

LOST AND FOUND!

Cassie Beattie

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

While this is a work of fiction, Daly Waters is a lovely town in the Northern Territory of Australia, it is a small town and it is a bit off the main road but it is worth it, if you ever get the opportunity, please go and see a unique little Australian town.

This story starts a few years ago now, When I was 15 I was offered a full scholarship at NIDA (national institute of dramatic arts), For me it would mean that I would have to leave my home, my family and everything I knew to pursue my dream of becoming a great ballet dancer. My parents didn't want me to go but I whinged them into submission and eventually they let me go.

Fast forward...

5 years later

I find myself broke, with 1 year still to complete of my NIDA degree, my grades sliding in the wrong direction and the man I had expected to spend the rest of my life with running off with a boy he met at school. So I did the only thing I could think of, I asked the school for a leave of absence and went home to my parent's house. After living in Sydney for just over 5 years, Adelaide seems so sleepy and boring, I found the money to fly home by selling my car and all of the things I wouldn't need to take home. It was awful, I love my parents but I always imaged I would be returning for a visit as a star, not as a poor, lost and hurt student. My parents were funny they seemed more concerned about my weight. I guess the hours of training and work had taken their toll on me physically and mentally, I spent the first few days with my folks sleeping or lounging around. After a few days I knew I needed to get out and do something, so I borrowed my mum's car for the day and went for a drive to see my Nan, she was in a nursing home and was so excited to see me. I was so glad some one was proud of me; I sat at her feet and poured out everything in my heart, she understood and listened then she slapped me in the back and said "welcome to the real world", I laughed and laughed until it hurt. I really needed the reality check. When I got home my parents were out the back cleaning their caravan, I stuck my head in the door to let them know I was back!

At about this point I should introduce myself my name is Isabella Burton, I am the youngest of 5 children all girls. My mum is a nursery teacher and my dad is a policeman, my nearest sister is 14 yrs older than me, so I really don't have much of a relationship with any of them. I was born and raised in Tusmore, a sleepy suburb of Adelaide, it was a nice house but when my parents bought it all of us kids were living at home, now we are gone it seems stupidly big for 2 adults and 3 or 4 dogs depending on what my dad is doing.

The night after visiting my Nan I sat at my mum's computer and applied for jobs all over the country, not having a lot of real world experience was a bit of a problem. There are not a lot of jobs out there for ballet dancers, musicians and actors. One of the jobs I applied for was in a place called Daly Waters, I had no idea where it was, but they were looking for a governess

for 4 children, only prerequisite was that you had finished high school and you were happy to relocate. I was looking for a new challenge and I had nothing keeping me where I was.

A couple of days later I received a phone call from the job in Daly Waters, the man I spoke to seemed really nice, he explained that there were 4 children aged between 4 and 7, they attended the school of the air but required some one to keep an eye on them and to make sure everything was done. It sounded pretty easy, we chatted easily for about 15 minutes before I was offered the job on a 3-month trial. He told me the location was very harsh and he didn't expect me to commit until I had really experienced it. It sounded fair, so I agreed; the man (Barry) said he would send me an email confirming the terms of employment. The job paid about \$30,000 per year but it included a furnished 3-bedroom home, all my meals and all other living expenses except petrol. Sounded like a sweet deal, he also said I would only work 4-5 hours a day with the kids but may be asked too watch them at other times. It was a job and I wasn't going to complain.

I got the email that afternoon, I read through it, it was exactly as I expected, I did call Barry to ask if I would be allowed to bring a dog with me. I should also explain my dad works for the police Dog squad and I had become very attached to a retired dog that was living with them while waiting for a new home. Barry said it was fine but I would be expected to look after it and pay for its food. Not an issue, now I had to convince my dad that the dog would be all right with me.

That night I asked my parents if I could borrow some money, I had taken a job in the sticks and needed to buy a reliable car. They were excited about the job, I told them all about it, they were dubious as to if I would be able to cope in the bush but they also agreed it would be a good experience for me. My darling parents didn't loan me the money, they gave me my dad's old Ford station wagon. It was lemon yellow in colour and it was perfect, my dad was looking at getting rid of it any way. I think my parents were also looking forward to getting rid of me as well; it had been a few years since we had all left home and I guess it was a bit unsettling for all of us.

I signed the employment agreement and asked when they wanted me there. The response was as soon as I got there, I was to learn that time is different in the sticks but at this point I was so excited to have a job and be doing something. I had dad's old car serviced, everything checked over and even had the tyres checked of course everything was fine, but it made me feel better. My Nan had given me a few thousand dollars to get me through, I was so grateful for the money; I didn't want to have to ask my parents for money to get me through, since they had given me the car. With a few days until I planned to leave I made sure I had everything I thought I would need, I even bought new sheets and towels for my new home,

my mum packed me a box of long life foods and crockery and cutlery. I also broached the topic of taking the dog with my dad, he was happy for him to come with him on the condition that I looked after him.

