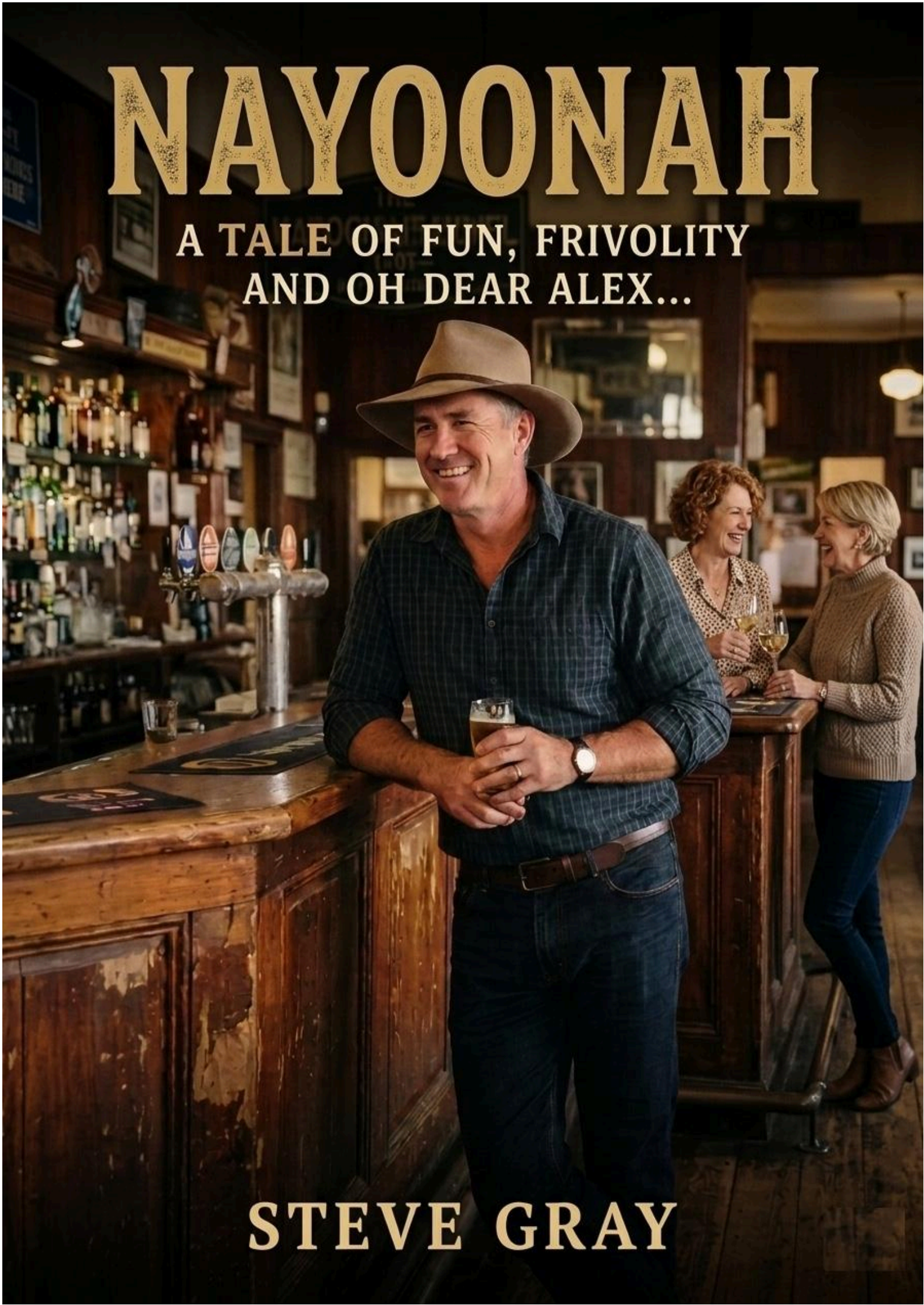
NAYOONAH

A TALE OF FUN, FRIVOLITY AND OH DEAR ALEX...



STEVE GRAY

Nayoonah

A tale of fun, frivolity and oh dear Alex…

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Edition one: August 2026

Edition two: October 2026

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Chapter One

Alex recognised that this would be a whole new chapter in his life, probably loaded with a bunch of unknowns, a fresh beginning, a new project, or two. His grandmother on his fathers side had passed away, and he was the sole grandson, as such she intended for Alex to inherit all she had, assets, a house on a half acre block and three other blocks nearby, one next door and the other two were down the street.

Funeral over, tears shed, memories explored, with friends and family. His father died a few years back in a car accident and Alex's mother passed away giving birth, so it was a small crowd, family were somewhat distant, one might say.

Alex had a few weeks to sort things out, his grandmother had planned things well in advance, transferring cash into Alex's account to avoid any issue of taxes and or whatever. She said to him, 'You get it either way, this way I know you got it and how much.' Alex sold his car, it was getting on in years and then bought something that would be more practical in a country town, a solid ute.

He knew quite a few people in the town, 'Nayoonah', he had been there on and off over the years, school holidays and then various visits with granny Maddie. Then for shorter visits with his boys and Allie his wife, good times, memories and knowledge of the area were shared. He knew she had kept a journal, she had shown him years ago, now he would find that, and other treasures to explore as he renovated the house.

Alex was very happy with the idea, that at this stage of his life, he would be moving to the country, a tree change. Nayoonah beckoned. He had some mates in the area, and knew that the place was in some ways in decline. Some blocks had been sold off, some were pegged out years ago by the original crown land settler Silas Vance, he got the licence to develop the land, built a house, some workers cottages and put in a timber mill. He turned the small fortune made while gold prospecting in the 1850's and onwards, into a town with a timber mill.

Old man Vance had a big vision, however a few things got in his way, a major bushfire in 1905, and the fact that not many liked where the town was situated, so while some bought some land, others preferred to only rent a small house off Silas.

Granny however had little choice, her father having bought two blocks of land, and then built a substantial house on one. Over time he bought another block off someone who wanted to move on, the price was right and great grandfather Hanson now had four properties, one with the house on it and three blank blocks he swore would go up in value, well not just yet… Granny Maddie described him as a stubborn man.

Alex's father grew up in the home and related various stories of bushrangers, bushfires, chasing kangaroos, stirring up the bullants in summer and rowdy trips on the school bus. Then of course the various characters around town, both young and old. He also pointed out which long time families in the area had a good reputation and those that didn't. Fathers of kids he went to school with who were hard and mean, then the others loaded with wisdom and a respectful approach to life. The Anson's, Grantley's and the Fisher's, all good people,

then there were the William's, Blakely's and Sherman's all a bit nutty, especially after a few beers.

Alex arrives, his second hand caravan, was the first thing he set up in the yard, not far from the house. He knew there would be times when the house would not be habitable, some of the floorboards would need to be pulled up and the flooring guy suggested that they do it all at once so he would have one big job, rather than a bunch of smaller jobs getting in the way of other things, therefore the caravan was deemed essential.

Alex drew up a plan, he needed to know what things would need to be done first, plumbing, electrical, new open plan kitchen and dining structures, flooring, bathroom.

For the first few weeks, old mates would drop in and wish him well, they would share a few stories and have some good laughs. Some of his mates had moved on ages ago, with some keeping in contact with others on the computer, emails and social media, those that dropped in were still 'local'.

Tradies came and went in those hectic few months of renovating and finally things had been sorted. Alex now focussed on the landscaping, an outdoor fire pit, BBQ etc along with some rustic paving. He had a sign made 'Rake Cottage', the place was a bit more than just a cottage, but it pleased him to call it that. He thought that Maddie Hanson would agree, it had more of a cottage feel than a larger, sprawling house.

The caravan stayed for quite a while, he hoped his boys would drop in and so they would have somewhere to stay, well that was his story and he was sticking to it. The fact that the house had three large bedrooms and now it had 'all mods cons', had nothing to do with it.

His boys grew up hearing dad tell tall stories, after a while, reality and fiction became one and few would believe Alex. They got tired of it and abandoned hanging out with him. His wife Allie, also tired of it, settled on half of the estate, pre grannie's house and blocks becoming Alex's. She never chased the paperwork though. Alex didn't care, he was a bit of a 'loose cannon,' in the relationship stakes and wanted to enjoy a free lifestyle doing whatever he wanted.

With the cash assets he had been given he was able to retire, for a while at least and focus on 'Rake Cottage' amongst other things.

When he tired of doing things around the house he would wander down to the local pub, Johnno and Mary Reuben were the publicans, the old place had changed hands a few times and relics of the past were everywhere. They kind of liked the old country pub feel. Their cook was a crazy Spanish guy, Pollo Francis, they had to keep him sober or crazy things would happen in the kitchen and beyond.

There was a bar, a ‘bistro’ area, tables, chairs and such and in one corner an area for a band and a dancefloor. These hadn’t been used in a long while, Johnno didn’t want the extra hassle and while the pub made enough money to keep things ticking over, why create extra work? Mary on the other hand was keen to mix things up and make extra cash.

On Saturdays in the warmer months they had set up a ‘farmers’ market, people paid to have a space, they would set up, sell their stuff and the pub benefitted from extra patronage and renting out the market spaces. It was an easy thing to do so they did it. Johnno said that if it didn’t work it would be Mary’s fault, but it basically built up over a few weeks and has held steady ever since. He still points out that it may not work, but it’s been a few years now and Mary simply rolls her eyes and smiles.

Alex, being the somehow new guy in town, but also a long term friend to some of the locals, knew he was welcome. Most of the locals knew his face and any doubts about who or what, were soon dispelled. When girls at the pub asked Mary at the bar about, ‘Who’s the guy in the Akubra hat, Mary would casually look up and say, ‘Oh the tall, good looking guy… That’s Alex, such a sweet guy… Single too…’ Often followed with a discrete nod and a raise of her eyebrows or a wink. She would chuckle to herself. She knew that many girls had asked after him in the past, even when he was growing up and visiting his granny.

Mary knew there were a few local girls who had handed over their innocence during the early years, when he visited as a youngster. She also noted that Alex’s reputation for a gentle touch, warm embrace, care and respect had earned him a ‘five star rating’ in the seduction stakes, ‘king of the hayshed’ also rang true. Another thing she knew was that his Grannie had mentioned to his father to, ‘Teach him about protection… condoms…’ Michael said he thought it was a bit early, ‘The kid’s barely in his teen years?’ Grannie smiled and said, ‘The boy seems to have learnt a thing or two about young ladies and their interest in ‘haysheds’, so Michael, get on it!’

