



# SARAH BARRIE

ONCE A VIGILANTE,  
SHE'S NOW A COP ...  
WHO DOESN'T PLAY  
BY THE RULES

# RETRIBUTION

*Friday, March 4*

Lulled by the gentle movement of the train, Daisy rested her cheek against the cool vinyl seat and stared out the scarred window into the darkness beyond. The carriage was quiet. Three other passengers shared the upper level space with her: a tired-looking fatherly type in a crinkled grey business suit and a couple of teenage Alice Cooper lookalikes more interested in their mobile phones than each other. She fought the temptation to allow her eyes to close. It had been a difficult day, one of many she'd had during the last year, and a bad night's sleep had left her drained of energy. But she needed to take care of things for her mum, so she'd get through it. That's just how it was. She yawned widely and stretched. Falling asleep and missing her stop wasn't an option.

The sharp slap of something hitting the floor brought her back to wakefulness. The middle-aged tradie in the vestibule downstairs picked his phone up off the floor, checked it, then typed something before returning it to a large gym bag at his feet. He crossed and uncrossed his legs before returning his gaze to the lower part of the carriage. He'd been staring in that direction each time Daisy's eyes had brushed past him.

He swiped an arm across the sheen of perspiration on his brow. It wasn't cold enough in the carriage to be wearing that heavy drill jacket zipped right under his chin. Whatever. Daisy yawned again, went back to gazing into the night.

The train's PA system declared the next station was Hawkesbury River. The train stopped and the opening doors blasted cool air into the warm space. They closed. As the train lurched back into motion, a shuffling noise drew her attention back to the vestibule. The tradie had gotten to his feet. He picked up his bag and walked down to the lower level of the carriage, eyes intent.

Daisy's skin prickled. A second ticked by, two, three, then a muffled sound of distress had her sitting straighter. A glance around showed the other three passengers hadn't heard. Or didn't care.

'No!' The woman's voice was tight. More words followed. Rushed, high-pitched. The man's voice was deeper, quieter. She couldn't make out what he was saying, but then the woman's loud, 'I'm not!' was quickly muffled. By force?

She should check what's going on. She got up slowly, crept towards the stairs and put her foot on the first step, the second. Her foot had just landed silently on the bottom step when the train's PA system sprang back to life.

*'Next stop, Wondabyne.'*

She scrambled back up the steps. The businessman in the suit gave her a curious look and shifted in his seat, cleared his throat and resettled. A well-built twenty-something in a hoodie and jeans came through from the carriage in front and stood at the doors. His eyes flicked around and down to the carriage's lower level. Remained bland.

Okay then. Maybe there was nothing to worry about. Daisy relaxed in her seat as the train rocked slightly, following the wind of the creek. Lights from a scattering of boats and a couple of houses across the water were all that competed with those of the station as it came into view.

Wondabyne. The tiny station sat between Mullet Creek, a tributary of the Hawkesbury River, and the steep mountainside of Brisbane Water National Park. There was nothing more here than a few weird sculptures, a caretaker's cottage, a sandstone mine that rarely operated and a public wharf frequented by the handful of houses across the creek and the odd fisherman. It wasn't far from here to the busy town of Woy Woy, which was a few short stops away from the city of Gosford, yet Wondabyne gave off all the vibes of being in the middle of nowhere. Especially at night.

As the train crept into the station, her attention was drawn to a rowdy group of drunk, feral-looking campers on the platform who were picking up backpacks and sleeping bags in preparation for boarding. Daisy dragged her own backpack to her lap and checked it was still zipped tight.

*'Doors opening. Please stand clear.'*

The doors opened, flooding the carriage with noise from the campers. The guy that had moved into the carriage stepped off to greet them and help with their gear. The guard

stepped out and barked orders, attempting to hustle the campers and their gear safely on board.

Gross. The carriage filled with the putrid odour of stale bodies and alcohol. She looked around, caught sight of the tradie in the heavy jacket stepping off the train, the smaller figure of a woman clutched tightly in front of him. She surged to her feet for a better look, but the guy in the business suit had gotten out of his seat and chosen that moment to step past her, blocking her view. 'Sorry, just going to change carriages,' the businessman muttered.

She fully understood why. 'After you,' she said over the general chaos. She followed the suit down the steps, only to have the air knocked from her lungs as someone crashed into her from behind. 'Sorry,' a young man that smelled like a public toilet slurred.

'Excuse me,' she said in return, screwing up her nose as she side-stepped him.

'This is supposed to be the quiet carriage!' the suit complained to the guard.

'Sorry, sir, but it might be easier for you to move than for me to get this lot to shut up.'

