

# HONORABLE ASSASSIN



THE  
MACMASTER CHRONICLES

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*a novel by*

JASON LORD CASE

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BOOK ONE OF  
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NEW YORK

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For my dear wife Sylvia,  
who still believes in me.

I would like to thank my parents,  
David and Mary Case, who raised me to read,  
and my sister Mardou Case without whom this series  
would never have reached the press.

## Chapter One

### Sydney

Terry woke with needles in his arms and tubes running up his nose and his penis. He was groggy and weak. Sensors were attached to his chest and head, and there were bags of saline and other unknown liquids dripping into his veins. He had difficulty swallowing with the tube running down his throat; it gagged him. His eyelids felt like sandpaper and his skull throbbed with waves of pain and nausea. He did not recognize the room he was in, or the emaciated, corpse-like body in the bed next to his. He was terrified and started to cry, a reasonable reaction for an eight-year-old boy waking from a coma.

His sobbing caused Terry to gag again on the tube in his throat and he reached up, grabbed the tube running up his nose, and pulled. The feeding tube slid up his esophagus and out through his sinuses. He needed to reset his grip twice to pull the entire length out. He almost vomited as he felt it slithering out of his stomach but did not, and was able to take a deep breath once it was clear.

The tears stopped flowing as Terry's memories began to return. He had no idea how he had gotten where he found himself. He remembered the long and boring ride to Sydney Harbor. He remembered his father checking the systems on his yacht before sailing from Berry's Bay. His mother was stowing the supplies for the day and talking to somebody unknown on her huge mobile phone. He remembered how her golden hair shone in the midday sun, how she smiled at him and it lit up his world. There was the memory of his mother pointing out Elton John's Sydney mansion. He did not know who Elton John was and thought she had said the name backward. Then they passed the Prime Minister's house situated right after Neutral Bay.

The beach at Shark Bay had been crowded with beautiful, suntanned bodies and Terry remembered thinking he would rather have been on the beach than on the boat but he had not said so. They had passed the red and white spike of the Hornby Lighthouse. He had always liked seeing the lighthouse, it let him know the day was over on the way back in, and that the land was behind them on the passage out. North Head was less visible on the other side of the harbor's mouth.

About 130 kilometers south was Comerong Bay, where they had sailed in and docked at Greenwell Point where Terry's father had walked into the town to visit what he said was an old friend. Terry and his mother ate some lunch in the park right off the docks.

The sensors on Terry's chest began to itch as he lay in the hospital bed and he reached up and pulled them off. Suddenly, an alarm went off, a single, unwavering tone from the machine next to his bed. Panic began to set into Terry's young mind and he thought about how much trouble he would be in for pulling the sensors off. His first thought was that he needed to get out of there. He pulled the needles out of the inside of his elbow and the back of his hand, throwing them on the floor and then tried to pull the catheter out of his penis. It would not come. He grabbed his penis with his left hand and the tube with his right and pulled as hard as he could but to no avail. The catheter would not budge. His struggles stopped as nurses began to run into the room in a state of disorder. They were all telling him to do, or not do, all sorts of different things. Terry released his hold on the tube and began crying again.

The tests they put the young man through seemed interminable. Two days of CAT scans, PET scans EEGs, EKGs, sonograms, blood tests, urine tests, (Terry was very glad they had removed the catheter while he slept) reaction tests, vision tests, hearing tests and psychological exams. The

boy began to get upset that nobody would tell him how he had gotten there, or where his parents were.

“Do you know what year it is, Terry?” The psychologist was a beautiful young woman named Doctor Sherry Cherry who could disarm almost any man, short of a total sociopath. She was warm, friendly and beautiful, inviting confidences not easily shared.

“Yes, it’s 1987. October of 1987.”

“Close, Dear. It’s actually November Third. The hospital staff did not know when you would wake up, that’s why we have you on the long term convalescent floor. We are all so happy to have you back.” Sherry’s lovely smile was genuine. She had not been in the field long enough to become jaded.

“So, I was sleeping for a month?”

