



"BECAUSE THE LEADING MAN IS IN THE ARMY, TOWNSVILLE WAS A NATURAL CHOICE ..."

AUTHOR CHARLOTTE NASH (PICTURED)

LOVE IN THE VILLE

VICTORIA NUGENT ASKS BRISBANE AUTHOR CHARLOTTE NASH ABOUT HOW HER FICTIONAL DOCTOR AND ARMY CAPTAIN ENDED UP IN TOWNSVILLE, OF ALL PLACES.

When it was time for Brisbane-based author Charlotte Nash to pick the setting for her next novel, Townsville was her first and only choice.

The rural romance writer knew the defence force was going to be at the heart of the novel, with Townsville standing out as the best place for the story.

"Because the leading man is in the army, Townsville was a natural choice when you look at Queensland army bases," she said.

"I get a lot of my stories from the landscape and Townsville has such a characteristic skyline with Castle Hill and everything that it just was a natural choice."

Crystal Creek tells the story of aspiring doctor Christina Price, who has vowed never to return to her childhood home of Townsville but a twist of fate lands her back in the city to complete a practical placement at Lavarack Barracks.

She soon meets Captain Aiden Bell, who is still hurting from a complicated past and unsure whether to take a chance on love.

Nash grew up in Brisbane and studied engineering and medicine before working with the CSIRO and in the mining industry.

During her medicine studies she spent some time at the Enoggera army base, planting the seeds for what became *Crystal Creek*.

Having had only a passing association with the city in the past, Nash immediately got to work interviewing friends who lived in Townsville, while planning a trip of her own.

Nash said she was able to spend only four or five days in

Townsville but it was vital to making sure she got the setting right.

"Nothing beats having actually been there," she said.

"I already had an idea of the events that would happen in the novel and needed to know if the locations would work."

Her trip to Townsville even included trekking up Castle Hill, all in the name of research.

"At one point I was actually going to have someone running up Castle Hill for exercise," she explained.

"It defeated me but I did get to the top."

Nash's depiction of the defence community came from stories told by friends in the army, while she says the medical centre she creates for the story is fictitious.

During the trip she visited *Crystal Creek* on the recommendation of a friend and the location came to play a vital part in the story and even give the novel its title.

"It wasn't my working title for most of it," she said.

"It was a place in the book that played a role but as I reviewed the book and made changes it had a bigger symbolic significance."

Nash teaches creative writing at the University of Queensland, and is an active member of the Army Reserve.

The book was officially launched on Tuesday without too much fanfare, with Nash having other things on her mind as she anticipates the birth of her first child.

Impending motherhood hasn't held back her writing, however, with the first draft of her next book, which will be set in the Victoria high country, almost completed.

REVIEW: BOOKS P27

NOVELS SET IN TOWNSVILLE

AFFECTION IAN TOWNSEND

This historical novel is based around the 1900 outbreak of bubonic plague in Townsville. Dr Alfred Jefferis Turner is sent north by the Queensland government to investigate a suspected outbreak of plague. Fifty-two possible plague carriers are quarantined on Magnetic Island but no one wants to listen to Dr Turner's warnings. Townsend's first novel details an interesting period of Townsville's history, entwining it with mystery and political drama.

MOONLIGHT PLAINS BARBARA HANNAY

North Queensland writer Barbara Hannay's romance has two love stories at its heart, one set during World War II and one in contemporary times. Townsville plays a big role in the novel, with mentions of Palmer St and modern-day settings accompanied by fascinating descriptions of Townsville during the war years. The descriptions of cannons lining The Strand are among the touches that enhance the novel for the local reader. Charters Towers also plays a role, with journalist Sally Piper sent out to the town to cover first a ball and then the story of a cattleman turned builder restoring his grandmother's homestead.

GIRL WITH A MONKEY THEA ASTLEY

Thea Astley is one of this country's literary greats, winning four Miles Franklin awards. She is remembered for stories that recreate north Queensland landscapes and lifestyles. Published in 1958, *Girl with a Monkey* is her first novel and tells the story of a young teacher, Elsie, who has formed a relationship with a local council worker in Townsville. The novel takes a "day in the life" form as Elsie prepares to leave the north behind.

HOUSE ON THE HILL ESTELLE PINNEY

House on the Hill paints a portrait of Townsville in the 1920s, telling the story of three sisters who live in a boarding house overlooking the sea. Castle Hill, Magnetic Island and other iconic parts of the region all make appearances in the novel, which sees the characters strive to improve their lives. The novel follows the joys in heartbreaks in the sisters' lives, including the choice that must be made by aspiring vaudeville star Belle between marriage and the stage. Greek cafes, life in a hotel kitchen, poverty and North Queensland's weather all have a role to play in the narrative.

