



COPPER COAST

A VOICE-ZONE TEXT TILE NOVEL

Kate Deller-Evans



MADDY



TYSON



OWEN



FOXIE

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VOICE-ZONES

ST IVES, CORNWALL

MADLINE KITTO (MADDY, MADS): 16-year-old Year 11 student at St Ives School. She runs the house and cooks while her mother is busy being an artist and her father works away. She has a retro vintage-style dress sense and a long-term boyfriend with whom she hopes to holiday in Paris.

GINNIFER KITTO (née Pardoe, GINN, GINNY): 35-year-old artist mother of Maddy, from Moonta, South Australia. Her studio is in the basement and is where she spends most of her time, apart from a trip to France to see the art.

RICHARD KITTO [deceased]: 46-year-old father of Maddy and husband of Ginnifer. In London he ran a booking agency for television and stage actors and commuted to St Ives on weekends.

PAULETTE KITTO: 68-year-old mother of Richard, a keen golfer and unforgiving of Ginnifer for 'taking away' her only child and 'forcing her' out of her own home. She believes her only grandchild, Maddy, is an unruly, undisciplined, alternative sort of girl, just the sort to take after her mother.

TYSON PENWITH: 18-year-old boyfriend of Maddy and short surfboard champion of St Ives Surf Club; who is finishing school, though study rates second to surfing and making his own boards. He is devoted to his club and has been steady with Maddy since their first school outing to the beach.

MARGARET PENWITH: 42-year-old mother of Tyson, she works at the front office of St Ives Infants as a school services officer. She is house proud; but most of all, she is devoted to her two sons. Her dream is to holiday somewhere warm across the other side of the world.

JOHN PENWITH: 43-year-old father of Tyson and local accountant. Like his wife, he is affable and unassuming, enjoying the company of his family. Happy where he is, he does not see the need to travel beyond Cornwall. He misses his brother, who migrated to Australia seven years ago.

ALEX PENWITH: 12-year-old brother of Tyson, he shares his bedroom with his older brother and thinks himself lucky to

score the top bunk. He doesn't share his brother's love of surfing, preferring instead his gaming console and 3DS.

JULIE GAWAIN (JOO LZ): 16-year-old best girlfriend of Maddy. She admires her friend's taste in clothes and buys chain-store clothes to approximate them. She has taken dance classes since she was three, and watches television avidly.

PRATI KSHA RAMA (TIKSHA): 15-year-old Tiksha has been friends with Maddy and Joolz since moving to Britain at the beginning of high school. Three generations live in her house where her grandmother wants her to marry well but her mother demands she study harder.

BEN and BARBARA: Maddy's two cats were named by Richard after St Ives' famous artists, Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. The two cats are independent and aloof although they appear to appreciate finding a warm home after being strays.

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education.

MOONTA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

OWEN CHENOWETH (OWEY): 18-year-old student, finishing Year 12 at Moonta Area School. He is the popular captain of the Young Turks Under-19s football team, with a secret passion to write drama. Closer to his mother than his father, he feels his girlfriend is in cahoots with his parents.

HELEN TRENERRY: 40-year-old mother of Owen, she is an avid gardener. In her privileged childhood she played charades and appeared in Christmas productions at school, wishing she could be on stage. Instead, she married. She is proud of her lineage.

DAVID CHENOWETH (DAVY): 38-year-old father of Owen, he has expanded his wife's plumbing business to include home improvements and desires a big house on the Wallaroo marina development. He is considered a handsome charmer by most of the town, but he is restless for more.

FRANCES QUICK (FOXIE): 18-year-old Foxie, the girlfriend of Owen, works in the Shaft Hotel as a waitress while finishing her studies. She has a sharp wit, and her temper is volatile. She is possessive of her boyfriend and plans for their marriage so she can escape her abusive father.

GRAEME QUICK: 39-year-old publican of the Shaft Hotel and the father of Foxie. He is considered a good hotel host, but he likes to drink too much. His wife left when Foxie was still in primary school.

