

Tracks: A Woman's Solo Trek Across 1700



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBYN DAVIDSON

Robyn Davidson was born in Queensland, Australia and grew up on a cattle station. *Tracks* hints at her difficult childhood; her mother died by suicide when Davidson was 11 years old and she was later sent to girls' boarding school in Brisbane. She was 26 years old when she undertook her trek through the desert, and she became a celebrity upon the publication of *Tracks* in 1980. She has since had an extensive career as a travel writer, often focusing on her time spent with various nomadic peoples. She has also published another memoir, an essay collection, and a novel. Davidson currently lives in London, India, and Australia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tracks is closely tied to the sociopolitical context of late 1970s Australia, as well as its national history more generally. Davidson's decision to go on her trek springs in part from her dissatisfaction with the superficial preoccupations of modern life, as well as her feminist belief that she is capable of more than the limiting gender roles that her society prescribes to women. Additionally, her experiences with and reflections on the Aboriginal communities she encounters relate to the broader oppression of Aboriginal people and the pervasive racism against them. The 1960s and 1970s saw a wave of activism in favor of returning land rights to Aboriginal groups that had been colonized, but most major legislation toward making these rights a reality did not occur until the 1980s. Although Davidson is not directly involved in the Aboriginal Land Rights movement, her journey takes place against the backdrop of its tensions and she witnesses the burden placed on Aboriginal people by racial biases and systemic oppression.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Tracks is part of a long tradition of adventure memoirs, many of which involve novice adventurers setting out on a journey to find meaning in life or heal past pain. *Tracks* is often compared to Cheryl Strayed's memoir [Wild](#), though it predates [Wild](#) by several decades. *Tracks* is also related to other works about the Australian outback and Aboriginal traditions, including *The Songlines* by Davidson's friend Bruce Chatwin. The influence of *Tracks* also guided Davidson's later books, most notably her second memoir *Desert Places*, which follows her year living with a nomadic tribe on the border between India and Pakistan.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Tracks: A Woman's Solo Trek Across 1700 Miles of

Australian Outback

- **When Written:** Late 1970s
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir; Adventure; Nature Writing
- **Setting:** Alice Springs, Australia; several settings across the outback
- **Climax:** Diggity's death; Davidson's arrival in Carnarvon
- **Antagonist:** The threats of the natural world; the limitations and oppressions of Western society
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Famous Friends. Soon after her trek, Davidson became friends with notable authors including travel writer Bruce Chatwin and novelist Doris Lessing, with whom Davidson lived with writing *Tracks*.

The Big Screen. *Tracks* was made into a 2013 film starring Mia Wasikowska as Davidson and Adam Driver as Rick, though Julia Roberts had reportedly been attached to star in a previous attempt at adaptation in the early 1990s.



PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator, a young Australian woman named Robyn Davidson, arrives in the small outback town of Alice Springs with her dog Diggity, a small suitcase, and six dollars. Although she has none of the necessary skills or experience, Davidson plans to find and train a group of camels that she can take with her on a trek across the desert. Davidson finds that anti-Aboriginal racism is rampant in Alice Springs, though she herself doesn't believe that the Aboriginal people are menacing and unintelligent as everyone says.

Davidson takes a job at the local pub and begins living there. She quickly gets some information about the local men who might be able to help her get camels, but the first one she meets, Sallay Mahomet, turns her away when he sees how inexperienced she is. The third man, Kurt, keeps a meticulous ranch and agrees to let Davidson train with him in exchange for selling her a camel cheaply. Davidson accepts the deal and, although Kurt's abusive and cruel nature quickly becomes clear, she learns a great deal about handling and training camels under his guidance. She also becomes friends with Kurt's kind wife Gladly. Soon thereafter, however, Davidson realizes that

she can't stand Kurt's domineering treatment and quits, returning to her job at the pub.

Davidson gets more familiar with the abhorrent racism and sexism of Alice Springs. Kurt tries to convince Davidson to return to his ranch and, after she finds feces on her pillow, she agrees to go back. This time, Kurt and Davidson get along somewhat better, and she loves getting to know each of the camels and their individual personalities. As time goes on, Davidson becomes friends with a group of people who live nearby in an old house. She relies on her new friends for support as Kurt continues to treat her cruelly. One day, Davidson again snaps at Kurt and quits her job. Although she is initially horrified at how much time she has lost without making progress toward getting camels, she is happily surprised when Sallay Mahomet offers her a job and promises to give her two camels in exchange for a few months' work. With Sallay, she learns much more about camels and gains hope for her trip's success. However, as the one-year anniversary of her move to Alice Springs approaches, Davidson feels unsure of whether she should continue with such a difficult mission. She goes back to Queensland to visit an old friend, who convinces her that the trip is worthwhile.

Back in Alice Springs, Davidson chooses her two camels from Sallay, selecting a young female named Zeleika and an older female named Kate. Her friends move away and leave her the house to live in until they're able to sell it, so she settles happily into the routines of living alone. Davidson also meets a neighbor named Ada Baxter, a kind Aboriginal woman with whom Davidson develops a close bond. Davidson also meets two young people, Jenny and Toly, who are involved with Aboriginal rights and become her close friends. Though she is happy to have supportive friends, Davidson begins to feel despondent again, in part because she still has to work with Kurt sometimes. Through Gladly, she also gets to know some local Aboriginal children and is depressed by the racist oppression they face. One child, Clivie, ends up getting sent to a reform school despite being smart and capable, and Davidson reflects that the schools and other local systems are totally unequipped to support the Aboriginal communities.

Meanwhile, Davidson worries that she may never actually leave for her trip. Kate has a large wound that has become infected, and though Davidson works with the local vets to treat it, it gets worse. One day, Sallay comes to visit and tells Davidson that Zeleika looks pregnant. Even as she looks forward to the baby camel's birth, Davidson also sees that Kate will not be able to recover. She shoots Kate to put her out of her misery. Davidson grows more and more depressed, both because of Kate's death and because of her ongoing fear of Kurt. One night, she even contemplates suicide, but snaps out of it with Gladly's help. Gladly soon leaves Kurt and moves away. Davidson is then even more afraid of Kurt, who now seems completely insane. Suddenly, Kurt leaves, having sold the ranch

to some strangers who expect Davidson to help with the camels. As she is showing them how to take care of the camels, a normally sweet young bull named Dookie attacks Davidson and she is barely able to subdue him. Frightened, the new owners sell her Dookie and another bull, Bub, for a cheap price. Davidson is delighted to finally have the three camels she needs for her trip.

Davidson continues to prepare while enjoying her friends. She gets to know her camels better and practices tracking them when they wander away. Then one morning, the camels wander so far that Davidson can't find them. When she finally does, she takes it as a sign that the trip really is meant to happen. Soon thereafter, Davidson meets a young photographer named Rick who convinces her to ask *National Geographic* magazine for funding for her trip. She drunkenly writes them a letter and then forgets all about it. When Zeleika's baby is born, Davidson names him Goliath and begins training him right away. To prepare for the journey, Davidson arranges to take a practice trek to the town of Utopia several days' walk away. Along with Jenny and Toly, she makes the journey in terrible heat, discovering along the way how much improvement her packs and supplies need. Davidson spends several weeks in Utopia, completing the final adjustments for the real trip. She starts to worry if it's right to want to be completely independent on her journey, noticing how much everyone else seems to be invested in it.

Meanwhile, Davidson receives word that *National Geographic* has accepted her proposal and flies to Sydney with Rick to finalize the contract. Though she is initially delighted, she quickly realizes that being accountable to the magazine and having Rick take pictures will corrupt the purely individual experience she had planned on. Though she feels like a sell-out, she continues with the final preparations back in Alice Springs. Davidson's father and sister come to visit, and she sets out on the trip at last. She is overcome by the beauty of the desert and her complete solitude, only to find Rick taking pictures with his **camera** around the next corner.

Once Rick is gone, Davidson relishes being alone and settles into a daily routine focused on caring for the camels, managing the packs, and staying on the schedule she has set for herself. Davidson soon arrives in an Aboriginal settlement, reflecting as she does on the horrors of white colonization. She enjoys getting to know the people there and feels fortified before continuing on toward Ayers Rock, where she will meet up with Rick again. Along the way, she begins to worry about her own courage and fortitude, especially after losing her temper with Bub and beating him at one point. To cope, Davidson relies on rigid routines and schedules, treating the trip "like a nine-to-five job" and checking her **clock** frequently.

As she gets closer to Ayers Rock, she notices the tourists and bemoans how out of touch they are with the natural splendor of the stunning desert. She enjoys seeing the Rock, and when

she meets up with Rick, is surprised to see that he's brought Jenny along. Though she is glad of the friendly faces, she also resents their intrusion into her solitude. Seeing Rick's photos from the start of the trip, she's also stunned at how different they are from her own lived experience. Davidson continues onward with Rick, continuing to come into conflict with him and feeling like his pictures make her trip less authentic. The two try to work out their differences and manage to become friends. Over time, their relationship becomes sexual as well, although Davidson regrets giving him the chance to become emotionally invested in a trip that she intended to be for her alone.

As Rick and Davidson approach the town of Docker, Dookie falls and injures his leg. Davidson stays in Docker for six weeks while he heals, even flying back to Alice Springs to get veterinary advice at one point. While in Docker, Davidson also has her first experience with wild, aggressive bull camels, which she shoots and kills with help from some Aboriginal men. She's devastated, but doesn't know how else to protect herself. Toward the end of her stay in Docker, she attends a traditional Aboriginal dance and is delighted to feel accepted by the women there, but her happiness disappears when she's asked to pay for participating. Davidson feels that she'll always be on the outside of Aboriginal culture looking in. Soon after leaving, Davidson encounters another group of wild bull camels and is again forced to kill them. She continues onward in complete exhaustion, beginning to feel detached from reality. After several days of near-madness, Davidson reaches an old settlement and gets water from the mill there, feeling revived. She sees a herd of wild camels and manages to scare them away without hurting any, feeling inspired by their freedom and beauty.

As Davidson continues, she meets a group of friendly older Aboriginal men and one of them, Eddie, decides to accompany her on the two days' walk to her next destination, Pipalyatjara. Davidson and Eddie enjoy each other's company immensely and Davidson reflects that he seems much wiser and more stable than most white people, even though Aboriginal culture is commonly considered primitive. They soon arrive in the settlement of Pipalyatjara and meet Glendle, the white community advisor of the Aboriginal people there. Through Glendle, Davidson learns more about the immense challenges and institutionalized oppression facing Aboriginal communities. At one point, Eddie's wife comes to visit, and Davidson is struck by how warmly and respectfully he treats her, reflecting on how women actually have a lot of authority in Aboriginal communities. Eddie decides to continue with Davidson to Warburton, 200 miles away.

As they walk, Davidson begins to let go over her previous fixation on schedules and efficiency and instead give in to Eddie's more relaxed, intuitive relationship with time and progress. He also teaches her to notice the land around her and she feels that she gains a much deeper understanding of the

order and balance of nature. Having Eddie around also makes the other Aboriginal people they meet much more open to getting to know Davidson. Throughout, Davidson is impressed by how happy and fun-loving Eddie is, even after having lived a long and difficult life. When they arrive in Warburton, they meet up with Rick, which causes tension when Eddie doesn't want to be photographed. Glendle arrives to drive Eddie back home, and the group spends a week in Warburton, with Davidson feeling happier than she has for most of the trip.

Davidson sets off on the last major leg of her journey, during which she will spend about a month completely alone. She revels in her new understanding of the land and spends many days appreciating the landscape, which culminates in a joyful roll in a dustbowl with Diggity and the camels. Afterward, she leaves her clock behind, giving up her wish to impose order on every aspect of the trip. Davidson feels grateful for the lessons she has learned in the desert and hopes she won't forget them when she returns to so-called civilization. She even manages to fight off a wild bull camel without hurting it. Davidson also shares some of the letters she wrote to friends during this time alone, though she never actually mailed them. The letters express boundless delight and love for the desert, despite its many hardships and dangers.

By now, Davidson feels that she has become completely uncivilized, no longer caring at all about her appearance or how to interact politely with others. She heads for a station called Glenayle, beginning to notice how some parts of the land are overgrazed or otherwise impacted by human interference. She rests for a while at Glenayle with a friendly family, then sets off for a three-week journey to the town of Wiluna, which will mark the end of the solo portion of her trip. Davidson continues to be awed by the landscapes she encounters. She realizes that she has grown immensely as a person since she set out, and feels overcome with joy at the privilege of all she's learned.

However, just as Davidson feels that she understands her place in the world, her idyll is shattered when Diggity eats a poisoned dingo bait and Davidson is forced to shoot her. After that, Davidson continues walking in a daze. The trip becomes surreal, and she barely notices anything until she stumbles upon a peaceful oasis that she calls "an outback amphitheatre." Davidson dances wildly there to deal with her grief, working herself into a fatigue that leaves her feeling cleansed. Almost immediately thereafter, she gets close enough to some stations that she encounters cars full of members of the press, who rush around her asking questions and taking pictures. Davidson is horrified by the attention and by the simplistic, sexist idea of her as a quirky "camel lady."

Rick arrives and helps Davidson deal with the press and introduces her to a local man named Peter Muir who lets them stay in his house outside Wiluna. Jenny and Toly also arrive to hide out with Davidson. She also gets countless letters from strangers who heard about her journey, some strange and

others encouraging. After several days in Wiluna and some time spent driving through the country to appreciate what she missed while mourning Diggity, Davidson continues on with Rick toward the town by the sea where her journey will end. The last leg goes mostly smoothly, with the two laughing at the camels' antics and getting along well. Rick departs for a time and Davidson at last reaches the farm where some acquaintances have agreed to adopt the camels.

With help from the camels' new owners, Davidson and the camels reach the sea at last, where Rick meets up with them again. Davidson cannot believe that the trip is really coming to an end as she watches the camels play on the beach. She spends a week at the beach with Rick, feeling blissfully contented with the results of her trip, even as she fears returning to the outside world. Finally, the camels' new owners arrive to take them back to the farm and Davidson says emotional goodbyes to them. With Rick, Davidson goes to the town of Carnarvon, where she encounters another wave of press waiting for her. At a welcome dinner, Davidson is overcome by despair, wishing to return to the desert and feeling unable to acclimate back into day-to-day life. Thinking back, Davidson reflects that the trip was ultimately easy; the only hard part was simply learning to trust herself and take the first step.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Robyn Davidson – Robyn Davidson is the author and protagonist of the book. She is 26 years old when she decides to undertake a solo journey across the Australian desert, even though she has no wilderness experience or background working with camels. She spends two years in the town of Alice Springs learning about camels and preparing for the trip and then spends about nine months on the trek itself, alone for much of it. Davidson never explains exactly why she undertakes this pursuit, but says that she doesn't believe she is exceptional, courageous, or unique in any way; rather, she believes that anyone has the ability to do extraordinary things simply by committing to doing so. Although she is regimented and meticulous at the start of the journey, she gradually learns to appreciate living life in the moment and discovers how meaningless modern social conventions are. Davidson vacillates between joy and despair throughout much of the trip, and she often wonders if she is wrong to want to experience the trip alone rather than letting others become involved with it. Davidson is also concerned with Aboriginal land rights and devotes much of her story to describing the plight of Aboriginal communities and the value of their way of life.

Rick – Rick is a young photographer around the same age as Davidson. The two meet in Alice Springs and Rick encourages

Davidson to apply for sponsorship from *National Geographic*. When she succeeds, he becomes the official photographer for her trip and meets up with her several times throughout her journey. Eventually, the two become romantically involved. While Davidson initially views Rick as an annoying intrusion, she eventually comes to appreciate his steadfast friendship and support. Rick is depicted as laid-back and adventurous, often arriving fresh from an exciting assignment in another part of the world. His **camera** also functions as a key symbol in the text, as it captures Davidson's journey while also, in her opinion, creating a false, glamorized version of it.

Eddie – Eddie, who sometimes calls himself Mr. Eddie, is an older Aboriginal man who accompanies Davidson through one leg of her journey. Eddie is relaxed and fun-loving, and he seems to Davidson to represent all the best aspects of Aboriginal culture. He is deeply in tune with the land around him and teaches Davidson invaluable survival skills, and he is also happy and hopeful despite having been unfairly oppressed throughout his life. Davidson is also stunned by the care and respect that Eddie shows toward his wife, which gives her insight into gender roles in Aboriginal communities. Although Eddie and Davidson have little language in common, they both enjoy their time traveling together and develop a close, almost familial bond.

Kurt – Kurt is an Austrian-born rancher who lives in Alice Springs with his wife, Gladdy. Kurt is skilled at handling camels and agrees to train Davidson and eventually give her camels in exchange for her work on the ranch. However, Kurt turns out to be cruel toward both humans and animals, and he requires an unreasonable amount of labor from Davidson, flying into rages when she doesn't meet his expectations. It also becomes clear that he does not intend to honor his agreement to give her camels. Although Kurt teaches Davidson much of what she learns about camels, he also terrorizes her to the extent that she eventually fears he might kill her. Finally, he moves away unexpectedly, having sold the ranch to people who know nothing about camels. Davidson often thinks back on Kurt as an example of cruelty and insanity, wondering how and why someone might end up behaving like him.

