
THE PATH TO BETRAYAL

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A wise old man once told me, that everyone has a book in them waiting to be written. This is mine. I'd like to thank the many friends, who encouraged me to write, especially Mary, Fiona, Nigel and Gayle who showed me that even a person with appalling grammar can write. All it takes is imagination and a computer with spell check, and good friends. But most of all I thank my family, especially my wife, for putting up with me during this time.

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NEW YORK PRESENT DAY

After a series of groans and shudders, a metallic voice announced the twelfth floor.

“Whatever you do don’t fuck up!” Nigel whispered to himself, as he led his team out of the lift. It was his first assignment as the senior agent and he wanted to make a good impression. Nigel again wondered if he should have pushed harder for backup, as he led his team down the seemingly endless corridor, hoping he’d taken the right direction.

When given the briefing on this assignment at the office, Nigel as the team leader had asked for backup. His Section Chief had told him firmly to stop complaining, that it was a low priority assignment. Nigel had capitulated, giving in to his boss, thinking he knew better. Now here with only his three men, he started to wonder, if saving money was his boss’s main consideration.

New York he knew, had a habit of swallowing the FBI’s funds and resources. Ever since 9-11, the FBI had been on a heightened state of readiness, answering calls from crackpots and concerned citizens alike. Most were just a waste of time and money that the Bureau didn’t have, or low priority, like this one.

Observing his team, Nigel realised that they didn’t inspire him with much confidence. Allan and Ian, who walked confidently behind him in their ‘off the rack’ suits, had been out of the academy for only three months. With no street experience, both thought this assignment was “Shit Hot.” Mind you, Nigel reminded himself, he’d only been here for a year himself. In that period he’d spent six months on the streets, the minimum time for leading a team like this one.

Bill, on the other hand, was a complete mystery. He’d been on the street for over ten years, and looked every inch a seasoned agent. ‘But he’s here taking orders from me?’ Nigel thought studying him. Bill’s suit was old and well worn, fraying

at the sleeves. His shirt collar was unbuttoned behind his tie, to allow extra space, for his oversized neck.

“He must have fucked up pretty badly, to be here taking orders from me,” Nigel mumbled softly to himself, getting more apprehensive.

“What’s this guy wanted for again Nigel?” Bill asked, suddenly, startling him.

“Some irregularity with his passport, he entered the country twice but only left once. They didn’t pick it up until after he’d left the airport, because of some glitch with the computer. So partner, we’re here to drag his arse downtown for questioning.” Nigel answered light heartedly, eliciting smiles from Allan and Ian.

“Do you know anything else about him? Like did you even bother to do a background check?” Bill asked gruffly, not amused by Nigel’s sense of humour.

“Of course I did Agent Stevenson! I even asked for backup, but the agency didn’t think it was warranted!” Nigel replied angrily, putting Bill in his place.

“Look, I’m sorry for my attitude Nigel, but we know squat about this guy. It just worries me.” Bill said apologetically, as they arrived outside the room.

Unknown to the others, it had been an assignment like this one that had led to Bill’s demotion. He and his partner had been sent to pick up a known drug dealer for questioning, and had walked in on a drug deal between the dealer and two of his associates. In the following shootout all three drug dealers had been shot along with Bill’s partner, and an innocent bystander, who’d been walking past the doorway at the time. Bill had been left to take the blame for the whole mess. It had made him very cautious.

“Well you’re right about one thing Bill; it doesn’t hurt to go in with a bit of care. Ian you knock, while Bill backs you up on the right side. Allan can cover this side and I’ll cover his back.” Nigel suggested. Personally he thought it was over the top, but it was his way of apologising for coming down hard on Bill. As they moved into position, Ian fronted up to the door excitedly, and banged loudly.

“FBI, open up!” Ian said in a clear voice. Silence followed.

“FBI, open up!” Ian repeated louder this time, thinking the occupant hadn’t heard him the first time, but again there was no answer. Not sure what to do next, he was just turning to get advice from Nigel, when a metallic sound came from the apartment.

“Get away from the door!” Bill screamed, going for his gun. The others instantly dived away, not from fear of the man inside the room, but the way Bill had yelled in absolute terror.

Without warning, a deafening roar like a jackhammer erupted from inside the apartment. Instantaneously, a line of holes appeared along the bottom of the door, until the door couldn’t take the pounding any longer and exploded out into the hallway. On the opposite side of the hallway appeared a neat line of holes, matching the ones on the door, except for the one space at the end where Ian’s leg had been.

Nigel and Allan lay dazed in a crumpled heap on their side of the hallway. Their eyes were glued to the bloody mess that Ian’s leg had become. Bill, using all his strength, dragged the now screaming agent further down the hallway. Coming to his senses, Nigel jumped to his feet, pulling out his automatic. With a mixture of fear and anger, he emptied a full clip into the remains of the apartment door then jumped away. He hoped desperately that in doing this, he would prevent the shooter from rushing out into the hallway and finishing them. Allan, by this stage had also managed to get into position, as Nigel reloaded and prepared for the worst.

A crash inside the apartment, after Nigel’s random shots through the door, gave them hope. He’d either clipped the offender or made him take cover. Either way it gave them breathing space as they backed further away from the door, momentarily deaf from the shooting. Looking down the corridor Nigel saw that Bill had taken off his belt and wrapped it tightly around Ian’s leg, as he tried to cut off the bleeding. He’d also had his radio out; it was lying beside him on the floor.

‘Thank God! He’s radioed for backup!’ Nigel realised, something he hadn’t even thought of yet.

