

Chapter 2

The week had passed without incident and now it was time to visit Dad for our lunch. I was excited and looking forward to it. My mother had died when I was a child and that was a tragic blow to my life. My mother Kaleen had died of cancer and I was only a young child at the time. It was certainly an interesting childhood, firstly with my uncle becoming estranged when I was 5, and then my mother dying when I was around 7. My Dad was my world. As a child there was just me, my brother and dad and that suited me just fine. I got used to that living arrangement and didn't know any different.

While I lived in an apartment in Caloundra, my father lived in a suburb of Brisbane in a Queenslander inspired home. His house, our family home, had a great big veranda, three bedrooms, a lounge room, bathroom and kitchen. I remember inviting my friends over to play when I was a child and we would hide in all the nooks and crannies. The design of the house was so good there was a cool breeze in summer and no need for air conditioning.

I got ready and drove down to his house and parked my car outside. I was excited to see my dad Marcus for the first time in ages. We were both so busy with our lives and didn't visit each other as much as we used to. I walked up to the front door to be greeted by Dad. I gave him a hug as I entered the house and he went back outside to tend to the BBQ. I could see Sam, Curtis's dog in the distance. Alex was already there in the lounge room with a drink in her hand chatting to my brother with a massive smile on her face. My thoughts immediately shifted to my uncles' box of belongings. Curtis and Alex were both standing there near the box in the lounge room.

"Cottony," cried Alex with sheer excitement. "This box, wow, someone obviously had such an imagination."

"Imagination? What's in it?" I asked curious at the box's contents.

'Look, there are two books and a map, plus a range of other stuff that were apparently your uncles including a photo album," replied Alex bouncing full of energy. I bent over the box that Curtis and Alex were excited about and picked up a book. On the front of the book was written in the English alphabet the word '*Seallinwold*' and my mind was ticking a hundred miles an hour wondering what that meant. Was it a name of a place?

“Wow, what do you make of this?” I said pointing towards the book in my hand. “Do we have any theories?”

‘Theories?’ asked Curtis. “Cottony I have more than theories!”

‘More than theories?’ What the hell was my brother on about more than theories!

“Open the book,” said my brother Curtis sounding excited. I did and inside the book on the first page was a map and then pages and pages of writing. The writing was certainly not in English or written in any language I had seen before. I was in shock. The letters were not written in a language I understood and yet the name ‘Seallinwold’ was pronounceable. It was a confusion for me. Ok, I thought to myself, we have a book with a title and then inside the book there were pages and pages of text in an unknown language. Had this book been created by someone with a vivid imagination? I was shocked by the content of the book. How was it possible that something like this would be written? I flipped through the pages in my hands and just stared at it.

“Wow,” I finally got the courage to say softly as I flipped through the mysterious book in my hot little hands. “What is your theory?” I asked Curtis.

“Well, I think before I disclose any theories to you, I should let you know we have a cousin,” said Curtis rather excited.

“A cousin?” I was struggling to take it all in and absorb what he was saying.

“Yes, our uncle Frank had a son named Dave. He is 16 now and well I contacted him.....”

“Why didn’t you tell me that on the phone the other week?” I asked a little annoyed at not knowing the full story or what was happening. I felt I knew less than everyone else.

“Because I wanted it to be your surprise,” replied Curtis as if omitting information would have ever been any sort of surprise.

“Ok so let me try to catch up a little. We have a cousin named Dave and we have a box of books and other stuff that our uncle gave us?” That was my brief and very limited understanding about what was going on. In other words, I knew little.

‘That’s about right, but.....’ Curtis trailed off. I hadn’t even had a chance to put my bag down or say hello to dad properly before I was being drawn into this mystery and the content of my uncle’s box.

“Ok, do we get to meet our cousin then?” I asked, and I turned to Alex for some encouragement. Even she seemed to know more about what was going on than I did and yet I invited her over.

“Yes, we do! That reminds me. We are going to meet him tomorrow. I have arranged for us to go and have lunch with him. He lives in Nundah and agreed to meet us,” said Curtis.

“Wonderful. Ok, so the book then? What is your theory?” I asked.

“The theory I have is the book is about a place called Seallinwold, but it is not known. It is something our uncle was investigating,” replied Curtis.

