

the cobbled street with a dull grunt. The woman called out a name. *Jean*. Her voice clattered around the small square. The other Moroccan went to the aid of his friend, yelling and gesticulating all the while. The man who had fallen brushed his friend aside and leapt to his feet. There might have been a metallic flash, but Oliver was never sure that he hadn't added that memory later. Maybe he even closed his eyes.

Oliver had never seen anyone stabbed, yet understood immediately what had happened. The Frenchman lowered himself to the ground as if it had become soft and he was sinking into it, one hand outstretched to protect himself, the other clutching at his side. The woman grasped at her husband. The Moroccan man who had stabbed the Frenchman leaned in and hissed something in Arabic. His friend restrained him. The woman covered with an arm bent across her face. The Moroccans vanished. Their running feet made no sound.

Oliver stood silently in his doorway with a hand across his mouth, as if to prevent himself from crying out. He breathed as shallowly as he could, to avoid making noise and attracting attention. The Frenchman was prone in the lap of the woman. His head lolled to one side and he was groaning. His legs roved on the cobbles, vainly searching for purchase. The woman was weeping. Oliver stayed where he was, apparently unable to move. He watched and listened. The sound of the woman crying was like the low sound an animal in distress might make. The woman looked around. Her hair was the colour of butter. Oliver was horrified to detect within himself something like satisfaction, as the woman struggled with the heavy, dying form of her husband. He flattened himself further into the doorway. He could feel the rough wood of the door against his palms. The door could be ancient. Probably hundreds of years old, he thought. The brass handle pressed into his lower back. Someone, he reasoned, would soon come to help her.

## goldilocks

fiona mackrell

Warren loved going for walks. He liked quiet streets. This one had big trees and big houses, and it was near the park. He liked looking at all the houses at night, when lights were on and people were home. He paused by a darkened weatherboard with pretty trimmings and big windows. He thought it would be nice inside. He rubbed the nail of his thumb with the opposite hand, his plastic carry bag rocking slightly. He did a little skip, a jump and a twirl. He laughed. There was a sparkly thing in the window and a fluffy white cat. He liked cats. He rubbed his hands through his hair. He wanted to touch the cat's hair. Later Warren came out of the house stroking the cat. It struggled as he carried it down the street. 'Pretty cat,' he murmured. It was warm and soft. Warren was going to take it home to keep. It struggled again but he held it tighter.

David Channing had stopped the car with a thud, jerking the handbrake

on hard. Susan took her sweet time gathering the recital programme from the back, so David stalked up the path without her. The little solar lights worked well on the pavers, he noted with a small sense of satisfaction. David's lack of interest in finer things and a litany of his other failings preyed on Susan's mind as she followed him, especially his rudeness to her friends. David thought Susan's friends were smug nouveaux riches wankers. He waited on the top step, as she came up behind. Susan gestured to the door, the light pouring out through the open crack. 'Well?' she said.

He turned with the key poised in his hand and put an arm out to stop her walking past. 'I didn't open it,' he muttered quietly. 'Stay here.'

'David...' she whined, suddenly frightened. 'What if they're still inside...' She grasped at the back of his jacket but he pushed her hand away and cautiously entered.

Ten minutes later the Channings rang the police.

Sergeant Laylor walked in the front door of the police station early the next morning, brushed past the constable on the desk waving messages, and marched through the bleating metal detectors. He walked on past the task force room, where the local detectives and sexual crimes blokes were getting cosy. He heard sniggers. He needed coffee not company; helped himself at the tearoom and walked on.

He tried to focus but his thoughts clanked together not making much sense. Stupid little burglaries. Three in three weeks. Kids making trouble? Breaking in but hardly taking anything. Having parties — drinks and plates scattered. That's what you get for being in the suburbs. Laylor stroked his tie and re-tucked his shirt in his pants. They were getting loose. The gym was working. Finally he reached his desk in the pit, plonked his mug, and dug down to fill out the Channing interview paperwork. At least he could claim he was too busy to be disturbed. It didn't work.

'Sergeant Laylor? Sir, take a look at this.'

Laylor looked up from behind his computer, annoyed. He didn't like the smirk on Constable Fletcher's face either. Fletcher: sandy haired, footy build, thick as a two-by-four. Laylor chewed his moustache hair, mounting his lower lip on his upper.

