

Paddy, Go Easy!

What Happens When You Hit And Run?

David Hearne

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Dedication

For Sharon

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Chapter 1 - I've Done all the Dumb Things

A blue-bellied black snake slithered through the grass with purpose. It twisted its way through dry country, making its way through a town named Rosewood, located 60 kilometres west of Brisbane, nestled in the Bremer Valley in Queensland, Australia.

The snake pressed forward, on the hunt for something to devour, as it slithered past an Acacia. In the distance, there was the sound of a Queensland Rail train as it headed towards the terminus.³

The snake slid onto Marburg Road, enjoying the warmth of chip-sealed tar. It slowed as an engine growl amplified.

The slippery critter reacted to the vibrations and hurried to move away as a car was almost upon it.

There was a 'screech' of brakes.

A 'stock' 1972 XA Falcon wouldn't have had a hope of stopping, however the DBA 330mm front discs with PBR two-piston calipers, combined with the rear drum brakes, enabled this cherry-red metal muscle beast to grind to a halt in no-time. The lucky snake slithered out of sight.

The 302ci Cleveland motor, which had been stroked to 408ci, rumbled underneath the striped, black bonnet. Clamour bellowed from the rear of the car thanks to a 2.25 inch exhaust system with Super Cat mufflers.

The car spun then straightened, accelerating rapidly, blurring the scenery and road. Seamless gear changes from the C10 three-speed transmission and a lead foot had the beast whipping past the New Oakleigh Mine then an endless sea of crops.

Sitting in the retro black-vinyl interior, a young man named Paddy, 23, sat brash and ready to take on the world. Hell, he'd probably already conquered it; it's just the rest of the populace hadn't realised it yet! He could fix that. Short, slicked-back hair, an ear ring, armband tattoo, and a smoke hanging out of

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his mouth, the man was at least 10-feet tall and bullet-proof, and that was on a bad day in his mind's eye.

'Run To Paradise', an old rock song by the Choirboys, hummed through the cabin of the car. Paddy grinned like a monkey.

The speedo hit 180.

He pulled 'Ford' dog tags from his chest and kissed them. He returned them to his chest.

"Yeah!" he yelled as he reached down for a stubby of beer and chugged it down.

The XA screamed past a police car going in the other direction. The cop car, a Toyota Aurion Sportivo SX6, spun around madly, hit lights and sirens, and set off in pursuit.

Two uniformed policemen watched the XA's lights fade from view. Constable Wright, 40's, balding, his uniform as crumpled as his forehead, pumped the accelerator.

"Slow learner," he mumbled.

Bradley, 25, less jaded than his partner and wearing a freshly ironed uniform, nodded agreement. He hadn't given up on the idea that he might be promoted from Constable one day.

"You want me to call for backup?"

Wright sniggered. "From Ipswich? We don't need their help!"

The Aurion slowed. Bradley looked surprised. "Why are we slowing? Our Commissioner says we chase; chasing acts as a deterrent, so that's what we do."

Wright brought the Sportivo to a stop. "Atkinson wears a skirt. We don't need to chase him. That's Paddy Brennan - how many '72 Cherry XA Falcons do you reckon we have getting around Rosewood?"

Bradley nodded.

"Funny thing," Wright chuckled, "he's been known to cover his plate with black tape. As if that's going to help when you've got such a custom, unique ride. Some people are born

idiots.”

The Aurion was moving again.

Paddy’s house was an old, rundown joint set on a large block. A dilapidated fence with missing posts led into an unkempt yard. Someone might have mowed it once but there was no proof. Nearby, a black Labrador outside his kennel yawned. It looked around, bored, chewed on the remnants of a bone and rolled on the grass. Was it dinnertime yet?

With a ‘roar’, the XA swerved into the driveway. Paddy laughed loudly. He swaggered out, threw the stubbie onto the road and relished the ‘smash’. He patted his dog, fumbled for the right key, something harder than one would think unless they too had downed a few schooners too many, then made for the door. Eventually, he opened the door and entered the house.

The police car turned into the drive, lights ‘flashing’. Wright and Bradley exited and went towards the door. The dog growled at them.

Paddy sat in his kitchen and looked through the window at the blue lights with crazed eyes. Dishes filled the sink, stubbies littered the floor.

Several structures, made by empty stubbies or cans with a pizza box on top, followed by more of the same to add new levels, stood impressively as high as Paddy himself in some instances.

“Shit,” he said, shaking his head. He’d done it again. He was sick of this feeling ... yet he knew nothing else.

‘One too many’ was something Paddy hoped he’d grow out of.

Always so much fun at the time, always such a tragic mistake the following morning.

For reasons he didn’t understand, his brain also wondered

if his love for Grandpa's medicine was also a factor into his 'spending money' the moment he got his mits on it. He was just your average 'weekend millionaire' from Friday night to Sunday then back to the breadline Monday to Friday afternoon. Surely this wasn't a good way to live?

'It's fine, it's fine, what good weekends they are!' another part of his brain countered.

Schizophrenic much, Paddy?

Wright put an end to such contemplations as he entered with Bradley in tow. Bradley's hand hovered over his gun. Wright was calm as he rested a hand on Paddy's shoulder.

