

# SCARRED

By

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SAMPLE CHAPTERS

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For every inmate who finds solace in the prison library

Gefahrlich das gebrannte kind.  
(Translation: The burned child is dangerous.)

Lyric from "Feuer Frei" by Rammstein

## Chapter 1

Jason Ennis smiled warmly as he filled the old man's Styrofoam bowl with soup, the rich smell of tomato stock and vegetables filling the air yet again before he replaced the lid on the giant simmering pot. The old man returned a large, mostly toothless grin. He looked very happy to have made it to the soup kitchen in Redfern, just a few kilometres from Sydney's Central Business District, in time to receive a free meal. Most nights the small soup kitchen and its crew of volunteers could not feed all of the hungry people waiting. It relied largely on donations and as often was the case when it came to charity, the demand outweighed the supply. Jason couldn't help everybody, but it gave him a warm feeling to think that some people, and particularly children, wouldn't be going hungry because of his actions. He was making a difference. A small difference, but a difference all the same. Somebody had to do something about the problem, and he was happy to take that responsibility upon himself. It was a frequently satisfying role, though unfortunately it did have its drawbacks. Most of the patrons were well-mannered and appreciative, but the drug-addicts and drunks that were inevitably attracted by free meals could sometimes be loud and unruly, occasionally even violent. Tonight, however, had gone without incident. More importantly, everyone in the line had been fed, and there was even food left over for the volunteers to take home if they wanted. As the old man took one of the empty seats at the kitchen, a feeling of pride and accomplishment came over Jason.

'Good job tonight as usual Jason,' said Margaret Pappas, a short stout woman with grey curly hair framing the radiant glow of her face. Margaret was always in such a good mood Jason wouldn't have been surprised if she was putting a fifth of rum in her coffee each night. Nobody else he knew was constantly in a good mood. Margaret was one of the other two volunteers at the kitchen tonight, and officially the manager, though she never flaunted this sliver of authority. Margaret was one of the few people who volunteered at the kitchen more than Jason did. She was retired, and had much more free time than Jason, who often stressed himself trying to make it there on time after coming from his lectures at the University of Sydney or his job at a warehouse in Marrickville, depending on which day it was. He hated running late all the time.

'Oh, it was nothing.' Jason shuffled awkwardly on his feet and held Margaret's gaze for a split second.

Jason liked working with Margaret. At least as much as he enjoyed working with anybody. He didn't have much in common with her, but Margaret was friendly, and more importantly, she was quiet. She rarely spoke just to fill the silence, or felt the need to gossip about the patrons or other volunteers. He was convinced some people volunteered purely because they couldn't find any other place that would tolerate their garrulous chatter.

'That reminds me, Max called me earlier to say he's going to a funeral this weekend, so I need someone else to cover the Saturday night shift now. Any chance you can do it Jason?' Margaret asked.

'Yeah sure, I mean, of course I can help you out,' he replied. He had actually been looking forward to his first Saturday night off in a long time, but Margaret needed help, and besides, he couldn't bear the thought of her being disappointed with him.

'Thanks, I knew I could count on you.' Margaret smiled and patted Jason on the back as she stepped past him to make herself a tea. Jason beamed. He took a single deep breath and allowed himself a few seconds to bask in what felt like the warmth of the morning sun.

'God, there's so much left over I won't have to buy food for a week!' said Caroline Barnett, the other volunteer working tonight, as she joined Jason and Margaret behind the counter. Caroline was studying at the University of Sydney as well, though she was a first-year arts student and he was final year psychology, meaning they rarely saw each other on campus. Jason also didn't mind working with Caroline. She was bright and bubbly and she talked more than he generally liked a person to, but she was attractive, and like most men, Jason had an enhanced tolerance for attractive women. He wasn't overly fond of her eyebrow piercing, which he thought looked unprofessional, and it annoyed him how she frequently dyed her shoulder length hair. *Just pick a colour and stick with it*, he often thought. For the last two weeks it had been a washy mauve colour, which Jason thought looked rather gaudy, though it didn't detract from her smile which seemed to light up the otherwise dull evenings at work.

Jason frowned. 'I really don't think you'd get a week's worth,' he said, 'I'd say three days at most, oh, well, you're a bit smaller than me so maybe you could get four ... out of ...'

