



SEASON 1: EPISODE 1

- Suzanne: Welcome to our podcast, BAD: All About Crime, brought to you by BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival and the city of Sydney. I'm Suzanne Leal.
- Andy: And I'm Andy Muir. Each month we'll be exploring the big questions in crime and crime writing. Subscribe to our podcast then jump onto the BAD: All About Crime Bookclub page on Facebook to be part of the conversation. And thanks for listening.
- Suzanne: We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our festival takes place and pay our respects to aboriginal elders past and present.
- Welcome to BAD: All About Crime. I'm Suzanne Leal. Before I turned to writing, I was a criminal lawyer so perhaps it's no coincidence that my novels are about criminal law and criminal behavior. *The Deceptions* is a story of wartime crimes and betrayals while *The Teacher's Secret* is the story of a school rocked by accusations made against a much-loved teacher.
- Andy: And I'm Andy Muir, screenwriter, novelist and inventor of the paperclip. Crime got under my skin writing and researching for the Underbelly series. I adapted *Underbelly Squizzy* into the novel and then wrote two crime novels featuring Newcastle house painter Lachie Munro, *Something for Nothing* and the follow up, *Hiding to Nothing*.
- Andy: This is our very first episode and we're very excited to have you with us. Crime fiction, as you've probably worked out, once you're hooked it's hard to beat the addiction. Today we're going to be talking about the book that first got us hooked and the one that's most recently kept us addicted. Let's meet our guests.
- Suzanne: Dr. Sue Turnbull is Senior Professor of Communication and Media at the University of Wollongong. She reviews crime fiction for the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age and has been a crime fiction judge for the Ned Kelly Awards, the David Awards and is an ambassador for Sisters in Crime Australia. She's the author of the TV crime drama Media Audiences. Our second guest is Catherine du Peloux Menagé. Over to you, Andy.
- Andy: After a career in educational publishing, Catherine's now a teacher and facilitator at writers' festivals and literary events. She co-founded the St Albans Writers' Festival in 2015, was its artistic director until 2018. She's now the artistic director of BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival and the Rose Scott Women Writers' Festival. We're going to kick it off with you, Catherine. As the artistic director of BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival, what do you most like about crime writing?
- Catherine: I love crime writing. I'd say crime writing is social realism. I love what it tells you about people, I love the fact that it tells you about different lives and it does so within a plot that's, at best, quite tight. You don't get a lot of redundancy, or you hope not to get too much redundancy and ...It is addictive in that it's so plot driven. I think that's one of the things I love.
- Suzanne: Sue, let's get a bit more specific now. What's the book that first got you addicted?

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- Sue: Well... I'm not quite sure, in retrospect, which it was, but I remember... Like many people of my generation, like many women of my generation, we were reading Enid Blyton and in particular for me it was the Famous Five. When I was thinking about, "Which book was it that actually got you started?" It's more like it was the Famous Five altogether, but in my memory there was that title *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* and I thought that particular book had a significant impact for me. I've actually been and gone back and reread it, and I'm happy to say and happy to confirm that it actually... The reading of that was so pleasurable, was so enjoyable despite all the things that have been said about Enid Blyton that I can actually say, "Yes, this was one of those books that got me hooked as a very young person in the 1950s reading what I think are thrillers and crime fiction."
- Suzanne: The funny thing is that Enid Blyton has actually really stood the test of time and she remains published today, although with some slight changes of both names and sometimes themes. She's a little bit on the nose in some ways. What ways, for those who don't really know Enid Blyton?
- Sue: Well, in *Five Goes to Smuggler's Top* there is a character called Pierre Lenoir. He's at school with Dick and Julian. They go to, obviously, to a boarding school. We never meet their parents, really. And Pierre Lenoir is called Sooty Lenoir because he has black hair, black eyes, black eyebrows and at one point further on in the book it is revealed that he has brown skin. Now, poor Enid Blyton has been over the years vilified for her racism and for all kinds of offenses against what we now think of as a certain type of political correctness. As I was reading *Smuggler's Top*, I was thinking, "Is Sooty being portrayed in a particularly racist way?" And the answer is no. What's odd about it is he has a white mother and a white stepfather and absolutely no reference whatsoever is made to his cultural origins, so it's a complete puzzle. But he's an absolutely engaging and delightful and cheeky and wonderful child who is a great friend of the Famous Five. So there's obviously some kind of undercurrent there.
- Sue: I suppose the other thing that when I was reading *Smuggler's Top* with the benefit of many years in between was the relationship between the older female characters and their husbands because Aunt Fanny, who is married to Uncle Quentin, is very subservient and keeps him very, very calm. She is the peacemaker whereas Uncle Quentin is the fiery tempered one and you get the feeling that is there some sort of domestic abuse going on. And sure enough, in the other family that we meet, Sooty Lenoir's family, there is a timid wife and an assertive scientific husband. The gender politics are actually fascinating before you get to, of course, the character of George who was every little girl in the 1950s who aspired to be a tomboy. She was our role model. Whether or not she would now be diagnosed as having gender dysmorphia or not, George was our hero.
- Catherine: Absolutely. The class stuff is also interesting, though, in all the Famous Five and the Secret Seven books. Because I came from a very different... I wasn't living in the UK, so this particular kind of class background was mysterious to me and very... I found it fascinating.
- Sue: It was mysterious to me, too, because I came from the north of England which, of course, is a very industrial working class area. All my family would probably be sort of lower middle class. The idea of going to a boarding school... I mean, this was something you did in another world altogether and these children who went on holiday together



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and had boats and went sailing... This was phenomenal, it was like another world so I was very well aware that these were people completely unlike us.

