

# MONOCHROMACY

*BY TROY BARNES*

The first two Chapters...

## *I*

*What have I done?*

Harry stared at the blood stained axe that was still gripped fiercely in his right hand. The red drops sliding poetically off the blade were forming an indiscriminate pattern at his feet. For the briefest of moments Harry thought back to his childhood, and the times he would look for animals and other funny shapes in the clouds. The only thing he could find in this growing pool of blood was a feeling of sheer hopelessness. A dry male voice continued to scream out in terror from behind a door that was slightly ajar. The well positioned chain stopped it from opening any more than a few short inches. It had been just enough room to allow an arm to reach out in a desperate attempt to escape. This door was the first of four, all in a line, and not far apart from each other. Harry looked beyond the puddle at his feet and gazed at the severed hand that was still trying its best to appear full of life. Little shocks of movement kicked the fingers slightly, reminding him of the stories he had heard of how chickens continued to run after losing their heads on the chopping block. Just below eye level was an indent in the timber door frame from where the axe had impacted with a swift and accurate blow. He remembered the arm receding back into the dark room behind the door as the hand fell with a dull thud onto the boards below. Little red streaks were chasing their way down the wall in a daft attempt at

finding the body part they originated from. Harry found it somewhat amusing, even though the horror around him was almost too much to stomach.

*How did this happen?*

Fate had raced around him in an instant and taken complete control of every aspect of his life. All of his choices seemed to have been ripped away, as though the pure fabric of time had been stripped back to the bare bone. A few feet away from the twitching hand was a young female body. She was lying on her back. The blood pouring from the deep wound between her breasts was surrounding her like a liquid crimson halo. Harry fell to his knees and went to touch her skin. For some strange reason he expected it to feel clammy and cold, yet he knew that wouldn't be possible. It was only a few short minutes ago that he had plunged the axe deep into her chest as she backed away from him. The noise it made when it sliced through her bones was sickening. Harry remembered back to that sound and vomit erupted from the dryness of his mouth. Some of it splattered on to her bare legs. Compelled by some form of respect, he wiped it off quickly. Another voice entered the scene. It filtered its way through the second door that was next to where the woman had fallen. The tone was female and young.

“What’s happening out there?” she said constantly.

Over and over again.

“Tell me what’s happening?”

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

Fear.

The last two doors remained silent, hiding themselves beneath the torment of their own surroundings. Harry let his body weight fall back against the wall, and slide down till he was crouched on the floor. The axe dropped, hitting the walnut stained boards with a dull thump.

Everything became silent and surreal.

“OH...MY...GOD!” the trapped man suddenly shrieked from the darkness behind the door.

Harry sat with his mouth ajar and his eyes held to the floor where the axe sat alone and smeared. He could feel blood creeping down his face. Blood that had sprayed on him from the blow to the girl’s chest.

*How did it all come to this?*

## 2

*Two weeks earlier...*

Welcome to Raven Beach.

For every tourist or visitor that was the welcome party. A sign on the west end of the bay made out of bricks and mortar sat within a garden of native plants. It was built on the grass in between the beach and the main street that ran the whole length of the bay. The beaches didn’t quite have the original glory of the past but at full tide the waves would crash right up to the grass edging and it was a beautiful sight. A string of stores with a few residential homes made up the opposite side of the main street. The small town had all the basics to keep it as self sufficient as a town could be these days when it was surrounded by two small cities only fifteen minutes away to either side. There was a bakery, a butcher, two hair salons, a post office, three take-away outlets, a dvd rental store and of course two pubs. The business area didn’t spread any further than the main street. The church was the only thing to sit outside the shopping area on the beach front. It was built on the western point and looked over the wave crashed rocks.

Normal families with normal homes made up the hills that looked down over Raven Beach. Towering over the hills about seven kilometres back was Black mountain. It wasn’t incredible in size but

large enough to be classed in the mountain group. Various hiking tracks were scattered around its base and all joined at the peak where a small lookout was positioned. Bushland made up the area leading back to the houses. The population sat at almost three thousand and even though it was an attraction for hoards of tourists every year, that number rarely changed. It was a tight community that looked after their own and that's how they liked it. Visitors and tourists were always welcomed with open arms but never made to feel like they shouldn't leave and experience the next destination on their schedule. It was a normal thing with small towns. They like how things are. If you live there that's the rules you play by. If you don't like it, you move on.

