

'The godfather of Australian crime fiction'

PETER CORRIS

SILENT KILL



around the room, which could best be described as functional. ‘There’s big money in it.’

It was late afternoon and time for a drink. It’d always be time for a drink for the sort of proposition Jack was making. I had a bottle of Dewar’s in a drawer and ice cubes in the bar fridge. Paper cups. I made two drinks and handed one over while I prepared myself for Jack’s pitch.

Rory O’Hara was a firebrand. He’d been a student agitator, a crusading journalist, had served a term in the Parliament of New South Wales as an independent and when he inherited a bundle of money, he became what he called ‘a self-funded righter of society’s wrongs’.

Jack took his drink. ‘I know what you’re thinking,’ he said.

It wasn't hard to guess. O'Hara had blown the whistle on a massive development project in the western suburbs. The development had the backing of a fundamentalist Christian church, a major trade union, a superannuation fund and had attracted investment from a variety of sources including an outlaw bkie gang. The finances were shonky, approval had been secured through the corruption of local councillors and a state government minister, the environmental report had been falsified and the prospectus issued to attract investors had violated every regulation in the book. The plan had involved building a massive church, blocks of flats and an entertainment centre.

O'Hara had embedded people inside parts of the operation, accumulated evidence of all the misdeeds and published the results online. Vast amounts of money had been lost when the financial structure collapsed;

several union officials, a fund manager, one of the local councillors and the state examiner were facing legal proceedings along with an auditing firm. It had been O'Hara's finest hour and soon after he'd been the victim of a hit and run. All this had scored the maximum amount of publicity. One thing O'Hara wasn't was publicity-shy.

I sipped my drink. 'So he's out of hospital, is he, after his accident?'

'If it was an accident.'

'Wasn't it?'

'Who knows? The man has enemies galore and he's nervous. Anyway, he's coming out the day after tomorrow.'

Jack reached into the breast pocket of his suit and produced a leaflet, which he passed to me. 'He's going on a big speaking tour. He'll attract very big, high-paying audiences.'

There's a documentary film being made and we've got a few high-profile TV interviews lined up. There's also a book deal.'

'More money,' I said.

'You bet. Take a look at the flyer.'

The glossy leaflet featured a photograph of a handsome, smiling O'Hara in a wheelchair. The message was simple: THERE IS MORE TO BE TOLD. THERE ARE MORE GUILTY PEOPLE TO BE NAMED. COME AND HEAR RORY TALK ABOUT HOW HE CLEANED UP ONE MESS AND PLANS TO CLEAR UP MORE.

There was a list of dates and venues for the weeks ahead—several in Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle and a dozen in regional centres along the coast and inland.

'Big itinerary,' I said. 'Is he for real?'

'He is. He's had people working for him for some time digging up the dirt. He's a

genuine new broom.’

‘I thought he was rich. Why is he turning himself into a money machine?’

‘What he’s doing costs a hell of a lot. It stretched his resources. He had to go to the US for one operation and you know what medical costs are like there.’

‘I had a heart operation there. My fund covered it.’

‘He says the health funds are essentially organised white-collar crime. He didn’t have any cover.’

‘Who hasn’t he pissed off?’

‘Nobody. You should see the hate mail— letters, emails, phone calls, death threats. The man has more enemies than . . . I can’t think of anyone.’

‘I suppose if he’s that anxious you’ve organised some protection in the hospital.’