

Chapter 1

Broome, 2022

Saskia Honeyman would look back on her mother's death and see that it had the cadence of an exquisitely orchestrated sonata. The indomitable Kiki, as everyone called her, even her three adult children, had a stroke on the first Tuesday of December, as she sat beneath a boab tree with a cluster of women she affectionately called the Yawuru girls. They'd often sat there together in the heat of the day where the shadows fell, talking and shelling nuts or threading seeds into long strands and teaching her more and more of their Yawuru words. The stroke that killed her came two days later as she lay still recovering in a hospital room with a window that gave her a meagre slice of Roebuck Bay view.

Friday the following week was Kiki's funeral where, at low tide, hundreds of her loved ones drove to the furthest reach of Cable Beach and celebrated her departure with sand and saltbush, sea spray and barbecues sizzling to feed the

slow-moving crowd. It was loud and messy, with a wildness that honoured her. Lennon, Kiki's youngest, dragged her Viscount along the beach with his LandCruiser, like an old friend who needed to be shown the way. And people clustered on the sunny side of the well-loved caravan, found shade on the other, put their drinks in her fridge and took their kids for a pee in her toilet. There was a wedding photo taped to the cupboard door, front and centre as people stepped into the caravan: Kiki and Bear, the father of her three children, who had succumbed to prostate cancer only four years earlier. They looked younger than the parents Saskia had known, but the same. Kiki's hair was long, threaded with flowers, and she wore a simple slip dress with a thin strand of pearls at her throat. Bear's smile was broad, as always, although shrouded somewhat by a moustache that draped past his chin.

At dusk, camels came swaying along the ocean's spume, their silhouettes a guard of honour against the setting sun. Everyone fell silent, a crescent of humans facing the slow approach of the grunting beasts. It could have been Kiki, Saskia imagined they were all thinking – the barefooted form at the front of the procession could easily have been her mother, leading the line of camels as she had done every tourist season for the last twenty years.

Lennon quietly picked up a stick, walked into the middle of the sickle-shaped memorial and wrote in the compacted sand, *Be still*. A murmur rippled out as everyone made sense of the letters embossed on the ground, the familiar words they had seen scrawled on notes stuck to Kiki's bathroom mirror, written at the end of birthday cards, or heard whispered with a squeeze of hand when someone had shared a confidence at Kiki's side.

Saskia looked around and realised they were remembering how Kiki had brought calm. For all her wildness, her spirit had been a glassy pool that she had allowed all these people to be quieted beside. It was a beautiful moment, but as Saskia cleared up soft-drink cans and paper plates, one of the last to leave the beach, her head began to throb. She tried to be grateful for the send-off her mother would have loved to attend, but her stomach churned. Here she was, cleaning up the mess again.

‘You got this?’ It was Violet, Saskia’s sister, leaning out of her car window, her hair the same blonde as their mother’s but lopped into a straightened bob. Saskia nodded numbly, garbage bag in hand, like any good oldest sibling. Most of the crowd had already gone back to the house, except for Saskia and her daughter, Anouk, whose thin nine-year-old arms were struggling to load an esky into the back of the ute. Dane was there too, ambling mindless circles while barking into his phone, oblivious to his daughter shifting the esky onto her knee and then her hip to lever it over the ute’s tailgate.

‘I’ll see you back at the house.’ Violet waved and sped away along the darkening beach.



They decided to read Kiki’s will together on the Friday after the funeral, on Christmas Eve, when they had already planned on being together.

Kiki had always insisted on a family Christmas. ‘It could be my last,’ she had stated flatly this year. Her children had sighed down the phone at her melodrama, none of them imagining the possibility of their energetic mother’s mortality. They’d

overestimated her expiry date. It turned out that Kiki's forecast had been more accurate. Nearly prophetic.

'Just bring something to share,' Kiki would say each Christmas, swatting away any suggestions of a plan. That was her idea of a feast. The Christmas lunch of 2004 had comprised three lasagnes and a chocolate Bavarian. That never happened again. What Kiki hadn't realised was that Saskia promptly took on the designation of Christmas lunch after that year, texting her siblings specific instructions for what to bring (Violet – ham, a leafy salad and a chocolate mousse; Lennon – roast chicken, potato salad and lemon tart . . .). She didn't mind. Everyone expected it of the oldest sister and the teacher, the natural organiser among them. Perhaps even Kiki knew it, deep down.

One good thing to be said for the terrible timing of Kiki's death was that all formalities were neatly tied up by Christmas, aside from the house, which still needed to be listed for sale. But Saskia had five weeks of school holidays and she planned to have the house sorted before she returned to work at the beginning of Term One. Violet and Lennon would subconsciously assume she had it in hand. It was an unspoken reality of the Berry family culture, since that autumn when Kiki had taken to bed following the death of her dearest friend to bowel cancer. Kiki's grief had been lavish and long, Bear the attentive husband always at her side, leaving twelve-year-old Saskia to pick up the loose ends of her mother's home duties and weave them back into the proper pattern. It turned out that Saskia had a knack for it, the braiding together of family meals, reminders, grocery lists, cleaning rosters.

