

Blood at Yellow Water

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Acknowledgements

While this book is a work of fiction, most of the cities and towns mentioned in the book are real places although some liberties have been taken with the distances between places. The Kakadu Land Council, the Binugy people, the Lost Temple and the Stockmen's Track are all figments of the author's imagination.



Chapter 1

SATURDAY – DALY WATERS

Jake Stafford flew into Darwin airport from Tokyo by Qantas jet early on Saturday morning, stepped out of the plane onto the tarmac, breathing in the warm tropical air of Australia's Northern Territory, grateful to have left the cloudy, polluted skies and hustle of Tokyo. It was October in the dry season, warm but a pleasant time to visit the "Top End" of Australia. Soon tropical rainstorms would sweep across the north, making many of the roads into the outback impassable.

Jake picked up his luggage off the carousel and hired a Toyota Land Cruiser station wagon from Hertz at the airport. Leaving the airport he drove through Darwin, once a small laid-back frontier town, but now a modern and cosmopolitan city. Most of the original buildings and houses had been destroyed in the devastation caused by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve in 1974. The city had been rebuilt and was now prosperous and vibrant, attracting large numbers of tourists who enjoyed its relaxed vibe and proximity to national parks of stark beauty.

Jake turned the car south along the Stuart Highway which runs all the way to Adelaide, just over 3,000 kilometres on the southern coast of Australia. His destination was the town of Daly Waters, about 600 kilometres from Darwin down the highway. The road was arrow straight, and soon after leaving the outskirts of Darwin, it was flanked by the red desert of the Australian outback. Rocky outcrops and termite mounds, some as tall as a man, interspersed the sparse landscape. The traffic was moderate, mainly frequented by trucks and B-Double trailers and four wheel drives, many towing caravans. After a short stop for a coffee break at the major town of Katherine he reached the turn-off to Daly Waters, seven hours after leaving Darwin. He followed the narrow bitumen road through desert for another three kilometres before he came to the outskirts of the town.

The sun was the colour of burnt orange as it rapidly fell below the horizon and long shadows splayed across the red dirt as Jake entered the town. A few tired timber houses sagged under the dying sun. Some skinny aboriginal kids ran around in bare feet playing football. A group of aboriginal men sat under the shade of a huge eucalypt tree, sipping cans of beer. The centre of the town comprised a hotel, a camping ground, a road-house, a bakery, a general store, some souvenir shops and about twenty houses. All the buildings were made of timber with iron roofs, most in a state of disrepair. An open-air shop was

distinguished by an old helicopter sitting on its corrugated iron roof surrounded by rusty sculptures of an emu, a kangaroo and a crocodile. Apart from the main bitumen road into town all the streets were made of red dirt causing plumes of dust to rise whenever a vehicle took to the streets. Chickens squabbled in the dirt oblivious to any traffic while an old blue heeler dog sat lazily watching them under the shade of the veranda.

Despite the ramshackle state of the town, it was busy with tourists, young backpackers from all parts of Australia and Europe, the “grey nomads” -retirees with their expensive four wheel drive vehicles and luxury caravans -and families with their tents, trailers and camper vans.

The attraction of Daly Waters was twofold. It was the only town within a 100 kilometres that had a petrol station and that brought a lot of motorists to the town. More importantly, it was famous for its local hotel, the Daly Waters Pub which had become an icon of the outback.

Saturday afternoons were always busy at the pub and this Saturday was no exception. The pub was packed with townspeople, local miners and farmers and tourists who had come to experience a legendary outback hotel. Jake pulled into the car park, locked the Toyota and walked into the hotel. He had never seen anything like it. It was a large square one storey building made from timber with a sagging corrugated iron roof. Over the years extensions had been built on to it which made it look even more dilapidated. It was first built in 1893 as a watering hole to service the stock route that ran between Queensland and Western Australian, subsequently as a staging post for the Pony Express which followed the telegraph line between Daly Waters and Tennant Creek, 200 kilometres to the south. In the 1920’s an airport was built just outside the town as a stop-over for international flights to London from Melbourne and Sydney. The airport was used as a base for the Australian and American air forces during World War Two.

The pub had survived threats from bushfires and storms, locust plagues as well as the ravages of exuberant patrons who, in moments of intoxication, had done their best to destroy the place by fighting each other. It had three separate bars, a huge beer garden out the back for diners and entertainment, a large kitchen, ten hotel rooms with shared bathroom facilities, and some dormitory style rooms for back-packers. Each of the bars was decorated in a unique way with the help of regular patrons and visitors. The main bar had a huge assortment of T-shirts, hats and caps and brassieres draping one wall, another wall had shelves of empty beer bottles and cans, while yet another was covered with business cards, banknotes, stickers and postcards - souvenirs left behind by visitors from all corners of the world. The sports bar offered every kind of sporting memorabilia from signed football jumpers to cricket bats. There was even a pencil drawing of Slim Dusty, signed personally by the legendary Australian country singer.

The main room was crowded as Jake edged up to the bar. The bar was lined with tough looking locals who looked like they had been drinking for most of the afternoon, one of which gave him a hard stare when he pushed past him to the bar. There were two attractive young women and an older guy tending the bar; the women were obviously on tourist visas working their way around Australia, one was Japanese and the other had a strong Irish accent. Jake asked the Japanese woman for a beer, ordering in Japanese.

She looked surprised at hearing her own language spoken and smiled at him as she poured him a beer out of the tap.

She replied in Japanese "How come you speak Japanese so well?"

Jake replied "I was in a student exchange program and stayed with a Japanese family for a year when I was at secondary school. I also work for the Australian Embassy in Tokyo."

"Oh, and what are you doing here?" said the Japanese woman, her eyes shining brightly.

"I'm catching up with family before going to a conference at Kakadu," replied Jake as he reached for his beer.

"Oh, you mean the Australian Japan conference at the Yellow Water resort?"

"Yes, how did you know that?" said Jake, surprise in his voice.

She was about to answer when Jake felt a sharp push in his ribs and a slurred voice in his ear saying "Hey, city boy, can you stop chatting up the Jap bird and let a man get a beer."

Jake turned around to see a large red face about three inches from his own belonging to a very big man with hands the size of shovels.

"Are you talking to me?" Jake said.

"Yeah I am, city boy. Move out of the way so a man can get a drink." He elbowed Jack aside and pushed his big belly up to the bar. Jack turned to the Japanese girl, calmly paid for his beer and said in Japanese "Thanks, you better serve this stupid gaijin before he breaks the bar down." She giggled shyly at his words.

"What did you say to the slant-eye?" bellowed red-face.

"I said you're so full of it you wouldn't know if you were drinking dingo piss."

The other locals round the bar turned to look at the newcomer.

"You smart arse, get going or I'm gonna spread you all over the pub floor," and with that red-face pushed him backward. Jake stumbled and grabbed red-face's shirt in the process spilling his beer all over his jeans.

"You cheeky bastard, yer gonna pay for that," growled red-face and promptly punched Jake in the face, knocking him flying into a bar stool which he hit full force with his hip before collapsing on the ground.

"Good onya Blakey, that's teaching him to have a bit of respect," said one of his mates called Skinner at the bar, urging him on.

Jake lay on the floor holding his chin which was hurting badly and looked up at the ugly face in front of him.

"Had enough city boy?" sneered Blakey leaning over him.

"Yeah, help me up will you?" said Jake, sitting up and holding his hand out to clutch his shirt.

In a flash, Jake pulled Blakey to him, planted his right foot into Blakey's upper left thigh and rolling backwards lifted him bodily over his head so that he went flying over, smashing his head on the side of the billiard table. There was stunned silence in the bar as Blakey lay crumpled on the floor. Jake was just getting up when two of Blakey's mates rushed at him. He managed to break a punch from the one called Skinner with his forearm, locked his arm and applied a full shoulder throw to swing him across his body so that Skinner's momentum carried him into a table and chairs where he also fell in a heap. However Jake didn't see the roundhouse punch coming from the other lout which slammed just above his

ear and he collapsed onto the floor in agony. Barely conscious, he looked up to see a huge boot coming at his head and thought this was it, he was about to die. Just then he heard a whizzing noise, a loud “*Thwackkkk!*” and the big guy slowly sank to his knees and fell head first onto the wooden floor.

Dazed, Jake looked up to see a familiar face hovering over him.

“Hi son, are you O.K.?”

He looked up in shock to see his father, Bill Stafford, one hand extended to help him up, the other holding a billiard cue. Jake gratefully took the hand and peered into his father’s face.

“Dad, am I pleased to see you.”

He looked warily around the room to see Blakey and his mates struggling out the door, yelling a parting “We’ll get you bastards later.”

“Yeah, well you better bring a few more mates next time, you spineless no-hopers” shot back his father as he sat Jake on a chair. Now the excitement had passed, the patrons wasted no time in turning back to serious drinking.

“How’s the head son?” asked Bill peering at the bruising on Jake’s chin and over his ear.

“I guess you’ll live but you need some ice on those bruises.” He yelled towards the bar “Hey, can we have some ice here please?” The Japanese woman came over with ice cubes wrapped in a tea towel which Jake duly applied to the side of his head.

“Shoni, this guy causing all the trouble is my son Jake,” he introduced her to Jake.

“Thank you Mr Bill, we already meet at the bar,” replied Shoni.

“Ah, so you’re showing off your Japanese skills again are you son? First the language and now the black belt in judo.”

Despite his aching head, Jake nodded and looked at Shoni. She was shy but smiled readily and he could tell she had a strength about her as well as a lively personality. She wouldn’t survive long in a pub in the middle of nowhere if she wasn’t determined to succeed in whatever she did. She was also very attractive, a lovely oval face and a slender figure. He thanked her for the ice and said he would see her at the bar later.

“You must come to our buffet dinner and show tonight. The Chook Man is performing,” she said as she turned back to the bar.

Bill gave Jake a knowing look. “We just might do that Shoni but we’d better get the lad cleaned up a bit.” He grabbed Jake by the arm and led him away towards the caravan park. He pointed to a cabin

“You can doss in this cabin here Jake, go get your gear.”

Jake fetched his bag out of the car and entered the cabin just as Bill was making a coffee. The wood cabin was basic but clean with a separate bedroom, a lounge kitchen area and a bathroom. It had a plastic table and chairs on the veranda.

“Anyhow, I thought you weren’t coming here till tomorrow?” said Bill passing a wet face washer to Jake.

“I got a call from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra and they want me up there a day earlier to take part in the officials’

talks before the Japanese delegation arrives,” said Jake dabbing at his face with the cloth.

“So what’s this conference all about, another useless trade talkfest or something?” asked Bill as he passed a coffee to his son.

“No, dad, it’s probably the most important meeting in the history of Australian-Japanese relations. The Prime Ministers of Australia and Japan will hopefully be signing a trade and defence treaty between the two countries after years of tortuous negotiations. They will be meeting at the new Yellow Water Resort at Kakadu National Park. After that they will launch the opening of the new mine at Jabiru which will produce uranium entirely for the Japanese market. I’ve been working on the trade provisions of the treaty for the last year in Tokyo.”

“So how long have you got here?” Bill asked.

“Just two day but I wanted to catch up with you as it’s been such a long time. How are you finding it here?”

Bill had been a schoolteacher in Victoria most of his working life but after his wife, Jake’s mother, died of cancer five years before, he retired early so he could travel round the outback. He’d camped at Daly Waters for a week, saw that the camping ground/caravan park was up for sale and on impulse had bought it. That was two years ago.

“I’m enjoying it, the locals are friendly, although as you can see they get a little rowdy at times. I’ve met a nice woman up here and I enjoy the life style.” This was news to Jake as his father had never mentioned meeting a woman.

“That’s good, Dad, you need some companionship, it’s been a long time since Mum died.”

“Yeah well, I still miss your mother but it can get lonely out here. Anyhow, you’ll meet Lizzie when we have dinner at the pub. What about you, are you still single?”

“Yep, since I split with Jemma I’ve been on my own but the job in Tokyo is full on and doesn’t give me much time for socialising.”

Jake had been living with Jemma for twelve months prior to his initial three year appointment to the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) in Osaka. She had chosen to go with him but couldn’t adjust to living in a foreign country where she couldn’t speak the local language, had no job and no friends. The fact that Jake was working long hours and travelling a lot didn’t help and the relationship had deteriorated rapidly. After a turbulent six months she decided to return to Australia. Jake had heard she was now married to a banker in Sydney.

Women found Jake attractive, he was thirty-three years old, good-looking, just over six foot tall, lean and athletic with a friendly smile and an easy-going nature, but he had not found anyone who could replace Jemma. While he had a couple of brief affairs with women from the diplomatic set in Tokyo, these had been short-lived and had not offered the companionship he yearned for.

After half an hour of talking, Bill stood up and excused himself, saying he would knock on his door at 7 p.m. and take him to the hotel for the dinner and the show afterwards. Jake looked at his ear and chin ruefully in the mirror as they already turning dark from the bruising. He unpacked his gear, stripped off his clothes and stood under the shower for ten minutes, tenderly washing his bruises. He dried himself off, took some aspirin and stretched out on the bed.

Jake lay on his bed contemplating his future. He was professional at his work but often wondered what he was doing working for Government. He grew up in the country town of Bendigo where his parents were both school teachers. He was close to his mother but not with his father who found it hard to show affection to his children. Jake suspected this may have been caused by Bill's experience in the Vietnam War; he was called up at nineteen under National Service and had seen action in the notorious Battle of Long Tan. He never talked about Vietnam and refused to go to veterans' reunions or walk in ANZAC Day marches. Jake knew Bill was a sniper in the war; occasionally he would take Jake hunting for rabbits and would show his expertise with a rifle.

Jake and his older sister, Melanie, did well academically at secondary school. Thanks largely to an excellent languages teacher of Japanese background, they both excelled in Asian languages, becoming fluent in Japanese, Mandarin and Cantonese. Jake also enjoyed sports representing the local district in football, swimming and athletics. He was close to Melanie who kept him grounded whenever his successes in the academic or sporting fields went to his head. She had become a lecturer in Asian languages at Monash University in Melbourne and was now married with two young children who heaped affection on Jake whenever he managed to return to Melbourne for a visit.

On completing secondary school, Jake studied Economics and Asian Studies at Melbourne University, taking Japanese as one of his major units. On graduating, he was head-hunted by a large Japanese trading company which had major interests in Australia including minerals and energy, shipping, automotive and general trading. He quickly moved up the corporate ladder with the company and visited Japan on business every few months. By the time he was 28 years old he was head of the Trading Division but starting to get weary of the long hours and felt frustrated by the Japanese committee style of decision-making which stifled any initiatives he proposed.

During this time he had frequent contact with members of the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade), a federal government agency, reporting to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, that promotes Australian goods and services overseas through offices around the world. The Senior Trade Commissioner (and Minister Commercial) in Tokyo, Ron White, who he knew well, encouraged him to apply for a vacant Trade Commissioner position heading up the Osaka office. With his qualifications and language skills he was quickly accepted. After three years in Osaka, he spent six months back in the Sydney office before he was promoted to the position of Senior Trade Commissioner in Tokyo, replacing his old boss, Ron White. That was two years ago.

Although he enjoyed his work, he found he was constantly tied up with Embassy matters which were only peripheral to his job of generating business for Australian companies. He was at the beck and call of the Australian Ambassador, Robert Connell, a pompous former Government Minister, who had been given the ambassadorial role as a sinecure for resigning from the Parliament to make room in the Cabinet for an up and coming back-bencher. Connell knew very little about trade and had no Japanese language skills. Hence he relied heavily on Jake to brief him on trade and business issues.

Bill's knock woke him from his reverie and he quickly dressed and walked over to the pub with his father. The garden lounge was packed with people from every ethnic and cultural background imaginable. They were mainly locals, some aboriginal, tables of Europeans, young backpackers, families and "grey nomads". Jake noted with surprise there was also a small group of Chinese. A large sign advertised "Beef 'n Barra BBQ buffet - \$25" and there was a large line-up of people queuing up at the buffet table with plates in hand, waiting for their serve of steak or fish, chips and vegetables. The hubbub of noise made it difficult to hear but Bill steered Jake to a table where a middle-aged aboriginal woman was waving. Bill introduced her as Lizzie Buckstone and she shuffled along the bench seats to make room for them. She eagerly shook Jake's hand.

"Geez, you took your time Bill, I've had to clout two guys already for trying to grab our seats. Nice to meet ya Jake, Bill's told me a lot about you but I can see it was mainly lies just by looking at you."

She gave Jake a once-over and saw a tallish, slim, good looking man with dark hair and a nice smile. "Hey Bill, Jake's obviously got his looks from his mother, he's nothing like you," Lizzie joked.

Bill and Jake sat down either side of her. They started chatting and Jake liked her immediately. She was in her late fifties, ten years younger than his father, and striking in appearance with light brown skin, long wavy black hair flecked with grey and an easy smile showing even white teeth. After they had lined up for their food, Lizzie told Jake her story. She was of part aboriginal descent born at a large cattle property near Katherine to an aboriginal mother and a white stockman who quickly disappeared after her birth, never to be seen again. She was one of the stolen generation who, along with her older brother, had been taken away from her mother as a young child and placed with a white couple in Katherine to be raised. With help from her adoptive parents, she trained as a nurse, worked in a country hospital, met and married a local farmer, bearing three kids to him. However after successive droughts, her husband lost the farm to the bank and became an alcoholic and abusive so she took the kids and left him to return to live with her adoptive parents in Katherine. Once her kids had grown up she worked in a hospital at Mataranka, the closest hospital to Daly Waters. She met Bill at the hospital when he visited for treatment to his back after a fall. They had an immediate rapport and after a courtship of nine months, Bill invited her to move in with him at Daly Waters. She readily accepted and commuted to the hospital in Mataranka four days a week.

Having eaten the largest plate of fish in his life, the local favourite, wild-caught barramundi, Jake looked around the room. He could see Shoni clearing tables in the distant and caught her eye. She smiled and came over.

"Hi Jake, how are you feeling? You've got a huge dark bruise on your ear".

Jake said he was feeling better and chatted with her for a few minutes, before she excused herself, promising to return before the end of the night. Jake watched her admiringly as she rushed back to the kitchen.

"Hey, I reckon she's got the hots for you Jake," Lizzie chuckled. Jake just smiled and to change the topic said, "Looks like the entertainment is about to start."

The first act, a country and western band called "The Daylies", was on the stage and started up singing a mixture of country ballads and rock and roll music. The

female lead singer had the typical nasal voice of country music singers but soon had the crowd joining in and a few couples started to dance on the small space allocated as a dance floor in front of the stage. Encouraged, the band started playing some old standards and invited the crowd to join in the singing. Soon even the table of German tourists were chanting their own interpretation of "Waltzing Matilda" which caused much merriment from the crowd.

After an hour, the band packed up and an old bearded guy wearing a strange bush hat walked on the stage carrying a guitar and a large wooden cage. He sat the cage on the edge of the stage, opened the door and lifted out the largest rooster Jake had ever seen, a white Cleghorn with bright pink crest and jowls. The old guy placed the bird on the top of the cage where it settled quietly. He grabbed the microphone and introduced himself as the "Chook Man." The crowd clapped with anticipation as he picked up his guitar and started singing a ballad. The crowd was fascinated as he played his own compositions about the outback, introducing each new song with a story about the source and meaning of the song.

After playing several ballads, he picked up the rooster and placed it on top of his hat. The bird looked quite at home, sitting comfortably on his head. The "Chook Man" then started up a new song about living in the bush and the rooster joined him in the chorus crowing in time with the music. The crowd loved it, roaring with laughter each time the rooster accompanied him with a well-timed "cockle doodle do". The bird seemed to enjoy the laughter, bobbing its head up and down as if acknowledging the applause. Many of the audience had tears in their eyes from laughing so hard, stomping their feet for more whenever a song had finished. After several encores the "Chook Man" finally returned his rooster to his cage and left the stage to rapturous applause.

Jake enjoyed every moment of the entertainment; it was such an iconic performance which you would never see anywhere except in the Australian outback. The band came back on the stage and started playing some rock and roll and couples started to move onto the floor. Lizzie dragged Bill onto the floor and they started moving easily to the music. Jake had never seen Bill dance before and was surprised how well he and Lizzie danced together.

Jake spotted Shoni walking across the room to clean up some tables only to be grabbed by Lizzie who spoke in her ear, pointing to Jake. Shoni took off her apron and walked to Jake smiling and swaying to the music. Jake got up stiffly, feeling the bruises courtesy of Blakey and his mates, took her hand and walked onto the dance floor. The band had switched to a slow number, Jake took her in his arms and they started moving rhythmically around the dance floor. Jake loved the way Shoni moved so easily in time with the music and felt the smooth silkiness of her body as she moved closer to him. He felt an instant attraction to her and they talked easily as they danced. The band finished the bracket and Shoni broke away from their embrace to continue her cleaning-up duties. Jake let her go after getting her to promise to meet him for a drink when she finished her work.

Jake headed out the back door to the men's toilet and noticed two Chinese men talking intently in the corner table. The older, taller one was clearly the leader while his companion was short and muscular. Jake wondered what they were doing in such a remote town as they didn't seem to be tourists. He walked into the toilet and could just catch their conversation. He found that if he pressed his ear

close to the thin plasterboard wall he could just overhear fragments of their conversation.

The older Chinese was saying in Mandarin

“.....the explosion in the mine will go off first and a second later the other one will blow up the...” The words became indistinct.

“What will be the damage, will it kill...?” Jake assumed this was the younger Chinese man talking.

“The uranium plant and the engine will be destroyed. There will be no survivors in the.....”

“What time are the explosions set for?”

“They will go off at.....”

As Jake strained to hear the answer, two men walked into the toilet talking loudly and seeing Jake against the wall stared at him angrily. Jake recognised them as mates of Blakey and quickly pretended to wash his hands at the hand basin before walking out. He tried to get closer to the two Chinese to take a photo of them with his mobile phone but the older one looked up at him at the exact moment he was taking his mobile out of his pocket so he moved on to avoid suspicion.

Jake was bewildered by what he had just heard. He wondered if he had interpreted it correctly. It sounded like they were planning on blowing up a mine but why would they want to do that? Then it occurred to him that the Japanese and Australian Prime Ministers were proposing to jointly launch the inaugural shipment of processed uranium known as yellow cake from the new uranium mine immediately following the treaty negotiations next week. Could it be that they were planning on sabotaging the mine while so many people would be in the vicinity; ministers, officials, mining employees and journalists?

Jake wondered what to do. Should he tell the local police, the secret service, the Australian Federal Police (AFP)? Would they believe him from overhearing such a short conversation in a foreign language? What would be the motive for such a terrible action of devastation?

He went back to his table and said goodnight to his father and Lizzie who were in the process of leaving. Bill shook his hand and Lizzie gave him a big hug.

“We’ll let you sleep in till 9 am in the morning and take you out to Lizzie’s special place. Bring Shoni if she wants to come.”

Jake sat down and waited for Shoni to finish her work, pondering what action to take if any. He picked up his phone and tapped in the mobile number of Jim Williams. Williams had reached the rank of colonel in the Army when he resigned to join the staff of Malcolm Crichton, the Minister for Defence. Subsequently he was appointed to the Australian Embassy in Tokyo as Defence Attaché. He maintained close contact with the AFP and the Australian Security Information Office (ASIO). Jake had had a few run-ins with Williams in the past and disliked his arrogance but couldn’t think of anyone else he could tell about the conversation he had overheard with the Chinese. He knew Williams was already at the Yellow Water Resort and involved in the security arrangements for the conference.

Fortunately Williams answered his mobile immediately. Jake explained what he had heard. Williams listened intently to his story and then responded

“What the hell have you been drinking Stafford? You really think these people would be planning a major hit like that from a pub in the middle of nowhere? This is all bullshit!”

“But I heard these guys talking about an explosion at a uranium plant.”

“What you probably heard was them talking about another explosion at the refurbished uranium plant at Fukushima in Japan. They’ve just had an accident in the maintenance area which caused a minor explosion. Stop worrying us about conspiracy theories and get on up here where there is real work to be done.”

After a few more terse words Jake hung up feeling frustrated by Williams’ reaction. His respect for him dropped even further.

He looked up to see a smiling Shoni standing in front of him.

“Are you all right Jake, you look worried?”

“No I’m fine, just tired and a bit sore.” He stood up and his hip gave way where he had hit the bar stool in his fight with Blakey and his cronies. Shoni grabbed him under the arm and helped him straighten up.

“Come on, I will help you walk to your cabin.”

They walked to the cabin, Shoni supporting him. Jake said “Would you like to come in for a quick drink? I always carry Japanese green tea with me.”

Shoni smiled as she nodded assent as they entered the cabin.

Jake shuffled around the kitchen, pulled out a packet of green tea-leaves and started making a brew. He asked her whether she knew anything about the Chinese men he had seen but she shook her head. They talked for a long time, sipping their tea before they both started getting tired. Shoni stood up to go. Jake took her in his arms and wished her good night and kissed her gently on the lips. She kissed him back and suddenly they were in a deep embrace. His weariness dropped away as he felt her body through the thin cotton of her dress. He led her towards the bedroom and laid her gently onto the bed.

Chapter 2

SATURDAY – BEIJING

5,000 kilometres away in Beijing, the Chinese Minister for Defence, Zhang Wei, was having lunch with General Lui Chen in a corner of the dining room of the Grand Palace Hotel. General Chen had recently lost favour with the Politburo and had been forced out of his position as head of China’s military. Nevertheless he maintained considerable influence and was a close and loyal colleague of the ambitious Minister.

Zhang was sipping his third cup of green tea after a sumptuous meal.

“Is all in readiness for our plan General?”

“Yes, Captain Xu and his men are in position and everything is ready for the assault at the mine opening on Friday,” said Chen.

“Are you confident that it will succeed?”

“Xu is our best man and an explosives expert. He has a professional team with him. He has never failed in the past.”

“Good, because there can be no mistakes and no evidence to link either of us with the action. Let the world believe it is an attack from an Islamic State organisation. In three weeks’ time the Party Congress is convening to elect a new Politburo which will decide China’s future. I must be elected to the leadership of the Politburo if China is to assume its rightful place as the world leader. I have the support of the Committee Secretary but he will deny all knowledge of it if the plan fails. If our plan works, the members of the Politburo will have no choice but to elect me as their leader.”

The General sipped his whisky. “And the Japanese will be set back years in their quest to become a world power.”

“Yes, they think they have fooled us into believing that the Jabiru mine is just supplying them with uranium when our informants tell us their real intention is to secure supplies of rare earths which they need for their military technology. China controls 95% of the world market for rare earths and we have refused to supply the Japanese with these materials because of their actions to take over the disputed territory of the Senkaku Islands. Our intelligence says that the Jabiru mine holds the richest reserve of rare earths in the world and we must stop the Japanese from getting access to them. The Australians refused our offers to buy the mine and they will pay a huge cost for playing favourites with the Japanese. Without these materials Japan will be prevented from carrying out their plans to build up the technology capability to make them a military power. Most importantly we must prevent the Japanese from expanding their power in the Pacific and put an end to their claims over the Senkaku Islands. It will take them a long time to recover from this set-back.”

“It will be an interesting couple of weeks Minister. Japan will be a spent force after this and you will be directing China’s new path in the world,” stated the General.

They discussed their plans for another ten minutes before leaving the hotel.

Chapter 3

SUNDAY – DALY WATERS

Jake woke up with the early morning sun shining in his eyes through a crack in the blinds. He rolled over to Shoni who was lying on her side with her naked back to him. He studied her thinking that he had never seen anything more lovely in his life. She stirred and reached out to him. He caressed her as she moulded her body into his. He pushed her onto her back kissing her body all over until she could bear it no more and pulled him on top of her.

Over breakfast Jake asked Shoni about her background. She was born in Takayama, a small town in the foothills of the Japanese Alps, and had a typical Japanese upbringing. She had hard-working parents and was the youngest of

three sisters. Shoni was educated at local schools, excelling in English, and decided to move to Tokyo University to study for a communications degree. On graduating, she joined a small public relations company which worked with a number of companies involved in conservation and new energy. She always had an interest in conservation because areas of national parks in Takayama were constantly under threat from developers. As her interest grew in environmental issues, she joined the Tokyo office of the World Conservation Council as their Public Relations Manager. The nuclear explosion at Fukushima Dai-ichi plant in March 2011 had shaped her views on energy and conservation, particularly as it had affected the lives of her grandparents. They had lived near the plant and had to move out of their home for twelve months until the area had been decontaminated. Consequently she was vehemently opposed to the building of new nuclear plants in Japan.

Shoni was twenty-eight years old and faced continual pressure from her family to follow the Japanese tradition of marrying and establishing a family like her sisters. But she was not ready to settle down into married life. She had a number of relationships with men and the last one had ended badly so she decided to leave her job and travel. Her first trip was to Europe where she and a girlfriend spent six weeks backpacking around England, France and Italy. On her travels she met and became friendly with a group of Australians who had encouraged her to visit Australia. She returned to Tokyo and found a temporary job but quickly became restless and applied for a twelve months holiday working visa to Australia.

She had started her trip in Sydney and gradually moved north up the east coast, working occasionally as a waitress to help pay for her accommodation, usually at a backpackers' hostel. After touring seaside resorts on the New South Wales and Queensland coasts she had decided to see the outback, travelling by bus across western Queensland to the Northern Territory and eventually stopped at Daly Waters. Having spent the first night in the backpackers' room at the Daly Waters Hotel, she noticed the hotel was seeking a barmaid/waitress, and on enquiring with the manager, was immediately offered a job for two months. She was now two weeks into her job. At the end of her employment at Daly Waters she planned to travel to Darwin before returning to Tokyo.

Jake suggested she must visit Kakadu National Park which was a unique heritage listed park famous for its waterways, plant species, crocodiles and bird life. A loud knock on the cabin door interrupted their discussion.

"Come on Jake, time to rise, we've got something special to show you."

Jake put on some shorts and struggled to the door to see his father standing there.

"Oh, did I interrupt something? Not to worry, we'll pick you up in ten minutes for our little excursion."

"Right, Dad, I'll be ready."

"You can bring the young lady with you if you want," said Bill smiling and wandered off.

Jake looked quizzically at Shoni.

"I can make it as I don't start work till 4pm today."

Fifteen minutes later, Bill and Lizzie arrived in a battered jeep and Shoni and Jake climbed into the back seat. Bill accelerated and headed off.

“Where are we going?” asked Jake.

“We are going to a special place which very few white people get to see,” responded Lizzie.

Bill drove out past the old airport which he explained used to be a base for the American and Australian Air forces during the Second World War.

“That’s strange, there’s an old plane sitting on the tarmac. I’ve haven’t seen anything but crop-dusters at the old airport for years,” Bill remarked as he turned onto a dirt road.

Lizzie said, “It looks like one of the old planes that the Australian Flying Doctor Service used to have. I think it’s a single-engine Pilatus PC-12. They have long range capability and they were popular in the 1990’s.”

Jake looked at the plane curiously and noticed two men strolling towards the aircraft as the car passed by the airport.

After about thirty minutes the track petered out near a large rocky outcrop and they all got out of the car.

“We’ll have to walk from here, put on your hats and bring your water bottles,” said Lizzie, moving on ahead. After fifteen minutes, Jake could see the rocky outcrop was much larger than it first appeared as they came to an opening between two huge boulders. Walking through the gap, they entered an old dried creek bed surrounded on both sides by steep rocks. The rocks were shaped like beehives with stripes of orange and black caused by wind erosion. They followed the sandy stretch till they came to a bend in the creek bed where the rocks closed in on the trail forming a small gorge. Jake could hear running water and was surprised to see water trickling over the rocks into a large pool.

“There’s a spring up here that feeds into the pool. The drovers used it seventy years ago to water their cattle but it fell into disuse and very few people know of it now. It’s a great spot for cooling off.”

“Come over here, I want to show you something.” Lizzie led them up the gorge, climbing for another hundred metres before squeezing through a narrow opening which tunnelled into the rocks before ending in a large cave.

Jake and Shoni stared in wonder. Around the walls of the cave was the most amazing scene. Aboriginal paintings covered the entire walls with pictures of giant wombats, kangaroos, turtles, snakes, crocodiles, lizards as well as aboriginal men dancing and women cooking over fires. There were ochre- coloured drawings of hands, boomerangs and dongas, scenes of bush fires and battles between aboriginals and white men.

“Very few people know about this place Jake and we want to keep it that way. This is aboriginal spiritual ground and we don’t want any white fellas coming here to disturb our sacred ground.”

“This is just amazing Lizzie, it’s much better than any rock art I have seen before. I can understand why you would want to keep it private,” Jake replied.

“Yeah, you can see some wonderful paintings at Katherine Gorge and Arnhem Land but they’re nothing like this. When you’ve seen enough come down to the pool and we’ll have a picnic lunch,” said Bill

After spending an hour together admiring the paintings, Jake and Shoni wandered back to the pool where Bill and Lizzie had prepared some sandwiches

and fruit using a large flat-topped rock as a table. They ate their lunch enjoying the natural beauty and solitude of the surroundings.

Lizzie asked Jake about the conference he was attending at Kakadu. After listening to Jake's explanation she said intently, "You know Jake that new uranium mine is on sacred aboriginal land. There could be a lot of trouble from groups of activists, not just aboriginal protesters but from the greenies, the anti-nuclear group and conservationists. I have a bad feeling about it."

"I'll be careful, don't worry, there'll be lots of security with the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia there."

"That won't stop some of them, they like the publicity with all the media there. The Kakadu Land Council endorsed the project after a long negotiation but there is still a lot of unrest among my people. My brother Barry lives up at Jabiru and is involved with the Aboriginal Land Council there, so if you're interested you could contact him." Lizzie scribbled a mobile phone number on a piece of paper and passed it to him.

"Enough of this negative stuff, let's cool off in the pool" said Bill stripping down to his jocks and plunging in. Lizzie flung off her dress and followed and after a quizzical look at Shoni, Jake took off his shirt and joined them. The water was surprisingly cool in the shadow of the rocks but it was crystal clear and refreshing. Jake splashed Shoni with a "come-on" urging her to join them. She looked at Jake's lean body gleaming in the water, and with a shy smile stripped down to her bra and panties and quickly slid into the pool next to Jake. Jake was admiring her body as she entered the water and didn't see Bill duck-dive underneath him and lift him bodily out of the water before dumping him head first into the water. That started wild splashing between the four of them before they all lay back laughing and floated in the pool. Jake and Shoni swam around a bend to the end of the pool out of sight of Bill and Lizzi. Jake pulled Shoni to him and kissed her lightly on the lips. He could feel her body cling to him as she responded and kissed him back. She wrapped her legs around his waist and he carried her to the edge of the pool and laid her down on a sandy beach, their passion burning for each other.

Afterwards, Jake looked up at the clear blue sky and thought this was one of the best days of his life. He had always enjoyed the Australian outback but nothing could be better than lying with a beautiful woman in surroundings like this.

"Hey you two, it's time to head back." Bill's voice interrupted their reverie. They hastily dressed and walked back to their picnic spot.

On returning to the caravan park, Lizzie and Bill excused themselves promising to meet again at the pub at sundown. Shoni had to start work again at the pub at 4 p.m. so Jake spent the rest of the afternoon walking around the town looking at the few shops with their range of goods on display; tourist items such as T-shirts, mugs, caps; food and drink; live chickens; antique chairs and ancient agricultural equipment. He enjoyed talking to the shop-keepers who were characters in their own right, telling their stories as to how they ended up in Daly Waters.

The pub was starting to fill up by dusk as Jake wandered over to join Bill and Lizzie on the deck. They sat watching the old gum trees silhouetted by the orange sky of the sunset, talking quietly of their lives over the past few years. Although they had kept in touch by telephone, email and occasionally Skype, it had been

three years since Jake and Bill had seen each other in the flesh. Jake noticed Bill had aged physically in those three years, his short cropped hair had turned white, his skin was like leather due to exposure to the harsh outback sun but he seemed just as fit in mind and body. His father had never been one to show his emotions and Jake had never felt close to him in the past. Seeing his father now made Jake realise how much he had missed his down-to-earth approach to life and enjoyed listening to him talking about his love of the outback. Lizzie's insights into living in the outback and black-white relationships were interesting to Jake who admitted he didn't know much about aboriginal culture.

They moved into the main dining room for dinner and again had the "Beef 'n Barra" buffet. Instead of the iconic "Chook Man", the hotel had a ballad singer and an aboriginal band complete with a didgeridoo player to entertain the crowd and before long there were couples up dancing. Jake saw no sign of the Chinese men he had eavesdropped on the previous evening. Shoni was rushing around clearing glasses from the tables and smiled at Jake whenever she passed near him. Bill and Lizzie had a couple of dances and chatted to the locals. The night went quick enough and after Bill and Lizzie made their goodbyes Jake started to feel tired. He caught Shoni's eye and invited her over to his cabin for a nightcap when she had finished up at the bar. He wandered back to his cabin and turned on the television set and watched an old movie till Shoni knocked on the door and slipped in. He made her green tea and they made their way to the bedroom. They made love again, this time slowly, neither of them knowing when they might meet again.

MONDAY MORNING – DALY WATERS

Jake packed up to leave, trying to be cheerful when he really wanted to stay with Shoni. He kissed her once more, promising to ring her from Yellow Water.

He threw his case in the back of the Land Cruiser and walked over to say farewell to Bill and Lizzie. Lizzie was hanging out the washing in the back yard. A small boy was using an old cricket bat to hit a cricket ball in a stocking tied to a Hill's Hoist clothes line. Lizzie looked around at Jake and smiled.

"Hi Jake, this is my grandson Gillie. He thinks he's going to be a test cricketer."

"Is that so," said Jake, "let's see if he can bat."

Jake picked up a ball and gestured for Gillie to stand in front of an old rubbish bin to be used as a wicket. Gillie smiled showing his beautiful white teeth and big brown eyes twinkling at the thought of a contest. Jake then proceeded to bowl a slow ball to Gillie which was promptly clouted into the back fence.

"Hey, this guy can play. Let's see how he handles a fast ball," said Jake as he swung his arm over a bit quicker before letting the ball go. Gillie giggled shyly and hit the next ball clean over the fence. They played for the next ten minutes while Lizzie finished hanging out the washing.

"O.K. That's enough now Gillie, Jake's gotta get going."

Lizzie gave Jake a huge hug. "You come back real soon Jake, your father has missed you heaps. He talks about you all the time and although he wouldn't say so, he really is very proud of you."

"I'm so glad to have met you Lizzie. Thanks so much for making Dad so happy."

Jake walked with her to the back door and went into the house to say goodbye to Bill. Bill shook his hand and gave Jake an affectionate hug, something he had never done before.

“Take care of yourself son, it’s been good to see you. Come back soon.”

“If I can manage it I just might come back after the conference but it will depend on whether there is much follow-up work.”

“That’d be great son. You know you can take the old Stockmen’s Track up to Kakadu which is a rough ride but a much shorter and more interesting trip than the highway. No one uses it these days. There’s an aboriginal site half way along the track called the Lost Temple which is just a magic place.”

“Thanks for that Dad, if I have time I might take it on the way back. In the meantime, you look after yourself,” Jake said as he jumped into the car and drove back to the junction of the Stuart Highway, veered left and headed straight north towards Kakadu National Park.

Chapter 4

MONDAY AFTERNOON – KAKADU

Jake settled into the long drive north up the Stuart Highway thinking about Shoni and how well the old man had settled into outback life with Lizzie. He was suddenly jolted out of his thoughts to see in the rear vision mirror a large Ford truck tailgating him. He eased off the accelerator pedal to let the vehicle pass thinking the driver must be in a great hurry. The truck roared up level with him and he looked out the window to see the angry red face of Blakey sneering at him from the window of the truck and Skinner sitting in the passenger seat pointing a rifle straight at him.

Blakey shouted at him, “I’m going to teach you a lesson, city boy, you ain’t going to no conference.”

Blakey swerved in front of him, forcing him to veer to the left side of the road. Jake gasped trying to hold the station wagon on the side of the road and braked sharply allowing the truck to shoot ahead of him. Blakey slowed right down again blocking the side of the road, forcing Jake to swing into the middle of the road to avoid being bumped. Blakey immediately swung the truck back into the middle of the highway ramming the side of the Land Cruiser. Jake was trembling wondering whether the idiot was trying to kill him as he veered to the other side of the road. He heard the blast of a horn and looked up and saw a B-Double semi-trailer charging down the highway only seconds from crashing into him. At the last instant he saw a dirt track on the right hand side of the road and swung the wheel violently to just miss the B-Double. The B-Double swung into the centre of the road to avoid him but was then heading straight towards Blakey’s truck, forcing him to drive into a ditch on the side of the road where the truck did a tailspin and ploughed into a barbed wire fence.