"Right. You're nicked!"

"And you, sir, have just set a new record on the wankometer," Paddy said, falling back into character. He hated authority. If you asked him to articulate why, it would all come back to blaming other people for where he was; who he was. The Police were part of that. Whinging and playing the victim was easy – which was why so many people were good at it, Paddy included. Deep down he supposed he knew as much but it was better to keep the truth at arm's length – no matter the cost.

Wright pulled Paddy to his feet and kept a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Sooner or later you're gonna get the book thrown at you, Brennan! I just hope I'm around to see it!"

Paddy laughed. It was all one big joke. His smile faded, and the facade dropped, just for a moment. He looked back at Wright with arrogant eyes and pulled himself free. "Did you know how good a spin bowler, I am! Could have been the next Warnie you know. I could get ya both with my doodlesra!"

Wright produced a TASER. "Please, give me a reason; I've been itching to use this thing."

Paddy swallowed and nodded his head. "I'll stay quiet, no problems."

TASER stood for "Thomas A. Swift Electric Rifle" and was a registered trade mark for any dart-firing stun gun made

by TASER International. The electroshock weapons used electrical current to upset muscle control – something known as ‘neuromuscular incapacitation’, where the stimulation of sensory and motor nerves caused involuntary muscle contractions.

Wherever Taser’s went, controversy followed. Three fatalities had occurred in Australia thus far – one of which was a man in Townsville who had been tasered up to 28 times. Wright loved the things. In fact, sometimes he found the temptation to ‘try them out’ irresistible. He looked Paddy up and down, his tongue flitting from his mouth like a voracious serpent.

There was a ‘crack’ as the TASER was discharged. Paddy was struck by a dart – hitting his chest and barrelling him to the ground. He wanted to speak, to move, to do anything, yet the 50,000 volts had rendered him immobile.

“Hey,” Bradley said. “He said he’d stay quiet!”

Wright smiled. “I thought he said he was going to start a *riot* and cause *problems*. No wonder the little lady says I need my hearing tested.”

Bradley looked over his shoulder then, comfortable they weren’t being watched, down at Paddy. “Did the trick, though.”

Holding the X26 TASER up, Wright considered firing a second dart. He loved the rollout of these devices, the only action of any value the Police Minister at the time, Judy Spence, had ever been involved with. She was instrumental in giving an early trial a green light, and a ‘Gumby’ like the over-educated experience-lacking Neil Roberts wasn’t likely to stop the police from using them. He would probably be too busy worrying about the other aspects of his bloated portfolio: Corrective Services and Emergency Services.

Wright put his hand on Paddy’s shoulder and Bradley helped pull the youth to his feet.

Outside the Ipswich Magistrates Court, Paddy wore a velvet, crumpled suit that may well have been the fashion in his grandfather's day. It had a 'Salvation Army' price sticker on the back of the jacket. He smiled wryly as he struck up a cigarette, waiting outside the entrance to the courthouse. He took a drag and pondered on how things had gone.

A man in his early 30's, Dave, approached; a rugged-looking tradie wearing a blue work shirt, stubbies, and work boots: the type of bloke you might see on a 'KingGee' work wear advertisement. He wore a 'Parramatta Eels' limited edition, signed 266+ most capped Eel 'Nathan Hindmarsh' cap on his head with more pride than the team's current form warranted, and looked as though he'd just walked off a construction site.

"You're a bloody wood duck, mate! What'd they give you this time?"

Paddy snorted. "Bastards fined me again."

Dave shook his head. "You're lucky you didn't get old man Faulkner. He gets you in his court and he'll let you have it with both barrels!"

Paddy put his arm around Dave. "Never mind that, do you know how much I had to pay for this jacket? Almost new prices, I'm outraged!"

Dave shrugged him off. "Dosh goes to a good cause, whinger!"

"Well, screw it all," Paddy said. "Let's get the amber fluid in motion!"

"No thanks! One day you'll end up wrapped around a power pole ... or worse, you might hurt someone minding their own business! When will you wake up!"

"Steady on, mate!"

Dave turned around, fuming. "I'm just here to give you a lift, that's it."

They walked, Dave itching to say more. "I don't get it! You've got a hot car, a nice bird, and a job that pays the rent. But ya just won't grow up and ..."

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Paddy snarled. “And what? Be a man like you?”

“Why not?” Dave said, thinking about it.

“So I end up having the bank take my house, an ex-wife who hates my guts, and kids I only see every second weekend? The great Australian dream!”

Dave scowled, his face contorting. He advanced ready to trade blows but settled for poking Paddy in the chest. “That’s just what happens to a plant when two people don’t water it. At least I’m having a crack at doing the right thing now! More than anyone can say about you!”

Paddy held up his hands in apology. “Come on, big man! Go easy.”

Dave pushed Paddy away. “Go easy? You can talk! Besides, things aren’t all bad with Bree. You’ve seen her!”

Paddy nodded. “That I have.”

Brianna Forbes was a 25-year-old post grad law student but more importantly, a Brisbane Broncos cheerleader. There were more B’s for Bree where they came from too, such as ‘blonde’, ‘busty’, and ‘boisterous’. No, Paddy supposed things weren’t all bad with Bree.

