

Captain Walt Lincoln

The Theft of the Australian Kangaroos

by David M. H. Butler

Walt found himself clapping to another dull speech at a benefit dinner for law enforcement agents.

“I have got to remind myself to be out of town next year at this time.” he thought, and began thinking just where that great get-away spot might be: Scotland, Hawaii, Southern France perhaps...

Suddenly he felt the soft, touch of his wife, Jackie, on his hand. Walt became painfully aware of the fact that he was the only one still clapping. Walt could feel every smiling eye directed at him. Jackie smiled and squeezed his hand.

“Wake up, babe.” she whispered.

A new speaker was walking down the darkened aisle heading for the podium.

“Uh, what’s this next speech?” Walt said partly to change the subject, partly hoping to find that it might be the last.

“The program says it’s a special presentation by Mitch Crenshaw the owner-publisher of the Clockwise News.” replied Jackie.

“You may as well keep your eyes on our Mr. Lincoln,” the publisher flashed a winning smile in Walt’s direction. “since he is the one that I am up here to talk about.”

Walt turned uncharacteristically red and Jackie nudged him in the side and whispered that he was going to get scolded.

“Each year the paper likes to single out a law enforcement agent,” the speaker started. “This year, The Clockwise News, in appreciation of his valiant efforts to rid this city of crime, would like to present Walt Lincoln with a vacation in Australia. Mr. Lincoln would you like to come up and accept these two tickets for a second honeymoon?”

Walt’s muscular frame rose from his seat and he strode up to the podium. Conscious of his earlier thoughts about long speeches, Walt kept his words of thanks brief and sincere; shook hands with the publisher and went back to his seat.

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As they drove home that night from the benefit dinner, Jackie kept on and on about their upcoming trip.

“There is so much to do! Lucky our passports are up to date. Is it summer or winter there now?” she was mostly talking to herself. Then she turned to Walt and asked, “So. When do we leave?”

“H’mmm,” Walt murmured, pretending not to hear his wife. “I wonder if I should take Jay or Pete they sure would love the chance...”

“Walt! You wouldn’t dare —” Jackie’s eyes shown with disbelief.

“Whoa, babe. Don’t pop a cork! You know that I want this to be a honeymoon too!” Walt laughed. “The tickets is for a flight a week from next Friday.”



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The day came quickly. Leaving their kids in the care of Walt’s brother, Walt and Jackie headed to the airport to begin their ten-day trip to the world’s smallest continent. Mercifully, checking into the flight was quick, and just as welcome, it was to be a direct flight to Sydney. Their seats were in first class and they settled back for the long hop across the Pacific.

After dinner and the movie they settled back to get some rest. Jackie lay with her head nestled against Walt’s shoulder and her arm lay across his chest, as her hand gently clutched his neck.

When they finally touched down and taxied up to the terminal, Walt let out a sigh of relief and rocked his head back and forth working out the kinks. He looked down at Jackie. She lifted her head and gazed back at him smiling with her soft brown eyes. All of Walt’s fatigue melted away. He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead.

“Let the honeymoon begin!” he whispered to her as they reached the door to the plane. With that he picked her up and carried her off the plane and onto the jetway. The stewardess who was standing at the doorway turned to watch them go, the blush of an incurable romantic tinged her cheeks.

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“May I help you —” began the almost mechanical question of the manager of the Sydney Hilton. Walt’s fame as a detective had obviously preceded him, for as the man looked up and saw who was standing there he faltered for a moment and then quickly regained his composure. “Why it’s you Mr. Lincoln! And Mrs. Lincoln. How nice to see you. May I welcome you to the Sydney Hilton? Your suite is all ready. If you have the slightest of problems I hope you will bring them to my attention immediately!” He whistled sharply and a bellhop strode up.

“Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln are in suite 724. Please take their bags and make sure they are comfortable.”

The man picked up their larger bags, nodded to Walt and Jackie and headed for the elevator.

“Hope you enjoy your stay!” the manager called after them.

In their room, the bellhop opened their window shades and showed them where the air conditioning controls were located. Walt saw him to the door and tipped him. They were alone at last.

Walt picked up Jackie and swung her around and they both laughed. He put her down on the couch and she pulled him down to her and gave him a kiss. She ran her hands through his blond hair as he kissed her ear.

“Sure seems a bit hot in here.” she said kicking off her shoes and giving Walt a mischievous smile.

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Walt awoke the next morning to the insistent jangle of the telephone. He rolled over and looked at the clock.

“Woof! Who could that be at 7:30 in the morning? If it’s the manager wanting to make sure everything is alright, I just might have to pop him one.” Walt grumbled, leaving Jackie’s arms and picking up the receiver. “Hello?”

“Mr. Lincoln?” came an inquiring voice. Definitely an Australian.

“How’d you guess?” Walt responded good-naturedly. He tried to make a guess at who and why he would be getting a call. “Are you working for the hotel or the travel agency?”

“No, No. My name is Graham Noyes.” the voice on the other end of the phone replied. “My fiancé works for the Hotel, so I heard you were coming. I’m having some difficulties at my business and need the services of a detective. I was hoping you might be able to help me.”

“How soon can you meet me here and fill me in on the details?” Walt asked.

“Is half an hour too soon?” Noyes asked.

“Get your tail moving and I will see you then!” Walt laughed and hung up. All thoughts about the time of day erased from his mind.

“Zing goes the honeymoon!” Jackie moaned.

“That’s what you think!” Walt chuckled rolling on top of her.

“Oh Baby!” Jackie laughed.



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“What took you so long, Graham?” asked Walt as the medium built, muscular man stepped into their suite. Walt guessed that he was in his mid to late twenties. “Would you like a cup of coffee? We just had breakfast sent up and I took the liberty to order some extra coffee and a Danish roll for you.”

