



Lance Colbert Smith - Preview Deeds of Salvation

PROLOGUE

Death has no boundaries. No particular time or place - and certainly no common cause. Death can visit anytime, anywhere and in many ways.

Take this beautiful, peaceful Sunday morning in Vaucluse, Sydney. The calm seas lapping the jagged rocks at the base of the spectacular gap, not a cloud in the clear, aqua blue skies. Yachts of all shapes and sizes could be seen out at sea or rounding Hornby Lighthouse at South Head all moving gracefully, gently nudged by a whispy breeze.

Two good friends sitting in the morning sun at the footpath tables outside their local café discussing the forthcoming nuptials of a favourite daughter at the nearby “Our Lady Star of the Sea” Catholic Church.

Jim Davis and his mate Pab Gonzalez were sipping coffee and going through the guest list. Jim’s daughter was the apple of dad’s eye and he so wanted the day to go well. He was smiling at the thought.

An elderly couple strolled past, walking their dog, holding hands and laughing, probably headed down the hill to Watsons Bay or, maybe, Robertson Park.

A sleek, silver BMW was travelling slowly down the road towards them obviously looking for a car space - always difficult on a Sunday morning, especially on such a perfect day.

It came to a stop outside the café just as both front and back windows slid smoothly open. ‘Wipeout’ smiled.

The silence of the morning was shattered by the sound of automatic machine gun fire coming from both windows quickly followed by the screeching of tyres as the BMW sped off in a cloud of smoke and disappeared down Marine Parade. It was all over in seconds.

There would be no wedding day for Jim or Pablo. Their bullet ridden bodies lay on the footpath with blood flowing into the gutter.

Then the screaming started.....

CHAPTER ONE - Tina

Detective Chief Inspector Tina Samuels squinted as she emerged into the sunlight from the Sydney Metro underground at Chatswood Station. She reflected that it had been a prudent move to purchase the Epping unit four years earlier, so close to the station.

The new train service runs every few minutes to the Police Missing Persons HQ just up from Chatswood railway station and hubby, David, does most of his design work at home. Works well for both of them.

Tall, with short fair hair, an attractive, strong face and piercing stare Tina was a force to be reckoned with.

The twenty four hour break had been her first day off in just over a month- since the Riley Sampson case began. She had needed it.

As Tina strode along Victoria Street her mind focused back on the job at hand and the apparent abduction.

She reached the foyer and quickly cleared security. "Morning Sir" a cheeky greeting from Bryce Rixon the Desk Sergeant. Tina waved back smiling at the number of her task force that called her "Sir". Didn't worry Tina. She was pleased to have been promoted to Chief Inspector last year.

By and large she was happy with her ten strong "Taskforce Delta" team. By and large they were a terrific crew, certainly skilful and hard working. They needed more, of course, but pressures from above prevented any expansion.

Today Tina had scheduled a 10am meeting with the whole team to go over their progress before she submitted her latest report to Police Commissioner Palmer tomorrow.

She had made herself a strong, black coffee- her standard routine - and headed into her office.

"Hey boss. Can I have a quick word with you?" It was Tina's right hand man Mike Broadfinger, a smart, well respected Detective Sergeant she had worked with for many years. Tina motioned him to sit down.

Mike settled his tall, fit frame and basketballers shoulders into the chair and tossed the Daily Telegraph to her. "Page eleven" he said "Our mole has been at it again"

The headlines claimed "Sampson Kidnapping Case in chaos" It went on to say there was infighting and disagreement within the Taskforce Delta ranks. Loosely it was correct. There were many opinions about a number of suspects and about the value of a number of leads and groundwork. That was normal in these cases.

"Whoever it is, they have to be in the inner circle. We've got a rat in the ranks"

Tina agreed and sighed. “We need this like a hole in the head. Day Street HQ are riding us for results and this will make them even more concerned, any ideas?”

Mike was at a loss “I’m buggered if I can think of anyone. What’s in it for them?”

Tina’s eyes narrowed as though stung by betrayal “Is everyone here for the meeting?”

“No. Bruno is on surveillance, I’ve got his file. Everyone else is here.”

“Right, give me half an hour to go over the latest and then come back”

“Sure thing” offered Mike “By the way, how was the day off?”

“Slept in, a medical check up and dinner with David at the Epping RSL. Not much else but I did enjoy it” Tina responded.

By 10 everyone was in the well appointed briefing room pouring over the many case notes on the walls and whiteboards. When everyone was settled Tina opened “First up, thanks for downing tools to go over this again. I need to be brought up to speed as Commissioner Palmer is breathing down my neck. He’s not a happy chappy as he is being hounded by both the Minister and the media. But my immediate concern, though, is how another story has appeared in today’s papers - and it seems to have come from this room. Before I go to Riley’s case let me say this - just once. If someone here has a problem with our work or me, come and have it out. There will be no grudges or retribution and my door is always open to any of you. BUT, if I find out someone here is undermining me or any other member of our team, in any way, behind our backs, they would wish I had only fired them!”

