

**JEFF TOWNSEND**

**BAILEYS CROSSING**



**An Australian Outback Story**

**One Group of Godly People Take on  
Evil Personified in One Wicked Town**

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## THE PEOPLE OF BAILEY'S CROSSING

**Scott Brooks:** A 21 year old first year secondary teacher. He grew up in an upper class Sydney suburb and put Bailey's Crossing Regional High School down as his ninety seventh choice. At university he majored in English with a minor in physical education.

**Bill Harden:** The Town mayor. He owns and runs the town's major employer, the slaughter yards, as well as owning most of the commercial property in town, including the pub. He is crooked in his business dealings and often manipulates the council into making decisions that benefit him and his family, often to the detriment of others.

**Jim Cook:** Owns and runs the town petrol station, where he also runs a small church.

**Nikita Cook:** Jim's twenty year old daughter is a nurse, who recently returned home from the city to help her Dad with the Petrol Station.

**Christine Peterson:** A twenty one year old part aboriginal girl who works behind the bar at the pub. She is a good friend of Nikita's. She lives with her Mother Missie in Scumtown.

**Richard Brimley:** Principle of the school where Scott teaches.

**Missie Peterson:** Christine's mother.

**Jack Armstrong:** A hard working, hard drinking, long suffering cattle farmer who has weathered many a drought. Sixty five years old.

**Myrtle Armstrong:** Jack's wife.

**Kylie Buckley:** A vivacious, noisy twenty one year old. She is popular with the local boys for all the wrong reasons. Kylie works at the meatworks in a mundane, unfulfilling job packing meat.

**Ross Bennett:** A first year probationary constable of Police.

**Sgt Alf Watson:** The head copper in the town and Ross' Boss. He is sixty four and very corrupt.

**Jeanette Watson:** His wife.

**Gladys Ma ynard:** The town busy body. She runs a boarding house, is on council with Bill Harden, acts as electoral officer and is President of the Bailey's Crossing chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

**Craig Harden:** Bill's eldest son. Works as a foreman at his dad's slaughter yards. A natural leader. Has a group of young blokes around his age that lean on his every word.

**Ricky Brown:** One of Craig's mates. A shorter bloke who more than makes up for his small stature by having an extremely loud mouth and a larrikin attitude.

**Russell and Celeste Jacobs:** Only just retired, Russell was the manager of the bank in Bailey's Crossing. He and Celeste live in a grand old home in town.

**Rupert Benson:** Rupert is chubby boy in Scott's third form English class that gets picked on all the time. His parents run the town Motel.

**Robert Harden:** Bill Harden's youngest son. He is also in form three.

**Arthur and Rosie Baker:** Arthur is a no nonsense farmer, hard working and extremely practical. Rosie was also raised a country girl and has a good traditional work ethic. The Bakers live about fifty miles north of town and have ten thousand acres of land.

**Gary Baker:** Arthur and Rosie's son and a 2nd year law student.

**Vicky Martin:** Vicky runs the town florist shop, which is called Victoria's. She also has the post office agency.

**Richard Cowell:** Foreman at the meatworks.

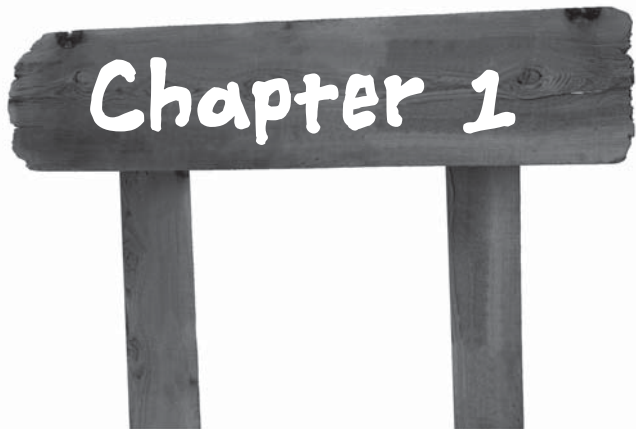
**Willie Cotswald:** Once a bushman, now certified insane and living in an asylum in Sydney.

