

lorries drove away and the road was empty once more. It waited until Jake's lorry was a tiny dot on the horizon. Only then did it pick its way down the rocks. Within moments, its sand coloured fur and amber eyes blended with the landscape and the dingo disappeared from view.

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Chapter 10 Australians

Jake's heart pounded heavily all the way to the petrol station. The lorry driver used his radio system to put him on to the emergency service operator. Jake described, as best he could, the location where he had left Maritska and Pim. Luckily the landmarks he described made sense to the operator.

By the time they pulled into the gas station, Jake heard the sound of helicopter blades overhead. Two choppers flew low and headed towards the outback.

There was a small snack bar in the petrol station. The waitress immediately brought Jake something to eat and drink.

"Have you got a phone?" he asked her.

It wasn't until somebody placed a mobile in his hand that he realized he had no idea of his parents' number. The information he needed to contact everybody was on his mobile phone. He didn't have anything at all written on a piece of paper. Normally, this was fine. But now his phone was lost, probably broken, in the middle of the outback. It made Jake realize how dependent the modern world had become on electronic equipment and computers to communicate and survive.

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Jake heard the 'whoop, whoop' of a siren from the forecourt. A police car pulled up. Two officers jumped out and hurried in. People pointed them in Jake's direction.

"OK, son," one of the officers said. "We've spoken to your parents. They're on their way."

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Jake was relieved that his parents knew where they were and that he'd see them soon. The police told him that several search parties had been out looking for them. As it turned out, Ray had moved so far from his flight plan to avoid the sandstorm that they had been searching in the wrong area.

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After Jake described the accident, the police told him that they had only survived because of Ray's skill as a pilot. Two other planes had been caught in the sudden sandstorm, too. Both of them had lost control and crashed. There were no survivors in either accident.

A message came through on one of the policeman's walkie-talkies. The officer smiled and shook Jake's hand. "No worries," he said. "They've found them."

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"Are they all right?" Jake asked. "Is Maritska OK?" After a short interchange the policeman nodded. "They're taking her to Darwin. She'll have to stay in hospital. They got to her just in time. If you had taken a couple of hours more, they don't think she'd have made it."

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At last Jake could relax.

The policemen were about to turn away when Jake jumped up. "There's something else I need to tell you! It's about the people who robbed the cattle auction."

Everyone in the petrol station fell silent. They turned to Jake and stared at him.

"I know who they are."

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7 radio system [ˈreɪdiəʊ ˌsɪstəm] Funksystem • 8 emergency service operator [ɪˈmɜːdʒənəsi sɜːvɪs ɒpəreɪtə] Notdienstmitarbeiter • 13 helicopter blade [ˈhelɪkɒptə ˌbleɪd] Hubschrauberrotor • 13 chopper [ˈtʃɒpə] Hubschrauber • 14 to head towards sth [hed təˈwɔːdz] auf etw. zusteuern

2 forecourt [ˈfɔːkɔːt] Vorhof • 10 to avoid [əˈvɔɪd] ausweichen, vermeiden • 16 no ... either [nəʊ] ... [ˈaɪðə] keine/-r/-s (der-beiden) • 21 interchange [ɪˈntɜːtʃeɪndʒ] Austausch

The next few days were a blur to Jake. The police quickly brought him back to Darwin where he met Maritska and Pim again at the hospital. Their parents were at her bedside.

5 After lots of hugs and some tears from their mother, they told the story of their ordeal in the desert.

"I'm so sorry," said their dad. "This wasn't the way we wanted you to arrive here."

"I know you didn't want to come to Australia," their mother patted Maritska's hand. She looked at all the kids, "I guess you'll want to go back to Holland as soon as you can."

Pim's eyes widened. "Oh, no! Back home was sooo boring! This is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me."

"Excuse me," Maritska corrected him. "We had a plane crash, walked a whole day across the desert, had to escape from armed robbers and I'm in hospital!"

"I thought it was fun," muttered Pim.

20 "There's something we need to talk about." Their parents stood up and faced them. "You didn't know Ray for very long, but he was a wonderful man. He didn't have any kids of his own. He was looking forward to all of you coming to live at the station. We told him so much about you he felt like you were already part of the family. He left us some papers in the event that anything should happen to him. We opened them on the way here after we heard he had died."

30 Their father handed Jake a letter. It had 'Last Will and Testament of Raymond Cooper Argyle' written on the top. Jake scanned the document quickly.

"How you kids feel about this country could influence the rest of our lives," said their dad.

1 blur [blɜː] Unschärfe, undeutliches Bild • 6 ordeal [ɔːˈdiːl] Tortur, Leidensweg • 17 to escape [ɪˈskeɪp] flüchten, fliehen

"What is it?" asked Pim. Maritska groaned as he climbed across her bed to look at the letter.

"He left the cattle station to us?" Jake couldn't quite believe what he was reading.

5 "He wanted a family to own it, a family who would make it their home. We brought you here to live with us for the rest of our work contract. We didn't want our family to be apart any longer. It would have been for a couple of years," their mother said.