Dave made for a gold VS Holden Commodore Ute, entered it, and slammed the door so hard it threatened to come off its hinges. Paddy jumped in the other side.

Dave let out a ‘humph’.

Paddy shrugged his shoulders: he’d been suspicious of Holdens ever since his grandad told him how he’d had to put a bag of wheat in the back of his EH to stop it sliding. “Been wasting more money?”

Dave grinned, all forgiven. “Can you pick what’s new?”

“Yeah ... the momo wood grain gear knob to match the hideous wood grain wheel, auto meter tacho with shift light, beyond tacky... and let’s not mention the embarrassing VX Maloo body kit.”

“You missed the best bits,” Dave assured him. “Lowered King suspension, Group A bonnet scoop, Exedy race clutch, K-Mac adjustable strut brace, and really, you didn’t pick up on the dual x-box performance exhaust system?”

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Paddy laughed. "Mate, it doesn't matter how much lipstick you put on the pig."

Dave scowled. "I don't know why I put up with you."

Dave got the motor running and pulled away from the curb.

Paddy gave that some thought. "Yeah, me either."

Chapter 2 – Good Girls Like Bad Boys

A neat, aluminium fence surrounded a modest home which sat on a large block. Landscaped gardens full of Australian natives were being over-run by a typically rapacious bougainvillea.

This ruthless plant's disarming purple flowers were probably just there to distract passers-by while it continued its mission to overgrow the hapless, dithering Lilly Pilly plants around it. Soon it would own the entire yard. The vigorous climber didn't know it had been named in honour of the explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who made the first French voyage around the world, however even if it was sentient, it's probable he would have been viewed as little else other than potential fertiliser upon expiration.

A micro-windmill blew gently out the front. The breeze picked up and the speed increased. Paddy's Falcon turned into the drive and blazed up the driveway, gravel crunching underneath in protest.

Two galahs sat on the overhead power line and watched on. They had a 'squawk' at each other. The gleaming vehicle beneath them looked a place as good as any to excrete. The fact the owner took some pride in the exterior only made the target all the more enticing.

Paddy walked into a retiring, ship-shape living room.

Bill, late 50's, tall as a giraffe, wore a singlet and stubbies and sat back on a chair chugging a XXXX Gold. His feet rested on another chair. Cricket was on an old CRT TV. Bill didn't like the Plasma ones, he was sure they gave you cancer. As for LCD, they were just a poor man's plasma, and they probably gave you cancer, too. In fact, now that he thought about it, the C probably stood for cancer. 'Likely Cancer-causing Device'. Yes, that worked. He hadn't paid much

attention when the newer LED sets appeared: interest waning as soon as it became apparent the word wasn't followed by 'Zeppelin'.

"Thought you'd be at 'work'."

"On arvo shift this week. Times change every week."

Bill nodded his disapproval. The boy was good for nothing – why couldn't his daughter see that? Sometimes he wished he could just bury the string of boyfriends that badgered his daughters in the backyard until his girls got some sense about them. He'd be running out of plot space by now, he supposed. In addition, there were some annoying laws, probably made by those without daughters, prohibiting such actions.

"Local coal mine's nearly dried up but if you're keen, and you'd work like a Trojan, I could talk to a mate who's working on starting up at Ebenezer again."

Paddy frowned. "I don't work like a virus ... but no, I heard it's a longshot – they don't have the dosh and may not have the infrastructure to support it," he said.

Bill's frown went further south. "We got trucks, rail, and the Port Of Brisbane. They've upgraded the Ipswich motorway so it's now a more deluxe goat track. It won't be a problem. If you don't wanna work then what are ya cut out for? To flap your yap on the blower all day like a gossiping Jezebel? Why can't you get a real job?"

"I have a real job. Call Centres are the front door to all companies. Check it out on 'You Tube', mate!"

"You what? You must have a hankering to work in India or the Philippines or some such rot – that's where all those jobs end up."

Bill put down his beer and fired a glare at Paddy. Maybe that wouldn't be so bad! Perhaps the lout should stick with it until they moved his job, and hopefully him with it, offshore.

Maureen, sixties, weathered features camouflaged by immaculate make-up, entered with a plate of raisin toast and a cup of coffee. She sat them near Bill and smiled at Paddy.

Showing she's no Mother Theresa, she then fired a filthy look at Bill.

Bill looked to ground sheepishly but obstinately refused to move his feet from the other chair. She forced a smile and looked at Paddy.

"Hello, dear! Can I make you a sandwich? The pumpkin bread's just come out of the oven."

Paddy made pistols with his hands, postured like an uncoordinated Wiggle, and grinned.

"You rock my world, Mrs G!"

"Oh that's the least I can do for my Lauren's sweetheart. You go up and I'll bring it to you in a jiffy."

Bill eyed his wife: she was still a fox. Man could not live on bread alone.

"Sweet!" Paddy said.

Bill shook his head. "Pumpkin bread's not sweet ... bloody idiot!"

Maureen ignored him. "Are you coming to church with us this Sunday?"

Bill rolled his eyes. "I'm not, I'll give you the drum."

