

DUDLEY HOOD

FLASHBACKS & FILM SCRIPTS

FEATURING
HIGHWATER
HIGHWAY



THE AUTHOR

Unique en son genre Dudley Hood credits his inspiration to his mother's ancestry. His mother, Dawn was the granddaughter of Thomas Stannard a professor of music who completed his degree in music in New York and immigrated to Australia in 1898. Following WW1, he established an eight-piece string orchestra in Brisbane and was flown around outback Queensland tuning pianos by aviation ace Bert Hinkler following his record England to Australia solo flight in 1926. Twenty-eight years later Thomas Stannard's son Sidney formed a Latin orchestra together with Dawn on Magnetic Island entertaining Australian and American servicemen on leave from the Pacific war. Gifted with his uncle Sid's *Harmony Nevada* guitar, Dudley Hood studied with Australian jazz guitar legend Don Andrews and went on to founding the successful Sydney group the 'Executives' contributed to several hit records over the ten years performing live with the band in Australia for 14 years. In 1984 he travelled to reside in America to resume his music and writing skills as a screenwriter. Since, his return to Australia he has authored a collective

FLASHBACKS AND FILM SCRIPTS

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HIGHWATER HIGHWAY

One of Faith's early memories was laughing with her parents. The petite seven-year-old was full of energy and curiosity. Blessed with loving parents and having shoulder-length auburn hair, she resembled her mother, Emma. Her father James was tall and strong but possessed a gentle nature. The family was enjoying a picnic lunch, but Faith found herself attracted by what *might* lie beyond the grassy field. Jumping up from the picnic rug, she ran towards the forest. 'Now, don't wander off too far, do you hear?' Emma called out to her as she disappeared into the nearby stand of surrounding trees.

Sunlight pierced the enveloping green revealing a shallow stream, its mossy banks erupting in yellow wildflowers. Balancing on the bank's edge, the little girl picked a yellow flower when her mother appeared. 'How many times have I told you not to wander off without me?' her mother scolded.

'But I found your favourite flower,' she responded, handing it to her mother.

A line of vehicles turned off the highway to enter the Rosehill Gardens Racecourse. James was behind the wheel of a bright red, 1955 Thunderbird, open-top convertible. Faith sat between her parents. Looking up she observed the ornate arched entrance, and beyond a bank of cumulus white clouds filling the sky. Turning into the parking area, a field of horses were being led from the stables into the marshalling yard.

With the atmosphere of excitement building, wearing their colourful silks, the jockeys walked their charges around the parade ring preparing for their first race of the day.

Alighting from the Thunderbird, Emma removed a sheath of yellow flowers from the back seat. Taking hold of her daughter's hand she led her to the race committee room to watch her mother prepare the winner's flower garland.

James made his way to the parade area to inspect his preferred charge. He had placed all his money on Grand Hope, a long-odds outsider. Wishing the jockey good luck, James then made his way through an excited throng of race goers to join his family in the stand. Training his binoculars on the horses, they were led from the parade ring into the starting gates. Hearing the starters signal the gates flew open. Jumping from the barrier the field galloped toward the first turn. Watching on James raised his glasses following the field jostling for position along the straight. Racing into the last turn he spotted the jockey's green and gold silks of the leading horse gathering pace. Jumping up from their seats urging on Grand Hope, it streaked over the finishing line in first place by a nose. James jumped to his feet, wildly waving the winning ticket; Emma looking on in disbelief.

Inside the committee room, Emma felt privileged to assist the Lord Mayor in presenting the garland of flowers to the winning jockey. Collecting his winnings, James stuffed wads of cash into his bag, unaware he was being watched. James and Emma had joined the owner and the jockey to celebrate their win in the

restaurant. as the waiter popped a Champaign cork when she suddenly realized that her daughter was missing. 'Where's Faith?' she asked looking around the restaurant. 'I thought she was with you?' James replied concerned, equally alarmed.

Scanning the crowded room, they jostled their way to the bar to find the restaurant manager. Proceeding to make an announcement regarding Faith's disappearance over the PA system, his voice was lost in the hub-hub of the crowd.

Unawares, Faith was happily wandering through the Rose Garden when a stranger appeared, blocking her path. Looking up at him, he extended his hand towards her.

Searching the premises in vain they left the restaurant and looked outside.

'Perhaps she went back to the car,' Emma surmised as they searched the marshalling yard. Hurriedly they made their way to the car park.

'She's *not* in the car,' Emma cried.

Joining her, James was reassuring his wife when two men approached. Pulling out a gun from his jacket, one confronted James and stuck the gun into his side and grabbed his bag of money while the other pushed Emma into the back seat of the Thunderbird, pressing a chloroformed soaked cloth over her face. Forcing James into the boot of the black Daimler they drove off followed closely by Emma's assailant carjacking the Thunderbird. Speeding from the racecourse the two cars turned onto the highway and disappeared over the hill.

Interrupting the still of a fading sunset the Thunderbird followed the Daimler driving north along the highway and finally slowing, turned off into a deserted gravel track. Coming to an abrupt halt dark angry storm clouds brewed overhead. Semiconscious Emma lay bound by her hands behind her back inside the Thunderbird when a flash of lightning illuminated two figures removing James from the Daimler's boot. Resisting, the men forced a groggy James into the bush. Attempting to escape they tackled James to the ground and fighting back he was finally overcome by the two assailants and repeatedly stabbing him, they left him for dead. In view of Emma terrified she helplessly watched on to the ominous sound of thunder releasing the storm in a deluge of rain as they drove off leaving their diabolical crime scene behind.

Fourteen years later in the autumn of 2021, a flurry of autumn leaves swept down the street in front of the Surry Hills apartment building. Jenny sat in the lounge room watching the news on television. An on-screen reporter stood on a dock beside a new police marine vessel.

'The Minister for Police and Emergency Services has just announced the addition of three new Sea Class patrol vessels fitted with the latest technology for search and rescue and to detect criminal activity,' the reporter said.

Phaedon was in her bedroom packing her clothes when her stepmother entered. Kim sat on the bed and handed her a small jewelry-sized leather case.

'I want you to take this with you and give it to Noel,' Kim said. Phaedon opened the case revealing its contents. 'It's his Afghan war service medals. Perhaps you'll have time to see him. The veteran's clinic is close to Armidale,' Kim told her. 'Since I simply have to travel so much there's days it's been a struggle for me to visit him lately. Noel's a resident in the Hartford Hall rehab clinic.'

'Sure,' Phaedon responded as she examined the medals. 'So, you're off again?'

'Yes, I'm afraid so. I fly out on Tuesday for a conference in New Zealand. But now my girl, with your job you'll be nearer to Noel, and you can explain to him why I haven't been able to visit.'

Turning off the television, Jenny made her way into the bedroom to join them and gave Phaedon a book. 'Look! I put together a photo album for dad, to remind him of happy memories,' Jenny smiled. 'I'll sure miss you, sis.' Giving each other a warm hug, Phaedon resumed her packing.

Jason was in a deep sleep, dreaming of driving a classic Chevy Pickup. His reverie was broken by Shirley shaking him awake revealing the early morning sun streamed through the bedroom window of his home in the Southern Highlands.

'Jason... come on, it's time to get up,' his mother said waking him. Dragging himself out of bed, Jason pulled on his clothes. Still half-asleep thinking about the Chevy, he joined his mother in the lounge room. She'd turned on the television to see a story on the upcoming

Sydney Motor Show. She ran her fingers through Jason's sandy hair, proud of her only son.

'This year we expect the entry of some fine classics,' commented the reporter.

Jason didn't respond. Instead, he sat down at his laptop and googled up vintage pickup trucks for sale.

'What are you up to now? Come on Jason, breakfast is ready,' she called from the kitchen.

'I'm looking for classic Chevy pickups but there's none for sale,' he said dejectedly. Shutting down his laptop he made his way to the kitchen.

'Huh. I suppose not. They're as rare as hen's teeth. That truck was very special to your father. I'm sure he loved that darn pickup more than he loved me!' she laughed, placing her arm affectionately over his shoulder.

'And what happened to it?' Jason asked.

'He lost it in a dispute with Uncle Sid,' she replied.

'What was it about?'

'You remember "Black Diamond"?' she said, pointing out a photo on the wall.

'Of course, dad owned him. I had to get up at the crack of dawn every morning to prepare him for his training run,' he recalled.

'Well, if you remember, Black Diamond had a big win at the Spring Racing Carnival. The following year, your dad was certain that Black Diamond could win again. Gus had spent so much time and money training the horse that he was flat broke,' Shirley explained.

'I didn't know that.' Jason aired his disappointment. He loved his father, who was always there for him.

'Your dad borrowed heavily from his brother to bet on Black Diamond. Uncle Sid loaned him twenty-five thousand dollars and Gus placed the whole darn lot on Black Diamond,' Shirley lamented. 'I remember it like it was yesterday.'

'And did he win?' Jason asked.

'Sadly, no. Black Diamond lost by a nose. Uncle Sid was so mad, that he demanded his money back straight away. He always put his business before family. He never could have enough money!'

'And did dad ever pay him back?'

'At first, your father pleaded with Sid to give him more time to repay him, but Sid refused. Gus was a gentleman and Uncle Sid always dominated him,' she said with a sigh before going on.

'They really didn't get on over the years, but that was the straw that broke the Camel's back. Despite Uncle Sid having no genuine interest in cars, your dad offered to give him the pickup as compensation.'

'You mean he gave it away?' Jason replied dumbstruck.

'I'm afraid so, and your dad loved that pickup as much as Black Diamond. I'm sure it broke his heart. We didn't see hide nor hair for your Uncle Sid after that. He just hopped in the pickup and drove off the same day. Your dad couldn't believe that his brother would do that. After all, Uncle Sid didn't really like the Chevy, anyway.'

'And what happened to Black Diamond?' he responded.

'The next race meeting, he stumbled and fell badly, damaging his fetlock. Unfortunately, it became

infected, and Gus had to put Black Diamond out of his misery. It was all too much for your father and I'm sure that's why he had his heart attack,' Shirley surmised sadly.

Jason cupped his chin in his hands. 'You know mum I'd love to get hold of dad's old pickup. Where does Uncle Sid live these days?'

'He did come to your dad's funeral and as far as I know, he still lives on his farm in Armidale. Last I heard, he still had the pickup,' she concluded as she walked away, leaving Jason with his thoughts.

Picking up his mobile, he called his best mate.

'Hey Jimmy, what are you up to?'

'I was just looking through my latest car magazine. You know the Motor Show's on next month.'

'Yeah, saw it this morning on TV, and I have a prospective entry for it. I need to check it out. Want to join me?'

Arriving at Sydney's Central Railway station Jason looked up the arrival time of the Armidale express on the digital display board.

'We just made it. It arrives in three minutes. Sighting the electric blue Express slowing around the bend it came to a halt at the platform as passengers bundled their bags from their trolleys into the carriage. Boarding, Jason and Jimmy made their way up the aisle and found their assigned seats. Producing a glossy car show magazine Jimmy buried his head flicking over its pages searching through the glossy photo images inside. A young girl, checking seat numbers and struggling with her bags attracted

Jason's attention. 'Look at this,' Jimmy said pointing to a photo of a 1950 Packard clipper.

Jason was still focused on the girl as she found her seat and struggled to lift her backpack into the overhead locker.

'Let me help,' he said taking hold of her backpack and slotting it into the compartment.

'Oh, thanks so much,' she replied. 'I always seem to pack too much luggage when I go anywhere!' She said exchanging a smile as he resumed his seat.

Pulled out a book from her handbag she settled in preparing for the seven-hour journey.

Jason gazed out the window taking in the scenery as the electric blue Explore flashed through the changing countryside, over bridges, and bypassing small towns. Removing his mobile phone from his pocket Jason texted his mother. 'I told mum I'd keep in touch,' he said, interrupting Jimmy.

'She's apprehensive about us meeting up with Uncle Sid.'

'Don't worry,' Jimmy replied, lifting his head from his magazine. 'What happened was a long time ago.'

'How about we try out the food in the dining car? I'm starving,' grinned Jason.

Jason's short, sandy hair complimented his perennial tan. Fit and wiry from working with his father on the horse stud-farm, he was uncertain about the future, and took life a day at a time. Unfolding themselves from their seats, Jason and Jimmy made their way up the aisle to the buffet car. Glancing up, Phaeton put down her book and followed. Jason and Jimmy placed

their orders and sat on the diner's bar stools. Phaedon reviewed the menu.

Jason eyed off Phaedon. Compact and athletic she had auburn shoulder-length auburn hair and green almond-shaped eyes, Jason felt an instant attraction the moment he set eyes on her.

'Could I have a Caesar Salad with light mayo on the side please?' Phaedon placed her order.

Playfully, she took a seat on a barstool beside Jason and Jimmy. Thundered over a steel bridge at speed, the sound filling an awkward silence between them.

Jimmy was the first to break the tension and introduced himself.

'My name's Jimmy, and um, this is Jason. We're getting off at Armidale.'

'Yes, me too. Hi Jimmy, I'm Phaedon. Thanks again Jason for helping me with my luggage,' she responded, flashing a warm smile.

'Yeah, Jason can be a proper gentleman sometimes,' Jimmy replied sarcastically.

Behind his classic aviator sunglasses Jimmy was a bit of a rough diamond.

'I hope the burgers are good?' Jason butted in.

'My alarm croaked early this morning, so I missed out on breakfast. I'm starving.'

'Me too,' agreed Phaedon.

'So, what takes you to Armidale?' Jason asked her.

'I'm starting a new job at the bank.'

'Really. I wouldn't take you for a bank robber in a thousand years,' Jason laughed.

'I just completed twelve months of training in accounting at one of their Sydney branches. Now they've offered me a job in Armidale.'

'Cool. That's much better than being a robber!' Jimmy chuckled.

'You bet,' Phaedon grinned. 'I'm tired of the city,' she said. Looking directly at Jason she asked.

'And what do you guys do?'

Jimmy promptly produced his magazine, flipped it open, and showed her a page.

'I restore classic cars. Like this one. It's a 1953 Single Spinner Ford Convertible. See?' he asked folding out the page.

'Sweet. Is that your car?' Phaedon responded, eyeing off the image.

'No, but I wish it was. It's my favourite classic,' Jimmy replied before turning the page.

'So, what about you Jason?' she quizzed. 'Are you into classic cars as well?'

'Actually, I prefer old pickup trucks,' Jason replied, pointing out a Midnight Blue Chevy pickup featured in the magazine. Hesitating momentarily, Jason produced his mobile and showed her a photo. 'This me when I was twelve sitting on the bonnet of my father's Chevy Pickup.'

'He sold it to his brother years ago and Jimmy and I are going to buy it back.'

'And where does he live?' Phaedon asked.

'Sid Handcock has a farm near Armidale.' Jason replied.

Phaedon studied the image. 'Is Sid Handcock's farm near the Chandler River?' she asked.

'Yeah! That's right. Are you a mind reader?'

'The name's familiar. I think I knew his kids. We were at the same school,' Phaeton recalled.

'Really? You must have an excellent memory,' he replied. 'How about your parents? Do they live in Armidale?'

'Actually, my foster parents came from Armidale. We lived there before moving to Surry Hills in Sydney,' Phaeton told him.

'I was also about twelve at the time, I guess. Since then, my foster dads moved back to Armidale. He's an Afghan war vet!'

Finally, just past midday the Explorer appeared on its final approach to Armidale's autumn tree-canopied streets and slowed to a halt beside the station platform. Armidale was a popular time for tourists visiting the Northern Tablelands and joining the line of tourists Jason, Jimmy, and Phaeton exited from the train and hailed a cab. Passing through the main street they dropped off Phaeton outside the Hunter's Bed and Breakfast before driving out of the suburbs along a clay dirt road, leaving a cloud of red dust behind. Jason pointed to a sprawling building set among rolling farmlands.

'It looked oddly out of place way out here.'

'That's Hartford Hall,' the driver remarked. It's a psychiatric hospital.

'Oh, you mean a mental asylum,' Jimmy responded peering through the cab window.

'It's the kind of place to avoid,' the driver replied.

'I'm told it has a dark history.'

Speeding past Hartford Hall their taxi crossed over the Chandler River Bridge and finally pulled into a remote homestead. Seeing them approach, Sid got up from a rocking chair on the veranda and extended his hand to greet them, he offered to drive them to the barn in his new Ford dual-cab truck.

'I haven't used the old Chevy since I bought the Ford five years ago,' he said as he led them to his truck and hopped in behind the driver's seat. 'It's just too old and parts are almost impossible to get. I need a more reliable truck,' he told them.

'That's okay. I'm a mechanic, so it's not a problem. Let me look. I'm sure we can get it going,' Jimmy replied confidently.

'You can hitch the Chevy to the tractor and tow it out if you like. There's a chain in the barn somewhere, along with some tools,' Sid said, pointing in the general direction of the barn. Returning to his truck, he promptly drove off. Prizing the heavy, double barn doors open, a cacophony of chickens flapping their wings scattered in all directions. Inside next to Sid's farm tractor, Jason and Jimmy saw the dilapidated Chevy Pickup buried beneath hay bales and covered in dust. Removing the bales, Jason and Jimmy stood back to assess their find.

'*Far-out*. It looks like it needs a lot of work,' remarked Jason, kicking away some hay to reveal more bumper bar. 'Maybe but remember that old Buick we restored. It was full of rust but after we cut it out, it came up like brand new,' Jimmy said as he looked inside the cab.

'Yeah. Cool enough for those girls to ride with us down to the bay,' Jason laughed.

'We'll need some parts for this one,' Jimmy quipped looking it over. 'Restored, it could be a winner at the Motor Show. Doesn't your Uncle Sid realize how valuable this pickup is?' Jimmy said passing on a wry smile.

'He hasn't got a clue. Look how he's left it! He knows nothing about cars, and he doesn't know what they're worth these days! We'll have to pump the tyres, check the oil, and top up the radiator. And the battery is probably as dead as Moses!' Jimmy responded from under the bonnet.

'That's a long time ago,' Jason laughed.

'Lucky, I brought my jumper leads,' Jimmy grinned pulling them out from his backpack.

Setting to work they began overhauling the pickup. Starting the tractor, Jimmy connected the jumper leads to the pickup's battery and waited. Blowing out clouds of black soot and smoke from its exhaust, the pickup finally sputtered to life.

Looking on from his veranda the sun had set as Sid looked on rocking back and forth in his rocking chair and watched the orange glow of the headlights of the old Chevy pickup passing through his farm gate and dim out of sight as Jason and Jimmy headed back towards town.

Built in 1854 the Armidale hotel was the social hub for the town. Its handsome restoration echoed its colourful past colonial glory. Parking outside the boys dusted off their day and making their way inside they caught the last few bars of the band before they left the stage.

Phaedon had just bought a glass of wine and turning from the bar, accidentally collided with Kimberley Walton. Kimberley immediately offered to replace Phaedon's spilt drink and despite Phaedon's protest the two instantly connected.

Kimberley was the lead singer in 'Zephyr Blue', the hotel band, and had just finished her set. Phaedon caught sight of Jason and Jimmy. 'Look, a couple of blow-ins!' she called.

'I ran into them on the train from Sydney,' she explained to Kimberley. 'The blonde guy is Jason, and the other wearing those cool shades is Jimmy his mate.'

Taking a nearby seat Kimberly introduced herself. 'I'm Kimberley,' she said as Max joined them.

'Hi, I'm Max the drummer,' he explained.

'Neat. So, it's a blues band?' Jason replied.

'Correct. We call ourselves the Zephyr Blues Band and Kimberley is our lead singer.' Max said.

'And the rest of the band?' Jimmy asked looking over at the stage.

'Well, tonight we have Keith sitting over there; he's our guitarist and Jenny our base player. We all know each other from school. Kimberly and I started out together in a gospel choir,' Max explained.

'So how did you two know each other?' Jason inquired directing his question to Phaedon and Kimberley.

'Us? Well, it's funny you ask,' Phaedon replied.

'We just spontaneously hit it off,' Kimberley laughed.

'And what do you do Jimmy?' Kimberley asked.

'I restore classic cars and pickup trucks.'

'Pickups? I bet.' Kimberley laughed flirtatiously, eyeing him off.

'Yeah, we've already got one on the go. It's parked outside,' boasted Jimmy, missing Kimberley's flirtation. 'The seats are pretty dilapidated and need replacing, and it needs a new paint job,' Jason reminded Jimmy.

'Well, I'll catch up after my next set, OK?' Kimberley told them. Making her way to the stage Kimberley joined her fellow musicians and sitting down behind the piano keyboard introduced the next song.

'Our next number is a sixties classic,' she announced. To the tap of Max on his drums, Kimberley raised her microphone and began to ease her way into the blues. Pausing, the bar staff along with the audience all listened on mesmerized by Kimberley's voice weaving her magic through the song.

Relaxing over their drinks Jason, and Jimmy listened on intently to the end of the final set and leaving the stage Kimberley and Max rejoined them.

'Now I believe this reunion with your pickup deserves a special celebration,' Kimberley said.

'I have a surprise for you all,' she grinned as the barman arrived and delivered a bottle of ice-cold Champagne in a silver bucket and set it down on the table.

After the barman announced 'last orders' Jason walked Phaeton to her lodgings next to the hotel. His instinct was to attempt a goodnight kiss but feeling unsure he just saw her safely inside the building before returning to his hotel.

Jason and Phaedon were enjoying breakfast and each other's company when the sound of a Harley appeared turning into the main street and pulled up in front of the café. Dismounting, Kimberley and Jimmy removed their helmets and joined Phaedon and Jason at their table.

'I'm tagging along with Kimberley tonight,' Jimmy said. 'The band's got a gig at the Trenton Gate hotel.' Kimberley removed her leather jacket and slid it over the back of the chair.

'I want to be ready for the Byron Bay Blues Festival at the end of the month and the hotel's a good place to sharpen up our act. The word's out that a well-known producer is scouting for new talent.'

'That's awesome. You guys will blow them away.' Jason approved nodding his head.

'How's the food at the B&B?' Kimberley asked Phaedon turning the conversation away from herself.

'It's okay, but I *kinda* miss my favourite restaurants back home,' Phaedon said.

'Hey Kimberley, that's a mean-looking bike,' Jason replied, looking over her bike.

'The only riding I do is on horseback,' Phaedon quipped. 'You mean horse riding?' Jason laughed.

'Don't laugh. My mum...well my foster mother loves horses,' she hesitated. Well, she enrolled me at a riding school in Camden Park,' Phaedon recalled tossing back her locks of hair.

'Camden Park? Ah! The trainers are almost as famous as the Rosehill Spring Carnival,' Jason recalled as he sipped his coffee.

'My late father used to racehorses at Rosehill.' Jason recalled.

'Really!' Kimberley exclaimed.

'Yes. And he died over them,' he recalled soberly.

'I'm sorry!' Phaeton was taken back.

'It was a while ago.' Jason replied dropping his eyes from Phaeton's, stirring his coffee.

'So, do you love horses?' she asked.

'Yes. It started with horses and just like my dad, I love classic pickups like the Chevy,' he said. 'So, when do you start at the bank?'

'In a couple of days, but in the meantime, I might visit my stepfather.'

'Do you know where he lives? I can give you a ride if you like.'

'Maybe. It's okay, I need to think about it first. You guys go ahead and enjoy Kimberley's gig. I'll catch up later.'

'Sure. I understand.' Jason retreated not sure of his ground.

'So, when are you guys heading back home?' Phaeton asked.

