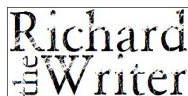


Helene

Richard Jefferis



Self-published in Australia by Richard Jefferis,
aka Richard The Writer.

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www.richardthewriter.download

8th January 1873
Brisbane !!

Dearest Lizabet

Great haste compels this note for a ship departs this very afternoon, bound for Europe, and I desire most urgently to inform you that we have arrived safely! Yes, it is indeed so! After three months our ship Die Lammershagen has at last arrived in Moreton Bay and we are most excited in anticipation of setting foot on dry land once more. 'Tis to be hoped that our sea legs, most arduously acquired, will be quick to remember the delights of solid ground!

I must close now for the Steward is impatient to take this and my other letters. Friedrich and the boys are well and we are all impatient to begin our new lives. Always remember that you, Father and Mother remain foremost in my heart at all times.

Your loving sister
Helene

Chapter One

It could have been a contender for Dante's Inferno. The vast reddish-brown landscape, arid and parched, stretched from horizon to horizon. Off to the north west the ground rose as a series of small hills but here it was flat. Well, flattish. There were undulations in the land with occasional dunes and things that were too low to be called hills but were still higher than the land around them. And what a land it was. Only the fevered imagination of Dante could have conceived such a land. More red than brown in places, more brown than red in others with patches of dirty grey and the occasional glint of something here and there. Such vegetation that grew was green of a sort, but sparse and clumpy. There were trees but they were thin and not rich with foliage. They seemed to wilt, barely resigned to Dante's malicious humour.

Still, the eagle soared. There was life down there. Granted much of such life as was visible was too big even for a full grown eagle to grapple with for much of that life was cattle. The cattle clustered in groups around water holes, pushing and jostling for space in the shade of the trees. The eagle ignored them. Even calves were too big. Further to the south the eagle knew the pickings were better for there were occasional lambs but this was not the lambing season. A new born lamb was small enough and made a tasty change from lizards and the like but this was the wrong time for such delicacies. Perhaps there might be a snake or an incautious rabbit.

Lazily the eagle dropped a little lower, its gaze shifting to the small red car that moved slowly across the landscape. Perhaps an hour before, not that the eagle measured time in hours, a long truck had passed the same way, rumbling and growling as if it too was complaining of being made to work in the heat. It had come to a halt, with small screeches of protest, in the town that lay further to the west. It still sat there, silent and forlorn, coated with the dust of this land. A primordial monster.

The little red car, now that was different. It hummed rather than roared and from this high up the eagle could barely hear it. Intriguingly it was also smaller than anything else the eagle had seen move along the narrow black strip that sliced through the scrub.

Curious, the eagle dropped lower. Granted it was still far too large to be prey and smelt unpleasantly wrong but even eagles enjoy a break from their routine.

Then the car slowed down and veered off the black strip, sending up a cloud of thin reddish grey dust. It came to a stop, much like the truck in town. The eagle circled once, then twice then again before the side of the car opened and a figure emerged. Disappointed, the eagle recognised the figure as one of those nasty creatures that shouted and flapped and threw stones when it got too close. It twitched its wing feathers and soared upwards into the sky before heading north. A solitary tiny black dot against the only thin wisp of white cloud that marred the pale blue intensity of the sky.

Lucy didn't see the eagle. Her gaze was upon the sign beside the single lane of the road. She'd stopped because the sign said, in large almost friendly letters, **Welcome To Helene Creek** and her emotions had been piqued. She was almost at her destination and, quite possibly, a deciding fork in the journey of her life. Pulling over to acknowledge the sign seemed a rightful homage, almost an act of surrender to destiny.

Of itself, 'Welcome To Helene Creek' was unexciting. Lucy was driving to Helene Creek and it was only to be expected that there would be a sign on the edge of the town announcing its existence to the world. After all, few maps of Australia ever mentioned the place and you had to zoom in a long way for Google Maps to even show a dot on the road. What had caused her to get out of the car, phone in hand, to take a picture of the sign, was that under the 'Welcome To Helene Creek', printed in smaller lettering, the sign read "Pop. 193". Underneath that, written in a shaky hand with what looked to be a thick crayon, someone had scrawled "comin ta get ya Griz". The 193 had been scribbled over and 192 inscribed under it. Actually it looked more like 792 but that seemed unlikely. To add to the effect there were three holes in the metal which could easily have been from bullets.

"Jesus," said Lucy, staring at the sign. "What kind of place is this?"

She looked around a touch anxiously but there was nothing to be seen

except the scrub, the road and the town a little further ahead and to the left, just past the bridge. Certainly there was no one watching her with a gun poised and ready.

“I wonder who Griz is and if they did come to get him,” she thought, looking back at the sign. “Seems a bit silly to warn him though. Maybe he saw the sign and did a runner.”

She reached out to touch the crayon writing then jerked her hand back. It seemed somehow to be tempting fate. Instead she backed away a couple of steps and flicked the camera app on her phone. She took a couple of shots, an inappropriate word perhaps given the holes in the sign, then one of the surrounding landscape. She tried to see how they'd come out but the glare on the screen made that impossible. After twisting into awkward shapes to get the screen in the shade of her body she gave up and got back into her little red Toyota Yaris. She shoved the phone up inside her t-shirt and peered down at it through the neck, something a girl can't really do when out in the open even though there wasn't, apparently, anyone around. The pictures of the sign had come out nicely although the one of the landscape was pathetic. Putting a frame around the scene took away any sense of scale and whatever grandeur there was in the vast harsh outback had disappeared. It could as easily have been a closeup of an old flower pot.

Lucy tossed the phone on the passenger seat and, out of habit and training, looked behind before flicking the indicator and pulling back onto the road. If there was any traffic it was probably still a lot of kilometres away. She'd only encountered one other vehicle in the last hundred kilometres or so. It had been coming towards her so she'd slowed and edged off the road to make way. The big battered ute hadn't slowed but it, too, had edged off the road and she'd been left with nothing more than an impression of a large hat driving the ute and a raised fore finger on the hand that had clutched the steering wheel.

Perhaps 500 metres further on was a sign pointing to the right saying Cemetery and, on the corner, was a small police station. As she slowly drove past Lucy wondered what the police had thought about the “comin ta get ya Griz” and if they'd taken it seriously. The police

station had a closed look about it so she suspected they hadn't seen it yet. It also seemed a little inauspicious for the police to be based near the cemetery.

There was another sign just before the narrow bridge which implied, through a rather ambiguous cartoon, that oncoming traffic had right of way. There was no oncoming traffic so Lucy drove across, the metal barrier to stop people jumping the two or so metres to the dusty creek bed barely inches from her wing mirror. After the bridge the road opened out into a broad thoroughfare with a wide strip of grass that looked surreally green after the desiccated scrub. At intervals were tall palm trees that offered small patches of shade. More to the point there was a pub with a faded sign proclaiming it to be The Bunkhouse Inn and, further on, a store with a couple of tables and some chairs outside, under its portico.

“Spoilt for choice,” muttered Lucy, driving slowly past both. “Do I want a coffee or not?”

Undecided she carried on past the service station, where the three trailer truck the eagle had seen still sat, waiting for its driver to return. She did a U turn at the end of the central grass and drove slowly back down the street towards the bridge. There was no other traffic although there were two utes parked outside the Post Office and one beside the children's playground in the park opposite the pub.

“Actually I fancy a cold drink,” thought Lucy as she did another U turn just before the bridge. She pulled up outside the pub and turned off the engine.

She sat in the car for a minute or two, letting the fizz in her blood from all the driving subside. Nothing moved. It was almost like a ghost town.

“Put a handful of crows in that park and this'd make a great horror movie,” she thought.

She picked up her phone and opened the door of the car. A wave of heat hit her. She shut the door and locked the car before hurrying

into the shade of the pub. On the wall, beside a dusty window, was an even dustier old thermometer. She peered at it then rubbed it with her thumb to clear a little of the dirt off. The mercury was right off the top of the scale which ended at 50 degrees centigrade.

“Oh my God!” exclaimed Lucy, staring at it. “Is that for real? Over fifty degrees? Wow!”

The door to the pub slammed and Lucy jerked her head around to see a huge man with an immense belly and a profusion of matted hair sprouting from that part of his face that wasn't hidden by a greasy cap.

“G'day,” he grunted, his eyes looking at Lucy's bare legs below the hem of her shorts.

“Umm, hello,” said Lucy warily. “Umm, is this thermometer right?”

“Dunno,” he said, half turning. “What's it say?”

“Over fifty degrees,” said Lucy.

“Nah, ain't that bad,” he said, scratching his chest under his dirty overalls. “Me truck reckons it ain't even forty,” and he jerked his thumb in the general direction of the service station.

“Oh right,” said Lucy.

They both stood there for a few moments then the truckie grunted “see yous” and stomped off, the thongs on his feet flapping on the wooden verandah. Lucy watched him for a few moments as the wooden steps down to the ground creaked under his weight then cautiously pushed open the door to the pub. There was clearly an air conditioner somewhere as the place was relatively cold. Lucy pulled the front of her t-shirt away from her body to let some cool air underneath while looking around. As pubs go it was fairly simple. A few tables and benches were dotted around and there was a bar with a couple of old fashioned lever pumps. The place smelt of cigarette smoke and every table had a big battered fruit can sitting on it. There were some framed prints of racing horses and footy teams on the

walls.

“G'day,” said a middle aged woman emerging from somewhere behind the bar. She looked to be an Islander.

“Oh hello,” said Lucy, going up to the bar. “Can I have a lemonade?”

“K,” said the woman. “That all?”

“Yes, thanks,” said Lucy. On closer inspection the woman had tired eyes which probably made her look older than she actually was.

The woman got a can of lemonade from the bar fridge and plonked it on the bar.

“Wanna glass?” she asked as an afterthought.

“No, it's OK,” said Lucy.

“Six bucks,” said the woman, ringing it up on her till.

“Right,” said Lucy, flinching at the price. She took a deep breath and proffered her phone.

“Cash or card,” said the woman. “We don't take them things here.”

“Ah,” said Lucy surprised. “Umm, OK, back in a moment.”

The woman nodded and put her hand on top of the can. Lucy hesitated then walked back out to her car.

“What kind of place doesn't take phones?” she muttered, rummaging through her shoulder bag for her wallet. “Even the market stalls in Melbourne take phone payments!”

She hurried back inside the pub, rummaging through her wallet for her credit card. It was still pristine through lack of use even though it had been issued three years previously. The woman smiled as Lucy waved the card at the little machine and pushed the can back across the counter.

“Thanks,” said Lucy. She popped the top and took a long swig. The woman watched, making Lucy feel a little uncomfortable. “Umm, I’ll go and sit over there then,” she added, pointing off into a corner.

“K,” said the woman.

Lucy sat down on one of the benches and peered into the fruit can. It was half full of cigarette butts so she pushed it away before taking another drink.

“Well, I’m here,” she thought, looking around. “S’pose I’d better let him know.”

She thumbed through her contacts to find David Kaufman and pushed the green icon.

“No signal” flashed up on screen.

“Bummer,” thought Lucy and tried again. It still didn’t work. She looked up and the woman was still watching her from behind the bar.

“Um, excuse me,” said Lucy, getting up and walking over. “Is there anywhere around here I can get a signal?” She waved her phone by way of explanation.

“Not round ‘eve, lovvie,” said the woman. “Back of beyond, this.”

“Oh,” said Lucy, blinking. “Only I need to ring someone to let him know I’m here.”

“Oh yeah?” said the woman, leaning forward to rest both her elbows on the bar. “Who’s that then?”

“What’s it to you?” thought Lucy but didn’t say it. “David Kaufman,” she said instead.

“Oh right,” said the woman. “I know Davy. He expecting you then?”

“Yes,” said Lucy. The woman looked expectantly at her as if some explanation was needed. “Umm, I’m here about a job.”

"A job?" she said frowning. "Ain't no jobs here lessen yous a stockman which you ain't."

"No, not that kind of job," said Lucy. "Umm, how can I phone Mr Kaufman if there's no signal?"

"So what sort of job yous lookin' for?" asked the woman. "Don't need no bar staff here."

"No, not that sort of job either," said Lucy with a faint smile. "Umm, do you have a phone here I can use?"

"S'pose," said the woman. She heaved herself off the bar and looked around. "Missus ain't here. Don't reckon she'll mind though. Come on through."

She lifted up a section of the bar. Lucy hesitated then followed her into a small office that was cluttered with papers. An old fashioned push button phone sat on the desk.

"Thanks," said Lucy, wishing the woman would go away. She didn't. She just propped herself in the doorway and watched Lucy with unabashed curiosity. Lucy sighed and got David Kaufman's phone number from her Contacts.

"Yeah?" said a female voice after several rings.

"Um, is David Kaufman there?" asked Lucy, glancing at the barmaid in the doorway.

"Nah," said the voice. "He's out in the paddocks. Who's this?"

"I'm Lucy Chaplin," said Lucy. "I'm ringing to let Mr Kaufman know I've arrived."

"Who?" asked the voice, clearly puzzled.

"Lucy Chaplin, from Melbourne," said Lucy. "Umm, I'm at the pub."

"Oh, her!" exclaimed the voice. "Yeah, dad's specting yous. Call you

back.” The phone went dead.

“Hello?” said Lucy to the dead phone. “Hello?”

“Melbourne, eh?” said the barmaid.

“Yes,” said Lucy, looking at the dead handset. “Umm, she said she'd ring back.”

“Sounded like Sheila,” said the barmaid.

“I suppose in a small town like this everyone knows everyone else,” said Lucy, replacing the handset.

“Reckon so,” said the barmaid. “So you're Lucy Chaplin, hey? Heard about you. I'm Genvie. Pleased to meet ya.”

“And you,” said Lucy. “Umm, do you think she'll call back soon?”

“Reckon so,” said Genvie. “She's most likely radioing him seeing as how Dave's in the paddocks.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. She hesitated a few moments. “Umm, so shall I stay in here or go back in the bar?”

“Whatever you want, Luce,” said Genvie. “So yous writing a book about us, hey?”

“Well, sort of,” said Lucy, wondering how much she should say, although it seemed to be common knowledge. “More a history of the Kaufman family.”

26th January 1873
The Victoria Hotel
Brisbane

Dearest Lizabet

No letters have arrived for us as yet which Friedrich tells me is only to be expected. He reminds me that the voyage for the mail is the same as it was for us so any letters from you that arrived now would be from soon after our departure. None the less it grieves me and I must put my faith in The Almighty that you, Father and Mother remain in the best of health as are we. The climate here is most unlike that of Vienna for it is both very hot and very wet but we are slowly becoming accustomed. The profusion of flies will, I am most sorry to inform you, be a trial that may prove hard to bear but no matter. Fortitude and patience are the greatest of virtues.

I am greatly delighted, however, to inform you of the great good news that excites us all. Friedrich has found us a farm! As I write he is closing the arrangements with the agent and we anticipate departing for our farm in a few days. Oh Sister, let me tell you of it for it will surely excite your pleasure at our great good fortune!

The farm is some distance inland from Brisbane. Friedrich tells me it will likely take some two months to arrive there but that is by the by. After three months on the raging seas two months by land will be joy to us all. But here is the most extraordinary good fortune ~ the farm is one hundred square miles in size! I know not what a square mile is but Friedrich tells me that one hundred square miles is the equivalent of five square meile or seventy seven million square klafters!¹ A farm of such a size and for only 3000 pounds! Doubtless a farm of such a size, were one to be had, in our native Austria would cost many hundred of thousands of gulden. Friedrich questioned the agent on that score but it seems that such a bargain is commonplace in Australia for there is so much land to be had and few desirous of it. Moreover, the agent speaks well of the farm and the prospectus informs us that the land comes complete with a house, a full complement of cattle, a creek of fresh water and access to a lake some fifty miles beyond its border. Indeed, the Agent had two other such farms for sale, of similar size, but they

1 Historical note from Lucy Chaplin: Until the introduction of the metric system into Austria in 1871, the main units of distance were the *meile*, equivalent to 4.54 imperial miles, and the *klafter*, equivalent to 6 imperial feet. At the time of Helene's departure from Austria, kilometres would have still been somewhat mysterious. Austria also used the Austro-Hungarian *gulden*, also known as *florin*, as its currency until 1892.

were further to the north and doubtless hotter still. Friedrich says that, while the land around Brisbane is not as rich and fertile as that of Austria, it is nonetheless good land and should prove eminently suitable to the raising of cattle. Indeed, he has even opined that it could prove prudent to purchase other such farms as this would be well within our means. As you know, however, Friedrich is a cautious man, as befits the son of a successful cloth merchant, and wishes to fully acquaint himself with the vagaries of farming in Australia before expending more of our capital. He has not yet, as he keeps reminding me, mastered the arts of farming despite having read both his books on such fully four times on the ship!

Our excitement is not yet at an end, however, dear sister! It transpires that the noble burghers of Brisbane have recently completed the construction of a Steam Railway to the town of Toowoomba ~ such strange names they have for places in Australia! ~ which lies no little distance from Brisbane in the direction of our farm on the other side of the mountains that lie behind this city. I say mountains for that is how they are considered here but they are in no way comparable to the majestic Alps of our homeland! But a Steam Railway! Is that not a most exciting way to travel? We are informed that the Steam Train that runs upon the Steam Railway is capable of speeds fully two times that of a horse and will be discommoded not the least by the amount of our baggage!

Your loving sister
Helene

I forgot to add that the present owner, a Mr Reginald Whitely from England, is obliged to sell due to the ill health of his wife and intends to return to that country. Friedrich was most desirous of knowing the reasons for the sale and is much relieved ~ although most concerned for Mr Whitely's wife, naturally ~ as he feared there may have been some fault with the farm itself.

Chapter Two

“I read a book once,” said Genvie with a small frown. “Got almost half way through it, an' all.”

“Oh yes?” said Lucy. “Didn't you enjoy it?”

“Nah,” said Genvie as the phone rang. “Too many big words. Was at school, like.”

“Um, is that the phone?” asked Lucy after waiting a few moments during which she wondered if Genvie expected her to answer it.

“Reckon so,” said Genvie looking faintly worried. “Missus ain't here though. S'pose I'd better answer it, hey?”

“It could be Sheila,” said Lucy encouragingly, hoping Genvie would hurry up and answer it before it stopped ringing.

“Missus don't like me answering the phone,” said Genvie as the phone stopped ringing.

“Oh,” said Lucy, wondering what else to say. “Um, do you think they'll ring back?”

Genvie shrugged and pulled a cloth out from under the bar. The phone started ringing again.

“I'll get it,” said Lucy decisively, marching back into the office. “It's probably for me anyway.”

“K,” said Genvie, no doubt relieved that if anyone was going to get into trouble it wasn't going to be her.

“Hello?” said Lucy, picking up the phone.

“That you Lucy?” asked the voice Lucy had spoken to earlier.

“Yes, Lucy Chaplin,” said Lucy. “Are you Sheila?”

“Yeah,” said Sheila. “Dad said he's out at top paddocks and'll meet ya at the pub in town.”

“Oh, great,” said Lucy. “Thanks. Umm, any idea how long he'll be?”

“Buggered if I know,” said Sheila cheerfully. “If he finds poddies could be a couple of days.”

“A couple of days?” exclaimed Lucy. “So, what, should I get a room here or something?”

“Reckon so,” said Sheila. “Dad says you'll be here a while and ya gotta stay somewhere. Ain't no room at the station what with all the building work.”

“Oh right then,” said Lucy, “although nothing's been formally agreed yet.”

“Yeah?” said Sheila. “Better talk to dad then, hadn't ya. Byee.”

“Just a moment,” said Lucy urgently but the phone was dead. She debated ringing back and decided it seemed rather pointless. She put the handset back on the phone and slowly walked into the bar.

“Heya,” said Genvie cheerfully. “For you, was it?”

“Yes,” said Lucy, picking up her can of lemonade. “What are poddies?”

“Unbranded calves,” said Genvie, wiping the damp ring on the counter where the can had sat.

“Oh,” said Lucy. “Why aren't they branded?”

“Ain't been rounded up yet,” said Genvie.

“Right,” said Lucy. “So David's out rounding them up I expect. She said he might be a couple of days.”

“Is that what she said?” asked Genvie.

"Yes," said Lucy. "She said he's out in the top paddocks looking for poddies."

"She's winding you up," said Genvie. "Dave wouldn't do that. He'd send some stockmen. Besides, it's the wrong time of year. Shouldn't be any poddies out now unless old Birchall missed a few."

"Birchall?" asked Lucy.

"Runs the station up past top end," said Genvie. "He's, like, a hundred and twenty or something but won't hand over to his sons. Daft old bugger."

"So why would David be looking for Birchall's calves?" asked Lucy. "Are they good friends or something?"

Genvie chuckled hoarsely. "Poddies is unbranded," she said. "Go figure."

"I don't under ...," started Lucy then her face cleared. "Oh, right. So if he finds some and brands them then they're effectively his?"

"Reckon so," said Genvie. "Ain't no one as can say otherwise."

"Well, I suppose they could always DNA test them," mused Lucy thoughtfully.

"You what?" asked Genvie, her brow furrowing.

"Never mind," said Lucy. "Umm, you got any rooms here?"

"Sure have," said Genvie. "We got ten with three spare at the moment. You want one?"

"I'm not sure," said Lucy. "Nothing's finalised yet and I rather got the impression I'd be staying on the station anyway but Sheila said there's no room."

"Yeah, reckon not," said Genvie. "They've torn down the old house and new ones ain't been built yet."

“Ten rooms, huh?” asked Lucy. “I wouldn’t have thought you’d get that many people staying here.”

“Seasonal workers and road gangs,” said Genvie. “Might even get a traveller later in the day.”

“Oh, right,” said Lucy, making a decision. “Well, I’ll take one for tonight anyway. Whatever happens I don’t fancy driving back to Melbourne today. How much are they?”

“Seventy,” said Genvie. “I’ll give you the one furthest from the bar. Be quieter.”

“OK, thanks,” said Lucy. “Umm, do I pay now or later?”

“You ain’t no truckie,” said Genvie with a grin. “Reckon you won’t be doin’ a runner. Besides, if you’re working for Davey then maybe missus’ll give you a bit off, like.”

“Oh, great,” said Lucy. “When’ll she be in?”

“Anytime,” said Genvie. “Before sundown for certain. Half a sec.”

She went over to the office and leaned around the doorpost to retrieve a key.

“There you go,” she said, slapping it on the counter. “Stairs are out and round the side but you can cut through the gaming room.”

“Thanks,” said Lucy. She picked up the key which had a cheap plastic key-ring with ‘10’ handwritten on it using a red highlighter pen.

“Dunny’s at the end,” said Genvie as Lucy started to leave.

“Thanks,” said Lucy and pushed open the door. A wave of heat slammed into her. “Jesus!”

“Hot enough for ya?” asked a scrawny older man half hidden behind a long straggly grey beard. He slammed the door of his filthy battered ute. “Gonna get hotter!”

“Oh joy,” said Lucy. “Doesn't it ever rain around here?”

“In the wet,” he said, stomping up the steps to the verandah. “Oh my bloody word does it rain! Floods the bloody place out most times.”

“When's the wet?” asked Lucy.

“November,” said the man. “That's if it does rain. Most years it's bloody drought thought. Devil's own country this.”

“Not until November?” exclaimed Lucy, aghast. “But it's still only August! What do you do for water?”

“Get it out the ground,” said the man, tearing his eyes away from her legs but not looking directly at her. He wiped his hand over his mouth and looked meaningfully at the pub door from under the brim of his battered old Akubra.

“Right,” said Lucy. “Umm, well I'd better be off.”

The man touched two fingers to his brim then pushed the door open.

“Must have wells round here,” thought Lucy as she turned to find the stairs.

Room 10 was at the far end of the pub. The door didn't fit the frame properly but enough of the lock caught the jamb to make it reasonably secure if the door wasn't pushed too hard. The room itself was barely big enough to fit the single bed although there was a plywood closet jammed in beside the window. An old battered air conditioner blocked at least half the window, making the room rather dark but it seemed to work even if it was a little noisy. A single bare light bulb hung from the ceiling and a battered kettle sat on top of a small bedside table. There was a single mug and a jam jar of sachets of Nescafe coffee and sugar.

“Not even a fridge,” thought Lucy, pushing down on the mattress. It seemed reasonable enough although there was only one pillow. “Oh well.”

She put the key in her shorts pocket and pulled the door shut behind her. Gingerly she pushed open the door to the bathroom next to room 10. It was the same size as her room and contained a toilet, a shower, a sink and a mirror. More to the point it looked clean, which was a relief, although the bowl of the toilet was stained. Usefully there was a half used bar of soap on the sink. Experimentally she turned on the cold tap and let the water run over her hand. Surprisingly it was quite warm. She let it run for a bit but it stayed warm so she tried the hot tap. That came out almost scaldingly hot and Lucy yelped in surprise and quickly shut it off.

“Wow!” she said, staring at the taps. The cold tap was still running so she cupped her hand underneath and tasted it. It was slightly bitter and tasted earthy. “Hot and very hot. Weird. I hope they don't use this water for tea.”

She closed the door and stood on the verandah for a few moments, looking out over the town. It was a small place made up mostly of dry dusty soil and single story wooden houses on stumps. From the bridge she'd crossed coming into town to the high antenna behind another building at the far end there seemed to be only three roads coming off the main street. Apart from the green of the park opposite the pub and the green centre of the main road everything else was dusty red.

“Bit different from Melbourne, hey!” said Lucy and laughed. “Jesus, I wanted some excitement in my life but this is going a bit far!”

A loud, deep blaring made Lucy jump and she quickly turned to see a huge fuel tanker crossing the little bridge, trailing a cloud of red dust. She watched as it growled slowly along the main street and pulled into the service station further along with a squeal of brakes. A moment later another big truck emerged from the dust of the tanker and crossed the bridge. This one had two trailers and it too pulled up at the service station. A thin mix of diesel exhaust and dust engulfed her and made her cough.

Flapping her hand in front of her face, Lucy made her way along the verandah and down the stairs. She slipped through the mesh door into the gaming room and stopped at the sight of a big pool table.

“Jeeze, that must be an eight footer,” she muttered, noting the plethora of cigarette burns along its rails. The cloth looked fairly clean though and, browsing through the rack of cues, she spotted one or two that looked to be in not too bad a condition. “There must be some pool enthusiasts in town. Cool.”

Apart from the huge TV screen on the wall behind the pool table the walls were mostly bare although there was a plaque hanging from a nail beside the door to the toilets that said, burnt into the polished wood, “a wife is an attachment you screw on the bed to get the housework done”.

“Sexist bastards,” muttered Lucy, screwing up her nose. She flipped the sign over and was amused to see “Winner Outback Tidy Town 1982” on the other side.

The skinny man with the beard was sitting on a bar stool nursing a beer when she went back into the bar. Genvie was still at the pumps, leaning on the counter and watching him although he was watching his beer.

“Hey,” said Lucy, going over.

Genvie looked up and smiled.

“Found ya room all right?” she asked.

“Yeah,” said Lucy, sitting on another stool some way from the man. “Hey, is the cold water always hot?”

“Reckon so,” said Genvie.

“Isn't it supposed to be cold?” asked Lucy.

“Bore water,” said the man without looking up.

“Excuse me?” said Lucy.

“Comes out the ground,” he said, glancing up but not looking at Lucy. “Artesian, like.”

"Oh, right," said Lucy. "So that explains why it tastes earthy, but why's it hot? Shouldn't it be cold if its been sitting underground?"

"Nah," said the man. "It's fourteen hundred feet down. Eighty, ninety degrees when it comes outta ground. Feeds straight into your hot water pipes from the filters."

"Jesus," said Lucy. "So where does the cold water come from?"

"Storage tanks," said the man. "Gets pumped in to cool down before going into the cold water pipes. Cepting it can't cool down too much cos of the air temperature."

"Right, that makes sense," said Lucy. "What about rain water?"

"Same," said the man. "When it rains, which ain't that often, it's at air temperature as well."

"So how do you get cold water?" asked Lucy.

"Put it in the fridge," said the man and emptied his glass. He pushed it over towards Genvie who took it silently and started to refill it.

The door slammed shut and all three over them looked over. A tall, wiry man in his sixties wearing clean but worn jeans and a checked shirt stood there.

"Lucy Chaplin?" he asked, striding over. He held out his hand. "G'day. I'm David Kaufman."

"Oh, hello!" exclaimed Lucy, surprised, taking his hand. It was rough and he had a surprisingly strong grip. "I wasn't expecting you so soon. Sheila said on the phone you might be a couple of days."

"She's just messing with you," said David, not smiling. Despite his face being weather-beaten he had a soft, almost prissy womanish look. "She's a joker, all right. How's the bores, Stan?"

"Vane on bore 38 broke," said Stan. "Fixed it but I'm heading back for more parts."

“Working all right now, is it?” asked David. He noticed Lucy’s look and added “Stan’s me bore man.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy, guessing ‘bore man’ was something to do with water bores rather than someone to dampen things down when they got overly exciting.

“Is now,” said Stan. “Likely been out 2, 3 days though. Bore was almost dry. Filling up nicely when I left.”

“Good, good,” said David. “Right, Lucy. Good to meet you. Let’s go up to the house.”

“Sure,” said Lucy, getting off the bar stool. “Is it far?”

“25k or thereabouts,” said David. “That your red Toyota outside?”

“Yes,” said Lucy.

“Thought so,” said David. “Round here we mostly use utes or four wheel drives. Reckon it can handle a dirt track?”

“I’ve no idea,” said Lucy. “I’ve, umm, never driven it over a dirt track.”

“Pretty much all we have round here,” said David. “Still, I’ll give you a tow if it can’t. See you, Stan.”

“Dave,” acknowledged Stan, as Genvie pushed the beer in front of him.

David gave Genvie a distasteful look which she ignored then turned on his heel and strode out. Lucy followed, wondering at the slight.

“Small town dynamics,” she thought. “Don’t get involved.”

“That’s me,” said David, pointing to a ute only slightly less battered and dirty than Stan’s. “I’ll keep me speed down.”

“Great,” said Lucy. “Um, I’ll be right behind you.”

6th February 1873
The Royal Bull's Head Inn
Toowoomba

Dearest Lizabet

When last I wrote I told you of our excitement at the prospect of journeying part way to our farm on a Steam Railway.

Believe me, dear Sister, when I tell you that our excitement was misplaced! 'Twas the noisiest and foulest contraption The Almighty has placed upon this Earth! Such hissing and growling and clanking as I have never heard before and the Blackest of smoke comes from the Train itself. 'Tis not an experience I am desirous of repeating. Friedrich was, however, keenly interested and Klaus thought it the greatest of merriment. Leopold, however, being but three years of age, found it most alarming and cried copiously. I was myself so tempted but managed to remain steadfast. I am told that such Steam Railways are the way of the future but, for myself, the present familiarity of horses is quite satisfactory. There is a calming sedateness to a carriage pulled by a horse whereas travel by Steam Railway is a sore trial upon the nerves.

No matter. We are here in Toowoomba and at the end of our journey by Steam Railway. The remainder will be by horse and wagon. Indeed, Friedrich has purchased three such for the transportation of our baggage and is even now interviewing for two men to accompany us as drivers and to be employed on our station. It seems that in Australia farms are not called farms, they are called stations. I know not the why of it but 'tis best when in an unfamiliar country to follow their customs whenever possible. The land we have purchased goes by the name of 'The Whitley Station'.

Aside from the noise and smell the journey through the mountains was entirely pleasant and the general name for the area ~ The Darling Downs ~ is not misplaced. They know not of snow in these parts, not even in winter, which means that all the warm winter clothing we have brought with us is of little direct use although I venture I will be able to adapt them to summer use. Doubtless there will be a capable seamstress near the station to aid me. I digress however. The land remains verdant which bodes well for our future on the station. The town of Toowoomba is, however, somewhat small and, until recently, enjoyed the name of Drayton Swamp! I know not the truth of it but, or so

we are told, some five and twenty years past when workers were sent to harvest the profuse reeds from the swamp itself – something not done before ~ a man was found right in the middle, living in a tent! Quite why no one is able to explain but perhaps the man was not inclined towards society and enjoyed the peace and quiet. He lives there no longer and, we are told, plans are under way to drain the swamp and expand the township.

We remain in good health although, with the proximity of the swamp, mosquitoes are in great abundance. Friedrich did suggest, in a moment of great humour, that we find some use for mosquitoes and farm them instead of cattle. Surely if we did we would soon be in possession of a great fortune!

Your loving sister
Helene

Chapter Three

About three kilometres out of town David turned off onto a dirt road. Lucy followed but was forced to drop back a long way because the thick dust thrown up in his wake made it difficult to see the pot holes and ruts.

When she did eventually arrive David was leaning against the door of his ute outside a large, sprawling single story wooden house on stumps. The house itself was at least two metres off the ground and had two more utes parked underneath it as well as piles of timber, sheets of wire mesh, a couple of rusting oil drums and some mysterious but presumably agricultural machinery. Some way off to the side of the house stood, incongruous in this landscape, a large haystack beside a flattened area scraped clear of the scrub that surrounded the homestead. Some way off to the left was what looked to be a construction site of some sort although no one seemed to be working on it.

“Was wondering where you'd got to,” he said, not smiling. “Welcome to Helene Creek Station. Come inside.”

He marched up the steps to the wide verandah which appeared to go all the way around and had several doors opening off it. It was littered with chairs, a few tables, some potted plants, bits of dismantled machinery and three dogs that barked excitedly at Lucy before running over to sniff her then backing away nervously.

“The wife's,” said David dismissively. “Not used to strangers.”

“What sort of dogs are they?” asked Lucy, squatting down and rubbing her fingers encouragingly at the dog that seemed least wary.

“Buggered if I know,” said David, looking contemptuous. “They're not working dogs that's for sure. Cuppa?”

“Oh, some tea would be lovely,” said Lucy as the dog sniffed her fingers and condescended to let her scratch its head. Emboldened, the other two jostled each other to have their heads scratched as well.

“Come inside when you're ready,” said David sourly, going through a screen door.

“Oh, sorry,” said Lucy, jumping up. After all, he was about to become her employer.

“This is Sheila,” said David, waving a hand at a stout woman, also in her sixties. She, too, wore jeans and a check shirt as well as a brightly coloured bandanna over her short greying hair.

“Nice to meet you,” said Lucy, surprised. Sheila had referred to David as her dad on the phone and this woman looked to be much the same age as him. “Lucy Chaplin. Was it you I spoke to on the phone?”

“Nah, that was the other Sheila,” said Sheila, looking Lucy up and down and clearly disapproving of her shorts. “Charlie's wife.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. Presumably Charlie was their son.

“You look awfully young to be a historian,” said Sheila.

“I study history, not make it,” said Lucy with a laugh. “How old should I be?”

“Hmm,” said Sheila, narrowing her eyes.

“Hmmp,” snorted David. “Lucy's got qualifications. I checked. Make us some tea. We'll be in the lounge.”

Lucy followed David into the small but comfortable lounge. There was no air conditioning but the big ceiling fan kept the air moving. Sheila, hopefully, went off to make some tea.

“Sit yourself down,” said David, sitting in an arm chair. Lucy sat at the end of the couch closest to David. “First time in Queensland?”

“I've been to Surfers Paradise several times,” said Lucy, “but never to the outback.”

“What do you think of it?” he asked.

“A lot drier than I expected,” said Lucy. “I’ve read about it, of course, and seen photos but the reality is quite, umm, striking.”

“I suppose it is,” said David. “I’ve been to Brisbane several times and once to Sydney. Never Melbourne though. Rains a lot down there or so I’m told.”

“Well, yes,” said Lucy. “I suppose it does.”

“Right then,” said David after a pause. He’d clearly run out of small talk. “Let’s get down to business.”

“If I can ask a question first?” said Lucy. “I probably should have asked this before when we were emailing but, um, why do you want someone to write a history of your family? What’s your objective? Why a book, as such?”

“How do you mean?” asked David.

“Well, um, do you want a simple record of who was born when sort of thing?” asked Lucy. “Like a glorified family tree or do you want something more in depth?”

“Ahh, I’m with you,” said David, settling back in his chair. Sheila came in with a tray and put it on the table. “There’s a couple of reasons really. The family’s been here a long time and I’ve never really given much thought to previous generations. Running the station is a big job and takes up a lot of time.”

“Yes, I can understand that,” said Lucy as Sheila waggled a teacup at her. “Oh, white no sugar. Thanks. So what made you start to think about your background?”

“I was in the park in town,” said David. “Waiting for the wife, can’t remember why. Anyway I was looking at the War Memorial. There are three names on it. Agatha Kaufman and Edward Mercer who both died in the first war and William Hickey who died in the second. The Mercers are relatives of ours. In fact, George Mercer runs our sheep station down south, but I’ve never heard of any Hickeys in the family. It got me to thinking and I asked around a bit. None of us who’s still

alive remembers an Agatha Kaufman or an Edward Mercer and yet their names are on the memorial so we were here over a hundred years ago. As for Hickey, well, no one remembers any Hickeys in town so why's he on the memorial? Who was he?"

"So you want to know more about your ancestors or the entire town?" asked Lucy.

"Both," said David, taking his cup of tea. "We own the town, of course, but I got to thinking. How did it all start and who started it? After all, Australia is a fairly new country and Kaufman is a German name so did some German come to Australia before the first world war and start the ball rolling? Couldn't have been easy when Australia went to war with Germany a few years later."

"Well, Kaufman isn't necessarily a German name," said Lucy. "It could be Polish or from somewhere else in that general vicinity. Helene isn't an English name either so that suggests Helene Creek was named for someone not English. You said two reasons?"

"Yes," said David. "You saw the building work going on when we arrived?"

"Yes," said Lucy, "although I didn't take a lot of notice."

"We're setting up cabins for working cattle station holidays," said David. "Four wheel drive tours, astronomy photography tours, that sort of thing. I thought it would be a useful feature if we had a book of the history of the Station and the Town which we could sell the tourists."

"Ahh, I see," said Lucy. "So a simple family tree type account would be fairly dull reading."

"Reckon so," said David, "although I'm not much of a reader myself. The Land and some government reports and such. That's about it. Wife's more of a reader than I am. Likes a murder mystery she does."

"The Land?" asked Lucy. "What's that?"

“Newspaper,” said David. “Don't you have it down south?”

“I don't think so,” said Lucy. “And to be honest I generally get my news over the Internet. So, umm, you're wanting a family history that's more of a story than just a dull recitation of births, marriages and deaths. OK. That'll be a bit more difficult but not impossible.”

“How'd you mean?” asked Sheila.

“Well, a basic family tree is fairly straightforward,” said Lucy. “That's mostly a matter of ploughing through old government records and so on for records of births, deaths and marriages and tying them together. If you want to go back to the Kaufman's original homeland that'll be more difficult as those records that still exist will be overseas, as will church and parish records, graveyards and so on. The drawback is that things will inevitably get missed. Records will have been lost or destroyed and there may well be a few illegitimate births or unrecorded deaths. I wouldn't be at all surprised if, in a remote place like this, some people died way back and no one ever bothered to report it. They may not even be in the graveyard I saw on the edge of town if they went missing in the outback. It's entirely possible the only record is an unexplained gap. For example, there could be a diary entry where someone refers to three children but there are only later records for two of them. What happened to the third? Finding out could take a lot of digging and we may never find out.”

“You mean digging up the graveyard?” asked David. “Doubt the pastor would approve of that.”

“Oh no,” said Lucy. “That's illegal and would need a court order. No, I meant digging through diaries, letters, newspapers, museum archives and so on. That's what I meant by taking a long time.”

“Hmm,” said David thoughtfully. “How long a time?”

“Impossible to say,” said Lucy. “A lot depends on what's still around. Have you got many records here?”

“We've got a few bits and bobs,” said David, “and I daresay some of the relatives have got things as well. Old Lauren, for one. She's eighty

and lives in town. So does Johnny who's seventy. Quite a few others as well. Half a mo."

He got up and walked out of the lounge.

"Tea all right, is it?" asked Sheila.

"Oh, it's lovely," said Lucy. "Do you use bore water here as well?"

"Ain't no other water 'til the wet," said Sheila. "Tanks are dry."

"Oh, right," said Lucy as David came back in.

"Thought this might help," he said, waving a couple of sheets of paper at Lucy. "When we was talking about doing this we worked up a family tree from what we could remember. Haven't got a lot of dates though."

"Well, it's a start," said Lucy, taking the papers and peering at the writing on it. By the look of it they'd remembered names then tried to join up what they could with lines, some of which were scribbled out. It would take a little sorting out. "OK, well, my first thought is to tidy this tree up a bit and talk to some of the older members of the family who're still around. I can also check government records and, since you want more of a story, newspaper archives and the like. The Land might be a good one to start with. There may be articles about things that have affected the Station or the Town or profiles of people and their activities. What about town records?"

"There ain't much," said David. "We got a town council of sorts but it only meets once or twice a year."

"OK, but there are minutes of meetings and agendas and so on?" asked Lucy.

"For sure," said Sheila. "I'm the Secretary. David's the President."

"Awesome," said Lucy. "Would I be able to look through them or are they confidential?"

David chuckled and Sheila looked affronted. "We don't do anything illegal," she said primly.

"I'm sure you don't," said Lucy. "I didn't mean to offend."

"That's all right then," said Sheila.

"Umm, I've another question," said Lucy, "but it's a little awkward."

David looked stonily at her and Sheila sighed.

"Umm, at this stage," said Lucy, "we've no real idea about what happened. It could be there are few records left or it's entirely possible that very little actually did happen. Would you be wanting me to make things up to create a good story? After all, it is intended for the tourists to read rather than an academic document to add to our knowledge of Australian history."

"Would you have a problem with that?" asked David.

"We don't want her lying, David," admonished Sheila. "That wouldn't be right."

"I would, actually," said Lucy. "I'm a History student and I'm hoping for a career in that field. I don't want my first proper publication to be a work of creative fiction. I'm quite happy to speculate on things where there's evidence to support such speculation as that's pretty much what the study of history is all about but I don't want to be involved in outright fabrications or deliberate falsehoods."

"I see," said David, frowning.

"And neither do we," said Sheila pointedly, looking hard at David.

"Hmm," said David.

"And there's a related matter," said Lucy, watching them both. "It's entirely possible that I may turn up some scandal or other. Perhaps someone in the family in times past fathered scores of illegitimate babies or there was a murder or fraud or something. How far would

you want that sanitised?”

“Sounds to me like that’d beef the book up a fair old bit,” said David with a grin. “Might even be a best seller.”

“Do we really want our dirty laundry aired in public, David?” asked Sheila, frowning.

“What’s the harm in it?” asked David, scowling at her. “It’s all done and dusted, isn’t it. History. Not as though I’ve a string of bastards to my name and everyone knows about Genvie and her brats anyway.”

“You want tourists knowing about her?” asked Sheila. “Really?”

“That’s the way it is,” said David spreading his hands. “Doubt anyone much cares these days anyway, ‘cept us.”

“Umm, if I may?” asked Lucy.

“Yes?” said David.

“Is everyone in the family on board with this?” asked Lucy. “If we go ahead with it am I to expect any antagonism or refusals to cooperate?”

David laughed abruptly. “This is the Kaufmans you’re dealing with, love. There’s always antagonism and no bloody cooperation.”

“I mean in any serious way,” said Lucy. “Obviously I don’t mean death threats but someone may have some information that I need but refuses to give it to me.”

“Oh, more than likely,” said David, “but if they do just tell me. I’ll sort ‘em.”

“Hmm,” said Lucy, looking down at the papers in her hand.

“So you still up for it?” asked David.

Lucy hesitated then made her decision. “Yes,” she said. “This could be

interesting.”

18th April 1873
Whitely Station
Queensland

Dearest Lizabet

I have not written to you these past weeks after our departure from Toowoomba and the reasons are two-fold. The first is not to be unexpected for there are no post offices in these parts of Queensland and needs must that we entrust such communications to those who we meet bound for Brisbane. I confess most ashamedly that their countenances do not encourage me on the safe delivery of our letters. I know I should be more charitable but therein lies the second reason which has cast both Friedrich and I into the greatest of despairs.

Oh Sister! We were deceived! Most grievously deceived for the land we have purchased is in no way as it was represented to us. There is some consolation in the fact that it does exist, although for a time we fancied that this was not the case for the boundary markers are small and difficult to find but, with the aid of The Almighty and Jeb's keen eyes, the property was found. It is, however, desolate. 'Tis little more than flat desert with small clumps of some weed and bakes in the sun. Of the creek we were promised there is no sign nor of the full complement of cattle. Friedrich tells me that according to his books on farming a farm of this size should support in excess of 50,000 cattle but it is quite apparent when we gaze out over the vast expanse of nothingness that such cattle as we can see would be hard pressed to number a few hundred.

And that is not the end of our travails, dear sister. The prospectus for the sale informed us that there was a house on the property. In that it did not lie but to describe the structure we have found as a house is a most grievous misrepresentation. 'Tis a small wooden shack of but two rooms with no windows nor hearth. There is a blackened hole near the dwelling which Seth tells us is a fire pit and used for cooking. Seth and Jeb, in my despair I neglected to inform you, are the two men Friedrich hired to drive the wagons and work the farm with us. They are both young but stalwart and God-fearing and likeable fellows.

In truth we had warning for over the weeks we have travelled this land has become ever more dry and desolate but we both held fast to our belief in God's saving grace and that our farm would lie beyond. Doubtless we both had visions of some Garden of Eden that would

appear but in that we are most decidedly wrong. I venture it will come as no little surprise to you, dearest sister, that neither Mr Reginald Whitely nor his ailing wife were in attendance. The dwelling showed signs of recent evacuation so 'tis likely Mr Whitely wasted little time after receiving news of the sale before removing himself and his chattels with alacrity. Jeb remarked that it is fortunate that he did not take such cattle as are here with him but Friedrich has scarce spoken a word since our arrival. I grant he is not the most jovial of men but his face is now beset with a grimness I have not seen before. The children however think it great fun to play in a sand pit bigger than their imaginations.

I know not what Friedrich plans for us now but to my mind our return to Austria is not an impossibility. Even Hungarian rule would be preferential than this forsaken desolation. In truth, God does move in mysterious ways. Perhaps this is His lesson on offering charity to Franz Joseph and the Hungarians.

I have other news, sister, which will delight you and perhaps I should have put this at the beginning rather than subject you to our disappointments. I am with child again! Yes, Klaus and Leopold are to be blessed with a little brother or sister! Friedrich and I have already spoken of names and, should the child be a girl, he has agreed that we may call her Elizabeth after you. With your permission, naturally, although I cannot imagine you would say otherwise!

Your loving sister
Helene

Chapter Four

Lucy drove slowly back from the homestead, her mind a whirl of thoughts and impressions and the car's air conditioning running full blast.

"Jesus!" she exclaimed as a wave of anxiety and doubt hit her. "What the hell am I doing here?"

Her foot slipped off the accelerator and the car slowed to a crawl before running into a large pot hole and stalling. She swore abstractedly but kept her hands on the steering wheel as she stared out across the red expanse, the buildings of the town still some way ahead.

"I've only ever done research from books and journals," she muttered. "I've never done this kind of shit before. They're paying me because they think I know what I'm doing and I'm clueless! What the hell do I do now? There's not going to be any local history books at the library. Shit, there isn't even a library! How the hell do I find out about who lived here decades ago? Look at this place!"

She hit the steering wheel with the heel of her hand then opened the door and got out. Way off in the distance, probably four or five kilometres away, a group of cows stood under the shade of a couple of thin straggly trees.

"Jesus," muttered Lucy, looking at them. "Cattle and desolation. How the hell am I going to write a book about that?"

She turned and leaned on the top of the Yaris then jumped back as the roof was hot. Something way off in the distance caught her eye.

"What's that?" she muttered, holding a hand above her eyes and squinting. "Looks like a stone chimney. Surely not?"

She started to walk over to investigate then changed her mind as it had to be at least a kilometre or two away and she was already sweating. She got back in the car and began to pull off the road then berated herself.

“Don't be stupid,” she muttered, slipping the car back into reverse. “It's bad enough on the track. You'll only get bogged down and end up dying of thirst before anyone finds you. It's probably just the remains of an old homestead.”

A couple of hundred metres down the track she pulled up and got out of the car again. The thing that looked like a chimney was still there although not noticeably closer.

“An old homestead?” thought Lucy, frowning. “Why would there be an old homestead between the actual homestead and the town? Why would someone build a house there then abandon it? Why not in town? That's weird. Unless it was an earlier house and they moved to another house further out, maybe a bigger one. Hmm. Why would they do that? And where'd they get the stone? It must be pretty old if the rest of the building's gone, unless they used the wood for the new place but why leave the stones? Wouldn't they be useful too?”

She slowly drove back into town and pulled up outside the pub. Stan's battered ute was gone but a dusty off-road motorcycle was propped in its place. Lucy got her backpack and holdall out of the back of her car and went up the stairs at the side to her room. She dumped her bags on the bed and pushed the button that started the air conditioner. With a squeal it started up and tepid air began to come out.

“I need a shower,” muttered Lucy.

She grabbed the folded towel that lay on the pillow and went into the bathroom next door. Locking the door she stripped off and stood under the shower, turning the cold tap on fully. The water was warm. She'd forgotten. Still, her dried sweat came off and she felt refreshed afterwards, although not as refreshed as a nice bracing cold shower would have left her. She wrapped the towel around herself, gathered up her clothes and went back to her room. The air conditioner was getting into its stride and the room was beginning to cool. She sat on the edge of the bed and looked around the room. It was bleak.

“I can't stay here,” thought Lucy. “Aside from seventy bucks a night, which I can't afford anyway, I can't possibly work in here. There isn't even a table! And it'll probably be pretty noisy in the evenings.”

With a sigh she got up and tossed the damp towel on the bed. She started to open her backpack to get out a dress then firmly pushed it away.

“Who cares if they don't approve of women in shorts?” she muttered. “This is the twenty first century after all! Women can wear what they like!”

She pulled her shorts back on then opened her backpack to get out a clean t-shirt as the one she'd been wearing was sweaty and had been splashed from the shower. Not seeing anywhere to hang the wet towel and damp t-shirt she draped them over the air conditioner to dry.

“G'day,” said Genvie, looking up from watching the man at the bar. “Found yer way back alright then, eh?”

“Yes, thanks,” said Lucy, wondering what David had meant by ‘everyone knows about Genvie and her brats anyway’. She didn't know Genvie well enough to ask so she didn't.

“Nother lemonade?” asked Genvie. The man looked around at Lucy in surprise.

“At six bucks a can, no way,” thought Lucy.

“G'day,” said the stranger, looking down at Lucy's legs. “Shout you a beer?”

“Ahh, thanks but no thanks,” said Lucy. “I'm not much of a drinker.”

“Strewth,” exclaimed the man and took a long slurp of his beer. “Name's Greg.” He held out a calloused hand. He was only in his mid twenties but he was unshaven, covered in dust and smelt rather strongly of sweat and that unpleasant odour that a livestock truck leaves behind as it drives past.

“Lucy,” said Lucy, touching his hand gingerly. She quickly turned away to face Genvie again. “Umm, Genvie, looks like I'm going to be staying in town for a while. Perhaps even a couple of months. Do you know of anywhere I can maybe rent a room? I can't afford to stay here.”

"Yous can stay at my place," said Greg with a grin and wiped the beer from his lips with the back of his hand.

"Thanks but no," said Lucy. "I need somewhere quiet so I can work."

"Straight up?" asked Greg. "What you do then? Bit of sewing or something?"

"She's writing a book," said Genvie, amused. Whether by the idea of someone writing a book or by Greg's proposal wasn't clear.

"Strewth," exclaimed Greg. "A book, hey. I read a book once. Back in school. Snugglepot and Cuddlepie. Load of old crap, I reckon."

"It's a classic children's book," said Lucy, a little put out as she'd read it as a child and loved it. "Umm, a room, Genvie?"

"Can't say as I know of anything, Luce," said Genvie. "Sorry."

"Try the radio station," said Greg.

"The radio station?" asked Lucy, taken aback. "They'd have a room?"

"Nah," said Greg. "They can put it out yours looking for somewhere. Someone might have."

"Actually, that's not a bad idea," said Lucy thoughtfully. "Where's the radio station?"

"Just up the road," said Greg. "Bloody big aerial outside. Can't miss it."

"Great, thanks," said Lucy. She nodded to Greg and turned away then turned back. "Driving back from the Station I thought I saw what looked like an old stone chimney in the bush. Do you know what it was?"

"About two, three ks up the track?" asked Greg. Lucy nodded. "Yeah, it's an old homestead. Place is riddled with 'em."

“Really?” asked Lucy. “How come?”

“Dunno,” said Greg. “Most likely them what built 'em buggered off, I reckon.”

“Well, yes,” said Lucy. “But why did they build them and why did they leave? How many are there?”

“Couldn't take the bloody heat, most likely,” said Greg with a laugh. “There's another just behind the pub, too.”

“A homestead?” asked Lucy. “Why would someone have a homestead behind a pub?”

“Sounds like a bloody good place to me,” said Greg, pushing his empty glass towards Genvie. “Nother, love.”

“I'll, um, I'll go and find the radio station, then,” said Lucy, realising that Greg and Genvie weren't likely to be of much help in her researches. “Um, Greg, what do you do round here?”

“Stockman,” he said. “Been checking the stock up top end.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. She hesitated a moment as Genvie filled his glass then turned and went outside.

“That must be the radio station,” she thought, seeing the aerial at the far end of town. “And he said there's another derelict house round the back.”

She went down the steps to the road and wandered around the back of the pub. There was a large car park, obviously large enough to take a few road-trains, and a short row of wooden houses, none of which looked to be ruined.

“I wonder what he meant,” thought Lucy as she gazed around. “Ahh.”

Not far away, on the other side of the dry creek, stood a small stone building. Part of one of the walls was missing and there was no sign of a chimney.