Diggity – Diggity is Davidson's beloved dog, a small mutt who is unfailingly loyal and loving. She accompanies Davidson throughout her entire journey and is always depicted as well-behaved and unusually intelligent, sometimes leading Davidson home when she gets lost. She is also especially fond of Rick. Davidson writes that Diggity is more than just a dog and becomes a very close friend during the trip. Toward the end of the trek, Diggity eats a poisoned bait intended for dingoes after Davidson fails to provide her with adequate food. She becomes intensely ill and Davidson has no choice but to shoot her. After Diggity's death, Davidson is devastated and initially unable to recover from her guilt over the incident.

Sallay Mahomet – Sallay Mahomet is one of the few camel

trainers in Alice Springs. Although he initially refuses to work with Davidson, he eventually agrees to employ her after she flees from Kurt. Sallay is gruff but kind, and he teaches Davidson crucial skills for handling camels. At the conclusion of her employment, he gives her the camels Kate and Zeleika, and he also continues to advise her as she prepares for her trip.

Gladdy – Gladdy is Kurt’s wife and becomes a close friend of Davidson’s. Although she is terrorized by her cruel husband, she is also a strong and independent woman who becomes an important source of support for Davidson. Notably, she also expressed anti-racist views about the Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, which Davidson appreciates. Gladdy lives with Davidson at Basso’s farm for a period, eventually leaving her husband and moving away. When she goes, she gives her dog Blue to Davidson.

Glendle – Glendle is the white community advisor to the Aboriginal settlement of Pipalyatjara. Davidson and Eddie meet Glendle during their visit to the settlement and he welcomes them warmly, providing a much-needed source of conversation and commiseration for Davidson. Although he loves his job as community advisor, he is constantly frustrated by his enormous workload and the dire lack of resources from the government. While he wants to protect the Aboriginal people and their rights, Glendle also fears becoming a paternalistic outsider. His struggles give Davidson insight into just how complex the issues around Aboriginal communities are. Glendle also advises Davidson to be kinder and more accepting to Rick, which helps her begin to see the positive side of her friendship with Rick.

Ada Baxter – Ada Baxter is a vivacious Aboriginal woman who is Davidson’s neighbor in Alice Springs. The two become good friends and Ada often behaves like a mother to Davidson. Their relationship illuminates for Davidson the disparity between the perception of the Aboriginal people in town and the reality of their kindness and humanity. Ada has a reputation as a tough and even dangerous woman, but she always treats Davidson lovingly.

Jenny – Jenny is one of Davidson’s closest friends in Alice Springs. Though little is revealed about her personality, she is repeatedly a source of support for Davidson, helping her prepare for the trip, comforting her when she has to put Kate down, and even visiting her at Ayers Rock. She and Toly meet Davidson in Wiluna as well and spend time with her near the end of her trip. Jenny is also an activist for Aboriginal rights.

Toly – Along with Jenny, Toly is Davidson’s other closest friend in Alice Springs. He is an activist for Aboriginal rights and also works as a teacher in Utopia, an Aboriginal cattle station. Davidson describes him simply as kind and supportive, and he frequently helps with her preparations for the trek. He and Jenny also visit Davidson in Wiluna and spend time with her near the end of her trip.

Dookie – Dookie is one of Davidson’s young male camels. She

acquires him from the ranch that formerly belonged to Kurt. Dookie is described as clownish and affectionate, and Davidson often rides him during the trip. Though he is usually good-natured, his wild behavior during mating season helps Davidson convince his owners that they should not keep bulls. When Dookie injures his shoulder early in the trip, Davidson is forced to spend several weeks in Docker while he heals.

Zeleika – Zeleika is Davidson’s young female camel, whom she gets from Sallay Mahomet. Zeleika is spirited and bossy, and she becomes pregnant after running away one night. She gives birth to baby Goliath, who joins the group for the trek. Zeleika becomes ill toward the end of the journey but recovers by the time she reaches her new home near the coast.

Bub – Bub is one of Davidson’s young male camels. She acquires him from the ranch that formerly belonged to Kurt. Bub does not like to lead but rather idolizes Dookie, whom he follows everywhere. At one point, Bub spooks and panics the other camels, and Davidson beats him in order to regain control. She feels terrible for her behavior and realizes how much trouble she has remaining calm during difficult situations.

Kate – Kate is an older female camel whom Davidson acquires from Sallay Mahomet. She has been abused previously and hates humans, though Davidson adores her and plans to use her to carry supplies during the trip, since she can’t be ridden. Kate develops an infection before Davidson acquires her, which eventually proves to be fatal. Davidson has to shoot Kate when it becomes clear she won’t live, which is a devastating setback for the trek.

Clivie – Clivie is an eleven-year-old Aboriginal boy whom Davidson meets through Ada Baxter. Although Clivie is kind and intelligent, he has a penchant for stealing things and eventually gets in serious trouble. He is separated from his family and sent to a reform school. Getting to know Clivie helps Davidson understand the ways in which schools fail Aboriginal children.

Peter Muir – Peter Muir is an experienced bushman whom Rick introduces to Davidson near the end of her trip. He offers Davidson and her friends his spare house outside Wiluna as a place to hide out from the reporters who are searching for her. Davidson admires Muir’s understanding of the wilderness and Aboriginal culture.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Goliath – Goliath is a baby camel born to Zeleika. Davidson describes him as adorable and spoiled, and he is constantly greedy for his mother’s milk. During the trek, Davidson often ties Goliath up near her camp as a way to keep Zeleika and the other camels from wandering away.

Blue – Blue is a sweet older dog who originally belongs to Gladdy. When Gladdy moves away, she gives Blue to Davidson, who adores him. Not long after, Blue dies after being poisoned

and Davidson learns that someone has been poisoning dogs in Alice Springs for years without being caught.

Julie – Julie is a friend of Davidson’s in Alice Springs. She lives with Davidson for a while at Basso’s farm and helps her find her camels when they disappear briefly, shortly before the start of the trek.

TERMS

Humpy – A humpy is Australian slang for a crude shack or hut used as a residence, usually by Aboriginal people. They sometimes rely on a tree trunk for support, similar to a lean-to, and are usually made of cheap or flimsy material. **Robyn**

Davidson encounters many Aboriginal people living in humpies during her time in Alice Springs and while visiting stations during her trek.

Swag – A swag is Australian slang for a sleeping bag or bedroll. Some resemble small tents, and swags are usually designed to be easy to roll up and carry over long distances.

Billy – A billy is Australian slang for a makeshift kettle used in the outback. It might be as simple as a metal can or bucket placed over a flame, and it is used for heating food and boiling water. **Robyn Davidson** writes often of “boiling the billy,” which usually means making tea.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



CHAOS VS. ORDER

Throughout Robyn Davidson’s story of her trek across the Australian desert, she grapples with the idea of chaos and its role in her journey. At first,

Davidson views chaos as a frightening threat—an indication that she is losing control over herself and her story. However, as her journey continues, Davidson begins to see that her fixation on structure and organization is a function of societal conditioning. Through her time in the desert, she learns that seemingly chaotic events and environments are not actually threats to order; rather, they are their own kind of order, one that can be more joyful and comforting than she had ever guessed. The overwhelming natural order of the desert shows Davidson the inherent weakness of man-made social order, demonstrating how apparent chaos may actually disguise true peace.

When she first arrives in Alice Springs to begin preparing for

her journey, Davidson devotes herself to creating some kind of order out of the chaotic civilization she finds there. Though she is largely unprepared for her trip, she knows that she will have to organize her skills, knowledge, and resources in order to undertake it. However, this process of making order out of chaos turns out to be an agonizing one. Through the trial and error of making friends and finding ways to learn about camels, Davidson goes through a painful process of finding a sense of belonging in Alice Springs. Davidson writes that this period is “infinitely harder” than she expected, and she often becomes depressed as she attempts to organize her elaborate, drawn-out preparations for the trip. Davidson’s experiences learning about and training camels underscore how wrenching it can be to impose order on something essentially wild.

Kurt—Davidson’s cruel employer—demonstrates that training camels requires beating them frequently, and he subjects even Davidson herself to rigid, sometimes arbitrary rules. Even when Davidson moves on to work with the more reasonable Sallay Mahomet, she still lives “in an almost permanent state of fear” while learning to control camels. Yet despite the pain along the way, Davidson’s rigorous preparations and training do eventually help her get ready for her trek. Nonetheless, she notes before departing for the first leg that all of her carefully prepared gear still looks ridiculous, and she finds that much of it quickly begins to break and lose the order she so rigorously imposed on it. While Davidson’s tenacity in marshalling her resources does pay off, the trip itself almost immediately begins to demonstrate the limitations of all her planning and organization.

During the first phases of Davidson’s journey, she remains anxiously devoted to schedules, timetables, and rigid ideas of how the trip should go. However, as the trip progresses, she begins to see that her tendency to cling to structure is limiting her ability to truly immerse herself in the unpredictability of her journey. Davidson notes that she remains reliant on her **clock** and ideas about time even when doing so has no real purpose and causes her only stress. She notes that she will often “steal furtive glances” at the clock and calls the schedules she invents “absurd arbitrary structures,” but nonetheless is “afraid of something like chaos.” Similarly, she relies heavily on maps at first, only to find that many of them are inaccurate or out-of-date. Seeing landscapes that differ from what her map tells her to expect makes Davidson doubt her own senses and even her sanity at times, again showing how clinging to external ideas of order can make even the perfectly normal natural world seem nonsensical. Later in the trip, Davidson relies more and more on her understanding of the world around her, until one day she impulsively takes off her clothes and rolls joyfully in the desert dust with her camels and dog. Immediately afterward, she leaves her clock behind on a stump, calling it an “insidious little instrument” and noting that “the desert refused to structure itself.” By this point, the desert offers Davidson a kind of sanity that all her structures and schedules do not.

By the time her trip concludes, outward disorder has come to seem more comfortable and harmonious to Davidson than the typical structures of civilized life, which she now views as oppressive and unsettling. Though the desert is still dangerous, Davidson comes to understand its nuances and see that its seeming chaos hides peace and stability. After exploring a particularly varied and surprising stretch of desert, she writes that she has finally succeeded in setting aside a fixation on safety in which “life is, after all, just ‘getting by,’ and where we survive, half asleep.” Even after the death of her beloved dog Diggity underscores how perilous the desert is, Davidson nonetheless embraces wildness, using a chaotic dance as a way to process her pain and move on with life. Notably, Diggity’s death is due to a poison bait set by humans to kill dingoes, which hints at how even the dangers of the desert are often indirectly due to human attempts at control. Whereas similarly distressing circumstances earlier in the book caused Davidson to sink into depression, her new ability to surrender control of her circumstances now gives her the power to rise above them. When Davidson finally does complete her trip and leave the desert, she is overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, and people of the city. To her, the nonsensical rules of so-called civilization feel unbearable, while she longs for what she perceives as the simplicity and peace of the desert. Upon this conclusion, the roles of chaos and order have fully reversed, with the seemingly chaotic desert signifying peace and the seemingly ordered city signifying misery.



INDIVIDUALITY AND INTERCONNECTION

Robyn Davidson’s decision to undertake a solo journey across the desert seems at first to provide a dramatic example of individualism. However, as she plans and undertakes her trip, she quickly discovers that her trek is not as isolated from others as she initially expected. This tension between individualism and interconnection forms one of Davidson’s core struggles throughout the book, as she wonders about the value (or lack thereof) of acting alone and reflects on how best to involve other people in her journey. Though Davidson attempts to balance these two values against each other, she learns over the course of her trek that individuality and interconnection do not have to be mutually exclusive. Rather, individual effort and the involvement of other people can ultimately strengthen and reinforce each other.

Davidson’s life in Alice Springs provides a vivid example of her discomfort with the ideas of both individualism and interconnection. She longs to belong in her new community, but she also experiences her greatest joys when fending for herself. When her friends move away and leave her a crumbling farmhouse to live in on her own, Davidson is ecstatic, realizing that she is a true loner and that “this condition was a gift rather than something to be feared.” However, she soon realizes that

living alone is part of what makes her vulnerable to the abuses of her manipulative boss, Kurt, and also leaves her house exposed to intrusion from men passing through town. Davidson struggles to cope with these challenges on her own, but when her friends Julie and Jenny come to live with her, her spirits revive and she feels able to face her life again. This early example shows how Davidson’s wish to rely on herself vies with her need to connect with others. Shortly before beginning her trip, a visitor accuses Davidson of being a “bourgeois individualist,” a charge which preoccupies her for several days. She wonders whether her wish to travel alone is self-indulgent, but also believes that her essential desire is simply to control her own life rather than being controlled by others. This sense of uncertainty about her own place in relation to other people follows Davidson as she begins her journey.

Davidson’s desire to be both alone and connected to others persists throughout her trip, as she attempts over and over again to define the boundaries of her journey and understand how other people fit into her essentially individual pursuit. Rick, the *National Geographic* photographer who meets up with Davidson several times during her trek, is perhaps the most dramatic example of Davidson’s ambivalence about involving other people. Although Rick is a steadfast friend who treats Davidson and her mission respectfully, Davidson nonetheless resents having allowed him and the magazine into her private pursuit, feeling several times that doing so has ruined the solitude she initially planned. Still, Davidson also appreciates Rick’s help and company, wondering throughout whether or not she was right to involve him. Davidson is also joined for a portion of the middle of her trip by Eddie, an older Aboriginal man who turns out to be an excellent guide and companion, despite the fact that the two have little language in common. Davidson describes Eddie as “healthy, integrated, whole,” and realizes that when two individuals are each secure in themselves, joining together can be a joy rather than a burden. Finally, during the parts of her trip that she is completely alone with her camels and dog, Davidson gains a new understanding that being alone does not have to mean being lonely, in part because the solitude allows her to connect more deeply with the world around her. Somewhat counter-intuitively, being alone and being connected go hand in hand during these later phases of Davidson’s journey. She finds that no matter how alone she is, her links to the land and to her animals continue to deepen and expand the boundaries of herself.

As Davidson approaches the conclusion of her trip, she encounters reporters and photographers from media outlets and realizes that, previously unbeknownst to her, the trek has become an international sensation. This abrupt intrusion of the outside world into her personal, private mission pushes Davidson to reckon once and for all with the ways that connection to others complicate—and balance—her individualist mindset. When Davidson realizes how well-known

she and her journey have become, she is at first resentful of the attention and angry at herself for allowing the intended purity of her trek to be corrupted. She feels that the media accounts have simplified her into a symbol of exceptional courage that ordinary people won't relate to, which she calls "the antithesis of what [she] wanted to share." However, Davidson also receives countless letters from people inspired by her solo journey, which suggests that her initial insistence on going it alone ultimately gives her a uniquely effective way to connect with others. By emphasizing the importance of self-reliance, Davidson manages in the end to create a version of the community and interconnection that she has explored throughout her journey. Although Davidson remains uneasy about how she will balance these values going forward, her trip demonstrates that individualism and interconnection do not have to be opposites; rather, they can support each other in surprising ways.



FEMININITY AND SOCIETY

From the start of her trip, Robyn Davidson's identity as a woman functions as both an obstacle and an asset. Within society, including Alice Springs and some of the towns she visits during the trek, being a woman leaves her vulnerable to threats that men do not face. However, during her time alone in the desert, Davidson realizes that this weakness is not an inherent quality of her or any other woman; rather, it is socially constructed and dependent on the views of others. By using her trip as an opportunity to gain new perspectives on her female identity, Davidson comes to a deeper understanding of her own strength and the ways in which she can redefine womanhood as a powerful identity rather than a vulnerable one.

In Alice Springs and even before the start of her journey, Davidson experiences rampant sexism and misogyny in her day-to-day life, which sometimes makes her feel threatened and unsure about her choices. Working in the bar in Alice Springs, Davidson reflects on the long history of misogyny in Australian culture and writes that she is "devastated" and "really frightened for the first time" when a customer warns her that she shouldn't be friendly because she's likely to get raped. Davidson's other experiences in Alice Springs reinforce the dominance of men and masculinity. Her abusive boss Kurt is an especially vivid example, and Davidson watches as he terrorizes his kind wife Gladdy, who becomes Davidson's friend. Gladdy eventually leaves Kurt, but witnessing the difficulty of this process and the pain it causes Gladdy is just one of many ways in which Davidson learns that misogyny is inescapable in modern Australian life.

However, once Davidson is alone in the desert, she finds herself feeling stronger than she ever has before and begins to see how conventional femininity is a product of a toxic society rather than a function of women's inherent character. Early in

her trip, Davidson muses that even though she knows it's important for women to "become politically articulate," she also thinks it might be helpful for men to use "the perceptive language commonly attributed to the female." Even at this early stage, Davidson senses that nothing is truly "male" or "female"; rather, individuals work together within society to label characteristics along gender lines. As she walks alone through the desert for long stretches, Davidson wonders more and more about the way that society needlessly places things into categories of good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate. For her part, she comes to feel that even though she is unwashed, sunburned, and totally unaccustomed to social convention, she is nonetheless free and happy in this natural state. She even notes that she is no longer ashamed of her menstrual blood, but wonders if it will still make other people "confused and unhappy." Learning to exist as simply human, Davidson sees the full ridiculousness of her society's rigid gender expectations. After she discovers the press coverage of her journey, Davidson is frustrated at the "camel lady" moniker the reporters give her and the diminutive connotations it carries. When suddenly seen through the eyes of others, Davidson's trek becomes a symbol of eccentricity and deviance rather than strength and courage. Noting that her trip would certainly have been viewed differently if she were a man, Davidson reflects that her culture causes any girl or woman to be "kept imprisoned inside her notions of self-worthlessness," regardless of her own actions and choices.

