



*Australian, Hutch Worthington is branded as the son of a convict. He forms a friendship with a professor They travel to the Nevada territory in 1864 guided by a Turquoise Bottle and a curious map in search of adventure and treasure.*

## **The Turquoise Bottle**

By Linda Shields Allison

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BOOK 5

# The Turquoise Bottle



Linda Shields Allison

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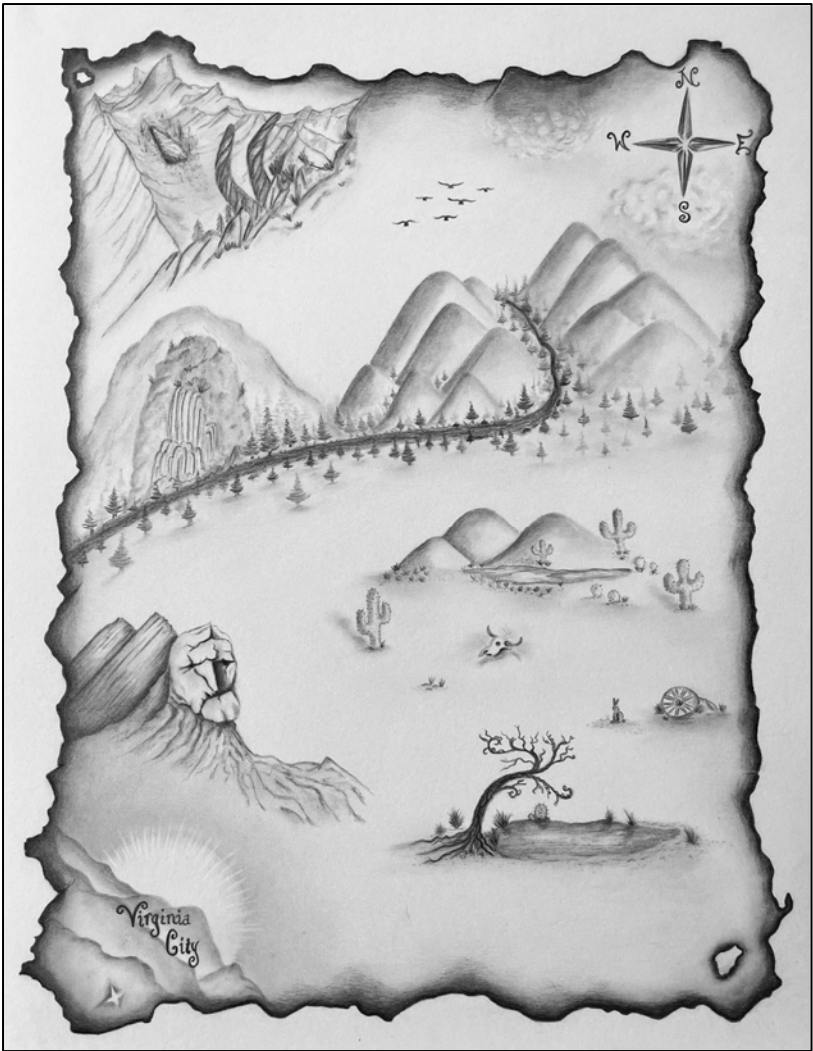
*The Emerald Bottle*

*The Bronze Bottle*

*The Amethyst Bottle*

*The Mandarin Bottle*

*The Turquoise Bottle*



## **Chapter 3**

### **Melbourne Australia – 1856 School**

The first day young Hutch Worthington walked into the one-room schoolhouse, he was told to stand at the back of the room with other students waiting to be assigned their seats. His teacher stood at the podium and read from a prearranged seating chart. Hutch scratched his neck to relieve an itch from the newly starched shirt his brother James had bought him for school. He shuffled from one foot to another, thinking it was much more comfortable running barefoot than having his feet rub against his new leather ankle-boots. He barely listened as the teacher called out names in a monotone voice until he heard his name called.

“Hutch Worthington?” Horatio Crocker looked up from his chart and sniffed as if a putrid odor had invaded the classroom. Hutch froze to attention. He smiled and raised his hand hoping to make a good first impression. The teacher covered his nose with a cloth handkerchief and sneered. “Such an odd name. Is it a nickname? I don’t like nicknames.” Hutch swallowed and shook his head indicating, *no*.

The teacher waved his hand in the air. “Never mind. I’ve heard rumors about you and your family. I’ve been told that you lost your parents and most of your siblings to typhoid fever last year. Is that correct?”

For eight-year-old Hutch, the pain of losing most of his family the year before was like a scab that wouldn’t heal. He

stiffened until he heard a voice like the cackling of a crow off in the distance. His thoughts drifted to the raw memories of burying his parents and five siblings.