“No way is that a homestead,” thought Lucy. “It’s way too small. Looks more like an old prison cell. Maybe that’s where they kept prisoners in the old days although wouldn’t it make more sense to have it next to the police station?”

She started walking towards it then changed her mind and headed back around the pub. A ruin could wait. Finding somewhere to live took priority. She paused beside her car then decided that the radio station wasn’t that far away and a walk would do her good. Fifty metres away she started regretting that decision as the sweat started to bead on her face. Still, the town was only four or five hundred metres from end to end.

“Helene Creek Community Radio and Real Estate Agency” said the sign across the front of the building. A dusty glass covered display bolted to the wall was labelled “Properties For Sale” but there were no particulars of any properties on display.

“Hmm,” muttered Lucy and pushed the door open.

A youngish woman, wearing the obligatory, but clean, jeans and checked shirt and with her blonde hair in a short ponytail, looked up from her book. She had her feet on a table, dangerously close to a laptop computer and a microphone.

“G’day,” she said genially over a country and western song that filled the room. “Can I help you?”

“Is this the radio station?” asked Lucy.

“Sure enough,” she said and swung her feet off the desk. She folded over a corner of the page and closed the book before putting it on the table. “Gimme a moment.”

From the doorway Lucy could see the book was a paperback of *The Time Travellers Wife* by *Audrey Niffenegger*.

The song came to an end and the woman did something with her laptop before pulling the microphone closer.

“And that was *Stand By Your Man* by *Tammy Wynette*,” she said. “We’re gonna take a short break now as I’ve got a customer. Back in a few. Stay tuned!”

She pushed the microphone away and did something to the laptop again.

“Testing, testing,” she said, cocking her head. The room stayed silent. She grinned. “Don’t want our convo being broadcast, do we?”

“Has that happened?” asked Lucy, genuinely curious.

“More than a few,” said the woman, gesturing Lucy to the only other chair in the room. “Shit happens. Name’s Gina. Don’t know you, do I?”

“No, I’ve just arrived in town,” said Lucy, sitting down. “Um, my name’s Lucy. Lucy Chaplin.”

“Now where do I know that name from?” asked Gina, her face creasing into a frown. “I’m sure Shane said something about you recently.”

“I’m here to write a book for David Kaufman,” said Lucy.

Gina snapped her fingers in the air.

“That’s right,” she said. “You’re that historian feller, um, woman. Bit young to be a historian, aren’t you?”

“How old should historians be?” asked Lucy.

Gina laughed. “Reckon as how I wouldn’t know but you’re younger than me I reckon. I’m 27.”

“Only just,” said Lucy. “I’m 25.”

“Awesome,” said Gina. “I kinda figured you’d be old and bald with those little half glasses on the end of your nose.” She laughed infectiously.

"I daresay I'll end up like that," said Lucy with a smile. She nodded towards the book on the table. "So what do you think of it?"

"Pretty good," said Gina. "You read it?"

"No, but I've seen the movie," said Lucy.

"Hey, cool!" exclaimed Gina. "I didn't know it was a movie as well. Anyway, what can I do for you?"

"Well, as you know," said Lucy, "I'm here to write a book but it'll take a while. Maybe three or four months, maybe longer. I'm staying in the pub at the moment but I can't afford to fork out five hundred bucks a week. Anyway, someone called Greg suggested I talk to you. He seemed to think you could put something out on the radio about a room for me."

"Too easy," said Gina. "That's what we do, seeing as how we're a community radio station. What sort of room are you looking for?"

"Somewhere quiet with a table and room to spread out," said Lucy. "I'll probably end up with a lot of papers. Oh and with Internet access."

"Shouldn't be a problem," said Gina. "Everyone in town goes through the satellite on the pub. Gets a bit slow when the footy's on but it's usually OK. How much are you willing to pay?"

"Umm, I don't know," said Lucy. "What's reasonable round here?"

"Wouldn't have a clue," said Gina cheerfully. "Anyway, I can put it out there and you can argue the toss with whoever comes back. Where can you be found? The pub?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "I'm in room 10."

"Whoa, better not broadcast that," laughed Gina. "Every stockman in town'll be knocking on your door. OK, might as well do it now."

She leaned over and tapped her laptop and pulled the microphone

over.

"We're back on air," she announced, her hands busy on the keyboard. "Sorry about that. An urgent request has just come in. There's a young woman arrived in town who's working for the Station for a few months and needs a room with a desk or table. Her name's Lucy and she looks to be a clean respectable girl so you stockies can empty your minds of any ideas. Anyone else though, if you got a room to spare pop over to the pub and ask for Lucy, OK. And here's a song by Roger Miller to help you make up your minds."

She leaned back and tapped the 'Enter' key.

"Trailer for sale or rent, rooms to let 50 cents," started playing over the speakers in the corners of the room.

"Appropriate," said Lucy. "A caravan would be a good idea."

"Yeah," said Gina with a laugh. "Only song I could think of. Only got about twenty thousand MP3s here. Not like one of your big stations in the cities."

"So, um, if you don't mind me asking," said Lucy hesitantly. "How come a woman like you ended up with a radio station in the outback?"

"Oh it's simple," said Gina. "I was in the Australian Defence Force, in Communications. I met Shane who was in the Engineers and we got married. When we both quit the ADF we came here."

"But why here?" asked Lucy. "It's a bit out of the way."

"Oh, Shane was born here," she said. "He's a Lamont, one of the family. He took over the Servo over the road."

"And the radio station?" asked Lucy. "Did you set that up?"

"Yes and no," said Gina. "There's always been a radio station as it was the only way the stations around here could communicate. You know, if someone got hurt they'd radio in and the station would get on to

the Flying Doctor, that sort of thing. I just took it over as I knew a bit about radio and turned it into a proper Community Radio Station.”

“And the Real Estate Agency?” asked Lucy. “You don't seem to have any properties for sale.”

“Oh, that's just a sideline,” said Gina. “Usually sell a property a year, something like that.”

“I wouldn't have thought there'd be any for sale,” said Lucy. “It's a very small place.”

“Oh forget the houses in town,” said Lucy. “They're all rentals anyway. No, we handle the sale of stations in the area. The smaller ones anyway.”

“I thought David Kaufman owned everything around here,” said Lucy, frowning.

“You've got to be joking,” said Gina. “The Kaufmans only own about nine thousand square kilometres. There's hundreds of other stations around here. We broadcast at least 300 k in all directions. That's a quarter of a million square ks or thereabouts.”

“Oh wow, right,” said Lucy, surprised. “I hadn't realised. Hey, tell me something. Do you know anything about that old chimney that's out near the track to the Kaufman homestead?”

“Nope,” said Gina. “It's probably from one of the old homesteads that used to be around here.”

“You mean before it was moved to where it is now?” asked Lucy.

“God, no,” said Gina. “That place has been there at least fifty years. No I mean from way back when the stations were all small. Before the Kaufmans and the Lamonts bought 'em all.”

20th April 1873
Helene Creek Station
Queensland

Dearest Lizabet

Yes, you read our address rightly! Friedrich has reached his decision and we are to stay. Let me tell you how this most unexpected decision came about for mayhap The Almighty has had a hand in these matters after all.

After writing to you of our disappointment but two days ago and I have that letter yet with me for no one has passed to take it to Brisbane we pitched our tents and passed the night for neither Friedrich nor I wished to spend any time in that verminous little shack. In the morning Friedrich rose with fresh determination and, with Jeb and two of the horses, set about exploring the property to ascertain the extent of our disillusionment. Neither returned until after nightfall and I confess to being almost overcome with worry but Seth is the most stalwart of men despite his youth and spent much time reassuring me. When I had regained my equanimity at their return Friedrich told me that they had counted some twelve hundred cattle including forty seven new borns. It transpires that this land is not as arid as we had supposed for there are small water holes and the cattle gather around them. Moreover they had a chance encounter with Mr Thomas Macivor from Scot Land, wherever that may be. Mr Macivor is the owner of the neighbouring property and informed Friedrich that not only are there numerous water holes but that from November to March there is a great profusion of rain. So much so that the creek ~ whose existence we had hitherto supposed to be a falsehood ~ becomes full and flows through our property as well as his. Mr Macivor also told Friedrich that the lake to the south is also real but, alas, has no water except in times of inundation which occurs every few years.

As you know, Friedrich does not make decisions impulsively so he slept on the matter and today, being Sunday, he held a service with myself, Klaus, Leopold, Jeb and Seth in attendance and we all Prayed to The Almighty for guidance. Once concluded, Friedrich then walked some distance from our camp and sat for much of the day. Much as I desired to sit with him and aid him however I could in his deliberations I felt it best to keep the children occupied and out of his way.

Upon his return Friedrich announced his intent to stay and make the

best of what The Almighty had bestowed upon us. He also asked Seth and Jeb if they were willing to remain with us and work the station. With surprising alacrity both agreed which pleased my heart greatly for I have become fond of both of them. Then Friedrich took my hand and lead me over to the gully which, he tells me, is the bed of the creek. Beneath the blue sky he then announced that henceforth this creek was to be named Helene Creek and the farm to be Helene Creek Station! Such a surprise! Moreover Friedrich pledged, in front of Jeb and Seth as well as the children, to devote his every effort to the prosperity of both myself and the land named after me! I was quite overcome with emotion and Friedrich felt obliged to give me some of the medicinal brandy we had brought with us. It was a deeply moving moment and binds us ever closer together.

I confess I do not wholly see how prosperity can be achieved but with Friedrich's determination and the steadfast aid of Jeb and Seth and the advice of Mr Macivor my mind is greatly eased. Indeed, even as I write to you Friedrich is writing to our attorney in Brisbane with instructions to undertake the necessary legalities for the naming.

Indeed The Lord does move in mysterious ways!

Your loving sister
Helene

Chapter Five

“So let me get this straight,” said Lucy, frowning. Gina frowned as well, either in sympathy or because she thought what she’d said was clear enough. “In times past there were lots of small cattle stations dotted around and over the years the Kaufmans bought up a lot of them so there’s now one big Kaufman station?”

“Yeah,” said Gina. “Like I said.”

“So when did the stations first start?” asked Lucy.

“Wouldn’t have a clue,” said Gina with a laugh. “That’s your job.”

“I suppose,” said Lucy thoughtfully. “And it might not even have been a Kaufman who bought in first.”

“How’d you mean?” asked Gina.

“Well the Kaufmans could have come along later,” said Lucy. “Maybe it was a Lamont who bought the first and somewhere along the line a daughter married a Kaufman. Or even that other family.”

“What other family?” asked Gina, frowning again. “Only Kaufmans and Lamonts run the Station.”

“There’s someone else on the War Memorial,” said Lucy. “David said so but I can’t for the life of me remember the name.” She snapped her fingers in irritation. “He could have been one of the last to own the Station and the Kaufmans bought it from him.”

“I s’pose,” said Gina. “I’ve always figured it was the Kaufmans but I’ve never really thought about it.”

“Hinkley, Brinkley, something like that,” said Lucy. “I’ll have a look at the War Memorial when I go back to the pub.”

“Never heard of him,” said Gina. “Just a sec.”

She fiddled with her computer as the Roger Miller song came to an

end then bent over her microphone.

“Don't forget folks, Lucy Chaplin's in town for a couple of months and wants a room to stay in,” she said. “Quiet and cheap is what she wants so have a think about it, OK. Here's a little encouragement from *ABBA* although I need to make it clear Lucy's not looking to get married. Just a room to rent. You'll find her at the pub.”

She leaned back and tapped her keyboard. *I Do, I Do, I Do* by *ABBA* began playing.

“Thanks,” said Lucy.

“No worries,” said Gina. “I'll broadcast it a few more times since not everyone's listening all the time. Let me know when you find a place and I'll stop.”

“Will do,” said Lucy. “Umm, how much do I owe you?”

“Nothing, sweetie,” said Gina. “This is a Community Radio Station so everything's for free. At least announcements, requests, emergencies and so on are. We don't do advertising.”

“Emergencies?” asked Lucy. “What sort of emergencies?”

“Ohh, people getting lost or injured in the scrub,” said Gina. “Maybe a breakdown. Flood warnings too. Well, anything really. So long as someone can radio in to me I'll get on to the police or the Royal Flying Doctor or just spread the word so people can go help. I'm a kind of coordinator really.”

“Don't the police have their own radios?” asked Lucy.

“Gavin has a radio at the police station,” said Gina, “but if he's out on a call his car radio isn't that powerful but I can still get a message through to him or back to the State Police Comms Centre. I also do daily radio checks with the more distant stations with news. Like this morning, for instance. A message came through to the Post Office saying that Angie Bennett's daughter in Sydney's had her baby and all is well. It'll take a month or more for that to get to the Bennett's

station through the ordinary post so Jessie at the Post Office dropped it round and I radioed Angie this morning and took a message to send back. They're pretty isolated out there."

"A month for the post to be delivered?" asked Lucy, incredulous.

"They're 300k away," said Gina. "Bert only comes into town once a month or so."

"Wow, that's unreal!" exclaimed Lucy, suddenly beginning to realise the isolation in the outback.

"Not everyone likes cities," said Gina with a laugh. "And for some a little place like Helene Creek can be overcrowded but it's good to know help is around even if it's some way away."

"Well, sure, I guess," said Lucy, feeling a little bit embarrassed. "I guess it's pretty obvious I'm a city girl."

"Sure is, sweetie," said Gina, smiling. "And it's not just the shorts."

"What's wrong with my shorts?" asked Lucy, looking at her legs.

"Best to cover up and not show much skin," said Gina.

"Why's that?" asked Lucy. "All the guys are sexist pigs, are they?"

"Pretty much," said Gina, "as you'll find out soon enough, but it's more about skin cancer. We get a hell of a lot of sun here so unless you've got a few barrels of factor 50 sun lotion best you cover your arms, legs and face."

"Oh, right," said Lucy ruefully. "I never thought of that."

"Get some boots, too," said Gina, tapping on the keyboard again. "Get a lot of snakes and spiders round here too. They come inside to get out of the heat as well." She bent over the microphone again. "This is Helene Creek Community Radio broadcasting on 92.4 FM. News and Weather Check coming up on the hour although if you haven't already figured out it's hot and dry you haven't been paying

attention. For those who remember the floods of '97 here's *Australian Crawl* and *The Boys Light Up*."

"Is there anywhere in town I can get some jeans and boots?" asked Lucy when Gina looked up again.

"Sure," said Gina. "The bakery'll have some although maybe not in your size. You're smaller than most of the women round here."

"The bakery?" said Lucy. "Don't they sell bread?"

"It's more of a general store," said Gina, "but it calls itself a bakery."

"Oh, right," said Lucy, getting up. "Well, I'd best be off. Thanks for all your help and that request on the radio."

"No worries, Lucy," said Gina. "Drop in for a chat any time. I'm here from seven 'til seven most days."

"Thanks, I will," said Lucy.

Back outside she got in her car and drove sedately up past the Service Station and the small Medical Centre then pulled up outside the even smaller Post Office. The Store and Bakery opposite had a closed look; the tables and chairs outside were now inside. Lucy looked at her phone and discovered it was coming up to 6 o'clock.

"No wonder I'm feeling hungry," she thought. "I hope the pub does meals."

She waited for a couple of utes to drive past then pulled away from the kerb. This time she went round the back of the pub to where she'd seen the car park. She parked near the steps up to the rooms and went inside through the Gaming Room which was deserted. There were half a dozen men in the Bar and all turned to look at her as she went in.

"G'day," she said.

"G'day," said one of the men as they all looked at her legs. "You that

there Lucy Chapman? What was on the radio?"

"Chaplin," said Lucy. "Yes I am."

"Wife needs a sheila if yous wantin' a job," he said with a leer. "Can make it live in if you like."

"I've got a job, thanks," said Lucy, walking over to the far end of the bar.

"Straight up?" he said, looking puzzled.

"She's writing a book about you lot," said a big, blousey blonde with grey roots bustling in from the office, "so don't you go giving her any trouble or she'll blow the dirt on the lot of yous." She was clearly in her sixties despite her thick makeup.

"You just say the word Lindy," called another of the men. "You and me can give 'er sommat to write about!"

"Take more than what you've got to be worth writing home about, Bludger!" said Lindy, fists on her ample hips. "Or so yer misses tells me!" The men laughed and someone catcalled.

"Lindy Kaufman," said Lindy, turning to Lucy. "I'm the manager of this here establishment. So you're Lucy Chaplin, yeah?"

"Yes I am," said Lucy. "Pleased to meet you."

"Is that so?" said Lindy, eyeing her. "So why don't you want to stay here?"

"I'm sorry?" said Lucy, backing nervously away a half step.

"I heard on the radio," said Lindy. "Yous looking for somewhere else to stay. Bit of an insult that, I reckon. I run a nice clean place here."

"I'm sure you do," said Lucy hesitantly. "Umm, it's just that I can't afford to stay here and I need peace and quiet as well."

“Won't find anywhere quieter,” retorted Lindy. “Well, 'cept on a Friday and Saturday nights. It can get a little noisy then. How about fifty a night?”

“That's still three hundred and fifty a week,” said Lucy.

“Ain't David paying you much then?” asked Lindy.

“Of course he bloody ain't,” called one of the men. “He don't pay any of us much, 'cepting himself.”

“He pays you more than you're bloody worth,” shouted back Lindy with a deep throated laugh. “Davey's me brother-in-law,” she added to Lucy. “He's a tight old bastard. How about forty five?”

“That's still over three hundred,” said Lucy. “Besides I need a desk and lots of space.”

“Ah well, no worries,” said Lindy. “So you're a Mexican, hey?”

“Umm, no I'm Australian,” said Lucy. “I'm from Melbourne.”

“Yeah, like I said, a Mexican,” said Lindy. “South of the border. Finding it a bit hot up here are you?”

There was a burst of laughter from the men drinking at the bar.

“Yes a bit,” said Lucy. “Umm, do you do food here?” She was about to say the bakery was closed but thought better of it. Lindy would probably take offence.

“Sure do,” said Lindy, a loud whiney growl penetrating the walls as a road train turned down the road beside the pub to pull into the parking area. “What do you want?”

“What is there?” asked Lucy, looking round for a menu.

“Steak and chips or steak and salad,” said Lindy.

“Ahh,” said Lucy. “Is that all?”

“Best steaks for a thousand ks,” said Lindy. “Kaufman’s own beef. You want barbecue sauce or pepper sauce with it?”

“Actually could I just have the salad?” asked Lucy.

Lindy stared at her as the truck behind the pub came to a halt with a loud hiss of its brakes.

“Just salad?” she said in disbelief. “You want chips with that?”

“Um, no thanks,” said Lucy. “Just salad.”

“If you say so,” said Lindy, “only you need fattening up a bit if you want to find yourself a bloke.”

“You mean like you?” thought Lucy, taking in Lindy’s ample curves, “no way.”

“What makes you think I’m looking for a bloke?” she asked instead.

Lindy burst out laughing. “Keep it that way, sweetie. Blokes are a waste of time, take my word for it. Just a salad it is. You want me to rustle up a sausage for you?”

“Um, OK, thanks,” said Lucy, uncertain of what was going on.

“K,” said Lindy. “Call it a tenner, OK?”

“Um, OK,” said Lucy. “Can I have it in my room?”

“No food in the rooms,” said Lindy. “Attracts the rats.”

“Ahh, right then,” said Lucy. “Umm, where ...?”

“I’ll get one of the girls to bring it to that table in the corner,” said Lindy, pointing.

“Right,” said Lucy. “I’ll just go to my room and wash.”

“Hear that, you blokes?” shouted Lindy, turning to the men at the bar.

“This here’s a lady, see. I should make you all bloody wash before you come in here!”

“You gonna scrub me back then Lindy?” shouted one, “and wipe me arse too, eh?”

“Please God someone offers me a room,” thought Lucy, walking out of the bar.

She had a wash and returned to the bar with her laptop and the sheets of paper David had given her. A sausage nestled in a bed of lettuce with a sliced tomato was waiting for her at the corner table, together with a can of lemonade. She fired up the laptop then ate the sausage and salad while bringing the family tree into some semblance of order using a spreadsheet. She was conscious of being watched but no one came over to bother her which was a significant improvement on Melbourne. There, any woman sitting alone in a pub, working or not, would be considered fair game.

“Hmm,” thought Lucy a couple of hours later when she was finally satisfied she’d got the family tree organised with colour coding and neat lines showing relationships. “Doesn’t look right though. No one born before, what, the 1910s and there doesn’t seem to be anywhere near enough children. I thought they had big families back in those days.”

She looked up and discovered that the bar was deserted but through the door to the Gaming Room she could see a short fat man in a cheap blue polyester jacket. He was nursing a beer and watching horse racing on the TV behind the pool table. Lindy’s voice came faintly from the office behind the bar although no one else’s did. Perhaps she was on the phone. The time on her laptop said 8:11 and the battery power was down to 31%.

Lucy shut her laptop, gathered her papers and walked through the gaming room. The TV was on silent and the man had Three States Freight emblazoned across his jacket. He watched her walk across the gaming room but didn’t speak. Outside, a big two freezer truck with Three States Freight and a phone number on its sides rumbled as its refrigeration unit worked against the evening heat. Annoyingly Lucy

could still hear the rumble in her room. She had another shower and sat cross legged on the bed with the air conditioner's rumbling competing with the truck. She used the single power point to make a coffee then plugged in her laptop.

“OK,” she thought, staring at the screen. “I’ve the beginnings of a family tree. Now what?”

She opened her word processor and quickly wrote:

- * investigate cemetery
- * search land records
- * start talking to family members

“What else?” she thought, staring at the list and tapping her front teeth with her thumb nail. After a few moments she added:

- * newspaper searches
- * library and museum searches

“Hmm, surely there’s more I can do to start,” she muttered. “OK, I’ll be following up things I find out but what else can I be going on with?”

She leaned back against the wall at the head of the bed, staring at the screen. The rumble of the truck's compressors suddenly spluttered then continued at a slightly slower speed. Lucy leaned forward and slowly typed “Where did it all begin?” Underneath she typed “Who started it all?”

“Well, it could be worse,” she thought. “At least Australia isn’t that old. It’d be a bugger if it was China with thousands of years of history.”

15th April 1874
Helene Creek Station
Queensland

My Dearest Lizabet

What joy! I have at last received a letter from you! It is dated the third day of August last year so I venture you have written to me but your other letters are gone astray or still journeying. Likely also you have not received some of mine so I will tell you now, at the risk of repeating myself, that your namesake Elizabeth has been born, on 17th September last, and is doing well. I am unable to tell you of her weight at birth for we have no scales and it was moreover a difficult birth for there were none to aid me save Friedrich, Seth and Jeb. Seth, he tells me, has aided with the birthing of sheep in the past so I count myself fortunate. Three healthy children is indeed a blessing. As indeed may be a fourth for 'tis likely I am with child again and I place myself in The Almighty's most caring hands. 'Tis likely with the knowledge gained by Friedrich from the birth of Elizabeth that the next will be easier.

What is of more concern to me is that while we eat well we eat, in the main, only meat. Friedrich slaughters one of our cattle every few weeks and even though we salt the meat and preserve it as best we can it does not keep well in this climate. Perhaps you could ask Father if he knows of any better ways to preserve meat? Still, we do not go hungry by any means. I would, however, prefer that some vegetables were available. Alas we did not think to bring any seeds or seedlings with us and Friedrich's letters to Toowoomba on this score have, as yet, remained unanswered. There is a plant that grows here but it is exceeding bitter and stringy despite my best efforts in finding ways to cook it. We also receive occasional shipments of potatoes from Charleville which is an exceeding small settlement some 300 miles from us but, alas, these potatoes are small and shrivelled by the time they reach us.

Ahh but I forget to speak of our good news! Friedrich has not made any attempt to sell any cattle as yet. He tells me his intent is to allow them to breed freely and build up our herd. This does not mean, however, that we live on our capital for there is nothing here to spend our money upon. If we cannot make it ourselves then we go without! Is this not the most Bohemian of existences?

That said, however, Friedrich has reached an agreement with Mr

Zebulon Cotterman who owns the property neighbouring ours to the West. We are to purchase said property for a sum a little less than what we paid for this even though it has more cattle and, to my delight, a larger house with three (!) bedrooms and a kitchen building with a proper hearth. I say a kitchen building because it is separate from the house which Mr Cotterman tells us is in case of fire. We take ownership as soon as Friedrich's draft is received by Mr Cotterman's bankers. Friedrich tells me that our herd will exceed 5000 when Mr Cotterman's is joined with ours and that next year we will likely send some to market. 'Tis Friedrich's intent to hire some natives to assist with the taking of the cattle to market.

We have no little experience of this already despite having not sent any thus far. Helene Creek Station borders a stock route which goes from the Custom's Point on the border with South Australia to the markets of Toowoomba and Brisbane. Indeed it is they, as well as other travellers, who take my letters to you and brings yours to me. Indeed, dearest sister, 'twas but twelve days ago when I saw the most interesting of sights. A long heavy wagon laden with timber passed us by, drawn by no less than sixteen pairs of bullocks! I cannot begin to imagine the weight of the timber if it requires so many animals to haul it.

Alas, however, Friedrich was not as intrigued as I. It seems that it is not uncommon for those herding cattle or sheep and other travellers to rest for the night on our border. That in itself is no bad thing but there has been damage to our fences any number of times for some of the more wilful of these men see no harm in cutting our wires and permitting their cattle and what have you to feed on our land. Friedrich is most upset by this for they are eating the food our own cattle need. If we are to build up our stocks we cannot permit our food to be stolen by, Friedrich's own words, these nefarious people. Charity begins at home but does not, it seems, extend to our borders!

No matter. The Almighty has seen fit to permit me to bring aid to my husband on this matter. I grant 'tis my duty to do so whenever possible but in matters to do with the farming of cattle I fear I am at best an encumbrance. However, it seemed to me that these men do not avail their herds with our foodstuffs through malice but through need. I therefore suggested to Friedrich that rather than spending our time building ever stronger fences why do we not take advantage of the situation and provide a bunk house for the men and food for their cattle and sheep? Friedrich considered this proposal to be disingenuous but once I proposed that we exact a payment for the provision of such

service he changed his mind and praised me most highly! Needless to say I was most delighted with his praise and, in seeking further such praise, I ventured to make another suggestion, to wit that Friedrich availed himself of such knowledge as he has of brewing, for Uncle Leopold owns a brewery as you recall. Alas I am not explaining myself clearly. My thought was that Friedrich could manufacture some passable beverage to offer those who avail themselves of the stock route and our bunk house.

You can imagine my delight when Friedrich told me he considered this the finest of ideas! So excited was he that he set Jeb and Seth to erecting our tents for use as a bunk house until such time as one more sturdy can be built and making simple beds. He also sent to Charleville for hay to feed the animals and hops and barley for the making of beer. As yet these goods have not arrived but I am delighted to tell you that a fair number of passing stockmen have been willing to part with a coin for a bed and a meal and those that do not so desire moved on and left our land undamaged.

I am filled with cheer by these developments and I hope all is well with you, dearest sister.

I am, as ever, your loving
Helene

Chapter Six

The blast of a big diesel engine firing up woke Lucy with a start. She rolled over and blearily looked at her phone.

“Fuck,” she said quite clearly and distinctly then flopped back on the bed, her phone clutched to her chest so the 5:17 AM was hidden from sight.

The clatter of the diesel continued and added to the tension and anxiety that seemed to emanate from her belly. Vague feelings of unease and worry and a strong sensation of being overwhelmed.

“I can't do it,” she muttered, curling up into a ball. “I don't even know where to begin. This is way way beyond me. I've only ever written essays. How the fuck am I going to write a book when there's nothing here but a few old people and desert? I can't handle it.”

Several minutes later the truck's door slammed and the room shook as the truck ground its way past the back of the pub and onto the dirt track that lead back to the highway. As it faded into the distance and the silence grew Lucy came to a decision.

“I'm going back to Melbourne,” she muttered. “I'll find a job there. There's got to be something I can do. After all, most of my friends down there have got jobs now and I won't be all on my own. Even McDonald's. Maybe I could be a trainee store manager or something. At least it won't be desolate and there'll be supermarkets and things. I'll go out in a bit and tell David. He's bound to find someone else easily enough. What does he want a family history for anyway? He's a bloody farmer. He should stick to raising beef.”

As the relief filled her body she drifted contentedly back to sleep.

Some while later she woke again, feeling refreshed. She rolled over to find out the time but her phone wasn't there.

“That's weird,” she muttered, reaching down to feel the floor around the little bedside unit. “Maybe it's fallen under the bed.”

She tossed back the thin sheet and slid down onto her knees. There was no sign of the phone under the bed although there was a fair amount of dust and a few things that looked suspiciously like mouse droppings.

“There you are, you little bugger,” she said suddenly, spying the phone poking out from under the sheet. She grabbed it and checked the time; 8:58.

“That’s more like it,” she said. “I’ll have a coffee and a shower then go out to see David. With a bit of luck I’ll be back in Brisbane late tonight and Melbourne the day after tomorrow.”

She put the kettle on then wandered into the bathroom and had a shower and cleaned her teeth. Back in her room she hung the towel over the air conditioner to dry and sat naked on the bed, staring at her closed laptop and nursing her mug while she waited for the coffee to cool enough to sip. Her belly rumbled a little reminding her that some breakfast would be appreciated.

“Maybe it’s not such a big deal after all,” she thought and blew on the coffee. “It’s like whatshisname, that Chinese philosopher guy said, even a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. This is just another essay, only a little bigger. It doesn’t even have to be a hundred thousand words or whatever. It could be quite small, like a booklet or something. But all I have to do is take the first step and follow up any leads I find. It’s no worse than at Uni and there isn’t even any real deadline.”

She sipped her coffee and stared some more at the laptop.

“And I’ve already taken the first step,” she muttered. “That family tree. Funny that Chinese guy didn’t say anything about taking a second step but shit, I’ve taken the first step. All I have to do is figure out what leads I can get from it and see where that takes me. Yeah. So what do I do today?”

She sipped some more of the coffee, aware of the rumblings in her belly.

“Some brekkie would be a good idea,” she thought. “What about that cemetery on the edge of town? Maybe if I wander around there I can fill in some of the gaps in the tree. It's got to have headstones that go back further than those papers David gave me. I wonder how old the oldest is? Hell, how old is Queensland? For sure there won't be any graves older than that.”

She opened up her laptop and checked for Internet connections. There was only one which was labelled BunkInn. She clicked on it and after a few seconds a little box appeared saying 'Room Number'. She typed in '10' and a moment or two later the home page for MSN opened up in her browser.

“Way cool!” she exclaimed happily and went to Wikipedia. As a source for historical information Wikipedia was completely unreliable and was treated with contempt by her History professors at Uni but as a tool for giving a quick overview it was unparalleled.

“Wow, I didn't know that,” she muttered studying the page for Queensland. “It only became a self governing colony in 1859. I thought it was older than that. Oh wow! That's insane!”

Lucy leaned back against the wall and reflected on what she'd just read. After becoming a self-governing colony the new Queensland government was desperately short of money and sold off vast numbers of plots of land to raise revenue. Then, in 1866, Australia was hit by an economic depression and many of the early buyers of the land packets, particularly in the west of the State, struggled badly. A lot either simply went bankrupt or sold at desperately low prices.

“I bet the Kaufmans or the Lamonts were one of the early buyers,” thought Lucy, her excitement growing. “I bet they were either one of the first wave of buyers and managed to keep going through the depression or were in the second wave and got the land cheap as a result. Frigging hell! I bet that's where it all begins! A ten mile by ten mile patch of scrub and desert in the 1860s or 1870s. That's like so totally awesome!”

She slapped her hand on the mattress and jerked back as hot coffee spilt onto her naked thigh, thereby spilling more which ran over her

thigh and onto the mattress. She swore halfheartedly and carefully put the mug on the table before jumping up to grab the towel to dry herself and the bed.

“I bet whoever bought it bought several plots,” she thought, propping herself against the air conditioner to gaze out the window. “Maybe he, must have been a he, had enough capital to buy several or when the depression was done made enough to buy out his neighbours. Still, at least it's pretty much fixed the starting point. Somewhere in the 1860s or 70s. I wonder if there are still records of those land purchases? Hell, how did they even know where the properties were? It must have taken years to survey the whole State! Maybe the buyers did their own surveying? No, that makes no sense. It would be too open to cheating and there'd be endless arguments and fights over boundaries. Hey, maybe I should look through court records as well? There might be some relevant cases. I wonder who Helene was and why this place is named after her? Or maybe it wasn't a her. Maybe it was someone's surname and the Kaufmans or the Lamonts bought the place and never changed the name? Maybe it was named after someone who never even visited? Hell, it could even be a corruption of an Indigenous word for something.”

An old car driving along the lane behind the inn car park caught Lucy's eye. She watched as it slowly drove along then turned into the car park and pulled up beside the garbage bins. A middle aged man got out and Lucy jerked back, remembering she was still naked. Fortunately the man didn't look up, and the air conditioner blocked most of the window anyway, but Lucy hurriedly pulled a fresh pair of shorts and a clean t-shirt from her backpack and got dressed.

“Cool,” she muttered happily. “I've got a plan! Go get some breakfast then spend the day at the cemetery which should fill in some blanks in the family tree. I can check out the ruin behind the pub as well. There might be a plaque or a sign which'll help fix a point in time. If nothing else it'll help me begin to visualise what it was like here back whenever it was built. Might even help to make the book more real, more personal than just a dry recitation of facts. Then this evening I can look to see what land information is available online.”

She shut down her laptop and stuffed it inside her backpack then

hesitated.

“Maybe there was such confusion with the early sell-off of land the records got confused or went missing,” she thought. “Maybe they didn’t even bother to keep records, just counted the cash. Hell, they didn’t have computers back then so it would all have been done by hand. I wonder how many clerks worked on it all? Maybe the records got lost in a flood? After all, there was a flood in Brisbane in 1873 which swamped the Botanical Gardens. Ah well, won’t know until I look. Where can I leave my computer so it’s safe?”

There wasn’t really anywhere so Lucy pulled on her trainers and took the backpack downstairs to lock it in the boot of her car. The Gaming Room and Bar were completely deserted and, peering over the counter, Lucy could see the office was deserted as well. There was no sign of the man who’d parked outside either and the kitchen behind the Bar was silent.

“Oh well,” thought Lucy. “I’ll grab something from the bakery. Check out their clothes as well.”

She went out onto the verandah and looked the old thermometer. The mercury was still way off the top of the scale even though it was quite cool in the shade.

“Oh yeah,” thought Lucy, spotting the War Memorial on the other side of the highway as she walked to the bakery. “Need to check that out as well.”

A couple of grey-haired nomads with a yappy little dog were sitting at one of the tables outside the bakery, their four wheel drive and caravan parked a little further along the street. Lucy paused to let the dog sniff her ankles and gave it a pat.

“Are you a local or passing through?” asked the woman as the man fiddled with his teaspoon.

“Umm,” said Lucy, taken by surprise. “I guess I live here. I work at the Station over there,” and she waved her hand vaguely to the south.

“Ahh,” said the woman. “Do you know where the Cobb & Co staging post was? We tried at the Tourist Information Office but it's closed and we couldn't see any sign of it driving round.”

“I'm sorry,” said Lucy, her ears pricking up at the mention of a Tourist Information Office. “I didn't even know there was a Cobb & Co staging post here.”

“Told you there wasn't,” said the man, glancing over at the woman.

“There must have been,” she retorted. “This place lies on the old stock route which goes through to the Northern Territory and South Australia. Cobb & Co must have had a route through here.”

“I'm sorry,” said Lucy, shrugging and holding out her hands. “I'm afraid I can't help you.”

The dog abandoned her ankles and went over to sniff something behind the table.

“Thanks anyway,” said the woman, looking disappointed.

Lucy smiled and went inside. To her surprise the bakery was just the front part of the building and the rest was taken up with a rather small supermarket.

“Can I have a cappuccino and a toasted bacon and egg sandwich?” asked Lucy, stopping at the bakery counter, “with skinny milk.”

“No bacon,” said the girl who looked all of fifteen. “Can do you a steak sandwich though.”

“OK,” said Lucy.

“Eat in or takeaway?” the girl asked.

“Eat in,” said Lucy, rummaging through her shoulder bag for her wallet. “Um, I'll just have a look around the store then I'll come back.”

“OK,” said the girl.

Lucy turned and started wandering along the aisles. Mostly the food was tinned but there was a chiller cabinet with cold drinks, cheaper than the pub, and milk. At the far end of one of the three aisles was a stationary section.

“Awesome!” exclaimed Lucy, grabbing an exercise book and a pen. She quickly wrote down Tourist Information Office, Stock Route and Cobb & Co on the first page then picked up four or five more exercise books as well as another black pen, a blue one and a red one. She was so used to her laptop and phone she hadn't thought to bring any notebooks. As an afterthought she also picked up a flimsy looking 15cm wooden ruler.

Going round the corner into the next aisle she found the clothing section. There was a rack with a dozen or so checked and plain tan long sleeve shirts and a couple of green fluoro jackets. On the floor underneath was a selection of boots and on the shelf were plastic baskets of thick socks and men's and women's underwear although, Lucy noted with interest, there were no bras. On the top shelf were several Akubra hats and a few broad brimmed cloth ones in blue.

“Cool,” thought Lucy. “Better get some clothes as well, like Gina said.”

She flicked through the rack of jeans and found a pair in her size then gasped when she saw the price tag and hurriedly put the jeans back. A pair of the boots looked small enough so she bent down to pick them up.

“No way!” she exclaimed, jerking back upright. “\$700 for a pair of boots? That's insane! I don't care if they are RM Williams, I'm not paying that!”

The Akubras were also expensive but the blue cloth ones were at the upper end of tolerable so she tried on a small one and it fitted reasonably well.

“Where do I pay for these?” she asked the girl at the bakery counter.

“Here,” said the girl. “There's your coffee and the sandwich'll be a minute or two.”

“Great,” said Lucy and flourished her debit card again. “I’ll be outside, OK?”

“OK,” said the girl disinterestedly.

Lucy nodded then went outside just as the 4WD and caravan pulled away. She dumped her purchases on the table and sat down then jumped up again and put on her new hat.

“No time like the present,” she muttered and laughed to herself at the irony of it then picked up the exercise book and one of the pens. “Let’s see who’s on the War Memorial.”

“There you go,” said the girl, bustling out with Lucy’s sandwich.

Advertisement on page 2 of the Darling Downs Chronicle,
Wednesday 31st March 1875

Governess / Nanny Wanted

to educate and edify three
children aged 7, 5 and 1.

Applicants must be of
Exemplary and Pious
character and be able to
supply satisfactory
references. Apply in person
to Friedrich Kaufman,
The Royal Bull's Head Inn,
Toowoomba, soonest.

Chapter Seven

Lucy was squatting in front of an old lopsided headstone when she heard the bike. She glanced up and saw a dirt bike had turned off the main road and was slowly coming up the track towards the cemetery. She turned back to concentrate on the headstone again. It was for an Albert Mercer, beloved husband of Elspeth Kaufman, who'd died in either 1901 or 1907 and father of Edward, Ursula and Howard. The date was difficult to make out. Lucy took a photo with her phone, hoping that enlarging it on her laptop and twiddling with the contrast would help. She jotted the details down in her exercise book then shifted over to the headstone right next to it. Unsurprisingly it was for Elspeth Mercer and a fourth child, Grace, was listed with the other three. Grace had died in 1939. Lucy took a photo of that headstone as well. It wasn't until she started to note the details in her exercise book that it struck her that Elspeth's headstone made no mention of a loving husband and yet Grace was presumably born after Albert died as Grace wasn't on Albert's headstone.

"Interesting," thought Lucy, standing up. "Don't go jumping to conclusions though."

She rummaged in her bag for her red pen to highlight Grace's name and link Elspeth's details back to Albert's as a point to be further investigated.

"G'day" called a woman's voice. "Lucy Chaplin?"

Surprised, Lucy's pen jerked and left a squiggle in the otherwise reasonably straight line back to Albert. She twisted round to see a woman in the inevitable dirty jeans but with a tan long sleeved shirt rather than a checked one propping the dirt bike on its side stand on the boundary of the cemetery.

"Hey, hi," she called back. "Yeah, I'm Lucy."

"Great," said the girl. She started walking towards Lucy so Lucy felt obliged to reciprocate and started walking towards her. The woman peeled off her leather gloves then fiddled with the strap of her open face helmet and pulled that off as well to reveal a young cheerful face

and long blonde-brown hair. The hair that wasn't gathered in a ponytail was plastered with sweat to her head.

"I'm Riley Symons," said the girl, holding out her hand. "They told me at the pub you were here."

"Pleased to meet you," said Lucy, shaking hands. Riley's hand was surprisingly soft despite the callouses. "Umm, I wonder how they knew? I didn't tell anyone."

"Ohh you'd have been seen," said Riley, grinning. "Can't keep any secrets round here. 'Sides, there isn't much to talk about except the weather and cattle prices so your every move'll keep 'em occupied for days."

"Oh, OK," said Lucy, a little perplexed. "So, um, you're looking for me?"

"S'right," said Riley. "Heard on the radio this morning you're looking for a place so I thought I'd drop round and see if you're still looking."

"Oh, yes, yes I am," said Lucy.

"Sweet as," said Riley. "You can stay at my place if you like. Got plenty of room."

"Oh, that's very kind of you," said Lucy. "Is it in town?"

"Sure is," said Riley, looking at the nearest headstone with a slight grimace. "Don't like grave yards. Give me the shivers. I'm in Birtles Street, right next to the pyramid. You can't miss it. Drop round any time if you want to have a look."

"Great," said Lucy, wondering why there was a pyramid in the town and if she'd misheard. "When will you be there?"

"Gotta go back to work now," said Riley, transferring her gaze back to Lucy. "We're vaccinating a mob up the road a bit but we should be done, ohh, late afternoon probably. If I'm not there just go on in. Doors aren't locked. Nothing worth nicking." She laughed. "Yours is

the empty room and we share the rest, OK?”

“Um, OK,” said Lucy, a little cautiously as it seemed as if she was already committed. “So you work on the station?”

“Sure do,” said Riley. “Stockman. You're a writer, yeah?”

“Well, sort of,” said Lucy.

“Cool,” said Riley. “Be nice to have someone intelligent to talk to for a change. Anyway, see you.”

“Um, yeah,” said Lucy. “Yeah sure. I'll come round later. Thanks.”

“Too easy,” said Riley, grinning again, her teeth bright white against her tanned face. She jammed her helmet back over her head and strode off, careful not to step in front of any headstones.

Lucy watched her for a few moments, blinking a little at the speed of what had just happened.

“No application forms, no references, no mention of bonds or rents? Unreal,” she muttered as Riley roared off in a cloud of dust. “Oh well.”

She slowly turned and walked back to Elspeth Mercer's headstone and stood looking at it for a few moments.

“Maybe you remarried and he died before you as well,” she thought. “Or maybe you were pregnant with Grace when Albert died. It's wrong of me to assume you had an illegitimate baby as a widow. This was the 1910s not the 2010s. But then, if you remarried wouldn't you be buried beside your second husband? I wonder when Grace was born. Maybe she's buried here as well.”

Lucy looked around at all the headstones she'd not yet looked at and sighed.

“A pyramid,” she thought. “Well it's definitely not like the ones in Egypt as it'd be towering over everything else. It's probably a local

nickname for the War Memorial or something. Oh bugger! I forgot to look at the War Memorial.”

She looked around the cemetery again then up at the cloudless sky.

“No worries,” she muttered. “I’ll go look at the War Memorial then go find Riley’s place. This pyramid is intriguing me. These headstones will still be here later. I can ask where Lauren Lamont lives as well. I’m going to have to talk to the older people in town and she’s the oldest. Might as well start with her.”

She made her way back to her car and drove slowly into town, keeping an eye open for anything that looked like a pyramid. There was a flash of something silver as she drove past the turnoff to Agatha Street but it was difficult to see between the houses. She parked beside the War Memorial and studied it. It was a simple stone plinth with a stone cross on top inside a circle and looked nothing remotely like a pyramid.

“Oh well,” muttered Lucy and got out, exercise book in hand.

There were three names on the Memorial, as David Kaufman had said; Agatha Kaufman and Edward Mercer who both died in the first war and William Hickey who died in the second. Lucy noted them down, together with their dates then wandered over to a young woman watching her child play on the nearby swing.

“G’day,” she said and the woman turned to look curiously at her. The kiddie stopped swinging to stare at her as well. “What road is this?”

“Victoria Street,” said the woman.

“Ahh, thank you,” said Lucy. “Do you know Bertie Street?”

“No Bertie Street here,” said the woman, frowning slightly. “Unless you mean Albert Street, or maybe Birtles Street.”

“Ahh, Birtles Street, that’s the one,” said Lucy.

“Next but one that way,” said the woman, pointing at right angles to

Victoria Street.

“Thank you,” said Lucy. She smiled at the kiddie who stared wide eyed at her. Lucy mentally shrugged and went back to her car.

She went up Albert Street and turned left into Birtles Street. Driving slowly she saw nothing that looked remotely like a pyramid although she did see one or two people peer out of windows to see who was driving past. At the end she did a U-turn and started driving back. She crossed over Albert Street and almost immediately she saw it through the wide gap between the house on the corner and the one next to it. A large silver pyramid, sitting quietly on the red dirt of the corner house's back yard. Lucy drove on a little further, did another U-turn and parked outside the house next to the corner house.

“This must be it,” she said, staring at the pyramid. It looked to be a couple of metres square at the base and its sides rose to a point, just like a pyramid should. “OK. It's a pyramid. I wonder what it's for?”

Frowning, she shifted her gaze to the house next door which was, presumably, Riley's. It looked to be a perfectly ordinary weatherboard house on stumps with three steps going up to the verandah. The tin roof was getting a little rusty but that was true of all the houses.

“Well, looks OK,” thought Lucy. “But I won't go in until Riley's back. It seems wrong and anyway it might be someone else's house.”

Lucy looked back at the pyramid and, out of the corner of her eye, caught a shadow move in one of the windows of the corner house.

“I've been seen,” thought Lucy, feeling guilty. She quickly drove off and went back to the park with the War Memorial. The woman was still there, although she was now sitting on the grass as the kiddie swung back and forth.

“Find it all right?” called the woman as Lucy got out of the car and walked to the water fountain.

“Yes thanks,” said Lucy. “Umm, do you know Lauren Lamont?”

“Sure,” said the woman. “Everyone knows old Lauren.”

“Where does she live?” asked Lucy.

“Right there,” said the woman, pointing to a house that was, judging by the roof rust, considerably older than Riley’s. It was on the corner of Victoria and William streets and faced the park.

“Oh, right, thanks,” said Lucy, her heart suddenly speeding up a little. She’d have preferred a few moments to prepare herself before knocking on the door but the woman in the park was watching her curiously. She slowly retrieved her bag and walked across the road. This house had six steps up to the verandah and half a dozen rather dry looking plants in pots scattered along the verandah. The front door was open so Lucy took a deep breath and knocked.

“Who is it?” came from somewhere towards the back of the house.

“Hello?” called Lucy. “I’m looking for Lauren Lamont.”

“Didn’t ask who you were looking for,” said an old woman tersely, appearing in the doorway opposite the front door. “I asked who you are.” She was leaning on two walking sticks and pointed one of them at Lucy.

“I’m Lucy Chaplin,” said Lucy. “I was wondering if I could have a chat with you?”

“I ain’t going in no bloody home if that’s what you’re here about,” snapped the woman irritably and banged her walking stick on the wooden floor.

“Oh,” exclaimed Lucy, taken aback. “Um, no. I just wanted to have a chat, that’s all.”

“You ain’t from the bloody Social Services?” said the old woman, making her way slowly across the living room to peer at Lucy. “Ain’t seen you before, have I?”

“No, I’m definitely not from the Social Services,” said Lucy. “Are you

Lauren Lamont?"

"What do you damn well want then?" demanded the woman, peering defiantly at Lucy.

"I'm a historian," said Lucy. "David Kaufman's asked me to write a history of the family and the town."

"What did you say your name was?" she asked, scowling at Lucy.

"Lucy Chaplin," said Lucy.

"It's that bugger of a daughter of mine that should be in a home," snapped the woman, jabbing a walking stick in Lucy's direction. "You hear me?"

"I think they heard you in the pub," thought Lucy but didn't say it. Instead she smiled nervously, not knowing quite what to say.

"Hmph," snorted the woman derisively. "Lucy Chaplin eh? Better come in then hadn't you."

"Thanks," said Lucy staying where she was on the verandah. "You are Lauren Lamont?"

"That's me," said Lauren. "You want a cuppa?"

"I can come back another time if it's not convenient," said Lucy hopefully.

"Kettle's on," said Lauren, making her way back towards the kitchen. "Sit yourself down."

"OK, thanks," said Lucy, cautiously stepping inside.

The room was definitely that of an old person. The furniture was old and worn and everything looked a shabby. There was a stuffed cockatoo under a glass dome on the top shelf of a small bookcase along with some old fading photographs and perhaps half a dozen books sat on the shelf beneath. In one corner sat a plastic basket of

folded clothes and a half completed embroidery on a frame. There was a ceiling fan but it wasn't on and, despite the open doors and windows the room felt closed in and a little oppressive. Lucy sat on the edge of an old floral patterned couch and listened to the noises coming from the kitchen.

"Let me give you a hand," she called, jumping up and going into the kitchen.

"I'm not incapable," said Lauren, fumbling with the lid of an old fashioned tea pot.

"Just trying to be helpful," said Lucy. "I didn't mean anything by it."

Lauren sighed and fixed her with a look.

"There's a tray on top of the fridge," she said.

Lucy reached up and lifted the tray down. Lauren put the teapot and a couple of matching cups and saucers on it before pouring hot water into the teapot.

"Milk's in the fridge," said Lauren. "Sugar in the cupboard if you want any."

"Great," said Lucy, getting a bottle of milk from the fridge. She hesitated then picked up the tray. Lauren didn't say anything, just followed her into the front room.

"So what do you want to chat about?" she asked, sitting in an armchair and resting her walking sticks against the arm.

"Well, as you probably know," said Lucy, sitting on the edge of the couch again, "I'm here to write a history of the town so I really just want to chat about whatever you can remember."

"Nothing wrong with my memory," said Lauren. "Just takes a while sometimes."

"Me too," said Lucy. "Um, do you mind if I record our conversation?"

It's easier than writing notes.”

“If you must,” said Lauren.

“Thanks,” said Lucy and got her phone from her bag. She started its voice recorder app and left the phone casually on the low table. “Shall I pour?”

“I can do it,” said Lauren but less aggressively. She leaned forward and poured tea into both mugs, holding the pot with both hands. “So what sort of things do you want to know?”

“Ohh,” said Lucy, spreading her hands. “Anything really. Your parents, for example. What were their names? What were they like? How did they meet? Were you born in this house? That sort of thing.”

“Me, no,” said Lauren. “I was born in Longreach. My mother lived in this house when she first got married but when he died she took up with my dad and moved there.”

“What were your parents' names?” asked Lucy.

“Greg and Grace Dawson,” said Lauren. “Her first was John Watkins but like I said, he died before I was born.”

“Do you remember your mother's maiden name?” asked Lucy.

“Mercer,” said Lauren. “Grace Mercer.”

“You mean the daughter of Elspeth Kaufman?” asked Lucy.

“Can't rightly say,” said Lauren after thinking about it.

“That's OK,” said Lucy. “So how did you end up living in the house your mother used to live in?”

“Oh, we moved back here when Dad died,” said Lauren. “I was eight or nine I think.”

“And you've lived here ever since?” asked Lucy.

“God no,” said Lauren. “I got married and went to live with me husband. He was killed in a car smash on the road to Charleville back in '85. Mum was still here so I moved back in with her after that.”

“What was your husband's name?” asked Lucy.

“George Lamont,” said Lauren. “He left me with bugger all 'cept three little 'uns. Didn't have nowhere else to go. Mum was getting on, you see, and on her own too. Worked out well for both of us.”

“It must have been hard,” said Lucy.

Lauren shrugged.

“You do what you have to do,” she said. “So this is what you do? Just go around asking questions?”

“That's part of it,” said Lucy. “At the moment I'm just trying to workout all the family relationships as far back as I can. Once I've got that straight I'll then start looking through records and trying to find out what happened, who was involved and why and so on.”

“You mean like letters and things?” asked Lauren.

“Yes,” said Lucy. “Letters, photographs, anything really. It's amazing what can shed some light on things that happened long ago. Even an old receipt can be useful.”

“Don't have a lot of receipts for things round here,” said Lauren. “Mostly things is done cash in hand and no questions asked.”

“Oh well,” said Lucy smiling. “Receipts aren't that important. Do you have any old things lying around? Perhaps an inherited photograph album or official documents like passports or birth certificates.”

“Yes I got a few,” said Lauren. “They're in a cupboard in the bedroom.”

“I'd love to have a look,” said Lucy. “Whenever it's convenient, of course.”

“Might be something in the back room as well,” said Lauren reflectively sipping her tea. “Had a leaking roof, ohh, back in '94 or '95 I reckon it was. Old Harry came round to fix it and found some things just shoved up there. No one had ever looked before. After all, who goes poking around under the roof? Reckon it was from before Mum's time as she didn't say nothing to me about putting anything in the roof.”

“What sort of things?” asked Lucy.

