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Other books by Megan Norris  
*Perfect Victim*, with Elizabeth Southall  
*Running Pink: the Deborah De Williams Story*  
*True True Blood*  
*On Father's Day: Cindy Gambino's Shattering Account  
of Her Children's Revenge Murders*

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MEGAN NORRIS

# LOVE YOU TO DEATH

A STORY OF  
SEX, BETRAYAL  
AND MURDER  
GONE WRONG



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*Dedicated to victims and  
survivors of violent crime*

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## CHAPTER 1

# GETTING LUCKY

THE WAITERS WERE setting the tables for tomorrow's Sunday lunchtime rush when the last stragglers settled their bills and drifted out of the restaurant. The second day of 2010 was almost over, but the night was still young for the droves of partygoers streaming past the bars and eateries of Melbourne's cosmopolitan Brunswick Street.

On the footpath outside their favourite Greek restaurant, Chris Soteriou draped a protective arm around his stunning wife, Vicky. In his spare hand he held a plastic bag containing the unopened bottles of BYO wine from his surprise birthday party.

'We'll see you in Spring Street,' Chris said to his close friends Jim and Lina Nestoras, Nick and Eleni Stamboulakis and Bill Pappas. He followed them toward their cars. Jim had parked fifty metres from the restaurant on the main thoroughfare through the inner-city suburb of Fitzroy. Nick's car was in a neighbouring side street, parked out of sight to ensure he didn't spoil the surprise dinner that Vicky had organised.

Chris and Vicky paused, watching as Bill Pappas, the only single man in the group, climbed into the back seat of Jim and Lina's car. Vicky giggled and teetered on her high heels, juggling the armful of birthday gifts their imaginative friends had chosen.

Vicky had wanted to make sure that her husband's forty-fourth birthday was celebrated in style. She'd spent the past few days ringing their friends, reminding them not to breathe a word about the surprise she'd arranged at Chris's favourite restaurant.

Alpha Ouzeri was a popular haunt among the well-heeled group of professionals from Melbourne's Greek community. With its traditional Greek menu and music, the restaurant had been the first-choice venue for countless other celebrations. Everyone knew that the owner and chef, Harry Tsiukardaris, would take special



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care of them. Just a few weeks earlier, the Soterious had celebrated Vicky's forty-third birthday there.

Tonight it was Chris who'd been indulged. He'd been showered with an assortment of creative birthday gifts, including a cigar holder and a bottle of designer aftershave, which the girls claimed was a gift no man could have too much of.

Vicky had insisted that he wear the new white shirt she'd chosen for his birthday and team it with his smart black pants. She'd watched like a delighted child that afternoon as he opened his birthday card. On the front was a photo of a flashy blood-red Ferrari, exactly like the one he'd been promising to buy himself. Chris laughed as he noted the personalised number plates, which said 'YOU WISH'.

Inside the card, Vicky and their 13-year-old daughter Marie had penned birthday wishes. 'To the coolest dad ever,' Marie wrote. 'I wish you the best 44<sup>th</sup> birthday ever! Enjoy your present ... Love, your beautiful children, Andrew, Dimitra and Marie.' She signed it with hugs and kisses.

Vicky wrote on the opposite side of the card in her own distinctive handwriting: 'My darling husband, Chris, wishing you all the best with everything you wish for ... thank you for loving me so much, your wife who adores you.' Like Marie, she finished her greeting with hugs and kisses.

Now, as they stood on the footpath, Vicky kissed her husband's cheek. They waved as Nick and Eleni purred by in their car toward the city, where the birthday revellers had arranged to have a last drink in the cigar bar at the European, a popular restaurant in Spring Street. Jim Nestoras left Chris and Vicky walking arm-in-arm toward Rose Street, where they'd parked his black Nissan 350Z sports car.

At just after 11.35 p.m., the lovebirds strolled past Bimbo Deluxe, a restaurant on the corner of Brunswick and Rose Streets, where CCTV cameras captured them pushing past other late-night revelers. They headed into the quiet side street where they'd found a parking spot on this busy Saturday night.

Vicky slipped a bird-like arm around Chris's waist, her bangles jangling, and curled her hand tightly. She rested her head on his

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shoulder, clasping his birthday presents in her other arm. 'Did you have a good birthday?' she asked, lifting her face up to kiss him.