The suit scowled then found a gap in the bodies still boarding and headed through the vestibule towards the doors between the carriages. Daisy stepped around two more men, hoping another gap in the fray would open up. She looked through the open doors but could no longer see anyone on the platform. The PA sounded again. *Shit*. Would everyone get out of her way!

Giving up, she shoved through the bodies and left the stale odour behind. As the doors closed and the train pulled away, she took a deep breath and told herself not to worry. Everything would no doubt turn out to be fine. Before long another difficult day would be over.

*Saturday, March 5*

'Lexi! Wait!' I hear as I charge into the gaping darkness of Woy Woy railway tunnel.

Nope. I am absolutely not waiting. I can run this little shit down. I know I can. The beam of my torch bounces erratically off the arched brick walls as I leap over one of two sets of steel tracks and smash through loose gravel, doing my best to keep said little shit in sight. My lungs are burning, both from the exertion of the sprint and the musty, stale air.

I should call out again, but I don't think I can talk and still breathe. My target isn't listening anyway. He's completely pumped on whatever he's taken and is kind of dance-running along the northbound rail line, his spray cans rattling as he haphazardly hits the wall with streaks of the same red and gold paint with which he'd decorated a nearby warehouse wall. I've seen the tag—a large gold crystal spearing from a stylised red G—in a few local spots. It's quite well done, but vandalism is vandalism.

I thought I could run this little shit down. Now I'm not so sure. I desperately need to stop and as he's showing no signs of slowing, I'm briefly tempted to leave him to it. He'll have to come back eventually. I'm not sure many trains run through here in the early hours of the morning. A pissed-off corner of my brain is telling me his untimely death via a speeding passenger train wouldn't be any great loss to society, but I'm not allowed to think like that. Now that I'm Constable Lexi Winter, a paid member of the New South Wales Police Force, albeit a probationary one, I'm supposed to value all life and risk my own to save the little shits of the world so they can live on and, in the case of the two we're after tonight, keep being little shits.

At least this one, along with the one my partner just caught, might spend some time behind bars. Last week they used some pretty impressive parkour skills to evade capture after beating a cop unconscious for trying to search them. I can safely say they either don't value or are incapable of higher learning.

Because here we are.

The short, sharp warning sound of a train entering the tunnel echoes along the walls. Shit! I stumble to a stop, resting my hands on my knees to drag in air as I contemplate my next move. A small, blinding light bursts into view at the end of the stupidly long tunnel, becomes larger as the train approaches and the engine noise intensifies to a

roar. That light illuminates the silhouette of the tagger now hot-stepping it back in my direction. The blast of the train horn sounds again and the squealing of brakes suggests the driver is doing his or her best to slow down, but it's not a quick process and the stupid little shit is still running down the middle of its same track.

'Fuck me.' I ignore my terror and force my jelly-legs back into action. I reach the little shit in a few more strides and yank at his arm, sending him stumbling out of the train's path and onto the southbound line. Despite the brakes, the passenger train hurtles past us with another ear-splitting blare of the horn. There's several seconds of wind that could kick your feet out from under you and those images I can now confirm flash before your eyes when you think you're about to die. Then it's gone.

My ears are ringing and my legs are unsteady as my heart struggles to return to its normal rhythm. Little shit has scrambled against the tunnel wall, staring at the disappearing train like a kid at a Christmas tree.

'Did you see that?' he asks in awe.

'How the fuck could you possibly think I missed it?' I snap. I draw in a few more much-needed deep breaths while I put myself back in the right headspace to resume being a police officer. We need to move before the next train tries to kill us.

'Get on your stomach!' I say, pushing him backwards onto the ground and rolling him over. I drop my knee into the small of his back and I'm met with little resistance as I pull one hand around his back, then the other, cuffing them together. I pat him down, checking for weapons, and pull a four-inch flick knife from his left pocket. I scramble off him and grab his arm. 'Get up. You're under arrest.'

'For what?' he whines, sounding about ten years old.

'You have the right to—'

'I haven't done anything wrong!' He attempts to turn his head to look at me, almost falling over his own feet in the process.

I continue my spiel as he continues his protests, and though his professions of innocence had started out whiny, it's not long before I hear aggression leaking in.

'Let's just get you safely out of here, okay?' I tell him in a tone reminiscent of a kindergarten teacher. I know how drugs can affect users, have seen many times how quickly addicts can go from chilled out to manic, especially if it's courtesy of methamphetamine. As I'm pretty sure that's what this one's on, I really need to keep him calm and moving back to Rico. I learnt a few self-defence moves at the academy, and I'm sure as hell a lot fitter than I used to be due to the program's medieval torture routines, but I've also seen how unbelievably strong and violent a teen on meth can be and I don't want to have to face that.