Alex was once asked, ‘How do you know so much about all this seduction stuff?’ It turns out he had a wise uncle, or so he said. Others thought he just found the romance section

in a book shop and made good notes, then went to the relationship section in the bookshop and took more notes. The rest was, ‘Good knowledge in action, equals wisdom…’

One of his mates from work, years ago, asked him one day, ‘How come you are so good with women?’ Alex looked him in the eyes and said, ‘Mate, so many guys are bad at handling women, that it’s easy to do the opposite. I watched kids at school, and I asked girls what they wanted… I then started to make eye contact with girls in the library at school.

We were meant to be reading, I would single out attractive girls, even ones in a higher grade, smile and make eye contact. Then I would figure out what made them attractive, so when they asked me, ‘What are you looking at?’ I would have a quiet almost whispering answer while maintaining eye contact. It’s really simple actually. Remember Angie Holt, she was a stunner, but could be a bit feisty. So after she said, ‘What are you looking at?’ I got up, walked slowly over to where she was sitting, and carefully said, at a very low volume. ‘I just realised that you are the prettiest girl in the room, and that made me happy. She blushed and slowly said thanks…’

Alex had a reputation, a quality reputation at that, even some of the teachers knew and sometimes would watch him like a hawk, on school camps and sporting events. At one sporting event he was seen emerging from the disabled toilets, and was interrogated by a teacher as Alex tucked his shirt in, his answer was simple, ‘The other toilets were busy and I needed to go…’ The teacher should have checked the toilet, the girl inside was still ‘sorting herself out.’

Naming Grannie’s cottage, 'Rake Cottage’ made reference to the idea of him being a ‘seducer,’ it refers to a wealthy and ‘scandalous man’ of loose morals. Alex liked the cryptic nature of the reference, if pushed on the matter he could refer to a memory of his granny using a rake in the garden. Innocent enough he thought.

Alex didn’t need to be wealthy to project an ‘air of wealth,’ the Akubra, RM Williams boots and belt, high end country shirts and a Driza-Bone coat that hung in the hallway when not being used. All these things signalled wealth. Alex knew these things were all quality brands and quality may cost more, but it will last longer, another thing his dad passed on.

Alex had good all round knowledge of things, due in part to having a number of jobs over the years. An apprentice plumber, he soon learned that the apprentice got to hang out in muddy trenches, then he worked in a supply house for plumbing goods, moved into a

management role shuffling papers and then, with some extra training, a HR role for the same company at their head office.

Along the way Alex learnt a thing or two, for some reason he was good at saving what he had earnt and investing the excess. When he married Allison Kearney, the pair were 23 years old and happy campers, she had a full time job in a legal firm as a para legal person, researching for cases, then when the boys came along, Jake and Benny, they turned things around, the boys were one year apart and a bundle of joyous energy, neither had a mean bone in their body. Allison had a break from working for seven years, that was mostly the norm for those days.

One thing that Aliison knew about Alex was that he was good in bed, he had a coy charm at times a wicked smile and if she was having a dull Saturday afternoon, he would seen pour on the charm and cause her no end of delight. This guy knew how to woo a woman. She often thought that it was as if he read her mind, knowing when to go a bit longer, give some more caress in the right spots and then finish with wonderful skill.

And his chatter, the conversational ‘ninja whispering’ that always set her at ease and had her eating out of the palm of his hand. If there was an argument earlier on, that soon faded to nothing as he let words hang loose in the air that engulfed a girl's imagination,

Alex had been known to ‘spin a yarn’ usually around a BBQ or a campfire, and over time as his boys grew up, they didn’t know what was really true, and what wasn’t. While the untrained ear of willing listeners would lean in to glean details from a seemingly real story, the boys would moan, probably having heard the story one or three times and in varying versions.

Allie didn’t know either and if she asked Alex about something, she knew he couldn’ t be trusted with the truth. In the long run it led to their demise. They get along well enough, especially when apart from each other. The boys, now well in their early twenties, were too busy doing their own thing to bother with Dad’s antics. When their girlfriends asked, ‘What does your dad do?’ The boys would roll their eyes and say, ‘He talks a lot… Don’t ask… We don’t have much to do with him, unless we have to.’

Alex always thought his ‘tall stories’ were amusing, he had a great memory for the details of each version and would connect things together often enough to make them even more believable. The boys just saw it as, ‘Another load of bull crap.’

Something about all those stories finally gave Alex a wake up call, his wife wanted out, the boys wanted space, and well, Alex just said, ‘Oops.’ Alex was a free spirit, and saw this as an opportunity to sow some ‘wild oats,’ from time to time.

Alex always had respect for people. That’s one thing his father instilled, ‘Respect everyone you meet, some will let you down fast, others might take a bit longer, but at least if you start from the position of respect then you’ve done the right thing…’ For some reason that stuck, and it served him well, all of his contacts and friends are people who he knew, would respect him back, that was a nice feeling.

Alex figured out after chatting to people, that his focus on respect, won hearts, at work and at play. Ladies would say, ‘It’s not just a one night stand or a fling, you put effort in, you have a way with words, with touch, with how you are still there after the ‘deed’ and carry on respectful conversations, I like that…’

He heard this so often it became the thing he worked on the most, winning hearts and influencing people. Sometimes it happened quickly and other times, slowly. Then there were the things that influenced him, sights, sounds, smells, things that triggered his interest, the eye contact with young ladies and reading their body language, commenting on their aroma, then perhaps ignoring the things that, well, didn’t quite ‘make the grade.’

Some of the girls would come and go in a blink, others, well they wanted more, not necessarily via a long term relationship, but more of a drop in, chat and see where things might go approach.

As a kid, during the school holidays, Alex would be at Nayoonah, it was a given. With no mother and a father who needed to work, Alex favoured being at Grannies, other Aunts and Cousins, didn’t quite fit to his idea of filling in the school holidays. The Aunts were old school, the cousins were dour. Grannie Hanson seemed to be a ‘good egg’ who knew things that could fascinate a young lad, she also knew all of the locals in town and how young people were growing up and what they had been up to. A good font of knowledge for a young lad with a twinkle in his eye and a reputation to build, or at least hang on to. She would also let him know that ‘Maddie Dingley had enquired about Young Alex.’

Chapter Two

There was a knock at the door, Alex had been busy painting the room at the other end of the house, and didn't hear the first tentative knock, then the next one was harder. The door was shut, so that made it difficult for the person at the door to call out. Alex finally twigged there was a noise at the other end of the house. He could see a silhouette through the textured glass on the back door.

Curious, Alex tentatively opened the door, he recognised the person straight off, she had aged, but still the same cheeky smile and disposition, it was Corrine Fisher. Alex had not seen her in a long time. In fact he was probably about seventeen when he saw her last. He smiled widely and headed out the fly wire door to greet her with open arms. 'Corrine! My goodness it's been a long time!' the pair hugged.

In an instant his memory went straight back to all the things that connected to his senses. The big thing that he recalled was a soft lemon scent she had as a teenager. He also recalled her ability to hold good eye contact and her level of presentation for a country girl, was a bit more city than country.

Corrine smiled and said, 'I heard you were back in town and I hear it's permanent?' Alex filled her in on the basics, then invited her in for a cuppa, kettle on and the pair sat and chatted away merrily. She had two kids, like he did, well on in their years these days, she had moved a town away and was now single again. Her relationship with her 'partner' was never really a good thing. She was now glad to be free. It turned out that one night she had had enough, so she said, 'Shut up, I've had enough,' He kept on going on so she took to his head with a frying pan.'

Corrine explained 'After that he knew I meant business and packed up and went shortly after, oh and the frying pan was never the same…' Alex was amazed, then they shared various stories about who was where, amongst the people she and he knew.

The thought crossed his mind that he should have covered the paint roller he was using earlier, but that thought soon passed. He was too intrigued about the locals and what had been happening. Alex then showed Corrine what he had done so far in the house and told her about what was yet to be done. Corrine recalled being in the house years ago.

Corrine was about to leave, then out of the blue, said, ‘You know one thing I remember from all those years ago that has stayed with me forever, was the way you had skills well beyond your years. No guy I have been with since then seemed to have a clue, you Alex Hanson were the complete opposite, I think you spoiled a few local girls and set their expectations very high for relationships with guys.

Alex gave a slow single nod, acknowledging Corrine's kind remark and said, ‘Thanks.’ She opened the fly wire door, then the pair headed out to her car. She probably realised that her final comment should have come out a bit later, as there was now some awkward silence as they walked.

Alex broke the ice and mentioned how good it was to see her, and that she should drop in again, stating if he was not here, he would most likely be at the pub. Corrine gave a final hug and said, ‘Okay, that’s good to hear, I would love to drop in for a cuppa again.’ Alex then added, ‘Well make it soon okay!’ She smiled as she opened the door on the car, and chances were that the smile would have continued for quite a while as she headed off.

Alex recalled in more detail the first session of ‘intimacy’ he shared with Corrine. It was one of those, one of a kind, ‘by chance’ moments. It was also one of the first times he had followed his fathers advice and had a foil wrapped piece of ‘intimate protection’, he then recalled inviting her to put it on. There were a few moments of ‘first time’ awkwardness around that fitting, but things seemed to progress okay, then there was an issue with wanting to put the wrapper in his jeans pocket, not wanting to leave any ‘evidence’ about the place.

Afterwards Corrine mentioned that he might need to use his hankie to take away the ‘other evidence’ that was a bit more obvious… He agreed. Here he was, barely in his teen years, and his time with Corrine was about the fourth time he had ‘done the deed.’ He had learnt a few things along the way, but one of them was very clear, his fathers voice echoed in his head ‘Always ask permission, be seen as the good guy, not the slick, dirty or fast guy who quickly moves on. Show deep respect, other guys won’t do that, but you should.’

His first encounter with Corrine was a memorable one. There would be other times, but this one stood out for some reason. He recognised that there were nice girls, good girls and ‘Oh look out here she comes!’ Girls.

His thoughts then went to who was his next intimate partner? Perhaps Alice, no no, or Ralene, a cousin who was visiting the Anson family in town, he thought that was weird, she

was desperate and wanted action, he wanted to explore more, soft embraces, gentle touches and ways to lead into the physicality of being intimate, by using suitable words which may seduce. She on the other hand asked one of the Anson girls to suggest someone who might help her with her ‘urges.’ Alex was it.

Alex recalled that there were some books at a local library he found around that time, they were out of the romance section, which had been left on the table. A quick glancing read and he found some sections that led him to explore chats like ‘Well hello, look at you, scintillating in red, either you want some delicate intimacy or perhaps a more aggressive approach?’ He wanted to try out some of these comments.

Instead Ralene was more forward, shall we say. ‘Hi your Alex yeah? Listen, I hear you're a bit of a boy about town and, well I have a need, and well, how about some… you and me time?’ Alex was caught off guard a little, he then touched her elbow and said, ‘Well it’s very sudden, but do you have some protection?’ She indicated with a single nod that she didn’t, he reached into his pocket and there in all its simple glory was a square foil pack with suitable contents. She had a brief moment of embarrassment but quickly added, ‘The family are busy having a BBQ, do you want to help out or not?’

