



Lies. Jealousy. Rage. **MURDER.**

a spectator true crime story by jon wells  
photography by gary yokoyama | design by william vipond tait

scene setter:

After Beverly Pirrera disappears, Sam is granted a divorce. Seven years later, as detectives continue to search Sam's house for evidence in the slaying of Maggie Karer, police try to find some trace of Beverly. When they come up empty, Peter Abi-Rashed decides they need one more search warrant.

Story has graphic content

chapter twelve

# Cold-blooded swagger

April 13, 1999  
Central Station

"The respondent has made no attempt to see the kids."

Detective Ken Weatherill shook his head as he read the words written by Sam Pirrera about his first wife, Beverly. Of course she hadn't tried to see her kids — because you *killed* her, he thought.

Weatherill reviewed court documents as he prepared a new search warrant for the Beverly Pirrera investigation — the Davidson case, as the police called it. What defence might Sam use if the case got to court? Who knows, Weatherill wondered, maybe Sam uses the very brazenness of his court statements to his advantage: "Why would I file affidavits like that, openly divorce her if I just killed her? Why risk getting caught like that?"

Weatherill wrote a warrant for a property management company at 155 Queen St. N. The company operated a townhouse complex at Barton Street and Kenora Avenue where Sam had lived with Bev in 1991 — the place where Sam's second wife, Danielle, said Sam admitted murdering Beverly, strangling her and pushing her down the basement stairs.

Peter Abi-Rashed executed the warrant for the townhouse records on April 14, nearly two weeks after the remains of Maggie Karer had been found at Sam's house. That discovery led Beverly's mother to tell police she had gone missing in 1991.

Abi-Rashed learned that only one family had lived in Unit 38 in the eight years since. He also hoped to find anyone who used to live near Sam and Beverly in the complex. Did any neighbours see or hear anything unusual, particularly in May 1991?

That afternoon he visited the townhouses at 2344 Barton St. E. and met the tenant of Unit 38, a 25-year-old man called Marcin, Polish name. His parents were away on an extended vacation.

Abi-Rashed stood at the top of the basement stairs and peered down, seeing in his mind's eye the story Danielle had relayed. The stairs were narrow and steep. Wood, no carpeting or padding, painted grey. Poorly lit: a light at the top of the stairs so that when you went down, you silhouetted yourself, walking into darkness. At the bottom, a concrete floor painted green.

"We're going to get a warrant to search this place, Marcin," he said. But the man was co-operative, even excited about helping the police.

Abi-Rashed posted a guard 24 hours a day when the forensic search began. The uniform would watch the basement — and bathroom, which could have been the site of the dismemberment — to ensure scene continuity. Abi-Rashed told Marcin he could continue living in the unit during the search, but could be charged if he interfered in any way.

Abi-Rashed was taking no chances — he was always a stickler for detail, anal to the extreme. And, while he had been in Major Crime for seven years, the Karer/Davidson cases had struck a chord.

He had learned to not let cases get to him. Do not take work home with you. But to a point you can't help it. In Major Crime the detectives speak for the dead. That was how he thought of it. A big responsibility. Had he become obsessed with the investigation? Abi-Rashed didn't like the word but it fit. Photos of Maggie and Beverly sat on his desk.

"Look at them," he said, holding up the pictures. "Look at them. And this — this bastard — killed them both. And beat them. Beat Beverly repeatedly."

Bottom line: it's tough enough to get a conviction for a homicide. He would not let a lack of attention to detail hurt this case.



On April 18, the forensic search of townhouse Unit 38 began. With three Ident detectives still working up the Mountain in Sam Pirrera's house, a second team was assigned to the townhouse — forensic detec-

Sam walked in at 10:18 wearing a blue jumpsuit. He looked a lot better. The two detectives remained sitting when he approached. But Sam did not sit. He looked down at Abi-Rashed and Holk.

tives Joe Ridos and Frank Pedersen.

Spray luminol in the semifinished basement for blood, examine the stairs, treads, walls, crevices, cracks, grout in the bathroom, wallpaper seams.