Jason's voice trailed off as Caroline started giggling. 'Geez Jason I was being sarcastic,' she said with a kind smile, 'why do you always take everything so literally?'

Jason blushed. It was the kind of question he'd been getting all his life. Through experience he was well aware that he had trouble reading between the lines, as the saying went. He could still remember the embarrassment when he was in year one, and the teacher had told him to 'pull his socks up' after he'd been late back into class from recess. Eager to make up for his tardiness, Jason had promptly reached down to his ankles and complied with the request, which had confusingly earned him a trip to the time-out area for being a smart alec. Trial and error had since taught him the actual meaning of commonly used idioms, though he had never managed to wrap his head around exaggeration or sarcasm. How everyone else seemed to understand it remained a mystery. Embarrassed, he decided to change the subject.

'Oh, right, so, when are you working next anyway?' He already knew the answer. The roster was printed and posted on the staff noticeboard and Jason had looked at it earlier in the week. People often commented on how good his memory was.

'Not till Sunday, but I've got a whole heap of essays to write this week. That should keep me busy.'

'Oh me too,' said Jason, reminded of his own unfinished essay at home. The deadline for submission was midnight tonight. He had hoped to finish it before he left for work that morning but he hadn't had enough time. If he hurried home after his shift he should be able to complete it. He was good at writing and it was nearly done.

'I'm really struggling with the one I'm working on at the moment, fundamentals of literature, uhh, give me a break,' she chuckled.

'I'm sure you'll do well. That last essay you wrote was great,' said Jason. His attempted compliment seemed to have gone well. Caroline blushed slightly and smiled. He had offered to proofread an essay of hers a couple weeks ago. It was decent, but more than anything he had hoped to make Caroline feel better.

'Thanks, and thanks again for helping me with it.' Jason could tell by the way she smiled with her eyes that she genuinely meant it. He usually struggled with recognising facial expressions, but a first-year psychology lecture he attended which had covered recognising genuine smiles, the 'Duchenne smile' as it was termed, had proved very informative.

'Anytime,' he replied.

Jason helped clean and tidy the kitchen as the last diners finished their meals. He was particularly thorough when it came to cleaning and organising things. Margaret observed that as usual he was putting in more effort than necessary. She considered him to be a quiet achiever, albeit an awkward and odd one. Even though he was busy cleaning, Jason took the time to wave, smile and nod at each person as they left.

'Did'ja get that jacket from Mad Max or somethin'?' asked the last patron as he walked past, a middle-aged man with a friendly smile.

Jason looked down at his jacket as if he'd never seen it before. People more frequently asked him if he rode a motorcycle when they asked about it, an assumption that wasn't helped by army style pants that were always tucked into combat boots. The jacket though, with reinforced padding seemingly placed everywhere it would fit and its unusual style had struck him as having a post-apocalyptic vibe when he found it online. He didn't mind the comment, but before he could think of a good reply the man was already out the door.

'Thanks for the help again,' said Margaret as Jason put the cleaning cloth and spray back under the counter.

Jason smiled, considering that to be a reply in itself to her thanks. 'See you Saturday Margaret, and I'll see you Sunday Caroline.'

Caroline looked up from her phone. 'Geez you're always here, I don't know how you fit it all in. I struggle with just one or two shifts here and uni.'

Jason shrugged. The truth was he constantly stressed himself keeping all the commitments he made, but he couldn't help himself. He was driven by a constant need to be productive. He attributed it, along with his teetotalism, to his alcoholic mother, who to the best of his knowledge hadn't accomplished a damn thing since giving birth to him. *We all rebel against our parents*, he thought. For him rebelling had meant getting a job, staying off drugs and going to university. After an awkward silence Jason smiled again, waved goodbye to Margaret and Caroline and went out the door. He put on his wrap-around sunglasses with the protective clear lenses and began walking home.

His apartment in Newtown was only a thirty-odd minute walk, and late at night was the best time to go walking, despite where he was. While the council had made an effort to improve Redfern's reputation as Sydney's ghetto in recent years, the process was far from perfect. The few people who knew about his volunteering were surprised to learn that Jason walked home alone at night through the area. He shrugged off their concern, knowing from experience that while the neighbourhood's reputation wasn't completely undeserved, it was grossly exaggerated.