“Technically, Dear, you were in a coma. You came to us unconscious and stayed that way for 10 days. Do you remember what happened?”

“I was sailing with Daddy and Mummy, down the coast. We stopped so Daddy could see someone.”

“Do you know who you were stopping to see?”

“Oh no. I didn’t see him. I ate lunch with mummy in the park. She always liked that park. Me too.”

“Do you remember the name of the park?”

“Greenwell, Greenwell Point. I like that park because there is a hollow tree with a big place to hide. At least it used to be big. I couldn’t fit in it this time. Mummy said it’s because I am getting big.”

“Indeed, you are a fine young lad, tall and strong.”

Terry blushed at the praise. He was another of a hundred patients at Sydney’s Saint Vincent Public Hospital who was on the verge of falling in love with Sherry Cherry.

“Do you remember what you did after lunch?”

“No. That is, I think I took a nap. Daddy was visiting someone. Can I see my Mummy?”

“I’m afraid that will not be possible, Terry.”

“They’re dead, aren’t they?”

“What makes you say that, dear?”

“If they were alive they would be here, with me.”

“I’m sure they loved you very much.”

“They are dead, aren’t they?”

“Oh, Sweetheart, I hope not. We don’t know where they are. We found you floating in the ocean near Cunjurong Point.”

“Cunjurong Point? That’s all the way down by Mollymook. That’s a hundred kilometers from Comerong Bay. Greenwell Point is in Comerong Bay at the junction of the Shoalhaven and Crookhaven Rivers.”

“My goodness. You certainly know your geography. I’ll bet one in a thousand grown men couldn’t have told me that.”

“Daddy always insisted it is important to know where you are. If you don’t know where you are, how do you know where you are going?”

“And do you know where you were going?”

“No. Daddy didn’t tell me.”

“Do you remember leaving Greenwell?”

“No. I was eating lunch with Mummy and then I woke up. I was here. Can you call my house and see if they are home?” Terry’s eyes were beginning to well up with tears.

“Of course I will. I called yesterday. I’ll call again today. I think we’ve talked enough today. We’ll have another little talk tomorrow, ok?” Sherry Cherry flashed him a dazzling smile and reached out to squeeze his shoulder. It did not bring a smile to Terry’s face but it stopped the tears.

There were two plainclothes policemen in the hallway. A nurse escorted Terry back to his room and Ms. Cherry went to speak with the Inspectors. Within half an hour, Terry was asleep.

The following day there was a kindly-looking, older gentleman in the room with Sherry Cherry. He introduced himself as Inspector Barlow. He wore a nice suit and his haircut was perfect. Though his hair was mostly grey, he was not going bald. His face was clean shaven. He asked most of the questions.

“Do you mind if I call you Terry?” he asked.

“No, that’s my name.”

“All right, Terry. We have hundreds of men looking for your parents, but we have not found them yet. I need to ask you some questions about them so you can help us find them. You do wish to help us find them, don’t you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“That’s a good boy. I must say you’re very mature for your age.”

“Thank you, Sir. Daddy always said it’s manners that separate the classes.”

“A wise man. Tell me more about your father.”

“Well, Inspector Barlow, my daddy is two meters tall and blond. He wears glasses for reading and smokes a pipe but only in the evening with his drink. He likes to have a drink of brandy on the veranda at the end of the day, when the sun goes down. He calls it his little vice.”

“I see. He doesn’t drink a lot then?”

“No, Sir, he says more than one will mean he is a drunk. He doesn’t want to be a drunk.”

“Very good, then. Tell me about the people who come to visit him. You know, his friends.”

“Daddy doesn’t have a lot of friends. He plays golf with them, but they don’t come to the house much.”

“So you don’t see many of his friends.”

“No. Sometimes his brother will drop over from Molong.”

“What is your uncle’s name?”

“Uncle Ginger.”

“And does Uncle Ginger look like your father?”

“How could he look like my father?”

“What I mean is does he look like he is your father’s brother.”

“Well, I guess... I mean he is my father’s brother so who else could he look like?”

“Could you describe him to us?”