'After Kimberley's gig at the Trenton Hotel, I'll be staying on in Armidale to arrange a paint job for the pickup at a local garage. I go back to work in two weeks actually,' Jimmy said as Kimberley draped her arm around his shoulder.

'How about I swing by some time before we leave?' Jason smiled directing his question to Phaeton.

'Sure thing. I start at the Bank on Tuesday,' Phaeton replied returning his inviting smile.

The sun had set when Phaeton finally returned to the B&B. She lay on the bed, half watching a war movie on television. Through the chatter of machine-gun fire, she began to recall some bitter memories from her life lived with Noel her stepfather. Her foster mother had just helped Phaeton dress when an argument broke out between her foster parents. Kim had separated from her Korean husband and immigrated to Australia with her daughter Jenny when she met Noel. Kim and Noel adopted Phaeton who embraced a relationship with her new stepsister.

In his youth, Noel was a robust man. Since, enduring severe post-traumatic stress after his service in the Afghan war, at times his behaviour was unpredictable. Noel had been leading a patrol when his companion stepped on an IED hurtling them both into the air. Suffering horrific wounds, Noel dragged his companion into a ditch trying in vain to stem the bleeding from his severed leg in his attempt to save his life while ignoring a severe head wound to his head.

Phaeton recalled Noel's reactions a week after Noel returned from Afghan. Noel had arrived home very late one night, and Kim was very upset that he had been drinking. Shafts of lightning suddenly lit the sky causing Noel to hide behind the couch. Violent thunderclaps reverberated around the apartment. Fearing he was under attack he angrily accused Kim of collaborating with an invisible enemy.

Following a physiological assessment, Noel was transferred to a military hospital, and finally honourably discharged and reunited with Kim and his family. As his

medical condition did not show improvement, he was admitted to Hartford Hall Veteran's Clinic for long-term treatment.

Phaedon's reverie retuned interrupted by the television transmitting a loud electronic snowstorm, ending her vivid ruminations leaving her exhausted, she fell into a deep sleep.

The head nurse at Hartford Hall sat relaying the patients' reports to Cindy Mathews, the therapist responsible for the drug rehabilitation unit. Listening on to the head nurse's instructions Cindy wore a permanent hardened expression.

'This is Ivan Antonov's file,' the nurse explained. 'It's his third admission over the past few years. He was a fisherman operating from the Trial Bay fishing Port. He was dockside when a steel cable snapped and hit his head. The doctor's report refers to this event being most likely responsible for a subsequent bout of erratic behavior,' the nurse said handing Cindy the report.

'This time, I recommend he's cared for in the drug therapy unit. But before you follow him up, I want you to check on the patients in the Veterans' Wing. We're short-staffed today.'

Making her way to the adjoining Hartford Hall's Veteran's Wing provided a serene setting for its patients and checking the patients one by one until she ended her day and left the building.

Collecting Phaedon at the B&B and riding pillion, Kimberley motored down the long, pine hedged

driveway and followed the parking signs and came to a halt.

‘I hope the medals don't upset him,’ she frowned as she hopped off the back of the bike.

‘He earned them trying to save the life of his best friend.

‘I'm sure you're doing the right thing,’ Kimberley replied. ‘You love your dad. I can tell and he needs to know that you support him.’

Directed by a nurse, they found Noel seated in the garden reading. He seemed a shadow of his former athletic self.

‘Hello dad,’ Phaedon said as she bent down to hug him. For a moment he didn't respond. Then looking at her he tearfully replied ‘Darling girl. Oh, how I've missed you!’

Phaedon placed Jenny's keepsake photo album into his hands and wiped his tears. ‘Dad, this is my friend Kimberley.’

Noel nodded, gathering his thoughts. ‘So, how's your mum? I haven't seen her for a while.’

‘She's busy as usual, with another conference. She never stops, and I'm a poor substitute!’

‘Never! I know it is a long way from Sydney.’

‘I'll be able to visit more often. I'm starting a new job at the First Bank tomorrow,’ Phaedon explained.

‘I always knew you'd do well Phaedon. You're a fighter. Just like me.’

‘And you Kimberley? Do you work here in Armidale?’

‘Well, sort of. I sing in a band, and it takes me all over the place,’ she replied giving Noel a warm smile. ‘Luckily, I bumped into Phaedon in town.’

'You'll never look back after meeting my girl,' Noel chuckled. Tentatively Phaeton handed him the box containing his service medals and studying them, his eyes brimmed with tears as he gently opened the box.

Leaving Hartley Hall, riding pillion Phaeton held Kimberley tightly around the waist as they sped along the open highway and then turned down a small path off the bridge down to the Chandler River and dismounted. Visiting her stepdad had been emotional for Phaeton but it was exhilarating to ride with Kimberly and a welcome distraction.

'It's so peaceful out way out here,' Phaeton observed absorbing the serenity. Picking up a flat stone from the riverbank Kimberley skimmed it across the water and sat down on a rock ledge beside Phaeton.

'It's so calm and so distant from my life in the city,' Phaeton related.

'Oh, how's that?' Kimberly was curious.

'As you could see from our visit, my dad suffers terribly from PDS and before that it was pretty tough dealing with that.' Phaeton replied.

'Was it tough for you?' Phaeton asked gazing into the water.

'Ah. Originally, I was teased about the colour of my skin and frizzy hair.' You know, just cheeky naive kids.

'I thought I had it tough, but I can't imagine what it was like for you?' Phaeton replied hugging her. 'When I was at school, they called me *Dolly Girl*.

'Girlfriend. That's just body envy. I know all about that. I struggled with name calling all my life,' Kimberly

replied.

'That's gross.' Phaedon replied. 'And what about your music?'

'That came from my dad. He had a passion for the blues. He loved Muddy Waters and BB King.' Kimberly recalled. 'He was mad about them. He was an Afro American serviceman and met my mum when he was on leave in Darwin. She was a Larakia woman.'

'Wow. I could have never imagined. Fate moves in so many mysterious ways,' Phaedon smiled.

'He often played in the green room with his mate at the old Darwin Hotel. It was known as the Grand Old Duchess. He played the Piano, and his mate was a double bass player', she explained further. 'When my dad taught me to play, he told me that the blues lives in our souls. It's the power of our inner truth he said.'

'And so how did you end up in Armidale?' Phaedon asked.

'Well after leaving the army, he found peace with god and became a paster with the Baptist Church and was offered a position here in Armidale.'

'*Alright!*' Phaedon replied taking it all in.

'That's when I started to sing in the gospel choir and that's where I met Max actually.'

'Okay. When was that?' Phaedon asked.

'I was just about sixteen then. And now Max's my drummer in our band.'

Casting an infectious smile, Kimberly took Phaedon by the hand and pulled her to her feet.

'Time to go,' she said as they made their back along the riverbank to the bridge.

Mounting the Harley, they rode back along the riverbank. Nearing the Armidale, town centre Kimberley pulled up outside the historic Armidale Baptist Church.

‘This is my church!’ Kimberley said stepping from the bike and leading Phaedon inside. Clutching a cross around her neck, Kimberly sat in silence with Phaedon. Sunlight from the windows beamed into the chapel lighting their faces. Highlighted by the colourful leadlight figures etched into the windows; Images that instantly evoked Phaedon’s fragmented memories as she wrestled to come to grips to uncover the hidden past about her biological parents.

Fifteen years earlier, Phaedon faintly recalled that her father had farewelled her as she boarded the school bus before he dropped Emma outside the Armidale Bank.

Emma had made her way inside to be greeted by her manager before sitting at her teller’s cubicle, waiting for her first customer. Yuri Antonov, sporting a black Akubra and thick moustache entered the bank and strode towards Emma and handed her his bank card.

‘Good morning, Mr Antonov,’ she remarked.

‘Yes, today I will close my account,’ he said.

‘I’m sorry to hear that. Nothing to do with the bank I hope?’

‘No. You’ve always taken good care. But I’m sure we will soon meet,’ smiling wryly. I see you often, with

‘Oh yes, James loves horse racing. A break from his regular work,’ she replied.

‘And what’s that?’

‘He’s the Lighthouse Keeper at Byron,’ she explained.

‘That’s a good distance from here.’ Yuri remarked.

‘Yes, but I need to keep busy and there’s no work for me there, so except for an occasional visit to see James I stay over in the hotel.’

Handing Antonov his closing bank receipt he promptly turned and walked out of the bank.

The following day at the local races, Yuri Antonov stood urging on the field from the stand as the horses approached the finishing post. Flashing across the post he tore up his ticket in disgust seeing his charge canter to halt at the rear of the field.

‘Looking for a winner?’ a fellow punter asked Antonov as he checked through his remaining tickets. ‘Any good tips?’ Yuri asked.

‘You might try number seven in the next race. But if you want a sure winner, I harvested some real good green stuff yesterday.’ The man lowered his voice glancing over his shoulder.

‘Meet me in the car park after the races.’

Yuri walked through Hartford Hall’s impressive reception when a nurse in her mid-thirties caught his attention. Cindy hid a cold-hearted figure beneath her white starched uniform. Ever the opportunist, she had manipulated her moves from one institution to another to advance her career.

'Ah, your Ivan's brother. He tried to walk out of the place yesterday,' she said.

'Really?' Yuri grunted.

'Yes, that's right. I'm Cindy Matthews and I take care of him. He's a very troubled man, Mr Antonov. We should talk, so I can explain more about this condition.'

'Why don't we share a drink after you finish your shift?' He offered. 'Come over to my Aunt Dorothy's place for dinner.'

Ending her shift, Cindy wasted little time in taking up Yuri's offer and rounding the corner on her Kawasaki. Cindy came to halt outside Dorothy's boarding house. Greeted her at the front door Yuri led her inside to the dining room. Dorothy was middle-aged and sturdy for her age. Vigorously chopping up a chicken she was busy preparing a meal as Cindy arrived and looking on took a seat at the dining room table.

'So how do you know Yuri?' Cindy asked as she produced a wine bottle from her bag.

'These days Yuri stays here when he visits Ivan,' Dorothy explained as she served up their meal.

'Years ago, I ran a boarding house at Trial Bay, and I looked after the two boys when his father was away at sea.

'What about their mother?' Cindy asked.

'She ran off with a boarder, and we never heard from her again. It was me that raised them after their father died,' she said.

'So, you're not even related?'

'No. One day I had a visit from the Russian Ambassador who told me what happened.'

Yuri picked up the story. 'One of my father's crew members told me that they were trawling off the Solomon Islands during the cold war when a paroling American naval ship collided with their trawler. It killed my father.'

'And was your father a true Russian patriot.' Cindy asked.

'The capitalists try to control everything,' Yuri grunted taking a swig of wine.

'The boys were only young men at the time. No one was left to look after them, so I stepped in. I even sent Yuri to Uni,' Dorothy told her.

'Uni?' Cindy asked.

'Yes, I studied Information Technology,' Yuri replied. 'But big money's my game,' he smiled wryly.

Collecting the dinner plates Dorothy headed for the kitchen. 'Now I'll do the dishes and you two can have a nice chit-chat.'

It was a warm bright summer day when Phaedon walked the short distance from the B&B to the Bank. Arriving early for her first shift she sat in the foyer waiting for the Manager.

In his late sixties and disposed with a cheerful demeanor he sighted Phaedon and made his way to greet her from his office.

'You must be Phaedon,' he said after introducing himself. 'Wait, haven't I met you somewhere before?'

'I don't think so,' Phaedon replied. 'I only arrived here last Friday.'

‘I’ve got a good memory for faces. I know I’ve seen you before; I just can’t place where I have seen you. Never mind, it’ll come to me. Now I’ll give you a tour, and you can settle in.’

Responding to Kimberley text message, Phaeton Jimmy and Jason met Kimberly at her apartment for dinner the following night.

‘So, how was your first day at the bank?’ Kimberley asked.

‘It was great.’ Phaeton smiled readily. ‘People are so friendly, compared to Sydney. Mr Martin, my new manager, thought he recognised me from somewhere, which was *kinda* odd.’

‘Does he know about your family history here?’ Jason asked as Kimberly delivered a platter of food onto the table.

‘Not that I’m aware,’ Phaeton replied. ‘Hey, I didn’t know you could cook?’

‘Nah. I just hashed up some KFC and added some salad garnished with toasted bread croutons. Come on dig in,’ Kimberly chuckled picking up a drumstick and dipping it in a side plate of Cranberry Sauce.

Across the farmlands, at Hartford Hall, the head nurse was speaking intently to the Hospital Administrator. ‘Cindy was on duty the night Ivan Antonov disappeared and I have reason to believe she helped him escape.’

‘And *what* makes you think that?’ she asked.

‘It’s just a suspicion. But I’m sure that she’s the one selling hospital drugs to inmates.’

‘Really? In that case, she’ll be stood down while we investigate.’

Phaedon arrived promptly at the bank to prepare for the morning when George Martin arrived.

‘How long have you been with us now?’ he asked before stepping into his office.

‘Over two weeks now Mr Martin,’ she replied politely.

‘Well, this week I’d like you to serve our customers with Garry at the service desk. Phaedon, smiling and nodding to her new colleagues, settled into her new role at the service desk.

‘You’ll probably find this more challenging than standing behind a glass window all day,’ Garry laughed.

‘That’s okay. I like helping people,’ Phaedon reassured him and turned on the computer to greeting her first customer with welcome smile.

The morning fell into a lull and Phaedon was considering taking a break when an eccentric-looking customer strode intentionally towards Garry and sat down. The brim of his black hat shaded his eyes, and his heavy black moustache dominated his face. Sliding a note across to Garry he partially opened his jacket to reveal a knife.

‘You mean you want sixty thousand dollars now,’ Gary reacted looking at his note.

Listening on, Phaedon froze in disbelief. Was this happening? Or was it some sort of ill-conceived initiation?

‘Listen, mate, I mean now,’ the man leaned over Garry waiting for his response.

'We don't keep that level of cash out here,' Garry choked.

'You'd better show me to the safe then.' He leant closer to Garry, revealing the blade of the knife.

Reaching under his desk Garry attempted to press the silent alarm but was thwarted when the man pushed him back into his chair. Now Phaedon knew this was real and tried to think what to do.

'This gentleman needs some help, but the safe is time-locked,' Garry said hardly able to speak.

Unexpectedly the man grasped hold of his knife revealing a prominent scar on his hand and plunged the long blade into Garry's arm. Enraged, he then turned on Phaedon swinging wildly at her with the knife. Phaedon reeled back, stumbling over her chair, and crashed to the floor. Threatening her, as he leaned in closer with his blade, she kicked his knees with her high heels bringing him crashing down onto to the floor in pain.

Hearing the commotion, George Martin flung open his office door to see a man on the floor with Phaedon standing over him as two women ambled into the bank unaware of the attempted robbery. Staggering to his feet the assailant raced out the door, still brandishing his knife and pushing past the alarmed customer's.

Hurriedly Phaedon ran to the bathroom, grabbing a towel and rushed back applying pressure on Gary's gushing wound. 'It looks like a nicked artery, 'she told the manager.

Calling emergency and still on the phone, Martin caught a glimpse of the man as he fled along the street. Jason arrived just in time to see the assailant tumble

into the passenger seat of a black sedan. Turning sharply out into the traffic, it nearly colliding with a passing car and careered onto the wrong side of the main street. Swerving violently to avoid the kayos, Jason hit his brakes hard when a car in front of him broke suddenly. Furious Jason popped his head out the window. 'You idiot, he yelled waving his fist before seeing a black sedan veer into the opposite side of the road and rapidly speed from the scene and turning the corner and disappeared.

Hearing the police and ambulance sirens Phaeton, realising the gravity of the situation tied a tourniquet around Garry's arm. Outside, curious onlookers began to gather and jumping from his pickup, Jason ran inside the bank to see Gary bleeding and Phaeton distraught tendering to Garry on the floor.

Bundling himself out of the patrol car a burly police sergeant made his way through the crowd and entered the bank. The paramedics quickly followed.

'This has been the second attempted robbery in Armidale this week. It's the same MO,' the sergeant said to the assembling witnesses. 'He escaped in a black sedan, is that right?'

'I'm pretty sure it was an old Daimler,' Jason corrected the sergeant. 'Yes, I think so. It looked like a rare 1950 model.'

'Are you sure about that?' The sergeant scratched down a note in his pad.

'Yes, he must be right.' Phaeton interjected.

'Jason restores classic cars. He knows them all!'

'Well, not all the classics, but I'd certainly like to get hold of one like that,' Jason said.

'Yes, and so would we,' the sergeant replied.

'We'll put out a description. Hopefully, track it down.'

'We'll need your CCTV footage,' he continued turning back to George. 'I suggest you take extra precautions and post security guards inside over the next few weeks until we find these criminals.'

'Okay now Miss,' the sergeant responded. 'Can you come to the Police Station and complete your statement? You can talk to our sketch artist, to build a composite. Help us identify this man.'

The next morning, Phaedon returned to work and was greeted by her manager. 'You were remarkable yesterday,' Martin said giving her a warm smile.

'Why thank you,' Phaedon blushed. 'I visited Gary in hospital yesterday afternoon. It was a deep laceration, but he said he'll be fine.'

'Oh, I suppose you already know all this,' she replied.

'Yes, I spoke to Gary yesterday.' Martin hesitated and continued. 'You recall that I told you, that I couldn't help feeling I'd met you before. Last night I found this photo at home. It was taken at our annual Church Picnic. I kept it framed along with these other photos of the staff mounted on the wall ever since,' he said handing it to her.

Studying the image, she made out a woman leaning against the door of a Red Ford Thunderbird convertible. Then she returned her focus to the woman's face in disbelief.

'It's like looking into a mirror! Who is she?'

'Her name was Emma. Emma Henry. She does have a remarkable resemblance to you,' Martin confirmed taking a closer look at the photo.

'Didn't I say your face looked familiar the moment you walked into the bank.'

'That's remarkable.' Phaeton said taking another close look. 'The only thing I remember is that my foster parents hinted my mother came from this area, but I don't know this person. Emma Henry, did you say?' 'That's right. So, you never knew your biological parents at all?

'Perhaps there is a family connection. Let me get you a coffee,' Martin said and called to his secretary. 'Jean, we'll have two strong black coffees please.'

'So, what happened to Emma?' Phaeton asked him.

'Emma was with the bank for about a year. I knew very little about her. She was the quiet kind. One day quite out of the blue. A stranger delivered a note to her saying that her father had suddenly taken ill, and she had to leave. So odd. I never heard from her again,' he said as his secretary delivered the coffee.

'Look I hope I haven't upset you, but this might help,' he said handing her a business card.

'I'm giving you stress leave after yesterday's shock. Ring my lawyer friend in Sydney. He may be able to help you with some answers about the past.'

'But I've only just started here,' Phaeton said sipping her coffee.

'You should take the leave,' he said firmly. 'I've already arranged a temporary replacement. Let me know what you find out. I often wondered what happened to Emma.'

Arriving the following day Jason met Phaeton at the B&B. Watching on she was busy packing her clothes.

‘I still can’t believe it. You actually kicked that bastard in the...’

‘Knees,’ she answered. ‘It was instinct, but I don’t have a black belt in Tae Kwon Do for nothing,’ Phaeton replied with a wry grin. Jenny my Korean stepsister and I trained with my stepdad at the Marshall Arts centre at Surry hills. He was a Special Forces veteran and self-preservation is in his blood.

‘Just take care,’ Jason replied with a note of concern. After that kind of trauma, you need a break. I’ll catch up with you in Sydney, okay?’ he responded warmly.

Pressing her body close to him, they embraced before she went on to prepare to leave. Giving Jason a parting kiss she walked from the Bed and Breakfast to the train station.

Flashing through the countryside Phaeton contemplated the photo of Emma in her hand. Drifting off to sleep she dreamed of her mother tying a neat ribbon in her hair.

‘Now it’s off to the beach. We’re having a picnic with your dad,’ her mother told her picking up a basket from the kitchen table. Running ahead to the front door, Phaeton saw a bright red car and her dad, wearing a broad-brimmed hat at the wheel. Her mother took her by the hand and led her to the car. With the convertible hood open to the sky Phaeton watched the green treetops passing overhead until she made out the image of a lighthouse. Parking at a deserted beach they followed a boardwalk to the sand-

Her parents watched on as Phaedon built a sandcastle and collected shells, decorating it.

‘Look mother it’s a lighthouse.’

‘Your Grandmother would be proud of you!’ her mother laughed.

Longingly Phaedon looked at her mother’s emerald ring. ‘It was given to me by your grandmother and one day it will be yours,’ she said giving her a warm smile. Suddenly an incoming wave crashed onto the beach, washing away the sandcastle.

The sound of a passenger slamming the interconnecting carriage door of the train abruptly woke Phaedon. Flashing by the steel arches of the Sydney Harbour Bridge rushed by as the train sped over the bridge heading for Sydney’s Central station.

Deboarding, Phaedon joined the crowd of passengers leaving the station and wandered toward nearby shops. Stopping, she gazed in some windows and came across an old jewellery shop.

‘And how can I help you?’ the shop assistant inquired.

‘I’ve read about Brazilian crystals. Can I see that ring in the cabinet? It looks so nice. Is it genuine?’ she asked, pointing out the ring.

‘Yes, it’s a natural green crystal. It’s the water sign. Try it on.’ Removing the ring from its case she handed it to Phaedon who slipped it on her finger.

‘It matches your Irish eyes perfectly,’ the assistant said.

Taking a look, tears welled up in Phaedon’s eyes, and removing it she placed it in the shopkeeper’s hand. ‘It’s very beautiful but I can’t take it. It’s not quite the one I

had in mind,' she stammered, before quickly leaving the store.

Outside, a loud crack of thunder was followed by a downpour of heavy rain pounding the pavement. The street flooded awash filling with rainwater as Phaeton waved down a passing cab to get out of the rain and home to Surry Hills. Pulling into the curb outside the apartment she tipped the driver and ran indoors. Inside she removed her backpack and settled back into her old bedroom. Making a cup of tea she lay down on the familiar couch. She fell asleep scanning a Hawaiian travel brochure that was lying on the coffee table.

Phaeton awoke to the front door opening. Her half-sister rounded the doorway of the living room. Jenny was a consummate professional, with perfectly styled hair, manicured nails, and always fashionably dressed.

'Hi, Sis, what a surprise! You only just left the other week to start your new job and you're back already! What's going on?'

'I had a bit of a rough start and I've been given some compassionate leave!'

'A rough start. What do you mean?' Jenny asked sitting down beside her.

'There was an attempted bank robbery and I got caught up in the middle of it. But I'm okay.' Phaeton sighed. 'So, how's the travel business?'

'It's always so busy I need a holiday myself, Jenny replied.

'Look, tell you what. I'm going on vacation to Hawaii next week. How about you join me? The break will do you good,' she urged.

'Yes, I saw the brochures. Phaeton replied glancing

at them again on the coffee table. 'No, it's okay. I have something arranged already. By the way where's Kim?' Phaedon asked looking at the travel brochures.

'She's at some conference in California. And how's dad? Did you get to see him when you were in Armidale?'

'Yes. I think he looks a little better. It's a pity Kim hasn't seen him more often. I ended up being the only one looking after Dad, and I was only thirteen at the time. Kim was so absorbed with her career as a broker, and you were so busy, I had to cope with everything. Noel was a real handful,' Phaedon lamented bitterly almost breaking down.

'I'm so sorry Sis but I suffered as well, and I couldn't do anything to help you at the time,' Jenny responded defensively.

