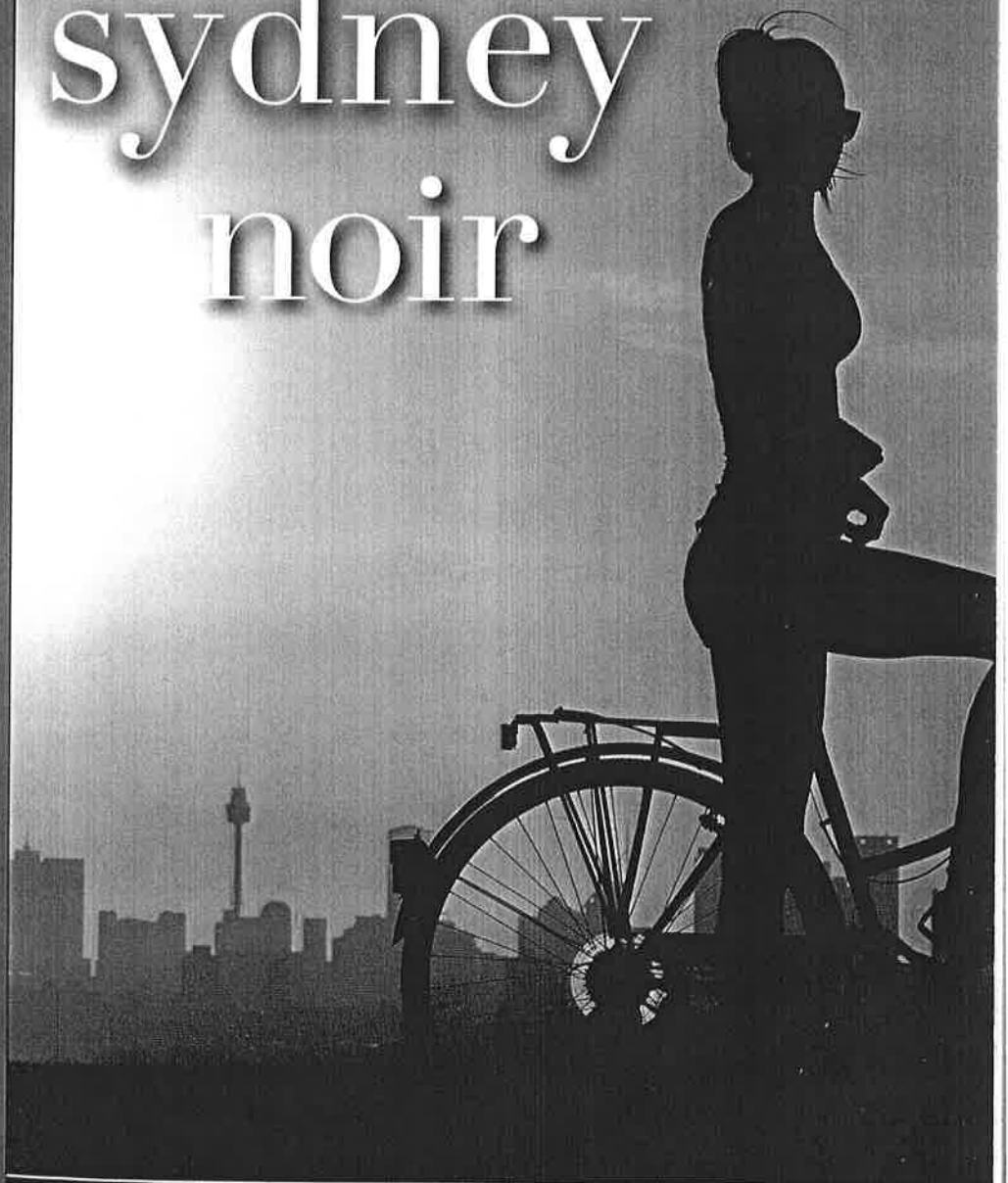


# sydney noir



EDITED BY JOHN DALE

ROBERT DREWE ♦ KIRSTEN TRANTER ♦ MARK DAPIN

MANDY SAYER ♦ PHILIP McLAREN ♦ P.M. NEWTON ♦ AND OTHERS

This collection comprises works of fiction. All names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the authors' imaginations. Any resemblance to real events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Published by Akashic Books  
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Series concept by Tim McLoughlin and Johnny Temple  
Sydney map by Sohrab Habibion