“He is a little shorter than Daddy, but he’s wider. He lost his hair on top, but he has a big red beard and his teeth are bad and his breath smells.”

“I see. Is Ginger a nickname or is it his given name?”

“I don’t know. He’s Uncle Ginger.”

“Does Uncle Ginger have a nice place?”

“He lives on a farm. He raises chickens and sheep and he has some grape fields. He grows his own feed for the sheep. I stayed with him for a couple of weeks last summer.”

“Did you like staying there?”

“No. Uncle Ginger made me work every day and he doesn’t have a telly. He doesn’t even have a telephone.”

“Are there any other relatives?”

“My Mummy had a sister but she’s crazy. They wouldn’t let her come over any more.”

“I see. Terry, do you know what your father does for a living?”

“Insurance.”

“And he goes to work every day, does he?”

“Some days. He says he has other people working for him so he doesn’t need to go to the office every day.”

“Very good, then. I’m still confident we will find your parents alive and well. I want you to keep your chin up. You are very mature for 10 years old, and I must say you handle yourself very well.”

“Eight. I’m eight,” Terry said, beaming with pride.

“Only eight? Well, bless me. You are quite a little gentleman for eight years old. I’m going to leave now. I’m going to go looking for your father.”

“If you find him, will you tell him I love him?”

“Of course I will. Or perhaps we can bring him here and you can tell him yourself. Sherry, take good care of this boy, he is really quite special.”

“I will, Inspector, he is one of my very favorite patients.” The smile was back on Sherry’s face as she began to ask questions about what he could remember.

“I had a dream. I was on the grass in the park in Greenwell Point with Mummy. Daddy wasn’t there and then he was there. He was running and there was a monster chasing him.”

“What did the monster look like?”

“I couldn’t see it. Then I woke up.”

“Inspector, were you able to glean any information from the child?”

“Yes, Superintendent, I was. It seems George Kingston has a brother named Ginger in Molong. Child Services can look into that after we have a talk with him. We already knew he doesn’t conduct business from his home, but it seems there is a golf course he favors and conducts business there.”

“Anything else?”

“Miss Cherry tells us he still has no memory of what happened after the yacht left Greenwell. She seems confident that his memory will return, but that it may take a while. A traumatic event like that can shock the mind and remove the memory.”

“Inform her that it is imperative that we find out what happened.”

“Yes Sir. I’ll call in a few minutes. She was still with him when I left the hospital. Is there any more information I can use?”

“Nothing substantial. Yes, he owns the insurance company in Orange, The Kingston Agency. A subsidiary of the Helping Hands Insurance Corporation. It seems the books are in good order and the Agency makes a good profit but nothing that allows a man to buy a yacht. His home was shut down as if he expected to be gone for some time. The furnace and air conditioning was shut off. The hot water heater was turned way down. What man does that for a day off?”

“So he wasn’t planning to come back for a while, and he has an alternate source of income. Have we gone through his personal books, bank records?”

“I have a woman looking into them now. I’ll have her report whatever she finds to you. I think he is a very careful individual, but he needed to finance that purchase somewhere. There is a safe in his home and we will be getting authorization to open it soon. I don’t think we will find much inside but it is worth a look.”

“Very well then. I’ll report again as soon as something changes. I think I would very much like to go out to see this Ginger, if you don’t mind?”

“Yes, Inspector, I think that it might be a capital idea. Call first.”

“I can’t call; the man has no phone. I’ll leave in an hour or so. Oh, about the wife, Marcia Kingston. She came from a well-to-do family in Canberra. Parents were professors at Copland College. They’re both deceased. She did not work outside the home. We are looking into extramarital affairs and the like, but I don’t think we’ll find anything. She seems to have been deeply devoted to her son and husband. Local officials say she was a religious woman

and spent quite a lot of time on volunteer work. We still have feelers out, but I don't think we will dig up anything on her.”

