

A slender woman stood on the shore in silence, listening to stories from the ocean. The woman's attire was elegant but simple. Long olive pants with cuffs were rolled to her knees with a soft lemon woollen jumper, whilst an olive-green jacket enveloped her shoulders; its buttons tightened to shield her from the coolness of the morning. Her complexion glistened in the fading sun and her long locks flared in the wind.

Stormy clouds threatened overhead, and waves thundered on the sandy seashore, yet she stayed her ground. She loved the wildness of the sea and often came to the beach nearby, when storms were at their height. She would watch as waves raged about, reflecting the anger she felt inside. Today was no different.

As she stood on the edge of the fine-grained sand, Eve felt the rolling wash of the waves over her feet. It was meditative. She listened to the roar of the sea and spoke of her worries as though it were her counsellor. Her face to the wind, with soul bared; she stood screaming, begging for the ocean to hear, determined her story would be told. She tightened the downy jacket around her, as if it were a friend, comforting her.

Rain fell in hard sheets, the wind whipping around her body. She didn't wipe the water from her cheek, as salt mixed with the cooling drops, preferring to no longer hide her anguish. Her cries turned to sobs, as pain wreaked through her limbs, and the rain became her tears. The ocean beckoned her closer, and she stood ankle deep in the water, her feet sinking into the sand. Swells washed up heavily, chasing the previous wave from its place, though she stood firm.

The caw of seagulls cried out as they flew overhead, and she looked up. A large pelican also circled above, watching, and waiting to see whether she would take up the offer of the sea. As she pulled away from the deepness of the tide beginning to envelope her, she withdrew from the edge, and the pelican flew away into the distance.

It was colder than usual for the time of year, Autumn was usually mild on the coast; though the weather had turned, and her mood reflected this. Eve retreated suddenly, as cold water and numbness began to fill her body.

Eve had finished telling her story, and her anguish had subsided, so she began to wander back along the shoreline, towards home, her companion alongside. The golden retriever was eager to please her mistress though the gulls teased the old dog, and she stretched her legs, ready to yield to the chase. Eve stopped her.

‘No Maggie. Not this time. I must get back. Your master will be home soon, and I need to shower.’

Maggie waddled beside her mistress, her faithfulness a sign of the bond they had shared for sixteen years. Eve stopped a moment, mesmerised by the sand as it dried before the rain made its mark again.

Whipped up by the wind, the sea suddenly soaked her body and as clouds rumbled on the horizon, Eve pulled the hood of her jacket over, to shield her face, and beckoned to the old dog.

‘Come on Maggie.’ Eve harnessed her lead and picked up her pace.

They walked briskly back toward home-a short distance away, only stopping to release the retriever as they arrived. Maggie stood, obedient and accepting. The routine was no different to that of the past and she knew it well.

‘Good girl Maggie.’ Eve hugged her, then unlocked the beautifully carved, old wooden door which marked to the entrance of the old cottage. It was originally the harbour pilot’s home and Eve had lovingly restored it a few years before.

She hung her jacket on the hook, taking in the smell of her husband’s aftershave and wandered through the narrow-whitewashed walls of the hallway. Her grandmother’s antique cabinet stood as a gesture of grandeur in the tiny space and Eve paused, as always, by the

beautifully hand painted bowl. Stroking the feathers inside, each a poignant reminder of her life; the colours reminding her of the red sunsets and golden sands of the outback.

As Eve touched the last feather, she jolted her hand away, as though the quill was a sharp reminder of past hurt. She licked the blood from her finger, and it brought her mind back to the moment.

‘Must throw that in the bin,’ she mused and headed upstairs.

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Winemaker

Eve waited alone in the dark, for her husband, Vic, to arrive home. The winemaker was late, and Eve had finally fallen asleep. He'd had a hard week at the winery and didn't want to disturb his wife, knowing she needed to rest to nourish their growing child inside.

Vic placed his boots quietly by the door and hung his jacket next to Eve's. He could hear her cry out as she tossed and turned upstairs, fighting the demons of her past and struggling to escape them in her dreams.

