

Endor's Way

Chapter 1 *Bondi Beach*

The body washed up on Bondi Beach around 3am, the time of arrival established by its presence amongst the flotsam and jetsam that marked the furthest extent of the incoming tide. Empty beer bottles, old tennis balls and multi colored plastic thongs lay scattered recklessly along the high water mark, intertwined with seaweed, bits of rope and the odd piece of driftwood. Rejected, along with Jameson, hurled back from whence they came by an angry, disillusioned ocean.

He'd been a handsome man, but as he lay there face up waiting for a savior now long overdue, you could never have guessed that. The crabs and little fish that had escorted him on his long, slow, drift from the foot of the cliffs at North Head, to his final resting place on the beach at Bondi, had been tugging at the edges of the gaping chest wound that had terminated his life.

I arrived at the beach around eight am. It was miserable day; grey clouds hurrying furtively across a darkening sky, and the wind, coming in from the south east, keening over the ocean swells like a requiem for lost souls.

The early morning jogger who'd stumbled across the body just before dawn was still being questioned by local police just out of the weather near the entrance to the surf club. I glanced at her as I passed. She was around forty-five or so, tall, blond and skinny, her arms folded tightly across a spandex plated chest, still pale and visibly shaken from her grisly find.

I nodded to the sergeant as I moved past them towards the beach. Another half a dozen uniforms were on the windswept sands close by the wading pool. Two of them were moving about, securing the flapping yellow tape that determined where the public stopped and started. Beyond that a small crowd of vultures in anoraks and track-suit pants hovered uselessly, drawn on by the scent of death, straining to catch a glimpse of the unfolding drama.

As I approached, the main group of uniforms parted to reveal the kneeling figure of Carl Seagan, doctor, coroner and, if his critics were correct, one-time abortionist to the Sydney glitterati. As he recognized me his face took on a slight frown.

"Glad you managed to make it before the tide came back in, Harrigan," he said, turning back to the body. Before I could respond his assistant, a worried looking young man just out of medical school, fumbled,

"I'm sorry, sir, it's your partner. It's Detective Jameson."

The statement hit me hard, flattening my rising anger. Jameson had been undercover for two years. He'd been a tough, resourceful cop but he'd been gone for almost a week and we'd all feared the worst. Seagan was talking again.

"You want a closer look," he was studying my face, "have you eaten?"

He was a dry, sardonic man by nature, and the years he'd spent with the N.S.W. Police Department had only served to encrust in him a natural tendency towards cynicism.

I ignoring the jibe and knelt down beside the body. They'd left him exactly as he'd been found. On his back, his torso twisted in a slight curve. His arms flung out on either side as if he

were about to burst into song. Sodden trousers, no shirt, no shoes and one only sock. Somebody had draped a red and yellow beach towel over his face and upper torso in a futile attempt to leave him with a little dignity. As I reached out Seagan murmured.

“That’s probably not a good idea,”

I ignored the advice and lifted the edge of the material.

“Oh Christ...”

It was Jameson all right. Or what was left of Jameson. His head had come to rest nestled against a clump of seaweed, the only indulgence the ocean had allowed him. The long green strands lay against his face and curled gently around his neck, partly concealing something. I eased the seaweed back. A thin black cord was tied tightly around the swollen throat, half buried in the fatty tissue.

“It’s a cable of some sort,” Seagan grunted, “that’s not what killed him.”

I knew what it was. It was a message from the opposition. A part of the wire lead that Inspector Kearney had insisted Jameson wear the last night that any of us had seen him alive. There had been a lot of bad feeling that day. Jameson had wanted out. He was scared. I could feel it, and it was there in his eyes. He’d been restless all through that final briefing and he’d protested when they’d wanted to put a wire on him.

“It’s dangerous enough now,” he’d argued, glancing around for support. But Kearney was an old hand.