“Are you deaf and dumb, boy? I asked you a simple question,” squawked his teacher.

Hutch felt as though the eyes of every child in the classroom were boring through him. *What was the question... typhoid...death?* He cleared his throat and mumbled, “Yes, sir.”

“I have been informed that your father was brought to this island on a convict transport ship for crimes against the British government. Is this true?” Hutch looked down at a scuff that had marred the appearance of his new boots and froze. “I guess you are deaf and dumb, as I thought! You will sit in the last desk in row five at the back of the room. That’s where the children whose relatives came to the island in convict ships sit.”

Some of the other students, sitting in desks near the front, and those still waiting to be seated, began to snigger. Hutch retreated to his assigned desk at the back of the room. He was surprised to hear some of the other children he knew to be the offspring of convicts laughing and pointing at him. It made no sense, and their cruelty reinforced his shame.

His teacher, Horatio Crocker, was a petty man. He was slight in stature with dull gray eyes, the color of fog. His pale brown hair was pulled back into a short wispy ponytail, which accentuated his hooked nose and protruding pale cheekbones. Hutch thought that there was nothing about his appearance or manner that instilled a feeling of warmth or kindness. Hutch took his seat and silently moaned. He had a foreboding feeling in his gut.

Hutch had cause to be alarmed. Horatio Crocker did not enjoy his job and the spiteful gesture of separating the children of convicts with the other students gave him a sick form of pleasure. He encouraged a class system of rewarding the

privileged over the less fortunate who were punished for the sins of their convict ancestors. With no prospects for a teaching job in England, he had answered an advertisement in the *Times* for a teaching position in Melbourne for a modest stipend and a room in town at a boarding house. Because of his petty spitefulness, the favored students, who sat at the front of the class, became emboldened to torment the convict children both on the playground and away from school.



Hutch Worthington had become a stalker. Over the weeks Hutch had been attending Horatio Crocker's classroom, a strange pattern took root in the boy who sat at the back with the other children of convicts. He didn't know why he did it, but he couldn't stop spying on a girl named Sheila, who sat near the front of the classroom. He had never even spoken to her but felt an overwhelming belief that it was his duty and obligation to watch over and protect her. Perhaps it was because Hutch mourned the death of his six-year-old sister, Angeline, that he felt a kinship with her. That one dear sister that was closest to his heart. Maybe it was because he missed the loving embrace of his dear mother tucking him into bed each night. Whatever moved him, he felt compelled to guard and protect her from all harm.

Sheila Townsend, who sat with the privileged children at the front of the classroom, walked with a limp. Her right leg was slightly withered after being stricken with infantile paralysis. She had contracted the polio when she was five. The strange disease sent fear to the hearts of the people of Melbourne. It could strike anyone at any time, and no one knew what caused it.



As was the practice of the day, Sheila had been fitted with a clumsy metal brace by the local doctor. Hutch knew she was the only child that had been stricken with polio that attended his school. She was teased and tortured by most of the children daily and was always excluded from any games during their lunch break. Hutch wondered if Horatio Crocker knew what was happening, but if he did, he never intervened. One day, Hutch agonized as he stood off to the side of the playground watching a ring of boys and girls form a circle around her on the playground chanting,

***Gimpy legged Sheila-gal,  
Walks just like an injured fowl.  
Clickity clack, and quackery quack,  
She'll grow to have a crooked back.***

Sheila was brave and rarely succumbed to the mean pranks of her tormentors. She usually just let them have their fun until they tired of their games and ran off to play. But this day, it seemed all too much for her when she lost her balance and fell to the ground.

Hutch was furious as he watched the children laugh and run away from her. He walked over and picked up her floppy hat, which had slipped off her head and lay in the dirt. As he approached, he saw large silent tears rolling down her cheeks. He bent down and awkwardly pushed the hat into her hands. She looked up at him and mumbled, "Thank you." He stood silent as a stone statue and watched her raise herself off the ground, place the crumpled hat on her head, and limp away from him. Her courage astounded him.

Hutch had been at school for a month the first time he followed Sheila Townsend away from school. He had noticed that three afternoons each week, she walked away from her

home on Darwin Street alone. He was perplexed and wondered where she went as the road she took led to a wooded area on the edge of town. One day, his curiosity moved him to secretly follow her from a distance. As he darted in and out of trees and bushes, he noticed that she occasionally looked back over her shoulder. When he peeked around the trunk of a eucalyptus tree, she was gone. Slowly, he walked down the dirt road, wondering where she had disappeared. He peered over a stone wall and spied a large sign that read:

## **Private Property Keep Out**

Hutch noticed that a trail of grass and weeds had been trampled down, which formed a footpath leading further into the woods. He looked around to make sure he was not being watched, shimmied over the stone wall, and silently followed the path. He hid behind a tree as the trail opened to reveal a freshwater pond surrounded by a stand of trees. The area was enchanting. Frangipanis and lemon-scented myrtles gave off a lovely fragrance. Golden Honey Locust trees displayed clusters of creamy perfumed flowers that smelled like honey. Towering eucalyptus trees cast shade on the area making it cool and inviting. Lively kookaburra birds chattered in the branches of the gum trees.

