

## INFILTRATION

A fortnight after meeting the artless Sara in Griffith, Jude and I were rehearsed, studied, polished and ready to go, and driving our new car, a snappy two-door coupé, befitting a successful art dealer with a very fluid cash flow. We had spent every moment of the past weeks backstopping our cover stories, creating a history for an art connoisseur and his sexy girlfriend. Inside the glovebox was a mess of brochures and invoice pads and my wallet was full of calling cards. We had opened personal and business bank accounts, all tied to a well-known national banking group, and with healthy balances dating back years. My name was Cole Goodwin. Often the best first names to use are variants of your own, and Goodwin had a distant tie to my family.

Back-catalogues from most of the art auction houses in Melbourne were scattered in the car. We also had a few oil paintings in the boot, just in case an orange grower wanted to invest in art. Jude had her cover story sorted; she was a child-care worker. Our rationale was that the Italians wouldn't care to visit a crèche full of screaming kids. And for anyone who asked, we planned to announce our engagement at a party in twelve months' time, having been together now for three years. This was an important element to our cover story, as one thing we knew well, especially from Vito's translations, was that even

though the Italians were married men, they had a string of girlfriends. We hoped an engagement would deter any unwanted smooth talk from our targets. Jude and I had taken a swanky Georgian apartment in East Melbourne, overlooking a quaint little park, and managed to backdate the lease for over a year. We had no pets, our families lived in Sydney, and we did most things together: the perfect couple, really. The rest we could wing—once, that is, I had madly studied up on Australian art.

I thanked my lucky stars for my ongoing love of art, triggered by my time in Europe twenty years earlier. I embarked on two weeks of pure research, often sitting in the reference library at the National Gallery, reading volume after volume of material. The night before Jude and I hit the road, a friendly mature-age arts student in her final year of a degree majoring in Australian art and good looks fired question after question at me, testing my knowledge for hours. By the end of the evening, she gave me her best smiling ‘pass’ mark, fascinated as to what I might be up to. I knew then that I was ready to infiltrate the Mafia.

On the long drive the next morning, while Jude gave me my final art quiz, I marvelled at the latest gadget from the technical whiz-kids. I have always held that undercover work is only as good as the cover stories you invent and the equipment you use during the sting. We had a wonderful bunch of technicians who delighted in inventing gadgets to beat the crooks. Their latest show-off piece was my mobile phone. It looked like an everyday phone—and it was—but when you wanted it to be a voice transmitter, you just pressed 51 on the key pad and it became a listening device, capable of transmitting back to my office in Melbourne. Upon reflection, a portable wire that enabled Vito to listen to our every conversation may not have been the perfect toy to have strapped to my hip.

After six hours of art questions and answers, Jude and I rolled into the lonely streets of Griffith, overdosing on the unknown. As I drove down the main street, looking for a hotel room, my mind wandered back to my younger years in undercover work, the ideal apprenticeship for what I was now about to begin.

Soon after settling into our hotel room, we ventured over to the Working Man's Club in search of Sara. The previous week we had sent her a cheery postcard from Pro Hart's gallery in Broken Hill, just the sort of thing new friends do for each other. As we walked through the automatic glass doors of the club, a ferocious blast of air conditioning instantly chilled the desert heat. I was as nervous as I ever had felt in my 14-year career chasing crooks. Jude grabbed my hand and threw her gorgeous smile into the room. We headed for the pokies and the sounds of a familiar voice.

'Guys, oh you're back, I've missed you two so much.'

Sara wrapped her fleshy arms around us both, kissing cheek to cheek, and we responded in the same enthusiastic manner. Jude gave Sara a Pro Hart key ring, which prompted a small tear; our Sara was in need of a friend. We spent the night chatting and sometimes laughing, knowing the squirrels were filming our performance. Sara was the perfect target, really; she was lonely and vulnerable, and had a direct 'in' to the Mafia. To compensate for her loneliness and to balance her own lack of interesting stories, she skited of her association with her Mafia mates and talked of Antonio and Rosario and their activities. We played back a cautious curiosity, careful not to seem overly keen. As more drinks were consumed, she got cavalier.

