

The Lovemakers

Also by Alan Wearne:

Poetry

The Australian Popular Songbook, 2008

The Lovemakers, Book Two, 'Money and nothing', 2004

The Lovemakers, Book One, 'Saying all the great sexy things', 2001

Out Here, 1987

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The Lovemakers

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For John Forbes (1950–1998)
and
Jas H. Duke (1939–1992)

*You know, I am told my tenderness for you
is for me, really, that if I treat you gently,
I replace a harshness I suffered from, the roles reversed.*

William Bronk, 'No Way'

*Oh I'm living the life I always wanted to live
Oh I'm living the life I always wanted to live
Instead of begging I've got something to give*

Roosevelt Sykes, 'Lucky Blues'

. . . who actually is The Man?

Paul Havin to Alan Myers, 1989

*You can call it a choice
if you want, but that doesn't change
what we learn to rely on,
the smallest stratagems. Whatever works.*

Bronwen Wallace, 'Joseph MacLeod Daffodils'

BOOK ONE

*Saying
all the great sexy things*

Part 1

JACK	AVOIDING TROUBLE
KENT	MURDERER
BERNIE MILLAR	COOK
DENISE	JACK'S GIRL
THE KID	RUNAWAY
DESLEY }	WHO HELP THE KID
IRIS }	
CROSS QC	BARRISTER

JACK'S PROGRESS (I)

for Rae Desmond Jones

Melbourne, May 1960

Kent, the friend who said he'll meet him here,
is late, been stopped or given up.

How many hours has Jack been out?
He'll check when many more get logged.
*... and no use just being 'free', I need to know
I am.*

Beers and smokes on a damp late morning,
with 'Corner Quiz' from the bar's portable.

It's quiet, business, and Take five the owner
urges his staff.

*Five what? Jack wonders
Well whatever they are, take fifty.*

So he will read perhaps.

Someone in the spine-snapped
American paperback loses his name,
has got to find it.

*If I gave mine away
and never bothered, how long would I last?
A man needs a kid, intelligent and pretty
and 'honest', 'reliable', the adjectives start melting together
Yeah and she could take over my name
so as I would never need it. All you can do for years, some years
it seems, is think, read and listen . . .*

Some queen is flogging corsetry or furs,
how come they finished 'Corner Quiz'?

'day Jack.'

It's behind him. 'Jack.'

He doesn't turn: 'Y' late.'

Losing my name? That'll keep. Girls? Probably.

And if he's been numb to it, Jack can always
flirt with forgetting them. But only flirt.

The rain has blown east. The staff return.

‘Yes Kent, y’ late.’

The sun unrolls itself along a wall.

Bernie Millar meets Jack: Sydney, Melbourne Cup Day 1960

... at fifties. Hi Jinx.

Sure, sure someone should’ve backed it.

Not Bernie though. For here’s what backing’s all about

for me, Jack: people, trust, the future;

two out of three, perhaps; three out of three,

Bernie is your bunny.

Which is why I’m glad

I’m here and meeting you.

I’ve forgotten where but I’m with Kent

and Kent knows you and who you are:

‘See him: he’s Jack: if he isn’t hard

he’s pretty hard. But anytime,’ says Kent,

‘you want someone to trust, trust Jack.

Unlike you, Killer Diller Millar, Jack’s

no girl.’

No girl? ‘Well yeah,’

I’m telling Kent, ‘let’s take that on, except,

except, I’ll get things done,

you and this Jack’ — pardon Jack —

‘couldn’t even know or knowing start

to understand’.

Anyone I want, I have them

needing me. And then it’s baby time!

There was this one ugly widow, see

(who ought to have been in leopard skins).

‘Isn’t that a funny coot?’ she asks.

‘Come over here funny coot.’

And anchors aweigh! I was getting piped

aboard The Good Ship Lollypop out of

Noah’s Ark.

So what’s doing here?

The race was run three hours back,

the party's into headache mode,
 whilst you and me just stare at a few
 sweet bays, the odd island, headlands and
 three or four ferries.

