

# **Trinity**

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## Prologue

'Is there anything I can get you, Mr Ryan?' The girl's voice was hesitant, timid, her knock barely audible behind the closed door.

'No thank you, Sarah.' Jonathan Ryan placed his mobile gently on the white laminated bench in front of him. It was 10.15am.

'OK. Everything's ready when you are.'

'I'll be there in a few minutes.'

The steel frame of the chair bit into his back as Ryan turned towards the door, head cocked, listening to Sarah's footsteps receding down the corridor on the hard tiled floor. Tap, tap, tap. Satisfied she was gone he turned back to the mirror, alone again with his thoughts. He blinked against the brightness of the spotlights, made worse by the high gloss of the bare white walls. Ryan plucked a handful of tissues from the box someone had thoughtfully placed on the bench next to a vase of his favourite yellow roses along with a carafe of water and small glass. He dabbed at the beads of perspiration coating his forehead brought on by the heat of the too-bright lights. On the wall to his right an air conditioning unit was waiting to be installed, the electric plug dangling below it.

He was more depressed than he'd expected to be. What was he doing here? How had he ended up back in this godforsaken town after he'd spent his whole life trying to leave it behind? Crumpling the tissues he tossed them into a wicker rubbish basket under the bench. The chair creaked as he shifted back searching for comfort on the thinly cushioned seat.

Ryan stared hard at his companion in the mirror hoping for some answers. Unsurprisingly, no help was forthcoming. He leant forward and rested his elbows on the bench until his forehead touched the smooth surface of the mirror. He wondered if this was what it was like for Alice when she went through the looking glass - everything going backwards. Would he eventually wake up from a dream? Could he get himself out of this mess and safely back home again?

More questions without answers.

He felt overwhelmed by emotion again, not sure if it was regret for what he'd done, or should have done, or what had happened in this place. If only Roger hadn't asked him to come back to do this concert. If it had been anyone else Ryan could have said no. But he couldn't, not after everything Roger had done for him. He didn't want to be here, performing for these people, pretending he owed them something for the time he'd spent here when he was a boy. They acted like they owned him, claiming him as one of theirs. And to add to the insult they'd named this monstrosity of a place after him! The Jonathan Ryan Memorial Performing Arts Centre - as if he was already dead!

So here he was. In a town called Trinity, in a dressing room of the new centre named in his honour. He glanced around the cramped room, at the cheap furnishings, the inadequate little mirror. The smell of newness permeated the air - fresh paint mixed with concrete and the recently laid grey carpet, their scents mingled and amplified in the warm airless space.

A prison without bars but with no means of escape.

He thought about the letters. His heart raced. If he believed what was in them, if it was true, then he really was a monster.

But it was true. All of it.

He poured a glass of tepid water, gulped it down quickly to settle his nerves and the nausea in his stomach. Coughed a little as it caught in his throat.

The sudden ringing of his mobile snapped him back to reality. Christ. Julia. The last person he wanted to talk to right now. He swiped the screen and listened. She would see him that afternoon before the performance. He knew that already so why she felt the need to ring and tell him again was beyond him. He said OK and hung up.

In hindsight, he never should have married the woman. Time to get rid of her. Fat, silly, bitch.

Ryan ground his teeth. God, he had to pull himself together. He massaged his temples with his fingertips, a futile attempt to ward off an incipient headache. He checked the time again. 10.18am. He had to get moving.

He reached for the vase of roses at the end of the bench. Brought it closer, drawing strength from their beauty. They were his favourite, named after him, Ryan's Rose. The intricately formed facets of the lead crystal vase caught the lights above the mirror as he slowly turned it, rearranging the slender stems.

His tormented thoughts quickly found relief, as he concentrated on their vivid colour and perfect form. He picked one of the blooms out of the vase, his nostrils quivering from the delicate perfume. Water dripped from the long stem onto the bench top and his lap. He caught a few drops with his hand as he closed his eyes and inhaled its smell, momentarily blocking out the harsh artificial odours and the memory of Julia.