The night before I left my parents had a few friends around for dinner to wish me well, earlier that day my dad had helped me pack the car, It was a long journey, I was expecting at least 3 nights sleeping in the car with the dog! My dad packed me 2 large bags of dog food, didn't want the hound to go hungry. The poor car was packed to the gills, including everything I could possibly ever need and then some! At 6am the next morning, with tears from my mum, Trojan (the Dog) and I set off on our new adventure. I had about \$2000, mobile phone and a credit card for emergencies and a giant smile. On the first night we drove until I started to get really tired, Trojan was great company, but I think even he wanted to stretch his legs, on the first day we got to a tiny little place called Marla, I stopped at the road house and asked if I could buy a shower, the girl was really nice and said I could have a room for \$40, nothing special but it did have a clean bed and running hot water, I said thanks but I was travelling with a dog, she said it was fine as long as he didn't sleep in the bed, he was welcome. I paid the \$40, took the key and found our room. It was tiny, but it did have a bathroom and running water. I parked the car at the back close to the door in case any one tried to break into it. I took Trojan out for a bit of a run, he needed to burn off some of his energy, after that he had his dinner, I had a hot shower and we both had a very good sleep. Next morning just after dawn a huge truck pulled up outside of our room. I was awake so I decided to grab some food quickly, had another shower and off we headed. Just after Marla we crossed the boarder into the Northern Territory, it was very exciting, not long after that I was pulled over by a police officer, I thought I was doing something wrong but had no idea, I was sure I wasn't speeding, I was using the cruise control, it turns out he was just letting me know I had the dogs toy on the tow bar! It was luck I didn't lose it although I doubt Trojan would have noticed; Trojan didn't like the policeman very much and proceeded to tell him off for talking to me. I drove through to Alice Springs, we stopped for a walk around and to get some food, I was tired but didn't feel safe stopping to sleep any where, so we kept driving north, we stopped at a place called Barrow Creek, I was exhausted and even if I couldn't get a shower or room I was sleeping. They were happy for me to take a caravan with the dog, it cost me a bit more than the room at Marla but it was a bit bigger. I still parked the car close just in case. I run Trojan for a bit until he was puffing, then I had a shower and we both settled down for some sleep. I woke up at about 4 am, there was some ruckus outside and the dog was awake and agitated so we investigated only to find out that there where 2 drunks having a disagreement. I wandered over to the bar and discovered that it was normal for people to bring their dogs into the bar. The lady that rented me the van was still working, she apologised for the noise, and offered me breakfast as reparation. I was starving so I said yes, it was a really good breaky, Trojan

got a fair bit of it but it was good to feel full, I then went back to sleep for a few hours, I woke up at about 9, had another quick shower and then we hit the road again. By the map I guessed we would have at least one more stop before we reached our destination, but so far so good, we had a really good run! I was back into the swing of driving when I passed a sign for Daly waters, I was confused, I was only early afternoon, I passed another one, this time I slowed down to read it, it said left turn 5 km, I slowed down when I come to the turn, made the turn and was surprised the road was rough bitumen, the map said unsealed, I decided that next time I buy more recent maps, the road in was about 15 km, so not a long way but it was very rough.

When we got there I thought I had made a wrong turn, it was basically a pub, a few houses and not much else. I noticed the name on the pub and it was the right place, I guessed there was more town further down the track, I was wrong, Barry was the local publican and said I should just ask for him when I arrived at the pub.

I let Trojan out to stretch and pee, he seemed happy to be out of the car, I was going to put him back before I went to meet my new boss but I didn't have the heart. It turns out it didn't really matter any way, the front bar had a couple of dog lying in the sun, so I guessed it was ok to take him with me. I walked in and asked the barman if Barry was around, he said Barry is always around, he suggested I take a seat, he would find him for me, the last thing I wanted to do was sit, so I stretched my aching body. Mid stretch this weather worn youngish man walked up to me and introduced himself to me. Trojan wagged his tail and accepted a pat, I introduced myself and Trojan, the fact that the dog like this man was a really good sign; I always believed that dogs were a good judge of character. He apologised for his appearance apparently they had been burning off; he also mentioned that they didn't expect me for another couple of days. It seems my predecessor had left an awful mess in the house that was to be mine and they were still cleaning it up. I told him not to worry about it, after a few days in the car with the dog I could no longer smell. He insisted that I stay in the motel accommodation for a couple of days until they got it all sorted. I was fine with that. He showed me to my room, where to park and where to shower, I thanked him and we both went off to sort ourselves out. I wanted to make a good impression on my first night, so I had a shower washed my hair and shaved my legs, I put on a summery dress and sandals I thought I looked ok, I even put on make up for the first time since I left Sydney, it felt a bit weird really.

Before I cleaned up I took Trojan for a run and gave him his dinner, I left him in my room with the door open, the pub dining room was in front of our room but I had faith he would be a good dog, he hadn't let me down yet. I walked into the front bar, I got a couple of whistles, and I know it is corny but I was chuffed, nice to be noticed! Barry was sitting at the bar, he

introduced me to everyone, they were all really nice, but then there were not many women here, I was beginning to wonder what I had gotten myself into. Barry insisted I have the special Beef and Barra for dinner, we ate together and shared a pleasant conversation, I discovered that he was raising his child and his brothers 3 kids, that they were good kids but needed to learn a lot about things like manners. His girlfriend couldn't cope with living in the sticks and had left about a year before, that they had employed 3 people since then to look after the kids. He made it very clear that I was not to get involved with anyone local, that he didn't approve of that type of thing and that if any one was bugging me that I should tell him and he would fix it. It all seemed very reasonable; he was a gentleman, even if he did have some rough edges.

Trojan again got a lot of my dinner, he didn't mind, but Barry did seem perplexed at how I could eat so little and be full. I had to explain that when you study ballet you work 5-7 hours a day and eat around a quarter of what a normal person your weight eats. I had done that for 5 yrs and was still adjusting to eating more.

After that he excused himself, we wandered around saying hi to the visitors then he got up on the little stage and sung some country songs and played an old guitar. It was very endearing but also a little corny. Afterwards he comes over to see if I wanted a nightcap, I said thank you but no I would turn in early. It was only about 9pm when I fell into bed but I slept so very well, I woke up at 10am the next day and at first freaked out, normally Trojan would wake me up before now, but Trojan was not in the room. I threw my sweat pants and top on over my nightshirt and opened the door. There is Barry and Trojan playing tug of war in the dining room, I took a deep breath, they both looked up, Barry said sorry did I wake you? They both looked so cute, how could I be angry. I told Barry that I had woken up in a panic because the dog was missing and as an ex-police dog I had a responsibility to make sure he stayed out of trouble.

Barry just laughed, he noticed that I had not surfaced and let the dog out to pee, then started playing with him. It was nice that they were having a good time, I left them to it and grabbed a quick shower before throwing on my jeans and t shirt, When I found them they were still playing but in the bar now, I had to laugh but I was sure it would wear off soon. Man was I wrong! I asked to meet the children, they were all watching TV out the back and they all looked so cute. I guessed it was a façade but as I discovered afterwards they really were good kids. I also asked to see my new home, he didn't want to show me but I have no idea why, it was in way better shape than my flat in Sydney was most of the time, he explained that the new carpet was arriving any day, that they had finished the painting and that the furniture was around the corner in the memorial hall waiting for me to choose what I wanted.

