



# A predator falls

Australian law enforcement officers help convict a globe-trotting sex predator.

## **\*Names have been altered to protect identities**

The mysterious email could have been the end of the story. Kelly\* arrived back in Australia in May 2012 from the US to renew her visa and was accompanied soon after by an email sent to her mother and aunt. Both clicked on a link in the email to discover then 25-year-old Kelly advertised as a prostitute on a US website.

The email was sent by a colleague who didn't want Kelly back in the US. Kelly's mother and aunt confronted her but she refused to discuss: "I got myself into this; I'll get myself out." In desperation, Kelly's aunt approached the US Embassy, who in turn referred the matter to the AFP. Again, Kelly didn't want them involved.

Ultimately, she was refused a visa – so the email worked. But it also brought Jamaican born Damion St Patrick Baston onto the radar of US and Australian law enforcement. Baston would ultimately be sentenced to 27 years' gaol and US Assistant Attorney Ray Altman referred to Baston simply as some "kind of monster".

## Damion St Patrick Baston

The email started a chain of events and an investigation spanning four countries. Baston was arrested on 21 separate charges from human trafficking offences involving prostitution to identity theft and fraud. US authorities also invoked a 2008 law for the first time to prosecute for human trafficking that occurred in another country.

"He was such a manipulator," says AFP Federal Agent Joanne Mooney. "He treated them like animals."

Federal Agent Mooney and NSW Police Leading Senior Constable Kylie Dodds made significant

Damion St Patrick Baston used an alleged membership of the Bloods to intimidate women into prostitution.

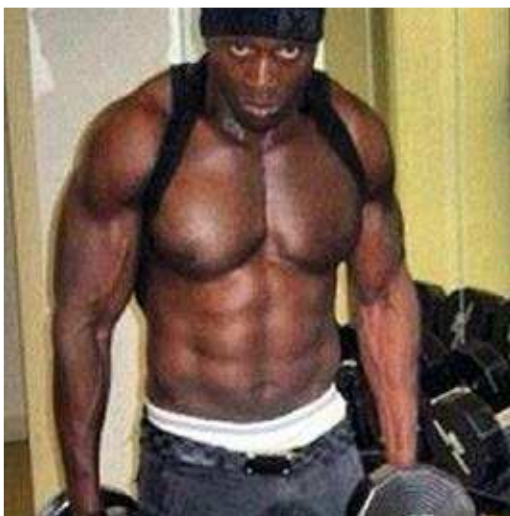
contributions in bringing Baston to justice. They were the leading edge of the investigation in Australia as women came forward and the case developed in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane and across the globe.

Damion Baston was a Jamaican national born in 1977, with a "running back's build" according to the Miami Herald. He moved to the US with his family in 1989 and grew up mostly in New York.

He portrayed himself as a sensitive, artistic man during trial who studied fashion design, lifted weights and had a black belt in a martial art. He claimed



Baston would shower vulnerable young women with gifts and attention to initially win their favour.



Monster: US Assistant Attorney Ray Altman referred to Baston simply as some "kind of monster".



Image and status: Baston had a desire for the high life and coerced vulnerable women into prostitution to fund his lifestyle.

it was romance and love for the 14 women that fell into his orbit between 2009 and his arrest in December 2013. He had a passion for image, status and Louis Vuitton bags stashed with money. But Assistant Attorney Altman said Baston was a liar who preyed on vulnerable young women and "converted them into little more than sex slaves".

He first came to attention of US authorities in December 1998 and was ordered to leave the US at an immigration hearing following a conviction on a theft charge. He managed to stay in the US illegally while appealing the decision.

Any doubt that he was entitled to remain in the US ended 10 months later on 11 September 1999. He lived in Burlington, Vermont, on the US/Canadian border and often crossed the border for a night in Montreal.

Immigration officer Elaine Mary Fortin questioned Baston who was dressed as Dracula, complete with gold fangs and yellow contacts. She said he was barred from re-entering and presented him with official documentation explaining the order, which he fingerprinted and signed. She then drove him across the border and deported him to Canada.

His response was to steal the identity of Iowa forklift driver Rayshawn Bryant. Armed with false ID, driver licence and a copy of Bryant's birth certificate, he applied for and received a legitimate US passport and fled to Australia.

## Australia

Baston arrived in Sydney in 2009 yearning for the high life and a plan to make himself rich using vulnerable young victims he coerced into prostitution.

His business model was a book called Pimpology, signed by the author, Pimpin' Ken, no less. He would become an expert at Rule 5 "Prey on the Weak" and bragged that by recruiting troubled girls with a history of abuse he could "use it against them". The author's philosophy is classy stuff.

"It usually starts with tears," says Ken. "I will see a ho [sic] crying for seemingly no reason at all, and I seize the moment. Say, 'bitch, what's the matter?' I ask in any most concerned voice."