'They're callin' 'em the Goldilocks Crimes!' Fletcher read aloud, '*Televisions and videos go missing, but are then found only a few blocks away in other*

*people's homes. Mr and Mrs Channing are the latest victims of the Goldilocks Thief, returning to their house to find their television on, their microwave destroyed, their couch broken, and their beds unmade. The headline's "Who's been sleeping in my bed". Funny huh?'*

Laylor grunted. 'You can see by my face how amused I am. Now piss off.'

Fletcher wandered off to show someone else.

Where'd they get it all from anyway? There'd been nothing about beds. He thought hard. No, definitely couldn't remember anything about beds. He'd have remembered beds. Double beds. People sleeping in beds who weren't welcome. He'd remember that.

These break-ins had been ruining the statistics for months now: B and E's going up, damage going up. Soon head office would get narky, start to ask what was going on. He re-read the Channings' statements he'd taken late the night before. When they'd got home they'd found all the lights in the hall and the kitchen were on, but the lounge was dark. The television had been on and the VCR was still playing the movie *Flash Dance* — it wasn't theirs; popcorn all over the floor. Their alphabetised video collection was scattered. Mr Channing said some were missing. Mrs Channing said she hoped so. Something, probably more popcorn, had been overcooked in the microwave. Its insides burnt black. Smoke had stained the ceiling. The worst damage was to the leather couch. Whoever it was had had a good time on it. The thing had given way like a deflated jumping castle.

It'd been more or less the same story every time — messy movie nights more than break-ins. Once it had been *Footloose*. Another time some old Tom Cruise movie, *All the Right Moves*. What kind of whacked out kids would be into such crap '80s movies? The Channings had found some leg warmers, blue with some kind of Fair Isle pattern. Laylor's ex-wife, Julie, used to wear leg warmers. Sometimes that was all she'd wear; ancient history, clear as yesterday in his head.

Warren and the cat trudged homeward in the faint pre-dawn light under the cover of the park's autumnal elms. A screech of brakes and car horns sounded from the freeway on-ramp, just the other side of the park. Warren squeezed the cat in fright. The cat spun in his arms, lashing out and scratching him, then leapt to the ground and raced into the garden of the house across the street. Warren gripped his arm, frightened by the hurt.

Warren followed, staggering across the road, up the narrow path beside the house. He was confused. He wanted to cry.

It was nearly lunchtime, and Laylor had found no enlightenment. Constables Fletcher and Sabini had been called out to a report of a pedestrian wandering the freeway on-ramp so at last he had some peace. He finished up his report on the Channings. They'd been a joy to interview, each accusing the other of not shutting up the house properly, getting the knife in with little backchats. How very familiar. Laylor had sat through it all thinking about Julie, then thinking about his ex-best friend Peter. He wasn't listening to the Channings. He had to ask all the questions twice. The back door hadn't been tampered with but it appeared to have been the entry-point. They couldn't agree on who'd checked it last. Nothing had been taken. He'd got some good ones with the fingerprint kit. See if anything turned up when it got cross-referenced.

Laylor pulled out his street map again. Two of the burglaries in the past month had been within a few blocks; an area with a school, some shops, and a park. They could all be cover for whoever it was. He'd have to get it regularly patrolled. He pondered the cases again. *Flash Dance?* Leotards and metal work, and fast music — he'd quite enjoyed it at the time, even if it was a bit of chick flick. Julie loved it. She was a dancer, a dance therapist these days.

'Warren, where are you?' Matthew walked into the kitchen counting heads, hands plunged deep in his cardigan pockets against the cold morning. No sign of Warren. Dani leant toward him from her chair, blowing spittle into bubbles. Craig was ignoring everyone, staring out the dirty pane to the deserted, overgrown yard from his wheelchair. He'd been dressed in a T-shirt with broad green and white stripes, and acid-wash jeans. No wonder he was in a bad mood. Craig hated being dressed unfashionably. Won't get a word out of him, Matthew thought, as his eyes flicked over the breakfast carnage and the burnt orange '70s kitchen decor. He tried to put thoughts about the amount of cleaning needed aside for the time being. The 'overnighter' hadn't done much, yet again.

'Damn it, Warren,' he muttered. Dani pushed the bowl of porridge off the table and onto the floor. She looked up at him innocently.

