

Colin slid under the steering wheel and gunned the Monaro to life. He asked Joe did he want a lift anywhere.

"No thanks, Col," he answered. He nodded to the telephone box down the street: "I'm goin' to ring up the depot. Me boss'll want to know why I didn't front for work today, then I'm headin' for the pub."

"Tell him you was stuffed right up." Colin said.

"What, with a cold?"

He revved the motor hard: "Na, stupid. Stuffed with stuff."

"Yeah," Joe grinned, "That ain't a bad one, Col. Stuffed with stuff, yeah."

He gave his unsuspecting landlord a tightened thumb, reversed with a wheel squeal, and chucked the black unit into gear. Glory had returned from her short walk and was clearing junk mail from her letterbox. Colin braked with another squeal and gave her a second good looking over. He agreed with his earlier summation; not as booby as the girl in the ute, but she looked okay.

He pressed the horn button and thought about asking her to press his. The unusual sound from the claxton air horn startled her and she dropped most of the coloured leaflets. Had the lost words returned? Had she been writing poetry in her mind and been unaware of reality? He laughed raucously, screeched the tyres again and sped off. That Colin Ford sure had a warped sense of humour.

Ten minutes later he pressed the car horn again. The reason being another woman. However, the result was far more damaging than coloured leaflets dropping to the ground. He had come up behind Ethel Reivers and whizzed past sending a cloud of grit and dust over the windscreen of her vehicle. Momentarily, she panicked in the blinding cover and jammed on the brakes. The utility slewed sideways in the screenings, tilted onto two wheels then fortunately tipped back the right way. The engine stalled but her condemnation of Colin Ford didn't. She shouted after him what seemed every obscenity known to man or woman. It took her several turns to fire the engine again. Then she twisted and turned the windscreen wiper knob, but the washers wouldn't spurt. When they did, it would've been better they hadn't, because the

pumping water only made dirty wide smears across the glass when the rubbers began their sweep.

Colin parked beside the farmhouse and was met by Jake Reivers. He was standing hands on hips staring at him as though he was someone unexpected and special - - or someone expected and a day late for work.

“Where the bloody hell you been!”

“I’ve been ‘round, Mr. Reivers, ‘round like a record.”

“You were supposed to be here yesterdee killin’ an’ guttin’ dogs!”

“I always go to church of a Sunday ... started yesterday.”

“Cut the smart talk, kid,” Jake said, “there’s been a change of plan.”

“Yeah, like what?”

“The boys’ want all those German Shepherds and Dalmatians killed and ready to take with ‘em on Wednesdee’ with them fox skins up yonder.”

“But you told me you were gonna hold some of them back for breedin’!”

“Yeah, I know, I know, ain’t my idea to let ‘em go.”

“Woman’s vote weigh you down, eh, Mr. Reivers.”

“Ahh! Someone down the line wants ‘em all together real quick, so ya better get a move on.”

“I’ll want extra money to work faster.”

“Aye! What ya on about now!”

“Meetin’ deadlines is outside our agreement, Mr. Reivers.” Colin said. “It’s too short a notice to kill, gut, and bury thirty dogs in under two days for the same price.”

“Yeah. Well if ya’d been here yesterdee’ like ya was supposed to, ya woulda had under three days to do the job, eh!” Jake said, “plenty o’ time ya woulda had, kid.” Then he added: “You’ll get the same rate as for the rest. Now git up to the shed an’ sharpen ya knives an’ get movin’ will ya. They all gotta be dried and ready by lunch time Wednesdee’.”

Money was surviving to someone who rarely had any. And Colin Ford rarely had any money. He really hadn’t expected Jake to open his wallet and offer him time and a half for the fast extra work. However, he knew he wouldn’t offer any and it cost him nothing to ask.

“You ain’t got those red eyes goin’ to church,” Jake said. “Yeah, you been druggin’ on again, ain’t ya.”

Colin grinned: “If Sunday’s still half the weekend, Mr. Reivers, I can only remember the first half.”

“Yeah, I ain’t surprised either, by the look of ya.”

