

# LADY KILLER

How conman Bruce Burrell kidnapped and  
killed rich women for their money

CANDACE SUTTON & ELLEN CONNOLLY

  
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Allen & Unwin  
83 Alexander Street  
Crows Nest NSW 2065  
Australia  
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100  
Fax: (61 2) 9906 2218  
Email: [info@allenandunwin.com](mailto:info@allenandunwin.com)  
Web: [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com)

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*For the families of  
Kerry Patricia Whelan and Dorothy Ellen Davis.  
May their loved ones be returned to them.*

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# PROLOGUE

A gunmetal-grey Jaguar Sovereign pulls up on Addison Street, Goulburn at Rugby Park where a large crowd is gathered in the autumn sunshine. It is mid-morning on Saturday 23 March 1996, the temperature hovering around 18 degrees Celsius.

At first glance, the Jaguar's driver seems reasonably well-to-do. He is dressed in a variation of what the local graziers wear: elastic-sided boots, jeans, a double-pocketed shirt and V-necked jumper. He is a farmer perhaps, although not quite a member of the 'squattocracy', and the look on his plump face is smug. The Jag is covered with a patina of dust after the 22-kilometre trip north-west from his rural estate and has a respectable amount of earth stuck to the mudguards.

Bruce Allan Burrell walks into the chattering throng gathered to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the town's rugby union club, the Dirty Reds, and heads for the bar. More than eight hundred locals and visitors from Canberra, the Southern Highlands and Sydney will turn up on this day to honour one of its golden sons. Families sit on rugs scattered on the grassy banks and groups of men and young people stand around drinking. The mood is triumphant in the town, Australia's one-time wool industry capital and one of Australia's wealthiest inland cities. All across the region, after years of middling results, wool prices are set to rise.

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At 1.50 p.m., Goulburn will name a former chunk of Crown land along Addison Street after its most illustrious sporting product, rugby international Simon Poidevin. The Federal Minister for Transport and Member for Hume, John Sharp, will dedicate the field and then run onto it during a golden oldies game, one of five that afternoon to christen the hallowed turf. The doyen of rugby commentators, Gordon Bray, will referee the afternoon's showcase: a Simon Poidevin XV versus a President's XV tribute match. The ground is thick with local rugby talent, including Goulburn first graders and club greats from yesteryear ready to pit themselves in the president's side against a team headed by the former Wallaby breakaway. Spectators are promised a free-flowing Barbarians style of play, a hard and fast game in which kicking will be virtually taboo.

On this auspicious day, Bruce Burrell feels he justifiably belongs. He is himself a former Goulburn rugby player, a tall, barrel-chested and, by all accounts, fair-playing second rower in the juniors teams of the 1960s. He is now forty-three years old, with receding reddish-brown hair, and is running to fat around his middle, a result of inactivity and a lust for beer. Bruce Burrell loves drinking beer, stubbie after frosty stubbie of Victoria Bitter, mostly.

He has brought to Goulburn his wife, Dallas, and his greatest supporter, his father Allan. Bruce wants his father to believe he is a successful country gentleman who has the properties and lifestyle to prove it. He leads Dallas and Allan through the crowd to some old rugby acquaintances. Bruce wastes no time dropping into the conversation that his Jaguar is parked outside. He slips the boast in several times, then moves on to his career as a city advertising executive.

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Dallas nods as her husband spins a few stories about his prowess in the advertising field. She works in advertising too. Bruce explains to the group that he divides his time between a seaside apartment and his property, 160 kilometres south of Sydney, at Bungonia. When a new person joins the group, Bruce shifts the conversation back to his Jag and the houses.

A voice comes over the public address system. A group of men is gathering around a microphone on the field for the day's official ceremony. By the time Simon Poidevin is ready to accept his hometown honour and cut a ceremonial ribbon, Burrell's bonhomie is beginning to wear a little thin on his old 'mates', one of whom is Jeff Peterson, two years older than Bruce. 'Peto' is a schoolteacher, but he has some experience working in marketing. The two know each other from the Goulburn Rugby Club tournaments in which Jeff played in the under 16s and Burrell in the under 14s. Burrell regales him with stories of excitement and glamour in the Sydney advertising world, all featuring Bruce closing deals which make him rich. Peto has not had much to do with Bruce since the Burrell family left town in 1968, but he can tell he's big-noting. Burrell is full of bullshit of the highest order, Peto thinks.

