contact number."

"That's good news. This man's clever. He appears to have deliberately gone as Jo Vincenti on a domestic business trip, and then changed to his alias to travel to Hong Kong ex-Sydney."

"I think you're right. The contact number on the file matches Jo Vincenti's mobile number on his business card." Steve looked at the fax sheets in Jane's hand. "So what has Immigration sent us?"

Jane laid the pages on the desk and pointed to the passport photos.

"Steve, your friend in Hong Kong was pretty accurate. Look at the two photos."

"Yes. At least these passport photos can be used as evidence."

Angela Nguyen came into the office. She held a piece of paper.

"Inspector, Interpol in Hong Kong has sent us this email. It's good news for you." She handed the printout to Jane. Jane read the message, and then passed it over to Steve, realizing she had a big smile on her face.

"Angela, you're right about it being good news. Steve, Hong Kong police state that Jo Variti was arrested for being drunk and disorderly on the 12<sup>th</sup> August. The arresting officer noted that Variti had a tattoo on his upper right arm with the name 'Maria,' underneath the dragon. The description also says that Variti had a gold crown on his right front tooth."

Jane read the information a second time, in silence. She paused at the comment regarding the gold-capped tooth.

*Eddie mentioned that the diner at the vineyard, who seemed to understand Chinese had a gold-capped front tooth. My God, the killer is a regular patron at the vineyard.*

"So we now have some information that may prove Vincenti and Variti are one and the same. Pity Vincenti didn't show his teeth when he smiled at us. Damn it, Boss I don't remember seeing a gold tooth, did you?"

"No, I don't remember seeing it, either. But, I think we have enough information to go and visit Jo Vincenti again. With a bit of luck we should get him in for something like a photo ID check and at that time get his fingerprints. At the moment, though, we only have circumstantial evidence that he was in Hong Kong and Melbourne at the times of the killings. We need hard evidence that Jo Vincenti is also Jo Variti."

"Shall I phone his office first?"

Jane smiled. "No, let's make this visit a surprise one." She picked up the Immigration papers and put them into her tote bag. "Let's go."

\* \* \*

Jane and Steve entered the main office door of *Vincenti Meat Exports*. Anna met them at the front desk.

"Inspector Doe, and Senior Sergeant Ho. I didn't realise you had an appointment."

"We were in the area, and we decided to call in and see how Mr Vincenti's arm was mending." *Two white lies, now the truth*. "We have no appointment, Anna. Is Mr Vincenti available for a quick chat?"

Anna knocked some papers off her desk. She picked them up. "Mr Vincenti's not in the office at the moment. He's actually visiting our cousin's widow, to assist her with the funeral arrangements. The coroner released the body this morning. It's all been a terrible shock for the family." Anna started to

sort out the papers, and continued. "Such a dreadful way to die." She pulled out a tissue from a box on the desk.

Jane spoke in a soft voice. "Anna, are you all right? You said *our* cousin."

Anna blew her nose. More tears welled in her eyes. "Lewis Lee's mother and my grandmother are sisters, Inspector. Uncle Lewis was such a lovely man."

*My God, Anna's related to a victim.*

Jane glanced at Steve. He had pulled out his notebook. She smiled and looked at Anna as she asked in a quiet voice,

"Anna, was Mr Lee a first cousin to your mother, or your father?"

"My father of course. Didn't you know?"

"Know what, Anna?"

"That Jo Vincenti is my father." She blew into her hanky once again.

"Sorry, I just assumed that you knew. Uncle Lewis's death was – was so shocking."

Jane looked at Anna. "I'm sorry Anna, but your father, didn't tell us."

*He didn't lie, but he didn't volunteer this information in our interview.*

"What's your mother's name?"

"Anna Maria, but everyone calls her Maria. My real name is Anna Maria, but I've always been called Anna."

Jane stood up, and put on her parka. Steve Ho did the same. Jane pulled out her business card and handed it to Anna.

"If you remember anything that might help us find the killer of your Uncle Lewis, or even if you need to have a chat, please contact me."

"Thanks Inspector, I will. I'm sorry my father, I mean, Mr Vincenti wasn't here to talk to you. I'll tell him that you came."

"Yes, please do. But don't tell him about what we discussed Anna."

"Why not?"

"I think its best kept our secret, for now, anyway."

"I agree, Inspector. I prefer that my – err Mr Vincenti doesn't know what I told you. He'd be so angry."

Anna walked with them to the front office door. She waved briefly to them as they drove away.

"That's one scared lady."

"Yes, but unfortunately, that doesn't help us prove who the killer may be. Let's get back to Sunbury. I'm sure that there is something that we've missed. I need to go through the files again. We have got so far, but not far enough."

Jane turned on the CD player, while Steve drove northwards. She immersed herself in thought, as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* swelled around her.

*What evidence can I find to use in court? I know Vincenti aka Variti is the killer, but how can I possibly tell a jury that a ghost told me.*

\* \* \*

Jane looked out of the windscreen and frowned, as Steve parked the car outside the Sunbury police station. Oliver's car was parked in the visitor's bay.

"What the *hell* is he doing here?"

"At a rough guess, Oliver came to see you."

"He's the last person I need to see at the moment."

"Perhaps he has something to add to the killer's profile?"

"I don't think he has, Steve. But you're right about him coming to see me. Damn it." She got out of the car, slammed the door and strode in through the automatic doors, leaving Steve behind her. Angela Nguyen, on duty at the front desk, pressed the security release codes to open the door, and Jane went through, Steve close behind.

"I'll leave you two alone, while I get a cup of tea." Steve walked out into the kitchen area behind the main office.

Oliver sat at the desk assigned to the Special squad, at the back of the large general office. He sipped the last of his cup of tea, and then stood up.

"You don't look very pleased to see me, my love."

"I'm not. Well, only if you have something to add to the killer's profile which might help us."

"I've nothing that I'd like to make public, Jane, as you well know."

Jane whispered her reply. "Oliver, be careful. The walls in this place have ears."

Oliver whispered back, his head only inches from her face. "I know Jane, that's why I think you should come up to Macedon for the evening. We need to talk."

"Do we?"

"Jane, would you like to go to the tip? Perhaps together, we might think of something or meet someone there who might put a new slant on this investigation."

"That's just what I probably need to do. Good idea."

"What's a good idea?" Steve now stood behind her, sipping his tea.

Jane turned around. "Oliver has suggested that I go back to the tip,"

"Why?"

"I think that from the top of the hill, I might get things into perspective."

Steve Ho laughed. "The right perspective can only help. Oliver, take her out of here. I'll re-read the files in case there's something we may have missed."

Jane looked at her watch. "It's after two. I need to eat some lunch. That's why I'm getting irritable." She walked to the door, turned and looked back at Steve Ho. "I'll catch up with you later. Phone me if anything comes up."

"Okay. Don't come back. You could do with some country air."

"Steve?"

"Yes?"

"Never mind. I'll see you later." Jane picked up her bag, went over to the security door, swiped her card, and strode through the opened door with Oliver following. They crossed the road and entered the small café. Within ten minutes, each had devoured a salad roll and mug of coffee, before returning to the police station's car park.

As Jane put on her seat belt, Oliver looked at her with a big grin.

"Let's hope we can find or remember something at the tip.'

"I hope so too. I'm sure that I've over looked something. It's a good idea of yours. The tip area might jolt my memory, or as I said to Steve, put things into perspective."

\* \* \*

Oliver's Saab bounced gently along the road inside the tip area. Jane peered out through the front window as Oliver parked near the manager's hut.

"Hoping to see Eddie Grant again?"

"Maybe. That's why you've brought me here, isn't it?"

"Got it in one, my love." He parked the car next to the manager's shed.

"Come on, Oliver. Walk with me to the top of the hill." Jane put on her boots, and then got out and closed the passenger door. She looked up the track. Oliver got out and went across to her.

"See anything?"

"No. I'm not hopeful." Jane squelched through the puddles. "Maybe Eddie simply wanted to be put to rest."

"Perhaps, but from what you told me, he was also keen to give you any information that he could to help you get the killer."

Half an hour later, Jane and Oliver descended the greasy track.

"Damn it. You know, I think his spirit is still around. I had a strange feeling earlier today. A cold draught came into the office at Sunbury station. At that moment, I felt compelled to print the words JO VINCENTI AKA VARITI. I saw the beginning of the word 'Avaritia'."

"Well Jane, from my research so far, I've learned that spirits can also communicate with telepathy. Perhaps that's what you experienced. Did anyone else in the office feel the cold air?"

"No. That's what makes it so spooky." Jane frowned. "Am I mixing facts with the ethereal?"

"Never, my love." He unlocked the car. Jane got in. "Now, it's time we went and got some food." He stopped at the tip entrance and turned left.

"What for? We've just eaten. Where are we headed?"

"Macedon. I'll pick up some take away and get some fresh salad for dinner and –"

"Hold it right here, buddy."

"No Jane, you stop it. Stop it right now. This distance between us can't continue. I really think that we need to discuss this case together. I'm the only one who knows what you know. I agree that it's impossible to reveal your exclusive, spiritual source regarding the killer's identity. By the way, have you found out any facts about anything today?"

"Yes. Jo Vincenti is – or was – the first cousin of Lewis Lee. His receptionist Anna let it slip that Vincenti is her father."

"What? Now that *is* interesting."

"She appeared to be very nervous when she realised what she'd said."

"Do you think that she knows about her father's secret life?"

"No, I don't think she does. One thing I do know is that she's frightened of him."

They stopped en route at Gisborne to walk around the small shopping centre with its boutique shops. Jane bought herself a hand-knitted, rainbow-striped sweater. She liked her purchase so much that she wore it when she left the shop, her old sweater folded in the shopping bag. Oliver grinned at her. Afterwards they went into a café and enjoyed a coffee, and cake.

*Oliver certainly knows how to make me relax. It's good to put work aside for a short time and clear my thoughts.*

Oliver touched her hand.

"Well, now I can honestly say that you are also my rainbow in the horizon, as well as my little ray of sunshine."

Jane laughed. "Come on, let's buy some food for dinner." They went into the local market. Jane's eyes glistened when she saw all the fresh fruit and vegetables. "Oh, that rolled roast beef looks delicious!"

They carried the food back to the car and Oliver drove into the local hills to his property. It was nearly five o'clock when Oliver drove up the drive into *Wyndales*.

Oliver unpacked the groceries in the kitchen. Jane watched. "It will take an hour and a half to cook the roast, Jane."

"Good, that gives us time to open a bottle of red from your wine rack and sip a glass whilst we talk. Thank goodness you can cook, Oliver."

He winked. "Call it self-preservation, my love. Yes, we can analyse this file again. You're right, there has to be some way you can get hard evidence against Vincenti or Variti, whatever he wants to call himself."

Ten minutes later, the food was in the oven, and the wine de-corked. Jane sat in the lounge, sipping her first glass, and watched as Oliver stoke the fire. "I have to get some more wood. Won't be long."

She let herself relax and started to sort out her priorities in her mind.

*I hope I'm right in trusting you. I missed you last night. Damn it, I still love you and want to live with you. I find it hard to keep my work and private life separate. Is that why I'm scared of a marriage commitment? Damn this killer.*

## Day Seven

It was nearly eight by the time Oliver and Jane finished breakfast. Jane yawned.

"I don't think five hours sleep has re-charged my batteries for the day."

"I feel tired too, but I think it was worth the lack of sleep. We certainly managed to write up a great summary of the case to date."

"Yes, we did. I'm glad you suggested the two columns to compare Vincenti and Variti. Looking at the comparison chart it became obvious that Vincenti leads a double life."

"It's a simple, yet effective way for him to move around under his alias name and passport. I don't know why we didn't think of that earlier."

"I was too bloody focussed on the dragon tattoo. Being so rapt in Eddie's ghostly evidence, I began to forget the real practical work of police detection. Maybe I should retire and get married."

"I won't argue with that."

"I'm not promising anything at the moment."

"I know you're not. I'm only teasing. You'd be like a fish out of water if you gave up your job and got married to the sink. I realise that now."

"You do?"

"Of course I do. I don't want you to be unhappy. You should keep your job."

Jane's mobile phone chimed in her hand bag. She got up from the kitchen table, picked up her bag from the bench and fished out the mobile.

"Yes Doctor? You've found what? Huh-hmm, huh-hmm, huh-hmm. That's great, Doctor. Yes, I'm definitely interested. I'll organise Forensic to collect the package straight away. Thanks, I owe you." She pressed the disconnect button. Her eyes were wide as she looked at Oliver.

"Well, don't keep me in the dark. What parcel? Doctor who?"

"Doctor Palmer, from the Royal Melbourne."

*Damn it, I didn't want to mention his name at the moment.*

"Palmer's a colleague of mine, Jane. He told me that he met you."

"Oliver, he told me that he's helping you with your research project about the supernatural."

"Yes, he mentioned that he'd told you, but I haven't and don't intend to ever mention your ghostly encounters to him. I promise that's our secret."

Jane frowned. *I hope so*, she thought, and sighed.

"I hope you don't let out anything about this secret accidentally."

"I promise. Now tell me about this parcel."

"Well, Palmer had been looking through Jo Vincenti's file to add more notes regarding the copy of the X-rays sent to me. He noticed that the nurse who had assisted him that day had added a note to the file. She took off Vincenti's torn, muddy, and bloodied shirt so Doctor Palmer could plaster the arm. At that time, she put the shirt into a large plastic envelope. When Vincenti left, the nurse was not there. She was assisting another emergency patient. So the shirt was still in the envelope on the desk in the filing room."

"Jane, that's brilliant evidence."

"That's why I was so excited when he told me." Jane dialled the police forensic number on her mobile. "Inspector Jane Doe speaking. I need a parcel to be collected as soon as possible from Doctor Palmer at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Good. Let me know if the bloodstains match those in the Severance Packages investigation. Oh, and the shirt is also muddy. Could you crosscheck it with the mud at the creek in the vineyard? Great, I'll leave that to you? Contact me on my mobile, as soon as you get the results." She disconnected the call. "Come on, Oliver, we need to get to the Sunbury police station."

Jane picked up her last piece of now cold toast and ate it quickly. They walked outside into the cold winter's morning.

"Brr, it's freezing. There's frost on the ground."

"Put your parka on."

Jane smiled as she put on the parka and got into the passenger seat.

"Oliver, I think we might be getting our breakthrough."

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, Oliver parked his car outside the Sunbury police station.

Jane opened her passenger door before he turned off the engine.

"Talk about impatient," remarked Oliver as he locked the car, and watched Jane rush away and disappear through the sliding front doors to the reception area. He jogged up the path, but did not catch up. The doors closed in front of him, making him pause briefly to let the mechanism work to re-open them. By the time Oliver walked into the reception area, Jane was already

walking through the door that led into the main back office. She stopped and turned.

"Come on, slow coach."

Steve Ho sat at the special crime squad desk. He looked up and grinned.

"Forensic have just phoned. They couldn't reach you on your mobile. You must have gone through a black area for reception."

"What did they have to say?"

"Well, they rang to say that the shirt has been collected. They will contact us with any results as soon as possible." A large grin appeared on Ho's face.

"This might be the break that we have been looking for."

Jane deliberately held up her hands and crossed her fingers as she responded. "I certainly hope so. They plan to crosscheck the blood on the shirt with that found at the shed. They said that they would check the samples against the victim's blood types."

"Coffee, Boss? Oliver?"

"Not for me thanks, mate."

"Yes thanks, I can't work without my coffee." As Steve went out of the main office to the kitchen, Jane pulled up another chair and started to check emails on her laptop. "Damn it, the killer isn't sending anymore cryptic messages to me."

Oliver sat next to Jane and said, "Maybe he won't. Perhaps there are no more bodies to be found."

"God, I hope you're right."

Steve Ho returned to the desk from the coffee-making machine in the back of the main office, carrying a mug. He handed it to Jane.

"Now it's waiting time again."

"I hate waiting." Jane got up and started to pace around the room. Each time she passed the desk, she paused briefly, picked up the mug of coffee, sipped a mouthful, and then placed it back on the desk, before pacing around again in small circuits.

Oliver beckoned. "Come on, Jane, sit down. You're making me giddy."

She returned to her chair, pulled out some files from the tray, and started to read them.

An hour later, Jane's mobile chimed. She pressed the connect button. Steve Ho and Oliver Tarrant leaned forward in their chairs.

"Doe. Yes. Yes. Oh heck! What else? Damn. Well, we might have been lucky. Never mind. Please keep checking and re-checking. Maybe the mud might match? Thanks." She pressed the finish button. A tight frown formed on her forehead. Steve spoke first.

"By the look on your face, the blood on the shirt belonged to Vincenti."

"Yes, darn it. I felt so positive."

Ho stood up. "I'm going to get some takeaway from the shop over the road. I didn't have breakfast this morning." He picked up his parka and put it on.

"Can I get either of you anything?"

"No thanks, Steve. We had a country-style breakfast with eggs and Bacon, the whole lot," responded Jane. "But don't let me stop you."