Jake fought the steering wheel to stop his wagon from tipping over during the sharp turn, eventually bringing it under control. He stopped the Land Cruiser, peered out the window to see Blakey stomping out of the wrecked truck, shaking his fist at him. The semi-trailer had just continued on. He reversed the Toyota, turned back onto the highway and floored it to escape from the scene.

Jake kept driving fast until he thought he was far enough away from Blakey. He then slowed down to wipe the sweat off his face and breathed deeply to calm his nerves. What would possess Blakey and his mate to try to run him off the road and shake a rifle at him? And how did he know he was going to the conference? He wondered whether he should report the incident to the police but reasoned that it would be just his word against Blakey's.

After two hours driving Jake reached the turn-off to the Kakadu Highway and it took him another two hours before he reached the boundaries of Kakadu National Park. He had been to Kakadu once before and thought it had a strange beauty and uniqueness. He had read that the park covers 20,000 square kilometres, extending 200 kilometres north-south and 100 kilometres east-west. It was listed as a world heritage park because of its huge bio-diversity and ecology accounting for a large proportion of Australia's waterbirds, fish, insects, mammals, crocodiles and plant life. Its enormous bio-diversity extends from the coasts and estuaries in the north through to flood plains, wetlands and lowlands to rocky ridges and rugged sandstone plateaus to the south.

He turned off when he saw the sign to the Yellow Water Resort, a newly built hotel on the edge of the Yellow Water wetlands, which was the venue for the conference. The hotel was magnificent taking the shape of a turtle. It was extensive with two stories set into a tropical landscape surrounded by pools, waterfalls, gardens and a golf course.

Jake pulled into the car park and entered the hotel lobby. The foyer was tastefully furnished with huge aboriginal dot paintings and wildlife murals decorating the walls.

The entire hotel had been booked out for the conference and security was particularly tight. His identity was checked by a security official and he was ushered to a reception desk manned by one of the hotel staff and a DFAT official who gave him his room key, identity card, programme and briefing pack. He found his way into his room on to the second floor and gratefully sat down on a lounge chair, still slightly shaken from his ordeal. He grabbed a beer from the mini-bar, stripped off and took a long cool shower, feeling the tension gradually easing from his body. He looked around the hotel room which was small but comfortable with a view of the tropical gardens and beyond that of the wetlands. The walls were painted in earth colours and adorned by prints of tropical flowers and the wetlands. There was a king-sized bed, two lounge chairs, a coffee table and a small desk with internet connection along one wall. He sipped his beer and settled into a lounge chair reading the programme and briefing material for the conference. He had an hour before his first meeting with the Australian officials' delegation at 5 p.m.

Jake's role in the lead up to the negotiations had been to persuade key Japanese officials to provide improved access into the Japanese market for Australian exports of goods and services, particularly in the agricultural area. As

Senior Trade Commissioner he had the diplomatic title of Minister Commercial in the Australian Embassy and had developed excellent rapport with officials from the Japanese ministries involve in international trade and various Japanese business groups and key corporations. His fluency in Japanese, knowledge of Japanese business practices and network of contacts in the government bureaucracy had been instrumental in bringing the Japanese to the negotiating table. He had earned grudging respect from senior staff of the Australian Embassy in Tokyo who often treated the non-diplomatic staff as poor cousins.

Jake was assigned to the working party looking at market access which had been the main sticking point in previous negotiations. From Australia's point of view the central issue was access to the Japanese market for agricultural products where Japan had been reluctant to open up its markets for products such as wheat, beef, sugar, fruit and vegetables, rice and dairy products, mainly due to resistance from its politically powerful farmers' lobby groups. While there was a trade agreement between the two countries, tariffs and quantitative restrictions remained on imports into Japan of many of Australia's key agricultural commodities.

Jake had been working with several Australian companies in the services industries such as education, tourism, health, finance and legal, and had often come up against government controls and other impediments to breaking into the Japanese market. Japan had similar concerns for its high technology industries operating in Australia including some intellectual property issues so both countries were looking for mechanisms to safeguard these growing areas of trade.

Japan had tabled a request for the removal of all tariffs on motor vehicles and auto parts entering Australia from Japan. While the tariffs were small, only 5% of the value of imports, Australia had refused this request in the past because of competition from cheap imports which threatened the survival of its car components industry. The Australian Government had also made clear its dissatisfaction with the decision by the giant Toyota Motor Corporation to close its vehicle manufacturing plants in Australia by 2017, despite being the recipient of large subsidies over many years from the Australian Government. In the wake of other plant closures in Australia by foreign car producers, this decision signified the complete demise of car production in Australia.

Japan had made strong representations over Australian foreign investment laws and was seeking the removal of restrictions on its present and future investments in Australia. In particular it wanted to be able to increase its investment in mining operations in Australia beyond the current government imposed limitation on foreign ownership of below 50%. This was a particular sore point for the Japanese in sourcing uranium from the new plant at Jabiru as they wanted to have long term security of supplies for their nuclear reactors. Japan also wanted to set up a mechanism to settle disputes on its vast investments in Australia.

Defence cooperation had been ongoing between the two countries for many years but had increased in importance with the expanding presence of China in the Asia Pacific region. China's threatening advances over disputed ownership of several island groups in the East China Sea had made Japan's government hierarchy increasingly nervous about Chinese ambitions. Consequently Japan had entered into a defence and security agreement with the USA and was anxious to

enter into a similar arrangement with Australia as a significant player in the Asia Pacific region. The meetings were expected to draw together and strengthen a number of defence and security arrangements between the two countries, both informal and formal, and combine them into one treaty.

Japan was also very keen to secure the contract to supply Australia with twelve submarines it required to replace its outdated fleet. Each submarine would cost about \$2 billion to build and the Australian defence ministry was about to make a decision on the bids it had received. The short list was down to bids from Japan, Sweden, Germany and the Australian Shipyard Corporation. The decision had to be approved by the Australian Cabinet which was divided between those members favouring the cheapest supplier with the best technological capability (Japan) and the Australian bidder which would provide the maximum Australian content in manufacturing and technology.

Jake walked into the meeting a few minutes to five, noting that all the Australian officials were already there. Despite the tropical setting he was the only one of the men not dressed in collar and tie. He shook hands with the Chair of the meeting, Jenny Antrim, the Deputy Secretary of DFAT, who he had met before and liked, nodded to Ambassador Robert Connell, helped himself to a coffee and a biscuit and sat down for the meeting. Antrim made the introductions before outlining the arrangements for the officials' talks and the subsequent ministerial discussions.

She explained there would be two days of joint working group sessions by senior officials on the major topics of market access, investment and services and defence and security cooperation. The groups would report their conclusions to a Plenary Session of Ministers, led by the respective Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Anna Sentoro and Norio Hayashi and Defence Ministers, Malcolm Crichton and Mitsuo Kenichi.

The Japanese and Australian Prime Ministers were scheduled to arrive on the Tuesday afternoon and would start their program with a boat cruise over the Yellow Water wetlands, followed by a private working dinner at the hotel. On Wednesday they would play golf in the morning and join ministers and officials for the talks in the afternoon. The plan was that the Prime Ministers would hopefully finalise the talks on the Thursday and sign off the agreement sometime that afternoon. On Friday they would perform their final official duty and launch the opening of the new uranium mine at a luncheon on site at Jabiru.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Jenny Antrim allocated officials to the working groups and outlined goals to reach positions for the ministerial talks. They were to work on tactics that evening and meet again over breakfast to finalise their positions. Then she suggested they all meet for an informal dinner in one hour's time where they would meet up with the Australian business delegates. She called Jake aside as the delegates left the room.

"Jake I understand you play golf? The Japanese Foreign Minister, Norio Hayashi, was going to play in the foursome on Wednesday morning but has to pull out because of a wrist injury."

"I haven't played for years Jenny, I'm sure someone else would make a better partner for Japanese P.M. Koshi Ogawa. I'm involved heavily in the officials' talks on Wednesday morning. What about Ambassador Connell?"

"I've talked to Connell and he suggested you because of your fluency in Japanese. Others can fill in for you in the talks in the morning. It's more likely the P.M.'s will discuss key issues during the game so you would be more useful there than in the officials' talks."

Jake sensed that he had been set up by Connell who knew he rarely played golf and could well embarrass himself in front of the two Prime Ministers. He also knew he couldn't refuse the request.

"I guess I'll have to agree Jenny but I won't be a great partner for Koshi-san."

"That doesn't matter, the Australian P.M. is a sports freak and loves to win any contest, especially against a world leader."

Jake went back to his room, annoyed at the request, and began going through the briefing papers. After a while, he wandered down to the dining area where the Australian officials and business delegates were milling around having pre-dinner drinks. He chatted with a number of the key business representatives before spotting the head of security John Carstairs, a short thickset ex-military man. He introduced himself and mentioned to Carstairs the conversation he had overheard between the two Chinese at Daly Waters and that he had passed on the information to Jim Williams from the Australian Embassy in Tokyo.

Carstairs asked him to outline his understanding of the discussion and indicated that he had already talked to Williams.

"It seems a bit thin that they would be plotting some kind of terrorist attack, especially from a nowhere place like Daly Waters. I assure you that we have tight security over every aspect of the visit of the two Prime Ministers, including the opening of the mine. There is no way anyone could get through our security net. So don't worry, we're in control of the situation," stated Carstairs.

Their discussion was interrupted by the arrival of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Anna Sentoro, who made a short speech welcoming the business delegates and officials and invited them all to take their seats at the dining table. Jake looked for his name plate and sat down next to Felix Sherbel, the Operations Manager of Energet, the Australian partner that owned 51% of the new uranium mine at Jabiru.

Jake had scant knowledge of Energet, a little known mining exploration company which had found the new lode of uranium and had quickly developed a commercial enterprise in partnership with some major Australian investors and the huge Japanese conglomerate, Nippan Energy which owned the other 49% of the mine. The Japanese company was successful in becoming a partner in the mine despite fierce competition from Chinese mining interests.

After an investment of \$300 million, production from the mine had now come on stream. The first output of yellow cake had been loaded on to railway trucks for transport via a new rail link to the port of Darwin for on-shipment to Osaka. This was to be launched jointly by the Prime Ministers on Friday.

Jake introduced himself to Sherbel and after exchanging the usual pleasantries, quizzed him about the development of the mine. Sherbel explained that the new mine had the richest reserves of uranium in the world which were estimated to last twenty years and the ore production was to be supplied exclusively to Japan, initially under a ten year contract. After a few drinks, Sherbel opened up a little and indicated the Australian Government had intervened at the highest level to

overcome environmental issues and the concerns of the local aboriginal people over land rights, thereby ensuring the development of the mine. When Jake asked why there was so much interest in the mine by both the Australian and Japanese governments given the current low world price for uranium and availability of uranium from other parts of the world, Sherbel gave a secretive smile and a glib answer about the high quality of the uranium coming from the Jabiru mine. He also dodged Jake's question as to the actual owners of Energet. Jake wondered about his evasiveness but could not get anything more out of him.

Dinner completed, the business representatives and officials dispersed to separate conference rooms to take their places in the various working groups. At the end of the sessions, each group reported back to Jenny Antrim on the agreed tactics for meeting with the Japanese the next day. Everyone then retired to their hotel rooms.

Jake, tired but not yet ready for sleep, wandered into the bar at the hotel, ordered a beer and looked around. A voice called out to him.

"Hey Jake, over here". He looked around and saw sitting down in a corner couch, Helen Kwang, the Asian Economics Editor for the "National" newspaper. He wandered over and lowered himself into a chair alongside her.

"Hi Helen, I wasn't expecting you to be here."

"Yep, I drew the lucky straw and was accredited to cover the conference for the National. I thought you'd be here. I've just done an interview with Anna Sentoro. I'd thought I'd come in early and look around Kakadu before the conference starts."

Jake had met Helen a number of times in Japan, liked her for her honesty and professionalism, something he didn't always find in journalists. He also knew her daughter Sarah Kwang, a fellow graduate at Melbourne University, and that had established a common interest between them. As a government official, Jake was restricted in what he could say to the media but knew he could trust Helen to record any conversations accurately. She was an experienced journalist, had done a number of serious investigative pieces which had earned her a number of awards and respect from her peers. She was now in her early sixties, just barely over five feet tall, a second generation Chinese-Australian; she had spent many years in Asia as a foreign correspondent and was an acknowledged expert on Australian-Asian economic affairs.

After exchanging pleasantries, Helen said, "So Jake, give me the gen? Are the negotiations going to bring about some meaningful trade benefits this time?"

"We certainly hope so, we'll get a better feeling tomorrow after the officials talk. No doubt you raised that with the Foreign Minister."

"Oh, she just gave me the standard line that everything is looking good. She won't tell me whether either side is willing to make concessions. Anyhow, I think the most interesting development is the opening of the mine at Jabiru. I hear there is a huge protest group setting up there, the conservationists, the aboriginals, the anti-free traders, the Japanese anti-nuclear lobby, the greenies and the locals are all up in arms about it. I'm going down to Jabiru tomorrow with our photographer to see if we can find a story there. You should go there as well Jake."

"I wouldn't mind but I don't think I'll get much time off from the negotiations," Jake responded.

“Jake, do you know anything about the Australian company Energet which has majority ownership in the Jabiru uranium mine?”

“No, I don’t, why do you ask?” replied Jake, curious because he had been unsuccessful in his own efforts to find out anything about the company from Felix Sherbel. He had heard that the Australian Defence Minister, Malcolm Crichton was a close friend of Ron Freeman, the Managing Director of Energet, but opted not to mention this to Helen.

“Oh, it’s just that it’s not listed on the stock exchange and I can’t seem to find out who owns it. It’s shown as an Australian company but nobody seems to know who the real owners are.”

Jake shrugged his shoulders and changed the topic. “I’ve been out of touch over the last few days, are there any new developments on the China-Japan border disputes?”

“Nothing new, but the word is that the Chinese are fuming over the Japanese fighter plane flying right over the Senkaku Islands last week. Apparently the Chinese military tried to shoot the aircraft down and the Japanese plane returned fire and damaged one of the Chinese military bases, killing two people. Tensions are simmering there at the moment and could blow up anytime.”

Relations between China and Japan had reached a low point when China unilaterally declared airspace over the uninhabited Senkaku and Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea which had been in hot dispute between China and Japan, both of which claimed sovereignty. Japan, the United States, South Korea and Australia all made strong protests at this provocation and the risk of conflict escalated as Japanese and American aircraft flew deliberately into the newly marked zone. Discoveries of large oil deposits in the sea near the islands apparently triggered China’s actions.

Incursions by China to reclaim land in the South China Sea for military purposes and its decision to send warships into the western part of the Indian Ocean had led to further protests. The U.S.A had responded by deploying additional surveillance aircraft at Australian bases in northern Australia, an action which China had protested against as intimidating.

Their conversation was interrupted when Ambassador Connell, accompanied by some DFAT officials walked into the bar, espied Jake sitting with Helen, and came over to them. “We’re not giving away our negotiating tactics are we Stafford?” said the Ambassador sarcastically as he walked past Jake’s table.

“Certainly not, I was just filling Helen in on the wonders of Kakadu. Did you know that there are two thousand crocs at Yellow Water Ambassador?” Jake replied offhandedly. Connell just grunted and hurried off. Jake winked at Helen, got off his chair and wished her good night.

Jake walked through the foyer of the hotel noticing the Japanese officials’ delegation had arrived in a cavalcade of cars and were in the process of checking in. He went back to his room and decided to give Shoni a call before going through his briefing papers.

Shoni answered on the second ring. “Hi Shoni, how are you?”

“Oh Jake, I was hoping to hear from you,” she said softly, “are you at the hotel now?”

“Yep, settling in for the start of the negotiations tomorrow.” Jake proceeded to tell her of his trip up to Kakadu, starting with attempt by Blakey to run him off the road which caused her to give an audible gasp.

“He is a horrible man, that Blakey. I wish Bill had hit him harder. It’s strange Jake that I’ve seen him hanging around some Chinese guys who are staying in Daly Waters.”

Jake thought about this. “That is strange, I wouldn’t think the Chinese would have anything to do with the likes of Blakey.”

Jake chatted to Shoni about the conference for a few minutes, then said “I really loved our time together over the weekend Shoni.”

“Me too Jake, it was fun,” Shoni responded. Jake felt his heart beating faster just listening to her soft voice.

“I would love to see you again Shoni, can we catch up again as soon as this conference is over?”

“I’d like that too Jake, please come back as soon as you can.”

“I will for sure Shoni. Bye for now.”

Jake disconnected his phone, thinking he hadn’t felt this way about a woman for a long time. He read through his briefing papers for an hour, made a few notes, watched the news on the flat screen television and went to bed. He lay awake for a long time thinking about the last few days, meeting Shoni and her effect on him, spending time with his father and Lizzie, feeling that his life was about to change. Eventually he drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 5

TUESDAY – YELLOW WATER – THE CONFERENCE

Jake woke early and decided to have a pre-breakfast run through the hotel grounds and around the golf course. The resort was located in a beautiful tropical setting with paths running through colourful gardens and lagoons which at that time in the morning were full of birdlife. Jake jogged along a path admiring the scenery in the early morning light. He did a circuit round the golf course and returned to his room, showered and dressed for the day’s session.

He went down to the breakfast room just before 7 am which was starting to fill up with officials from both the Australian and Japanese delegation. He wandered over to the buffet and saw that there was a choice of western or Japanese food. Jake was amused to find traditional Japanese foods laid out across the table. A Japanese chef had been flown in from a leading restaurant in Sydney to supervise meals for the Japanese contingent. He helped himself to some ramen, sushi and orange juice and found a small table on the terrace where he could watch the goings-on of the various groups huddled together in deep conversations. He finished off his meal with tea and toast and studied the faces of members of the Japanese delegation, many of which he recognised. He moved across the room

greeting a number of the Japanese officials and business representatives who he knew well from spending five years in Tokyo.

Suddenly he was touched lightly on the shoulder and spun around to see Saito Watabe from the Japanese Ministry of the Economy. Saito was beaming at him and said in Japanese

“Ah Jake so good to see you again, how are you my honourable friend?”

Jake shook his hand vigorously and replied in Japanese “Welcome back to Australia Saito-san, I’m sure we will have some fun while you are here although we don’t have a Kato here.”

Jake knew Saito well and had spent many a late night drinking and eating with him and some of his colleagues at some of Tokyo’s best restaurants. The Kato was their favourite drinking hole. Saito had a bright personality and was always the last to leave the drinking sessions. He had invited Jake to his home to have dinner with his lovely wife and children several times and at one time had tried to set Jake up with his wife’s sister.

“There doesn’t look like much time for fun in the next few days but hopefully we will sign this agreement and then have some celebrations,” responded Saito.

“Yeah, let’s do that, I’ll catch up with you shortly around the negotiating table.”

After asking about the well-being of Saito’s wife and children, Jake walked back to his room, picked up his briefing papers and headed towards the conference room housing the Market Access Working Group. While Jenny Antrim was the leader of the Australian delegation on the panel, Jake was a key player in the discussions given his deep knowledge of the issues from a commercial point of view and sat in his allocated seat next to Jenny.

Gradually, members of both delegations arrived, all wearing business attire and carrying thick brief cases. There were about twenty delegates from each side, representing various government agencies in food and agriculture, manufacturing industry, minerals, customs, finance and foreign affairs and trade as well as industry bodies and business councils. There were also interpreters from both sides.

After a few quiet words to Jenny, Jake got up from his seat and helped himself to a cup of coffee and readied himself for a long, arduous session. Jenny then called the meeting to order, welcomed the Japanese delegation, set out the objectives of the session and introduced the Australian delegates. She paused from time to time so the interpreter could translate her words into Japanese. Her Japanese counterpart responded in Japanese, also pausing for the translation.

Jake became increasingly frustrated with the proceedings, knowing that virtually all the Japanese could understand and speak English but that the process had to continue. Eventually, the discussion turned to the key issues, starting with access into the Japanese market for Australian food and agricultural products. The items were listed one by one; beef, dairy products, fruit and vegetables, wheat, rice, sugar and so on, all of which were subject to some form of quantitative restrictions (quotas) or tariffs. Jake listened as the Japanese trotted out the familiar reasons why these products could only be included in an agreement if these restrictions could be phased out over a period of up to fifteen years or more. He sighed, realising that only a political intervention could break

the impasse. Then the Japanese side made its requests starting with the removal of Australian tariffs on imports of Japanese motor vehicles and parts.

The discussions moved on but neither side were prepared to make major concessions to break the deadlock. Better progress was being made at the Working Group on Investment and Services with some concessions agreed in providing better access for services into both countries. Australia agreed to look at a dispute settlement mechanism for Japanese investment in Australia but held the line on changes to foreign ownership of mineral resources. The only positive news was that the Defence Cooperation Group had made steady progress in defining areas where closer cooperation could take place.

The talks continued on through the day with only a short lunch break but still there was no real advance on the key issues as each side stuck to its long held positions. Despite long-winded expositions from members of both sides, few concessions were made. By 4 p.m. the joint chairmen agreed to break up the working groups early to allow each side to work separately on the issues that evening in preparation for the Plenary Session with Ministers the next day.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON - THE MINE AT JABIRU

As he had a couple of hours to kill before dinner, Jake thought he would drive to Jabiru to take a look at the mine. He climbed into the Land Cruiser and drove the short distance to Jabiru. The town was well laid-out, tidy and quiet, with neat houses and modern shops surrounded by parkland. It had a population of only 1200, mainly aboriginal. Jake drove through the town onto the road to the uranium mine.

When he approached the mine site he could see that things were anything but quiet. There was a large group of protesters standing outside the gates, waving banners and chanting slogans. In total there would have to be over 150 people there. A large team of security guards formed a barrier outside the gates. They were backed up by local Northern Territory (NT) Police and members of the Australian Federal Police. Jake parked the wagon on the side of the road, and looked around to see if he could identify anyone. He saw some media people and camera crews and recognised the petite figure of Helen Kwang. He walked over to her.

“Hi Helen, I thought I might find you here.”

“Hello Jake I didn’t expect to see you here, what has the conference finished already?” she enquired somewhat cynically.

“No, we’re just having a break before we re-group after dinner. What’s happening here?”

“It’s looking nasty Jake, there’s a lot of opposition to this mine. The aboriginals in particular are angry as they say they never gave permission to build another mine here on their land. But there’s also the greenies, the anti-free traders, the peaceniks, the anti-uranium group, a large contingent from the Japanese anti-nuclear group, some locals as well as the usual professional protesters. There was a clash with the security staff this morning when the protesters tried to force their

way through the front gate. I think things could get ugly when the Prime Ministers arrive to officially launch the mine on Friday.”

They chatted for a few more minutes before Jake took his leave of Helen and decided to take a look around.

The mine was a huge open pit where the uranium ore was extracted and transported to the nearby plant and processed into a concentrated uranium called yellow cake. The pit had created a huge scar in an area of woodland. Jake noticed the mine had an electrified fence all the way around its perimeter and saw some German shepherd dogs tied up by chains inside the complex. He could also see the train, its trucks loaded with yellow cake ready to make the journey to Darwin along the newly built railway line. He noticed some security officers guarding the train.

Among the protest groups he saw a tent with the black, yellow and red aboriginal flag and walked up to an old bearded man sitting on a canvas chair, brushing away flies vigorously.

“G’day mate, do you know a guy called Barry Buckstone?”

“Who wants to know?” he replied offhandedly.

“Jake Stafford, I’m a friend of his sister Lizzie.”

“Oh, hey Baz, there’s a guy here who says he knows Lizzie,” the old guy yelled into the opening of the tent.

A bearded lanky man walked out of the tent. He looked at Jake quizzically and asked, “You know Lizzie?”

“Well, I’ve really only just met her. She was staying with my dad, Bill, at Daly Waters when I visited there last weekend. She told me to look you up if I got the chance when I was up here.”

“Ah, so you’re Bill’s boy. He’s a good man is Bill,” Barry smiled as he shook Jake’s hand, showing gleaming white teeth. “This old bugger is Larry Wilpena,” he said pointing to his companion.

“Come inside out of the heat, we’ve just made a pot of billy tea”. Barry wheeled Jake into the tent.

“How do you take it?” asked Barry.

“As it comes, thanks,” replied Jake. Barry poured the steaming tea into a cup and handed it to him. Jake could smell the fragrance of the tea which was enhanced by eucalyptus leaves floating in the pot.

While sipping his tea, Jake explained how he came to meet Lizzie and what he was doing in Kakadu. Barry nodded his head while Jake outlined the conference and the intention to negotiate a treaty with Japan.

“Yeah all I know about treaties is that the indigenous people can’t get one with the Australian Government, but we sure as hell ain’t happy with this mine they’ve developed. I’m a representative of the Binugy people on the Kakadu Land Council and most of us are dead set against building a mine here. In the 1970’s we had given the miners permission to build the original Ranger mine about ten kilometres from here but once the ore petered out, the land was supposed to revert to the National Park.”

“Now the miners have an agreement which allows mining here. There’s been a lot of in-fighting in the Land Council. There’s something fishy going on. The Prime Minister himself got involved and persuaded Bert O’Shea, the Chairman of the

Land Council, to agree to let the mine go ahead, ostensibly in return for a new school and community centre at Jabiru.”

This was news to Jake, especially about the P.M.’s involvement.

“Surely, it must have been above board. I heard there was an independent report by a consultant on the land rights and environmental issues,” responded Jack.

“Yeah, well I’ve heard a rumour that O’Shea has an interest in the consulting company that did the work, although it can’t be proven as it’s owned by trust companies. He and a couple of his mates on the Council are suddenly flashing a lot of money around.”

“Let me tell you Jake, there could be some big problems when the Prime Ministers come here to open the mine on Friday. This is aboriginal land and we’re not letting it go just like that. I’d stay away from the place if I were you.”

Barry explained some of the history of indigenous habitation at Kakadu and the introduction of mining into aboriginal land. The area has been populated for 50,000 years by the Binugy and other aboriginal tribes who have a deep spiritual connection to the land. There are over 5,000 recorded rock art sites in the Park. The traditional owners manage the park in conjunction with the Australian Government.

Uranium was discovered in the 1970’s, and despite considerable controversy and objections from traditional owners and conservationists, approval was given to mine within certain defined areas which were excluded from the park. The Ranger uranium mine, which was subsequently developed near Jabiru, became one of the most productive uranium mines in the world. However the life of the mine had come to an end and steps were taken to re-include the area in the national park. But then three years ago a major new discovery was made of a rich lode of uranium and other minerals, just ten kilometres from the original Ranger mine. The Government had done an about-face and in fact had reneged on its agreement to return the area to the Park confines so that commercial exploitation could take place.

Jake finished his cup of tea, thanked Barry for his time, walked to the car and headed back to Yellow Water.

TUESDAY EVENING – YELLOW WATER

Back at the hotel, Jake joined the rest of the Australian delegation for dinner. After the meal the delegates were split up into groups to discuss ways of progressing the specific issues. He observed Ambassador Connell dominating the discussions pushing his hard line views of not giving in to Japanese demands for further concessions. By 9 p.m. everyone was becoming tired and touchy and Deputy Secretary Antrim wound up the discussions for the day.

As they were walking back to their rooms, Jake drew Jenny Antrim aside and said, “Look Jenny we’re not getting anywhere here, we’re just rehashing the old issues. We have to come up with a break-through initiative if the Prime Ministers are to agree.”

“Let’s sit down for a minute Jake,” Jenny pointed to some chairs in the lounge. After settling into their chairs Jenny said, “I know it’s a painful process, have you got anything in mind?”

“As a matter of fact I do. Here’s what I suggest.” Jake outlined his thoughts as to a solution. Jenny listened for the next fifteen minutes as Jake explained his proposals.

“I think you may have something here Jake. I’m meeting with Foreign Minister Anna Sentoro in her suite in an hour. Could you prepare a short paper outlining your proposals and join me at the meeting.”

Jake went back to his room and worked furiously preparing a broadsheet outlining the issues and his recommendations for their resolution. He then rushed up to the Minister Sentoro’s suite and knocked on the door. Jenny answered the door and invited Jake in. She then introduced him to Anna Sentoro who invited him to help himself to a coffee.

Jake had met Sentoro previously. She had visited Tokyo twice and Jake had escorted her to a number of meetings with Japanese officials and business representatives. She was in her mid-forties, of Italian origin, petite, olive skinned, dark haired with a lively personality. She had grown up in rural New South Wales in the small town of Cooma at the foot of the Snowy Mountains. Her grandfather, as a newly arrived immigrant from Italy, worked on the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme and her father had also worked as an engineer at the power station. After graduating in law at the Australian National University, Sentoro had worked in one of the major law firms in Sydney specialising in commercial law before returning to Cooma to open up her own law practice. Her popularity in the community led her to be nominated as a candidate for the local electorate when the existing federal member retired. She was elected at her first attempt. Because of her ability to grasp policy issues quickly and her appeal to wide sections of the community, she was recognised as a rising star in the party and performed well in portfolios of Minister for Social Services and Minister for Communications. A few months ago she had been appointed Deputy Leader and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in place of Malcolm Crichton who had to step down from both positions due to a financial scandal.

Anna invited Jake run through his proposal. She listened attentively and questioned him intensively about various aspects. She leaned back in her chair.

“You have some interesting ideas here Jake. Nothing seems to be working at the moment and we must break the current stalemate if we are to sign an agreement. Give me time to think it through and perhaps I’ll run it past the P.M.”

Jake strode back to his room and went straight to bed, tired from a long and frustrating day.

Chapter 6

TUESDAY AFTERNOON – YELLOW WATER

Japanese Prime Minister, Koshi Ogawa, and his Defence Minister, Youichiro Kenichi, accompanied by their personal staff and bodyguards, arrived at Darwin airport in the early afternoon. After being ushered quickly through customs and immigration the group set off in four armoured limousines to Kakadu National Park. The delegation arrived at the Yellow Water Resort after a two and a half-hour drive and was met at the steps of the resort by the Australian Prime Minister, Neville Murray.

After welcoming the visitors, P.M. Murray announced that he had arranged to take the Japanese delegation on a boat cruise on Yellow Water before the official dinner. The Japanese P.M.'s party was then issued with security passes and keys and shown to their rooms.

Having changed into casual clothing, the Japanese party was picked up outside the resort and driven two kilometres to the wharf at Yellow Water. P.M. Murray escorted them onto a small boat where they were taken on an hour's guided tour of the wetlands.

Their aboriginal guide explained through an interpreter that Yellow Water is an iconic area of wetlands which contains a unique profusion of plants, birds, crocodiles, fish and other wildlife. Thousands of people come from all parts of the world to see the unique flora and fauna.

All of the Japanese had cameras at the ready as the tour guide pointed out numerous crocodiles sun-baking on the banks of the estuaries, some as long as four metres. They also saw a huge assortment of birds, magpie geese, whistling ducks, brolgas, jabiru storks, black cockatoos and kingfishers.

After disembarking from the boat, the group was taken to the nearby Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and given a presentation on the history of aboriginal involvement in the area over a period of 50,000 years. This was followed by a culture display and dances from members of the Binugy aboriginal people telling "Dreaming" stories.

The Japanese party were by then showing signs of fatigue and all of them dropped off to sleep in the short ride back to the resort. Once there, they were given an hour to freshen up before the official dinner.

The dinner was confined to the Ministers and their senior staff and a few top level business people. The menu was designed to show the best of local produce in the Northern Territory with entrées of sea-food containing prawns, crab and lobster, followed by a choice of prime beef, kangaroo or wild barramundi for the main course. After the main course, the Prime Ministers exchanged speeches about how they hoped fervently that the Treaty could be signed at this conference. P.M. Murray explained the significance of holding the conference at Kakadu, the first time a major international conference had been held outside a major Australian city. It was one of the most unique areas in the globe, a world-heritage site, and the finding of uranium in the middle of the national park not only benefitted the Australian mining industry and the Japanese energy sector but also the traditional owners of the land through the allocation of the mining royalties generated.

The Japanese P.M. Koshi responded, expressing gratitude to Australia for hosting the conference and for inviting his delegation to visit such an amazing part of Australia which he had never been privileged to see before.

After a dessert of local tropical fruits, the dinner broke up. The two P.M.'s took their coffees and went to a private room for one-on-one talks.

Chapter 7

WEDNESDAY – YELLOW WATER

Jake was up at 6 a.m. for a quick breakfast before heading for the golf course to partner Koshi for the match against Murray and Sentoro.

The golf course looked amazing, verdant fairways lined by tropical trees and colourful flowers, ferns and bushes; every hole had a lagoon or creek alongside the fairways infused with water lilies and a vast array of bird species, magpie geese, kingfishers, storks and wrens. There were several large yellow and black “Beware of Crocodiles” warning signs around the lagoons.

Jake picked out a set of golf clubs and had some practice swings while he was waiting for the others to arrive. The temperature was already warm as the sun rose above the horizon. Koshi arrived with two bodyguards, bowed to Jake and shook his hand. Jake had met Koshi a couple of times before and liked him, although he doubted if Koshi would remember him. He was short and thick-set, dressed in white slacks and a red golf shirt made by UNIQLO, the Japanese fashion house. He had his own set of Taylor Made clubs. He addressed Jake,

“Saito tells me you are good sportsman, black belt in judo huh?”

Jake replied in Japanese “Yes but not so good at golf, I may not be the best partner for you, Prime Minister.”

“Well we will see, we must play our best against Prime Minister Murray.”

Just then Neville Murray arrived with Anna Sentoro, both looking immaculate in casual wear, Sentoro in a designer pair of long pink shorts and crisp white blouse, and the P.M. in a lime-coloured Greg Norman golf shirt and fawn slacks. They were also escorted by two bodyguards. Murray smiled broadly, shook hands with Koshi, wished him good luck, nodded at Jake and headed off to the golf carts. He and Sentoro sat together in one, Koshi and Jake in another and the two pairs of security guards each shared a cart.

P.M. Murray tossed a coin, Koshi called heads and lost. Murray said,

“O.K., we hit off first, shall we make it match play. Would you like a small wager on the game?”

Koshi shook his head in agreement.

“Great, shall we play for \$500?”

“O.K.” said Koshi, a slight smile on his face.

Anna Sentoro went up to the ladies red tee, had a few practice swings, teed up the ball and hit the ball sweetly, a little to the left of the fairway about 150 metres. She was applauded politely by everyone.

Prime Minister Murray strode up to the men's tee, did a few stretching exercises, took out his driver and thumped the ball 250 metres straight down the middle of the fairway. He beamed with pride as everyone clapped.

Then it was Koshi's turn to tee up. He pulled out his drive and hit a long low drive perfectly but a good 40 metres short of Murray's ball. Once again everyone applauded politely.

Jake feeling extremely nervous and out of his depth, pushed his tee into the ground and tried to place the ball on the tee. His hand was shaking so much, it took him three tries before he could get the ball to sit firmly on the tee.

"Here goes nothing," he said to himself as he took a deep breath and swung his three wood mightily at the ball. The ball took off skimming just inches above the ground but to Jake's dismay it smacked into the concrete red mound on the ladies tee and took a huge lob backwards. Everyone scattered as the ball plopped back on the tee a metre in front of Jake's feet.

There was amusement all round and Neville Murray guffawed at Jake's predicament saying, "I'd love to see you do that shot again Jake. Let's make the stakes \$1,000."

Shame-faced and not prepared to take the risk of using the wood again, Jake took out his four iron, carefully addressed the ball and used a slow backswing to hit the ball. This time the ball flew some 150 metres and finished in the rough on the left side of the fairway. Not a great outcome but he heaved a sigh of relief as he walked to his cart.

Koshi murmured encouraging words to Jake as they drove off in the cart to take their second shots.

Jake improved with his third shot but put his fourth into the bunker beside the green. He managed to blast out of the bunker at the first attempt and landed on the green, two putted and finished with a seven. In the meantime, Murray had hit the green with his second shot and two-putted to finish with a par four. Sentoro and Koshi each finished with a bogie five. First hole to Murray and Sentoro.

The next few holes went quickly with Jake starting to grow in confidence as his play improved and he started holing a few long putts. After the first nine holes they were three holes behind.

The tenth hole was a difficult par five taking a dog leg to the left with lagoons on both sides of the fairway and deep bunkers surrounding the green. Koshi hit a solid tee shot but drove his second into rough on the side of the lagoon. Jake descended from the cart to help him look for the ball. There was no sign of his ball and they poked their golf sticks into the reeds on the edge of the lagoon.

Koshi let out a sigh of relief as he spotted his ball just a few centimetres in the muddy water and took his stance with one foot in the water and the other on the bank. Jake was about ten metres away when he sensed rather than saw a ripple in the water. He hurled himself at Koshi in a flying leap knocking him sideways onto the bank just as a huge crocodile launched itself at Koshi. The crocodile just missed his leg but managed to grip his golf stick in its jaws. Jake hauled Koshi up the bank dragging him through the mud as the crocodile angrily tossed the golf club from side to side.

A bewildered Koshi gradually picked himself up not quite realising what had just happened. Then he saw the crocodile swimming away with his golf stick in its mouth and suddenly gasped as the horror of the situation struck him. Jake brushed him off just as the bodyguards arrived in their cart wondering what the commotion was all about. Jake gave him some water and sat him down in the cart

to allow him to recover from his shock. After drinking the water, he calmed down and thanked Jake for his quick action.

Prime Minister Murray and Sentoro drove up and were horrified at Koshi's near miss. After checking that Koshi was unharmed, Murray said,

"You can't continue on after such an ordeal Koshi-san. We will just to have a call it off. Of course that means we win the match and the money," he continued half-jokingly.

Jake couldn't help himself and whispered in Koshi's ear, "That's a crock of shit Koshi."

Koshi got the joke and started laughing. His laugh was infectious and soon they all started laughing. The laughter rumbled on and each time they stopped someone would tell another crocodile joke and they would start up again.

Eventually, Koshi took a penalty drop and continued playing, still chuckling to himself. His game seemed to have improved after the near-miss with the crocodile and they won the next two holes.

Coming up to the 18th hole, Koshi and Jake were still one hole down with one to play. The 18th was a 220 metre par three with the huge green ringed by bunkers. All four players hit their tee shots. Anna hit from the ladies' tee and her ball fell short of the green by about 30 metres, Murray's shot landed on the green about 15 metres from the flag. Koshi hit his shot into the back bunker while Jake's ball hit the edge of the green but rolled back into the front bunker.

Murray looked triumphantly at Koshi. "There's going to be some pressure on you now Koshi-san."

Koshi just smiled and said stoically, "After facing a crocodile, I can handle any pressure."

They walked up the fairway. Sentoro played her second shot but over-hit it, the ball landing on the back of the green, leaving her a 20 metre putt. Jake took out a sand wedge, walked into the bunker, swung at the ball, connected it too cleanly and it went sailing across the green and landed in the bunker on the opposite side of the green.

With Murray watching with a smile on his lips, Koshi walked into the bunker, also took out his sand wedge, calmly lined up the ball and swung easily. The ball flew out of the bunker too high but to everyone's amazement struck the flag near the top and fell straight down into the hole. Koshi threw his arms up in triumph and received a huge high-five from Jake as he walked over the green to pick his ball up out of the hole.

Murray watched grim-faced as Sentoro lined up her putt but missed to the right of the pin. Then he lined up his 15 metre putt carefully, aware that he needed to sink the putt to even the hole and win the match. He struck the ball firmly and held up his hand triumphantly as it appeared to be going in the hole, only to see it lip around the edge at the last milli-second and finish two centimetres past the cup.

The match was a tie. Koshi beamed with delight as he congratulated Sentoro and Murray, then turned around and gave Jake a huge bear hug. Such a show of emotion was most uncharacteristic of Koshi.

After freshening up, they walked into the club dining room where a light lunch had been set-up on the terrace. Jake was invited to join them. They had a

panoramic view of the golf course which was ablaze with multi-coloured tropical plants surrounding the lush green fairways.

They ordered drinks and chatted enthusiastically for a time about the golf match.

Murray downed a beer and leaned over towards Koshi.

“Koshi san, I hope we can come to some form of agreement in the next couple of days but my advisers say they are not making any progress on some of the key issues, especially market access for some of our key agricultural exports.”

“I am getting the same advice from my own officials, especially on the investment issues,” replied Koshi.

They talked about some of the unresolved issues while eating their entrée.

Eventually, Murray looked towards Jake.

“You’ve been heavily involved in the officials’ talks Jake, but I’m advised they are at a stalemate on trade and investment. Anna tells me you have some ideas for breaking the impasse. Please speak frankly.”

“Yes that’s right Prime Minister, we seem to be going over the same issues but not getting anywhere. However, I have suggested some solutions to Minister Sentoro,” replied Jake.

Koshi sipped his beer and said, “Yes, I am also concerned about the slow pace of the discussions. I would be interested to hear your suggestions, Jake.”

Jake drew a deep breath and thought to himself “What the hell, here goes nothing!”

