

**YOU
KILLED
MY WIFE**

A J WILTON

1

‘You killed my wife.’

There, I had said it. Finally, after all these months of wondering how it would sound. It was out there. The reaction was about what I had expected.

Dillion Benson turned his focus to me and was about to tell me to ‘F... off’ no doubt, but seeing me, he stopped. It had certainly stilled the various conversations amongst his group (and some surrounding groups as well).

Benson wasn’t the first to respond. Joe Lancaster, his boss and the detective inspector, responded, ‘And who might you be?’

‘He knows,’ I said, nodding at Benson.

Benson looked at me and asked, ‘Mort?’ He offered his hand, and I nodded and shook hands with who I believed was my wife’s killer. He continued, ‘It was an accident – the coroner has signed off on it. But I must say I am truly sorry for your loss.’

I did not say anything, just stared at him, making him and some of his colleagues uncomfortable. I am a big man and admit I do know how to intimidate.

Another of his colleagues, whose name I wasn’t sure of, piped up. ‘What do you care? You didn’t even make the funeral.’

I turned the stare onto him, causing an increase in the tension

Eventually, I replied, 'The army were unable to extract me, didn't even tell me she had been killed until our mission was complete.'

I continued to stare at him, gradually broadening my look to include the Detective Inspector and Benson, and said, 'I have read the coroner's report. I find it intriguing it is not mentioned anywhere that you are a serving policeman, or that a blood test was carried out. So that alone makes the report interesting reading.'

I let that hang, slowly placing my empty glass on their table without breaking eye contact with Benson.

As I left, I told him, 'You will be seeing me again.'

Upon this, I left the bar and the pub. There, I have set the ball rolling – let the dice fall where they will. If I had known then what those four words, 'You killed my wife,' would lead to, would I have uttered them?

You betcha!

2

SIX MONTHS PRIOR

Lavarack Army Barracks, Townsville

One last salute, and I am out of here.

Lavarack Barracks had been my home for the last eight years. Yet, for over five of those years, I was on deployment in Afghanistan, so not really home home if you know what I mean. Whilst I was away, my wife Liz had left Townsville and headed back to Brisbane to further her teaching career with Catholic education.

As I approach the gate, I snap a final salute to the guards, who naturally respond before giving me a ribbing about being unemployed. I sling my duffle up onto my shoulder and walk (not march!) down towards the main road to wait for my Uber. It was good of the Colonel to come out again this morning to say goodbye. He, like me, wouldn't have gotten much sleep last night after my farewell – which had surprised me – anyone would think I was famous or something! But it was a good night, as my head constantly reminded me. At least I had had the sense to book an afternoon flight so I could sleep in a little.

Still, I have a plan – the army had taught me some pretty unique and usable skills at which I had become pretty adept. But before I can think my plan through a little more, my Uber arrives and off to the airport I go.

Townsville Airport is nothing flashy. Hasn't changed too much

in twenty-odd years, but it's still functional. It is also used by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and of course, with my luck, my Jetstar flight has to wait whilst a couple of fly boys roar off into the blue.

Now that I am unemployed (not for long, I hope!), I had to slum it and bought the cheapest ticket I could to Brisbane. Mind you, I did splash out the \$25 to get an exit row with the extra leg room – I am a big boy, after all.

My plan – well, let's see – I need to:

- Get my business set up.
- Find a car (Liz was killed in ours, so it had been written off by the insurance company).
- Find somewhere to live and work – hopefully at the same address.
- Investigate Liz's 'accident' – I have a few questions I would like answered as the investigation doesn't smell right – a little too vague on some critical points, in my biased opinion.
- Check up on and catch up with Pig. He, of course, claims he's doing great, but Pig was/is always full of shit.

My business, well I have already registered the company, 'Digital Data Solutions' and website and through my former CO Colonel Richards, who has settled quickly and easily into some senior 'security' role on Civvy Street (even he admits it's cushy!). But when he heard I was cashing out, he sent me an email saying he had at least one client who would pay good money for my particular skill sets. So, I am keen!