Hutch felt that someone must have once cared for the garden pond, but today it looked overgrown, and neglected. From behind a frangipanis tree, he saw Sheila sitting on a weathered wrought-iron bench under the canopy of the gum trees and looking at the water. She sighed, then glanced around to make sure she was alone. She began to remove her brace, shoes, and stockings.

The stalker turned his head with embarrassment when it became clear that the girl was about to shed her outer garments. He thought about leaving but was concerned and somewhat intrigued as to what she was up to. Hutch lifted his head and glanced over at her. He was relieved to see that she wore a bathing costume hidden under her clothes. She pulled a towel from her knapsack and placed it on a nearby flat rock. Next, she placed her brace and other belongings on the wrought-iron bench and stood up.

Hutch grew alarmed. He had always felt an overwhelming need to watch over and protect the girl, but he had always guarded her from afar. There were a few times when he thought that he might have to step in to defend her, but the pranks never went that far. He always felt that her tormentors didn't really want to hurt her and heckled her for their own impulsive amusement.

As Sheila shuffled to the edge of the pond, he noticed that she almost walked with a normal gait without the clumsy brace. She waded into the pond up to her waist and plunged head-first under the water and disappeared. She remained under for several seconds before breaking the surface of the water ten yards further from the shore.

Hutch was in a near state of panic and surprised himself by stepping out from his hiding place and calling out. "What are you doing? Are you trying to get yourself killed? You could drown in that pond. Not only that, this is private property. You could get into trouble with the police at the constabulary."

The abrupt noise broke the tranquil silence of her special place and in an irrational state of panic, she abruptly slipped under water as if to hide. Without thinking, Hutch ran to into the pond and plunged headlong into the water with his boots and clothes still on. He was an excellent swimmer, but the heaviness from his shoes and clothes weighed him down and he

found himself sinking to the bottom of the pond. A hand reached down and pulled him to the surface. He blushed and displayed a crooked smile when he realized the water only came up to his chest and he could easily stand.

“What do you think you’re doing? Are you trying to get me in trouble with the owner of this property? Why are you here?” She looked around. “I thought I was being careful...of not being followed. You have ruined everything!” shouted Sheila.

Hutch coughed up a little water that had gone down the wrong pipe. “I’m sorry, but I thought you were in danger,” he sputtered.

Sheila looked Hutch in the eyes and, after a moment said, “Your name is Hutch. You are the boy that handed me my hat when I was being made fun of on the playground.” The girl stared into the eyes of her intruder and noticed that they were a greenish blue with copper and gold specks at the edge of the iris. She had noticed, from time to time, that he seemed to be staring at her from a distance. But he always quickly looked away, and she wondered if she had been imagining it.

Hutch wiped away some water that had been dripping from his hair. “Yes, that was me.”

Sheila stared into his face. “You have interesting eyes. They are the color of a turquoise pendant my father once bought for my mother when he was visiting Turkey on business.” Hutch blushed and turned his head to look at the trees.

“This place is beautiful. How did you find it?” asked Hutch.

“It’s a long story.”

“I have time,” offered Hutch. “Although, I would like to dry my boots and clothes a bit.”

Sheila looked at the water dripping off his chin and wanted to laugh but held her composure. She knew what it felt like to be laughed at. “Let’s find a grassy place in the sun, and I will tell you my tale,” offered Sheila.

Hutch trudged to the edge of the pond and sat on some grass. He removed his shoes and socks and placed them on a nearby rock. The day was warm, and he felt that his boots and clothes should dry enough to get home without arousing the suspicion of James. Besides, it was the first time he had felt an inner peace since losing his family. He thought the beauty of this secret place held an aura of mystery.

Sheila dried her hair with her towel before handing it to Hutch. He gratefully took it and began robustly rubbing it over his head. After he was finished, he laid the towel over the rock to dry.

“My father is the secretary to the assistant governor... a truly kind man named Hugh Watson. Two years ago, my father came home and sadly announced that Mr. Watson’s wife had died in childbirth. He was very distraught and shared that the year before, he had finished the construction of a man-made pond with surrounding gardens because his wife missed a pond on the estate she had enjoyed as a child. Mr. Watson loved her so much that he wanted to replicate a similar pond that she might enjoy on his estate in Melbourne. He shared how delighted she had been when he brought her here, and that she visited and swam in the pond almost every day until she became pregnant with their first child. The birthing did not go well, and both she and the child were lost. He was so grief stricken over her death, that he did not think he could ever visit this place again, because it was a painful reminder of her and their stillborn son.”

