

JOEY

Chapter one- The decision

'Is that you Jo? Have you sent off the UCCA form yet'

My stomach cramped as my father's voice boomed from his office. The letter had arrived about two weeks earlier and he immediately pounced on it. He recognised the post mark and left it for me on the breakfast table.

'Your UCCA form has arrived, you need to complete it and send it off if you want to go to Uni.'

I thought he had forgotten about it. I could feel my heart thumping in my chest. What am I going to do? I just can't do what he wants. I must get out, get away anywhere.

It was that time again. He always went quiet as the date came nearer. It had been nearly ten years since mum died. It had happened so suddenly. I have vague memories of her lying in bed and speaking to me her voice so soft almost inaudible. She was so young I hardly knew her before she was gone.

My head was throbbing and my eyes were still full of sleep. This was the last thing I needed. I crept downstairs and into the kitchen. I just wanted to be alone, to settle my thoughts and let the warm sunshine coming through the windows relax me. I had just woken from a dream, one of those awful ones that you can't remember but that leave a dark shadow on your mind.

'Dad, I'll do it later, please I'm just finishing my breakfast.' I shouted.

Why does he keep nagging me to complete it? He knows I don't want to go to Uni. I'm not an academic like him, all those dry facts. I'm more like my mother artistic and sensitive. Why did she have to die so young; I miss her so much, it wasn't fair. Some of my friends have had both of their parents all their lives. I didn't do anything wrong so why me? The memories of her were fading and I could hardly remember her. I was only seven when she died. It was so sudden. Dad told me to kiss her goodbye. She looked so pale with her wide eyes staring at me; she was still warm. I didn't know then that she was dead. I didn't understand. I saw her later so still and so beautiful like an angel.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted, dad was speaking again.

'I'm off, get that form completed and let me see it when I come home. I'll be back around six, love you.'

'Love you too,' I whispered but did I? Yes of course I did but not all the time; not now that he was trying to push me in a direction I didn't want to go. I felt trapped like an animal in a vice, struggling to get free. I felt an imaginary hand pressing down on my head stifling me. I had to get away.

I heard the front door slam and he was gone. The house was strangely quiet. I sat alone struggling to decide what to do. I knew that I couldn't do what he wanted, to follow in his footsteps. He had come from a family of academics. His father was a professor and his mother was a teacher. He knew no other life, He was destined to be an academic and finally became Professor of Mathematics at Manchester University. I know he really wanted a son to follow in his footsteps but he got me.

From the beginning he treated me like a boy. He hated it when I wore a dress.

'What are you wearing?' He would shout, you look so silly in a dress, only sissies wear dresses, be a.... he hesitated. He was going to say 'be a man,' but at the last moment he'd catch himself. I wanted to shout at him, I'm a girl and girls wear dresses but I was afraid. I knew his temper, I knew he could be violent and I didn't want to be on the receiving end. I remained silent.

I now felt so alone as if the house was closing in on me. I had to get away, away from him, anywhere, to find the real me, not the fiction that he had created of me. Then I remembered the message from Gwendoline my penpal on my Facebook page, *come and visit me, we would have a great time please try*. Suddenly I had this crazy idea, I'll go to Melbourne to see her. The more I thought about it the more excited I felt. I knew it was madness but I felt trapped. Did I have the courage? I felt afraid but knew that if I faltered now I would never forgive myself.

Now was the time before he came home, I had to get going. I mustn't think too much about it. I hastily packed a few things in a backpack and almost forgot my passport. Luckily I had renewed it recently. I clasped it, it felt like a lifeline. I had saved a few pounds. What will my father do when he finds me gone? For a moment I imagined his face, that look I had seen so often of despair as if I would never be the child he wanted. He would be so angry and for a moment I almost lost my courage. I'll write him a letter, I'll explain.

Professor David Hodge eased his car into his parking spot and turned off the engine. He sat, deep in thought. He was uneasy. He was still remembering the conversation with Jo. He knew that he had handled his daughter clumsily. He had spoken too hastily. Jo was unhappy, she missed her mother. He had tried so hard to make it up to her but knew he couldn't. She seemed so confused. She'll be better when she gets to Uni with people her own age, he decided. Then he thought of the day ahead and his spirits lightened. Suddenly he heard his name called.

'Professor they are waiting for you.' It was Maggie his secretary, her bright face beaming at him. He had forgotten he had a meeting with Admin to discuss an application he had made for some more funds.

At last I was ready. I had pushed my doubts into the back of my mind. I knew Dad would be furious when he found out but by that time I would be far away. I began to write a note. '*Dear Dad,.....*' I carried my small bag into the hall and placed the letter on the side table and stood up catching my reflection in the mirror. My pale

green eyes stared back at me, a look of fear creasing my face. I stared back and shouted,

'No I am not going to Uni.' I suddenly caught sight of the letter and in a moment of uncertainty wanted to tear it up and throw it into the bin. Bracing myself I closed the front door and paused. This was it. No going back. I pushed my keys through the letter box and heard them clatter on the tiled floor.

My plan was to catch the bus to the coach station at Margaret Moxon Way in Hull. I knew the coach to Tilbury was leaving at 9.25 am and due to arrive at 9.30 pm. I had this crazy idea of smuggling myself onto a ship.

Driving home, Professor Hodge could hardly remember what had happened at the meeting, his thoughts were still with Jo. The day had rushed by and suddenly it was six and Maggie was saying goodnight. He packed his case and walked the short distance to the car park nodding to Bob the attendant. They had known each other for years. Bob had sought his help when his son was struggling at school. A brief talk to the boy seemed to have helped and now he was planning to go to Uni.

Jo was still on his mind as he let himself into the house, it was unusually quiet. Strange he thought, Jo usually came to greet him. He called her name and then saw the letter on the table. There was no stamp, just a stark white envelope with the word Dad written in Jo's round handwriting. His heart gave a thump. For a moment he couldn't move, wild thoughts ranged through his mind. What was this? With his hand shaking, he tore open the envelope.

*Dear Dad, please forgive me but I can't be the daughter you want. I have got to live my own life. I need to get away. I have decided to go to Australia to see my pen pal. Please don't try to stop me. Don't worry I will be fine. I love you, Jo
PS I will call you when I arrive.*

He sat down clutching the letter, struggling to breathe. He tried to calm himself. His hands were shaking. What was happening? It was all too confusing. He thought of Deborah, his late wife and wished she was here, she would know what to do. Now he felt alone, deserted, a failure. With all his achievements he knew he had failed, failed as a father.

Chapter Two- Hull Bus Station

The station was crowded when I arrived. So many people were scurrying around that for a moment. The noise was horrendous, voices shouting, mobiles ringing, I was struggling to focus. Then I saw it, the ticket office. I made my way to it. I seemed to have become empowered by a strange strength. I felt an inner confidence. There was a short queue, then I was at the desk.

'One single to Tilbury please,' I asked. The agent looked up.

'A single? Don't you want a return? They're cheaper than two singles.'

Maybe I should I thought, then no.

'One single please,' I repeated and handed over the money.

'The bus is at platform four,' he said, pointing to somewhere behind me. I nodded and set off in that direction. I found it and climbed aboard. The coach was only half full so I had a seat to myself. I put my bag in the overhead shelf and settled down for the long journey. Sitting by the window I watched the world go by. People were moving to and fro, either looking for their bus or rushing to leave the building. I saw a mother pulling two small children behind her looking anxious and tired. A young man was busking playing a squeaky violin but no one seemed to see him. It was the first time I had been away from home on my own and it was all very strange. I felt free for the first time in my life. It gave me an unaccustomed confidence knowing it was what I wanted to do.

We set off on time. Familiar landmarks flashed by. Soon the rocking of the bus made me feel sleepy and I must have fallen asleep. I jerked awake when we stopped in London to pick up some more passengers. Suddenly I was confused and began to panic. What was I doing here?

It was getting dark and the stars were beginning to appear in the clear sky. I watched as the new travellers came into the coach and noticed a young man get on, he looked Indian. He was clearly confused and couldn't decide where to sit. I caught his eye and smiled. He blushed then sat down next to me.

'Thank you, may I?' he whispered. The coach set off and we sat in silence. I could see his outline in the window. He had a small serious face with short black hair and a wrinkled brow.

'You going to Tilbury?' he asked. I hesitated to tell him my plans but after a silence I said.

'Yes, I want to visit my pen pal in Australia. Where are you going?'

'I returning to India, getting married, it's arranged.'

He fumbled with his wallet and showed me a photo. It was of a young dark haired girl in a sari.

'She's very beautiful.'

'Yes she is.'

We sat in silence for the rest of the journey. We were strange companions both going into the unknown. He going to marry a girl he didn't know and I was running away and going to an unknown country.

Chapter Three- The Hostel

I lost sight of him when we arrived at the dock. By now it was dark and beginning to drizzle. I was cold and hungry and needed to rest. I walked for a while and then I saw a policeman on traffic duty near the station. When the traffic had slowed down, I went over to him.

'Excuse me, I am looking for somewhere cheap to stay tonight, can you help me?' He peered into my face.

'How old are you?'

'Eighteen.' I lied'

'OK, there's a woman's hostel in the next street. If you wait a moment, I'll walk you to it. A young woman like you shouldn't be out at night on your own.'

I said nothing. He was right but I had no choice. We walked together in silence, our footsteps echoing on the empty pavement. Finally we came to a large house on the corner.

'This is it,' the policeman pointed to the open entrance.

The hostel was bright and welcoming. I thanked him and entered.

'Good evening,' a voice beamed. It was from a young woman standing behind a desk; she could have been my age.

'Hi I'm Kate, how are you?' I nodded, I think she could see that I wasn't doing so well. I must have looked a sight but she said nothing.

'OK I s'pose.' I replied. 'Do you have a room for the night I'm really tired.'

'Sure.' She turned, reached for a key from the rack behind her and handed it to me. I looked at it, No 13.

'Are you superstitious?' she asked.

'Me superstitious no,' I said shaking my head, 'not at all.'

'It's up the stairs and along the corridor. Supper is just finishing so come down as soon as you can.'

I picked up my bag and went up the creaking stairs. Then along a threadbare carpet until I found Room 13 at the far end. I passed a toilet and shower room on the way. I glanced in. It looked clean. I'll have to share the facilities I said to myself. I reached room 13, turned the key and entered. It was pitch black. I fumbled for the wall switch and pressed it turning on the light; a single bald bulb shone down from the centre of the ceiling. The room had a narrow bed against the far wall and opposite a small chest of drawers. It smelled clean. It was fine, I would be safe here.

