

**CITY
OF LIGHT**
DAVE WARNER



FREMANTLE PRESS

PART ONE: 1979

CHAPTER 1

The two-bar radiator was fighting a losing battle with the bone-aching cold that was the morning of August third, 1979. Maybe it would have been adequate in one of those dogboxes Barry Dunn was making a fortune out of building up in the northern suburbs, but in our convict-built station house, all limestone and wood, nothing short of a blast furnace had a chance of success.

You could have played a basketball game in here. In fact we had, New Years Day, when the streets of Fremantle had finally ceased being molested by drunken sailors, dings in supercharged Valiants and normally law-abiding citizens letting off steam on that one night of the year they felt obliged.

But that had been summer, when your blood pumped and you felt alive. On this dark morning, the breeze bit and howled like two sheilas at an office party gone wrong, and I just wanted to curl up and sleep.

On duty forty-five minutes, I'd already brewed myself two cups of tea and a coffee. I'd have made toast but the only bread left was curled, cardboard-dry and the colour of grass. I contemplated asking the uniformed boys for some of theirs but I knew they'd resent it and, right now, they were nowhere in sight.

Wind whistled through gaps in the sash-windowsills but otherwise the station was silent as a jockey on a good thing. Dragging myself from the heater, I went back to forage in the same Gladstone bag that had faithfully served my grandfather for his last twenty years on the wharf. This morning it yielded an apple and a gladwrapped ham and tomato sandwich. What the hell, I could get another sandwich when the shops opened.

As my frozen fingers struggled with the wrapping, I peered through the

windowpane. Its layers of dirt had smudged under the streaky rain, but down at the end of Essex Street I could make out white caps on a churning sea.

I hoped the weather would keep up till Saturday. Purely selfish, of course. I played better in the wet. Not that they'd ever keep me in for Peakey once his hamstring was right. I was still considered a reserves player, not quite good enough yet for a regular game. Still, Simmo hadn't been travelling too well lately, and coach Smithy might just go for my endeavour over Simmo's skill. But here I was, Thursday morning and acting like I was already named. Better not count my chickens. It was training tonight and who knew what might happen? Simmo'd probably try and cork me again. Little prick.

More hungry than angry, I tore into the sandwich. I guess I was in la-la land, because when the phone shrieked, all I could think was that it was Smithy confirming my place in the team.

'Fremantle CIB, Detective Constable Lane,' I answered.

'You better come quick.' The voice was raspy, not young, uneducated.

'Who is this, please?'

'Sam Molloy.'

The horse trainer? 'What's it concern, Mr Molloy?'

'Jesus Christ. I found one.'

You could taste the strain in his voice. Somehow I knew. 'You found a body, Mr Molloy?'

'Yep. I'm between South Beach and Coogee. You'll see my wagon with the horse float hitched.'

'Don't move, on my way.'

I hung up, wondering if I should call Homicide. Molloy had been badly shaken but that didn't necessarily mean he'd come across one of Mr Gruesome's efforts. It could just be a drowning victim. Body washed up, blue and bloated. Call Homicide over something like that, you'd never hear the end of it. Where the hell were the uniforms when you needed them? I grabbed my jacket and ditched the sandwich. Suddenly I didn't feel much like eating.

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The Commodore took a minute to warm and catch. I gunned south down the coast road past the brooding outline of the South Fremantle Power Station. The sky was just lightening, the sea choppy and black.

A couple of ks on from the power station, a white station wagon and horse float were pulled off the road behind some low sandhills. Propped against the flank of his car, hunched in a check fleecy jacket, was Molloy. He glanced up when I stopped, then turned back to his rollie. From his left hand dangled a long rein attached to chestnut horse. A dog of the loyal-mutt variety sat at Molloy's feet.

As I tried to climb out of the car, I found myself fighting the wind tooth and nail for the door. It was a mean, vicious day all right, but the bumps that were rising on my skin didn't have much to do with the elements.

Even the Trojans had more luck with horses than I did. Many of the losing ones I'd backed had been trained by Molloy, whom I recognised from TV. Stocky, with thick greying hair, he had the wizened skin characteristic of so many in the racing game.