"You won't." Ho disappeared through the security door into the reception area. Jane and Oliver watched through the large one-way mirror that afforded the interior main office a spy-like view on who was entering the building. Jane turned to Oliver and whispered, so the two constables across the room would not hear.

"Oliver, I might just have to tell the force that I've communicated with Eddie Grant's ghost."

"No, don't. They won't believe you anyway." His voice was also deliberately low.

"Another bloody dead-end, Oliver. There must be something, something obvious." She frowned again, and started to shuffle her files on the desk. She muttered each word as she wrote on a clean sheet of paper. "Blood check, mud check, DNA check – that will take days – fingerprints - fingerprints!" She picked up her mobile and jabbed in the phone number to forensic. "Doe speaking. I've just had a thought. Could you crosscheck the index print found under the table in the shed with the fingerprints of a Jo Variti? Hong Kong Interpol sent us his fingerprints. And please, check them against the unidentified prints on the business cards from Malloy's office as well. Yes, I think we might be lucky this time. Give me a call when you're done."

"My, you look beautiful when you're determined." Oliver grinned at her. "Mind you, it's a good idea." He moved his chair back and ushered her out to the centre of the main office. "Start pacing, my love."

Ten minutes passed. Jane walked up and down the office, Oliver jotted down notes in his pocket book.

"What's up?" They both started and stared at Steve without answering.  
"Have I interrupted anything?"

Jane's mobile rang.

"Shush." Oliver put his finger over his lips as a signal, and then leaned forward in his chair to watch Jane's reaction to the phone call.

"Doe. What? Yes. Bingo. Could you stand by to compare fingerprints of a Mr Jo Vincenti's of *Vincenti Meat Exports* office with Mr Jo Variti? Senior Sergeant Ho and I will be going to see him shortly. We now have enough to be able to get his fingerprints for comparison with Variti's file." Jane pressed the disconnect button. She clenched her free hand, punched it up in the air and shouted, "Yes!"

\* \* \*

Oliver Tarrant stayed at the Sunbury police station. He watched Jane and Steve drive away to North Melbourne. As he returned to the warmth of the police building, an excited constable Nguyen met him in the reception area.

"Oh Doctor Tarrant, I've missed them. I've got the Internet investigation team on the line for Inspector Doe."

"I'll speak to them." Tarrant walked in through the security door behind Constable Nguyen, who handed him the phone. He talked briefly, gave the phone back to Nguyen. "Constable, take down the information and type up a report for the Inspector when she returns. I'm going to tell her the news on her mobile."

"Yes, Doctor Tarrant."

Oliver dialled Jane's mobile number. "Jane? It's me. The IT team just phoned. Yes, the ones who've been trying to trace the origin of your emails. They have traced a link on your last email from the word games nutter to a North Melbourne Internet shop. Vincenti is known to the shop owners. Yes, I know it's great, isn't it?" He laughed. "I won't repeat your last comment, Inspector. I might be up for indecent language over the phone. Constable Nguyen is taking all the details and you'll have a written reference of the call on file for your return. The IT team will be sending a copy of their report to you as well. They have been able to sign in under Vincenti's aliases, and apparently, they make interesting reading. Now remember, Jane this man is a disassociative personality who can easily snap under any pressure into the alter ego. Handle him with extreme care."

\* \* \*

Jane sat quietly beside Ho as he turned into the street where Jo Vincenti had his office. He parked the car outside the front door of *Vincenti Meat Exports* and turned to face Jane.

"We've enough evidence to arrest him. The email connection alone is enough to bring him in for questioning. I can't wait to see the look on his face when we ask for his fingerprints."

"Me too. Let's make this official. However, as Oliver said we must be very careful with this. We can't let him lose control. Come on, let's go."

Jane got out of the car, slammed the car door, and strode to the front door. Steve rushed across the pavement and joined her.

Jo Vincenti was standing next to Anna at the reception desk. He tapped on the computer screen on the desk. He was scowling.

"I'll sign the letter once you've printed it, and I've re-proofread it." Vincenti looked up as the door closed with a thump behind Jane and Steve. An instant smile appeared on his face. His voice changed to a modulated, controlled tone. "Inspector Doe, Senior Sergeant Ho. It's a pleasure to see you again."

"The pleasure is ours. Mr Vincenti. May we talk to you in private?" responded Jane.

"Of course, if I can assist the police in anyway."

Jo Vincenti ushered Jane and Steve into his office, and they sat down opposite his desk. Steve took out his notebook. Vincenti settled himself into his large chair, readjusting his sling.

"Is your arm feeling better now?" asked Jane, breaking the silence.

"Well, it still hurts, but not as bad as earlier." Vincenti's eyes were darting around the room. He rubbed his chin with his left hand. "Now, how can I help you?"

"We're following up inquiries Mr Vincenti, and tying up a few loose ends from our last visit." Jane paused and rummaged in her bag. She pulled out her notebook and flicked over some pages, before continuing. "You told us during our previous visit that you were last in Hong Kong from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of July."

"That's correct." Beads of perspiration appeared on Vincenti's upper lip.

"You haven't been up there since then?"

Vincenti leaned forward in his chair, and rested his broken arm on the desktop. "No, I haven't."

Jane wrote a comment in her notebook. Steve did the same and remained silent as he observed Vincenti's body language. They had agreed that Jane would lead the interview.

Vincenti moved back into his chair. He started to tap on the desktop with his left index finger.

"Look inspector, I'm a busy man. I have nothing to add to what I told you last time. Unless you have something else to ask me, I'm afraid you are wasting your time."

"Mr Vincenti, you've been very cooperative and helpful to date. Would you be willing to come with us to our city office to look at some photos of some suspects?"

"Suspects? So you actually have some?" Vincenti smiled, revealing a gold-capped front upper-right tooth.

Jane smiled back. "Yes, we do have one suspect in particular. With your contacts in Hong Kong, we think that you might be able to help us identify him. We would also like to fingerprint you, to help eliminate you from our inquiry. Will that be alright?"

Vincenti swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he carefully considered his response.

"I don't see why not, Inspector. Especially if it helps eliminate me from your enquiries. Yes, why not?"

"Thank you, Mr Vincenti. Your cooperation is appreciated." Jane put away her notebook and then stood up. "We could drive you into our office now, and bring you back here on our way back to Sunbury."

"I – Yes that will be fine. Will I be away long?"

"Well it depends upon how long it takes to look at the photos, and for the fingerprinting to be done." Steve glanced at Jane, and then at Vincenti.

"Let's get this nonsense all over with. I don't want it said that Jo Vincenti never cooperated with the police force." Vincenti's forehead glistened with sweat. He pulled out his handkerchief. "It's hot in here." He stood up, picked up a jacket, and walked to his office door. As they passed Anna's desk, Vincenti snapped. "Turn down the central heating girl. I'm melting."

Anna visibly shrank back into her seat. "Yes, Mr Vincenti, she mumbled."

Jane looked at Anna and thought, *You poor thing having a father like him.*

Jane produced her most endearing smile and focussed it at Anna. "Nice to see you again, Anna." When her father turned his back on them and headed towards the front door, Jane winked. Anna grinned back at her.

Once outside, Jane and Steve ushered Vincenti to the police car. Vincenti sat in the back. He was silent until Steve drove the car along Kings Way, turned left into Bowen Crescent, and then right down Queens lane and into the car park under the rear of the St Kilda Road Police complex.

"So this is where the murder squad works." He unlatched his seat belt and got out of the car. "Very swank."

\* \* \*

Ten minutes later, Jane sat behind the desk in the interview room. Steve Ho had brought in cups of coffee for Jane and Vincenti, and Chinese tea for himself. Steve sat on a chair next to Jane, and Jo Vincenti sat on the opposite side of the small desk. There was a knock on the door. A man came in the room and Jane stood up.

"Mr Vincenti, this is Detective Sergeant Anderson from the fingerprint department. Sergeant, Mr Vincenti has kindly volunteered to give us his fingerprints."

Vincenti started to stand up, but Sergeant Anderson beckoned him to remain seated.

"Mr Vincenti, there's no need to get up. I can get your prints at the desk."

Vincenti pointed to his plaster, "You might find it a bit difficult with this plaster, sergeant."

"Nothing's too difficult Mr Vincenti. Now if you can let me hold this finger. Yes, that's it. Now I'll press it onto this chart. Good, one done, nine to go."

Jane and Steve watched in silence as the sergeant took each print. He placed the print sheet in a pre-labelled file and then nodded at Jane and Steve.

"Thank you Inspector, Senior Sergeant. Mr Vincenti, your cooperation is appreciated." He looked at Jane before he departed through the door and added, "I'll phone you." Anderson shut the door behind him.

"Well, that was painless, Inspector," remarked Vincenti, who was now sitting back in his chair with a smile. "Now what photos do you want me to look at?"

Jane opened the file that she had earlier placed on top of the desk. She picked up the top loose sheet, and laid it on the desk. Jane spun the paper around and pushed it across to Vincenti.

"Mr Vincenti, could you please take a good look at these two photos? As you can see, the first one is a copy of your passport photo, held on file at Immigration. The second photo is from the passport file of a Mr Jo Variti." Jane and Steve noted Vincenti's eyes widen.

"Who's this Mr Variti?"

Jane leaned forward in her chair. "You don't recognise him?"

"No, should I?" Beads of moisture appeared on Vincenti's upper lip. He pulled out a handkerchief with his left hand and wiped his mouth. "Why are all buildings heaters turned up too high? It's stuffy in here."

"Would you like a glass of water, Mr Vincenti?" asked Steve.

"Yes, please."

Steve Ho leaned across the desk and poured water from the jug into a glass for him. "There you go."

Vincenti gulped down half the contents before putting the glass down.

"I'm sorry, Inspector, but I don't recognise this Mr Variti."

Jane stated, "We believe Mr Variti runs an international company called *Avaritia*, Mr Vincenti." Vincenti's face went pale. His mouth started to twitch.

"*Avaritia*? W-what does this company do exactly?"

"So the word *Avaritia* means nothing to you Mr Vincenti?" Jane continued using a quiet voice. "And you don't know or recognise this photo of Mr Jo Variti?"

Vincenti banged his left fist on the table. "No I don't. In fact, I don't really see how I can help you any further in your inquiry, Inspector. I'd like to go now."

Vincenti stopped as Jane's mobile phone chimed.

"Yes? Really? Well that's just what I'd hoped to hear. Can you bring up a copy of your file? I'd like to show it to Mr Vincenti."

Vincenti pulled out his handkerchief again, dabbed his forehead and wiped around his neck. "It's so hot in here."

"Is it?" responded Jane.

There was a knock on the door. Vincenti's eyes bulged as Sergeant Anderson appeared holding a file. Jane got up and went across the room to Anderson, so they were out of hearing from Vincenti. Anderson handed the file to Jane and whispered, "The left hand index is a perfect match, Inspector. And the full set matches those on file, and the business cards. Well done." Anderson then left the room.

"What's going on, Inspector?"

Jane leaned forward in her chair. "Mr Vincenti, I'm now obliged to advise you of your legal rights."

"What?" Vincenti face was very pale. "Are you telling me that you are charging me with something?"

"Indeed, I am Mr Vincenti. I'm charging you with the murders of Mike Malloy, Jason Green, and Eddie Grant. Once the courts have finished with you in Australia, there will be further charges for you to answer in Hong Kong, relating to the death of your cousin Lewis Lee. Interpol also have charges

pending against you regarding international money laundering through your company *Avaritia* under your alias of Mr Jo Variti."

Jane paused. Vincenti sat in silence. He remained silent for a few moments, swallowing hard. He finally spoke. "What concrete evidence do you have Inspector? My lawyers will prove that everything is circumstantial." His thick left index finger poked at the passport photo of Jo Variti. "Can't you bloody see that this Variti fellow has long straight hair and a moustache? He looks nothing like me. Good grief woman. You think you're so smart." He leaned back in his chair, his face now flushed.

Jane looked at Vincenti. "Would you like your lawyer to be present for this interview?"

"I don't need a lawyer at the moment, thanks all the same. You haven't any evidence." Vincenti scowled, then leaned back in his chair, and drummed his left fingers on the table.

"Very well, Mr Vincenti." She turned to Steve and said, "Steve could you read Mr Vincenti, his rights?"

"Yes, Boss." Steve put in two blank cassette tapes into the machine. He pressed the start button. Jane sat back in her chair and observed Vincenti. He stared blankly at her. As soon as Steve finished, Jane asked the first question.

"Mr Vincenti, you denied knowing or recognising the man in this photo, namely a Mr Jo Variti. Do you still stand by this?"

"Of course I bloody do."

"Mr Vincenti, I'd like you to look at a copy of a report, from the forensic fingerprint team. It was completed after you gave your fingerprints." Vincenti's

eyes narrowed. A frown creased his forehead as he observed the sections, pointed to by Jane. "Firstly, Mr Vincenti, your fingerprints match those of Mr Jo Variti."

"What? How did you get them?"

"When you were in Hong Kong, under your false passport, as Variti, wearing a wig and false moustache, you were arrested for being drunk and disorderly."

"What does that prove?"

"Mr Vincenti, the police took this photo." Jane produced the police photograph. The arresting officer also noted in the distinguishing marks, a tattoo of a dragon, and the word 'Maria' on Variti's upper right arm. He also noted Variti's upper right tooth was gold-capped. The officer fingerprinted Variti."

"What? I –I- don't remember that." Vincenti slumped in his chair.

"The prints of Jo Vincenti and Jo Variti match."

"So I have an alias, so what? How on earth does that tie me into the murders?" Spittle sprinkled onto the desk from Vincenti's mouth as he spoke.

Jane calmly replied. "Mr Vincenti, Mr Variti, it doesn't matter what you want to call yourself. The fingerprints match. That proves you have two names and two passports. You have denied being in Hong Kong since 27<sup>th</sup> July. You have, in fact visited Hong Kong as Jo Variti from 1<sup>st</sup> August to the 14<sup>th</sup> August. On 12<sup>th</sup> August, verified by the arrival and departure stamps in your Variti passport, and by the local police when arresting you for being drunk and disorderly, and by their fingerprint files. Obviously the alcohol has dulled your memory."

"You have no evidence that I killed anyone."

"Yes we do, Mr Vincenti. Variti's fingerprints were found in Mr Lewis Lee's hotel room, after his death. "

Vincenti looked down at the desktop and muttered, "So what?"

"We have matched up your left index print with a print under the table in a shed next to the creek at Malloy's vineyard. The same spot where Jason Gee's body parcels were found. DNA tests so far confirm the print was made in Gee's blood."

Vincenti was silent, his head bowed. Jane continued.

"Through *Avaritia* you organised groups of wealthy businessmen to fly to Australia. In Melbourne, these special groups went to Malloy's vineyard. They met Mike Malloy. He, in turn secretly gave them business cards. These cards referred them to Mr Lewis Lee, a jeweller, and victim, and Fallon's financial Advisors."

"Lewis Lee and George Fallon were business friends. I have no idea why Malloy had their cards."

"Mr Vincenti, we have evidence that Lewis Lee was your cousin. Your mother and his mother are sisters. The word 'Maria' on the tattoo under that plaster on your upper right arm, is your wife's name, we believe?"

"That proves nothing."

"Forensic have just checked your prints against the business cards, found hidden in a drawer in Malloy's office. One set belongs to Mr Malloy, the others were unknown, until now. They are yours, Mr Vincenti. You'll find that hard to explain away."

Vincenti sat still. He looked directly at Jane, his eyes staring into hers.

"I'm afraid that I may have underestimated you Inspector." He stopped and looked down at his sling.

"Mr Vincenti, we also have evidence from friends and family of the victims, that each were secretly receiving large amounts of cash, unexplained cash that did not come from their normal income. We also have traced emails sent to myself, back to you at various Internet shops, in Sunbury the city and North Melbourne. The shop's employees have identified your photo, Mr Vincenti."

"Emails prove nothing. They were only clever word games." Vincenti suddenly stopped. Jane grinned at him.

"Yes, clever perhaps, but they gave too much away, Mr Vincenti." Vincenti pouted and looked down at the desktop.

"You were originally a butcher, weren't you?"

"Yes. Bloody hard work it was too."

Without warning, Vincenti grabbed a pen from the table in his left hand and lunged at Jane. Steve grabbed the swinging arm before it connected with Jane's face, locking the wrist in a karate hold. Jane stood up and quickly pressed the safety sensor on the nearest wall. Uniformed police entered and took Vincenti under their control, out of the room and down to a holding cell.

\* \* \*

It was nearly five o'clock when Jane and Steve returned to the Sunbury Police station after searching Vincenti's North Melbourne unit and Woodend property. Oliver greeted them when they came in through the security door into the main back office.

"Congratulations Jane, but I did warn you he might snap. Maybe you do need me as a protector after all."

Jane sighed and sat down on a chair. "Okay, perhaps I do, Oliver. Anyway, the DPP think we have an airtight case."

"Did you find anything at his city unit or Woodend property, Jane?"

