

# CHAPTER 1

Jack Burn stood on the deck of the house high above Cape Town watching the sun drown itself in the ocean. The wind was coming up again, the southeaster that reminded Burn of the Santa Anas back home. A wind that made a furnace of the night, set nerves jangling, and got the cops and emergency teams caught up in people's bad choices.

Burn heard the growl of the car without mufflers as it came to a sliding stop. The percussive whump of bass bins bulging out gangsta rap. Not the usual soundtrack of this elite white neighborhood on the slopes of Signal Hill. The car reversed at high speed and stopped again, close by. The engine died, and the rap was silenced in mid-*muthahfuckah*. Burn looked down at the street, but he couldn't see the car from this angle.

Susan watched him from inside the house, the glass doors open onto the deck.

“Come and eat.” She turned and disappeared into the gloom.

Burn went inside and switched on the lights. The house was clean, hard-edged, and modern. Very much like the German rich kid who had rented it to them for six months while he went home to Stuttgart to watch his father die.

Susan carried the fillet from the kitchen, moving with that backward-leaning, splay-footed waddle of the heavily pregnant. She was beautiful. Small, blonde, with a face that stubbornly refused to admit to being twenty-eight. Aside from the huge belly, she looked exactly as she had seven years ago. He remembered the instant he first saw her, the feeling of the breath being squeezed from his lungs, his head dizzy with the knowledge that he was going to marry her. And he did, not six months later, laughing off the difference in their ages.

Susan looked the same, but she wasn't. Her lightness was gone, her easy laugh a memory. Lately she'd seemed to be in constant communion with her unborn child. That's how she referred to it, as her child. Her daughter. As if Burn and Matt were another species, outside of this exclusive club of two.

Burn sliced into the fillet with a carving knife, and blood pooled on the cutting board. Perfect. Rare, the way they all liked it. Matt lay on his belly in front of the plasma TV watching the Cartoon Network. Just like home.

“Hey, get over here and eat,” Burn said.

Matt was about to protest; then he thought better of it and came across to the table, dressed only in a pair of baggy shorts. He was four, blond like his mother but with some early trace of his father's frame.

Susan was seated, piling salad onto their plates. She didn't look at Matt. “Go and wash your hands.”

“They're not dirty,” he said as he clambered up onto a chair. He held his hands out for her to inspect. She ignored him. It wasn't intentional; it

was just as if she wasn't tuned to his frequency anymore. As if her son reminded her too much of his father.

Burn tried to get Susan's eye, to somehow draw her back to them. But she stared down at her plate.

"Listen to your mother," he said gently, and Matt took off for the bathroom, sliding on his bare feet.

Burn was carving the fillet when the two brown men came in off the deck. They both carried guns, pointed action-movie style at right angles. From the way they were laughing, he knew they were cooked on speed.



The night the trouble came, Benny Mongrel was watching them, the American family, out on the deck of the house next door. The guy drinking wine, glimpses of the blonde woman, the kid running between the deck and the house, the sliding door open onto the hot summer night. A snapshot of a world Benny Mongrel had never known.

He had been in and out of jail since he was fourteen. He wasn't sure, but he guessed he was turning forty. That's what his ID said, anyway. When he was paroled from Pollsmoor Prison last year after serving a sixteen-year stretch, he swore he wasn't going back. No matter what.

So that's why he was pulling the night shift on the building site as a watchman. The pay was a joke, but with his face and the crude prison tattoos carved into his gaunt brown body he was lucky to get a job. They gave him a rubber baton and a black uniform that was too big. And they gave him a dog. Bessie. A mongrel like him, part rottweiler, part German shepherd. She was old, she stank, her hips were finished, and she slept most of the time, but she was the only thing that Benny Mongrel had ever loved.

