

TATIARA
(The Good Country)

Written by

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FADE IN:

THE PRESENT:

EXT/INT. CAR TRAVELLING - DIRT TRACK - DAY

OLD TOM SPENCER (late 70s) drives a dusty, late model European car along a bumpy track.

Various mobs of sheep graze in the broad open paddocks. Old Tom looks scornfully across the paddock beyond the sheep at some sort of drilling rig that operates in the near distance.

He clutches his chest and awkwardly tries to pull to a halt. In vain - the car veers into a fragile Mallee tree.

The sheep near the boundary fence stare vacantly at the scene.

The dust clears - no major damage.

Old Tom struggles to gather his wits, and his breath. He fades into semi-consciousness.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

MELBOURNE:

KATHERINE SPENCER (36), black executive suit that spells elegance and success, slings her computer carry case from her shoulder, removes her Macbook Pro, places it on the glass tabletop, opens it ready for business.

She's joined by three other FEMALE EXECES along with two MALES, all in their thirties all similarly armed with laptop - and confidence.

One of the Females opens a large sketch-book and displays images of haute-couture designs

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1
Looks like wool is back in vogue.

EXT. DIRT TRACK - DAY

A large 4-WD Land Rover pulls up alongside Old Tom's car, nestled up against the mallee. The DRIVER in scrubby work clothes, alights and rushes to Old Tom's car.

On the door of the Land Rover is a sign:

Tatiara Resources

INT. TATIARA KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen of the Tatiara Homestead, last modernized in the nineteen-seventies.

AUDREY (late 50s), the domestic help, picks up the wall-mounted phone and punches in a number.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Katherine et al close their lap-tops

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1
Okay, remember our ethos, there's
always a market for the best. If we
get this one right, there'll be no
stopping Nova Marketing.

They're all ready to give Don Draper a run for his money.

Katherine stands first, approaches the starting blocks, an event to be run and won.

YOUNG FEMALE EXECUTIVE #1 (CONT'D)
We're moving up, guys.

KATHERINE
And remember - no ceilings, glass
or otherwise.

They depart the Boardroom but as Katherine gets to the frosted glass door her mobile phone RINGS.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Audrey?..I'm not sure...oh, right,
Audrey. Yes, yes, long time...

She steps back from the starting blocks.

INT. APARTMENT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

MELBOURNE:

High-rise city apartment. Katherine, in slinky robe that does wonders for her body, closes her valise and places it on the floor alongside other travel cases. She stretches her arms and her back and moves into her

BEDROOM:

Katherine makes herself comfortable on her bed. With a small remote control unit she dims the lights and plays soft relaxing MUSIC, stares at the high-rise city lights outside.

EXT. ESSENDON AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

A light commuter aircraft ascends into the sky.

INT. LIGHT AIRCRAFT - DAY - LATER

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

EXT. PADDOCK - DAY

The aircraft circles over a mob of healthy, fleecy sheep.

EXT. COUNTRY AIRPORT - DAY

The light aircraft on the tarmac at a country airport.

Katherine walks from the plane and a scruffy young man, a FARM HAND (20s), approaches her.

FARM HAND
Miss Spencer?

KATHERINE
"Miss"? Quaint.

He's bemused.

Katherine nods and smiles.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Never mind.

The Farm Hand takes her luggage and they head toward Old Tom's car - hurriedly cleaned, a minor dent to the front fender still visible.

As he packs the luggage in the boot, she requests the keys.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
I'll drive.

FARM HAND
D'you know the way?

She plucks the keys from his hand.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - TATIARA GATEWAY - DAY

Katherine, with the Farm Hand, drives Old Tom's car in through an old, once-grandiose gateway and heads along the dirt driveway toward the Tatiara Homestead.

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CONTINUED:

INSERT:

On one deteriorated pillar of the gateway, a tarnished brass plaque

"Tatiara The Good Country Est. 1886"

EXT. HOMESTEAD - VERANDAH - DAY

Audrey serves tea to a frail Old Tom, his daughter Katherine and his lawyer RAYMOND HARTMANN(60). Katherine looks toward

A Paddock:

CORY HAMILTON (late 30s) rides a trail bike along a fence some distance off

RESUME VERANDAH:

KATHERINE

New hand?

