LoveReading

YOU LOVED YOUR LAST BOOK...
BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO READ NEXT?

Using our unique guidance tools, **LoveReading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

TRUST

Written by **Chris Hammer**
Published By **Wildfire, an imprint of Headline Publishing Group**

All text is Copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is brought to you by **LoveReading**. Please print off and read at your leisure.

CHRIS HAMMER

TRUST



Trust.indd 3 27/08/20 2:08 PM

Copyright © 2020 Chris Hammer

The right of Chris Hammer to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2020 by ALLEN & UNWIN

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
WILDFIRE
an imprint of HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 978 1 4722 7290 4
Trade Paperback ISBN 978 1 4722 7291 1

Map by Aleksander J. Potočnik

Typeset in 13/18 pt Granjon LT Std by Bookhouse, Sydney

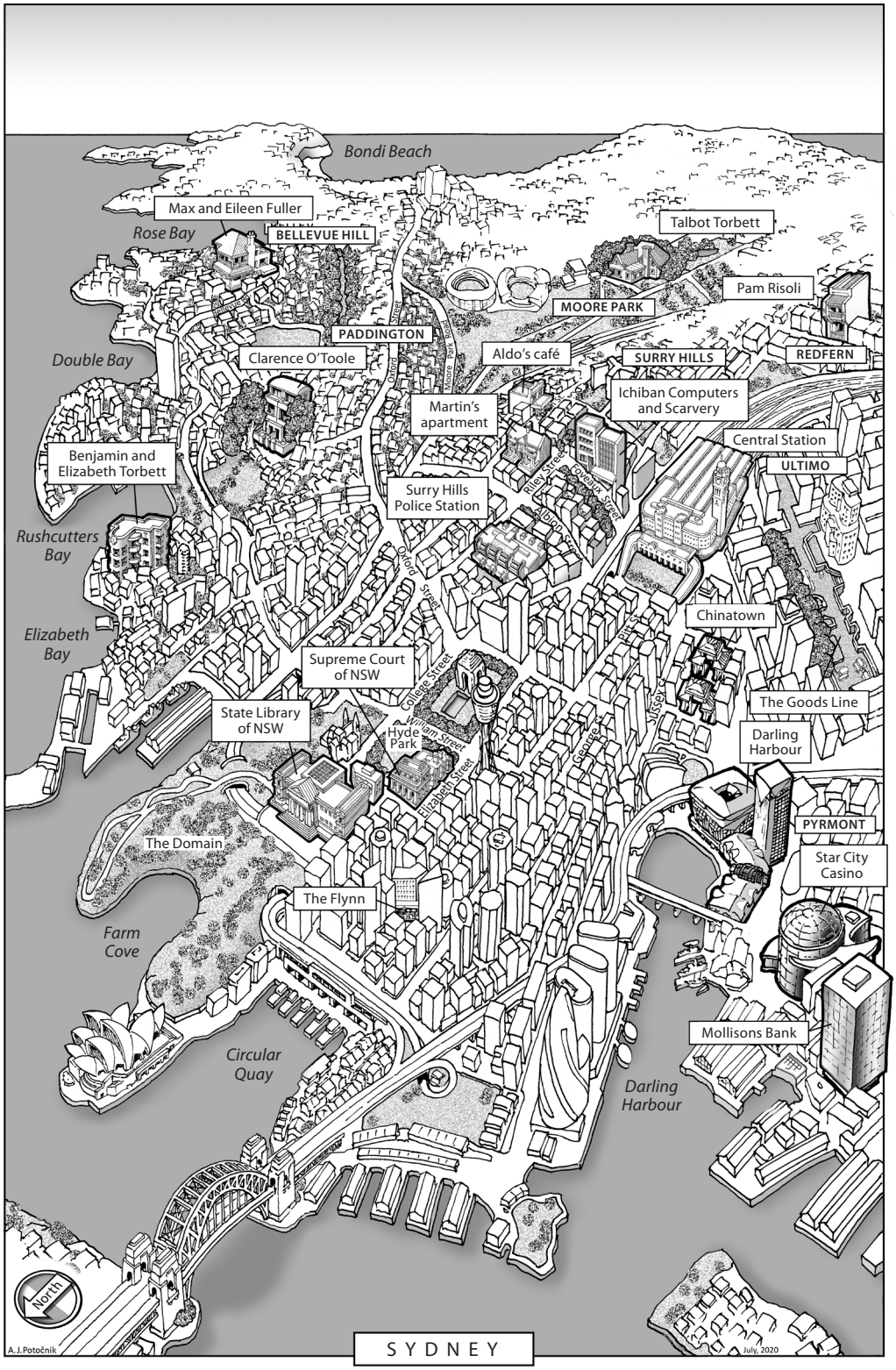
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in well-managed forests and other controlled sources. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
An Hachette UK Company
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