“That *is* a very tragic story, but how did you end up coming here on your own?”

“I couldn’t get their story out of my mind. I became so enchanted by their love for one another that I vowed to find the pond and come here in her honor. At first, it was just to see the place. I thought that finding it would satisfy my curiosity, but it only made me long to come back. I have never lied to my

parents, but my longing to visit this enchanted place overtook me. My parents had always hoped that I would make friends with some of the girls at my school. I believe that was one of their reasons for sending me there. I came up with a story that I had been invited to come to some of the girls' homes to play a few days a week, and would they allow it. Of course, they were thrilled that I had made some friends and willingly said yes. At first, I only came infrequently, but my desire to be in this enchanted place caused me to become emboldened. I had never lied to my parents before, but I think they could see how happy I had become. They never questioned my story. Plus, my father had taught me to swim when I was five...well, before my ill health."

"I'm sorry that happened to you," mumbled Hutch.

"In the beginning, I was afraid to venture too far into the pond. But in time, I gained more courage. The first time I let loose and glided across the surface of the water, I felt like I was flying. After a while, I sensed that the swimming was making my leg stronger. In fact, I honestly believe that I don't even need to wear the brace anymore. Look Hutch, my leg is not as withered as it once was."

That day forged a friendship between Hutch and Sheila born out of loneliness and loss. Three times a week they took off in different directions, but always ended up at the place they had secretly named, *The Enchanted Pond*. Over time, Sheila's parents came to notice, the muscles in their daughter's withered leg, getting stronger. In time, they allowed her to stop using the clumsy brace and observed that the leg became even sturdier. The local doctor was perplexed but allowed Sheila to continue walking without the brace. Although she walked with a slight limp, it was barely noticeable to her classmates, and they stopped harassing her. Hutch and Sheila maintained their secret

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of *The Enchanted Pond*. They felt that if others knew about their secret place, the magical waters might not continue to heal her.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Melbourne – Australia 1858**

#### **Headmaster Horatio Crocker**

Ten-year-old Hutch hid behind an old stone garden shed which sat off to the side of a quaint stone cottage, which looked to be out of a fairytale. He hoped that the gang of boys from school chasing him would not find him. He knew what they would do if they did. They had bullied him many times before.

Hutch's family had been gone three years from typhoid fever. His brother, James, had recently turned nineteen. After losing their family, James contacted his mother's parents in Sydney to share the tragedy. He hoped that the Hutchinson grandparents might want to take a more active role in their remaining grandchildren's future, but that was not to be. They blamed their daughter's death on her convict husband. James became furious with the unfair assessment of the father he loved and admired. That was the last time James and Hutch had any communication with them.

James did his best to care for Hutch. He taught him to swim in the Yarra River that meandered through the middle of town and took him fishing after church each Sunday, but his work was demanding. As an apprentice to his father, James Senior, he had been able to take a position in the same government department. Young James tried to fill the void left by his parents in Hutch's life, but it was hard. Plus, he had his own set of friends. Although Hutch never voiced it aloud, he thought he must be a terrible burden on James who had become saddled



with a seven-year-old child when he was still in his teens. He knew Hutch longed for their mother. James tried to fill that void, but the best he could do was muss up Hutch's hair or pat him on the back when he did well on a test at school.

The boy had ached with loneliness until meeting Sheila at the pond. Their friendship had grown over the past two years. Her withered leg grew strong, and without the cumbersome brace, she had been accepted by some of the girls at school. He was happy for her and was glad that she still made time to swim with him a few days a week when the weather was agreeable. The two never spoke or played together at school because they did not want to attract attention. They knew that their headmaster would not like Sheila befriending the son of a convict.



“You may as well come out you bloody criminal! Your blood is tainted with the blood of your father who was nothing more than a dirty filthy convict,” shouted George, the leader of the gang. “We don’t like you going to our school, and we will lay our fists into you every chance we get...and you can’t do nothin’ about it.”

“Come on, Georgie. Let’s go, mate. He’s long gone,” begged another boy named, Finch. “I heard Mum say they’re delivering a load of Lilly Pilly to the market. Her Lilly Pilly jam is the best in Melbourne. She even sells it to the market.”

“Maybe we can pinch some fruit off the wagon,” added a boy named Harry. Hutch could hear murmuring among the group.

The small, bright pink fruit grew in clusters like bunches of grapes, all over Australia. The interior flesh was firm and tasted

as if a juicy apple and a pear had married. Hutch's mouth began to water thinking how refreshing a handful of Lilly Pilly would taste. He was hungry. The rest of the gang agreed with Harry that pinching Lilly Pilly off a wagon would be fun, and Hutch could hear feet shuffling in the dirt road as they headed back toward town.

