

Colin Palmer

BILLY

Going where darkness fears to tread



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**Billy. Going where
darkness fears to tread...**

«Издательские решения»

Palmer C. D.

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He was unique. Or so he believed. He packed a lifetime into his 21 years of Life and now waits for the return of an uncontrollable evil created by Mother Earth herself. Or is it?

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Chapter One

“Climate Control”

10:00 a.m. The days predicted maximum had already been exceeded.

The forecast was similar to yesterday, a maximum of thirty-two degrees Celsius and a slight southeasterly breeze to cool things down by mid-afternoon. It was one of those perfect summer days, not a cloud in the sky, its perfect azure untainted from horizon to horizon. The sun shone down on already crowded beaches. Sun worshippers arrived early to get the pick of the spots. Their liberally oil coated bodies glimmered in the sunlight and contrasted sharply with irregular beach goers with dull, white, zinc creamed noses and big all encompassing hats and tee shirts. Families and couples, groups of friends, rich people, poor people, middle Australia, they were all equal here at the beach.

Sydney, the unofficial capital of Australia and home to over three million people, on this holiday weekend the heat was driving them all to the beach. The roads were packed with cars, ferries were loaded to the gunwales, bus stop queues stretched fifty metres and were growing and all were heading for the same location. The beach... any beach, the closest cooling beach.

11:00 a.m. Thirty-six degrees.

Those already there, the lucky ones, didn't know about the climbing temperature. They had the surf to cool them down. Some noted the excess heat radiating off the sand and the overt warmth of the water, which was not unexpected. They cavorted, they read, they napped, they swam and they surfed and Life was fun!

Noon. Forty degrees.

Within the steel, concrete, bitumen and glass of the city the heat was confined and almost ten degrees hotter than coastal areas. The radio weatherman couldn't explain it. Two more degrees would be a record for this day of the year, three more a record for the month, five more an all time Sydney record. Already the elderly were collapsing, dying in non air-conditioned homes, shops and on the streets. Young children were suffering from dehydration and heat stroke. Parents had begun to panic. Warnings were broadcast on radio and television as emergency services were stretched to capacity.

1:00 p.m. A new record was set.

1:13 it was forty-eight degrees.

1:25. fifty-three degrees.

1:30 p.m. sixty degrees was registered.

Bitumen roads melted. Peak hour like traffic was literally stuck. The Sydney Harbour Bridge could be seen buckling, stretching. It groaned so loud that people abandoned marooned, overheated vehicles and ran for the perceived safety of the bridge ends but the heat and sticky, sucking bitumen

made movement almost impossible. The soles of their footwear melted and their screams of pain barely registered above the cries of the bridge itself. Some managed to scale the safety fences. Their hands, arms and any exposed flesh burned instantly when it made contact with the bridge. They died screaming as their bodies toasted to a crisp. The more desperate and athletic slapped down onto the water below with a sound like a watermelon striking concrete.

2:00 p.m. Seventy-five degrees.

Buildings, cars, trucks, service stations, houses, people both dead and dying spontaneously burst into flames. The throngs at the beaches were no more, their charred corpses now rolling and burning across the sand. The masses that reached the perceived safety of the surf had been literally boiled alive. No structures remained intact.

3:00 p.m. The temperature peaked at ninety degrees and finally dropped to eighty-five. Within thirty minutes it had returned to forty degrees.

At 4:00 p.m. zero degrees registered, if there was anything left to measure that fact.

Heavy rain began to fall followed by sleet which progressively turned to snow as the temperature plummeted to minus twenty. Exposed fires were extinguished in the extreme cold.

5:00 p.m. minus sixty degrees.

A man dressed like a boy stood on the cliffs of South Head. His smile was broad and he raised his arms, looking upward to a still, clear sky. Earlier that morning any interested observer would have seen him carry out the same action. He had stood there all day watching the mayhem. As each hour passed or at a particularly satisfying act of destruction his smile could be seen to grow. It had grown largest when people in the surf and on the Harbour were boiled alive, their screams and desperate pleas appearing to feed his satisfaction.

He continued to watch unaffected by nature's cruelty. Furrows in the earth appeared, sucking in the damage, consuming all before it burning or no', and the soft hue of romantic light provided a beautiful backdrop to this, his most perfect day.

Chapter Two “Mt Warning”

Her tortured squeals of terror and pitiful grunts of desperation echoed across the pre-dawn mist as the sun began its inexorable rise, its red stain across the horizon a prelude to another steamy day. The many species of bird life had been active for some time. Noisy parakeets screeched across the sky and camouflaged the footfalls of many ground dwellers out searching for their morning meal, or having eaten, returning to their nighttime lairs. Food remained abundant here with fruits and vegetables both wild and cultivated supplementing the animal meat.

Today would see them feasting on a sow, almost wild after being loose in the forest. She had been suckling three young ones that made her a relatively easy target – catching the piglets had been more difficult. If some fool didn’t steal them from the pen they now occupied, it would see their group sustained for weeks. Their actions were necessary but not needed... as they would find out.

They hadn’t meant to kill her. She was more value to them alive and an obvious sign a male pig was out there somewhere. She could have been the beginning for some or at least one of the group to return to their former Life. But a group led by panic is a group without leadership, and the sticks and rocks they held for self-defence became instruments of death. Some shouldered others out of the way just so they could get in their own pleasurable stab or bash, and when the sows’ skull fractured (exploded really), others turned away and puked, but their hands did not leave their sharpened sticks imbedded in her eyes, neck or guts. The realisation that she was dead raised a cheer and they set onto her again, this time with teeth and bare hands clawing and ripping at her raw flesh. One of them even ran from the mob with the sows’ intestines trailing from his teeth spilling blood, gore and the stinking contents of the organ over everything he passed. These people may not have forgotten their Life yet, but common decency had certainly disappeared from their memories.

Life. It was a word that none of them had use for anymore. Life. They recalled fairytales told long ago by their mothers or indeed, spoken from their own mouths to their own children. Fairytales or prayers? Who could remember anymore? Who cared anymore? Some of them did. But that was another time, another place. Here they were among their own kind, no fairytales to comfort them, no Mothers to hug them.

New arrivals were always difficult. Most refused to believe the facts, refused to believe their destiny, refused reality, and clung strongly to their beliefs. Some of them made it but they were a minority – a very small minority. The old cliché about the strongest and fittest surviving was crap! Here, the strongest and fittest, the fastest, the smartest, meant nothing. Zip, zilch... unless it was applied to acceptance. He who adapted and accepted quickest, survived. Most didn’t, understandably.

You go through Life with all the best intentions, selfish as most of them may be. Life; that anomaly of being alive. You live Life by striving to do better, earn more money, screw as many girls as you can, buy that flash sports car, go on that debauched holiday, living Life to its fullest.

Sometimes they can tell straight away if someone is going to make it or not. It doesn’t take long to figure out who has it and who doesn’t. They’d seen mothers, fathers, teenagers, toddlers, grandparents, politicians, council workers, real estate salesmen, all and sundry come through here. Some stay mere seconds, some for a couple of hours, but by the end of their first day most, if not

all, have gone. And it's not that they all arrive together either, like on a tour bus or something, no; it's more like they are coming and going, and going and coming at all hours of the day or night.

You had to feel sorry for the ones that arrived at night – they have no chance, no chance at all. Of those that watched over them, there stood one that knew better than any other individual, because there had only ever been one that survived a night arrival – and it was he.

It isn't night now. The sun has risen, striking his piece of dirt before any other on the Australian mainland. Once again there had only ever been one that knew what was going to happen, and that, as you may have guessed this time, was he again.

Chapter Three “Old Billy”

It’s not the sort of thing he used to worry about, that’s for sure. He’d lived, and it had been good. He’s an old man now and had enjoyed his Life. He missed Life; he just didn’t let anyone else know it.

Let me tell you a little more about who he is. His name is Billy, at least it was Billy... Billy Nelson. He arrived for the last time about four or five years ago near as anybody can figure – could be forty or fifty years for all he knew and cared anymore but others have been there so long nobody can even remember their last names! At last count there was about two hundred of the more permanents but constant arrivals and departures every day made it hard to keep track.

Billy spent his Life with abilities that would have made Superman envious, but they were abilities that remained oblivious to the majority in his time as a mortal entity. As a baby, a child, he could see and do things that would have seen most committed to the nuthouse. But he’d been born to that Life and remained, relatively speaking, quite normal. Sure, he used to disappear at times when the desire to do so crossed his mind, and he understood the spoken language almost immediately. He could even hear peoples’ thoughts, but it was the visual world that was the most dramatic to him.

Billy could see and hear the other people who were no longer mortal souls, who waited for whatever was their reason to pass onward. He learnt quickly not to let on that he could see them. Experience taught him that whenever he did so, a mob would immediately form demanding he relay messages of advice, love, or desperation to living relatives.

As a two year old it had been simple to ignore them (he may have *understood* language but communicating it to others remained as mysterious and frustrating as for any toddler his age). It was impossible to disseminate the things they wanted him to. As the years progressed he came to bless the insight that enabled him to switch off to their presence in his Life.

Anonymity became Billy’s friend. Not even his parents accepted his abnormal behaviour and it taught him to be cautious about who knew. Such caution became easier as he grew, firstly through puberty then into an early maturity well beyond his years. He was 15 when things changed dramatically, the change so dramatic that only the whole story could possibly make it clearer.

Chapter Four

“Tony and Jen”

“Where the fuck? It isn’t?”

“Told ya!”

“Fuckin’ fantastic man. C’mon, lets get in there!”

“No, wait! Billy! Hang on... ” His best mate Tony was always willing to please, to try anything. He always had his ear to the ground, so that nights like tonight were not a surprise – for him anyway. Tony loved doing this sort of stuff. Yesterday afternoon as he and Billy walked home after jumping off the school bus he just up and said it.

“We gotta be at the Top Pub tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“You’ll see. Pick ya up at three.”

“I was gonna come over for a jam session before lunch, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah, okay. You still seein’ Jen?”

“You betcha. Seeing her at tennis in the morning. Dad wouldn’t let me go out with her tonight – her brother was gonna take us to the drive in and he doesn’t even know him but he still said he doesn’t trust him, so I can’t go. Sucks man. And Jen was pretty pissed off too.”