“Well Ministers, I think the only way to go is to take a holistic approach, include everything in the trade provisions so that it is truly a free trade agreement (FTA) with no exceptions. Nearly every FTA in place around the world, excluding the Australia-New Zealand Agreement, has a long list of exceptions and conditions. We should make this a trade agreement with no limitations. I realise this would take a lot of political goodwill and some major compromises from both sides.”

Jake expanded on his ideas while the three listened attentively. Murray looked at Jake.

Koshi interposed, “I am not sure what advantages there would be for Japan? Our farmers would take a lot of convincing that such a deal would be in their interest.”

“A compromise solution would be for Australia to remove all barriers to investment from Japan. There would be no limits on Japanese ownership of investments in Australia. Japanese investment would not be subject to controls by the Australian Investment Review Board. Japanese companies could buy Australian land and properties which would help them develop minerals and food production for the Japanese market. And we could also include provisions for settlement of disputes on investment.”

“That would be a positive outcome Jake but I’m still not sure it would be enough for me to sell the package to my people,” said Koshi.

Jake took a deep breath. “Well we could look at the submarine contract, perhaps as a joint venture.”

Koshi looked surprised at this because to date the Australian Government had been reluctant to talk seriously about including the submarine contract in the negotiations.

"That would be of great interest to Japan," he said emphatically.

Murray quickly intervened, "You have some interesting thoughts there Jake but what you are proposing would be difficult politically for both sides. There would be a lot of senior people in industry and government who would have to come on board. Could you prepare a paper outlining how this would work and what concessions each side would have to make?"

"Yes, I have already prepared a broad sheet listing the issues and concessions to be made for each side and proposing solutions."

"I would be interested in seeing your document Jake," said Koshi.

"I'm happy to pass this on to you with the permission of my Prime Minister," Jake replied.

"That's fine by me Jake," Murray concurred. "Can you translate it into Japanese and pass it on to Koshi-san? If we both see merit in Jake's proposals, we can make that the centrepiece of our talks, rather than go through the detail of the issues again."

They finished up their lunch and Murray turned to Koshi and said

"Well, it's time to get down to work, Koshi-san. The ministerial talks start at 2 pm."

As they broke up and set off towards the resort, Jake asked Koshi in Japanese if he enjoyed his lunch.

"Yes, I did Jake, but what type of meat was it that we had for the main course? It tasted a little like chicken."

"Oh no, Koshi-san, that wasn't chicken. It was crocodile meat," Jake chuckled.

Koshi burst into laughter, bowed to Jake and went off to his room.

Jake rushed back to his room, pulled out his notebook computer, worked furiously on refining his proposals and then translated them into Japanese. He advised Jenny Antrim that the P.M.s had agreed on a different approach and gave her his broadsheet. He sought out Saito and gave him a copy of the version in Japanese.

Promptly at 2 p.m., both delegations sat down for the introductions. Prime Minister Murray welcomed Prime Minister Koshi and his delegation and outlined the framework for the conference. Koshi responded in kind thanking Murray and his delegation for their hospitality and expressing his hope that the conference would be successful in agreeing to a treaty.

The meeting then got down to business following the pre-arranged agenda containing a list of twenty-seven items. The first items covered standard protocol issues before coming to the substantive issues. The foreign ministers and defence ministers led the discussions, starting with a report on the ministerial meetings in the morning. All comments had to be translated by interpreters which doubled the time taken to deal with issues. After an hour and a half, little progress had been made on the substantive issues and the meeting paused for afternoon tea. Prime Minister Murray called Prime Minister Koshi aside and the two had an earnest discussion for the next twenty minutes.

As the talks recommenced, the two P.M.s jointly announced a new agenda item which they called "The P.M.s' Action Plan." They then had distributed a large broadsheet to everyone around the table and in firm language requested the meeting to examine the proposal as their sole priority for the rest of the afternoon.

There was a buzz of surprise and expectancy from both sides of the meeting as they looked at the Plan.

Jake looked at the paper and realised it was virtually a replica of his own proposal. He was even more surprised when P.M. Murray asked him to explain the Plan to the meeting. Somewhat nervously, Jake stood up and went through the package of measures contained in the Plan. He gained more confidence as he went along, switching from English to Japanese to describe each point to both sides.

Jake outlined the issues as succinctly as he could. There were concessions to be given by both sides. On tariffs, it was proposed that Japan immediately phase out all tariffs and quotas on food and agricultural products coming from Australia. In return Australia was to remove all tariffs on imports into Australia of Japanese vehicles and automotive parts.

On investment, both countries were to agree to remove impediments to investment from the other and to enter into an investor dispute settlement mechanism. This would remove the limits on Japanese investment in Australia mining developments such as the 49% limit currently on Japanese ownership of the Jabiru mine. Similarly, both countries would agree to remove restrictions on services provided by the other in their respective countries, in particular on education.

The breadth of the proposal clearly took the delegations by surprise and there was much consternation by both sides after Jake had finished his explanation. But then P.M. Murray intervened and said that he expected officials of both sides to work hard to negotiate an agreement on the basis of the Plan. This would mean convincing some key players in both Australia and Japan to endorse the plan, particularly some major industry groups and corporations. Koshi stood up and endorsed Murray's sentiments.

The meeting continued on into late afternoon, re-generated by the new focus. It then broke up to allow for intensive consultations with representatives of industry groups.

Jake hoped fervently the Plan would work and knew that the sticking point would be to get the Japanese farming interests to agree to a rapid withdrawal of its tariffs on Australian food and agricultural imports. With the Japanese system of working by the committee process of consultation he knew that it would be a long night for the Japanese delegation. He also knew that Murray would have to get the Australian Cabinet to agree to the removal of foreign investment restrictions on Japan investment in areas as sensitive as land and uranium development. But the defining issue would be the outcome of the negotiation on the submarine contract. There was going to be a lot of lobbying work behind the scenes if the Plan was going to be approved.

Jake was heading back to his room when his mobile phone rang. He was surprised to hear his father's voice.

"Hi Jake, sorry to bother you, have you got a minute?"

"Sure Dad what's up?"

"It's Lizzie's brother Barry, he's been arrested and they're holding him in the cells at the Jabiru police station. She didn't want to worry you but I thought you might be able to help out. I'll pass the phone over to her."

“Hi Jake I’m sorry to bother you but Bill insisted I talk to you,” Lizzie came on the line, clearly upset.

“That’s O.K. What on earth happened?”

“He’s been beaten up and arrested by the police at the mine site for supposedly causing disruption. He said it’s all trumped up, he didn’t do anything. Could you go down there and try to sort it out?”

“Yeah, sure, I’ll go down there but I’m not sure I’ll be able to do anything.”

After getting a few more details from Lizzie, Jake hung up, cursing under his breath. He had plenty of work to do that evening but felt obligated to go to Jabiru and see if he could contact Barry. He jumped into the four wheel drive and drove the short distance to the Jabiru township, pulling up outside the police station. The station was a small square building in the main street. Jake walked up to the door which had a sign saying the office was closed. He could see a light at the back so he rapped on the door. Nothing happened so he knocked again this time very loudly. Eventually he heard footsteps and a young burly constable opened the door.

“Sorry mate we’re closed, you’ll have to wait till tomorra morning.”

“Look, my name is Jake Stafford and I want to visit Barry Buckstone who is locked up here. He’s a friend of mine and I must talk to him.”

“Sorry mate, no visitors allowed till the morning.”

“Look all I want is five minutes with him. I’m with the Australian Government and it’s important I see him now.” Jake flashed his security badge from the conference.

The constable, whose name was Angove, appeared confused as he saw Jake’s pass.

“Orright , but you’d better be quick. I’ll have to check you out for weapons.” He patted Jake down and led him through to the office to the holding cell. The cell was just a small room with a two-foot square opening on the door which served as a window. The constable yelled out through the window.

“Barry, you’ve got a visitor.”

When he received no answer, the constable peered through the window.

“Christ, he’s lying on the floor.” Quickly, he pulled out his keys and unlocked the door. They both rushed in to see Barry spread out face down on the floor, clearly unconscious and with a huge lump on the side of his skull. He also had some cuts and bruises to his face and arms. Jake checked his breathing and the pulse under his neck. He was breathing shallowly and his heartbeat was steady but weak. He and the constable rolled him onto his side and checked his airways.

The constable said “I’d better call Sergeant Barker and let him know what’s happened.”

“No you won’t, you’ll call for the ambulance right now. This could be serious by the look of that lump on the side of his head,” Jake replied angrily.

“But he looked fine when I last checked on him; he had some cuts and bruises but he was talking O.K.”

Jake lost patience. “Just ring the bloody ambulance or do you want another case of a black death in custody?”

Constable Angove picked up the phone and rang for an ambulance. He then rang his sergeant. They tried to make Barry comfortable while they waited,

loosening his clothes and shoes. In less than ten minutes the ambulance arrived and two officers quickly checked Barry over and gave him oxygen. Sergeant Neville Barker came bustling in shortly after and was quizzing the constable as to what had happened. Barker, one of only a handful of aboriginals to make the rank of sergeant in the NT Police Force, had been in charge of the Jabiru Police Station for three years and knew Barry.

"It looks like he's passed out after taking a heavy blow to his head. We can't take any risk with head injuries. We're going to have to take him to Darwin Hospital straight away," said one of the ambulance officers.

"But he's locked up for been involved in the riot at the mine," argued the sergeant.

"Doesn't matter, he's got to be checked out properly for any brain damage" retorted the ambulance driver as he and his colleague lifted Barry onto the stretcher.

As he was placed on the stretcher, Barry stirred and opened his eyes.

"Christ what's happened?" he said as he tried to sit up.

"It's O.K. Barry, you've had a hit to your head and blacked out," replied Jake, putting an arm on his shoulder as the ambulance man gently pushed him back.

"Jake, what are you doing here?"

The sergeant barked, "Yeah, who the hell are you?"

"Your sister asked me to check on you when she heard you'd been locked up. It's just as well I did because the constable and I found you lying unconscious on the floor."

Jake followed the stretcher out of the police station and watched as Barry was lifted into the back of the ambulance. He was starting to get some colour back in his face. After he was settled into place, Jake climbed into the back of the ambulance and crouched alongside him.

"Do you feel like telling me what happened?" Jake asked.

"Look, it was a set-up. It was meant to be a peaceful protest. We were chanting our anti-mining slogans outside the wire fence at the mine when one of those dickhead anti-nuke protesters threw a rock at a security guard whacking him on the head. The guard retaliated by grabbing the dickhead and then someone else threw another rock. There was a lot of pushing and shoving and it got out of hand. Suddenly, a whole mob of coppers appeared flaying us with truncheons and pushed us all back, knocking a few heads in the process. I copped a stick right across the back of the head and went down like a bag of spuds. Then a guy from the mine sprayed us all with a fire hose and everyone scattered leaving me lying there semi-conscious. The coppers dragged me into the back of the paddy-wagon and locked me up in the cop shop. I thought I was O.K. but I started getting woozy. Next thing I knew I was lying on the floor in the cell."

The ambulance officer said "We're all set to go," and asked Jake "are you coming with us?"

Barry replied "No need for you to come Jake, just let Lizzie know where I am. She'll arrange for a lawyer to fix this up and let my wife know what's happened. Thanks for your help."

Jake jumped out of the back of the ambulance, pulled out his camera phone and took a photo of Barry. "I'll send this photo to Lizzie so she'll know you're O.K."

“What about you Sergeant, are you coming?” asked the ambulance officer.

“No, the silly bastard doesn’t need a police escort. But there could be charges so I’ll get the boys in Darwin to keep an eye on him.” He waved the ambulance off and walked back into the station, motioning Jake to come with him.

The sergeant introduced himself. “What’s your interest in all this, fella?”

Jake explained the reason for his visit to Kakadu and how he came to know and call on Barry.

The sergeant listened intently occasionally interrupting with questions.

“O.K., I’d appreciate it if you stay away from here in the future and keep quiet about what’s happened. We’ve got enough on our hands with the protesters over the mine opening. The media were all over the protest yesterday and we certainly don’t want them getting any word of an aboriginal found lying unconscious in gaol and being carted off to hospital in Darwin.”

“No problem, Sergeant, I won’t be saying anything to anyone. But is Barry really in trouble here? He doesn’t seem the violent type. ”

“I know Barry and I’d be surprised if he was one of the ringleaders in the attack on the security staff,” Barker admitted. “We’ll look at the surveillance video and see who the real culprits are. There seemed to be some professional protesters there and it looks like someone tipped off the media to be there at the right time. If Barry’s not involved in the violence he’ll be in the clear.”

“Thanks for that Sergeant. If that’s all, I’ll be off”

“O.K. but keep a lid on this,” repeated the sergeant as he waved Jack off.

Relieved, Jake pulled out his mobile phone and rang Lizzie. At first Lizzie was horrified, but then calmed down after Jake explained that Barry seemed to be recovering. She indicated she would arrange for a lawyer to handle any charges. She thanked Jake profusely as she hung up.

Feeling hungry and realising he was going to be too late to eat dinner back at the resort, Jake looked for a take-away café but could only see a pizza shop. He walked into the shop, studied the menu on the blackboard and ordered a pepperoni pizza. He looked around the shop and the only people inside were a group of Japanese who were sitting at the tables eating pizza. Jake noticed that one of them had a bandage around his head and assumed that they were part of the anti-nuclear protest lobby. One of the Japanese women had her back to him but her long hair tied in a ponytail and slim body shape looked familiar. She turned around and he could see her profile.

“My God, it’s Shoni!” he cried out, completely shocked.

She looked round in surprise. “Oh, Jake!” She jumped up from the table and put her arms around him, much to the amazement of the Japanese group.

Completely taken aback Jake asked, “What are you doing here, Shoni?”

She blushed. “Come with me Jake, I can explain.”

She pulled him by the hand leading him out of the shop onto the footpath. She looked him straight in the eye.

“Jake, I’m here with the protesters. I told you my grandparents’ lives were destroyed by the explosion at the uranium plant at Fukushima. I’ve been a member of the anti-nuclear association in Japan for many years. I’ve made friends with many people in the group and wanted to support them while I was in Australia.”

“But why didn’t you tell me you were coming up here? I have no problem with you being opposed to nuclear energy.”

“Because you are with the Australian Government and I thought you might want to stop me protesting. And you could get into trouble with your superiors if you were seen to be associating with a protester.”

Jake said angrily, “So you were staying at Daly Waters because you were on your way to the protest. You were lying to me!”

“No Jake, I’m not lying to you. I have a job at Daly Waters for two months, I like it there and I’m going back there after the mine opening. Everything I told you is the truth. I just didn’t mention I was going to the protest for a few days because I thought you wouldn’t like me being involved.”

“I’m not sure whether to believe you or not.”

She looked up at him, tears starting to fall down her cheeks.

“Please don’t think badly of me Jake. I care for you so much.”

“If you really care for me, you will go back to Daly Waters immediately. There is danger here. Did you get caught up in the riots today?”

“Yes, we were sprayed by a fire hose and our leader was hit in the head by someone throwing a rock.”

“Well it could get a lot more violent. I have heard a rumour about a possible terrorist attack. You and your comrades should get out of here.”

Shoni looked shocked. “All right Jake. I can’t leave now but I promise to leave first thing tomorrow morning.”

Jake said “For your own safety please go. I thought we had something special between us but I don’t feel that you have been honest with me.”

“That’s not true Jake, I never lied to you. I do care for you but we have only just met and I didn’t want to do anything that would upset our relationship.”

He looked at his watch. “Look I have to get back to the conference. I’ll call you tomorrow once you’re back at Daly Waters.”

She looked at him with those soulful brown eyes. He wiped the tears off her face, gave her a quick hug and hurried off, leaving her standing alone outside the pizza shop.

He jumped into the Toyota and headed back to Yellow Water, feeling confused and angry. A Jeep roared past him coming from the opposite direction and he caught a fleeting glimpse of the driver and his passengers. Despite his weariness, Jack did a double take. The driver looked like Blakey and his two passengers resembled the Chinese he had seen in the Daly Waters Pub. He stopped the vehicle and looked back but the Jeep had already disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Having left his pizza behind in Jabiru, Jake walked into the hotel restaurant hoping to get a quick snack. The restaurant was about to be closed but he managed to salvage some salad and fruit from the buffet and sat by himself out on the terrace overlooking the hotel gardens. He knew he was late for the evening’s meetings but he needed a break before getting back into the negotiations. He ordered a glass of wine to settle his nerves. His mind was buzzing with questions. Seeing Shoni at Jabiru had brought on mixed emotions of confusion and betrayal. They had enjoyed a few days together but how well did he really know her? She was under no obligation to tell him anything about her plans so what right did he

have to question her? Was Barry Buckstone going to be all right and was there going to be further trouble at the mine? What were Blakey and the Chinese doing in Jabiru if indeed it was them in the Jeep?

He snapped himself out of his reverie and found the meeting room which was being used by the Australian delegation. He slipped quietly into a seat at the end of the table, hoping he wouldn't be noticed.

"Ah here comes Jake at last. Christ you drop us in this huge hole and then just disappear." Jake looked over to see Ambassador Connell sneering at him.

"I'm sure you could dig us out of a hole anytime, Ambassador," Jake retorted sarcastically. Connell went red in the face and was about to answer when Jenny Antrim interrupted. "Right everyone, let's start allocating tasks so that we can get clearances for our position for tomorrow's talks."

Jenny then allocated tasks around the table, including some for Jake on market access.

"We'll have to burn the midnight oil, so let's go get agreement from our industry people and government agencies as the P.M. has ordered. We'll meet here again after breakfast at 8 am to review the outcomes."

Jake spent the next two hours in his room on the phone to several industry chiefs and senior government officials. He sought their approval by email for the position to be taken at the negotiations the next day.

By midnight he had done as much as he could and switched on the television to unwind. He found the National News channel and was having a coffee when he suddenly saw coverage of the riot at the mine. The news item showed the protesters pushing against the security staff trying to get into the mine. One of the protesters had wire cutters and started hacking into the fence. Jake caught a glimpse of Barry Buckstone in the forefront of the protesters, holding up a sign saying "This is aboriginal land!" Then the camera caught sight of a flurry of rocks been thrown from the back of the crowd, knocking one of the security staff to the ground.

The camera panned around to catch a group of policemen charging into the protesters and forcing them back by using their shields and truncheons. One of the security staff had a fire hose and was pummeling the protesters, forcing them backwards. In a flash the protest was over as the protesters retreated from the fence. Jake saw Barry lying on the ground and being pulled up by one of the police. As the program switched to another news item, Jake switched the television off and lay on the bed, too tired to remove his clothes.

Chapter 8

THURSDAY – YELLOW WATER

Jake slept fitfully during the night, awoke at 6 a.m. and decided on a quick walk around the grounds of the hotel before going to breakfast. While finishing breakfast he saw Saito come into the restaurant and waved. Saito beamed with

delight at the sight of Jake and sat down opposite him. They discussed the conference and Saito seemed ebullient about the prospects of getting an agreement. Jake was gratified that Saito had been allocated to the same Joint Working Group on Market Access.

The Australian delegation re-convened in its conference room at 8 a.m. Anna Sentoro, Jenny Antrim and Robert Connell were all there surrounded by Australian officials. Sentoro started off by emphasising the importance of breaking the impasse in the trade talks and passed over the meeting to Jenny Antrim. Jenny outlined the progress made overnight and set out the issues on a large whiteboard.

The morning was to be taken up by Joint Australia-Japan Working Groups on the major issues, each of which would report after lunch to the Plenary Session headed by the two P.M.s . If the negotiations were completed successfully, the P.M.s would jointly sign the agreement at a press conference in the afternoon.

The delegates rose and went to their respective working groups to continue the talks with their Japanese counterparts. Jake was pleasantly surprised that his group disposed of most of the issues one by one and by 11.30 a.m. the negotiations had gone as far as they could. Jake and Saito had played an influential part in achieving compromises within their respective delegations. The main stumbling block in the Market Access Group was the phase-out period of tariffs in Japan on imports of Australian agricultural products; the Japanese delegation wouldn't agree to anything less than a ten year phase out period. This would be left to Ministers to sort out given the political implications.

One by one each of the Australian leaders of the working groups returned with agreed outcomes. Anna Sentoro marked the issues off on the whiteboard as the leaders reported back.

By midday the Working Groups had concluded their work with 90% of the issues resolved. Apart from the agricultural imports phase-outs, the remaining unresolved issues were the Australian restrictions on foreign ownership of uranium mining, the tariff issue on imports of Japanese automotive and auto parts into Australia and the submarine contract.

Both sides retired for lunch and agreed to reconvene for the plenary session at 2 p.m.

As Jake walked over to the lunch venue he was tugged on the arm by John Carstairs.

"Come with me Stafford," Carstairs commanded.

Jake nodded and followed Carstairs into the bar area where Jim Williams was waiting for them. They sat down on some lounge chairs.

Jake looked at them seeing consternation on their faces.

"What's up?"

"You getting involved with those protesters is what," said Williams.

"You were seen talking to those aboriginal activists at the mine on Tuesday and we heard you were talking to one of the ringleaders of the riot at the Jabiru Police Station last night. Can you explain what you're up to? "

Jake patiently explained the reason for his initial contact with Barry and for his visit to the police station the previous night.

Neither of them looked convinced at his explanation. Carstairs said, "You could be in serious trouble over this Jake. Barry Buckstone is seen as a troublemaker over the mine opening and one of the instigators of the riot."

"That's not what I heard from Buckstone or Sergeant Barker who was there. The sergeant reckons there were other instigators who started throwing rocks. Video surveillance at the mine will tell you who the real culprits are."

"We'll check that but I want a written report on your involvement by tonight. We'll have to inform Ambassador Connell. There's a good chance that you'll be sent back home on this and receive a reprimand."

"That's crazy. I'm an innocent bystander on this. But for my intervention there could be another black death in custody case. The guy was lying on the floor unconscious when I visited him."

"Jesus, the last thing we'd want is the media to find out about this with the P.M. about to launch the opening of the mine," stated Williams. "You'd better keep your mouth shut."

Jake was starting to get angry. "I've got no intention of telling anyone about this but you'd better be careful about your accusations."

"All right, we'll keep this to ourselves for the moment - but I still want your report by tonight."

Jake walked off fuming to join the Australian delegates for lunch. He never had much time for people from the intelligence agencies who seemed to overreact to the slightest hint of subversive activities. He could understand their concern about security, given recent bombings in Australia carried out by individual Islamic State extremists that had resulted in the death of a number of innocent Australians - but their approach was often closer to paranoia rather than a realistic assessment of threats.

In his hotel room, Prime Minister Murray hung up the telephone. He had just completed calls to the chairmen of some of Australia's major corporations including Toyota Australia, the Australian Shipyard Corporation and Energet and was pleased with their responses to his requests.

Before joining Parliament, Murray had a successful career in business and had made a fortune after selling his information technology business. He was recruited by the Liberal Party in Melbourne and had moved rapidly up the ranks of Parliament drawing on his business acumen and demonstrating strong leadership in devising policies that would appeal to the voters. When the Party was in opposition, he was appointed to the Shadow Cabinet and eventually elected Leader of the Opposition. He won his first election four years ago, largely thanks to a dysfunctional Labor Government which was riven by factional in-fighting. In his first term as Prime Minister he had managed to steer the economy through a growth period as well as introduce a number of social and economic reforms. However, the Liberal Party had just scraped in at the last General Election a year ago but was now behind in the popularity polls because of poor statistics on the economy, a number of broken promises and gaffes from some of his ministers. Recently he had faced a challenge from within his own party from Malcolm Crichton who was then Deputy Leader of the Party and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. However, the day before the vote for the leadership, the National newspaper broke a story about Crichton's interests in a mining development

which showed a clear conflict of interest and he was forced to withdraw his challenge. Murray then called on the party to vote on the deputy leadership and encouraged Anna Sentoro to run as Deputy Leader. She easily beat Crichton in the ballot and was subsequently promoted to Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. A disgusted Crichton was moved sideways to the Ministry of Defence.

Murray badly needed some good news on the political front and was determined to sign off on the treaty with the Japanese. He had worked hard on his Cabinet members and business leaders to accept compromises on the issues which had stalled progress of the Agreement. At 2 p.m. he waited outside the conference room until Japanese P.M. Koshi arrived, bowed to him and invited him to enter the conference room.

Both delegations stood as one as the two P.M.s entered the room and waited till the P.M.s had taken their seats opposite each other in the middle of the table before resuming their seats.

Each of the leaders of the Joint Working Groups presented their findings to the P.M.s and handed out their agreed recommendations. After a brief discussion they endorsed the recommendations. That left only the contentious issues on market access, investment and the submarine contract to resolve. They discussed the issues for the next hour before calling a halt. P.M. Murray announced that the meeting would break for one hour while he and Koshi met privately in a separate conference room for one-on-one discussions. On the way out P.M. Murray beckoned to Jake to accompany them. Jake was caught by surprise but went along as asked. Sitting down in the small conference room, Jake looked up expectantly at P.M. Murray.

“Jake, as this Action Plan was your idea, I’d like to get your view on how we resolve these remaining issues. P.M. Koshi says he trusts you, especially after your performance on the golf course.” Koshi nodded affirmatively, beaming at Jake.

Jake thought carefully before replying. “Well to be honest Prime Ministers, if we are going to have a treaty incorporating free trade, that’s what it ought to be. Let us show the rest of the world how a proper free trade agreement should be and remove all barriers to trade and investment. The more exceptions and concessions you have to make, the less effective the agreement is in actually expanding two-way trade. In compensation for Japan removing all barriers to imports from Australia I would suggest that our Government award the submarine contract to Japan but with maximum Australian content. This would demonstrate what a close relationship the two countries have in defence and security.”

Jake was encouraged by the nods of approval by both P.M.s and went on

“So here’s what I would do if it was up to me.” Jake then spent the next thirty minutes explaining his views.

The P.M.s listened attentively, asked a few more questions, then both stood up and thanked Jake for his input. Jake walked out, buoyed by the honour of being invited to give his views but also relieved to be out of there.

Jake walked out of the room only to be confronted by the beefy figure of Ambassador Connell, miffed that Jake had been asked to give his views and not himself.

“What went on in there Stafford, what were you saying to them?” demanded Connell.

“Oh we were just talking about our game of golf yesterday. Koshi wants to go back and look for his golf club in the lagoon,” Jake said smiling at the Ambassador as he walked back to the main conference room.

One hour later the P.M.s walked back into the conference room and addressed the delegates. Murray spoke first.

“Prime Minister Koshi and I have agreed on a seven-point plan as the foundation of an historic treaty between the two nations; these are as follows;

1. Japan and Australia will enter into a new defence alliance which will help to enhance security cooperation in the Pacific region.

2. Japan will phase out within twelve months all tariffs and quotas on imports into Japan of Australian food and agricultural products.

3. Australia will remove immediately all tariffs on imports of Japanese vehicles and auto parts into Australia.

4. Australia will remove all restrictions on Japanese ownership of Australian resources and land.

5. Australia and Japan will each provide safeguards on investments from the other country including a dispute settlement mechanism.

6. Both countries agree to remove impediments to the provision of services by the other in their respective countries.

7. Australia and Japan will enter into a joint venture to manufacture twelve submarines, the vessels to be built in Australian shipyards with the design and technology to be provided by Japan.”

Koshi repeated the words in Japanese for the benefit of his delegation.

The P.M.s concluded by saying that all impediments had now been removed and that the drafting of the treaty would be completed that afternoon. They thanked all the delegates for their hard work and advised that there would be the formal signing of the agreement at a press conference at 5 p.m. that afternoon.

There was a stunned silence around the table at this announcement. Then a rumble of applause started and continued until it became a crescendo. Even the normally sedate Japanese were laughing and high-fiving. Jake almost whooped for joy. This was an historic breakthrough in bilateral agreements especially with so many complicated issues to resolve.

Drinks were promptly brought into the reception area outside the conference room. Anna Sentoro and Jenny Antrim thanked Jake for his contribution and then departed to draft the final agreement. Jake went over to Saito and they toasted each other with flutes of champagne.

The press conference was held in a roped off area of the resort’s foyer. Jake was surprised at the number of media in attendance. All the major Australian newspapers were represented as well as the national broadcaster and two of the commercial television stations. There were also representatives from the major news networks in Japan. Photographers and television cameramen were setting up their equipment.

Promptly at 5 p.m., the two Prime Ministers walked to the dais both beaming for the cameras. P.M. Koshi spoke first, stressing the importance of the treaty to

Japan and thanking the Australian Prime Minister and his delegation in gracious terms for their part in completing the negotiations successfully.

Murray was ebullient, lauding the benefits of defence and economic cooperation between the two countries. He explained that Japan was Australia's second largest trading partner with two-way trade exceeding \$70 billion and this would now rapidly escalate thanks to the free trade benefits of the treaty creating new employment opportunities for Australians. The two countries had complementary economies and a similar objective of a secure Asia Pacific region, they were close friends and the treaty would bring them even closer together.

Two originals of the Agreement, each bound in a leather folder, were presented to the P.M.s for signature. They posed for the cameras while signing the Treaty.

The media were then invited to ask questions which lasted for another thirty minutes. Finally, both P.M.s gave radio and television interviews. Murray made the most of his role in the negotiations indicating he had made a number of personal interventions on critical issues to secure the Treaty. He would make this a key factor in his re-election strategy. He then invited the press to attend the opening of the Jabiru mine the following morning.

By 6.30 p.m. the formalities were all over and Jake heaved a huge sigh of relief. He could have a few drinks and a relaxing meal tonight to celebrate. There was to be a celebration party at 8.30 p.m. in the resort's ballroom for all the delegates, which he intended to attend briefly. He would prefer to be celebrating with Shoni, his father and Lizzie. He just had to attend the opening of the mine tomorrow morning before he was free to take some time off. It was an exhilarating thought.

He went back to his room, ripped his tie off and lay flat on the bed, the exhaustion of the last few days creeping over his body. He picked up his mobile and keyed in Shoni's number but there was no response and the call went to her message bank. After leaving a brief message he rang Bill and told him the conference was over and that he hoped to visit him again in the next few days. Bill was delighted at the news. Jake asked about Shoni's whereabouts but Bill replied he had not seen her for a couple of days.

Jake decided to have a relaxing swim in the resort's pool, undressed, put on a pair of bathers and thongs, grabbed a towel and wandered down to the pool. The pool was turtle-shaped and surrounded by palms and various types of tropical bushes with their bright flowers. He had the pool to himself as he stepped in and started swimming using long easy strokes. The water was warm and he felt energised as he carved through the water doing lap after lap of the pool. He increased his speed feeling at peace as he became totally absorbed in the swimming. He did thirty laps before hauling himself out of the pool feeling weary but relaxed in mind and body.

On the way back to his room he saw the Foreign Affairs Minister Sentoro coming towards him. Casting an appreciative eye over Jake's lean dripping body, she said "Cooling off after a long day Jake? I thought you'd be celebrating in the bar with rest of the team?"

"I'm not really the social type Minister," Jake responded.

"Well you made a big input today. I need people like you in my office. Make sure you come to the party tonight," she commanded with a sparkle in her eye.

"Will do Minister," replied Jake as he headed back to his room.

Back in his room, Jake changed into a sports shirt and cotton slacks and went down to the main restaurant and filled up a plate from the buffet. He saw Ambassador Connell in earnest discussion with the Minister for Defence Crichton and Defence Attaché Williams but managed to avoid them and sauntered out on the terrace where he found an unoccupied table and sat down. He enjoyed the noises of the tropical night, the bird calls, the chirping of cicadas and crickets, the gurgling of frogs and the strident calls of the geckos. He thought how pleasant it would be to live in a tropical hideaway and once again contemplated his future.

He returned to his room, sat on the bed, opened a can of beer and watched the news channel on television. Before long up came vision of Prime Ministers Koshi and Murray signing the treaty followed by an interview with an impassioned Murray who extolled the virtues for Australia of the free trade provisions and the submarine contract. He even recounted the incident at the golf course, implying that he personally had saved Koshi from the clutches of a crocodile.

Around 9 p.m. Jake walked into the Tropical Ballroom, the venue for the party for the participants in the negotiations. The party was in full swing, loud music coming from a four-piece band playing pop music. People were on the dance floor swaying to the music while others were standing on the terrace with drinks in hand. Jake pushed his way through the crowd to the bar, ordered a beer, and looked around the room. He spotted Saito in a small group of Japanese officials, who saw him and waved him over. He shook hands vigorously with Jake and introduced him to his colleagues. Jake knew most of them and bowed to each one before joining in the conversation. Saito was beaming as he explained to the group Jake's role in the negotiations. They were all excited over the success of the talks and pleaded with Jake to tell the story of the golf match. After much prodding from Saito, Jake started to recount the incident with the crocodile but his account was interrupted by the sound of applause as P.M. Koshi, accompanied by two bodyguards, entered the room smiling and bowing.

As he walked across the room, Koshi spotted Jake and Saito and came over to them greeting Jake like an old friend. Jake offered his congratulations to Koshi on completing the Treaty who reciprocated by thanking Jake for his important contribution. He then chatted to the rest of the group. Saito asked Koshi whether he enjoyed his game of golf. Koshi beamed and recounted the golf match with great gusto and humour, relating in detail his encounter with the crocodile, including Jake's efforts to rescue him, and finished off the story with a description of his spectacular chip shot out of the bunker to win the last hole and square the match. The group all laughed uproariously at his account and Jake knew from experience that the Japanese men would be celebrating hard well into the night. To Jake's annoyance Ambassador Connell came over to congratulate Koshi which immediately caused the group to break up.

Jake pulled Saito aside and asked him whether the Japanese delegation had received any security alerts about the opening of the mining plant the next day. Saito responded in the negative but indicated Koshi and his team were well guarded and that the whole mine site had been fully secured.

The band played the latest pop number and soon the dance floor was crowded with people swaying to the music. A woman's voice said in his ear "Come on Jake, let's see if you can dance as well as you speak Japanese."

Jake looked around to see the petite figure of Anna Sentoro standing in front of him smiling, with her hand extended. She pulled him into the flowing mass on the dance floor and immediately started writhing in time with the music. She looked striking with her dark hair flowing and wearing a long rainbow-coloured dress with a side split and a plunging neckline. Jake struggled to keep up with her but got into the rhythm when the band switched to a fast salsa which, fortunately for Jake, was one of the few dances he knew. She laughed as he shimmied, dipped and twirled her around the dance floor as they both enjoyed the tempo of the dance. The band moved into a slower ballad and Anna held him close as they moved across the dance floor. Jake could feel her soft body pressed against him and breathed in her heady scent. He was aware of other dancers watching them.

“You dance well Jake,” she murmured in his ear. “Do you do everything so well?”

“Not really, you’ll remember how bad I was at our golf match, Minister.”

“Please call me Anna. Well you and Koshi came from behind to draw the match. And you probably saved Koshi’s life by pulling him away from that crocodile. You’ve made a friend for life with Koshi.” She snuggled closer to him.

Jake was prevented from answering as the band quickened its momentum and played an old time rock and roll number which had them jiving around the dance floor.

Jake couldn’t help but notice how attractive she was as she swayed to the music and was starting to enjoy himself when the band abruptly finished its bracket. Anna grabbed both his hands and whispered seductively in his ear “We’re having a party in my suite at midnight if you would like to come- Suite 202.” Jake was saved from answering when applause broke out from the crowd as P.M. Murray entered the room with his entourage, smiling broadly as he waved to the audience. He made his way to Koshi and there was much bowing and shaking of hands all round. Anna said “I’d better go and join his lordship,” blew Jake a kiss and joined Murray and Koshi.

The band started up again as Jake joined a group of Australian officials at the bar. The mood was festive as everyone celebrated the signing of such an historic treaty. After several drinks Jake could feel a wave of tiredness overcome him, excused himself from the group he was with and walked back to his room. He lay on the bed thinking about Shoni and closed his eyes. Some time later he was awoken from a deep sleep by the insistent ringing of the phone on his bedside table. He picked the handset up and a familiar voice purred into the phone “Hey Jake, it’s Anna, the party’s in full swing in my suite. Aren’t you coming up?”

Jake sat up on bed, shaking himself awake. “I’m afraid I dozed off Minister, er sorry Anna, It’s been a long week.”

“Oh come on Jake, get yourself up here and celebrate. You can sleep in tomorrow. And I’ve got something to tell you.”

Jake thought for a second, he really needed to sleep but he didn’t want to refuse the Minister. “O.K. Anna, I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

He freshened up and walked up a floor and knocked on the door of Room 202, one of the Penthouse Suites. He could hear loud music coming from the room as the door was opened by one of the Minister’s staff. The suite was huge with a large lounge area, dining room, a balcony overlooking the pool and two bedrooms with

ensuite bathrooms. There were about thirty people in the lounge talking loudly or swaying to the music, most of them in various stages of intoxication. The younger ones were the noisiest, taking selfies with their mobile phones. Anna came over, glass of champagne in hand, and gave him a big hug.

“Ah here’s Jake, the wonder boy” she said, slurring her words slightly. “Give him a glass of champers.” Someone pushed a glass into his hand.

“Sit next to me Jake,” pointing to the large comfortable settee. Jake dutifully sat down next to her. The party was well and truly in full swing and the drinks were flowing freely. Anna looked deep into Jake’s eyes.

“Jake, I need someone in my office with some practical experience in international trade. Would you be interested in joining my office staff after all this is over?”

“Er, I’ve still got six months left of my contract with Austrade.”

“Don’t worry about that Jake, we’d fix that up easily. Let me know tomorrow if you are interested. I presume you are coming to the mine opening?”

“I think I’m invited.”

“Good, make sure you turn up, it will be an interesting event.”

She pulled Jake to his feet and started dancing with him to a slow ballad. Jake could tell by her sluggish movements that she was really intoxicated. She pressed herself close to him. Jake could feel her soft breasts through the thin material of her dress and could feel himself responding to her sensuality. They danced onto the balcony out of sight of the rest of the party-goers and looked out into the tropical night. They could see the pool below them bathed in moonlight. He looked down at her as she reached up and kissed him hungrily on the mouth. She whispered in his ear “Jake wait out here while I get rid of the party-goers,” and disappeared inside.

She was back in twenty minutes looking very woozy.

“They’re all gone, thank God,” she mumbled taking Jake by the hand and leading him towards the master bedroom.

“Anna, I don’t think this is a good idea.”

“Nonsense Jake, no one will know. Just wait here for two minutes while I get ready.” She left him outside the bedroom and he could hear her open the door to the bathroom. A couple of minutes later he heard the swish of the bed clothes as she fell onto the bed.

“Come on Jakey boy, I’m ready,” she called in a husky voice.

Jake hesitated, he was aroused but not sure what he should do. He waited another couple of minutes and peeked around the bedroom door. He could see her head buried in the pillow and crept to the edge of the bed calling her name softly. As he got closer, he could hear her snoring softly and realised that she was fast asleep. Relieved, he let himself out the door of the suite and into the corridor. Two ministerial staffers were walking past the door taking selfies with their mobiles as he slipped out and gave him a knowing look. He made his way back to his own room and was asleep in seconds.

THURSDAY EVENING – JABIRU

Fifteen kilometres away, Captain Xu and Liang carefully walked along the railway line, only a pencil thin light emanating from Xu's torch breaking the darkness. Xu was the explosives expert. It took him less than thirty minutes to place the plastic explosives in two separate parts of the track and wire them up so that they would explode on impact. He used camouflage to conceal the explosives so expertly that a searcher would have to stand right on top of the track to see the tiny wire that led to the explosives buried under the rail. Satisfied with their work they walked up the mound to join the rest of the group. Two of their men were sitting noiselessly in deep scrub about a hundred metres from the point where the railroad exited the mine fence. They were well hidden in an area surrounded by bushes and trees. The other member of their group, a sentry, sat in the fork of a large eucalyptus tree holding a rifle complete with infrared sights. They had watched earlier as security officers had searched the track but there had been no patrols that evening.

Xu had set up two similar explosives in the mine's production plant the night before. They could be set off any time by the remote control in his pocket. He had easily penetrated the mine's security system by stealing a security pass and posing as one of the catering staff during the day. He had hidden in one of the portable toilets until midnight when he was able to slip into the production plant under the cover of darkness. After setting the explosives, he had returned to his hideaway in the portable toilet until the catering staff arrived early the next morning. He then slipped out of the toilet, picked up a box from a truck and joined the staff carrying food into the kitchen. After a couple of trips he quietly sneaked out of the mine entrance and re-joined his comrades.

Chapter 9

FRIDAY – JABIRU

At the mine site, the workers arrived early in the morning busily putting together the final touches for the opening ceremony. A huge marquee had been set up in the garden outside the main building for the luncheon for the 150 invited guests with a special table set up at one end for the V.I.P's. Security staff were everywhere, checking everyone going through the front gate. The freight train was sitting at the start of the railway track, each of its cars fully laden with yellow cake ready to be transported to Darwin for on-shipment to Japan.