Catherine: Different. And also many, not all, of the baddies are working class, "lower class". Or many of them, not absolutely all, but there are strange gypsy-like men skulking around.

Sue: Oh, there's a wonderful kind of manservant in *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* called Block, who is apparently deaf and he's huge. He reminds me of Lurch in the Addams Family.

Catherine: Yeah, absolutely.

Sue: But the actual baddy, and I'm going to give a spoiler alert, sorry to all of you there, the actual baddy is a smuggler who has run the smuggling business for years and years, so he's kind of like almost like a James bond character living on this island. And I should say about this setting, it's extraordinary. It's the St Michael's Mount in Cornwall which is like the Mont-Saint-Michel. The setting is this island in the middle of the marshes with these medieval buildings on the top and a tower. The smuggler operates off this place which is absolutely undermined by catacombs which, of course, the children get to via secret passages.

Catherine: There's lots of secret passages and Kirrin Island, the island to which they go... Anyway, we could obviously talk about this for days.

Sue: There lots of secrets passages. I do have to say, in *Smuggler's Top* there are no lashings of ginger beer. That just doesn't happen. But there are lots of secret passages which are entered via various ways. As a child, every time we visited an old house I'd be the one that'd be tapping the wainscot in the hope that I might suddenly disappear into a secret passage and a different life.

Suzanne: Sue, you've read many, many crime books. Why has this one stood out for you in particular?

Sue: I think it was the setting. I think it was the unusualness of the setting and I think it was this extraordinary place. I mean, I'm always interested in setting in crime fiction and this one was so outside my usual encounter. And I have to say something about the illustrations because I do remember, as a child, pouring over the illustrations, and were all done by a woman called Eileen Soper who was apparently an extraordinary etcher and illustrated hundreds of children's books over the years. The way in which these black and white illustrations, these beautiful pen and ink drawings, evoke an era, a time and the adventure and Timmy's wagging tail. I think it's the visualization of it that also completely grasped me. But I do have to point to the fact that I also think Enid Blyton is possibly to blame for the ubiquity of exclamation marks. There's an exclamation mark possibly after every spoken word, "And 'Woof' said Timmy... The last chapter ends with an exclamation mark. It's glorious, you can almost hear it. It's almost enunciative. 'Woof' said Timmy, "And so they went home, exclamation mark."

Suzanne: And of course Timmy is number five of the Famous Five, and Timmy is not in fact a human. Who's Timmy?



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- Sue: Timmy is George's dog, the puppy that she adopted and who accompanies them on all their adventures, and seems to me to be the ideal dog. In Smuggler's Top, he has to hide because the father doesn't like dogs, won't allow him the house so they'd got him secreted in the tunnels. He comes to their rescue at some point, he attacks the bad guys at some point. He is just a wonderful dog, as Enid Blyton keeps telling us the whole way through. He is an admirable animal.
- Suzanne: He's as clever as Skippy the Kangaroo, is he not?
- Sue: Oh, yes. He comes on call, he can open doors, he seems... Yes, he is a real character and there's a real love of the animal.
- Catherine: He has an intuitive sense of who is not a good person, because he growls and they all go, "Timmy, stop growling." And then they realize that there was a reason for that growl.
- Sue: Absolutely. He really doesn't like Block the manservant, so we know from the start Block is not a good person.
- Andy: Well, that's probably a good point to sort of ask you Catherine. As the artistic director of BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival, what do you most like about crime writing?
- Catherine: I'm not a true crime reader, really. I mean, I do read a bit of true crime and it's very interesting, but I like kind of losing myself in plot, I have to say.
- Andy: It's probably one thing that Enid Blyton was quite good at as well.
- Catherine: Oh, Enid Blyton was good but my first crime love, I suppose, when I was trying to remember was... I mentioned that I didn't grow in either Australia or the UK. I grew up in a small island called Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. French was my first language, so the first books I was given were by a writer called Caroline Quine, spelt Q-U-I-N-E. They were the Alice series. *Alice et le Fantôme*, which in England is *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell*. *Alice et le Diamant*, we know what diamonds are, et cetera. They were culturally totally bizarre. The protagonists were Alice Roy and James Roy, her father, Beth, Marion and Ned, her best friends and boyfriend. Which is kind of odd because those are really English names and what are they doing in a French book? But I just kind of read them, I must have been six or seven, just carried on reading. And it took me decades to realize these are actually the Nancy Drew books.
- Catherine: Not only did they change the name of the character, Nancy Drew becomes Alice Roy, they changed the spelling of the name of the writer from Carolyn Keene to Caroline Quine and it was really weird. In fact, when I looked into it a bit more I discovered that they weren't in fact written by Caroline Quine at all either, in either spelling. They were written by a syndicate... Sorry, they were rather a syndicate hired writers to write this series of books and the first writer was called Mildred Wirt Benson, which is great. So it's kind of a whole mystery story in itself and I just thought, "What is this one?" A bit like I did with Enid Blyton because living in Mauritius in the 1960s, nothing that you could read reflects your reality because nobody wrote about it.
- Catherine: I became addicted, I think, then to series. I couldn't say it was one book, but I just read all the Alice books I could get my hands on and all the Enid Blyton books I could get my