“So, you think Seallinwold is really a place? What about you Alex?” I wanted an archaeologist’s theory too.

“I think it could be a place,” replied Alex, “but I want to take a closer look at this second book.”

“Another book?” I asked just staring at the second book in Alex’s hand. I was shocked with the book I was holding and knowing there was yet another one!

“Yep, this book is also written in another language the same one as the book you are holding in your hands,” said Alex.

“I see. Ok,” I was still confused.

“Basically, the theory is, we have these two books and Seallinwold is a place and your uncle knew where it was located and had started deciphering the books and their mysterious language,” replied Alex. “Your cousin Dave has some answers apparently...’

“Ah I see so we will find out more tomorrow?” I was a little wiser now, but still so confused. How was it possible that a mysterious place unknown to anyone would exist? Where would it exist? How would it exist? Is it a name for another place that exists in our known world? See I had many ideas now running through my mind.

‘Yes. See this map,” said Curtis pointing to the map in his hands. “This is a map of Seallinwold and we or rather our cousin, said he knows where it is and can read some of the text in these books.” I was shocked that we even had a cousin and he was only young and now he could read foreign texts in an unknown language? It was a shock to my system. As of a week ago I had not known our uncle all too well and now..... now here we had a box of his weird stuff full of mysteries and links to far distant and unknown places.

“I am going to borrow this book for a week Cottony and tell you what I find. Can you let me know what your cousin says?” asked Alex.

“Yes of course,” I had no idea what else to say. After all I had invited Alex over to investigate the books, didn’t I? I just wasn’t expecting to turn up at Dad’s and find the two of them so absorbed into the box of interesting finds. In fact, I never expected that there was even a box in the first place. When people tell you things over a phone that are hard to believe, often its much easier to pretend the phone call never happened.

‘All this hunting through lost and mysterious books has made me hungry,” I said getting up and putting the ‘Seallinwold’ book back into the box. I got up to go and find Dad. I had not even had the chance to go and say hello to him properly since arriving. All my thoughts were preoccupied with those books!

I found dad outside in front of the BBQ cooking our lunch. He looked sullen and that his mind was off distant in thought as he cooked the sausages.

“Dad,” I said waving at him while he cooked. “How are you?” I gave him a hug. He was wearing an apron while cooking and a pair of jeans and a check shirt.

“I am great. Look the sausages are nearly cooked. Are you hungry?” he asked me. My Dad Marcus was such a considerate man. I was starving.

“Yes starving,” I replied. I was salivating at the thought of just eating those sausages. “I have been inside looking through our uncles’ stuff.”

“Ah I gathered that’s where you were. Those two have been siting there looking through those books and stuff since Alex arrived about an hour ago,” said Dad.

‘What? Alex arrived an hour ago?’ I was in shock.

“Yes, she was a little early and wanted to see what all the fuss was about with uncle Frank and his box!”

“Ah and now she is going to borrow on of those books.” I told Dad not really thinking about what he was even saying. “How come our uncle Frank wasn’t talking to us?” I asked dad the question as he was flipping over sausages preparing to put them on a plate to serve.

‘Well it’s a little complicated Cottony. Um.... I had a falling out with him when you were a child. I don’t expect you to understand, but he did something unforgivable.’

“Unforgivable?” I asked.

‘Yes, he cheated on me with your mum.’ That came as a complete surprise to me. “Before your mother got sick the two of them were having a thing” he said putting the sausages on the plate for us to eat.

“A thing? How did you know?” I was so curious now and in complete shock.

‘Well I caught them together one day and I was so mad. Of course, I blamed your uncle not your mum. He knew what he was doing was wrong and yet he kept seducing her. I didn’t want to blame your mum. I still loved her.’ I would have been fuming if I was Dad I thought to myself. I would have wanted to do something. I am not sure if I would have forgiven mum either. Our mother Kaleen, as far as I remember, was such a gentle, kind, quiet woman certainly not the type who you would expect to cheat in any relationship. But then what was I to know? I was a child at the time. I was just in complete shock at that announcement. I was expecting Dad to say our uncle Frank had did something else to upset him, not that he had an affair with my mum! What else could I say? What could I do? I was just standing there in shock at the openness my Dad just came out and told me that news!