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-61775-581-1  
Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-61775-737-2  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2018931222

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First printing

Akashic Books  
Brooklyn, New York, USA  
Ballydehob, Co. Cork, Ireland  
Twitter: @AkashicBooks  
Facebook: AkashicBooks  
E-mail: info@akashicbooks.com  
Website: www.akashicbooks.com

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## INTRODUCTION

CITY OF CHANGE

Sydney has a long and distinguished criminal history. From the arrival of 756 convicts in 1788 through to the postwar waves of ethnic crime gangs, this city of five million people has more unsolved murders than any other Australian city, as well as more drive-by shootings and more jailed politicians. Noir is as much a part of Sydney's character as frangipanis and cockroaches, rusted iron lace and sandstone terraces, torrential rain and potholed roads.

A subgenre of crime fiction, noir is the most democratic of genres in that it includes people from all walks of life and in all kinds of trouble. The protagonists are not private eyes and implausible police detectives from central casting, but ordinary people caught up in crime and violence, the kind of people you pass in the street or sit next to on overcrowded buses and trains.

In the early 1980s, I was working in a rundown bar in Darlinghurst that was a popular watering hole for the notorious 21 Division, a flying squad of the city's hardest detectives. On Friday and Saturday nights, a couple of middle-aged women from the western suburbs would sit out on kitchen chairs on Riley Street soliciting for customers. On the other side of the street was a flea-ridden hostel for alcoholic men, and farther down the road was a tow truck business with criminal connections, while upstairs, the publican, a capable older woman, had shackled up with a Maori biker.

The bar was unlike any I had been to in Hobart, where I grew up. On busy nights cops, bikers, would-be actors, rock-and-rollers, trannies, small-time celebrities, and general riff-raff turned up in that Darlinghurst pub to drink to excess and hatch their plans while complying with the unspoken rule that no actual drug exchanges were to be undertaken on the premises.

The 21 Division detectives, chosen specifically for their size, congregated in the doorways so that everyone had to squeeze past them to get served. The old diggers from the hostel drank at the front bar perched on their stools like babies in high chairs. The sex workers were a friendly lot and ordered a sherry or gin and tonic after their shift, waiting in the lounge bar for their partners to pick them up for the long drive home. Sex and drugs and money and booze all came together in this seedy pub situated in the hollow between the central business district and the Cross. That old, rough-neck, Anglo-aboriginal inner Sydney is mostly gone now, modernized and corporatized, but the pub still stands and its clientele park their Audis and BMWs outside while they dine at the rooftop restaurant.

Nothing lasts in Sydney, especially good fortune: lives are upturned, shops are sold, roads dug up, trees and houses knocked down, premiers discarded, and entire communities relocated in the name of that economic mantra—growth and progress. Just when you think the traffic can't get any worse and the screech of the 747s descending over your roof can't get any louder and the pavements can't get any dirtier, along comes a wild electrical storm that batters the buildings and shakes the power lines and washes the garbage off the streets and you stand, sheltered under your broken broly in the center of Sydney, admiring this big beautiful city.

What never changes, though, is the hustle on the street. My father was a detective in the vice squad shortly after the Second World War, and he told stories of busting SP bookies in Paddington and Surry Hills, collaring cockatoos stationed in the laneways of South Sydney, and arresting sly-groggers. Policing back then was hands-on for the poor and hands-off for the rich. Crime and Sydney have always been inseparable: a deep vein of corruption runs beneath the surface of even its most respectable suburbs.

These brand-new stories from some of Australia's best writers deal with men and women who work in finance or serve in Liquorland, drive cabs or beat-up utes; they might be architects or struggling students, athletes or aboriginal liaison officers, retired coppers or contract laborers, patternmakers or photographers, philosophy lecturers or drug dealers. Some are desperate for revenge or money and fame; others are simply caught up in circumstances beyond their control or in a sexual relationship gone wrong. These fourteen stories take us from Kings Cross to La Perouse, from Balmain to Parramatta, Redfern to Maroubra, Clovelly to Bankstown, Sydney Harbour to Edgecliff, Newtown to Ashfield, and Lavender Bay to Mosman. There are no safe spaces in this collection. What *Sydney Noir* does best is to provide a window onto the street.

