



EPISODE 1

It was a beautiful autumn morning. Fatty Graden strode the footpath outside the sprawl of his Holden store on Parramatta Road. The daring car heist he had masterminded a few weeks ago a distant memory, it was business as usual. Hands clasped behind him like a military man, he let his gaze slither chillingly over each car offered for sale.

He stopped abruptly, pivoted on his heel, and leaned over the brick retainer wall. Fatty's sight wasn't what it used to be, and he squinted to read the stickers. His eyes became terrifying slits and he fumed. A motor trader's worst nightmare, all were old stockers. Shit, he hated that. God, did he!

Fatty wrenched a cell phone from his overcoat.

"Johnny, get that... *Ughh!*"

A gunshot rang out, and the big man collapsed to the ground. Blood seeped through the expensive woolen material of his gray Armani suit jacket. A loud screech of tires from across the busy road signaled his attacker was gone.

Minutes before, a man with a heavily scarred face sat in a car across the highway. A Remington long barrel lay on his lap. Rush hour had dissipated, but there was still enough traffic to be bothersome for anyone trying to get somewhere. In the eastbound HOV lane, it appeared as though he had stalled, but that wasn't the case. A patrolman, upon seeing what he presumed to be a breakdown, pulled up behind. Just another routine stop, he thought. Roof lights flashing, the young officer stepped from his cruiser and approached. Suddenly, a rifle poked out and fired across the highway. Stunned, the policeman drew his Glock 22 and rushed the driver. A second shot sounded as he arrived, and he fell to the ground and died. It all happened so fast.

A lifer from Long Bay Jail, the driver sped towards the city. A convicted murderer and Bandido gang member strong-arm, he had been sprung from the slammer by Harry Edwards, his employer, to do the hit. Harry was a man who still wielded some measure of influence within the NSW police force, even though he had dropped in the ranks, due to Graden's influence. A dangerous, psychotic cop, Edwards had a hard-on for Graden — and rightly so, in his own warped, irrational logic.

Rounding a corner recklessly fast, the panic-ridden man lost control and t-boned a school bus carefully inching its way off the driveway of a petrol station. There was an immediate explosion. Car and bus erupted into flames. Fatty's assailant was killed on impact; so, too, 30 children and their elderly driver. All burned to death. No survivors. Cars stopped, would-be rescuers trying to douse the flames with clothing, frantic. It looked an awful, tragic waste.

“Jim, are you alright? Jim?”

Phone pressed to his ear, Johnny strained to listen, to make something out. Anything. Nothing he could distinguish except traffic noises and all the bustle and craziness that was Parramatta Road. A fit man with chiseled features, trimmed dark hair and a goatee, Millhouse was fiercely handsome, normally a figure of patience and cool head. Not so today, and his look changed to dread. The intuitive short hairs quivered at the nape of his neck. He paced the living room of his million-dollar apartment, casually dressed, ear stuck tightly to the only source of salvation. He knew the boss had pissed off some pretty dangerous heavies in the past. His mind began to fill with everything horrible that could possibly go wrong. He yelled through the phone a few more times then hung up. Staring blankly at the comings-and-goings of ferries from the busy Circular Quay terminal below, he crossed his arms and tugged at his left ear, fidgeting nervously with his earring stud. A telephone number escaped him for the moment. He needed to get on this quickly. Ten miles was too far to drive to find out in person. Time was the enemy.

A distance south of the city, in a modest home five blocks from Maroubra Beach, Harry Edwards sat impatiently by the phone. In his fifties, the tall, gray-haired man looked at his watch. An impetuous man, he had taken the week off. He rapped his knuckles nervously on the breakfast table and wondered why his man hadn't yet checked in. A tip he'd received from an insider at Graden Holden guaranteed Fatty would be at the dealership at nine o'clock for a surprise inspection. It was already after ten.

“God damn coke addict,” he muttered of the man he'd gotten out of the pokie just a week ago. That cost him a few favors with the prison warden. Regardless of his vices, the man came highly recommended from local mobsters.

Edwards hadn't had luck doing it himself. When he hired another man to run Fatty's limo off the road a few years back, the fiery accident killed Graden's eight-year old boy, but not him. Happy that he had crushed Fatty's heart, the result didn't quell the hatred he had for Graden. The driver was later found by police, his brains splattered all over his bedroom. He had been executed. A time later, when Edwards blew up Fatty's auction house, the big man survived that, too. After Graden thwarted his sting operation during a big car heist just last month, Edwards went over the top. Now, killing Graden was his only priority in life. He would expel every last breath to achieve his mission. A bent copper and closet homo, he wasn't going to be denied a fourth time. Hell no! Whatever it took to pay back a man who had destroyed his career he would do. Moreover, a bloody car dealer of all people!

It was Edwards' first time using this shooter. Handle a hit? Jesus, how difficult could the bloody thing be? Nope, he wouldn't use this assassin again, slack as he was for not calling in a report.

His face twitched, eyelids flickered, triggered by nerve endings stretched taut. He looked ready for a straight jacket. When he tried the felon's cell phone a third time, it just rang and rang.

“Fuck!”

Sirens wailed from the ambulance as it carved a lively path through late morning traffic. Sydney Hospital was twenty minutes away. In back, a female paramedic had Fatty, unconscious, hooked up to life support. Tubes everywhere, oxygen mask over his face, heart machine beeping erratically, it was difficult to stabilize him. His diagnosis was officially critical. His chances looked bleak. ER would have to operate.

Back at the deadly scene, firefighters extinguished the blaze. Everywhere was foam, pumped from a ladder truck. Members of the coroner's office carried the tiny limp bodies from the bus amid a horde of crying parents, a black-haired ethnic diversity, that tried to wrestle their little "Nicks" and "Marias" away. A pedestrian, twenty minutes earlier, had heroically rushed to the burning car and pulled free the driver. His heart sank when he felt for a pulse and found none.

Police officers and emergency workers now flooded the area. Traffic was backed up for miles. One policeman, a forensic detective nearing retirement, knelt over the dead shooter.

"So, this is the asshole responsible, aye."

A uniform rushed from the car destroyed by fire, long barrel in hand, and tapped the detective on the shoulder. The detective stood, pulled the lollipop from his mouth, and inspected the charred weapon.

"Hmm, bit odd havin' a bloody shotgun like this in yer car for a passenger, wouldn't ya think?" He flew into second gear. "Right! Run his prints. Usual stuff. And I want ownership records on that gun. Bag whatever you find on him and in the car, then bring it all to me." Arms crossed, studious look, he studied the dead man being covered over. "I wanna know where this prick had his last shit! I intend to rip this bloke's life apart." He looked over at the smoldering bus and shook his head, lamenting. The tow truck, a semi, was hooking up. "Damned shame. Just kids. Shit, the mayor's gonna ride my arse for this one."

Marilynn lazed in a sexy red one-piece by the pool, tanning as she usually did. Her long dark hair danced in the brisk, salt air. Practically a live-in at Fatty's harborfront mansion for the last few weeks, she was a solid ten in looks and body. The thought of being Jim Graden's wife brought a look of supreme contentment and she smiled. In two months it would be official. She had lost him many times in the past. There wasn't any power on earth or anywhere else that she'd ever allow to separate her from him.

