

Back to the Dreamtime

intermediate

by H.Q. MITCHELL



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For teachers' inspection ONLY

CHAPTER 1

All I could see were shadows. There was no moon. Nothing moved. Suddenly more shadows appeared. It looked as if the shadows were dancing and slowly coming closer to me. I could hear whispers coming from everywhere. Then a strong wind picked up. The wind and the shadows were whispering together, telling me something. I tried to reach out and touch the shadows, but they kept moving further away. I started to run after them, but before I could reach them, they'd gone.



"Good morning, this is the seven o'clock news. You're listening to MMM FM Sydney. Today's headlines are..."

As Richard switched off the radio alarm clock, his mother, Sonya, burst into his room and opened the curtains.

"Rise and shine, young man," she said. "You don't want to be late for school, do you?"

Richard quickly put his hands over his eyes to protect himself from the light. "Oh Mum, that's cruel!" he said to his mother.

Sonya smiled at him and left the room. Richard could hear her repeating the same words in his sister's bedroom just down the corridor. Routine was an important element in Sonya's life. She believed it made the world an easier place to live in. Richard did not agree with his mother's approach to life, but he admired her determination and persistence.

"Time to get up," Richard thought to himself. As he slowly dragged himself out of bed, he thought about the strange dream he had had. He kept having the same dream lately and it was affecting his sleep.

"Are you going to the bathroom first, or should I?" asked Richard's younger sister Judy, who was standing by his bedroom door.

"No, you go ahead," replied Richard.

Richard went over to his desk and picked up a pencil. He wanted to write about the dream he had had. A few minutes passed, but he could not find the right words to describe the dream. He sometimes wished his life could be as clear-cut as his mother's. But it was not, and the dream only confirmed this further. He dropped his pencil and went to the bathroom.



"Richard, breakfast is ready," shouted Sonya.

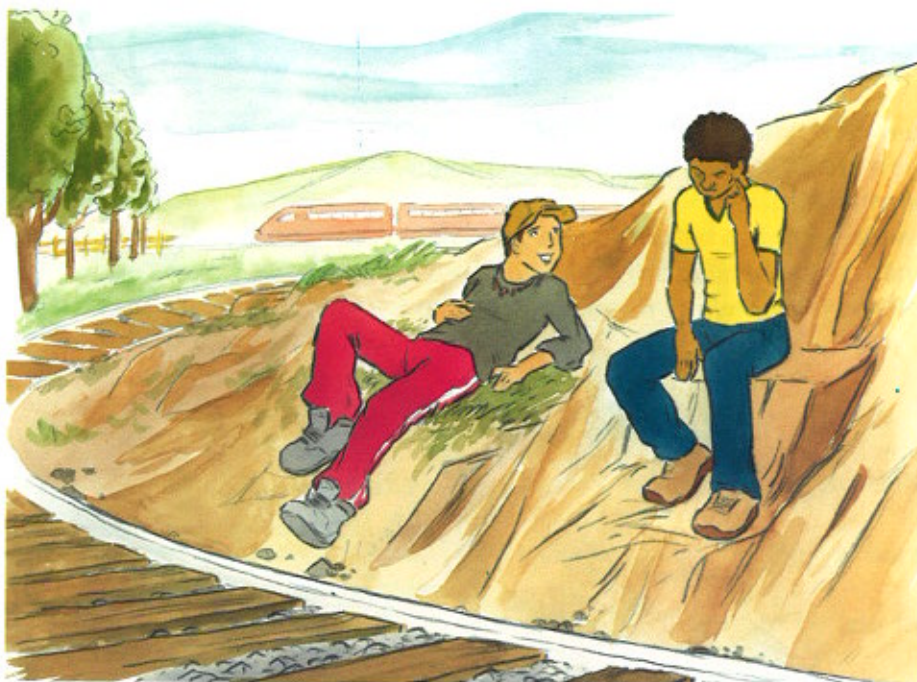
As Richard was walking down the staircase, he paused and quickly went back to his room. He was beginning to remember the dream.

"Why is Richard taking so long?" asked his father Joe.

"I don't know, but he looks like he has something on his mind," said Sonya.