“Can't rightly say,” said Lauren. “All I remember is we dumped the trunk in the back room. Didn't give it much thought what with the leak and all. Probably still there. No one's been in that room since.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Friday, 2nd April 1875

I can scarce believe it! I keep pinching myself to see if I wake from a dream and yet I do not wake despite my arms being almost black and blue from the pinches and when I am not pinching myself I fear this is some April Fool's trick being played on me yet I have only to look at the top of this page to see that the 1st is past and the 2nd coming to a close! To think that I, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a creature of little beauty and no fortune, however small, to offer a man in recompense am now Mrs Friedrich Kaufman! How strange that looks when written upon the page but it has a dignity in the sound of it that in no way lessens the dignity of the man himself, my husband of but a few scant hours! Mrs Friedrich Kaufman, indeed. With three children no less and Mistress of three hundred square miles of cattle! I can scarce believe my great good fortune and must keep stealing glances at the golden ring that sits upon my finger. Mrs Friedrich Kaufman Mrs Friedrich Kaufman Mrs Friedrich Kaufman I fear if I do not keep repeating that name it shall all blow away like dust in a gust of wind. Mrs Friedrich Kaufman. There, 'tis captured upon the page and thereby becomes a certainty!

And the wonder of it lies in how it came about for surely God must have answered my Prayers. I woke but yesterday and went to feed the chickens when I espied a sheet from a newspaper caught fast upon the coup. I retrieved it and what did I see? An advertisement for a Governess to three little ones. It came to me that as I could both read and write there was a possibility that I might suit and, if indeed I should suit, then such a position would provide me with no little respectability and improve my station in life. My lack of references was a concern but I felt I could rely on my lack of years to explain that. So with no further ado I put on my Sunday Best and ventured to introduce myself to the Gentleman.

'Twas a bitter disappointment when I was shown to his rooms at the Inn and he informed me that the position was no longer available. I fancy he must have seen the disappointment upon my face as I turned to leave, my tears already beginning for I had built up such hopes on my walk into town for he showed himself to be a kindly man despite his stern expression and stiff demeanour and invited me to stay for a time and take morning tea with him and his children. I daresay he was lonely and filled with much disappointment himself for he told me that he had spoken with another about the post only a short time before. The lady in question had, in no uncertain terms, informed him that no respectable

woman would venture to live on his cattle station as Governess with three single men and no other white women. I remarked that her point of view was eminently reasonable and enquired how the situation came about that there were three men with three children and no mother for them. With the greatest of sadness upon his face he told me his wife had died in childbirth but five months previous. With the station to manage and the welfare of his children uppermost in his mind he had come to Toowoomba to find a respectable woman to ensure their needs were met. I remarked that his taking of another wife would resolve the difficulty of respectability and he agreed but remarked that there was no possibility of same for the nearest place where a wife might be found was here in Toowoomba and he could not spare the time. It transpired that he had travelled for six weeks with the children and a native girl and would be travelling a further six weeks more to return.

I confess I know not what prompted me to this but the depths of sadness in his eyes which he struggled to hide filled me with great sadness and compassion in turn so without thinking I put down my tea and informed him that I would be his wife, if he would have me. Being a Gentleman he protested but I could see the sadness in his eyes begin to change and I fancied I saw relief appear so repeated myself whereupon he began to describe the hardships that must be endured on a distant station. I replied that being the daughter of a widowed rush cutter I was no stranger to hardship. He called for more tea and we soon reached agreement. I might add that his two boys, Klaus and Leopold, sat quiet and attentive throughout our conversation and the infant girl, Elizabeth, cried only once whereupon I took her upon my lap and fussed over her and her little hand grasped mine most firmly. I was most taken with that as I was with her eyes which are the bluest of blue.

We talked until the end of the morning then I returned to seek Father's permission for I am but seventeen while Friedrich went to find a minister to conduct the ceremony. Fortunately Father was not yet in his cups and brooding on the travails of his life and gave his permission quite readily. Returning to the Inn to inform Friedrich he told me that he had found a minister but that our marriage could not take place until the banns had been read. However, for a donation to the Church, the minister, after Friedrich explained the predicament, announced he would be willing to record the banns as having been read on the three previous Sundays and that we could be married the next day. Friedrich was affronted by this but the minister reassured him that the donation was only a token to enable God to look into our Hearts and see the Truth that lay within. And so we were wed this very afternoon.

Alas I can write no more today for Friedrich is making preparations for our departure in the morning and will be returning to the Inn very shortly. My hand is becoming unsteady as trepidation grows within me for I fear the wifely duties I venture a man must expect on his wedding night and that moment of discovery is fast approaching. My heart is all a-flutter and my hands all a-tremble.

Still, three hundred square miles!

Chapter Eight

“A trunk, you said?” asked Lucy staring at the piles of junk in the small back bedroom.

It looked like there was a bed in there but it was covered with what seemed to be the dismantled parts of another bed, a couple of old suitcases and a goodly number of cardboard boxes, one of which had split and disgorged old Christmas decorations. Propped against a wardrobe was a sagging mattress held up by a bent imitation Christmas tree with a decorative Santa still perched on top and a pink bicycle with a wire basket on the handlebars, no chain and a flat tyre.

“That was Jessica's,” said Lauren, reaching out to touch the bicycle with a sad smile on her face.

“Your daughter?” asked Lucy, trying to peer under the bed to see if there was a trunk there.

“Yes,” said Lauren then her face hardened. “She's married some builder in Brisbane and they're trying to put me in a home. I keep telling 'em I've got a home but they don't listen. Says I can't look after myself any more not that she ever bothers to visit me.”

“You seem to be managing all right to me,” said Lucy, half pulling out another cardboard box. It seemed to be full of old vinyl records. The one beside it had old copies of Australian Women's Weekly.

“That's what I keep telling her,” said Lauren. She grasped her walking stick, which hung from an old pet collar around her wrist, and pushed the bicycle contemptuously. It shifted a little and knocked the Christmas tree causing the mattress to sag even further.

“A trunk,” said Lucy again. “Do you remember where it was? Was it metal or wood?”

“I think it was metal,” said Lauren, pushing the top few of a pile of newspapers with her walking stick so they slid onto the floor. “Can't say as I really remember. Was a while back.”

“Well I can't see anything that looks like a metal trunk,” said Lucy. “Perhaps if I came back tomorrow I can take everything out of the room and, if you like, I can take the rubbish to the tip. It would give you more space.”

“No, can't do that,” said Lauren bending stiffly to pick up a tatty copy of one of Enid Blyton's Famous Five books. She leafed through it slowly with a strange look on her face, as though it brought back a mixture of memories. “No, never throw anything away, that's my motto. Never know when it'll come in handy.”

“OK,” said Lucy. “Umm, do you mind if I shift some of this stuff around? The trunk might be in the wardrobe.”

“Do what you like,” said Lauren, dropping the book on the bed. “Would you like some more tea?”

“Oh, yes please,” said Lucy. “That last one was lovely.”

“Won't be a moment,” said Lauren, looking around the room again. “Needs dusting, that's all.”

She sniffed and slowly walked off, leaving Lucy alone in the room. Lucy waited a few moments then quickly wheeled the bicycle out into the hallway. The mattress gave up all hope and collapsed completely causing the Christmas tree to snap part way down and throwing up a cloud of dust. Lucy coughed and flapped her hand in front of her face then gripped the edge of the mattress and heaved it forward so it rested against the bed. With the base of the Christmas tree pulled out of the way there was just enough room to open one of the wardrobe doors part way. Inside there were a lot of old clothes hanging up but there looked to be something big at the bottom. Something that caused a couple of the longer dresses to ruffle up and hide the shape of whatever it was. Lucy squatted down and reached inside to feel it. It was solid and had definite corners. It also felt like metal.

“Could be a trunk,” muttered Lucy and stood up again. She pursed her lips then gave the bed a hard shove. It shifted all of a centimetre so she grabbed the mattress and dragged it along the floor to prop it against the side wall. The wardrobe door almost fully opened but it

came up against the metal frame of the bed.

“Bugger,” thought Lucy and peered around the far side of the bed to see what was blocking it from moving right up against the wall. Under a sheet she found half a dozen wooden picture frames with no pictures inside. With an effort she managed to dislodge one of them and propped it against the mattress. The others were easy and with them gone the bed shifted until one leg came up against something else.

“Awesome!” muttered Lucy as the wardrobe door opened with a couple of centimetres to spare. She sneezed twice then squatted down again. Pushing away the hanging clothes the trunk was now fully visible and, usefully, had a handle at this end. It screeched a little as she pulled it towards her but it wasn't particularly heavy. Tipping it on its side she dragged it out of the wardrobe and dumped it beside the doorway to the room. She checked to see if there was anything else in the bottom of the wardrobe then closed the doors and dragged the mattress back to where it had been and propped it up with the bike.

“I'm afraid I broke the Christmas tree,” said Lucy, carrying the trunk back into the front room.

“Oh,” said Lauren looking concerned. Then her face cleared. “Oh well, I don't suppose I'll ever need it again. Is that the trunk?”

“Sure looks like it,” said Lucy, putting it carefully on the floor. It was roughly the size of a large suitcase but deeper.

“Tea's ready,” said Lauren, frowning at the trunk. “I don't remember it being black though.”

“Well, I didn't see any other trunks,” said Lucy. “There's an address label on the end, next to a P&O Shipping label. The label's a bit faded though. Let me have a closer look. Umm, it looks like the name is Thomas something which ends in man. Might be Kaufman, it's difficult to tell. That could be a K and the address is either 3 or 8 Victoria something. This is Victoria Street, isn't it?”

“Yes,” said Lauren, staring at the trunk. “8 Victoria Street and there used to be a Thomas Kaufman. He owned the Station a long time ago. I was nineteen or twenty when he died.”

“So that would have been in the early sixties then,” said Lucy sitting back on her heels. “Do you remember how old he was when he died?”

“No,” said Lauren. “All I remember was that he was a cantankerous old bastard. Always finding fault with everything. Ran the Station with an iron rod.”

“Actually I seem to remember a Thomas Kaufman in the family tree David gave me,” said Lucy. “Do you suppose he used to live here before he took over the station?”

“Someone did,” said Lauren with a shrug. “This place was probably build around 1900. Maybe even earlier.”

“Is it OK if I open it?” asked Lucy. “There's no padlock on it.”

“Go ahead,” said Lauren, waving her hand. “If there's any money in it it's mine,” and she laughed then started coughing.

“Are you all right?” asked Lucy, looking up in alarm.

“I'm fine, dear,” said Lauren putting a hand on her chest and clearing her throat. “Get me my ciggies would you? They're on the front verandah.”

“Um, sure,” said Lucy, wondering if she ought to. Then again Lauren had probably been smoking for over sixty years and a few more wouldn't make a lot of difference. She trotted out onto the verandah and spotted a lolly tin beside the single chair. Inside was some loose tobacco, a packet of papers and a disposable lighter.

“Thank you,” said Lauren when she brought it back. Lucy watched in fascination as Lauren's arthritic fingers deftly rolled a cigarette and lit it with a sigh of pleasure.

“So what's inside?” asked Lauren, blowing a cloud of smoke at the

trunk.

"I was about to look," said Lucy, squatting beside the trunk again. She lifted the lid and carefully let it fold back onto the floor. "Oh wow! There's a couple of letters here! One of them's unopened. It's addressed to Mrs Jane Kaufman at 8 Victoria Street so it looks like he did live here. I wonder if she was his wife or his mother?"

"His wife was Daisy, I think," said Lauren doubtfully. "What's the other one?"

"It's not a letter," said Lucy, opening the envelope and pulling out the single sheet of folded paper. "It's the Discharge Certificate for Thomas Kaufman from the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Forces, whatever they are. Hey, it's dated 14th December 1917. That would have been the First World War. Just a moment, there are three postmarks on the other letter. That one's all smudged and I can't read it but this one's from P&O Shipping and it's dated 15th November 1917. Oh wow! Look at this! It's dated 12th November 1917 and it looks to be Ypres. Wow! This is awesome!"

"Eeps?" said Lauren, flicking ash on the floor. "What's that?"

"Ypres," said Lucy, staring at the envelope, "or Wipers as it's sometimes called. It was one of the big battles of the First World War. Ypres was a town near the trenches, somewhere in France. Oh my God! Thomas must have been fighting in Ypres and got discharged! This is probably his letter home saying he was going to be discharged!"

"So why wasn't it opened?" asked Lauren.

"I don't know," said Lucy, looking at the back of the letter. She carefully laid the envelope on the floor beside the trunk then put the Discharge Certificate with it. "But I have bad feelings about it."

"You're too soft," said Lauren. "Give it to me."

"I'll just have a look through the rest of the things," said Lucy, not looking at Lauren. She picked up the cloth that covered everything

else and held it up. "What do you suppose this is?"

"It's a christening gown," said Lucy. "Look at the embroidery. They don't make them like this any more."

"Oh," said Lucy, folding the gown neatly and putting it beside the envelopes. "These are baby clothes, aren't they?" She held up a couple of very small items of clothing.

"Yes," said Lauren, leaning forward. "Looks like they're for a newborn."

"And a hat," said Lucy. "This is an adult woman's hat. So's this dress."

"Probably her Sunday Best," said Lauren, reaching out to touch the dress.

"Jane's you mean?" asked Lucy.

Lauren nodded.

"Oh dear," said Lucy. "And these are probably her hair brushes and hand mirror. Her favourite ribbons as well probably. What's this? Ahh. A folder of sketches. I wonder if they were drawn by Jane?"

"She was good, whoever it was," said Lauren, looking through them. "That bull looks almost alive."

"Yes it does, doesn't it," said Lucy. "Oh my word, would you look at this." She passed a small wood carving of a horse to Lauren. "Read what it says underneath."

"To Jane with all my love Thomas," said Lauren, peering at the base of the horse.

"You know what this means, don't you?" said Lucy quietly, touching the letter. "Thomas wrote to say he was being discharged and was coming home but Jane never got the letter. She must have died and he didn't know. He must have got home from the War expecting his wife to welcome him and found she was dead so he shoved her things in

this trunk and hid it in the roof. He must have been distraught.”

“And the baby,” said Lauren, gesturing at the baby clothes and the christening gown. “She probably died in childbirth which is why she had all these things. That gown was probably passed down through the generations.”

“And her sketches,” said Lucy, picking up the folder again. “He probably couldn't bear to look at them. That's so sad.”

“Is there anything else in there?” asked Lauren.

“Just some books, I think,” said Lucy, peering in the trunk again. “Oh.”

“What?” asked Lauren. “What's that?”

“It's a flute,” said Lucy, opening the case. “It must have been Jane's although I suppose it could have been Thomas'. Maybe he put it in here because he couldn't bear to play it again. And this is a prayer book. It's probably Jane's since there's a pressed wild flower inside it. Oh, look, someone's written Jane Kirk inside the front cover. That must be her maiden name.”

She put the flute and prayer book neatly on the floor with the other items and reached for the last book. It was big and heavy and had a leather cover.

“It's a German Bible!” said Lucy in surprise. “Look, it's got *Die Bibel* on the front.”

“Well, Kaufman is a German name,” said Lauren. “It was probably passed down through the generations as well.”

“It says *die Bibel oder die gesamte Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testamentes* on the frontispiece,” said Lucy, carefully opening it.

“What does that mean?” asked Lauren.

“*The Bible or the entire Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments,*”

said Lucy distantly as she stared at the back of the frontispiece. "Bloody hell!"

"What is it?" asked Lauren.

"There's an inscription," said Lucy excitedly. "Listen. *Meine liebste Helene Während wir uns auf unser großes Abenteuer begeben bete ich dass Gottes Wort uns den Weg durch alle Schwierigkeiten erhellen wird die vor uns liegen Dein dich immer liebender Ehemann Friedrich*, and it's dated *Oktober 1872!*"

"What on Earth does that lot mean?" asked Lauren, frowning.

"Oh, um, roughly translated it means, um, *My dearest Helene. As we embark on our great adventure I pray God's word will light our path through whatever tribulations lie ahead of us, your ever loving husband Friedrich*," said Lucy, her voice trembling a little. "Oh my God, you know what this means, don't you?"

"They were Germans?" asked Lauren.

"Noooo, well, yes, probably," said Lucy, staring at the inscription. "But it's Helene's Bible! She's the one this whole town is named after! And the Station! Friedrich must have given her this Bible just before they left to come to Australia! That must be what their great adventure is. Oh my God! This is where it all begins, back in 1872! This is just incredible!"

"Well it had to start somewhere," said Lauren, unimpressed. "Not like Helene's an aboriginal word or anything. And we knew they were Germans anyway."

"Actually no," said Lucy. "Technically Germany only got created in 1871 when all the Germanic states except Austria unified after the Franco-Prussia War. They were probably Prussians or Austrians or something." She turned the page and ran her finger down it. "No, Austrians, I'd say."

"What, you've found another inscription?" asked Lauren.

“No, it's the list of the Books in this Bible,” said Lucy, looking up. “It's got the two books of the Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon and a few others in it which means it's Catholic. The Protestant Bible doesn't have those books.”

“But why Austrian?” asked Lauren, frowning.

“The Prussians were mostly Protestants,” said Lucy, “whereas the Austrians were mostly Catholics. Anyway, after the Austria-Prussia War in 1866 Austria broke with the other German states and allied with Hungary which is probably why the Kaufmans left Austria.”

“I don't follow,” said Lauren.

“A lot of Austrians hated being ruled by Franz Joseph,” said Lucy, leafing through some more pages, “I'm only guessing here but I'd say Friedrich and Helene were Austrians who didn't like the situation and opted out. They came to Australia and bought some land and in time the town of Helene Creek grew up with it. This is so awesome! And to think it was just sitting in the roof! Oooooohh!”

“What have you found now?” asked Lauren.

“There's the family tree in the back,” said Lucy, bending her head to look more closely. “Look, it started with Helene and Friedrich Kaufman and their four children and, oh.”

“What?” demanded Lauren.

“Helene died in 1874,” said Lucy flatly. “So did her baby Katrina, no, Katarina. Friedrich got married again, in 1875 and had, umm, six, no seven more children. Wow, eleven kids. Randy old bastard! Still, I suppose they didn't have birth control in those days. Let me see, oh yes. The last entry is for Jane and Nancy Kaufman in 1917. She must have died in childbirth and Thomas came back from the War to find his family gone. He must have really hated God. To go though the trenches as Ypres with thousands of other Aussies being killed around him then finding his wife and baby died too. No wonder he put the Bible away.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman
Wednesday, 14th June 1876

I have been so busy here ever since we arrived at Helene Creek Station that I have not had the time to put pen to paper but it was my intention to write an account of my first year as a married woman but I could not find my journal. I thought it lost forever but it was found after a time in the pocket of a broken saddlebag. How it got there I know not but, and it grieves me so to write of my suspicions, but I suspect Leopold of hiding it from me. Klaus is a delightful boy and Elizabeth shows early signs of great intelligence but try as I might win Leopold's affections he is much withdrawn from me. Likely he still misses his mother and continues to resent me for he is but six years of age and Klaus has two years on him which makes a difference. Mayhap he even resents my easy relationship with Klaus for he and I have become great friends and often work together in our vegetable garden where we talk and what not. Klaus also is much caring of my own baby – Oh! How is it I can write in my journal and not say that I have a baby of my own? This is unforgivable of me! Her name is Marlene Kaufman and The Lord delivered her safely to me on the 3rd day of January not yet six months past and she is the delight of my life although I am most careful to not show any open sign that I favour her ahead of Klaus, Leopold and Elizabeth for that would not do at all even though I do favour her ahead of all others.

By the by I shall duly note here that I am with child again which pleases me for Friedrich is a vigorous man and his attentions are not displeasing to me. I pray that this new one will be as healthy as Marlene. 'Tis too early to think of names but Friedrich has expressed a desire for the name Werner should the babe be a boy and leaves it to me if the babe be a girl. I am undecided but should a little girl be the outcome I incline towards Ida after my mother, God rest her soul.

'Tis a year or more since I last wrote in here and there is so much to tell but as I put pen to paper I fear it all deserts me and I can think of little to write! Friedrich is well and works hard to ensure we prosper. Ahh, but I am forgetting and it is most remiss of me for I had not thought to be so callous and forget such a thing. Jeb, one of the two most faithful and industrious of labourers who elected to travel with Friedrich when he first came here was thrown from his horse and suffered a most grievous injury to his left foot when the horse trod on him. Being a man of most strong character although sadly not the most God fearing of souls, he was able to drag himself back upon his horse and make his way to our

homestead but, alas!, his foot was beyond all our attempts to heal and Seth and a native worker had to hold him down while Friedrich removed said foot. 'Twas a most heartrending experience for I was unable to cover the ears of all the children. Friedrich is of the opinion that it is well for children to learn early of the difficulties of life but I remain uncertain of this. That said there is little we can do so they will, of necessity, learn through experience as and when things happen.

Most happily, and this pleases me greatly, Jeb was soon up and about and although he can no longer ride a horse well enough to muster cattle Friedrich has put him in charge of the bunkhouse and our brewery. Ah yes, our brewery! That is another thing which is worthy of mention for between our marriage and our travel to Helene Creek – and I confess it pleases me that Friedrich so honours his former wife through naming the Station after her – Friedrich arranged for a pair of mighty barrels of some fifteen gallons each to be made and delivered to us at no little cost and in them he brews a beer which is sold at the bunkhouse to the drovers and bullock masters and all who pass who desire some drink other than water which is to say all of them! I confess the brew has a taste which is somewhat unusual ~ Friedrich believes it to be from the bitterness of our water ~ but it is not unpalatable. Indeed, Friedrich rises greatly above the normal admiration a wife has for her husband for he is a man of intellect and wide knowledge and inventive spirit. It transpires that as a child he once visited the brewery owned by an uncle of his in Austria and acquired sufficient knowledge of the process in that visit to perform experiments and devise a method of brewing within our capabilities.

The loss of Jeb from the Station had within itself the potential to be a great loss for Friedrich and Seth alone could not manage our three hundred square miles even with the handful of natives who work with us but the Good Lord once again showed His great beneficence a few weeks ago. A certain gentleman of, it must be admitted, disreputable appearance came upon us one day as the sun was setting. He called himself, most appropriately it seems to me, a 'sundowner' although in Toowoomba we called such as he 'swagmen' for they travel with just a blanket and few possessions, their swag. This gentleman, by the by, told us he goes by the name Tob or Tub, apparently a shortening of Tobias, but is either unable or unwilling to give us any other name. No matter. He appeared one day at sundown asking for food and a bed for the night in exchange for some work the following morning and, for reasons known only to himself, has remained with us ever since. Tob is a most unusual man for he is able, nay gifted I should say, with the

ability to tell long and oft time humorous tales of time sad tales of his own devising and keep us entertained of an evening. As to where he came from he will not say although Friedrich believes him to originate perhaps in eastern lands for he has a swarthinness about him that is not common. After a particularly entertaining tale I declared him to be related to the writer of the Tales of the Arabian Nights and he was greatly amused by this. Perhaps he is an Arab after all. I daresay we shall never know.

What else can I say? I confess to being intrigued that before my marriage I was able to write at great length about what now seems to be of very little consequence but now I find myself so busy that I have little to say here. Was my life that incomplete before? Perhaps it was but I was unable to see it. Ahh, two things I have just thought of which are worth recording. Friedrich is considering the purchase of more land. A Mr Havergard has two hundred square miles the other side of the stock track which he is considering selling. Doubtless the two will reach an amicable agreement. Certainly such an acquisition will not inconvenience us as Mr Havergard is of the opinion that his two white men would prefer to stay with the property rather than seek employment elsewhere. The other is that when they have time Friedrich, Seth and Jeb are building a small house for Jeb to live in near the bunkhouse so he is able to watch over those who spend the night and see that they are not overcome by our beer and fight or otherwise disturb the peace for our homestead is some considerable way away.

Chapter Nine

“So what you reckon?” asked Riley handing Lucy a glass of water fresh from the fridge.

“It's very nice,” said Lucy, looking out from the back verandah. The water was welcomingly cool in her hand and she rolled the glass against her forehead.

To the left and right were the few houses that made up the tail ends of William and Agatha Streets but straight ahead the vast Queensland outback stretched unbroken to the horizon. A herd of cattle, barely recognisable with distance and shimmering heat haze, grazed and a little further to the right a giant teardrop of dust hung in the air with a barely visible dot showing the ute that threw it up.

“Yeah, you'll get used to it,” said Riley with a laugh. “Bit different from Melbourne, hey.”

“Oh yes,” said Lucy. “Although it does have a certain grandeur of its own. Umm, do you normally have a motorbike in your front room?”

“Shit no,” said Riley. “Sorry about that. One of the rear shocks broke so I brought it in to fix it. New one's on order but it hasn't arrived yet. Soon as it does I'll shove it on and put the bike back outside.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. “So, um, are you sure you want to share your place with a stranger?”

“Oh no worries,” said Riley, leaning back against the verandah rail. “Usually do. Last girl was a backpacker who worked in the pub for a few months. She moved on two, three weeks back.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. “Great. And there's internet access?”

“Yup,” said Riley. “Wireless to the pub then satellite from there. Sometimes plays up a bit when there's a storm but it's usually OK.”

“Great,” said Lucy. “Well then. When can I move in?”

“Anytime,” said Riley. “Now if you like. Where’s your stuff?”

“I’ve a suitcase and a box in the car and a few odds and ends back at the pub,” said Lucy. “I’d better go back and tell them I won’t need the room tonight. Umm, so what’s with that pyramid next door?”

“Oh that’s Mandy’s,” said Riley, grinning. “She’s a fruitcake.”

“How do you mean?” asked Lucy, her brow furrowing.

“Oh don’t worry, she’s harmless,” said Riley. “She doesn’t go out much although you might hear her talking to her invisible friends in the middle of the night.”

“OK,” said Lucy slowly. “And the pyramid?”

“She sleeps inside it when there’s a full moon,” said Riley, shrugging. “Something to do with listening for alien communications or something, I’m not really sure. Apparently the aluminium pyramid picks up the signals and channels them somewhere. Dunno why she has to sleep in it but I reckon it’s easier not to ask. Her old man doesn’t seem to mind although he’s crazier than she is and isn’t there much.”

“Where does he live then?” asked Lucy.

“Oh he lives there,” said Riley, “‘cept he’s the fence checker for the Station so he spends most of his time driving round checking the fences. Spends a night or two at home every couple of months then he’s off following the fences again. There’s a few thousand k of fencing and he has to check all of it.”

“A few thousand?” said Lucy, surprised. “I didn’t think the Station was that big.”

“Just under nine thousand square kilometres I’m told,” said Riley, “but there’s fences all over, not just round the boundaries. He spends his life criss-crossing the place and avoiding anyone he runs in to. Doesn’t really like people or so I’m told. Never spoken to him other than to say Hi when he’s back.”

“So he sleeps out there as well?” asked Lucy, intrigued.

“Yup,” said Riley. “Name's John. John and Amanda Lamont, the town crazies.” She laughed. “Got to wonder how they ever even got married let alone have three kids. Mind you only the one's still here. Shane, the guy who runs the servo. The other two bugged off as soon as they could. Don't remember their names. Never met 'em.”

“Shane? The one who's married to Gina at the radio station?” asked Lucy.

“That's him,” said Riley. “He's OK and so's his gran, Lauren Lamont. She's a switched on old bugger, all right. It's just those two in the middle, like. From what I hear John used to be OK as well but he's been doing the fences for over twenty years and I reckon it's getting to him.”

“That's Lauren who lives opposite the War Memorial?” asked Lucy. “I was talking to her earlier.”

“Yup,” said Riley.

“So Amanda is her daughter?” asked Lucy. “The one who's trying to put Lauren in an old people's home?”

“No, Mandy's her daughter-in-law,” said Riley, “and she wouldn't put anyone in a home as she reckons we should all be living closer to nature. No, that'll be the one who lives in Brisbane. At least I think she does.”

“Oh that's right,” said Lucy. “I remember Lauren saying something about Brisbane.”

“You get a lot of that around here,” said Riley. “Most of the girls leave as soon as they can. A lot of the guys as well. Hey, you'd better get along and get your stuff otherwise the pub will charge you for tonight as well.”

“And I'd better tell Gina,” said Lucy, finishing her water. “She's probably still broadcasting about me.”

“So how come you're still here?” asked Lucy as she and Riley ate their steaks on the verandah.

“Oh, I'm not local,” said Riley. “I grew up in Moreyfield in North Brisbane. No, I got pissed off with life when I was at Uni and headed into the outback and ended up here.”

“Oh really?” said Lucy. “What pissed you off?”

“I was doing Psychology,” said Riley, screwing up her nose. “I was really into it as well. In my third year I did an internship with the Brisbane end of a global firm of recruitment and staffing consultants and they offered me a permanent job there when I'd finished the degree, assuming I passed, of course.”

“So did they piss you off?” asked Lucy.

“I guess,” said Riley. “Well, no, not really. Everything changed in my final year and when push came to shove I figured I couldn't really face spending the rest of my life designing silly little personality assessment tools so I sent them an email and jumped on my bike.”

“So what happened in your final year?” asked Lucy.

“You don't give up, do you?” asked Riley, looking quizzically at Lucy.

“Sorry,” said Lucy. “It's just I'm a Historian and that's really all we do. Ask questions and try to get to the bottom of things. Sorry. I didn't mean to pry.”

“So how come you ended up here, then?” asked Riley. “Not a lot of history here. Wouldn't you have been better off going to Europe or something?”

“Actually I did,” said Lucy. “I did my Bachelors in general history then my Masters in modern German history. I spent a year over there researching for my Masters thesis.”

“You mean the Nazis?” asked Riley.

“Actually no,” said Lucy. “I covered the period from around 1870 to the end of the Weimar Republic although that did include the rise of the Nazis. I'm not interested in wars though. I'm more into the social changes that give rise to things like the Nazi Party.”

“How do you mean?” asked Riley, dumping her plate on the verandah deck.

“Oh, um, well, nothing happens in isolation,” said Lucy. “Take the Nazis, for example. They had to come from somewhere and generally speaking most people, well historians anyway, say they had their origins in the huge social problems that arose during the Depression in the Weimar years but I disagree with that. I maintain that the origins of the Nazis go back decades before to the installing of Wilhelm as the first Emperor of the united Germany. Probably even further but it's my contention that the uniting of the various principalities of Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria and the rest into a unified Empire gave rise to the ambitions of Empire which were exacerbated by Wilhelm's appointment of Otto von Bismark as Chancellor. Once he was in place there is a direct line of Imperial ambition that lead to Germany's challenging of the global status of the British Empire that ultimately resulted in the First World War.”

“But how did that bring about the Nazis?” asked Riley, frowning.

“Ahh, well, the thread continues,” said Lucy. “Germany's defeat in the first war came as a huge surprise to the German people as information about the war had been manipulated and distorted so when the German surrender was announced in 1918 there was a revolution which brought down the Empire and resulted in the Weimar Republic. That was a time of huge social unrest. The defeat in World War 1 and the subsequent revolution would have been bad enough but when coupled with the extraordinarily punitive reparations demanded by the French and the economic collapse of Germany during the Great Depression the conditions were created in which it became possible for the Nazi philosophy to get a foothold and ultimately for them to seize power in 1933. If you look at that period with a broad perspective you can see a causal connecting line

that goes from the appointment of Bismark in 1872 to Hitler's coup in 1933."

"Oh right," said Riley, leaning forward. "And from a psychological perspective all that took place in a single lifetime. A kiddie when Bismark came along would still have been alive to support Hitler."

"Absolutely," said Lucy. "Someone born in, say, the early 1860s would have grown up with dreams of Empire, had them blown apart by defeat in the War then suffered tremendously through the Depression years with hyperinflation, massive unemployment, starvation and so on. It's hardly surprising that a lot of them saw Hitler as a saviour."

"Interesting," said Riley, nodding thoughtfully. "Very interesting. I never thought of it that way. Maybe I should have studied History instead of Psychology."

"History is Psychology," said Lucy. "It's just that we can't sit down and do motivational or behavioural experiments on people who died years ago."

"Well, yes, I can see that," said Riley with a grin. "Actually, this ties in with what pissed me off with Psychology. Well, kind of."

"Yeah?" asked Lucy encouragingly.

"Yeah," said Riley. "Just a sec."

She got up and went inside then came back out a few moments later with a couple of chilled beer cans and her tobacco tin.

"Want one?" she asked, putting the can beside Lucy and proffering the tin.

"Oh, no I don't smoke," said Lucy, "but thanks for the beer."

"Yeah, I didn't 'til I came here," said Riley, sitting back down. "Most people round here smoke."

"I noticed that at the pub," said Lucy, popping her beer can. "Every

table in the pub had an ashtray on it. I thought it was illegal to smoke inside.”

“Yeah it is,” said Riley, rolling a ciggie.

“So why don't the police do anything about it?” asked Lucy.

“Tim's got to live here too,” said Riley, lighting her cigarette. “He's the local cop. If he tried to stop people smoking he'd be run out of town. Anyway he probably gets a backhander from Yoshi.”

“Who's Yoshi?” asked Lucy.

“Not sure,” said Riley. “Never met him but I've heard about him. He runs a few acres of illegal tobacco just beyond the Station. Smokes are cheaper than bread round here. I've heard it said he's got links to bikie gangs as well but it's best not to ask those sorts of questions.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. “Umm, he's not a Kaufman or a Lamont is he?”

“Doubt it,” said Riley. “Sounds more Armenian or Ukrainian or something. Umm, hey, yeah, there was one of the family who ran off with a bikie now I think of it. Back in the eighties I think it was. Probably a load of bullshit though. Some of the guys round here will talk any old shit to get in your pants.”

“Back in a moment,” said Lucy, putting down her beer. She returned a few moments later with her exercise book. “Do you know her name?”

“Whose?” asked Riley, looking at the exercise book.

“The girl who ran off with a bikie,” said Lucy.

“Why? You going to write about her as well?” asked Riley.

“Sure,” said Lucy. “Even if she wasn't one of the family she was one of the town people and things like that are interesting. It's not all about land acquisitions and meetings about public toilets. It's real life human interest.”

“No, I guess not,” said Riley with a snort. “Don't remember her name. Don't even know when it was. Reckon you could ask around though. Someone'll remember.

“I will,” said Lucy, jotting down a note that in the eighties (?) a girl (probably) ran off with a bikie (maybe, which group?) and appending who? when? why?

“Am I going to be in the book?” asked Riley.

“I don't see why not,” said Lucy. “After all you're part of the town and History isn't just about the past. History is constantly happening in the here and now. Besides it'll be interesting to know why people who aren't part of the family came here and stayed.”

“Maybe I won't stay,” said Riley.

“How long have you been here?” asked Lucy.

“Two years, give or take,” said Riley.

“Which is hardly passing through,” said Lucy. “So why are you here?”

“Shit!” exclaimed Riley, bursting out laughing. “You really don't give up!”

“You can always refuse to tell me,” said Lucy, “or make something up.”

“Nah, it's all cool,” said Riley. “I'm here because of Trump.”

“An ex-boyfriend?” asked Lucy.

“No, that guy running for President,” said Riley, dropping her dog end in her beer can.

“OK,” said Lucy. “So you're taking the make it up option. No worries.”

“Actually, I'm not,” said Riley. “Like I said, I was in my final year at Uni and I read something in the papers about Louisiana. You know,

that State in America?”

“Yeah, I've heard of it,” said Lucy.

“Well, apparently Louisiana's been badly damaged by hurricanes caused by climate change,” said Riley, “which are getting worse. People don't have time to clear up and re-build before the next one comes along. On top of that they've got a lot of oil and gas and chemical companies in the State and they're suffering from worsening pollution because the environmental protections that were in place are being thrown out.”

“Yeah, it's sad, isn't it,” said Lucy.

“Well, that's the thing,” said Riley. “According to the article Louisiana is going to overwhelmingly vote for Trump even though he calls climate change a giant hoax and reversed most of the environmental protections during his first term as President. It made no sense to me so I did a little digging and it's not just Louisiana. A lot of people were planning to vote for Trump even though it went against their best interests.”

“Well, that's one of the downsides of democracy,” said Lucy. “How did that bring you all the way out here?”

“Well, I got to thinking,” said Riley, “and I talked to some of my lecturers. They couldn't really explain it and more or less told me to stop worrying my pretty little head about it and concentrate on my finals, which pissed me off. Worse though it started to undermine my belief in Psychology as a field. If psychologists can't give any sensible explanations of why people vote for someone who is clearly working against their best interests rather than for them then maybe psychology isn't really giving good explanations for anything to do with the mind. Maybe all the theories about psychoses, mental illnesses, aberrant behaviours and so on are all just pie in the sky. I was kind of involved with a guy a few years before who was studying Economics and dropped out because he said that all Economists do is build complicated fancy mathematical models to support their theories but never actually test those models against real life. That's why we get things like the Financial Crisis of 2008 and the meltdown

of the British economy a few years ago. I started thinking that maybe psychology was like that because so much research nowadays is done through questionnaires on Social Media. Seriously, just how effective can treatments be if the research is based on Social Media? Anyway, I did my exams, packed my panniers and buggered off in search of a better world. That consulting outfit that offered me the job could go hang. Wouldn't surprise me if they endorsed Trump as well."

"And you ended up here," said Lucy, quietly.

"Yeah," said Riley with a barking laugh. "I ended up here. Next door to the crazy lady."

"Why?" asked Lucy. "Why here? Why not somewhere else?"

"David offered me a job," said Riley.

"You had a job," said Lucy. "In Brisbane. Better pay and conditions too I would think."

"I guess," said Riley, staring out over the darkening outback. "Actually I was working another place when I heard about this job. Nearer the coast. Picking fruit. This one sounded more fun so I drove over on the off chance."

"And you're still here," said Lucy.

"Yeah," said Riley, picking up her tobacco tin again. "It's real isn't it. It's just me, my crew, the cattle and the outback. Back to basics and all that. At least the bullshit round here is from real bulls."

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Saturday, 26th August 1876

We have had an unusual visitor here these two days past. His name is Dr Alphonse Benedict d'Eau which I confess I found most amusing but that is nothing compared to his attire for he arrived in full evening dress, court shoes, bow tie and top hat and was sweating copiously! On horseback no less! It transpired that Benedict, as he likes to be familiarly known, came to us at the invitation of Tob who, as this was the middle of the day, was some way distant attending to the repairing of fencing. It did not matter however for Benedict was most eloquent on many topics, not the least of which was his own magnificent skills in the divining of water and, after a lengthy monologue on the subject, he declared he had been summoned to us as Tob fears we are to suffer drought when the summer rains, expected in two to three months, fail to arrive.

Friedrich was as amused by this Gentleman as I and, as visitors are few and far between and entertainment even less often, invited Benedict to stay the night and divine for water in the morning. What a sight it was! The Great Man strode proudly around our house, oftentimes going some distance into the scrub, with a forked stick held in both hands. It seems that, to those such as he that have the skills to perceive, that the stick will speak to him and thus point to where water can be found under the ground. Indeed, as Friedrich, Klaus and Leopold followed him and I stayed back to watch with Elizabeth and Marlene, it was readily apparent that the stick did three times spring up and around and point to the ground and in those places Benedict placed small piles of stones so we would know their places. 'Tis my opinion that the moving of the stick was by way of Benedict's hands but we were much entertained by the sight and when it came time for Benedict's departure Friedrich was happy to pay him the £3 he requested for his services. In the afternoon Friedrich took Benedict on horseback to the Western boundary where there is no water and he tells me Benedict laid two more piles of stones. Tob assures us that Benedict has a great skill but we are not convinced, most especially because Benedict despite his eloquence of his skills was unable to give particulars of how deep we would need to dig. All he was able to say was that the water, if indeed there is any, is not close to the surface but beyond that he could not say. Doubtless he is a charlatan but Friedrich, ever prudent, has ordered that the stones be left untouched and instructed Tob to give each pile a coat of whitewash in the morning. To me it seems a waste of good whitewash but 'tis not my place to argue.

Chapter Ten

Lucy was sitting on the front verandah with her feet on the rail and her laptop on her lap when Riley roared up William Street on her work bike, veered into Birtles Street and then her front yard in a swooping S that made use of the full width of both roads. She bounded up the steps, pulling a long thin cardboard box from inside the front of her shirt.

“Reckon it's come,” she exclaimed, wagging the box.

“What has?” asked Lucy.

“The shock absorber,” said Riley and put the package on the rail. She pulled off her gloves and helmet and put them on the other chair before ripping the end off the package. “Cool! Might fit that tonight.”

“So we'll be able to get the bike out of the front room?” asked Lucy. “Why've you got two bikes anyway?”

“The one inside's mine,” said Riley, inspecting the shock absorber. “It's a road bike. The other one's a dirt bike for work and belongs to the Station.”

“Ohh right,” said Lucy, her attention drifting back to the laptop. “I always thought you stockmen all rode horses.”

“Can't ride a horse,” said Riley, dumping her helmet on the deck and sitting down with the shock absorber cradled in her arms. “Anyway, I'm in Snorrie's crew and we do most of the repairs and maintenance and only sometimes get involved with the cattle so we don't need horses.”

“Ohh,” said Lucy distractedly. She typed in a thought then saved the document before looking up. “Snorrie?”

“Yeah,” said Riley. “Snorrie Sturlosen. He's from Iceland.”

“Long way from home,” said Lucy. “What's an Icелander doing in the Aussie outback?”

“Probably hates the cold,” said Riley with a laugh.

“I guess,” said Lucy, frowning. “Actually, I suppose Iceland is much like here, only cold rather than hot. If you don't like it there's not much else you can do except leave. Is there a vet in town or on the property?”

“What do you need a vet for?” asked Riley with a frown.

“I don't,” said Lucy. “It was just something that popped into my mind while I was wandering round earlier.”

“OK,” said Riley. “No, the nearest is in Longreach which is 350k away.” She grinned. “He's my boyfriend. Name's Paul. I go over every three or four weeks and do the shopping at the same time. There's supermarkets and shops there. He comes out here sometimes when one of the cattle or horses need it. Usually stays overnight. That a problem?”

“Not at all,” said Lucy, “so long as he knows which room's which. Are there many horses here?”

“I dunno,” said Riley. “Can't say I'm that interested in horses. Old Davey keeps a few for racing and there's probably fifty others. Maybe more. All of my work's done from the bikes and a truck.” She dumped the shock absorber on the deck beside her helmet. “Need it for hauling stuff. I'm going to take a shower.” She jumped up and headed inside.

“OK,” said Lucy, looking back at her laptop.

“Oh,” said Riley, pausing in the doorway. “The water here's pretty shit so it's a good idea to rinse your hair once a week or so with vinegar. It gets the minerals and stuff off your hair. There's a ten litre container ready made up in the bathroom. Help yourself.”

“I wondered what that was for,” admitted Lucy. “I thought maybe it was for cleaning the toilet.”

“Waste of time,” said Riley. “The bore water stains the porcelain and

no amount of cleaning gets it off. Do you dye your hair?"

"Yes," said Lucy, touching her ponytail. "I'm naturally a mid brown so I darken it a few shades."

"Me too," said Riley. "I'm not naturally blonde as you can see from my roots. Don't ever dye your hair here with tap water. Best if you go to Longreach and get a hairdresser to do it but if you're going to do it yourself get some distilled water from the servo. The minerals stop the dye binding or something and can change the colour. First time I tried it here I got streaks of brassy yellow and it stained the inside of my helmet. The water in Longreach is purer."

"Ugh," said Lucy, making a face.

"Back in a tick," said Riley and disappeared.

"Wonder what the water does to your insides," thought Lucy, studying the end of her ponytail. "Oh well."

She started to Google hairdressers in Longreach on her laptop then looked up again as a ute turned into Birtles Street and pulled up outside the house next door. The passenger got out and saw Lucy and stared for a few moments before turning to say something to the driver. They both laughed then the passenger waved and called "G'day".

"Hi there," called back Lucy.

Thus encouraged the man walked over to the edge of the verandah and the driver followed. They were both in their mid to late twenties and the driver sported a bristly beard. The other was merely unshaven.

"Name's Mikey," said the unshaven one. "Ain't seen you here before."

"Brad," said the other.

"I'm Lucy," said Lucy. "I'm staying with Riley for a while."

“Sweet as,” said Mikey. “So, what, you working round here or something?”

“Yes, I'm doing some research for David, the Station owner,” said Lucy.

“Oh yeah? And what does his missus think of that then?” said Mikey with a straight face. Brad sniggered but didn't say anything.

“She's fine about it,” said Lucy, faintly puzzled. “So, um, are either of you Kaufmans or Lamonts or related to them?”

“Shit no,” said Mikey, rubbing his chin with the back of his hand. “We's just ringers.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. “So you work on the Station?”

“Sure do,” said Mikey. “Listen, you wanna come over for a few cold beers later?”

“Thanks but no,” said Lucy. “I've got work to do.”

“Bugger that,” said Mikey. “Don't wanna work too hard, do yus. Tell you what. We'll bring some beers over here and we can have a party, like. You and Riley and us. What you reckon?”

“Yeah, a party,” echoed Brad.

“Umm, well, I'll ask Riley but seriously I do have a lot of work to do,” said Lucy and tapped her laptop.

“No worries,” said Mikey. “Maybe tomorrow, huh.”

“Maybe,” said Lucy.

“K, see yous,” said Mikey. “C'mon, mate. I need some tucker.”

They both turned and went back to their place. Lucy thought she faintly heard “lessies” and raised an eyebrow as she watched them disappear inside. She sighed and turned back to her Longreach

hairdressers search.

“Heard voices,” said Riley a few minutes later. She emerged wearing a pair of shorts and a baggy t-shirt and was vigorously towelling her hair.

“Yeah,” said Lucy, looking up. “A couple of guys from next door.”

“Ohh, those tossers,” said Riley contemptuously. “Wanted to party did they?”

“Yes,” said Lucy. “They suggested coming over with some beers.”

“Hope you didn't say yes,” said Riley. “They try it on with every girl they see. Tell 'em to fuck off next time. That's the only language they understand.”

“OK,” said Lucy, unwilling to be quite so aggressive. After all, there could be repercussions. “Do you work with them?”

“Nah,” said Riley, flopping into a chair. “They're in one of the other crews.”

“How many crews are there?” asked Lucy, idly curious.

“Four,” said Riley, “and four of us in each.”

“Are you the only girl?” asked Lucy.

“Nah,” said Riley, combing her hair with her fingers. “There's Annie as well. She lives the other side of town in the bunkhouse.”

“How come she doesn't live here with you?” asked Lucy, “since she's the only other girl stockman?”

“She's seasonal,” said Riley dismissively. “So what you been up to all day?”

“Oh, I was going to go back to the cemetery but it got too hot,” said Lucy, “so I went over to the Tourist Information Office but it was

closed even though the sign said it was open from 8 until noon, Wednesday to Friday.”

“Can't say as I've ever been there,” said Riley.

“Oh well,” said Lucy. “I daresay it'll be open tomorrow. I also went over and had a look at that ruined building the other side of the creek. That was quite interesting.”

“Oh yeah?” said Riley. “Want a coffee?”

“I'll do it,” said Lucy, putting her laptop on the deck and standing up. “Yeah, it's the old Overland Telegraph Repeater Station according to the sign on the wall. The sign didn't say when it was built or when it was shut down but I daresay there are some records somewhere. Back in a minute.”

“I wanted to ask you a favour,” she said when she came back with their coffees. “Oh sorry.”

Riley was slouched in her chair with her eyes shut and her bare feet on the verandah rail. She jerked awake and gave Lucy a lazy smile.

“Thanks, hon,” she said, sitting up straighter and taking her mug. “What favour?”

“I've seen what looked like a ruined chimney stack in the distance,” said Lucy, sitting back down. “On the track out to the homestead. Gina at the radio station said it was probably one of the old homesteads.”

“Yeah there's a bunch of 'em,” said Riley. “Dotted all over the place.”

“Well, I was thinking,” said Lucy. “Back when the Kaufmans arrived they probably only had a small holding and bought out some of their neighbours as the years went by. I read online that there was a depression in the late 1860s so probably quite a few of the original settlers here had a hard time of it and I daresay more than a few gave up. Still, the Station is now nearly 9000 square kilometres and I'm willing to bet the original plots of land were relatively small. You're

saying there's quite a lot of these ruins so they're probably the original homes of the people who lived round here."

"Yeah, probably," said Riley. "So what? They're just ruins."

"Well, I was thinking I'd like to visit some of them," said Lucy. "There might be a few bits of old machinery lying around or some other artefacts which would help me. If nothing else it would give me a much better idea of what life was like here a hundred or more years ago."

"I s'pose," said Riley, wrinkling her nose. "Most likely whatever was left behind has been lost in the floods over the years but you may be lucky. What favour?"

"Would you come with me?" asked Lucy. "I'm a city girl and I'm scared of going out on my own. I could easily get lost."

"And you'd wreck your car," said Riley. "Need a 4WD out here. Little 'uns like yours ain't got the suspension and front wheel drive would get you bogged in minutes. Ride a bike, can you?"

"Fraid not," said Lucy. "I had a bicycle as a kid but I've never driven a motorbike."

"K," said Riley. "Dare say the boss'll let me have a ute for a day or two. How many do you want to see?"

"How many are there?" asked Lucy.

"God knows," said Riley. "Never counted. Gotta be at least fifty, maybe a hundred."

"Well, maybe not all of them," said Lucy thoughtfully. "Certainly the ones nearer town though. They'd be the ones the Kaufmans probably used or built first. I wouldn't think the homestead where they live now would be that old."

"K," said Riley. "I'm not working this weekend. We can go then if you like."

“Aren't you going to see Paul in Longreach?” asked Lucy.

“Nah, saw him couple of weeks back,” said Riley, resting her coffee mug on her belly. “He's just a shag. We're not that close. 'Sides, did the shopping then. Don't need to go for another week or two.”

“Oh, right,” said Lucy, a little surprised.

“So you reckon the Kaufmans moved here in the 1860s?” asked Riley.

“No,” said Lucy. “The inscription in their Bible says 1872 so it was probably then. Actually I think I might have found the ship they arrived on.”

“How the hell did you do that?” asked Riley, twisting to look at her.

“I've spent most of the day looking through German shipping records,” said Lucy, picking up her laptop and opening a file. “There's one called The Lammershagen which left Hamburg on the 6th of October 1872 and arrived in Brisbane on the 8th of January 1873. They could easily have been on that as the date in the inscription ties up. I won't know for certain until I track down the passenger lists and it's quite possible they left from Bremen or even Holland or Italy. They might even have gone to Sydney or Melbourne first.”

“So why don't you look at Aussie shipping records then?” asked Riley.

“I'll probably end up having to,” said Lucy, “but I'm familiar with German archives and they're probably better than Australian ones from that time. For sure I wouldn't think there were any Australian shipping companies back then, at least not sailing to Europe. I would think the established shipping companies of Europe controlled the main passenger and freight routes. Still, the Lammershagen's arrival might well have been reported in the Brisbane newspapers and there might be a mention of Austrian immigrants. Especially if they were reasonably wealthy which they would have been if they'd arrived planning to set up a cattle station. That would need a fair amount of capital I would think.”

“I suppose,” said Riley. “Didn't they have cheap fares for immigrants

though?"

"That came later," said Lucy. She frowned. "At least I think it did. I'm assuming, of course, that the Kaufmans weren't convicts or at least descended from convicts since transportation had finished by then. Anyway the Bible's in German which would have been difficult to get hold of in Australia. Still, I suppose I'd better check that too if I can't find the passenger lists." She made a note in her exercise book.

"I always thought ancestry people always worked backwards," said Riley.

"I wouldn't know," said Lucy. "I'm a historian not an ancestry tracer or whatever they're called. Anyway, I'm planning to check the Queensland Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages as well. See what I can tie up. Might even start tonight but I don't hold out a lot of hope."

"Why's that then?" asked Riley, looking at her watch.

"Well, I've been looking at the headstones in the cemetery," said Lucy. "I haven't finished yet but the oldest I've found so far is Frederick Kaufman who died in 1909. It's quite possible that they didn't have a cemetery much before that. I've also seen quite a few for kiddies who were only a few months or years old which was quite sad. Anyway, I've been thinking about it off and on all day and, what with this place being so isolated, they probably never bothered to let the authorities back in Brisbane know when someone was born or died. They probably just buried them somewhere on the property. I wouldn't be surprised if a few illegitimate babies were born to Indigenous women as well. I know the Kaufmans were Catholics but that's never really stopped people having kids out of wedlock. Besides, I had a drive around town as well and couldn't find a church which is a shame as there'd probably be church records as well."

"I think the Town Hall might have been a church," said Riley after a few moments of thinking. "I went there once for some town meeting and there looked to be an old altar shoved in a corner. Couldn't say for sure though. I'm agnostic."

“Where's the Town Hall?” asked Lucy.

“Agatha Street,” said Riley, jumping up. “C'mon, I'll show you.”

She led Lucy through to the back verandah and pointed to a building at the end of the street on the right. It was a little bigger than the other houses but not dramatically so. For certain it looked to be just another old wooden building on stumps.

“Funny place to put a Town Hall,” said Lucy.

“Funny place to put a church too,” said Riley.

“Which way's East?” asked Lucy.

“That way,” said Riley, pointing off to the right.

“Well, it's orientated right,” said Lucy. “Catholic churches are always built so the congregation faces to the East. I'll go and have a look tomorrow but if it used to be a church and is now a Town Hall I wonder where the old records are.”

“Probably back at Head Office,” said Riley.

“Which would be where the Bishop is,” said Lucy thoughtfully. “I wonder if he's in Brisbane? I don't suppose you know what diocese Helene Creek is in?”

“Wouldn't have a clue,” said Riley cheerfully. “What's for dinner or have you forgotten it's your turn tonight?”

“Of course I hadn't forgotten,” said Lucy having completely forgotten about it. “Do you want steak or sausages?”

“Surprise me,” said Riley, heading for the front verandah again. “So why don't you go on social media as well?”

“Why would I go on social media?” asked Lucy, following her.

“Maybe some Kraut back in Germany's been tracing their ancestors as

well,” said Riley, flopping in her chair again. “I don't expect the whole bloody family moved to Aus so there's probably still a lot of them back there. Not a lot of point in you working up a sweat if someone else has already done it.”

Lucy stared at her for several seconds, blinking and thinking. Riley tossed the dregs of her coffee over the rail, completely oblivious.