Inspector Barlow was on the telephone with Sherry Cherry when the news came in that the Kingston yacht had been located 80 kilometers due south of Ulladulla and 23 kilometers east of Tuross Head. The fuel slick that was released on a calm day allowed the pilot of a small plane to spot the location. He called it in and the police dive team located the wreck. It had been scuttled next to Bass Canyon, the immense underwater rift that shadows the entire southeastern side of Australia. Whoever had sunk the yacht had undoubtedly intended to drop it into the canyon and thereby effectively lose it forever. It was a good plan but they were a couple of kilometers short of the shelf break. As a result, the yacht was resting about 200 meters below the surface, not the 3000 meters it would have been if it had been sunk in the trench itself. Divers had identified the wreck as Agamemnon, George Kingston's vessel, but no bodies were found.

Inspector Barlow ruminated over the information for a while. Insurance was always motivation for sinking a ship but he discounted it in this particular instance. One cannot collect, even from one's own insurance agency, if one is presumed dead. There was no evidence that George had a drinking problem or that he was in debt from gambling or drugs. His one excess seemed to be the yacht and he spent quite a number of weekends sailing. He lived far enough from the ocean that his home was not very expensive and it was modestly furnished.

The real question he wanted answered was where did George go when he visited Greenwell Point? Who did he see and what did he do? Whoever George visited in Greenwell Point might have the answers to the real questions.

Barlow took a deep breath and exhaled through his nose. He was getting nothing done and the case was getting

colder and colder. He tossed his jacket over his shoulder, smoothed his thick, graying hair back and went to report to his Superintendent before leaving for Ginger Kingston's farm in Molong.

When Inspector Theodore Barlow pulled his unmarked Holden into Ginger Kingston's driveway he was unpleasantly surprised. The farm was in a state of disrepair that made it look deserted. Some of the outbuildings were sagging and threatening to collapse. The smell of animal waste was to be expected on any farm that dealt in sheep and chickens but here it was overwhelming. The rusty hulks of tractors that had not run in many years adorned the sides of the house though there was newer equipment visible through a broken window in the nearer barn.

When he stepped out of his vehicle, Barlow got his second unpleasant surprise. Standing on the unpainted, sagging side porch was a man in overalls and rubber boots holding a double-barreled shotgun. The man had no shirt on but his chest was covered with a huge red beard. A cigar protruded from the beard like the tail of a squirrel from its nest.

"What business do ye find here?" asked the man.

"Ginger Kingston I presume. Inspector Barlow here. I'm conducting an investigation into the disappearance of your brother George."

"He's missing, eh? What does that have to do with me?"

"I assume it has nothing to do with you, but as his only relative outside the home I thought there may be something to be learned."

"Let me see yer badge."

Barlow produced his badge and edged sideways slowly to move away from the business end of the shotgun. Kingston squinted at the badge and shrugged. The shotgun pointed toward the ceiling and its wielder grunted and

motioned with his shaggy head. The top was bald but the sides were in desperate need of a trim.

Inside the house was the same sort of shambles as the rest of the farm. The side porch led to the kitchen where newspapers were piled up all over the place. The dishes in the sink had gone past the point of unwashed and would soon qualify as genuine archeological finds. The kitchen table held a pile of unopened bills, newspapers, dirty glasses and coffee cups, a liter bottle of Bundaberg and a can of Coopers Ale.

“Shot of Bundy, Inspector?”

“Oh, I don’t imbibe in the stronger spirits, I...”

“Crack a Cooper, then?”

“Yes, a Coopers would help cut the dust.”

Ginger Kinston moved to the refrigerator and opened the door. Inside were what appeared to be examples of genetic experiments along with a dozen cans of ale. He tossed one across the room and Inspector Barlow caught it. When he cracked the top it blew beer all over the unopened bills on the kitchen table.

“Oh, I’m dreadfully sorry. I didn’t think it would fly so.”

“Cripes. I never intended to pay them anyway.” To Barlow’s surprise, Kingston swept the bills and newspapers off the table and onto the floor. “Grab a chair. If you want a shot of rum, take one.”

“No, no rum. The Coopers is good.” The correct protocol for drinking an Australian ale is to guzzle the first half of it immediately and Barlow did just that. His immediate reasoning was that to gain the confidence of an alcoholic, nothing works better than drinking with him.