I pretended like I didn't know him. 'Mr Molloy?'

He nodded and flicked away the cigarette. The breeze strangled the fag before it hit sand. He narrowed his eyes. 'You the footballer?'

'Yes.'

'My nephew plays for South. Steve Parlane.'

'I know Steve.'

He nodded again. The delay was making me tingle with fear and excitement.

'Inside the shed.' With a jerk of his stubbly chin, he indicated a long, rambling structure of wood and tin about five hundred metres off. I guessed we both knew it was part of the now disused Robb Jetty abattoirs, but neither of us seemed anxious to dwell on the irony. 'I was taking Sid'—evidently the horse—'for a frolic when Katty here disappeared.' The dog looked guilty at its lapse. 'I went to investigate. Wish to God I never had.'

I started towards the shed and Molloy followed. I wondered why he didn't box the horse. 'You don't have to come,' I told him.

'It's okay. I won't be goin' in.'

We trudged along the bitumen in silence. The grey was lifting, and the US Fleet which had been anchored off Gage Roads for the last few days, was now clearly visible. I wondered what life on the high seas might be like and pushed my doubled body into the fierce breeze. A car passed us with its lights ablaze, and I wondered what the driver would make of the sight of two men, a horse and dog shuffling along the road that bleak morning. Since I was wearing the suit, I would probably get made for the trainer. I wondered what it was like to be a horse trainer. I wondered anything but

what deep down I was really wondering—what was in this place and how was I going to cope?

When we reached the building, which was boarded up and vandalised, Molloy took a right turn and walked down its flank. We were heading towards the sea, across what had been a car park. Trapped in potholes was the rain of the previous forty-eight hours, dark as strong tea.

Molloy stopped at a recessed concrete doorway that smelled of urine. A wire gate, evidently useless for a time, hung crazily from one good hinge.

Molloy looked me in the eye. 'I hope you've got a strong stomach.'

I stepped into gloom. This part of the building had no windows, but up towards the road end, a few shafts of light penetrated. Probably some of the roofing tin had given way.

'You want my torch?' Molloy's voice was comforting. He was only about a metre away but it seemed like a furlong.

'Thanks.' I backed a step and saw the small torch offered through the doorway. Whatever he'd seen, Molloy wasn't keen on a repeat.

The light helped. At the beach end of the rectangular building—broken bottles, tins, takeaway food containers. I played the beam straight ahead. Graffiti. An upturned forty-four-gallon drum. Mess. Swivelling the torch to the left, I illuminated a brick wall that jutted about a metre and a half into the room and blocked what lay immediately behind it.

I took a deep breath and went around. Anticlimax. More rubbish. Then five metres further on, another jutting semi-wall like the one I'd just rounded. Obviously the building had been sectioned for some reason. I walked and turned.

She was prone on the concrete apron. At least her naked torso and legs were. Her head was staring back at me, severed and fitted back-to-front, like a doll whose head had been twisted one-eighty degrees. The face was swollen, distorted, the eyes like glass. Blood had congealed on the floor in pools. One arm was tucked under the stomach; the other, also severed, was propped against a corner of the wall.

Fighting the urge to chuck, I forced myself to examine the concrete floor. No obvious weapon. A handbag, marooned in blood. Shoes. Underwear.

It wasn't till I turned to go back that I noticed. High up on the brick protrusion, in blood, had been written 'U-Jean'.

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Outside, Molloy was waiting. ‘Mr Gruesome?’ I was too busy keeping down the puke to reply.

I went back to the car and radioed for the Homicide boys. They said they were on their way and ordered me back to the scene. I called Fremantle Station and got young Dewey. He and Porter had been called out to help some wharfies and Yanks blueing at the Australia’s early morning session. I ordered him to get down here asap but didn’t tell him why.

As I cruised back to the abattoir, a Mercedes sedan past me, veered across the side of the road to where Molloy was standing with the horse, and skidded to a gravelly halt. The door of the Merc swung open and a small, thickset man charged at Molloy, gesticulating the way men with short forearms and shorter tempers do. This was somebody else I had no difficulty recognising.