"Yes, ticket stubs of all his trips. He'd filed them under tax claims in a locked drawer in his study at Woodend. There were two files. One file contained the Vincenti trips and the second file, the Variti trips. The second file also contained the Variti passport."

Steve Ho laughed. "I'd like to see his lawyer explaining that."

Oliver looked at Jane. "How did you get Vincenti to volunteer his fingerprints?"

"I thought he felt that he was invincible. That was his downfall, as he was so sure that his alias was still unknown to us that he was only too willing to give his prints, to eliminate himself from our inquiries."

Steve leaned against the desk facing Oliver. "She dangled the bait under his nose. I watched as he nibbled at it, and then took it. In the interview room, Vincenti's body language was tense. He was sweating." Steve grinned at Jane. "Every time he tried to take control of the interview, you put him at a disadvantage. I still remember the look on his face when he began to realise

that he might have met his match, when he reckoned that he might have underestimated you. But when he suddenly snapped, I thought he was going to kill you."

"But thankfully, because of you, he didn't," Jane got up from her chair. "Come on you two, it's getting late. Let's go over the road to the Ball Court Hotel. I feel like one celebration drink."

"Your shout, my love?"

"Yes."

The trio, walked across Macedon Street and in through the front door of the hotel. The bistro bar was empty. Jane ordered and paid for three glasses of light beer. They sat down at one of the bistro tables.

"Cheers," said Jane.

"Well done you two," remarked Oliver."

"The kudos really goes to you, Boss. It was your insistence that we find concrete evidence against Vincenti." Steve sipped from his glass, before continuing. "Was it simply a hunch, or did you have a secret source of information?"

Jane's face went pale. "What?"

"It's just that I couldn't see in the beginning that Vincenti was the prime suspect, Boss. What put you onto him?"

"Steve, it was only a feeling, that's all. Now let's drink up. We've got lots of paper work to do before we go back to the city."

Oliver put his empty glass down. "You're not staying at *Wyndales* tonight?"

Jane shook her head. The table fell silent for a few minutes.

Steve picked up the empty glasses. "I'll take these to the bar. Thanks for the drink. See you back at the station." He walked over to the bar, left the glasses on the counter, and then walked over to the door. He turned, flashed a smile, and left.

Jane stood up and put on her parka. Oliver walked with her to the hotel door and held it open. She walked outside into the chill of the evening air.

*Brrr!*

"Jane?"

"Yes?"

"You didn't answer my question?"

"No, I didn't, did I? I need time to tidy up all the paperwork. We may not finish until late. Steve can drive me back to my place."

"Do you think that Steve knows about your ethereal powers?"

"What?"

"Jane, I saw you turn into the colour of a ghost when he asked if you had a secret source of information."

"Hell Oliver. You're right about me nearly freaking out. If Steve knows, then everyone will get to know. I'll be pensioned out of the force for being medically unfit."

Oliver laughed.

"Calm down, Jane. I honestly think that Steve was teasing you. Remember we told him about your experience of communication with the ghost of Ryan down at the coast. Although we have both since made light of your

experience, it wouldn't surprise me if Steve would understand if you confided in him."

"Don't talk nonsense."

They had now crossed over the dual carriageway and were walking across the lawn in front of the police station.

"You know you can stay over. We need to talk. Promise that you'll phone, when you are nearly ready to leave. Allow me fifteen minutes to get to the station. I can pick you up, and take you back to Macedon, or you can go with Steve to the city. I'll leave that up to you."

"I'll think about it." She got up. Oliver followed her back to the police station. Jane stopped outside the front doors. She faced him.

"There's no need to come in. I need to concentrate on my reports. And stop pouting." She smiled, cupped his face with her hands, and then kissed him lightly and quickly. "I'll phone you." She turned and walked briskly through the self-opening doors.

\* \* \*

Jane and Steve spent nearly three hours typing reports into their laptops. Finally Steve stretched and yawned, and Jane looked at her watch.

"Heck, its eight o'clock."

"I don't know about you, but I'm bushed. I'm going to grab some takeaway, then go and stay at the motel again tonight. I'm too tired to drive back to the city tonight."

"Have you been talking to Oliver?"

"Boss?"

"You're not being very subtle. I'll phone him and get him to pick me up."

"Good. You two need to talk. I'll see you here tomorrow morning then?"

"No, I'll make my own way back to the city office during the morning. I'll catch up with you then, Steve. Thanks for your loyalty."

"Loyalty? Hey, you make me sound like a puppy. I'm happy to work with you. I've told you that many times before. You're a good copper. Oliver's a lucky man. My only concern is that he won't wait for you forever."

"I need time."

"Now where have I heard that excuse before? As a friend, do me a favour and take back the engagement ring. The poor bloke has been tripping over his bottom lip since you tossed it back at him. There's no reason why you can't balance your career with marriage."

Jane smiled. "You're a good friend. Oliver has already confided that he's asked you to be his best man."

"And I accepted. The rest is up to you. You'd better call him. I'm going to get my takeaway. See you tomorrow in the city office."

## Epilogue

Three months later, Jane parked her car underneath the police building in St Kilda Road, where the 'Special Operations Squad' was located. She swiped her security card through the door latch that led to the reception area, walked through to the front door, and went outside.

She bought a takeaway cappuccino at the small sandwich shop, located next to the front entrance, and then went into the police reception area. She walked over to the lift, and pressed the button to the fifth floor. The early morning sun shone when the doors opened through the windows along the corridor. She went directly to her office. Jane pulled out her security card again to swipe it through the computerised catch. She smiled at Oliver's ring as it sparkled in the sunlight. She thought,

*I'm glad I took the ring back that night. It's strange how calm I feel.*

It was then, that she noticed the office was already open. Steve Ho sat on the chair next to her desk. He looked up and smiled as she entered.

"Morning, Boss."

"Morning, Steve. You're in early, too."

"Yes, I couldn't sleep. I guess, like you, I wanted to take one last look at our *Avaritia* file before going to court at ten to hear the judge's sentence."

"Like you, I'm glad the trial has finished. The DPP says that Vincenti will get life."

"I hope so. He's fifty-three now, and will be at least in his seventies by the time he faces the charges, waiting for him in Hong Kong. He'll never see freedom again, and that gives me great satisfaction."

Jane nodded. "I was glad that Vincenti was remanded in custody until the trial." She took off the lid from the polystyrene cup containing the cappuccino and sipped it.

"He's a greedy man. I reckon he would kill his own mother, given the chance to earn more money."

"At least his wife and daughter can follow their own lives now. I bumped into Anna in the city yesterday. She's a new woman, and told me that she's engaged to a nice Chinese gentleman. Those were her words."

"I noted that the Vincenti meat exports company has been wound up. What's Anna doing with herself?"

"She's in partnership with her fiancé. They've opened a Chinese restaurant in North Melbourne. Apparently Anna is a talented cook."

"I wish them well." Steve pulled a paper out from the inside pocket of his jacket. "I got this email from my friend in Hong Kong, this morning. I know you'll be interested." He handed the paper to Jane. She read it in silence. Her eyes bulged.

"Oh my God."

"Interesting huh?"

"Vincenti certainly didn't commit these two new severance package-style murders in Hong Kong."

"No. The PM results state that these two men died only one week ago."

"Our Vincenti has been in custody for the last three months. But it certainly looks like *Avaritia* is still operating."

"Or perhaps a new version of it. I don't envy them in Hong Kong. It'll be impossible to get any secret employee breaking the code of death of the company. I think my friend is correct in that the Chinese Hong Kong connection has taken over. Any tour company could participate in the *Avaritia* money-laundering scheme. There will always be people trying to clean money obtained from illegal sources. I reckon trying to stop money-laundering is like the little Dutch boy plugging the dyke with his finger." Steve got out of his chair, his hand in his trouser pockets, and paced around the room. "*Avaritia* was the signatory on the labels, Spooky stuff."

"Yes."

"Talking about spooky, I believe in Karma or what you call fate. I also believe however, in the spiritual world. Spirits can be very useful to the living."

"What?" Jane's face flushed. She suddenly felt light headed. "But, surely, Steve, as a police officer, you work every day with facts. Our job is collecting facts and cold hard evidence. We can't rely on the ethereal world."

"Why not? I've gone over and over our files. The more I read them, the more I'm convinced that you had more than a gut feeling about Mr Jo Vincenti. Initially, there was nothing to say that he was our prime suspect. Yet you persisted. In fact, you became obsessive in your pursuit to find concrete evidence against him. Why?"

"What are you inferring?"

"I'm simply saying that I believe in the supernatural. I believe that someone, not of this world helped with our investigation."

Jane gasped. "What?"

"Which victim was it? Gee? Malloy? Grant?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Steve clicked his fingers. "I know, it was Eddie Grant, wasn't it? That's why you kept distancing yourself from me at the tip. You had the perfect witness. But in the end, the case was solved by good old-fashioned police work."

"I – I'm sorry Steve. I don't understand."

"This is strictly between you and me. I believe in the fact that you actually communicated with Ryan O'Byrne, when you were on sick leave down at the coast. It's been documented that some people, after serious head injuries, actually develop or discover other senses after such injuries."

"Both Oliver and I don't know what we saw when we were at the cottage." Jane fiddled with her ponytail. "Why can't you forget this theory?"

"I can't and I won't, because I've experienced a communication with a dead person myself. I wouldn't and haven't told anyone, until you now, because I'd be considered a nut-case and invalidated out of the police force." He stopped pacing and returned to his chair. "I know what you are going through."

"You do?"

"Yes. Well, perhaps not. My communication with a ghost was been with a departed relative. My late grandfather communicated with me when I visited my grandmother in Hong Kong after his death. He appeared next to me when I

visited our favourite fishing spot. It wasn't scary. I guess what I'm saying, is that you don't have to hide your new ability from me."

Jane sat in silence for a few moments. She sighed.

"I don't intentionally make these communications happen."

"I know. My experience however is only with my late grandfather. He was more of a father to me than my own. I think the bond between us was so strong, that it continued after he died." Steve leaned forward in his chair.

"Steve, I wonder if I'll have another ethereal experience. I didn't experience any during our last short investigation."

"But we were only assigned to help protect the visiting Premier and his wife. There was no death involved."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Promise that you will tell me if it happens again. I won't tell anyone. I can help you keep your secret. It's an awesome ability. Use it."

"I'll tackle that, when and *if* another spirit contacts me." Jane looked at Steve. "Thanks for being such a good friend. I can always rely on you. That's why I chose you for my squad."

"Really?"

"Yes. I was relieved when you accepted."

"As I said before, I appreciate what you've been through."

"The attack? That was my fault."

"No, I'm not referring to the attack by Greenough, or Vincent, or your spiritual contacts." Steve leaned forward in his chair. "The police force's hierarchy is changing. Good officers like you are now being promoted." Steve

grinned at her. "It's not easy being an Asian in a Caucasian force. I'm glad you're one of the new breed. It's an honour to work with you, really it is."

Jane felt her face blush as she sipped her coffee. She didn't respond. Instead, she got up, walked to the window, and stared out into the parkland below.

"Are you okay? I thought you'd snap at me or tell me to mind my own business or deny everything. You seem distracted. Or are you simply missing Oliver? He gets back from London tomorrow morning, doesn't he? Lucky devil, wasn't he, getting to talk at the police profiling conference."

"Yes, he was. Pity I was too busy to go with him, but I had to be here for the court proceedings against Vincenti."

"Was everything all right at your check-up yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly healthy." Jane dipped her stirring stick into the froth on the coffee, and licked it slowly. "I couldn't phone him after the appointment, as he was already flying home. Anyway, it's best I tell him in person when I pick him up from the airport in the morning."

"Tell him what?"

Jane sat down. She felt a big grin appear on her face.

"I'm pregnant!"

The End

***Severance Packages: A Crime Paranormal Novel and  
Exegesis focussing on the Electronic and Digital  
Publication of Creative Writing***

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# INTRODUCTION

Writing and print and the computer are all ways of technologizing the word.

Walter J. Ong (1998)<sup>1</sup>

Electronic and digital publishing<sup>2</sup> in the form of E-books and digital print books are established and steadily growing industries in the USA and Canada, while in Australia they are still relatively new media. This Master of Arts project comprises a novel, *Severance Packages*, written for electronic and digital publication, and an accompanying exegesis that contextualises the novel in relation to its genre and to the emerging field of electronic and digital publication in Australia.

Creative writers in Australia, as in North America, operate within turbulent, market-driven publishing networks. In particular, the globalisation of the traditional print publishing industry affords creative writers a world of seemingly diminishing traditional<sup>3</sup> publication opportunities, particularly in Australia (Wilding, 2000: 152-4). Most books are still traditionally published. However, well-established, traditionally published writers are now dabbling in electronic publication (Courtenay, 2000; King, 2000; Edwards, 2000; Alexander, 2002). There is also evidence of an increasing number of Australian electronic/digital publishers, with expanding fiction lists, such as Writers

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<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Ong 2002, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, Methuen, London, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> 'Electronic and digital publishing' refers to publications facilitated by electronic distribution, such as electronic download, compact disc (CD) format and digitally printed books, printed on demand in runs of 1 – 2,500 copies.

<sup>3</sup> 'Traditional publication' refers to the offset printed publication and non-electronic distribution of books.

Exchange, Common Ground Publishing and Jacobyte Books. However, these publishers are still positioned as the 'other', or 'fringe', of Australian publishing.

My novel *Severance Packages* emerges from this fringe area, the small electronic and digital book field in Australia. This thesis comprises part-exploration of my creative process, which is evident in the thesis novel component. The novel *Severance Packages* makes a contribution to the present very small body of electronically published crime/paranormal fiction by Australian women writers. Few Australian writers have had fictional work published as E-books and in digitally printed book form. Of the creative writers, only a few write crime fiction, and fewer still write in the mixed genre of crime/paranormal fiction.

The thesis also comprises, in this exegesis component, an exploration of the production process for *Severance Packages*, and the various horizons of expectation surrounding its production. The exegesis also contextualises *Severance Packages* in relation to the globalised publishing industry, to the acculturated attitudes of book consumers, and to traditional and electronic modes of marketing and distribution. Finally, the exegesis contextualises my practice as a creative writer in relation to other electronically published creative writers, and to selected niche publishers in Australia.

As previously noted, well-established, traditionally published authors have ventured into electronic publishing – but so too have lesser-known writers, for whom the new media offer publication opportunities. For example, *The Price of Freedom* (2002), an award-winning autobiography by Alex Domokos, was overlooked by traditional publishing houses, and eventually published

electronically. This project explores such opportunities for the electronic publication of creative writing in the Australian context.

The shift towards digitisation in the publication of writing can be seen as part of the ongoing development of writing as a technology, rather than a quantum leap forward or backward in terms of writing or literacy or publishing. Walter J. Ong argues that writing is a technology that is constantly evolving. He states: '[We] find it difficult to consider writing to be a technology as we commonly assume printing and the computer to be. Yet writing (and especially alphabetic writing) is a technology' (Ong, 1998: 81). Historically, oral stories preceded the scribes' written stories. The scribes were replaced by the hand press, which was superseded by mass press/printing of books with the Gutenberg revolution. Printed scripts for plays emerged and later, scripts for movies and television. Hence, prior to the digital revolution, the delivery platform for the narrativised 'word' changed from word-of-mouth form, to handwritten form, to printed form, to electronic form – yet the 'word' itself remained as the basis of the narrative. It is also the case that the more established the delivery platform, the more naturalised it becomes; therefore it becomes the standard against which technologised innovations in 'word' delivery are measured and judged.

Generally speaking, the introduction and adoption of a new technologised delivery platform for the 'word' is perceived to herald the withering or even inevitable obsolescence of older delivery platforms. For example, it was thought that video would supersede film, that television and then the computer would sound the death knell for the book. However, the

'word' itself has proved to be robust, and to have been translated into, rather replaced by, its technologised delivery formats. According to Ilana Snyder:

[the] computer does not necessarily signal the death of the printed book. The introduction of a new technology of writing does not automatically render older ones obsolete, mainly because no technology has ever proven adequate for all needs. For example, even though printing completely replaced handwriting in book production, it did not spell the end of handwriting (Snyder, 1997: 2).

Nevertheless, there is an ingrained cultural conviction that printed books are better than E-books, as well as a persistent preference to feel and smell the printed page. There is also a perception that 'screen text' is qualitatively different to 'printed-paper text' – whereas the actual difference is the technology used to deliver the text. Such concepts and reactions to electronic books are part of an ongoing reaction to technological change in the publishing industry.

The thesis novel *Severance Packages* is traditional fiction intended for electronic and digital publication. In the field of electronic and digital fiction, there are the following types of writing and delivery formats:

- a) Hyperfiction. This writing/delivery format uses hyperlinks within the story. The narrative is therefore interlinked and non-linear, and must be read through a browser on a computer screen. The links can be internal (within the book itself) or external to the Web. For the writer, there is the danger that the reader may have no sense of plot, and can be taken elsewhere on the Web and not return to the book.