I was hungry and decided to check out the dining room. Following the sound of clattering plates, I entered a large brightly lit room with two long tables and about 10 chairs, two of which were occupied. I nodded to the occupants. One looked up, a woman in her fifties.

'Hurry, yu ain't got much time it'll finish soon. Food's on counter over there,' she said pointing to the far wall. I picked up a plate with the corner cracked and helped myself to some potatoes, stew and some green vegetables.

'What's yur name?' the woman asked inviting me to sit next to her.

'Josephine, Jo,' I said embarrassed.

'Where yu from?'

'Hull,' I said not wanting to say anymore. We sat in silence. I ate quickly; the food was basic but comforting. She had a gentle face. Her clothes were loose and grubby and she smelled of urine. I needed to leave as soon as possible. She carried on talking even though she could see I was eager to get away.

'Why yu 'ere?'

'I, um.' I hesitated I didn't really want to tell her. I was beginning to wonder the same question. It seemed so easy when I left home, exciting, an adventure but now it felt very different, I was beginning to have doubts. The more she questioned me the more uncertain I felt.

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'I must get some sleep,' and without turning to thank her I rushed from the room.

The more he thought about the situation the more Professor David began to panic. Why had she run away? Was she really going to Australia? His immediate thought was to call the police but then he stopped, what would he say to them. What could the police do? Tell him to stay calm she would probably return soon. What about the publicity, the papers, they would make the most of it, *Professor's daughter runs away*? How could he face his colleagues? No, no, that would never do. He decided to wait and see what happened. With all his years of experience he was totally lost and confused. That night he couldn't sleep. He realised he had to do something. My daughter has run away and I don't know where she is. The thought kept disturbing him.

Chapter Four- On Board

I woke as the light percolated through the thin blinds. Confused, I lay still trying to remember where I was. My watch said 7.30am. I crept out into the corridor and saw the shower door was open. I grabbed my clothes and a thin towel off the rail and went in. The water was hot and there was some soap. I undressed and stood letting the hot water cleanse me. I felt renewed as if my life was just starting and I was washing away the past.

The dining room was busy when I entered. I still felt out of place as if I really shouldn't be there. I had a comfortable home that I had deserted by choice. Most of my companions were there out of desperation, poverty, violence or illness. They looked up as I entered. I rushed my meal. I needed to get away from their tired eyes, staring, questioning. I paid my bill and made my way to the dock.

I had done some reading and knew that a Peninsular & Oriental liner bound for Australia was sailing from the new landing stage some time that day. I had this crazy idea of smuggling myself onto her and hiding until we reached Melbourne. The more I thought about it the more impossible it seemed. First of all how would I get on board and then where would I hide?

Now I was there looking at her, her hugh bow rising high above me in the morning sky. As I approached the landing stage a number of people were already assembled with their luggage. I overheard snippets of conversation about the trip and how excited the travellers were. They were clearly impatient to get started. I stood next to a small family and overheard a man say,

'Let me help you with your luggage and then I'll come off before the departure.' Was it possible that I could go on as a visitor? I went up to him.

'Excuse me sir, did I hear you say that visitors can go on board and then come off before departure?'

'Sure,' he said in a broad American accent. 'You'll need a visitor's pass. You can get one over there', pointing to a small kiosk. 'Mention my name *Macintosh*, and come as my guest.'

I returned after a few minutes with the pass and thanked him.

'No problem, enjoy your visit,' he said and was gone.

I now felt more confident. I waited until it was almost dark by which time most travellers had embarked and then holding the pass in my hand and with my heart racing, I climbed the swaying gangway following a small family that including some children. I hoped I would not seem to be too obvious. Happily, it worked and my pass was accepted without question.

'The ship sails in two hours Miss, please leave before then,' the quartermaster said.

'Thank you sir,' I said smiling to show I was confident but inside I was shaking. Would I be able to hide on board and what would happen if they caught me out? I didn't want to think about it.

I had climbed the gang plank, showed my pass and now was on board. It was all so easy. I walked about the ship following one group after another looking for the cabin decks. My plan was simple. I would try and find an empty cabin and hide in it. The more I thought about it, the more impossible it seemed but I had started and there was no going back.

I had been moving about for some while when I noticed that there were fewer and fewer passengers as most had gone to their cabins to prepare for dinner. Then I heard the gong sound and a voice on the intercom boomed out,

'All visitor to leave the ship now please.' Five minutes later it sounded again. I knew that this was the moment when I had to decide. Could I carry it off, could I manage to hide all the way to Australia or should I leave now? It seemed an impossible choice. I crouched down behind a couch and struggled to decide what to do. Then I heard the sound of heavy chains and the drumming of the engines. I felt the ship begin to roll gently and we were on our way. Fate had decided for me, there was no going back.

I had seen the ladies' toilet on C deck and made for it. I would stay there for a while. I settled myself in one of the cubicles. The dull rumble of the engine and the slight swaying movement soon lulled me into asleep. It was dark when I awoke. I was now very hungry and decided to see if I could find some food. I listened. It was all quiet. I slowly opened the toilet room door and peered out, it was empty. I stepped into the corridor. Suddenly I heard footsteps. I froze expecting to meet one of the ship's officers and my deception would have been discovered. Instead it was Samar, my Indian friend from the coach. I couldn't believe my eyes.

He was startled to see me.

'What you doing here?' he blurted out.

'I, I am trying to get to Australia,' I said.

'You get on the boat, how?'

'I stayed on after the visitors left. Please you must help me, I'm desperate.'

'Come, you come to cabin, we talk there.' I followed him to D deck and waited while he opened his cabin door. It was a long, thin pokey room with a port hole at the far end, a small bunk bed that folded onto the wall and a small wash basin and a chair.

'I thought the cabins would have been more comfortable.' He saw my disappointment.

'No afford a bigger one.'

'No it's fine, thank you for showing me it.'

'You stay here if you wish,' he said. 'We sleep opposite in the bed. You be fine.' I couldn't believe what he was saying, he was offering to hide me.

'Are you sure? You could get into serious trouble you know if they found out that you had been hiding me.'

'I know, I don't care. I want help you,' he grinned broadly. 'You hungry?' he asked seeing my drawn face.

'Yes starving.'

'I get food, being served on deck. Rest, I not be long.'

Later, I was startled as I heard someone insert a key in the cabin door and open it. I pulled the covers over my head pretending to be asleep.

'It's OK it's me Samar,' he whispered. 'I bring sandwiches, fruit and a cup of tea. I found tray.'

'What about the steward, what will happen if he finds me?'

'It's OK, I told him not mention that you my girlfriend, another passenger staying with me. I give him a tip and he wink at me, going to be OK.'

The following day I met his steward a Goanese called Almeida who smiled knowingly when he saw me. I was very frightened of being found out and stayed in the cabin for the next few days while Samar brought me food.

I was very embarrassed because I had so few clothes and what I had were not suitable. Samar must have realised it.

Quite suddenly without warning, he said,

'Why you try wear sari I bring for my new wife. Perhaps you get fresh air on deck wearing it. No one know you?'

I thought for a moment that he was joking but I saw his face was serious.

'Are you sure? What will you give your bride?'

'I'll buy more in Bombay, don't worry try one. The Nivi style suit you, very popular, my favorite.'

He handed me the garment. I was amazed how light it was and how soft and smooth the material.

'It chiffon,' he said noticing my pleasure. At first I didn't know how to wear it but he showed me how to wrap it around my body. Gradually it took shape and was changed from a large loose gown into a stunning garment. I looked in the mirror. It was amazing I was transformed.

'Now you need jewelry and makeup, you look beautiful'

Chapter Five-Samar

Samar began to talk about himself. He had come to England with his family when he was twelve and went to a local school. His father who was in the Colonial Service and died soon after. He lived with his mother, two brothers and a sister. He wanted to be a doctor but they didn't have the money so he became an Operating Theatre assistant working at St Thomas' in London.

'My family came from Andhra, Pradesh a state in South East India. Its capital is Hyderabad. I have never been there.'

'How did you meet your wife to be?' He went quiet and then said,

'I haven't, it's arranged by our families.'

He saw the surprise on my face. How could you marry someone you had never met I thought but said nothing. He went on,

'She come from same village. Our families known each other since childhood.' I knew her when child but didn't know she be chosen to be my wife.' I wanted to ask him how he felt about his family choosing his wife it was so alien to me. How could they possibly know who to choose to make him happy?

I was ready. My face was made up and I was wearing the sari and some jewelry that Samar had bought for his new wife. Could I pull it off? Could I go out onto the deck and mingle with the other travellers? I took a deep breath and walked towards the door. I immediately realised that I had to adopt a special gait, slow small steps and keeping my knees together. In this way the Sari remained flowing and free.

'Samar I can't go out on my own, you must come with me, it would look more natural.' Together we left his cabin and made our way to the deck. I tucked his arm in mine and smiled at him. I felt I had known him for ages. We walked slowly around the deck as if we had known each other for ages. The night was warm, the sky was bright with stars. For the first time I felt free.

It was the second day out and we were passing Gibraltar at the entrance to the Mediterranean. Samir and I again left the cabin and made our way to the top deck and joined a number of other passengers. We walked around the deck arm in arm until we reached the port side where we had a good view of the rock towering above us. Many others had the same idea. Standing with Samar seemed very natural and I began to feel more confident. I noticed one or two people looking at me and assumed it was the sari they were admiring. The view was enchanting, the water sparkling as the ship glided along, the nearby rock standing high in the sky, aloof and majestic.

I overheard a man talking to his partner.

'It's an amazing story how the rock became British.' I leaned closer to hear what he had to say.

'The Spanish have always claimed it, saying it's part of their mainland and so it is but the residents have always wanted to remain British. For centuries it had been a target for invaders as it guarded the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. During the war of Succession (Spain's king had no heir), the Rock was ceded to Britain after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.'

'What about the monkeys?' his companion asked.

'Oh! you mean the Barbary Macaques. They are one of the favorite tourist attractions. Look you can see some over there.' he said pointing to the top. They are thought to have been here since the 1800's.'

I was so interested in what he was saying that I almost forgot where I was.

'Come,' Samar whispered, 'keep walking.'

We made our way to the top-deck where a late meal was being served. By now I was very hungry.

I whispered to him,

'Do you think we dare eat here? It looks so good.'

Without answering he said,

'Follow me.' There was an empty table in the far corner of the deck. 'Sit, I get some food. What you like?'

'Anything that looks good.' I watched him as he mingled with the other guests helping himself to the wide range of dishes on offer. I was envious of his freedom and wished that I could be free of the fear that at any time I could be found out. Samar returned with a tray brimming with delicious looking dishes, fish, meat and a wide range of salads. I didn't wait for him but just tucked in.