'Do you want to meet the Don?' she offered.

For an elongated second, I couldn't believe what she had asked. I wanted to pinch myself. I wanted to stick a sharp pin into my eyeball to make sure I was well and truly awake, not dreaming. I simply couldn't believe our luck. I had just won the jackpot and I hadn't used a coin.

'The Don, who's Don?' I asked casually, taking little notice.

'The Don—the godfather,' she uttered, looking as if half the wind had dropped from her sail.

'Oh yeah, I suppose.' We tried to look uninterested but mildly willing.

Sara walked us over to a large round table in the main room where Giovanni, Antonio and Rosario were seated, along with a gang

of other lesser villains. She introduced us, one by one, in the pecking order we'd expect. I shook the hand of the old godfather, Giovanni, and the surreal nature of the moment made the hair on the back of my neck tingle. I rubbed my neck vigorously with my left hand while shaking with my right. Then I met Antonio and Rosario and the others. Antonio looked as handsome as a movie star, as a Romeo should. He offered us a chair and we sat in their company for over two hours. Small talk was all that was on offer, of course; the Italians weren't as stupid as Sara.

Rosario Trimbole spoke of his love of Melbourne and his many visits to the city, as did Antonio. Our cover stories got a thorough going over, piece by piece, question by question. Jude and I worked the table as hard as we could, oozing smiles and charm, while making sure not to overstep the level of friendliness. We acted aloof yet interested in our new acquaintances. The laughter flowed. The key to our acceptance was Jude and her sexuality; she was a mixture of the classic girl-next-door with lashings of temptress. And she was dressed to kill that night, in a cream pantsuit and black low-cut satin top, carefully designed to play to the ego of our targets, especially Rosario, who had a one-track mind. Jude deliberately leaned into Rosario as she spoke, putting herself into his space, enough to ensure that he never wanted to leave the table, and the others enjoyed her repartee. I worked on Antonio, playing our cover stories, hoping to stir his interest for another social get-together.

By the end of that first night with the N'Drangheta bosses, Cole Goodwin had convinced Rosario and Antonio that there was a lot of money to be made buying and selling art. Antonio took my calling card. Jude had worked Rosario beautifully, suggesting that he was a very handsome Italian man and that all of us should catch up in Melbourne in the future, for drinks. I sensed that night that Jude would be my ticket to the Mafia, as long as I could hold up my end of the sting.

Jude and I were welcomed back to our Melbourne office like rock stars. I don't think I had ever worked in an environment that

could sniff such promise. These were exciting times but that initial rush was soon hosed down by the naivety of our management, who were more interested in trying to chart time-lines for when we'd be buying drugs from the Italians. Yeesh! They had simply no appreciation of the complexity of an undercover infiltration. And that was precisely what we had just started; an infiltration of the Mafia that may or may not succeed. It was far too early to get carried away with anything else.

I insisted that we be allowed just to befriend our targets at this stage and leave the issue of drugs completely alone. After all, our cover story was that of an art dealer and sexy girlfriend, not desperate drug dealers looking to buy from the Mafia. We needed to move 'slowly, slowly' with our new mates. I requested six months to infiltrate. It should be the Italians who made the first move, who first raised the issue of drugs. This premise caused issue with some, whom I sensed were itching to sprint around the hierarchy corridors, touting success.

A couple of weeks later when Rosario arrived in Melbourne, the squirrels were onto him. He rang my mobile phone and left a message for Jude, wanting to know if we wanted to have dinner with him and his two cousins later that night at his favourite Lygon Street eatery. We agreed by return message and swung into action, racing off to our East Melbourne apartment for showers. At the restaurant it was obvious that Rosario had taken a fancy to Jude; the Latin lover was coming out in him. We had half-expected this, as she had turned on a considerable level of charm the first time they met, so on this encounter we made sure she stamped her feelings all over me, just enough to cool him down but not to ruin our achievements. I enjoyed her ear playing, frequent kisses over dinner and roaming hands.