Alex suggested that the family might miss her not being there? She added, ‘Oh they think me and my cousin have gone for a walk, so yeah that’s not a thing.’ Granny Maddie had gone into town to pick up some things, and hadn’t been gone long. He gestured to Ralene to come inside, he showed her the door at the other end of the house, just in case Granny turned up sooner rather than later, it might be her exit point, but usually she was gone for a good hour at least.

He headed down the hallway to the spare room, the one he stayed in when he visited. It had a view out to the road where grannies' cars would come, if she was early. He mentioned that he would usually go with her into town but today he was more interested in what was on TV.

Ralene dragged Alex over to the bed, he was busy unwrapping his protection and started to chat, Ralene said, oh, no need to talk Alex. Instead he instinctively passed her the device, she put it on him like she had done it a million times. Her legs over the edge of the bed with her short skirt flipped up and pants down. He was now confronted with a new position, her ‘private parts’ were now in full view, but instead of flat on the bed she was feet on the ground and bent back at nearly ninety degrees, she enticed him to move forward and

get on with things, Alex wanted to take his time and caress the girl, she wanted in and out action, not some romantic fondling and suggestive touches.

Ralene grabbed Alex and did her part to ‘squirm’ and get things to ’line up.’ The room was lit by mid afternoon, warm spring sunshine, generally Alex was quite comfortable, but being grabbed and forced into action was a fresh new thing. He was glad in a way that there was no resistance from the girl, all she wanted was to have the physical stimulus and all the noises that go with being stimulated. Alex was able to put his hand either side of her waist and produce the necessary actions to please Ralene.

As quickly as things started, things ended, and Ralene was now pants up, skirt down, blouse back in place and ready to walk out the door. Quite surprisingly thought Alex, she gave him a hug and said, ‘Thanks, I needed that!’ Followed by a brief kiss and a final thanks with a quick, ‘Oh you’re quite good at this, thanks again.’

She went out the door she came in, it was then that Alex noted her cousin had been following close by and had sat on a chair on the verandah the whole time, not that it was a long time. He hadn’t really thought much about the cousin, but hey she had to be somewhere.

There were times like this that had fleeting passion and little connection, then other times where things had developed slowly, small discussions, that led to more detailed discussions, ‘What do you like?’ This often led to specifics being whispered. Occasional awkward exchanges and some kissing, the fleeting kind, then a deeper connection would often take place, touching on bare skin, and I’m not just talking ankles. There was more thought into where and when, this might then lead to what’s working and, ‘What would you prefer?’ These longer moments of intimacy were the sort of thing that Alex deeply enjoyed.

Time showed that the boy had learnt a thing or two about connecting, touching and eye contact. He also learnt that if you did make eye contact in a public setting, that the boyfriend should not be present! Or you should at least figure out if the girl is single or not. There were a few close calls. The last thing Alex wanted was a broken nose, or a cracked jaw. Later in life he learnt that a married ‘connection’ was trickier, than one that was single.

Next on the scene was Maddie Dingley. Always eccentric, a creative type, two years older than Alex, her Father had a big farm that ran cattle, she was always thinking things up, creating and exploring. She could be in town visiting a friend and take them on a walk around town. She still lives on the farm, sings folk songs, ballads etc and does a haunting rendition of

‘Ode to Billy Joe.’ Guitarist, and occasional piano playing, although the piano she sees as a device for creating ‘stylised works’ in the style of the composer Phillip Glass, somehow.

In the early days as Alex was becoming known around town, Maddie wanted to discover the magic and creative intent of having sex with a younger boy whose physical experiences were putting him ahead of the crowd, so to speak.

She was quite direct with his Grandmother, ‘Mrs, Hanson, when are we likely to see young Alex?’ She always called him ‘Young Alex.’ The year before Alex married, Maddie made it her duty to have her ‘Senses exposed’ to the magic of Young Alex’s touch, rhythm and general vibe. She would invite him to afternoon tea, put on a classical record and the rest as they say was ‘history.’

‘Young Alex’ never knew what to expect, he did know that there would be no one else in the house if he was invited over and on occasion stayed the night, too cold to head out to the car and Maddie had a beguiling way of engaging Alex in deep conversations about art, philosophy and the general way of things. Even though the pair ‘may’ have had a mid afternoon session of love making. The two am ‘extra’ was a testament to his physical endurance and also her ability to seduce. He mostly liked being tested at two am. Sometimes this meant Maddie would be playing the piano in the morning as he awoke. It could be a soothing ‘liminal’ piece or something more jarring, made up on the spot.

Alex Married, Maddie was at the wedding ceremony and held no malice, wishing the pair well in their life’s endeavours. Allie asked who she was? Alex replied, ‘Oh, one of the girls from school, we used to catch up and chat at times.’

Long rambling red hair she piled up on top, or out the back, she would get it cut just once a year, usually around the time of the summer solstice or equinox, whichever suited her mood. In between she would have it curly or straight, never quite sure which she wanted. Her outfits were sometimes described as ‘an outrageous mix of raunchy grunge, to, mysterious and or, ‘What the hell is going on here!’ There could be a pile of scarves, a hat that sat uncomfortably on her head and the mix of a skirt over long pants. Makeup, well that was something to behold, bold and bodacious some might say. Maddie didn’t care much.

As an artist she was somehow prolific, she took over part of a farm shed, played music and created, cattle would come by in the paddock next to the shed and listen, her father was not sure of ‘what to do with Maddie’ and left her to her own devices. Advice back in the early

days of Maddie growing up put her squarely in the ‘autistic, but high functioning camp.’ Always active, drawing, painting and making ‘music’.

Her father resigned himself that as a creative she might not make an income, her ability to hold down a job, although academically adept, might be a challenge. Her Mother had no idea about these things and left the decisions about Maddie to him, all her efforts to get Madie to dress a certain way or look a certain way were instantly dismissed and led to frustration, her father seemed to have more influence.

He hired a shop in town that had been empty for a long time, it was wide and narrow, he put a bunch of her artworks in the window and put up a sign with their phone number, people could then see the works by appointment only. Maddie agreed and thought, ‘There’s something I don’t have to do.’

The works sold bit by bit, the shop owner had little interest in making much money, it was more of a loss making device that balanced out his profits, this benefited the amount of tax he didn’t have to pay. Maddie continued to create, local art awards sometimes came her way, a little bit of cash here and there.

Now in her late forties, having discovered that ‘Young Alex’ was back in town, she had to catch up. These days, just as eccentric as ever. She drove an old silver Mercedes from the nineteen eighties, it had seen better days but it kept on going, she would throw a bale of hay into the boot or the backseat and trundle off to feed the cattle, if she picked up a friend to go somewhere they had to reconcile with the madness of her car, always a mess. On the front dashboard was a sign that read, ‘Put the cat out’ Apparently she had gone into town a while back, not realising the cat was in her car, she left the door open and in it went. She returned to the car an hour later to find ‘puss’ was curled up on the front seat. It was quite happy.

Alex was in the yard, he heard the silver Mercedes trundle haplessly up the side street and around the corner, then into his driveway. ‘AHH Young Alex, it’s true!’ she called out though her open window, Alex smiled and approached with open arms, his mind flickering through distant memories, physical, mental and emotional. Alex replied with ‘The Artist returns!’ They embraced, headed in for a long cup of tea, had discussions on what each had been up to and then Maddie stood up, took Alex’s hand and delicately guided him down the hallway to rekindle some intimate moments.

There was silence, Maddie flipped her phone to music mode and put on a slow classical piece. It was as if they hadn't been apart. A chat after the deed was done, the pair agreed to go to the pub for a meal. Off they went in the Mercedes. Johnno spotted the pair and he said to Mary, 'I wondered how long it would take for her to catch up with 'Young Alex' and there you go, all's right in the world!' Mary looked up from pouring a beer and had a chuckle to herself.

Meal done, Alex wandered back to his place and Maddie trundled off to hers. On occasion he would go to her place and she would go to his, there was an easy feeling to be had, she would communicate consent with a big embrace and he with the words, 'Well Maddie, the sun appears to be over the yard arm? At least it is somewhere in the world, so 'what say ye?' Rarely was there a nay.

Chapter Three

Clearly the boy was back in town. Now what? He thought. His rummaging through his grannies' journal pointed out that various things had happened through the years. Some of which Alex knew, the bushfires in 1905, How the timber business went into decline when the government cut back on old growth timber getting, the town then went into a speedy decline. He knew that the original layout of the town was mapped out and some of the streets hadn't seen any activity for many years.

Alex thought that if he liked the area and had started his 'tree change.' That others might like to do the same, ten to fifteen minutes from the next town but isolated enough to hold a quaint charm, an idea brewed in his head.

In the journal was an old map of the roads, various streets and blocks marked out. Once upon a time he had ridden his bike up and down those streets and in some ways knew them well, while pegged out at some stage those markers would probably be long gone. Alex wondered about what was there once upon a time. The journal gave clues as did the map, Old man Vance the original owner who had subdivided the area for future development hadn't done much other than having the area surveyed and the roads roughed in.

While out shopping Alex took a drive down the back streets overgrown with weed, these streets had seen little if any activity. He got on the phone to the council and asked if they knew who would be responsible for grading works in this situation? It turned out they

were. A few weeks later an assessment had been made and a team showed up to correct ruts created by rain, repairs to the sandy clay surface and most of the weeds at least mown back into some sense of order.

Alex, being a man of action, had a few thoughts flowing through his head. One thing really stood out, that the town of Nayoonah was a boring place, sure a few things happened, of course they did, but perhaps the stories, some of which were brief entries in the journal, were ripe for ‘embellishment.’

A few things stood out, prior to the 1905 fires no one really knew how many dwellings there were, the rentals that Silas Vance built, there were about five of those, with another two under construction, but in the fires part of his property was wiped out along with paperwork detailing the other blocks that had been sold off. Houses wiped out by the fires, most were not replaced, the owners moved on, devastated, they were getting on in years and hard labour to pay off another house was not something to be relished.

A few sold, Alex’s relative Robert Hanson bought one of the blocks down the street, he already had two others. Alex knew about all these and had the task of keeping them in order, after all they were his. A surveyor was employed to re mark the boundaries for these as Alex wanted to sell one of them off.