www.headline.co.uk
www.hachette.co.uk



Trust.indd 7 27/08/20 2:08 PM

prologue

THE REALISATION SWELLS WITHIN HIM, LIKE A BIRTHING. IT'S HAPPENING RIGHT now, today, in this moment of time, in this sliver of history. After months of gestation—after all the connections and the cultivations, all the plotting and the intrigues, all the threats and the blackmail—it's this simple. He's going to get away with it. The files are downloading, faster than he could ever have imagined, transcribing the guilt, the corruption, the criminality, all neatly packaged, all digitised, all pre-digested, pouring from the computer through a supposedly disabled USB port onto the bright blue thumb drive, encryption broken, the truth laid bare, the drive itself hidden by nothing more than his bravado and a takeaway coffee cup. He stands and looks around, his mind electric but his exterior calm, the consummate actor. The consummate spy. He smiles—but, then, he is always smiling.

Trust.indd 1 27/08/20 2:08 PM

The trading floor is a hive of activity, brokers swarming, abuzz with corporate fervour and personal ambition, banks of monitors alive with bonds and equities and derivatives and exchange rates, all fluid, all flickering, all demanding their attention. Simply by standing still, he's rendered himself invisible. No one is looking at him, no one cares about his monitor, they're all focused on their own ephemera: numbers and charts and transactions; losses, margins and gains. He feels he is the only point of stillness, the cyclone swirling about him, that he alone possesses the perspective to know what is truly happening across these epochal seconds. It completes his victory; carried out in plain sight, the audacity of it, his own subterfuge disguised by the bank's own much larger deception. It will make the retelling all the better; this will be the making of him, the stuff of legends. He catches a reflection of himself, only slightly distorted, in the surface of a golden wall panel. He's pleased with what he sees: hair bouffant, face tanned, eyes bright and teeth even. He likes his face; everyone likes his face. It's a likeable face. More importantly, it's a trustworthy face.

The transfer is almost done. He lifts the coffee. It tastes excellent. Through the windows of the office tower, he can see the perfect Sydney day, blue and white, the sun pouring benevolence across the skyline, harbour alight, as if the city itself approves the righteousness of his actions.

He looks back to the computer, startled to see it's finished. Already. He blinks, savouring the moment, this tipping point, this culmination. If nothing else, he'll miss the bank's state-of-the-art tech, so much faster and efficient than the antiquated systems at his real workplace. He sits. Quickly, he imposes his own encryption on the thumb drive, then runs a purpose-built program to cover

Trust.indd 2 27/08/20 2:08 PM

his tracks. It takes mere minutes. Then he ejects the drive, pockets it and logs off. Done.

'Early lunch?' he asks, pausing at the cubicle of Raff, the shift supervisor—the one person he knows won't accept his invitation.

'Sorry. Bit under the pump,' says Raff, not lifting his eyes from his screens. 'Maybe later in the week.'

'No worries,' says Tarquin, grinning at his colleague's predictability. 'I'll be an hour or so. You want anything?'

'No. Brought my lunch in.'

'Okay, see you, then.'

And Tarquin Molloy walks away, his gait confident, as always; his eyes shining, as always; his smile every bit as generous and unflappable as on his first day here. But inside, his stomach is churning and his mind is bubbling with what he has achieved.

He enters the lift, hits the button for the lobby, for glory, taking one last look across the trading floor as the doors begin to close, the curtains falling on the final scene. He commits it to memory, for the recounting. Then, at the last, an arm reaches in, forcing the doors open. Tarquin Molloy beams at the newcomer, a tall man, thin and dressed in a vintage suit of coarse brown wool. The doors ease shut.

'Morning,' says the gentleman, inviting engagement.

'It certainly is,' he replies. And to Tarquin, he *does* look like a gentleman. The suit is three-piece, of heavy cloth, as if it's been transported from somewhere in the mid-twentieth century, immaculately maintained despite its age. There is a patterned kerchief in the suit's breast pocket and a Legacy badge on its lapel. The man's face is long, as is his hair, oiled so it stays in place behind his ears. The hair oil, or something, has a pleasant aroma in the

Trust.indd 3 27/08/20 2:08 PM

confined space. The smell, like the suit and the man's demeanour, is old-fashioned. His complexion is touched with sepia. A smoker, thinks Tarquin. Old for a trading floor.

'California Poppy,' says the man.

