

Born to Rage

"I think he's dead."

Mum poked at the little body; nothing happened. Then he gave a small whimper, snuffling through his infection. "Well, nearly so."

The ginger kitten opened his mouth and gasped for air, snot and goo oozing from eyes and mouth. He looked very sick, I thought.

"The poor kitty's mother's dead. Oh, dear – what will we do?"

"T ... Take him to the doctor, Mum, h ... he'll fix him." Although, as I looked at him, I wasn't so sure.

"That's too expensive...." She looked at me, her eyes misting over. "I think we'll have to put the poor wee thing down, Basil. He's just too sick to save...."

"Aw, Muuuuum! D ... D ... Don't s ... s ... say that. W ... Why do that?" I couldn't bear to think of that, of what might happen.

"No, son, I think we must."

I didn't like the way she said 'we', but I didn't say anything for a few moments. We were standing on the back verandah and it was one of those steamy summer mornings that, in Brisbane, we know so well: when you felt it, you wished straight away that you were at the beach. I opened my mouth to say that I would look after him but, before I could, my brother came through the open door from the kitchen.

"What's going on here, Mum?" Arthur, at eleven, was two years older than me, and we were like chalk and cheese, or so people would say. He was dark and I was fair. And everybody said that Arthur was so sensitive – to just about everything. I couldn't understand that.

"The poor wee thing is nearly dead, Arthur. The mother's gone now; she died in the night and this one is still sick and looking like death."

Arthur looked at the kitten and immediately turned away. "Oh, how awful for it."

"It's a him," I said, adamantly. "Not an it." I was irritated; but then Arthur always irritated me.

"Come, come, boys, don't fight." Mum looked again at me, then at Arthur. Then, she said, "Basil, you'll have to do it. I can't, and you know that Arthur can't either, he's so sensitive."

I knew what she meant, because I'd seen Dad do it, but I didn't like it and I didn't want to do it either. "But, Mum, w ... why can't I look after him, I'd g ... g ... get him well again, I just know. P ... Please don't say that he has to be p ... put d ... d ... down, please!" I was nearly crying now.

I don't know what sort of sickness he had, but it must have been some kind of cold or flu; everybody was talking about Asian flu and things like that.

"But, dear, he's in such misery. We can't cure him, we can't afford a doctor, and look at the wee thing – such a misery." She looked at me, pleading with her eyes. "Please, Basil, please do it. Please put him out of his misery."

While she was pleading she'd picked up the skin and bones that was the kitten and carefully placed him in a small cotton bag. She drew the string tight and handed the bag to me. "Up the back, there's a bucket. Fill it with water from the hose and then put the bag in the bucket. He's so far gone, he won't feel a thing."

Dumbly, holding back my tears and distress, I took that bag while Mum and Arthur looked on. I looked in his eyes, hating him at that moment, and he looked away. But, as I turned, my tears welled and I kept my face forward so that they didn't see; though by the time I got to the bucket, I could see it sparkling through my tears, dull, grey and dirty. The hose was nearby and I filled the bucket quickly, now wanting to get the dirty deed done. I put my hand in the water and felt the cold and the mud stirred up from the bottom. My hot tears fell off my face onto that dirty water as I lifted the bag and lowered it until it disappeared, whispering I'm sorry, little kitten ... I have to put you out of your misery.

Desperately, frantically, I saw then his little face rising, pushing, trying to push through the cotton, feeble claws raking at the bag, crying, mewling for air. The water began to thrash as the animal fought for life and I gasped in anguish and terror, and saw a length of wood, grabbed at it blindly, my cries now mingling with the kitten's, and vaguely, I heard Mum call out to

me but I didn't understand as I put the end of the wood against his body and pushed hard, harder, hardest – until I felt it stop at the bottom and held it there, feeling it jerk a bit and kept holding it until all motion ceased.

“Leave it in therefore a while, Basil, just to make sure. Later we'll dig a nice little grave in the garden and put it there, with a little cross. You and Arthur would like that, wouldn't you?”