Suddenly Jake roughly grabbed him by the arm: “Did ya bury them other
remains this time like I told ya!”

“Sure, Mr. Reivers,” he lied, assuredly. “First thing after church, Sundee.”

“No worries, no problems?”

“No worries, no problems, Mr. Reivers.”

“No one saw ya?”

“Not even my shadow, Mr. Reivers.”

“Good work, kid,” he said, patting his shoulder. “I told ‘em you’d come through. Ethel reckoned you’d get bombed outa ya mind an’ forget what ya was supposed to remember,”

Colin checked the road leading to the farm. No car was coming, no person walking. No sign of Ethel Reivers anywhere.

“Well, Ethel was the one who bombed out this time, eh, Mr. Reivers.”

“Yeah, kid, yeah,” he grinned, exposing those revolting teeth again: “Ya sure got a slick sense of humour, kid.”

Jake strolled into the house and emerged clutching a sawn off .22 rifle and a box of ammunition. While he was away Colin had removed his sunglasses and wiped finger smudges from each lens. Then he had opened the car boot and had removed his hide belt and three curved, boomerang shaped butchers knives. He’d undone the clip and had removed the longest one from its lug. He had stretched across into a small wooden box and had pulled out a rectangular sharpening stone. He had lifted the cover off the abrasive and had let a bubble of his white saliva hang, then drop from between his lips and land dead-centre on the stone.

Colin cackled, and Jake thought he saw a look in him that wanted to hurt someone. “I bet your aim with that rifle ain’t as perfect as mine with me slag, eh’.” “Mr. Reivers.”

“I reckon not, kid,” Jake said. “I reckon not. When ya done ya sharpenin’ we’ll get goin’ and do the job, eh.”

Colin went through the same process with each knife. Meticulously he rubbed each side on the stone knowing just when to stop and turn the blade across; just as a masseur with a sensitive patient. Then one by one he replaced them in the belt and said: “Okay, Mr. Reivers, whose turn to cut the pack first.”

They strode down the gravel track to the animal enclosure. Jake pointed the rifle barrel at the dogs he had wanted to keep for breeding that now had to be killed.

“Take that one first, then the Dalmatian, then the G.S. over there,” he said.

“What’s the diff’ about doin’ them in order, Mr. Reivers, if they all gotta go?”

“The longer I keep the ones I want for breedin’ alive, the better chance of talkin’ Ethel outa what she wants to do with ‘em,” he said. “She’s gone into town to get some book we had lyin’ ‘round ‘ere for years read. I reckon she’s gonna come home in a good mood.”

“An’ you reckon ‘cause she’s gonna be in a good mood you can sway her into sparin’ the dogs you want kept alive, eh, Mr. Reivers.”

“Yeah, kid, yeah,” Jake grinned. “That’s what I’m hopin’.”

Colin smiled, then he grinned. He placed a hand on Jake’s shoulder and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

Jake laughed too; he didn’t know what for, but he laughed.

“Not a bad idea, eh, kid ... whad’ya say, eh?”

“That’s clever thinking, Mr. Reivers,” he chuckled. “I sure hope it comes home a winner.”

But of course Colin Ford knew it wouldn’t.

“What about our one here, Mr. Reivers?” He was indicating to Prince, who’s large brown-black head jerked back and forth as he barked from his special spot behind the shed.

“What ‘bout him, kid?”

“I got the best share in him. I ain’t killin’ him.”

“That’s right, kid ... not yet anyways.”

“Maybe never not yet always,” he said, glaring at Jake.

Colin hurried up to the shed with the rifle, the bullets and his knives. Then he entered the wire enclosure, and with Jake watching roped the first unfortunate dog.

“Ya work carefully, kid,” Jake said. “These have gotta be perfect cuts. This buyer is real fussy the boys’ reckon.”

“Sure, Mr. Reivers, sure.”

He dragged the yelping dog away.

“An’ make sure ya bury the remains first off this time!” he yelled.

“Sure thing, Mr. Reivers, Sure thing.”

