

Bottled

Memories



By SWITCH senior writers



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Dear reader...

We wish for you to have a speedy recovery.

We hope that even though you sometimes may feel like the world is against you, you are able to keep your shining smile making this world a better place.

Yes there are going to be days where you feel like you want to give up, but keep your head high, keep your smile bright.

You are worth so much more than you think, so much more than you believe.

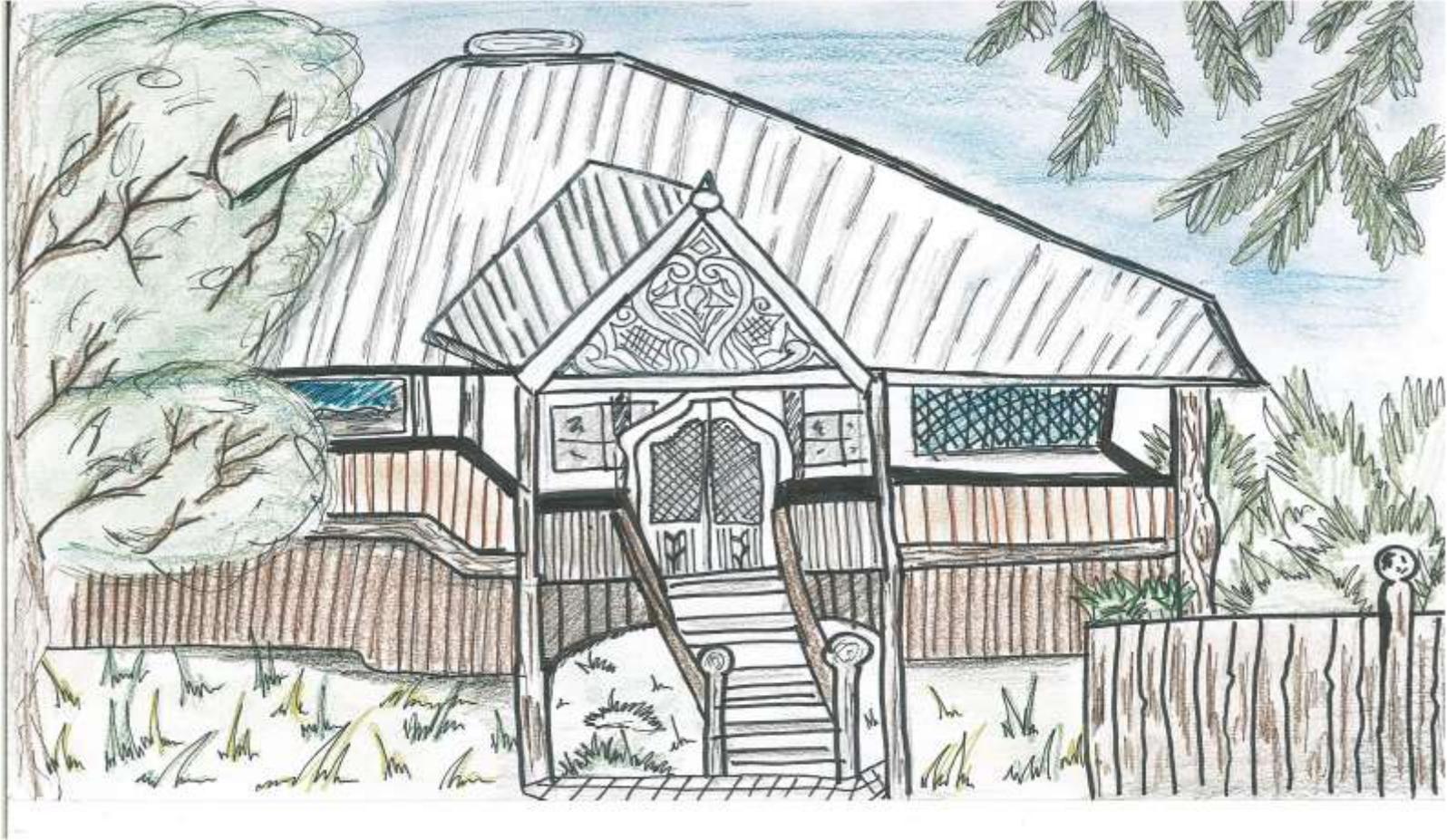
We couldn't possibly understand what you may be thinking, how it would feel, but we know that you can get through this. Your dreams can become a reality, but only if you believe that they can.

A quote we would like to pass on is, "if you're not smiling you're doing it wrong."

We hope you enjoy this book just as much as we have making it.
Get well soon ...