The snot was now drooling from my nose and my eyes were so tearful, I didn't know which was which. Fighting to keep my voice under control, I said, “Yes, Mum, th ... th ... that'll be nice. That'll be real nice.”

I stayed like that for a minute or two, not moving and just looking at the dirty water, until my eyes had dried and I wiped the snot with the back of my hand as I turned around and said, “All okay now, Mum – I've put it out of its m ... m ... misery.”

And I even managed to put on a big smile as she said, “Well, let's do the shopping now, shall we?”

Thinking about long-ago things like that always put me in a foul mood – probably another reason I hate shopping, I thought, as I loaded the bags into the boot and got in to start the car. I shook the thoughts away and was just about to turn the key when I felt a bump. Not a big bump, but enough to know that the car had moved and not because of anything I'd done. Puzzled, I looked at the dash, but there were no red lights or any sign of problem. Then I glanced in the rearview mirror: there was another car, now very close.

As I got out and walked to the rear, a thickset hulk of a man came forward from his car. Badly in need of a shave, he was about average height, fortyish, had close-cropped hair, a swarthy complexion, dark brown eyes, a large red nose – a heavy drinker? – and almost no neck. Not a pleasant image at all, I thought; and he was scowling.

I looked down at the rear of my car where the trailer hitch protruded about forty centimeters. It seemed okay, as did the front of the other car: no damage that I could see to either. Nothing to get worried about at all.

As the man reached me I said, “No problem, no damage that I can see.” I smiled at him.

" W'the fuck you do that fer? Look where yer parked, fer fuck's sake." He waved his hand around in the area between the two cars. His scowl had deepened.

Just for a moment I was nonplussed. But only for a moment. Glaring, I snapped back, "Hey – *you* hit my car." I thought that would be the end of it: there was no damage, and I didn't see any further point in talking with a cretin.

"Fuckin' idiots like you shouldn't be onna road. Look – look how far yer fuckin' hitch crosses that line." As he spoke, he bent down and peered, for a moment, at the grill of his car. "Lucky fer you, no damage."

I looked at the yellow parking lines. He was right: my car's trailer hitch did extend about five centimeters into the area where he'd just parked his car – at the very end of his parking space. "Oh, fahchrissake," I said, "how often does that happen? How often do *you* go over a parking line a bit?"

His face suffused with menace, he came close enough for me to see the multicoloured tobacco stains on his teeth, and hissed, "Fuck you, yer far-king little baaaaaarrrrstid." Then he turned back to his car, locked it, muttering more obscenities, and walked off towards the shopping centre entrance.

I raised my voice. "Well ... that's a great way to solve a problem." I was angry, but wary about getting into any physical contact; at fifty-nine and arthritic, I would lose.

With a toss of his head, he shouted back, "*Fuck you, cunt.*" He didn't look back.

It never ceases to amaze me how miserable some people are. Not only miserable within themselves, but to most others, including complete strangers such as myself. People like that really irritate me. And, not for the first time, it occurred to me that some people needed to be taught a lesson, maybe shown that their attitude is entirely unjustified, maybe needed to be put out of *their* misery, even. So, I watched him until he disappeared into the mall, drilling his image into my brain. Then I wrote down the make, model and year of his car, and the rego, muttering, "Okay, arsehole, I see your heap again, you'll be sorry." Grinning within myself, I thought how easy it is to take down urban terrorists who get off on road rage: they don't expect anybody to fight back. As I closed my notebook, I murmured: "I can wait -- you've got a surprise comin' one day, ya baaaaaarrrrstid."

By the time I got back to Bald Hills with the shopping, however, I was feeling a bit better – I'd worked out what to do and how I wanted to do it, if I ever saw that fucker's car again. Dropping all the bags on the kitchen table for Val to attend to, I went off to my workshop and, in less than an hour, I had what I needed.