She heard a telephone ring from the house but thought nothing of it. Minutes later, a jittery Carlo tapped her awake.

"Miss Marilyn, phone for you."

She looked up, saw the horror written on the face of Fatty's man servant, and took the phone. Listening on, she started to chew on her perfectly manicured red-dipped nails. Without even realizing it, she dropped the receiver to the concrete in shock.

"Nooooo!"

Several nights later, Fatty lay on the hospital bed, heavily drugged out. Rain fell outside the window, trickling against the glass. The cacophony of the medical telemetry machines and the soft, steady hiss of the respirator connected to his body were barely audible. His heartbeat stable, the operation to remove the bullet from his spleen had been a success and he was expected to live. He had lost a lot of blood. Every so often, he would flutter his eyelids while unconscious, a sign to those who had visited, including his fiancée Marilyn, that he intended to survive this.

The floor was thinly staffed, the usual graveyard shift. A visitor slipped into Fatty's room. Apparently a doctor by the way the man was dressed, he stood over his patient and stroked his brow as though he cared.

"Mr. Graden, oh, you look oh so drained and pale.. so horribly vulnerable and weak." He chuckled, his tone evil. "Ripe for the killing."

He pulled a flick knife from his pocket and went to work, severing an array of tubes and wires, and removing IV's that served as lifelines. The machines all screeched out warnings.

Fatty gasped and jerked. Finally his eyes snapped painfully open, revealing the sneering visage of Corporal Harry Edwards glaring down at him. He didn't seem to recognize him, like it was some terrible nightmare, and he fell unconscious.

Masquerading as a doctor, Edwards stood over his enemy. A maniacal gleam flashed across the crazed policeman's eyes. Buzzers immediately sounded outside the door and down the hall at the unmanned nurse's station. In a panic, he fled the room. He had wanted to stay, to make sure Graden was dead. The final gasp of air he imagined him expelling would have been sheer bliss to witness. Unable to complete the 'send-off' he would have liked, he resigned himself to the fact that no one could live through the mischief he had just perpetrated and bolted down a nearby stairwell, jumping two at a time.

Down the hallway, in an empty ward, Johnny Millhouse awoke to the racket. Pulling his handgun from its shoulder holster, he leapt from the cot and ran into the boss's room. Aghast at the spectacle of Fatty flopping around like a dying fish on land, he saw the precious fluid escaping from the tubes onto the floor. When he tried to reconnect a few, he was all thumbs.

The ward nurse, an old matron, rushed in and pushed him aside.

"Quick! Go to that drawer there. I need new tubes. These are contaminated."

Johnny complied. The nurse moved quickly and reconnected the drips. The EKG was inoperable until a technician could arrive, so she placed a stethoscope on his chest and listened. The rate, erratic and dangerous at first, was coming down.

"Will you be alright here?" Johnny asked.

Before she could answer, he was gone, searching out the 'dead man' who had done this. Several arseholes came to mind.

The next day, Johnny called an emergency meeting at Graden Holden. Inside Fatty's spacious office, he held court with a half-dozen men, all

managers at the store. He needed to piece together the events leading up to the attempted hit, who found him, and what they had seen. A seventh man, a recently hired assistant sales manager, was notably missing. When the question was raised as to his whereabouts, one answered, "He blew out of here right after the shooting." Right then, Johnny suspected an infiltrator. It made sense. Fatty's movements after the car heist were secret. That security measure, viewed a little over the top by some, was his idea, for Fatty's own protection. Police still asked questions, and there were others, including the insurers and a gangland heavy, Benny Wong, a notorious tong gang boss, pissed off that he had gotten away with it. A multi-million dollar insurance claim for the loss of all those Benzes was certainly a lot of money. But, that was but a drop in the bucket compared to what Graden got paid from a friendly chop shop operator for all those nice imported parts. Fatty made plenty off that scam. Benny might crawl out of the woodwork and want a share. So might other lowlifes.

Johnny looked about the room — all innocent faces. Could this absentee be the one? He started making calls.

Some hours later, as dusk settled on the Sydney skyline, Johnny revisited Fatty in hospital. The boss looked a little better, so he made his suspicions known. He went on to explain that three days had gone by since the attack, and that the rogue manager had gone to ground and was nowhere to be seen. There were no calls to explain, and what phone numbers Johnny had on him just rang off the hook. A healthy commission check even waited for him at reception. Hell, he must have known about that! The feelers were out and photos distributed. No stone was being left unturned. But everyone turned up a blank. It was as though he had dropped off the planet.

Then, a week later, a breakthrough! A spotter on Fatty's payroll, staking out Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport, made him at the baggage carousel. Outside, as the man waited for a cab, a van screeched to a halt. Out jumped two men, and he was snatched. A clean job. No witnesses.

Fatty had already released himself from the hospital, much to the protest of his doctor, when the call came in. He, Johnny, and the Simpson Brothers, three huge bastards in duster coats that resembled mammoth aberrations than human beings, flew down.

Some time ago, Fatty had used the Simpsons to hunt down the man responsible for his son's death. When the order came down, they executed him there without any qualms, shotguns blasting. These men were nothing more than animals. They didn't have a problem killing in cold blood and Fatty paid them well. In the Gulf War, America fought crazed fanatics. Anyone in Fatty's team had to be just that. Fiercely fanatical! Take no prisoners!

Fatty stood on a bridge in a remote area of the Victorian countryside. Slender trails of wispy cloud brushed across the incandescent features of a full moon which hung low this night. The air chilly, the distant amber glow of downtown Melbourne contrasted this refulgence. Under his overcoat, bandages were wrapped about the stomach and his stitches itched. Flanked

by three men with heavily bearded faces, an evil leer crossed his face as Ed Simpson, an ex rugby player with a pushed in nose, spiked white hair, and caulflowered ears, dangled their captive by the ankles over the side. The big thug was as tough as nails, without an ounce of pretense. It was enormous entertainment what he was doing and everybody laughed, everyone except their captor, who had already pissed his pants. The man's arms dangled uselessly, heavy as lead weights, as he fell in and out of consciousness. In the dark abyss below was a railway line. Dank, inhospitable, and overgrown, a parade of rats the size of cats scurried about, frantic and threatened about some pending catastrophic event. An ear piercing mechanical scream cut the still air. Suddenly, a speeding passenger train, the XPT Express bound for Sydney, thundered over the planks. A blustery gust resembling an earthly cyclonic wind blew up the overpass. Simmo loosened his grip a little as the last carriage sped underneath. He cackled while his captive screamed in terror.

"I'm not here to bugger around. Who pulled the trigger, son?" Fatty inquired, cold and ruthless. He had the air of a man who was used to having all his orders obeyed, and God help the person that didn't obey. He gave the 'proceed' signal to Simmo. The brute loosened up his grip.