“She’s a looka Billy. Does Wendy know?”

“No way! Best thing about Jen goin’ to school in Lismore is nobody else around here knows her!”

“So, tomorrow night, is one of them comin’ with us?”

Billy slapped him on the back. Tony hated the fact that Billy always had a girl, or two, or three! It wasn’t that he was bad looking himself, it was, well, the fact that he never gave them a chance to get to know him, really know him, know him like Billy did. They’d strike up a conversation with the girls Tony and Billy and the first question Tony’d ask is if any of them wanted a fuck! The girls usually drifted away about then but curiosity would almost always bring one of them back, eventually – to Billy that is. He’d go to the loo or to the bar and run into one of them and she’d say something like; “Is your friend always that crass?” And they’d end up having a conversation and he’d end up with the girl. If not that night in the back seat of a convenient car, or once, even the ladies loo at the Workers Club in Lismore, then at some other venue at some other time. As the ice had already been broken it was pretty easy for him to go up and introduce himself again. Worked like a charm just about every time and Billy wouldn’t change Tony for the world! One day, Tony was going to wake up to it, that’s for sure. Billy always hoped it wasn’t sooner rather than later!

It wasn't that Billy needed his help. Jen for one, he met at the local tennis courts just after her family had moved into the area from Lismore. Tony didn't play tennis or any other sport so Jen was safe from his unique approaches. Her folks didn't want her to change schools at this stage, being Year 10 and all that, so while she caught the bus to Lismore the other locals like Billy and Tony caught the bus to Ballina.

Billy earnt pocket money by watering, rolling and marking the local clay tennis courts and aside from the money, pushing and pulling that roller around endowed him with more defined muscles than most boys his age. There he was that morning, finishing with the heavy roller on the courts in his shorts and tennis shoes, arms and torso pumped, tanned and flexing from their efforts when a voice drifted across the court from the small clubhouse. He hadn't seen her arrive because she walked across the park while he was pushing the roller in the other direction. She stood in the shadows of the clubhouse and it was difficult for him to make her out.

"I said, it looks hot out there," she repeated.

He dropped the roller after putting it in the most out of the way position and walked toward her, quite disturbed – nobody, generally, was able to sneak up on him and the fact she had bothered him. Billy didn't speak or even look at her until he was almost to the wire fence, and one look rendered him speechless – the girl was gorgeous! She was dressed for tennis in a short white skirt, white blouse, white socks and white Dunlop Volleys, which contrasted against her lightly tanned almost flawless skin, her startling green eyes and long light brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was an absolute vision and didn't wait for him to speak. He probably couldn't have anyway!

"I was told to be here at seven thirty."

Her comment gave him more time – he checked his watch and a surreptitious glance to check his abs! It was twenty past, which meant he was late – he had to be changed and ready by seven thirty as well and in his confusion he said the only thing that came into his brain at the time.

"You're early." It didn't actually mean anything, or it meant many things. Regardless, it made no sense. He tried again. "I mean, everybody gets here at seven thirty, which is ten minutes away yet. Don't worry, they'll be here. They tend to rock up together. Who, who are you waiting for?"

"I was told to see Billy, Billy Nelson – Mr Howcroft said he would look after me."

Billy was stunned again; his normally precocious brain dumbfounded – Howcroft had delivered him an angel! He wondered if Howcroft had seen her? No way! If he had, the old lech would have been here giving her private coaching lessons, not referring her to him. He replied hesitantly.

"Ah, that's me. Billy. Um, Howcroft said see me?"

"Yes. Mum rang during the week and went in and, you know, registered and paid the fee and here I am! Do you need a hand with anything?"

"No. Yes!" He spoke sharply. "I need to put the nets up, the lines will be fine for today."

Billy realised how late he really was when she asked if he needed help. He knew he really should do the lines but after a late start there wasn't time to load the lime and run it around both courts – it wasn't as if any of them was a John McEnroe or Evonne Goolagong! He ran through the gate and she followed him into the clubhouse, where he rummaged in the equipment chest for the nets, and as he turned she was standing right behind him, eyes looking straight at his with a strange sparkle.

“Give it to me,” she told him, “I know how to do it.”

He passed her the first net then dragged out the second and they walked out onto the courts together. She dropped her net at the closest end and bent over in front of him to unroll it. Billy rolled his eyes to the heavens and she turned back to look at him – it was his turn to be standing there looking at her with a sparkle in his eyes. Now he knew what she'd been looking at in the clubhouse, and he had just returned the favour!

“I think I'm going to like it here after all,” she said straight to his face and then immediately turned around, bent over again and finished unrolling the net.

Since that first meeting over a month ago they'd become inseparable, which annoyed Tony somewhat. They turned into Billy's street and Billy decided to stir him up a bit.

“I was thinkin' of asking Wendy but it is Saturday and I usually see Jen on Saturday.”

“I know,” Tony said sullenly.

“So, I thought if I see Jen tonight, then I could still ask Wen tomorrow!”

Tony's shoulders slumped appreciably and Billy almost wished he hadn't done it. Poor Tony! One day, and Billy knew it would be soon, one of Tony's propositions was going to be accepted and he hoped to God he was there to see it. But his guilt is too much for the moment so he decided to cheer him up.

“Nah, stuff the women! Let's just you and me hit the town tomorrow, okay mate?”

Tony lifted immediately, as if nothing had happened. He was like that, resilient as all hell and Billy liked that about him too.

“Okay, okay! I'll see ya after then”.

Billy slapped him on the back before opening the front gate. “Don't wanna come in for a drink do ya?”

Tony didn't even stop walking to reply over his shoulder and was past the yard by the time he'd finished. “No, sorry, gotta go. See ya mate,” and with a backward wave, he crossed the street. Tony had only ever gone into the house once and Billy's Mum and Dad had made him feel about as welcome as small pox.

“Aren't you Barry Smiths' son?”

“Yes sir.”

“You a drug addict boy?”

“No sir.”

“How come I hear the Smith boy is a drug addict?”

“That’s my big brother sir.”

“Brothers! Thick as thieves. Your brother ever give you drugs?”

“No sir.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“Yes sir.”

“Why? Tell me why I should believe you, boy.”

“No sir.”

“What d’ya mean no?”

“Oh! Sorry, I mean, yes sir, it’s the truth sir.”

“Dad! Stop it will ya. Tony’s okay Dad, trust me.”

“Why? You gimme one good reason why I should trust a smart-alec fifteen year old? You takin’ drugs too?”

“Dad, you know better than that. Trust me ‘coz I’m your son.”

“You’re hangin’ around with a drug addict.”

“He’s not a drug addict Dad. Let it go will ya?”

“What, yellin’ at me now are you? You ain’t so big that I can’t throw you over my knee.”

“Dad, you know as well as I do that you couldn’t if you wanted to. Sorry for yelling. Let’s go Tony.”

“Where you goin’ boy, haven’t you got homework? I forbid you to go down to that, that drug addicts place. You get back here. Billy? Billy?”

His mother’s voice floated out to them as they had walked to the front gate. “Where are you going Billy? You haven’t upset your Father again have you? Billy? Come back here son. I’m your Mother, don’t you walk away from me. Billy?”

That was why Tony never went back inside Billy's house! His old man was okay, just a bit grumpy at times. But that was then. Today, Billy walked into the house and his Dad was sitting where he always sat. He nodded to Billy without even looking away from the television and Billy went straight to his room.

Billy didn't always tell Tony everything, in fact he tried to tell him as little as possible and it had been the truth about seeing Jen tonight – his Dad wouldn't let him go. But what Dad didn't know wouldn't hurt him, the same with Tony for that matter and as much as his Mum and Dad talked and blustered they never stopped him from doing anything. So Billy would be going to the drive in with Jen tonight only no one except the four of them going knew.

He walked out of the house around six-thirty but stopped suddenly on the front step – something made him go back. He stood at the entrance to the living room and looked at his Dad whose eyes remained glued to the TV.

“You okay Dad?”

“Yep. Where ya goin’?”

“Just down the servo, meet a couple of the guys, grab a burger, you know.”

“If I knew I wouldn't ask. Be home by ten.”

“Yeah, no worries. You sure you're okay?”

He did look up this time. “Don't you pull that crap on me son!”

“I'm not Dad, I'm not. You'll be fine. See ya.” He was back watching TV before Billy finished speaking.

He was at the front gate when his Mum came out. “Billy,” she called softly. He went back, her concern etched across her face. “What did you see Billy, what did you see?”

“Nothin' Ma, it was nothin'.”

“You ain't ever said what you just did to your Dad before. What did you see Billy? You know he don't believe, but I do. I do. What did you see?”

“I'm not sure Ma, but there's nothing to worry about.”

“You did then, you did see something. What? Tell me. What?”

“It was nothing Mum, nothing clear at all. I've told you before, it isn't always clear...”

“Billy,” she admonished. “I seen you have glitches before and people died Billy Nelson! This is your Father we're talking about now. You gotta tell me Billy!”

She was raising her voice and Billy didn't want his Dad and everybody else in the street hearing the conversation. “Mum, shhh, please? Alright, there was something, I can't tell you

anymore, for sure, yet. If it becomes clearer I will tell you alright? Now please be quiet. I will tell you okay?"

She appeared to accept this. Billy knew this time had to come some day, when he would have to try and save someone he cared for, family, or a close friend. He also knew there was literally nothing he could do about it. He knew because he'd tried. Many times. When he was younger and still exploring his capabilities, he'd even gone over and tried to bring some of them back, some that had died but not yet passed on – it never worked. Now he looked but didn't touch anymore. He reached out and grabbed his Mother's hand. Reluctantly, she let him take it. Their family was not much into sharing anything that remotely demonstrated affection of any form.

"Don't worry," he told her.

It was lame, but it wouldn't have mattered what he said at that point. She would believe whatever she wanted regardless. He let her hand go, turned and left and twenty metres from his front gate he was whistling as he walked.

Billy didn't get home that night. He stayed with Jenny, sneaking into her house after they got home from the drive in, snuggling up together in her narrow little bed. She had been very tentative to let Billy do anything at the drive in with her brother sitting in the front. Understandable really! They kissed and cuddled and both knew her brother had his hand up his girlfriend's skirt. Billy thought he'd even got a blowjob about halfway through the second movie. But they were nineteen, Billy and Jen were fifteen and kids their age didn't do things like that. And pigs fly!