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Chapter 1

The Adventure Begins

It was early Friday morning and Gary, the young successful secretary had just arrived at his Great Aunt Margaret's house in Rockhampton. Stepping out of his red commodore, he immediately felt the quick rise in temperature, which was typical for spring time in Central Queensland. He slowly made his way up the gravel driveway of his aunt's house, taking in the change of the houses' appearance. The old 'Queenslander' style house, had lost majority of its pristine white paint and the grass was in need of a tidy up. It was to be expected though, Margaret was only a few months off seventy-five and needed help doing the smallest things, that's why she needed Gary to come and help her with the move. Walking up the old wooden stairs, he noticed his great aunt sitting on a worn out chair on the veranda, drinking a cup of tea.

"Aunt Margaret!" He yelled, clearly happy to see his relative. "It's been too long! This place sure has changed since I was last here."

"Lary my love! I've missed you dearly." She exclaimed as she placed her steaming tea on the chipped wooden table in front her. She walked over to Gary with a slight limp and held her arms out wide, waiting to embrace him in a long awaited hug. Gary gladly accepted, bending a little to meet the old ladies' short, frail body.

"I've missed you too Great Aunt Margaret, but my name's Gary," he laughed as he left her warm embrace.

She shook her head, "Sorry love, this dementia has been causing me some trouble," she explained, "Would you like some tea? It's **delicious!**"

"I'd love some great aunt! How 'bout we head into the house and get out of this terrible heat?" He asked.

He walked towards the front door and opened it, holding it open for his fragile aunt. As they made their way into the house, they followed the wood-panelled hallway until they reached the kitchen at the far end of the house. Gary sat at the small table in the centre of the kitchen, while his aunt made some more tea.

“So I was thinking,” Gary explained, “if we start in the lounge room and clean off some of the shelves, we could also take down a few of the pictures and other knick-knacks that are around the house. How does that sound?”

Margaret turned towards the fridge and started walking towards it. “That sounds great darl, but what exactly are we cleaning up for?” Margaret questioned, a curious expression evident on her face as she opened the door of the fridge and grabbed the milk.

“Remember, you’re moving to the retirement home in the middle of town. The one just down the road from the shops,” he described, as he took in the surroundings of the familiar kitchen where he spent some of his childhood.

“Oh! That’s right, sorry dear,” she apologised, placing the tea in front of Gary and sitting across from him. The smell of tea lingered through the kitchen, however the smell of musty furniture overpowered the whole house. Gary quickly finished his tea, eager to start the long process of cleaning that was ahead of them.

“Okay, let’s get to it,” he said enthusiastically, as he stood and pushed in his chair. He followed Margaret to the lounge room where the moving boxes were placed against the wall on the far side that Margaret must have previously left there. He grabbed the first box and moved it over to the wooden shelf before he started to carefully place the trinkets in to the box. After he finished, he moved on to the pictures that hung on the wall. Great Aunt Margaret walked over to Gary, and helped place the frames into the box, explaining each one as she went.

“This one was taken when your cousin was only two... or was it four?” She questioned as she tried to explain the old photo of a small boy. “I’m pretty sure he was three,” she mumbled, perplexity etched into her wrinkled face.

“What’s this Margaret?” Gary interrupted, he pointed to a map of Queensland pinned to the wall with multiple areas marked with crosses.

“I’d love to tell you dear, but I honesty can’t remember,” she replied, a glum look on her face. “I have a feeling those areas mean something, but I don’t really know. I’d love to visit them though.”

“Why don’t we?” asked Gary. “I mean, you have a week until you have to be at the home that’s plenty of time to drive up to Mackay and back.”

“Are you sure darl? I don’t want to bother you,” she replied.

“No, it’s fine! It’ll be fun,” he explained. “I haven’t unpacked my clothes so I’m ready. All you need to do is pack some clothes of your own and we can go.”

“I have to take my suitcase filled with some special stuff though. Just in case something happens to the house while we’re gone,” she explained as she pulled out a brown raggedy suitcase. The suitcase had its own personality, old and used like it had experienced many amazing journeys.

Margaret moved as fast as she could into her room and packed some clothes while Gary backed her old, blue Volkswagen beetle out the driveway. They packed everything into the car, drove out the driveway and down the road, ready to embark on one last adventure for Great Aunt Margaret.

Chapter 2

The Flood of Memories

The sun beamed off of the bonnet of Margaret's blue Volkswagen beetle as they drove into Mackay searching to find the reason why Mackay was marked on the map. The map flew in the wind, only to be held in place with Margaret's tight grip.

"The beautiful water," Margaret blurted.

"Water? What do you mean water?" Gary asked, confusion in his tone.

"I remember a body of water, it was crystal clear with the sun brightly glistening off the surface. The blue resembled a radiant summer's sky."

After listening to the description, Gary wondered if she meant the Bluewater Lagoon.

"Are you referring to the Lagoon Great Aunt Margaret?" asked Gary.

"That does sound familiar! Let's go and have a look," replied Margaret.

As they continued their journey, the old Volkswagen creaked as they navigated through the streets. They followed the signs to the famous Bluewater Lagoon. The lush forest grew dark green as they drove deeper into the forest. The smell of fresh rain that had fallen upon the trees blew through the open car windows, creating a sense of peace and serenity.