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hands on. In fact, when I went to live in England aged 12 I had just discovered the Famous Five and I will never forget our English teacher, Miss Clay, saying, "Catherine," she's given us an essay to write. "I think it's about time you got over those mystery stories." I thought, "This is cruel, I've only just discovered them!"

Sue: Teachers were really critical of your reading matter and that prejudice against reading popular fiction, the Enid Blytons, continued all the way up until I got to university and I was reading English literature. I had become a cultural snob myself, I frowned at my mother's thriller reading and I was the one who would be seen conspicuously reading Dostoevsky on a bus. I completely turned away from the books that had inculcated my love of reading. It was only really in my 40s that I, working as an academic and having a small child and being very, very tired most of time but unable to give up reading in bed, that I started picking up crime novels again and rediscovered my love of reading.

Sue: Because it was the power of the narrative to carry you through a book, that you completely absorbed in for the duration of that book. So that cultural snobbery that was inculcated and, of course, it's still around today because where's the crime writer that wins the Booker Award? Peter Temple was the only Australian writer to kind of cross over from being a crime writer, a much awarded crime writer, to win, I think it was, the Miles Franklin award. That prejudice, that perception that the popular, the crime, the thriller are somehow separate from the literary... Which I think is actually a publisher's device to kind of categorize their books in bookshops and libraries so people will actually read them, but that prejudice against crime fiction, it still runs quite deep.

Catherine: Yeah. I think that's very much the case.

Suzanne: Andy, that's a case in point for you. You're a crime writer yourself. Do you feel that prejudice? Do you feel that there really is a delineation made between literary fiction and crime fiction?

Andy: Yeah, I think there is. I think that with crime writing, as we've said, it is about the plot, it is about a narrative that's driving very quickly forward and you're not really going internal with these characters, you're not spending a lot of time thinking about things. It's all about what's the next clue, what's the next thing they're going to explore and so it is that kind of drive which, I mean, if you're reading a work of literary fiction, you're there much more for... Well, for me you're there much more for the sentences and much more for sort of the prose and the lovely words whereas crime it's about the plot. Give me the plot and we'll just keep on going.

Sue: I want to disagree with you profoundly.

Andy: Oh, fine.

Sue: I really, really do because I've been fighting this battle for a long time. In fact, Patricia Highsmith, psychological characters. You're not reading Highsmith for the plot at all. The fact that you have got characters and their relationships go back to Sherlock Holmes and Watson, the relationship between those two characters. And if you're talking about good writing, I just mentioned Peter Temple. Read him for the poetry of the plot. I think it's way too easy to say that crime fiction is a particular kind of genre that does this. It



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doesn't. It can be literary, it can be deeply psychological, it can do deep investment in character and it can be beautifully written. So, sorry about that.

Andy: No, I completely agree and I think that that's the great thing about crime. You can find whatever you want in crime. If you want to find literary crime, well, you'll be able to find it. If you want to find maybe a prose poem crime fiction, you'll be able to find it.

Sue: Well, there are two at least that I can think of crime novels that are in fact extended poems, one of which was shortlisted for the Booker, in fact, when Val McDermid was one of the judges. Yes, I think it's called *The Night Train* or something and it's absolutely brilliant. I might be confusing that with Ian McEwan. We'll look it up and we'll put it on our website, right?

Suzanne: Let's drill down a bit, Andy. So you've talked about crime fiction being anything. Two of your novels feature the protagonist Lachie Munro. Where did Lachie come from and why did you write about him?

Andy: I mean, my background was working in television as a screenwriter and a researcher. I was in this world and hearing these great stories and often when you're researching a project, you'll find tangents and other little snippets that you want to use but you can't actually put into something. So I was just sort of building up this file of ideas and that's sort of where Lachie came from. There was sort of a lull in the screenwriting trade for a period and I ended up working with a friend who was a house painter. And so Lachie is kind of an amalgam of these house painters that I met and just kind of that workplace banter that happens where you're sort of talking about, "Where's the best sausage roll? Don't go there, the coffee's bad." Those sorts of things. So that's the world that Lachie inhabits and he's also got this kind of background of... He's got a nose for trouble, he's got a background in Melbourne that we don't really know about and he's kind of ended up in Newcastle. He doesn't really talk about his past but you know that there's something not quite right about why he's there. He sort of came out of, I suppose, a place of frustration, I guess, because it was also ... you these have ideas that you'd really like to see turned into scripts or be used in a TV series and you don't get the opportunity to. So yeah, Lachie's... he's quite curious.

