

Stolen Love

They came in the night, as the gumtrees stood still and the sound of cicadas echoed in the distance. We woke to the thunder of engines and knew who it was. They were coming to take us away, take us from our bagirngun and babiin and steal our blood.

The removals had been happening for months, in places around us, so we had been preparing. But no matter how much we fought back and how much we ran, we could not escape them. We held onto each other as we drove off, our only family in our arms, as the sound of our cries echoed into the night.

Clara sat at her dining table and listened to the conversation going on around her. Her mother sat opposite her, sipping her tea every so often, keeping her eyes trained on the plate in front of her. To Clara's right sat one of her older brothers, Howard, who was deep in conversation with her other brother, Lawrence, and her father.

This was how their mornings usually went. The men talked, while Clara and her mother sat silently, listening. They were greeted when they sat down at the table but were never asked to join in the discussion. A full meal with no talking, that was the unspoken rule. Not a strict one, but it was the norm.

This morning was different. After Father's conversation died down and the table settled into an uneasy silence, Mother spoke. "We have a new maid arriving today. She is young so she will be watched by Ruth for the first few days."

Clara's ears pricked up. She loved the maids – they were the few people in the house who regularly talked to her – but they were years older than Clara and felt more like aunts than friends.

Her mother had said that the new maid was young. Maybe she was Clara's age? The thought of another girl her age living in the house excited Clara. She didn't have many friends and only talked to the girls at her school.

If this new maid was Clara's age, she could have a new friend to spend time with her at home. And her afternoons of solitude would be over.

When Clara arrived home from school later that day, she could hardly contain her excitement. The whole day she had let her mind wander and barely paid attention to her teachers. Next year she would start finishing school and the books, chalkboards and ink wells of her current classroom would be long gone. Clara loved school so she hated wasting her precious class time. Today, she had made an exception.

Clara went searching for new maid, first in the kitchen and then in the dining room. She thought maybe she was helping set the table for supper, but she was nowhere to be seen and eventually Clara retreated to her room, disheartened. But when she opened the door to her bedroom, there stood a young girl folding a blanket by her bed.

"Hello!" Clara exclaimed, then collected herself feeling slightly embarrassed about her abrupt introduction. "It is nice to meet you," she added, with an extended hand.

The girl looked down at Clara's hand suspiciously and then snapped her focus back to the blanket. Determined not to give up so easily, Clara tried again. "What is your name? Mine is Clara McKenna."

Clara waited a beat and then dropped her hand. *Maybe this girl would not want to be her friend...* she thought to herself. But when Clara turned her gaze to the ground, she heard a voice.

"Annie."

"Excuse me?" Clara asked, surprised at the small voice that had come from the girl in front of her.

"My name is Annie."

Clara felt a surge of excitement flow through her again. "Well it is nice to meet you Annie. Where are you from?"

"Wiradjuri country," Annie said, but then she caught herself.

"Umm... where?" Clara mumbled.

Bitting her lip, Annie tried again, "Australia, I come from Australia."

"Well, yes. I assumed you did. Wiradjuri country? Is that where you grew up?"

Annie looked down. "I was raised in an orphanage a while from here. This is the first proper house I've gone to."

"I am sorry about your parents."

Annie took a deep breath. "My mother died when I was younger."

Clara didn't know how to respond. She wanted to comfort Annie, but she didn't seem sad at all, if anything, she looked angry. Clara decided to drop the topic.

"I hope you enjoy it here! I am really excited for us to get to know each other and I hope we can become good friends," Clara said with a blinding smile.

The corners of Annie's mouth lifted. "Thank you."

The girls met daily. When Clara got home from school and after Annie had finished her tasks, they sat on the floor of her room and talked. Clara recounted her school day and explained to Annie what she had learned, while Annie sat and listened. Every-so-often she would interrupt and ask Clara questions about her schoolwork. Annie rarely talked about herself and Clara didn't want to push her.

One day, after Clara had finished telling Annie about her History lesson, Annie interrupted. "Can I tell you about my family?"

"Sure, you said your mother died when you were a child."

"That was a lie," Annie kept her eyes on the carpet, "That was the lie we were told when we arrived at the orphanage, but I know it's not true, I know she's still alive."

"I do not understand, why were you sent to the orphanage if your mother was still alive?" Clara was confused.

"They didn't care if she was alive or not, they just wanted to take me and my little brother away from her"

“You have a brother?”

“Yes, he was with me when we were taken but we grew up apart. The last time I saw him was three years ago. They allowed us to visit each other every year or so but he stopped coming when I was nine.”

“What is his name?” Clara asked.

“His real name is Jiemba, but they changed it to Henry when we were taken from our home.”

Clara sat and let this new information wash over her. Children had been stolen; Annie had been stolen for her own mother at the age of 5. Then, she realised something.

“What’s your real name?” Clara blurted out.

“It’s Kirra.”

“Well, it is nice to meet you Kirra,” Clara said, with an extended hand, and this time, Kirra took it.

“I have a plan,” Clara said, definitively. She sat Kirra down and began explaining.

