

The Truth that Lies Beneath

Phoebe is on the trail of a story that could win her a promotion ... if it doesn't bury her first.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

CU on a messy desk. In the background, voices hum, keys clack, phones ring as a cockroach crawls out from a paper pile.

A gasp and a shriek as PHOEBE SINCLAIR, 20s, spots it and pushes her wheelie chair way back from the desk.

PHOEBE
Jasper...help!

At the next desk, JASPER, 20s, red hair, looks around. He rolls up a magazine and - whack - splatters the beast.

PHOEBE
Would you mind...? (waves it
away with distaste)

JASPER
So I'm the assassin and the
clean-up crew?

He bins the cockroach as Phoebe returns to the screen.

PHOEBE
(sarcastic)
Oh great. I get to cover the
mayoral election. The fun just
keeps coming for the local
affairs reporter.

Chief of Staff, KATE, 40s, shouts from across the room.

KATE
Phoebe, a moment!

PHOEBE
(sweetly)
Sure boss. (whispers to
Jasper) Speaking of
cockroaches...

Phoebe threads her way through the office desks to Kate, whose eyes stay on her screen as she speaks.

KATE
The answer's no. You can't
move to film news. It's local
affairs or unemployment for
you.

Phoebe is crushed. Kate looks up, angry.

KATE

And I don't appreciate you going behind my back to complain about me. You got something to say, say it to my face.

Phoebe skulks away.

KATE

I need profiles of the mayoral candidates by Thursday night.

Phoebe flops down, face like thunder. Jasper notices.

JASPER

So, I'm guessing no celebrity interviews for you this week?

PHOEBE

That bitch of a guidance counselor went straight to her after our meeting. Dobber.

JASPER

Look, you've only been on local affairs for six months. Most people spend 18 months on a round before moving on.

PHOEBE

Well, I'm not most people. And now instead of interviewing the new James Bond, I get to write about mayoral candidates. Boring small business owners who want to change local laws in their favour so they can become medium business owners. Bunch of dull, grasping...

On her screen, she sees a picture of a shady man, with slick black hair, dark suit and glasses.

PHOEBE

...mmm. Damien Tollhurst.

JASPER

Damien what?

PHOEBE

Just a mayoral candidate, who
might not be totally boring.

Hearing a noise, she glances in the bin. The cockroach is
alive. She screams and Jasper stomps it. Again and again.

INT. LOCAL COMMUNITY HALL - NIGHT

The hall is plain, with rows of plastic chairs, half full
with locals as DAMIEN TOLLHURST, 40s, all in black,
steps up to speak. He's still wearing sunglasses.

DAMIEN

Hello. Thanks for coming out
on this chilly evening. I'm
Damien Tollhurst, your new
mayoral candidate.

Phoebe sneaks into the hall and sits. Damien notices.

DAMIEN

I'll be running on an
environmental platform,
opposing the council's plans
to rezone the Coogee cemetery
for residential apartments.
Obviously building over the
historic graveyard on that
spectacular site will make
someone rich. But is it in the
community's best interests?

EXT. LOCAL HALL - NIGHT

As the hall lights go out and Damien exits, Phoebe
approaches him.

PHOEBE

Mr Tollhurst, Phoebe Sinclair
from the Sydney Herald. Can I
have a moment?

DAMIEN

Sure. Please call me Damien.

Damien removes his glasses. His eyes are so dark they seem to suck out the light rather than reflecting it.

INT. PHOEBE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lolling on her bed with her laptop, Phoebe regards a photo of Damien on screen while talking on the phone.

PHOEBE

His eyes were so creepy. But that's not the strangest part. I've done some research... yeah I do occasionally do my job Jasper... and this is the third place he's run for mayor - get this - just to stop councils building over graveyards. Isn't that weird?

She doesn't notice a dark shadow pass her window.

INT. PHOEBE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phoebe is asleep. Moonlight reveals a cockroach on her quilt. As if sensing something, she sits up and switches on the light. No insect. She lies back down and closes her eyes, as one cockroach, then two, creep up the covers. Dozens swarm at her, light glancing off their black shells. They scurry onto her face, in her mouth and eyes, silencing her primal scream.