The house was huge, it had 5 bedrooms, I pointed out that I was promised a 3 bed home, he shrugged and said it was also the school house so I would really only have 3 or 4 rooms and he didn't want to scare me off. The house had both an indoor and out door bathroom, they left the old out side bathroom when they put the new one inside for the last governess, I have to admit I was grateful for the inside bathroom but the outside one would make washing the dog far easier!

After the tour of the house Barry took me on a walk around the town, it wasn't very big, he stopped to introduce me to the locals and then took me on a tour of the pub to meet the staff. It was early afternoon after all of this tour, Barry offered me a late lunch but I was fine. He said it got busy with tourists in the afternoon so he would need to be dealing with that, but I should ask the staff if I needed anything. The afternoon and evening went past peacefully. The next day as promised the new carpet arrived, along with the bathtub, I was happy with the shower but apparently the previous girl wanted a bath, so I got the bath. After they had finished laying the carpet, Barry and some guys from the pub come over and asked me to chose the furniture, they took me to the hall, it was the most beautiful building inside, polished floors and some thing that looked like a grand piano. I asked, if it was they said yes, it was tuned by a passing piano tuner last year but no one ever played it. I asked if I could, they said if I wanted to I was welcome to. They uncovered it and all the other furniture. I chose some furniture; there was heaps of it, including brand new mattresses. I sat down at the piano, it was a 9 ft concert grand by Steinway, it was the most beautiful thing and this was the last place on earth I expected to find it. It was tuned to perfection and the joy of playing it must had shown on my face, he stood there watching me play while the guys moved the furniture into the house, I knew I should have been helping but they didn't seem to mind. When they were almost done, they asked me to come and check I had everything I needed. I gently closed the lid, knowing I would be back soon, I then babbled about wishing I had bought some music with me. The house was coming together great, I had everything I needed, and I went and grabbed the car and started unloading it. It was late afternoon when Barry was pulled away to work. Trojan was happily sleeping in the lounge room, I was busy making the bed and unpacking all of my rubbish. The guys from the pub helped me with all of the heavy stuff. I was happy with my little house, the schoolroom was set up, I had a computer room, the kids had a computer each connected to the Internet and I had a computer with Internet. School didn't go back for another week and my not so little house was all sorted. They even installed a giant dog door for Trojan, so I didn't have to let him out. I was going to sleep late often if they kept spoiling me like this, I run myself a bath, it seemed only right to christen it complete with bubbles, While I was in the bath I couldn't help but wonder how I got so lucky.

Then I realised as Barry looked into the bathroom that any privacy I once had was lost, after years at a performing art school I was used to it. He went beetroot red and looked away, mentioning something about closing the bathroom door! I told him I hated doors and I was sure the dog wasn't going to rat on me! He laughed and told me that dinner would be at 8 tonight, I was fine with that and told him I would be over soon.

I got out of the bath all pruned, my body felt awful, it was a while since I had danced and my body was warning me that if I didn't soon, I never would again. I dressed for dinner, fed Trojan and wandered over to the pub, it was basically just across the road, Stew the barman was working a busy bar, he asked me if I wanted a drink then looked at me oddly when I asked for a glass of milk, he still got it for me! I had about an hour until dinner so I wandered around to the house, I sprung Barry putting the kids to bed, they all slept in one bed and he was reading them a story, well sort of reading because I don't remember a 2 tonne truck in sleeping beauty!

It was my turn to be sprung this time, Barry was dressed for dinner, and the kids were almost asleep when he spotted me. We both stayed silent about each other, preferring for the kids to fall off to sleep. They were like a basket of puppies all tumbled together, afterwards Barry asked how long I had been there, I said a little while but didn't want to disturb them, I wasn't sure if he was pissed off or if I should be packing the car again. We wandered out and had another lovely dinner this time, I only had a small piece of barra, and it was delicious. I asked Barry straight out if he was pissed off at me for spying on him. He looked up and this huge smile spread over his face, he admitted that he was embarrassed at being caught, now it was my turn to be confused and asked why, he said he feels like a dill making up stories for the kids and staying with them till they are asleep. I assured him it told me that he loved them and that he wanted them to know that. With that out of the way I asked Barry who I needed to talk to if I wanted to use the memorial hall, he said it was him, when he bought the pub he got he town with it! I asked if I could use the hall for a couple of hours the next morning, he said fine and gave me the key off of his collection. He just asked that I keep the key safe. After another pleasant evening, I retired to my little house for the first time. I have to admit that I slept very well! The next morning, I got up put on my training gear, grabbed the cassette player and my gym bag with everything in it and Trojan and I went to the hall. It was stuffy inside already, I guess it spent most of it's time closed up which was a shame, all of the furniture was gone and the piano had been recovered with it's protective layers, they may not know much about it but they did know how to look after it. I left the door open for the airflow and started my warm up, and then I changed into my favourite ballet slippers it felt like I was putting on an old friend. I tested my body a little bit more and stretched a bit more before I started the music and went through the same routine I had done a million times before. I felt good to be moving,

I had grabbed a chair to use as a rail, and it was the perfect height. Trojan was laying across the door so I knew no one would get past him, it wasn't until I was finished that I noticed a shadow on the floor, I looked up and there was Barry, bloody dog could have told me! He had a big smile on his face, I walked over and said well now were even, he looked quizzical, I elaborated, you have watched me dance, I have watched you read a story to the kids. He protested, not the same thing your good at what you do! It was my turn to blush! I could feel myself falling for this guy but it could never be.