Tell us, Jack,
 how'd they ever let in coves like us?
 A bag o'fruit or two is one thing,
 but my guess is they'll try to frisk me
 at the door and you'll remind them
*Fellas, this funny coot's with me and I'm
 with you aren't I?*

Don't you love the way it is
 up here? How no place slums it quite
 like Sydney does. If this lot let in
 Bargain Basement Bernie wouldn't they lock out
 no-one?

But matey, Jack, don't they realise how,
 one day, I'll do something so special,
 how I'll leave everyone looking ridiculous
 (I've just one chance to do *that*)
 for I'll want them saying (you too Jack,
 you too) *So! That's what he meant!*
*Playing silly buggers wasn't Bernie Millar's
 only game!*

The gee gees?

No you can't do much
 with them but shout and win perhaps.
 Friends took me to the Cup once;
 before the race I was staring
 at this painting: Carbine. And, I tell you right,
 this little prick's beside me,
 giving out a tip and, one name sounding good
 as any, I take the tip. Which wins!
 That's backing enough for Bernie; he's never been more ahead.

You get out of Melbourne a bit?
 I get out of everywhere. You come here,
 you go there, you inform the appropriate squad
 Just visiting friends which ought to sound good
 but often isn't. For Jack, certain people don't enjoy,
 don't trust, too much moving around.

And no-one should of course, unless
 it's you and me doing the moving just to annoy
 these certain people. I can imagine
 telling this walloper tonight *Why am I*
in Sydney Sarge? To watch the Melbourne Cup!

I still can feel my ears ablaze even if, guess what,
 it hasn't happened yet.

Well Jack, your very first coaxial cable Cup:
 how's matey rating it?

Yeah, I know,
 Hi Jinx at fifties: should've been backed
 and must've been doped.

Doing much tonight?

A few tales from my life so far

(1)

A sucker for the nags and their manoeuvres
 my father played his life with small debate
So you miss on the Railway Highweight?
There's bound to be the Second Improvers
 '... for this is not; he'd poke at his chest, 'mug punter
 mark one'

Then, each self-conviction
 brimming into the next, each absurder fiction
 sustaining the last, our time to leave the Upper Hunter
 arrived.

We always left everything.

At six,
 after The Sisters clipped my skull, forming headaches,
 Dad slammed the family's spiritual brakes
 right to the floor: quitting being the micks
 we hardly were.

And if our drifting was so-so,
 f.a.q., still we drifted: just ask the kids and wife:
 it was hardly time for getting on with life:
 war days, moving days, twenty years ago.

(ii)

... and Now I was twenty.
 With widge nights, bodgie days
 keeping me learning there were other ways
 to turn, to look, to see.

It's an age of plenty,
 I get advised, and so I take
 what life's about: living it total, once:
 day of the bludger, night of the ponce,
 with Jack-on-the-make
 at twenty-two running this 'stable'
 where they'd only be so young so young.

And, climbing one extra rung
 of respect I go along with the fable;
 any balls in a knot
 will never be mine,
 trusting, perhaps, there'll arrive a time
 to get me everything free-with-the-lot.

(iii)

... and part of me announced as I was grooming my stubble
 into a beard Let's play the beatnik/ scientist/ explorer)
Ahh Jack you were born never to be forgotten: like an aurora
 Yeah but now I'm heading one way and trouble
 the other. Here's how dumb I was: once, coming south
 overloaded with such dreams that ricochet *Whack!* into your chin
 ... schoolgirls? Who'd I think I was? Errol Flynn?

I'll tell you what remained but: how my mouth
 had tasted hers and hers and hers.

The jug is always a shock.
 For remember you carry what's called a prick, which might be romantic
 but not when it governs your every scheme and antic.

Now, back on the street what am I after? Christ matey anything
 in a frock.

Except that this arvo, just as they're running The Cup,
 I'm in, of all places, Steak 'n' Kidney
 and guess what (he would and he did, wouldn't he didn't he)
 Mr Bernie Millar is picking us up.

(iv)

I'm no 'great man', never was meant to be;
 one day but my kind of good might happen;
 though not if I stand around plain-yappin'
 with you Millar: you're such a poison.