“So, you just had nothing to do with him after that?” I asked Dad.

‘Yeap. I spoke to him about it and then he left, and we had no contact. I think he felt a little guilt about it, but I can not say so for sure.’ Dad sounded so calm about it. Even after all these years I think if it was me, I would still be a little angry. “I think the guilt also played on your mother and that gave her cancer. The medical profession would certainly disagree with me I am sure, but that’s my theory.”

“Well there might be something in your ideas Dad,” I said giving him my assurances. At the rip old age of 23 I had never had anyone cheat on me and didn’t feel equipped to relate to how he must have felt at the time. I picked up the plate of sausages to carry them inside to the dining table for our lunch feast. “Did you tell Curtis about the affair?”

“No. No. Not until lately. He was only young too Cottony, and I didn’t want him to know. Then when your uncle’s box arrived..... I did hear from your uncle until about two years ago and he was investigating this mystery. He sounded panicked and wanted to just let me know

he was going overseas and might never come back. I thought it was rather odd at the time but said nothing and just wished him well in his endeavours. Then last week Curtis rang telling me of the box.” Dad shrugged as if thinking someone going overseas to explore a mystery was the most normal thing in the whole world.

“Did you have a look at the books and stuff in the box?” I asked Dad as we put the food on the table and got everything ready to sit and eat.

“I had a brief look. Curtis wants to be the chief investigator, so I am letting him!”

“I see. I heard we have a cousin named Dave. Do you know much about him?” I was fishing for more information to no avail.

“Nope. I know he is about 16 or 17. After our falling out your uncle got married to a lady named Lorena or something. I am none the wiser about him apart from that.” Dad just raised his eyebrows and went to usher Curtis and Alex into the dining area for lunch. I was just thinking to myself how knowing all this information made me feel. When I was driving over here, I never suspected for a second my father would reveal so much information to me and yet I needed to know more! I am glad I know what I know now. I feel like it must have been a burden Dad was carrying around with him for many years. I wish I could have been there for him when it all happened. He must have felt so alone. Dad never had that many friends and he never spoke about his problems with anyone. How could he tell anyone? There was only me and Curtis and we were both children. I felt sorry for him and thought he was so brave going through it all. Losing a brother and a wife. I felt angry at my mother even though she is no longer here.

We all sat down and ate our lunch. Dad was great at using the BBQ. Dad was telling us about his day’s at work last week. I talked about my job as a data analyst. My family never really understood my fascination with water, oceans and other things. I was never sure of where my love for those things came from. I just think I developed them.

After lunch I went and took the book on Seallinwold and read through it. Well not literally, rather figuratively. I sat there turning each page imagining what meaning the words conveyed. Alex had left for the day taking the second book with her. Curtis had organised our visit to our cousins for tomorrow. Dad was resting on the lounge reading a book. He had this fascination for action adventure novels and read them religiously, especially on weekends.

I examined the map in the book and tried to see if it looked like any areas of earth or if it looked made up. To my eyes the map in the book looked made up, like someone had drawn it for fun. When you're a child sometimes you make up fictional places and made up lands, maybe that's what happened with this book? Alex didn't know what to think and wanted to investigate some more. I just wanted to know what this book was all about and so did Curtis.

After sitting there flicking through the pages of the mysterious book and staring at the map and staring at the other fold out map that was also in the box, I gave up. I then picked up a photo album that was in the box and started looking at the images in it. I could see a photo of me as a child. A photo of dad and mum and then a photo of my uncle with his wife. His wife looked beautiful, her name was Lorena. I made a mental note to see if I could contact her at a later stage to find out about my uncle and to learn more about the book. I finished flicking through the photos and put the album back. Dad had fallen asleep on the lounge. I decided that was my cue to leave for the day.

I said goodbye to Curtis with the intention of meeting him at our cousins tomorrow. Curtis had given me Dave's address and I was looking forward to our first meeting. My thoughts were on how Dave must be feeling knowing he now had two cousins. I would find out more about Dave tomorrow I thought. I picked up my bag, walked out to my car and drove off back home to rest up for tomorrow.