

And some goodies for you—some free pages from the book to introduce *The Atlantis Stone*:

The Atlantis Stone

From chapter 1...

The doorknob turned very slowly, then stopped...and twisted back again.

Benjamin watched it in the darkness. His skin prickled as the familiar fear washed over him. He held his breath and waited. He must not—dare not move. His body screamed in protest and begged him to breathe. He allowed himself a shallow pant; it sounded like a sob. This couldn't be happening! The nightmare was being played out again. He'd sobbed in terror many times as a child...watching the door handle turn.

It turned again, testing. Benjamin expected to hear the labored breath and the drag of the crippled leg.

But there was only silence.

He waited. Moonlight streamed through the windowpanes of his workshop, highlighting the last of the wood dust that was still trying to settle. Everything was still—almost. With his cheek pressed against the splintered wooden floor, Benjamin watched the shadow of two feet through the crack under the door.

He felt trapped inside his canvas swag, the bushman's sleeping bag that he'd rolled out on the workshop floor. Only a moment ago he'd been snuggled down, hiding in sleep from the chilly night air.

Benjamin drew his arms up and placed his hands on the floor, bracing himself to flee or fight. Which?

He glanced across the darkened room. His half-inch skew chisel was made of Böhler S700 high-speed steel. Its edge could shave the hairs off his arms; its long blade would be deadly. But it was well out of reach, nested neatly in the rack above the wood lathe on the other side of the workshop.

The shadows under the door disappeared.

There was silence.

A minute passed.

Then another. An eternity.

Suddenly, there was a crash of splintering glass. Benjamin ducked instinctively. Something large fell through the skylight above him. It ripped off the old sheet that he had tacked over part of the skylight and smashed to the floor beside him.

Shards of glass fell everywhere. Then all was still.

Benjamin removed his hands from his face. It took a moment for him to focus...and to realize that he was staring at the ruined remains of a human being. A corner of the sheet had tried to fold itself over the body like a shroud. It failed to cover an out flung arm. A pistol had spun away and slid across the floor. Moonlight gleamed on the dull metal of its silencer as it rested against the leg of Benjamin's workbench.

...And here's another snippet that introduces the heroine

From chapter 2...

Felicity Anderson looked at the devastation around her and tried to fight down a wave of despair. The 'house' she had purchased was little more than a shed made of ugly cement blocks and a corrugated iron roof. However, its location meant that it had been horrendously expensive to buy. It stood just one street back from the Moyne River, which was very upmarket. The river was edged with modern luxury houses, pontoons, and expensive boats

owned by rich retirees from Melbourne. The rest of Port Fairy was very different; it was comprised largely of old houses built either of dark volcanic stone or weatherboard. Its gentle streets and cafés whispered of an age when time was kinder to people. The tourists loved it.

Felicity, or Flick as she was usually called, ached for that kindness. She needed it desperately.

She leaned on the shovel and stared at the pile of building debris in the middle of the shed. Ruined...like her marriage. She had invested her inheritance and her heart in a marriage and a townhouse in North Melbourne. The house had been a futuristic thing, minimalistic and clever but emotionally cold. He blamed her for the unreasonable demands of her job. She blamed him for having an affair.

The separation had been acrimonious. He was a lawyer, and she hadn't fared well in the divorce settlement. She had run away to lick her wounds, fleeing her job and her marriage to the country with just enough to buy an ugly post-war garage in Port Fairy. The garage had once been used as a car repair business—until it was trumped by the large steel and glass dealerships in the nearby town of Warrnambool.

Could this ugly shed ever be transformed into a place where Felicity could live and chase her dream of being a writer?

She was currently staying in the back room of her brother's home. He was one of the doctors in Port Fairy. His wife was pregnant again, so the arrangement couldn't be long term. Nonetheless, she was grateful to have had a place to hide for the last six months. Staying with her brother certainly had its perks. When he felt the need to flee the demands of his career, he took himself off with one or two friends in his twin-hulled Shark Cat and went scuba diving. It was a passion Felicity shared, and she often went with them.

