

YOU HAD IT COMING

B.M. CARROLL



First published in Great Britain in 2021 by
VIPER, part of Serpent's Tail,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
EC1A 7JQ
www.serpentstail.com

Copyright © B.M. Carroll, 2021

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset in Palatino by MacGuru Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78816 419 1
Export ISBN 978 1 78816 420 7
eISBN 978 1 78283 648 3



1

MEGAN

The radio crackles just after 7.30 p.m., a half-hour before their shift is due to finish. The streets are quiet, deceptively benign. Megan is enjoying the pleasure of driving for once. Not having to race against time, or worry about taking a wrong turn, or curse other drivers for holding them up.

Lucas is smirking beside her. 'You have to give it to the old fellas. They know how to turn on the charm.'

The old man they've just dropped off to Royal North Shore Hospital said she was 'just his type' and if he were forty years younger and not married to his beautiful wife, he'd take her out to dinner.

Lucas played along while he took the man's temperature and blood pressure. 'So what's your "type", Barry?'

‘Dark eyes, with a bit of mystery to them. And a nice smile. Keep smiling, love.’

Lucas is right: the old men tend to turn on the charm. Bravado to disguise their vulnerability and fear.

‘I couldn’t help noticing that his wife had *blue* eyes.’ Lucas is still laughing.

They’re stopped at an intersection on Pacific Highway. Megan is thinking about the cup of tea she’ll have back at base before signing off for the night. Her thoughts fast-forward to tomorrow, her mum’s birthday, which should be a joyous occasion but won’t reach the bar. Megan is taking the day off work and they’re going out for a fancy lunch. Because if you don’t manage to make an effort for birthdays you might as well give up.

Car 482, intrudes the scratchy voice on the radio. Category 1B in Killara. A shooting. Details coming through.

Megan glances at Lucas, seeing her own anxiety and adrenalin mirrored on his face.

‘ICP on the way?’ she checks. An intensive care paramedic is usually dispatched as well as an ambulance if the situation is high acuity.

ICP is on another job.

Oh God.

‘Male, fifties, several gunshot wounds to chest and abdomen ...’ Lucas reads from the mobile data terminal while Megan turns on lights and sirens and executes a U-turn at the intersection. They’re five minutes away, according to the MDT.

‘Nonresponsive and bleeding heavily,’ Lucas

continues, intermittently glancing up to help navigate. 'Assume substantial internal damage ...'

'Only the one patient? Is the scene secure?' Megan's heart pounds just from the thought of what they're about to walk into.

'Shooter is believed to have driven away. Police attached and in transit. Neighbour giving assistance ... Watch out for the P-plater, Megs.'

The P-plater changes lane at the last minute, and the road ahead is clear. Megan accelerates: two minutes away. Sydney doesn't have much gun crime. This will make the 9 o'clock news.

Lucas exhales audibly. He has four years' experience to her six. Car accidents, house fires, domestic violence, heart attacks: they've dealt with everything ... except this.

Megan scrambles to assimilate what she knows in theory, if not in practice. Thorough visual inspection (it can be easy to overlook wounds if there are multiple entry and exit points). Possible tissue damage to lungs, liver, spleen. Possible rupture of heart, bladder or bowel. Shattered bones can become secondary missiles.

No more time for theory. They're here. This is real. A squad car has pulled in ahead of them.

'Just need to make sure it's safe,' one of the officers says, through the open window. 'Sit tight till I give you the nod.'

A short unbearable wait until they're given permission to enter the scene. The victim is laid out at the

entrance of a driveway, a wheelie bin close by. The sight of the bin – something so innocuous and routine – brings a lump to Megan’s throat. In this job she has become desensitised to many things, but seeing catastrophe juxtaposed with the ordinary gets her every time. A resuscitation on a kitchen floor, inhaling the smell of roast dinner. A dead-on-arrival motor-vehicle accident, pop music playing obliviously on the radio. Tuesday night, bin night.

Two people, a man and woman, are assisting the victim, trying to stem the flow of blood using jumpers and jackets. Several others are huddled in a group nearby.

‘What’s his name?’ Megan asks, kneeling down on the cold rough concrete of the driveway. The injured man is wearing a dark suit and what was once a white shirt. Someone had the presence of mind to turn him on his side to manage his airway. A quick glance establishes that his colour is bad – pale and grey – and his breathing is shallow. She knows even before she checks his pulse that it will be barely there.

‘We don’t know,’ the woman replies in a quivery voice.

‘I’m Megan and this is Lucas. What are your names?’ They’re trained to do this: exchanging names establishes an immediate connection and fast-tracks the flow of information.

‘I’m Sarah. I live in the apartment block across the street. I was putting out my bins too.’

‘Darren,’ the male adds. ‘I was parking my car. Heard two loud bangs, then a motorbike roaring away.’

Megan cuts open the man’s clothes to assess his wounds. One entry point in the right-hand side of the chest and one in the abdomen. Two exit points in his back. Blood clotted on the skin and clothing. Distension of the abdomen.