Nevertheless, everyone celebrating the newly christened Simon Poidevin field seems to be having a sensational day. Despite the best efforts of Simon Poidevin, who at thirty-seven is a fit and dashing-looking redhead, his side loses the game, 22-19 in a bone-jarring contest that does not live up to the prediction of a try-scoring fest. Just before full-time, the man of the hour is sent off after a brawl which the referee claims 'Poido' started. From a distance, the fracas appears to be staged for the crowd and Bruce boos merrily along with the others.

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As the day wears on, Peto loses track of Bruce, who once upon a time played the game hard and fair on the field but has become, well, a bit of a wanker. Bruce was always a bullshitter, according to another of his old rugby friends, Spiro Pandelakis, but now it seems it's too late to remind him: 'Bruce, you're talking to us!'

The revellers troop over for dinner in the great hall of St Patrick's College, Poidevin's alma mater. At 7 p.m., five hundred guests are seated; among them are Bruce, Dallas and Allan Burrell at a table with Bruce's old school friend John MacCulloch and his wife, and Spiro and Judy Pandelakis. As the guests tuck into their plates of chicken, former Wallaby John Lambie warms them up with stories of rugby exploits in funny, foreign places, before he introduces Poido. The Goulburn crowd give their most prestigious export a rousing welcome. The night ends late, but happily, Jeff Peterson recalls. He will not hear from Bruce Burrell for another year.

Peto is not in a position to know the truth about his old football friend's new life. He does not know it is practically all an illusion. For a start, the Jaguar is stolen and its registration plates belong to another stolen vehicle. Bruce's marriage is a façade; his wife Dallas has decided to leave him because she can no longer handle his violent tirades. In two months' time she will have moved out and without her financial support, Burrell's cash flow will dry up. Contrary to the glittering business world Burrell purports to inhabit, in truth he has had no income of his own for three years. His bank account is practically empty, although he has cash secreted away, the remainder of the \$100 000 he stole from a 74-year-old Sydney widow he killed. The thought of easy money brings a smile to his face. Bruce takes what he wants, does as he

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pleases, without the slightest sense of guilt or regret. He has no conscience and takes pride in his achievements, no matter how nefarious.

Bruce was questioned the previous year about the disappearance of Dorothy Davis, a kind of family 'aunt' to Dallas who lived around the corner from their ocean-view apartment. His alibi was never properly checked. Bruce delighted in getting away with the murder and credits his smooth talk and cleverness; he and Dallas made a good impression when they turned up in the Jaguar at the police station. The police are less likely to suspect a rich man with an apparently stable relationship. The police are pretty stupid, in his view.

Already, Burrell is eyeing off his next victim, someone with an untapped pot of gold. His crime is still in the planning stages. For now, he just enjoys this reunion. The charming front Burrell presents on this fine day belies his terrible temper and a mendacious nature; he is a manipulator with a greed for both money and control. If Poido is Goulburn's proudest, Burrell may turn out to be its most reviled.

As the penultimate weekend of March 1996 draws to a close, the newspapers are preoccupied with the forthcoming trial of the serial killer who murdered seven young backpackers and buried their bodies in the Belanglo State Forest, just 60 kilometres north-east of Goulburn. Barrister Mark Tedeschi, QC, is at his Sydney home, rehearsing his opening address as Crown prosecutor in the trial against the accused, road worker Ivan Milat.

The backpacker murders fascinate and excite Bruce. He loves to discuss the case with friends; in particular, Ivan Milat's secret arsenal of guns and his skill in hiding his

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murder victims. Bruce brags that he, too, knows a good place for hiding a body—an 'Aladdin's cave' he calls it. Everyone laughs at the boast. They don't really know what makes Bruce tick. They have no idea what he is capable of doing.

