

Sample Chapter

With Reading Guide

After

Inspector West Book 1

©Peter Mulraney 2013

Chapter One

‘It says here that a bloke can expect to live until he’s ninety, maybe even older if he’s fit and healthy, and gets plenty of sex.’

‘Paul, turn out the light and go to sleep. I’m too tired.’

‘Relax. I wasn’t chatting you up. I just hadn’t thought about living that long. I thought I’d be dead way before ninety.’

‘You’ll be bloody dead before morning if you don’t shut up and let me get some sleep.’

Paul switched off the light. He lay there thinking about living for another fifty years or so and wondering how he was going to pay for twenty five to thirty years of retirement living. He would just have to get serious about financial planning, once they had passed through the private school fees

paying phase of middle class living. The last time he had seriously reviewed the family budget the most obvious fact was that their expenses matched their income. There was no surplus for contingencies.

His thoughts turned to Josie. It was always a challenge being next to her in the bed. He wanted sex every time he touched her naked body. Josie, however, had a different perspective. Obviously, as far as Paul could see, God had a twisted sense of humour. How else could you explain the different arousal rates between the sexes? He sees or thinks naked woman - instant arousal, with lumping great erection advertising the state of his interior monologue. She requires hours of talking, coupled with gentle, slow foreplay, before she even thinks about having sex and, even after all that, she is just as likely to roll over and go to sleep, and leave him there with his dripping erection. At least, that had been his experience.

‘Paul, stop tossing and turning! Every time you move you pull the covers off my shoulders.’

‘Sorry. I’ll try to die as soon as possible.’

She ran her smooth hand over his belly. It felt good. His penis stirred from its frustrated slumber.

‘I’m sorry, honey. I’m just really exhausted and I’m finding it hard to go to sleep.’

She snuggled up to him. Within three minutes she was asleep.

It was no wonder prostitution was a thriving business, he thought. It was married men who required the services of prostitutes and supposedly celibate men, in the guise of clergy, who were most strident in their opposition to the profession. He wondered what it would be like having sex with a prostitute. She certainly wouldn't engage with the client on a personal level. After all, the client was just another transaction and, to survive as a person, the prostitute would have to shut down her emotional self while she was on the job. He decided he'd stick with Josie.

He thought of those times when they did connect and the sex was indescribable. What was the point of sex anyway? It wasn't about the physical relief, even though that was good, it was about the sacredness of intimacy and that required connection on all three levels of being: physical, emotional and spiritual. He understood why communication failure led to relationship breakdown. The blokes were too much into the physical to notice that the girls were coming from the emotional looking for the spiritual. He knew it was when he came from the emotional, and they

touched the spiritual, that they had great sex in the physical.

He looked at the clock: 11:55. He got up and went down the corridor to the toilet for a piss.

He got back into bed to wait for sleep. Josie was snoring softly. He knew he didn't snore softly because Josie always woke him up and told him to stop it.

Josie wasn't the only one snoring. He could hear Matthew trumpeting away in the next room. That boy was always making noise. He spoke with a sonic boom and whenever he blew his nose you thought of a ship lost somewhere in a mid-Atlantic fog.

He drifted back to thinking about money. They were spending a fortune on the boys' education and it looked like Matthew wanted to become a musician, while Luke was dreaming about becoming the next Michael Jordan. Well, they had no-one to blame but themselves. They had encouraged the boys to go after their dreams. What was the point of insisting they go into a profession or pursue a safe career?

The alarm clock displayed the time in big red numerals: 12:36. It looked like he wasn't going to get any sleep. At least Josie had rolled over and

stopped snoring. If he could only go to sleep he could stop thinking about this stuff.

* * *

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Paul's hand shot out and hit the switch to kill the electronic rooster. Josie was already out of bed. No wonder she's always tired, he thought. He looked at the clock. 6:00. Time to start the day.

He eased himself out of the bed and ambled down the corridor to the toilet for a morning piss. Then he went into the bathroom, where Josie was fixing her face in front of the mirror.

'Morning, sweetheart'.

He patted Josie's backside as he stepped into the shower to spend five minutes standing under a stream of hot water. After the shower, he rubbed himself dry with a towel and lathered up for his morning shave. By the time he had finished in the bathroom it was 6:30.

He went into the boys' rooms to play alarm clock and start the morning struggle to have them out of the house by ten to eight.

'Come on you lot, out of bed! It's already half past six. Get a move on!'