“That’s grand! Thanks.” responded the Australian, accepting the cup of coffee and adding some cream to it.

Walt introduced Jackie and they all sat down around the coffee table in the living area of their suite. “So fill me in. What kind of business problems are you having?”

“Well, I recently opened a Kangaroo sanctuary on the outskirts of town. A lot of people coming to Australia want to see the ‘roos but don’t necessarily have the time to get out and see them in the wild. I figured a few ‘roos on a couple acres in a fairly natural setting would bring in the tourists. It had a little bit of a rocky start, but with some careful advertising it seemed to be picking up. I started with 8 animals. Then about a week ago I discovered one of my kangaroos was missing. This week another has gone missing and I’m beginning to panic. If I lose any more kangaroos I’ll have to change the name of this place to Scrub weed sanctuary.” Graham tried to inject a less serious note as he trailed off.

“And you’ve talked to the police?” asked Jackie. “Or don’t you think it was theft?”

“Oh, it has to be a theft. I’m sure of that.” Noyes replied, “And yes, I have talked with the Police. They came out, looked around, asked a few questions, gave me some advice on how to add some security features to the sanctuary: Better locks, possibly a video camera, etc. But it’s not a murder or drug crime. They just can’t or won’t put that much man-power into solving the crime.”

“I take it there is no way the Kangaroos could have escaped on their own?” Walt asked. “Maybe a gate left open or a low area of the fencing?”

“That’s not very likely. The fences are build to a height to keep the roos in and snoopers out. As to a gate left open? We have a double gate system, so that as visitors enter there isn’t a chance for a freak accident to let the kangaroos slip out. One gate accidentally left open, maybe. But both? I just don’t think so.”

“Security?” Walt prompted.

“After the first theft, I doubled the guards. We went from two to four guards. And I have to say, if the loss of the kangaroos doesn’t wipe me out the cost of staff sure will!” It sounded like a sore topic, but then it was true all this must be pretty costly.

“Any other staff?”

“I have a receptionist. She and one of the original guards collect money at the front gate and occasionally act as a tour guide if we get some VIP visiting. The other guard is actually an animal trainer. We have to double up on jobs right now. At least until the business starts to grow.”

“So getting back to the kangaroos. They aren’t caged? Do they always roam freely?” asked Walt.

Noyes took a final sip of coffee and set the cup down. “We do have cages. There could arise a situation where we’d want to isolate them: sickness, an animal that becomes overly aggressive. But up to now we haven’t used them. The kangaroos are free to roam around the sanctuary which we’ve built to represent a picturesque and natural surrounding.”

“You said ‘We.’ Do you have a partner then?” Walt added.

“Originally; yes. A bloke I’ve known for a while. But as we got further into the construction, Jack started cutting corners. Tried to do everything with cheap or sub-standard materials. I caught him telling the concrete contractor to use a rather questionable mixture on the office building. We were planning on using the building for living quarters as well! Can you imagine! His cost cutting had gone too far so I bought him out.”

“Could he be the cause of your problem?”

“It’s possible, I suppose. I still see him from time to time at the pub and, while I can’t say we’re the best of friends, I don’t think I made him that mad.”

“Well what say we get out of this hotel.” Walt said. “Why don’t we go over to your sanctuary and you can give us the tour so we can see what’s what.” Walt turned to Jackie. “You do want to come, I imagine?”

“Wouldn’t miss it!”

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As they walked through the sanctuary Walt was impressed with the design. The trees and open areas had been well laid out to provide wonderful views and shady rest areas. It was surrounded by 8 to 10 foot fences. The entrance wall was of concrete while the other fences were mostly of chain-link with barbed wire at the top. The pathways that visitors walked on were separated from the kangaroo areas by short hedges and often a small water filled canal was on the kangaroo side of the hedge. It afforded a close up view of the animals but kept the visitors from getting too close and endangering themselves or the animals.

“The kangaroos can achieve strides of something like 10 to 15 feet when they are running flat out. In here they don’t have that much room, but they are still quite a powerful animal. The big toe on their hind legs can be very dangerous. There were times in the past when the ranchers would hunt the ‘roos with dogs. It wasn’t uncommon for a dog to be killed by those hind legs.”

“They are such beautiful animals.” Jackie sighed, “It’s sad to think they were hunted down like that.”

“The Kangaroos were competing for food with the rancher’s sheep. And then, I think it also was that English fox hunt fascination given an Australian twist.” Noyes responded. “Me? I agree with you. I’d rather look at them.”

“When have the kangaroos been stolen.” Walt asked. “Or, should I say, when have you noticed that they are missing?”

“Far as I can tell they are taken at night.” replied Noyes. “Tom, that’s the trainer, and I check them in the early evening and then again about 8 o’clock each morning to feed them. It was in the morning both times that we discovered our loss.”

“I heard you say something about living quarters earlier.” Walt continued, “Does someone sleep here?”

“Yes. I do. In fact this has become my home. But I also have an extra bunkroom that any of the others can use if they need to stay late. It’s mostly used by the guards between shifts.” Noyes explained. “Here. Why don’t I show you?”



He took them through the office into a large room with two bunk beds, a couple bureaus and a sink and mirror in one corner. They went back out by a second door and he showed them the cages which were 8 foot square and made of chain-link. As Noyes had said they were empty and most of the doors hung open.

“What about locks. Did you change them after you bought out your partner? Uh, what was his name?”

“Oh you mean Jack. Jack Warren. And, yes, I did have the outside gate locks changed.”

