

GOOD COUNTRY

First Ten Pages

Written by

Jeffrey P. McMahon

FADE IN:

SUPER:

TATIARA: 'GOOD COUNTRY' OF THE POTARUWUTJ NATION - MARCH 2019

EXT/INT. CAR TRAVELLING - RURAL BACK ROAD - DAY

OLD TOM SPENCER (80) drives a dusty, late model European car.

Sheep graze in the broad open paddocks. Old Tom looks scornfully to a paddock some distance beyond the sheep. A drilling rig of sorts.

A news broadcast emanates from the car's audio.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

In Melbourne, seventy-eight year old Catholic Cardinal, George Pell, who was found guilty by jury in December 2018 of abusing two choirboys while he was archbishop of Melbourne in the 1990s, was today sentenced to serve a term of six years in prison. He will be eligible for parole --

Old Tom turns the radio off, drives a few more metres, clutches his chest, awkwardly tries to pull to a halt.

In vain. The car veers into a fragile Mallee tree.

The dust clears - no major damage, not enough to action the air bag.

He fades into semi-consciousness.

EXT. MELBOURNE STREET - DAY

A tram trundles past a modern, medium rise office block.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

KATHERINE SPENCER (40), black executive suit, places her laptop on the glass tabletop.

She is flanked by three other FEMALE EXECS along with two MALES, similar age, similar devices ... and confidence.

One of the Females punches some commands on her device ...

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1
Time to bring wool back into vogue.

A huge screen on a wall, images of haute-couture designs.

EXT. RURAL BACK ROAD - DAY

A silver-grey 4-WD tradies ute, loaded with machinery parts, pulls up alongside Old Tom's car up against the mallee tree.

On the door of the vehicle is a sign: "KEROGEN DEVELOPMENTS"

The DRIVER, work clothes, hi-vis vest, rushes to Old Tom's car.

INT. HOMESTEAD KITCHEN - DAY

Part of a stone addition to the original nineteenth century building, last modernized in the 1980s.

AUDREY (60s), the domestic help, holds a battered address book, picks up the wall-mounted phone, taps a number.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY - SAME

Katherine et al close their laptops.

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1
Okay, remember our ethos, there's
always a market for the best.

They stand in unison.

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1
We're moving up, guys.

KATHERINE
And remember. No ceilings, glass or
otherwise.

They depart the Boardroom. Katherine's mobile phone rings.

She curtly farewells the others, checks the NO CALLER ID, curious. Reluctant at first, she never-the-less answers.

KATHERINE
Audrey? I'm not sure I ... Yes of
course, Audrey. Yes, long time ...

INT. MELBOURNE CITY APARTMENT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

High-rise Melbourne city apartment.

Katherine, silky kimono robe, closes her valise, places it on the floor alongside a small ultra-light travel case. She moves into ...

BEDROOM

... grabs a small remote unit from a sideboard, dims the lights, plays relaxing MUSIC.

She goes to the full-length windows and stares out at the high-rise city lights.

EXT. ESSENDON AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

A Cessna 310R light commuter aircraft ascends into the early morning sky.

INT. LIGHT AIRCRAFT - DAY

Katherine dozes in her seat. The plane banks. She wakes, takes a casual look out the window.

EXT. Paddock - DAY

The aircraft flies over geometric fields of golden leafed vineyards, circles over a mob of grazing sheep.

EXT. COUNTRY AIRSTRIP - DAY

The light aircraft on a simple country airstrip, parked on the tarmac by a basic terminal.

A simple sign: "WELCOME TO PADTHAWAY"

Katherine alights. A scruffy bloke, ANDY (20) approaches.

ANDY
Miss Spencer?

KATHERINE
Miss? Quaint.

He's bemused.

KATHERINE

Never mind.

ANDY

Andy. Local Taxi. Been sent by Miss
Audrey.

Andy stows the single case and valise in the boot of an older
model sedan that passes as a taxi.