Jason passed the familiar murals encompassing the entire sides of buildings. One, of a young Indigenous girl staring out into the street with a sad expression, had always touched him. The one next to it changed every couple of months. Last week it had been a woman sleeping on a pile of bones, which he had quite liked. Now it was an odd series of technicolour swirls, which he did not think was an improvement on any level. He often wished his own art would reach as many people as these, though he was far too shy to even show it to anyone. Turning off the main road into a side street, the art became somewhat less professional. Undecipherable graffiti tags covered walls, doors, and even the footpath in some places. The vandalism was broken up every now and then by the tell-tale uneven dark grey squares of a paint roller. The cover up effort only highlighted how many decades old the original paintwork all around it was.

Jason noticed a syringe on the ground. He took a cursory look around, made sure nobody was watching him, before he carefully picked it up. He smashed the needle into a brick wall, snapping it clean off, before he placed it in the next garbage bin he walked past. It belonged in a proper sharps bin, of course, but now the needle part was broken Jason thought it was safe enough to dispose of in this way. Better than leaving it on the street where some child could step on it. Somebody had to do something about the problem, and he was happy to take that responsibility upon himself. As much as Jason liked making the neighbourhood safer, he liked keeping a low profile even more, and seldom did anything that he thought would draw the attention of strangers. Had anyone been watching, he would have left the syringe where it was.

He was in a particularly good mood tonight. His shift at the kitchen had gone without incident or stress, and more importantly, everyone had approved of him. He didn't notice his

pace slow as he enjoyed his walk, all concerns about his essay falling from his thoughts. He was usually in such a hurry but tonight for a change, he felt relaxed. He looked up at the moon and smiled. The lights of the city made few stars visible, but the three-quarter moon seemed to be glowing particularly bright.

'Oi! Gimme all ya fuckin' money!' Snapped out of his fixation on the sky, Jason stopped and turned in the direction of the aggressive, slurred male voice. A skinny man wearing a tracksuit in dire need of washing and an old pair of sneakers was approaching him from a nearby alleyway. He had a small kitchen knife in his hand which was pointed in line with Jason's face. Jason stared expressionlessly at the man, considering him. How old was he? Mid-forties? It was hard to tell. The man had the worn-out look that only years of substance abuse could generate. The sunken look in his eyes reminded Jason of his father. His scruffy light brown hair looked like it hadn't been washed in weeks. His nose was running and the man seemed to be a little drunk, swaying as if he was a reed and there was a breeze.

From his experiences at the soup kitchen, and at most of his other jobs which somehow always seemed to attract the dregs of society, Jason concluded that the man couldn't be reasoned with. The man was a danger to society. That much was evident. Somebody had to do something about the problem, and he was happy to take that responsibility upon himself.

'Didn't ya hear me cunt? I said gimme ya fuckin' money!' The man was getting agitated. He'd done this many times before but a stoic and expressionless target wasn't the typical response.

'I'm gonna to count to-' The man stopped mid-sentence as Jason pulled out a pistol from behind him and aimed it at his forehead. Jason saw the man's eyes widen, and estimated he had about two-thirds of a second to realise he'd picked the wrong victim.

Jason's face remained expressionless as his finger squeezed around the trigger. The silencer removing all but the faintest noise. A small red circle appeared in the middle of the man's forehead and a spray of red mist and pinkish chunks blew rearward from the back of his skull. He fell to his knees and crumpled to his right side. The kitchen knife dropped from his hand to the street.

Jason squatted down and tilted his head to his left side, examining the fresh corpse. He liked how you couldn't predict exactly how a body would fall or how the blood would spray from an exit wound, or even where the exit wound would be in relation to the entry wound, if there was one at all. Bullets often ricocheted around tissue and bone and left the body somewhere unexpected. Tonight, while the bullet had entered the skull dead centre it had exited distinctly to the right at the back. Jason thought the entry wound looked comically small in comparison to the gaping hole at the back of the skull, which he could have easily stuck his fist in.

Jason felt like he'd made a difference, albeit a small one. One less criminal in the world. He had stepped on one cockroach in a city with thousands, but it was a difference all the same. He



frowned at the kitchen knife. It was a poor choice of weapon; a cheap thing that only would have cost a few dollars. He picked it up with his left hand then stood, looking around to make sure there were no witnesses. He wasn't sure what he would have done if there had of been an innocent witness, and was relieved to find the street deserted. He holstered his pistol and recommenced walking home. He threw the small knife down a drain a couple blocks away. He had no use for it, and knives shouldn't be left lying in the street where children could find them. Jason looked back up at the moon as he walked. Was it just his imagination, or did it seem brighter now than it had before? He suddenly remembered about his essay due tonight and cursed himself. He had dawdled on his way home and now this unexpected incident had delayed him even more. He picked up the pace, worried now that he wouldn't be able to submit his essay before the deadline. He hated running late all the time.

