

*Echoes of Daniel*

A five-minute  
romantic thriller

BRONWYN  
PARRY

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## **Echoes of Daniel**

There were at least two of them, and they were gaining on him. He kept a brisk pace, weaving through Sydney's peak-hour pedestrians, slumping his shoulders to disguise his height. At the corner, he slipped into the crowd waiting to cross, but went left instead of stepping off the curb as the light changed. Fifteen metres down, a group of a dozen tourists spilled from a hotel, milling on the pavement. He swung around them and through the hotel doors, casting a glance back to check for his pursuers... and in that short moment of distraction, he collided with his past.

Instinctively he raised his hand to steady her, but his apology died on his lips as the shock of recognition hit. Fifteen years, far too much to explain, and he had to stumble across her, *here*, on the other side of the world from Scotland, when he had criminals after him and stolen data in his pocket.

White-faced, wide-eyed, she stared at him. "*Daniel?*"

Her exclamation drew attention from those around. But if anyone connected them, she'd be in as much danger as him.

"I'm sorry, ma'am." He dropped his hand from her shoulder, stepped away, and lied to the only person he'd ever cared about. "You've mistaken me for someone else."

Confusion clouded her eyes, swiftly hardening to disbelief. She knew him, just as he'd known her, in that first instant. Fifty years could pass, and they'd still recognise each other.

A teenage boy stepped to her side. "Are you okay, Mum?"

*Mum?* As recognition slammed another punch into his gut, he had to draw on every element of training and control not to

react. The lad's age. The dark, wavy hair. The hazel eyes that shot a protective warning at him. Mairi's swift glance between them.

With no time to absorb the shock, no time for even one of the million questions racing in his brain, he stepped backwards, put distance between them, and protected them the only way he could – by denying them. He looked straight at her, the small hope that somehow she might still trust him struggling to exist. "I have to go," he said, and added the only truth he dared, "I'm very sorry."

The elevator chimed behind him, and he swivelled on his heel and strode to it, leaving her without explanation, just as he'd done, all those years ago. As the doors slid together, he saw one of his pursuers enter the hotel, scanning the lobby for him.

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Her legs suddenly weak, she let Rohan guide her to a chair.

"You're shaking, Mum. Are you hurt?"

"I'll be fine. It was just... a shock." Seeing the ghost of a man who'd drowned in the North Sea and shattered her dreams. She could still feel the bitter wind on her skin, see them towing the burnt-out wreck of the fishing trawler into the harbour, hear the policewoman's voice explaining there were no survivors. A lifetime ago. Her son's lifetime.

And because she didn't lie to her son, she pulled her wits together and explained, "He looked very like your father. But it wasn't, of course." Of course it wasn't. She managed a shaky laugh. "I guess I haven't got over him, yet."

But Rohan's concerned gaze was the image of his father's, a constant bitter-sweet reminder that she'd never get over him. She smiled to reassure him. "Let's go – we've got a bridge to climb, and a city to see."

"Excuse me, Madam." Absorbed with Rohan, she hadn't seen the two men approach until they spoke beside her. One waved an ID card briefly. "We're from the Federal Police. The concierge said you were just talking with a man."

"I..." Maybe her nerves were too much on edge. Despite their neat suits and the glimpse of official ID, her protective instincts jangled to alertness. But they were police, and the man wasn't Daniel. Couldn't be Daniel. Because Daniel wouldn't be in trouble with the police.

"The man who bumped into me? For a moment I thought he was someone I knew once. I was mistaken."

"He got into the lift over there. The middle one," Rohan said, and she saw both men look at him, hard, before exchanging glances. One strode away to stare up at the floor indicator above the lift, his phone to his ear.

"That's helpful, mate. You're visiting from Ireland, Mrs...?"

The misinterpretation of her accent shouldn't have irritated her. "McDonald. Dr Mairi McDonald. I'm taking up a position with an outback health service this week."

"Good." He did a quick scan of the lobby, and nodded to his colleague. "Would you mind stepping this way, Dr McDonald? Just somewhere quieter for a couple of questions."

Puzzled, she followed him to the lift, Rohan beside her. The short seconds of the unexpected encounter replayed through her mind.

No, her imagination hadn't added that softened accent, an echo of Daniel's. Nor had she imagined, she was certain, the shock flickering in his eyes when he'd recognised her. *Recognised* her. And she definitely hadn't imagined his sharp intake of breath when he'd seen Rohan.

*"I have to go. I'm very sorry."*

Ambiguous words, yet meaningful. Denial and disbelief evaporated. It had to be Daniel. But what the hell was he caught up in?

She and Rohan and the two federal police officers were the only occupants in the lift. As the doors opened into the basement carpark, one of the officers took her arm.

"This way, Dr McDonald."

The carpark for an interview? It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense. And his hand on her arm was too tight. She stood her ground. "No. Tell me what is going on, first. And I'd like to see your ID again, please."

"You're coming with us, Dr McDonald. And this..." he reached in under his jacket and drew a gun, aiming it at her, "is my ID."

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He ducked behind a pillar as he saw them emerge from the lift.

"Get that back-up here now," he growled into the phone. "They've got hostages. A woman and a youth."

Leaving the call connected, he stepped out into the open, his hands wide. "Let them go, Barlow. They're nothing to me."