'Dani, what did you do that for? You'll have to help me clean it up now.'

Loud laughter erupted from the lounge over the blaring television. The toaster popped. Dani had decided to sit on the floor beside the spilt milk and oats.

'Warren's gone out,' Dani said, then started singing to herself in her high whispy voice. She pushed her finger through the cereal, making circles. Her thick glasses had slid down her foreshortened nose; her tongue stuck out in concentration.

'Out where Dani?' said Matthew getting a sponge from the sink before he squatted down next to her. She didn't reply. He wiped up most of the mess, threw the sponge across the room into the sink with excellent accuracy then walked into the lounge.

The musty smell of the velvet-covered sofa permeated the room, an old person's house smell. Trevor was sitting in front of the TV with the volume turned up high — looked like Premier Soccer. Trev hadn't left the TV since they'd got cable. The council wouldn't fix the VCR anymore; it'd caused too many headaches anyway. Matthew switched the TV off.

'Come on Trev, mate, time for yer breakfast.' Without a word, Trevor stood up and walked to the kitchen with heavy steps, leaving Matthew alone to think in quiet at last. Warren was supposed to go to his assessment in an hour. His bus would be here soon. It wouldn't be much good if Warren wasn't. Matthew followed Trevor into the kitchen. 'Trev, you seen Warren, mate?'

Trevor spoke with his chin touching his chest, a soft mumble that took time to interpret. Matthew was worried now, and getting impatient.

'Gimme a break mate, what are ya sayin'?'

'Warren said Trevor had stolen his *Top Gun* video. He kept on about how he couldn't find Tom anywhere. Thank God,' Craig said in his belligerent growl, not looking away from the window. 'Everyone's sick of his Tom Cruise thing, well I know I am. There's nothing to watch videos on, anyway. They shouted at each other, then Warren left. Out on another of his wanders.'

'When was that?'

'Half six probably. She,' Craig said with emphasis, 'was washing me.'

'Yeah, don't worry mate, I'll do sumthin' bout that in a minnie.' But

Matthew was thinking he was going to have to round them up in the council van and go for a drive, a.s.a.p. It was half eight, two hours, Warren

could be anywhere by now. Hopefully he was at the park again.

'He'd only just come home,' Craig continued. 'He was gone most of the night. Not that anyone noticed. Matt? You there?'

But Matthew had already started planning a search party and was on the phone.

'He was crying,' Dani said to no-one in particular.

'Sergeant Laylor?'

'What?' This was his third interruption. Some dickhead constable he didn't know, still with headphones around his gawky neck.

'We've got another one.'

'Another what?' Laylor snapped.

'Well it sounds like it is. I mean I think it is. Thought you'd take it.'

This lady's just rung. She'd been out all night. Says she came home. Found the TV on. Place messed up. And a cat.'

'A cat?'

Dickhead constable shrugged.

'Bloody hell.' Laylor hated cats. He was allergic to bloody cats. He picked up his coat, shrugged it on and took the report off the constable.

'Get friggin' Higgins, may as well have company.' He read as he walked then stopped dead in the middle of the corridor. 'This some joke?'

'Sorry sir?'

'This address? Julie Deboro?'

The constable was looking at him blankly.

'Shit. Don't worry about Higgins. I'll go alone.' Sergeant Laylor

stalked off to visit his ex-wife.

Laylor stood on once-familiar steps, his back to the door, listening to the drone of the freeway and looking at the colours in the trees: golds, reds and yellows. He turned as the door opened.

'Of all the available police in the state, they send you?'

'Yep. Howzit goin', Jules?'

'Alright. Come in.' Julie stepped back to let him into the hall. 'You

look like hell. Up all night?'

'Hear you got a cat?' Laylor looked down the hall trying not to stare at the tension in her body. She held her shoulders back, her feet turned

out, erect and straight in her loose-fitting tracksuit.

'It's in here.' Julie pranced into the front room where a white fluffy Persian lay on a white fluffy rug on a white fluffy bed. Laylor hung back in the hall. Someone's been sleeping in my bed, he thought bitterly.

'There's a bell and a name tag — Tom — if you can believe it. No address but he might have a microchip.'

'Hmm. Want to show me what happened?'