“Why didn't I think of that?” said Lucy, sitting down to make a note in her exercise book. “Thanks, although I think I'll leave it for a bit.”

“How come?” asked Riley.

“The thing with historical research is to stay organised and in control,” said Lucy. “If you get sidetracked by every little thing you end up wasting a lot of time going down futile little blind alleys and get a vast mass of unstructured and mostly useless data. You can easily miss the bigger picture and fail to explore important things. A professional historian has to remain professional and, since I'm kind of thinking I might be a professional historian I need to do things properly.”

“I thought you were a professional historian,” said Riley, looking at her watch again as a hint.

“I've only done my Masters,” said Lucy. “I took some time off to decide whether or not to go on and do my Doctorate or find a job then this came along. I decided to take it to sort out whether or not I want to spend the rest of my life researching.”

“So this thing for David Kaufman is a kind of make or break for you, huh?” asked Riley.

“You could think of it that way,” said Lucy.

“Well you can't do that on an empty stomach,” said Riley grinning. “Go put some tucker on.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Friday, 4th May 1877

To my shame I find I cannot like Leopold. There is something in his manner that speaks of deceit and cruelty which I fear is incorrigible for Friedrich has given the lad many lectures and thrice a beating and yet he persists in pinching and otherwise tormenting Marlene and baby Ida and endeavours to blame Klaus when caught doing something he should not do or failing to do that which he should. 'Tis a worry. Indeed, when I came to write in my journal today for I have not written in it for some weeks and there is news to record I could not find it. It was found after a time pushed behind the hay rack in the stable. How it came to be there I cannot say for certain yet I have but one on who to lay my suspicions. For certain it was not Marlene nor Ida nor Friedrich nor one of the hands and of Klaus and Leopold the latter is vastly the more likely. Mayhap it could be one of the native workers but they are not allowed in the house and keep to their encampment and one wonders what manner of devilry would induce a native to hide my journal. The theft of something of value perhaps but a journal when none can read? No, I fancy Leopold is the mischief maker. Still, 'tis of no great concern for I have thought of a place to hide my journal from now on and Leopold spends much of his days with his father or Seth learning the ways of a cattle station and so will not see my hidey hole.

This summer past has been something of a disaster for the rains did not come. My vegetable garden is all dead and desolate through lack of water for such water as we have has been diverted to maintain the cattle on which we depend. It is becoming apparent to us all that unless something is done to find more water then we may, by Friedrich's reckoning, lose upwards of one third of our cattle before next summer's rains and, if they do not come then we will be bereft for there are early signs the bores we have are growing weaker.

I venture with some desperation in his mind although he does not show it Friedrich has written to a company who works with the mines around Mount Isa after much consultation with Tob and others who pass through. This company is, it seems, much skilled in the drilling of holes in the ground and Friedrich has in mind to put to the test the skills of the water diviner friend of Tob. For certain the whitewashed stones that were placed where said Benedict so indicated are still there. Indeed, this is the reason for my writing in my journal for a letter arrived but yesterday with a train of wagons bound for South Australia. It transpires that the company is sending a drilling rig, whatever that is, and a large

supply of clay piping and they expect to be with us before the end of the month.

I confess in my ignorance that I presumed diggers would be needed to dig down but Tob informs us that this is not possible for they will encounter rock not far beneath the surface. Doubtless explosives could be used as Friedrich suggested but Tob was of the opinion that explosives could rupture the rock over a wide area and release all the underground water in one fell swoop likely causing a flood greater than The Flood Our Lord sent to cleanse the World which would not be desirable. In consequence these people are to drill holes through the rock and have requested we supply a team of four cattle or horses to rotate aforementioned drill. Should it come to pass that they do find water then pipes and valves will be laid to control the flow and prevent A Flood. I shall pray every day to The Lord that we do find water and that we do not unleash A Deluge upon this country. I shall pray also that such seeds as remain from my vegetable garden will prove sufficiently hardy to spring forth once again when water is available.

Chapter Eleven

Lucy pulled up outside the homestead and checked her phone. It was five minutes to eleven so she was a little early. She got out and noticed another homestead, probably a kilometre or so further along the track, partially obscured by a huge metal shed. The main door was open and there looked to be a helicopter inside, which was intriguing.

“G'day,” called a woman's voice.

“Oh, g'day,” called Lucy, jerking round to look up at the verandah and shading her eyes. “I'm Lucy Chaplin.”

“Yeah, I know,” said the woman. “I've seen you round town. I'm Sheila Kaufman. Come on up.”

“So you must be David's daughter-in-law?” said Lucy, grabbing her backpack and going up the steps while trying to remember the more recent end of the family tree she'd been working on. “Charles' wife?”

“S'right,” said Sheila. “Charlie's out in the paddock but Dave's in his office. Cuppa tea?”

“Love one,” said Lucy, noticing a young child's face peering anxiously through the fly screen. “And this must be Lucas?”

“Yup,” said Sheila. “He's three and scared of strangers. Don't get many visitors here.”

“I can imagine,” said Lucy.

“Still, he'll be starting kindergarten at the end of the year so that will help with his socialising,” said Sheila, opening the fly screen. Lucas ran off and hid behind the couch. “Bit of a worry though. I don't want him growing up tongue tied and inarticulate like most round here.”

“Well, no,” said Lucy. “Um, if you don't mind me asking, um, ...?”

“Why am I here?” asked Sheila. She snorted. “Met Charlie at

Agricultural College and a huge cattle station seemed pretty cool. Been living here the last four, five years. Still, when Lukey's older we'll probably send him off to a boarding school in Brissie."

"Well that'll probably help," said Lucy noncommittally. "Is that another house up the track or is it barns or sheds or something?"

"Up there?" asked Sheila, jerking her thumb in roughly the right direction. "That's where Lindy lives. Her and Liz."

"That's David's sister-in-law?" asked Lucy.

"Yup," said Sheila. "Brian's wife. He's dead now. Liz is their daughter. Brian used to run the Station but he died a couple of years ago."

"Oh?" asked Lucy. "So David's only been running it for two years?"

"Best you talk to Dave about that," said Sheila. "I don't know how much he wants you to know."

"Ahh, right," said Lucy as Sheila, David's wife, came in through the back door with an armful of washing. "Hello Sheila."

"Lucy, how's it going?" said Sheila, unceremoniously dumping the washing on a table.

"Quite well," said Lucy.

"I'm just making some tea," said the younger Sheila. "Want some?"

"Lovely," said Sheila. "Settling in all right? Like it at Riley's?"

"Yes, very much," said Lucy.

"Good, good," said Sheila as the younger Sheila disappeared into the kitchen. "Hot enough for you?"

"Yes," said Lucy with a laugh, "although it sometimes gets this hot in Victoria as well. Umm, I'm here to see David."

“He's in his office,” said Sheila. “You know where it is?”

“Umm?” said Lucy, looking round.

“End of the corridor,” said Sheila, picking up the shirt on the top of the washing and folding it.

“Thanks,” said Lucy. “I'll, um, go in and see him.”

She headed off down the corridor and tapped on the open door at the end.

“Ahh, Lucy,” said David, twisting round in an old leather swivel chair. His desk, an old fashioned roller top one that looked antique but uncared for, was strewn with papers. He didn't smile. “Come on in. I thought I heard your voice. How are you?” He stood up and held out his hand.

“I'm very well thanks, David,” said Lucy, giving his hand a light touch. “And you?”

“Pissed off,” he said. “I hate paperwork. Sit down. Fancy a cuppa?”

“Sheila's making some,” said Lucy, sitting down.

“Ahh, good,” said David, sitting down again. “Don't ever take up farming. Bloody Government's always thinking up new ways to waste paper. So, what can I do for you?”

“You wanted an update on my progress,” said Lucy, a little surprised. “I've been here ten days now.”

“Ah yes,” said David, a flicker of a smile appearing momentarily in the corner of his mouth. “I forgot. Know anything about biosecurity hazards, do you?”

“Umm, sorry no,” said Lucy, “other than the occasional plagues that have decimated societies throughout history. Ever since William McNeill published his book *Plagues and Peoples* which explored the impact epidemics and pandemics have on cultural and societal

development the subject's become quite popular. Plagues used to be considered acts of God and were largely ignored."

David just stared at her, his brows furrowed.

"Sorry," said Lucy, for no particular reason.

"Right," said David, pushing a pile of official looking printed forms away and leaning his elbow on the desk. "So how's it going?"

"Here's your tea, Lucy," said young Sheila coming in the room.

"Thank you," said Lucy.

"Make me any?" asked David.

"Didn't know you wanted one," said Sheila, putting the mug on a corner of David's desk. "Do you?"

"Yes," said David testily.

"K," said Sheila. "Back in a mo." She turned and left.

"I hear you're staying with Riley Symons," said David, turning back to Lucy. "Working out all right is it?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "She's nice."

"Good girl that," said David. "Hard working. Not like some of the bludgers we get here. So, what have you uncovered?"

"Well, it has only been ten days," said Lucy, opening her backpack. "I've mostly spent that time going through the headstones in the cemetery and checking with the archives of births, marriages and deaths. There's quite a lot of missing information and I want to talk to you about that. I've also had chats with several of the older people in town but the most important thing so far is that I've identified where it all begins, at least here in Australia."

"Oh yes?" said David, sitting back in his chair. "Where does it all

begin?"

"In January 1873," said Lucy, "when Friedrich and Helene Kaufman arrived in Brisbane from Austria. Lauren Lamont had Helene's old Bible in a trunk in her roof, along with a few other things. I've also identified the ship they arrived on. Sadly I haven't been able to track down the ship's passenger lists but there was a small item in the Brisbane Courier on the 11th of January 1873, since it only came out on Saturdays, which listed several European passengers including the Kaufmans. I also found a Deed of Land Transfer dated 30th of January 1873 which transferred a ten square mile plot of land from someone called Reginald Whitely. I've got the Bible here as well as printouts of the newspaper item and the Deed if you want to see them."

"Absolutely," said David leaning forward.

"I must ask you to handle the Bible very gently," said Lucy, delicately lifting it out of her backpack. "I've wrapped it in baking paper for the moment because that was the closest thing the Store had to acid free paper. I've ordered some acid free paper online but it'll take a few days. Umm, I've brought some tissues as well if you want to open it."

She carefully laid the package on David's desk then peeled back the baking paper before plonking a box of tissues in front of him.

"Lauren had this?" he asked, staring at the cracked and faded leather cover.

"Yes," said Lucy. "That's a story in itself but I haven't got to the bottom of it yet. As far as I can tell at the moment, Thomas Kaufman and his wife Jane lived in that house around the time of World War One. He went off to fight and returned in 1917 to find his wife had died. I haven't started searching the Military archives yet so I don't know where Thomas was posted or what happened to him but there were quite a few of what looked to be Jane's things in the trunk as well so it looks like he just packed everything of hers away and put the trunk out of sight. Why he put the Bible in I don't know."

"Fascinating," said David, reaching out to pick up the Bible.

“Uh uh!” exclaimed Lucy, leaning forward quickly. “Use a tissue please.”

“Sorry,” said David, sitting back without touching the Bible. “You said Austria? This is in German.”

“I’m guessing Austria,” said Lucy. “This is a Catholic Bible and most of the German Catholics were in fact Austrian.”

“I see,” said David. “I always thought we were Germans. What else was in the trunk?”

“Oh, some clothing, hairbrushes, sketches, things like that,” said Lucy. “I’m fairly certain those things were Jane’s since this was in there as well.” She brought out the carved horse, also wrapped in baking paper. “It was a gift from Thomas to Jane. He probably carved it for her although I can’t be certain of that.”

“It’s well done at any rate,” said David. “Can I touch it?”

“Oh yes,” said Lucy, passing it to him. “It’s wood and not that old.”

“Yes, quite lifelike,” said David, looking at it from several angles before handing it back. “What’s that?”

“The Deed of Land Transfer,” said Lucy, taking it out of a folder. “It’s a photographic image of the archived original so the quality is quite poor but you can clearly read the name Kaufman even though the identifying location of the land is illegible. That said, it would be an incredible coincidence for another Kaufman to buy some land around here and name it Helene.”

“But it is possible?” asked David.

“It is possible,” said Lucy. “Kaufman is a fairly common Austrian name although Helene isn’t that common. Look at the date though. The land was transferred on the 30th and they arrived in Brisbane on the 8th. That’s only three weeks. The likelihood of another Helene Kaufman buying land at the same time is vanishingly small.”

"I suppose," said David with a non-committal shrug.

"I can do more searches," said Lucy. "Actually I wanted to ask you about that anyway. Titles Queensland charge \$35.43 plus GST for every search for titles prior to 1994. If you want me to do searches for every parcel of land that the Station has acquired over the last hundred and fifty years or so it would cost a fair amount as this Deed suggests they were usually around a hundred square miles. That's a 160 square kilometres and the Station is pushing 9000 square kilometres now. Searching for more Helene Kaufman related purchases could be expensive as well. It's entirely possible some plots of land were also sold by the Station in that time."

"Do you think there's a need?" asked David.

"Riley told me the Station is one big area," said Lucy. "That suggests that Friedrich bought one plot originally then bought up others around it. Is that right or does the Station own other plots of land in other areas?"

"Well, there's the sheep station down South," said David, "but that's part of the cattle station. It's just that we raise sheep there. No, we have more or less a big rectangle. Roughly 85 kilometres by 100 plus a part of Lake Disappointment in the South Eastern corner."

"Interesting name," said Lucy.

"An honest name," said David with a curl of his lip. "There's only water in the lake every few years when we get floods. The rest of the time the lake's dry."

"Yes, I can see that would be disappointing," said Lucy. "Obviously if I uncover any interesting episodes relating to particular acquisitions of land I can do a search and find out more, but I see little point in simply listing each and every land purchase. It will make very dry reading even in an appendix."

"I dare say," said David, using a tissue to lift the cover of the Bible. "Speak German, do you?"

“Yes,” said Lucy. “Which leads in to another question I wanted to ask you. Now we are fairly certain Friedrich and Helene Kaufman came to Australia and bought what became the Helene Creek Station how far back do you want me to go with them?”

“What do you mean?” asked David trying to flick through the pages with a tissue and making Lucy wince.

“Well, do you want me to try to find out why they came to Australia?” asked Lucy. “What they did in Austria before they left? After all, Friedrich was 26 and Helene 22 and they brought two children with them so they must have done something. What about their families? Helene’s maiden name was Chamb, incidentally.”

“How do you know that?” asked David.

“There’s a family tree in the back of the Bible,” said Lucy. “It starts with Friedrich and Helene and only goes as far as 1917.”

“Ahh,” said David and clumsily tried to open the back of the Bible.

“Let me do it,” said Lucy, helpfully reaching over with another tissue.

David studied the tree for a while then looked up at Lucy.

“How does this tie in with the one I gave you?” he asked.

“There’s a gap of at least one generation,” said Lucy. “I’ve been spending a lot of time looking through the Births, Marriages and Deaths archives but there are big gaps there as well. None of Helene Kaufman’s children are recorded nor those of Friedrich’s second wife or any of those children’s partners or children. The oldest headstone in the graveyard seems to be Frederick Kaufman in 1909 but there’s no entry for him in the Deaths Register. I’m slowly filling in what gaps I can but I doubt very much I’ll be able to identify everyone. I daresay there were a few still births as well who may not have ever had a name and just got buried somewhere out in the scrub.”

“That’s a shame,” said David, sitting back in his chair again. “I was hoping to get some artist in Brisbane to do the full family tree on a

board so I can hang it somewhere.”

“You still can,” said Lucy. “Just be aware it may not be complete. Umm, actually I did find something a little strange on one of the headstones.”

“Oh yes?” asked David. “What was that?”

“Well, one of them was for Albert Mercer and it referred to his wife Elspeth who, from the Bible was Elspeth Kaufman and their three children,” said Lucy. “Edward, Ursula and Howard.”

“Yes, the Mercers are part of the family as well,” said David. “They run the sheep station.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy, making a note. “Anyway, Elspeth's headstone is next to Albert's but it has four children listed, not three. The fourth is Grace but there's no mention of another husband for Elspeth and the Bible says she was born in 1911, four years after Albert died. Also, the births of Edward, Ursula and Howard were registered but Grace's wasn't.”

“Ahh,” said David, toying with a pen. “Perhaps that was just a mistake by whoever did the headstone.”

“Perhaps,” said Lucy, “but I've also found two marriage records for a Grace Mercer. One to a John Watkins in 1928 and the other to Gregory Dawson in 1943, three years after John Watkins died. Gregory and Grace were, incidentally, the parents of Lauren Dawson who's still alive. She's Lauren Lamont now.”

“So you think Elspeth had an illegitimate child after her husband died?” asked David.

“It certainly looks that way,” said Lucy.

“Well, these things happen,” said David. “Anyway, it's no great scandal, is it. She had been married and the fourth child came along after her husband died so she wasn't unfaithful to him or are you suggesting one or more of the other children weren't his?”

"I've no way of knowing," said Lucy, "but it's worth remembering Elspeth's oldest, Edward Mercer, who is Grace's half brother, is one of the two listed on the War Memorial as having died in World War One. Some people in town might take exception to that if it turns out his mother was a bit of a philanderer. Especially as he has a road named after him."

"A road?" exclaimed David. "What do you mean a road?"

"Edward Street," said Lucy. "Isn't it named after him? I just assumed Edward, William and Agatha Streets were named after the three people who died in the two wars since they're the same names as those on the War Memorial."

"You know that never occurred to me," said David, thinking about it. "It makes a certain sense though. When was this?"

"Grace was born in 1911 and Edward died in 1915," said Lucy.

"So it's well over a hundred years ago," said David. "Who's going to care after all this time?"

"I couldn't say," said Lucy. "I dare say Lauren might be a little upset to discover her mother was illegitimate and her grandfather wasn't who she thought he was."

"I doubt it," said David, "and if she does there's not much she can do about it. What else have you uncovered?"

"Not much as yet," said Lucy. "I did warn you this would be a slow process. What do you want to do about the Kaufman's in Austria?"

"Leave them for the time being," said David.

"OK," said Lucy. "I have a fair idea of what was happening in Austria and Prussia at the time so that part of the book can be fairly general."

"Good," said David. "Is there anything else to discuss?"

"I understand Brian used to manage the Station," said Lucy. "Would

his wife be likely to have any records?"

"No," said David. "All the records stayed here, in this house, and it would be pointless talking to her."

"OK," said Lucy slowly. "I'd like to go through those as well at some point. Umm, can I ask why it would be pointless talking to Lindy?"

"She doesn't get involved with the family anymore," said David. "Neither of them do."

"Neither being Lindy and Elizabeth?" asked Lucy.

David nodded.

"Can I ask why?" asked Lucy.

David stared at her for a few moments.

"I daresay you'll find out some other way," he said. "And I did say that you weren't to leave anything out of the book simply because it was distasteful, didn't I?"

"Indeed," said Lucy, getting her exercise book out of her backpack. "So what happened?"

"Dad, that's Gregory Kaufman," said David, "turned the Station from a family business into a Proprietary Limited Company back in 1977 at the urging of Brian who'd studied accounting at University. When Dad died in 1981 Brian took over as CEO which we all expected although we didn't expect Dad dying so soon."

"How did he die?" asked Lucy.

"He had a heart attack while on a muster," said David. "Fell off his horse and cracked his head on the ground."

"Oh, nasty," said Lucy, jotting this down. "This doesn't explain why Lindy has nothing to do with you though."

“It's background,” said David. “Brian started doing strange things back in, ohh, the early 2000s.”

“What sort of strange things?” asked Lucy.

“Ohh, sitting staring at the walls for hours,” said Brian. “Several times he was found wandering around outside with nothing on, not even his boots. I remember one time he got on the radio and ordered all the stockmen out in the middle of the night to do a muster. Things like that. Lindy took him to see a doc in Brissy who did a bunch of tests and decided Brian was suffering dementia.”

“Ahh,” said Lucy. “So you took over the company?”

“Not right then,” said Brian. “We tried to be supportive but things got worse. When he announced he was going to sell off half the property to a woman he met in the pub in town I called a family meeting, since we're all shareholders, and after a huge bloody row we voted him out. That was back in 2012. Lindy and Elizabeth have never forgiven the rest of us.”

“Interesting,” said Lucy, making a note to find out Lindy's side of this dispute.

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Wednesday, 9th January 1878

Yesterday was Klaus' 10th birthday and as if to mark our celebrations The Good Lord saw fit to send us rain! 'Tis still raining and has done so without break since early yesterday morning and the ground, so parched as to soak up every drop, is only now beginning to turn to mud. After feast comes famine or so they say but in our case it is the other way around for after our famine we now have a feast of water! Friedrich gave Klaus his own rifle, ordered especially from Brisbane for he is a small lad for ten years and Friedrich believed a full size gun would bowl him over. Klaus was much delighted and spent much of the afternoon polishing it and pretending to shoot some cattle. Leopold gave him a sliver of rock which he had fashioned into a small knife and bound onto it a wooden handle. 'Tis not overly sharp but it was a nice thought. I baked a cake and Friedrich permitted Klaus to have a small mug of beer and we were all very jolly.

Indeed, some of our jollity came from our finding of water the day before the rains came! The men from Mount Isa have drilled three bore holes thus far and the third, near our Western boundary, proved to be successful. It is hot and tastes brackish but the Drilling Master says he will direct the water to a dip in the ground nearby so the water can sit and cool and the cattle can drink from it. I confess my secret thoughts as to the worthiness of Dr Alphonse Benedict d'Eau have been shown to be entirely misplaced for the finding of water in that part of our property is a God Send indeed. The Drilling Master, an untidy man by the name of Deek Masterton, was most greatly pleased for, so he tells us, his drills can only go to a depth of some thirty feet for it has insufficient weight to cut deeper. I do not understand these things for it seems to me that if you can cut through rock then how does it matter what depth the rock is? Deek tried to explain and talked of things such as torque and torsion resistance but I know not of what he was saying. 'Tis sufficient to say, however, that at a depth of some twenty eight feet the rock gave way to water and, so Deek tells us, the water came gushing out with such force he and his men near drowned before they were able to put a lid on it. Then, as is so often the way in this world, the rains came but Deek and his men are, as I write, endeavouring to replace the lid with a valve and, when they are successful, they will attach pipes. Friedrich will tomorrow decide whether to continue drilling at the other sites Benedict proposed. With a success rate of one in three and the cost of drilling ~ for it takes two months or thereabouts to reach the limit of their drill as needs must if no water is found sooner ~

Friedrich must weigh the cost of no rain when the wet season is dry against the cost of drilling. 'Tis my hope that he also weighs the welfare of the cattle in his deliberations but it is not for me to say.

This is not the only good news we have had for only two weeks ago Friedrich received a letter from a company by the name of Cobb & Co who are in the passenger and mail delivery business who propose to construct a staging post wherein fresh horses, overnight beds and food will be available. Moreover, knowing we have a number of horses as well as cattle ~ although how they know this I cannot imagine ~ perhaps they spoke with others who have stopped at our bunkhouse or one of their own employees has done such. No matter. They say in their letter that they are desirous of renting some of our land for their staging post and buying horses as and when needed. Friedrich wrote back expressing some agreement with their proposal and suggesting that, as we already have a bunkhouse and provide food and drink, that the Directors of Cobb & Co rent that as well rather than building their own. It may be desirous to extend the building but that will be a minor matter for when the old bunkhouse burnt down these two winters past Friedrich had a new one built with provision for extending should the need arise.

On other matters, we now own 700 square miles for a neighbour with 200 square miles believed the drought would last several years and left for the coast delighted at his good fortune at finding Friedrich willing to buy. Alas his workers were inflicted with our neighbour's misgivings and departed with him. Friedrich is now looking for another two men to join the four we have.

Jeb has also found himself a wife! Her name is Amy Canderer and she is but 16 and is the daughter of a bullock driver who has passed this way four times. Their marriage is planned to take place when next she and her father pass this way which is likely to be in two months. Amy divulged to me a dislike of endlessly watching the backsides of bullocks as they pull the wagons and jumped at the opportunity to marry and stay in one place and see the front of the bullocks from time to time as they arrive! I daresay a few horses in the employ of Cobb & Co will add further variety to her life although doubtless Jeb will do his best for his is a lonely life spending all his time as he does at the bunkhouse. I grant he has the company of those that stay but none stay beyond a single night for they have places to go and Jeb does not. Quite who will have the task of marrying the couple I do not know for there is no priest this side of Toowoomba but Jeb says that the Captain of a Ship is permitted to marry people and Friedrich is the Captain of our ship and so he

should be the one. Friedrich does not agree and is very reluctant to take God's Name in vain and perform such a ceremony. I know not what the happy couple will do but I am certain it will all turn out for the best.

Chapter Twelve

“Wow!” exclaimed Lucy as she drove past the Tourist Information Office the next day. “The bloody place is open!”

She slammed on the brakes to duck into Staggers Lane, between the pub and the Tourist Office, and the huge truck that had been following blared its horn angrily and veered into the middle of the main street.

“Sorry!” called Lucy, cringing in her seat. She gave a half-hearted wave at the back end of the truck and it belched a cloud of black diesel fumes at her. A trail of concrete dust leaking from its side showed how far into the oncoming lane it had veered and a couple of people from the pub came out onto the verandah to see what all the noise was about.

“My bad,” called Lucy but the truck was already level with the store.

She pulled into the pub car park and sat there for a few moments until her mild trembling died down then got out and locked her car out of habit even though no one else in town bothered. They generally left their keys in the ignition as well and, if they were planning to go off again in the next half hour or so, they usually left the engine running too.

“Hello,” she said, going up the steps to the Tourist Office and peering in through the door.

“Well, hello,” called a cheery voice. “Be with you in a moment.”

“OK,” called back Lucy and looked around. The Tourist Office itself seemed to be mainly a narrow corridor with a rack of leaflets at one end and a table at the other but, between them, there was a wide entryway that led through to what looked like an Art Gallery. Intrigued, Lucy went through.

“Oh wow,” she said softly, looking around.

Hung on the walls and discretely separated were at least twenty

paintings of various sizes. Each had its own soft light mounted above it and a small plaque beneath.

“Oh, there you are!” exclaimed the voice behind her. “I thought you'd escaped!”

“Oh, hello,” said Lucy, turning to see what at first glance appeared to be a gnome. He wasn't, of course. He was just a short elderly man with a bushy fringe of white hair that circled his entire face and round glasses of the kind John Lennon liked to wear. It didn't help that he was wearing a red waistcoat and held a fishing rod in his hand. All that was missing was a toadstool for him to sit on.

“Excuse the rod,” he said, propping it against the wall. “I was trying to unblock the toilet.”

“Ahh, right,” said Lucy. “Umm, did it work?” She wasn't used to looking down at people as she was only five foot three herself and this gentleman barely came up to her shoulder.

“Don't know,” said the gnome happily. “I was about to do a test flush when you arrived. How can I help you?”

“I wanted to see if you had any information about the town,” said Lucy, her mood lifting from the near miss because of his cheerfulness, “but I'm worried about your toilet now.”

“Perhaps not as worried as I am,” said the gnome, grinning. “I need to use it. Shall we do a ceremonial testing of the waterways?”

“Why not,” said Lucy.

“Why not indeed,” said the gnome. “This way.”

He grabbed the fishing rod and led Lucy back into the corridor and past the table. There, through a door, sat the toilet. It looked like a perfectly conventional toilet with a white porcelain bowl and a plastic cistern above it but it carried a faint aura of brooding menace. The gnome pressed himself against the wall to make way for Lucy.

"Perhaps you would do the honours?" he said, holding out a hand with a flourish. "I don't think it likes me."

"Certainly," said Lucy. She stepped forward and pushed the button on the top of the cistern. The toilet immediately gurgled and a rush of water flowed into the bowl. The water level rose up a couple of inches then subsided again.

"Ahhh!" said the gnome, peering inside the bowl. "You have the magic touch!"

"I think it was probably your rod," said Lucy.

"Perhaps," said the gnome, "but my heartfelt thanks regardless. Would you excuse me for a moment?"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Lucy and backed out. The gnome shut the door and Lucy was almost back at the Art Gallery when the flush went again.

"That's a relief," said the gnome cheerfully. "My name is John but most people call me Lofty. You wanted information?"

"That's right," said Lucy.

"About the town or Queensland generally?" asked Lofty. "I have a large scale road map of Queensland, a street map of the centre of Brisbane, leaflets on the history of mining?"

"I'm more interested in the town itself," said Lucy.

"Ahh, right," said Lofty. He squeezed past to stand in front of the rack of leaflets and started plucking some out. "This is a leaflet about the camp site on the other side of town, this one is about the many attractions of Charleville. Ahh, yes, this is about the amenities at the War Memorial and Commemorative Children's Play Area. It's a rather good picture isn't it."

"Yes it is," said Lucy, glancing at it. "Um, do you have anything more specifically about the history of Helene Creek?"

"Ahh, history!" said Lofty. "Would Cobb & Co interest you?" His fingers hovered over another leaflet.

"Definitely," said Lucy.

"Then this is for you," he said, plucking out a leaflet and handing it to her.

"Thanks," said Lucy and quickly scanned it. "Umm, this seems to be a general overview of Cobb & Co. I can't see any mention of Helene Creek."

"I believe there was a staging post here at one time," said Lofty.

"Any idea when?" asked Lucy.

"What I find particularly interesting about Cobb & Co is that they usually built their own staging posts," said Lofty, "and staffed them with three or four people including a spare driver and, of course, changes of horses."

"So that could have had an impact on the town's development," said Lucy. "When did they build the staging post?"

"Who can say?" said Lofty shrugging.

"OK," said Lucy. "Is the staging post still around? I haven't seen anything but I daresay it's been put to another use by now. I'd be interested to know where it was and what it might have looked like."

"You're not Lucy Chapman by any chance, are you?" he asked with a small frown.

"Lucy Chaplin," said Lucy. "You've heard of me?"

"You're that historian then," said Lofty. "The one David hired to write a book about us?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "That's me."

“Delighted to meet you,” said Lofty. “I’m Johnathan Kaufman, David’s cousin twice removed or something like that. Our grandfathers were brothers. I was hoping to meet you earlier but I’ve been in hospital.”

“Oh dear,” said Lucy, concerned. “Nothing too serious, I hope?”

“Oh just a spot of bother with the old waterworks,” said Lofty cheerily. “I have high hopes of you, my dear.”

“In what way?” asked Lucy.

“Your book, of course!” said Lofty. “As you can see we have very little information here about the town. Even the Cobb & Co and the Overland Telegraph leaflets are just general and don’t mention Helene Creek. Did David tell you about our the plans for tourism?”

“He did mention something about cattle station working holidays and four wheel drive tours,” said Lucy.

“That’s it,” said Lofty, pulling out another leaflet. “It’s all in here although it’s not expected to open to visitors for another eighteen months or so. Hopefully your book will be finished by then and we can sell some here as well. Do you know who’s going to publish it?”

“Ohh, it’s far too early for that,” said Lucy, feeling pressured and a little embarrassed at the same time. “I’ve barely even started doing any research let alone actually writing anything.”

“Ah well,” said Lofty, pushing his little stack of leaflets into Lucy’s hand. “I hope you find some space in it to devote to our local artists and artisans. Have you seen our gallery?”

“I did have a quick look just now,” said Lucy, following Lofty into the Art Gallery section. “They’re very good.”

“Mostly by local Indigenous artists,” said Lofty, “although there are a few by other locals. That one, for example,” and he pointed to a rather atmospheric painting of a sunset over a flat red land with two sheep staring moodily off into the distance. Something that looked like an alien spacecraft but was probably a bore valve lurked in the

foreground on the extreme left of the painting. "That was painted by Nicole Mercer. She's only 20 and shows great talent, don't you think?"

"That would be the daughter of the man who runs the sheep farm to the south?" asked Lucy.

"That's right," said Lofty. "We're related but God knows how. We're relying on you to work it all out for us." He laughed and elbowed Lucy just above her hip.

"Well, I'll do my best," said Lucy. "What are those in that cabinet?"

"They're pottery pieces," said Lofty. "They're made by a lady called Auntie Rosie."

"They're very nice," said Lucy, peering at a piece that looked to be a kookaburra perched on a branch. "Is she local as well?"

"More or less," said Lofty. "She lives in a shack about eighty k out of town. She used to be married to one of the stockmen but he died, ohh, twenty, twenty five years ago. She's a recluse now."

"I hope she's happy," said Lucy. "Is this for sale?"

"That one's only \$500," said Lofty. "Her work usually sells quite quickly."

"Perhaps when my book becomes a global best seller then," said Lucy, straightening up. "You mentioned the Overland Telegraph? That's that stone ruin over there?"

"The very same," said Lofty.

"Do you know when it was built or closed down?" asked Lucy, walking away from the pottery.

"I've no idea when it was built," said Lofty, "but it would have closed down in 1916 when the Post Office was built."

"Are you sure that was 1916?" asked Lucy, keenly aware Lofty actually

knew very little of the history of Helene Creek.

“Yes,” said Lofty. “It says so over the door to the Post Office. You should go and have a chat with Jessie Carmody the Postmistress. Her grandfather was the first Postmaster here.”

“Oh really?” said Lucy. “Have you got a scrap of paper and a pen so I can jot that down?”

“Certainly,” said Lofty. “On my desk. Of course, the repeater station wasn't part of the Australian Overland Telegraph, you know. That went from Adelaide to Darwin and from there through a giant cable on the sea bed all the way to Europe and America.”

“I didn't know that,” said Lucy, jotting down Jessie Carmody – Post Office – granddad on the piece of paper Lofty gave her. “Wouldn't it have made more sense to connect Sydney or Canberra to the rest of the world?”

“I don't know why they chose Adelaide,” said Lofty, “but the line that went through Helene Creek connected Brisbane to the Overland Telegraph somewhere near Alice Springs. I daresay there was a line from Sydney as well. Perhaps you could do a chapter on it.”

“Perhaps,” said Lucy. “I daresay there was a strong social significance to being able to send messages quickly. After all it would have taken six months or so to send a letter to Europe and get a reply. I wouldn't think it would affect Helene Creek much though unless the Station needed to send telegrams to do with cattle exports. Would they have even been able to use it? It was, after all, just a repeater station so there wouldn't have been an office or anyone to actually send the telegram. Not like an actual Post Office.”

“Ahh, my dear, how wrong can you be,” said Lofty, gently extracting the leaflet about the Overland Telegraph from her hand. “If you read this it explains everything.” He opened the leaflet and tapped a paragraph. “The repeater stations were built every 250 kilometres and were usually staffed by six men. Four to receive and re-transmit the messages and two to patrol and repair the lines in their area.”

“You are joking!” exclaimed Lucy. “I thought the repeaters were just little electronic things that boosted the signals.”

“Old technology,” said Lofty, grinning. “I imagine someone listened to the Morse code that came in, wrote it down and passed it to another person who tapped the Morse code back in again. That would explain why there were four of them. Two on each shift.”

“Wow, that must have been soooo boring!” said Lucy emphatically. “I bet they made a lot of mistakes as well.”

“Perhaps,” said Lofty. “Although I daresay the people who did that were quite experienced and not everyone wants to be a stockman or lead an exciting life. I would think it was quite a secure, risk free job although probably not well paid. Perhaps they got all the excitement they wanted from being among the first to hear things.”

“Perhaps,” said Lucy, screwing up her nose. “Well, thank you. I’ll come back and buy some of the art work when I win the lottery.”

“They sell scratch cards at the Post Office as well,” said Lofty helpfully. “Good luck!”

Lucy read through the entire leaflet on the Overland Telegraph as she slowly walked back to her car.

“Interesting coincidence,” she thought. “The line from Adelaide to Darwin was completed in 1873, the same year the Kaufmans arrived in Australia. I wonder when the repeater station was built? And six staff. I wouldn’t think any of them were women so they’d have been six men. Where would they have lived? Would they have all lived at the repeater station? It didn’t look big enough. Maybe they lived in houses in the town? Did they have families? How long did they stay here? Maybe they just did six months or a year at a time then went back to their families? How can I find out?”

She pondered for a few moments, tapping her finger on the steering wheel then got out and went back to the Tourist Information Office.

“Surely you haven’t won the lottery already?” beamed Lofty.

“Fraid not,” said Lucy. “Um, do you know if there are any archives about the Overland Telegraph? Or books about its history?”

“There might be on the Internet,” said Lofty, his wrinkled face wrinkling further as he thought about it. “I do know that the Cobb & Co archives are now at the State Library of Queensland. There was something about that in the Tourist Office Bulletin a couple of years ago but that’s no help of course. Cobb & Co would have been in competition with the telegraph.”

“Oh well, not to worry,” said Lucy. “Thanks again.”

She wandered out into the bright sunshine again and back to her car. With the engine running and the air conditioner starting to cool the interior down she noted Cobb & Co's archives being at the State Library in her exercise book then wrote down Jessie Carmody.

“Might as well drop in and see her now,” she thought, glancing at her phone. “I don't expect she's busy.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Friday, 13th February 1880

I am a good Christian.

I have worked hard and kept faith with both God and my husband Friedrich and cared as best I could in this harsh land for my own children and those from before but I confess there must still be something lacking within me for today is Friday the 13th and a day of much grief and sorrow. I had supposed that I had put all my Faith in the Lord and yet, like a superstitious savage, there is within me that which blames this day for the death of Klaus. They say only the good die young and Klaus was nothing if not wholly good and yet he has passed so young. A fine sturdy lad he was on his twelfth birthday but a few weeks ago, overcoming his small stature with a burst of growth and close to catching up on his father in height if not in breadth of shoulder. A fine handsome lad not given to sickness but The Lord moves in mysterious ways and I, nay all of us, must take comfort in the knowledge that Klaus's suffering has come to an end and he lies now in the bosom of God.

Alas we know not what affliction took him for our book of remedies had nothing to say on the matter of great sweating and exhaustion. We did what we could for the rash that spread across his arms and chest and yesterday his sweating ceased and there were signs of the boy's rash beginning to recede. We offered prayers to God and hoped that the worst was over and Klaus would soon be able to leave his bed and ride Beauty his favourite horse once more but it was not to be. While Friedrich was out tending the cattle I endeavoured to feed Klaus an egg, whipped and fried in the pan but he could keep nothing down and the sweats began again. Then he cried out in great fear and called for his mother in German. I did my best to comfort him but he passed away in my arms and I wept for he was a good friend and I considered him to be as one with my own children. We buried him near the house on the West side so that he may continue to dwell with the sunsets that he so loved.

Friedrich is bereft and blames himself for bringing Klaus to this cursed land.

I know not what to do.

Chapter Thirteen

“Hello Gina!” said Lucy in surprise when she walked into the Post Office. “How are you?”

“Yeah, I’m good, Lucy,” said Gina, looking up from watching the girl behind the counter putting official stamps on pieces of paper. “Just renewing my passport. How’s things? Uncovered any juicy scandals yet?”

“Oh not really,” said Lucy. “It’s still early days yet.”

“Not really, huh?” said Gina as the girl turned to her computer. “So what’ve you found?”

“Oh, nothing much,” said Lucy. “Just a little discrepancy on one of the headstones.”

“Oh, thanks, Bev,” said Gina as the girl handed her a receipt. “Is that all? I thought there’d at least be some slave trading or massacres or something lurking in this dump’s past.” She cocked her head and listened to the radio that warbled quietly in the background. “Ooops, gotta go. I put on the extended version of *Heard It Through The Grapevine*² and it’s nearly finished. Drop in for a chat when you fancy a cuppa. See ya!”

She hurried out with a smile and a wave, the fly screen clacking noisily behind her.

“What can I do for you?” asked Bev.

“Do you think she’ll make it back before the end of the song?” asked Lucy, putting her backpack on the counter.

“Dunno,” said Bev, leaning over and turning up the radio. The vocal had long finished but the guitar and drums were still rolling through the melody and beginning to fade out. “Could be close.”

2 Credence Clearwater Revival, *Heard It Through The Grapevine*, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 1970 ~ the extended version is 11 minutes in length.

A few seconds later the song ended and the radio went quiet. Bev started counting quietly. Lucy could feel an amused tension building up inside her.

“What a classic!” boomed out of the radio. Gina sounded a little breathless and Bev turned the radio back down. “I just lost myself in that song,” continued Gina. “Sorry about that but we’ll continue the Creedance theme with *Bad Moon Rising*, this time by our own Aussies, *The Reels*, and their classic cover.”

“Twenty three seconds of dead air,” remarked Bev as the eerie opening chords of The Reels’ version started to play. “She’s slowing down. Oooh I love this song! Makes me all goosebumpy!”

“I prefer it to the original as well,” said Lucy. “It’s more atmospheric, more ... I don’t know, surreal maybe. You can really feel the bad moon rising and that someone’s going to die.”

“Oooh, tell me about it!” said Bev. “Dad played it only a couple of weeks back and I couldn’t go outside for hours! Gave me the spooks it did. So what can I do for you?”

“Is Jessie here?” asked Lucy. “Jessie Carmody?”

“She’s out doing deliveries,” said Bev. “Can I help?”

“I just wanted to have a chat with her,” said Lucy, thinking Bev looked to be 15 or 16 and almost certainly knew nothing of Post Office history. “Um, when do you think she’ll be back?”

“Oh won’t be long,” said Bev. “Only had half a dozen letters today. Five, maybe ten minutes I reckon.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. “Um, would it be OK if I wait?”

“Sure as,” said Bev. “You that Lucy whatsit? The one what was looking for a place on the radio?”

“Yes, Lucy Chaplin,” said Lucy.

"I'm Bev," said Bev. "Seen you round a couple of times an' all. Everyone's talking about you."

"Oh really?" said Lucy, surprised. "I'm not really that interesting."

"Yous writing a book about us, ain't you," said Bev. "Am I going to be in it?"

"Ahh, probably not," said Lucy. "It's not that sort of book."

"Bummer," said Bev crinkling her nose in disappointment. "Jess said you'd be round sooner or later."

"And here I am," said Lucy with an embarrassed little laugh. She looked at the door anxiously.

"Funny that," said Bev, looking Lucy up and down critically. "Thought you'd be a bit more glamorous, like. All tits and make-up, like dad says. Some of the guys think you're really hot though."

"Ahh, sorry," said Lucy, her embarrassment growing. "You're probably thinking of Hollywood script writers. I'm just a historian."

"So how old are ya?" asked Bev, pushing her own chest out a little. "I'm 16," she added proudly. "Going to the TAFE in Longreach in January."

"Um, twenty five," said Lucy. "What are you going to study?"

"Journalism," said Bev. "Dad says they's going to need journalists what with all these war zones springing up all over the place."

"Seriously?" asked Lucy. "You want to be a war correspondent?"

"Nah," said Bev. "I wanna be a beautician but there ain't no call for beauticians round here."

"You could always go to Brisbane or Sydney," said Lucy. "There are loads of beauty parlours in the cities."

“You reckon?” asked Bev, toying with a strand of her hair.

“It’s certainly worth making enquires,” said Lucy, “and you’re not as likely to get shot or blown up in a beauty parlour as you would in a war zone.”

“There is that,” conceded Bev. “Mind you, there’d be loads of soldiers around. Jess is back.”

“Well, true,” said Lucy, looking over at the door. No one came in.

“Heard her bike,” said Bev. “She’ll be in in a minute.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy.

A door slammed at the back of the Post Office and a few moments later a small, deeply tanned elderly woman marched briskly in from beside the counter.

“Balance the till, would you, Bev,” she said, putting a crash helmet on a stack of parcels. “Then you can go. Oh, sorry, didn’t see you there. Deal with the customer first then balance the till, Bev.”

“She ain’t a customer,” said Bev. “She’s here to see you.”

“Ahh,” said Jessie. She came over to the counter and peered shortsightedly at Lucy. It didn’t help that one eye pointed in a slightly different direction to the other. “Ohh, you’re Lucy Chaplin, aren’t you?”

“Yes I am,” said Lucy. “You’re Jessie Carmody, the Postmistress?”

“That’s me,” said Jessie. “I’ve been expecting you. Come on through and I’ll put the kettle on. Bev, dear, put the Closed sign up when you go.”

“Yes Jess,” said Bev, rapidly counting some coins into the till. “Umm, we’re out by a dollar seventy five.”

“Oh dear,” said Jessie. “Which way?”

“We're up,” said Bev.

“Ahh, that's all right then,” said Jessie. “Put it in the Christmas box.”

Bev closed the till and brought out a jam jar, half full of assorted coins, from under the counter. She dropped in the coins still remaining in her hand then put the jar back.

“See ya tomorrow,” she said with a wave and sauntered off towards the door.

“Good girl that,” said Jessie, watching her flip the Closed sign.

“You don't need to close,” said Lucy. “I can easily come back later.”

“Oh Wednesdays are very quiet,” said Jessie. “Don't expect we'll have any more customers today. Come on through.”

“Oh, right,” said Lucy.

“So I suppose you're wanting to know the history of the Post Office here,” said Jessie, rinsing a couple of mugs. Each was labelled 'Australia Post' and the logo.

“Um, not just yet, if that's OK,” said Lucy. “I will do in time but I like to keep things organised otherwise it can get chaotic, in my own mind if nowhere else. Actually I was just talking to Lofty at the Tourist Office. He said your grandfather was the first Postmaster here so I was hoping you'd be able to tell me anything you've heard about the Overland Telegraph repeater that used to be here. You know, the ruin behind the Tourist Office? I'm still trying to get the 19th century straight, you see. The 20th can wait a bit longer.”

“I completely understand,” said Jessie approvingly. “A Post Office is no place for mess and chaos. Mail gets lost and mis-delivered and that would never do. We have a responsibility to our customers and I daresay as a historian you have a similar responsibility to your readers. Deliver the facts, eh? Milk, sugar?”

“Just milk,” said Lucy. “Thanks. Yes you're right. I've read more than a

few articles where it's obvious that the writer is trying to bend interpretations to fit their political beliefs although it's the ones where it isn't so obvious that worry me more."

"Sit, sit," said Jessie, pouring water into the mugs. She put one in front of Lucy and sat in a very old creaky wooden chair. "Hope you don't mind teabags?"

"Not at all," said Lucy, getting out her phone. "Do you mind if I record this?"

"I'd prefer not," said Jessie. "This is a Government establishment after all."

"Ahh, right," said Lucy. "Yes, my bad." She turned her phone off and got out her exercise book. "Is it OK if I make notes?"

"That's fine," said Jessie. "So you want to know about Granpa, do you? I never knew him, of course. He died long before I was born. In the late 30s I believe. I wasn't born until 1951."

"So you're 73?" asked Lucy. "You don't look it." Actually Jessie had a pickled walnut look about her which suggested she was even older but Lucy thought it best not to say that.

"Thanks," said Jessie dismissively. "The Post Office stayed closed for a couple of years after he died as Pa was off in Singapore fighting for King and Country and no replacement could be found. He re-opened the Post Office when he returned."

"What was his name?" asked Lucy.

"My father or my grandfather?" asked Jessie.

"Both," said Lucy.

"My father was Malcolm Brassel," said Jessie, "and Granpa was Ebenezer Brassel."

"So did your father ever talk much about Ebenezer?" asked Lucy.

“Quite often,” said Jessie. “In fact it was probably his tales that made me want to work for the Post Office as well.”

“Oh really?” asked Lucy, sipping her tea. “Anything about the Overland Telegraph?”

“Granpa actually worked for the Telegraph,” said Jessie. “I don't know when he joined the service but he worked here for several years as a Telegraph Operator before becoming the Supervisor a couple of years before it was closed down.”

“You mean here?” asked Lucy, pointing at the floor. “In Helene Creek?”

“Yes,” said Jessie, “although not here exactly. He would have been at the repeater post on the other side of the creek.”

“Awesome!” exclaimed Lucy, making a note of that. “So when would this have been?”

“Well, the Post Office was opened in 1916,” said Jessie, “and Granpa was the first Postmaster. That means he'd have been made supervisor in 1914 or possibly 1915. As I said I don't know when he joined the team but I wouldn't think he'd become supervisor after only a year or two.”

“I wouldn't think so either,” said Lucy. “I don't suppose you know when he was born?”

“Oh no,” said Jessie. “Although he was only in his mid 50s when he died.”

“Which was in the late 30s?” asked Lucy. Jessie nodded. “So if we assume he was 55 and died in, say 1938, that would mean he was born in, um, the mid 1880s. Do you know where he was born?”

“Oh, here,” said Jessie. “We're all Helene Creakies,” and she smiled. “He was, I believe, the son of one of the workers on the cattle station.”

“Right,” breathed Lucy, tapping her pen on her book. “So do you

know when the Telegraph repeater post was built?"

"Around 1880 I think," said Jessie. "I'm not certain however. I'm sure there are records somewhere though."

"I'm sure there are," said Lucy, "but by the sound of it the repeater post was probably here before Ebenezer was born so he'd have grown up knowing about it."

"I would think so," said Jessie. "And I think it's fair to say he didn't want to follow his father on the Station. None of my family have ever been what you would call outdoorsy types. Sitting indoors all day probably suited him very well."

"Yes, probably," said Lucy. "I don't know what age he'd have been when he started with the Telegraph but I'm guessing it would have been not long after 1900. Umm, do you know where he lived?"

"No," said Jessie, "although there were some houses for the Telegraph employees down by the creek. He probably lived there but I've no idea where he was born."

"Houses?" said Lucy. "Do you know where? Exactly?"

"Where the bunkhouse is now," said Jessie. "I can still remember watching them being torn down and the bunkhouse being built in the early 60s. I was fascinated as I'd never seen a house being bulldozed before."

"And the bunkhouse is for seasonal workers on the station?" asked Lucy. "Did that only start in the 60s?"

"Oh gosh no," said Jessie. "As far as I know there have always been seasonal workers on the Station. "No, before that I believe there was an encampment out where the camp site is now."

"Fascinating," said Lucy, scribbling hastily. "Why do you suppose they were built this side of the creek when the repeater post is the other side? To minimise noise maybe? I imagine they'd need things fairly quiet to be able to hear the Morse codes."

“Actually I believe it was because of the batteries,” said Jessie.

“Batteries?” asked Lucy frowning. “What batteries?”

“Telephone lines need electricity,” said Jessie. “Every repeater post had big powerful batteries to provide the power to send the signals to the next post. I saw one once in a museum in Brisbane. Great big glass bottle which had to be regularly refilled with some acid that actually generated the electricity. I remember Pa telling me they sometimes started fires so they probably built the houses the other side of the creek for safety.”

“That would make sense,” said Lucy. “That’s probably why they needed two maintenance men as well.”

“Oh no,” said Jessie. “That was because the lines were constantly failing.”

“Why?” asked Lucy. “Surely they coated the wires with something weather resistant?”

“Oh it wasn’t that,” said Jessie. “There were a lot of thefts.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. “You mean for fencing and so on?”

“Possibly,” said Jessie, “but Pa said it didn’t take long for people to realise they could make excellent fish hooks from the wire itself. Apparently it was galvanised iron and didn’t rust.”

Lucy burst out laughing.

“And not only that,” said Jessie, looking mildly affronted, “they could also make spear heads and knives from the porcelain insulators. Apparently they’d pull them off the poles and smash them against rocks so they could use the shards. And some people would pull down the poles themselves to get at the iron base plates. Pa had a hatchet that had been made from a base plate. He used it for firewood. They probably used the poles for fire wood as well.”

“Awesome,” said Lucy. “Actually, thinking about it, it’s a wonder any

messages ever got through if people were constantly tearing the poles down.”

“I don't imagine it was that often,” said Jessie. “After all, there've never been that many people in these parts and one pole with all its fixings would have probably lasted quite a long time before the locals needed another.”

“I daresay,” said Lucy, “but one pole down would stop messages getting through. I wonder what they did while it was being fixed.”

“Ahh, I do know about that,” said Jessie. “Apparently four or five years before Pa was born there was a major flood further down the line in the Northern Territory which destroyed a repeater station and brought down a few poles. It was two weeks before the line could be repaired.”

“So what did they do?” asked Lucy, intrigued.

“They ferried the messages on paper,” said Jessie. “Literally. They wrote the messages down at the last repeater before the flood and used boats to take them to the next one that was working and sent them on from there. As the water subsided, they switched over to horses until the lines and the flooded repeater could be repaired.”

“Wow,” said Lucy. “They wouldn't do that these days.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Monday, 6th September 1880

Yesterday was the most delightful of days! Indeed, I cannot remember another more joyous nor more full of surprises!

Friedrich had arranged for me, in the greatest of secrecy, a Birthday Party! What fun!

He said it was a celebration of not only my birthday but of the successful birth of our daughter Elspeth but three weeks ago and it gave me occasion to think on how I have been blessed for am I not, at the ripe old age of 23, the most contented wife of a loving husband, mother of four children of my own and two remaining of Friedrich's and mistress of near one thousand square miles of cattle! To think but six years ago I was the unlovely daughter of a cane cutter with no prospects and now I have more than anyone, save perhaps a Princess, could wish for! If my life continues thus I shall be mother to hundreds before I am in my dotage!

It was also a time of sadness for these thoughts did bring upon me a melancholy for the memories of my own Werner who died from a pox but two years ago after only the briefest of three months of life and that of Klaus now gone these six months or more. I also shed a tear for Katarina and her mother Helena who I never knew but whose untimely demises made my present happiness possible. God Bless Their Souls, each and every one.

It came as the greatest of surprises that Friedrich had bought for me a new hat! It came all the way from Brisbane and is in the latest of fashions for it is deep purple in colour with a wide brim, which will be useful if I wear it outside in the sun which I will never do, and has lace upon it and three feathers of brown, green and red! It is the most magnificent of hats! Alas I have not any dress to do it justice but that is by the by for Friedrich got the Hat for me and suffered greatly for fear it would not arrive in time!

But that was not all!

After permitting me the longest of times to admire myself in my Hat in my mirror and to the receiving of the nicest of compliments from all the children, including Leopold, and those of the men who were present Friedrich greatly puzzled me by informing me we would be going out to

dine!

