

Chapter 1

Stan pushed his empty wheelbarrow toward the pile of sand under the shade of a large eucalyptus tree. He dropped the handles, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and pushed his fingers through his straw-colored hair. How he wished he could stretch out on the cool sand and rest. Hearing the creaking sound of cart wheels jouncing over the gravel, he looked up to see his friend, Milton, going after another load of bricks. Stan waved Milt to a stop.

“Hey, Milt. Who’s that old man over there talking to Mrs. White?”

“Name’s Stephen Haskell. Dad asked me to ride along in the buggy when we met him at the Dora Creek train station. Came from America. Dad knew him in New Zealand about twelve years ago when he brought something very special to Grampa Hare’s family.”

Stan ignored Milton’s last remarks and asked, “What’s he doing here?”

“I guess Mrs. White asked him to come here. He’s gonna have something to do with our new Avondale School here in Australia.

“What good will he be? Look, his beard’s as long as Father Time’s,” Stan laughed. “Bet that old bloke* can’t do nothin’ but preach.”

* Chiefly a British expression for a man or fellow.

“Does look like a preacher, but he can sure move fast for being so old. Must have had a drink from the fountain of youth on his way here.” Milt grinned at his friend. “You should have seen him carry his big bags from the buggy to a tent where he’s staying. It’s pitched over near Sunnyside, Mrs. White’s home.”

“I’d be surprised if he could drive a nail straight into a board without bending it or if he could -”

“Not so loud. My dad’s coming!” Milton motioned toward his father.

Milton’s father smiled at the two boys. “Milton, I just talked to Cristabel, who’s sliding bricks down the plank to the men in the cistern. She’s used almost all your last load. You don’t want to keep the men who are walling it up waiting, do you? We must have that well ready when God sends the rain to fill it up.” Metcalf Hare spoke firmly

but kindly. Then he turned to Stan. "The men making concrete need more sand too. Make it a full load and please hurry."

Stan started shoveling as Milton drove away in his empty cart. He piled on more sand than usual. His arm muscles bulged as he struggled to push the heavy wheelbarrow to the cistern.

"Shall I get a horse to pull both you and the wheelbarrow?" Cristabel called to him.

"Cut it out, Cris. I haven't stopped for rest or a cool drink all morning. Mr. Hare says we gotta hurry in case it rains. Doesn't look like rain to me. We haven't had a drop for months."

"He probably got that idea from Mrs. White. Maybe she had another vision that it's gonna rain."

Stan heard a sneering tone in Cris's voice and looked up in surprise as she added, "Don't tell me you believe her visions really come from God? I don't."

Cris shoved another brick down the plank. "I'm fifteen years old, and I think I know how to make decisions without having to listen to what Mrs. White says."

Knowing that Cris just wanted to argue, Stan changed the subject. "Did you see that old bloke in the black suit talking to Mrs. White?" he asked.

"Yes, I did. Makes me mad. We work so hard in this heat, and they just stand and talk." Cris stamped her foot.

"I think I'll change my route on my return trip for sand. If I go real close, maybe I can hear a few words." Stan started down the hill.

"Let me know what you find out," Cris called.

Stan wheeled close enough to catch a glimpse of Stephen Haskell's face. Something about him reminded Stan of his grandpa, who had died recently. Stan slowed down at the sound of the man's big voice.

"It's good to be back in Australia, but it seems a shame to bring my bride to only a tent," Stan heard Haskell say to Mrs. White.

"I wish we had something better, but Hetty won't mind. She'll fix it up pretty with never a complaint," Mrs. White answered.

"You're right!" The deep bass voice sounded kind to Stan, and he noticed the old man smiled. "On my trip here from Europe I visited South Africa. There I saw Hetty in action. She does a good job in any work, from training Bible workers to doing carpentry. I do hope the ship bringing her arrives soon. It's been so lonely these three years since Mary died -"

HE CHOSE TO LISTEN

Stan knew he had to get his wheelbarrow moving. The noise of the wheels on the gravel drowned out the sound of the man's voice, but when Stan glanced back, the old man smiled at him. Suddenly Stan felt good inside like when Grandpa was alive.

Puzzled thoughts disturbed the boy as he shoveled sand. America, Europe, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia. Haskell spoke of faraway places like Stan talked of the nearest post office in Cooranbong two miles away.

Who was this man? Stan wondered. Why had he come to New South Wales? He looked important, but seemed comfortable like his grandpa. And why would such an old man - he looked over sixty - be taking his bride to a tent? And what connection did this man have with Ellen White? Seemed strange that a world traveler would want to come to a country village with only a post office, one small store, a few houses, and live in a tent.

Stan resolved to unravel the mystery of this American newcomer who had returned to Australia in 1896. Maybe he could go over to the Hare's cottage later and see his friends, Milton and Robert. Stan thought it strange how he felt drawn to this old man. And why did Cris seem so bitter and resentful toward Mrs. White. Yes, Stan would listen carefully. Maybe he could find the answers to his questions. And then he remembered what Milton had said about Haskell bringing something special to the Hare family years before. What could it have been?