



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

a spectator true crime story by jon wells  
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scene setter:

The person who lives at 12 Burns Place, where body parts have been found, is Sam Pirrera. He is known to police, as they say, and to homicide detective Peter Abi-Rashed in particular. Abi-Rashed gets a call from St. Joseph's Hospital. Pirrera has tried to hang himself.

Story has graphic content

chapterthree

# Reasonable and probable grounds

Peter Abi-Rashed dialed Major Crime detective Wayne Bennett, who had been conducting interviews for the case at the Mountain station. Sam Pirrera had tried to kill himself at St. Joseph's Hospital. He needed an experienced Major Crime hand down there.

arrest him on reasonable and probable grounds of murder?" Bennett was Abi-Rashed's lead investigator on the ground. Pale blue eyes glowed with intensity against his leathery face, he spoke with a raspy voice. Bennett had been a cop for 30 years, had confronted his share of nasty elements in the city, but refused to say much about it. "If you feel like you're

The two cops struggled to pin Sam down as he tried to get away. If this were one-on-one, one cop thought, he'd probably have to severely injure Sam, or kill him, to get him down and protect himself.

pulling nails out of a hardwood floor, you are?" He would only allow that he had dealt with some guys over the years who had "a whole lot of different thoughts on life." On regular duty he looked like a cop through and through, but undercover he had been a chameleon, grew his hair past his shoulders, the natural toughness and attitude suddenly blending into the scenery of Hamilton's underworld.



Detective Wayne Bennett, foreground, was Peter Abi-Rashed's lead investigator on the ground. Bennett, whose pale blue eyes glowed with intensity, had been a police officer for 30 years. He looked like a cop through and through, but used to work undercover, blending into Hamilton's underworld.

He worked among outlaw biker gangs, and had posed as a contract killer in order to get a bead on a local thug who was paying for hits. Bennett was hired for a hit, and they arrested the guy. On that Saturday of Easter weekend, he had been outside on the back deck at home. Where in the city, he would not say. But the barbecue had hit the precise temperature, he had seasoned the steak perfectly, was just about ready to sear it on the grill. Got paged at 6:45 p.m. about the suspicious death case, showered, shaved, put on a suit and reported to work. The beef never did hit the coals, he reflected ruefully.

At 8:34 p.m., Abi-Rashed had detailed Bennett to get to St. Joe's. By 8:50, Bennett arrived at the hospital.

Sam Pirrera had been checked in to the hospital as a "person in distress" and placed in an observation room near the ER. He had tried to hang himself with a blanket. He had not succeeded.

At 9:10 p.m., Bennett received a page. It was Abi-Rashed. Bennett didn't have a cell in those days, he picked up a hospital phone off a counter and dialed.

Abi-Rashed told Bennett that Sam Pirrera should now formally be placed under arrest for murder. They had been interviewing people, they had enough information to charge him. Abi-Rashed was in no rush to get downtown and talk to him. Sam wasn't going anywhere. They would talk on his timetable, not Sam's.

Bennett passed along the information, and veteran uniform officer Dave Petz entered the observation room in the ER, along with rookie partner Jack Vander Pol. Jack went seven feet tall, and a good thing, too, because Sam was not going quietly.

Petz started to read him his Charter rights, place him under arrest for murder, cuff him, when it hit the fan. Sam tried to get away, fight the arrest, Petz and Vander Pol struggling to pin him down, Sam bare-chested, drenched in sweat, slippery as a fish, the brawl was on. He was not that big a guy, Petz reflected, but the adrenalin and perhaps the drugs coursing through his system gave Sam the strength of 10 men. It occurred to Petz that this was an instance where, if it was one-on-one, he'd probably have to severely injure or kill Sam to get him down and protect himself. But with Jack there, and now a few other uniforms jumping in, they finally pinned and cuffed him.

Pirrera continued to struggle, grunting, as the officers led him out of the ER. As they approached the sliding ER door, Sam jumped into the air, put his bare feet against the glass. It bulged as though it would break. They peeled him off the glass, and finally he was loaded into the police van for transport to a cell at Central Station downtown.

Before the van had completed the short drive to Central, the banging started. Sam slamming his head and face against the inside wall of the wagon, drawing blood. They had to turn it around and head back to St. Joe's. When anyone in custody has any type of injury in transport to Central, no matter how minor it is, Hamilton police protocol is to have them treated and medically cleared before incarcerating them downtown. It's not uncommon for someone to bang his head against the wall of the van, acting out, often when drunk or high. That's why the interior wall is made of acrylic plastic.

Was Sam trying to kill himself again? It would be nearly impossible to commit suicide that way, he'd go unconscious before he could kill himself banging his own head on something like Plexiglas.

Back in the ER, on a stretcher, he started to moan, and thrash, trying to remove his restraints. He was taken for an X-ray, where he thrashed again, refused to co-operate, and the X-ray was not done. He was treated for a laceration over his right eye, a nurse cleansed the cut. She noted other abrasions and bruising on his head.

His transport to Central Station lockup would have to wait until the next morning.

At 9:20 p.m., Wayne Bennett introduced himself to Sam's mother, Lina Pirrera, who was also at the