They snuck into the bedroom as soon as they got to Jen's place, lips locked together. Their frustrations from watching and listening to her brother and his girlfriend were finally released. As soon as they were in bed Billy almost ripped off her cute little sky blue panties such was his desperation. After about twenty minutes they lay on their sides hugging, faces less than an inch apart where they whispered and giggled until she finally fell asleep in his arms. Then Billy knew. The revelation hit him full the face – he was going to marry this girl!

Billy snuck out early the next morning, went home and got tennis gear, and going out clothes for later with Tony. His Mum and Dad were sound asleep as usual – neither of them rose before about ten and for his Dad that meant a burp, a fart, and turning on the TV where he would sit, sans toilet breaks, for the next twelve hours or more.

Billy managed to roll and mark the courts before Jens arrival; it had become ritual now for her to arrive early and help. They'd first made out on the equipment chest in the clubhouse and that too had become ritual! This morning was to be slightly different though. She sat, her mostly bare buttocks on the raw timber of the chest (He never knew how she didn't get a splinter – Billy regularly got them, in the fingers and hands and once even in the thigh). Jen mostly kept her knickers on, just pulling the crotch to one side, but the few times they did it were always great for them both. She loved to orgasm, it too a relatively new thing for them, and Billy loved experiencing them with her. This morning was no exception to that at least.

"I couldn't, yell out, last night, at home, and I, really nee, needed to," she gasped.

And yell she did. She wrapped her gorgeous smooth legs around Billy and held him so tight he thought he'd have to push her away just to breathe. When she calmed down she looked at his

watch, and saw they still had a few minutes before anyone arrived. She was looking a bit funny and Billy put it down as some sort of post-orgasmic reaction you read about in Penthouse Forum – until she spoke.

“It was really weird last night.”

“What? Sitting in a car while your brother got it on in the front seat?”

“No. I’m serious. After we made love last night in my bed, you holding me, something really strange happened.” She kept looking at Billy, as if he already knew what she was going to say.

“Yeah? What?” She looked disappointed. He was standing between her thighs, inside her still, and each tiny movement by either of them was very pleasant indeed but her serious look removed any pleasure Billy felt. She didn’t even notice him pull out, her legs remained wrapped around him holding him close, her arms still around his neck. He kissed her but she pulled away quickly. “What is it Babe? Tell me?”

“Billy, I, I think I’m in love with you Billy” she said, shyly. It was the first time in a month that he had seen her shy. It didn’t suit her at all.

“Is that all? Funny, ‘coz I love you too!”

He said it as brightly as he could and even thought it wasn’t bad for his first time. But her reaction was horrifying! She cried! She hugged him tightly and cried, and Billy thought it was something you were supposed to be happy about, yet she was crying! He wasn’t sure how to handle it – so he cried too! The tears began spilling from his eyes and he couldn’t have stopped if he wanted to. The strangest thing was that despite his tears, he was happy. He stood there bawling like a baby and that’s when he recognised how she felt. He hugged her as tight as she was hugging him and they cried together in each other’s arms. It took some time but they eventually composed themselves and she looked straight into his eyes.

“I love you Billy Nelson. I realised that last night. But do you want to know what the really weird bit was?”

“Yes, of course. What?”

“Somehow, when I was falling asleep, I just knew, all of a sudden I just knew that you were the one I was going to marry.”

Billy stood there looking at her wide-eyed. He thought, “Did she get that from me? Was it possible that we thought the same thing at the same time?” His look of surprise must have worried her.

“Oh no, I’ve said the wrong thing, haven’t I? Oh, I shouldn’t have told you that, I’m going to chase you away now, aren’t I? Billy? Please, I’m so sorry. Billy?”

“It’s okay Babe it’s okay, it’s just that, well, I felt the exact same thing at the same time. That’s what shocked me.”

The timely sound of cars arriving ceased their conversation. While Jen rearranged herself and perched rather perkily on the equipment chest, Billy sat in the opposite corner. They awaited the arrival of the others, except now things were different. Prior to this morning they had looked at each other with lust. Now, near as Billy could figure, they eyed each other with so much more. It was beautiful, an amazing feeling, and it was obvious to Billy that she felt exactly the same.

After tennis they bade a sad farewell and most of the other kids and adults recognised what was going on between them. There had been a few casual comments before today, light-hearted stirring, but they'd always managed to ignore it. It was different now. To the adults it was cute, childhood sweetheart type stuff. To the other kids it was sick. They could recognise love and love was for big kids, not kids their age. Some of them even looked at Billy and Jen with disgust. Tough, they would learn for themselves one day, but for the present Billy didn't give a damn what anybody thought, and neither did Jen. She hugged him in front of everybody so he kissed her, softly, for just a few seconds.

"Ring me later," she called out.

Billy waved and said nothing but he did ring her. He rang her as soon as he got to Tony's. After they finished the jam session he rang her. Then he rang again before he and Tony went out to Byron and told her he would see her tomorrow. She was disappointed but happy at the same time that she was seeing him, soon. Funny, but Billy felt disappointed too.

Chapter Five

“The Widow MacIntosh”

Peter Gordon MacIntosh was a sales rep. He had been a sales rep for over eight years and married to his childhood sweetheart Lynn for twelve years now. They were about to move into their new home in the next two weeks or so, weather permitting. Peter was also a fishing nut. Fishing mad. They lived at Hastings Point, a small village about thirty minutes south of the Gold Coast, so it was easy for Peter to indulge in his hobby as often as he wanted. He was also a sales rep for a fishing wholesale company, so he had the best of both worlds. Peter loved his wife, loved his job, and loved his fishing!

His work area encompassed the coastal areas from the Gold Coast right down to Grafton, about two hundred and fifty kilometers further south. He worked diligently, and fished even harder in his area of responsibility as often as he could. This meant that he spent at least a couple of nights a week away from home. He and Lynn had known each other since primary school, gone steady all during high school and as everybody predicted, they married immediately after graduation. In Peter's eyes they had the perfect relationship, the perfect Life.

Lynn was lonely. Sure, she still had her friends but it was her husband she wanted. She and Peter hadn't been able to conceive and this was a major disappointment to her, though Peter didn't seem bothered by it at all. She had known of course, about Peter's love of fishing, and had even tried to get into it herself just so that she could spend more time with him. It hadn't taken long to realise that it wasn't for her, noble as her intentions had been. So she resigned herself to becoming a fishing widow. It hadn't been too bad when Peter was just working up the road at the electrical store, but now he was always off visiting clients or trying out some new product. Even when he wasn't on the road he was out fishing. He would dash in from work, grab his gear, and be off again. Lynn missed her husband dearly.

Because he was away so much, the responsibility for their new home had fallen squarely onto her shoulders. She had looked around at blocks of land, Peter providing only approval and the appropriate signatures once she found one that he agreed to. And then it was traveling all over the area looking at the home displays, picking a builder, arranging the finance, picking a house plan, choosing the bricks, the tiles, the paint, the carpets, the tap ware and so on. It had been difficult for her, but if it wasn't for the nice salesman at the display home she thought she would never have been able to do it. Such was her dependency on him, whenever he or she had a question about the house contract, he would jump in his car and pop around and see her! Naturally, she told him about her husband, it was a romantic story after all. But as she became comfortable with him she began to tell him more, how Peter was always away, work and fishing. She thought it was ironic that this salesman was so attentive to her needs when her husband, the salesman, chose to ignore her.

The first time that they touched had been an accident. He was passing her a pen and their fingers met fleetingly. Lynn was sure everybody in the room had felt the electric charge. Now that he visited her at home, they would sit a little closer. There were no prying eyes here! It started when their feet touched, again accidentally, but then their legs would rest against the others. One time he had even massaged her neck after she complained about feeling a bit stiff. This night, tonight though, they were sitting side by side at her dining room table and when she finished telling him that Peter was away until tomorrow night, he placed his hand onto her thigh, leaned over and kissed

her. She sat stiffly, eyes wide open in surprise, but then wrapped her arms around him and kissed him back hard. He slid a hand up under her dress, his other hand pulling at the shoulder straps. They ended up on the couch, her dress bunched around her waist, legs spread wantonly as the salesman thrust himself into her. Her eyes were tightly closed as she reveled in her orgasm, and then felt the approach of a second. She couldn't remember ever having two orgasms! Then the phone rang.

“Keep going, keep going, don't stop,” she told him, pulling at his hips harder.

Peter was driving back from the small fishing village of Wooli to Grafton. He was mostly only an hour or two from home but he had clients to see the next morning, so he had booked into a local Motel. He had chosen this timing as Lex, the proprietor of the local marine shop, had told him the recent rain had brought jewfish on the bite from the local break walls. He had no luck, though a young fella got an average sized fish while he was there, which Peter expertly gaffed for him. He was thinking of this now as he drove rather exuberantly back along the narrow road. He knew the road well after eight years plying his trade along this route, and this plus the familiarity with his vehicle exacerbated what happened next. He rounded one of the tighter bends and the driver's side wheels slipped off the edge of the bitumen. The verges were soft and still damp, from those same rains that had brought the jewfish on the bite. As soon as the tyres hit the verge, the car screwed savagely to the right and plunged straight off the road into an ancient gum tree that barely registered the collision. The car though, concertinaed like a cardboard box, the engine, dash and steering wheel smashing backwards almost to the rear passenger compartment. Peter died instantly.

A car came by five minutes later and discovered the grisly scene. Emergency services were notified and dispatched. Probationary Constable Ivan Phillips was on his first posting, and was given the gruesome task of removing any and all identification from the car, and what was left of the body. The registration papers were prised from the glove box, which was fortunate, as Peter's drivers license was imbedded with his wallet somewhere near his left lung. Back at the station, Phillips rang the home number. There was no answer.

“Try again in fifteen minutes,” the Sergeant told him. “If you don't get an answer then, ring the Tweed and have them dispatch a vehicle.”

Peter opened his eyes and saw that he was standing beside a mountain stream in a small clearing lit by the moon. Thick rainforest on the opposite side prevented him from seeing further and that same rainforest surrounded the clearing. His surprise at his location made him overbalance, and he fell into the stream, laughing as he surfaced and dragged himself back up onto the bank. All Peter could remember was seeing the tree coming at him in the headlights of the car. And then he was here! He leaned down to see his reflection in the water. Lynn, he thought suddenly!