The night ran like many future nights, full of laughter, stories of Italy, comments about food, and having a rollicking good time. I have no doubt my history with my Italian mates from my younger years helped me to befriend my targets. Rosario was relaxed, and by the end of the night he confided that he was able to pass on the names of horses in fixed race meetings. He paid the tab for dinner, telling the

restaurateur to look after us each time we dined there, that he'd pick up our tab for any future visits.

Each time Rosario came to Melbourne we caught up for dinner or drinks, often with his cousin, little Rocco. He showed up in his red Porsche 911, which he kept hidden on one of the orange groves. It almost got to be a constant for him: dinner with Cole and Jude. Likewise, we were finding reasons to visit Griffith, mostly under the guise of buying or selling art works in Broken Hill or Canberra, and always available for a catch up with our friends.

We stopped overnight in Griffith, staying at the same hotel each time. Every now and again Rosario helped with our luggage, in gentlemanly fashion. I believe that he was actually sussing out the details we had left at the hotel register, as well as checking what might have been in our bags. We were prepared for both and just rolled with whatever punches he had. Jude and I noticed one morning that someone had ransacked our car overnight. While nothing had been taken, we had carefully set up the glovebox to alert us to any snooping; the car had been relocked and to all intents and purposes looked exactly as it had done the night before, except that the documents in the glovebox had been replaced the wrong way around.

Antonio owned a restaurant in the main street of Griffith, a tidy little side investment, probably to hide a portion of his wealth. He invited us to dine; it was a long night of fabulous food and wine in the upstairs room. Antonio joined our table of Italians, sitting opposite my mobile phone. It was comforting to know that Vito was listening in the event that it all went sour, as we were a long way from home with no back up and no gun. The main topic of conversation that night was art and how easy it was to launder money by investing in art works. Antonio's questions were probative; he was visibly stirred by this money and art thing.

Whenever we ventured into Griffith we were showered with gifts—cases of oranges, boxes of wine and bags of mandarins—all from the farms of our new-found best friends. Our new godfather and his number-two man were obviously greasing us up for something, but

what? The plan was going beautifully but it was still a waiting game; the trouble was that time was never our friend. With the constant demands for results from the hierarchy, we were concerned that soon we might be pre-emptively forced to find an opportunity to raise the subject of drugs in our conversations. While Jude and I were undercover, it was decided there couldn't be any drug-related arrests; we couldn't afford to have the N'Drangheta getting paranoid, thinking their new skippy friends might have tipped off the cops.

Back at the office, everyone was running at a now familiar fast pace. Each social occasion that Jude and I attended increased the workload for my crew: confirming facts from our meetings, telephone checks and translations of their calls to each other, especially after our dinner dates, to hear what they thought about us. Vito was moving like an Italian sports car. My commitment to the infiltration side of the investigation meant that I had less and less time to devote to managing the entire team, so I started scaling back on that aspect.

The most angst Jude and I encountered was in keeping up with our paperwork. We had to make handwritten notes in our court books, as well as transcribe the many tapes from our conversations, all important stuff for a later trial. In between our meetings we sat around in our swanky apartment; we were living there now, like a happy little soon-to-be-married couple, with our headphones on and our notebooks out.

The Italians had taken to visiting our pad when in town, so we had to be there, just in case of a knock on the door. The solitude from the mayhem at the office at least allowed us to keep the transcripts going. As the months ticked by, our only release was sipping bottles of wine and Antonio kept us well stocked in that department. It's so odd playing lovers when you're not. I found it difficult being cooped up with such a cute woman every day. Despite the delicious attraction that was forming between us, we worked hard at not letting it get too far advanced. Jude needed to be there, to keep things natural. We cooked and lazed about. Jude had a penchant for fine lingerie, and there were times when the spare pillow found its way to the centre of

the bed, as a moderator to the obvious tensions that built up. It would have been crazy to allow too many shenanigans anyway, as each room in the apartment was wired for sound and there were half-a-dozen secret cameras, all operated by the flick of a switch from our office. It was enough to make Jude very nervous before her shower.

