

### **CHAPTER 30**

Sitting on a blackened stump, feeling like the smallest thing alive, Professor Bloke watches the Sarge poke and prod through the burnt out farmhouse. Stopping now and then, circling slowly through the charred ruin, peering at the ground.

Every wall completely gone, the tin roof buckled and hanging down black; the poles at each corner leaking slow grey smoke.

All of sudden Sarge spins on his heels and bolts straight up towards the ridge, without a backwards glance; into the bush.

Leaving Professor Bloke sitting there. With his mouth open.

Leaving him staring nervous at the rusted cars, the long grass, the fibro shacks, the sheds, the black gutted house. Plus feeling bodies he don't want to look at, lying all around him.

Five minutes feels like fifty!

Something moves up there.

He leaps back quick, down behind the stump.

His eyes are blurred. Four, five, six - hard to tell, people come walking out of the bush, just like that. More – six, seven.

Is that the Sarge?

Yeah! It's him. Someone's waving.

Professor Bloke taking deep breathes as the line approaches, feeling relieved.

“How'd did you .....

“I'm a black man sir. I tracked 'em. Wasn't too hard. Tons of people round Gi's place always has been, too many! But, well... he was what he was” Sarge walking slowly past and muttering.

Professor Bloke distracted, staring at this line of ferals now clustering together, dull and blank in old army gear, dreadlocks, braids, downy beards or heavy Ned Kelly numbers - men and women mostly younger.

Herding themselves slowly into a little circle, staring out at the world. One in a sleeveless footy jumper, a mangy puppy round his feet.

All huddled together, a strange sight; all alone and lost – like a single tongue-less actor under this huge, huge sky.

“high as kites” whispers the Sarge staring with disgust.

“Can't get a word out of 'em,” He snaps his fingers at one bloke, who barely notices. Who now turns his head slowly, slowly and stares in a dazed smile.

“See what I mean. Completely flying. Totally off their chop”. The Sarge spits in disgust. All of this; the four murdered bodies, the broken, flopping neck of the small child, the sky, the burnt out house, the stink and now these bloody feral zombies, all circling and staring: it’s starting to get to Professor Bloke, like he’s stood up too fast and the world’s suddenly spinning non-stop.

Faces peering at him close and luminous, like big endless jelly fish.

A shudder gets through him which he brushes away.

“They’re totally comatosed” he screams, just to hear his own voice, “they’re bloody out of it - completely, the lot of them”.

“Wouldn’t argue with that sir, off their heads” agrees Sarge toeing a casual hole in the dust. Suddenly a electronic beep, beep burst of music out of nowhere makes ‘em jump. Professor Bloke screaming ‘Where?’— spinning round, “There, there” yelling and pointing at a corpse behind ‘em;

“It’s the phone, the phone, some mobile.” he stammers pointing at the childish tune floating up from the ground.

“Yeah, seems like it.

Someone trying to ring I reckon”.

The Professor backing away.

Hearing a thud of feet and swinging round.

Staring, they’re dancing! Them ferals, they’re dancing! Right there in front of him, dancing to the ring tone, propping one foot to another, mouths open, eyes closed, swaying like seaweed in the grass and the sky.

“They’re dancing to the mobile” he stammers, pointing like no one else can see it. As the mobile rings and rings.

“Aural stimulation”, says Sarge, throwing it away. Staring up at the ridge thinking on something else.

Professor Bloke groaning like his stomach’s cramped, swinging round, twitching like a leaf, his skin thin as tears. The vast sky with no handle, grating down on him.

The bush, the air, the shuffling feet, the strangulated beep of the mobile; not a bird, not a car, not a voice, not a word; the bodies and the vacant stares.

“Fuck, Fuck” he screams “No”, he screams pushing them off him, “I can’t take this, I gotta go right now. Right now. This is nothing to do with me! This is not my problem” spinning abruptly and rushing off into the long grass and the wide field, stopping ten yards in, starting to cry, grass up to his chest, pulling up his sleeve and scratching his left arm like a maniac.

As one feral sheilas flies her long braided hair round in a circle swaying her hips to the techno beeps.

The Sarge walking slowly up behind him. Then the two, saying nothing, just walking fast away.

Breaking into a run,

“Over here sir” cries Sarge, “Sir, over here” guiding him to where the meadow bangs against the steep cliff.

Scrambling at some bushes beside the cliff face, yelling “Give us a hand”. The two of them tearing out what looks like thick scrub bushes, finding underneath a battered looking, beige coloured, Holden ‘56 Ute.

“I stash it here” yells Sarge, “so them druggies don’t get it”

adding “ It’s a beauty, goes like a bird. Course I got another in town for them cops to stare at, know what I mean”

He leaps to the wheel, the two of ‘em shouldering it back out into the paddock. Sarge cranking the engine, till it clatters and starts.

Professor Bloke feeling sunlight bursting in his heart. A little bit nervous about getting inside. He can’t trust it yet: a car.