"Nothing," she snuffles.

"Oh, you know you can tell Daddy anything," I said. The story eventually comes out. It usually is a similar story. I was raped as a little girl, or I was abused, and I feel real bad about myself."

But first came romance. He frequented clubs and targeted girls without boyfriends and showered them with money and attention. He talked about being a music producer, brokering multimillion dollar deals and his trillionaire friends (Assistant Attorney Altman pointed

out that the world's richest man had \$50 billion dollars). All their problems would be over.

"The way the girls talked to me about him – he was really charming," says Federal Agent Mooney. "He's a big black American guy, very musical guy and very well built. I mean there are not a lot of big black Americans in Australia. They would fall at his feet."

The romance didn't last. Each woman was brutalised, damaged and terrified of him coming back to find them. He claimed he was a member of the Bloods and had links to law enforcement in Australia and would seek revenge if they left.

Perhaps even more insidious, he threatened to inform the women's families about what they'd been doing. If that didn't work he would threaten harm to their families. Finally, he physically and sexually assaulted them until they complied.

## Brutality & degradation

Baston's first Australian victim was 18-year-old, Dianna\*. Keen for Australian residency he romanced her and they married. Baston had started his Bachelor's Club escort agency and sent Dianna to Perth to meet clients. Baston met Dianna at the airport on her return.

"Basically she didn't earn enough money," Federal Agent Mooney says.

Some clients would pay up to \$1000 a night. When Dianna returned with basically nothing she was in trouble. He drove her to a golf course at night and pinned her to a chair and anally raped her. He said she would "never forget" how she disrespected him. Federal Agent Mooney says it was ruthless and brutal.

Lithuanian-born Vardre\* crossed another of Baston's cardinal laws in October 2010. The girls were barred from meeting black clients. They were never allowed to even look into men's eyes. When Vardre met a client socially she was in trouble.

Baston told Dianna and another girl to book a hotel room and stay away from the apartment. When Vardre returned he "beat the crap out of her" Federal Agent Mooney says.

He then stole her passport, ordered her to strip naked and forced her into the shower. He turned on scalding water over her and forced her to stay

there. Scalding water was a threat Baston often used to intimidate.

Vardre left soon afterwards for work but never arrived. She sought refuge with a friend, but no one responded to her calls or the doorbell as arranged. Vardre panicked and sought refuge with a stranger in the unit complex where she had arranged to meet her friend.

Feeling trapped  
Vardre dialled Triple 0. It was 9.30pm on a busy Saturday night when NSW Police Leading Senior Constable Dodds (then attached to The Rocks Local Area Command) responded. She said Vardre was terrified and refused to leave the apartment.

Vardre was paranoid

Baston was waiting outside and knew what she had done. LSC Dodds escorted Vardre from the apartment "clinging to her arm for dear life". Once inside the police vehicle she hid on the back seat petrified Baston would see her.

Leading Senior Constable Dodds testified in Florida that she had never seen anyone so terrified in nine years as a police officer. Vardre was so traumatised she didn't appear at the trial. But the chilling Triple 0 call was presented in Court and Leading Senior Constable Dodds' testimony demonstrated the depth of Baston's brutality.

Leading Senior Constable Dodds attempted to track down Baston on the night of the assault. She did connect with Baston on his mobile but he refused to disclose his whereabouts. She ordered Baston to present himself to The Rocks Police Station regarding allegations of Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm and the service of a Provisional Apprehended Violence Order.

Baston said he was allegedly nearby and would attend but, as suspected, failed to appear. Instead, Baston, Dianna and another girl departed within

Each woman was brutalised, damaged and terrified of him coming back to find them.



[Click here to watch an interview with Federal Agent Joanne Mooney](#)

hours for Melbourne. For weeks following, NSW Police attempted to contact Baston at his known residential address and by phone, not yet knowing Baston had already fled to Melbourne.

Dianna and Vardre had become close friends – but she never found out what had happened to Vardre and what compelled her hasty flight. Baston simply told her that she hadn't returned. When Diana later discovered the truth it would be an important turning point in her decision to fight down her fear and testify against Baston. In any case, Dianna by now had realised the hopelessness of her 'marriage' and she too left and never returned.

Baston then left Melbourne for the Gold Coast in June 2011 where he met Kelly. Again posing as a music producer they began a relationship. Baston lured her into prostitution with the dream of opening a restaurant together. He convinced her that prostitution would only be a short-term means to the end of achieving the dream.

But Baston's Australian venture was ending. His application for Australian residency was rejected and his bridging visa ended on 18 December 2011. Without being able to depend on Dianna, he left for New Zealand with Kelly and New Zealand girl, Abbie\*. He stayed in New Zealand long enough to apply again for Australian citizenship and left with Kelly and Abbie for Dubai.