It was nearing Christmas; Jude and I had been running with the Italians for six months and we could honestly say we had well and truly infiltrated the Mafia. We kept ahead of their questions; we made sure our stories withstood their scrutiny and endured the long days and nights of socialising. We had become spies, more so than undercover cops, the most difficult of all grey professions to sustain.

I thought the world of Jude; I admired her integrity, which was above and beyond that of most people I had dealt with in the police department, if not in all my life's journeys. She was resilient. I was an experienced undercover operative and task force manager; Jude was just a squirrel, with no actual undercover experience. Yet she had the tenacity and dash to match the very best operatives; her natural charm had lured the Italians to us. We both felt it was only a matter of time before I'd be swamped with offers of drugs. I could sense it, but the constant whingeing by our hierarchy to 'buy drugs, for Chrissake, buy drugs!' was beginning to wear me out.

Just in case we had forgotten how serious these men really were, an incident occurred to sober us all. A few large drug deals that had gone down in Queensland prompted the NCA to raid some Italians, believing it wouldn't affect Jude and me. Antonio became worried, cagey, suspecting a worm in the organisation. He vowed to find the snitch.

A detective friend of mine, Big Bird, worked in the Sydney arm of the NCA and I trusted him completely. He was a giant of a man, a touch under 2 metres tall with long sandy hair and blue eyes. In another life he would have passed for a Viking. He was the only non-Melbourne office investigator who was aware that Jude and I were undercover—or so I thought! The lid had to be kept tight, or Jude and I would end up feeding the fishes, like Donald Mackay. My Sydney

confidante promised to keep his ears open, to monitor what sort of information Antonio was able to find on the snitches.

Big Bird rang. I wished he hadn't, as I knew he'd only call with bad news.

'A dago's been killed overnight mate, eight rounds into him,' Bird told me.

'Where?'

'On a road that leads to Griffith.'

'Fuck. Who's responsible?' I asked the obvious.

'Your best mate Antonio, he ordered the hit. He believes there's a snitch.'

'Was he the snitch though?'

'No Cole, of course he wasn't. You know who the snitch is.'

Jude was seated on the lounge chair. She didn't know who was on the phone and I made sure that she didn't hear my conversation.

'How long have you got?' he asked, sounding worried.

'I want six more months; it'd be nice to get them all cold.'

'If I were you, I'd get out now, just disappear mate.'

'Can't ... thanks, been on too many losers up till now.'

'Watch your bosses. They've been up here, bragging about their undercovers—there are too many loose lips.'

'We both know that Bird, can't put brains in monuments.'

'You're mad. I'll keep my ears peeled for you, stay safe.'

It was obvious that some of our own managers were getting ahead of themselves, so keen to blabber to their border counterparts, instead of maintaining confidentiality. I guess I had expected nothing less but, with Big Bird on side, we might at least stand a chance of keeping half a step ahead. Our friendship became even closer after that phone call.

The following evening we had a dinner arranged with Rosario and Rocco at our usual Lygon Street restaurant. The only catch was that Rosario had been bleating again about his poor cousin Rocco, a very old-fashioned quiet guy in his early forties. Months earlier, Rosario had asked Jude to find a girlfriend for Rocco. Strategically, we thought it

important to have Rocco content when visiting Melbourne. It would have ruined our investigation at this crucial point should Rocco drift away from us, taking Rosario in search of female company elsewhere. So on this night we had Liz, our friend, come along to flutter her eyelids at Rocco and make him all goey. Little did the Italians know, but Liz was also a policewoman, attached to the undercover unit.

Rocco enjoyed the vivacious company of the good Constable Liz. He believed she was unemployed, recently separated from her husband and needed to go ‘slowly, slowly’ with any dating. Meanwhile, on my end of the table, I got into some heavy chit-chat with Rosario. Something serious was on his mind. After a few wines, he blurted it out: there’d been a discussion in the ‘family’ as to whether Jude and I might be cops; they’d completed checks into our background, among their own contacts, and we had passed. He went on to reassure me that the ‘family’ had to make sure we were okay.