His head said, houses were wiped out and no one really knows how many? Perhaps there’s a story or two to be had here? The current locals had bought up blocks closer to the pub, way back in the early days after the fire, and had built houses in the style of the time. Some of the non rental blocks sold too, but that was par for the course as they say, old man Vance sold off blocks as his fortunes waned, finding it easier than trying to battle with the bank. The depression hit and all he had was the newly rebuilt timber mill, that was fine and now he didn’t need to sell off any blocks. Years later he passed away and things settled down, the mill slowly closed and people moved on.

Alex’s mind conjured up more notions about an alternative history for the town. He giggled to himself with some of his thoughts. Another story showed up in the journal, a bit bigger in stance than most. Maude Miller, Town Matriarch, based on a brief entry in Maddie's journal. ‘Maudie Miller ', town ‘Matriarch’ or town ‘Madam’, depending on who you talk to. She lived next door to Silas who was in the ‘big house’. After the big fire she was gone, no inkling of where, when or for how long… Did she die in the fire? No one’s really sure. What was certain was that she wasn’t about in the aftermath of the fire.

Maude had two ‘ladies’ who worked with her, the plied their ‘trade’ at the local pub and Maude made sure they were well looked after, the poor girls were all that was left after the fire, Maude's house was razed in the fire, they had nothing, they had lived with her and now, there was nothing left.

Silas provided them with some ‘emergency accommodation’ until they found other work somewhere else. There was a chapter of life that was now well and truly over. If gents wanted to ‘be pleasured’, they would have to go elsewhere. Alex thought that Maude was possibly not doing as well in ‘business’ as she might have liked and took the opportunity to ‘lit out for places west.’ under the cover of the devastating fires. A good ploy, perhaps.

She was gone, but that didn’t mean a story couldn't be conjured. Alex scribbled some notes, made Maude sound more notorious, figured out how a woman like this could control her girls and the rough gents who want to ‘court them.’ Then concoct an encounter with her bank manager and how the accounts didn’t look too promising. She hatched a plan to move on, but what of her girls?

Well like many others they could be left ‘high and dry.’ in the aftermath of a natural disaster, so who would notice, who would care. The story ended with ‘She was possibly last seen on the train, headed west, she had taken a horse and rode into town, it was tied up next to the water trough and Maude was gone. The local paper mentioned the horse being abandoned in one of its articles, ‘Perfect!’ thought Alex.

An idea popped into his head, what if all of these could be compiled somewhere? We don’t have a museum, there wouldn’t be enough information and artefacts to fill one anyway, but perhaps a place where people can explore Nayoonah and get a feel for the place. Who knows it might spark some interest in the idea of a tree change and help me to sell off one of those blocks?

Two am and his head said ‘website!’ the old map could be there, pictures of people made up in some Ai site to reflect various characters if no real pictures could be found. He now had to figure out how to make that happen, a bunch of stories linked to the map, click on and learn more. An hour later and his head said, ‘But why,’ he said, ‘Well why not!’

The next two days were spent on the computer, he found a local web kid eager to develop websites, you know the type ‘My nephew can do that!’ Alex focussed on the content,

Stories about Silas and the early days, where the fire came from in 1905. Then Maude and her girls arrive in town, probably invited by Silas to ‘entertain his workers.’

He almost threw darts at the map, linking various people mentioned in the journal to places they could have lived, how harsh things were and things that happened. Like the time two girls went missing. Then the development of the general store.

The story of Silas and how he was devastated after the fire, and the things he did next. He was then hit by the 1929 depression and how the bank came looking for the money he owed them. He died from Tuberculosis in 1934, His wife sold up and moved on, preferring a city existence.

Alex then thought about the ‘big house’ that Silas commissioned, with a view across the shallow valley out towards the pub. Then the cottage next door that Maude Miller lived in with her girls. Alex made the gold prospecting fortune bigger than it was, no real details were left after the fires so there was no way anyone could check, so some sensational scandals could be developed out of the sparse details, tradies wanting more cash, furniture that was imported and who knows what else would be concocted, like a maid, a cook and a gardener to look after things. Yeah why not, Silas was a man of means.

Mad Dog Atkinson made his presence felt, a sometimes bushranger who was too polite to really be a bushranger, didn’t want to hurt anyone but didn’t want to work for money, so he took the lazy way out, bundling up coaches and demanding gold or cash, then would disappear up the track and be gone for a few weeks, until he needed more cash and the process would repeat. Listed in the journal as ‘Morgan the thief’, Alex knew that the entry on the website had to be more theatrical than that.

In the early days of the town being developed, Sila’s let people set up tents and then lean to structures on his blocks, so that he had workers close at hand, they put up with the conditions, happy to not yet have to pay rent. Conditions were harsh but they were grateful for the work and a simple structure over their heads.

There were scuffles at the pub, usually after a drink or three and then the pushing and shoving would roll out onto the street out the front, Alex gave certain characters more ‘voom,’ making the punch ups bigger than ‘Ben Hur.’ Simple drunkenness would turn into heated jealousy over a local woman, then disputes about who owned a specific horse and the list went on.

Armed with a bunch of stories created from the journal, Alex headed to the pub, there were a few old guys who would have other stories from the early days, surely? If not he could remind them of some details based on the journal and see if they came up with some more info. He sweet talked Old man ‘Athur Stenhouse,’ a well known local, but in his mid to late eighties age, it meant that he was now an old guy with a memory like a sieve. Alex asked questions,

Arthur got things mixed up easily, Alex related a few stories on his list, Arthur agreed and then more expansion of the details took place. ‘Yep my dad and grandfather remembered some of those fights, they told us kids about, the Blakely’s and the Sherman’s going head to head, they hated each other, they would be at opposite ends of the bar exchanging vile glances and then bang! It would be on for young and old!’

Alex took more notes, a wry smile developing as more stories were embellished and some new ones added. John Grantley added a story about a fire at the Fisher’s place, they say it was started by lightning, but no one was sure, there was some rivalry that implicated the William’s family, nothing was proven but a bad taste was left, Yep you guessed it Alex twisted things a little and the women folk got into the action with a story or two of their own about how each were bad mothers, none of which were true, but let’s not let that get in the way of a decent story.

It was duly noted that there were ‘good families and not so good families,’ The Anson’s, Grantley’s and Fishers were all good people, then there was the William’s, Blakeley's and Sherman’s, hard nosed, ignorant and idiots.

Armed with a few new stories and some details to fill out the existing ones the content for the website was well underway. Alex enlarged one the maps, figured out where some of these families ‘lived.’ then added reference to the stories thus far using a numbered system.

His ‘web guy,’ had things started and Alex was able to readily add in the stories and photos of characters. He took photos of the guys at the pub and then asked Ai to create fictitious historical figures based on the current ancestor, it blew him away how realistic the images looked. He used photos from Grannie Hanson’s old albums as well and then put in a loose timeline of events. He soon realised he would need more stories to add in and ‘fill the gaps.’

Not long after the website went live, they got the attention of Gary Higgins a local historian in a town nearby, he questioned Alex via email about the authenticity of some of the stories, Alex simply said, ‘I got the details from my Grannies journal and after chatting to a few ‘old timers’ at the pub.’ Alex thought little of it, not knowing that Gary was a local historian. Gary was good at ‘Playing his cards close to his chest.’

Chapter Four

Some time spent at the pub, the locals were starting to read through the various bits of history on the website, the local Facebook page lit up with people wanting to check the validity of various things mentioned, some locals added in their thoughts and recollections and then on the odd occasion Alex chimed in with ‘The details were found in a locally created old journal. I have no reason to doubt its authenticity.’

People siddled up to Alex in the bar and asked for details, he had more stories up his sleeve and after awhile had made up more detailed accounts of ‘new’ stories, neighbours who fought, workers who clashed with the boss, loads of timber that rolled off the well worn tracks and plenty of near misses with ‘timber getters’ felling trees on steep slopes. Alex had a way of getting his far fetched stories supported by lots of smaller believable ones.

Gary, the historian arrived one afternoon, was directed by Johnno at the pub on where to find Alex’s house, and catch up with him there. He did so, introduced himself and together over a coffee, Alex told him a few things, Gary, after a while was not at all sure about what was true and what wasn’t, Alex backed it all up with his timeline. Gary agreed that the dates matched up with key events but that was about it. Alex agreed to disagree and then said to Gary, How often in your research have you found a good rollicking story from times past that ends up being a fizzer, too often right? So on occasion if you write things up with a bit more voom, you might actually cause people to take interest, yeah?’

Gary agreed, but before he could say, ‘Yeah but…’ Alex would counter with another story about one of the local families and the silly things they got up to. Gary wanted to catch up some more. On the way home he recalled what Alex had said, ‘Adding to a story to make it more interesting,’ was the basic gist of things. He then reflected on how the facts in his stories caused some of the things to become mere average ‘fluff and bubble.’ Details would

be details, but would people really care? He decided he didn't have to do much to agree with Alex and his story telling concept. 'After all, what would it hurt to stretch things a little?'

Gary followed the website with interest getting updates on each new entry, having a laugh at some of the details and following other details on local history and comparing. Alex found that if he stayed within the date ranges for things that happened and did a good job of making things realistic, like period details, he could get away with all sorts of things. Gary kept in touch with Alex and even added a few things that overlapped into his area. To keep things discrete and 'keep his nose clean.' he used a pseudonym name, just in case.

Alex would also update the noticeboard at the pub just before each farmers market and then watch as various people followed the antics in each story. He watched the numbers of viewers on the website as well; there was a steady rise each month as people 'tuned in.'

One story that came up was the name of the town, allegedly in the local first nations dialect, when asked the name of this place they said Nyoohnah, later on when they were able to translate what it meant, it was suggested that it mean 'We don't know this place.' The spelling then altered to an easier mix for the western settlers.

Alex was happy with how things were progressing and figured on a simple idea, Each site where things 'happened.' He could put up a simple sign with a number on it, then as people arrived they could look up what happened at the site.

Another bunch of stories.

Two children went missing back in 1895, the Barrow kids. There was an extensive search by many adults, the mill was shut down for a while so there would be enough adults to carry out the search, the children were finally found two days later, hungry, thirsty and cold. Mrs Barrow said she woke up from a nap and they were gone, three and four years old. It was later alleged that she had consumed a hefty amount of gin that day. In actuality the kids were only gone for a short while, having gone down the street to watch some horses in a paddock.

Mrs Barrow was only concerned for a short while, she was hanging out the washing on the line to dry, the kids had wandered off, but that wasn't a big thing in those days. All Mrs Barrow did was ask a neighbour had she seen her boys. It was recorded in the journal and now It's been made into a bigger thing, so now it's more theatrical. 'Barrow Children Missing, big search underway!'

The 1905 fires took a few days to materialise, coming from the North West. Horses ran through the open paddocks as a grass fire ran ahead of the big fires that wiped out so much. Mad Dog Atkinson opened the gate to let them out as the flames approached. He headed them in the direction of the river, the other direction would have been straight into the fire front. A simple gesture but one that was seen as brave, ‘Atkinson not so mad afterall.’ read the original headline. The altered history one read ‘Mad dog saves hundred of horses in Daring round up.’ The gesture was considered ‘highly heroic.’

