

Prologue

"What the –? Damn people dumping their dead dogs at this tip. Don't worry, mate, I'll bury you with the others in the lower paddock."

The driver turned off the earthmover's engine. He climbed down from the cabin, and walked around to the huge bucket at the front to take a closer look.

"Oh, my God!" Vomit rose into his mouth. He leaned against the machine and shivered. It was some minutes before his fingers were steady enough to call the police.

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Senior Sergeant Frank Stubbs strode around to the bucket, peered in, and shook his head. He looked at Senior Constable Marion Moore and said softly, "Looks like it's a serial killer now."

Stubbs blew his nose hard into his handkerchief. Marion Moore joined him at the side of the bucket and looked in. A foul stench emanated from the tear in the plastic. The constable put her hand over her nose and mouth. She waved her free hand in a vain attempt to brush away the flies buzzing around the parcel that contained the remains of a human torso.

"Well, at least we know one thing, Sarge."

"What's that?"

"It's a male." Moore blushed then added, "No boobs, and – um the obvious appendage."

The sergeant was unimpressed. "I'm going to get Doe and her new Special Crime Squad. It's the same M.O. as her Malloy murder."

"But, Sarge, it might be a copycat. There were enough details in the papers."

Stubbs stared at the gruesome parcel. "Marion, we need to secure the area. This tip is closed until further notice, or I should say until we find the rest of this poor sod's body."

Senior Constable Moore walked over to the car and joined two ashen-faced young constables who had retreated to the police car.

Senior Sergeant Stubbs stood transfixed. The plastic parcel had an old-fashioned, cardboard tag attached with rough, heavy-duty string. The cold, evening breeze flicked the card from side to side. It read: SEVERANCE PACKAGE, 1 of 6.

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Detective Inspector Jane Doe shuffled the pile of papers on her desk. She sorted them into the In, Pending, and Out trays. Stretching her arms above her head, Jane yawned, then swung around on her swivel chair, looked out the window behind her desk, and let her thoughts drift for a moment.

It's still a bit of an effort to get up so early after all those weeks of sleeping in. I'm glad my new office is on the fifth floor. The view's fantastic. I must go for a walk in the gardens at lunchtime. I might even go up to the top of the Shrine of Remembrance. A good way to keep fit.

She gazed at the gardens across St. Kilda Road, frowned, and blinked.

Damn, the last thing I need is a headache. The specialist did say I'd still get them for some time. Better take a couple of painkillers or I won't be able to think clearly.

Jane looked at the sparkling, solitaire diamond ring on the fourth finger of her left hand.

Why did I accept your ring, Oliver? I love you and want to live with you but I can't agree to be a fulltime housewife; not yet.

She rummaged through her handbag and retrieved a packet of tablets.

Heck, is it only eight weeks? No, don't think back. Think forward. Headache or not, it's good to be back at work.

The phone rang. She reached across the files on her desk and picked up the receiver.

"Doe speaking. Hello, Frank. What? Damn. Yes, you're right. I need to check this one out." She glanced at her watch.

"Don't move the parcel yet, Frank. I'll send Doc Harvey to you straight away. Steve Ho and I'll be there as soon as we can, say in forty minutes."

Jane replaced the receiver, her thoughts racing.

First week back and what do I have? One chopped up body of a retired MP and no suspects. Now there's the first parcel of another identically packed body-part found at the Sunbury tip. What's the connection to Sunbury?

Jane popped out two painkillers from their foil package and swilled them down with cold coffee from the mug on her desk. Grimacing, she dialled Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Ho's extension. "Steve? There's a neatly wrapped parcel waiting for us."

"Another severance package?"

"Looks like it."

"Sunbury?"

"Yep. But, this one's at the tip, not the vineyard."

"Pieces of garbage? This killer is some son of a bitch, Boss."

"Sick and dangerous, Steve. I'll meet you out front."

Jane hung up. She put on her parka and picked up her murder kit. The fragrance of *Chanel No. 5* drifted back into her office as the door slammed shut.