"How is this possible?" I enquired for we are some hundreds of miles from any restaurant or hostelry. I imagined he had made preparations for a picnic or some such but he bade me take my place in our carriage – a wagon in truth but decked out with some pretty cloth he had also ordered – and took us all to the drovers' bunkhouse. 'Twas the greatest of surprises for I had not left the vicinity of our home since arriving these six years past and even though he had spoken of building a place I still thought of it as a place of canvas tents. Moreover, 'twas not just a bunkhouse for there is, but fifteen miles or so from our home, a veritable city! Besides the bunkhouse, a wooden building which can house and feed upwards of twenty people, there is another building nearby where Jeb brews his beer, seven houses which are the homes of Jeb and Amy and two other stockmen who have brought their families to this place and four who work, to my astonishment, for Cobb & Co. Friedrich has spoken of the possibility of their coming but I had not known it was a done thing. It seems that Friedrich, in his desire to please me, had kept it a secret and had been planning this day!

And there is more!

A piece of land has been marked out with cords and pegs which will become, I was informed, a row of some six houses. Moreover, nearby but on the far side of the creek, there is a partially complete building of stone. When I enquired who would be living in such a princely dwelling even though it seemed too small for even a single person to live in Friedrich laughed and told me it was nothing more than a work place for those engaged in the sending and receiving of messages along wires and that the houses to be built were for those workers and their families. This surprised me greatly for I could see no wires but they are coming soon I was informed.

I was all astonishment for when I came to this place as a new bride this was a desolate land and now there is a town with, or soon to be at least, a population of nigh on thirty people! That is not counting those travellers who stay overnight in the bunkhouse. When it is full, and Jeb tells me that does sometimes happen, the town, for to call it anything less would be an insult to the hard work of those who have built it, must be a place of great jollity and noise and carousing!

As it was we had a very jolly party outside the bunkhouse, the more so for there were but four women – myself, Amy and Beth and Kate being

the wives of the stockmen who have taken up residence there – and at least thirty men all of whom desired every dance with us all! An entire calf was spitted and Jeb had brewed a barrel of ale for longer than usual for so special an occasion. I confess I was most giddy as we journeyed home from the dancing and the ale and had to cling to my dear Friedrich for fear of falling from our carriage!

Chapter Fourteen

Lucy was vaguely aware of a metallic growling chattering noise and her head rolled forward slightly. Then it stopped and she drifted back to sleep. Moments later a rough smelly hand clamped itself over her mouth stifling her scream as she jerked awake. Her laptop slid off her lap and banged noisily on the deck of the verandah.

“Ha!” exclaimed Riley delightedly. “Sleeping on the job, ya bloody slacko!”

“I wasn't asleep,” retorted Lucy, twisting round to look accusingly up at Riley behind her. “I was merely reflecting on something I was reading. Jesus you scared me though!”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” snorted Riley, peeling her leather work gloves off. “You were asleep. I could hear your snoring from the main street.”

“I don't snore,” said Lucy, reaching down to pick up her laptop. “Not like some I could mention.”

“You saying I snore then?” demanded Riley, slumping in the other chair and starting to unlace her boots.

“No, not really,” said Lucy, worriedly tapping the keys on the laptop. “I hear you sometimes when I'm up late but it isn't that loud. What the fuck's wrong with this?” She lifted up the laptop and peered at the underneath then twisted it to look at the sides. “It's not working!”

“You sure you've turned it on?” asked Riley, tossing a boot towards the doorway.

“Of course I'm sure!” snapped Lucy. “This is the power button and I'm pressing it but nothing's happening. That light's supposed to come on and it boots up but it isn't. You'd better not have broken it!” She stabbed twice at the power button to emphasise her point. “And there's no computer place in town. Jesus, all my notes are in here!”

“Hey, it wasn't me who dropped it,” said Riley, pulling off her other boot. “Haven't you done any backups?”

“Of course I have,” snapped Lucy, scowling at the dead computer. “But they’re no bloody good unless I have another computer to restore them to. Shit, I suppose I’ll have to go all the way to Brisbane to get another one.”

“Oh you can get one in Longreach,” said Riley.

“And I can’t really afford it,” said Lucy sadly, still staring at the dead screen and ignoring Riley. “This one was, like, over twelve hundred bucks!”

“For real?” asked Riley, getting up to peer at the laptop. She poked at the power button and the laptop nearly slipped off Lucy’s lap again. “You can use mine if you like. I don’t use it much.”

“Thanks,” said Lucy, “but I suppose I’d better get another.” She sighed and folded the screen down. “Shit!”

“Sorry,” said Riley, sitting back down. “But you were sound asleep and I couldn’t resist it.”

“Oh well,” said Lucy. She curled her lip at the laptop then put it on the decking and looked around. “Hey, where’s your bike? And who’s ute is that?”

“That’s a point,” said Riley, frowning. “You really were asleep. Maybe your battery’s just gone flat. Where’s your charger?”

Lucy stared at her for a couple of seconds then jumped up and hurried inside. She returned a few moments later, trailing an extension cable.

“Cross your fingers,” she said, plugging the charger in the side of the laptop. “Ooooh, look! The little light’s come on! Just a sec.” She anxiously pressed the power button and nothing happened. “Shit!”

“Give it a few seconds,” said Riley. “It’s probably completely drained.”

“One,” said Lucy slowly. “Two, three, four, five.” She pressed the power button as they both held their breaths. The screen flickered

and then the laptop started to go through its booting sequence.

“Oh thank Christ for that!” exclaimed Lucy, watching avidly as it did its various things then the Windows logo flashed up.

“So it's all right then?” asked Riley.

“I'll wait 'til it's finished booting,” said Lucy, still staring at the screen. “The touchpad's working though.”

“Cool,” said Riley. “Want a coffee?”

“Hmm?” said Lucy, not looking up as Windows signed her in again.

“Coffee,” said Riley. “Want some?”

“Oh yeah, thanks,” said Lucy. “Hey, it seems all right. That article I was reading's still there and ... hey, the battery was down to 1%. It's now on 5% and charging. Jesus, that's a relief. I thought I'd lost the thing.”

She saved her notes then sat back in relief and noticed the ute again.

“Who's ute's that?” she called.

“What was that?” asked Riley, coming back out.

“Who's ute's that?” asked Lucy, looking up at her.

“Oh, it's one of the station utes,” said Riley. “I dropped in after work and asked if I could borrow one to take you out to look at ruins tomorrow.”

“Oh, cool,” said Lucy. “So you're not going to see Paul this weekend?”

“Nah,” said Riley. “He sent me an email this morning. He's got a rash on his hands from a dog and doesn't want me infected.”

She disappeared back inside the house.

“So has he been to the doctor?” called Lucy.

“Of course he bloody hasn't,” said Riley, reappearing with the coffee mugs. “He's a vet and thinks he knows it all. Probably won't even see the doctor if the rash spreads all over his body. He might if his dick falls off but probably not, just try and stitch another one on. Anyway, I'm staying well away from him 'til it's all cleared up.” She handed a mug to Lucy then sat down.

“Guys are like that, aren't they,” said Lucy. “Does he know what caused it?”

“Yeah,” said Riley. “The dog has some skin condition with an unpronounceable name but it isn't that serious. Bit like ringworm or mange. So that's OK with you?”

“Ringworm?” said Lucy, frowning. “I don't want ringworm. Or mange.”

“Keep your hands off him then,” said Riley with a laugh. “No, I meant looking at the ruins.”

“Oh no, that's great,” said Lucy. “I've been looking forward to it although I only know where one is. That's the one I told you about. You can see it from the track to David's homestead.”

“You want to go there first then?” asked Riley.

“Actually I'd really like to find the place where Helene lived when she first arrived here,” said Lucy, checking the battery level. It was now up to 9% so she closed the lid and put it on the deck beside her. “Do you think that's the place?”

“Wouldn't have a clue,” said Riley cheerfully. “Like I said there's loads of them all over the place. Some are still standing and others are just a few corner posts or a falling down chimney. Anyway, I've something in the ute that'll probably help. Just a sec.”

She jumped up and wandered over to the ute to fetch a portable hard drive.

“David gave me this,” she said, returning to the verandah. “It’s full of satellite images of the entire station and you can see some of the old homesteads. He thought it might help you.”

“Oh wow!” exclaimed Lucy, snatching the drive from Riley’s hand, “that’s awesome!”

She shoved the cable into the USB port of her laptop and opened the drive.

“Jesus,” she exclaimed, staring at the screen. “There’s thousands of them!”

“Yeah, David said each image covers about five square kilometres,” said Riley, sitting down again. “He also said they’re named in order so AA01 is the north west corner.”

“So that would make AR44 the south east corner?” asked Lucy, studying the list. AR44 was the last file.

“I guess,” said Riley.

“Hmm,” said Lucy, frowning as she opened a file at random. “That’s going to make navigating a bit difficult. Hell, it going to be a big job just looking though all the files and finding sites.”

“Hey, I’m just the driver,” said Riley, looking up from rolling a cigarette.

“Well, which one is the town in?” ask Lucy. “That would give us a starting point at least.”

Riley shrugged and lit her ciggie.

“OK,” said Lucy, opening a couple of other files at random. “1826 files. Guess I’ll need to use a little logic then. Umm, how far is it from town to the western edge of the station?”

“Twenty k or so,” said Riley.

“So that would make it in AA04 or AA05 then,” said Lucy. “Let’s have a look. Nope, no sign of the town in either.”

“The northern boundary’s maybe twenty five k away,” said Riley. “So wouldn’t the town be in AE04?”

“No, it’s not there either,” said Lucy, checking AE04 and AE05. “Bummer. It’s not in AE06 either.” She scowled at the screen then sat back and blinked a few times. “How big is each image?”

“David said about five square k,” said Riley.

“Jesus I’m an idiot!” exclaimed Lucy. “If the image is five square k then the width’ll be whatever the square root of five is. Umm ...” and she opened the calculator, “... call it two and a quarter so if we’re twenty five k down from the top then that’ll be ... umm, eleven and twenty is almost nine so the town should be in, umm, AH11. Ohh, what’s that?”

“What’s what?” asked Riley, leaning forward.

“Looks like a big oval dirt track,” said Lucy. “Any idea where that is?”

“Can I see?” asked Riley. “Oh yeah, reckon that’s the racecourse.”

“Where’s that?” asked Lucy.

“Couple of k out of town,” said Riley. “That way,” and pointed over her right shoulder.

“Which is, what, north west?” asked Lucy.

“Yeah,” said Riley. “Roughly.”

“So we need to go one image south and one image east,” said Lucy. “So that would be, umm, what, AI12? Hey! Way cool! There’s the town! Awesome.”

“Ooooh, and there’s my house,” exclaimed Riley, peering over Lucy’s shoulder. “Jesus, looks small doesn’t it. So that glinting thing must be

Mandy's pyramid.”

“Well, it's in her backyard,” said Lucy. “And there's the War Memorial and the pub. Where's the old Telegraph Station?”

“The cemetery's not there,” said Riley. “Must be in the next image and the Telegraph Station is the other side of the creek as well.”

“Ahh,” muttered Lucy and opened AI13. “There is it so that splodge there must be the Telegraph. I wonder how far I can zoom in? Ohhh, way cool! I can just make out the individual stones! That's pretty neat.”

“How big is each stone?” asked Riley, studying the image.

“Oh, I don't know,” said Lucy. “Maybe sixty, seventy centimetres.”

“Take forever looking at nine thousand square kilometres at sixty centimetres a time,” commented Riley. She went back to her chair and sat down again. “Boring!”

“Well, yeah,” said Lucy, “but I can look at each of the pictures and zoom in on anything that looks like it might be something. I don't have to study every pic at this level. I daresay most of them will just be scrub with a few cows in the anyway.”

“True enough,” said Riley. “What's for dinner?”

“Umm,” said Lucy, zooming back out. “Dinner?”

“It's your turn today or have you forgotten?” asked Riley, blowing out a cloud of smoke before dropping the dig end in the baked bean tin that was her ashtray.

“Ahh,” said Lucy, looking up with a frown. “You sure?”

“Sure I'm sure,” said Riley. “I did the ham and eggs yesterday, remember?”

“Oh yeah,” said Lucy. “Sorry. I didn't get anything out of the freezer.

Umm, I guess I could microwave some of that leftover stew.” Riley curled her lip at the thought. “Or how about I treat you to a pub meal?”

“OK,” said Riley, smiling again. “Pub it is. Be crowded though, it's Friday or had you forgotten that as well?”

“I know it's Friday,” said Lucy, scowling at her. “How far away is that chimney you can see from the road to the homestead?”

“Oh God, I don't know,” said Riley. “When shall we go?”

“Tomorrow, you said,” said Lucy, opening images to follow the road out of town to find the track to the homestead.

“I meant the pub,” said Riley patiently. She was slowly getting used to Lucy's habit of getting distracted by whatever thought she was focusing on.

“Oh right,” said Lucy. “Ahh, that's probably it. So, what, five k maybe?” She opened another image and studied it.

“Lucy,” said Riley.

“Yeah?” said Lucy, closing the image and opening the next one down.

“The pub,” said Riley. “When are we going?”

“Oh, whenever,” said Lucy. “Oooh I think I've found it! That looks like a chimney, doesn't it.”

“I'm going to have a shower,” said Riley, getting up. “We're going in half an hour, OK.”

“OK,” said Lucy.

* * *

“You're not still at it, are you?” asked Riley coming out onto the verandah.

"Ahh, there you are," said Lucy, looking up. "I want to go there tomorrow," and she pointed to the screen.

"And I want to go to the pub for me tucker," said Riley.

"Yeah, yeah, in a minute," said Lucy, still pointing at the screen. "Don't you want to know what's there?"

"I already know," said Riley. "My dinner."

"No, I mean there," said Lucy, jabbing at the screen.

"Not really," said Riley. "Looks like just another bit of scrub and I've seen plenty of that already. You going to get changed or are you staying in your shorts?"

"I think it just might be the original site of Helene's house," said Lucy.

"No way!" exclaimed Riley. She peered at the screen. "It's just scrub! Where is it anyway?"

"Well that's the thing," said Lucy. "The original land sales were for blocks of ten square miles and a square mile is roughly two and a half square kilometres which is more or less the width of an image. Now, I figured they'd probably have done the land in rectangles rather than weird shapes and that the town wouldn't be too far from the plot of land Helene and her husband bought and the creek otherwise it wouldn't be called Helene Creek so I've been looking at the images above and below the town."

"OK, and?" asked Riley, resignedly sitting down again. Dinner wasn't looking to be any time soon.

"Well, there's a fair chance that the original site is now under one of the houses in town," said Lucy, "and I haven't been able to find any chimneys or anything like that but it occurred to me that if they'd bought a plot of land that hadn't been farmed before they'd have probably just had a simple shack rather than a proper house with a built-in kitchen."

“Yeah, maybe,” said Riley. “So?”

“So they’d have still had to do some cooking, OK,” said Lucy, “but it would probably have been outdoors, like a camp fire. Maybe with a spit or something.”

“You mean like a barbeque, like at a pub?” hinted Riley.

“Yeah, yeah, like that,” said Lucy enthusiastically. “And, since they lived there permanently it wouldn’t have been like a little overnight camp fire. It would have been bigger and left more traces.”

“Well, maybe,” said Riley, doubtfully. “What about rain and flooding? Wouldn’t that have destroyed any traces of a camp fire?”

“Oh yeah,” said Lucy, looking back at the screen. “Wait. Maybe not. Not if they used the same place for several years. The heat from the fires could have gone down into the ground quite a way. Anyway, look at this.”

Riley sighed and heaved herself out of her chair. Her belly growled audibly.

“See?” said Lucy, tapping the screen. “That looks to be a regular outline which could, maybe, be the traces of a building. I reckon it’s, ohh, five or six metres long and a couple of metres wide. Decent size for a shack, don’t you think?”

“I think it’s wishful thinking,” said Riley.

“Well, maybe,” said Lucy. “But what about this?” She tapped the screen a little to the side of what might have been the remains of the shack.

“I don’t see anything,” said Riley. “I’m not even sure I see the shack outline either.”

“Here,” said Lucy tapping the screen again. “Don’t you see the discolouration? This patch here, it’s a couple of shades darker than the surrounding land.”

“Well, maybe,” said Riley, screwing up her nose. “Probably just a shadow from a cloud or something.”

“You think?” said Lucy. “I reckon it's no more than a couple of metres across. You think there'd be a cloud that small casting a shadow there? I think it might be where they had their fireplace. And look at this. That's the bed of the creek maybe ten metres away. Good place to put a house wouldn't you think?”

“Well, maybe,” said Riley. “Worth a look, I s'pose. Where is it?”

“This is AK12,” said Lucy, “which means this outline and the darker patch are roughly three k from town, which makes sense. They bought the plot of land, built a shack to live in beside the creek to begin with and then, over time, the station expanded and the town grew up near the original site. That other place with the chimney could have been a better place they built when they'd bought some more plots and were expanding.”

“I guess,” said Riley. “And since it's only three k out of town we can go have a look at it first. Can we go to the pub now?”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Thursday, 17th October 1889

My mind is awash with fears and foreboding and I know not what to write. Likely I fear that in the writing I will make what has happened become real. As if by not writing things can be undone as though they never were. 'Tis foolish of me but I am a woman and foolishness comes naturally to me. I sit here and gaze upon this page desiring only to still my mind but the dread comes upon me each time I pick up my pen and dip it so I put it down and stare some more.

Marlene is with child.

There, 'tis written black upon the page as it is written black in my heart and soul. My dearest Marlene, my first babe, my oldest, is with child and she is but 14.

And my dread is not relieved for I have not written here the badness of the matter for it matters not that she is but 14. What matters is *[indecipherable due to repeated crossings out]*

And curse my hand for faltering once more. Be strong Eileen, be strong. Write of the foulness that Marlene has done for in truth she has lain with Leopold. Aye and the foulness is not hers alone for Leopold is a grown man of 18 years and knows full well the evil that has transpired, that he has forced upon Marlene. And yet even as I write I know that it is not the whole truth for Marlene has admitted to me that she has lain with him more than once and did so willingly.

Curse the day I brought her forth into this world.

I know not the laws of Queensland on such things but the Law of God is most clear. Neither sibling nor half sibling may lie with another and Friedrich is father to both and likely will suffer greatly when he finds out and find out he will for I must speak of this with him and soon for it will not be much longer before her condition is plain to see.

I am afraid to speak with my husband.

Is that not the most sorry state? I am afraid to speak with Friedrich. Why? I do not fear for myself for he has never beaten me despite his occasional tempers and if he should choose to do so then I shall bear it with fortitude. Likely he will beat Marlene and I fear for her and the babe

but she is deserving of such and I shall not intervene. Mayhap such a beating will have a happy outcome for to deliberately extinguish the life that grows within her is an Abomination under God. Now my thoughts are growing still I believe my fears are for my Friedrich for speaking of such things to him will likely cause him such consternation of the mind that he may come to harm himself.

What am I saying? To beat a woman until she miscarries, and in truth Marlene must now be considered a woman for her childhood is now forfeit, is an Abomination as much as any other means of so ending the life of the babe. I pray that she miscarries naturally but she will likely not for she is my child and I have carried six already with no mishap.

No, I must speak with Friedrich and counsel him as best I can on what is to be done. But what is to be done? Therein lies the nub of it. Marlene and Leopold cannot marry that is for certain.

Oh God Forbid! I have just had the most unhappy thought. What if Friedrich casts Marlene out? She cannot survive in this harsh forbidding land alone nor can she give birth and raise the child. It would be better to cast Leopold out but that will not happen for it will leave the Station a man short and Leopold is to inherit the Station anyway. Nor is there anyone we know in Brisbane or Toowoomba who would take in Marlene. Perhaps she could be sent to live with the family of one of the native workers? Pah! What foolishness am I thinking? Death would be a better fate for the girl.

I know not what to do.

Still, I must speak with Friedrich soon, that is for certain, much as I dread doing so. It cannot be avoided.

There is one thing more I must add here although it shames me greatly and I shall pray for forgiveness but I confess the idea that Friedrich may take a horsewhip to Leopold holds certain charms for me. There is much in that cursed boy that is bad.

Chapter Fifteen

“Ahh g'day Luce, how's it going?” said Genvie with a hurried smile.

She turned away to pass two glasses of beer to a couple of men in the crowded bar before turning back.

“Oh yes, all good,” said Lucy, pitching her voice louder than usual to be heard. “How are you? Looks very busy tonight.”

“Always is Fridays,” said Genvie. “What can I do you for?”

“We want to order some food,” said Lucy.

“Oi watch it,” snarled Riley as one of the men tried to push past her to get to the bar. She shoved back hard and the man stumbled into another man beside him who laughed.

“K,” said Genvie then shouted “Tala!” over her shoulder.

“Strewth Riles, give a bloke a break,” the man said, wiping his beard. “Fair parched I am.”

“You and me both, mate,” said Riley. “Oh, hey Greg. You met Lucy?”

She tapped Lucy on the shoulder just as someone shouted back “What? from the kitchen behind the bar.

“This is Greg,” said Riley as Lucy turned round. “He's in my crew. This is the girl I was telling you about, Greg.”

“More tucker!” shouted back Genvie over the general hubbub around the bar.

“Ohh g'day, love,” said Greg, lurching forward a little as someone jostled him from behind. “Hey, I remember yous. Met ya in here a few days back. Riles treating ya right is she?”

“Oh yes, very well, thank you,” said Lucy, surprised.

“Whatcha want?” asked a younger version of Genvie emerging to stand beside her.

“Oh, umm, two steaks and salad,” said Lucy, turning back to the bar.

“Snorrie here tonight?” asked Riley.

“What's ya name?” asked Tala.

“Nah, he's gone to Charleville,” said Greg, watching Lucy.

“Lucy,” said Lucy.

“Oh yeah, that's right,” said Riley. “I forgot. Hey, Lucy, I'll get us a table on the verandah.”

“OK,” said Lucy. “Um, how much is that?”

“Thirty bucks,” said Tala, pushing some hair out of her face. She looked a little hot and harassed.

Lucy paid and Greg slid deftly up to the bar as she turned away. A roar of laughter came from the far end of the bar where Lindy was swapping ribald insults with a group of truckies while she filled beer glasses two at a time. Squeezing between the men surrounding the bar, Lucy made her way out and onto the verandah. Every table was taken and Riley was nowhere in sight.

“Oh there you are,” called Riley, sticking her head around an open side door. “Got us a table in here.”

Relieved, Lucy hurried back inside and joined Riley in the Gaming Room.

“So where have all these people come from?” she asked, sitting down on the hard wooden seat. “I didn't think Helene Creek was that big.”

“Oh they're mostly stockmen from all around,” said Riley, “and some truckies. So where do you know Greg from?”

"I'm not sure," said Lucy. "He did look faintly familiar though."

"Ah, no worries," said Riley. "You want a drink?"

"Oh, just a lemonade, thanks," said Lucy. "So do they bring the food over or do I have to go get it?"

"They'll shout although it might be a while if they haven't got some already cooked," said Riley. "Back in a bit."

The Gaming Room wasn't as busy as the main bar but there were still a fair few people. Four lads were trying to play pool and most of the rest were watching horse racing on the giant TV screen. As she gazed around the room, Lucy noticed the "Winner Outback Tidy Town 1982" sign had been turned around so the quote about women as attachments was visible again.

"Well, that didn't last long," she thought and watched the pool players for a while. One of them was pretty good but the others kept missing easy pots and swore whenever they did.

"There you go," said Riley, plonking Lucy's lemonade on the table.

"Oh, thanks," said Lucy. "I've been thinking. I might have met Greg the day I arrived in town. I came in looking for a room and there was a guy at the bar. Could have been him."

"Well, he seems to remember you anyway," said Riley. She took a long drink from her glass of beer.

"So he's in your crew, is he?" asked Lucy.

"Yup, just the four of us," said Riley, pulling out her cigarette tin. "Me, Greg, Snorrie and Bludger who's Snorrie's son. Snorrie's the crew boss and Bludger's only been with us a month or so. He's 16 and bloody clueless."

"So what is it you guys actually do?" asked Lucy.

"Anything and everything," said Riley with a grin. She licked the

paper of the cigarette and rolled it tight. "Like today we were fixing a bore head out the top end and yesterday we were repairing some fencing up along the highway which some mongrel pulled down."

"You mean deliberately, like vandalism?" asked Lucy, nursing her cool lemonade.

"Doubt it," said Riley. "Going by the tyre tracks a truckie probably dozed off for a few moments and collected the fencing with his trailer. Happens every now and then."

"So you're basically repairs and maintenance then?" asked Lucy.

"Not just that," said Riley. "The other crews have specific jobs but we help out wherever they need a hand. Like with branding or mustering or whatever. David'll radio Snorrie and then we'll go off and do whatever. Is that us?" She sat up and looked out the window.

"Is what us?" asked Lucy.

"Though I heard someone shout your name," said Riley. "I'll just go check."

She put her beer down and went back into the bar. A ragged cheer went up from around the pool table as one of the players finally managed to pot a ball.

"It was us," said Riley re-emerging from the melee with two large plates in her hands.

"So who's Tala?" asked Lucy as she sprinkled a little salt over her steak. "I haven't seen her around before."

"She's Genvie's daughter," said Riley. "They live in one of the houses out the back of the pub."

"So what's the story there?" asked Lucy.

"How do you mean?" asked Riley, spearing a half tomato.

“I was talking to David a few days ago,” said Lucy, “about the scope of my research and to what extent he wanted anything negative that I uncover included or excluded from the book.”

“OK,” said Riley. “So I’m guessing Genvie’s name was mentioned?”

“Yes,” said Lucy. “He said something strange. I forget his exact words but it was along the lines of him not having any bastards and everyone knowing about Genvie and her kids. Actually I think he said ‘brats’.”

“Well, OK,” said Riley.

“So what’s the story?” asked Lucy. “What does everyone know?”

Riley swallowed her mouthful and picked up her beer.

“You mean you don’t know?” she asked.

“I’m a stranger round here,” said Lucy. “How would I know?”

“Fair point,” said Riley with a grin. She took a swallow of beer. “It’s a small town. I guess we all forget about the rest of the world. You know Genvie’s a Filipino, yeah?”

“Actually, no, I didn’t know that,” said Lucy. “I thought she was an Islander of some sort though.”

“OK,” said Riley. “Well, from what I’ve heard Lionel Kaufman bought himself a wife from the Philippines a few years back. Well, probably twenty or more years actually since Ulan’s twenty and the family didn’t approve.”

“Who’s Ulan?” asked Lucy, pushing her plate away. The steak was far too big for her.

“Genvie’s son,” said Riley. “Tala’s brother. He works at the servo as a tyre fitter.”

“OK. So why didn’t they approve?” asked Lucy.

“Well, from what I've heard Lionel was in his late thirties and Genvie was only sixteen or something,” said Riley, “so there was a big age gap and the stigma of him needing to buy a wife didn't help. And there's a bit of an attitude about Filipinos round here anyway.”

“You mean because of blackbirders?” asked Lucy.

“Yeah,” said Riley. “Queensland used to bring in a lot as slaves way back. A lot of the old attitudes are still not far from the surface and the Kaufmans didn't like it even though it ended. Anyway, there wasn't much they could do about it since Lionel was a Kaufman which meant Genvie was as well. Leastaways not until he died.”

“What happened then?” asked Lucy.

“Ohhh, he died ten years back maybe,” said Riley. “Something like that anyway. With him gone they more or less turned their backs on Genvie and her kids. Oh they gave her one of the old bunkhouses to live in but no one would give her work except Lindy.”

“Why's that?” asked Lucy.

“Most of the employers round here are Kaufmans or Mercers,” said Riley. “From what I hear Lindy only did that to get back at David for forcing her old man out as CEO.”

“Ahh yes, I heard about that,” said Lucy. “I think he had dementia.”

“Wouldn't have a clue,” said Riley cheerfully. “I wasn't here then. Anyway, Genvie's the town bike as well.”

“I'm sorry?” said Lucy, blinking in surprise. “You mean she runs a taxi service?”

Riley burst out laughing and nearly spilt her beer.

“Gawd no,” she spluttered. “She's the local tramp, you know, hooker.”

“Ah,” said Lucy. “I don't imagine that helps with the family relationship either.”

“Too bloody right there,” said Riley. “OK, she mostly goes with the truckies but people in town don't particularly like it. Lindy only keeps her on because it's good for business ... and probably to spite David and that lot.”

“Interesting,” said Lucy thoughtfully.

“Small town dynamics,” said Riley. “Bet you weren't expecting that.”

“Actually I was,” said Lucy. “Not that specifically but the dynamics of inter-personal relations underlie everything no matter how big or small the community is. Often it doesn't even need to be true, especially if someone is disliked for some reason. Do you know for a fact what Genvie gets up to or is it only what you've heard?”

“Oh I wouldn't have a clue,” said Riley. “I'm pretty much an outsider here too since I've only been here a couple of years.”

“So it could quite easily be a made up story,” said Lucy. “Perhaps even started by those who want to exclude her.”

“S'pose,” said Riley. “Nothing like a bit of juicy gossip though, is there. You going to put this in your book?”

“I doubt it,” said Lucy. “I don't see how a rumour like this would be constructive to the history of the family or the town. Perhaps if it turns out to be true it might be worth including but I don't for the moment see how it could be relevant unless, of course, it turns out that Genvie's lifestyle has significant repercussions. If she had an affair with someone which caused something major it would be worth including but she does have a right to privacy.”

“Such as?” asked Riley.

“Oh I don't know,” said Lucy. “Umm, well, suppose she persuaded David to sell the station to an American corporation and run away with her. That would be pretty significant and would alter the entire history of the area but having a little fun with a truckie or two, well, who really cares at the end of the day. Gossip mongers, maybe, but that's about it.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman

Tuesday, 20th December 1892

We are diversifying!

'Tis a new word to me but Friedrich tells me that it is a good thing. It seems that by only farming cattle we are at risk should anything untoward happen to the cattle or in the markets, either meat or hides or both, and could lose everything. Friedrich frightened me when he told me of this for, despite the harshness of the land and the ever present fear of drought, I had believed our lives to be secure, insofar as any life is secure, and I was of the belief that there is always a ready market for beef. Friedrich tells me that that is so but there is always a risk of beef coming from elsewhere in the world at a lower cost and making our beef not worth the buying. I confess it is a worrying thought and doubtless it is a thought that has been on Friedrich's mind for he has decided we are to diversify and farm sheep as well as cattle.

Friedrich heard through a traveller who visited our land these three months past that Mr Pennywater who owns some sixty square miles to the south that is well stocked with sheep is looking to sell. We knew of him, of course, for the edge of his land is only forty miles to the south of ours but had never met him. Friedrich is always willing to buy land even though we now own some fourteen hundred square miles and so, after some consideration, he journeyed forth to meet Mr Pennywater and enter into discussions. He returned greatly thoughtful after three days and brooded three more days before making a decision.

The land is a bargain for, unbeknownst to us, the shearers who take the fleeces from the sheep have been refusing to work these last two seasons unless their wages are increased and Mr Pennywater had remained steadfast to the idea that these shearers were already overpaid and refused to have his sheep shorn. In consequence of this likely foolhardiness Mr Pennywater has had no income from the sale of his wool for two years and is, in Friedrich's estimation, facing bankruptcy. In consequence of this consequence Friedrich offered Mr Pennywater a quarter of what we paid per square mile for our most recent land purchase and, after some heated debate, at least on Mr Pennywater's part, agreement was reached on a little less than half the value. Friedrich was greatly pleased with this, although being a wise and experienced man, their agreement allowed Friedrich seven days in which to change his mind.

The reason for this prudence, Friedrich tells me, is that our other land purchase earlier this year has left our bank account with insufficient funds for this new purchase although Friedrich assures me that there is more than enough money to ensure our ease of life until the next muster and cattle sale. In consequence, and there seem to be a surpassing number of consequences to the idle chatter of an itinerant, Friedrich sought to delay the purchase while securing it should another come along who wished to buy, until such time as he had made arrangements with our bank for a loan.

It is at such times as this that the Overland Telegraph, of which there is a depot in our town, makes itself useful for, once Friedrich was certain of the rightfulness of his decision, it took only the dispatch of a telegraph and a day's wait for a reply to secure said loan. There was a further delay while Friedrich returned to Mr Pennywater with his final agreement then the dispatch of another telegraph to arrange the transfer of the money. Mr Pennywater was delighted with the speed with which this was accomplished and is, we are given to understand, now in negotiations for the purchase of a fruit orchard in Victoria.

Perhaps regrettably, perhaps not, Mr Pennywater's two permanent workers have elected to move to Victoria with Mr Pennywater. It is unsurprising as they are his wife and son and I venture Friedrich would not have been happy to employ either of them. Friedrich is sending Leopold to manage the sheep station as it is time he took on responsibilities himself and he will take our steadfast and loyal Seth with him to assist. Friedrich had no desire to uproot us all and leave the cattle nor go on his own. In respect of the shearers, Leopold is under instructions from Friedrich to increase their wages for, as Friedrich says, so long as a profit is made it is better to increase your costs than make no sales at all and that Mr Pennywater was a stiff necked fool with no business sense.

Friedrich also divulged to me that he is thinking to the future for he has heard that the politicians in the various states are debating whether or not to end their differences and unite to form a single Australian nation. I know not their reasons for this but Friedrich is of the opinion that should it come to pass, and he thinks it will, that the duties and tariffs currently in place at the borders between the states will end and there will be a free and unrestricted movement of goods and livestock. As we are close to the South Australian border and not much further from the New South Wales border Friedrich thinks new markets will open for both our cattle and sheep in Adelaide and Sydney or even Melbourne. I did remark that

as wool does not need feeding nor goes bad that the greater distance to Melbourne should pose no impediment and Friedrich praised me for my perceptiveness and business sense which pleased me greatly!

What is no little strangeness to me is that all this came about from a chance encounter with a traveller. While we are not unaccustomed to receiving the occasional traveller seeking employment of some form they were few and far between. Indeed, our own Tob came to us as a sundowner and is still with us – he is to take over Seth's duties. Perhaps over the last six months or so their numbers have been increasing and we now receive such travellers, on their own or sometimes in groups of two or three, several times a week. What disturbs me is that they mostly tell the same tale of unemployment and starvation in the cites but know not why this is the case. Friedrich dismisses their tales as an unwillingness to work and, even if there is privation in the cities it will not affect us given that we are so far from any city. He is also unwilling to employ any as they lack any of the skills needed for cattle save the occasional carpenter or smithy. Nonetheless I do insist that they do not leave us hungry and send them on their way with full bellies.

Also more good news for I am with child again! I had thought my time had passed even though I am only 34 since Lorna is nearing twelve but it seems not. It will be good for Marlene's little Agnes, to have a playmate of similar age although I confess it will take a while to become used to the idea that my child is three years younger than my grandchild!

Chapter Sixteen

“So, you fancy him then?” asked Riley with a smirk.

“Who?” asked Lucy, looking at her in surprise.

“Jimmy,” said Riley. “Only you can't seem to take your eyes off him.”

“You mean that guy at the pool table with the stupid mullet and sleeveless shirt?” said Lucy with a slight grimace. “God no! Just that he's the only one who seems to know what he's doing with the cue.”

“That's all right then,” said Riley, tossing her smoke in the old can ashtray. “He's a real drongo is Jimmy. Don't waste your time with him.”

“I wasn't planning to,” said Lucy. “So is he any good? He doesn't seem to miss many shots.”

“Actually, yeah,” said Riley. She swallowed the last of her beer and cradled the glass. “He's the best player round here that's for sure and he's, like, totally up himself. Thinks he's God's gift.” She plonked her glass down on the rickety table. “Wouldn't leave me alone when I first started here so I ended up having to threaten to cut his balls off to make him stop.” She laughed. “Totally ignores me now, thank Christ.”

“Does he work on the Station?” asked Lucy as Jimmy neatly bounced the white ball off the side cushion to pocket one of the green balls into the corner.

“Yeah, used to be in my crew but he pissed Snorrie off too much,” said Riley. “David shifted him to Nat's crew who're mostly down the south end so he's only in town at weekends now. Fancy another cold one?”

“Oh, thanks, just lemonade though,” said Lucy.

She drained her glass and Riley headed off to the bar just as Jimmy potted the black to win the game. Friendly insults were exchanged as the two losers handed over some cash. Both headed off to the toilets

and Jimmy's partner headed for the bar. Jimmy glanced over at Lucy then, holding his cue like a spear at attention he swaggered over, a cheeky grin on his face.

"G'day sweetie," he said. "Been watching you watching me. How's it going?"

"Oh fine, thanks," said Lucy. "Umm, I was only watching the game though."

"Sure you were," said Jimmy, his grin widening. "Play some, do ya?"

"A little," said Lucy. "I'm not very good though."

"Well, yous a sheila, ain't ya," said Jimmy condescendingly.

"Well, yes," said Lucy, feeling a stab of irritation at his casual sexism.

"So yous wanna play a game or two?" he asked, jerking his head at the pool table. "Maybe learn a few things, hey."

"Well sod you too, mate," thought Lucy, keeping her face calm.

"Love to," she said. "Just you and me or can Riley play as well?"

"Riley, huh," said Jimmy, his grin wavering a little. "Nah, how about just me and yous play around a little. Maybe even have a game of pool after, an' all," and he guffawed.

"Ha ha," said Lucy straight-faced. "I meant pool."

"OK, OK, don't get yer panties in a wad," said Jimmy. "Come on then."

"I didn't know you wore women's panties, Jimmy boy," said Riley, re-appearing with their drinks. "Mind you, I always suspected it."

"You what?" spluttered Jimmy, his face falling. "I don't wear no sheila's clobber and don't you go round saying I do, neither." He tried to look threatening but Riley just smiled.

“So what you getting your panties in a wad about then?” she asked, putting the glasses on the table.

“Jimmy's invited us to play pool with him and his mate,” said Lucy, getting up.

“Oh joy,” said Riley, curling her lip. “OK, but not for money though, eh.”

“Course not,” said Jimmy, cheering up at the implied acknowledgement of his superiority. He turned and called “Oi, Wayne, set up another. We're on for some sheilas.” He glanced back at Lucy then wandered back.

“So the other one's Wayne?” asked Lucy, getting up.

“Yeah,” said Riley. “He's OK though, least when he's not hanging round with Jimmy. So can you play pool?”

“I know the basics,” said Lucy. “It'll be fun.”

“I bloody hope so,” said Riley, watching Jimmy with distaste. “I don't mind losing but not to that bloody Jimmy.”

“Have faith, he hasn't won yet,” said Lucy, heading for the table. “Hello, Wayne, I'm Lucy.”

“G'day,” said Wayne gruffly, not looking directly at her. “Pleased to meet ya.”

“We'll give you the break,” said Jimmy. “Usual rules, first to pot a ball chooses solids or stripes, a ball must hit a cushion after a shot unless it's a pot and winner breaks the next game.” He paused and grinned. “Oh and if neither of yous pots a ball by the end of the game you both drop yer daks, OK.”

“No way,” said Riley, instantly.

“OK,” said Lucy. “Gives us more incentive, doesn't it,” and she smiled sweetly at Jimmy.

“Hold it, Luce,” said Riley, putting her hand on Lucy’s arm. “You know what that means, don’t you?”

“Sure, said Lucy. “That’s normal in Melbourne pubs. If you don’t pot a ball you drop your trousers or skirt. You have got undies on, haven’t you, Riley?” She winked at Riley and Jimmy licked his lips in anticipation. Wayne giggled nervously.

Riley stared at Lucy for a few moments then raised her eyebrow.

“Reckon it’s down to them to find out, don’t you?” she said, deciding to have faith in Lucy. “Who’s up first, me or you?”

“Oh I will, if you like,” said Lucy. “I’ll just get a cue.”

Only one of the cues in the stand had a half-way decent tip so Lucy took it. She rubbed the chalk over the tip but the chalk was so old and dirty none it was useless.

“Jesus,” she said and took the chalk over to where their used dinner plates sat. She scraped the chalk with a knife until all the crud was off then rubbed it over the tip. “That’s better,” she muttered and blew the surplus chalk dust off. Jimmy smirked and Wayne stared at Riley’s ankles.

“I’m ready,” she said, returning to the table. “Shall I break now?”

Jimmy stepped back from the table with an exaggerated bow and wave of his hand.

“Excuse me,” said Lucy to a large bearded man with his back to the table. He glanced around and wagged his beard slightly. “You’re in the way.”

“K,” he growled and moved a few inches closer to his mates.

It was just enough so Lucy bent over the table, lined up her cue and fired a shot at the racked balls. The cue ball hit nicely just to one side and the balls scattered. The striped red ball rolled nicely into the corner pocket.

Lucy studied the table while chalking the cue again then announced “solids”. Jimmy burst out laughing and Wayne snickered. Riley strode over in consternation.

“You potted a stripe,” she hissed. “Don’t choose solids!”

Lucy sighed and beckoned Riley away from the table.

“There’s nowhere to go with the stripes after the pink,” she said quietly. “If I go for solids there’s a path around the table for all of them.”

Riley scowled and returned to the table. She stood there studying the balls.

“Yellow in the side,” said Lucy and bent to line up on the solid yellow. A moment later the yellow slid gracefully into the side pocket and the white cue ball came to rest slightly off the perfect line for the brown.

“Brown in the corner,” said Lucy, pointing to the corner with the cue.

The brown did what it was told but the cue ball fell short afterwards and the striped green ball was slightly in the way of a shot on the solid pink.

“Pink in the side,” said Lucy, moving around the table so she was on the wrong side of the cue ball.

Jimmy snorted and half stepped forward in anticipation of his turn. Lucy ignored him and banked the white near the corner pocket so it bounced onto the other cushion and knocked the pink into the side pocket. Wayne whistled and banged the end of his cue on the floor several times in appreciation of the shot. Jimmy just grimaced and stepped back. The blue, red, orange and green balls disappeared into the pockets in quick succession, leaving only the black to win the game.

“Black in the corner,” said Lucy.

She carefully lined up and deliberately hit the black slightly off centre

so it missed the pocket by a couple of centimetres.

“Bugger,” she said.

“Sweet,” said Jimmy and stepped forward.

“What the hell did you miss for?” whispered Riley. “I’m up next!”

“I didn’t want him to drop his pants,” whispered Lucy back. “Not yet.”

“Cool,” whispered Riley, her faith in Lucy now absolute having seen how she played.

Jimmy potted six balls but missed the green stripe by a hair’s breadth. He did, however, manage to leave the cue ball almost touching the black and square on so it was almost impossible to pot. He looked pleased with himself as he stepped away from the table.

“Don’t pot it,” whispered Lucy as Riley stepped forward with only the black to go to win the game.

“Fat chance of that,” whispered Riley and successfully managed to miss potting the black by a substantial margin. In fact the black didn’t quite touch a side and Jimmy was quick to call a foul.

“Well done, that was perfect,” whispered Lucy. “Even Wayne should be able to play out now.”

Wayne picked up the white and repositioned it so his shot on the green was easier. It hit both sides of the pocket but managed to fall in. His next shot, along the cushion to knock the black in the corner, was overly hard and slightly off so it brushed the cushion and struck the black at an angle rather than full on, knocking the black into the cushion and causing the white to plunge headlong into the opposite corner.

“Bugger,” muttered Lucy. Wayne’s shot was a foul which meant she could put the white anywhere she wanted and with only the black remaining it would be almost impossible not to pocket it.

She put the white in the obvious place and deliberately hit it high so it had some top spin. Inevitably the black rolled into the pocket but, as intended, the white continued rolling and followed the black.

“Your game,” said Lucy as Riley looked disappointed.

“Straight up,” said Jimmy as though it had been inevitable. “Shame you choked at the end there.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Lucy, “but like I said I’m only a beginner. It was sheer luck I even got the others.”

Riley turned to stare at her in disbelief.

“Yeah sheilas have all the luck,” said Jimmy with a grin. “Another game?”

“If you like,” said Lucy.

“How about we make it more interesting?” said Jimmy nonchalantly racking the balls again. “Say five bucks a game?”

“I’ve only got ten dollars,” said Lucy, checking her purse. “Have you got any cash, Riley?”

“You are joking!” exclaimed Riley. “Play this joker for money? No way!”

“Oh,” said Lucy. She turned back to Jimmy and put her two five dollar notes on the wooden edge of the pool table. “How about just you and me play?”

“Ten bucks on the sheila,” said a man who’d been watching.

“Taken,” said the man next to him. “She’s only a sheila. Jimmy’ll beat her out of sight. He was just playing with her.”

“And another ten on Jimmy,” said a man, stepping forward from the doorway to the main bar.

"And me," called another.

"What do you say, Jimmy?" asked Lucy, tapping her ten dollars. "There's enough for two games here."

"Your loss," said Jimmy. "Stand back. You ain't seen nothing yet!"

* * *

"Pubs closing in ten minutes," said Riley quietly after pushing her way through the crowd around the table with another lemonade for Lucy. "How much are you up?"

"Umm, about two hundred and forty I think," said Lucy, glancing at a despondent looking Jimmy across the table. "Ten minutes?"

"Yeah, Lindy just called time and Tim's outside with his breathalyser," said Riley.

"OK," said Lucy, chalking her cue. "What do you reckon? Daks?"

"Yeah," said Riley, grinning evilly. "Daks."

"It's my break, isn't it?" called Lucy as Riley re-racked the balls.

"'Course it bloody is," snarled Jimmy sourly. "You bloody won, didn't ya?"

"Oh yeah," called Lucy. "My bad."

"All yours, Luce," said Riley, backing away from the table. None of the watching crowd called out any side bets as the result was pretty much a foregone conclusion.

"Sweet," said Lucy and put the white on the baulk line. She lined up her break shot and a drunk lurched forward.

"Bloody beauty!" he slurred, trying to throw an arm around her shoulders. "You little bloody beauty!"

Someone in the crowd dragged the man away and Lucy tried to regain her composure. After a few breaths and encouraging shouts from the crowd she bent and lined up her shot again. A gasp went up as she miscued. The white shot off to the side, cannoned into the cushion and, by sheer chance, managed to hit the racked balls and dislodge the solid orange enough for it to touch the cushion, thereby rendering it a legal break.

“Fuck!” exclaimed Riley, horrified.

“Ooops,” said Lucy.

“Come on Jimmy,” shouted one of his mates from the crowd.

Jimmy stepped forward and snatched up the chalk. He rubbed his cue tip then lined up on the orange. This was a crucial shot as he had to pot the orange and get the white to rebound so that it ricocheted into the rest of the balls and broke them up. He didn't manage either as his hand shook slightly on the shot. The orange ended up in the jaws of the pocket and the white sailed happily past the racked balls without disturbing them. There was laughter from the many who had been beaten by him in the past.

“Go Lucy!” called Riley encouragingly.

Lucy potted the orange and managed to break two balls from the pack, one solid, one striped. She studied them indecisively for a few moments then chose solids. She managed to break up the pack some more with the next shot then proceeded to pot the remaining solids, one by one, with Jimmy watching helplessly from the sidelines.

“Time!” shouted Lindy from the doorway. “Everyone drink up and bugger off!”

Her focus distracted, Lucy looked up and saw Jimmy. His face had gone pale and he was anxiously toying with the buckle of his belt. Unexpectedly she felt sorry for him.

“This is for you, Jimmy,” she said under her breath and deliberately miscued again to foul.

Jimmy breathed a sigh of relief and potted the black.

“Good game,” he said, more out of habit than anything else.

“Sure,” said Lucy, picking up the pile of notes on the side of the table. She peeled off a five and tossed it on the table. “Next time, huh.”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman
Wednesday, 7th June 1893

I am sick with worry.

Friedrich left yesterday in great haste for we received several telegraphs on Monday saying that the Queensland Rural Bank of Toowoomba has collapsed, that the directors are considering paying out two shillings on the pound for deposits and that all loans are being foreclosed. This is a disaster for all our money was deposited with the Queensland Rural Bank of Toowoomba and the loan from them to purchase the sheep station far exceeds what we had on deposit let alone what we shall have at only two shillings to the pound. Friedrich departed this morning for a creditors meeting that has been called on July 6th hence to decide how best to proceed and he felt it highly important to attend. He will miss the birth of our seventh child but that is of little consequence when all our lives are at stake and we face bankruptcy and destitution. I could not sleep last night for worry.

It does not help that Leopold tells us we were deceived over the purchase of the sheep station. Friedrich believed Mr Pennywater to be a poor businessman but it transpires that he was not for when Leopold engaged shearers and sent the fleeces to Brisbane he discovered that the price of wool is scarce half what it was two years ago and exports to Europe have almost ceased. Doubtless Mr Pennywater knew this when the shearers began asking for higher wages and chose to sell the property rather than make a loss on the wool. Needless to say it is us who must accept the loss on the wool sales. And now we must face the prospect of selling both stations and becoming destitute.

I pray to the Lord that our circumstances will change for the better but I fear greatly. Friedrich has promised he will send a telegraph when he has news but he will be at least three weeks travelling on the Cobb and Co coaches. Please God he is in time for the meeting although how he will be able to change things I know not.

Chapter Seventeen

“Oh come on, Lucy,” exclaimed Riley when Lucy came out onto the front verandah. “There won’t be any men out there!” She stared challengingly up from beside the rumbling ute.

“What do you mean?” asked Lucy, puzzled.

“Stop showing off your legs,” said Riley. “It’s going to be pushing forty degrees out there with no shade and your legs’ll fry. Put some jeans on. And a hat.”

“But I’ll get too hot,” protested Lucy.

“Better to sweat than get skin cancer,” said Riley, coming up the steps. She stopped when she saw her feet. “Seriously? Trainers? Haven’t you got any boots?”

“No,” said Lucy. “I looked in the store but the cheapest were, like, \$700.”

“Oh my word,” said Riley. “Those flimsy things won’t stop a snake biting you. What size are you?”

“Eight,” said Lucy.

“Great,” said Riley, going back inside the house. “You can use an old pair of mine. Got a hat?”

“Umm, I’ve got a cap,” said Lucy.

“Mmm,” said Riley, screwing up her nose. “Well, better than nothing, I suppose. Go on, get changed. I ain’t taking you out there dressed like that.”

“But we’re only going a few k,” protested Lucy, hovering beside the door to her room. “And we’ll be in the ute most of the time. What’s the problem?”

“And what if the ute breaks down and we have to walk a few k back?”

asked Riley, disappearing into her room. "Don't expect David'll be impressed if his pet historian come up dead from snake bite or loses a leg to cancer. 'Sides, even in the ute you'll get sunburn at the very least. It does have windows or hadn't you noticed?"

"I'm not his pet historian," said Lucy with a frown.

"Whatever," said Riley. "Get changed and put these on or we ain't going."

She tossed a ratty old pair of boots in Lucy's direction and they thumped heavily on the floorboards. Lucy stared at her for a few moments then bent to pick them up.

"That's better," said Riley when Lucy reappeared a couple of minutes later. "Make a ringer of you yet," and she laughed.

"I don't want to be a ringer," said Lucy petulantly. "I'm an academic, not a labourer."

"Then stay indoors," said Riley indifferently. "Up to you."

"Oh faff," said Lucy. "I'm sweating already. Come on, let's get this over with."

"And keep your hair over your ears," said Riley, "not tucked behind otherwise your ears'll get burnt since that cap doesn't have a brim all the way round."

"Are you serious?" asked Lucy, pulling her hair forward a little.

"Only an idiot takes unnecessary risks out here," said Riley as they went back out to the ute. "Easy to die in country like this. There's no shade and no water and a million snakes and spiders. See this?" and she tapped an aluminium box bolted in the back of the ute.

"Yes," said Lucy.

"There's a hundred litres of water inside," said Riley, "in two litre bottles. All our utes carry them. Never leave the ute without a bottle,

OK.”

“OK,” said Lucy. “A hundred litres is a lot though, isn't it?”

“Twenty litres each for a four man crew,” said Riley, getting in the cab, “and a few spare just in case. Now, you ever used a two-way radio before?”

“Um, no,” said Lucy, getting in the passenger seat.

“OK,” said Riley. “If something happens to me and you need help, just use this mike, OK? Don't touch anything else or you'll screw up the settings. Push this little button on the side when you speak and let go of it when you're not speaking, OK? You'll be picked up by someone at the homestead and by Gina at the radio station and someone'll come out to help. Never ever leave the ute.”

“So why the lecture about boots and walking back to town?” asked Lucy.

“Because the radio might not be working,” said Riley. “Shouldn't be a problem today as we're only going a short way out of town so if the shit hits the fan you'll still be able to see where the town is. Next time we'll go further out and you won't be able to see the town so stay with the ute otherwise you'll get lost and no one'll ever find you. You'll just wander around aimlessly until you run out of water then you'll die.”

“You are kidding!” exclaimed Lucy.

“A bit,” said Riley with a grin. “But for sure if you stay with the ute you'll have all that water and you'll be easier to find. Wander off and it'll be more difficult and you can't carry all the water with you. Always stay with the ute.”

“Are you trying to scare me?” asked Lucy.

“Yes,” said Riley. “People who've lived out here all their lives get caught now and then and they know what they're doing. You're a city girl. You won't last ten minutes. Right, what do you do if something goes wrong?”

“Radio for help and stay with the ute,” said Lucy, feeling a little intimidated.

“That's right,” said Riley. “And how long do you stay with the ute?”

“Umm, until the water runs out?” hazarded Lucy.

“No,” said Riley. “You stay until someone else turns up even if the water's gone. Ready?”

“I guess,” said Lucy.

Riley put the ute in gear and started to drive off.

“So where did you learn to play pool like that?” asked Riley.

“Hmm? Oh I dated a guy for a couple of years,” said Lucy. “He taught me. So if something does go wrong how will anyone find me?”

“GPS,” said Riley. “Another reason to stay with the ute since that's what the GPS works from. Wander off and it'll be hard to find you.”