## Chapter 2

A few seconds after she regained consciousness, Kelly Steiner wished she hadn't. The first time she had woken up with him on top of her it had taken half a minute for her to fully understand her situation. This time it had only taken a brief moment. He ran his tongue up her cheek as he pulsed forward again, his foul-smelling breath rolling all over her face. Kelly turned her head to one side in a fruitless attempt to get away from him. Her vision half obscured by her long black hair, she could still see the bruising around her right wrist. It had spread a couple inches up her forearm since yesterday and the cut from the cable tie securing her to the black iron of the bed frame looked infected. The only other thing she could stare at on this side of the room was the mould which seemed to be on a slow journey from the ground to the ceiling, currently about one third of the way up the bleak concrete wall. The view on the other side, only slightly more scenic, consisted of several cardboard boxes and some dusty wooden furniture. Kelly didn't see any point in looking at her other wrist, it felt as bad as her right looked. Her ankles didn't feel quite as bad. For some reason he had tied them with rope instead. Unlike her wrists, which ached constantly, her ankle restraints only hurt when she struggled, and she'd stopped doing that some time ago.

How long had she been here? There was no way to tell. The single globe hanging from the ceiling of the basement was always on, making it impossible to tell day from night. She was drifting in and out of consciousness as the dehydration took its toll on her small frame. Had it been two or three days? It felt like a lifetime. The last thing she remembered before waking up was walking back to her student accommodation block alone. It was 2 AM and the bar on King St, the main road of Newtown, was closing. Her girlfriend Sally was supposed to be giving her a ride home, even though she was almost certainly over the legal blood alcohol limit to drive – not that it had ever stopped her before – but she had disappeared. Kelly declined the advances of the two young men who, unsuccessful in their efforts to pick up inside the club, were now making a desperate last attempt to woo the drunken female patrons who were leaving. She wasn't anywhere near drunk enough to even consider them. Her buzz had almost completely worn off from the frustration of searching for Sally, who was the only reason she had come out in the first place. Not having the money for her own taxi in this week's budget, she would have to walk home. It was only a few blocks away, and she thought the walk would probably wear off the last of the alcohol anyway. Still, she wasn't going to let Sally hear the end of this tomorrow. As she began her walk she tried calling her missing friend one last time. A few kilometres away a chirpy ringtone calling out from a jeans pocket on the floor remained unheard by either Sally or the guy she had taken home forty minutes ago.

Sally had woken up with a severe hangover and regret for her choice in men. Kelly had woken up with something far worse. Folding her arms against the light chill, she was about half way home when she really started wishing she had of brought a jacket with her. The black miniskirt and pink tank top had been a good choice for the dance floor, but they weren't doing

much to protect her from the elements. She had just slipped off her high heels, so as not to torture her aching feet for the rest of the walk, when she heard something behind her. Kelly remembered wanting to look to see what it was, but she couldn't recall if she had. Everything had turned grey before she knew what was happening. From the ache she felt at the back her skull when she woke up, Kelly assumed she had been hit from behind. Her first thought was why her head hurt so much, her next was trying to figure out what was on top of her. Once she had realised, she let out a scream that was cut short by a fist to her jaw. When he was done with her he taped her mouth shut, and it had been like that ever since. Sometimes, strangely, that felt like the worst part. Not even being able to scream, robbed of the last visceral freedom of a trapped creature. When you couldn't even cry out for help, what possible hope did you have left?

How many times had he come down to use her body since then? Four or five maybe. He came and did what he wanted, whether she was awake or not. Any attempt to struggle only resulted in beatings. The last time she hadn't resisted at all. She had no way of guessing that her lack of resistance would quicken the inevitable. She wondered how long she could survive this. He hadn't given her anything to eat or drink. How long could the human body survive without water? A faint recollection of one of her nursing degree lectures earlier this year told her it was three or four days, but she wasn't sure if that was right. She wasn't sure of anything anymore. Her thoughts were clouded, painful, everything was painful when she drifted out of the dreams in her sleep and into the nightmare of her reality. *Why can't I just pass out again?* He hadn't untied her at all, giving her no choice but to urinate on the mattress. It surprised her that he didn't seem to notice.