'I have surprise,' he announced holding something behind his back. He had brought two glasses of white wine. It was a magical moment sitting on the deck sailing majestically into the mediterranean with the rock of Gibraltar slowly disappearing in the distance. I tried to capture it in my memory so that years later I would be able to recall it.

A sudden shadow darkened my thoughts, my dad what was he doing? How was he dealing with my disappearance? I had a strong impulse to contact him, to tell him that I was fine. How would he respond; would he be happy for me or would he still be angry and try to get me back? I couldn't dare gamble with my future so I decided to wait.

I should have realised that a young European woman in a sari would soon attract the attention of one of the ship's officers. Two or three days later a sealed envelope with the word 'Invitation' printed on it was slipped under our cabin door together with the daily news-sheet. Samar handed it to me.

'This for you, sure,' he smiled. Printed on the ship's embossed headed paper was an invitation to both of us from the staff commander for drinks in his cabin at 6 pm that day. I handed it to Samar.

'What are we going to do? We can't possibly go. I would be bound to be found out immediately.'

Samar read it and then looking straight at me said,

'We go, yes you can, we act it out.'

That evening I was shaking with fear as I dressed. We had rehearsed our story and practiced it several times. Could I carry it off? The Commander's cabin was on the main deck. Precisely at 6 pm, Samar and I arrived. He knocked and we heard a deep voice,

'Come.'

We entered a large airy room, with wide views of the sea from all windows. The commander a large man with a ruddy complexion beneath greying hair was seated in an armchair. He rose as we entered.

'Ah good evening my dears, how lovely to see you. I am so glad you could come. Please make yourselves comfortable,' he said pointing to two chairs. I sat down carefully arranging the sari to cover my knees, I was still getting used to it.

'I have some chilled wine; may I give you a glass?'

I nodded. I was feeling very nervous, He seemed so calm and confident that I was waiting for him to say something that would floor me.

Looking at me he said,

'You are a very lucky man Samar; how did you meet Jo?'

He turned to look at me,

‘Short for Josephine is it?’ I nodded

Samar coughed, he had to act quickly. We had agreed to say that we had met when I was at college in England.

Interrupting I said blushing,

‘It was love at first sight but we decided we wanted to get married in India.’

It was getting more and more difficult. I was getting deeper into the mire but I had no choice if I needed to stay incognito. Gradually the conversation became more general as we talked about the trip and what we hoped to see on the way. It was with relief that we left his cabin and made our way to ours.

‘I think he has guessed,’ I said, ‘the way he looked at me.’

‘No, you not right,’ said Samar, ‘he confront you there and you be arrested as a stow way. Relax try enjoy ourselves.’

But Samar was wrong. The Staff Commander had suspected something as he said to the purser in the main office.

‘There something that doesn’t make sense about those two. Can you have a look on the ship’s manifest and just reassure me that my suspicions are unfounded?’

The purser had begun to go through the passenger list when the Boat Alarm sounded. It was the usual lifeboat practice alarm to familiarize the passengers with their lifeboats in the unlikely event of an emergency. He stopped what he was doing and went to assist passengers to find their boat stations. When it was over he returned to his office but was busy dealing with passenger enquiries and forgot it. Later when the staff commander asked him about the couple rather than admit he had forgotten he assured him,

‘They are both genuine passengers, Commander your suspicions were unfounded.’

Samar and I continued to enjoy the trip going for walks every morning and afternoon. I was still eating most of my meals in the cabin but was feeling more relaxed. One evening Samar suggested that I ate in the dining room with him. He said that there was a spare seat at his table, someone may not have got on at Tilbury he suggested.

‘Why you come eat with me? We go like couple?’

I took special care to dress that evening, pleating the waist and ensuring that my sari was properly fitted. But I can’t deny that I was nervous as I entered the dining room that evening and followed Samar to his table. The room was magnificent with a row of chandeliers hanging from the ceiling with their mock candlelights sparkling. The tables were lavishly set out with white damask table cloths, silver cutlery and crystal glasses. A harpist was playing soft music.

Waiters dressed in formal attire were standing awaiting their orders. Samar lead me to the spare seat and sat next to me. Soon others guest began to arrive. They were

mainly young people who seemed to be travelling alone. I found myself sitting next to a young man from the States, I recognized his accent.

'Hi my name is Walt,' he began.

'I'm Jo, pleased to meet you,' I said in my formal way. It felt so out of place. He had bright blue eyes and a mop of straw-coloured hair just like the movies. I felt shy and turned away.

Chapter Six- The Professor Remembers

The Professor had almost forgotten about his daughter as he busied himself with his University work but occasionally her whereabouts would niggle him. One Sunday when he was feeling particularly lonely he decided to try and second guess her movements. He knew she had wanted to go to Australia but didn't know how she would get there. He checked the several steamship company's dates of departure and found that the P & O Himalaya was leaving Tilbury on the day after she left the house. He put two and two together and on the following day took the train to the city to visit the P & O offices in Threadneedle street.

It was late afternoon when he found himself standing outside the white Portland Stone Building with the P & O logo on the wall. By now he was beginning to wonder if this was a wild goose chase but having got there decided to continue. A very helpful woman at the reception desk directed him to the second floor where the P&O had its offices. A young man was behind the reception desk.

The Professor began,

'I know you must think I am mad but I am trying to find out whether my daughter is travelling on one of your ships to Australia.'

'Do you have the details of her ticket?' he asked politely seemingly unperturbed by his enquiry.

My father hesitated,

'I don't think she has a ticket.'

'Well then how could she be on one of our ships?' he said shrugging his shoulders.

'I just wondered, it was a long shot.' She may have smuggled herself on board he was going to say but stopped. It was a ridiculous idea he realised.

'Thank you very much I'm sorry to have bothered you,' and he left.

Over a tea break later that day the young man mentioned the unusual enquiry to a colleague.

'It was very strange, he seemed to believe that she was travelling without a ticket. I didn't understand.'

The colleague a senior was puzzled.

'Leave it to me I'll contact the ship and find out.'

The following day the ship's purser on the SS Himalaya received a cable. He left it unopened until he had finished his routine jobs and then over coffee read it.

'GREETINGS SS HIMALAYA stop ROUTINE ENQUIRY stop DO YOU HAVE ANYONE ON BOARD CALLED JOSEPHINE HODGE? stop P&O OFFICE LONDON

For a moment he was confused. What was this all about and then he remembered the enquiry from the Staff Commander? Wasn't he also asking about the same person? He then stopped. Hadn't he forgotten to complete the search? Panicking and without finishing his coffee, he rushed to the records room and pulled out the file showing all the passenger's names. He searched through it. He checked under 'H' no one then 'J' also. By now he was frantic, there must be a mistake. How had she got on board without a ticket? The commander couldn't have got the wrong name could he? He was frightened to ask him again. I'll just telegram back that I am looking and hope they'll forget it. No-one could have got on without being spotted.

Back at home, the Professor began to realise that Jo may not have gone to Australia and could still be in England. He suddenly felt a pang of fear. Something may have happened to her. He immediately phoned the local police station and arranged to go there the following day.

The local Police station was a single story building in the centre of town. Professor Hodge arrived early. He had arranged to meet Sergeant Rogers. They had met before at a Police Charity. Promptly at ten, the sergeant appeared from the back office. He was in his middle forties heavily built and balding.

'Good morning Professor, how are you?' They shook hands.

'You say your daughter has run away?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

The Professor fumbled with his diary.

'About two weeks ago.'

'What! Why haven't you reported her missing before?'

'I thought it was just a scare and in any case I was embarrassed. I didn't want it to be spread over the local papers.'

'OK, let me have some details and I will circulate all the Police stations.'

Two weeks later the Sergeant phoned. The Professor recognized his voice,

'Have you heard anything about my daughter?'

'No Professor, we have heard nothing; no one answering her description has been found.'

Chapter Seven- Walt

I was enjoying my conversation with Walt. He was so open and frank. The boys I knew were full of nonsense, only talking about football and beer. I was intrigued by his answer when I asked him why he was going to Australia

'I am hoping to see an uncle who grew up in Australia. My father was also born there but moved to the States for a job which is how I was born American. He

had one older brother who is now retired. I have always wanted to meet him, to go back to my roots.'

I saw Samar looking at me but didn't think anything of it until I got back to the cabin. He was standing by the porthole looking out. He didn't say anything.

'What's the trouble Samar? Why are you so quiet?'

'What you talking to American about?'

'Nothing special why?'

'You getting on very well.'

'He's an interesting chap. We were just talking that's all.'

I could see that Samar wasn't convinced.

'What is it Samar? What's upsetting you?'

'Nothing,' he muttered, 'nothing.'

That night we lay together he hardly speaking. I reached over and touched him. He pushed me away.

I decided not to ask Samar but it came up again. Walt must have seen me taking my morning walk. Suddenly I found him walking side by side with me.

'How are you on this fine morning?' he said smiling and taking my arm. It seemed such a natural thing to do.

'Fine just enjoying the sea breeze.'

'I really enjoyed talking to you at dinner last night. You are a very interesting person. I'd love to get to know you better.'

We walked on a little further and then he asked.

'Are you and Samar an item?' The question took me by surprise and for a moment I was flummoxed. I realised it was a natural conclusion since we spent all our time together. Walt blushed

'Sorry it was an impertinent question, I shouldn't have asked it, please excuse me.'

'No it's fine, we are just good friends,' and then I spoke out of turn.

'He's going to Bombay to get married.' As soon as I said it I stopped, it was not for me to talk about Samar's plans.

'Excuse me I must go,' I said and rushed off. I felt such a fool.

Samar was reading when I returned to the cabin. The atmosphere still felt strained.

'The fresh air was just what I needed,' I said.

'You see him?'

'Who?'

'You know?'

'As a matter of fact I did, he happened to be on the deck.'

'You meet him didn't you?'

'Samar what's all this about? We are just friends you're getting married I don't understand.' He said nothing so I repeated the question. 'Don't cut me out tell me what's the problem.'

'I don't know, I beginning doubts about wedding. Since I meet you I feel different. Why I marry a girl I don't know because parents say so? You wouldn't would you?'

I was about to say of course not but then I stopped. Maybe what he is doing is the best way, the safest way to find a partner for life. Someone who shares your values, your religion, your beliefs. I then thought of Walt. I was attracted to him, I liked his smile he seemed to be caring but what did I really know about him?

I turned to Samar.

'The girl you are going to meet will make you happy; she will share your hopes and expectations and you will be able to talk to her on the same level, the same language. I am sure it's all going to be OK.'

The purser was in trouble. He couldn't find Josephine's name on the passenger list and he needed to tell the Staff commander.

