

A rustic wooden cabin with a porch and glowing windows at night. The cabin has a gabled roof and a small window in the gable. The porch has a railing and two rocking chairs. The interior lights are on, and the porch is lit up. The cabin is surrounded by trees and greenery.

Protect
the
BLOODY
silver

**SUZANNE
FLEMING**

PROTECT THE
BLOODY SILVER

By

SUZANNE FLEMING

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SYNOPSIS

Mike Deekie knew Australia was a front runner for a hostile takeover. He warned everyone who'd listen, the danger was real, and the outcome would be catastrophic. It didn't take him long to realise most people had zero interest in what he was telling them. They didn't give a damn. Or they stuck their heads down deep sand holes and ignored the problem.

Finally, Mike decided to stop talking and act. He told his fifteen-year-old son, Charlie, to prepare for a great adventure. They threw a few bags of sensible clothes, a pile of favourite books and a couple of cherished possessions into the SUV, stuffed two massive backpacks with canned food and shoved them beside the tools and camping gear in the rear storage compartment. For good measure, Mike tossed in the four bottles of wine he'd be saving for a special occasion, and they headed to the high country.

Five days later they stumbled across a tiny community nestled on a mountain plateau. They pitched their tent, then jogged over to meet their new neighbours, Stan, and Dulcie Harrison. The next morning, they were introduced to the Shaw family; Jane, Nella, twelve-year-old Luke and ten-year-old Sarah.

The invaders arrived a week after Mike and Charlie left town. Innocent people were slaughtered, homes were firebombed, and towns and villages were destroyed.

Nella Shaw discovered she and Mike had a lot in common. They'd both had been Special Ops soldiers in another life, and they were desperate to do something to save their country. After tracking down a band of resistance fighters, they convinced the leader to let them join his team. During a dangerous mission, Nella was captured by a terrorist, who tortured her then left her

to die in dense bushland. Nella's militia mates swore they'd avenge the brutality she endured.

Twenty years later, Sarah and Luke, now highly respected ASIO officers, foiled a Central Sydney terrorist attack. One of the extremists escaped, but a blood trail from his badly sliced arm was a bonanza for the Australian Federal Police. DNA testing identified he was the person who tortured Nella two decades earlier.

Sarah and Luke were soon on the escapee's trail, with backup from their freedom-fighter friends. The chase takes them from their childhood home to an enemy training camp in the Simpson Desert.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

■
This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or they are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

I took my first post-birth breath in the Kyogle Memorial Hospital, A few days later, my mother took me home to 45 Campbell Street, Kyogle. My father was in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and he was on active duty in the Pacific at the time.

I trust the people who live in the northern coastal districts of New South Wales, especially the inhabitants of Kyogle, will forgive me for setting this novel in their beautiful region.

Kyogle is a town of approximately 4000 inhabitants located in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, Australia. It was founded in the 1830's as a lumber camp and is located 758 km north of Sydney and 32 km north of Casino which is on the Summerland Way, close to the Queensland border. It is the gateway to the rainforests.

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PART ONE

Nella

CHAPTER ONE

The valley was shrouded in thick silver fog. Although Nella could not actually see the Kyogle township, she knew the highland forests were aggressively forcing their way down to the lowlands. During the past two years the forest density had increased twofold. Nella knew if the onslaught continued unabated, it would eventually decimate the agricultural land in the valley.

Nella gazed at the Richmond River below and smiled as a flood of childhood memories swamped her mind and her heart. She recalled the beautiful family home she had grown up in. It was ten kilometres from the town's central square. She remembered how much she loved watching the sun turn the river water into a carpet of sparkling blue diamonds, as it rushed to join the ocean.

Her grandparents had chosen a half-acre plot on the crest of a rolling knoll, as the perfect place to build their home. After clearing and levelling the ground, the north- to-south building was erected. When grandfather Shaw and his brothers finished the house, they put up a white picket fence and handed the house keys to Nella's grandmother. The Shaw women quickly got to work and established an enormous herb and vegetable garden close to the back door.

When the kitchen gardens were finished, they swung their heavy mattocks and pickaxes and dug wide flower beds on each side of the fence. They enriched the soil with cow manure, compost, and molasses fertilizer. They crammed the beds with a variety of brightly coloured, sun-loving flowers. In no time the vegetable gardens were producing great crops. And the flowerbeds were a blazing display.

Nella had been blessed to spend her childhood in such an idyllic place. She was eternally grateful for her good fortune. When grandmother Shaw and the grand aunts were too old to look after the gardens, Nella and her

mother, Jane, took over. The gardens thrived under their care.

A short distance beyond the homestead, Nella's father and her uncle had helped Grandfather Shaw establish a small mixed orchard. It produced a bountiful harvest of citrus and stone fruits. The fig and avocado trees planted in the centre of the orchard were also prolific producers. Nella vividly recalled the tightly packed shelves of preserved fruit, jams, chutneys, and sauces, in her gran's massive pantry.

On the orchard's right the ground ascended gently upwards. It was here the Shaw men laboured long and hard to terrace and cultivate one-hundred acres of land. When they finished preparing the soil, they planted parallel rows of grape vines along the terraces.