**Cheryl Bailey:** A seventeen year old that works in the café. Her parents run the old theatre, which now operates on a Friday and Saturday night only as a cinema. Cheryl also helps out her parents by running the candy bar and working as an usher.

**Peter Mackay:** The town doctor.

**Guy Robinson:** A well known, Sydney based pop star.

**John Hobson and Philip Drew:** Two undercover Police from internal affairs.

A wooden signpost with a horizontal top bar and two vertical posts. The top bar is dark and has the words "Chapter 1" written on it in a white, hand-drawn font. The signpost is set against a light, textured background.

Clive Ramsbottom leaned back on his creaky office chair and pondered for a while.

It was a very conservative office. The desks were old, plain and made of veneered wood, which was peeling off in places. The blinds were the off-white Venetian kind that gathered dust like crazy, and they'd been bent in the middle on more than a few occasions, causing them to look older and more time weathered than they actually were.

A big old metal fan on a pedestal was spinning noisily in a corner, as it struggled to make the temperature in this non air-conditioned Education Department office just that little bit more bearable.

In spite of the fan, Clive was sweating profusely. A droplet ran down his nose and plopped off the tip, landing below on the worn-thin white shirt that was stretched tightly around his protruding gut.

Clive's older colleague Brian was sitting at the desk opposite, shuffling through a pile of papers. He looked up for a moment, glaring at Clive over the top of the spindly, metallic reading glasses that were perched on the end of his nose, and said "You'll never get those High School location assignments finished sitting back like that. They've got to be in the mail by tomorrow lunchtime!"

"This is actually a very responsible position I have here, you know," Clive mused, holding his biro up to the light and staring at it. "Right here in this pen I hold the destiny of two hundred and sixty four graduating secondary school teachers. When I write the name of a school beside a particular teacher's name, I am determining not only where and who they will teach, but also where they will live, who they will meet and possibly even who they might one day marry and raise children with. What an awesome responsibility!"

"What a load of rubbish! Just hurry up and get on with it, and stop acting like God," Brian said, irritably. "You're a level three clerk in the Education Department. Get over it and get on with the job."

"Do you know what your problem is, Brian?"

“Oh, do tell,” Brian replied sarcastically, and with mock interest. “I’m desperate to know!”

“You just don’t know how to have fun,” Clive responded, matter-of-factly. He picked up a piece of paper that had the words ‘New South Wales Department of Education - Application for Preferred Location’ as its heading, followed by a long printed list of one hundred secondary schools with a hand written number from one to one hundred written beside each one as a preference. “Now, whose life will I throw into a whirlwind this time? Ah, here’s a ripe one. Twenty-one year old Scott Brooks of Manly on Sydney’s delightful North Shore, has selected Northern Beaches High School as his number one preference. Solid choice too, I might add. He probably went there himself. But let’s see where he’ll really be spending the next year or more.”

Clive raised the pen in his hand and closed his eyes, then let the pen come down at a random spot on the page.

“Oh yes!” Clive guffawed with excitement. “Choice number ninety-seven out of a hundred, Bailey’s Crossing Regional High School. He’s gonna love that! Oh it really is exceptionally sweet when I get the chance to send a rich snob from the North Shore out into the middle of the outback. Woo Hoo!”

“You really are a pathetic man Clive,” Brian said in disgust, shaking his head.



3 months later – January 1974



The 1948 Buick 8 convertible roared effortlessly along what seemed to be an eternally straight stretch of bitumen. It hugged the never ending broken line that ran down the centre as it raced alongside miles and miles of yellow cattle country, dotted with the occasional tall, scraggy gum tree. New South Wales was facing one of the worst droughts in recent years and the land was dry and parched.