Barry was called away, so I changed my tape and went on with my work out, then I heard the dog growl and big deep growl, there was another local watching me, I stopped and said hi, he run away. I thought it was a bit interesting but thought nothing of it; I was over it any way so I packed up and went home for a drink and shower. That night Barry and I met in the front bar for dinner, I didn't mind, the dinning room area was full and that was a great thing for a country pub. The guy who seen me dancing had been drinking all afternoon and started hassling me at the bar, saying things like pretty girls don't belong in the bush and that dolls should wear dresses, I don't think he approved of my training attire but I ignored him until he grabbed my arm. Barry went to tell him off but being stronger than most people think he found himself in a pile on the floor, I have been hassled by wankers in bars in Sydney, all of his mates stood around laughing at him. Barry was shocked; he didn't think I had it in me either, he though I travelled with Trojan as protection!

We had a pleasant meal and I retired to my new place early, I wanted to move some stuff around, about half way through moving things I decided the back bedroom would be a better room for me and the front one would make a better school room. So I continued to move the house around until about 2 am when I decided I could finish it tomorrow. I had moved my bed to the back room and made it so I had a quick wash and turned in. That bed felt so good! A couple of hours later, I was woken by Trojan growling, he didn't often growl so I guessed something was up. Then I heard someone try the door, I grabbed the phone and called Barry, he was just about to go to bed, so he slipped on his thongs and come over to investigate, when he got there he found the door had been forced with a screw driver, he called out my name and I called back. The same drunk that had hassled me in the bar was now pinned to the floor in the schoolroom with a large dog baring his teeth at him. He had a roll of duct tape over one hand and a jemmy bar in the other. Barry called the local policeman, told him what had happened and asked him to come and get the moron. The police came, took statements from me, the neighbours and people who where in the bar. Then I released the dog and they put him in the back of the van and drove away, I was a little shaken, so Barry stayed with me, we grabbed a coffee and watched the sun come up. The first of what was going to many sunrises together, at around 8am the kids showed up, although school didn't start for another

couple of days, they were bored and wanted something to do. I enjoyed the company, Barry set to work fixing the door and fitting locks to the doors for me, the locks had been there for ages but never installed. The kids helped set up the schoolroom, making sure all of their treasures were put away, by about 1 they noticed that they had missed a meal and all took off home for something to eat.

Not long after that my own batteries were running low, having had very little sleep, so I lay down on the couch for a little bit, maybe an hour, I woke up when Barry come to check if I was ok, we had a dinner arrangement at 8, it was now almost 9! He thought it was funny even if I didn't. I got up and tidied myself up before wandering over to the pub for some food. The food was amazing, I imagined putting on a whole lot of weight while I was here. Barry offered to stay in the guest room at the house so I could sleep, I told him I was fine I had the dog to look after me! The truth was I didn't want to be too close to him, I had fallen for him in a big way, he was over 10 years older than me, but I wanted him. I purposely kept my distance from him, trying to make sure the kids were around or the other staff were around. He noticed this, I think he thought I was playing hard to get, he gave me some space and that made it easier. The first term of school passed fast. At the end of my first term, Barry asked me to stay, I was happy too; I had fallen in love with him, the kids and the place.

During the school holidays I decided to throw on some old clothes and try to make something out of my garden. First things first, I asked Tommy, the local snake catcher to check for any thing I didn't want to meet. Then I proceeded to move potted plants people had given me to the front of the house, I pulled out the weeds and even cleaned the outdoor bathroom. At the end of a long day I was exhausted, I had a long shower before falling into my pyjamas and onto the couch. I was reading my book when I started to feel really unwell, I thought it might be a touch of heat stroke, when one of the kids come over I told them I wasn't feeling well and they went back and ratted on me to Barry.

Barry come over a little while later to check on me, by this time I had trouble moving, he said it wasn't heat stroke that was usually a headache and tummy upset. He called the doctor in Katherine, told him what was going on, he said it sounded like some sort of virus, that they should give me plenty of water and keep an eye on me. Barry decided I would be more comfortable on my bed, so he gently picked me up and moved me there, once there he put the phone and water bottle close and told me if I got any worse I should call him. I didn't get any better, when Barry come back an hour or so later I was in a really bad way, he called the doctor back and told him I was going down hill fast. The doc asked him to have a look for any rashes or bites, it didn't take him long to find the rash on my stomach, I thought it was just something I had brushed up against while out side. He told the doc and the doc said I was in

serious danger, he grabbed my number and said he would call back in a few minutes, when he called back he said there was a helicopter coming to pick me up, he should wrap me up and have me at the landing zone in 10 minutes. Barry did just that or at least so he tells me, I don't remember a thing.

The next thing I remember is waking up in hospital with Barry alongside of me and my parents at the foot of my bed. It turns out I had been exposed to a bacteria, commonly found on snakes and lizards, most likely in the garden, being a city girl and only a light weight it made me really sick and for a few days they didn't know if I would survive. After 15 days in hospital it was decided I was allowed to go home, when I arrived, everything had a fresh coat of paint, even my pot plants! Trojan was so happy to see me he did a little dance and the kids were happy I had come back. My parents had also come back to look after me until I was stronger, now I love my parents but they drove me mad in the first couple of days, Barry must have noticed this and offered to get me an assistant until I was fully well, this seemed to satisfy them and they wandered home to Adelaide.

Barry didn't get me an assistant, he didn't need to, I had the kids to get me any thing I wanted and they also dobbed me in when I pushed it too far. I had been home for a couple of weeks before I felt strong enough to wander over to the pub for dinner, everyone had hugs for me, it was nice to feel like a part of a very odd family. Barry and I had dinner together for the first time in a long time, then he walked me home, we sat on the couch for a while, I didn't have a clue what he was thinking until he eventually spoke with very careful words. He said I had given him an awful fright when I got sick, I thought he was going to say it was time for me to go back to the city where I belong, but instead he leaned over and kissed me gently on the lips. He told me he never wanted to let me go again and asked me to marry him! I was shocked I had not expected that, I told him I needed to think about it, I was tired and emotional, he told me I had all of the time I wanted, that when I was ready I would tell him. He only asked that if it was no that I don't run away, that we could both just pretend it never happened. That night I got very little sleep, the next morning when the kids come over for school I was still in bed so they all bundled in with me. We were still like that a couple of hours later when Barry come over to see what was going on, usually by now the curtains in the schoolroom were open, he thought maybe we were watching a movie. I was telling them stories and they were having a lovely day, as lunch was soon for the kids I sent them back to the pub and invited Barry onto the bed.