But only the location changed. Baston took their passports and convinced them they couldn't get away. He applied for a permit in the Hamriyah Free Zone in Dubai and began advertising them for prostitution.

Baston was enraged when he thought Abbie had seen a black client. He brought both girls to a darkened hotel room and made them kneel in front of him. He wrapped a belt around his fist and said he would hospitalise them if they didn't follow the rules. Abbie would testify that Baston threatened to pour boiling water over her.

Baston later accused Abbie of staring at a bouncer at a club. He 'backhanded' her in the lift up to their hotel room. He then forced Kelly and her into a threesome while Abbie cried throughout the rape.

As with all the girls; when the lies, the threats, brutality and the emptiness of Baston's alleged romance reached desperation point they finally fled. Abbie approached the New Zealand Embassy in Dubai, without her passport, and told them her story.

Again, Baston fled. This time returning to the US with Kelly and settled in Miami about May 2012. Again nothing changed. Baston would recruit three American girls and his modus operandi continued until he was arrested in New York with US national, Jane\*, being the last girl recruited.



The desire for money, fashion and the good life led Damion St Patrick Baston to gaol for 27 years.

Evolution: Damion St Patrick Baston would evolve from petty crime to 21 separate charges from human trafficking offences involving prostitution to identity theft and fraud.



## Testimony

Kelly, Dianna and Abbie testified. Three of Baston's US victims, including Jane, also testified. Leading Senior Constable Dodds testified on her involvement with Vardre. The Triple 0 call was a powerful moment during the two-week trial.

The chilling similarity of testimony from women that had never met was persuasive. The women all testified on 'Daddy's rules', all reflective of the Pimpology book. Similar testimony of threats of torture, scalding water, the beatings and sexual assaults verified by women separated by tens of thousands of kilometres and mostly unknown to each other.

Like Abbie in Dubai – Jane was bashed (while pregnant to him) and threatened with a broken broomstick. He then forced her to have a threesome with another girl who was "crying, shivering and shaking". Neither Kelly nor Abbie knew these other victims.

Compelling testimony was provided by Dr Frank Ochberg – the man credited with creating the term Stockholm syndrome. Dr Ochberg testified at length about trauma bonding, which includes the phenomenon of Stockholm syndrome and battered wife syndrome. He said she may be battered, she may be raped but she stays.

"There are other situations of trauma bonding where one person has a lot of power, a lot of authority, and the other ends up being subservient, obedient, almost like a pet dog that has been trained to do the master's bidding," Dr Ochberg said.

"Often this bond involves sudden unpredicted abuse, violence and then just the opposite – sudden unexpected gifts, apologies, positive things. Back and forth like that, can create what we now call a "trauma bond" and Stockholm syndrome is one unusual way that it can happen."

Kelly was central to the case. Federal Agent Mooney and members from the AFP's Sydney Office became involved in October 2012 when Kelly moved from Melbourne. Jo Mooney and another officer visited Kelly but she was still scared of Baston and reluctant to talk.

Then Kelly came forward herself. "I got an email in May 2013," Federal Agent Mooney says "and that's when I became the case officer and I reopened the case". Kelly had contacted the US directly. Still reluctant, she pulled out a couple of times, such was her fear of Baston and the threats he had made to Kelly and her family. But without Kelly there was no human trafficking case.

"I spent a lot of time meeting her and having coffee and talking her through the process. A team from the US came out here for two weeks and we all met her. These girls were still mentally harmed. So it was letting them see that they might get some closure from it."

Once Kelly was onboard the pieces fell into place. Kelly provided numerous items of evidence. Baston's fake ID established a link to the fake Rayshawn Bryant.



He convinced her that prostitution would only be a short-term means to the end of achieving the dream.

The fingerprints from his Australian citizenship application linked the fake Rayshawn Bryant to Baston's theft charge from 1998. Law enforcement now knew who he was and Baston's own deception began catching up with him.

Dianna, now divorced from Baston, was located. She too was extremely reluctant to come forward. But through speaking with Leading Senior Constable Dodds and Federal Agent Mooney, she discovered the brutality of Baston's assault on her friend, Vardre, and what had really happened to her. As a show of strength in honour of her friend, she agreed to testify.

Abbie was located in New Zealand. She spoke to US authorities directly and agreed to testify. Vardre was still too traumatised to come forward. Similarly, other Australian victims were just too scared to take part.

Baston was arrested by officers from Homeland Security Investigations and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security on 17 December 2013, while visiting his mother in New York. He was transferred to Florida and has been in prison ever since. On 5 September 2014, the jury took just six hours to find Baston guilty of all 21 charges. He was sentenced to 27 years' gaol on 29 September 2014.



One of Baston's victims lays covered in money. He would charm then abuse 14 victims in an international-wide investigation.