Chris nodded. 'It was a great birthday – thanks,' he said, smiling. Vicky ran her tongue across his bottom lip. 'The night's still young,' she teased. 'Like I told you earlier, tonight's your lucky night.'

Chris certainly felt lucky. He'd expected to spend his birthday at home with Vicky and Marie, who would no doubt have her nose stuck in the laptop they'd bought her for Christmas. Upstairs, their twins, Andrew and Dimitra, who had just turned fifteen months old, would be sound asleep in their beds.

Vicky's Greek-born parents, Dimitrios (Jim) and Maria Skarlatos, had already babysat the twins on New Year's Eve at their home in the nearby suburb of Preston, so Chris was pleasantly surprised when Vicky announced at 4 p.m. on his birthday that her mum had offered to mind the children again. 'Get ready. We're going out, birthday boy,' she said, hurrying him into the shower. She refused to say where they were going. It was a surprise.

Vicky had been full of surprises tonight, Chris thought. His wife's over-the-top flirting had been the biggest surprise of all. It had started from the moment they left their house, when she suddenly lifted her hand off the steering wheel and grabbed his crotch.

Registering her husband's amazement, she winked and blew him kisses. 'Relax,' she purred. 'It's your birthday. You're going to get lucky later on.'

Vicky had insisted on driving tonight. It made sense, because she knew where they were going on this secret outing. But it was an unusual thing for her to do. She hated driving in city traffic, and Chris was sure it would be busy this first Saturday night of the new year, with Melbourne in holiday mode.

From their house in the outer-middle suburb of Watsonia North, Vicky drove to Heidelberg, where she pulled over outside the bottle shop at the Old England Hotel and asked Chris to buy lots of champagne and wine. He bought about eight bottles, which he put in the car in plastic bags, certain they must be expecting company to drink all this. Chris wasn't a drinker, but from the amount of alcohol, he estimated that she'd organised a birthday party and must have asked about twenty guests.

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They left the bottle shop, taking a quick detour past the block of land where they'd soon begin building a luxury home. Then Vicky drove on to the freeway and the city.

When they arrived in Fitzroy, Chris expected his wife to pull over into one of the parking bays close to their favourite restaurant. From the moment she turned into Brunswick Street, he'd suspected that she was heading for Alpha Ouzeri. But when Vicky drove past the restaurant and turned left into Rose Street, Chris wasn't so sure.

'Where are you going?' he asked as she drove past several empty parking spaces toward the far end of the street. On their thirty-odd visits to Fitzroy, they'd never parked this far away from Brunswick Street before. Usually, Chris parked in one of the disabled bays along Brunswick Street, using a sticker he'd acquired from a relative. His mates ribbed him about the ruse, and Vicky always felt ridiculous emerging from his two-seater sports car in her high heels, looking fit and able-bodied.

When Chris couldn't find a spot there, he'd use the paid parking on top of the Coles supermarket around the corner in Johnston Street. Chris took great pride in his expensive cars and didn't want to risk them getting scratched. He'd had his sports car vandalised about six weeks earlier after leaving it outside a restaurant in Greensborough near his home. The giant scratch he found on the bodywork had cost \$2500 to fix, so he wasn't keen to park down this dark side street. He'd have preferred a well-lit, secure area where guards or pedestrians would notice any acts of vandalism.

But tonight they faced a good half-kilometre walk back to Brunswick Street, where he was certain Vicky had booked a table at Alpha Ouzeri. 'Why have you parked all the way down here?' he asked. He scanned the empty street again. 'It's OK,' Vicky reassured him. 'I always park here when I come into town with the girls.'

She flashed him a smile. 'We're running late for your surprise party,' she said. 'Let's just leave it here – it'll be fine. Let's go.'

The couple walked hand-in-hand, Chris carrying the wine and Vicky hugging and kissing him as she tripped along the footpath in her trademark high heels. When they reached the busy main street,

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she made a beeline for Alpha Ouzeri, as Chris expected. Inside, his closest friends were waiting for him.

During the evening, he studied his pretty wife and felt blessed. Vicky was always so thoughtful and enjoyed making him happy. As they posed for Jim's camera, she looked a million dollars in her new off-the-shoulder purple Christian Dior dress.