INT. PHOEBE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

She wakes up, damp with sweat. The room is normal. Relieved, she exhales. It was just a dream. Or was it? On the floor, a cockroach kicks its last. She's freaked.

Later, dressed for work, she sprays insecticide liberally as she talks on the phone.

PHOEBE

So you're saying local laws allow redevelopment of cemeteries eighty five years after the last burial. But if a more recent grave is found on the site...the clock starts again from the date of ../cont

PHOEBE (cont)

... that grave. So if I wanted to oppose a development I might look for a fresher grave on the site?... Great. Thanks.

She hangs up and smiles smugly.

INT. CAFE - MORNING

Phoebe lines up for takeaway coffee.

PHOEBE

Double-strength skinny cap with one sugar and two marshmallows, pink, in a large takeaway cup.

Jasper appears beside her.

JASPER

Your usual simple order.

PHOEBE

I thought you were flying to Alice Springs today.

JASPER

I am. Just getting my caffeine hit first. Flat white please.

PHOEBE

I wonder if you could do me a favour while you're there. One of the places Damien Tollhurst ran for mayor is only 50ks from Alice Springs. You couldn't pop by and check it out for me, could you?

JASPER

(peevd)

Is that all? You don't want me to write the story for you. Do your laundry while I'm at it?

PHOEBE

What's your problem?

JASPER

Is that all I am to you?
Someone who fixes things?

PHOEBE

No, you're my friend.

JASPER

Friend. Okay, glad we got that
sorted.

He takes his coffee and turns to go.

PHOEBE

Come on Jasper. I told you I
don't date people I work with.
But I suppose there are
exceptions to every rule.

They both laugh and look coy.

PHOEBE

We could have a drink and
discuss it when you get back.
After you've checked out that
town for me?

He smiles. How can he ever refuse her?

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Phoebe stares at the screen. Kate shouts across the room.

KATE

How are the profiles going?

PHOEBE

Great.

KATE

Don't let me down Phoebe.

PHOEBE

Never boss!

(to the screen)

Jasper, you there yet?

EXT. AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK - DAY/INT. NEWS OFFICE - DAY

Through a skype connection, we see Jasper driving in the Australian outback. Outside the driver's window, we see lots of red sand, some gusting around.

JASPER

You owe me Phoebe. It might only have been fifty K's, but the roads are awful. It took two hours to get here.

PHOEBE

So I'll buy you two drinks when you get back.

JASPER

So what do I do when I get to...what's this place again?

PHOEBE

Collier Vale. There's a graveyard I want you to check out. The local councillors wanted to redevelop the site for a shopping centre. Damien Tollhurst campaigned against it. I can't find any record of what happened next.

EXT. COLLIER VALE - DAY/NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Jasper passes a **WELCOME TO COLLIER VALE** sign, loose on a post as he drives into town. Dust swirls appear on the unsealed road. The wind's roar is eerie. We see through a camera. Occasionally Jasper sticks his head into shot.

JASPER

Not much of a town. If you ask me, it needs redeveloping.

He passes two abandoned cars covered in thick red sand, their tyres flat, windows smashed.

Walking down the main street, the shops are deserted, their windows are thick with sand. On the pavement are broken cartons with food tins spilling out, rotting vegetables. There's a mayoral campaign sign on the ground: Vote Carraway for a shiny, new future.

JASPER

Are you seeing this? There's no-one here. It looks like a tornado hit the place. I might get going actually.

PHOEBE

Can you just look for the settler's graveyard first.

JASPER

What's that? Who's there?

PHOEBE

Jasper? Is everything okay.

A kangaroo bounds past. Phoebe sighs, as does Jasper.

JASPER

I'm a bit jumpy I reckon.
Right, here's the graveyard.
And the old settlers' graves.

There is the old section with aged headstones.

JASPER

That's odd. It's been added to recently. In a big way.

Rows of new graves with fresh earth mounds and wooden crosses marking them are lined up behind the others.

JASPER

All these people died in 2017, this year. This is weird. What happened and who buried them?
...Hello! Is someone there?

PHOEBE

Jasper?

JASPER

No, get back.

He drops the camera and runs ... The screen goes dark.

PHOEBE

Jasper!

Phoebe picks up the phone.

PHOEBE
Police. I'd like to report an
accident. Okay, I'll hold.