‘You were supposed to be back at the stables forty minutes ago. I’m a busy man, Sam.’

Molloy gestured my way. The man turned, animosity softening to defiance when he saw what I was. ‘What’s the matter? Bloke has to use his indicators at six in the friggin’ morning?’

‘Have to use them anytime, Mr Dunn, but that’s not what this is about.’

His eyes narrowed. He felt emboldened but he was still guarded: if that wasn’t what I wanted, what was? ‘What is it? Need a permit to train a horse on the beach, now?’

‘Nothing like that, Mr Dunn.’

‘Katty found a body,’ put in Molloy.

‘What?’

I shot Molloy a look to keep his trap shut.

‘A fucking body?’ said momentarily bewildered. Then, ‘That’s not my problem.’

I took my cue. ‘No, it’s not. Mr Molloy, though, must remain till the Homicide Squad arrives.’

‘Homicide?’

This time Molloy didn’t embellish.

‘And what’s supposed to happen to Ceremony?’ Dunn demanded. ‘Fuckin’ horse is catching its death out here. Saturday he’s twos-on in the Stakes, and if he doesn’t win all hell breaks loose and your lot haul me up and chuck me out of racing for four months. Who the hell are you and where are you from, anyway?’

In my five years on the Force I'd never been spoken to this way. But I was too stunned or overwhelmed by this little man's brazenness to do anything but give him my name and rank.

'Lane? I've heard your name somewhere?'

'He plays footy for East,' offered Molloy.

Dunn nodded slowly. He was president of our arch rivals, South Fremantle, but I doubted he ever actually watched his team play.

'I'm sure we don't need the horse, Mr Dunn. If you'd like to load it up, you're quite free to take it back to the stables yourself.'

Dunn looked at me the way a bride might look at a stain on her wedding dress. Molloy saw it and his eye twinkled for an instant.

'A fucking murder. You wouldn't believe it. And you had to find the body.' Dunn turned on Molloy, who pointed out that it was actually Katty who'd done the finding.

'I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave, Mr Dunn,' I said, with as much authority as a UN resolution.

'Gotta go anyway. He gonna be all right?' He indicated Ceremony but he was looking at Molloy.

'Sure. He loves it out here,' replied the trainer.

'Right. I'll speak to you later. You playing Saturday, Lane?'

'Maybe.'

'I'll keep an eye out for you. If you're playing well, I'll ask Timmy Wittenoom to give you a couple.' Dunn chuckled. Wittenoom was a Thursday Islander with biceps the size of my thigh, and a serious defect in his ability to distinguish between an opponent and the ball.

I tried to smile tough. Dunn climbed into the Mercedes, U-turned and sped back towards Fremantle. The wind had lost none of its ferocity.

'How old is he?' I asked Molloy.

'Forty-one,' he replied. 'He's a good bloke to work for. Interferes now and again but most of the time leaves it up to you.'

'Okay, Mr Molloy ...'

'Call me Sam.'

'All right, Sam, we better get down to it.' I explained that he would have to give me a statement, even though the Homicide fellas would go through it all again.

Molloy had arrived as usual around 5.00 am. He'd ridden the horse up the beach as far as the power station, then turned and walked it back. He'd seen nobody the whole time, but, of course, the sandhills obscured the

road so there could have been passers-by. After a time he'd noticed that Katty was missing. He remembered the dog running up toward the old abattoir building and had gone to investigate. He heard the dog barking inside and was worried some wino might have been tormenting it.

Before Molloy could elaborate, the sound of rubber on sandy bitumen made us look up. It was Dewey in the panel van.

'G'day Snowy, what's up?' he asked in his pimply voice. (Snowy's the name some wag had given me at training camp the year before. My hair is thick and jet black.)

'Go stand guard over by the shed there. If anybody asks anything, say nothing.'

He was hurt at not being let in on the whole story. I could tell by the way his mouth pouted and he flipped on his cap. Being a big-hearted softy, I relented. 'There's a corpse in there.'

His eyes widened. I turned back to Molloy. 'When you went in, did you move anything? Touch anything?'