“You’ve come this far Michael and you’ve done an excellent job. I’m not about to insist on a wire, but without it, how can we protect you? They trust you Michael. They know you. With a wire we can hear your every heartbeat. At the first inkling of trouble we’ll be in there like a shot. I guarantee that.” Kearney was standing directly in front of Jameson. He was a big man, six foot two and powerfully built and, with his iron grey hair, square jaw and pale blue emotionless eyes, he bore the aura of a man accustomed to being obeyed. “Michael,” he continued in a more persuasive tone, “I know you’re nervous and that’s understandable, but the entire operation depends on tonight’s meeting. There’s two years of solid police work here and millions of dollars of public money, we’ve got to get him on tape. If you’ve lost your nerve, you must tell us now.”

The room had fallen absolutely silent. Even Brennan, Kearney’s ingratiating off-sider, turned away embarrassed. Everyone in the place was waiting for Jameson’s response. He knew Kearney was a heartless bastard but he hadn’t expected to be put on the spot like this.

“I didn’t say anything about losing my nerve,” he said, his face white with anger, “I said I was concerned, that’s all.”

I interrupted, “Look, Mick, if you’re worried about going in there, we may have to rethink this whole thing.”

He’d turned on me immediately.

“Stay out of it, Harrigan!” he’d said, his voice low and tight. “Ok? This is my call. I’ve brought the operation this far and I’ll be seeing it through. I’ll be doing my job tonight, just make fucking sure you do yours!” Then turning back to Kearney he’d said, “I’ll be fine, sir. Last minute nerves that’s all.”

I let it go. It was pointless. It could only have made things worse. He wasn’t mad at me, he was angry because he hadn’t stood up to Kearney, and Kearney knew that. Jameson had swallowed the bait whole and the hook was firmly imbedded.

“Good.” Kearney had said loudly, “Good man, Michael. I knew you were up for it. Just

remember, at the slightest sign of trouble use the code. Say the words clearly and calmly; *Exactly what time is it now?* and we'll be in there within seconds."

Jameson had nodded, but we all knew that his heart wasn't in it, and suddenly everyone in the room was busy, checking equipment, reading notes. Nobody wanted to meet his eye, and it was a relief when he finally shook hands with Kearney and left without another word to the team on that final, fatal assignment.

And now here he was on the beach, or what was left of him. And the last words anyone had ever heard coming through the wire had been the correct words all right '*Exactly what time is it now?*' but it hadn't been Jameson's voice. They'd been screamed into the mike by someone who'd sounded completely out of control. Laughing hysterically as if demented and followed immediately by the two short, sharp blasts of a shotgun that almost deafened the police radio operator and reverberated throughout the surveillance van in the shocked silence that followed.

By the time the S.W.A.T. team had smashed through the two steel reinforced doors that guarded the entrance to both levels of the disused warehouse, Jameson, Endor, the money, the drugs, and all other signs of life had long since vacated the building through a rear entrance unknown to the waiting police, which led directly on to a busy motorway at the back of the building, and disappeared at speed in the direction of Sydney Harbor.

"How long was he in the water, Doc?"

"Hard to say," Seagan pursed his lips, "Three, maybe four days."

I stood up.

"A shotgun?"

"Yes. Two blasts. Either one would have killed him instantly. The wire around his neck's for decoration."

"Was he tortured?"

"Maybe," Seagan looked away, "I'm not sure. Two shots, very quick. He was dead before he hit the ground."

"What about his eyes? What happened there?"

"I don't know. We won't know till we get him back to the lab. It could have been the fish," he was fumbling in a small black bag, "Or it may have been something else." He glanced at me sideways and added grudgingly. "Look, Harrigan, you can't blame yourself. He volunteered for this."

"Nobody volunteers for this shit, Doc."

A television crew had arrived and begun the usual diatribe about the freedom of the press. I said a silent goodbye to Jamie and moved away. We'd been close friends for a long time but that had changed over the last year or so. I never knew why. He was going through a messy divorce and that can twist a man. But overall he'd been a good cop and an honest one.

As I was leaving the beach a group of cars cruised to a halt on the strip outside Speedo's Cafe and the tall, impeccably uniformed figure of Chief Superintendent Kearney stepped out of the back, the wind tugging at the lapels of his jacket. He was quickly followed by Sen. Sergeant Bader, Lt. Brennan and another guy in casual clothes who I recognized as head of the surveillance team that had been staking out Jameson's place all week. Kearney spotted me and called out.

"Harrigan. You're not leaving are you?"