'Sometimes I felt that Kim treated me like a companion dog for Noel. But at least you know who you are,' Phaedon sobbed. 'I don't even know who I am or for that matter where I even come from!'

'I had no idea you felt that way. You've always been my one and only little sister,' Jenny said taking hold of her hand.

'You know I love you and you know Kim does too. You have always known who you are. Strong and independent. Right?'

Outside the bedroom window, rain swept across the sky. Phaedon retrieved the bank manager's card and rang the lawyer he'd recommended. After a short delay, the receptionists answered.

‘Yes, *that’s* right. I think her name is Emma,’ Phaedon explained to the receptionist. ‘And she possibly lived in Armidale. Her mother’s name is Molly Watts and that’s pretty much all I know,’ she explained. ‘I was referred to Mr Jacob’s by his friend George Martin. Yes, that’s right. He’s the bank manager I work for in Armidale. ‘Mr Jacobs is busy with a court case for the next two weeks so I can make the appointment on the 14th at 10.00 am?’

‘Yes, that’s fine,’ Phaedon replied and hung up.

Jimmy was behind the wheel of the band’s yellow van. Turning the corner, he pulled up in front of Kimberley’s house to find Kimberley polishing her Harley under the awning. Stepping from the van they playfully flung their arms around each other. ‘What do you think?’

‘Not bad,’ he replied.

‘Thank you. That’s a compliment coming from a car guy. And where’s Jason?’

‘He collected the pickup from the local paint shop yesterday and he’s on his way by now to meet up with Phaedon in Sydney,’ Jimmy replied.

‘So, you know Jason well, right?’ Kimberley asked. ‘Absolutely. We’ve been through a lot together.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like, well, for one when Jason arrived in Sydney he was pretty messed up and he and Shirley was left to pick up sticks from a hard life in the country’.

‘Do you think Phaedon’s good for him?’

‘Yes, I do. He’s had a few “interesting girls”, but Phaedon seems different. She’s special.’

‘Almost as *special* as *me*?’ Kimberley gave him a playful hug.

'Ah, um, I'm not sure how I answer that!' joked Jimmy.
'Am I special?'

'You're raw and sexy and I like raw and sexy,'
Kimberley teased.

'Raw and sexy? I'll take that as a compliment, shall I?' Jimmy gave a broad smile.

'Okay, well I'm ready,' she said pragmatically, taking hold of his hand. 'You drive. We don't want to keep Max waiting at the hotel.'

When they arrived at the Armidale hotel Max was busy packing up the gear and preparing to load it into the van.

'Is the PA system packed yet?' Kimberley asked as Max looked over their gear.

'Not yet,' he replied collecting the microphone stand.

'Make sure you check it first. It sounded a little scratchy last night.'

'No sweat. One of the speakers croaked but I've fixed it okay. Have you heard from Phaedon?' asked Max as he picked up an amplifier.

'Yes. She contacted her lawyer but there's some sort of delay,' Jimmy responded as he helped Max load the van.

'Geez. I hope she can make the festival in time,' Kimberley said.

'It's okay. If we leave now, we will have plenty of time.' Max responded.

The headlights lit up the deserted car park of the Gunnedah Bowling Club as a van reversed up to the back door. Two hooded men armed with a crowbar, pried open the door and headed for the ATM.

Unexpectedly, the night shift security guard confronted the men and in a brief struggle, they struck the guard over the head silencing him.

Appearing on the police security system, a flashing light appeared alerting him to the break-in. Grabbing his keys the police constable dashed to his patrol car. Dislodging the ATM, the two thieves dragged it onto a trolley and wheeled it to the van. Starting the engine, they saw a police car's flashing blue and red lights illuminated the night approaching and roared off into the night and disappearing in the opposite direction.

Outside an office building, Phaeton read the brass name plate inscribed Anderson and Jacobs, and then made her way inside. Taking a seat in the waiting room she picked up a Cosmopolitan Magazine to read. Before she had time to look at the first page the receptionist invited her into the lawyer's office. Extending a welcoming hand Jeffrey Jacobs offered her a seat in a plush leather chair in front of his desk. In his mid-fifties, Jacobs looked quite distinguished in his tailored suit and having a dark well-groomed head of hair accentuated his fine facial features and grey eyes directed at her.

'Thank you for taking the time to see me,' began Phaeton nervously. 'As I told your receptionist on the phone, I feel my foster parents have sheltered me from my past. Not that I'm ungrateful for their care,' she hurriedly explained.

'I'm sorry about the delay,' Jacobs responded. 'I was in the middle of a court case. Martin explained your role

in foiling the attempted robbery. How long ago was that?’

‘Nearly three weeks ago now I guess,’ Phaedon replied.

‘I see. You Know, Sometimes Foster parents are often overprotective,’ Jacobs replied factually.

‘I know they’ve been very good to me but now more than ever, I feel I need to know something about my biological parents.’ Phaedon commiserated.

‘Sometimes it’s best *not* to know. They probably had their reasons. I understand from Martin that there you seem to have a strong resemblance to an Emma Henry. Is that right?’ Jacobs asked. Phaedon.

‘I made a preliminary search to discover there was a woman named Emma Watts who lived in Armidale. I’m sorry to say that most of the records have been obscured by watermarks. The archive building is long overdue for repairs from rainwater damage. I’ll make a further forensic search for more information,’ he explained.

Phaedon searched through her handbag and extracted the photo of Emma Henry standing beside the red Ford convertible and handed it to him.

‘So, you feel this Emma Henry resonates with you?’
‘Yes. It seems like a crazy coincidence, but she looks terribly like me, don’t you think?’

‘Perhaps,’ he said studying the photo.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll do the best I can. The documents are very sketchy, so I need some time to do some digging for conclusive information. Is there anything else?’ he asked.

‘My grandmother could be Molly. When I was seven, I remember her name mentioned.’

‘Well, it’s a *start*,’ he said rising from his chair.

‘I’ll keep in touch.’

Phaedon walked the street bordering the bustling entertainment strip and entered a crowded hotel bar. The pub music was deafening. Pushing her way through the crowd of drunken patrons Phaedon felt dozens of ogling eyes follow her every move. Turning back, she squeezed herself through the pack and fell out the door onto the sidewalk. Collecting herself, she made her way along the busy strip and hailing a taxi, she directed the driver to take to her back to Surry Hills. Falling into a troubled sleep, Phaedon dreamt of sitting beside her father in the red Thunderbird. The headlights shone through a torrent of rain, with the windscreen wipers barely clearing the screen. Lightning struck the lighthouse showering sparks and blowing out its powerful lamp.

Coming to a halt at the lighthouse James had entered the doorway into pitch black with the young Faith following closely behind. Striking his cigarette lighter he found the kerosene lamp and negotiated their way through the dark to the basement. Sighting a crack of light under the storeroom door her father opened it to find two men playing cards. ‘What’s going on here? I don’t pay you to play cards! You’re supposed to be on watch.’ Taken by surprise one of the men jumped up to confront her father. In a brief struggle, the lamp crashed to the floor erupting in flames, enveloping one

of the men until her father smothered the flames with a blanket from a bunk bed inside the room.

Outside the lighthouse, under the grips of a violent storm, mountainous waves burst over the parapet wall revealing a flailing Ketch crashing onto the rocks and flinging its crew overboard into the turbulent waters.

The sound of loud hammering woke Phaedon from her nightmare. Wrapping herself in a dressing gown she partially opened the front door to find Jason outside.

‘Wait until you see our Chevy,’ Jason said excitedly. ‘It’s Midnight Blue, your favourite colour. Letting him in, Phaedon still felt disturbed from the lingering emotions from her nightmare.

‘How’s Jimmy?’ she asked.

‘He’s sweet. He’s driving Kimberley to the festival. I’m sure there’s something going on between them.’

Jason had just turned on the TV and slumped down onto the couch when Phaedon’s phone rang. Picking it up it was Jacob’s secretary on the line.

‘This is Sandy from Mr Jacob’s office. He’s in court this week but he has time during the lunch break today and asked if you could meet him outside the City Central Court building at midday.’

Finding the Court House courtyard a flock of pigeons scattered in front of Phaedon and Jason. Sighting Jacobs he was seated on a bench waiting for them. After greeting Jacobs all three walked to a nearby wooden table and sat down.

‘I’ve come across some disturbing information, Jacobs greeted them. “What I’m about to tell you will

not be easy to hear. Are you okay for me to continue?' Jacobs' tone was serious.

Holding Jason's hand firmly Phaedon nodded to Jacobs. 'As I said, I'd rather know the truth,' she replied. 'Arriving at the truth is best in the long run.' Jacobs offered.

'So, *what* is it?' Phaedon asked bracing herself.

'I searched for more records and found that the Emma in the photo was married to a James Henry.'

'So, you think these could be my real parents?'

'Yes, it appears that your foster parents changed your name. Faith is your original Christian name. I called your stepmother to confirm this. 'But she never told me.' Phaedon, sounded indignant.

'She told me that she wanted you to have a fresh start,' Jacobs said passing her a file. 'She renamed you Phaedon, "one who gives light". It's an ancient Greek name.'

'Your family history is quite unusual too. Police records, list the incident as a cold case,' explained Jacobs. 'I'm so sorry Phaedon, but sadly James Henry was the victim of foul play. The report states he was a murder victim. His body was found in Oxley National Park a month after being kidnapped.'

'Kidnapped and murdered! What happened?' she struggled to take it in clutching Jason's arm.

'I'm sorry but there's no other way but to tell you this. His assailant was never found. There was speculation and gossip, but the investigation led to a dead end. Your father owned a property near the Spring Point Lighthouse. He inherited it from his father, but I need to do more research into the property matter.'

'And my mother. Do you think she could still be alive?' Phaeton looked incredulous.

'Well, I don't want to raise false hope. After all this time she is most probably deceased. I will check out every lead I can, just in case. You have my word.'

Returning his files to his briefcase Jacobs glanced at his watch, ready to go.

'It's about time we left as well,' Jason responded. 'You say the lighthouse is down Spring Point Road near Byron Bay?'

'Yes, that's right,' Jacobs replied. 'It's a historic site about a ten-hour drive north of Sydney.'

'Hey that's interesting. Kimberley band is performing at the Byron Bay Blues Festival,' Jason said. 'Were planning to meet them there,'

'I'll keep you informed Phaeton in the event I come across more information about Emma,' Jacobs said as they parted and left the square.

Crossing under the harbour tunnel the high-pitched sound of Cindy's Kawasaki echoed through the tunnel on her approach to China Town.

Pulling up in front of a red neon sign advertising the Golden Dragon, Cindy headed towards the back of a crowded restaurant scanning the room for a familiar face. 'I'm sure you and your friend will be happy with my deal,' he said. 'Just make sure you look after my friends.'

'I always do,' she responded confidently.

'So, you came up with the cash?' the man asked airing his satisfaction.

'Fifty grand, right? Half now and the other half when you deliver the goods,' Cindy responded handing over a backpack of cash.

'That's very good. I plan to rendezvous with the yacht next Wednesday night,' he said in a low tone. 'Once it's delivered, don't worry, I will let you know. And of course, we will all benefit. I expect it'll be worth at least five times more on the Sydney market alone. Meet me at this address,' he concluded handing her a phone number and disappeared among the patrons.

The office of Blake and Simson overlooked the city centre. The rather portly Senior Partner, John Blake perched on the edge of his chair sorted through files at his desk. Extracting a file, he passed it to his secretary. 'Can you check this Lighthouse Property file?' Blake directed. 'I need to update it.'

'That's been on file for quite a while now,' she responded. 'I received the final payment from Yuri Antonov yesterday and I need to check the date to keep his squatter claim alive,' Blake insisted. 'Can you check on it as soon as possible?' he directed looking over the document.

At the Land and Titles Record Office Blake's secretary carried out Blake's instructions searching the file when she discovered that an additional claim on the property had been lodged by Anderson and Jacobs. Making a photocopy she hurried back to her office to deliver it to Blake. 'Look at this,' she said to Blake. 'An additional claim has been added to the Lighthouse mansion property.'

'Damn, I was about to process the Yuri Antonov's claim next week,' expressing his anger.

'It's been filed by Anderson and Jacobs on behalf of a Phaedon Henry,' he said pointing out the reference at the bottom of the page. 'I'd better contact our clients. They've already paid us a substantial cash payment. Can you speak to your friend first at Jacobs's office?' Nodding, she was soon on the phone to Jacobs's receptionist. 'Yes, that's right. It appears that Phaedon is the daughter of the original owners of the property and he's with some bloke driving a midnight blue Chevy pickup and apparently, they're planning a trip north to the blues festival she informed Blake's secretary passing on the information. Immediately Blake was on the phone to Yuri Antonov.

'And how should I have known she would suddenly turn up,' Antonov stammered his alarm.

'And you should know that need extra money to squash her lawyers claim,' Blake telling Yuri abruptly.

'Don't worry I can arrange that. I expect some extra funds very soon,' Antonov assured him and ended the call.

Off the coast, the white sails of a yacht moved effortlessly along the horizon. Darting through the waves a patrol boat quickly approached them. Pulling alongside the yacht the patrol boat crew boarded to carry out their search. In the mansion, Cindy repeatedly paced the length of the room with her mobile pressed to her ear. After ending the call, she rummaged in the cupboard and produced a bottle of

Vodka. Pouring Antonov and herself a glass of Vodka she slumped down in her seat.

‘It’s not good news. The yacht has been intercepted, and our shipment has been seized by a marine authority patrol boat.’

Throwing down a shot of Vodka, she gestured a toast to an unimpressed Anatov seated at the table. ‘Za Nas! To your health!’

‘Damn it woman!’ he yelled, slamming his fist on the table. ‘You told me your friends knew what they were doing.’

Crossing over the Sydney Harbour Bridge Phaedon and Jason headed north. Close behind a black sedan followed Phaedon and Jason, ducking in and out of the traffic. Approaching a roadhouse, they pulled out of the steady stream of traffic for a rest break. The roadhouse was a hub for road travellers making their way out of the city along the old Pacific Highway. Turning into the dinner Jason found a parking space and they made their way to the diner. Pulling into a nearby parking space a heavyset man left the black sedan and sauntered towards the pickup. Ensuring he remained unobserved he crouched down and fixed a tracking device underneath the pickup chassis.

Ordering their burgers Jason and Phaedon took a seat in a dinner cubicle.

‘Yes. I really do like the Midnight Blue,’ Phaedon said looking out from the diner.

‘You were right! It sure looks good,’ lauded Jason.

‘You know, ever since Jacobs mentioned the lighthouse, I’ve had a weird sensation.

'Like what?' Jason asked.

'I remember my father arguing with some man at the lighthouse. They were shouting at each other, and I felt afraid.'

'Do you recall what your father was saying?'

'It was something about a boat that was wrecked in a storm and crashed onto the rocks.'

The road had emptied by the time the two resumed their journey north. Cuddled up besides Jason at the wheel, the sun was fast beginning to set by the time they reached Port Macquarie.

Wheeling off the highway, Jason sighted a motel vacancy sign and checked them both in.

Seated outside on their balcony overlooking Port Macquarie harbour they admired the distant funnels of light reflecting on the water.

'That's a pretty effect,' Phaeton remarked, 'It reminds me of a light from a lighthouse.'

'Everything reminds you of a lighthouse,' Jason teased, pouring her a glass of Champagne.

'I've just remembered my parents taking me to the beach. One night we stopped at a lighthouse, climbed to the top and looked out over the sea. I still remember its light reflecting on the ocean.'

Sipping on a glass of wine they observed a dark cloud passed by above revealing the light of a half-moon. 'I know it must be hard to accept Jacobs's story, but it's for the best. After the festival we can drive down to Spring Point and take a look at your old home,' Jason said.

Returning to their room Phaedon slipped out of her clothes and showered, letting the water run over her face she felt a welcome relief from the days heat of the sun. Following suite, Jason joined her and drying off, lay down in the bed beside her. Wrapped naked in each other's arms they tenderly caressed and entwined in each other's arms they drifted off to sleep.

A heavy thud pounding against their motel door abruptly woke them. Instinctively they threw on their clothes and grabbed their belongings just as an axe-head split open the door. Pushing open the balcony sliding door, they ran outside and clambered down the fire escape to the parking lot and sped off in the pickup.

Phaedon dialled 000.

'What is your emergency?' the operator relied.

'We're at the Port Macquarie Harbour Motel and some maniac just broke down our door with an axe!'

'I'll send officers over immediately,' the operator replied. 'Is anyone hurt?'

'What is your situation right now?' the operator asked.

'Someone tried to break into our room, but we managed to escape, and right now we're on the highway heading north,' Phaedon stammered.

'I suggest you call into the nearest police station and make a report,' the operator responded curtly just as Phaedon's mobile battery died.

The early morning sun pierced the pickup's windscreen and slowly coming down from his adrenaline rush when Jason's pickup spluttered to a stop. The petrol tank was empty. Checking his map Woodburn was only five kilometres down the road.

'Phaedon. Lock yourself inside, I'm sure the towns just a short walking distance from here and there should be a local garage there,' Jason told her grabbing a petrol can from the back giving her a tap on the widow. 'Don't worry I'll be back soon.'

Dozing in the Chevy's cabin Phaedon turned on the radio to pass the time. Confirmed by the broadcast news thirty-five minutes had passed since Jason set out. Pulling up behind the pickup a black car came to a stop on the road behind her. Unaware of its presence a rough-looking character exited the sedan and made his way toward the pickup. Reaching in through the open driver's window he unlocked the door.

Panicking at the sight of the masked man, she leapt from the passenger door and tumbled to the ground. Struggling to her feet, she began to run but the man grabbed her and dragged her towards his car.

'Let go of me!' she screamed.

Another car turned the corner and pulled up opposite the black sedan. Jason jumped out, dropping the fuel can, and raced towards the man dragging Phaedon towards his car. Looking on the Good Samaritan who had given Jason a lift froze in his seat. Phaedon lay kicking and screaming on the ground and grabbing hold of the crazed man Jason released her from grip on Phaedon and delivered a blow and kicked the assailant sending him careering into a ditch leaving him lying unconscious on the ground. Hastily Jason filled the petrol tank as the bewildered Samaritan watching drove off.

Jumping into the pickup, Phaedon jumped inside the cab beside Jason who threw the pickup into gear and

crossing a high curb unknowingly dislodged the tracker from the underside of the pickup. Glancing into his rear-view mirror, Jason caught a glimpse of the man crawling out of the ditch and heading for his car.

Just on mid-day, rounding a bend the Byron Bay Motel came into sight and turning into the Motel car park they booked in. Returning to the pickup Jason drove off leaving Phaedon to find Kimberley's Jimmy, Kimberley and Max kicking back watching TV.

'Hi, it's so good to see you,' Kimberley greeted them excitedly. Where's Jason?'

'He's gone to get some burgers. Can I use your phone.' My phone needs a charge Phaedon replied still distraught.

'Sure-thing girlfriend. Here you go.' Kimberly replied handing over her phone.

'I don't know where to start but we were assaulted on the way here.'

Dialling out she connected to Jacob's receptionist. Transferring Phaedon to Jacobs, he was surprised to hear her voice trying to explain the assault.

'Did you report it to the police?' Jacobs asked.

'Well, yes, but it was awful,' she sobbed.

'Are you hurt?' Jacobs asked.

'No, I'm okay now.' Phaedon replied.

'Look, just be careful. There are lots of crazy people out there these days. I'm going to talk to a detective to see if we can get more information,' Jacobs said. 'So, what are you going to do now?' his calm voice echoed over the phone.

‘Well, we both plan to go to the blues festival tonight,’ Phaedon replied.

‘Good idea,’ he reassured her. ‘Just take it easy and call me if you need anything at all.’

Phaedon hung up the phone feeling reassured by Jacobs. ‘Sounds like you two had a rough ride,’ said Max.

‘That’s an understatement!’ Jason replied. ‘So, the bands playing tonight?’ ‘

‘Yes, and we’re really looking forward to the gig,’ Kimberley said. ‘And it’s a special Halloween night,’ Max replied twirling his drumsticks. ‘Hey, it’s still early. Why don’t we go windsurfing? The water looks great today and there’s a good breeze,’ Jimmy said pulling up Kimberley from the couch and giving her a squeeze.

‘OK, come on let’s do it,’ Max agreed, tossing his drumsticks onto the couch.

Jason had returned and sharing the burgers around, went outside to look at the ocean. Taking Jason’s hand Phaedon led him to the Manager’s office.

‘Is the lighthouse far from here?’ she asked.

‘It’s about a twenty-five-minute drive. It’s closed to tourists at the moment and the roads are in pretty bad shape. It floods easily and it looks like the weather’s going to change. They’re talking about some Spanish effect. La Niña or something like that,’ he said directing his gaze towards the sky.

Jimmy and Max joined Phaedon and Jason outside and bundling themselves into the van they set off toward the nearby beach. Unloading the gear from the van’s roof racks and put on their wet suits. A brisk wind formed white sea caps across the bay. Bracing

themselves in the prevailing wind they navigated their way through the surf. They followed each other as far out as they dared, and in turn, caught as many waves as they could. Phaedon felt the rush of adrenalin as she leaned hard into the wind. Reaching the shallows, she re-set the sail and jived back to start over again. A pod of playful dolphins appeared beside Phaedon and rode beside her on the crest of a giant wave carrying her to the beach. Behind her, Jason, Jimmy, and Kimberley finally caught their last wave and met Phaedon, waiting for them drying out on the beach.

A ferry edged its way into Circular Quay wharf as Jacobs and Inspector Ross relaxed at a quayside restaurant. Ross was keenly intuitive and as a prominent female detective, she excelled in the investigation department she led. 'After all these years it's so good to see you again,' Jacobs said pouring her a glass of wine.

'Yes, last time was when I was promoted to the Cold Case Squad,' Ross replied.

'I upset the boys club, especially when I worked out in the gym.'

'I don't think I've seen you since the Donnelly case,' Jacobs remarked. 'He was quite a nasty customer. Deserved life, but we all did our best. Come to think of it he must be up for parole by now,' Jacobs noted topping up his glass.

'That's true. Not a comforting thought.' 'And your marriage?' Jacobs asked Ross.

'Divorced, I'm sorry to say. Moving up through the ranks put an end to that,' Ross responded.

'Well, thanks for your time,' Jason said. 'That's okay, I'm retired now. When you rang, I must admit I was a little intrigued. So, what's on your mind?'

'Look, I need a fast track on something. It involves a property called the Spring Point Lodge Lighthouse estate. He was direct. 'My client's mother disappeared fifteen years ago following the Rosehill Carnival and I need your help.' He gave Ross a broad smile.

'Yes, I remember that case,' Ross recalled. 'James and Emma Henry, is that right? He held the lighthouse lease and had a bookmaker's license. I worked on the case when I was a young detective.' 'Yes, that's right. The last sighting before their disappearance was at the Rosehill Races.'

'Did you ever find out anymore?' Jacobs asked before calling the waiter to their table.'

'No. That's where the trail ended until Henry's body was found dumped in the Oxley State Forest. But I'm afraid that we had no joy in trying to solve the case and it ended up another one of those mysteries. Even their red convertible disappeared.'

'It's interestingly the daughter has turned up,' Jacobs said. 'Really, that's quite a surprise,' Ross responded.

'The victim owned a mansion at Spring Point. I only discovered today that the inheritance went to James Henry's brother in England.'

