

# *A Family Broken*

*By Benito Murga*

*We* are looking for someone, *anyone* left in our family.

All my closest relatives are gone. Mom took off when I was born. I don't know if I am fine with that; after all, I had never met her before. But I knew my dad was heartbroken, and I respected her for having the respect of my father. Because our most of our family members are gone now, we are looking for other relatives, however distant they may be. Birds of a kind flock together, or something like that. I feel my dad might be able to mend his heart with others like us.

So we are looking for someone, someone else named Walker, someone else with these accursed emerald green eyes and silver hair. Because of my looks, I never really fit in at school, or anywhere. Yes, I suppose we are a lot like mutants in society, but at least we don't have blue skin. We've tracked down two of my third cousins, perhaps our last remaining relatives. My dad says that we're going to need each other in the times to come. Besides, we can't rely on the family inheritance forever, and if my dad and I are going to settle down, at least it will be with family.

After my twelfth birthday, dad whisked me off to all sorts of places to hunt down our family's bloodline. Many of them realized that at our family might one day be separated, so we find hidden messages and clues from the past that Walker's have left behind at the top of a mountain, or in a tomb, or under the churning waves. We compare these clues with modern day records, and that's how we get our information. It's a seriously irritating and tedious task, because our family happened to have a knack for adventure and travelling. Honestly, it's a miracle that our bloodline has made it to this generation, what with everyone messing around with danger. As far as we can tell, every known Walker has ended up travelling the face of the earth, one way or another.

My father sometimes does journalist and photography on the side. Wherever we go, he manages to write some kind of article and take a bunch of beautiful pictures to make money. It's not too hard to come across interesting places. As I said, my ancestors were natural

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idiots (I mean, adventurers), so following them leads us to dangerously beautiful and beautifully dangerous wonders.

Once, when I was younger, I pointed out to my father that a simple job such as journalism can't possibly be enough to fund such journeys. So he tells me about our inheritance, about all the artwork and music and literature that our distant ancestors had contributed to the family name. It's in our blood, apparently, and also our bank accounts.

So far, from the clues we have built together during all our adventures, our results have produced a general location of the twins Jeffery and Laura Walker somewhere in Australia's Golden Outback. Hopefully they are still alive; the latest records of them in California date back to nearly a decade ago, when they booked a flight to Australia and revoked all their American papers and documents. We couldn't find any more information. We don't even have a picture. We just have a general location, and a silly hope that they kept their ancestral image (after all, how would we recognize them?).

We ourselves entered Perth just a month ago. I had been to Australia twice before, at the Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Islands, but those were both in Eastern Australia. This is my first time in the Southern-West. So after about a week of checking out the caves near Margaret River, we headed East-North-East and continued our search. We had short stops at various settlements to refuel, eat and sleep. Our last stop was at Hines Hill, where we set off about two and a half hours ago

Which brings us to now. It's a humid, 34° summer day outside, which is most likely above the average maximum heat. Must be global warming. It's around twenty to twenty-five kilometers to get to Merredin, our next destination and the most probable location of Jeffery and Laura Walker. Probably.

We are moving at a top speed of 45kmph because we don't want to overheat the engine and we're low on fuel. Occasionally we risk a small amount of water to pour over the car hood. Since a couple days ago we have been travelling down the Great Eastern Highway towards Merredin. There's not a cloud in the sky and the sun burns us down without hesitation. I often catch sight of the dust flying into the air, a beautiful spectrum, which to me is like a blessing from the wind.

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I remind dad not to do his “swervy-swervy” car tricks but he said if he loses control, he can’t hit anybody if there’s nobody to hit. *Sigh*, I think, *typical of a Walker*.

During a roundabout of my dad doing figure eights, I hear a persistent beeping arise from the dashboard.

“What does that sound mean?” I ask.

“I don’t know. It’s not my car.”

“Ummm, ok, just don’t say that if a cop comes along. It makes you sound like a car thief.”

We both look to the monitor and find in front of us a problematic obstacle.

“I don’t think the ‘E’ means extra fuel...” I say

“Oh, chicken nuggets,” he mock swears. “Check the map, there may be a gas station nearby.”

