

JENNIFER SHOT



THE
FIRST
SHOT

Patricia Kristensen

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By
Patricia Kristensen



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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my sister, Maree, for her enduring support even when I was a putz.

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Chapter One

My name is Jennifer Shot. I am twenty-five years old and until about two months ago, my life was relatively normal. This begs the question of why I found myself lying in a ditch in a small town graveyard at five o'clock one morning waiting for a psychopathic murderer to appear or why I was on his list of people to kill.

It all started with a shock announcement between the weather forecast and an advertisement of the release of Extra Juicy Fruit Jujy Chews onto the market. I remember contemplating the introduction of this new confectionary into my life, when a breaking news flash interrupted my thoughts to replace them with a disturbing and gruesome image. Police had just discovered the partly eaten remains of a man in his late forties in dense bush land twenty miles northeast of the historic town of Port Arthur.

This was not just a shock to me but to all of the population of Tasmania. Things like this just didn't happen in Tasmania . . . well at least not since convict days.

I was born and raised in Tasmania, Australia. Tasmania is often confused with Tanzania, but the two are totally different places. Tasmania is an island state of Australia, an island country and continent in the south. In fact, any farther south and you hit Antarctica. It sits southeast of mainland Australia across a treacherous body of water known as Bass Strait.

Tasmania was colonized by the British in the 1800s, and by colonized; I mean they used it as a dumping ground for their jail overflow. Convicts were brought to Tasmania in floating prisons, along with their guards and British administrators. The tyranny of distance, and the harsh conditions made it a prison sentence for all. This small Australian state developed a colorful history in its struggle to emerge. There were: black markets, whoring, bushrangers, rebellions, prison breaks, and jails that made Guantanamo Bay look like a holiday camp.

The notorious Port Arthur Prison was established on one of the most inhospitable coasts of the island. It was built to

house hardened criminals, all repeat offenders. A cold, bleak, isolated, windswept place, its natural barriers to escape included shark infested freezing waters, dense surrounding bush, and a narrow spit guarded by hungry dogs.

One of the prisoners who did escape, Mad Bill Thornton, ended up eating his companion, a much smaller and evidently tasty man, Jack Burton. Mad Bill was eventually caught and returned to Port Arthur. The next time he escaped, he chose a prisoner who was more substantial as his running mate, Fatty John Marsden. Mad Bill was caught again and this time hanged. Fatty Marsden had ended his life as bush tucker, which goes to show that escaping from prison with a cannibal was not a good life choice.

As the colony developed, land grants were awarded to induce free settlers to migrate to Tasmania and entice those who were residents to stay. Farming and agriculture grew with the infrastructure, and eventually, Tasmania's new inhabitants became more civilized.

Two major towns developed, Launceston and Hobart. Hobart is a port town that sits on the Derwent River in the south, and Launceston is a two-hour drive north and inland. Other towns are dotted throughout Tasmania, mainly along the east coast and to the north. A ferry now docks from mainland Australia in one of the northern towns called Devonport.

The weather in Tasmania is mild, and the land is fertile. The early farmers were successful in growing grains, wine grapes, fruit, sheep, and cattle. Apples, potatoes, and stone fruit were grown in the Huon Valley. These are still grown there today, but Tasmania is best known to the rest of the world for its rugged natural beauty. Most of its west coast is untouched wilderness and has been world heritage listed. It is a favorite of Greenies, bush walkers, and environmentalists. Its wildlife includes kangaroos, wallabies, koalas and the Tasmanian Devil, a small ferocious carnivore that is nocturnal and feeds mainly on carrion.

Since the days of Mad Bill, Tasmania had successfully remained free from cannibalism, although we still have the

occasional murder, pub brawl, and road rage incident. Because the population of Tasmania has always been small, it has been the brunt of jokes relating to inbreeding: a Tasmanian virgin is a girl who can run faster than her brother, Tasmanians are kissing cousins, and have two-headed offspring. This doesn't worry me; my brother has never been good at any sport. I can proudly boast of having only one head, and I have an intense dislike for all my cousins.

My mother and father died in the same year in Tasmania when I was thirteen.

My father was a detective working undercover in a gangland murder. However, he was caught under the covers playing hide the baton with Robert Big Bob Tagliani's twenty-two-year-old, model, girlfriend. Big Bob was called Big Bob because everything about him was big: his size, his house, his car and his minder, a man called Asshole. Asshole was a biker and was known only as Asshole, which is just as well, because given his first name I didn't want to know his middle and last names.