“Shit I’m glad Bill came!” Nigel said to Allan, getting a dazed look from the still rattled agent, as they both faced the door, weapons ready. As the seconds ticked by in the hallway, other sounds started to filter through to Nigel’s slowly returning hearing. He could hear the screams of ordinary people in the building, stampeding away from the danger those gunshots signified. Moments later the fire alarm activated, triggered by someone trying to evacuate the remaining people in the building, away from the danger, on the twelfth floor.

In time, the fire alarm stopped and the sound of people fleeing grew distant, as an eerie silence returned to the hallway. This was punctuated by moaning from Ian, fighting his pain. Fifteen minutes seemed like fifteen hours to the agents in the hallway.

The adrenalin rush, which had been fuelled by their fear, had worn off. The agents were left grasping for air, as fatigue gripped them. Shaking like a druggie, waiting for his next hit, Nigel, nearly spent, gripped his weapon unsteadily in his sweat drenched hands.

“Where the fuck is the backup?” Nigel cursed loudly, his eyes glued to the assailant’s door. No answer came from the others, as Nigel realised he was speaking just for the hell of it. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the clatter of weapons and body armour heralded the arrival of their Swat team.

“Bloody Hell, it’s about time!” Bill grumbled, as the first Swat member approached. Hearing Bill’s comment, he gave him the finger in reply, making Bill smile. Moving cautiously past the over rort agents, the heavily armed police officers quickly took up positions either side of the door. Having been given the well done signal, Nigel, and his men moved cautiously away.

After several commands to “surrender” were broadcast by the Swat unit, receiving no answer, a tremendous series of explosions echoed down the hallway. The Swat unit then stormed through the doorway into room 1217, expecting the worst. Instead they found the unconscious shooter with a bullet wound to the leg, plus a graze on the side of his head,

compliments of Nigel's shooting spree. The shooting over, medics now rushed down the hallway. One team attended to Ian's injuries, the other to stabilise the shooter. As normality returned to the hallway a series of 'well done' slaps rained down on the four agents, who had somehow become heroes.

Pulling himself together, Nigel, on unsteady legs, followed Ian's stretcher back down the long hallway with his men silently behind him. To the agent's surprise, ordinary cops and firemen clapped their hands and cheered his group, as they quietly passed.

"My God all I want is to get out of here," Nigel said softly to the others, as the medic's and his team crowded in to a lift.

Exiting on the ground floor, the agents were swamped by a sea of people and media. The crowd cheered and yelled their thanks, as Nigel and his men, shyly waved back. Dodging microphones that sprouted from the mob like corn, they were forced to push their way through the jubilant, relieved crowd. Making slow progress, the group loyally followed Ian's stretcher to the ambulance, making sure he was safely inside, as camera's snapped wildly, blinding them.

Seeing the surging by the crowds, the local police came to their rescue. Forming an honour guard, they proudly escorted Nigel's team out to their vehicle. Bill, being the most capable, jumped behind the wheel and drove slowly away from the hotel. The three agents near breaking point, sat quietly letting their tension slowly fade, as they drove back to their headquarters.

"My first assignment! Fuck didn't that go well?" Nigel whispered, berating himself.

FBI HEADQUARTERS NEW YORK

At their headquarters Nigel, Bill and Allan were subjected to a two hour debriefing. When the interrogation was finished, they gathered in the canteen feeling dejected. Badly shaken, exhausted and smelling of dry sweat, the agents were given the rest of the week off. Still no one wanted to leave, without finding out first, how Ian was doing at the hospital. Sitting there in silence, Nigel looked up to see the Head of the FBI, John Wilson, strolled into the room. He was followed by a large group of reporters and “yes” men, including Nigel’s Section Chief, the same man who’d told him he wouldn’t need backup.

For the next ten minutes the head of the FBI shook hands with the three agents, telling all present how, “These fine men had gone above and beyond the call of duty to arrest the suspected terrorist.” While this was happening, Wilson’s staff manoeuvred the camera crews around the room, trying to get the perfect picture, of their boss with his men. As quickly as it had started, it was over, leaving the three agents wondering if they’d dreamed the whole thing. Silence settled again over the room, broken eventually by Nigel.

“If it wasn’t for you Bill, we’d all be dead!” Nigel stated, feeling guilty for Ian getting shot.

“Don’t be stupid!” Bill retorted “It was just Ian’s bad luck, and as far as getting killed, did you notice how low the scumbag shot. I don’t think he was trying to kill anyone Nigel.”

“Still I shouldn’t have been in charge, I lacked experience;” Nigel replied.

“Forget it Nigel, what’s done is done. And I don’t anyone will ever accuse you of having no experience again!” Bill said smiling, hoping to lift the mood, but failing. Nigel phone ringing brought them all alert. The call informed them that Ian was okay and would gain the full use of his leg in a couple of weeks.

The relieved agents all smiled at the same time. Getting to their feet, they shook each other’s hands excitedly, happy for Ian. They all knew, for the first time since the

shooting that they could finally put it behind them. The three agents then left for their weeks leave, forgetting all about that day's events and their discussion of the shooter's aim.

THE INTERROGATION

Two days after the shooting, the man from room 1217 groggily opened his eyes and looked around the room. He was obviously in hospital. The only difference between this room and the hundreds of other rooms in the complex, were the six heavily armed guards. They stood silently watching him like hawks, as he lay handcuffed to the bed. Seeing him stir, one of the guards spoke into his headset. Moments later, two more men entered the room. Although not armed like the guards, the shooter knew that these were the men who could do him the most harm.

"Good morning Mr Brown. It would appear you've been a bad boy!" stated one of the new arrivals.