The animal fought against the rope tether as though it knew it was fighting for its life.

“An’ make sure ya hang them skins out ta dry”!

Colin called out no worries, Mr. Reivers, no worries as he almost decapitated the poor dog being dragged toward the killing shed. Just as the pulling man and the tugging dog disappeared from sight, Ethel Reivers roared into the property..

She lifted the gate chain and limping, dragged herself toward Jake.

“Where’s that kid!” she screamed. “Where the fuck is he!”

“H...he’s in the shed doin’ the killin’, Ethel. W...what’s wrong?”

“That fuckin’ kid!” she screamed again. “Get outa’ ‘ere, Jake, go inside, this has been comin’ for a long time!”

“B...but, Ethel I ...!”

“Go check on Garry,” she panted, “go have a beer, Jake! Just go!”

A rifle shot rang out. The dogs barked even more frenzied than before; as though they knew one of their own had gone forever.

Colin dragged the dead German shepherd over the concrete and onto the floor of the butcher’s room. He grabbed the knives and commenced sharpening them further by deftly crossing them several times. He paused when a shadow passed across the wall he was facing. He assumed it was Jake. Had Ethel agreed to let him keep his dogs for breeding? Had she said no, go tell the kid no ... kill ‘em all?

Then the unexpected voice: “You’re a real smart arse you are, aren’t you!”

Colin looked up at the fuming Ethel Reivers.

He sniggered, ignored her, and went to press the knife into the dog's lower jaw.

"Look at me when I'm talkin' to you ... you nasty maniac bastard!" she said. "You almost killed me back there, you idiot, moron!"

"I'm gonna be doin' a lot of killin' here this afternoon," he smirked. "You wanna join the the queue, eh?"

"I believe you would," she answered, with a cold shiver she tried to hide. "I believe you could kill anythin' or anyone and show no remorse at all!"

Slowly he stood and stepped over the dead dog. He tapped the knife against his palm and glared at her as he struggled forward.

"If I get paid for workin' I work," he said. "There ain't no discrimination between doin' this dog or doin' you, lady."

"You'd love to, wouldn't you?"

Ethel tried to back away at the same pace he moved toward her. But oh, that leg, it hurt, and hurt some more,

"Love to what?"

"Use that knife on me."

"What, kill you!" he smirked, again.

"Yes."

She put her total weight on one foot, and kept edging away.

"Na," he said. "I'd like to cut you up a bit, but I'd have to be paid to kill you."

"Liar!"

She pressed a hand against the wall to retain her balance.

He took another two steps forward. He was now only a couple of paces away with those blue pale eyes piercing at her.

"If someone was payin' me to have you dead lady, you would be by now," he said.

Suddenly his hand holding the knife shot forward and she felt the cold steel under her chin: "But no one is, an' I don't work for nuthin'."

He lifted the knife raising Ethel's jaw. She stared at the rusting iron roof, while he pretended in his mind to slit her throat: "So, if you don't mind, lady, I'll get back to doin' what ya husband is payin' me to do."

He whipped the knife away, and giggled at Ethel as she coughed, spluttered, and gulped down fresh air.

“You bastard...!” she croaked. Y ... you rotten bastard ...!”

Colin chuckled and went down on the dead dog again. He hoped she hated him enough to watch what he was doing. He plunged the hungry blade into the front lower jaw, cut it, and ripped down to the forelegs. The young butcher worked quickly and efficiently, not to impress his company but to revolt her. Then without slitting the legs, he peeled off the skin by drawing it wrong side over the body leaving the fur inside.

He was now cackling, and he tossed the pelt at the one foot Ethel had anchored on the concrete. Skin on skin. The warm wet pelt seemed to wrap itself around her bare ankle as though that’s where it belonged, then start a slow climb up her leg. Her calf muscle felt it. She imagined her knee cap trying to run up her thigh to escape the mental invasion.

