



# THE SECOND SON

'Tight and tense,  
*The Second Son* is a  
wonderfully sharp-toothed  
crime thriller.'  
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'A compelling story  
of fear, love, violence  
and—ultimately—hope,  
a modern-day *Godfather*.'  
ANNA DOWNES,  
author of *The Safe Place*



# LORRAINE PECK

# PROLOGUE

I dream in English now. I know the nightmare is coming when I start dreaming in my own language. This dream is a memory burnt deep into my soul.

My father opens the front door and the soldier raises his shotgun. The blast lifts my father off his feet and hurls him against the wall. More soldiers surge through the front door and my mother starts screaming.

I am fourteen and small for my age; I could pass for twelve. Maybe this is why they don't kill me. Instead, they tie me to a chair and gag me, so I have to watch them rape my mother and sister.

I count them twice. There are always ten soldiers in our tiny house.

My mother pleads with them, 'Leave my Susana alone! Do what you want to me. Don't you touch her!'

But Susana is sixteen. All the boys in school are in love with her. She is both kind and beautiful, impossible to ignore.

My mother's cries for mercy turn to curses. 'You will all die

and be sent to hell! You will burn forever! You are weak! You are cowards!

One of the men steps forward and shoots my mother in the face.

They drink the red wine they find in our cellar and help themselves to the food in the fridge and pantry. They feast as they rape my sister, one after another, all through the night. Until one soldier notices the pools of blood and, with his fingers on her throat, declares her dead.

They catch and kill our chickens and take what is left of the food. They leave me tied to the chair, sitting in my own filth, surrounded by my dead family.

# JOHNNY

I blink in the darkness. Someone is pounding on our front door. Amy groans and turns on her bedside lamp: 3.15 a.m.

I roll out of bed, pull on my jeans and head down the hall. The knocking starts up again. Fuck, I'm coming, okay? I check our son on the way past his bedroom. Fast asleep, sheet thrown off, arms flung wide, his blond hair too long for a boy.

I grab the cricket bat I keep in the umbrella stand and check the spyhole. Police. My heart rate cranks up a notch, but I put the bat back in the stand. When I open the door, the wet heat of the night spills in and expensively cooled air swirls out around my ankles.

Two uniforms take up a sizeable chunk of the front patio. They're big bastards, similar in shape, bookends. A tall bloke stands in the shadows a couple of paces back, a glint of red in his hair.

'What's going on?' I'm looking at the suit, trying to place him.

He steps forward. 'Been a while, Johnny.'

My shoulders tighten. Detective Inspector Ian MacPherson. The last time we met he was in charge of the Liverpool Narcs. Now he heads up the Western Sydney Organised Crime Task Force. What the fuck? Why is someone this senior at my front door?

MacPherson nods at the two uniforms. ‘Constables Bridges and Dyson. Can we come in?’

‘Got a warrant?’

‘We’re not here to search the place. Something’s happened.’

Did one of the boys get caught in the middle of a job? But why come to me? Has something happened to Dad? I turn on some lights and gesture towards the living room.

‘I’ll throw a shirt on.’

By the time I make it back up the hall to our bedroom, Amy is zipping up her dress.

‘What’s happening?’

‘No idea. Two cops and MacPherson.’

‘MacPherson? The head of that task force?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Why would he be here?’

‘No idea, Ames.’

I keep my voice down, pull on a T-shirt. Whatever she sees on my face makes her frown.

‘I’ll put the kettle on,’ she says.

Amy walks ahead of me down the hall. My wife is tall, slim and beautiful and I wonder why the hell she fell in love with me. Keeping her and Sasha safe is my number one priority, so I don’t let them anywhere near the family business. Amy tucks a strand of blonde hair behind her ear as she peeks into Sasha’s room, then closes the door. I can tell by the set of her shoulders

that she's anxious. Me too. She disappears into the kitchen and I wish I could follow her, but I keep going, back into the living room.

The cops are looking around. MacPherson is holding a framed photo from the mantelpiece: my brother and me, aged about six and five, sitting cross-legged in Mum's veggie patch, tanned and grinning. Ivan's arm is slung around my shoulders and I'm holding a huge pumpkin like a trophy. MacPherson puts the photo back and avoids my gaze. What the fuck is going on here?

'Amy's making tea, but we can do coffee if you want.'

One of the uniforms gives MacPherson a pleading look.

'That won't be necessary, thank you. Perhaps you could ask her to join us instead?'