‘When did he become unresponsive?’

‘After a couple of minutes,’ Sarah says. ‘He was moaning and muttering, then he just faded away.’

Lucas packs the abdominal wound with haemostatic dressing, in an attempt to arrest the bleeding. Megan checks the head, feeling for skull deformities with her fingers. Appearance and alignment of trachea and jugular veins seem okay. She inserts an oropharyngeal airway. Next priority is oxygen.

A second squad car arrives. Two male local-area detectives.

Megan supplies them with a brief update. ‘External and internal haemorrhaging. Need to get his blood pressure up before he goes into irreversible shock.’

The fact that he’s already unconscious is a sign that he’s lost huge amounts of blood.

Megan and Lucas work quickly, issuing abrupt instructions to each other.

‘Here’s a vein.’

The IV has Hartmann’s Solution, a temporary fix until his blood type is cross-matched at the hospital.

‘Keep applying pressure.’

Extensive bandaging, trying to stem further loss of blood, probably futile considering the extent of internal bleeding.

‘Blanket. Keep him warm.’

This man’s life is in the balance. Time is of the essence, yet they can’t cut corners. If he dies – and that seems likely – their actions will be analysed to the very last detail.

His blood pressure is improving as a result of the crystalloid fluids. A small window of time: another deterioration is likely en route to the hospital. Load and go. Lucas hurries to get the stretcher.

‘One, two, three.’ The patient is on, and they’re mobile, the stretcher bumping over the stencilled concrete of the driveway.

‘I hate when we don’t know their name,’ Lucas says.

Megan knows what he means: it’s hard to reach the patient if you don’t have a name to use as an anchor. But she’s only half listening. In her head she is planning the quickest route to the hospital. She’ll call ahead as soon as she gets behind the wheel. Warn them of myriad internal injuries and the need to have the right resources standing by for immediate surgery.

The rear doors of the ambulance are open, bright light spilling out. The stretcher is ready on the hydraulic lift and it’s only then – in those few seconds as the stretcher is rising and the patient is fully illuminated – Megan realises that she knows his face. She knows it from a different world, a different life. This face

has haunted her, belittled her, broken her. Those thin lips, the hateful words they spat out: lies, terrible lies. Behind those eyelids are eyes that are pale blue, cold and contemptuous.

She checked this man's body from head to toe, trying to envisage the bullets' trajectory through his tissue, bones and internal organs, all without properly looking at his face. His hair has whitened; his skin is the colour of death; the poor lighting on the driveway: these are the reasons she failed to recognise him. And she never imagined she'd see him again.

Her conscience wrestles with her deep hatred. The reinvented Megan wrestles with the old, devastated one. This man doesn't deserve comfort. He doesn't deserve Lucas's murmured reassurances, trying to reel him back to consciousness.

'His name is William Newson,' she blurts out, against all her instincts.

Then she shuts the doors on Lucas's questioning face.

Members of the jury, this trial has revealed some harsh truths about Jessica Foster. In courtrooms we talk a lot about character, so we can understand and judge behaviour in a wider and fairer context. This young lady is not as innocent or indeed as vulnerable as she maintains. This young lady was engaging in provocative and risk-taking behaviour.

2

JESS

Tuesday nights are reserved for the serious fighters. They warm up with stretches, skipping and some work on the punching bags, before being paired off in the ring.

The first pair tonight – Billy and Lachlan – are in their mid-twenties and have similar ability. The purpose of sparring is to practise punching, positioning, posture and footwork, without hurting one another.

‘Go easy,’ Jess reminds Billy, as she helps him on with his gloves. ‘Save the aggression for the real fights.’

She loves being a coach. Teaching better technique, eradicating weaknesses, giving praise when it’s been earned. She loves it, and the members love it too. Some of them are like family to Jess.

Billy adjusts his headgear, patches of sweat under

each armpit from the warm-up. Tones and I's 'Dance Monkey' is playing on the sound system. Vince, her boss, is in Lachlan's corner. The buzzer emits five rapid-fire beeps to indicate the start of the round.

'Billy, you're too straight on the front leg. *Bounce*. Knee over foot.

'Sit. Sit. He's putting pressure on you. You're giving him too much time.

'Jab only. Find your range. You're coming up too late. Jab to the body. Set it up. Good shot, mate.'

Vince calls out similar advice from the opposite corner. Twelve years ago, Jess arrived at this gym, spitting with rage and the desire to hurt someone as profoundly as she'd been hurt. Her rage earned her three Australian titles and two split-decision losses on the world circuit.

The most rewarding part was fighting battles she at least had some chance of winning.

The sparring finishes at 8.30 p.m. The boys unwrap their hands before starting core work on the exercise mat. There's a strong smell of sweat, probably the only thing Jess doesn't like about her job.

'That's it for tonight. Good work.'

'Billy is coming along well,' Vince comments, as the boys pack up their things. His wiry physique and skewed nose provide clues to his former career as a professional boxer. His hair was charcoal when Jess first met him, now it's fully grey.