Walt tried to put a few of the pieces together in his mind. The kangaroos were a pretty powerful animal and he couldn’t imagine them being all that cooperative. Even their weight would make moving them very difficult. How would someone go about the heist? Helicopters? Walt discounted that as way too noisy. Trucks? But how would you get in? Could it be an inside job? Maybe the thefts were a cover up for some other operation.

Walt asked Noyes if he could talk to the guards and receptionist. He readily agreed and said he would have them in the bunkroom in about 5 minutes. After he left, Walt turned to Jackie. “While I’m questioning the staff, I’d like you to take a careful look around the grounds. Keep your eyes open for any way that someone could get through, over or under the fence. See what you can see.”

“I’d be happy to.” she said grinning. “Do I need an official detective’s magnifying glass?”

Walt gave her a wry smile and a quick kiss. “See you in a bit.”

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The guards were just arriving as Walt walked into the bunkroom. The four men introduced themselves as Mike, Frank, Joe and Tom.

“Ah, so Tom you are also the kangaroo trainer?” the man grinned and nodded and Walt continued. “So which of you doubles as cashier and tour guide?”

Mike gave a nod. “That would be me.” he said.

“And I’m the regular receptionist.” A tall, good-looking, raven-haired woman had entered the room just as Walt had asked his question. “My name is Catherine.”

Walt saw all four guards turn their heads to greet her. Tom gave her a big smile, which she returned.

Turning his attention back to the guards, he asked, “So that makes you, Joe and Frank, the new guys?”

The two of them smiled and nodded in agreement.

“Do you each have a station that you guard? What’s the set up for the four of you at night?”

It turned out that they had something of a rotation, with three men on and one man off. One guarded the gate and office area; the other two walked the visitor trails. During the days only Mike or Tom was there as needed.

“These last couple weeks must have been pretty demanding on those two.” thought Walt. “Working day and night with occasional breaks.”

“Okay.” Walt started, “On the nights of the thefts did any of you hear odd noises, did the kangaroos seem more restless than usual?”

Mike was the first to reply. “No sir. There is a lot of road noise from the motorway that runs past here and it’s not uncommon for the kangaroos to move around at night.”

“That’s right.” Tom interjected. “They know Mike and I pretty well now and often are curious as to what we are up to.”

“Who is allowed to enter after closing hours?”

“Just about anyone with a good reason.” Again it was Mike who was the first to respond. “But you can’t enter without one of us to let you in, and we keep a log of everyone who enters.”

“And we also make sure that everyone who comes in is checked off the list when they leave.” Catherine added. “At least that’s the procedure. I usually get off at five o’clock.”

“So Tom, as a trainer, you are a pretty familiar with Kangaroos. How do you think someone could get them out of here?” Walt asked.

“Well that’s the question now, isn’t it! I’ve tried to work out scenarios and it’s pretty tough to imagine. Almost certainly you would have to tranquilize the beasts. But then you’d need some sort of dolly to move them around on. That or a couple of good strong blokes to carry her on a liter of some sort.” Tom scratched the back of neck and continued. “But getting them over the fence? There I’m flat out stumped.”

Walt decided he'd run out of questions and thanked the men for their time. As he left the building he saw Jackie walking back along one of the trails. She was sweeping her hands through some of the tall grass, seemingly lost in contemplation.

"Hey beautiful." Walt called, "Come this way often?"

Jackie smiled demurely and waited to get by his side before saying anything. "All the walls look solid to me. The back fence seems the most secluded if someone wanted to rig a way to get over it: That's the place to do it. But the closest thing to an opening that I found was a storm drain."

They walked back to it to take a look at the drain. "Seems like it would be a mighty tight fit." Walt mused, "But I should do a little research on it."

After checking the back fence, they decided to take a break and get some lunch. Walt needed some time to go over the bits and pieces he had picked up. To try to make some sense of them.

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They found a great looking little pastry shop with four or five tables out on the sidewalk. The smell of baking bread was heavenly. They sat down and ordered a cappachino, a fruit salad and a croissant.

"You know, I was toying with the idea that maybe it's Graham who is the culprit. He's complained about money problems. Maybe he's out for the insurance money." Jackie said as they waited for their order to arrive.

"It crossed my mind as well," Walt nodded. "But he would be taking one heck of a gamble asking me to come and investigate his problems. Sure it would make things look good on paper to say that he'd hired someone to get to the bottom of the problem. But it's the rare occasion that I've had the wool pulled over my eyes. Still it's a good point and I should make sure to do some checking on his background."

The food arrived. Walt took a sip of his cappachino, gave a contented sigh. Jackie took a bite of her croissant and gave a look that said it was money well spent.

"So what's your plan for this afternoon?" she asked.

"I've been going over the possibilities." Walt answered. "There are several things to follow up on. But this afternoon I think I will look up Jack Warren. He's the guy who most interests me at the moment."

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"Yeah, the name's Warren." snapped the short but muscular man in the doorway. "What do you want?"

"Just have a couple questions. May I come in?" Walt asked, half pushing his way into the man's apartment. "Where do you work?"

"You sure have a lot of cheek. Who are you? Police?"

"I suppose you don't have to answer. I can always get the information somewhere else." Walt shrugged. "But, judging by your clothes, a pretty safe bet is that you are working in construction."

“Listen, Mister. If you don’t ...” the man started.

“Okay, okay. I’ve been asked to look into the references of Graham Noyes who runs the Noyes Kangaroo sanctuary.” It wasn’t too far from the truth anyway.

“That guy is still using me as a reference? There’s a jolly bit of nerve!” Warren shot back. “Well if this has anything to do with his problems over there or if he has any notions that I am in any way responsible for those thefts, then tell him to file some sort of charges, but stop bothering me!”