"Yes, I'm leaving," I told him,"

“Is it Jameson?”

“Yes. Positive I.D.”

I kept moving. Kearney was the very last person I wanted to look at.

“Can you stay on a little longer. We may need your help here.”

“I’ll be at headquarters,” I told him, “the smell’s starting to get to me.”

His eyes hardened, but he made no response and, turning on his heel abruptly, he set off down the concrete ramp to where the body lay, his little entourage hurrying after him.

I got into the car and sat there feeling old, old and very tired. I could see them all walking about on the beach. The uniforms putting up screens around the corpse were moving quickly now, conscious the top brass was on the job. Kearney was standing near the body, towering over Seagan. Nodding as if in approval, his hands clasped behind his back, clutching his little baton as if it were a magic wand.

Seagan was looking agitated and as I watched he broke away and began striding up the beach. Kearney shouted something after him but the words were snatched away by the wind. Seagan kept on walking, refusing to look back. That’s one thing about Doc, I thought, he doesn’t give a fuck about anyone.

I turned the key and drove home. I needed time out and I needed a drink. Anything to wipe out the shock and despair I’d felt when I’d lifted that towel and saw what was left of my partner’s face.

When I arrived back at my place the ancient blue Combie van that I’d noted as I left, was now parked directly opposite the entrance to my garage, steamed-up windows betraying the fact that it was occupied. I went around the rear of the house, slipped in the back door and locked it behind me. I pulled out my gun and stood there motionless for a long moment. ‘You’re paranoid,’ the voices murmured as I went from room to room. Maybe, I thought. And maybe that’s why I’m alive and Jamie’s not.

I holstered the gun, re-crossed the living room and peered out the blinds. A skinny, long haired, hippie type, who looked like he hadn’t seen a decent steak in years, was pulling on an old black wet-suit by the Combie’s side door.

I went back to the kitchen and opened the cupboard next to the fridge. There it was as always, a large unopened bottle of Johnny Walker. I picked it up for the first time in more than a year and sniffed at the cap. No smell. I looked at it a while longer then replaced it on the shelf and pulled a coke out of the fridge. As I raised the bottle to my mouth I realized I was trembling.

‘Why do you keep that stuff in the house?’ I asked myself. I’d sworn off the drink eighteen months before. It was my second attempt. There’d been a drink driving charge that I’d beaten on a technicality and then a brawl over a singer in a night club. Nothing serious, but there’d been a few other incidents over the years and, as the disciplinary board had taken pains to point out, they all seemed to be related to alcohol.

I finished the coke, opened another, walked through into the lounge room and settled down into an armchair. Well, so long Jameson. Thirty-six years old and dead on the beach. We’d known each other since we were kids. We’d worked together and we’d played together. He’d been a hard man. Six foot one and strongly built. The sort of guy you’d want standing in your corner when things went south. We’d sorted out a lot of trouble together. The guys at the club had christened us the terrible twins.

Anger was beginning to replace the shock, welling up from way down below. Why tie a wire around his neck for Christ's sake? And what about his eyes? Seagan had said it could have been the fish but I didn't buy that. I got up, stood in front of the mirror and was surprised how old and grey I looked. The phone rang. I hesitated before picking it up.

"Harrigan,"

"It's Gabriele, Sean," it took me by surprise, "I just heard about Jamie. Are you ok?"

"How did you hear?"

"Jean called. Are you O.K.?"

"Yeah, I'm O.K. It should never have happened. Not like that."

"How did it happen?" she was scared, "Were you with him?"

"No, he was undercover."

"Sean," she paused, but I knew what was coming, "You've got to get out of that job."

There was a long silence. "Sean? Are you there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here, Gaby."

"Do you feel like coming over?"

"No. Not just now. I'm sorry. I don't want to talk. Not right now."

"O.K. But you're welcome. You know that. Call me if you need to. Promise?"

"Yeah, I will. I promise."

I hung up. Do you want to come over? How long had it been since she'd said those words? What had started out as a trial separation had gradually deteriorated into a fact of life. She hadn't been to my place in over a year and I doubted she was coming back. She hated the job and everything that went with it. She'd hated the midnight calls and the drinking. The broken promises and missed promotions, and finally she'd just moved out. The only time I saw her now was when we were having our once a month get together as recommended by her therapist. That wasn't going anywhere fast either.