Living on the outskirts of large city like Brisbane, I knew that the chances of having a blue with the same person again were remote. But, well, I reasoned that life is full of strange coincidences, so one should take precautions, just in case. After all, I reasoned again, I could just as easily encounter some other asshole who doesn't like some aspect of my driving or parking. As Val says too often, "Better to be safe than sorry". Val's full of shit like that, clichés and *non sequiturs* that make her sound like the half-wit she is, so I made a point of not telling her about that episode. Do I need a further torrent of cliché-ridden verbal diarrhea? Too much of her crap always leaves me in a black mood.

Pushing aside thoughts of Val, I held the device and admired my craftsmanship, turning it over, feeling the almost-needle sharp point, checking the angle and testing its rigidity within the base I'd made for it. Confident that it would work, I wrapped it in a cotton rag, went to the car, opened the bonnet and secreted it in a niche just behind one of the headlights. Dropping the bonnet with a bang, I went inside to have tea but the silly cow hadn't even put the shopping away. I'd been doing all that work in the workshop and she hadn't done anything an hour later, for fuck's sake! I was angry.

I found her in the living room, asleep in her TV chair, a commercial droning away on the screen.

"What t'fuck you doing, Val?" I gave her shoulder a hard shake.

Abruptly she woke, her vacant eyes looking at the telly, then at me.

"Wha ... oh ... sorry, dove, I must've dropped off." She rose and scurried off to the kitchen. She always called me dove when she thought I might be angry – she was nuts about birds and probably thought dove had a calming effect. Didn't make any difference to me.

But I followed because I was getting hungry, I was angry anyway, and I knew that Val needed to be hurried along otherwise it might be midnight before we ate. And my presence was enough to keep her on track. As I drank a cup of tea and watched her, I wondered again why I bothered with Val, but I knew the answer to that without even thinking: our daughter Heather, our beautiful teenage daughter. She was such a marked contrast: joyful, intelligent, vivacious, loving – all that a doting father could hope for in a daughter. In fact, the difference in mental capacity and physical appearance was a continual mystery to me: how could such a beautiful person be born from such a dullard as Val? But I wasn't complaining. Take life as it comes, is what I say.

"I'm going out to the garden. Check on a few things," I said, and started out the back door, onto the steps.

"Yes, dear. Dinner will be ready at seven, alright dove?"

I didn't bother answering – too busy squashing a large cockroach into mush and kicking the mess onto the grass below. My anger was still there and Val's inane chatter just irritated. I glanced at my watch: six p.m. It was a bit cool, late August and the cold winds often blew in from the west. I pulled my collar up and started for the garden at the back when I stopped. My eye had caught the squashed roach that I'd kicked out; it was now being attacked by hundreds of small ants, all voraciously tucking in. Go for it, you little suckers, I chuckled to myself and eagerly watched as the pieces, like some slow motion video, began to melt away in single file, all the little meaty flags waving, flapping and swaying....

I stood like that for a long while, Val said later, lost in thought.

I couldn't see Arthur anywhere. Where is he, I wondered? We'd been playing at World War II battle, on the point, for an hour and I'd won all the sneak attacks so far. I was good at that, sneak attacks. We'd both go our separate ways from the central clearing, and then run off into the bushes, each trying to find the other first, by stealth, and shoot. I'd shot Arthur four times in a row now, but this time I'd been trying for over ten minutes to find him, but couldn't. I put my wooden gun into my belt and sat down to listen, hiding behind some bushes

on the top of a small rise. In the distance, I could hear the soft murmur of the waves hitting the rocks below; I just loved those sounds.

For a long time, I sat, unmoving. The breeze stirred the bushes, the gulls cried almost incessantly, but still I heard no footsteps, however quiet, from Arthur. Cautiously, I raised my body and peered over the tops of the bushes, and turned around a full circle: there were the Brisbane hills in the distance, Moreton Bay, the islands to the east, the open sea, the southern coastline. He wasn't anywhere I could see. Finally, I got fed up.

"Arthur!" I cupped my hands and called again, louder I hoped. "ARTHUR!" Then I cupped my hands around my ears, like Dad taught me, and listened. Nothing.