- b) Traditional fiction in electronic and digital format. This writing/delivery format has no hyperlinks and uses linear narratives with conventional sequential plots. This type of fiction can be downloaded from the Internet and read on desktop or laptop computer screens, or portable pocket size readers; the download can be printed out on paper to be read. As well, this type of fiction can be produced also in CD form, in multiple reader formats, thus saving computer hard drive space.

As a manuscript intended for publication as an E-book, *Severance Packages* contains no hypertext,<sup>4</sup> or hyperlinks. My novel reads in a linear fashion like a 'normal' book, for publication and distribution in both electronic and digital print formats. There is general confusion among readers acculturated to traditionally printed books, that an E-book is 'hypertext' or a story published on the Internet, and therefore not a 'proper' book, or is a second-rate book compared to the traditional paperback. I have lost count of the number of times that well-meaning friends have introduced me as a 'writer, who publishes on the Internet'. These potential readers, who are of my age group, usually say, 'Oh, so you are not a proper author?' or, 'So they are not proper books!' or, 'When will your work be properly published in print?' in my view, such comments devalue my published work.

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<sup>4</sup> Hypertext is a writing form that utilizes the networking capabilities of hyperlinks and the Web, and can only be read via a browser on a computer screen.

There have been studies, papers and conferences about the 'new' publishing field involving E-books<sup>5</sup> and D-books<sup>6</sup> compared with P-books,<sup>7</sup> however little has been stated from the point of view of the electronically published writer. I embarked upon this project in order to explore my position as an electronically published writer and to compare digitised publication with traditional publication methods.

In Chapter One, I explore my own writing, editing, marketing and distribution processes, as the writer of the thesis novel *Severance Packages*. I compare these processes with those utilised in the production of a traditionally published book, and show how my literary mentors influence my chosen mixed genre. My writing for electronic and digital publication reveals a closer involvement of me as the writer in the editing, marketing, distribution - and even the cover design - of the product.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the global publishing industry, the traditional publishing context, and finally the Australian publishing industry in relation to these contexts.

In Chapter Three, I review a small case study involving two traditionally published Australian authors who have also been electronically published, and two electronic publishers practices and a small offset print publisher, and relate and compare their experiences with my own work.

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<sup>5</sup> E-books are electronically formatted for sale via the Internet, to be read on a computer screen or electronic reader.

<sup>6</sup> D-books are digitally printed, in a small batch or individually, after being ordered online and paid for by the consumer.

<sup>7</sup> P-books are printed books, produced using traditional offset techniques.

# CHAPTER ONE

## The Production of *Severance Packages*

Above all, the mystery tells a story and provides for us the satisfaction of excitement, suspense, and vicarious danger.

P.D. James (1996)<sup>8</sup>

### Horizons of expectation

As a writer of popular fiction for electronic publication, I encounter horizons of expectation impinging on the writing, editing, publishing, marketing, and distribution of my work. It could be said that all fiction writers, whether print or electronically published, are positioned within different horizons of expectation, which affect their work and its – and their – relationship with the reader. In this chapter, I explore the particular expectations, or context, impinging on me as the writer of the thesis novel *Severance Packages*, and my responses to those expectations. I first explore expectations surrounding writing, secondly, those surrounding publication, and finally expectations surrounding marketing and distribution.

### The writing of *Severance Packages*

*Severance Packages* can be categorised as a form of popular fiction generally termed the 'crime novel'. Stephen Knight claims that there is 'unclarity [sic] in writing on crime fiction, which comes from the overlapping terms used to

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<sup>8</sup> James, P. D. 1996, 'Forward', in Miller, Ron 1996, *Mystery! A Celebration*, KQED Books, San Francisco (p. x).

describe this form of writing' (Knight, 1996: 3). Knight argues that 'some call it [crime fiction] the thriller, which relies on the emotive impact on the reader; others call it the mystery, stressing complexity of the plot. Detective story is another term, with a focus on a detective who solves the crime' (3). Knight concludes that the term 'crime fiction' remains the best term for the genre. He notes that other terms sometimes used in fact describe a subgenre. With this in mind, *Severance Packages* can be categorised as a hybrid crime novel incorporating elements of the police procedural, paranormal and romance genres. The police procedural is a mystery story which imitates the activities of a police force as they solve crimes. Paranormal novels incorporate ghosts and supernatural phenomena not widely accepted as real by mainstream scientists. Romance novels are based around romantic love, and often contain sexual tension.

*Severance Packages* is the second novel in my Jane Doe crime series. The prequel *Flowers from the Grave* (2001) introduced Jane Doe, a Detective Inspector in charge of the murder squad at Victoria Police headquarters, and covered her investigation into a series of murders of prostitutes by a serial killer. The first novel also introduces Jane's boyfriend, Oliver Tarrant, a police profiler and psychology academic, and Jane's colleague, ex-Hong Kong police officer Senior Sergeant Steve Ho. The novel also introduces Jane's newfound ability to see and communicate with ghosts.

As a writer of crime fiction for electronic publication, there are two broad areas of negative expectation impinging on my work. First, crime fiction is seen generally as a lesser or inferior form of creative writing compared to so-called 'literary' fiction. The Australian crime and 'literary' novelist Garry Disher has

spoken of this phenomenon in relation to the Melbourne Writers' Festival and its neglect of so-called 'lowbrow' fiction. Disher states:

[children's] and crime writing are seen as lesser forms and their practitioners not good enough to write proper books, but most of all there's the fear that a children's or crime writer might (lowering my voice conspiratorially here) embarrass the other panelists, the proper writers, the famous overseas guests (2002: 7).

The second negative expectation relates to the acculturated, possibly 'highbrow' attitudes of fiction readers – perhaps still the majority – that electronically published books are inferior to traditional print books. My awareness of these negative expectations is stronger now than when I first began to write fiction for electronic publication.

As a fiction writer, I write what I like to read, but I am also aware of the expectations of my reading audience, which are different to the negative expectations above. I write primarily for women readers who are electronically literate and actively engaged with electronic print culture. *Severance Packages* falls within a fiction mode whose stories rely on generic formulas. Part of the pleasure of writing and reading these stories is their familiar formula. Writer and academic Marele Day describes crime fiction writers as 'storytellers', who give the reader the thrill of the new and the comfort of the old, in that the genre predictably gives the reader certain expectations (1996: xiii). As such, Day argues, readers expect the familiar 'old' in that a crime will be committed and through the course of the story the writer will give the answers – 'the how-why-

who-where-and-when' of the story. The thrill of the 'new' is found in the particular historical period in which the novel is set, and in its story elements – its characters, settings and events. Day concludes that each new writer adds to the genre and changes its shape (1996: xiii) – as I have done with *Severance Packages*, by mixing the police procedural, paranormal and romance genres.

I also have a series of traditionally published literary mentors, who are generally recognised as good writers, as well as good crime fiction writers. Different aspects of my mentors' work have influenced the Jane Doe series and the thesis novel *Severance Packages*. My most significant mentors are the crime writers P. D. James and Elizabeth George, whose respective novels focus on a serial police protagonist, include social issues within their plots, and link each novel with an ongoing romantic story involving the police protagonist. Each police protagonist in each author's novels has a second-in-command who acts as a supportive confidante and foil. Commander Dalgliesh in James' novels is university-educated, a published poet and widower, now married to his job. His second-in-command is Kate Miskin, an East End Londoner, who is in direct contrast to Dalgliesh in class, gender, and cultural terms. Inspector Lindley in George's crime novels is a peer in the House of Lords, and in the later books, he is married. His second-in-command is Barbara Havers, who again is in direct contrast to Lindley in class, gender, and cultural terms. James' series covers social issues of nuclear power, the Greens, incest and old age, while George in her series has covered poverty, drugs, and paedophilia.

Before writing the first Jane Doe novel, I sought out electronic crime fiction, and read the work of Michael La Rocca and Betty Sullivan La Pierre. Both these writers weave their plots around current social issues. In *Vigilante*

*Justice* (2002), La Rocca's protagonist Gary Drake – an Internal Affairs detective – takes on the system, even to the point of defying the law to avenge his brother's death from cocaine. In the course of the story, Drake learns that he is HIV-positive, and the social issue of AIDS becomes a sub-plot. In Sullivan La Pierre's *Murder.Com* (2001), the protagonist is Angie Nevers. Although this novel is a police procedural, it also features sub-plots involving romance, a secret past, and the social issues of blackmail and illegitimacy, all neatly linked to the computer company owned by Angie Nevers' murdered husband.

In *Severance Packages*, I incorporate aspects of my mentors' fiction, adapted to an Australian context. Like my mentors' novels, *Severance Packages* is concerned with a social issue (corporate downsizing), as well as a criminal issue (money laundering). In a similar way to Adam Dalgliesh and Inspector Lindley, my police protagonist, Jane Doe has several characters who act as foils or 'opposites' and who cast into relief her 'feminine' side, providing her with the constant dilemma of being torn between career versus marriage, and factual versus ethereal police investigation.

As previously stated, *Severance Packages* is the second novel in the series. When writing the novel, I had in mind the expectations of the readers of my first Jane Doe novel, and of my publisher. Jane Doe fans in the UK and USA have emailed me asking what happens to Jane after *Flowers from the Grave*. They ask: 'What happens next?', 'Will she get married?', 'Will she continue to see ghosts?', and 'What happens to her career?'. The following is an excerpt of an email from a reader's review of *Flowers from the Grave* after it was first published in the USA by Crossroads Publishing ([crossroadspub.com](http://crossroadspub.com)) as an E-

book. The reader Linda Green<sup>9</sup> lives in the UK, and travels frequently, using her E-reader. She writes:

I read a lot of mysteries and detective novels but the outcome of this one took me by surprise and true to form I could not decide who the killer was until all was revealed at the end. There was also a little shock towards the end, which totally threw me off guard and did nothing to help me work out the conclusion.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first introduction to Jane Doe and am very much looking forward to the next book in the series, as this will no doubt take a totally different direction yet again (Appendix A).<sup>10</sup>

The readers of the first book in the Jane Doe series, *Flowers from the Grave* (2001), came from the United Kingdom, Europe, the USA and Australia. Readers from all these places have sent me emails asking when the next 'Aussie' book about Doe is coming. The success of the audio version of the first book with rural people in remote Queensland, Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria prompted me to use an Australian rural setting in *Severance Packages*.

Writer Jack Hodgins considers that 'perhaps the first job of the fiction writer is to convince the reader to believe in the world of the story – at least temporarily' (1994: 72). A key way of achieving this is to create a believable and distinctive setting for the story. The township of Sunbury and its environs provide the setting for the action in *Severance Packages*. I know the area well,

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Green's full reader review is in Appendix A.

<sup>10</sup> Another reader's review is cited in Appendix B.

as a resident for twenty-seven years. Sunbury lies in one of the oldest wine-growing areas in Australia; the town's surrounding vineyards and the local tip are used extensively as locales in *Severance Packages*. The original idea for the plot came from a short news item two years ago about a severed arm found at a Melbourne suburban tip. More recently, in 2004 Melbourne police searched a tip near Mornington for the remains of the missing wife and child of alleged murderer John Sharpe (Hogan, 2004: 2). It appears therefore that a key element of the scenario in *Severance Packages* is plausible.

In the 1990s Stephen Knight conducted a survey on the differences between international readers' preferences for protagonists in crime fiction. The survey results were:

COUNTRY	DETECTIVE METHOD			
	Police	Private eye	Amateur	Any method
UK	38%	7%	46%	9%
USA	13%	50%	20%	17%
Australia	31%	25%	9%	35%

(Knight, 1996:10)

From this survey, it appears that Australians have a dislike of the gentleman amateur, and prefer a police detective. My detective protagonist Inspector Jane Doe is such an individual.

My novel uses third person limited omniscient point of view. Jack Hodgins contends that this form of narration:

[tells] all about the main character but knows nothing more about the rest of the characters or the outside world than the main character does. This point of view can be moved in so close to the main character as to be almost first person. We see the world through the character's eyes. But the same voice can also stand back just a little and cause us to see the character from the outside (Hodgins, 1994: 190).

My narrative is focalised through the consciousness of Jane Doe, so the reader only knows what is happening from Jane's position, and how she feels about her co-workers, her fiancé (Oliver Tarrant), the ghost of one of the victims (Eddie), and the murder investigation. Jane's highly efficient, professional persona is often at odds with her private self; this is reflected in her insecure emotional relationship with Oliver, and in her fear that her paranormal communications will expose her to ridicule in the police force. As most readers of the prequel to this novel were female, I have written *Severance Packages* to appeal to this audience. Readers are therefore more likely to identify with Jane and to enjoy the ongoing romance in the series between Jane and Oliver.

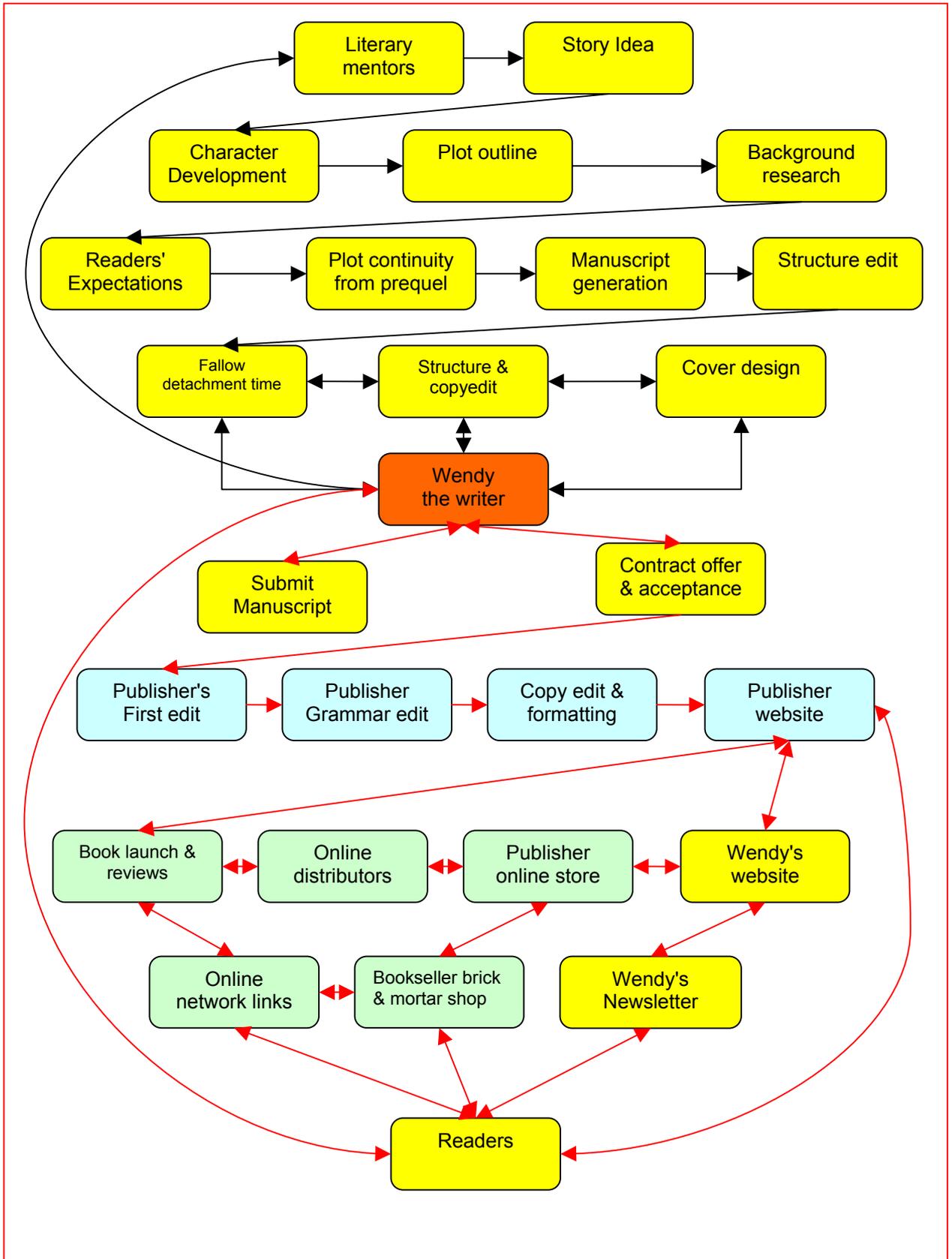
Readers of crime novels expect an action-packed beginning. In *Severance Packages*, the prologue starts with a short account of an innocent man finding the grisly remains of a murder victim, before the story involving Jane Doe begins. This beginning reflects the advice of an editor at Crossroads Publishing, who edited the first edition of the prequel *Flowers from the Grave*. I was advised by this editor to shorten the prologue, to add more action and horror, and to set the scene for the reader, by immediately immersing them in the action. In keeping with the conventions of the crime novel, I have

incorporated cliffhangers both within, and at the end of chapters in *Severance Packages*, to provide narrative drive and to propel readers to continue reading. In addition, I have kept the length of *Severance Packages* to around 40,000 words, that is, to the length of a traditional novella, which is popular with my readers. My decision to use the novella length is to give readers ease in reading from a computer screen or E-reader, thus making them more likely to finish the book and to encourage them to read more of the E-book series.