“Stop. Stop! Hey stop! Please! Stop!” A voice yells from over by the left of the paddock - the men instantly stooping down.

“Stop! Stop! Hold on. Help! Please! Help me. Wait!!”

It’s a girl, a girl! Sixteen, seventeen; eighteen maybe. Running through the long grass, towards ‘em, waving and yelling and panting through the long grass. They can see her long hair, it’s a girl.

“Don’t leave me. Help me, Help me! Please! I gotta ....”.

Clutching her chest as she stops there in front of ‘em. The blokes too stunned to speak. The girl out of nowhere sucking deep breathes, “I heard the car”, swallowing, “Give me a ride! Please. You have to. You can’t leave me here. Please!”

Eighteen, nineteen? An English accent. A little bit cross-eyed – them two blokes staring like she’s got five arms

“Who are you girl?” pokes Sarge finally, “Where you from”, landing a hard stare on the girl’s face, standing up from behind the car to say it

The men watch her struggling to focus. Finally she spits out,

“I’m Two Sisters, that’s who! Two Sisters. God stop talking, help me!

When she gets no reply, she screams in their faces,

“I live over by Ray’s Bag. By the Dooley’s”.

“You know? Over there?” being sarcastic in a weak way, waving, talking fast and breathless, “by Rays Bag?” her brown eyes going one to the other.

“Take me please. Please! I’m ok. I’m alright, honest. Please!! You have to do something” drops of sweat shining on her soft throat, her high cheek bones, her pale soft skin.

“We don’t have to do nothing” replies Sarge coolly, “and yeah I know Rays Bag, so what?”

“Live there do ya?” adding before she can reply “What you doing here then?”

“And what sort of name’s that anyhow? Two Sisters?” he adds with a snap, “Sounds like some stupid dreamtime name, outta some old time story, walking all over, making mountains; that kinda name. Don’t sound like no real name I know. Where you from girl? Whatcha doing here? Come on. Out with it. You ain’t said nothing yet” advancing towards her, “People been murdered here, you know. Shot dead – know what dead is do you? Rays bag! Hey? Dead is dead.

Know him” pointing at the bloke, “Know them. Don’t know you but”

“Sergeant please.... stop” interrupts Professor amazed by this rant, but the girl, she pushes past him yelling

“Look! I was here last week. Ok? I left something. That’s all. In the house. I came back to get it. That’s the house. Why won’t you listen?” she starts to sob, “a book – ask them – go on ask them. We have to get out of here! Please. I’m starting to hyper ventilate I need to see a doctor, please! I have this nasty bang on my head.”, pointing for some reason at the farway dots, still dancing in front of the homestead, “I left something, here, I left it Ok? I came back for it”. Her voice quivering, “All right?”

“Sounds fair enough” agrees Professor Bloke looking at the Sarge, not finding too much wrong with the girl, the look of her, or the way she stands up for herself either.

“Of course we got room” he waves at the car, “should be ok?

Please”, she stares imploringly at Professor Bloke.

Bloke about to say “yes” to something else, but before he can, Sarge seizes him; leads him out of earshot.

“I was hiding” she screams as they go. “You can’t leave me here!” she spits as the two men move.

Soon as they’re into the cliff’s shadow, the Sarge leaning close, whispering, ‘Sir, listen up. Pay attention! What do you reckon this is about? Aye? What?

This is deep shit happened here sir, its dark. No game either yeah? No game at all. We're not trusting no one, hear me? No one! Know what I mean? No one. Specially some sheila come out of nowhere"

Professor Bloke staring for a bit, becoming sad and calm, saying finally, "I just want to see me Dad".

"Maybe still will sir. Maybe still will, but this business here, it's something else and we gotta deal with this right now, not your Dad".

"So" Professor Bloke shakes his head, "What are you saying..... We can't leave her here. What if they come back and find her? Russ'll..."

"this ain't Russ; no way" breaks in Sarge, "This is Vaughney – guaranteed. He's the only one devil enough for this shit. Russ's just a kiddie kicker. Got no guts for this sorta stuff. None at all. He was here alright, but Vaughney done the killing. His prints are all round Gi .... Only mate I had in thisentire shit-hole town; fuckin' hell! The only one"

"But look" he sighs, "there's something else as well: someone's drained me tank. Ain't got no petrol. Don't ask me how. Filled it last week I did, going Ulong and never made it".

He wipes his face.

"and one more thing – here" and he drags the corner of an A4 brown plastic bag out from beneath his shirt, "Ssh, Ssh" grabbing the Professor when he gives a little jump –

"found it back there. Next to them ferals. It's got the lot: DVD's, diaries, every bloody thing. Some things look like receipts to me. This is what we need I reckon. Some lawyer gotta be interested in this all right.

He sighs, " nasty shit this is. People getting killed for this" tapping the parcel, "know what I mean? We gotta stash it and have a look".

Professor Bloke's finding hard to focus. The girl screaming at them.

"Getting worse by the minute too, fuck it is" sighs the Sergeant. "Every bloody time we turn round we're in it bloody deeper. Fuck" he taps the bag, "Better be something worth something here."