So sit back and enjoy the view.

*John Dale*  
*Sydney, Australia*  
*November 2018*

## GOOD BOY, BAD GIRL

BY JOHN DALE

*Newtown*

Jazz came out onto the porch in bare feet to watch the dogfight. Day or night, there was always something going on in this park. That's why her nan kept a special chair outside with a leather cushion; most mornings she sat out here pulling faces at people who passed. Jazz leaned on the spear-tipped fence and watched a man and a woman struggling to separate their dogs. Finally the man pulled his boxer off by the collar, yelling, "Good boy, bad girl!" The tiny white shih tzu stood her ground, baring her teeth, and her owner, an old woman with see-through hair, patted her dog's flank and said in a voice loud enough for Jazz to hear, "Clever girl."

Backpackers were lying around on the grass smoking dope and drinking goon. In an hour or two they'd make their way down to the clubs, pubs, and cheap eateries on King Street. Jazz had lived in her nan's house all her life and she couldn't imagine living anywhere else. Memorial Park and St. Stephen's Church with its graffitied sandstone walls was her front yard, though recently at night the park attracted ice addicts and undercover cops.

Newtown was the place to be, but it wasn't always so. When Jazz was a kid, it was a different world. Her nan would call from the kitchen, "Jazz, go get your father for dinner," and she'd run barefoot up Church Street to the Shakespeare, push on the heavy wooden door with both hands, and through the

fug of cigarette smoke find her way to the back bar where the TAB was; she'd weave a path between the big bellies and tug her dad's sleeve, looking around at the faces of the council workers and the coppers from the Police Youth Club. When he was done drinking, her dad would squeeze her hand and she would lead him home down Crooks Lane. Most nights ended peacefully with her dad snoring in his armchair, but there were other nights when he broke a glass or chipped a tooth and his mood would turn on a sixpence, and she and Nan would retreat to their bedroom and watch TV together on the portable set, fiddling with the rabbit ears, while her father vented his rage on doors and crockery, cursing her mother for dying on them.

It still surprised Jazz how many people knew her dad, for he never became a household name, but he always gave it a go, and at his memorial service in St. Stephen's there were over three hundred people in attendance: stand-over men, boxing trainers, Bluebags supporters, battlers from the housing commission flats, and that little rooster fella from 2GB who told everyone that "Spearsy had the heart of a champion, was a champion bloke."

Afterward there were egg sandwiches that Jazz had cut the crusts off herself, and she heard one wag say that, "Spearsy wouldna come to his own funeral if he'd a-knownn there was no grog." She'd wheeled her nan home and at five o'clock she began her shift at Liquorland.

The steam had cleared in the bathroom and Jazz dried her hair and applied mascara and her favorite dark lipstick. Her childhood was rough and ready but it wasn't as disadvantaged as her welfare officer said. She had free range of the park and the churchyard and when she was little she'd played hide-and-seek behind the headstones. Everyone's got misfor-

tune in their family is what Jazz figured, and if people thought they could avoid tragedy by having truckloads of money and a four-bedroom mansion right on the harbor, they were mistaken. Her mum and dad were party people and they took her everywhere. Once they left her at the Courthouse Hotel and came back after closing time to find her eating sausage rolls and drinking lemonade with the publican's Down syndrome grandson. You learned more about life sitting in a Newtown beer garden than you did watching *Sesame Street*, that's for sure.

Those old Newtowners were a different species, the way they spoke out the sides of their mouths, the way they expressed emotion with both hands.

Jazz wasn't abused or nothing like some of them Catholic kids and she had her nan. When he passed out dead drunk on Gardeners Road, Jazz's grandfather was run over by a steam-roller. Her dad loved telling that story, how he had to identify his father's disfigured remains in the Glebe morgue.