"Your passport shows you're an American citizen from Nevada, but under the effect of the anaesthetic, you were speaking in Arabic. We then checked your prints with Interpol and we're bombarded with requests for your extradition from the Israelis. Care to make a statement Mr Brown?" asked the same man glaring at him. In return he greeted the questions with silence.

"Look it will go a lot easier on you if you co-operate," said the second unarmed man, a slight smile on his lips. He gave the impression of being a friend, though his eyes told another story. This continued, day and night for the next week as the FBI's top two interrogators did their best to break this mystery man.

Unfortunately, he showed about as much reaction to questioning as a rock would. The interrogators, ready to give up, tried another tactic.

"Who trained you Mr Brown? You allowed yourself to get trapped in a room by four rookie agents! Then you were stupid enough to get hit by a stray bullet! Who trained you?"

Some Mountain Afghani?” the interrogator asked, causing the guards in the room to start chuckling, as they tried not to laugh at Mr Brown’s embarrassment.

“The room was not my idea smartarse! And I was trained by your CIA at Fort Bragg, you little shit!” Mr Brown spat out angrily, silencing the room. Looking around the now quiet room, Mr Brown saw the shocked expressions on the guard’s faces. He also noticed the confident looks the interrogators gave each other, as the man pretending to be Mr Brown realised he’d given them their first break.

As he had intended.

THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC

The Oval office had always fascinated the Head of the FBI, John Wilson. As he sat with the other Department Heads, waiting for the President, he was amazed at how the President's desk dominated the room. Of course when it was originally built it was designed for that exact purpose. It had been skilfully engineered to give their President an advantage, when having meetings with overseas politicians and dignitaries. Its oval shape with the Presidents desk, in the centre to the side, meant that anyone sitting in the room was isolated from the man next to him. The President on the other hand, looked at everyone at the same time, dominating them.

It also worked well at staff meetings like this one and John knew he would soon feel that isolation. Looking around the room, John caught Don Brooks the Head of the CIA, staring over the top of his rimmed glasses at him. It wasn't much of a secret in Washington, that Wilson and Brooks loathed each other. John figured that Brooks' gleefully thought that today was the day that he would get the axe. Catching John watching him, Brooks, busied himself with a folder of documents he'd had with him. Moments later his unblinking eyes returned to John, this time with a confident smile on his lips.

From the side door two Secret Service Agents slipped into the room, announcing the arrival of the President, as all made ready to stand.

"Wilson what's going on? I just had the Israeli President call me a liar, when I told him that this "Mr Brown" fellow had died of his injuries. Care to elaborate?" the President asked angrily, waving everyone to sit back down, as they tried to stand.

"Well, the Israeli agents watching the hospital guessed that it was a lie. We had to say something to get the press of our backs," John Wilson replied casually.

The whole room became deadly quiet as the President stood dumbstruck by John's statement. Brooks seizing the

opportunity put the knife in.

“You idiot Wilson! You’ve made the President lie to one of our allies. You should be dismissed.” Brooks screamed angrily. The rest of the Department Heads sat there stunned into absolute silence. Not by Wilson’s statement, but by the way Brooks had venomously attacked him. No one knew what to say, but they had to agree with Brooks on one thing, John Wilson looked to be leaving office and soon. They’d all noticed the President use his surname instead of his given name. This was a telltale sign that you were out. Brooks, sensing the mood in the room was about to continue hammering Wilson, when the President raised his hand for silence.

“You’d better have a good excuse for lying to me Wilson and I want to hear it right now!” the President commanded angrily, using his surname again.

“We can’t hand him over Sir. He’s one of ours.” John answered quietly, letting the gravity of the statement flow over him.

“Are you kidding me!” exploded the President. “Well I suppose you can’t be or you wouldn’t have said it,” the President continued, his eyes never leaving John’s face. Silence again settled over the room, as the President chewed over in his mind, what to do.

“Let’s hear it John, though it’s my understanding that this Mr Brown is over fifty. That’s a bit old for the Army isn’t it?” suggested the President, with a slight smile on his lips. Wilson noticed that the President was back to using his first name, showing that he believed him.

“Sir, it’s my belief, and we have several records from Army Intelligence to prove it, that Mr Brown, better known as Ali Moustaffer, was part of a unit set up in the eighties. It was made up of Foreign Special Forces troops to take care of targets around the world under the orders of the CIA.

This continued, until several years ago, when the CIA lost control of the unit. It then became a force for hire.” John stated a little anger in his voice.

“You’re crazy Wilson! You can’t prove any of this!” Brooks angrily yelled at John, before being silenced by a

raised hand from the President.

“Everyone except John and Brooks out of the room!” the President ordered flatly. “And not a word of this leaves this office. Am I understood?” the President ordered.

The Department Heads quickly nodded their agreement, before fleeing the room. John of course felt better, hearing the President use his first name, while Don Brooks also had heard his surname being used, he could see Brook’s confidence had been rattled.

“Brooks, the fact that you said John couldn’t prove it, instead of denying it was true, means I believe John. So now I want the whole truth. You start John, we’ve got all night.” the President said getting comfortable, he knew this would be a long story.

“Well Sir, it started in early nineteen eighty-two,” John replied, as he started to tell an amazing and frightening story.

NORTHERN NSW AUSTRALIA

6 MONTHS EARLIER

Steve and Ken sat in a corner booth at their local watering hole, doing what they did best, writing themselves off. Steve's boss, Ken, sat facing away from the crowd, while Steve sat like always, watching the crowd around him. Dressed in their matching farm work clothes consisting of blue shorts, blue shirts and brown farm boots, it was obvious to everyone present that looking for female company was the last thing on their minds.