As the months go by, Bruce's desperation for money will escalate and, besides, May is coming; Bruce Burrell likes to kill in May.

# 1 THE MEETING

**Tuesday 6 May 1997**

Kerry Whelan was dressing for a secret meeting. She ignored the row of designer clothes and went straight to her new Trent Nathan suit. The 39-year-old loved clothes; her wardrobe spanned half a room. She had bought the purple outfit a week earlier at a boutique near where she lived in the country village of Kurrajong, 80 kilometres north-west of Sydney. Kerry knew she was not unattractive, but as she approached her fortieth birthday, the mother of three was self-conscious about her weight. She told her husband, Bernard, she wanted to lose a few kilograms in time for their joint '100 years' party. Bernie would turn sixty a month before Kerry and the couple planned a large celebration with their family and friends.

Her husband of seventeen years came into the room as she was zipping up her pants. 'Got to run, darl,' Bernie said. 'I'll drop the kids off. See you around four o'clock.'

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Kerry told Bernie she had a 9.30 a.m. appointment at the beautician in Parramatta.

He pecked his wife on the cheek—easy affection—and was gone.

The Whelans lived on a 30-acre property at Kurrajong, Willow Park, on which was a modern, red-brick house, large without being ostentatious. It had five bedrooms and five bathrooms, a tennis court, a pool, horses out in the fenced paddocks and enough room to build a motorbike track for the three Whelan children, Sarah, Matthew and James. The children's nanny and horse trainer, Amanda Minton-Taylor, sometimes stayed at a small cottage at the back of the house.

Bernard, as Kerry preferred over the more familiar 'Bernie' that everyone else used, was an astute businessman in charge of the Australian and Asian arm of Crown Equipment, a multinational company which sold forklifts. He frequently travelled interstate and overseas, and two days earlier had returned from a business trip to Singapore. He and Kerry were scheduled to fly to Adelaide later that afternoon. Bernie had some business to attend to but once those meetings were out of the way, he and Kerry planned to explore the vineyards of South Australia's Barossa Valley. The couple wanted some time together, without the children.

Bernie left the house a little after 8 a.m., driving Sarah, fifteen, and James, who had just turned eleven, to their school, Arndell College, at nearby Oakville. Thirteen-year-old Matthew stayed at home, having woken with a rash and a temperature.

'Matt's sick,' Kerry yelled from the kitchen to Amanda, who was heading out the back to work in the stables.

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'Is he okay?' Amanda called back.

'Got a bit of a rash. Don't worry too much about the horses. Keep an eye on him, maybe watch a video or something,' Kerry said. She grabbed her keys and handbag and left.

Tuesday 6 May 1997 was a crisp day and there was frost on the ground. The temperature would rise to only 16 degrees Celsius; Kerry was dressed for autumn. She drove to the neighbouring village of Glossodia, to the home of Amanda's mother, Marjorie. The two women were close, their friendship forged through Sarah Whelan's love of horses. Marge was a highly regarded horsewoman. She had taught Sarah to ride when she was a child and the two families spent most weekends at horse events, with Sarah competing. Kerry couldn't ride, and instead she provided the food and wine with an enthusiasm and good cheer that were infectious.

'Excuse the mess,' Marge said as she opened the door to Kerry. 'I've been cleaning out the cupboards. God! You look a million dollars. Where're you off to?'

'I've got an appointment at nine thirty in Parramatta,' Kerry said. She didn't elaborate further.

'What time's the flight?' Marge enquired.

'Half past five. I'll have a wander round the shops, some lunch, then drive over to meet Bernard.'

Kerry was in a good mood. She was excited about a London trip she and Marge were planning. Generous Bernie had decided to treat the girls to a holiday, first class all the way.

'We'll go to the travel agent when I get back and book the flights. Bernard thinks he'll meet us now, towards the end. He's got a business trip,' Kerry said.

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The phone rang and Marge answered. When she hung up she was grinning. 'That was Helen Cassidy.' Marge was talking about the wife of Melbourne Cup-winning jockey Jim Cassidy. 'You've just sold your first horse.'

