



THE STING

By Kate Kyriacou

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Book Review by Denise Cullen

It was the very last roll of the dice.

Police were convinced they knew who had abducted and murdered Sunshine Coast schoolboy Daniel Morcombe. But there was no physical evidence, and their prime suspect (Brett Cowan) had just strolled out of an inquest into the matter without once slipping up on the stand.

It was time to take a different tack.

Cowan had no idea the chatty bloke sitting next to him on the plane back to Perth was an undercover operative. When 'Joe' invited him to earn some easy cash by collecting protection money, moving guns, undertaking surveillance and stealing cars, Cowan thought he'd joined a crime gang, a brotherhood, a family – when in fact he'd just become the target of a 'Mr Big' sting.

Suddenly, he had money – and mates who accepted him no matter what he'd done. His desire to remain in the fold was enormous. It would lead to him confessing his deepest, darkest secret.

Kate Kyriacou's *The Sting* is the incredibly detailed story, gleaned from thousands of pages of court documents, of the undercover investigation that caught Daniel Morcombe's killer.

Kyriacou was in court for Cowan's committal hearing when his confession was played publicly for the first time. "Yeah, OK. You know ... I did it," he said. The details about how he lured the boy into an abandoned building, and what came next, sickened the seasoned crime reporter. "It was the most horrible thing in the world," she told the *Penmanship* podcast.

The Sting is written in a style that positions the reader as a fly on the wall. It opens with Cowan's meeting with 'Mr Big', an undercover operative posing as a crime boss, in the foyer of a five-star hotel. 'Arnold' can 'sort things out' – make alibis appear, evidence vanish. "But I need to know what I need to do," Arnold urges. And suddenly, in the space of seconds, Cowan's shiny new world tilts on its axis.

The first two parts of the book chronicle the events leading up to Daniel Morcombe's disappearance. Cowan's disturbing criminal history is detailed, but his psychopathology is not – in fact, by the end of *The Sting*, Cowan remains as much an enigma as ever.

This was a conscious choice by Kyriacou, who had gotten to know the Morcombe family and sought not to write a book that gave their son's murderer any more publicity. The focus of *The Sting* thus remains firmly on the undercover operatives – the unsung heroes whose identities cannot be revealed, and whose difficult, demanding work otherwise goes unacknowledged.

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