'Friday night, the end of the work week' Steve thought, as he looked around the overcrowded room, checking for danger, spotting none. It was a big night; and the Alstonville Station Pub was filled to the brim, overflowing with a colourful mix of locals, tourists and drunks. Crushed together, the crowd stood around talking loudly over each other, trying to squeeze some joy into their miserable lonely lives, or they wouldn't be here at eleven o'clock at night, drinking.

"Maybe it's just me?" Steve mumbled to himself, as he scanned the room trying to spot something or someone to lift his spirit. Just when he was about to give up he spotted Justine the barmaid and signalled her for two more drinks. Poor Justine! In her late twenties, good looks and a knockout figure, it was always going to be hard working as a barmaid. At least she was a friendly face in a sea of nobodies and it cheered him up slightly. Weaving her way towards their table, Steve noticed Justine was wearing her usual frozen smile. She'd learnt to do this while trying to ignore the crude comments made by drunken men about her body. Navigating her way through an ocean of crude chatter, Justine delivered their drinks, placing them carefully on the table.

"Thanks Justine," Steve said paying for the beers and giving her a good tip for her trouble.

For this small act of kindness, he received a genuine smile. Picking up their empty glasses, Justine turned and made her way back to the bar, her frozen smile back in place as comments about her figure assailed her again. Looking

back at Steve from behind the bar Justine wished that this mystery man had been a little younger. There was something about him that she found attractive. She liked Steve and Ken. They had been coming to this pub on and off for over a year, and in that time had caused no problems. Apart from the fact that no one knew anything about Steve, for some reason he aroused her.

“Maybe age isn’t that important?” Justine said smiling.

“How about a beer’s or something else sexy!” a crude voice asked, from behind Justine. It was followed by wolf whistles and hoots from the man’s friends. Looking around at the new arrivals with loathing, Justine snapped back to reality, her frozen smile back in place.

A feeling of impending doom settled over the bar staff at the appearance of these young men. They were well known for causing trouble and unfortunately getting away with it, because of family money and connections they had in the area. Steve also sensed trouble with the appearance of the young men and their treatment of Justine. His instincts warned him that it was time to go, before he did something about them. Turning to Ken, he was just about to suggest leaving, when Ken began to speak.

“My wife’s leaving me Steve, why is she leaving me?” Ken babbled looking into his glass for answers. Ken was right to look there, for in the last three months, Ken had spent almost every night here instead of at home with his wife. Ken was an alcoholic or close to it, and had given up caring about anything else.

“You fool! To throw away love so easily, what I’d give to have my wife back!” Steve murmured to himself, as his mind flooded with visions of his wife.

She was dressed as he remembered her best, in her long black dress, blonde hair spilling down over her shoulders. It had been the night he made up his mind to marry her rather than be separated a minute longer. His eyes blurred as her image danced before him making his heart fill with love for her, his heart thumping rapidly with longing. A sudden sob from Ken interrupted his thoughts causing the vision to vanish,

leaving him back in the bar feeling gutted and angry. Looking closely at Ken, Steve saw tears running down his face, which surprised him.

“Well, he really loved her after all! All the more the fool you are, for letting her go,” Steve said to himself.

“But at least he didn’t get her killed like you did to yours!” came a voice, laughing inside his head, tormenting him and bringing his anger rushing to the surface.

“Come on Ken, you’ve had enough, let’s go!” Steve growled, starting to stand, hoping to get as far away as possible before he exploded. Ken looked up and saw the black anger in Steve’s eyes and knew what it meant, his demon had returned.

Ken had found Steve to be hard working and completely reliable. But he was a mystery. Ken knew nothing of his past only that he had children, and a demon that possessed his dreams at night. Some nights Ken had heard Steve scream in terror in the cottage he rented at the edge of his property, and it was quite a distance from his house.

Only once had he seen this anger take control of Steve on the farm. His hand had become caught in a Chipper while working on it. Consumed with rage he’d hit the machine repeatedly, with vicious chops and kicks until he was a bloody mess, falling unconscious to the ground. Ken had just stood there, too scared to approach, for fear of being hit by mistake. He’d seen professionals fight before and knew some of those blows that rained down on the machinery would be fatal to a human.

In the end, he’d just waited until Steve collapsed from exhaustion before approaching him. He thought of firing Steve over the incident, but Steve was good company and since then it hadn’t happened again. That was until now.

“Okay Steve take it easy, I’ll just finish my drink!” Ken smiled nervously, as he quickly downed his drink, standing unsteadily. Heading for the door, Ken turned to see if Steve was following, when he collided with two of the trouble makers from the bar. The smashing of glasses raised a cheer from the crowd, as Ken disentangled himself from the two shocked

youths.

“Sorry about that, I’ll get you some more drinks.” Ken said pleasantly, realising it was his mistake.

“You stinking country bumpkin someone should teach you some manners!” the leader of the gang snarled at Ken, as more troublemakers flowed back into the pub.

“I said I was sorry, I’ll get you some more drinks,” Ken repeated, fear in his voice. He’d backed into Steve in an effort to get some distance from the growing bunch of young men and at the same time, keep Steve away from them.

“It’s too late for that old man, you and your mate need sorting out!” the Gang leader snarled, getting support from the watching crowd.

“He said he’d replace your drinks big mouth, now how about backing off!” Steve growled dangerously, to the growing group of trouble makers. The rest of the pub looked on, shocked at Steve’s defiance to the group of young men. Even the gang leader felt a touch of fear from Steve’s reply, but with the gang behind him and the crowd support he moved forward.

“Steve for God’s sake, take it easy, help me get their drinks!” Ken begged, worried that his friend wanted this confrontation to release his anger, and that was the last thing Ken needed at the moment.