Y' see,

Bernie isn't merely bland, merely bad, he's so bland –
 and bad beyond the bland and the bad of any Mr Bloke.
 (Besides, who else but me would have him?)

And it has got to be a joke

how, tiptoeing the borders of Rockspiderland
 he expects to find me there and all I can say is *What?*
Pick up some kid sheila both of us and root her delirious?
Mate I mean y' not this serious?

But he won't answer and you've still got
That for a friend?

You sure have.

For few arrive at the black,
 still centre of my heart quite as Bernie does.

And he says (or may well): 'Whatever this buzz
 between us is, it works for mates like us eh? Eh Jack?'

East St Kilda, New Year's Eve 1960

Look to that first floor flat: a window up,
 watching this show that the night plays (water
 and lights, a road) it's Jack, his hands over
 a woman's shoulders, squeezing them slow
 and firm.

He met Denise through a serving hatch.

'I'll go to hell for this,' she rather guessed,
 the first time they got drunk.

'If it exists,'

he tried agreeing, 'then I'll join you.'

Thin, with Betty Boop eyes, she always carries
 proof-of-age. The man before called her
 Lollypop, pushed her around but
 only once.

At noon the heat
(how many days of it?) just split apart
and fled.

Home after work
Jack kept every door and window open,
showered himself, lay down to hear the rain,
and read, loving the cost of every word,
the working-at-it.

When Denise arrived,
a best frock over her arm, they went to the window.
Behind them, to follow-on some feather duster gags
(the set's sound down) a throaty 'Ragtime Cowboy Joe'
is mouthed from a dummy.

Jack spits sharp into the night.
He's wanting something better:
*'Hotter Than That', 'Wildman Blues' . . . aren't I
nearly hotter, almost wild?*

He's nearly almost anything;
except a kitchen hand's no cook, a cook's hardly a chef.

Yet who is this in singlet,
thick plain belt and jeans, behind Denise?
Her very own trim bearded hero: our Jackyboy!
Who sounds a sigh. *This is not too bad?* it asks
No no she likes it . . . Eh?

And wait, wait
this *Eh?* replies.

Too right, don't move.

'All this,'
she's told, 'finds a spot so far inside my head it's
outer space. Do you know that?'

Do you know what else dazzles him?
Just her standing there; that anyone could.
Or, even simpler, how they might survive.

'I'm going squarehead from tonight . . . well
part of me might. Yeah . . . I'm Rin Tin Bloody Tin,
who's not? We'll go out soon, there's something,
they reckon it's a cabaret or something,
somewhere.' (The doll stops singing, cackles,
is replaced.) 'Denise,' says Jack. 'Denise.
I can't quite figure what we've started, mate,
but it's unrolling.'

THE KID IN ST KILDA

Through their kitchen and onto the back verandah
 Desley and The Kid had dragged the mattress.
 She'd been known to bring back worse and,
 since the lease didn't allow for pets
 this way they got around *that*.

Call it
 a sudden snap of weakness, but Des had
 wanted to like him: you saw a person,
 gulped, took risks. Some paid you to love,
 some you almost ordered yourself to enjoy.
 He was obviously neither: thanks praise et cetera
 hardly a customer, twelve she guessed him, thirteen, fourteen,
 young or old enough for those famous
 'friendly lectures' Desley almost couldn't help.

'Saint Bloody Kilda: run away from home,
 from any place, you'll find it. What kid
 wouldn't?'

After a few wet days
 drains were hopeless, but, till then that's
 what people did: some rode round for a root,
 others lived in drains.

'Flat 4 tarum-taraa!'

Here was her home so where was his?
 His name then? No, you're caught with a name.

'Son, they catch you with a face.
 Well I'm Desley, my friend's Iris and here's hoping
 she approves.