“Right,” said Lucy.

“So he was a pool hustler, was he?” asked Riley, turning up the lane beside the pub. The car park was slowly emptying of the two and three trailer trucks that had parked there overnight.

“No, he was a uni student like me,” said Lucy. “Have you heard of Neil Robertson?”

“No,” said Riley. “Who's he? Your boyfriend?”

“No, he was World Snooker Champion a few years back,” said Lucy. “He was from Melbourne and the guy I was dating was the son of his coach.”

“Oh right,” said Riley. “So who broke up with who?”

“I broke up with him,” said Lucy, lurching heavily into the door of the

ute as Riley turned off the track to go cross-country. "Pretty much all we did was play pool and have sex which was fine when I was, like, eighteen, nineteen but it didn't seem to be the basis of a good long term relationship."

"Yeah, know what you mean," said Riley. "So did you find someone for a long term relationship?"

"No, not yet," said Lucy. "I've dated a few guys since but no one really special. And my Masters put an end to that anyway since I had to go to Germany for, ohh, ten months to do my research."

"So you didn't meet any cute blonde German guys then?" asked Riley, following the dry creek bed.

"Actually I did," said Lucy. "There was this guy called Moritz. He was doing his PhD and we spent a lot of time together. I thought we had a connection but it turned out we didn't."

"What happened?" asked Riley.

"Ohh, nothing dramatic," said Lucy. "We stayed in touch over Skype for a couple of months after I came back to Melbourne then I got an email saying he'd met someone else and that was that."

"Were you very upset?" asked Riley.

"Actually not as upset as I thought I would be," said Lucy. She laughed a little. "Oh, I cried myself to sleep for the next two or three nights then my research took over and I more or less forgot about him."

"How long ago was that?" asked Riley, glancing at her.

"Ohh, a year," said Lucy. "No, fourteen months, something like that."

"And there's been no one since?" asked Riley.

"Nah," said Lucy. "Oh I went out with a couple of guys once I'd finished my Masters. They were nice but they were nothing serious,

then I came up here.”

“And met Jimmy,” said Riley with a mischievous smile.

“Jimmy?” exclaimed Lucy. “You’ve got to be joking!”

“Well, he does play pool,” said Riley.

“Up to a point,” said Lucy. “OK he’s good at potting but he has no strategic or positional sense.”

“What do you mean?” asked Riley.

“He just pots the obvious shots,” said Lucy, “but makes no attempt to leave the white in a good position for the next shot or to block the other player from making a shot. That’s why I agreed to play for money since I knew I could beat him quite easily and because he’s a sexist pig he couldn’t quit and be beaten by a girl. He had to keep going in the hope I’d get tired or something and he’d end up winning overall. No way would I be interested in someone like that.”

“Because he wasn’t good at pool or because he’s sexist?” asked Riley.

“Oh the pool doesn’t matter,” said Lucy. “I’ve dated guys who weren’t interested in pool. I’m not either, to be honest, but there’s no way I’m getting into a relationship with a guy who looks down on women.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” said Riley. “I kind of had to prove myself when I started here but it wasn’t a biggie to be honest. OK, all they guys round here try hard to be macho all the time but deep down they’re scared of women. Stand up to them and they’ll back down quick as anything.”

“So is Paul the vet the one?” asked Lucy.

“Shit no,” said Riley. “He’s a nice enough guy and good for a shag every now and then but long term? No way.”

“So what are you going to do?” asked Lucy. “Long term I mean.”

“Oh I don't know,” said Riley. “Don't think about the future much. Maybe I'll stay here another couple of years then go to Europe or something. Somewhere cold, wet and green for a change.” She laughed. “Sides, vets can be a bit clinical sometimes. Doctors are probably much the same.”

“How do you mean?” asked Lucy.

“Oh nothing really,” said Riley, bringing the ute to a standstill. “Well, here we are.”

“Where?” asked Lucy, looking around the empty landscape.

“At that place you think was a homestead,” said Riley. “I checked that satellite pic on your computer while you were still asleep and reckoned it was about 3k along the creek from the edge of town. We've done about 2.7k so by my reckoning it should be just up ahead.”

“So why did you stop here?” asked Lucy. “Why not go all the way?”

“I didn't want to run the ute over it,” said Riley, getting out. “I don't know what you're expecting to find but if there is anything there you probably don't want it all churned up.”

“Good call,” said Lucy, also getting out. “I'm not expecting to find anything but I've never been to ... well, I don't know, an archaeological site I guess. I'm just hoping to see if there's any sign of anything at all there.”

“I'd be surprised if there was,” said Riley, getting a couple of bottles of water from the box. She tossed one to Lucy. “How long's it been?”

“Oh, a hundred and fifty years or so,” said Lucy, taking a swig of water. It was warm and tasted quite brackish.

“There'll have been a fair few floods in a hundred and fifty years,” said Riley, gazing around the desolate and arid red landscape. “Wind, rain, cattle too I shouldn't wonder.”

“So, um, what do we do now?” asked Lucy, beginning to realise the scope of the problem. A patch of slightly darker soil seen from the air was actually going to be quite difficult to find at ground level when there were virtually no landmarks to latch on to.

“We walk,” said Riley. She lifted up her Akubra and wiped her forehead before settling it back. “I estimated the patch was maybe fifteen metres from the creek so I’ll stay twenty metres or so away and you go ten or twelve. If we go for half a k or so then turn back one of us might see something.”

“Well, it’s a plan,” said Lucy, looking doubtful. There were all sorts of minor variations in the colour of the soil and patches of scrub dotted around. “I thought you said not to leave the ute.”

“If we don’t go too far we’ll still be able to see it,” said Riley. “Anyway, we’re right beside the creek and we can still see the pub from here. It’s not a biggie.”

“K,” said Lucy. She followed as Riley paced out roughly ten metres then waited while she went a bit further. Then they both started slowly walking south. Even at 9 in the morning the heat from the sun was fierce and biting and Lucy could feel the sweat starting to form. Every few paces she took another swig from her bottle. Riley, she noticed, had yet to take a drink.

“She’s probably used to it,” thought Lucy. “This was a bloody stupid idea. Everything just looks the same!”

Unexpectedly Riley suddenly veered towards Lucy then stopped and studied the ground.

“Have you found something?” asked Lucy, excitement stirring inside her. She hurried over.

Riley squatted and picked up a handful of dirt. She looked at it then gazed around while letting it trickle out of her hand.

“Nah,” she said, standing up again. “Nothing here.”

She moved off and they both resumed their slow walking.

“Let's head back,” said Riley, half an hour or so later.

“OK,” said Lucy. She was a little disappointed that they hadn't found anything but, now she was actually out there she could appreciate just how unlikely it was. That is, until something caught her eye and she stopped.

“What?” called Riley.

“I don't know,” said Lucy hesitantly, slowing stepping backwards. “I think I saw ... ahhhhh.”

“What is it?” asked Riley coming over.

“There looks to be a straight edge,” said Lucy, pointing. “Just there.”

“Where?” asked Riley. “I can't see anything.”

“Stand here,” said Lucy, taking half a step sideways.

“I still don't see anything,” said Riley, studying the ground.

“Just here,” said Lucy, walking to where the edge seemed to be and gesturing with her hand.

“I still can't see anything,” said Riley, walking slowly over to where Lucy was standing.

“Is it my imagination?” asked Lucy, “or is the ground flatter there than it should be?” She waved her hand in front of her.

“Well, maybe,” said Riley, uncertainly.

“Stay here,” said Lucy. She slowly walked away, her eyes intent on the ground. Then she stopped and scraped some soil into a small pile with her foot.

“What do you reckon?” she asked, glancing over at Riley. “Five or six

metres, maybe.”

“Something like that,” said Riley. “What are you doing?”

“I’m pretty sure I can see an outline,” said Lucy. “There’s a flatness that side which doesn’t really fit the other side. Hold on.”

She turned ninety degrees and slowly moved forward again. Then she stopped and made another small pile before turning through ninety degrees and walking back.

“Now do you see?” she asked, motioning Riley to step back when she’d made four small piles.

“Actually I think you’re right,” said Riley. “What do you think it is?”

“Well, it looks to be, what, six metres or so by maybe three metres,” said Lucy, studying the patch. “If someone had a small cabin here the soil inside would have been flattened quite a lot wouldn’t it. And even though it’s rained and wind has blown more soil over it still looks flatter than it should, don’t you think?”

“Bit small though,” said Riley.

“Houses were small in those days,” said Lucy thoughtfully. “I visited Captain Cook’s house in Melbourne a few years ago and I was amazed at just how tiny it was. This looks big enough for a couple with two kids, especially if they spent most of their time outdoors.”

“I suppose,” said Riley doubtfully. “So where’s the dark patch where you think they did their cooking?”

“It was some way to the side,” said Lucy. “Damn, I left my laptop in the ute. Umm, I’m pretty sure it was on the creek side though.” She abruptly turned and slowly walked towards the creek, her eyes fixed on the ground.

“Stop!” exclaimed Riley.

“What?” asked Lucy, freezing.

“Don't move,” said Riley hurrying over. “I thought I saw ...”

“Fuck, a snake!” cried Lucy, jumping backwards.

“No,” said Riley, dropping to her knees. “As you stepped there I saw something move just here,” and she pointed to the soil a few centimetres away from Lucy's footprint. “Definitely not a snake. It's under the soil.”

She reached behind her and pulled her gloves from under her belt and put them on.

“Do you think it's alive?” asked Lucy, kneeling down beside her.

“No,” said Riley. “Most likely a stone or piece of branch or something,” and she started to dig her fingers into the soil. “Ahhh.”

“Oh wow!” exclaimed Lucy as Riley cleared the soil away. “Just wow! Look at that!”

Extract from the journals of Eileen Kaufman
Wednesday, 9th August 1893

Yesterday was a day of celebration wherein we slaughtered a calf and broached a cask and invited all and sundry from both stations and the town to join us for we are saved!

On Monday Friedrich returned causing me the greatest of alarm for 'twas after dark and his cries and gunshots and the sounds of horses in the distance made me most fearful of a raid by highwaymen and murderers! But 'twas only Friedrich announcing his arrival with the greatest of good news and I was in turn able to introduce him to Herman who was born but ten days previous.

It seems that after much debate among the depositors and shareholders of the Queensland Rural Bank of Toowoomba that disaster has been averted. I cannot understand the details of their agreement but a new bank is to be formed from the entrails of the old which is to have the same name which makes me wonder if it is indeed a new bank. Still, that is of no matter for the shareholders have agreed to fund this new bank and the depositors have agreed to not withdraw their deposits for seven years although we shall receive interest thereon. This will cause us some inconvenience but is nothing compared to the loss of everything! Moreover the loan Friedrich had to purchase the sheep station of necessity has been foreclosed to reduce the debts of the Queensland Rural Bank of Toowoomba but Friedrich was able to negotiate a loan from the Bank of Queensland in Brisbane to cover that foreclosure and to provide us with some working capital until the next muster and sale. Friedrich warns me that we are likely to face a year or two of penny pinching but I am a rush-cutter's daughter and no stranger to such things.

Friedrich was also, alas, the bearer of sad tidings for he brought news that my father died in January and not one of his acquaintances thought to let us know. I confess I am not surprised by this for those that were habitually acquainted with my father were drunkards also but the news saddened me and brought no small measure of guilt for only writing to him thrice in the eighteen years I have been gone. Friedrich, being a most compassionate man, arranged for a headstone to be placed upon his grave so that some mark is left as a memento of his life.

Friedrich also learned that the straits which befell the Queensland Rural Bank of Toowoomba were greatly widespread and some sixty of the

seventy or so banks all over Australia fell for there is a Great Economic Depression upon the land. Indeed it is this Depression that has greatly afflicted the wool and gold markets although, for reasons beyond my comprehension, not cattle or beef. He also tells me of another matter which I find to be most curious. It seems the the good people of South Australia are considering giving women the power to vote for who is to stand in the Parliament of South Australia. I confess I cannot see the purpose of this for will we women not vote for whosoever our husbands tell us to? It falls to us to run the household and care for the children so I know not how we are to be expected to also find the time to attend political meetings and follow the ins and outs of political debate. Friedrich told me he was swayed during his time in Toowoomba by the argument that women are subject to the law and should therefore have a say in how those laws are determined but I confess I am not so swayed. Politics is a man's business and we women are best left to such things as lie within our realm. Doubtless this proposal will fail in South Australia and I daresay the people of Queensland have more sense than to even consider such a thing.³

3 Historical Note: In fact women in South Australia received the same voting rights as men in the *Constitutional Amendment (Adult Suffrage) Act 1894*. With this Act, South Australia became the fourth place in the world to give women the vote and the first to permit women to stand for election. Ironically this latter point was due to a miscalculation by a leading opponent to women's suffrage, Ebenezer Ward, who proposed an amendment allowing women to stand for election in the belief that it was such a ridiculous proposal the entire Bill would be voted down. In Queensland, women did not get the right to vote until 1905, nor stand for Parliament until 1915.

Chapter Eighteen

"It's only an old knife," said Riley, brushing some of the dirt off. "It's broken. Look. Half the blade's missing."

"But it probably belonged to whoever lived here," said Lucy, snatching it from her. "It probably broke and whoever it was tossed it away. Don't you see? It's proof that there was a house of some sort here."

"Maybe," said Riley, getting to her feet again. "Or maybe it was just where they did some work."

"You're a cynical sod, aren't you," said Lucy, wiping the blade of the knife on her jeans.

"Yup," said Riley. "That's why I'm in this forsaken hole and not in some cushy consulting job in Brisbane on ten times the salary."

"Oh phooey," said Lucy, dribbling a little water on the knife before wiping it on her shirt. "You love it out here. Hey, there's writing on the blade."

"What's it say?" asked Riley, leaning over to look.

"Not sure," said Lucy peering at the blade. She spat on it and rubbed it hard with her thumb. "Looks like TEYR."

"What's the hell's TEYR?" asked Riley.

"Most likely it's STEYR," said Lucy excitedly. "Steyr's the main knife and weapons manufacturer of Austria."

"So it's Austrian then?" asked Riley.

"Definitely," said Lucy, turning the knife over to wipe the other side. "Oh, and look. It says 'Jagdmesser' which is almost certainly 'Jagdmesser' which means hunting knife. It's an expensive one as well. This handle isn't plastic or resin. I think it's bone. In fact I think it's probably an antler. Look," and she poured water over the handle before pulling her shirt out of her jeans to clean it better. "It's got the

ridges and colouring of an antler rather than a bone.” She turned it over then froze, staring at the handle.

“What?” asked Riley.

“It's Friedrich Kaufman's knife,” breathed Lucy reverently. “Oh my God! It's his knife! His very own knife!”

“How do you know?” asked Riley.

“It says FK there,” said Lucy, pointing to a small plaque inserted into the handle.

“Oh yeah,” said Riley, peering at the plaque. “Doesn't mean it's his though. Could be anyone's whose initials are FK.”

“OK,” said Lucy firmly. “I'm a professional, or trying to be anyway. Think logically and don't get carried away. Fact 1, we are almost certainly on the original hundred square mile site that Friedrich Kaufman purchased. I grant a hundred square miles is pretty huge but according to the satellite photograph we are at the location of an anomaly and the only one I've found in the area, which is fact 2. Fact 3, the anomaly seems to be flatter than it should and is of dimensions that would correspond to a small dwelling. Fact 4, ...”

“Fact 4 is that there's absolutely no trace of any dwelling,” said Riley. “No corner posts, no planks or bricks, not even any sign of the fireplace you think you saw.”

“Well, true,” said Lucy, “but there aren't a lot of trees around here so it's quite likely they took the building apart and used it to build on another site. And besides, we haven't really looked for the fireplace yet.”

“Maybe,” said Riley, kicking idly at the spot where she'd dug up the knife.

“Fact 4,” said Lucy firmly. “We have found a knife. It was made in Austria, it's clearly very old and it has Friedrich Kaufman's initials on it. Now I grant that it is possible someone else with the same initials

broke their knife here but an Austrian one? On the likely site of Friedrich Kaufman's first home in Australia? Come on, Riley, it's not like this place is full of people. Not even tourists."

"Well, true," said Riley. "So where's this fireplace then?"

"Could be anywhere," said Lucy, gazing around, "although it shouldn't be too far from the house but not too close either. They wouldn't have wanted to risk burning the place down." She looked down at the ground and let her eyes wander. Then they fixed on where Riley had been kicking.

"You dig holes, don't you?" she asked. "I mean, as part of your job?"

"Yeah," said Riley. "Fencing and shit."

"So what colour's the soil when you go below the surface?"

"Much the same as the top," said Riley, "only a little darker."

"How much darker?" asked Lucy. "Almost black?"

"God no," said Riley. "Only a couple of shades darker. Why?"

"Because the soil down there is almost black," said Lucy. "Almost like the remains of a fire that have been covered over."

Riley frowned then dropped to her knees and scraped away some more soil.

"You're right," she said, scraping further away. "Seems quite big too. What's this? Ohh, there's a couple of bits of burnt wood too. Almost charcoal."

"Might not be the house fireplace though," said Lucy. "Could just be where some stockmen camped overnight a few years ago."

"Yeah," said Riley, sitting back on her haunches. "A stockman who's initials are FK and who owned an expensive antler handled Austrian knife which broke so he tossed it in the fire."

“Tossed it in the fire?” said Lucy, looking at the handle of the knife again. “That would explain the blackening on the handle. Do antlers burn?”

“Cattle horns don't,” said Riley. “They discolour but they don't actually burn. I think you're right. Their house was over there and they did their cooking here. Friedrich broke his knife and tossed it away and some time later they pulled the place down and moved somewhere else.”

“Fact 5,” said Lucy, sitting on the ground and looking very pleased, “We've found the fireplace and Fact 6, Riley agrees with me!”

“Well, OK,” conceded Riley.

“Oh come on!” exclaimed Lucy, bubbling inside with excitement. “How can you just sit there and not feel just the littlest bit excited? We've found the spot where the Kaufman's first lived! Before the town ever even got started! A hundred and fifty years ago! Don't you think that's even the littlest bit bloody awesome?”

“Actually ...,” said Riley, slowly. She scowled at Lucy then her face burst into smiles. “It is pretty bloody awesome, isn't it!” and she whooped and banged her fist on the ground. “Bit bloody desolate though, isn't it.”

“Well, yeah,” said Lucy. “Nothing like Austria.”

She picked up her water bottle and took a long drink then slowly screwed the cap back on while looking around.

“I wonder what it was like when they first arrived here,” she said quietly.

“Much like this, I would think,” said Riley, taking a drink as well.

“No, I meant what was Helene thinking?” said Lucy. “What were her feelings? She'd followed her husband from rich, fertile Austria. Perhaps even Vienna which was a major European city, full of people, shops and culture. Back then Brisbane would have seemed like a small

outpost in the back of beyond and she may not even have spoken English. Then she arrives here at the farm her husband had bought with Brisbane thousands of kilometres away. Desolate, dry, windswept. No people, no vegetation, probably not even any cattle to farm. Shit, even though they're beside a creek there's no bloody water in it. What would they drink? What would they eat? She must have been totally gutted, coming out here with two young kids and ... nothing. No other kids to play with, no schools, no church, no doctors. Just sand and flies. Jesus."

"Actually that's a point," said Riley, frowning. "When they got here there wouldn't have been any bores. They wouldn't have been dug yet. When did they get here?"

"1873," said Lucy.

"What time of year?" asked Riley.

"No idea," said Lucy. "Their ship arrived in Brisbane in early January and they bought the land at the end of January. They could have moved here straight away or left it for a long time. I've no way of knowing."

"They couldn't have moved here straight away," said Riley. "Would have taken them a couple of months or more to get here from Brissy which would put them at the end of the wet season so the creek would have been full. Could have been a flood year as well."

"Which would make sense of building a house near the creek," said Lucy. "Jesus she must have been tough. Life back then was hard enough for a woman let alone out here with absolutely nothing. And the heat. She'd have been used to Austria where it snows a lot of the time. Suddenly she's forced to survive in a forty degree desert. It's bad enough now with air conditioning and plenty of water but back then? She might even have had servants back in Austria but here she'd have had to build a fire and cook over it and do all the washing and everything with no one to help or even talk to except Friedrich and he'd probably have been away most of the time dealing with the cattle. And bring up the children. Do you get crocodiles up here?"

“Nah,” said Riley. “Too dry.”

“Well, that's something,” said Lucy. “I wonder if she ever regretted it? Maybe wished she'd never married him? On the other hand maybe she hated Austria and loved it here. What time is it?”

“Bout elevenish,” said Riley, glancing at the sun. “Had enough?”

“God no,” said Lucy. “I want to explore some more. There could be some other artefacts and traces buried just below the surface.”

“There's some shovels and brooms in the ute,” said Riley. “Want me to get them?”

“Will it be easy to find this place again?” asked Lucy.

“Not really,” said Riley. “We'd have to walk around like we did. There should be some stakes in the ute though. I could put one in the ground which would make it easier. Just follow the creek until you see the stake.”

“That would be great,” said Lucy, getting up. “I want to go visit that chimney as well since I think it's on the plot of land next to this one which means it's quite possible they had a better house there but I want to come back here as well. Even if I don't find any more artefacts it'll be great for getting a sense of their lives, what they went through. Gives everything some context. Land records and things like that don't give you that.”

“OK,” said Riley. “You stay here while I get the ute.”

She jumped up and strode off. Lucy watched her for a few moments then started to wander around the outline of the house.

“What were your thoughts?” she wondered. “What were your hopes and dreams, your expectations? Did you like being here or did you hate every moment of it? Did you ever want to go back to Austria or were you just happy to have got away? I know you weren't here long. Only a year or so but did it feel like an eternity? How did you die? Was it in childbirth or was it something else? Oh Jesus! You died! Are

you and Katarina buried somewhere around here?" She stopped wandering in alarm.

"What's the matter?" called Riley as she brought the ute to a standstill beside the creek.

"I was just wondering if Helene and her daughter are buried here," said Lucy. "I know they both died in 1874 and there isn't any record of them in the cemetery."

"Ahh," said Riley. "Not a nice thought, hey. So, umm, you want to go looking for their bodies?"

"God, no," said Lucy, walking over. "Anyway, they died a long time ago and I doubt even their bones are left. Still, it would be nice to have a cross or something. I don't really like the idea that I might be standing on top of them."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," said Riley. "Still, the odds are you aren't. I wouldn't think Friedrich would have buried them close to the house. If it was me I'd bury them the other side of the creek."

"Actually, I'd sure Friedrich would have put up a cross or some sort of headstone," said Lucy. "He was a Catholic, after all. I wonder if he was heartbroken?"

"Didn't they have other kids?" asked Riley. "I seem to remember you said they did."

"Yes," said Lucy. "Two boys and a baby girl called Elizabeth. She was born in 1873 so she was still an infant. I wonder how he coped all alone out here with two young boys and an infant and still deal with the cattle."

"Maybe he didn't," said Riley, getting out of the ute. She went around the back to find a stake. "Maybe he ignored the cattle for a few years. They can look after themselves you know."

"Yeah, maybe," said Lucy. "I wonder if he loved her or if it was an arranged marriage and they secretly hated each other?"

“Whoa, that's a thought,” said Riley. She stood still with a stake in one hand and a sledge hammer in the other. “This place is bad enough as it is but if you can't stand the person you're here with? Jesus. Maybe he killed her and the kiddie. Maybe the silence drove him mad?”

Lucy stared at Riley for a few moments, a faintly puzzled look on her face.

“I suppose it's possible,” she said then pursed her lips. “No, definitely not. He married someone else. Eileen O'something and had a whole lot more kids as well as expanding the station and starting the town. A man driven mad by the desolation wouldn't have done that. He'd have either killed himself or live as a hermit or something.”

“Well, that's a relief,” said Riley. “Where do you want the stake? Let's hope it's not through Helene's heart, hey!”

“Jesus, you can be ghoulish sometimes,” said Lucy, grimacing. “Umm, how about one of the corners? He wouldn't have buried her there.”

THOS. VAN DER GARTEN & SONS

Drillers, Borers, Excavators &c
Fortitude Valley, Brisbane
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ACCOUNT

Leopold Kaufman
Helene Creek Station
West Queensland

Dated: 12th June 1896

In respect of:	£	s	d
Drilling of three bores in locations on the property known as Helene Creek Cattle Station in locations as per attached Schedule:			
Prov'n steam drilling rig, 16 wks @ £17 per week	272	-	-
" 300 12in drill bits @ £0 11/9 per foot	171	15	-
" 5000ft 5in cast iron piping @ £0 2/4 per foot	583	6	8
" 5000ft 12in cast iron piping @ £0 3/11 per foot	979	3	4
" 3 12in cast bore cap valves	11	14	-
Engineer for 16 wks @ £4 10/- per week	72	-	-
5 Labourers for 16 wks @ £0 13/9 each per week (board & lodging provided by customer as agreed)	55	-	-
Travel & haulage	82	9	10
Welding, fastenings and other consumables	104	8	4
Sub total	£2331	16	6
<i>less</i> Return of 28 12in drill bits	16	9	-
Return of 880ft 5in cast pipe	102	13	4
Return of 520ft 12in cast pipe	101	16	8
<i>Sub total</i>	220	19	-
Total	£2110	17	6
Deposit received 18 th Nov 1895	600	-	-
Interim payment 1 received 17 th Feb 1896	600	-	-
Interim payment 2 received 6 th April 1896	600	-	-
Balance owing:	£310	17	6

Chapter Nineteen

“G’day,” said Sheila, leaning over the verandah rail of the homestead. “Davy said you were coming out today. Fancy a cuppa?”

“Oh, yes thanks, Sheila” said Lucy, peering up at her. The bright sunlight left the verandah in shade and Sheila was difficult to see. “Looks like work on the tourist cabins has started.”

“Yeah,” said Sheila, “come on up. Yeah, no, Davy wants the roofs on before the wet so he's got some of the men putting in the stumps.”

“How many are there going to be?” asked Lucy, going up the steps with some difficulty as Sheila's three dogs tried to trip her as they vied for her attention.

“Just the four,” said Sheila, heading inside the house. “Can always build some more if it turns out to be popular.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so,” said Lucy, carefully shutting the screen door without hurting any of the dogs. “Do you think it will be popular?” One of the dogs whined and scratched at the screen making it rattle.

“God knows,” said Sheila. “Davy thinks it will so let's hope so, hey.” She laughed and put the kettle on. “He likes a project to get his teeth into. I'll let him know you're here. He's just over with Steve in the hanger. Some problem with one of the choppers.” She picked up a walkie-talkie handset that sat in a charger at the end of the bench top and pressed a button a couple of times then grabbed a jar of teabags.

“What?” squawked the handset a few seconds later.

“Lucy's here,” said Sheila, pushing the button again.

“K,” squawked the handset. “On my way.”

“How many helicopters have you got?” asked Lucy, intrigued.

“Just the two,” said Sheila, dropping teabags into three mugs. “I've forgotten, do you take sugar?”

“No thanks, just a splash of milk,” said Lucy. “So, um, what do you need helicopters for?”

“Oh, mostly for mustering,” said Sheila, “and trips to Brissy. Need 'em for the occasional emergency, too. Like in the floods a few years back. One of Birchall's utes got bogged 'bout a hundred k further north so we sent a chopper to fetch his lads. No trucks could get through and he didn't want to risk the horses.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy as Sheila poured water into the mugs. “So what happened to the ute?”

“Oh it stayed there 'til the water went down then they drove it back,” said Sheila. “Let's go in the lounge. I heard you found a sack of money.”

“Word gets around quickly,” said Lucy with a laugh. “But it wasn't a sack, it was a small bag and there were only a dozen coins in it. I've got them in my briefcase. Do you want to see them?”

“Ohh this place is just a gossip mill,” said Sheila, sitting down. “Not much to talk about round here 'cept cattle and bore water. Can I?”

“Sure,” said Lucy. She opened her briefcase and took out one of Riley's clean dishcloths and laid it neatly on the lounge table. Then she took out a margarine container and prised the lid off.

“I've wrapped each one in tissue paper,” she said, taking the wrapped coins out of the container one by one and carefully laying them on the dishcloth. “I know they're coins and meant to be handled but I'd rather you only held them with the tissues. They are pretty old.”

“OK,” said Sheila and picked one up. “Hey, that's heavy. What is it?”

“They're all two gulden Austrian coins,” said Lucy, watching anxiously as Sheila unwrapped it. “They're all dated between 1864 and 1870.”

“Is that right?” said Sheila. “Are they silver?”

“Almost certainly,” said Lucy. “I checked online and they should be

90% pure silver and they weigh about 24½ grams. For comparison an Australian \$2 coin is only 6½ grams.”

“So they’re worth a lot then?” asked Sheila, studying the coin. “Why does it say Franc on it?”

“Where?” asked Lucy, leaning over.

“Just there,” said Sheila, pointing with a fingernail to the 'FRANC' in the engraved FRANC IOS I D G AVSTRIAE IMPERATOR that ran around the coin.

“Oh no, that just says 'Franciscus Josephus I Dei Gratia Austriae Imperator',” said Lucy, “which means 'Franz Joseph I, by the grace of God, Austrian Emperor' and the head is that of Franz Joseph.”

“Well, well, well,” said Sheila. She gazed at the coin for a moment then flipped it over with the tissue paper. “And what does all that say?”

“It’s just a list of the countries Franz Joseph was Emperor of,” said Lucy. “Austria was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time.”

“So Helene and what’s-his-name were Hungarians then?” asked Sheila with a frown. “I thought they were Germans.”

“Ah,” said Lucy. “That period did get a little complicated. Austria had to leave the German Confederation after losing the Austria-Prussia war of 1866 and joined Hungary under Franz Joseph. That was almost certainly why Friedrich and Helene left Austria as a lot of Austrians didn’t like the idea of Hungarian rule.”

“So they lost that war then, did they?” asked Sheila.

“Umm, yes,” said Lucy as the screen door slammed.

“Yeah, Lucy, g’day,” said David, striding into the lounge.

“Hello,” said Lucy, jumping up.

“So what's up with the chopper?” asked Sheila, not looking up from the silver coin.

“Dust clogging the fuel lines,” said David. “Steve thinks it's getting in the storage tank. He's rigging up a secondary filter.”

“OK,” said Sheila. “Come and have a look at these coins. Lucy says they're solid silver.”

“90% silver,” said Lucy hurriedly as David came over.

“Big bastard, isn't it,” said David picking up a coin without the tissue paper. Lucy winced. “Worth a bit, eh?”

“Perhaps a hundred dollars or so each,” said Lucy. “That's if you sold them. I, erm, wanted to talk to you about that.”

“Where did you find them?” asked David, tossing the coin back on the dishcloth. “I heard you were out at some of the old ruins.”

“That's right,” said Lucy. “Riley and I went out to two places and we found several interesting things, not just the coins.”

“Oh yeah?” said David, sitting down. “Is that tea for me?”

“Yes,” said Sheila, pushing his over.

“Thanks,” he said. “So there's, what, twelve of them? You think there are some more out there?”

“Probably not,” said Lucy. “As I was saying, we went to a site which looked to have an anomaly from the satellite images which I'm pretty certain is the site of the first house that Friedrich and Helene Kaufman lived in when they came here in 1873.”

“Where's that then?” asked David, scratching his cheek with the coin.

“About 3km south of the town, beside the creek,” said Lucy. “We left a stake in the ground as a marker as there's virtually nothing there anymore.”

"And that's where you found the coins?" asked David.

"Not on the first visit," said Lucy. "We found those when we went back on Sunday."

"So why do you think it's their first house?" asked Sheila, "if there's bugger all there?"

"Because it's in about the right place," said Lucy, "and we found this in what looks like a patch of heavily burnt soil."

She took Friedrich's knife out of her briefcase and unwrapped it.

"It's an Austrian knife," she said. "Made by Steyr, the leading knife manufacturer in Austria, and it has Friedrich Kaufman's initials on the hilt. Since the blade is broken I'd say Friedrich was doing something with it, broke the blade and tossed it in the fire. They probably didn't have the facilities to repair it at the time."

"So the house was on fire, was it?" asked David, dropping the coin on the table and picking up the knife. "That's why there's nothing left of it?"

"Oh I wouldn't think so," said Lucy. "The flattened area where I think the house was is four or five metres away from the burnt patch. I'd say they did all their cooking some way away from the house so it didn't catch fire. Then when they bought more property and moved they probably pulled the house down and used the wood to rebuild."

"Makes sense," said David, putting the knife down. Unthinkingly, Lucy picked it up and wiped it with a tissue. "So where were the coins?"

"When we went back on Sunday, we took a metal rod and did some probing around what I thought was the outline of the house," said Lucy. "After all, anything left behind would have had soil blown over it in the last hundred and fifty years, not to mention rain and flood water."

"So the coins were under the surface?" asked David.

“Yes,” said Lucy. “About 30 centimetres actually. They were in a canvas bag but the bag fell apart as soon as I uncovered it. We found it a little to the side of one of the corners so I'd say Friedrich probably buried it there for safe keeping. Certainly Austrian coins wouldn't have been much use in Queensland unless he went to a bank in Brisbane and I'm not certain even a bank would have exchanged them back then.”

“So why bury them?” asked Sheila. “They wouldn't have been of any use to a thief.”

“They're silver,” said Lucy. “They could always be melted down.”

“True enough,” said David, picking up another of the coins. “So were you looking for coins?”

“Actually no,” said Lucy. “We found something very interesting hidden at the other house we went to so we decided to go back to this one the next day and, um, well Riley wanted to see if she could find Helene's grave.”

“Her grave?” exclaimed Sheila. “You mean she's buried out there?”

“I don't know for certain,” said Lucy quickly. “But she did die in 1874, according to her bible, and there isn't a headstone for her in the cemetery. In fact there wouldn't have even been a cemetery back then since there wasn't a town. I would expect Friedrich buried her somewhere around where they were living and in 1874 they were living at one of those two places.”

“Where's the other place?” asked David, sitting back.

“You know that old chimney you can see from the track on the way here?” asked Lucy. They both nodded. “That place.”

“So why do you think that's where they moved to?” asked David.

“Back then the government sold off plots of land that were ten miles by ten miles,” said Lucy. “I'm not sure where the exact boundaries were but in 1874 Friedrich Kaufman bought the plot that neighboured

theirs to the west from someone called Zebulon Cotterman. I've got an image of the deed of sale on my computer if you want to see it. Anyway, if we assume that the house on the original plot was over towards the western edge rather than the eastern edge then the chimney we can see would be on the Cotterman plot."

"So this Cotterman had a house there?" asked David.

"Perhaps," said Lucy, "or the Kaufmans built one. Certainly Friedrich and his wife were living there at the end of 1874."

"How can you possibly know that?" said David. "And didn't you say Helene died in 1874?"

"Ah, yes," said Lucy, taking something wrapped in a pink pillow case from her briefcase. "All that remains of the house now is a brick hearth and chimney so it's likely that whoever built the place built a wooden house and a separate kitchen with a brick cooking area. Still, when we explored on Saturday, I was sweeping the soil off the hearth and I noticed one of the bricks was loose. I pulled it up and found this underneath," and she tapped the pillowcase.

"What is it?" asked Sheila.

"It's Eileen Kaufman's journals," said Lucy, opening the pillowcase. She took out a fairly small but beautifully made flat wooden box.

"Eileen Kaufman?" said David, frowning. "Who's Eileen Kaufman?"

"Friedrich's second wife," said Lucy, lifting the top of the box. She twisted it round so they both could see inside. "I didn't know what was in the box to begin with as it was locked and there was no key but it's clearly a box made by a craftsman and I'd guess it was a jewellery box or something like that that Helene brought from Austria. I don't see something of this quality being made in Australia at that time. I would think after her death Friedrich married Eileen and gave the box to her. He very likely gave her Helene's jewellery as well but there's no mention of that. Anyway, Riley managed to pick the lock with a paper clip. Please, I'd rather you didn't touch the journals. Although the box and the bricks protected them they're still very

delicate. I've wrapped them in tissues as well but they won't survive rough handling."

Lucy reached over and very gently lifted the top journal from the box and laid it reverently on the dishcloth before delicately lifting away the tissue paper to reveal a slim volume, a little larger than A5 in size. The volume was bound in pale green cloth with a hand embroidered flower on a piece of white lace attached to the front.

"That's very pretty," said Sheila.

"What's in it?" asked David.

"I spent Monday photographing every page," said Lucy, "and Tuesday and Wednesday deciphering and transcribing what Eileen wrote. If you'd like to read her journals I've printed them out for you."

"Just give us the essentials," said David.

"OK," said Lucy. "As you can see there are two journals here. She may well have had a third from her earlier years but I don't know where it is. Certainly these two cover the period from about eighteen months before she married Friedrich up to August 1893, about a year before she died. The journals as social commentary are absolutely fascinating. They are almost entirely about living on the station and the gradual development of the town although she gives a fascinating insight into the Depression of the 1890s and Women's Suffrage. I found it particularly interesting that although many dedicated women fought for the right to vote, if Eileen is in any way representative of the so called 'ordinary woman', they didn't really want it and didn't know what to do with it when they got it."

"Oh yes?" said David, somewhat disinterestedly. "So how'd he meet her? There couldn't have been many women round here back then. There aren't many now."

"And that's totally fascinating as well," said Lucy enthusiastically. "Eileen talks about it in her journal. After Helene died Friedrich was left alone to look after two young boys and a baby girl as well as the cattle station so he went to Toowoomba and put an ad in the local

newspaper for a nanny. Eileen applied and she proposed to him at the interview! I did some digging online in newspaper archives at the State Library and I found Friedrich's advertisement."

"You mean it was love at first sight?" asked Sheila.

"Actually no," said Lucy. "According to Eileen the previous applicant had flatly refused to go into the middle of nowhere with unmarried strange men and Friedrich was despondent about it. Anyway, Eileen saw an opportunity as she admits herself she wasn't particularly good looking and had few prospects. Mind you, she couldn't have been that unattractive as they had seven children together. Still, there are a couple of things about this journal that I particularly want to talk to you about."

"Oh yes?" said David. "What's that then?"

Well," said Lucy. "Firstly, although a lot of what's in these will be excellent for the history of the family that I'm writing, I think these journals are publishable in their own right. After all, *We of the Never Never* by *Jeannie Gunn* is an iconic narrative and there are any number of other personal accounts of life in outback Australia. I think there's even one written by a policeman in Birdsville. Whether or not you want to is, of course, entirely up to you but it's well worth considering." She paused. "However ..."

"However?" asked Sheila. "However what?"

"There is one incident that Eileen mentions," said Lucy, "that has the potential to be in some ways contentious. Scandalous even."

"Oh yeah?" said David with a leer. "Eileen had an affair, did she?"

"Actually no," said Lucy, pulling a single printed sheet from her briefcase. "It's this. Umm, the 18th of October 1889. Eileen writes that her first child, a daughter called Marlene, is having a baby at the age of 14 and the father is Leopold, the son of Friedrich and Helene."

"So she was underage?" asked Sheila. "That's not so big a deal. These things do happen."

“Actually no,” said Lucy. “Queensland didn't have an age of consent until 1899 and they set it at 14 so her age wasn't the issue.”

“So what's the problem?” asked David.

“Friedrich was the father of both Leopold and Marlene,” said Lucy. “They were half brother and sister which makes it incest which almost certainly wasn't legal in Queensland. But it definitely wasn't legal under Catholic law and they were Catholics.”

“Well, that happened a lot I'm sure,” said David. “Especially in remote places like this. 'Sides, it was back in the 1890s. Would anyone care now?”

“Well, quite possibly they would,” said Lucy. “You see, the baby was named Agatha. Agatha Kaufman. This means that, as Marlene was a Kaufman herself, they decided to brazen it out otherwise the child would have a different surname as Marlene would have changed her surname when she married, which she never did incidentally. Anyway, I see the name Agatha Kaufman doesn't have any particular significance to either of you.”

They both frowned and shook their heads.

“Agatha Kaufman's name is the first name on the War Memorial,” said Lucy. “She died in 1915. I'm trying to get hold of her war records but I have found out that she was a nurse in World War 1 and was killed somewhere overseas. It's entirely possible that there will be some who take exception to the fact that an incestuous child born to a mother who never married and who, according to Eileen's journal, willingly slept with Leopold on several occasions when she was only 14 is commemorated on the War Memorial as a Hero.”

Report Made to Cobb & Co Manager, Helene Creek Depot
by Elias Finn, Coachman
Wednesday 14th January 1903

It wus like this, see. Me and yer stable lad Ned got the horses settled just after sunrise which dint take much time atall seeing as how there wus only the four to tie in. Coach being only a six seater, see. Then I got them 3 mail sacks from the store and Manager checked em like and signs off the mail docket. I loads em in back and padlocks em safe and sound. Then Ned helps me with getting them 2 crates a hand tools for the Pattersons out at Birdsville up on the coach roof as theys damned heavy and I lashed em down with rope. The small box of medcins for Tanbar I put under the back passenger seat as it be only small and fitted in right well.

That done I had me a smoke wile waiting for Shamus whood gorn to fetch wages bag from Telegraph Office for the lads wot be down the track Shamus being guard on this journey. I were just finishing me smoke when Mr Donohue who be travelling from Charleville to Birdsville joined having partaken of his morning vittals. We exchanged greetings and he commented on the weather which be looking like more rain afore dark. Then he settles hissself on back seat while Shamus gets the wages bag from Manager for the changing stations and depots tween Helene Creek an Birdsville. Shamus then locked both bags in the trunk under me drivers bench and checks is gun is fully loaded and his cartridges close at hand. Then we all sits and waits for a time as Mrs Smithson still be at her toilet or so Mr Smithson be saying. Him and his missus being from Roma and be going all the way threw to Alice as Mr Smithson be taking up as new manager of some shop there or so he say. Anyhow Mrs Smithson comes out all full of twitterings and pologies for delaying us thow it aint bin much delay an it be easy enough ride to Tanbar which be the next overnight stop and there be just the 3 changes of horses to get there. I checks all passengers be nicely settled then me an Shamus gets up on drivers bench and we be off.

Bout 5 mile outta Helene Creke, it being some way afore boundry of Helen creek cattle station, we comes across a big hole across track most likely from the rains these days past. I slows the horses and shouts down to passengers to hold on to their hats as we be in for a big jolting but we be getting threw nice and gentle like and Mrs Smithson called up that they be all nice and thanking me for being gentle. Then there be shots fired from behind us and Shamus fell forward and damned near landed on the haunches of the back pair. I had to rein in

cos he'd have fallen under the wheels otherwyse and it woodnt do for shots from behind to strike the passengers if I geed up the horses and them behind gives chase. Anyways 3 men on horses and neckerchiefs over their faces and guns in there hands came up quick like and made us all descend to the grownd. Thereupon one of the men produced an axe and broke open the wages trunck and took both bags while another cut the canvas to get the mail bags. All the while the other of the men kept his gun pointing at us. I forgot to say Shamus had fallen to the ground and was moaning and crying out while holding his shoulder but the gunman be cold of heart and would let none of us attend him not even the lady. Then him as wot took the wages bags pointed his gun at the head of Mrs Smithson and demanded the two men hand over their wallets and pocket watches then he took the gun and cartridges of Shamus and his watch too then theys all took off on their horses and headed to the north west leaving us.

Mrs Smithson was all of a faint and shaking like a leaf in a storm and Mr Smithson sat with her inside the coach and offered her what comforts he cood while me an Mr Donohue attends to Shamus who was shot in the shoulder and has a busted shoulder bone. We strapped his shoulder with some rags and put him on the front passenger seat. Mr Donohue then got up on the drivers bench and we turned the coach to Heleen Creek again as there only be a changing station up ahead an having no aid for Shamus or Mrs Smithson. Besides I must report this soonest to Depot Manager as Shamus said there be 34 pounds and 6 shillings in the Cobb bag an more in Telegraph bag although he knew not how much but them Telegraph lads be paid more than us so I be reckoning it be a sight more than 34 pounds. While driving back to Helen Creek Mr Donohue be telling me he noticed 3 men on horses leaving the town a short while after us but thought little of it as there be no shortage of men on horses as Helene Creek be a big enough place. He aint certain them 3 wot robbed the coach be the same 3 tho just that there be 3 of them and there be 3 wot be doing the robbing.

Elias Finn
Coachman

Notes Taken of Town Meeting on Friday 16th January 1903
by Ethel Kaufman

Leopold opened the meeting by informing all present, which was most of those who live in town and two or three travellers passing through who doubtless felt this meeting to be an entertainment put on by the pub, of the unpleasant and needless robbery of the Cobb & Co coach and its passengers on Wednesday last. It was apparent that all knew however.

Leopold also told the meeting that we have had many cattle rustled over the past few years and recounted the recent discovery of two heads and skins that had been found of cows which had been slaughtered and butchered and that he was of the opinion that both the rustling and coach robbery were the acts of bushrangers who had been infesting western Queensland since the early days of the Depression.

Leopold also observed that although the Government is telling us the Depression is now ended the number of wandering souls seeking employment has not dropped noticeably and it was likely that this was true of those who had turned to crime.

Jethro Caldecott, being the Manager of our Cobb & Co Depot, supported Leopold in his statement and told us that a total of £83 3/9d in wages for both the Cobb & Co staff and the Overland Telegraph staff had been stolen as well as three sacks of mail and some valuables belonging to the passengers. He was of the opinion that the Royal Mail would not be best pleased and may consider withdrawing the mail service from this area as there have also been 4 other mail robberies in these parts in the past 3 years. He was at pains to explain to all attending that Cobb & Co were dependent upon the Company's contracts with the Royal Mail and, should the Royal Mail withdraw then Cobb & Co would likely withdraw as well and that would have consequences for our town.

Rob Birchall also spoke of cattle thefts from his property but questioned Jethro on the withdrawal of the Royal Mail as he was under the impression the Royal Mail had a legal obligation to deliver all mail and to take reasonable steps to protect it to which Jethro replied he wasn't certain of the legalities but he was certain the Royal Mail would not be best pleased and either way the Royal Mail would only protect the mail and not any other persons or goods.

Mathew Riley also drew attention to several instances of damage done to and thefts of Telegraph equipment, particularly of porcelain insulators which, he told us, are good for making knives, and of poles which are likely cut down for firewood.

Jeb spoke up to tell us, even though we already knew for the town had run out of beer for a short time afterwards, that he had had a wagon load of hops stolen three months ago while on its way from Longreach and he was worried it could happen again. The prospect of a period of abstinence from beer apparently dismayed many of those assembled more than the loss of any mail they might receive.

John Ennerby, who was visiting the town and decided to attend the meeting, told us that two of his stockmen had been assaulted and left for dead when they encountered a group taking down fencing that bounded his property. Almost a mile and a half of wire had been taken. He also told us that he will not permit his wife nor any of their 3 daughters to visit Helene Creek without the attendance of several of his men for he feared they might be accosted by drunken revellers.

To this Jeb replied, somewhat loudly it must be admitted, that he was not responsible for the behaviour of any of his patrons after they had left the pub and John remarked that no other could be held accountable as there was but the one Inn. More words were exchanged but it would be impolite to record them here and Leopold was obliged to remind both John and Jeb that there were ladies present.

Ed Mullins the baker took the opportunity to inform us that his wife had had clothing stolen from her washing line and Paul Fernley told us that he had had a barrel of lamp oil, 3 bolts of calico and a box of ammunition taken from his store in the past 6 months. Jeb expressed his opinion that none of these events were likely due to patrons from the pub and Leopold felt it necessary to ask him to restrain his temper as no one was blaming him directly. More harsh words were exchanged and Leopold promised to evict anyone and everyone unless they moderated their behaviour and observed the decencies. It was not clear whether he was referring to the meeting or the houses they rent from us but the desired outcome came about. In the silence Clive Barnet told us that his wife had complained to him that a stranger, clearly under the influence of drink, had pushed her over Friday last and she had fallen in the mud and ruined her dress. This caused no little merriment among the men present and Clive was greatly offended and shouted that he was sick and tired of his baby twins being awoken late at night by

drunken louts singing and swearing and threatened to shoot the next person who did so.

Leopold chose this moment to reiterate that there were numerous grievances and that the purpose of calling this meeting was to find a solution rather than make matters worse. He then called for suggestions.

John Ennerby proposed that the town form a posse of armed men to provide protection which was supported by several. Chas Hardacre observed that he would be more than happy to serve in such a posse provided he was recompensed for his loss of earnings while unable to fulfil his duties as stockman on our station. John said he would be happy to pay any of his men for this but felt that as his station was some distance away they would be unlikely to be of much use. Both Jethro and Mathew said that while it was an eminently sensible solution Cobb & Co and the Telegraph could not spare any men from their essential duties and that, each in their own way, they felt that it was a local problem rather than one affecting Cobb or the Telegraph directly. Leopold said he agreed with both Jethro and Mathew but pointed out that the Royal Mail was in fact a Government responsibility and therefore the Government should take an active part in ridding this area of the criminal elements that have come to afflict us.

Josiah Kemp, who has recently come to the town and set up business as saddler, spoke for the first time to tell us that prior to moving to Helene Creek he lived in Ipswich and that there was a large and effective police force there to keep the peace. He proposed that we approach the police and ask that they establish a well manned police station in the town which would serve the surrounding area. This was generally agreed to be a good idea.

Leopold proposed that he, as owner of the Helene Creek Station, write to the Ipswich police. Jethro said that they would likely dismiss the request out of hand as they would perceive it as being a request for personal protection and this point was debated for several minutes after which it was agreed that the letter should be sent by Leopold and several upstanding members of the community. Jeb opined that it was unlikely we would be able to find several upstanding members of the community and he was told to shut up in no uncertain but humorous terms.

Josiah suggested that rather than several individuals signing the letter,

might it not sound more official if a title was used such as The Helene Creek Citizens Committee or some such. This proposal was greatly admired and a number of alternative suggestions were made, including Assembly of Townspeople and Town Council. A vote was taken and it was decided, by a small majority, that the letter would be signed by The Helene Creek Town Council and the names of the members of the Town Council listed as it was felt by some that 'Town Council' was an anonymous title and might not prompt any sympathy amongst those of the police who make such decisions. It was agreed that Leopold, Jeb, Ed and Josiah would be sufficient to represent the town.

Chapter Twenty

It was dark when Lucy got home but the lights were on.

“That you, Luce?” called Riley as the front screen door closed with unexpected ferocity.

“Yes,” called back Lucy with a frown. She gently pushed the screen door open part way and let go. It snapped back and rapped her knuckles. “Where are you?”

“Out the back,” called Riley.

Rubbing the back of her hand, Lucy wandered through to the back verandah, dumping her briefcase on the table as she passed.

“What's happened to the screen door?” she asked.

“Fixed it,” said Riley. She was lounging in her old armchair in the dark with her feet on the rail. “The screw at the back was missing so I put another in. Works now.”

“Bit fierce,” said Lucy. “Nearly took my hand off. Want some tea?”

“Yeah?” said Riley lazily rolling her head to look up at Lucy. “Reckon it just needs adjusting. I'll fiddle with it later. Na, not long had one. Your tucker's in the microwave.” She picked up her tobacco tin and started to roll a cigarette.

“Thanks,” said Lucy. “I'm famished. I kind of expected David and Sheila to ask me to stay for dinner since it was getting late but they didn't.”

“They don't socialise with the workers,” said Riley. “Least not outside ...,” and paused to light her ciggie before continuing, “... outside the barbies and stuff they do every now and then.”

“Oh yeah?” said Lucy. “Why's that?”

“Landowners,” said Riley, slapping at a mozzie. “Consider themselves

gentry. Us workers are here to work not be part of the family.”

“Makes sense I suppose,” said Lucy. “The Station's a business after all and I don't expect many business owners get too friendly with the staff, not that I've had any proper jobs. Only part time ones. I would think it would be difficult to sack someone if they've almost become one of the family. Back in a minute. Oh, was that yes or no to tea?”

“Actually, I've changed my mind,” said Riley. “I will have one after all.”

“K,” said Lucy, disappearing back inside.

“So what did they say?” asked Riley when Lucy reappeared with a tray of reheated chicken schnitzel and chips and two mugs of tea.

“Who?” asked Lucy, giving Riley her tea before sitting down with the tray on her lap.

“David and Sheila,” said Riley. “About the woman on the memorial.”

“Oh,” said Lucy. “Well Sheila was a bit shocked. I think David found it quite funny although he tried not to show it. You know, that ties in with what you said just now, about being gentry.” She ate a mouthful of just past tepid schnitzel and screwed up her nose but swallowed anyway. “Sheila was more concerned with how it would reflect on them as a family rather than anything else. Certainly she didn't care if anyone in town thought having Agnes on the memorial would be disrespectful to the memories of those who died in the war.”

“Which is bloody stupid anyway,” snorted Riley. “Agnes died in the war same as all the others. Doing her bit for King and Country and all that crap. She deserves to be on the memorial.”

“That's what I said,” said Lucy, “although I worded it a bit differently. I also pointed out that Agnes could well have known what she was and became a war time nurse as a way of atonement for her mother.”

“Well, I suppose it's possible,” said Riley doubtfully. “Psychologically speaking she may have had a strong sense of guilt although the guilt

was her mother's not hers.”

“Arguable,” said Lucy, trying some warmed-up chips and deciding not to bother with the rest of them. “Given it was the 1880s I wouldn't think Marlene had any idea about sex and I'd be astonished if anyone had sat down with her and explained that having sex with her half brother was wrong. Those sorts of things weren't talked about back then. Anyway, if anything it was more Leopold's fault since he was 18 or 19.”

“Bullshit,” said Riley. “She lived on a cattle station. OK she may not have known about incest but she'd have known about sex. The cattle and horses do it all the time. You can't help but see. She'd probably seen hundreds of calves and foals born as well so she'd know a fair amount about giving birth too.”

