

## Excerpts from Starts With C

Billy already knew about police lies, collaborations and cover-ups. But once familiar with statutes and by-laws and the arcane mysteries of administrative policy, he could make the coppers sweat. He had sipped and slurped from the radical's trough, hung around Redfern pubs and the Louisa Street ghetto, talking revolution and fight. He had photos of himself with the black fraternity's big men, fondly framed and hung on his office wall.

'We know police methods,' Billy told everyone in the pub. 'And they won't learn if we don't show 'em a bit of fight.'

He would always defend his people. Law, Facts, Truth, Evidence, Due Process, Torts, and Jurisprudence; they were all written in capital letters. They were white-man's terms, serving white-man's purposes. He reckoned laws were conspicuously, scrupulously, methodically ignored; conventions forgotten, bypassed, misinterpreted and willfully misunderstood.

'Coppers are just cogs in a big machine that grinds people to little pieces,' he said in the Unity, 'extracting our juices and sending us to gaol or a grave.'

Evidence, Due Process, and Jurisprudence; they were big muscular words, lovely, seductive words; Billy reckoned they deserved his contempt.

For him, the truth was this: everyone lies. Facts can be hard to come by. It's one man's word against another. 'And whose word do the authorities believe?' he would ask anyone who'd listen.

He knew that evidence could be 'cleaned up,' rearranged and conveniently reinterpreted, especially in police stations and courts far from metropolitan centres.

'Due process? That's a joke,' said Billy to Farrell's face.

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Once the TRG had settled into the town's cramped police station, Chief Warren called a squad meeting, so everyone damn well better be there, in uniform, tidy and presentable.

Despite the prevailing wall of heat, in fact because of it, Warren wanted discipline at all times. 'Straighten your tie detective,' he said to Cassidy as he entered the staff area.

'Chris: get rid of that pin on your lapel. Now listen up.'

The Chief surveyed his officers, dressed in either a grey suit or deep-blue uniform, arrayed about the filing cabinets, desks and chairs or leaning against the walls.

'Shortie: turn up the bloody air-conditioning.'

Geoff Short adjusted the rattling grey unit poking through the wall, everyone briefly relaxed, expecting instant relief.

'Righto,' said Warren. 'Had enough marching around town?' A few smirks and jostling amongst the men heralded brief acclaim, before the boss' scowl cut through the din.

'Had enough sweating it on the street?'

No acclaim this time.

'Had enough carrying weaponry and cooling down the natives? Three hours here, three hours there, scorching Main Street? Well, you've had it easy to now.'

Warren paced one side of the room, glancing at his notes.

'Last month, we received a brief to lock-down this town, and men, you probably think we've done it, right?'

The men mumbled a little, tempted to say 'sure we have.' They'd spent weeks patrolling this town, breaking up petty fights and stepping on toes, and nothing much had happened.

'You know what: it's time we swung into town policing. Remember policing? You blokes remember theft, graffiti, licensing, motor vehicle accidents, missing persons? Well, for now we TRG have nothing better to do than police this town while the polities promise the world will be paradise, at least until the election's out of the way.'

The men cackled laughter.

Johnnie Crowbar even let out a hoot, Warren's stern look silencing him, and others beside.

'We have a special case here. It seems that a Bicentennial official, a Mr. Clifford Badger, disappeared not long before our arrival. Went missing, not seen in Sydney or elsewhere.'

Warren picked up a sheet of paper. 'On August twenty-second. Last seen at a town council meeting on the night of the twenty-first, when he had a difference of opinion with, guess who, Billy the Revolutionary, Billy the rioter.'

There were astonished looks at that.

'That's not all. It seems Councilor Sheila also attended the meeting, and she is Badger's ex-wife. Big secret this. Town doesn't know it seems. They divorced nine years ago, so they didn't exactly get on. So put that in the mix. And topping it off, Madame Sheila herself informs us, on the quiet, that her hubby called on uncle Kev the morning of his disappearance. Kev, the other riot leader. That's when Cliff Badger disappeared.'

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But seeing the faceless men with guns in their hands, thoughts of Sharpeville, of Myall Creek and My Lai, Billy put his hand on Hanna's elbow. Chris Hanna wished Kev was here to help everyone get-along. His brain was exploding, and both men had a vision of many dead. Chris' eyes locked onto Mara, pleading for help, screaming for it. They were burning the sun with distress, Mara's face, his hopeful moon. She stepped up to him, turned to the mob, her back to the riot squad. Cassidy could have reached out and hauled her away, so he moved between them.

'Brother and sisters,' she said. 'Brother and sisters.'

The pushing and shoving eased.

'Hey. You mob.' The hubbub eased again, and people focused on her. 'These coppers behind. They're useless, right?' The mob cheered. 'This bunch couldn't start a picnic, I reckon. So we'll find Kev ourselves. We'll find him. Yeah.'

Chris and Billy formed a protective ring around her.

'When Kev's worried, where's he go, eh? Where does he go?'

The mob had no answer. The cops looked at each other through their goggles, some pushing them back for a better view.

Awash with doubt, the mob waited.

'What does Kev do when he's worried, eh?' said Mara. 'He's got a lot of worries, ain't he?' There were a few nods, and mumbling agreement. 'Kev. He goes to that river, down by them fish traps. That's where he goes. He sits there and thinks of the ancestors. Washes away trouble. Gets away from stinking cops.'

The hubbub and anger grew, but Billy waved it down.

'We're gonna wash away our troubles,' said Mara. 'We got Chrissie home. Thanks to Billyo. Ain't nobody can stop us. We're gonna find Kev. Down on that river. You gonna join us? What do you say, Billy?'

Billy pursed his lips and nodded. 'We've got no business here,' he said. 'We got no business dealing with guns and stinking coppers. We got business down on that river. We got business at them fish traps. We're gonna find Kev. That's his spirit down there. Them fish traps belong to our people. That's koori business. That's what Kev would want. Yeah. That's what Kev would want. Come on everyone. Let's get going. It's Australia Day, ain't it? It's our day too.'