Tina let that sink in. She had overheard two of them talking a few weeks earlier “I think she’s got balls” one of them had said. Tina didn’t mind, that is a mark of respect in a man’s world. She then went on to the Sampson case from day one.

Riley Sampson was just seven years old and had disappeared sometime after 9ish in the morning from a school bush camp at Narrabeen Lakes nearly five weeks earlier. No one saw or heard anything out of place and Riley had said nothing to any of his friends. He wasn’t reported missing until midmorning when he had not been seen with his group since breakfast and had not participated in any of the camp activities.

The group leaders were devastated. Riley was a very popular kid. No one had a clue about what had happened to him.

As news broke SES and volunteers, camp staff and police had searched all the area and surrounding bushland and police divers had carried out a thorough search of the lakes themselves, nothing.

There were possible sightings of a boy fitting Riley’s description in nearby Brookvale, on the Wakehurst Parkway, at Seaforth – even one at Taronga Zoo. None of them produced any concrete leads. Riley’s mum, Jan, was beside herself with worry. A single mum, living at Hornsby with her folks, working at the nearby Westfield Plaza. As the days

went on she became increasingly distraught and was causing quite a bit of concern, particularly for her mental wellbeing.

Enquiries soon established Jan and her husband Rick Sampson had split some eighteen months earlier. He was a successful Real Estate Agent working and living at his own business at West Pennant Hills. His movements and whereabouts on the day had been carefully checked and cleared.

Motives were scarce and the usual round up of all known paedophiles in the district had produced nought to date. The Taskforce Delta team had checked out all the camp staff, Riley's regular school teachers from Normanhurst State School and all his extended family members from both sides. Inspector Samuels threw to Mike Broadfinger.

"Sergeant, did you get any further with the team leader Alan Trundle?" she asked

'Well, He does have a serious gambling problem and is in deep financial shit, but we've had no ransom requests or found anything in his past that would point the finger at anything worse. "

There were a few murmurs as some of the team were convinced Trundle was a creep. He had certainly lied about his gambling problems when first questioned.

"What about the catering delivery. Any progress?" asked Tina.

"Nothing unusual from the company but the young driver said he noticed a snazzy light blue Mercedes convertible parked just off the entry road in the bush. It had gone before he left around 9.45" reported the ever zealous Detective Constable Georgia McHenry. "I am looking further into it."

Georgia was short in stature with attractive features and was a very popular switched on team member. She was due to be married in just under two months.

"Brian, anything more from the extended families?" Tina asked undercover Detective Carey.

"One of the uncles from Riley's dads side, 'Bushy' Thompson, is a small time mobster with the Cobama Gang around Parramatta. He has a record of petty crime but nothing like this. That's about it from both sides".

Tina liked Carey. He never stood out but had great respect from everyone and a valuable network of contacts in the underworld.

Brad Henderson spoke up. "One of the camp office staff reported a phone call just after 9 from an anonymous person advising they had seen two suspicious characters loitering in the thick bush near the western boundary of the complex. They sent three people to check it out, but found nothing." Henderson reported. "But Riley had not been reported missing then".

Tina was not sure about Brad, he seemed to have a bee in his bonnet over many of their recent group decisions and was not displaying team spirit. This wasn't like him, he certainly was not his normal smiling self.

The meeting broke up around 10.45am with nothing new or major coming out of the various reports.. Tina had returned to her office to go over all the files. She was convinced they must have overlooked something small but important and she was desperate to solve what appeared to be an abduction. Tana was terrified it could happen again on her watch. They had no idea if Riley was alive or dead. No ransom demands had been made – and that’s a bad sign. Her mobile vibrating brought her out of her trance. She looked at the screen, frowned, and answered “Morning Commissioner”.

“Samuels, I have just had a call from the Minister. He is getting very agitated with our lack of progress on the Riley Sampson case and pissed off with today’s newspaper coverage. What’s going on? It seems like this case is going nowhere”

“We’re doing our best Sir. There is a mass of information and leads coming in from all sides but nothing turning up trumps. I have no idea who it is leaking to the media, but I am moving on that as we speak. Sorry I can’t offer any better news”

Commissioner John Palmer was tall, distinguished and imposing. He liked Tina and held her in high esteem.

“Samuels, watch your back. It seems someone is out to get you. That report due tomorrow – I want it this afternoon” and then he hung up. Tina’s shoulders slumped a little. She wondered if her uncovering of internal corruption was coming back to haunt her. She was under way more pressure than she wanted and had no answers.

First up she called Mike Broadfinger into her office and told him she had a plan to catch “the leak”. She had to trust someone and she was certain she could trust Mike with her life.

“I want to see Brad Henderson at 2pm, Graham James at 2.30 and Jim Heggarty at 3 and I want you to follow up on the Parramatta mobster lead. I think that’s the Moriarty mob. See if you can join the dots to anyone else involved”.

Mike left and Tina started to work on her updated report, scanning every file. What had she missed?