Ginger poured himself about four ounces of Bundaberg Rum and knocked it back, draining what remained in his can as a chaser.

“So, Inspector, what’s this about my brother?”

“Well, Mr. Kingston...”

“Call me Ginger.”

“Very well, Ginger, it seems, excuse me,” Barlow belched voluminously. “It seems your brother has gone missing about two weeks now. His son was found floating in the water off Cunjurong Point on October 24th. We have just located the wreck of his yacht off Tuross Head.”

“October 24? That’s almost two weeks ago. You mean to tell me you’re just getting around to telling me now?”

“The boy just woke up. He was in a coma all this time and we didn’t know who he was until he woke up. We never would have found the yacht if the fuel tank hadn’t developed a leak after it hit the bottom.” It was a small lie but effective.

“Oh. The boy is still alive?”

“Yes, Terry is awake and seems none the worse for the experience. He misses his parents, of course, but we may still find them.”

“Two weeks later?”

“Stranger things have happened.” Barlow took another huge drink from his can.

“Better to keep your feet on the earth, anyway.”

“That’s always been my thought as well. Tell me, Terry says you visited George’s house from time to time, what was your business with him?”

“He’s my brother. I don’t need business to visit my brother.”

“No, certainly not, but people don’t do things for no reason. I assume you’ve had reasons for visiting him.”

“I need money from time to time. The farm is not as profitable as might be expected and he has plenty of money. Sometimes I stop by for a loan. Just until I can get wool to market, or get paid for eggs and chickens. I pay him back when I can.”

“But there is no problem between you? Money problems or the like?”

“If you think I killed him and sank his boat, you’re out of your mind. He’s the only brother I’ve got. We don’t see each other often enough. Don’t get me wrong, we fought when we were kids, all boys do, but we never hated each other. We grew up on this farm. If there was ever a problem we settled it the old-fashioned way, but we never shot each other. We started hunting together when we were six and seven, or seven and eight, or so... We never shot at each other. If I was going to kill him I would have done it when we was teeners. I always been a better shot. When I’m sober enough.”

“You were never a suspect. Do you know of anyone who would wish to harm them?”

“Nobody I know of. He don’t talk of his business. He sells insurance. Sold me insurance on the farm, cheap. He’s a good man.” Ginger poured himself another glass of rum and held it in salute. “To George. May he live long and... well, may he be alive.”

“So you can’t think of anyone?”

“I told you, I don’ talk business wit’ George. Hey, what happens to the boy?”

“That is not my department. Health and Human Services or Orphan Services will determine what to do with him once the doctors say he can leave the infirmary.”

“Drop him off. I’ll take care of him till his father shows up.”

“As I said, Sir, Orphan Services will handle that.”

“No worries. Say, did you talk with his representative, Mr... uh... Shwartz or Shvance... uh... Stein... cripes. Streng, that’s it, Streng.

“Is this his legal representative, Mr. Streng, and is his office in Orange?”

“So far as I know. He may have something for you.”

“We’ll contact him. Thank you for the information.”

“You think I’m a slosher, don’t you?” Ginger went to the refrigerator and got himself another can of Coopers.

“The evidence points in that direction.”

“I can stop drinking any time I want.”

“It may be a good idea to consider wanting to.”

The man with the huge red beard picked up the half burned cigar from the ash tray and fished in his pocket for his Zippo. He lit the stub without setting his beard on fire and spat out a bit of tobacco. “I’ll need to if I want to help George’s son, won’t I?”

“It will make a large difference with Services.”

Ginger took a deep breath and shook his head. “The bastards never let a man be a man, do they?”

“They take a dim view of drunkenness.”

“Right, then. It’s time.” Ginger surprised his visitor more than he had when he had greeted him with a shotgun. He picked up the half full bottle of rum and walked to the sink. He uncapped the bottle and poured it into the drain.