'Sorry?'

'The hair oil. California Poppy.'

'It smells very nice.'

'Thank you,' says the man genially. One of his teeth has a gold cap. 'Hard to come by nowadays.'

The lift shudders to a halt, but the doors don't open. They're stuck between floors.

'That's strange,' says Tarquin.

'You don't know the half of it,' says the man in the brown suit. He unbuttons his coat and withdraws a revolver. A six-gun, a prop from a Western, a massive thing, matt black and menacing, its handle inlaid with pearl shell. Tarquin's stomach plummets and his mind begins to reel. The muzzle is pointed at his chest.

Trust.indd 4 27/08/20 2:08 PM

SUNDAY

Trust.indd 5 27/08/20 2:08 PM

chapter one

THE BOY IS LAUGHING WITH THE JOY OF IT, THE SENSATION OF IT, SLAPPING AT the sea water with his hands, sending it spraying about him. Martin laughs too; Liam's pleasure is contagious. They're side by side, the man and the infant, sitting in a briny puddle formed when Martin scooped out sand to build a castle, now demolished. The excavation won't last much longer either, its sides slowly collapsing as another wave rolls up the beach, the tide on its way back in. *Splat, splat, splat*, go Liam's pudgy hands. *Splat, splat, splat*, go Martin's as he emulates his stepson, inciting more delight. Oh, how he loves the boy's laugh, that distinctive chortle that has always been his and his alone, pre-dating words.

Martin can hear his phone ringing in the beach bag further up the sand, below the steps to the house, but he doesn't move, doesn't consider answering it. Nothing is urgent here, not anymore. The days of subjugation, to the dictates of phone calls and editors,

Trust.indd 7 27/08/20 2:08 PM

to deadlines and scoops, to egos and rivalries, are past. For sixteen months they've lived here at Port Silver—Martin, Mandalay and Liam—repairing their house on the cliffs above the beach, repairing their lives. Constructing a new and more robust reality, quarantined from the past.

'Marn. Look. Marn!'

'What?'

'Whale! Marn, whale!' The boy is on his feet, pointing excitedly out beyond the bar where the river meets the ocean. Martin hears it before he sees it, the exhalation of breath, the fizzing spray of a mist, the whale's blow. And now, as if to greet them, one white fin rises from the water, waving as it catches the early afternoon sun.

'Humpback. It's a humpback,' says Martin, smiling broadly, but Liam is too busy waving back to attempt the word.

The phone rings again. And again he ignores it. This mid-winter day is too perfect to lose: the sky clear, the day warm, the sea gentle. Even on the far north coast of New South Wales, winter southerlies can bite, bringing rain and cold. Days like this, the first after a week of cloud and squalls, are not to be interrupted. But when the phone rings for a third time, insistent, he knows he must answer it. Nobody rings three times unless it's urgent.

'Right back,' he says to Liam as he stands. He moves up the beach, no more than twenty metres. He walks backwards, not taking his eyes from the boy. Liam is well past two, twenty-seven months, a real toddler, walking and talking. Even so, Martin is taking no chances, not with the boy close to the water. Still looking at Liam, he picks up his phone and answers the call. 'Martin Scarsden.'

Trust.indd 8 27/08/20 2:08 PM

'Martin. Long time.'

'Max?' Martin takes a quick glance at the screen, shading it from the sun, confirming it's his former editor, his old mentor, Max Fuller.

'Where are you? Port Silver?'

'Yes, on the beach.'

'Lucky you. How's work?'

'Yeah, good. The book's doing well, the one about the killings up here last year.'

'Good. So you're at a loose end?'

'Lot to be said for that, Max.'

'I've got wind of a big story. A cracker. I could do with your help.'

Martin hesitates before responding; he still feels residual guilt for his part in Max being stripped of the *Herald*'s editorship. Liam has plopped back onto his bare arse and is splashing about in the puddle. Since when would Max need his help? 'You don't mean just a feature, do you? You wouldn't need me for that.'

'It's early days, but this could be huge. An investigative series. A book as well.'

'What is it?'

'Not on the phone. You in Sydney anytime soon?'

'I wasn't planning to be.'

'Well, see if you can make it down. Don't wait too long.'

Liam is standing again, taking a few unsteady steps towards the sea, apparently intent on paddling.

'Okay. But don't take it for granted I'll come on board.'

'You will when you see what I've got. We're not talking about a few pissy murders here, son. We're talking grand conspiracy. I promise you, you'll want in.'

Trust.indd 9 27/08/20 2:08 PM

'Okay. I'll talk to Mandy, see what I can do. Sorry I didn't pick up first time.'