A sharp knock sounded at the door. Then another, more insistent. It couldn't be that girl again, surely. Before he could respond, the door banged open.

'What are you doing here?' Ryan stared in surprise at the visitor's reflection in the mirror as he pushed the flower back into the vase.

'I had to come.'

'Why?'

'Tell me it isn't true.' The door closed with click.

'Why are you so upset?' He laughed in surprise. 'It was just a game. A diversion.'

'Didn't you get my letters?'

'You sent them?' His mouth went dry. 'I didn't bother to read them.' But he had read them. Bile rose again in his throat and the glass shook as he poured more water, sipped it, sloshing a little on the bench.

His visitor moved closer, knuckles white on the back of the chair, staring at him in the mirror.

'Please. Say it isn't true!' The voice was full of anguish.

'I'm sorry. But it is.' A profound sense of despair consumed him and he closed his eyes. If only he could stop the voices, the accusations, the memories, the enduring sadness that inhabited his life.

'You bastard! I'll make you pay for this.' Clothing brushed against his shoulder as the visitor leant towards the bench.

Ryan's eyes blinked open and he saw the look of pure hatred on his accuser's face just as the vase of perfect yellow roses came crashing down on his head.

## Chapter 1

Gravel crunched underfoot as Louise Keller hurried across the road to the welcome shade of the ancient fig trees bordering Forsyth Park. A patina of perspiration coated her skin from the heat of the mid-morning sun. It was late October and the wattle trees were in flower, their fragrance mingling with the scent of recently mown grass.

It was going to be another scorcher of a day.

Located two hours west of Sydney, Trinity was in the grip of heatwave. In an area prone to drought and the vagaries of a changing climate, it was almost like the mild winter had slipped straight into summer, bypassing spring altogether.

A fountain played in the centre of the park, casting rainbows across the green velvet of the lawn surrounding it. A nearby sign reassured the locals that only bore water was being used.

Up ahead Louise could see the new Performing Arts Centre. A large banner promoting the concert marking the official opening that night hung limp in the torpid air across the building's façade. Jonathan Ryan, the renowned opera singer, was the star attraction and the concert was a sell-out.

Made of steel and glass, the centre had divided opinion across the community. Some loved its style and modern form whilst others couldn't stand the futuristic shape and overdone concrete. Louise was definitely in the second camp.

A cluster of media vans was parked at the foot of the steps leading up to the main entrance. Reporters were strung out along the steps in a jumble of camera cables and mikes vying for the best position to make their live-to-air reports later that day. The locals were outnumbered by the national TV and radio networks. When it came to media scrums there was no home town advantage.

Louise picked up the pace, long legs covering the ground quickly as she checked her watch. 10.40am. She'd have to hurry or she'd be late for her appointment. Pushing damp hair back off her face, Lou debated whether to take a short cut around the back of the centre. It would mean leaving the relative cool of the trees and crossing the car park and main road in the blazing sun. A quick glance at her watch again clinched the decision. She hated being late.

Head down, she followed a path down the side of the building. Moments later she reached the car park and paused in a wedge of shade to work out the best route that would take advantage of what little shade was available. The sound of voices caught her attention and she turned to see three men coming towards her from the opposite direction.

She was surprised to see it was Detective Inspector Ron Jacobs and two detectives from Trinity LAC, Detective Sargent Edwin Harrison and Detective Constable Barry Dangu. They stopped at a steel door next to a roller shutter.

'Ron. Hi.' Louise called out and waved. 'Ron! Ed!'

The men didn't appear to hear her as Jacobs pulled open the heavy door and they disappeared inside. Lou darted to the door and slipped in behind just before it banged shut.

In the faint light Louise could see they were in a cavernous room that appeared to be a storage facility. Windowless, it was almost empty except for a few wooden crates and some stage equipment. It was several degrees cooler than outside and Lou was grateful for the temporary escape from the oppressive heat.

She was about to call out to Jacobs again but stopped as the detectives were approached by two uniformed constables who were already inside, their footsteps echoing in the silence. Louise knew them both, Don Kenthurst and Tony West.

