



## The Song Dog (A Kramer and Zondi Mystery)

By James McClure

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The year is 1962. Young Lieutenant Tromp Kramer of the Trekkersburg Murder and Robbery Squad has been ordered up to Jafini, a small, dusty town in northern Zululand, to investigate the "hero's death" of the town's chief detective, Maaties Kritzinger—another Afrikaner maverick, and one with many secrets. Kramer finds himself increasingly identifying with the victim as the investigation proceeds.

And then his path crosses that of Bantu Detective Sergeant Mickey Zondi, who is trying to locate a multiple killer whose summary execution will quiet the spirits of his ancestors. Despite racial differences, the two men sense a kinship . . . one that might prove dangerous in rural South Africa in the year of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## Editorial Review

Review

### Praise for James McClure

"[McClure is] a distinguished crime novelist who has created in his Afrikaner Tromp Kramer and Bantu Sergeant Zondi two detectives who are as far from stereotypes as any in the genre."

—**P. D. James**

"McClure's stories . . . have been noteworthy in equal measure for their poignant evocation of [South Africa], their perception of partnership, and their acute sense of sexual obsession."

—*Time Magazine*

"The pace is fast, the solution ingenious. Above all, however, is the author's extraordinary naturalistic style. He is that rarity—a sensitive writer who can carry his point without forcing."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Soho completes its reprinting of one of the finest police series to begin in the 1970s, James McClure's eight books about Tromp Kramer and Mickey Zondi, a South African biracial detective team in the days of Apartheid."

—*Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*

About the Author

James McClure (1939–2006) was a British author and journalist best known for his Kramer and Zondi mysteries set in South Africa.

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Like a cat she was quick and her hand slapped and the mosquito spread red on her thigh.

“Christ, he’d done well out of you,” he murmured. “Look at all that blood . . .”

“That’s never *my* blood,” she said, flicking away the dead insect. “I didn’t give the little bastard the chance! Must’ve been yours.”

“Can’t be,” he said. “I’d have felt it also.”

They lay back on the bare mattress. They lay side by side, no longer touching.

He was glad of this: he was hot, the sweat streaming.

“Phew!” she said, and they both laughed, before falling silent.

Outside, mangrove frogs croaked; a crocodile slid with a lazy splash into the estuary; two owls hooted, one high and one low.

Oh, ja, he was hot, bloody boiling, but awash with wellbeing. Even better, he seemed able to think straight again, now that she had stopped crowding his mind with voluptuous conundrums; now that he had all the answers to how each and every part of her young body felt, and to what she cried out when she came. Her hoarse cry had made him come also, that very same instant, and he looked forward to hearing it again, once they’d rested awhile.

Then the candle flame, fast running out of wick, began to fluster, and this sent a tremble through the shadows it cast. Some shadows were long, looming right up the unpainted wooden walls of the room; others slunk across the floorboards into untidy corners that were heaped with fishing tackle and dirty clothing. Soon, even the exposed roof of river rushes overhead appeared to be moving uneasily, undulating in

that wavering light.

And he found himself going back over the events of the day, astonished, in a numb, remote sort of way, by how suddenly he had succumbed to a temptation fiercely resisted for five years or more, ever since he'd first known her. A temptation so strong that in the end only the words of a crazy black bitch had stood any chance of holding him back from the brink, from what he feared would be his eternal damnation. Beware, Isipikili, the spearhead in your veins and where you next plunge it! Beware, Isipikili, for the songs I hear are of death, and how my old heart mourns! But, great mother, he had replied, all my songs are of death, so what can you mean by this?—and he had been afraid when she refused to answer him. Yet, after long hours without eating and only one brandy, it had taken no more than the lightest of touches, brushing the back of his hand, for him to dismiss all this as the usual mumbo jumbo, meaningless, without context, and how easy the rest had been, how natural, how good and life-giving, a joyous thing happening between two unhappy people that nobody else would ever know about.

He raised himself on an elbow. "Whose blood?" he said, looking again at the vivid smear left by the mosquito.

She, her eyes closed, shrugged.

"Listen," he said, "a mozzie who's sucked up that much blood doesn't fly far—he's too full."

"How would you know, hey?"

"It stands to reason. So where did it get that much blood?"