Well, I think that's enough to focus of for now – let the future take care of itself.

Whilst I have a certain number of the specialised 'tools' I will need, I will have to spend a few bucks in the right place to get the rest. Don't have the army quartermaster to hand them over anymore.

But I need to find a decent joint to build my workshop/office in first. Of course, my priority is catching up with Pig, then the old man, now retired to his Bribie Island home. Mum passed away a few years ago, and Dad has gone to pot a bit. And sitting down with Liz's parents, or trying to at least. They were very unforgiving when I didn't get home for the funeral. And I couldn't blame them.

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The flight down to Brisbane from Townsville takes a couple of hours – Queensland is a big state, after all – so I drift off after they come through with the service cart. \$7.50 for a coffee and muffin – not too bad, I think. It isn't long before they are announcing our arrival. Brisbane, my home again after the eight years based in Townsville. Liz had moved back down about three years ago, once it became obvious I wouldn't be back for a while. She had rented a unit in Stafford, close to her job at Mt Maria College and also close enough to the nightlife precinct of the Valley.

The landing is nice and smooth, better than most air force transports I am used to arriving in. I head down the back stairs, so it's quite a quick exit from the plane, follow the crowd in, go down the escalator to the luggage carousel and wait for my duffel.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see a familiar shape approaching – Pig! 'You big ugly bastard, about time you got shot of that mob,' is Pig's welcome. Not as crude as I would have expected – maybe he was respecting the crowd around us.

We give each other a big 'man hug' and shake hands fiercely. Pig was invalidated out, losing a leg when our Bushman was hit by an IED whilst on patrol. So, we were as close or even closer than brothers. There were many memories to hold us together, each having saved each other's lives more than once.

'C'mon, let's get out of here. We're headed to the pub, going to

the Brekky Creek – you remember our sessions there way back?’ says Pig as we walk from the terminal. ‘Hasn’t changed much, still best steaks in town and more beers on tap than you can handle!’

We join the taxi queue and wait our turn, and Pig continues, ‘So what’s the plan? Man, I’ve been looking forward to seeing you!’

‘What about you, Pig?’ I ask. ‘I never hear too much about what you’re up to. Where’s George, by the way, not joining us?’

‘Nah, he’s got some big meeting going on, usual government bullshit – you know, talk, talk, talk, do nothing stuff,’ is his reply.

Our turn comes so we jump into the taxi, a Camry (*at least it’s not a Prius*, I think – I can at least get in), and Pig tells the driver to head to the Brekky Creek Hotel.

‘So where are you living?’ I ask Pig. Letter writing and emailing are not his strong points; besides, I generally had limited opportunities for emails, Facebook, even Wi-Fi, so our communication in recent years was irregular at best.

‘George has a nice joint at West End, a three-bed apartment with all the amenities, so we are pretty cool there,’ Pig replies.

‘And how are things between you two?’ I ask with some trepidation, as their relationship has been rather volatile at times.

‘Pretty good lately,’ Pig replies, watching the cabbie watching us. ‘It was pretty rough when I first came home, you know, with only one leg and having to get around. George was super supportive though, took time off work – weeks, actually – so I wouldn’t be alone, but I was a pretty shitty patient.’

‘I can imagine that!’ I slip in, getting a wry grin in reply.

‘But George got right up to the Department of Defence to make sure they did the right thing by me, forced them to prioritise my prosthesis – and that’s another story.’ He laughs.

We pull into the car park at the Brekky Creek Hotel; I get out and look around as Pig pays the driver.

‘It doesn’t look any different, does it?’ Pig comments as we head towards the bar.

We head to the Staghorn Bar, our favourite from years ago when based at Enoggera Barracks here in Brisbane. *I can just about feel the hangovers from those days*, I think.

‘What you having?’ asks Pig (Pig is not his real name, but that’s all he has ever been known as since he joined the army, fifteen-odd years ago).

‘I dunno, I’ll have what you’re having,’ I say.

