

CHAPTER 1

The old man lay on the ground looking up at the clear, blue sky through the fluttering canopy of a large, spreading mango tree. He was lying on his back and could feel the coolness of the lush grass through his sweat-damp shirt. He had been playing bocce with friends just before he fell, and although his strength had left him, and he was unable to move, he was fully aware of his surroundings and the excitement that his fall had caused.

There was action all around him; animated people with raised voices, crowding in on him. Someone was asking him to stay with them, as they opened the top buttons on his shirt, another was asking everyone to stand back and give him space, while worried faces peered down at him anxiously offering advice.

He could hear a siren wailing in the back ground becoming louder as it got closer, and he knew it was an ambulance coming for him. However, in spite all of this chaos, he was calm.

He felt no pain now, he was at peace; he remembered a blow slamming him like a sledge hammer in the chest, and then the severe pain in his left arm. He remembered the dizziness taking the strength from his limbs, and causing him to fall to the ground.

But all of that seemed unimportant now, it had passed, and all of the excitement around him faded to the back ground, as he considered what was about to happen. He knew that his mortal life was leaving him, and he reflected on how he had spent it.

He thought of his beloved wife of many years and their beautiful daughter who brought him so much joy, and of how much he loved them both. It made him sad to think that he wouldn't see them, just once more, to say goodbye before he left.

He thought of his son and the love and the pride that he felt for him. He reflected on their close relationship and on what an outstanding young man he had become, respected by his family and his community for his many qualities.

He hoped that his children's lives would be as rich and as wonder filled as his had been, and that his wife would spend many more years in the comfort of their love.

His thoughts were very clear now, as he took stock of this life he was about to leave.

The year was 1965, and he was in his 70th year. There was no doubt that he would like to live longer, but if someone had offered him 70 years when he was a young man, fighting for his life and the lives of his comrades, during the war in Europe, he would have taken it gladly and been well pleased with the deal.

The old man was happy in the knowledge, that when he was gone, his family would be secure financially, and he knew that each of them was more than capable, of contributing to the improvement of his legacy.

He felt little sorrow for himself at his leaving, except that he would never know the joy of grandchildren. His children had come late in his life and they were yet to have children of their own, but he was sure that they would come. His children would see to that in good time, and through them they would know him.

He thought of his life-long friend, who knelt beside him now, with tears in his eyes, holding his hand as he died.

He couldn't speak to him, but as he looked into his old friend's eyes, he wanted to tell him how much he had treasured his friendship over the many years that had known each other, and he wanted to tell him not to be sad, that everything was as it should be. He thought of the achievements that they had known together in their lives, and he had no regrets.

They had come a long way in the many years that they had been friends; they had crossed continents together and fought their enemies together; they had toiled and laughed together, and they had raised their families together.

As he smiled up at him through welling tears, he hoped that his brother at arms and close friend, would have many more years to enjoy his family, and that his children would give him many grandchildren.

Finally, he thought of the family that had come before, his first family, which he had left behind those many years ago, when he was yet a young man in Lari, the village of his birth in Italy; the family that he had seen but a handful of times since.

He thought of his mother, his father and his older brother. They were all gone now, but he could see their faces clearly, as if it were yesterday. His plan had always been to bring them out to his new country, and have them share his wonderful new life, but it wasn't to be. When the time came they were old and wished to stay in their old country, in their home.

He had loved them dearly, and had always hoped that when this moment came for him, he would see them again, and would be able to hold them to him once more, and rejoice in the comfort of their presence, as he had when he was a child.

It seemed to him that his life, a very good and rewarding life, had gone by in just a blink, and he wondered what would come next. He wasn't nervous or frightened, he was just curious.

He was leaving now, suddenly finding himself above the confusion on the ground. He could see the paramedics lifting his body into the van, and the press of people trying to help.

As he watched them, he reflected on how many good friends he had, but then, as he started to rush away from the scene, he turned toward a gentle, white light, looking for his family.

Suddenly he was in a hospital room, and he wasn't himself, he was a baby again. For a fraction of a second he saw a young man's face staring at him, and then, just as suddenly, he was back in the white light, and his mother and brother were there, arms outstretched to welcome him home.

He searched around expectantly, then saw his father walking towards him with a gentle smile on his face, and he knew that he was loved and in a safe place. He looked around for the baby, but couldn't find him, yet he knew that he was part of him, and that this would always be so.

At the very moment that the old man past on, Pamela Dyson gave birth to a healthy, robust boy, his head covered in a shock of curly auburn-red hair. Her husband Richard, was present at the birth, and said afterwards that he was certain that at the moment that the baby was born, his son opened his eyes and stared directly up at him, and for a split second had a very adult frown, and expression of curiosity on his face, but then the child closed his eyes and, crying loudly, became a baby again.