"P-Please don't drop me," the man stammered. He tried to push him away, rather feebly, but his strength was a gnat compared to Simmo's. His liquid hazel glance darted about, desperately searching for an escape that wasn't there.

"I'll ask you one more bloody time, mate! Who pulled the—"

"I don't know!" he cried, evidently bereft of wisdom.

"Ed, drop him."

"Oops, sorry boss."

The man fell, screaming the name Frank Crow.

"Thumbs are ya, Ed?"

Fatty peered over the side and cringed. The man lay on the tracks, lifeless. The drop was enough. If it wasn't, the next train would. Rats crawled over the body in a hungry frenzy and claimed their prize.

"Well, at least I got a name now," he drawled with a short, bitter laugh.



"Frank Russell Crow, alias Russell the Muscle," read the detective of a police dossier just handed him. "So, this is our bloody driver, aye." In his Darlinghurst substation office, he reclined into the butter-soft leather embrace of his seat, threw his shoes up on the desk, and poured through the contents of the folder. He scrutinized it with steepled fingertips. The man's rap sheet was a mile long. Fiddling through, he came across a court order. It reported Crow's extended stay at Long Bay, guest of the Crown. A receipt, signed by a Senior Corporal Harry Edwards and paper-clipped to the order, showed that Crow was released a week ago on special police cognizance. Odd, he thought, but continued his peruse. He found a gun ownership record. The owner of the rifle found in the car was listed as, "Harry Edwards. 1313 Palm Street, Maroubra." There was that police

officer again. He stroked his chin. That name rang a bell. So did that address. He jerked forward in his seat and stared holes in the gun report, mouth agape.

“Oh shit, bloody Harry.”

He shot to his feet and walked over to a window covered in sooty grime. He rubbed a hole to see through. A beam of daylight flared through. It was mid afternoon. No wonder he felt sleep deprived. He had been there all night, closing as many cases as he could before his last day on the job. His retirement was a week away. Across the street, children played soccer in a small inner city park. All about police headquarters were terraces, weathered from years of neglect. He had been to Harry's place many times, hooker parties mostly. Other times he would go there just to get high. Harry was his supply. He knew how corrupt the man was, those in the mafia that he did favors for, and his psychotic demeanor. He was certainly capable of anything, murder especially. Could this Crow guy be a paid hitman? Who, then, was he gunning for? No, Harry wasn't a friend. Not even close.

He closed the folder up and threw it in his outbox. A sardonic, lop-sided smile twisted his lips.

“Nope, can't get involved,” he muttered, reining his thoughts back to the situation at hand. “Strewth, my bloody pension's at stake if I did. That's all I need, one of these boffins 'round here findin' out 'bout my weed habit.” He glanced at his watch and felt the urge for lunch. “Think I'll quietly hand this over to a mate at Internal Affairs.” With that, he lit up, cracked a dark, throaty smile and left.



Benny Wong sat in back of a Lincoln, parked up a narrow side street from Fatty's Spanish style villa in Vaucuse. In a black suit with narrow lapels, thin black tie and hit-man sunglasses, a loaded ruger lay in his lap. He looked the part. Tattooed on his neck in Chinese letters was the word “Never” and, next to it, the symbol for death. He had staked out Graden's place for a few days now. But his enemy was nowhere in sight; no traffic entering or leaving the high-walled compound at all.

A few years earlier, Fatty dispatched divers to hole Wong's floating Chinese restaurant in Kowloon Bay, quite a hotspot for tourists at the time. The act was in reprisal for the kidnapping of Dillon, his young son. No harm came to the lad, and Wong gladly gave him up just to talk. The tong chieftain wanted in on a caper Fatty was about to pull. What better way to get his attention, he thought at the time. The sinking of his business did not bode well for Wong. The shame from his grandfather, Mock Duck, the founding chairman of the feared *Ghost Shadows* gang, came especially hard. Benny, a subordinate, sliced off his little finger to prove loyalty. It was a high price to pay for violating rules. He swore an oath to get Fatty whatever the cost.

The security gate to Fatty's mansion opened. A gold Mercedes sedan pulled out of the pebbled driveway. Benny sat up. It was a welcome sight for him.

“That’s Graden’s Mercedes. Follow it.”

Entering the main road, Marilyn punched the pedal and the V-12’s race-bred engine ignited like a nitrous racer. Low profile tires gripped and the S600’s acceleration kicked her back in the seat.

“Nope, better not get a ticket.”

It was Jim’s car. She pulled back to a reasonable speed and dawdled down to Double Bay, a ritzy shopping center just east of the city. Off to her right, the lights of downtown flickered magically in the distance. The sky promised rain, but none had yet fallen.

A Goldilocks night, she thought.

She wanted to purchase a new dinner dress. On Jim Graden, of course. She hadn’t seen her beau since he checked himself out of hospital. His whirlwind trip to Melbourne came quite unexpectedly and no reason offered. An hour earlier, he had called her, asking that she pick him up at the airport. He would be on the eleven-thirty flight. She changed the radio station and glanced at the dash clock.

“Still a few hours to doll myself up.”

A black Town Car unexpectedly pulled parallel. Shunting her in the doors a few times, trying to force her off the road, it sped on and screeched to a halt. She jammed on the brakes and pulled to within a few inches of its doors. Two men leapt out and ran over, ignoring the blaring of horns from inconvenienced motorists. They jerked her out, dragged her off, and flung her brutally into the back seat, chuckling sadistically as they got in. Tires screamed along the asphalt and the Lincoln was off in a cloud of smoke, weaving a reckless path through traffic.

“Good evening, little fly.”

Tossed about, she finally picked herself off the floor and sat up. Wisps of hair fell across her face and she opened her mouth, forcing words past desert-dry lips.

“W-who are you?”

A little laugh greeted the words.

“Shut up, bitch. I’ll ask the questions.”

Her stomach fluttered in trepidation, searching her abductor’s carefully guarded features and maniacal calmness with wide, frightened eyes. He was in control. She sensed he was evil in its purest form: cold, no compassion whatsoever. He looked the type who would gladly throw a poor, defenseless kitten out onto the fast moving roadway.

Wong raised a handgun to her throat and ran his hand up her skirt. His cold, rough touch made her gasp in fear. She tried to scream but nothing came out. He reached for her silk panties and ripped them off with one hard yank.

“Please.. no!”

Ignoring her plea, he pushed one finger up inside her, then two. He let out a low whistle of approval even though she was dry. He prodded and poked, masturbating her clitoris and massaging her vaginal walls. When she tried to push his advance away, he dug the gun deeper under her jaw and continued to explore her cavern. She could do little more than comply. Her

fists clenched against her side, eyelids strained shut, she panted so as to not lose control. Tears flowed down her cheeks and her body trembled uncontrollably. The rough texture of his cold fingers was excruciating and her breathing quickened. Her heart threw itself recklessly against her ribs as though it sought to escape and flee without her. She wouldn't give her rapist the sick satisfaction of lubricating for him. It was the most miserable time in her life that she could remember. Nothing prepared her for such pain and humiliation.