Jake drove up at midday, and was waved by a security guard into a paddock converted into a makeshift car park for guests. He was clearly one of the last to arrive and parked right at the end of the paddock as close as he could to the railway line. Out of curiosity he looked down at the track but could see nothing out of the ordinary. He walked towards the marquee and noted that the protestors had doubled in number and were shouting their slogans in full voice. The anti-nuclear group and conservationists from Japan were particularly vocal. For a moment he thought he saw Shoni's face in the crowd but after a closer look,

concluded he must have been mistaken. The aboriginal group was also very active, waving their flags vigorously in front of the media. A voice rang out calling his name and to his surprise he saw Barry Buckstone waving at him. He had a white bandage on his head. Jake walked over, shaking Barry by the hand.

“What are you doing here Barry, you’re supposed to be in hospital in Darwin?”

“Nah, they let me out, I had some concussion that’s all. The lawyer Lizzie arranged made some phone calls and found out there were no charges. I didn’t want to miss this so I checked out of the hospital and got a lift back here.”

“But the cops wanted to charge you?”

“The CCTV showed it wasn’t me causing the trouble so they had to let me off.”

“That’s great Barry,” Jake shouted over the noise of the protesters.

“There’s not going to be any more trouble is there?”

“Not from our group and there’s security and police everywhere. But there’s some strange people around so who knows what might happen. I learnt a few things while I was in the cell with those others. That Bert O’Shea from the Land Council has done a deal with Energet to give up our land rights. I’m gonna dig around and see what I can find out. Are you going in there with the bigwigs?” Barry asked, pointing to the marquee.

“Yeah, I’m invited but as soon as it’s finished I’ll go back to see Bill and Lizzie at Daly Waters. I’d better get going. Take care of yourself Barry, you’ve had a nasty whack on the head.”

“Thanks mate. I’m as good as gold. Hope we catch up again.”

Barry watched as Jake walked up to the marquee. He said to Larry Wilpena, “I’m taking off for a while. Back in an hour or so.”

Barry got into his car and drove around to the Land Council Office. He knew the office would be empty for the next couple of hours as most of the Councillors and staff would be at the opening of the mine. He let himself in with his key and immediately walked to the door of O’Shea’s private office but found it locked. He pulled out a credit card and gently eased it around the lock until it clicked and the door opened. He quickly searched the office for any documents relating to the mine but most of the cabinets were locked. O’Shea’s laptop was sitting on the desk. It was locked and he tried a couple of different passwords without success. He knew O’Shea would have a written record of his password somewhere and searched around for a hiding place. He examined his desk drawers again without success. He knelt on the floor and looked under his desk. Taped on the bottom of one of the drawers was a piece of paper with a name and number on it. Jubilant, Barry copied the password down and then sat down on O’Shea’s chair.

He quickly scrolled through O’Shea’s emails and various folders. He went through his files and was just about to give up when he saw some documents relating to the Jabiru Mine. His heart raced as something took his eye. It was a letter to Baobab Trustees from Northern Consultancy, the consultant that did the study on the land rights and environmental impact. There were also several other documents marked confidential that took his interest. He pulled out a USB memory stick from his pocket and copied the documents onto it. He was just about finished when he heard a car pull up outside. He quickly finished the transfer of the documents, pulled out the USB and walked out the door just as one of the office workers, Mary Bloom, was coming in.

“Hi Barry, I thought you’d be at the mine?”

Barry tried to look calm. “Yeah, but I didn’t get an invite to the big lunch so I thought I’d come back and pick up a couple of things.”

“Oh, right, see you later then,” said Mary looking rather puzzled.

Barry hurried out, got in his car and drove to his house.

* * * * *

Jake walked towards the entrance of the marquee. He had his credentials and invitation checked and had to walk through an X-ray machine before being allowed to move inside.

Most of the guests had already arrived and were being handed pre-lunch drinks. He entered just as the announcement came for guests to take their seats. He saw Security Chief Carstairs in deep conversation with Williams and others of his team and walked over. Carstairs ignored him and kept talking to his colleagues. Undeterred Jake butted in.

“Excuse me Carstairs, how’s the security arrangements going?”

Annoyed, Carstairs turned towards him.

“It’s all under control but as you can see we’re busy.”

“Any sign of the Chinese?”

“No, look Stafford we’ve got enough on our plate here without chasing down every half-baked rumour. This place is secured as tight as a drum. Now can you let us get on with our job.” Carstairs dismissed him as he turned back to his men.

Jake found his allocated seat in the marquee and introduced himself to other guests at his table. He saw Helen Kwang in the distance and waved to her, receiving a warm smile in return. An aboriginal dance group performed some traditional dances as a welcome to the guests. Then the V.I.P. party entered the marquee led by Prime Ministers Murray and Koshi. Anna Sentoro followed behind the Prime Ministers walking directly past Jake. She saw Jake but looked right through him. There’s a message there thought Jake. The audience applauded politely as the V.I.P.’s took their seats on the stage. Bert O’Shea from the Land Council was among them.

An elder from the Binugy people gave the traditional aboriginal welcome waving burning leaves to ward off the bad spirits.

Ron Freeman, the Managing Director of Energet, the Australian joint owner of the mine, was master of ceremonies. He took the microphone, welcomed everyone, introduced the special guests on stage and set out the agenda for the official opening. He invited people to start their meal, indicating that the speeches would commence after the main course.

Jake looked around the marquee and could see that security was very tight. He noticed Carstairs being vigilant on one side of the room and several security officers standing around trying to look inconspicuous. A four-piece violin group had replaced the aboriginal dancers but didn’t completely block out the sounds coming from the protestors.

The company had certainly turned it on for the guests. The food was delicious, focussing on local produce from the Northern Territory and the best Australian wines from the southern states. After the main course was served, Freeman walked up to the rostrum and outlined the history to the opening of the mine,

stressing that it would become the largest producer of uranium in the world. He introduced his counterpart, the Managing Director of Nippan Energy, the Japanese partner in the venture, who endorsed Freeman's comments. Then it was the turn of Prime Minister Murray who strode purposely to the lectern. He spoke lengthily about the importance of the opening of the mine to Australia-Japan relationships coming immediately after the signing of the Treaty. He then passed the microphone over to P.M. Koshi who spoke briefly and to the point about the significance of the uranium supplies to Japan.

The two Prime Ministers then jointly unveiled a plaque, officially commemorating the opening of the mine. Photographers and T.V. cameramen crowded around the P.M.s as they posed by the plaque.

The final event was the inaugural rail shipment of uranium ore produced at the mine for transport to Darwin. The two Prime Ministers were to travel with the engine driver in his cabin for the first kilometre of the journey and then disembark at a siding where they were to be met by their cars and returned to the resort.

The meal completed, P.M.s Murray and Koshi walked the red carpet from the marquee to the train followed by a horde of photographers and guests. They posed for photographs with the train driver at the steps of the driver's cabin before they climbed on board, closely followed by two bodyguards and Carstairs. The driver blew three short blasts from the train's whistle as the train gradually pulled out to the cheers of the crowd. Secret service guards jogged alongside, keeping pace with the train.

Jake walked back towards his vehicle, glad to get away from the pomp and ceremony of the luncheon. He was mentally exhausted from the week's negotiations and was looking forward to seeing Shoni and his father again. He had already checked out of the resort and had dumped his bag in the back of the Toyota. He looked across the paddock and could see the train moving slowly along the track not more than 200 metres away.

Captain Xu and his team watched anxiously from their hide-out in the bush as the train gradually moved into view. As the train approached he pressed the remote control button and was rewarded immediately to see a massive explosion at the mine site with huge plumes of black smoke spouting into the air. Two seconds later the front wheel of the engine triggered the explosives set on the track and an enormous blast of orange fire and black smoke lifted the engine straight off its rails. The engine went careening along the embankment for another 80 metres before it flipped on its side and came to rest in a screech of twisted metal and black smoke.

The Chinese team immediately broke from their cover and rushed through the smoke with their guns ready for their assault on the train. They gunned down two security officers who were running along the track trying to reach the train.

In the driver's cabin, Carstairs pulled himself up from the wreckage. He was hurting in several places but had no bones broken. He looked around the cabin and could see carnage everywhere. The driver had gone through the front windscreen and was clearly dead. A door had been almost ripped off and one bodyguard was lying halfway through the doorway with his neck twisted awkwardly. The other was painfully getting to his knees. P.M. Murray was lying on

the floor groaning in pain covered in blood but alive. There was no sign of P.M. Koshi.

Carstairs lifted Murray to a sitting position asking him if he could stand. He knew they were vulnerable in the cabin. He pulled out his pistol and told the bodyguard to arm himself. He looked out the window and could see the Chinese approaching with automatic weapons ready. He peered out the window, took aim and shot the leading Chinese in the chest. The Chinese returned fire and Carstairs was thrown back with a bullet in the shoulder. The bodyguard let loose two shots before he was taken down in a hail of bullets. Carstairs dragged himself in front of the P.M. as the Chinese stormed into the cabin with guns firing. Liang was the first to reach the cabin, he looked down at Carstairs and Murray lying on the floor and cold-bloodedly shot them both in the head. He then checked the bodies of the bodyguards in the cabin to ensure they were all dead. Lastly, he draped a flag over the smashed side window of the train.

Xu jumped into the cabin, checked the corpses and yelled "Where is that Japanese pig, Koshi?"

Liang searched the cabin again but there was no sign of the Japanese Prime Minister.

"He must have been thrown out or crawled out. Start searching. Find him and kill him."

Jake was about to get in his wagon when he heard the first explosion at the mine. He could see smoke billowing into the sky when the second explosion came only 200 metres away and the shock waves knocked him off his feet. He looked up to see the train leaping in the air before it careered into the embankment in a blaze of orange fire and black smoke. He picked himself up, jumped into the Land Cruiser and sped across the paddock towards the railway line. It was a scene of absolute chaos. Through a pall of black smoke he could see the engine lying on its side and most of the rail cars lying in a smoking, tangled mess. He parked on the verge of the railway line and saw the Chinese rushing towards the train driver's cabin. He left the vehicle and crawled closer to the embankment. He watched in horror as the Chinese stormed the cabin firing their guns through the windows. The firing stopped suddenly and Jake glimpsed a movement on the edge of the embankment just 40 metres away. He looked closely and realised it was a human body. He slid down the embankment carefully and crawled up to the body just as further gunfire broke out in the cabin. He leaned over the body to look at the face and with a gasp, recognised Koshi. Somehow he had been thrown clear and landed 30 metres from the train wreck. He was alive, covered in blood and gradually regaining consciousness. He looked up at Jake in recognition and tried to speak but could only manage a groan. Jake spoke urgently in his ear.

"Prime Minister we are in danger here, we must get away quickly. Can you stand up?"

Koshi nodded his head and struggled to his feet. Jake grabbed him under the shoulder and dragged him up the rise towards the Toyota. He looked back and saw the Chinese scrambling around the embankment. Suddenly one pointed up to them and shouted to the others and they all started rushing up the rise. Jake shoved Koshi into the back seat, jumped into the driver's seat, praying the four wheel drive would start at once. Fortunately it roared into life and he flattened the

accelerator, taking off in a wheel spin. He heard gunfire and felt a bullet smack into the rear of the cruiser but soon had put himself a safe distance from the Chinese.

Xu cursed as he saw the Toyota pull away and made a call on his mobile for Blakey to pick them up. Blakey, driving a jeep, came roaring out of cover in the bush and within minutes had picked up the Chinese. Two of them were carrying their dead companion who was unceremoniously dumped in the boot of the jeep. After some frantic instructions from Xu, they took off in pursuit of Jake's Toyota.

At the mine site there was panic as people fled from the explosion. Two production workers had been killed instantly while three others had suffered serious injuries. Fortunately, the guests at the luncheon were in the process of dispersing when the mine exploded, so there were no fatalities but several serious injuries caused by flying debris. Some casualties were lying on the ground moaning with their injuries as others scrambled away with cuts to their faces and bodies. Ambulances were on the scene quickly with officers tending to the wounded while fire brigades rushed to control the fire at the mine.

Helen Kwang emerged unscathed from the explosion and was quick to assess the situation. She assisted one middle-aged executive who had cuts to his head before passing him over to an ambulance officer. She searched for a photographer, spied Percy Usifail from her own newspaper, and told him to take shots of the carnage. She saw security guards closely surround Anna Sentoro and Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Norio Hayashi, who were joined by an ashen-faced Ambassador Connell, and watched as they were ushered hurriedly into the comparative safety of their armoured cars.

She pulled out her phone, rang a colleague at the National newspaper and started dictating a description of the disaster around her. She had heard the second explosion and wondered about its origin. She saw several security officers and police rush down the railway line and it dawned on her that the P.M.s might be at risk. She ran after them, urging Percy to follow. After 500 metres she could see the smoking ruin of the train and shuddered at the enormity of what had happened. There was the twisted metal of the train, the spillage of yellow cake everywhere, all shrouded in black smoke. Security guards had set up a barrier round the cabin of the train but she could see several bodies being lifted out of the cabin and laid on the ground. A large black and white flag was draped across the side window of the driver's cabin. She whispered to Percy to see if he could get some close-ups of the bodies and the flag. Even with the billowing smoke she recognised the face of Prime Minister Murray with his eyes wide open frozen in terror and with a shock realised he must be dead. She looked at the other bodies, all motionless, but couldn't see Koshi amongst them.

Percy was busily clicking away before a security officer saw him and warned him that no media or photographers were allowed and that any photos would be confiscated. Percy promptly retreated but indicated quietly to Helen that he already had taken a good shot of the P.M.'s face. They stood around anxiously but any attempts to ask questions of the police drew blank responses. She heard a clatter overhead and looked up to see an Air Ambulance helicopter about to land in the paddock alongside the stricken train. Ambulance officers rushed to the scene and tried to revive the casualties. After a short time the bodies were loaded

onto stretchers in body bags and carried to the helicopter, which promptly took off.

The speed of the operation and the actions of the ambulance officers made it clear to Helen that there were no survivors. She pulled out her phone again, dictated the latest revelations, and sent off a message with Percy's photos attached. She looked aghast at the chaos around her and realised the enormity of the disaster. The Australian Prime Minister had been killed and the Japanese Prime Minister was missing, possibly killed, after what appeared to be a terrorist attack. She had acted automatically in recording the mayhem but it had only just sunk in that she was the first reporter on the scene and had captured one of the most important events in Australia's recent history.

Before long, T.V. reporters and cameramen arrived but the police had by now cordoned off the area and prevented anyone from getting close to the disaster area.

Chapter 10

FRIDAY AFTERNOON – JABIRU, THE LOST TEMPLE

Jake sped down the road to Jabiru, honking his horn as he tried to avoid cars on the road as people tried to escape from the chaos. He knew he had to get off the main road or he'd be quickly overtaken by the Chinese. He tried to remember what his father had said about an alternative route to the Stuart Highway. He drove past a dirt road on the left hand side and noticed the name Stockmen's Track on a signpost. With a start he remembered his father had recommended the Stockmen's Track as an alternative route to Daly Waters. He did a quick U-turn and sped down the track in a great flurry of dust.

Xu and his men raced after Jake cursing at cars blocking their way. The dust and smoke made it difficult to see very far ahead. They had driven for fifteen minutes before they realised they had lost sight of his vehicle. With Xu screaming in his ear, Blakey turned the jeep around and doubled back, looking for any alternative route that Jake might have taken. He saw the signpost for the Stockmen's Track and from the dust hovering over the road guessed that Jake had taken that route.

Jake looked behind but could see no sign of pursuit and prayed that his ploy had worked. He looked at Koshi who was lolling in the back seat semi-conscious but he knew he couldn't stop to check his wounds. He fished out his mobile phone and tried to call the 000 emergency number to alert the police but to his dismay found he had been put on extended hold because of an unexpected rush of calls. He punched in his father's number and cursed as his call went straight to voice mail. He left a message, "Dad, I'm in deep trouble. I'm driving along the Stockmen's Track with the Japanese P.M. who's been injured in the bomb explosion at Jabiru. We're being chased by Chinese terrorists. Can you call the..." Just then the phone went dead and he realised he was out of range.

He sped down the road which was a heavily corrugated dirt track and he struggled to keep the Toyota from sliding off the road. He was determined to put as much distance as possible between himself and the Chinese and drove as fast as he could without losing control.

Another hour passed before Jake thought it safe to stop the car and check on Koshi. He was now conscious but clearly was suffering from concussion and was mumbling incoherently. He was bleeding in several places from cuts to his head and body. Jake ripped up a T-shirt from his luggage to wrap around his wounds as best he could. Amazingly Koshi didn't seem to have any bone breakages but Jake knew he could well have received internal injuries. He made Koshi drink from his water bottle and forced him to swallow some painkillers. Jake climbed up a ridge and tried his mobile phone but again there was no signal. With a start, he thought he heard a noise and listening carefully he could just hear the drone of a car engine. Cursing, he tied a seatbelt around Koshi's body in the back seat of the Toyota, climbed in the driver's seat and accelerated down the track. It was now late afternoon and it wouldn't be long before dark. He had to get Koshi to safety in the hospital at Mataranka before the Chinese caught them up.

Another thirty minutes passed and Jake realised that his pursuers were gaining on him. It was now twilight and he could see car headlights not far behind him. He realised at his current pace it was just a matter of time before they caught up with him and had no doubt what they would happen if they were overtaken.

Suddenly a kangaroo sprang seemingly from nowhere in front of the station wagon, Jake swerved to avoid it, giving it a glancing blow in the process and slammed the wagon into the dirt embankment on the side of the road before managing to regain control of the vehicle. Koshi groaned in the back seat as the Toyota swung from side to side. A whirring sound came from the right front wheel and Jake cursed hoping it wasn't a puncture. He stopped the cruiser, got out and checked the wheel. The mudguard had bent right back from the collision and was pressing on the wheel causing it to wobble. He tried to force it back with his hands but was unable to shift it. He tried to think of his options. There was no way he could outrun his pursuers now. There were no alternative routes to take so his only hope of survival was to find a hiding place.

He recalled his father's words about the site of the Lost Temple half way along the track and wondered if that might provide an avenue of escape. He had been driving for over two hours and must be getting close to the turn-off. He risked turning the Toyota's lights on so he could pick up any sign posts. At that moment, to his relief the headlights picked up a sign post to the Lost Temple. Jake switched the lights off and turned into the track. He jumped out of the Toyota and pushed the sign post over, hoping the turn-off wouldn't be noticed by his pursuers. He got back in the cruiser and drove carefully up and over a hill. In the distance ahead he could just make out some dark shapes and eased the Toyota along until he came to what appeared to be large stacks of curiously shaped rocks. He presumed this must be the Lost Temple. He risked turning the lights on so he could find a way through the rock formations. The track petered out and there was just stony desert in front of him dotted with large pinnacles of rocks. Driving carefully for another 100 metres, he picked up a rocky outcrop covered by trees and bushes and eased the Toyota into a small gully behind some rocks. He stopped the

cruiser, fished out a small flashlight from his luggage and searched the immediate surroundings. He decided it would have to do. He drove the cruiser deeper into the bush and parked it. He listened for the sound of an engine but there was only silence. Only then did he look at Koshi who despite the bumpy ride was asleep. Jake checked his pulse and breathing, both of which seemed normal. He scouted around the wagon, broke off branches from trees and bushes and used them to cover up the Toyota. He pulled out the jack handle from the boot of the wagon and after some strenuous heaving managed to lever the mud guard back off the wheel. Breathing deeply to relieve the stress coursing through his body, he took a drink from his water bottle and sat on a flat rock listening to the sounds of the night.

FRIDAY EVENING – JABIRU

Back at Jabiru, order had been gradually restored at the mine site. The fire brigade had put out the fire at the plant while the injured had all been attended to by the ambulance officers or taken to hospital. A team of police forensic experts had arrived from Darwin and were combing over the bomb sites at the mine and the railway track for clues as to what had happened.

It was not so orderly in the town where the Federal and local police had rounded up all the protesters and were holding them for questioning at the Jabiru Police Station. Barry Buckstone once again found himself in custody with the rest of his group of protestors. He was being interrogated by police about his movements during the last week. After providing written statements, his colleagues were released but Barry, as the ringleader, was kept in custody overnight.

The police were going through a similar process with the other protesters and interviews were conducted well into the night. They had commandeered the local community centre as the Police Station was too small to accommodate all of the protesters. All the ringleaders were held in detention overnight for further interrogation the next morning.

Bert O'Shea let himself into the Lands Council Office in Jabiru, grateful to be alive after the explosion at the mine. He needed a stiff drink and kept a bottle of whisky in his office. He was surprised to see the door to his office unlocked, but shook his head thinking that he must have forgotten to lock it. His chair wasn't in its normal position and his lap top computer was on when he was sure he had closed it down when he last left the office. He checked through his emails and files which seemed to be in order. He did a memory search on his files and his eyes widened when he saw that some files relating to the mine had been opened only few hours ago, presumably while he was at the luncheon.

He rang up Mary, the receptionist. After explaining what had happened at the mine he asked her "Was anyone in the office this afternoon?"

She answered, "Only Barry Buckstone who was picking up a couple of things."

"Did he go into my office?" demanded O'Shea.

"I don't know, he was leaving in a hurry just as I was going in."

"Fuck!" screamed Bert. "The bastard's being into my computer and copied my files."

He hung up on Mary and dialled a number. When a voice answered he said “We’ve got a problem.” He spent the next ten minutes talking anxiously on the phone.

FRIDAY EVENING – YELLOW WATER

The media was in a frenzy over the terrorist attack and every major T.V. and radio station and on-line news service were featuring the story. Big bold headlines announced the assassination of the Australian Prime Minister by terrorists. The graphic photos taken by Percy Usifail and the first-hand account of the disaster by Helen Kwang featured in the National’s On-line News Service and were repeated by other media outlets. The black and white flag draped on the train was identified as the flag used by the Islamist State extremist group ISIS. The media commentators were quick to condemn ISIS for the terrorist attack and demanded urgent action by the authorities to capture the terrorists.

The news had quickly spread to Japan where the immediate reaction was one of outrage that their Prime Minister was missing, presumably abducted by terrorists. There was sympathy towards Australia which had lost its own Prime Minister but there was also trenchant criticism of the Australian Government for not providing adequate security for the Japanese delegation.

Anna Sentoro, still shocked by Murray’s death and the mayhem at the mine, was back at the Yellow Water Resort and had set up a war room in the conference centre, staffed by a team of advisers including senior AFP and ASIO officers. As Deputy Prime Minister, and soon to be Acting Prime Minister, she had immediately taken control of the situation. She had appointed John Fisher, the Commissioner of the AFP, to head up a Task Force to find P.M. Koshi, investigate the bombings and track down the terrorists. Fisher issued instructions for the AFP to round up any suspected ISIS supporters around the country for interrogation.

Anna had set up a teleconference with her Cabinet colleagues and briefed them on the terrorist attack and consulted with them on the action she was taking. The Cabinet members were full of questions but she was pressed for time and left her Chief of Staff, Allan Laidley, to discuss the details with them. She then held a briefing session with a badly shaken Japanese Foreign Minister and the Japanese Ambassador. Her most difficult call was to Murray’s wife to convey her deepest sympathy and to assure her she would do everything possible to capture the assassins.

With the media hounding her and her staff over speculation about the Prime Minister’s death she had no option but to announce a press conference that evening.

At 7 p.m. she fronted the media in a packed conference centre at the resort and told them calmly and succinctly that the Australian Prime Minister and nine others had been killed in a terrorist attack and an extensive search was under way to find Japanese Prime Minister Koshi. Except for the presence of the flag on the train there was no clear evidence that the attack was undertaken by an ISIS terrorist group. She confirmed that everything was being done to track down the terrorists and locate the Japanese P.M. She answered questions from the media

for twenty minutes before excusing herself from the meeting, leaving her Media Adviser to handle the numerous questions from the reporters. She was escorted back to the war room shaking with emotion, a coffee was handed to her which she gulped down. She had never been faced with such a crisis before and hoped she was capable and tough enough to see it through.

Chapter 11

FRIDAY EVENING – THE LOST TEMPLE

“Fuck!” yelled Blakey as he slammed on the brakes.

“What’s the matter” shouted Xu.

“There’s no dust on the road ahead. We’ve lost them.”

“You imbecile Blakey, how could you have lost them?”

“They must have turned off somewhere. We were gaining on them so either they’re hiding off the road or they’ve found another track,” Blakey retorted as he turned the Jeep around and headed back the way they’d come.

“Find them quickly Blakey or your life won’t be worth living,” threatened Xu.

Switching the lights onto high beam, Blakey drove steadily scanning the sides of the road for any sign of a track. After fifteen minutes he was beginning to doubt his own judgement when something caught his eye. He stopped the vehicle and jumped out searching the side of the road. Xu followed him.

Blakey pointed to a shape in the ditch on the side of the road.

“Look there.”

“What is it?” demanded Xu.

“It’s a dead kangaroo. It’s got fresh blood on it. They must have hit it and damaged the car. They can’t be far away.”

Blakey drove carefully up the road but still saw no sign of any exit route. He went back the other way and after a few minutes he yelled in exultation to Xu. He pointed to tyre marks turning into a narrow track and to a sign post laying on the ground.

“The bastards have gone this way,” he yelled pointing up the track.

* * * * *

Jake woke up with a start and looked up to see Koshi standing over him. He didn’t know how long he had dozed off but thought it could only be a few minutes. Koshi was visibly shaking from a combination of both the trauma he had been through and the cold night air. Jake sat him down on the rock and explained what had happened. He shook his head incredulously while listening to Jake’s account of the events. Jake explained to him the gravity of their situation and that the Chinese could be close at hand. He checked him over but apart from a strained ankle and some scratches and bruises he seemed to be physically sound. He was, however, suffering from shock and complained of a severe headache. Jake gave him some more painkillers and some water which, after a while, seemed to revive him.

As Koshi stood up, he cocked his head to one side.

“I hear something.”

Jake listened. Sure enough he heard the faint drone of a car engine.

“It’s a car coming this way. We must find a safer place to hide.”

They pulled some more bushes over the Toyota and brushed away any tyre marks they could see. Then they hurried off to look for a hiding place.

The moon appeared behind some clouds and there was just enough light for them to look around their environment. It was an extraordinary and eerie place. The large rock stacks seemed to be in a regular formation and resembled the ruins of a huge ancient temple. As they wandered around, Jake supporting Koshi under one arm, they both felt an eerie sensation. Behind the temple there were dark shapes embedded in some hilly outcrops. Shining his torch Jake noticed some caves and entered one of them, taking care not to trip over rocks which were partially blocking the opening. There were old ashes in the centre of the cave which suggested it had been as a meeting place by aboriginal groups. Around the side of the cave was a narrow opening which led to a larger cavern. He stopped in awe when his torch lit up some magnificent paintings on one wall of the cavern. He explained to Koshi that the paintings were ancient rock art, depicting aboriginal stories. He could hear water dripping and found a small spring at the back of the cavern. They drank their fill and Jake filled up his water bottle which was close to empty. There was a thin beam of moonlight shining into the cave and by climbing up some rocks Jake could see there was another exit near the roof of the cave. He squirmed up through a narrow tunnel and came out on the side of a hill. He scrambled back down to where Koshi was waiting.

“This cave is probably as safe as anywhere else to hide out. We have shelter, fresh water and a place to rest. If they find it, we could climb out the other exit.”

Close to exhaustion, Koshi nodded in agreement and gratefully sat on the ground. Jake quietly pulled some rocks in front of the main opening to the cave to disguise the entrance and took up watch behind them.

Blakey drove up the track, following the tyre marks of the Toyota. When the track petered out, he and Xu stepped out of the Jeep and examined the terrain. There was just stony ground in front of them and the beam from the Jeep’s headlights didn’t pick up any sign of the direction the Toyota might have taken. The moon was covered by clouds and the darkness was almost complete. Blakey switched on a powerful torch and walked on ahead, waving it from left to right. Eventually, he stopped, beckoned to Xu and pointed to some flattened grass.

“They’ve gone this way, I’ll walk on ahead and you can follow me in the Jeep.”

After a hundred metres, Blakey stopped and walked back to the vehicle.

“It’s no good. I can’t find anymore wheel marks in the dark. We’ll have to spread out in a chain and see if we can find them. They can’t have gone too much further in this terrain.”

The Chinese stumbled out of the Jeep and formed a line. The moon broke through the clouds providing them with a faint glow to help their search. Eventually one of them grunted and pointed to a tyre mark in the dirt. Carefully they walked towards a thicket. Blakey, walking in front, cleared away some loose branches and thought he detected a gleam of metal. With a heave he lifted up a large branch and sure enough there was the Toyota. They surrounded the vehicle

with guns drawn but a quick inspection proved it that it was unoccupied. They checked the Land Cruiser over but found nothing of interest.

The Chinese conferred and decided they would split up to search the immediate area and return to the vehicle in one hour. With torches and guns at the ready they split up, each allocated an area to search.

After an hour, they returned to the car frustrated by their inability to find any trace of Jake and Koshi.

“It is no good in this cursed darkness,” said Xu. “We will have to wait till first light to continue our search. They can’t have gone far, Koshi must be injured.”

Liang kept guard while the others settled down amongst the rocks and tried to make themselves comfortable for the remainder of the night.

From his view point at the cave entrance, Jake had seen light from a torch some twenty metres away but breathed a sigh of relief when the Chinese had continued on past the cave entrance.

FRIDAY EVENING – DALY WATERS

Just after 10 p.m. Bill Stafford drove into the caravan park at Daly Waters. He had driven Lizzie to Mataranka as she had an early morning shift the next day at the hospital. Her car was being repaired following an altercation with a kangaroo so Bill had offered to drive her up to Mataranka. He had heard about the drama at Jabiru on the radio but was unconcerned about Jake, presuming he would have left Jabiru before the explosions. He entered his cabin and made himself a coffee. He checked his mobile phone which he had left in the cabin connected to a charger earlier in the day as the battery was running low. He saw there was a message and clicked on it. With alarm he saw it was from Jake and listened to his message.

“Christ!” he cursed, “he’s in big trouble. I’ve gotta help him.”

He rang up the local police constable, Max Hobbs, and passed on Jake’s message. Initially Hobbs was incredulous but he knew Bill well enough to take him seriously. He promised to relay the information to the AFP and get back to Bill as soon as possible.

Bill grabbed a bottle of water, collected his two rifles and ammunition from the closet and rushed out the door. As he was getting into the car, he saw Shoni walking hurriedly towards him from the hotel. She had arrived back from Jabiru the night before.

“Mister Bill, have you heard from Jake? I’ve been ringing him for the last twenty-four hours but he hasn’t called me back. With the terrorist attack at Jabiru I worry about him.”

Bill repeated Jake’s phone message. She looked aghast and asked Bill what he was going to do. When he told her his plans she insisted she was coming with him.

“Oh no you’re not! This could be very dangerous. We might need you back here in case Jake turns up.”

Defiant, Shoni jumped in the passenger seat of his truck and despite Bill’s pleas refused to get out. He shrugged his shoulders, jumped in the truck and after filling

it up with petrol at the all-night service station, roared northward up the highway until he came to the turn-off to the Stockmen's Track where he took a right turn.

* * * * *

After hanging up from Bill, Max Hobbs, telephoned the Jabiru Police Station and spent half an hour on the phone trying to get hold of anyone who could actually help him. Frustrated, he rang the mobile number of Sergeant Neville Barker, who he knew from previous contacts, and repeated the message from Bill Stafford. The sergeant listened intently, jotted down some notes, said he knew Bill and had met Jake. He advised Hobbs that he would pass the information on to the Task Force and get back to him.

Barker immediately went over to the Jabiru Court House where the Task Force had been set up, asked the receptionist to see John Fisher, the AFP Commissioner. She advised Fisher was in conference with his advisers, and couldn't be interrupted but he could talk to the Task Force's Liaison Officer, Jim Williams, the Defence Attaché at the Australian Embassy in Japan. Williams came out and Barker relayed the information from Jake Stafford.

"We have nothing that indicates there was any involvement by a Chinese group. Our priority is to check out ISIS sympathisers. I know Jake Stafford and he lacks credibility. He is a friend of one of the leaders of the aboriginal protest group we are investigating."

"But I'm sure this is genuine. I've met Jake Stafford and know his father and they don't seem to be the types who would make up crazy stories," protested the sergeant.

"Look we're chasing dozens of leads at the moment and this has less credibility than most of them. We'll follow it up but it's not our first priority," replied Williams brusquely as he showed Barker the door.

Chapter 12

SATURDAY MORNING – JABIRU

At the request of Commissioner Fisher, Sam Popolo, Assistant Commissioner of the Northern Territory Police, had driven down from Darwin to Jabiru to lead the forensics investigation. He had worked through the night with the specialist forensics team trying to identify what had caused the explosions and to find evidence about the terrorists. The power had been restored in the plant and after clearing away the twisted metal, the team had been able to identify parts of the bomb that had been used to blow up the processing plant. Searching the cause of the explosion to the railway line had proved a lot more difficult. While they had set up powerful lights over the wrecked train engine and carriages, they had not identified any possible bomb parts by midnight and decided to re-start their investigation at dawn. However, they found traces of the plastic explosive C4 at the plant and they suspected that the same material had been used to blow up the train.

Fisher had called a meeting of the Task Force for 7 a.m. He listened to various reports of his group who had each been allocated specific tasks. They had set up a Hotline to encourage anyone from the public to relay any information relevant to the bombings. They had conducted countless interviews with employees of the mine, the protesters and the participants at the opening function but to date, none of these had led to any concrete leads. Apart from the Islamic State flag, nothing had pointed to ISIS involvement.

Sam Popolo reported to Fisher the initial findings of his team's forensic investigation. He showed a piece of the explosive found at the mine to Fisher and other members of the Task Force.

"This is a C4 plastic explosive, and it is the most sophisticated version any of the team have seen. The people who have made this and set the explosives are experts. Few people around the world would have access to such technology, it must be a highly organised terrorist group that set it up."

Fisher responded "Have you seen it used before Sam? Do you know which countries produce it or terrorists groups that have access to it?"

"I've only heard of it being used once before, by the Israelis in the Middle East. But it's possible ISIS could have got hold of it. I believe the Americans and the Chinese have the technology to produce it."

"Could a local group be responsible? We are holding a number of the protesters in custody as suspects, including from the aboriginal group. Would they be able to get access to this explosive?"

"I doubt it very much. Even if they did somehow manage to get hold of some C4 they wouldn't know how to use it, they'd probably blow themselves up. No, this was carried out by professionals," stated Popolo with certainty.

"O.K. we need to focus our attention on an international connection."

Turning to his team he asked "Has anyone mentioned seeing any strangers or foreigners?"

A Task Force member ventured "Most of the protesters were blow-ins. There was a group of anti-uranium Japanese protesters but we've interviewed most of them and they seemed innocent enough. We could check them out again."

"O.K. do that," said Fisher.

"There were quite a few foreigners in the catering staff for the reception. It's possible that a terrorist could have posed as a caterer and gained access to the mine," opined another Task Force member.

"That's a good thought, can you check out thoroughly all the contractors used to set up the reception and provide food and hospitality?"

After another half hour, the meeting disbanded with Fisher emphasising the urgency of obtaining results quickly.

SATURDAY MORNING – THE LOST TEMPLE

The aboriginal warriors danced in a circle around the fire, their white painted bodies gleaming in the firelight. They cast huge shadows around the cave as they chanted their songs and raised their weapons in the ancient war dance. Suddenly,

they stopped their dance and with blood-curdling shrieks thrust their spears into the terrified white man lying in the middle of the circle.

Jake woke up with a start, in a cold sweat from his nightmare. The early morning light filtered into the cave. He looked out from his viewpoint from the cave, hoping that the Chinese had given up their quest. He was soon proved wrong as he heard a twig snap not far away. He could just see one of the Chinese moving towards their cave. He was armed with a semi-automatic pistol. Jake hurried back to the main cave where Koshi was sleeping and shook him awake. As he got unsteadily to his feet, Jake could see he was still suffering from the blow to his head and various cuts and bruises. His ankle was badly swollen but he was able to limp along. Jake motioned to Koshi to move towards the exit at the back of the cave.

Jake saw the beam of a high powered torch sweep the first cave expecting that the Chinese would find the main cave any moment. He urged Koshi to climb up a pile of rocks to the exit and pulled him through the small hole that led them out onto the hillside. He pulled some loose branches over the hole. They lay waiting at the top hoping the Chinese hadn't heard their scrambling up the rocks. It wasn't long before they saw the beam from the torch flickering across the main cave. They held their breath for several minutes as they could hear footsteps coming from the cave. Then the light disappeared and the footsteps retreated.

From their position on the hillside they could see the Lost Temple in silhouette against the sunrise, looking like an ancient Inca ruin, some 200 metres to the east of them. They spied one of the Chinese searching the temple pillar by pillar while another was searching the stony ground to the west. Counting the one in the cave below them, that just left one other and Blakey.

Jake was thinking desperately what their best options would be. They could go back into the cave and hope the Chinese wouldn't look there again which seemed unlikely. They could try to outrun them but Koshi's strained ankle would slow them down. They could stay put and hope that they would be rescued, if Bill had got Jake's message. Or they could try to sneak back to the Toyota and make a getaway - but presumably the Chinese would have left someone behind to guard the vehicles.

In the event, Jake's mind was made up for him. A sudden noise behind him startled him and he looked around into the barrel of a gun. One of the Chinese was just pulling himself out of the exit from the cave with his gun pointing at Jake. Jake put his hands up in surrender as the Chinese motioned for him to stand up.

"Where is Koshi?" shouted the Chinese in broken English.

Jake could see a movement behind the Chinese but pointed down the hill.

"He's just down there."

Jake watched in amazement as the Chinese's face suddenly transformed into an horrific grimace and he slowly toppled backwards into the cave. Standing directly behind where the Chinese had just been was Koshi with a huge rock in his hand and a look of satisfaction on his face.

They quickly peered into the cave to see the Chinese's body lying face down on the rocks. They scrambled back down the opening and carefully rolled him over.

He was completely lifeless and after checking his breathing and pulse Jake realised with a shock that he was dead.

“Shit, you’ve saved us Koshi but we’re really in deep trouble now. They’ll come looking for him soon. We’ll hide the body under rocks and hope they don’t find him for a while.” They pulled the body into a corner of the cave and packed rocks over the corpse.

“Now we’ve got to get out of here quickly,” said Jake picking up the dead man’s pistol. They discussed which direction to take.

“They’ll be expecting us to head further west away from the road so why don’t we go north at first and then circle back towards the road.” Koshi grunted in agreement.

Keeping low to the ground they moved as quickly as they could northwards. So far they had been able to keep behind bushes and trees of the woodland to screen them from the Chinese but before them now was only open ground.

SATURDAY MORNING – JABIRU

At 6 a.m. Barry Buckstone was woken up from his temporary cell in the Community Centre by a policeman and dragged across the street into the interview room at the Jabiru Police Station. He tried to break away but was quickly subdued and pushed onto a chair opposite two burly policemen. They grilled him for two hours, repeatedly asking him to go over his movements during the last week. They were aggressive, accusing him of masterminding the terrorist attack. When he protested his innocence and tried to get out of his chair they slapped him hard across the face knocking him to the floor. They picked him up and threatened to charge him for resisting arrest. He was refused water and told he wouldn’t receive any refreshment until he confessed. They half-carried him back to his cell and dumped him on the floor. One of his cell mates rushed to help him up on a chair and gave him some water.

He was still sitting on the chair thirty minutes later when one of the policemen entered the cell and hauled him up out of his chair and dragged him into the office.

Feeling groggy, Barry asked “What’s happening now?”

The policemen replied “You’re being released.” He gave Barry an envelope with his personal belongings and ordered him to sign a receipt for them. He then pointed to the door.

“I don’t know why you’re being released but get out of here and stay out of trouble you stupid bastard.”

Barry struggled out the door and staggered out across the road. He never saw the large 4WD come roaring around the corner. The bull-bar of the vehicle caught him flush, lifting his body up in the air, tossing him like a rag doll several metres in the air until his body crashed back onto the road. The 4WD kept going and accelerated around the next corner, vanishing from sight in seconds. At that time of the morning the street was deserted but Ollie Grant, the owner of the Shell service station fifty metres away, was making himself a cup of coffee in his tiny office when he heard the noise of the crash. He hurried outside to see a body lying

on the side of the road and a white vehicle disappearing round the bend. He rushed over to see Barry's lifeless body covered in blood just as a policeman charged out of the police station. The policeman checked Barry's pulse and breathing but could find no sign of life. He immediately started CPR yelling at Ollie to call for an ambulance but knew there was no hope of saving the victim. Another policeman joined him and cordoned off the area as a small crowd started to gather.