“So the police have been here?” asked Walt

“Oh yeah.” the man sighed. “Are you finished?”

“Well you never did tell me where you work.” Walt prompted.

The man gave a resigned sigh. “The Devon construction company. Worked with them on and off for several years now.”

“I hear that you and Noyes were partners on the sanctuary. What caused you two to break up the partnership.” Walt asked.

“There is no secret there. I was trying to save us some money on the construction materials. Graham has this idea that the more things cost the better they must be. Add to that his infernal perfectionism and the outcome was probably extremely predictable.” Warren hunched his shoulders. “One day Noyes just blew his top and started shouting. I couldn’t keep working like that, so I asked to be bought out. No big deal.”

“Until now.” thought Walt.

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“So where are you now?” asked Jackie as she and Walt readied for bed that evening. “Do you have plans for tomorrow?”

“There are several avenues of research that I want to explore. Checks on the Sanctuary, Noyes, Warren.” Walt said as he turned out the light. “But let’s not worry about ... “

The phone cut Walt off in mid-sentence. Walt snatched up the phone and answered before it could ring a second time.

“Mr. Lincoln. This is Joe Lynde — One of the guards at the sanctuary. I think we may have someone in the woods. Mike and Frank are trying to corner him. Tom just woke me up and told me to call you.”

“Make sure the front gate is locked and have those guys be careful. We don’t want you guys getting shot. Have Graham wait for me at the front gate. I’ll be right down.” Walt put down the receiver and got dressed.

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Noyes was pacing by the front gate when Walt pulled up. He unlocked the gate and Walt slid past. The gate creaked closed and Noyes locked it again. They hurried past the office where they met up with Joe and Frank.

“Where’s Tom and Mike?” asked Walt.

The answer came via a crackle over the walkie-talkies that the guards used to keep in touch. It was Tom and his voice sounded agitated. "I just found Mike by the back fence!" panted Tom. "He's been knocked out."

"What!" yelled Noyes, his nerves were clearly on edge.

"Joe and Graham! You stay here and keep your eyes peeled." Walt commanded. "If our thief is still in the compound, we don't want him slipping out the front gate. Frank you come with me, lets go help get Mike back to the office."

As they hurried along Walt could hear the sound of water running.

"Where's that water sound coming from?" asked Walt. "Is that from the canals?"

"You mean that slushing sound?" replied Frank. "More likely it's from water in the storm drain. The canals are pretty slow moving affairs."

They met up with Tom, who was loosening Mike's collar. "He seems to be okay, just a bump. I think he's even starting to come around."

"Any idea if our intruder is still here?"

"Just after I found Mike I did hear some twigs snap. But I was too worried for Mike to investigate." Tom replied.

Walt moved off carefully into the wooded area. Only a dozen or so yards later he came across a large mass lying on the ground slightly in front of him. He called to the others and Tom and Frank came running their flashlights yellow beams stabbing the darkness as they made their way to Walt's side.

"Is that what I think it is?" asked Walt pointing to the dark hulk.

As the lights played over it, Walt's suspicions were confirmed. It was one of the Kangaroos.

"Is he sleeping?" asked Walt.

Tom went over to the beast and checked him over. He stood up and shook his head. "I think he's been drugged. He's breathing shallowly and he's not responding to my touching him."

"Looks like you guys earned your pay tonight." Walt said. "It would appear that you surprised the guy before he could carry out the theft."

"But I'm wondering if the bloke is still on the grounds. It might have been that he was going over the fence when he and Mike had their tussle." Tom said. "There is also the possibility he's still here."

But after an hour of patrolling the grounds there wasn't a sign of anyone still being there. When Mike came around he confirmed that he'd tried to stop a large man who was climbing over the fence. He really hadn't gotten a good look at him but just as he had jumped to stop him, the man had swung something heavy, and the next thing he remembered was everyone standing around him.

"At least we've confirmed Tom's theory that they drug the animals." Walt said. "Not much, but it's something."

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The next morning Walt stopped at the front desk to get information and directions to the city's records office. The manager was full of his usual pomp and self-importance as he whipped out a city map and with a few deft strokes pointed out the route that Walt should take. From the corner of his eye, Walt noticed a young woman who seemed to be watching him with a bit more curiosity than would seem natural. He decided to act as if he hadn't noticed. He left the hotel and walked across the street turning as if to check a newspaper stand. Looking back, it appeared that the woman hadn't followed him. "Very curious." He mused.

He continued to the bureau of records. The receptionist there was very helpful and soon he was pouring over maps and plans for the sanctuary.

The first thing he noticed was that the prime contractor on the project was the Devon Construction Company; the same company that Jack Warren worked for. No real surprise there. Several of the documents were signed by an F. Swanson. Walt guessed that to be the project foreman.

He spread out one of the blueprints and began tracing his finger over the surface looking for the specifications for the storm drain.

"The drain pipes are shown here as having a 20 inch inside diameter. I can imagine a man squeezing through that, but certainly not a kangaroo."

He checked what sort of access was available for someone coming over the back fence. It showed that the back edge of the property had been built up about two feet in that area and there was a bank of trap rock along a good portion of the fence for erosion control.

"Boy. That intruder who Mike tried to stop from going over the back fence, was sure in for slippery footing when he came down on the other side. He must have left some tracks. I need to go check that out for sure."

Walt put those maps aside and on a hunch looked up any records of land held by either Graham Noyes or Jack Warren. The records showed that Warren owned a one-acre plot of woodland outside the city. Noyes only property record was for the Sanctuary. Noting the location of Warren's property, Walt returned all the files and left.