"Don't, don't, don't," she begged.

He pulled out and slapped her across the face.

"Stop crying, woman!"

The pain was instant and sharp.

"Please," she implored him, "don't hurt me."

With a scowl of anger, he grabbed a clump of her long dark hair and bashed her head against the glass. That did the trick and he smiled sardonically, eyeing blood trickle from a cut on her forehead. His fingers again dug gratuitously into her pussy in a humiliating reminder that her crotch was bared and vulnerable. For one sensually exquisite moment, he allowed himself the seductive luxury of pure unadulterated terror, relishing his quickening blood, the dryness in his mouth, even the damp sweat slicking his palms.

"You're going to do as you're told," he spat triumphantly.

"Okay, okay," she squeaked, protecting her face when she saw him raise his hand again.

He cocked his head thoughtfully and ceased his lewd attack.

"Bitch, I don't want you. I want Graden, you hear me."

"W-what do you want with Jim?"

He holstered the weapon inside his jacket, sat back, and licked his fingers. She smelled sweet down there. Oh, so incredibly sweet and delicious.

"He put me in jail. Now that I'm out, I want my revenge."

Her eyes widened as the car drew quietly to a halt at a red light. Through the dark tinted glass, she saw a couple stroll the sidewalk. This was her chance.

"Help me, help me!"

Unable to hear her desperate cries, they continued on, arm-in-arm.

Benny laughed. "Try screaming a little louder, bitch," he announced with brazen assurance.

She did.

He cocked his head back, savoring her wails as though they were a most heady aroma.

"Don't you see?" He rapped his knuckles on the tempered glass. "The finest Armourlite material money can buy. These windows are bullet proof."

Manic laughter tore at the air, the sound a strained and cracked affair, which silenced her.

"No one can hear you, miserable woman," he chanted with boisterous mirth. "Your pleadings fall on deaf ears, little fly. Nothing but cries of hopelessness. The cabin, I assure you, is quite soundproof."

A time later, in Sydney's inner west, the neighborhoods became rougher and rougher, until finally they were in an area that Marilyn had never even seen before. The car screeched to the curb in front of an old abandoned building on a dead end side street. It was a deserted thoroughfare that rarely, if ever, saw any police traffic. Benny kicked open the door and threw her out onto the sidewalk, just as the skies opened up. Fat raindrops plopped onto the road around her.

"I live and feast on the dream of torture, little fly," he insipidly chanted several times, whispering harshly as though it soothed him, comforting his angst.

Her expensive designer skirt torn, Marilyn sat there on the sidewalk, soaked to the bone. Her legs lazily apart, her womanhood innocently exposed, the impact had stolen her breath, which left her dazed and disoriented. She drew back a little to bring him into focus and gave him a perplexed look, like she was not drawing the meaning of his words. He was clearly deranged and extremely dangerous. That, she knew. She folded her arms around herself and shuddered. Panic bit into her with rabid speed, making her battle and struggle in mortal dread.

"Here's your filthy panties and handbag, bitch," he said with derision, dropping her articles in a gutter awash in water. "You tell Graden to watch his back. I'm gunning for him." He paused and blankly regarded her helpless condition. "I live and feast on the dream of torture," he repeated with more volume, putting his finger to his temple as though sharing a secret with her.

He had wanted to throw her out when the car was moving. But, he needed her to deliver his message. Dead, she couldn't. Alive and bruised, her will in tatters, she could, in a way that would be to his advantage, he thought. His mental state tested, there was no sanity left. He wanted Graden badly. And Graden he would get, whatever the cost. He had a bullet just for him.

Benny pissed himself laughing at her predicament. "Graden's gonna die, die, die, little fly," he hissed. "I live and feeeeast on the dreeeam!"

He slammed his door. The car tore off so fast that the tires threw gravel into her face. Her knees and elbows scuffed and bloodied, she was sore inside and out. She slowly rubbed her fingertips over the cut on her forehead. Behind it was a swollen lump.

"Shit!"

She wasn't normally accustomed to using profanity, but she was mad, scared, and it just came out of her mouth. Cringing at the pain, she looked about. It was a scary place. She scrambled to retrieve her things engulfed in a tidal current before they disappeared down a drain. Pushing her rebelling body fully erect, she struggled to her feet. Dripping, cold and silent, the downpour was relentless. Her breath steamed in the cold air. There was nothing remotely dry on the ground that she could swathe herself in. Legs quivering, purse over her head, she staggered to a red telephone booth at the corner.

South of town, at the domestic terminals, Fatty waited with Johnny at the cab rank for a ride. The storm had passed and the full moon shone through the clouds. It was already after midnight and Marilyn had not shown up. Concern consumed him and he nervously tapped his shoe. This was unlike her. Marilyn's cell phone didn't answer and when he telephoned Carlo, his manservant at home, he said she had left in his car a few hours earlier but he hadn't seen her since. Perhaps she had had a breakdown, Fatty thought. He had been having problems with the starter. Regardless of the problem, he ordered Carlo to scour the streets for her. As he hung up, the phone rang. It was the police, informing him that his Mercedes had been found and towed to impound. A good many officers at the local constabulary were his mates, men he enjoyed a casual beer with. They thought it suspicious that the familiar gold S600 sat abandoned against the curb of New South Head Road; driver's door open, keys on the mat.

Fatty just about blew a fuse. He demanded that they find her, and hung up. The pain from the bullet wound unexpectedly returned.

Johnny saw him stoop forward. "Jim, you alright?"

Fatty gritted his teeth, supporting himself with shaking arms braced against his knees. He bullied his exhausted body to accept a ragged breath.

"Yeah. Hey cabbie, take us to the Rose Bay cop shop." He sighed. "Soon as I get home, I'm gonna have a stiff belt of whisky."

Johnny lifted a questioning brow. "You sure, boss? I mean, you just got outta hosp—"

"I'll live," Fatty snorted.

His cell phone rang again.

"You answer it."

Johnny did so, listened for a second or two, and his eyes grew wide.

"It's Marilyn."

Fatty snatched the phone. "Where are you? What?" Fatty stared, open-mouthed, for a brief second. His eyes were like manhole covers. "Oh Christ, I'll be right there."

"Cabbie, skip Rose Bay," he said, lifting his too heavy head. "Take me to the Pyrmont Police Station. It's on Harris Street. And step on it."

"What's the matter?" asked Johnny, bewildered.

"Bloody Benny's the matter, mate." Fatty took a deep breath, pain obvious in every word. "That fuckin' chink dickhead kidnapped her a few hours ago. He left her for dead on the side of the road. She called the cops and they picked her up. God, at least she's safe. Smart bird, that girl." He sighed with a shake of his head, then slanted him a grim look. "Mate, we're at war again."

A week earlier, police advised him of Wong's release. His five year sentence for kidnapping Dillon reduced for good behavior, he was paroled early. Fatty assumed the gangster had learned his lesson and didn't think his release would pose a threat. He wanted to believe it; he wanted to change his mad dog ways, for Marilyn's sake and his pending marriage to her. His life since childhood had been laced with nihilism and he wanted it no more. He yearned for a new life, one that would not force him to crack heads at every turn. But it was wishful thinking, and he hated himself for letting his

guard down. The Chinaman had a history with him. And a gripe. He was back in his life. Shit!