Paddy racked his brain on the search for an excuse. He really wanted the bread! Church though? He figured he could still get the bread without going to church.

"Mum says I shouldn't ... I'm a protestant," he said meekly.

Maureen frowned, letting her smile drop. "It's only because you don't know any better!"

She lined him up in a square, direct gaze. "Do you know the difference between your faith and Catholicism, Paddy?"

He was being tested!

"Well," he said, feigning deep thought, "we believe the bible is the final authority, not the Church, and our faith and salvation is solely based on Christ, not deeds. Been that way since the 16th century when a monk named Luther penned his protest against the Catholic Church allowing folk to buy their way out of sin."

“Strewth,” Bill said. “You been smoking bible pages?”

Maureen frowned for a moment until her social graces brought a thin smile back. “Things have changed several centuries later, my dear,” she said. “We’re quite progressive these days.”

“Sure you are,” he said, “but mum, you know, is mum!”

He put his hands up helplessly then excused himself and lobbed up the stairs.

He knew that Wikipedia session would come in handy one day!

“Bye darling!” Maureen said sweetly, smile back in place. “You can’t help it if you mother is a guileless twit,” she added when he was out of earshot.

“Judge not!” Bill said, appearing surprised he remembered something that may have been in the bible. “Or lest you ... might be ... could appear in court or some such,” he added, losing the thread.

Her smile turned into a frown once more. She set burning eyes on Bill who became nervous. She whipped out a cigarette lighter, ignited it, and pushed it at his feet. He grunted and his feet quickly left the chair.

“Sorry, love,” he managed. He recalled a time when he dared her to burn him with a lighter. It hadn’t ended well for him.

Lauren, 21, wearing a natty skirt and blouse, sat back watching her T-box. She was a short, mousy blonde with modern glasses and an I-Pod hanging around her neck. She smiled as Paddy entered and kissed her.

The bedroom was modern with a neat single ensemble, night stand, computer desk with SONY vaio lap top, topaz-coloured curtains and a large window. Lecture notes, textbooks and flowcharts were littered about the desk copiously; more work than play for this girl.

“Hey. What’s up?”

“Still struggling with my thesis - do you think my abstract

has to include conclusions?”

Paddy pulled her close. “I conclude you need some R&R. You know?”

She snorted. “I think I’ll be marked down if I don’t ... so do I became a slave to antiquated methodology just for a higher mark? Or do I challenge the paradigm?”

There was a ‘knock’ on the door. They separated.

“Yeah?” Lauren enquired, expecting her dad.

Lauren’s sister, Jessica, 23, fit, athletic, wearing a bathrobe, entered.

With long auburn hair and a sleek, slender torso, she looked nothing like her sister.

“Oh, hi, Paddy.” Jessica looked around the room before her eyes rested on Lauren. “You seen the GHD?”

“No. You had it last - at 08-hundred yesterday. I did remind you to put it away!”

Jessica rolled her eyes, mouthed ‘boring’ to Paddy, huffed and closed the door.

Paddy watched after her. While Lauren was the girl for him, her sister might be the other ‘girl’ for him. If things ever went badly. Perhaps both of them? He mentally ‘slapped’ himself. She was a looker though!

He realised he was still watching after her. He set his eyes back on Lauren. *What kind of man did he want to be?*

“GHD? Stay away from the drugs, babe! They’ll warp your mind!”

Lauren’s hazel eyes looked him up and down. She liked her men dumb – and with Paddy she often thought she’d struck the jackpot.

“It’s a hair straightener. Don’t the males of today know anything?”

“There are some things we blokes make a living out of not knowing.”

Paddy locked his arms around Lauren and they kissed. They fell onto the bed and Paddy laughed.

“Hey, did I tell you I put the Yella Terra rockers in the other day?”

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Lauren pulled away from Paddy in a huff. “The money you spend on that depreciating boat anchor! Why can’t you get a statistically-more-likely-to-remain-in-one-piece car like a Corolla?”

Paddy made a face. “A Corolla? You are on drugs!”

Lauren folded her arms and scowled.

Chapter 3 – Into the Valley

Lavish decorations and bright colours juxtaposed with grim faces suggested there was a party and the staff working the phones weren't invited. Paddy sat before a computer and wore a headset. He munched on a greasy, oily, burger.

Three other workers sat in the same pod. One of them was a girl in her early 20's who jogged on the spot and stretched as she talked to a customer. Paddy checked out her form as his computer beeped.

He slapped himself mentally again – looking at other birds was natural – but sometimes it turned into more than a look. Even if he didn't cross any lines he wondered if he'd ever be able to tame his X-rated imagination? While lust seemed harmless enough at first, the more you courted it, the more elaborate, daring, and eventually nauseating that courtship became.

“You're speaking with the man. What's doing?”

The girl shook her head at Paddy's casual, unprofessional manner.

Paddy nodded, listening to the voice on the other end.

“If I can start with your name and date of birth? Right. Mr Purves. You're a bit of a bird watcher, eh? Me too! Okay, so I'll just get your account number - yep - hit me, cobba.”

Paddy read a box that popped up on the screen.