Hallucinations! She was hallucinating. She felt a force of warm spew race up her throat and gush into her mouth. She pressed her lips tight, tighter in an effort to hold in the rushing substance. However, like having May Ferris’ diary translated, she failed. The rusty coloured vomit oozed through the fingers guarding her mouth. Then there was an almighty upheaval somewhere down inside her, and it seemed that everything she had down there fixed or otherwise, had broken loose and gushed everywhere.

“Hooray!” She’s chuckled, hooray!” he laughed, as Ethel whimpering, limped into a corner.

He grabbed a wet hind leg of the skinned animal and held it close to her face: “Here, grab a leg and gisa hand to drag him outside, eh’ lady,” he grinned. Then he rubbed the leg into her hair: “C’mon, he’s nice an’ wet an’ slippery, like a soaped up bath or shampoo he is.”

Ethel dry retched, spat phlegm, and blindly stumbled along the wall seeking a way out.

Colin followed as though they were roped together.

“I can show you another way to skin the next dog lady, if you want to watch,” he said, unmercifully.

Ethel moaned, shook her head.

“This time I’ll slit up the inside of the leg from one side to the other in a straight line making a design like a double cross,” he continued, anyway.

She was almost at the doorway.

“Then I’ll chop off his feet and zip off the hide and wrap it around ya leg like before,” he whispered in her ear.

“Ahh! No! No!” Ethel gasped, stumbled outside, dragged herself away as he rubbed more of the dog pelt in her hair.

“This way ya won’t have to give me a hand lady. You can carry him with me usin’ both hands instead.”

He threw back his head and laughed heartily as poor Ethel reeled and limped away from the place as best she could. Then he returned to the evil room.

Colin became his own removalist as he always knew he would. He dragged the dog remains outside onto a plastic sheet and returned for the rifle. He made another trip for victim number two. And after the return journey he would do the same trip another thirty times before his agreement with Jake ended and he was paid his dues.

Bob and Anna Owens ran a grubby caravan park on the down side of Brookfield. As with many uncomplicated business’ in mundane country towns, the middle aged couple were being challenged by changing times. The higher expectations of holiday makers to escape the rush and noise of city life, and the modernisation of camping facilities such as the Brookfield Lakes Park was killing them off. Their site was over twenty years old without individual amenities or posh surroundings and it was failing financially.

Three summers ago, a cartel of regional businessmen had applied to build a flash new holiday complex including a children’s’ playground and a swimming pool adjacent to the Park on the Lakes road. The Owens’ objection to council about loss of cliental and opportunity, and their request for the access road to their site being upgraded, had been unanimously defeated. Anna had gone right over the edge in the council chamber accusing the nine members of payola, and deserting the plight of the little people she’d claimed they were elected to represent.

However, complaints from ordinary people seldom alter preconceived business decisions. And she was removed from the meeting after hearing that competition was good for the community and if they couldn't compete get out. So with February the hottest month almost gone, they had just the Ferris brothers and another caravan as guests at their 'Goldfield Caravan Park'.

Realistically, if Bob and Anna couldn't understand why the other holiday destinations in Brookfield and surrounds were better frequented, they should've used those same researchers who compiled the survey for the council to ask around for them. Then they would've read a report that said what they were offering the public in comparison to the other facilities was an abject disgrace.

The supposedly hot water system was never more than luke warm. The shower drain holes continuously blocked causing the broken concrete floor to form a cold pond. The toilet bowls were seatless, bare porcelain and seldom clean. There was a poor reserve of toilet paper. Word filth had been graffitied on the back of lavatory doors and across walls. The camp sites were mostly overgrown in long grass and weeds. And there was no kiosk, newspaper service or public telephone. Consequently, they now catered for drifters like the Ferris brothers, and people who could only afford the cheapest of camping holidays.

Vince Ferris was lounging in a beach chair under the caravan annex guzzling canned beer while his brother hung out washing on a make-shift rope clothes line. On the other side of the caravan roundabout, a tanned young woman wearing short-shorts and a sleeveless coloured sweater was doing the same.

"Whad'ya think of her over there?" Vince asked his brother.