Harrison Cowley first laid eyes on the welcome sign a little over six months ago. His Aunt Molly had died from an aggressive cancer in her right breast and as he was the only family member remaining, her ageing cabin at the base of Black Mountain was left to him. It wasn't much to look at, but the roof didn't leak and it was better than sleeping in the car, which had become the accommodation of choice for more nights than he wished to remember. Harrison, or Harry as he preferred to be called, had reached the prime age of twenty seven without making even a slight dent in the radar of success. He had never been the type who understood what life had in store for him. There wasn't ever a line he was meant to walk on, or a path that seemed to fit. So instead he flowed through the years hoping that one day something would appear and show him the way. The last thing he expected was to be living in a worn down cabin in the bush, while holding down a part time job stacking shelves in the local supermarket.

Harry was a single child. He never knew his father. He was always told that the man was a drifter who passed through town, and that he was long gone before anyone knew he had left behind a woman who was pregnant with his child. He lost his mother when he was only nineteen. She was a quiet, fit woman, who had no idea that a

tumour had invaded, taking over her brain one cell at a time. Once the doctor discovered it, it was too late for any type of treatment. A little under five weeks later, she was dead. He had never really been close to his mother but losing her that way had been extremely hard for him. Being a loner didn't help either. Without a network of close friends he was forced to deal with loss alone, his only helping hand being copious amounts of bourbon. The alcohol dulled the pain when it was at its worst, and then over time it healed leaving only a mental scar that was his alone to bear. In the years following, he moved from town to town, always searching for something to make him stop. It was a finalisation that he still had not found. Raven Beach had not proven itself to be an answer but at least he had a roof over his head. Aunt Molly was his mother's sister. At a young age the two siblings had fallen out and he never had a chance to meet her in person. It was a complete surprise when he received a call from a lawyer claiming to be looking after her will. He had forgotten that he even had an Aunt. With nothing holding him to the place he was staying, it was decided he'd move to Raven Beach.

When he first saw the cabin the look on his face was priceless, and the shock even more obvious. It was a basic one room structure that sat in a small clearing surrounded by trees that towered over it. A chimney poked its way out of the tin roof, and a small covered in porch covered the main entry door at the front. The dirt road leading into it was rough but drivable. Harry thought it looked like the cabin that time forgot. No, he didn't think it looked like it. It was forgotten by not only time but technology. There was power connected, but except for the ceiling lights, there wasn't much for it to do. The best part was that it matched his wagon perfectly. They had a lot in common. They were both old and falling apart. Harry disposed of all of Aunt Molly's belongings and only kept what he knew would be of use. It wasn't a hard thing to do because she was a stranger to him. There was nothing of any emotional value. Before long he was calling it home and even though it wasn't even remotely close to anything

special, he found it a relaxing place to be. The best part of it all was the non-existence of neighbours. The cabin was half a kilometre off the road to the base of the mountain and the nearest home was twice that distance away. Even with all of its faults, it was the most perfect home Harry had ever lived in.

Harry opened his eyes slowly. A sliver of sunlight was weaving its way through the curtains and cutting the morning shadow away from his face. The sheets on the double bed had drifted down past his waist during the night but it hadn't compromised the comfort zone. Harry lifted both arms above his head and stretched out the morning sleepy haze. His hand lowered to find 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 which was a great feeling for Harry. He loved it when he woke prior to the annoying ring on his mobile phone. It allowed a few minutes of lazy time before making his way to the shower. In a split second his mind decided to wake up. The body always gained momentum first.

*Why is the sun shining on me already at this time of morning?*

Harry snatched his phone off the bedside table and stared at the screen.

*DAMN IT!*

The time on the screen read 9:15.

He was meant to start work fifteen minutes earlier. He didn't need to check. He knew right away that he had forgotten to switch his phone over to the alarm setting before going to sleep. His body leapt from the bed like a comic book superhero. The clothes from the previous day were crumpled up on the floor and as he threw them on he noticed just how creased and crinkled they were. There wasn't any time to be worried by such things though. He had to move quicker than he had ever done before. Luckily his short brown hair would be hidden away under the cap that came with the uniform. Within five minutes he was out the door and driving down the dirt road.

Harry trundled through the rear entry door hoping that no one would notice his late arrival. A young girl was startled by his sudden appearance. Megan Hyland was a fresh faced twenty year old girl who had lived in Raven Beach all of her life. Her shoulder length sandy blonde hair flowed more naturally than the waves that could be heard outside the door. Her pretty face held a few freckles but they suited her in ways that would not work on most girls.

“Coming through the back door isn’t going to help you, Harry,” Megan informed him instantly. “He already knows you didn’t turn up on time.”

Harry lifted his hands up and made an action as if he was about to strangle someone, then dropped his head and let free a deep sigh.

“Do you know where he is?” he asked her.

Megan just shook her head from side to side.

