

### The Hitchhiker

Nowadays, most motorists were surprised to see a hitchhiker. It was unusual. People were wary, so he tried to look as little like a serial killer as possible.

In the distance as the ribbon of road dissected the scrub, he could see the small cloud of red dust. He waited as the cloud got larger and eventually, he could see the white utility hurtling towards him. It slowed suddenly and swung slightly on the rough surface, as if the driver had a sudden change of heart. It stopped a few metres beyond him on the apron, tyres squelching in the last remnants of the wet. He grabbed his backpack and ran to the passenger door, which had been pushed open.

“Where are you headed?”

“Just up to Fitzroy Crossing.”

“Hop in.”

The driver pulled out, flicking on his indicator as he did, which seemed unnecessary. His hands rested lightly on the wheel. They were deeply tanned with patches of white where the pigment was missing. He wore a hat low on his head, so his features were difficult to see, but his face, like his hands, was deeply tanned and he had a three- or four-day stubble. A religious icon attached to the rear-view mirror swayed from side to side almost in time to the heavy metal soundtrack which made talk difficult, but not impossible.

To either side there was endless scrub with the occasional small group of cattle collectively moving their heads as they watched the car. Large birds rose from the carcasses of animals too slow to avoid the road trains and settled a slight distance off till the car had passed. He and the driver sat in silence. That seemed to be the expectation. He pulled out his map and checked his progress. Another five hours to Fitzroy Crossing, where he intended to stay a few weeks getting some bar or farm work. He was looking forward to a break after being on the road. He glanced at the driver who looked ahead, guiding the car towards the smoother sections of road. A cigarette dangling lightly from his lips, and a thin trail of smoke rising to the roof. The driver turned towards him and looked at him without expression.

“Do you want a drink? Fresh lemonade my wife made it from her lemon tree.” He said nodding towards a plastic bottle in the centre console.

He was thirsty and drank in gulps his throat rhythmically expanding and contracting. It was good. His thirst quenched; he leaned his head back against the seat as the toils of the road started to catch up with him. He slept.

His head rolled from side to side as the road became rougher, the car staggered on the uneven surface and then it stopped. He opened his eyes, but his body felt heavy and unresponsive like it was separate. He could see that they were no longer on the road. He felt sick.

The driver appeared at the window and then he winked.