

Creek Street

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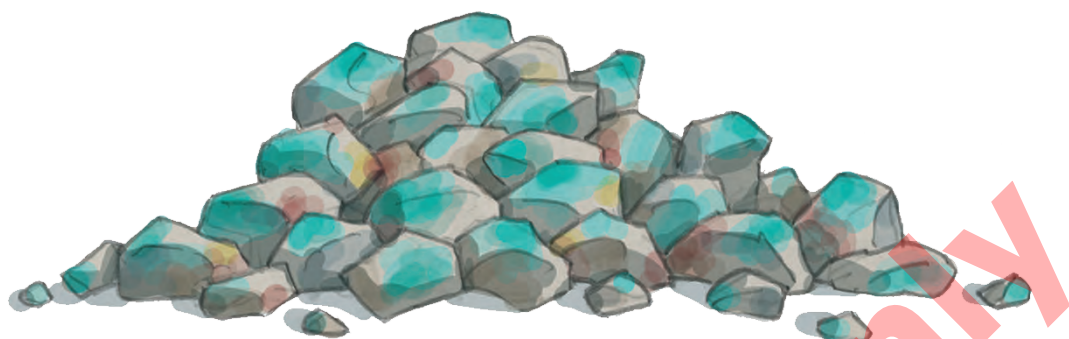
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Chapter 1

A Startling Happening



Jackson stared at the two large gaping holes that had been dug into the red clay riverbank and shook his head.

“Doorways?” he muttered. “People couldn’t have lived in there.” He couldn’t believe it. He picked his way across the uneven ground and grasped one of the metal grilles that had been set in the doorway to prevent entry.

“Help! I’m a prisoner,” Jackson joked to his parents and younger sister, Ivy, behind him.

“Yay!” she shouted. “Don’t let him out.” Running up to him, she cried, “What can you see in there? Are there any ghosts?”

“Yes,” said Jackson.

Ivy halted, eyes wide. “There are not.”

“No?” Jackson said in a taunting tone. “Come and see for yourself, little one.”

Ivy spun around. “Mum?”

“No ghosts, Ivy,” said their mum. She opened a tourism brochure. “But it says here that over a hundred and fifty years ago, about two thousand people dug homes all along this deep riverbank. Mostly miners and their families. They came to Australia to work in the copper mines here.”

“That’s silly,” said Ivy. “They should’ve built houses.”

Jackson peered closer. “They’re like big rabbit holes. Wouldn’t people suffocate?”

“I wouldn’t want to live in there,” said Ivy. “It smells dirty.”

“Maybe families back then didn’t have a choice,” said their dad.

Jackson moved a few metres across to the other doorway and peered through the bars. It was the same as the one next door. Another dim, gloomy hole with an earthen floor and a blocked up window. His mum read more information out loud from the brochure, but Jackson stood gazing inside.

Something was not right.

On the back wall, shadows began to play and flicker. Jackson leant one way and then the other. It wasn’t his shadow. The day was calm with a few light clouds, and hardly any sun could reach inside.

With a frown, Jackson eased himself closer, until his nose almost touched the bars. He was still struggling to fathom what the strange shadows were on the wall, when a sound reached his ears. No. It wasn't one sound, it was a tumble of sounds. But they were so faint, they could've drifted in from dreams.

Jackson stood rooted to the spot, but he took a tentative glance over his shoulder. Everything looked the same. His parents were chatting to Ivy, who was pleading for an ice cream.

"Maybe later, Ivy," their dad said.

Ivy's reply faded into silence. Above the dugouts, a couple of other tourists were walking towards the slope that led to the riverbank. But from what Jackson could make out, none of them were talking.

Yet, Jackson could hear something. Not specific words, just murmurings.



Shivers ran up and down Jackson's back, and his skin tightened with goosebumps. He suddenly felt as if he should've worn something warmer than a t-shirt.

And then, without warning, a rush of smells came on so strongly that Jackson could almost taste them. He quickly covered his nose.

What was going on?

In front of him was a doorway that led into a cave-like room. Around him grew tufted green grass, maybe where water once ran. Leaves fell from trees. Birds flew overhead. And yet ... Jackson grasped the doorway bars and stared inside. There were shadows. And sounds. And smells.



But was it all *really* happening? How could it be?

“Jackson, you coming?” called his mum.

With a jolt, Jackson cried, “Yeah, I am! I’ll meet you back at the car.”

“Okay, we’ll wait on the main street.”

Jackson took a breath, slid his hand into his jeans pocket and drew out his phone. Holding it up between the bars, he selected the camera icon.

And clicked.

The bright light on the screen was the last thing Jackson saw before a swirl of air whirled him through a spiral of darkness. Round and round he went, as if he were a feather in the breeze. He was floating and flying, but his eyes were open, fearless.

Chapter 2

Back to Creek Street



Sometime later, maybe a second, or a minute, a shudder rippled through him as if he'd been turned inside out. He ran his fingers through his curly hair. Then, he slurped the last of his porridge, stood and straightened his suspenders over his shoulders.

Jack looked around. Everything was as usual.

Shadows from the kitchen lantern danced across the walls. The air smelled of damp clothes drying, wood burning and something bubbling in a pot on the stove.

From down the chimney flue came a voice, yelling, "Butcher here, missus! Was you wanting meat for a nice stew?"

"Yes!" Jack's mam shouted back up the chimney. "I'll send my son up with the money." To Jack, she said, "Get a coin from the burglar safe.