Suzanne: You've spoken where the inspiration for Lachie came from, but what was the first crime fiction book that you remember reading? Or at least the one that first got you hooked.

Andy: I think most of us have got somebody in our past that had a real love of books and that was my grandfather. He had this quite incredible library that you'd sort of go and just pull books off the shelf really. I remember pulling off the old green Penguins that were sort of falling apart and I can't remember what the exact one was, but I suspect it was probably the Sherlock Holmes or *The Lady in the Lake* and it was kind of the first one that I read. He was always very kind of, "I'm not sure whether you're old enough to read this yet but just don't tell your parents." Or all those sorts of things. So the books were there in the past, but probably the... I didn't realize what I was enjoying and engaging with until I sort of picked up Don Winslow's *The Winter of Frankie Machine* secondhand. It was just such an engaging story and it was just such a cool character that I then sort of just read his entire back catalog and that was really where I came in "Okay, I think I understand this and I'm really excited and want to just keep on reading this crime fiction stuff." So yeah, Don Winslow's probably got a lot to answer for.



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Suzanne, you're also a crime writer. What was some of the books that influenced your journey?

Suzanne: It's interesting. I'm not sure if I'd actually call myself a crime writer in the narrow sense of the word. I think at BAD we talk about being "all about crime" and I think as we've spoken about crime, we've realized just how wide its become. What I've written about, really, is community life but with an undercurrent of criminal allegations. My work when I'm not writing is to sit on a tribunal where I decide whether people should be given the right to work with children or not, so those people have been refused the Right to Working With Children Check clearance. As you might imagine, the stories that you get from this are quite fascinating. You have people who have had criminal convictions or have had allegations made against them or where there is some material that casts a doubt on their persona or their character.

Suzanne: In the book I wrote, *The Teacher's Secret*, it's about a deputy head of the local primary school who is forced into an early retirement following accusations. I've always been interested in the person who's accused whether rightly or wrongly and how that manifests for their rest of their life and how it affects the community. I suppose whilst I haven't written thrillers, my recent book, *The Deceptions*, is about the holocaust and the ongoing effects of that time on ensuing generations. There's so much undercurrent to so much work about criminal behavior. I think, answering your question as to what was the first book that affected me, it's a similar book that engages in issues that influence me and my writing and that book *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay.

Suzanne: It's not at first blush a crime book, but it's a book with undercurrents of something gone terribly wrong. I think what I loved about it was the atmosphere that Joan Lindsay created. For those who aren't familiar with the book, it's set in 1900, I think. And it's set in a boarding school, a school for young ladies and it's a hot steamy day when members from the school go for a walk. And some of them disappear up a rock, Hanging Rock, and never return and others do return. I suppose what I loved about Joan Lindsay, and I think what I try and do in my writing to some extent, is not to give the reader all the answers. I think it's very easy to satisfy a reader and tell the reader exactly what to think and what happens. I think it's better for me, as a reader and as a writer, to leave some space for the reader and the writer. I think Joan Lindsay really leaves that space. Although, as I was researching it today, there was in fact a chapter that was added to that book that was taken out at the last minute.

Andy: I was going to ask whether you've gone back and read that chapter.

Suzanne: I read the synopsis, if I'm to be honest, of that last chapter. It sets out what she understood happened which really was interesting because I was reading old interviews with Joan Lindsay and when she's asked the question as to what happened she says, "Well, who knows." And I'm thinking, "Well, clearly you did. I mean, because you had a chapter that was taken out." So I love that idea of the editing process and the fact that once the book, as you would know Andy, goes to the publisher, it becomes almost a cooperative endeavor.

Andy: Yeah, it becomes a dialogue.



