

Chapter 1

Another Successful Camp

Dan and Dave were examining sports equipment at the Roses Gap Camp before putting it away into storage. It was wet day in the middle of March and they were huddled in the equipment shed out of the rain.

The Turner family had managed six camps at the campsite since arriving in November. This was the final day of what was to be their last camp for some time.

“That’s the last helmet,” said Dan. “Now we’ve only got to check the harnesses and do a visual inspection of the ropes.”

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“I’ve had a great time learning how to look after this equipment – and use it too!” said Dave. “Much better than being stuck at uni in Adelaide.”

“Or locked down in Melbourne,” agreed Dan.

The cousins had spent the last three months together working with Alex and the rest of the family to keep the Roses Gap Camp open when the owners, Steve and Sylvia, had been forced to go to Melbourne for Sylvia’s treatment. It had been expensive and they had feared that the campsite would have to close, but the Turners and Alex had shared their reward for the recovery of NK2’s stolen gold and this had covered the cost. Now, instead of shutting down the camp, they were planning upgrades using the funds gained from six successful camps and the knowledge that the Turners and Alex were available to continue helping run the campsite.

As a result, everyone had agreed that there would be no camps until the start of May.

Steve and Sylvia would stay at the campsite while the Turners finally took the camping holiday they’d planned when they left Melbourne. Much to Dan’s satisfaction, Dave would come with them.

“I’m looking forward to camping,” said Dave, picking up the of the harnesses they were inspecting.

“Yes, we’ve spent enough time here in Roses Gap,” said Dan. “Time to head for the hills.”

At that moment, Alex hurried into the shed, eager to escape the rain. “How’s the inspection going?” he asked.

“Everything looks pretty good so far,” said Dan. “One carabiner was badly cross-threaded and the spring on the gate of another was broken, so we’ll need to replace them, but that was all. Oh, and one of the campers said that a rope

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was looking a little frayed. I'm just about to start inspecting the ropes so I expect that we'll find it soon."

"Have you written it all in the log book?"

"All except for the rope."

"Well, make sure you put that down too. It's not a formal report, but if a camper mentions something, we always need to check it."

"I'll do it now." Dan made a note in the log book while Dave began to inspect the strong but soft and flexible climbing ropes. Soon, Dan joined him. He loved the smooth bulk of the ropes that gave such a feeling of solid reliability. He knew by now that climbing with ropes demanded caution, but felt a deep-seated confidence in their reliability when used properly. He had never done any rock climbing before coming to Roses Gap and had thoroughly enjoyed learning from Alex, who had taught him many of the technical requirements for climbing and for supervising climbing and other sports activities. Visually inspecting the ropes and running them through his hands to make sure there was no internal damage was something he enjoyed. He had found that his fingers were very good at identifying any unevenness or fraying in ropes, and it wasn't long before he found the rope the camper had mentioned. Alex inspected it as well and decided that the rope should be taken out of service – there was enough fraying that it might get caught in carabiners or other devices.

Inspections complete, the three made sure that the equipment was neatly stowed and ready for the next camp. Alex locked up the shed and they hurried back to the living quarters, getting out of the rain as soon as they could.

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The car park was still full of cars, but within minutes, the campers would begin departing and another successful camp would be over.

The campers were students from a secondary school in Horsham, and they were hurrying backwards and forwards between the cabins and the several buses that would take them home. Laughter and happy shouts showed that they had enjoyed the camp, despite the unseasonably heavy rain that had dampened their spirits over the last two days.

“Is there anything else for us to do?” called Dan as he led the way into the office where his mother Tanya and his sister Belinda were finalising the paperwork for the camp organisers.

“We’re just making sure the final invoice is correct,” said Tanya. “Belinda is going through it one last time to make sure nothing has been left out.”

Belinda had enjoyed the varied work they had all done at the campsite, but she had been surprised at just how much she had enjoyed the administrative work and accounting chores – particularly when it was rainy or extremely hot!

“Nice to work inside where it’s dry, hey sis?” teased Dan.

“Well, someone has to do the work indoors instead of playing around outside.”

“Would you like to swap places then?”

“No thanks, Danny-boy,” said Belinda, smiling sweetly. “This job needs someone who can add up numbers properly.”

“Ah, so that’s why Mum’s with you?”

“Children, children,” said Tanya, exasperated. “We’ve only got a few minutes to finish this. If you want to be helpful, Dan, go and find your father and help him. I think

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he's in the kitchen with Steve. Something to do with pumps and the dishwasher."

As Dan, Dave and Alex headed out into the rain, Alex stopped and said, "I'll go and clean the solar panels. Your dad said they need cleaning and the rain will make that easier."

He went back inside to get his rain jacket while Dan and Dave made their way to the kitchen. There they found Dan's dad, Nathan, and Steve, the owner of the campsite, easing the large commercial dishwasher away from the wall. A steady stream of water was running out from underneath and pouring into the drain in the middle of the floor.

"Can we help?" asked Dan.

"We've got to find out where this leak is coming from, and that means moving the dishwasher," said Nathan. "We've undone the hold-down bolts and moved it away from the wall a bit, but now we need to disconnect the pipes so that we can move it away further and see what's going on. Dan and Dave, can you disconnect the pipes while we go and turn off the power for this room? I need to show Steve a few things that have changed since we came."

"Sure," answered Dan and Dave together.

Nathan and Steve left the kitchen and Dan went to look behind the dishwasher. There wasn't much room behind it, and there wasn't much light either.

"Lots of spiders' webs," commented Dan, peering behind the machine. "They might be redbacks. I'll get a broom."

He fetched one from the cleaning cupboard and began to clear away the dust and cobwebs, keeping an eye out for spiders – he hated spiders and had no wish to get bitten.

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Dave, meanwhile, had knelt down on the other side of the dishwasher and was looking under it, using his phone torch.

“There’s a pipe underneath that leads towards the wall. It must be the drain.”

“Is the water coming from there?”

“Doesn’t look like it – in fact, it looks like it’s running down the wall. You might be able to see it better from your side.”

Once Dan finished clearing away the cobwebs, he looked down at the water supply pipes – just as the lights went out.

“Hey! How come... oh, I suppose Dad just turned off the power.” He took out his own phone and the extra light made it clear that Dave was right. “Yeah, the water’s coming out of one of the supply pipes and running down the wall.” Seeing the blue fittings at each end of the pipe, he added, “It’s the cold water pipe.”

By that time, Dave was shining his phone torch from the other side of the machine and a sudden reflection from something on the floor caught Dan’s attention.

“Hey, Dave, can you hold your phone still for a moment? I think there’s something under the dishwasher – jewellery maybe.”

Dave held his phone still for a moment while Dan looked, then moved it around a little to get a better look himself.

“You’re right, Dan. I think it’s a necklace or a bracelet. Some bits are metal: gold, probably.”

Dan knelt down on the floor and reached in under the dishwasher to where he had seen the flash of light. Before he’d reached in very far he felt something hard and metallic

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lying on the floor. It didn't feel like jewellery! Pulling it out, he found that it was a large serrated knife.

“That's weird,” he said, “Look at this, Dave.”

“A knife! Someone must've dropped it when they were putting it in the dishwasher.”

“Mmm. Probably.”

Dan handed the knife to Dave then looked under the dishwasher as he reached underneath. He had to stretch as far as he could before his fingers closed on a small cold, metallic object attached to a band. Taking it carefully out, he found that it was a bracelet, mostly made of braided leather, but with gold-coloured attachments for fastening and a single star in the middle.



This is the end of the first part of the first chapter of *West to Moora Moora* by Mark Morgan.

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