Jazz zipped up her giraffe-print dress, the one Lockie liked, and slipped her feet into flats. She went down the hall to find her nan sunk in her wheelchair watching *Animal Kingdom*, a glass of water and a box of Arnott's crackers on her tray. Nan liked to suck on the barbecue shapes without her teeth in. Jazz changed her nan's bag and cleaned her face with a washer. Her phone buzzed and she read the single-word message: *Parking*.

"You remember Lockie, don't you, Nan?" Her nan stared blankly at the TV. Some days she appeared to understand what was going on, but mostly she occupied a different time zone. Jazz wasn't one of those ungrateful young women who dumped her last remaining relative in an aged-care unit; she knew how to care for old people. Before her mum died, she'd promised to buy Jazz a dog but she never did. Anyway, where

would she fit a dog in a single-story, two-bedroom terrace? That's why the park was so important. She strapped her nan's legs securely in the wheelchair so she couldn't fall out and squashed two ants climbing up the edge of her tray.

"Won't be long, Nan," she said. Lockie had something important to tell her tonight and she suspected he wanted to ask her to marry him or else move in together now that he'd finished his law degree. She'd thought it over long and hard. Her nan would have to come with them or else Lockie could move in here, help out with the showering and toileting; it hurt her back lifting Nan in and out of the tub.

Her girlfriends said she had snared the man of her dreams, tall, athletic, handsome, with rich parents. Mr. Perfect. Of course Lockie had his little kinks, but he certainly wasn't her worst BF; she'd had her fair share of disasters in the past, and it was a pleasant change to go out with someone from the North Shore. Hunters Hill was as far removed from Newtown as you could get.

The doorbell rang while Jazz was fixing her hair. She walked down the hall and opened the door.

"You look nice," Lockie said. He was wearing a bright pink Tommy Hilfiger polo with bone-colored chinos as if he'd dropped by for a round of golf. He leaned in close: "You smell good, what is that?"

"It's me."

"Nice," he said. She stepped outside and pulled the door shut and he put an arm around her waist as they walked. Up close he smelled of cologne—too much cologne.

The iron gates to the churchyard were open and the rector was chaperoning a party of Japanese guests through the grounds. The private cemetery was popular for weddings although it struck Jazz as a strange place to get married.

Lockie had everything planned for the night. A few drinks and a seafood meal followed by sex in the backseat of his father's car.

"We need to talk," she said.

"Later," he said. "Let's enjoy ourselves first."

She took that to mean, *Don't spoil my night*, but Lockie was the one who did most of the talking. She mainly listened and tuned in and out when necessary. She was happy for him to pick the pub, book the table, and order the wine. He liked to be in control, play the grown-up. From experience, she figured it was best if she just went along with things. They walked up King Street past the *Tear Down Capitalism* posters, the pie and burger joints starting to fill with customers, cars and buses running bumper to bumper. When did it become fashionable to eat your dinner with a lungful of diesel fumes?

Lockie was talking but she found it hard to hear over the traffic noise. "Sorry?"

"So many weirdos out," he said. "It's great."

She took that as a compliment from a Hunters Hill boy who went to St. Joseph's College and then Sydney Uni. She didn't hold it against him, having a privileged childhood; she was never envious of others because she had a theory that it all evened out in the end.

Lockie whispered in her ear how much he was looking forward to doing it in the X5. "Hope to Christ it's safe parked there," he said.

A group of shaved-eyebrow guys were staring from the Italian Bowl, checking out his rig. Unlike her previous BFs, Lockie never ogled other girls, never even glanced out the corner of his eye at a pretty girl, or commented on their attributes; it was almost as if he wasn't interested in other women. Sometimes she asked herself if Lockie was gay, but no, he couldn't

be. He was like a horny puppy dog, always rubbing up against her, always touching her butt.

He stopped at the entrance to the hotel, checked his app to make sure this was the correct address, confirmed it was. "The crispy soft-shell crab is the go apparently," he said. If only he'd asked her instead of Google, she could have told him this was her father's former local, transformed into an upmarket eatery. Downstairs still retained its sour, beery, wet-carpet odor, a few gray-faced men drinking alone at dark tables, a bluish flicker from Sky Sports, a buxom barmaid playing with her split ends. No different from twenty years ago, but upstairs—Jazz couldn't recall there ever being an upstairs—upstairs there was light and a beer garden with potted plants and climbing vines and tables that faced an open-plan kitchen where short-order cooks flipped meat and fish and red capsicum over a stone grill; there was a wine list and specials on a chalkboard and photos plastered on the walls of what Newtown must have looked like in her grandfather's day before he was run over by the steamroller. The twin barmaids were younger than she was and fashionably pierced.