We already knew that someone had been snooping around behind our backs as only a few days earlier the Griffith branch of our bank had tapped into the Cole Goodwin accounts, not knowing that head office had a covert watch on. Squid told us immediately. Things were hotting up.

Big Bird’s team of squirrels had been busy tracing Antonio, who had spent a fair time in Queensland staying at Jupiter’s Casino, no doubt fixing his own security issues, over and above gambling. Whatever concerns or worries the N’Drangheta might have had, they now seemed to be satisfied with the authenticity of Jude and Cole. Antonio spoke of using the Cole Goodwin art bank accounts to hide some of the ‘family’ money, for a fee of course. Rosario relaxed too, talking freely about buying a Ferrari, some land, and of wanting to build a new home, though one not quite as large as Antonio’s. Squid had figured Antonio must have ploughed more than a million dollars into his castle, so heaven knows what sort of money Rosario planned to throw at his own ranch.

Jude and I celebrated Christmas with our Italian *compadres* in true style, taken to their most favoured restaurant, again in Carlton, near

Lygon Street. We enjoyed a feast as honoured guests; there was little doubt of our esteemed friendship. After seeing so much of each other, it was only natural that we would form a close bond. In long-term infiltration work, this is an accepted phenomenon. Jude and I struggled daily, making sure we didn't lose sight of who our targets really were. Our job was to report back to the federal parliamentary committee on the goings-on of Italian organised crime and our role, as two undercover operatives playing in the most elevated cell of the N'Drangheta, was crucial to the committee's final report. There would be no Stockholm syndrome for us!

Spread out along our Christmas table were Antonio, Rosario, Rocco, Jude, myself and, of course, Liz, who was working harder than any of us, in her own way, deflecting the constant romantic attentions of Rocco. Liz was a great operative, totally understanding her importance in the entire operation. I had promised her that the second we hit pay dirt on drugs, I'd phase her out of the job somehow.

Poor Liz; we used to tease her a lot, at our strategic planning meetings in the basement of an old factory in Collingwood. We met weekly, plotting and planning, exchanging the facts and information that we had gleaned about money laundering, drug sales, assets accumulated by the Mafia, violence and a whole lot more. Liz could only offer the number of times Rocco had tried to kiss her, or how far his Roman hands went the previous night. But her role was crucial; I reiterated that when the timing was right we might have her squashed by a truck, or die at the Infectious Diseases Centre, anything that would stop Rocco from ever seeing her again. She liked that and monitored my promise daily.

Meanwhile, she suffered Rocco's gentlemanly soft chatter and occasional hand touching. I had no fears or nightmarish thoughts that Rocco would ever try to harm Liz, despite the sheer violence that the N'Drangheta was known for. He was from the old school of Italians, happy to be chaperoned with Liz till the time was right. Sadly, no time would ever be right for Rocco.

A most beautiful 19-year-old girl was also at our Christmas dinner party. Kim was a local Griffith girl who worked in Antonio's

restaurant. I was taken by her stunning looks; she hung on Antonio's arm all night. We learned that she often accompanied him to Melbourne on his drug-dealing missions, spending a few days in the finest hotels the city could offer. It was a lifestyle completely foreign to what she had known in Griffith. Kim appeared completely besotted by her beau. He, in turn, appeared very ... Armani.

We all clinked glasses and wished everyone a '*buon Natale*' and '*buon anno*' throughout the evening. Later that same night, back at our apartment, Jude and I gifted three matching paintings to Rocco, Rosario and Antonio. Each was by the artist Michael McCartney. I had purchased the three under my paddle at Sotheby's a few weeks earlier, and Jude made a song and dance about wrapping them in pretty ribbon and tinsel paper. They went down a treat; the three boys were over the moon, probably thinking they were worth a small fortune, which they were. I gave up trying to get reimbursed by the department, which had trouble reconciling the fact that the art works were a necessary operational expense.