Faces spun wildly in his mind: Marilyn and that sexy smile, Benny Wong's nasty scowl at him the day they hauled him off to jail, the terror on the man he had just dropped off a bridge, and what this Frank Crow bloke looked like. Memories even of his beautiful but dead son haunted him. Dark tearing claws strafed the deepest crannies of his brain, vampirically draining his strength, his very lifeforce. He could feel the blood begin to boil in his veins, reducing into a thick, viscid sludge. For someone who had almost died, Fatty had a lot going on, as the taxi sped into the night.



Benny Wong stepped from a café, a legitimate business he owned. The upstairs part was a place where his *Axe Gang* gathered and hung out. Sitting down at a table on the sidewalk, the tong chief casually sipped espresso and browsed the Saturday newspaper. Flanked by his men, the industrial park they operated from served like a moat surrounding a fortress. They expected trouble. Always.

Cabramatta, the heroin capital in Sydney's south west, was central to Benny's "China White" drug business. It was a place where his intimidating tong clan prospered, a place where cops feared to go. He had wiped out all his Vietnamese rivals in the area, products of a slew of drive-bys. In the aftermath, Benny was kingpin now. Cabramatta was his. His main criminal activities were drug trafficking and extortion activities. He got his rocks off targeting businesses, mainly nightclubs, for protection rackets. To him, extortion was easy money.

A large number of Chinese, spiked hair, jeans, and attitude, would enter the club, upwards of 20 at a time. They outnumbered the security staff and assaulted male patrons, sometimes stabbing them with butterfly knives. The incident would be over in minutes, and Wong's gangsters long gone before police arrived. A few days later, senior members, well-dressed and business-like, approached the club owner and offered protection for a small fee of three-grand a week.

Wong's role was so critical and his influence so great within the inner west neighborhood, in certain circles he was considered a legend. On the street, reputation was everything.

Studying the sports section, Benny caught an unfamiliar SUV slowly approach in his peripheral vision. The street was empty and he assumed an owner of one of the nearby warehouses drove the expensive German tourer. He thought nothing of it and went back to his coffee. Repetitive fire suddenly rang out and the oncomers cut loose with a terrifying barrage from machine guns fitted with 100-round drums. Wong and his escorts dropped to the sidewalk to escape the spray, fumbling for their Berettas. A tac-tac-tac of bullets thumped holes through the walls and windows of the café above their heads, suppressive fire to aid in their getaway when the first few slugs didn't find their mark. A bullet whistled past Benny's head and he emptied a clip in response. Already too late, he could only watch as

his attackers sped out of range. He shouted to his men standing out in the middle of the street, loading and reloading the whole time, to stop their wild shooting. Recoil echoes ceased and he assessed the situation. Amidst a sea of broken glass, his brother lay under the table beside him. One of the missiles had torn away part of his jawbone and blood spurted from his neck at the jugular. He died in front of his eyes, choking on his own blood. Another gang member, a teenager, lay at the foot of the doorway. He had been reloading when he got hit in the throat. His neck disintegrated basically. Benny scalded with vengeance. Now it was his turn to get even. He went for his cell phone and hit speed-dial.

“A white Benz four-wheel drive. Headed your way. Take it out!”

Not far away, two members of Benny’s gang waited in an old Ford sedan, automatics at the ready. Its souped-up engine idled roughly. Their job, teamed with three other cars similarly manned around the area, was to ensure that, whenever turf wars flared, those who dared invade would earn their wrath. In a black nylon bomber jacket with a colorful dragon stitched on the back, the pimply wheelman cocked the firing mechanism of his Uzi. He handed it off to his passenger, another Asian youth; sunglasses and spiky hair with dyed highlights, just as the target raced by. In a scream of tires, they gave chase. Five streets later, automatic fire peppered the SUV and the German truck lost control, crashing into a house. A terrific explosion ensued, the result of several sticks of dynamite accidentally rolling under the seat and catching alight. A distance away, Wong’s gunners sat in their car. Half the block behind them was on fire. They didn't like the developing scene. People across the street were looking out their windows, and cars paused to gawk. The driver got on his mobile.

“Job’s taken care of, boss.”

Benny heard the faint cry of sirens grow louder.

“Return to your post and await further orders.”

He walked inside the café with a snarl on his lips. A hazy shroud hung. Bullet holes, concentrated in a wide sweeping arc, pockmarked the walls. Tables and framed posters were shot up and elaborate meat displays destroyed. Strewn everywhere on the ground were shards of glass, plaster shrapnel, and splinters of wood. Even his beloved cappuccino machine, an old relic with an array of copper pipes he had doled out plenty for, was reduced to holed junk. The incredible firepower unleashed could have completely demolished the cafe, given a dozen or so more rounds. The place was salvageable, though barely.

Screams of hysteria came from the kitchen.

“Someone go comfort my sister,” Wong announced. “She’s giving me a headache.”

One of his men complied, and silence soon fell.

On the floor near the two dead bodies he noticed a spent round. It was huge and largely intact, its head barely dented. An apparent ricochet, he picked it up.

“A 7.62 millimeter. And a red painted tip.” He stroked his chin. “Hmm, *Viet Chings* use MAC-90s.” His eyes lit up. “I knew that gunfire

sounded familiar. I thought I killed all the Vietnamese gangs around here.” A surge of adrenalin coursed through his body. “Ha-ha, they can’t scare me with their stupid blood curses.” He sucked a deep breath through his teeth, pressed the heels of his hands into his gritty eyes, and tried to think.

“Break out the painter’s covers and pin them up outside. We must hide all this damage quickly. Make people believe we’re renovating. Get outside with brooms. I want the sidewalk swept. Leave nothing.”

His men stood around, stunned. It was hard for them to believe they had survived such a deadly firefight. A few patted themselves as a reality check just to make sure they weren’t dreaming.

Benny clapped his hands. “Chop, chop!” he growled, his voice thick with frustration. Everyone jumped to action. He expected any workers in the surrounding warehouses to turn a blind eye if they knew what was good for them.



Fatty lay asleep in his own bed. Still heavily bandaged, it would be a few more weeks before they could remove the stitches. The gentle snores continued to rise and fall with each breath he took, unconsciously thankful that he was in his own bed and everything he loved in his life was safe again. Alongside him slept Marilyn, naked. She groaned in her sleep and leaned into him. Her bottom lip split and badly swollen, the bruises on her arms and face hadn’t yet healed. Nor had her insides. They served as a cruel reminder of her terrifying ordeal. Outside, several guards patrolled the property with trained Rotts, Fatty’s dogs from his auto auction business in Haberfield, and the fence was again electrified, security measures insisted upon by a worry-stricken Johnny.