Audrey looks toward Cory, turns quickly and departs.

Hartmann puts cup to lips but stops short, looks toward Cory.

OLD TOM

(matter-of-fact)

Hamilton. New manager.

Miffed, Hartmann stares a moment at the old man.

KATHERINE

New manager? I thought times were tough! Why the christ do you think I came all this way for?

OLD TOM

Don't use that language around here. If your mother were alive today -

KATHERINE

She'd be in misery, as always.

OLD TOM

I should slap your face!

Hartmann sits a little uneasy with all this

OLD TOM (CONT'D)

You carry on like one of these upstart modern women!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATHERINE

If you must give one a label.

OLD TOM

You're still the insolent one aren't you. *I* didn't ask you back here and meddle.

KATHERINE

No but I am here and you'd better get used to it.

She stands and addresses Hartmann

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Mister Hartmann. You've been this family's lawyer for quite some years now. I trust you've managed to keep abreast with the times.

She turns and leaves.

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 (CONT'D)

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

The fact is, he was pissed at the time and should never have been behind the wheel.

OLD TOM

If she hadn't -

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

Hartmann calls.

HARTMANN

Nurse! NURSE!!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHORT DISTANCE OFF:

Katherine turns to the source of the noise.

THE VERANDAH:

A woman in a rudimentary white uniform, a NURSE(40s) rushes to Old Tom's aid.

RESUME KATHERINE:

Eyes burning, Katherine lingers momentarily but continues on her intended way, toward a chapel on a small rise in the near distance.

EXT. SMALL FAMILY GRAVEYARD - DAY

At the rear of the chapel. The headstones reveal the extent of the dynasty. She comes to a particular site;

Richard Sebastian Spencer
Born 4-1-1971
Died 6-6-1994

INT. TATIARA DINING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Olde world antique decor but far from dismal.

On the walls and cabinets various paintings, photographs and other mementos depict the Tatiara dynasty.

Katherine peruses the various portraits and photographs.

She stops a while at a black and white photo -

INSERT FRAMED PHOTO:

A handsome young man in his late twenties in a convertible sports car (early 90s era) - a particularly attractive young woman and a girl in her teens (a young Katherine) stand either side. In the background, an older man.

KATHERINE
(mutters to herself)
You stupid bastard.

She continues perusing and stops at a photo of a ram and a caption:

Sir James
World Record

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

\$415,000
Adelaide, 1985

She moves to the doorway to the Hallway, leans against the jamb, gives the room a final once-over and moves into

THE HALLWAY: - CONTINUOUS

She proceeds up the magnificent staircase to the

LANDING:

Katherine moves along the Landing to a door. She stops, listens to the conversation within -

HARTMANN (O.S.)
You don't owe him or his family
anything.

OLD TOM (O.S.)
Conscience is a curse!

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

INT. OLD TOM'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Katherine and the Nurse enter and interrupt Hartmann with the ailing Old Tom.

The Nurse goes about her business checking on her patient.

Hartmann, uneasy, excuses himself.

HARTMANN
(to Old Tom)
Anyway, give my proposition serious
consideration.

Katherine potters nonchalantly about the room.

Old Tom sneers at the departing visitor.

KATHERINE
I won't ask what all that was
about.

OLD TOM
Good.

Katherine indicates that she will tend to her invalid father and the Nurse complies and leaves.

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CONTINUED:

OLD TOM (CONT'D)

You come to meddle again?

KATHERINE

I know this much. I didn't quit a perfectly good position in Melbourne just to come here to be insulted.

OLD TOM

Well why don't you go back?

KATHERINE

Because 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

I know what's obvious. How old are you Katherine?

KATHERINE

You should know. But thirty-six for the record.

OLD TOM

And still no man in your life!

Katherine scoffs.