"Anything Margaret? Remember anything?" Asked Gary.

"That tree." Margaret said as she stared at an ancient eucalyptus tree. "I remember placing a bottle under that tree."

"A tree? That's **nonsense**, why would you put a bottle under a tree?" Gary questioned.

"Not under the tree, hanging in the tree!" explained Margaret.

Gary parked the car, pulling the stiff hand break to prevent the rickety old car from rolling away.

"Gary, please don't leave the suitcase in the car, you know how much it means to me." Great Aunt Margaret begged with a soft voice.

Gary grabbed the suitcase and they both exited the car. The pair started to walk towards the old tree that triggered Great Aunt's memory. Gary followed, wondering if this was a waste of time. Margaret touched the tree and a faint vision of her and a friend entered her mind, but she couldn't quite put her finger on who it was. She looked up and there it was, the bottle swung in the gentle breeze, secured by a strong piece of rope. Great Aunt Margaret grabbed the bottle and pried it out of the knotted rope. Once it was safely in her grasp, she pulled out a photo. It was a picture of Great Aunt Margaret and another girl that Margaret could not recall. The back of the image read "Best friends forever."



“Do you know this girl, great aunt?” asked Gary.

“I suppose so, I mean I know her face but her name and how I may know her, is a blur. We must have been good friends or this wouldn’t be here. It says her name is Tilly, what a beautiful name. That defiantly rings a bell,” Margaret said with a smile on her face.

Gary was surprised at how much his Great Aunt could remember and hoped more memories would come back to help her get over the confusion that surrounded her. Gary opened the suitcase and placed the first bottle inside with a gentle touch. He left the photo and message next to the bottle so they could lay flat and minimise the risk of being damaged. He clipped the suitcase together and stood it up so that it was ready to go, ready to go, he looked for Margaret and found her staring at the sparkling water.

“Is everything okay Margaret?” said Gary.

His great aunt stared into space as memories came flooding back to her. Memories of Tilly and the great times they had in the water together.

“I remember her. I remember Bluewater Lagoon but that’s it.” Margaret spoke, a disappointed look spread across her old face. “I think there might be more hidden bottles,” Margaret said but unsure of her own words.

Gary gave his great aunt a hug and started to head back to the car. They walked along the footpath to the Volkswagen. Gary remembered the suitcase and placed it in the boot carefully. Great Aunt Margaret hopped in to the passenger seat and waited for Garry to start the engine. Margaret looked at the map and noticed that Airlie Beach was marked as the next travel point. Gary decided that they would continue their journey along the outskirts of Queensland to help Great Aunt Margaret regain her memories.

Chapter Three

The Crack in the Tree

The car started to splutter with the lack of fuel. Gary could see the service station in the distance and took the turn off towards it. He took the pump and filled the car up before heading to the counter. Gary grabbed a few snacks and drinks for the road and payed. He stretched out his legs once more before getting back into the tiny blue beetle and heading off towards Airlie Beach.

Gary drove through the rural town glancing at all the shops and people, before setting on a location where he believed the next bottle could be. He pulled up in an empty parking space and looked around at the scenery. He looked to his left and saw Margaret was still asleep. He shook her gently to wake her up.

“Great Aunt Margaret, we’re here.”

She woke up slowly and looked around. “Oh no, how long have I been asleep?” She asked. “Most of the drive, is this the place?”

“Oh yes its beautiful isn’t it?” She replied “We stayed here for days.”

The pair got out of the car and looked around. Gary looked down at the map and pointed in the direction of the bushland.

“This way,” Gary directed his great aunt to the entrance of the bush.

Margaret looked around and took in the beauty of the bush and Gary directed her through the area.



“Are you
know

sure you
where you

are going?" Margaret asked.

"Yeah I think so, I am following a map from like 30 years ago so I am trying my best here." Gary replied with a small laugh.

Margaret smiled and walked alongside him. They continued walking for a few minutes before coming to a fork in the track. A large **cracked** tree stood in the middle of it. The pair in front of the tree and Margaret had a look of realisation on her face.

"I remember this place" Margaret said as she walked towards the tree. She put her hand inside the crack and started to feel around inside. She pulled her hand back out and held up a little bottle with a little piece of paper and a small green clover inside. She walked back to Gary and motioned for him to hold out his hand. When he did she pulled off the cork and tipped the contents into his hand. It showed a small dried up four leaf clover and a small folded piece of paper fell into his hand. Margaret inspected the clover, a ghost of a smile on her face as she remembered putting the bottle into the tree with her friend. Gary unfolded the paper slowly, revealing a small note.