10 "But now you're talking about us living here for the rest of our lives," said Jake.

Their mum and dad nodded gravely.

"It's your decision, kids. After we thought we had lost you, we felt so bad. We'd put our work ahead of you too many times. Whether we stay here, or go back to Holland, will be up to you to decide."

15 Maritska, Pim and Jake looked at each other. After all the years of arguments and annoyance, the trauma of the past couple of days had somehow brought them closer together.

20 "Take some time to see how you like it here," their mother said. "It'll be up to you which place you want to call home."

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25 They all stayed in Darwin for a few days until Maritska was discharged from hospital.

It felt strange going back to the airfield for their flight to Argyle Downs. Their parents had hired a pilot with a larger plane, so they could all travel together. This time their whole journey was clear and smooth.

30 They landed on a small airstrip. Several large houses with verandas were dotted around. Instead of the red desert, they were surrounded by green fields and trees.

1 to groan [grəʊn] stöhnen • 8 to be apart [bi əˈpɑːt] getrennt sein • 26 to discharge sb [dɪsˈtʃɑːdʒ] hier: jmdn. entlassen • 31 airstrip [ˈeɪstriːp] Landebahn

They could hear the moos of brown and white cows grazing on the hills.

After they had had a quick look around, the kids ran into the house. They had been allowed to choose their own rooms. The station house was huge and so were the rooms.

Maritska chose a large room at the back. It had lots of shade and a small balcony. Pim picked one with an unusual round window which had a writing desk in front of it. Jake's room was at the front of the house. It had a view of the sunset and distant red hills. Every one of the kids felt happy with their choice.

After they had settled in, Jake often thought of Kyeema. He was sorry he hadn't had the chance to thank her for coming to their rescue that night after the crash.

Jake became friendly with some of the Aboriginal men who worked on the station. One of them, whose name was Jimmy, knew the Yolngu settlement in Arnhem Land where Kyeema said she lived. He offered to take Jake there. Jake wondered if they'd have to walk. Jimmy replied with an Aussie, "No worries". He had a jeep and they could drive.

The Yolngu settlement was a collection of low shacks. Jake didn't know where to begin to look for Kyeema. Jimmy saw a couple of old Aboriginal men sitting in the sun. One of them had white lines painted on his face, the other wore a checked shirt and had straggly grey hair. "Let's ask those old blokes," he said.

The men didn't speak English well, but luckily Jimmy spoke a couple of Aboriginal dialects. Jake heard Jimmy say some things he didn't understand, but when he said 'Kyeema' the men leant forward. Jimmy said 'Kyeema' again. This time the men looked worried. They had a short conversation and exchanged some words with Jimmy.

1 moo [mu:] Muhen • 2 to graze [greiz] grasen • 8 balcony ['bælkəni:] Balkon
13 to settle in ['setl] sich einleben • 18 Arnhem Land [ɑ:nəm lænd] Region im Northern Territory • 26 straggly ['stræglɪ] zottelig • 27 bloke [bləʊk] Kerl

"Do they know where she lives?" asked Jake.

"They think you've had too much sun," Jimmy told him as they walked away. They got back in the jeep.

"She's not here then?" Jake was disappointed.

As they drove back to Argyle Downs, Jimmy explained why the men had acted oddly. They did know of a girl called Kyeema. She wanted to do something important with her life. She wanted to change the world. She was frustrated that the boys got to have all the adventures while the girls stayed at home. So one day she went on a walkabout.

"I know," said Jake. "That's where I met her."

"No way, mate," said Jimmy. "A sandstorm blew up a few days after she had left. When it cleared they think she was in a place she didn't recognize because she hadn't been taught all the words of the songs. She never came back."

Jake was confused. "What do they mean never? She only went on a walkabout a few days ago."

"No mate," replied Jimmy, "this was sixty years ago. The old men say there's a dingo people see from time to time. They think it's Kyeema. It reminds the old people she lost her way because they wouldn't teach her all of the sacred knowledge because she was a girl. They feel guilty when someone sees the dingo. It reminds people they have to change."

Jake was lost in thought as Jimmy started the jeep and they drove back to Argyle Downs.

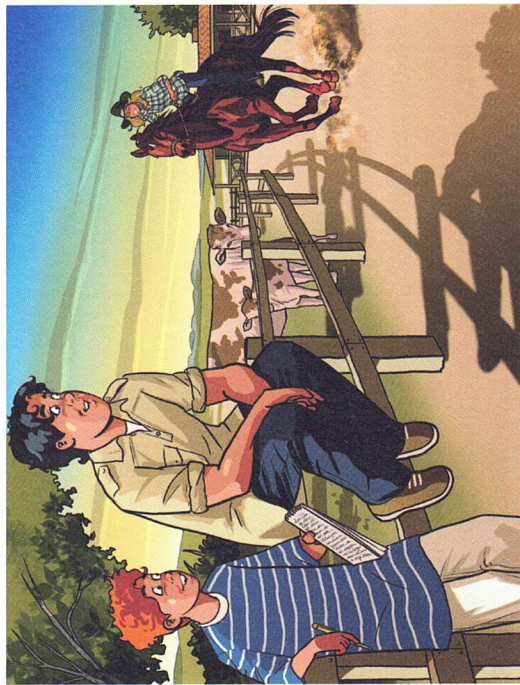
Jake sat on the gate of one of the cattle pens. Pim was reading out loud to him. They had electricity on the ranch, but it would often fail. The Internet signal was weak and Pim got bored with losing the connection all the time. Pim had started writing, with a pen and on paper! Every night he'd sit at his desk in front of the round window and write stories. Pim had a wild imagination. His stories were crazy, but they were funny. It had become a new routine that