Years on, after he'd been
 Mr A and The Baron and The Alien
 (dealing and taxi-driving to help set himself
 back on the rice trail) he'd tell, whoever wanted
 or didn't want to hear, how
 yes, when he was this tearaway living

in the drains, these St Kilda hookers took him in
 (... and how it might have been
 right where we are now: 4/9) and how,
 yeah anyway at this party there he met,
 well kinda met, that sucker Kent.
 Then there was Bernie, bit of a mongrel Bern,
 who tried interesting him, at twelve,
 in grass or whatever it was called;
 and Jack who wouldn't let him so as he 'n' Jack
 could be friends. Or so it seemed.
 Last time, in Bangkok or Manila or wherever,
 he thought he saw Bernie, or the ghost of Bernie,
 behind a bar, he didn't need to stop.
 Jack of course he always saw around, that man
 was The Phantom: made to be seen around;
 but nothing special now, just someone to nod at.
 Then the intros were recalled: you know Jack, Kent?
 Well this is Denise his girl; that's Bern
 and this is The Kid, he goes with the place for now.
 'Know the first law of anything?' Kent wanted to know.
 'He's asking you,' Desley prompted.
 'Only one law,' Kent advised, 'never be dumb enough.'



Iris had made a condition:
 'You can be here when one of us are home ...'
 so a few days on she asked
 'What're you doing through the day ...'
 (Fish, he thought; or go to town; or read things;
 help out.) 'Making trouble or avoiding it?'
 Iris knew a stupid question when she
 asked one. He kept to his smile.
 'You know,' she asked, 'where we work,
 Des 'n' me?' The boy had already guessed,
 grinning as if he'd known even before
 the women had. 'You're not dumb ...'
 Iris could enjoy that. 'Girlfriend?'
 Stumping The Kid his bravado melted and
 he blushed. 'Well not yet. Why should you?'

Haven't you friends though, at your age?

'Friends? Some ...' He could exist without them but. Or could he?

'Des,' he shot out fast, 'she's letting me stay ...'

'On our back verandah, sure. You're not the first, mind. You heard we have this do on Saturday?' Flicking his head he showed he'd heard. 'There'll be Kent,' she told him, 'Jack and Denise, Paula and her chink, Bernie Millar (under sufferance), the twins, and now, by special arrangement, Desley's latest acquisition: you, The Runaway Kid. We've broadminded friends, but how do we explain you, when we have to? Call you my sister's boy?' Didn't think he'd need that, didn't want to neither, though Iris buoyed the idea: 'I'll think of something later ...' She wouldn't try.



Kent was out. Wouldn't he need a party? Iris did. It was okay by Des even if they needed her to accommodate this guest appearance: The Kid, her kid, late of the drains with his scrubby sandy hair, his whingey words and clever words. The drains apart she wanted to know his home and, truth or fibs, he mentioned some suburb or country town. Des thought she'd heard of it; sometimes a customer might drop a name that sounded familiar, though in this job, by thirty-four, you often thought you heard. Don't expect her to stay trying this *that* long. Soon enough she'd quit sitting around and settle down, with Mr Menzies, adopting for her boy scout this kid who, over the past days, ran her a few bobs worth of messages.

So Kent was out and, after stocking-up for their party, Iris sagged

into her afternoon. Happy with wanting the lot.
 Des of course would give it all away:
 they differed over that; but better her than
 bible-thumpers, standover ponces, bent cops,
 all that these men with Billy Graham jaws could do
 was cast blunt spells on those who
 wanted to be scared. So what was wrong
 in this drooping-off to nothing?
 Death might be life's grandest thing (if only
 you were certain what it was). 'She went
that way?' acquaintances would ask her friends,
 and her friends, proud to have known Iris,
 would elaborate. Though of course you'd miss
 such admiration.

And she liked the sound
 of what was said: death as life at its grandest.
 If only she'd known to inform Kent
 (that night or any time) but who would?
 For Kent, a trim man under his little hat,
 had only eighteen months to live.
 In a fortnight he and a mate would
 find themselves a job and botch it:
 and cornered by two cops would panic:
 a cop would get the mate, Kent would get
 that cop, then, after next summer,
 when nothing but the cricket, the heat and Kent's appeals
 made news, they'd string-up Kent,
The Herald having him stroll to the noose
 reciting Lawson or Paterson or 'Life is mostly
 froth and bubble ...'