Davidson's experiences with women in the Aboriginal communities throughout her trek contrast starkly with her own society's misogyny and sexism. She sees that Aboriginal women are often respected and powerful members of their communities, and as a woman herself, she usually feels safer and more comfortable in Aboriginal settlements than in the other communities she experiences. This vivid contrast underscores the idea that femininity and gender norms come from social expectations and the perceptions of others, not from any biological determinant. Watching her older Aboriginal friend Eddie interact lovingly with his wife, Davidson is struck by the tenderness and respect he shows her. From that point onward, Davidson begins to understand that even though white male anthropologists would argue otherwise, women are actually very powerful in Aboriginal communities. Davidson also notes that while sexism is still present in these communities, she believes it exists only because of the influence of white colonizers, who demonstrated toxic masculinity and encouraged Aboriginal men to embrace it. Upon returning back to her own mainstream society, Davidson keenly feels the conflict between her new understanding of femininity and the misogyny that suffuses her world. Though she feels lucky to have the memories of the insight she gained in the desert, she is also aware that no one woman—herself included—can fully shed the burdens of identity that society constructs.



RACIAL TENSION AND OPPRESSION

The complex relationship between white Australians and Aboriginal Australians (often called black) is a constant concern for Robyn Davidson throughout her trip. She begins her story feeling abstractly concerned about Aboriginal rights, but without a clear idea of how she fits into this tension. As her journey progresses, however, she becomes intimately familiar with Aboriginal communities and begins to see the depth of their oppression under white Australians. Furthermore, Davidson finds that the Aboriginal people she meets are often far wiser and more peaceful than the white-dominated society she left behind, even though white narratives depict Aboriginals as savage and uncivilized. This sharp contrast between cultural narrative and lived reality illuminates the Aboriginals' oppression and shows that, like misogyny, racism is an unjust social force rather than a material truth.

Davidson's first impressions of the Aboriginals she meets during her journey are filtered through the racist, fearful perspectives of white Australians in the outback. Though there are exceptions, most of the white people that Davidson meets view Aboriginal people as inferior and undeserving of respect. Davidson notices that all black people in Alice Springs experience both subtle and overt racism, from derogatory comments to unsuitable schools for Aboriginal students. Though she knows the situation is unfair, she's not sure at first how to involve herself or what she can learn from it. She befriends one particular Aboriginal child named Clivie, and witnesses how harshly he is punished for a small crime. Davidson sees Clivie as normal child who is essentially a victim of his circumstances, and his story is one of the first to drive home the idea that Aboriginals in the outback are at the mercy of white society, no matter how hard they may try to take responsibility for their lives. Davidson also makes friends with a kind Aboriginal neighbor, Ada Baxter. Ada treats her with more respect and humanity than nearly anyone else she meets in Alice Springs, which hints to Davidson that Aboriginal culture may actually be more "civilized" than white culture, even though dominant narratives state the opposite.

As her trek progresses, Davidson senses that she has a lot to learn from the Aboriginal people, though she's also aware of how her identity as a white person affects her connections. She is wary of becoming what she calls a parasite on them and their culture, but through careful acquaintance she comes to learn more about how the Aboriginal worldview offers valuable new perspectives. During her first few encounters with Aboriginal communities, Davidson suspects that she "could never enter their reality, would always be a whitefella tourist on the outside looking in." Her pain at this distance shows how wary the Aboriginals are of white people (and for good reason). Davidson eventually finds belonging with the Aboriginal community in large part through her friend Eddie, an older

Aboriginal man with whom she gets along well and who accompanies her for a stretch of her trip. She notices that in addition to being kind and helpful to everyone around him, Eddie also seems complete and whole as a person, untroubled by the agonies that Davidson herself goes through. Along with making her feel that she has found genuine human connection across racial lines, Eddie also gives Davidson a glimpse of what she might be missing by seeing the world through a white, colonizing perspective. Eddie's deep connection with the land around them also rubs off on Davidson, and she realizes that through his eyes, "the land was not wild but tame, bountiful, benign, giving, as long as you knew how to see it, how to be part of it." This changed connection to the natural world is perhaps the most vivid example of Davidson's realization that the cultural narrative of Aboriginals as savages is only a myth; with Eddie, she sees that they are in many ways more civilized and stable than white people are.

By the time her trip is complete, Davidson has come to the realization that most of the problems surrounding Aboriginal communities—such as poverty and alcohol abuse—are, at the root, attributable to the abuses of white Australians. She finds that racism, rather than race, leads to negative outcomes, while Aboriginals themselves are tasked with coping with this inequitable burden. At various points during her trip, Davidson details the history of abuses carried out by white people on Aboriginal communities, including stripping them of their land rights and forcing them to live under the control of white missionaries. This history hangs over the narrative, underscoring the ways in which the Aboriginal people that Davidson meets have already been oppressed for generations before. Davidson's time in the community of Pipalyatjara is a particularly stark example of the ways in which colonization's effects persist in the present day. Even though Glendle, the white advisor of the settlement, is kind and well-intentioned, lack of resources and ineffective government oversight nonetheless mean that conditions in the settlement are poor. Large-scale oppression remains relevant on an individual and community level, as Davidson witnesses over and over again. Nonetheless, Davidson notes that individuals like Eddie remain happy and balanced, despite all that they and their communities have been forced to endure. She writes that "Eddie should have been bitter and he was not." Inspired by his example, Davidson resolves that she will try and avoid bitterness too, regardless of the difficulties she may face. For Davidson, the lessons that she learns through getting to know Aboriginal people are far more valuable than the social strictures of her home culture, even as white society continues to dominate Aboriginal communities.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE CLOCK

The small clock that Robyn Davidson takes with her on her trek serves as a symbol of her devotion to—and eventual rejection of—the strict schedules and structures of mainstream society. During the first few phases of her trip, Davidson glances at her clock constantly, always trying to maintain a routine and stick to a schedule, even when doing so is unnecessary and stressful. She writes that the clock helps her manage her fear of “something like chaos,” even as she perceives that it keeps her from being fully present in the moment. Davidson continues to struggle against her own need for external order, gradually becoming more comfortable relying on her senses and instincts, as well as the moment-to-moment realities of the land around her. Finally, Davidson is overcome by the joyful urge to pause and roll naked in the dirt with her camels and dog, after which she abandons the clock on a tree stump and calls it an “infernal instrument.” At this point, she gives herself over to the new reality of the natural world and its deeper order, surrendering her previous commitment to exerting control over herself and her surroundings.



THE CAMERA

The camera that Rick brings along when he meets up with Robyn Davidson is an important symbol of the tension between Davidson's desire to be independent and her need to rely on connections with others. Rick and his photography skills are a key factor in getting Davidson her deal with *National Geographic*, which provides financial support for the trip and forces her to keep going when she might otherwise have stopped. While Davidson is often grateful for this source of support, she also resents Rick's presence at times, feeling that he and his incessant need to take pictures interfere with the solitude she had hoped for. Additionally, she feels that the pictures from Rick's camera end up being shallow, misleading versions of reality, which ultimately misrepresent her (and others, including the Aboriginal people) to the outside world. Still, the photographs help Davidson gain the notoriety that she needs to share the true meaning of her trip with other people. Davidson never quite resolves this tension, wondering throughout if it's wrong to want to rely on herself and how to cope with the necessity of involving other people in the trek. The lines between individuality and interconnection blur over the course of the book, and the camera often serves as a representation of this blurring: it shares Davidson's experience with other people while simultaneously getting in the way of her wish to represent that experience accurately.

Miles of Australian Outback published in 1995.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ If the blacks here were like the blacks there, how could a group of whites be so consumed with fear and hatred? And if they were different here, what had happened to make them that way? Tread carefully, my instincts said. I could sense already a camouflaged violence in this town, and I had to find a safe place to stay. Rabbits, too, have their survival mechanisms.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Upon arriving alone in the town of Alice Springs, Davidson notices the pervasive racism everywhere in town. Though she suspects that there's nothing to fear from the black Aboriginal people, the hatred that white people express toward them unnerves her and makes her wonder about the complexities of race relations there.

The harsh attitudes of the residents of Alice Springs provide the book's introduction to the racism and oppression that Davidson encounters in varying forms throughout her journey. Here, she ties those trends to her own safety as an unaccompanied woman, hinting that racism is part of a larger patriarchal violence that has negative effects for everyone, even the white people perpetuating it. Though Davidson is most concerned here for her own safety, she also begins to delve into the unjust racial realities that will confront her over the course of the book.

☞ I hated myself for my infernal cowardice in dealing with people. It is such a female syndrome, so much the weakness of animals who have always been prey. I had not been aggressive enough or stood up to him enough. And now this impotent, internal, angry stuttering.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Kurt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Although Davidson is initially delighted to take her job with Kurt and learn all about camels in preparation for her trek, she quickly finds that his irrational, abusive behavior makes



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Tracks: A Woman's Solo Trek Across 1700*

the work almost intolerable. She wishes that she could express how angry she is at him, but she does not know how to do so and links this inability to her social conditioning as a woman. In this instance, Davidson's female identity is a liability, as it puts her in danger of Kurt's abuse and makes her feel that she is powerless to fight back.

Additionally, this quote hints at the difficulty of establishing effective boundaries with others and foreshadows the way that this will become a driving theme of Davidson's journey. She desperately wants to operate independently, but in order to learn how to do so and stay safe along the way, she has no choice but to ally herself with others, even when those others are as objectionable as Kurt. Even in this early frustration, Davidson begins to sense that standing up to people can only do so much; her independence is actually woven closely into her relationships with other people.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ One does not have to delve too deeply to discover why some of the world's angriest feminists breathed crisp blue Australian air during their formative years, before packing their kangaroo-skin bags and scurrying over to London or New York or any place where the antipodean machismo would fade gently from their battle-scarred consciousness like some grisly nightmare at dawn. Anyone who has worked in a men-only bar in Alice Springs will know what I mean.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

After quitting her job at Kurt's ranch, Davidson returns to living and working at the pub in Alice Springs. While there, Davidson experiences rampant sexual harassment and intimidation from the men she serves. Here, Davidson attributes the men's behavior in part to the traditional machismo of Australian culture, in which being hyper-masculine is a sign of strength and virtue, while femaleness is constantly devalued. Davidson's time in the pub is one of the starkest examples of the ways in which being a woman can be a liability.

Additionally, Davidson's societal perspective here also indicates that large-scale trends and biases can be responsible in large part for discriminatory beliefs and behaviors at the individual level. This quote lays the

groundwork for the social analysis of racial oppression that Davidson delves into more deeply later in the book.

☞ To enter that country is to be choked with dust, suffocated by waves of thrumming heat, and driven to distraction by the ubiquitous Australian fly; it is to be amazed by space and humbled by the most ancient, bony, awesome landscape on the face of the earth. It is to discover the continent's mythical crucible, the great outback, the never-never, that decrepit desert land of infinite blue air and limitless power. It seems ridiculous now, to talk of my growing sense of freedom given the feudal situation I was living in, but anything could be mended, anything forgotten, any doubt withstood during a walk through those timeless boulders, or down that glittering river-bed in the moonlight.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Kurt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

After returning to Kurt's ranch and subjecting herself once again to his cruelty, Davidson calms her fears and anxieties by appreciating the immense beauty of the desert landscape around the ranch. Even though Davidson does not yet have the intimate knowledge of the land that she will gain later in her trek, she nonetheless senses that there is an underlying peace and order to its outward chaos. While conventional wisdom would state that the ranch should be a more civilized place than the outback, Davidson can already tell that the reverse may actually be true.

Furthermore, this quote shows how Kurt's domination over Davidson ceases to matter when she is immersed in the natural world. This profound shift hints that the gender dynamics that give Kurt so much power over Davidson are not at all natural or immutable; rather, they are socially constructed and immediately evaporate when confronted by the deeper truth of the natural world's balance.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ I wandered and roamed through my domain, my private space, smelling its essence, accepting its claim on me and incorporating every dust mote, every spider's web into an orgy of possessive bliss. This sprawling, tattered old stone ruin...this was my first home, where I felt such a sense of relief and belonging that I needed nothing and no one.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after she gets her two female camels, Davidson's friends at Basso's farm move away and leave her their house to live in until they're able to sell it. Walking through the house for the first time, Davidson realizes that she has never lived alone before and revels in her solitude, feeling like she needs no one but herself to thrive. This point represents an extreme in Davidson's understanding of solitude, in which she feels completely able to rely on herself. Interestingly, the friends who left her the house are the ones responsible for situation, but their influence seems to be invisible to Davidson in the moment.

Additionally, it is in the crumbling, disordered space of the old house that Davidson feels the most free, even though she has previously been attracted to the perfect order of Kurt's ranch. This sharp contrast suggests that giving in to some measure of chaos can be a more effective coping mechanism than trying to fit everything into orderly systems.

☞ So it was little wonder that children did not want to experience this totally alien and threatening environment. It taught them nothing they needed to know since the only job they were likely to get was itinerant station work, which did not require the ability to read or write. Little wonder that they were termed hopeless, unable to learn, sow's ears. "Ah yes," the whites shook their heads in sadness, "it's in the blood. They'll never be assimilated."

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Clivie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Davidson points out that the conditions of the state-run schools near Alice Springs are completely unsuited to the needs of the Aboriginal children who attend them. Because the schools have nothing to do with the children's actual needs and ignore their home lives and unique culture, the children are unengaged and the white people who run the schools write the Aboriginal children off as hopeless cases. This analysis illuminates the case of Davidson's young

friend Clivie, who ends up getting sent to a reform school despite his natural talents and intelligence.

This early example is one of the first times that Davidson understands exactly how impossible it is for Aboriginal people to achieve success while being constantly oppressed and discriminated against by white Australians. While the standards of white society may be deemed civilized, many of them are actually just arbitrary rules disguised as propriety.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ This debilitating fear, this recognition of the full potential of Kurt's hatred of me, and the knowledge that Kurt could and would hurt me very badly if I displeased him enough, was the catalyst which transformed my vague misery and sense of defeat into an overwhelming reality. The Kurts of this world would always win—there was no standing up to them—no protection from them. With this realization came a collapse: Everything I had been doing or thinking was meaningless, trivial, in the face of the existence of Kurt.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Gladdy, Kurt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

In the weeks leading up to Gladdy's decision to leave Kurt, Davidson feels overcome by despair at the idea of defying him, knowing that he will always be more powerful than she is and fearing that he will harm her or her animals. Here, Kurt is a stand-in for all the patriarchal forces Davidson finds herself facing throughout the book; simply because she is a woman, she is subject to threats, harassment, and stereotypes that interfere with her personal goals and self-determination. This dynamic with Kurt is the epitome of Davidson's initial sense that being a woman is terrible drawback.

Additionally, Davidson's perception of this situation shows the negative side of the need to connect with and rely on other people. Though Davidson finds over and over again that working with others is necessary for her individual success, there are also times like this one when a lack of boundaries between herself and others is genuinely dangerous. This experience further complicates Davidson's struggle to figure out how other people can or should fit into her very individualistic journey.

●● I was basically a dreadful coward, I knew that about myself. The only possible way I could overcome this was to trick myself with that other self, who lived in dream and fantasy and who was annoyingly lackadaisical and unpractical. All passion, no sense, no order, no instinct for self-preservation. That's what I had done, and now that cowardly self had discovered an unburnt bridge by which to return to the past.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

While searching for her camels from the light aircraft after they go missing, Davidson finds herself caught between a desire to find them and a desire to simply abandon her plans and go home. She reflects that she only ever decided to go on the trip by convincing herself that she was brave, when in fact there is another side of herself that isn't brave at all and doesn't even want to find the camels.

By examining the different sides of herself, Davidson tacitly admits that even a single individual isn't truly just one person, which opens the door for a deeper understanding of how she might balance her desire to be independent with the need to rely on others. Furthermore, she notes here the side of herself that wants to continue with the trip is also the side that has no sense of order. This moment foreshadows the way that Davidson will have to overcome her devotion to order once the trip is underway.

the nitty-gritty preparations for her journey. Although she does her best to control all the details, she only gets more anxious; her efforts don't seem to make her feel any more prepared for what's to come. This quote shows the intensity of Davidson's wish to impose order on her environment, as well as the essential futility of her efforts to do so.

Additionally, Davidson's reliance on Jenny and Toly illustrates how crucial support from others will be throughout her trip, even though she hasn't yet accepted that fact. Here, she asks Toly and Jenny for help, but only in her sleep; her subconscious mind seems to acknowledge what her conscious mind cannot. Taken as a whole, this passage foreshadows the transformation that Davidson will undergo during her trip, as she learns to release the boundaries between herself and others and accept the natural chaos of the world.