MILLICENT JEAN PARDOE (MINNIE) [deceased]: mother of Ginnifer, and known in Maddy's dreams as 'the Witch'. Throughout her life Minnie was a devout and regular attendee of the Moonta Uniting Church.

RICHARD ROBERT BUTTERWORTH (BOB), 69-year-old lawyer with a firm in George Street, Moonta. His parents sent him to boarding school for his last years of schooling and he studied law, knowing he would return home.

PHILIP FENTON (FLATHEAD): 18-year-old friend of Owen, who loves to play the guitar with him. He has family across the gulf in Port Lincoln.

SAM HELLYER: 18-year-old classmate of Owen, whose family has a cliff-side property at Sims Cove, between Moonta Bay and Port Hughes.

IRIS HELLYER (MRS): 40-year old mother of Sam and friend of Helen Trenerry. She secretly thinks Owen is too nice and needs a bit of roughing on the edges. She adores her son.

KARI PENWITH: 20-year-old cousin of Tyson. She is studying in Adelaide while her parents live in Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula. Her family migrated from Britain seven years ago.

DR JAYA SINGH: 29-year-old resident general practitioner in Moonta, who finds the townsfolk are growing on her.

PLONK: 7-year-old black labrador belonging to Owen. He loves to chase seagulls down at Port Hughes beach.

KERNEWEK LOWENDER: The world's largest Cornish festival, held every two years in the Copper Triangle. Translates literally as *Cornish happiness*.

SACE: South Australian Certificate of Education.

PROLOGUE



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

I'm falling in the dark
off the cliff.

All I know is
I was pushed.

My full-length skirt billows,
flutters up, over my head —
bobby pins slide out from my bun
and tendrils of my hair fly free.

The rocks are coming — fast.
I gauge the distance
cliff-edge to the shore
— not far now.

Then I wake
in an iron bed
by roughcast walls.
Outside, wind hurls a gale,
rattles window panes,
tree branches in its thrall.

The moan of a door
announces its opening, and
silhouetted against the flicker
of a spluttering candle,
a small woman stands.

Behind her are stairs,
down to a dank cellar,
its odour rank
wafting from below.

‘I’ve waited. Until now,’ she says.
‘So tell me your name.’

I try to open my mouth
but no words come.
Voiceless, I want to scream.
First, the long dream-fall;
now, this strange place.

‘Don’t disappoint me,’
she warns, leans down,
grabs my wrist,
squeezes it hard.
‘Are you ready?’

I close my eyes to stay the terror,
calm my pounding heart,
clear my ringing head.

When I open them
it’s to my own wooden bed,
blue walls, and posters.

Now, it’s my own real night
with only the faint crash of surf
and cries of gulls
in the distance.
But my wrist
is still stinging.

PART 1



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

After my father's funeral
his mother
is tight-lipped.

Even in my rib-cage-seizing
sense of loss
a corner of my mind is puzzling
why the woman who's never
let me call her Nan or Nanna
or Gran, Granny, Grandma,
can't even shed a tear.

I'm all cried out myself.
Dry-eyed, I suppose
with pent-up fury
at how his death is just another
piled-up road statistic —
last Friday on the M4,
his usual route home from Camden
down to Cornwall for the weekend
to my mother and me.

For the service
Paulette's wearing a dark blue suit
creases down its pants
ice-pick-sharp as her words:

‘Madeline, you look ridiculous.
Disentangle yourself at once.’

But I grab harder Tyson’s waist,
twist myself into his shadow.

Fricken Snow Queen, I think,
I owe you nothing.

I hear her parting shot to my mother:
‘Ginnifer, you’ll be hearing from me.’

I look to Ginn to check her reaction,
but her face is still awash —
no problem for her to weep,
where it’s down to the absolutes —
all or nothing,
every time.

§

My mother
is an artist —
interested only in paint,
mebbe the paper or canvas too.