No-one knew an angel
 must have been preparing to arrive at
 4/9 that evening, this angel malevolent
 enough to slap Kent's back, matey style,
 with *Welcome home Kent you poor dumb cunt,*
welcome from those of us outside . . .
enjoy yourself it's getting late.



Jack asked The Kid: 'Told you read a bit?'

And grafting to the man's lean speech something of his 'When I can. Papers. Anything.' The Kid replied. The only bearded bloke he'd met before was Santa Claus.

'Had it a month,' piped Des, 'Jacky's going Buddhist oooooo!' and waved her hands like he worshipped Casper The Friendly Ghost. Should've, she thought, sent The Kid in next door for 'Hawaiian Eye' and 'Perry Mason' but Rasmussen was out.

'Me?' Jack looked at The Kid; The Kid looked back. 'We've got our business ...' came an answer pleased with itself. 'Boys aren't my line, you know that. Right Bern? Go on tell us, Bern ...'

And Bern told them:

'Makes a decent beer this town don't it?'

Even at his age such phrases shuddered The Kid: he wouldn't forget it, this exactly: the very insignificance of Bernie-the-cook. Jack would be that good smart man he met a few times at the pros, but Bernie set him a life-motto: never be anything like that, an anything that's nothing. A bignoter? Please, if only ... for one day he'd become that passenger who leered back 'Bro? Hey bro?' or Fatso, grinning to the mates, then goin' down on Crazy Horse pussy just for them. When someone's getting fucked in the dark by the wrong guy, Bernie wants to be that wrong guy: a man and his little little con, who ceases without it.



'Des, why'd you take me in?' The Kid asked later. 'Why aren't I booted out?'

She explained it:

'Don't think it goes with the job. Iris 'n' me might have hearts of gold, the next girl

probably hasn't. Of course you'll have to leave one day,
 all of us will, but I couldn't have you
 caught in a storm, then swept into Port Phillip Bay ...'
 Survival was one fact of life, that and love.
 There were of course the others, since all that sex-stuff
 was living really. You did it or you
 read about it and what was the fuss?
*'He saw the outline of her nubile form
 swell from behind the negligée ... It's a bit
 like that, but hardly much. It's just
 there's something every hour, every minute, second ...'*



And that day women's problems had Iris
 a little peaky. Des was going with her
 to the quack, leaving him with Bernie,
 their friend, his perhaps, who was humming
 'Paper Doll' and 'Ballin' The Jack' now they were alone,
 songs The Kid had heard him sing that summer
 but knowing *Stay still stay quiet* was the order
 of Bernie's eyes, and how it should continue:
Do this, I'll give you that ...

(*'Fourteen maybe, skinny though ...'* Iris muttered
 as he dozed off his first night there.)

Now, this arvo, he was being touched
So here's how they start with kids like him
 having to shrug-it-through, for money was better but.
 Scary when a soft hand pats your face
 but near enough to fun, like seeing what
 went next, or daring to ask
 'What 'm I getting?'

'Sheilas feed y' well?'
 (In the man's chest something seemed clicking-
 up towards his throat.)

'What 'm I getting?'
'They feed y' well?'
'What 'm I getting Bernie?'

He dodged an open hand as, for an answer,
 it splayed into a sideboard; half a second

sounded nothing at all, till a pretty cup bombed
 onto the floor. *Give us a year I'll be your size,*
silly poof you should've got me drunk
 like in the stuff he'd read. Remembering things
 he'd heard was great, didn't *You'd fuck anything*
Bern sound wonderful? Might even repeat it.

'Look ...' Bernie was blinking, panting. 'Look ... what ...'
 though with footsteps coming to the door
 The Kid could strut out what he liked:

'Ten. Ten quid and quick, else I tell Des.
 She 'n' Iris never believe you!'



But Bernie had been set-up enough:
 during the next few days, wanting to play it right,
 he started thinking and a great idea arrived.
 It was too risky though: having something pinched
 then blaming, no better planting, it on The Kid.
 Des adored that boy; Iris would hardly
 believe anyone she hated as much as she hated Bern;
 whilst he didn't need to imagine Jack
 cocking a brow as his eyes drilled for
 the little truth left
Know you did it mate, just explain why, Bern.