He watched her proudly across the table when the waiter brought in the platter of Greek desserts with two matching candles to make '44'. The candles wobbled uneasily between the baklava and Turkish delight, their flames dancing across the sequins of Vicky's dress and lighting up her brown eyes.

Her diamond rings sparkled as she raised her glass in a birthday toast to her husband. 'To Chris,' she said. 'Thanks for making me the happiest woman alive.'

Later, she clicked off toward the bar and returned with a waiter bearing a tray of cocktails and shots. Chris never drank, but his wife insisted his birthday was worth a toast. She pouted in feigned disappointment as he reluctantly inspected the two cocktails. One of the waiters produced a lighter and set fire to the alcohol, which blazed in front of him. 'Are you trying to get me drunk or what?' Chris joked. But Vicky had gone to so much trouble that he didn't want to disappoint her. He picked up the two flaming cocktails and knocked them back in two easy gulps.

The surprise birthday gathering explained why Vicky had disappeared that afternoon. Chris had been in the shower when she tapped on the glass to say she was off to buy milk for the twins. The simple errand had taken two hours, and when she'd returned at 6 p.m., she'd offered no explanation for her absence. Instead, she hurried him upstairs to get changed.

Now he suspected she'd escaped the house to make last-minute arrangements for his surprise birthday dinner. He could picture her, yapping on her mobile, looking pleased with herself in her oversized sunnies.

The noisy table grew louder as Chris hurled the empty cocktail glasses onto the restaurant floor in customary Greek fashion and stomped on them hard enough to send slivers of glass flying under the tables. While the others knocked back sambuca shots, Vicky

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dragged her husband toward the tiny dance area, pushing her petite body against his and telling him, as she always did, that she loved him to death.

Even a high-flying career, three lively children and seventeen years of marriage hadn't dampened the passion between Chris and Vicky. To those in the Aussie-Greek community who knew them well, the successful businessman and his vivacious, immaculately dressed wife were the ultimate power couple. Attractive, glamorous, popular and wealthy, they were perfect soulmates.

During the evening, the women disappeared outside for a smoke, as they usually did after a meal. Vicky too enjoyed an occasional cigarette after a night out. Later, she vanished again, and her girlfriends assumed she was having another cigarette or had gone to the toilet.

'Where's Vicky?' Jim asked after about fifteen minutes. Chris hadn't noticed she was missing. A few minutes later, Chris passed her coming from the direction of the restrooms and guessed that was where she'd been. When he returned to the table, she was telling the waiter to top up his glass, though she should have known he wouldn't drink the wine.

As they walked together down Rose Street, he breathed in his wife's musky Christian Dior perfume. She loved the heady scent of Poison. It was a must-have accessory, he often joked, for a sexy, sultry housewife.

Vicky usually reserved displays of passion for more intimate moments behind closed doors. It was out of character to hear her whispering provocative remarks in his ear as she'd done tonight. Perhaps getting older was an aphrodisiac, Chris thought, as his wife clicked alongside him down Rose Street toward the car. Not that he was complaining. The thought of getting lucky with the most beautiful woman in the room tonight promised a perfect ending to his birthday.

It was 11.45 p.m., and the walk felt much longer in the darkness. He noted that they were the only people around. He was scanning the street for his car when something in the shadows drew his attention. Crouching behind his Nissan was the silhouette of a man.

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Was the guy drunk? Perhaps he'd been drinking at one of the nearby bars and staggered down here, off the beaten track. He wouldn't be the only partygoer paying the price for over-indulging on the first Saturday night of the new year.

Chris's eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. 'What the fuck is he doing?' he said aloud, his voice suddenly sharp. He stared harder at the man, who had a hood pulled up, covering his head and obscuring his face. Whatever he was up to, he definitely appeared to be loitering behind Chris's car.

Chris's throat tightened. 'What the crap is he up to?' he repeated, turning to Vicky and craning to get a clearer view. He knew the dimly lit inner-city back streets made a perfect trawling ground for opportunistic thieves. Even without a key, an offender with the know-how could hot-wire a car. Or he might be a desperate junkie intending to break into the vehicle on the hunt for items to hawk for drugs. But Chris's luxury sports car with its high-tech security locks and alarms was hardly the easiest target.