I started off saying that this wasn't a normal school day and I didn't think one day would really hurt, he smiled and said neither did he. I was tired but wanted to talk with Barry about his proposal, I told him so, he said I should rest now; he would come back with food for dinner

and wake me up. I had a delightful sleep that afternoon, I woke up around 6, had a bath and called my parents to tell them about the proposal, it turns out they already knew, he had asked there permission while they were there, he was going to leave it until I was stronger but obviously couldn't wait.

When Barry come back with dinner, we sat on my bed enjoyed the food and the conversation, afterwards I told him I had considered his offer and the answer was yes! On the condition that we had a proper engagement. He was over the moon, we kissed for a bit then I must have fallen a sleep, I was woken up the next morning by the kids, Barry and I were still cuddled up on the bed, it was nice to wake up with a man. We told the kids, they were even more excited than we thought they might be. They immediately took off to tell everyone that there was going to be a wedding. Barry and I went over to the pub to break the news to everyone, the kids had been there before us and everyone was really happy for us. It was about 3 months before I got my engagement ring, Barry wanted me to choose it and I was still very weak, too weak for the long car journey to Katherine or Alice springs, I had also put on a stack of weight. I really needed to buy myself some new clothes, I guess this is what happens when you don't exercise, when I left NIDA I was 50kg, I got down to about 48kg at one stage, when I weighed my self I was appalled to weigh 60kg, I was telling barman Stew this and he pulled up a chart on the internet with ideal weight and for my height I was still very light, my ideal weight was between 65 and 68 kg.

A couple of days later my family started arriving, Barry had invited everyone to our engagement party, it was nice to see them but I really wish they had of stayed home. They hated everything about my home, it was too remote, there was too much dust, the only person happy was my mum, and she was excited to see some meat on my bones and kept congratulating Barry for his hard work. Like hell, if I hadn't become so lazy it wouldn't be there. They all stayed for a few days before heading back to their lives, I was never so happy as when they all left. My parents wanted us to get married in Adelaide, I wanted to get married at the pub, my sisters wanted me to get married in the same church they all did, one of them even told me I could wear her dress. Not ever going to happen, the night after they all left Barry and I sat down to discuss the wedding, when, where, who, how, his response to every questions was it was my call, I just had to tell him when and where and he was there. It did seem really odd to be thinking about marrying a man I have never had sex with. It started to play on mind, maybe we were not compatible or he was some sort of freak.

The wedding plans were coming together quite nicely, I bought the dress on ebay, it cost \$120, it was a little big when it arrived but that was easy to fix, it was a fairly simple cream dress, I had sorted most things out, the date was set, the venue was set, the invites were

made, the kids helped with the invites adding all the little sparkly bits to them, I was all set to send them but the nagging thing in the back of my mind about the sex was holding me back.

After dinner that night I invited Barry to my place, I knew the kids were asleep and the pub was winding down, he didn't even think about it he was there. I told him about my nagging question, he laughed and laughed, he said he though I was an old fashioned girl and wanted to wait and he was fine with that. Now it was my turn to laugh, I crawled onto his lap and made it very clear what my intentions were. He explained that he was a bit rusty but he was pretty sure he could learn again. He picked me up and carried me to the bedroom, she kissed me and disappeared for a few seconds, explaining he locked the door, didn't want any interruptions. He slowly undressed me, kissing each new patch of skin he uncovered. Then I returned the favour, we did a lot of kissing and cuddling, then he gently entered me, he filled me perfectly, it was like our bodies were designed to fit together. It wasn't exactly a marathon session but it was lovely and very satisfying. Afterwards we lay together hot and sweaty, it was a warm night but not that warm, Barry got up and went to the bathroom, I heard water running, at first I thought he was washing his hands but then I guessed it was the bath. He come back and told me there was a nice cool bubble bath for 2 waiting for me. The bath was really not big enough for both of us but it was a lot of fun and the foreplay started all over again, I have no idea if this was intentional but it was far more than I expected from a country bloke. We made sweet love again after that before both of us went to sleep in each other's arms. The next morning we were woken by the kids. The front door was locked so they went round the back and come in the dog door. It's a good thing the dog warned us, we just had time to jump into some clothes, the kids were suspicious but didn't say anything. Instead Barry told them I was feeling a bit tired and that they should have a fun day at home, he even told them he had a new dvd for them if they were good. They cast aside their suspicions and took off home, Barry followed them with a cheeky grin and the staff guessed he had been caught, that he was doing the walk of shame from his fiancés house. Not really that bad even in a country town. It also presented some new questions about where we would live, how the kids would be cared for and a hundred other things. After much discussion over the next week it was decided that we would all live in my place, the schoolroom would be moved to his place along with the computers and the kids would have a room each. We told the kids about this, they were excited, but had slept together for a long time and were a bit confused by the room each. The following week we all went to Alice Springs for a few days, Stew could run the pub so we really didn't need to be there.

We bought the kids some new clothes for the wedding, we bought new linen and towels and we bought each of the kids their own bedroom furniture, it was neither the cheapest nor the dearest but they were very excited. We then went to see a mate of Barry's to see about

getting it shipped up, it turns out he was on his way the next day, so we could follow it up or he would unload it at the pub. We decided to meet it there it saved us having to rush and I wanted to do a few more things while we were there. The motel we were staying at was really nice, they let the kids use the pool well after they should have locked it, they gave us extra coffee and milk, and they generally didn't complain about the kids. The time came for us to pack up and head home, the morning we were leaving I woke up feeling unwell in the stomach, Barry offered to stay another day but I didn't see any point, I skipped breakfast and off we set.