“Too late for that!” the Gang leader spat out, as punches flew into Ken’s, unsuspecting body. Like a wild pack of dogs, the gang hammered Ken, punching and kicking him on the ground, until he lay unmoving. The group sensing Ken was finished concentrated their blows on Steve, as the crowd yelled excitedly, at seeing a fistfight. At first Steve held back hesitating, hearing Ken’s words, knowing he was right. Seeing Ken hit the floor changed everything, as his anger exploded, and his training took over.

Surging forward, he drove his fist into the leader’s throat sending him spinning backwards into the crowd. Blows continued to rain down on him, but forgetting the pain, he concentrated on his opponents. Pivoted to one side, he

smashed the legs out from under two gang members, clearly breaking the first youth's leg, causing him to scream in agony. A chop to the left, broke the nose of another poor bastard, before he head butted a youth to his front, knocking him unconscious.

The intoxicate crowd shouted their approval at every blow, mesmerised by the action, as they bayed for more blood from the combatants. And so it continued, Steve taking punishment, but giving more back, until gradually a space opened up around himself and Ken. The once cheering crowd stood there quietly, shocked at the carnage inflicted, on so many, by two old men. Steve, fighting through a wall of pain, grabbed Ken from the floor; before he contemptuously looked around at the sea of faces watching them.

"Are you all happy? Did you get to see a fight?" Steve asked angrily, as the effects of his injuries started to sap his strength. "Someone call a medic!" Steve added bluntly, as, fighting through his pain, he tried to get Ken outside, before it started again. They'd almost made it too. As Steve tried to push the swinging bar door open while supporting Ken, a flying glass bottle shattered against the back of his head, knocking him unconscious.

As Steve crashed to the floor, blood from his head wound, sprayed through the doorway, onto the surprised Police officers who were just about to enter. Looking down at the two bleeding middle aged men, who appeared severely beaten by the cheering mob inside, the Police angrily, came to the wrong conclusion,

"The poor old bastards!" a young Constable growled looking down at Steve and Ken lying at his feet, then murderously at the crowd.

"Get the mongrels!" yelled their Sergeant, as he called for backup. Needing no encouragement, the other Police officers drew their batons and charged into the wild and drunken crowd, laying into anyone who didn't get out of the way quick enough. When it was all over thirty-eight people were admitted to hospital, including four police officers. A further twenty were arrested for various offences and the well

maintained pub looked like a bomb had hit it.

After things had quieted down, the dazed Hotel staff, slowly emerged from their hiding spots behind the bar. They then started the unenviable job of trying to clean up the mess.

“What the hell happened here?” a voice demanded from the door, as Detective Boulton worked his way through the debris to stand in front of the hotel staff.

“We’re not really sure.” answered one of the Bar staff named Luke. Seeing the Detective wanted to hear more, he continued. “All I saw was two old guys heading for the door. I think one bumped into a couple of young guys, spilling their drinks. Next minute the whole place erupted. Me and the other staff hid behind the bar, other than that we saw nothing.” Luke said getting nods of support from the other staff.

“Are Steve and Ken okay Officer?” Justine asked worried for them.

“They’re both in hospital but they’ll be okay. Do you know them miss?” the Detective asked fishing for information.

“Not really, they work out on a farm about five kilometre’s from here to the south, they’ve been coming here for about a year,” Justine answered honestly.

“Cause any trouble before?” the detective asked, scanning the staff faces.

“What those old guys? You’re kidding us Detective they must be in there fifties!” Luke answered smiling, amused by the cop’s question.

“I know how it sounds, but lots of the witnesses say that one of the old guys inflicted most of the injuries, before trying to walk out. I’m just checking to see if it’s true.” Detective Boulton replied neutrally. Seeing the surprised looks on the faces in front of him, it was clear no one believed him.

Three days later, Steve finally regained consciousness, and tried to take stock of his surroundings, through a wall of pain. His eyes were blurry, but it was definitely a hospital room, by the equipment near the three other beds.

“So you’re finally awake?” a friendly voice stated, from

the end of his bed. Focusing, Steve recognised Justine sitting with an open book in her hands. He tried desperately to get his mind up to speed to make a reply, but nothing came.

“I’ve got to tell you Steve, you don’t look too good. But you’re certainly better looking than the pub; it looks like a bomb went off there!” Justine exclaimed smiling.

“Bomb! Was it sanctioned?” Steve exclaimed, before his mind could focus properly.

“Sanctioned! Now that’s an interesting word, what’s it mean?” asked a male voice to the right of Justine, out of Steve’s line of sight.

“I’m not sure he knows what he is saying Detective?” Justine replied, wondering too what Steve had meant.

Inside Steve’s brain alarm bells started going off, clearing his mind and alerting him to a danger he sensed.

“Hello Justine, how long have I been here?” Steve asked warily, this time hoping for information on what had occurred since the fight. Justine happily told Steve all about what had happened, from her limited knowledge. She told him roughly about the fight and riot that followed, with Steve ending up in hospital, explaining that was three night’s ago. She even introduced Detective Boulton the Officer in charge of the Investigation, who was here to protect Steve.

“Why do I need protecting?” Steve asked innocently.

“Well it appears several members of the public, who were hurt in the fight, reckon you did all the damage to them and the pub. Several have threatened to get even, so here I am!” replied Detective Boulton watching Steve.

“I really can’t remember a thing detective, only that Ken bumped into some young men spilling their beer that’s about it.” Steve replied blankly.

“How silly detective, how could Ken and Steve do so much damage? They were just victims, of some young thugs who’d had too much to drink.” Justine pointed out worried they might come after him.

“I suppose your right miss. It would take an incredibly good fighter or trained soldier to fight his way out of a brawl.