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

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

Frank Connors had barged his way into the back store room after hearing Megan and Harry talking. Frank had owned the Raven Beach General Market for more years than any of the locals was able to recall. He was a spry man for his sixty eight years but he looked much older, mainly due to a ghostly white beard. His wife, Pam, also worked at the market but kept to the bookwork and invoices. Harry was never sure who he would prefer to face between the two of them if he had a choice.

“Well?” Frank said, insisting on a prompt answer.

All of the possible excuses streamed through Harry’s mind as quick as he could process them. None seemed worthy for such a situation.

“My alarm didn’t go off Frank. I’m really sorry. It won’t happen again.”

Megan had taken a small step back while all the action was taking place. There was no where to retreat but she felt more

comfortable not being square in the middle of the war. Frank stared and gritted his lips together.

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

“I hear you, Frank.”

Frank turned to walk away and then stopped. He looked at Megan standing silently.

“What? You don’t have anything to do?” he questioned her.

She didn’t even bother to answer back. Instead she squeezed past him and back into the store.

“Sorry, Frank,” said Harry.

He raised his finger and pointed it at Harry.

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

Frank opened the door and stormed back into the store, slamming it behind him. That was the fourth *only warning* he had received.

Harry shook his head and wondered for a moment whether all of the confrontational issues he had with his boss was worth the hassle just for a part time job. If there were more chances for employment he would have told him to shove his market right there and then. Unfortunately small towns don’t allow for high job opportunity and Harry knew it. He followed the trail that Frank left behind and entered the store. A couple of locals watched as he walked past them. They had overheard the commotion and looked on with typical middle aged judgement. Harry continued on his way and didn’t pay them any attention.

Harry was supposed to work until 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 making his way out the rear door.

“Hello, young Harry,” she said in a squeaky voice.

“How are you today, Mrs Patterson?”

Hilary Patterson tilted her head lightly to the side and smiled. She loved it when people remembered her name. It was easy to feel as though the world had lost any interest by the time the wrinkles had conquered all areas of her smooth skin.

“I am having a wonderful day, Harry. 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 smiled back at her. He enjoyed the fact that even at her age she could still find reason to smile and have days of happiness in her life. Maybe getting older wasn’t so bad after all.

“He is a very 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 little 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 to her.

She leant over to Hilary and whispered into the ear that she always called her *good one*.

“He may be cute to look at, but I think we can both do better, don’t you?”

Hilary continued to giggle and then started to make her way toward the cash register in the front of the store.

Harry made a confused face in Megan’s direction.

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

“I just told her the truth, Harry.”

She developed the widest grin.

“I told her you have herpes.”

Harry laughed and then pushed the door out of his way. Megan followed him to the back store room.

“You are such a lying bitch,” he said and at the same time gave her a shove jokingly.

“See you, Harry.”

He grabbed his car keys off the bench and continued his direction into the outside world.

“Don’t forget to apply the cream the doctor gave you,” she yelled out.

He could still hear her laughing even as he closed the door to the wagon. He couldn’t help but smile.

Harry reversed out of the side entry and onto the main street. Hilary was seated in the passenger seat of Mr Long’s green sedan that was parked near the front door to the market. She waved as he drove past. He returned the gesture and then waited for a young boy on a skateboard to pass before accelerating. The boy nearly ran straight into Mr Long but he changed his line at the last second. Peter Long was the local priest in Raven Beach. He was only aged in his early thirties but his level of maturity was way beyond his years. He had a caring soul and always offered to help the members of the local community when ever they called upon him to do so. He was a much loved man by everyone. That even included the non church goers. He had been in the town for a little under four years and in that time he earned a high level of respect that isn’t often handed out to outsiders. Peter was different from most newcomers though. He was just one of those people that others felt instantly comfortable with. He never pushed his beliefs outside the church and he showed time and time again that he truly cared for more than just himself. This was a lot more than what 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 hassling of Frank. He walked over the stack of wood next to the front porch and grabbed an arm full. The first day of winter had just passed a few days earlier and it brought the cold weather with it. The first day had been the thickest frost for a couple of years if he could believe what the locals had been telling him. Everyone who had walked into the market that day had said the same thing.

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

One thing he had learned while working in a retail store was that there was always just one simple language that everyone used. The language of weather. As he piled the pieces of wood onto his right arm he couldn't think of one person who had not commented on how cold it was during that morning. So far the temperature of a night hadn't improved either. The best cure for that was a raging fire combined with closed doors and windows. The one good thing about the cabin being so small was that it was easy to heat. Within a few short minutes the fireplace was flickering with red and orange flames, and Harry was sitting back watching them skip all around the logs. He found it relaxing and slightly hypnotic to just sit and admire the way they played with each other. Soon he was asleep, and the first of the dreams began.