Benny Mongrel and Bessie were up on the top floor of the new house, the roof open to the stars, when he heard the car. It was tuned loud the way they did out on the Cape Flats. He walked to the edge of

the balcony and looked down. A red early-nineties BMW-3 series sped down the road toward him, way too fast. The driver hit the brakes just below where Benny Mongrel stood, and the fat tires found builder's sand and the car fishtailed before stopping. The BMW reversed until it was level with the entrance to the building site. The wheelman cut the engine and the hip-hop died.

Everything went very quiet. Benny Mongrel could hear Bessie wheezing as she slept. He could hear the pinging of the BMW's cooling engine. He was tense. He was aware of that old feeling he knew so well.

Benny Mongrel stood watching, invisible, as the two men got out of the car. He saw enough of them in the streetlight, caps on backward, baggy clothes, the Stars and Stripes on the back of the tall man's jacket, to recognize members of the Americans gang, the biggest on the Cape Flats.

His natural enemy.

He was ready for them. He put the baton aside and slid the knife from where it waited in his pocket. He eased the blade open. If they came up here, they would see their mothers.

But they were going toward the house next door. Benny Mongrel watched as the tall one boosted his buddy up, the shorty pulling himself onto the deck like a monkey. Then he was reaching a hand down to the other guy. Benny Mongrel couldn't see them from where he stood, but he knew the American family would be eating at the table, the sliding door open to the night.

He closed the knife and slipped it back into his pocket.

Welcome to Cape Town.



Susan had her back to the men. She saw the look on Burn's face and turned. She didn't have time to scream. The one closest to her, the short one, got a hand over her mouth and a gun to her head.

“S’trues fuck, bitch, you shut up, or I’ll fucken shoot you.” The hard, guttural accent. The man’s skinny arms were covered in gang tattoos.

The tall man was round the table, waving his gun at Burn.

Burn put the carving knife down and lifted his hands off the table, in plain view. He tried to keep his voice calm. “Okay, we don’t want any trouble. We’ll give you whatever you want.”

“You got that right. Where you from?” asked the man coming at Burn. He was as lanky as a basketball player.

“We’re American,” said Burn.

The short one was laughing. “So are we.”

“Ja, we all Americans here. Like a big flipping happy family, hey?” The tall man nudged Burn with the muzzle of the gun, positioning himself behind the chair to Burn’s right.

The short one pulled Susan to her feet. “Oh, we got a mommy here.”

Burn watched as the man slid his hand under Susan’s dress, grabbing at her crotch and squeezing. He saw her eyes close.



It was coincidence, pure and simple.

Somebody had told Faried Adams that his girlfriend, Bonita, was selling her ass in Sea Point, when she was supposed to be visiting her mommy in the hospital. Faried hadn’t minded that she was hooking again, but he’d absolutely minded that she wasn’t giving him any of the money. He wanted to catch the bitch on the job.

So lanky Faried went and banged on the door of his short-ass buddy Ricardo Fortune. Rikki lived in one of those ghetto blocks in Paradise Park where washing sagged from lines strung across walkways and the stairways stank of piss. Rikki had a car. But he also had a wife, Carmen, who moaned like a pig about everything. Which is why Rikki

smacked her all the time. Faried would do the same; in fact that bitch Bonita was gonna get a black eye tonight, too. If she was lucky.

Faried and Rikki took the BMW to Sea Point after Faried put a couple of bucks in Rikki's hand. They cruised up and down the hookers' strip, slumped low in the car, bouncing to Tupac as they drove. There were a few brown girls working the street, all thick makeup and dresses that just about covered their plumbing, but no Bonita.

"I fucken had enough of this, man," said Rikki. "Let's go."

"Okay, tell you what. Drive over to Bo-Kaap. My cousin Achmat is there. We can come back later, and maybe I catch Bonnie swallowing some whitey's dick."

Rikki was shaking his head. "I don't want to go to Bo-Kaap, man. I rather go home."

"We can smoke a globe. And then we come back later."

"Achmat going to have a globe?"

"No, I got it by me."

"Why the fuck you only tell me now?" Rikki was throwing the car into a U-turn, ignoring the minibus taxi that had to slam on its brakes.