Then he went to the kitchen for breakfast: two slices of toasted multigrain bread and a cup of coffee.

‘Did you sleep well, sweetheart?’ he asked, as he sat down at the table.

Josie looked up and shook her head. ‘I feel like I’ve run a marathon. Just can’t get my head to switch off.’

‘Why don’t you call in sick and give yourself a mental health day?’

‘You know what it’s like at school. Taking a day off just makes more work. Besides, I’ve promised my year eights I’d listen to their speeches this morning.’

By seven Josie was ready to go. She searched through her handbag for her purse. Found it, opened it and revealed its emptiness.

‘Can you give me twenty dollars? I’ll pay you back tomorrow when I get paid.’

Paul opened his wallet. It held thirty dollars. He checked his bus ticket. It still had six trips on it. He extracted the twenty dollar note.

‘Seems like we are always running out of money,’ he said as he handed it over.

‘Let’s not go there. I’ve got to go.’ She kissed him on the cheek, went up to the boys’ rooms, said goodbye to them and left to catch the early bus, so

she could enjoy a fifteen minute walk through City Park on the way to work.

* * *

After Josie had gone, Paul made another trip to the boys' rooms to make sure they were up and getting dressed. Then he went back to the kitchen to finish cleaning up the breakfast dishes.

'Morning, Dad.' Matthew arrived in the kitchen and started making himself a bowl of cereal for breakfast.

'Where's Luke?'

'He should be here in a minute.'

Before he knew it, it was ten to eight and wouldn't you know it, Luke was in the toilet.

'I'm ready, Dad,' said Matthew as he finalised the packing of his bag.

'Come on Luke, time to go!'

Luke appeared with his tie in one hand and his overstuffed school bag in the other. They were ready.

It took ten minutes to drive the boys to school, then another ten to drive to the interchange to catch the bus. If a bus arrived just after he got there he would make it to work on time. Every morning the boys were not ready to leave at ten to eight he was late for work.

Today he had to wait ten minutes for a bus. Fortunately, it was sunny. He hated waiting at the interchange on cold, wet and windy mornings. The flat roofed, no walls, structure had obviously been designed by someone who would never have to use it.

8:30. Five buses arrived at the same time. The first bus pulled into stop A. Several people rushed towards it, only to be disappointed as the driver shut the door and pulled out. He wondered if the idiot understood he was supposed to be driving people to and from the city according to a timetable and not just driving to a timetable.

He boarded the 578, which stopped at stop B, and got a seat at the back of the bus. He looked at the thirty or so passengers on the bus.

Couples and friends were obvious. Couples touched each other. They held hands or leaned together. Some hugged and kissed as if they had to fit in as much physical contact as possible before the separation of the working day. Friends talked, smiled and laughed. The strangers sat next to each other in the intimate space of the bus seat, often sharing more body heat through the enforced contact with the person alongside them than they shared with any other person in their day. Yet the

strangers ignored each other. They stared blankly from glazed eyes, read papers, magazines or novels, blissed out plugged into their iPods or feigned sleep. It was a rare sight to see two apparent strangers strike up a conversation on a bus.

Paul wondered why he didn't speak to the person he was sitting next to. He looked at her as she gazed out the window. He was old enough to be her father but he couldn't help admiring the curves of her young body. Just as well most people couldn't read auras. His would betray his lust every time he looked at a gorgeous young woman.

He wondered if young women noticed. Or did age give older men a veil of invisibility? What chance did the average forty to fifty year old male have of scoring with a gorgeous twenty something year old? He wasn't even on her radar screen. That's why he didn't talk to her. He looked away.

If he couldn't have a gorgeous young woman in his waking life, why were all the women in his dreams gorgeous young women with bodies full of sensual desire? In the dreams they came to him. They beckoned him. They opened their secret parts for him and pulled him into deep penetration. He always awoke at the moment of climax. The subconscious had a lot to answer for.

Maybe his dreams of screwing gorgeous young women were simply expressions of his suppressed sexual desires. Maybe he wasn't getting enough sex at home. No maybe about it. He wasn't.

* * *

The bus arrived at his stop in the city. He got off and ambled towards the bank. No point in rushing in for another routine day in the world of banking.

Paul started his day, like he did most mornings, sharing a cup of coffee with Henry, his team leader for the last two years. It was an opportunity to sort out the day's priorities and discuss the state of the world before they got down to the serious stuff.