'What've we got?' As usual, Jacobs was impeccably dressed, in spite of the heat, the charcoal grey suit sitting well on his broad shoulders.

'The call came in a few minutes ago, Sir. We were out front keeping the media under control,' advised Kenthurst. The young constable was fresh out of the academy and his face flushed crimson matching his red hair as Jacobs questioned him.

'And?'

Kenthurst, ill at ease, looked at West for support. 'The victim is Jonathan Ryan.'

'Jesus Christ,' muttered Jacobs, running a hand through his thinning grey hair. 'How was he killed?'

'Blow to the back of the head,' replied West.

Lou almost gasped out loud, couldn't believe what she was hearing.

Jonathan Ryan! Dead! But not just dead. Murdered!

The detectives must have come in the back way to avoid the media at the entrance. If Jacobs caught her eavesdropping, there'd be hell to pay. At one time these men had been her colleagues when she was a detective at Trinity. They had worked together on a lot of different cases. But murder wasn't one of them.

Lou ducked behind a stack of packing boxes just inside the entrance. She was far enough away to be out of the group's direct line of sight but close enough to still hear their conversation.

'They were having a special rehearsal this morning for some students from the academy,' West continued, checking his notebook.

'But the concert isn't until tonight.'

West was the exact opposite of Kenthurst. A long serving copper, he'd been in the force for over fifteen years. A case of no brains and no ambition. He nodded his head, heavy jowls shaking. 'Seems like a last minute thing.'

'Murder weapon?' Edwin Harrison had been Lou's partner and in the short time they'd worked together Lou had been impressed by Ed's no-nonsense approach. He was a 'what you see is what you get' type of guy without the usual ego found with many male cops. Of average height, he was in his early forties with dark brown hair speckled with grey.

'A crystal vase. There were roses in it.' West consulted his notes again. 'Yellow.'

'Who found the body?' asked Barry Dangu. Louise liked Barry. Part aborigine, he was a bit of an enigma having somehow persevered to overcome the pitfalls and prejudice of the system and make it to detective.

'Sarah Walker, one of the students, in the dressing room at the rear of the stage. We've secured the scene.' Kenthurst's colour was still high as he fielded the barrage of questions, unprepared like the rest of the group to deal with the situation.

'Well, come on man, give us the rest,' demanded Jacobs.

Louise peeked around the boxes, careful not to disturb anything, listening intently.

'She'd gone to his dressing room to let him know that everything was ready for the rehearsal and to see if he needed anything. But when she knocked on the door she didn't get an answer so she opened it. And found the body.'

'Witnesses?'

'Six students from the academy, Seth Wilkins the CEO of the Arts Centre and a Christian Downer, a PR guy from the Opera Society. And Jennifer Preston who works at the academy. Nine in total. They're in one of the lecture rooms.'

'OK. West, you get back out the front and make sure the media don't get wind of this. Dangu and Kenthurst, talk to the witnesses, find out if anyone saw anything,' instructed Jacobs. 'Harrison you come with me to the dressing room.'

Footsteps approached and Louise backed deeper down the aisle between the boxes as West hurried by. She reached out to steady herself accidentally knocking a large gilded frame off the top of the stack. Lou grabbed for it but missed and it fell to the floor with a loud crash.

'Who's there? Come out right now!' An angry voice cut through the air.

Shit!

'It's me, Louise Keller.' She stepped away from her hiding place.

'What the hell do you think you're doing?' Jacobs's normally handsome face was flushed with annoyance.

'Is there anything I can do?' The frame felt heavy as she propped it against the nearest box.

'Absolutely not. This is police business and you have no business being here.'

'Sorry. I was on my way to the station, for our meeting. Then when I saw you I followed you inside so I could give you this.' Louise fished a CD out of her bag and waved it in the air.

'What are you talking about? What meeting?' Hands on hips, Jacobs stared at her in disbelief.