It’s a sickness,
I’ve come to realise,
where a normal life
doesn’t enter the picture
— pictures are the picture.

She can paint all day —
misty-soft figures

all alone in the landscape —
and I've gone to bed,
telling her the image
is coming together well.
Only to get up in the morning
when she's whited out the lot.

And not slept.
Up all night
all next day too,
paintbrush in one hand
black coffee in the other.

When I tell her,
'Ginn, you've got to eat!'
then cook her some food,
she doesn't call me
Darling, Daughter, or Maddy,
or thank me,
but replies,
'Only if I have to, Mum.'
Her little naming joke
wearing thin.

I wrestle the paintbrush
from her cramping fingers,
force her to the table
and the meal I've made,
then shoo her off
to get some sleep.
She grumbles all the way.

§

We live in St Ives,
a corner of West Cornwall
where the light is right
for Ginn to paint.
Our house is end-of-terrace Georgian,
perched on the high side of the road
on the curve before a cul-de-sac.

That's what I love the most,
our views to the sea,
best from my window
up here on the top floor.

After school I sometimes push on,
further past our place
all the way to the crest of the hill
so I can look right on down,
back along the steep road
to the rolling surf
across St Ives Bay
and its grey-green water,
sandy beach and golden granite,
with the surfers lined at the break
hoping to carve some barrels —
and my Tyson can be found there
when the swell is high.



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

Coming home from the funeral
Mads looked a mess.
The first time I've ever seen her
lose her cool.
Always the sensible one.
Her hair like striped jersey caramel
bobbing on her shoulders,
creamy milk skin
that day blotched —
at first I thought from blubbing
then realised, it was in anger
with her Nan,
who's always been a miserable cow,
snooty-faced, poking her nose down at Mads
and as well as at her mum.
Them never good enough for Paulette
or her precious son.
I'm not saying Mads' dad Richard Kitto
was all that bad — he'd been really fine
about us two —
just, sometimes I wondered if
he worked so far from home
to keep his mother off their back
or, more probably, his.

§

What I'm looking forward to —
we'll be sailing out on the Portsmouth ferry
me and that girl of mine
— one of those long-term couples
others are envious of,
heading across the Channel
to France
for the summer hols.

With her parents last year, going to
Provence for painting
Mads had been smitten.
The food, the houses, the heat, she said.
How we had to get there —
this time it would be
just her and me.

Stuff going to galleries! she said.
We'll buy baguettes and runny cheese,
picnic on a mat.
I'll wear my old-fashioned dress
and we can swank around.
Imagine, the sun warming us.

It's a picture I keep
fixed in my mind.
Then she won't be miserable
or sad about her dad,
but alone with me —
we'll have finished the year at school
and I'll have all the time in the world
for us, and endless surfing.
Till then, I'll just be waiting,
waiting for the season to change.



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

We had a great relationship,
me and Dad,
though his work in London
meant he was so often away.
I'd sometimes think of him more
as an older brother, or friend.

He called me his cheeky monkey,
said I was there to cheer them up.
But he was more the clown,
the one always laughing,
light-hearted, never gloomy.
When business was slow
he'd take up with some cause or other,
like daytime TV stars
fallen out of favour —
his line of duty
with his actors' agency.

Like the cats he rescued
from the streets and
brought back home to us.

And at least when he was here
it was someone
to take the pressure off
me, looking after Ginn.

So it's a triple whammy
with him now gone:
my father, my friend
and our comic conversation.

§

While he was in hospital
Ginn stopped painting,
I'll give her that.
A side of her I'd never seen.
Of course, I still cooked
and ran the fricken place.
But she sat bedside with Dad
that week in intensive care,
his hand loose in hers,
— I heard her say,
You did it for me, Richard.
You saved me.

He looked asleep,
not unconscious,
not ready to leave us,
forever.
And she added,
I'll always value that.

I've no idea
whether she thought
he could actually hear,
whether she knew I stood
outside the door
or what she really meant.