Mad Dog Atkinson again, made a mistake and stopped in at the pub for a drink after robbing a coach going through the area. He was found out and was tied up to the tree out the front of the pub, one of his mates cut him down after a few days sneaking in under the cover of darkness. In reality Atkinson, was tied up to the tree for being drunk and disorderly for a few hours, the locals had to find a way to deal with their own law and order issues as there was no local police at the time.

Robert Hanson, Alex’s great grandfather, told stories of his ancestor Cryrus Hanson, moving into the area as a Carpenter in the early days and then as a mill hand later on. Known for going head to head with Silas Vance on health and safety issues at the mill. There were too many tripping hazards in the yard and in the winter the mud made working there intolerable. Silas fobbed it off as nonsense, one afternoon Cyrus and a bunch of workers witnessed as Silas came into the yard, tripped and fell into a mud puddle. They had a chuckle, Cyrus was soon put in charge of sorting out the problems, Silas didn’t come to the yard much after that.

House fire, a log falls onto the floor at Mrs Jennings house, the house was almost lost, Mrs Jennings made it out just in time with a baby in arms. The story was a beat up of a small fire that Mrs Jennings soon sorted out in her kitchen. But who lets a non dramatic story get in the way of things? Logs fell out of fires rather often in that era, Mrs J simply grabbed the unburnt end of the log and flipped it back onto the open fire. She went outside to get a bucket of water to douse a few things that were singed.

A worker at the mill had an accident, got hit with a piece of timber, and ended up with a bruised leg. That was written up on the site as a ‘A guy got speared by a flying piece of timber, thrown out the back end of the saw, he lived, but the mess was something else, the local Dr, lived a town away, he was called, came out and had to use a hand saw to shorten the ‘spear’ before carefully, but painfully removing it.

Louie Manse was a mate of Alex's he does a bunch of fencing and odd jobs in the area and is in need of a hand, Alex offers to help out and spends the next few week running wires along the length of paddocks and nailing them in place, the work was a wake up call, his body had adjusted to a more laid back approach to things. One benefit was listening to Louie when he started to discuss the website and stories from locals in the area. Louie's family had been a quiet bunch since moving to the area back around 1930. Now Alex was starting to get an inkling that there might be more stories they could share. He was right Louie had stories passed on to his father from his grandfather, they weren't lost, just waiting for the website.

Alex soon had the stories rolling in from Louie's mob, most of which were able to be used. To make the whole thing come together Alex found a local sign writer who he used to make the numbered sign posts. That fitted to the info on the website.

Another character who shows up from time to time, was Karl Gundi, his family had a small place that caused a bit of a ruckus from time to time, they were first nations people, people would come and go from their little house on the edge of town, cousins and such. Karl would occasionally attend school and picked up enough information to hold a job and figure out some of the 'white man's ways.' He was a tricky character and he and Alex got on well, sharing tall stories. Both characters honed their skills sharing details.

Karl heard about Alex's stories and website then offered a few stories of his own. He added to the info about Mad Dog Atkinson, mentioning that his grand dad would follow Mad Dog in the bush and saw him hold up coaches, bushranger style. He also had stories about how giant freshwater crayfish used to be found in a nearby river and how his people would feast on these. Oh and Platypus… Apparently quite a delicacy if you knew how to cook them. There were lots of stories brewing one way or another

On the weekends things were getting busier. Cars would meander along the roads looking at the posts and reading what had happened in the area, then some would have lunch and a drink or two at the pub. Alex called it a 'living exhibition.' There were a number of times he stood by the noticeboard at the pub and added stories as people read the info. He stood resplendent with his Akubrea and Driza-Bone, Rm boots etc. People who chatted often felt like they had met a local legend and thanked him for compiling the stories. Yep Alex was a local legend, his family going back a couple of generations in the area at least.

Mary liked the extra customers. She stood and chatted to Alex one afternoon and asked, 'What else can we do?' He immediately said, 'How about a band?' On the good days

you can have them in the beer garden to the side and on the cooler days, inside, there's a stage there. Ask the council for some 'Cultural Development Funds.' Figure out your costs and go from there. What you make money from is the drinks, but often the drinks are not enough to cover the cost of the band, all the sound gear they hire and all that.

She looked at him with some degree of surprise, he looked back and said, get an event organiser to figure out the details, run a decent raffle, and have some fun. The big thing is picking the right date, right band and making the marketing work really well. Oh and watch out for organisers and bands who say, 'raise money for charity,' That rarely goes well, except when it's a really big band with people paying a lot to be part of it.

Mary asked, 'How come you seem to know so much about this sort of thing, I mean I'm glad I asked, but?' Alex smiled, 'One of the guys I worked with a while back, his missus was an event organiser, and before you ask, they moved interstate. But it's fascinating what you can learn, listening to people at barbecues and asking questions.'

Mary thought long and hard about it, made contact with an event organiser and followed the details on their website, they had an info sheet that answered a lot of the sorts of questions Mary needed to ask.

A few weeks later a guy turned up, he was in a small band that did rock and roll covers, asked if they wanted to have a band play and bring in the crowds. Mary watched a youtube video of the band and thought they were okay, she was now armed with a bunch of questions from reading event info online. How much do you charge? Do you have your own Public Address System or do you hire that? What about public liability insurance?

The guy had a hard time answering all that, and ended up saying, 'Look we're a band that wants to play, we have a good time and so does the audience.' Mary countered with, 'Yep while all that sounds good, I can't guarantee how much I can make and I don't think it would be fair to hire you guys to pay you a pittance.' The guy left, thanking Mary for her time. Mary was impressed that she was able to handle the guy and ask enough of the right questions to weed him out.

One of the event companies contacted her and made a suggestion, a silent disco, they provide the gear, a bunch of wireless headphones, and a pre recorded list of tracks, people put the headphones on, someone presses go and 'bingo' entertainment has begun. Mary decided to trial it, after all it was cost effective and they didn't have to charge much. She and Johnno

along with some of the locals thought it looked weird, all these people dancing about but no one else could hear the music.

That went well, the organiser suggested they run an emo music event, the alternative goth types are going for that big time, they don't buy much in the way of drinks but with the right drinks list, they could do okay. The event came and went, Mary and Johnno marveled at the red and black costumes and the goth make up. The organisers had picked a set of tracks that would go all night if they wanted to.

One of the locals suggested they do a blues and roots festival and go for a council grant for festivals. Mary simply smiled and said, 'That sounds fantastic, are you putting your hand up to make it work? No I didn't think so…'

Mary got an email a few days later, someone in a neighbouring town wanted to run a festival but needed a space. Mary suggested the footy oval across the road and down a side street. She was then asked if she wanted to be part of the planning for it. Mary said, 'Not at this stage.'

The idea came and went, a few months later someone from the cultural development branch of the local council turned up and said they had heard that Mary was interested in running a music festival?' Mary smiled and added, 'Well that escalated! I would support a festival but I don't want to organise it etc, too much hassle.'

That idea went by the wayside, the next thing was a musical duo showed up, cost effective, had their own gear and insurance. Beer garden on the Sunday after 1 pm, and Friday night in the bistro after 7.30, The aim was a trial for a month, all for two hundred each session. They provided the posters and some social media, and Mary did some of that too. The initial crowds weren't huge, but things built up over time. The pub made some extra money and customers were entertained. Mary thought it was amazing what a guitarist, a drum machine, other backing instruments and a singer could do.

Alex liked the way it would bring in some more clientele and a few people his age. He could stand at the bar and enjoy some tunes and watch as people connected, laughed and had a good time. Occasionally he would get a touch on the shoulder from one of the local girls.'Trish the dish' as she was known, was always well presented and was often 'pre primed' with a wine or two before entering the pub. She would then hope that some guy would buy her a drink or three. Alex liked to be generous, but would only buy her one drink,

the first drink of the night if he could, so that she would have a clear enough head to remember who had bought it.

Trish was a feisty person at times, she sorted out her husband with a pushy attitude, a slap and a judo take down move, that stunned the husband. He took the hint and left the next day.

Trish was always well presented, up market casual, and on occasion Alex would take her out to dinner, they seemed to always end up at her place and spend time drinking port and pleasuring each other. He would choose the music, Fusion jazz, some far out exciting jazz that was sometimes soothing, other times it seemed to follow no rhyme or reason. Trish liked it because it would often be music she hadn't heard before and her mind would drift off to some weird fantasy land.

As for the pleasure, well sometimes it just didn't happen, the planets may not have been 'aligned' or similar. But when things went well, they went very well. The friendship they shared was one of mutual admiration, she actually seemed to like that other 'ladies' were into Alex, and he liked the way Trish liked to party, she had a smart head and never went too far with her drinks, or other substances. He liked that she could handle herself, a big fan of 'Ninja Whispering.' he never had to step in if she was being harassed at the pub, by some 'boofhead' that thought she might be 'easy meat.'

He wouldn't hear what she had to say, but watched as the idiot male peeled away, shrugged his shoulders and ended up elsewhere. Trish would keep a wary eye out, just in case. Alex liked a confident woman. He knew that if he had to, he could step in and assist, his mates knew it too and if some were at the same event, they all knew Trish held a special place in their mates heart and were in a sense deeply protective.

What that meant for Trish was that at least locally she was protected, but it also meant she didn't get much of a chance with other guys, they were all looking out for her like 'big brothers'. It was never sure if she realised that, but it was the way it was.

Every now and then Alex would recall a girl who made things memorable for some of the wrong reasons. Cynthia was one, she had this thought that she would whip Alex into line, and entrap him by pulling the pregnancy card. They had an intimate evening with full pleasure, then a while later she claimed she was pregnant, Alex acted cool, calm and collected

and said, ‘I can show you the very small scar where I had a vasectomy a few years back, you know, the snip… If you are pregnant, that may be possible, but highly unlikely.

After having two boys twenty something years back. I decided it would be wise for me to take positive action.’ He kept looking her in the eye as she melted away. He then said, ‘Look up on the internet, Munchausen's syndrome, you may think you have something, in this case a pregnancy, but it doesn’t mean it’s real.’

Cynthia wasn’t impressed with the outcome and hadn’t thought things through. As she turned away Alex said, ‘Mind you it didn’t stop me from having a good time that night. I can only hope it was good for you as well.’ She did, it was a tantalising time and it caused her to come back for more, not often, but often enough to keep her interested, Alex seemed to know more than a thing or two about causing a ‘person’ to get excited, physically excited the sort of excitement that made a person quiver. And yep, she liked that… Even though most people would have felt humiliated having tried to ‘entrap’ a person with a tricky pregnancy manoeuvre and not succeeded, Cynthia didn’t feel overly awkward. Perhaps at first, but she came to respect his direct communication and it put her in her place, something about that gave him power and control and for some strange reason she liked that..