CHAPTER 2

It was 1997 and Jacob Shaunessy was in his thirty-second year. However as he surveyed his surroundings he could be forgiven for thinking that he had stepped back in time.

The ambience of the room suggested the 1940's or 50's perhaps, before plastics and vinyl had taken over. The furnishings were made of a distinctive timber, that, when highly polished, showed off its dapple grain to striking effect. Jacob recognized the timber as Northern Silky Oak, a timber rarely used in modern furnishings. He owed his knowledge of this decorative timber to his mother's dedication, over many years, to collecting furniture made from it, furniture that was considered antique today.

Actually, the tree that produced the timber was not oak at all, but one of the grevillea family, native to the rain forest of Northern Australia. It had provided the timber which much of the local furniture and many buildings were made from, during the early to middle twentieth century, and was now rare and expensive.

It was as if Jacob was looking into the past, back to a time before his, a time that his grandparents might find familiar.

His attention was drawn toward movement in the room and he became aware of a beautiful young woman standing, assessing her appearance in a full length mirror.

She stood with her back to him, and appeared to be wearing a wedding dress, a backless, more casual style, not brushing the floor as a full gown would, but sprayed from the waist, to a mid-calf length, giving a cooler, more casual appearance, a style more common to the 1960s than would be worn today.

The scene was on an enclosed verandah, which ran the length of an old "Queenslander" style house. The style was named for the state in which it had proliferated since the 1840's, with the main structure of the house surrounded by large, wide verandahs and an abundance of doors and windows, which were aligned to maximize the affect of cooling breezes, allowing them to flow through the house unimpeded during the tropical, summer heat of North Eastern Australia.

The verandah, on which the scene was playing out, had obviously been transformed into a bedroom sometime in the past, closed in where railings used to be and fitted with louver windows running almost its full length, opening to the east, to capture the frequent sea breezes, during those humid, hot summer months.

Through the windows, Jacob could see that they were on the second story of a two-story house that was situated on a hill in the midst of a sea of sugar cane.

The south-easterly breeze drifted in across the fields from the Pacific Ocean, creating the illusion of waves on a deep green sea, as it pulled and teased the tops of the mature cane. It continued up the hill, and was captured and channeled by the louvers, to create a zephyr through the room, lightly tugging at the curtains on the windows, and drifting on to ruffle the young woman's wavy, dark brown hair, which fell to her shoulders in a cascade, framing her

beautiful face. Her dark brown eyes and olive skin suggested a Mediterranean ancestry, and she was tall, approaching six feet in her high heeled shoes.

Jacob was watching her from a doorway, which opened to a set of stairs leading down to the yard. From his position, he was looking over her shoulder at her reflection in the mirror, she was familiar to him but he didn't know her. Her beauty was such that his heart raced, and he caught his breath when she slowly turned toward him. Her face broke into a dreamy smile when she realized he was there, a smile that made him feel that his being there was not only welcome, but one of the things she treasured most.

He had an overwhelming feeling of love and well being, a feeling he had almost forgotten existed.

She came over to him and took his arm as she kissed his cheek, then she rubbed a smudge of lipstick from his face, as they turned and walked down the stairs onto a cement path, that traversed the lush, grass covered yard. They continued out to the driveway which ran to the house, where a young man in a suit, was holding open the rear door of a black 1964 EH Holden. He smiled at them as they made themselves comfortable, arm in arm, in the back seat, Jacob thought how new the car smelled, and how odd that was, for a car of that vintage. The driver closed their door, then got in behind the wheel and slowly drove off, following the road's gentle slope toward a church in the distance.

Jacob became aware that he was dreaming. He tried to stay asleep, not wanting to wake; he wanted to stay where he was, in this beautiful place, with this beautiful woman, who wanted more than anything to be with him, and he with her. In the dream his troubles and cares were insignificant; it was as though nothing else mattered in the world, except being with her.

He was forced slowly awake in the morning gloom, the noise of the early city traffic on the road outside, invading his peace. He rolled over and read the time on the clock radio beside his bed; it was ten minutes to six.

He lay in the half-light and considered the dream, it was still so vivid in his mind, as if it had really happened; not only the scenes revealed to him, but the affect on his senses and emotions, which accompanied them; they still lingered so clearly.

Jacob generally believed that dreams had no real meaning, but now he allowed himself to imagine, that this strangely clear dream, may have some mystical meaning in his future, as those existing in unhappy emotional and financial circumstances often do, in a forlorn hope, that something magical could change their life.

As he attempted not to think about the stressful certainties, which would fill his day ahead, he allowed his mind to reach back a few months, examining once again the circumstances which delivered him to this unhappy point in time.

Out of the blue, Jacob's life was to undergo dramatic changes; changes that he did not see coming, and was not prepared for when they occurred.