§

The pile of post
slots through our front door,
in an avalanche
following Dad's death
— something Ginn won't deal with.
So I sort through the letters:
bills from the business
re-routed from Camden Town;
sympathy cards; and
two letters out of the ordinary
(whatever that is),
one from a Truro solicitor,
the other from abroad.

§

After school
I see the solicitor's letter on the table,
slipped out of its envelope.
I can't believe what I read —
and call out for Mum
to come up from the studio.

'What's this crappy note mean?'
I demand an answer from her.
'How can she be so cruel?'

Ginn wanders into the kitchen
as if there's nothing wrong.
So I push the question home.
Hands on hips, legs apart,
I stand in front of her.

‘Lady Muck’s never liked you, has she?
Weren’t you born in the right country
or summat?’

But Ginn is as vague as usual
and looks about the kitchen
as if she’s misplaced something,
or as if the answer can be found
behind the Welsh dresser
or Blue Willow crockery.

‘What have we done,’ I ask
‘to be thrown out of our own home?’

‘It’s hers,’ she says.
‘Paulette didn’t sign it over to Richard,
so it was never ours.’

‘Can’t we buy her out?’
My mind’s firing into overdrive.
‘There’s the business to sell
plus the apartment.’

‘Oh, apartment only leased,’ she says.
‘And I’m not sure
the business was flush.
Not in these difficult financial times.
Being an actors’ agent
didn’t really pay that well.
Not recently, anyway.’

‘So, according to this letter
we’ll be out on the street
by Christmas?’

My voice has risen to a squeak.
I'm almost unable to speak.

My mother's eyes focus.
'I'd better find out,' she says.

A more sensible answer from her
than I think I've ever had.

§

It's only after supper
when I'm cleaning up
I find the other post in the larder
propped beside the pot of marmalade,
its stamp a fat grey koala,
dead-give-away of where it's from.

'Ginn!' I call. 'Mum! Come open this up.'

She slits the envelope,
scans its contents,
flops onto the kitchen chair.

'The old witch has died.'
She looks up into my face.
'And I've been left the house.'

Even if I don't know who the witch was
or where the house is,
what she's talking about sounds cool.
'Awesome!' I say, punching the air.
'At last, something going our way.'

I'm surprised when she sighs
as if the news is bad.

'Well,' she says, 'that's decided',
and heads downstairs again.

I don't realise then
just what she's got in mind.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

‘C’mon, mate,’ Dad says.
‘You’re where I left you
this morning!’
He yanks the quilt
off my head.

I snatch it back.
‘It was a power nap.
Okay?’

He grunts —
‘You’ve got so much,
y’know, Owen.’

It’s an accusation,
so I sit up,
swing my legs out of bed,
study the carpet
beneath my feet.

*Yeah, right, I think,
he means the shop.*

‘There’s the business
to look forward to.’

What he really means is,

Don't waste your time at school.

Start working for me now.

Yeah, right.

§

At the dinner table

Dad tells Mum

all about his day.

It's always like this

— him wheedling away at Mum

or bawling me out —

while everyone else beyond these walls

thinks he's this great fantastic bloke.

Tonight he's even more excited than usual —

something about 'The New Development

and the opportunities now here

on South Australia's very own

Copper Coast.'

I can recite the blurb, no probs.

'Helen, if only I could secure the cash

we could become a part of the action...'

His request is left hanging in the air.

Mum looks kind of interested,

though it's hard to read

what she's really thinking.

§

In front of the television

I'm finishing my homework

and Mum's turning pages
of a gardening magazine.
Who knows why she needs them,
when our yard out front's
the best all round,
not just here in Moonta township,
but she's won prizes for it
across the whole Copper Triangle.

In the light of the flickering screen
I check out her silhouette,
catch the profile I need —
the face of Hamlet's mother
for my sketches of the play.

I've done the set, and mapped the
choreography
just the costume designs left to do
for my Year 12 Drama Studies
Personal Project.