●● I began right then and there to split into two over Rick. On the one hand I saw him as a blood-sucking little creep who had inveigled his way into my life by being nice and by tempting me with material things. On the other hand I was confronted with a very warm, gentle human being who genuinely wanted to help me and who was excited by the prospect of an adventure, who wanted to do a good job, and who cared.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Rick

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Davidson finally sets out on her trek and is overcome with joy at the natural world around her, only to round a corner and find Rick there, interrupting her solitude by taking hundreds of pictures. Her words in this passage indicate the depth of her confusion about how to remain independent while accepting support from others. Because she is not yet able to tolerate the idea that individuality and interconnection can exist simultaneously, she solves the conflict by viewing Rick almost as two different people, each one representing a different side of her conundrum. Throughout the book, Rick is perhaps the most prominent example of Davidson's struggle to include—or exclude—others from her experience, and this early moment illustrates just how profound this conflict is for Davidson.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● I made lists of lists of lists, then started all over again. And if I did something that wasn't on a list, I would promptly write it on one and cross it out, with the feeling of having at least accomplished something. I walked in my sleep into Jenny and Toly's room one night and asked them if they thought everything was going to be all right.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Toly, Jenny

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

While spending time in the settlement of Utopia after her trial trek with Jenny and Toly, Davidson throws herself into

The presence of Rick's camera also adds a new dimension to Davidson's fixation on order and structure. While she still wishes outwardly for everything to remain organized and in control, she also senses that the version of life the camera captures is somehow false. It makes things look simple and orderly, while Davidson knows on some level that they're actually complicated and chaotic. Here and throughout, the camera and Davidson's reactions to it highlight her ongoing struggle to surrender her wish to impose order on the world.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☛ Sometimes you can see where a track is by the tell-tale blossoms of wildflowers. Those along the track will either be growing more thickly or be of a different type. Sometimes, you may be able to follow the trail by searching for the ridge left aeons ago by a bulldozer. The track may wind around or over hills and ridges and rocky outcroppings, straight into sand dunes, get swallowed up by sandy creek-beds, get totally lost in stony creek-beds, or fray into a maze of animal pads. Following tracks is most often easy; sometimes frustrating, and occasionally downright terrifying.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 111-112

Explanation and Analysis

As Davidson settles into the routines of the early phase of her solo trek, she reflects on how fickle and confusing the tracks in the outback can be. Just about any kind of path left by a vehicle can be a track, and their representations on maps often turn out to be inaccurate. Tracks are both a crucial resource in Davidson's journey, but they can also be a liability when they are misleading or incomplete.

Here, Davidson's reflections on tracks and their pitfalls mirror her changing understanding of the role that other forms of external order, like maps and clocks, will play in her trip. At first, she thinks that her success relies on impeccable organization and understanding everything around her clearly, but this moment is the first of many when she begins to adopt a more flexible mindset about her path forward.

☛ I had a clock which I told myself was for navigation purposes only, but at which I stole furtive glances from time to time. It played tricks on me. In the heat of the afternoon, when I was tired, aching, and miserable, the clock would not move, hours elapsed between ticks and tocks. I recognized the need for absurd arbitrary structures at that stage. I did not know why, but I knew I was afraid of something like chaos. It was as if it were waiting for me to let down my guard and then it would pounce.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Continuing to develop a daily routine, Davidson notices that she tends to treat the trip like a structured job, even though there is no one keeping tabs on her and no reason to proceed according to a strict schedule. The symbol of the clock plays a prominent role in this phase of her journey, as it represents both the rigidity of her habits and the futility of being too devoted to those habits. As Davidson observes here, the clock doesn't seem relevant for her current circumstances; time moves in its own unique way, which the clock cannot capture.

Nonetheless, at this point Davidson cannot yet convince herself to let go of the structures that bring her comfort, even though she recognizes them as arbitrary. She can articulate her fear of chaos, but she cannot banish that fear. This moment is a key point in the development of Davidson's thoughts on this theme, showing the delicate balance between her devotion to order and her understanding that it cannot be maintained.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛ Some camps on those nights were so desolate they stole into my soul, and I longed for a safe nook out of that chill empty wind. I felt vulnerable. Moonlight turned the shadows into inimical forms and I was so glad of Diggity's warmth as we snuggled beneath the blankets that I could have squeezed her to death. The rituals I performed provided another necessary structure. Everything was done correctly and obsessively. Before I went to bed, everything was placed exactly where I wanted it for the morning.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Diggity

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 130-131

Explanation and Analysis

On her way to Ayers Rock, Davidson settles into the routines of her trip and finds herself feeling strangely despondent at times, wondering when and how the trip will become truly transformative. Here, she describes the challenges of building up her daily habits and how much she has to rely on the rigid structures she creates for herself.

At this point, Davidson's fixation on creating order is closely linked with her dawning realization that she can't be fully independent if her trip is to succeed. She misses the comfort of having others nearby and leans on Diggity for comfort, which suggests that her obsessive habits have become a stand-in for connection with other people. Davidson begins to understand that both her insistence on clear order and her commitment to going it alone will prove to be unsustainable, but she is not yet able to reject them.

☞ They were gorgeous photos, no complaints there, but who was that Vogue model tripping romantically along roads with a bunch of camels behind her, hair lifted delicately by sylvan breezes and turned into a golden halo by the back-lighting. Who the hell was she? Never let it be said that the camera does not lie. It lies like a pig in mud. It captures the projections of whoever happens to be using it, never the truth.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Rick

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

When Davidson arrives at Ayers Rock, she meets up with Rick and sees the photographs that he took of her when she was first setting out on her journey. The photographs are beautiful, but she can barely recognize herself in them, which convinces her more than ever that the perspectives of other people add a sense of falsehood and insincerity into what she had intended to be a pure, independent journey.

Davidson's insistence that the camera is lying demonstrates how uncomfortable she is with the idea of outside

perspectives on the trek. For her, the only real truth is her own experience; other interpretations are necessarily false, and she does not yet appreciate how seeing the world from someone else's perspective can be a support rather than a burden. Because the pictures are so overtly feminine, they also underscore the way the socially determined gender roles circumscribe all of Davidson's efforts to do something original and authentic. Because she is a woman, her journey will always be viewed through a female lens by the outside world.

☞ We didn't talk much on the way home. I did not know then that it was merely a rule of etiquette to give some little gift at the end of a dance. I felt it as a symbolic defeat. A final summing up of how I could never enter their reality, would always be a whitefella tourist on the outside looking in.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

While staying in Docker, Davidson goes with an acquaintance to visit a group of Aboriginal women who are practicing a traditional dance. She is elated when she is asked to join them, but then devastated afterward when it becomes clear that she is expected to pay a few dollars for having participated.

For Davidson, this moment is a keen reminder that connection with others is actually a crucial component of her journey, even though she has so often rejected it in the past. Being rejected by the Aboriginal people causes her pain, which underscores how much she truly does desire interconnection. Additionally, this moment shows how the rupture between Aboriginal culture and its white colonizers is essentially violent for everyone involved; even though Davidson is from the dominant culture, she still experiences pain as a result of this history of oppression.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞☞ The fire flickered on white moonstruck sand, the sky was black onyx. The rumbling sound of bulls circled the camp very close until I fell asleep. In the moonlight, I woke up and maybe twenty yards away was a beast standing in full profile. I loved it and didn't want to harm it. It was beautiful, proud. Not interested in me at all. I slept again, drifting off to the sound of bells on camels, peacefully chewing their cud.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving Docker, Davidson is attacked by a group of wild bull camels and shoots and kills one of them. The others retreat and she falls asleep, waking to the peaceful, almost transcendent scene described here. This moment is a key turning point in Davidson's relationship with the natural world and her own desire to impose order on it. By shooting the bull camel, Davidson effectively takes control of the situation, but she is not happy with the result; rather, she feels sad at destroying something beautiful and wild. In this moment, she appreciates the complete balance of the world around her and knows that she does not need to do anything at all to change it. However, this wisdom is short-lived; she still has to kill the other bull camels in the morning and cannot yet fully internalize the lesson learned here.

☞☞ Aborigines. Warm, friendly, laughing, excited, tired Pitjantjara Aborigines, returning to Wingelinna and Pipalyatjara after a land rights meeting in Warburton. No fear there, they were comfortable with silence. No need to pretend anything. Billies of tea all round. Some sat by the fire and chatted, others drove on home.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

After completing a particularly arduous stretch of the trek and wondering if she is even psychologically capable of interacting with other humans, Davidson encounters a group of Aboriginal people and is pleasantly surprised by how much she enjoys interacting with them. Soon after this

passage, she learns that one of these men is Eddie, who will become a close friend going forward.

The calm and friendliness of the group of Aboriginal people shows Davidson that interconnection with others isn't necessarily burdensome; when the people involved aren't struggling to dominate or impress each other, the relationship can be mutually supportive. That Davidson learns this lesson with Aboriginal people rather than white people also demonstrates how their culture may be healthier and more sane than white culture, even though prevailing wisdom states the opposite.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞☞ The job is made more difficult by the fact that the adviser is more aware than the Aborigines of the possible consequences of their decisions, and wants to protect them. Not becoming a paternal-style protectionist means seeing catastrophic mistakes being made, and not being able to do a thing about it except advise, because you know that the only way the people can learn to deal with the white world is to make such mistakes. There will not always be kind-hearted whitefellas around to save the situation and be a buffer zone.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Glendle

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

While staying with Glendle at the settlement where he is a community advisor, Davidson observes all the difficulties inherent in the racial dynamics between Aboriginal people and white people. Even though Glendle wants to help the people he advises, he often feels unable to do so effectively and worries about balancing his wish to be useful with the need to avoid becoming a paternalistic overseer.

Glendle's predicament underscores the way that the white colonization of Aboriginal people leads only to pain and confusion that cannot be easily resolved, even by well-intentioned members of the dominant group. It also adds a new perspective on Davidson's ambivalence about interconnection with others; here, the Aboriginal people's supportive connection with Glendle constantly teeters on the brink of becoming unhealthy, which reflects on the way Davidson often feels about the people who get involved with her trek.

☛ I was being torn by two different time concepts. I knew which one made sense, but the other one was fighting hard for survival. Structure, regimentation, orderedness. Which had absolutely nothing to do with anything. I kept thinking wryly to myself, “Christ, if this keeps up it will take us months to get there. So what? Is this a marathon or what? This is going to be the best part of your trip, having Eddie with you, so stretch it out, idiot, stretch it out. But but...what about routine?” and so on. The turmoil lasted all that day, but gradually faded as I relaxed into Eddie’s time. He was teaching me something about flow, about choosing the right moment for everything, about enjoying the present. I let him take over.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

While walking with Eddie for a long stretch of her trip, Davidson at last begins to loosen her grip on the strict schedules and systems that she has been fixated on throughout the trip. She still worries about time, but she now realizes that it doesn’t make sense to do so, so she lets Eddie teach her the hidden patterns of a calmer, more intuitive approach to time and decision-making. Davidson finally begins to see that chaos is not the opposite of order; rather, there is a deeper sense of order within things that may seem outwardly chaotic.

Additionally, it is significant that this sense of release and progress comes from Aboriginal ideas about time and interacting with the world. The perspectives of Aboriginal culture help Davidson develop less rigid ideas about how she should interact with others and the land around her, which suggests again that their cultural traditions may be wiser and more coherent than those of white culture.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☛ And as I walked through that country, I was becoming involved with it in a most intense and yet not fully conscious way. The motions and patterns and connections of things became apparent on a gut level. I didn’t just see the animal tracks, I knew them. I didn’t just see the bird, I knew its relationship to its actions and effects. My environment began to teach me about itself without my full awareness of the process. It became an animate being of which I was a part.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

As she falls into the routine of the most challenging part of her journey, in which she is completely without human help, Davidson experiences a sense of peace, joy, and balance unlike any she has felt thus far. Here, she describes how different her perceptions of the land are than they were before. Drawing on the Aboriginal perspective that she learned from Eddie, Davidson now sees all the connections between the different aspects of nature and understands that underneath their seeming chaos, they are actually deeply orderly and balanced. This perception is a sharp contrast with her previous belief that order must be something imposed from the outside.

Additionally, this passage shows how Davidson is letting go of the idea that independence and interconnection are opposites. From learning how to observe nature closely, Davidson comes to understand that each entity must rely on every other, even if it takes its own individual path. This is an apt metaphor for Davidson at this point in her journey, as she grows simultaneously more self-reliant and more appreciative of the ways that she has relied on others throughout.

☛ And I thought I had done it. I believed I had generated a magic for myself that had nothing to do with coincidence, believed I was part of a strange and powerful sequence of events called fate and I was beyond the need for anything or anyone. And that night I received the most profound and cruel lesson of all. That death is sudden and final and comes from nowhere. It had waited for my moment of supreme complacency and then it had struck. Late that night, Diggity took a poison bait.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Diggity

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

As she moves toward the conclusion of the longest solo leg of her journey, Davidson feels elated by her understanding of the interconnection of the entire world and her place within it. However, Diggity’s sudden and tragic death comes

immediately after this sense of complete and perfect balance. In this quote, Davidson grapples with this fact, trying to reconcile the sense of joyful truth she experienced with the grim reality of losing her closest companion.

Though this incident shakes Davidson's sense of stability, it also ends up reinforcing her understanding of the way the world works. The world is a finely balanced system of interconnected entities, but at the same time, it contains infinite difficulty and pain, which even deep understanding cannot necessarily reduce. This realization echoes the pain of oppression that the Aboriginal communities face, and it also foreshadows the difficulty that Davidson will later have integrating back into nonsensical social structures of the outside world.

nature, independence and interconnection can also come into balance effortlessly.

☛ I was now public property. I was now a kind of symbol. I was now an object of ridicule for small-minded sexists, and I was a crazy, irresponsible adventurer (though not as crazy as I would have been had I failed). But worse than all that, I was now a mythical being who had done something courageous and outside the possibilities that ordinary people could hope for. And that was the antithesis of what I wanted to share. That anyone could do anything. If I could bumble my way across a desert, then anyone could do anything. And that was true especially for women, who have used cowardice for so long to protect themselves that it has become a habit.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☛ I danced until I could dance no more—I danced out everything. Diggity, the trip, Rick, the article, the whole lot. I shouted and howled and wept and I leapt and contorted my body until it refused to respond anymore. I crawled back to the camels, covered in grime and sweat, shaking with fatigue, dust in my ears and nose and mouth, and slept for about an hour. When I woke, I felt healed, and weightless, and prepared for anything.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Rick, Diggity

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

After wandering for several days feeling numb from Diggity's death, Davidson finds a wide-open space in the desert and impulsively dances naked in the dust. She gives herself over completely to a communion with the land and throws away all of her previous fixation on order and schedules, simply living in the moment until she feels ready to move on. This instance of profound healing shows that peace comes from giving into the existing order of the world, rather than trying to impose one's own external order onto its seeming chaos.

This experience also helps Davidson integrate her conflicting feelings toward her deep connections with Diggity, Rick, and everyone else who has been involved in her trip. Her sense of acceptance here suggests that once a person comes into balance with the underlying order of

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Rick

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Upon getting close to Wiluna, Davidson is astonished to find hoards of reporters and photographers waiting for her, all competing to share her story and image with the world. The reports they publish vary widely and many are inaccurate, but all seem to share the image of Davidson as a glamorous, mysterious "camel lady" who can accomplish extraordinary things. She learns from Rick that her picture has even been published widely already because tourists have sold their photographs to newspapers.

Davidson's distress upon learning of these stories shows how corrupting the interpretations of other people can be. At the same time, her hope to teach a better lesson suggests that her seemingly independent journey has always had an undercurrent of interconnection, even though Davidson herself has never been comfortable with it. Davidson's thinking here hints that while there is a way to balance independence and interconnection, it's also easy for these forces to come into conflict rather than supporting each other. The sexist interpretations of the trek also show how much harder it is for women to define their own identities in connection with others, since others' perceptions are always filtered through gender stereotypes.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ And here I was at the end of my trip, with everything just as fuzzy and unreal as the beginning. It was easier for me to see myself in Rick's lens, riding down to the beach in that clichéd sunset, just as it was easier for me to stand with my friends and wave goodbye to the loopy woman with the camels, the itching smell of the dust around us, and in our eyes the fear that we had left so much unsaid. There was an unpronounceable joy and an aching sadness to it. It had all happened too suddenly. I didn't believe this was the end at all.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker), Rick

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

Davidson drives toward the ocean with Rick and her camels, feeling confused and disbelieving that the trip is already coming to an end. In this final phase of the journey, she finds it easier to understand herself through the eyes of others, joining Rick and her friends in seeing her as “the loopy woman with the camels.” She even values the perspective that Rick's camera affords her, despite having resented it throughout the trip. Even as Davidson acknowledges how others' perspectives are different from her own, she at last comes to view them as a valuable support, which here gives her the strength to withstand the emotional turmoil of ending something so meaningful. She remains independent, but no longer rejects the idea that connecting with others might be able to coexist with that autonomy.

☞ I had pared my possessions down to almost nothing—a survival kit, that's all. I had a filthy sarong for hot weather and a jumper and woolly socks for cold weather and I had something to sleep on and something to eat and drink out of and that was all I needed. I felt free and untrammled and light and I wanted to stay that way. If I could only just hold on to it. I didn't want to get caught up in the madness out there. Poor fool, I really believed all that crap. I was forgetting that what's true in one place is not necessarily true in another.

Related Characters: Robyn Davidson (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

While spending a week at the beach with Rick and the camels before leaving for the town of Carnarvon, Davidson is overcome with joy and gratitude for the lessons that she learned on her journey. She no longer needs elaborate packs, rigid schedules, or strict routines to feel secure; her pared-down supplies symbolize her final submission to the deep order that hides beneath the seeming chaos of the natural world.