"What do you think, Jazz?" Lockie asked proudly, as if he'd built this rooftop courtyard himself. Like most men, Lockie liked to be praised for little things.

"You did well," she said.

He went to the bar and ordered drinks: a full-strength pale ale for her and a light lager for himself.

*Never trust a man who drinks light beer*, her dad used to say. Or was that her mum? Neither of them had worried about drunk driving.

Jazz watched Lockie return—confident, broad-shouldered, attracting male glances.

"The marinara looks awesome!" he said.



"This used to be my dad's old pub," she told him. "They didn't serve food back then, only crisps and beer nuts."

"So much character," he said. "My parents would love it."

"I must meet them one day."

"Oh, you wouldn't like them, Jazz. They're very left wing."

What did he mean by that? Was he ashamed of her? Did his parents even know he had a girlfriend? Wasn't it peculiar how you could sleep with someone, go out to dinner with them, see two Ryan Gosling movies in a row, and still never really know them? Even after eleven months she didn't know Lockie and he sure as hell didn't know her.

"I haven't told you my news," he said. "I won the Sociological Jurisprudence Prize."

"Wow," she said.

"One hundred forty dollars, awarded to a final-year law student."

They toasted his success. When the plates came, he talked about how this award would improve his chances of working for an international NGO. His life stretched out in front of him like a brand-new superhighway, while hers was a bumpy, winding back road filled with potholes.

"You should do a course," he said, sifting through his marinara for shellfish.

"Like what?"

"Bookkeeping. You can't go on caring for that old woman forever." Soon as he said it he tried to backtrack, mumbling through a mouthful of spaghetti how it was better for senior citizens to be with people their own age, that modern nursing facilities had improved their level of aged care exponentially.

"So what are you suggesting?"

"Let's not discuss it now," he said.

"You brought it up!"

He gave her a look to indicate her voice was loud. A couple at the next table glanced over so she breathed in deeply and said, "I know what I'd want if I was her age."

"And what's that?"

"To die in my own home."

He didn't argue, wasn't going to spoil the evening. His crab, he told her, was superb. She didn't tell him her dish, the one he insisted she order, was bland, the seafood overcooked and drowning in a watery sauce.

"Don't look now," he whispered, "but there's a guy who keeps staring at you."

The man was seated alone in the corner: coarse red hair, ruddy complexion with pitted skin. She had a feeling she had seen him somewhere but couldn't place where.

"You know him?" Lockie asked.

"Not sure." The guy was wearing a tight-fitting white shirt, unbuttoned to reveal the links of a gold chain. He was chewing, deep in thought, but at that moment he glanced up from his T-bone and gave her a curt nod of recognition. She leaned back in her chair.

"Looks like a cop to me," Lockie said.

Now that Lockie mentioned it, he did look like a cop. She'd met her fair share of detectives when her father was alive. His suit jacket was slung over the back of his chair and although overweight, he had the physique of a man who used to work out. He stood up, a red napkin tucked into the belt of his trousers.

"Oh shit," Lockie said, "he's coming this way."

Jazz put on the smile she used at the bottle shop. The man stopped at their table and said, "You're Spearsy's kid. Jasmine, right?"

"Yes," she said.

"Just wanted to say, your old man was one of a kind. They broke the mold when they made him." He took the red paper napkin out of his belt, wiped his mouth, then balled it on the floor near her feet. "Sorry to hear about your mother too," he said. "Real shame what happened there. Real shame."

She nodded.

"Just thought I'd say hi." He made no attempt to move on toward the bar, seemed to be waiting for an invitation to join them, but Lockie didn't offer any encouragement. Jazz sensed hostility between the two men. "Decent send-off, all them speeches, Johnny woulda been proud . . ."