### **The editing of *Severance Packages***

In this section, I explore the editing process of *Severance Packages*. However, the notion that the creation of *Severance Packages* – and indeed, any of my novels – can be neatly divided into discrete 'writing' and 'editing' processes is misleading. In fact, the creation process of *Severance Packages* has been influenced at both the writing and editing stages by the expectations of my readers and publisher of the Jane Doe series, of the crime genre, and of the E-book format. As well, the writing and editing process overlap to a certain extent.

The following chart shows the creation and marketing process for my E-books and D-books. The connecting black lines reflect my 'internal' world as a writer generating a new book. As soon as I have contact with my publisher, editors or readers, the connection lines change to red to reflect the two-way flow of communication. Once the book is published, there is ongoing, two-way communication, between me as the author and readers, reviewers, bookstores, the online network, and my publisher.



According to Daniel Chandler (1995: 48), who conducted an extensive study of literary and academic writers' relationship to the act of writing, writers' experience of a sense of being able to 'pin down' their meaning in writing may come in part from the malleability of text. The need for a writer to revise '[may] sometimes be reinforced by a romantic sense of the inadequacy of language for expressing what we mean' (49); on the other hand, through revision of text, writers can get closer to what they actually think and feel (52). From my point of view, I feel the need to revise any manuscript several times, simply to submit the best possible manuscript to my publisher. I also revise to clarify any possible misunderstandings of the meaning of my text for my readers.

After writing the first draft manuscript, I leave the work for a few weeks, in order to detach myself from the work, and to give myself some 'fallow' time to allow shortcomings in the work to become more obvious to me. After this period, I begin the structural edit, by first closely reading a printout of the novel. I initially check for continuity of plot, time sequences, and character development and consistency. The initial structural edit for *Severance Packages* involved very minor changes, as I had already constructed detailed plot and character outlines, and in a sense these ensured a structurally sound first draft.

After the structural edit, I do a complete copyedit of the manuscript. According to Chandler, some writers consider the activity of copyediting for mechanical accuracy requires '[so] much detachment that it is often more effectively done by someone other than the author' (1995: 153). For myself, I feel obliged to submit as 'clean' a manuscript as possible to my publisher. For the copyedit, I achieve a level of detachment from my manuscript by utilising the

software program Text Aloud. This program uses a voice actor to 'read' the novel aloud to me, as I read the text on screen. I find this program stops me from quickly skimming through the text and not noticing errors. Instead, I hear misspelt words and grammatical errors, pause the reader's voice, and correct the text. Once this initial copyedit is complete, I then read the manuscript again in print form to double-check for any remaining structural, grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors.

Once the 'internal' edits are completed, I submit the manuscript electronically to my publisher. If the book is accepted for publication, my E-publisher sends me an electronically signed copy of the contract for my acceptance and counter signature. This sometimes takes less than an hour, if we are both online at the same time. The initial publisher edits commence.

I have never dealt with E-publishers who have demanded payment for their services. Unfortunately, there are many E-publishers who entice writers into such contracts, which are really a form of 'vanity publishing' where no editing is done, and the finished work unprofessionally produced. My current publisher Writers [sic] Exchange E-publishing has manuscripts professionally edited, with no charges, as would a traditional offset print publisher. However, the structural, grammar and copy editing process is faster, with manuscripts sent as email attachments between the editors' computers and my own.

This has been my experience with my previous American publishers. Sending a manuscript by normal post or 'snail mail' is obsolete. The publisher returns my manuscript electronically, with structural suggestions and comments highlighted in square brackets or coloured text within the relevant part of the manuscript. I am then responsible for updating the manuscript. Once updated, I

return the manuscript with my amendments and comments, via email attachment to the publisher. The manuscript is next sent to the grammar editor and then to the copyeditor, who may live in Australia or the USA or England, in the globalised network of E-publishing. Grammar and copyediting take from one to six months, or even longer, depending on the length of the manuscript submitted. This is a cordial, collegial and two-way process, where edited sections of the manuscript are sent to me, I approve or question changes, and return the manuscript, either to an editor or to the publisher. I have learned that great care is required for accuracy at this stage, otherwise I will need to edit the manuscript further.

This involvement positions me in a book's creation at the base level, and has given me an appreciation of the publisher's processes. In this sense, writing for an E-publisher means that I necessarily become more involved in the actual production processes. My experience of greater involvement in the book process is validated by Robin Freeman, who notes that the development of electronic processing has been probably the first major change to the delivery process within the author-publisher relationship, passing responsibility for the initial recording of the work in type (from manuscript to typescript) from the publisher back to the writer' (Freeman 2001: 108 - 9). Similarly Bill Cope notes that authors are no longer specialised wordsmiths but rather 'players in a collaborative design team' (2001a: 18).

The submission guidelines of my present publisher (Writers Exchange) require the manuscript to have single line spacing within paragraphs, no indents at the start of paragraphs, and a line space between paragraphs. Once the editing is complete, this format makes it easier for the publisher to reformat the

manuscript into the different E-reader book formats, such as 'LIT' for the Microsoft reader, 'PDF' for the Adobe reader, or 'HTML'<sup>11</sup> for reading via a Web browser on a computer screen. The publisher also reformats the manuscript for the digital print company BookSurge. Once *Severance Packages* is produced as a D-book, it will look and feel like a 'normal' traditionally printed paperback book.

In summary, it can be said that the pre-publication process in electronic and digital publishing involves a collapse of the traditional 'author function' of 'wordsmith' into the 'editor' function generally. This collapse, or merging, can encompass cover design as well. For example, when the now defunct Crossroads Publishing accepted *Flowers from the Grave* for publication, an artist was commissioned to design the cover. This meant I lost 15% of the retail cost for each book. However, for *Severance Packages* I have omitted such loss of royalty payments by designing the cover myself using computer software and personal photographs to avoid copyright problems. There have been endless hours of fun, photographing a cheese slicer for the 'hatchet', bottles, wine glasses and tomato sauce 'blood' for the cover (see Appendix C).

Finally, the above discussion shows some of the ways in which my involvement in a book's editing and production differs from that of a traditionally published fiction writer. Not only is the communication between me and my publisher faster and more direct, but I also contribute more than a traditional author to the editing, layout and 'packaging' of the final product – my book.

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<sup>11</sup> These files are read on a browser, or on the mobipocket program (my personal choice, as I can add or remove bookmarks, and change the size of the text).

## **The marketing and distribution of *Severance Packages***

The distribution and marketing of E-books and D-books involves both electronic networking and a personal commitment by the author. For me, it is an ongoing process, as I constantly seek new ways of marketing my work. The flowchart I created shows the two-way flow of communication between myself, my publisher, and my current readers and potential readership. This communication is based on electronic networking using the Internet, which is of crucial importance in the marketing of my work. In this sense, I have adopted a business model demanded by the contemporary globalised, networked marketplace. According to Dan Poynter, 'statistics indicate that if you are not using the Internet as part of your business you will no longer be competitive enough to compete in the global digital economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (Poynter, 2002: xix).

The buyers of my book will be technologically minded, and enthusiastic adopters of the Web and/or electronic/digital technology as content delivery media. *Severance Packages* is intended for publication in the following formats:

- a) Download. This format suits readers who are Internet users, comfortable with virtual shopping via the publisher, author, or online bookstore. Upon verification of payment, the reader receives an email containing a hypertext link to the Internet page to download the novel. Once the novel has been 'captured' and stored on their computer's hard drive, the reader is then able to read it in the format of their choice, such as PDF, LIT, or HTML. Readers can also download the book from their computer to an electronic reader (see Appendix D).

- b) Compact Disc (CD). Many E-books are not downloaded, but bought over the Internet or in brick and mortar shops as a digital CD. This is a popular format, as the reader does not use up space on their computer's hard drive. They simply insert the CD and 'view' the book on a reading programme. As well, the CD file can be saved on the hard drive, or loaded onto an electronic reader.
  
- c) Digital Print or D-book (Print-on-Demand, or POD). This format suits readers who prefer to read a printed paper book. The book is bought from a virtual store via a secure website and printed 'on demand' by the digital printing company, who distributes the printed paperback to the reader within 48 hours of purchase, worldwide.

In this sense, my readers and potential readers will be individuals, probably from the English-speaking world, who are Internet-literate, and who visit online bookstores (such as Amazon.com), online auction sites (such as eBay), online publishers' and writers' websites (such as Writers Exchange and my own website). According to Bill Cope, '[the] Internet and new variable print technologies create possibilities, and new markets, for book production' (2001b: 285). It is in this playing field that my novels emerge. My publisher (Writers Exchange) sells E-books and D-books via a secure, encrypted virtual store on its website, and via virtual stores worldwide, through distributors such as Fictionwise.com and BookSurge.com. BookSurge markets POD titles by distributing books worldwide via Baker and Taylor, one of the leaders in book distribution to libraries and bookstores. The result is that the D-book version of *Severance Packages* will be available to libraries and retailers worldwide.

However, as an E-author, I also expect to be involved in the marketing and distribution of *Severance Packages*, as has been the case for my previously published E-books. My personal involvement in this aspect of book production illustrates further the collapse of the traditional author function of 'wordsmith', and its merging in this instance with the traditional 'publisher functions' of 'marketer' and 'distributor'. In fact, these functions form another horizon of expectation surrounding my work and my identity as an E-author, and involve me at a highly personal level with my readers. I maintain a writer's website, which I created myself, where readers can purchase copies of my E-books and D-books (via links to my publisher) and where I encourage readers to submit reader reviews. I also send out monthly online newsletters and update my website with the latest information about my books. I network online with fellow writers and writing groups, and with readers in chat groups.

This online communication with readers functions as a highly personalised form of marketing. For example, readers of *Flowers from the Grave* have emailed me asking when the next book will be available. I also have a sequel planned for *Severance Packages* and have pre-notified readers on my website about the sequel (*Haunted Heart*), and have uploaded an image of the book cover, which I have already designed. I also self-publish audio versions of my books, liaising online with the voice actress Amy Howard Wilson, in the United States. Amy produces the CDs for distribution in the USA, Canada and Europe distribution; I burn copies and print the CD inserts and covers for distribution in Australia and New Zealand. Amy and I market the CDs through our respective websites, through eBay Australia and eBay USA, and through the virtual bookstore Amazon.com. Sales from the USA base are made via Amy

Howard Wilson under a distributor agreement with my company Wendave Audio Books, which therefore functions as a globalised small book distribution company. I am fortunate, that the local newspaper, the *Sunbury Telegraph* interviewed me (2003: 1, 14), complete with a coloured front-page photo, and another on page 14 with the interview about my involvement as an author in E-publishing industry. Such publicity is rare for niche market authors.

According to Chandler, writers refer to their texts as companions during their evolution, and state that the process of writing is 'experienced as very much a living part of the writer, but it starts to die as soon as it leaves the writer's hands . . . publication deepens this sense of separation' (Chandler, 1995: 55). My experience as an electronically published writer does not mean the death of my completed text, but the beginning of a continuing relationship with the ongoing life of my books, through my involvement in their marketing and distribution.

Five years ago, I would not have dreamed of such a venture in E-culture. The horizons of expectation generated by E-culture, and by the merging of the traditional author, publisher, marketing and distribution functions, have involved me in a more personal relationship with readers, publishers, fellow writers, and even actors, which I find very rewarding. However, I also realise the current shortcomings of marketing and distribution within the electronic publishing field.

In the next chapter, I discuss both positive and negative aspects of electronic and digital publication within the context of traditional print publication in Australia.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Publishing Context in Australia

We have sold the author, not the book. Publishers spend more on publicity than editing. That well-hyped first novel you're reading may have been rushed into print; meanwhile, the books of fine mid-career authors gather dust or don't even get published.

Garry Disher (2002)<sup>12</sup>

#### Publishing and globalisation

By using the Internet to buy E-books, readers become part of a worldwide electronic community, and participate – as consumers – in the globalised industry of E-publishing. E-publishers incorporate staff globally. The company may, for example, be based in Australia, but utilize the services of manuscript readers, editors, cover artists, and illustrators from the United States, England, Europe, or Asia. Liaison between the authors, publishers, editors and readers, occurs via the Internet. The result is a globalized industry, with the ability to distribute and buy books internationally with the click of a mouse. In this chapter, I explore the publishing industry in general and the Australian industry in particular, within the context of economic globalisation.

#### Current trends

Books are a universal commodity. Distribution occurs worldwide through brick and mortar shops or virtual stores on the Internet. Here books are bought as

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<sup>12</sup> Disher, Garry 2002, 'Chapter & Verse', *The Age* 'Saturday Extra', 25 May, p 7.

traditionally published hardbacks and paperbacks (P-books), or purchased 'on demand' as digitally printed D-books, or as downloads in E-book form or as CDs for viewing on a computer screen. This universality of the written word in book form and the globalized book publishing industry has effects upon the local Australian publishing industry, as well as Federal Government taxation revenue. *The Age* newspaper reports that:

Amazon.com is estimated to sell about \$100 million of books a year (about 10 per cent of book sales in Australia), which equates to \$10 million uncollected GST . . . [According to Readings and Music director Mark Rubbo] many customers were buying from sites such as amazon.com instead of supporting local book stores (Smith 2004: 6).

As just one small example, I have bought and read a mainstream bestseller via Amazon.com.uk months before it was physically available in Australia. This book was cheaper, including exchange rates and postage, than the book launched six months later in Australia.

Currently two major international shifts – towards economic globalisation and towards technological innovation in communication, or 'digitisation' – are working in tandem and having a major impact on the book publishing industry as a whole. Some volume of traditional print content has migrated to non-traditional print alternatives such as PDF downloads and other electronic publishing methods. According to Romano, '[the] printing industry has seen a loss of about \$16 billion [US] in revenue since 1999 as content that would have been print form moved to Internet or recorded disk distribution' (Romano 2003:

28). In Australia, large transnational traditional publishers have swallowed up Australian small publishers. Michael Wilding notes that the remaining small publishers have small distribution, small profits, and extremely tight budgets. In this environment, profit dictates publishing choices, and the end result is less diversity and fewer literary texts (Wilding, 2000: 152). Dynamic independent Australian publishers active in the 1970s and 1980s have now closed down, been taken over and absorbed, or ceased literary publishing (152). Wilding concludes that one of the main consequences of present trends is that publishing decisions are made on the accountancy model of transnational conglomerated companies, where the priority is to make a profit (152).

In recognition of the shifts towards globalisation and digitisation, and of the possibility for new economies of scale in the publishing of E-books and D-books, the Australian book industry hosted an international conference on the future of the book in 2003.<sup>13</sup> The conference brought together writers, publishers, booksellers, editors and printers to discuss the position of Australia in the global industry.

Key speakers at the conference addressed some of the issues associated with the shift towards digitisation in publishing. Paul Mercieca noted the slow acceptance of online publishing and portable e-book devices. He argued that 'the digital artefact [book] is simply an electronic file. This electronic file can also disassociate the reader from the content' (Mercieca 2003: 190). Mercieca conducted a case study of reader responses to E-books. Anecdotal evidence showed that 'the affinity readers have with the physical book, having the ability 'touch' and 'smell' the artefact is not evident in the electronic

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<sup>13</sup> This was the *Book Conference 2003: From Creator to Consumer in a Digital Age*.

publishing medium' (190). In contrast, special guest at the conference, Jason Epstein – instigator of the 'paperback revolution',<sup>14</sup> with over fifty years in the globalized world of multinational publishing – argued in favour of digitization as part of the ongoing process of globalization and technological innovation in publishing. According to Epstein, '[as] the Gutenberg era approaches its limits, today's new technologies will perform a comparable service for a worldwide marketplace' (Epstein 2003: 5). Similarly, Bill Cope, director of Common Ground Publishing, a small electronic publisher in Australia, argued that '[the] new mix of technologies: print on demand, the Internet and electronic book readers . . . when combined will make publishing books easier, quicker and cheaper, expanding the book market and increasing the cultural impact of books' (Cope 2001c: 18). Nevertheless, this is the utopian view, which is contradicted by the present reality of the Australian publishing industry, to which I now turn.

## **The Australian publishing industry**

Available statistics show that the large globalized publishers still dominate the sales lists in Australia. However, the statistics also show a slight shift in profits from traditional P-books towards E-books and sales via online Internet shops. On the one hand, according to Nielsen BookScan, the bestsellers over a four-week period to March 2003 were all P-books, and not surprisingly, the top sellers were J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Bradley Trevor Grieve's picture/caption books. Nielsen BookScan only compiles statistics on P-books, which account for the vast majority of books sold (ABS 2003a: 18). Other statistics released by the

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<sup>14</sup> In 1952, as a young editor at Doubleday, Epstein created Anchor Books, which launched the so-called 'paperback revolution' and established the trade paperback format.