"Come on" screams the girl, "Hurry! Please"

"That's why we gotta find some place to hid it" finishes the Sarge, ignoring the girl.

"So what'll we do... I don't understand ...?" mutters Professor Bloke dropping his hands.

The Sarge sighs, staring at the ground thinking for a bit,

"Look sir, you trust me don't ya? I mean, well, I can't think of nothing else right now other wise I wouldn't say it, but..." he shakes his head "But what I figure is, this Dooley bloke, this Rays Bag thing, what she's talking bout..." he shakes his head again, "This Dooley, he's got

a cut flower factory. Big joint. Cut flowers? For Hong Kong, Singapore, whatever, know what I mean? - huge joint, about thirty miles that way. Middle of nowhere.

Hundreds of people, workers, truckies, all of that - they got dormitories, canteens and stuff. Serious! Gigantic joint! Huge.

Blokes always coming and going. Hung out there myself on many occasions.

The point being sir, this Dooley bloke doesn't care. Blokes bunk months - just kip there. Live in them dorms. No one knows: one shift coming on, one shift coming off. There's always a feed somewhere around. Long as you don't, you know, advertise. Nobody cares....

So I'm thinking ...” he measures up Professor Bloke, “well... maybe you should hang there. Stash these. And just, you know, hide out for a few days”

Spreading his palm across the hidden bag.

“meanwhile I'll nip back to town, see Bell. See if she's found someone can help us. See if this is any good; what's on here” patting his hidden parcel. “Clear the air sir. We gotta do something get out of this mess sir. All I can think of.”

“What about the car?”

“Sir concentrate. Didn't I just say we got no juice.

“Yeah, Yeah. Yeah, you did” the bloke holds his hand up.

“One more thing sir”, the Sarge persevering, staring for a second at this white bloke from far away “biggest bloke in Oz is after us. Remember that. Ain't no fairy tale. We ain't worth shit if he finds out what we got. That's a fact. So, not a word ok...Not one!.. I mean it!

Specially to her. Sir? Not one word. Ok?

I'll drop you at Ray's. You hang there - it's fine- I'll be a few days max. Pick up some juice shoot on back, pick you up, off we go to Sydney - must be some lawyer there can help us.

Besides, they know you in Wy, you can't go there.

“Oh shut up” He yells as the girl screams again, “Don't come no closer neither”.

Turning back to the other Bloke saying “You can't go Queensland Sir. I can't go bush neither, not with you hanging on. And we sure as fuck can't stay here.

Don't know if I'm thinking right... but there you go..... best I can do.

He throws up his hands up “and Russ, he knows 'bout your dad.

And there's not enough juice for Darling, couple of hundred mile over there. We'd never make it. Same crowd anyhow, there as here.

Anyway, that's me best shot”.

“I got money” blurts the Professor “What I got for dad!”

“It ain’t the cash sir” sighs Sarge, “this is ain’t Sydney; they hate your guts. They’ll dob you in quicker than fart; cash or no cash. And there ain’t no servo on every other corner either. You need to hole up Sir. For a bit. I mean it, can’t think of nothing else.”

The Sarge nodding as he finishes.

“Come on, please!” demands the girl yelling, jumping in the air and walking closer.

“I don’t even know where I am” sighs Professor, staring at the cliff, “which way’s Wy-Wy? Hey? Which way?” he turns around, “I ain’t got a clue – you might be right you might be wrong how would I know”

After a bit, with a shrug, saying, “Alright”. Shrugging again, “Alright, then, well..... let’s go!”

“You, girl, come here” yells Sarge.

Now the three of ‘em, anxious to be gone, clamber into the front bench seat of the ute, Sarge saying, “Get in the middle girl, go on, otherwise it’s the back, take you’re pick”

The rusty ’56 Holden gunning in a long slide across the rough ground, the wheels gripping, slipping, fish tailing, across the mat of crushed grass.

Coming up to Gi’s corpse, the Sarge slamming back the gears, switching off and getting out. The girl scratching red bites on her leg.

Sarge, as he steps into the long warm grass, hearing the steady buzz of insects, feeling the warm heat on his face, staring down at his mate, thinking “Lie back there Gi - where you loved it – have a bit of a sleep mate --- like that huge dead bird you were. Go on, lie in the earth” his voice coming out of nowhere to him; a new voice speaking in his chest, saying soft and strong,

“Sleep mate” tears coming, “Sleep. The rain’ll wash your wounds clean. The wind’ll sing your dreams, sleep here mate. In this grass. Let the dry earth wrap your big heart for a bit; don’t be sad. You ain’t lost. When them willows sway and the sky turns dark blue; when them fish grope in the river, and the dawn hawk cries – I’ll hear you”.

He stands root still, in the blood of another moment. Feeling like a different person, liking the calm of it.

Wondering for a second, his eyes blinking fast: what the fuck am I doing here!

Guiding a long breath out through his teeth, staring at the steep hills and up at the sky.