“Okay, the computer says I just need to transfer you to overdues. Hang ten, sport.”

Paddy pushed some buttons on the phone but ended up leaving the customer on hold. “Now how do I transfer again?”

A male, middle-aged supervisor with an eyebrow piercing and clothing ten years too young for him, approached. His tie could be on acid. He eyed the burger and Paddy floundering to attempt to transfer his customer.

Paddy stabbed a button. “How about that one? No. Nothing doin.”

“If you’re attempting to transfer your customer, it’s all online under ‘processes’. Just type in, oh I don’t know, perhaps ‘transfer’ into the keyword search?”

Paddy grinned. “Now where’s the challenge in that? How about this one? I’ve got a sophisticated process of elimination, that’s right it’s a big word so you can go and look it up, going on here!”

He stabbed another button. A light on the phone went out.

The supervisor shook his head. “You’ve just hung up on your customer.”

Paddy laughed. “Problem solved, then!” He took a chomp of his burger.

“You know they’ll kill you,” the supervisor continued.

Paddy held up his food like a prize. A bit fell to the floor.

“They’re what I deserve.” He held the half-eaten burger towards his super. “You want a bite?”

The super watched on aghast as a bit of beetroot fell to the floor. “You logged in five minutes late again this morning. This won’t do.”

Paddy laughed again. “I’ve got a secret for you, bud. We’re not working for ASIO, here. Relax!”

“I also overheard you use the words ‘cobba’ and ‘sport’, hardly very professional.”

Paddy pulled off the headset. “Are you having a go? You’re wearing a dickhead tie, mate, so we’ve established we both have ‘opportunities for improvement’.”

The super shook his head. “You’re worthless.” He walked away.

Paddy slyly kicked away the bit of burger that had fallen to the floor and nodded agreement sheepishly. He then laughed.

A thin man in his mid-forties with glasses and a Hawaiian shirt and cargos slid over to him.

“Watch your back, buddy. The super has it in for you.”

“He can suck my big one,” Paddy said with a grin. “Don’t worry, Lester, I know how to deal with dickheads.”

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Lester smiled a toothy grin. “Well, buddy, get back to your net browsing, I’ll look after the router logs so they can’t ping you.”

Paddy hit alt-tab on his keyboard and looked up another You-Tube video of funny cats. This one played the piano! Gold!

Sitting back at home chugging a beer, Paddy looked at the clock.

10.05 P.M.

He burped and dialled a number. “Come on dickhead, pick up!” Eventually, there was an answer.

“Yeah, it’s Paddy here, my neck’s no good again, so going to have to talk to Workcover and all that again. Yeah, dunno when I’ll be in, I mean it’s just killing me having to cradle the phone and talk to you, I’m dying here, so can we get on with it? Too much pain, gotta go, ouch, argh – asshole! No, no not you – the pain, the pain!”

He laughed softly at whatever was being said on the other end of the phone.

“Oh, you’ll be short? Yes, yes that sounds like a real problem for you. Maybe you need more staff as a contingency, eh? I’d better go, need a painkiller now. I know, wish I cared more, but there it is.”

He slammed the phone down and finished his beer.

“Dickhead. What’s he want me to do, call the Toowoomba Choral Society up to provide some background music for his crying?”

He and his beer became acquainted once more.

The supervisor appeared angry as he spoke on the phone. “Yes, we’d like you to follow him, get some photos, I’m sure it’s a scam. We didn’t get him last time, so I want you to do better this time!” The supervisor hung up curtly.

Lester appeared from around the pod, raised an eyebrow, then slid back to his desk. He looked around to ensure no-one was watching him then made a phone call.

“Buddy, it’s on like Donkey Kong!”

The private dick sat in a black SUV across the road and up the street from Paddy’s house. He got his camera ready and waited for the inevitable. He should have nabbed him before but had been plain unlucky.

For reasons he didn’t know, Paddy had been one step ahead of him last time. What were the odds of that happening again?

Paddy opened a box and pulled out a neck brace. “Hello, old friend,” he muttered.

He tried it on for size. Best thing he’d ever bought from Ebay!

The private dick saw Paddy’s front door open through his side mirror. He powered down the window and stuck out his camera.

“Here we go,” he said.

Paddy hobbled out like a man on his last legs. His neck brace was on and he didn’t turn his head.

The zombie staggered around the yard, locked the dog around the back, then shambled to the letterbox, attempted to bend over then fell in a heap, unable to move.

The detective lowered his camera. “You’ve got to be shitting me!”

He threw his camera into the back seat, took a sigh, and

opened his door.

Paddy lay on his lawn, looking up at the sky. He started to cry.

“Help! Why did this have to happen to me at work! I was just doing my job when my neck went at work. It’s not fair these things happen at work!”

He continued to cry until a man in a suit stood over him.

Yep, same dickhead detective that tailed him last time.

“Let me give you a hand,” the detective offered glumly. Today was not going to be a pay-day. Not at all.

Paddy and Lester sat back in the sports bar of the Raceview Tavern. Neck brace and any sign of ‘the pain’ was long gone.

Paddy nursed his beer in one hand and a KENO ticket in the other. Lester was almost his mirror image, although his other hand held a TAB ticket. He watched the horses go around on SKY as though his life might change if the nags followed his script.