The car was the driver’s pride and joy. He’d been working on it since he was sixteen and had fully restored it to its former glory, and some. It was a beautiful bright yellow and looked stunning.

Scott Brooks; twenty-one years old, wind blowing in his dark, shoulder-length hair, yawned and looked at his watch. It was four o’clock in the afternoon and he’d been driving for hours.

He had set off early yesterday afternoon. His Mother had put on a special lunch to give the family a last chance to farewell her youngest son. Why, even his

Dad managed to shock everyone by taking a Friday afternoon off work from his city office job, and catching the Manly Ferry home especially for the occasion.

After saying goodbye, he'd put his foot on the accelerator and waved farewell to his crying Mother as the car loped on up the street.

Sydney traffic did its usual thing and kept him driving slow for about two hours, and then he crossed the beautiful Blue Mountains and headed west along the Great Western Highway. He had stopped in the town of Dubbo for the night, at a motel, then had headed off around eight the next morning to complete his journey.

He knew the trip to Bailey's Crossing would be a long one, but right now he was starting to get tired.

A sign saying "Debraville" appeared on the side of the road and Scott thought "Great! A town! I'll pull over and grab a drink."

He parked the car in front of what appeared to be the only building in the entire town; a small, wooden shack with a rusty old petrol pump out front and a weather-beaten advertising sign that said "Last petrol until Bailey's Crossing, 103 miles."

He stepped inside as the door knocked an old cowbell hanging in its way. An unshaven man walked out, dressed in a dirty singlet, shorts and a pair of work boots. A roll-your-own cigarette was hanging, soggy and limp from the corner of his mouth. He looked older than he probably was.

"Giddy cobber," the man spoke. It seemed like his lips were not moving. "What'll it be?"

"Can I have an orange juice please?"

"Nope," the man replied. "Alls we got's Coke, Tab and Fanta."

"Oh," said Scott. "I guess I'll have a Coke then."

"Where ya off to?" the man asked, reaching into the fridge for the Coke.

"Bailey's Crossing," Scott replied. "I'm the new high school teacher."

"Yep. Figured you must be a teacher."

"How's that?"

"Well, bein' the end of January and all, and 'cause you're a young fella."

"What's my age got to do with it?" Scott chuckled.

"Young folks don't come to Bailey's Crossing. Not unless they're teachers or coppers. They just got a new copper a few months ago, so I knew you had to be a teacher. They had three new teachers start last year, and sure enough all three of them left at the end of the year too, just like normal. No, most of the younger ones out 'ere just can't wait to leave and go to the big smoke."

"Why's that?" Scott asked, naively.

The man smirked. "You'll figure that one out soon enough, son. See you on the way home, hey!" With a sneering chuckle he went back to his TV set.

Scott jumped back into the convertible and took off. He wondered what could be so bad about Bailey's Crossing that made everyone young want to leave. He'd been feeling apprehensive about the move as it was, wondering what to expect, but now he was feeling even worse.

As long as he could remember he'd wanted to be a teacher, right back since primary school. He remembered even practicing on his little sister when he was ten. He would get her to sit on a rock in front of an upturned rubbish bin as her desk, and he would wrap a blanket around his shoulders as a cape, put a paper party hat on his head and stand in front of the back yard shed wall holding a stick as a pointer, telling her lots of useless and generally false information.

Now he was driving to a place he'd never seen, to take up his very first position as a teacher. It was an exciting time and Scott had no idea what to expect. What would these outback farmers' kids be like? Would they listen to him? Would they respect him? He chuckled at the thought that he could probably learn a thing or two from them, seeing as this would be his first time actually living in a country town.

On a couple of occasions he had to slow right down to a crawl. The drought had bitten the region really badly and farmers were forced to drive their cows along the roadside so they could eat whatever grass they could find, because the paddocks were all bare. Land that normally looked luscious now looked like the surface of the moon. Dry and lifeless!