Later that morning, Richard and his brother Tom were sitting beside the railway tracks, where they usually sat every morning before going to school. Tom, lying on the grass, enjoyed these moments of laziness.



"Earth calling spaceship Enterprise. Do you read me?" said Tom jokingly.

"What? Oh, I was day-dreaming," answered Richard. "I've got a few things on my mind, that's all."

"Tell me Richard, have you decided what you want to study next year at university?" asked Tom.

"No, I haven't," replied Richard, "... and I have to see the career teacher today."

"Well, you'd better think of something now," said Tom. "The career teacher won't be too pleased if you have no idea what you want to do."

"What about you, Tom?" asked Richard. "Have you decided?"

"I think I'll continue with photography," said Tom. "I find it very interesting, and it's not your usual nine to five job." He looked at his watch and got up slowly. "Come on now, let's go, or we'll be late for school."



When they arrived at school, Richard went to the career office and waited outside until he was called by Mrs O'Grady. He entered the office and sat down.

"Richard McDonald?" asked Mrs O'Grady.

"That's right," answered Richard.

"Well, Richard, your school grades are very good," said the career teacher.

"I try my best," said Richard.

"May I ask you if you are of Aboriginal descent?" asked the career teacher.

"My father was an Aboriginal," said Richard. "He died when I was two years old. I was adopted by the McDonalds."

"The reason why I'm asking is because the government wants to help Aborigines financially with their studies," said Mrs O'Grady.

"That's very interesting, but I don't think so," dismissed Richard.

"Well, it's something you can think about," said Mrs O'Grady. "So, Richard, what are your plans for next year?"

"Well," answered Richard, "I'm interested in history, so I would like to study that at university."



"History is an interesting subject," said Mrs O'Grady, "but I must tell you, jobs are difficult to find in that field. Maybe the situation will improve by the time you graduate in three or four years' time."

"Yeah, I sure hope so," said Richard.

"OK Richard, do you have any questions?" asked Mrs O'Grady.

"No, not at the moment," answered Richard.

"Well then, good luck," said Mrs O'Grady and smiled at Richard. "If you have any questions, come and see me, OK?"

Richard thanked her and left the office.



That afternoon Richard went to the Arcade to play video games. He got on his bike and rode through the back streets, to avoid the patrol car that was usually stationed on the main road. If the police saw him riding his bike without a helmet, they would stop him immediately. A quarter of an hour later, Richard arrived at the Arcade. As he entered the building, someone called out his name. He looked around and saw his friend Bradley.



"Richard! Where were you today?" asked Bradley. "I didn't see you in class."

"I was with the career teacher," said Richard.

"So you didn't hear about the end-of-year camp?" asked Bradley.

"No, what camp?" asked Richard.

"This year's senior class camp will be in Alice Springs," replied Bradley.

"We'll be staying there for five days."

"Alice Springs!" shouted Richard. "That's something new. It should be interesting."

"And hot," added Bradley. "They say temperatures can reach up to 35 degrees during that time, but I'm really looking forward to it."

"When will we know more?" asked Richard.

"In two or three days' time," said Bradley.

Richard looked around the Arcade. "OK. So, where's this new video game everyone is talking about?" he asked.



CHAPTER 2

On Saturday morning Richard, Judy and Tom were playing cricket in the backyard. It was their favourite pastime on the weekend. Having two older brothers meant that Judy had become a very good player over the years. The boys considered her their equal and gave her no special treatment. Judy was aware of this and proud of her achievement. She had earned their respect, which meant a lot to her.

Joe came out to the backyard and joined the children in their game. A few minutes later, he said to them playfully, "I need three volunteers."

"That's really funny, Dad," said Judy ironically. "What do you want us to do?"

"Well," said Joe, "I was in the attic yesterday afternoon looking for something and saw how messy the place has become, so I was..."

"Oh dad," interrupted Richard, "that'll take hours. I have planned something for today."

"Don't get upset over nothing," said Joe. "The three of you can clean it up in no time. Anyway, I'm not asking for a perfect job. Just put some things in order. Besides, when was the last time I asked you for a favour?"

"OK," said Richard, "we'll get the job done."

"Can we keep any hidden treasures we find in there?" asked Tom jokingly.

"Off you go now, wise guys," said their father.

