

Missing Pieces

The second novel in the Cass Diamond series

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For Annie Chance, with thanks for everything.

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Finally, I would like to remember the late Graham McCleary, and our sunny days together at Crystal Cascades.

I would like to acknowledge the peoples who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which the city of Cairns now stands, and of the surrounding regions. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future.

Caroline de Costa

Disclaimer

Missing Pieces is a work of fiction; all characters are the product of the author's imagination and not based on any person living or dead. Likewise, institutions including the hospital and police headquarters are fictitious. However the city of Cairns and the wider region of Far North Queensland do exist, and I urge readers not yet familiar with our beautiful part of the world to visit.

1

ATHERTON TABLELANDS, NORTH QUEENSLAND

SUNDAY 19TH AUGUST 2012

The first thing Cass felt was a headache above her left eye. She tried to open it but couldn't. She tried the right eye. There was a red mist there. Where the hell was she?

She could just make out a chink of light in some boards, and a red flower, but everywhere else was dark. There was a pain in her chest which was worse with each breath she took. Her hands, where were they? She tried to get her brain to send messages out to them. They must be behind her. She wanted to move the fingers on her right hand, then her left. Not possible. They felt encased in some sticky substance. And tied together. Her feet ... they must be very far away. They were heavy, far too heavy to lift. Too heavy to think about right now. She wanted to sleep again. Her left eye was already closed, better not to open it. She closed her right eye and that felt better too. She could just drift off again...

She snapped herself back to the moment. Think, Cass, think. Yes—the guy in overalls. He had a spanner. She had tried her taekwondo move and tipped him onto the ground but he was too strong. She couldn't hold him down. And then he had lifted the spanner...

2

CAIRNS, NORTH QUEENSLAND

WEDNESDAY 1ST AUGUST 2012

The alarm clock shrilled, right next to Cass Diamond's left ear. She rolled over and hit the snooze button. Beside her Zak murmured: 'You have to get up, it's half past seven'. He wasn't due at work in ED until ten, so had the luxury of another hour of sleep in her bed. She had to be at Sheridan Street police headquarters at eight.

Sleepily she edged out from under the sheets and found a sarong. Tying it around herself she padded into the kitchen and put on the kettle. She picked up the TV remote and turned on the ABC. Breakfast news was on. Local first.

'The big story today,' said the reporter, her dark hair slicked into a roll on the back of her head, her makeup perfect (Christ, what time did she get up, Cass wondered) 'is this announcement about Andrew Todd, who died in Cairns in June'. The screen moved to a photo of a middle-aged man in a business suit and mayoral robes, soon identified by a caption at the bottom of the screen. He stood in front of a building that must have been the previous council chambers at a time well before Cass's arrival in Cairns. The early nineties, Cass guessed. She had only the vaguest idea of who Andrew Todd was. Or rather, had been.

The camera returned to the reporter, now identified as Kristy. 'Yes,' she continued, 'in a bizarre twist to the story of Andrew Todd it seems we are going to be revisiting the very tragic disappearance of little Yasmin Munoz from the Crystal Cascades picnic ground in 1992. Ryan Russell is reporting for us.'

There was a cross to what Cass recognised as the park at the bottom of the Crystal Cascades, in the western suburbs of Cairns. A secluded spot where water that was genuinely crystal clear tumbled down from the mountains over rocks worn smooth through hundreds of years, into a series of swimming holes. Cass also knew this as a place where danger lurked. Especially for young backpackers who regularly misjudged the strength of tropical streams and storms. Ryan was standing by the lowest swimming hole, gripping a fluffy microphone.

‘Good morning, Kristy,’ he said. ‘Yes, it was right here, in August 1992, when Yasmin Munoz, aged 22 months disappeared from a birthday picnic. She was never found and no convincing case has ever been made for what happened to her.’

A fuzzy archival photo of Yasmin Munoz was shown. Cass moved closer to inspect a small brown-skinned, dark-haired child clutching a bucket and spade. Then the kettle boiled and she backed into the kitchen, still listening. What did this have to do with the late mayor of Cairns?