'No, no, no. I said NO. I hate you! Leave me alone! I said NO. Why don't you listen?' She was haunted by a night long ago, and though the incident had passed, her dreams held its memory.

Eve fought the doona as it lay heavily on her slender body, feeling its tight grip around her as though they were fingers were clutching at her throat. Finally, she gave it a hard kick and the doona fell to the floor. Eve felt an immediate release of tension and fell into a deep slumber.

Vic raced upstairs and peered in, though by then, she had settled again. He patted their faithful friend who slept at the foot of their bed.

'Great watchdog,' he chuckled, and Maggie's eyes opened. She wagged her tail, then promptly fell asleep again.

Vic grabbed a blanket from the end of the bed and crept into their spare room, leaving Maggie to guard her mistress.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning, Eve sat, bolt upright, trying to focus on her surroundings. Though the delicately coloured walls of the room were familiar, it was always difficult after these dreams and she took a moment, not wanting to rise from the warmth of her bed. Eve pulled the doona back over her head and lay for a while longer.

She thought she had overcome the emotional rollercoaster of negative self-talk, heart palpitations, scratching, and haunting memories of the past; yet here they were back again. Still groggy from the sedative she'd downed the night before, she tried several times to rid herself of a reliance on the drug, yet they had become a part of her way to survive.

Eve didn't want to worry her six foot something husband and tried to reassure herself it was ok, by discussing it with her midwife.

'They're alright if prescribed by your doctor, though you need to be conscious of what you are taking while you're pregnant, Eve. If you can stop them for the moment it would be better.'

Eve googled the name of the pill, finding it suggested that onata (zalepion), was commonly prescribed to women with sleep disturbance, but that data regarding their safety was limited and should be avoided during pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

'Hmm,' Eve rubbed her eyes and stretched her arms, feeling the small movement helped. She considered giving them up again as mornings became harder to manage, worried her 'hangover' would have an effect on her unborn child. She had tried to wean herself before, cutting them into quarters. It seemed though, that last quarter was her lifeline.

Eve eventually wandered downstairs and busied herself in the kitchen, unaware of the heavy burden from the previous night. She hadn't heard Vic come home and as she munched on toasted muesli, overheard a heated conversation in the next room.

Eve popped her head around the doorway, as he slammed the phone down and cursed loudly.

'Bloody hell.'

'Hey.' Eve called out as she walked back to the kitchen. 'I heard that.'

'Sorry.'

She left Vic alone with his thoughts until his temper had calmed, then wandered back in to the lounge to greet him. Vic knew better than to curse in front of Eve and she watched him, deep in thought, as he leaned heavily against the door.

Vic had taken on a new business partner a few months before. He had talked it over with Eve after finding it difficult to manage the wine business on his own. He had reservations about forming a partnership, though 'Chad' had come highly recommended and with the business growing, it was time.

Vic wasn't sure about the guy when they first met. Vic's lean, tall stature meant he towered over Chad, and thought he had 'little man' syndrome as he bragged his way through the interview. Chad's references were impressive though, and after a conversation with the previous business owner, Ted, an agreement was formalised.

Chad handled things well at first, though lately one too many issues made Vic uncomfortable about his decision to take him on. The guy was supposed to be building clientele for the Seven Signs Estate, in addition to overseeing the processing. Vic would concentrate on the business side of things and exports. As the viticulturist, he would also ensure the blend was right; yet the past few weeks had him wondering if he'd made the right decision.

The Seven Signs Wine Estate was based in the Jasper Valley, about two hours drive from Little Harbour. Set amongst fifty acres of rolling hills, the Seven Signs Estate yielded several varieties of red and white wines. It had been established by Ted Jantzer's family in the late 1800's, though after the death of his wife, Ted made the decision to sell when his own son refused to take the business on.

## Vat 29

‘Ok, tell me about it. What’s wrong?’ Eve was curious as to why her husband seemed on edge again. The overheard conversation led her to believe she knew the answer.

‘It’s just that I’m supposed to be in Adelaide tomorrow for a meeting. Now I’ll have to head over today to clean this mess up straight after.’