"Sorry, I've forgotten your name," she said.

"Kenny. Call me Kenny."

"Like the movie?" Lockie put in.

"What movie?" The man gave Lockie a stare, then lowered his voice: "You wouldn't know where I can buy some marijuana, would you, son?"

"What?"

"My niece has cancer, and smoking weed relieves the pain." Jazz said, "There's a guy down at Redfern Station—"

Lockie kicked her under the table. "Sorry, can't help you."

The man nodded as if he was weighing up his response. "Nice shirt, son. Is that peach?" And turning on his heels, he walked over to the bar, bouncing his keys in his hand.

"Told you he was a cop," Lockie whispered.

"He didn't like you very much," Jazz said.

"Guy's a creep. I thought he was going to pop the buttons on his shirt. And see that hair, some kind of wig—"

"Now I know where I saw him!" Jazz cut in. "At the park." She told Lockie about the dogfight between the shih tzu and the boxer. "The guy was the boxer's owner but he wasn't wearing any suit."

"So he is a cop!" Lockie said.

"How do you figure that?"

"You told me undercover cops patrol that park looking for ice dealers."

"Did I?"

Some men were like dogs the way they took an instinctive dislike to each other and started barking. Lockie was still yapping, worked up about this stranger standing over at the bar chatting to one of the identical barmaids.

"There's a difference," he said, "between entrapment and a sting operation designed to catch a person committing a crime. What he was trying to do was entrapment."

"But you don't sell dope," she said.

"I would never ask a complete stranger in a restaurant where to buy marijuana, would you?"

"It's Newtown, Lockie. Forget about it."

"I find people like that so obnoxious."

"Let's get out of here."

She led him down the stairs, through the public bar, and out onto King Street. Crowds of people swept past, car horns blaring, colored lights flashing. She felt the heat of the pavement through her shoes. They looked in shop windows and walked off their dinner in silence. When they turned onto the quiet of Church Street, Lockie was still brooding. Jazz stopped outside St. Stephen's Church. The gate was unlocked.

"That's odd," she said, "the rector always padlocks it at dusk." She pushed on the heavy iron gate which gave a rough grinding sound as it swung open.

"What are you doing?" Lockie grabbed at her arm.

"I want to show you the churchyard at night."

"It's trespassing."

She steered him past her favorite old fig tree, black shapes

flitting between its branches. Clouds obscured the stars and the gravestones shone in the moonlight. She showed him the monuments she liked the best: the figure of a grieving woman, a ship ploughing through the waves.

Lockie displayed no interest in these stone carvings; all he wanted to do was get back to his father's car. "This place gives me the creeps," he said.

"Why don't we do it here?" she suggested.

Lockie looked around at the swaying oak trees. She could sense the idea appealed to him.

"What if we get caught?"

"Who's going to find us?" She didn't mention the graffiti gang who scaled the walls to spray their tags or the bicycle cops who sometimes pursued them. She didn't mention how she used to come here with her previous boyfriend. She read the names of someone's beloved on a cracked headstone nailed to the bottom of the wall and then she knelt and unzipped his chinos and took him in her mouth. Kangaroo grass brushed against her legs. Once, she'd asked how old he was when he'd first had his cock sucked, and he'd answered, "Fifteen. At Joey's."

"By a woman?"

"You're the first," he said. Of course she'd suspected he was a virgin, all that studying law and going to the gym left no time for girls.

He lifted up her dress and rolled down her underpants. When he laid her gently on a horizontal slab, the sandstone felt cool against her bare skin but not unpleasant. Jazz closed her eyes and let the moment carry her. His breathing grew rapid and a cricket chirped and then a jet roared low over Newtown, muffling his cries. Afterward she held onto him, not wanting him to rush off.

"We need to talk," he said. Glistening with sweat, he rolled off her onto the worn slab. Low spiky bushes surrounded them. "Don't get me wrong, Jazz," he began. His voice sounded nervous. "I like being with you, I really do, but I don't know if we're suited. I mean, we can still be friends, see each other now and then . . ."

She sat up and searched for her underpants, then smoothed down the giraffe-print dress she had worn especially for him.

"There's no other woman, if that's what you're thinking. I just need to focus on my career. The next few years will be critical."