The ambulance arrived quickly and the officers applied resuscitation procedures but there was no response. The body was placed on a stretcher and driven away to the medical centre where a doctor pronounced Barry dead.

Sergeant Barker was quickly on the scene and interrogated Ollie. All Ollie could recall was that the vehicle was white and looked like a Nissan Pathfinder 4WD. He did remember that the cover of the spare wheel had a design of a crocodile on it.

Meanwhile the rumour had quickly spread around the local indigenous community that Barry had been beaten up and killed by police. Within an hour, a large group had gathered outside the police station chanting for justice. The crowd was starting to get ugly and a few started throwing rocks at the police station breaking windows in the process.

SATURDAY – LOST TEMPLE

Bill had been driving his truck up the Stockmen's Track for three hours but hadn't come across any sign of Jake's Toyota or any other vehicle for that matter. He stopped the truck and turned to Shoni.

"We should have run into Jake by now. Either he's not coming or he's turned off somewhere. I don't know where he could have pulled off the road without leaving some sort of sign."

Shoni replied "Are there any tracks leading off the road along here?"

Bill thought for a second. "Good question Shoni. The only one I can think of is the track to the Lost Temple but it's rarely used. But it's worth a try, I think I may have even mentioned it to Jake. It can't be far away." Bill gunned the truck.

An hour later Bill was explaining to Shoni that the Lost Temple derived its name from a peculiar sandstone rock stack formation when he saw the dead kangaroo on the side of the road. He jumped out of the truck and shone his torch on the corpse. He could see that it had been hit by a car and searching the road noticed freshly made tyre marks. Back in the truck he followed the tyre tracks until he saw them turn off the road. He saw the signpost to the Lost Temple lying on the ground as well as two sets of tyre marks heading down the track.

"This is where they've gone and there's a car following them," Bill said to Shoni. "I hope we can get there in time. We'll have to take it slowly from here."

Bill tried to call the Daly Waters Police Station again but there was still no telecommunications coverage. He swung the truck onto the track.

* * * * *

Jake and Koshi ran as fast as Koshi's injured foot would allow through the open ground to the next clump of trees. Koshi cried out as he tripped on his injured

ankle and sprawled over in the dirt. Suddenly, a voice yelled out in the distance behind them and they knew they had been seen. Lifting Koshi back on his feet, Jake dragged him to the nearest clump of trees. He peered behind to see one of the Chinese waving to his companions and pointing in their direction.

Knowing that they could not outrun the Chinese, Jake looked for a hiding place or some form of shelter. He saw a rocky outcrop about 150 metres away and thought it might provide some form of protection. Luckily they found a U-shaped band of high rocks which provided them with protection on three sides. Deciding that that was their best chance of survival they wedged themselves under the overhang of a large rock, out of sight from anyone coming up towards them. Jake pulled out his gun and waited with Koshi.

The Chinese conferred when they saw Jake and Koshi disappear behind the rocks. They split up in different directions, one was clearly intending to circle behind them.

Jake saw them coming and figured they were most vulnerable from the rear. Whispering to Koshi to stay where he was wedged under the rocks, he cautiously moved 100 metres behind another rock and waited for the attacker to come from the rear. He lay motionless for twenty minutes before he heard a slight noise to his left. A shape appeared 30 metres away coming towards him. It was the small Chinese man moving stealthily towards where Koshi was hiding. Holding the pistol in two hands, Jake waited till the Chinese was within 15 metres of him, stood up, took aim and fired. The Chinese cried out and collapsed on the ground clutching his arm. Jake raced over and saw that the bullet had hit him in the arm, causing him to drop the gun. The Chinese scrambled over to reach for the gun and Jake shot him twice in the chest. Picking up the gun Jake rushed back to where Koshi was waiting anxiously and slid back under the overhang of the rock. The realisation came that he had just killed a man and he gagged as he tried to stop himself throwing up.

The Chinese called out to their colleague but hearing no response started moving behind the rocks to where they heard the gunshots. They saw their colleague lying on the ground and looked around for Koshi and Jake. They climbed up a tall rock and scanned the terrain around them. The sniper adjusted his telescopic sights on his rifle and picked up a movement under a large rock. He gently squeezed the trigger. He grunted with satisfaction as he heard a scream and knew that he had hit at least one of them. He fired two more shots in quick succession.

Jake yelled when he felt white hot pain in his leg and knew he had been shot. He rolled away deeper under cover of the overhanging rock while more bullets sprayed around him, yelling at Koshi to follow him. Koshi was quick to respond and watched with dismay as Jake collapsed on the ground in agony, his jeans covered in blood. He helped pull Jake up to a sitting position, carefully rolled up the left leg of his blood-soaked trousers and examined the wound. The bullet had gone right through Jake's calf muscle and shattered the rock he was lying on, causing numerous cuts to his legs from flying fragments of rock. There was a lot of blood pouring out of the entry and exit holes made by the bullet but Jake was relieved to find the bullet had missed major arteries. He ripped off his shirt and wrapped it around his calf tightly to stem the blood flow. There was now a hail of

bullets smashing into the rocks around them and Jake knew they were sitting ducks for the sniper.

Bumping along on the Stockmen's Track, Bill stopped the truck when he heard the first shots, trying to identify which direction they were coming from. Leaving the road he drove across the scrub and up to the top of hill where he had a view of the landscape. Grabbing his binoculars and rifle he jumped out of the car and looked down at the scene below. He could see four men firing into some rocks. He guessed that it was Jake and Koshi hiding in the rocks and knew that if he didn't act quickly it would be too late to save them. He lay on the ground, sighted his rifle and took aim carefully at the assassins below him. Shoni lay alongside him, fearful for the lives of Jake and her Prime Minister.

The Chinese marksman smiled as he expertly pumped bullets into the rocks, knowing that it was only a matter of time before he finished off his prey. Suddenly a bullet smacked into the rock he was lying on, narrowly missing his neck, but spraying stone chips and dust into his face, temporarily blinding him. They were startled as another bullet just missed them and they scattered to find cover from this new threat. The bullets were coming from a different direction from Jake's position and they realised that someone else was firing at them.

Jake wondered why the Chinese had suddenly stopped firing when he heard the sound of a vehicle. Then he saw a truck driving wildly over the stony ground coming towards them. With amazement, he recognised the truck as belonging to his father. Bill was honking the horn of the truck and waving animatedly at them. The truck skidded to a stop in front of them and his father yelled at them to get in the truck. They left their hideaway and hobbled into the back seat as Bill immediately headed back the way he had come. Bullets thudded into the back of the truck but in a few minutes they had outdistanced the deadly fire. It was only then that Jake realised that Shoni was sitting in the passenger seat next to Bill. She turned around with a look of deep concern on her face.

"Are you hurt badly Jake, we were so worried about you."

He leaned over the seat and took her hand and looked into her troubled eyes.

"I'll survive thanks." He had never seen anything so welcoming in his life.

"Geez, that was a close one. You sure know how to get into trouble Jake," Bill said as he drove wildly across the scrub dodging rocks and trees before eventually coming back onto the track.

"We'd better hurry, it won't be long before those guys start coming after us. Can you two hang on till we get to the highway?"

"Yeah, we'll manage but we could do with a decent drink."

Shoni passed over two water bottles which they drank from greedily.

Jake introduced a bewildered Koshi to Bill and Shoni and explained what had happened in the last twenty-four hours. Bill outlined how he had only received Jake's message late last night before coming out to look for him. He had passed Jake's message on to the local police and had heard nothing back although he knew they were currently out of mobile phone range.

Xu led his team back to the Jeep, furious that Koshi had escaped. He asked Blakey.

"Can we catch them up before they get to the highway?"

"Unlikely," replied Blakey. "They've got too big a lead on us."

“Where are they likely to go?”

“The nearest hospital is at Mataranka. I reckon they’ll go there. But the place is likely to be crawling with cops once they get there.”

“Nevertheless, we must go there and kill Koshi. Otherwise our mission will have failed.”

“It would be suicidal trying to kill him in the hospital.”

“We must try. It will be suicidal for you if you don’t help us.” Xu spat the words out.

After what seemed an eternity, Bill and his passengers reached the Stuart Highway and turned north heading towards Mataranka. Now in mobile phone range, Bill rang Lizzie who was already working at the hospital and asked her to arrange rooms for two new patients. He then rang Constable Hobbs, explained what had happened and suggested he set up a roadblock at the end of Stockmen’s Track to capture the Chinese. He also asked him to arrange for a police guard at the Mataranka Hospital.

Hobbs in turn called up the Senior Constable at the Mataranka Police Station requesting help with putting up a roadblock and with a police guard at the hospital. He then rang Sergeant Barker at Jabiru and explained that the Japanese P.M. had been rescued and could he alert the AFP?

Sergeant Barker rushed over to the Court House, saw Commissioner Fisher talking to Williams and interrupted him. He blurted out the news of Koshi’s rescue to a shocked Commissioner. Fisher then sat him down and asked him to repeat it all over again. He looked angry when Barker told him he had passed on Jake’s message to Williams the previous night. He rebuked Williams for not bringing it to his attention but Williams blustered that he was running down other leads about the terrorists. Fisher called his Task Force together, apprised them of the developments and gave each of them specific instructions. One of these was to provide immediately a security team for Koshi at the hospital. He would personally fly down by police helicopter to interview Koshi. Before he left, he phoned the Acting Prime Minister and filled her in on the details.

SATURDAY MORNING – YELLOW WATER

The assassination of the Australian Prime Minister and the suspected abduction of the Japanese Prime Minister made front page headlines around the world. Most of the stories attributed the attack to Islamic State terrorists. The morning edition of the National’s Saturday newspaper had scooped the pool with Helen Kwang’s first-hand account of the disaster together with graphic photographs of the slain Prime Minister and other casualties. Her article and Percy’s photos covered the first four pages of the “National” and were repeated on line in all the major media outlets.

With her phone constantly ringing through the night, Helen had only two hours sleep before her alarm woke her at 6 a.m. She had agreed to give interviews with two of the major Australian television stations that morning, the first starting at 7.a.m. She showered and dressed quickly, choosing the one outfit that she hadn’t worn that week, put on her make-up, checked her messages and the internet, and

prepared herself for a long and difficult day. She had a quick breakfast at the resort's buffet before walking to the hotel entrance where her interviewer and camera crew awaited her. She was nervous realising that for any journalist this was the story of a lifetime.

* * * * *

Anna Sentoro was also up early after a short and interrupted sleep. She was taking counsel in her suite with her Chief of Staff, Allan Laidley, on how best to respond to the stream of requests from her Cabinet members, the media and the Japanese Government. When John Fisher rang with news that Koshi was safe, she breathed a sigh of relief following the first piece of good news after the nightmare of the previous day. She hoped fervently that Koshi would be able to shed some light on the terrorists which would lead to their capture.

SATURDAY – MATARANKA

A police escort met Bill on the Stuart Highway, some 50 kilometres from Mataranka and led them on to the Mataranka Hospital where Lizzie and hospital staff were waiting to take Koshi and Jake inside. They were immediately loaded onto stretchers, taken by elevator up to the second floor and wheeled out to separate operating theatres where medical teams were waiting. Jake was by now in a lot of pain and had lost quite a lot of blood from the wound to the leg. The medical staff administered morphine for the pain and set about cleaning up his wound. Before long he was attached to a number of drips feeding him antibiotics and saline solutions. He was sedated and quickly fell asleep.

In the next room, after being given painkillers, Koshi underwent a thorough assessment of his concussion and a clean-up of his many cuts and bruises. He had his ankle x-rayed which showed no breakages but severe strain to the tendons. He was sedated and moved into a private room next to Jake's room with a connecting door. Exhausted by his ordeal he sank into his bed and was asleep in minutes.

AFP officers were stationed outside each of their rooms with instructions not to let anyone in except authorised medical personnel. Koshi was the first to wake up some two hours later and asked to speak to his wife. He was handed the telephone and talked to his relieved wife, assuring her he was safe and sound. By then he had a number of visitors anxious to talk to him; first the Japanese Foreign Minister and the Japanese Ambassador who been flown to Mataranka airport courtesy of a police helicopter arranged by John Fisher. They were clearly overjoyed to see him alive and in good spirits. He then took a call from Anna Sentoro who expressed concern at his ordeal, offering her full support to assist his recovery and prompt return to Japan. Lastly he was visited by John Fisher who was accompanied by one of his Task Force and an interpreter. That interview went for thirty minutes before Koshi started to get very tired and a nurse shooed them out of the room. They were shocked by the revelation that the terrorists were Chinese.

In the next room, after a dead sleep for a couple of hours, Jake awoke to see the familiar faces of Shoni and his father peering at him anxiously. He sat up and hugged them both in turn, feeling deep emotion for each of them for saving his life. He realised that they were the most important people in his life, his father who he had known all of his life but had never felt close to until now, and Shoni who he had first met just a few days ago but felt like he had known her all his life.

They discussed the events of the previous two days filling each other in on their experiences. A nurse entered the room, announcing that the AFP Commissioner was outside and keen to interview Jake. Shoni and Bill left the room while John Fisher and his assistant came in. They explained they had interviewed Koshi and wanted to get Jake's version of what had happened. Jake answered their questions for an exhausting forty minutes before starting to doze off and they left him in peace, indicating they would return to continue that evening. Fisher then arranged for AFP officers to drive out to the Lost Temple to recover the bodies of the two dead Chinese and retrieve Jake's rented Land Cruiser.

SATURDAY – DALY WATERS

Blakey had driven the Chinese back to the Stuart Highway and turned the Jeep left heading back towards Daly Waters. They knew that the police would be looking for them and figured that they would be safer back in their hide-out in Daly Waters. As he reached the turn-off to Daly Waters he saw two police cars rushing past in the opposite direction heading towards Mataranka. He expected they would be soon putting up road blocks at the Stockmen's Track intersection with the Stuart Highway and at other points on the highway. He also knew that before long Jake would have given to the police a description of his vehicle and would have identified the Chinese and probably himself.

On the outskirts of Daly Waters, Blakey took a side track and after another 20 kilometres reached the old farmhouse. The owners of the farmhouse had moved out years ago and its isolation made it ideal as a hide-out for the Chinese. Blakey had made the place liveable by installing additional appliances, beds and furniture and had stocked up on food and other household goods for the Chinese. They had been hiding there for the past two weeks. He had been well paid for his trouble and there was more money to come but the recent turn of events had made him question the worth of his involvement with them. He parked the Jeep next to his truck in an old cow shed out of sight from the track and they all piled out and went inside the house. After grabbing beers and some snacks they all sat round the table waiting for Xu to plan their next move.

SATURDAY – MATARANKA

Commissioner Fisher had taken over the Sergeant's office at the Mataranka Police Station and was issuing instructions to his Task Force and local police. His main concerns were to provide security for Koshi and to track down the terrorists. They had managed to avoid the roadblocks to date but he was convinced that they

were hiding out somewhere nearby. He rang Sergeant Barker in Jabiru asking him to release the people held in detention after questioning them about possible sightings of the Chinese. Barker filled him in over the death of Barry Buckstone from a hit and run accident following interrogation by AFP officers. Fisher cursed loudly and asked who gave the order to release Buckstone. Barker said he would find out and provide a full statement of the facts to Fisher. It was yet another major issue Fisher would have to deal with once Prime Minister Koshi had been returned safely to Japan.

JABIRU

After the call from Fisher, Sergeant Barker set about releasing the protesters held in detention in the overcrowded community centre at Jabiru. He had questioned each of them but none could throw any light on the Chinese terrorists. The crowd outside the station was still in an ugly mood but moved back when the protesters were released. Barker let himself out the back door and walked over to his car. With trepidation, he drove out to Barry's house to break the news to his widow and family. He wasn't looking forward to the next few days.

Chapter 13

SUNDAY MORNING – MATARANKA

Jake woke about 3.a.m feeling sore but a lot better after a deep sleep. The bullet wound in his calf muscle was deep but had been cleaned out and stitched up. There had been no damage to arteries and veins and according to the surgeon his leg would heal quickly. He still had several intravenous drips connected to his body but was assured that subject to a medical check, these would be removed in the morning. There was a huge bandage round his lower leg and bandages on a number of places on his head and body. He had to use the toilet and made his way on crutches to the bathroom pulling the mobile drip stand with him.

He was in the process of drying his hands when he heard the fire alarm go off. He shuffled out to the door of his room and poked his head into the corridor. The two police guards were still outside Koshi's room looking down the hallway where there was a wisp of smoke coming from under the door of the elevator. An orderly rushed down the corridor stopping at each room yelling

“Fire, fire, everyone evacuate immediately via the stairs.”

Jake cried out to the policemen “Quick get the Prime Minister out of there.” One of the policemen rushed in to Koshi's room while the other remained on guard at the doorway.

A shocked Koshi was in the process of getting out of bed, when the policeman hurriedly wrapped a dressing gown around him.

Jake could hear the siren of a fire brigade in the distance. The smoke was now starting to billow out from under the elevator door. He shuffled back into his own room, removed the I.V. drips and his gown and quickly threw on some clothes. He went out into the corridor and saw two firemen coming from the direction of the stairwell checking the patients who were being ushered towards the stairwell. He sensed something wasn't right. They were both dressed in uniforms that looked too large for them and neither was wearing boots. With a jolt he realised that the faces were Chinese. He warned the guard standing outside and rushed into Koshi's room yelling to the other police officer

"This is a trap to kill the Prime Minister. They are Chinese terrorists not firemen. They're coming down the corridor looking for him. We must get him out of here."

The policeman looked stunned and rushed to the door to join his colleague in the corridor. Jake pushed Koshi through the connecting door to his own room.

The police officers had their guns drawn but hesitated momentarily when they saw two uniformed firemen coming towards them. It was a fatal mistake as the Chinese pulled out their hand guns hidden under their coats and shot each of them in the chest. One of the officers tried to get up but was shot in the neck by the Chinese and crumpled to the floor.

Jake heard the shots and knew the Chinese would soon work out that Koshi had moved into the next room. He looked around and saw that their only means of escape was through the small window on the outer wall of his room. He wrenched it open and looked out. They were on the second floor and it was too far to jump to the ground. There was enough moonlight to show that there was a flat roof over the first floor about three metres below them surrounding an air conditioning unit. They had no choice but to jump for it. Jake went first and landed with a roll onto the roof, wincing as his injured leg hit the metal roof. He then waited for Koshi to squeeze through the window and jump. He hit heavily but Jake was able to cushion his fall to some extent by grabbing his shoulders and stopping him pitching head first into the roof.

Jake chanced a quick look upwards and saw one of the Chinese looking down at them through the window. He ducked when he heard a shot which narrowly missed Koshi and they scurried around the air conditioning unit out of sight. There was a maintenance room next to the unit with an outside door which fortunately was unlocked. They climbed down a ladder and found themselves in a storeroom on the ground floor. A passage led them to an emergency exit which came out onto the street. They limped across the road to the comparative safety of the Town Hall directly opposite the hospital. Smoke was billowing out of the hospital which was a scene of turmoil illuminated by the flashing lights of fire brigades and police cars. Firemen were hosing down the basement and ground floor of the building and were containing the fire. The fire had started underneath the elevator shaft where the terrorists had set fire to a huge pile of cardboard boxes. Patients were being herded out of the hospital by staff and escorted across the street and seated in the ballroom of the Town Hall.

The police had sealed off the area around the hospital and had set up roadblocks on the Stuart Highway both north and south of Mataranka. As soon as

the firemen gave the all clear, the police started a room by room search at the hospital looking for the terrorists.

In the Town Hall, Jake and Koshi sought out a police officer and asked to be directed to John Fisher. After a few minutes Fisher and Williams strode into the Town Hall. Fisher was clearly relieved to find them unharmed and quizzed them about the attempt on their lives. They had yet to find the Chinese assassins. The two policemen who were shot were wearing bullet-proof vests but the one shot in the neck was in a serious condition and had been evacuated by helicopter to the hospital at Darwin.

* * * * *

Blakey was parked in the shadows in a side street, a block up from the hospital, when Xu and Liang came rushing out from the basement of the hospital. He was driving his old green Ford utility as the police had descriptions of the Jeep. He flicked his lights and they piled into the tray of the utility and Blakey pulled a tarpaulin over them. He drove around the back streets of Mataranka and circled back onto the highway praying that the police hadn't had time to set up a roadblock. When he got to the highway he swung the Ford south towards Daly Waters. Fire brigades and police cars passed him coming from the opposite direction rushing towards the hospital. He was just starting to relax when he saw the flashing lights of a police car up ahead and two policemen in the process of setting up a roadblock. He drove up slowly to the roadblock as one of the officers waved him down.

Blakey poked his head out of the window.

"What's up officer?"

"We're looking for some Chinese guys who started a fire at the hospital" said the young constable as he peered into the driver's cabin.

"Well, I don't have any Chinese on board but I got a couple of dead roos I shot tonight if you'd like 'em," said Blakey pointing to the tarpaulin.

"No, you can keep your roos, have you seen anything unusual tonight?" asked the policeman.

Blakey shook his head "No, officer, certainly not any Chinese."

"O.K. you can be on your way buddy," said the young officer.

Blakey breathed a sigh of relief and drove at a steady pace until he turned into the track back to the farm-house in Mataranka. The two Chinese crawled out from under the tarpaulin and made their way to the house. They made tea and sat around the kitchen table.

"You're stuffed now Xu. The whole area will be crawling with cops and they're gonna find us sooner than later. What are you planning to do?" asked Blakey.

Xu scowled "We'll have to get out of here. We'll fly out first thing in the morning. Can you tell the pilot to have the plane ready for take-off at sunrise?"

"It'll take some time to get it ready, Simmo will be asleep from a night out at the pub by now."

"Ring him up right now and tell him I want the plane ready by dawn or he won't get paid," shouted Wu angrily.

Swearing to himself, Blakey made the call. After a long wait, a groggy Simmo answered the phone and Blakey passed him the message. After a short and expletive ridden conversation, Blakey hung up and turned to Xu.

“He’s not happy - he reckons the earliest he can take off will be about 7 a.m.”

“Shit! O.K. but he’d better have it ready by then and he’d better be sober.”

They made a meal out of some canned food and were soon climbing into their beds to get a few hours’ sleep before flying out.

* * * * *

The main street in Mataranka was in chaos as Bill and Shoni rushed into the Town Hall and with relief saw that Jake and Koshi were safe. Jake explained what had happened and that the Chinese had escaped.

Fisher was on the phone coordinating the pursuit of the Chinese when he saw Bill and called him over.

“Bill you’d know this area well. I’ve set up roadblocks north and south along the highway but there’s been no reports of any sign of the Chinese. Where do you think they could have gone?” Fisher pointed to a large map spread out on the table.

“They’ve had help from Blakey who knows his way round here. There’s a couple of bush tracks that roo-shooters use but you’d think someone would’ve seen them.” Bill pointed out the tracks on the map.

“O.K. I’ll get someone checking them out,” said Fisher. “The only other way they could get away from here is by flying out. We’ve got the major airports covered but are there any smaller airfields around?”

Bill scratched his head. “Some of these properties have makeshift airstrips used for crop dusting or cattle herding. There is the old airfield at Daly Waters. It was built before the Second World War but is rarely used these days. Now you mention it, I remember seeing a small aircraft there last week.”

“That might be worth checking out, I’ll send someone out there as soon as I can,” said Fisher.

Dawn was breaking as the hospital was declared safe with the only problem being smoke damage to some of the rooms on the ground floor. The patients were gradually being returned to their rooms.

Jake sought out Koshi who was resting in one of the chambers of the Town Hall, heavily guarded by police. He beamed when he saw Jake and thanked him profusely for rescuing him yet again. He said he had received a further call from Acting Prime Minister Sentoro and had accepted her offer to fly him out of Mataranka by police helicopter to Darwin. He would have a brief stop-over at Darwin airport to meet with Sentoro before taking an RAAF jet straight back to Tokyo. He asked Jake to see him on his return to Japan. Jake shook hands with him and promised to catch up in Tokyo.

Jake then went looking for Bill who indicated he had to get back to Daly Waters to manage his camping ground and encouraged Jake to come with him. Jake agreed after getting a clearance from the hospital doctor on the condition that he would completely rest his leg. Lizzie had been working non-stop helping the patients at the hospital and would be needed there for a few days before being able to return to Daly Waters.

On his way out of the Town Hall Jake called on a haggard looking John Fisher and asked if they had caught the Chinese.

Fisher shook his head. "No, not a trace of them Jake. It's like they've disappeared into thin air. They seem to be one step ahead of us all the time."

"You don't think they've got an insider in the system helping them out?" queried Jake.

"I doubt it but they do seem to be well informed," replied Fisher.

Jake gave him his contact details and shook his hand and walked out of the building. He climbed into Bill's truck alongside Shoni and they headed south down the highway.

Before long they were pulled up at the same roadblock which stopped Blakey a few hours before. The constable walked up to the truck and explained to Bill the reason for the roadblock.

Bill asked, "Have there been many vehicles come through in the last few hours."

"Nah, mainly police cars and fire brigades, a couple of trucks and caravans and a roo-shooter."

Bill scratched his head. "That's curious, there haven't been many roo-shooters around here lately."

"Well he said he was a local, a big guy driving a green ute. Said he had a couple of dead roos under the tarp in the tray."

Another car pulled up behind them and the officer waved them through.

After a few minutes driving Jake sensed something was worrying Bill.

"What is it, Dad?"

"What he said about the roo-hunter doesn't quite ring true. There's not many roos around here anymore since the drought. The shooters tend to go further north near Katherine where there's plenty of kangaroos."

Jake thought for a minute. "What sort of car does Blakey have?"

"He's got that big Jeep. But wait a minute he used to have an old green ute, I haven't seen it for a while but it just might be..." Bill's voice tailed off.

"The copper said the guy had some kangaroos under his tarpaulin, he could have been hiding the Chinese."

"It's possible, Jake, perhaps we should check out Blakey's place when we get to Daly Waters."

Jake had a sudden thought. "Remember when you drove us all out past the old airfield, didn't you point out there was an aircraft there?"

"Yeah that's right, the airfield is rarely used these days which was why I noticed it."

"Might be worth a look," suggested Jake.

"You're thinking they might be trying to escape by flying out from there?"

Jake nodded in agreement.

"O.K. we'll go there as soon as we get to Daly Waters. You'd better call your mate Fisher to let him know what we're doing," suggested Bill.

Jake rang Fisher's number which was busy so he left a message.

SUNDAY MORNING – DALY WATERS

Bill accelerated down the highway. He turned off to Daly Waters and drove straight out to the old airport. He slowed the truck when he approached the airfield.

Jake pointed to an aircraft which was parked outside the airport's only hangar.

Bill exclaimed "I reckon that's the same plane that we saw a few days ago when we went past the airport on the way to see the caves. Lizzie thought it was an ex-Flying Doctor Service plane."

The single-engine aircraft was in the process of being fuelled up by a small red-faced man wearing a blue flying jacket. Bill stopped the truck alongside a tree which blocked them from view from the airport. He got out of the truck and pulled out two rifles from under the back seat. He handed one to Jake who gingerly stepped out of the truck. Shoni started to follow him but Jake pushed her back into the truck.

"Shoni, we are going to take a look around to see if the Chinese are here. We need you to stay here till the police turn up."

Shoni protested but Jake insisted she stay put.

"If we find the Chinese we'll need you to fetch help."

She reluctantly complied. Jake followed Bill who was walking carefully across an open paddock towards the back of the hangar. They waited for several minutes before they edged their way along the rear of the hangar. They came to a window and chanced a look into the hangar. The window was covered in dirt and cobwebs but they could just make out three men standing next to a green utility parked in the hangar.

Jake whispered to Bill, "I'm pretty sure that's them. The big guy looks like Blakey and the two smaller men are about the right height for the Chinese. I'm going to ring Fisher again and tell him to send the cops straight away."

Bill nodded as Jake pulled out his mobile and tried to ring Fisher. His phone was still engaged so he left another urgent message on his voice mail. Out of desperation he rang Williams who answered his phone promptly. He explained the situation. Williams listened intently, asked for details of where they were and promised to send reinforcements immediately.

"Listen Stafford, stay where you are. Don't go near them under any circumstances. I'll ring up the local police to surround the place and will send a contingent from Mataranka. They should be there very soon."

"O.K. we'll wait but you've got to hurry, these guys look like they're going to leave any minute."

Jake peered into the window again. After a minute he saw one of the Chinese pick up his phone and start talking animatedly. He pocketed his phone, barked some orders at Blakey and the other Chinese. Suddenly, they pulled out their pistols and rushed out the front of the hangar, splitting up and walking around either side of the entrance.

"Shit, something's spooked them, they know we're here," Jake whispered to Bill. "We've got to get out of here".

With that they ran back towards the road, Jake limping behind Bill. They heard a shout behind them and the sound of gunfire as the Chinese spotted them and started pursuing them. Jake waved urgently to Shoni who started up the truck and drove towards them over the paddock. The Chinese were catching up rapidly

when Jake's leg gave out from under him and he collapsed on the ground. A bullet whipped over his head just as he fell. Bill stopped when he saw Jake on the ground, turned around and fired off two quick shots from the rifle. The return fire caused the Chinese to halt temporarily which gave Shoni enough time to pull the vehicle up acting as a shield between the Chinese and Jake. They both jumped into the truck and Shoni thrashed the truck back towards the road while the Chinese pumped bullets after them. They could hear a police siren in the distance.

Once they were back on the road and out of range of the terrorists' fire, Bill motioned to Shoni to stop the truck. Jake and Bill hopped out and looked back at the airfield. The Chinese had turned back and were hurrying towards the plane. Simmo was being dragged out of his hideaway in the hangar by Blakey and forced to finish fuelling the aircraft. The Chinese threw their packs in the back of the plane and with guns waving remonstrated to Simmo to get into the plane. He jumped aboard into the pilot's seat followed immediately by the Chinese. The engine roared into life and the propeller started to spin.

"Bugger, they're getting away. The police are too late."

"Do you want me to take a shot at the aircraft?" said Bill

"Can you hit it from here?" replied Jake.

"No, but if we get a little closer we could. Shoni, drive over as close as you can to the plane."

Shoni shifted the truck into gear and drove across the paddock again and stopped the truck about 100 metres from the plane.

Bill leaped out and climbed onto the roof of the truck as the plane taxied out to the start of the runway and stopped ready for take-off. He lay on the roof, steadied himself and fired, aiming at the fuel tank. He had let loose four shots as the plane started up and gathered speed down the runway but nothing happened. As a last hope he fired once more.

"Damn, I've missed and they're getting away," Bill cursed.

They watched in dismay as the wheels of the plane folded up into the wheel carriage and the aircraft took off and swung around to the north

"Wait, look," said Jake as a thin wisp of smoke started trailing behind the aircraft. Then suddenly a bright flame burst out from the engine followed by an explosion as the plane tilted over and started spiralling towards the earth. Within seconds it plummeted to the ground where it exploded on impact in a fiery crash.

Bill took the wheel as they jumped back into the truck and drove as close to the burning plane as they dared. A police car was close behind them as they pulled up and surveyed the wreckage. The closest they could get was 50 metres from the plane as the heat radiated out like a furnace.

Three policemen jumped out of the car and approached the plane with fire extinguishers but the heat from the fire drove them back. There was clearly no chance of any survivors. Bill and Jake recognized one of the police as Constable Hobbs from the Daly Waters Police Station and walked over to him and explained that it was two Chinese with the pilot in the aircraft.

Suddenly a green utility burst out of the hangar heading for the road and Jake turned around in surprise.

"Hey that's Blakey who was helping the Chinese. He's getting away."

Constable Hobbs turned around to see Blakey's ute bumping over the paddock

“O.K. we’ll catch him” said Hobbs. Gesturing to one of the policemen he shouted over the noise of the fire

“You stay here till the fire brigade arrives. We’ll put out an alert on Blakey and pursue him.”

The policemen dashed back to their car and sped off in pursuit of Blakey.

Within ten minutes the fire brigade arrived and immediately set about putting out the fire from the plane wreckage. Shortly thereafter an ambulance and two more police cars arrived. They were federal police.

The senior AFP officer, John Jenkins, spoke to the local policeman and then questioned Jake, Bill and Shoni about their involvement with the Chinese. The policeman confiscated Bill’s rifles for forensic analysis and took statements from each of them.

Jenkins said accusingly “You guys were told to stay out of this and leave it to the experts. Now look at the mess you’ve made.”

Jake took offence at his officious manner and retorted,

“Well if we’d waited for you to turn up they would have escaped clean away and be on their way to Vanuatu or somewhere by now. How come you guys took so long to get here? I alerted Colonel Williams hours ago.”

The AFP officer answered back defensively. “Our resources were tied up in Mataranka with the attempt on the Japanese P.M.’s life and the fire at the hospital. You guys were told not to get involved. Anyhow the local police arrived here quickly.”

Jake remained unimpressed. “Not quickly enough unfortunately. Can we go now? We’re heading back to Bill’s camping ground in the town.”

“O.K., but stay there in case we have more questions. One of my men will contact you to write up statements. I need to have the signed statements by the end of the day.”

The fire brigade had put out the fire and pulled out three blackened bodies from the remains of the aircraft. They were placed in body bags in the ambulance and taken back to Mataranka to the morgue until they could be identified.

Bill, Jake and Shoni drove back to the camping ground still shaken from the turmoil at the old airport. They all went into Bill’s cabin and Bill found some mugs and made them coffee. He produced a bottle of whisky and laced each mug with a liberal amount. Jake put his leg up on the couch with a sigh of relief. Fortunately the stitches in his calf muscle had held tight despite the stress he had put on it in the last few hours but the wound was still painful. Bill was still shaky from shooting down the aircraft which led to the death of the two Chinese and the pilot. They were all on a high as they reflected on the entanglement with the Chinese. Jake expressed his disgust with the delay in the police arriving at the airport.

Shoni made the point. “When you two got out of the truck at the airport, I rang the police station at Daly Waters and spoke to Constable Hobbs. It was news to him about the Chinese being at the airport, so obviously the AFP didn’t ring the local police here.”

“That was quick thinking on your part Shoni. Yeah, I think Colonel Williams has a lot to answer for,” responded Jake.

“He might have just contacted the police at the Mataranka Station which was why they took so long,” suggested Bill.

“Yeah well, the guys that arrived were AFP not locals. You’d think they would have at least rung Constable Hobbs, the man on the spot here. Anyhow, I’ll talk to John Fisher about it,” said Jake savouring his coffee.

Bill was checking his phone messages when he cried out, “Oh Christ!”

“What’s up, Dad?” said Jake with concern on his face.

“It’s a message from Lizzie. Her brother Barry has died from a hit and run car accident after being released from the cop shop in Jabiru. I’ll call her back, she’ll be devastated,” said a shocked Bill.

Bill phoned Lizzie and spoke to her for ten minutes. He turned around to Jake and Shoni and explained the circumstances surrounding Barry’s death.

“I’m going to have to go to Lizzie. She’s in Mataranka now and needs to go up to Jabiru to support the family before the funeral. She’s in shock so I’ll have to drive her up there.”

“Jeez, Dad, that’s horrible news. I really liked Barry, I can’t believe he’s gone. Would you like me to come with you?”

“No, you’ve had enough excitement and need to rest that leg. Use the same cabin as you did last week. You can stay as long as you want.”

“Who’s going to run the place while you’re gone?” queried Jake.

“Gwen Mackie will look after it. She does the cleaning and knows how the camping ground runs. I’ll go and see her now and give her the heads up. Oh, and I’ll arrange for a mate to drive your rental car down from Mataranka.”

“Thanks Dad, I wish I could be of some help.”

“Don’t worry son, I’ll be back in a couple of days. I’m gonna get cleaned up, make a few calls and be off.”

“O.K. but let us know how things are going. I’ll come up for the funeral.”

“That’d be good son. I’ll keep you posted. See you soon,” Bill said as he strode off to his house.

After farewelling Bill, Jake and Shoni walked over to the cabin. They were both exhausted after their ordeal. Shoni helped Jake take the bandages off his leg and he inspected the wound. There was a large nasty-looking bruise around the gash but the stitches had held up well. He took the rest of his clothes off and with Shoni’s help he hobbled into the bathroom to have a shower. She quickly disrobed and got into the shower with him washing carefully his leg and other cuts and bruises on his body. Despite his condition he felt himself getting aroused under her gentle touch and pulled her glistening naked body to him. They kissed fervently as their bodies thrust against each other under the warm gush of water. Jack turned off the shower taps, pulled her out of the shower, wrapped a towel around her and laid her on the bed. Their tiredness disappeared as they made passionate love before dropping off to a deep sleep.

SUNDAY – JABIRU

The news of the rescue of the Japanese Prime Minister spread quickly around the media. Helen Kwang was one of the first to hear it and rang Anna Sentoro’s press secretary for confirmation. She verified the story and indicated that the Acting Prime Minister would be calling a press conference that afternoon at the

resort to provide details. Helen repeated the rumour that the Chinese assassins had been killed in an air smash but the press secretary would not confirm this.

Helen had also been following up the other big news story of the death of Barry Buckstone. Accompanied by her photographer, she had driven to the township of Jabiru and observed a large group of protesters outside the police station. She had interviewed a number of the local inhabitants who claimed that Buckstone had been beaten up by police while being questioned over the attack on the Australian and Japanese Prime Ministers. One of the people she spoke to was Larry Wilpena, a wizened old aboriginal man, who had shared the cell with Buckstone and confirmed that Barry had a number of cuts and bruises when he was released from his cell after his interrogation.

After some more questioning, Wilpena let slip that Barry claimed he had acquired evidence that some members of the Land Council had been bribed to relinquish their land rights so that the mine at Jabiru could go ahead. Helen took notes on this, determined to find out whether there was any substance or not in what Wilpena was alleging. She had put in calls to the local and federal police but no one was returning her calls.

She watched as the protesters waved their signs outside the police station. There was a large group of police and security personnel keeping watch around the station. One of the protesters threw a rock which shattered a window of the station and the crowd started getting angry. They started yelling slogans and waving placards saying "JUSTICE FOR BARRY BUCKSTONE". Suddenly another raced up to the front of the station and threw a Molotov cocktail through the window which set alight one of the wooden office desks in the station. The police responded by moving in on the crowd using pepper spray and swinging their batons around and arrested the demonstrator. The crowd quickly dispersed to avoid the onslaught. The police inside the station immediately dowsed the flames with fire extinguishers.

Helen kept a safe distance while the National's photographer, Percy Usifail clicked away with his camera. She would have another lead story and pictures for the National's morning paper. She and Percy drove back to the Yellow Water Resort in time to attend the Acting Prime Minister's press conference.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON – YELLOW WATER

Anna Sentoro had little sleep over the past few days and was not looking forward to giving another press conference. She had been briefed by Fisher as to the events leading up to the plane crash and had decided not to mention Jake and Bill's involvement in the shooting down of the aircraft which killed the Chinese. She braced herself as she walked over to the podium blinking from the numerous flashes from the cameras. She was flanked by John Fisher of the AFP and her Press Secretary. A large part of the reception area of the Yellow Water Resort had been cordoned off for the briefing and was packed by representatives from all the major Australian media networks as well as a large contingent from Japanese, American and other international news outlets. The news of the Australian Prime

Minister's assassination and the disappearance of the Japanese Prime Minister had made headlines around the world.

She announced that the Japanese Prime Minister was safe and was on his way to Darwin where he would meet with her that evening before flying home to Japan. She then also advised that the assassins had been killed and had been identified as Chinese. Three of them had been killed fleeing the scene and two others and the pilot had died while trying to escape in a small aircraft. She commended the Northern Territory police and the Australian Federal Police for their efforts.

She then asked the press gallery for questions. A barrage of questions was shouted out by several reporters and she gave succinct answers to each one as best she could. The main line of questioning was as to the cause of the explosion to the aircraft carrying the Chinese and the identification of the Chinese assassins. She responded that the aircraft had exploded after take-off for reasons unknown to date but the wreckage was being examined by aviation experts. The bodies were badly charred but everything was being done to identify them and their associations with any terrorist groups, but at this stage it was too early to draw any conclusions. She deflected questions which related to any political motives of the Chinese Government and indicated that police were working closely with their counterparts in China to identify the assassins.

Helen Kwang managed to get in a question about the death of Barry Buckstone outside the Jabiru Police Station. Sentoro deferred this question to John Fisher who explained that Buckstone had died from injuries received in a hit and run accident and that the Northern Territory Police were pursuing the matter. The AFP was also investigating his treatment by police prior to the fatal car accident. Fisher was stung by her follow-up question as to whether he knew of allegations that a certain member of the Land Council had received bribes to allow mining to take place on sacred aboriginal ground. Fisher stated he had heard the rumours but had no information that would substantiate such allegations.

The questions kept coming and Sentoro patiently answered them for another thirty minutes before thanking the media for attending and closing the briefing session. She walked back to her suite and started packing for her trip to Darwin for a farewell meeting with Prime Minister Koshi.