After Kiki emerged from six weeks of grieving, she never did properly pick up the full load she had so abruptly set down.

Saskia became the family member to consult when things needed organising. Christmas included. And Bear's funeral, followed by Kiki's four years later. So, of course, she would deal with the house too.



Saskia, Lennon and Violet met without partners or children for the will reading, just the three of them at the house, filing into the family lounge room with its 1970s arched walkway that led to the kitchen, and the chesterfield so worn and softened by time it was like climbing into the lap of a teddy bear. Lennon sat on the floor, tanned legs akimbo, a few days stubble on his jaw, flicking grey-blue eyes and a dim smile at Saskia perched on the leather couch. Violet put a plate of 'energy bites' on the coffee table and retrieved a dining chair to complete the circle.

'Chia seeds, peanut butter and matcha,' Violet said, as if it would improve the appeal of the green orbs.

Saskia grabbed one to keep her hands occupied and glanced around the room. All the louvred windows were open, allowing a breeze to sift through, tugging at Kiki's wall hangings, tickling a wind chime and playing with Lennon's almost shoulder-length, wispy brown hair. His chin was on his chest, eyes red. Saskia's heart squeezed. She wanted to go over and hug him, but she knew he would hate the fuss. Of them all, he had the most sensitive heart. He was also at that fragile time of life with a newborn baby demanding three-hourly feeds and a toddler in the next room. She knew he wouldn't be the sort of dad who rolled over and tried to get back to sleep; he would be retrieving their hungry baby and propping pillows around his wife, Janice,

as she breastfed through the night, despite needing to be at the architectural firm where he worked by 8.30 a.m.

Violet looked at her watch. Where Lennon's body was loose and honest, Violet's was tightly tethered. Every little part of her was curated for the critical gaze, from her painted toenails to her pencilled brows, from her button-front dress and Chanel belt to her trim figure. This was the same sister who Saskia had speared mud crabs with, who'd pulled bream from the ocean and cooked it an hour later, picking white flakes of flesh with her fingers, her tanned face showing the same smile of delight as her siblings' as she sucked juices from the bones and skin. How was it that one childhood could result in such disparate adults?

Saskia's throat was a knot and her eyes were suddenly hot. She turned away, rustled in her handbag for nothing at all, fighting to regain composure.

There was a knock at the front door.

'Yoo-hoo!' Colleen Brummage walked in without waiting for a reply, and one by one the family accepted her perfumed hugs and coos of sympathy, her own eyes glistening with tears. Kiki and Colleen's friendship had been a tour de force, but they weren't a pair you ever would have picked. Kiki's well-worn sandals, boho dresses and one-day-at-a-time approach to life had been met with Colleen's designer sunglasses, clip-clopping heels and tennis club membership.

'She was meant to outlive us all! What a shock, what a shock,' Colleen repeated, as she had done a week earlier at the funeral, when she'd taken Saskia aside and explained that she was the nominated executor of Kiki's will, and could she arrange for the family to meet for its reading? Saskia smiled

tiredly. Managing other people's grief was perhaps the most gruelling part of losing her mother, apart from the loss itself. She had no capacity for tending to their pain.

'Right, then.' Colleen settled into the armchair Saskia had offered. 'Let's hop to it. I know this might seem strange, a bit Agatha Christie, to read out the will together, but it gets everything out in the open while bringing you all together in a way that honours your dear mother.' She dabbed a tissue under her eyes to collect any runaway mascara and lifted a pair of glasses from her handbag, propping their bright pink frames on the edge of her nose. 'This is the last will of Greta "Kiki" Berry, nee De Winter . . .'

'De Winter?' Saskia interrupted. 'I always thought Mum's maiden name was just plain Winter.' She looked to Lennon and Violet.

'Yeah, me too, not that it would've been mentioned more than half a dozen times in our childhood,' Lennon said.

'Well, it clearly says De Winter here,' Colleen said. 'A minor detail, I'm sure. Many migrant families altered their surnames for ease of pronunciation, so no doubt that's what has happened here.' She smiled, satisfied with her own explanation, before continuing to read aloud.

Saskia watched Colleen's lips moving over the details of the will, which she held aloft; the breeze curled around the paper, gently shaking it so it seemed as if Colleen had the tremors. Her lips were coloured plum, the lipstick applied with precision and matched to her floral blazer. They moved as if in slow motion, meeting and parting, meeting and parting. The words were a long, abrasive thing, like the zipper on a body bag. All Saskia

could hear was the scratch of it, even as she tried to listen to the details. She floated on the undulations of Colleen's voice like a wave she was riding into shore. A titter of forced laughter made Saskia flinch, suddenly present. Colleen peered at her over her glasses for a moment, before continuing.

