

Also by Christine Crawford

The View From Out Here

THROUGH WINDOWS

The present is a reflection of the past

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Periplum.



Then tragedy struck. Despite her husband's instructions to stay away from the village, the Marquise and her baby made occasional visits.

'Did you see the carriage in town today?' the gossip went. 'The Marquise brought her mother to the village to order some jewellery. I think the Marquis would have been displeased!'

Later that day, a ragged worker from the estate burst into the inn. 'There's been an accident on the road to the chateau,' he gasped. 'The Marquise! Her carriage rolled when her horse shied and bolted. I think she has been killed. Her mother is safe but injured.'

'And the baby? I think he was with them,' a voice came.

'They are searching for the baby. I didn't wait.'

'It's getting dark,' another said. Anxious to help, or to witness the disaster, men who were not too inebriated leapt up. A growing throng joined them as the news spread. Only a handful of women was among them. With lanterns glowing they tramped along the road. As the group approached the accident scene they were met by the Marquis's men.

'Go back home, all of you. There is nothing to be done here. Go!' In the fluttering light they could see the bottom of the tipped coach, one wheel in the air. They turned back reluctantly but knew that news would come in the morning.

Chapter Seven

It took Ben an hour to clear the city traffic. Green countryside began to replace suburban roofs. His fingers drummed in time to the radio as he sang along. He was relieved to be away from the workshop. That morning back in Sydney there had been yet another confrontation between John and Adam. His mother had shepherded him out the door, 'Make your escape,' she had whispered. 'And don't worry, you'll be fine, even if your Dad usually does the quotes. At least you won't have your grandfather interfering.'

Lorraine was right. Adam liked to think he was involved in this procedure, but usually John had done most of the costing and time estimates before talking it over with his father. The old man tended to be conservative in his pricing, and overly optimistic in promising completion dates. This was the first assessment Ben would do on his own. There would be an opportunity to talk it over with his father that evening. There was no need to give the old lady an indication of costs today.

'I could live in the country,' he spoke aloud, as he turned off the highway. 'And it's not far from the coast. I could still go surfing.' The rich dairy and cattle country was neatly divided up by timber fences or, in some places, by old lichen-covered stone walls. Moisture laden sea breezes brought regular rain to the area. Stands of mature trees surrounded large old homes, their slate roofs visible amidst the trees. As Ben neared the township of Netherleigh, swathes of new

brought with her from home and shown Lily some of the drawings of her friends.

‘They’re not very complimentary, I must say,’ Lily had said. ‘They’re good drawings, but you’ve made everyone look angry. I wouldn’t want you drawing me!’

Maida was itching to do just that. Her grandmother’s face with its pouches and deeply etched lines would be a challenge to draw.



Maida had avoided bringing up the subject of the young man who had left his work gear at the house. It was obvious he would be returning soon to begin whatever job he was hired to do. The topic would arise soon enough. It was Lily who mentioned it first. She and Maida were having breakfast together in the dining room.

‘That young man will be back today,’ she said. ‘The one who is going to fix my windows.’

Maida looked up from her breakfast. ‘Windows?’

‘Yes, my stained glass windows. Some in the house, but mainly the ones in the old chapel.’ She looked at Maida accusingly. ‘You haven’t been in there, have you? You’ve been poking around everywhere else.’

‘No, Nan, I haven’t. It’s locked.’ She looked cheekily at Lily and added, ‘Otherwise I would have poked around in there too!’ She continued, ‘I used to love going in there when I was a kid; it was all dark and spooky and away from the grown-ups. Like my loft ... and I always loved the coloured windows.’

Lily looked at her thoughtfully. ‘Did you?’ she said. ‘They really are the only part of this property I care about.’ Her voice trailed off. ‘Perhaps one day ... I’ll tell you a story.’ A pause. ‘I think you’re old enough.’

‘Ooh Nan! A bit of saucy scandal. Tell me, I can’t wait!’

‘Well, you’ll have to wait until I’m ready. Now let’s talk about this young man who’s coming.’

It seemed the young man was called Ben, from a Sydney firm. He would be staying for a few days here and there. Lily had offered him a bed in the house (Just as well she moved out, Maida thought) but he had refused. He would be bringing a swag and would sleep in one of the outbuildings, or in his van. (Hopefully nowhere near her loft!) There was a rudimentary shower and basin for workers in one of the buildings. He had insisted that would suit him fine. He had engaged a local worker to help him with dismantling and handling some of the windows. They would both be arriving today.

‘Well, I’ll be keeping out of their way,’ Maida said, rising and collecting the mugs and plates. ‘Perhaps I might go into town.’

‘I just might need you here, Maida,’ Lily said. ‘I noticed you avoiding him. He’s a very nice young man.’

‘I don’t need a nice young man. Or any man right now. I ...’

Lily peered at her, ‘Aha! You have a secret too.’