Chapter 14

MONDAY MORNING – JABIRU

Bill pulled up the truck outside Barry Buckstone's house in Jabiru, climbed out and knocked on the front wire door of the old weatherboard house. He could hear voices inside, said "Hello" and let himself into the front room. Lizzie was sitting on the sofa comforting Elsie, Barry's widow, as he walked in. Lizzie looked up to see Bill and rushed over and hugged him. Elsie was sobbing, rocking backwards and forwards on the sofa, devastated by the loss of her husband. Bill put his arms around her and expressed his condolences. Elsie's sister, Bonny, came out of the

kitchen holding a tray carrying a teapot, cups, milk, sugar and biscuits. She embraced Bill and started passing teacups around.

Having drunk the tea, Bill followed Lizzie out to the kitchen. He could see she was upset but also angry. He put his arm around her. She looked up to him, tears falling down her cheeks.

“Bill, we’ve gotta do something about this. We can’t let the bastards get away with it. It was no accident that Barry was run down after being beaten up by those cops.”

“There’ll be an inquest into it Lizzie and the truth will come out,” suggested Bill.

“No it won’t, they’ll cover it up and nothing will happen. They’ve been trying to shut Barry up ever since he started investigating the deal between the mining company and the Land Council to open up the Jabiru mine. Barry said he had evidence of some dodgy deal involving payback to Bert O’Shea, the President of the Land Council, for giving approval to the deal.”

“Does Elsie know where this evidence is?”

“No, but she said their place was done over a few weeks ago, left in an awful mess, but nothing of value was taken. She reckons whoever went through their stuff must have been disturbed cause it looked like they left in a hurry. Barry was worried about it but couldn’t find anything missing.”

“Well, if Elsie agrees, perhaps we can search the house while we are here.”

Lizzie nodded her head in agreement. “I’ll ask her about it tomorrow.”

“Elsie said we can bunk down in the sleep-out for a couple of days till the funeral”.

“O.K., I’ll bring my bag in,” responded Bill and walked out to the truck.

MONDAY MORNING – DALY WATERS

Jake was woken up by the ringing of his mobile phone. He rolled out of bed and picked it up.

“Jake it’s John Fisher. Have you got a couple of minutes?”

Jake acquiesced and Fisher asked him for his version of the events that led to the plane crash which incinerated the Chinese at the Daly Waters airport. Jake gave him a concise account of the last few days. Fisher listened attentively.

“Thanks for that Jake. It pretty much tallies with what my guys are telling me. Look for political reasons it’s best you keep your role and that of your father quiet on this and let us handle it. The Acting P.M. wants to calm the media down and I’m sure you don’t want a media gaggle on your doorstep.”

“Yeah that’s fine by me, I’m happy to opt out altogether.”

“Thanks for that Jake. Anna Sentoro is very grateful for what you did and you’ll receive an official commendation for your help.”

“I don’t need any favours to keep quiet on this. You can take my word on that.”

“Thanks for your cooperation Jake. Will you be going to Canberra after this?”

“Yes, I’ll be there later in the week for a couple of days.”

“Perhaps we could catch up for a coffee and run through some details.”

Jake agreed. Fisher said his personal assistant would be in touch and rang off.

Jake checked his mobile to see he had a missed call from Helen Kwang who had left a message asking him to call her back urgently. While the last thing he wanted to do was to talk to the press, Helen was a good friend and he trusted her. He keyed in her number. She answered straight away.

“Hi Helen, it’s Jake here. I’ve been following your reporting of the P.M.’s assassination and Koshi’s survival. It’s been riveting stuff.”

“Thanks Jake. I was just wondering if you are O.K.? There is a rumour going around that you were involved in Koshi’s rescue. Is that true?”

“No, I’m fine thanks, they’ve got me mixed up with someone else,” Jake lied.

“Well, I’m glad you are O.K.,” she said somewhat sceptically. “Where are you now?”

“I’m staying in Daly Waters at my dad’s place and will be going on to Canberra in a few days’ time after going to Barry Buckstone’s funeral.”

There was a pause on the end of the line.

“Oh, I didn’t realise you knew Barry. How did you get to meet him?” she inquired.

Cursing himself silently for letting it slip that he knew Barry, Jake explained the connection with his father and Barry’s sister.

“Jake, you may not be aware of this but there are protests going on at Jabiru over Barry’s death. One of the protesters tried to burn down the police station. There is also a rumour suggesting Barry was killed because he had some documents exposing corruption and bribes involving a member of the Kakadu Land Council and the consulting company who did the environmental study for the Jabiru Mine.”

“I’ve heard the same rumour but I gather nothing’s been substantiated” replied Jake.

“Jake, I’ve tried to contact Barry’s family but no one is taking my calls. As you know the family do you think you could ask around and find out if there is any truth in the rumour?”

“It’s a bad time for them but I can ask. I doubt if I’ll find anything.”

“I’d appreciate your help Jake. I’m driving up to Darwin where Sentoro and Koshi are giving a joint press conference tomorrow. Could you call me if you dig up anything of interest?”

“O.K. Helen, but don’t hold your breath,” replied Jake.

They discussed the attacks on the Prime Ministers with Jake being careful to avoid any mention of his role in the pursuit of Koshi by the terrorists.

Jake ended the call after promising Helen he would contact her when he visited Canberra.

Chapter 15

TUESDAY – DARWIN

Surrounded by his security detail, Prime Minister Koshi was ushered into Sentoro's suite at the Hotel Tropical, Darwin's leading hotel. Koshi was giving a press conference before flying out of Darwin courtesy of an RAAF jet that afternoon. The whole top floor of the hotel had been booked out for the Prime Minister's entourage and was under tight security. Koshi looked pale and tired after his ordeal but managed a smile when greeted by Sentoro. Anna was dressed and groomed immaculately and showed no outward signs of the stress she was feeling. She escorted him to a plush lounge chair and sat opposite him, waving the officials away so they could have their conversation in private. A waiter came and delivered them tea and coffee.

Sentoro asked him whether he had recovered from his ordeal. Koshi nodded his head and acknowledged the efforts of the Australian police to keep him safe. In particular he praised the efforts of Jake Stafford in securing his safety and recommended he be rewarded for his efforts. Sentoro explained that for security reasons they were keeping Jake's role quiet but he would be rewarded in the future.

They discussed the approach to the press conference they were about to give in the conference room at the hotel. This was mainly to give the Japanese Prime Minister an opportunity to express his thanks to the Australian public and to demonstrate that the business of government would continue despite the actions of terrorists. They also went over the process involved in implementing the newly agreed Japan Australia Treaty. After nearly an hour's discussion, they rose and made their way to the conference centre which was packed with people from the media and security.

Sentoro made the opening remarks praising Prime Minister Koshi for his courage in the face of his ordeal and how his leadership had ensured a long lasting friendship with Australia. Koshi limped to the rostrum to the spontaneous applause of the audience. He expressed his deepest sympathy to the family of the late Prime Minister Murray and to the families of the other Australians who had lost their lives. He thanked the police and others involved in securing his safety from the terrorists. He stressed that the recent crisis had further strengthened the Japan Australia relationship and had bonded the two nations inexorably together. The newly signed treaty would continue as a legacy to Neville Murray. He stepped down from the rostrum to generous applause from the media.

Sentoro then took her place on the dais and reiterated Koshi's remarks about the strength of the Japan-Australia relationship in a brief speech. She vowed that neither Australia nor Japan would be cowed by terrorism and new counter-terrorism measures would be introduced in the next sitting of the Australian Parliament. She announced that there would be a Day of Mourning in Australia on the following Friday to coincide with the state funeral for Murray in Melbourne. She then outlined the progress of the investigation into the Chinese terrorist group and invited questions.

There was an immediate chorus of questions from the journalists and Sentoro selected one of the Japanese reporters to ask the first question of Koshi. The question related to the attempt on Koshi's life and how he had managed to survive the terrorist attack. Koshi replied in Japanese attributing his escape to the help received from the Australian police and officials. An interpreter translated his reply

for the majority of the audience. Although quite fluent in English, Koshi preferred to use an interpreter to give himself time to think about his answers.

The questions were soon directed at Sentoro asking about actions taken to identify the terrorist group and whether the Chinese Government had offered assistance. Sentoro responded that investigations were proceeding into the background of the terrorist group and that representations had been made to the highest level of the Chinese Government which had pledged assistance in tracking down the terrorists. In answer to a further question, Sentoro explained that the Islamic State flag had been planted at the scene of the attack as a ruse to distract the police investigators and all the Islamic suspects had been released from jail.

After another ten minutes, Sentoro cut short the conference on the pretext that Prime Minister Koshi had to leave for the airport. They were escorted by their security teams back to their hotel suites. Within the hour, Sentoro had joined Koshi in his car on the way to the airport. She farewelled him on the steps of the aircraft.

She waited until the aircraft took off and heaved a huge sigh of relief as the plane disappeared on its way to Tokyo. She was looking forward to having a day's break to catch up with her husband and children. But she knew she wouldn't have long to rest. In a week's time the Liberal Party was to elect a new leader to replace Neville Murray and she had a lot of campaigning to do if she were to win the ballot.

TUESDAY EVENING – ALICE SPRINGS

Jason Blake, aka Blakey, had managed to elude the police for 36 hours. The first clue as to his whereabouts came when a report came in to the police station at the town of Tennant Creek that a Ford sedan had been stolen from a camping ground. On checking out the theft an alert police constable noticed a green utility had been found partially hidden under a tree next to the camping ground. He identified the utility as belonging to Blakey and sent out a despatch alerting police of the stolen vehicle and the suspected occupant.

The vehicle was identified in Alice Springs, parked 50 metres away from a well-known brothel in the inner city. Police surrounded the brothel while a team of policemen searched each room. They found Blakey intoxicated and naked in bed in a compromising position with a woman. He provided no resistance as they hauled him out of bed, made him dress and escorted him to the police wagon where he was promptly taken to the Alice Springs Remand Centre.

WEDNESDAY – ALICE SPRINGS

Sam Popolo, Assistant Commissioner, N.T. Police, flew into Alice Springs Airport where he was met by a constable and driven straight to the Police Remand Centre. He took over the interview of Blakey who had been questioned most of the night. Blakey had refused to answer any questions but Popolo was known for his ruthlessness in his interrogations. He threatened Blakey with the murder of the

Prime Minister and after an hour's interrogation he decided to confess. Later he signed a full statement.

Chapter 16

WEDNESDAY – JABIRU

The open area in front of the Uniting Church in Jabiru was already crowded with mourners when Jake parked the cruiser in a side street. The church was modern, the wooden walls were painted white and the roof was of corrugated iron. Its main feature was the beautiful stained glass window on the wall behind the altar. There was a large group of protesters holding up signs demanding justice for Barry as well as a few members of the press and photographers standing around in the street. A small police contingent was keeping them away from the church grounds.

Jake got out of the cruiser and searched for Lizzie and Bill. He spotted them in the middle of a large group and walked over giving Lizzie a big hug and put an arm around his father. Lizzie introduced him to Barry's widow Elsie and a dozen or so adult family members. They were surrounded by numerous children dressed in their best clothes, bright-eyed but not really understanding what the occasion was all about. Jake recognised Lizzie's grandson Gillie, who gave him a shy smile. Eventually they moved into the church and took their seats.

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Jake was looking for a seat at the back of the church but Lizzie grabbed him by the arm and made him sit next to her and Bill in the front row. Every seat in the church was soon taken and a number had to stand at the rear. The service started with a choir of aboriginal women singing "Abide with Me" as the young Minister walked to the pulpit. Jake was deeply moved by the service that followed, which at different times, was both joyous and sad. Lizzie gave the eulogy in a heartfelt account of Barry's life and the work he had done for his community. Two of his grandchildren read prayers and his daughter spoke with passion about his love of his family, community and the land. Elsie was too upset to get up and speak. Many of the congregation were quietly sobbing during the service. When the service was completed, Barry's four grandsons carried the coffin to the graveyard adjoining the church grounds followed by the rest of the congregation. The coffin was lowered into the ground and each member of the congregation walked past the grave and showed their respect by throwing a twig of rosemary onto the coffin.

The whole congregation then moved onto the Memorial Hall where they were provided with sandwiches and drinks. It was the first time that Jake had a chance to talk to Bill and filled him in about the latest developments on the Chinese terrorists. Bill was relieved that his role in hunting down the terrorists was to be hushed up. Jake then passed to him the rumour that Helen Kwang had mentioned to him about Barry having some sensitive documents about the purchase of the land for the Jabiru mine.

Bill responded, "Yeah, I've heard the rumour, and I asked Elsie about it but she has no knowledge of any document that Barry might have hidden. Although she did say that their place had been done over a few weeks ago but nothing appeared to be missing."

"Have you searched the house for it?" asked Jake.

"Yeah, I've been through his office and checked his computer. I'm not sure what we're looking for though. I've had a quick search of the rest of the house but it's not in any of the obvious places."

"Would Elsie mind if I had a look for it?"

"No, of course not. Everyone's going to be here for a while. The house will be empty of people for the next couple of hours so it will be a good time to search it. Let's go!"

They left together and got in their vehicles. Jake followed Bill to Elsie's house. It was an old three bedroom weatherboard home but well-kept and recently painted. Bill pulled out the key for the door but the door was unlocked.

* * * * *

"That's strange, I'm sure Elsie locked the door when we left," Bill said.

Suddenly they heard a rush of steps and the back door banging. They raced through the kitchen to see a man sprinting towards the back fence. Jake set off in pursuit but the man had quickly climbed over the fence and disappeared into the next house. Jake hurled himself over the fence and dropped to the other side, wincing with pain as he landed on his injured leg. Bill landed next to him and they both set off round the side of the house and out to the next street. They looked left and right but there was no sign of the intruder. Bill swore loudly as they walked back to Elsie's home.

* * * * *

The house was untouched by the intruder except for the office which had been ransacked with books and files and papers scattered all over it. The screen on the computer was still on so the intruder had obviously been going through Barry's computer files before he was disturbed.

"Barry must have had something of real value for them to have another go at robbing the place. And whatever it was, they probably didn't get it because that guy wasn't carrying anything when he ran off. Poor Elsie doesn't need this on top of everything else."

They set about cleaning up the office and restoring everything to its proper place. Once the office looked decent again Bill suggested they start their search.

"The problem is we don't know what we're looking for. It could be on the computer, a memory stick, some paper documents, an audio or video tape," said Jake

"O.K., let's do this room by room. Jake you take the computer, the office and the bedrooms and I'll do the living areas and bathroom."

They searched every room thoroughly, checking for hidden spaces, hollow walls, loose floorboards, even poked around in the ceiling, but could find nothing. After two hours, they were convinced that whatever it was, it was not in the house. They then started on the outside, the garage, the garden and the shed, still without

success. The only remaining place to look was under the house. Bill changed into a pair of jeans and T-shirt and brought out some old clothes and a torch for Jake. Jake replaced his suit for the old clothes while Bill came out with a set of house keys and found one that unlocked the padlock to the gate providing access to under the house. Jake followed Bill as he crawled through the gate and they found there was just enough room to stand up if he bent right over. He shined the flashlight under the house brushing cobwebs aside as he went. There was a pile of timber, old bathroom tiles and a stack of plastic agricultural pipes as well as assorted tools and junk lying on the earthen floor, but nothing that would indicate a hiding place. They hauled themselves back out through the gate and straightened up. Bill went to replace the padlock when Jake stopped him.

“That padlock and key look new Bill, yet you wouldn’t think Barry would have needed to go under the house too often.”

“Yeah, that’s true but the old one could have just rusted out” replied Bill.

“But there’s nothing of any value under there, so why would he need a padlock at all? Let’s have another quick look.”

Jake ducked under the house again and shone his torch along the inside walls either side of the gate. There were two PVC plastic pipes lying along one wall, each about four metres in length and ten centimetres in diameter. They were the type that Jake had seen carried on roof racks of 4WD vehicles to be used for water storage. They had screw caps on each end. He picked up the end of the closest pipe, unscrewed the cap off and shone the torch down the pipe. All he could see was an old bag stuck in the pipe. Without any expectation he pulled out a plastic bag sealed with masking tape. He stumbled back through the gate into the yard. He peeled off the tape and opened the bag. Inside the bag was a small black box. It looked like a gift box used for jewellery or watches. He opened the box and inside it was a key ring. The key ring was of no interest to Jake. But he was very interested in the USB memory stick attached to it.

“Bill, I might have something here. Take a look!” Jake showed him the key ring and memory stick.

Bill looked at the memory stick. “Right, let’s load it onto the computer and see what’s on it.”

They walked inside and Jake plugged the USB into Barry’s computer. He started scrolling through the files. He found several documents that looked interesting including a letter, some emails and two contracts. He read the letter quickly and gasped.

“What’s in it Jake? Bill peered over his shoulder at the computer screen.

“This is a copy of a letter from a company called Northern Consulting to Baobab Trustees. It states that they will pay Baobab \$2.25 million for services relating to land rights and environmental issues in the development of the Jabiru mine.”

Bill interjected “Christ Almighty! That’s what the intruders were looking for. Northern Consulting is the consultant commissioned by Energet to negotiate with the Land Council over the aboriginal land rights issue holding up the mine development. I’ll bet Baobab Trustees is owned by Bert O’Shea, President of the Land Council. They’ve made a secret deal with O’Shea to make sure the Land Council doesn’t object to the development of the mine. Barry’s got hold of a copy somehow. This is dynamite!”

Jake checked the other documents. There were emails detailing technical specifications of the area for mining development in Jabiru which didn't mean much to him. Then he examined the largest document which was entitled "Agreement between Energet Resources and Nippan Energy". It seemed to be a standard contract detailing terms and conditions for the exploitation of uranium in the Jabiru district. His interest was sparked when he scanned a second contract which was marked "Highly Confidential". This outlined an agreement between Energet and Mitsustrata, a Japanese company he had never heard of. This also seemed to be a standard contract but one clause took his eye. It set out special payments for the production and supply of rare earths and spelt out the names of particular rare earths of interest. This confused Jake because all the publicity for the mine related to the production of uranium.

Just then, Lizzie and Elsie walked in the front door. Jake hastily closed down the computer and removed the memory stick. He returned it to the gift box and put it in his pocket. He spoke to Bill, "Let's talk later about what we do with this." Bill nodded his head in agreement and walked to the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Lizzie was comforting Elsie who was overcome with grief and exhausted from the effort of trying to hold herself together at the funeral. Lizzie made her a cup of tea and encouraged her to lie down on her bed after giving her some sedatives to help her sleep.

Bill told Lizzie about the break-in and what they had found under the house. She gasped when Jake pulled out the memory stick from his pocket and explained its contents. They discussed what they should do for several minutes. Lizzie sat down next to Jake and said

"Jake, we'd like you to keep the USB and follow this up. Elsie won't want anything to do with it after what's happened to Barry. You understand this funny business better than anyone we know and we trust you. Will you take it and see that Barry gets some justice?"

Jake thought about it. "I'm not sure I'm the right person to follow this through. What about giving the stick to the police and letting them pursue it?"

"I wouldn't trust the coppers as far as I could throw them. Look what happened to Barry. Please Jake, we don't know anyone else with your background that could follow this up."

"O.K. I'll give it a go. I'll talk to a few people and work out what's the best course of action. But Elsie should have a say in this."

"Thanks Jake. Don't worry about Elsie. I'll talk to her tomorrow when she's recovered a bit from her ordeal. But I'm sure she'd rather you followed it up. All she wants is justice for Barry's death."

Jake nodded, not sure what he was getting himself into.

"I'll think it over for the next few days."

"You'd better stay here tonight Jake, it's a long drive back to Daly Waters."

Jake agreed, returning the memory stick to his pocket, and spent the evening talking to Bill and Lizzie. He retired early and slept on a mattress on the floor in the sleep-out.

Chapter 17

THURSDAY – DALY WATERS

Early in the morning Jake farewelled Bill, Lizzie and Elsie, climbed into the Toyota and headed back down the now familiar highway to Daly Waters. He entered his cabin to find a note on the kitchen table from Shoni saying she was working that evening at the hotel and suggesting he eat dinner there and have a drink with her at closing time. He walked across to Bill's office and let himself in. He plugged the USB into Bill's computer and printed two copies of the documents. After removing the USB, he folded up one complete copy of the documents, walked across to the general store which also acted as a post office and bought some large envelopes and postage stamps. He then wrote a short note, placed the note and documents in one of the large envelopes, addressed the envelope to Helen Kwang at the National's office in Canberra, marked it PRIVATE in big bold letters, stamped it and dropped it in the mailbox outside the store.

Back in the cabin, he placed the second copy of the documents in the other large envelope with the intention of giving it to Bill to hold in his office safe.

He opened his laptop and started searching on the internet for information about rare earths.

He found several articles of interest. Rare earths comprise seventeen different metal oxides such as cerium and lanthanum which are used in manufacture of emerging technologies such as lasers, magnets, batteries, defence equipment, fibre optics and electronic components. China has 95% of world production and controls the world market. By contrast, Japan is the world's biggest consumer of rare earths used for its high technology and defence industries. Following the recent disagreement over disputed territories in the East China Sea, China had refused to supply Japan with its rare earths. This had left the Japanese desperately seeking alternative supplies of rare earths.

Jake rang around some of his contacts in the mining industry until he found an expert in the field of rare earths. His name was Stan Hill, a former employee of the Australian Bureau of Mineral Resources, and now working as a consultant. Jake introduced himself as the Australian Trade Commissioner based in Tokyo and was seeking information on the pretext of looking for new opportunities for Australian companies. He asked him whether any new suppliers of rare earths had emerged in recent times and the likely effects on the market if a substantial new supplier emerged.

Stan advised that there were reserves of rare earths in a number of countries outside China but China had vigorously undercut any international rivals and had driven them out of business. Australia has large reserves in the Northern Territory and South Australia and was the only country outside China which had the reserves and capacity to produce rare earths in commercial quantities. The problem was the huge cost of developing any new mine to produce rare earths.

Jake queried Stan on the Chinese-Japanese relationship regarding trade in rare earths. He affirmed that it was an extremely sensitive area between the two

countries and that China would do anything to prevent any other country supplying Japan. It would be seen by the Chinese as a threat to its domination of the world market and to its leading position in the development of new technologies, especially for weapons systems.

On further prompting from Jake, Stan suggested that China would try to buy into any new deposit of rare earths in Australia and would want a controlling share in any new development. China was vehemently opposed to the current limit set by the Australian Investment Review Board of 49% on foreign shareholdings in mining development and had made its views known on numerous occasions to the Australian Government on mining projects of interest. Any move by Australia to produce rare earths without China's involvement would most likely lead to a severe protest from China and deterioration in relations.

Jake thanked him and hung up. The more he thought about it the more intriguing the situation became. He remembered his conversation with Felix Sherbel, the Operations Manager for Energet, who was evasive about the production of uranium at the Jabiru mine. What if the top people in Energet and Nippan, the joint operators of the mine, had conspired to produce rare earths to supply the Japanese market, not just uranium as widely publicised. It was not uncommon for uranium and rare earths to be found together and the uranium mine could be a smokescreen to cover the production of rare earths. Such a secretive operation could only be undertaken after close collaboration at the top level of the Australian and Japanese Governments. The Australian production would fill the void of rare earth supplies that had been left by the withdrawal of Chinese supplies. Consequently the Japanese defence industry would have access to the metal oxides so critical to development of new technologies for its strategic industries, especially in the defence area.

With a start, Jake realised there could be a connection between the Chinese terrorist attack and the production of rare earths at the Jabiru mine. Was it possible that the Chinese had discovered that the mine was intended to produce rare earths and wanted to prevent the Japanese from receiving alternative supplies? He shuddered at the thought that the Chinese Government might take such action - or was it a splinter group within the Chinese bureaucracy?

Jake checked through some other documents on Barry's memory stick. Apart from the contracts there were also details of payments to overseas bank accounts. He did an extensive internet search on Mitsustrata, Northern Consulting and Baobab Trustee and the overseas banks but came up empty-handed. The only two people he knew with the skills to track something like this down were Helen Kwang and her daughter Sarah. He picked up the phone and dialled Helen's mobile number. After a couple of rings, Helen picked up.

"Hi Helen, it's Jake. How's it going?" Jake enquired.

"Still frantic Jake. Koshi has just returned to Tokyo and everyone's heaved a huge sigh of relief. But there's still a lot of unanswered questions about the Chinese terrorists. What have you been up to Jake?"

"Helen, I've mailed some confidential documents to your Canberra address. Could you keep them safe for me till I get to Canberra and can discuss them with you."

Helen responded “Sure Jake. I’ll be back in Canberra tomorrow. Give me a call when you’re in Canberra and we can have a meal together. Have you found anything of interest?”

“I’m not sure, I’ve got some names of companies and overseas banks which might be important but I can’t track them down. Would you be able to help me?”

“I’ll do what I can Jake but I’m no expert in chasing these things either.’

“What about Sarah, is she still in the finance security business?”

“Yes, she is, I could ask her to help. What’s this all about Jake?”

Jake knew that Sarah worked with one of the financial security companies and was an expert in tracking transactions to their source. She had also saved one of the banks millions of dollars by running down some hackers who had infiltrated their financial system.

“It may be nothing or it could be something sensitive. Look if it amounts to anything, you’ll be the first to know.” Jake was being deliberately vague.

“O.K., send me the details Jake and I’ll talk to Sarah about it.”

Jake thanked her and texted her the names of the companies and banks involved.

Chapter 18

THURSDAY – CANBERRA

After seeing off Koshi at the airport in Darwin, Anna Sentoro flew to Canberra, taking the opportunity of working in the plane to catch up on a huge backlog of her normal day to day work as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. She was met by her driver at the airport and taken to her home in Canberra where she spent the evening with her husband Don and her two young teenage sons. She hadn’t seen them for a week and enjoyed spending a few hours just being a normal wife and mother and catching up on their activities. After she had cooked the boys their favourite dinner of cannelloni followed by banana shakes, the four of them sat around the table as she told them what had happened over the last week, sparing them some of the gory details of the assassination of the Prime Minister and others. She then explained to them that she had to make a decision as to whether she would run for the leadership of the Liberal Party to become Prime Minister.

They were supportive but she knew if she were to be successful there would be a real strain on the family in view of the huge demands on her time as a Prime Minister. As it was, Don was unhappy with the amount of time she spent away from the family in her role as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and their relationship had been strained for some time. After kissing the boys goodnight she and Don shared a bottle of red wine on the couch watching the television. There she nodded off to sleep until Don gently woke her and she shuffled her way to the bedroom. She was asleep again the minute her head hit the pillow.

FRIDAY MORNING – CANBERRA

Anna woke refreshed in the morning, threw on her robe and prepared breakfast for Don and the children and packed their school lunches. She was again happy to do the normal things as a wife and mother after the horrendous week she had been through. She kissed the boys as they walked out the door to the garage and got in Don's car. Don always drove them to school on his way to work. Her chauffeured-driven car was already waiting to take her to her office in Parliament House. She quickly showered and dressed, jumped in the car and was in her office by 9.00 am. She acknowledged her staff as she entered her office where she collapsed into her chair with a huge sigh. The last week had been the most gruelling in her life and the next week wasn't going to be much easier with the ballot for the party leadership coming up and a state funeral to arrange.

Her Personal Assistant, Jenny Larkham, brought her a cup of coffee and presented her with her schedule for the day, the daily news briefing and the red folder containing urgent action papers. She switched on her computer and scanned her emails.

She then called her staff to a meeting in her office and briefed them on the activities of the last week before asking each of them to fill her in on major issues she needed to be aware of. On winding up the meeting she asked her Chief of Staff, Allan Laidley, to stay behind. Allan was in his early thirties, but looked older. He had a perpetual frown on his face, was short, overweight and balding. Owing to his appearance, people often underestimated him. He was highly intelligent and had a very good feel for politics and policies that would work. He had been working for Anna for six years and she depended on him for his loyalty and honesty and respected his opinions especially in regard to his judgement in reading the political climate.

"What's the latest on the leadership election Allan?" Anna asked, referring to the ballot by the Liberal Party to replace Neville Murray as Prime Minister.

"It's going to be held in the party room next Monday at 10 a.m. Apart from yourself, It looks like the only other candidate to stand for the leadership will be Malcolm Crichton. There will also be a spill for the deputy leadership position with two nominations."

"What's the feeling in the party room?"

"We've been canvassing around the members and at the moment you are the clear frontrunner, especially after your handling of the crisis following the P.M.'s assassination. But Crichton is an old campaigner and is certainly pitching hard. He's making a lot of noise about your inexperience compared to his long standing as a minister of various portfolios."

"Heaven forbid if he ever got the Prime Ministership. He's forever feathering his own nest. There's still a lot of rumours about some dodgy mining and property deals he's involved in."

"Nevertheless, there is a number of undecided back-benchers and you need to get on the phone to shore up your support. I've made a list of the more influential members."

“O.K. thanks for that Allan. Anything else of importance today?”

Allan ran through the most urgent matters requiring her attention and her appointments during the day. She noted an appointment scheduled at midday with Anthony Wiley, Malcolm Crichton’s Chief of Staff, and queried it with Allan.

“He requested an urgent meeting with you Minister and wouldn’t say what it was about. He said it was personal. Do you want me to cancel it?”

“No, but I wonder what that little weasel wants. No doubt Crichton has something nasty he’s cooking up.”

Allan left her office and she started going through the papers in the red folder. By midday she had signed off the most urgent papers and handled two meetings in her office.

Jenny tapped on the door to announce that Wiley had arrived. She told her to bring him in and she waved him to a chair on the opposite side of her desk. Wiley was well named and had a reputation as a skilled manipulator of people in the world of politics. He was a small ferret-like man and Anna knew he revelled in doing hatchet jobs for Crichton.

After making the usual pleasantries and congratulating her on her handling of the terrorist crisis he finally got to the point.

“Minister, would you mind telling me if you are planning to run for the party leadership?”

“I haven’t made up my mind definitively yet, but several party members have encouraged me to run. I’m sure you already know that.”

“Well, something has come to my attention which might cause some embarrassment to you and the party if it came to light.”

Seething, Anna said “And what might that be Anthony?”

Wiley pulled out an envelope and threw it on Anna’s desk.

She picked the envelope up and shook out its contents. There were three photos. She gasped when she saw them. The first was of her and Jake Stafford dancing very closely together at the celebration party at the Yellow Water Resort. The second showed her and Jake kissing on the balcony in her suite at the after-party. The third showed Jake coming out of her room and was time dated at 3 a.m.

Her face turned bright red with fury. “You little weasel, where did you get these from?”

“Let’s just say they were taken by someone who knows you well.”

“This is monstrous! Nothing happened between Jake and me. We were just having a bit of fun. I danced with lots of people at the party as well as in my suite afterwards.”

“That may be so Minister, but the camera doesn’t lie and it casts you in an embarrassing position, especially if the media gets hold of these photos.”

Anna couldn’t believe what was happening.

“Who else has seen these photos?”

“To date only the person who took the photos, Mr Crichton and myself.”

“So what are you planning on doing with them Wiley?” Anna sneered.

“That depends on you.”

“What do you want? Are you trying to blackmail me?”

“Not at all Minister. In fact I’m quite happy to give you these and the originals.”

“O.K. what do you want from me, what’s the price I have to pay?”

“Well, if you were to withdraw your candidacy for the party leadership ballot, I’m sure this problem would be resolved.”

“You worm. You and Crichton are the biggest bastards ever. This is blackmail. I’ll take this to the police.”

“And we would simply deny we have ever seen them.”

“You can’t threaten me with this. I’ll go to the press and explain what happened and tell them about your sordid blackmail attempt.”

“Again, I would just deny it. It wouldn’t help you, your family or the party if such a scandal was exposed. But it’s up to you, let me know your decision by tomorrow or these just might find their way to the press. You can keep the photos as mementos.” Wiley sniggered.

“Get the fuck out of my office, you vile little man,” Anna screamed.

Wiley smirked and let himself out of her office. Once she had recovered her composure, she asked Allan to come in to her office. She tossed him the photos and explained what had happened. He stared at the photos with a horrified expression on his face.

“Christ, what are you going to do about this?” Allan asked.

“I honestly don’t know. It’s all circumstantial and I could call their bluff and see what happens. But if this gets to the press it could be damaging to me personally as well as the Government. It would also be upsetting to Don and the boys. While I can explain to Don that nothing really happened it would still place additional strain on our marriage.”

“Who do you think took the photos?”

“It could have been anybody who was at the party and who was celebrating at my suite afterwards. Many people were taking selfies with their phone cameras. But does it matter now that the prints have been made?”

“Probably not, but if we could work out who it was and somehow got hold of their phone we could delete the evidence,” suggested Allan.

“It’s a long shot and even if we did find out who it was, how do we get their phone off them?”

“Don’t know, but nevertheless I could draw up a list of people who were at both places and see if we could work it out. What about Jake - do you think he might have noticed anyone?”

“I don’t know, he wasn’t drunk like most of us so he just might remember someone.”

She thought for a second. “He needs to know about this anyway, so I might give him a call and ask him.”

“Allan, would you keep this to yourself and think how we might contain it from becoming a scandal. Come back to me in an hour with any thoughts.”

Allan nodded and walked out of her office.

She dialled Jake’s number. He picked up after a couple of rings.

“Jake it’s Anna. How are you?”

“I’m fine thanks Minister.”

“Please call me Anna, Jake. How’s the leg healing up?”

“Ah, good thanks, Anna. I’m pretty mobile again.”

“I’m sorry to have to ring you Jake but I’ve got a problem which affects you.”

She explained about the photos and Wiley's threat to go to the media.

Jake listened in amazement.

"This is crazy, nothing happened between us."

"I know Jake although I apologise if I was a bit drunk and coming on to you. But the photos show us in a compromising position and the press would have a field day if they got hold of them. Can you remember anyone who might have taken photos of us?"

Jake thought hard for a minute.

"I can remember a young woman walking past as I let myself out of your suite. I can vaguely recall a flash as she brushed past me. She could have taken a photo from her mobile phone. I'd seen her at your party but I don't know her."

"Do you think you'd recognise her again if you saw her and could you describe her?"

"Yeah, I think so. She was short, blonde and wearing a green dress at the time."

"O.K. I'll ask around the office and see if anyone can identify her. I'll get Allan to send photos of anyone who might meet that description."

"Right Anna. I'll wait for them."

"Thanks. Jake this is highly confidential. Please don't breathe a word to anyone about this and don't take any calls from the press."

"Of course."

"And Jake, despite everything, I did enjoy myself at the party."

"Me too Anna, it was a fun night." Jake rang off.

Anna called Allan into her office and gave him the description of the woman with the green dress.

"O.K., I'll ask around and see if anyone can identify her."

In less than ten minutes he was back in her office.

"Jenny thinks she knows who it is. It's Belinda Rattan, a media advisor in Crichton's office. She was at the party in the resort as well as at the party in your suite. Jenny saw her taking lots of photos with her mobile."

"That would make sense. What a bitch! Can you get hold of a photo of her and send it off to Jake?"

"Will do. The Parliamentary Office will have one."

Allan hurried back to his office, opened his laptop, downloaded Rattan's photo from a link to the Parliamentary Office and sent it off to Jake's phone with a quick text. Jake texted back a few minutes later confirming it was the same woman. He walked back into Anna's office and sat himself down in a chair.

"Jake's confirmed it's Rattan alright. What do we do now?"

Anna thought for a second. "I'm not sure. We could confront her with it, but she'd probably deny it."

"What if we managed to grab her phone and delete the photos?"

"How would we do that - by stealing her phone? Even if we did delete the photos, Wiley's still got copies."

"Without the originals, we could claim they were doctored."

"No, people will believe they're the real thing anyhow. I'm afraid we're stuffed."

"Let me think about it anyway. It's worth chasing up." Allan got up and left her office and walked over to Jenny Larkham.

“Jenny, we have confirmed it’s Belinda Rattan who took those photos. Do you know her well? She’s put Anna in a very compromising position. I’d like to confront her on it and see what she says.”

“I don’t know her that well, but I see her around the Parliamentary Offices from time to time. I’ve seen her drinking with some friends at the Kingston Hotel after work a couple of times.

“It’s Friday, do you think she’d be going there tonight?”

“Quite likely. In fact I’m going there myself with a couple of people from the office. Do you want to join us, we’ll be there at around 5.30 p.m.?”

“Thanks Jenny, I’d like that. I’ll see you then.”

Allan rang his wife and told her he would be late getting home. He spent the next two hours finishing off the more urgent paper work, packed his brief case, said good night to Anna and walked out of the building to the car park. It took less than ten minutes to drive to the Kingston Hotel. The hotel was a popular watering-hole for public servants and staffers from ministerial offices. The car park was full so he parked in a side street and walked into the main lounge of the hotel. The lounge was packed and as he looked around he recognised a number of people from ministerial offices. He nodded to a couple of acquaintances and spotted Jenny sitting at a corner table with two other people from the office. He offered to buy them all drinks. He pushed his way through the crowd at the bar, ordered and paid for the drinks and carried them back on a tray to the table. They chatted about the last week’s events, raising their voices so they could be heard above the din.

Jenny leaned across and spoke to Allan quietly. She pointed discreetly to a table about ten metres away.

“See that group three tables up, the woman in black in the centre of the group is Belinda Grattan.”

Allan turned on his seat slowly and cast his eyes over the people around the table and let them rest on the woman in the centre. He realised he had seen her before at the party in Anna’s suite. He recognised most of the people on the table as being on the Defence Minister’s staff. They were in a party mood and looked as though they had been drinking for some time.

“Thanks Jenny, now all we have to do is steal her phone.”

Half-jokingly, Jenny said “That should be easy. All you have to do is spill a drink over her and while she is cleaning herself up lift her phone out of her handbag.”

“Yeah right, we don’t even know where she keeps her phone.”

“There’s an easy way to find out. Just ring her and when she answers, say she’s won a prize from a radio promotion or just say sorry wrong number and hang up.”

Allan thought for a second. “Hey, that just might work. I’ve got her mobile number, I can call her now.”

“No, then she’d have your number and might be able to track it down. Use the public phone at the bar,” suggested Jenny.

“Good thinking. O.K., I’ve got nothing to lose, I’ll try it. We’ll both watch her to see where she keeps her phone.”

Allan stood up and walked over to the public phone. He picked it up, dialled Belinda’s number and leaned over so he could see her reaction. He watched her

but there was no reaction. He thought either she hasn't got her phone with her or she hasn't heard it ring. He tried again and sighed with relief when she shuffled in her handbag and pulled it out.

"Hi, is that Belinda Gray?" Allan asked disguising his voice.

"My first name is Belinda but my surname is not Gray. I think you must have the wrong number."

"Oh, I'm sorry to bother you. Bye."

He watched as she put her phone on the table and picked up her drink.

Steeling himself, he waved to Jenny with his fingers crossed, picked up a half empty glass from the bar and walked towards Belinda's table. At the same time two young office workers, obviously intoxicated, brushed past him, forcing him sideways. He accentuated the move and crashed into the table with the contents of his beer glass splashing over Belinda's dress and the impact sending glasses flying everywhere. He recovered his footing, apologised profusely to the startled Belinda and used serviettes to mop up the beer on her dress. She swore at him.

"You stupid bastard, look what you've done?" she screamed as she pushed his hands away from her sodden blouse. The others on the table were also trying to recover from the mayhem.

"I'm so sorry, those guys shoved me as they walked past." Allan apologised again as he started to sponge up the beer on the table.

A large man at the other end of the table leaned over and glared angrily at Allan.

"Just get out of the way before I hang one on you," he said, pushing Allan in the chest.

"O.K., O.K., I'm going, I said I was sorry." Allan took the opportunity to leave and walked to the men's toilet, winking to a startled Jenny as he walked past.

In the toilet, Allan locked himself in the cubicle and pulled out Belinda's mobile from his pocket. He quickly scanned through her photos and grunted with satisfaction as he found the photos taken at the party. He deleted the offending photos, and then went back to have another look at a photo which caught his attention. He copied the photo onto his own phone, put Belinda's phone back in his pocket and let himself out of the cubicle. At the washbasin, he dabbed at beer stains on his shirt and walked back to his table where Jenny was looking at him wide-eyed.

"Did you get it?" she whispered as he sat down. He nodded and cast his eye around the room. Belinda had obviously rushed off to the ladies' room and the rest of the group were standing around waiting as the table and chairs were being dried off with a towel by a waitress.

"Give it to me and I'll slip it back before she realises her phone is missing. You need to make yourself scarce in case someone twigs as to what is going on."

Once the table had been cleaned, Jenny walked over to the waitress and gave her the phone explaining that she had picked it up off the floor and assumed that it belonged to someone involved in the accident at the table. The waitress thanked her and gave it to one of the group taking their seats.

She returned to her own table and saw Allan heading towards the exit. She raised her glass of wine to Allan who smiled and made his way out of the hotel.