Firstly, his wife of 5 years had decided that she didn't want to be married to him any longer. Although they had some rough patches along the way, he had supposed that getting over them was part of the journey and the commitment. Although not a religious person, he had married for life, come what may, it was a commitment he made to, not only her, but to

himself and to his belief in family, but it was not to be. She left with another man, whom she had been seeing for some months behind his back.

The only positive he could take from his misery was that, at her insistence, they had kept postponing having children, and consequently there were none to add to his devastation.

After much soul searching, he had decided that although he could never love her as he had, if she changed her mind, he would have her back in a moment, however he would not pursue her further. He came to a conclusion, which many in his situation do not. The fact was that, you can't make someone love you, or stay with you if they want to leave; his philosophy demanded that he suck it up, and get on with life.

Then, a few months later, when Jacob was just starting to feel positive about himself and his future, the company at which he had worked for 8 years as a marketing executive, decided that they didn't want him either. The company was making staffing cuts, and had made his position redundant. This also was unheralded. He and six other management colleagues, were informed of the company decision one day, and they were gone the next. His employer, a large national company, had decided to compress their marketing management into their national head quarters and decrease the size of their state offices.

These two events, coming on top of each other, and the division of assets as a result of the divorce, had dire financial and emotional consequences. Jacob was unable to find a position which paid the lucrative salary he was used to, and without a partner, the lesser income he was now earning as a commissioned salesman, was not enough to maintain the mortgage payments on the home that he and his ex-wife had purchased. After having paid her out at an inflated value, he was forced to sell the family house at a "fire sale" price and was now in a rented unit on a busy, noisy road. His confidence had taken a battering, but his philosophical outlook allowed him to look back at the events as part of life's journey, and, although there was pain, to look forward to a new beginning and the next phase of the adventure.

He came back to the present and, rolling out of bed, he put his feet on the floor, rising to face the chilly winter morning. It was June, and while not freezing cold, the mornings in Brisbane were cold enough to prompt Jacob to pull on a robe over his shorts.

While carrying out his morning ablutions in the bathroom, he studied his head of thick, dark hair in the mirror, there were no signs of loss or graying, but he thought it was time for a haircut. The women in his life had always encouraged him to keep his hair short, maintaining that it made him more handsome, but he kept it short mainly because "Clean-Cut" was an asset in his line of work. However he promised himself that one day he would wear it long again, just to satisfy his rebellious streak.

He finished up and went through the laundry to the garage, where he kept a heavy punching bag hanging from an exposed steel beam in front of his car. He had discovered that, if he parked the vehicle just far enough inside the garage to pull the door down, it left ample room at the front, for him to give full punishment to the bag.

After donning his training gloves, he dropped off his robe and started in on the bag. He had been involved in boxing since he was 12 years of age, and was a top competitor in the junior ranks, until rugby had taken his interest at high school. Boxing had always been a source of his confidence, to know he could handle himself in a fight if the need arose, one of the rules of life he had learned from his father at an early age. As with most males, physical conflict

was inevitable at certain times in his life, and Jacob's abilities had always deterred the bullies who knew him, and he had always come out on top of the ones who didn't. These days, as well as keeping him sharp, and relieving a little stress, he enjoyed boxing training as part of his fitness regimen.

He pounded at the bag for about 30 minutes, feeling the warmth come back into his broad shoulders, his body heat increasing until a sweat broke across his lean, muscular body. Standing at 188 centimeters tall, he had an athlete's build and was proud of it, keeping up a regular fitness programme, sometimes going for a run in the mornings, but more often, during the winter, he exercised indoors. Now as his body told him his energy was about to run out, he threw one last flurry of punches at the bag, then embraced it as he hung there catching his breath, feeling the cool of the leather against his face.

As he recovered, his thoughts drifted back to his intriguing dream of earlier that morning, wondering where it came from, what it meant, if indeed, it meant anything at all.

The images stayed with him while he showered and dressed for work. As he stared unseeingly, out of his bedroom window, at the traffic in the street below, his thoughts were of the young woman in the old house, he was reluctant to let them go; the emotions he had experienced were still very prevalent, and he found himself wondering if the locations in the dream, the farm house and the church, actually existed. He had never been in such a house, or indeed in North Queensland, but he had no doubt in his mind, that the north was the setting of his reverie.

As he turned away from the window, he thought about the hopes that he and his ex wife had harbored toward travelling, and perhaps one day, living in that part of the world. The north, for some inexplicable reason, had always held a fascination for him, and he supposed that this was probably the reason why there was a northern flavor to the scenes of his dream. Whether the dream meant anything or not, he now had a renewed urge to go north, and he made a promise to himself that he would investigate the possibilities, sooner rather than later.

The distraction of his dream persisted, until he turned on the television, the morning news temporarily pushing it from his thoughts, as he breakfasted on toast and Vegemite washed down with a cup of tea.