'Show yourself. You'll work it out.' She turned to sit on the bed and play with the ears of a prissy cat named Tom.

David Channing, Head of Community Housing for the municipality, listened patiently to Matthew's raving about explanations why Warren was three hours late for his social services appointment. Matthew paced while Warren stared at David's filing cabinet, off on another planet.

'The police picked him up, completely hysterical. He's terrified of cars and you know where he was? The freeway overpass, cars everywhere. God knows how he even got there.' Matthew stuffed his hands in his cardie.

David clicked his neck then ran his hand through his hair, reflexively. 'Matt, Tracey's been on all week. She says Warren was there when she left and you were late.'

'That's simply not true.'

Warren moved to a chair in the corner holding his *Top Gun* video tight to his chest. He wore the mirror sunglasses Matthew had bought him. His neck strained upward, his Adam's apple bouncing as he struggled for words.

'It's alright, mate.' Matthew patted his shoulder. Warren slapped him back with light force. 'I've got to get him back, he's really tired, poor bloke.'

'Look, Matthew, you and I know he needs special care, but for the time being it's got to be this way. What's with the video?'

'*Top Gun*? Yeah, he loves it. I had to buy him that to get him to come here. He'd lost his old one. Kept on and on about how he had to find Tom.' Warren cradled the tape, stroking it fondly. Matthew grimaced. 'He likes all the big '80s movies, especially ones with Tom Cruise in 'em. They calm him down. Could we get him his own telly and VCR at least?'

David looked at Warren for a long time. Toms, too many Toms. He shook his head. 'I'll look into it. No promises.'

Warren rocked slightly, his salt and pepper hair brushed carefully into a side part.

'Your receptionist told me you got robbed, anything taken?' Matthew said, changing tack suddenly.

'No, just kids. The cat's missing though. Susan's beside herself but it'll turn up. Just got scared off. Does Warren always wear leotards?'

Sergeant Laylor walked down the familiar corridor knowing what he'd find. The lounge looked like a theatre after the feature, a video sat on top of the now turned off telly — Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman staring back at him — *Rainman*.

'So you don't know when it happened?' He called out over his shoulder. Was the TV on? He couldn't remember if she'd said. Julie re-emerged into the hall. 'No, I was at Peter's place. You remember him, the one who works nine to five, makes a lot of money, takes me out to dinner.'

'I don't need to know.' They stared at each other down the length of the hall.

He'd lost weight she noted; still burly, but not as stodgy.

She still looked beautiful to him. Sometimes the heaviness seemed impossible. He was old, an old, tired, sad fuck, sliding down the back-end of a less than glorious career alone. He pulled at the corner of his moustache. She chewed on her top lip, 'Fair enough.'

She squeezed past him into the open plan kitchen, flicked the kettle.

'That's weird.'

'What?'

'There're dishes in the sink. My God, they've helped themselves to breakfast. I didn't leave that out.' She pointed to the instant porridge box on the bench.

Laylor looked at the box, thinking about the fingerprint kit.

'I should feel scared, I know, but this feels like, I dunno, an uninvited houseguest, not a burglary.'

'Well, be careful getting home late on your own anyhow. Doubt they'll be back, but you never...' Laylor felt his stomach tighten, knowing she probably wouldn't be. They both let it lie.

'Coffee?'

'Thanks.'

'You know, there was this client at Cloverdale I taught last year, funny bloke, really sweet. He was totally obsessed with '80s movies, *Footloose*, *Pretty in Pink*, anything with Tom Cruise...' Julie laughed.

'What's that?' Laylor was looking for an evidence bag big enough for the cereal box.

'He even wanted to learn the routine from *Flash Dance*,' she smiled at him, in that way she had that could make everything smell good.

'You know at the end with all the tumbles. Not that he could do it, mind. But I gave him a pair of my leg warmers so he could really feel the part.'

Laylor stared at her.

'You still take sugar? And lots of milk, right, so it's not too hot.'

He nodded at Julie as he answered his phone. It was Mr Channing.

'I've been going through the videos, came home from work early,' he said. 'There's only one missing.'

'*Rainman*?'

Laylor asked. 'That's right.'

Warren patted his doona, and curled in a ball. Matthew said to have a rest before tea. Warren was tired. He giggled. This bed is just right, he thought.

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