

WOMEN'S BUSINESS

A treasured charm bracelet goes missing when a team of outback vets visit a remote community in Australia's Pilbara. Two of the community elders find out what's what from their chairs.

FADE IN

EXT. AERIAL VIEW, OUTBACK - DAY

The landscape below is rich reds and khaki greens broken by ragged rocky ridges. A pale red line against the green is met by other red lines - cattle tracks converging on a lone watering point with a windmill, near a dirt road that seems to go from one horizon to the other. From high above and in the distance we see dots on the road and a plume of dust. We swoop in close enough to make out that it's two 4WDs. They are the only sign of movement or settlement out here.

EXT. COMMUNITY CAMP, PILBARA - AFTERNOON

Two dusty, window-tinted 4WDs pull in to a community. They've got logos on the side that depict Remote Area Veterinary Services. The community consists of a double handful of houses, windows and doors open or missing, couches and chairs on front verandas. There's an impression of heat in the light, and sporadic lazy bird calls. Some of the Aboriginal people who live here are spread around on verandahs or gathered under a tree talking and making craftwork/artwork. Many dogs roam, sometimes eight coming out of a single house. Some kids are playing football in a mix of team singlets and no-shirts, but stop and run over to check out the new arrivals. One of the adults, AILEEN, comes over. Out of the 4WDs get JOHN and HANNAH, well-tanned Caucasian vets; JULIAN, an Asian-Australian vet; and TRINA, a young student vet nurse on volunteer placement from California.

HANNAH

Aileen! Hello again.

JOHN

Councillor!

AILEEN

G'day. Trip all right?

They shake hands and exchange nods. Trina is stretching sore/stiff, and looking around at everything like a tourist.

HANNAH

(grin for understatement) Bit of a hike. You remember Julian? This is Trina. She's volunteering from California. We told her you were just up the road a bit.

AILEEN

Welcome to our country, Trina.

TRINA

Thank you, Councillor Aileen.

JULIAN

Hi Aileen! (to the kids) Hey, guys. Wasn't there someone here who followed Collingwood?

One of the kids comes forward in a Magpies singlet. Julian produces an Aussie Rules team football and handballs it to him.

JULIAN

Trina is from California. She doesn't know how to use our kind of football. Or which team's the best. You guys want to show her?

Murmured excitement from the kids, and the game is on. Trina gets pulled in, cautiously at first but eventually with lots of laughter. As they try and teach her to handball and drop-kick, a very blingy charm bracelet sparkles and swings on her wrist.

JOHN

All right, let's get set up so we can start in the morning.

AILEEN

Over there, we'll set up your tarp between those trees. I'll get my sons to help.

HANNAH

Thanks. Got any spare doors?

AILEEN

Should do. Fuel drums?

JOHN

Yeah. Please.

They scatter amongst the houses. Aileen waves over a couple of young men to help. As the sun lowers to the horizon and crows and dogs watch, some ropes are strung up with a large tarp to make a shade roof, six 44-gallon fuel drums are rolled over and three doors are retrieved from behind or on houses and placed on top to make three full-size workstations. Trina helps Julian and one of the community men place the last door, then they stand in the gloaming with John and Hannah and admire their work.

EXT. COMMUNITY CAMP, PILBARA - MORNING

John and Hannah are sitting on the ground with Aileen, some of the kids and their dogs. Trina comes over, looking sad.

HANNAH

Morning, Trina. How'd you find it?

TRINA

Slept OK, I guess. But my charm bracelet's gone. I left it by the window when I went to sleep.

AILEEN

That dangly sparkle thing you had
on yesterday?

TRINA

Yes. My grandmother gives me a new
charm every birthday.

AILEEN

Grandmother. Huh. Well, let me ask
a few questions.

HANNAH

We should get to work. Everyone
ready?

Nods all around. Julian joins them as they grab crates of gear and take places at the tables, one vet to each door. The kids and some adults begin to line up with dogs in tow ready for worming and spaying. Trina runs between the work stations, administering needles, helping shave bellies, helping hold animals as needed. Aileen settles herself into a chair somewhere where she can watch it all, and DORIS, another elder, settles beside her to watch and gossip.

AILEEN

Girl. Trina. You said it was by the
winda?

TRINA

Yes.

DORIS

Sarah! Go look outside the lady
here's winda, don't stand on the
marks, tell me if anyone was there
last night.

A teenage girl in the line, around thirteen or fourteen, nods at Doris, stops playing with her dog and gives it over to a much younger child, and wanders off. Shortly she's back.

SARAH

Just one person. Dunno who.

DORIS

Need to practice more then. Man or
woman or child?

SARAH

Man, teenager.

DORIS

Coming out of the winda?

SARAH

Just stood there. No one came out.

AILEEN

(to Trina)

So, didn't run off with any of our boys last night, ay?

The two women elbow each other and chuckle. Trina looks mortified, but keeps concentrating on her work.

JOHN

Trina, ketamine here please.

DORIS

I'll go have a look.

She raises herself up and goes to the house. When she comes back she's dragging one of the footballers, JACK, by one ear with her.

AILEEN

Jack. Shoulda known. What were ya doing outside Trina's winda last night?

JACK

Nothing, honest!

DORIS

Lady lost her bracelet. You take it?

JACK

No!

AILEEN

Better tell the truth. See how she's sticking needles in that dog's butt? Don't cross her.

Trina attempts to look fierce, raises the needle. Jack flinches, looks embarrassed.

JACK

'struth. I didn't do nothing. I was gonna ask her about California, but she was asleep. Bracelet was there, but I didn't touch it.

DORIS

Don't need to know about California. They shoot blacks there.

She lets him go, he runs away.

AILEEN

So. None of the kids took it.

DORIS

Nup.

A small commotion begins amongst the kids waiting with dogs.

SARAH

Hey! Runner's choking!

HANNAH

Get him over here.

They manhandle the dog up onto her just-vacated table and clear the obstruction in its airway - which turns out to be a sparkly champagne-bottle charm mixed with bits of fish.

TRINA

Hey! That's the charm my grandmother gave me for my 21st!

DORIS

That so.

She and Aileen look at each other, then Aileen calls to the kids.

AILEEN

Some of youse go and check over at the fishing hole. See if you can find the bracelet. Sarah, keep your eyes open.

The kids run off. When they come back, they're triumphant, carrying three pieces of bracelet. Sarah has a sharp rock.

SARAH

Crows took it. Prints everywhere. Broke it on the rock.

TRINA

Crows?

Aileen and Doris start laughing.

AILEEN

Best way to catch a fish is with something sparkly. Crows know that as well as we do.

DORIS

Some well fed crows out there today!

TRINA

There's still a few charms missing.

AILEEN

You keep working. We'll send the kids looking. Hope you like fish for dinner!