
Another sleepless soul was Harry. Various threads of distrust unravelled in his mind. Why had that lump of lard, Muriel, claim to have seen him and Lance enter the house the day of the murder? Possibly she may have seen him but certainly not with Lance. What was she hoping to achieve by making that statement to the police? So far the cops believed Charmaine when she said she'd been with him all that day, but whether this was a blind in the hope they'd discover his real activities remained to be seen. Lance. What if Muriel was right when she claimed to see him enter the house? Since the funeral, he'd been acting strangely, aggressively, not like his usual insipid self. He'd followed that girl, Belinda, when she disappeared upstairs the day of the wake. The girl had dropped a VHS tape. Did Lance know something about the tape? Was he hiding information from the group, information that related to the missing film? But the negative had been destroyed, so what if...it had been copied onto a VHS tape? No. Not a tape... but a positive print! Had Max made a copy from the negative before it rotted away? A possibility; and also a possibility that Belinda knew about it. As well as Lance? But how to confirm this theory? A visit to troublesome Miss Belinda?

"Hello, Muriel. I dropped by to have a chat with Joe." Lance stood at the doorway, a beaming smile on his face.

Muriel wiped her hands on her apron. "You know it was me who told the police you entered Max's house when he was murdered?"

Lance's eyes blazed. For a moment Muriel thought he was going to strike her. "Thank you for telling me that. I'm not likely to forget," said Lance icily, the smile vanishing swiftly. "It caused me all sorts of problems with the cops."

"But I see you're still free."

"Free because I wasn't at the house."

"But I saw you."

"You're lying, Muriel. I don't know why except to divert any suspicion away from yourself."

"Why should I do that? My conscience is clear. I only reported what I saw."

Lance took a deep breath. "Let's stop bickering. For whatever reason, you made the statement which you know is false. The cops have cleared me. Now could we forget that for the moment? I want to see Joe."

"I don't know that I want a murderer in my house."

There was a silence as both looked each other coldly in the eye. Muriel blinked. "Well, you'd best come in. Keeping the door open lets the cold in." So saying, she stood aside to allow Lance to enter. The door firmly shut, she led the way down the hall. "Joe seems to be a popular chap these days, 'someone always wanting to talk to him. Lord knows why."

"Well he knows a lot of film history," said Lance, as he took in the threadbare surroundings.

Muriel gave a grunt either of acknowledgment or disdain. "He's here in his usual spot in front of the telly." She pushed open the door to reveal Joe enthralled in a movie classic. 'Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night' rang out shattering the suburban ennui. Lance entered, and Muriel closed the door on them but stood, her ear pressed against the gap in the door frame. She could only hear muffled voices until the television sound stopped suddenly.

".. and I was wondering if you knew about film laboratories in Melbourne all those years ago, and a bloke called Bert," said Lance.

Joe's reply was faint, but Lance's response was clear. "Oh, so Belinda was asking the same question. Did you tell her?" Deep in thought, Muriel turned and made her way to the kitchen. The lamb stew was bubbling away nicely. Why this interest in film laboratories? She'd have to question Joe more clearly. Before she could conjecture further, Lance called from the hallway, "Muriel, I'm off now."

Muriel hurried to him. "Did you get what you wanted?"

Lance smiled confidently. "Just what I wanted. God bless Joe and his little black book."

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't call here again," said Muriel, "It lowers the tone of the neighbourhood, having murderers visiting."

Lance glared at her. "I think the neighbourhood lost value the day you moved in." He left swiftly with a curt goodbye.

Muriel slammed the door after him but the lock did not catch and she had to slam it a second time. When she returned to Joe, he was flipping through his black book. Muriel took it from his hands and looked at Ann Miller flashing her limbs on the cover. "I think I'll take charge of this."

Lance sat in his car. He gave a grin of satisfaction. Good old Joe. A fountain of information. The laboratory link was tentative, but it was a start. Would he tell the group the priceless film may have been copied? No. He knew that any member who had the information he'd discovered, would have kept it secret in the hope of cashing in on the valuable work of art. Belinda had the head start on him, but with some judicious detective work he could track down Bert Ballard, and once the valuable print of the missing film was in his hands, it would see him strolling the Croisette.