

## Prologue – Dan’s Reflection

They say the land remembers, and I've come to believe it wholeheartedly—the dust holds tales, murmured by the breeze and etched into the parched earth beneath my feet. As I settle into this creaking chair on the veranda, my gaze sweeps across the fields that have both nurtured and turned against us, and I can almost feel the weight of history pressing down deep within my bones.

This isn't merely my saga; it belongs to David and those who walked this soil beside us. Before the next chapter unfolds, I want to share how we reached this reckoning—not just in fact, but in feeling—the parched soil of drought, the betrayals, the quiet resilience. No polish. Just the raw truth—shaped by toil, sacrifice, and our choices about what to leave behind.

When I first arrived at Midjal, I was nothing more than a boy, my hands tender and untested for the rigours of farming, dream after dream swirling in my heart. David Crowley was a man of the earth, imbued with his father's quiet strength and his mother's fiery poise. We were worlds apart, yet we wove our lives together over the years like the intricacies of a well-worn tapestry—brothers not by blood, but by the seasons that shaped us. The burdens we bore together.

I've borne witness to the world transforming around us. I've seen foreign investors eye our fertile ground like something to be bought and branded. I've watched our children—bless their innocent hearts—strive to uphold the weight of our traditions in a world that races faster than the April rains we used to count on.

David carried this weight with a different kind of ferocity. He's bold and insatiable; the grit of mining dust clings to his boots, and his eyes gleam with ambition that stretches to the horizon. He charges ahead, tuned in to the whispers of the earth, listening to its heartbeat. It's a delicate balance, two sides of the same coin.

And me? I'm the aging man, burdened with a trove of untold stories and a dwindling supply of time.

As my own chapter nears its close, I feel compelled to honour the droughts, the harvests, the betrayals, and the quiet resilience of those who gave all to this land.

This story, our story, bears no polish. It is raw, shaped from dirt and toil and sacrifice. It speaks of legacy and our choices about what we leave behind.

So listen closely. What follows is not merely a narrative—it's a reckoning.

— Dan Curley