Chris's pace quickened. His attention was focused on the loiterer. 'Is he breaking into my car or what?' he asked Vicky.

'No,' she whispered. 'I think it's the car behind.'

The tension was interrupted by a click and the sound of his car's security system being deactivated. The car lit up, and he remembered that Vicky had the remote in her hand. He guessed that in her anxiety she'd accidentally tightened her grip on the remote and set off the central locking. From her blank expression, it was clear Vicky was unaware that she'd just made the job of a would-be car thief much easier.

The realisation brought Chris's attention back to his car, whose orange security lights were still flashing angrily at him in the darkness. As he turned, he noticed that the stranger had slipped away from the kerb and was now directly behind him. Chris thought he saw a knife, but before he could utter a word, the stranger gripped his jacket collar and roughly jerked his head back. To his horror, Chris felt a sudden stinging as the man hurriedly drew a cold blade across his throat.

It was like a scene from some surreal horror movie. For a split second, Chris felt utterly disconnected from what was occurring.

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He gasped for breath, then the scene around him grew sluggish and out of focus.

It was as if someone had pressed a button and set in motion a series of ugly thumbnail images of his life. He saw himself in every ghastly unfolding scene, his body paralysed with shock, his mouth gaping in horror, his terrified eyes taking in the blood gushing from the gaping wound in his neck.

The warm, wet, creeping sensation of blood soaking through his crisp white shirt made everything real. The shirt clung moistly to his chest, and the scene before him grew sharper and horribly real. Chris's hands flew instinctively toward his injured neck, where blood now pumped through his fingers. 'Why are you doing this?' he choked.

Was he being mugged? Chris wasn't sure. The stranger hadn't uttered a word. He hadn't tried to grab Chris's wallet or snatch his expensive watch. Neither had he demanded the keys to the Nissan, which Vicky still had in her hand.

Chris looked wildly around for his wife. She was standing, paralysed with fright. Fearing the stranger might attack her next, Chris threw a couple of shaky punches, striking the stranger in the face. 'Where are you, hon?' he shouted weakly. Somewhere, he thought he heard metal clinking on concrete.

This was Vicky's chance, he thought. 'Run, just run,' he shouted. He wondered why she wasn't moving. She just stood there watching as he stumbled backwards on the footpath into a fence. 'I'm dying,' he spluttered, stretching his arms toward her.

The stranger was now on top of him, lunging again and again with his knife. A searing pain sliced through Chris's abdomen, the blade penetrating his flesh with cool, terrifying precision. 'Vicky,' he rasped. 'Just look after the kids ... I love you.'

Chris thumped to the ground, and Vicky's face disappeared from view. In its place, a blurred white light crept from the shadows, washing over him, warm and soft, bathing away the blood and the pain. His agony gave way to a strange new calm. The warm light appeared to whisper, 'Come with me.' Chris closed his eyes. So this was how it felt to die.

Then a strong, clear voice called out from the opposite end of the



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street. The stabbing immediately ceased. The stranger leapt to his feet and raced away. Chris heard footsteps approaching. 'I've been stabbed! I've been stabbed!' he cried.

A man shouted something about police, his words growing louder and more purposeful as he rushed toward the fence where Chris lay bleeding. Somewhere in the darkness, Vicky began to scream and sob. The man bent over Chris and asked his name. 'Stay with me, Chris,' he urged.

The sound of his name hauled Chris back into the nightmare. His eyes fluttered open, the screaming pain giving his words a raw edge.

'I'm dying,' he choked, shaking and chilled again. The other man's voice remained even. 'Just stay with me.' Strong hands squeezed down on Chris's throat, strangling his cries. Above him, a woman said something. Then he felt lighter, smaller hands firmly pressing down on his blood-soaked shirt.

The warm light shrank as slowly as it had come. In the distance were howling sirens, then cold blue flashing lights beamed down the street, lighting the small group huddled on the footpath.

But Chris, his pulse quietly fading, saw only black.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE MUGGER

BRUNSWICK STREET WAS teeming with people when Harry Tsiukardaris locked the doors of his restaurant that night. It had been a frantic start to the new year. All his staff were relieved to finish their shift and rest their aching feet.