However, her suspicion that it will be difficult to hang onto this joyful understanding once she's back in her home society foreshadows the painful culture shock to come. This passage illustrates how powerful the force of an oppressive society is on those who live in it, particularly for those with gender or racial identities that leave them vulnerable. Davidson has discovered profound truths during her time in the desert, but even they cannot change the harsh realities of a racist, patriarchal world.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The memoir's narrator, Robyn Davidson, arrives in the town of Alice Springs in the Australian outback. She has with her only one suitcase, six dollars, and her beloved dog, Diggity. She has traveled there from her comfortable life in Queensland with the idea of finding and training wild camels, in order to take the camels on a trek across the desert. Though she feels confident at first, Davidson also wonders if her plan is a "lunatic idea."

Davidson thinks to herself that Alice Springs is ugly and uncomfortable, although the landscape surrounding the town is beautiful. She has planned to camp with some Aboriginal people, but all the white people she meets warn her against these people, whom they refer to as black. Davidson learns that the residents of the town consider Aboriginal people to be lazy, unintelligent, and dangerous. Davidson wonders whether she should also fear the Aboriginal people or if the white residents are paranoid.

Davidson goes on to describe the town, which is made up mostly of government workers and people who run businesses catering to tourists. She meets a group of young people who are happy to let her stay with them, but then discovers that they, too, are racist. Soon thereafter, she gets a job at the town pub and is able to rent her own room in the back. She also asks around town about finding camels and is told that there are three men who might be able to help her.

Soon thereafter, Davidson goes to meet the first camel-man, Sallay Mahomet. Sallay is confident working with the animals, but he sees how unprepared Davidson is for her trek and refuses to work with her. The next man doesn't seem to be in control of his camels, so Davidson goes on to the third camel-man, even though some people tell her that he is "a maniac."

Even from the start, Davidson frets about the lack of reason and order in her planned trek. She senses that its uncertainty is somehow crucial, and yet the "lunatic" nature of it also troubles her. This opening moment of solitude as Davidson prepares to meet the residents of Alice Springs also underscores the tension between individuality and collectivity that will pervade the book.



Davidson's first impressions of Alice Springs are tied up in her observations of its racial tensions. The discrimination against the Aboriginal people is immediately apparent, while Davidson also senses that there may be more to their culture and the simplistic stereotypes placed on them by white people.



Even at this early phase, Davidson's highly individualistic quest relies on support from others, but the racist ideas of the group she falls in with also highlight the ways that other people might corrupt Davidson's (still murky) intentions for the trip.



Davidson's struggle to find a strategy for learning about camels hints at how difficult it will be to turn the chaos of the world around her into the order that she desires. The rumors about Kurt are also the first sign that Davidson's identity as a woman may be a liability in Alice Springs.



Davidson meets Gladdy, who runs a camel ranch with her husband, Kurt. Davidson is impressed by the property and quickly takes a liking to Gladdy, but does not meet Kurt at first. Gladdy says that she doesn't think there's anything wrong with the "blacks" in town, which pleases Davidson. The next day, Davidson meets Kurt, who turns out to be a harsh, domineering German man with perfect control of his camels. He agrees to allow her to work as an apprentice for eight months in exchange for a one-eyed camel to take on her trip.

Although she suspects that Kurt is ripping her off, Davidson works for him for some time, cleaning up after the camels and keeping the farm organized. Kurt proves to be volatile, but Davidson stays because she admires his work with the camels, who, she quickly learns, are very intelligent and affectionate when trained correctly.

Davidson learns a great deal about working with camels from Kurt, although she wonders whether she can tolerate his abusive behavior for eight months. She thinks that she would like to stand up to him but doesn't know how, which she calls a "female syndrome." Finally, she snaps and tells Kurt that she's finished working for him. The next day, Davidson moves back into the pub.

CHAPTER 2

Back at the pub, Davidson is troubled by how badly the Aboriginals ("blacks") are treated, noting that they're not allowed in some areas of the pub. Although she writes letters home pretending to be happy, Davidson feels herself getting depressed at how difficult it is to get camels and proceed with her journey.

Davidson also writes angrily about the treatment of women in Alice Springs, which she sees as an especially disgusting manifestation of Australian machismo and misogyny. She delves into the history of gender relations in Australia, describing the development of the hyper-masculine way of being a man that Australians still view with sentimentality. Although she is friendly to her male customers at the pub, one night a regular warns her that she should be careful because some of the men might be targeting her for rape. Davidson is devastated by her lack of power and feels "really frightened for the first time."

Paradoxically, gaining the independence she craves forces Davidson to submit to domination by Kurt, which suggests that independence and interconnection may not be as opposed as Davidson seems to think. Gladdy's relatively progressive attitude toward the Aboriginal people also shows Davidson that more complex thinking about racial issues is possible and desirable.



As her relationship with Kurt continues, Davidson begins to see how her status as a woman means that he expects her to tolerate unlivable conditions. At the same time, her increased knowledge about the camels begins to suggest that, with the right understanding, something chaotic like a wild camel can actually turn out to be comforting and reliable.



Here, Davidson reflects on how her social conditioning as a woman keeps her from being as assertive as she wants to be, and allows Kurt to treat her abusively. Breaking ties with Kurt is one way for Davidson to maintain her individual identity, but at the same time, cutting herself off from his support is a significant setback in terms of preparing for the trek.



The more time she spends in Alice Springs, the more Davidson understands that the town's racism is irrational and extreme. Meanwhile, her attempts to impose order on the chaotic process she has assigned herself begin to result in depression at the task's difficulty.



Here, Davidson situates her own journey in the context of widespread Australian gender dynamics. While women with ambitious goals are suspect, quintessentially "strong" men are idealized and revered. Davidson's sense of frustration at the social limitations of being a woman turns to genuine danger when she is threatened at the pub, illustrating exactly how dangerous it is to be a woman in a context like Alice Springs.



Meanwhile, Kurt stops by occasionally to try and convince Davidson to come back to his ranch. Although she does not want to subject herself to Kurt's abuse, Davidson thinks that she might need to return if she's ever going to learn enough about camels. Gladdy also comes to visit her and they become friends, with Davidson occasionally staying the night at the farm. One morning, she returns to the pub and finds a piece of poop on her pillow, and this incident pushes her to decide to return to Kurt and Gladdy's farm.

Davidson is initially happy upon her return to the ranch. She enjoys working with the camels and spending time with Gladdy, and she is glad to be away from the pub. She gets to know all of the eight camels who live there and describes each one in detail. She also appreciates the beauty of the land around the ranch and finds that it reduces her other anxieties. However, Kurt continues to behave cruelly, especially when Davidson makes mistakes. She thinks back on how impossible it was to understand Kurt, and how silly she was to believe that he was good under the surface.

Over time, Davidson develops a close bond with a young bull camel named Dookie. Because of this, it is especially hard for her to witness Kurt's occasional cruelty to the camels. She begins to become depressed again and thinks sometimes about going home, but she stays when Kurt promises her that she can have gear and three camels at the end of eight months. Still, he refuses to sign anything confirming the deal.

At Davidson's request, Kurt helps her capture a young crow to keep as a pet, but several other crows die in the process. Davidson again finds herself devastated over the pain caused to the animals. Still, Davidson continues to settle in and makes friends with some neighbors at a nearby farm called Basso's. She begins to spend more time with them, but at the same time, she becomes less connected with other people in the town. One night after drinking, she has a vision of her three camels saddled and ready for the journey.

Davidson settles into a routine with Diggity, her crow, and the camels she cares for. She sleeps for a while in her own tent, which gives her some privacy, but when it is destroyed in a storm she moves back in with Kurt and Gladdy. She tolerates Kurt's behavior for a while longer, but snaps again one morning when he asks her to do an unreasonable amount of work. She leaves the ranch again, feeling that she will never get her camels.

Stuck between her fear of staying at the bar and her fear of returning to Kurt, Davidson realizes how all-encompassing the misogyny and sexism around her is. Still, if she wants to complete her trek, Davidson has no choice but to join forces with Kurt once again, showing that interconnection is often unavoidable, even when it is an oppressive force on the individual.



Davidson's joy upon getting to know the camels hints at the beauty and balance hidden within outwardly chaotic situations, especially where the natural world is concerned. Working with the camels gives Davidson a sense of mastery over her circumstances and helps her begin to let go of her fixation on controlling small details. At the same time, her friendship with Gladdy shows how important interpersonal connection can be, especially for women in a sexist society.



The complexity of the situation with Kurt is one of the book's earliest indications of exactly how fraught connections with others can be. On the one hand, Davidson requires Kurt's support to progress, but on the other hand, she is reluctant to ally herself with him. This uncertainty around the role that other people play in her trip will follow Davidson throughout the book.



By finding a few close friends and becoming less involved with the broader culture of the town, Davidson stumbles upon a model in which other people can be an effective support system rather than an oppressive force. That this social change coincides with a vision of preparation for the trip underscores that achieving this balance will be a crucial task for Davidson.



By essentially repeating the same break with Kurt that she experienced in the previous chapter, Davidson shows how conflict with and reliance on other people can become cyclical. It is both toxic and supportive, a paradox that Davidson constantly struggles to resolve.



To her surprise, Sallay Mahomet offers Davidson a job soon after she leaves the ranch. With Sallay, who treats her well, she learns even more about handling camels, and though she is happy with her progress, she also worries that she may not be strong enough to carry out her plan. She has been in Alice Springs for almost a year and feels psychologically shaky, so she returns to Queensland to see her closest friend. After the visit, Davidson's confidence is renewed, and she decides again to commit to her plan to cross the desert. Davidson reflects that "one really could do anything."

Davidson's new job with Sallay underscores the difficulty of her planned venture; even with Sallay's support, being truly prepared to depart is an almost impossible exercise in transforming many conflicting factors into an ordered plan. Overwhelmed by this reality, Davidson turns to a long-standing friendship, showing again how independence is essentially reliant on interconnection, even though Davidson does not yet fully understand that balance.



CHAPTER 3

Davidson completes her job with Sallay Mahomet and is given two camels in return. She chooses an older female named Kate and a younger female named Zeleika. At the same time, her friends at Basso's farm move away and leave their house for Davidson to live in until it is sold. She gets the camels to Basso's but is troubled to find that both have infected wounds.

The camels' injuries demonstrate that even at the rare points in Davidson's journey where things seem to be going smoothly, unexpected challenges always crop up. Learning to adapt to these constant changes will be a key part of her growth going forward.



Although Davidson feels slightly adrift without her old bosses around for help, she also feels liberated to be living on her own with the camels. She appreciates the beauty of the desert and realizes that she has never before had a home of her very own. She walks through the farmhouse, admiring each feature even though it is in ruins in places. Davidson reflects that she had always assumed that being alone meant being lonely, but that now she sees how she might be happy on her own.

Davidson's unexpected joy at living on her own illustrates a new side to her fixation on independence. Here, independence isn't just something that Davidson wants for its own sake; it's something that can actually lead to increased self-esteem and understanding of herself. This version of being alone is a healthier, more complex one than she has previously encountered.



Davidson's closest neighbor at Basso's farm is a fun-loving Aboriginal woman named Ada Baxter. Davidson enjoys Ada's company and finds that she fills the role of a surrogate mother. Davidson begins to think more about Aboriginal rights and reflects that although she likes the young people she meets who are involved in Aboriginal rights, she's not sure whether she wants to get more involved in local social life and jeopardize her solitude. However, two of these young people, Jenny and Toly, win her over and become her close friends.

Davidson's friendship with Ada expands her understanding of Aboriginal communities and shows just how inaccurate the racist views of the white people in Alice Springs are. Still, Davidson is unable to become more engaged in Aboriginal politics on her own; it's ultimately Toly and Jenny's friendship that draws her in more deeply. With this incident, Davidson gains another example of how important connection with others can be in achieving her individual goals, in this case learning more about Aboriginal people (even though this only comes about through connection to other white people).



Over the next few months, Davidson finds herself becoming less happy, despite her enjoyment of living alone. She attempts to remain friends with Gladdy and so sees Kurt as well, who continues to treat her with animosity. Gladdy plans to leave Kurt but does not do so right away. Additionally, Davidson befriends a couple of children from a nearby Aboriginal camp and through their lives she learns more about what she calls the “incredibly complex problems” that Aboriginal people face. She describes the poor living conditions, discrimination, and health risks that the communities around Alice Springs are subject to.

Davidson is especially troubled by how unequipped the local schools are to educate Aboriginal children, and also notes how Australian assimilation laws have led to ruthless practices of stripping land from Aboriginal communities. She describes the particular case of an eleven-year-old Aboriginal boy she meets named Clivie, who is intelligent and friendly but prone to stealing. Davidson enjoys getting to know Clivie but hears later that he runs away after stealing weapons and is eventually caught and sent to a school for delinquent boys.

Over time, Davidson feels that she is beginning to grow more and more miserable. She feels like she is procrastinating starting her true journey and does not fully believe that she will ever leave for the desert. Though uneasy, she distracts herself by continuing to care for her camels. Zeleika is too thin, while Kate is traumatized from her abusive past and hates humans. Kate also has a serious infection in the flesh of her chest, which the vet teaches Davidson how to treat.

Kate’s condition continues to worsen, and Davidson spends several months devoted mostly to caring for her and training Zeleika for riding. The two camels are closely bonded to each other and Davidson slowly learns how to work with them effectively. She also describes the various traumas that both animals have endured and, after discovering that the wooden nose-peg that she uses to control Zeleika has splintered and injured her, she reflects: “How animals forgive us for what we do to them, I will never understand.”

Gladdy’s struggles to leave Kurt underscore how difficult it can be for women to avoid oppression under patriarchal power structures. At the same time, Davidson sees how the Aboriginal people near Alice Springs face even more all-encompassing oppression, subtly tying the two concepts together through her observations.



Clivie’s story offers one of the book’s most pointed examples of the oppressive conditions that Aboriginal communities face; Clivie’s personal strengths are no match for the circumstances that conspire against him, and what might be shrugged off as a youthful mistake for a white child is considered unforgivably criminal behavior for him. From this example, Davidson understands even more deeply that what white people call “civilization” may actually be chaotic and nonsensical, even though it appears orderly on the surface.



At this point, Davidson’s endless preparations for the trip begin to turn into a kind of paralysis. Though she believes that organization and order will move her forward, she only gets more and more stuck. Kate’s previous trauma at the hands of humans also underscores how trying too hard to control something wild can lead to deeply negative outcomes.



As Kate’s illness gets worse, Davidson sees the clearest evidence yet that some things may simply be out of her control, no matter how much she wishes otherwise. The bond between Kate and Zeleika also hints at the importance of relying on others, suggesting that Davidson’s inertia here is due in part to her unwillingness to surrender her ideal of independence.



Sallay comes to visit Davidson and informs her that Zeleika seems to be pregnant. He tells her that having a baby camel on the trip will be helpful, since Davidson can tie up the baby and Zeleika will never wander away from it. At the same time, it becomes clear that Kate has blood poisoning and will not be able to recover. With support from her friend Jenny, Davidson steels herself and shoots Kate to put her out of her misery. Without Kate, Davidson feels like a murderer and thinks despairingly that she has wasted the past 18 months and will never successfully start her trip.

In addition to being a blow to Davidson's emotional state, Kate's death indicates more clearly than ever that Davidson's careful preparations are to some extent useless. Additionally, Jenny's presence underscores the necessity of sharing burdens with friends, even though Davidson still perceives the delay as an individual failure.



CHAPTER 4

While continuing to feel depressed over Kate's death, Davidson also becomes more and more afraid of Kurt, who grows increasingly erratic. She feels defeated, knowing that there will always be someone like Kurt in the world. She feels melancholy all the time except when her friends visit, but she nonetheless struggles to tell them how desperate she feels.

The sense that some version of Kurt will always get in the way of Davidson's plans demonstrates how, at this point, Davidson views her female identity as something that holds her back rather than supports her. This sense of overall defeat makes even her close friendships less helpful, which again illustrates the complex interplay between individual fortitude and collective strength.



Gladdy eventually leaves Kurt, and though Davidson is happy for her, she feels even more frightened knowing that she will soon be alone with him when Gladdy leaves town. One night, Davidson's depression and sadness about Kate overtake her and she briefly contemplates suicide. However, Gladdy interrupts Davidson's thoughts, and Davidson thinks with horror that she must never contemplate suicide again. Gladdy moves away and leaves her dog Blue with Davidson.

This incident demonstrates both the dangers inherent in being a woman and the way that friendship, particularly with other women, can help mitigate those dangers. Gladdy and Kate each face an emotional crisis and get through it with support from each other, for which Davidson is thankful even though her circumstances remain frightening.



When Kurt realizes that Gladdy is gone, he becomes more furious than ever with Davidson. To her surprise, her brother-in-law calls Kurt and offers to buy his ranch, which leads to several weeks of Davidson trying to keep Kurt subdued while he becomes more and more abusive. Then one morning, Kurt vanishes, having secretly sold the ranch and its camels to some strangers who know nothing about camels. He also told the buyers that Davidson would teach them how to care for the camels. She tells them that she will do so in exchange for two of the camels, but they back out of the deal after several weeks, leaving Davidson frustrated and angry.