Once outside Allan sent a quick text to Anna telling her he had deleted the offending photos.

Chapter 19

SATURDAY/SUNDAY- CANBERRA

Anna spent the weekend doing the normal things that mothers do. Don played golf every Saturday morning at Royal Canberra Golf Club so she took the boys to their junior tennis competitions and enjoyed watching them play so exuberantly. In the afternoon, the boys played with their friends at home while she potted around the garden and did some cooking, two of her favourite pastimes. In the evening, they all went out to their favourite Italian restaurant and had pizza.

On Sunday she spent a relaxed day with her family and had a picnic lunch at Black Mountain Peninsula. She had been chewing over the decision as to whether she would run for the leadership and discussed it with Don. By the end of the weekend she had made up her mind.

She arrived at her office at 8 a.m. on Monday to see that Allan was already working behind his desk. She called him over.

“Hi Allan. Thank you so much for going to the trouble of deleting those photos. It was very daring of you. But despite that, I’ve decided not to run for the leadership of the party.”

Allan’s face fell. “But you can still win the ballot. They can’t prove anything without the original photos.”

Anna raised her hand to stop him. “No, the media will have a field day with this even if we deny it. They like nothing better than a sex scandal. There will be enormous pressure on Don and the boys. And frankly, I’m not sure I’m ready to take on the stress of being Prime Minister.”

“So you’re going to let Crichton become Prime Minister without a fight. You know he’s corrupt.”

“Look the polls are showing the Labor Party ahead by 58% to 42%. The general election is only six months off. We’re probably going to lose anyway.”

“Yes, but you could turn it around. The public love the way you took charge after the P.M.’s assassination. The next poll could swing back our way.”

“Sorry Allan, my family means more to me than the leadership. I can’t risk losing my husband and kids.”

As a last desperate attempt Allan pulled out his phone and showed her the picture he had downloaded from Belinda’s phone.

“Look, this photo shows Crichton talking animatedly to Takaya, the Japanese billionaire, at the mine opening. Takaya is known to be corrupt even if he is a shareholder in Nippan Resources. Crichton’s in bed with one of the largest crooks in the business.”

Anna peered at the photo. “That’s interesting but it doesn’t prove anything Allan. People can talk to whoever they like. I’m sorry, but I’m not going to run for the leadership. I’ll tell Crichton that I’m not going to oppose him. Oh, and could you let Jake know I’m not running for the leadership?”

Shaking his head in disappointment, Allan walked back to his office and picked up the phone.

Chapter 20

SATURDAY/SUNDAY – DALY WATERS

Jake spent the weekend relaxing at Daly Waters. His leg was healing up well and he was going on long walks to strengthen it. The Toyota had been repaired and returned to him courtesy of a friend of Bill's. He spent as much time as he could with Shoni and together they explored the area around Daly Waters which was mainly semi-arid desert but also contained some gorges and natural springs. There could not have been a greater contrast to the hustle and bustle of Tokyo with its twelve million people living in confined spaces.

Their relationship grew as they talked for hours about their past and their hopes for the future. They felt very comfortable together and found they had a lot of things in common. After her shift at the pub finished each evening, Shoni rushed back to the cabin where Jake had a glass of wine waiting for her. After talking for a while they would shower together and make love on the old bed in the cabin.

MONDAY MORNING – DALY WATERS

Jake had just finished breakfast when his phone rang. It was Helen.

“Hi Jake. Sarah was able to check out those companies you sent to us. The companies are all registered in the Bahamas and all financial transactions have been with the Bank of Bahamas. Baobab Trustees was set up by none other than Bert O’Shea who as you probably know is the President of the Kakadu Land Council. Northern Consulting is jointly owned by its Managing Director, Tim Burston, Ruby Resources and Baobab Trustees. There is a complicated network of shell companies but she has tracked down the holding company to be Ruby Resources. The only address for Ruby is a post box number in a Canberra suburb. It is Post Office Box Number 457N at the Manuka Post Office in the Australian Capital Territory.” She paused as Jake copied the number down.

“As far as the Japanese company Mitsustrata is concerned, she has been able to track down the majority shareholder as Sidu Takaya, who is also a substantial shareholder in Nippan Energy, the Japanese partner in the Jabiru Mine. Ruby Resources also has a minority shareholding.”

Helen continued, “Sarah traced some transactions and has identified three large payments of \$750,000 from Northern Consulting to Baobab Trustees. She hasn’t been able to find out who are the owners of Ruby Resources. I’m emailing you a list of the transactions and company structure. Jake does this information mean anything to you?”

“Thanks to both of you for your help. I’m not sure what it means but I’ll go through it carefully and see if I can come up with anything.”

“Jake, I can feel something’s going on here. Is it to do with the new uranium mine?”

“I honestly don’t know Helen, but if I do find anything you will be the first to know. Please thank Sarah for me. I owe you both a dinner.”

“O.K. Jake let me know if I can do anything else?”

“Sure thing Helen, talk soon.” Jake rang off.

Jake pondered over the names he had been given over the phone from Helen. Something bothered him but he couldn’t quite figure it out. He grabbed a pen and a sheet of paper and sat at the table. He wrote down the names of all the companies and people involved in the establishment of the mine. He drew a chart and moved the names around into different groupings. After spending an hour poring over the names he threw his chair back in frustration and decided to go for a walk. It was midday and already hot and the few people that were around were keeping to the shade. He walked into the General Store and bought some bottled water. Bill had told him the local water was safe to drink but he wasn’t prepared to take a risk. He walked over to the souvenir shop which had the helicopter sitting on its iron roof, curious as to how anyone could have hauled it up there without crashing through the roof. As well as the usual tourist souvenirs of T-Shirts, toy kangaroos, boomerangs and beer can holders, all made in China, the store had a jewellery section and a collection of local gemstones, including sapphire, ruby, opal and amethyst. He bought some bracelets made from amethyst as gifts for his nieces. The shopkeeper was at pains to explain that the bracelets were good value for money as they were made from genuine amethyst and not from glass like his competitor in the next shop.

Jake walked out of the shop with his small package. He was planning on leaving Daly Waters the next day to travel to Canberra and Sydney to make some official calls and would finish up his Australian program in Melbourne before returning to Tokyo. He would spend the next weekend in Melbourne catching up with his sister and her husband and their two girls. He always brought presents for the kids and knew they would be disappointed if he didn’t have a ‘surprise’ for them.

Something about the gemstones was playing on his mind. He took his mind back to the conference at Yellow Water. He remembered that someone wore rubies. Then it hit him. Malcolm Crichton always wore a ring with a large ruby set in it. His cufflinks and tie-bar were also set in rubies. He used to own a company that mined gemstones in the Northern Territory but the quality was poor and production ceased. Was this the connection with Ruby Resources or was he being fanciful? It was a tenuous connection at best. He tried to think it through logically. What would Crichton have to gain by setting up such a complex web of companies? Did Crichton have an interest in the rare earths production at Jabiru? As a government minister, he was supposed to divest himself of any interests in companies where there could potentially be a conflict of interest. He had lost the deputy leadership of the Liberal Party because of a previous scandal over his mining investments. There clearly would be a conflict if he had an interest in the Jabiru mine but he could have set up the company offshore to hide his interest.

Chapter 21

MONDAY MORNING – CANBERRA

The Liberal Party members filtered into the party room for the ballot for the leadership and took their seats. The rumour was running that Anna Sentoro was not going to run for the leadership and that Crichton would be the only candidate for the leadership. The Party Whip, John McLelland, called the meeting together and outlined the process involved in the election. He then asked for nominations for the leadership. Malcolm Crichton stood up and announced he was contending for the leadership. The Whip then asked if there were any other candidates for the position. There was a hushed silence and the members looked expectantly at Anna Sentoro. When there was no response from her or anyone else, McLelland declared Crichton as the new leader and Prime Minister Elect. Crichton then made a lengthy speech as to the honour of being selected leader and how well he would serve the people as Prime Minister.

To everyone's surprise, Sentoro stood up and announced that she wished to step down from her position as Deputy Leader of the Party citing family reasons for her decision. There was a concerted gasp from the room at this announcement. The Whip then asked for nominations for the Deputy Leadership. The Treasurer, John Blackman, one of Anna's supporters, rose hesitantly from his chair and announced that he would apply for the position of Deputy Leader. Then the Education Minister, Harold Falconer, a close colleague of Crichton's, stood up and indicated he would also nominate for the Deputy Leadership. The Whip asked for any further nominations and when there were none forthcoming, asked the two candidates to state their case for appointment to the position. After their presentations, the Whip arranged for ballot papers to be distributed to the members. Once the ballot papers were completed, they were collected by the clerk and tallied up and presented to the Whip. McLelland looked at the result and declared a majority of fourteen votes in favour of Blackman. A murmur arose from the members. Blackman then made a short thank-you speech and the meeting concluded.

Anna hurried out of the party room, ignoring the members wishing to talk to her and rushed back to her office. She brought her staff together and told them briefly what had transpired in the party room. She gave her reason for stepping down from the deputy leadership as being able to spend more time with her family but her staff knew it was because she could not work with Crichton as Prime Minister. Crichton had however promised her that she would retain her role as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if she agreed to not stand for the leadership. Feeling herself become emotional she thanked her staff for their continuing support and concluded the meeting. She walked into her office, shut the door, shrugged her handbag off onto her desk, kicked off her shoes and collapsed into her chair and sobbed uncontrollably. After five minutes, she composed herself, wiped her eyes,

opened the small bar fridge and made herself a stiff gin and tonic. She thought of a quote from Robert Browning, her favourite poet, "My sun sets to rise again".

Chapter 22

MONDAY – BEIJING

A different type of political crisis was playing out in Beijing. Strong representations had been made by both the Australian and Japanese Governments over the terrorist attacks involving the assassination of the Australian Prime Minister and the attempted murder of the Japanese Prime Minister. Both governments were threatening to withdraw their ambassadors to China. The American and British governments had also lodged formal protests.

Zhang Wei, the Minister for Defence, had been summoned to the office of the Committee Secretary of the Politburo, Hi Tang. Wei knew that a summons to the Secretary's office was usually bad news.

Tang indicated the chair opposite his desk and Wei sat down.

Tang shook his head. "It has been brought to my attention that you instigated the attacks on the lives of the Australian and Japanese Prime Ministers and the bombing of the Jabiru mine. Is that true?"

Wei shook his head in denial. "That is a vicious allegation made by my enemies to place a slur on my reputation."

"The information comes from General Chen who has been interrogated over the last two days. Unfortunately the General suffered a heart attack and died during his interrogation. Before he died he gave a written confession that he had organised the attack under your direct orders."

Wei knew instantly he was in deep trouble and tried to hide his mounting fear. "I did this for China. Those Japanese dogs are preparing for war against us and the Politburo indicated action was needed to protect our territories from their encroachment."

"Your intentions may have been honourable Wei, but you had no authority from the Politburo to undertake such a provocative action. Unfortunately you failed in your mission and we now have the whole world condemning China for this attack."

"We will be announcing that General Chen was responsible for the terrorist attack and operated on his own initiative. There can be no connection to the Politburo or the Chinese Government. You will be placed under arrest and incarcerated for the rest of your life for your treachery to the Chinese people."

Tang picked up his phone and barked an order. Two security officers entered the room.

"You will be escorted back to your apartment to pack your things. You will have no communication with anyone from now on."

The two men took hold of Wei by the arms and manhandled him out the door. They drove him to his apartment and waited in the living room while he packed a bag. He went into the bedroom and took out a leather case from the wardrobe,

then walked into the bathroom and withdrew a pistol from the false bottom of the case. He loaded the pistol put it against his head and pulled the trigger. The security men rushed into the bathroom to see Wei slumped on the floor in a pool of blood, his sightless eyes staring up at them.

Chapter 23

MONDAY AFTERNOON – DALY WATERS

Jake entered his cabin, limping slightly after a walk around the town. He was looking forward to seeing Bill who was due to return that evening after his visit to Jabiru for Barry's funeral. He showered and dressed and sat outside his cabin till he saw Bill's truck pull up outside his office. He wandered over as Bill climbed out of the truck and wrapped his arm around his shoulder as they went into the office. Jake could see Bill was drained from the events over the last few days. Bill pulled out two beers from the fridge, tossed one to Jake and they sat outside watching the orange sun go down. Bill took a long pull from the can and started talking about the funeral and the many visitors Elsie had calling on her to pay their respects. Lizzie had stayed behind in Jabiru to help Elsie clean up Barry's affairs.

Bill had talked to Sergeant Barker at the Jabiru Police Station and to date the NT Police had found no clue as to the identity of the driver of the hit-run vehicle that had killed Barry Buckstone. The good news was that the NT Police had found Blakey in Alice Springs and he was being interrogated.

Jake told Bill about what he had found out about the information contained in the memory stick he had found under Barry's house. Bill listened attentively.

"Jake, everyone in Jabiru is upset over Barry's death. The town is at flashpoint. Unless Barry's killer is found soon there is going to be another riot. If we can find out who is behind this we just might be able to prevent some more bloodshed."

"Yeah, I understand. But I don't think we have enough information to convince the police yet."

"I know some of the local police are corrupt so it would be risky to go to them."

"I could talk to the AFP Commissioner when I go to Canberra tomorrow. I'm sure he'll be receptive," suggested Jake.

Bill nodded his head in agreement and stood up. "Let's go and get something to eat Jake. I'm tired and need an early night."

Jake followed Bill to the pub and they found a table. Shoni appeared from the kitchen wearing an apron, gave them one of her bright smiles and came over to kiss them both. After a brief chat, she continued clearing tables. Bill and Jake bought some beers and lined up for the BBQ smorgasbord. They both somehow got through the mountain of meat and fish served up to them and settled back to watch the entertainment provided by a bush band.

After a time, Bill got up and said he was off to bed while Jake sipped his beer waiting for Shoni to finish her shift. Eventually she came out of the kitchen removing her apron and took Jake by the hand to walk to his cabin. They talked

for a while, showered together and went to bed. They made love passionately promising to meet again but not knowing when they would next see each other.

TUESDAY MORNING – DALY WATERS

After saying good bye to a tearful Shoni, Jake packed the car and walked over to Bill's office. He retrieved the documents from the safe and stashed them in his briefcase. After a few awkward moments, Bill hugged Jake and told him how much he had enjoyed spending time with him after such a long absence. Jake returned the hug and promised to call him after he arrived in Canberra. He climbed into the Toyota and set off for Darwin. This time the drive seemed never-ending but eventually he arrived at the airport terminal, returned the rental vehicle and checked in for his flight to Canberra via Sydney.

Chapter 24

TUESDAY AFTERNOON – CANBERRA

Arriving at Canberra airport, Jake took a taxi to the inner suburb of Kingston and let himself into a small apartment which had been reserved for him by the Austrade office. From there he could walk to the main shopping area and restaurants and was close enough to walk to the Austrade and DFAT's offices and the Parliamentary Circle. He unpacked his small suitcase and decided to take a walk before dinner. He left the apartment and followed a path which took him to Lake Burleigh Griffin, taking in the new development of apartment blocks and restaurants which had been built on the foreshore of the lake. He strolled down the main street of Kingston and decided to eat at Luigi's, a well-known Italian restaurant, one often frequented by politicians and public servants. He ordered a plate of linguini carbonara and a glass of red wine and sat at the back of the restaurant quietly enjoying his meal. He felt relaxed after the drama and excitement of the last ten days.

His reverie was disturbed as three men and a woman entered the restaurant and were seated at the adjacent table. By their dress and manner, Jake guessed they were staffers from the Parliamentary Offices. They all were suits and were talking loudly about politics. He couldn't but help overhear their chatter. His ears pricked up when he heard them talking about Anna Sentoro. They were discussing the election of the new Prime Minister and the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. The woman was saying that she had heard that Anna Sentoro had pulled out of the leadership contest because she was caught up in some sex scandal which Crichton had threatened to leak to the press.

His state of mind disturbed by the intrusion, Jake finished his meal quickly, paid his bill and walked back to his apartment.

Later that evening he rang his father. “Bill, I’ve made an appointment to see Fisher, the AFP Commissioner, for the day after tomorrow and I’ll show the documents to him. I trust him and I’m sure he’ll follow them up.”

“You don’t think they’ll try to bury it do you?”

“If they do, we can always go to the press. But that could cost me my job.”

“Yeah well, I know you’ll do the right thing to get justice for Barry. There’s huge protests going on throughout the Territory and unless someone’s brought to trial for Barry’s murder it’s going to get violent.”

“I’m aware of that. How’s Elsie and Lizzie bearing up?” said Jake changing the topic.

“They’re bearing up O.K. under the circumstances.”

“Bill, have you seen Shoni around? I’ve been trying to ring her and left messages on her voicemail but there’s been no answer.”

“Come to think of it I haven’t seen her today but I’m sure she’d be O.K. As you know the phone coverage can be lousy up here. I’ll wander over the pub later and see if she’s there.”

After asking a few more questions of Bill, Jake hung up. His leg was aching after the walking he had done and Bill’s call had dampened his spirits. He made himself a coffee in the kitchenette of the unit and prepared himself for an early night.

WEDNESDAY – CANBERRA

The next morning Jake was up early for a busy schedule of appointments with colleagues at Austrade and DFAT. He had received an email from Allan Laidley from the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade asking him to have a drink with him at 5 p.m. at Parliament House. He walked over to the Austrade building for meetings with senior management and his colleagues in the North Asia Branch. The main topic was how to encourage Australian companies to take advantage of the free trade provisions of the newly signed Japan Australia Treaty. As the Government’s senior trade representative in Japan, Jake’s role would be pivotal in rolling out a new marketing strategy for Australian companies to take up the trade opportunities provided.

After lunching with his colleagues, Jake received a call on his mobile.

A cultured voice enquired, “Is that Jake Stafford?”

“Yes, who’s calling?”

“It’s Katherine Smith, Personal Advisor to Ted Pearson, the Director-General of ASIO. The Director would like to meet with you urgently. Could you possibly come over to his office this afternoon, say at 4 p.m.?”

“Well, I have appointments with people from DFAT but I can reshuffle those if it’s important.”

“Oh, that would be super. We’ll see you at four o’clock. Just ask for me at reception.”

Jake wondered what that was all about.

He strolled over to the DFAT building where he had meetings with officers from the Asia Division starting with Jenny Antrim who had led the Australian delegation at the treaty negotiations. Jenny welcomed him warmly and discussed

the plans for implementation of the Japan Australia Treaty. He spent the next hour meeting with DFAT officers until it was time to go to his meeting with ASIO.

Jake was carefully screened going through security checks at the ASIO office. A small middle-aged woman was waiting for him and introduced herself as Katherine Smith. They took the elevator up to the fifth floor. She tapped on the door of the Director General's office.

"Enter", floated a voice from inside and Jake was shown into the office. There were two men in the room, sitting either side of the desk. The man behind the desk facing Jake was in his mid-sixties, tall and thin with a mane of silver hair. He had a reputation of being highly intelligent but quite cold and ruthless. He was labelled in government circles as "the silver fox". He got up from his chair and gave Jake a limp handshake.

"Nice of you to come at such short notice. You know Anthony Wiley, the Defence Minister's Chief of Staff do you?" Jake was curious as to why Wiley was there.

"Yes Director-General, I met Mr Wiley at the conference in Yellow Water." He shook Wiley's hand.

"Let's keep this informal shall we? Call me Ted. Shall we have some tea or coffee and sit around the coffee table?" They sat themselves down and gave their preferences for beverages to Katherine.

"Jake I wanted to thank you for your role in saving the life of Prime Minister Koshi. I'd like to hear your version of what happened."

Jake gave a quick description of their escape from the Chinese.

"That's wonderful Jake. Both the Japanese and your own Government are extremely grateful for your initiative and courage in the face of the terrorist attacks. We can't openly acknowledge your involvement but it won't be forgotten."

"However, I'm informed that you are involved in some other matters which are highly sensitive to the Government and of concern to us."

Jake blanched. "What are you referring to?"

"I'm talking about the death of Barry Buckstone and certain documents he had in his possession which were stolen. Can you enlighten me as to how you knew Buckstone?"

"My father's partner Lizzie is Buckstone's sister. I had met Barry through her and attended the funeral. It's as simple as that."

"Do you know anything about the documents he was supposed to have stolen?"

Jake framed his response carefully. "I heard rumours that he had some evidence of corruption in the Kakadu Land Council which had led to the Council's withdrawal of its opposition to the Jabiru mine."

"Let me stress that these documents are extremely confidential and sensitive. If they end up in the wrong hands they could pose a high level security risk. If you have any information on them you should pass it on to us immediately. Do you understand me?"

Jake nodded. He understood it to be a veiled threat.

"It would go very badly for your career Jake if you were found to have possession of these documents."

"What makes you believe that I have these documents?"

“We don’t, but we have to check everyone who was in contact with him around the time of his death. You were seen talking to him at Jabiru while the demonstrations were going on. And you were staying at his house.”

The realisation that he had been under surveillance surprised and annoyed Jake. He responded testily “I’ve already explained that. I looked him up at Jabiru because his sister asked me to. I attended the funeral with my father and Lizzie and his widow invited us to stay overnight at her house.”

Pearson looked at Wiley who nodded.

“O.K. Jake you know how important this is to the Government. I should stress that all members of the Public Service sign confidentiality agreements as a condition of their employment. This applies to any documents which affect the government.”

“I’m aware of that.”

Pearson stood up to shake Jake’s hand, signifying that the meeting was over. “Thanks for coming over Jake.”

Wiley followed Jake out to the elevator and pressed the down button.

He sneered. “You’re in deep trouble here Stafford. You’ve involved yourself in something way above your head. I’ll have your guts for gaiters over this.”

The elevator door opened. Jake turned to Wiley.

“You’re the one who’s over-stepped the mark here Wiley” Jake said as he trod heavily on Wiley’s foot as he moved to the elevator. He gave a polite wave to a furious Wiley as the elevator doors closed.

Back out on the street, he took a taxi to Parliament House for his meeting with Allan Laidley.

At a few minute before five o’clock, Jake arrived at the reception area at Parliament House and announced himself to a security guard behind the counter. The guard rang up Laidley to advise him that Jake had arrived and issued Jake with a visitor’s pass in a lanyard which he hung around his neck. He walked through the security screen just as Allan stepped out of the elevator. He shook Jake’s hand vigorously and escorted him through the corridors of the ministerial offices until he came to the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Allan led him into his own office where he invited Jake to join him on a couch alongside a coffee table. He walked to the bar fridge and offered Jake a beer which he accepted gratefully.

After exchanging pleasantries, they discussed the work needed to follow-up from the signing of the treaty with Japan. Allan then reviewed the events over the last few weeks, including the reasons why Anna Sentoro had declined to nominate for the Liberal Party leadership. He showed Jake the damaging photos of Jake with Anna and explained how he had managed to have them deleted. Jake mentioned his suspicions about Crichton’s involvement with the Jabiru mine. He outlined the transactions which appeared to involve Crichton, O’Shea and the Japanese tycoon Takaya. Allan cried out excitedly

“That slimy bastard Crichton! Jake if this can be proven it would ruin Crichton. Have you got any documentary evidence?”

“I have but it doesn’t mention Crichton’s name anywhere. I’m pretty sure he has an interest in the company behind it.”

“Why don’t you show the material to the authorities? They would tell you whether there was a strong case or not.”

Jake responded “I’m not sure who to trust. I’ve just come from a meeting at ASIO with the Director-General and your ‘mate’ Wiley from the P.M.’s Office. They gave me a pretty stern warning about disclosure of confidential information affecting the Government. I reckon any documents incriminating the P.M. would be buried pretty quickly. They wouldn’t expose the newly appointed P.M. to such allegations.”

“Yeah, good point, they might just hush it up. Then again, if the story came out it would destroy Crichton.”

He paused for a moment, shuffled in his cabinet and brought out a photograph. Jake studied the photo. It showed Crichton and Takaya in close conversation.

“This doesn’t prove anything but it shows Crichton and Takaya to be close buddies. It’s a spare copy, you can keep it if you like.” He gave the photo to Jake who slipped it in his pocket.

There was a tap on the door. Jake looked around to see Anna Sentoro push the door open.

Anna said “Allan have you got the press statement on...” Her words hung in the air as she saw Jake sitting with Allan.

She looked surprised “Oh, sorry Allan, I didn’t realise Jake was with you. Jake, how nice to see you again.” She came over and shook Jake’s hand.

“Hello Minister,” Jake stammered. She had dark rings under her eyes and looked stressed, obviously suffering from the pressure she had been put under over the last few days.

“Jake please call me Anna. Have you recovered from your ordeal?”

“Yes Minister, er I mean Anna. The leg has healed up nicely.”

Sensing some embarrassment, Allan chipped in.

“Anna, we’ve been discussing the follow-up to the signing of the Japan Australia Treaty. Jake has some ideas for promoting the commercial opportunities arising from the Treaty.”

“That’s great Jake. I’d like to be involved in any way I can be useful.”

“Well, over the next few months we will need to run seminars for business people right around Australia explaining the benefits of the Treaty to Australian companies and industry groups. It would make a bigger impact if you could be a keynote speaker.”

“I’d be happy to Jake, just let Allan have the details when the seminars are planned and I will make sure I fit them into my calendar.”

Allan cut in. “More importantly Anna, Jake has uncovered some information on the Prime Minister’s possible involvement in the Jabiru Mine which smacks of corruption.”

Jake repeated the information to Anna. After he had finished she thought for a moment.

“Jake this is powerful stuff if it can be substantiated. I think you should show the material to the AFP and let them judge what to do with it. If I became involved it would be seen as if I am trying to undermine the leadership out of spite.”

“I’m meeting with the AFP in the morning and will pass on the information to them.”

Anna said “Jake when you’ve finished with Allan would you like pop into my office for a few minutes?”

Jake spent another ten minutes with Allan before he knocked on Anna’s door. She opened the door and gestured towards her couch.

“Jake I wanted to let you know that I appreciate all you’ve done, not just in saving the Japanese Prime Minister at the risk of your own life but all the work you did at the negotiations. One day you’ll get the credit you deserve for this.”

“Thanks Anna. I’m not worried about receiving recognition. I’m just sorry things haven’t worked out better for you.”

“Well, that’s politics. Things can change rapidly as we’ve seen over the last few days. My turn will come. If what you’ve found out proves to be true, things could change very quickly again.”

“Oh and Jake, I’m terribly sorry that you’ve been brought in to the dirty politics that Crichton and his staff instigated with those photos.”

“Don’t worry Anna, they’re just muck-raking, nothing happened.”

“Yes, but those vultures can cause enormous harm just through innuendo.”

She looked up at him, her eyes searching his.

“To be honest I was having a good time at the party even if I had too much to drink. I like you Jake. In other circumstances...” Her voice trailed off, not finishing the sentence.

Jake took that as his cue and stood up to leave. She hugged him and he could smell her scent as she pressed her body into his. He walked out the door and Allan escorted him back to the reception area, promising to keep in touch.

Jake left Parliament House, walked back to the Austrade building and picked up his laptop and brief case. He opted to walk back to his apartment rather than catch a cab. It was nearly dusk and the night air was getting chilly. He took a short cut across the parkland onto National Circuit and crossed the road with the traffic lights. Half-way across the road he heard a roar and jerked his head around to see a large Ford bearing down on him. He launched himself sideways as the front bumper scraped his hip. He ended up tangled in a bush on the side of the road and got up to brush himself off when he saw two men jump out of the car and start running towards him. He cursed realising he was in real danger and started running across Telopea Park towards the Kingston shopping centre. One of the men picked up Jake’s briefcase and yelled something to his companion who was closing in on Jake. Hampered by the blow to the hip and the wound to his leg, Jake realised he wasn’t going to make it to the protection of the shops in time. He saw a large branch lying on the ground, snatched it up and stepped behind a large pine tree. When he could hear his pursuer approach the tree, Jake stepped out and swung the branch as hard as he could. The branch hit him in the stomach winding him as he fell to the ground. He was getting up on his knees just as Jake smashed his heel into the side of his head in a classic judo side-kick. He slumped to the ground moaning. Jake could hear the other man approaching and took off across the road to the safety of the shopping centre.

Close to exhaustion and feeling the effects of the shock, Jake saw a police station that fortunately was open and walked in the door. He spoke to the constable on duty who took details of the attack and prepared a statement. She enquired as to whether the attack might have been an attempted robbery and he

advised that the only thing he had lost was his briefcase which contained his laptop and some official papers. She suggested Jake have a medical check but he assured her he was physically fine. She promised to follow-up the attack and asked him for his personal details so she could get back to him.

An hour later, Jake let himself into his apartment, helped himself to a brandy from the mini-bar and threw himself on the bed. It was only when he looked around that he realised something was different about the apartment. While everything looked to be in place, he could tell that the clothes in his case had been disturbed and the toiletries in the bathroom had been moved. Nothing seemed to be missing but it was obvious that his room had been searched.

He called for the manager of the apartment block and explained what had happened. The manager listened attentively and offered to check whether anyone suspicious had been seen in the building. Jake decided to move out of the apartment. The manager waived the bill, took Jake's number and promised to let him know if they uncovered anything suspicious.

Jake packed his travel bag and left the apartment. He booked himself into a small motel nearby, paying cash in advance for two nights. The room was small and basic but he was too tired to care. He lay on the bed and was asleep within five minutes.

THURSDAY – CANBERRA

After a restless night, Jake woke early. He thought about what had happened the previous night. Were his assailants trying to kill him, rob him or warn him off? Was it a random attack or a deliberate one? One of his attackers went straight after his brief case. But what were they looking for? He concluded the only thing of value was his laptop but they could also be after the mining documents and the memory stick. He wondered how would they know his movements? A sudden thought struck him. He picked up his mobile phone, slid the cover off the rear, pulled out the battery and looked inside the body of the phone. He cursed when he saw a tiny silver disc in it and realised that was how they knew where he was going. But who had inserted the bug? He thought back over the last few days and remembered leaving his mobile phone at his desk at Austrade a couple of times while at internal meetings which would have provided someone with the opportunity of placing a bug in it. He was about to destroy the disc but stopped himself and put it back in.

He went to a small café and had breakfast. At 8 am he used his mobile to ring the AFP Commissioner's Personal Assistant and asked if he could change his appointment to 9 am rather than 9.30am. After checking Fisher's diary she agreed to the change. He then took a cab and asked to be dropped off 100 metres past the AFP Building in Kings Avenue. He noticed a small coffee shop next to the building. He entered the café and sat down next to a window which gave him a clear view of the entrance to the building as well as the car park. He ordered a coffee and waited. At about 8.45 am he was rewarded when he saw a Ford pull up in the visitors' carpark. There were two men sitting in it. It looked like the vehicle that had tried to run him down but he wasn't certain. Then he saw one of them get out

of the car and light up a cigarette. He had a bandage on his head and Jake was certain that he was the man who had attacked him.

Jake paid his bill, walked out of the café and slipped behind a row of bushes which bordered one side of the carpark. He worked his way carefully along the bushes until he was close enough to recognise the man with the bandaged head. He pulled out his phone and took a photo of him from between two branches. He then worked his way behind the vehicle and took a photo of the number plate of the Ford. He quickly retraced his steps until he was back on the street. He walked directly to the front door of the building looking straight ahead. He could sense that he was being observed but moved straight up to the receptionist. He asked for John Fisher and waited till Fisher's Personal Assistant signed him in before stealing a glance out the window. He could see the two men still sitting in the Ford. The assistant led Jake up to the fifth floor and showed him into the Commissioner's office.

John Fisher shook Jake's hand firmly, invited him to take a seat and offered him coffee.

"Before we discuss anything John, could I ask you a favour?" asked Jake. "There are two men sitting in a Ford in the carpark outside who are following me. They attacked me last night and stole my briefcase which had some incriminating evidence in it. I have photos of the registration number of their vehicle and of the man who attacked me. Could you check them out for me?"

He showed the photos to Fisher.

"Sure Jake" responded a perplexed Fisher, taking Jake's mobile to copy the photos.

"But what's this all about?"

Jake quickly explained how he came into possession of the documents. He broke open his mobile and gave the bug to Fisher.

After listening to Jake's story, Fisher excused himself, walked out of his office and briefed two of his staff, providing them with copies of the photos.

He returned to the office. "Jake, I've asked two of my people to check this out urgently and confront the guys in the vehicle. They should get back to me in a few minutes. Can you explain to me what these documents contain?"

Jake outlined the contents of the stolen documents, and his belief that Barry Buckstone had been killed because he had evidence of bribes paid to O'Shea to secure the Land Council's support for the Jabiru mine development. He also explained how the documents exposed corruption by overseas based companies in the mine development including a possible link to Malcolm Crichton.

"Christ, these are serious allegations Jake, if they can be proven it would not only bring Crichton down but the Government wouldn't survive either. We'd need to see the evidence before we could take action."

There was a knock on the door and at Fisher's behest a man stepped quickly into the office.

"What have you found out Gary?"

"Commissioner, we've found out something about the men in the Ford in the carpark. We checked the number plate at the motor registry and the identity of the man in the photo."

"And who is he?"

“He’s a guy from ASIO and the car is also registered to ASIO.”

“What, you’ve got to be kidding. Did you talk to them?”

“Yes they said they were just waiting to pick up a colleague in the car park. They deny attacking anyone last night and have never heard of anyone called Jake Stafford.”

“O.K. thanks Gary.” Fisher waved him away.

Fisher looked bewildered. “Either you’re mistaken Jake or there’s some funny business going on. I’ll chase it up with Ted Pearson, the Director-General of ASIO and see if he can shed some light on this.”

“Have you any other information to back this up? Did you keep copies of the documents anywhere?” Fisher asked.

Jake was about to say yes when he stopped himself.

“No, I don’t have any other copies with me,” he replied, which was partially true.

Jake changed the topic. “What’s happened with the Chinese terrorists? Have you managed to track down the organisation behind it.”

“We found Blakey hiding out in Alice Springs and got a confession out of him. He claimed he was just asked to provide accommodation and transport for the group in Daly Waters and didn’t know what they were planning to do. He gave us details of a bikie gang in Darwin who arranged the logistics as well as the supply of semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles and we have made a number of arrests. We identified three Chinese on flights departing from Darwin to Beijing on the day of the terrorist attack but they seem to have disappeared without a trace. They were probably part of the support team for the terrorists. We’re still trying to establish whether this was a rogue terrorist group or whether there was some connection to the Chinese Government. I suspect we might never find out.”

“Have you found out where the Chinese received their intelligence from?”

“Not yet, we’re still chasing some leads on that. They certainly had some inside help to plan their assault.”

Jake said “Well, I can think of someone at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo who seemed to go out of his way to create problems for us.”

“You’re talking about Colonel Williams no doubt. He’s been told to stay put in Canberra while we check out his activities.”

Fisher paused for a second before adding “Oh, incidentally Jake, I’ve been informed that ASIO have arrested the Japanese woman at Daly Waters on suspicion of helping the terrorists.”

Jake exclaimed “What! You mean Shoni? You must be joking. She’s completely innocent. She actually helped us rescue Koshi and pursue the terrorists.”

“I’m just telling you what ASIO has told us. Apparently she’s been held in a police remand centre in Darwin.”

“They’ve made a huge mistake. She should be rewarded for what she’s done. The local police in Daly Waters and Jabiru can verify her part in this. Can you do something to help?”

“I’ll make some enquiries Jake and see what I can do. We owe you that much.”

Jake said “Thanks. Can you tell me who would be in charge of her case at the Northern Territory Police. I’ll contact a lawyer to try to get her out of the remand centre.”

Fisher asked Jake to wait outside his office while he made a call to Sam Popolo, the Assistant Commissioner in the N.T. police in Darwin. Popolo was a member of the Task Force set up to track down the Chinese terrorists and was also in charge of the investigation into the hit and run which had killed Barry Buckstone. After ten minutes, he hung up from Popolo and walked over to Jake, passing him a note with the name and contact details of the officer dealing with Shoni's case. Visibly shaken, Jake thanked Fisher and shook his hand. On his way to the elevator, he picked up some scissors lying on a vacant desk and put them in his pocket. As he was leaving the building, he noticed the two ASIO officers still sitting in their car and walked over. He knocked on the passenger side window. The guy with the bandage on his head rolled down the window.

"How's the head feeling?" Jake asked.

"Get fucked fella."

"Yeah, well, the AFP are onto you guys. I'd like my briefcase and my laptop back thanks. If they're not back at the Austrade office by this afternoon I go to the ACT Police."

He walked around the back of the car and stabbed the scissors savagely into each of the rear tyres.

He hailed a passing taxi to take him back to the Austrade building, reported the theft of his laptop to the Human Resources Section and requested a replacement. He also asked for a new mobile phone, claiming his own phone had been damaged in the robbery. He found a spare office, closed the door and started making some calls from the office phone. His first call was to Shoni and there was no answer so he left a message for her to call him. He then rang Bill who picked up the phone immediately.

"Dad, it's Jake. I've got a problem and I hope you can help me."

"You sound worried Jake."

"I've just been told that Shoni's been arrested by the cops and been taken to Darwin for questioning. Apparently ASIO have accused her of helping the Chinese terrorists."

"But that's absolute bullshit. She helped us to save Koshi."

"Yeah, I know. I think they're trying to nobble us from exposing the people responsible for Barry's death. I'm sure the local police will exonerate her when the facts come out. Would you know of a lawyer in Darwin who I could contact to help spring her out of gaol?"

"You could use the lawyer who helped Barry, Gertrude Billson is her name. She's pretty good and knows everyone in Darwin. Just a minute and I'll get her number."

He was back in two minutes and gave Jake the number.

"Jake would you like me to go to Darwin and try to help secure Shoni's release? If I leave now I can be there later tonight."

"That would be great, thanks Dad. I'll ring up the lawyer now and see how quickly she can act to seek Shoni's release. I'll fly up to Darwin tomorrow night if I can help. Another thing, would you mind collecting her things from her room at the pub and taking them up to Darwin with you. And let her boss at the pub know that she's unlikely to be coming back. I think she'll want to go home to Japan after all this."

He passed Bill the details of the remand centre, thanked him and rang off.

He then rang the lawyer's office and was put through to Gertrude Billson. He explained who he was and his connection to Barry Buckstone. She was clearly upset over Barry's death and was happy to help Shoni. She listened carefully to Jake's request and promised to act quickly.

Half an hour later, the phone on Jake's desk rang. He picked it up. A strange muffled voice came through.

"Is that Jake Stafford?"

"Yes, who's calling?"

"Never mind that. I've got a simple message for you. If you want to get your girlfriend out of gaol you'd better keep your mouth shut about those papers you stole."

"What are you talking about, I don't have any papers. They were stolen from me."

"You heard what I said. Shut the fuck up if you want the girl released." The phone went dead.

Jake shivered as he digested the threat. He could feel his temperature rising at the thought of Shoni being in prison. Someone high-up in Government was pulling the strings and trying to scare him into silence. He had been nearly run down, assaulted and robbed. Now they were threatening Shoni. He was fed up and had to decide what to do. He could let the whole thing rest, hope that Shoni would be released and fly back to Tokyo with her. But then he thought about Barry's death and reasoned that the people who caused it should be brought to justice.

On an impulse, he rang Helen Kwang and asked if he could meet with her urgently. She suggested they have dinner that evening and gave Jake details of the restaurant. Jake asked her to open up the envelope he had posted to her from Daly Waters and read the documents in it before their meeting. He suggested she make a copy of all the documents and keep the originals in her office safe.

He went back to his motel and sat in the small room, chewing over what to do. He poured himself a brandy from the mini-bar and switched on the television. He found a news station and saw the familiar face of Malcolm Crichton being interviewed on a current affairs program. He had just been officially sworn in as Prime Minister by the Australian Governor-General. Crichton announced that he had been contacted directly by the Chinese Premier to advise that the Chinese security forces had captured the ring leader of the Chinese terrorists, Lui Chen, a disgraced ex-General in the Chinese Army. Cheng had confessed to his crimes but had suffered a fatal heart attack while imprisoned. Crichton emphasised the close relationship he had forged with the Chinese Premier which had helped to bring the terrorists to justice. He then went on to make a political speech and announced a new policy to build up defence and security services to safeguard the lives of ordinary Australians. Jake switched off in disgust as he knew Crichton would do anything to maintain power and to further his own interests.

He checked his watch and saw it was nearly time to meet up with Helen. The receptionist at the motel ordered a cab for him. The taxi driver dropped him at the Dragon Palace restaurant which was located in Dickson, a northern suburb of Canberra, well known for its numerous Chinese eateries. The restaurant was elaborately furnished in typical Chinese décor with a huge fish tank adorning one

wall of the reception area. He walked in and saw Helen sitting in a table at the back of the dining room. When she saw him she smiled radiantly and gave him a big hug as he sat down.