I stood up to the full height of my thirteen years. Where's the bopper gone? I started walking around the point aimlessly, figuring that, if I didn't know where he was, it didn't make much difference which way I went.

Then I heard his voice, as though a long way off.

"Bazza!"

I shouted back, still cupping my hands to my ears.

"ARTHUR!" Screaming now, almost in anger.

"Bazzaaaaa!"

The shout seemed to be coming near the cliff edge, which actually wasn't so much an edge as a slope. But, it was a deceptive slope, mostly loose sandstone, low scrub and a place where you can easily fall over. So, you had to take care when creeping down that slope because it did eventually fall off to thirty-foot drop to the rocks. Being a good, strong athlete at school, I was nimble with my feet and careful with my hands, making sure I didn't dislodge any stones. As you got closer to the real edge, you had to get on your bum and work your way down very carefully, digging you hands and heels in as you go.

And then I saw him.

Arthur was balanced at the very edge, a pile of loose stones around him, resting on his stomach and with his legs dangling over the side. He was gasping for breath and not quite starting to panic. He saw me.

"Bazza. Thank God you heard me. I've been calling for hours."

I could see that his fingernails were torn and his fingertips were bleeding. There was a bloody gravel-rash on his left elbow also. "What the hell are you doing there?" I suppose the question was unnecessary because he just glared at me. "Anyway, you haven't been calling for hours." I grinned to myself: I've won this round and felt my sense of power growing stronger. Then, a strange calmness settled over me as I aimed my gun at him and said, "Bang!"

He snorted angrily. "Just help me get back up there, you bloody idiot! Come on, get a bit closer and let me grab your hand." He stretched out his arm, blood dripping from the deep scrape in his elbow.

I didn't move.

He looked at me. "Well, what are yer waiting for? Come on."

Pocketing my gun, I lent back, resting on one elbow and said, "How could you do such a stupid thing? Why on earth would anybody go right down to the edge?"

His face went brick red. "Bazza – for your information, I was trying to circle around you, if you must know, a bit higher up." He paused for breath and then went still as some of the sandstone around him moved. "Basil, for fuck's sake, stretch your leg down and let me grab your foot. If you dig in more, I'll be able to haul myself up."

I looked around at the stones and dirt. I wasn't so sure.

"But, why come down so low, in the first place. You know it's dangerous." I picked up a stone and threw it over the edge. How long can I keep this going? I thought.

He almost screamed at me. "God, you irritate me. Can't we talk about it after I get out of here, you fucking idiot!" He froze as the stones moved again.

"Me? I'm an idiot, am I? So, who's on the edge, and who's leaning back all comfy, eh?" I threw another stone over the edge. "Arthur – I irritate you? That's a laugh. You've always irritated me, you dumb fucker, ever since I can remember. Who's the one who's always had to get you out of a mess, or do your dirty work for you? Who, eh? Who? ME! That's who, yer bugger." He was looking at me now with real fear on his face, and that just spurred me on. I leered down at him. "And now, look at you, you shithead. Here I am getting you out of

trouble again. And what thanks do I get?" My sense of power over him now made me feel ecstatic.

Arthur looked at me queerly. "Bazza, please, help me up." Hoping to mollify me I suppose, he then said, "I must say, it's amazing how you're not stuttering right now...."

He stopped and lay there with his eyes pleading; I spat in his direction, disgustedly, but the wind caught it and it blew it away. Grabbing onto some heavy bushes, I let my body weight slide down towards him more. As I did, I said, "Here, grab my foot and haul yourself up, but just do it slowly, shithead."

As he leaned forward, I tested the bushes and they seemed firm, but the bigger bush seemed stronger. I turned onto my side, held the trunk in both hands, and stretched out my body so that my right foot was within half a yard of him. That was as far as I could go safely. "Okay, work you way up slowly and grab my foot. Then, when I start to pull with my leg, you try to get one of your legs back over the edge."