It's quiet, without Dad in the house
— apart from the buzz of the box.
I feel my shoulders begin to drop,
relaxing at last.
'Think I'll walk Plonk
round the block,' I tell Mum.

'Get some air into your lungs
for that Grand Final,' she adds
as I set out the front door,
Plonk straining on his leash.



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

All I've ever known
is Cornwall, Great Britain.
Low skies, wind,
the feel of fine driving rain,
scent of green grass
and fishermen with their catch —
beyond, surfers in wetsuits,
like slick black seals,
slicing through the tubes.

St Ives Infant School
when I was young,
then St Ives School —
a technology college Dad said
would suit my talents best
and I love it so.
It's where I've made my besties,
Tiksha and Joolz,
and the one-and-only
graduating short board champ
Tyson —
my dearest friends and boyfriend,
and
the places I belong.

§

I click 'Save As'
on the document, and
put my computer to sleep
knowing I've finally laid to rest
the catering business plan:
the assignment I thought
might never get done,
after Dad died.

But the teacher understood,
gave me an extension.
I frown a little smile of pride,
this work has taken all term
and it looks good —
report-style, professional.

When Ginn knocks on the door
and I open my mouth
to tell her
how the project's finally finished,
she doesn't notice me
trying to tell her anything.

Her eyes are wide and wild
— she's looking at me
as if I'm not here,
as if I'm not even me.

'I've written to Paulette,' she says.
'I told that stuck-up harridan
we won't be troubling her again.
We won't need her pity or her help,
that I've come into my own property. Ha!'

‘Mm, yeah,’ I nod.

‘Well, I’m picking up sticks!’ she cries.

‘Pulling the pickets
right out of the ground!’

I still don’t get it.

‘We don’t need her house
anymore.’

She’s not making sense
and my brain now begins
scrambling in panic.

‘We don’t need this place,
this town,
this damned country at all.’

Breath catches in my throat.
I finally hear my heart,
thundering.

‘I Still Call Australia Home!’
she sings, finally reaching out for me.
‘Great Southern Land!’

She pulls me from my seat
starts to haul me around.

I resist, look daggers at her.
Demand, ‘Ginn, whatcha mean?’

She stops twirling round,
says in a mebbe normal voice,
'We'll go live in the cottage.
My place.
The house that is my inheritance.'

She looks at me, and I can tell
she thinks I understand.

She starts up again,
jigging like a pirate,
'*We're bound for South Australia!*'

'At last. I can return,'
she sighs, loudly, dramatically.

But I can't take it in.
This sudden news.
The idea of being
wrenched
from all I know.

My head's in a spin,
what with her
acting like some deranged teen,
dancing and singing still.

§

Alone in my bedroom
I'm speaking in my head.

You can't expect me,
I tell an imagined her

as I stare, blank-eyed
at my sky-blue ceiling,
to leave Tyson behind.

*He's my future,
a twin path,
— him and me.*

*Even if you think we're too young
to be all that serious,
weren't you just eighteen
when you had me
and were married?*

*I know sixteen doesn't sound like much
but I've practically run this place
and Tyson's already eighteen.
So you're forcing the issue a bit,
telling me I have to leave.
You can't really expect me
to come too, can you?*

Anger helps.
I slide out from my bed
pull my overcoat
over my pjs,
slip from my room
out of this quiet place
that belongs to Paulette.



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

I'm already in bed
nearly asleep
when Mum creaks the door open.

'She's in a real state, luvvy,
I knew you wouldn't mind
me bringing her in.'

Mads says, 'Ta, Mrs Penwith,'
then snuffles over to me.

I tuck my arm round her shoulder
where she curls into a tight ball,
squeezing with me onto the bottom bunk
while above us Alex snores.

Mum hovers for a bit
then whispers she'll bring us up
cups of tea.

In my arms
Mads is coiled tight as a spring,
jabbering in a rush,
like white noise from a tube wave.