“I suppose,” said Lucy thoughtfully. “I'm a city girl. Anyway, the important thing is that they aren't going to suppress it. Sheila wanted to but I pointed out that since Marlene and Agnes stayed as Kaufmans the family weren't ashamed of what happened so why should they be now, a hundred and whatever years later. And, which I should have said but I've only just thought of it, whoever had the names put on the War Memorial would have known as well and they chose to include Agnes.”

“Actually it was probably Leopold,” said Riley, her white teeth gleaming in the moonlight as she grinned. “He'd have been running the station back then, wouldn't he? And been head of the town council I would think. He probably wanted his daughter commemorated on the memorial.”

“Fair point,” said Lucy. “I'll check when he died in a minute but that's actually an interesting cultural point. Even now, in the 21st century, we tend to blame 14 year old Marlene when it was almost certainly 18 year old Leopold who was the driving force. Yeah, I could do a few paragraphs on change or the lack of it in perceptions of morality. In fact, in this instance at least, it looks like it's more of an issue now that it was then since Sheila wants to cover it up but Friedrich and Eileen chose to be open about it.”

"It's probably more of a rural thing," said Riley, rolling another cigarette. "Country people can be more tolerant of some things than city people."

"Could be," said Lucy, standing up. "I'll just get my laptop."

She dumped the rest of the chips in the garbage bin then got her laptop out of her briefcase and went back on the verandah.

"Mind if I put the light on?" she asked, her hand hovering over the switch.

"Nah," said Riley.

"I thought of something strange," said Lucy as her laptop was booting. "Driving back I wondered why someone else wasn't on the War Memorial as well. Laura, Laurie, something like that. I'm pretty sure she died in the war too."

"Maybe she wasn't in the war itself," said Riley. "After all lots of people died then anyway."

"True," said Lucy. "My brain was locked in on Agnes and the war. Laura or whatever her name is probably died of illness or something here in town, although I don't remember seeing a headstone in the cemetery either. It's probably nothing. Now then, ..." and she hummed quietly while she found and opened her file on the Kaufman family tree.

"Leopold," she muttered. "Ah yes, he didn't die until 1923 so he'd almost certainly have taken over the station when Friedrich died since he'd have been 22 and the oldest living son. That would mean he'd have been 45 when Agnes died. Did they have a town council back then?"

"Dunno," said Riley. "I'd have thought so though. Isn't it the council who decides on war memorials?"

"Not necessarily," said Lucy. "I'm pretty sure it's not a legal requirement and all sorts of organisations put up memorials and

things. I seem to remember reading somewhere about a memorial put up by some truckers' association to commemorate truckers who've died on the road."

"For real?" asked Riley. "I didn't know that. Hey, maybe there's one for girl ringers too!"

"You could always start one," said Lucy. "Actually, I think it's time I started looking through the Council archives. Sheila's the Secretary to the Council and she's got the archives up at the homestead. Anyway, yes, Leopold was head honcho of the station and if there was a town council he'd almost certainly have been the head of it so even if there was opposition he'd probably have found a way to make sure his daughter was on the memorial. If there wasn't a council then he probably put up the memorial himself. Don't forget, Edward Mercer was a relative as well. He was the ... um ... son of Elspeth Kaufman who was Leopold's half sister. Actually she was Eileen's fifth child so that makes Edward Leopold's nephew, or half nephew at least."

"So she married someone called Mercer?" asked Riley.

"Yes," said Lucy, checking her spreadsheet. "Albert Mercer. He died in 1907 so he'd have been 44. I wonder who he was and how he died. He was probably one of the stockmen, I would think, or perhaps a son of one of the other landowners in the area. I wouldn't think there were many opportunities for the girls to meet people from elsewhere back then. Oh well, I daresay I'll find out sooner or later. Now, Laura."

She studied the spreadsheet for a while.

"There's a Lauren," she muttered. "No, couldn't be her. She wasn't born until 1944."

"Who wasn't?" said Riley whose mind had been drifting.

"Lauren Lamont," said Lucy. "I'm trying to find this Laura or Laurie that I've got in my head."

"You mean old Lauren who lives down in Victoria Street?" asked Riley.

Lucy gave an embarrassed little laugh.

“Yes, and I've talked to her,” she said. “She had Helene's bible. You know, I keep forgetting these are real people. Like most historians I research and collect data on people but it's easy to forget that they were once real people with hopes and fears and emotions and everything. I was seeing Lauren Lamont as just a name in my spreadsheet and forgot that I've talked to her and sat in her house and drunk tea with her. Wow.”

“What are you doing?” asked Riley as Lucy typed something on her laptop.

“I'm putting a little note on my desktop,” said Lucy. “It says 'Don't forget, these are all real people’.”

“Oh,” said Riley flatly. She thought about it for a few moments. “Does it really matter?”

“I think so, yes,” said Lucy, leaning back and gazing out into the darkness beyond the verandah. “Take Agnes for example. We've been sitting here talking about her as just the illegitimate child from an incestuous relationship, as though that's all that matters but it isn't. She was a real person, not just an entry in someone's journal or a name on a war memorial. What did she think about it? Did she get sick and tired of the hidden sniggers every time she came into town? Is that why she became a nurse, so she could hide away in Brisbane, or went off to war in another country? Did she ever fall in love? She didn't have any children but she may have wanted them and was afraid to. How much did her origins affect her outlook? Was she happy or depressive? Did she ever read stories and wish she was the person in the book? There's a million things, a billion things, about her that we'll never know but as a historian I need to remember that she's more than just a dry entry on my spreadsheet and somehow I need to get that across when I actually write this history.”

“Oh,” said Riley.

“Oh, indeed,” said Lucy. “It's very easy to forget that. It's like Eileen talks about these people who came to the station looking for work. We

historians go 'oh yes, 25% of the workforce was unemployed during the Depression of the 1890s' and talk about how it impacted this and that and go on about the economy and the decline in production and international relations and forget that these were real people, hungry, desperate, maybe with families starving back home hoping daddy will send some money to buy food. How many of them, for God's sake, died out here in this dry desert and no one ever knew?"

"Well, I guess a few did," said Riley. "Inevitably."

"And you know the really shocking thing?" said Lucy. "Even though I'm saying all this I'm thinking 'actually that's a good angle for my book'. Make Helene and Eileen and Marlene and Agnes come alive again rather than just being entries in a dry history of who bought that piece of land and who built this memorial. Does that me a bad person?"

Riley stared at her for a few moments then laughed.

"Seems to me you're forgetting something important," she said.

"What's that?" asked Lucy, frowning.

"You're a real person too," said Riley. "You've got good bits and bad bits just like everyone else. OK, so you're a historian and you've just realised that history is about people but don't forget you've got a job to do which is to write the history of this little part of the world and if you can make the people who lived through it seem more real to us now then go for it. That doesn't make you a bad person, it makes you a better historian."

"You think?" asked Lucy.

"Yup," said Riley.

"Maybe you're right," said Lucy. "For sure I don't want to be a bad historian." She turned back to her laptop then looked over at Riley. "And if I can make it interesting enough so that people read it all the way through and tell their friends then I'm bringing Marlene and the rest back to life, aren't I. In a way."

“For real,” said Riley. “Want a beer?”

“No,” said Lucy, turning back to her laptop. “What I want right now is to find this Laura or Lauren or Laurie or whatever her damned name is. She's bugging me.”

“Found her?” asked Riley, coming back out with a cold can in her hand.

“No,” said Lucy, “and it's pissing me off. There aren't any Lauras or Lauries and only the one Lauren. There's an Angela but she was born in the 40s as well. There isn't even a Lawrence or Larry. Where the hell did I get that name from? I must have got it from somewhere as I'm associating it with the Kaufmans and WW1. Surely I didn't just make it up?”

“No idea,” said Riley. “Sorry. I used to know a Laura back in Brisby but I don't think I've mentioned her to you.”

“Hmm,” said Lucy scowling. She sat back and glared at Riley while tapping her fingernails on the arm of the chair. Then she jumped up and went inside.

“This looks serious,” said Riley as she reappeared with Helene's bible in her arms.

“I am serious,” said Lucy. “I write down and reference everything and that name has got into my head somehow. The only sources I can think of are this and the headstones in the cemetery.”

“Maybe someone said the name when you were talking to them,” said Riley.

“Unlikely,” said Lucy, carefully unwrapping the bible on her knees. “I've the year she died in my head as well which would be unlikely from a conversation.”

“I guess,” said Riley, swigging her beer.

“Ah hah!” exclaimed Lucy, stabbing her finger at the bible. “I knew

it!”

“What?” asked Riley.

“Lorna Kaufman,” said Lucy. “Born 1880 and died in 1900. Oh. 1900. I thought it was during WW1. Still, Lorna. I knew I’d seen the name somewhere and the year’s close enough.”

She checked her spreadsheet then swore.

“I’m a bloody idiot,” she said tersely. “I’ve missed her out completely! I’ve got Elspeth in 1878 and Herman in 1893 but nothing for Lorna in 1880. Freaking idiot. I haven’t got her husband either. Oh, that’s interesting.”

“What is?” asked Riley, not expressing overmuch interest in her tone of voice as it was getting close to bed time.

“They both died on the same day in 1900,” said Lucy. “Lorna Roberts was 20 and hubby Finley was 29. I wonder why?”

“You mean like in a car crash?” asked Riley, yawning.

“Well it wouldn’t have been a car crash as they didn’t have cars in 1900,” said Lucy. “At least I don’t think so. Maybe it was some disease.”

“Or maybe he killed her then committed suicide,” remarked Riley.

“Or maybe it was food poisoning or a cattle stampede,” retorted Lucy. “You don’t have to be sensationalist about it.”

“You’re the one who wants people to find your book interesting,” said Riley. “A nice juicy murder suicide on top of incest and child abuse would make it a best seller!”

“Actually, I wouldn’t be surprised if there was a murder suicide round here,” said Lucy. “Might even be today.”

“Is that a threat?” asked Riley, yawning again. “You know where my

shotgun is, don't you?"

"Actually no," said Lucy, "and I don't want to know. The temptation would be too great sometimes."

"Very funny," said Riley, getting up. "If you do feel the need to shoot me, put the barrel here," and she touched her temple. "It's quicker. I'm off to bed."

"I'll remember that," said Lucy. "Sleep well."

"Yup, you too, hon. Night," said Riley.

"And 1900," muttered Lucy, looking back down at the screen as Riley disappeared. "Why does that ring a bell? What happened in 1900? Well, off the top of my head Franz Ferdinand got married in Austria and the US Senate accepted the British-German Treaty of 1899. Oh and there was the Boxer Rebellion in China but Lorna and Finley wouldn't have had anything to do with those, would they? Or the Olympic Games in Paris? Hey, maybe one of them was an athlete. Did Australia go to the 1900 Olympics and the plane crashed or something?"

Drafts of a letter addressed to the Queensland Police,
probably dated on or before Monday 19th January 1903

~~The Police Chief, The Head of the Police, The Chief Officer, The Officer
in Charge of the Police
Brisbane Police Station, Police Barracks, Police Headquarters,
Queensland Police,
Brisbane, Queensland~~

~~To whom it may concern, Sir, Dear Sir,~~

The people of the town of Helene Creek would like you to set up a
police station in our town because there is a lot of crims and thefts and
things going on and we want it stopped.

We, the undersigned, would like

We represent the people of Helene Creek and are writing

We, the Council of ~~for~~ representing ~~Helene Creek~~ the people of Helene
Creek

The Officer In Charge
Police Headquarters
~~Brisbane Police~~ Queensland Police
Brisbane
Queensland

The Council of Helene Creek, as representatives ~~of the people of the
town of Helene Creek of the townspeople of Helene Creek the people
of the town and surroundings of Helene Creek want you would like you
to are writing to ask demand are writing to request that you set up install
create operate establish a Police Station in the town manned police
station~~ staffed and equipped police station in the town

The Officer In Charge
Police Headquarters
Queensland Police
Brisbane
Queensland

As the members of the Council representing the people of the town and surrounding areas of Helene Creek we are writing to request that a Police Station, fully manned and equipped

The Officer In Charge
Police Headquarters
Queensland Police
Brisbane
Queensland

Dear Sir

These past years the peaceful and orderly town of Helene Creek, and the surrounding areas, have been ~~inundated~~ ~~plagued by~~ afflicted by with a ~~lot of vast numbers~~ large number frequent crimes committed mostly by ~~bushies~~ ~~bushrangers~~ itinerant criminals and we want a police station

We would like you to

We want you to

We respectfully request that you ~~arrange for~~ establish a police station in the town, fully manned and equipped, to punish these criminals.

Such acts as afflict us are frequent and repeated rustlings of cattle and sheep and other goods from the store and being transported, frequent drunken fighting and carousing in the streets and God fearing respectable women being assaulted in the streets and many other things ~~including making babies cry in the night.~~

Signed by the members of the Town Council

The Officer In Charge
Police Headquarters
Queensland Police
Brisbane
Queensland

These past years the peaceful and orderly town of Helene Creek and surrounding areas have been afflicted with a large number of frequent crimes committed mostly by itinerant criminals. Such acts as afflict us are frequent and repeated rustlings of cattle and sheep, thefts of goods from the store and being transported, frequent drunken fighting and carousing in the streets and wives and daughters, God fearing and respectable ~~to a man~~ each and every one, being assaulted in the streets and many other things. AND THE COBB HOLDUP

We respectfully request that you establish a police station in the town, fully manned and equipped, to punish these criminals.

Signed by the members of the Town Council

The Officer In Charge
Police Headquarters
Queensland Police
Brisbane
Queensland

We the undersigned, as the Town Council of Helene Creek wish to inform you that these past years the peaceful and orderly town of Helene Creek and surrounding areas have been afflicted with a large number of frequent crimes committed mostly by itinerant criminals. Indeed, but a few days past a Cobb & Co coach was robbed at gunpoint of three Royal Mail sacks, the wages of Overland Telegraph employees and Cobb & Co employees and three passengers deprived of their valuables but five miles from the town. A man was shot as well.

Such other acts as afflict us are frequent and repeated rustlings of cattle and sheep, thefts of goods from the store and being transported, frequent drunken fighting and carousing in the streets and respectable, God-fearing women are being assaulted in the streets and many other things of like nature.

We respectfully request that you establish a police station in the town, fully manned and equipped, to punish these criminals.

Signed by ~

Leopold Kaufman, owner Helene Creek Station, ~~Head of~~ Chairman of the Council

Jeb Sawyer, ~~Publican~~ Inn Keeper

Edward Mullins, Baker

Josiah Kemp, Saddler

~~The Pub,~~ The Bunkhouse Inn, Helene Creek, Queensland

Either the final draft or the finished copy of a letter addressed
to the Queensland Police, Monday 19th January 1903

The Officer In Charge,
Police Headquarters,
Queensland Police,
Brisbane,
Queensland.

We the undersigned, as the Town Council of Helene Creek, wish to inform you that these past years the peaceful and orderly town of Helene Creek and surrounding areas have been afflicted with a large number of frequent crimes committed mostly by itinerant criminals.

Indeed, but only a few days past a Cobb & Co coach was robbed at gunpoint of three Royal Mail sacks, the wages of Overland Telegraph employees and of Cobb & Co employees and three passengers deprived of their valuables not five miles from the town. The Guard accompanying the coach was also most grievously injured with gunshot wounds.

It is our belief that both the Royal Mail and the Overland Telegraph are under the auspices of the Queensland Government and entitled to due protection.

Such other acts as afflict us are frequent and repeated rustlings of valuable cattle and sheep, thefts of goods from the store and in transit, frequent drunken fighting and carousing in the streets and respectable, God-fearing women are being assaulted in the streets and many other things of like nature.

We respectfully request that you establish a police station in the town, fully manned and equipped, to punish out these criminals.

Signed by ~
Leopold Kaufman, Town Council Chairman
Jeb Sawyer, Town Councillor
Edward Mullins, Town Councillor
Josiah Kemp, Town Councillor

Reply to ~ The Town Council, c/o The Bunkhouse Inn, Helene Creek, Queensland

Letter Received from the Commissioner, Queensland Police,
dated Friday 2nd April 1903

Mr Leopold Kaufman and companions,
C/o The Bunkhouse Inn,
Helene Creek,
Queensland.

Dear Mr Kaufman &c

In re your correspondence of 19th January this year, I am instructed by The Commissioner of Police to inform you that the contents have been noted and are under due consideration. Please also be informed that the Royal Mail and the Overland Telegraph are within the purview of the Australian Federal Government rather than the Queensland Government.

I am further instructed by The Commissioner to appraise you that, under the Local Government Act 1878, a minimum of one hundred households are required before a community can be considered a municipality and thereby become entitled to be represented by an elected Council. As Helene Creek has not been gazetted nor, we are so informed, does it yet amount to one hundred households, The Commissioner is regrettably unable to recognise the existence of a Helene Creek Town Council.

Lionel Askew
Asst. Clerk to The Commissioner of Police

(handwritten note appended below the letter)
What is gazetted?

Chapter Twenty One

“Bugger!” exclaimed Lucy, opening the fridge. “I’d forgotten there’s no bloody milk!”

She pushed the fridge door shut and opened the freezer. She took out a two litre bottle of milk and stood there for a few moments fanning cold air over herself. It was barely the beginning of spring but the temperature was pushing forty degrees and the ceiling fans didn’t extend to the kitchen. She picked up the milk and frowned at it.

“You’ll take a few hours to defrost,” she muttered, “and I hate microwaved milk. Blurgh. S’pose I’d better go get some fresh.”

She dumped the bottle in the sink and flicked the kettle off before wandering unenthusiastically back into the lounge. She’d spent the morning browsing through the Trove Archive of newspapers in the hope of finding some reference to Helene Creek and was getting bored as she hadn’t found anything so far. Nor had she had any replies to the various requests she’d made to the National Archives of Australia in Canberra, the Museum at the War Memorial, also in Canberra, the Queensland State Library or any of the other organisations she’d contacted and was running out of things to do. She sat down and stared at the screen for a few moments then checked her email again.

“Oooh,” she thought. “I’ve got an email!” Then her face fell. “Oh. It’s only Monash Uni. I wonder what they want?”

She opened the email and read it through. It was a notification of the date of the Graduation Ceremony for those new recipients of Masters Degrees and requested that she inform them by the end of October if she intended to attend and, if she did, whether she wanted to rent or purchase the relevant gown and mortar board and to have her official portrait photograph taken.

“Bloody hell, that’s expensive,” she muttered, looking at the prices. “Do I really want to go? My Bachelors graduation wasn’t that exciting. Maybe I’ll skip this one and go to the one for my Doctorate, if I ever do it. Still, I can always stay with mum and dad which’ll be fun.”

She thought for a few moments then emailed the three friends she'd made while doing her Masters to ask if they were going. None of them replied instantly which was irritating.

"I need tea," she said aloud to the empty room then jumped up and waved her arms about. "Tea, tea, tea! And toast! I am going stir crazy!"

She pursed her bottom lip then snatched up her bag and hurried outside. It was actually a little cooler as there was a breeze.

"Awesome," she said, looking up and down the empty street. "I'll walk. The store's only just down the road. That way I can justify getting an ice cream as well! Cool!"

She crossed the road and headed towards the junction with William Street then paused when she saw the small white sign announcing the name of the road.

"I wonder why it's called Birtles Street?" she thought. "That's a funny name, Birtles. The other streets round here are pretty obvious. Victoria and Albert after the Queen and Agatha, William and Edward after the people on the War Memorial but Birtles? Is that someone's name or something else?"

She carried on walking, aware that she was beginning to sweat and thinking that it might actually have been a better idea to drive.

"G'day, how's it going?" called Lauren from her verandah as Lucy was about to cross over to the park and play area.

"Oh, good thanks, Lauren," called back Lucy with a wave.

"Dug up more scandals, have you, lovey?" asked Lauren with a cackle.

"No, not yet," said Lucy, walking closer. "Is it me or it is hot today?"

"Hot?" exclaimed Lauren. "Just you wait for summer then you'll know what hot means."

“Looking forward to it,” said Lucy, rather bravely she thought. “I daresay I’ll get used to it. Hey, do you know why Birtles Street is called Birtles?”

“Can’t say as I do,” said Lauren. “Probably after someone in Brisbane.”

“Why Brisbane?” asked Lucy, puzzled.

“Ain’t all the roads named by Brisbane?” asked Lauren. “That there Department of Roads and Transport or whatever it is?”

“Ahh, fair point,” said Lucy. “I suppose that makes sense. Anyway, I’ve run out of milk. See you.”

She smiled and waved and walked across the park, exchanging a smile of greeting and a nod with the woman whose children always seemed to be playing on the swings but whose name she didn’t know. She paused to let a double trailer truck go past then a ute pulled out from Edward Street and beeped a greeting. She waved but couldn’t see who was driving because of the glare on the windscreen and almost everyone drove a battered white ute. There was no other traffic so she sauntered across, ignoring the trickle of sweat that slid down her spine.

“Ohh that’s nice,” she said, pushing open the door to the general store and standing in the down draught of chilled air.

“Hot enough for you?” asked Cassie, looking up from her nails.

“I’m not used to this weather,” said Lucy, pausing beside the checkout. “It hardly ever gets this hot in Melbourne.”

“I’d like to go to Melbourne one day,” said Cassie wistfully. “Anywhere, really. Get out of this place,” and she disdainfully looked around the store.

“Oh, I’m sure you will,” said Lucy. “All you have to do is decide to go then go.”

“Ain't got no money,” said Cassie and sighed.

“Well, that could be a problem,” admitted Lucy. “Maybe you should look online for a job in Melbourne.”

“You reckon?” said Cassie.

“Worth a try,” said Lucy, edging over to the cooler cabinet where the milk was.

“Yeah,” said Cassie, “worth a try, hey,” and she smiled and checked her nails again.

The door banged as Lucy took a carton of milk from the cooler and a male voice said “G'day Cass.”

Lucy glanced over but it was a youngish stockman she'd not seen before so she wandered over to the ice cream cabinet.

“G'day Mac,” said Cassie in a dispirited way.

“So who's that then?” asked Mac.

“That's Lucy,” said Cassie.

Hearing her name Lucy looked up. Mac was looking at her with a half smile on his face.

“G'day,” he said.

“Hello,” said Lucy. She half smiled then turned back to the ice creams.

“Tourist, are you?” asked Mac.

Lucy looked up again and he was still looking at her so presumably he was talking to her.

“In a way,” she said. “I'm working for David at the Station for a while.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked. “You ain't a ringer.”

“She's writing a book about us,” said Cassie. “Be nice to her or she'll write nasty things about you.”

“Oh, for sure, for sure,” said Mac with a grin. “I'm always nice to the sheilas.”

“Yeah, right,” scoffed Cassie.

Lucy chose a Drumstick ice cream and slowly walked over to the checkout. Mac watched her every step of the way then backed off a little so she could put the Drumstick and milk on the counter.

“Nine bucks,” said Cassie, ringing it up. “That all?”

“For now,” said Lucy, getting some money out of her purse. “Thanks.”

She turned to leave and Mac, with an exaggerated flourish, moved out of her way. She pushed open the door and a wave of heat hit her. She let the door swing shut and started to walk. Within three strides her face felt moist and the trickle of sweat started rolling down her spine again. She sighed, wishing she'd brought the car, and heard the door to the store open behind her.

“Hot enough for you, Lucy?” called Mac.

Lucy turned politely.

“I'm just not used to it,” she said. “I'm from Victoria.”

“Oh my word,” said Mac, coming forward. “Blooming long way from home, aren't ya? Where you staying? At the homestead? The pub?”

“In town,” said Lucy, nodding in the general direction of the other side of the main road.

“Good on ya,” said Mac. He glanced around then added, a little nervously, “Hey, buy you a cold beer, maybe?” and nodded towards the pub.

Lucy was about to say 'no thanks' but she was hot and her throat was dry and, despite being dressed like a stockman, his clothes were clean and he was polite.

"What the hell," she thought and said "OK, but just a lemonade."

"Sweet as!" exclaimed Mac. "Oh, you'd best not be eating that in the pub. Lindy'll have a fit."

"Oh right," said Lucy, looking at her ice cream. The paper wrapper was already covered with droplets of water as it quietly defrosted. "Umm, I'll have it here and you go in and order. I'll join you in a minute."

"Sweet," said Mac and hurried off.

Lucy peeled the top off the Drumstick then tore the paper cone away. She crumpled them as she slowly walked towards the pub. She found a seat in a patch of shade on the verandah and enjoyed every cold mouthful. She crunched the bit of chocolate in the bottom of the cone as Mac came back out with their drinks.

"Thought you'd done a runner," he said, putting a glass with ice and a can of lemonade in front of her.

"Thanks," said Lucy. "So, umm, you're Mac, yeah?"

"Sure am," said Mac, sitting down.

"I haven't seen you around before," said Lucy. "Are you a stockman?"

"For sure," he said. "Down at the sheep station. Don't come into Ellen Creek much only I've a few days off so I come up to see me mum. So what you writing?"

"Oh, David asked me to write a book about the history of the Station and the town," said Lucy. "By the way, it's pronounced Helene Creek, with an emphasis on the last syllable. Hel-ay-ne."

"Yeah, Ellen like I said," said Mac, then slapped his knee. "Oh yeah,

heard about you. You're the one who found out all the Kaufmans are inbreds, hey?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Lucy, taken aback. "It's certainly not true. There seems to have been one instance but there was only one child and she was killed in the war leaving no other children."

"No sweat," said Mac, grinning. He took a long pull on his beer. "History, hey. You should talk to me mum. She's into all that old stuff."

"Really?" asked Lucy, pouring some lemonade over the ice. It hissed and frothed and the ice crackled so she hesitated before pouring some more. "In what way?"

"Oh she's got some old junk," said Mac. "Keeps in it a shed behind the house."

"What sort of old stuff?" asked Lucy. "And who is your mum? Maybe I know her."

"Raylene," said Mac. "Raylene Kepple. She's the nurse down at the medical centre."

"No, I haven't met her yet," said Lucy. "So, um, what sort of things does she keep in the shed?"

"Oh strewth," said Mac, frowning. "I dunno. For sure she's got some old radio set and some medical stuff. You know, from the old days before there was a medical centre."

"Interesting," said Lucy thoughtfully. "Any idea how old?"

"Dunno," said Mac. "I know the radio don't run off the electric. They used it before there was electric here."

"Seriously?" said Lucy, frowning. "I thought all radios used electricity. What does it run on?"

"Dunno," said Mac. "Better ask her."

“I will,” said Lucy, reaching for her bag to get the little notebook she always carried. “Raylene? Raylene Kipple?”

“Kepple,” said Mac, watching as she wrote. “I’m Mac Kepple,” and he tapped his chest. “So, ahh, yous going to the show?”

“What show?” asked Lucy, putting her notebook down.

“The annual show in Charleville,” said Mac. “Bit of all right, it is. Sheep and cattle prizes, horse racing, shearing contest, all sorts of stuff then a dance after, like.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. “No, I wasn’t planning to.”

“Bummer,” said Mac. “Hey, you wanna go with me?”

Letter Received from the Commissioner, Queensland Police,
dated Thursday 9th June 1904

The Civic Council,
C/o The Bunkhouse Inn,
Helene Creek,
Queensland.

Sirs,

Further to previous correspondence, The Commissioner of Police has instructed me to appraise you that, after due consideration and consultation, the provision of a Police Station within or adjacent to the boundaries of the township of Helene Creek, notwithstanding the aforementioned township being not designated a municipality within the meaning of the relevant Acts, is approved as is the assignment of one Police Constable to said Police Station.

The jurisdiction of said Constable remains to be formally defined, pending further consultations with the Commissioners of Police of South Australia and the Northern Territories.

A Government Surveyor will attend the township in due course to attach a suitable area of Crown Land for the purpose of construction of the Police Station. Should no Crown Land be suitable, an area of land under private ownership will be subject to a compulsory purchase order at a valuation to be determined by the Government Surveyor.

Henry Parker-Smyth
Chief Clerk to The Commissioner of Police

(handwritten note beside the reference to land)
and bound to be at well below the market rate bastards!

Chapter Twenty Two

“G'day,” said the nurse, looking round as Lucy pushed open the Medical Centre door. She smiled and pushed the filing cabinet drawer shut with her hip.

“Hi,” said Lucy. “Umm, are you Raylene?” She didn't look old enough to have a son Mac's age but you never know.

“No, I'm Fay,” said Fay. “Raylene's finished for the day. Hey, you're that writer, Lacy, aren't you. I've seen you round.”

“Actually it's Lucy,” said Lucy, smiling. “Lucy Chaplin.”

“My bad,” said Fay. “I'm Fay Connolly. Pleased to meet you. Was it Raylene you particularly wanted to see?”

“Yes and no,” said Lucy. “I want to have a chat with her about my research but I also want to see someone about an itchy little rash I've got.”

“Oh yes?” said Fay. “Whereabouts?”

“Under my boobs,” said Lucy.

“No worries, I can take a look if you like,” said Fay. “Are you registered here?”

“No, not yet,” said Lucy, resisting the urge to scratch her rash. “I figured I wouldn't be here long enough.”

“Well you'll still need to register even if it only takes a couple of minutes,” said Fay, pulling a clipboard out from under the counter. “Fill this in for me, yeah, and I'll put you in the system. Have you got your Medicare card with you?”

“Yeah, sure,” said Lucy, fumbling with her shoulder bag. “Umm, I meant I didn't expect to be in town long enough to need a doctor.”

“Ohh,” said Fay, turning her attention to the computer screen. “We

don't have a doctor here. If it's serious we'll send you to Longreach."

"Ahh," said Lucy, "I didn't know that."

She handed over her Medicare card and Fay typed in the details as she started filling out the form.

"So you're going to the Charleville Show with Mac, then," said Fay as Lucy wrote 'none' in the section on allergies.

"Word gets around quickly here," said Lucy, faintly irritated. "I haven't decided yet."

"Small town," said Fay with a smile. "Nothing much else to talk about except everyone else's business. Mac seemed to think you are."

"I only said I'd think about it," said Lucy, signing the form and pushing the clipboard over. "Is it worth going to?"

"I've been a couple of times," said Fay, starting to type the details into the computer. "It's not like your big shows in Brissy but it's a bit of fun."

"I've not been to the show in Brisbane either," said Lucy. "I went to one in Melbourne with my parents when I was 7 or 8 but that's it."

"Then go," said Fay. "If nothing else it'll give you more of an insight for your book about us. We're not all about sheep and cattle."

"Actually, that's a good point," said Lucy, putting her Medicare card back in her purse. "Maybe I will."

"Sweet as," said Fay. "Birtles Street, hey. You're just down the road from Raylene. She's at number 4. You can drop round after you're done here. Not like it's a long way," and she laughed.

"Won't she be busy?" asked Lucy.

"Wouldn't think so," said Fay. She scanned what she'd typed then hit the Enter key with an air of finality. "Right, come on in to the

consulting room.” She beamed at Lucy and strode the three paces to the consulting room. Lucy followed meekly.

“A rash under your boobs, you said?” asked Fay, pushing the door shut even though there was no one else in the building. “Would you take off your top, please.”

“Sure,” said Lucy and took off her blouse. “Bra too?”

“Yes,” said Fay. She peered at Lucy's rash while Lucy stood there feeling embarrassed. “You're from Melbourne?”

“Yes,” said Lucy.

“That's what it'll be then,” said Fay. “Heat rash. You're not used to it. You're sweating and your bra's trapping the sweat. I can give you some cream if you want but your best bet is to get some calamine lotion from the store. It's cheaper. And don't wear a bra for a few days until it's cleared up.”

“As simple as that?” asked Lucy. “I thought it might be insect bites or a reaction to the bore water or something.”

“It's possible it's a reaction to the water,” said Fay as Lucy put her blouse back on, “but unlikely. If it was you'd be getting rashes everywhere. Do you have any sports bras?”

“Yes, but not with me,” said Lucy. “I left most of my things down in Melbourne. I wasn't planning on going to a gym while I was here.”

“They're designed to absorb sweat,” said Fay. “Still, not to worry. As I said, don't wear a bra for a while and when you do, put some tissues underneath. They'll help. And wash your bras frequently. Old sweat can build up and make things worse.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy. She frowned, wondering if Fay thought she didn't wash her clothes enough but Fay didn't notice as she was busily typing.

“Right then,” she said, abandoning the computer. “Anything else?”

“No,” said Lucy. “So, ahh, that's that, yeah? Calamine and no bra?”

“Wish everything in life was as easy,” said Fay with a grin. “Use the calamine as often as you like. It'll stop the itching as well.”

“Great,” said Lucy, stuffing her bra into her bag. “Well, I'll go and get some.”

“And put it on with cotton wool or a tissue,” said Fay. “Don't use your fingers. Don't want an infection, do we.”

“Well, no,” said Lucy. “Umm, thanks.” She hesitated a moment then said “Goodbye” and left.

“Should have thought of that myself,” she thought as the heat hit her again. “Jesus, I wonder what it must have been like back in the 1800s with all those heavy woollen suits and thick dresses and petticoats. I wonder if they had calamine lotion then?”

She crossed the road to go to the General Store and a truckie standing beside his truck glanced at her then turned to stare with a leering expression on his face.

“Bugger,” thought Lucy and shifted her shoulder bag around to the front. “Maybe I should wear a thicker shirt, like Riley.”

“G'day Luce,” said Cassie, as Lucy went into the store. She glanced at Lucy's chest as the air conditioning took effect and raised an eyebrow.

“Hi,” said Lucy, shifting her bag around even further. “Have you got any calamine lotion?”

“Got a heat rash, have you?” asked Cassie. “I get that between my legs. Itches something chronic, it does.”

“Oh,” said Lucy, startled. “And some cotton wool.”

“Down the medicines aisle,” said Cassie. “It's the chafing, see.”

“What is?” asked Lucy, looking around for the medicines aisle.

"Me rash," said Cassie. "Mum says to wear some of her Lycra pants but they make me legs sweat worse."

"Oh, right," said Lucy. "Umm, medicine aisle, OK."

"Top shelf," said Cassie. "Beside the condoms."

"Of course," said Lucy, raising an eyebrow. "Where else."

Cassie grinned. "So yous going out with Mac, eh?"

"No," said Lucy, a little frostily. "I said I might go to the show in Charleville with him but that's all. I'm certainly not going out with him."

"Oh right," said Cassie. "Figured you might be getting some condoms too but I guess not."

"No," said Lucy, frowning. "Definitely not." She strode off to the medicines aisle.

"Got packs of twelve, an' all," called Cassie after her. Lucy ignored her.

"Best get a big bottle," she thought when she found the calamine lotion. "And a big bag of cotton wool balls."

"\$18.95," said Cassie, ringing up the items on the till. "So, what, you going camping with him or is he shouting a room?"

"What do you mean?" asked Lucy, tapping her card on the machine.

"Mac," said Cassie. "You'll be there overnight. Maybe two if yous making a thing of it."

"I'm sorry?" asked Lucy. "Why would we stay overnight?"

"Charleville's four or five hours away," said Cassie. "Mac won't want to be driving back in the middle of the night. Not after he's had a few."

“Ahh, I didn't think of that,” said Lucy, wondering why she hadn't. “No, I'll probably drive back myself. For sure I'm not spending the night with him.”

“Oh yeah?” said Cassie. She sniggered.

“Definitely not,” said Lucy firmly. “Catch you later.” She picked up the lotion and the cotton wool and left.

“This needs some thinking about,” she muttered, walking back to her car which was parked outside the Medical Centre. The truckie had gone but an older man filling his SUV with diesel watched her surreptitiously as she walked past the service station.

She drove home and made liberal use of the calamine lotion before turning on her laptop and Googling 'Charleville Show'. Google gave her the show's website and she spent a few minutes reading through it.

“Actually, it does look interesting,” she thought, “and Fay's right. If I'm going to do a decent job of the town's history I need to look at more than just the family and the growth of businesses. Leisure time and recreation are a factor as well and will help round out the story.”

She sighed and wondered what to do about Mac. After all, he'd be bound to insist they went in his ute rather than her little Yaris and she didn't think he'd be too pleased about letting her drive it back to Helene Creek in the middle of the night.

“I'm not too sure I'd want to drive the Yaris back in the night either,” she thought. “Bound to be a lot of kangaroos and whatever on the road. Maybe I should get a room?”

She went back to Google and found there were several pubs with rooms in Charleville and, after making several phone calls, booked what sounded like the last room available. It was, as one publican happily informed her, “show week and Charleville'll be heaving”.

“Looks like I've committed myself to going,” she muttered, sitting back. “I'll need to make it clear to Mac that he's not sharing the room with me though.”

She glanced at the time and, since it was only early afternoon, decided to drop round to see Raylene. If Mac was there she could tell him about the booking. That way he'd have plenty of time to make his own arrangements.

“Good,” she said with a decisive nod. “And if he isn't there I can leave a message with his mum. It's purely a research trip, nothing more.”

She applied some more calamine lotion, even though the itching had died away, and headed out again. She decided to drive despite Raylene's house being only a couple of hundred metres away.

“Come in,” called a strong woman's voice when Lucy knocked on the screen door.

Lucy pushed the door open and stepped inside. The big ceiling fan was turning on what seemed to be its lowest setting.

“Hello?” called Lucy.

“Heya,” said Raylene, emerging from the kitchen with a floured apron on. “Oh, you're, umm, Lacy, aren't you?”

“Lucy,” said Lucy. “Are you Raylene? Fay at the Medical Centre said it would be OK to drop by.”

“Yes, I'm Raylene,” said Raylene. “If you're here to see Mac he's not here. He's gone back to the station.”

“Ahh,” said Lucy. “I did want to have a word with him but I'm actually here to see you.”

“To see me?” said Raylene, looking puzzled. “Why would you want to see me?”

“Mac said you had some old medical equipment,” said Lucy. “From the days before there was a Medical Centre here.”

Raylene just stared at her for a few moments then slapped her head, dislodging a small cloud of flour dust from her hand.

“Of course,” she said happily. “You’re that Lacy! I should have realised.”

“Lucy,” said Lucy.

“Fancy a cuppa?” asked Raylene. “I’m just making some bread then I’ll put the kettle on. Come in, come in.”

She disappeared back into the kitchen and Lucy followed. Raylene started to knead a huge ball of dough.

“Kettle’s over there,” she said, nodding to the end of the bench top, “if you want to make a start.”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” said Lucy and hurried over. “That looks like a lot of bread.”

“Yeah,” said Raylene, tossing the lump over and driving her fists into it again. “I do enough for a couple of weeks and freeze it. This’ll do four loaves.”

“Good idea,” said Lucy, filling the kettle to about half way. “Shall I make the tea?”

“Would you?” asked Raylene, pounding away. “Mugs are in the cupboard.”

“Just us?” asked Lucy, “or will anyone else be having some?”

“Just us,” said Raylene. “So you’re the one who’s writing that book, aren’t you?”

“That’s right,” said Lucy. “I’m a historian.”

“Which explains why you want to see my little collection,” said Raylene. She paused to wipe some sweat from her forehead with a cloth then resumed her kneading. “Makes sense. I should’ve realised when Mac told me he’d met you. So, you’re off to the Show with him, are you?”

“Yes,” said Lucy. “Actually that's what I wanted to see him about. To confirm I'm going and to tell him I've booked myself a room in a pub but he'll have to make his own arrangements for the night. Will you be seeing him again before the Show?”

“Doubt it,” said Raylene. “He only comes up here when he's got some time off and he most likely won't be back for a couple of months or so.”

“Ahh,” said Lucy. “So how can I get a message through to him?”

“Gina at the radio station's your best bet,” said Raylene. She stopped and pressed her thumb in the dough. “I wouldn't bother though. He seems to think you're going anyway. Yeah, that should be enough.”

“Ahh,” said Lucy. “But I need to tell him about the sleeping arrangements.”

“He can sleep in the back of his ute,” said Raylene, picking up a sharp looking carving knife. She grinned at Lucy then deftly cut the dough into four roughly equal pieces. “He usually does when he's off somewhere.”

“Oh right,” said Lucy, spotting a jar of tea bags. She took out two and opened an eye-level cupboard door in search of mugs.

“Other one,” said Raylene, patting the four lumps into vague hemispheres. She covered them with cloths then started to wash her hands. “Milk's in the fridge and sugar's in the other jar. Two for me.”

“Got it,” said Lucy and busied herself with making the tea.

“Beautiful,” said Raylene, removing her apron. “Let's go into the lounge.”

“Have you finished the bread then?” asked Lucy, glancing at the four cloth covered mounds.

“For now,” said Raylene. “You don't make bread then?”

“No,” said Lucy. “I’ve always got mine from the supermarket or a bakery.”

Raylene snorted.

“Home made’s much better,” she said. “Anyway, I’ll let it sit for an hour or so to rise then I’ll chuck it in the oven. Come on through.”

“Let it rise?” asked Lucy, following with the tea mugs.

“Yes,” said Raylene. “That way it gets aerated otherwise it’ll just end up a heavy solid lump. Sit down, sit down.”

“Right, said Lucy, dismissing bread from her mind. Aerating bread was incidental to why she was there. “Tell me about your collection.”

“Ahh,” said Raylene. “I came here fresh out of nursing college just when the medical centre was being built and they were looking for staff.”

“When was this?” asked Lucy, getting her phone out. “Do you mind if I record this?”

“Not at all, sweetie,” said Raylene. “Ohh, 22 years ago now. Back in 2002.”

“Really?” asked Lucy in surprise. “What did they do about healthcare before that then?”

“That’s what I wanted to know,” said Raylene. “Which is how I got interested in the Royal Flying Doctor Service. You’ve heard of them, yeah?”

Letter from the Bishop of Toowoomba to the Civic Council,
dated Monday 2nd December 1929

The Chairman,
Helene Creek Town Council,
Helene Creek,
Queensland.

Dear Sir,

As you may be aware, the Catholic churches and chapels of South Western Queensland, previously under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brisbane, were moved under the newly created Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba earlier this year. Regrettably some elements of the records pertaining to the Chapel of St Stephen in Helene Creek have been found to be missing.

In consequence, His Excellency The Bishop of Toowoomba has made several attempts to communicate with the Rev. Finley Roberts of the Chapel of St Stephen. As yet, no response has been forthcoming.

As the Chairman of the Helene Creek Town Council you are doubtless fully cognisant of the chapel and the Rev. Roberts. His Excellency would be most gratified if you would inform the Diocese of the correct address of Rev. Finley Roberts or, if he is no longer the priest in charge of the chapel, the name and address of his replacement.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Simon Balfour,
Executive Secretary to the Bishop,
Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba.

Letter from Thomas Kaufman to the Bishop of Toowoomba,
dated Thursday 19th December 1929

Mr Simon Balfour,
Executive Secretary to the Bishop,
Margaret Street,
Toowoomba,
Queensland.

Dear Mr Balfour,

Thank you for your letter of 2nd December regarding the Rev Finley Roberts and the Chapel of St Stephen.

Finley Roberts left Helene Creek the middle of 1899 and died overseas in 1900. He was replaced by the Rev Shannon McFarlane in July 1901. His address is:
14 Agatha Street
Helene Creek
Queensland.

I am sure the confusion has arisen because the chapel and Shannon McFarlane's house were previously in Virtue Street. In 1919 Virtue Street was renamed Agatha Street in honour of Agatha Kaufman, a nurse who died in the service of her country during the Great War. I expect that this change of the address got lost somewhere.

Yours faithfully

Thomas Kaufman,
Chairman,
Helene Creek Civic Council.

Chapter Twenty Three

“Of course!” said Lucy. “I’ve heard of them, although I’ve never used them. I’ve always lived in cities.”

“Oh they were absolutely vital in rural areas,” said Raylene. “Still are, of course.”

“Really?” asked Lucy. “I thought we had lots of doctors and hospitals and things all over the place nowadays.”

“God no,” said Raylene. “Far too expensive to have a doctor for a small community like Helene Creek and there’s a lot of properties that are a long way from any town. Whenever we get a serious medical problem, which isn’t often fortunately, the RFDS sends a plane to take the patient to Charleville. One time a fencers out at the Dillinger’s place broke his back and couldn’t be moved so they flew in a doctor. That was, ohh, eight or nine years ago.”

“Jesus,” said Lucy, pulling a face. “What happened to him?”

“The doctor was able to stabilise the man sufficiently then they flew him straight to Brisbane,” said Raylene. “I heard the man got a job as a tractor salesman when he recovered since he obviously couldn’t go back to being a fencer after that.”

“Well, no, I can imagine,” said Lucy. “So, Mac said you had some old ...”

“And you know Helene Creek was involved in the creation of the RFDS?” asked Raylene.

“No, I didn’t know that,” said Lucy. “I wouldn’t have thought Helene Creek had enough influence. Tell me more.”

“Well, you’re right, of course,” said Raylene, sipping her tea. “No, it all started down in Victoria when the Presbyterian Church got Reverend John Flynn to look into the needs of people living in the outback and as a result an experimental group called the Aerial Medical Service was set up in Queensland in 1928 and that service became the Royal

Flying Doctor Service.”

“So the experiment was carried out in Helene Creek?” asked Lucy.

“Oh God no,” said Raylene with a laugh. “It was set up over in Cloncurry but there was a nasty incident in Helene Creek which showed there was a desperate need for something like that.”

“So what happened?” asked Lucy.

“Back in 1919, a stockman called Frank Maseby down at the Weston station was thrown by his horse,” said Raylene. “He was in his forties so he'd have been a tough bugger. No one knows whether he landed on a rock or the horse kicked him but he severely ruptured his abdominal muscles and burst his bowels. They found him the next day, still alive, so they dumped him in the back of a car and drove a hundred miles or so cross country to the Mercers' sheep station. They had no idea what to do so they drove him up here to Helene Creek and took him to the pub.”

“Surely they didn't think all he needed was a stiff drink?” exclaimed Lucy, horrified. “A burst bowel? He must have been in agony.”

“I would think so,” said Raylene. “No, the landlord of the pub had been a stretcher bearer in the War so they probably thought he knew about these things.”

“A stretcher bearer?” said Lucy, leaning forward. “Would a stretcher bearer know anything about burst bowels?”

“Oh I doubt it,” said Raylene. “Mind you he'd probably have seen some very nasty injuries on the battlefield but he wouldn't have known what to do about them. Anyway, it seems Jack Merchant, the publican, had some good sense and a strong stomach.”

“So what did he do?” asked Lucy, fascinated.

“He got the Telegraph Office to send a message to a hospital in Brisbane,” said Raylene. “The Telegraph Office was just over the creek from the pub, you see and ...”

"I know where the Telegraph Office was," said Lucy. "So what did they do? Send a plane?"

"There wasn't the RFDS back then," said Raylene. "That's what they'd do now but back then one of the surgeons at the hospital sent instructions on what to do and Jack at the pub operated on Frank's abdomen and bowel."

"You are joking!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Absolutely not," said Raylene. "Apparently Jack's son ran up and down between the Telegraph Office and the pub relaying the messages. It would all have been done in Morse code back then as well."

"But the pub wouldn't have had any anaesthetics or surgical equipment or anything," said Lucy, aghast.

"Apparently they tied Frank down on the bar with some rope," said Raylene, rather ghoulishly, "then poured whisky down his throat until he passed out."

"That wouldn't have done much good for his bowels," commented Lucy.

"Would have been better than beer," said Raylene drily. "Anyway, the surgeon in Brisbane sent instructions and Jack carried out the operation using the pub's cooking knives."

"Oh my word!" exclaimed Lucy, flopping back in her chair and staring at Raylene.

"Yes," said Raylene. "You can't really imagine it, can you. Jack slits Frank's belly open with a fairly blunt knife then stands back and says 'now what do I do?'. His son runs over to the Telegraph and they tap out dit-dit-dah-dit-dah to Brisbane then the reply comes back after a while saying 'slice through the anterior muscles of the abdomen to reveal the bowel' and the boy runs back and shouts the message to his dad who says 'how the hell will I know when I've found it?' and off the boy goes again. God alone knows how they managed although Jack

probably used his wife's needles and thread to stitch Frank up afterwards. The bar must have been pretty messy afterwards as well. Blood everywhere I should imagine."

"Jesus," muttered Lucy, feeling a little sick. "And Frank survived all this?"

"Well, he survived the operation," said Raylene cheerfully. "The trouble is he went back to work too soon and burst all the stitches. When they found him again he was dead.

"Jesus," said Lucy.

"And that's why we now have the RFDS," said Raylene, finishing the last of her tea. "Can't leave everything to publicans."

"I can't imagine how that man even survived the cross country driving with a burst bowel and ruptured abdomen," said Lucy, "let alone an operation like that."

"Well, they were tough those stockmen," said Raylene. "Had to be in them days. Frank was also lucky. He was found in time, at least the first time. A lot of them weren't since they didn't have radios and helicopters like they do now."

"What about infections?" asked Lucy, still thinking about Frank and his bowels. "A pub's no operating theatre."

"True, but alcohol's an antiseptic," said Raylene.

"Well, I guess," said Lucy. "I wonder how many drinks Jack needed before he started."

"Oh, I don't imagine he'd have been that bothered," said Raylene. "After all, they all did their own slaughtering back then. None of this ready wrapped meat from the supermarket. If you wanted chicken for dinner you went out the back and killed and gutted one."

"Yuk," said Lucy, screwing up her nose. "I don't think I could do that."

“Of course you could,” said Raylene. “Especially if you’d been brought up that way. So, you wanted to see my collection?”

“Actually. before we do that,” said Lucy, “umm, do you have any sources for what you were just telling me about Frank and Jack?”

“Sources?” asked Raylene with a frown. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I’m guessing you weren’t there in the pub while it was happening,” said Lucy, “since it was over a hundred years ago so you couldn’t have been an eye witness. How did you hear about it?”

“Oh,” said Raylene, looking startled. “You know, I’m not entirely sure. Does it matter?”

“It does if I’m going to include it in my book,” said Lucy. “There needs to be some sort of evidence as to the authenticity of the story otherwise it’s just a story and might not be true.”

“Hmm,” said Raylene, frowning. “Well I certainly didn’t make it up. I’m pretty sure someone with the RFDS told me.”

“Do you remember who?” asked Lucy. “I might then be able to find out where they got it from and then I can include it in my book and put in a reference. Otherwise, if I include the story I’ll have to put it down as hearsay, an anecdote.”

“I’ll have a think about it,” said Raylene, pursing her lips.

“Thanks,” said Lucy, realising that Raylene seemed a little affronted. “Are you still OK to talk or would you prefer to leave it to another time?”

“Oh no no no,” said Raylene, getting up. “Come out to the shed. You’ll be interested I’m sure.”

“Great,” said Lucy, grabbing her phone and following.

Raylene took her out to a small shed that wouldn’t have looked out of place in a suburban back yard and swung open the door to reveal a

couple of metal racks of shelving. The various things on the shelving were covered with pieces of sacking.

“What do you think of this?” asked Raylene, pulling the sacking off one of the objects.

“Looks like an old radio,” said Lucy, bending over to get a closer look. “I’ve seen things like that in old war movies. What’s that thing beside it? Looks like something off a bicycle.”

“It’s one of the early radio sets developed for the RFDS,” said Raylene proudly. “It was developed by Hermann Traeger for use in the outback when they didn’t have electricity. That bit is a generator. What you did was sit in front of the radio with the pedal part on the floor and you used your feet to generate the power to make and receive signals.”

“Wow!” said Lucy. “So all the time you were talking you were pedalling away like you were on a bike?”

“That’s right,” said Raylene. “And when receiving. If there wasn’t any power you couldn’t receive either.”

“Must have made the conversations a bit breathless,” said Lucy. “Why didn’t they use batteries?”

“No way of charging them,” said Raylene. “Besides, it’s not like you were cycling uphill or anything and this way the battery wouldn’t run out in the middle of something important.”

“Well, true,” said Lucy, pushing one of the pedals experimentally. “Does it still work?”

“Gina from the radio station came over and played with it,” said Raylene. “She said it still works fine although it produced a lot of static as the generator isn’t properly damped.”

“Impressive,” said Lucy, peering behind the radio. “So who would have used one of these? A hospital?”

“Oh my word no,” said Raylene. “The hospitals and the RFDS bases had big permanent generators. These were for the homesteads. Virtually every house would have had one.”

“That makes sense,” said Lucy. “Can I take a picture?”

“Sure,” said Raylene. “I’ll just tidy it up a little. Are you going to put it in your book?”

“Actually,” said Lucy slowly as she took a photo with her phone, “if I do it might be an idea to set it up properly and have someone in the picture using the pedals. Where did you get this?”

“It used to be at the Birchall property,” said Raylene. “They had a clear out of one of the sheds. I dare say they hadn’t used it for a while since it was pretty filthy. I cleaned it up and Gina replaced the cables to the generator.”

“Awesome,” said Lucy, easing the sacking off another piece of equipment beside the radio set. “What’s this?”

“I don’t really know,” said Raylene. “It know it’s medical because it says Haemorrhoid Brazer in the label but I don’t know how it works but it’s quite old. The label says 1921.”

“Haemorrhoids?” said Lucy, reluctantly picking it up. “It looks like a small metal thermos with a long tube on it. How do you treat haemorrhoids with it?”

“There are some perforations in the end of the tube,” said Raylene, pointing. “I’m guessing you put warm or hot medication or pain relief in the canister part then inserted the tube up the rectum so the medication targeted the specific location of the haemorrhoid but I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“So this would have been for home use?” asked Lucy, putting the contraption back on the shelf.

“I would think so,” said Raylene. “A hospital would just surgically remove the haemorrhoid. I suspect it was for use by a chronic sufferer

who was unable to get to a surgery.”

“Maybe it was for treating cattle,” said Lucy, touching the perforated end of the tube.

“Do cattle get haemorrhoids?” asked Raylene, “and would anyone actually care?”

“I s'pose not,” said Lucy.

“This, on the other hand, did come from a hospital,” said Raylene, pulling a dark wood box from the bottom shelf and resting it on the floor. “It's a diathermy electrocoagulator, also from the 1920s. I got it from the hospital where I did my training.”