Kurt's arbitrary, unreliable behavior demonstrates the negative side of relying on other people for support. While Davidson would not have been able to get ready for her trip without Kurt's help, his cruel and irrational actions also impede her goals. This experience further complicates Davidson's feelings about involving other people in her trip, even though relying on others has been necessary at several points.



On one of Davidson's last days at the ranch, a young, normally sweet bull camel named Dookie goes berserk and attacks Davidson, showing how dangerous bull camels can be during mating season. Davidson makes it through the incident and convinces the buyers that bulls always act like that, which leads them to sell her Dookie and another bull, Bub, for a low price. Davidson brings them home to Basso's farm.

Dookie's sudden change in behavior serves as a symbolic representation of how thin the line between chaos and order can be. Dookie usually seems tame but quickly turns wild, showing how things that seem orderly might hide chaos, and vice versa.



In the weeks that follow, Davidson contends with annoying buyers who visit to see the farm, as well as interfering police officers who tell her she doesn't have a chance of succeeding in her journey. Another friend, Julie, comes to live with her, and she begins to see how comfortable life can be with a home and friends. She wonders if she is becoming so comfortable that she won't go through with the trip. At the same time, she feels herself becoming somewhat mean and intolerant, and wonders if the traditional outback value of fierce individualism is the cause.

During this time, the dog Blue is poisoned and dies, and Davidson learns that several other dogs in Alice Springs have also been killed by an unknown person. Sadly, she thinks that such a trend is hardly surprising in a town like Alice Springs. The farm becomes increasingly infested with cockroaches and snakes, but she tries to focus on the positive things in her life and feels grateful for her friends, wondering if maybe all her strokes of bad luck are behind her. She also spends a lot of time tracking her three camels—who can go a long way even when hobbled—and gets to know each of them better, learning to enjoy their individual personalities.

One day, Davidson discovers that Bub has a shard of glass in his foot and is terrified that he will end up dying from the injury. With the help of her friends, she devotes herself to caring for him and he slowly heals. However, soon thereafter, all three camels run away together into the hills near the farm. Davidson tracks them for miles but eventually gives up, returning the next day via a light aircraft flown by some kind acquaintances from town. When they don't find the camels, Davidson grows despondent, thinking that maybe the loss of the camels is a sign that she should give up on the trip. She even wonders if that might be for the best. But at the last minute, Julie spots the camels, and Davidson decides once and for all that she must resolve to go through with the journey.

CHAPTER 5

Having seen the camels from the air, Davidson sets out on foot with Jenny and Toly to capture them. Although she is at first confident of their course, the group quickly becomes lost and Davidson is alarmed at how easily her sense of direction fails her, worrying about its consequences for her upcoming trek. Eventually, they do find the three camels and return them home. Davidson also notices that Bub's foot is nearly healed, to her relief.

This period is an especially vivid depiction of Davidson's struggle between embracing interconnection with others and rejecting it in favor of self-reliance. Her friends comfort her, but even the comfort is uneasy, as Davidson remains allured by the dream of complete independence while also knowing that this is impossible in the real world.



The fact that Davidson isn't surprised that such barbaric behavior is common in Alice Springs shows again how the comforts of orderly society might not really be so rational after all. At the same time, her growing bond with her camels gives her a new avenue to work toward finding connection with others; throughout, her bonds with animals are simpler than her bonds with people.



Tellingly, Davidson's ultimate resolution that she has to go through with the trip depends almost completely on kindness and support from others, even from people who aren't close friends. By accepting their help and allowing them to guide her toward making the trip a reality, Davidson begins to internalize the idea that the seemingly independent undertaking of her trip actually relies heavily on other people; it's not as easy to separate the two as she once thought.



Again, Davidson relies on her friends at a crucial moment in her journey, while simultaneously bemoaning the fact that she's not able to handle everything on her own. At this point, she still views independence and interconnection as opposites, rather than linked realities.



Now that Davidson has settled on the trip once and for all, she is intimidated by how much work she'll have to do to prepare and how much money she will need for supplies. One day, a friend arrives with a young photographer, Rick, who takes pictures of the farm, Davidson, and her camels. Rick tells Davidson about his career as a photographer and convinces her to write to *National Geographic* to ask for sponsorship for her trip. Davidson writes the letter immediately, while drunk, and then forgets all about it.

Davidson turns her attention to building packs and saddles for her trip. With her friend Toly's help, she slowly learns how to make and fix the equipment she will need for her trip, although the skills do not come naturally to her and she sometimes finds the process agonizing. As she gets more and more anxious, Davidson's friends convince her to go on vacation for a week, but while she is away, Zeleika gives birth to a calf: the adorable baby Goliath.

As her preparations continue, Davidson decides that she will leave in March, about four months later. She decides to do a trial trip in a month by trekking the camels to a nearby Aboriginal settlement called Utopia, where Toly is a teacher. She diligently prepares for the trip, and eventually she and the camels depart for Utopia alongside Jenny and Toly. Ada Baxter begs Davidson not to go, saying that she will certainly die, but Davidson leaves nonetheless.

The walk to Utopia takes eight days through extremely high temperatures, which Davidson describes as "unspeakable hell." It quickly becomes clear that the equipment and saddles need improving, and the camels are not used to going without water. Despite these setbacks, they eventually make it to Utopia, where Davidson stays for several weeks. She continues to adjust her equipment and plan for the trek, becoming more and more anxious all the time.

At one point during her time in Utopia, an acquaintance accuses Davidson of being a "bourgeois individualist," which she finds very upsetting. She wonders if it's wrong to want to take the trip on her own and feels that perhaps her very paranoia about the issue is essentially a bourgeois concern. Over time, she realizes that admitting weakness is itself something that's often called bourgeois, and wonders if the need to admit weakness is why so many politically liberal men struggle to reckon with their own sexism. Davidson also wonders why everyone she meets seems to be so invested in her journey, and feels that the trip has already lost the simplicity she intended for it.

Rick's appearance is a key moment in Davidson's process of accepting that other people will have to play roles in her seemingly lonely journey. Her careless approach to contacting National Geographic also hints that instinct can be as powerful a guide as careful, orderly planning, a concept that Davidson will struggle to accept going forward.



This sequence is a particularly vivid example of how Davidson's attempts to regulate and control the world around her are doomed to fail. Even Goliath's birth goes against her plans, coming at the exact time that she's not there to witness it. The more Davidson tries to bring order to her preparations, the more (seemingly) chaotic they become.



The contrast between Jenny and Toly's positive attitude and Ada Baxter's negative attitude shows how complicated it can be for other people to get involved in Davidson's trip. Everyone interprets her actions differently, twisting her independent choices into shapes she never intended. Nonetheless, Jenny and Toly are a crucial support system in Davidson's practice trek.



Again, planning and schedules turn out to be of limited use when it comes time to apply them to the realities of the natural world. Davidson is not yet prepared to accept that she can't control everything, which leads to anxiety that she can't resolve.



The accusation described here provides a lens for linking the book's themes of individuality and femininity. Davidson is afraid of being perceived as arrogantly individualist, but at the same time, she suspects that her female identity is part of what makes her a target for others' criticism. At this point, she still perceives that identity as a liability, since it keeps her from obtaining the independence she craves.



While in Utopia, Davidson receives word that *National Geographic* has accepted her request for sponsorship. She knows that she needs the money from the magazine, but she also feels that she has sold out and wonders if she's made the wrong choice. The contract also means that Rick will sometimes be present to take photographs, which Davidson worries will ruin the solitude she had planned on.

Davidson flies to Sydney for an interview alongside Rick, and the magazine quickly finalizes the deal. Though she is briefly ecstatic, Davidson soon descends into self-doubt and misery. She thinks that even though Rick is nice and helpful, she doesn't want him—and his possible feelings for her—to interfere with her trip. She perceives that Rick's investment in documenting the trip is sincere, which feels like a burden to her.

Davidson returns to Alice Springs, wondering if she's being unreasonable in her desire to keep her trip to herself. She continues her preparations, receives the money from the magazine, and sets a firm departure date. She also arranges when and where Rick will join her through the journey. Davidson is alarmed and excited to see how seriously everyone is taking her, as family, friends, and townspeople gather to wish her well. After much cajoling, she agrees to pack a two-way radio for emergencies, which she interprets as yet another "tiny symbol of defeat" in her efforts to make the trip truly her own.

As she prepares to leave, Davidson's family comes to visit and she says emotional goodbyes to her father and sister, with whom she has had rocky relationships in the past. At last, Davidson walks out into the desert with Diggity and her camels and feels the magnificence of the world around her. Then, just as she begins to feel at peace, she rounds a corner and finds Rick taking pictures. Though she feels comforted to see a friendly face, she is also annoyed at the intrusion. After a final visit from Jenny and Toly at a campsite along the way, Davidson makes final adjustments to her pack, puts the camels into their line, and departs for the first full leg of her trek.

Again, Davidson's aversion to accepting help or interference mars what would otherwise be happy news. Though Rick and the money will both be crucial supports, Davidson remains, at this point, devoted to the simplistic idea that independence and interconnection are opposites.



Davidson shows here that it isn't just careless interference from others that bothers her; Rick's sincerity actually makes him more of a burden to her than he would otherwise have been. Caring, Davidson suggests, can be both a good thing and a bad thing. This complex idea foreshadows the more nuanced understanding of other interpersonal relationships that she develops during the trip.



As she prepares to depart, Davidson continues to feel conflicted about wanting to be alone; she senses that there may be more to the issue than she currently understands, again hinting at the conclusions she will reach later in the trip. This point also shows the upside of Davidson's fixation on creating order and sticking to schedules, as her efforts finally result in readiness to depart.



Davidson does not write in depth about her family relationships, but her mixture of happiness and sadness upon seeing them here indicates that she has, on some level, come to terms already with the idea that other people can be positive presences and negative presences at the same time (and also hints at unspecified reasons she decided to take this trek in the first place). This duality appears again when she sees Rick; he's a friendly face, but he's also an irritation. Davidson's moment of wonder at the world around her also hints at the understanding she will come to later in her journey, when she sets aside the order of civilization in exchange for the peaceful balance of nature.



CHAPTER 6

During her first day alone, Davidson is overwhelmed by “a sustained, buoyant confidence.” She follows a track that she expects to meet up with a main road later on. She notes that in Australia, tracks are defined as just about any mark made by a vehicle, and that they vary widely in quality and clarity. Sometimes it can be difficult or impossible to follow tracks, which can begin and end with little clear reason. Maps of tracks are also notoriously unreliable.

Nonetheless, the entire first day goes smoothly. The camels behave perfectly, and Davidson enjoys the bountiful life and exotic birds of the desert. She is slightly nervous at night, unsure of how far the camels might go in their hobbles. She ties Goliath to a tree, hoping that doing so will keep Zeleika and the other camels nearby. She describes some of the food she eats on the trail, including dried goods and freeze-dried meat and vegetables, a diet that she says keeps her very healthy.

Davidson settles into a routine as the days pass and describes her processes of waking early, feeding the camels and carefully balancing their packs, and meticulously repacking all of her supplies. She keeps to a relatively strict schedule of covering 20 miles per day, so that she can avoid traveling in the summer and keep to the schedule that she gave *National Geographic*. She expects the trip to take about six months, or as much as eight if necessary.

On the third day, Davidson finds a road that isn't on her map, while discovering that the road she expected is nowhere in sight. Again, the failure makes her doubt her navigational abilities and she wonders what will happen if she makes a similar mistake when she's much farther from civilization. She manages to calm her panic and walks out scouting for the road she wants, which she finally finds after hours of confusion. She sets her course for the Aboriginal settlement of Areyonga and continues.

Upon arriving in Areyonga, Davidson recounts the brutal colonialist history of the settlement and describes how little autonomy and resources the Aboriginals have been left with. The children of the settlement greet Davidson joyfully, which immediately improves her mood. She reflects that Aboriginal children always seem more loving and well-behaved than white children. She finds that her camels and the enthusiasm of the children give her a crucial bridge in relating to the residents of the settlement, where she stays for three days.

Davidson's suspicion that her maps may not be as useful as she hopes is an early sign of her slowly growing acceptance that she may need to surrender her commitment to approaching the trip in a clearly ordered way. The unreliable tracks also highlight the idea that things that seem sensible may actually turn out to be meaningless. This also alludes to the book's title: some tracks lead to places that one might not expect.



Davidson's increasing appreciation of and comfort in the natural world will eventually become more meaningful to her than her own external ideas of success. This phase also begins to show Davidson that being a woman doesn't necessarily make her weak; she remains strong and thriving without outside help.



Here, Davidson is still reliant on her strict schedules, even though sticking to them puts her at some remove from the natural world she is growing to love. National Geographic's role here also shows how influence from others can sometimes reinforce these artificial structures.



This incident reveals the limitations of the careful plans that Davidson has relied on so far. At this point, she views these limitations as a failure, not yet seeing the value in submitting to the seemingly chaotic world around her. Her fear of getting farther away from civilization also shows how connection to other people does comfort her, even as she tries to reject it.



Davidson's experiences in Areyonga add new depth to her understanding of the racism facing the Aboriginal people. Her reflection that the settlement's children seem better behaved than white children also suggests that their culture may have much more value than common, racist opinions would suggest. Building connections with the Aboriginal people also gives Davidson the beginnings of a new perspective on others' role in her journey; here, other people are a relief and a comfort rather than a burden.



After some rest and further repairs to her equipment, Davidson and the camels depart for Tempe Downs station, 40 miles away. During this next leg, she is overcome by the “awesome grandeur” of the desert and finds that the landscape is beautifully varied and interesting. One day, Bub panics when something falls off his pack and frightens the other camels. Davidson manages to calm them all, but she has to beat Bub to do so and feels frightened at her own terror and lack of control.

As a result of that incident, Davidson learns that she has to trust herself to handle emergencies and also needs to reassess her understanding of time on the journey. She notices that her devotion to checking her **clock** and following a schedule has added unnecessary stress, but also notes that she is “afraid of something like chaos.” She reaches Tempe Station shortly thereafter and, after a brief break there, continues onward.

Just as the splendor of the world around her begins to loosen Davidson’s fixation on strictly scheduled progress, the incident with Bub makes her more afraid than ever of what will happen if she loses control.



By noticing her tendency to rely so much on her clock and defining her fear of chaos, Davidson takes an important step toward recognizing the downsides of a highly ordered perspective. At this point, she sees that other perspectives are possible, but she cannot yet bring herself to adopt them. Her growing realization that she needs to rely on herself more also ties into her sense of her female identity, which has previously seemed like a weakness but has now begun to feel like a source of strength.



CHAPTER 7

After leaving Tempe Station, Davidson encounters sandhills for the first time and is awed at the ethereal, alien quality of the world around her. She learns to deal with flies and other small hazards, and she continues on calmly despite sometimes feeling stifled by all the sand around her. She expects to travel for about two weeks before she reaches Ayers Rock, where she will be meeting Rick.

Davidson reflects that she doesn’t look forward to seeing Rick and all the tourists that will surround Ayers Rock, thinking that even nice people are intolerable when they become tourists. However, she distinguishes between tourists and travelers and notes that she does meet some “lovely people” during her journey. Davidson finds the trip to the Rock somewhat disappointing, in that the initial thrill of her trip has worn away and she’s beginning to wonder if and when she’ll feel that something truly important is taking place.

As she travels, Davidson becomes more and more devoted to detailed rituals and habits, making sure that everything she does is exactly correct. During a brief stop at a bar in tourist ranch, she is so disgusted by the misogynistic behavior of the men there that she immediately leaves. She also begins to see the first signs of wild camels around her and becomes nervous about the possibility of meeting a wild bull camel, since Sallay Mahomet told her to “shoot first and ask questions later” when confronted by one.

This portion of Davidson’s journey hints at the potential of the natural world; she senses that it is essentially peaceful (or at least stable) despite its many hazards. Her sense of independence also increases during this time, though she also knows that her solitude will be interrupted soon.



Davidson’s thoughts on the differences between travelers and tourists represent a significant development in her conceptualization of others’ involvement in her trip. Here, she realizes that not all outside influence is bad; the right people can actually be a positive presence, rather than something that gets in the way.



As the perils of her trip’s wildness increase—in this case because of the wild camels—Davidson’s inability to accept that wildness also increases. She doubles down on her rigid habits, even as she senses that some form of chaos may be just around the corner. The behavior of the men here highlights the idea that Davidson’s female identity is only a liability in the context of social convention; it isn’t actually a weakness on its own.



Finally, Davidson arrives at Ayers Rock for the first time in her life and is stunned by its eerie beauty. She meets the head ranger of the national park and learns from him how the Rock and the area surrounding it are in danger from the behavior of disrespectful tourists. Though she's shocked at their behavior, Davidson feels that not even tourists can ruin the Rock's beauty.

Rick arrives the next day and, to Davidson's surprise, he brings Jenny along with him. Although Davidson is happy to see Jenny, she is also dismayed to have her isolation interrupted yet again, which causes immediate tension between her and Jenny. Rick shows the two women the photographs he took with his **camera** of Davidson's departure, in which Davidson can barely recognize herself because she looks so much more glamorous than she feels. She eventually begins to tell Jenny and Rick about her trip so far and, although she feels that little has happened, she nonetheless notices that she can feel the trip starting to change her thought processes and ways of relating.