Australian Bureau of Statistics in late 2003 show that '9,078 new Australian titles were published during 2001-2, of which 8,058 (89%) were printed titles originated by Australian book publishers and other major contributors' (ABS 2003b: 3)<sup>15</sup>. These statistics reflect P-books and generally reveal the strength of the P-book format and the distribution power of large multinational publishers. On the other hand, the ABS figures for 2001/2002 also show a small increase in sales of P-books by publishers selling via the Internet. While these sales were less than 0.5% of publishers' income, they show a growth in sales of electronic titles, including audio books of just over \$12 million in 2001/2002, a 16% increase from 2000/2001 (*Australian Bookseller and Publisher* 2003: 10). ABS statistics reporting sales of printed books by category show education (including professional and reference books) as the largest share of market volume, followed in order by non-fiction, fiction and children's books (ABS 2003a: 2).

Since 2001/2, the Australian publishing context has been characterised by a slight growth (1%) in P-book fiction publishing, but also by a continuing strong demand for P-book fiction compared with other book categories. The latest statistics (ABS 2003b: 4) also show sales of Australian titles growing since 2000-1, although no specific figures are available for E-book sales.

To a limited extent, the contemporary Australian publishing context is characterised also by 'corporate welfare', or Government assistance to transnational publishers. This is evident in the Books Alive program, a \$6m initiative which forms part of the Federal Government's Book Industry Assistance Plan (BIAP), designed to compensate the industry for the

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<sup>15</sup> These statistics derived from '[businesses] which had either book publishing as their main activity (book publishers) or generated \$2m or more in income from book publishing, although this was not their main activity (other major contributors)' (ABS, 2003: 1).

introduction of the GST on books.<sup>16</sup> Under the Books Alive program, a small number of P-book fiction titles are chosen for promotion each year. According to Michael Rose, the Books Alive program is 'Australia's biggest promotion of books and reading backed by \$1.9m in advertising, promotion, and publicity in 2004' (Rose 2004: 6). Of the six titles chosen for promotion in 2004 – *White Gardenia* (2002), *Selby the Wonder Dog* (2004), *The Shark Net* (2000), *Shiver* (Nikki Gemmell, (1997), *Au Revoir* (2003) and *Blacktown* (2003) – Rose notes that 'no titles are included from small or independent publishers and there is only one children's title' (Rose, 2004:6). In 2004 the Books Alive promotion was exclusive to traditional P-book retailers such as independent bookshops, book chains and department stores. A seventh Books Alive title – *Spiking the Girl* (2004) – was available only through discount department stores.

In light of the above, E-authors and E-publishers in Australia face a formidable battle for market share against the 'big league' traditional P-book publishers – even without the high-powered handouts and publicity currently received by the multinational conglomerates and traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Why do Harper Collins, Penguin, Random House, Pan, and Hodder, all large globalized publishers, get such support from the Australian Government? Is the Federal assistance to these multinational publishers purely politically motivated, or does it also reflect the economic power of these globalised publishing conglomerates?

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<sup>16</sup> 'Books Alive' is a four-year campaign funded by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and coordinated by the Australia Council, to promote the intrinsic value of books, reading and literacy (particularly of children), and the books of Australian writers.

## The Australian book consumer

Recent statistics provide graphic evidence of the strong competition faced by writers and publishers to sell a new book to the active reading public. A national telephone survey, conducted in June 2001, investigated the reading and book buying habits of approximately 1,500 Australians, 18 years and over.<sup>17</sup> The survey found that 72% of respondents had read books for pleasure in the week before the interview, a readership lower than for newspapers (92%), but ahead of magazines (63%) and reading for work or study (44%). New books fared poorly in the results. Those who had read books for pleasure in the previous week were asked about the source of each book read. The sources were as follows:

<b>BOOK SOURCE</b>	<b>READER USEAGE</b>
Bought new	29%
Borrowed from library	20%
Been in house for a long time (origins unknown)	19%
Borrowed from friend	13%
Received as a gift	10%
Bought secondhand	5%
Borrowed from someone in the house	2%
From other sources	2%

(ACNielson, no date: 8)

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<sup>17</sup> The survey formed part of the Books Alive campaign.

In summary, 44% of books were purchased (new, secondhand, or as a gift) and 35% were borrowed. Most borrowing was from libraries, but informal networks also played a significant role. The 2001 survey also collected data on the percentage of book buyers using each of the retail outlets 'often'. The following table shows where the readers surveyed bought their books:

<b>BOOK RETAIL OUTLETS</b>	<b>BUYER USAGE</b>
Book Chains	33%
Independents	12%
Second-hand bookshops	10%
Newsagent	7%
Variety Stores	6%
Direct Mail/book club	5%
Through the workplace	5%
Department store	4%
Discount bookshop	4%
Fair, garage sale	3%
Internet	1%
Through a reading group	Less than 1%

(ACNielsen, no date: 9)

Taking into account that this survey was carried out in 2001, the 1% Internet sales is not encouraging for E-book, and D-book sales. Generally, the survey shows that most people are still buying books from brick and mortar shops, and that the large book chains such as Dymocks still retain market share and power. The same survey asked the following question: 'Is Internet purchasing likely to increase?'. The responses showed that '[one] in five ruled out this option as they have no access to the Internet. Most readers (59%) consider Internet purchasing in the future to be unlikely; only one in five (21%)

consider it a possibility' (ACNielsen, 2001: 10). It should be noted that interest in Internet purchasing was stronger among men (10).

## **Developments in distribution**

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004), the percentage of households with access to a computer increased from 44% in 1998 to 66% in 2003. The percentage of Australian households with access to the Internet at home has increased even more strongly, rising from 16% in 1998 to 53% in 2003. The increase in home access to the Internet affords Internet sellers greater access to consumers.

The world's largest personal online trading community (eBay, 2004: 1) has created a new marketplace on the Internet, with one-to-one trading in an auction or 'buy now' format. Launched in the United States in 1995, eBay has separate sites in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. In 2004, Internet sales of my audio books via my virtual shop, have increased steadily each week, and most purchases within Australia have been from rural areas in all States. Prior to selling via eBay, I had sold approximately 10 audio books, but since I opened seller access via eBay, I have sold 150 audio titles. The increased sales possibly reflect acculturation of Australians to Internet buying, and in particular, to buying from eBay – as well, I hope, to increasing popularity of my work.

Through my Australian publisher, Writers Exchange, the D-book versions of my books will be distributed through the Booksurge network. Booksurge, based in the USA, services thousands of publishers and authors via its Global Publishing System (GPS). The GPS system allows publishers to print, distribute

and sell books anywhere in the world in any language and at any level of demand, simply with the click of a mouse. For example, utilizing this system, if ten copies of *Severance Packages* in D-book format were ordered, through Writers-Exchange in Australia by a bookshop in the United Kingdom, books would be printed on demand in the UK and received by the consignee within 48 hours. The cost of these ten copies would be born by the UK bookshop, at a retailer's discount, and my publisher would not have to warehouse or ship any of the books concerned. The Booksurge system also allows publishers and booksellers to package with no additional effort the E-book version of a title with the D-book sale. This is the reverse to E-publishers' commitment to E-books, with D-Books the 'add-on' product, however it also exemplifies the interaction and links between E-book and D-book production.

In February 2004, the Victorian State Government announced a \$25,000 Government grant to support the development of a print-on-demand system by the Melbourne-based Mercury Communications Group utilizing the Booksurge system. The Victorian Minister for State and Regional Development John Brumby stated that the project would lead the way in speeding up and streamlining supply chains for Victoria's digital publishing industry:

Printing on demand cuts delivery times, eliminates inventory and allows improved electronic ordering and rights reporting management . . . It can take over three weeks for books to be shipped from the United States or Europe even when they are in stock. But advances in digital printing, managed by the *Booksurge* [sic] system means books can be printed as required in the country where the order originates (Brumby 2004: 1).

The Victorian Government's Booksurge agreement parallels the Federal Government's Books Alive initiative. However, compared to the \$6m Federal backing for Books Alive, the Victorian grant of \$25,000 towards the development of digitisation in the local publishing industry seems minuscule. Although worthwhile, small digital publishers will need a lot more financial assistance to compete with the globalised traditional print market.

Nevertheless, niche market and small print publishers are moving towards D-books as an alternative to P-books. The University of Queensland Press (2002) launched print-on-demand technology in February 2002. According to Greg Bain, UQ Press deputy general manager, the POD system has been well received, and will eliminate the need for large-scale initial print runs of high-risk titles, such as first novels. At the time of the UQP launch of POD, Robert Sessions of Penguin Books Australia advised that about one hundred out-of-print titles were to be made available using the POD technology, after a successful tested and costed production of titles through its sister company, Pearson Education Australia (*SMH* 2002: 1). Sessions noted that '[it] will have the effect, potentially, of keeping books in print indefinitely. That would be good for authors, good for readers, good for publishers and booksellers' (*SMH* 2002: 3).

According to Epstein (2003), it is impossible to anticipate in detail the eventual effect of today's efficient technologies. Notwithstanding, Epstein maintains that the introduction of powerful new methods for the production, storage and distribution of books, could change the publishing industry as

profoundly as the printing press changed Gutenberg's feudal world five centuries ago.

In the next chapter, through a small case study, I explore aspects of writing and publishing, of globalisation and digitization, and of the possibilities offered by economies of scale in relation to a small sample of Australian authors and niche publishers.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Writing and Publishing in Australian Niche Markets:

#### A Case Study.

The basic problem is that there are 7 major publishers in this country and 200 little ones. That makes equal advertising and distribution - which is what it's all about - VERY difficult.

Goldie Alexander (2004)<sup>18</sup>

#### Overview

To give further insight into my experience with writing and editing for electronic and digital publication, and into my understanding of the production, marketing, distribution and viability of E-books and P-books, I conducted a small case study of representative Australian writers and publishers. The study focussed on two traditionally published Australian writers who also have been published electronically (Hazel Edwards, Goldie Alexander), and three small Australian publishers, one traditional (Ian Fraser – Indra Publishing) and two electronic (Sandy Cummins – Writers Exchange E-Publishing; Robyn Freeman – Common Ground Publishing).

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<sup>18</sup> Goldie Alexander 2004, Case study interview, p. 4.

## Case study methodology

The study used a qualitative methodology based on an open-ended questionnaire focussing on issues related to writing and publication, with a particular focus on electronic writing and publication. I confined my case study to a small number of respondents, and in particular, to small-scale Australian-based publishers, rather than multinational operators in the global marketplace, in order to make more meaningful the comparisons with my own experience, as a small player in a niche market. In doing so I was mindful of Stake's claim that '[the] more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the epistemological rationales' (Stake 2003: 136). In generating and ordering the topics for discussion in the questionnaires, I utilised two methodological approaches advocated by Clough and Nutbrown (2003). The first, dubbed the 'Russian Doll' principle, involves listing topics as statements, and then breaking down each statement into a series of research questions, in order to focus closely on defined areas (33). I used the 'Russian Doll' principle to determine the focus of my investigation, to establish topics for investigation in each questionnaire, to break each topic down into sub-categories, and then to rank each topic, and its sub-categories, within the questionnaire as a whole.

After this conceptualisation process, I generated the sets of research questions themselves. For this second process I utilised Clough and Nutbrown's 'Goldilocks' test, which – as the name implies – involves ensuring that each question is 'just right for the investigation at *this* time by the researcher in *this* setting, and not too big to be tackled in this study at this time' (2003: 34). I

compiled three different questionnaires utilising the methodology above – one questionnaire for the writers (Appendix E), one for the traditional publisher (Appendix F), and one for the electronic publishers (Appendix G). The appropriate questionnaire was sent to each respondent as an attachment via email, and respondents were requested to write their responses to each question within the questionnaire, and to email the completed questionnaire back to me.

The completed questionnaires provide valuable insights into a range of issues associated with writing and publishing within the electronic, digital and traditional offset environments in Australia today.<sup>19</sup> From my own point of view, the case study has allowed me to contextualise my own experience in this field in a disciplined and focussed way, and within a broader framework than I normally encounter in my daily practice as a digital and electronic writer. In this sense, for me this study has confirmed Stake's observation that '[the] utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience. The methods of qualitative case study are largely the methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience' (Stake 2003: 156). In general, I found that the responses of my interviewees, who all had considerable experience in their respective fields, confirmed my own experience of the current publishing environment. In the following section, I discuss each interviewee's responses, in order to explore their thoughts about, and experiences of, the current Australian publishing environment.

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<sup>19</sup> The nature of the ethics approval for the case study for this MA project means it is not possible to include the completed questionnaires as appendices to this thesis.

## Discussion of interviewees' responses

### 1. Traditionally published Australian writers who have also been published electronically

#### a) Hazel Edwards

Hazel Edwards is a prolific Australian writer, with 150 books for children and adults published, including fiction, non-fiction, scripts, and textbooks. Traditional offset print publishers published all 150 books. Edwards' E-books (originally published as P-books) include five children's novels in the Frequent Flyer twins' series,<sup>20</sup> and two travel books.<sup>21</sup> The American E-publisher Bookmice (bookmice.com) published five Frequent Flyer titles, but the company was sold to another publisher, which subsequently became insolvent while Edwards' titles were still on its list. Edwards regards her E-publishing experience as an electronic apprenticeship and part of her professional keeping up-to-date with new technology.

In her questionnaire, Edwards notes some positive aspects of E-publishing, but responds at greater length on its negative aspects. Edwards considers that electronic screen-based books suit both younger and older adult readers best, as children adapt more easily to screen reading, and older adult readers benefit from the ability to adjust font size. She also sees E-publishers' shorter lead/production time for each title as an advantage, noting that it takes

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<sup>20</sup> The Frequent Flyer twins E-novels were: *False Bottom* (2000), *Game Play* (2000), *The Ideas Pirates* (2000), *Artnapping* (2000), and *Fleeced* (no date). The publisher experienced difficulty in updating the fragile Internet links in each title. I experienced the same problem with my novel published by Bookmice, *Captain Angus, the Lighthouse Ghost* (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Edwards was the writer-in-residence on the *M/V Polar Bird*, on a round trip to Antarctica. The ship became icebound, but Edwards used an Internet satellite link to launch *Non-Boring Travel Writing* (2001) in Melbourne.

one to three years to produce traditional offset print books, while E-publishers take about three months. However, Edwards is not sanguine overall about E-publishing. Her venture into E-publishing provided negligible financial returns, due to poor marketing and distribution by her E-publisher (Bookmice). Edwards notes that E-authors 'are required to take on the additional role of publicist and to market their E-titles more than is required by conventional publishers' (Edwards 2004: 2). Edwards' E-books have had a short shelf life of about two years, partly due to her publisher's distribution problems. Edwards also thinks that audiences are still getting used to electronic distribution, and are still evaluating content. In consequence, Edwards' present relationship to E-publishing is reflected in her statement that 'I would not consider offering a book solely for E-publication unless I could not place it conventionally' (3).

Generally Edwards notes her own respect for good editors, and that all her books have been 'properly edited' (3). Edwards considers that E-authors have 'unrealistic expectations' (2) about editing, thinking they can do it on their own. Edwards states: 'There's a difference between E-publishing as a genuine commercial alternative to print publishing and thinly disguised vanity publishing' (2).<sup>22</sup> Edwards' response to the possibility of electronic publishing as a viable form of publishing compared to traditional print, was 'Not at present. Maybe later' (4).

As an adjunct to her questionnaire responses, Edwards provided me with a paper delivered to the Australian School Librarian Association (ASLA)

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<sup>22</sup> This statement refers to those E-publishers who do not provide editing. Vanity publishing is also a feature of traditional print publishing, but in my experience the standard of editing in E-publishing is highly variable.

Conference in 2002.<sup>23</sup> Here Edwards notes more positive aspects of E-publishing, such as 'small print runs being viable for specialist books e.g. family histories' (Edwards 2002: 3). She sees the use of hypertext in lieu of illustrations as a 'gift' to extend readers.<sup>24</sup> Edwards notes her qualms about '[quality] control, when some authors become publisher, editor, publicist and distributor as well as choosing their own work as worthy of publication when no-one else is prepared to risk investing in it' (3). She also notes the problem of 'short-lived E-publishers with poor or limited distribution and too few titles, as well as vanishing editors and editorial roles' (3). Of particular interest was Edwards' comment that 'E-publishing and E-reviewers seem to operate in parallel worlds as print publishing and reviewing and rarely cross over' (3).

**b) Goldie Alexander**

Goldie Alexander has written 25 books for adults and children, plus numerous short stories and articles. She has been a co-winner of the Mary Grant Bruce Award (2000, 2001) for two long short stories, and is known for her historical and mystery novels, non-fiction books and short stories for boys. Of Alexander's 25 published titles, four are D-books and three are E-books. Of these seven titles, three of the D-books were originally offset-printed, and then D-printed by Phoenix Education. The remaining D-book, *Unjust Desserts* (2001), is a murder mystery published originally as an E-book by Zeus Publications. The remaining two E-books (published by Zeus) are children's titles, *Eastern Bay* (no date) and

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that this paper antedates Edwards' questionnaire responses and her negative experience with the American E-publisher Bookmice.