Fatty’s face cringed and his snoring stopped. Stirring and restless, covered in sweat, he was caught up in a nightmare, his mind embroiled in a devilish agony that would not go away. A horrifying episode in his life from several years ago, the murder of his young son in an attempt on his own life had returned to haunt him. The boy’s screams, “Daddy, daddy, help me please” replayed over and over and over as he limped towards the car. His leg broken, he could hobble no faster. The tears, the helplessness of such sweet innocence, flooded his head.

In bed, he tossed and turned.

The sight of his boy bashing his bloodied fists on the back glass of the limo, coupled with the eerie sounds of bagpipes playing *Amazing Grace* at a packed funeral, was cruel. It all came to a head when the car sailed up in the sky after a mighty explosion and blew apart, not fifteen feet from him.

Fatty regained consciousness and sat up, terrified.

“Dillon!”

Crocodile tears in his eyes, he held his head in his hands and bawled. He wished he had been in that car and not him. Marilyn cuddled him into her bosom, smoothing back a few wisps of his blond hair lovingly.

“There, there, Jim. It’s only a bad nightmare.”

He looked at her, numb. "I killed my boy, my precious eight-year-old son."

"No, no, you didn't, baby. There was nothing you could do. You were thrown from the car. When you came to, your leg was broken. The car was up the road in a ditch. By the time you limped there, the car was already on fire." She rocked him. "There was nothing you could do, baby. Nothing. I know it was terrible for you to bury your child. I know it would be for me. I loved little Dillon, too. But, you did the very best that you could. He loved you, as do I."

Fatty quickly settled. Marilyn's words had a soothing effect on him as they always had. He remembered back to when he saw her wrapped in a trench coat and barefoot at the police station after being kidnapped. Her hair still damp, she looked lifeless, her face full of terror. It pained him to the depths of his soul to see the fear in those jade green eyes fixed on his. He jolted back to reality and thanked his lucky stars she wasn't dead because of him. He looked at her and saw eyes genuine for him. He took her hand and held it in his own.

"I don't want to ever lose you."

She nuzzled up and heaved a contented sigh.

"You won't, baby."

He was her world.



Johnny inspected the lower level of an old vacant warehouse with another man. Amidst residential rooming houses and establishments of light industry, the small two-story structure sat a few blocks behind Graden Holden. The high-ceilinged hall was dusty and stripped clean, just concrete floors, wood-paneled walls and the occasional coke can. It looked as though it hadn't seen a tenant in years.

Fatty's lieutenant had always wanted to open a gaming joint ever since a teenager. Now five million dollars richer, thanks to what he legitimately procured from Graden's empire, the signed lease he clutched made his dream a reality. And, he had Fatty's blessing, too. It had been a long hard grind with the NSW Casino Control Authority. But, approve his application they did, thanks to Fatty's plump balance sheet and a little "leverage" found on one of the ruling commissioners. The man was a crook and Fatty leaned on him. Hard! Not wanting his wild gambling habits or the hoods he owed heavily to become common knowledge, the official caved in. On the ballot as a candidate for NSW Premier in the upcoming state elections, Fatty's work would have ruined a promising political career.

The game Johnny chose was a time honored one, "Two-up." More a gathering where hundreds dared to bet on the throw of a coin, it owed its origins to the Digger vets of Gallipoli. He despised *Thommo's Two-Up*, a chain of gaming houses that enjoyed a veritable monopoly for decades. Tossed out of one as a teenager, he felt he could go head to head in battle and win.

“God, I’m bloody stoked! This joint’s gonna be rakin’ it in.” In the center was a sunken area surrounded by pillars which held up the ceiling. “That’s where the Two-up ring’s goin’,” he said, and pointed to it. The more he looked around, the more he grew excited about the endless possibilities. “And, and... against that wall I’ll have a long bar. Oh, oh, and over there, booths under the windows. Crystal chandeliers hanging everywhere. And hot babes serving drinks with hardly a stitch on. Maybe I’ll get some ‘Pai-gow’ action upstairs for the chinks. Those fuckers got plenty of money.”

The other man quietly stood his ground, dubious. Dave Reid was a tall, athletic type with auburn hair. He wore a beautifully cut but outdated navy blue Nehru suit, a white turtleneck sweater, and black leather ankle boots. Expensive. He looked like a refugee from *Gentleman’s Quarterly*. No jewelry except for a wristwatch, and it wasn’t a Rolex, surprisingly. He resembled the Rolex type. A slight scent of cologne. Citrus. Confident, perfect posture, he had a military background, having once served as an SAS assassin in Fatty’s secret ‘hit squad’ unit back in Vietnam. Hence the nickname Hero. He was another of Graden’s trusted crew.

“Hero, it’ll be a flash lookin’ joint. You can run the casino cage.”

“Great,” Hero said in mock, hands dug in his pockets. With a little more enthusiasm, he might have been believable.

Johnny sneered at him. “Don’t be a bloody smartarse.” A smirk crossed his lips. “I’m gonna call it ‘The Golden Johnny.’”

“Bullshit!”

“Yeah, I’m kidding. Lighten up. Just seein’ whether you were payin’ attention or not. Nah mate, the name’ll be ‘The Golden Coin.’ You know, coins used in Two-up. See, see?”

“Phew! Just as bad.”

“Stuff it, Reid!” Johnny zoned him out. “This joint’s gonna sell plenty of booze. No food, just bloody booze. Barrels of it. I want every player liquored up. I can hear the hundreds of crazy gamblers screamin’ their lungs out now.” He greedily rubbed his hands. “I’m gonna skim twenty percent off every bet. Jim wants eight, leaving the House twelve.” His mouth salivated. “Strewth, I’m made!”

Hero leant a wary eye. “Has Jim seen this joint?”

“Yeah, why?”

He laughed. “Cause it’s gonna cost you a bloody fortune to doll this dump up. Look around. Hell, nobody’s put out the welcome mat in years.” He leaned against a support pillar with arms folded in a casual manner and shook his head. “The joint needs carpet, paint, lighting, security cameras, an army of carpenters. Hell, knowin’ you, you won’t wanna do it on the cheap, and—”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Johnny had a million things on his mind, most all about him.

Hero ran a searching glare over him, then shrugged. “Whatever,” he muttered, and walked off.

Interested to see whether the layout upstairs would be a drastic improvement, Hero trudged up a wooden stairwell off to the side of the

room. Right handed from the way he used the stair rail, each dusty plank creaked under his weight. It was a waste of time reasoning with a man, he thought, drugged by his own self-importance.

Recently, he had overseen transportation of the stolen Mercedes shipment to a friendly car stripper in Queensland at Fatty's orders. The truck-jacking caper a success, he was there today as a *quiet* observer for Graden, and would get a tiny piece of the casino's take for his trouble. It wasn't that Fatty distrusted Johnny. Not in the slightest. As careful as he was, Jim Graden didn't trust 'anyone' when it came to money. That was just the way the big man was. He wanted to make sure his investment and cut was protected, and that any outsider trying to muscle their way in would be dealt with. Trust him as he might, Johnny would come to regret bringing Hero into his confidence. Soon.