It had been a mean idea, but a great one,
 just flawed by being clumsy. Yet if Bernie
 was bad news, Kent was badder
 (even Jack, Cap'n Squarehead himself, seemed
 hardly dad material) and how could you
 let a youngster stay in St Kilda,
 let alone with Desley,
 when out where he belonged were paddocks
 to run in, plenty of trades to learn?
 He wasn't sure how legal it might be but
 the right word with the right cop made
 everything wonderful. Never was after thanks
 but Bernie might be thanked, the girls let off,
 praised, even, for their public service:
 caring for a runaway best they could,

then giving him up and sending him back
to a loving home and mum's best tucker.

Equal better Bernie would get his own back.

So an early morning later, The Kid
looked up from his mattress, recalling the story of
the three wells: for look who'd arrived:
a few of our old mates, the boys and, yes,
even a girl as well, in blue.

Time to give up. But he would leave milking
the situation so that Bernie might cop something:
'Fair go, today's me birthday!'

Wistfully in tears Desley blanched:
why hadn't he told them?
Muttering 'Learn a trade son'
Bernie sounded, yes, a touch embarrassed; Iris lit up;
and weren't the cops exquisitely uncomfortable?
'Happy returns . . .' the woman offered; and 'Well,'
Jack smiled, as he always seemed to,
'If it is or almost is . . .'

Des recovered.

She wanted to say something like
No matter even how weird, love's love but 'Crikey Bern,'
she sighed, 'it had to happen sometime,
but today? Y' should've asked us
tell them about the drains son
who's he is this kid needed somewhere, someone.'

And he wanted to go anywhere now, away from
Bernie shovelling what's-for-the-best
at the bulls. Free country though and no regrets,
when it was decided you move, you moved;
you learnt that knowing Bernie.
Wouldn't he do the same? Had hardly fleeced
this dobber though, that was all.
Next time, even if they never get it,
when someone wants then someone pays.

Desley came closer: 'Iris sends her love.
Come and see us one day, don't leave
without these, son.' (His *Pocket Compendium
of Australian Statistics; Facts and Figures*
from the SSB.)

He was slightly smiling now
but The Kid had turned into a boy
sloping off with the cops.

CROSS QC:

THREE VILLANELLES

for Michael Prideaux

(1) R v Kent: The cross-examination

... after what's been said and what's been done
it distresses, I understand, this evidence.
Let's get it right though: *then* he dropped the gun?

A criminal shot, a colleague dead, Just one-on-one:
life's never been like this before, it's far, far tense
than any courtroom, right? Yet, after what's been done,

after you've heard *I'm gonna get you, son* ...
please constable, take no offence
but get it right: he dropped the gun

and then he aimed it? Where'd you read that? *The Sun*?
(Your Honour I withdraw.)

But what amount of sense
does this make: after all's been said and done,

with a partner dying wouldn't you make a run
(the only thing left to prove your innocence
is time)?

And yet Kent doesn't. My client drops the gun.
What guilty men act this way: lots, a few, none?
(When a life's at risk all words swell immense,
soon as they're said.)

As for what was done:
we have it right? Then he dropped the gun?

(ii) R v Kent: The summing up

The case you've heard, with due respects, is bent.
We may not like him, think he's highly flawed,
yet he's stayed calm my client, Mr Kent,

and that's but a start to show he's innocent.

Up rose his hands as he howled *Oh Gawd!*
(the case you've heard unravels, it is bent)

having a good idea what *Drop it!* meant
but, for that second, froze: his being gnawed
with staying calm.

My client Mr Kent's

no saint (what chassis never had a dent?).
It's hardly the point he gambled and he whored
with due respects.

The case you've heard is bent:

relive this evidence again: the scent
of anger's out, the ground is being pawed . . .
still he stays calm my client Mr Kent.

Four! Five! Six! That gun was a long time spent.
Throw it down! somebody implored.
And didn't he?

The case you've heard is bent:
for he stayed calm my client Mr Kent.