'It's my speech. You asked for copy and to give you an update on the conference. At 10.45am.' Louise had spent the past two days at a council sponsored safety conference. She was the only PI in Trinity and she'd been invited to give a presentation on the emerging importance of the internet and social media in adolescent criminal activity. The conference had been held at The Willows, a new conference centre at the junction of the three rivers that gave the city of Trinity its name.

'Now is not really the time is it?'

She shrugged her shoulders, knowing the excuse was lame at best even if it was true.

'Don't even think about interfering with my investigation. Harrison, escort Miss Keller off the premises.' Jacobs' reaction was not unexpected. And not just because she was a civilian. It would be fair to say since leaving the service, Louise was not exactly welcomed with open arms when she occasionally dropped in to see her ex-colleagues. Cops didn't take kindly to other cops who left especially when they went over to the dark side and became a private investigator.

Ed Harrison grabbed her elbow and propelled her roughly towards the steel door. 'What do you think you're doing?' he hissed.

'Sorry, Ed. When I saw you all come in here, I just followed. I didn't know about Ryan. It's unbelievable!'

'Well, you'd better make yourself scarce.' Ed's hand was firm on her back as he pushed open the door. It clanged shut behind her and Louise found herself outside in blinding sunlight again.

She stood for a few moments trying to absorb what she'd just heard about Ryan's death. It was almost too shocking to comprehend. She'd worked homicide cases in Sydney and her police training kicked in, her mind going into overdrive. Who had killed Ryan and why? And why here in Trinity? Was it one of the nine people at the rehearsal or was it someone else? More importantly, where was the killer now?

There were several potential escape routes - through the main entrance, the rear entrance or out one of the side exit doors. Louise looked around. To the left was a blue tarpaulin covering a heap of builders' rubbish waiting to be cleared away. The dust and dirt around the rubble was scuffed most likely from the boots of construction workers. Maybe the killer had come out this way.

Shading her eyes against the glare, Louise scanned the car park. It was big enough to accommodate over a hundred cars but was largely empty so early in the day. There were three cars parked together near the front of the building. A dark green Jaguar, silver BMW and black Mercedes Benz convertible. Could be connected to people attending the rehearsal. A red two door Honda Civic and white Range Rover were parked closer to the back entrance along with several vans, possibly belonging to the media or even people working at the centre.

It would take a while for the police to search the venue but it would be in lock-down in a few minutes. If the killer was still inside they could have arrived in one of these cars. Or the owners of the car may have seen something suspicious, a person leaving around the time of Ryan's death.

Heart racing, Louise instinctively reached for the camera in her tote bag then remembered she'd left it in the car. Her mobile would have to do. She rapidly shot off a dozen photos before she heard voices coming round the corner from the front of the building. Could be some of the crime scene techs.

It was time to leave.

Forsyth Street was like any main street in a large rural town - long, wide and straight as a country mile, it bisected the town right down the middle running north to south. There were a few diehard locals about in spite of the soaring temperature as Louise walked backed to her office, keeping to the shady side, her mind churning through the events of the past thirty minutes.

This was going to be huge for Jacobs and the other detectives. The murder of such a high profile person would mean major media coverage and the top brass in Sydney would be involved.

From experience Louise knew that Len Pennington, Superintendent at Trinity LAC, would have to bring in the big city cops. It was just too high profile to leave it to Jacobs and the local detectives. And, bottom line it spread the risk. So if anything went wrong there'd be someone else to blame. That's how it always worked.

The real question was who would they send?

Trinity Private Investigators consisted of a small reception area, although Lou had never employed a receptionist, an office complete with desk, chair, printer and view of the parking area out back, kitchenette and bathroom. Slick with perspiration, Louise flicked a switch and the air-conditioning sprung to life. By the time she reached the bathroom, stripped off and stepped into the shower, cool air was fast replacing hot in the enclosed space.

Five minutes later and a lot cooler Louise was towelling off and putting on a fresh, short sleeved green blouse, white skirt and low-heeled sandals. Next, she tied her hair back in a ponytail then applied pink lip gloss before checking the result in the mirror.

