

THE MALICIOUS EGG



An Illustrated JIM FALK Mystery

by Reg Lynch



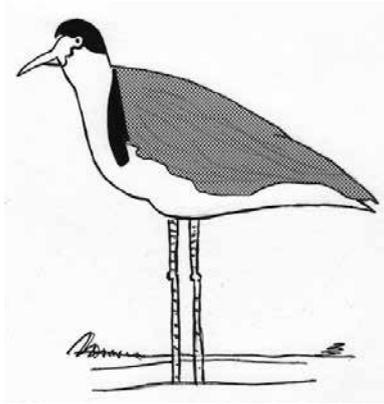
A HORSESHOE BOOK

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This is for Bruce the Bear



*The Tasmanian town in these pages is imaginary.
Some of the names are real, but the people are all
fictitious.*



PROLOGUE

The front bar of the Dock Hotel was full. Three fishing boats had arrived back at the same time that afternoon. Through the blokes and the beards and the corner windows, across the road and through the trees, the masts and rigging were all lit up down at the wharf. Was a black night otherwise. Only a small sliver of moon slipping around on the surface of the river. Cold too. A lot of beanies about.

Was friendly in there. Most people kind of knew everyone else, as is often the way in smallish Tasmanian towns. A lot of them were related to each other, and the AFL was on the big screen and beer and a bit of fish was in the air.

The mainlander sat on a stool at the left-hand end of the long bar, near the door for the gents and the beer garden. He was twirling his phone around and around on the dark wood. The brim of his hat shaded his face from the ugly fluorescents. It began to drizzle outside. Intermittent pairs of sleepy-looking headlights swished past. A nicely hotted-up blue Torana appeared near the

opposite corner, in the shadow of a broken streetlight, wipers on.

Collingwood fluffed a goal and the punters roared and laughed their approval and the mainlander's phone buzzed. Private Number. About time. He grabbed it up and headed to the beer garden for some quiet. Out the door into the yard, he took four strides to his left and the automatic floodlight came on overhead.

‘Hello ... Hello.’

Silence. The rain had stopped again already. Been doing it all day.

‘Anyone there? Hello.’

Nothing.

Back on the stool twirling his phone and the barman nods at the empty glass in front of him,

‘Another beer?’

‘Make it a shot of rye in a dirty glass.’

‘Whassat?’

‘Sorry, Dave. Beer's good ... ta.’

Dave behind the bar looked like he'd spent a bit of time behind bars. He brought back the change smiling.

‘Oh, I get it now. Shot of rye. Sam Spade/Humphrey Bogart style. Are you’, he paused and looked around what he reckoned was melodramatically, ‘on a case?’

‘I thought I was.’

Dave glanced away toward the service area, everyone seemed to have a drink. He leant in on an elbow , ‘How *is* the part-time P.I. business?’

Falk, for that was his name, pushed his hat back on his head and answered, “Well, let’s just say I’m glad I

didn't give up my day job. When *am* I working here next, boss?' At that point the crowd went off again and so did the phone.

'This could be it. Back in a sec.'

As he got up and turned to go out the back for a second time, his mind registered that the Torana wasn't out there anymore.

'Monday!', Dave called after he'd gone.

Falk stopped in the doorway to the dark beer garden getting his bearings. Started moving diagonally to the left toward the sensor for the light. Phone in that hand up to his ear.

'Hello!!'

A tinny echo of his own voice came from somewhere to his right ... *Hello!!* ... and as he stopped and turned his head, the cricket bat caught him fair square on the brow. He knew it was a cricket bat due to the rich sound it made. A beautiful clonk. A favourite sound.

He swirled around for a bit, deciphered the silhouette of someone with a phone glowing through their top pocket. Saw a smile and the bat raised for a hook shot. Back of the head this time and he went down on his knees and sprawled sideways to the cement. The floodlight came on. Eyes wide and tearful with shock, bottom lip trembling in the brightness, holding onto the ground as if it was a reeling deck. He suddenly thought of his brother.

'Jim ... help ... Jim ...'

A second later he was cover-driven into the long night and the floodlight went out.



Into the long night.