'I look at the people working here, Paul, especially the ones that have been here for twenty years or more, and wonder how anyone can work in a place like this for that long and be satisfied with a basic clerical position.'

'I think I might know why. It's called economic slavery.'

'Slavery?'

'Think about it. The first workers anywhere were slaves. I mean, who built the Pyramids or the Great Wall of China?'

'I thought it was the emperor.'

‘Well, he got the credit but who actually did all the work? The slaves and all they got for it was food and lodging. The emperor lived in luxury while the ordinary working man slaved away building the great whatever.’

‘But you can’t be serious about slavery in today’s world.’

‘It’s more subtle these days. In the past, the rich could buy and sell slaves on the open market. They can’t do that anymore and they don’t have to. We turn ourselves into slaves. Think about it. The rich still own the means of production. They make all the things we need and want. They advertise all their wonderful stuff, which we can buy in their shops with money they will lend us, provided we agree to sign a mortgage, a bill of sale or credit card and work for them for minimal wages to pay it all off.’

‘Paul, you’re having me on, aren’t you?’

‘Henry, what’s stopping you from resigning this morning? It’s such a neat system most people don’t even realise they’re slaves, until it’s too late.’

‘I see what you mean. Well, we’d better go and do the master’s bidding.’

Paul walked from Henry’s office to his work station and logged onto his computer to start on the day’s problems.

The telephone rang.

‘Good morning, lending administration. This is Paul, how can I help you?’

Paul enjoyed problem solving but he detested the constant stream of telephone interruptions. Everybody’s problem was urgent and important. To make matters worse, his department was now fielding complaints from customers about the latest fee increase.

To the customers, who had no understanding of the links between the bank’s profits, its credit rating and what it paid for funds, any fee increase was highway robbery. To prove their ignorance, they rang up in their hundreds to abuse the bank’s staff. Naturally, the boss man on his million dollar salary, who made the decision to raise the fee, didn’t take any calls. He wrote a memo to all staff and the wage slaves, like Paul, took all the flak. At least Paul understood the rationale behind the fee increase. Most of his workmates agreed with the customers but were left with the task of handling the angry customers so they could keep their jobs.

Paul waited for the end of the caller’s opening rant.

‘You’re ripping me off! What service am I getting for this fee anyway?’

‘Sir, the fee is a way for the bank to recover the cost of operating your account.’

‘That can’t cost eight dollars a month! You only send me one or two statements a year and my payments are made electronically by my pay office!’

‘Sir, we still have to maintain your account on our computer system every day. Your account details take up space. We have to process the electronic payments your pay office makes. Computers cost money to run. In the past we were able to cover the cost in the amount we charged for interest. We can’t do that anymore, so we have to increase our fees.’

‘What a load of crap! I’ll be taking this to Consumer Affairs. You can’t do this!’

‘Sir, if you read the terms and conditions of your loan contract, you’ll see that we have every right to change this fee.’

‘Other banks aren’t charging eight dollars a month!’

‘I suggest you phone around. You’ll find this is a fairly standard fee.’

‘This is bloody highway robbery!’

Paul knew it was robbery. The bank had the customers over a barrel but he couldn’t actually tell

the customer that. The bank was getting enough bad press as it was, without him adding to it.

‘You bloody banks make such high profits as it is. Why can’t you look after the customers for a change instead of screwing them?’

‘Well, sir, perhaps you should buy shares in the bank.’

‘What will it cost me to discharge?’

Typical, thought Paul. You give the guy some good advice and he doesn’t even hear you. They were all intent on threatening to go elsewhere. Time for the customer retention spiel.

‘Sir, the account keeping fee on your account has increased by sixty dollars per year. The interest rate on your account is the lowest it’s been for twenty years. If you want to spend a thousand dollars discharging this loan and then spend another five or six hundred dollars setting up another one, with similar fees and charges, elsewhere, I’d be happy to give you an indicative payout figure.’

‘Well, now that you put it like that, I see I’m probably in a no win situation.’

‘Sir, I appreciate that you’re angry about the fee increase but we’re stuck with it. In the current competitive environment there’s no way we can avoid it.’ Unless the executives all took a massive

pay cut and he couldn't see that happening. More than likely they'd lay off slaves if the bottom line didn't improve.

'I suppose you're right. Thanks for listening anyway.'

'No problem, sir.'