Had the office made a mistake, and they had missed off her name. That must be it he thought. The alternative was unthinkable. The more he waded through the passenger's names all 1150 Of them, 400 first class and 750 tourist, the more flustered he got. Page after page of names, some altered some crossed out. It was impossible. In the end he gave up.

Chapter Eight-Port Said

We had now almost passed through the Mediterranean. I woke and felt something was different. I couldn't decide what it was and then I realised the engines weren't running; the drumming had ceased. There was an unusual calm, only the sound of some voices in the distance. I shook Samar and together we peered out of the porthole. The news sheet said that had arrived at Port Said and that we had 12 hours in port before continuing our journey. The weather had improved and I noticed the crew had changed from dark blue to white, their summer uniforms.

'We go ashore,' said Samar. 'I love to visit a souk.'

'What's a souk,' I asked.

'An Arab market place, full of smells, colour and sound.'

'It sounds exciting.'

'It is.'

'Do you think it will be safe for me.?' I wondered.

'What you mean?'

'If I get off the boat, will they let me get back on?'

'I see, me try and find out.'

Twenty minutes later Samar returned smiling.

'I think going to be OK.'

'What did you find out?'

'I spoke to quartermaster on the main deck. He said everyone going ashore given pass. We need to show on return. You be OK.'

'What if they ask me for my ticket?'

'That's OK. I asked him, we need to carry ticket? He say no, only don't lose pass.'

It seemed that I could get away with going ashore but I was still very apprehensive. What would I do if they stopped me and wanted my ticket?

As it was, I got through without any hassle.

'Make sure you don't lose it,' the quartermaster said smiling. I smiled back although inside I was really shaking. I followed Samar down the gangplank, holding on to the rope bannisters as it swayed with my footsteps. Stepping onto the concrete dock was strange, I felt as if I was still on board rocking as I walked.

'Which way?' I whispered.

'We follow man over there, with turban. He know where going.' We followed him as he weaved along the crowded pavement stepping over people lying asleep on the ground. The noise was horrendous mainly coming from the road that was jam packed with vehicles of all sizes from small single bicycles to 12 seater buses all fighting to get ahead. There appeared to be no road sense and no one was controlling the traffic. Soon we arrived at a large high-ceilinged building from which loud sounds could be heard. The man entered and we followed. The sounds were coming from traders calling out to passers-by to enter their shops. The shops were unlike anything I had ever seen. They were like rooms open to the street with their floors covered by richly coloured carpets. The owner would be sitting on a small stool and would beckon the visitor in. He would point to some small stools and invite you to sit while he prepared some tea. You soon felt like you were visiting a friend. No mention was made of you buying anything, it was quite disarming. I turned to Samar.

'What's happening?'

'He setting scene. Make difficult for us not to buy. It's sale pitch.'

'What do I do?'

'Relax and enjoy, he offer things to buy.' As he spoke the owner had got up and was taking lengths of cloth from a dresser behind him. He laid them at our feet one by one spreading them so that we could see the beautiful array of colours each more striking than the previous.

'They are are beautiful what are they?'

'Saris from different areas of India. If from my region, I like buy it.'

Samar spoke a few words in Gujarati and the man smiled. He went to the back and brought out a most striking length of cloth.

'That is really beautiful,' I said.

Samar asked, 'ketalu?' 'How much?'

Then began the bargaining, each smiling and gesturing. I couldn't understand a word but could tell from the facial expressions that the man wouldn't accept Samar's offer. Samar turned to me and whispered,

'We getting there, soon he accept my offer.' Sure enough the man suddenly stopped speaking, leaned forwards and shook Samar's hand, a deal had been struck.

Back on board ship I asked Samar how much I owed him. He smiled,

'Nothing I give it to my wife to be, she be delighted with it.'

Chapter Nine -Suez Canal

Passing through the Suez canal was a special experience. I had read that although there was evidence of previous attempts to create a canal passing from the Nile and the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea as far back as 2000 BCE, the modern single channel waterway was not opened until 1869. It allowed only one way traffic without locks. Ships waiting to enter the Mediterranean were directed into one of two passing locations, the Ballah Bypass or The Great Bitter Lake where they remained until all the ships going south had passed through and then they were allowed to enter.

We had just missed our turn and were directed into the waiting area. The following morning we began our slow passage to the Red Sea. Standing with Samar high up on the top deck well above the land, I looked down as the ship slowly ploughed its way along the canal; its banks so close that it seemed that we were cutting through open fields. After more than half a day of very slow progress we emerged into the Red Sea.

The days seemed to fly and suddenly we were due into Bombay the following day. We were both very quiet over supper. Samar had brought some food from the dinner table and we had it in the cabin lying on the bunk. I was very sad at the thought of being alone without him.

'I will miss you very much,' I said holding his face in my cupped hands.

'Me too,' he said. I could see the sadness in his eyes and suddenly we were kissing. It felt so natural holding him and letting him kiss me. I had never been with a man before and was uncertain and scared. But he was so gentle as he slipped off my top and kissed my breasts. I closed my eyes and just floated with the sensations. He had his shirt off and I felt his bare back, the muscles, hard bands that twisted and softened. It all seemed so right and then I was bare lying with him our bodies pressed together. I felt his hardness and opened my legs to let him enter. I waited, I heard it would be painful but nothing only a soft sensuous movement as we came together. I saw sweat on his brow and wiped it off. He smiled, the lines on his face relaxed and softened and we kissed again. I could feel him inside me lighting up my body with stabs of pleasure. I knew it would be all right. I was no longer afraid. I felt empowered, alive, real, joyful and fulfilled; no longer a child.

We stayed locked together for a long time reluctant to move and then I felt him soften and we slowly slipped apart. Strangely I then felt shy and self conscious and quickly covered myself and rushed into the bathroom. It was a confused night. I slept badly waking with vivid images of my anxious father and on one occasion my mother lying in bed her pale face illuminated by the bedside lamp. The dawn came and I got up, Samar was still sleeping his face smooth and at peace. I stood in front of the mirror, and studied my face. Would it look different but it was unchanged, slightly puffy from the night before? I then remembered we were to part and I dreaded the day ahead, he to leave and me to find somewhere to hide.

I thought the staff commander had forgotten me but I was wrong. Unknown to me he was still nagging the Purser.

'That girl who is she? I want to know There is something funny going on and I need to sort it out.'

'But Sir I can't find her name,' he admitted at last. 'I have searched but its not on the passenger list.'

'It must be, check it again.' he screamed.

Disembarkation was at 10 am. The tannoy repeated the announcement several times while Samar and I packed.

'Good luck, I hope you will be very happy,' I whispered hugging him.

'Thank you. I never forget you. Take care, hope all goes well.' Perhaps we'll meet again some time, I thought. We hugged again and then went our separate ways, he to the gangway and me to the upper deck where the lifeboats were stored.

It was a private place and I was able to watch without being seen. I followed him as he walked down the gangplank, a slight figure carrying his case. He turned back looked up and waved. Then he was gone, swallowed up in the seething crowd waiting on the dock. I felt very alone standing there with my small bag of belongings at my feet. What was I going to do? I thought of giving myself up and take the consequences.

I was still struggling with what to do when I felt a movement by my side. It was Walt.

'Hi what are you doing here.?'

'I'm just seeing my friend Samar off.'

'I thought you were an item and would be going with him.'

'No we only met by chance on a bus. He's' going to get married.

Hank looked surprised.

'Married?'

'Yes to a girl he has never met.'

'Oh! an arranged marriage?'

'Yeah.'

'That's so strange I don't understand how you can marry someone you've never met.'

'I agree but it's their culture. Ours isn't that successful.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well we are free to choose whom we like and end up with half our marriages failing.'

The Staff Commander's nagging finally got to the Purser and he decided to find out one way or another. He rang the office in London and after waiting some days, the reply arrived, He was shocked by the answer he got.

'We have no one by that name travelling on your ship to Australia.'

Later that day he decided to tell the Commander. He stood outside his office before timidly knocking.

'Come,' he heard from within. He entered.

'What do you want I'm busy?'

'Commander?'

'Yes?'

'You know you asked me to find out about the girl.'

'Yes. I thought you told me that was all OK.'

'I thought it was.'

'You thought!! What does that mean?'

'Well I checked and I made a mistake. She doesn't exist. The Office says there is no passenger with that name on board.'

Chapter Ten- Farewell

Walt and I were standing watching the people leaving the ship. There was lightness in the air and it seemed a good time to ask him. I was really frantic with fear about my future. I took a deep breath, plucked up my courage and blurted out,

'Walt, I've got a favour to ask. Please don't feel obliged in any way.'

'Sure what is it? I'm happy to help if I can.'

I could feel my heart pounding. Would he help me or would he walk away or worst report me.

'I need somewhere to sleep.'

'Sleep? I don't understand what's wrong with your cabin?'

'I don't have one.'

'You don't have one? How do you mean?'

This was it, now or never.

'I'm a stowaway.'

There I had said it. I watched his face, a look of confusion slowly appeared.

'You a stowaway, how can that be possible?'

He was struggling to understand.

'I came on board as a visitor and hid until the boat sailed.'

'Wow! you're brave; I couldn't do that, I would be too afraid.'

'I was,' and then I explained why I did it. All the time I was trying to guess what he would say.

The Staff Commander was now on the lookout for me. He had to find me before the whole story got out and he would be made a scapegoat and blamed. While I was talking to Walt I was keeping a watch out for him. Then I spied him on the lower deck standing by the gang way. I could see him scanning the passengers. I stepped back out of sight behind one of the lifeboats.

'I must go; the Staff Commander is on the deck below. I must get out of here.'

I needed to meet Walt later. I was desperate and he was my only life line. I whispered to him.

'Can we meet here tonight at ten?' He looked confused but nodded.

I rushed off and made my way to my favorite hiding place the Ladies' toilet on D deck. I could only guess what was going through Walt's head.

Walt returned to his friends one of whom had seen him with me.

'Was that the pretty blonde who was with Samar at the dinner table.'

Yes, he got off at Bombay, she's going on the Perth.'

'Do you fancy her?'

Walt blushed.

'Lucky you.'

I was in a real dilemma. If Walt decided he couldn't help me what was I going to do. We were now sailing the long stretch of open sea to Perth a journey of several days. If I gave myself up now I would be kept on board and shipped back to the UK, the last thing I wanted. But how would I manage on my own, I had to persuade Walt to help me. It was with some trepidation that I waited for him on the upper deck.

I saw him standing in the shadow when I arrived. I studied his face in the half light to see if I could guess what he had decided. He stepped out into the light and I saw him smile and we hugged. It was going to be all right.

