

Flat Paddock Love

She isn't your average girl.

A pony tail and a pair of Cuban heeled boots is more her style.

She's 22, wild and free, and she just wants to walk out in open paddocks and feel the freshly ploughed soil beneath her boots. It is what she lives for, the black soil paddocks in the heart of the Central West. 'Nullen' is Home.

Alice walked around the Chamberlain one last time, her heart felt heavy. The last five years have been tough. The crippling drought and her uncle battling the melanoma cancer that appeared upon his face. Alice felt as though she couldn't get a break.

Who knows what the future would hold? All she knew was that she had to get the oats sown in the ground before the harsh sun zapped out the remaining amount of moisture in the soil.

She hopped on up into the open cab of the 9G tractor and pulled the choke.

The tractor tyres lined up the row for the final lap around. The sun was beginning to set and Alice sighed a sigh of relief.

The paddocks were only small but with a hopeful drop of rain, the oats may just pay for the treatment that her uncle desperately needed.

She pulled the tractor to a halt and began climbing the rocky hill so she could watch the remainder of the sun set behind the rolling hills. The views were like they were from a movie. The scenery was dry and the old gums were lacking their glossy appearance, but the air was fresh and would fill anyone's heart and soul with love, and a sense of being.

'For Sale'.

The beaming sign hanging on the front fence caught Alice's attention as she pulled up to the gate in her old HJ 47 Landcruiser Ute.

A shocking surprise, yet an expected one. The cancer treatment didn't work.

Alice sat staring into space, the flash back crossing before her eyes.

Jimmy held out his hand as he laid in his bed in the old run down weatherboard home.

"Cya around, Alice. Go chase your dreams", he said as he took one last breath of air.

Tears filled Alice's eyes as she traced the engraving of the timber farm sign on the front gate. 'Nullen'.

She walked back to the Ute and kicked the tyre of the cruiser and screamed into the silence around her.

Alice scrambled back into the ute's cab, her heart pounding. She felt like giving up.

She placed her hand on the steering wheel, before the yellow enveloped document sitting beside her, caught her eye. She clonked the old, rusty ute into reverse and headed back onto the Golden highway towards town. "Now is the time", she muttered to herself as she peered back at the enveloped document, which securely held the \$100 deposit.

With a thud, the red post box lid closed and Alice stood for a second, not letting go of the boxes worn handle. "Go chase your dreams", the warm wind whispered.

A hot and lonely summer had passed. The weight of Alice's uncle no longer around had weighed heavily on Alice and her family.

An anxiousness came upon her, she knew her announcement to her family would come as another massive blow. She was once an A grade high school student and chasing a career in Agronomy wasn't going to happen by sitting around and moping about the sale of the farm. She had to make the move.

The last of the bags were tied onto the tray back of the HJ and she kissed her Mum and Dad goodbye, holding them close to her, not knowing when the next time would be. Their faces streamed with tears as Alice honked the horn and drove out the drive way.

Alice wound down the window, it was 5 hours into the trip, only one more hour and she would reach her destination.

The cab was hot, the flies began making their way in to escape the intense heat outside. The Ute was old and worn, a car with modern day technologies and an air conditioner was tempting, but if the Ute sprung a leak or did a bearing, she could easily fix it herself and keep motoring along.

'Glenwood Agricultural College'.

Alice smiled as she drove past the sign and down the straight and narrow bitumen drive. "I've done it, I can't bloody believe it!" She squealed with joy.

As she was about to get out of the Ute and straighten herself up, she quickly kissed the photo of her mum and dad and placed it back in front of the speedo.

Before her, sat her new fellow peers on the grassed area of the college grounds.

"Shit, I'm late, frighten Ute", she muttered to herself and brushed her denim RM Williams shorts, as if to hide the creasing from the six hour drive.

The sun was piercing, enough to make her strawberry blonde wavy hair and faint freckles stand out more so than usual. Alice took a seated position on the grassed area at the back of the group under the shade of a willow tree.

With the years at college flying by quicker than she could blink, the memories rolled into one big blur.

Alice felt as though she had finally accomplished her dreams and at last, she was in her third and final year, with her new agronomy career at the tips of her fingers.

Alice meant business, she knew what she wanted and she was determined to hang it out 'til the end, even if she had to battle on with her homesickness.

The assessments were a walk in the park, after all, tractors and machinery and the overall agricultural industry was in her blood, it was all she knew.

There was just one thing she couldn't remove from her mind, and she knew she fiercely wanted it, right or wrong. What ever she tried, she couldn't shake it from her head.

Clancy Andrews.

Clancy laid wide awake in the comfort of his single bed in the Donga on the college campus. The thought of finishing college at the end of the year was beginning to weigh in on him.

Taking over the family farm and being the fourth generation farmer was everything he ever wanted. GPS and auto steer were just the beginning of the ideas that he wanted to improve on upon his return to the farm.

The thought of returning home with only a piece of paper from graduation and moving into his parents cold and dark homestead on his own, was a chilling thought.

He loved Alice, she filled his world with light. A light he had never experienced before. Her faint freckles would dance across her face and her natural curls would leave you longing for more. Taking Alice home with him at the completion of the year, and making the farm their empire would be like a dream. But is it too good to be true?

As Clancy drifted off to sleep, he heard the sweet whisper of Alice swaying around him "I have to return home, Clancy. I'm returning to the hills."

Three months had passed since graduating college. He longed for Alice.

The communication was minimal but the love between them was as strong as their hand shake on the first day of orientation day, just over three years ago.

Clancy sat in the cane chair as he ate his cereal and planned the day ahead of him. It was harvest, the busiest time of year on the farm and his Dad would take in turns and rotate from the header to the truck, just to keep each other sane and free of cabin fever. A term the pair joked about when sitting in one cabin for far too long and boredom would hit you like a freight train.

The eeriness of the homestead and the occasional creak forced Clancy up, out of his chair and out the back door to begin another day of stripping the barley.

Fading of the sun left Clancy looking for his sunglasses to block out the last of the daylight. He put his glasses on and lightly plonked his Akubra hat on his head as he pushed the auger button to fill the mother bin with the last of the grain.

A swirl of dust swooned up from the dirt track and caught Clancy's eye. "Shit, shit!" He grunted as he realised the grain was beginning to fill over the sides of the bin.

Curious to see who would be travelling at that speed up the back lane, he idled the header down and put an out stretched hand to his eye to block the sun. He could only just make out a black bull bar and a familiar grey HJ cruiser Ute, nearing towards him. The smile on Clancy's face beamed and grew larger. He couldn't help feel the butterflies from within himself. It was Alice.

"Alice bloody Patrick!" He squealed as he flew open the door of the header.

Alice and Clancy laid talking for hours on the couch on the wide verandah of the homestead. The rain poured down and began filling the cracks in the dry ground, with an occasional lightning bolt and rumbling thunder.

"I would only pack up my life and leave behind my family to move six hours South for you, Clancy Andrews", she giggled.

"And only you would leave the hills to overlook my flat irrigation paddocks", he taunted.

They both laughed and finally, at last, Alice felt at home.

Right at home in the arms of her college sweet heart, Clancy. She was there to stay.