“Hi Jake, good to see you again. You’re looking jaded. Are you coping O.K.?” she asked with genuine concern on her face.

“Only just, it’s been a rough week and getting rougher.”

Helen listened intently as he explained what had happened since he arrived in Canberra, including the threat to his life, the theft of his laptop and briefcase, his run-in with ASIO and the arrest of Shoni.

“Goodness Jake, it looks like you’ve uncovered a major conspiracy involving the most senior level of government and big business. I’ve read the documents you sent me and they have some explosive material in them.”

Helen paused for a minute as a waiter brought a jug of water and left menus with them. Helen ordered drinks from the waiter.

“This place serves the best Chinese food in Canberra, Jake. My uncle owns it and you are my guest. I suggest we order the banquet for two but you can choose anything you like, even the live lobster crawling in the fish tank over there, if you would rather. You look like you could do with a decent meal and some fine wine.”

Jake scanned the menu. “The banquet looks fine to me, thanks.”

Helen waved the waiter over and ordered the banquet.

Helen opened her briefcase and pulled out the documents that Jake had sent her and laid them on the table. She opened up her iPad and started scrolling until she found her notes.

“Jake, I’ve read all the documents and have a number of questions. Firstly, are you certain these documents are genuine?”

“Absolutely, they have already cost Barry Buckstone his life and I have been nearly run down and had the documents, my memory stick and my laptop stolen. And now there is the threat to Shoni. They wouldn’t go to all that trouble if the documents weren’t genuine.”

“Fair enough, but they would claim that the papers are false or doctored.”

“You could easily verify the letterheads and signatures of the correspondence.”

“O.K. we can do that. Now can you explain what these documents mean?”

“Well the first one is an agreement between the Australian company, Energet, to supply uranium to the Japanese company Nippan Energy. It sets out normal terms and conditions of quantities, prices, timelines and looks pretty standard. The second one, marked “Highly Confidential”, is an agreement between Energet to supply rare earths to a Japanese company, Mitsustrata, out of the Jabiru mine. They have kept this agreement secret and only a few people within the companies and at the top levels of government would be aware of it. It is political dynamite as it seems the main reason for the Jabiru mine is not so much to supply uranium to Japan but to provide them with rare earths. They obviously wanted to keep the arrangement secret from the Chinese given China’s monopoly over production of rare earths and the tensions between China and Japan. But also, Mitsustrata stands to make enormous profits from this by supplying the Japanese Government with material vital to its defence industry.”

“Mitsustrata was one of the companies you asked us to check out?” asked Helen.

“Yes and it appears to be suspect. You will recall that Sarah found out that the largest shareholder of Mitsustrata is the Japanese billionaire Takaya who is also a substantial shareholder of Nippan Energy. He is the biggest industrialist in Japan and has huge contracts to supply the Japanese defence forces with electronics and defence materials. He is known to be dodgy and has been accused of corruption many times but because of his high level contacts in Government has consistently managed to avoid being prosecuted.”

“The interesting thing is that Sarah established that Ruby Resources is also a substantial shareholder in Mitsustrata. Ruby is an Australian company obviously wanting a finger in the rare earths pie.”

“So what’s the big deal about rare earths?” asked Helen as the first of their courses arrived. Jake realised he was hungry and helped himself to some prawns grilled in a spicy sauce.

“Rare earths are mainly used to make electronics in the defence industry and certain types are extremely rare. China has 95% of the world’s production and wants to safeguard its control of world supplies. They are close to war with Japan and refuse to supply them with materials that would make their defence industry more competitive. I suspect the real reason for the Chinese attack on the Jabiru mine was to prevent Japan getting hold of the rare earths.”

“That’s a pretty heavy accusation Jake.” She studied up her notes. “What about Northern Consulting?”

“Northern Consulting was contracted by Energet to persuade the Kakadu Land Council to drop its opposition to the development of the Jabiru mine which is on a sacred sight of the Binugy people. The Land Council serves to earn \$50 million on behalf of the indigenous community from Energet in compensation for giving up its land rights. Most of the money paid over so far has ended up in the hands of a few directors, especially Bert O’Shea, and some senior executives but little has filtered through to the aboriginal communities. Thanks to Sarah we now know that Northern Consulting is jointly owned by Tim Burston, Baobab Trustees and Ruby Resources. Burston is the Managing Director of Northern Consulting and has fronted the company in conducting all of the negotiations on the land rights. However this letter shows Northern Consulting made a number of payments to a company called Baobab Trustees for “unspecified services.” We now have proof that the owner of Baobab Trustees is none other than Bert O’Shea, the President of the Kakadu Land Council. O’Shea was instrumental in gaining the Land Council’s approval for the mine development. In total he received \$2.25 million in bribes from Northern Consulting.”

Helen poured them each another glass of wine as the second course arrived.

“So was that why Barry was killed?”

“Without a doubt. Barry suspected O’Shea all along of being corrupt and had discovered the incriminating letter linking Northern Consulting with O’Shea’s company. It’s going to be very hard to prove it though unless the Northern Territory Police can find the driver of the vehicle who struck him.”

“So who is behind Ruby Resources?”

“I don’t know for sure but I suspect it’s someone high-up in Government, even Crichton himself.”

Helen raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“You must be kidding Jake.”

“I’m not. Only someone at the top level of government could do this. He’s also got the Director-General of ASIO in his pocket.”

“Can you find out for sure who it is?”

Jake replied. “No, not yet. All I have on Ruby Resources is a Post Office Box Number at Manuka Post office. I’ve checked with the Post Office and they won’t divulge the name of the owner. Crichton is too smart to register it under his own name in any case.”

“Let me see if I can find out who’s registered the post box. I’ve got some contacts in the Post Office.”

Helen thought for a minute. “What if we try to set up something? We could send a package by courier to the P.O. Box number, contact Crichton’s office to advise an urgent parcel addressed to Ruby Resources has been sent to the Post Office and wait and see who picks it up.”

Jake rubbed his hip which was still aching.

“That might work. Have you got someone who could undertake surveillance?”

“I could ask Percy, our photographer. He knows everyone in politics in Canberra and could take snapshots of anyone familiar who goes in and out of the alcove where the post boxes are kept. We could also make the parcel look distinctive so it would be easy to identify it if anyone was carrying it out.”

“O.K. let’s try it.”

After a pause Jake continued, “Are you going to run with this story?”

“I think it’s an amazing story. I’ll have to run it by the Editor-in-Chief and our solicitors but I’m sure they will agree to publish it. We could run the story line over three or four days. I can start drafting the material as soon as I get home.

Helen enquired, “Are you happy that we print this story Jake? Of course your name won’t be mentioned but they’ll guess it came from you. We don’t have to reveal our sources. But once this material is published there would be no point in them harassing you anymore.”

“Yeah, that’s why I decided to pass the information to you.”

The waiter brought over the main course and through the rest of the meal they talked about how Helen could present the articles.

Jake was amazed how much food Helen could put away. She was still eating well after Jake had laid down his chopsticks. Eventually they finished their meal with a coffee and a brandy. Helen drove him back to his motel.

Despite his concern about Shoni, he felt relaxed after the huge meal and drinks. Back in his room, he undressed, laid on the bed and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 25

FRIDAY – DARWIN

Bill woke up in his motel room in Darwin early in the morning, flexing his back, his joints stiff after the long drive from Daly Waters the night before. He had

arrived in Darwin at 10 p.m. and had found a small hotel on the outskirts of the city where he crashed for the night. He walked out of the motel, found a café nearby and ordered a breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon. After eating he took a walk around the city centre till it was time to meet up with Gertrude Billson. Jake had pre-arranged an appointment for him to meet with her at 8.30 a.m. to discuss Shoni's case.

Gertrude had a small office in the north side of the city. She welcomed him and asked if he wanted tea or coffee. He requested tea and she invited him to take a seat in the office. She was a big cheerful woman in her middle fifties and after chatting to her about Barry's case, Bill sensed that she was a professional who would take no nonsense from anyone. She advised him that she had made some enquiries about Shoni's detention and had arranged an appointment to see the Officer-in-Charge of the Police Remand Centre at noon. Bill said he would meet her then at the Police Remand Centre. He left a message on Jake's phone bringing him up to date. He wandered around the city centre killing time for an hour, bought a local newspaper and sat in a coffee shop until it was time to go to the Remand Centre.

Bill waited outside the Remand Centre till he saw the familiar bulk of Gertrude arrive and they walked into the Centre together. The Officer-in-Charge was expecting them and told them to sit in his office. He excused himself, left the room and returned a few minutes later with Shoni.

Shoni rushed over to see Bill. Tears were rolling down her cheeks as she hugged him.

The officer said to Gertrude. "She's free to go. You must have friends in high places. Sam Popolo, the Assistant Commissioner, rang me half an hour ago to say that her arrest was a mistake and no charges would be laid."

Relief flooded over Shoni's body when she heard the officer's words. He handed over her handbag and passport which had been confiscated when she had been locked up. She signed some release documents and walked out of the office hanging onto Bill's arm as if she would never let go. Gertrude drove them back to her office and served them tea and coffee. Bill rang Jake, said a few words and passed the phone over to Shoni.

Shoni sobbed into the phone. "Jake, it's so good to hear your voice. The police have released me. I'm so glad to be out of that awful place."

"Shoni, I was so worried about you. Are you safe now?"

"Yes, I'm free to go. Oh, Jake, it was terrible. I miss you so much. "

"What happened to you Shoni?"

"These two men came to the hotel and just said I was under arrest and they were taking me to Darwin. They wouldn't even let me pack my things. All I could take with me was my handbag and passport."

"Listen, Shoni. You've been through an ordeal. The best thing is to fly back to Japan as soon as you can. I will meet you there in a few days' time."

"O.K. Jake, I just want to get out of this place."

"I'll fix it for you Shoni. Can you pass the phone back to Bill."

Bill came onto the phone. "Bill, there's a Qantas flight from Darwin to Tokyo going out tonight at 10 p.m. Can you arrange for Shoni to be on it? I'll book the flight and she can pick up the ticket at the airport."

“No problem Jake. I’ll drive her out there in my truck. I’ve got her luggage in the back.”

“I’m indebted to you Dad. Could you let me know once she has flown out?”

“Will do, don’t worry son. I’ll make sure she’s on the flight.” Bill disconnected the phone.

FRIDAY – CANBERRA

Percy Usifail was having trouble staying awake. He’d been sitting on a park bench with his camera on his knee for four hours watching people coming and going into the post box area at the Manuka Post Office. He had picked a location where he had a good view of the foot traffic going into the area but wouldn’t be noticed himself. So far he hadn’t recognised anyone and was beginning to think that Helen Kwang had sent him on a wild goose chase. It was now getting dark and, although the area was well lit, it was becoming more difficult to recognise faces.

Suddenly, a large black Holden Commodore pulled up outside the post office and Percy noticed the car had government registration plates. A large ruddy-faced man got out of the car. Percy started clicking his camera. The man disappeared into the post box area and came back a few minutes later with a large green envelope in his hand. The addressee on the envelope in big bold letters was “Ruby Resources” and was clearly visible. Percy smiled as he recognised the man. He took some more shots as the car drove away.

As Percy walked triumphantly into the Canberra offices of the National he could see Helen in earnest discussions in the boardroom talking to senior management.

Helen was explaining to senior managers and the editorial team the contents of her first article on ‘Jabirugate’ as she called it. She had submitted it to her editor earlier in the day and had provided copies for each of the people around the table. In view of the explosive nature of the allegations, the Editor-in-Chief had involved senior management and the paper’s legal team. Initially she had wanted to run with the story on the rare earths contract in the same edition but because of its sensitivity the Editor-in-Chief wanted to check with top levels of government before agreeing to publish it. However they were prepared to run immediately with the story over corruption in the Kakadu Land Council and the link to the hit-run murder of Barry Buckstone. In the article she outlined the payments made by Northern Consulting to a trustee company owned by Bert O’Shea, the President of the Land Council. There was enough evidence to suggest that the O’Shea had been bribed to secure his support for the development of the Jabiru mine. The article also made a link to the death of Barry Buckstone who had threatened to expose the bribery payments. After some questions, the meeting broke up, having agreed to run the article in the next day’s edition.

Helen returned to her office to see Percy sitting in her office grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“Take a look at these beauties.” Percy thrust his camera at her.

Helen eyes widened as she clicked through the view finder and saw the familiar face of Malcolm Crichton holding an envelope with Ruby Resources written across it.

“Wow, so Jake was right. Crichton’s involved with Ruby Resources. These photos don’t prove anything in themselves but they sure cast suspicion over Crichton.”

She looked up at Percy. “You’ve done well Percy. You might have another photo on the front page of the paper shortly.”

Percy beamed at the praise from Helen. He reckoned he was already a chance to get a Walkley award, the premier Australian awards for journalism and photography, for his pictures of the train wreck at Jabiru. He waddled out of the room as she picked up her phone to dial her contact at the post office.

Chapter 26

FRIDAY – DARWIN

After days of extensive but unsuccessful investigations trying to locate the vehicle that had run down Barry Buckstone, the N.T police received their first real clue as the whereabouts of the vehicle. A car mechanic from an auto workshop in Palmerston, an outer suburb of Darwin, had reported to the local police that he had seen a vehicle matching the description of the wanted car being driven into the panel beater shop next door. A police car was promptly despatched to the premises and two uniformed policemen interviewed the mechanic. He pointed to the adjacent shop which had an old sign on the roof saying ‘Mick’s Auto Repair Shop’. The officers walked over to the building and, as no one was in the office, they stepped into the workshop. They saw a 4WD in the process of being spray painted blue by a bearded middle-aged man in grey overalls. They signalled to him to stop and he turned off his spray gun at the auto shop and removed his protective goggles. He identified himself as Mick, the owner of the shop.

On being questioned, Mick advised that a tall skinny guy calling himself Stringer had come in the previous day and had asked for an immediate re-paint of the duco of the 4WD and paid cash in advance for the job. He was in a hurry and didn’t want to wait for the usual four coats that would be required to make a good finish. He left a contact number and told the painter to ring him as soon as the vehicle was ready.

The police found the spare wheel of the 4WD which had been unbolted and was lying on the workshop floor. The design on the cover was of a crocodile and fitted the description provided by the owner of the petrol station in Jabiru. One of the policemen checked the registration number and established that the vehicle had been stolen two weeks previously. They advised Mick that the vehicle was stolen and that they wanted to arrest the man who had brought the car in. He was in trouble himself for helping with the theft of a stolen vehicle. Mick protested his innocence and said he had never met the guy before.

They called their sergeant and worked up a plan to capture the man. Police reinforcements were called in and hidden around the workshop. Then the sergeant ordered Mick to call Stringer and tell him the vehicle was ready to pick up.

An hour later, two men arrived in a utility truck and drove into a parking space outside the workshop. They got out and went into the office where Mick was waiting. Mick nodded his head and suddenly the office was full of policemen.

The two men were taken to the Darwin Police Station and interrogated. They were placed in separate rooms and questioned individually. The tall thin man who called himself Stringer refused to answer any questions other than giving his name and address. His younger companion however succumbed to the pressure after two hours of interrogation and started talking. He admitted to stealing the vehicle but swore he was paid to do it by Stringer. He hadn't seen the vehicle since he delivered it to Stringer.

Assistant Commissioner Popolo was informed of the arrest and the lack of cooperation by Stringer. He decided to interview Stringer himself. Popolo was a huge man and his bulk and shaven head could be intimidating even to the most hardened criminal. He let himself into the room where Stringer was being interrogated and asked the interviewing officers to leave. He switched off the recording device.

He sat opposite Stringer who stayed slumped in his chair.

"You're in big trouble Stringer. Your real name is Brett Anstey and you've spent time in prison for assault and various felonies. Now you're up for a hit and run murder."

Stringer sat up and spat straight in Popolo's face.

"That's bullshit, you've got nothing on me."

Popolo slowly wiped the spittle off his face. Then he leaned over the table and shoved Stringer so hard that he fell backwards in his chair hitting his head on the floor. Popolo knelt over him and sunk his knee hard into his solar plexus. Stringer doubled up in pain and started dry-retching. Popolo pulled him back into his chair.

"You're gonna pay for this copper. I want a lawyer. You don't have shit on me." Stringer struggled to get the words out but he'd lost his bravado.

"Oh yes we do. Your colleague has dumped on you big time. Says he stole the 4WD for you and that you drove it down to Jabiru the day before the hit-run. You returned the next day and hid the vehicle in his garage until you could get it spray-painted. We've found traces of the victim's blood on the bumper bar and under the mud-guard. You'll go for a life sentence here."

"You're bluffing, you can't prove anything."

"You're responsible for a black death here and I've got a bunch of aboriginals and politicians screaming for justice. Someone's gotta pay and you're all we've got."

Popolo continued "Look we know that someone paid you to do this. If you tell us who hired you we can go easy on you and you'll get a lighter sentence."

Stringer shifted uneasily on the seat. "What guarantees have I got that I'll get a lighter sentence?"

“None, but if you help us I can assure you that I’ll do my best to mitigate your sentence. If you don’t, you’ll be held in gaol with some blackfellas until your trial comes up. I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes in those circumstances.”

Stringer turned pale. “Orright, I’ll tell you what I know.”

Popolo turned on the recorder.

“O.K. speak up.”

“I had a call from a mate who asked me if I was interested in doing a job. He said he’d been contacted by a guy who would pay \$50,000 for a hit-run job. \$10,000 in advance, the rest once the hit was made. I said yes, but I wanted half up front in cash. My mate rings me back and said I was to meet the guy at the gardens at 5 p.m. that day. I front up at 5 and this aboriginal guy comes up. He was wearing a hoodie covering half his face but I knew I’d seen him before. He discusses details of the hit and asks me if I can do the job. I say yes if I can see the money and he passes over a small plastic bag. I count up \$25,000. He also gives me a description of the guy he wants whacked and details of his whereabouts.”

Popolo said “O.K. who was the guy that contacted you?”

“He didn’t say his name, but I think it was that aboriginal guy who heads up the Land Council. I’ve seen him on T.V.”

“Holy shit, you mean Bert O’Shea?”

“Yeah.”

“Just a minute.”

Popolo dashed out the room and came back a minute later with a photo of O’Shea. He showed it to Stringer.

“Is that the man?”

“Yep, that’s him orright.”

Popolo opened the door and beckoned the two interviewers.

“O.K. Stringer here wants to make a confession. You can take his statement.”

Popolo left the room and went back to his office. A few minutes later a constable knocked on his door.

“The forensics people are just about to check the vehicle over to see if there are any blood samples or other evidence to link up with Buckstone’s death.”

Popolo smiled to himself, “Good, let me know if you find anything?”

The constable left wandering what the joke was. Popolo picked up the phone and gave orders to Sergeant Barker at the Jabiru Police Station to keep Bert O’Shea under surveillance until warrants could be processed for his arrest and transport to Darwin. He commenced the process of obtaining warrants for arresting O’Shea and for searching O’Shea’s house and the office of the Land Council in Jabiru. Then he dialled Commissioner Fisher’s number.

Fisher was at a meeting in Canberra when Popolo rang but he returned the call to Popolo fifteen minutes later. He shook his head in disbelief when Popolo told him about the capture of the hit-run driver and his confession. He congratulated Popolo and asked to be informed once O’Shea had been arrested.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON – JABIRU

Sergeant Barker and two police constables drove up to the front of Bert O'Shea's house and parked behind O'Shea's car sitting in the driveway. They got out of their car and climbed up the steps to the front door. The house was a "Queenslander" style home built on stilts and looked like it had recently gone through a major renovation. One of the constables walked around the veranda to the back of the house in case O'Shea tried to escape that way. The sergeant knocked on the front door and called out O'Shea's name. Receiving no answer, Barker tried the door handle, found it unlocked and pushed his way into the house.

The house had a lived-in look about it but there was no sign of O'Shea. They spread out to search the house. One of the constables checked the main bedroom and suddenly swore loudly.

"Sarge, you better come and look at this."

Barker strode into the room to see O'Shea lying prostrate on the bed. At first he thought he was asleep but then he saw the hypodermic needle and a small bottle of liquid on the chair beside the bed. He checked O'Shea's pulse but could find none.

"Is he dead?" asked the constable.

"Yep, looks like he's overdosed. Don't touch anything and call for an ambulance and forensics."

Barker pulled out his mobile and told Popolo the news. He had to hold the phone away from his ear to lessen the impact on his eardrum of the roar of the expletives coming from the other end.

Barker waited for the forensics team to arrive and do its work before ordering his fellow officers to search the premises. They found O'Shea's computer and personal files in the study and boxed them into cardboard cartons and packed them into the police wagon. Barker picked up O'Shea's mobile phone, wallet and keys. They drove back to the town where they entered the offices of the Kakadu Land Council and continued their search for any incriminating evidence.

Chapter 27

SATURDAY MORNING – CANBERRA

Jake arose early and walked from his motel to the nearest newsagency and bought a copy of the National newspaper. He walked into a café, ordered scrambled eggs and coffee and spread out the paper. There were two stories on the front page, one was the latest poll on the political parties showing that the Government's popularity was still sliding downwards, the other in big bold headlines reading "LAND RIGHTS CORRUPTION LINK TO MURDER". There followed an article under the by-line of Helen Kwang detailing payments made to Bert O'Shea, President of the Kakadu Land Council in the negotiation of land rights to develop the mine at Jabiru. The article continued onto Page Two where

specific allegations were made about corruption in the Land Council and linking it to the hit-run murder of Barry Buckstone.

He rang Bill and outlined the contents of the article. Bill seemed excited and said that Lizzie had heard that the police had found O'Shea dead at his home. The whole town was buzzing over the news.

Jake finished his coffee and pressed Helen Kwang's number on his mobile. She answered within a few seconds. Jake congratulated her on her article in the National.

"The story's largely thanks to you Jake. I'm getting swamped with calls over this. I keep telling people to wait till tomorrow's edition of the paper."

Jake reiterated what he had heard about O'Shea's death.

"Jake do you know whether it was suicide or something else?"

"No, it's too early to know that at this stage."

"God, this case gets more sinister every day. O.K., I'll chase this up and verify it. This will add some extra juice to tomorrow's article."

"Listen, I've got some news for you Jake. Percy staked out the Manuka Post Office and guess who turned up to collect our bogus parcel?"

"It wouldn't by chance be our new Prime Minister would it?"

"Correct! What's more I've found out who signed the registration for the Post Box number at the post office."

"Surely not Crichton?"

"No, but close. It was signed by Anthony Wiley, 32 Hugheson Street, Garran, A.C.T."

"Crichton's Chief-of-Staff! Oh wow, that's good enough."

"Well it wouldn't necessarily prove anything in a court of law - but it tells us that Crichton's up to his neck in this."

Jake paused for a second and said, "What's your next step Helen?"

"I'm going to follow-up this story about O'Shea's death and see if I can find someone to speak about it. My Editor-in-Chief insists on checking with some top level government officials before publishing my article about the contract on rare earths."

"They'll deny everything of course. You could start with John Fisher, the Commissioner of the AFP. He's a straight-shooter and understands the political repercussions."

"Right, I'll ring him. Will you be around Canberra for a while Jake?"

"Well, I'm scheduled to go to Sydney and Melbourne to talk to some Australian companies about the new Japan Australia Treaty. I'm planning to go to Sydney tomorrow afternoon."

"That's fine. I'll keep in touch with you over the O'Shea business."

"I look forward to reading your article tomorrow."

"Great Jake, keep an eye on our on-line news as well in case something breaks this afternoon."

"Will do. Thanks again for the dinner last night." Jake rang off.

Chapter 28

MONDAY – DARWIN

The news about the arrest of Stringer and the death of O'Shea broke in the afternoon. The N.T. Police Chief's office was being hounded by the media. In view of his involvement in the case, Assistant Commissioner Popolo was asked to give a press conference. He agreed reluctantly as his dislike of the media was only slightly lower than that of his hatred of criminals. The press conference was held in the Board Room at Police Headquarters in Darwin and was packed by journalists and photographers. Popolo was uncomfortable speaking to the media and resolved to keep it short.

He walked into the room and the hubbub subsided as his imposing presence filled the room. He stood on the dais and gave a concise account of the arrest of Stringer, alias Anstey, for the murder of Barry Buckstone. Stringer had confessed to the hit-run attack on Buckstone and had implicated O'Shea. Police had raided O'Shea's home but found him dead, possibly from a drug overdose. They had also confiscated a number of computers and documents found at the homes of Stringer and O'Shea as well as at the office at the Land Council and were analysing these for evidence of their complicity in the crime. He finished up by circulating a press statement which they could use for their media outlets. He then asked for questions.

A barrage of questions followed seeking details of the arrest of Stringer and the apparent suicide of O'Shea. After appealing for order, Popolo took the questions one by one, keeping his answers to known facts. The reporter from the National raised his hand and asked whether the murder of Barry Buckstone was connected to the allegations of corruption in regard to the development of the Jabiru mine.

Popolo indicated that investigations were proceeding into the allegations but it was too early to make any conclusions. He took two more questions and walked out of the conference room.

The National's representative phoned Helen Kwang immediately and outlined the main points of Popolo's conference and sent her a copy of his statement.

MONDAY AFTERNOON – CANBERRA

Helen was finishing off her article for the next day's edition of the National. She phoned AFP Commissioner Fisher and questioned him about his knowledge of the corruption inside the Land Council. He suggested they meet privately in an hour at a coffee shop at the Civic Centre in Canberra. She found the café and saw him sitting discreetly in the back corner. After exchanging greetings, Fisher stated

"I read your article in the National Helen. This discussion has got to be off-the-record Helen. We're talking about some sensitive matters here some of which could have serious implications for the Government. Tell me what you've got."

“We’ve got a copy of a letter demonstrating that a trust company owned by O’Shea received bribes so that the Land Council would remove its opposition to the Jabiru mine. We intend to publish the story tomorrow morning.”

“How did you get hold of this letter and are you sure of its authenticity?”

“I can’t tell you where I got it from but it’s authentic all right. Here read it.”

She passed a copy of the letter over. Fisher read it carefully and looked up.

“You got this from Jake Stafford didn’t you?”

“I told you I can’t reveal my sources but you can keep the copy if you want. We’ve also obtained copies of transactions from the Bank of Bahamas which shows payments of \$2.25 million made to O’Shea’s trust company. You can have them as well.” Helen handed over copies of lists of transactions.

“This looks like evidence of a serious case of bribery and provides a motive for the killing of Barry Buckstone. I’ll pursue it.” Fisher placed the papers in his briefcase.

She went on to outline details of the contract to supply rare earths to the Japanese which the National was proposing to publish over the next few days. She left out the part about the possible involvement of the Prime Minister. He listened attentively.

“Personally I have no problem you publishing that as it’s a contract between private companies. If it were a confidential government contract you would be in legal trouble if you released it. However, I suspect it won’t go down well with some high level ministers and officials as well as some powerful business people. I’d say the Jabiru mine is doomed once these disclosures are made and some people will be facing criminal charges. I’m sure the high-ups will try to suppress the story.”

They finished their coffee and left the café. Helen went back to her office and recounted the discussion with her Editor-in-Chief, Colin Black.

Black said “That’s good work Helen. There is political pressure on us from the very top level not to publish any of this with veiled threats to sue us and of withdrawal of government advertising from the National if we do publish. I’ve talked to the Managing Editor and as long as we stick to the facts we’ve got the green light. So let’s go with it.”

“Thanks Col. It’s going to be an interesting couple of days.”

Helen strode back to her office, sat down at her computer and went to work on her article.

MONDAY EVENING – SYDNEY

Jake let himself into his room at the Novotel hotel in Sydney, threw his coat and tie onto a chair and pulled out a beer from the mini-bar. He’d flown to Sydney the night before and his day had been filled with appointments with companies and food and agricultural industry groups interested in hearing about the new free trade provisions of the treaty with Japan. He slumped onto the queen sized bed and sipped a beer while looking out the window at the bustling Darling Harbour. He turned on the television to watch the national seven o’clock news. His attention was drawn to the second item on the newscast which was a televised excerpt of Sam Popolo’s press conference providing details of the arrest of Stringer for the

murder of Barry Buckstone as well as Bert O'Shea's apparent suicide. A reporter outside the Darwin Police Station suggested Buckstone had been murdered because he was about to blow the whistle on corruption by O'Shea, the President of the Kakadu Land Council in regard to the Jabiru uranium mine. Jake watched the rest of the news but there was no other information on the Buckstone murder.

Jake rested for an hour, left the hotel and found a seafood restaurant along the harbour. He ordered a bottle of white wine and relaxed over a plate of delicious seafood while watching people strolling around the harbour front. Back in his hotel room, he called Shoni to let her know he planned to be in Tokyo on the following Monday. Since her return to Japan, Shoni had been staying with her parents before looking for a job. After all they had been through, they found it easy to talk to each other and Shoni was anxious to learn about developments with Barry Buckstone's murder. She promised to meet Jake on his arrival at Narita airport.

Jake called his father to bring him up to date on the news of O'Shea's death and suggested he buy a copy of the National first thing in the morning. Finally he rang his sister Melanie to let her know he would be in Melbourne for the weekend and hoped to catch up. She insisted he stay with her at her family home and that his nieces were looking forward to seeing him.

Jake watched television in bed before nodding off to sleep.

Chapter 29

TUESDAY – CANBERRA

The National's front page exposé of the confidential deal for the Australian company Energet to supply rare earths to Matsushita of Japan quickly became the hot topic for the day with all the media outlets seeking comments from the P.M.'s office. The article outlined the shareholding arrangements between Ruby Resources, Mitsustrata and Northern Consulting. The media was quick to draw the conclusion that the secret rare earths deal was the catalyst for the Chinese terrorist attack on the Australian and Japanese Prime Ministers and the destruction of the plant at the mine. The disclosure of names of companies involved in the contract was the subject of widespread speculation.

Helen Kwang's second article on the Land Council corruption scandal appeared on Page Three. It stated that the AFP had confirmed that bribes had been paid to O'Shea and had uncovered a number of suspicious overseas bank transfers to companies involved in the land rights negotiations. The AFP was continuing its investigation into the death of Bert O'Shea and had not ruled out murder as the cause of his death.

It was a sitting day of the Parliament and the Opposition Party lost no time in using question time to badger the P.M. on his knowledge of the rare earths contract. Crichton categorically denied any knowledge of the contract or of having

dealings with the companies involved. He stated that he had never met with Takaya, the owner of Mitsustrata.

Under pressure by the media for comments, late in the afternoon the Prime Minister's Office put out a statement categorically denying any personal knowledge of, or involvement in, the rare earths contract. The statement also denied any involvement by the Government in the Land Council corruption case. Prime Minister Crichton refused to hold interviews with the press.

The story gathered momentum in the evening television and radio news. Helen Kwang had numerous requests to do television interviews but agreed to do only one, the national broadcaster's current affairs program, which had the best reputation for balanced reporting. She kept her answers concise and to the facts of her investigations. She refused to speculate as to the possible Australian ownership of the companies involved. After the interview she went back to her office and started writing her next article.

Commissioner Fisher switched off his television after watching Helen Kwang's interview. He had arrived at his home a few minutes before the program started and had sat down with his wife to eat dinner in the lounge room in front of the T.V. set. He wondered where all this was going to end. It had become messy and he sensed some heads at the top level were going to roll. The evidence that Helen had given to him showing that O'Shea had taken bribes had been confirmed by his investigators. Sam Popolo had rung him to advise that there was some evidence that O'Shea might have been murdered. There were no fingerprints at all on the bottle of liquid heroine he had used to inject himself and only one set of O'Shea's prints on the syringe. Most of the documents in his home and work offices had disappeared and his computer had been wiped clean.

Fisher's team was in the process of tracking down the list of overseas shell companies and financial transactions that Helen Kwang had passed on. Nothing definitive had shown up yet but someone had gone to a lot of trouble to cover up their identity and activities.

WEDNESDAY MORNING – CANBERRA

The headline of the National's morning edition printed the denial from the P.M.'s office of any involvement in either the rare earths contract or the Land Council corruption case. Helen Kwang had a piece outlining the complicated series of shell companies and transactions made through the Bank of Bahamas to set up the rare earths deal. She outlined the involvement of the mysterious company, Ruby Resources, in both the rare earths contract and the consultancy involved in negotiation of the land rights issue. She pointed out that efforts made to identify the ownership of the company had proved unsuccessful to date.

But the most sensational part of the front page were the two photographs pictured underneath the headline of the P.M.'s denial. Helen's article made no reference to the photos. One showed P.M. Crichton in close discussion with Takaya, the billionaire majority owner of Mitsustrata. The other showed the Prime Minister leaving the Manuka Post Office carrying a large envelope addressed in bold black letters to RUBY RESOURCES.

The two photos were instantly re-published through social media and within an hour had received thousands of hits on the web. There was an uproar when Parliament sat as question after question was asked as to the Prime Minister's involvement in the scandals. The Leader of the Opposition called for the Prime Minister to resign and moved a motion of no-confidence in the Government. The motion was narrowly defeated. Crichton stalked out of the Parliament leaving his colleagues to face the music.

As Parliament broke for lunch, Anna Sentoro was mobbed by ministers and back-benchers alike seeking Crichton's resignation. She gathered senior Cabinet members around her and suggested they meet immediately in the Party Room. The view of the group was unanimous that the Government would be in danger of being brought down if the situation was allowed to drag on. It was clear that Crichton had to go. A group of four senior ministers led by Anna was selected to approach Crichton. They marched to his office and requested a meeting. Crichton had no forewarning of their arrival and immediately took a confrontational approach. He claimed that the allegations were all lies and a plot to get rid of him. He abused Anna for showing disloyalty. Anna explained calmly that the party was totally unanimous in its view that either he resign immediately or he would be voted out in the party room. The Government was already down in the polls and would not be able to survive a scandal of this nature. They gave him an hour to make his decision and walked out of his office.

At a hastily called press conference on the steps of Parliament House later that afternoon, Crichton made a short announcement that he was resigning from the leadership and the Parliament. He claimed that the allegations made against him were fallacious and vicious but for the sake of the Party he would step down voluntarily. He was completely innocent of the allegations but he didn't want to put his family or colleagues through the stress of such a malicious campaign.

He was immediately besieged by journalists yelling out questions but turned on his heels and hurried back to his office surrounded by security officers. As soon as he left, there was a mad scramble by the journalists to file their reports for the evening news.

Subsequently Anna Sentoro was contacted by several key players in the party, encouraging her to run for the leadership vacancy. She went home and discussed the leadership question with her husband and children.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON – CANBERRA

The Government Whip called order to the meeting of Liberal members in the Party Room. He called for nominations to the leadership of the political party in the light of the resignation of Malcolm Crichton. Anna Sentoro was quickly nominated by one of the backbenchers. The Whip called for other nominations but there was only silence in the room. The Whip then announced that the new leader of the Party and Prime Minister Designate would be Anna Sentoro. She gave a short speech thanking her colleagues for their support and vowed to work with them in overcoming the current crisis and developing policies that improved the lives of the Australian people.

The Chief Whip walked out of the Party Room and announced to the waiting Press Gallery that the Party had elected Anna Sentoro as its leader and Prime Minister Elect.

WEDNESDAY EVENING – MELBOURNE

Jake walked through Melbourne airport having just flown in from Sydney. He paused when he saw the face of Anna Sentoro on television in the terminal. She was giving a press conference at a hotel in Melbourne. The commentator mentioned that she would be the third Australian Prime Minister within a period of two weeks and only the second woman ever to be an Australian Prime Minister. Jake listened to her in admiration as she made an acceptance speech in which she paid enormous tribute to Neville Murray whose state funeral was to be held in Melbourne the next morning. Jake had complete faith that she would make a great Prime Minister and could create a new era in Australia's political history.

He walked out the terminal and caught a taxi to take him to his sister's place at Black Rock, a bayside suburb of Melbourne. When he arrived at the front door he was greeted by the fresh faces of two excited little girls who immediately jumped into his arms calling him "Jake the Snake". Melanie and her husband Alex laughed as he carried the girls into the hall way.

Chapter 30

THURSDAY – MELBOURNE

Former Prime Minister Neville Murray was farewelled at a state funeral at St Paul's Cathedral in Swanston Street in the heart of the city of Melbourne. Traffic had been blocked off around the cathedral to cater for the thousands of mourners expected to attend. A Day of Mourning had been declared and all Australian flags around the country were lowered to half-mast.

Jake was surprised to receive an invitation to the memorial service and presumed Anna Sentoro's office had nominated him as a guest. He arrived at 10.30 a.m., thirty minutes before the service was due to commence and was ushered to a seat in the reserved area of the church. The cathedral was already packed to capacity. The mourners spilled out into the adjacent Federation Square where the memorial service was being telecast live on a huge screen. Television crews and photographers were set up outside the cathedral to catch the dignitaries entering the church.

Jake looked around and could see some of the most powerful people in the country; past Prime Ministers, ministers and parliamentarians from all sides of politics, former governors-general, State Premiers, community and business leaders and celebrities. Foreign dignitaries included Prime Ministers and Presidents from Britain, Canada, New Zealand, South East Asia and Pacific Island

Nations; the Vice-President of the USA, the Chinese Premier, the Deputy Prime Minister from Japan and ambassadors resident in Australia. The Archbishop of Melbourne led the service in honouring Murray's lifetime commitment to public service, a life tragically cut short by a terrible terrorist attack. Family members and friends paid glowing tributes to his character and devotion to his family. Anna Sentoro, as Prime Minister in-waiting, spoke eloquently on behalf of the Government in paying respects to his achievements in government, business and the wider community.

Outside the church, thousands of the public watched solemnly as the coffin, draped in the Australian flag, was carried out of the cathedral by family members and placed in the back of a hearse. A large cavalcade of black cars, surrounded by security officers, followed the hearse as it wound its way slowly down Swanston Street, the main thoroughfare through the city, to the Melbourne Cemetery on the edge of the city. Thousands of mourners lined the street paying their respects as Neville Murray made his last journey.

* * * * *

Jake left the cathedral and walked to the Austrade office where he had meetings lined up for the afternoon. He was struck by how such a tragedy had brought people together, even those who previously had been critics of the former Prime Minister. Although his heart wasn't in it, he managed to get through the afternoon's appointments and arrived at Melanie's home by 6p.m., looking forward to a home cooked meal and a relaxing evening.

FRIDAY/SATURDAY/SUNDAY

On Friday, Jake finished off his work commitments by attending several meetings with businesses with interests in Japan. Having completed his visits program, he was able to spend the entire weekend with Melanie and her family. He strolled along the beach with them at Half Moon Bay, watched the girls compete at Little Athletics, ate with them at their favourite restaurant, watched a DVD and read bedtime stories to the girls. He enjoyed just being part of a family, something which he realised had been missing from his life for a long time.

Melanie wanted to know everything about the state funeral and what had happened to him over the last two weeks. Bill had rung her to tell her of some of the story but she wanted Jake's version. She gasped in amazement when Jake told her about his role in P.M. Koshi's escape from the Chinese terrorists. She plied him with questions about Shoni and their relationship. He was non-committal, saying it would take time but she would be the first to know if their relationship became serious.

On Monday morning he bade farewell to each of them, took a taxi to the international airport and boarded a plane for Tokyo. He dozed on and off throughout the flight but thought a lot about his future, his career and his personal life. Most of all he thought about Shoni.

Epilogue

SIX MONTHS LATER – TOKYO

Jake and Shoni had been sipping coffee from paper cups, waiting in the arrivals area at Narita airport for nearly an hour, before they saw the family exit from the customs area. His sister Melanie was the first to emerge closely followed by the two girls wearing identical backpacks and Alex dragging a trolley piled high with luggage. Jake embraced each of them warmly and introduced Shoni. He herded them outside the terminal to the pick-up area where the embassy driver was waiting in a combi-van. The driver packed their luggage into the van and they all climbed in for the long drive to the city.

Once settled in the vehicle, Jake told them that Bill and Lizzie had already arrived and were settled into his new apartment. He asked them how their flight was and they all started talking at once. The girls took an instant shine to Shoni and started asking her questions about the wedding. Melanie tried to shush them but Shoni was happy to outline the wedding plans. They listened intently as she explained that she and Jake were having a traditional Japanese wedding in the picturesque village of Takayama where she had grown up. Her family and Jake's family would stay at a lovely ryokan, a Japanese inn, and the wedding would be held in the grounds of the ryokan in a beautiful Japanese Garden.

After battling the Tokyo traffic for two hours the driver pulled up the van outside an apartment block which had the Australian flag fluttering on a pole outside the entrance. They piled out of the van and the driver led the way to the lobby. Jake used his security key to take the elevator to the penthouse on the fifth floor. He unlocked the door to the apartment and beckoned the family to enter while he held the door open. On her way through Melanie noticed the plaque on the door.

"Hey, the sign says this is the residence of the Australian Ambassador to Japan?"

Jake just smiled and said "So it does, so it does."

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