Chapter Five

‘Oi, sexy boy…’ Alex turned, Mary at the bar leaning in ready for a chat… she laughed, ‘I made you look didn’t I…’ He glanced around the room, and added, ’Well being the only guy here at the moment, you can only be referring to me…’

Mary shook her head, ‘Anyway, on a serious note… all these stories that are popping up on the website and the noticeboard, how real are they?’ Alex smiled and said, ‘Well some are maybe a bit of a stretch, but if you take a look at the reality of our town’s history, it is rather boring… so to make things worthwhile, I took the contents of Grannie's journal and the other stories from the locals and tweaked them a little. You would have figured that out fairly early though?’

Mary nodded, ‘I did, not knowing a lot about the area, but is that the right thing to do?’ Alex smiled, ‘Are you guys enjoying the extra patronage? Yep I thought so, and is it fun reading the next exciting chapter of our illustrious history? Yep I thought so. Does anyone

really care if things are out of whack, not true, a bit of a stretch? Not really, some will spot the extra bits and anyone that does more online searching will soon realise things are not quite right, but until then, I'm having some fun and seeing people drive up and down and check out the history, the numbered signs is a cool thing. Hey Mary, why don't you write a story, make something up, I'll check it out and if it's any good I'll put it on the site.'

'Yeah, nah, oh well, I'll think about it, but nah… Not yet anyway, mind you I have heard enough stories over the years to know a thing or two…'

Alex nodded in reply, 'Well there you go, you have it in your head, put it on paper or in an email, Mad Dog Atkinson turned out to be a big bad bushranger, so I figure some other local character could be a raucous, reprobate who causes chaos.'

Alex hoped he had planted a seed, I guess time will tell.

One thing that did happen, that caught the locals by surprise, was the local council saw that there was extra activity out at Nayoonah and decided that a block of land they had next to the pub should become a playground, complete with a public toilet and ample parking. None of the locals seemed to have asked for it, mind you they did think it was a good idea. So one day a crew turned up, erected a sign, some obligatory long term temporary fencing and then the next week crews turned up to create a public stopping point. A bunch of carparks, two electric car charging points, colourful playground, landscaping and toilet block.

Johnno was pleased it would take pressure off people asking where the toilets were. Mary said, 'Ah progress, but do we want it?' Some of the locals at the pub said it was useful, others were not so sure. Someone suggested that it might cause their council rates to go up, there was some silence around that suggestion as people processed that thought.

It turned out that people who visited the area liked the new additions, people picniced, checked out the stories and notes, some even added to the facebook page comments. In all the outcome was positive. Comments were made about the old general store, could it be done up? Should it be knocked down? Who owns it?

A story arose about an incident at the store, way back in its heyday,

A weary traveller pulled up to the general store. Walking in, he found the storekeeper Alan Jenkins, lazily reading a paper. The traveller asked, 'Do you sell marshmallows?' Alan yawned, pointed a finger, and said, 'Aisle two, right next to the canned soup.'

The traveller went to Aisle two, looked around, and returned to the counter looking utterly lost.

‘I've searched everywhere, and there are no marshmallows on Aisle two!’

Alan didn't even look up from the paper. He sighed, took off his reading glasses, and said, ‘Well, if we don't have 'em, then we're out of 'em.’

The traveller blinked, completely baffled by the logic. ‘But, if you're out of them, why did you tell me they were in aisle two?’

Alan looked him dead in the eye and shrugged, ‘Because if I told you they weren't in the store at all, you'd have just walked right out the door and never talked to me. Now did you see any tinned beans? I’ve been up and down the aisles and I’ll be buggered if I can find them.’ The traveller sighed and left the store bewildered.

That entry on the site got a few giggly responses, Alex thought there must be more stories we can add about the store. He then wondered who had the key to the door, the people who lived in the old Vance house on the hill didn’t know, their property was on a separate title and although Silas Vance once owned the store, no one seemed to know who had the ownership these days and Alex wasn’t about to find out. He was however curious to find out what it was like inside.

‘Yulo,’ thought Alex, 'He'll know how to get in.’ Yulo was an old mate living locally who worked for a builder. He had a range of skills, and had a way of figuring things out. It turns out he knew how to pick a lock. Alex had a chat on the phone, ‘Meet me at the back door of the store at four pm.’ Said Yulo.

Alex was there as Yulo arrived, Yulo took a careful look at the lock, then looked at Alex, ‘Hm, this could be tricky, it's an old Yale lock, they can be annoying.’ He then took a look around the bottom of the door and the steps, then a bit wider on the ground. Alex wondered what he was doing. Yulo reached down and picked up an innocuous looking rock, there underneath was a key, a Yale key. Yulo smiled and said ‘I thought you would have checked that before calling me! It’s an Aussie tradition, leave the spare key under a rock.’

The door opened after a bit of push and shove and they were in, a lot of dust, some back store rooms, a toilet and kitchen, then the main store with not much in the way of fittings, along one side was a row of shelves attached to the wall.

The pair carefully wandered about fully expecting the floorboards to give up, they were still solid. Alex said to Yulo, ‘I wish I knew who owned it.’ Yulo looked at him in a startled kind of way, then said, ‘Mrs Garrity across the road mate, Edna Garrity, she owns it. Old man Jenkins ran it for all those years, she leased it out to him. When he packed up she simply shut the door, didn’t need to bother with the place, she figured it would cost too much to maintain and all that. Apparently Jenkins complained about the lack of income for some time and she was sick of it. Locked the door and walked away.’

Alex shook his head, 'I've been asking people for the past few days about who owned this place and you knew all along.’ Yulo smiled and said, ‘Well up until now you didn’t ask me, you have to ask the right people Alex! It would be good to see it put to some use though.’ Alex thought the same, but what, how etc was currently evading him. Door locked, the pair were on their way.

Mrs Garrity was now in her late seventies, sharp as a tack, a bit of a busy body, liked to go to senior citizen events one town over and was interested to see things changing around town. Alex wandered over the day after he and Yulo had been in the store. A knock on the door and he found she wasn’t home. He had a sleepless night the night before, not sure of what he was going to say to her, but he was curious about the store.

Later that day he tried again, about to cross the road he spotted her car ambling down the road, no indicator as she turned to pull in her driveway. She stopped short of the garage at the back, got out and was about to open the roller door. Alex wandered up the driveway, but hesitated, he didn’t want to startle her by approaching too quickly so he stopped.

He waited for her to put the car in, then close the roller door, then he approached, he called out, ‘Hello Mrs Garrity, I’m Alex, Alex Hanson, Maddie’s Grandson.’ she responded by looking him up and down, then cleanly said, ‘I know who you are, Maddie spoke of you a lot, now you’re back in the district all these years later and probably up to no good!’ She then put on a wry smile. ‘I had heard you had done up her place, is it any good?’ Alex didn’t expect any idle chatter but he soon warmed to it and briefly told her about the changes. She mentioned that it had been a long while, but she had been there. It turned out that she and Maddie had been good friends despite an age difference of quite a few years.

She invited him in for a cup of tea. Alex obliged, saying, ‘Only if it’s not too much trouble.’ The pair sat while the kettle boiled. Shared a few stories about Grannie Hanson and the local goings on, then the new playground and the people wandering all over the place on

the weekends. Mrs Garrity didn't have any internet connections so she didn't know about the local history page on Facebook. Mind you she had a few stories of her own that Alex noted.

Finally the conversation got around to the store over the road. ‘’I'm reliably told that you own the store, is that right?' She nodded and replied, ‘Yep, after old Jenkins whinged and moaned and didn't want to pay rent anymore, I gave up on the place too, my accountant said it could just sit, I had enough other income and that this could sit and help balance out my tax.'

Alex enquired if she had thoughts on it being used, she poured the tea carefully out of the teapot. Then enquired ‘Sugar, milk?' They sat and sipped tea, finally she said, ‘You know I liked it when it was running and got a bit busy there for a long while, then things faded out as the nearby supermarket in town took over. That was a bit sad, but I have no idea about who would want the place and what would work. People whizz by here and don't stop much, except now with the playground, that's changed things a bit. Now you've started to ask questions about it, so maybe you have an idea?'

Alex added, ‘Well it sits and looks kind of lonely and I don't know what would work in there either. It wasn't until I asked Yulo up the road who owned it, he was surprised I didn't know it was you.'

Edna took one last sip of her tea, sat back in her chair and mentioned, ‘You know I fully agree that the store looks tired and doesn't help the town's image, so I guess I'm open to suggestions, I don't want to be one of those people who people say held the town back, not that I'd care much anyway what people thought, but there you go. Now, if you have some ideas, share them, and let's see if we can figure something out. At my age I don't need big money but if I can help the place be a bit more lively, then that could be useful.'

On his way home Alex contemplated that he had started something else now, and perhaps he could just walk away and let it be, let it rot, let it be an eyesore. By the time he got home he thought otherwise. On the facebook page, he posed a question, ‘If the old store was usable again, what would work in that space? Ideas please?' There wasn't a rush of ideas, a few questions perhaps, then someone mentioned a coffee shop, then someone else said, it might not get busy enough… ideas came and went.

Micro space, it could be a yoga studio, a creative art space, a casual coffee space, a retreat space. Alex realised that if one person took it on as a shop they would have quiet

times, there probably had to be a place that had done a series of micro businesses out of the space and made it work? The micro shop idea would need some coordination but it was doable, surely? Rent out a flexible space for various uses, weekend workshops, and so on that could be a good way to get things started.

People agreed, some people even offered to run some sessions. It would be a local hub for creative connections, from coffee in the mornings to Yoga in the afternoons, then creative classes for kids and adults, then back to yoga in the evenings, or some sort of combination of things along those lines. A question was raised, are there enough people in the area to bother with all that or do we have to run things on the weekends where out of towners are invited, like a writers festival?

The local community hub fifteen minutes away in a neighbouring town was mentioned, ‘So would we be competing with that?’ Followed by another comment that said, ‘Just because the old store is there doesn’t mean it’s useful…’ That caused a bit of a stir.

Alex wondered if he would have to coordinate things, he wasn’t too keen on that. Maybe he wanted to see the end result, be part of it, but not run it as such.

Another suggestion came through, if it was a feasible thing, then what if a group of people coordinated to run it? Set up guidelines for it and make it so it wasn’t a burden on just one person, then another thought was, do we need to set up some form of formal organisation to be able to apply for funding? Ideas came and went.

