

A sunset scene with a bright sun low on the horizon, partially obscured by a mountain range. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow. In the foreground, there is a dark, calm body of water reflecting the light. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

# **Darker Side of the Sun**

**Nina S. Wornham**

# Darker Side of the Sun

by  
*Nina S. Wornham*



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# Dedication

*For my Australian family, Kev and Marie,  
I am here to share my story and make a  
difference to others today because you were  
there for me yesterday.*

*Thank you.  
With all my love.*



# Contents

Acknowledgments	7
1. Standing at the Edge of Fear	9
2. Two Years Earlier in England	18
3. The Move to Australia	31
4. Hidden Agenda Begins to Emerge	43
5. The Deliberate End of Her Career	54
6. The End of the New Start	65
7. Meeting with the Divorce Lawyer	76
8. A Night in Jail	89
9. Staying Sane Throughout the Nightmare	101
10. Darkest Hour Before the Dawn	111
11. The Shocking Truth About the Neighbor	122
12. Facing Some Harsh Truths	133
13. Taking Back Control of Her Life	144
14. Driven to the Point of No Return	154
15. Her Victorious Outcome	165
16. The Return to England	175



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Nina S. Wornham

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My grateful and sincere thanks to you all for your love, friendship, and help in writing this book.

# 1.

## Standing at the Edge of Fear

Stephanie eased her car toward the front gate and pressed down on her keypad, waiting patiently for the heavily clad, metal-gate entrance to her Australian, Florida-styled residence to glide open, allowing her to drive into the Fort Knox-styled garage.

She sat there waiting, looking at the ostentatious water-front home she had never fallen in love with and wondered why they had to live behind such a gated stronghold.

They were meant to be living in Paradise.

The gate didn't move. She pressed down harder on the keypad again. There was no response. As she started to feel a familiar, sickening heat rise to the surface from deep within her, a desperate thought entered her mind as she stared in disbelief at the locked gate.

*He had been back inside the house.*

Her stomach started to churn at what might be waiting in the dark house once she went inside. She never knew what to expect, where he'd be, or how he might surprise her. Or what like-minded individual he may have hired to help scare her into signing the papers that would leave her broke and destitute in a foreign country. She knew someone was helping him, but had no idea who or what was going to be gained by being involved.

Never in her wildest dreams could she have ever imagined the devious plans her Australian husband had made for her. He had asked her to leave England and go with him so that they could start a new life together on his home turf. Now here she was, fighting for her own survival in a foreign country with no identity and no family or friends to which she could turn for support.

As she sat in the driver's seat watching for any signs of life inside the house, her thoughts were rampaging through her head as she tried to assess the situation as it appeared. It looked as though he had paid her a visit while she had been out at work, disabling the electronics controlling the alarm system and gated entrance to the house they had once shared. The intention was to leave her scared and alone in a house with no locks or security. This meant he, or whoever was helping him, could return at any time. She had no way of knowing what lengths he would go to next in pressuring her to give in and sign away everything. He had already almost crippled her in a speedboat accident and tampered with her car, causing her brakes to fail.

She couldn't afford to misjudge the situation or take any risks.

Knowing there was no one to call, she sat there juggling with the idea of turning her car around and leaving. She knew this was exactly what he wanted. His plan was to force her out, scare her witless, stake his claim, and move back into the mansion-styled, glitzy, waterfront home with its private jetty and open water frontage on the shore of one of the Gold Coast's most beautiful locations.

He wanted her out and wanted everything they owned. He had no conscience about how he did this. He had already told her that he would resort to any measure to achieve his goal saying that she wasn't entitled to what he claimed was his "hard-earned" money, in spite of the fact that she gave up everything for him when she left England and was his wife for twelve years. He always denied her the chance to follow her own career so that he could travel and pursue his own selfish ambitions.

After standing by him all that time, he was now telling her

that she didn't deserve a reasonable share of their joint assets because she hadn't made any financial contributions in all the time that they were married. How she survived or started her life again without any family, support, or money, wasn't his concern.

Although injured, she survived both the boating incident and a near car accident after the brakes failed. She knew that the odds were stacked against her and that the longer she fought him, the angrier and more scheming he would become.

Outsmarting him and keeping out of his way were her only defenses.

Feeling nervous as she looked around, she slipped the car into first gear and edged slowly forward, positioning the bumper of the vehicle hard up against the electronic gate. She turned the engine off and slid from the driver's seat out into the blackest darkness. She cautiously stood still looking all around her first, before silently removing her shoes. Then hoisting her slight frame up onto the bonnet of her car, she hurled herself over the gate landing neatly without a sound on the other side onto the drive. She was grateful she didn't weigh much and that her size meant she could easily slip through the smallest gap.