Esmond looked the woman over: "Nice round arse, slim waist, broad back," he answered, "can't tell about the rest 'til she turns around."

Whether by choice or design, she ignored the rest of her washing and did just that - - she turned around. She smiled and angled her body all ways like a beauty contestant does before the judges. She caught Vince's lecherous stares from fifty metres away. And had he'd been closer, he would've seen a set of cigarette-stained teeth, well overdue for

a polish belonging to a twenty eight year old divorcee. A roving woman who'd had as many different lovers in a month as Vince had beers in a day.

"Hell!" Vince gulped, wriggled uneasily in his seat, "what a body, eh."

"Her girlfriend's got more meat on her bones," Esmond said.

"Well, let's invite 'em over for a drink," Vince said. "That one just gave me the eye again."

"Not yet little brother," Esmond said, pegging out a shirt. "We've got other more pressing problems to sort out."

"Yeah, well, I wouldn't mind pressin' her out."

"Business before pleasure, Vince, we need to talk money matters."

Vince watched his brother hang out the rest of the hand washing. In this Brookfield stay-over it was Esmond's turn to be a domestic first and a drinker second. A wind gust blew a towel backwards. And the sudden sensation of a cold object touching his bare chest made him gasp aloud.

"Get a cold tickle, eh," Vince grinned again.

"Yeah, he answered, plonking into the other easy chair: "Almost as cold as the one we got from those two yesterday."

"Yeah, I could tell you was gettin' pissed off with Jake ... I can't stand him."

Vince plunged his hand into the car fridge and in a sick way pretended to be drowning Jake. He passed over a cold can.

"I wonder how much cold cash them two have got stashed away." Esmond said. He took a long gulp: " They must have hundreds upon hundreds of dollars hidden away in that house."

"I reckon so."

"They don't need to accumulate any more extra wealth at their age. They should be seein' their next of kin are secure. Whad'ya say little brother!"

"And that's us two, eh, Es."

"Us. You and I. Bloodline or stepline. There's only us following them to share what they've accumulated," he said.

"Yeah, but there's Garry too, Es."

"No!" He shook his head drank on: "The government pays the balance of all his needs for the rest of his life."

“Na, Es. I reckon they’d leave us nuthin’. And as or the bastard Jake, he’d leave his dough to his dogs before he saw me touch it.”

Esmond drained his can and said: “ Then we got a right to it before they die.”

“You mean ask them for it?”

“I mean take it from them ... pass me another can.”

“You mean r... rob them!”

“Not at first,” Esmond said, zipping the top: “We can explain the advantages of bringin’ their will forward so they can appreciate their children benefiting from it.”

“But we ain’t their children.”

“We were good enough to be their kids when it suited them to meet people through us,” Esmond said, angrily. “So it’s good enough for them to be our parents when it suits us.”

Vince watched him drain his can and pitch it away: “And if they don’t want to hand any money over....”

“We go in after it the other way, “ Esmond answered, adjusting his sunglasses: “Even if we have to demolish the place room by room to find its hiding place. “

“What if it ain’t in the house?”

“We’ll threaten to kill their fighting dogs,” Esmond said. “That’ll leave ‘em with no Saturday night income and a lot of angry punters. They’ll talk about their money one way or another ...they’ll talk.”

Vince smiled and relieved the ice box of two more cans. He loved the thought of hurting Jake Reivers.

“We’ll set this up on Wednesday with the collection of the skins and then go settle with Ossie,” Esmond said. “Then how does a spot of fishin’ up north sound little brother?”

“Sounds okay to me, big brother,” Vince grinned, raised his can in salute.

The two women campers took Vince’s arm movement as a wave and did likewise.

“Hey, look, Es...the one you fancy is smilin’ at us too.”

The other young woman was also wearing skimpy clothing. They smiled and waved again giving the impression they were waiting to be invited over.

Vince stood and made the offer. The women muttered something to themselves before the one who'd been hanging out the clothes answered yes, they'd love a cold beer. So hand in hand, they made their way across open ground to double the drinking school at the 'Goldfield Caravan Park'.