Arthur was pale now and obviously scared. He nodded and, as I watched, he began to work his hips like a snake, wiggling from side to side, and carefully moving forward. As his thighs started coming over the edge, his hand got to six inches or so from my shoe, the sandstone was crumbling more and with a panicky heave, I felt his fingers latch onto my ankle. The shock of his weight almost broke my hold on the bush.

"Arrgh! Hold on, hold on." I paused for breath. "Okay, Arthur, I'll try to pull myself up to the bush I'm holding. You should be able to get one of your knees over the edge if I do that. Okay?" I looked down to his stricken face. He nodded. "Okay then -- when I count to three, we both go at the same time, okay?" He nodded again. "Right." Tightening my grip, I said, "Three ... two ... ONE!" And pulled with all my strength.

It was only when I heard his scream disappearing with him over the edge that I realize he'd pulled my shoe off and taken it with him. His hands had slipped on my ankle, that was all, and then his frantic fingers, still with some nails, sliced into my skin, digging into the flesh, grabbing at and then ripping the shoe off, and, in the process, leaving long bloody furrows from my ankle almost to my toes. And then he was gone.

I lay there, unable to move for a long time, staring at the gulls as they beat against the wind, hovering just a few yards from me. Then I thought: I wonder if there was anybody down

below when Arthur landed? I looked down at my ankle and foot; it was all very bloody and the pain was now starting. I'd better get Mum to look at that, I thought. I sat up a bit, still holding the bush and looked around, but the area was deserted. Carefully I pulled myself up above the bush, dislodging more stones that followed Arthur over the edge. I had to favour my damaged foot, but in a few minutes, I was able to start a slow hobble back to the relative flatness at the top.

I felt a bit tired, so I sat there, finishing off the strawberries we'd bought from one of the nearby farms, and wondering what Mum and Dad would say. They'd blame me, I know that, and that's another thing that always irritated me about Arthur. He is – or was now, I supposed – always a miserable bugger and I was always the one who got the blame when things went wrong. That's not fair, I said aloud to myself, not fair at all. And then the tears of frustration and rage began to fall, as I remembered all the times he had been favoured ahead of me. Not fair, I shouted, and I wiped my eyes and nose.

Still tearful, I stood and began a slow walk back across the connecting sandbar to gran's house, about two miles away. I was still dripping a bit of blood and the foot hurt, so I had to tread lightly. As I stepped forward, my left shoe nearly came off.

"B ...B ...Bugger it." I bent down to tie up the laces. Mum always told me to keep the laces tied on my shoes so that they didn't slip off or cause me to trip. That way, I wouldn't have accidents, she'd said. But I often forgot about that, so I couldn't remember whether the other, now with Arthur, had been laced up properly.

I still couldn't remember. Not that it mattered anymore, anyway.

"Basil!"

Val's shout broke into my reverie. Viciously, I ground my foot into the remains of the cockroach and the ants still feeding then went inside to have tea.

Val may be stupid but she's a good cook; and just as well. Besides, with her mouth full, she couldn't, or wouldn't, talk –

thinking she was *so* genteel – and that meant I didn't have to listen to any inane chatter. Sometimes, though, I wished that I hadn't married so late in life – Val being nearly twenty years younger than me – but Heather's presence made all the difference. Tonight, however, she was out somewhere with her friends, and that didn't sit well with me either. Fuck it.

Anyway, life went on and you have to deal with it.

Almost a year passed since the incident with the fat fucker at the parking lot, but I'd kept an eye on cars at Chermside Westfield, just in case. Val seemed to get more stupid and dull – if that's even possible – and I did very well with the veggie garden. And that kept Val happy and out of my hair most of the day.

I was thinking about that – life and how to handle it – as I sat in the car at the traffic lights at Rode Road; Val was in the passenger seat, almost nodding off, as usual. Heather, in the back seat, was humming along with her iPod. I watched the lights and tapped my fingers on the steering wheel, in time with Heather's singing. The yellow flashed. I glanced to the right – the traffic was slowing to stop. Nothing on the left; a few seconds more and the green showed for me; I hit the pedal and then my glasses slipped off my nose.