Once again he overbalanced, and found himself miraculously standing in his own living room. He straightened and his eyes widened when he saw his wife, legs spread-eagled, lying back on the couch, their couch, and some half naked stranger pumping his penis into her. He shook his head, and screamed “Noooo...”

He fell into the stream again. He was back, wherever it was. He dragged himself up the bank without laughter this time, and the fleeting thought that he was dead made him frown. It had to be. He wished he could cry, at both the thought and at seeing Lynn. He sat down on the bank and a hand came down and rested on his shoulder, startling him, making him jump, and fall into the stream for a third time! He swiveled around quickly in the thigh deep water and focused on the kindly

old face that was now extending a helping hand. He rose from the stream yet again, and this time noticed that he was dry. Totally dry. He looked at the man.

“Am I dead? Am I really dead?” The old man replied with a nod only. “But, but Lynn? Lynn!”

He surveyed his own lounge room again. I’ll never get used to this, he thought. Lynn was in the throes of an orgasm, that he knew, and the phone was ringing. He watched as she pushed the stranger off and got up, stomping toward the phone, breasts and buttocks jiggling with each stomp.

“What is it?”

“Is that Mrs Macintosh? Mrs Macintosh this is Constable Phillips from the Grafton Police.”

Peter watched as his wife was advised of his death. Her tears began to flow as she backed up against the wall to support herself. Then the man raced over to her to hold her up. Peter leapt at him.

“Leave her alone you barstard, aaargh!” He fell into the creek again! The old man was still there but he allowed Peter to get out unaided this time. Peter slumped onto the bank trying desperately to cry. He didn’t jump this time when that same hand came down on his shoulder. He just wanted to cry. When he looked up at the kindly face he saw the sympathy, and nodded at his futile position. “What, happens now? What do I do?”

The old man looked at him and smiled. It was a warm encouraging smile. “You follow me.”

The old man spoke with a thick accent that Peter thought might have been German. He pronounced “follow” as “vollow.” “What? Yes, follow. I get it. Where?”

“Like wit your wife, think ov following me.”

“Yes, okay.”

Peter stood at the summit looking in awe at the vista in front of him, the lights of the Gold Coast to the north, coastal villages including his home to the east, and the sweep of the Cape Byron lighthouse coming from the south. He knew where he was now, having used this very summit as a marker point when he went out to sea. He turned looking for the old man and was surprised to see a number of others, all of them old. He saw about twelve of them, some together in small groups, others sitting peacefully on their own – and the general feeling was exactly that – peaceful. He saw the old man, the one with the beard, further up the slope sitting on a rock, picking his teeth with a piece of grass. As Peter passed some of the others gave him a smile, some a nod of acknowledgment. The overall aura of peacefulness was affirmed. He approached and the old man looked up, and also nodded.

“I’m Peter.”

“Albert. You sit down now.”

Seeing no other rocks nearby, Peter remained standing instead. “All these guys. They, you know, dead? And you too?”

Albert looked at him, and Peter saw a fleeting glimpse of sadness before the smile returned. He nodded again. Peter saw another man, much younger than the others, more his own age, standing a bit further down the slope. This man waved at him as well as smiled. Peter walked toward him hearing Albert's voice as he set off but not understanding him through the heavy accent. "Be careful, be very careful."

"Hi Peter," the new man said as he approached. "Welcome. The old farts up there don't talk much. Lucky I saw you or they'd have bored you to death within an hour," and he laughed at his own joke.

"You, everybody here has died?" Peter ignored the joke.

"Yep. You got it. Ask me anything man, anything. You must have a thousand questions going 'round in your head?"

"How, what happened? I saw my wife. The old guy, Albert, said I just had to think.."

"Yes, that's right. But don't listen to them. What you gonna do about her?"

"Who? Lynn? What d'ya mean?"

The man's smile seemed a permanent fixture, and Peter thought that maybe he wasn't as sincere as he first appeared, but at least he was talking with him. "I mean, what are you gonna do about it? You seen her man, fucking that other guy, and you not even in the ground yet!"

Peter's shoulders slumped. He didn't need reminding. "But it was my fault. I know that. Always leaving her alone. No wonder!"

"Fucking crap man. You were married. Did you ever cheat on her man? Bet ya didn't, in fact, I know ya didn't, did you?"

"No. But then I was doing what I wanted to do. And I was so happy when I went home and saw her, you know. But she didn't like fishing."

"That's right, she didn't like fishing. What else didn't she like Peter? I bet before tonight you thought that you'd been the only man she'd ever had, right? And she was the only woman you ever had, true? So what d'ya think now man?"

"Nothing. It hurts. And now there's nothing I can do about it."

Smiley man's smile broadened even more. "Yeah, I bet it hurts Peter." He put his arm around Peter's shoulder and spoke confidentially into his ear. "But you can do something about it."

Peter looked up him, eyes wide in surprise. "What? Tell me? What can I do from here?"

"You can go back and fix her man," his smile so wide it seemed to spill off the side of his face.

"No, I don't want to see her, see that again."

“What, and let her get away with it? No way man, you gotta strike. Strike while the irons hot you hear me?”

“What d’ya mean?”

“I mean, you don’t wait until they go cold, until they’ve forgotten about you. You hit ‘em hard as soon as you can, while their grief for you is still uppermost. For the maximum effect you understand!”

“What, haunt them or something? You’re kidding?”

“No, no, haunt them! That’s movie Life crap! I mean hurt the bitch,” the smile turned into a malevolent grin.

“What, hurt her? Lynn? Why? No! No way!”

“So you gonna let the cheatin’ bitch get away with it, eh?”

“Get away with what? That was my fault. My fault I tell you!”

“Crap Peter. Absolute crap! Tell me, do you think that guy has been the only one? Is that what you think? Do you want me to tell you about the others then?”

“No, I don’t believe you. She wouldn’t!”

“Wouldn’t she? Come with me Peter.” Peters lounge room materialised in front of him yet again. Smiley was right behind him but there was no Lynn, and no stranger. He heard voices from the bathroom and found himself at the doorway, looking at his wife and the man sitting on the side of the bath. Lynn had at least readjusted her dress, but the man sat with his hand on her thigh, his other arm around her shoulder. Lynn was still sobbing and holding a tissue to her face. “See what I mean,” smiley mans voice came from behind.

“You barstard, get your hands off her,” Peter yelled, leaping at them, and somewhere in the back of his mind he prepared to land in the creek again. Instead, he passed straight through the man, straight through the bath and the wall, and rolled onto his side lawn outside. He was seething, even through his surprise. He jumped back at the exterior wall, and passed through both the man and Lynn this time, before standing and looking at smiley man who was leaning with his shoulder against the doorframe. “What, how then?” he said frustrated.

Smiley man stood upright, and the smile disappeared. “You wanna get the bitch now, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must do what I tell you Peter.”

“No, no I don’t think so anymore. She’s crying, for me!”

“Bullshit Peter. She’s putting on an act for him,” he pointed to the salesman. “You gotta do it now Peter. Or never.”

“Why?”

“Because Peter, it’s all in the timing. It will mean nothing if you don’t do it NOW!”

“I don’t want to. I don’t understand. I wish I could cry. I can’t cry.”

Smiley man softened a little, and his smile returned. “Turn around Peter. Look at her.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Turn around Peter. Do it,” he commanded. Peter turned slowly and obediently lifted his head to see what he no longer wanted to see. The man was now caressing her thigh and Lynn had dropped her head onto his shoulder. “Peter, I’ll give you a little analogy that will help you understand. When you hear the jewfish are biting, off the break wall, and they are all a hundred pounders, what do you do? Do you wait until tomorrow night? No way man, you go out straight away, while they’re still there. You understand me now? It’s gotta be now Peter.”

“Yeah, okay, but what about him. I want to kill the bastard.”

“No you don’t. He’s just a pawn. What you gonna do, kill every man that comes along and looks at her sideways? Why kill a hundred when you only have to deal with one? You can do it Pete. You gotta stop it at the source.”

“Yeah, yeah you’re right. Just help me get this bastards hands off her, will ya?”

“Okay, now do exactly what I tell you.”

Peter nodded.

“Raise your arm, hold out your hand to her.”

Peter frowned and looked around at smiley man. The response was another order but his voice was much stronger, booming off the walls.

“DO IT! RAISE YOUR HAND!”

Peter watched as his arm rose almost of its own accord. His hand reached out toward Lynn.

“Move forward, let your hand feel her heart. DO IT!”

Peter watched, transfixed, as his hand passed through the mans arm, then his wife’s dress and her left breast, yet he could still see it clearly.

“NOW, CUP HER HEART. PUT HER HEART IN YOUR HAND.”

Peter’s eyes widened when he saw Lynn’s heart appear in his hand, pumping its rhythm of Life.

“SQUEEZE!”

“What, I, I...”

“SQUEEZE! SQUEEZE IT NOW! FEEL ITS POWER THROUGH YOUR PALM! SQUEEZE!”

Peter squeezed, softly at first, and he saw Lynn give a little start. But then he did feel it, he felt the hearts rhythm transferring through his hand and began to time his squeezes to match. Each time he did so he began to feel the strength, its strength, traveling up his arm and into his body. He began to feel again, the floor under his feet firstly and a tear escaped from the corner of his eye.

“Can I stop, now?”

“NO. SQUEEZE,” the voice so loud it hurt his ears.

He looked at Lynn and almost felt she was looking at him. She was very ashen faced, and the salesman was panicking around her now. Her eyes were still looking at Peter, and he realised suddenly that she was seeing him.

“SQUEEZE!” the voice continued to command.

Peter gritted his teeth, reveling in the feel of his tongue against the roof of his mouth again. He stared into his widows’ eyes, seeing her Life fading.

“Peter!” she gasped.

“Damn you, you cheated on me,” he yelled back at her, and squeezed tighter.

And then her heart stopped in his hand. Peter squeezed. He squeezed harder. She was still looking at him but with unseeing eyes.

“Noooo,” he yelled, and turned to face the smiley man. “What have you made me do?”

