

## Chapter 5

‘Does that mean I don’t go to jail?’ asked a short man with a Macedonian accent.

Ashley could have sworn she saw a glimmer of disappointment flash across his face. She suspected a jail stint might have added to his street cred.

‘No Tony, it is very unlikely you will receive a jail term. The magistrate will be lenient given this is your first offence.’ First known offence, thought Ashley.

‘Very good, very good.’ Tony beamed, his balding head shiny with what she guessed was perspiration brought on by nerves.

Tony Mircevski was an aging and overweight client. He resembled Danny DeVito, with a stomach bulging out of his suit. Ashley was tasked with defending Tony in the Magistrates’ Court that morning. Tony had become involved in an ongoing dispute with his neighbour, who he had accused of coming onto his property to steal his wife’s beloved award winning roses. While a normal person could have responded in any number of socially acceptable ways, Tony had the bright idea of creating and setting homemade neighbour traps. When Tony’s neighbour had indeed come onto the property, his foot had become caught and injured. Tony was charged with the offences of setting traps to cause a serious injury, and conduct endangering persons, but was very lucky that a combination of a reasonable police informant and a lack of priors might mean escaping jail.

‘Come on Tony, let’s head down to court.’

Ashley gathered the file, a white brief folder and her leather compendium and made her way to the Magistrates’ Court. At the corner of Lonsdale and William Streets since 1995, the court heard thousands of criminal and civil disputes each year. On a morning lawyers, prosecutors, police officers and anxious clients bustled around the foyer. Most cases were low-level crimes, traffic offences or small civil disputes. The court was also a starting point for serious crimes that went to the higher courts.

As they made their way down William Street, Ashley’s phone rang.

‘Hello Ashley, it’s mummy.’

‘Hi mum, listen, I can’t really talk right now –’. Before Ashley could finish, Molly interrupted.

‘Have you spoken to your father recently?’

‘Not since I saw him the other night at dinner. Why?’

‘Did he seem a little ... I don’t know ... strange to you?’

‘Strange? What exactly do you mean, mother?’ Ashley could not help but become slightly irritated.

‘Well who can really tell with your father, dear, but he’s been very secretive lately. Glued to his phone. Taking private phone calls in the other room. We have barely seen each other for weeks.’

‘Mum, we all had dinner together the other night.’

‘Do you think we need to start marital therapy?’

‘Oh for God’s sake, mum! No, you don’t need therapy. Just talk to him. He’s probably been busy at work. Look, I really have to go. I’m with a client and about to walk into court. I’ll call you later.’ Ashley hung up before Molly could interject. She would deal with her mother’s dramatic tendencies later.

Ashley and Tony had passed through the court entrance security. She sat Tony down in one of the client rooms and asked him to stay put. In the meantime, she went to check the courtroom location. Ashley enquired at the desk and was told to attend courtroom 5E. On level five checking the hearing board, she discovered her client’s case was not listed. Great, she thought. They’ve given me the wrong location. Heading for the lifts at the same time was police informant Tom Clark who Ashley had known for several years and despite being on opposing sides, they’d always maintained an amicable relationship. With Tom was prosecutor Alyson Fletcher. A tall and stunning blonde, Alyson’s reputation was that of an intelligent and ruthless prosecutor.

‘Ashley, hi! Great to see you. How are you?’ Alyson greeted her warmly.

‘Hi Alyson, I’m good, just frantically running around trying to find the courtroom.’

‘Oh me too, I was scheduled downstairs, but apparently Magistrate Woods ordered a switch of the courtroom.’

‘That’d be right. Woodsy just being difficult, huh?’

‘Normally I’d agree, but we have a committal hearing for a drug case that we’re prosecuting this morning. Ardi Bajram, the Albanian drug dealer is attracting unwanted media attention. Magistrate

Woods will not tolerate the publicity. He hates that Bajram is being treated like a media magnet so we're being moved here.'

'Not surprising. Good luck.'

Ashley located the correct courtroom, checked in with Tony and met with the police informant. The matter was now ready to proceed.

