

# The Misery Of Others

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## Chapter One

He stares into the mirror, at a field of lush green grass that leads up past a barn whose weathered siding has scored upon it an odd shape that is as familiar to him as the shifting white clouds that roll slowly across the horizon. It is an image he has borne witness to his entire life: the all-seeing eye, the circle within the eye, signifying the One, he who is coming to lead the world down a path from which there can be no return, to parade them past an indifferent father who cares no more about them than he who was cast out of His paradise all those centuries ago.

He has walked this land since the dawn of time, stalking his way up through the shadows and into the night, and then out into the light of day. He was there when the snake curled 'round the ankle and the apple was bitten, when the rain came down and two-by-two the Ark was boarded. When brother killed brother, he was there; in the desert, when the son of man was tested and the scripture spewed forth, saving Him from a fate which could only have been dreamt of in His wildest of nightmares, one he who watched from the shadow of the Cypress would have gleefully marched him into had the slightest weakness been shown to him.

He stares into the mirror, watching the Jester rail, the dark clouds gather, and then race across the sky, lightning flash and fire streak like runaway-missiles to the ground, scorching everything in its path. All across the world, cars and trucks and all manner of transportation grind to a halt, while the loved ones of those whose knees will soon be bent are snatched away to a place from which they will never return; fire rains and the

hopeless run screaming beneath wide, white bolts that leave molten globs of flesh steaming in the streets behind them. Civilization falls as the wicked rise up, placing a collective boot on those who try meekly to defy them, until all is lost beneath a rising horde of beasts and brutes, two-legged behemoths who care nothing of no one but themselves as they race from one vicious attack to another, ransacking all who stand before them.

He has waited patiently for this day to come, standing in the background as the inexorable march of time has unfolded. He was there when the sons and daughters were sold to the Judeans, when the first cross was raised and the disobedient nailed upon it. He was there: at the siege of Milos, long before the gentle messiah came forth from his virgin mother, when the Athenians massacred the men, and sold the women and children into slavery; on the great western plains where the red man was slaughtered. When the first Jew was ripped from his home and hustled into the square, he was there, smiling as the cattle car rumbled down the tracks, to a destination filled with murder and madness and extraordinary human suffering.

He sees all of this as he stares into his mirror: the unbearable atrocities he's witnessed down through the ages, stacked one upon another until the stench of them tickles the very nose of the Creator himself, all capped off by the coup de grace that has played out before him lo these many months: the rapes and murders, the natural order of the laws of survival pitting neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend and foe alike, fighting and scrapping for bits of food while blood spills and the movers and shakers of this newly-formed world bear down upon them with guns and knives, with whips and chains and hobnailed boots.

He stares into the mirror as the weak bow down and the strong rise up, and chaos reigns free upon the land. He stares at an exploding tanker truck, at the smoking and smoldering corpses left in its wake; at the biker army bleeding in the rubble of a jail house which has tumbled to the ground in a hail of concrete and metal and splintered shards of glass, at the Jester who falls and the great platoons of military green that spread swiftly throughout the land.

He has been there for each and every sordid event, drawing from them that which sustains him, the sorrow of the fallen, the cry of the oppressed, who call out for their maker to save them while the hammer falls and the ax drops, and blood runs free upon the land.

It is anger that gives him the will, the sorrow of the hopelessly downtrodden that provide him the energy to move forward, to see his plans come to fruition. The fury and the pain give him sustenance, the frustration of the dashed hope, the outrage of the condemned, the anguish of the unanswered prayer, moments before the eyes flutter shut that final time—this is what feeds him, what furnishes his life's blood and breath, the very essence of his being, derived from the misery of others.

## Chapter Two

Harry was drunk again, plastered. But who could've blamed him, after everything he'd been through? Seven long weeks he had survived, seven miserable weeks laced with damn near every bizarre situation you could imagine. Danger at every corner and dark alleyway, scumbag rapists threatening whoever they came across. Thugs and criminals running rampant through the streets, terrorizing everyone they happened upon; street gangs and hoods of all make and manner, taking from the weak whatever they could get from them; brutish two-legged beasts hell-bent on subjugating all whose paths they crossed; nightmarish creatures slithering along the landscape, victims of whatever had set this thing into motion, all those weeks ago. He'd seen it all from his office, high above the city: fire raining from the sky; people, zapped like bugs by lightning bolts that strafed the earth as if the hand of God himself had hurled them, leaving behind molten piles of flesh as far as the eye could see. People running, people screaming, neighbor turning on neighbor, killing each other over scraps of food, or over the slightest of perceived insults.