There's a pause. 'What do you mean?'

'Wasn't that you ringing just a moment ago?'

'Not me.'

'Okay. I'll be in touch.' Martin ends the call and checks his phone. Sure enough, the two previous calls were from Mandy: his partner, Liam's mum. Unusual for her to call; she usually texts. Liam is heading towards him now, holding up a seashell.

'Mumma,' says the lad.

'She'll love it.' It's something Mandy and Liam do together, collect shells on the beach below their house.

Martin looks back at his phone; she's left a voice message. He opens it, holds the phone to his ear. But it's not words, it's a scream: one long shriek, full of desperation and danger, ten seconds long. It cuts through the tranquillity of the day like a blade. It doesn't finish; instead it ends abruptly, as if cut off.

'Fuck,' says Martin.

'Fuck,' says Liam, the irrepressible mimic.

Martin is already moving. He lifts the infant and starts running towards the stairs behind the beach, leaving everything else behind, taking only his son and his phone, nothing else matters.

Almost instantly the boy is crying, shocked by the rough handling, but Martin doesn't care, not now. He reaches the steps carved into the sandstone, leading up to their clifftop house, starts bounding up, the boy squirming and wailing. Up they go. Ten metres, twenty. Martin is breathing hard, slowed by Liam's weight. The steps finish at a zigzagging path. He scrambles along to the start of another flight, wooden stairs this time, suspended from

Trust.indd 10 27/08/20 2:08 PM

a near vertical rockface. He doesn't hesitate; up they go, the boy becoming sullen and silent.

The stairs end. They're close now. Another couple of switchbacks through the rainforest, the rise not as steep, and the house appears through the foliage. He stops again. He can see nothing wrong, nothing unusual; he can hear nothing other than the noise of his own panting and the now distant sound of the surf . . . No, wait. There. Just visible around the corner of their home: a white car. *Shit.* Someone is in the house. He pauses, torn. Mandy's scream is still reverberating around his skull, but he can't take Liam in there, into possible danger. *Shit.* Then he knows what to do.

'Drive, Liam.'

He jogs up to the house, hoping no one is watching, still holding his stepson firmly. Ducking down below the windows, he moves along the building's side. He pauses at the corner, peering around it to where the unfamiliar car is parked. An SUV. New. Queensland number plates. A rental? He steps quickly past it to Mandy's Subaru, sitting unlocked in the shade of some trees. He places Liam in the booster seat and fastens the belt.

'Drive!' enthuses Liam.

'Soon. I'll be back soon. You wait here, okay?'

'Mumma?'

'Yes. I'll get Mumma.'

Liam looks uncertain, but there is no time to reassure him. Leaving the car door open—even in winter, a locked car can grow dangerously hot—Martin scuttles to the house, sheltering below the kitchen window. He looks back: the open door is out of sight on the far side of the car; Liam is silent and almost impossible to see. Martin turns his full attention to the house. He can hear

Trust.indd 11 27/08/20 2:08 PM

nothing unusual; just the wind, the surf and birdsong. How can the birds be so insensitive? Didn't they hear her scream?

He eases the kitchen door open and slides inside. There is no sound, a stillness has settled. The door to the dining room is open. Again, nothing. No: there is, there is. On the table: her phone. The one she screamed into. She must be here; she wouldn't leave her phone.

He moves through the room, looks around the open doorway into the living room . . . And sees a man in a suit face down on the floor. Adrenaline hits him, and his already surging heartbeat accelerates. He tries to listen for the sound of an intruder, but the blood in his ears is too loud; that and the memory of Mandy's scream. He takes a breath and edges forward, knowing he's exposing himself, knowing he may be walking into danger. But she's in jeopardy; standing still is not an option.

Nothing happens. There is no one else. He moves to the body, squats, feels for a pulse. It's there, in the neck, strong and consistent. The man is alive. Martin can hear him breathing: a little ragged, but steady enough. There is blood seeping from the back of his skull, out through his hair. There is no other sign of injury. Someone has king hit him from behind, laid him flat. Did Mandy do this, knock the man unconscious? Where *is* Mandy? Martin needs to get upstairs, explore the rest of the house, try to find her. But first he rolls the man onto his side, into the recovery position. He's a dead weight, showing no sign of waking. Only when Martin has him in position does he look at his face—and is shocked to recognise him. It's Claus Vandenbruk, the ill-tempered policeman Martin encountered a year and a half ago in far western New South Wales. What the hell is Vandenbruk doing here? Back

Trust.indd 12 27/08/20 2:08 PM

then, Vandenbruk was on secondment to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the ACIC; he'd played a major role in bringing down an organised crime syndicate. What is he doing here? The questions flood Martin's mind, but he dismisses them: right now he needs to get help, and he needs to find Mandy.