Rikki shot up Glengarriff Road, wanting to hang a left into High Level, the quickest way to Bo-Kaap. But his cell phone, a tiny Nokia he had recently stolen from a tourist at the Waterfront, blared out the opening bars of Tupac's "Me Against the World." Rikki fished it out of his cargo pants, saw who was calling, and sent it to voice mail. Fucken Gatsby. The fat cop wanted money. Money that Rikki didn't have no more.

Distracted, he overshot the turn and ended up on the slopes of Signal Hill.

"You missed High Level," said Faried.

"I know. I'll cut through."

Rikki was speeding the car down a narrow road, fancy houses hugging the slope. Then he hit the brakes and the car skidded to a stop.

"What the fuck?" asked beanpole Faried, his head banging the roof.

Rikki was reversing back up the road. “You got your gat?”

“Your mommy wearing a panty?” Faried patted the Colt shoved in his waistband. “Why?”

Rikki stopped the car and cut the music. “Let’s go into that house.” He pointed to a house with a deck built over the garage.

Faried was staring at him. “You fucken crazy, brother?”

“Quick, in and out. Those places is full of stuff. Maybe we have some fun, too.” Rikki smiled, showing his rotten teeth. “Let’s smoke that globe, and we do it.”

Faried thought for a moment; then he shrugged. “Why the fuck not?”

He took the stash of crystal meth and the unthreaded lightbulb from his jacket pocket. With practiced ease he fed the meth into the bulb and held it out. Rikki applied his lighter to the base, and within seconds Faried was sucking up a big chesty of meth. It made a *tik-tik* sound in the globe, the sound that gave meth its Cape Flats name. He held the tik smoke in his lungs and passed the globe to Rikki, who sucked at it. Rikki blew out a plume of smoke.

Nothing like Hitler’s drug to put you in a party mood.



The short man, the one with his hand under Susan’s dress, gyrated obscenely, moving his hips against her. His mouth gaped, and Burn could see the blackened front teeth. Susan opened her eyes and looked straight at Burn.

The guy behind Burn laughed. “We gonna have us some nice fun tonight.”

And that was when Matt came running back into the room. The eyes of the two men were drawn to the boy, who skidded to a stop, staring at them.

This gave Burn the moment he needed. As he twisted in his chair,

he grabbed the carving knife from the table and buried it to its haft in the tall man's chest. Blood geysered from his ruptured heart. Burn stood, grabbed him before he fell, and used his body as a shield. He felt the lanky man take the bullet fired by the short one. Then Burn shoved him away, launched himself, and grabbed the short guy by his gun arm. His weight took both of them to the floor. Burn twisted the man's arm and heard it break. The gun clattered to the tiles.

Susan backed away. Burn kneeed the short guy in the balls, and he curled like a worm into a fetal position. Burn looked over his shoulder. The tall one was dead, his spreading blood almost reaching Matt's bare toes. His son was frozen, staring.

Burn reached back onto the table for a steak knife.

"Take Matt out of here," he told Susan.

"Jack . . ."

"Take him out of here!"

Susan rushed across the tiles, grabbed the boy, and disappeared down the corridor toward the bedrooms.

Gripping the steak knife, Burn kneeled over the short man, who was staring up at him, wide-eyed. "Mister, we wasn't gonna do nothing . . ."

Burn hesitated for only a moment; then he reached down and cut the short man's throat.

# CHAPTER 2

Carmen Fortune fed her four-year-old son, Sheldon. He lay in a small crib, his withered limbs jerking and his sightless eyes moving in their sockets. The food dribbled from his mouth.

He had been born three months premature, blind and deformed, with massive brain damage. Nobody knew how or why he'd survived. Except Carmen. She knew God had cursed her. Made sure that every time she looked at her son she remembered all the tik she had smoked while she carried him inside her. He was a constant reminder of the hell that waited for her one day.