I hung up the phone and stood there looking out the window at nothing. The call had troubled me. How could Jean have known about Jamie so quickly? The wind was swirling dried brown leaves around in endless futile circles on the concrete pathway outside and a solitary black crow with cold yellow eyes was sitting on a fence watching.

I mulled things over for a while then left and drove across town to where Jameson had lived. The surveillance unit that had been parked up the street from the house all week was gone. Bad news travels fast. We'd set the place up for him when he'd first gone underground. It was part of his cover. A crooked cop living beyond his means, caught up in a web of gambling, prostitution and drugs. I'd been to the place many times and even though he was dead I observed the routine. The curtains on the second floor bedroom window were drawn closed. They shouldn't have been. That was the 'at home' signal, meaning he was there and available for contact.

As I parked the car a couple of blocks away my mobile rang. I checked the number then tossed the phone in the glove box. Walking back towards the house I caught myself watching for tails in a newspaper shop window and realized how spooked I was. The death of someone close does that, it tightens your grip on life.

The key turned smoothly in the slot and I slipped in, closing the door behind me. I examined the area without moving for a long moment before easing out my revolver. Three doors led off the hallway, all of them closed. I went across to the lounge room, opened the door quietly, and peered in. The room was tidy, way too tidy. From the tasseled rug on the floor to the carefully

arranged cushions on the sofa, there was nothing out of place. Magazines were laid out on the coffee table at just the right angle, looking like a photo shoot for Vogue. I checked the other rooms, they were all the same. Jameson had been many things but he'd never been Vogue.

I went back to the main bedroom. The set up was almost laughable. There was a mirror lying face up on the edge of the dressing table with traces of a white powder on it. I knew what it was before I tasted it. Cocaine. A plastic bag of the same stuff was lying alongside it, maybe half a kilo or so.

I went through the drawers. The top one contained underpants and socks mixed in with a few shells from a 9 mm. In the next were various bits and pieces. A pager, a torch, a beach towel, numerous socks and an old mobile, all jumbled together bachelor style. The remaining drawers contained shirts, bed sheets and an assortment of sweaters and woolens. Nothing unusual. I sat on the bed and looked around. There were none of Jamie's personal items there, no letters, no photographs. None of the bits and pieces of trivia that tend to gravitate towards bedrooms.

I went back downstairs and prowled around. I could feel the intruders touch everywhere. There were scrape marks on the tiles directly in front of the fridge; they'd pulled it out to inspect the back. I had a thought. Jameson never cooked. His fridge had been crammed full of the same frozen food for almost two years. It had been a standing joke at headquarters. Some wise guy had christened it the black museum. I opened the freezer door. It was empty. They'd taken everything. Frozen chickens, fish, meat, pizza, even the ice cubes were gone.

I moved back to the study and switched on the computer. Bluescreen. Everything was gone. Probably an introduced virus. I switched it off and sat there, my eyes roaming around the room. The more I looked, the less I found of Jamie.

There was a mirror on the wall near the phone with photographs stuck in around the edges of the frame. The main photograph was of Jameson standing by a roulette table with two top heavy blondes in Playboy outfits. He'd always joked that they were undercover cops. There was another one of him at the police club, smiling broadly with his arm around a waitress. I'd seen these photo's many times. The one above had been cut in two. Jean had been in the other half. It had been taken the year before they split up. The next one was of Jameson and myself being awarded black belts by Sen. Sergeant Bader of the unarmed combat course. There were some old ones there too. A young Jameson in uniform looking proud and determined, his mother and father on either side of him. I was about to turn away when I noticed the gap. A photograph was missing. I looked closer. Traces of blue tack were still visible on the glass. The faint dusty outline suggesting it had been removed recently. I cast my mind back, trying to recall the shot. Then I rechecked the drawers in the kitchen and lounge room. It was irritating, I must have seen it a dozen times. I racked my brains, trying to remember, but no luck. I spent another hour checking and re-checking the house, it was spotless; the forensic guys would be wasting their time. Whoever had turned over Jameson's place had been a pro.