Jazz let him talk. *Men always let you down*, her mum used to say, *you can't rely on them for anything*. What would Lockie think of her in the years to come? Would he look back on their hasty sexual encounters with fondness or would she be quickly forgotten in his scramble for success? He never said it, but this is what he thought: she was not good enough for him.

He tried a change of tone, almost jocular: "You'll probably thank me one day, Jazz."

Something heavy moved near the wall and Lockie jumped to his feet. He buttoned his pants and grabbed a thick branch from the ground and raced over, thrusting the bushes aside. Jazz assumed it was a dog trapped in there or one of the local taggers.

A man ran out from the bushes straight at Lockie, who yelled and brought the heavy end of the branch down hard on the guy's head. The sound it made was like a timber crate being split with an axe. Stunned, the man swayed, mouth agape, then fell forward. His forehead struck the edge of a stone urn with a loud crack and he landed sideways on an unmarked grave, arms and legs sprawled, not moving.

Jazz ran over and knelt beside him. It was the man who'd

approached them in the restaurant. She saw the depression in his skull and placed two fingers against his carotid artery. Nothing. By the light of the moon she could tell he was gone. She'd seen two dead parents up close and knew that look. Wedged between the fingers of his right hand was the smoldering remains of a joint. So he had scored, after all.

Lockie tossed the branch into the bushes and covered his face with his hands. "Oh God," he said, "I've killed a cop!"

"Why'd you do that?"

"He freaked me out, he came out of nowhere, I thought he was going to rape us . . ."

Jazz slipped a hand inside the man's suit jacket and found his wallet. She flipped through a bunch of store cards looking for ID and there it was, a business card: *Kenny Gelder. MEMBER. REIA.*

"He's no cop," Jazz said. "He's a real estate agent."

"This isn't happening!" Lockie was taking rapid breaths and looking up at the church steeple as if praying for a miracle.

Jazz touched the man's coarse hair. Lockie had got that wrong too; it was no wig. Poor old Kenny with his bad skin and ruddy complexion.

"I'm fucked," Lockie said.

"Tell the police it was self-defense."

"I can't go to the police. My whole life would be ruined. My father is a lawyer. My grandfather was attorney general."

"Maybe they'll get you off then," she said.

"What was I doing in this churchyard? Having sex on a gravestone. Oh yes, that would look brilliant for my future employment. Why'd you bring me here?" His voice rose in anger. "Why didn't we go back to the car?"

Surely he was not trying to blame her? She had a good mind to walk away and leave him to deal with it. But Lockie

started to quickly backtrack. He was not the violent type, he'd never been in a fight before, not since high school. "What am I going to do, Jazz?" His eyes begged her. She stood up and held him in the dark. The moon had slipped behind the clouds and a few faint stars were the only light source.

"I'll help you," she said, "but this has got to be *your* decision."

He wiped his nose and nodded.

"First thing, we need to get rid of his phone; second, the cops will interview everyone at the restaurant. We tell them we last saw him talking to the barmaid."

"What about the body?" Lockie asked, staring down with distaste.

"We dispose of it."

"I'm not chopping it up!"

"If they find his body it's murder, at best manslaughter. If they don't find a body it's a missing person. Big difference in priority." She bent over Kenny and patted his trouser pockets, retrieved his iPhone, checked a message on the display, then snapped his SIM card in half. Poor Kenny, he was out celebrating a house sale. Who would feed his dog?

"Wait here," she said.

"Where you going?" Lockie called after her. "Jazz . . ."

One thing her father had taught her was to never panic when you are in a fight; keep calm and wait for your moment. When she was twelve years of age, he took her to the gym in Erskineville, put her in with a fierce girl with cornrows who tried to knock her head off, but she did exactly what her dad had taught her, slipping and countering, sliding her feet in and out of trouble, moving her head and rolling her shoulders until that big islander girl had punched herself out. Her dad and his boxing mates cheered her on from the ropes. He never encouraged her education, never took her anywhere that didn't

involve his drinking, but she'd learned how to weather life's blows from him.