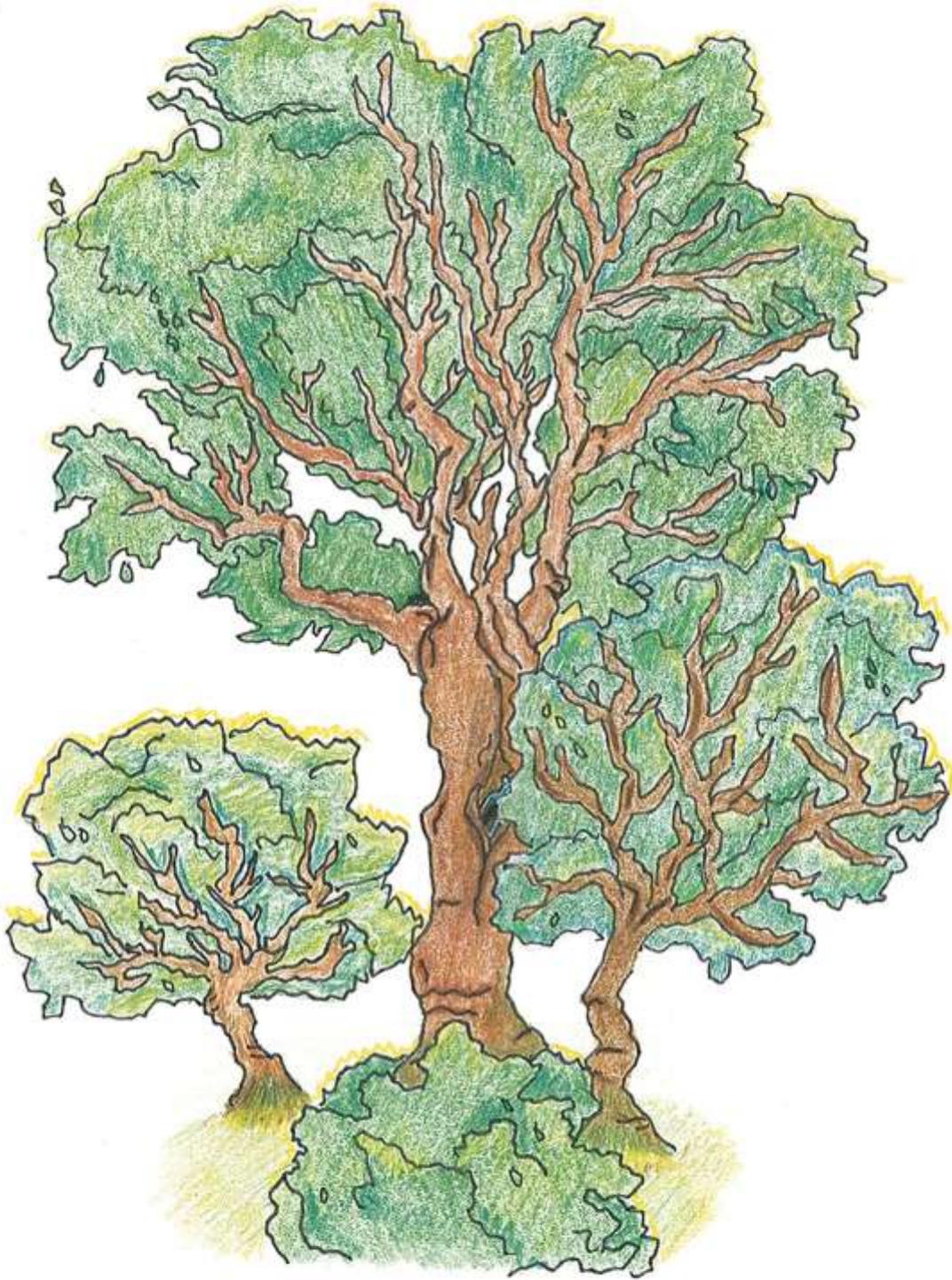
"Is this our next clue?" Gary asked.

"I suppose so," Margret replied.

"Alright, let's go!"

The pair walked back to the car. Margaret spoke passionately about her old adventures as they came back to her memory. When they reached the car Gary opened up the suitcase and placed the new bottle in with the others. He closed it and put it in the backseat. Margaret took one last look at the bush before sitting back in the car

"How about we get some food first?" Gary suggested. He started the car and drove off, looking for a place to eat before their next adventure.



Chapter 4

Time Ticks, Memories fade

“Are you enjoying the trip Margaret?” Gary asked.

“It’s very exciting and I’m just hoping we don’t run into any **danger** at our next destination,” Margaret said.

Gary drove the rundown Volkswagen up the coast towards Ayr, in hopes of finding the next bottle to help Margaret’s memory. The previous message read,

“The times I’ve spent with you will always be cherished.”

“Margaret, what do you make out of this message, what does it mean to you?” asked Gary.

“I don’t quite remember. Can you drive me around when we get to Ayr?” Margaret questioned.