'I've recently met the daughter who has a possible claim on the estate. I also spoke to her stepmother who told me that she was found wandering alone in a bit of a dream at Rosehill Racecourse. She kept asking for Molly, according to her stepmother,' Jacobs explained.

'I see,' Ross replied.

‘Police couldn’t identify her parents, so she became a ward of the state and fostered and re-named Phaedon by her foster family. There was confusion over her name. When they found her, she answered to the name Faye, but I discovered that her real Christian name was Faith. The authorities misinterpreted Faith as Faye.’

‘So, Faith became Faye who became Phaedon.’

‘I just need your help to pull this all together for me,’ Jacobs asked.

Delivering a new bottle of wine to the table the waitress displayed the label before opening the bottle. ‘Your favourite Cab Sav, Mr Jacobs.’

‘So, you’re a regular here?’ Ross smiled, as examining the 2012 Chapple Hill label. ‘Yes, my office is just around the corner.’ Jacobs replied pouring them another glass.

‘So how exactly can I help?’ Ross picked up from where Jacobs had left off.

‘Well, I carried out a title search which unearthed something very interesting. I contacted the governing trustee who handled the title matter at the time of Henry’s murder. He had a hell of a time tracing his elder brother. Arnold turned out to be a farmer in Chester, England. James hadn’t left a will, but his property was finally awarded to Arnold Henry. He had disowned James when they had a fall out over running the farm and James left the country. As far as I can make out Arnold never knew that his brother had married Emma. It appears the property was too far away for him to show interested in it.’

'I guess as a farmer his priorities lay at England,' Ross replied.

'However, there's more. Searching the current status of the property I found a claim has recently been lodged by a Yuri Antonov. 'You see under the occupation law; a squatter claim is open to anyone who has occupied the property undisturbed for twelve years or more.' Jacobs told Ross.

'Really. And who might that be?' Ross asked as he poured another glass of wine.

'A Yuri Antonov used to work for James Henry more than twelve years ago as it happens. 'I'm trying to contact Arnold Henry but no luck so far. In the meantime, I have lodged a counter claim on behalf of Phaeton.' Jacobs revealed.

'As it happens, a man called Yurie Antonov took over the lease to maintain the lighthouse and mansion exactly fourteen years ago. You see James Henry who was Phaeton's father held the original mariner's license for the lighthouse. He had a big fallout with the maritime authority over a boating accident regarding an incident at the lighthouse.'

'Oh yes now you mention it I do recall.' Ross replied. 'A fishing ketch was dashed on the rocks killing two crew members.'

'Yes, that's the one.' Jacobs nodded. 'The operation of the lighthouse keeper lease is now shared with Antonov and his brother. From my research, the Antonov brothers were employed by James Henry as relief keepers.'

'That's all pretty interesting,' Ross replied sipping on her wine. 'I found the report confirming the failure of

the lighthouse during a storm. This all came out in an inquiry at the time and the coroner ruled that the sailors' deaths were due to the unavoidable events of a natural disaster and not able to prove any negligence at all contributing to the tragedy,' Jacobs summarised.

'I also inquired as to the current leaseholder of the lighthouse from the Marine Safety Authority. According to the records Yuri Antonov is the latest leaseholder and the current lighthouse keeper,' he concluded.

'Ok. You've certainly sparked my interest,' Ross responded. 'I'll investigate it for old times' sake. Leave it with me.'

Set in a carnival atmosphere hundreds of campervans arrived through the day at the annual festival campground. Centre of the grassy green field, roadie crews went about setting up the stage and testing the sound systems.

Arriving early Jason identified Max's van and parked alongside. Met by Kimberly and together with the band they all made their way to a food stall.

'Hey quite a turn up already,' Max said.' The organizers expect over fifteen thousand fans this year,' Kimberly replied. Looking on Phaedon and Jason were sampling the local fish and chips.

'Not bad. Take some. We haven't had a bite all day.' Jason said handing around a cardboard plate of chips.

'Keith and Jenny are on the way,' Max chimed in.

'I hope so,' Kimberly replied.

'It's okay, I brought their guitars with me to make a sound check before we go on tonight,' Max assured her.

At nightfall, the blues festival was buzzing in a hive of activity. Taking the stage the host introduced The Zephyr Blues. Kimberly sat herself behind the piano. Behind, Keith Jenny and Max opened their performance accompanied by a backing group of gospel singers from the local Baptist Church. Centre stage Kimberly began projecting her soulful voice into the microphone; her sound carrying into the fans packed around the dance floor in front of stage and into the crowd beyond with Phaeton, Jason and Jimmy looking on from the wings.

Taking her hand Jason led Phaeton down onto the dance floor and held her close dancing their way into the crowd. It was Halloween and caught up in the theme a group of fans were wearing masks and fooling around trying to scare each other.

On stage Kimberly completed her set and left the stage. The next band in the lineup took over with a performance by the Tedeschi Truck blues band from New York. Finding Phaeton, Jason, and Jimmy caught up in the exuberant crush. Taking Jimmy by the hand they gathered together and danced late well into the night.

Phaeton sat recovering at the motel enjoying a hearty breakfast with Jason and her friends.

'You guys put on a great show last night,' Jason remarked.

'Sure thing,' Phaeton replied. 'What was it that your dad told you Kimberly? You really did have the soul power last night.'

‘Thanks guys. I couldn’t do it without you all,’ Kimberly replied. ‘Yes. I think he would be proud. So, what are you guys up too today?’

‘How about we take a drive to the lighthouse?’ Jason responded downing the last of his beacon and eggs on his plate.

‘That’s cool. You guys go on,’ Kimberly replied, taking a sip of coffee. ‘I’ve been invited to meet the promoter today. He’s interested in putting together a national tour for us.’

‘*Alright!*’ Phaeton replied.

‘We’ll meet you back here later this afternoon,’ Kimberly said propping her chin in her hands and smiled. ‘Jimmy and I have lots to do until then.’

‘And what about you Max?’ Jason asked.

‘The van badly needs a new tyre so I’m taking it down to the local garage to get it fixed,’ he said.

‘Yeah, go ahead,’ Kimberley agreed.

‘We’ll just hang out until you get back.’

Travelling along the Pacific Highway, a partially damaged sign pointed toward their destination, Jason turned off the highway and headed down Spring Point Road toward the Lighthouse. Ominous clouds filled the sky. Descending from the heavens a down paw of rain increased with intensity, Jason was unnerved by the repeated bolts of lightning flashing in front of him, struggling behind the wheel to see his way ahead. Finally, they came to a flooded causeway and attempted to cross. Caught in the flash flood, water surged into the engine bringing them to a halt and stranding them midstream.

Back at the Blues Festival, Jimmy answered his mobile. 'Jimmy is that you? It's Jason. Listen, we need help. The engines flooded and we're stranded about a kilometre from Spring Point on the old Lighthouse Road.' Before Jimmy could respond, the line dropped out.

Exiting Armidale Airport, Ross collected her rental car and headed off to meet George Martin at the bank. When Ross finally arrived, she sat in Martins' office while he searched through his computer files.

'Yuri Antonov opened an account in September the day before the attempted robbery. But it was only opened for a week.' Showing Ross, the records he flicked back through the file.

'I've found an account here in the name of Yuri and Ivan Antonov was opened and then closed it within a week.'

'That's odd, don't you think?' Ross asked. 'Do you remember what the brothers looked like?'

'No, but I have an account address.'

'Yes. It called Parkland. Number 35 Hill Avenue, Armidale. It's an old boarding house run by a woman called Dorothy Turner. I've heard she's a bit cantankerous, but she might be able to help.'

'Do you have any CCTV of the day of the robbery?'

'Yes, but the man's face was disguised, and the police haven't identified him yet.'

Leaving the bank Ross headed for Hill Avenue and pulled up outside number 35.

Ross's knock was met by Dorothy Turner peering out from behind the fly screen door.

Ross presented her badge. 'I won't take much of your time. Do you recall a man called Yuri Antonov? I believe he boarded here.'

Opening the screen door, Dorothy took a close look at Ross and then her badge.

'Yes. I raised him after his father was killed but he hasn't lived here for a long time now.'

'Do you recall if he had a car?' Ross asked.

'Yes, he had an old black one that looked like one Hitler would own! I remember it very well because Yuri loved that car. Silly memory!'

'No, not silly at all Ms Turner.'

Ross produced the photo of Emma beside her red Thunderbird and handed it to Dorothy. 'Do you know this girl?'

'No. But she's a pretty thing. I do remember Yuri turning up in a real flashy-looking red Convertible like the one in the photo. Yes, I think so. He used to fill up both cars at Smithy's garage.'

'And which garage was that?'

'It's a Shell Garage on Vine Street. Smithy owned the garage for years. He races a yellow stock car on the weekends.'

Returning to her car Ross looked up the address on her phone. Turning into Vine Street she saw a dilapidated Shell sign outside an old garage with a single petrol bowser. She found the owner working on a stock car engine. Introducing herself she asked him if he knew Yuri Antonov.

'Yes, he owned a 1958 Daimler. I told the police it was the car used when we were robbed,' Smithy said leaning over the engine of his car.

'You were robbed?' Ross responded.

'Yep. They arrested Antonov's brother, caught red-handed trying to rob a bank in Tamworth. He was sent for a stretch in Hartford Hall for his trouble. Ivan's his name.'

Leaving the workshop Ross sat in her car and rang the Administrator of Hartford Hall and introduced her.

'I believe that you have a patient named Ivan Antonio?'

'Yes, he was a patient,' the Administrator replied.

'What do you mean was?' Ross asked.

'He escaped from a low-security unit about seven months ago now,' she explained. 'He was admitted into a new drug therapy program. Our internal investigation indicated that the nurse in charge may have been complicit in his escape. She's also suspected of supplying patients with illicit drugs, and we dismissed her.'

'And what was her name?' Ross inquired.

'Cindy Mathews.'

'I see. Anything else you can tell me?' Ross asked.

'Ivan had several visits from his brother before he escaped,' she replied shuffling through some papers.

'We reported all this information to the police and interviewed his brother, but there was no evidence he was involved in his escape!'

Returning to her car Ross called the local police station. The duty officer checking the records found

only one 1959 Daimler recorded under the name of Yuri Antonio revealing Spring Point Lodge as the address of the owner.

Stranded in the flooded crossing, unable to start the engine, Phaeton searched for her phone.

‘Where’s my phone?’

‘I don’t know, and my phones useless. The battery died when I was speaking to Jimmy,’ Jason replied. ‘Let’s try and make a call from that house over there,’ Jason said.

Leaving the stranded pickup they waded through the rising water to safety.

Inside, Yuri Antanov was watching television when the broadcast was interrupted by breaking news.

A category three storm weather event warning has been issued. The Bureau of Meteorology has reported that it will hit the northern coast of New South Wales at 5 p.m. eastern standard time and residents are advised to take all precautionary steps to avoid injury or damage.’

Turning off his television, Antanov walked to the kitchen when he heard a knock at the front door.

Partially opening the door, he found a drenched Jason and Phaeton standing outside.

‘I’m sorry to bother you but we were wondering if you can help us. Our truck broke down not far from here. Do you have a phone we can use?’ Jason asked politely.

The man drew closer, staring at Jason and Phaedon standing at the door soaked by the rain. Wearing thick horn-rimmed glasses perched on his nose it exaggerated his some-what dishevelled appearance. Opening the door, he ushered them into an enormous entry room. Once spotlessly maintained, now a repugnant musty odor permeated the faded interior. In the dining room, Phaedon observed an old photo of a lighthouse hanging on the wall.

‘Ah, you noticed the lighthouse! It's just down the road from here. Have you seen it before?’ he asked in a thick accent.

‘Well, no,’ Phaedon replied. ‘Not really. We’ve heard about it. We were on our way there to take a look but now we’re stuck in this dreadful weather, and I’ve lost my phone.’

‘Mm. The weather here is quite unpredictable. That’s why they built the lighthouse here years ago. Before it was built many ships foundered at sea.’

‘In the era of the old windjammer sailing ships, I suppose,’ Jason replied. ‘But they don’t need it these days, right? GPS navigation has changed everything?’

‘Uh. I don’t trust those newfangled gadgets. Give me a chart any day,’ he said leaving them standing in the hallway as he went to the kitchen. ‘There’s a fireplace in the lounge room. You can dry out there. You must be hungry. I’ll be with you soon.’

Huddling by the fireplace Phaedon and Jason overheard the muffled voices of the man and a woman and the sound of someone sharpening a knife in the kitchen sent a chill through their bones.

Reappearing Antonov laid out some plates on the table balancing a tray of roast meat. Appearing in the hallway, Phaedon glimpsed a woman disappearing down a corridor.

‘Is that your wife?’ Phaedon asked airing her curiosity.

‘No, that’s just my housekeeper,’ he said placing the platter on a table. Stabbing a slab of meat, he handed them each a sharp-bladed knife.

‘Eat up, I slaughtered the pig myself,’ he said forking the meat onto their plates. ‘Ah, no forks. I never use them, but I’ll find some for you,’ he said and left the table to promptly return with a set of forks.

‘You’re interested in navigation?’ Jason asked, pointing to a sextant on the wall.

‘That’s an heirloom. My father was a mariner,’ Antonov said stuffing a piece of meat into his mouth.

‘Really? A seafarer?’ Jason was intrigued.

‘He captained a cargo ship years ago.’

‘So, is that how you ended up here?’

‘Oh yes. On his last voyage during WW11 he was shipwrecked just off the coast near here.’ He was lucky to survive, but as a Russia Ally during the war he was granted Australian citizenship.’

‘Did he have anything to do with the lighthouse?’ Phaedon asked curiously.

‘Indeed. After he was employed as an assistant keeper. Now it’s my job.’

‘And who was the keeper at that time?’ Phaedon asked.

‘What’s that?’ he replied sharply.

‘Have you ever heard of a James Henry?’ Phaedon stammered.

‘James Henry, you say. Yes, I believe he was the keeper here years ago,’ he said brushing her question off. ‘And what brings you down this way?’ Antonov asked suspiciously eyeing them off.

‘We have come to see our friends at the Byron Blues Festival, and we just wanted to see the old Lighthouse.

‘Yes, that’s all,’ Phaeton replied. We like looking at old historic landmarks.’

‘And their history.’ Jason added.

‘History. Is that right?’ Antonov barked. ‘My father always admired Lenin and his revolution.’

Feeling uncomfortable Jason changed the subject. ‘Can we possibly call for assistance on your phone now?’ Jason asked.

Ignoring Jason’s question, Antonov’s eyes glazed over, and he became disquietingly calm. Wiping his mouth with his hand he left them and climbed the staircase in the hallway.

Reaching the attic, he switched on a video surveillance camera and brought up the images of Jason and Phaeton sitting in the lounge room. Zooming in on Phaeton and studied her face for a moment before he clicked open a laptop computer file displaying images of a woman dressing in front of a mirror.

Returning to the lounge room, he found Phaeton and Jason looking at a painting of his father. ‘My father was not only a great mariner, but he was also a great Soviet patriot,’ he gloated. ‘Now we’ll go to the Lighthouse.’

‘Okay, but first we need to use your phone if we may?’ Phaeton said balking at the idea.

‘It’s out of order,’ he responded bluntly. ‘But you can use the phone at the lighthouse. It’s only a few minutes

from here.' He said leading them outside through the kitchen service door to his car.

Immediately after they had left Cindy appeared in the kitchen. Opening a small cabinet on the wall and retrieved a glass vial. Inserting a syringe into the vile she slowly withdrew its contents before making her way into the basement. In the confines below, a man sat restrained in a chair struggling in fear as she approached. Pulling back his sleeve Cindy administered the dose from her needle into his arm.

Opening the rear door of the car Phaeton and Jason took a seat in back. 'I like your old car,' Jason told Antonov as he slid next to him the driver's seat. 'Wow, is that a genuine mahogany dashboard?'

'The best wood comes from Northern Brazil,' Antonov replied starting the car.

'How did you come by such a classic?' Jason said peering out through the front windscreen at the chrome three-pointed star symbol on the bonnet.

'It belonged to my father,' he said checking Phaeton out through his rear-view mirror.

Making their way from the mansion Antonov drove through a wooded forest toward the lighthouse running into a squall, streaming in from the south, intensified.

The flooded causeway had subsided, allowing Kimberley's to pull up the van behind Jason's abandoned pickup. Looking inside the pickup's cabin Max was startled by Phaeton's ring tone. Searching for the source of the sound he found the phone on the floor. 'Hello, who's this?' Max asked.

‘This is Inspector Ross. Have I got the right number? Can I speak to Phaeton please?’

‘This is Max, a friend of hers. Her boyfriend called for help earlier but he cut out. We found his pickup abandoned near the lighthouse. This is her phone all right, but she’s not here. She’s with her boyfriend, Jason.’

‘*Look*, I don’t want to alarm you, but I believe that they may be in danger. Just wait there, I’m already on my way.’

The sun had long set over the mansion and a dark sky closed in. Max, Jimmy and Kimberly made their way from the van to the mansion. Ignoring Ross’s warning, Max nervously knocked on the front door only to be greeted by silence. Making their way to the side annex they found the kitchen door ajar and entered cautiously. ‘*Look* I’m sure that’s Phaeton’s scarf,’ whispered Kimberley identifying Phaeton’s familiar blue scarf draped over a chair.

Kimberley checked upstairs and was attracted by the light from the computer in the attic. Activating the computer filled the screen with images of a burly man with his arm around a woman clad in riding leathers and surrounded by a group of bikies. Looking around the room she saw a box lying on a table containing a false black moustache and makeup.

Suddenly, an angry voice broke the silence of the house. Kimberley hurried down the staircase to see Cindy confronting Jimmy and Max. ‘What the hell are you doing here,’ Cindy yelled. ‘Get out of my house right now!’

Through the torrential downpour, the Daimler's headlights illuminated the foot of the Lighthouse. Scrambling from the car the three ran to the lighthouse basement door. Antonov led Jason and Phaeton inside. 'There's a phone inside the basement storeroom over there,' Antonov directed Phaeton. 'Jason, you go ahead and take a look around upstairs while your friend makes her call.'

The moment Jason was out of sight Antonov slammed the storeroom door shut, trapping Phaeton inside.

Half blinded by the rain peppering her windscreen Ross reached for his mobile phone and made a call. 'Emergency line may I help?

'Yes, this is inspector Ross. Please send a firearm backup crew to the Spring Point Lighthouse. This is an emergency.'

Overhead, in the lull of the storm a full moon made a brief appearance overhead. Inside the mansion Kimberley, Jimmy and Max retreated from their confrontation with Cindy. Once outside, Jimmy flashed his torch to get their bearings. Through an open side door of the garage, he made out the shape of a car covered in a heavy dust cover. Lifting the cover, it revealed a bright red Ford Thunderbird Convertible parked in the garage.

Looking over the car Jimmy opened the driver's door and slide behind the wheel. Looking on Kimberly and Max were startled when they heard the roller door suddenly rattling open, setting off an alarm. Outside

the piercing sound filled the surrounding woods, scattering hundreds of birds nesting in the treetops.

Appearing outside the roller door, a man with a bulky frame, brandishing an axe, loomed outside.

‘Leave my car alone!’ he screamed outrageously. Wildly taking a swing of the axe he accidentally embedded it into the timber wall. Struggling to release it, Jimmy broke free with Kimberly and Max hot on his heels and raced through the garage doorway and made off toward the woods.

Pursuing Kimberley, Max and Jimmy into the woods. The assailant saw them hiding behind a tree and desperately took a swing sending the axe-head into its trunk. Horrified they took flight and breaking out of the wood they sprinted toward the shore and took shelter hiding behind an outcrop of rocks. Visible above they sighted the searching eye of the lighthouse casting its warning beam of light far out to sea.

Reaching the creek crossing Ross sighted the stranded pickup and the deserted van and sped on toward the lighthouse.

Locked in the storeroom, in panic, Phaeton recalled a dire memory herself as a child. Pinned against the storeroom wall her father was shouting angrily at two men. One grabbed her father’s arm, knocking his kerosene lamp from his grasp, engulfing the other man in flames.

Pulling up outside the lighthouse, Ross bolted from her car and ran into inside to hear Phaeton yelling and bashing at the storeroom door with a crowbar. ‘We ran into a madman,’ she cried.’ I don’t believe it.

'Where's Jason Ross,' yelled helping Phaeton from the storeroom.

'He must be up on the bridge,' she gestured toward the spiral staircase.'

On the bridge Lighthouse Antanov found Jason peering out looking out to sea. A huge ocean wave crashed over the rocks at the foot of the lighthouse sending spray and foam high into the air. 'The tide's almost at its peak,' Antonov yelled standing menacingly behind him.

Drawing out a butcher's knife from his jacket, Antanov lunged at Jason, slicing the air.

Jason threw up his arms in self-defence and in desperation Antonov took a wild swing striking Jason over his head with the butt of his knife sending him crashing head long onto the deck semiconscious.

Proceeded by two hours of solid heavy rain, the category three storm struck the lighthouse. Met by its force, Ross and Phaeton appeared from the stairs outside on the top of the lighthouse bridge. 'Wait here.' Ross yelled to be heard above the howling din.'

Drawing out her revolver she began to make her way around one side of the bridge and coming across Jason, she found him struggling, trying to get to his feet.

Ignoring the inspector's instructions, Phaeton buffeted by the storm began to edge her way pulling herself along the rail against the fury of the storm on the other side of the bridge. Antanov had sighted the inspector's car pull up below. Climbing a steel external ladder attached to the bridge, he made his way up toward a hatchway leading to the Lamp room when a shaft of

lightning struck the dome above and losing his grip he fell backward in a shower of sparks and crashed onto the bridge.

Regaining his feet, he found himself confronted by Phaedon standing directly in front of him.

‘So, you escaped,’ he growled. ‘But not this time. I’m not going to let another ‘Henry’ get in my way,’ he menaced.

‘You crazy animal. So, it was you who murdered my dad.’

Lunging at her with his knife he slashed her arm. Grabbing hold of Antonov’s arm with the other he struggled, contorted in rage trying to break her grip; Phaedon finally overpowering him twisted his wrist, forcing him to release his knife.

Recovering momentarily, he delivered a blow with his fist and sent Phaedon sprawling onto the deck. Blinded by a bolt of lightning, Antonov hesitated and seizing the moment Phaedon regaining her feet charged headlong at Antonov, catapulting him over the railing. Letting out a blood curdling scream he plummeted onto the rocks below. Horrified, Phaedon looked on to see him consumed in the foaming tide and disappear into the murky depths below. Appearing from the other side of bridge Ross and Jason found a stunned Phaedon, bleeding from the wound to her arm dazed and crumpled on the deck.

Sighting the flashing lights of two police cars and an ambulance they burst into sight from out of the woods and sped towards the lighthouse. Jason slung Phaedon’s arm over his shoulder and together they staggered their way down the lighthouse staircase.

Reaching the foot of the staircase Phaedon collapsed onto the ground, finally overcome by her ordeal. Coming to her aid a Medic administering his treatment to stop the flow of blood from her arm led Phaedon and Jason to the Ambulance. Hastily making his way outside Ross met the police sergeant and proceeded to lead his men to a disoriented Ivan standing on ledge. Gazing motionless looking out to sea he dropped his axe and handcuffing him they escorted him to a police car.

Emerging from behind the rocks Kimberley Jimmy and Max made their way to the scene to find Jason waiting by an ambulance. 'What happened to your head?' 'We saw someone fall from the bridge,' Kimberley stammered as Jimmy and Max arrived. 'And where's Phaedon?'