<sup>24</sup> Notably, the transient nature of hyperlinks was one of the reasons Edwards decided not to continue with E-publishing the Frequent Flyer Twins series.

*Cowpat\$* (2003), the latter now also published as a P-book by Macmillan Education Australia.

Alexander's overall relationship with publication and the publishing industry reflects that of most writers. She has unpublished manuscripts that she keeps sending out, which she senses is the experience of most other writers; she says that writing modes are subject to fashion, and that non-fiction is the current popular mode. For Alexander, this is problematic, as she writes what she feels like writing, and because fiction is her first love.

Alexander's experience of electronic and digital publication has not been generally positive. Publication is much faster – almost immediate, compared with six months to a year for traditional print publishers. However, in Alexander's experience, E-publishers 'leave all the editing and proof reading to you' (Alexander 2004: 3) and the almost immediate nature of production means there is '[no] time to correct or edit' (2). Alexander states: 'They simply reproduce what you send them. Less care on their part unfortunately can often mean an inferior product' (3).<sup>25</sup> Like Hazel Edwards, Alexander has had poor financial returns with E-books, the returns barely covering expenses. She argues that returns will not improve until a universal E-book reader is developed, and very young children, brought up with computers, start to read electronically. At present, Alexander considers that few people, including children, want to read E-books, possibly because E-reading is hard on the eyes.

Alexander's experiences of traditional offset print publishing have also been mixed. P-books, both educational and trade,<sup>26</sup> still provide her with the best financial returns. However, P-books also go out of print. This has been the

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander was referring to her E-publisher Zeus Publications.

<sup>26</sup> Trade books are mass market books available through ordinary bookshops, as opposed to books produced for specialist markets, such as the education market.

case with Alexander's young adult novel *Mavis Road Medley* (1991), which went out of print after the first 3000 copies were sold. The original publisher sold out to Scholastic, a multinational, who have refused to do a reprint, despite *Mavis Road Medley* being named by the State Library of Victoria and the Australian Centre for Youth Literature as one of the Library's 150 'treasures' to celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On the other hand, Alexander cites her best P-book return as *My Story: Surviving Sydney Cove* (2000), published by Scholastic, and released in the United Kingdom as *My Story: Transported* (2000). Alexander is hoping for similar success with *Body and Soul*, a novel written in 1996 and eventually published as a P-book by Indra Publishing in 2003. However, Alexander notes that 'the publisher is much smaller than a multi-national Scholastics' (4). She states:

The basic problem is that there are 7 [sic] major publishers in this country and 200 little ones. That makes equal advertising and distribution – which is what it's all about – VERY difficult. I have encountered incredible difficulties in even getting reviews from daily newspapers who only bother with the big companies. Other authors tell the same story (4).

Perhaps as a result of her negative publishing experiences, Alexander considers that E-books – while not currently viable – will make accessible many middle-range writers and out-of-print books.

## **2. Small Australian publishers**

### **a) Ian Fraser – CEO/publisher of Indra Publishing (small offset print publisher).**

Ian Fraser started Indra Publishing in 1987, his involvement in the publishing industry dating from that time. Indra publishes six to eight P-books each year, mainly novels reflecting cultural, historical, and peace and war themes, and some non-fiction reflecting mainly the Australia/Asia-Pacific context. Fraser sees these categories as 'valid expressions of life in Australia' (Fraser 2004: 1) and as reflecting his own 'areas of publishing interest' (2). Indra does not publish poetry, short stories, children's or young adult fiction, genre fiction (crime, romance, science fiction) or 'boys [sic] own' adventure or war stories. Fraser himself is committed to independent Australian publishing and to the publication of 'not necessarily commercial' (1) manuscripts. Indra can therefore be seen as a small, quality offset print publisher, which – unlike the globalised multinational players – is not primarily interested in profit-making.

The approach to editing and production at Indra reflects its overall philosophy, or publishing mission. This approach could be seen as old-fashioned, both in comparison to the practices of globalised offset print publishers, and in relation to E-publishers. For example, the production time for an individual title can be up to twelve months, which includes nine months for editing, and three months for pre-production before publication. Editing is done by Fraser himself, and by contract editors. The initial hard copy edit is sent back to the author for their comments, and all editing changes are then negotiated

with the author. Face-to-face meetings, as well as postal mail, emails and the telephone are all used to negotiate the final version of the manuscript. The print run accounts for the largest part of Indra's publishing budget.

Authors are utilised in the publicity of their books, '[to] the extent the author is able' (3). Fraser is actively involved in the publicity and promotion of each title. Fraser stages a launch, attempts to get radio interviews, and television and writers' festival appearances, and encourages authors 'to be visible for other reasons apart from their writing' (3). These strategies are traditionally part of the offset print publishing world, but large players no longer automatically promote a new author's work<sup>27</sup>. Unlike the larger offset publishers, Fraser does not remainder books, as the Indra backlist continues to sell, 'albeit slowly' (3). Indra uses distributors in Australia, New Zealand, South-East Asia, North America and Europe, and supplies books directly to individuals, bookshops, library suppliers, schools, and university libraries. Indra makes only a few sales via the ordering page on its website.

Fraser himself is aware of D- and E-publishing, but has no expertise in these areas, and believes also that 'the market has shown adequately that it still regards these forms as 2<sup>nd</sup> [sic] class books' (4). Fraser thinks E-books will have a future only if a technology is developed to facilitate easy access and reading, but that D-books will in the medium term take over the lion's share of general book publishing. However, Fraser considers that books which are seen as having an inherent value, warranting a long service life, such as gift books,

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<sup>27</sup> For example, I am aware anecdotally of the experience of Australian author Winnie Salamon, whose first novel *Facetime* was published by Allen & Unwin in 2002. Allen & Unwin did not organise a launch, and gave the book no publicity. The book was therefore not prominently displayed in bookshops, and its sales were low.

art books, and novels by well-recognised writers, will continue to be P-published.

**b) Sandy Cummins (Writers Exchange E-Publishing)**

Sandy Cummins has been involved in the publishing industry since 1998, when she began reviewing E-books. Cummins set up Writers Exchange E-Publishing in 2001, after running a writing resource website with a monthly E-zine, and coming into contact with many E-published authors. Cummins considered that writers needed their submissions to be judged by quality rather than their existing writing credits. Cummins' start-up costs for Writers Exchange were minimal. She states: '[All] it required was time, effort and knowledge, not extra equipment' (Cummins 2003: 1). Writers Exchange publishes about fifty books per year, ranging from genre titles, to children's, young adult, general fiction, poetry and how-to books. Cummins publishes E-books (in multi-formats for download and in CD format), and is considering publication in DVD-format. Cummins judges all submissions on the basis of quality. Writers Exchange categorises all titles it accepts as either 'exclusive rights' or 'distribution'. 'Exclusive rights' titles are edited and published by Writers Exchange; 'distribution' titles are titles published by other publishers, such as Awestruck E-books, or orphaned titles, or self-published titles.

'Exclusive rights' manuscripts are edited with care. Cummins does most initial editing. If the manuscript does not require structural editing, it then goes straight to the grammar editor after Cummins' initial edit. If the manuscript requires more work, it goes back to the author to make suggested changes, and/or to a copyeditor, before proceeding to the grammar editor. In this sense,

while it is not possible for Cummins to sit down with her authors during the editing process, as does Ian Fraser at Indra, the process itself is thorough, and the writer is consulted about changes. Production times vary, depending on the type of book. For example, children's picture books take over a year to produce due to artist assignments, whereas novels take less time. Some books require multiple editing and rewriting, and therefore take longer to produce.

Cummins utilises the Internet 'nearly 100%' (5) for sales and publicity. Writers Exchange E-books are distributed as downloads through distributor websites (eBookAd.com, concentreserve.com, fictionwise.com). D-books and CD-books are sold through brick and mortar shops, post offices, and on the Writers Exchange website. Writers Exchange pays for some advertising, although promotion is largely up to the author. Cummins states: '[Working] at such distances, it is hard to organise things for them, it comes down to the author promoting themselves in their area of the world' (4).

Like Hazel Edwards and Goldie Alexander, Cummins highlights the lack of suitable electronic readers in Australia as the only problem confronting readers of E-books, as 'some people do not want to read on their actual computers' (5). Cummins publishes D-books because 'many people still need to feel a "real" book in their hands, so it may increase sales' (5). However, print books cost money to make, money to store, and money to distribute. According to Cummins, 'the hassle is not worth my time . . . Print is just a necessary evil because people expect it' (5). Cummins is optimistic about the future of E-books, especially for readers with allergies, little storage space, or physical ailments like RSI or poor eyesight. As well, she notes that formats and hardware improving all the time.

**c) Robin Freeman - ex-publisher of Common Ground Publishing (E-books, D-books, and P-books)**

Robin Freeman has worked in the Australian publishing industry over 15 years, as an editor, managing editor, commissioning editor and publisher, with experience in P-book, E-book and D-book publishing. Freeman's most recent experience (2000-2003) in the industry was with mixed media Melbourne-based publisher Common Ground Publishing, which produces E-books (as PDF files), D-books, and occasionally P-books. The 'mission' of Freeman and her colleagues at Common Ground was to 'experiment with digital publishing and distribution as a way of getting exposure for authors whose works did not fit the industry standard of a minimum 3000 offset printing that would sell within 6-12 months' (Freeman 2004: 1). During Freeman's time at Common Ground, the company was primarily interested in producing digitally-printed paper products that could be ordered online and despatched via the post. The company offered the option of E-books (as PDF downloads) purely as value-added, and considered that academics, who wanted fast access and/or keyword searchable text, would be the major purchasers of E-versions.

While Freeman was at Common Ground, the company published approximately 16-20 titles each year, in four targeted areas, with most titles appearing in both print and electronic formats. The four areas were:

1. A small list of general trade titles, including poetry and books for writers and editors, distributed via an online bookstore;

2. An academic list;
3. Conference papers, with individual papers sold via websites linked to each conference, and
4. Fully funded projects from other institutions, small publishers, and sometimes self-publishing individuals.

Print runs were small, usually between 100 and 500 copies, although some runs could be as few as 50 copies, or as many as 2000 for individual projects.

Production costs, particularly on structural editing, were kept to a minimum by soliciting trade authors with well-written works, previously published authors, or second editions of books which had been orphaned, or gone out of print. The work of academic writers had generally gone through an internal peer review process. As well, all projects accepted for publication by Common Ground were edited. Freeman allocated three months as a minimum for pre-production, including editing, on each title, although some shorter titles (100 pages) were turned around in 4-6 weeks. Once a book was ready for printing, the digital printer could turn it around in 5-8 working days. The company also used a template with writers of most newly initiated projects; writers were asked to cut and paste their text directly into the template.

It can therefore be seen that, as a niche market publisher, Common Ground differs in its approach to editing and production, from both the traditional print publisher Indra, and from the E-publisher Writers Exchange. The production times at Common Ground were much shorter than in traditional offset publishing. As well, Common Ground published fewer titles annually than Writers Exchange, and unlike the 'distribution' titles accepted for publication by Writers Exchange, Common Ground edited all manuscripts before publication.

And again, unlike Writers Exchange, the emphasis in electronic publication at Common Ground fell generally on D-books, rather than E-books. Nevertheless, Common Ground was not 'wedded' to digital print. According to Freeman, '[the] crossover point where it was cheaper to use offset rather than digital print was around 750 copies' (9). Offset was used for occasional print runs of 1000 – 2000, but most titles were printed in smaller runs of 100-200, and reprinted as needed. Freeman states: ' We were working towards the magical one order = one printed book scenario' (6).

Marketing and distribution at Common Ground were also carefully tailored to take advantage of author 'capital' and the capabilities of the Web. Authors were chosen because they could provide some significant ways of marketing their titles. For example, authors were selected because their title was a reprint and already had a defined market, or because the book formed part of the author's overall business strategy and was sold at workshops, public speaking events, or through short courses. Selected trade titles were sent to the print and electronic media for review and to generate an author interview, but this strategy was not preferred because it was expensive and less likely to generate sales.

Common Ground set up a series of E-commerce online bookstores, but eventually utilised a distributor for P-books, combined with mail order campaigns and sales at conferences and book launches. Freeman considers that the shelf-life of an E-book or D-book is 'ongoing' once digitised, but that practical shelf life is governed by each title's marketing and third party distribution. She states: '[In] my experience, the best book products to sell online are specialised books, unavailable elsewhere, with some organisation or

individual directing customers to an online bookstore for purchase with credit cards' (6).

Freeman concludes that in future, P-books, E-books and D-books will be parallel resources. Traditional offset print will survive as long as it is cost-effective to produce single titles in large numbers, with publicity in the print and electronic media. Freeman considers that mainstream publishers and sellers prefer the status quo. In this sense, P-books will remain for the traditional mass market, D-books for non-mainstream and specialist and academic titles, and E-books for technical manuals in the short-term, until a universal E-reader is developed. Once this happens, mainstream novels and non-fiction works will be viable as E-books.

In the following sub-section, I compare my experience as a creative writer for electronic and digital publication with the various scenarios outlined by the above case study interviewees.

## **My experience as an E-Published, D-published and P-published writer**

I have been an E-published and D-published writer since 1999. I initially became involved in the field by chance, when my children's book *Captain Angus, the Lighthouse Ghost* was picked up by Bookmice, an American E-publisher. I did not approach this publisher; rather, the Bookmice CEO Aliske Webb approached me via an email, after reading some of my unpublished poems and short stories listed on my website.

*Captain Angus* launched me into the E-publishing niche market. Aliske Webb also liked the Australian bush poetry on my website, and commissioned me to write additional poems for an anthology which Bookmice published as *Under the Coolabah Tree* in 2000. One year later, Bookmice was sold to D-book company McGraw Publishing. This company promised Aliske Webb that all the Bookmice E-books would be published also as D-books. McGraw Publishing changed names to Bookmice, trading on the goodwill inherited in the takeover sale. Unfortunately for the Bookmice authors, the new company closed down, orphaning our books.

Crossroads Publishing picked up my two books and offered a contract for *Flowers from the Grave*,<sup>28</sup> which was published in 2001, just before the company was declared bankrupt. In this sense, my orphaned books reflected the economic fragility of the fledgling E-publishing industry at that time in the USA. A new traditional print company, Crystal Dreams, offered contracts for my books and published the paperback version of *Under the Coolabah Tree* in 2001, with sales via the publisher's site and Amazon.com. *Captain Angus* – although under contract – remained unpublished. Nevertheless, during this year I had a short story (*River Gum*) and a poem (*Seduction*) published in anthologies<sup>29</sup> as D-books by Australian publisher Inner Kiss Publishing.

By 2002, I decided to 'pull' my books from Crystal Dreams and move 'onshore' to Australian E-publisher Writers Exchange. In 2003, *Captain Angus*, *the Lighthouse Ghost* was published in a new E-book version without the previously fragile interactive hyperlinks. Writers Exchange have since published

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<sup>28</sup> As previously noted, *Flowers from the Grave* (see appendix H) is the prequel to *Severance Packages*.

<sup>29</sup> The anthologies were *Australia's Best Short Stories* (2001) and *Australia's Best Poetry* (2001).

as E-books *Mirror, Mirror...* (2003), a murder mystery co-authored with Dianne Dalziel, under the pen name of Dalziel Laing, and recently *Flowers from the Grave* (2004); D-book versions of both titles are forthcoming. Writers Exchange have contracted also *Under the Coolabah Tree* (with an extra ten poems commissioned), *Mind's Eye* (poetry), *Sir Henry, the Knight in Space* (children's novel) and *Cock of the Walk* (murder mystery). During the last two years, I have self-published audio CD versions of all my books with the exception of *Mirror, Mirror....*

My initial experience of E-publishing and D-publishing was similar to that of Hazel Edwards, but I am now more firmly established as both a writer and published author in the field. My experience with the editing of my books also parallels that of Hazel Edwards - all my books have been edited and proofread professionally by each publisher. Edwards and I also had books orphaned when Bookmice was bought by McGraw Publishing, which then became insolvent.

Edwards stated in her ASLA conference paper that 'E-publishing and E-reviewers seem to operate in parallel worlds as print publishing and reviewing and rarely cross over' (Edwards 2002: 3). It has been my experience that my E-books are reviewed by E-reviewers, and the reviews are E-published on their websites. For example, one of my reviewers Molly Martin – also a mystery and children's book writer – publishes E-reviews on her website, and the reviews also appear on Authorsden.com, a portal site that links readers, writers and publishers, of all genres and publication forms.