If it wasn't for the grant the state paid every month for Sheldon, she would put a pillow over his face and no one could blame her. But her

useless bastard husband, Rikki, smoked away whatever money he scammed or stole.

What the fuck, she was already in hell. Could it, honest to God, get worse?

Carmen was twenty but looked thirty. Her faced was bruised and swollen from the latest beating. Rikki hit her because she wasn't giving him a normal child, one that he could show off to his buddies to prove that he didn't father only mutants. That's what he called Sheldon: a fucken mutant.

The doctors told her that her womb was finished; she couldn't have no more kids. She didn't tell Rikki. He would have killed her. Better just to take the beatings.

When she heard the banging on the door, she knew there was only one fat white bastard who would hammer like that.

"Uncle Fatty!" She yelled across to where an ancient rail-thin man, wearing only a pair of dirty briefs, slumped in front of the TV. He drank from a bag of wine, his toothless mouth sucking at it like it was a tit. "Uncle Fatty, open the fucken door!" He mumbled something but stayed where he was.

The banging continued. Carmen drew her nightgown around her body, crossed to the door, and pulled it open. Gatsby filled the doorway, fat and stinking.

"He's not here," said Carmen.

The white plainclothes cop pushed her aside and walked in. Without a word he crossed the small living room, stuck a head into the kitchen, and then went into the only bedroom. She heard the closet doors banging and the sound of breaking glass. Then he came back out, wheezing like a cheap concertina.

Carmen stood with her hands on her hips. "I tole you."

"Where is he?" Gatsby came right up to her, and she could feel his foul breath on her face. He had food in his mustache.

“How the fuck must I know? He went out with Faried. In the car.”

“Where to?”

“I dunno.”

Gatsby had her against the wall. Jesus, he stank. “Talk to me.”

“They said something about Faried’s girl whoring in Sea Point.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes, that’s all. And what is this? The Weakest fucken Link?”

Gatsby stared down at her. “No wonder he smacks you. You’ve got a mouth like a shit-house.”

“And you stink like one.”

Gatsby’s fist came up. She didn’t flinch. “Hit me, you bastard. I’m used to it.”

He wheezed and dropped his hand. “Tell that fucker Rikki I want my money. Tonight still.”

She shook her head. “Good luck.”

Gatsby slammed out, and she locked the door. Uncle Fatty had passed out in a spreading pool of piss. Carmen went into the bedroom and saw that the fat boer had broken her mirror.

“Men,” she said to herself as she sat down on the bed. “I wish they would all fucken die.”



Burn washed the blood from his hands at the kitchen sink. As he wiped his hands he stood and listened intently. Nothing. No shouts, no sirens, no concerned neighbor ringing the buzzer. He walked past the bodies toward the bedrooms, closing the passage door behind him. Burn found Susan and Matt in the main bedroom, huddled on the bed. Susan cradled their son.

Matt looked at him over Susan’s shoulder. “Daddy . . .”

“Daddy’s here, Matty.” Burn sat down on the bed. “Everything’s

fine." He reached out a hand and touched Matt's hair. He knew he couldn't avoid looking at his wife's eyes any longer. "You okay?"

Susan stared at him. "What do you think?"

Burn reached a hand toward her face. She pulled back. "Don't."

He dropped the hand. She looked at him with haunted eyes. "So what happens now?"

"I clean up. Get rid of the . . . them."

"Just like that? And what, we just forget this happened? Go to the beach in the morning?" Her eyes were locked to his.

"I did what I had to do," he said.

"That's your mantra, isn't it, Jack? And you're sticking to it." She was still staring at him, hating him.

He stood. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what? That we're not at home? That you brought us to a place where animals like that . . ." She stopped, shaking her head, her eyes pinning him. "Or are you sorry that you've become one of them?"

He dragged his eyes away, unable to offer her any words. He had cleaning up to do. As he reached the door she spoke.

"Jack." There was something urgent in her voice. A different kind of fear.