He finished only a couple minutes after he started. She was glad it never took him long. He would go away now. After the first time he had spent what seemed like an age just staring at her. Kelly found it disturbing that he never spoke, but perhaps that was best. She could only imagine what a sick man like this would have to say. But the next time after he finished he had left straight away, and each time after that.

Now he was staring at her again. Still on top of her. A bead of sweat dripped off the end of his nose and landed above her eye, repulsing her even more than when he came inside her. She met his gaze. He was an ugly man. Sunken eyes, broken nose. Brown hair, unkempt, receding at the front and flaked with dandruff. He stank, even over the smell of her urine. As she looked into his eyes, she tried to guess what he could possibly be feeling.

\* \* \*

Boredom. Howard Silverman was feeling bored.

Seeing her walking as he drove home from his regular Friday night curbside crawling at Kings Cross, he had felt exhilarated, deciding without much thought to play out a fantasy he had been thinking about as long as he could remember. He'd already had some fun tonight, but it had

cost him \$60. Fifty for the sex, and the whore had actually charged him another \$10 for open-mouth kissing. Still, some of the whores wouldn't do that at all, and it was the best part, certainly more fun than the paltry squirt that brought an end to it all. The intimacy, feeling like they actually wanted him, even if he knew deep down that it was bullshit. This fun, however, wasn't going to cost him a damn thing. Parking ahead of her and waiting in the trees, he had hit her with his tyre iron. Then it had been a matter of dragging her into his van, and then from his van to his basement. He could hardly believe it. He had gotten away with it. It had been so easy, he wished he had done something like it years ago. The thrill of tying her up in his basement had given him an erection, and he had taken her for the first time there and then. Her shock, the smell of her fear as she had woken up and realised what was happening to her had only served to excite him further. Seeing how afraid she was just as he walked down the stairs the next three times had made him hard before he even forced himself on her. As it turned out, real fear was even better than faked intimacy. However, the next time, the last time before now, she hadn't looked afraid at all. She still looked like she was in pain, which was something at least, but she hadn't even fought back. It was as if she had accepted that this was her new life. She was beyond fear. This was the way things were now. And this time it had been even worse. She hadn't even looked at him until he was done.

Hoping to reignite the thrill, he waited until she was unconscious again this time, creeping down the stairs as quietly as possible. Nothing. No reaction at all. It reminded him of the toy pinball machine he had been given on his seventh birthday by his grandmother. Only a few days after he had gotten it, the spring mechanism that launched the pinball had broken. His shiny toy looked so fresh and new, but it just didn't work anymore, and no amount of crying or yelling would make it better. He couldn't even ask his grandmother for a new one. She'd died not long after, leaving just Howard and his father.

Howard looked at Kelly. This wasn't much fun anymore. The sex was worse than with the cheapest, drugged up hookers he paid for. He wanted her to look alive again. To feel alive. But he didn't know how. Desperate and petulant, he tried punching her in the face for good measure, but all he got in response was a whimper. She wasn't even crying. Howard frowned. What could he do now? He wrapped his hands around her throat and her eyes widened. For a moment it just looked like confusion then her look changed to sheer terror. *Here we go.* She sure looked alive now. Her struggle to hold onto her life was so pathetic it was beautiful. He squeezed even harder. Now she was really panicking. Faint croaks escaped her mouth as her body convulsed. He was straddling her abdomen with the full weight of his 95kg frame, but she fought so fiercely she almost threw him off her. Twice.

The affair was as short as it was brilliant. Just when Howard thought her spasms couldn't get any stronger she gave one final push against his body and collapsed. Howard kept the pressure on the neck of his now limp victim. As exciting as this had been he knew he would never get the same response from her again. This one was all used up. He needed another.

Howard looked down at his naked body atop hers. The thrill of watching the life drain out of her had given him another erection. He figured the sex would be even blander now, but he may as well make use of her body one last time before he marked her to let the world know that she had been his. He had planned that from the beginning, it went without saying, but he still didn't know how. As he pulsed back and forth on top of her, he wondered how he would do it. And where he would leave the body.

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