OLD TOM (CONT'D)

If you want to be involved in men's affairs then first get yourself a man. In the meantime, my financial affairs will be taken care of by Hartmann and the day to day business of this place will be in the hands of the young bloke Hamilton.

KATHERINE

I don't believe I'm hearing this.

OLD TOM

Well you'd better. Just remember girlie. While I'm still drawing breath I'm in charge of this family's affairs.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OLD TOM (CONT'D)

And don't start off about your precious qualifications. They mean nothing in the real world and particularly not in this one down here.

KATHERINE

Bastard!

She turns and leaves. Old Tom mutters after her

OLD TOM

I'd be careful with that word around here.

INT. TATIARA STUDY - LATE AFTERNOON

Katherine casually peruses older style business accounts books - she's not impressed with the state of affairs.

EXT. STABLES-PADDOCK - LATE AFTERNOON

Some horses graze in the small paddock - one in particular, a robust colt, stands apart from the others.

Katherine, in her R M Williams designer gear, approaches with a halter.

The colt ambles up to her. She caresses its neck, quietly slips the halter on and gives the beast a thorough inspection before leading it off.

EXT. TATIARA PROPERTY - LATE AFTERNOON

Late afternoon and Katherine rides competently through grazing sheep. Bird-life SCREECH high in a tree.

EXT. STONE COTTAGE - LATE AFTERNOON

A neat small stone cottage, another longer stone and corrugated iron dwelling - the Shearers' Quarters and yet another building, the Shearing Shed, each a short distance from each other form a triangle of sorts.

Katherine, on horseback, approaches the cottage.

She dismounts and knocks on the front. No response.

She wanders about the place, peeks through windows. She returns to her horse as a well-worn 4-WD ute approaches.

Katherine unconsciously checks her own grooming.

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CONTINUED:

The vehicle comes to an abrupt halt causing the horse to shy a little and Katherine does well to control it.

Cory, tall, dark-haired, tanned, steps out of the vehicle, goes to assist Katherine restrain the horse.

CORY
Sorry, didn't realize.

Katherine is momentarily captivated by this young man's general appeal.

She takes complete charge of her animal, stroking its neck soothingly.

CORY (CONT'D)
I didn't expect any one to be here.

He offers his hand.

CORY (CONT'D)
Cory Hamilton.

She hesitates at first but then takes it firmly in a business-like manner.

KATHERINE
Katherine. Spencer.

CORY
Ah, right.

Cory goes to the rear of the vehicle, opens the tailgate and gathers a number of cardboard cartons.

KATHERINE
Just checking the place out. Taking stock of the little 'empire'. Doesn't seem to be as vast as I imagined it was as a little kid.

Cory carries the cartons to the small verandah.

CORY
I'm afraid I've only been here a couple of weeks.

He returns to the vehicle and gathers a final carton

CORY (CONT'D)
Still getting my bearings back.

The last carton is overloaded with books and as he places it on the verandah to open the door, some of its contents spill.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Katherine bends down and retrieves one of the books, titled *The Law of Torts* and hands it to Cory who tidies up the rest of the carton.

CORY (CONT'D)
One thing's for sure. The whole region seems to be changing.

He leaves the cartons there alongside a bleached skull and spiral horns of a long deceased ram. He invites Katherine in.

CORY (CONT'D)
It's never locked.

She smiles and politely declines the invitation.

CORY (CONT'D)
So, how's your father?

KATHERINE
To be honest, he's losing his grip on things. Forgive me being blunt but - well, I mean, why hire you?

Cory's tone changes - he is quite deliberate.

CORY
I had a good reference.

KATHERINE
Yes but I mean, he had no need to hire a manager.
(a bitterness in her voice)
The fact is, I'm more than capable.
But -

CORY
Obviously there's a dilemma. How do you propose we deal with it?

KATHERINE
Don't worry. I'm not planning any immediate changes in my status so your position's secure - at least while he's alive.

He finds this pronouncement a little vague.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
Surely you're aware of my father's arrangements for you and Tatiara?

He takes a critical examination of the country surrounding them.