Smiley man was no longer there. Instead, the room was shimmering like a heat haze on a hot day, and then it rotated, slowly at first but gathering speed rapidly until Peter felt giddy. He looked down at his feet and could see nothing under them as everything seemed to get sucked backwards as if in a giant vacuum. Except Peter stood firmly and when everything had disappeared, he was left in absolute darkness. He spun around looking, desperately searching for any sort of comforting light. And saw it! Off, so far in the distance that he had to squint to make sure his eyes weren’t playing tricks on him, was a small pinprick of light.

“Is that you?” he screamed again.

The light moved toward him at incredible speed and as it closed Peter prepared to duck. He could see now that it was many light sources, not just one, and as they ascended his eyes widened in fear. They tore into him like sharks, their fang like teeth and serrated claws removing immense chunks of his flesh with each pass. They tore around his body like mosquitoes. When he opened his mouth to scream some of them immediately dove into his mouth, removing his tongue and

even consuming his teeth as they worked, eating their way into his body. Peter heard that voice, the smiley mans voice, just one last time.

“My name is Duran. Welcome!”

Chapter Six

“Rock ‘n Roll; and Death In The Family”

There they were, Saturday night, standing out in front of the Top Pub at Byron Bay. The music pounding out was great but it was the voice, that voice, which had had got Billy’s excitement going. He only just heard Tony calling over the noise.

“Billy! Wait!”

“What is it Man?”

“We, we can’t go in the front door.”

Billy shook his head. He couldn’t believe what Tony was saying. He’d dragged him all the way out to Byron to see the man, the one and only, Billy’s absolute favourite singer, and now he was telling him that they couldn’t go in? Billy considered hitting him.

“Do you know, who, that is in there?”

““Course I do.”

“Then why the fuck can’t we go in?”

““coz we’re fifteen.”

“Hasn’t stopped us before.”

“This is different Billy. He, he’s an international star, and they have security everywhere. Don’t worry, I’ve arranged something.”

“What? He gonna come out to us?” Usually, Tony didn’t take Billy’s sarcasm well, but tonight he was composed and grinning like a Cheshire cat. That was proof positive that he had something under his hat. “Spill the beans Tony? What are you up to?”

“You’ll see,” he kept grinning.

“Why can’t we go in now?”

“No! Just wait Billy, wait just ‘till the first break.”

Whatever it was he’d arranged, he had confidence that it was going to happen. Tony kept his ear to the ground. He was a pretty simple guy in some ways but in others he was unfathomable, and unflappable when everything was running to plan. Ah, the sweet brashness of youth. They sat on the grass and listened to the music and Billy thought of Jen. He almost got up to ring her but knew that would piss Tony off, enough maybe for him to change whatever arrangements he’d made. Billy watched a girl walk past laughing and chatting brightly with her friends and it made him sad – she would die tonight. The sadness swept away immediately when the music ceased. He

looked at Tony who was lying on his back looking up at the stars. That same Cheshire grin greeted Billy when he thumped him on the shoulder.

“Be patient Billy, be patient.”

“You said we had to wait for the break. So? They’re havin’ a break! What are we waiting for now?”

“You’ll see. Have faith my friend,” he kept grinning. Billy was almost at the point where he was going to smack him in the mouth again, but Tony sat up suddenly as the MCs’ voice came across the loudspeakers. Billy wasn’t listening but caught the end of the announcement ... “home grown talent Billyyyyyy Nellllsonnnnn!” He looked at Tony goggle eyed and slack jawed. “Go on man, that’s you,” Tony said quietly, the look of satisfaction making his face glow in his moment of triumph.

“But, but how?” was all Billy could stammer.

“Sent them a demo tape” Tony replied, as if that answered all the questions screaming around in Billy’s brain.

The MCs’ voice yelled for me again. “C’mon Billy, where are you? Get up here.”

Billy walked zombie like into the crowd and to him, it seemed to take forever to get through the throng nearest the stage. He was there standing beside the MC and both of them were looking at him. A huge cheer rose from the crowd as Billy mounted the stage and was introduced.

“Billy Nelson, this is Joe Cocker.”

“I know,” was all Billy could say.

Billy had no idea what was said to him at that moment – he was still in awe. This was one of his all time heroes standing there beside him, shaking his hand, talking to him in front of a crowd of yelling, boozed up and doped out head bangers. All of a sudden everything became clear and even more shocking.

“What song are we doin’?” said Mr Cocker.

Billy may call him Joe when he’s talking to anyone else but to his face? No Way! He deserved respect. But sing a song, was he kidding? Billy stood there looking like an idiot, shaking his head.

“You can sing can’t you? That was you I heard on the demo?”

Billy just nodded.

“You do know why you’re here, don’t you Billy?” asked the MC.

Billy shook his head.

“You won! We ran a competition for somebody to sing a song with a famous guest artist, and you won!”

If he could get them to say it all one more time Billy’s numb brain might have been able to absorb it! Now he was thinking of Jen and wishing she were here. She’d be very surprised. Billy could sing okay – the problem was he had never sung in public, in front of anybody, ever... except Tony and his band a few times but to Billy they didn’t count. Now here he was standing on a stage with Joe Cocker no less, and everybody was expecting him to sing. He didn’t know whether to faint or cheer. He thought about Jen again and knew the song he wanted. He nodded at the MC and turned to Joe, sorry, Mr Cocker. “When a Man Loves a Woman?”

He nodded but frowned a little as well. “You don’t want, want to start off a bit lighter do you? You know, something a little rock ‘n roll maybe?”

Billy just looked at him and thought, “What the hell did I know about performing? About as much as I knew about quantum physics really,” so he bowed to undeniably greater knowledge and nodded. Billy looked again and realised Mr Cocker was drunk, or if he wasn’t, he was on something. At least his Life looked relatively intact.

Surprise rendered Billy blind of his normal perceptions but as his feet returned to earth, he began to see a little clearer again. It was not always easy for Billy to constantly be seeing two visions at once, and being able to identify which ones were Life and which ones were not. He concentrated on one, almost always Life, the reality part if you like, and only acknowledged the other when and if he really needed to. Life, reality, could hurt, maim, kill. Get hit by a bus, you die. The other side, threatening as it appeared at times, Billy knew to be relatively innocuous, and also that it would come for him... one day.

“You start, I’ll follow.”

So he did. The drummer initiated and the rest of the band broke into what Billy recognised immediately as “You Can Leave Your Hat On”. He sang, and he was good enough that they let him stay up for an entire set. Mr Cocker even let him solo a few times, though never an entire song – after all, the paying public were there to see him, not Billy. For Billy, it was a brilliant night. Afterwards he got Tony and introduced him to Mr Cocker, identifying him as the one responsible for sending in the demo tape. Mr Cocker gave Billy his Agents’ details and instructions to ring, and his assurance that a good word would be left on his behalf. Billy was ecstatic and as they left, people, girls and guys, patted him on the back, congratulated him. He felt like a star and unbelievably light headed, so much so that he remembered nothing of the trip home in Tonys’ big brother’s car.

Tony’s brother just happened to be in jail so his car wasn’t real useful to him at the moment. Billy’s Dad had been right about one thing... Tony’s brother was a drug addict but he’d been put away for dealing, not using.

Dad! Reality hit home again as they rounded the corner into Billy’s street and the ambulance sat in front of his house. Its bright, side-mounted lamps illuminated the front yard with an eerie off white glow, glaringly contrasted by the flashing red domes. Dad!

Chapter Seven

“Billy in Training”

The whole world appears ill equipped to handle the likes of this boy. He stands in faded and torn jeans, a t-shirt small enough to be a crop top and a filthy cardigan. His apparent impunity to any living soul is obvious when nobody approaches him. Not a soul saw his arrival and none lifts a hand when he stands amongst them, staring up at the sky as if seeking enlightenment, arms outstretched as if receiving the word of God.

At times he appears to smile and at others his concentration is obvious. He stood sometimes for hours on end, before nodding assent and smiling to himself, and then simply disappearing. Nobody is able to substantiate how this happens, simply one second he is there and the next he is not.

Similar incidents are reported three times over four years in different cities and States. They remain unconnected, even though up to forty witnesses are procured. But no laws have been broken so in all cases, further action is deemed unnecessary.

Chapter Eight

“Billy the Man”

The view was nice – water, boats, high rise buildings off in the distance, but very few people. Billy didn't see any of it. Sure, he knew it was there, and sitting on the patio there like he was gave him the greatest exposure, but he really hadn't seen anything for months now, not since that night when they pronounced his Dad dead. In his chair of course – eyes still open, and Billy was the only one that could tell you he was still watching that damn television. Billy knew that kind of thing happened if your grasp on something in Reality is strong enough.

It didn't shock him as much as his mother did. She held Billy responsible, made a scene she did, enough for the ambulance guys to actually restrain her. They ended up taking her with them in the back of that same ambulance, sedated and strapped in a stretcher beside her husband. Tony didn't hang around. He knew his limitations.

For the first time since that night, Billy was actually considering going back, to see that his Mum was okay, and to see Jen. He hadn't looked much at Reality for a while. You know how it is. Grief does funny things to people, and in Billy's case, it sent him off.

Right now he sat beside this old guy and Billy couldn't recall whether the old man owned this place or rented it. He knew he'd liked it there. The old man had died too, yesterday afternoon actually, and his sleeping corpse had sat outside on his patio all night and most of the day. He was still enjoying his view, not unlike Billy's Dad and his bloody TV. Billy heard a noise on the upstairs balcony and decided that now was the time.

“Hey, hullo, is there someone up there?” He stepped away from the patio area so he could look up to that balcony and be visible to anybody there. An elderly lady holding a watering can peered down. “Ma'am, the man down here, in the unit underneath you. I think he's, well, could you just ring an ambulance?”

That little old lady peered at Billy for a few seconds. Then without a word she walked back into her unit, methodically closing her balcony door like she'd probably done a thousand times before. She began closing her curtains and Billy realised he was on his own. He walked to the patio door and found it unlocked, of course. The phone hung over the kitchen bench and after dialling 000, he returned outside to wait.

A Police car arrived first – no siren, just pulled up out front. The two occupants stared out the windows, exchanged a glance and got out. Nothing strange to see really, a young guy, Billy, sitting on a deck chair beside a dead guy.

“I asked for an ambulance,” Billy said to them.

