



## Prologue

A lady dressed in black appeared in the dim wood at twilight. Her face, as pale as the moon, was wrinkled with age and ancient knowledge and her eyes were as black as a raven's wing. She was almost transparent, as she stepped across the leaf-strewn ground, but they made no sound as though she were a ghost. When the first birdsong of morning was sung and echoed by the trees, she faded into nothingness.

## Chapter 1

I pushed aside the moss-green leaves of the gumtrees to reveal a skull shape engraved in the oldest tree of the wood. Sap leaked and dribbled down the tree and glistened in the sunlight like tiny glittering blood-red rubies. I gasped. There were about a dozen trees around me with the deathly symbol. All of the poor tree's bows knelt to the ground in a sad way. Its leaves were no longer green but a dull grey. Simple as that. The trees were evidently dead. This wasn't right, I had visited the ancient trees just the day before, and every tree that was dead had the skull-shape just yesterday. What could have done this?

## Chapter 2

Every day I stepped through the deathly silence of the wood, more and more trees gave up their lives. And also, the Bell Birds no longer sang their tunes of complete beauty.

"Go through the woods to Mrs Daris, Aries, deliver the message and come straight back." Mother ordered, so I set off, message in hand, through the wood. At twilight. On my own. Skipping past cream-trunked Spotted Gums, grey and dull with their skull carvings, I came to a part of the wood where the branches covered the moon. A figure stood in the distance. A figure dressed in draping black garments. She almost seemed...transparent...but her face was hidden with a hood. Was it a ghost?

### Chapter 3

Someone else might have run away, or perhaps have been frozen to the spot, but the brave child stepped forward to the challenge. She crept carefully to the figure, swallowing enough courage to ask, "Excuse me, who are you?" The figure had not seen the girl and so jumped with fright, and with this jump, her hood slid off to reveal a woman's face, oldest of old and obscured by wrinkles, obviously didn't know what to say. It was then I noticed the knife in her hand. I would have expected it to be dripping with blood, but it was old and rusted, and had evidently not been utilised for its original purpose. And carved onto the tree she had been facing, was half of the skull-shape.

### Chapter 4

That was it. This was the answer. It had not been a what, it had been a who. The culprit was this old lady, but why? Why would she want to kill the trees? With these thoughts swirling in my head like a tornado, the lady finally found her words.

"I am the Black Widow."

Before I knew it, a sudden pang of anger hit me.

"Why would you do this? Destroying trees for the sheer amusement of it?"

The Black Widow was obviously dumbfounded,

"I didn't do it for amusement," She spoke, "I did it for revenge."

### Chapter 5

"Revenge? Against the trees?"

"No, against Them."

"Who's Them?"

"The people who stole my land."

"I don't understand."

"They came to Australia took over my land. They left Huckmore and me nothing, so I starved and died. And when white men came, they drove Them away, so when They died, Their hearts were the seeds of these trees. The Death Symbol kills anything that it is carved on, so I am destroying Their souls for stealing what was mine."