And that saved our lives....

As I braked momentarily to pick up the glasses, a young punk on a motorcycle wailed by on Gympie Road at a hundred or more, right through the red, missing us by a metre at most. The noise and the braking jerked Val awake, to see the bike disappearing into the distance, and to hear me raging about murder. So she started to wail in unison. I'd stopped almost a car-length beyond the white line and the car behind hit the horn; so I gave him the finger and did my nut with Val at the same time, yelling at her to shut the fuck up. It was only the quiet insistence of Heather's voice, "Dad, Dad, calm down, it's over, stop shouting please!" that allowed the red rage to fade. By that time, the lights had turned again, so I had to edge back a metre or so, to make sure that no overzealous copper would book me for obstruction. You never can tell with *those* bastards.

"Fuckin' hooligans, goddamn bikers." Muttering to Val about all the wasted expenses on red light cameras, I put my mind back to watching the lights again, when I saw him – that

fat, fuckin' arsehole from a year ago – standing on the corner to my left, waiting to cross the street. Had he been there when that bike had flashed by? I couldn't tell; I'd been too busy. The WALK signal showed and he, with a few others, began their snail-like saunter across: the great treacle of humanity treating the cars as though they were walking through a used car yard, for fuck's sake, in their mindless perambulations through their sorry lives. He passed in front, almost brushing against the bull-bars, and for a brief ecstatic moment I pictured him crushed between them and a brick wall. Maybe he didn't see me? Val was still irritating me with her sniffing, Heather had gone back to her iPod, and I remained immobile, but followed him with my eyes, almost missing the lights turning green. Waiting until that dickhead behind started honking again, I began to turn right, and glanced across in time to see the fat fucker turn, look directly at me and with a wide, evil smirk, thrust his bent arm into the air, fist clenched, his other hand hooked onto his bicep.

I had no time to do anything except keep my eyes on the road and fume.

"Who was that, Dad? He seemed to be looking at us. Why'd he do that with his fist?"

I glanced in the rearview mirror, but he was gone. "I dunno, dear. Maybe a friend of that stupid biker? The world's full of arseholes.... Forget about him, okay."

Val piped up with another *bon mot*: "Well, all's well that ends well."

Heather patted Val on the shoulder. "Yes, Mum, that's right."

I rolled my eyes. "Let's just get the bloody shopping done!"

That brought the prior episode back again of course, and it was another day before I'd fully calmed down. Being insulted and threatened once was bad; twice meant no mercy. The day after, Val and I had to go to Chermside again – she'd forgotten to bring her shopping list the last time – so when I spotted what looked like that arsehole's car in the same parking lot, I was elated but said nothing to Val. Just noted where it was, parked a good distance away from it, and told Val to get the shopping started while I checked under the bonnet of our car.

"Yeah, I can hear a funny sound; you get going. I'll join you soon."

A bit miffed, but knowing better than to argue, she trotted off.

I popped the bonnet, and pulled my little surprise package from its Val-proof hiding place, held it cupped in my hand and sauntered back to his car. I started to feel the excitement: I've been waiting a long time for this, asshole – here comes your surprise. The underground lighting was good, so it was an easy matter to verify the make and model and a glance at my notebook confirmed it: the license number matched what I'd written and remembered. Okay, shithead....

I walked on by, looking around, making sure there was nobody in the immediate vicinity. A few metres on, I about turned and walked back. As I passed his car again, I pulled my glasses case out and dropped it so that it bounced towards his car. Then, as I retrieved the case, I quickly shoved my surprise up to the point where one of the tires meets the asphalt, wedging it in tightly; and being black, it was invisible to all but close scrutiny. Without a backward glance, I got back to my car, closed the bonnet and rejoined Val in Coles, where I found her only just started. Lazy cow, I thought.

"Everything alright, Basil?"

