

~ Monochromacy ~

# MONOCHROMACY

Fresh Cut Edition

Sample

Troy Barnes

# 1

*What have I done?*

Harry stared at the axe still gripped in his right hand. The red drops sliding off the blade formed an indiscriminate pattern at his feet. For a brief moment, Harry thought back to his childhood, looking for animals and other shapes in the clouds. The only thing he found in this growing pool of blood was despair. A male voice was screaming out in terror from behind a door that was a little ajar. A chain stopped it opening more than a few inches. It had been enough room for an arm to reach out in a desperate attempt to escape. This door was the first of four, all in a row, not far apart from each other. Harry looked beyond the puddle at his feet and stared at the severed hand. The fingers twitched. It brought back stories of how a chicken could continue to run around after losing its head on the chopping block. Just below eye level was a deep indent in the timber door frame. The axe had been swift and accurate. He remembered the arm receding back into the dark room as the hand fell with a thump to the boards below. Little red streaks chased each other down the wall, a foolish attempt to find the body part they originated from. The horror was too much for Harry to handle.

*How did this happen?*

Fate had taken control of every aspect of his life. All his choices disappeared, as though the pure fabric of time stripped him back to the bone. A woman's body lay on her back, next to the twitching hand. The blood pouring from the deep wound between her breasts surrounded her like a crimson halo. Harry fell to his knees and touched her skin. He expected it to feel clammy and cold, but he knew that wasn't possible. She was, of course, still warm. It was only minutes ago that he'd plunged the axe deep into her chest. Harry recalled the sickening sound it made and he vomited violently. Some of it splattered on her bare legs. Compelled by some form of respect, he wiped it away. A female voice came from behind the second door.

“What's happening out there?” she said.

Over and over again. Different variations of the same question.

“Tell me what's happening?”

He heard tears in the youth of her voice, and something else.

Fear.

The last two doors remained silent, hiding beneath the torment of their surroundings. Harry fell back against

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the wall, sliding down till he met the floor. He let go of the axe.

“Oh ... my ... God!” the man who lost his hand shrieked from the behind the first door.

Harry sat, his mouth gaping, his eyes aimed at the floor where the axe lay alone and smeared. He felt blood trickling down his face.

*How had it all come to this?*

## 2

*Two weeks earlier ...*

Welcome to Raven Beach.

That was the first thing visitors and tourists saw when they arrived. The sign sat in the middle of a small native garden, on the grass between the northern beach and the main street that ran the length of the bay. It was incredible scenery and a beautiful sight when the waves crashed right up to the grass edge at full tide. A string of stores and a few houses made up the opposite side of the main street. Two small cities were located fifteen minutes to the east and west, bookending the town, but Raven Beach still had all the basics - a bakery, a butcher, two hair salons, a post office, three take-away outlets, a DVD rental store and, of course, two pubs. The businesses didn't spread further than the main street. The only building to sit outside the shopping area on the beach front was the church. Built on the far western point, it looked out over a field of jagged rocks that blanketed the sand. Houses covered the hills that looked down over the beach. Towering over them, further back, was Black Mountain. Hiking tracks to suit various fitness levels started at the base and all joined together again at a small

lookout on the peak. Dense bushland smothered the landscape leading back to the town. Raven Beach attracted hordes of tourists, but the population never moved above three thousand. Visitors were welcome, but never made to feel too welcome. It was normal in small towns. It was a tight community that looked after its own.

Harrison Cowley first laid eyes on the welcome sign six months ago. When Aunt Molly died from a sudden heart attack, he was the only relative remaining, so her cabin near the base of Black Mountain went to him. It wasn't much to look at, but the roof didn't leak and it was better than sleeping in the car. The wagon had been the accommodation of choice for more nights than he wished to remember. Harrison, or Harry as he preferred, reached the prime age of twenty-seven without making a dent in the radar of success. He had never been the type of person who understood what life had planned. There wasn't a path that seemed to fit. He moved through the years hoping something would appear one day and show the way. He never expected to live in a worn out cabin in the bush while holding down a part-time job stacking shelves at the local supermarket. Life can be funny like that.