'She's okay now,' Jason assured them. 'She's being taken care of in the ambulance.'

Inside the Ambulance the Medic was applying a bandage to Phaedon's lacerated arm.

Issuing her final instruction to the arresting police sergeant inspector Ross made her way to her car leaving Phaedon and Jason trying to understand what had just happened.

It was early morning and the storm had well passed when Jimmy, Kimberley and Max arrived at the Byron Bay police station. Inspector Ross led them inside to join Phaedon and Jason. Bearing a sling on her arm Phaedon sat sipping on a mug of coffee beside Jason. Phaedon was completing her written statement when Ross entered the interview room. 'As it turns out Yuri

Antonov had an older brother,' Ross began. 'Ivan suffered extreme trauma from burns to his hands and face and spent time in a psychiatric hospital,' she said producing a document from Hartford Hall.

'I also ran through Antonov's home surveillance videos. He was quite clever technically. He installed CCTV and alarms on all the doors, presumably to control Emma's movements. Both men shared quite extreme macabre behaviour,' Ross explained. 'It appears Yuri and Ivan followed your parents from Armidale to the Rosehill Racecourse. They had planned the kidnapping and robbery and murdered your father and buried him in the Oxley National Park. Yuri was the mastermind.'

'They took over your parent's house and sedated your mother and locked her in the attic.

'Oh my God!' exclaimed Phaeton trying to come to grips with it all.

'It seems she planned an escape and left this note,' Ross said passing it to Phaeton.

'It's a slim lead. I don't hold too much hope as it's been so many years here take a look.'

I am writing this letter in the hope that I can escape. I have been cut off from the world for so long that I have almost lost any hope of freedom. I pray that my daughter Faith is safe. Molly Watts can tell her everything she needs to know. Emma.

'Apparently, Watts was my mother's maiden name before she married my father,' Phaeton said. 'I will have our Missing Person Unit investigate the matter,' assured Ross.

‘But how could they get away with it for so long?’ Jason asked. ‘They should have been discovered years ago.’

‘We found the remains of a hoard of money hidden under the floorboards along with your father’s bookmaker bag and betting tickets,’ Ross went on.

‘Your father collected a large windfall of over six hundred thousand dollars at the Rosehill Spring Carnival, the day the Antonovs kidnapped your parents. Our original investigation came to a dead-end,’ Ross summarised. Entering the room the sergeant arrived with a tray of coffee.

‘The Antonov’s lived off the cash for years to avoid a money trail,’ the sergeant reported. ‘

That’s right and they never used credit cards and never filed taxation records. They briefly opened a bank account to survey the bank’s layout. Ross continued, ‘More recently, the brothers were involved in stealing the ATM from Gunnedah bowling club. A security guard disturbed them, and they attacked him. Fortunately, he survived. They rented a van for the robbery, and the rental agent identified them. Six months later there was a series of attempted bank robberies. Acting alone, Ivan was caught red-handed at Tamworth attempting a hold-up. Apparently, he took a train to Tamworth station which was not far from the bank.’

‘Ivan masked his disfigured face to avoid being easily identified,’ the sergeant added placing a black balaclava on the table.

‘Previously Ivan always acted as the getaway driver. We think that he acted alone purely out of desperation.

Ivan was returned to Harford Hall, but he broke out a week later. Undoubtedly it was Cindy who helped him escape. As the money started to run out, they reverted to dealing drugs. Cindy was Yuri's mistress,' Ross explained further.

'It appears that Ivan's behaviour finally became so erratic they kept him in the basement to keep him under control. The doctors told us that the lack of proper medication probably caused his rampage. A lawyer appointed for Ivan's defence has filed a claim of insanity on his behalf.

'And what about Cindy Mathews?' Jason asked Ross.

'She's being held under custody facing serious pending charges. Regarding ownership of the property, I have been in touch with your lawyer Jeffery Jacobs. Your father had an older brother in England.'

'Oh, is that true?' Phaeton gasped.

'Yes, your uncle's name is Arnold Henry. As next of kin, he inherited the property after your father's death. According to Arnold's neighbour, he was tired of keeping up the rates over the years and finally decided to come to Australia to sell the house.

'So, he's still here?' Jason replied.

'Unfortunately, he wasn't found alive. We discovered his deceased body buried in the basement. It appears when he visited the house the brothers murdered him. Our sergeant contacted Scotland Yard and learned he only flew from London five months ago.'

'So, what was the motive for his murder?' Jason asked. 'Yuri Antonov had lodged an 'adverse possession' or 'squatter's rights' claim with the court to

take ownership of the property. When Arnold Henry turned up claiming his inheritance, they cut his throat. So now the property will revert to you Phaedon as the next of kin.'

Dozing off watching Kimerly's TV Phaedon heard the familiar sound of her Harley pull up outside.

Phaedon stirred and turned off the TV as Kimberly made her way inside and removing her helmet put it down on the table.

'How did your gig go tonight?'

'Friday nights always packed.' Kimberly replied. 'Carl Jackson the promoter turned up and we went over some tour dates.' Kimberly said.

'George Martin the bank manager sent me a text message tonight. He wants' me to meet me at the bank in the morning.'

'Girlfriend. That's really good news.' Kimberly replied. 'He must want you to start. I know how much you have suffered and getting back to work would take you mind off things,' she said giving Phaedon a hug. 'Well go together in the morning. I've heard so much about your manager.'

Turning into the curb outside the Armidale Bank they dismounted from the Harley as Kimberly pulled the bike back onto its stand alongside a parked police patrol car and made their way inside.

'I came by as soon as I got your message. Don't tell me there's been another hold-up?' Phaedon chuckled giving Martin an affectionate hug.

‘Do you mean the sergeant’s car outside? No thank goodness, there’s no bank robbery! But he has some news for you.’

Following Martin into his office, he swung the door open finding herself to coming face to face with Emma in the company of the sergeant. Instantly, flooded with emotion Emma flung her arms around a stunned Phaeton embracing each other in sheer delight. ‘You found her!’ Phaeton sobbed.

‘You’re *just* as I pictured you,’ cried Emma, taking a long look at her daughter. ‘Though I never saw a single photo of you.’

‘But where have you been all this time?’ Phaeton asked ecstatically.

‘In Brisbane?’ Emma replied wiping away her tears.

‘But why Brisbane? And *why* didn’t you contact the police?’

‘The truth is I was terrified of the Antonovs,’ Emma admitted shaking with emotion.

‘And who is your friend?’ Emma asked.

‘This is Kimberly. She gave me hope and the strength to find the truth. I knew nothing about you all this time you were no than a faint memory,’ Phaeton remonstrated. ‘It drove me mad ever since I was a child. Kim my stepmother even changed my name to protect me.’

‘You have every right to feel so angry’. I knew even less but I understand now. Your lawyer explained it all to me.’ Emma said sharing every moment with her. ‘I believe Phaeton means ‘a bright light’ and my darling that’s so true! Mr Jacobs also told me what happened to your father. James was such a wonderful man and I

miss him so dearly,' Emma stammered, tears welling up in her eyes.

'You were such a beautiful child,' she said hugging her again. I did try to look for you on social media at the library, but I was scared that if I had found you, I might risk your life as well.'

'I knew in my heart that I would someday somehow find you,' Phaeton told her exchanging a warm smile. 'So how did you get away?'

'I faced unspeakable abuse at the hands of those monsters. After a while, I convinced Yuri that I was useful in the kitchen. That's where I discovered a medical cabinet. One evening preparing a meal I spiked Yuri's drink with sleeping pills. He was out long enough for me to take his keys. I found enough money in his room to help me to escape to Brisbane.'

'It must have been terrifying,' Phaeton exclaimed taking hold of Emma's hand.

'Yes, it was. But I had the presence of mind to plan my escape. Nothing was going to stop me from getting as far away as I could. I thought he would track me down, so I and changed my name to Molly Watts and managed to get a job in a flower shop.

'Oh yes I do remember how much you loved your flowers.' Phaeton replied.

'And luckily we eventually connected the dots,' the sergeant said with a beaming Kimberly and Martin standing beside Emma looking on.

With that, Emma hugged Phaeton and removing an emerald ring from her finger she passed it to her. 'It's a Brazilian emerald. It's a family heirloom. It was first

passed down to Molly in the eighteenth century, and Molly passed it down to me, and now it's yours!'

'And Phaedon I heard that Jason was quite a hero,' Martin said. 'What's he up to now?'

'He's hanging out with Jimmy his mate at Byron Bay.

'There pretty much into surfing and the Northerly swells are near perfect this time of the year,' Kimberly laughed.

'Yes, but I believe they have something else in mind,' Phaedon said holding Emma in her arms, 'you'll soon have an opportunity to meet him. He's someone very special!'

Reflecting the night lights of the city skyline, the glass exhibition hall housed the Sydney Motor Show displaying the latest automobiles on offer from around the world.

A centenary year celebrating classic cars, centre of the exhibition hall was devoted to a dazzling display of classic vehicles, restored to their former glory.

Three entries vying for the most outstanding restorations were on display. The first was the bright red 1955 Ford Thunderbird Convertible. The podium's second-tier spotlighted Jason's immaculate Midnight Blue Chevy Pickup and on the third tier the spotlights revealed the 1958 Black Daimler sedan.

Surrounded by an enthusiastic patron audience and international television camera crews Phaedon looked on, proudly watching Jason and Jimmy step up to receive the 'Wheels Best Classic Show Car Award' trophies from the Motor Show President.

In a blaze of lights, linking their arms together Phaeton and Emma shared the glory raising the winning trophies high above their heads into the air.

'Welcome to the spiritual home of classic cars,' the show president announced stepping forward onto the display dais introducing Kimberly and the Zephyr Blues gathered on stage in the foreground with the Armidale Gospel choir. Taking a seat behind the keys of a grand piano Kimberly began her arousing tribute rendition of Highwater Highway. Caught in a blazing burst of lights a new star was born; her voice carrying across into the patron audience together with sound of the gospel singers being broadcast across the nation.

MODELS INCORPORATED

One hundred thousand fans gathered at Melbourne's Albert Park International Formula 1 Grand Prix circuit. Twenty-five competitors were lined up on the starting grid facing an overhead gantry of red lights. As the lights turned green the field rapidly accelerated from the grid, smoke billowing from their tyres. Racing down the straight vying for positions, rounding the first turn three cars were forced into a sand trap leaving the remaining cars to roar ahead through the chicane.

From the grandstand, Celeste and her father, John Bircham were seated intently watching the cars jostling

for position. One by one, the field pulled in for their final pit stops, changing tyres and refuelling. Speeding on into the afternoon the leading drivers made their final bid cheered on by the crowd who stood up from their seats to witness the leader finally emerge from around the final bend, flashing past the chequered flags and crossing the finishing line.

Exhilarated, John and Celeste made their way from the grandstand to the winner's podium to witness the presentation of the prestigious Jack Barham trophy. Placegetters enthusiastically showered each other with magnums of Champaign in celebration.

Leaving the podium, team crews were already loading their chargers into the transporter vehicles. One team car in particular stood out, and for Celeste the man overseeing the operation: the French entrant Gabriel Agar.

Celeste recalled that she had observed him a few days earlier. She was in Collins Street fashion shop completing a fitting for an elegant, saffron dress designed by Conrad Dirham. Starring out the shop's front window she saw a distinctive Renault Alpine sports convertible pull up to the curb she found herself immediately attracted to the man stepping from the car and crossing to a nearby café. Young and handsome in his early twenties he had an athletic figure, having a trimmed beard his blond hair contrasted with his olive complexion.

The race over the crowd began to disperse and Celeste and her father made their way to the

marshalling yard. Gabriel's crew were busy preparing to load his race car into a transporter. Sighting Celeste, he invited her to take a close inspection and to climb into the cockpit and try it out and in an exchange of glances their connection was clear from the start.

Leaving Gabriel with his crew, Celeste and her father hailed a cab and were driven to the Southern Cross Hotel where they were staying. Her father had built up a successful textile business based on the well-known Australian adage 'that the country's success rode on the sheep's back.'

Entering the restaurant arm in arm with her father Celeste was suitably fitted out in a Zara Jane-inspired wool tweed suit. Met by the maître de, he led them to their table. Having a tall, lean body and shoulder-length red hair, Celeste carried herself like a perfect model and sighting their customers, Mr Hiroshi and his associate Mr Tatsunori rose from their seats to greet them.

'Good evening gentlemen,' Burcham responded helping Celeste with her chair. 'I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.'

Exchanging formal greetings, Burcham beckoned the waiter and ordered some fine wine. Listening on throughout dinner Celeste looked on as they discussed a proposal to manufacture a new range of suits from her father's new super fine Marino wool fabric.

'In fact, the suite Celeste is wearing now is manufacture from this fabric,' Burcham told them.

Completing their deal over coffee, Celeste left them to chat and opted to join a group of young women at the

cocktail bar. Her gaze, directed at the mirror behind the barman she recognized Gabriel appeared at her side.

'Bosnior,' he greeted politely.

'How unexpected!' Celeste swivelled around on the stool to greet him. *'Well, what a surprise.'*

'Now. How about a flute of French Dom Perignon champagne?' Gabriel offered beckoning to the barman,

Propping themselves up at the bar the barman popped the champagne open and filled their flutes.

'I understand you're a new team member driver for Renault?' Celeste asked exchanging a glance.

'Yes. It' my first stint. I qualified just a year ago after completing my service with the French helicopter rescue service in Mont Blanc.

'Huh. Skiing is one passion of mine. In winter I often take a trip to the slopes of Queenstown in New Zealand.

'Really. And for me it is the exhilaration of skiing as fast as I can down the slopes which led me to taking up Formula 1 racing. I like risk taking. 'It's my first time in Australia so how about taking a flight with me tomorrow to show me around?'

After a hearty breakfast the next morning, they drove to his racing team's headquarters at Albert Park and clambered aboard a yellow Bell Jet Ranger helicopter. Flying low over Melbourne's early morning city skyline Gabriel set a course west. Gliding over a patchwork of green fields and scattered farmhouses, Celeste directed Gabriel to follow a long gravel road and

reaching the green fields beyond, pointed out a Merino stud farm below.

‘That’s Wimmera Downs. It borders the upper Barwon River,’ Celeste remarked pointing it out.

‘When my father took it over, he spent years breeding the finest Merino sheep before turning his hand toward the textile and fashion business,’ Celeste explained.

‘You must be proud of him?’ Gabriel responded.

‘Yes, I am.’ Celeste nodded.

‘And we are all proud of you too Celeste,’ Mike told her. ‘Celeste is our star models he fathers Birchum house fashion brands in Sydney.

Leaving the homestead they bade goodbye to Mike, returning to the helicopter.

‘And how long do you intend to stay here before you leave for your next race?’ Celeste inquired thoughtfully.

‘My next race is in Bahrain at the end of the month. It’s my first visit to Australia and there’s nothing more that I’d like to do than to stay here for another couple of weeks.’

‘Well after we take a look at the Apostles how about I return your generosity and fly you to Sydney with me and I’ll show you around our harbour city?’ Celeste replied sliding into the cockpit alongside Gabriel seated at the controls.

Resuming their flight, they flew south. Skirting the tormented waters of Bass strait following the Great Ocean Road, beyond the limestone towering cliff lined shore the craggy outcrop stacks of the Apostles came into view pounded by waves sending a sea of spray high into the air.

‘It’s known as the shipwreck coast,’ Celeste yelled. ‘Since settlement over two hundred shipwrecks have been discovered.’

Taking in the wonder of the twelve apostles from the air Gabriel set them down in a clearing next to a walking trail and taking to the trail set out to explore foreshore. Returning to the hotel and collecting their luggage they took a taxi, then boarding a seaplane flight bound for her home on the foreshore of Rose Bay, Sydney.

Celeste, John and Rosetta resided in an opulent family waterside mansion built on the southern foreshore of the harbour. Rose Bay was known as the Sydney playground of the rich and famous and in the mid-thirties the destination of the London to Sydney Kangaroo Flying Boat Route. Originally selected, the Rose Bay site was Australia’s first international flying boat airport and took advantage of its protected waterway located close to the city. ‘The Qantas Empire flying boats carried up to fourteen passengers in complete luxury with a flight time of only ten days compared to more than forty days by the sea,’ Celeste told Gabriel looking out over the city, preparing for their landing at Kingsford Smith airport in Sydney.

John and Rosetta were relaxing on deck chairs by the waterfront home swimming pool when Celeste and Gabriel arrived from the airport. Rosetta’s had her head buried in a magazine. She spent hours at the hair salon and manicurist and almost as much time in front of her mirror applying her makeup complete with looks to kill sat beside the swimming pool.

'Gabriel, you met my father in Melbourne.' Celeste re-introduced John to him.

'And this is Rosetta,' Celeste introduced her, barely acknowledged by Rosetta ignoring their presence.

'Behind the bar inside the cabana Kwan was preparing cocktails. 'How about one of Kwan's special cocktails?' John gestured to Gabriel and Celeste.

'That was a fine race yesterday directing his attention to Gabriel. 'Fifth place I believe?'

'Yes. It was my first competitive drive on the circuit this year.' Gabriel replied airing his satisfaction.

'I look forward to hearing how you go with your next race?' John said politely.

'It's in two weeks. It's the Bahrain Grand Prix in Sakhir actually.'

'And so, *what* are you two getting up to?' John responded adjusting his sunglasses.

'Gabriel's taking the guest room then tomorrow I'm going to introduce him to our harbour.' I'll take Gabriel out on the dive boat to see some wrecks and do some scuba diving,' Celeste replied.

The following morning Celeste and Gabriel began to load their scuba diving gear into her dive boat moored alongside her father's yacht.

'The Moonraker.' laughed Gabriel. 'And ready for action I take it,' noting its name painted on its transom.

'It sure is. James Bond's a favourite of mine.'

'And your dad's Yacht?'

'The Mystic. She's a forty-foot Maxi,' Celeste exchanged a smile. 'Johns competed twice in the Sydney to Hobart Classic.'

'Really. And any results?'

'Tenth was his best result but finishing means everything to John,' Celeste replied.

Celeste sat behind the Moonrakers wheel and firing up its powerful twin mercury outboard engines and casting off, they are powering their way out across the harbour. Speeding out passing between the majestic sandstone cliff formations of the North and South heads, Celeste set a course toward the northern beaches and finally anchored above the M24 dive wreck which lay 45 meters below them.

'In 1942 the M24 was one of three WW11 Japanese submarines that entered Sydney Harbour. Their target was the USS Chicago,' she told him as they prepared for their dive. 'Each Sub fired two torpedoes but missed the intended target and unfortunately one hit a ferry.'

'And what happened?' Gabriel asked staring into the water.

'The Kuttabul was a converted ferry being used as a Royal Australian Navy depot ship and the torpedo struck the ferry killing twenty-one allied naval ratings, and nineteen Australian and two British sailors,' she explained. 'It was a dark time in our history.'

'I can understand that. Both my grandparents died at the hands of the Luftwaffe during a bombing raid over Paris.' It devastated my parents.'

'I'm so sorry to hear about that,' Celeste consoled him while helping him into his oxygen gear.

'Thank you. We have so much to be thankful for these days.'

Following a line hitched to a yellow marker buoy on the surface and attaché to the M24 below they swam down toward the ocean floor.

Intact, they sighted the remains of the submarine hulk below. Now a marine haven it was resurrected resting peacefully on the sand. The man of war had been returned to nature, in a colourful spectacle of silver blue and yellow stripped species of coral fish inhabiting every crevice of the wreck.

Finally, ending their dive, they followed the tether back to the surface and clambered back on aboard the 'Moonraker' and set a course back toward the harbour.

The sun had set when they returned and tying off the boat to the mooring Celeste and Gabriel sat together in the cabana overlooking the harbour. On this occasion the night sky was remarkably clear. Above the moon watched over with its warming light bringing them close together. Under the cabana they touched each other for the first time and there; in the balmy heat of the night, they lay couched, losing themselves deep in each other's arms until the moon vanished into the distant clouds on the horizon.

Preparing for the Sydney fashion expose' Rosetta sat in her office viewing a range of fabric's when Celeste entered.

'I'm sorry that I'm so late Rosetta but I had to drop Gabriel off at the airport and the traffic was awful. '

‘Huh...if you thought as much about your career as your boyfriends you would never be late. Now get over to the fitting department.’

The fitting room is a hive of activity with dress makers fussing over their latest creations when Celeste enters and made her way to her wardrobe to be met by Tommy, her wardrobe assistant.

‘How is my latest gown coming on Tommy? I’m sorry to be so late,’ Celeste apologized.

‘Look it’s okay. But I’m afraid you won’t be wearing it tomorrow.’

‘What do you mean? *I won’t?*’ Celeste was upset.

‘No.’ Rosetta made a change to the line-up,’ Tommy revealed.

‘But I don’t understand why. I spent hours working out a special routine with our choreographer,’ protested Celeste.

‘I’m afraid Rosetta has given it to Emily, and you’ll be modelling or new Alan Larimar line.’

‘What’s going on Tommy? Ever since Rosetta took over, I don’t know where I’m at.’ ‘I don’t know what’s on her mind and I just don’t get it,’ Celeste bursts into tears.

‘Well, all I know is that since your mother died everything changed,’ Tommy said putting his arm around her waist to comfort her.

‘Yes. And she was so creative and kind,’ Celeste replied.

‘And your mother truly loved your dad...You know it’s none of my business, but lately I have noticed that Rosetta dominates him.’

Parading down the catwalk runway a chic model in an outfit featuring the latest casual wear spring collection faced the fashion paparazzi. Backstage, Celeste stood with three other models preparing to model a new wool suit collection produced by her father's latest Japanese manufacturer.

Rosetta acted as the show coordinator. Originally emigrating from Spain, she looked every inch related to her heritage. Having dark facial features and penetrating dark eyes she was in her thirties and carries out her business with the authority and rule of an iron fist.

'How many times do I have to tell you, girls, to check your outfits before you walk out onto the runway?' Rosetta demanded.

'Yes okay. I'm sorry Rosetta,' Celeste reluctantly replied, squeezing into her sports suit outfit.

'You should be. I have spent a lot of time preparing for this show,' Rosetta fired back at her. 'Emily you're up next.'

Taking to the catwalk to the sound of music, Emily strutted confidently down the catwalk while Celeste waits nervously in the wings for her call as the celebrity compare begins his spiel.

'Please welcome Emily everyone. Emily is wearing the latest Birchum-inspired Spring collection line.'

Completing her parade Emily gave way to Celeste who is steeling herself ready to make her entrance from the wings.

'And now ladies and gentlemen give Celeste a hand,' the compare announced, addressing the press and guests looking on.

Greeted by polite applause Celeste entered the stage, pausing for a moment, and as the music struck up, she turned to display her outfit before striking out down the catwalk.

‘Celeste is featuring the latest sportswear featuring the finest wool fabric, announced the compare. ‘She is the daughter of our generous host John Birchum; fashion textile company founder and the House of Birchum has great pleasure in presenting the exclusive range of wool fabric designs by Alan Lorrimar.’

While the parade continued into the afternoon, a stiff southerly wind had sprung up on Sydney Harbour and at the helm of the Mystic John Birchum felt the power of a southerly wind as they were propelled across the Harbour.

Swinging into action the crew prepared to tack into the wind as John swung at the helm turning the vessel downwind, while a crewman on the foredeck released the spinnaker.

