

Gambling and million-dollar racehorses means crime is never far away.

BILLION DOLLAR BILL

BRAD FRANKLIN

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**To my beautiful wife and to my
fabulous family & friends, for loving
my first novel and encouraging me
to write the second.**

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CHAPTER 1

The unmarked police car ripped north across the Sydney Harbour Bridge at close to 120 kph. As it passed the second pylon, the driver glanced down at the speedo and smiled with mild satisfaction; the passenger calmly gazed at the glorious colours of a late-summer sunrise to their east. There was almost no traffic at this hour, so the siren was not needed full-time, but the concealed blue and red flashing lights blazed as it weaved between a couple of random early-morning service vehicles.

Seeing the road widen ahead, the driver pressed the accelerator a little more. The dark blue Ford Falcon XR8 growled and leapt forward to tear up the Bradfield Expressway past North Sydney at 160 kph. Hugging the right lane, they took the turn-off ramp toward Military Road and backed off momentarily to negotiate the right-hand bend at the lights.

Entering Neutral Bay, the road narrowed to two lanes alongside a row of parked cars. The driver began hitting the siren intermittently as the speeding Q-car approached intersections and other vehicles. All understood the warning and got

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the hell out of the way.

Ahead, a battered Holden ute pulled out of the McDonald's drive-through into the left lane and began to pick up speed. The two occupants were tucking into their hangover breakfast when the shriek of a siren scared the living daylights out of them. A glance in the mirror confirmed a plain-wrap cop car with the police lights flashing a message.

The driver knew his time was up. He'd chosen to drive home after about 40 schooners at an all-night rave in Surry Hills, and he was way over the legal limit for blood alcohol content. He swore loudly as he threw his breakfast burger onto the floor of the car and pulled over to the kerb ready to face the music. To his profound surprise, the cop car blew right past without breaking its pace.

As the speeding Ford approached Spit Junction, a black BMW M3 rounded a bend coming from the other direction. Two swarthy men in the beemer swore in Arabic as they spotted the flashers. The driver threw a desperate left turn into a side street while his passenger pelted dozens of packets of pills and powder into the bushes. They continued to weave back and forth across Mosman until they felt safe enough to head back towards the Eastern Distributor, satisfied they had got away with it.

On Spit Road, a teenager in a Hyundai with P plates checked Facebook as she drove to her early shift at a cafe in Brookvale. She was weaving into the next lane while 'liking' a friend's holiday selfies when a kaleidoscope of flashing colour frightened her into next week. She swerved back to the left lane and threw the smartphone across the passenger seat where it bounced and smashed against the side window. But the cop car

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did not pull her over.

The blue Falcon roared down the steep S-bend towards the Spit. As it approached the bridge, the amber warning lights were blinking and the boom gates began descending. The bridge was about to rise to allow boats through to Middle Harbour. The passenger looked concerned for the first time and glanced at the driver. The driver gave a smug smile and veered the Ford onto the wrong side of the road to avoid the boom gate. A handful of early morning cyclists watched open-mouthed as the steel bridge span began rising a split second after the car crossed.

Twin exhausts bellowed as the driver pushed 140 kph up the steep hill at Manly Road. They crackled and popped as the driver lifted and changed down for the right turn into Sydney Road. The passenger checked his watch. He was unconcerned.

Golfers teeing off at Balgowlah Golf Club spun around startled as the siren pierced the air. A bus about to pull out into traffic paused to allow the wailing emergency vehicle to pass. Closer to Manly, Sydney Road narrowed and became bumpy, so the driver backed down to a pedestrian 100 kph through Fairlight and down the hill past the oval.

The big Ford turned right at Belgrave, left at the wharf then shot along East Esplanade and left again at Victoria Parade. Finally, it turned right at the beachfront and the tyres chirped as it slid to a halt outside the South Steyne Surf Club.

The passenger noted some curious early walkers and joggers backlit by the rising sun. He saw no-one he knew. He turned to the driver. "Thanks for the lift, Sabina."

The driver put the selector in *park* and said to the passenger with genuine triumph, "Not bad, hey? And I reckon I could have gone quicker if Sydney Road wasn't so crappy. So, did we

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make it in time, Jase?” asked Detective Senior Constable Sabina Bodanski.

He looked at his watch. “Yeah, just. But you lost a few seconds when you swerved around that jaywalker outside Manly Wharf.”

Sabina made a face.

“Anyway, my training session starts at six-thirty. We’re a couple of minutes early, so we’re sweet.”

“I think you’re mad, Jason. We could have slept in till eight and then I would have made you breakfast.” The way she pronounced ‘slept’ made it clear she was not talking about snoozing.

Jase Callaghan tried to keep a straight face. Sabina ‘The Body’ Bodanski excelled at many things but cooking was not one of them. Sex, on the other hand, was something she was very, very good at, and Jase had to admit that after last night’s marathon session, he was spent. Besides, Callaghan had responsibilities and right now one of them was leading a group of rugby players in a cross-training session at Manly Beach.

Jase unclipped his seatbelt and turned to Sabina. He looked at her honey blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, her lively blue eyes, her high Slavic cheekbones and full lips over perfect teeth. She looked like a super model not a fraud squad copper.

Leaning over, he kissed her. Lightly at first, then deeper and longer. Sabina released her seatbelt and shuffled across to him, her hand running from his muscular chest to his firm flat belly. She let it linger near his belt buckle. Jase cupped one of her beautiful, surgically enhanced breasts as their tongues probed each other’s mouths. He felt a stirring in his loins and wished they had stayed at her apartment for a morning ‘heart starter’.

Reluctantly, he disengaged. “Sabina, I’m vice-captain of

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the footy team and the boys are relying on me to lead their pre-season fitness training. Plus I'm rostered on surf patrol this morning. I have to go."

She pouted. "Alright. Go and play with your surfboard, then."

"It's a rescue board, actually," he replied with pretend sincerity.

"Whatever," Sabina grumbled. She refastened her seatbelt and started the engine.

Jase took his cue and stepped out of the car. As he leaned in to grab his gym bag from the foot well, he made eye contact with her one last time.

"Call me," she said. Her spectacular smile had returned.

"Sure, baby," he grinned.

As she peeled away from the curb, Callaghan headed for the clubhouse. His walk was stiff due to the cramped accommodation in the front of his jeans and also from what he expected was a mild case of groin chafing. He managed a wry smile as he remembered last night's fun.

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