“Do you think they wanna be doing this?” Paddy said in thought. “Running around in circles all day? I mean, that’d give me the shits.”

Lester considered that. “I dunno. So long as they win dosh for me, I could care less. Besides, that’s all we do, although on a supposedly grander scale!”

Paddy nodded but wondered about that. We had a choice; he wasn’t so sure they did.

He liked horses. Dogs, horses and funny cats had a place in his heart.

Lester’s eyes drifted to the young bloke behind the bar, who offered him a cheeky wink. Despite his run on the nags, he could still get lucky before this day was done. He offered the fellow his best smile.

Paddy grinned. “You should ask him out, mate. He’s not

the worst sort I've seen, if you're into blokes that is, and I'm not, just sayin' is all. I'm not blind here."

Lester grinned merrily. "I dunno. He's an PC man, I'm an Apple man, could be oil and water, my friend."

"Pfft. I dunno, you Geeks! So long as the piano-playing cats load I don't care what the computer is! I'll be back" he said, wandering away.

"I'll be here," Lester assured him, eyes returning to the nags.

Paddy walked into the gaming lounge. Pretty lights assailed his senses at once. There they were, his greedy friends that promised more than they usually delivered.

'Jetsetter', 'Jackpot Carnival' and 'Fastlane' were favourites, along with good old 'Pyramids' if it was linked to the 'Money-train'.

Anything that had a jackpot attached to it was fair game.

He stood at a machine and fed it five dollars. He also fed the machine next to it. Operating the two machines at once, he put his bet up to one dollar a spin and watched the money go down. He held down the 'gamble' button so he didn't have to wait for the results of each spin.

Suddenly there was a series of car horn sounds and lights flashed! A jackpot would be his!

"Yeah, baby!" he yelled as cars and amounts spun on the screen before him. After some more button mashing, a 'jackpot' of \$77.50 was all his for the taking.

He danced, spun, got on all fours and started break-dancing, much to the amusement of several other patrons.

"It's mine, oh yeah, I'm living the dream!"

A figure stood alongside him. The patsy who hands over the dosh, he assumed. He turned.

The private detective he'd seen earlier smiled at him. "You certainly were."

Paddy instinctively reached for his neck. "Ouch, there it goes again," he said weakly.

Inside the Manager's office, a Greek man named Otis in his early 40's, sporting a neatly trimmed goatee, sat behind a desk. His houndstooth suit was a size too large. He wore a gold medallion and had three shirt buttons too many undone. Everything about him was slightly exaggerated.

The supervisor stood alongside him. Paddy sat before them, a fish out of water, arms folded.

Otis slapped the desk. "Nice gold logie performance at my expense!"

"Hey, hey," Paddy said. "It comes, it goes."

"Oh you'll be going, alright!" Otis yelled. "Fae skata kai psoga re malaka!"

Paddy wondered what that meant. It didn't sound endearing.

"Yeah? Well, you can stick your souvlaki up your moussaka!" he managed.

Raceview hadn't been far enough from Rosewood. Yes, that had been his mistake. He should have found a drinking hole further afield!

Otis sighed and appeared to calm down. "And when you're not ripping me off, and you do appear, you're always late. It's like working with 'Where's Wally' here!"

Paddy responded heatedly. "You even count my minutes? Do I also use too many squares of bog paper? What don't you pricks count?"

"That's enough language, thank you," the super chirped dutifully.

"Hey! I'm talking to the boss, not his bum-buddy! I do a good job out there! Customers love me! I won the 'special encouragement' award three months running!"

Otis shrugged his shoulders. "Eh, katheki, I'm trying to run a business here, okay? It's all about efficiency!"

"Mate, when I went to bed last night this was still Rosewood? Did I just wake up in New Delhi?"

Otis was suddenly distracted. He licked his lips. "Nah, but now that you mention it, I could go some Indian for lunch."

The super whipped out a pen and pad and started to jot.

“Noted, sir. The dahl and rice special again?”

“Yeah but don’t be stingy on the naan bread this time: I like the cheese and garlic one. Buy any main that ends in ‘ghee’, they’re all winners.”

“Affirmative,” replied the super. This little call centre had sewn up the South-Western roof sheeting market, and one day he would be managing it. He wished his parents still spoke to him ... so they could see how his star had risen.

Paddy was in two minds. Should he be insulted that they weren’t even considering him anymore? His dilemma trumped by something as unimportant as a hungry stomach? Perhaps he should let them finish the conversation – after all Otis might mellow with some good tucker coming his way.

He decided he was outraged more than anything else!

“Hey! Back to me here! So do I get another one of those letters to wipe my arse with or what?”

Otis was grim. “I’m keen of hearing, Paddy, and all I hear from you are excuses. So, nah! No more letters! You’re fire...”

Paddy raised his hand. “Hold it right there! You don’t get the satisfaction of firing me. Bugger you - tooroo! I quit – get that into you!”

Paddy snatched the pad and pencil from the Supervisor. He wrote, ‘WANKER’ in large letters, ripped off the top sheet, and stuffed it in the Supervisor’s pocket aggressively.