Gary nodded and continued to drive towards Ayr. Margaret and Gary had reached their destination at midday, by this time the sun’s beams were extremely hot. As the pair continued into Ayr, they passed many significant places, but none of them triggered a memory for Margaret. Gary had begun to wonder if they were ever going to find the next bottle. Gary had become restless as they drove through the windy roads. Margaret wound down her window, the scent of tropical flowers filled her nose and left her mesmerised. Margaret began to remember her trip from many years ago, the scent of the flowers reminded her of a landmark she had visited. She read the clue once more.

“I remember! I remember the landmark!” Margaret yelled in excitement.

“The Ayr town clock, it’s in the centre of town,” she exclaimed.

Gary didn’t hesitate and continued their journey to find the message in the bottle. As they drove into town centre the scent of the flowers became stronger and stronger. Gary could see the top of the clock tower from a side street, the excitement of the both of them rushed through their bodies. They reached the small round-a-bout where the town clock was and Gary parked the car. They walked down the path towards the clock tower. Margaret remembered where she left the bottle. She buried it beneath the rose bushes. Gary dug the small glass bottle out of the ground and gave it to Margaret. She held it in her hands carefully. The bottle was dirty and some water had filtered inside. She also noticed a pocket watch inside it.

Margaret and Gary walked back to the car, he popped open the trunk for Margaret to put the bottle inside of the suitcase. Margaret insisted they took a photograph of her and the suitcase in front of the clock tower. Gary pulled out his phone and took a picture, Margaret looked at the photo. “That’s a wonderful photo Gary. I can’t thank you enough for this” Margaret gushed. They walked back



towards the car smiling and laughing at the story Margaret told him. The both jumped back in the car and looked at the map.

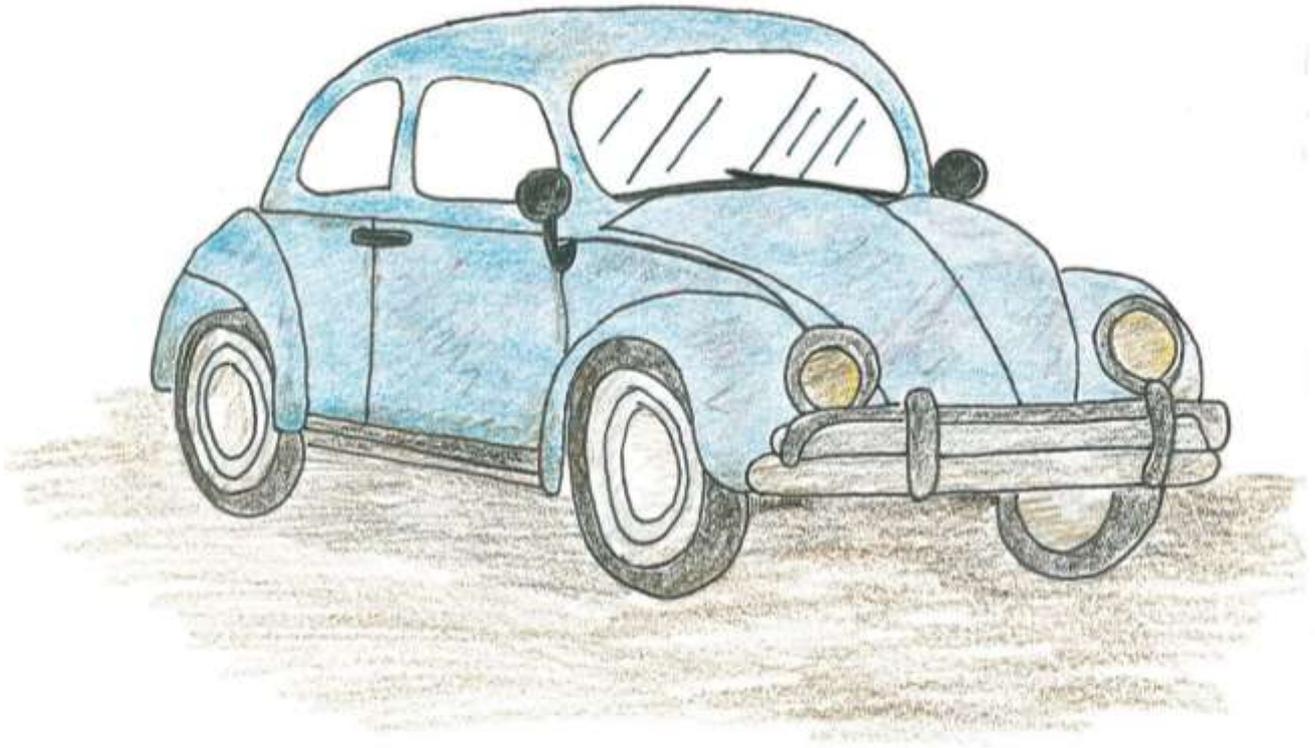
“Next stop, Townsville!” Gary announced.