At the top of the stairs, Hero opened a door in a way that it nearly fell off its hinges. The knob came off in his hand and his mouth dropped.

"What a shit hole!"



Jeff Crompton sat behind his desk in the palatial elegance of his penthouse office. Occasionally, he chewed on a manicured nail in silence. Atop the Chifley Plaza skyscraper, half a mile above downtown Sydney, the view of the harbor and its glistening blue majesty made him meditate. The sun was beginning to drop over to the industrial sprawl of the western suburbs in the distance. The chairman of Australian Finance, the largest auto dealer floorplan financier in the country, was the target of an investigation by police detectives. It was a humiliating affair. What they purportedly had on him was still a mystery, but his attorneys were on it. All they would say was corporate corruption, but wouldn't elaborate further. It was, to him, a witch hunt. In the interim, for the sake of the firm's integrity, the board had 'asked' him to put himself on paid administrative leave, pending the company's own internal inquiry by hired private investigators and auditors. Today was his last day. Boxes containing personal belongings were stacked near the fireplace in the lounge, awaiting his butler to ferry them back to "Kangaroo," his recently purchased forty-million dollar waterfront colonial on the point at Elizabeth Bay.

An unannounced caller paid him a visit.

"Afternoon, Jeff," Edwards said, looking around. "You movin' or something?"

"Shut up, Harry," he replied in a strong Bostonian tongue.

"Oh, testy are we?"

Crompton removed his ancient spectacles balancing on his nose. Taking his apathetic body to task, he reared his head back and glared down his narrow aristocratic nose at the tall, gray haired policeman standing in civvies with all the imperial arrogance of his unbending Anglo-American being.

"Harry, if you and I didn't share hatred for James Roderick Graden, I wouldn't give you the time of day."

“Yeah, yeah,” said Edwards, and foraged through a wooden cigar box on the desk. Nothing but little fat Cubans. “Hey, where are your Supremos?”

“I smoked them all,” Crompton snapped, and slammed shut the box, almost breaking a few of the rude policeman’s fingers. He simmered. “Now, take a seat.”

Edwards did so.

“So, I hear through the grapevine that you’ve been a very busy boy.”

Edwards looked unfettered. “I sprung some idiot from Long Bay to shoot Graden, but he managed to stuff things up. So, I took matters into my own hands and went down to the hospital and wasted him myself.”

“He’s not dead, you know.”

Edwards’ smile disappeared and his mouth fell open.

“W-wha..”

“No matter. Listen Harry, I want you to cease and desist. I’ll take over from here. I’ve got a very good operative working on this matter right now. She’s got all the evidence I need to pull him down. Permanently.” He chuckled.

Edwards sank back in his chair, distraught. “Not that bitch?”

Elbows resting on the chair’s arms, Crompton steepled his fingers in thought. An air of narcissistic confidence enveloped him. This was *his* show.

“Yes, yes, our sexy, darling, *deadly* Julie Moss.”



Across town, Benny’s driver pumped gas at an unmanned service station. The sun dipped below a line of tall trees, heralding the coming of dusk. High in the sky, an international flight poured a contra trail from its four turbines. He looked up and wished he was sitting in first class, enjoying a cold beer. That was the last thing he remembered before falling to the ground, splattered with red liquid that meant life. A victim of an ambush, he would breathe no more. The Simpsons, in black dusters, sunglasses, and Kevlar body armor, rushed the Lincoln Town Car. The ear-splitting note of shotgun blasts rang out. The brothers coolly stood their ground and pumped their reload mechanisms in precision. Door handles and mirrors were blown off and anything that resembled an accessory destroyed. And yet, their fire couldn’t penetrate the bullet proof glass.

“Blow out the rubber, boys,” Ed Simpson yelled.

Tires burst and deflated, and the car sank. When Benny’s men got out, their attempts to protect the boss, to kill those who dared stand up to them, were in vain. Flack jackets under their shirts, guns shooting wildly, they thought they were invincible. They were blasted into history! Except Benny’s bodyguard, a big man, who jumped out, hands held high, and surrendered his gun.

“On your knees, fat boy,” Simmo snapped.

The man did so.

From his belt, Simmo pulled a sawn-off, double barreled, side-by-side shotgun.

“Look up at me. Now, open your mouth.”

When the bodyguard tried turning away, Simmo grabbed a clump of his hair and wrenched his head about. His rapier gaze darted briefly over the angst-ridden details of his victim’s face. Without warning, he shoved the double barrel into the Asian’s mouth, breaking teeth on the way in. Both barrels let rip. The blast blew the bulk of his head clean off and the skull was a projectile, ricocheting off the car’s windshield. All that was left was the bottom jaw and neck. It was a heck of a lot of fire power at near point black range! Simmo wiped the shotgun clean of blood, mucus and saliva off on the dead man’s suit jacket then stepped over the headless body. Blood oozed from a bullet lodged in his arm and nick to his ear. He ignored his wounds and opened the back door of the shot-up Lincoln. He found Benny huddled on the floor, the only one left alive. Benny raised his Beretta defiantly. In that split second, when he pulled the trigger, the mechanism jammed. Nothing. Benny was more surprised than Simmo, who couldn’t believe his luck. With an evil leer, the towering giant swatted the weapon away. He flushed a deep angry red and waved his finger under the gangster’s nose.

“Now, now, my little chink friend. That’s not nice.”

A massive hand went out and he dragged him out by the scruff. Benny, rather mistakenly, chose to struggle. Simmo threw him to the ground and pointed his 9mm at Benny’s temple.

“You call yourself a fucking leader, do ya, cobber?”

He pulled the trigger.

It clicked.

Ed knew it was empty, but Benny didn’t.

“I’m the toughie here, dickhead. Not you.”

Simmo swatted the piece away and unceremoniously hoisted his prisoner up. Shouldering him like a side of beef, he quickstepped it back to the car, hidden behind the station. Benny, without warning, went for a knife hidden in a specialty tailored pocket of his jacket sleeve and plunged it into his captor’s arm. The huge man grimaced without a sound, dropping the Asian to the ground with a bone-jarring thud. He pulled out the knife from his forearm, licked the blade clean, and stood over Benny with the foulest look.

“My blood’s worth bottlin’, shit fer brains,” he snapped, and cold-cocked him. A loud, hollow knock echoed, and he was out cold. Simmo grabbed a handful of trouser seat and hauled him off to the car as though two hundred pounds hanging from an arm was nothing.

“Hey, don’t kill him!” yelled Fatty from the car.

“He ain’t dead, boss,” smirked Simmo. “Just restin’.”

“Dingbat!”

An hour later, in an empty laneway west of the city, Benny regained consciousness to find himself being manhandled through the back door of a butcher’s shop. Located a few streets behind Dealz Auto Auctions in

Haberfield, one of Fatty's businesses, the butchery was closed today at the big man's order.