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Devon Construction Company was a bustling hive of activity as Walt stepped into the main office. Walt walked up to the receptionist and introduced himself. The receptionist gave Walt a less than friendly look, as if Walt was interrupting him from more important activities, but asked how he might help.

"I would like to speak to the foreman who worked on the Noyes Kangaroo Sanctuary. I believe his name was Swanson?"

The man took a deep breath, obviously summoning his strength for the Herculean task of verifying this information.

"Yes, That's correct. Fitzgerald Swanson was the foreman on that project." he said, "If you want, you can catch him out back, he just went out to sign for a shipment of material that's being unloaded."

Walt walked past the reception desk to the door that was being indicated to him. Opening it he found himself in the shipping and receiving area. A truck was pulled up to one of the bay doors. Several men were unloading it and another man was standing near by with a clipboard. Walt walked up and asked if he was Fitzgerald Swanson.

“That’s me. What can I do for you?” he replied.

“You were the foreman in charge of Graham Noyes Kangaroo sanctuary. Right?” asked Walt.

“Sure. What of it?”

“Were you around when Graham and Jack Warren got into the argument that caused Graham to buy Jack out?”

“Oh yeah! I’d say anyone in a 5 mile radius heard that argument.” the man smiled. “That fellow, Noyes, has got a temper. He was shouting and saying some pretty vile things, Calling Jack a ‘Low down worm’ was one of the nicer things he said. He even took a swing at Jack. I don’t think he actually connected, but in avoiding the punch Jack slipped and fell. Boy was he mad.”

“So what did Warren do?” Walt prompted.

“Well he turned scarlet for one thing. But Noyes was already standing over him shouting that he wanted Jack out of there and that he’d buy out his half. I think Jack just figured that was fine with him and it would be better to just cut his losses and go. Noyes is definitely the stronger of the two, plus Jack was just tired of Graham’s temper and of the constant criticism.”

“Were you good friends? That is you and Warren.”

“That’s no secret. Jack and I are pretty good mates. I met him when he first started working here. We’ve worked on several jobs together. Fact is, that’s how Devon Construction got the job at the Kangaroo place.”

“How about you and Noyes?”

“Oh, let’s just say I wish the guy well, but I won’t be taking any work from him in the future.” He smiled but he couldn’t disguise a touch of bitterness in the remark.

Walt thanked Swanson for his help and left.

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Walt decided it would be worthwhile to check out the property owned by Jack Warren. If he was the culprit it seemed like a likely spot for hiding the kangaroos. He wondered if Jackie would like to go along for the ride so he headed back to the hotel.

As he got off the elevator and turned to go to his room he noticed the same woman he had seen earlier. Now she was dressed as a maid and she seemed to be ducking into one of the neighboring suites.

Walt hurried to their suite. He was suddenly very concerned for Jackie’s safety. Entering, he saw Jackie was out on the balcony reading a book. He decided not to alarm her.

“Hey Jay-bird!” he called cheerily. “Would you like to take a little countryside ride with me?”

“Sure thing!” she replied. “Just give me a second to put on some shoes and run a comb through my hair.”

About an hour later they pulled up near the woodlands owned by Warren. There was a faint car track that led off the road. Walt parked the car and they got out and made their way on foot along the track. The trees formed a canopy over them and the filtered light made the walk very pleasant.

Sure enough, not too far into the wood was a clearing and in the clearing a fenced in area made of chain link. The gate was open and there was no sign of any kangaroos. Walt went into the enclosure to look around. There were traces of some sort of food and it looked like there might have been some straw bedding that had been removed.

Jackie called from outside the enclosure. “Looks like someone had a fire here.”

Walt went to inspect Jackie’s discovery. It was several weeks old by the looks of things. It appeared to have been used to clean up the construction debris.

“What do you want to bet this was built by a couple of Devon Construction employees. Maybe even with pilfered supplies.”

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“Back there you said ‘a couple’ of employees.” Jackie said, as they were driving back. “Do you suspect Fitz Swanson as well?”

“Well I was thinking that building that enclosure would be at least a two-person job. And also Jack Warren didn’t look like he was floating in cash.”

“What if ...” Jackie started. She stopped and reflected a moment. “What if Warren and Swanson are in on it. Maybe Swanson wants to help Warren get back at Graham.” she thought a second longer. “Maybe Graham embarrassed Swanson as well. So he helped juggle some company books to get the supplies diverted to Warren’s property.”

“Jackie. I think you may have hit on something there. Swanson did allude to the fact that he wasn’t real happy with Graham.” Walt mulled that over for a moment. “And your juggling the books scenario gives me another idea: Okay. So we say that Graham has made both Jack and Fitz embarrassed, mad and maybe even vengeful. While Graham is away for a couple hours, they have some oversized segments of pipe put into the storm drain. Of course they just leave the blueprints showing that the pipe is a mere 20 inches.”

“And then they have their passageway for smuggling out a drugged Kangaroo!” chimed in Jackie.

“Let’s see if Graham can confirm any altercations between him and Swanson. Next stop: The kangaroo sanctuary.”

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They found Graham Noyes in his office talking with Tom Williams, the trainer. They were reviewing plans for a change in the kangaroo’s diet.

“Sorry to interrupt Graham, but I’d like to know how you got along with Fitz Swanson, the foreman on the construction project.”

Noyes looked a bit embarrassed but replied, “Well, I’m afraid I did try to prompt him into working harder once or twice.”

Tom Williams glanced at Noyes. “Oh, come on Graham. That time you told him the Kangaroos could probably do his job better wasn’t the most amiable scene I’ve ever witnessed. He tried to flatten you.”

“Well okay that might be true.” Noyes admitted.

“And telling him to straighten up or he’d find himself on the street smoking second hand cigar butts didn’t win you any friends either.”