'Thank you so much,' I whispered. 'Thank you.'

'It's nothing. I couldn't let you struggle alone on the ship and I didn't want you to be arrested and returned to the UK. Follow me I'm on B Deck.'

His cabin was much bigger than Samar's. It had a proper bed and two armchairs, it was quite luxurious.

'This is very nice,' I said admiring the space, 'much bigger than Samar's cabin. Are you sure you are OK with me being here?'

'Yes don't worry I'm OK with it.'

The next few days rushed by. Walt brought food from the dining room and in the evening I would go out on the deck for some fresh air.

It was the evening before we were due to arrive in Perth that I began to get really scared. It had seemed so simple at the beginning, an adventure something different but as the days went by, the reality of what I was doing slowly hit me. It had started off as a game, fun; a way to make my own way to see the world. But now the thought of getting caught and being sent back terrified me. Should I try and get off there or wait till our next stop at Melbourne? Walt was going on to Sydney, should I try and go along with him? I was getting confused and kept changing my mind. It was getting very difficult to make a decision and I began to feel increasingly uncertain and depressed. What was I going to do, should I try and get off the ship here? And if I tried, how was I going to do it without being seen?

The day's news sheet explained that everyone disembarking at Perth had to assemble in the main dining room at 10 am where passport control would be set up. I had my passport but didn't have an exit stamp from the UK therefore to all intents and purposes I was still in the UK. If I intended to get off, I realized that I would have to wait until all embarking passengers had left and then if possible sneak off with crew members. It seemed a crazy idea.

Walt could see it was getting to me.

'Look Jo,' he said, 'you've come this far, try and be positive you'll find a way.'

Chapter Eleven- Disembarkation

I was now desperate, I decided I had to get off the ship. But how? I could feel the Staff Commander closing in on me. I expected to meet him face to face every time I made the brief trips on the deck to get some fresh air. I began to dread each day, not knowing what was waiting for me around the corner. The final day drew on and slowly most of the passenger disembarked. The ship had quietened down. Just the occasional voice or a snatch of music could be heard. I watched as groups of crew members went ashore for a break and began to formulate an idea. I would join some of the female staff, such as the waitresses and try to pass for one of them. I packed my few things and told Walt my plan. After listening patiently, he took out some Australian money and handed it to me.

'Here you'll need this, pay me back when you can.' I was overwhelmed and began to cry. It was such an unexpected and kind gesture. He gave me his address in Sydney.

'Look me up if you get that far,' and we hugged.

I waited until it was almost dark and made my way to D Deck from which disembarkation was still taking place. It was now very quiet with only a few groups of the crew going ashore. I heard voices and saw three young women whom I recognised as waitresses walking towards the gangway. I greeted one.

'Hi Isabelle,' I had heard her name spoken by one of the other girls. 'May I join you going ashore?'

'Sure we'll all go together, is this your first time in Australia?'

'Yes,' I said.

As we reached the gang plank the officer stepped forwards.

'May I see your passes please ladies?'

I had to think quickly. I fumbled with my bag appearing to search for it.

'Crumbs I've left it in my cabin.'

'Sorry Miss but I'll need to see it.' he said

One of the girls nudged him.

'Come on Pete she's with us, it's OK,'

He paused and I thought it wasn't going to work.

'OK but keep it with you in future.'

Still shaking, I walked down the gangplank and onto terra firma. As my feet hit the ground a great weight lifted from me. In the end it was so easy. I turned, looked up and saw Walt on the boat deck. He had been watching and waved, I waved back.

I was free but the elation didn't last very long. I was alone in a strange country with very little money and only my UK passport. I was an illegal immigrant and didn't know how to proceed. I wanted to get to Melbourne 2500 miles away but how was I going to get there, the challenge seemed enormous. Dejected and uncertain I stood looking around. The dull lights from the nearby buildings sent long shadow on the road adding to my confusion. I was cold and hungry. In the distance I could see the neon light of a small cafe. I clasped the dollars in my pocket and made my way to it. It was warm and inviting with small tables covered with brightly coloured plastic table

cloths. Two or three people were sitting at the small counter. The smell of cooking made me realise how hungry I was. I ordered a hamburger with fries. It came quickly and I ate ravenously lost in the flavours exploding in my mouth.

Chapter Twelve - Hank

I was suddenly distracted by a man's soft drawl.

'You're off the ship?' Surprised I looked up. I hadn't seen him when I entered. He was a young man with a short beard and bright blue eyes.

'Yes,' I stammered not certain what to say.

'English?'

'Yes,' I hesitated.

He continued.

'What's your name.'

'Jo short for Josephine and yours?'

'Hank short for Hanktofer. My father was English, he met my Mom here thirty years ago. I've never been there.'

'What part was he from?'

'Um the North near Manchester.'

'Manchester United! Do you support them?'

I decided to probe him.

'What do you do?' I asked, praying that in some way this man could help me.

'I drive a long-distance truck. I am waiting for a load to deliver to Melbourne.'

I couldn't believe my luck. It seemed as if my prayers had been answered. It was so tempting to tell him my plans but I knew how dangerous that could be. I heard my father's words ringing in my ears,

'If it looks too good, it is too good.'

Reluctantly I wished him a safe journey and we parted. He left and I stayed and finished my hamburger. I was deep in thought when one of the waitresses came up to me and whispered,

'Hi my name is Louise, We are closing in ten minutes.' She must have seen the look of concern on my face because she asked,

'Are you all right?' I nodded but she continued. 'Where are you staying tonight?'

I paused and then,

'I don't know I'll find somewhere.'

'Look I can see you're struggling. I don't want to know your problems but I have a spare room upstairs which you can have for tonight.'

It was later that night that I heard a knock on the door and Louise was standing in the hall.

'May I come in?' She asked. 'I was thinking about you and wanted to know why you were here.' Her presence really surprised me and I didn't know what to say.

We sat in silence for a few moments and then I began. Louise listened while I told her my story. It seemed more pathetic every time I repeated it. I could feel myself beginning to cry. I was so alone. The excitement of my adventure had gone and now I was frightened unable to go back and not knowing how to proceed.

I was expecting her to be sympathetic and to console me in my unhappiness but instead she began to shake me gently.

'Hey, stop it,' she said firmly. 'Enough I don't want to hear any more of your moaning. You made the decision to embark on this trip so stop whining. You want to go to Melbourne to see your friend right? Have you spoken to her since you left the UK?'

'No, I haven't been able to.'

'OK let's ring her and you can speak to her.'

After a few rings I heard a female voice answer.

'Hello.'

Louise handed me the phone.

'Hi Gwendoline, this is Josephine.'

'Who?'

'Josephine, you know, Jo from the UK; I'm in Perth.'

'Wow that's great, when did you arrive?'

'Yesterday?'

'How are you travelling?'

'I would like to fly but don't have enough cash. I may end up hitch-hiking.'

'Let me know when you get here and I'll meet you, OK?'

'Yes that would be great.' The telephone went dead.

Louise had overheard the conversation and said,

'That's sounds fine but she's right, how are you going to get there, it's a very long way?'

Now the grim reality of my position was sinking in. The following morning we had breakfast together. I could see Louise was in a hurry to get going.

'I'll get my things and make my way,' I said.

'Sorry I can't help you anymore.'

'You have been very kind. I'll send you an email when I get to Melbourne,' I said without much conviction. We hugged.

I left the cafe and followed the signs to the main Perth-Melbourne highway. It was a cool morning with the sun just peeping from behind the clouds. My spirits began to rise. Suddenly my father's face appeared in my mind. I must contact him to let him know I'm OK.

My thoughts were interrupted by a familiar voice.

'Hi, where are you going?' Puzzled I turned. It was the young man in the cafe.

'I'm not really sure I thought I might try and hitch-hike.'

His face dropped.

'I wouldn't do that if I were you, it could be very dangerous. You need to go with someone you know.'

'I don't know anyone going that way.'

'Yes you do.' I could see he was smiling. 'I am.'

'You! Are you really?'

'Yes I'm taking my load to Melbourne later today. Why don't you join me?'

It was as if a guardian angel was watching over me.

Chapter Thirteen - Travelling

I was really uncertain about travelling to Melbourne with a stranger but I couldn't think of any other way. He had offered me a hand and I felt I had no choice. It was either that or try and find my own way hitch-hiking with strangers (wasn't he really a stranger?) Somehow talking to him had allayed my fears. He had a calm confident air about him and seemed genuine and uncomplicated.

'I don't know your name. I'm Jo short for Josephine.'

'I'm Hanktopher but prefer Hank. Come on up and see what it's like.'

I struggled to get in his truck climbing over the enormous tyre and then dropping down into the front seat. The cabin was huge with a wide view of the outside.

'Behind you is my bedroom but I try to stay in a trucking hotel whenever possible, It's really only for emergencies,' said Hank

I had never been in the cabin of a truck this size and was amazed at its comfort. Behind the seats was a bedroom with two single beds, a small wash basin and a toilet unit.

'It looks very cozy,' I said, without thinking.

We set off later that day. I watched as he maneuvered the huge vehicle onto the main road and followed the signs towards Albany. He began to speak as if he was a tourist guide.

'Welcome to Western Australia the largest of the six states of Australia.'

Without looking at me he asked,

'What are the names of the others?'

I began,

'Western Australia, Northern Territories, Queensland,' and then I stopped I knew there were six but what were the others.

Hank coughed.

'Go on there are three others let me give you a clue, your long reigning Queen.'

'Oh Yes Victoria.'

'Good two more.'

I struggled to remember and then,

'I give up.'

'OK, New South Wales and South Australia' We drove on in silence.

'You'll start to see the signs to Margaret River and then Albany. Do you know anything about the town?' I could see that I was going to have a History and Geography lesson on the way to Melbourne but I was game for it. Before I left home

I had taken a book about Australia from my Dad's library. He had an amazing collection of books on all subjects. I fumbled in my bag and took it out.

'OK,' I said. 'Now you answer some questions. When did the first people arrive in Australia?'

'That's easy they came in 1788 as convicts from the United Kingdom. That was when Australia was founded.'

'Wrong! The first people, the aboriginals came to Australia more than 50,000 years ago. Their skeletons have been found and dated. They came from Africa across the land masses.'

'Sorry I thought you meant the Europeans.'

We had been travelling for about three hours and I was beginning to need a break. Hank must have seen me wriggling and said,

'We are nearly there. We can stop and have a bite at the White Elephant cafe. I have been there before. They won't let me park my truck in their car park so we will need to walk a short distance.'