As Scott drove slowly past the cattle, it struck him as odd that even though these great working men of the outback were under immense pressure financially and emotionally, they still made a point of waving to every car as they drove by. "I know I'm in the real country now," Scott grinned as he thought to himself. "That never happens in the city!"

Each mile now seemed to take longer to pass. Scott was really getting sick of driving and just couldn't wait to arrive at his destination. In his eagerness he started to speed up.

He passed a sign that said "Bailey's Crossing 22 Miles" and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. "Good," he thought. "I'll be there in time to settle in at the boarding house and have dinner at the pub, and a chance to meet some of the locals." He'd received a letter from the Mayor of the town, telling him to meet at the pub for a 6:30pm welcome dinner.

Looking in his mirror he noticed a flashing blue light.

"Oh no, not now," Scott frowned, as the Police car overtook; the lone driver signalling him to pull over. He obeyed.

A young Policeman stepped out of the Police car, put his hat on and walked up to Scott. He was tall, thin and had short brown hair. "Good afternoon Sir," he said. "Could you show me your Driver's Licence please?"

“Certainly officer, I’m happy to oblige,” Scott said meekly, passing him the licence.

“Okay, Mister...er...Brooks,” he said, unfolding the paper licence. “You’re from Sydney so you should be aware that the state limit here in New South Wales is sixty miles per hour.”

“Yes officer, I am aware of that. Was I going over?”

“Sir, I think you know that, don’t you? I clocked you doing seventy three.”

“Sorry,” Scott replied, feeling like a fool. “It’s been a long day and I’m tired and desperate to get to Bailey’s Crossing. I have an appointment there with Mayor Harden.”

“Harden?” the officer sneered in disgust, walking around the car with his pen and clipboard. “You have my sympathy there. But I’ve got no sympathy for you on the speeding issue. If you intend on arriving safely at your destination I suggest you drive at the speed limit. I also recommend you take a little more notice of the safety standard of your vehicle. These tyres are bald!”

Scott stepped out of the car and walked around to the front. “I’m planning on getting a couple of new tyres as soon as I get my first pay cheque in two and a half weeks time.”

“Three new tyres to be precise,” the officer added. “You’ve got one good tyre on the back. The other three are shot. What about your spare?”

“Yeah, it’s pretty bad too,” Scott murmured.

“I suggest you get yourself four new tyres, Mr. Brooks,” the officer said, as he peeled the back off a yellow sticker and stuck it on the lower left side of the windscreen. “You’ve got seven days to comply, Sir, or else you risk a hefty fine and loss of licence. I’m also issuing you with an instant traffic violation for speeding.” He passed Scott a blue slip of paper.

“Oh come on,” Scott blurted in exasperation. “I can’t afford a fine and a yellow canary. I haven’t even earned my first pay cheque yet. Can’t you give me a second chance?”

“And if I did that, and you lost control of your vehicle, or one of these dodgy tyres blew out, what then?” The Policeman started to get his back up. “If you veered over to the other side of the road and had a head-on collision with a car load of innocent people, killing them, would anybody be able to give them a second chance?”

Scott stood there, a stunned expression on his face. He had not expected this kind of angry response.

The Police officer’s lower lip was quivering. He was clearly ruffled. He returned to his car, and as he got in, said to Scott, “Seven days! Phone your family or someone and get a loan if you have to, just get those tyres replaced, then report to the Bailey’s Crossing Police Station to get that sticker removed.” With that, he fired up the engine and took off.

Scott climbed back into the driver's seat and put his head in his hands. He couldn't believe his bad luck.

He started the engine and drove off sombrely, making sure he stuck to the speed limit.

As he drove, his conscience started to prick him. It wasn't bad luck at all. He knew he needed new tyres. He'd just put off getting them. And he did know he'd been speeding. But that copper sure had an attitude!