“Okay, it’s true. But that was a bad week for me. My fiancé, Ruby, had left me, Jack was pulling his shenanigans and then Swanson’s foot dragging just pushed me over the edge.” Noyes explained.

“From these stories it would sound like you have quite a temper!” said Walt. “But while we’ve been here you have been controlling yourself, and besides, I thought you still had a fiancé?”

“One of Ruby’s stipulations for us getting back together was for me to get some anger management counseling. It has been helping a lot!”

“Good for you, Graham. I’m really glad to hear that.” Walt said and he realized he had seen Graham in a couple situations where his temper had almost flared. “But meanwhile I’m really coming to believe that Jack and Fitz are our main suspects.”

“Really?” asked Graham. “That’s hard to believe. We’ve known each other for quite a while now.”

“How was it that you and Jack met up and decided on working on the kangaroo project together?” asked Walt.

“We met back in college. We played on the football team; um, that would be soccer to you Yanks. We lost track of each other for a couple years.” Graham paused a moment, then continued, “Before starting the sanctuary I was working for a veterinarian and he came in — that was about a year ago — he was looking for someone to check a horse he was thinking of buying. He had just made a bundle at the track and was thinking about buying the horse as an investment. Of course we recognized each other right off. Since we were on the subject of investments, I started going off on my idea to build this sanctuary. He started getting excited as well and, I’m not certain if it was that day, but we decided at some point to go in together.”

“I would almost suspect the veterinarian!” Tom added. “First Graham left and after opening the sanctuary he asked me to come work for him.”

“That sounds like tomorrow’s investigation.” said Walt.

* * *

Before they left Walt took a walk around the outside perimeter of the fence, to check for signs of someone dropping over the back fence the night before. There would have been a bit of a drop and Walt couldn't find any signs of disturbance.

"Curious." he mused. "Could they have some sort of lift? Maybe he climbed down the fence and didn't jump like I was imagining."

Walt stood by the fence and looked around. He was standing in a dirt access road that ran along the fence. Backed up to the other side of the alley was a small Self-storage business.

"Could he have had a plank going from the fence to the roof top over there?" Walt crossed his arms and tried to imagine the possibilities.

* * *

Arriving back at their room, Walt went to insert the key, but the door was already open. Alarm bells were going off in Walt's head.

"Jackie. Stay behind me. This could be serious."

He pushed open the door. Standing by the phone was the woman in the maid's costume.

"Hold it right there!" he shouted. He jumped to detain her. "Jackie! Call the front desk and have them call the police."

"H-Hey!" shouted his captive.

"Uh, Walt? What are you doing?" asked Jackie. "This is Ruby, Graham's fiancé. She's a maid here at the hotel."

It took a couple seconds for Walt to understand. He let Ruby go and laughed. Ruby still looked a bit worried. Jackie turned to Ruby and said. "I'm sorry, I guess Walt hadn't met you before."

"You two have met?" Walt asked.

"We had a great little chat this morning while you were out gathering clues." Jackie replied.

"Whoa, I am so sorry, Ruby." Walt apologized. "I saw you this morning in street clothes and thought you were eaves-dropping on my conversation. I guess I let my imagination go and when I saw you in a maid uniform, I just suspected that you were trying to disguise yourself."

At this Ruby laughed. "Oh well! To be mistaken for a clever secret agent — That's quite thrilling! But this morning I was just getting to work and it was the first time I had seen you since you got here. I was just interested in seeing what you looked like. But the boss gets his knickers in a bit of twist if I talk to 'the guests,' so I held back from introducing myself."

"Well! I'm glad to meet you Ruby." Walt said extending his hand. Then with a twinkle in his eye he added, "I'd give you a hug, but I think I've already taken that liberty."

* * *

“So where do we go next?” Jackie asked. “Are you going to inspect that storm drain pipe? Talk to the Vet? Maybe confront Swanson?”

“Well, actually, I’m thinking of spending the night at the Kangaroo sanctuary. They failed last night maybe they’ll try again.” Walt shrugged his shoulders. “So I was thinking of getting some sleep right now.”

“But are you tired? How can you fall asleep at a time like this!” Jackie exclaimed.

“Well we are on our honeymoon after all.” he replied with an impish smile.

* * *

There was a light on in the reception area when Walt got to the kangaroo sanctuary around 9 o’clock that evening. Mike and Catherine were talking rather intently about something as Walt walked in. He was struck again at her good looks. Her skin and facial features hinted at having aboriginal links mixed into her heritage.

“What’s happening?” he asked. “Sounds serious.”

“Oh, Hi Walt.” Mike said, then added, “Nothing too serious. Something happened to one of the kangaroos and Catherine is a bit worried.”

“One of the kangaroos had an abscess.” Catherine looked at Mike as if she couldn’t believe that he didn’t take the situation as seriously as she did. “Graham and Tom had to take him to a veterinary hospital. Those two have been working so hard recently, and now this.”

“Is that why you are here so late?” asked Walt.

“Yes. We’re so understaffed I offered to stay until they got back.”

“Well then I guess it was a good thing I came down. Are you guys hungry? Can I go get you something to eat?”

Catherine smiled, “Thanks, that’s sweet. But Frank ran out about seven and got us some take out.”

Walt turned to Mike. “Do you guys have an extra gun I could borrow while I help patrol the grounds?”

“Uh, is that legal?” Mike asked nervously. “There is Tom’s gun, but I’m not sure...”

“Michael.” Catherine snapped. “Mr. Lincoln will need to protect himself if anything should happen. We can bend the rules a bit ... Right *Tom?*” she said looking at Walt.

“Uh. Tom it is!” returned Walt grinning.