“Well, that’s the way the old bugger is. It happens at odd times. He lost his wife 10 years ago, to cancer, and got drunk for about two years. Then he sobered up for a while. Look, when he’s not drinking he works like a Tasmanian devil and when he is, nothing gets done about the place. It’s been six months, right about on time, I’d say. If he poured his bottle down the sink then he’ll be alright for a while. Would you like one of us to check up on him?”

“No, I don’t think so, Constable. Orphan Services and the Health and Welfare people will be popping in to see him. Thank you for your concern. If Mr. Kingston has any incidents in the next few days, give us a ring, will you? His record shows he thrashes people from time to time.”

“Certainly, Inspector. He hasn’t been drinking in the taverns for a while but we’ll call if there’s a problem.”

“Thank you, we’ll be in touch.” Inspector Barlow hung up the phone and thought about all the men he had known who had said they could stop drinking anytime they wanted to. He could not count on one hand the heavy drinkers he knew who really could.

Ten o’clock came around and Theodore Barlow went back to Saint Vincent Hospital to see Terry Kingston again. Doctor Cherry was still busy with another patient so the inspector leafed through the Sydney Morning Herald looking for anything relevant that came from a different direction. He had found nothing when Sherry Cherry sauntered down the hall. Her long blonde hair was tied back in a tight bun and secured with ornamented black hair sticks. The style accented her creamy skin, long neck line and smiling cheeks. Inspector Barlow had been married for many years and loved his wife but Doctor Cherry could have brought out the worst in him.

The inspection room seemed close and exceedingly warm, even though the air conditioning kept it at a comfortable level. Barlow and Cherry spoke alone for a while and agreed to let the doctor ask the questions this morning.

“So, Terry, we’ll need to be letting you off, soon enough. You seem to be quite healthy despite your ordeal.”

“Have you found Mummy?”

“No Dear, I’m afraid we haven’t”

“Where am I to go then?”

“That will be determined by Doctor Curlew. He works with Heath and Welfare.”

“I don’t like him. He’s mean.”

“Doctor Curlew can be brusque, but he has your best interests at heart. Tell me, do you remember any more of what happened?”

“I had another dream. Daddy was running and yelling, then we were on the boat. The monster was chasing him.”

“Was the monster swimming after you?”

“No, it had a boat. It was in one of those little, fast ones and it was chasing us. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t help. I didn’t see it, but I knew it was there.”

“Did the boat have a name?”

“Daddy’s boat was Ag-a-mem-non,” he said carefully.

“Not your daddy’s boat, Dear, the one that was chasing you.”

“I didn’t see it, the name. It was sparkly. Blue with sparkles.”

“Dark blue or light blue?”

“It was dark blue with twin Evinrude engines.”

Inspector Barlow was not paying much attention until this point but he began writing notes now. He found it interesting that a child could remember the color of a dream and the kind of engines it had. It was as if he had been listening to an orchestra but only a few of the instruments were playing. The composer had just added music for a new instrument. While he knew dreams were unreliable bits of evidence, details of this kind were not to be overlooked.

“Was there anything else, Terry?”

“No. Maybe I’ll remember more tomorrow.”

“I think you’re doing just fine. I shouldn’t be surprised if you remember the whole affair tomorrow.”

“Ok.”

“Terry, when you visited your Uncle Ginger, was he drinking a lot of beer?”

“No. He didn’t drink any brandy either. Daddy says he drinks a lot but I never saw him drink anything but water. He made me work every day and he doesn’t even have a telly, just lots of chickens and sheep.”

“I’m sorry that you don’t like him, but he may be your last living relative. If we can’t place you with him you may need to go to the orphanage instead.”

“I’ve never seen the orphanage.”

“I don’t think you would like it. Thank God they don’t have the old system. You’d be sent to the Fairbridge Farm School in Molong instead of going to live with family. You should be glad they shut that one down in the early seventies.”

“Uncle Ginger has the farm without the school, so it doesn’t matter where I want to go. I have no choices that I like.”

“Oh, Dear, I’m so sorry.” Doctor Cherry opened her arms and gave him a long hug. Terry was not crying.

The representatives of the Health and Welfare Department were skeptical as to the efficacy of placing a child with Ginger Kingston. He had a record of drinking and fighting in bars. They headed out to the farm to take stock of the area.