"Is it really a lot?"

"Look for yourself!"

Her eyes languidly opened. "You mustn't frown like that," she chided. "Makes your eyebrows meet in the middle, spoils your good looks." And she touched a fingertip to his forehead.

"You're certain that your bloody cook boy isn't still here? That there's no one?"

"How many more times?" she said. "Like I told you, I gave him the night off and he went to get drunk at his uncle's. Ach, he'll never be back before morning at the earliest."

He twisted round to look at the shuttered window. "That mozzie must've come from somewhere close by," he said. "I know, what about poachers?"

"That'll be the day!" she said, and laughed. "No poacher ever comes within ten miles of this place—no kaffir in his right mind would ever dare to! You-know-who has given it too much of a reputation."

This made him glance at the bruise on her right shoulder: a big, lilac bruise that clearly showed three knuckle marks. He had found such evidence of brute violence curiously titillating earlier on, but now it troubled him.

"Ach, come on, why the face?" she said, taking his hand and making it brush her right nipple. "There," she said, "do you see how quickly it says hello to you?" She cupped his hand over her other breast, squeezing it. "Ja, nice," she grunted, "only do it harder, hey? Harder!"

His hand remained limp, his gaze back on her thigh. "You'd think," he said, "a mosquito so loaded down like that would just want to sit somewhere quiet and digest."

"So what? Maybe that's what he thought he was doing when he landed on me, only I was too—"

"But where did he come from, so fat?"

"Jesus!" she said, shoving his hand away. "What's the matter with you? You're the last person I would ever expect to act like he had a guilty conscience!"

"It goes with the job."

"That I believe!"

"No, what I meant was, being on your guard all the—"

"Just shut up a minute," she said.

And she reached out for her cigarettes on the orange crate by the bed, lit one and inhaled long and deep. The smoke drifted slowly from her nostrils, drawing his attention to the droplets of sweat on her upper lip, and to the beauty spot just to the right of it. From so close up, it was revealed as no more than a small mole from which two tiny hairs sprang,

but it still gave him a small thrill for some reason or other—just as he liked licking the imperfection of her slightly protruding navel, neat as the knot sealing a pink party balloon.

He touched his tongue to it again, on sudden impulse.

“Don’t stop,” she said, her free hand moving to hold his head there. “And stroke me. Stroke me the way you did when we first started . . .”

He began, facing the darkening bloodstain there beyond her plump, tawny mound on the surprising pallor of her thigh; a mark as vivid as a splash on the white tiles of an autopsy room. His eyes closed and he stroked more swiftly. His hand skimmed lightly over her breasts and then down, dipped and rose gently, flattened out along her smooth flank, and paused only when it reached the coarsened skin of her knees. Back again. Down again.

“More,” she said, her cigarette hastily crushed out on the orange crate. “More . . .”

There was no need. He was hardening against the movement of her insistent hip, and the great dizziness was again taking hold of him. Soon, he knew, he’d move round, mount her, strive for that ecstatic moment of release which would be sudden, like the give of a stiff trigger-pull, and he’d see her arch up, cry out, and then slump back, a deadweight beneath him.

She stirred, moving her legs wide apart. “Now?” she whispered.

“Just wait,” he whispered back, his hand skimming light as a feather, faster and faster.

She waited, her whole body beginning to tremble.

“Ja, now!” he said, rolling over to kneel between the clench of her thighs, his back to the window. “Quick, take it and—”

A cough sounded right behind him.

“A croc,” she said quickly, closing her fingers around him, making him feel ridiculous: a saucepan grasped by its handle. “Just a stupid old croc—they sometimes make noises like that.”

He pulled away, sitting upright. “A croc?” he said, as though the word were entirely new to him.

“Ja, you know,” she said, “only a crocodile—I’m sure of it. Sometimes they like to come up and lie in the gap under the house. Don’t ask me why.” She was trying to draw him down again.

The space beneath the floor was hardly a gap, he thought, having noticed it earlier on his way across the dunes. The wooden piles supporting the house were easily tall enough to allow a fully grown man to crouch, eavesdropping beneath that floor, turning a deathly pale.

“Listen,” he said, his voice uneven, for it had dropped very low, “there’re ashtrays everywhere in this place. Does, er, youknow-who also smoke? Well, does he?”