Then a nine year old girl, Gail Brecht, one of Yulo’s daughters had an idea, ‘Wash it down, paint the details, the front is mostly windows, then have a sign writer do one of those big vinyl wraps, you could have a picture of an old style store with people in it. Then you could think about what to do with it later on.

It wasn’t long before people mentioned a friend of a friend, and a kid with AI skills for the picture and a mock up image came through. Then there was the matter of cost, Johnno at the pub put up a starting amount of one hundred dollars and others chimed in, ‘Drop into the pub and put some funds in people! The jar is chained to the bar.’ And they did. The signwriter gave a discount, a local cleaner did the pressure wash for a reasonable price too.

Alex showed the idea to Mrs Garrity, she was very happy for it to proceed. It wasn’t long before the funds were raised a few dollars here and there, it all added up. A few images

were shared and a consensus was formed as to the one that suited the building and the town best.

Mrs Garrity then suggested to Alex that he get a quote to paint the sides of the shop, she would then pay for that to be done. This added to the overall positive effect and the people were happy, yay!

Chapter Six

‘Come to the pub and read about Mad Dog Atkinson, and how he lost his fortune chasing gold.’ Read one of the entries on the facebook page. Louie Manse, a mate of Alex’s said it sounded strange, perhaps it should have read the other way, ‘Made his fortune chasing gold.’

There was some discussion in the comments, then someone said, ‘I did some research, old man Atkinson wasn’t even a real mean bushranger, he actually helped when the fires came through releasing horses trapped in paddocks and all that, so the title ‘Mad Dog Atkinson’ is probably a bit misleading.’ Other comments followed, it seemed that no one was really interested at this point with facts, perhaps preferring hearsay and ballyhoo.

Gary, the local historian, noted the point raised and had a laugh. Fully aware that most of the ‘new history’ was fictitious.

Mary spotted Alex one afternoon at the pub, ‘Oi, Toy Boy,’ she called across the bar, ‘You’ll need to get some more of those photocopied maps of the area, I reckon we’ll run out by the end of the week. People keep asking for them.’ Alex smiled, Mary didn’t know if that was because of the success of the maps or the fact she called him ‘Toy Boy.’ The pair often shared a laugh, he didn’t have anything to call her except maybe, ‘Johnno’s Mistress.’ Not that it meant anything, but maybe it sounded a touch 'risque.’

Clearly she and Johnno were pleased with the renewed interest in the area and how that positively impacted the Pub’s bottom line. Mary even noted that Johnno had a bit of a spring in his step as he did things about the place, he complained less about menial tasks and that was very useful. She smiled a long knowing smile.

‘Hey Johnno,’ Called Alex, ‘Have you seen the shop next door?’ Johnno nodded back with a big smile, ‘Yep, looks mighty fine! Can’t believe that it sat looking so freakin’ miserable for so long.’

Alex mentioned a working bee, mowing some grass, getting rid of some rubbish, cutting back weeds and so on. Johnno suggested that someone contact the council and see if they will do it. Alex smiled. He knew a guy at the local council, well more to the point he knew the guy's wife… Johnno noted his smile and asked, Alex said, ‘Leave it to me, I have a contact…’

A few days later a council maintenance crew turned up and cleaned up around the store and playground area. Very nice thought Alex, amazing what a phone call to the ‘right’ person can do. Keeping things clean, neat and tidy might be another thing.

A few little fix ups at ‘Rake Cottage’, and Alex decided to stop by the pub for lunch. That was fine, a simple lunch and what’s that? A beer ‘on the house.’ Mary was being generous, he thought. A nice gesture. ‘Yo, what’s the excuse for the freebie?’ Mary smiled and tilted her head for a bit, then walked back to his table and mentioned that they had got a grant through to have a band play. Something she saw on facebook, grants to bring life to town. It turned out to be a no-brainer and a chunk of cash would be paid to have a band. So that seemed like a nice idea, application in, and granted. Therefore, Alex planted a seed and got a free beer out of it.

It was a few weeks off yet, a Saturday shindig, indoors, cool evening, hot band, sell beer, have fun. All the pub had to do was show that they had public liability insurance. Easy as…

The ‘Southern Cross Blues Project’ was booked, a get down and dirty delta and Chicago blues mix with an add on of some Yamana/Nunga blues. Posters arrived with the details, onto the facebook page that went, people expressed a great deal of interest. Booking via a suitable page set up by the grant provider only. They had strict guidelines, and on the day they would provide security and all the gear etc. Mary thought they were a bit over the top but they had done this a few times before. They wanted to make sure they had a good return for their ‘investment.’

The afternoon of the event, everything went to plan, the set up of the band, the security check, and security guys on the door from 7 pm, strictly ‘no ticket, no entry!’ The main crowd started to file in from about 8pm, background music was on and the band arrived to play. They finished at 11 pm, the crew sold a lot of drinks and nearly everyone had a good time. There were a few idiots that had to be ‘turfed out’.

Alex noted that Johnno and Mary would get very busy, but that they were having a good time. He decided to help out behind the bar, he had pulled beers before and it didn’t take long for him to get back into the swing of things. M & J were very grateful. End of the night people slowly headed off and said how pleased they were at the fine time they had. The facebook page for the pub lit up the next day asking when the next event would be.

Alex remembered the band were okay, but more to the point that Tracy, a 35 year old was still about at the end of the night and ended up heading off with Alex. He had known her from years back, now single, she had inherited a decent chunk of cash, ditched her then partner and was known to philander about with guys like Alex. They both had needs, for Tracy she knew that Alex was a good guy of ‘secure intent’. He didn’t want to hurt people, just enjoy life and keep things ‘sorted.’

Not much happened until the next morning they were both too worn out the night before. Tracy reached over and took a gentle grip of ‘Billy the Willy’, a little bit of action and he started to rise, Alex smiled widely, then there was some really positive action, Tracy went down on Billy with a lot of interest. Alex had to hold back all he could and save the ‘giving part’ of the process for a bit later, that wasn’t far away.

Tracy then took more control of the situation and moved to ‘get on top,’ it wasn’t long before ‘Billy,’ was in, and fully primed for action, a few movements later and Tracy said out loud, ‘Oh naughty Billy I think I will have to call you quick draw Billy!’ The movement stopped as Alex let Billy do his thing, the ‘vinegar stroke’ was happening with intense force. Well it felt that way. Science says it’s only about a teaspoon full of ‘ejaculate material,’ but there are those who will swear it’s much more than that. Alex didn’t care too much about the quantity, just the intense feeling of ‘giving’, the quality..

The pair laid back and had a ‘breather’, catching their collective breaths and then a short period of silence. Then the chats started, what’s on for the rest of the day, what’s next in the wider scheme of things, and why did Tracy go to the pub last night? Various other things were explored.

Breakfast was a bit later on after a lengthy chat about all manner of things, the little fan heater in the bedroom meant they didn’t have to run off to the kitchen to start the fire to get warm. That came later.

One of the points that Alex mentioned in all their chatting was the fact that he had multiple sexual partners, and what did Tracy think of that? She chuckled, ‘Everyone knows that, I can’t say that they have always known, but you were the go to, the measuring stick if you like. Actually I’m surprised a little that some guys haven’t come around to lynch you, not becuase you pleasured their partner, but because you are the one they get measured against…’

Alex smiled at that, in a sense he knew that all the local girls knew, how wouldn’t they, but then there were times when he wasn’t sure, so it was always good to get that sort of self affirming detail from a ‘participant.’

Tracy asked, ‘So what is it that makes you so special?’ Alex laid back in bed, he had been sitting up for a while and was about to get out of the bed. He smiled and said, ‘Well from an early age I figured out that women were amazing, something rather special. In the school library the older kids were looking at books on the subject of sex, so I got in early, looked at the pictures they were looking at, then read details, then found other info at a bookshop, it was all fascinating.

While other boys my age were chasing footballs, I was chasing knowledge. I also watched as other boys, older boys, messed up with girls, I made eye contact, I smiled, I learnt that most girls liked compliments and I had the ability to deliver those compliments, without too much embarrassment on my behalf.

Billy the willy kept ‘egging me on.’ I liked the sensation of him ‘getting excited’ and so I wanted more. And for young girls wanting ‘more’ I was in a position to give. Oh and apparently I’m a good kisser.’

Tracy rolled on her side to face Alex, then smiled and asked, ‘What was the most daring situation you found yourself in? You know, sexually?’ He smiled and then shook his head, Alex looked perplexed, then mentioned, ‘Well I must admit I was at a school dance and a girl in a higher grade, Glenda, she wanted to find out what I ‘knew’ about things, the night was getting on a bit and her Father was due to pick her up at any minute. Well we found a spot in a back room of the hall and well, I showed her a few things. Now I want to make it clear that she came prepared with a protective device that she clearly knew how to handle and put it on Billy. We were done in a flash but it was mighty good, one of my mates interrupted us ‘full flight’, her dad was in the building and wanted to know where she was!

Glenda nearly went into shock at that point and well I didn’t care too much, as long as I didn’t get caught. There was a ‘mad scramble’ on her behalf. As she straightened herself and flipped the package the ‘protective device’ came in at me and said, 'Put that in your pocket and get rid of it, but not in an obvious way!’

It turned out that her father was suspicious of her and had figured out somehow that she was probably ‘active,’ shall we say. She headed out of the room, went to the toilet that was across the other side of the hall via a back corridor. He came looking and there I was with my mate Roger, having a chat, walking out.

He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘Empty your pockets boy!’ Thankfully I had handed the ‘evidence’ to Roger. He put it in his back pocket but as I turned my pockets inside out, Roger moved the ‘packaging’ out of his pocket into the bin by the door. Glenda’s dad looked me in the eye again and said, ‘Where’s Glenda boy!’ I said ‘I didn’t know, last I saw she was over the other side of the main room with her classmates.’

He added, ‘I’m watching you and I don’t care how old you are, you get my message!’ I said, ‘Yes sir.’ He turned, looked briefly at Roger and headed back into the main hall.’ That was a close call… Roger had a laugh. After that, I used to see Glenda’s dad around town driving, and I would nod to him, as I got older I would wave at him. He would point at me in a menacing way. Ah the good old days.’

Tracy rolled back to be flat on her back, having a giggle, then asked. ‘Wow I wonder what Glenda's doing these days?’

Alex was now getting out of the bed, turned and said, ‘She has three kids, is still married, apparently the guy is a total arsehole, and she lives in Adelaide. Her dad has passed away and her mother still lives two towns away. In an aged care facility if my sources are correct. I think, as they say in the classics, Glenda married her father…’

The pair headed out to the kitchen to start the day, kettle on, breakfast organised, wood heater fired up.