It was that same night that all the hens came home to roost for Jude and me, when all the sheer bloody hard work of the previous six months paid off. Sitting in our lounge room at East Melbourne, sipping after-dinner drinks, Rosario offered me an opportunity to buy drugs—lots and lots of drugs. To open my account I could buy 'pure' cocaine, in vast amounts, and also car-loads of marijuana. Ho, ho, ho, Santa Claus was coming to town. The moment Rosario put his offer, I just wanted to scream, jump a metre in the air and embrace my pseudo-girlfriend but, of course, I couldn't. I stayed cool and acted nonchalant. Besides, there was a lot of work ahead.

Together, Rosario and I hatched a plan that worked for us, bearing in mind we were crooks, or at least one of us was. We schemed on how to move some serious weights of cocaine. And, should we need to talk to each other in the future, we drafted a code. All drug dealers use codes and we were no different. We decided to call the cocaine 'Picasso'; this would work well because I was an art dealer and if I rang Rosario seeking a 'Picasso', a prying ear might believe we were just

talking about art. One ‘Picasso’ equalled one kilogram of pure cocaine, sealed fresh from Colombia.

Rosario offered to get me a sample in the New Year. He thought I could sell the cocaine in my whizzy art world and to people I knew in the music industry, whom I had casually mentioned earlier. He later offered me large quantities of marijuana ‘heads’: the tip of the plant and the most potent part. He spoke of recently selling 600 pounds of ‘heads’—around 240 kilograms; drug dealers never really took to the metric system—at \$3500 per pound, a total of \$2 million. In the most matter-of-fact way, like a baker offering his warm loaves of bread, he took me through his price list: heads in 10-pound lots and the price could vary from \$3500 to \$4000 a pound, and so on. He spoke freely to a man he thought was able to sell his wares, and confirmed everything we had learnt through our phone taps and Vito’s painstaking translations.

As I listened to Rosario prattling off his price list, I stared keenly at a spot of cotton on the knee of my trousers and began to fidget with it as the prices kept coming. The money ticked in my head: millions of dollars, tonnes of drugs.

I pulled at the cotton, wanting to yank it out, as my mind’s eye saw newspaper headlines: ‘Mafia arrested for drugs’. I wanted to turn the page to the cartoons. I was despondent, wanting it all to go away. I had lost interest in the game and the police department. I just wanted to take my bat and ball and go home. It was a massive anti-climax. But Rosario was on a roll, seamlessly moving his price list from heads to cocaine and back again. I nodded, like a bobbing dog on a parcel shelf.

The cotton piece that had so taken my attention was getting longer, more annoying, as was the information I was receiving on drugs. ‘Too much information!’ I wanted to yell. ‘Stop telling me all your secrets!’ I wanted to scream.

But I couldn’t; it was my job to infiltrate. To worm my way into the lives of these people, the N’Drangheta, to pry into their crimes. And now here I was, I had been so successful, so clever, that the talking head in front of me wouldn’t stop. I wished he’d just go back to

Calabria, and maybe I could disappear someplace peaceful and idyllic, with the patient and long-suffering Connie—somewhere with a palm tree or two and no cops-and-robbers nonsense.

I experienced the most vivid image; like a slow-motion slide-show it seemed to last for many minutes yet it could have only lasted seconds. That first meeting with Rosario and Antonio and their gang, at the Working Man's Club floated past, then the dozens of other meetings, the many smiles, the laughs and the many dinner parties, all leading to this moment. I wanted them all to be erased. I wondered why I was such a driven person, so in need of success, so unable to accept failure. As my internal slide-show rolled, Rosario punched the inside of one hand with the fist of another, doling out instructions: be careful, and wait for a sample of cocaine. I kept nodding. I was one of his men now, he thought. But of course, I was not; I was a detective, gathering crucial evidence on the Griffith Mafia. I was doing my job, on a detective's paltry salary of twenty-eight dollars an hour. I only hoped that I never saw the bad side of Antonio.