He turned to her. She was watching a pool of blood spreading from between her legs onto the white duvet. "Jesus, Jack, I'm losing her . . ."



Benny Mongrel, squatting on his haunches, took Rizla papers and a bag of Dingers cherry tobacco from his uniform pocket and rolled a cigarette, his fingers deft and practiced. His eyes hadn't moved from the American's house since the two men had crossed the deck and disappeared inside. He'd seen nothing more. All he'd heard was the single gunshot.

Bessie had reared up at the sound of the shot and started to

whine softly. Benny Mongrel had put a hand on her head to calm her. “Shhhhhh, Bessie. Still.”

The old dog had keened once more, then collapsed onto the concrete with a sigh and lay there with one eye open.

Benny Mongrel had sat and watched, waiting. Waiting to see the gangsters come out of the house and drive off into the night in that red BMW. But there was no sign of the men. Or the American and his family.

The guy who had called him *sir*.

Benny Mongrel had been called many things. He had been called bastard, bushman, rubbish, and, for many years, Prisoner 1989657. White men in suits had called him a menace to society. Brown men bleeding from his knife had called him brother as they begged for mercy. He had none to show them. Cape Flats gutter curses had been spat at him since he was ripped from the womb of a woman he never knew. But nobody had ever called him *sir*.

Not until the American.

Benny Mongrel and Bessie were walking the front of the site one evening, the old dog dragging her back legs, when the little white kid had come running up to them. He only had eyes for Bessie and reached out to pet her. Benny Mongrel wasn't sure how Bessie would react and he pulled back on her chain, but she wagged her tail and stood there docile as you please, the kid stroking her matted fur.

Then the white man came over. He'd been unlocking the street door to the neighboring house, a high-walled fortress like all the others in the street, when the kid scooted over.

“Hey, Matt. Take it easy.”

The guy spoke like the people on those TV shows the other prisoners had watched in Pollsmoor Prison. American. He looked a bit like somebody from those shows too, biggish with a clean face and some gray in his dark hair.

Even though it was nearly 7:00 p.m., the sun was still high, so

when the kid looked up at Benny Mongrel for the first time, he could see his face clearly. And that was when the kid let go of Bessie and jumped back, like he had seen about the worst thing imaginable. He stood and stared up at Benny Mongrel, unable to tear his eyes away. He opened his mouth to scream, but all he could find was a whimper.

The big guy scooped the kid up and held him, face into his shoulder. Then he looked Benny Mongrel straight in his good eye. "I'm sorry, sir. Excuse my son."

Benny Mongrel said nothing. Just stood there looking at the white guy who never reacted, never even blinked as he took in the horror that was the left side of his face. Benny Mongrel had lived inside this mess of misshapen bones and keloid scar tissue for more than twenty years. He didn't care. His face had served him well. It had been an asset in the life he had lived.

Most people reacted the way the kid did when they saw his face, but the American guy stuck out his hand. "My name's Jack. I live next door."

Benny Mongrel had never shaken hands with a white man, and he wasn't about to start now. He hauled at Bessie's chain, whistled sharply to get her moving, and headed back onto the site.

But something about the American had got his interest. He would watch them from the top floor of the building site, the big guy and his small blonde wife and the kid. In their house or driving away in their fancy Jeep.

Benny Mongrel finished rolling his cigarette. He lit it, his ruined face visible in the flaring match. He sucked the warm smoke deep into his lungs, and as he exhaled he heard the siren.

The ambulance screamed up to the house and two medics got out. The door in the garden wall buzzed open, and Benny Mongrel watched as they hurried inside. The medics carried the white woman out on a stretcher. They put her in the back of the ambulance and drove away. The light flashed, but the siren was mute.

Benny Mongrel waited. Puzzled. Where were the gangsters? And where were the cops?

Then the garage door rolled up and the big guy reversed out in the Jeep. The door rolled shut. As the Jeep passed beneath him, Benny could see the child strapped into the car seat in the back.