'Are you kidding?'

Molloy had taken one look at the scene and run outside. He had remembered there was a phone box a kilometre up the road and it took him about five minutes to ride there. He figured that would be quicker than boxing the horse, then driving.

I knew his call had hit the station at 6.08 am, I'd written it in the log. That meant he must have found the body just before six. To my question about other vehicles in the vicinity, he replied that one or two cars might have passed him while he was waiting for me but he couldn't be sure, not in the state he'd been in. He was definite that he'd seen no cars about when he first came down to the beach.

I wondered if he would have seen anything from way up near the power station. He assured me he would have spotted any cars, so long as they'd been burning headlights. At 5.00 am it was pitch black down there. That's why he carried the torch.

A loud crunching signalled the arrival of the Homicide crew.

'You Lane?' The D who asked was a couple of inches shorter than me, about five-eleven. When he held his hand out, I noticed his fists were big and his shoulders powerful. His partner was a gaunt man, tall. 'I'm Dave Holland,' the D told me. 'This is Maurie Talbot.'

'This is ...' I began to introduce Molloy but Holland cut me short.

'Yeah, we know who this is.' I wasn't sure if the bitterness in his voice

was mock. 'This is the guy who never trains a winner when you bet on his horses.' Talbot's lips parted in what I guessed was his version of a smile. Suddenly Holland relaxed. 'Pretty in there?' He offered a cigarette to Molloy, who declined.

The trainer indicated me. 'Don't he get one?'

'Nah, he's a footballer.'

How'd he know?

Holland anticipated my question. 'Nobody your age makes Freo CIB unless he can play footy.' Again that hard-bitten charm was turned on Molloy. 'He do right by you?'

'Sure.'

'You get his statement?' To me this time.

I nodded, hoping I hadn't missed anything.

'Okay Sam, you can go and get that horse out of the cold. We know how to get hold of you.'

Holland and I trudged off toward the shed, when Holland suddenly stopped and turned back to Molloy. 'This thing running Saturday?'

'In the Stakes.'

'He gonna win?'

There was a deadpan look from Molloy. 'The owner thinks so.'

Holland took a drag on his cigarette, almost managing to keep his smile to himself. I introduced Dewey who was standing stiff as a Dutch porn actor.

'Okay, let's do it.' Holland crushed the cigarette under his heel, then ordered Dewey to put the butt in his pocket so the Forensic boys wouldn't get confused.

'Where is Forensic?' asked Talbot. 'They should be here by now.'

'I wanted a look first,' said Holland. 'I held the call to them for five minutes.' He saw the warning in Talbot's eyes as they swung from me back to him. 'Don't worry, he isn't gonna rat on us.'

Presuming I was welcome, I followed them into the shed. I grabbed Dewey's torch and passed it to Holland. 'Up there on the left.' I felt like commentator on a macabre bus tour. 'This place used to be an abattoir.'

'What do you mean, used to be?' cracked Holland. Then I heard the intake of breath.

'Jesus,' whistled Talbot, 'he's getting worse.'

I couldn't bring myself to look again.

'Fresh,' said Talbot.

'Last night, I reckon.'

'There's some writing on the wall there,' I offered.

The light hit me full in the face. 'Don't breathe a word of that to a fucking living soul, Lane. Did the uniform see it?'

'He hasn't been in.'

The torch left me and played on U-Jean. 'What about Molloy?'

'Didn't mention it in his statement. I think he took a quick look and skedaddled. It's Mr Gruesome, isn't it?'

'Or his twin fucking brother.'

I knew some of the circumstances surrounding the two previous murders. At least what they'd circulated to the stations. Both victims had been prostitutes in their early twenties. One had been found in bush at Chittering Brook, bashed and then incinerated. The other had been found in a city park, decapitated, the head placed atop a drinking fountain. No leads.

'That writing at all the murder scenes?' I asked.

'Forget you ever saw it,' muttered Talbot.

We stepped back outside and into heavy rain. Normally I'd have prayed it continue, but after what I'd seen in there, thought of a god seemed horribly optimistic.