There was quite a strong sea breeze when I alighted from the truck. It was good to stretch my legs and by the time we arrived at the cafe, it was beginning to fill up but we managed to get a table overlooking the sea. It was great just to be still and enjoying the view. We ordered a couple of Hamburgers and cokes. Hot and fulfilling, I began to relax and enjoy myself. My eyes began to feel heavy and I was dozing when Hank jogged me.

'I think we should get going if we are to reach Albany before dark. I have booked us into the 1849 Backpackers Hotel.'

I climbed into my seat and promptly fell asleep. When I awoke we were slowly backing into the car park at the hostel. It was simple, clean and very popular, mainly youngsters like me but I saw one or two older couples. Reception was manned by a young woman. I noticed her English accent. After we had completed signing in I asked her where she was from.

'Rochester in Yorkshire do you know it?'

'Sure we're almost neighbours, I'm from Hull.'

Hank and I had adjoining rooms, sparsely furnished but adequate.

'Let's clean up and see the town,' shouted Hank through the thin partition wall. 'It was a former whaling station. In the season you can see whales passing along the coast from the high cliffs at Torndirrup National Park.'

It was dark by the time we walked into York Street, a broad dual carriageway at the end of which was the harbour with lights twinkling on the waters.

'Let's find somewhere to eat I'm starving,' he said guiding me towards the bright lights of The Venice, an Italian Restaurant.

'G'day, how ya doin?' greeted a young waiter steering us towards a small table by the window.

'What are you drinking, a beer?' Hank turned to me.

'Not tonight I'd like an orange juice.'

'Ok a beer and an orange juice,'

We settled for two Pizzas. I could smell them long before they arrived sizzling hot.

We returned to the hotel but I couldn't sleep. It was a mixture of heat and fear. I tossed and turned stripping the sheets off me. All the while I could hear Hank snoring softly through the thin partition that separated our two rooms. I had a strange dream in which my mother was arguing with my father about me. I tried to stop them and then I woke up confused by the wall that seemed to be in the wrong place. Then I remembered where I was. I tried to open my eyes but blinked from the bright sunlight glaring into them. I knocked on the wall and heard Hank grunt.

'Are you awake?' I whispered.

'Yes, now!' he replied.

It was just after dawn when we set off. Hank wanted to get a good mileage under his belt. The truck was not what I expected, I always thought they were noisy and you would be shaken about but this was different. It was a quiet smooth ride like a family car. I was getting used to the rhythm and sound of the vehicle and found the experience very exciting travelling high up with a panoramic view of our surroundings. We soon left the coast and began to travel through open country. Suddenly Hank asked,

'Tell me about you? What made you come all this way?'

I had told my story too many times already every time i repeated it, it sounded more unlikely.

When I had finished he smiled,

'You're a remarkable girl with a lot of spunk. Not many kids your age would have had the courage to do what you are doing.'

'Thanks,' I said not knowing what else to say. I didn't feel courageous at all just a bit stupid.

Chapter Fourteen- The Accident

We travelled for a further two hours when we came upon a Motel.

'Let's stop and have a break,' Hank suggested. He drove the truck into the car park and stopped under a clump of trees. I needed the bathroom and was impatient to get out. No sooner had the truck stopped than I opened my door and stepped down. I had forgotten how high I was. My heel seemed to catch on something and as I put my foot down, I suddenly lost my balance and tumbled to the ground taking all my weight on my bent foot. I felt a severe pain.

'Hank help,' I shouted out. Hank came rushing from the other side of the truck to find me on the ground nursing my right ankle.

'What happened?' he said, kneeling down looking at my ankle which was rapidly swelling.

'I need the bathroom,' I said and tried to walk but the pain was too bad.

'Please can you help me.'

Somehow with his help I managed to get to the bathroom and slumped onto the toilet seat.

'Are you OK?' I heard him call.

'Yes I won't be long.'

I sat shaking. I couldn't believe what had happened. One moment I was stepping down and the next I was on the ground. It was such a stupid thing to do. I hoped it wasn't serious as I struggled to get up. In the end I hopped to the outside where Hank was waiting. By this time my ankle was beginning to swell and turn blue.

'I think we better get you to a hospital I don't like the look of it.'

'No it will be fine please I don't need any medical attention.'

After a few minutes searching on his cell, Hank said that there was a Medical centre in Ravensthorpe.

'It's not necessary, I will be OK. I just need to rest it for a while. Please don't fuss.' I said but he took no notice.

'The hospital is not far we will be there very soon.'

There was no point in arguing with him so I just kept quiet. I don't like doctors or nurses for that matter, they seem to know too much. They take over and tell you what to do. You have to listen to them even if you don't want to. When we arrived, It was just as I expected. I was wheeled into a room and this doctor said,

'Now then what have we here?' in a condescending tone. The nurse was worse she made me fill in a form asking me questions about my life. Where did I live? What were my hobbies, was Hank my boyfriend? Finally as I wrote my friend's address in Melbourne she said sarcastically,

'You're a long way from home.'

Her next question,

'Next of kin?' Made me stop. I paused and then wrote my Dad's name and address.

'Do you have his contact number?' She asked wiping her hair off her face.
'May I ring him?'

Did I want Dad to know that I was injured? Perth was 5 hours ahead I checked the time it was just after 2pm, Dad would be home.

'Sure OK I haven't spoken to him for a long time.'

Chapter Fifteen- Professor Hodge

Professor Hodge had just put down the telephone after a difficult conversation with Admin when it rang again. Who could that be he thought? There was a pause and a high pitched whistle, then a female voice with an Australian accent.

'Is that Professor Hodge, Josephine's father?'

'Yes what is it? Why had she mentioned Josephine? He hadn't thought about her for some time. Is she alright? Suddenly he felt a pang of fear. Had something happened to her?

'Is she all right?'

The voice continued.

'Josephine has had an accident, she's in hospital.'

'An accident, is she all right?' he repeated.

'She's fine she had a fall.'

'May I speak to her please ?' A pause and Josephine's thin voice

'Hi Dad how are you?'

He dismissed the question.

'Where are you? What has happened?'

'I've had an accident. I've injured my ankle.'

'Are you all right?'

'Yes I'm OK apart from my ankle, I am waiting to have it X-rayed.'

'Where are you?' He repeated. A pause 'Where are you?' he repeated louder.

'I'm in Australia, you know I told you I was going.'

'Oh yes Australia.' He was getting more confused.

'I'm near Perth you know in the West. Dad I've got to go they are taking me to X-ray I'll ring you later.'

He heard the click and the line went dead. He sat trying to calm himself. The call had come out of the blue and had confused him. He hadn't thought about Josephine for months. When the police had had no sighting of her, he had felt more confident that she was OK. So she had gone completely out of his mind and now she was back with a vengeance. Australia? how on earth did she get there? His mind went blank. Then he remembered her note. At the time he thought it was a joke, one of her crazy ideas. His immediate response was to go and see her and find out just how badly injured she was. Then he calmed down and began to think rationally. Finally he decided to do nothing and wait and see until the injury had been assessed. He had many things coming up, meetings and planned talks; going to see her was going to be difficult. But he knew what her mother would have said.

'What is more important than supporting your daughter?'

Chapter Sixteen- The Hospital

The trolley rumbled down the corridor towards the x-ray Department with me strapped to it. My ankle was wrapped in a splint to reduce the pain. At the entrance I was met by a trim young woman in a pale blue uniform.

'Hi my name is Brenda, I will be x-raying you today.'

It was about ten minutes later that I heard the verdict. I had fractured the ankle and it needed to go into a cast. I was devastated. I felt so stupid, why had I been so careless?

By the time Hank returned I was sitting up on the trolley. I had regained my composure and was prepared to accept his rebuke. My right leg was wrapped in a plaster cast from toes to below the knee.

He was taken aback. I said nothing, after all what could I say? I had been careless and was now paying the price. Unaware of my embarrassment, he asked

'Why have they put it in a cast? -May I?' He said taking out a pen and preparing to write something on it.

'I've broken it,' I moaned. 'I can't believe it but that's what the x-rays show.'

'How long is it going to be on?'

'The doctor said a minimum of six weeks, it's a lifetime.'

'What are you going to do?'

'What can I do,? I can't stay here on my own. If you say it's Okay, I want to stay with you and continue onto Melbourne as we agreed.' I waited for him to object, to make some excuse so that he could leave me behind but he said nothing and just nodded.

Professor David Hodge was uncertain what to do. He knew the right thing was to go to his daughter to support her in an unfamiliar country while she was recovering from the accident. But another voice an angrier voice was shouting at him.

'Tell her to come home. Tell her in no uncertain terms that this nonsense has got to stop. She is not a child anymore she needs to grow up and act responsibly.' He sat while the two voices shouted louder and louder. He had become an onlooker to the battle which was being waged inside him.

'Stop,' he shouted aloud, 'I need to think.'

He rang his secretary;

'Marjorie I need a favour? Can you find out details of flights to Australia later today or tomorrow? I may have to go there.'

While waiting he checked his diary. There were no really urgent problems and his assistant could deal with everything else.

Suddenly his phone rang, it was me.

'Dad I'm really sorry about what happened.'

'Jo I'm furious. You disobeyed me and now you're in trouble. What do you want me to do?'

'Can you come here please,' I pleaded.

'No I want you to come home.'

'Dad I can't, I can't. Please understand I need to do this. I know you disapprove but trust me it's the right decision for me right now.'

I waited hoping he would soften, hoping he would change his mind, then the line went dead. I sat holding the phone. Had he finished the call or was it a technical hitch? Would he ring again?

Professor David Hughes sat looking at the dead receiver. He was livid and could feel his heart thumping in his chest.

'I don't know what to do,' he shouted at the wall. 'I can run a University department but can't control my teenage daughter, it's ridiculous.'

I tried to imagine what he was doing. I had seen him angry before, shouting at Mum when he couldn't get his own way. Usually he calmed down and gave in. I hoped the same would happen.

Hank suddenly appeared.

'What are going to do? I need to get going. Are you coming with me or waiting for your Dad?'

'I'm coming with you. I can't wait for him to decide what to do.'

By the time Dad rang again we were on the road. I had been given a pair of crutches and had managed to hobble to the truck. With Hank's help I clambered into the cab and propped my leg on the dashboard. I was confused. I had deliberately opposed my father's wishes and was now feeling very guilty. It seemed OK to run away without talking to him but having now done so and hearing his angry voice, it frightened me. Hank must have sensed my discomfort because he suddenly asked,

'Are you all right, you are very quiet?'

'I don't know, I feel very confused. When I left home it all seemed very straight forward. I would make my own way to Melbourne and meet my friend. Somehow I didn't think how it would affect my dad. He was always tied up with his work and hardly noticed me. But now I realise that he cares, really cares and is worried about me

'Of course,' interrupted Hank. You're his daughter, of course he cares.'