Benny unfolded himself from his squatting position and walked to the edge of the balcony. He looked down at the red BMW, then back at the house next door. Bessie appeared beside him and licked his hand.

He patted her head and spoke in a whisper. "I think they seen their mothers, Bessie."



Inspector Rudi Barnard, known on the Flats as Gatsby, drove his white Toyota through the rape and murder capital of the world, the dark flip side of the Cape Town tourist postcard. The night was full of the usual music of the Cape Flats: sirens, snatches of screams and laughter, gunshots, and pumping hip-hop. The Flats were where anybody who wasn't white had got dumped back in the days of apartheid, far from the privileged suburbs slung like jewels around Table Mountain. A desolate, bleak sheet of land persecuted by wind and dust.

Even when it wasn't hot, Barnard sweated, but on this January night the water dripped from his jowls, gluing the shirt to his sumo-sized gut. All the windows of the Toyota were open as he drove, but the air lay heavy as a dead whore across the Cape Flats.

Rudi Barnard loved Jesus Christ, gatsbys, and killing people. And out here on the Flats he could feel that love the most.

The bumper-sticker simplicity of reborn Christianity suited Barnard well. He would get up each morning and pray. Then he would part his air bag-sized butt cheeks and smear Preparation H on his hemorrhoids, clothe himself in jeans and check shirts from the Big 'n Tall shop, strap

on his Z88 9 mm service pistol, and go forth and dispense frontier justice in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unbidden, an image of Carmen Fortune's body came to him, her breasts and thighs barely covered by the short nightgown. He pushed it away. Barnard couldn't remember when last he'd had sex with a woman. Sometime before his bitch of a wife had finally left him. He didn't miss her or the screwing. He had always found the process disgusting. When the urge grew too great for prayer to subdue, he spent a few guilt-stricken minutes in communion with his hand and a *Hustler* magazine.

To distract himself from that image of the half-breed's brown thighs, he grabbed the mike of the car radio, barking out an APB on Rikki Fortune's red BMW. Saying it might be in the Sea Point area. He wasn't desperate for the five grand Rikki owed him. His web of vice and corruption generated a constant source of income that met his modest needs. But he couldn't let a little cunt like Rikki get away with anything.

Fear was his God-fueled power. Any sign of weakness and it would be his body found dumped in an open strip of veld.

The law of the jungle.



Burn paced the waiting room of a private hospital in a leafy suburb of Cape Town, his son sleeping on a chair, his young wife and her detached placenta somewhere behind swinging doors, and two dead bodies going cold in his dining room.

When they'd fled the United States three months before, he'd had little time to decide on a destination. Not Asia, because they would be too visible and he had wanted to be sure of medical care for his pregnant wife. Not Europe, too much of a colony of the States. It would be harder to disappear. It was a toss-up between Sydney or Cape Town. Australia, despite its huge landmass, had a tiny population, and Burn had felt

claustrophobic just thinking about it. South Africa sounded good, with a Western infrastructure if you could afford it, but chaotic enough for a man to fall through the cracks.

But that chaos had reached out and grabbed hold of his life by the throat.

“Sir?” A pale-skinned young nurse in a crisp uniform appeared before him. “You can see your wife now.”

Burn stood and reached down for Matt. The nurse shook her head. “I’m sorry, but the little boy can’t go in with you.” She smiled. “Don’t worry, I’ll sit with him.”

Burn managed a smile in return. “Thank you.”

Susan was in a private ward that looked like a hotel room. She lay in bed, wan and beautiful. She opened her eyes when Burn came in.

He hesitated, then took her hand. She let him. “How are you feeling?”

“Everything’s okay, Jack. My baby is fine.”

He nodded. “I know.”

“I just need to stay in here for a couple of days.”

“Good. Let them take care of you.”

She took her hand back. “You go now.”

“Are you okay?”

“I just want to sleep.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She nodded, closing her eyes, already withdrawing from him as he walked away.