Twenty minutes earlier, Harry had waved off his good friend Chris Soteriou, watching as he disappeared down the street with his friends, his arm around his glamorous wife. Before they left, Harry had overheard the group making plans for a late-night drink in the city. He might do the same himself when the evening's takings had been tallied and his staff had finished preparing the restaurant for tomorrow.

Outside the restaurant, the street buzzed with pedestrians and traffic. It was busy tonight, he thought, as his staff began to drift off.

About 11.45 p.m., two young off-duty doctors, Christopher O'Loughlin and Kate Bryan, turned into Rose Street, searching for a parking spot. After dinner at a restaurant in Carlton, they were meeting friends for a late drink at Bimbo Deluxe. As the couple stole a kiss in their car, they became aware of some noise from the far end of the dimly lit street. They could hear something like a scuffle as they opened the door and climbed out.

In the darkness, they observed the silhouette of a man struggling with another man, who appeared to be lying on the ground. As they crossed the road, the scuffle grew noisier and they heard a woman screaming.

Her long, continuous scream made Chris O'Loughlin turn. He started to walk toward the screaming woman, but his girlfriend was wary. 'Just leave it,' Kate said. 'They'll be drunk or something.' Then the screaming was drowned out by the shouts of a man in obvious pain. 'I've been stabbed! I've been stabbed!' he yelled.



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Dr O'Loughlin turned to his girlfriend and told her to dial 000. He wasn't sure what was happening out there in the darkness, but whatever it was, it sounded serious.

'Mate, the cops are coming!' he shouted, hoping the mention of police might put a stop to the scuffle. His words echoed back from the far end of the street, and the taller of the two figures paused, sprang upright and ran toward a dark hatchback idling nearby. The car drove off at speed and turned right into Napier Street.

Despite the poor lighting, Dr O'Loughlin managed to get a good look at the attacker. He appeared to be a man of average height, and was wearing a dark jacket with the hood pulled up. He also wore dark tracksuit pants with white stripes down the legs.

The car sped away, and the doctor sprinted toward the man on the ground. He was slumped and upright, with his back against a fence. He was in a state of great distress and repeatedly said he was dying. Observing his blood-soaked clothes and the blood on the ground, Chris O'Loughlin thought this was a distinct possibility.

He bent over the man and checked his pulse. 'What happened?' he asked, trying to calm him down. This unfortunate guy had obviously been in the wrong place at the wrong time. His pale face and the obvious slash marks on his torso suggested his condition was critical.

The injured man attempted to stand, but Dr O'Loughlin urged him to remain still. His girlfriend, Kate Bryan, rushed over and handed him her mobile so he could give the operator directions.

Kate Bryan spoke to the woman, who was still screaming and breathing fast. Dr Bryan asked, 'Are you hurt too?' She put her arms around Vicky in an attempt to console her. But Vicky continued to shriek that her husband had been stabbed, then she collapsed onto the footpath. Dr Bryan checked her breathing, moved her into the recovery position and went to help Dr O'Loughlin.

The two doctors placed the man on his back on the footpath. They were shocked when they saw the gaping wound across his throat. Kate Bryan immediately pulled off her cardigan and put it over the injury, and her boyfriend placed his hands firmly on the man's throat, applying pressure to stem further blood loss.

Dr O'Loughlin asked the injured man his name, and he answered

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weakly, 'Chris Soteriou.' He appeared to be struggling to breathe. 'I'm dying,' he rasped again. The doctor tried to reassure him. 'Stay with me, Chris, stay with me,' he repeated gently. An ambulance was on its way.

Using his free hand, the doctor lifted Chris's shirt, where several deep stab wounds were visible on his chest and abdomen. The knife was likely to have penetrated his major organs. It was clear to the two professionals that the victim was in deep shock and had potentially life-threatening injuries.

Kneeling beside Chris, Dr Bryan put her hands on his abdomen, applying pressure to the deeper wounds. Beside them, Vicky continued to sob hysterically. She told the doctors it was her husband's forty-fourth birthday. 'A mugger just stabbed him,' she wept. Then she started to push past the doctors, clawing at their bloody hands with her fingers, desperate to get to her wounded husband.