They knew the small number of vines would never produce enough for the vineyard to a commercial enterprise. Not that this worried her grandfather. Being a boutique winemaker gave him immense joy.

Nella smiled, when she thought of the dark-skinned Syrah grapes grandfather Shaw produced. They were legendary. Her grandmother proudly framed all her husband's Shiraz wine awards. They hung in the wide vestibule. A pretty impressive Ego Wall.

Nella shook her head to break the reverie. She had work to do. It had been five years since she and her mother, Jane, packed up the children, the family dog, ten cartons of their favourite books, and eight tea chests crammed with their most treasured possessions. They filled thick plastic bags with clothes, towels, bed linen and bedding. They jammed walking shoes and gumboots into cartons and piled their cargo onto a heavy wooden dray.

The women secured the load, locked their house, and hitched up a team of four horses. Lastly, they tethered two milking cows behind the dray. They were the pride of Jane's dairy's breeding stock.

The lead-horse, Nugget, had been Grandfather Shaw's faithful companion. For years, the old mare had carried Bernie Shaw, and his supplies, up the mountain to his cabin.

It wasn't an easy journey, but the animals were bred from hardy stock, and they performed like true champions. The old loggers' track they travelled by, was overgrown and the rough conditions were arduous. Eventually they reached a wide plateau, just below the Fairy Mountain peak, and settled into the rustic cabin that would become their new home.

Nella's grandfather, and his sons, Lincoln, and Benjamin, had built the cabin on a three-hundred-acre parcel of land that had been owned by the family for over a century.

Grandmother Shaw designed the two-bedroom house. Her husband and two boys built it exactly to her specifications. Sadly, her grandmother died before it was finished. But Nella knew she would have loved it.

In addition to the two bedrooms, the cabin had a decent sized living area, a huge kitchen, with a walk-in pantry attached, a separate dining area, a sunroom and a small study.

Out front a wide staircase lead from the garden to the veranda. The family crest was beautifully carved into the door's top panel.

Before he retired, Bernie Shaw had been a distinguished, ornithologist. He had been a lecturer at one of the state's most prestigious universities. A position he held for twenty-five years; the last fifteen of them were spent at the university's rural campus in Lismore.

Bernie's love of birds began in his childhood, and it quickly became a full-blown obsession. When his wife, Maud, passed away, he called a family meeting and told everyone that he intended to move into the cabin on a full-time basis. Bernie said he wanted to spend his final years studying and photographing the vast array of birds that inhabited the region. He hoped to publish his research findings, and his photographs, before he died.

He never realised the dream. Seeing his beloved country being invaded by cruel foreigners, killed him before the work was finished. The invasion had ripped most people's worlds apart and crushed their dreams. The brutality that spread across the land changed the face of the country and its people forever.

Nella hurried back to the stable to feed the livestock. She gave the animals fresh water and dried Lucerne hay, then she went inside to help her mother prepare the evening meal, for themselves and the children; twelve-year-old Luke, and ten-year-old Sarah.

The children adored their cabin home and knew every nook and cranny of the environment for miles around it. They knew where to find huge mushrooms, wild strawberry patches, and they discovered the most exciting places to play.

Nella's education program for Sarah and Luke was rigid. Every morning they helped with several age-appropriate chores. School lessons commenced at nine-thirty on the dot. They had

a ten-minute break at eleven and lunch between one and one-thirty. Classes finished at three.

After school, the children helped in the garden, turned the hay on the barn floor or laid down a fresh supply. A few weeks after they arrived at their new home, their neighbour, Stan Harrison, gave Nella five laying hens, and egg-collecting was Luke and Sarah's favourite task. Doing the daily chores was non-negotiable.

The evening meal was usually a simple one. Mostly it consisted of a large cheese and tomato omelette or quiche, served with a creamy potato-bake, and lots of greens on the side. The main meal was usually followed by slabs of Jane's apple pie, which she always smothered with mounds of pure cream. After dinner, the children read for an hour, then they had a warm shower and climbed into bed at eight.

The shower was a luxury, and proof of Grandfather Shaw's ingenuity. The water came from a huge, spring-fed tank that was connected to the kitchen and bathroom. Three

other massive rainwater tanks were used to irrigate the fruit trees and the grape vines he had trained over the cabin's rear portico and trellises.

At sunup, every morning Jane milked the cows and separated the cream. She churned half of the milk into butter and cheese. She saved the pure cream for puddings and cooking.

Bernie Shaw also had the foresight to install a generator. This supplied the electricity needed to operate a small refrigerator and a few strategically placed lights, both inside and outside the cabin. Nella and Jane had done a deal with their neighbour, Stan Harrison. In return for a regular supply of fruit, vegetables and dairy products, Stan made sure their fuel drums were always full.

From corn he grew on his extensive acreage, Stan manufactured excellent biomass petroleum. He and his best mate, Bernie Shaw, had finished building the processing plant and distillery just a few months before Bernie died. There was nothing sophisticated about the unit, but because of Stan's sound maintenance

regime, it worked efficiently. The plant permitted Stan to refine a generous supply of fuel on a continuous basis.