Two days later, Jenny leaves for Alice Springs, and Rick annoys Davidson by photographing their goodbyes. She is also frustrated by the need to pose for photos for the magazine, which feels dishonest and staged to her. She embarks on another stretch of travel toward the Olgas, which are rocky landmarks about 20 miles away. As she walks, Davidson feels depressed at Rick's interference and blames him for her negativity.

The conflict with Rick escalates, with Rick sulking and Davidson growing angry. Finally, at the Olgas, she sits him down and demands that they stop acting like children. The two end up talking for hours and end the conversations as friends; Davidson discovers that Rick is likable after all. Rick joins Davidson for several more days of her journey, which, she writes, she did not see at the time was yet another way in which she let the outside world co-opt her story.

The threats that tourists pose to the Rock and the area around it provide new perspective on Davidson's distaste for interference from other people. While the tourists are upsetting to Davidson, they are a genuine existential threat to the Aboriginal people who have always revered the Rock. This contrast shows that as much as Davidson is annoyed by outside influence, its danger to her is nothing compared to its danger for Aboriginal people.



Previously, Jenny has been one of the people who showed Davidson how to rely on other people, but at this point, she views even Jenny as an intrusion. This shows just how devoted Davidson has become to her impossible ideal of independence. At the same time, the somewhat false images that the pictures show demonstrate that Davidson isn't wrong to fear others' interference; their perspectives can conflict with her own sense of truth. Davidson's discomfort with the glamorously feminine images again suggests that the burden of femininity comes primarily from society's perceptions of women, not from the simple reality of being a woman.



Davidson's continued frustration with Rick and his photographs underscores her negative perception of collaborating with others. Davidson doesn't just find the photographs inaccurate; she finds them genuinely depressing. This extremity shows how far Davidson has to go in gaining an understanding of how interconnection with others can help her.



This phase of Davidson's relationship with Rick is an especially clear illustration of how she assumes independence and interconnection to be in conflict with each other. She likes Rick and learns that she enjoys talking with him, but nevertheless views his company as co-opting the trip rather than enriching it.



Davidson begins to grow angry with Rick again as she shoulders the burdens of the trip's labor while he simply takes pictures with his **camera**. At one point, the two separate and Rick is late to meet up again, which worries Davidson and makes her furious when it turns out that he was back at camp reading the whole time. On the same day, Goliath runs away during a rainstorm, and after chasing him down, Davidson has a hysterical breakdown in front of Rick. That night, the two begin the sexual aspect of their relationship. Although Davidson is glad to have Rick as a friend, she writes that she regrets allowing their relationship to become sexual, because it allows him to fall in love with her "camel lady" image and further prevents her from having full control over the journey.

A few days before the next stop, Dookie falls and injures his shoulder. Davidson is unsure how to help him and she, Rick, and the camels rest for a few days until he can walk. Then they arrive in Docker, the next Aboriginal settlement, where Davidson ends up staying for six weeks while Dookie heals. While there, she and Rick fight over whether or not it is ethical for him to photograph the Aboriginal people, as *National Geographic* wants him to. He takes the pictures anyway, which upsets Davidson. Right before he leaves, Rick also inadvertently takes pictures of a sacred ceremony, which Davidson feels turns the local people against both of them.

Because Dookie does not seem to be improving, Davidson flies back to Alice Springs in a mail plane to seek advice from the vets, even though doing so makes her feel completely defeated. The vets tell her that all she can do is wait, so she stays in Docker, feeling bored and miserable. One day, she encounters her first wild bull camels right by her camp and, with the help of a young Aboriginal man, ends up shooting and killing three of them to keep them from attacking. She is overcome by remorse and wonders how anyone can ever kill for pleasure.

Soon thereafter, a nurse working for the Aboriginal health service arrives, and she and Davidson become friends. They drive to another settlement and dance with a group of Aboriginal women they meet there. Davidson is delighted, feeling that the women are accepting her at last, but is then dismayed when she is expected to pay at the end of the dance. She feels that, once and for all, she will always be "a whitefella tourist on the outside looking in." When Dookie's shoulder finally heals, Davidson hopes that one of the older Aboriginal men would be willing to be her guide for the next part of the journey, but they all decline. She leaves the town miserable, convinced that her trip is just "an empty foolish gesture."

Davidson's lack of stability during this phase of the trip seems in part to be due to her dawning realization that she can't keep trying to control everything; Goliath's escape pushes her into hysteria. At the same time, she is also burdened by the way that her sex appeal and "camel lady" image increase her aversion to involving other people in the trip. Because Davidson is a woman, other people's interpretations of her trip tend to fall back on sexist stereotypes, which makes the entire trip feel less authentic to her.



In Docker, Davidson's concerns about documenting her trip collide with her concerns about the exploitation of Aboriginal people by white outsiders. Rick's behavior toward the Aboriginal people isn't just annoying; it's arguably unethical. This sequence reveals the way in which Davidson's wish to be left alone is rooted in the very real ways that outside inference can be oppressive for people of marginalized identities.



The death of the wild bulls here is perhaps the first time that Davidson understands how painful it can be to try and impose so-called civilization on aspects of the natural world. She successfully takes control of the situation by killing the bulls, but rather than being comforted, she feels deeply guilty for interfering with the natural way of things—even if this "natural way" could have resulted in her own death.



This point marks one of the first times that Davidson truly realizes how important interconnection with others is for her trip. Feeling rejected by the Aboriginal people, she understands that, despite what she thought, independence actually isn't enough for her. This painful incident also shows how the rupture between the white people and the Aboriginal people has negative consequences for everyone; oppression isn't truly beneficial even for the oppressors.



CHAPTER 8

Leaving Docker, Davidson feels that all of her actions are meaningless. She is shaken from her hazy mindset when three more wild bull camels charge her, and she is terrified at having to deal with them on her own. She shoots and kills one, and the other two run away. She falls asleep and opens her eyes to see a moonlit camel standing in profile. She is overwhelmed by its beauty and realizes that it means her no harm, then falls asleep again. When she wakes up, the remaining bull camels attack her again and she kills one of them. She hopes to spare the third, but she is unable to catch her own camel Bub with the wild camel nearby, so she is forced to kill the third wild bull. She weeps as she kills him but feels oddly detached as she continues walking.

Time and space feel strange to Davidson, and she focuses only on the road before her. She also begins to wonder if she has brought enough water and starts to feel panicky. One night, she wakes from a dream and hears voices, some angry and some comforting. She feels unable to break free from them, and their memory follows her into the next days. She tells herself that she only has to reach the next station, Mount Fanny, and avoid going mad before she gets there.

Davidson begins to talk to herself and yell at the dunes around her, frightening Diggity. Then, finally, she makes it out of the dunes and, upon finding the mill at the old station, she feels cleansed and refreshed, relieved that she and the animals have found water. Right after leaving the mill, they encounter another herd of wild camels. She shoots into the air to scare them and they all run away, their beauty making her feel grounded and sane.

Unexpectedly, several cars full of Aboriginal people pass by Davidson's camp and greet her happily. Though she is initially nervous to interact with humans again, she ends up enjoying their company. The visitors stay with her overnight and in the morning, they agree that one of them, an older man named Eddie, should accompany her during the two-day walk to her next destination. The two of them laugh together because her name sounds like the word "rabbit" in his language.

This incident deepens Davidson's sense that perhaps her instinct to control every aspect of her trip is causing more harm than good. Even though she does everything "right" by killing the bull camels, the image of the bull in the moonlight shows her that what she has really done is interrupt the true rightness of the world around her. Her fear at having to cope alone also shows that she has now opened her mind to the necessity of relying on others, at least to some extent.



Although it is unpleasant, this part of the trip shepherds Davidson into relying on simple forward motion rather than complex, rigid structures. She has begun to shed her fear of chaos and starts to learn to embrace it instead. The variety of the voices she hears also illustrates her complicated relationships with others; the outside world is both friendly and frightening, and she has yet to resolve this conflict.



This time, Davidson manages to escape the wild camels without hurting any of them. Her sense of peace in this moment reflects her increasing understanding that true freedom comes from embracing life's chaos, rather than trying to control it.



Davidson's enjoyable time with the Aboriginals and her light-hearted meeting with Eddie shows development in both her relationships with others and her understanding of Aboriginal culture. She sees that she may actually be more comfortable with people who many view as savages, and at the same time, she sees that collaborating with others can be enjoyable when the parties consider each other equals.



CHAPTER 9

Eddie and Davidson walk together for two days, enjoying each other's company. Davidson admires Eddie's warmth and intelligence and thinks about how grounded Aboriginal people like him seem, in contrast to their reputation as "uncivilized." She also recognizes that she needs to speak with someone at length about her experiences, and because Eddie speaks little English, Davidson looks forward to meeting up with Glendle, the white community advisor in the nearby settlement of Pipalyatjara.

Davidson and Eddie arrive in Pipalyatjara and meet Glendle, a kind and caring man who welcomes them into the caravan where he lives. Davidson still feels like she must be going crazy, but realizes that people out in the desert might not care; she thinks that they may all be a little crazy themselves. They stay with Glendle for four days, with Davidson enjoying the comforts of sleeping in a bed and having friendly company.

While staying with Glendle, Davidson gets a deeper sense of how challenging it is for Aboriginals and community advisors to manage their settlements with minimal resources from the government. Glendle wants to be as helpful as he can, but he is hindered by bureaucracy and by having to handle many aspects of the settlement without help. He also struggles with wanting to protect the Aboriginal people he works with, without becoming what Davidson calls "a paternal-style protectionist."

Davidson also notes that Pipalyatjara is lucky in that its population comes from only one tribe, while other settlements have to deal with inter-tribe tensions and dynamics in addition to all the other difficulties. She also comes to understand how complex the issue of land ownership is for Aboriginal people, in part because they do not see themselves as having ever owned land; rather, the land owns them. At the same time, outside forces seek to take ownership from the groups who have traditionally been its stewards. Because the Aboriginal people have such a deep spiritual connection to their land, Davidson points out that taking their land is the same as "committing cultural and...racial genocide."

Davidson's enjoyment of Eddie's company, along with her open desire to connect with Glendle at the next stop, demonstrates that she has reached a new way of thinking about other people's involvement in her trip. She no longer has to be totally independent to feel successful. Additionally, her friendship with Eddie provides an immediate, personal perspective on her growing conviction that Aboriginal people may be wiser than white people in many ways.



The warm rapport that Davidson develops with Glendle underscores her new willingness to accept support from others. Similarly, her realization that everyone out in the desert might be somewhat crazy diminishes her conviction that she's unique; being independent seems less important when she knows that others share her experience.



Perhaps more than any other part of the book, Glendle's experiences working in the settlement illuminate the complexities of the pain caused by white oppression of Aboriginal people. His relationship to the settlement's people also shows how interdependence can be both a good thing and a bad one; he wants to help, but he does not want to take away the people's independence, a dynamic that mirrors Davidson's thoughts about involving other people in her trip.



Davidson's analysis of the violent nature of white colonization illustrates how deeply Aboriginals have been harmed by this oppression. From this passage, it is clear that the problems Aboriginals face are not of their own making; rather, they are the product of larger societal forces. Additionally, Davidson's new understanding of Aboriginal people's relationships with the land expands her developing perspective on how the land might be able to guide and support her own journey.



Glendle also helps Davidson work through her own difficulties around the trip and, in particular, her relationship with Rick. Glendle points out that Rick has been a good friend to Davidson and that she was the one who invited him and *National Geographic* to be part of the trip, which comforts Davidson and helps her become less angry about their intrusions into her solitude. Davidson enjoys staying with Glendle so much that she contemplates staying through the rest of summer, but she feels restless and decides that she will move on soon.

Meanwhile, Eddie continues to be a steadfast guide and also becomes fixated on Davidson's rifle, which he is fascinated by. One evening, an old woman arrives to visit Eddie and he greets her with joy and respect. After she leaves, Davidson is astonished to learn that the woman was Eddie's wife. She reflects that although white male anthropologists might not think so, women actually have a lot of authority in Aboriginal societies. Unlike in those in Alice Springs, the black women she meets in the settlements have a lot of social standing, and Davidson thinks that the sexism in Aboriginal societies comes from the influence and example of white colonizers more than anything else.

To Davidson's delight, Eddie decides to accompany her another 200 miles to the next settlement, Warburton. Before they leave, Davidson watches as an Aboriginal doctor (called a *nankari*) makes sure that Eddie is healthy for the trip. Though Davidson does not understand how *nankaris* do their work, she believes that they're as effective at healing as Western doctors are. When they depart, Davidson is at first annoyed by multiple delays and deviations from their schedule, but in Eddie's company, she gradually learns that that it might make more sense to let go of her devotion to order and try to approach the trip in a less structured, more meditative way. She notes that Eddie teaches her about "enjoying the present."

As they continue toward the next settlement, Davidson continues to enjoy Eddie's company and is amazed by how well they get along with little spoken language in common. She admires the way Eddie knows the landscape intimately and is "at home in it totally." She is thrilled by the chance to get to know the land better with Eddie to help her notice its subtleties. They settle into a companionable routine, and Eddie continues to educate Davidson about the traditions and knowledge of his culture. In particular, he tells her that she must never eat or harm a kangaroo, but they do work together to shoot and eat rabbits.

Glendle's influence is a crucial factor in helping Davidson resolve her conflicting feelings about Rick and, more broadly, allowing her trip to be documented for outside consumption. Through his own support, Glendle also demonstrates how comforting and empowering collaboration with others can be.



Witnessing Eddie's loving encounter with his wife sheds new light on how societal biases and prejudices impact both race relations and gender relations. From the interaction, Davidson sees that it is possible, in the right context, for femininity to be a source of strength and power. Similarly, she gains new insight into the wisdom of Aboriginal social structures and sees how their negative aspects can be traced back to white oppression.



During this stretch of her journey alongside Eddie, Davidson begins to integrate some of her changed beliefs about working with others and the wisdom of Aboriginal perspectives. Most critically, the more open mindset that she develops through getting to know Eddie helps her finally release some of her fixation on schedules and concrete concepts of progress.



As their time together continues, Davidson comes to internalize the idea that order and chaos are not necessarily opposites. She had previously believed that the natural world was full of chaos that she needed to control, but now she sees that it actually has its own order that she simply needs to observe and appreciate. Again, this change is due in large part to her acceptance of Eddie's support, as well as the meditative perspective he brings from his Aboriginal culture.



Eventually, they cut back to the main road and begin seeing cars along the way. Davidson notices that all the cars of Aboriginal people stop to chat and laugh with Eddie, and she's happy to gain acceptance into their community through his company (and through her camels, which they also love). Whenever they stop to socialize, Davidson is treated as an honored guest. In contrast, they also begin seeing tourists again, who are fascinated by the two of them and their wild, unkempt appearance. Davidson is annoyed by their attention and, in particular, how disrespectfully they treat Eddie. At one point, Eddie pretends to be an insane savage to frighten a group taking pictures, which makes both him and Davidson laugh hysterically. Davidson is inspired by the fact that even though Eddie's hard life has given him every reason to be bitter, he remains upbeat and joyful.

As they approach Warburton, Davidson encounters two young white men on bikes and, while trying to talk to them, she realizes how difficult it has become for her to "swap realities" between Aboriginal and European ways of thinking. The incident makes her see how desocialized she has become in recent weeks and wonders how she'll ever meet her own society's ideas of sanity and happiness, since she now feels happier than ever but knows that she will look bizarre to people from the "civilized" world.

Davidson and Eddie soon arrive in Warburton together. Eddie suggests that she find another old man to go with her on the next stage of her journey, but because it will be through the wildest desert yet, she wants to do it on her own. Rick finds them soon after they arrive, bringing with him a rifle as a gift for Eddie. Eddie loves the new rifle, but is confused about why Rick has to take so many pictures with his **camera**. Davidson tells Rick to stop photographing, which leads to tension between the two. She reflects that while she later ends up loving the photos Rick took, she never feels that they really reflect the reality of her trip.

Warburton turns out to be a gloomy town, but Davidson nonetheless enjoys her time there. Glendle arrives to drive Eddie back home, and the three of them, along with Rick, spend hours talking with each other and the residents of the settlement. Davidson feels like the trip is finally going the way it is supposed to, and that even her deepest consciousness has been altered by walking so devotedly, day after day. She even experiences old memories resurfacing, and she and Rick tentatively agree that they're experiencing a kind of magic. Davidson looks back on this conversation ruefully, unable to believe that she once spoke in terms of fate and magic.

Once Davidson becomes fully open to the idea that interconnection with others can make her trip richer and more satisfying, she finally gains the acceptance from the Aboriginal people that she has craved all along. The contrast between her treatment by the Aboriginal people and the white tourists underscores the fact that healthy relationships depend on social context, and Davidson sees again how Aboriginal cultures foster this kind of supportive connection better than white Australian culture does. Reflecting on Eddie's resilience, Davidson realizes even more fully that his version of independence doesn't mean being separate from others; rather, he is a strong individual because of his connection to the land and to other people.



Reaching the end of her journey with Eddie, Davidson begins to feel some of the conflict between mindsets that will plague her when she returns back to mainstream society. The social pressures of her home culture may be nonsensical, but they're still very real, and her worry about her appearance hints at the way that her female identity will become a burden again after the trip.



