

Words that create tension

Emery is yelling at me. 'Take the handlebars. Get to the gully, unhook the dogs if you have time, if not just hide!'

'What?' I say.

'I'll catch up,' he says. 'Keep going!'

'Wait!' I yell, but he's thrown himself down into the dirt and he's rolling behind a couple of tree stumps, scrabbling around for rocks, and the cart goes on.

And I want to stop the cart. I want us all to fight those bikers together, but the dogs keep running and I steer the cart behind them, straight at that patch of bush. And a track opens up ahead of me like I wished for it, like a vehicle has been into the bush from here before, and I tell the dogs to 'Haw!' and they turn down it, and with big trees either side of me, it's almost too dark to see anything.

'Woah!' I yell, and the dogs slow, and I shove the brake on. 'Woah!'

A gunshot cracks the night. My heart leaps into my throat and I croak out a scream. Lights are waving around cutting through the dark behind me and another shot cracks off. And Maroochy is growling.

I drive the cart into the bush beside the trail, tip it over and wrap it around a tree trunk. I won't leave Emery there to die. I have to go back for him. One light is bouncing around coming for the trail behind me. I feel around for a stick or something to fight with, but all I find is that roo

carcass, fallen off the cart, and that's what I grab.

I run back up the track, dragging the skinny roo with the one back leg missing, making it lighter. The dogs are all yelping and barking behind me. They wanna be helping Emery too.

The light aims square down the trail and I dive into the trees.

The dogs are lit up, bouncing and pulling on their harnesses, yelping, coz the cart's stuck on the tree, and the bike picks its way down the rough trail towards them. The light blinds me as it gets real close, and I shut my eyes so it don't ruin my night vision. Then, when the whir of the electric motor is on me, I step out, dragging the roo by the tail. I swing it up around my head once and bash the rider across the back. He crashes down and the bike slides ahead. At the edge of the light, a revolver bounces on the track. I run after it, pick it up and run around the man trying to get to his feet. I use the butt of the gun to bash the bike's headlight in. Three goes, it takes, that thing is solid! Then I bash in the red tail light and I'm blind, seeing spots, but I stumble towards the sound of dogs. I roll my ankle, crash to my knees and jump up again. I run smack into Maroochy's bouncing black fur and unclip her harness from the gang rope, and then Wolf and Bear. I leave the two white dogs stuck there, because the man on the ground is already up yelling and fighting Maroochy off, dragging his bike, trying to get it up maybe.

Words that create
tension

He flicks on the indicator lights, and in the orange flashes, he sees us, circling him, three dogs and me standing pointing his revolver.

Maroochy's got him by the leg or something. He's yelling, bashing an arm at her, and Wolf and Bear are trying to get a chunk of him too, following her lead. He better not hurt my dogs.

Then the bike crashes back down and boots thud as the man runs for it. Dogs on his heels, him whacking them away, or kicking them away. It's a mess of noise in the dark. Just dogs growling, claws scrabbling, and the white bits of Wolf and Bear's faces, teeth showing in orange flashes as they help Maroochy chase that man away.

Words that create
tension

Words that create
tension

I chase the man back up the track too. I'm terrified, I'm mad, filthy angry at what they done. But mostly I have to get to Emery. Nothing else matters. The man's running to the path of light from a stopped bike. Stopped back up near the stumps where Emery is.

'Rooch!' I say. 'Get Emery!'

I stay out of the light. Trying to run silently. Without being seen. But the dogs cross the light every now and then.

'There's a pack of wild dogs down there!' the man we're chasing yells. 'And a kid with my gun!'

'Where?' the other man yells, and I aim for that sound. Point my gun and pull the trigger. My heart's slamming in my chest, but the gun doesn't go off. I feel around the top of it for a switch or a lever or something. A safety catch like in the movies. By the time I find it and flick it, I don't know where the other man is no more, so I can't shoot. Not with Emery and our dogs out there somewhere.

Words that create
tension

Another shot cracks the air so loud, so close, I jump out of my skin. Dog claws go scrambling. The white face of Bear shoots past, eyes panic-wide, tongue flapping. He's getting out of here. My heart crawling for my stomach, I circle round on the bike. Skirting the pool of red brake light. There's a rifle stuck in a holder near the handlebars. I slide that out, then I smash out the white headlight, one blow this time, tuck the rifle under my arm and run.

The men swear, run to the bike. I stop running, line up the revolver, hands shaking like crazy, shoot at them, but even holding the handgun in two hands the blast makes my arms fly up in the air and the bullet too probably.

I skirt round back to where I think the stumps are, looking for Emery. There's black fur and a panting right at my hip. Rooch is here. Maroochy didn't run away, she's right here with me.

Words that create
tension

The men swear. 'Stay low. We'll come back for the other bike in the morning,' one says. The bike starts up, a quiet hum. In the red brake light, there's an arm with another handgun pointing my way and I hit the dirt, pulling Maroochy down with me. A man runs past the red light and gets on the back. Another gunshot cracks off, making

me and Roochy jump.

'I'm pretty sure that kid that hit me with the rock is dead,' the man says.

My heart stops, all the air that's in me falls out, and I think I'm gonna suffocate. Emery. My Emery. My big brother. He can't be dead. He can't be. I should never have left him.