Margaret laughed and adjusted her seat. Gary drove out of the small country town and followed the windy back streets back to the main highway. The sunlight shone upon the purple mountains in the distance and there was not a cloud in the sky. Margaret gazed out of her window and watched the kangaroo’s journey through the paddock. Margaret thought about all of her memories she had found, from their travels she looked back at the seat behind her in search of her suitcase.

“Gary stop the car! My suitcase is gone!” Margaret shouted.

Gary pulled over on the side of the road and jumped out. He opened the trunk and couldn’t find it. “Where could it be?” asked Margaret.

“We might have left it in Ayr at the town clock” Gary replied.



Chapter 5 Re-united

Gary and Margaret were in the Volkswagen beetle, driving back towards Ayr. Margaret sat anxiously watching the country scenery fly past.

“You should have picked up the suitcase” Margaret exclaimed for the thousandth time.

Gary rolled his eyes at his great aunt again.

“I thought you had it, Margaret,” Gary said trying to make up for forgetting the suitcase with all the bottles in it.

“Fine, but it better still be there,” was Margaret’s response.

They made it more than halfway back to Ayr when the car hit a pot hole and they had to pull over onto the side of the road.

“What’s going on Gary?” Margaret asked, in a stressed voice.

“I think it’s a flat tire,” he said as he hopped out of the car to take a look. He came back a moment later and shook his head in annoyance.

“It’s a flat tire, at the back of the car, but I have a spare tire in the back so I just have to replace it,” he said feeling stressed but worried about his great aunt.

“Stay here,” he added.

While Gary was working on the tire, an old orange Chevy, with its paint peeling off, pulled up on the other side of the road. An elderly woman stepped out of her car and went over to Gary.

“Hey, do you guys need some help?” she said in a friendly tone. Gary looked up and was startled.

“You’re the lady from that picture!” he said amazed.

“Margaret, Margaret come out here!” he yelled towards the front of the car.

There was some grumbling that came from the car, but the door opened, eventually. While Margaret was grumbling, Gary introduced himself as Margaret's great nephew. Margaret started speaking.

"Why, what do you need me for? I don't know how to change a tire if that's why you got me out here," she said annoyed. Margaret went to Gary and saw the woman.

"Hi, Margaret, wow it's been so long, and of course we meet in the middle of no-where," the elderly woman said to Margaret. Margaret looked confused, searching the familiarity she recognised in the face.

"I'm sorry, I don't remember you," Marg said, her eyes looking over the woman.

"Well it has been thirty years, Marg," the woman said jokingly. Margaret was shaking her head.

"I really don't remember you," she said earnestly. The woman looked dumfounded.

"It's Tilly, Margaret, I'm Tilly," she said desperately, hoping that saying her name would make Margaret remember.

"Tilly? Tilly? Where do I know that from? Gary?" Margaret said because she was confused. Gary had a really big grin on his face.

"It's the woman from the picture, Marg, The one that we got from the bottle in Mackay," he said joyfully. Margaret looked confused.

"What picture?" Margaret said shaking her head. Tilly looked from Margaret to Gary and then back to Margaret.

"Bottle? Why are you collecti..." Realization crossed Tilly's face.

"You're collecting all the bottles that we put around Queensland Marg?" Tilly asked bewildered.

"I guess that's what we are doing," Margaret asked flustered.

"What happened Margaret, why can't you remember me or anything?" Tilly asked.

"I have...." Margaret started but looks at Gary to continue.

"Dementia, she has dementia," Gary finished for Margaret. Tilly looked taken aback and she looked at Margaret with new determination.

"Well I guess you will need something like an old brown suitcase and memory bottles in it, won't you?" Tilly said glancing towards her car. Margaret looked really excited and ran to look in the trunk and there it was, the suitcase that Gary and Margaret had left in Ayr.

Gary only took a couple minutes changing the tire and when he came back, you could see that his shirt was dirty from changing the tire.

"There, that should do it," he said as he hopped back into the car.

"So we are on our way," Tilly said exited from her car.

"And let's hope we don't get another flat tire because I only had one spare," Gary laughed.

They headed towards Townsville to collect the last bottle from Castle Hill, the three of them finishing the adventure together. They pulled up to the hill and looked up the mountain. Margaret turned to Tilly.

"Where did we put the bottle?" Margaret asked. Tilly looked around and her face suddenly lit up.

"We put it under a sign at the start of the path," Tilly exclaimed, excited.

They began to walk towards the sign and when they got there, they started looking around for loose dirt or stones for where they may have hidden the bottle.