'Ginn thinks I'm malleable,
like metal that's tough

but when you want it to bend
you can turn it,
break it, if you need.
And I'm not going.
I'm just not.
No way.
I'm sticking put,
staying here.'

A ball of boiling anger
bubbles up into my guts
when she tells me
she's leaving,
soon as her mother can.

For where? Some skanked-up
arse-end of the earth.
Not coming away with me
on holiday.

Mads' tears soak in,
wetting my t-shirt,
my own eyes twitching,
itching with a black rage
at how *she* could be telling *me*
she'll be leaving
without me.

More importantly,
I yell in anger
inside my head,
without asking
if
you can go.

§

Mum tiptoes into the room,
looks up from the tea tray
and in the glow,
yellow night-lit room
our eyes meet,
but we don't say
anything.



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

Mr Penwith drives me home,
late, through the lamp-lit streets
water whooshing as the wheels
slip over wet black tarmac.

‘I’ve heard it’s pretty good
down there. “Heaps good”.’

I can tell
he’s trying to be jolly.

‘I thought that ad campaign was great.
You know the one on the teev,
“Bugger off from Britain”?’

I shake my head
too weary to care much.

‘*That’s* about South Australia.
Looks more refined than Sydney
and none of those poisonous jellyfish
they have up there in Queensland.’

Oblivious of the fact
it’s nearly midnight,
I’m going home in disgrace,
and don’t want to talk

anyway, he adds,
'My brother went there,
you know?'

'Queensland?' It's so late
my brain is addled.

'Na, South Aussie.
He's a bobby.
A whole lot of his West Country force
took a punt, and migrated.'

As we pull into the hill road
to my place, he turns to me,
'I've been meaning to go visit.
Margaret would adore it
but who knows when.
You could drop in,
say hello to my brother.
He's got a nice girl around your age.'

Glinting light through the rain
on the car's windscreen
shows his face, full of hope.

I nod, 'I'll look them up, then,'
I say, lying through my teeth.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

‘Us lads’ll be late,’ I tell Mum.
It’s the last chance for a drink
before Saturday’s match
when the entire Peninsula will be here
seeing if the Turks can somehow win,
snatch victory in the face of defeat
or some scenario like that.

I’m writing scripts in my head
for how to make footy fashionable
maybe in opera, or dance,
some update from Richardson’s *The Club*.

‘Don’t be too late.’
Mum says it precise
as a shopping list request.
‘Or I’ll get lonely.
Your dad’s out meeting those
developers tonight.’
She pats me on my arm.

‘If you see Frances,
tell her my snapdragons are out.’

‘Okay, Mum.
She’ll be happy to hear.’
I fudge the truth to make her happy.

As if I'd actually tell my girlfriend
my mother's latest
gardening news.

§

After final footy training
I'm at The Shaft's front bar
with a Coopers Ale in hand,
and while Foxie serves mixed grills
to diners in the lounge
she brushes past,
whispers she wants to meet me
out the back
where the drive-thru used to be.

I down the cold beer,
nod to the lads
on the way through,
take a slash in the Gents
then head outside,
lean against the stone wall
waiting, feeling the cool night soak in —
where all around is black and silent,
stars splattered across the sky above.

Foxie slides out the door
and her perfume swamps me,
so musk it nearly makes me gag,
but she leans into my chest, warm and real
and I'm beginning to settle
when she pipes up.

‘So, your dad was here earlier
with those new developers.’

‘What, the Irish ones?’

Foxie’s *Yup* is smothered
when she nips the back of my neck.

‘We could put our name down
for a block, you know.’

I freeze in surprise
but she’s on a roll.

‘When you start working
full-time at the shop
we should be able to get a mortgage.
Your folks’ll help out.
We could build a house
in the new development.
Move in together,
get real cosy.’

She lifts her leg around my hip
pushes hard against me.
Blood rushes in my ears
but it’s ice-block cold
not running molten lava,
like it can do,
and I want to shrug her off,
force myself to sound calm.

‘Your dad’ll go berserk
if he catches us out here,’ I say.
‘Better get back inside.’