Her clawing was interfering with their efforts to keep her husband alive until help arrived. Vicky plucked Dr O'Loughlin's hands from Chris's throat, but he shoved her off. 'Get her away from him,' he told his partner. Dr Bryan calmly led the flailing woman away from the injured man. 'Let him do his job,' she said soothingly.

By now, Chris had begun to drift in and out of consciousness. 'I feel faint,' he spluttered weakly. Dr O'Loughlin tried to reassure him. 'We just need you to stay calm,' he said.

Vicky's screaming had brought a number of residents out of the nearby houses. A shaft of light streamed from the hallway of a house in Napier Street. Jonathan Langford had been at home watching TV with his housemate when he heard screaming from the street. The piercing sound lasted for about thirty seconds. Jonathan left his chair and went through the front door to investigate. As he reached his front gate, he saw a dark-coloured hatchback turn into Napier Street and speed away.

Jonathan went over and tried to ask the woman what was going on, but she continued to scream. He observed a young guy tending to a man who lay propped up against the fence. He watched the woman approach the group.

By now his mate, Neil Ripper, had come outside and was trying to comfort the sobbing woman. 'What happened?' he asked

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her gently. The young man on the footpath answered, 'He's been stabbed.'

The neighbours saw a young woman hand the guy a mobile phone. They both crouched down beside the bleeding man, while the younger man gave directions to the operator. 'I'm dying,' they heard the blood-soaked man splutter.

'Keep breathing,' urged Dr O'Loughlin, casting a worried look at his partner. Neither of them had been extensively trained in emergency medicine, and they were concerned that if Chris stopped breathing, they'd have to administer CPR. That would be problematic, because the poor guy was covered in blood. They were also concerned that the blood gushing from his neck wound might compromise his airways.

Amid the commotion, Erica Schmidt, who was staying at a house in Rose Street with her partner, Patrick, ventured into the street. She was shocked to see a bleeding man lying on the footpath, where a young couple appeared to be administering first aid.

Further along the footpath, she saw neighbours trying to comfort a well-dressed woman who was sobbing uncontrollably. There were gift packages scattered in the road, and a man was endeavouring to get the hysterical woman to sit down.

Ms Schmidt asked the woman if she was OK. She replied that she was, but her husband wasn't. She explained about the party and how a man had come up behind them and attacked her husband. Over the commotion, emergency sirens howled and flashing lights sped toward the group gathered on the side of the road.

\* \* \*

In the initial 000 call at approximately 11.51 p.m., it had been unclear whether the injured man had been stabbed or was suffering from gunshot wounds. The operator had heard a woman screaming in the background and a man saying he was dying.

The first police on the scene were Constable Timothy Ryan and Senior Constable John Cannon, who arrived in a patrol van. The young male doctor was waving a towel to flag them down. As they got out of the vehicle, the police noticed a woman lying in a foetal position on the footpath. She was shaking uncontrollably, shouting

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and screaming. Erica Schmidt and her partner were trying to comfort the distraught woman, but she was inconsolable.

The police also saw a man lying on his back, covered in blood from the bottom of his mouth to his groin. He had blood on his arms and hands, but his eyes were open and he seemed conscious. He looked scared, and when he tried to speak, the police couldn't understand what he was saying. Blood was already spurting through the towel that the doctor had put on the injured man's neck, and a bloody cardigan lay on the ground beside them.

Two ambulances had already arrived, and the paramedics were making hurried attempts to dress the gaping wound in Chris's neck. The young doctor sat on the footpath holding Chris's head while the paramedics placed pads across his throat and secured them with bandages.

Paramedic Michael Azzopardi arrived in a MICA sedan to find the ambulances already there. He realised that they were dealing with two patients, a stab victim and a deeply traumatised witness. Azzopardi helped the other paramedics to dress Chris's wounds, then examined the distraught wife. He noted that she was anxious and unable to answer questions. She appeared to be in shock. He checked her oxygen levels and blood pressure, as well as her heart rate. Despite her fainting fit, the results were normal.

But the paramedics were taking no chances. The ambulance crew decided to take her to the Royal Melbourne's emergency department, which was already on standby for her critically wounded husband.