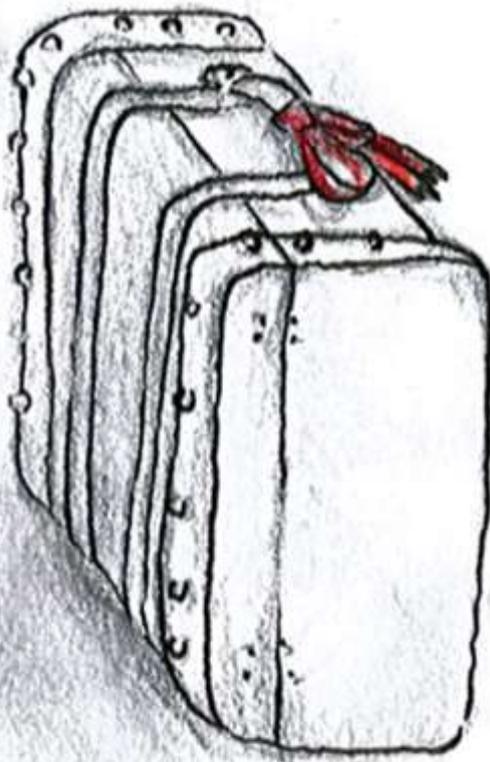
“I found something” Margaret yelled. “Gary, come help me move this properly,” Gary ran to Margaret and lifted the piece of concrete and underneath was a bottle with a message. “Open it, open it!” Tilly squealed. Margaret took off the lid, pulled out the piece of paper within and began to read.

“A strong friendship will last separation and distance—
Tilly and Margaret— friends for life”

The two old friends looked out from the mountain over the big country town, memories flooding back to both of them.

“We had some good adventures didn’t we Tilly? I can remember” sighed Margaret.

“They don’t need to end, we can continue the adventure,” Tilly said softly, the sun fading in the sky marking the end of the day.



Epilogue

One Month Later

Margaret and Tilly rocked gently on their chairs in the common room of the retirement home. Together they spoke of the freedom and adventures they experienced together. The cold, air conditioned breeze billowed around them, chilling the small group of retirees that had gathered to listen to the pairs stories.

“Are you ready to hear about the time my great nephew took me on an adventure?”

The group made no effort to decline Margaret’s readiness to describe their adventure, they simply relished in the excitement they felt as she told them about her long distance travels across Australia. Tilly rocked back on her chair, her sunken eyes were closed as she thought back to her travels with her best friend. A small, thoughtful smile appeared on Tilly’s face, the wrinkles that were aged into her skin pulled, defining them more.

“When my great nephew Gary rocked up to my door, I just knew that it was a ripe opportunity to get out on another adventure. This time to save my sanity.” Margaret cackled with laughter as she remembered her dementia scare.

As she lost her mind, she believed that there would be no way to save it, but yet again Tilly saved her. The wooden rocking chair that Margaret sat on squeaked obnoxiously as she rocked back and forth.

“Marg, you’re such a jokester, even when we were young you’d pull jokes on everyone. Then you’d blame it on me!”

The pair of old friends had enlisted into the retirement home together a month ago. Margaret smiled sheepishly, a faint blush appeared on her tough, aged skin and the pair chuckled softly. Tilly and Margret both took a moment of silence, reminiscing the good old days, the old sounds heard were the odd cough and occasional sneeze and the constant whirr of the air conditioner.

“Ah yes, those were the days. Where was it we headed first? McDonalds?” Tilly laughed wholeheartedly, she clutched her stomach as she laughed.

“You were always the forgetful one. We first went to Mackay. Is that ringing any bells Marg?” Tilly mocked, holding her dear friends hand as she thought. A look of realisation crossed Margaret’s face.

“Ah yes,” Margret laughed at her own forgetfulness, “I’d probably lose my head if it wasn’t screwed on properly. What would I do without you Tilly?” The group stirred, each laughing at their own intensity before they broke out into spurts of coughing.

The care takers at the centre stood around the room, smiling at the pair of best friends as they entertained the group.

“Anyway, we arrived in Mackay and I immediately remembered that I had been there before. So I directed Gary to Blue Water Lagoon.” Margaret boasted, certainty and confidence oozing from her body.

Tilly gently squeezed her friends' hand, catching Margret in her lie.

"Oh don't talk nonsense Marg, you had no clue what was going on." Margret smile sheepishly, her white dentures appearing from under her lips.

"I could never lie to you Tilly. Alas, we found the mystery bottle eventually. It was filled with our treasures from the time that we went to Blue Water Lagoon." Tilly sipped her lukewarm tea slowly, the delicious tasting Lipton brand tingling her tastebuds as her friend continued the story.

"After seeing how good looking we were in our snapshot, we found another clue to where the next bottle would be at the base of the bottle." Tilly placed her heated glass down on the wooden table next to them and rocked back slowly.

"Our next clue was the stub of a ticket to get to Airlie Beach. So that's where my nephew and I set off to next." Margret rocked on her chair again, the creaking cracked the sudden silence that enveloped the old group.

Tilly grimaced as she remembered the first time they went on the tram.