The police informant tendered evidence in support of their case. Tony's neighbour gave evidence that he had sustained a serious injury to his leg, and required medical treatment. Luckily for Tony, the medical evidence didn't quite show a 'devastating' injury, more a deep cut. Tony had followed Ashley's legal advice and elected not to give evidence himself in the witness box. Instead, the defence submitted evidence of Tony's good character and that at the time of laying out the traps, Tony had been suffering from severe work stress impacting on his mental health.

After an entire day of testimony, the Magistrate found Tony guilty of conduct endangering persons. With a five-year maximum jail term for the most serious offences, Ashley's client was lucky to escape with a community correction order, an order for a mandatory apology and that Tony pay his neighbour's medical expenses.

An elated Tony almost skipped out of the court building that afternoon. As Ashley walked out of the building with him, she was greeted with what she was sure was the entire Mircevski family, and what looked like the Macedonian church priest. Tony's wife was ushering everyone for coffee, as Tony's elderly father pulled out a bottle of homemade brandy from the leather pouch around his waist. Trying to escape the celebrations was an almost impossible task because convincing the Mircevski family that drinking brandy in the middle of the legal precinct would not do wonders for her reputation fell on deaf ears. Eventually, she accepted a bottle of brandy, told Tony she would send him out a reporting letter and made her way back to Davidson, Jones and Associates.

On her walk back to the office Ashley passed barristers in long black gowns and horse hair wigs, presumably finished court and making their way back to chambers. She passed the café near the Magistrates' Court with clients debriefing with their lawyers after court. The lawyers were usually impeccably dressed in tailored suits. The defendants often in over-sized, creased and ill-fitting suits

looking like they were hurriedly dug out of the back of the wardrobe. Two mafia look-alikes with gold chains and shades walked past that easily have come from the *Underbelly* television series.

Ashley walked through the doors of Davidson, Jones and Associates exhausted after a long day.

‘Ashley, thank goodness you’re back. There’s a client waiting for you in meeting room two’.

Ashley frowned. She didn’t think she’d had any meetings today and her secretary knew better than to book appointments when she had a court appearance.

‘Client? I had Tony Mircevski’s court hearing today. I didn’t think I had any appointments?’

‘You didn’t. But Mr Boudassou waltzed into the office about an hour ago. He said his friend had given him your details, apparently you represented him for a criminal matter a while ago. I told him you wouldn’t be back for a while but he insisted on waiting so I let him into the meeting room. Said it was really important.’

‘Did you get him to fill in a new client instruction sheet?’

‘Yep. Here you go.’ Ashley took the clipboard. The form told her the new client was Professor Gérard Boudassou, age fifty, occupation listed as botanist. Apart from an address and declaring he had no prior convictions, the instruction sheet did not divulge much about the walk-in.

Ashley had a feeling she knew what Professor Boudassou had been charged with. She guessed the botany professor was a little bored with traditional plants and got caught growing something illegal. Given his age and employment status Ashley also predicted the walk-in might be going through a midlife crisis (as many of her family law clients seemed to be) and would like a divorce.

Ashley grabbed a notepad and pen and walked into meeting room two.

‘Good afternoon, Professor Boudassou, I’m Ashley Grey.’ Ashley extended her hand.

Facing her was a good looking but dishevelled older man. His face was tanned from sun exposure, and hidden behind round glasses. His grey hair was messy. He was wearing blue jeans and a raincoat jacket over a casual blue shirt.

‘Ashley, I’m so glad you’re here. I’m in a spot of bother and I’m hoping you can help me.’ He looked at her earnestly.

‘Of course. What’s happened?’

‘The police came in and they searched everything, and tore my house upside down. Nearly destroyed all my plants! They think I did it. They think I’m guilty. I think they’re going to charge me and I don’t know what to do. You see, I’m innocent, I didn’t do it.’ Boudassou’s hands shook. He looked genuinely nervous.

‘It’s alright Professor. I have dealt with the police in drug charges many times. We’ll do our best to help.’

‘Drug charges? Oh no, I think you’ve misunderstood.’ Ashley looked at him, puzzled.

‘The police see me as a suspect in my wife’s murder.’