Asshole put a big hole in my father's head and sent him for a big dive off the Derwent Bridge. Asshole was convicted of the murder and served ten years in Hobart's Risdon Prison before being released on parole. Apparently, he found religion and a job in the prison bakery. Asshole became a pastry chef specializing in making small French cakes: petite fours. He now owns and runs a bakery in the Huon Valley called Jail Bake.

My mother followed my father off the Derwent Bridge three months later. It was not an act motivated by overwhelming grief at my father's death, but by my mother's need to always be right. While driving on the bridge, my mother saw people waving and yelling that the bridge was down. As she had crossed it earlier in the day, she saw no reason why it should not be there on the way back.

The combination of a big ship and a drunken captain had not fared well for the structure. The center of the bridge was torn out, leaving a gaping hole that claimed the lives

of sixty-three people. They drove their cars straight off the center of the bridge, plunging into the Derwent River and to their death. My mother was the last person to make the fall.

I was orphaned at the age of thirteen due to the bad luck and bad judgment of my parents, so this was not the first time that a gruesome death had touched my life.

My parent's deaths had also impacted directly on the lives of the rest of my family. I have a brother, Trent, a sister, Tracey, and an aunt, Aunt Elizabeth, my mother's sister. Trent and Tracey are ten and twelve years older than me, respectively. At the time of my parent's death, Trent had graduated in law and was working as a lawyer in Launceston. My sister, Tracey, was finishing her last year of medicine and was living in sin, according to my Aunt Elizabeth, with her boyfriend, a medical intern at the Royal Hobart Hospital.

Aunt Elizabeth, who was a war widow and had no children of her own, took me into her house and her heart. She had found solace in religion after her husband's death. My Uncle Ernie was run over by a tank during World War II. After his passing, Aunt Elizabeth became a devoted Catholic and avoided public transport and motorized vehicles. She was horrified that Tracey was engaging in unwed cohabitation and believed she would be a negative influence on my impressionable young mind.

Aunt Elizabeth had inherited a substantial property from her late husband's parents. It was originally part of an early land grant. A magnificent property on prime real estate in the exclusive historical suburb of Battery Point, it was national trust listed.

This is where I still live and instinctively returned after hearing that cannibalism had once again returned to our shores.

Battery Point received its name from a gun battery that was positioned on an elevated point of land overlooking the Derwent River. It was Hobart's secret weapon against enemy invasion by sea. Unfortunately, its firing range was only fifty meters. Unless the enemy vessel was trying to dock

immediately in front of the battery, deterrence was its only possible purpose.

After the war, the area was made into a park and tourist attraction. A wooden boat was constructed for the local children to play on. Ironically, this boat was in range.

Many historical buildings lined the streets of Battery Point. Dating from the 1830s, these buildings were constructed from the variety of local materials discovered by the early settlers and harvested by them to build their new town and export to mother England. Woods, like sassafras, black wood and Huon pine, were used to construct house frames, roofs, and staircases. Fireplaces, architraves, benches, and cabinets were handcrafted from these beautiful timbers. Much of the work was exquisite and displayed like works of art rather than functional features. Many of the convicts had been carpenters and tradesmen in their past lives, so this type of convict labor was in plentiful supply.

Aunt Elizabeth's house was one of the houses built at that time. The two-storey residence sits proudly on a hilltop, overlooking the Derwent River. A substantial residence, it displays the grandeur befitting a wealthy early land owner. Its walls are built from sandstone and convict bricks, identified by a thumbprint or an arrow imprinted in the brick. High ceilings, ornate cornices, expansive balconies, mezzanine floors, and hand-painted murals are just some of the remarkable features of this house.

My favorite feature is the turret accessed by a staircase at the top of the second storey. The turret is fitted with carved Huon pine benches, padded with green velvet. Its glass windows afford a three hundred-sixty degree vantage over the Derwent River, the Hobart docks, and the surrounding suburbs.

As a child, I was not impressed by the view, the quality of the building materials or the historical significance of my aunt's home. I was only interested in its function in my childhood fantasies. I used to play princess for hours in the turret. I even grew my hair for the fateful day that my prince would

ride up on his white horse and climb up to take me away so I could live happily-ever-after. Until I was older, I thought he didn't come because my hair was too short.

I was numb as I drove up the street, and my eyes were firmly fixed on the turret, which seemed a good place to escape thoughts of death and murder.

My aunt moved into assisted care shortly after I returned from my gap year and no longer lived at the house. She had begun to show signs of dementia two months prior to my return when she was picked up by police in the Battery Point Park looking for Uncle Ernie so she could give him a clean pair of underpants in case he was hit by a bus. Aunt Elizabeth had been found wandering the streets of Battery Point three times since then, abusing Range Rovers. This prompted the authorities to question her mental capacity and ability to live independently.