Tracy asked, ‘So apart from your boys, have you ever received a fathers day card from some alleged child?’ Alex had a chuckle and then went a little sour in the looks department, he finally mentioned, in a slow, low voice, ‘Yes, yes I have… and it wasn’t funny at the time. But now I have a laugh, I have no idea who it was from but hey there you go, it was in my second year of marriage, I soon got rid of it, before Allie found it, She always let me get the mail, she was never interested in what came in the mail, especially bills. This one said, dear dad in kids writing across the front… eww I felt sick, it had our address on it so I knew it was meant for me.’

The pair headed down to the Sunday market and checked out what was on offer, after last night's event, things were a little subdued, Mary figured that might be the case. It was also Pollo the cooks day off so Mary would put out a short menu that she could handle cooking, three main dishes as a Sunday special. Chicken, beef and a vegetarian option that rarely got taken up.

Tracy noted her car was still in the carpark and that was a good thing. The pair parted ways and Alex was soon back home settling in to watch some TV.

Chapter Seven

Alex got a call from a local real estate agent, his spare block down the street is the only one currently with a reasonable title and ownership they could readily find, ‘Do you want to sell it?’ Alex didn’t have to think about it for long, a price negotiated and the block is now

something he doesn't have to worry about, mind you it was basically a phone call to a local farmer he knew with a slasher on his tractor to cut back the grass.

It didn't seem to be too long before a builder put up a sign to mark the block, Alex wondered about what would get built? It then took a long time for anything to happen, building approvals, then surveying, then other bits and pieces. Then some other long delay. The builder putting up their sign sparked interest, the people meandering up and down the street checking out the 'historic details' would stop and ponder. A few times people stopped to chat if Alex was in the yard, they would enquire if any of the other blocks were for sale? No was the short answer, well not that he knew of, he suggested they chat to the council to see who owned what and explore from there.

One afternoon, two cars pulled up, one was a history browser, the other was 'Trish the dish,' dropping in on the off chance Alex would be home and share a cuppa, and perhaps a bit more… The browser had figured out that some of the 'historic stories' were 'bunkum!' and wanted to discuss the issue. Alex would just say, 'Well I just tell it like I heard it…' Trish wandered over and got into the conversation, saying, 'Hey buddy if you don't like the story, then bugger off and write your own, it's a big country.' The driver wound his window up and slowly headed off, shaking his head.

Another car stopped as Trish and Alex stood and chatted. 'Hey Pal, is there any land for sale out this way, it's a nice spot…' Alex gave him his standard spiel, chat to the council and see if someone will sell. Trish added in, 'Yeah it's a good place to hang out, lot's of history!' The pair nodded in unison, they were thanked as the guy drove off.

The pair disappeared inside before there were any other interruptions, Trish suggested he put a sign up with the details and a contact number for the council for land enquiries. They chatted about Alex having new neighbours, wondering what they would be like. Trish and Alex had a few laughs about goings on, some recall about things in the past and all that, the kettle was put on, a few biscuits put out, Alex did favour a good Tim Tim. Then Trish sidled up closer to Alex at the sink as he rinsed out a couple of cups ready for a brew.

She locked eyes and put on a wry smile, then said, 'So… how's 'Billy'...' Alex turned and whispered, well, perhaps Billy is really well, but that's from my perspective, maybe we

should explore him from another angle?' Trish moved closer, having a chuckle, 'Ah Billy you old bugger, let's have a feel then shall we?' There was an embrace, some fiddling around Alex's 'private parts' and then a short jaunt off to the bedroom.

It wasn't long before Trish called out, 'Oh Billy you naughty boy, you are, well, very well you passed your health check! They both lay back, quite satisfied with how the afternoon turned out. Trish suggested that Billy might need another health check sooner rather than later, Alex smiled, 'Ok what about that cuppa? Perhaps we could discuss his next appointment?' The pair slipped their clothes back on swapping silly stories about 'Billy's health check and how a nurse might have to check for any issues from time to time, just to help the doctor.' The afternoon soon faded and Trish was off into the distance with a wave and a blown kiss.

A few months later a real estate sign went up down the street with a 'sold' sticker already on it. Then further down the street another one the same, it looks like people took Alex's advice and found the owners. He thought, 'Well they have better research skills than me, I couldn't find any details.'

One of the new owners turned up one afternoon to survey their block, Alex waved at them off in the distance, they drove up and parked at Alex's place, he wandered out and introduced himself, in the car was Jock and Marie Johansen, excited to be building a new home down the street, Marie recognised Alex's name and mentioned, 'Are you the guy that put together the website on the history of the place?' Alex nodded, She asked if there was any particular history on their block, the one next door to it had a sign up with a number and they read about the loss of that house in the fires back in 1905.'

Alex's brain went into overdrive, he concocted a story about how there was a shed on that block that got burnt out, an old guy lived in it, he had dug a big hole for his toilet and had a 'thunder box' on top, then how the guy had hay, some sheep to keep the grass down and lived hand to mouth doing small jobs about the area, people took pity on him a give him things to do, minor fencing, tending to gardens, fixing fly wire doors and all manner of things. He also knew a lot about animal husbandry. His name? Henry Walkinshaw, the locals called him Walkie.

Marie thanked him and asked why Walkie's story wasn't on the website? Alex closed one eye and slowly said, 'Some stories sometimes take their time to come to the surface, old Walkie is a new story in a sense, It's not been long that I picked up the details, an old fella in town told me recently, It's like he's a ghost of sorts, drops by for a chat in one ear, you know, old guys can take a while to remember things.

The Johansen's thanked Alex and were soon on their way, Alex wandered inside to jot down the story he just concocted before he forgot the details. 'Old Walkie' was now the stuff of legend. Alex smirked and said out loud, 'Ah boyo, you've still got it!' Details went up on the website along with a numbered sign not long after. Mary at the pub called Alex over on his next visit… 'Old man Walkie sounds like a character.' She smiled as Alex did a half smile, half smirk and in a slow drawl said, 'Yeah he does sound like a character doesn't he. You don't get 'em like that anymore.' Mary shook her head and said 'Oh boy you sure are a rummin! Mary topped up his beer, and handed it back.

Alex liked the idea of a half priced beer, a few more stories of fanciful characters might do the trick. He thought about the guy who was the historian, perhaps he knew a few things Alex didn't that might give him some starting points. What was his name? Ah yeah Gary. He had a local facebook page, a quick glance and Alex made up a loose story about a farmers Daughter and a timber getter named Smithy, then another one about a stray bull getting into a farm and 'inseminating' a range of cows before the farmer knew that he was missing.

Then an itinerant family who got run out of town, blamed for a spate of minor thieving that was never proven, the Stockton's, the local policeman invited them to move on, but the thieving continued, it turned out to be a local kid, Willy Truscott. Willy's dad made him return the goods and then had him do work to repay the families he had upset. That kid ran away from home at age twelve, some say he joined a circus that was passing through. He became a tight rope walker, or so the legend says.

One afternoon at the pub, lunch had been had and Alex was sitting, chatting to one of the old guys, Humpty Jack. He was good for a story or two, but he was now getting too old, he was soon to go into an old folks home, his son had to clear out the old house. Just as Jack wandered off Allie, Alex's ex walked in the door. Wandered over and sat. 'G'day Al.' ALex

looked up . smiled and directly said, ‘Hello, you want some action?’ She gave a tight smile and shook her head, no that wasn’t on the agenda.

‘I dropped by the house, it looks good, you’ve done well there, ‘Rake Cottage’ Nice touch… Oh and I’ve seen the website, you obviously still have quite the imagination Al, quite the imagination, Old many Walkie and company, wow.’ Alex smiled and said ‘Yeah, cheers.’ Allie straightened up in the chair and said, ‘Now listen, I’m not here about all that, Benny’s not been well, he was crook at work one day and the Doc says he has a low grade tumor that needs to be removed, he’s not thrilled about it but it needs work, I didn’t want to just call or email, I thought you should hear about it face to face.’

Alex was taken aback, and was now wide eyed, he had a bunch of questions to ask Allie about Benny, filled in on the details he sat back and said ‘Gees poor kid, should I drop in to catch up?’ Allie tilted her head to one side, then said, ‘No. not yet. He would be pissed off that I told you to begin with, I think it needs some time for him to get his head around it. Jake’s a bit knocked about by it as well, other than that he’s doing okay and thanks for asking.’ Alex looked her straight in the eyes, ‘Well thanks for the guilt trip…’ she smirked and said ‘You’re welcome.’ Not long after Allie was on her way.

Alex now had something new to have in his head, he then resigned himself to sending texts to Allie in the hope she would reply, he figured that if she bothered to drop by and tell him about Benny then she probably would reply to a text or an email. Benny was set to have an operation a week later so his mind was preoccupied with that.

Two days later Alex’s other son Jake dropped by, he didn’t know that his mum had been out to visit and Alex didn’t let on at first, Jake gave him the news about Benny, and a bunch of details. Alex asked him about how he was and what he thought of his brother having a tumor. ‘To be honest dad it’s a bit scary, Brothers can be a pain in the arse at times but Beny and I get along really well these days and I don’t want to lose him.’ ‘We all die one day or another Jake, ‘ No shit Sherlock, it’s a true statement but not just yet, Ben’s got a lot of life to live.’ replied Jake.

As it turned out the tumor was inconsequential but there was follow up therapy to make sure things were all clear. Texts to Allie kept Alex in touch and finally Alex went to visit.

Benny had softened in his approach to his dad, the pair chatted for a while at Allies place. He pointed out the website and said some of the stories were even far fetched for Alex's imagination, Alex pointed out that they were the true stories… the other ones were made up. Ben said, 'Oh well, maybe you need to try harder.'

Jake wandered in, Alex stayed for dinner, pleased that the boys had become more accepting of having him around. As he left he gave the pair an open invitation to drop in, mentioning that it's good to call or text first… There were handshakes and even a hug from Allie. His trip home was full of emotion, pondering Benny's health and the new found connection with Jake and Allie as well. It was strange after all this time to catch up, Alex then wondered what things would have been like if Benny didn't have a health scare, how long would it be before they caught up again.

He was pleased to hear that the boys were working and mostly enjoying what they did, albeit that Ben was now on sick leave for a while. Alex suggested that if he needed a hand with anything that he would gladly help out. Ben said, 'Yeah, thanks…' Alex thought that if they did ask for help with anything it would be a huge step towards reconciliation. He didn't hold out any high hopes.

Nayoonah had certainly provided some fun times for Alex, from doing up the house to catching up with friends he hadn't seen in a long while, some more intimately than others, one might say. Today some reconciliation took place, even though it was under tricky circumstances. Alex felt that things were on the mend all round and hopefully a bright future continued to lay ahead. On the way home Alex noted another sold sign had gone up that day, oh well here's hoping they all make good neighbours!