

foreshadows her later social independence and isolation, yet her dependence on her camels and dog.

Despite Robyn's increasing dislike of many of the humans around her, this chapter concludes with a trip home to visit and be nurtured by her friends – one of the few times she alludes to positive relationships and experiences outside her journey.

Key point

It is in connection with her trip home that Robyn offers a rare discussion of her reasons for undertaking the desert journey (see pp.36–7). This is one of the very few places in the text that she articulates what she hoped to achieve with her trek.

Key vocabulary

Misogyny: hatred of and/or prejudice against women.

- Q Nancy (p.35) and Robyn (pp.36–7) both describe the purpose of Robyn's trip. How do their explanations differ? What can you add to these, to explain more about Robyn's motivations or hopes?
- Q In what ways are Sallay and Kurt different? How are they similar?

Chapter 3 (pp.38–58)

Summary: *Robyn acquires two camels and moves into Basso's Farm; she becomes friends with Ada Baxter and several local Indigenous youths; she begins to train Kate and Zeleika; she euthanises Kate.*

Despite her struggles in getting the camels to Basso's, Robyn is delighted with her freedom and privacy, and with the first home of her own – a grand but deteriorating old farmhouse that provides only minimal protection from the elements, serving as a smooth transition for Robyn into life away from 'civilisation'. Her privacy and space afford insights into her own psyche; she discovers she is comfortable being alone and is reluctant to share Basso's with anyone but her Aboriginal neighbour Ada Baxter, who visits often, and Jenny Green and Toly Sawenko, who become her firm friends and are two of the few individuals with whom she forms lasting relationships.

This chapter features a detailed discussion of the nearby Mount Nancy Indigenous camp. Davidson offers a perspective on how Indigenous people are treated by non-Indigenous Australians; what the legal, social, financial, health and educational situations are for camp residents; and how the young Indigenous people feel about their circumstances and futures. The subtext here is Davidson's views on the impact of racism; some of what she depicts closely resembles the Australia we see in *Charlie's Country*, even though it is set many decades later.

The rest of the chapter is concerned with the training and management of Kate and Zeleika, Robyn's camels. Away from her mentors, this is the first time Robyn has been solely responsible for the animals (though she does consult vets for support and treatment advice), and this is echoed in the detail with which she describes their behaviour, actions and characters. The good news of Zeleika's possible pregnancy is overshadowed by the decision that the infected and ailing Kate must be put down. This experience is traumatic for Robyn, forming the chapter's climax.

Key vocabulary

Assimilation: a practice and policy, prominent in Australia up until the early 1970s, whereby Indigenous people were encouraged or forced to abandon their traditional culture and lifestyles in favour of non-Indigenous ways of life. Davidson characterises the policy as discriminative, manipulative and cruel.

- Q** How would you describe Robyn's interactions and relationships with the local Indigenous people (including Ada, Joanie, Frankie and Clivie)?

Chapter 4 (pp.59–77)

Summary: Kurt sells the ranch; Dookie goes wild and attacks Robyn; Robyn buys Dookie and Bub; Bub's foot is injured; the camels disappear.

Robyn suffers a period of depression which she attributes to having to shoot Kate and to the realisation that she can never win against 'the Kurts of this world' (p.59). In an extremely low moment she considers suicide, but the very consideration of it provides her with a life-affirming sense of certainty and optimism. This period of depression foreshadows the misery she will experience after Diggity's death.

Kurt, with whom Robyn maintains a working relationship (largely to access his camels), is wilder and more cruel than ever, finally selling the ranch and disappearing, leaving the clueless new owners to take advantage of her almost as much as he had. Robyn makes the best of another possible disaster: after a terrifying incident in which she is attacked by Dookie, she manages to buy both Dookie and Bub cheaply from the hapless owner and is once again equipped to continue planning the trip.

More challenges follow. Bub suffers a foot wound and infection, and then all three camels go missing. With the disappearance of the camels, Robyn is able to articulate the conflicting desires that have been growing in her as she becomes more comfortable with her life at Basso's, among friends: she is desperate to embark on her trip, and equally desperate to have an excuse to abandon it. She has begun to feel she is 'being softened' by the comfort of human companionship and has 'almost forgotten about the trip' (p.67).

Chapter 5 (pp.78–105)

Summary: *The missing camels are recaptured; Robyn and Rick meet and the National Geographic plan is hatched; Zeleika gives birth to Goliath; Robyn attempts a trial run; she begins her trek.*

The most significant event in this chapter is the meeting between Robyn and Rick. Rick Smolan is a *National Geographic* photographer who convinces Robyn to apply for the funding that she desperately needs for the trip. Her application is successful, but the connection to the magazine also locks her into an agreement she resents: she can no longer feel completely self-sufficient and independent and her precious, private trip is now bound to another individual – not just anyone, but Rick, for whom she has little personal or professional respect. Her relationship with Rick is one of the most important in the book, yet Davidson is often reluctant to discuss it in depth.

The trial trip to Utopia goes miserably wrong in almost every way, and is followed by another period of stressful preparation and equipment repair. As frequently happens in the text, stress for Robyn promotes self-examination, and this time she begins to interrogate the accusation that she is a 'bourgeois individualist' (p.88), and to question what she is doing and why.

Key vocabulary

Ayers Rock: an Australian landmark, located in the Northern Territory, which has particular significance for Indigenous Australians. Note that 'Ayers Rock' is no longer the accepted name; 'Uluru' is preferred. However, when quoting the text, use the terminology Davidson uses.

- Q** *Tracks* is about Robyn's solo journey across the desert. Why do you think Part One, which describes her preparations rather than her trek, is (at 105 pages) by far the longest of the parts, accounting for almost half of the book?

Part Two: Shedding Burdens**Chapter 6 (pp.109–24)**

Summary: *Robyn completes her first day on the journey; she becomes lost for the first time; she stops in Areyonga; Bub panics and Robyn beats him.*

In contrast to the chaos of the trial run in the previous chapter, Robyn's first day on the journey feels blissfully free and easy. She follows tracks, enjoys foraging for food and observes in great detail the landscape and wildlife around her. She describes her day and evening and the regular routines that will fill her coming weeks and months: food, responsibilities tending to the camels, setting up camp, and so on.

Key point

Page 115 is the first instance of Davidson reporting her self-talk as traditional dialogue, as though she were several characters conversing. The impact of this is to remind us of her extreme isolation and the fact that she is dependent on her own company in times of stress and challenge.

Though the first day is easy, the journey quickly becomes difficult: the map doesn't match the roads, causing Robyn to take the wrong trail; the physical pain of the travel takes its toll on her and Diggity; Robyn learns that the camels already have injuries and infections. The pleasant visit to Areyonga and the Pitjantjara people, with whom Robyn feels comfortable despite the