Georgie shouted a final volley of insults, to have the last words on the matter. "See you tomorrow, you son of a bloody criminal!" Faint laughter echoed in the distance.

Melbourne had mushroomed after gold was discovered in 1851 one hundred miles from the town. That same year, Victoria emerged as a separate colony from New South Wales and Melbourne became its capital. The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Prince's Bridge, and Melbourne University were erected between 1848 and 1853. The first railway in Australia from Port Melbourne into the city was completed in 1854. As Melbourne grew in population, the city encountered some of the same growing pains as San Francisco. Crime, poverty, and confronting similar issues with indigenous Aboriginal tribes mirrored the same problems in America's west. While some men acquired great wealth, most of the people were scratching out a living. Throughout these early years, Melbourne was finding its voice.

The school that Hutch attended had been built on the edge of town by a group of convicts that worked in chains under the constant threat of the whip. The school was made from the wood of gum trees. It was freezing cold during the winter months of July and August and sweltering hot in the summer months of December and January. Forty boys and girls of various ages attended the school run by the miserable Horatio Crocker.

The thirty-year-old headmaster had answered an advertisement in the newspaper calling for a teacher who had a sense of adventure and might want to come to Australia to teach the youth in the town of Melbourne. Horatio Crocker responded to the advertisement because he could not find work in London. He was small in stature and looked even smaller due to a sizable hump on his back. Horatio had fallen off a swing as a boy and almost died. The accident resulted in a broken back that had never healed properly. The minute he stepped off the sailing ship and onto the dock in Melbourne, he knew he had made a mistake.

Horatio had no recourse but to take the teaching job that came with living accommodations for a single man in a poorly run boarding house. The educator was ill-suited for life in a town that he felt was rough and uncouth. Crocker was a miserable little beast of a man. He vented his frustrations on many of the children that had been entrusted to his care. He was particularly cruel to the students whose parents had once served time as convicts.

He enjoyed giving the children of free settlers the best seats at the front of the classroom. The ex-convicts' children were separated and made to sit at the back of the room. The seating system exacerbated the existing bigotry against pardoned convicts and their families. At first, Hutch didn't mind because he thought he would be one of the first out of the door for lunch and at the end of the day. But that was not to be. Headmaster Crocker released the front-row students first and the convict children last. This meant that the gang of boys that tormented him was always waiting for him or some other child when they left school. Often, they chose Hutch as their victim. Hutch learned to run fast and was often able to elude them, but still they enjoyed the chase. Some days, like today, he was able to

break away from them, but often they hunted him down for sport like a pack of wolves.

One day James came home to find Hutch's face bruised and bloodied, and Hutch could not sluff it off with the excuse that he had tripped. He had downplayed his bruises before. The next day, James took Hutch to school to address the issue. Together, they walked into the classroom as Crocker was writing out the assignments for the day on the blackboard.

"Headmaster Crocker, might I have a moment of your time?"

Crocker, faking a smile, turned to face what he believed was one of the parents of free settlers. When he looked to see Hutch and his brother standing before him the smile dissolved into a scowl.

"Oh. What do *you* want? As you can see, I am terribly busy organizing my lessons for the day," he sneered.

"As *you* can see, my brother has been beaten to a pulp by some of your students, and I want to know what you're going to do about it?"

"What the children do when they have left the classroom for the day has nothing to do with me. Perhaps your brother is deserving of the punishment given to him by my students."

James drew in a deep breath and tried to continue with a civil approach, although what he really wanted to do was grab the little man by his throat. "I understand, but have you tried to talk to the children about the callous conduct ensuing outside your classroom? Surely, you must have noticed the bruises on Hutch's face when he comes to your class. But maybe you can't see the bruises since Hutch and the other children of pardoned convicts are made to sit at the back of the classroom." Hutch thought he saw his teacher flinch, like a child caught with his hand in the candy jar.

James was at least a foot taller than the teacher and he had slowly begun to inch his way closer to Crocker until the little man felt his crooked back splayed against the slate of the blackboard. The little man's eyes grew wide with fear. In truth, Horatio himself had been bullied by other children because of his size and affliction most of his life. As can be the case with many who have been bullied, they grow up to take sadistic joy in handing out the same punishment to those smaller and weaker. Headmaster Crocker was guilty of this cruel practice.

"This is intolerable. I will not abide these false accusations against my character," he choked out with false bravado. "I treat all my students with the same amount of care." There may have been a slight truth in this statement only because he really didn't care for any of what he silently voiced as *grubby little monsters*. He only treated the free settlers' children with a bit oilier charm because their parents occasionally invited him around for a Sunday meal.