Stan was the proud owner of an impressive tool collection. He was a highly trained mechanical engineer. He gained his qualifications during his time in the army. Stan was considered a genius when it came building and fixing anything comprising moving parts. Designing and making things from scratch was his forte. He was highly innovative and extremely resourceful.

Shortly after Jane and Nella arrived, Stan built them a butter churn. It was a no-frills affair, but it got the job done. He said it was payback for the Makita 230mm Angle Grinder and two cartons of discs Jane had given him.

She told Stan she bought the grinder on impulse at a Bunnings sale. She had rationalised the purchase by telling herself she might take up sculpting some time down the track, and the tool was a bargain, too good to pass up. When she and Nella were loading the dray, she had thrown the grinder in the back.

‘You never know. It just might come in handy one day.’ She said to Nella.

Stan and his wife, Dulcie, had been living on the mountain for seven years when the Shaw family arrived. They had previously been townfolk and the farmhouse in the mountains was their holiday retreat. It was now their permanent home.

Stan and Dulcie knew little of what was happening in the lowlands. Shortly before leaving Kyogle, they had heard that thousands of illegal immigrants had flooded into the country, however, details were sketchy. They sometimes wondered if their house was still standing, but suspected that after so many years, it had probably been taken over by the invaders or squatters.

Dulcie tried not to think about her old home and the possessions she left behind. She loved the mountain and believed trading most of her belongings for safety and freedom, was a pretty good deal.

The Shaws and the Deekies were the only other families living on the plateau. Before the invasion, Mike Deekie had been a private

investigator, and a committed political activist. He had seen early signs that the country was in danger of being overtaken by a hostile group.

Mike maintained Australia was an easy target, and an overthrow by insurgents would be aided by the socialist-left. Mike said the general apathy of most Australians, along with their refusal to admit what was happening around them, would play right into any invaders' hands.

Mike also believed people who wore heavy-duty blinkers would be a contributing factor to the country's demise. In his opinion, politicians, and hardcore socialists, had been brainwashing Australians for decades. People were crippled by political correctness and fear of being labelled a racist. So, they just stuck their heads in the sand and told themselves Australia was doing just fine.

Mike spent years trying to convince people the Australian way of life was under threat. When he realized no one was really interested in what he was saying, he stopped talking.

That's when he packed a few bags of sensible clothing and some of his most cherished possessions, into his four-wheel drive. He threw in his camping gear and a few Jerrycans filled with fuel.

Mike hadn't used banking institutions for decades. He believed his hard earned cash was safer in his fishing-tackle box. A hell of a lot safer than in the hands of greedy, puffed up, suit-toadies. Mike shoved the box under the front passenger seat, and told his fifteen-year-old son, Charlie, to pack his favourite stuff because they were going on a great adventure.

Mike filled his tank from the fuel cans he always had stored in the shed, then he and Charlie headed for the only road leading to the highlands.

After following the road along the ridge, Mike came to what had once been a timber-haulers' track, he turned onto it and kept driving until the trail was too rough for his vehicle to handle the terrain. He pulled into a small clearing, covered the truck with shrubs and saplings, then he and Charlie hiked up the mountain until they reached the plateau.

It took five days to get there, and although the trek physically exhausted them, they were enchanted by the beautiful country they discovered. After a quick reconnaissance of the area, Mike selected a site on the boundary of what he found out later was Stan's property. He and Charlie pitched the tent, stowed away their supplies and personal treasures, then they jogged over to the nearby farmhouse to introduce themselves to their new neighbours.

Stan's wife Dulcie greeted them with a bright smile. She was delighted by their arrival and she soon had the kettle boiling. She made a pot of her special dried rosemary and basil tea; it had taken her a few months to perfect the blend but now it was a delight to the tastebuds.

Dulcie told them they were in luck because she had just cooked a batch of Anzac biscuits in her old, wood-fired, oven. She insisted Charlie take a handful of them.

Dulcie was thrilled to learn Mike and Charlie were going to join their tiny community. Stan on the other hand was suspicious of the new arrivals. It would take him some time to decide if Mike was genuine, or someone from the valley trying to infiltrate their village.

Stan asked Mike if he had known they lived on the plateau and was that the reasons he decided to come up. Mike assured him he had no idea they were there.

He added that he had never heard any town-gossip to suggest anyone else knew they were there. “In fact,” Mike said, “if anything, the general feeling of the local people is that the rainforests have become impenetrable. Most people believe that unless there’s a massive undergrowth cleanout, and some large-scale tree-felling, the highlands are completely useless for habitation or agricultural purposes.”

Mike shrugged. “I’m pretty sure the general consensus is that the highlands are of no use to anyone. And they are happy to let the native wildlife and the indigenous flora have it.”

Stan wanted to believe Mike was genuine, because it would be great to have another adult male around, but he wasn't ready to take him at face value any time soon.