"Oh, sure, Buchanan. The boy's the image of you."

"Yeah, maybe. My brother left a few brats around." Would she understand the reason for his pretended uncaring? She knew he had no brother. With his life expectancy measuring only minutes now, he had to explain fast, while maintaining his undercover persona. "Didn't we meet at that pub in Fraserburgh? Before Danny informed on the old man for smuggling?" He threw Barlow a grin. "Idiot didn't know we were picking up weapons and explosives that trip. Something went ka-boom when the cops raided. Sheesh, that water was cold."

That would have to be enough. Witness protection, and his new identity and police career in Australia – no easy way to explain that to her, with their guns aimed and patience evaporating.

"Give us the data, Buchanan. Or I shoot your brother's girlfriend."

Ten seconds, he figured, before Barlow and his mate started shooting. He doubted he could stretch it much longer. He shrugged and started walking forward. "You can have your data. No need to waste a pretty woman."

He heard the carpark door winding up, and saw the door of the stairwell opening a crack. Mairi and the boy watched him, maybe for some sign, but all he could do was keep the men's attention on him.

"I'm going to take the drive from my jacket pocket, Barlow."

"No! Get it from him," Barlow ordered his off-sider.

The thug let go of the boy, and the boy – his son, whose name he didn't know – shifted closer to Mairi. The door behind inched open, and with one last glance at Mairi, he made his move.

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She saw the silent goodbye, and cursed him for thinking he could leave her. Catching Barlow by surprise, she threw herself at him, dragging his arm down as he aimed at Daniel. Sounds exploded around her – yells, shots – and her knees hit the cement as Barlow toppled. The gun dropped, and she scrambled to him, pounding her fists into him.

"Leave him to us, ma'am," someone said. "We're Federal Police."

Men swarmed the area. Rohan stood over the fallen thug, grinning and safe. And Daniel limped towards her, a blood-stained hand against his thigh.

She met him half-way. "Let me look at that."

"It's only grazed. Thanks to you."

He stood before her, no longer twenty, a police officer in a business jacket instead of a youth in a fisherman's pullover, yet still the same Daniel she'd loved. Rohan slung his arm around her shoulders.

"Would you..." She steadied her voice, "have time for coffee or lunch with Rohan and me?"

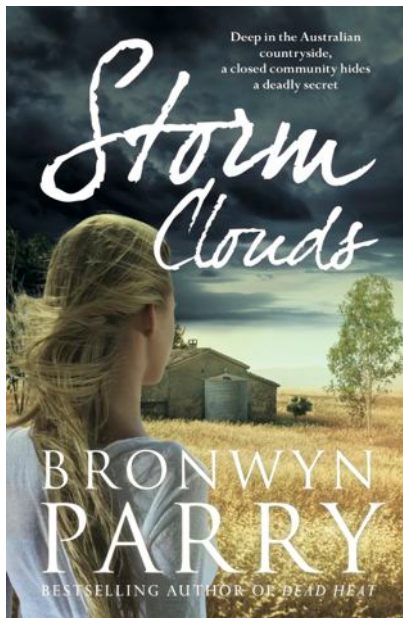
His smile sparkled in his eyes. "We three have a lot to catch up on. How about coffee *and* lunch?"



## **Thank you!**

Thank you for reading *Echoes of Daniel*. I hope you enjoyed it!

My new novel, [Storm Clouds](#), published by Hachette Australia, is due for release on January 13, 2015.



Life is falling into place for National Parks ranger Erin Taylor. She has a job she loves, she's falling for her colleague, Simon - and she is finally leaving the past behind. Until a woman is murdered. But the victim is not just any woman - she's Simon's wife, Hayley. The wife he's not mentioned to Erin. The wife he's not seen in fourteen years.

On the edge of the national park, the alternative lifestyle community of 'Simple Bliss' denies knowing Hayley, but Simon

and Erin suspect otherwise. As Simon uncovers shocking details about the group, Erin is drawn further into their midst and finds a web of lies, decades old - and a charismatic, manipulative, dangerous cult leader who will let nothing and no-one stand in his way. On the wrong side of a river in flood that has become a lethal torrent, Erin and Simon must race to expose the truth and prevent a tragedy.

Storm Clouds is available for pre-order as an ebook now at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [amazon.com.au](http://amazon.com.au), and also in paperback from [Booktopia](http://Booktopia) and other Australian booksellers.

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Please do consider leaving a review at the site where you downloaded this story or in a reader's community. Reviews are a great way to help other readers find new books they'll enjoy, so I appreciate all reviews, whether positive or negative.

## **Other books by Bronwyn Parry**

Note that while the books are in loosely-linked series, each book does stand alone.

### **Dungirri series:**

[As Darkness Falls](#)

[Dark Country](#)

[Darkening Skies](#)

### **Goodabri series:**

[Dead Heat](#)

[Storm Clouds](#) (due January 2015)

### **Free short story:**

[Dear Ruth](#)

## **About the author**



Bronwyn Parry's gritty romantic thrillers set (mostly) in Australia's wild places have finalled twice in the Romance Writers of America RITA Awards and won two Australian Romance Readers Awards for favourite romantic suspense. Bronwyn lives in beautiful bushland atop the Great Dividing Range in northern New South Wales and loves to explore rural and outback Australia.