Harry was a single child who never knew his father. The man was a drifter who passed through town and was long gone before anyone knew he had left a pregnant woman behind. He lost his mother when he was nineteen. Diana Cowley was a quiet, fit woman, who had no idea a tumour had found a home in her brain. It was too late for treatment when they discovered it. She was dead five weeks later. Harry wasn't close to his mother, but losing her so quickly was hard for him. He didn't have close friends and dealt with the loss alone, his only helping hand being copious amounts of bourbon. The alcohol dulled the pain when it was at its worst. As the years went by, he moved from town to town, always searching for something to make him want to stop. Raven Beach hadn't proved to be the answer, but for now, it was a roof over his head. Molly was his mother's sister. The two siblings had fallen out in their twenties for reasons unknown and Harry never had the chance to meet his Aunt in person. It was a complete surprise when the lawyer called about her estate. He forgot that he even had an Aunt. With nothing holding him down, he decided to move to Raven Beach.

The look on Harry's face was priceless when he saw the cabin for the first time. It was a basic one room

structure that sat in a small clearing surrounded by towering trees. A chimney poked up through the tin roof and a small enclosed porch covered the only door at the front. The dirt road leading to it was rough and full of holes. Harry thought it was the cabin that time forgot. No, he didn't think it. He knew it. It was also forgotten by technology. There was power connected, but except for ceiling lights, there wasn't much for it to do. The cabin and his wagon were a perfect match for each other. They were both old and falling apart. Harry disposed of all Molly's belongings and only kept what would be of use. There were no hard decisions to make because she was a stranger to him. There was nothing of any emotional value. He was soon calling the cabin home and even though it wasn't anything special, he found it a relaxing place to be. The big benefit was the non-existence of neighbours. The cabin was half a kilometre off the road to Black Mountain and the nearest home was twice that distance away. Even with its faults, it was the most perfect home Harry had ever had.

Harry was slow opening his eyes. A sliver of sunlight weaved through the curtains and cut the morning shadow away from his face. The sheets on the double bed had drifted down past his waist during the night, but

hadn't compromised his comfort. Harry lifted both arms above his head and stretched out the morning haze. His hand found a bird nest of hair. He sniffed a little as the first deep breath of air tunnelled through his nose. The alarm was yet to sound. He loved it when he woke before the annoying ring on his mobile phone. It allowed a few extra minutes of laziness before making his way to the shower.

*Why is the sun shining on me already?*

Harry snatched his phone off the bedside table.

*DAMN IT!*

The time on the screen read 9:15.

He should have started work fifteen minutes earlier. He'd forgotten to switch on the alarm before going to sleep. He leapt from the bed like a superhero. The clothes from the previous day lay crumpled on the floor. He ignored how crinkled they were and threw them on. There wasn't time to worry about such things. He had to move quicker than he had ever done before. His short brown morning hair would hide away under the cap that was part of the uniform. He was out the door and driving down the dirt road five minutes later.

Harry raced through the rear door, hoping no one would notice his late arrival. A young girl stood near the

doorway. Megan Hyland was a fresh-faced twenty year old girl who had lived in Raven Beach all her life. She had shoulder-length blonde hair and a face full of freckles that suited her in ways that would not work on most girls.

“Coming through the back door isn’t going to help you,” said Megan. “He already knows you weren’t here on time.”

“Shit! Do you know where he is?”

Megan shook her head.

“He was up front a minute ago, but he could be anywhere by ...”

“Where the hell have you been?” an angry voice interrupted.

Frank Conners barged his way into the storeroom. Frank had owned the Raven Beach General Market for more years than any of the locals were able to recall. He was a spry man for his sixty-eight years, but looked much older due to his thick white beard. His wife, Pam, also worked at the market, but kept to the bookwork and invoices. Harry wasn’t sure who he would prefer to face if he had a choice.

“Well?” Frank said.

All the possible excuses streamed through Harry’s mind. None were worthy of the situation.

“My alarm didn’t go off, Frank. It won’t happen again.”

Megan had taken a small step back while the action was taking place. There was nowhere to retreat, but she felt more comfortable not being in the middle of the war. Frank stared, lips pressed together.