Still looking around with only the faint glimmer of street lighting allowing her to see, she listened and watched silently from the shadows. She had never lived in a place where the nights were so menacingly black. It was as if the sun and moon were both eclipsed by an endless sea of blackness. No one in his right mind ever walked around blindly in the dark for fear of walking into a spider web. The thought made a shudder race down her spine as her hot skin tingled and the fine hairs on the back of her neck bristled.

There was no sound apart from the familiar whirring of the cicadas, which created a small sense of comforting relief and background noise. It was enough to cover her if she made a sound. The humid heat was stiflingly hot, making beads of moisture trickle down her tensed body. The exotic fragrance of jasmine and hibiscus intoxicated the heavy night air. The mosquitoes hung

around in droves, piercing her skin with their stinging, spiteful mouths as they drew blood making her skin itch and inflame. Intense, glistening eyes shone back at her as she looked toward the bushes. She heard the eerie rustling, flapping sounds of the fruit bats as they carried out their nightly descent, gorging on palm berries with their large, leathery, black wings stretched out between palm fronds almost touching her bare shoulders, while the sticky mess of liquid fruit pooled at her feet. A Lyrebird sent out a terrifyingly loud screech adding to the loaded atmosphere of the night, and then a gecko ran across her foot. She prayed to God that it was only a gecko as she tried to steady her breathing and stop any sudden noise from emerging from her throat.

Every sense in her body was on fire screaming at her from deep within, as adrenaline rushed through her veins spurring her to keep moving. Each step she took toward the house in her bare feet was agonizingly painful as she crept silently across sharp, jagged gravel, which grazed and tore at her skin.

It was then that she felt the slow release of fear through her body as she suddenly sensed that there was someone else standing in the shadows watching her. It wasn't her husband but another person. She didn't know where or who, but someone was waiting and listening. She could feel, smell and even hear the shallowness of his breathing. She stood very still.

Then suddenly she heard the click of a door being closed and locked from the inside along with the sounds of window blinds being drawn for the night followed by a male voice talking soothingly to his cat. She realized with a deep sigh of relief that it was her neighbor, Alan.

\*\*\*\*\*

He and his wife, Barbara, were English "ex-pats" and had moved to Australia only a few years earlier. They were older, retired, seemingly well-off, and were keen to introduce themselves over the fence one morning while Stephanie was cleaning the barbecue. They told her that they recently moved from Sydney into their new open plan, contemporary home a few months ago, and

immediately invited her to give them some styling tips from her many years of experience as a property designer and renovator.

Since that first introduction, both she and her husband, Mark, were often invited round to their new English neighbors' house for *al fresco* dinners and cozy wine evenings which they had all enjoyed under a canopied sky in the balmy heat of the long, hot, Australian summer nights.

Both Alan and her husband bonded instantly, soon becoming friends, having found much in common with their shared interest and passion in boats and deep sea fishing. The men regularly paired off to talk wandering off towards where the boats were moored along the jetty as they left Stephanie and Barbara to talk about what they missed back home and how the Australian food supermarkets compared to those in England. They agreed that they both missed Waitrose, the high quality UK food supermarket.

Their newly introduced neighbors befriended them quickly, calling round frequently, or inviting Stephanie and her husband for barbecues or a glass of wine in the evening as well as other social events. They would sit and talk for hours outside on the decked patio underneath the stars watching the sunset, and the fish jump, hoping to catch a glimpse of a shark fin as dusk fell. Sometimes they just sat looking across the water at the mountain beginning to glow a brilliant red as night closed in, and the summer bush fires, burned out of control lighting up the vast Queensland valleys, and starlit indigo sky.

Alan's dark tales of his past life as an ex-bailiff and ex-loan shark when he lived in London's East End were eye-opening, to say the least. He had often shocked people and raised a few eyebrows. No one seemed to take him seriously or believed he'd done half the things he laid claim to, especially after he'd been drinking. Most of his stories were viewed as just inventions dreamed up in his own mind after he drank too much wine, allowing him to be the center of attention. He enjoyed the idea of letting people think that he spent part of his earlier life being embroiled with London's infamous criminal underworld of gangs and mobs. He seemed

friendly and harmless enough, but always remained elusive about his reasons for leaving England.

Having never even visited Australia before moving here, it was clear that something happened which made him want to leave London in a hurry. He had suddenly spirited himself and his wife into their new lives suggesting that the reason was because they had had enough of the long, cold winters and the Labour government, which he said, sent the country to the dogs. He never divulged more than this, preferring to gloss over the details by simply stating that they decided to get away from it all and have a new start.