As she holds on, she hears a beep from her phone. It's a
text: **SORRY ABOUT THAT. I'LL CALL YOU LATER. J.**

She hangs up and dials Jasper's number. It's engaged. As
she puts the phone down, LUKE, 40s, handsome, is standing
behind her.

LUKE
Ms Sinclair?

PHOEBE
Yes?

LUKE
I'm Luke, the new guidance
counselor. Can we talk?

She follows him through the open plan office.

PHOEBE
What happened to the other
woman counselor?

LUKE
She was called away suddenly.

INT. LUKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Phoebe is sitting, as Luke paces, biting his nail.

PHOEBE
Tell me straight. Am I getting
the boot?

LUKE
No, nothing like that. You've
been making enquiries about a
particular mayoral candidate.

PHOEBE
You mean Damien Tollhurst?

LUKE
We'd like you to drop it?

PHOEBE

But Kate wants profiles on the candidates.

LUKE

Particularly inquiries into his activities in central Australia. Investigations are underway there, which would be jeopardised by a news story.

PHOEBE

How did you know I was looking into that?

Luke smiles at her - it's at once patronising and frightening as he leans right to her ear.

LUKE

Leave it alone, Phoebe. Okay?

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

As Phoebe leaves the office, she's on the phone.

PHOEBE

Jasper? Call me as soon as you get in. Something weird's going on. I've been warned off the story. So naturally, I'm going in harder.

She enters the revolving door. It jams shut, locking her in. She tries to push, but it's stuck. A cockroach appears on her side of the glass. She squashes up against the opposite wall and shouts for help.

From outside, her scream is silent.

Terrified, she takes off her shoe, and whacks it. Blood spills out - a large amount, but it's not dead. She hits it again and more blood gushes. She screams. Silently.

Eventually, the doors move. She jerks out onto the street, distraught. As she looks back, people revolve through happily. The blood has gone.

EXT. CEMETERY NIGHT

Phoebe weaves through the graves on the headland over the dark sea. An arc of city lights around it.

PHOEBE

(whispers on phone)

Jasper, where are you? I'm following Damien Tollhurst through Coogee cemetery. I know what he's up to. He's trying to find a grave less than 85 years old, to stop the redevelopment. Come and meet me here when you get this. We'll have that drink after.

She hangs up and continues trailing Damien. She sees him standing, talking down to someone we can't see. As if sensing her, he turns. She ducks behind a headstone.

After a time, she get up and he's gone. She weaves through to the spot where he was and looks down - into an open grave, where Jasper is lying unconscious.

PHOEBE

(hisses at him)

Jasper! Wake up.

He doesn't budge. So she jumps down into the grave. She tries to shake him awake. He groans. He's not dead.

PHOEBE

We have to get out of here.

He's floppy so she puts her arm around him and tries to lift him. Her eye catches movement - shiny and black. Cockroaches oozing from the walls of the grave.

PHOEBE

Please Jasper! Wake Up!

He wakes and looks terrified as the wave of cockroaches overwhelms him. He falls backwards on top of Phoebe.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A beautiful day overlooking the ocean, as the media gathers, with microphones and cameras. Damien, all in black, threads through the trees towards them.

PHOEBE

What's happening?

Phoebe is among the throng. Luke stands next to her.

LUKE

It's an announcement about the cemetery.

PHOEBE

What are you doing here?

LUKE

I'm a guidance counselor. I'm guiding and counselling.

Phoebe looks at him, like he's weird.

DAMIEN

Thanks for coming. After an exhaustive search, I have found what I've been looking for. Two graves less than 85 years old. Which means the redevelopment cannot proceed. I owe a debt to the grave's occupants and will repay that by granting them peace in this magnificent site for another 85 years.

Photographers snap pics of two headstones. Phoebe sees the first, which reads: **JASPER GREER, 1994 -2017.**

PHOEBE

What? Jasper. No!

She looks with dread at the second grave. **PHOEBE SINCLAIR, 2017, CURIOSITY KILLS.**

PHOEBE

I'm not dead! I'm right here.

No-one responds - they can't hear her. Only now does she see how dirty she is. She turns to Luke, who shrugs.

LUKE

You couldn't leave it alone, could you, Phoebe?