As he drove the final few miles to Bailey's Crossing his mind was full of negative thoughts and fears. He had that hollow feeling in his chest that comes when you know you've really stuffed up.

He remembered the first time he felt that hollow emptiness. He was twelve years old, and he'd just put the bins out, which was one of his regular chores. His mother reminded him that he'd forgotten to close the back gate and asked him to go and do it. He said he would, but then continued to watch his favourite TV show. Later on he went to bed, and as he lay there in the dark of his room he remembered that he'd promised to shut the gate. But it was cold outside and he made a decision to leave it till morning.

At around three o'clock in the morning he woke with a start to the sound of a screeching car out the front of his house. He hurriedly pulled on some clothes and ran outside to see what had happened, followed closely by his Father.

Out there on that cold, dark night he saw a sight that chilled him to the bone and would stay with him for the rest of his life! Lying there on the road was his dog Blackie, whimpering and shaking as blood oozed from his broken body. The car had driven off.

He ran over and cradled Blackie in his arms, crying as the last vestiges of life drained from the dog's quivering body. Within a minute Blackie was dead, and Scott sat there bawling his eyes out in utter despair. He felt that painful vacuum in his chest as he realised that it was all his fault.

Back then he had made a decision not to close the back gate, and he paid for that decision for years to come. Right now he had that same feeling. He had made two decisions: one, not to replace the tyres, and the other to drive too fast, and now he was going to have to pay.

He had one hundred and fifty dollars left in his wallet from the money he'd earned over summer. One hundred for two weeks rent and board in advance and fifty dollars for petrol and spending money to last for the next two and a half weeks. Now he had to find sixty five dollars to pay the fine and about a hundred and fifty dollars for the new tyres. He'd been determined not to ask his father for money. He wanted to make this start in life on his own, without help. He was dreading telling his folks about what had just happened.

As he approached the outskirts of town he drove through an area of major roadworks where a new road was starting to be built.

Pretty soon he drove past a sign that said “Welcome to Bailey’s Crossing – Cattle Capital of the West.” Bailey’s Crossing was a smallish town with a population of around two thousand people and about a hundred thousand cows. It was the lynchpin and indeed the lifeline for a number of other smaller regional towns within a radius of up to a hundred miles.

As Scott drove down the main street he saw all the typical sights of an outback Aussie town. The Pub, Supermarket, Post Office, Petrol Station, Take Away Food Shop, Farm Supplies Store and of course the Police Station, although Scott made a point of getting away from that building as quickly as he could. He saw the familiar looking Police car parked out front.

Like most outback towns, Bailey’s Crossing consisted of the main street, which was also the highway and ran right through town, with a number of side streets running off it. There were no traffic lights.

No Aussie town would be complete without the Anzac memorial, which paid tribute to the gallant young men who had lost their lives defending their country. Bailey’s Crossing had a big one in the form of a needle which pointed to the sky, and was covered in the names of many of the town’s lost heroes from the first and second world wars, and more recently from the Vietnam conflict. It was positioned right smack bang in the middle of a roundabout on one of the town’s major intersections.

Following directions he’d been given, Scott turned right at the Anzac memorial and pulled up outside “Maynard’s Boarding House,” an old but charming, large weatherboard home nestled behind an immaculate garden full of flowers; in particular roses of many colours.

Scott grabbed his two suitcases and walked on up the finely manicured path. As he stepped onto the wooden veranda the front door opened and a short, stout woman wearing a floral dress and sporting too much make-up smiled at him.

“You must be Scott,” she said, beckoning him to come inside.

“Yes, hello ma’am,” he said, putting a case down and shaking her hand.

“I’m Gladys Maynard,” the woman proclaimed. “I saw you drive up through the lounge room window. You must be so tired.”

“I am a bit,” Scott replied.

“Not too tired to meet Mayor Harden, I hope,” she said with a knowing smile.

“Oh, you know about that?”