Paul and his workmates were handling the overflow calls from the fee hotline. The last time he had spoken to the team leader of the fee response team, he had discovered the few he had spoken to had been reasonably civil. Apparently, the bank's customer base contained a large number of abusive people, under the impression that a barrage of obscene language would persuade the bank to change its decision. Fat chance. The bank wasn't even listening.

* * *

Paul's mobile phone rang.

'Paul Ford.'

'Paul, it's Rosa. Where's Josie? She isn't here and she's not answering her phone. It just goes through to voice mail. Is everything OK?'

'What are you talking about? She left home to catch the bus at seven this morning.'

'Paul, she's not here.'

‘Maybe she decided to take the day off after all. She wasn’t exactly full of beans this morning. I suggested she take the day off but she said something about her year eights.’

‘She’d have rung me if she was doing that and she’s not answering her phone.’

‘Maybe she left the bloody thing at home. You know what she’s like. She’s always leaving it somewhere. Let me call home and get back to you.’

He ended the call, scrolled through his contacts to ‘home’ and pushed the ‘call’ button. He waited as the phone rang six times and then listened to the message Luke had recorded on the answering machine.

‘Josie, it’s Paul. If you get this message, please call me.’

‘Where the hell is she?’ he mumbled to himself, as he found the school’s number and hit the ‘call’ button. He listened while Rosa did her formal telephone greeting before saying, ‘Rosa, it’s Paul. There is no answer at home. I’ve left a message for her to call me. She might have gone back to sleep.’

‘I’m worried Paul. This is not like her. She always calls in.’

‘Yeah, you’re right. Think maybe I’d better go home and check. Give me a call if she arrives at school. I’ll talk to you later.’

‘Thanks Paul. I’ll wait for your call.’

After ending the call, he logged off his computer and went to speak to Henry, who was in his office staring at his computer screen.

‘Henry, got a minute?’

‘Sure, what’s up?’

‘Josie’s work has just rung to say she hasn’t turned up or called in sick and she’s not answering her phone or the one at home.’

‘Don’t like the sound of that.’

‘Think I’d better duck home and check if she’s okay. She wasn’t feeling all that flash this morning. I was surprised she went to work but you know what teachers are like. They reckon it creates more work if they stay at home. She might have had second thoughts and gone back to bed without calling in, which probably means she’s as sick as.’

‘Sounds like a good idea. Give me a call if you need to take the rest of the day off. Hope she’s feeling better soon.’

‘Thanks. I’ll give you a call.’

Paul went back to his work station, picked up his bag and told his work mates he needed to go home

and check on his wife. Then he headed for the door and started retracing his steps.

* * *

Riding the bus out of the city mid-morning was an enjoyable experience. No crowd on the bus and not much traffic on the streets. He was back at the interchange before ten o'clock and driving into his driveway ten minutes later.

He got out of the car. Before going in he checked the letter box. It contained no mail. When he opened the front door there was no sign of Josie's handbag on the hall table, its usual spot when she was home. He checked the bedroom. It was empty. He checked every room, including both toilets, and then the backyard. There was no sign of Josie or of her having returned to the house since leaving it earlier in the day.

He wasn't sure what to make of her absence. Where else would she be if she wasn't at school and she wasn't at home? He pulled out his phone and called her number. He listened to her voice mail message and left a message asking her to call him. Then he called Rosa to let her know she wasn't at home and to ask if she had turned up at school.

‘I’m really getting worried now, Paul. What if something has happened to her? Maybe you should call the police.’

‘Think I’ll make a few more calls before I call the police. Let me know if you hear from her.’

He went into the kitchen to find Josie’s address book, the one she used for the telephone numbers of her family and friends.

He started with his mother-in-law. ‘Ma, it’s Paul.’

‘Oh hello darling, how are you?’

‘Ma, I’m a bit worried. Have you spoken with Josie today?’

‘No. What’s wrong?’

‘I don’t know if anything is wrong but she hasn’t turned up at work, she’s not home and she’s not answering her phone. I’m trying to find out where she is. I was just wondering whether you had heard from her.’

‘You think something has happened to her?’

‘I don’t know, Ma. She wasn’t feeling well this morning but she still left for school. I thought maybe she had changed her mind about going to work. If she rings can you get her to call me? I’m going to call some of her friends. I’ll call you back.’

‘I’m worried now, Paul. This is not like Josie. Maybe something bad has happened.’

‘We don’t know if anything has happened yet. I’m going to make a few more calls.’

‘Call me as soon as you find out where she is.’

