I sat. I stared. Out at the far away horizon and at the last of the quickly disappearing, brightly coloured sunset. Legs crossed, leaning against the pole beside me. I heard the guard finish locking up for the day and then all was quiet. Not a sound to be heard, except for the first of the bats flocking to the surrounding trees. Peace at last in the dim, abandoned car park of the plaza on Main Street, Camden.

And so it was, every Friday night, as routine had it, that I could be found each week sneaking in, hiding in the bathrooms ‘till all was deserted, then creeping out to sit alone and think in the quiet without the noise of my loud, pushy family.

I would watch the traffic in the streets behind the row of houses directly in my view, I would listen to the settling down of the birds in their nests and I would smell the first of the cooking croissants from the bakery across the road. I sigh, a reflection of the joy it was to have the simple company of myself.

But, today was different. An eerie atmosphere hovered just above me. Distant shrieks of teenagers out late were more threatening than expected. Some of the street lamps had dimmed to a hazy, lime green shade. Even the dark thunderclouds huddled together for safety. It would have been alright, but all those little things put together made the scene feel planned all along, making me uneasy and vulnerable to an unknown enemy.

Suddenly, that enemy began to strike. There was an ear-piercing screech as a rusty, red, second-hand car came swerving around the corner of a row of car spaces. It was loaded, with them, the people I would have no choice but to face, now or never, alone.

They were loud, smelly, young and crazy beyond excuse. Why they wanted me, I knew I would find out sooner or later. One of them started yelling out crude words, well, it was rather a continuous blabber. Others beeped the car horn or banged the sides of the collapsing hunk of metal, through winded-down windows.

I hadn’t really thought to panic until that point. It was typical, wasn’t it? That something as inevitable as this would have to happen sooner or later. I wondered nervously if today would be the end of everything I knew. Had the time come for me to take the toll for my stubbornness? Could today have been the last I had ever seen of my family?

More or less, it never once, in all my imagination, occurred to me that what followed could ever have happened the way it did, nor that its consequences could be as premeditated.

But I did panic when I saw three figures, tall and bony, dressed fully in black, from balaclava to boots, head towards me. I fumbled in my pocket to reach for my phone, this was definitely an emergency. I stretched upward to my full height, still clamping my only escape, and tried to back away as slowly as I could. I had to think fast, to recall all the moves
I had seen ‘Karate Kid’ and work out how to make myself imitate them without making a fool of myself.

Before I could make my first move, or even dial a number, they had me cornered. “Ha ha ha”, the first thug laughed uproariously, his voice echoing and bouncing off the cement walls.

“Our first target! Let’s see how much juice we can squeeze out of my, shall we?” Another, who looked like he was in command, spoke in a low, deep voice.

With each beating pulse, my panic grew stronger. My stomach had tied itself in knots long ago, and my throat was dry beyond any quenching methods could cure. All I could think was, “What do you want with me?!”

From then on it all happened so fast, I can only recall it as a blur. One of them whipped out a rope that looked as if just holding it would make you bleed. His comrade pulled out a toxic smelling can whilst the others quickly put on clear gas masks type things. This was obviously a planned process. With a single movement of the muscles in the third thug’s left pointer finger, the space around us filled with a heavy, green haze. I was instantly blinded. My hands were jolted backwards and I felt my right shoulder crack as pain surged into my arm and chest.

But the pain didn’t last long. The toxic haze took its toll in making me woozy and numbing the pain. The last I remember is one last tug of the rope being tied firmly around the middle of my back and the last image of my parents in the front lounge room, reading the newspaper and sipping coffee in the sunset. Then, only black.

I woke in a damp, dull, grey predicament. I tried to move, to muffle a word or two. No luck - still tied and mouth now taped shut. I knew I was still in the boot of the car because I could feel the bumps of the wheels every time it hit a pothole. Where were they taking me? How long until we got there? I got a taste of de ja vu as the wooziness that knocked me out before, once again worked its magic....

Bang! I was blown awake by the sound of two tin lids, like ones from the trash cans in an abandoned alleyway. I was conscious enough now to know I was nowhere near any source of light, hopefully that stuff had worn off by now. All I could see was black, dark, dark black. Not like the car boot, but even hazier and creepy. Vulnerable was a very good word to describe my state. I took a deep breath to calm my bursting pulse; fear gripping me tighter than the knots in my stomach. I had been propped against a solid wall, hunched over and the tape over my mouth removed. When no one approached, I got my hopes up that they might have abandoned me, realizing I was worthless to them, which I thought I was. But, there they were, merely black shadows against the grey haze of midnight, sneering nastily and showing a grin full of sharp, yellowed enamel. Hoping had been foolish. As soon as they saw I was conscious again, which I regret letting them see, they crowded me once again; my
second taste of de ja vu. Making the most beastly noises, as if vicious animals were coming to feast on their juicy prey, the leader shoved me to my feet. I saw his ripped glove that left bear some dirty fingernails and a grimy substitute for fingers. He cracked his knuckles densely and pounded his clenched fist in his other hand, making my heart pound more rapidly than ever before.

Their mastermind scheme of torture must have been going to plan because they fried my eyeballs with a light that seemed almost brighter than the sun itself. It took me a while to adjust, but to my surprise and curiosity, they didn’t seem to mind. As if they realised they weren’t being exactly pleasant, and were being patient with their victim. Through the eyeholes of their balaclavas, I saw their scornful expressions timidly relax into a calm but not quite peaceful state. The commander’s pained expression looked as if he were the one being tortured, not me. This strange expression lingered on their faces for what seemed like centuries worth of time.

There could have been many possibilities for that moment; I could have made my escape, bolted out of the place I would rather not visit again. But I was too stunned. I almost stood there with my mouth open. I guess I was expecting a punch up, to see a shiny silver gun be pulled out or something. I know, I’ve watched too many horror movies.

At least I wasn’t being hurt, I thought. But again I had been too buoyant as the pain from my shoulder returned, adding to the eventful situation.

Suddenly, the one closest to me triggered his expression, as if in embarrassment, and with a scorn stepped closer to me. Grabbing the front of my shirt, he pulled my face up, so close that I could see the prickles he had missed shaving off on his chin. I gasped. Sheer terror overcame me once again and I could feel I was about to faint once more. I hoped I would pass out. I didn’t know where this was heading and I didn’t want to stick around to find out......

“We need your help, Rob” a voice sounded desperately through the eerie night. And I knew I was finding out why.