“What are you doing?”

“I'm waiting for an ambulance.”

“Why?”

“‘cause he’s dead.” They both looked shocked. Reality dawned on Billy, pun intended for those in the know. “Did the old lady upstairs ring you guys? Damn! I asked her to call an ambulance.” The lead one now went toward the old man and found no pulse. He glanced at his partner again and both turned to face Billy. He shrugged his shoulders at them, “What? You believe me now?”

“What are you doing here?”

“I was walking past and I saw this old guy sitting here. I said g’day to him and when he didn’t acknowledge me I knew there was something wrong. I yelled at the old lady upstairs to call the ambulance – silly old duck must have asked for you guys by mistake, sorry.”

Billy wondered what they’d think if they knew he’d been there over four months, keeping that old guy company even though he didn’t know it. Billy hadn’t thought for a moment the old man would last that long but he led a pretty unstressed life. The ambulance pulled up. Its red lights were flashing and Billy had a momentary thought about that night coming home to his Dad. Exchanging glances yet again, one copper went to the ambulance and the other approached him.

“You got any ID?”

Billy produced his wallet, showed him the school bus pass that was the only thing with his name on it, and stood up. They must have thought it safer with him sitting as neither cop had asked him to stand before that – and Billy only did so now so they could see he was just a kid. What he didn’t realise was how much he’d aged in the past few months. Grief does that to you as well.

“What’s your name?”

“Like it says on my pass, Billy Nelson.”

“It says,” he held it up as if he had poor eyesight or reading skills, “William Augustus Nelson,” as if it meant something Billy should know, which of course it did seeing as that was his name. The cop kept looking at Billy waiting for some kind of response. Billy wasn’t sure what was wanted so he said nothing. He stood there looking back. He felt something was wrong but didn’t want to make things any more difficult than they already were. His at times smart mouth had got him into trouble before so he kept it shut this time. “How old are you?”

“Fifteen sir.” Billy decided that respect was required.

“When’s your birthday?”

“Eleventh of September sir.”

“What year?”

“Why, every year sir!” He grinned.

Billy couldn’t resist that and once more his mouth brought trouble! The cop didn’t smile back, that’s for sure. “Wait here smart arse.”

He stamped back toward his car holding Billy's wallet and bus pass, spoke briefly to his partner then opened the passenger door. The ambulance guys had been held back until then and they immediately went to the old man after a nod from the other cop. Nobody looked at Billy. The old guy was deposited onto a gurney, the sheet pulled up over his head then unceremoniously wheeled and shunted into the back of the ambulance. They were about to drive off when the cop in the car got out and halted them with an upraised arm. He walked over to his partner and exchanged a few words, and they both approached Billy.

"What did you say your name was?"

"Billy Nelson sir."

"And how old are you Billy?"

"Fifteen."

"Please raise your hands in the air, turn around, we're going to do a pat down."

Billy looked at them blankly. He had no idea what they meant. "What did you say?" Billy sounded confused.

One of them placed his palm on the butt of his revolver. The other cop moved forward, wheeled Billy around roughly and pulled his arms above his head. Billy recognised what they wanted now though he still didn't know why. He was patted down, a card came from one pocket of his jeans and some loose change from another and they spun him back around again. Billy kept his arms up. He wasn't scared, just confused, but thought it was better if he acted a little frightened.

"Please, what have I done?"

"Put your arms down idiot," the first one commanded. "What's this?" He waved the card at Billy.

Billy had to think for a second. The cop even turned the card around and showed it to him. "Oh, that's Joe Cockers' agent."

"Yeah right. And I'm Kamhal."

"No. True story. Joe Cocker gave it to me a few months ago."

"Where was that?"

"Byron Bay, at the Top Pub."

They looked at each other again and came to some conclusion or other. "Alright, William Augustus Nelson or whatever your name is, you're coming with us to the station."

"Why? All I did was call an ambulance for a dead guy. What am I supposed to have done?"

“How old d’ya reckon you are?”

“Fifteen,” he said angrily now.

“Well Billy, or whoever you are,” the cop sneered back, “William Augustus Nelson has been reported as a missing person for over four years now. You look about twenty to me and everybody else in this world yet you claim to be fifteen. Haven’t used a mirror in awhile have you? Not many fifteen year olds have facial growth like that,” he pointed.

Instinctively Billy reached up to his face and quickly pulled his hand away. Hair. He had hair on his face! God, I haven’t even started shaving yet he thought! Any wonder the old lady called the cops and any wonder the cops are now treating me like a suspect. He looked down at himself and saw his jeans only barely made it to his ankles. His t-shirt was at least two sizes too small, just covering his belly button, and the cardigan was tattered and torn. He looked like a street bum and all of a sudden he was embarrassed! He looked at the coppers, eyes pleading at them to understand his confusion. He saw that he was a similar height to the tallest cop who was at least six foot. Billy looked down at his bare ankles again – and fainted.

In times of peril or from sheer desire or need, Billy regularly moved between his two parallels. He could remain anonymous, invisible to reality when he did so, and as a sanctuary it was second to none. Billy thought of that as soon as he woke up. He should have moved on and the cops would have been left with nothing but thin air and a great story to tell. Looking at the white ceiling above him, he heard and smelt enough to know he was in a hospital. He looked higher and craned his head, seeing his name handwritten on a card mounted on the headboard. At least it said he was still Billy Nelson. He moved an arm expecting to find it restrained, but it wasn’t. Neither arm was, nor his legs. He could see out of the window but didn’t recognise anything, the room too high in the building to allow visible landmarks. He sat up without problem, except for gnawing hunger pangs from his tummy. Reality!

“Hello there,” said a bright and cheery voice from the doorway.

Billy looked at her and was disappointed with what he saw. Her voice had conjured up images of a young bosomy nurse in a low cut dress and instead he got an old, dumpy thing in what could only be described as prison issues! She walked into the room and picked up his chart, checked pulse, blood pressure, and chatted incessantly. Billy may have liked the initial sound of her voice but after another minute of it he was ready to throttle her. She popped a thermometer in his mouth just as she paused enough in her prattle for him to get in the burning question.

“Rot rer rer it?”

She’d have made a beaut dentist as she actually understood what he said. “They told us you might ask that you know!”

Billy rolled his eyes at her. He wondered if they told her how to answer it as well. He removed the thermometer from his mouth. “What, year, is, it?” enunciating each word so she would hopefully comprehend that an immediate answer was required.

She stood still looking at him, no discernible concern registering on her face that she felt insulted or anything. Her response ignored his question entirely. “You put that back in your mouth right now,” she scolded.

Billy was beginning to get a mite upset but somehow kept his anger in check. *You could just kill her you know?* He had always been a patient person and very little upset him. Composed. That’s how one of his teachers described him. But if the cops had been right, and recalling his appearance he did not doubt it, he understood that somehow, he had not been away only four months, but four years and four months.

His recollection of the last four months was as plain as day, sitting out on that patio with the old man watching the boats go by. He had no one to ask where he’d been for four years, and he doubted anybody else would know, except he knew he should. Billy strained, concentrated, but could not recall anything. He clearly remembered walking out of home the morning after his Dad and Mum had been taken away. He recalled moving on. He could see each and every day since, as they had all been almost exactly the same. There had been no break, no breach at all. Where had the other four years gone? He put the thermometer back in my mouth.

“Rot rear ris it?”

“Why, it’s nineteen eighty-four!” she replied brightly, as if he was stupid or something.

So it was fact – he had lost four years of his life. He lay back on the pillow so confused that he couldn’t work out if he was twenty already, or turning twenty in another few months. Little in Life frightened him but this came close. He warmed to some memories, of Mum and Dad, home, Tony, school, but mostly, mostly of Jen. *Oh fuck, more of this bleedin’ heart crap.* And he dreamed of seeing her again after what was supposed to have been short sabbatical, and what their reunion would be like. It will certainly be different now. The warden spoke again and interrupted his thoughts.

“I said, you’re probably famished. I’ll get something sent up to you, okay?” Billy looked at her and nodded. “Let me give you a hint young man. This is a public hospital, and the Staff does not have time to mess around with people who think they are something special. The nerve, running away the way you did! Any wonder your poor mother passed away like that!”

She walked away, leaving Billy staring open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the vacant doorway. *Told you to kill her.* Mum gone too. It was getting a little clearer now, slowly, as the story unfolded and he managed to put the pieces together. Nobody had really asked him where he’d been yet, except the cops. They must simply assume that he’d hid somewhere for four years. The probable reality was that nobody knew, nobody, but Billy should have. Perhaps the guys on the other side had some idea. He moved on and went home.

Chapter Nine

“Transits, Home, Jen, and Tony”

Moving On Billy called it. The term described shifting between the parallels or from one location to another within the same parallel. People, normal people have this conception that ghosts, spirits, whatever you want to call them, can appear wherever they want to. Well, whatever you think they are, they can do that. But there are limitations. They can't decide that Tahiti looks good and just go there! They must have some history at the location first, in Life, then they can return whenever they want, if they want. Hence the commonly known “haunted house” scenario. Most of them did exactly that for the first couple of years, (return that is, not haunt, a debateable difference) until things change so much that it begins to hurt. Survivors in Life, the widow, the widower, the girlfriend, boyfriend, whoever, always found someone else eventually. These transitory beings, transits, would usually give up after that, and after days, months or even years would finally pass on to wherever.

The Transits were the ones Billy saw moving into and out of Life as they checked up on their Reality. As soon as that was gone, so were they. Which helps explain why Billy was always so composed at such a young age. He needed to keep his feet on the ground, metaphorically speaking, but what he knew, what he alone saw and experienced granted a boy maturity beyond anything Life could give. He opened his front gate and walked slowly toward the front door, the front fence, garden and the outside of the house had been completely refurbished. He looked around in wonder.

“Who is it?” was the response to his tentative knock.

Billy didn't recognise the voice and moved on into the house so he could see. The inside had also changed considerably. New paint, furniture, his Dad's chair and TV were gone. His room was now a nursery; colourful mobiles hung from the ceiling and gaily painted animals and letters of the alphabet splashed over the walls. He returned and stood beside the woman as she opened the front door, and was greeted by nobody, of course. She peered around, up and down the street and then closed the door.

“Damn kids!” she muttered.