The low wattage bulb that dangled from a wire in the ceiling did little to combat the gloom of the refrigerated room they were in. This dreary chamber, a locker constructed of steel and used to hang meat, had the aura of a tomb or cell on death row, a place for the damned. Simmo stripped the Asian man and hung him up on a hook. Chains attached at all fours, Benny's naked body was suspended in midair, spread-eagled like a star. The metal cuffs at his wrists, ankles, and throat felt deathly. He flexed his fingers and then tried the toes. They would move but nothing else on his legs or arms. He could turn his head, but only in a limited way. He struggled desperately, an act which only served to rub his wrists raw, causing a trickle of blood from the abrasions. He jerked on the handcuffs again. It abraded his wrists more and blood ran down his fingers, pooling on the concrete floor. Helpless... he was totally helpless.

Tying on a large plastic apron, Ed pulled the starter cord to a rusty old chainsaw spotted in blood and animal matter. After a few tries, it fired right up. Exhaust fumes filled the air. He touched the still blade to his victim's face. Wong flinched and gritted his teeth, fighting for breath in short bursts as his heart rate went off the scale. His fate was horrifyingly realized.

Fatty found a rickety wooden chair, lit up a cigarette and sat down in the shadows. It was just the three of them in that cold, mildewy room. Hearing the incessant clatter of the machine Simmo held didn't faze him, not one bit. The walls made of steel, it was scream proof. Perfect! The big man crossed his legs and pulled his overcoat taught around his neck.

"Core, it's a bit bloody chilly in here." He looked him up and down. "So Benny, how 'bout Simmo there starts with yer nuts." He chuckled darkly. "My, my, you got little ones, ain't ya, cobber. Strewth, not enough for a bloody dim sim. Don't worry, you're not gonna miss 'em."

Gunning the saw, Ed's face gleamed. "Yeah."

Terrified, Benny ranted something in a high-pitched Cantonese.

"What, Benny? I don't understand bloody gibberish."

Whatever he said fell on deaf ears and Simmo went to work. He barely touched his ballsack with the spinning blade. His testicles flopped to the ground in a splash of blood.

"Hey Benny, you want rice with that?"

Mindless of a brief bout of screaming, Simmo began his carve up the middle. Benny quickly lost consciousness and died. The big brutish man cared not. On his parent's farm, this was the way he would fillet cattle carcasses. The body vibrated for a few seconds then came apart. The air ripe in a foul, tinny smell mixed with two-stroke, it was a bloody mess. Undeterred, the executioner stayed the course.

"Nah, Ed. A little to the left."

Simmo adjusted his upward direction. "Oh yeah, like this?"

"Yeah, just like that. Now yer cut's straight."

In exactly 28 seconds, Benny Wong had a twin and both pieces separated, dangling from the chains. Ed finished the sides off in little bits. Pieces five inches square lay on the concrete floor, ready for the meat grinder. A hint of a smile dangled on Simmo's lips as he surveyed his handiwork. A hand separated from a metal cuff and dropped to the floor. The pinky was missing. Fatty stood up and strolled over.

"Leave that, Ed. I want a souvenir." He studied a large ruby ring on one of the fingers with interest. In the jewel's center was a fire-breathing dragon insignia, the family mark. "Those bloody tongs of Benny's will think twice next time. I think I'll send his hand to Wong's grandfather. Tell the miserable old bastard to go fuck off. Oh, what's his name?" He racked his memory with a snide grin. "Fuck Duck? Yeah, somethin' like that."

Simmo turned a deaf ear to the boss's ranting. He dropped the chainsaw, removed his plastic apron, which was covered in blood, and reached for a coiled up hose. Turning on the faucet, he went to work and cleaned up the mess. Ushering Fatty to move out of the way, he hosed body parts into a corner, spraying the floor in wide arcs. A blood trail snaked its way to a drain hole in the middle of the room. Turning the hose off, Simmo retrieved a garbage bag from the shelf, knelt down and began stuffing handfuls of flesh and the gangster's clothing inside. Tying off the bag, he ran the hose once more then shut the water off. A thorough man, this wasn't the executioner's first hurrah.

"What?" Fatty growled.

Head down, Ed said nothing.

Fatty gave him a stern look.

"Oh, give'us the bloody silent treatment, will ya? Thanks for the fuckin' vote of confidence, mate."

Ed took to the floor with a mop, cleaning the final traces, tongue in cheek. He'd seen plenty of slaughter in his life, working in the cattle abattoirs as a young lad. He had killed for Fatty where necessary. But, the few times that he had, something inside him, perhaps the spirit of a deceased mother he cherished, said it was wrong.

"Listen, mate. Whad'ya expect?" Fatty said definitely. "What else can I do? Do you think I wanted this? Hell no!"

Fatty paced the floor, the echo of his heels clicking about the steel walls.

"Benny Wong wouldn't stop. He just wouldn't quit. First, he kidnaps my boy. Then, my fiancé. Fuck him! I don't go lookin' for it."

He stopped and spun around quickly.

"Have you ever seen me go out willy-nilly, putting the hurt out on anyone? No, Ed. You know why? Because I'm not like these gutless, criminal scum. They're just organized crime. These bastards are into drugs, extortion, and will kill anyone for a quid. They aren't even their own man."

There was a pause.

"Look matey, I'm no fuckin' choirboy, I'll be the first to admit that. Sure, I like to rig a race or three, but I'm a legit businessman. And I'm up on Parramatta Road." Fatty jammed his thumb into his chest. "Graden

Holden, that's me. Live and let live, I say. But if anyone fucks with me, they'd better wish they were never born."

Simmo did a final wipe of the floor and leant on the stick of his mop. Not the sharpest tool, it looked as though he was figuring out some type of puzzle or riddle.

"Yeah, I agree, Jimbo. Benny asked fer it."

Fatty dug his nose into the big brute's face, eyes like blue steel.

"Wong rolled the dice, Ed. I warned him. He fuckin' well lost! 'Nuf said."

Ed tossed up his arms. "Okay, okay, boss."

The pair left the premises. Darkness had already fallen. Fatty opened the back door of the car and hesitated, while Ed loaded the bloodied chainsaw and bulging, leaking plastic bag into the trunk. A few mangy strays dove under a dumpster, their feline senses frightened over the sound of the car's powerful engine turning over. At the end of the laneway, in the distance, the skyscrapers graced the night sky, silhouettes of darkness filled with pinnacles of light, standing tall and proud. Inches to the left, the lights twinkling across the trademark arch of the Harbour Bridge made him ruminate. In his eyes, 'righteousness and what you sowed you reaped' was the framework to what made him tick. The evil that he had been a part of back there in that cold dank room was, in his mind, for purpose. He didn't believe in the bible, only the street. The street had raised him, fed him, made a man out of him, profited for him. On the street, he had learned what to do; to coerce, to charm, to be a leader. And he was incredibly efficient at *negotiating from strength* with mugs like Benny Wong. His tough father's teaching, "Good overcomes evil," was advice he took to heart. Though he despised him for his rough upbringing, the old codger's honorable ways were inbred into him.

In Fatty's eyes, he was the white knight battling adversity for the greater good of every hard-working Australian like him. A self made man, he was damned if he would allow anyone, ANYONE, to take it away.



EPISODE 2 follows...

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