Katherine presents an open palm, soliciting the keys. He's
reluctant. She's assertive. He acquiesces.

ANDY

It's a bit of a drive, Miss. D'you
know the --?

She plucks the keys from his hand.

EXT. RURAL BACK ROAD - ENTRANCE GATEWAY - DAY

Katherine, with Andy passenger, drives the taxi in through an
old, once-grandiose gateway.

On one deteriorating pillar of the gateway, a tarnished brass
plaque:

"TATIARA PARK - EST. 1886"

They continue along the dirty gravel driveway of the avenue
of Silver Birch trees, leaves golden yellow, toward the two-
story sandstone homestead, stately despite years of neglect.

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Neat and tidy, the sash window open, airing.

Katherine deposits her suitcase on the floor just inside the
door, takes her valise and computer satchel from Audrey,
slings them on the old brass and iron double bed.

The mattress trampolines, the bed creaks.

Katherine picks up a floppy toy cloth lamb from the pillow.

KATHERINE

Good old Lammikins.

AUDREY

You used to stuff your jarmies in
them, remember?

KATHERINE
Hmmm, pyjamas. Remember them.

AUDREY
This all the luggage?

KATHERINE
Travelled light. Just a sojourn.

Audrey stands at the doorway, ill-at-ease.

AUDREY
The nurse is with him at the moment, but he's expecting a visitor a little later. Don't know if you want to join them for a light brunch?

KATHERINE
I'm sure I'll be up to it.

Audrey bites her lip, slips away.

Katherine lifts a framed school photo from a chest of drawers:

Innocent looking teenage girl in her immaculate uniform.

Another photo of her on a pony with other teenage girls.

She replaces the photo, opens the top drawer, withdraws an old school diary, flips through the first few pages, reads.

KATHERINE
Roses are red, Wattle is yella,
Katherine is sure to find a nice
fella. Anonymous.

She tosses it back in the drawer, eyes the posters of her teen idols on the wall; Bowie, Grohl, Bon Jovi.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - VERANDAH - DAY

An upmarket silver-grey 4-WD parked in front.

On the door barely visible through the dust, signage:
"KEROGEN DEVELOPMENTS"

At a cane wicker table setting, Audrey serves tea to a frail Old Tom, Katherine, and a portly man RAYMOND HARTMANN (mid-60s) in ill-fitting fashionable rural attire.

Katherine looks toward

A TRACK

A black 4-WD dual cab ute rumbles from a track close to the gateway and out on to the road.

VERANDAH

KATHERINE
And that would be?

Audrey looks toward the 4-WD, turns quickly and departs.

OLD TOM
Hamilton. New manager.

Hartmann looks with disdain toward the gateway.

KATHERINE
New manager? The old one kick the bucket?

OLD TOM
Let him go.

KATHERINE
Why? Couldn't hack the job, or the bastard of a boss?

OLD TOM
Thought by now you would have learnt a bit of respect, young lady. If your mother was alive today, she'd be --

KATHERINE
Miserable and old for her years.

Hartmann sits a little uneasy with all this.

OLD TOM
Still the insolent one, aren't you, girlie. I didn't ask you to come back here to meddle again.

Katherine abruptly stands.

KATHERINE
Girlie.
(addresses Hartmann)
Mister Hartmann. I trust you've managed to keep abreast of the times.

She storms off to one side of the homestead.

Hartmann shifts in his chair.

HARTMANN
Bit harsh old man.

OLD TOM
Harsh my arse.

Hartmann's beady eyes follow the departed Katherine.

OLD TOM
What's an ailing man to do without
his own son?

HARTMANN
You can't go on blaming --

OLD TOM
She had no right to meddle.

HARTMANN
He was pissed. Should never have
been behind the wheel.

OLD TOM
But if she hadn't --

Old Tom takes a sudden turn, stiffens in his chair.