“You don’t like gays do you, homophobe,” said the Supervisor brashly.

Paddy shook his head. "Don't pull that card on me, knobnuts," he said. "Arseholes be arseholes, and guess what you are? That's right, you're an A-one, A-grade, arse-wiping Arsehole!"

On the Warrego highway, just outside Marburg, Paddy drove his car at a sensible speed as the sun finished putting itself to bed. The Cleveland motor growled as he sang along to Jet.

Paddy nodded in time to the music, thumping the steering wheel. He couldn't believe how smooth the ride was – since he'd redone the suspension with King springs, front shocks and a Pedders heavy duty sway bar.

"I'm sacking the man cause the man is a thief.

I'm kicking the plan before the plan kicks me. I'm gonna get me, get me out of here.

I'm gonna get me, get me out of here! Wooooo!"

The car slowed and turned left into Queen street, Marburg, accelerating up to 60 kph.

"Screw 'em," he yelled to himself.

A young, female cyclist ahead kept well to the left of the road. Her cycling was erratic and she wasn't wearing a helmet, something against the law in Queensland. Paddy prepared to check her out. He didn't want to but her form looked fine. He'd heard, when he was dragged along to Church, about a bloke called 'Job' who had made an agreement with his eyes never to look lustfully at a woman. Fancy that the bloke beat him on two counts – he could control his eyes and with a name that like, had to be gainfully employed. Paddy was content with Lauren but that didn't stop him looking, if you'd had steak the last twenty nights, chicken or fish seemed appealing.

Deep down he suspected the more you fed lust, the more it owned you. There was daily resistance or a downward spiral.

His car was almost alongside the cyclist, who seemed to be sobbing. Paddy slowed the beast as she lost control of the bike and steered sharply in front of the Falcon. He clipped her, sending woman and bike sprawling.

Paddy's eyes widened. He wrestled with the wheel and slammed on the brakes. The wheels locked and the car stopped obediently with a 'screech'. Smoke and skid marks told the story.

"Shit, shit, shit!"

Paddy looked back at the miasma of smoke through his rear vision mirror. As it dissipated he could make out the form of the girl. He hardly clipped her but she wasn't moving.

David Hearne

He opened the door then stopped. “No. No! I’m sober as! I wasn’t speeding! Shit!”

He peered back through the half-open door. Still no movement. He knew he had to help her – it was ‘the right thing to do’. He licked his lips, indecision telling.

He shut the door.

“Sober as ... but who’s gonna believe that, man?” Headlights approached in the distance.

“I’m not going down for this. You turned in front of me, you stupid bitch!”

He floored it and the car thundered away from the scene of the incident. The cyclist remained motionless - crumpled body and bike lying side by side.

From a nearby, rural driveway, a boy brought his bike to a sudden halt. Charlie, an aboriginal in his early teens, watched after the Ford.

He chewed on a raw onion. He rode ‘hell for leather’ up the drive towards a house. Charlie looked back to see another car make its way down the road slowly. He tilted his head and furrowed his brow, intrigued by what he saw.

Chapter 4 – From the Frying Pan ...

The Falcon rumbled up Paddy's driveway, wobbling all the way. Paddy killed the engine, opened the door, and exited the vehicle, trembling. He slumped down near his car, cursed, picked himself up, and looked back down the road. He looked at his trembling hands then made for the front door.

Paddy paced around the living room, running his hand over his head repeatedly, mumbling incoherent ramblings. Photos of a couple in their fifties adorned a nearby wall. He looked up at them then away in shame.

"Poor bitch! Why did I run away? Because you're a gutless wonder, just like dad always said; because they're gonna think it was your fault, yeah! So ... now what, eh? Now what, virtuoso?"

He paced a tighter circle, running his hand through his hair, reaching for the phone and hitting a speed-dial button.

'Dave home' was written by the button. No answer. "Come on! Where are you, Dave!"

He tried the next speed dial which had 'Dave mobile' written next to it.

"Come on, come on, damn you!"

The mobile answered. *"What'd you want?"*

"Dave! Mate, I've ... I've really done it this time!"

"Yeah? Now what?"

Paddy took a breath. "I've, no shit, Dave, I've, I've freakin' killed someone."

Dave's VS ute pulled up outside Paddy's house. Headlights illuminated the street. It stopped. The dog popped out of his kennel, saw Dave, and sauntered back in with a yawn. No Frisbees.

Inside, Paddy sat in a ball, back to the wall. He fell to his side and curled up into the fetal position, his mind elsewhere. A curtain picked up the breeze and danced apathetically. Dave staggered in, unsteady, and approached cautiously, wide-eyed and shaken.

“Paddy? What happened?”

Paddy’s jaw trembled as he sat up and stuttered the words. “I ... killed some girl. A cyclist. I just ... I fled. I ran away! Just like always.”

Dave raised an eyebrow and sat on a chair before Paddy. He put his face in his hands and wiped sweat away.

“Right. Where and when?”

“A few hours ago up on Queen. I killed her, Dave, but I was as sober as. She turned in front of me, I swear! I swear it!” Paddy slapped the back of his own head. “Dumb boy. Dumb boy! Dad, it wasn’t my fault!”