'What am I going to do?'

'Are you asking me?'

'Yes what would you do?'

'You said he wants to come and see you?'

'Yes.'

'Well invite him. He would enjoy it and you and he would have some time together. From what you have said that hasn't happened much recently.'

'Hank you're right, thank you so much.'

I leaned over and hugged him.

'Careful I'm driving,' he said smiling.

Professor Hodge had gone back to his desk and had begun to read the first draft of a paper he was co-authoring when the telephone rang again.

'Hello, who is it?' he said absentmindedly, the previous conversation having completely gone out of his head.

'Dad it's me.'

'Jo have you had your leg treated?'

'Yes it's in a pot. They say It will take six weeks.'

Neither of them spoke then he blurted out.

'I'm coming to see you. I can't let you be on your own. I now have your phone number I'll let you know when I arrive.'

Jo put down the phone and turned to Hank a smile on her face.

'What's happened?'

'He's coming, my Dad's coming to see me.'

Chapter Seventeen- Adelaide

No sooner had he put down the receiver than Marjorie phoned.

'Sir, I have the flight details. A Qantas flight leaves in two days time from London. There is a stopover in Singapore and you arrive in Adelaide 36 hours later. It's the new Boeing 707, they say they are very comfortable.'

'Thank you,' he replied.

David Hodge didn't like flying. It seemed so unnatural, secretly he was afraid. He would have preferred to go by ship but that would take too long.

'OK,' he replied, 'book it.'

Immediately after replacing the phone he began scribbling a list. It included all the things he needed to take. Top was *Passport, Tickets and Money*. If he forgot any of the other items he could buy them. Despite that he still travelled 'heavy'. No matter how he tried he always ended up with too much luggage. He envied those who only took hand luggage.

The Professor hadn't always hated travelling. In fact he used to really enjoy it especially if he could go to a meeting with his late wife. As he began to sort out luggage from the garage, he remembered the trips he had taken with her. He sat touching a large double suitcase that still had the stickers from France, Toulouse and Marseille. During the days of the meeting he would attend and she would go sightseeing. Then after the meeting was over they would stay on and explore the country. They would make a mini-holiday of it. It was then that he felt so close to her, sharing the same pleasures.

Even when he went alone he always looked forwards to his return. He would phone her from the airport and she would be waiting for him when he arrived home. He could still remember the warmth of her embrace as he stepped inside the house. They would cling to each other until one or other would break away breathless and burst into laughter. It seemed like only yesterday and for a moment he was lost in memories.

Now it was different. Travelling made him feel lonely and vulnerable. Returning home was difficult but Jo was always there and she would help to ease his loneliness. Since she had gone that empty feeling had returned.

Suddenly he remembered he had a meeting. He grabbed his case and made for the front door.

Chapter Eighteen-On the Road

Having refuelled the truck and replenished our supplies of drinking water and snacks, we set off. Hank and I had settled into a routine. We would travel for about two hours and then stop for a break as I needed to get out of the cab and move about a little. Hank was very helpful and would get out first and assist me letting me hang onto his shoulders while getting down. I was conscious of his proximity, the sweet smell of his sweat and came to enjoy our contact although he was careful to remain very proper. Once on the ground I would hop about on my crutches. I was

getting very proficient and began to show off. But I was too confident and slipped on some gravel coming down heavily. It gave me quite a shock and after that I was more careful.

We would plan our overnight stay usually a motel or guest house. Sometimes there was nowhere convenient and we would sleep in the cabin. It was a bit cramped but we soon got the hang of it and it began to feel like home.

We had been travelling in silence when Hank suddenly began to speak.

'I'm getting a bit fed up with driving, it was fun when I started, the idea of being your own boss but now I get lonely. It was never what I wanted to do. I really wanted to be a teacher. I come from a big family and loved being with my younger brother. We would go for long bike rides just the two of us, way up into the hills just outside Sydney. Sitting there in the open space it felt that we owned the world. But then it all fell apart when my father became ill and I had to leave college to help. I thought we would all live together but Mum met this fellow and she seemed to change.'

'We gradually drifted apart and it was then that I decided to leave. He and I just didn't get on. He was rough with Mum and drank a lot. One night we came to blows. I heard Mum shouting at her and went into her room to see what was the trouble. He was standing over her his eyes blazing and had a strap in his hand. Mum was frantic with fear. I tried to stop him but he was stronger than me and pushed me to the ground. I saw Mum look away as if we were strangers and then I knew it was time to leave.'

I watched his face contort as he spoke the words and I put out my hand and touched his. He suddenly stiffened and said no more. He drove on in silence.

Chapter Nineteen- National Highway One

I imagined Dad travelling to Adelaide. I know he hated flying and really didn't want to go but felt compelled by remembering the words my mum would have said. She's your daughter, and she needs you. What is more important than that? He would have been grumbling all the way. He hated long car journeys and would have been mumbling to himself as his taxi waited in the long queues on the M4. He would have arrived far too early at the terminus and stood for a long time studying the flight details on the board. When he found his flight, he would find a seat so that he could read the latest University report. I could imagine him fidgeting, getting up again and again to check the board and his Departure Gate number. The flight was departing at 13.10 via Dubai (1½ hour stop over arriving at Adelaide 8.50 pm- a flight time of 21 hours). I hoped he had chosen to fly club because he hated being shoved into a small seat unable to move about easily.

Meanwhile I was travelling East along the National Highway 1 to Adelaide. I glanced at Hank, he was tight lipped and mumbling to himself. I just managed to hear him say

'I think this is going to be my last trip. I can't spend my life driving. I wonder if her father could help me. She said he was a Professor or something, maybe he could put a word in for me, point me in the right direction.'

The flight was called and the Professor made his way to the Gate. He was pulling his carry-on case full of papers that he hoped to read on the journey. Suddenly the gate was opened and people began to file towards the Flight attendant who was checking passports and boarding passes. He waited until most travellers had gone and then got up. He fumbled with his documents eventually finding the right one and after presenting it was directed to the departure lounge.

Staring through the large windows he could see the planes parked on the tarmac, huge metal birds waiting to fly. It was then that he began to feel frightened. He could feel his palms sweating and his pulse racing. It was always the same. No matter how many times he flew, he always had this reaction. At one time he swore he would never fly again but that turned out not to be practical. He had told many friends about his fear and they had tried so hard to reassure him. They had even reminded him that the journey by taxi to the airport was probably more dangerous than the flight but he would have none of that.

Chapter Twenty- History Lesson

Hank loved his history; he couldn't resist telling me about where we were and where we were going.

'We are now travelling on the Eyre Highway linking Western Australia to South Australia. It was a fully tarmacked sealed road running 750 miles across the Nullarbor plain. Edward John Eyre was the first European to cross the Nullarbor plain by land in 1840-41. Thirty years later in 1870 the route was retraced by John Forrest to establish its suitability for an East-West Telegraph line and originally bore his name until being renamed.'

'Of course that won't be used now that the internet had arrived.' I interrupted. He continued,

'The Nullarbor plain is so named because there are no trees, just a straight highway with unchanging flat saltbush-covered terrain on either side. It contains the section between Balladonia and Caiguna, the longest straight stretch of road in Australia and one of the longest in the world.'

I followed his gaze. It was an amazing sight, mile after mile of flat terrain with not a tree to be seen, just small low salt bushes.

'In the past the indigenous inhabitants collected their seeds, ground them up to make damper, a type of bread.'

I watched his face as he spoke, his lips pronouncing the words so clearly. I could see the slight stubble on his upper lip where he had missed it when shaving. His voice was droning on and I began to feel sleepy again

I was lying in a double bed with Hank asleep by my side. I was dozing when I felt his hand on my shoulder. I didn't move. I held my breath uncertain what he was going to do. Strangely I didn't mind. I could feel my heart thumping. Slowly he began to caress my breast gently stroking and squeezing the flesh. I could feel myself becoming aroused I didn't want him to stop. He moved his hand slowly over my chest and to my waist. I was no longer scared. I could feel the excitement welling up inside me and then his hand was on my pussy, slowly exploring. stroking, smoothing until his finger was inside, gently squeezing my clit. The feeling was unbelievable. I arched towards him so that he was in contact with all of me. Then I felt him move on top of me, gently easing my legs apart. I felt him enter me so soft yet so hard. Deeper he went until I thought I would burst. I struggled to breathe as he moved slowly in and out.

A sudden jerk of the truck woke me.

'Sorry,' Hank said. 'It was a rabbit, I managed to avoid it.'

I was still shaking,

'Its OK,' I moaned still half asleep.

'Are you OK.' Hank asked

'Yes I'm fine. I was just dreaming.'

'What about?'

Should I tell him?

'I can't remember.'

I sat quietly by his side as we rumbled through the overgrowth. I was still tingling from the experience.

Chapter Twenty-one- En Route

The plane left the cocoon of the terminal and slowly began to circle until it was facing the runway. The Professor could see the buildings from his window getting smaller as it was slowly positioned for take off. Then suddenly the engine sound increased to an ear shattering roar as the great machine began its journey into the sky. A sustained thrust in his back signalled the force of the engines gaining power as it gathered speed. Buildings and house flashed by and then the sound changed as the plane left the ground. There was an eerie silence as if the engines had failed. For a moment the Professor panicked and almost cried out in fear. A neighbour's hand on his reassured him.

'I used to be frightened like you but I've learned to control it.'

Professor turned to see a young man no older than twenty.

'Thank you,' he stammered. 'I feel very foolish but can't seem to overcome my fear.' And then having calmed down, he asked, 'what are you going to Australia for?'

'I'm starting college in September studying Paleo-ontology.'

'Where?'

'At the University of New England.'

'That's interesting, what got you into that?'

'My father was an amatuer archeologist and we spent many hours together searching for specimens and then trying to identify them.'

'Isn't the University of New England in Sydney, we are flying to Adelaide?'

'Yes my mother lives there and I am going to see her before returning to Uni.'

They fell silent and then,

'What do you do Sir?'

My father was embarrassed by the title.

'You don't need to call me sir, my name is David Hodge.'

'What is your name.'

'Michael, Michael Wilson, my family name was originally Wilyali. Dad was an aboriginal. He changed it when he married my Mum, she is English.'

While he was speaking Michael had seen the emblem on the Professor's case. He recognised it as the crest of the University of Manchester.

'You work at the University?' he said pointing to the crest.

'Yes, I am on the staff.'

'What do you do?'

'I am in the department of Mathematics.' The two then fell silent each with his own thoughts.