‘Well,’ she adds, spiking up
her dark streaked hair,
‘I thought the same of your dad
if your mum saw him with that developer.
She looked kinda powerful, y’know?
A real swish sexy thing.’



MADDY

St Ives, Cornwall

In a last-ditch effort
I phone Paulette,
plead with her for us to stay
in our house (her house),
but she hangs up on me,
uptight to the end.

So I go visit Mrs Penwith
while Tyson's out surfing,
beg her to take me in.

'Luvvy, you're really needed
looking after your poor mother,
what with Richard gone and all.
It's not like it's the end.
I'm sure summat'll get sorted.'

So it's another *No*
and I'm stuck
walking home with nothing
but cat food to pick up
from Tesco's,
eat crackers myself,
decide not to cook dinner
for Ginn,
who can go starve
for all I care.

§

When I get home
Ginn tells me
with Dad's insurance money
she's gone and bought
two one-way tickets
out of here.

Dad! I bellow inside my head.
Why'd ya leave me
to this?

I think I'm still too angry with him
to admit to myself
he's never coming home.

§

Who'd think
the distracted painter
would be so focussed
on something other than her art?

I can't believe how quickly
she wraps up all the deals —
our household stuff to Oxfam,
her art materials boxed and sent.

On my last day of school
the gang ribs me mercilessly,
taunting me with the old song:
I Come from the Land Down Under.
Can the lyrics truly say

women groan or men chunder
and just how gross is that?

How can I forgive them,
these so-called friends of mine?
Tiksha and Joolz, fair enough,
who think it won't last,
that my mother's so daft and flighty,
we'll soon be back.

But Tyson, my one and only boyfriend,
who calls me his own true luvver?
He's joining with them making fun
and that's hard to forgive.
Such distance between us now,
just when I need him close.

To have come to this — destined
to disappear forever.

'Hey, you might get a spot on *Neighbours*,'
says Joolz, striking a dramatic pose.
'You could send us some autographs.'

As if they don't get it —
I'll be going,
going,
gone.
Away from all this —
never
to return.

§

On my last day in St Ives
Tyson's mother cries,
struggles to speak,
finally tells me,
'Don't mind about the cats.
We'll take good care.'

My father and his cats...
Perhaps he thought of Mum and me
as pets he could indulge too.
He loved those cats
the bedraggled waifs
brought home and cossetted,
Ben and Barbara,
named with his sense of the absurd
after St Ives' most famous artists.
The very pets the Penwith family
are adopting.

So all at once
I have to farewell
the memory of my father,
my boyfriend and his family,
the only house I've ever known,
my school, best friends, and
even the cats,
damned cats.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Mum's the one with the money
inherited from her folks.
Our house here in Moonta
in her name only,
where sometimes I wonder
how I got to keep Dad's surname.
He's always said she's the landed gentry —
fourth generation shopkeeper royalty,
like on the town library plaque
and the big sign near the Bay,
of our very own business,
Trenerry's Building Supplies,
that Dad runs
— and is my foregone destiny.

§

The next night when I'm studying
at the kitchen table
he comes home,
looking jumpy or something,
thinking he'll entertain himself,
I reckon,
baiting me again.

'What've you done with yourself?
Today like every other, eh?'

His tone is tricky
and the question's loaded.

I shake my head
to unfuzz my brain.
'Played my guitar,
took Plonk for a walk down Port Hughes
and studied,' I say,
pointing to my books,
'as usual.'

I challenge him with a look
to complain about that.

'The dog needs walking. Sure.
But I expected you
to come to work.'

'It's only the start of holidays.
Last break, then nearly Year 12 exams.
I have to study, Dad.
So, aside from helping out
occasionally
it's not time to start proper work yet.'

His fat-handsome face is set at bland
but I can see criticism stretched
in the corners of his mouth.

'Plus there's the match,' I add,
hoping to be cut a little slack.
'Young Turks made it to the Grand Final.
Remember?'