"Yeah, yeah. C'mon, it's five, let's hurry this up, okay!"

"Yes, Basil, but we're getting some extras, as you know, because Heather and her boyfriend are coming to dinner."

Christ, I'd forgotten about that: Heather was bringing her new beau to meet us. I didn't like the thought of Heather and a boyfriend, so by the time we left, I was in a foul mood. But that changed as we drove past that fucker's car: once more, I grinned to myself, wickedly, and murmured, "Have a *fuckin'* day, asshole."

When they hadn't arrived for dinner by seven, I told Val to serve it up anyway. But, we were just about to sit down when the doorbell rang: two coppers were at the door. I frowned when the man asked to come inside; but I sensed bad news. Stepping aside, I said, "Okaaaaay...."

Around the table, the dyke sat beside Val; the man looked across at me.

"Mr and Mrs Moody, I'm afraid I have some bad news. There's been an accident at Chermshire shopping mall, and some people have been ..." He stopped as Val began to quiver.

I glared at her as the dyke put a hand on Val's shoulder. To the copper, I said, "Go on...."

"You have a daughter, Heather? Heather Anne Moody?"

I nodded, as Val broke in: "Oh, please, sir, please, what...?"

I cut her off, "Yes, yes. We have a daughter. What's happened?"

He looked back at me, studiously avoiding Val's face that was ready to burst into tears.

"Well, looks like she and a young fellow, Jack Armstrong, were coming out of the parking lot – the underground one – at Westfield when they stopped in the middle of an access road." He looked at his notes, for a moment, then looked up: "Seems like they had a flat tire, and both got out of the car to have a look at the left rear wheel." He paused, flicked his eyes to Val and continued, "Unfortunately, another car came around the tight bend at that point, going too fast and..."

I was thinking, furiously: Why didn't I know that fucking Jack had a car? Did Val know? And why the fuck was Heather in the same car? Seething inside, I cast a frosty look at Val but she was too busy wiping her eyes to notice.

Just then, before the copper could carry on, Val fainted, so the dyke and me carried her to the couch where she lay there, the dyke holding her hand; so, Val didn't hear the rest of the details. Probably just as well, because I didn't need her wailing anyway.

"You were saying...?" I tried to keep my voice under control as I came back to the table. Somebody has to.

He looked at me a bit oddly, but then gave a small shrug: "Well, like I said, before they could do anything, this guy came around the blind bend there, too fast to stop, but in fact *did* stop when his car rammed into the other ... I'm sorry, but all three were killed instantly."

I was stunned, sickened, absolutely speechless: my daughter and part of my life, dead. This isn't real, I thought. I looked at Val, who'd woken up and was now sobbing, the dyke trying to soothe her, and just wished the cunt'd shut the fuck up. I turned back to the copper.

"B ... But ... but ... w ... why did their c ... c ... car stop in the middle of the road?" I cursed myself for stuttering, something I hadn't done since childhood.

"The investigation's not complete yet, but that flat tire on Jack's car looks weird, if not suspicious – there was some sort of steel spike embedded in it. Forensic people are examining it and the tire now, so we'll know more tomorrow." He frowned, briefly. "Must have punctured it nearby, we think, and caused a slow leak. And, like I said, they were both out of the car, looking at the flat tire when the other car...." He stopped and shook his head. "Very sad – young kid buys a car two days ago, and now he and your daughter...."

I gasped, as though kicked in the balls: that fat fucking deadshit arsehole must've *sold* his fucking car. I gripped the table, wanting to crush it – something, *anything* – hard, as hard as I could, and was now livid to the point of apoplexy so that sweat popped out on my forehead; only a supreme effort kept my rage under control.

The copper leaned forward. "You okay, Mr Moody? Been a great shock, I know, and we're so sorry for your loss." He patted my trembling arm. "But, look, seeing as how they'd just come out of the parking lot, we're checking all surveillance cameras, to see if anything useful turns up." He smiled, a professional smile, hoping to reassure me. "You never know – we might get lucky."

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