

## Chapter One

Brisbane, November 1942

Tiggy hesitated. The rise to Boggo Road Gaol was swarming with protesters. The afternoon sun shimmered overhead, with not a whisper of a breeze to disturb the limp strands of hair stuck to her forehead. Everywhere she looked she saw sweat-stained shirts, sunburned arms and cheeks. A small group launched into a chant that rippled outwards as people caught the rhythm.

‘Kill. The. Jap. Kill. The. Jap.’

Not exactly poetry, she supposed, but at least it was a clear message. Tiggy dug into her satchel and found her notebook and pencil. She jotted down the slogan and a potential headline, *Crowd bays for blood outside Boggo.*

She spotted a gap and, making liberal use of her elbows, hustled her way to the top of the hill. ‘Coming through. Excuse me, Courier Mail coming through.’ Ahead she could see a line of blue police uniforms forming a cordon to keep the crowd away from the entrance to the gatehouse. To the right stood a contingent of reporters straining against the wooden trestles set up as temporary fencing. She clamped a hand onto her hat and squeezed between a large woman with a very damp bosom and a fragrant chap, shaking a placard saying ‘Bring back the Death Penalty’.

‘Turner. Over here.’ Jim Rathborne waved at her. *The Courier Mail* had several excellent photographers, most of whom were fighting in the Pacific. Jim Rathborne was what they had left. At nineteen years old he had tried eight times to enlist and been knocked back every time due to a club foot. As a photographer he had a lot to learn but, at six foot six, he had the advantage of perspective. Tiggy had to admit that it was damn useful having a human flagpole on a job like this.

‘Hey Jim, any action yet?’ She craned her neck around the suit-clad shoulder of the fellow standing next to him. ‘Let me in front of you. I can’t see for quids.’

As Jim stepped aside, the suit shoved his elbow back, clipping Tiggy high on her cheek. ‘Find your own bloody place to stand. Bloody lady reporters. You’re a waste of space.’

‘Hey fella, watch it!’ Jim grabbed at his sleeve.

‘Don’t bother with him, Jim,’ Tiggy said. ‘So you don’t like lady reporters? Just as well I’m no lady.’ She stomped her court heel as hard as she could on the brute’s foot. He grunted and swore. Jim whisked her around to his opposite side and used his body to shield her. Tiggy listened to several more blue phrases and smiled. Nothing like pissing off *The Sydney Morning Herald’s* Queensland correspondent to get the blood pumping.

While Jim occupied himself placating the old bull, Tiggy leaned out as far as she could to look at the protesting frontline. More placards bobbed above the crowd. ‘Hang the Yellow Peril’, ‘Justice for Jane’ and ‘Rescind the Criminal Code’. She didn’t rate anyone’s chances of that. Queensland had abolished the death penalty over twenty years earlier. The murder of a fifteen-year-old girl was enough to stir up all the usual capital punishment crackpots, but Jane Danfield had died at the hands of a Japanese prisoner. Strangled and defiled. The judge could have handed down twenty life sentences and it still wouldn’t have been enough. The Japs were killing Aussie boys every day in New Guinea and Singapore. Brisbane was at boiling point.

The brick facade of the prison bounced heat around the asphalt square. Tiggy took off her hat and fanned her face. The smell of sweat and cigarettes mingled with the ashy petroleum of the blacktop. They were all done like roast dinners. On the opposite side of the gates, a small group stood, enduring the heat but not stirring. Standing apart from the crowd, on the other side of the driveway, they would be in prime position to see the transfer of the

prisoner when the van arrived. She plonked her hat back on her head and used the shade to better see who they were. The Police Commissioner, Mr Cecil James Carroll, glared at his constables battling to maintain the barricade. He stood next to a couple who leaned into each other, huddled together like frightened rabbits. The woman wore a faded floral dress that had clearly seen several summers. She dabbed at her cheeks with a handkerchief and blew her nose. Her husband held her, one arm across her shoulders, the other cupping her elbow as though she were made of the finest china. What struck Tiggy most about him was his face. Tanned and lined with a straight nose, he could have passed for a film star in his younger days. But today he looked every bit a middle-aged man who had lost his last remaining child. Reginald Danfield raised his eyes, letting his gaze travel along the barricade. He paused, noticing Tiggy staring at him. Unable to look away, she nodded once. He returned the gesture with only the slightest movement of hat brim, then looked again at the ground. Those eyes. Where there should have been grief or rage, there was ... nothing. She had seen a void. As though he was no longer a man but a cavern into which light disappeared.

‘See the Danfields over there?’ She nudged Jim.

‘Great, thanks.’ He took a few pictures then lowered the camera. He glanced down at Tiggy. ‘Poor beggars.’