Stephanie had guessed that he had probably come from the rogue side of town but had worked hard on smoothing down the edges of his East London cockney accent so that the words were almost polished and much softer as he spoke. Aiming to impress, he often mimicked a more refined London accent while smiling and winking as he talked about the businesses in England, which he said he had owned from car dealerships to real estate. He also operated a money lending business, giving cash loans to desperate people who needed funds in a hurry. Some of his ramblings were about how he and his contacts would retrieve outstanding debts using rough tactics to force people to pay. As before, once he told the story, he would laugh and wink teasingly, suggesting that he was only joking with the line between truth and fiction always blurring as he spoke.

At some point in his life, he obviously made a large amount of money. This allowed him to retire early and migrate to Australia where he bought a beach-facing, water-front home, enjoying all the trappings that the Australian lifestyle had to offer.

Barbara, small, demure and plain-looking in appearance, always said little while Alan was talking. Stephanie observed that she was almost too quiet, even detached, as she sat, eyes looking downward, admiring her salon-manicured long nails, huge diamond and white gold eternity ring, and matching bracelet.

She would listen, smiling contentedly to herself, leaving Alan

to talk and drag up more vague details of his past dealings of how they made their money; and how he always got the clients, no matter how desperate, especially the women, to pay back their debts one way or another.

Nods and winks along with roars of laughter, always accompanied his stories of life in the East End so it was difficult to tell whether his accounts of various dealings were real or imagined. Stephanie frequently lost track and switched off to the effects of the wine talking. She had quietly assumed that because he was short in stature and not particularly well built, he probably hadn't been as dangerous or adventurous as he would like everyone to think. People who met him in the short time after they moved into the area saw him as a lovable rogue and perfectly harmless. He was well-known for over-telling his stories once he started on the wine.

She was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt especially since he was always so apologetic the next day hoping that he hadn't offended anyone. His reproachful manner and promises to behave the next time, usually chased away any lingering thoughts she had in the back of her mind.

They were good friends and neighbors. She felt comforted knowing that they were just next door, even though her husband's sudden leaving must have made them feel awkward. She had noticed the friendship had cooled slightly, after she saw that her husband's car had been parked on their drive several times recently.

She decided not to compromise them by involving them too much. If she was in serious trouble or needed anything, she knew she could always knock on their door.

At least several times a week, Alan called to check if she was okay. Always inviting himself in for coffee, he would ask if she needed anything before asking questions about what her lawyer was advising her to do next or what her plans for the future might be.

Barbara waved and smiled as she passed and put notes in her

Nina S. Wornham

mailbox inviting her for a glass of wine and a catch up.

They even left a bouquet of roses on her doorstep one afternoon.

Obviously they were trying to stay neutral and not take sides.

She felt comforted knowing that she had such good friends living next door.

\*\*\*\*\*

Standing in the shadows, she watched and listened without moving as Alan's house went into darkness. Breathing a sigh of relief, she focused her attention back on her own front door.

She was sure her husband wasn't inside the house.

Rarely did she see him these days.

He always stayed invisible, keeping his distance, sulkily hiding behind the viciousness of his lawyer.

She only found out afterward if she had fallen into one of his traps.

This was how she was beginning to see his true colors—a menacing coward, always around but out of sight behind the scenes employing others to send his messages and carry out his plans. While living in England, he was warm, charming, polite in his manner, and softly spoken, often using his electric, soft-blue eyes and broad smile to communicate his unspoken words. But underneath his mask, there was a lurking darkness emerging that she had never seen in him before.

Since arriving back in Australia, the change in him was instant.

Bending swiftly down toward what she thought must be the control box for manually operating the gate, she felt around for the tiny metal key that would give her access to the control panel. The night seemed to close in and become even darker as she held her breath while she pushed her hand blindly through the undergrowth of bushes and plants.

Not even daring to think that she might be bitten by any one of the venomous Queensland spiders which guarded their webs so ferociously at night, she quickly felt the key in her fingers and

tried to get it to turn in the rust covered lock so she could open the door and free the mechanism allowing the gate to slide back.

She hated spiders with a passion and had learned to identify most of them just in case of a bite, but by comparison, they were much less of a threat considering the nightmare situation she found herself now up against.

Hospitals always carried anti-venom.

She could survive a spider bite.

At that moment, she convinced herself that it was the lesser of two evils.

Guiding her hand through the dark mass of sticky, thick webs; brittle sun-burnt leaves; soft, sandy dirt; and ignoring the rush of insects running over her skin, she quickly flipped open the door and manually overrode the mechanism. Once the gate was fully open, she dove back into her car and drove it into the garage, stopping abruptly before racing back to close the gate and secure the control box locking system that she had opened on the drive.

He was locked outside, and she was safe on the inside for now.

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