

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED

A Noir Psychological Suspense Thriller

BRYAN QUINN

A NOVEL IN SIX PARTS



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About the Author

Bryan R. Quinn, a life-long student of history, earned a BA in American History & Politics from McGill University and a Computer Electronics Diploma from Herzing College, which comes in handy when he has to troubleshoot inevitable computer problems. Yet, despite his expertise with digital technology, he still relies on his wife to operate the coffee machine. Bryan lives with her in Canada.

Bryan won an Honorable Mention Award in the worldwide 85th Annual Writer's Digest 4000 Word Short Story Competition in 2016.

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED is Bryan's second novel. His first novel THE PACKAGE, an historical-contemporary conspiracy thriller, has garnered international acclaim.

Follow Bryan on Twitter: *@AuthorBryan*.

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But greed of gain can often make men fools

- Sophocles

Beginnings

Belonging to the Mafia was like standing over a trapdoor—the bottom could fall out anytime, anywhere, on anyone, without warning. From the highest rank to the lowest, no member of the Mob was safe. Fate lurked around every corner, behind every door, under any circumstance. Like it or lump it, there was no escaping it or stopping it.

Normally tucked in the back of his mind, this sobering truth preoccupied Bronco, a forty-something mobster with nothing to lose and everything to gain. His boss had ordered him to snuff out a loyal underling for the greater good of the family. Nothing personal. Simply business...Family business...And no one else's business.

And all the while Bronco skulked in the dark, littered alley like a common thief, doing his best imitation of stealthy in his snakeskin boots, barely succeeding at it. Though imitation wasn't his forte, killing *was*. And despite appearances, his overabundance of caution didn't spring from any sense of fear, even though he lived a life steeped in violence, rather, it sprang from what—or more precisely who—lay ahead.

The advantage presently his would be lost if his minions hawking their merchandise at the other end of the alley caught him spying. He might lose face. He couldn't let this happen; it would undermine his fearsome reputation, a reputation he had spent decades cultivating. But these concerns were secondary. His primary concern was carrying out the don's command.

Untroubled by this order, Bronco wondered why as he skirted piles of rubbish, his nose wrinkling at decomposing garbage and God knows what else. He dismissed out of hand right versus wrong, the conventional moral ball and chain shackled round the neck of the typical Jane and Joe. Morality had never hindered him in the past, so this couldn't be why. He carried the line of self-enquiry further. Could his indifference be due to his indispensable capacity to inflict mortal injury upon his fellow man—and the odd woman—without remorse or regret? He mulled it over. The pain of others rarely nudged his conscience, so this must be why. Bronco congratulated himself for this insight, never dreaming the fatal scheme he was putting into play tonight would boomerang.

He continued to weave his way toward Pepe's Tavern, a place he often called his second home, its shoddy decor and even shadier clientele oozing a certain *je ne sais quoi*. But ambiance was the least of it. Besides quenching his indiscriminating thirst for cheap alcohol, the wayward tavern doubled as a convenient waystation for resolving family issues away from nosy law men, issues like snuffing out a loyal underling.

Bronco arrived at the alley's end in silence and settled in the shadows next to the tavern, a ramshackle structure whose crumbling bricks and cracked mortar evinced neglect more than age. Erected in the South Bronx long before he had popped into the world, the tavern was now a seedy hangout for members of the Cabreezi crime family, a notorious neighborhood haunt locals darted past on their way to someplace safer, to someplace saner. Walk-ins never happened.

Unsure if the building might cave in, Bronco restrained himself from leaning his hulking frame against it, and he peered from the shadows to check on the street action, his pitiless black eyes scouting left and right. He bided his time, he was in no hurry.

Distrustful by nature, but also due to his profession, he wasn't above spying on his crew from time to time. A *caporegime*, or captain, in the Cabreezi gang—the muscle in control of the market for banned substances and illicit liaisons in this part of town—Bronco maintained tight rein on a crew of soldiers, drug pushers and prostitutes. But keeping a low profile wasn't easy;

he stretched over six feet and was built like a pro wrestler, thanks to pumping heavy iron every day.

Although foot traffic was sparse on this overcast night, the street teemed with idling vehicles, several luxurious. Drivers chatted up his girls and bargained with his dealers, like every other night. Poorly lit, the strip was anything but a regular shopper's paradise, more of a market for those who wished to obliterate the unrelieved *ennui* of modern life through chemical and carnal diversions that offered the illusions of paradise. Back in the days of Prohibition, the Noe-Schultz gang of bootleggers held sway in this neighborhood, but vices had changed and so, for better or worse, the Cabreezi gang provided services to gratify them.