Thanks to her mother's Irish ancestry, Lou had inherited the same auburn hair and blue eyes. She could also see shades of her father's face staring back at her: straight nose, narrow jawline and arching brow. The only feature Lou could claim as her own was the dimple on her chin.

Hers was an ordinary face by anyone's measure but a young man once told Louise she had an 'interesting' face. Now in her early thirties she rather liked the description. Or maybe, like a lot of things in life, there were more important things to worry about than her looks.

Back at her desk Louise was scrolling through the news website checking bulletins about Ryan's murder when her mobile rang. 'Trinity Private Investigators.'

'Hello? Can I speak to Mr Lu Keller.' A man's voice.

'This is Louise Keller.'

'Oh. Are you the private investigator?' A pause. 'I thought you'd be a man.'

'A common mistake.'

'I'm Andrew Bailey, Jonathan Ryan's personal assistant,' he replied. 'I'm calling on behalf of Julia Ryan.'

Louise almost dropped the phone in surprise.

'Umm...how can I help you?'

'Julia wants to talk to you about the death of her husband. To retain your services.'

'Mr Baily, this is a police matter and I can tell you that they'll have the best team on it.'

'You were recommended to Julia by Roger Alexander and she would like to meet with you.'

Louise couldn't believe her luck. The biggest case to hit Trinity in living memory and here was an offer to be involved. 'OK, Mr Bailey. When do you want to meet?'

'As soon as you can get here.'

## Chapter 2

Tyres squealing, Lou hit the road ten minutes later. Traffic was light driving north on the Hume Highway and Louise caught up with the coverage about Ryan's murder. She turned up the radio volume as Assistant Commissioner Paul Simmons, Commander of the NSW Southern Region, headed up the ABC news bulletin.

*'A special task force will be set up to investigate this brutal and senseless murder. We will leave no stone unturned to bring Jonathan Ryan's killer to justice.'*

Well, that was reassuring.

It was mid-afternoon by the time Louise reached the outskirts of Sydney and another forty minutes before she made it to Millers Point on the northern fringe of the city in The Rocks. In the early settlement days the area was the domain of thieves, corrupt officials and criminals. Today, it was home to pensioners and renters rubbing shoulders with Sydney Silvertails, Pitt Street Farmers and captains of industry, many of whom had obtained their wealth by sailing a bit too close to the wind. Hard not to see the irony in that.

Cruising up Kent Street, Louise passed old terraced houses, three storied colonial mansions, apartment blocks, restaurants and cafes. She was forced to suddenly slam on the brakes when a man with a hand held camera and a well-dressed woman trailing a microphone bolted across in front of her.

'Morons,' she yelled out the window. 'Jesus, the body's barely cold and already you're scavenging for a story. Are you nuts? Are you really that desperate to get a story you'd get yourselves killed?'

The camera man gave her the finger as Lou blasted the horn. Some people just lacked any common sense. And when it came to the media they often lacked common decency. If she was still on the job she'd stop the car and arrest the idiots for obstructing traffic.

Closer to her destination the road was even more congested. After a few more blasts a path cleared long enough for Lou to dive down a narrow lane next to the Captain Cook Hotel. The SUV skipped up the kerb and Louise squeezed into a tight spot behind a red Ford Transit van replete with antennae and satellite dish from one of the local TV stations. Lou checked the trip computer on the dash. Two hours thirty seven minutes. Not bad considering the traffic in the city. Snatching up her bag Louise locked the car before hurrying back up the lane.

Bridgewater, where the Ryans lived, was located at the cross roads of Kent and Argyle Streets. Red and blue lights flashing, five police cars were parked across the intersection preventing any more vehicles from getting through. With the news of Ryan's murder spreading like a summer bushfire Louise expected to see a large contingent of media outside. But nothing prepared her for the crush of vans, trucks and the chaos of people milling about.