Amy must be listening. She comes in and I introduce her.

'Please sit down.' She gestures at the sofa.

Amy perches in one of the armchairs opposite and I take the one beside her. MacPherson sits on the sofa, but the book-ends remain standing, as though they're expecting action. The detective pulls out a pen and one of those black, flip-top notebooks. He opens it, looks at his watch and scribbles.

My fingers start drumming on the armrest. Amy reaches over and takes my hand.

MacPherson looks up. 'I'm very sorry, Johnny. There's no easy way to tell you this.' Now his eyes are locked on mine, as if he's searching for something. 'It's your brother, Ivan. He's been shot.'

In two strides I'm out in the hall, snatching up my car keys. My ears are ringing. Why has nobody moved?

'Which hospital?' I shout.

‘He didn’t make it. Johnny, I’m sorry.’

MacPherson does sound sorry, but I’m back in the living room towering over him. Nothing makes sense. They’ve fucked this up somehow.

‘Bullshit. It’s not him.’ One of the bookends steps forward and puts his hand on my arm, but I shake him off. ‘You’ve got him mixed up with someone else. Ivan can’t be dead.’

MacPherson looks at his notebook again. ‘Ivan was shot at the end of his driveway while he was putting out the garbage bins at eleven-forty this evening. A neighbour called it in. Ambos got there before we did, but there was nothing they could do.’

I can’t breathe. The keys are digging into my palm. I want to rip that black notebook out of MacPherson’s hand and shove it down his throat. I want to rip the world apart. Then Amy’s arms are wrapped around me.

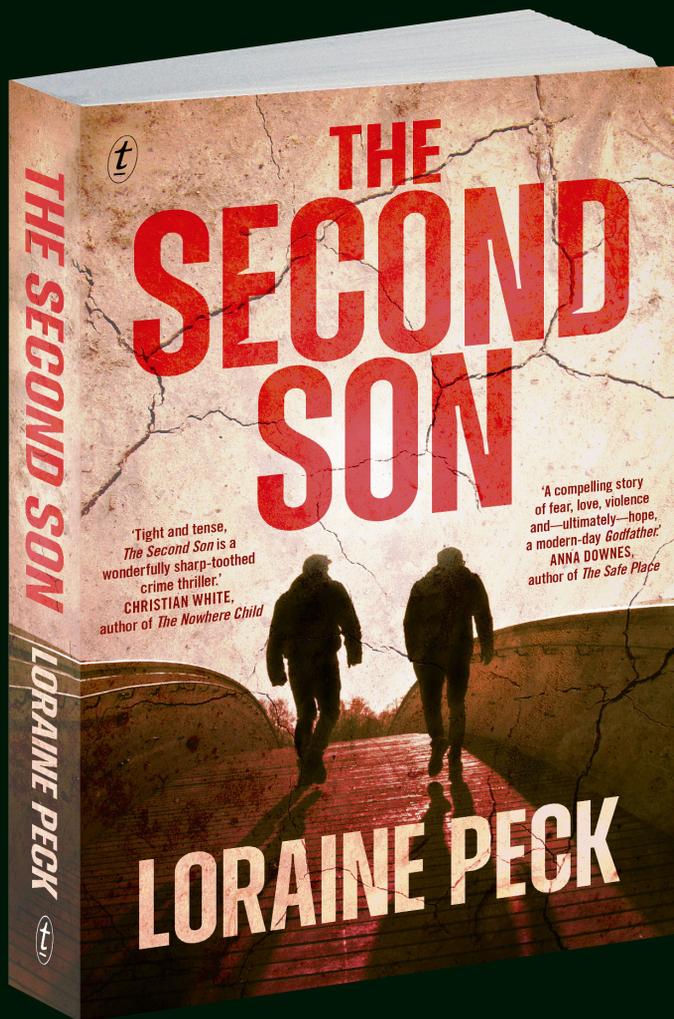
‘Are you okay, Mummy?’

Sasha is behind us. I can’t look at him.

‘Oh, God,’ Amy groans into my shoulder. I can feel her heart pounding as she hugs me tight. Then she lets go.

‘Come on, Sasha. Back to bed.’ She bends down and cuddles him, murmuring into his ear as she guides him out of the room. Their voices recede up the hall.

I’m shaking and somehow my face is wet. The cops haven’t moved. My knees give way and I slump back down into the armchair. Wiping my face with my hands, I take some deep breaths and, when I can trust my voice, I ask the only question that matters: ‘Who did it?’



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