She walked back to the renovated kitchen where Billy had interrupted her cake making. He watched as she hummed to herself and resumed beating the mixture. It felt comfortable and Billy thought he might stay awhile but then shook his head.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid,” he admonished.

The woman stopped beating and frowned. She looked around the kitchen, shook her head herself, and continued beating again. Her humming was softer, more restrained.

Billy looked around the house one more time then went to Tonys' place. There was no mistaking that Tony still lived there. His room had not changed but his drum kit was bigger and more expensive, as was his sound equipment. Billy sat down at the messy desk and wrote a note, then took a deep breath for his next visit. This was going to be the difficult one. He went to Jens'.

He sat on her bed and looked around the room. Very little had changed but enough to know Jen wasn't there anymore. Her photos were still there on the wall and the mirror of her dresser, exactly as he remembered them. He saw one of them together at the tennis courts as well. She was so beautiful. He quietly opened a few drawers of her dresser. They were empty. Her wardrobe was empty. Everything was completely empty. The room was like a shell, a facade. It didn't feel like she had just moved out of home or anything simple like that. Billy thought that she would have taken the photos, and her parents wouldn't have left her room looking like a mausoleum. Something felt wrong, even smelt wrong. He took one of the smaller photos from the mirror.

He could smell that cake cooking back at home, his old home, and remembered how hungry he was. His note for Tony, if he got it in time, would see them catch up before the weekend was out. Billy went to his other favourite place, the tennis courts, or more precisely, the clubhouse.

It wasn't small anymore. It had more than doubled in size, and there was six courts now all green concrete with permanent painted lines. A lingering aroma of food remained and Billy assumed that he'd just missed the ladies morning comp. The smell reminded him again of his hunger. That's the trouble with Life, you have to maintain it or die, or at the very least suffer in some way. There was a fridge and a freezer and a proper kitchen in there no less so he helped himself as well as he could. A frozen steak out of the freezer was soon sizzling on a hot plate. Some left over salad from the fridge went straight into his mouth. He ate the steak half raw and still part frozen in the centre, slapped between two slices of bread warmed over the cooking steak. The juices ran through the bread and made it fall apart but he didn't care. It was a feast, and he made an appropriate mess eating it!

Billy's ability to move in and out of Life used to give his Mum and Dad the heebie jeebies that's for sure! His Mum would be pushing the stroller along only to find her toddler, Billy, gone less than two minutes after she'd strapped him in there! They got used to it eventually, but he remembered the looks of confusion they used to get from hospitals and doctors, counsellors and psychiatrists, as his Mum tried to explain that their "baby" could disappear and reappear at will! Of course Billy never did it in front of anyone else – nobody would understand!

Before jumping to any conclusions, Billy is not dead. He hasn't died, been killed, or anything like that. He was just born to it, and whatever or however it happened, not even the guys Over There can tell him why. They look to him with a reverence, naturally, because he is alive, and they are not. To Billy, it is all perfectly natural.

Chapter Ten

“The Reunion”

He checked his watch. It was almost time to meet Tony – if he’d got the message. His watch always read the right time. Reality time that is, but it didn’t work at all on the other side. Billy never questions it – it’s just normal. He went to the all nighter in Ballina, a service station, the only one in town that was open all night. Guess that didn’t need explaining?

When he arrived he mingled into a recently arrived group from a tour bus, a young kid the only one to notice him. It rarely happened, where he appeared in somebody’s focus, and when it did, such is Life, most assume he had always been there! Kids, though, kids are different. They are still questioning Life and normalcy. It wasn’t normal for Billy to have materialised like that right before his eyes. The kid tugged at his mother’s sleeve and she gave Billy a quick cursory glance. There was a busload of people and she hadn’t seen them all on their short leg down from Brisbane. She pulled her kid away sharply and Billy felt sorry for him – she’d probably take him around the corner and give him a belt across the backside now, for lying. Sorry kid!

Billy sat down outside the packed cafeteria and watched. The people moved past him, in and out, making the most of the chance to stretch their legs. Probably the only place busier would be the loos. He saw Tony drive up searching the throng, unable to drive closer than the fuel pumps because of the crowd and the parked bus. Billy blessed him for being reliable and stood up, waving his arms so that he wouldn’t miss him. That was a possibility – Billy hadn’t forgotten his appearance had changed a little, and it had been over four years since Tony had last seen him.

Billy didn’t look like a faggot anymore either. He wasn’t so dumb that he’d left the hospital in those backless gowns they dress you in. Actually, and embarrassingly, he did! He’d forgotten, and that’s why he hadn’t let the lady at his old house see him. Later, he borrowed some of Tonys’ clothes, had his first ever shave – a very painful experience – a shower, spruced up totally. His long, dark hair was clean and brushed. He had to look good for Jen, and Tony of course.

Tony stared at him in amazement before recognition hit home. He leapt out of the car and raced over, hugging Billy embarrassingly in front of everybody. Billy was brought up with little or no physical affection and he was uncomfortable with this scenario. Tony hadn’t grown much, or maybe it was just that Billy had – he stood half a head taller than him. It was fortunate he dressed like a dag so at least his clothes fitted both of them. Tony stood at arms length looking Billy up and down, his hands cupping his shoulders as he carried out his inspection. That Cheshire grin he possessed was plastered right across his face.

“Fucking hell man, that is you in there isn’t it?”

“Of course it’s me you idiot,” Billy told him.

As soon as he heard the retort his smile widened. “It is you! Jeeesarse man, where ya bin, wow, look at you!”

“Let’s get outta here Tone.”

“Yeah, yeah, c’mon, we’ll go down to the Aussie, no somewhere quieter and you can tell me all about it.”

He remained looking at Billy, in awe almost. He had hardly changed, except for a wispy goatee. He chatted non-stop all the way to the pub – only once did he pause, after he mentioned Jen. A quick glance at Billy then he carried on talking as if he’d never stopped. But Billy knew Tony. It may have been almost four and half years for him but it was still only mere months for Billy. There was something about Jen. Something had happened that he didn’t want to talk about. Billy thought about Jen’s bedroom, how empty it had been and made a mental note to bring it up later, but he ran through the possible scenarios. The most likely one was that she was with someone else, married probably. Billy was patient enough. He knew he would find out in due course.

They walked into the pub and Billy was about to make a joke that this was his first time legally on licensed premises. Now that would take some explaining! Their early years familiarising themselves with the interiors of such establishments meant it wasn’t such a big deal anyway. However, like most teenagers, and he still thought of himself as one, Billy had been looking forward to this very occasion. The Aussie, as he had known it, had been flashed up a bit since the last time. Tony had said they would go somewhere quieter but it’s where they ended up. Billy didn’t bother questioning it. Tony had almost exhausted his chat and begun to ask questions. Billy replied as best he could, having quickly prepared some set responses.

“Nah, just shared a flat with some old guy on the Gold Coast for awhile.”

“Yeah, worked around doing odd jobs. No, no singing.”

“Yeah, I was gonna call so many times, but you know, I thought, I didn’t know what to say to you man. Like, I buggered off and all on you, I thought you might hate me!”

“Yeah, I heard about Mum. After the funeral though. You went hoping I was going to be there? Why thanks mate.”

“No, by myself. No sheilas. Have you seen Jen? What? No I haven’t heard. You thought I already knew? About what?”

“So, she married? Got knocked up, had a kid? What?”

Tony was shrinking on his bar stool – if it hadn’t been there he would have been under the table by now. It was very obvious that he did not want to discuss Jen. For some reason he assumed Billy already knew. Billy thought he knew why. Tony would assume that Billy had already contacted her, or kept in contact even.

“Tony?”

“She’s, ah, gone Billy. Coupla years ago now. No! More, longer, same year you left.”

“Gone where?”

“Gone. Gone gone. Um... dead. Killed. God, I’m sorry Billy. I thought you knew. She, she and some, some guy, got killed, down at Riley’s Hill quarry. Murdered. Cut the guys head off too they did! Um, Billy, I’m so sorry man.”

Chapter Eleven

“The Apostle of Girangar”

He stepped through the swirling mist, aware that at any time he must be prepared to act and act quickly. A large rock face became visible in the gloom. Sheltering under a minuscule overhang was the seven of them, huddled together. Their faces reflected mortal fear. There were five men and two women, well perhaps three men and two boys. The women were teenagers themselves. They stood arms around each other for warmth and protection, the act of physical contact salvaging what little semblance of sanity remained. A glimmer of hope shone in some eyes as they saw him approach, confidently stepping through the mire and obviously heading toward them. Salvation! They had been found! Their confidence was boosted by his sudden, soundless appearance.

“*Ho*” he called to them.

“It’s just a boy,” one of them whispered, one who was barely older himself. “Can you help us?” he said as the figure stopped directly in front of them. The boy that spoke had a comforting arm around one of the girls.

The figure smiled a happy and confident smile and nodded. “*I surely can, I surely can. Which one of you is Errol?*” he asked looking directly at one of the men.

“That’s me,” Errol acknowledged, a considerable vibrato betrayed his fear.

“*Errol, come here,*” the boy motioned to a position beside him. Errol stood his ground, looking at the others for support, any support. “*Come on Errol, I won’t bite, I promise,*” the boy grinned.

Errol slowly detached himself from the group and moved forward. A hand reluctantly released his shirt. His steps were slow and his body trembled. He faced the boy but turned side on so that he could still see the others. The boy appeared to ignore him as he addressed them all again, but to his horror Errol recognized that it was a question meant for he, and he alone to answer. He glanced sharply at the kid.

“*How much did you drink tonight?*”

“I didn’t, only, had a couple,” he shook even more, the pitch of his voice almost a squeal.

“*Try seventeen,*” the boy smiled at the group again. “*And your two mates there weren’t much better. How did it feel driving with a blood alcohol concentration so high that you could have been considered clinically dead?*”

“I, I didn’t, couldn’t ...,” Errol turned and addressed the group himself, pleading almost.

“*You could and you did,*” the boy interrupted conversationally. “*And how did it feel when you launched your car off the median strip at seventy-five miles an hour? Did that feel like flying!*”

“No, no, I wasn’t...”

