**The other side of sorrow**

***Peter Corris***

I spent the next morning working hard and not getting far. I spoke on the phone to a NIDA lecturer who remembered Talbot.

‘He thought of himself as a method actor,’ he said. ‘And he thought that just meant being his normal, charming, conceited self. He was wrong and he didn’t like it when he found out.’

Through a contact in the Corrective Services Department I tried to get information on Talbot’s prison record and failed. I went to the TAFE college in North Sydney where both Talbot and Megan had studied and drew a blank with Talbot. No-one remembered him. But Dr Sylvia Davis, who taught something called environmental philosophy, remembered Megan.

‘Very bright,’ she said. ‘Her first semester results were HD.’

‘Sorry, that means?’

‘High Distinction. First class honours in the old style.’

The college, with its multiple acronyms, codes and facilities like condom-vending machines in the toilets, had made me feel very old style. I asked what had happened to Megan subsequently.

Dr Davis didn’t even have to consult a file. ‘She dropped out. Didn’t submit an exercise, didn’t turn up for her seminar presentation. That’s the worst sign.’

‘Did you try to find out why?’

She sighed and looked around her tiny office, cluttered with books, folders and video cassettes. ‘Mr Hardy, have you any idea of what my work load here is like? You were lucky, you caught me with fifteen minutes to spare. Look, I wrote a note to the address we had on file. It came back stamped “not-known-at-this-address”. That’s all I could do. I’m sorry. I hope you can find her. She had great potential.’

No comfort, that. I went to my car and sat thinking, working out the best way to tackle Talbot’s mother. The mobile rang.

‘Mr Hardy? This is Tess Hewitt. I’ve been trying to get you for an hour or more. Why don’t you answer your mobile?’

‘I don’t carry the phone with me. Can’t stand it. Have they shown up? Are they there now?’

‘Been and gone,’ she said. ‘I think you should get over here. A man’s been killed.’

‘Killed? What man? Who by?’

‘They say Damien Talbot did it. He and Meg were here, now they’ve gone.’

‘Jesus. Right, I’m on my way.’

‘No, on second thoughts, don’t come here. There’s police all over the place and I’m going to be flat out keeping Ramsay calm. I just snuck off to let you know.’

‘Did she go with Talbot willingly?’

‘Look, I can’t talk now. We’ll have to meet later.’

There was sense in what she was saying and I fought down my impatience. ‘Okay. Where and when?’

‘Come to my place this afternoon. Say about three. The police should be finished with us by then.’

She gave me an address in Concord and rang off. I dropped the phone on the passenger seat and stared through the windscreen. The rain of the past few days had cleared and the day was fine and still. The water and wind had removed the pollution and I could see the whole length of the tree-lined street. I could see the arch of the bridge above the building line. Things were changing here too. They were knocking things down and throwing things up in search of the dollar but at least it wasn’t the Olympic tourist dollar. Just for once, the north side of the city had more appeal for me than the south.

On the drive south I caught a news broadcast that gave the usual sparse details on the events at Tadpole Creek. No names were mentioned and the writer of the bulletin obviously had almost no knowledge about the picket line. A man had been killed and police were investigating and that was about it.

I was worried, but I tried to adopt a professional attitude. I had a good source and would learn more in time. I drove to the public library in Glebe and used the Internet to dig up whatever I could on the work at Homebush. The information was vast and I printed out only the odd page. According to the official version, every effort had been made to clean up what had been dirty, restore what had been damaged and preserve everything of value. The sanctimonious tone of the material made me suspicious and I knew something the compilers didn’t – that a straggly waterway named Tadpole Creek had escaped their notice.

Just to be thorough, I searched for Tadpole Creek. Slim pickings – an account of a picnic there in the 1930s attended by some minor member of the Royal family; a stormwater and drainage proposal not proceeded with after the war; an offer by a consortium to build a tennis facility involving piping of the creek, rejected by the council in the mid-eighties and a Native Title claim lodged in 1996 but withdrawn a year later due to the discovery of an unspecified mistake in old maps of the area.