I was about to call it a day when I remembered and examined the space around the edge of the back door, starting from the bottom right hand corner and working up. Sure enough, half way across the top, a length of fine thread had been stuck onto the paint work, bridging the gap between the door and door-frame. He never used the back door but he always checked the thread when he returned home. It was an old fashioned, habitual, security check. The thread was broken.

I retraced my steps, cleaning everything I'd touched. Then I went to the bedroom, removed all traces of cocaine, flushed the remnants of the powder from the mirror down the wash-hand

basin, rinsed the mirror and returned it to the bedroom. I then wrapped the coke in a plastic garbage bag and sealed it with some heavy duty tape I found in the kitchen. I cleaned the area thoroughly, hung the coke off my holster strap and put my jacket back on.

Leaving the house, I walked in the opposite direction before circling back towards the car. I was feeling more than a little confused. Someone was toying with us. They'd slaughtered the guy in no uncertain manner. Why spend half a day going over his house with a fine tooth comb and then making the frame-up so patently obvious? None of it made any sense. As I stepped into the car the mobile trilled again. "Harrigan,"

"Where the hell have you been, Sean? Kearney's furious. He's been on my back for hours. Where the fuck are you?"

"Cool down, Sarge," I told him, "I needed time out."

"For Christ sake, man, we thought you were back on the piss. Look, he's called a meeting. Ten O'clock sharp, tomorrow morning. You have to be there. Do not let me down."

I snapped off the phone. Sarge was a decent man but, like the rest of them, he was terrified of Kearney.

On the way into town I made a brief detour to deposit the coke at a friend's place.

"This needs to disappear for a while," was all I needed to tell Trevor. He was a reformed crim of the heaviest type and I trusted him absolutely.

"It don't exist till you say so," he smiled, "It's in the vault, mate."

That was all the assurance I needed. Shakespeare got it right. Loneliness makes strange bedfellows. As I resumed the journey into town the photograph came back to haunt me. I knew there was some reason that I should remember it, but it just wouldn't come. It troubled me all the way in, nagging at my mind, hovering like a half remembered dream just outside the edge of consciousness.

Chapter 2

Sydney

The disused garage lay shrouded in shadows on the not yet fashionable back streets of Woolloomooloo, one of Sydney's oldest suburbs. The area had been mostly by-passed by those looking for an easier road to gentrification. Further relegated to obscurity when the Main Roads Department had constructed a flyover that eased the congestion on the approaches to Sydney Harbour Bridge, but did nothing to enhance what had already been considered a slum for many years.

The front windows of the abandoned building had been boarded up, old-fashioned petrol pumps stood like toy soldiers from a by-gone era, whilst signs warning of a twenty-four-hour surveillance that no longer existed, hung in tatters from the discoloured, red brick walls.

The shadow in the doorway glanced at his watch and looked back. There had been a movement at the far end of the street. From a distance you could have mistaken Charlie Douglas for an athlete. Tall, slim, dark track suit, Red Reeboks and a headband. Up closer that illusion faded rapidly. The gaunt face, haunted eyes and empty ass jeans all spoke of a long standing love affair with the big H. A mistress now badly in need of refreshment.

"You're late,"

"Making sure I wasn't followed," Charlie's eyes were roaming up and down the silent street, "This could get me fucked over, man."

"Let's not get too dramatic, Charlie," the policeman gestured and they moved inside, "You're getting two-hundred and fifty bucks. And only that much if it's worth it."

They walked to the back of the building. Fluorescent lights from the freeway overhead cast an ethereal light down through broken skylights in the fibro roofing. Charlie was a grass. A junkie pimp who'd started out as car salesman in one of the most prestigious Mercedes dealerships in NSW. Led astray by ego, big money, easy girls and the intoxicating aphrodisiac of rubbing shoulders with some of Sydney's best-healed socialites. He's lasted for five years before they tired of him and his growing habit and, when he eventually lost his job and his demo model Merc, Charlie's life had fallen apart.

First he'd tried dealing drugs up at the Cross. When that endeavour failed through lack of muscle, he'd hooked up with a prostitute he used to rent and became her pimp. Supplementing his income by moonlighting as an informer to the Sydney Drug Squad.