Billowing out and gently propelled by the offshore wind, the yacht reached downwind making a final run before reaching its anchorage alongside his mansion’s private waterfront dock facility.

Pulling alongside, the crew disembarked, making their way via a side passage to their cars, John bade them goodbye and entered the mansion through a rear entrance doorway.

The fashion show over Rossetta piloted her shining blue Bentley to Rose Bay pulling into the mansion’s

white paved front driveway entrance, parking inside the triple garage.

Changing from her fashion outfit Celeste answered her mobile. It's Gabriel on the line.

'Hey, I had a great time in Sydney...how are you?' voiced Gabriel.

'Fine, I just finished my show. Where are you now?' Celeste asked.

'I arrived back home in Paris yesterday and I'm taking a couple of days here before my next race. Keep in touch.'

Returning home Celeste made her way to the front door. Entering, she overheard a heated argument between her father and Rosetta in the kitchen pouring herself a Vodka.

'That's it. *Look at these bills.* How much did you spend at the races? I don't mind the money being spent on our fashion shows but not your extravagant gambling every week,' argued John with Celeste out of sight listening in.

'Huh. All you can think about is that fancy yacht. And your daughter is no help.' Rosetta raised her voice. 'She always forgets to check her dress before the show, and she still thinks she deserves to be a top model.' She yelled slamming down her vodka on the bench to see Celeste suddenly appear in front of her. Distressed Celeste charged out of the kitchen and stormed up the stairs, with her father following her into her bedroom.

'I'm sorry about that Celeste but I've had enough,' John said. 'Look. Let's go to the gun club for a while to

give her time to cool her heels.'

With a flurry of yellow autumn leaves flying into the air from under its wheels, John's black Jaguar sped on winding its way up the bay road from the mansion and turning into the Rose Bay gun club. Pulling up outside the club John and Celeste bundle themselves from the car and enter the club and signed in.

John is easy going and always had a positive nature, which Celeste acquired from his genes. Over the years the trust has been mutual.

Removing her target pistol from the security cabinet, Celeste joined a line of members inside the shooting range. Positioning a set of earmuffs on her head she took aim, firing six rounds in quick succession. Removing her earmuffs, she checked her score and re-joined John who sat observing her from the lounge and ordered two coffees.

'Maybe I did make a mistake,' John commented.

'When your mother was lost at sea, I felt a complete void in my life and Rosetta appeared from out of nowhere. But I fear that may have been a mistake.'

'I *just* don't know, but I have to do my best to please her. But I just don't know,' Celeste remonstrated. 'We simply don't get on at all. To be honest I need a break from modelling, so I've applied as a receptionist at the Hyatt Resort Hotel in the city. I hope you understand.'

'Yes, that's good. I know how you've tried to get on with her. Perhaps the change will be good for you both.'

'I truly hope so. Over the past twelve months, she has

put me through the ringer, even dropping me from top billing at the last show.'

'Is *that* right? I wondered why your agent called me the other day.'

'She did?' Celeste asked.

'Yes...Marsha seemed concerned and asked me if you were okay. I often meet with her to see how the agency division is going.'

'That was thoughtful of her, but that man Rosetta has employed to be her assistant gives me the creeps,' Celeste shivered, 'And does she really have to have a chauffeur to drive her around?'

'Yes...Allie does seem to have a lot of influence over the agency these days,' John replied. 'I did raise my objections to him originally, but Rosetta ignores me whenever I raised the issue and as far as the chauffeur goes Rosetta can't drive and Kwan is very useful around the dock maintaining our boats.'

Taking up a position at the Hyatt Hotel Celeste had concluded her night shift, taking a lift down to the third-level underground car park. Stepping into her red Alpha Spider she drove up the ramp to street level and into the traffic heading for her Rose Bay home.

Arriving, she turned into the driveway and came to a halt, unfolding herself from the car and entered the house.

Walking into the living room overlooking the bay she found John fast asleep on the couch. Rosetta was nowhere to be seen, Celeste retreated and silently made her way up the stairs to her room turning in for the night.

Lit by the half moonlight, a motor launch silently made its way across the harbour toward the Birchum waterfront mansion. Cutting its engine the launch drifted the final few yards docking at the mansion's wooden wharf.

Alighting a dark figure and silently crept up to the rear door and detecting the keyboard of the security system entered a security code and quietly opened the door and crept inside.

In a restless state of sleep, Celeste was suddenly startled by the sound of the piercing shot ringing out and springing up from her bed she turned on the light. Throwing on her dressing gown she raced down the stairs to discover her father sprawled out on the floor with blood bleeding from his forehead.

Fumbling for the house phone on the coffee table she frantically dialled the emergency number.

'Emergency services. Yes, how can I help you?'

'Please. My father's been shot. Send an ambulance straight away.'

'Is he breathing? The voice came back.

'Yes. But *please* hurry,' pleaded Celeste completely distraught.

Bursting out from the mansion driveway with its blue and red lights flashing and its siren blurring out its warning an ambulance accelerated away down the street. Weaving through the traffic it narrowly avoided a collision before continuing in its race against time. In the back Celeste sat beside a paramedic. Anxiously gripping hold of her father's hand, the ambulance sped on through the traffic toward the hospital.

Half dozing Celeste anxiously waited outside Saint Vincent Hospital emergency room when her concerned uncle finally arrived.

'Oh... Uncle James. Thank you for coming,' Celeste said. 'Dad is unconscious. I really *can't* believe it.'

'And Rosetta?' her uncle asked trying to come to terms with the situation.

'I called her, and she said she will be on her way on the next flight from Brisbane.'

Appearing at the end of the hallway a doctor made his way toward them and cautiously greeted them both.

'I'm afraid your father is in a critical condition. A bullet is lodged in his temple lobe, and we will need to consider an operation to remove it when the swelling recedes.'

'And *how* long will that be?' Celeste asked concerned.

'Probably in about twenty-four hours. I will keep you updated. In the meantime, I suggest you go home and get some rest.'

Returning to the mansion Celeste and her uncle James, had just long arrived when a police inspector and his police sergeant knocked on their door.

Kwan opened the door and letting them inside the inspector fond Celeste being comforted by her uncle James the company lawyer.

'I'm inspector Callum and this is Sergeant Adams,' he said making his introduction.

'I hope you don't mind if we take a look around. I completely understand your concern about your father, and we will do all we can to find the culprit.'

Broadfaced and having a thinning head of hair Callum appeared to be in his early fifties and precise in his every mannerism. Conducting a thorough search of the crime scene before rejoining Celeste and James in the lounge room.

‘Can you tell us what happened?’

‘I understand that you were sleeping upstairs at the time...Is that right?’ Callum asked curtly.

‘Yes. I heard a shot and found my father lying on the floor next to the couch. It’s awful.’

‘And what time was that?’

‘It was late. About three o’clock in the morning I think,’ Celeste replied.

‘Yes, *now* I remember. I glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf over there.’

‘And were you home all night?’

‘No. I arrived at about twelve thirty after driving home from work.’

‘And does anyone else reside here?’

‘Yes. Kwan, he’s Rosetta’s chauffeur and Allie live in the annex just through there at the rear of the house.

‘Rosetta, you say?’

‘Yes, Rosetta is John’s de facto partner.’ Celeste’s mother disappeared in a boating tragedy a couple of years ago,’ James chimed in.

‘And where is Rosetta?’ the inspector responded making a note.

‘She’s on her way from Brisbane,’ James replied.

‘So, they were away last night?’

‘Yes. As far as I know Rosetta and Allie flew to Brisbane to meet a fashion supplier.’

‘And where were you?’ Callum asked Kwan.

'After I dropped them off at the airport I went to the Casino.'

'And what time did you leave?'

'It was about four in the morning and when I arrived here.'

'So, the shooting incident occurred at about three O'clock?' the inspector questioned Celeste again.

'Yes, that's right.'

'And does anyone else live here?'

'No. Mrs Moore is just a casual housekeeper and doesn't live in.'

'And do you own a gun?' 'Well, yes, I'm a member of the local gun club,' Celeste replied. 'But I wouldn't shoot my father.'

'*Look here* inspector I hope you not insinuating that my niece had anything to do with the assault?' her uncle defended Celeste.

'I can't see any sign of a break in and I'm quite mystified about how someone could have entered without setting off the security system alarm.'

'Who else has the code beside yourself?' He continued his questioning.

'My father of course and Rosetta,' Celeste replied.

'Look if you think Celeste was involved somehow, you're quite mistaken. I'm the family barrister and I look after her father's business Celeste's interests. There is no way she could have been involved,' James objected.

'It's just a matter of routine. Please keep me informed about your father,' Callum said and standing up from his chair he gave a polite nod and headed for the door with his companion.

Celeste was waiting beside her father's hospital bed when Rosetta arrives late the following morning.

'And what do the doctors think?' Rosetta asked.

'It's Doctor Martin.' Celeste was precise. 'He's consulted with the hospital's top surgeon and apparently without an operation to remove the bullet he has no chance and at best they warned me that his chance for survival was less the ten per cent'.

'He should survive,' Rosetta added coldly. 'He's always come through before.'

The following day Celeste and Rosetta rose early preparing to leave for the hospital.

Despite the incident Kwan began his usual day polishing the Bentley.

'Look... I'm sure your father is in good hands,' Rosetta stated. 'Hurry up and get dressed and we'll have Kwan drive us to the hospital together.'

'But I *still* can't understand. Who could have been so callous as to try and kill him,' Celeste struggled casting her mind back over the situation. 'He is such a good man and hasn't got an enemy in the world.'

Entering the garage through an internal door and opening the Limousines door they slid into the back seat and behind the wheel, Kwan proceeded to drive them on their way to the hospital. James had already arrived and was anxiously waiting inside.

Two hours had passed by before the surgeon appeared, grim-faced and delivered his news.

'I'm deeply sorry but your father passed away on the

operating table. Our team tried everything possible, but I'm afraid he was finally overcome by the trauma.'

Grief-stricken, tears welled up in Celeste's eyes and she broke down falling into the arms of James. Staring blankly into space Rosetta gave her a pat on her on the back.

'Please tell me it's not happening.' Celeste cried.

'He meant everything to me.'

A flight of birds perched on the roof of St Mary's Cathedral scatter into the air disturbed by the solemn sound of its bell ringing out through the city. Inside attending the mourning of Johns' passing, guests filed into the cathedral. Celeste sat inconsolable next to her uncle as the priest read John's eulogy.

'John Bircham was a fine father and good citizen. He worked hard to build up his textile business and in no small measure contributed much to our society. He was generous to the poor and needy and a stalwart of the community and he will be remembered by all. And now a word from the gospels,' the priest continued, leading them in prayer.

The service concluded and in the afternoon after returning home Celeste's uncle called her on the phone.

'I'm sorry to disturb you after all that you have been through, but I need to see you as soon as possible.'

Driving toward the city, Celeste felt the distinct oncoming chill wind of winter and closing her convertible top she turned into the bustling city centre.

The city was alive with shoppers crowding the streets and Celeste often visited her uncle James and fondly remembered him from as far back as she can remember. A stoic character and always fit he routinely made time for his early morning workouts at the gym and was a regular crewman on board her father's yacht.

Parking beneath his building she took an elevator to his chambers. Making herself known to the receptionist she led Celeste into his office. James had his head buried in a file on his desk and making her comfortable, he sorted through its contents.

'I've been going through your father's financial affairs and as far as his estate is concerned, we will have to wait until the inquest has been completed. In the meantime, Rosetta has been appointed to the board.'

'I understand,' Celeste responded nodding her head thoughtfully.

'I've spoken to inspector Callum,' James continued with a tone of apprehension in his voice.

'According to the police your father's death is now a murder enquiry and unfortunately, I must tell you that you are also a suspect,' James revealed in a concerned manner.

'But why would I have anything to do with it?' Celeste protested.

'For one, you were the only one at home at the time and there was no sign of a break-in.'

'*That's ridiculous*,' Celeste argued.

'I know it is my dear. but Callum is looking for some motive,' James replied attempting to placate her.

'Motive?' Celeste replied taken aback.

'Yes. *Look.* Take a look at your father's will,' James said, handing her the document.

'The estate is worth more than Two hundred and forty-five million dollars and the police are asking many questions.'

'Well, it *wasn't me*. But who else could it be?' Celeste defended.

'That's what the inspector wants to know. After you, Rosetta is in line for the estate and that's what troubles me,' James said airing his concerns.

'And what else?' Celeste asked him, struggling to come to terms with it all.

'Callum has discovered that the calibre of the gun that was used was the same as the gun you use at the gun club,' he revealed as Celeste listened on in disbelief.

'I locked it away last week. Have they found it?'

'No. Not so far, but the only possible conclusion I can arrive at is sadly that Rosetta is somehow implicated. Her alibi is just too neat for one and now she has appointed herself to the company board,' James replied trying to come to grips with the situation.

'And then there's Allie her fashion assistant,' added Celeste. 'Where was he that night?'

'Uh...We can rule him out,' James replied. The inspector checked it out and said that he left for Brisbane with Rosetta the day before the incident.'

'Perhaps that's true. She treats him like her pet dog and keeps him on her leash everywhere she goes,' Celeste replied.

'Right now, I'm truly concerned for your safety,' James said anxiously. 'I strongly recommend that you make yourself scarce over the next month or so. I've

engaged Pete Logan to investigate it all. 'He's a top private investigator and a good friend of mine,' he assured her. There must be someone with an alternate motive. Perhaps a competitor was involved?'

'And there were so many who envied his position.' Celeste replied.

'As I said, meantime you need to make yourself as scarce as possible for a while,' James urged.

'Here take this card and only call me on this private and secure line.'

'But *what* about Rosetta?' Celeste asked.

'Just tell her you need time to get over everything and you're going away for a break. But don't disclose where you are going. I can't help feeling that you are in grave danger.'

'And my hotel job?' Celeste asked seeking his advice.

'I'll give you a letter to allow you to take stress leave. But don't leave it too long and take this cash with you. Credit cards leave behind a trail that anybody can follow these days.' James said telling her whilst handing her a leather satchel.

'And the police?'

'Don't worry. Leave the police to me. We just need time to solve this case and be sure my dear I will cover for you. I'm sure your father would have it no other way.'

Taking the elevator, she peeked into the leather satchel to find thirty thousand dollars in bundles of one-hundred-dollar notes.

The following day a patient Celeste waited for the manager at the Hyatt Hotel reception desk when she

heard a group of noisy French tourists chatting among themselves arrived returning from an excursion trip. Checking back in into their rooms, Celeste noticed that one young girl has left her handbag the desk. To identify her room, she opened the bag to reveal her passport and credit cards and catching her eye is a return cruise ship ticket to Noumea.

Looking up the visitor guest register, she proceeded to the room to return her bag.

Answering the door Celeste is greeted by the bubbly visitor.

'Mon dier,' she acknowledged Celeste as she handed her the handbag in a delightful French accent. *'Merci. I must* have left it at the desk.'

Exchanging some niceties, Celeste made her way back to the elevator and returned to the ground foyer level to find the manager behind the desk, presenting the opportunity for her request for stress leave.

Satisfying the manager, Celeste left the hotel. Observing her, a man of oriental appearance wearing dark glasses seated at a street side coffee shop followed her every move and watched her enter the office of a travel agent. Following her inside he observed her purchasing a cruise ticket for a Pacific Cruise bound for Noumea due to depart the next day.

Outside the Pacific Cruise Terminal at Circular Quay wheeling her luggage bag behind her, Celeste lined up to join the passengers preparing to board. The Oceania Queen was the cruise lines grand class cruiser, featuring a decor of magnificent dark wood

balustrades and decking with spacious and sumptuous interiors, and the pride of the cruise line.

Standing in line to check in, the oriental man now donning a baseball cap followed close behind. Checking in Celeste proceeded through the terminal, the man followed suit and followed her as she made her way up the gangplank to Level-B to find her cabin and settle in.

Departing, the majestic liner sailed passed the Opera House and standing on the deck Celeste took a last forlorn look at her father's Rose Bay waterfront mansion visible in the distance. Sailing out through the harbour entrance, the liner turns north and headed off sailing into the expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

Strolling along the deck looking for a vacant deck chair, Celeste overheard the excited voice of several guests and instantly recognised the girl she had met from the hotel the day before.

'Je ne crois pas, *marseille*,' the girl crowed out loud in her distinctive French accent. 'You didn't say you would be aboard this cruise today? And thanks again so much for returning my bag. I'm Naomi and this is Curtis, my fiancé,' she introduced him reclining on a deck chair next to her.

'Oh yes. What a coincidence,' Celeste smiled broadly. 'I had no idea that you were returning on this ship.'

'Amazing don't you think? 'How about we celebrate at the French restaurant tonight?' Naomi asked. 'And you're alone by the look of it?'

'Yes, that's right. Sure thing,' Celeste replied politely.

‘Sounds like a great idea.’

Naomi was the same height as Celeste and could well be mistaken for her sister. Curtis her fiancé’ had a debonair appearance and with his camera, at the ready, he took a snap of them on deck before they parted company to prepare for dinner.

The French restaurant was buzzing with activity as Celeste Naomi and Curtis shared a joke over a bottle of champagne.

‘So, what do you get up to?’ Naomi asked waving her glass in the air.

‘I’m a model when I can find work,’ Celeste told her taking a sip of champagne from her glass.

‘Really? Oh, that must be a blast,’ Naomi said.

‘Well...Not lately. I just lost my dad,’ Celeste replied lowering her eyes.

‘Oh. *That’s terrible*,’ Curtis interrupted. ‘Look we don’t mean to intrude.’

‘That’s okay. I need good company right now. And what do you two get up to?’

‘I work at the Paris Institute of Art and Curtis is a freelance photographer,’ Naomi replied. Returning the waiter politely refilled their glasses. Excusing himself Curtis left the table leaving Celeste and Naomi to chat over their drinks.

‘Look I need to be honest with you. I could do with your help,’ Celeste told Naomi.

‘*Help*. Yes of course. What can I do?’

‘I don’t want to appear over dramatic but I’m in danger. You see my father was murdered and my

uncle who is a barrister believes that I have been set up,' explains Celeste. 'My father is very wealthy, and I believe someone is after his fortune.'

'You mean his inheritance?' said Naomi. 'What about your mother?'

'My mother died some time ago. But it's complicated and hopefully, until my uncle and his detective friend can unravel the case I need to remain as anonymous as possible.'

'So how can I help?' Naomi said trying to come to grips with her revelation.

'I need to borrow...No. Not borrow but share your identity for a while so the culprits can't trace me,' Celeste explained.

'How so?' Naomi replied puzzled by the suggestion.

'Well, I'm quite prepared to pay twenty grand into your credit card account. You can use it now and then and a further ten grand later for your trouble, 'Celeste replied calmly. 'And I need to style my hair the same as yours.'

'Hey, that could be fun. You know Curtis even said we look alike. With a total hairstyle and face makeover, I bet we could be mistaken for twins.'

'And where do you live?' Celeste asked.

'In Paris actually and the money will sure help us with our rent.'

Locating a phone booth in the cruise ship's shopping level Celeste places a call to Gabriel. Answering Gabriel can hardly hear her on the satellite phone.

'How are you? I'm out of mobile range and I'm calling from a cruise ship bound for Noumea.'

'Noumea. You never mentioned that to me? That's a long way from home.'

'Yes. Look a lot's happened since we last spoke, but I'll explain when I get to Noumea. When do you have your next race?'

'This weekend I'll be competing in the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai,' Gabriel's voice echoed over the phone.

'I'll call you the following Monday. I love you. Take care,' choking back tears welling up in corner of her eyes.

'You take care now. I love you too.' Gabriel's voice breaking up over the phone as they lost the connection.

Strolling through the ship's shopping level gallery Celeste and Naomi walked into the lavish interior of the onboard style studio and are met by an enthusiastic hairdresser.

'Welcome to our complete on-board style experience,' handing them the latest St Clare Fashion magazine. 'My name is Marice, and our staff can provide the finest service.' giving them a glowing endorsement. 'This should give you some ideas,' Marice continued pointing out the latest styles.

'We will begin with a complete hair make over,' Marice said guiding them to their chairs and handing them a magazine of examples.

'Perhaps the latest eccentric look with long straightened bangs, which you can have tinted in any colour you like will take your fancy? Amazing don't you think?' Marice exclaimed excitedly introducing them to his companion hairdressers.

'This is Marie and Claude by the way,' giving his cutest smile as Celeste and Naomi sat side by side in front of a giant mirror as the hairdressers begin to go about their work. Undergoing the complete makeover of hair, nail manicure and cosmetic face treatment they are finally offered a selection of matching hi-fashion dress outfits to try on.

Steaming toward its destination the glow of the Oceania Queen's night lights reflected on the calm of the Pacific waters and inside the liner, the sound of disco music reverberated from the Paradise Entertainment Auditorium. Lit in a blaze of coloured stage light, a roving spotlight fell on the host on a dais in front of the ship's patrons on the dance floor.

'Welcome aboard to our Paradise Dance Club,' announced the host interrupting them. 'Tonight, we have a special night in stall for you all, 'directing the spotlight toward Celeste and Naomi in the wings.

'Tonight, let me introduce our look-alike dance team,' he announced and with their arms outstretched they strode out onto the stage are welcomed by the audience in enthusiastic applause. 'Welcome everyone.'

'If you too want to look fabulous like Celeste and Naomi, why not visit our onboard style studio and take advantage of our fine services. You can truly pamper yourselves,' he concluded receiving a polite applause from the audience. Under the psychedelic light show the music's hypnotic beat resumed, consuming the dancers on the floor. Celeste and Naomi join in and

whipped up into a frenzy they follow suit parading around the dance floor and dancing well into the night.

Lifting off from the Star Flight airport helicopter facility a charter helicopter preceded, making its way to the heart of the city and hovering over the Birchum skyscraper tower set down on a landing pad located above the ninetieth floor of the building.

Dressed in a red power suit Rosetta and her assistant stepped from the chopper and make their way to the express elevator.

Appearing out from the elevator on the Mezzanine foyer level she strode to the board room with Allie her assistant at her side.

Slightly balding, Allie had a stocky build, more in keeping with a boxer, and always wore a well-fitted black suit, white silk shirt with no tie.

Gathering around a long glass top boardroom table the ten board members of the Birchum Fashion House are seated chatting when Rosetta appeared leaving Allie to wait outside and takes her position at the head of the table.

‘Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,’ Rosetta announced, addressing them and directing her attention to her report. ‘Can you please table my report?’ handing her some copies and adjusting her horn rim glasses.

Promptly responding a spritely young executive picked up the bundle of reports and proceeded to hand them to the board members seated around the table.

‘Thank you, William. Now please take note of the first item. We will discontinue the donations to the charities

listed below which you can see on the first page of the report,' Rosetta spoke emphatically.

Charles the senior accountant immediately raised his concern.

'*Discontinue?* But we have made these contributions for years,' Charles argued. 'We benefit considerably through our Hawaiian Pacific charity-based division and receive very substantial tax deductions every year.'

'Well, that's all about to change,' Rosetta responded curtly completely unconcerned. 'If you look at the next item, I have arranged a charter flight to the Cayman Islands tax haven, to establish a bank account, and Charles I'm sorry about the short notice, but we fly out tomorrow.'

Promptly concluding the meeting, Rosetta rose and walked out from the board room only to find Allie fending off a gathering of press reporters waiting for her in the lobby.

'Perhaps you can answer my questions, a reporter asked re directing his attention from Allie to Rosetta. Is it true that your stepdaughter may be involved in John Birchum's murder?' a reporter fired his question.