Mike told Stan where he and Charlie had set up their camp and said he was happy to pay for the privilege of being there. He assured Stan he would do every he could to help out and contribute to the community. He also gave Stan a potted version of his professional career, which included eight years in the Australian Defence Special Forces, five in the Australian Federal Police and finally four years as a private investigator. Mike's time in the Special Forces and the Federal Police, almost won Stan over. It certainly softened him up a little. However, he vowed to keep a close eye on the new McMaster's plateau residents.

Stan and Bernie Shaw had named the place McMaster's plateau as a tribute to their old friend John, who had been a highly respected, fifth generation, farmer, and grazier. John died a few years earlier, but before his death, he had been a regular visitor to the plateau and often helped Stan and Bernie with their projects.

Between them Bernie and Stan owned all but ten acres of the land, on and around, the table. The ten-acre plot had been owned by old woman named Mrs. Quigley. When she died years earlier, she left her property to a cousin who lived in London. The cousin had never visited Australia, but when Bernie contacted Mrs. Quigley's cousin and asked if he would like to sell the land, he received a resounding no. It seemed the guy wanted to keep the land for his children. Mike's tent was on the Harrison and Quigley boundary.

The name McMaster's plateau had no official status. Years ago, Bernie and Stan had searched the National Library and they discovered the area wasn't even shown on topographic maps used by the military.

Giving the place a name had been important to the two friends. And calling it after a man they both admired, was paramount.

The friends had met at sun-up, one very crisp morning, said a few prayers and bestowed the name. They toasted John McMaster with a cold glass of Scottish ale, and a 1954 Chivas, Royal Salute, whisky chaser.

Mike turned to Dulcie, “And how do you like living in such an isolated area Mrs. Harrison?”

“Oh dear, Mrs. Harrison indeed. Just call me Dulcie.” She said with a smile. “And to answer your question, I love it.” She took a sip of her tea, “Although I’m glad we have Jane, Nella and the children.

Stan is away a lot. Trapping rabbits or fishing in the stream.” She glanced over at her husband,

“We rely on him to add a bit of variety to our diet. Mutton tends to become pretty dull when it’s eaten for long periods.” She smiled at Stan, then added “It means Stan is often away for days at a time.”

“You must get lonely when he’s away.” Mike said sympathetically.

“It’s fine. As I said, I have the Shaw family for company.” Dulcie pushed the plate of biscuits over to Charlie and chuckled, “As they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

After half an hour Mike thanked Dulcie and Stan for their hospitality and he and Charlie headed towards the front door. Mike stopped in the

hallway to admire a beautifully maintained, treadle-sewing machine with the Singer brand emblazoned in gold.

“What a beauty.” He said running his hand across the wooden cabinet. “My grandmother had one of these. She was a seamstress, so she used hers every day until she died. After Gran’s death my mother used it to sew for the family. Mother and Gran always claimed treadle-machines are superior to electric ones.” He smiled at Dulcie. “Something about more control I think they said.”

“Your Gran and Mother were absolutely correct. The treadle allows the sewer to alter the speed really smoothly. Excellent for fine detail work and curves. The speed of electric machines can’t be reduced as smoothly as a treadle.” Dulcie smiled at Mike and ran her hand affectionately over her much-loved machine.

“Stan brought it up here when we left our home down in the valley. We didn’t bring much from our old house, but Stan insisted this was an essential piece of equipment.”

Dulcie chuckled. “The fact treadle machines don’t rely on an electric power supply is a bonus. The sewer’s leg is the only fuel needed.”

Dulcie rubbed the corner of her apron across the glossy black metal. Mike had no doubt that the one-hundred-year-old machine was her pride and joy.

“Of course, Stan was right. This beautiful old thing is an essential piece of equipment. It’s been a Godsend. I create all manner of things to make our home warm and welcoming.”

She smiled at Mike, “And I do a lot of sewing for the Shaw’s. Clothes for the children and of course repairs when things are torn or worn.” Dulcie patted Charlie on the shoulder “I’d be happy to sew for you too.” She said as she pressed a large bag of Anzac biscuits into Charlie’s hand.



Stan strode into Nella's barn and sat on a bundle of tightly rolled hay.

"So, what do you think of the Deekie bloke?" he asked, "And just as importantly, what does Jane think of him?"

Nella hung Nugget's curry comb on a nail and pulled a fuel drum over to the hay bale.

"Too early to have a definitive opinion, but he strikes me as a genuine sort of bloke." Nella said. "I really like young Charlie. He helps me exercise Nugget and seems to like making himself useful. Yesterday, while we were feeding the animals, I quizzed him a little about his father. Unless the kid's a bloody good actor, and in my experience most kids his age kids aren't, he pretty much backed up Mike's history." Nella looked directly at Stan.

"It seems Charlie's mother left them when the boy was about eight years old. She got fed up with the long periods of single parenthood forced on her when Mike was away on lengthy assignments. His wife's departure was the reason Mike left the Federal police and set himself up as a private investigator. As soon as his AFP contract ran out, he hung up his shingle

and took on the single-parent role himself.”

“So, you believe him? You don’t think he’s a spy for the other side?”

“It’s early days Stan. I think we should be cautious, but let’s give the bloke the benefit of the doubt, shall we?” Nella smiled reassuringly. “Let’s just see how it plays out, hey?”