She pulled the cemetery gate shut and walked down Church Street, flying foxes squabbling overhead, then turned onto King, pushing between crowds of diners and drinkers. She dumped the phone and the SIM card into an overflowing bin, making sure the bouncer obscured her from the hotel's CCTV cameras. Cockroaches scuttled past her feet on the greasy pavement. After the council trucks rolled through in the early hours of the morning, there would be no sign of Kenny or his phone. She went home and found Nan asleep in front of the TV. She grabbed a short-handled spade from the old brick shed under the mango tree and rolled it up in her yoga mat. At the churchyard she pushed softly on the iron gate and crept up on Lockie, who was sitting on the edge of a tombstone, hands covering his face. The enormity of what he had done had paralyzed him into inaction.

Jazz unrolled her yoga mat. He blinked at her with self-pity then followed her cautiously along the west wall until she stopped between two gravesites overgrown with weeds and tall grass. A horizontal slab covered one of the graves, the engraved names erased by the elements. Jazz worked her spade in under one corner of the slab but couldn't shift it. She heard the *woo-hoo* of a powerful owl. She looked around and tried again. What panicked her most was that underage drinkers would discover them.

Lockie removed his polo and, grunting, lifted the slab off with a *pop* like a tight lid coming off a jar. Underneath was a deep sunken hole where the rain had got in, giving off an earthy smell of rot. How many bodies were interred below, Jazz didn't know; she hoped poor Kenny wouldn't mind spending eternity on top of strangers. Together, they dragged his

body over by his legs and rolled him into the hole and covered him with a layer of dirt and then maneuvered the stone slab carefully back over the top. Volunteers from the church often tidied up these neglected gravesites, but you couldn't tell the slab had been disturbed. It was airtight and partly hidden under the Chinese elms. No one was going to bother around in there.

She dropped a branch and sprinkled leaves over the adjoining grave and rolled the spade up in her yoga mat and gave it to Lockie, who looked at her strangely, as if she had done this type of thing before.

On the way out she showed him where she had scattered her mum's and dad's ashes at opposite ends of the churchyard so they wouldn't argue with each other. St. Stephen's was her favorite parish church in the world and the only one she'd ever been inside of. Years ago, her nan knew everyone on this street, families who had lived in the same houses for generations, but that sense of community was gone. People had to look after themselves these days. She secured the heavy padlock on the iron gates and slipped her arm around Lockie's waist. She had never known him to be so quiet. Maybe this could work out between them. She could use those gym muscles. She asked him if he would do her a big favor: "Help me carry Nan to bed?"

Without hesitation he said yes.

"I couldn't stick Nan in a nursing home," she told him. "We need to look after her properly . . ."

The word *we* didn't seem to faze him. Since her father had died, she had wanted a man she could rely on, someone she could trust. That's what a real relationship was. Of course, he would need to make adjustments. She thought of his smooth, hairless chest shining under the moonlight. Her girlfriends

were right. She had snared the man of her dreams: tall, strong, handsome, with rich parents. Mr. Perfect.

## IN THE DUNES

BY ELEANOR LIMPRECHT

*Maroubra*

The week before council collection the footpaths are stacked with people's unwanted stuff. Snapped surfboards, plastic baby walkers, stained office chairs, and dinette sets from the eighties. Rusted-out bicycles, suitcases with broken zippers, cracked terra-cotta pots, box set televisions, and weight benches spilling foam. Alf does the drive round in his dual-fuel Falcon Ute with Marnie sitting shotgun. He keeps the engine running since the Falcon can be finicky about starting.

Marnie slides out and checks the gear over while he idles beside the curb. She knows the drill by now. Does the chair have a broken leg? Has the cord been chewed by a rat while it moldered in the garage for twenty years? Seriously, though, you wouldn't believe what people give away. Just because two-thirds of it is crap doesn't mean that there aren't some genuine treasures in the remaining third.

Marnie doesn't jump at the chance to come along these days but she still does if he insists. She sits sullen and silent beside him. Used to be it was like an adventure together, a treasure hunt, some of their best times. It's harder and harder to know what's going on in that head of hers now. She fixes dinner like her mum used to, puts the laundry on, and sometimes even watches the telly with him, but most of the time she's either in her room with the door shut or present but not,