Wouldn't it Captain?" Boulton smiled, as he turned and walked out the door, leaving Justine staring at Steve.

Two days later, Steve, with the help of Justine, arrived back at his rented cottage near Ken's farm. Hobbling inside, Justine made him a cup of tea, as he settled into a lounge chair, and sorted through his pile of mail found on the doorstep. Most was junk mail, two were not. One was from the owner of the cottage giving him three weeks notice, the other was from Ken. It said that he was no longer required on the farm, and included a cheque for two weeks' severance pay. It appeared that the young troublemakers had friends in this town, and even Ken had decided to keep his distance.

Seeing his reaction to the letters Justine came over and took them from Steve and read them.

"They've got no right to treat you like this!" Justine said angrily, tears forming in her eyes.

"I'm not a local, Justine. They see me as an outsider. The people who own this place and Ken have to live here. This is the only way for them to co-exist with the people that were hurt at the pub." Steve replied feeling gutted.

"Still Ken was your friend, I would've expected better from him!" Justine answered, seeing the sorrow on Steve's face, as they both sat in silence drinking their tea.

"Thanks for all your help Justine you've been a great friend, though I'm worried that your helping me, could affect your job." Steve said softly.

"You don't have to worry Steve. I quit a couple of days ago after a run in with the manager. So if it's okay with you, I'll stay here with you for awhile." Justine replied, her eyes getting misty, worried that he might say no.

"Of course you can. I'd love to have you stay with me, but it's a bit cramped, it's only got one bed." Steve answered, blushing at the mention of the bed.

"It's okay Steve I'm sure we'll both fit!" Justine replied, with a mischievous smile on her lips.

Much later that night Steve and Justine lay entwined on the bed, having spent most of the afternoon and night making

love. Both lay there deep in thought, as to what this relationship meant to each of them. Steve felt guilty about Justine's age.

"God! My daughters are in their twenties, and Justine is only twenty nine. I'm just a dirty old man!" Steve whispered to himself, smiling at the situation.

On the other hand he couldn't remember the last time he'd made love, he knew it had been with his wife, for she was the only other woman he'd slept with. It must have been the night before the...

He stopped there, remembering was still too painful, and he didn't want to ruin this moment with another woman, who cared for him.

Justine lay beside Steve more content and satisfied than she could remember for a long time and at the same time sad, for it wouldn't last. She knew in her heart that Steve would not be staying with her, it was in his eyes. 'The fear of getting too attached to someone,' she thought. At first Steve's love making had been like a caged animal seeking only to satisfy a hunger. But as time went by he had become a more considerate lover wanting her to enjoy it as much as he did. It had been a beautiful experience for her, and she would always treasure it, but he would not be staying.

Something about the look in his eyes, when the Detective had called him Captain. She sensed that she would be in danger, if she stayed with him, and she knew he would not allow that. So she decided to enjoy the moment while it lasted.

"Why'd the detective call you Captain, back at the hospital Steve?" Justine asked softly, as they lay in each other's arms.

"I was in the Army once. I worked my way up to the rank of Captain before I left." Steve answered defensively. "There's a lot more to the story Justine, but I'm not joking when I tell you that your life could be in danger for knowing it." Steve stammered out, thinking she'd think him slightly crazy.

"Tell me Steve, I can see it in your eyes you need to tell someone and you can trust me," she asked softly, sensing

Steve desperately needed to confide in her. Looking deeply into her eyes Steve slowly unburdened himself, telling her of his life and the demons that haunted him.

Several hours later after an agonising horror filled story, Steve wept and sobbed uncontrollably in Justine's arms, finally releasing the pain he had held in for so long.

"You've got to go to the authorities and tell them Steve!" Justine said, wiping tears from her eyes.

"I'd be dead before I put pen to paper. The only thing that's stops them at the moment is that I am hard to find. Unfortunately the detective running a check on me has ruined my staying here." Steve answered sadly, knowing he was falling in love with this young woman. Time went slowly by as they both lay silently together, trying desperately to find an answer to their problems, and in the end, not finding one.

"I'll miss you Steve, when you go, but for now I've still got you!" Justine whispered, with a forced smile, giving up. Pushing Steve down onto the bed, she decided, to enjoy her time with him as much as possible, before he left.

Superintendent Ken Walker sat at his desk checking his Officer's reports before filing them, or passing them onto Sydney. One was missing from Detective Dave Boulton's pile, the one on the pub brawl. Reaching across to the intercom he had his secretary call Detective Boulton, he wanted a word with him. Five minutes later Boulton knocked and entered Walker's office. Ken told him to take a seat.

"Where's the report on the brawl Dave? I thought it was a simple fight?" Ken asked flatly.

"So did I, but there's something fishy about Steve Roberts. Here have a look at his file from Sydney," Dave grumbled. Ken quickly read through the dossier then turned to Dave.

"What's the problem Dave? He was in the Army, his wife's deceased and his kids live with his sister. What's the problem? I don't see anything here?" Ken answered confused.

"That's the problem! There's nothing in there, the guys

a zero. He hasn't even had a parking ticket, something smells wrong!" Dave exclaimed, suspicious of the file.

"You're wasting time Dave, you've got nothing!" Ken spat out, wondering where this was going.

"Look! I did some checking on this guy through a friend of mine in the Fed's. The guy's kids go to the best private school in Sydney. Their money all comes out of trust funds and shares in Australian companies worth millions. Where'd a soldier get that type of money eh? My friend, then got his arse kicked, for checking Roberts's record. The guy's dangerous, I can feel it," Dave explained.

"You might be onto something Dave. But you've got no proof, and it seems he's still has friends somewhere. Let it go Detective. Run him out of town if you want to, but let it go." Ken stated formally, leaving Dave no option.