Stan didn’t return the smile, but he nodded his agreement to watch and wait.

“Look, why don’t Jane and I invite the Deekies to dinner one evening.”

“While the children play board games we can talk about the townspeople and Mike can give us an update on what’s happening down there.”

“Great idea. We’ve been stuck in a time warp for too long. It will be good to know if Kyogle is still functioning or if it’s been completely decimated,” He lowered his head, so Nella wouldn’t see his eyes mist over, “and to find out what’s happened to our old friends and the other residents.” Stan swallowed hard, “I try not to think about it too much, but I suspect

many of them have come to a sticky end. Those bloody barbarians have a history of unbelievable brutality. I read a lot of reports about them starving their captives to death. We all know that raping the women and girls is common practice. And their trademark modus operandi is giving heads the chop.”

Stan’s face burned with anger, “Bastards. I hate them.” Stan blew his nose and inhaled deeply. “I still have trouble coming to terms with the fact that our lily-livered politicians allowed this to happen to our great country. The mongrels sold us out to the UN and lied through their friggin’ teeth on every issue. National security was never a serious concern to them. Appeasing the peaceful religion and treating us like mushrooms was their primary goal. Keep ‘em in the dark and feed them bullshit, that was their strategy.”

Stan stood up suddenly. He was having trouble controlling his anger.

“The joke was on us though. Most people just went along their merry way and accepted all the crap that was dished out to them. If it didn’t interfere with their footie, their favourite T.V.

shows and their long weekends, they didn't give a shit about seriously questioning any of it."

He walked to the open door and said over his shoulder, "Oh God, throw a brick at me and shut me up. All this stuff sends my blood pressure through the roof."

"I know Stan." Nella said softly and grabbed the curry comb again. "I'll set up the dinner date and then we can talk until the cows come home. As a matter of fact, I'd really like to hear Mike's opinions about our friends of peace and love." The last three words were dripping with sarcasm.

CHAPTER TWO

Jane laid the table with the dinnerware her great-grandparents had given her parents as a wedding present. It was an elegant, fifty-seven-piece, Oxford-Green, Royal Doulton original, with a beautiful, understated design. When she and Nella packed the dray to come to the cabin, Jane had carefully wrapped the china in fine linen napkins, a king-sized linen tablecloth and put it all in a large wicker travel chest and padded the precious contents with thick woollen jumpers. Nella laughed at her and said she didn't think they would be having too many formal dinner parties in their new home. Jane agreed but said she could not bear to leave the tableware behind because her mother had loved it so much.

Jane had also packed a few of her mother's favourite pieces of silverware, including a beautiful serving tray, two vases, a teapot, a champagne bucket, and a canteen of cutlery.

She wrapped eight, fine crystal wine glasses, in bath towels, and tucked them carefully on top of the tableware. She cried with delight when she finally unpacked everything and found nothing had broken.

The dining room looked like a high-class, fine dining, restaurant when Jane had finished setting it up. She lovingly laid out all the family treasures, and placed a long centrepiece, she made from tiny native orchids and ivy leaves, along the full length of the huge cedar table.

Jane had spent the afternoon cooking. The menu included an entrée of finely sliced baked potatoes, topped with cheese, onion, and herbs. The main dish was wild rabbit, sautéed in garlic and wine. Stan had trapped the rabbits the night before, and after he skinned, cleaned, and dried them, he took them to Jane early that morning. He also gave her a bottle of his special merlot. Stan quite rightly claimed he was a pretty good vigneron, however when he compared his wine to his old mate Bernie's he admitted he still had a lot to learn.

Mike and Charlie arrived at seven o'clock and Stan and Dulcie followed a few minutes later. Dulcie presented Jane and Nella a huge bouquet of Marguerite Daisies and a bunch of rhubarb as thank you gifts. She brought the children a batch of strawberry tarts and a bowl of fresh grapes.

After admiring the table and complimenting his hosts on their lovely evening attire, Mike presented them with another bottle of red wine.

“I stuck it in the knapsack on impulse.” Mike said. “I never expected we’d dining at the Fairy Mountain Ritz, but I’ve got to say, I’m thrilled to be here.”

The meal was a great success. Everyone agreed it should become a regular event. Conversations were highly animated and easy flowing. Mike entertained the children with ‘Knock-Knock’ games and silly riddles. Stan told them stories of colonial bushrangers who had terrorized the locals. They loved the ones about Fred Wordsworth Ward, a.k.a., Captain Thunderbolt and. affectionately known as the Gentleman Bushranger.

When everyone finished eating, Stan and Mike cleared the table and rinsed the plates. The children were despatched to the sunroom with a stack of board games, and the adults made themselves comfortable in the living room. Jane waved the last bottle of wine above her head.

“There’s just enough for a glass each.” She laughed.

Stan looked across at Mike and said, “So Mike, what made you decide to finally leave the town and head for the hills?” Dulcie gave Stan a stern look. She was used to his blunt manner, but she knew some people found it a bit too confronting. Stan ignored the warning and continued to make eye contact with the younger man.