‘Yep. He just needs to bend those knees when he’s punching. He’s still not sitting low enough. I’ll tape his knee next time.’

‘He’s nearly ready, though.’

‘Yep.’

Vince will organise Billy’s first amateur fight in the next month or so. He is already putting out feelers to find the right opponent. Too good, and Billy could get scared off. Not good enough, and Billy won’t learn much from the experience.

The boys leave, one by one, through the garage roller door. The gym is located in an industrial estate in Artarmon, neighboured by warehouses and factories. Each departure is pre-empted by a series of fist bumps: the club’s version of a handshake.

Billy catches her eye on his way out. ‘See you, Jess. Thanks.’

He makes no secret of the fact that he likes her. He’s an associate lawyer with one of the big firms in the city. Every day he puts on a sharp suit and plays games with the truth.

‘See ya.’ She gives him an abrupt nod.

There is no obligation to like him back. She is his coach, not his friend.

Her hatred of lawyers is so ingrained, no amount of charm or good looks can get past it.

Home is a five-minute walk through the industrial estate, followed by a fifteen-minute train ride. The

industrial estate is poorly lit, deserted, but that doesn't bother her. She is more than capable of defending herself. In many ways she'd welcome the challenge.

The 8.48 arrives as she's scaling the concrete stairs to the bridge. She sprints, takes two steps at a time on the descent, and flies through the open doors just in time. The carriage is virtually empty: rush hour has come and gone, it's just the stragglers left. She pulls out her phone from the inside pocket of her backpack; she hasn't looked at it for hours. The fact that she can take a long time to answer messages is a long-running complaint of friends and family.

Two new messages. The most recent one is from Alex.

Hey, babe. Just gone for a few beers with Ramsey. Don't wait up! A

She sighs and smiles at the same time. This is what Alex does: works hard and plays even harder. While one part of her wishes he would grow up, another wants him to stay the way he is: always living life to the fullest, a daily reminder that she should have the same aim. She has an early shift in the morning, doesn't want him waking her up when he stumbles in the door. But there's no way to say that without nagging so it's easier to say nothing at all.

The second message is from a former friend. Just seeing Megan's name brings a rush of guilt. It's been a few years since they last had contact.

Something weird just happened. Got called to a shooting in Killara and you won't believe who the victim was. William Newson!!! He's badly wounded. Don't know if he's going to make it. Thought you'd like to know.

She's so startled she almost drops the phone, fumbling to re-establish her grip on it, then brings it closer to read the message again. William Newson has been shot. Maybe there is justice in the world, after all.

A whoosh of cold air brings her back to the present. This is her stop. She exits the station, crosses the road, takes the second left. Her pace is slower than usual; her legs seem to have lost their power. William Newson! Someone has actually done it. Taken action. All Jess was capable of was fantasy. Who? Why? How many lives has he ruined this time?

Home is a one-bedroom 1970s apartment, its proximity to the station equating to a hefty price tag. She used her prize money to pay the deposit, with a small amount left over for furniture. Most of her neighbours are well into retirement. The lift judders upwards, an old-people smell lingering within its confines. Jess doesn't mind it; better than the smell of sweat in the gym.

She decides to eat before composing a reply to Megan. Nutrition is a constant battle. So many calories burned in training, fitted in during quiet periods at the gym, along with whatever she expends instructing classes. Calories out always seem to outweigh calories in, despite her best efforts.

Dinner is a toasted sandwich in front of the TV. The food sits in her gut. She can't stomach the last few bites and pushes the plate aside. Megan will be waiting for a response. It takes a few attempts to come up with one.

Someone else must hate him as much as we do.

She puts the phone down and goes for a shower. The water cascades over her face and along the sharp angles of her body. She shampoos her hair, massaging the lather into her scalp as images flash through her mind. Megan, her eyes swollen and accusing. William Newson, every reproachful word and gesture. The police, the parents, the jurors. The lies, the shame, the injustice.

The bathroom is freezing when she exits the shower cubicle. She rubs her skin roughly, before wrapping the towel around herself. The mirror is condensed and she uses her fingers to clear a circle. There she is. Platinum-blond hair darkened from the water. Her nose, kinked from three separate breaks. A scar under her left eye and another above her right, where she's had stitches. Her face is just the half of it: fractures of the wrist and thumb, dislocation of both shoulders, ankle and finger sprains, and three concussions, the last one signifying the end of her career. But it was worth the pain.

When people find out that she was a professional boxer, they automatically assume a rough background. Her father is a heart surgeon, her mother a concert pianist turned piano tutor. Rough is about the last word in the dictionary that applies to them.

Boxing saved her, albeit not from a poor background. It provided a release. It gave her focus, goals and a training routine to cling to. More than anything, it rebuilt her self-respect, which William Newson had done his utmost to destroy.

‘You had it coming,’ she says, as though it were his reflection in the mirror and not her own. ‘You had it fucking coming.’