“Yes, the Mayor and I work quite closely together. I’m a councillor too,” she said proudly, puffing out her oversized chest.

“Well then, I’d better behave myself while I’m living here, hadn’t I?” Scott said with a smile.

Mrs. Maynard frowned, disapproving of his flippant attitude. "That's quite enough of that. I run a very tight ship here Mr. Brooks and I expect a suitable standard of behaviour from my boarders. Breakfast is served at 7am sharp and dinner at 6pm. If you're not there on time you miss out. I don't allow smoking or the demon drink in my house, and any lady callers are to be entertained in the parlour and NOT in the bedroom."

"Mrs. Maynard, I'm fine with all of that. I won't cause you any problems, I promise you that. You don't have to worry."

"Very good then. Here's your room," she said, ushering him through a doorway. "It's cosy, and it catches the morning sun. Now, that'll be one hundred dollars please for two weeks rent and board in advance." She held her hand out. Scott sheepishly handed her five twenty dollar bills.

"Well then. I'll leave you to settle in." She handed him a key and closed the door behind her as she left.

'Cosy' was not quite the word Scott had in mind as he looked around his room. It was much smaller than his room back home. The furniture consisted of an old iron single bed, wardrobe, bedside table with lamp, and a dressing table and mirror, and with all that the floor space was almost totally taken up. The walls were lined with ornate floral wallpaper and there was an old, faded print of a painting of Ayers Rock on one wall.

He put his cases down and sat on the bed. The springs squeaked noisily.

Looking at his watch he saw it was just after six thirty. "Flip, I'd better get moving," he thought to himself.

He ran out the front door and climbed into his car.

A couple of minutes later he pulled up in the car park of the 'Royal Hotel.' He climbed out of the car and stepped inside the front door.

This pub was a lot less plush than the ones he and his friends had frequented in Manly. It had a long, polished wooden bar with stools and a stainless steel floor ashtray running along the full length. Other furniture included a public phone, dartboard and cigarette machine. A photograph of a young, freshly coronated Queen Elizabeth the Second took pride of place on one wall. The other walls were covered in faded old pictures of prize-winning racehorses, and official club photos of victorious Bailey's Crossing Cricket, Football and Netball teams from years gone by. An old jukebox in the corner played an Elvis Presley tune as an elderly couple danced slowly in each other's arms, both managing to do so holding a beer glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other. There were a number of people sitting around tables.

Scott stepped up to the bar. The barmaid, who had noticed him come in, walked over and looked him up and down.

"You the new teacher?" she asked with a glint in her eye.

"Gosh, is it that obvious?" Scott replied with mock irritation.

“Yep, sure is,” the girl responded. “You certainly aint no farmer’s kid, that’s for sure. What’s your name?”

“Scott. Scott Brooks,” he replied, shaking her hand. “What’s yours?”

“I’m Christine. You want a drink?”

“Oh, yes thanks. I’ll have a beer please.”

Christine was medium height, slim and had long dark hair that fell loosely on her shoulders. She was twenty-one years old and was part Aboriginal and quite attractive. She wore tight denim jeans and a flannelette shirt.

“You a city boy then?” she asked.

“Yeah,” said Scott, sipping his beer. “I’m from Manly in Sydney.”

“Oh, even better, a rich city boy,” Christine joked, good-naturedly.

“No, not rich,” he replied. “In fact I’m hanging out for payday already.”

“Sounds like most of the blokes in this town. Well, you’ll be alright. Harden said your food and drinks are on him tonight.”

“That’s really generous of him,” said Scott.

“Not really, he owns the joint. Speak of the devil. Here he comes now.”

Bill Harden had just walked through the front door. A tall, solidly built man with thick, greying brown hair; he was dressed in business trousers, polished shoes and an open-necked sports shirt. Everyone in the bar noticed him. One bloke said “G’day Bill,” but the rest just went back to their drinks.

“You must be Brooks,” he said, reaching out his hand and welcoming Scott with a firm handshake.