I open the glove compartment and withdraw a road map of the Golden Outback. My eye traced the Great Eastern Highway until my finger meets a small area labeled Nangeenan. I have never even heard a glancing mention of the place. It must literally be in the middle of nowhere, and indeed it was surrounded by about eight kilometers of nothingness on both sides, according to the map.

“We should be able to gas up there,” I say.

About thirty minutes later we end up at a discreet, neglected gas station. My dad and I got out of the car and dad let the employee there do the gassing up for him. Usually dad would gas it up himself, but he needed to pee.

As my dad was in the toilet at the back, I took a look at the merchandise there. And there was certainly merchandise here like no other. Sure, there was the usual freezer of drinks and rows of chips and other junk foods. But aside from that there were souvenirs of the stranger kinds, such as kangaroo feet turned into bedroom slippers, or a reinforced grass-weave coat. Or mineral rocks, which as far as I could tell were real. Or beautiful shells from all around the world, some of which I recognized from our travels across nations. In fact, all of the objects on sale were either from Australia or some other place I had been before, and that’s saying something.

And at an instant, a handful of pieces from a puzzle that I cannot fully see yet suddenly came together, and I could see a small part of a

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much larger picture. Yes, Jeffery and Laura first went backpacking to the exact same places my father and I had been, and later they came here, to Nangeenan. But why? And was I even right about them being here?

But I had to be! It was total assumption, but the logic was sound. I repeated it in my head, as I often do when I am confused. Jeffery and Laura left from California even though they had relatively peaceful lives there. They flew around the world, using the Walker's inheritance, picking up souvenirs along the way. All those seashells and stones and all the other souvenirs were from places where my dad and I found distinct clues left behind from the Walker legacy. Could this be it?

I slowly made my way to the cashier. She was wearing a baseball cap and a cashier uniform, and looked quite young, almost like a college student. Her hair was completely hidden in her cap. As she looked up, I felt her eyes on my own and my hair. But that didn't mean anything. Lots of others find my appearance odd.

"Excuse me, do you know anyone in the neighbourhood who has moved here in the last decade or so?" I asked her as politely as I could.

"No, sorry, that's around the time that me and my brother moved here, so no," she said.

My eyes widened, I felt my heart rate increase and my palms get sweaty. After ten years, was it finally here, in this town of all places?

As I was about to say something, she asked me, "Did you dye that hair colour?"

"No, believe it or not, this is natural."

All of a sudden, she looked at me with teary eyes. As if the thing she had been waiting for had finally come. I would pretend to be confused, that I didn't know what was going on. But I did, and I felt the same way she probably felt. I couldn't help but get a little teary eyed as well. For a minute we just stood there in perfect stillness, looking at each other's eyes, trying to see if the other was whom we thought it was. We were both rooted to the spot, speechless. Then she reluctantly called out.

"Jeff? Get over here, there's someone here I want you to meet."

A muffled voice came from the back room.

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“Who is it?” it asked.

“Just get over here,” the girl said.

A man of around his early twenties stepped into the counter area. As he took note of my hair and eyes, he quickly rushed over to the other of the counter and practically jumped on me, holding me tightly in warm embrace. Then he raised his head, and I finally noticed his striking, familiar, emerald green eyes.

“J-Jeffery and Laura Walker?” I asked, and Jeffery nodded. Laura removed her hat to reveal smooth and beautiful silver hair that glints under the electrical lights, as if they could take something ugly and reflect its beauty in her silky hair. Laura smiled at me, tears in her eyes. Jeffery hugged me a second time. And I still couldn’t find my words.

With perfect timing, my dad came in through the door.

“My, my,” he said after a couple seconds. A blatantly obvious grin crept over his face. “We still haven’t introduced ourselves. I seriously hope I am correct in believing you are Jeffery and Laura.” A nod from both of them confirmed the fact to my dad. “Well then, my name is Daniel, and my son is-“

I cut him off. I had found my voice. With probably the largest grin on my face, I said, “My name is Nicholas Walker. Pleased to meet you.”