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- Sue: I always thought it was an alien abduction. When I finally saw the film, that haunting music was so weird and them going up the rock. I haven't actually watched the remake which they did for Foxtel recently, but that original film had that element in it that it was just too peculiar and that the Australian bush was so menacing and so weird that yeah, no. I was quite convinced that, like Cartman in South Park, they'd been taken by aliens.
- Catherine: But there was something strange, or that something about adolescence and something about girls, something about sexuality. All those white floating dresses and sort of flashes-
- Sue: I had a boyfriend at the time who was, when the film first came out, who was completely and utterly obsessed with Miranda. There was a certain moment there where everybody wanted to be Miranda with that hair and a white dress even if she was going to be abducted by aliens.
- Catherine: Disappeared. I think one of the things, you know with talking about mystery and not necessarily knowing what happens, I like the fact that you do, really. That it's tied up but increasingly it seems to me, things are tied up but they're not tied up and returned to the state they were in before. So Agatha Christie, who was another person I've read every single book by and twice some of them, the status quo is usually restored. Everybody lives happily... Well, I mean apart from people who died but life is restored to its normal, nice, middle class to some degree. But now, I think that happens much less. People are left visibly damaged and visibly broken and they're never going to get better. I don't mean the people who've been actively... People who are dead or injured, but there's a lot of fallout but never get restored but things are brought into the light in a way that I don't think they were and that's more psychological or social. You know, these things happen.
- Sue: I think there's something really interesting there about this notion that you have an equilibrium and then a disequilibrium. Getting that one out was a little tricky. Because in fact it was people like Dashiell Hammett who was talking about, society is the crime. So that what you actually have is a constant state of disequilibrium; something happens, you resolve that particular problem, whatever it is, you find out what caused and solved it but you cannot solve the problem that is society itself, because society is the crime.
- Catherine: And it remains unequal and unfair.
- Sue: Yeah. And I think that's where crime fiction casts light on what are the key moments in the society that defines it in terms of the crime of the moment. For example, you can see waves. Through the 90s, it was all about the serial killer and whatever the serial killer manifested in terms of a psychological anxiety about someone who kills for pleasure and targets women and in a sexual way. And then the next wave was actually around pedophilia and there's still quite a lot of that.
- Catherine: And sexual child abuse in the family. A lot of that.
- Sue: Absolutely. And we're now in a... The most latest wave that I've kind of identified is what you would call domestic noir, where there is no detective in sight but what you have is a woman in a situation, surrounded by friends and with a partner and something is horribly wrong in that situation and she becomes targeted. That, I think, speaks to a



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moment around domestic violence. I think crime fiction actually, in an interesting way, tends to mirror the anxiety of the moment while society itself bumbles along being completely the crime scene. There's so much inequality, there's so much violence, there's so much racism, there's so much this, there's so much that. You can't ever reach an equilibrium, you can just solve that one why.

Catherine: So you don't think that even in Agatha Christie where there is a desired state of affairs, possibly, where this kind of nasty stuff doesn't happen? It may not be an equilibrium but it's a very nice, safe, middle class world.

Sue: I think it comes down to something very interesting about anxiety which is... And the way in which crime fiction addresses our anxieties which is that a crime can be solved which allays the anxiety of that particular incident, but the underlying anxiety can never be solved.

Catherine: It'll happen again.

Sue: Therefore we need our next fix, our next book to go through and allay it for that next moment. There is a way in which there is a level of anxiety in what you're reading and a level of anxiety in society that run in parallel.

Catherine: That's rather good, that crime fiction is a kind of psychological tablet, it's a psychological Valium. That it keeps us calm by finding the killer or the evil person.

Sue: It answers the question, "Why?" At the best, it tells us why something has happened but it can't solve the problem. If it's pointing to social inequality, if it's pointing to gender relations or it's pointing to violence, it can tell us why that particular incident's happened but it can't solve the problem.

Suzanne: Crime books that I enjoy reading are those where there's often a false accusation where the protagonist is accused and perhaps wrongly. I think recently, Candice Fox comes to mind, particularly with *Crimson Lake* and *Redemption Point* and the third in that series. I understand that, Sue, you're quite a fan of Candice's work. Tell me, what's the latest book of hers that's confirmed your addiction to crime fiction?

Sue: Oh, that's a lovely segue because indeed *The Chase* is exactly that. I actually read Eden, which was the second of her first trilogy, first and then went back and read Hades and The Fall. It was quite clear at the point that you had a really, really original voice in Australian crime fiction. Without wishing to spend too much time on this, and we've interviewed Candice for the BAD Sydney Crime Writers Festival on a couple of occasions, she has an extraordinary background. She had a mother who fostered 135 children, her father was a parole officer, her mother kept bringing injured animals home as well as injured children and Candice was brought up in this melee. And somehow or other, that seems to have been the absolutely perfect background for a crime writer because her insight into humanity and the people who've fallen through the cracks and the ones end up on the wrong side of the law. But her big shift most recently is to take this to the US. Of course, she's partnered with James Patterson in a number of successful novels, but she's now written two and *The Chase* is the second set in the US. I would love to hear from an American whether they can detect that this is an Australian because I certainly think she's just done it brilliantly. But this one is set in a correctional center in the middle

of the Nevada Desert where there is a mass breakout engineered in order to get one particular prisoner out. Our focus is on the woman who looks after the prisoners on death row and she has a particular fixation on one called John Kradle who is in there on death row for apparently killing his wife, sister-in-law and son.

Sue: We discover that our character Celine's family background includes another terrible family incident. She's completely focused on this character and once he escapes, she wants to get him back. But a canny reader knows right from the start that John Kradle is not at that he seems to be. This is once again Candice developing these characters. And there's a glorious moment where the central character walks down death row and she sees... It's something like that the child killer is crocheting, the serial rapist is sleeping. She humanizes all these men in these cages, including John Kradle who has somehow or other rigged up a toaster as a soldering iron and is making a sign that says "please wipe your feet" to put on the prison governor's door as a thank you to one of the guards. And you go, "This is a very interesting character."