Once the paramedics arrived, the doctors stood back and spoke to the police. Dr O'Loughlin gave Ryan a description of the attacker and recalled a few of the letters and numbers on the car's number plate. The officer conveyed the information on his hand-held radio to colleagues in police communications.

The two young doctors helped the paramedics hoist the injured man onto a gurney, and watched in relief as he was placed into the back of the ambulance. As the crew closed the doors, Dr O'Loughlin stepped back and felt his foot brush something on the footpath. He stooped to pick up the item and was shocked when he realised it was a utility knife about 24 centimetres long. From the bloodstains,

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he assumed this must be the weapon used in the attack. He immediately dropped it back in the same place and pointed it out to Ryan, who had already seen it. The policeman marked its position on the ground. He started putting up crime-scene tape and moving people out of the area to preserve the evidence.

\* \* \*

In Brunswick Street, Alpha Ouzeri's staff were leaving for the night. One of the waiters saw police cars tearing down the street and decided to investigate the cause of the disturbance. Assuming there must have been a road accident or a late-night brawl, the young man was confronted by two uniformed police officers who were setting up a roadblock at the entrance to Rose Street. They began instructing motorists to remain on the main road, chatting intermittently on crackling walkie-talkies in low, urgent voices.

The spectacle attracted a small crowd, who congregated near the roadblock, speculating about the cause of the commotion. Further down Rose Street, the waiter observed a sobbing woman standing in the road. Her long dark hair and purple sequined dress looked familiar. His stomach lurched as he realised it was Vicky Soteriou.

Less than half an hour earlier, he'd seen her leaving the restaurant, clinging to her husband's arm. Now, he craned his neck for signs of Chris and his friends. But the only person he could see was Vicky.

Unsure if Chris had been the victim of a road accident or a mugging, the waiter hung around for a while to see if he could glean some information to pass on to his employer, who he knew was a friend of the couple. His throat tightened as he watched paramedics rush from the ambulances toward a figure on the footpath. In the headlights, the waiter saw figures kneeling beside the person on the ground. A buzz spread around the crowd near the roadblock.

'Someone reckons a guy's just been attacked,' a bystander volunteered.

'He's been stabbed,' another added.

The waiter watched the paramedics lift the figure off the ground and place him on a gurney, which disappeared into the back of a waiting ambulance. Doors slammed.

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The small crowd of spectators watched the ambulances leaving Rose Street, the police removing the flimsy makeshift crime-scene tape to allow them past. The waiter sprinted back down Brunswick Street to tell his boss what had happened.

Harry was startled to see the waiter burst back in. 'It's Chris Soteriou,' he blurted. 'I think he's been mugged, or stabbed. They're taking him to the Royal Melbourne Hospital.' The waiter hurriedly explained what he'd seen. 'Vicky was screaming and crying,' he said. 'It has to be Chris.'

Visibly upset, Harry pulled out his mobile phone and scrolled through his contacts until he found Bill Pappas's number.

\* \* \*

Upstairs at the European, Chris's mates were enjoying a cigar over their half-finished drinks and wondering where the Soterious could possibly be.

One of the friends called Vicky's phone, but she didn't pick up. Nick rang Chris. 'He's not picking up either,' he said, looking concerned.

About 1 a.m., Bill's mobile rang. He guessed it would be Chris, telling his mates he'd decided to go home. He was surprised to hear Harry's voice on the other end. 'Chris has been injured in some sort of fight,' Harry explained. 'He's on his way to the Royal Melbourne ... it looks like he's been stabbed.'

The friends looked at one another in disbelief. 'Where's Vicky?' asked Lina, looking distressed.

Harry hadn't mentioned whether Vicky had been hurt, Bill Pappas said. Perhaps she was at the Royal Melbourne too? The friends grabbed their belongings and headed for the hospital.

\* \* \*

In the back of the first speeding ambulance, Chris's condition was deteriorating, prompting the paramedics to radio ahead to the on-duty trauma nurse in accident and emergency.

The stabbed man's pulse was escalating at an alarming rate and his blood pressure, which had been dropping fast during the sixteen minutes they'd been in attendance, had fallen so low that they



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were unable to record a reading. During their earlier preliminary examination, Chris had been able to tell them what had happened between gasping breaths. He said he thought he'd seen the weapon used in the blitz attack. It appeared to be a kitchen knife similar to one at home, with a blade about ten centimetres long.