Aunt Elizabeth had nominated me as her sole heir and gave me power of attorney in the event of her mental incapacity, so I was now responsible for my aunt's care and the administration of her estate. Although I did agree with her point of view on Range Rovers, I thought putting her into assisted care was probably the best option.

Even though she had little experience with children, my Aunt Elizabeth was a kind and loving guardian. She was in her early seventies when I moved in with her and her two cats, Miffy and Candice. A creature of habit, my aunt went to church every Saturday morning at nine o'clock and had afternoon tea promptly at four o'clock. Apart from this, she usually spent her days in the garden. In the event of inclement weather, she would paint in her studio in the old servant's quarters. Aunt Elizabeth smelt like apples and dressed in soft pastel colors. Her grooming was immaculate. She always wore her pure white hair pulled up in a well-secured bun at the back of her head, and she wore the pearl necklace and matching earrings with an emerald clasp given to her by her late husband, Uncle Ernie.

To prepare me for my foray into the outside world, Aunt Elizabeth periodically gave me practical advice; she took

her duty as my guardian very seriously. She asked me every morning before I went to school if I was wearing clean underpants just in case I was hit by a bus. This puzzled me. I could think of a number of other good reasons why I should be wearing clean underpants, and if I was hit by a bus, surely I would have more pressing issues than whether my undergarments had recently been laundered. I thought perhaps my aunt was unnecessarily anxious because of Uncle Ernie's tank experience. Maybe she thought the outcome would have been different if he was wearing clean underpants—a truly big ask for anyone with a tank heading straight for them. I would always smile and assure her that my underpants were fresh on that morning.

* * *

Life before my parents' death had been relatively uncomplicated. I attended a state primary school, Stony Bay Primary. It was a small school in a tight-knit community where I met two people who were destined to play a big role in my life: my best friend, Mary Thompson, and a boy by the name of Jet Damon, two years my senior.

Jet liked me. I could tell this by the way he punched me in the arm every chance he got and chased me into the girls' toilet. Thanks to Jet, I became an exceptional athlete.

When I finished primary school, I went to Saint Marie's College, a Catholic girls' school, and Jet and Mary went to the local high school, Stony Bay High. Mary and I remained friends and kept in close contact, particularly after my parents' death. I even let her play princesses with me in Aunt Elizabeth's turret. I saw Jet at regional sports competitions, and as we grew older, I would often sneak a sly admiring glance.

I was shy with the opposite sex as a teenager. This was in part due to my Catholic upbringing and in part due to the attention my overdeveloped breasts received from the male of the species. I took to wearing baggy tops and focusing on sports and my studies. Two things that were to stay with me

for the rest of my life were my self-consciousness about my breasts and my ingrained sense of Catholic guilt.

In my final year of college, we had a graduation dance with our brother school, St. Martins. My partner was Dean Mason. Dean was the captain of his school's rugby team, the Tasmanian Tigers. He was tall with blond hair and green eyes and the object of admiration of all the male-deprived girls at my school.

Dean and I snuck outside during the dance and just when I was anticipating my first proper kiss, Jet Damon roared up on his motorbike. Dean was unceremoniously thrown into the Holy Virgin Mary's Rose Garden of Contemplation, and I was kissed by Jet in a way that evoked six months of disturbingly intense Catholic guilt and immediate public humiliation.

The Sisters of St. Marie's called the police and my Aunt Elizabeth. I wished the police had locked me up. I had to sit my final exams in the public library, and Aunt Elizabeth made me attend church with her twice weekly for a year, favoring services with sermons that focused on the sins of the flesh.

I wasn't annoyed with my aunt; she genuinely believed she was saving my soul. My feelings toward Jet on the other hand, were a mixture of raw undeveloped sexual attraction and anger at his undisguised arrogance.

My transition from secondary to tertiary education was a smooth one. I went to the University of Tasmania and studied arts, followed by an honors year in politics.

Mary joined the circus as a tightrope walker, travelling with Sliver's Circus, and shortly after our rose garden encounter, Jet joined a biker gang called the Hellcats and moved to mainland Australia in search of adventure.

After finishing my studies, reality hit me like a block of cold ice on a hot summer's day. An arts degree led to one of two paths: a career in the public service or a further year of study and a diploma of teaching—a choice between mind-numbing and soul-destroying. The thought of spending the

rest of my life in a small cubicle with a flickering fluorescent light where the sun should be or with fifty spoilt, noisy children, was enough to make me want to seek refugee status in another country; under the circumstances, I wasn't sure that I wouldn't qualify.