Vehicles were parked or abandoned in any available space: double parked on the street, down laneways and up on the pavements. Crews vied for position setting up in locations that ensured a good shot of the front of the building, providing a back drop for reporters giving minute by minute updates. Even the fine old Morten Bay fig trees in tiny Argyle Park were not spared. Louise could see one cameraman clinging like a monkey on the lower branches trying to get a better shot of the action over the crowded thoroughfare. The local residents were also out in force standing around in groups, gawking and pointing, mobile phones at the ready, texting and taking photos, trying to find out what was going on.

The towering apartment block was under siege and for the first time Lou could sense the magnitude of the loss being felt by millions of adoring fans who knew and admired Jonathan Ryan.

Unlike many of the prestigious apartment blocks on Kent Street which were converted office blocks, Bridgewater was a design masterpiece. Sheer glass walls rose into the sky, obscuring Observatory Hill behind it, reflecting the blue off the sky and harbour and historic buildings surrounding it. The bright sun glinting off the surface created the illusion of the building shimmering in the afternoon light. At ground level the glass revolving door was in constant motion with people coming and going.

Off to the right Louise spotted a uniformed Sergeant directing the setting up of barricades around the entrance to the building. She sprinted across the road. 'Hi. Who's in charge here?'

'I am for the moment.' His name badge said Marsden. He was fiftyish with a weather beaten face and thick hairy eyebrows.

'Looks like you've got your hands full,' said Louise, amiably.

'Too right. Like herding cats. And it's not just the media. It's the locals and people coming to have a look. Christ, what a nightmare!' The Sergeant took off his cap and wiped his forehead with a beefy forearm. 'We got down here as soon as we heard about the victim but we never expected this. It's out of control. Who was he?'

'Jonathan Ryan, the famous opera singer,' replied Louise. This was met with a blank look and head scratch. She didn't bother to fill the Sergeant in on the details. It wouldn't make his job any easier.

'I suggest you get reinforcements. It's only going to get worse. I have an appointment to see the victim's wife on level 54.' Lou gestured to the front door of the building.

'Sure, see one of the constables inside.'

The lobby screamed wealth and privilege with a black marble floor, gold and white brocaded walls and impressive crystal light fittings. At the Concierge's desk two men, dressed in dove grey jackets and dark pants, as well as three uniformed policemen tried to keep control and answer questions.

Irate residents were demanding to know why they couldn't get their Mercedes and Maseratis out of the underground garage whilst a film crew cornered anyone they could find who knew Ryan and was willing to be interviewed.

Louise spotted the lifts located past the desk, three on the northern side of the foyer and one opposite. A uniformed policeman was questioning anyone attempting to get into the lifts, checking to ensure they were genuine residents, many of whom were clearly unhappy about the intrusion. He was young, looking awkward in a uniform of dark blue pants and light blue short sleeved shirt that looked too big for him. Lou waited whilst one resident blasted the officer who wouldn't let him pass. 'Listen, mate, I've lived here for four bloody years. And no, I can't prove it. I didn't go out to buy the paper expecting one of the neighbours to be murdered! Now, just get out of my bloody way.' The constable stepped aside with a loud sigh as the gleaming doors of the lift glided silently shut.

Louise checked the name badge clipped to his blue shirt. Constable Shaw looked harried and pissed off.

'I have an appointment with Mrs Ryan.' Louise flashed her PI credentials at the young man.

'I'll have to ring and confirm. Just wait here, please.' He pointed at the floor before trotting over to the Concierge desk and grabbing a handset. A few seconds later he was back.

'They're expecting you. I'll take you up. Anything would be better than having to deal with these wankers.'

### Chapter 3

Shaw ushered Louise in through the open doors of the lift before swiping an access key and pressing 54. Louise checked her watch as the doors shut and the lift commenced its ascent. Shortly after a chime sounded and the doors schussed open. A quick peek at her watch showed it took exactly 81 seconds from ground zero to the top level. That was fast.

The lift opened directly into the foyer of the penthouse and Louise caught her breath as she stepped out. It was like entering a florist shop. Magnificent funeral wreaths and huge bouquets were everywhere covering a corner table, visitor's chair and stacked three deep on the carpet along the edges of the walls. The pungent smell was overwhelming in the confined space.