‘Sure, Ma. Bye.’ He hung up knowing she would be on the phone to the rest of the family.

Next he called his parent’s number. Fortunately, his mother was home.

‘Hi, Mum. How are things?’

‘Fine thanks. What are you doing calling me at this hour on a working day? Is something wrong?’

‘Mum, have you seen or heard from Josie today?’

‘That’s a strange question, Paul.’

‘Mum, Josie seems to have disappeared. She’s not at work. She’s not at home and she’s not answering her phone.’

‘Well, she’s not here. I haven’t heard from her since Sunday. You two haven’t finally had a fight have you?’

‘Sorry to disappoint you, Mum. Every thing’s fine apart from not knowing where she is at the moment. I’ll call a few of her friends. She might just be playing truant.’

‘That doesn’t sound like Josie.’

‘I know. That’s why I’m worried. If I can’t find out where she is, I’ll be calling the police.’

‘Are you sure you need to get the police involved?’

‘Don’t you watch TV, Mum? Things happen to people every day. Look, I’ll call you back later. Say hello to Dad for me.’

‘Are you going to be alright?’

‘I’ll call you back, Mum.’ Paul ended the call.

He worked his way through Josie’s address book. None of her close group of friends had heard from her or seen her. No doubt he had started a rumour mill among her friends. At least if any of them did hear from her he would soon find out. Some of them sounded as worried as he felt. Then he wondered whether she was sitting in that park she loved so much.

He called Henry to let him know he hadn’t been able to find her and to tell him he was going to check City Park, and then call the police. Henry suggested he speak to the police first, so he called the number for police assistance on the fridge magnet stuck to the kitchen fridge and introduced himself to the female voice that answered.

‘How can we help you, Mr Ford?’

‘Look, I don’t know whether I’m panicking or not but my wife hasn’t turned up for work and she’s not answering her phone. She’s not home either and no-

one has heard from her since she left home at seven this morning.'

'Do you have any reason to think anything may have happened to her?'

'She's a teacher. She always lets the school know if she's not coming in or if she is running late. They haven't heard from her and she's not there. This is not like her. I'm worried something might have happened to her.'

'I can understand that, Mr Ford. It's best to report it now so we can have someone look into it. Do you have a pen and paper handy?'

'Yes.'

'OK, you'll need to go to your local police station and file a Missing Persons report. Do you know where your local police station is?'

'Yes, it's about five minutes from here by car.'

'OK, you'll need to supply certain information, so write this down. We'll need a recent photograph, details of her height, weight, age, what she is wearing.' She paused to let him get the details down and then continued, 'we'll want to know if she has any distinguishing features, like scars for example, and the names and contact details of family and friends. If she has a credit card bring the card number.'

‘Do you want a digital photo or a paper one?’

‘Both if you have them. Does she take any medication?’

‘No.’

‘OK. Get those details together and go to your local police station. Once you have filed the report we’ll be able look into it for you.’

‘Thanks.’

He hung up and went to the study and booted up the computer. It took a few minutes to load. He opened the photo library and found three recent photographs of Josie, which he copied and saved to a CD. Then he printed the one of her that he had taken only last weekend on A4 photo paper. While it was printing he checked his email. No new messages. He shut down the computer and wrote down her vital statistics. What the hell was she wearing this morning? Then he remembered. White, sleeveless blouse and black skirt. She was carrying the black bag with shoulder strap she used for carrying students’ work to and from school and, yes, those pink running shoes she used for walking, with her regular shoes in a black and white plastic bag.

He looked at the list he had written following the policewoman’s instructions. Credit card. He found a

statement in the file marked: accounts. Distinguishing features like scars? She had one scar, thanks to Luke's caesarean birth, but that was not visible while she had her clothes on. Having gathered together the CD, the print, the credit card statement and the piece of paper with his notes, he picked up his phone and car keys and headed for the front door.

* * *

Ten minutes later he was walking through the door of the local police station. The young officer behind the desk looked up as Paul entered and noted the photograph in his hand.

'Good morning, sir, how can I help you?'

'I need to make a Missing Persons report. My wife seems to have disappeared.' Paul put the photograph, CD, credit card statement and the piece of paper with his notes on the counter.

The officer looked at the photograph. 'When did she go missing?'

'This morning. She hasn't turned up at work. She's not answering her phone. No-one seems to know where she is. I'm worried. She always lets the school know when she's not going to be there.'

'What's your name, sir?'