On April 20, Abi-Rashed visited the townhouse. Ridos and Pedersen briefed him. It appeared that wall panelling had been removed in the basement. Marcin said that was the way they found it when they moved in. On one hand, that was bad news for the case. If there had been blood spatter on the walls, it was long gone. Then again, the fact that the panelling had been removed might mean Sam had been trying to cover his tracks.

The next day, Abi-Rashed was at Central Station when he got a call from Ridos at the townhouse. Not only had panelling been removed, but some ceiling tiles as well. And the basement floor had been painted, parts of the bathroom as well.

Ridos told him the official result of the search was negative. They had found no traces of blood, no sign of a murder, a fight. Abi-Rashed cursed. Yes, it had been a long shot after eight years. But it was still a huge letdown. After the inconvenience to Marcin, three-day search, police guard 24 hours inside. All that, and — nothing.

At 4 p.m. Marcin came to the station to see Abi-Rashed. He was glad police hadn't wrecked his family's home. His parents were due back soon from vacation.

"Thanks for your help, Marcin," Abi-Rashed said. He shook his hand and gave him back the keys.

Major Crime and Ident detectives continued to catalogue exhibits and statements in the Maggie Karer homicide. Abi-Rashed sat with Ross Wood and Gary Zwicker, going through each bit of evidence. "This piece of broken glass, what you want to do with this? Send it to CFS?" Number it, log it.

Detective Mark Petkoff's job was reading all of the statements from witnesses and writing a brief summary for each on what would be said in court.

It was not yet clear what defence Sam Pirrera was going to offer. Plead innocence, based on some unforeseen alibi? Self-defence? Temporary insanity?

On May 19, Abi-Rashed got a call from James Vincelli — Sam Pirrera's lawyer. At 2:45 p.m. Vincelli met the detectives for a tour of 12 Burns Place.

Ident had gutted the basement, every wall and ceiling panel removed, the entire bar dismantled, carpeting gone. The detectives walked Vincelli through the crime scene and offered their account of what had happened in the basement: the assault, beating, blood spatter. Showed him the fruit cellar where the body parts were hidden. Showed where Constable Kathy Stewart had found the bag and box of remains outside.

Sam Pirrera's next court date wasn't until Sept. 27. Still time to gather more evidence in the Beverly Davidson case.

Abi-Rashed decided it was time to take another crack at Sam. He would have no idea they were coming for an interview. Did he know what Danielle had told police about his secret? Might he assume they found evidence of Beverly's murder in the old townhouse?

Sam was no longer at the Barton Street jail. He had requested a transfer to Quinte Detention Centre in Napanee — for his own safety, fearing retribution among the incarcerated at Barton, some of whom may have been friends with Maggie.

At 5:45 a.m. June 9, Abi-Rashed and Detective Sergeant Mike Holk hit the highway. The interview this time would be all about Beverly. Abi-Rashed brought a couple of photos with him for Sam to view. Might stimulate some conversation.

Visiting an accused in prison unannounced is a common tactic used by detectives. Abi-Rashed was guardedly optimistic. Since their first interview at Central Station, Sam had had time to dry out, clear his head, get relatively healthy. Think about the past, what he had done. And he figured Sam had to know they had him cold for Maggie's murder. If he knew he was in for life on that one, maybe he'd admit his role in Bev's death — give peace and closure to the families, and perhaps to Sam Pirrera as well.

After a four-hour drive, Abi-Rashed and Holk arrived at the penitentiary. Just after 10 a.m. they met with the superintendent. Procedure, go through their ID, credentials, purpose of the visit.

Sam's file showed a suicide attempt. He had slit his wrists and ankles. Lost a lot of blood, could have died within 30 minutes if staff had not responded quickly. He ended up in physiotherapy to regain movement in one hand after damaging tendons in the wrist.

"I was feeling down and I slit my wrist," he wrote on a prison injury form. "I thought it would end my life."



As police detectives dotted the i's and crossed the t's in the Maggie Karer murder investigation, they worked hard to uncover evidence for another homicide charge against Sam Pirrera, whom they suspected of murdering his first wife, Beverly, pictured above.