

NO TIME
TO



PLAY

SCOTT ZARCINAS

NO TIME TO PLAY SCOTT ZARCINAS

NO TIME TO PLAY

Scott Zarcinas

ALSO BY

SCOTT ZARCINAS

Free eBooks

Rain

Jessica's Confession

∴ JbbYUg7Uh

Lorraine's Diary

Fiction Titles

Samantha Honeycomb

The Golden Chalice

DeVille's Contract

Ananda

Roadman

Non-Fiction Titles

Your Natural State of Being

NO TIME TO PLAY

Scott Zarcinas



DoctorZed
Publishing

www.doctorzed.com

Copyright © Scott Zarcinas

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First published in digital format by DoctorZed Publishing.

DoctorZed Publishing books may be ordered through booksellers or by contacting:

*DoctorZed Publishing
IDAHO
10 Vista Ave
Skye, South Australia 5072
www.doctorzed.com
info@doctorzed.com*

ISBN: N/A (ebk)



For My Girls

*“Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds
and other minds and other dreams. They are
journeys you can make to the far side of the
universe and still be back in time for dinner.”*

— Neil Gaiman

THE WITCH'S CANDY

ROBBIE O'NEAL fled on his bike as fast as he could, chased by his shadow.

The candy in his pocket pressed through his jeans into an aching thigh with every pedal. The afternoon heat laboured his breath, stinging the back of his throat. His hair blew back from his sweaty brow and his Arsenal shirt stuck to his chest like a wet rag. Worse, the cobblestones rattled the wheels so much he reckoned his teeth'd be shook loose.

Not that he was going to stop. No way. He had to keep going. Had to get the hell away from here as fast as he could.

He glanced over his shoulder, hating his brother. Over the hotels and tenant blocks in St Katherine's Wharf he could just make out the flapping pennants atop Tower Bridge. Thankfully the only cars behind him were stationary and driverless. The old witch wasn't following.

Pauly always made him do his dirty work, but this was the last time for sure. No way was he gonna let Pauly get away with it again.

He could probably relax now, but the sooner he met Pauly the better. He didn't want to hang onto the thing pressing into his thigh for longer than was necessary. He didn't like the way it felt. It certainly wasn't proper candy. He knew what that felt like – hard, so that it almost chipped your teeth when you bit it. No,

proper candy wasn't anything like this thing in his pocket. This was like...

Like *fake* candy wrapped in tinfoil, candy that was trying to be something it wasn't, just like Pauly whenever Jenny was around. The more he dwelt on it, the more he wanted rid of it. Quickly.

Yet it was still pressing into his thigh and the thought of getting caught with it made his heart sink. He still hadn't kissed Jenny Wilcox and she said she didn't kiss boys, only teenagers like Pauly. That was a bummer coz he was only nine and a half and his thirteenth birthday was a whole lifetime away.

So he had to keep pedalling and get the candy to his brother. He had to keep pedalling like mad. But it's not his fault. It's in his genes.

THE HANDOVER

BARELY NOTICING the warehouse apartments on the river as he sped by, his gaze now fixed on the corner plot where the milkman's lane met the street.

His mum always called the neglected plot "the park" as if it were acres of forest where she could spend the afternoon forgetting how crappy life in the East End was and pretending that everything was all right. But the park was nothing of the sort. It was just a place where he and Pauly came to kick the footy around, where one decent boot of the football could send it flying over the far end into one of the windows of the Italian restaurant on the opposite corner. Pauly called it the shit box.

He cycled up to the rusty gate and stopped, taking a moment to catch his breath. Looming over two sides of the park were drab, five-story council estates, not too unlike the apartment block around the corner in which he and Pauly shared with their mother. Rows of open windows stared down at him, lidless accusing eyes, except for the last window on the top balcony. That one had an eye-patch made of wooden boards and it gave him the creeps, naked-old-men-in-overcoats kinda creeps.

"Stop staring and get over here!" Pauly yelled.

He was standing in the middle of the park with his foot resting on a football, like he was expecting his little brother to come over and shine his shoes or something. On second glance, he looked more like he was standing on someone's skull.

“Hurry up! I haven’t got all day!”

Robbie opened the gate and cycled up to him. Pauly’s blue eyes were staring at the creepy boarded window on the top balcony. There was a vacant grin on his face that for some reason Robbie associated with their now forgotten father. Robbie always felt uneasy with that grin.

“D’ya have it?” Pauly asked.

No hello. No good to see you’re safe. No friendly slap on the back or punch on the arm. Typical Pauly, as were the black jeans, sneakers and AC/DC T-shirt. Robbie nodded and said yep.

Pauly held out his hand and told him to hand it over.

“Not till you tell me what it’s for.”

“None of ya business, stoopid.”

Pauly mouthed the word ‘stoo-pid’ like he was imitating some gangster-of-the-month he was currently infatuated with. Gangsters were to Pauly what cigarettes were to his mother, an addiction.

“Now cut the bullshit,” he said, still holding out his hand, “or I’ll kick ya teeth in.”

Robbie knew Pauly was as good as his word. Still straddling the bike, he reached into his pocket, then stopped. “I won’t say noth’n to mum,” he said. “Honest. You can tell me.”

Pauly frowned, then grinned his vacant grin. “Tell you what,” he said. “You give me the stuff right now and I might forget slapping ya ’round like a whore. I might even let ya come with me and Jenny and see for ya’self.”