The two girls would travel together to Victoria, Clara as a young girl visiting her aunt and Kirra as her maid. When they arrived, Clara would give Kirra some of the money she had, and they would part ways.

By the time Clara returned home, she would tell her family that Kirra had stayed with her aunt and started working for her.

This plan benefited Kirra greatly, but it also helped Clara. If she were to travel to Victoria, she would be able to continue her education. Next year she would start finishing school and her studies would be over, but in Victoria she could continue learning and change the life expected of her.

When Clara finished explaining her plan, Kirra leaned forward and hugged her. “Thank you, Clara, thank you,” Kirra choked out.

The girls went to sleep with feelings of anticipation and hope running freely through their minds

Clara and Kirra stood in front of Flinders Street Station. Clara’s gloved hands held her suitcase close as she looked out from the train platform. Kirra stood to her left with a small suitcase of her own.

“My Aunt May will be here soon to pick me up,” Clara said as she turned to face Kirra.

Over the past few months the two girls had grown incredibly close. They were both excited about the journeys they were about to undertake but that didn’t stop a feeling of sadness washing over them. They both knew that after today they would not see each other again for a very long time.

After a minute of silence Kirra spoke, “I never thought that I would meet someone as kind as you. I never imagined I would meet a white person who truly cared about me or my people. I want to thank you for being my friend.”

Clara felt her eyes prick with tears as she moved forward and embraced Kirra.

When Clara stepped back, she cleared her throat. “I will miss you Kirra.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll find you in the future.” Kirra picked up her bag and gave Clara one last smile before turning around and becoming absorbed into the crowd.

Kirra peered through thick glasses at the newspaper which she held in her frail, trembling hands. ‘National Sorry Day’ was printed in the bottom left corner on the sixth page of The Age. A box that took up the quarter of a page was all that the newspaper had to offer.

She put the newspaper down in disappointment. After nearly 80 years of trauma, she was only now getting an apology. *We understand all too well the hurt and harm that occurred.* How could they understand? They weren’t taken from their mothers. They weren’t sold as slaves and sent off to white families.

Kirra knew she was lucky. After years of travelling and talking to others like her she realised how fortunate she had been as a child. While others had been abused mentally and physically by the people around them, Kirra had made a friend.

She still remembered Clara after all these years. An outgoing girl, someone Kirra had looked to in times of despair. *Clara would keep looking*, she used to think to herself back when all hope of finding her family seemed lost.

But Kirra never found her mother and, though she never stopped searching, she never saw her brother again. Kirra held the grief of those losses in her heart and at times felt like they would suffocate her.

Then, when her daughter was born and, two years later, she held her newborn son in her arms, Kirra found a love she thought she had lost forever.

Bibliography

Campbell, Mike. “Wiradjuri Names.” *Behind the Name - the Etymology and History of First Names*, www.behindthename.com/names/usage/wiradjuri.

Annotation:

This website gave me the name of Kirra’s brother.

None. *Wiradjuri Language*, www.wiradjuri.dalang.com.au/plugin_wiki/tags_by_tag/59.

Annotation:

I used this website to find certain words in the Wiradjuri language.

A.o., and A.o. “Girls Names of Australian Aboriginal Origin.” *Waltzing More Than Matilda*, 19 Feb. 2012, www.waltzingmorethanmatilda.com/2012/02/19/girls-names-of-australian-aboriginal-origin/

Annotation:

This is where I found Kirra’s name.

Bologna, Caroline. “These Were The Most Popular Baby Names In The 1890s.” *HuffPost Australia*, HuffPost Australia, 13 Feb. 2019, www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2019/02/13/most-popular-baby-names-1890s_a_23669037/?guccounter=1.

Annotation:

I used this website to find the names of Clara and her two brothers.

“AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia.” *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, 3 July 2020, www.aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia.

Annotation:

I used this website to find where the main character was from. I chose a group close to NSW, Sydney as this is where majority of the story is set.

Korff, Jens. “Stolen Generations Stories.” *Creative Spirits*, 17 July 2020, www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations/stolen-generations-stories.

Annotation:

These stories allowed my story to be more accurate as I could base plots off real-life events.

“The Age from Melbourne, Victoria, Australia on May 26, 1998 · Page 6.” *Newspapers.com*, The Age, www.newspapers.com/newspage/123040768/.

Annotation:

This newspaper page was described in my narrative. It is the exact paper that was available in Victoria on the first National Sorry Day.

Reconciliation Australia. “National Sorry Day 2020.” *Reconciliation Australia*, Reconciliation Australia, 9 June 2020, www.reconciliation.org.au/national-sorry-day-2020/#:~:text=The%first%National%Sorry%Day,in%the%20th%century.

Annotation:

I was able to understand what happened on the first National Sorry Day.

says, Krystle, et al. “What Did Women Wear in the 1930s? 1930s Fashion Guide.” *Vintage Dancer*, www.vintagedancer.com/1930s/women-1930s-fashion/.

Annotation:

I used this website to find out if gloves would have been used by my characters.