"This info's worth at least a grand,"

They were sitting in battered swivel chairs in what had once been the glass partitioned office of the garage. Long dead paint peeling off the yellowed walls, shards of broken glass hanging like stalactites from shattered wooden frames, a large calendar featuring a swollen

breasted Miss November smiling down wantonly as if intimating she'd take on all comers, a grease laden floor littered with rubbish, a black leather briefcase sitting on a dirty wooden table, the stench of stale oil heavy in the air.

"Any word on Sophie?"

"No. Nothing yet. She probably hooked up with some John for a few days. Don't worry about her. She'll be back."

This wasn't the time to tell him that Sophie - AKA Pamela Jenkins - had been fished out of Sydney Harbour in the early hours of that morning; a knife driven through her chest with such force that it had partially severed her spinal column. The face and body mutilated so badly the identification had relied solely on the Japanese style tattoos that embroidered her back.

"Something's wrong," Charlie's head moved sideways, as if in protest, "She always calls. I could be next."

The cop shrugged. "Easy money, Charlie,"

'Easy for you maybe,' His eyes flicked around the room once more before he made his final decision.

"His name's Endor. That's what they call him."

There was a moments silence, then the policeman raised his eyebrows.

"That's it? That's all you've got? Endor?"

Charlie stole another look around at nothing.

"He's an import. You know. English or European, or something. Some sort of wog."

The policeman removed his hat and placed it upside down on the black briefcase.

"Age, description, surname, location? What else do you have?"

Again a glint of fear behind the narrowed eyes.

"No. Nothing. That's it."

"Ohh, no," The policeman smiled, "That's not it. There's something you're not telling me. What is it?" The pimp squirmed for a moment longer, his eyes chasing shadows at the far end of the garage. "You get nothing for nothing, Charlie. Come on."

Charlie went silent for a long moment, struggling with internal demons.

"He's a cop. They reckon he's a copper." He looked directly at the policeman for the first time, "He's in with the bikies,"

"What does that mean? In with the bikies?"

"He's in with them for fucks sake! You know. He's bent. Drugs, protection, everything."

"And that's it? No surname, no rank, no description? What else you got?"

"They reckon he's high up. No one's ever seen him, but they reckon he's high up."

"Where do you get this stuff from Charlie? Its meaningless without a source. Come on, mate, there's no such thing as a free lunch. You could be making it all up. How would I know?"

"Sophie told me. Some bikies hired a few of them for a party. The guy she was with was off his face. He started talking about stuff. You know, weird stuff. Next thing the boss guy went crazy and kicked all the girls out. She was scared, man. Really scared."

"The name of the biker?"

"I don't know. She was shit scared, mate. Didn't want to know."

"Were they wearing colours, patches, insignia? Where were they from? Sydney, Melbourne?"

“No idea. She wouldn’t talk about it. Said it was too dangerous. That’s it. That’s all I got. That’s gotta be worth a grand.”

“Ok. Look, I’m going to give you five hundred now, but I want more intel by Friday. When you get me a name, an insignia, or some other form of ID, you get the other five hundred. I’m going to show you some photographs,” The policeman was reaching for his briefcase.

“Waste of time, mate, I never met...”

Charlie’s voice trailed off when he saw the gun.

“Have you been telling me the truth, Charlie? I really do need to know who these people are.”

“Mate, I swear. On my mother’s grave. That’s all I know. Sophie didn’t know who they were. She would have told me. She didn’t know.”

The policemen stared into Charlie’s eyes for a long moment.

“And who else have you discussed this with?”

“You fucking joking? My bitch disappears into thin air and you think I’m gonna talk about this shit to anyone? Those bikies are fuckin crazy, man. I nearly didn’t come here tonight. Get fucking real!”

“Ok,” the policeman nodded, “I believe you. I’m going to trust you on this one, Charlie.”

He glanced at the calendar, taped onto the only remaining sheet of glass.

“What do you think of her tits, Charlie?”

“What?”

“Her tits. Are they real, or fibreglass?”

As the pimp turned to the calendar in confusion, the policeman touched the tip of the silencer to Charlie’s right temple and pulled the trigger, scattering blood, grey matter and bone across the impossibly white teeth and golden breasts of a still smiling Miss November.