

CHAPTER FOURTEEN ALBEMARLE INN



The Albemarle Inn overlooks the most beautiful natural harbour in the world: sailboats on glistening water, an opera house of overlapping shells, a dramatic steel arch bridge.

Walking through the lobby into the dining room, one is immediately struck by a large painting on the far wall, eight feet high, three ten foot wide panels. Australia's native animals and plants, coast to desert, come alive: penguins, wallabies, kangaroos, frilled lizards, Tasmanian Devils and ghost bats. To the right, a wall of windows, floor to ceiling, overlooks the harbour.

The Inn's concierge, (known as "Admiral") approaches the table where Julian and Shilli are having dinner with their families. In his forties, tall and angular, brown hair, dark eyes under dark brows, he speaks in a low voice. "Once the dinner service is over, we've arranged games in the Library." Meeting the Admiral for the first time, most shared the same impression - this is a sensitive man with a strong will.

The Inn's Library is warm and inviting: wood paneling, flowers, a fireplace banked by leather armchairs, bookcases filled to overflowing, a magnificent 19th century Chickering concert grand piano in the far corner. The Admiral is reading, the Inn's kelpie, Youri, asleep at his feet. Samuel, Emilie, Julian, Shilli and Asha sit at the large game table playing Monopoly, all talking at once. Emilie - "I wish I had curly hair." Samuel - "I'd be happy to switch with you." Asha to Julian - "Your long hair is great, don't ever change it" Julian to Asha - "It's cool you always wear a flower in your hair."

As everyone laughs, a three legged orange and white tabby cat enters the room and walks, lopsidedly, to the game table. Crouching, he jumps up and falls backward onto the floor. With a second try, he jumps and lands on the table, sending the Monopoly board and pieces flying. The tabby moves around the table, very gently, softly, patting each person on the cheek with his right paw. Jumping down, he walks, leaning, out the library door.

Samuel is the first to speak. "I had a dream about this." Emilie and Asha, at the same time, "Me too!" Julian - "In my dream there was a white crow." Shilli points to his left. A large oil painting of a White Crow, all the grandeur of an ancestral portrait, holds the place of honor over the fireplace.

The Admiral comes to the table. “Sorry he interrupted your game. That’s just Snug saying “G’day.” Would you like to go on a beach picnic tomorrow?” Still speechless, the kids all nod their heads. “I’ll ask your parents. Youri loves to watch the surfers.”

In the far corner, unnoticed, sitting in a high-backed chair facing the wall, is Lapis, the Russian teenage singing sensation due to appear at the opening Ceremony.

Shilli, Emilie, Samuel, Asha and Julian get in the 1940 grey Pontiac Special Series Woodie. As the car slowly pulls out of the circular driveway, the back door opens and Lapis jumps in. The Admiral turns his head, laughing, “How’s it going, mate, hiding from the cameras? Fasten up, we’re off!”

The Cove. After a day of swimming and surfing, Asha, Samuel and Emilie play frisbee with the Admiral and Youri.

In the distance, next to a tide pool, Julian and Shilli sit talking to Lapis. Lapis - “Did all five of you have the same dream?” “Yes.” “Have you ever had a dream that came true?” “No, have either or you?” “No.”

A green tortoise walks out of the water. “We sent you a dream. We need your help.” A carp pops his head out of the water. “Will you tell the others?” The tortoise goes back to the water, the carp swims away.

Julian, Lapis and Shilli look at one another. “Did you hear something?” No, but I’m thinking something.” “So am I.” “Me too.”

As the sun sets and it starts to rain, everyone gathers up their things. On the drive back, Julian has an idea. “Let’s ask if we can have a sleep over tonight.” The Admiral answers. “If you get permission from your parents, I’ll set up beds in the Library, stay up as late as you like.”

Three large game tables in the Library have been replaced by five cots and a table filled with sandwiches, cookies, fruit, pitchers of milk and juice.

Emilie, Julian, Samuel, Asha, Shilli and Lapis sit on the floor talking. Julian - “When you were playing frisbee, we were over by the tide pool. A tortoise and a fish came out of the water. We didn’t actually hear anything, but we all thought the same thing.” Lapis and Shilli nod. Asha asks “What did you think?” “We sent you a dream, we need your help, tell the others.”

Lapis - “Something’s up. They cancelled our rehearsal today. Bees were all over the stadium.” Samuel - “I heard they closed the gym this morning. Coaches saw different colored caterpillars everywhere.”

The library door opens and Youri and Snug walk over to the children. Youri - "We're here to ask for your help. We'd like someone to speak for us tomorrow. You must all agree." Snug - "We don't want you to do anything you don't want to." The kelpie and cat walk away.

Shilli - "We all have to agree. It's a lot to think about."

The Admiral enters the Library. "Your parents want you to go to your rooms." Emilie - "Is something wrong?" "Someone put a bomb on a bus."

Shilli gets up to leave. "Let's not tell anyone about this." Asha - "We can each decide and phone the Admiral. He stays at the front desk all night. To help, vote "blue"; to do nothing, vote "green."

Breakfast. The Dining room is full and noisy, everyone watching as jet boats, catamarans, yachts, rowboats, ocean liners and kayaks fill the harbour. As Emilie, Shilli, Julian, Asha and Samuel sit with their families, the Admiral walks to each of their tables - "Four votes for blue, one vote for green."