‘Two off the wood,’ orders Pig.

‘Shit, they still do that after all these years?’ I say.

‘Yep, reckon they won’t stop now; it’s one of the things they’re famous for, that and their steaks,’ he replies.

‘Cheers, man,’ we say in unison, and chug half our beers at once.

‘Man, that feels good, my first beer as a free man.’ I laugh.

Pig, noticing the odd look the bloke next to us gave me, explains, ‘He just joined Civvy Street after fifteen years in the army.’

The bloke nods and raises his glass to us.

‘Cheers,’ we chorus.

Pig leans in and whispers, ‘I think he thought you had just got out of prison,’ and laughs.

‘Not quite,’ I say.

We settle in for a couple more beers, knowing it’s going to be a long night, and we plan on enjoying it too.

‘So, where you staying? What’s your plan?’ Pig asks again.

I reply, ‘Colonel Richo has a client lined up for me! have a meeting next week – at the Tatts Club, no less. I’ve set up a company, and I’m going to use the skills I’ve learnt to make a few bucks, and I want you to come and join me as I’ll need a lackey.’ I sway out of the way of his good-natured back hander as we both laugh.

‘Well,’ he replies, ‘depending on what’s involved, it would be

good to have something more constructive and consistent to fill my days. Sometimes I think how easy it would be to start drinking again. Heavily, I mean. I went through quite a period during my rehabilitation when I sought solace in the bottle. Fortunately, George saw it happening and helped me through it, sort of strengthened us too at the same time.'

He continues, 'So, I am his maid, if you like, do all the housework, cooking, etc... Must say I don't really mind, but if you're offering a bit of excitement and drama, I am in,' he says with a big grin.

'I'll go and order a feed before the line gets too long,' I say. 'You stay here. Same as always?'

Pig nods, so I go off and join the queue to order our meals.

After ordering a rare eye filet for Pig and a medium T-bone for me, I head back to where Pig is in conversation with the bloke next to him.

I let them finish their conversation, taking some time just to look around, refresh my memories, watch people young and old everywhere, vibrant, cheerful, noisy—

Such a contrast from Afghanistan, I think, the tough, bitter, vicious life they have to live over there. The typical Aussie doesn't know how lucky they are. True of most developed nations, of course.

Pig finishes talking to his neighbour and asks, 'So where are you staying?'

'I've booked a room at some joint along Kingsford Smith Drive for a week whilst I get my bearings,' I tell him. 'I've started searching for something to buy, but I want something, ideally where I can make an office/workshop downstairs and live upstairs so I don't have to travel too far. And it would be easier to secure that way as well,' I add.

'I have seen a couple of places worth looking at around Morningside, some new developments going up around there. You want to come along and check them out with me, maybe next

week?’ I ask. ‘Only if your housekeeping duties allow, of course,’ I add, avoiding another back hander.

‘Cheeky shit,’ Pig responds.

I tell him my plans for the next few days, going up to Bribie to see the old man, then down the coast to see Liz’s parents.

‘Man, that’s going to be tough,’ chimes in Pig.

I nod in agreement. ‘But first, I have to buy a car so I can get there – ours was totalled when Liz was killed, so I have the insurance pay out to spend.’

‘So, what are you looking at buying?’ he asks.

‘Not anything much, needs to be nondescript for the sort of work we will be doing, so maybe a Camry or one of these Hyundai’s you see running around everywhere. Man, haven’t they taken hold since I was last roaming around,’ I add.

Pig says, ‘I like the way you say “we”,’ and I smile.

Will be good having the old bugger around – Pig’s some eight years older than me, not as big physically, but strong, tough as nails, never takes a backwards step either. And we have always got on well, ever since our first meeting in specialist training. Shit, that was eight years ago. Bugger. Like me, he is dark featured – swarthy, even – and we both have dark hair and big bushy beards when needed. One of the reasons we were both so good at blending in over there – until we opened our mouths, at least.