* * *

Crouching behind a bush near the storm drain, Walt settled down for what he figured could be a very long wait. He pulled the borrowed gun from its shoulder holster and while he waited, he idly inspected it.

Suddenly he heard that shushing water-like noise coming from the storm drain. He casually looked over to the drain. Doing a double take Walt realized that the whole drain was raising up, almost like an elevator. Walt saw a black figure exiting and then a

second figure appeared. Walt wasn't sure but it didn't look like the second man had come from the drain. It was too dark to say for sure. The drain began closing and suddenly the source of the sound was obvious: An hydraulic lift was being used to raise and lower the lid.

Walt shifted his position to watch them better. When he suddenly realized they were heading his way down the path. He held his breath and froze. In the dark they wouldn't see him as long as he didn't make any noise.

Too late Walt discovered that they were coming straight at him with guns drawn. They knew he was there! Before he could move, a familiar voice said, "Come on out of there, Lincoln. Keep your hands where we can see them — and move slowly"

Walt rose slowly from his hiding place. He tried to keep disguised that he was holding his gun.

The familiar voice chuckled triumphantly. "I told you he'd be there!"

From the direction of the other man he suddenly heard the faint click as the man released the safety latch of his gun.

In a flash, Walt realized that they were not looking for a hostage. "They just wanted to make sure where I was!"

Lincoln pivoted to make himself less of a target and dove to the ground just as the first explosion shattered the peaceful night. A second flash spurted from Lincoln's gun. Almost as if everything had gone into slow motion he heard the rustle of the leaves on the bushes as the bullet whistled towards its target. Then he saw the silhouetted head jerk of his would-be assailant, followed by a grunt almost as if in disbelief at what had just happened. His knees buckled and he seemed to slowly crumple to the ground.

The other man started running. He dove toward the storm drain and Walt heard the sound of it raising. The man turned and was shooting wildly, trying to gain time to get into the drain. Walt hugged the ground and inched forward as leaves and twigs rained down on him as the bullets ripped through the trees above.

Walt heard the guards running his way. Only two shafts of light heading his way confirmed that Graham and Tom hadn't returned yet. He hoped this wasn't the first time that Joe and Frank had dealt with gunfire. But that wasn't his problem right now.

The other man was into the drain and Walt could hear feet pounding on cement. Lincoln jumped into the darkness as the drain cover was closing. A couple of faint green glowing sticks gave the only indication of the tunnel ahead. Walt saw a black form moving past one. He squeezed off a shot at a shallow angle. There was a spark as it hit the side of the pipe and ricocheted. There was a gasp from the fleeing man and he momentarily stopped. To avoid being an easy target, Walt flattened himself against a side wall behind a notch where the round pipe met the square drain shaft.

"Next shot might not be so friendly!" Walt called.

"Lincoln. You're a dead man!" screamed the voice in the darkness. It was followed immediately by a flash from his gun. The bullet whistled past Lincoln and clattered noisily further down the pipe.

Walt suddenly knew who that familiar voice was. It was Mike the guard! There wasn't a lot of time for thinking, but suddenly several things fell into place. That story about a thief going over the back fence was a total lie. The thief wasn't at the fence. He was going down the storm drain that night as Walt and Frank were running to the back fence. And that's why there weren't any marks outside the fence.

Walt knew that if he fired his gun it would give his position away. He bided his time. He wasn't sure how many bullets Mike had left, but it couldn't be many. As if to answer his question, he heard the click of Mike's gun but no report. Mike was definitely panicking. Walt could hear he was breathing in gasps.

"Mike," he called out. He sensed the man freeze hearing his name. "Do the smart thing. Drop the gun and come back here." Walt heard another click and a curse.

Suddenly another shot erupted from somewhere farther down the drain pipe. Mike shrieked and Walt could hear him hit the ground as the bullet scudded past on the far wall.

"Don't shoot. Oh God! I've been hit. Please don't shoot!" Mike was crying. His breath rasped. He was hugging the ground scrambling towards Walt.

Further down the pipe Walt saw a faint wedge of light. The third man was opening a trap door. Walt hoped Mike wouldn't die of fright, but he wanted to stop the other man from escaping. Walt stepped into the center of the passageway, took careful aim and shot. The trap door dropped back down and Walt spun himself back into his notch in the wall.

Mike was just arriving back at the drain shaft.

"Open the drain, Mike." Walt ordered.

Mike pointed to one of the dull green glowing lights. "Press that." he said.

* * *

Walt was out of the drain in no time hauling Mike with him. Frank and Joe were standing there trying to find a way in.

"You guys, take Mike and handcuff him. Treat his wounds, whatever, but don't let him get away. He is a member of the gang of thieves." Walt didn't have time for their looks of disbelief. "Do it! I have a third man to catch."

Walt was off in a shot. From the blueprints that he had been looking at that morning, he had a good idea where the pipes lead. Like a cheetah he raced through the sanctuary and with a single thought: Get to the third man before he could escape. The fence by the office was his best and most direct route. Hardly pausing to think, he used the corner formed by the fence and office wall to slither right up and over the fence. It was almost as if the fence or barbed wire didn't exist. He was back on the ground and heading for the Self-storage buildings. If his calculations were correct, one of the end two units was his target.

He rounded the corner in time to see Swanson pulling open the door to a pick-up truck. He appeared to be favoring his left leg. Walt reached the truck just as the door was

closing. The starter motor was turning over, but Walt grabbed the handle and jerked open the door.