She nodded. “Ja, but he hasn’t a—”

“How many?” he hissed. “How many a day? Lots?”

“Ja, quite a few—maybe thirty, forty. He—”

“Be quiet!” he said. “Be dead quiet and lie still!”

“Honestly!”

Yet she lay still, apart from the slight jiggling of her right foot. He listened hard. He wondered if he should reach for his revolver, there in its shoulder holster where his clothes were neatly laid, underpants uppermost for a quick getaway. The candle flame dimmed and then flared in its death throes. He felt very, very excited.

“Well, at least *someone’s* still interested,” she murmured with a sigh, taking hold of his extreme hardness to thumb its slippery tip daintily.

And he could see that her own state of arousal had been heightened too. Her eyes now had a strange look in them, a stare that was snakelike in its fixed intensity. It made him twitch against the softness of her palm.

“Ja, it’s time you stopped imagining things,” she said, her thumb even busier. “Do you honestly think that ten minutes ago either of us would’ve noticed a mozzie biting us? Jesus, it must’ve thought it’d landed a ride on a bucking bronco! I bloody did!”

He laughed out loud, very loud, astonished to learn what a wonderfully dirty mind this young girl had. “Not bad for my age, hey?” he said, joining hands with her. “But that was only the curtain raiser, remember!”

“Oh, ja?” she said, raising herself to him.

The second cough came from directly below them, abrupt and chesty. Her skin goose-pimpled. It goose-pimpled all round the blood smeared on her right inner thigh, and he actually saw this happen.

“Oh, no!” she said. “You’ve gone kerflop!”

“Shut up!” he said.

A giggle took hold of her. “Gone KER-FLOP, just like that!” she sputtered. “One second, it was looking me—”

He struck her, frantic to halt her noise, and hit her perhaps a fraction too hard with the edge of his hand, as he occasionally did with people.

“You okay?” he said.

She said nothing, her blue eyes wide open.

“We could be in bad trouble,” he said, dropping his voice even lower. “Stop fooling round . . .”

Those blue eyes were unblinking.

“Jesus wept,” he said. “A joke’s a joke, hey? Reach over and pass me my gun—you’re the nearest.”

A strange warmth enveloped his knees. He glanced down; her bladder was voiding. Recoiling violently, he landed on his feet beside the bed with a loud thud.

*Cough*

The two owls hooted, one high and one low.

“You bastard!” he exploded, snatching up his revolver. “YOU BASTARD! I’ll get you for this! FUCKING GET YOU!!”

And, not thinking, not caring, but berserk, he hurled his empty holster aside to go charging, stark naked, from the room. He knocked over chairs, barged a table aside, and went crashing, shoulder-first, through the fly screen over the front door, before taking a wild, windmilling leap from the verandah to the ground below.

Where he landed badly and fell, sprawled facedown, with his left hand over the toe cap of a fishing boot.

He whimpered.

Just once, never having felt so vulnerable before, and froze.

It went on and on, that wait for the unimaginable. That craven grovel in the stinking, filthy mud beside the estuary. Until something slimy suddenly slithered over his right calf, making him flinch involuntarily and jerk his hand—the fishing boat toppled sideways.

It was empty.

“Oh, Christ . . .” he sobbed, getting clumsily to his feet and having to stoop to pick up his gun again. “All for what, hey?”

Because he just *knew*, even before looking around him, that he would see nobody in the vicinity, nothing untoward under the house.

The moon reappeared at that moment, slipping free of a sea cloud, and its cold, steady light confirmed at a glance just how right he was: the place was totally deserted. And when he heard a sort of cough, he was able to turn in time to see a huge crocodile heave itself into the estuary from a nearby mud bank, plainly outraged at having its peace disturbed.

“You bastard,” he said weakly, and tried to laugh.

But no sound came. Because, in his mind’s eye, he could still see her so vividly, her hair seemingly askew like a wig, her breasts not rising and falling. Perhaps a nightmare hadn’t just ended—perhaps it had barely begun.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Brian Wilson:**

As people who live in the modest era should be change about what going on or information even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era that is always change and progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know which one you should start with. This The Song Dog (A Kramer and Zondi Mystery) is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

#### **Richard Crowe:**

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