"Okay Sir, I'll finish the report," Dave replied bluntly, before walking out.

Steve and Justine had been at Steve's cabin for about a week, when the incident occurred. Someone hurled a brick through the cabins window, spraying the room with glass, before driving off into the night. Steve had wanted to let it go, but Justine insisted on calling the Police. Detective Boulton arrived the next morning and superficially examined the damage.

"Looks like someone doesn't like you Captain?" Boulton smiled, as Justine appeared from inside the cabin. Looking from Justine to Steve, at first Boulton appeared surprised, but he'd seen it all before and quickly got over the shock.

"Any idea who threw the brick?" Boulton smiled.

"Well since no scumbag has turned up dead, obviously not." Steve replied, with the same smile.

Detective Boulton stood there his smile gone, his anger barely suppressed, as he stood there watching Steve. 'What would happen if I went for my gun and tried to arrest him?' Boulton thought to himself. His anger told him to go for it, but his gut told him he'd never make it.

For as relaxed as Roberts looked there was something in his eyes that said he was ready. Dave for the first time in his long career knew death was looking him in the eye and fear made him hesitate.

“Is there a problem Detective?” Justine asked nervously as both men stood there silently watching each other.

“No I’m finished here, I’ll keep you informed.” Boulton stated, as he backed away and climbed into his vehicle. With shaking hands, not looking back, Dave turned the key, and drove off down the road.

That night at the pub, Boulton was greeted by two fellow Officers from his station, named Mick and Adam.

“Did the bricks last night scare him into leaving early?” Adam asked smiling.

“In a way. I think he’ll leave soon, but for other reasons I say.” Boulton replied nervously, as he looked into his glass with an empty expression.

“What’s wrong with you Dave? You look like you saw the devil!” Mick laughed, perplexed by Dave’s strange mood.

“You might be right there my friend. And don’t go near him again; he’ll be ready next time.” Boulton ordered, sounding a scared.

“Bloody hell Dave, pull yourself together, what are you worried about? There’s two of us, what’s he going to do, kill us both?” Adam replied angrily.

“Yes that’s exactly what he’ll do, so don’t go near him that’s an order!” Dave shouted back, before getting up and walking out the door, leaving his two friends bewildered.

Steve sat outside on the veranda all that day thinking of a way out of his problem. The detective knew a brick had been used. Justine had told the police that a rock had been thrown, as he’d told her. The cops were in on it Steve concluded.

He knew it was time to go, but he didn’t want to leave Justine. He’d just got to really know her, and he had to admit,

he was a little in love with her. What should he do? At that moment Justine came out and sat beside him.

“Your thinking of leaving aren’t you?” she said sadly as she snuggled up against him.

“Yes as much as it hurts, I’ve got to go.” he replied, feeling physical pain in saying it.

“I knew when you talked to the detective, something had happened between the two of you.” she said a little frightened.

“You were right about one thing, I’ve got to clear my name and stop running, and I think I’ve found a way,” Steve said hugging her fiercely as they sat clinging to each other.

The next day Steve began to prepare to leave. Finding somewhere for Justine to live, was the first priority. Borrowing Justine’s car, he checked out several units for sale down in Ballina, and one caught his eye near the ocean. Ballina was a small seaside town, with a small airport and scenic riverside harbour. Not only was it beautiful, but Steve considered it far enough from Alstonville to keep Justine away from any more trouble with the locals.

Getting the real estate agent moving was Steve’s main problem. In his work clothes, Steve didn’t lend to the image of someone able to buy a million dollar unit. A quick ring to his bank in Sydney, guaranteeing the total purchase price, suddenly made thing happen. Paying the total amount had its advantages. It allowed him to rent the unit, until it was exchanged, complete with furniture.

Next stop on his outing was to buy several suits, travel clothes and baggage. This would fit his businessman image, something his farm shorts and boots wouldn’t do. The last purchase was to buy a plane ticket to Sydney, for the following week.

Steve hoped very much that one day he would return, but for security, he still only purchased a one way ticket. To Justine the days remaining before Steve left passed by in a heart breaking rush. No matter how much time she spent with Steve, or made love to him, it didn’t seem enough considering

the chances of him coming back to her seemed slim. Moving out of the cottage was a sad time for them both as it had become special to them, but Steve assured her he had found somewhere more comfortable for her to stay in, until he returned.

The shock at arriving at the unit overwhelmed Justine. The cottage had been at the lower end of the rental market, in reality a dump. The unit was definitely at the other end with its three bedrooms and incredible views of the ocean from its large balcony. It was to Justine something a movie star would own. Another feature she loved was it had two toilets, both inside for a change.

“Steve its lovely, but I can’t stay here the rent would kill you, and I don’t know when I’ll find a job, while your away to help out!” she explained worried.

“I didn’t rent it Justine, I bought it. I want something nice to come home to, as well as you.” Steve whispered into her ear, kissing her.

“I don’t understand. You worked on a farm and lived in a dumpy cottage. Why?” she asked, pulling away from him.

“I’ve always been lucky with money Justine. It’s hiding from my enemy that has made me live the life I live now.” Steve answered hugging her, stopping more questions.

“Well I’m glad you bought it furnished it’ll make tonight a lot more fun!” she giggled, as she wandered into the main bedroom to see if it had a large bed, which of course it did.

Two days later the departure day dawned and while Steve showered and dressed, Justine tried to put on a brave face to take him to the Airport. Coming out of the bathroom dressed now in the suit he had bought and freshly shaved, Justine was so totally surprised that she couldn’t speak. She’d never seen him in anything but shorts and a work shirt before.