When the social workers pulled in the driveway they were surprised to find that Ginger was not only sober but painting the house. He was on a 15-meter ladder, painting the outside of the attic. He greeted them with a huge smile and asked if they were there to help him paint.

His beard was trimmed and his hair had been cut. His clothes were clean except for some paint spatter and his demeanor was friendly and open. He invited the workers into the house where everything was in relative order, though musty and old. The furniture was threadbare but still serviceable, if no longer comfortable. There were no animals in the home.

The two social workers asked Mr. Kingston a few questions about Terry and whether he was willing to take over his custody. Ginger replied in an affable and affirmative way explaining that he had no children of his own and that his wife had passed away from lymphoma 10 years earlier. He explained that Terry was a likeable child and a good worker and he would be happy to adopt him.

The older of the two workers explained that he could not adopt the boy until it was confirmed that George and Marcia were dead. Their bodies had never been found. It made no difference to Ginger.

The government employees left quite satisfied that the stories they had heard about Ginger Kingston were either exaggerations or complete fabrications.

## Chapter Two

### Bradley and Cooter

“Sure, she’s a fine looking sheila, but you can’t keep her chained up down there forever.” The speaker was tall and well groomed. He had good teeth and was wearing contact lenses. His suit was worth a week’s pay for some people, a month’s for others.

“Why not? It’s got nobody looking for it. Husband and son are dead. I say we just use it for what she’s worth. You have the contacts; what do you say we make a snuff film out of it? We can make quite a bit off that.” The other man was shorter and needed a hair cut. Dressed in a tee-shirt and blue jeans that looked like they could use a wash, he did not look like a professional man. A scar ran down the left side of his face, making his mouth droop on that side. Somebody had slashed him with a broken bottle, blinded his left eye and scarred him horribly.

“Bloody cracker, what happens when they trace it back to us? There’s a lot more here than just some woman. She’s not a runaway teenager, that’s the Viper’s wife. What do you think his friends will do if they find out we got his wife, let alone what happens if they find out we killed him. They don’t know now and I don’t want them to know.”

“Bollux, they’ll never know.”

“How can you be so sure? You’re getting stupid now. If you remember, I wanted to take her out when we did her man. It was you, thinking with the wrong head again, that put us in this situation.”

“What situation? We got it secure. It’s locked up tight. That sweet little round bottom is mine and I intend to do whatever I want with it.”

“You’re a dripping idiot. We should have fed her to the sharks and walked away clean.”

“The sharks can have that fish, but not ‘til I’m done with it.” The man rubbed the scar on his face and chuckled.

The tall man grimaced and looked out the window at the fields of wheat. “Why do you live out here anyway? There’s no company, no stores, no neighbors except the farmer that owns the land, and I don’t suspect he drops by for a game of gin rummy.”

“That’s it precisely. Nobody comes here. They think I’m some crazy hermit. I cooked up a story about having been left some money and wanting no part of people. So they leave me alone and that’s just right by me.”

“I couldn’t live this way. Away from people an’ all.”

“Oh, I’m not exactly away from people. I got me a nice fresh one in the basement.”

“That’s not what I mean and you know it. Well, make sure you dispose of her proper when you’re done with her.”

“Like I said the sharks can have that fish.” The shorter man grabbed his crotch pointedly. “I’ll take care of it. Eh, you ever find out why they wanted the Viper done in?”

“No, nobody’s talking. I think he must have done the wrong guy or something. Maybe he turned on his contacts and started talking to the bobbies.”

“I doubt it. This man was in the business two or three years before I was. I heard of his jobs while I was still in the Academy. That makes it about five years before you. How long you been doing this?”

“About five.” The man picked at some imaginary lint on his suit.

“Five years, don’t time fly? That means he been at it maybe 10 years. I heard he was responsible for those jobs the papers called the Porno Killer. You know, the lads that were doing the flicks with little boys? I also heard he done a man once in a provincial station. Leastways, that’s what they say. Right in the station, in handcuffs, right in front of the