"Well, Crocker, as a government employee and a good friend of Councilman Hodgkinson, I will voice my complaint to him if my brother comes home with any more bruises on his face. Do I make myself clear?" said James, who stood nose to nose with him.

Crocker was clearly shaken. He did not know that Hutch's brother was influential with the councilman. He cleared his throat and said, "I will look into the matter."

James stepped back, looked at Hutch and said, "Let me know how your day goes."

"I will, James...and thank you." James ran his hand through Hutch's unruly hair, musing it up before heading out the classroom door. Later that night at dinner, Hutch said, "I didn't know that you were friends with Councilman Hodgkinson?"

James smiled at Hutch and winked. "I'm not."

Hutch's life at school improved only slightly. He still sat at the back of the room with the other children of ex-cons, but at the end of the day Headmaster Crocker released his class with those sitting at the back. This small gesture gave Hutch a running start and most days he was able to outrun his tormentors.



Hutch waited behind the gardening shed until he felt confident that the boys had, in fact, walked back to town. As he rose from his crouched position in the grass, he could see a few daffodils which were always one of the first flowers to appear in spring. For the first time in a long while, he observed that the day was beautiful. He felt the whispering of a gentle breeze, which was moist and carried the fragrance of several white tea roses climbing up the side of the stone shed. It was a rare moment, and the boy felt a sense of peace. So, he lingered.

Hutch looked at the main structure on the property, which reminded him of a charming stone cottage in a fairy tale. He wondered who lived there. Then, he began to explore the smaller stone building. The wooden door had been recently painted green. The top of the door was curved, which made the little structure look like woodland elves might live there. He knew he should probably leave, but something held his interest. *Someone is taking good care of this little shed.*

Hutch could see that the door was unlocked so he decided to investigate. He looked around to see if anyone was nearby. When he thought it was safe, he carefully pushed on the latch. The greased hinges on the door opened without a sound, and he stepped inside. A small window on the opposite side of the door let in a portion of light from the sun inching lower in the western

sky. Hutch thought the little room might be dank and dusty. He was surprised to see spotless shelves along three sides of the room with a rectangular table taking up most of the space in the middle. He tucked his hands behind his back so he would not touch anything.

The shelves held a collection of some of the most interesting rocks, animal bones, and skulls he had ever seen. Each rock was polished and labeled with words he thought might be Latin. The bones were labeled according to its species. He recognized the words, Dingo, Wallaby, Kangaroo, Crocodile, and Koala, and deduced that the bones and skulls must be related to these creatures. The wooden table was polished to a shine. There were tools and instruments at one end of the table that appeared to be used to clean and label the artifacts.

Hutch almost jumped out of his skin when he realized he had been discovered. A man with a lean body and ruddy face stood between him and the green door, his only method of escape.

## Chapter 5

### Melbourne –1858

### The First Meeting

The man and the boy stood frozen in place for some time and regarded one another. Hutch saw a man who appeared to be around forty and seemed very fit. He wore tan pants and a matching shirt open at the neck. His face was tan with tiny lines framing the area around his piercing blue eyes and sun-streaked golden hair. *This man has spent a lot of time outdoors in the sun.* The man was of medium build, but Hutch could see that his shoulders were broad and muscular like many of the convicts he had observed digging railroad tracks by the side of the road. Hutch had never seen this man in and around Melbourne. As Hutch stood frozen unable to move, he observed a strong face with intelligent looking eyes. The man was handsome in a rugged sense, but the eyes were his most interesting feature. They were aqua blue with hints of green at the edges. Hutch noticed that the man wore a unique stone around his neck attached with a strip of rawhide. He observed that the stone was almost the same color as his eyes.

Professor Edmond McCormick had been watching and listening to the taunts of the gang of boys from his parlor window. He decided to investigate. He had been observing the boy from just outside the green door for some time. The boy had been so engrossed that he failed to notice he was being watched. McCormick noted that the young intruder had not lifted or touched any of the artifacts comprising his collection.



Edmond saw a boy, who looked to be around ten or eleven. The boy had dark brown curly hair in need of a good trim. He had an interesting face. Deep-set green eyes and a smattering of freckles framed his upturned nose. The young lad's clothes were not ripped or frayed, although he thought they could do with a good wash. McCormick couldn't decide if he was annoyed or intrigued by the boy's invasion of his stone shed. Normally he locked the structure when he was in the house, but he had planned to return to work after taking an afternoon tea break. He reminded himself to be more careful in the future. Oddly, the young intruder was the first to speak with rapid words that spilled from his mouth like the tapping of a drum.

"I'm deeply sorry, sir. I didn't intend to do any harm to the items in your stone shed. The door was unlocked, and I just wandered in. I guess I was surprised to see all the interesting rocks and bones. Please do not take me to the authorities. They would tell my brother and my teacher. That would give Headmaster Crocker cause to abuse me more than he does already." Hutch swallowed a gulp of air and clamped his mouth closed.