'Trains are dangerous.'

'Trains are dangerous,' he repeats and begins charging ahead so I have to jog-walk to keep a hand on him. Relief floods through me as we reach the exit and I hear Rico calling out.

'Here!' I shout and wave the torch around. Once out of the tunnel, I have no problem spotting him jogging towards us, but neither does little shit and it trips a switch in his drug-fogged brain. He knocks into me hard in an attempt to get free.

I lunge at him and we go down in a tangled, squirming mess on the track. There's a clang. I think it might be him banging his head on the rail, then I'm thrown off. He stumbles, finding it difficult to get his feet underneath himself with his hands cuffed. I grab his ankle and he goes down again, but somehow backwards, on top of me, pressing me painfully into the gravel.

Rico gets hold of him and his weight suddenly lifts. Little shit is yelling, swearing and spitting, then coughing as he's face-planted into the ground. Rico has him pinned, but it's taking some effort to keep him down. He looks back at me and I don't need the illumination of the full light of day to know he's pissed off.

'Seriously?'

I sit for a moment to recover then get up slowly and dust myself off. 'Have you got the other one in the car?'

'Yeah. Lexi, you were in that tunnel when that train came through!'

'No kidding.'

'And you took this one on alone after I told you to wait!'

'To be fair, I knew you were on your way.'

'Are you okay?'

'No. I'm not.' I'm not injured, but I'm covered in debris from our tussle. I brush at it uselessly. The uniform's not all that comfortable at the best of times, but now it's stupidly itchy. I untuck my shirt and shake it in an attempt to dislodge some of the grit and whatever was crawling on me. I can't see anything much in the dark. 'I have dirt in places dirt should not go.'

Rico's scowl almost becomes a satisfied smirk. 'Serves you right.' I can't help but smile back. For a field training officer, Christian Rico is as good as it gets. He's likeable, considerate and has a sense of humour.

At a year over forty, he's also built like a kind of modern-day Adonis. All six-feet-one of him is tanned muscle and dark good looks, which makes him easy on the eye from my perspective and terrifying to anyone considering taking him on. It's a win-win, given that during the last couple of months he's come between me and danger countless times.

'Get the fuck off me!' little shit screams as he thrashes around, but Rico keeps him down.

'Can I taser him?' I ask, only half joking as I find a piece of gravel in my bra and toss it.

'Let's see how we go,' Rico says, then to his captive, he says, 'Are you going to cooperate?'

'Yes! Fuck!'

'Okay.' Rico carefully gets him up. 'But one wrong move and she hits you with fifty thousand volts. Got it?'

'Where's Jason!' the little shit demands, and I do a mental fist pump. The kid has confirmed these are the two I was hoping they were: Jason and Aden Hamill of the very nasty Hamill crime family. Excellent.

'Back to the car, let's go,' Rico orders. I walk slightly behind them in case I really do need that taser, then move ahead as we reach the car to open the door for Rico to secure Aden next to his brother, Jason.

'This is bullshit!' Jason complains. 'We've done nothing wrong!' 'You seriously assaulted a police officer,' I say, dragging a twig from my hair before raking my fingers through the tangled black mess and twisting it back into a semblance of the obligatory bun.

'Prove it!' he demands as I slide into the front passenger seat.

'We have a witness, don't worry,' I tell him.

'You think that matters, bitch?' Jason spits. 'We're Hamills! You don't mess with us and get away with it!'

Ha. He didn't know the half of it.

'Settle down,' Rico orders.

'Not fucking likely! You better let us go or we'll send someone round to your place to mess you up, how's that sound?'

'Like another easy arrest,' I say, giving my shirt one last flap before doing up my seatbelt.

'Still uncomfortable?' Rico asks with a chuckle. 'I thought you were going to strip off out there.'

'Only those with breasts would understand. I'm going to need a shower when we get back.'

'You know, it could have been a lot worse.'

'Yeah, I could have shot the little shit.'

'Pig-bitch!' spits Jason.

Rico turns in his seat. 'I told you to settle down! You're not doing yourself any favours.'

'How about you give me a chance to bash your head in? That'd be doing me a favour. I will, you know. First chance I get!'

'It's never too late to use the taser,' I murmur.

'The boss is going to go ape shit as it is,' Rico says. 'I get in trouble too, you know. We're supposed to be out on a routine patrol in our own district.'

'These two bashed one of his best cops a week ago! Do you think he'll care what we're supposed to be doing?' I think about that and reply before he does. 'Maybe let's not mention the tunnel.'

'You'd rather he hear it from one of them?' He indicates the teens in the back. 'You've got fifteen minutes to come up with an accept-able spin on this, Winter. Start thinking.'