Andy: Well, it's kind of funny, isn't it? Because we often have authors that we follow and as soon as you kind of know that they've got a book coming out, we're right there at the bookshop putting our money on the counter. So is there an author or a series that you feel the same way, Catherine?

Catherine: I mean, when I was thinking back to what made what I've read in terms of crime fiction, I just came up with, okay, P.D. James. Every P.D. James, more than once, often. Sara Paretsky, I loved Sara Paretsky. Partly because she had a female detective, V.I. Warshawski. Again, a completely different milieu. I mean, Chicago I had... So I learnt a lot. I mean, it was just interesting to read. Also the food, she had lots of food. And she's an interesting character. Sara Paretsky doesn't go into depth about her background, but it's alluded to in every book and there are just wonderful touches about the glasses that her mother brought from Italy, the precious crystal glasses that she takes out every now and then.

Catherine: I did love Dorothy Sayers as well. I mean, what's not to love? Wish fulfillment, you create this bloke, make him rich, make him a bit damaged and a bit sensitive and in the end all works out happily. I mean, just lots of stuff like that. My mother-in-law used to send to me Peter Corris novels when I was living in England and I think of it as my kind of introduction to Sydney and St. Peter's Lane, I think.

Andy: Yeah. Had you actually been to Sydney before?

Catherine: No. I'd... No.

Andy: So that was your first introduction to Australia?

Catherine: Actually, that's not true, I'd been there briefly but not so... But yeah, I think she was setting me up to come over here. Slightly odd choice of writer, possibly.

Andy: And to run a crime festival.

Catherine: But also in the 80s, I was really into lesbian detective fiction. There's a woman called Mary Wings, she's published by The Women's Press in the UK. *She came in a flash*, she



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came too late. They were great. They were tight, they were tough, they were funny. And of course, all the Patricia Cornwell, so I kind of get into a writer and just keep going and then... Yeah.

Sue: It's interesting. Val McDermid, of course, started with The Women's Press writing a lesbian detective.

Catherine: Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

Sue: What's her name? Lindsay Gordon?

Catherine: Yeah, that's right. Who was a journalist.

Sue: Lindsay Gordon, who was a journalist. And then her second series, she has a woman whose partner is a rock journalist and they live in adjacent houses connected by a conservatory.

Catherine: That's right. Smoked lots of dope, I seem to remember.

Sue: Yeah. Her back catalog's fascinating.

Catherine: Yeah. Some date more than others. I mean, the other interesting thing about crime fiction is now you read something that was written 40 years ago and you think, "Just Google it!" Obviously, I'm not entirely serious, but you realize the use of technology and telephones, mobile phones, "If you could only have phoned, that woman would not have died. Why isn't she caught?" Which is silly but there's just an awful lot of that. And social class, the servants, the maids, I just find all of it endlessly fascinating and you learn a huge amount about the time.

Suzanne: Andy, as a writer would you say that the mobile phone has killed crime fiction?

Andy: I wouldn't say it's killed it. I certainly may say that it's made it much more challenging to plot. If everyone's able to contact each other, it's very tricky. Sometimes in books, you'll kind of see authors coming up with all sorts of strange scenes like they've dropped their phone in the water and so the phone won't work and these kind of convolutions to kind of get around the fact that they can't call someone.

Catherine: And they never charge their phones. I mean, in real life people charge their phones. In crime fiction-

Andy: Yeah. They never go in the toilet.

Catherine: Yeah. So the number of uncharged phones, it's too high.

Suzanne: I found the year 2000's a good year. Pre-mobile phones, you've got much more mystery, internet is not really there, at least not in the form it is now. Andy, when asked about the book that has concerned your addiction, you chose R.W.R McDonald's *The Nancys*. I notice in the first page, a mobile phone makes an appearance. What did you think about this book and why do you like it so much?