McCormick inwardly smiled. "I have no intention of alerting the authorities, laddy," he said in a thick Scottish brogue. I was a curious young lad myself once, and I could tell you were just looking about with no intent to do harm. Who were those boys? And why were they shouting obscenities in the road? I was watching from my front window. Were they molesting you?"

Hutch calmed the minute he heard that he would not be taken to the police for trespassing. He loved the sound of the stranger's lilting voice, which sounded like it belonged in a poem or a song. He relaxed a bit and slowed his speech. "That gang of boys has made my life miserable for as long as I can remember. They torment me because...well because my

deceased father was brought over to Australia as a convict.” Hutch added in a defensive tone. “But he served his time and was even employed by the government as an engineer. That was before he and most of my family passed from typhoid three years ago.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Who takes care of you now?”

“My brother James...he was an apprentice to my father. We were the only two to survive the typhoid. The government kept him on after...what happened...so we do all right.”

“Aye lad, I’m sad to hear that...nasty disease that typhoid. Might I ask what your name is?”

“Oh yes, sir...my name is Hutch.”

“Hutch is it now! Well, Hutch, my name is Professor Edmond McCormick, and I teach geology and archeology at the newly established Melbourne University. In my younger years, I studied geography, botany, and archeology at Oxford University in England.”

“How did you happen to come all the way down here?”

“I guess one could say I have an adventurous spirit. I was always intrigued by the newspaper reports of all the gems and minerals, which were being discovered in Australia, so I applied and was accepted at the university. I enjoy my teaching assignments and my students. Plus, the university allows time off for a sabbatical to go on digs and such. These artifacts are samples of *some* of the objects I have uncovered, although most of them are on display at the college.”

Hutch and the professor talked for another hour, when Hutch said, “I guess I should be heading home. I wouldn’t want to worry my brother.”

“Aye. It’s never good to worry your kin. Well, it’s been genuinely nice meeting you, Hutch. You have a fine inquisitive mind. In fact, I’m wondering if you might like an afternoon job.

I'm looking for someone to help me around the old place...with gardening and such. Any chance you might be interested?"

"That would be really grand, but I would have to get permission from my brother."

"I'll tell you what. Why don't I escort you home. I'll meet your brother, James, and have a word with him."

"That would be fine. Golly, thank you, sir."

"You can call me Professor. That's what my students call me."



The chance meeting between Hutch and Professor McCormick proved to be the beginning of not only a working relationship, but a true friendship. Hutch had never thought much about what he might want to make his life's work. He soon realized the professor's enthusiasm and passion for geology were contagious.

Three afternoons a week, when school was finished, he would race over to the professor's house, where he would find a list of things to do tacked on the back door of his cottage. Hutch enjoyed watering the professor's plants, weeding around his shrubs and flowers, and tending to his newly planted vegetable garden. The last item on the list usually had something to do in the old stone shed. He had trusted Hutch by showing him where he kept an extra key hidden under one of his clay pots. Hutch was tasked with dusting the shelves or polishing the wooden table. It was the young lad's favorite time of day. The professor was very thoughtful, and Hutch often found a cool cup of water and a few biscuits resting on a cracked tea saucer for him. Hutch considered that the professor knew how much the rocks and other artifacts intrigued him.

Hutch had been working for the professor all spring and throughout the summer without mishap. The cooler weather signaled the season was turning to autumn in the southern hemisphere. This also signaled that Hutch would be heading back to school in March.

The professor once told Hutch how difficult it had been adjusting to the flip-flopping of seasons down under. “Celebrating Christmas at the peak of summer just doesn’t seem right! Mittens and a piping beaker of hot Wassel should be enjoyed with a light dusting of snow on the ground,” he had grumbled. “Here, it is hotter than Hades at Christmas.”

Hutch had just finished dusting and polishing the artifacts. It generally took him awhile because he loved to hold and admire the beauty of each rock and gem. He looked out the window. He had promised James he would always come home before dark. With the days getting shorter, he knew it was time to go. Hutch was surprised that the professor hadn’t come home yet. He sighed and gathered the cup and saucer along with the key and was about to lock up and return everything to its rightful place when he heard his nemesis George talking loudly close by.

Within minutes, the gang had gathered outside the little green door as Hutch was locking up. “Well, I’ll be. If it ain’t our old convict chap, Hutch,” sneered George as he stood pushing Hutch up against the door. He and the other boys swiftly created a barrier trapping Hutch against the door before he could slip away and outrun them.

“What have we here, mate? Is this your secret hideout? We’ve been wonderin’ where you’ve been sneakin’ off to all summer.”