'Paul, Paul Ford.'

He picked up the things Paul had placed on the counter. 'Mr Ford, come around to an interview room where you can give me all the details.' He opened the door at the end of the counter and led Paul down a short corridor into a small room with a table and four chairs.

'Bit more privacy here, Mr Ford. Just take a seat while I get the right form.'

After a couple of minutes, he came back into the room followed by an attractive woman in a police uniform that looked vaguely familiar, in Paul's assessment.

'Mr Ford, this is Sergeant Wood, she's in charge of our Missing Persons unit.'

Paul stood up and shook hands with Sergeant Wood. 'Paul Ford.'

'Marie Wood.'

They sat down on opposite sides of the table. She looked at the photograph and then looked up.

'OK Paul, what's your wife's name, and why do you think she's missing?'

'Her name's Josephine, but we all call her Josie. I don't know that she is missing. It's just that I don't know where she is and it's very unusual for her not to contact the school, she's a teacher, if she's not going to be at work.'

‘Have you tried to contact her yourself?’

‘Yes, I’ve called her mobile. She’s not answering. I’ve been home. She’s not there. I’ve called her mother and some of her friends. No-one has either seen her or heard from her. Look, I know it’s less than four hours since I last saw her but something’s just not right.’

‘You’re doing the right thing making this report now. Tell me about when you last saw Josie. You mentioned it was only four hours ago.’

Paul noticed that the younger officer was taking notes.

‘She left home for work this morning around seven. That’s the last time I saw her.’

‘Where does she work and how does she usually get there?’

‘She teaches at St Catherine’s in the city. It’s that girls’ school on the southern side of City Park.’

‘I know the one. I’m an old scholar.’ She looked at Paul and smiled. ‘How does Josie get there?’

‘She walks to the interchange and catches a bus into the city. Usually, she gets off at the stop near the main gate to City Park on North Terrace and walks through the park to the school. She reckons that’s the most peaceful part of her day.’

‘If she leaves home at seven, how long does it take to get to the interchange from where you live?’

‘It’s about a fifteen minute walk. She would normally catch a bus around seven twenty and get off at City Park around seven thirty five and be at school by eight.’

‘I take it the school rang you.’

‘Yes, Rosa from the school office rang me around nine fifteen to ask me where she was. She had tried calling Josie before she rang me.’

‘School starts before nine fifteen, doesn’t it? Why didn’t they call you earlier if she’s normally there by eight?’

‘Well, she doesn’t have a home class this year. Maybe nobody noticed she wasn’t there until she didn’t turn up for the first lesson. Anyway, schools are pretty chaotic in the morning.’

‘Paul, I’ll need to ask you a few personal questions, is that OK?’

‘Sure, fire away.’

‘How long have you and Josie been married?’

‘It’ll be twenty years this year, in July.’

‘Do you have any children?’

‘Two sons, Matthew, he’s sixteen, and Luke. He’ll be fourteen in August. They go to St Jude’s.’

‘Oh, you’re Matthew’s father.’ She looked at the photograph again. Now she knew where she had seen her before.

Paul raised an eyebrow.

‘My daughter, Margaret, goes to St Jude’s. She’s in Matthew’s home class. She talks about him all the time.’

‘Seems Matthew might be keeping some things to himself.’

They smiled.

‘How are things at home with you and Josie, Paul?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Any tensions? How are things between you and Josie?’

‘Nothing out of the ordinary. We’re a happily married couple as far as I know. No domestic violence or anything like that, if that’s what you mean?’

‘Paul, I’m just trying to see if there are any reasons Josie might want to leave without telling you.’

‘That’s all right. I understand that you’re just asking what needs to be asked.’

‘Any money worries?’

‘Just the usual middle class strain of sending two boys to a private school.’

‘What’s on the CD?’

‘That photo and two others. I took that photo last weekend and the others earlier this year.’

‘She looks pretty happy in this photo. What was the occasion?’

‘We had a barbecue lunch for her mother’s birthday at our place.’

‘I’ll get you to go through the Missing Persons report with John here, so that we will have your contact details and can start a file. You’ll need to sign the report. While you’re doing that I’ll get these photos circulated to patrols in the city, then I’ll be back with a map of the local area and you can show me the path she would take to the interchange from your place.’

The sergeant picked up the CD and left the room. With John’s help, Paul spent the next ten minutes completing the Missing Persons report form. When Sergeant Wood returned she placed a map of the local area on the table and handed him a yellow highlighter pen.