Aunt Elizabeth's plans for me were just as uninspiring and included becoming a nun or marriage to a suitable professional person with a good health plan.

My own aspirations, while unclear and not soaring to dizzy heights, were still preferable than any of these options—after all, I was the Turret Princess. At this point in my life, the pristine beauty of Tasmania and the small comfortable community I lived in became monotonous and claustrophobic. I craved crowds, pollution, new faces, and the unknown.

After checking I was wearing clean underwear, I boarded a plane and travelled to Europe with little thought for anything other than getting away from Tasmania. Aunt Elizabeth was sad to see me go but decided a gap year would be good for me as long as I went to church regularly and avoided the sins of the flesh. Of course I did neither. Instead, I travelled around Europe for a few years working as a waitress in various bars and cafes and exploring the different cultures, artwork, buildings, and history that spanned thousands of years.

In the Greek Islands, I finally met my prince, Antonio Italiano. He was a wealthy Italian businessman with the body of a Greek god. We spent six months travelling and making love on his fifty-foot yacht, *The Sea Princess*. The relationship unraveled when I accompanied him to Athens, and whilst staying in his luxurious apartment, made the mistake of answering the phone and doing the "Who are you?" exchange with another woman. She won the competition of righteous indignation with those gut wrenching words, "I'm his wife; who are you?" The pristine beauty of Tasmania and its comfortable small town atmosphere started to look very appealing, so I headed home with a double dose of Catholic guilt and a broken heart.

After Aunt Elizabeth went into assisted care, I was placed in a scary position of responsibility that led me to reconsider

my life path. My brother, Trent, was making a pretty good living as a lawyer and had so far received only three death threats and had one stalker. As I was already a proud recipient of an Arts Degree, it would only take me a further three years to complete a law degree, so following his lead, I enrolled in law.

In a happy coincidence, Mary had left the circus and also returned to Tasmania. Her marriage to a circus clown had come to an abrupt end when she found him with the lion tamer. He said Mary didn't take him seriously. "He's a clown!" said Mary. "How could I take him seriously?" I guess Mary had a problem with role differentiation.

Mary decided to join me at the Tasmanian School of Law, and we commenced our new life and our studies together. The only problem turned out to be money. Aunt Elizabeth had a War Pension, which covered the cost of her assisted care but little else. The Battery Point property was expensive to run and maintain so I decided to rent out the old servant quarters and two of the downstairs rooms in the main house. I kept the second storey and the turret as my exclusive domain—a princess has her limits.

I mechanically pulled into the curb just as one of my housemates, Cindy, walked up to the door carrying a brown grocery bag and what looked like the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Cindy is a six-foot, muscular police officer who is temporarily on personal leave. She rented the old servant quarters. Her husband had sold their house and absconded with the proceeds and her three babies. The babies were not children but her beloved Harley Davidson motorbikes, one of which she had rebuilt with her father shortly before his death.

Cindy was a very angry woman who had settled comfortably into a man-hating phase of her life. After discovering that her husband had gone with all her money and her bikes, Cindy had a meltdown at work. She took her baton, affectionately referred to by her as "the Big Bopper," and beat the hell out of six of the lockers in the women's change room.

There were no survivors. Her senior officer convinced her to take three months of personal leave on the promise of a promotion to detective when she returned. He kept the remnants of the lockers as a reminder to all the men who worked there of what a wronged, angry woman could be driven to. Apparently four officers ceased their extra-marital affairs and half the squad started going home early from Friday night after-work drinks.

Initially Cindy kept to herself. She walked a lot, taking big angry strides and worked out with big angry weights. Alanis Morissette wailed out of her lounge room window. I figured it was better for that much anger to come out, and it did in palpable waves. Eventually, after two months of working out, walking, and wailing, Cindy's anger stabilized to a controlled simmer. One Saturday afternoon, Cindy appeared at my door with beer, pizza, chips, and ice cream—all the major food groups. Despite our obvious differences, Cindy and I became good friends.

I met Cindy at the front door, and I knew by the grim set to her mouth that she had heard the news.

"Shit," said Cindy, "I take a couple of months off work, and people start eating each other."

"I'm sure it's nothing personal," I mumbled through my shock-induced daze. But Cindy took crime very personally.

"What idiot eats another person anyway?" said Cindy.

I opened the front door, and Cindy and I watched as our two other housemates, Rod and Nathan, ran down the hall. Nathan was chasing Rod, squirting tomato sauce on him from a red plastic sauce bottle and suggesting they go on a wilderness bush walk together.