Hartmann calls.

HARTMANN
Nurse. NURSE.

SHORT DISTANCE OFF

Katherine, up a gentle incline, turns on hearing the
commotion.

HOMESTEAD

A middle-age NURSE in a rudimentary white uniform rushes
along the verandah to Old Tom's aid.

KATHERINE

lingers momentarily ... but continues on her way, up toward a
chapel in the near distance.

EXT. SMALL FAMILY GRAVEYARD - DAY

The rear of the chapel.

Several headstones reveal the extent of the dynasty.
Katherine comes to a particular site, the headstone reads:

"RICHARD SEBASTIAN SPENCER BORN 4-1-1974 DIED 6-6-1997"

INT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

DINING ROOM

Olde world antique decor but far from dismal.

Katherine stares at a framed black and white photo (mid-90s era) of a handsome young man (mid-20s) in open top vintage sports car. To one side of the car, an attractive young woman (early 20s). On the other, a teenage girl (young Katherine) in riding gear and helmet upon a pony. In the background, an older man.

KATHERINE

So sorry, Ricky.

She moves past various paintings, portraits, mementos that depict the Spencer dynasty, lingers a moment in front of a framed photo of a ram with a caption:

"SIR JAMES - ONE OF A KIND - ADELAIDE - 1987"

At the doorway, Katherine leans against the jamb, gives the room a final once-over and moves into ...

THE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

... proceeds up the carved staircase to the landing and along to a door, stops, listens to the conversation within.

HARTMANN (V.O.)

You don't owe him, or his family anything.

OLD TOM (V.O.)

Conscience is a cruel overlord.

The Nurse arrives, knocks gently, opens the door and politely beckons Katherine enter with her.

INT. OLD TOM'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katherine and the Nurse enter, interrupt Hartmann with Old Tom, propped up in a massive, ancient mahogany bedstead.

The Nurse goes about her business checking on her patient.

Hartmann, uneasy, stows a folded document in his jacket, excuses himself, brushes past a glaring Katherine.

HARTMANN

I'll have the paperwork finished
back in Adelaide. Be in touch.

Old Tom sneers at the departing visitor.

Katherine goes to a bedside what-not, picks up a tarnished silver filigree photo frame: PIC OF WOMAN IN HER THIRTIES (circa Late-1970s)

KATHERINE

I won't ask what that was about.

OLD TOM

Good.

Katherine replaces the frame on its lace doily, intimates to the Nurse that she will tend to her invalid father.

The Nurse complies and leaves.

OLD TOM

You come to meddle again?

KATHERINE

I know this much. I didn't fly all
the way from Melbourne just to be
insulted.

OLD TOM

Then why did you come?

KATHERINE

I was summoned.

Old Tom looks disdainfully at the door.

OLD TOM

Not by me you weren't.

KATHERINE

Point is, I'm here now.

OLD TOM
How long?

KATHERINE
Longer than I'd planned, it seems.

OLD TOM
Why's that?

KATHERINE
You're not up to running the place
any more.

OLD TOM
Says who?

KATHERINE
I'd have thought it was obvious.

Old Tom dismisses this comment with the wave of a hand.

OLD TOM
How old are you Katherine?

KATHERINE
As old as my tongue --

OLD TOM
And still no man in your life.

Katherine scoffs.

KATHERINE
Not likely. Seen what's on offer.

OLD TOM
You want to be involved in men's
affairs, first get yourself a man.

KATHERINE
I don't believe I'm hearing this.

OLD TOM
Well you'd better. Just remember,
while I'm still drawing breath, I'm
in charge of this family's affairs.
In the meantime, I've got a
competent bloke to run the place.

She goes to protest, but he grabs the upper hand.

OLD TOM
You'll get your chance when I'm
good and ready.

She turns and leaves.

KATHERINE

Bastard.

OLD TOM

(mutters after her)

I'd be careful using that word
around here.