‘Paul, can you trace out the route that Josie takes to the interchange for me, please?’

Paul looked at the map and located his house. Then he traced the pathway both he and Josie took when they walked to the interchange: turn left at the front of the house, walk to the end of the street, turn right and walk to the interchange along the pathway through the park that ran along the river bank.

‘Paul, did you actually see her go that way this morning?’

‘No. I only heard her leave through the front door after she gave me a kiss and said goodbye.’

‘There’s probably nothing to worry about but we will keep a look out for her until she turns up. Most people who go missing, more than ninety five percent of them, turn up by themselves. I know it can’t be easy not knowing where she is but she’ll probably come home tonight and be all apologetic about not telling anyone where she was. Give me a call on this number when she either contacts you or turns up home. If you don’t know where she is by nightfall call me.’ She handed him a business card with her contact details. ‘What do you intend to do now?’

‘I’m going in to City Park just in case she decided to find a quiet spot and spend the day meditating.’

‘I hope you find her there.’

‘Thanks.’

They shook hands. Paul picked up his copy of the Missing Persons report and his notes. Sergeant Wood led him out to the front entrance of the police station.

* * *

Paul walked back to his car and drove into the city. He found a park near the gate on the southern side of City Park, close to St Catherine’s. He entered the park and spent a couple of hours looking for Josie, in the parts of the park she had described to him as wonderfully quiet spots in the centre of the city. It certainly was quiet but there was no sign of Josie. He sat down on a bench in the shade of a large tree. He was hot and thirsty. It was nearly two o’clock in the afternoon. He called Rosa and then Josie’s mother. Neither had heard anything or seen her since his earlier calls. He walked back to the car and just managed to evade the parking inspector waiting nearby to give him a ticket for overstaying the two hour parking limit. As he drove home, he wondered what he was going to say to the boys when they got home from school.

End of sample chapter

Reading Guide

After is not your typical police procedural.

Yes, it has a crime and a police investigation with complicating factors, and it's a murder mystery with all the twists and turns you might expect. But, the police investigation plays second fiddle to the main story, which is Paul's story.

While Inspector West and his team work on solving the mystery of Josie Ford's murder, you're taken into the world of Paul Ford to explore the impact an unexpected death has on the family of the victim.

If you're like me, you probably have a few secrets like Josie Ford. I think that's part of human nature.

Maybe you know couples who put on a front to keep their families happy. Nobody wants to admit their relationship might be on shaky ground when it's no-one else's business. Sometimes, it's easier to pretend everything is okay and not rock the boat.

This is where Paul Ford is when you meet him. His relationship with Josie has become routine. They're working well as a family unit raising two teenage boys, but he's not aware of their relationship breakdown or that she's having an

affair right under his nose. And, thanks to their ability to put on a good front for the outside world, everyone thinks they make a great couple and that they're great parents.

Then, Josie gets murdered.

Unexpected events often fracture the facades we present to the world, and Josie's murder is one of those events for Paul. He's able to hold things together at first, but then Josie's secret life becomes public knowledge and he can no longer pretend. He even has to contend with her lover telling him the truth about their relationship.

I was kind to Paul. I gave him a supportive family, an understanding priest as a friend, and a new girlfriend from an unexpected quarter, so there's a bit of a love story in there as well. I'm not sure how anyone would cope with his situation without that level of support.

Paul's story is a journey of resilience and a new start. I hope you enjoy it.

The police investigation takes a few interesting turns but, in the end, you get to learn who killed Josie and why.

* * *

If you'd like to find out where to buy **After** either as an ebook or a paperback, here's the link:
www.petermulraney.com/crime/after

Other Books by Peter Mulraney

Crime

Inspector West series

The Holiday

Holy Death

Whistleblower

Twisted Justice

The East Park Syndicate

Stella Bruno Investigates

The Identity Thief

A Gun of Many Parts

Bones in the Forest

A Deadly Game of Hangman

Taken

Fallout

Writing as a Mystic

Sharing the Journey

A Question of Perspective

My Life is My Responsibility

I Am Affirmations

Beyond the Words

Mystical Journey

Self Help

Everyday Business Skills

Everyday Project Management

Everyday Productivity

Everyday Money Management

Living Alone

After She's Gone

Cooking 4 One

Sanity Savers

Living Alone (Collection)

Writing

Field Notes for Writers

Full details available www.petermulraney.com