'I give the boat and ukulele collection to Lennon.'

They were in age order, Saskia realised as Colleen marched on with the reading. Youngest to oldest, meaning she would be last. No more than eighteen months between each of their births – how her mother had managed it, Saskia couldn't comprehend. Bear was a hands-on father ahead of his time, of course, and Saskia had often been described as Kiki's 2IC. But Kiki had a stillness of spirit that had enabled her to face each day as it came, without stress, with grace and certainty that things would be okay.

'I give the pearls and the Pro Hart to Violet.'

That was no shock. Violet practically purred with delight, nodding so that the hot-iron waves of her bob shimmied.

'Thank you, Colleen.' She clasped her manicured hands. 'Kiki said as much to me quite recently in fact.'

'And finally,' Colleen continued, ignoring Violet and licking a finger to turn the page, 'I give the caravan to Saskia.'

Silence.

'The van?' It was Lennon, scratching at his crop of scruffy hair. 'Are you sure that's right, Colleen?'

Colleen just arched her brows.

'But you have that fancy apartment without any parking,' Violet hissed. 'When will you use it, Sass? You never take holidays.'

The room held its breath and Saskia felt three pairs of eyes levelled at her. She shrugged and smiled weakly.

‘Well, I don’t know why she would’ve left the caravan to me,’ Saskia said. Her head swarmed with questions as she scrambled to recall a time, any time at all, when Kiki might have hinted at this . . . this gift? Violet was completely on point. The caravan didn’t fit. Yet for some reason Saskia felt blighted by that truth coming from her sister’s mouth.

‘Let me know if you need any work done on it, sis,’ Lennon offered with a wink. ‘You could always flip it. Or we could team up as a travelling ukulele troupe!’ His blue-grey eyes sparkled at her, a lifeline. It worked. Colleen and Saskia erupted in laughter and Lennon told them about the time Kiki had taken him for a weekend away in the caravan, just the two of them and her complete collection of twenty-four ukuleles. He was six, and he’d learnt his first chords that Saturday, awakening a passion for music that he still tinkered with in his spare time.

The breeze had settled to a whisper and the room was warm with their memories. It was a spacious time, and Saskia could imagine Bear folded into the armchair where Colleen now sat, Kiki perched on his knee. They’d always seemed to be linked, and the years since Bear’s death had been hard, seeing Kiki without him, knowing she must feel rudderless. Saskia stood up and walked to the window, stretching her neck, her back, stretching the questions playing on repeat in her head and agitating every fibre of her: *Why, Mum? Why give me your caravan?* There must be a reason. Kiki hadn’t been one to make mindless decisions, especially not where her children were concerned. Saskia’s brain whirred.

‘You all know about my pearls,’ Violet continued. Kiki and Bear had done a season with the Willie Creek Pearl Farm before they were married, harvesting oysters, and she’d asked to be paid in pearls so she had something special to wear down the aisle. Violet had always sought them out as a child and danced with them at her young, milky throat, waving scarves and swirling skirts in the sunshine drenching Kiki and Bear’s bedroom.

‘It makes sense,’ Saskia said from where she stood at the window. ‘Your pearls and the painting, Violet, your ukuleles and the boat, Lennon. But the caravan? Why on earth would she give that thing to me?’

‘She always did have a good sense of humour,’ Lennon laughed.

Is that what the caravan is? Saskia wondered. A final joke at my expense?

Colleen read the rest of the will without interruption before handing them each a copy.

‘I have selected your inheritance with great deliberation, and I am confident that you will each know intrinsically why I chose you as the recipient of your particular gift, which is why I have not elaborated here. All other belongings, including the house (because I know none of you are the least bit interested!), should be sold and the proceeds split evenly between you.

‘There. That’s it. But most importantly, my precious tribe, be free. Don’t let any material thing or any career or any circumstance deprive you of the freedom that is your birthright. My love for you is already in your veins: you carry it, you always have. Be love itself. And still your soul in its presence.’

WHERE THE BIRDS CALL HER NAME

The room fell back into silence as Saskia, Violet and Lennon held the paper in their hands. It was a paltry exchange for their mother.

‘Now is the time to make it known if you have any disagreement with your mother’s final wishes,’ Colleen said, clasping her hands in her lap. Saskia kept her eyes lowered, waiting for an objection to the obvious blunder in Kiki’s will. She was prepared to hand the caravan over to keep peace. She and Dane certainly didn’t need it, nor the money if they were to sell it. But Colleen’s words remained unchallenged as she tucked the papers and glasses into her patent leather handbag and rose to leave.

‘Your mother would be so proud of you,’ she said as she crossed the room. ‘She was right – her love is in your veins.’