By the time we got home I felt fine, we set about pulling both houses apart, the kids were tired and cranky well before we were half way there. So Stew gave them all dinner, followed by ice cream and put them to bed. I knew there was a reason we made Stew the best man. By about 3 am we sort of had everything in order, the kid's rooms were set up, the beds were made, and all they had to do was move in their toys and clothes. They each had a desk and chair, I put a sign on each door with their name on them, the next morning they came barrelling over to find their new rooms, then each of them was given a clothes basket to start filling it up with their things, we only had one small issue, we have the names mixed up on some of the furniture but that just required swapping the names, then everyone was happy. Off they went to start moving into their new place. My room on the other hand was a complete mess; I had just dumped everything on the floor to get the kids sorted. Trojan was looking at the mess very confused; this was a whole new thing for him. The following week Trojan was to turn 15, old for a German Shepard but he seemed to be in good health and thankfully he had managed not to pick up any ticks.

I woke up feeling off colour again only this time I kept it to myself. I had done a mental count back and realised I could be pregnant, I bought a test in Alice but didn't tell Barry, we had not even discussed adding to the brood. Although really only one was his child I know that raising all 4 weighed heavy on his mind. The only problem was we had not been apart long enough for me to do the test, I told Barry I needed some time out, I was taking a bath, could he watch the kids, he was fine with that, I snuck the test into the bathroom with my clothes and latched the door, there is a first for everything. I peed on the stick like the instructions said, then I ran the bath while I waited, the wait was awful. The response was very clear, it was positive, I think I lapsed into a state of shock, 6 weeks out from our wedding, pregnant and fearing he would call the whole thing off, I started to cry. I turned the taps off and kept crying, Barry must have heard this and come to the door, it was latched, and he asked if I was ok, if I needed anything, I managed to respond I was fine. I jumped in the bath and tried to pull myself together. Next thing I know there is a fork through the gap in the door the latch is opened and in he pops, he asked if I was having second thoughts or if I needed to talk about any thing. I

said I did but I wanted to do it dressed. He sat on the loo to contemplate this and spied the test. I should have hidden it, bugger, he picked it up and looked at it, it took him a couple of minutes to figure it out then a huge smile spread across his face. He looked up and said does this mean what I think it means. I nodded, and said your going to be a dad again. He come over and kissed me, gently and for a long time, then he explained he thought I was having second thoughts and was going to run. I said no not at all, are you? He asked why I would ask such a thing, I responded that we had never talked about kids and I wasn't sure he wanted another one. He started laughing; he always wanted a big family, which is why he was raising his brothers' kids. The relief was overwhelming. I told him I was going to get big and fat, she said that was fine with him!

We decided not to tell anyone else until after the wedding, I did go to a doctors appointment in Katherine, to confirm and have some tests done, the doctor said I needed to be careful of my diet, because I was so light I needed to be extra careful and the week before the wedding Barry and I went for the ultrasound, the ultrasound showed twins, both perfect size for their age. We took the video home and watched it a few times, before we decided to tell the kids but swear them to secrecy. I know it would never work but it was fun watching them squirm, the secret lasted until my parents arrived with their caravan and our wedding present, a Great Dane, his name is Jolie.

Then the kids in their excitement of meeting there soon to be relatives spilled the beans. The look on my mothers face made it all worthwhile. The night before the wedding we had a gathering/ party at the pub, my parents were still not happy about it not being a church wedding but in light of the recent news of our impending twins, she was quiet. That night we announced and played the video to everyone, family, friends and people staying at the pub going along with the ride. Everyone was shocked and surprised but I think the thing that made everyone wonder was my eldest sister chucked a tantrum and stormed off to her room, we all stood looking at each other wondering what just happened. Not even my mum knew, the following day, she didn't show up at the wedding, the dress was a little tight but at least I knew why it was tight. The wedding was in the memorial hall, followed by a party at the pub, the kids all took part in the ceremony, the celebrant was a friend of ours and a great day was had by all. Trojan carried the rings down the isle, and then refused to give them to the celebrant, Barry had to take them and hand them over; everyone had a good laugh about it. Trojan was starting to show his age, he was getting grey around the muzzle and was having trouble getting started in the morning. My dad suggested it was getting close to time to say good-bye; I wasn't ready to contemplate it yet. It had been on my mind for a while but he always seemed so happy even if he wasn't a great working dog any more, he was my pet and I loved him. When we got back to the pub after the ceremony, there was a card from my sister saying she

had left, that we should have a great day and that she would call soon. She never did! She got home to her place in Adelaide, wrote everyone letters, posted them, then took a massive dose of painkiller and committed suicide.

I got the letter from her, the day they discovered her body, she had been dead for a couple of days, when my mum got home she had tried to call her but it was not unusual for her to screen her calls. She guessed she would call back when she was ready. The letter basically said she had pursued her career as a lawyer for her whole life but never stopped to have a proper relationship or baby, by the time she realise this is what she wanted she was too old to have a baby and every relationship she had was measured in days, never weeks or months. She was jealous of me and the wedding was the last straw. I should also add here that she had been married 3 times! I felt bad for a while but Barry told me I deserved to be happy and that was the most important thing.

Barry and I made the trek to Adelaide for her funeral, we left the kids and the dogs with Stew along with the pub, it was the quiet season and we knew it would be fine. While we were in Adelaide we decided to start shopping for the twins, we filled the back of the land cruiser with crap, said good-bye to my parents and headed for home. I was a really odd thing for me, the last time I drove this road I was starting a new life and I really was again. It was not exactly the honeymoon I was hoping for but the trip was good, we travelled slowly, stopping often to enjoy the scenery and a quick kiss. When we got back Stew was exhausted, he took a few days off to recover and behave badly in Katherine.