“I’ve always been a bit of a political activist. Never knocked back an opportunity to strut my ideas about the downward spiral of our political system. Always free with my opinions of the Australian government’s obsession with the UN. Not once did I hold back when it came to the UN. Never tried to hide the fact that I think it’s an extraordinarily corrupt organisation that

has duped the leaders of the Western world.” Mike glanced around at the others. “It hasn’t always been that way. “

“When it was first established in nineteen-forty-five. Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary- General of the United Nations, worked tirelessly to make the UN a valuable global humanitarian group. You may remember he died in a plane crash in 1961, while he was on a peace mission in the Congo. The UN had real integrity back then. But not anymore. Money and power have destroyed a once great organisation.” Mike inhaled deeply. “I believe their goal now is to create the utopian one-world-government. After they syphon trillions of dollars from the West. “They intend to achieve this through their bloody social-engineering program, Agenda 21.”

Mike took a sip of his wine, “A few people agreed with me and we shared ideas with each other, but overall, most people didn’t want to talk about it.”

“They changed their tune big time, after a couple of bloody great vessels made their way into the Gulf of Carpentaria, while our boarder-control people were asleep at the wheel. Twenty-thousand so called refugees, raced ashore, demanding asylum.”

Mike snorted with disgust “We saw the same bleeding-heart bullshit in Europe and Germany back in 2015. The locals were running around with placards saying ‘Welcome. We want to help you.’ For Christ’s sake. Help them how? And help them to do what? Overrun the friggin’ country and destroy its national ethos?” Mike lowered his voice a little, so the children would not hear him.

“Our own Leftard-Tree-Huggers took a battering when two more ships dumped another eighty- thousand, illegals along the coast. By then it was too late. We had been invaded. The diplomatic solution had failed big time.”

“The friggin’ politicians were running scared and they had no idea how to handle the mess they’d created.” Mike glanced at Nella. He noticed the colour had drained from her face. “As part of their insane quota- obsession. I’m

sure you know the one I mean. Sticking women in senior positions regardless of their experience or qualifications to get the job done.”

“Compete imbeciles were appointed to key jobs in defence and national security. That was the most disastrous political grandstanding tactic this country ever had foisted upon it.” Mike shook his head incredulously, “And yet, at the time, people applauded the move. The idiot voters celebrated the fact that we had laid the foundations for Australia to become a nation that could no longer protect itself. When the illegals started organising themselves into violent gangs, I knew it was time to get out.” Mike shrugged.

“That’s when Charlie and I packed up and headed for the high country.”

“I had no idea where we’d end up, because I’m fairly new to this region. A blow-in from the south. I’m a Mona Vale lad. Grew up in the northern beaches area of Sydney. Only moved up north when I decided to set up my own business. I did some research and discovered there was a shortage of good investigators up

this way.” Mike grinned, “I’ve got to tell you, Charlie and I were pretty excited when we came across McMaster’s plateau. The place is a little piece of paradise and you guys are great.” Mike looked directly at Stan then added.

“Having us land here out of the blue, was a bloody great shock for you all. I get that. For all you know, I might be one of the evil bastards from down below.”

Mike reached for his wineglass and drank the last few drops of the merlot. “Words are cheap though. I understand that it will take time before you’re sure you can trust me. And that’s fine by me. Actions speak louder than words. So, I’ll just do what I can to make myself useful and let time tell its own story.”

Stan nodded slowly but remained silent. He wasn’t in a hurry to make up his mind about Mike, one way or another. As the man said, time would tell.

Jane drained her glass and spoke in a clear, but tense, voice.

“What is it like down there now?”

“It’s not good.” Mike said. “Two more converted cruise ships followed the initial frigates. Now there are more than a million illegal immigrants racing around. They’ve been torching towns, destroying buildings, libraries and vital infrastructure. But the most devastating thing is the fact they set fire to grazing and agricultural land and burned livestock alive. I’m not sure how many of these savages made it to the Far-North-Coast regions. My guess is a lot of them, judging by the destruction they’ve inflicted.”

“How has Kyogle fared?” Jane asked. Her voice trembled. She wasn’t sure she really wanted to hear Mike’s reply.

“It’s in bad shape. Most of the commercial centre has gone. So, have the homes in and around the town. A few farmhouses have survived, but remember I’ve been gone for over a month, they could all be gone by now.”

“What are the police and the defence services doing to protect people.” Nella asked.

“Not much they can do really. They tried to quash the riots with teargas, but the invaders simply threw Molotov cocktails and grenades

at the troops, then charged with their machetes and rifles. Plus, there seems to be no limit to the number of suicide- bombers who are ready to blow themselves up.”

“Their aim is to kill as many innocent victims as possible.” Mike sighed heavily. “We’ve got a war on our hands and the nation is almost on its knees.”

“If it’s a war, why aren’t people fighting to save the country?” Stan asked.

“People are just focusing on protecting their families. The defence and emergency services are still coming to terms with the mayhem. It will take time for them to re-group and develop strategies on how to defeat the bastards. The politicians and bigwigs are floundering around in new territory. We’ve never had to fight a war on our own soil before. There’s no historical knowledge to draw from.”