‘Yes. I can’t imagine how hard this is for them. I guess they really want to see him locked up.’

‘Don’t think I’d want to be here. Makes me feel like a crow waiting on roadkill. It’s not right, is it?’

‘What? Doing our job?’

‘Yeah. I don’t feel good about it sometimes.’ Jim shrugged. ‘People deserve a bit of privacy, don’t you think?’

Tiggy surveyed the line of police, the surging protestors and the mob of reporters around them. ‘All these people are here because of them, Jim. They want justice, or whatever they think justice is, for the daughter the Danfields lost. You don’t have to agree with the politics, you just have to believe that the public needs to know what’s going on. That’s our job.’

‘Fine. Don’t get all twisted. I’ll take the photographs and you’ll get your story, if that’s all you care about.’

The shrill burst of a police siren cut through the commotion and hung suspended in silence for a second before the crowd began to bawl obscenities at a black prison van crawling uphill. Two police cars, one in front the other trailing behind, escorted the van to the gates of Boggo Gaol.

Jim brought his camera up, snapping pictures of the scene. ‘Jesus, I bet they didn’t plan on a show this big.’

Tiggy watched several officers shouting and pushing people back into the frontline. ‘I hope you’re getting that, Jim.’ She pointed to the scuffle. More protestors were pressing themselves up against the wooden barricades. ‘If they break through, they’ll kill him.’

‘Would that be a bad thing?’ Jim swung the camera towards the van. Two guards got out and waited as the green gates to Boggo rolled open.

Tiggy scanned faces, making mental notes for her report. How many were here? A thousand? Two? Probably more. Her boss, Emma Vanneck, the sub-editor of the women’s pages, wanted a report on the female angle. Who was there? What were they wearing? Any dignitaries? Failing that, any notorious characters? Women behaving badly. She glanced at the Danfields and her stomach constricted. There was plenty of bad behaviour all right. Jim had a point. Maybe she was one of the worst. She knew the paper would expect her to speak to Mrs Danfield.

The trial and conviction of the Japanese man had finished that morning. A sentence of life imprisonment to be served at His Majesty's Brisbane Prison for Men, Division 2. Boggo Road. Twenty-five years. It didn't seem much when she thought of the front-page photograph of Jane that *The Courier Mail* would print for the next edition. It was a school photo. Jane wearing a gym frock, fair hair in plaits, smiling through her freckles. How was she going to interview the mother of that girl? Harden up, cream puff. That's how.

Two prison wardens stood on either side of the entrance to the gaol. Behind them in the shadows, Tiggy saw the governor of the prison and another half a dozen wardens. They walked out into the sunlight and assembled next to the van. The noise of the protestors dwindled as all eyes strained to see the murderer. A guard opened the rear doors of the van with a metallic creak. He reached in to help the prisoner step down. For a moment, Tiggy thought there must have been a mistake. They had brought a child instead of a child killer. Then she saw the dark hair falling forward over his eyes, the light olive complexion and those high cheekbones which were so distinctive in his mug shots. Hitoshi Mori peered out from beneath his fringe. He shuddered as two wardens took his arms, jangling the manacles around his wrists. Dwarfed by the men on either side, he dragged his feet as though he were walking for the first time.

A lone voice called, 'Die, you yella bastard!' Three empty beer bottles spiralled overhead and smashed on the ground. The sound unleashed a torrent of abuse as more projectiles hit the van and the police cars. Jim ducked as a wayward bottle hit the brickwall and sprayed beer and glass over them.

'Don't waste good beer on him!' someone shouted. Pushed forward by the pack of reporters, Tiggy lurched into the trestle in front of her and fell forward, losing her hat. She felt Jim wrestling behind her as she tried to find her footing. It was no good. So using a gymnastic talent she hadn't called for since her playground days, she tucked her legs in and

flipped over the rail, landing on her hat. It was from this vantage point that she saw Mrs Danfield swing her legs over the barrier and run at Hitoshi Mori. The commissioner and the governor shared the same look of empty-handed shock as the nearest warden failed to stop her. She hurtled into Mori. Her lips stretched white over her teeth. She clawed at the small man. She made a sound Tiggy had never heard before, something guttural and feral. Reginald Danfield looked at his wife with his blank eyes. He didn't move. Within a few seconds, a posse of wardens and police officers were pulling her off the prisoner. Tiggy scrambled onto her knees, trying to shuffle backwards out of the way. Mrs Danfield collapsed like a limp kitten. Her husband held out his arms and the wardens deposited her there.

The guards holding Mori thrust him in front of them and hurried through the gates. As he went past, he looked at Tiggy crouched under the barricade. She heard the last words he spoke before entering prison.

'I didn't do.'