Around 3.30pm the desk phone rang. Her PA advised it was a Dr Marie Emslie from the San Hospital. “Good afternoon Dr Emslie” said Tina to her favourite oncologist.

“Good afternoon Tina. I have just received your scans from yesterday. There are a couple of things we need to address. I would like to see you first thing in the morning, here at the San. Is 9.30 okay?”

“Is there something wrong?” asked Tina. “I am in the middle of a major case here, but I can make it if you think I must”.

“Okay. I’ll see you at 9.30” said Dr Emslie.

‘What now’ thought Tina, ‘Whatever it is I don’t need it’.

The Commissioner's report was emailed just before 4pm after a few quick meetings with the 3 team members. Tina knew it did not answer any of the Minister's concerns. She needed a breakthrough.

Just then Broadfinger burst into her office "Boss, another kid missing. Close to where Riley lives! Sounds similar to Riley, same age, apparently abducted from Pennant Hills about half an hour ago. I think we had better get out there"

They both left the office in a hurry. Tina crossed her fingers as they sped along the Comenarra Parkway towards Pennant Hills.

CHAPTER TWO - Alvaro

He awoke with a start - instantly alert. The bedside clock showed 3.12am. Alvaro was sweating, more bad dreams. His mind wandered.

Alvaro Pedro Palez loved Australia and wanted to do more for it. He had been here almost eight years having taken over five years and three refugee camps to achieve his goal, but he was on his third Temporary Protection Visa -TPV- and was very afraid it may be his last.

His thoughts went back to that stormy night they came ashore on Christmas Island. How they made it in that stinking, leaking, overcrowded excuse for a boat he will never know. But there they were- and alive!

The Australian asylum seeking interviews were very harrowing for Alvaro even though he had been well briefed in, firstly Jakarta and later in Lombok. He had no papers but knew what to say.

Indonesia had become a transit hub for refugees but they had never signed the International Refugee Convention Agreement and so did not provide any basic human rights.

Alvaro had many nightmares about life in his homeland, Colombia. The murders, the mass killings and the armies controlled by the drug lords. He had been a very successful up and coming lawyer. He was a member of the powerful Sarmiento family. His cousin was one of the five Presidential candidates murdered by the drug cartels for standing up to them. This was a terrible blow to the whole family and they were living in fear.

Corruption was rife. Eleven of the twenty five Supreme Court Magistrates had been assassinated in the last two years and a number of those remaining had 'protection' from the mobs in return for regular judicial 'favours'.

But Colombia did have many decent politicians and citizens trying to overcome organised crime. In 1988 they had signed the 'Vienna Convention against the Illegal

Traffic of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Agreement.' They had aggressively worked to achieve their aims.

There were four major drug cartels and hundreds of splinter mobs all vying for territory in this insidious trade.

The 'Bandas Criminales' or 'Bacrim' was well known and constantly pursued by the authorities.

The wars between the FARC Guerrillas and other groups had almost brought the country to its knees. All of them trying to gain a bigger share of the estimated \$7 billion annual illicit drug trade – mainly to the USA where a recent survey showed one in every six adults had experimented with cocaine, but also to Australia, Asia, UK and Europe where their criminal gangs were well established and operating.

The capture and death of Pablo Escobar, head of the feared Medellin Cartel, had sent warnings to the remaining gangs that the authorities were closing in.

Many of the Medellin members had 'rolled over' as a plea bargain for a lighter sentence. Colombian gaols are feared. The Southern Colombian Cali Cartel, also, were happy to 'assist' as the Medellin mob had been expanding south recently.

Alvaro's older brother, Gresco, had played a major role in catching Escobar but was murdered soon after in a horrific bomb blast which also killed seven of his colleagues. Retribution, Colombian style.

Alvaro remembered his parents and sisters in total shock and disbelief. The wailing and tears went on for days after Gresco's funeral in Barranquilla.

Gresco was among hundreds of honest journalists, officials, politicians and police massacred that year. That was the main reason Alvaro decided to dedicate the rest of his life to bringing the cartel ringleaders to justice.

Alvaro remembered how proud his parents were when he had opened his legal practice in Bogota. As a young lawyer he was making quite a name for himself, a name he would soon bury, as they had buried his brother. He quickly became a valuable ally to those fighting against organised crime.

During the first few years Alvaro established a large network of cartel members who sought his legal services. He became a trusted member of many key underworld players.

Alvaro was amazed how well he was balancing his legal practice, home life with his beautiful Spanish born wife Olga and their two wonderful, much loved children Rodriguez and Zarla as well as his undercover liaison with his two very senior, honest police contacts. He WAS making a difference.

Alvaro was very happy that his vital information had already led to the arrest, conviction and gaoling of a number of cartel ringleaders.

Then one morning, out of nowhere, he was shattered. He received an urgent call on his private phone from his Assistant Police Commissioner contact. All he heard was “Bernardo, get out quick, they are on to us” and then the volley of shots and the screaming.

Alvaro remembered quickly ringing Olga and yelling “Get the children NOW! Go to your parents in the country NOW. Don’t wait one second!”

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