Robbie almost threw the tinfoiled candy over to Pauly, glad to be rid of it. He found it hard to believe something as small as a bottle cap could be so important. Pauly eyed it with a sneer that said, *Is that all?* then stuffed it into his pocket and kicked the ball as hard as he could. It looped in a high arc over the fence, just missing the far window of the Italian restaurant, bounced down the street and came to rest against the wheel of a parked car.

Robbie made to drop the bike on its side and collect the ball, but Pauly told him to forget about it if he wanted to come with him and Jenny. Robbie looked at his brother, then at the ball, then back at his brother.

His shoulders sagged. He’d do anything for Pauly. Even give up his only football.

Yet he kind of wished he wouldn’t have to.

THE GIRL

AT THAT moment, the gate at the other end of the park squeaked on its rusty hinges and Jenny Wilcox stepped through.

Robbie couldn't take his eyes off her. How often had he fantasized of being her dashing saviour? How often had he daydreamed of pulling her from the wreck of a flaming car, rescuing her from the unwanted advances of bullies, holding her in his arms after she'd fallen from her bike? She was everything he wanted. She was all he could think about.

He loved her flaming red hair, loved the way she moved and the way the hem of her skirt lifted up with each step to show the smooth white flesh of her inner thigh. He loved her slender wrists and large brown eyes. He loved her full, curvaceous lips and the two small mounds pressing beneath her white top. He wanted to touch them. Wanted to touch and kiss her all over. She was a dream.

She was also his brother's girlfriend, and there was noth'n in the whole *stupid* world he could do about it.

Jenny slung her daypack onto the other shoulder, waved and smiled. Robbie waved back. Pauly just looked at his watch.

"Hello, you two," she said, and pecked a kiss on Pauly's lips.

Robbie felt blood rushing to his face. Pauly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and looked at his watch again.

“You’re late,” he said. “D’ya bring the stuff like I said?”

She nodded and handed him the daypack. Pauly rummaged through its contents to make sure everything was there, then withdrew a small metallic box from his back pocket and put it inside the daypack. As he handed the bag back to his girlfriend, Robbie saw him glance once again at the boarded windows on the upper floor of the council estate.

“Come on,” he said, grinning. “We’re late for the party.”

Robbie felt a spasm in the soft part of his guts just above his belly button, like Pauly had just socked him for fun. He wasn’t so sure he wanted to go ahead with this anymore. Moments before, the idea of finding out what Pauly was going to do with the candy had seemed exciting and fun. Now, he didn’t know why, he had a feeling that nothing good was going to come of this.

He gripped the handlebars so hard his hands began to hurt, and even Jenny seemed to sense his wariness.

“Do you really want to go up there?” she asked Pauly.

“Where else should we go?” Pauly said, shrugging.

Robbie hated that shrug. It said there was no point talking about it because all of them would do exactly as he wanted anyway. Pauly started walking backwards in the direction of the building, arms wide.

“If you don’t want to come, you don’t have to. I’m not twisting your arm.”

Yet that was exactly what he was doing. They all knew it. If they didn't want to be with him, he was really saying, then there were plenty of other lads in the neighbourhood who would die to hang out with Pauly O'Neal. And plenty of other girls too for that matter.

Robbie and Jenny shared reluctant glances, then followed Pauly across the park to the graffiti-covered stairwell.

THE ROOM

ONCE AT the stairwell, Robbie chained his bike to the railing and crept up to the fifth floor behind the older two.

The door to the derelict apartment was on the side facing the riverside warehouses. All the windows on that side were boarded up as well. Jenny then removed a butter knife from the daypack and gave it to Pauly, who slid it into the crack between the doorknob and the doorframe and wiggled it back and forth until the lock disengaged. The door creaked ajar.

Robbie snuck behind Pauly and Jenny into the kitchen. Immediately his nostrils were filled with a horrid stench. Mingling with the dust and stale air was a gut-churning reek of corned beef left too long out of the fridge. Pauly told Robbie to shut the door, but that was the last thing he wanted to do. He put his hand on his belly, trying not to puke.

“Hurry up *stupid!*” Pauly hissed.

Robbie grabbed the doorknob, noticing that his fingers had a shake he couldn't fully bring under control, then reluctantly pushed the door shut. The moment the lock clicked into place, the room was swamped with total darkness.

Robbie felt his heart miss a beat, along with the kind of crushing agony he had whenever Pauly sat on his chest in one of his crazy games of lets-see-how-long-Robbie-can-stand-the-pain. He bit his lower lip, wanting to tell Pauly more than anything that this

was a big mistake coming up here. He wanted to say he was really frightened. Except there was no way he'd say any of that in front of Jenny, no way at all.

"Give me the candle," Pauly whispered to his girlfriend. "Quick!"

Robbie could then hear Pauly rummaging inside the daypack. Next, he heard Jenny tell Pauly to grab the candle from her hand, followed soon thereafter by the fizz of a match being struck.

There was brief flash of light, like a spark from an electrical socket, enough to glimpse Jenny holding the daypack between her legs and Pauly readying the candle to be lit. The smell of the burnt match briefly overwhelmed the stench of rotting corned beef. Then the flame died out and it was complete darkness again.

Another match was struck, but the head broke off and dropped to the floor. Jenny giggled nervously. Pauly told her shut her trap and try another one. This time she had more success. Soon the candle was flickering in Pauly's hand.

The first thing Robbie noticed was how the flame turned Jenny's white shirt the kind of orange the sun made when it set over Tower Bridge. "Summer orange," his mum called it. Not the dull, watery lemon of mid-winter.

The second thing he noticed was the state of the kitchen. With the limited splattering of light from the candle, he could see bare cupboards with doors ripped from the hinges, sockets with twisted electrical weeds, an empty sink layered with grime and

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