Vic was concerned about his wife’s health. He had lost his first wife and child to a tragic car accident and couldn’t bear to lose another, so had become quite protective of Eve in the last few months.

Eve spoke calmly. She didn’t want to inflame his mood, though was concerned Vic had hired Chad too quickly.

‘This guy seems to cause more problems when you’re away, Vic. I’m not sure you hired the right guy!’ Her voice was indicative of issues he’d caused since first arriving.

Vic was angry and it showed in his body language and tone.

‘It’s just that I wanted to be home a few days before heading back to the estate,’ Vic continued. ‘That’s the whole reason I took on a partner, so I could have some down time - and be with you,’ he added.

Vic had a capable overseer, Mitch, who would have been a perfect partner. He was a local indigenous man who had been with the previous owner, Ted for twenty odd years. He had good skills in the bottling plant, though didn’t have the expertise or contacts Vic needed to grow the business. Mitch ran the bottling side of the business, like clockwork, and his fellow workers held him in high regard. Chad though, was racist and treated Mitch with contempt – something Vic found difficult to address.

Eve rubbed his shoulders and stood behind her husband.

‘You ok?’ she asked, in a more sympathetic voice.

‘Yeah,’ he replied. ‘Just annoyed.’ Vic’s tone had quietened, though Eve could feel his body was still tense.

‘Hmm, I can tell, Mr Frencham.’ She chuckled and slapped his behind, then turned to go back into the kitchen, leaving him with his thoughts. ‘Your bag’s still packed. Just go and I will call you if I need you,’ she called back over her shoulder.

Vic followed her and watched as she added spices to whatever she was cooking. He loved the way she moved and smiled to himself as her waddle matched Maggie’s - taking the heat from his anger.

‘You do look enticing Mrs Frencham.’

Eve looked down to see her apron on backwards and Vic stepped closer to wipe something from her mouth.

She smiled. ‘Just the way you like me.’

\*\*\*

It was a while again before they got back to their conversation and Vic finally told Eve about the urgency of the vat situation later that evening as he continued.

‘Vat 29 overflowed.’ Vic finally said over dinner. Chad had been *matter-of-fact* about it when he phoned, suggesting a worker had sealed off a tank when it was still fermenting, and the pressure built to dangerous levels.

‘Apparently,’ Vic rolled his eyes, ‘he suggested Mitch didn’t give him the right temperature to set it to. The result was a volcano of wine pouring out of the heavy vats and ruining Vat29.’

‘I find that hard to believe.’ Eve replied. ‘I know how reliable Mitch is at the winery and you’ve always said what a great bloke he is.’

‘Yeah, well Chad hired one of his friends for the processing. I’m not happy it, though I felt I needed to give him a chance. I guess this has made me realise it was a bad decision.’

Vic looked like a forlorn puppy and Eve laughed.

‘Oh, baby. You look sad. Come here for a pat.’ This made Vic laugh too and he swooped her in his arms.

‘You always manage to make my glass half full don’t you.’

‘I try to please.’ Eve replied as she fluttered her eyelids.

After more than a passionate embrace, Eve finally suggested she needed to get back to cooking.

‘Your dinner will burn again, if you don’t let me finish,’ she said as she reached behind Vic to turn the stove down.

‘Ah, just the way I like it,’ he replied and tapped her on her backside as she pushed past to find garlic from the fridge.

‘I really don’t want to have to leave you this time, though I’ll only be gone a few days. Are you sure you’ll be alright? I’m worried that.....’

Eve cut him off. ‘I’m fine,’ she said, this time sounding irritated. Vic was way too overprotective for her lately and she needed a break from the ‘watch out, don’t do too much’ conversations. As she looked at him standing before her though, Eve realised she’d been too harsh and softened her tone. ‘I’m sorry. I am fine. Truly. You really don’t need to worry.’

He pulled her close again and placed his arms around her purposefully. Eve giggled at the awkwardness of her growing belly. Vic’s tall stature meant Eve had to stand on her toes and he lifted her onto the kitchen table to meet his face.

‘When do you go?’

‘Tomorrow. I’ll try not to be too long. I promise.’ Vic tried to reassure Eve and she nodded - though she did enjoy the space.

---