Running over the events of the last few year, the Professor was preparing himself for the meeting with his daughter. He was still angry with her. She had run away from home and violated his trust in her and he was now having to come and sort out the situation. She had behaved really badly but he knew that if she had asked his permission to leave her studies he wouldn't have allowed it. So he sat mulling over what he would do and say when they met.

I was preparing myself for the meeting when Hank's voice interrupted my thoughts.

'You are very quiet?'

Hank's question brought me back to reality, I was just preparing myself for the meeting with my father. What would he say to me? Would he have understood why I chose to leave and not go to Uni or would he be his normal self, not listening, not trying to understand?

'I was thinking about the meeting with my father.'

'You must be pleased about seeing him?'

'Yes but?'

'But what?'

'I did leave against his wishes so he could be very angry with me.'

'Nah! He'll be so happy to see you again.'

'Do you think so?'

'Well I would be if you were my daughter and you needed me.'

Hank tried to imagine what it would be have been like to meet his own father. He had died before Hank was born. The only image he had of him was a faded photo that he carried in his wallet. The picture showed a young fair haired man with a mustache wearing a navy uniform. He had been an officer in the Merchant navy during the war and sailed in the North sea as part of the convoy carrying supplies to the Russians. He lost his life when his ship was torpedoed.

Chapter Twenty-Two- The Joey

100 miles west of Adelaide, Hank glanced at his watch.

'What time did you say your dad will arrive at the airport?'

'He said about 4pm today.'

'OK that gives us 5 hours to get there. We should be OK if nothing untowards happens. How do you feel?'

'Nervous.'

'I guess he will more nervous than you.'

I sat with my hands between my knees trying to imagine the meeting. It was all getting too much. I adjusted the plaster on my leg. It was becoming a nuisance and I still had another two weeks before it could be removed.

The two of us sat in silence and then Hank began to sing and slowly I joined him in a familiar refrain. We tried to outdo each other by singing louder and louder. It helped to break the tension we both felt. An onlooker would have been astounded to hear the sounds being emitted from the truck as it belted its way along the motorway to Adelaide.

We were in the middle of a popular chorus when Hank suddenly stopped.

'Did you feel that?' he said.

'No what?'

'A bump, we hit something, I thought I saw a roo on the road and then it disappeared.'

Hank slowly brought the truck slowly to a halt. He got out and walked to the rear. I prepared to join him and was almost on the ground when he shouted out.

'Jo, don't come any further, I don't want you to see this.'

'What?'

'We hit a roo, its lying on the road thrashing in pain. I'm going to have to put it out of its misery.'

I slowly descended and limped to the rear of the truck. Lying in the middle of the road was a fully grown female Kangaroo trying to stand with its abdomen ripped open and its guts lying in the road. It was moaning in pain. A small bundle was lying in its pouch

'Oh my God Hank it has a Joey- its moving..'

'Its OK Jo, I see it. Leave it to me.'

I watched as he gently removed the Joey from the pouch and wrapped it in his shirt.

'Here Jo take this while I put its mother out of her misery.'

'Please do something Hank, do something, please stop its suffering, please.'

Hank was standing over the dying animal a small pistol in his right hand. Carefully he lined it up with the centre of the animal's forehead and pulled the trigger. A loud

report shattered the calm of the day reverberating across the fields. The kangaroo went rigid then slumped to the ground. It twitched for a moment then lay still.

Unable to control my feelings, I burst into tears, that beautiful animal now lying dead. I wanted to scream at Hank.

'How could you, why didn't you see it?' But it would have made no difference. It had happened. He didn't do it on purpose. Slowly he came over to me and wiped away my tears.

'We need to do something with the Joey.' We need to find a vet as soon as possible.'

I sat holding the small mite. It had stopped wriggling and was closing its eyes. I felt a sense of compassion for it thrown so suddenly into the world. We had a lot in common. I stroked its head and it opened its eyes and I think it smiled. An enormous sense of happiness engulfed me sitting there holding it.

We drove on in silence. I glanced at Hank's face. It was set in a rigid stare, tears were running down his face. He loved animals and that was the last thing he would have wanted to do. I reached out and touched his hand. He didn't move. Then mechanically he picked up his phone, made a call and left a message. It was to the Adelaide Veterinary Specialist & Referral Centre at Norwood.

'They'll ring back.'

A moment later his phone rang. A Vet had picked up his call and was telling him what to do.

'It's not far. We can pass by and leave the little fellow with them.'

The centre was not busy when we arrived and we were soon seen.

'You've brought the Joey?' Said a young woman wearing a blue gown.

'Yes it's in my shirt.'

Hank slowly removed the animal and handed it to the Assistant. It was shivering and its eyes were closed.

'Ah poor thing let me have it. We often, too often, have to care for them when their mother has been killed. I'll warm it up and then check it. I've got your number I'll let you know how it does.'

At last the outskirts of the city came into view with the airport adjacent to west Beach, 6 Km west of the city centre.

'I can't park at the airport but will get as close as possible and you can get a cab.'

I hesitated and then asked,

'Hank will you come with me.'

He hesitated.

'Are you sure?'

'Please, I would like you to.'

'Of course, I would like to meet your Dad.'

The intercom crackled and then the captain's voice boomed.

'Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to Adelaide, Australia. The local time is 4.15 pm.' Professor Hodge sat up and rubbed his sore eyes. His back felt stiff and his knees sore. He stretched out his legs as far as the seat in front would allow. Michael his neighbour greeted him.

'Good Morning David, how did you sleep?'

'Not bad I suppose and you?'

'Like a log I always do.'

Chapter Twenty-three- Arrival

Professor Hodge suddenly remembered why he was there. He began to search his mind for what he would say to Jo. Would he be all jolly and light hearted, smiling as if everything was OK or would he revert to his usual school master role, admonishing her and demanding an explanation. Michael saw the look of uncertainty on the Professor's face.

'What's troubling you Sir?'

'I am a bit anxious, I don't quite know what to expect.'

'It will be OK just give her a big hug, smile and the rest will follow you'll see.'

Hank nosed his truck into a parking space and turned off the engine.

The airport foyer was crowded as passengers searched for their flights. Lines of people crisscrossed the space searching for their flight gate. It was like bedlam, the busiest time of the day.

Professor Hodge turned to Michael in desperation. He was almost sorry he had decided to come. He was confused and out of his depth.

'What do we do now?'

Michael spied the Information desk.

'Follow me. I know what we to do.'

The assistant was helping another passenger as they arrived at the desk. They waited a few moments.

'Could you help us please? The Professor is meeting his daughter. Could you send out a message on the intercom that he is waiting for her here.'

A few minutes later the intercom crackled and a voice boomed out above the din.

'Could Joanne Hodge please come to the information desk where her father is waiting for her.'

Hank heard it first.

'Listen Jo, I think I heard your name called.'

The announcement was repeated. Then Jo heard it.

'It's my Dad, he's at the Information desk.' I couldn't contain my excitement forgetting that he might be very angry with me. I just needed to see him.

'Dad', I shouted Dad, 'it's me.' The professor heard My call and saw me limping towards him. A heel had been added to myr pot so I could take weight on it.

'Jo,' he shouted as he swept me up in a big embrace. We clung together as Hank and Michael looked on. There were smiles on everyone's face at the happy reunion. Tears ran down my face as I hugged my father.

'Dad it's so wonderful to see you. Thank you so much for coming all this way.'

'Darling I couldn't stay at home not knowing how you were.'

It was some time before their excitement subsided and we were able to make plans. In the confusion I remembered that Hank needed to get going. I caught his eye and the two of us separated from the others.

'Dear Hank, I don't know how to thank you for all your kindness. Let me have your mobile number and as soon as I am settled, I will ring you. I will never forget your friendship and help.' We hugged.

'Aw Jo it was nothing, great to be of help. Let's keep in touch,' and he was off.

The Professor had booked into the Atura Hotel near the airport and we made our way to it. He was very quiet on the journey. I didn't know what to say. Should I apologise and say how sorry I was to cause him so much worry. I decided to wait and see how he handles it.

After checking in, we found our rooms and arranged to meet in the bar for a drink. Dad had carefully avoided any reference to my escapade so I waited knowing that sooner or later it would come up in conversation. I arrived first and sat at a table by the poolside. One or two families were playing in the pool. Dad arrived soon after. He had changed and was wearing white slacks and a T shirt. He looked refreshed.

We ordered tea and sat not speaking, I waited expecting some reference to my adventure but Dad said nothing. I could see that he was biding his time waiting for me to say something that he could challenge. I didn't know what to do. Should I just apologise and say I am sorry but I wasn't. I did it because I wanted to and I would do it again. A lot had happened since I left home. I had grown up. I had learned that I could cope on my own.

I could see that dad was preparing to say something but when it came, it left me completely unprepared.

'Jo I need to say something about what has happened. When I read your letter I was very angry. I thought I knew better than you. I thought, how dare she ignore my wishes. I was trying to make up to you for mum who I know you miss so much. But as the days and weeks passed I realised that I couldn't. I had to let you go, let you learn about life the hard way as we all do, making mistakes and hopefully learning from them. Gradually my anger turned to admiration, admiration that you felt able to go it alone. Seeing you now so confident, no longer a child but a woman, I am so proud of you.'

I listened and began to understand. He loved me so much and only wanted the best for me as he saw it. Our separation had enabled him to see me as a confident capable person and not the shy adolescent that I used to be.

It was some days later that I decided to continue my journey to see my penpal in Melbourne. Dad and I had a tearful goodbye and promised to keep in touch.

Chapter Twenty-four - Jo's Penpal

Gwendolyne and I had been talking online for some months. We had met by chance on facebook. I was looking up some details of the ocean around Australia for a school project when her name appeared. She described how she had always been fascinated by the sea and wanted to be a marine biologist. Her father had died in a car accident. We had both lost a parent which also gave us something in common. She was older than me having finished Uni. She lived in a small apartment in Melbourne. Meeting her was like meeting an old friend. I had arrived from Adelaide by Jetstar and she met me at the airport.

'Hi,' a voice from behind me said. I turned and there she was. We fell into each other's arms. She looked so much younger than her Whatsapp image.

'Welcome to Melbourne, you must be tired?'

I followed her through the crowded Terminal four to the car park. She had a small VW and soon we were winging our way to the city centre.

I had been in Melbourne a few weeks when Dad called. He was very excited.

'How is Manchester?' I asked but was surprised by his answer.

'I am still in Adelaide.'

'What are you doing there?'

'I met a wonderful woman. Her name is Rianna and we want to get married but I need you to meet her.'

'Who is she?'

'You remember Michael the young man I met on the plane. Well she's his mother. He invited me home for dinner and I met her. I can't wait for you to meet her. You will love her.'