I did notice that Trojan was not well, I checked him over for ticks and didn't find any, but I gave him a tick bath anyway. The local vet was on his way through and I asked him to check him over, he confirmed what I guessed, his heart was going, he said he didn't know how long he had, it might be days, it might be months. It turned out it was a few weeks, we got up one morning and he was gone, he was curled up in this favourite blanket, looking very peaceful but I know he was not there. We let the kids say goodbye to him, I think it is important to do that, they were prepared, and Jolie softened the blow for the kids but not for me. I was also in the last trimester of my pregnancy and Barry was concerned about me. He called the doc in Katherine only to find out he was not far away, he called in to see us. He conducted a lovely funeral for Trojan and the kids made a head stone. I cried and cried the kids would come and rub my back or my tummy, but they knew I was missing Trojan. The doc checked me over and suggested I relocated to Katherine; I was toward the end of an easy pregnancy, so I said I would rather wait another couple of weeks. I have somewhere between 4 and 6 weeks left; I wanted to stay with the kids and my home. That night the kids put up a tribute to Trojan in the front bar, I was very touched by the love that they showed, I was also exhausted, so I turned

in with the kids. The next couple of weeks went by easily, Jolie followed me around, he really was a lovely dog, big and goofy, but also loving. At first I was afraid he would pose a threat to the twins but he was so gentle with the kids and their toys I figured he would be fine.

With 4 weeks or so to go we made plans for the whole family to relocate to Katherine for the duration and a couple of weeks after the birth, I know it was for me that they were doing it but it was a lot of work. The night before we were to leave, I was tired so I went to bed really early, Barry got caught up paying bills and making sure Stew and the other staff knew what was going on. Around 1 am, I realised I was in serious trouble, I woke up to discover my water had broken, what the hell happened to hours of labour pain before this point, I grabbed the phone and called the pub, Barry raced over with one of the Canadian barmaids, turns out in her real life not the one backpacking around Australia, she is a nurse, she asked if she could look. And quickly reiterated that we were in trouble, baby 1 was crowning. She directed people to get everything she needed, clean towels, cotton and the phone, Barry called the doc and told him what was going on, he spoke to the nurse and they agreed it all sounded very normal. Baby 1 was welcomed into the world a few moments later, ready or not! Not long after baby 2 arrived. It was all very simple and with no complications, I was really lucky, both were girls, I am not sure if Barry was happy or disappointed, I was too tired to care. The doc arrived the next morning, he checked everyone over and declared us all well. We named the girls Eleanor and Rachel!

As with any arrival of this type and magnitude, chaos followed. I was really glad to have all of the love and support of the people around me but I was also feeling so overwhelmed. My parents offered to come stay with us and to help me with the twins but I really didn't want them going to all of that trouble. I had some great people supporting me and I knew that I would be fine.

One thing I hadn't counted on was how much stuff a baby consumes, we had bought a couple of boxes of new born nappies and a few soaps and creams but twins go through huge volumes of stuff, I was really lucky, when the twins were born there was a midwife staying in the motel, she heard about the births and come to see me and offer any assistance, Barry gave them an extra couple of nights at the motel and in return she helped me to learn how to nurse the girls and all of the practical things that I really had no idea about. On about day 4 or 5 after they were born, we realise we really needed to go on a big shopping trip, I was not feeling confident enough to go on my own, so Barry with the 4 older kids packed up the car and took off for Alice Springs, they were armed with a long list of things they had to come home with. I had gone on the Internet and printed a list of all of the things we needed and a few we didn't need. That night Barry rang and said that they had completed most of the

shopping mission but that he was exhausted so they were going to stay over night and come home in the morning.

The next morning he arrived as promised, with a car packed full of groceries, this may seem like a really simple thing but when the nearest supermarket is 400 kilometres away, it is exciting. While he was away there was a letter from his brother Dave telling us that he was coming to visit, we thought this was a bit odd, he never come to visit before, we invited him to the wedding but got no response. It all become clear after he arrived a few days later.

When Dave pulled up I knew who he was, the resemblance was uncanny, he walked into the bar and asked for Barry. Barry was out the back with the kids, I stuck my head through the door and told him he ad a visitor. When he seen Dave it was clear he was not happy to see him, there was a forced smile but there was no real warmth in it. Dave on the other hand was very pally. I also found it interesting that none of Dave's kids knew who he was and neither brother told them, they all bundled out of the school room and were on their way home. The twins were at home sleeping, I had the baby monitor so I knew they were awake and I was heading home. The kids ran past Dave and into the house, it was almost lunchtime and as usual they were starving.

The twins were up and all of the kids were fed before Barry and Dave come over, it was very clear that Barry was not a happy camper, it conspired that Dave wanted to take his kids! Barry was their legal guardian and he had told Dave he would need to go to court to get them back. He had not seen them since they were all really little, the eldest was barely 3 when he left their mother, and the youngest was just a few days old. Their mother had no way of looking after them so she signed them over to Barry to look after them. It was really very sad, she had not had any contact with them either, and Barry assumed that she had started another life but he never said anything.

The following few months were interesting, we attended court in Katherine many times, we had to take the kids to appointments with doctors, then in court it was revealed that the reason Dave had not seen his kids is that he was in gaol. It seems that he had sexually assaulted a girl in Melbourne; the judge ruled in our favour, the kids were awarded to us permanently and we thought that would be it. The problem was Dave would not give up, he kept trying to see the kids, we had a restraining order on him that prevented him from being within 15 kilometres of the house, but a number of times he broke that order.

The police would be called but they were a fair way away and by the time they arrived he would be gone! It started to make me paranoid that he would break into the house and snatch

them or something horrible would happen to them. So Barry and I sat down and decided I would move the kids to Adelaide for a little while and we would put the pub on the market. It was awful, I loved the pub but I was so worried about the kids.

It turns out that we needed have bothered, I called my parents and asked them to find us some where we could rent, they even found a good school and everything was set, when the night before we were going to leave there was a fight at the pub. We were at home just Barry, the kids and I, Barry went to find out what was going on and it was Dave, he had shown up at the pub drunk and was making a huge fuss. Stew the barman and a top bloke, threw Dave out the back, told him to sober up and called the police. The police arrived about 45 minutes later, gathered him from the back yard and tossed him in the back of the van. They drove him to Katherine to be charged and locked up at least for the night! When they delivered him to the watch house he was drunk but otherwise unharmed but sometime during the night something happened and he died while in custody. We got a phone call early the next morning, I was up early trying to get the twins ready for what was going to be a long few days.