She checked the weather forecast again with the app on her smart phone. The conditions at Thunder Point would be perfect today. It was a rare occurrence. Swells from the Southern Ocean usually threw themselves against the rugged cliff-line west of Warrnambool, causing the sea in the tiny coves to boil with deadly fury. Today, however, all would be calm, and she could continue to test out a theory, a theory she was not yet prepared to share with anybody. She would explore it alone.

But first, there was work to be done. She kicked at the broken pieces of plasterboard and metal off-cuts on the floor, sighed, and began carrying them to the trailer that was parked outside. She wanted the debris cleared away before the tradesmen came next morning to install the window frames, complete with glass. By tomorrow evening, the space where the old garage doors had once been would be filled with a multi-paned, old-fashioned shop window she had bought from a salvage yard. The result would be pretty.

It would look a whole lot prettier, Felicity conceded, if she could afford to put a bull-nosed veranda on the front and clad the cement brick walls with weatherboard. And it would take a whole lot more work to make it livable inside. Whilst the roof space had been converted into a generous living area lit by loft windows, there was still a great deal to be done. Not even the second fixings had been completed. Her house was nothing more, she decided, than a middle-aged tart with half her makeup on. There was no money left to finish it. Her ex had delivered a last parting gift of venom: he had maxed out the credit card they'd had in shared names. A letter from the bank demanding that she pay half of the outstanding amount lay crumpled in her pocket. It would take all that she had left. The implications were appalling. Moyne Shire Council had been very specific regarding the deadline for completion of her rebuilding project. She would have to sell if she couldn't meet that condition. Her dream—everything—would be lost.

The frame of the old shop window, due to be installed the next day, leaned against the inside wall. Felicity's reflection stared back from it. The frames made her look as if she'd been crossed out—discarded, canceled. Was she really that insignificant? She examined her reflected image. She'd been told too often by her city friends that she was beautiful to hold to any false humility that she was not. But her good looks were definitely under siege by a dark

smudge of building dust across her cheek, her gray pallor, and the grim set of her mouth. She had high cheekbones and dark brown eyes, the corners of which hinted at something oriental.

Felicity's black hair was tied back into a long ponytail, its volume at odds with her petite frame.

She moved her image to the next pane of glass. No improvement. There were four rows of five panes; she'd counted them. She resisted the urge to check herself in all of them. Instead, she leaned forward, rested her forehead on the old painted wood, and began to cry.

Felicity never cried for long. There was a little voice inside her that made a habit of mocking her weakness. It was the tyrant that urged control. *Always be in control. Always be precise. Always be right.* Her father had insisted on it when she was a child. He'd died five years ago of a heart attack. Her Italian mother had died earlier in childbirth—at Felicity's birth. She'd been born in the Solomon Islands where her father was a doctor. He'd worked with *Médecins Sans Frontières* and, at that time, still believed he could save the world.

"It looks as if you could use a coffee."

Felicity was appalled to be caught crying. She wiped a hand over her face and turned around. A woman with untidy red hair piled on top of her head stood beside the tailgate of the trailer. She was dressed in a tie-dyed skirt, a gypsy-style waistcoat, and was wearing a necklace of gum-nuts, seashells and beads.

...And, finally, here's another snippet that introduces the mysterious Marjorie.

From chapter 3...

Marjorie Eddington never intended to be a spy—and didn't consider herself to be one. Her passion was anthropology, not national security. She sighed. Occasionally, life conspired to take her down paths she would never have chosen.

She sat alone at the old wooden table she had requisitioned as a desk. Her secretary and friend, Phoebe, was preparing a night-time drink for them both in the kitchen. Beside her, a standard lamp threw shadows against the wall of the Victorian room. It reeked of history, and she was glad she had booked the beautiful old holiday house.

Only three objects sat on the table. The first was a communiqué from Thames House, London, which gave details of a murder. The second was a letter from her doctor, confirming that her cancer was inoperable. The third was a laptop computer.

Marjorie scrolled down the computer's screen. Despite being in her mid-seventies, she loved computers and had embraced their technology with enthusiasm. Computers had been a godsend for her area of research—genetic anthropology. She twitched her blue silk dressing gown across her lap and retied the chord around her slim frame as she gazed at the screen. She'd seen the data many times. Thousands of genetic codes—row upon row of them—were summarized before her. They detailed the genetic history of indigenous Australians. The legal situation surrounding land rights and deals struck between mining companies and local aboriginal people now required genetic proof of heritage and ties to the land. Just occasionally, the data threw up some surprises.