“That’s me,” Scott replied with a smile.

“I’m Mayor Bill Harden. Pleased to meet you. So, you survived the long drive then?”

“Yeah, no problem,” Scott lied, nervously.

“You must be hungry. Come and sit down at my table.” Harden led him to a table at the back of the pub. “This is where I always sit. It’s a bit more private and a good place to get some work done.”

“You own this place then,” Scott asked, sitting down.

“Yes, it’s part of our family business. Now, are you a meat eater?”

“Sure. I love a good steak.”

“There you go. I knew you’d be a man after my own heart. Mavis in the kitchen is a great cook.” He motioned to Christine. “Hey girly, get over here and take our order.”

Christine rolled her eyes as she put down the tea towel she was holding. She grabbed an order pad, came over to the table and waited, pen in hand, an irritated look on her face.

“How do you like your steak?” Harden asked.

“Oh, well done,” Scott replied.

“Two mixed grills, well done. Tell Mavis to use the T-bone and not the crappy cheap sandwich steak. And two beers. Make it snappy!”

Without a word Christine wrote down the order and went off to the kitchen.

“Christine seems nice,” Scott said.

Harden leaned forward purposefully. “Now you take my advice, Scotty,” he murmured, as his whole demeanour changed. “You stay away from that black trash, you hear me? She’s no good.”

“Why’s that?” Scott asked, quite perturbed.

“This is a small town,” Harden replied, his voice lowered. “As a teacher you’ll hold a position of respect and trust in the town. If any of the locals see you hanging around with that filthy boong, they won’t like it, and you’ll lose their respect. Now as a respected teacher in the town you wouldn’t want that to happen, would you?”

“No, of course not,” Scott replied, hesitantly. He was about to ask Harden how come Christine was in his employ when she was such a bad person, but just as he was forming his words a young woman sauntered up to the table. She was short in stature, only moderately good looking with shoulder-length, bottle-blond hair that had way too much re-growth showing, and was dressed in tight, pastel coloured pants with a low-cut, see-through, lacy top. She was chewing gum with her mouth open.

“Giddy Bill,” she said, in a strong, high-pitched, ocker accent.

“Giddy Kylie,” Harden replied, staring lasciviously at her chest. “You’re looking lovely tonight, as usual.”

“Gee thanks Bill,” Kylie replied, pretending to blush, although it was plain to Scott that she enjoyed the compliment. “Who’s this spunk then?” She turned to face Scott with a pout.

“This is Scott Brooks, our new high school teacher. Scott, meet Kylie Buckley. Kylie won Queen of the Royal Show last year.”

“Very good,” Scott said. “Hello.”

“Gee, where you been all me life?” Kylie teased. “We haven’t had a cute teacher here in Bailey’s Crossing for a long time. Reckon it must be my lucky day.”

Scott blushed.

A classic Elvis ballad started playing on the jukebox.

“Oh ripper, I love this one. You wanna dance with me?” she asked coyly, grabbing Scott by the hand, not really leaving him a choice.

Scott stumbled on his words. “Er...I don’t think I should...”

“Go on, and have some fun,” Harden commanded, patting Scott rather solidly on the small of his back. It was more of a shove actually.

Reluctantly Scott went with Kylie to the dance floor, where she immediately put her arms around his neck and started slow dancing, seductively.

“Hey you,” Kylie yelled out at Christine. “Get me a gin and tonic.”

Christine poured the drink and passed it to her. Kylie gave her a cash note she’d removed from her tight jeans pocket.

“He’s barely arrived in town,” Christine said to Kylie, irritated. “Why don’t you let him settle in first before you attack?”

“Oh rack off, you black bitch. No one cares what you think!”

Four young blokes in their early twenties were sitting at a table drinking beer and playing cards. They’d been watching proceedings, and when they saw Kylie drag Scott up for a dance they started wooing and wolf whistling.