“This isn’t good enough, boy. You hear me?”

“I hear you.”

Frank looked at Megan.

“You don’t have anything to do?” he said.

She squeezed past him, back into the store, not bothering to answer.

“Sorry, Frank,” Harry said.

Frank raised his finger and pointed it with intent.

“I don’t want to hear sorry. I want to see responsibility. I want to see some respect. This is your only warning, boy. One more time and you’re gone.”

Frank opened the door and stormed back into the store, slamming it behind him. That was the fourth *only warning* Harry had received. He wondered if all the confrontational issues were worth the hassle just for a part time job. He would love to quit, but getting another job in a small town was difficult. Two locals stood near the door as he walked onto the shop floor. They had overheard the commotion and looked on with middle-

aged judgement. Harry continued on his way and didn't pay them any attention.

Harry's roster finished at one in the afternoon, but out of fairness to Frank, he stayed an extra half hour. An elderly woman was examining her choices of milk as he was walking to the rear door.

“Hello, young Harry,” she said.

“How are you today, Mrs Patterson?”

Hilary Patterson tilted her head a little to the side and smiled. She loved people remembering her name. The wrinkles had conquered all areas of her smooth skin, but she still liked to feel important from time to time.

“I am having a wonderful day. Mr Long offered to drive me into town so I could pick up my groceries. It was so nice of him, don't you think?”

Harry enjoyed knowing that, even at her age, she could still find reason to smile. Maybe getting older wasn't so bad after all.

“He is a helpful man, Mrs Patterson. Now you remember to watch those stairs going out the front door. I don't want the best looking lady in Raven Beach to slip and do herself an injury.”

Hilary giggled like a schoolgirl and bobbed her head around like a lot of little old ladies do. Megan

stepped around the corner just in time to enter the conversation.

“Stop fraternising with the staff, Mrs Patterson,” Megan said and leant in and whispered, “He may be cute to look at, but I think we can both do better, don’t you?”

Hilary continued giggling and then made her way toward the cash register at the front of the store.

Harry directed a confused look at Megan.

“What did you just say to make my biggest fan waddle away?”

“I just told her the truth. I told her you have herpes.”

Megan followed him out to the storeroom.

“You’re not as funny as you think you are,” he said.

She just grinned back at him. He grabbed his car keys off the bench and continued on to the outside world.

“See ya, Harry. Don’t forget that cream the doctor gave you.”

He could still hear her laughing, even as he closed the door to his wagon out the back.

Harry reversed out of the side laneway and onto the main street. Mr Long’s green sedan was near the front door to the market. Hilary was sitting in the passenger

seat. She waved as he drove by. He returned the gesture and then waited for a boy on a skateboard to pass before accelerating. The skater almost ran into Mr Long, but he changed his line at the last second. Peter Long was the local priest in Raven Beach. He was only in his early thirties, but his level of maturity ran well beyond his years. He had a caring soul and always offered to help the people in the local community when called upon. He was a much-loved man by everyone, even non-churchgoers. He had been in the town for a little under four years and in that time had earned a level of respect that isn't often handed to outsiders. Peter was different from most newcomers. He was the type of person who made other people feel comfortable. He never pushed his beliefs outside the church and showed time and time again that he cared for more than just himself. This was more than could be said about many of the residents of the town.

It wasn't long before Harry was back home and far away from the Frank's hassling. He walked to the stack of wood next to the front porch and grabbed an armful. The start of winter had passed a few days earlier and it brought the cold weather along for the ride. The first day had been the thickest frost in years, if he could believe

what the locals told him. Everyone who walked into the market that morning had said the same thing.

“This is the worst frost we have had in four winters.”

One thing he learnt while working in a retail store was there was always one simple language that everyone was fluent in. The language of weather. As he piled the pieces of wood onto his right arm, he couldn't think of one person who didn't comment on how cold it was that morning. The temperature at night hadn't improved since then and the best cure for that was a raging fire. The fireplace was soon flickering with red and orange flames and Harry sat back, watching them skip all around the logs. He found it relaxing to sit and admire the way they played with each other.

Soon he was asleep, and the first of the dreams began.