Hutch silently moaned. *I have been careless and let my guard down. Think. How can I break free of them?* But he was outnumbered one to five and they had formed a tight circle

around the door. He made a dash hoping to break through the barrier but was grabbed before he could slip away.

“Whatcha got in your hand, you dirty thief? I’ll bet you’re stealing off the bloke who owns this property.”

Hutch looked down at the cup, chipped saucer, and key ring clutched in his hands. He admitted that it did look suspicious.

“Take ‘em from him, Georgie! You’re bigger’n him.”

Hutch struggled to hold on to his possessions, but two boys grabbed his arms as George attempted to pry the objects from his hands. The cup and saucer fell onto a steppingstone and broke into several pieces as George pried the key ring from Hutch’s fingers.

He held it up, like a silver trophy for all to see. Hutch became enraged and plowed into George’s chest knocking him to the ground. The other boys joined in the brawl, and soon they were all knocking about on the ground like a pack of angry dingoes.

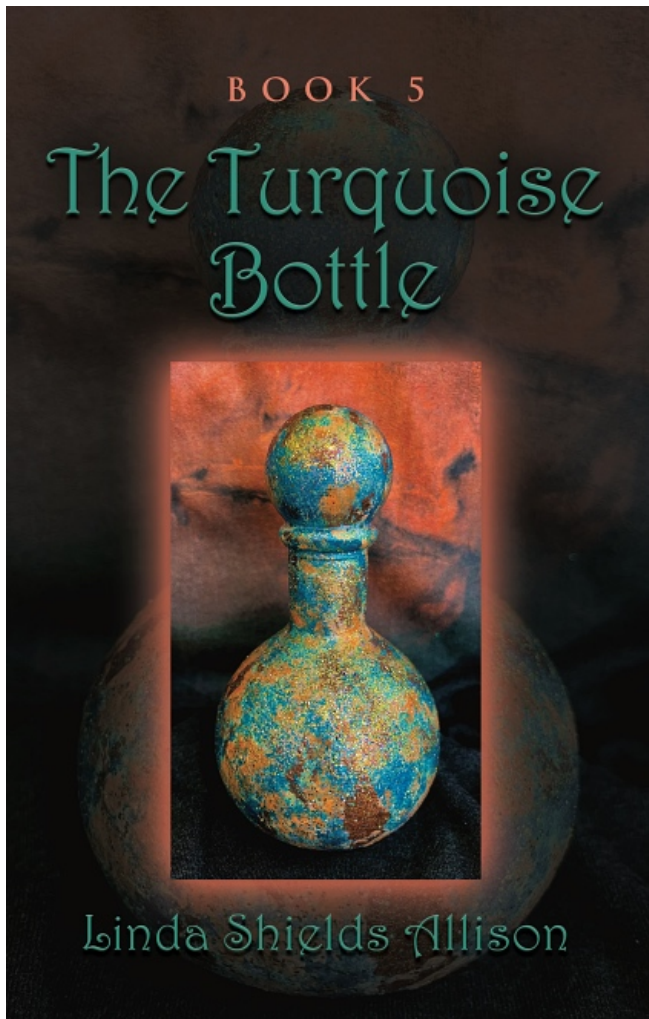
A loud whistle pierced the air, and the boys froze thinking it might be coppers. When they looked up, they saw a middle-aged man in a tweed suit and hat glaring at them holding an intimidating branch in his hands. “What do you think you hooligans are doing on my property?”

Georgie and the boys had had run-ins with the police before. Thinking fast came easy for their leader. “Pardon me, sir, but this son-of-a-convict was trying to break into your gardening shed. Me and my mates came by just in time to stop him.” George raised the key in his hand and said, “See, here’s the key. We stopped him from breaking into your property.”

Professor McCormick retrieved the key and said, “This young lad is no criminal. He is employed by me to take care of the plants in my potting shed,” he said stretching the truth. He wasn’t sure he wanted the boys to know what was really inside the shed. The professor looked at the boys and spoke slowly,

enunciating each word slowly in his Scottish brogue. “If I ever find you on my property again, or harassing my gardener, I will call the constable and have you arrested for trespassing. Also, I plan to make a visit to your teacher, Headmaster Crocker. If you ever bother my assistant again, you will be in more trouble that you could ever imagine. Have I made myself clear?”

The boys were scared witless at the measured sounds of the professor’s accent and words. They gathered in a bunch and nodded. The professor pointed to the road letting them know the conversation was over. They were gone in a flash.



*Australian, Hutch Worthington is branded as the son of a convict. He forms a friendship with a professor They travel to the Nevada territory in 1864 guided by a Turquoise Bottle and a curious map in search of adventure and treasure.*

## **The Turquoise Bottle**

By Linda Shields Allison

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