He dials triple zero, asks for the police, explains quickly, voice low, what he's found, requests that police and ambulance both attend, warning that there is the potential for danger, that the police should enter first. The dispatcher starts to ask questions, but Martin can't afford to wait any longer. He interrupts to tell them of the boy in the car—if anything happens to him, at least they'll find Liam. Then he hangs up and starts moving towards the stairs.

Trust.indd 13 27/08/20 2:08 PM

chapter two

SHE OPENS HER EYES, BUT CANNOT SEE; TRIES TO SPEAK, BUT CANNOT TALK. She closes her eyes again, almost slips back into sleep. It must be dark. No. It's not that. There is motion, a sense of movement. She feels the vibration, can hear the sound. A car. She's in a car. Or a van or a truck. But the weight of fatigue is too great. Her eyes close and she drifts away.

A loud sound, a vibration. She comes awake, and still she cannot see. But now she can feel the cloth that brushes her eyelashes when she blinks. She's blindfolded. She rolls her eyes around. Yes: there, to her lower left, the slightest seepage of light. She tries to open her mouth to speak, but it's taped shut. A fog comes rolling across her mind and it's all she can do to stay awake, to stave off the temptation to fall under once again. But it is coming in too strong, a dark tide. She feels herself taken.

Trust.indd 14 27/08/20 2:08 PM

*

Awareness comes seeping back in; again, she opens her eyes to darkness. But the mist is lifting from her mind. She's sitting upright, in a car. She can feel the cushioning beneath and behind, the shape of the seat. There are industrial smells: oils and grease and solvents. She tries to move her hands but they're tied together. She attempts to lift them to her eyes, to remove the blindfold, but it's no good: their movement is restricted. *Breathe*, she tells herself, *breathe. And don't betray your weakness.* She realises she's not fully gagged; there is nothing in her mouth, it's just been taped shut. She can't speak, but she could easily make a noise. She decides against trying. Instead, she sits back in the seat, feigns unconsciousness, while trying to work through what has happened to her, what might happen next.

The man. She remembers him now. The man in the suit, as unfamiliar and unlikely in her coastal home as a priest or a politician, out of place with his fidgety nervousness and abrupt manner. What had he said? That he knew her, that they had met before? In Riversend, her home town in western New South Wales. Had he said that, or did she dream it? There were no men in suits in Riversend. Only at funerals were there men in suits. And then she remembers: at the end, after the killings, the policemen and the reporters, all wearing suits, setting themselves apart, setting themselves above. That was it: a policeman. He'd said he was a policeman, had shown her identification. She remembers that now. A policeman.

God, she feels tired. Remembering is like lifting weights.

She closes her useless eyes, trying to concentrate, to push her mind through the treacle. Her memory of the detective is hazy, but she feels it wasn't so long ago that she was talking to him. In her lounge room. In their house on the cliff. Claus. He said his

Trust.indd 15 27/08/20 2:08 PM

name was Claus. Why is it so hard to remember? Has she been hit? Has she been drugged? She pushes against the headrest, slowly flexing her neck muscles, but there is no pain. Not hit then; drugged. She congratulates herself for working that out, then realises that it doesn't help. She flexes her arms one way, then the other, testing the restraints: her wrists are bound painfully together, so too her ankles, with another cord threaded through the seatbelt, preventing her from lifting her hands above her midriff. She tries moving in her seat: but the belt holds her firm. To her left, there is nothing, but to her right she encounters resistance. The side of the vehicle. She leans as far as she can, presses her bare arm against the hardness. It's warm. The sun, she thinks. The sun warming the side of the vehicle. If it's the afternoon, then they're driving south. But she can feel no sunlight on her face. So not a window, then. She must be in a van, or a truck. Makes sense. They could hardly have her sitting up, bound, blindfolded and gagged next to a window. She tries to follow the pattern of movement; there is no accelerating and decelerating, no rounding of corners. The engine and road noise have a constant pitch. They must be on the freeway, heading south. South towards Sydney.

South towards the past.

She breathes deeply, trying to quell the rising sense of panic. A detective came to her home, drugged her and kidnapped her. She tries to make sense of it, to imagine alternatives, but only one conclusion is possible: it's the past, come to claim her. After all these years, just as she was beginning to believe she had achieved escape velocity, fled its orbital pull once and for all. The past; she's sure of it.

Trust.indd 16 27/08/20 2:08 PM