The cotton broke away from my trousers just as Rosario finished his price list routine. I held the thread between my fingers, twirling it into a fine tight spear of fibre. Rosario looked at me. As I dropped it to the floor, I realised that I had ruined a good pair of trousers, just as I was also about to ruin the lives of Rosario and Antonio, as well as many others. Success wasn't in me. I carried a can that represented the invisible faces of maybe fifteen people, my broader team all hovering in cyberspace listening to my conversation with an Italian drug dealer, and the hierarchy sitting in their timber-panelled offices punching the air with each of Rosario's precise comments, my mobile phone listening device transmitting his every word.

I mentioned to Rosario that I had a young brother who was a bit dodgy, a young surfer type who was a builder. He might want to take five or ten kilos of the heads. This was small change to Rosario. While I knew it was a mere drop in his bucket, I also knew how tight the police department was. I had enough experience to know that I would battle

a hard war to get the department to spend money for us to gather the evidence we needed to put these Italians away. Away for a long, long time, so they could never get back at me or sweet-faced Jude.

As soon as our Italian friends left for the night and we were alone, Jude and I pulled a bottle of French champagne from our fridge and quietly toasted our success. After a few bubbles tickled the tips of our noses, the smiles dropped from our faces and we sat on the sofa together in silence. We had drifted into the same thought at the same time, wondering what the fuck we had gotten ourselves into. Should we survive the next year or so, we would always be looking over our shoulder, always wondering who might be walking behind us, especially on cold, dark nights. Our wine and celebration went flat.

They say necessity is the mother of invention. That's what happened with my creation of my brother. Rodney had decided that Jude had to be phased out of the investigation; he believed it was getting too dangerous for a woman. Jude was devastated at being removed at the most crucial point, when drugs were finally starting to run freely. I couldn't for the life of me see how I'd be able to explain her absence to my new best friends, Antonio, Rosario and Rocco. None of it was making any sense. Luckily, over the New Year period our targets were busy with other commitments, which allowed me valuable time to renegotiate Jude's exit. She remained adamant that she wanted to stay till the end, to stand by me—to corroborate the vital evidence. We had only just removed Liz from the operation. Seeing that drugs were on our agenda, Liz had dropped a few tears on Rocco, telling him that she wanted to make another go of it with her ex-husband. The perfect drug-dealing gentleman, Rocco fully understood her decision and wished her well. Liz promised not to keep in touch as she felt it would be too sad to meet again, what with feelings and all.

Now, no amount of my version of logic could change Rodney's mind; Jude was out too.

I worked out a story that should appease our targets: Jude was caught up in family illness, nursing her dying mother in Sydney. We planned a cosy lunch together for her final day. Jude and I felt relaxed

in being able to sit around our swanky apartment and just shoot the breeze, nibbling on antipasto and sipping a glass of Heathcote shiraz. It was a sad day for both of us; we had become so attached to each other that it felt more like breaking up an old married couple. There were sparks still hovering but we were both professionals, just doing our jobs. I made sure she knew the importance of her work, not only in the early days of our infiltration, but through all the telephone calls she had with the Italians, as well as all the dinners she livened up. Whatever success the task force might ultimately have, I would always attribute it to the special ways of Jude.

Jude and I mopped up our artichokes and olives, knowing that the inevitable would follow the last olive leaving the plate. She took a slow walk around the apartment, glancing at the bathroom, then the bedroom, stopping for a moment, with her hand on her face, looking at the secret panel that held the twenty or more notebooks of all our dealings with our targets, the evidence to send them to jail. She looked at the hidden cameras that she had dodged in getting dressed each day and smiled. Finally, she came back into 'her' lounge room, the room that she had prettied up and socialised in.

She grabbed her bag and reached for the front door. As she opened it I handed her a bunch of twenty-six long-stemmed red roses, one for each week she had bravely and so deliciously wrapped our targets around her cute little finger. We looked at each other, aware of tears waiting to break, and we kissed, ever so softly. We held our kiss long enough to know we had reached a line; reached a point where it was time to stop and walk away. And she did. She walked off and I went to the kitchen window, following her with my eyes until she disappeared from my view. I would miss her every day over the next six months. She was an extraordinarily brave woman.