Mike shifted in his chair, obviously frustrated and angry. “For the past couple of decades, the idiots who have been running the show have spent their time arguing about useless stuff, like same-sex marriage, global warming and gender equality.”

“They have refused to face the big issues relating to national security and immigration. All they’ve done is run around with bloody rainbow flags and obsess over trivial matters.”

“For years they’ve been feeding people propaganda and appeasing the people who want to change our culture to suit their religious beliefs. We’ve been bombarded with demonstrations from hard-core, far-left, groups demanding we open our borders to everyone. These idiots completely ignored the fact that most Australians wanted to heavily restrict the numbers of refugees we accept into the country. The mainstream political parties have done everything in their power to smash our borders wide open. They did nothing to restrict the flow of radical groups.” Mike shook his head. “A mob of friggin’ boy scouts would do a better job than the lunatics who have headed up our defence forces.”

His voice rose with every sentence. “The Greens hollered like spoilt brats and tried to block expenditure when the Liberal party wanted to buy advanced-capability fighter jets. They tried everything they could to weaken the nation’s ability to protect itself.”

Nella looked directly at Mike. “How’s this all going to end?”

“Hard to say.” Mike said.

“It won’t end until we all bow-down to the enemy’s demands.” Jane said loudly.

“That might happen in the first instance” Mike said, “but remember the Australian spirit is incredibly strong. Once people finally absorb what’s happened here and they’ve come to terms with the ramifications, I suspect they’ll rise up and fight like a pack of rabies-infected dogs.” Mike said emphatically. “When that happens, the barbaric bastards will wonder what struck them. Aussies are a tough lot. We’ll fight the mongrels with true Anzac passion.”

“What can we do to help?” Nella asked.

“For the time being nothing. We just have to wait and get on with our lives. When the time is right, we’ll all have a part to play.”

“There must be some way we become involved and do something to help out now.” Nella said defiantly.

Mike thought for a moment, “I guess we could start with reconnaissance.”

“What sort of reconnaissance do you have in mind?” Jane asked.

“Status profile building. And situation monitoring.” Mike said. “We could head down the mountain now and then. So, we know what’s going on.” Mike paused and studied Nella intently. “And maybe we could contact a few blokes I know. Chances they’re already gearing up to protect the democratic heritage our ancestors fought and died for.”

Dulcie made a pot of coffee and handed around slices of her banana cake. She had remained quiet throughout the earlier discussion but now spoke to Mike directly. “Are the television and radio stations still operating?”

“When I left a few regional ones were. I can’t tell you if they still are. I brought a small radio with me, but I haven’t been able to pick up any reception.” Mike glanced across at Nella. “What about you guys. Do any of your radios work?”

“I haven’t turned mine on for years, so I don’t know.” Nella responded.

“I try mine sometimes. Unfortunately, I’ve had no luck picking up any reception.” Jane said. “Just too dense up here I guess.”

Stan munched his cake, then turned to Mike and said, “How about we see what we can do about the poor reception hey?” Mike nodded. “It’s time we had some sort of contact with the outside world.” Stan said. “I haven’t bothered before because we’ve all been happy to roll around in our own little bubble.”

Stan shrugged and raised one eyebrow. “Guess we’ve been acting like those apathetic idiots you were talking about earlier. The ones who facilitated the creation of the mess in the first place.”

“I don’t think so Stan.” Mike said. “My gut tells me apathy is not an issue for you.” He grinned, “Now back to the radio situation. Do you have a decent receiver?”

“I do indeed. It’s old, but pretty reliable. I reckon, with a few aerial modifications and a decent outdoor antenna, we might be able to

pick up FM signals at least. AM might be a bit tougher.”

Stan’s mind was racing. He was already designing a new system in his head. The golden rule for pulling strong radio waves has never changed. Big aerial. Stick it up high. Keep the location environment free of all obstacles that might cause interference. Stan smiled broadly at Mike.

“Know how to shinny up tall trees, son?” he asked.

“You build the antenna. I’ll shinny up the mountain’s tallest tree and we’ll be in business.” Mike chuckled.

“We’re about one hundred kilometres from civilisation up here. Probably around two hundred kilometres from the closest radio transmitter, which is in Lismore. Big and high should be enough to plug us in to the local station, but we’ll just have to see if we can draw in any others. We’ve got no TV or the Internet up here, and mobile phones don’t work either. Too remote.” Stan said.

“Okay. Then radio will be our only bet. Let’s get started in the morning and see how we go.” Mike said, “Of course there’s no guarantee that the stations are still in business.”

CHAPTER THREE

“Bingo.” Stan yelled. “We’ve got River FM 92, Triple Z 100.9 and 94.5 ABC North Coast, all as clear as crystal.”

“Great stuff.” Mike grinned. “Luv ya work mate.”

“Teamwork pal. I did the easy bit. You had to climb that massive tree and attach the antenna.” Stan was delighted with their efforts, “I honestly thought we’d only have limited results. Dragging in three top FM stations is fantastic.” His tone became serious. “It’s incredible that these stations are still on the air. It’s got to be a good sign. Maybe things down south have changed for the better.”