The horse was a mare called Peaches. Kerry had paid \$30 for her the previous year. It was a tiny outlay, but since then the horse may as well have been grazing on hundred-dollar bills for what she cost in maintenance and feed. Kerry decided to sell her. Peaches had just netted Kerry a \$2000 profit. Kerry was thrilled: 'We'll have to celebrate when I get back. Tell Helen I'll take her to lunch. Bernard will be happy.'

Kerry glanced at her wristwatch as well as the clock on the stove. 'How long will it take me to get over to Parramatta at this hour?' she asked.

'Peak-hour traffic. You shouldn't leave any later than eight forty-five.'

'God, Marge, I'll have to make a move then.' Marge had agreed to babysit the Whelan children while Kerry and Bernie were in Adelaide. 'Let me pay you for babysitting?'

'Kerry, we're friends. I love the kids. They're no trouble.'

'Thanks. I'll ring you tonight to see how the little horrors are. Please don't cook, just buy Chinese or pizza.' Kerry folded two fifty-dollar notes into Marge's hand and squeezed it.

'Don't leave yourself short, Kerry.'

'No, I've got five hundred on me.'

Kerry caught a glimpse of herself in the entry hall mirror. 'Do I look overdone in this?' She seemed anxious.

'Slightly,' Marge said, tucking Kerry's heavy antique fob chain inside the neck of her top, 'but you look fantastic.'

Whenever Kerry travelled she wore her most expensive jewellery. It was a deliberate safety precaution. On a previous

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trip to London she had lost a bag containing more than \$30 000 worth of valuables. Today she wore a custom-made diamond bracelet and hoop earrings. She never removed her gold engagement and wedding rings, for sentimental reasons. All up, she was wearing more than \$50 000 worth of jewellery and felt slightly conspicuous. 'I don't want other men's wives to think I'm overdoing it,' was her mantra.

She got behind the wheel of the silver Land Rover Discovery.

'Have a good day and enjoy the break with Bernard,' Marge said from the front gate.

Kerry waved at her friend and backed out into the street. At around 8.50 a.m. she phoned Bernie to tell him about Peaches.

'That's great news, love,' Bernie said.

Four minutes later, Kerry rang again. 'I'm just a bit worried about what I've packed for Adelaide. Do you think I'll be warm enough?'

'I put your coat in, don't worry,' Bernie said.

Before signing off, Kerry said, half laughing: 'Darl, what time's the flight again?' Kerry was routinely late for appointments, in particular flights, and it had become a running joke between them.

'You need to be outside my office at 3.45 p.m. Don't cut yourself short. We can't be late,' he said.

'I'll be there, darl, you know me,' Kerry put down the phone.

She made good time and at 9.35 a.m. turned the Land Rover off Phillip Street and down a ramp into the underground car park of the Parkroyal Hotel. The sign to Premier Parking read 'Full' but Kerry ignored it. She scraped an overhanging signpost with the roof of the car as she descended.

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Kerry yelled out to the car park attendant: 'I'm in a hurry, got a space for me?'

Mark Mascari, recognising her as a regular, obliged and lifted the boom gate. He directed Kerry to reverse in front of a Nissan Pulsar sedan which was parked in bay number 49. 'Just double park and I'll move it,' Mascari said. He scribbled '9.37 a.m.' on her docket and handed it to her.

Kerry pulled on her jacket and buttoned it as she rushed from the vehicle.

'Leave me the keys, madam,' Mascari said.

'They're in the ignition,' came her reply.

To Mascari, she seemed stressed and in a hurry, not unusual for one of his customers.

As Kerry walked up the ramp, a security camera recorded her movement—fifty steps—frame by frame. She was already seven minutes late but the man she was meeting did not care. He was waiting. As patient as a spider. He pulled his green Mitsubishi Pajero into the kerb outside the hotel as he caught sight of her.

As Kerry disappeared from the security camera's view, she rushed over to his vehicle, opened the door and climbed into the passenger seat.