

## PAY DAY—TRUE CRIME

- *Ernest Norton Barnard, 84 years, was murdered in 1987 in Innisfail*

In nine short years of dredging crime  
I'd seen it all from time to time,  
Yet there is one disturbing tale  
That echoes still from Innisfail.  
The rain smells sweet up north, I'll vouch,  
When rain floods every water pouch,  
And fishing docks all come alive  
As oceans swirl and sea birds dive.  
But idol minds grow far too wild,  
And trouble stalks the vacant child,  
And Ernest Norton Barnard's home  
Became his grave... for him, this poem

Ernie's shuffling, peddling, feet  
Had often crossed my busy beat,  
Collecting bottles, dressed in rags,  
With odd things stuffed in plastic bags.  
He had a house, both cold and dark,  
Yet so much warmer than the park.  
A single lamp, a sweat soaked bed,  
And stains from Possums over fed,  
And two sad sorry souls, next door  
Where *Urban Legend Experts* swore  
That Ernie's mattress (mind the mould)  
If you were game, was lined with gold.

I'd heard it too, when I was young,  
In my hometown, from everyone.  
That old girl scrounging round the dump  
Was rumoured well, to have a lump  
Of cash as thick as my dad's fist  
So when us kids one night got pissed  
We planned a midnight rendezvous,  
But didn't cross that line... would you?  
Ernie's friendly neighbours did,  
Yet misery would haunt their bid,  
As common sense was hurled away  
And in they marched to earn their pay.

Curled up tight the pauper slept,  
While clumsily his Nightmare crept,  
Then, Hell awoke him, "*Righto Pop  
Let's open up the lolly shop!*"  
Ernie stumbled blind and felt his way  
Towards the door where yesterday  
He'd left the house to climb the drive  
And watch the *Meals On Wheels* arrive.  
But these fresh lads were dining in,  
Five knuckles caught his scrawny chin.  
The steel caps sent him on his way,  
He died stone-broke...and so were they.

Now Ernie's gone to where they know  
That shiny things don't always glow,  
And wealth accrued in one foul play  
Will curse us to our final day.  
He'd lived his life, and there's the shame,  
Those two boys never knew his name.  
Nor did they sit and share his fire  
And meet a man they might admire;  
A bloke who once ran mad and free  
And dreamt of easy cash (like me).  
He was a walking matinee!  
He knew it all...but so did they.

A few days later Ernie's ghost  
Was perched where I had seen them most.  
Behind the eyes of guilty men,  
Who spilled their guts upon my pen.  
And if we're measured (like they say)  
When we confront our lowest day,  
Those two tough kids looked mighty short  
When they were ushered from the court.  
For no weight sinks them like the rock  
They carry handcuffed to the dock,  
And, nothing kicks a youthful gut  
As hard as a cell door slamming shut...

Except... the linger of the pause...  
Before the silence bares her claws.