One of them was Craig Harden, Bill’s son. He was a tall, strong looking bloke with long brown hair, who was clearly the ringleader of the group. He called out loud, “There, see. I told yous it wouldn’t take her long to get her claws into him.” His mates all chuckled and sneered in response.

“Settle down you lot,” Kylie replied loudly with a smile. “Yous are just jealous cause yous can’t have me all to yourself.”

“What are you talkin’ about, ‘can’t have you’?” Craig replied. “We’ve all had you! Every bloomin’ one of us!” He and his mates all simultaneously erupted into raucous laughter.

Christine was watching proceedings from behind the bar with her arms crossed in front of her. She didn’t really like Kylie, not since they’d been at school together, and she found Kylie’s sluttish behaviour hard to take.

“Now come on fellas, that’s not very nice,” Scott said, nervously. “How about apologizing to the lady?”

That comment caused even more laughter. “Lady?” Craig cried out. “That’s the first time I ever heard her called that!”

“Shut up Craig, ya drongo,” Kylie yelled, clutching onto Scott tightly. “Nobody cares what you think!”

Ricky Brown was one of Craig’s mates at the table. He wasn’t as tall as the rest of the blokes, and had short blond hair. He more than made up for his small stature though, by having an extremely loud mouth and a larrikin attitude. “Hey guys,” he yelled out in his thick farmer-boy accent. “I didn’t know the new high school teacher was a cyclist.” The other blokes around the table sneered and grinned at each other.

“What do you mean?” Craig asked, with mock interest.

“Well, he must be a cyclist, I reckon,” said Ricky, trying to hold back his laugh, “cause he’s already latched himself onto ‘The Town Bike.’”

As the blokes launched into another bout of noisy laughter, Kylie, in genuine anger, stormed over to the table, grabbed a half-full glass of beer and threw it right in Ricky’s face. “How dare you, you rotten mongrel.” Tears started to run down her taut cheeks and over her angry, pursed lips.

Ricky rose sharply in anger and lunged at her, muttering, "You bitch!" But one of his mates held him back, saying "Leave it Ricky, she's not worth it!"

Kylie, now crying profusely and frustratingly lost for words, turned and stormed out of the pub.

Scott turned to go after her, but Harden stopped him.

"Leave it be, Son. She'll be alright." Walking over to the table, Harden grabbed Ricky firmly by the shoulder and said, "Honestly Brown, sometimes I reckon you were born with no brains at all."

"She had no right to do that to me," Ricky bit back.

"Yeah, well you just mind your manners in future," Harden replied. "We don't want our new teacher thinking the town's full of nothing but yobbos like you, do we?"

"Whatever you reckon, Bill," Ricky said bitterly as he wiped the beer from his face with a serviette.

On his way back to his table Harden called out to Christine the barmaid, "Hey you. Get these fellas another round on me, and bring two more beers over here."

Christine frowned at Harden in disgust without answering. She just did her job and put up with it, just like she always did. She reached for a glass and started pulling the beers.

"How come you're shouting them a round?" Scott asked, perplexed.

Harden slid back into his seat. "No use holding onto a grudge. You know how it is. Boys will be boys." He gave Scott a sly wink.

Scott was having a hard time digesting the 'boys will be boys' comment, but decided that now was not the best time to challenge this man, whom he'd just met, and who was paying for dinner.

Christine delivered the two beers.

"Come on lad, drink up." Harden seemed to be egging him on. "There's plenty more where that came from."

Scott was not traditionally much of a drinker. He tried to pace himself, but Harden seemed intent on getting him to drink more, and Scott didn't want to upset the Mayor on his first day in town. It must have been a town ritual, or so he thought.

Christine brought another two beers, and then another two.

Scott was starting to like the stuff.

The meals came out. It all tasted like beer.

"Two more beers here," Harden barked.

Then more beers.

And more beers.

Then nothing but a blur.