“Maybe.” Stan replied. “Let’s just listen to the news reports and hear what’s going on down there.”

The two men sat on a couple of battered old milk crates. It was almost time for the midday news. When the transmission started, they were stunned to hear a heavily accented announcer introduce himself as Omar Hadad, then go on to deliver the twelve o’clock news coverage. It

was unlike any news coverage they'd ever heard before. It was more of an update on the most recent terror attacks around the region, along with glowing reports about the devastation that had been caused.

Hadad praised his spiritual being for helping his soldiers destroy more churches, schools, and monuments. Hadad told his listeners that more attacks were planned for the coming week. He said he would provide particulars as soon as he had the information. Stan and Mike both felt like a wrecking ball had smashed into their guts.

“Quick. Tune into one of the other stations.” Mike said. “See if they’re still okay.” Stan fiddled with the dial and found another leading station.

The same voice came through the speakers. The news content was just a continuation of what they heard a few seconds earlier. Stan kept moving the dial until he found another popular station. The same announcer ended the same propaganda session with a farewell to the listeners and invited his followers to enjoy the Arabic poetry that was about to follow.

“So, all the stations have been taken over. The same shit is being transmitted to them all.” Mike said.

“What the hell are our politicians doing about it?” Stan yelled.

“The government must have fallen.” Mike said grimly. “I’m guessing our enemies are in the driving seat. That means the country is now under foreign rule.”

“It’s time for us to stop the guessing game Mike. We need to get down there and see what’s happening for ourselves.” Stan said hoarsely. “And we need to do it as quickly as possible.”

“Totally agree with you buddy.” Mike responded. “We’ve got to find out how safe we really are up here. It’s time to see if those feral bastards have got the highlands in their sights.”

“Let’s get back to the cabin and tell the women what’s going on.” Stan said. “We’re in trouble son.” He added. “Bloody big trouble.”

Everyone assembled in the living room. Unlike the last time they were together, their mood was sombre. Stan told them what they had heard during the radio transmissions, then said he and Mike were going down to assess the situation. Jane said she wanted to go with them and asked Dulcie and Nella if they would mind taking care of the children without her backup.

Stan and Mike were reluctant to take Jane along, but she reminded them that she had been a bush nurse for fifteen years. She insisted she might be needed to provide first aid to people who were sick or injured. Everyone knew Jane was an incredibly fit country woman. She was a hard worker and extremely capable. Jane was used to dealing with difficult situations and she knew the local area well. She knew how to handle a firearm, and she was an experienced horsewoman. Stan and Mike relented.

“When we get down to the base of the mountain, we can use my vehicle to drive into the town.” Mike said. “The tank’s half full and there are a couple of jerry-cans in the back.”

While Dulcie and Nella packed the provisions and filled two large containers with drinking water, Mike, Stan, and Jane planned their mission. They wanted to avoid being seen by the invaders at all costs.

“I’m thinking our best option is to go directly to Jane’s old dairy farm. If we get lucky, and it’s not occupied, it will be a great base for us.” Stan said confidently.

“The farm’s close enough to town for us to make trips in and out. The old milk-tanker roads will link us to all the other farms, so we can check them out.” Stan continued.

“It’s imperative we keep a low profile and exercise extreme caution. We can’t risk being observed, or worse still, getting our sorry arses captured.” He closed his eyes for a moment, then added. “I don’t fancy having my head detached from my shoulders with a machete, so let’s be really careful hey.” Jane tried to smile at Stan’s comment. She failed, and a shudder ripped through her body.

At five-thirty the following morning the trio set out. Dulcie handed them the provisions which they crammed into their backpacks, Nella woke the children, so they could say goodbye. Charlie and Mike had stayed at the cabin the night before, and Charlie would remain with Nella until his father and the others returned.

Because of Stan's extensive knowledge of the plateau and the surrounding land, he was made the trek leader. Instead of following the overgrown tracks, Stan led them to a spring-fed, brook, which took a sudden downhill plunge. When it levelled out at the base of the mountain, it became a steady pasture stream. Stan's route was the shortest distance to Jane's dairy, and it was a more attractive environment than the bullock-train tracks that had once been used by the lumberjacks.

However, the moss-covered rocks presented high risks for anyone who lacked the experience to safely negotiate the terrain.

Stan warned the others to keep a sharp lookout for the narrow furrows created by kangaroos and other native animals. Losing one's foothold could have lethal consequences.

All three of them were experienced bushwalkers so it didn't take them long to effectively negotiate the steep descent. By sunset they were halfway down the mountain, so they found a place to camp for the night. They ate some tinned beans, then rolled out their sleeping bags. At daybreak they resumed their journey and finally reached the lowlands by the end of day three. Mike was amazed by how quickly they had accomplished the trek. He told the others he and Charlie had taken five days to reach the plateau.

“You were slogging through unknown territory and travelling upwards remember.” Jane said. “It's always faster when you know the area and the shortcuts.” She smiled at Mike,

“Under the circumstances, five days was pretty good going.”

They followed the stream cross-country until they were almost at Jane's farm.

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