Dave nodded. “Right.”

Paddy stood and walked around Dave, eyeing him.

“What? You don’t believe me? Huh? Is that it? No-one else does - why should you?”

Paddy slammed his hand down on the table and sent crockery and a glass flying with a ‘smash’.

“No one ever believes me!”

Dave motioned for Paddy to cool it. “I believe you, okay? Doesn’t mean you’re off the hook!”

Paddy’s stance softened. Dave rubbed his hands together.

“You’ve fled the scene of an accident. With your form you’ll go down. Did anyone see you?”

Paddy tried to digest what Dave had said. Yes, with his form he would ‘go down’.

No doubt.

Onto the only question that mattered right now. “No. I don’t think so.”

Dave nodded again, hatching a plan. “You said it was her

fault?”

Paddy nodded. “Yeah ... but I did it ... I gotta fess!”

“What are you, Catholic? If you go to the cops, you’re screwed! You’ll get manslaughter at best!”

Dave stood and took Paddy by the shoulders. “You’re going to play it cool.”

“But she didn’t move, man, she’s dead ... and ...”

“She killed herself! You said as much!” Dave insisted.

Paddy fought back tears and broke free of Dave’s grasp. He looked out the window to see a full moon looking back at him. How could the outside world continue such customariness during such calamity?

It had been like that when his dad died. Puerile TV advertisements continued as though nothing had happened, the sun rose and fell, and all the hard work they’d put into his XA Falcon remained ... yet he hadn’t lived to see it finished. He’d been angry at the world for daring to go-on without so much as a respectful hiatus.

How dare it?

Did it not know a giant among men had fallen?

Dave’s voice snapped his focus back to the present.

“Here’s what you’re gonna do. Nothing. I’m going to go over your car tomorrow and see if I can mask the damage. She’ll be right.”

Paddy shook his head and backed away, incredulous. “She’ll be right? She’ll be right! She’s a piece of roadkill! How the hell is she gonna be right?”

Dave clutched Paddy by the shoulders. “Shut up and listen to me! We can still save your hide.”

Dave gave Paddy a circumspect glance. Why was he trying to save him?

Did he even like Paddy? He didn’t know for sure: all he knew was that he’d become a ‘keeper’ for all his friends since Tezza died. ‘She’ll be right,’ was the great Australian axiom but the night Tezza took his own life because ‘blokes sort out their own ‘head’ problems’ had changed Dave forever. The black dog wasn’t going to feast today! Another mate wasn’t

going to disappear on his watch, not if he could help it. Everyone had their collection of demons to manage and Dave was no exception to the rule. He understood that much, at least.

Paddy dropped his head. “My hide ain’t worth saving.”

Dave opened a cupboard and pulled out a bottle of Jim Beam. “Bullshit.” He took two glasses and poured for both of them. He finished his in one second and began to pour another. Paddy wrapped his fingers around his glass and looked back at Dave with uncertain, frightened eyes.

“That cost me fifty clams, you know,” he said to Dave ungraciously.

Crickets chirped in the still of night. The dog slept, snoring softly. His paws twitched as he dreamt mysterious dreams. A single window was lit – Paddy’s living room.

Paddy swigged some more bourbon, neat, from his glass. The bottle was nearly empty.

“Did I mention I lost my job? Just like the old man said, ‘born to lose’.”

“You’re shitting me? How come?”

“Because they’re bastards is how come! Funny how you think you’ll be someone when you’re a kid, reckon you can be anything. I wanted to be an astronaut – closest I got was being a ‘spaced-out man’. I hate this shit town.”

“It’s not that bad! At least we’ve got an Eagle Boys! Then there’s Wayne’s World – I’ve got many a bargain there – like those 100 paddle-pop sticks for a dollar!” Dave said, trying to find a positive somewhere in Paddy’s life. Crisis or not, he always kept his back to the sunshine. “Not sure why I bought them now I come to think about it.”

“It is that bad, unless you like camp drafting, country music, and freakin’ steam trains, maybe!”

Dave sipped bourbon dourly. He forced a smile. “At least

this day can't get any worse for ya."

The phone 'rang'.

Paddy glanced at the clock.

11.17 P.M.

Agog, Paddy stared at Dave, time frozen as the clock ticked and the phone continued to ring.

"Pick it up," Dave instructed him.

Paddy reached out and picked up the phone circumspectly, as though it was a serpent. With his other hand, he grabbed the bottle of bourbon.

"Yeah?"

"Paddy?"

He recognised her voice at once.

Lauren.

"Yeah, babe? What's up?"

Lauren sobbed down the other end of the line. *"It's Jess. There's been an accident. She was on her bike and..."*

Paddy stood up, taken aback, his eyes saucers. The bottle of bourbon fell to the floor with a 'clang'.

"Someone ran her down. They didn't stop. She's dead. How could someone do that?"

"What is it?" Dave asked, shaking his head in search of sobriety. Paddy lowered the phone, still able to hear Lauren.

"Paddy, why? Why would someone do that? Paddy?"

"What? What is it?" stammered Dave.

Paddy dropped the phone. He tried to summon words but none came.

"Paddy?"