“You were, you were flying, and your car still hadn’t hit the ground when it struck these kids standing innocently at a taxi rank. Do you know they had just been out celebrating Julies’, ” he pointed at one of the girls, “sixteenth birthday? You killed them Errol, and your mates, and there is another six people still in hospital because of you Errol. Look at them,” he commanded, as Errol let his chin slump to his chest. “LOOK AT THEM!”

Errol raised his head at the shouted command. He tried to stare defiantly but failed. Everybody stared back, their hate smoldering. One of the other men spoke.

“We’re dead? “Coz of him? We’re dead?”

“Yup!”

“You was drinkin’ just as much as me,” Errol shouted.

“That’s a lie. After I got to the pub, yeah, true, I had three or four, just like you did, but you’d already been there for a couple of hours, and I wasn’t driving,” he responded accusingly. “Seventeen schooners Errol? Man, I knew you drank a bit, but seventeen? You got a real problem.”

“You all have a problem. He killed you all, just as if he’d gone out and bought a gun and shot you down, he killed you. You ALL have a problem now. So what you gonna do about it?”

The boys’ invitation elicited some confused looks and one of the girls, the other girl beside Julie spoke. “Why can’t I cry?”

“Because of him,” he nodded at Errol who now stood hands on hips, defensive, face set. One of his legs still trembled though. “He killed you and now you can’t cry. You can’t cry and you can’t love, but you can hate and you can wreak revenge. So what are you gonna do about it? I said what are you going to do about it?”

There was a pause of a few seconds, then one of the men growled out an oath. “You barstard” and he leapt, smashing Errol to the ground in a flying tackle.

The rest followed, jumping, kicking, punching, even the girls flailed into the melee. Their terror and fear released, there was satisfaction when their nails connected with a face, and not a care about whose face it was! The boy smiled, turned and walked away. He heard Errol utter his last screams of protest, and then the desperate screams of the others as the darkness descended. With the darkness came the lights, many, perhaps hundreds of them. Panic turned to horror as they were set upon. He heard Julie, the sixteen year old, and her final pitiful scream. He imagined the creatures as they consumed her young body. It was a shame; she was pretty and about his age.

“Don’t think like that,” a voice beside him spoke and an arm draped over his shoulders.

The boy didn’t jump. He didn’t even look in the direction of the speaker. He continued to stride confidently down the sloping, wet and broken ground before him.

“How’d I go?”

“You did well, very well. But next time, be more careful about when you invite them to react. You may have to incite them a little more first, but it worked, this time. Girangar was pleased.”

“So he should.”

The boy was stopped by the arm, which grasped at the collar of his cardigan and turned him to face the speaker. “Shhh. Girangar is not a he, nor a she. Refrain from applying gender, or any human title to Girangar.”

The boy looked into the normally smiling face of the speaker, but there was no smile. The speaker was deadly serious, and a little frightened. He had never, ever seen that before in this man.

“Then what do I call, it, him, just Girangar? What is, who is Girangar?”

The smile returned with the man’s reply. “Girangar is everything, the earth, the ocean, the rivers, the mountains, the only true misanthropist.”

“Miss who? I thought you said there was no gender?”

Again, the fear returned. “Shh. You mustn’t. Misanthropist, a true hater of mankind. Now, speak no more. Go back and we will continue your training later.”

“How am I doing?”

“Excellent. Just watch your mouth.”

“When can I come in, you know, go back?”

“You are doing very well but it has only been a year. We shall see.”

“How long does it normally take, this training?”

“For some, a matter of weeks, months, but they are the failures and they are passed on. Normal? Well, there is no normal because there has been so few, but I believe that you should be ready in another three or four year’s maybe. It is but yet early days. Now, no more. Go.”

“Just one more question, please?”

The man smiled. The curiosity of the boy, his maturity, these were the things that were making him a brilliant student – not that he would ever be told that. “Okay, one more question.”

“Why do I have to hide? Why can’t I just be me?”

“That’s two questions. And you know the answer to them both. It’s the element of surprise. Don’t worry, you will understand, by the time it’s necessary for you to know.”

“You don’t know do you?”

“Enough! Go!” And there was no smile in return.

“Really, seriously, I have a last question. Why did you say don’t think that way about the girl?”

“Because it isn’t necessary. When you return to Life and begin again, you will have a girl, or as many girls as you want. They will be at your beck and call, they will all want you, they will see that you are different, unique. But there will be one, a special one that you will want rather than any number of others, and she will look after you. She has been trained to look after you – and she waits for you now.”

“How will I know her?”

“You will know her. She will know you. Don’t worry, you have been fated to meet. It will happen.”

“Can’t wait,” the boy shrugged and moved on.

Chapter Twelve

“Living With Tony”

Billy always knew that Tony was resilient. He’s one in a million. He was on a hiding to nowhere really. He sees Billy for the first time in over four years and accepts him back as if he’d only gone yesterday. Four years without a phone call, a letter or any other bloody thing, and there were no recriminations, no aggro, nothing but acceptance. It was almost the welcoming back of the prodigal son and that’s probably what stopped Billy from going off again after the shock about Jen. Billy felt obligated to stay.

Perhaps before, when he really was a fifteen-year-old kid, Billy wouldn’t have felt the same. Coming to terms with the fact that he was suddenly a twenty year old, an adult, he knew there was a certain way adults are supposed to act. His composure and maturity as a teen stood him in good stead.

Apart from the obvious, like the Ten Commandments, there are the unwritten rules of Life that most people follow and try to engender into their offspring. Not that Billy learnt much like that from his parents. *Excuses, excuses, fucking wimp. This moron couldn’t find his way to his own shithouse if he had the worst case of diarrhea imaginable. It’s all bullshit. Yes, bullshit! Duran is the Angel and Girangar will lead us to the new world. So stick your fucking heads down between your knees and kiss your arse goodbye, because we’re coming to get you. And we will. You can’t hide, so there’s no need to panic. Just go. That’s right, go. Ha, go fuck yourself!*

Tony was a true friend. After dropping the bombshell about Jen he helped pick Billy up and put him on the road to recovery, so to speak. More or less, that’s what he did. He took Billy home with him, set up the spare bed in his room and that’s where Billy lived from then on. Tony’s parents were cool about it, they were pretty laid back sort of people. They’d always liked Billy and his steady influence on Tony. Especially after the debacle with their eldest son, who had served his prison term for drug dealing only to get out and re-offend within two weeks, while he was still on probation! Once a fool always a fool, eh!

Tony’s parents even rang the Gold Coast Police and made sure that everything was hunky dory with them, that Billy wasn’t actually wanted for anything. The gist of their response was that a missing person case was the last thing they were worried about, and seeing as he was no longer in Queensland it was out of their jurisdiction anyway. Billy hadn’t expected to make the Top 10 Wanted List or anything but he had been hoping for maybe a couple of answers. At least he was in the clear so to speak.

It took a fair while to get over the shock of Jen. Tony couldn’t understand. It had been four years for him, but only four months for Billy. Billy and Jen had truthfully believed, like so many fifteen year olds do, that they had been meant for each other.

Billy learnt the hard way to embrace and recognise fate otherwise Life is a constant compromise. He knew his Life was different, that he was different. He had grown up alone with that knowledge. Alone except for the guys from the other side. He supposed he was a hypocrite because of what he did, leaving Jen and his Mum. But he felt he hadn’t left them, just went away for

a short time to grieve and recuperate. His intention had always been to return. He really believed that she would be there waiting when he came back. He missed her. He continued to grieve for her.

He felt guilty too. If he hadn't gone away maybe she would be alive today. Billy thought of this often. If that was her fate, to die horribly like that, perhaps that could have been him, you know, the guy with Jen that got decapitated? But Billy knew it wasn't so.

Billy only knew his destiny did not lie in Life. It wasn't apparent to him how he knew, he just did. He had to live his Life first to find out. He lay in some sort of middle zone, the only one there that anybody knew about anyway. He was both alive, and not. He is neither here nor over there. He can go here, and there – whenever he liked! But he had to finish his business here before he can find out what is there. Billy was a kid when he began shouldering that knowledge, and to have remained relatively normal to those around him was testimony to his insight and ability. He's not a kid anymore, or normal. But he was when he digested that much about himself. And as for normal, well, that's for each individual to decide.

So here he is living with Tony and his parents now. It's been several weeks and Billy still feels so hollow inside. It's the most "human" he'd ever felt. Thankfully, the involuntary tears and sobbing had all but disappeared. He had found that embarrassing after awhile. Jen had been the only one to ever see him cry before and that time had been from happiness. Billy learnt a lot about emotion from the past few weeks, that's for sure. He had felt and observed enough before so that he could have known, but the grief about his Dad was nothing compared to this. Even having seen more death than anybody can ever imagine. Seen it every single bloody day, almost every minute of every frigging day in fact, in the presence of the transits. But now it was up close and personal, he knew what it really felt like. And wished he hadn't found out.

Billy soldiered on and Tony got him going to the jam sessions again. They all wanted him to actually sing in the band. In the back of his mind though was his one and only public performance, with Mr Cocker no less. He still thought if he hadn't gone there, to the Top Pub that night, or to tennis, or Tonys', or to the drive in, that he might have been able to save his Dads' Life. And because it was his Dad, family, blood, maybe he could have done something that time.

A minor "problem" at home was that Billy's Mum and Dad knew about him and some of his abilities. His Mum accepted it, recognised it for what it was and let him be, but his Dad, no way! To his Dad Billy was a freak and he refused to accept it. Billy even stood in front of him one night and went off then came back, right before his very eyes, which isn't a bad trick for a four year old! He tried to convince him for so long, even telling him about events to come, sad events, and they always came true but still he refused to listen or accept. What he did do though was to start sitting in front of that television as his escape from his spooky kid. Everyone must learn to accept Reality, and to make the most of whatever fate deals you. Billy knew that very few made it. His Dad didn't.

Billy and Tony lived in a little town about ten kilometres south of Ballina named Wardell. So he and Tony were not being lazy by catching a bus to school. Billy wondered how he would have gone if he had finished school? Billy lived in town itself. Tony's house was about half a kilometre away, just past the outskirts. Tony's parents had a few acres they grew pineapples on which is probably where his big brother got his horticultural skills! Jen used to live on the other side of town, about two kilometres away on the back road to Lismore. Her Father bought the school bus run from Wardell to Lismore, which is how they ended up moving here.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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