We start another beer, just enjoying the noise and atmosphere around us, a large group on the other side of the bar whooping it up, all good natured. Then our number gets called, so I jump up and go over to the window and grab our meals; they haven’t changed much either – still big steaks, crappy coleslaw, and a baked potato. Still bloody good, though.

Pig nudges me halfway through his steak, pointing his fork at a passing lady. ‘Plenty of options for you here, mate,’ he says, smirking.

‘The last thing I need is *you* trying to matchmake,’ I say. ‘Besides, it’s too soon; I still think of Liz a shitload.’

Pig turns to me, putting his hand on my shoulder, and says, ‘Mate, that was two years ago; you are allowed to move on.’

I nod but don’t say anything.

We enjoy a few more beers, and we agree to call it a night. As we wander back to grab an Uber, some twit knocks into me, can hardly stand, but wants to make something of it, snarling, ‘You bloody moron, why don’t you watch where you’re going?’

I stop and look down at him, not saying a word. His mates get the hint, telling me, ‘Sorry, mate, he’s a bit pissed,’ and they head off back to the bar.

Pig shakes his head and says, ‘That’s the trouble these days: young dickheads can’t handle their booze, or they combine it with drugs and then want to beat everyone up – cops included. You wouldn’t believe the number of one-punch deaths there have been these days. Sad, really, where society is heading.’

‘Man,’ I say, ‘when did you get so philosophical?’

Our Uber has arrived, drops me off at my hotel and heads off, taking Pig home. We agreed I would call him later in the week to catch up again.

Now that I’m out, I am really looking forward to spending time with Pig; we have a really close bond, real life ‘blood brothers’.

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Next morning, I let myself sleep in – no alarm, no need – wander down the road to a café for a decent breakfast, read the paper – normal things – wondering, *Can I do normal?*

Once fed and caffeinated, I head back to my room and start looking for a car for real. Time for action. I track a couple of likely prospects down, two ex-company cars at the same dealer, couple

of years old, not too high in mileage; mind you, with the Toyota badge, they will go for ever anyway. So I jump another Uber and head over to the Toyota dealership just up the road from the Brekky Creek and have a look at the two I had seen online.

A young keen salesman, Doug, soon approaches and we chat about the two cars – the differences and the benefits. I take them both for a test drive, not noticing too much difference between them. I ask what else he's got similar, so he shows me a little Corolla, and I look at him and say, 'Look at me – look at the size of me – and you want to try and sell me that little thing?'

Of course, once he sees my point, he's embarrassed, so I take the opportunity to squeeze him on price. The white Camry looks the better of the two to me, and they want \$18,500, so I say, 'Cash deal right now, I'll pay \$17,000 flat.'

He shakes his head, says, 'No, no, the boss won't do that deal.'

'Okay,' I say, 'I am out of here, plenty of other Camrys to buy,' and start walking away.

'Wait, wait,' he yells, 'can't you come up a little so I can show the boss I am working hard? Say, \$17,500?'

'No,' I say, 'but let's meet at \$17,250, including six months rego and on-road costs.'

'Okay, wait here. I'll see what he says. You want a coffee, tea, or something?' he asks before heading off.

'No, I'm good, want to get going if it's no deal,' I tell him.

I wander back outside into the sunlight, a lovely day, not a cloud in the sky – as always. After all, as the saying goes, 'Queensland, beautiful one day, perfect the next'.

The salesman comes back and says, 'He'll do \$17,500 with six months registration, and include twenty-four months extra warranty – how's that sound?'

'Okay,' I say, 'deal,' and we shake on it. 'Now, I want the fastest

ever transfer you've done, so I can get going. Get me an invoice so I can make payment while you get all the forms completed, please.'

I take a cup of coffee off them now that we have a deal, and watch whilst they rush around getting the paperwork sorted, and I notice a detailer giving the car a quick hose down. *Damn, I think, I must be getting soft, can't have screwed them enough!*

I get the invoice, access my account via my phone, make payment and send through a remittance, and an hour later, I am on the road. Another first – in a civilian car; my own, no less!