'Something else isn't it? We've been bringing up the delivery guys all morning. Flowers and more flowers. Unbelievable.' He shook his head in amazement.

Newness squeaked from shiny black boots as Constable Shaw stepped around the flowers towards an intercom located on the opposite wall next to a closed white door. Pressing a button he said, 'I have Ms Keller here to see you, sir.'

The constable crossed back to the open lift. 'Mr Bailey will be with you shortly. Have a nice day.' Hitching up his pants weighed down with the paraphernalia loaded onto his accoutrement belt the young constable briefly touched the brim of his cap before he vanished from view into the maw of the building.

Louise turned as she heard the door behind her open.

'Hi. I'm Andrew Bailey. Thanks for coming so quickly.'

'Louise Keller. Nice to meet you Mr Bailey.' Louise extended her hand as she quickly sized up the man who had opened the door. He was of medium build with a pleasant face and hazel eyes under brown hair greying at the temples. He pushed up the sleeves of his rumpled white shirt before returning a limp handshake. The top button was undone and a red checked tie hung slackly on his narrow chest. 'Please come in. And call me Andrew. Sorry about the flowers. Just watch your step.' He gestured for her to follow through the white door.

The long hallway was lined with more floral arrangements. Several doors led off it before Bailey showed Louise into a large sitting room through tall, double white doors. After clearing some space amongst the flowers in front of a black leather lounge chair he invited her to take a seat.

'Julia will be here shortly. The phones haven't stopped ringing and the flowers just keep coming. The response has been incredible.' He raised a slim, tanned hand and massaged his forehead. 'We're all just devastated by the news. It's unbelievable. Did you see all the media parked on the doorstep and the crowd of stickybeaks? Every time someone comes into the building they're being mobbed, asked to give a comment, or if they knew Jonathan. It's like a bloody circus.'

Louise thought that was a fair description but kept that to herself. 'I'm very sorry for your loss.'

'Thank you. But we're going to have enough to do without having to deal with this every day. Is there anything the cops can do to get rid of the bastards?' He rubbed his eyes wearily.

'I'm sure the police have everything covered downstairs. I saw them setting up a perimeter around the front of the building so residents can get in and out without too much trouble. The media will have to wait behind it.'

After five minutes there was still no sign of Mrs Ryan and Bailey lapsed into silence. As they waited, Louise gazed around the enormous room. It was beautifully decorated with nine foot ceilings, walls covered in yellow silk wallpaper and plush white carpet underfoot. North facing

floor to ceiling windows presented panoramic views over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. The overall effect of the huge windows and white and yellow decor was a room full of light and space.

An antique Chinese black lacquered sideboard took up most of the western side of the room with a large vase of long stemmed, yellow roses in the centre. In the south east corner of the vast room stood a sleek black grand piano. Above it hung an immense gold and crystal chandelier.

But it was the painting of Jonathan Ryan on the eastern wall near the piano that dominated the room. The sheer size of it took Lou's breath away. It was a full length portrait that showed a man in his prime. The artist had captured Ryan's rugged maleness: thick black wavy hair, olive complexion, strong jawline and heart-stopping smile. But it was the deep blue eyes that were the most striking. A yellow rose bud graced the lapel of his black jacket. Lou had seen photos of the victim but the fine brush strokes of the painter had brought the man to life in a way no photograph could possibly do.

The chair Louise was sitting on faced the painting, almost like a seat placed strategically in front of a work of art in a gallery. Was it Ryan who sat here gazing at himself or his loving wife? Lou walked over to the painting to get a closer look and reached out to touch the canvas expecting to feel the warmth of a living person. The overall effect was compelling. Louise knew it was that combination of fabulous good looks and glorious voice that had made Ryan the poster-boy of opera in Australia and internationally for the past decade. And more recently voted one of the sexiest men alive by a popular gossip magazine.

Louise turned as the white doors clicked open and Andrew stood up. 'Here's Julia.'