“God Steve! You look like one of them business men you see in the cities, on TV!” stammered Justine, sounding like a country hick, making Steve burst into laughter. Driving to the Airport, Steve told Justine to drop him off and keep going. At first she refused, wanting to come in with him, but he warned

her not to, as surveillance cameras were everywhere and for safety he didn't want her photographed with him.

Handing her a credit card, Steve told her to use it to pay bills, and live off until he returned, warning her he didn't want an argument over it. Instead of complaining, she reached across with tears in her eyes, and kissed him hungrily. Weak at the knees, Steve dragged himself away from her and climbed out of the car, waving as she sadly drove off.

Watching from the Airport car park, Dave Boulton, and his two sidekicks, watched as Steve kissed Justine goodbye before entering the Airport.

"Bloody hell, that was quite a kiss!" Mick smiled from the back seat.

"He's a bit old for her isn't he?" added Adam a little jealous.

"I don't give a shit about her! I just want to make sure he's gone!" Dave mumbled angrily, wondering where Robert's had gotten the suit from. Somehow he looked totally different, 'more confident' he thought. Twenty minutes passed and Dave checked his watch noting that the flight would be boarding any minute now.

"Nice of you three to see me safely off!" a voice whispered next to Dave's window, making the three Officer's jump.

Looking up, Dave saw Steve standing there his face devoid of emotion.

"Going to miss your plane if you don't hurry, Captain," Dave said calmer than he felt, as Steve stood there watching him.

"I can understand you guys trying to scare me off with the brick. If I was in your situation I'd most probably have done the same thing. But believe it or not, I'm no danger to you or anyone else here. Sure I've killed. My unit over the years has killed more people than I could possibly count. That was our job and we were good at it. So look after my girl while I'm gone my friends, you wouldn't want me to bring my unit back here!" Steve stated flatly, before walking back into the airport. Sitting in the police car the three Officers sat there silently for several

seconds.

“Do you think we should go after him?” Mick suggested, breaking the silence and clearly not wanting to.

“How’d he do that? It’s a clear space between here and the terminal. How did he get next to the car without us seeing him?” Adam asked, rattled by this unknown phantom.

“It’s his training I’d guess, and I’d say he’s had a lot of it.” Dave answered, getting over the shock and feeling better. He realised that his gut feeling had been right about Roberts being dangerous, just not to whom. The danger was for who his masters sent him after, not them.

“Well I don’t think I’ll be asking Justine out on a date while he’s gone!” Mick said, trying to look serious, and breaking into a grin. At the same time, the three Officers burst into laughter. Tears ran down their faces as they laughed, relieving the pressure they all felt at the departure of this mysterious and dangerous man.

The flight to Sydney passed without incident. Upon arrival at the Airport Steve set his plan in motion. First while at the Airport he booked a one way ticket to Los Angeles, business class, leaving the following day.

He didn’t need a visa, as his fake passport now showed him as an American returning from a business trip. Booking a room in the Airport Hilton, under his assumed name, Steve settled in for the night. At 3am, Steve reached for the phone and dialled Switzerland, after four rings he hung up and dialled again. This time it was picked up.

“Hello who is it?” a familiar voice asked.

“It’s Steve, how are you Ali?” Steve answered, happy to hear his friend’s voice.

“Shit Steve, I thought they’d got you. How long has it been?” Ali answered sounding genuinely relieved to hear from him.

“Too long my friend! The reason why I’m ringing is I’ve got a plan to stop running, are you in?” Steve asked, hoping he wouldn’t hang up.

“Let’s hear it first!” Ali replied doubting it could be done. For the next hour Steve detailed his operation to Ali. He then

waited for a reply, wondering how desperate Ali was to join him in this operation.

“I’ve got to tell you Steve it’s risky, especially for me, being an Arab, but I’m in!” Ali answered, obviously feeling the hiding had gone on long enough.

“I’ve put a lot of thought into it Ali, it’s a good plan.” Steve stated confidently.

“Okay I’ll contact the others, and if they agree or not, I’ll meet you in New York in ten days time, at the Waldorf.” Ali assured him, hanging up without another word.

“God, I didn’t even ask how his wife and kids were.” Steve exclaimed sadly.

The next day Steve passed through Airport customs without attracting attention and entered the Business Lounge area, where he settled in to await his departure. Breaking one of his own rules, he bought a mobile phone at a duty free store, and dialled his sister’s home, waiting to see if she was there.

“Hello who is it?” answered the unmistakable sound of his sister’s voice.

“Hello sis, how have you been?” Steve answered excitedly.

“Steve, is it really you?” Louise answered after a slight delay, her voice shaking with emotion, as she tried not to cry.

“Yes it’s me! How are you and the kids? Are you all okay?” Steve answered crying now himself.

“We thought you were surely dead. Where have you been?” she asked pulling herself together.

“Not far from where we lived as kid’s sis. God I’ve missed you!” Steve answered, tears running down his cheeks.

“Everyone’s fine, your girls are doing great, come home Steve!” his sister pleaded.

“I can’t sis. They’re still after me. But with luck, I’ll be home soon.” Steve croaked out, wiping his eyes before he continued. “Tell them I love them and I miss you all.” Steve sobbed, before cutting the connection, hoping no one was listening or tracking his call.

Pulling himself together, Steve quickly wiped his eyes,

then turned around and dumped the phone in the first rubbish bin he saw. Eyes straight ahead, his expression neutral, Steve confidently walked to the boarding gate, to the outside world showing no emotion whatsoever.

Sitting in Business class sipping complimentary champagne, Steve thought back over his life.

“How did I get into this mess in the first place?” He asked himself, as he finished his drink, and fell into an uneasy sleep, remembering how it had all started so long ago.