Apparently that was the first moment that Swanson realized that Walt was there. He looked up in surprise, his gun was sitting on his lap. He grabbed for the gun, but being a right-hand drive vehicle it was in an awkward position and as he started to raise it and swing it around, he bumped the steering wheel and dropped it. Walt dragged Swanson from the truck. He miscalculated the man's reserves, for even off balance Swanson was able to lash out and catch Walt on the side of the head.



Walt staggered back for a second and Swanson tried to regain his truck. But with a lame leg he wasn't much of a match for Walt, who swung his legs around knocking the feet right out from under his opponent. Swanson came down on his hurt leg and let out a gasp. Police sirens could be heard nearing and he knew he chances for escape were gone. With a resigned groan he rolled off his bad leg and onto his back. He put a hand over his eyes and just seemed to be waiting for someone else to take care of him.

"I guess he's going to have to get use to that, where he's headed." Walt thought grimly.

* * *

The police gathered everyone briefly in the bunkroom next to the office. Jack Warren was dead, he was the man who had tried to kill Walt in the attack that had turned a calm night into a frenzy. The medical team had already taken him away. Mike hadn't actually gotten shot. A chip of cement had struck him on the neck, causing a nasty gash, but nothing serious. Walt had shot Fitz Swanson in the calf. The medical team had cleaned up the wounds and given the men antibiotics, but the police wanted a few questions answered before they would let anyone leave. Walt had a couple of his own.

"Was this really about getting revenge over a few insults?" Walt asked when he had a chance.

Swanson looked up, all of his will power seemed to have vanished. "With Jack dead, there isn't much left to hope for." he said dejectedly.

"And what is that suppose to mean?" Walt asked.

Mike answered for him. "Insurance. Noyes has a life insurance policy with Jack Warren as beneficiary. With Jack gone what do the two of us have?"

Walt took a moment to let that sink in. He turned to Graham, who had returned shortly after the police had arrived, and asked. "Is that true?"

"You know. I had completely forgotten about that, but it's true. We took out policies on each other when we first began seriously planning the sanctuary. I put the policy in my file cabinet and haven't thought about it since. The next payment must still be several months away."

Walt looked back at Swanson and Mike. "So he was offering you a share in the life insurance money if you would help him kill Graham?"

"I only said I would help them get information to help them figure out when to enter the park." Mike said. "It was Warren who did all the talk about killing."

Swanson looked up, a gleam of anger in his eye. "Jack was hoping to use Noyes anger against him. He was hoping the thefts, his girlfriend problems and other setbacks might cause him to commit suicide."

"Yeah, but failing that he wasn't against taking care of him some other way." Mike sneered. "and his recent gambling losses had him in a panic."

Their animosity towards each other was going to be a big help in wrapping things up.

"Oh, and you were the little choir boy." shot back Swanson. "Trying to convince him to kill Tom Williams and make it look like Noyes had done it so you had a chance with the skirt in the ticket office!"

Tom recoiled in disbelief.

"And might I guess that Mike found a way to give that kangaroo an infection to cause the abscess?" Walt asked.

Mike's fervent denial and Swanson's leering glance at Mike weren't a confession. But Walt didn't need that. He just wanted to give the police every possible angle to hold these two.

"What about the kangaroo's? Did you hold them in that enclosure on Warren's woodlot while waiting to sell them?" Walt asked.

Swanson head snapped up. "You know about his property?"

"I was there this morning."

The police constable broke in. "I think we have enough for this evening. We'll be taking these two down to the police infirmary and charging them with theft and we'll have to see about conspiracy to commit murder. We'd also like to get a formal statement in the morning from you, Mr. Lincoln.

* * *

"Walt! It's three in the morning." Jackie said sleepily, when he arrived home. She rolled over, stretching lazily under the covers.

"That would be correct." Walt teased. "Do you have the weather report as well?"

Jackie looked at Walt with a wry smile. "Hot and bothered?"

“Oh Ho!” laughed Walt. “Let me see if there are showers in the forecast and I will be right back.”

* * *

The next evening Walt and Jackie had dinner with Graham, Ruby, Tom and Catherine. Walt had suggested a meal at a good restaurant when Graham had talked about payment. A seven-course meal for the six of them probably wasn't cheap. But then everyone needs to eat and it gave them a chance to talk. For Graham and Tom it was one of their first chances to relax in two weeks.

“It's my guess that getting Graham and Tom away from the sanctuary was a ploy to make it easier for Warren to get onto the grounds. I'm not sure that they were going to continue stealing kangaroos. But they were trying to put a lot of pressure, a lot of worries, on Graham. When I showed up, I think it really threw Mike. He wasn't expecting me. Again, it's only my guess, but I think Mike called Warren or else just met him at the drain and told him I was laying in wait for him.

“I was kind of curious why he was in there talking to me when we were so short handed.” Catherine said, “Now I would guess he was just trying to keep me occupied while his buddies snuck in.”

“My guess is he was just taking advantage of us being gone to chat you up!” Tom interjected.

“Thomas!” Catherine chided. “Jealousy is so unlike you!”

“Speaking of emotions that reminds me,” Ruby said turning to Graham, “you really have learned a lot about controlling your temper. During these last weeks you have made me so proud!”

“There were a couple times, honey, when I thought I was going to boil over. But among the other things I've been learning for controlling my temper, the thought of losing you was what helped me the most.”

Almost in unison, Jackie and Catherine sighed, “Awww.”

It was getting late and the group was starting to break up and head home.

“So what sort of plans do the two of you have for the rest of your stay in Sydney?” asked Graham as he helped Ruby with her jacket.

“A bit of sight seeing, I would imagine.” he answered, and turning to Jackie and giving her a kiss on her temple, “and just a wee bit of honeymooning as well.”

The End

Originally written summer 1964 (Book 201), Revised: 1971 and again in August, 2000.