She lifted the lid to reveal a mass of switches, knobs and dials.

“A what?” asked Lucy.

“A diathermy electrocoagulator,” said Raylene. “It's for coagulating the blood during an operation so the surgeon can see what he's doing more easily. They're used all the time now but they're smaller and lighter.”

“I never knew that!” exclaimed Lucy. “I thought they just used suction like at the dentist. I bet Jack at the pub could have done with one.”

“Well, yes,” said Raylene, “although he wouldn't have had the electricity to use it.”

“They could have rigged up one of those pedal things from the radio,” said Lucy, pointing to the radio set. “Jack could have pedalled while cutting Frank open.”

“You have a strange sense of humour, Lucy,” said Raylene disapprovingly, putting the electrocoagulator back on its shelf. “Now this I think you will be impressed by. It dates back to March 1940 and came from a property over near the border which was flooded in 1941 and the owners abandoned the place.”

“What is it?” asked Lucy.

Raylene lifted a cloth bundle from the top of a large heavy box that sat on the bottom shelf of the other rack. She put it on another shelf then pulled box onto the floor.

“An original RFDS medicine chest,” said Raylene proudly. “Possibly even one of the very first batch produced and complete with all the medicines.”

“Awesome!” said Lucy, squatting down to look as Raylene lifted the lid. “So, what, each aeroplane carried one of these?”

“No,” said Raylene, lifting out one of the three neatly fitting trays. “These were given to homesteads so that when there was a medical problem they could radio in and a doctor would tell them which medicines to take. See, each packet is numbered so there wouldn't be any confusion with the technical names.”

“So the doctor would say 'take three of number 7 and call me in the morning?’” asked Lucy, picking up a packet of Doxycycline Hydrochloride tablets which was, incidentally, labelled 400D.

“More or less,” said Raylene. “It was much easier and less prone to error than using the pharmaceutical names.”

“That was a pretty good idea,” said Lucy. “What happened if they ran out?”

“They just ordered some more,” said Raylene, taking a couple of fading printed sheets from an envelope that had sat on top of the tray. “These are the order forms.”

“Wow, cool,” said Lucy, inspecting the forms. “That's a lot of medicines. Were they expensive?”

“Relatively,” said Raylene. “I don't know the prices back then but the program was subsidised so eligible householders got them free of charge.”

“Who wouldn't have been eligible?” asked Lucy, picking through the contents of the box.

“Ohh businesses,” said Raylene, “houses that were close to centres, things like that.”

“Oh, right,” said Lucy, picking up a packet labelled '188D Morphine Sulphate Ampoules'. “And they've got expiry dates. What does the D stand for?”

“Anything with a D should only be taken on the orders of a doctor,” said Raylene. “Other things, like Codeine, you could take whenever you wanted.”

“Makes sense,” said Lucy. “That is seriously impressive. Why did they stop doing these chests?”

“They didn't,” said Raylene. “They're still in use today, except they're made from plastic now, not hardwood.”

“Interesting,” said Lucy, picking up the cloth bundle. “This is all fascinating. I hadn't realised. What's this?”

“Oh just an old book,” said Raylene, pushing the chest back on the shelf. “It's a medical book of some sort but it's in German. I didn't have the heart to throw it out.”

Letter from the Bishop of Toowoomba to the Civic Council,
dated Friday 5th September 1930

Mr Thomas Kaufman,
Chairman,
Helene Creek Civic Council,
Helene Creek,
Queensland.

Dear Mr Kaufman,

Thank you for your letter of 19th December last year.

We have written to the Rev Shannon McFarlane on three occasions but have not received any communication from him.

I am also instructed by His Excellency to inform you that, following an exhaustive search, no record can be found of any person ordained under the name of Shannon McFarlane within any Ministry in Australia. Furthermore, no record can be found of the appointment of any priest to the Chapel of St Stephen in 1900 or any subsequent year. Moreover, there is no record of the receipt of any tithe since the third quarter of 1899.

His Excellency would be most appreciative if you could advise the Rev Shannon McFarlane to communicate with this office immediately. Should no communication be forthcoming His Excellency may feel the situation requires the attendance of an investigating priest.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Simon Balfour,
Executive Secretary to the Bishop,
Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba.

Chapter Twenty Four

“Heya,” exclaimed Riley, staggering in through the screen door with two bags of shopping in her hands and a box under her arm. “Give us a hand, would ya?” She still had her crash helmet on and her voice was indistinct but loud in compensation.

“Sure,” said Lucy jumping up from the floor of the lounge. She made her way around the sacks on the floor and took the box.

“Ta,” said Riley and lurched towards the kitchen.

Lucy hesitated, torn between helping Riley put away the food and seeing if the box contained her new boots. The boots won and she ripped the lid off the box. A pair of nice, shiny, brand new black boots with elasticated sides and rugged soles stared up at her.

“Awesome!” she muttered and kicked off her thongs to try them on. They fitted reasonably well and Lucy walked around a little experimentally. They were fairly comfortable as well although a pair of thick socks would help.

“Thanks for the boots,” called Lucy. “How much do I owe you?”

“Sixty bucks,” said Riley, appearing in the doorway, helmet-less, with a shrink-wrapped lasagne in her hand. “Cheapest they had in K-Mart with steel caps. Fit OK do they?”

“They’re perfect,” said Lucy, admiring them on her feet. “I’ll just get my bag, OK.”

“So what’s all this then?” asked Riley, noticing the sacks all over the living room floor.

“Council archives,” said Lucy, clumping across the wooden floor. “Sheila rang this morning to say she was back from Sydney. Her daughter Estelle’s had her baby and everything is fine so she didn’t stay. Three point four kilos apparently.”

“Great,” said Riley, peering inside one of the sacks. “So why’re all the

archives here?”

“Ahh, well,” said Lucy, bending to take off her boots. “I asked if I could go through them and Sheila said it was fine and she'd show them to me when she got back. Apparently 3 or 4 years ago there was a flood and the outhouse where they kept the Council records nearly got swamped. They chucked everything in some empty feed sacks and dumped them in a chicken coup under a tarpaulin which is why they're a bit smelly but the tarp was disgusting. They've sat there ever since and no one's bothered to sort them out. I didn't fancy sitting in a mucky coup for days while I went through them so I asked if I could bring them here. Sheila didn't mind.” She looked around for her thongs. “Umm, do you? I didn't think you would.”

“Makes no difference to me,” said Riley, “although we'd best leave the windows open. You think it'll take days to go through them?”

“I was having a look when you got back,” said Lucy. “They're a mess. Everything just got shoved in all higgledy piggledy and most of the files and folders have come apart. The first thing I have to do is get them all back in order.”

“Good luck to you,” said Riley. “I got a lasagne for dinner, should be enough for two days. That OK?”

“Perfect,” said Lucy. “So how's Paul? His rabies cleared up all right?”

“It wasn't rabies,” said Riley, giving up on the bags of shopping in the kitchen. She edged around a couple of sacks to get to one of the easy chairs and sat down to roll a cigarette. “It was some sort of mange but his hands have all cleared up. So how did it go at ...?”

“Oh, and you've had your hair done!” exclaimed Lucy, looking properly at her for the first time. “You've got a fringe!”

“Yeah,” said Riley. She pulled off the elastic band holding her hair in a ponytail, tousled her hair then combed her fringe with her fingers. “I fancied a change. Had a few inches taken off the length as well. What do you think?”

"I think it really suits you," said Lucy, studying her. "Your hair frames your face nicely now it isn't so long and ... have you changed the colour?"

"Yeah," said Riley, pulling a handful of hair over to one side. "A few shades blonder. I was bored with being mousy."

"You weren't mousy," said Lucy. "Just light brown."

"Ahh, whatever," said Riley. "Now I'm blonde," and she shook her head so her hair flew around. "Be easier shorter as well. Long hair and bikes don't mix. It gets all knotted in the wind. So how'd it go Saturday? At the show?" She lit her ciggie and looked at Lucy expectantly.

"Not too good," admitted Lucy. "I lost my bets on the first two races so I stopped and watched the shearing contest instead which was interesting but I don't know enough about shearing to appreciate the subtleties. Then Mac started drinking and it all went to shit."

"Oh Jesus!" exclaimed Riley. "Did he get pissed?"

"I don't know," said Lucy. "He did get into a fight with someone who he said was looking at me and we had a row about that after a couple of guys pulled him off and he'd calmed down a bit."

"I bet he was happy with that," said Riley, her eyes narrowed. "What was the row about?"

"What do you think?" said Lucy. "I told him I had every right to talk to anyone I wanted and it was nothing to do with him." She frowned at the memory which was still fresh in her mind.

"What did he say to that?" asked Riley, not noticing her ciggie had gone out.

"He said not while I was going out with him, I wasn't," said Lucy. "So I told him I wasn't his property and we weren't even going out. That was when I stormed off."

“So what did he do?” asked Riley, puffing on her ciggie. She frowned and re-lit it.

“He grabbed my arm and tried to pull me back,” said Lucy. “So I slapped his face.”

“Oh God,” exclaimed Riley, jerking forward a little. “He didn't hit you, did he?”

“No,” said Lucy. “I thought he was going to but he didn't. Someone bumped into him so he turned and swore at them and I left.”

“Where'd you go?” asked Riley, lighting her ciggie again as it had gone out again.

“Back to the pub,” said Lucy. “I sat in my room for a while with the door locked in case he came after me but he didn't, fortunately.”

“That was lucky,” said Riley. “I don't know him but some of the ringers can have a bit of a temper.”

“What was weird though,” said Lucy, “was that he came to get me in the morning to take me home. It was like nothing had happened.”

“So you let him bring you back?” asked Riley.

“Didn't have much choice,” said Lucy. “I phoned for a taxi but that was going to cost, like, a thousand bucks or something and I knew you were in Longreach so you couldn't come and get me.”

“I would have if you'd phoned,” said Riley. “Paul's got a helmet you could have used. He'd probably have let me use his ute as well. Hell, he'd probably have insisted on coming too in case of trouble.”

“Well, thank you,” said Lucy. “And thank Paul for me as well but it turned out OK in the end. We sat in silence for most of the way then he said there's some ute muster somewhere and we could go if I liked. I told him no way did I ever want to go out with him again.”

“Brave,” said Riley, “seeing as how you were alone with him in his

ute.”

“We were only a couple of K outside Helene Creek,” said Lucy. “I could’ve walked from there.”

“Well, OK,” said Riley. She tossed her butt into her ashtray. “So long as you’re safe.”

“Yeah, all good,” said Lucy. “I was a bit worried though. Still, it wasn’t a total disaster.” She grinned.

“Oh yeah?” asked Riley, her eyebrows going up. “How’d you mean?”

“All this happened in the afternoon,” said Lucy. “Never did get to go to the dance. But after sitting in my room for a couple of hours I got hungry so I went down to the bar to see if they had anything to eat.”

“Uh huh,” said Riley slowly, watching Lucy intently. “So, ah, was he cute?”

“Was who cute?” asked Lucy, trying to look innocent.

“The guy you met in the bar,” said Riley.

“Yeah,” said Lucy, grinning. “He was.”

“Please tell me he wasn’t another ringer,” said Riley, now perched on the edge of the chair and looking concerned.

“No, he’s a lecturer in Engineering and Remedial Maths at the TAFE in Charleville,” said Lucy. “We both ordered sausages and mash and laughed about it then ended up chatting while we ate.”

“Then he went home to his wife?” asked Riley.

“He’s not married,” said Lucy. “He’s 28 and has lived in Charleville for two years although he’s from Brisbane originally and he’s a Pisces. No, we stayed chatting until the bar closed. Then he went home. He lives alone with two kelpies and hasn’t had a girlfriend since he left Brisbane.”

“A Pisces and kelpies,” said Riley with a laugh. “He’s a keeper all right. You going to see him again? What’s his name?”

“Michael,” said Lucy. “Michael Helmscott and I don’t know. We swapped phone numbers, email addresses and Facebook details so maybe. If he gets in touch anyway. His kelpies are called Sheba and Monty by the way. He showed me their pictures on his phone. They’re lovely.”

“They’re kelpies,” said Riley. “Great dogs, kelpies. Very loyal. Hey, I’m impressed hon. Seriously impressed. You went out with Mac and came back with Michael. Didn’t think you had it in you. Way to go Luce!”

“Thanks,” said Lucy, blushing a little. “I’m not usually like that though.”

“I know,” said Riley, laughing. “That’s why I’m impressed. Looks like I missed all the excitement. Hey ho, s’pose I’d better get on with the shopping. It won’t put itself away.”

“I’ll give you a hand,” said Lucy. “I’ll just wash since I’ve been touching those sacks.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” said Riley, getting up and heading for the kitchen. “Only take a few moments. What’s that?” She paused by the table and picked up a book. “Found another old book, have you? That reminds me, I got those acid free sheets you wanted. Found them in an art supply shop.”

“Oh, awesome, thanks,” said Lucy, going over to the table. “Yeah, I went round to see Raylene the nurse on Friday. She’s got a load of old medical equipment and things in her shed as well as this.”

“What is it?” asked Riley, flicking through the pages.

“It’s Helene’s book of household remedies,” said Lucy. “Hausmedizin oder Freund des armen Mannes which means House Medicine or Friend of the Poor Man by Gustav Zeitler. It was published in Vienna in 1861.”

“So how do you know it was Helene's?” asked Riley, looking at the battered and broken spine.

“There's an inscription in the front,” said Lucy, gently taking the book from Riley to show her. “It was a wedding gift from her uncle Heinrich. It says something along the lines of 'To my dear Helene on your wedding day. May this handbook aid you with caring for your new family.' and it's dated 1st June 1867 which is probably the day she married Friedrich. That ties in with her first child, Klaus, who was born in early March 1868.”

“I'm impressed it's survived this long,” said Riley, touching the cover, “seeing as how she probably used it a lot. Is that a bloodstain, do you think?”

“Quite possibly,” said Lucy. “There's a lot of stains throughout and several of the pages are torn.”

“So what does this say?” asked Riley, pointing to the printing on the title page under the title. Only part of it was affected by the stain but it was still readable.

“In the hours of affliction, pain, and sickness,” said Lucy, translating the smaller print, “this book points out, in plainest language, free from doctor's terms, the diseases of men, women, and children and the latest and most approved means used in their cure and is expressly written for the benefit of families. It also contains descriptions of the medicinal roots and herbs and how they are to be used in the cure of diseases, arranged on a new and simple plan by which the practice of medicine is reduced to principles of common sense.”

“And is it a simple plan, nicely arranged?” asked Riley.

“I don't know,” said Lucy. “Raylene let me borrow it but I haven't had time to go through it properly yet.”

“OK,” said Riley. “So how did Raylene get her hands on it?”

“She said it was sitting on a bookshelf up at the Homestead,” said

Lucy, carefully putting the book back on the table. "She saw it when she went there to introduce herself when she started at the Medical Centre. They said she could keep it since no one there could understand German."

"But aren't they all Austrians?" asked Riley.

"No, they're Australians," said Lucy. "OK it all started with Helene and Friedrich as Austrian immigrants and I would expect their children all grew up speaking German and English but I doubt their grandchildren would have. Certainly no one in the next generation would have and it's not as though any of them would have learnt German at school since there wasn't a school. They would have become Australianised fairly quickly as everyone around them would have been Australian. Any Austrian cultural characteristics would have died out after two or three generations. Actually David told me he thought they were originally German. He was surprised when I said they were Austrian. I suspect he based that on the name Kaufman rather than any family memories."

* * *

"Hey, did you know you're going to get a swimming pool?" asked Lucy, later that evening.

"Yeah," said Riley drowsily. She was half watching some show on the television and was slowly falling asleep. "They've been talking about it for a while ..." and she yawned, "... but no one can decide where to put it."

"According to this," said Lucy, waving a sheet of Civic Council Minutes from the previous year, "the Shire Council wants it out by the racecourse but the Civic Council want it closer in to town, beside the camping area."

"Oh yeah?" said Riley, yawning again. "What difference does it make?"

"Umm, David seems to think it'll be cheaper to build by the campsite as the piping from the bore will be a lot shorter," said Lucy, scanning the Minutes. "Lindy suggested they'd get more paying customers from

the campsite as well if it's nearer. No mention of when it might be built though. Could be in one of the later meetings. These documents are a mess."

"Not holding my breath," said Riley and yawned again. "Jesus this is rubbish. I don't know why I'm watching it."

"Then go to bed," said Lucy, taking another handful of documents from the sack she was working on.

The documents she'd already been through were in neat little piles around her, sorted by decade and year. The oldest so far was from the 1970s and was mainly concerned with finding a reliable contractor to cut the grass of the park and play area. A suggestion to fence the area and put in a couple of sheep had been considered and ultimately rejected.

"Will do in a minute," said Riley. "Just want to see how this ends."

"Why bother if it's crap?" asked Lucy, glancing at the document in her hand. She frowned and re-read it slowly. "Why would the Civil Council be writing to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba?"

"God knows," said Riley then laughed and pointed at the ceiling. "Ask him."

"Who?" asked Lucy, leafing through the other documents in the handful.

"God," said Riley.

"What?" asked Lucy, looking up in puzzlement.

"Forget it," said Riley. "So what you got there?"

"It's a letter from Thomas Kaufman," said Lucy, turning back to the document, "replying to the Diocese and giving the address of the Minister or whatever they're called."

"Oh," said Riley. "Didn't they know then? After all, he'd be one of

theirs.”

“You'd think so,” said Lucy, “but I haven't found their letter yet so I don't know why they wrote to the Council. Still, it's a pretty useful letter anyway.”

She put it down on the floor and got up to get her notebook.

“Oh yeah?” said Riley. She turned off the TV with the remote. “The end was crap too.”

“What did you expect?” asked Lucy, returning.

“So what's interesting about it?” asked Riley, twisting to look over at Lucy.

“Well, it gives me some idea of what happened to Lorna Kaufman and her husband,” said Lucy, jotting the details down. “They both left Helene Creek in 1899 and died the following year somewhere overseas.”

“That isn't much,” said Riley.

“You know,” said Lucy, staring into space and tapping her teeth with her pen, “I bet they were missionaries. Why else would a priest give up his parish and go overseas?”

“Maybe he'd been caught shagging sheep or something,” said Riley.

“Even if he had been,” said Lucy, looking down at the letter again, “why go overseas? Brisbane would have done or Sydney. Also this confirms something else.”

“What's that?” asked Riley, sitting up.

“Agatha Street was named after Agatha Kaufman,” said Lucy. “It was originally Virtue Street. That implies Edward and William Streets were also named after Edward Mercer and William Hickey who are on the War Memorial as well.”

“Fascinating,” said Riley, getting off the chair. “I’m going to bed. Night.”

“Ohh, good night,” said Lucy, distractedly. “So who was Shannon McFarlane, the new minister? Where did he come from and when did he leave? Was it him who deconsecrated the Chapel or was it someone else? Why did they do that anyway? Maybe that’s why the Diocese wrote to the Council, to warn them that they were shutting down the Chapel? And who the hell is William Hickey anyway? Why doesn’t he turn up anywhere except on the War Memorial? Why hasn’t the National Archives got back to me yet?”

Citation granting Award of the Military Medal to Pvt William Hickey
Thursday 17th November 1943⁴

To: Colonel Staverton
Commanding Officer 33 Infantry Battalion
Battalion HQ
Port Moresby

From: Capt John Pickles
C Coy, 2/33 Infantry Battalion

Sir

I write to appraise you of the actions of Pvt William Hickey, under my command, on 16 November 1943.

Cpl Mike Mitchell led a patrol consisting of Pvt William Hickey, Pvt Ewan Evans and a native Papuan tracker from base camp at ref 022 towards Kokoda. Approx 1 hour after dawn the tracker identified enemy activity at the log bridge at ref B39. Investigation led to the identification of two Japanese machine gun teams digging in, one at each end of the bridge. Mitchell lead an attack on the emplacement at the west end of the bridge, killing all four Japanese. Mitchell and Evans sustained injuries rendering both unable to walk. Hickey sustained injuries to his arm and side. The native tracker was killed in the attack. Showing great presence of mind Hickey threw the bolts of the machine gun and the rifles of the Japanese and those of Mitchell and Evans into the river. Observing that the 2nd Japanese machine gun group had completed their emplacement with full coverage of the log bridge, Hickey forded the river with Mitchell across his shoulders and dragging Evans. Hickey then returned to base camp, again carrying Mitchell and dragging Evans, through approx 1800 yards of jungle. At base camp, Hickey alerted me to the presence of the machine gun emplacement which was subsequently eliminated, thereby saving an inestimable number of lives as the bridge is in frequent use by C Coy.

John Pickles (Capt)
co C Coy

4 Note: The Military Medal is an Australian military award for bravery granted to NCOs and Other Ranks. It is the equivalent of the Military Cross which is awarded to commissioned officers only.

Chapter Twenty Five

“Heya,” said Lucy as Riley came up the steps of the verandah. “Didn’t expect you back for a while yet.”

“Yeah, no,” said Riley, shaking her hair loose from the effects of her crash helmet. “Had a mob of cattle on the road, ohh 15k out of town. Had to round ‘em up before any got hit by a truck.”

“But you did?” asked Lucy anxiously, visions of mangled cattle and trucks floating through her mind.

“Yeah, no probs,” said Riley. “By the time we fixed the fence it wasn’t worth starting anything else so Snorrie said to bugger off.”

“That’s good,” said Lucy. “I’ll put the kettle on.”

“Nah, I’ll do it,” said Riley. She sighed and propped herself against the verandah rail. “Oh yeah, nearly forgot. David’s coming round later. He said to let you know.”

“David?” said Lucy frowning. “David Kaufman?”

“Yeah,” said Riley. “He was on his way back from somewhere and pulled over to talk to Snorrie.”

“Why’s he coming round?” asked Lucy. “I’m going over to the homestead in a couple of days.”

“Buggered if I know,” said Riley, pushing herself off the rail. “Tea, coffee or a beer?”

“Oh tea, thanks,” said Lucy. “Hey I found out why this road is called Birtles Street.”

“Oh yeah?” asked Riley, pausing by the screen door.

“Well, in a manner of speaking anyway,” said Lucy. “I haven’t actually found out why it was named Birtles but I now know who Birtles is or was at least. I didn’t find anything in the Council records about why

they actually named the road after Birtles. Not that it really matters, I suppose, but I am curious and I daresay back then ...”

“Lucy, get to the point,” said Riley patiently. “Who is Birtles?”

“Francis Birtles,” said Lucy with an apologetic smile. “He was the first person to drive a car across Australia from west to east, back in 1912. Except he didn't which is a little confusing since he couldn't drive.”

“So who did drive?” asked Riley.

“The man he travelled with,” said Lucy. “I don't know who he was. Maybe he was paid to drive by Birtles which is why Birtles got the credit not the guy who actually drove. Anyway, they went from Perth to Sydney so it's at least possible that they went through Helene Creek which might explain why they named a street after him. Or perhaps it was to commemorate the achievement.”

“Or someone on the Council was a car enthusiast,” said Riley, pushing the screen door open.

“Or maybe that,” agreed Lucy. “Still, an interesting little snippet, don't you think?”

“Not really,” said Riley. “By the sound of it someone had already driven across the other way.”

“Good point,” said Lucy, frowning again. She turned back to her laptop and opened Google.

Riley laughed and disappeared inside the house.

“It was Harry Dutton and Murray Aunger,” said Lucy when she came back out with some tea and a cold beer.

“What was?” asked Riley.

“The first crossing of Australia by car,” said Lucy. “In 1908, except they went from Adelaide to Darwin.”

“So why not commemorate that?” asked Riley.

“I don't know,” said Lucy. “I daresay that would have meant naming two streets, although I suppose they could have named this road Dutton and Auger Street.”

“Maybe Birtles was born here,” said Riley, putting her bare feet on the rail.

“I think he was born in England,” said Lucy. “I suppose I'm going to have to dig deeper on this as well. Damn! I thought I'd nailed it.” She snorted.

“Does it really matter?” asked Riley.

“It could do,” said Lucy, a little defensively.

“Oh yeah?” asked Riley. “So a road was named after someone. What difference does it make?”

“It isn't the naming of the road that matters,” said Lucy. “It's more why it was done. Just suppose, maybe, that someone on the Council actually was a car enthusiast and got the name of the road changed to Birtles. Maybe, in years to come when a highway was being constructed out this way that person managed to get the route changed so it went through Helene Creek rather than, say, Longreach or somewhere else and bypassed the town. The difference between having and not having a highway could have a significant impact on how the town developed. It could be that without the highway the pub shut down through lack of business, other shops and services never opened and Helene Creek ended up more or less just another settlement of stockmen working the Station. Why things happened is what makes History interesting, not so much the events themselves, although usually they're quite interesting as well.”

“So you think that's what happened?” asked Riley, screwing up her nose.

“Nah, not really,” said Lucy. “Helene Creek was already on a stock route because of the Customs Point at Birdsville so the highway would

most likely have followed much the same route and the town was well established by the time the highway was constructed anyway. Still, if I can find out why Birtles was commemorated by a street name it might explain some other aspect of the town's development."

"Such as?" asked Riley.

"If I knew that I wouldn't need to find out," said Lucy. "That's why it's called research. Is that David's ute?"

"Looks like it," said Riley, glancing at the ute coming up William Street.

"I wonder why he's coming to see me," said Lucy, watching the ute turn the corner.

"You'll find out in a minute," said Riley as the ute pulled up and David got out.

"G'day," he called, half waving his hand.

"Hello David," called Lucy, going to the verandah rail. "Come on up."

He strode up the three steps and acknowledged Riley with a curt nod in her direction.

"Can I offer you some tea?" asked Lucy, "or a cold beer?"

"Oh a cold one'd be beaut," said David. "Thanks."

"I'll get it," said Riley, getting up. "You want to sit here or go inside?"

"This'll do," said David, going over to Riley's chair. "Won't be too long, I reckon. So, how's it going Lucy?"

"Actually there are a couple of stumbling blocks I wanted to talk to you about," said Lucy. "I was going to bring them up when I saw you on Friday."

"Oh yeah?" said David as Riley came back out with a beer and a

stool. "Thanks." She put the stool down and sat on it.

"One is this business of the priest," said Lucy. "You remember I mentioned him at our last meeting?"

"Yes," said David. "McFarlane or something. What about him?"

"Shannon McFarlane," said Lucy. "After our meeting I emailed the Diocese of Toowoomba to see what information they could give me and basically they told me to get lost. They have archives but they're only available to ecclesiastical scholars although they did confirm that the Chapel was deconsecrated as that's a matter of public record."

"So that's a dead end then?" asked David.

"Well, yes and no," said Lucy. "It all seems very strange to me. According to what little was in the Civic Council archives, the Diocese wrote asking what was going on, Thomas Kaufman wrote back giving them the details of the priest at the Chapel, the Diocese wrote back to say they've never heard of him and threatening an investigation and then silence. Then, three years later the Chapel was deconsecrated but there are no records other than what the Diocese has and they won't let me look at them."

"Well, if that's the way it is then that's that," said David with an air of finality.

"Well, perhaps" said Lucy. "Umm, it did occur to me that perhaps this Shannon McFarlane was actually a fraud of some sort so I spent a couple of days searching court archives and found something rather interesting. Just a sec."

She fiddled with her laptop for a few moments.

"Yes, here it is," she said. "In 1939 someone by the name of Shannon McFarlane was convicted in Cairns of attempting to defraud a church group. He was the right sort of age as well, as he'd have been 26 back in 1901."

"So you're saying the priest back then was a con man?" asked David,

frowning.

“No,” said Lucy. “I’m saying he might have been. The name and age could just be a coincidence, but it’s worth investigating further.”

“Why?” asked David.

“Well, there are a number of ramifications if that is the case,” said Lucy, “for the Kaufmans as a family as well as the town.”

“What do you mean, for the Kaufmans?” asked David, his frown deepening.

“Um, well, if it turns out that the two are the same,” said Lucy, starting to feel a little nervous, “then it would suggest that Leopold Kaufman appointed McFarlane as priest of St Stephen’s Chapel without the approval or agreement of the Diocese of Brisbane. Later, when the Diocese of Toowoomba took over and got in touch Thomas Kaufman went to talk to McFarlane who realised the game was up and did a runner. The lack of any mention of this in the Council records suggests that Thomas then tried to keep everything quiet. He might even have gone to Toowoomba to do a deal of some sort and that lead to the Chapel being deconsecrated.”

“Why on Earth would Thomas have wanted to do a deal?” said David irritably. His frown was turning into a scowl.

“Yeah,” said Lucy, her nervousness increasing. “Good question. Umm, what would it mean if it turned out the priest wasn’t a real priest?”

“Very little, I would imagine,” said David.

“Oh shit,” said Riley and David twisted to stare at her.

“Everyone who got married while he was the priest wasn’t properly married,” said Riley.

“Exactly,” said Lucy. “The same goes with christenings and funerals which could have a profound impact on the souls of the people in the town, not to mention the tithes.”

“What tithes?” asked David, staring at Lucy.

“I forget the exact amount,” she said, “but every Catholic has to pay a percentage of their income to the Church. If the priest was a con man then those tithes that were paid were, effectively, stolen. Now, Leopold presumably didn't know McFarlane was a con man but Thomas would have since the Diocese denied all knowledge of him and, because there seems to have been no formal investigation, it would suggest that Thomas was complicit in a cover-up.”

“How do you know there was no investigation?” demanded David. “You said the Diocese won't let you look in their archives.”

“I don't know,” said Lucy. “But there's absolutely nothing in the Council records, not even an acknowledgement of a final report or any provision of assistance for the investigators. It's the total silence that makes me suspicious.”

“But why would Thomas have done that?” asked Riley.

“Yes, bloody good point Riley,” said David. “Why would Thomas have done that? He was Chair of the Council, after all.”

“Exactly,” said Lucy. “He was Chair of the Council and I would imagine he didn't want any sort of scandal. I have no idea what happens when people are married or christened by a fake priest but it would have been a mess, both legally and theologically. There's also something else.”

David sighed. “What?”

“Don't forget Thomas came back from World War 1 to find his wife and child had died,” said Lucy. “I don't know what he went through during the war but when he came back he put all his wife's things in a trunk and hid it away, including her bible and prayer book. I wouldn't be surprised if his war experiences significantly affected his faith and the discovery of their deaths was the final straw and he lost his belief in God. If that's the case then it could be he was dismissive of the problems that arose when the fake priest was discovered and squashed the whole thing in contempt. He may even have recompensed the

Church for the lost tithes to make the problem go away with the least amount of trouble.”

“But this is all speculation,” said David after staring at her for a while. “You have no evidence.”

“Beyond the coincidence of the name with a convicted fraudster, no,” said Lucy. “The lack of local records isn't evidence as those records could have been filed separately and got lost or whatever. That said, I only searched the court records forward in time, not backward. If it turns out that Shannon McFarlane in Cairns was convicted and imprisoned either there or somewhere else when our Shannon McFarlane was known to be Helene Creek then they can't be the same person. Also, if I investigate the Cairns McFarlane further I may find a confession or something else which helps us decide one way or the other.”

“Or you could just ignore it,” said David.

“I could,” said Lucy, “but it would be unethical.”

“Would it?” asked Riley. “Is it really that different to Agatha Kaufman being an incestuous child?”

“Actually no,” said Lucy after thinking for a moment. “The two situations are similar.”

“And I don't expect anyone directly affected would still be alive,” said David thoughtfully. “Thomas certainly isn't and off the top of my head I can't think of anyone currently alive who was born back in the 1920s.”

“So you have no objection to me researching this further?” asked Lucy. “Because there's something else I want to investigate further which is slightly related but more problematic.”

“Another scandal?” asked David, putting his beer can on the decking.

“Not at all,” said Lucy. “There's the possibility of even a bit of heroism involved, or at least martyrdom.”

“Martyrdom?” said David with a snort of derision. “A martyr in Helene Creek? Come off it.”

“I’m not joking,” said Lucy. “The letter from Thomas to the Diocese said that the previous priest, Finley Roberts, left and Shannon McFarlane took his place. Not only did Roberts leave but he died overseas and so did his wife. Now, it’s possible they both just went on a holiday but if that was the case why leave the Chapel? I’m sure he could have just taken some time off without too much difficulty.”

“So why do you think he left?” asked David. “To go on the Crusades?” He chuckled to himself.

“Well, in a sense,” said Lucy. “The only thing I could think of is that he became a missionary. So I emailed some of the bigger Catholic missionary organisations and it turns out he did. The Paris Foreign Missions Society got back to me yesterday confirming he joined their Society in 1898.”

“Never heard of them,” said David.

“Well, they’ve been around a while,” said Lucy. “Since 1658, in fact. Anyway, the Society also confirmed that Finley and his wife Lorna were sent to China as missionaries and died there in 1900.”

“So where does the martyrdom come in?” asked David.

“It’s entirely possible, of course,” said Lucy, “that they both died from illness after drinking contaminated water or whatever. But it’s also possible that they died in either the Boxer Rebellion or the Russian invasion of Manchuria, both of which happened in 1900. It’s quite possible that the Roberts got mixed up in either of those and perhaps died while trying to protect their Christian converts.”

“Interesting,” said David. “Still, it shouldn’t be hard to find out. Just email this Society back and ask them.”

“I already have,” said Lucy. “Apparently they haven’t got the resources to investigate their archives but they’re quite happy for me to go to Paris and do the research myself. And, it occurred to me, if you’re

happy to fund that, that Austria isn't too far from Paris so I could skip over there and do some research on the backgrounds of Helene and Friedrich Kaufman before they came to Australia. Kill two birds with one stone, as it were.”

“Absolutely out of the question!” exclaimed David. “That would be far too expensive and this project is already costing too much as it is. In fact that's why I came round to see you. I'm terminating the project. Today.”

Bikie Thugs Descend On Outback Town

Teen Girl Kidnapped

Bikie thugs rampaged through the tiny outback town of Helene Creek before taking over the local pub.

Scenes of confusion and panic occurred when a gang of over thirty bikies roared into Helene Creek on Tuesday afternoon scaring locals who fled into their homes for safety.

The bikies, members of the notorious Knights Of Kaos, tore through the town on their way from Brisbane for their annual national gathering in Western Australia.

Many of the thugs pulled wheelies and terrorised locals with swearing and threats before taking over The Bunkhouse Inn for a night of heavy drinking.

"I've never seen anything like it!" said Helene Creek resident Denise Lamby (67).

"I was just popping to the store to get some milk when all these huge bikes surrounded me. Gave me such a turn, they did!" she added.

Helene Creek's only policeman, Constable Vernon Lightly (41) was quickly on the scene but was derided by the bikies. One thug even poured a glass of beer over the hapless copper.

Constable Lightly called for reinforcements from Charleville but they were hours in arriving. Several local girls were accosted

and two were spotted entering the pub to drink with the marauders, including Fay Watkins (17).

"Two of them wanted me to have a drink with them," said local girl Masie Turner (16), "but I told them I couldn't because I've got a boyfriend and he wouldn't like it."

As night fell regulars arriving for their evening entertainment were barred from entering.

"It's a bloody liberty!" said one furious resident who didn't want to be identified. "I work bloody hard all day and I deserve a swill or two of an evening."

Tensions rose in the evening as four ringers from a nearby cattle station attempted to force an entry and fighting broke out.

All four sustained minor injuries and the headlamp on a ute was smashed beyond repair before Constable Lightly intervened and told the ringers to go home before any serious damage was done.

Late in the evening two police cars and a police helicopter arrived from Charleville and, after discussions, the bikies agreed to leave. They were escorted to the border by the police.

Queensland Outback News has been told that over \$50 worth of damage was done inside the pub as the thugs drank heavily before leaving peacefully.

Fay Watkins was last seen on the back of a Harley Davidson ridden by Kostos Karnarios, a long time member of the Knights Of Kaos.

The bikie was stopped on the edge of Helene Creek and the pair

questioned. Karnarios was allowed to continue when Fay Watkins said she was going of her own free will.

"Can't wait to get out of this ****ing dump," she told police. "Best thing I ever did, I reckon. See ya!"

"Can't say I'm surprised," said Connie Watkins (34), Fay's mother. "She always was a bit of a tearaway. Be sorry to see her go though."

No illegal drugs were found.

Chapter Twenty Six

Lucy just gawped at him in stunned astonishment, then her lower jaw dropped. Even Riley looked quite surprised.

“Excuse me, what?” said Lucy after quite a few seconds.

“I’m cancelling the project,” said David. “It’s December now so you’ve been here, what, four months and there’s very little to show for it. Besides, the medium range forecast is for flooding at some point in January and February which means I’m going to be hit for around \$40,000 a day in feed while it lasts and that’s before livestock losses. I’ve already started purchasing feed in advance and prices will rise soon. I’m not the only one who looks at weather forecasts.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Lucy, gathering her wits at last. “I can’t comment on the weather or livestock but I did warn you that historical research can be time consuming and it’s unfair to say there’s nothing to show so far. I’ve uncovered a huge amount already and I’ve been updating you every ten days.”

“And you haven’t even started on writing the book, have you,” snapped David.

“Actually I have,” said Lucy. “I’ve mapped out the chapters and outlined the contents for most of them. I grant there is still a fair amount to do but the actual writing of the book is the least time consuming part. Once I have all the data I need I should have the book ready for editing after a month or so.”

“And now you want to go gallivanting off to Paris and Austria,” said David. “You’ll probably want to go to China as well!”

“In a perfect world, yes,” said Lucy, “but this isn’t a perfect world. Lorna and Finley Roberts are only a very small part of the history of Helene Creek and the Kaufman family. I thought it would be useful to have the positives of some missionaries to counter the negatives of other aspects of the family history but it’s not a huge issue. I don’t even need to go to Paris. I’m sure it’s possible to pay one of the people who work with the Society to do some research for us, or perhaps a

student. As a worst case scenario I can just say that the couple died in China while undertaking missionary work but that would be missing a good opportunity.”

“But is it really worth the cost?” demanded David.

“I have to say, speaking as a historian,” said Lucy, “that if you cancel this it would be extremely unfortunate and a major loss to Australian history of the details of a largely unknown period of outback development. A lot has been written about Australia as a whole and of the development of the states and the cities but very little about the small outback towns and stations. What there is is primarily anecdotal as it comes from books of stories and biographies of individuals rather than a full blown historical analysis.”

“And what do I care about historical analysis,” said David irritably. “You were hired to write a history of the family to sell to tourists, not sit on shelves in university libraries.”

“And that is what I am doing,” said Lucy, getting into her stride. She'd had to justify various research projects and theses before. “But I have a feeling you don't fully appreciate the significance of your family in this region and of Helene herself. I am convinced that this book, if you let me finish it, will have a much wider audience than just the tourists who come here.”

“What do you mean, significance?” asked David. “Helene died soon after coming here. She did bugger all!”

“And that's where you're wrong,” said Lucy. “Just look at all the people who've run the station. Friedrich, of course, who was Helene's husband. Then Leopold, her son, who was followed by his son, Thomas, Helene's grandson. Then there was Benjamin, Thomas' son, and Brian who was the son of Thomas' brother Harold and now you, Brian's brother. All of you are direct descendants from Helene. Not one person who has run the Helene Creek Station has come from Eileen's side. Not only are the station and the town named after Helene but everyone who has run the station and been the Chair of the Civic Council have come from her.”

Well, I suppose,” said David, his scowl lightening to a frown.

“And you're also forgetting that as a result of Helene Creek being founded,” added Lucy, “major national organisations such as the Overland Telegraph and Cobb & Co not only routed their operations through this area but chose to set up bases in the town. This indisputably had a significant impact on the prosperity of Helene Creek and other smaller communities in the area. Many of which, I am sure, owe their existence to the rise of Helene Creek.”

“And the Royal Flying Doctor Service,” added Riley.

“And the Royal Flying Doctor Service!” exclaimed Lucy, raising her finger and jabbing with it to help make her point. “I wouldn't go so far as to say that Helene Creek was the cause of its creation but the town certainly played a major role.”

“Well, perhaps,” said David.

“And who was this woman behind all of this?” asked Lucy. “All we know so far is that she was an Austrian immigrant to Australia who was only 22 when she arrived and that her maiden name was Helene Chamb. We don't even know where she was born, why she left Austria or anything of her life there. Your ancestor is shrouded in mystery yet she created this dynasty in the Australian outback. Don't you want some recognition of that fact?”

“Hmm,” said David, pursing his lips. He was still frowning but his face had relaxed. “I hadn't thought of it like that. So why haven't you gone into her life then?”

“My brief was the family history after they arrived in Australia,” said Lucy, “although a couple of weeks ago I did put some tentative enquiries out on Facebook and several European ancestry websites to see if anyone has been tracking back from that end.”

“No one has?” asked David.

“So far I've only had two responses,” said Lucy. “One was from a man in Sydney who said he had lots of information which he'd be happy to

share if I have dinner with him and stay the night which I dismissed for obvious reasons. The other was from a woman in Belgium but it turned out she was talking about a different Helene. A Helene Kaulman, who was born in the 1880s. I'm not saying anyone has done any ancestral research on Helene Kaufman but if there is anyone it's entirely possible they only look at the sites every few months. Research takes time."

"Can I say something?" asked Riley.

"And another thing," said Lucy, ignoring her. "I've heard back from the Museum at the War Memorial in Canberra. William Hickey, it turns out, was awarded the Military Medal for bravery on the Kokoda Track in World War Two and died there six months later. His name is on the War Memorial in Helene Creek and yet no one here knows who the hell he is! He's a war hero for crying out loud and yet he's totally forgotten. What's his connection to the town? To the Kaufmans? Was he a stockman who went to war or was he married to a Kaufman or a Mercer? Did his widow remarry and her children took the other man's name? Don't the people of the town and those children deserve to know who William Hickey was and what happened to him during the war? Someone from Helene Creek played a vital role in arguably the most famous Australian theatre of operations in that war and no one knows. Another mystery."

David just looked at her uncertainly.

"Can I say something?" asked Riley again.

"Sure," said Lucy. "Oh, and then there's Frederick Kaufman. He died in 1940 when he was 18 but he isn't mentioned on the War Memorial. Was he in the war and, if so, why isn't he on the memorial? Did he disgrace himself and was excluded for some reason? If he wasn't involved in the war then why not? Was he a conscientious objector? Was he medically unfit or mentally ill? Maybe he made a valuable contribution in some other way and deserves to be recognised for that."

"I have no idea," said David.

“Third and last time,” said Riley. “Can I say something?”

“Sure,” said Lucy, watching David. “What is it?”

“Weather forecasts are often wrong,” said Riley.

“What?” exclaimed Lucy, twisting to look at her in confusion.

“I’m just saying,” said Riley, leaning forward on the stool. “Just because the weather forecast is for floods doesn’t mean we’ll get floods.”

“What is your point, Riley?” asked David, also leaning forward.

“Why not keep Lucy going on the book until you at least know for sure you’re going to be up for a lot of expenses,” said Riley. “After all, maybe you aren’t.”

“But what about all the feed I’ve already ordered?” asked David.

“It keeps,” said Riley, “and for sure we’ll be having a drought soon enough anyway. This is outback Queensland, there’s always a drought sooner or later.”

“But is it going to be worth it?” asked David. “She is taking a long time. Longer than I expected.”

“Granted,” said Lucy, “and it’s my fault for not making that clearer at the start. I confess I kind of thought it wouldn’t take that long either. Just talk to a few people, look up a few records and bash out something to keep the tourists happy but I was wrong. The more I look into the background the more I realise the social and historical significance of the family, the station and the town. I also think that if I write it the right way that the book could become popular among a broad general audience rather than just tourists and academics. Perhaps even overseas. I’m sure a decent number of Austrians and Germans would be interested and probably a fair number of British.”

“Overseas?” asked David, his eyes lighting up a little.

“Sure, why not,” said Lucy. “OK it may need to be translated but that shouldn't be a problem. It might even generate more tourism. Rather than selling the book to tourists already here it could turn out that people come from overseas to visit Helene Creek specifically because of the book.”

“You think so?” asked David, the wheels of his mind clearly beginning to turn.

“Yes,” said Lucy. “Especially with the museum.”

“What museum?” asked David, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

“I've already accumulated a number of artefacts,” said Lucy. “There's Helene's bible and medicine book and Eileen's journal as well as Friedrich's knife and those coins. There's all the things belonging to Jane, Thomas' wife such as her flute, hairbrushes and baby clothes and so on, not to mention Thomas' letters and his discharge documents. Oh, and the wooden horse he carved for her. They're all accumulating in my room. God knows what else will be uncovered. Maybe William Hickey's medal will turn up. You never know. Anyway, it occurred to me a while back that it might be good to have all these things in a museum somewhere in town. You could charge tourists a few bucks to have a look around and you could sell the book there as well.”

“You think there's enough for a museum?” asked David, frowning again.

“Sure,” said Lucy. “Especially if Raylene agrees to lend her stuff as well. An original RFDS pedal radio would be of huge interest I'm sure and she's got a lot of other stuff that would add to the general background of the era.”

“That old cottage in Agatha Street would be good,” chimed in Riley. “OK, it's a bit run down but me and a couple of guys could do it up in a few days. You know, that one across the road from the Tourist Information Office.”

“Actually that's not a bad idea,” mused David. “It's a bit of an eyesore

at the moment although it's not a cottage.”

“What is it then?” asked Riley.

“It's the original gaol,” said David. “The only reason it hasn't fallen down yet is that it was built from ironwood shipped in by the police when they built the first police station.”

“Oh for crying out loud!” exclaimed Lucy. “An original log gaol from around 1905? Jesus!”

“What?” asked David and Riley, almost in unison.

“That alone is a major tourist attraction,” said Lucy. “Whatever you do, don't repair it!”

“What, not at all?” asked Riley.

“Well, enough to make it rain and dust proof,” said Lucy. “We can get cabinets and things to protect the exhibits.” She looked meaningfully at David.

He stared back at her for a few moments then glanced at Riley then back at Lucy before snorting.

“All right, all right,” he said, holding up his hands. “We'll keep going, at least until the rains begin. OK?”

“Awesome,” said Lucy, beaming. “Fancy another beer?”

Historian Makes History

Have-a-go hero takes out dangerous criminal

Local historian Lucy Chaplin herself became news yesterday when she was involved in an incident in the town of Helene Creek in the far west of Queensland and became a local hero.

Convicted armed robber Giles Bandicoot escaped from Woodford prison, near Brisbane, on Saturday, 14th December and disappeared after stealing a Nissan Pathfinder SUV.

The vehicle was next seen outside the general store in Helene Creek by local policeman Constable Tim Severin, who entered the store to investigate further.

“There was no one in the store except Cassie who works there,” said Constable Severin. “She told me that she'd noticed the Nissan SUV pull up only moments before and the sole occupant, whose description matched that of escapee Giles Bandicoot, had crossed the road and entered the Post Office.”

“I'd just gone into the Post Office to collect a package,” said historian Lucy Chaplin. “It was relevant to my book on the history of Helene Creek so I wanted to collect it as soon as it arrived.”

“A man followed me in and I

thought it was strange because he was wearing a jacket even though it was nearly forty five degrees outside. While I was talking to Bev at the counter I noticed he was behaving very oddly. He was standing against the wall and peering through the window in an agitated way. Then he suddenly pulled a shotgun out from under his jacket and shouted at me and Bev to get up against the wall. It was quite scary actually, especially as I'd never been involved in a robbery before."

"I heard shouting coming from the Post Office as I approached," said Constable Severin. "Then I heard a scream coming from inside so I withdrew my firearm and took cover on the verandah. I had every reason to believe that Giles Bandicoot was within and likely to be armed. There were people inside who were at risk."

"It was Bev who screamed," said Lucy Chaplin. "I was just too frightened. I remember hearing someone outside shouting "Police, lay down your weapon and exit the building with your hands up" or something like that. Then the man started swearing and he smashed the window and pushed his shotgun outside."

"I heard the window break," said Constable Severin, "and saw a shotgun appear. I shouted again for the suspect to drop his weapon and, to my surprise, he did. Thereupon I entered the premises and apprehended the suspect."

"I don't know what made me do

it,” said Lucy Chaplin, “but when he broke the window I thought he was going to shoot Tim. My mind went blank and I just grabbed something off the counter and hit him over the head with it. It turned out to be the EFTPOS Card Reader which is quite solid really. It must have hurt.”

“Lucy was very brave,” said Constable Severin, “although it's fortunate that he didn't turn on her. Even though he'd dropped the shotgun he's still a large man and known to be violent.”

“I think I just took him by surprise,” said Lucy Chaplin. “Most likely he was expecting a shootout with the Police but instead he was hit over the head by a girl. He was a big man and the Card Reader didn't knock him unconscious or anything. Then Tim charged in and handcuffed him and it was all over which I'm glad about. Probably in a couple of weeks I'll think it was really rather exciting although I hope nothing like that ever happens again.”

“Lucy was wonderful,” said Bev Carmody. “I was scared to death and couldn't move but Lucy just hit him over the head like she was one of The Avengers or something.”

“We're all very proud of Lucy,” said David Kaufman, Chairman of the Civic Council and Head of the Helene Creek Cattle Station.

“She's a brilliant historian and a valued member of the community. We hope she stays with us for a very long time.”

“Thank God she wasn't hurt,” said Michael Helmscott, Lucy's boyfriend. “At least I know she can take care of herself though.”

Giles Bandicoot has been returned to Woodford prison and will be charged with attempted assault and threatening behaviour.

Lucy Chaplin's book, “The History of Helene Creek” is due out in November 2025.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Riley's bike threw up a plume of red dirt as she skidded into the front yard of her house. She slammed the side-stand down and nearly dropped the bike in her haste to get inside.

"Lucy, Lucy!" she shouted, ripping off her helmet. "Where are you?"

"In the shower," called back Lucy from the bathroom. "Out in a mo."

Impatiently Riley pulled the crumpled newspaper from inside her shirt and smoothed it as best she could on the table.

"So who's been shot?" asked Lucy, emerging from the bathroom wrapped only in a towel.

"You're in the paper!" exclaimed Riley snatching the newspaper up and thrusting it at Lucy. "You're bloody famous!"

"You what?" asked Lucy, trying to grab the paper from Riley's waving hand.

"Read it!" exclaimed Riley.

Lucy snatched the paper and skimmed it. Then she sat down and read it through more slowly.

"Bloody hell," she said, blinking a few times.

"Too bloody right," said Riley, grinning from ear to ear like a Cheshire cat. "Bloody hell hey!"

Lucy read the article a third time then sat back and stared at Riley with a frown on her face.

"I suppose you knows what this means," she said.

"It means you're a hero," said Riley. "Look. It says so right at the top. Aren't you pleased?"

“Actually no,” said Lucy with a sigh. “It means the publishers will probably want another chapter and the book's already with them being edited. And it'll be about me as well. Bummer.”

“I really don't get you,” said Riley, staring at Lucy with her hands on her hips. “You're a hero and you're in the papers and everything and all you can bloody think about is that bloody book of yours.”

“Yeah,” admitted Lucy, looking back at the newspaper. “I can get a bit obsessive at times.”

“Well, I've got to get back to work,” said Riley, feeling a little deflated. “I only dropped round to show you the paper.”

“And thank you for that,” said Lucy, reading the article yet again.

Riley watched her for a few moments then left. She revved her bike irritably before riding off.

“Oh well,” thought Lucy. “I'd better email the publishers and find out what they want to do.”

She got up and went to her room where her laptop sat, booted and ready since she was in the process of editing and commenting on Eileen Kaufman's journals. She logged in to her email and checked her inbox out of habit.

“You what?” she muttered, looking at an email with the subject line in German. “What's this then?”

She opened it and read it through, translating on the fly.

Hello Lucy Chaplin

My name is Marina Stamberger and I saw your posting on euroancestors.com. I am sorry for the delay in responding but I got married last year and stopped researching my family for a while.

I am a direct descendant of Lizabet Chamb, the sister of Helene Kaufman who left Austria in 1872 on the ship Die Lammershagen with her husband

Friedrich Kaufman. They were bound for Australia. If this is the Helene Kaufman you are researching, please let me know as I have all the letters Helene wrote to Lizabet as well as other letters, many of the books she left behind, her sheet music, two folders of her drawings and paintings and a number of other personal items. I have also researched the family backwards another three generations and have much on them if you have an interest.

I too would be very much interested in your work as Helene ended her writing to Lizabet in April 1874 and I do not know what happened to her afterwards. I can only presume she died but she was still a young woman. Perhaps she did not. I am hoping you can tell me.

I attach a jpg copy of a photograph of Helene. I believe it was taken in the summer of 1872 when Helene and Friedrich were making their departure preparations.

*Regards
Marina Stamberger*

In stunned disbelief, Lucy re-read the email, the newspaper article forgotten. Then, with a trembling hand, she clicked on the attached jpg.

“Oh my God,” she muttered as a faded and stained black and white image of a small young woman appeared. She was sitting, rather stiffly formal, on a chair and wore a full black dress with a tight bodice. Her black hair was pulled back and held in place with an ornate hair net. Her face was stern but there was a mischievous glint in her eye.

“Hello Helene,” said Lucy softly after staring at the picture for what seemed like an age. “Your own dynasty and a town! What do you think, hey? Was it all worth it?”

Books By Lucy Chaplin

Currently in print:

A History of Helene Creek

Published by Sloford Timms, Melbourne, November 2025

The Journals of a 19th Century Cattle Station Wife

Published by Sloford Timms, Melbourne, November 2025

Planned:

Helene Chamb, the Austrian who founded a Queensland Dynasty

Boring! The Visionaries, Engineers and Misfits Who Plumbed The Great Artesian Basin

They Made 'Em Tough Back Then ~ Tales of Outback Medical Emergencies

Academic:

Lucy Chaplin's Doctoral Thesis, *City And Town: A Comparative Analysis of Impacts Of And Responses To National And International Events*, will be available to University libraries and Academic bookshops in late 2028