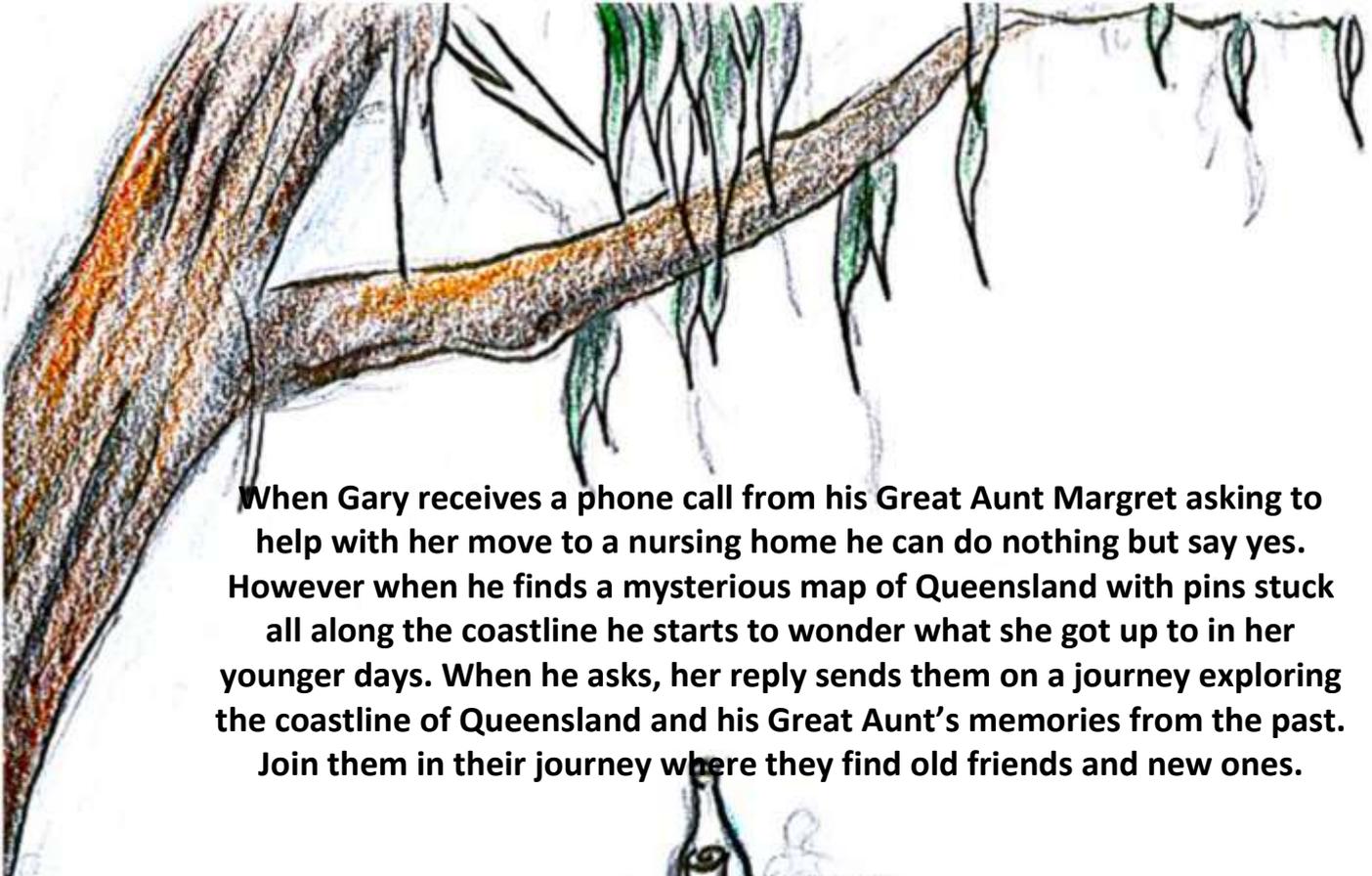
"Gosh Marg, I can't believe I forgot about that rickety little tram." Tilly shut her eyes and remembered the feeling of her body shaking with every turn on that tram.

"That thing was dangerous, right Marg?" Tilly turned to look at her friend, only to find that she wasn't listening.

Instead, Margret **hums** the iconic song of the girls' trip back in 1962. Tilly grinned and began to hum along with her friend. "I can't get no," Margret sang, Tilly quickly joining in with her.

"Satisfaction!" The pair sang happily, breaking out into a laughter that echoed around the building.

These friends would stay together until the end.



When Gary receives a phone call from his Great Aunt Margret asking to help with her move to a nursing home he can do nothing but say yes. However when he finds a mysterious map of Queensland with pins stuck all along the coastline he starts to wonder what she got up to in her younger days. When he asks, her reply sends them on a journey exploring the coastline of Queensland and his Great Aunt's memories from the past. Join them in their journey where they find old friends and new ones.



This book is recommended for ages 10-16