Ryan continued: ‘Yasmin was the daughter of dancer and minor celebrity Delia Munoz, living in Cairns at the time, and later charged, together with her husband Felix Watkins, with the sale of fake artworks. Munoz was acquitted.’

There were photos of a young dancer with a wide smile, wearing an orange body suit, dark hair severely pinned back. Ah, yes, remembered Cass. The fake Aboriginal artworks had been a big story. And Delia Munoz had featured a bit in the kind of magazines Cass got to read at her hairdresser’s, Delia being both photogenic and prone to scandal.

‘Rumours,’ Ryan went on, ‘have abounded that Yasmin’s father was not Delia’s partner of the time, but the late Andrew Todd, though these were never confirmed. However, the shock announcement by the Todd family lawyers yesterday evening would seem to provide posthumous confirmation of Andrew Todd’s recognition of paternity of the child.’

‘So what exactly have the lawyers said?’ asked Kristy from the studio.

‘Well, Kristy, it seems that Andrew Todd’s will has some quite unusual clauses,’ replied Ryan. ‘As you’ll be aware Mr Todd had very significant interests in mining in Central Queensland, despite his commitment to preserving the Reef and rainforest in the Cairns region, particularly when he was a councillor and later, mayor. His estate is said to be worth around two hundred million dollars. He was divorced and has never remarried. As is well known, he had one son, the construction entrepreneur Clarkson Todd, who it is assumed would inherit the bulk of the estate.’ Ah, yes, thought Cass, *that* Todd.

‘However,’ continued Ryan, ‘it seems that the will has a clause directing that a search be undertaken for Yasmin Munoz. It seems Andrew Todd had some reason for thinking that she may still be alive but why, exactly, he thought this, has not been revealed in the announcements so far. It also appears that he has directed that his estate cannot be settled until an extensive search has been completed. Of course, if she *is* alive—and that seems quite doubtful, according to some witnesses and police involved in the case—she is no longer a small child but a woman of around 22.’

‘So how exactly is she to be found? Or at least, looked for?’ asked Kristy.

‘Well, we’re still waiting to hear about this, but the family lawyers will be advertising for anyone with information to contact them. Hopefully, they might offer some details that shed more light on why Andrew Todd thought she could be alive.’

‘Of course,’ said Kristy, ‘Clarkson Todd has also been in the news lately in relation to the approval of the new Xerxes coal mine in Central Queensland. What did he say about these revelations concerning his father?’

Some archival footage of Clarkson Todd was shown, first stepping out of a Mercedes close to an open-cut site somewhere

in the centre of the state, and second, walking in front of Brisbane's Parliament House with the state's Premier. Cass stood watching while the tea brewed in the pot.

'It's no secret that his father strongly disapproved of the application to open this huge mine, although he did have some smaller mining interests here in Queensland. And his son's opposition to ideas about climate change is public knowledge along with the fact that the two were estranged. It's not known whether Clarkson Todd will be the sole heir or at least the major one to the Todd fortune, and so far nothing has been revealed about this. We tried to contact Clarkson Todd but he has no comment on the situation at present.'

Cass popped two slices of bread into the toaster and poured the tea. She munched her toast while watching the world news. There was good news and bad. The good was that Barack Obama had said that male politicians shouldn't be making decisions restricting women's healthcare, the bad, that Moscow band *Pussy Riot* would be jailed. She finished her breakfast, slipped quietly into the bathroom, dressed, and poured tea for Zak. She took the cup into the bedroom and put it beside him, then clambered onto the bed to embrace him. Zak opened his eyes, smiled and kissed her but almost immediately went back to sleep. Clearly the tea would be left to go cold. She reset the alarm for nine and put it at more than arm's length on the bedside table.

In the kitchen she left a note for Jordon: *Don't forget to drop videos back, xx Mum*. Three sets of male sneakers scattered by the back door indicated that he had two mates staying over after the party that followed yesterday's seven-a-side footy match. Cass hoped he would get up in time for his chemistry tute at midday. Outside the back door she tipped food into Denzel's bowl and gave him a hug, then climbed into her car and headed towards Sheridan Street and the day to come.