'And where is she?' another inquired.

'Since the loss of her father, I believe she has taken a much-needed break.' That's all,' Rosetta defended turning to leave.

'Can you confirm that she is under police investigation?' A women reporter sprouted from the back of the pack.

'These are *nothing* but rumours,' Rosetta replied. 'I'm sure she's innocent.'

Storming off Rosetta and Allie pushed their way through the reporters to the car park express lift to be met by their chauffeur and whisked away in the Bentley into the night.

Arriving at the Sydney airport Star Flight charter facility they alight to be met by Charles waiting inside. Checking in with their luggage they cleared customs, before boarding a chartered long-range Lear jet waiting on the tarmac outside. Introduced to the pilot he ushered them to their seats and returned to the cockpit.

Taxiing to the runway the pilot completed his final flight checks and receiving clearance, the plane accelerated down the runway, lifting off and once air-born banked to the north, speeding on its way toward Hawaii.

Putting down on the Big Island the Lear Jet taxied from the runway into a hanger.

De-boarding Rosetta was met by the Burcham House International operations manager to oversee the transfer of a large cache of US Dollars in steel boxes from an armoured car into the cargo hold of their plane. Resuming their flight on to Miami they refuelled, to make a final hop to the Caribbean Cayman Island tax haven.

Ploughing its way across the Pacific the Cruise Liner is making progress towards its first destination. Reclining in deck chairs Celeste and Naomi studied a brochure outlining the cruise activities.

Reclining in deck chairs Celeste and Naomi are reading over the cruise activities.

'Look we stop over at the Isle of Pines tomorrow morning,' Celeste read from a brochure.

'It's a good chance to go diving.'

'You *mean* snorkelling,' Naomi nodded sheltering her face from the sun.

'No. Scuba diving,' added Celeste excitedly.

'No. Not me,' Naomi laughed. That's only for the brave. But Curtis will be in it. He took scuba diving lessons to improve his photography opportunities. Curtis has just bought a new waterproof camera and is dying to try it out.'

Anchored a safe distance from the Pine Island reef a group of passengers assembled at the mid-ship transfer gate and are waiting to board the liner's orange-coloured tender boats preparing to transport them to the reef.

'Now for those who wish to snorkel this tender is for you.' A tour instructor announces to the eager line-up. 'Be careful as you board. You are allowed just one hour of snorkelling and swimming before returning.'

Naomi is among them and excitedly clasping hold of their snorkelling gear the group gingerly climb aboard the tender and casting off Naomi waves to Celeste and Curtis as it heads off toward the reef.

Celeste and Curtis join the next group lined up near the transfer gate ready to go.

'Now please stand by to board your tender.' announces the instructor. 'This is for experienced scuba divers only. It will take you to what is known as the treasure reef, so named after the pirates of yester year,' as she chuckles.

‘Once there, you can dive to the edge of the deepest undersea ravine known to this reef. It is a spectacular dive. Enjoy yourselves and be careful.’

Laden with their scuba diving equipment, Celeste and Curtis board the next tender and joining the group the oriental man wearing dark glasses and wearing Yankees baseball cap was sitting directly behind them. Nearing the location, the crew threw an anchor overboard securing a mooring as the helmsman cut the engine.

‘All divers must form groups of three for safety reasons and it is very important that they swim together,’ the instructor advised.

Leaning forward the oriental man seated behind tapped Celeste on the shoulder, indicating that he wished to join them to make up a dive party of three together with Celeste and Curtis.

Drifting lazily over the dive location the passengers assembled in their groups donning their scuba gear and make their way to the boats aft preparing for the dive.

‘Now I need to remind you that this is a dangerous dive,’ the instructor said as he handed them each an emergency buoy. ‘Take this emergency buoy and if you experience any difficulties at all just pull this tag. We have an emergency crew on standby and they will come to your assistance if required.’

Pressing their masked to their faces, the three fell back into the water and following each other made their way down through the shallows. Swimming deeper and feeling the pressure being exerted on their ears they approached the deep-sea trench below.

Leading the way, Curtis sighted a school of colourful coral fish and taking hold of his camera from around his neck he begins taking some shots. Distracted, he failed to see the man that had been following Celeste. Approaching the ravine trench, Celeste swam skiting its edge when the oriental man suddenly surged to her side, grabbing her mask and attempting to pull it from her face.

Struggling, trying to ward him off, she tumbled violently in the water, and overpowering her ripped off her mask, releasing a sudden burst of air bubbles from her air supply.

Turning to see the commotion Curtus instantly responded diving to her aid grabbing the man by the arms tumbling a sea of bubbles. Taking a grip on the assailant's lifeline he violently resisted until Curtis pulled out a knife from his belt and slashed at the assailant's air hose fighting him off before the man finally succumbed to the lack of oxygen and disappeared into the ravine.

In desperation Curtis reached the flailing Celeste and removing his mask placing it over her face as she gasped for air. Releasing the emergency buoy, they finally began their ascent toward the surface.

Aboard the cruise ship, Celeste and Curtis were recovering in the purser's cabin after giving their alarming account of the event to the ship's detective.

'From our passenger manifest, your assailant was known as a Henry Wong. He boarded in Sydney but according to his passport in his cabin he was a resident

of Hong Kong,' the ship's detective is displaying the man's passport. 'Do you know of this man?'

'No...I don't think so. I've never seen him before,' Celeste hesitated looking at his photo.

'We have had a dive crew searching for him, but I'm afraid that he must have drowned in the ravine. There are strong undercurrents there and he must have been swept far out to sea by now. I've sent a report to the authorities, but we must resume the voyage as planned.'

Slowly recovering from the ordeal, Celeste Naomi and Curtis were together standing on the forward deck looking out over the ocean with the distant Noumea finally coming into sight.

'We stopover at Noumea for two nights,' Curtis said. 'If we can find an Air France agency you can get a ticket on our same flight.'

'Does it fly direct to Paris?' Celeste asked. 'I can't help feeling a little concerned.'

'Almost...There are two stop overs on the way but don't worry you'll be safe with us,' Naomi reassured her. 'You can be sure of that.'

Looking out over the rail they observe Noumea's port coming close into view as the crew went about preparing to birth.

Inside the Sydney barrister chambers, the receptionist called James over the intercom seated at his desk and directed Pete Logan inside.

'It's Pete Logan to see you. And how do you like your

coffee?

'Black with two sugars,' Logan thanked him taking a seat.

'Thanks for coming to see me so soon,' James greeted him shaking his hand. 'A guy called Henry Wong made an attempt on Celeste's life,' James revealed. 'It's all in this email from Celeste plus a report from a medical officer,' he said handing Logan the email. She's okay but this certainly Muddy's the waters.'

'So, *what* have you found out so far?' James asked Logan.

'There appears to be a couple of anomalies,' he began.

'First. You may recall in the papers that there was an attempt at an unfriendly takeover of the business attempted four years ago'. Logan said tabling an old newspaper in front of James.

'Turned out it was a man called Demonic Bianchi who was a prominent Mafia figure trying to muscle in on the business. It left a lot of bad blood between John Bircham and Bianchi,' Logan drew his breath. 'That's a possibility. And, assuming that the assailant entered via the waterfront, I searched for the ferry activity reports that occurred on the same date. One was filed by a captain Murray, Logan revealed handing James his information.

'That's interesting,' as James browsed through the report.

'Yes. The ferry captain reported a near miss at 1.30am on the same night of the murder, and as he recalled he almost collided with a motor launch which

was heading toward the Birchum mansion, and he was certain that it docked near the wharf.'

'Any identification?' James asked.

'Apparently not. He wasn't able to identify the craft but I'm still looking into it,' Logan informed James.

'Anything else?' James responded.

'The mansion was fitted out with an elaborate security camera system, however the data is usually recorded and held at the company's head office, and it appears that someone removed the data. It's normally stored in microchip memory files and according to the manager it could have been accidentally removed by any of the eight staff,' Logan concluded.

Birtherd and tied up alongside the Noumea Port the 'Oceania Queen' has arrived on schedule. Celeste Naomi and Curtis disembark and make their way down the ship's gangplank wheeling their luggage behind them.

Having a day to spare before their flight, they took a cab, directing the driver through the city to the exclusive beachside de Meridian Aquarveve hotel. Turning into the broad palm tree-lined beach side boulevard, the cab drove into the beach resort's palatial marble entrance. The hotel overlooked the sparkling waters of the Anse Vata Bay on the islands northern peninsular.

After checking in at the resort's reception desk a porter led them through the lobby to the elevator before they proceeded to their room. Drawing back the curtains the porter opened the balcony double doors and handing him their tip the three made their way out onto the

balcony and fell into the sumptuous, cushioned deck chairs to relax.

Dialling Gabriel, Celeste finally found the courage to share the news about her father's murder and the reason behind her unexpected trip to Noumea.

Reclining, a waiter arrives to deliver a tray of cocktails as they savoured the view overlooking the water.

'According to my ancestors it was a captain Louis de Mon travel 'who founded the port,' laughed Curtis attempting to relieve Celeste's stress. 'You might not believe it, but he was my father's great grandfather and a great seaman, so I'm told.'

'And did you know that it was Captain Cook who first discovered the islands?' But I'm not related,' Celeste replied giving a cheeky giggle.

'Have you been here before?' Naomi asked.

'Yes. Three years ago, I sailed here with my parents.'

'Really?'

'Yes. You see it was on my sixteenth birthday and my father decided to sail here. It was to be an adventure of a lifetime he told me.'

'That's amazing,' Naomi chirped up twirling the decorative umbrella on her cocktail with her fingertips.

'It was at first. Our yacht was anchored in the bay just a kilometre from the hotel. I can still remember it all so well. My father had a great passion for sailing. He named his yacht the Mystic. It was his gift to my mother.

'So, you set sail on your birthday?' Curtis enquired.

'Yes, the following day. My father taught me everything,' Celeste replied as fell into a reverie and

began to recount the events as she dozed off in her dream state.

The Mystic was approaching their waterside mansion dock. John was at the helm unfurling the main sail and tying it off; Celeste threw a mooring line to Angie her mother waiting on the wharf to greet them.

Her mother cut a petite figure and having the face of an angel she had flowing blonde head of hair and possessed a personality as gentle as a summer breeze.

‘I’ve been waiting all morning for you both, ‘she had said. ‘Don’t you remember Celeste it’s your sixteenth birthday today?’

‘Yes, I remember.’

‘And I have a surprise for you both.’ John chuckled out loud. ‘Tomorrow, we set sail for New Caledonia. ‘It will be a voyage of a lifetime to remember.’

‘But *who* will take care of the business while we’re away?’ Angie quipped.

‘Rosetta of course,’ John fired back. ‘Anyway, she practically runs the place these days.’

Under full sail, they headed out from the harbour past Sydney heads as the Mystic began to revel in the offshore breeze. At the helm, John felt the sea spray on his face setting a course to their first port of call located on the Bay of Islands at the tip of New Zealand’s north island. Finally navigating past the Bay of Islands a flock of seagulls flew overhead as if to be bidding them farewell and leaving them behind they set a course bound for New Caledonia.

Angie wound the winch and John altering tack, avoided

a huge oil tanker and blasted its deep-throated sound across the water interrupting Celeste's memory as she found herself with Naomi and Curtis who had tossed his sunglasses onto the table breaking her reverie he posed a question.

'So, I guess you finally arrived safely?' Curtis said picking up his cocktail and taking a sip.

'Yes, and we stayed right here at this very hotel. After four weeks at sea, it was great to regain our land legs again,' Celeste chuckled.

'So, you returned home?' Naomi inquired.

'Well, my dad wanted to continue to on to Hawaii.' Celeste recalled. He had an international office there, but Rosetta called to tell me that she had booked a fashion show for me in a few weeks, so we set sail for home the following day,' Celeste recounted her tale.

'Unfortunately, it turned out to be a fateful decision that I will never forget,' Celeste said taking a long sip from her cocktail and falling back into her reverie.

Spirited across Anse Vata bay in the yacht's dingy, John clambered aboard as Angie and Celeste passed him the last of their provisions. Extending his helping hand, he pulled them both aboard the Mystic. Weighing anchor, John took the helm and fired up the auxiliary diesel engine and prepare to depart.

'It's pretty calm in the bay right now so we'll set out under power to navigate clear of the reef before we catch the prevailing southerly,' John yelled out to them as they stowed away the provisions in the galley.

With the Isle of Pines in the background, Celeste recalled how she was busy going about hoisting the

sails as the Mystic began to revel in the prevailing offshore trade winds.

‘So, you had set sail just out there?’ Naomi interrupted, pointing to several yachts anchored in the bay pondering over the situation the waiter appeared delivering another round of cocktails.

‘Yes, but it was at the halfway point we found ourselves becalmed for three days so we decided to continue using the yacht’s auxiliary diesel engine; However, we almost exhausted most of the fuel and were left to drift at the mercy of the currents,’ Celeste told them as she fell back into her reverie.

Celeste was on deck with Angie while John was checking his chart.

‘According to our GPS, we have drifted to this point here and its well off the shipping lane. ‘John said, measuring the distance.

‘Perhaps we should send a distress signal.’ Angie replied looking at the chart.

‘*Not yet.* I just checked the weather radar system, and it looks like an easterly wind is building up ahead. Hopefully, it should reach our position by morning,’ he calculated. ‘We should let her drift tonight while we get some sleep,’ he told them as he turned on the night navigation lights. ‘Can’t be too careful...We don’t want to be run down by some stray ship.’

Below, in a restless sleep, Celeste stirred in her bunk when the predicted easterly reached them as she heard the jangle of the wire mainstay rope rattling against the mast. ‘Listen. I think the easterly is about to hit,’ Celeste said. Clambering out of her bunk and

onto the deck, she felt the instant relief as the Mystic began to dance in the oncoming breeze.'

'I never felt so much relief, but it was far from over,' said Celeste as she is relating the events to Naomi and Curtis, before continuing with her memory of the events to follow.

Now at the helm, John struggled to maintain the yacht's course as the waves built up in the face of the increasing wind strength whipping up around them.

'Celeste, you need to go below.' John warned anxiously. 'Have Angie help you with bringing up the jib storm sail. The barometer is going off the scale and it looks like we're headed into the teeth of a storm...and put on your life jackets,' he ordered.

Returning from below with the storm sail, Celeste and Angie proceeded to pull down the main sails and tie them off, before hoisting the storm sail on the Jib, struggling in the gale force wind and transforming the ocean into a sea of mountainous waves.

With spray sweeping over the deck, Celeste and Angie struggled to keep their balance on the bow as the Mystic crashed head-on through ever-increasing mountainous waves.

Off balance, a giant wave engulfed the yacht and caught in its path, Angie was swept off her feet and flung overboard to be left flailing about in the churning surf and out of reach.

'Desperately John tried to turn the Mystic around, but it was too late,' Celeste trembled caught up in her the last memory of her mother.

'That *must* have been terrible,' Naomi responded sensing Celeste's distress. 'And did you find her?'

'No,' Celeste replied choking back her tears. 'We searched for days. We even called in the sea rescue people who sent a chopper, but they failed to find any trace of her,' she lamented. 'And even more tragic, we were only fifty miles from home.'

Against the silhouette of the hotel, the early morning sun was beginning to cast its light over the pristine ocean. Waking Celeste dressed and made her way downstairs to the hotel foyer and finding the in-house travel agents' desk, proceeded to give instructions to book her on the same flight as Naomi and Curtis to Paris.

'Yes, that's right. Flight 607. I'm travelling with two friends I met onboard the cruise ship on the way here. Naomi de Plante and Curtis Monsieur. If you can arrange adjacent seating, I would be more than grateful.'

Returning to her room, she immediately picked up the house phone and placed a call to her uncle, James, in Sydney.

Answering, the phone board the receptionist promptly transferred her call to James.

'Yes. Whose calling?' answered James.

'It's me, Celeste. I'm calling from Noumea.

'Noumea?' The press has been buzzing all over town looking for you. Are you okay?' I received your email. Logan is pursuing every angle he can think of.

'Yes, I'm fine.' Have you found out anything?'

'Logan's on the job and he found out that whoever was responsible for the security cameras also removed the memory cards. They even removed the data from the gun club and the police are still baffled over your missing target pistol,' James's voice echoed.

'Inspector Callum believes that it was your gun that killed your father.

'And Rosetta? What has she been up to?'

'Jim Page is keeping me informed.'

'Oh yes, Jim Page...He helped John crew the Mystic.'

'And he's on the company board of directors. He told me that Rosetta has redirected the company's charity funds to an offshore bank.'

'That's outrageous.' We have been helping so many charities for years,' Celeste protested angrily.

'Yes, we both understand that. 'He is completely sympathetic to your situation and has assured me he'll keep me informed of any other actions that may occur. Don't worry I've placed a caveat on your father's private estate until Logan and I unravel this case. Just keep in touch,' he said assuring her before hanging up the phone.

Outside the Noumea International Airport, a cab dropped Celeste, Naomi and Curtis off at the passenger terminal and making their way to the departure desk, they check in before proceeding to board the plane.

Naomi and Curtis's three-story French provincial apartment building was located in the Gare du Nord precinct. Two weeks after their arrival, Celeste decided to go out shopping and buying a baguette and

some croissants, returned. Upstairs Naomi responded to the doorbell and let her inside. Unpacking the basket on the kitchen table she joined Naomi who was busy in the living room working on some artwork.

‘How do you like my painting collection? I have to prepare some space in the local gallery for an installation. I like this one, what do you think?’

Glancing at the painting over Naomi’s shoulder, Celeste slumped down on the couch.

‘It’s *great* but I’m bored. I tell you what. ‘Curtis mentioned that he has a shoot in London next week so why don’t we tag along.’ Naomi smiled looking on the bright side.

‘London’s got some great fashion shops, and we could pick up some nice outfits there,’ Naomi said sitting down beside her and giving Celeste a hug.

On board an English Channel ferry Celeste, Naomi and Curtis stood on the forward deck, shrouded by fog. Finally, from out of the fog the Brighton terminal came into view and disembarking they make their way to a transit transport station, boarding a coach and heading off to London.

Stopping at the Q shopping centre Curtis left them to meet up with the team for his shoot leaving Celeste and Naomi to check out the shops. Strolling through the centre they looked at a fashion display at an icon brand outlet and entered.

Trying on several outfits, they make their purchases and proceed to walk to the WW1 Fountain of Peace to meet up with Curtis as he instructed, however he was nowhere to be seen.

Calling him on her mobile he mentioned to Naomi that he is delayed and would be another hour and instructed them to wait at the Oxford hotel.

Well past nightfall an hour passed and losing their patience Celeste and Naomi decided to take a walk outside.

Standing on the deserted sidewalk the shadows of two youths appeared staggering drunkenly toward them. Purposefully bumping into them, one suddenly pulled out a knife and bailing them up at knife point demanded they hand over their money.

Reluctantly Celeste obliged, and digging into her bag, passed them a one-hundred-pound note. Taking advantage of the young thug's distraction, Naomi grabbed the other assailant by the arm struggling with him he fell to the ground. Alerted by the skirmish two nearby patrolling policemen, rushed to their aid as the thugs regathered themselves and sprinted off disappeared into the night.

Returning to the hotel Curtis was waiting. Over a beer, Celeste revealed her innermost fears to Naomi. As a child sitting with her father on the homestead veranda after hearing the news of the neighbouring family's little boy tragically drowning John had comforted her.

'Don't worry my child I will always be there to protect you,' he had told her.

'Your father will always be with you,' Naomi replied. I had the same fears when my mother died but I feel she's always looking over my shoulder when I most need her, 'she said taking hold of Celeste's hand.

In Sydney, James has just left the court building and is listening to Logan on his mobile phone as he walked toward his office.

‘I have just been browsing through a bunch of files which made interesting reading,’ voices Logan.

‘Really? I’m just dodging some pedestrians. I’ve had a hectic day in court, so *what’s* up?’

‘Apparently, Rosetta and Allie were charged with attempted fraud in Spain eight years ago, but they escaped a jail sentence before they ended up here in Sydney.’

‘Is that so?’ James replied. ‘Partners in crime do you think?’

‘Seems so.’ Logan’s voice echoed through the noise of the traffic. ‘I’ve already called inspector Callum and asked him to investigate further,’ Logan concluded the call leaving James to ponder over Logans information as he reached his office.

The lights of the Paris apartment were burning way past midnight when Celeste Naomi and Curtis finally returned from London. Over a coffee, Curtis produced the photos from his London shoot.

‘Not bad at all he mumbles to himself.’

‘Hey, look at these shots.’ I took this one of you both standing on tower bridge. And look at this one. You Celeste are standing beside one of the Queen’s guards at Buckingham Palace wearing that new outfit you bought at the icon outlet.’

‘Look you two,’ Celeste said. ‘I’ve been thinking. I can’t just spend my life shopping. I’m very grateful for

all your help but I really need to do some modelling. I know an agency here in Paris.'

'But isn't that a bit risky?' Naomi replied.

'Not if I use your name. You know like a pseudonym.'

'I think you mean alias,' Naomi laughed.

Celeste stood outside the Beau Grenelle high-rise building looking at a list of occupants painted on a brass plate at the entrance. Identifying the Express Model Agency, she made her way to the first floor. Entering the agency foyer, she was greeted by a young receptionist seated behind her desk.

'Yes. How can I help you?' the bright young girl inquired chewing on her gum.

'I'm on a working holiday and looking for some modelling work,' Celeste replied.

'We only accept experienced girls. We will need a portfolio. Do you have one?' the girl replied curtly.

'Oh yes of course. I'll bring it in. Anything else?'

'Just some form of ID that's all.'

Without replying, Celeste trotted out the door and bouncing down the stairs hurried back to the apartment.

Sitting in the living room Naomi and Curtis were working away at her computer when Celeste finally found the courage to pose her question to Curtis.

'Curtis is it possible to take some shots so I can put a portfolio together?'

'Sure thing. We can shoot some shots of you at some of our cons, like the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower.'

‘And the Musee du Louvre would be great,’ Naomi added looking up from her screen.

‘Yes. I can just see you posing next to that beautiful glass pyramid.’

‘Anything else?’ Curtis asked.

‘I need a temporary ID and some nice outfits I guess,’ Celeste baulked at her idea.

‘Look. Really, it’s no problem,’ Curtis replied.

‘Naomi let me have your driver’s license. All I have to do is change the photo.’ Here Naomi said handing over her driver’s license.

‘And as far outfits go, I haven’t worked in the art department for nothing,’ Naomi recalled. ‘I’ve collected a decent wardrobe and after all, we’re both almost identical in size and my sister is a make-up artist and lives here on the second floor.’

Together, the next morning Curtis sat behind the wheel of his battered Citroen fully prepared for the shoot. Turning into a roundabout Naomi sighted the Louvre.

‘There’s a car park just down from the Louvre.

‘We can start there.’

Unfolding themselves from the car Curtis removed his camera case and his folding light reflective umbrella equipment from the Citroen’s roof ski rack, while Naomi unloaded a luggage trolley full of clothing from the trunk and they set off down the street for the shoot. Arriving at the Louvre, Curtis set up his camera tripod and light umbrella against the backdrop of its glass pyramid, whilst Naomi made some final touches to Celeste’s makeup. Posing propped up; leaning against the glass Curtis snapped a series of shots. Moving on to the next location circling the Arc de

Triomphe they found a nearby parking spot. Selecting a long winter fur coat Celeste posed under its arch before they drove on to the Eiffel Tower. Taking the lift to the deck overlooking Paris, Curtis took a series of final shots.