Hazel Edwards also stated in her interview that E-authors 'are required to take on the additional role of publicist and to market their E-titles more than is required by conventional publishers' (Edwards 2004: 2). This has certainly been

my experience. I use electronic networking to bring Web enthusiasts to my website. This networking is mainly free, and takes advantage of the linking capacity of the Internet. For example, my website links to the sites of other writers, to my publisher and to my own interests, such as lighthouses. As well, the coding for my website utilises meta-tags, such as 'kids' books', 'murder', 'murder mysteries', 'Australia', 'bush poetry', 'Australian authors', and so on, which search engines such as Google will find. My website also utilises the capacity of 'Web rings', which are communities of common interest mediated via the Web. For example, I am a member of EPIC,<sup>30</sup> Authors Ring, AllAboutMurder, Australian Book WebRing, Sisters in Crime and Aussies Together.<sup>31</sup>

I am a subscribed member of EPIC and Authorsden, and am therefore listed on their websites, and through them on search engines. I also send out electronic press releases to the 'New' and 'New books' sub-indexes on Authorsden, when one of my books is published. I compose and publish *Laing's Latest*, a monthly newsletter which is generated via Authorsden. My present publisher Writers Exchange sells most of its E-list, including my titles, to the United States. Like both Edwards and Alexander, I have found financial returns from my E-books to be negligible. In fact, returns are better for my audio-books, which are published on CD, and which I sell on my website and on eBay, and on Amazon.com.

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<sup>30</sup> 'EPIC' is Electronically Published Internet Connection, an organisation catering to the interests of producers (writers, artists and publishers) of E- and D-published books. My first E-book *Captain Angus, the Lighthouse Ghost* (Bookmice, 1999) was a finalist in the EPPIE 2000 Awards, sponsored annually by EPIC.

<sup>31</sup> An individual WebRing functions as part-portal, part-directory, and part-search tool for its members.

In summary, my survival as an E-, D-, and P-published author in the globalised marketplace of fiction publishing depends not just on my continued generation of work for publication, but also on my own active marketing of my own work within the networked communities of the Web. I am in the fortunate position that I can continue to generate fiction without needing an immediate monetary return. However, my ultimate financial – as opposed to publishing – success depends on a more generalised public acceptance of E-publishing, and a shift to D-publishing in the industry.

## CONCLUSION

As the Gutenberg era approaches its limits, today's new technologies will perform a comparable service for a worldwide marketplace.

Jason Epstein (2003)<sup>32</sup>

In this thesis, I have explored my own creative writing practice and the cultural context surrounding that practice and its final products – both the thesis novel *Severance Packages*, and my other published creative work. Broadly, the thesis has explored how the globalisation and digitisation of the publishing industry, together with the advent of new technologies in writing, publishing and marketing, impinge upon my writing and publishing practice as a creative E-book and D-book author.

This thesis has addressed the dimensions of the cultural context surrounding my writing practice. This context comprises not only the conventions of the genres in which *Severance Packages* is located, but also the shifting roles of the writer for electronic and digital publication. I have addressed also current trends in book publication, particularly globalisation and digitisation, and the contemporary relationship of the Australian publishing industry and the Australian book consumer to those trends.

Finally, I have addressed writing and publishing in contemporary Australian niche markets, by conducting a case study of five 'players' – writers and publishers – within these markets, in order to contextualise at the micro-

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<sup>32</sup> Epstein, Jason 2003, 'Revolutionize Book Distribution: How Print on Demand at Point of Sale Will Replace the Traditional Supply Chain.' in Dare, H. and Kalantzis, M. (eds.), p. 11.

level my own experience as an E- and D-published writer. This study has revealed that the current situation is fluid, with tentative first steps being taken towards electronic/digital publication within a still largely traditional publishing context in Australia.

In this thesis I have demonstrated – based on my own experience – that a market exists for electronically published and digitally printed books. However, this market is still at the start-up stage, is both volatile and fragile, and is reliant on the marketing and networking skills of writers as well as publishers for its success. Meanwhile, the publishing industry remains geared primarily to traditional publication, that is, to the production, marketing and distribution of paper books which are printed in large print runs and sold by brick-and-mortar bookstores.

This thesis has shown that Australian publishers at present support the status quo, which is still generating profits, and that there is as yet no financial imperative to shift to electronic and digital publication. The Federal Government, through its \$6 million handout to multinational publishers via the Books Alive program, also supports the status quo in Australian book publishing. This support is far in excess of the Victorian Government grant of \$25,000 dollars to support print-on-demand book technology at the local State level. However, this thesis has shown also that technological trends, such as the online purchasing of books through overseas-based online bookstores such as Amazon.com, are beginning to affect booksellers' profits and Government GST revenue in Australia. In other words, the forces of economic globalisation and digitisation are now impacting on the marketing of books.

This thesis has shown that, while some readers – including readers of my books – are acculturated to electronic and digital books, most readers seem to prefer print books. Based on my own experience, it appears also that readers consider E- and D-books inferior to traditionally published P-books. In the main, readers still want to 'feel' and 'smell' the written text. However, it may be that neither the traditional publishing industry nor the general reader will be able to resist a more generalised acceptance of E-books and D-books. Electronic and digital publication is one way of trimming the high costs from publishing budgets of the warehousing, distribution and remaindering of books. As well, digital publishing uses 'green' technology, which does not consume natural resources (trees and fossil fuels) to the same extent as traditional publishing. As Australians gradually accept that changes need to occur to preserve trees and to protect the environment at large, perhaps there will be an increased acceptance of E-books and D-books, and a redressing of their 'inferior' status. Once a cheap, portable E-reader with a universal download format is developed, it may be that a more general shift towards E- and D-publication and book reading occurs.

In the meantime, traditional publishing involves high costs and risks, to promote celebrity and 'marketable' authors and to mass-produce printed books. These P-books have an average shelf life of six weeks, compared to the notionally unlimited shelf life of E-books and D-books. The new technology of D-books, which are printed on demand once a payment has been made, is not currently available through brick-and-mortar stores; however, the finished product looks and feels the same as a traditionally published book. POD books

may find an easier path to acceptance by the reading public if the publishing industry makes the technology available in bookstores.

This thesis does not forecast the tolling of the death knell for the traditionally published book, but a future in which P-books, E-books and D-books will co-exist as parallel forms. As Ian Fraser of *Indra Publishing* has noted, books seen to have an inherent value will probably continue to be P-published, while D-books will possibly take over the lion's share of general book publishing. And as Fraser has noted also, it appears that E-books will have a future only if a technology is developed to facilitate convenient access and reading. Generally, it appears that the future of the publishing industry will depend upon a considered evaluation of new digital technologies compared with current traditional techniques and practices. It also appears that the publishing industry will need to become highly flexible in order to remain competitive in the future.

From my own point of view as a creative writer, digital publishing has offered me an enhanced appreciation of the cultural context in which my work is produced, and a greater involvement in the creative process of book production than that afforded the traditional author. Currently electronic and digital print publishing exists on the fringe of the publishing industry. However, it appears most likely that electronic and digital publishing – like the 'Fringe', its counterpart in the theatrical arts – will continue to exist and slowly flourish alongside traditional publishing.

## Appendix A

From: 'Linda Green' [linda@tmaw.co.uk](mailto:linda@tmaw.co.uk)  
To: 'Wendy Laing' [wendylaing@yahoo.com](mailto:wendylaing@yahoo.com)  
Subject: Flowers from the Grave review  
Date: Fri, 19Sep 2003 16:25 +0100

### **A smart, but sentimental detective!**

In this, the first in the 'Jane Doe' series, Wendy has introduced us to a smart but sentimental detective. She sets the location very early on in her author's note, which is helpful for those who are not familiar with the region. It also helps to set the scene for the story with the cliffs and the sea.

Throughout the story Wendy manages to keep the reader's interest by introducing new ideas and we are constantly waiting to find out what is going to happen next. At the beginning of the book we see Jane Doe being attacked and left for dead, which leaves us thinking that maybe the hero is going to die before we even get to know her. However, she makes a good recovery and it is her convalescence that gives us the story that is about to unfold before us.

As the story progresses we see Jane enjoying some time on her own, allowing her to think about her future and what she wants to do about her relationships. Gradually all this changes into her obsession with a strange and haunting man about whom we are told very little to begin with. During this part of the story I found I could easily work out the truth about Ryan despite Jane not being able to figure it out, but again Wendy handles this aspect of the story extremely well and keeps us guessing at the whole story throughout.

I found the book very easy to read and very hard to put down. In this carefully thought out plot the story moves along, not necessarily at a fast pace but certainly in an intriguing fashion and the element of the paranormal keeps you guessing at the end of every chapter. It was the kind of story that twists and turns and just as you think you have worked out the ending, so it changes completely and you find out that you are going down the totally wrong path. I read a lot of mysteries and detective novels but the outcome of this one took me by surprise and true to form I could not decide who the killer was until all was revealed at the end. There was also a little shock towards the end, which totally threw me off guard and did nothing to help me work out the conclusion. I thoroughly enjoyed my first introduction to Jane Doe and am very much looking forward to the next book in the series, as this will no doubt take a totally different direction yet again.

## Appendix B

The following is an email from another reader, who bought the audio book version of *Flowers from the Grave*:



Dear Wendy,

I finished your book 'Flowers From the Grave' last night. I have to say that it has been a pleasure driving to work each morning listening to the suspense of this book. If it was a paperback I think I would have stayed home to read it all!! I didn't guess the killer until the last possible moment before it was revealed and for me that is fantastic!



Thank you for such a wonderful adventure. I have now started 'Cock of the Walk'. So hurry up with the next one coz it doesn't seem like an hours drive to work whilst

listening to your books!! 

My mother - in - law is now listening to Flowers from the Grave I heard it this morning. I want to also say that it is refreshing to be able to listen - read a book that is not full of sex as well! Thank you for that too. It just goes to prove that a story can be told without all that stuff involved! My Mum - in - law will appreciate that as well. 

(REVIEW) - Sorry the above was just babble!!!

Gripping story....edge of your seat suspense...very well told....made long drives too work very enjoyable....can't wait for the next instalment

Warmest Regards



## Appendix C

This is my proposed cover for *Severance Packages*



## Appendix D

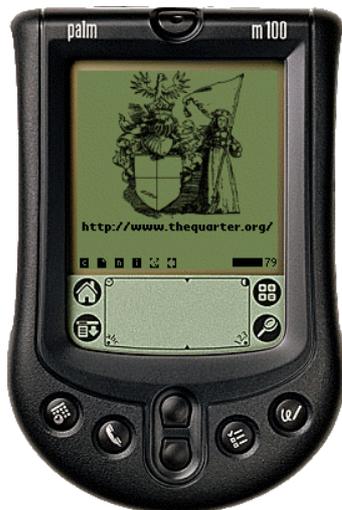
Electronic readers come in a variety of forms, but are all different forms of handheld computer that enable the storage and viewing of E-books. Some popular different forms of electronic reader are detailed below:



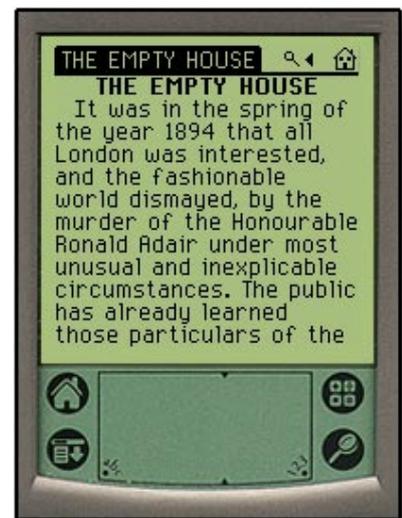
Handheld PC



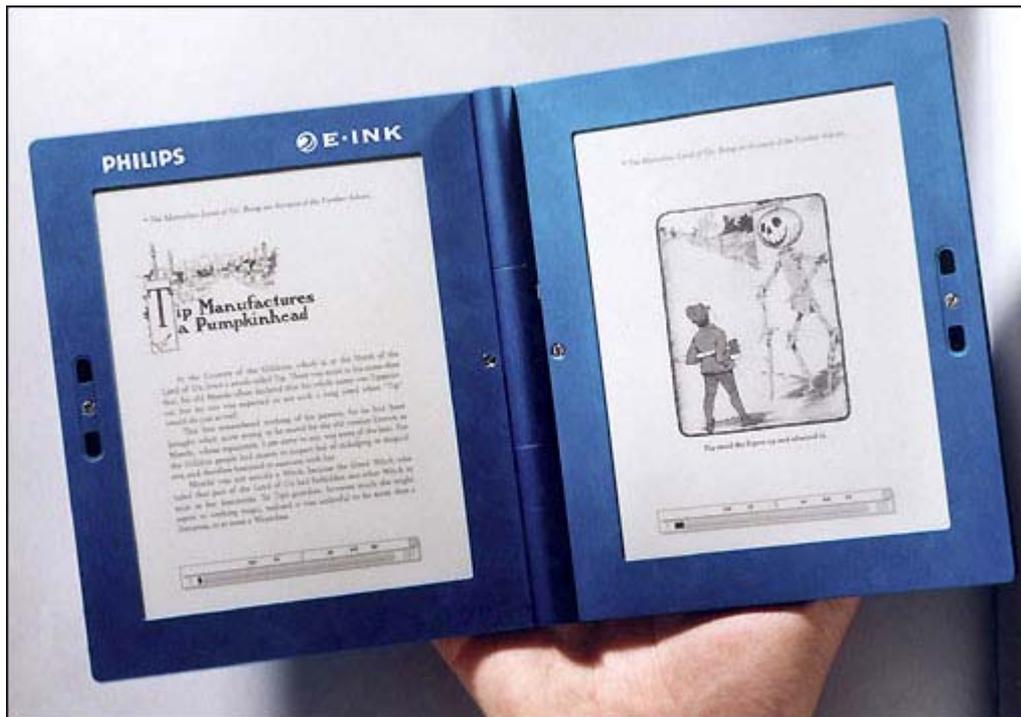
Pocket PC



Palm PDA



E-book or Palm PDA



Electronic 'Book' Reader

## Appendix E

### Writer's Questionnaire

1. What types of books have you had published?
2. Have you written any books that have not been published?
3. Can you tell me your experience in this regard?
4. Have you experienced any 'publishing gateways' with publishers, which have been a barrier to having a book published?
5. Can you tell me about this experience?
6. How many of your books have been published by a traditional offset print publisher?
7. How many have been published electronically as E-books and D- books?
8. What have been your general experiences regarding lead time/ production times with traditional publishers?
9. What have been your general experiences regarding lead time/ production times with electronic publishers?
10. Has your experience with electronic publishing been generally good or bad? Could you tell me about these experiences?
11. What problems do you think your readers may encounter with E-books?
12. How do you communicate with your publishers about the editing of your books?
13. Have your experiences with the book production process been different between traditional offset print publishers and your electronic publishers? In what ways?
14. Do you have a contract with a publisher that produces both offset printed books and digitally printed books?
15. What has been your experience with the shelf life of your books?
16. Can you tell me about the financial returns from your E-books? D-books? P-books?
17. Do you find electronic publishing to be a viable form of publishing compared to traditional publishing for a creative writer? Why? Why not?

## Appendix F

### Traditional offset Print Publisher Questionnaire

1. How long have you been in publishing?
2. When did you start your present publishing concern?
3. You must have seen many changes in the industry in the last 5-10 years, with globalisation and absorption of Australian publishers into global conglomerates. How has this affected you?
4. How many books do you publish each year?
5. What type of books and which genre do you publish? Why?
6. What are the general guidelines for your writers? What are your reasons for specifying these guidelines?
7. What is the production time given to a new book?
8. What is the shelf life of your books in general?
9. How do you do the editing, copy editing, with your authors?
10. Have you needed to 'remainder' any of your books? If so, why?
11. How do you distribute your books?
12. Which area of the 'off-set' print publishing process is the biggest part of your budget?
13. To what extent do you utilise your authors in the publicity process?
14. What do you understand about E-publishing (E-books) and Digitally printed books (D-books)?
15. Would it be worth your while to consider going into Electronic Publishing, to produce E-books and D-books? Why? Why not?
16. To what extent do you use the Internet in your publishing house for emails, sales and/or publicity?
17. What do you think is the future of P-books?
18. What do you think is the future of E-books and D-books?

## **Appendix G**

### **Electronic publisher questionnaire**

1. How long have you been in publishing?
2. Why have you chosen to publish your books electronically and digitally?
3. You must have seen many changes in the industry in the last 5-10 years, with globalisation and absorption of traditional off-set print Australian publishers into global conglomerates. How has this affected you?
4. How many books do you publish each year?
5. What type of books and which genre/s do you publish? Why?
6. What are the general guidelines for your writers? Why have you laid out your guidelines in this way?
7. How do you do the editing, copy editing, with your authors?
8. What is the production time given to a new book?
9. What is the shelf life of your books in general?
10. How do you distribute your books?
11. Which area of the electronic publishing process is the biggest part of your budget?
12. To what extent do you utilise your authors in the publicity process?
13. What problems do you see your readers may encounter with E-books?
14. To what extent do you use the Internet in your publishing house for emails, sales or publicity?
15. Would it be worth you while to consider going into traditional off-set publishing to produce your P-books? Why? Why not?
16. What do you think is the future of P-books?
17. What do you think is the future of E-books and D-books?

## **Appendix H**

*Flowers from the Grave* (2004), an E-book in multi-formats on CD, is in the plastic envelope on the next page.

The CD is playable on any computer. Instructions are on the back of the CD cover. This book is the prequel to the thesis novel *Severance Packages*.

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