The paramedics' cursory check of the five separate stab wounds in his upper chest and abdomen confirmed this. They estimated that the lacerations on the man's torso were roughly one centimetre wide. More shocking, though, was the six-centimetre cut across his throat, which appeared to be deep, and which paramedics were concerned might have caused damage to his thyroid gland and larynx. They were less bothered by a more superficial flesh wound on the back of his upper arm, where bruising to the surrounding skin was consistent with the victim stumbling onto the footpath.

The ambulance crew assessed the patient as 'responsive', though distressed and anxious. When he answered their questions, his speech was clear and continuous. But his decreasing oxygen levels had left him short of breath, and his skin was pale and cool to the touch. From the amount of blood on the man's clothes and at the crime scene, it was evident he'd already haemorrhaged extensively. The paramedics noted an unequal expansion of his chest, where the right side appeared to be more inflated than the left. This suggested a build-up of blood or air in the chest cavity. They suspected the blade had punctured one of his lungs.

The paramedics responded quickly to the life-threatening situation. They put Chris on oxygen and performed an ECG, which confirmed an irregular heartbeat. They also inserted an intravenous line through which they administered morphine to relieve his pain. Then they inserted a cannula through his inflated chest wall, penetrating the intercostal space between his ribs to the area around his lung, relieving what they now suspected was a haemopneumothorax, a build-up of escaped blood and air.

As the ambulance raced toward the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the paramedics were increasingly concerned about injuries to major internal organs. The depth of the stab injuries was unknown and would require further investigation in emergency. The most serious stab wound was in Chris's lower abdomen, directly above

## LOVE YOU TO DEATH

his liver, which the crew believed was bleeding internally.

‘How’s the pain, Chris?’ asked the paramedic.

‘Better,’ Chris moaned, drifting in and out of consciousness.

At the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the trauma team were preparing for the arrival of their second stab victim of the night. About two hours before this attack, another man had been critically wounded. At 9.30 p.m., while Chris was celebrating his birthday, a 21-year-old Indian student named Nitin Garg had been stabbed in the chest while making his way through Cruickshank Park in West Footscray to begin his shift at Hungry Jack’s. The injured man staggered 300 metres to the fast-food outlet and collapsed in the arms of a colleague, saying, ‘Please help me. I’m dying.’

The stabbing was the fourth in a stream of vicious attacks on young Indian students in a matter of months, and police thought it was racially motivated. Was the new casualty on his way to hospital from Fitzroy the victim of a racial attack, or simply the target of a random late-night stabbing? Nobody knew, but this weekend was shaping up to be an ominous and violent start to 2010.

## CHAPTER 3

# SAY GOODBYE

AT 12.20 A.M., Chris was rushed from the ambulance through the automatic doors of the Royal Melbourne Hospital's emergency department, where the triage staff lifted him off the stretcher and onto a bed.

'He was attacked tonight at approximately 11.50 p.m.,' one of the paramedics explained to the lead trauma nurse, Jodee Bootle. There was one stroke of luck, he explained. The first bystanders on the scene had been off-duty doctors. 'They put towels on his wounds and maintained pressure until we got there,' he said. 'Without those guys, he could easily have bled out and died.' Looking at the pale, blood-soaked man on the bed, Jodee thought there was every possibility he still might.

She immediately alerted the trauma team to their new patient, who was formally admitted at 12.24 a.m. by the on-duty registrar. Within minutes, the trauma nurses had removed his clothing and begun to clean the blood from his wounds to allow a closer examination.

Chris had suffered five stab wounds to his chest and abdomen, one superficial wound to the back of his upper arm, and a serious laceration to his neck. He had lost a great deal of blood, and the nurse categorised him on the triage admission forms as 'high risk'. Within minutes, emergency doctors confirmed that his injuries included a potentially life-threatening haemopneumothorax to the right of his chest.

A careful examination of the neck wound revealed that the blade had cut through subcutaneous fat and muscle, causing possible damage to Chris's thyroid gland and larynx. There was another prominent wound to his upper chest, near his collarbone, and a deeper wound in his pectoral region, where a haematoma appeared to be forming. Dr Reuben Casey ordered immediate CT scans to confirm what was going on internally.