When the phone rang Barry answered it, it was the police calling to tell him, his only brother was deceased and that they needed him to come and do some paperwork. Barry really had mixed feelings about it, but he agreed to come up in the next few days to do the paperwork. When he told me I was both shocked and relieved, I have to admit I was also a bit excited that we would be able to stay put. I rang my mum and told her the move was off, I told her what had happened, I think she was a bit disappointed but she did say that she would talk to my dad and that they would bring the caravan up and spend some time with us.

Towards the end of the week Barry went up to Katherine and did the paperwork, he also made the funeral arrangements, I trekked up with the kids for the funeral, for them it was like losing an uncle but we were the only ones there. It was a short service, with no fanfare or fancy word, the priest did all of the talking, and it was all very generic. It was a bit sad really, we were contacted about a month later by a lawyer suggesting that we should sue the police for his death but we had no intention of doing that. The post mortem said that he had died of a heart problem, he was young for that but I guess when your time is up, it's up. It was fairly obvious he was not a nice guy and I didn't think any more about it again.

Time flew past, the older kids all went off to boarding school for their high school years, it was really hard to let them go but I know it is the right thing for them. They were boarding in Alice Springs, so it was only a few hours drive to see them; I think it was harder for me than for them. The twins despite their dramatic entrance into the world were really good babies and they grew into school age far too fast. We talked about moving closer to town but it was so

hard to leave such a beautiful and unique place. Eventually we were made an offer for the pub that we could not refuse, it was far more than it was worth as a business but the people buying it thought it was a good buy. So we sold up and with many tears we moved further south, we bought a good size home about 20 minutes out of the centre of Alice Springs, the house had a huge yard and more than enough space. The other kids were all off at school or at university, one of them come to live with us for her final year of high school but decided after about 3 weeks to go back to boarding, as she put it, the food was not as good but at least it was quiet.

In Alice Springs we found ourselves in a difficult position, we had plenty of money to live on but nothing to fill our days, the twins were off at school for a big part of the day and we were home alone. At first it was fun but then we both wanted something to do. We had a look around town and decided that what they needed was a really good hardware store; we had no idea about retail other than the pub! So we talked to a couple of the big companies and eventually talked ourselves out of it.

It was around this time that the run down pub on the next block over come onto the market, it was a really ratty pub, it smelt bad, it was awful. The locals had stopped going there and eventually the people running it went broke and now the bank was going to step in and sell it. We had a look at it, it was a lot of work but we were both up to it. We discussed it with the twins and the other children and they all said that we should do it, we had the money to buy it but it was going to cost a lot to do up. We did some numbers and then we went to talk to the real estate people, we offered a very low figure, we expected them to come back and ask for more money but they didn't. We got the pub at a bargain price; I think everyone was just excited to have it out of the way.

On the day we got the keys all of the kids were home to see the pub, each of them was also put to work on day one. The kids were great, they all worked really hard and we were really surprised with how far we had gotten. We started by stripping everything out, it was awful, it ponged and by the time we all walked home we all really needed a shower. Even the twins helped by brushing up and bringing things, by the end of day one all of the carpet was out, all of the rubbish behind the bars was removed, all of the old stained furniture was thrown in a big bin, we also had a huge pile of rubbish alongside the bin. During the night some one set alight to the bin, we heard the sirens and went to check the pub, at first we thought it was the pub but in reality it was the bin and the big pile of rubbish, all of the carpet was alight, the fire brigade kept the fire away from the pub, it was still a bit smoke affected, the smoke got in the open windows and the paint on the outside was a bit singed but overall we were really lucky.

On day two we finished stripping out the furniture, the old bar got to stay, under all the grime it was still in good condition, we also gave the kitchen a proper clean, it was really surprising how good everything was under the muck. The kids were there to help and the eldest one told us he wanted to be a chef and that maybe he could work for us one day. His uncle liked the idea so much he offered him a job! His sister said she would work in her holidays but she was determined to get her degree in accounting. It was nice that she had a plan, her younger brother also had a plan, and he wanted to study law. Barry's son wanted to be a policeman; he had enrolled and was just waiting on his acceptance letter. The twins decided to join in and tell everyone they just wanted to survive school!

With our free workforce the pub cleaned up really quickly, I was surprised, on day 3 we started giving everything a fresh coat of paint. We had also ordered the new carpet, furniture and everything else we could think about. I was sure I had forgotten something. You always do.

Within a fortnight we were ready for the grand reopening, we had a big party, we invited all of the key people in the town and all of our neighbours. Everyone was really surprised with how well it had cleaned up, within a few weeks we had a regular clientele, our chef was gaining his own following with his pub food and his special creations that kept everyone guessing even us.

Epilogue

10 years on!

We still own the pub although now a lovely man, he come and asked for a job 7 or 8 years ago and worked his way up to manager. I was glad we found some one to look after it, the hours and the work started to make it really hard to get excited about it. The eldest child in our clan is still the cook, he loves it, he left for a while to study in Adelaide but come straight back, he still comes up with weird and wonderful creations, his sister become an accountant, she married a local boy and they have 6 children, they seem extremely happy. Her younger brother ended up in law, sort of, he ended up entering the police force with his cousin, they are both married, Barry's son ended up in the dog squad, much to my dad's delight. My parents moved to Alice Springs to be closer to the grand children, they have settled in and are really enjoying their twilight years.

The twins are both great, they have both survived school, one decided to go to university, the other got a job at a local book store while she figures it all out. I really don't mind either way, as long as they are healthy and happy.

Barry and I are still married and still best friends; we are both enjoying the semi-retired state we find ourselves in. We often talk about Daly Waters and the fun we had but we don't miss it too much. We are proud of how our kids have all turned out, they are all productive members of the community, none of them have ever been arrested or in any real trouble, so we are pretty blessed. We still have a collection of animals living in our house, after having Jolie for almost 15 years; I was hooked on great danes, at the moment we have 3! And I would trade any thing for all the money on earth!

End



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