She was looking at one of those surprises now. In among a long stream of coded letters was a single name: "Benjamin Bidjara." By itself, the name meant nothing but when coupled with the recent murder in London of a senior archivist, it claimed Marjorie's attention. Her interest had also been sharpened by a phone call she'd received in earlier the day.

Marjorie put an elbow on the table and massaged her temple. The pain wasn't too bad tonight. It did, however, remind her that time was at a premium. She reached into a drawer of the desk, took out a pocket Bible, and turned to Lamentations, chapter three:

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...

She tucked the letter from her doctor into the page and closed the book.

Phoebe came in clutching two mugs of hot chocolate. Her stocky, buxom figure was squeezed into a pink flannel dressing gown. Marjorie smiled. To look at Phoebe, few would guess that she had a fearsome intellect and an extraordinary memory. That, and her instinct for caring, made her an ideal companion.

“How long have you been fetching me hot drinks, Phoebe?”

“Thirty-six years and three months.”

“You know, of course, that you should be doing it for a husband, not a dried-up intellectual who is well past her use-by date.”

“We should probably have made plans for that fifty years ago.” Phoebe shrugged. “It never seemed to work out for me...and your fella was thoughtless enough to get himself killed somewhere up north—just a month before your wedding, wasn’t it?” She placed a mug in front of her. “So, how are you feeling tonight?”

“Not too bad.”

“Hmm.” Unbidden, Phoebe reached across and picked up the communiqué from London. “Is this all you have from MI5?”

Marjorie nodded.

“And you can’t get ASIO interested?”

“No. I’ve been trying for a month.”

“But you think it could be important?”

Marjorie shrugged her thin shoulders. “That’s why we’re here.”

“It makes a change for you to be trying to rev up ASIO. You’re normally trying to cool them down.” Phoebe smiled. “It was how we first met, if I remember. I was asked to contact you, tell you enough to alarm you, then ‘afford you all the assistance you needed’ to help us investigate.” She laughed. “It didn’t work. You were never alarmed. But it still took you five years and 250,000 dollars of the department’s money to convince ASIO that there wasn’t a problem.”

“That was...um...”

“The threatened radicalization of the Aboriginal communities in northern Australia. ASIO wanted your singular skills...and your links with the church.”

“Aah, yes. The World Council of Churches were providing funds for the *Gwalwa Daraniki* movement’s 1973 conference. The government was worried.”

“To be fair, they had some justification. The stuff in their *Bunji* newspaper could be pretty inflammatory.”

Marjorie shook her head. “It was only ever going to lead to justice for indigenous Australians. Land rights had to happen.” She folded her hands together and closed her eyes. The issues impinging on the well-being of indigenous Australians were horrendously complex, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle truth from greed. One thing she was sure of: it would take more than compensation claims and political correctness to build the dignity and autonomy of Australia’s first inhabitants. They desperately needed meaningful jobs.

She was brought back to reality by Phoebe, who was tapping the communiqué from MI5 with a finger. “This is nasty.”

“Throat cut. He was murdered in the small grove of trees between the National Archive and the railway bridge over the Thames.” Marjorie leaned back. “What do we know about the National Archive at Kew?”

“It’s the latest repository for the UK’s public records. I think England’s earliest records were stored in the Great Treasury off the cloisters at Westminster Abbey. They became the responsibility of the Public Records Office that relocated to the National Archive at Kew in 2003. They’ve got some pretty important documents there, including the Domesday Book.”

“Hmm.”

“Why does this murder concern you?”

“A fifteenth century treaty was stolen.”

“Yes, so I read. Is it significant for us?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure. It was a secret treaty signed between Henry VII of England and John II of Portugal. John was hedging his bets. He was signing treaties with both Spain and England at the time.” Marjorie furrowed her brow as she tried to recall the details. “There was a flurry of treaties in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, mainly concerning who had rights to which lands in a world that was rapidly being discovered. Most were not worth the paper they were written on.”

“What was the subject of this treaty?”

“Jave la Grande.”

“Isn’t that...?”

“Australia. Yes.”