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- Andy: I really liked it because it was something a bit different to what I had been reading and it took me a while to get there. As we kind of all have to kind of wrestle with our to be read pile next to the bed, this was in there and I just hadn't got there. When I finally did, I just was ready for it which is often what happens with books. I think that books kind of find us as opposed to us sort of findings books. Yeah, the phone's quite important. The protagonist is Tippy Chan, she's only 11 so she's very much involved in that sort of social media scene. Her uncle comes to sort of help because there's been a bit of a family tragedy and things going on in the town. It's set in New Zealand. There's sort a few things going on there which fall into the crime sort of scene, which was really refreshing. It had these really interesting characters. You had a young protagonist and it was very much about the world today and it was funny. I think there should be more fun in crime.
- Suzanne: You can tell it's a funny book from the cover. Now, obviously we're on audio so we can't see it but it's a bright pink cover with eyes and it screams fun. Is that what it is? Was it fun to read?
- Andy: Well, it is but, I mean, there's obviously there's darkness in there. But the characters make it fun and you're going along with these characters to sort of work out what they're doing and what they're sort of trying to understand and decipher. Yeah, no, it is, It's a lot of fun. And the sequel is about to come out which is one of the reasons why I picked it up. I'm really looking forward to reading that.
- Catherine: But you never read Nancy Drew, did you?
- Andy: No, I didn't.
- Catherine: Because that's a lovely reference. Nancy Drew and Caroline Quine.
- Andy: It is. It's actually... Yes.
- Catherine: I found it difficult to read because I think I was expecting something like those books on some bizarre level. I mean, I'm not entirely silly but on some level I was thinking it was going to do that strange thing.
- Sue: But I loved it for its outrageous gayness. Because the uncle and his uncle are outrageously gay and they bring all this outrageousness to this small New Zealand town which just absorbs it and embraces it. I found it such a genial and lovely book in that particular way.
- Andy: Yeah, no, it's really endearing. It's certainly a book that I'll be recommending to people.
- Catherine: So is that cozy crime? Is it cozy crime?
- Sue: Oh, cozy. That's such a fraught word because it's often used to diminish crime novels that people don't think are serious because even within crime fiction there's a hierarchy, right?
- Catherine: Right.
- Sue: At one end sits your gritty realist crime novel and those are the ones that tend to win awards. And then at the other end sits the cozy, the entertaining, the...



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- Andy: Enjoyable.
- Sue: Everything... The enjoyable, the non confrontational, the something that is other to that realism. Cozy can be used pejoratively but in the way that people do... If you go on any of the American websites, people will identify themselves as cozy readers.
- Catherine: Come out as cozy.
- Sue: They come out as cozy they completely do. They embrace it and they go, "I don't like the tough stuff. I don't want that, I want the entertainment. I want crime fiction where Timmy the dog solves the crime, where the cat solves the crime." There is, indeed, a whole subgenre of that.
- Andy: Mm-hmm (affirmative), a whole series of that. And librarians.
- Sue: Librarians and cats?
- Andy: Yes. Yeah, and teashops as well for some strange reason.
- Sue: Yeah. There's that whole end and if you look at what's on television in terms of crime series, you see those two things. And sometimes you just don't feel like Vera stomping around Northumbria being miserable on a Friday night, you actually want to go somewhere more cheerful. I know it might sound odd, but Midsommer where it's so broke, it's so over the top that it's enjoyable because you have the sense that nobody's really getting hurt. That it is a game.
- Suzanne: Sue's spoken about the hierarchy of crime fiction. Where would you place *Snow* by John Banville, Andy?
- Andy: He's sort of, I found, falling more into sort of the traditional sort of English style of crime. But it's one of those books that you read where I was just really loving the language and I was just really captivated by these really fantastic sentences. When we're kind of doing this stuff... I mean, we're all kind of reviewers, we're all kind of reading crime as part of an industry that we're part of. We read a lot of debuts and John Banville is, I think... I'm not even going to tell how many books he's wrote because I can't remember, but this an author that's been around a long time and he's written a lot of stuff. You're really seeing an author at the height his powers and it was just so good to kind of engage with an author at that stage.
- Sue: Can I just say, I didn't like *Snow*. I didn't like John Banville's crime novels written under his pseudonym which is... What is it... Benjamin Black. I didn't like those either. I found them too grim and too try hard. And there is a way in which when I read *Snow* I thought, "All right. He thinks he's writing a crime novel and he's set up this character going to this place, but he hasn't got the flair. He hasn't got the notion of what the genre can do." I just found *Snow* a very depressing read, however beautiful the language was.
- Andy: Well, I agree and he's actually come out as sort of almost ashamed of... Because this is supposed to be under the pseudonym and he's kind of gone, "No, I'm no longer ashamed to be writing genre." And so he's put his name on it this time which is, again,



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it's a really interesting sort of conversation to have about an author and their work. Like, why is there shame in writing genre?

Sue: And why do they do it so badly? Have you read Ian McEwan's crime novel? That is one called *The Night Train*. Its terrible. When literary authors think they're going to write crime fiction, they actually sometimes... I think they condescend to the genre, and they assume it's much easier than it is.

Andy: Yeah, they go and slum it for the weekend and bash out 40,000 words.

Sue: And they're not having fun. They should have fun.

Andy: Yes, that's right. Like all writing, all writing should be fun. You should be enjoying it as much. If you're enjoying it, the reader will enjoy it.

Catherine: I think sometimes, you can want to work at reading a book and I'd say "literary fiction", you know that you're going to have to work. You know you're going to have to read slowly, think about what you're reading in a particular way and with crime, for me anyway, I read very fast but I don't have to do that. I read it for pleasure. And not that working isn't pleasure, but it's a different kind of pleasure.