The two men arrived separately, the local man first. Lily knew him of course, and Maida watched from her loft as they chatted for a while. Then Lily sent him to the rear of the house, presumably to where Ben’s equipment was stored.

Soon after, Maida heard Ben’s van arriving. She watched him climb down, greet Lily then look around. Perhaps he was looking for her? She was mortified when she heard her grandmother calling her. She looked quickly at herself in her mirror and made her way slowly down the ladder. She was annoyed. She didn’t want this Ben knowing where she was staying. She sauntered out of the barn, hoping he would not suspect she was living there. Unless of course Lily had told him?

Chapter Eighteen



James approached Lorraine's desk late one afternoon. 'Lorraine,' he said, 'there's some training on next week. I'd like you to attend. It involves the new marketing strategy for our franchise. I'll be going and, if you are to become office manager, it would be important for you to go too.'

Lorraine hesitated. Next week. What was on next week, she asked herself. James continued, 'If that crabby husband of yours will allow it of course.'

'James! That was uncalled for. I can decide for myself, and yes, I'll be there. When is it?'

'All day Thursday with the dinner that evening. Bring your finery. And it's in Newcastle,' he added. 'We'll drive up early Thursday morning.'

'O-kay,' Lorraine said, feeling trapped. There was a bell ringing about Thursday. 'Does that mean an overnight stay?'

'That's up to you, but I don't drink and drive.'

'Neither do I,' Lorraine replied, 'I'll be designated driver for the trip back.'

James chuckled. 'I think I can trust you to drive the Beamer back,' he said.

What had she let herself in for? Lorraine wondered. Two hours or so in the intimacy of a car. And was she his dinner date? And returning late at night. Despite her bravado, the thought of driving that distance in an unfamiliar car, especially at night, was terrifying. And what would John say? Could she get out of it?

James was speaking. 'Then perhaps you could cancel the accommodation booking Jodie made?'

Lorraine found the Training Folder and when she phoned the hotel was relieved to find the booking was for two separate rooms. She hesitated before cancelling one.

After James had left for the day, Lorraine sat alone at her desk for a while, wondering where it had gone very wrong. Probably when she was too quick to say she would attend. Yet she had felt pressured, provoked. Now how to escape neatly? She wanted this job, although she was beginning to have doubts. The manager's job appealed; she wanted to do that training. She would need to find better ways to handle James. She would have to be more assertive.

So, what she would do, she reasoned to herself, she would drive up to Newcastle by herself – James could take his BMW – and she would return that afternoon. No question of staying overnight or sharing a car. No dinners, no finery. She couldn't resist a little giggle to herself; the thought of dressing up had been tempting; it might have been fun to be noticed, appreciated. So now I have to tell John, she thought, tonight.



It didn't go well. She had rehearsed several opening lines and imagined the resultant scenarios. In the end she blurted out, 'John, they've put me down for training next Thursday ... in Newcastle. I'll drive up and be home that evening.'

John gazed at her. 'Have you forgotten?' was all he said.

'What? Oh no! The opening.' Several young glass designers were having a joint exhibition at a nearby gallery. One of them had

estate; I thought I might enjoy working in that field. It was stupid of me.'

'No Mum, that sounds good,' Ben said. 'I'm just surprised, I didn't know about it until Claire told me on the way from the airport.'

'Well, you've been busy, and away. And to tell you the truth, it wouldn't have been nice to have been around home lately.'

'I pretty much suspected that,' Claire said, 'Somehow I couldn't see Dad, or Grandad for that matter, letting you escape from Holloway Glass.'

'Well, my escape was short lived,' Lorraine said. 'I can't go back to real estate now.'

'Let's just wait and see, Mum. We don't know how things are going to turn out,' Ben said.

'Well, whatever happens,' Claire declared, 'things will have to change. And I'll make sure they do.'

Chapter Nineteen

Maida was happy as she drove to Sydney in her painted car. Colin's son at the service station had assured her it would be fine on the expressways. She had never driven much in Sydney but she refused to let any anxiety encroach on her sense of happy anticipation. As she drove she examined her happiness.

To her surprise she was looking forward to seeing her mother. The past months at Netherleigh had allowed her some distance to look dispassionately at her parents' marriage. They hadn't been happy together; despite her childish resistance, they did the right thing in separating. Her father had every right to find a new partner and, if she was not that much older than Maida herself, well, that was his business. She needn't have stayed there with them defiantly; she could have moved out, got a job, studied part-time; taken more care with her choice of study.

And her mother? There was still some discomfort there; why hadn't Maida been more precious to her? She was, after all, her only child, her daughter. Still, if her mother had loved someone, she probably made the right choice in pursuing that. Maida shied away from thinking about love; yet with Ben she might, almost, perhaps, be starting to fall in love with him, just a little bit.

Ben, of course, was the other reason for her sense of happiness. She would be seeing him soon, even though the circumstances were frightening. Unlike Lily nearing the end of her days, Ben's father was