Cindy shook her head in disbelief and posed the question, "Where did you find these two morons?"

I had advertised the two downstairs rooms at the University Housing Agency. The response was overwhelming. I settled on two mature age law students from Melbourne: Nathan and Rod. By "mature age students," I mean they were older than the other students. If emotional maturity was measured

in volts, their combined level wouldn't light up a table lamp. They had been kicked out of the University Halls of Residence after getting drunk and removing all the doors from the girls' dorms. The reason I rented them the rooms was that I was desperate as the property rates were overdue, and Nathan's father, a prominent Queens Counselor from Melbourne, agreed to pay the bond and six months' rent up front.

Nathan's parents had transported him to Tasmania to complete a law degree after he was involved in a rather unfortunate and embarrassing incident with the Terrorist Squad, which resulted in his lifetime ban from the Federal Public Service.

Nathan had landed a plum job in the Treasury with some help from his influential father. On his first day of work, Nathan overslept and arrived fifteen minutes late. In a panicked state, he hatched an ingenious plan. He went straight to the men's toilets, placed his suitcase in the last cubicle, found the tea room, and made himself a coffee. However, while sauntering to his office, acting as if he had been at work the entire time, the evacuation alarm sounded and the Bomb Squad rushed into the building. Someone had found Nathan's unattended briefcase in the rest room and had initiated a terrorist alert.

Nathan was detained for questioning for twenty-four hours, sacked, and released after intense negotiations with his father, on the undertaking he never work for the Public Service again.

Nathan's high profile father and socialite mother decided that Tasmania was sufficiently far enough away for their misfit son to fade into obscurity whilst they attempted to keep their reputations intact.

Rod had attended Stallwall Grammar School with Nathan. It was an elite private college in Melbourne. Wealth and nepotism usually guaranteed a place, but Rod had been awarded a sports scholarship. Their economically diverse backgrounds were not an obstacle to their friendship as they were united by two common driving forces: the regular consumption of

alcohol and the pursuit of as much sex as their testosterone-fueled bodies could manage, and they could manage a lot.

In complete contrast to their more adult physical pursuits, Rod and Nathan's minds were set in a permanently regressive mode.

Cindy stomped through the house to the old servant's quarters, and I went to the turret to contemplate gruesome murders.

I found my cat, Sam, lying on my bed when I descended the turret. Sam is cross between a Rag Doll, a Bombay Brown, and a moggie cat. He is big and cuddly with a soft cream-colored body, dark brown points, and a white tummy and paws. His most defining feature is his eyes, which are as large as saucers and bright pale green. Sam is a truly beautiful cat, gentle and loving but totally vacuous. He is the dumb blond of the cat world. I also have another cat, a stray that I found living behind the local butcher shop. He is a big fluffy tabby now known as Psycho by popular consent. His name was Mike until the day I babysat my sister Tracey's two children, Gemma and Thomas. I'm not exactly sure what happened, but Psycho emerged from the laundry room with a bad attitude and a deep hatred for the clothes dryer.

I couldn't see Psycho, but I gave Sam a hug and felt a little better.

When I went downstairs into our shared living area, I noticed that Nathan and Rod had shelved the condiments and were sitting with Cindy. All three were glued to the late morning news. The newsreader was relaying details of how a pair of hikers had stumbled across their grisly find.

"I wonder what people taste like?" said Nathan thoughtfully.

"I've heard they taste a bit like pork," answered Rod.

"So you'd probably serve them with a white wine," said Nathan.

"What? Are you two crazy? Someone didn't just serve the wrong wine at a dinner party, you idiots; they ate another human being," said Cindy.

"Maybe they were really hungry," said Nathan.

“Yeah,” agreed Rod. “Bush walking always makes me hungry.”

“You don’t just go and eat someone because you’re hungry,” said Cindy.

“What if they were really hungry?” said Rod. “What if they had been walking around in the bush for days and were starving to death? We just looked at some legal cases that said you could eat people in situations of necessity.”

“The newsreader just said the deceased’s sister had reported him missing the day before his body was found,” said Cindy.

“The killer may have had a very fast metabolism and couldn’t go for long without eating,” suggested Rod.

“I think most people could hold off eating their bush walking companion for a day, even if they have a fast metabolism,” I assured Rod.

Cindy left to take her dog, Chomper, for a walk, after shooting a look of general disgust in the direction of Rod and Nathan, and I headed off to the library to do some reading before tomorrow’s lectures. Hopefully, it didn’t contain any material about eating people out of necessity or for any other reason.

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