Sue: I bought myself two... I thought, "Over Christmas I'm going to have a sabbatical from crime." So I bought two literary crime novels. I shan't say what they, but they were both prize-winning novels and they went on my bedside table. I started one on Boxing Day and I read 30 pages and I went back to my crime fiction. I tried the other one a few days later, I read 30 pages and went back to my crime fiction and I went, "I think I can't read literary fiction anymore." And this is as someone who studied English literature, medieval literature and all the rest of it and I'm like...

Catherine: But there are things in crime fiction that I'm really over. So, drunk women. Like, what is it? Why? I think it's an antifeminist plot, actually.

Sue: I haven't seen as many as you. Are you fixated on drunk women?

Catherine: Well, I will send you... Everything you pick up, they're throwing up and I'm thinking, "Really? Not again!"

Sue: I can only of... Give me an example. I can only think of *The Girl on the Train*. She was having a drinking problem, but I understood that.

Catherine: She was drinking, yes. There's the woman that...

Sue: *The Woman at the Window*?

Catherine: Yeah. She does a lot of drinking.

Sue: All right. That's two.

Catherine: That's two. Okay. I will now make a list of them. Honestly, there are more than two. Of course, now I can't think of a single one. I should've written them all down.



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- Sue: There you go.
- Catherine: But there are a lot, seriously. It's a bit like the dead women on the slab of which there were a lot. They're not so... Anyway, that's another story. But in fact, it is a bit much, throwing up all the time.
- Andy: Yeah. There's so many tropes in crime that we need to unpack.
- Catherine: The throwing up trope.
- Andy: That's right.
- Sue: V.I. Warshawski, she would often have too much to drink the night before and then go for a run and jog.
- Catherine: She didn't throw up everywhere though...
- Sue: She had nothing in her fridge to throw up.
- Andy: Right. Well, while those two argue... Suzanne, maybe we should move on to your recommendation or a book you've wanted to discuss with us today.
- Suzanne: Yeah, look, I've got two that I'd like to talk about. *The Ruin* by Dervla McTiernan and *The SafePlace* by Anna Downes. So Dervla McTiernan has come to some prominence and *The Ruin* was her first book. What I love about that is that Dervla lives in Australia but she's Irish, and she really brings the description of Ireland that made me want to just close the door and immerse myself in the plot.
- Suzanne: It's the book of a young guard, or a young policeman, called Cormac Reilly who has been in the guard for a number of years. The book opens with an early case he had where he found a dead mother in a house, with two children being left behind. Fast forward and we come back to see what's happened to those two children and Cormac, who has never really forgotten that case, finds himself immersed once more in the family. What I loved about this case is the understanding and the empathy that Dervla brings to her writing. She was a lawyer and she also worked in community services and social services. We're dealing with kids that have been neglected, kids that need more care than they're getting, all wrapped up within a fairly empathetic police investigation which I thought was masterful. So good luck to Dervla for the success she's since had.
- Suzanne: The second book is *The Safe Place* by Anna Downes. She's English but living in Australia. It's funny. It's a really funny, witty book that the voice just dances. What it is, it's about a woman, 20, 21, whose name's Emily Proudman. She's wanted to be an actress, hasn't been working out. She finds herself without a job and then suddenly she's offered the trip of a lifetime where she's to nanny a little girl and her sister, mum and looking after the girl in this french château in the south of France. It's a mystical, magical place that seems too good to be true and of course it is.
- Sue: There's a lot of parallels being drawn between that book and Daphne du Maurier because it's got that kind of *Rebecca* sense of the innocent going to an environment that is beautiful and magnificent, but becomes more and more strange and more and more



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hostile. I just thought that was wonderful, that evocation of place in this house which, while beautiful, became a kind of prison and the danger that was lurking and where you thought that danger lay. She kept you guessing about where the actual danger was. I actually think the end of that book is fantastic.

Catherine: The ending's very good. Because endings can be disappointing, but that one wasn't.

Sue: No. And to come back to Dervla McTiernan, I actually think her third book, *The Good Turn* is her best book so far. I like *The Ruin*, I loved that opening but I found the plotting a bit laborious and the same with *The Scholar*, which was the second one. She hadn't quite nailed the pace, but in *The Good Turn* she manages, she actually switches focus to a different character. I think having turned away from her policeman, she's actually liberated. They go to a small town, a small village in Ireland where most of the action unfolds in that book. I think having escaped Cormac for a bit and going out, she rediscovers the whole sense of place and the whole sense of this community. I think it's the strongest book she's written.

Suzanne: Good. I haven't read that one. I've reread *The Scholar* so looks like that'll be next on the bedside table. Time has flown, everybody, and we're at the end of our podcast. I'd really like to thank you for joining us today, Sue Turnbull and Catherine du Peloux Menagé. We'll be back in a month with episode two of BAD: All About Crime. That's when we'll be talking crime fiction and true crime with writer and journalist Caroline Overington and writer and art historian Katherine Kovacic. I'm looking forward to your company then. Thanks Andy. Thanks Sue. Thanks Catherine.

Catherine: Thank you.

Sue: Thank you.

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