Satisfied with the pace of illegal commerce, Bronco retraced his path through the heaps of malodorous garbage and slipped into his gleaming low-slung ride, a charcoal Chrysler 300S. He cruised around the block and parked down the street from the tavern. A jolt passed through his people while he progressed along the uneven sidewalk opposite them. Moving into a cone of feeble light carved out of the semi-darkness by the tavern's overhead lamp, he gave his crew one last hard stare before pulling on the door handle with his meaty hand. Message transmitted and received.

Boisterous voices spilled into the street and, despite the citywide ban on smoking in public places, a wave of air reeking of stale tobacco smoke let loose by the open door assaulted his sensitive nose. His face screwed up. There were some things he couldn't control. Setting aside his irritation, he plunged into the dim interior, smoke and all. Members of this private club didn't care about a whole gamut of regulations, let alone an anti-smoking one, and neither did the city health inspector. But this paperclip pusher had been paid not to care, so he didn't count.

Over on the left, in a corner behind the bar, a Yankees game blaring on a flat screen TV anchored above shelves of bottled booze competed with the energetic chatter of the all-male clientele enjoying the contest of skill between batter and pitcher. They paid Bronco no attention, mesmerized by the luminous action on the tube. Beefy forearms crossing his pneumatic pecs, the bartender, a fellow iron pumper, gave Bronco a respectful nod as he lumbered by the bar on the wooden floor worn shiny with wear, then resumed watching the game.

At the rear of the room on the right, among the shadows, Bronco spied his underling through the foggy haze hauling on a cigarette. A wiry hustler in his early twenties, his hair tangled and his jawline untouched by the caress of a razor for what must be several days, the kid waited alone in one of the cracked red vinyl booths fixed to the wall decorated with sports memorabilia from a bygone era. He stiffened at Bronco's approach, as did most people in his presence. Those who didn't often regretted it.

Bronco watched him take a final drag on his cigarette for none of his minions dared smoke in his company. He had witnessed his mother die one breath at a time from lung cancer brought on by smoking multiple packs of cancer sticks per day. He had no desire to follow her act of slow suicide. Tilting back his head, the kid blew out a final plume of smoke while he hurriedly stabbed out the butt.

Unexpectedly, the door to the men's room in the far corner opened, seizing his concern, and a triangle of light spilled into the darkened alcove followed by one of the regulars. Bronco threw him a look, the kind of look that could knock his teeth out from across the room, and the fella's head dropped as he scampered back to the bar to rejoin his buddies.

Bronco scraped to a halt and squeezed himself onto the spongy banquette opposite the kid, and cheap vinyl groaned at his bulk. An empty glass frosted with a residue of beer foam rested on the ring-stained table and a pile of cigarette butts lay squished like miniature accordions in an

improvised ashtray fashioned from a mini-tinfoil cup, the sort that might have once held a butter tart or some other sugary confection. No hellos or handshakes were exchanged. This was a business meeting, not a social gathering. And besides, they weren't equals on the scales of life.

"About time you arrived. Where you been, man?" the kid said. "Like, I'm down half a pack of smokes."

Anyone else displaying such nerve would've earned him a cuff upside the head, but Bronco let it slide. He possessed a soft spot for him; they had both experienced violent episodes in their adolescence. What's more, the kid's days were numbered.

"I can't figure out why I let you talk to me with such a lack of respect," Bronco said.

"Cause you got a big heart?" his quip punctuated with a toothy grin.

"I got to hand it to you," Bronco's tough persona dissolving in snorts of laughter, "you know me better than I know myself."

Untrue, but there was no harm in letting the kid think so.

What could be relief passed over the underling's face. He checked around then leaned in, "Don't worry," he whispered. "Your secret's safe with me." He gave his boss a wink to seal the deal and settled back.

Bronco's shoulders shook with another bout of amusement. When he regained self-control, the kid was regarding him with expectation.

"So, what do you want with me this time, big guy?"

"That's what I admire about you. You don't waste your breath with useless small talk."

"Cause, like, there's other places I'd rather be than this dump."

Bronco quirked an eyebrow and rested his weight on the table, his leather jacket creaking in concert. "The decor doesn't do it for you?"

The kid fiddled with his pack of cigarettes, his lips twitching with unspoken thoughts and counter-thoughts, and Bronco enjoyed watching his minion squirm. He coughed up an answer and he coughed it up quick. "This place could stand some upgrades. I mean, check out the damn ashtray for chrissake." He held his breath.

Bronco's stony demeanor softened. "Had you going there for a second, didn't I?"

The kid exhaled. "You got me, big fella. Now can we get down to business or do I, like, have to get rough with you?"

To the din of cheering in the background—the home team must have scored—Bronco ignored his jest and in a loud voice said: "Take care of this," and his hand whipped out of his jacket.