4 disappointed [ˌdɪsə'pɔɪntɪd] enttäuscht • 22 guilty [ˈɡɪltɪ] schuldig
27 pen [pen] hier: Umzäunung, Pferch • 29 to fail [feɪl] hier: ausfallen

every evening, before dinner, they would sit in the yard and Pim would read out what he had written the day before.

The sound of hooves interrupted them. Maritska galloped up on a tall horse. She took off her wide-brimmed hat. Her blonde hair dropped down.

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Jake thought it was funny that a girl who had once worried herself silly about clothes now wore jeans and boots most of the time. She had had a few riding lessons back in Holland. At first she was nervous about getting in the saddle, but once she got back on a horse, she found she loved it. She'd go for a ride around the station every evening, checking the fences and helping the workers at the cattle station.

"Good news," cried Maritska as she jumped off her horse and tied it to the fence. "The cops caught Bob and Jolene!"

"Where did they find them?" asked Pim.

3 hoof, hooves (pl.) [huːf], [huːvz] der Huf/die Hufe • 10 saddle [sædl] Sattel • 12 fence [fɛns] Zaun

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"Getting on a flight out of Brisbane. They'd have probably escaped if we hadn't given the police their description."

"Good," cried Jake. "Nice work, team!" The three of them slapped their hands together in a high-five.

Maritska climbed up on the fence and sat next to Jake.

"So have you decided?" She looked at Pim and Jake.

"I have," said Pim.

"Me too," said Jake.

"So we know which country we want to call home?"

They nodded to each other.

"We're going to be Australians!" shouted Pim. He jumped up on the fence next to Jake.

Without doubting that they had made the right choice, the three of them laughed and joked as the last rays of golden sun brought the day to an end.

"Kids! Dinner is on the table!" Their mother's voice echoed from the house.

Maritska jumped down and led her horse to the stable. Pim gathered his papers and ran towards the house. One thing he was never late for was meals.

Jake watched the sunset a moment longer. He had never

told the others what the old men had said about Kyeema. He was worried his family would think he was crazy if he thought her spirit was the dingo which ran with him during that long night.

Jake thought Australia's endless outback could be

deadly, but it also held great wonders and beauty. Kyeema was born of this land. She too could be harsh and brutal, but also kind and funny. Maybe that was Australia's gift to him. It could be a dangerous place, but if you learned to respect and trust it, it could be the most incredible place to live. Kyeema would always mean Australia to him, and he knew in his heart that would mean home.

4 high-five [haɪ'faɪv] Abklatschen • 13 to doubt [daʊt] zweifeln • 14 ray [reɪ] Strahl • 18 stable ['steɪbəl] Stall • 19 to gather [ˈɡæðə] (ein)sammeln • 28 harsh [hɑːʃ] rau, barsch • 31 incredible [ɪn'kredɪbəl] wunderbar, unglaublich

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Jake jumped off the fence and knelt down. He dug his fingers deep into the red soil. Something in him echoed with the vibration of the earth. After a moment he dusted the dirt from his hand, stood up and slowly walked back to the house. The sounds of his family sitting down to dinner echoed from inside. "Don't eat yet, Pim. Wait for your brother," he heard his dad say.

"Hurry up, Jake!" Pim yelled out the door. "I'm so hungry!" Jake broke into a trot. There was no mention between them of adoption or being half-brothers and sister anymore. Jake finally felt he belonged to this family, and to this country.

As he ran to the house, Jake decided that tonight was the night he'd tell the whole family what the old men had said about Kyeema. He'd tell them how he truly believed she was the dingo. If that dingo hadn't stopped him, he would have run to the wrong hill. If he had made that mistake it would have taken him hours to get back to the road. The doctors said that delay would have cost Maritska's life. And Jake wouldn't worry if they laughed at him! Maybe they wouldn't believe it; perhaps they'd think it was all just a crazy story. But then Kyeema had said she wanted to change the world and be a person in a story.

Jake took a second to look at the evening sky before he went into the house. A bright star shone in the dusk. Jake suddenly realized that Kyeema had done what she had set out to do. She had changed their lives. He owed it to Kyeema to tell her story to anyone who would listen. He'd make sure the girl who went on a walkabout all those years ago would not be forgotten.

Kyeema's wish really had come true.

2 soil [soil] Erde • 4 dirt [dɜ:t] Dreck, Schmutz • 11 to belong to sb [br'ɪlɒŋ] zu jmdm. gehören • 25 dusk [dʌsk] Dämmerung