Returning late in the afternoon they decided to hang out to review the shoot at the café de Flora.

‘Who knows who we might meet there,’ Curtis told them. ‘It’s renowned for its famous clientele.’

‘And talking famous let’s celebrate a little tonight?’ Naomi teased.

Located at 7 Rue Fromentin the Le Grand Ecart nightclub was formally an icon of the roaring twenties and now reinvented. Inside Celeste, Naomi and Curtis sat in a cubicle listening to a live jazz band. Topless hosts delivering trays of cocktails from the crystal bar plied their wares, circulating among the patrons. Above, a rotating mirror ball dangling from the ceiling, coloured light patens danced around the walls lighting the restaurant interior.

Curtis caught the attention of a vivacious waitress offering her wares. ‘I’ll have a round of drinks for my friends’.

‘*Anytime*, she replied leaning provocatively over the table placing the cocktails on the table.

‘Well, hears to you Celeste. Or should I say to our alias.’ Curtis laughed raising his glass.’

The Givenchy, Lanvin model agency located in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district thrived in a hive of activity. Lining up with the gathered hopefuls, Celeste

handed over her portfolio and doctored license ID to the young receptionist and taking a seat prepared to wait.

‘I’ll give this to Monsieur Lamont in just a moment,’ the receptionist told her. ‘Please wait here and fill in our application. You’ll need to take a runway test when he is available. You’ll find an outfit in the change room.’

After a ten-minute wait, Celeste was called in and changed into a fashionable low-cut white cotton gown. Entering the test runway, Monsieur Lamont had a long fashion career grooming aspiring models seeking fame and fortune at the top and sat expectantly with his legs crossed at the end of a runway.

Turning on some music, he raised his hand and gestured for Celeste to commence.

Walking out onto the floor Celeste began with a swirl of her gown and strutting down the test catwalk she flashed her eyes confidently toward him to finish in a well-practised twirl.

‘And your piece de resistance,’ voiced Lamont gesturing to her with his hands.

Erotically, she lifted her gown to her knee and spinning again she slinked back along the runway with her head turned back looking seductively toward him.

‘Excellent my dear. You can relax now. Please take a seat he said reassuringly looked over her application.

‘Let me see,’ said Lamont. ‘So, your name is Naomi de Plante, and as I understand it you are on a working holiday. Is that right?’

‘That’s right monsieur.’

‘Good... As it happens you are in luck today,’ he smiled luxuriously. ‘We have an opening for you to take part in our fashion designer show next week.’

Alone at the apartment, Celeste picked up the phone and placed a call to her uncle, James, in Sydney.

‘Uncle is that you? I thought I should call you. I’m staying with some friends in Paris, and I’ve just got some modelling work next week in the Paris fashion show.’

‘That’s very good,’ his voice echoed over the phone.

‘You need to keep yourself occupied. However, be careful!’

‘Any progress at all?’ Celeste asked keen for a response.

‘No... but Logan is following some new leads. I’ll let you know. Call me after your show.’

Steeling herself for the fashion show, Celeste waited nervously in the dressing room with six other models preparing for the parade.

Naomi sat amid a crowd of guests while Curtis joined a gallery of photographers waiting in anticipation for the show to commence. Monsieur Lamont sat in the front row looking on.

A world away in Sydney inside the Birchum House fashion headquarters, Rosetta eagerly leaned over to look at Philippa’s computer.

‘Phillipa. Can you bring up the Paris Givenchy fashion show?’ she asked her. ‘It’s being streamed live from Paris this morning and we need to see what’s on offer for our spring collection.’ Rosetta added. ‘And put it on

the big screen in the board room and have the staff ready to take a look.'

Across the globe, in Paris, the live show being streamed around the planet. Backstage, Celeste was busying herself wriggling into a red tube mini skirt while her male stylist hovered over her fussing over her hair details.

'Don't be so nervous darling. You look gorgeous,' he said fussing about and making some final touches to her hair. 'Your third to go on, behind Marie don't forget.'

Lining up in the wings the tension mounting, the host in turn began to introduce the models.

'I'd like to welcome you all to the Givenchy fashion show ladies and gentlemen,' announced the host. 'First on parade is the beautiful Bridget Valair.'

Receiving a polite applause from the audience, she made her appearance wearing a silk gown revealing her long leggy look. Exposing her outfit to the audience in a flurry of, silk she slunk her way down the catwalk to the host commentary.

'Bridget's gown was designed by Maurice Devine. Please note the extreme look revealing her beautiful long legs. Give her a hand everyone. And now it's Marie's turn.'

'You're up soon. Good luck,' said the stylist, wishing her well and making a last touch-up to her hair assuring Celeste waiting in the wings.

Inside the Birchum House board room, all the staff gathered together with Rosetta and Phillipa looking on

at the big screen live streaming broadcast.

'Maria looks stunning,' Rosetta said.

'Take *note* people. She's wearing a Heidi Silane gown.'

Next, they viewed Georgia taking to the catwalk. Featuring a cotton pin stripped skirt and cut-down top and reaching the end of the runway she turned and made her way to the wings.

'Now please let's welcome Naomi de Plante'. I understand she has taken a sabbatical from the Australian fashion scene, and we are sure happy that she has done just that,' the host's voice echoed on the screen broadcast from Paris.

Taken by surprise Rosetta's eyes bulged out of her head, stunned to see Celeste appear on the runway, making her familiar entrance and beginning her parade before her eyes.

'My goodness, she looks stunning,' said Phillipa looking on in amazement.

'Yes, and look at that mini,' added another staff member. 'Gosh, it's petty revealing. She's wearing one of those scanty Anthony Vicarly mini creations ...Naomi de Plante,' did they say?'

'I don't think so,' Rosetta scoffed. 'It's definitely Celeste. I can recognise her anywhere.'

A world away in Paris Celeste had returned to the apartment with Naomi and found Curtis already looking at the photo images that he had taken at the event.

'Thank you all so much,' Celeste thanked them.

‘And now look I’m famous as well.’ Naomi giggled looking at an image of Celeste on the catwalk.

‘And I’m so grateful to you both,’ Celeste chuckled.

‘Okay, this calls for a celebration.’

Retrieving a bottle of champagne from a shelf Curtis proposed a toast. ‘I saved this bottle of Don Perignon champagne for such a special occasion. To our beautiful alias,’ he said raising his glass.

Speeding around the Renault Paul Ricard formula 1 test facility tracing circuit in Marseille, Gabriel sat behind the wheel of his test car. His engine reached a screaming pitch at top speed as he sped past the workshop, the exhaust sound penetrating the building. Continuing around the track Gabriel finally slowed and pulled into the facilities garage. Looking on the mechanics set about working on the engine as Gabriel unfolded his frame from the cockpit to watch over the mechanics when he was interrupted by the buzz from his phone.

‘Gabriel, did you receive my text messages?’ Celeste voice echoed on the line.

‘Yes, but you sent them anonymously so how could I reply?’ Gabriel said sounding crestfallen.

‘My uncle cautioned me not to disclose my location. He thinks the culprits are preparing to make an unfriendly offer to take over the business,’ Celeste voiced. ‘And I’m sure whoever it is will spare no expense to track me down because I’m the only one who can prevent it!’

‘I guess that could explain your father’s death,’ replied a concerned Gabriel.

‘Yes, and our private detective believes that there’s been an audacious attempt to set me up as my father’s murderer.’

‘That’s outrageous. Look Celeste I’m so glad you called me because my race manager has just withdrawn my entry in the Monte Carlo event, so right now I have some time to catch up with you in Paris.’

‘Really...That’s great. ‘You can stay with me at Naomi and Curtis’s apartment. They’re both looking forward to meeting up with you at last.’

Rosetta’s Bentley turned into the Kingsford Smith air charter terminal driving into the car park. Walking inside, Allie is by her side. Checking in they boarded the waiting Lear Jet. Taking their seats the jet taxied to the tarmac apron, lining up on the runway before it speared down the runway and lifted off disappearing into a bank of clouds heading toward Paris.

At the Sydney barristers’ offices, James was on the phone speaking to Logan.

‘I’ve been thinking about that smoking gun. The gun club is completely mystified about the disappearance of Celeste’s target pistol,’ he pondered pacing up and down with his phone in his hand.

‘At this stage, I must say that I’m pretty darn frustrated.’

‘Don’t let it get to you,’ James responded. ‘I just had a tip-off from Jim Page who has told me that Rosetta spotted Celeste on a live-streaming fashion event. It was a Paris fashion show and according to Jim, Celeste has taken the name of Naomi de Plante. I can

only guess, but I bet that Rosetta is on her way to Paris by now. 'James surmised in a serious tone.

'Is that right,' Logan sounded his concern.

'Logan. I want you to take the first available flight to Paris. I'm sure that the Naomi girl is the girl Celeste is staying with. This is a disturbing turn of events and I need you to find out what's happening,' he directed Logan before hanging up.

Collecting a rental car at the airport Rosetta and Allie had driven through Paris making their way to the exclusive Le Bristol Paris hotel and checking in to their room Rosetta produced her mobile phone googling the model agencies.

'I'm sure this must be the model agency,' Rosetta said noting its director. 'Monsieur Lammont owns the Givenchy model agency. It's across the city but I'm tired so in the meantime, I want you to find a hardware store and purchase these items,' she told him handing Allie a list. 'Don't just stand there,' she demanded and don't wake me up until the morning.'

The Givenchy Model Agency was busy with new hopeful models lined up at the reception area. Rosetta and Allie arrived and seeing the line impatiently jostled past the queue of hopeful models pushing their way to the desk. 'Can you help me please Madame?' Rosetta asked the receptionist. 'Do you have a Naomi de Plante' on the books?' Rosetta asked in an unfamiliar polite tone in her voice.

'Yes, we do. She's become an instant hit around here after her appearance at the latest international fashion show,' the young girl replied willingly.

'I'm her aunt you see, and I need to see her,' Rosetta said giving an incredulous smile. 'Do you have an address?'

Could you provide some identification for me,' the young girl responded suspiciously eyeing Rosetta off. 'I afraid can't just give that information out.'

'I'm a client of Monsieur Lammont,' Rosetta angrily replied.

'Oh, I see. I'm sorry. Look. Monsieur Lammont is out all day,' the young receptionist replied. 'I'll ask him when he arrives first thing, so call by tomorrow and see if he knows the address.'

On board an Emirates airline flight bound for Paris, Logan dozed in his seat. Woken by an in-flight attendant, Logan requested the use of an inflight phone. Returning, he placed a call to Interpol. Connecting to the security team, Logan provided his credentials before he was transferred to a detective.

'I have an urgent request. Could you look up the address of a Naomi de Plante? I'm on my way to interview her. 'I'll be arriving at Charles De Gaul airport on Emirates flight 421 at 7 a.m. in the morning. Can you have a man and a car waiting on standby for me?' Logan requested settling back in his seat and dozed off for the reaming flight.

Boarding an early flight from Marseille airport, Gabriel had taken a taxi to the airport and upon his arrival in Paris finally made his way to the apartment. Arriving,

Celeste flung her arms around him. 'I'm so glad to see you.' This is Naomi and Curtis,' she said introducing them.

'We've heard so much about you,' Naomi smiled as Curtis held out his hand and led him inside and produced some of his photos.

'I took these shots for one of my clients at the French Grand Prix at the Le Castellet race circuit last year.'

Rising early Rosetta and Allie returned to the Givenchy model agency. Handing over Naomi's address, they left and drove through the city streets bustling in activity. Locating Naomi's address, Allie parked their rental car under the shade of tree-lined street a short distance from the apartment. Getting out of the car, Rosetta stood and looked over the apartment building while Allie opened the car trunk and removed a large cardboard carton.

Walking up to the apartment entrance Rosetta pressed the buzzer and waited.

Upstairs Curtis was working at his computer while Celeste and Naomi were occupied looking through the latest Clare fashion magazine.

'I'll answer it,' Curtis responded to the buzzer and made his way down the stairs to the front door.

Opening the door Curtis found himself confronted by the unfamiliar face of Rosetta and a man carrying a huge carton.

'Yes. How can I help?' Curtis asked the stranger looking at the carton.

'It's for Naomi de Plante', Rosetta replied.

'Oh...A delivery. Let me take it up to her.'

'Thanks...But I need to have her sign for it personally,' Rosetta insisted firmly.

'What is it?' inquired Curtis.

'It's a new gown from the agency to try on before her next show,' she insisted.

Following Curtis, they took the stairs and opening the door they confronted Celeste in the living room with Naomi.

'My god. Rosetta...What are you doing here?' Celeste choked dumbfounded, taken completely by surprise.

'Never mind just come with me,' threatened Rosetta. Dropping the carton Allie dug into his coat and produced a pistol.

'And *you two* whoever you are. Make yourselves scarce in that room over there...Quickly now.' Rosetta ordering Curtis and Naomi to comply confronted by Allie waving the gun at them.

Reluctantly Curtis and Noemi obliged and entered the bedroom to wake a startled Gabriel who sprung out of the bed as Allie locked the door shut behind them.

'So *really*... You want to take over my father's estate as well. Was it you who planned to kill him?' Celeste choking out her words uncontrollably. 'That's my pistol from the gun club. I can recognize it anywhere,' uttered Celeste. 'It has an ivory handle that Dad especially had carved for me in India. So, what do you plan to do with me? Kill me as well?'

Pressing the point of the gun to her neck Allie proceeded to shove her towards the staircase. Pushing Celeste out in front of him he forced her down

the staircase followed by Rosetta close behind.

Listening through the bedroom door, summing up the situation Curtis prised open the bedroom window, climbing out onto the fire escape followed by Gabriel and Naomi clamber down the staircase.

Racing onto the footpath they arrive just in time to see the assailant holding Celeste against her will, forcing her into the back. Taking the gun from Allie she clambered into the back menacing Celeste with the gun and ordered Allie to drive off. 'Now. Take us back to the hotel.' Rosetta yelled.

Reacting spontaneously, Curtis tossed his car keys to Gabriel and jumping into his battered Citroen followed by Naomi tumbling into the back seat they began to give chase.

Approaching the end of the street a police car emerged from around the corner. Accompanied by Logan, the driver almost collided with the Rosetta's rental car followed close behind by Curtis's Citroen giving chase. Recognizing Rosetta in the back seat with Celeste, Logan barked an order to his driver who promptly made a U-turn and bolted off after them with his light flashing and siren bellowing in pursuit.

Screaming around the corner, the rental car zig-zagged almost out of control accelerating past three unsuspecting vehicles directly in their path. Almost careening into them Allie's found his path momentarily blocked by a slow-moving truck, allowing Gabriel and the police car to close in behind them.

In a panic, Allie looked at them closing in fast through his rear-view mirror and desperately pulled out into oncoming traffic, half mounting the curb sending a

collection of garbage bins into the air. In the police car, Logan picked up the radio intercom.

‘We need aerial support, so we don’t lose this maniac. ‘We’re approaching the Boulevard Voltaire,’ Logan yelled urgently.

‘Right away. Stand by. I’ll dispatch a chopper to the area immediately.’ The voice of the operations room radio operator echoed back directing the message to a patrolling Police emergency Helicopter already in the air.

In the back seat, Rosetta and Celeste were holding on for dear life, being tossed from side to side.

Speeding parallel alongside the Seine River, the chase approached the Pont de la Tourelle Bridge and racing across the bridge the suspect’s rental car made a sharp turn toward a roundabout. Blocking their path on either side of the roundabout two police cars appeared in front set up ahead. Sighting them, Allie took a middle route mounting the footpath sending pedestrians scattering in all directions and charging off toward the Eiffel Tower now visible in the distance.

‘You fool,’ Rosetta yelled. Turn back. You’re going the wrong way.’

Disoriented Allie wildly weaved his way through the traffic to be halted by the sight of a thousand placard-waving yellow vest protesters flooding the street ahead. Making a sharp turn to avoid the crowd, Allie lost control and mounting the sidewalk his rental car smashed through a shop front window showering the stunned shopkeeper in shards of glass. Trapped, Rosetta ordered Celeste from the car and abandoning it, Allie and Rosetta shoved Celeste in front of them as

they hurriedly made their way, fleeing through the crowd.

Overhead the observer in the police helicopter caught sight of the fleeing suspects entering the base of the Eiffel tower. In pursuit behind them and making their way to the tower, Logan together with the police give chase on foot barging past several onlookers sending them flying as they sprint through the crowd behind Curtis and Gabriel. In shock, a group of tourists leaving the elevator on the ground floor looked on as they see Rosette with Allie holding Celeste in his grip, violently struggling trying to escape pushing her into the elevator followed closely behind by Rosetta.

Arriving too late, Curtis and Gabriel caught a glimpse of Celeste being pushed into the lift. In desperation, Curtis and Gabriel began the impossible task of clambering their way up the stairs while Logan and the police found themselves stranded waiting for the second lift. Desperately Logan contacted the police operation room on his mobile phone.

‘The suspects have kidnapped our victim and are in the Eiffel tower lift heading for the observation deck,’ Logan yelled in a tone of urgency.

Reaching the observation deck, Allie pulled the distraught Celeste from the lift holding her in a stranglehold grip dragging across the deck to the horror of onlooking tourists. Pushing her up the safety barrier, Allie attempted to push her over the edge but out of reach, Celeste tumbled hard back onto the deck. Looking on, a bystander came forward to confront Allie but responding Allie delivering a violent punch sending the good Samaritan sprawling onto the deck.

With Allie's pistol at Celeste's head, the helicopter police patrol arrived, hovering above the observation deck. The pilot, struggling in a strong cross wind to maintain the helicopter's position, closed in as close as possible to the deck. Inside an armed officer slid open the helicopter's sliding door and perched on the open doorway, the marksman levelled his weapon, fixing his rifle's cross hairs at Allie's head and fired a single shot. On the observation deck, the horrified tourists witness Allie buckle and releasing his grip on Celeste he crumpled onto the tower deck suffering a deadly single bullet wound to his head, his gun, falling harmlessly onto the deck floor.

Released from her assailant's grip, Celeste collapsed onto the deck as Logan burst onto the scene followed by several uniformed gendarmes emerging from the second tower lift. Seizing Rosetta, they lead her away in handcuffs to the lift.

It came as a complete surprise for Celeste when she passed through Sydney airport customs to find Mike waiting to greet her. 'It's so good to have you home again,' Mike said greeting her and throwing his arms around her.

'You came *all* the way from Wimmera Downs?'

'Yes. And your father would be so proud. We had a record wool clip this year,' Mike reassured her. 'I'm sure he heard you. Long ago he told me that it was in the very best of hands,' Celeste sharing her joy making their way out of the terminal building.

Inside the board room, Celeste sat with Mike and her uncle. At the head of the table, Pete Logan began reviewing the traumatic course of events.

'We have received the inquest report from Interpol,' James spoke followed by Logan. 'In the first instance, Hong Kong police established a connection between Allie and Henry Wong.'

'So that explains the drowning attempt,' Celeste replied.

'Yes...In Paris, it appears that they planned to fake your suicide. Rosetta had a hotel room key card in your name on her and in the hotel bathroom we found a fake suicide note next to a bathtub filled with water and a box cutter.

'That's awful,' Celeste gasped.

'You mean they intended to cut my wrists and bundle me up in a bathtub?' Celeste responded in shock.

'Yes, I believe the plan would have suited Rosetta perfectly. She was planning to collect your father's inheritance. It was a despicable plan. She's being held on remand in Paris awaiting extradition from France and together with Allie they face charges of conspiracy to murder and kidnapping.'

'But *right* now, we have some special guests here to see you.' James said opening the boardroom door. Appearing, Naomi and Curtis following closely behind Gabriel entered the board room as Celeste gave them all a huge hug before they all took a seat.

'Let me introduce you all to Naomi and Curtis her fiancé. 'And this is Gabriel,' invited Celeste extending a warm smile around the table.

‘Now that you’re all here I have some good news for everyone,’ announced Celeste. ‘Mike has been appointed our new Birchum House director and Naomi has agreed to oversee our design department right here in Sydney and Curtis will be our new fashion photographer.’

Exchanging warm handshakes, Naomi opened her bag and produced some tickets.

‘First thing on the calendar is a well-deserved vacation. I thought we could all do with a decent break,’ Naomi chuckled. ‘These are our cruise line tickets to New Caledonia.’

‘New Caledonia...Wow,’ an elated Celeste crowed. ‘I don’t believe it. And look, everyone. A booking for all of us at the Noumea Meridian resort for two whole weeks,’ chuckled Celeste.

‘And this time we can truly relax. For one, I’m looking forward to some diving and taking some underwater shots among the beautiful Coral fish on the reef,’ Curtis laughed out loud as he kisses Naomi on the cheek.

‘Naomi, thank you so much,’ Gabriel replied.

‘And well in time before my next commitment at the Monaco Grand Prix in Monte Carlo.’

Birthed at Circular quay international shipping terminal the Oceania Queen’s crew were busy preparing to sail. Checking through customs and making their way up the gangplank the passengers felt a southerly breeze whipped across the harbour. Among them, Celeste made out the tall white sails of a yacht casting her memory back to her father’s sailing boat, keeling over driven by a brisk southerly wind. Gently breaking

through a line of white caps, it sent bursts of spray across the bow of the yacht visible on the distant secluded waterfront echelons of Rose Bay.

Accepting a sheath of flowers from the captain, Celeste, Gabriel, Mike, Naomi and Curtis boarded the majestic liner and proceeded to the main deck.

Casting off, the sound of liners deep throated horn, carried across the Harbour guided by a pilot vessel it sailed past the steel arch of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the white wings of the Sydney Opera House and proceeded majestically to make its way across the harbour.

Sailing past the towering sandstone cliff heads out to sea, the Ocean Queen finally sailed on out into the Pacific Ocean.

Silhouetted against a deep blue fading sky overhead the five stood huddled together on the stern, bathing in a light sea breeze on their faces.

‘I think someone once said that there are no discoveries unless you leave the shore.’ Celeste remarked casting the flowers into the water.

‘In France they say *Avoir del la chance*,’ Gabriel laughed out loud.

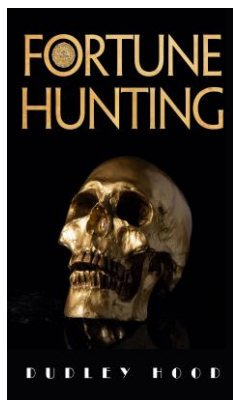
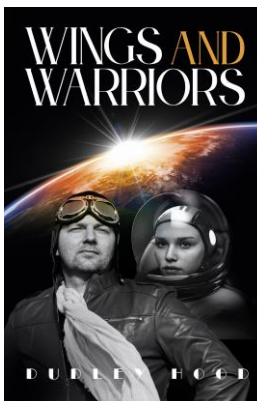
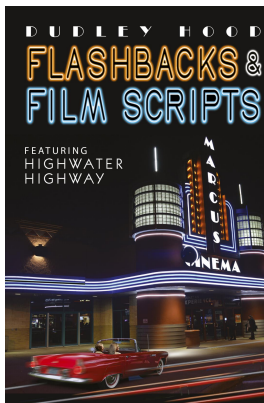
‘Oh, and what does that mean?’ Celeste asked.

‘It means that you can often have more luck the second time around,’ Naomi replied captured in the funnels of crimson sun light reflected in the wake of the Ocean Queen leaving the distant harbour city far behind.

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