The clouds came black as night, blotting out the sun, and then rushing across the horizon, just like the lunatic prophet said they would, the fire and lightning that quickly followed turning a lush green world to one of blight. Driverless cars rolling slowly to a stop while Harry hurried home to his wife, only to find the house empty and Helen nowhere in sight. A kiss on the cheek that morning, a smile and a 'have a nice day', and then out the door he went. Seven weeks and counting now since he'd felt the gentle touch of her hand, the warmth of her as they lay naked beneath the sheets. Seven weeks since

Harry Reynolds, a policeman as corrupt as any you'd ever heard of, decided to turn it all around, day by day, step by step, night by bloody night. Out into the world he went, gun in hand and a knife in his pocket, a fifty-two year old super hero pushed to the brink of insanity by grief and despair in a world gone suddenly mad, where closeted psychopaths spring forward from the shadows, well-respected pillars of the community, happy to live out their darkest of fantasies now that the thumb in the dyke of civilization has finally given way, flooding the landscape with violence and depravity, and enough human suffering to bring a tear to the eye of God himself.

Rape and murder, cannibalism and vicious acts of brutality rolling across the city like a biblical flood, and no one there to stop it but Harry, a high-ranking officer of the court with a lifetime of misdeeds to atone for. Harry Reynolds, the man who looked the other way as ordered so a murdering piece of human detritus could wiggle away from the long arm of the law.

Harry, whose wife was gone because he was nowhere around when she'd needed him, a man who'd lied, stolen and cheated, sent innocent men off to prison while men he knew were guilty paid the toll and skipped happily away from their crimes.

Harry, who'd looked helplessly on last night while a woman he had promised to protect cried out for help as the fires of hell consumed her, courtesy of a Molotov Cocktail that Harry should have seen coming but didn't. Harry, who'd hesitated at that street corner even though he knew he shouldn't have, because he could feel in his bones that something wasn't right, could feel it, but there he sat while the window exploded and Sharon went up like a pile of dry twigs, screaming and flailing while Harry bailed like a

coward from his car, as the flames rose and the disgusting smell of roasted flesh assailed him.

Harry Reynolds, who had more to make up for than he would ever be able...

He sat in a chair, across from his friend, Derek, who sat on the edge of his bed smoking a Marlboro, Harry lifting a bottle of Crown Royal, while Derek said, "Oi, mate, you did what you could. Sometimes it just doesn't work out the way we want it to. You live to fight another day, and hope it turns out better next time."

"What's that," Harry said, "some kind of half-assed Australian wisdom?"

"Got no wisdom down there, Harry, just Fosters and Tooheys and kanga-fucking-roos."

Harry laughed, and so did Derek.

They sat there, Harry in his chair in his black leather jacket, Derek on the mattress, safe in their room on the second floor of the recreation center, in the middle of a town that had fallen into lawlessness, the mean streets of the city a lifetime away from them; Harry's pump-action shotgun propped against the wall, his .45 and .9mm on the bedside table alongside Derek's .38 caliber revolver. They sat there, fully aware that guards were at the outside entrances, sentries walking a roof whose spotlights shone down on the streets surrounding it, comfortable in the knowledge that no harm could reach them here.

"Next time," Harry said, giving his friend an exaggerated wink as he chugged down another shot of whiskey, and then handed the bottle to Derek, who took a drink of his own, before saying, "This Scott-guy, you sure he's alright?"

"Saved my life last night."

“Yeah, you told me. It’s just, you know, sometimes people aren’t what you think they are these days.”

“Oh yeah? Like you’re not a crazy fucking Aussie who shot his own eye out with a goddamn BB gun when he was eight years old?”

“Gonna bring *that* up again, are ya, mate? Should never have told ya about it in the first place.”

“You wouldn’t have if you weren’t drunk on your ass.”

“And properly pissed I was, eh?”

Harry leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, and saw the bottle flying toward him, the flaming wick trailing it as the window shattered and the bottle exploded, showering his shrieking young passenger with a burning liquid accelerant that quickly engulfed her, Harry’s door popping open as he dove for the safety of the street, the flames crackling, Sharon screaming, flailing her arms and calling out to God to save her, and to Harry... who could do nothing but stand helplessly by while the horror unfolded.

Harry opened his eyes.

“The bottle,” he said. “Let’s have it.”

“Not properly pissed yet, *are* we?” Derek said, smiling as he handed the half-full bottle back to Harry. “But we will be, don’t you worry about *that*.”

“Damn right, we will,” Harry said, even though he knew they damn well *were* pissed, snockered or plastered or anything else you wanted to call it. He was lifting the bottle, tipping it back and guzzling a mouthful when gunfire erupted in the hallway, he and Derek reaching for the nightstand as the bottle hit the floor and a dark shadow followed a bucking pistol through the doorway, Derek collapsing wide-eyed onto the bed,

a hole in his shoulder and two smoking holes in his chest. He lay there, gasping, blood soaking the mattress beneath him as the guy in the doorway turned his weapon on Harry.

“One wrong move, old man,” he said, and then waved the gun, motioning for Harry to stand up.