Eddie's confusion at Rick's photography highlights Eddie's approach to the world, which Davidson has now adopted: it is more important to live in the moment and appreciate what's around you than it is to try and document or structure it. This tension over the camera acts as a stand-in for Davidson's nervousness about opening herself up to interconnection within oppressive social structures. She is comfortable sharing herself with Eddie and Rick because she knows and trusts them, but she already fears what will happen when the pictures give the rest of the world a window into her journey.



Despite all of her misgivings about involving them in the first place, it is this time spent among close friends that gives Davidson the greatest sense of peace she has experienced so far. Rather than constraining her, these relationships actually free her from her desire to control and schedule everything, making her feel more independent than she would have if she were actually on her own.



CHAPTER 10

Davidson leaves Warburton on her own, expecting that she'll be completely alone for about a month. She feels a little nervous about having to rely on her survival skills, but she is also physically fit and feels prepared for the difficulty. Rick drives along her route ahead of her and leaves some water barrels along the way for her. After a few hours, she decides to leave the track and cross the sandhills. She notices once again that her awareness of the land is completely different than it was at the beginning of the trip and relishes the "openness and emptiness" that used to frighten her.

As she continues noticing all the nuance and interconnection of the desert's many forms of life, Davidson begins to perceive the land itself as "an animate being of which [she is] a part." She recognizes her previous feelings of madness as an attempt to reject this reality, which she now realizes she has no choice but to accept. Davidson walks on, loving the feeling that she is part of something limitless and perfectly balanced. Although she often talks to herself or the camels and Diggity, she finds that she is not at all lonely.

After many miles of crossing the dunes, Davidson decides that the terrain is rough enough that she should return to the track. She falls into a new routine and enjoys every new geographic feature she sees, in part because so much of the desert is completely the same. At one point, she finds a dust bowl and joyfully joins Diggity and the camels in rolling naked in the dirt, laughing and thinking about how the modern world has forgotten what it feels like to simply play. The next morning, she leaves her **clock** behind on a tree stump near the dust bowl, calling it an "insidious little instrument."

Davidson continues along the track, thinking about how unacceptable she must look to outside society, and how meaningless conventional rules of female attractiveness are. She tells herself to remember these lessons, yet worries that she will forget them as soon as she leaves the desert. Suddenly, four wild bull camels appear from the landscape. Davidson dreads having to kill them, but shoots anyway, not knowing what else to do. Her gun jams and she fights back panic, running in circles to avoid them and throwing rocks to frighten them away. Eventually, all four get bored and wander back into the desert, leaving Davidson still frightened but relieved that none of them actually attacked.

As she approaches the most demanding leg of her journey, Davidson has successfully integrated her sense of her own independence with her ability to rely on others. Rick's aid here is crucial, but so is Davidson's belief in her own efficacy. At last, she comes to see that interconnection and independence can actually strengthen each other, rather than working as opposites.



Along with Davidson's balanced sense of her relationship to other people, this phase also marks her hard-won acceptance of herself as part of a natural order, rather than a maker of an external order. She gives herself over to the complex chaos of the land and finds that it actually makes sense to her in a deep, unprecedented way.



At this point, Davidson understands that she can rely on tracks and other external markers as much or as little as she wants; she is now free to choose her own path without worrying about what is technically right or wrong. Her abandonment of her clock shows the completion of this transformation in her thinking. Similarly, the fact that she shares her joy with Diggity and the camels reflects her newly positive understanding of connections with others.



Through discovering that she is able to deal with the wild bull camels without killing them, Davidson shows a marked transformation from her earlier belief that only controlling a situation—in this case, with her gun—can lead to a successful outcome. Here, her success comes instead from relying on her own intelligence and understanding of the natural world. Her strength in this moment underscores her ideas about how silly notions of female weakness are, further developing the idea that conventional femininity is only a social construct.



Although Davidson knows that she should be wishing for protection from such dangers, she thinks that night that in reality, she wouldn't switch places with anyone back home. She enjoys relying on her wits and having her abilities truly tested. She writes letters to friends at home, which she doesn't send and rather likens to a diary. Davidson includes the full text of one letter, which rambles freely from one detail of her daily life to another, expressing both the challenges she faces and her joy at dealing with them. The letter also describes encountering a peaceful herd of wild camels and finding a beautiful claypan area that looks different from any other place she's ever been. She expresses some loneliness and longing for creature comforts, but she is also overwhelmingly happy to be having the experience she is.

After the letter concludes, Davidson reflects on the ways that the letter both expresses her complete joy during this part of the journey and also obscures how hard things really were. For example, the herd of wild camels actually frightened her camels and led two of them to get lost for several hours, and she also describes getting lost in the desert and needing to have Diggity guide her back to camp. Davidson notes that Diggity has always seemed like more than just a dog and that she considers her a close and beloved friend.

One day, a car drives down the track, the first Davidson has seen in a long time. It turns out to belong to a white man trying to break a driving record, and he wants to camp with Davidson. Eventually he leaves when she is rude to him, but she is irritated at the interruption and his assumption that she wants his company. As she gets closer to her next stop, Carnegie, she wonders about her habit of walking naked and feels genuinely confused about how she will ever be able to relearn rules of social etiquette.

Davidson arrives in Carnegie to find it abandoned, the surrounding landscape destroyed by overgrazing cattle. She is depressed at the devastated land, but soon encounters two friendly young men who offer her food and company. After resting with them briefly, she decides to head for a station called Glenayle, which means following a route that she has heard is especially difficult. She knows that she and the camels all need a rest and also worries that the camels might not be getting enough food. Zeleika is especially skinny, as she nurses the greedy Goliath almost constantly.

By using her letters to friends as a form of diary, Davidson shows that she has at last become comfortable bringing others into her experience; writing to herself and writing to others no longer seem like substantially different acts. Her overwhelming joy at getting to know the world around her, even when it is dangerous, also highlights how much she has accepted the need to embrace her role in the deep order of nature.



Davidson's later reflections on the letter she wrote during the journey show that her connections with others are still not without complication. Even when essentially writing to herself, the letters constitute a kind of performance that does not totally reflect Davidson's lived experience. This tension foreshadows the pain she later feels upon watching the outside world try to interpret her trek—especially since even her own interpretations don't feel wholly authentic.



This interruption from a white man, who has nothing to do with the reality Davidson has discovered in the desert, reintroduces some of the complications that Davidson felt before leaving for her trip. She wonders how she is supposed to behave as a woman, and she also realizes that her comfort with others depends on their good intentions and comfort with themselves. This incident also hints at the difficulties to follow on her return home.



The devastation Davidson sees on this stretch of land shows that for the natural world to maintain its inherent order and wisdom, it needs to be preserved by people who understand and appreciate its value. This crucial balance underscores the wisdom of the Aboriginal people and the ways that white oppression can interfere with it.



One night, Diggity chases and catches an elderly kangaroo. Davidson considers eating it, but remembers Eddie's warning and decides not to. Soon thereafter, she arrives at Glenayle and stays for a week with generous hosts, who live happily despite their lack of resources and the harsh landscape. With the help of her hosts, Davidson plans out the next stretch of her trip, to a town called Wiluna, and feels slightly disappointed that it will be the last one she completes totally alone.

Although the countryside that follows is rough, it is also beautiful in what Davidson calls "a fossilized primordial sort of way." She worries about Diggity because of the poison baits in the area, which are set to kill dingos, but she does not make the dog wear her muzzle, which she hates. Eventually, they reach a gorgeous view of a mountain range and sand dunes, a place Davidson calls "the heart of the world, paradise." She thinks back over how far she has come during the trip and hopes that she can remember everything she's learned about rejecting structures and habits in favor of freedom and loving engagement with others and the world at large.

Just as Davidson feels that she has generated a true sense of magic, she learns what she calls the "most profound and cruel lesson of all." One night, she rations Diggity's food instead of shooting fresh game for her, and Diggity sneaks away from camp and eats a poison bait. Davidson is stricken as she witnesses her beloved Diggity sicken and, eventually, she has no choice but to shoot her. Davidson feels so panicked and devastated that she thinks she is dying too, and awakens the next day feeling completely numb as she says goodbye and continues walking.

CHAPTER 11

Davidson walks on without Diggity, feeling both devastated and detached from her emotions. She has frequent dreams that Diggity is alive and feels completely isolated without her, as well as frightened by the landscape and noises around her in a way that she has not been previously. Though she knows it is irrational, she feels vulnerable and full of dread without Diggity.

During the days between Diggity's death and her arrival in Wiluna, Davidson finds a stunning landscape of colorful cliffs and sand that looks to her like "a martian landscape." Even so, she still feels empty and unable to appreciate what she is seeing. Eventually, she comes upon a rock formation that looks like an amphitheatre and spontaneously dances naked until she is completely exhausted and falls asleep. When she wakes up, Davidson feels that she has healed and is prepared to face the rest of the trek.

Even as Davidson mourns the approaching end of her solitude, she is completely grateful for her hosts at Glenayle. This relatively uncomplicated perspective on accepting help from others shows how far Davidson has come in her understanding of her own independence and how others might relate to it.



The complete sense of balance that Davidson describes in this section brings together all of the disparate themes that she has grappled with so far. Through her calm acceptance of both the land and its people, she sees her place in its order clearly, without worrying about the racial and gender-based tensions that have plagued her throughout. Still, Davidson worries even now that she will not remember these lessons, which again foreshadows how difficult it is to remain sane within a nonsensical societal context.



Diggity's sudden and painful death illustrates both the value of Davidson's new perspectives and their fragility. Her recently discovered strength allows her to cope with this devastation, but the incident also shows her that nothing can solve the essential pain and danger of the world. This moment bridges the gap between Davidson's ecstasy on the trip and the pain she experiences elsewhere, showing how the two are deeply linked despite their differences.



The loss of Diggity shows once and for all that Davidson has never been truly independent throughout her trip. Relying on others turns out to be a crucial source of meaning for her, as she fully grasps once Diggity is gone.



Davidson's method of coping with Diggity's death highlights the importance of surrendering to the beautiful chaos of the natural world, even with its dangers and pains. Here, the landscape inspires and facilitates peace in a way that Davidson's fixation on order and control never could.



Shortly thereafter, Davidson spots a vehicle driving toward her and, though she expects local people, it turns out to be reporters and photographers from the press. They swarm around her, asking questions and offering money for her story. Davidson is overwhelmed and agrees to go with them to get a beer. She still tries to fend them off but ends up disclosing Diggity's death, a fact which they eventually print even though she asks them not to.

The press also informs Davidson that the man she met earlier who was trying to set a car driving record claimed to have spent a romantic night with her, and that he gave them the geographic information they needed to track her down. Davidson is furious and hides from the people trying to film her, and eventually they leave her to her camp. Alone, she feels exposed and astonished at the amount of attention her trip is getting.

Moments later, Rick arrives, warning Davidson that more members of the press are on their way. Later, Rick tells her that she "looked and behaved like a mad woman" at this time. The journalists and photographers talk to her for a while and take some photos before Rick convinces them to leave. He also informs her that tourists have been selling pictures of her to papers. Stunned, Davidson realizes how far out of her control her own story has gotten. She speculates that her image as a wild, eccentric woman has won her both unfounded admiration from people who wish to do the same and unfair scorn from sexists. She resents being pigeon-holed as the "camel lady" and regrets that her image is now mythic, when what she really wanted was to show people that you don't need to be special to do something ambitious.

Rick introduces Davidson to a bushman and tracker, Peter Muir. Peter warns her that Wiluna is swarming with reporters and offers her his second home to stay in, miles outside of town. Rick has also arranged for Jenny and Toly to fly in, which delights Davidson. Together, the four of them hide out in the spare house and Davidson begins to share her stories with them. She also starts receiving huge amounts of mail from strangers of all kinds, some of which are admiring and some of which are simply odd.

This encounter with the press is Davidson's first indication that the relationship of others to her trek will remain complicated after its conclusion. The insensitive and overwhelming tactics of the reporters also serve as an example of how uncivilized the so-called civilized world can be, shedding new light on the contrasting wisdom of Aboriginal communities.



The man Davidson met earlier is able to effortlessly establish his version of events as the truth, even though it has nothing to do with the reality Davidson experienced. This moment shows how the male perspective will come to dominate interpretations of the trek, even though Davidson tries to stop it.



The ongoing attention from reporters and photographers reintroduces all of the negative aspects of interconnection with others, as their interpretation of the trip immediately diverges from what Davidson intended. However, Rick's role here complicates the scenario; his presence provides a contrasting example of how other people can also be supportive allies. Because the outside interpretations are largely sexist, this sequence also underscores how Davidson's female identity can be a liability within the simplistic gender roles of a paternalistic society.



The time during which Davidson hides out from the press showcases how involvement from others can both support one's independence and undermine it. Along with helpful strangers like Peter Muir, her friends protect her from the aggressive press, while the press themselves constantly threaten Davidson's autonomy. The letters she receives show both sides of the story; in their variety, they show how other people's perspectives can be both inspiring and irritating.



While continuing to dodge the reporters, the group drives back through the country that Davidson recently passed through, since she feels that her sadness over Diggity kept her from fully experiencing it. Though the country is gorgeous, they also see a helicopter of uranium prospectors, which underscores the constant threat to the land's purity. They return to Wiluna and enjoy a last day together laughing at the camels' antics before Jenny and Toly depart.

Davidson and Rick spend a couple of additional weeks traveling through the desert together, leading the camels, talking over the trip, and bonding through their shared experience. Davidson plans to complete her trip at last in the coastal town of Carnarvon, near a farm where some acquaintances have agreed to take over ownership of the camels.

CHAPTER 12

As Davidson and Rick near Carnarvon, Zeleika becomes ill. With the help of some residents of a nearby station, they nurse her back to health and continue the walk toward the coast. The weather turns hotter and the camels become pickier eaters, worrying Davidson again. Rick departs for a period for another photography assignment, but Davidson meets an outback couple at their homestead who generously help feed the camels and provide supplies. Davidson marvels again at how people living in difficult situations can still be so caring and welcoming.

Just as they reach the farm that Davidson hopes will be the camels' new home, the packs and saddles begin to disintegrate. Davidson walks the last part of her trek naked and has to dress quickly when she stumbles upon the farm sooner than expected. All four camels are happy in their new home, and the new owners dote on them. Rick rejoins Davidson and the two arrange to spend a week at the coast with the camels as a conclusion to the journey. Davidson regrets that the trip is ending so soon, and asks that Rick at least not take pictures with his **camera**.

Accompanied by her friends, Davidson sees more clearly than ever how the natural landscape provides a model for the effective integration of order and chaos. At the same time, she knows that its integrity is under dire threat, knowledge that reinforces her concern for the well-being of the Aboriginal communities that are so deeply connected to the land.



These happy weeks with Rick demonstrate how Davidson has managed to resolve some of the conflict she experiences between being independent and relying on other people. Though she is still uneasy about how other people have been involved with her trip and continue to interpret it, her changed relationship with Rick also shows that going it alone and working with others don't necessarily have to be opposites.



During this last leg of her trip, Davidson relies on others more comfortably than she has ever before. It becomes clear here that Davidson is most comfortable relying on people who also know how to rely on themselves happily, such as the Aboriginal people and those few white people who live similar lifestyles. Again, it seems that independence and interconnection can coexist peacefully when everyone involved is stable and secure in their own identity.



Tellingly, the last bits of the order Davidson imposed at the beginning of the trek—in the form of the carefully designed packs—fall apart just as she reaches her destination. Once there, Davidson shows her continued comfort sharing her experience with others but still asks Rick not to take pictures. This lingering aversion is a reminder of how the involvement of others' perspectives can still diminish one's experience, even as they may also provide support.



Upon reaching the ocean at last, Davidson cannot believe that her trek is truly ending, feeling that it all happened too fast. The camels are astonished to see the ocean and play in the waves as Davidson and Rick watch. The two spend the week enjoying the perfect beach scenery and playing with the camels, and Davidson feels at peace. She fears getting caught up in the “madness” of the outside world and hopes that she’ll be able to remember this feeling of freedom even when she arrives in New York City in just a few days. On their last morning, Rick talks in his sleep and accuses Davidson of killing the camels’ parents.

When the camels’ new owners arrive to take them back, Davidson spends hours saying goodbye to all four. Once they are gone, Rick drives her to the town of Carnarvon, where she is hit with immediate culture shock. She feels intimidated and confused by the people all around her, and gets sick during a fancy restaurant dinner, wishing to be back in the desert.

Looking back on her trip later, Davidson concludes that when it came down to it, the journey was easy once she realized that she could be as strong as she allowed herself to be. She notes that the hardest part was simply beginning, and although she knows that the truths she learned during the trip were profound, she nonetheless struggles over and over again to remember them when faced with the realities of the outside world.

Davidson’s peace during this time shows that for all her struggles throughout the trip, she has nonetheless learned to resolve her central conflicts to some extent. At the same time, she knows how hard it will be to remember these lessons once she’s back in an essentially oppressive social context. Her fear here reinforces the idea that the world of the desert and the Aboriginal people who live there is truly more civilized in many ways than the white society that oppresses them.



While the chaos of the desert once frightened Davidson, the scarier prospect now is the artificial restriction of a simple restaurant dinner. Davidson nonetheless leans on Rick for support, showing a final example of how she’s learned to embrace the support of interpersonal connection even within a society that she abhors overall.



Davidson’s ongoing struggles to remember the truths she learned during her trip underscore the difficulty of balancing nuanced ideas within a society based on stereotypes and rigid expectations for individuals’ behavior.





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