Then he's shifting gears
into overdrive.
'I'm a wake-up to you, lad.
You should be pulling your weight.
I need you to take some responsibility
so I can concentrate on the important stuff.'

*Yeah, right, I think,
brain gone fuzzy again,
and what's that then?*



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

They let me drive them to Heathrow
in Dad's car. Then, after they're through
I lean against the plate glass
until the last, as her plane taxis
tail first from Heathrow's longest runway,
out from Terminal 2.

Then I get the text from Joolz saying
her sister's boyfriend's interested
in coming for a surf,
and could I show him how?

I'm almost numb
from letting go.
Half of myself
gone with Mads.
Of not saying good-bye,
not even, *A bientôt*
like Mads instructed me to —
not *Farewell*, but *Till we meet again*.

So, what might help right now
is the water
and the waves.

PART 2



MADDY

in transit

On the eighteen-hour flight
Mum starts coughing
and her face is flushing red.

‘You okay?’ I ask.
She just nods.

‘Try and get some sleep,’ I tell her.
‘You look exhausted.’

She nods again,
closes her eyes
and is away.

My eyes stay fixed open
immabe they’ll never close.

§

But of course they do.
I slept in a fitful scrunch,
even asleep, have avoided
resting on my mother —
her shoulder no comfort
I want to take right now.

I dreamt the witch,

who was cackling at me,
chasing me.

Actually, no.
I tell that story
to myself, playing
some complicated fairy-book victim,
willing myself into the dark forest
not waiting for any sun-filled
antipodean happy ending.

What I really dream
is hazy, but it leaves me
waking, with a half-remembered song,
the idea of stones
and a strange smell in the air.

§

The plane begins descent
after forever in transit,
flying across such distances.
I can't believe the patchwork
of a country
so brown and wide.
Hours and hours over land
with absolutely no sign
of habitation
or greenery.
Ridge after ridge of red —
like sand dunes, of dust or dirt.
Then, finally, low over a city
that crouches by the coast,
onboard screen showing

gulf waters only,
no endless ocean
like in the TV shows,
but the water blue and clear
nevertheless.

Outside the airport terminal,
tiny compared to what I know,
the heat hits,
is astounding.

‘Only thirty degrees, mate,’
the taxi driver says. ‘It’s spring.’
‘You ain’t seen a bloody thing yet.’

Thirty degrees! Near a hundred,
I calculate,
in Fahrenheit.

He drives with his arm
out the window,
an open furnace blasting in.
I turn to stare down Ginn,
register my disapproval.

She sits like the Dalai Lama
supremely happy.
‘We’re back,’ she says.
‘Finally.
Isn’t that good?’

If I could have smacked
the smile off her face
I would’ve.

§

Without a day's grace
on the outskirts of the city
Ginn buys a second-hand car,
a Vectra by Vauxhall,
here called a Holden,
stows our bags in the boot
then sets off on a crazy drive.

'You'll see where I'm from,' she says,
and I'm sure she must have a temperature
and her coughing's getting worse.

But this is another mother talking here,
not the one I'd known down all the years.

'This is the route that edges
the whole continent.'
She marvels,
'It's dual-laned now.'

For all that, it's a lonely highway,
aside from a few stacked lorries
white-faced sheep, stinky on the wind.
Nothing like the packed motorways,
streaming traffic, or green fields and verges
back home.

At an outpost town, Port Wakefield,
she calls, 'Pit stop!'
insists on honey ice-creams.

From there on, the narrower road
is empty.

Late afternoon sun
starts sinking in a direction
that feels all wrong,
blinding us as we wind up
the low-strung hills
Ginn calls the Hummocks.

‘Tail of the Flinders Ranges,’
she tells me. This tour guide guiding
me, reluctant traveller,
with zip interest in the place.

‘Shouldn’t you Google the way?’
I’m hoping to catch her out.

‘No need and no coverage.
Next is Kulpara,
Paskeville, then Kadina.
Our journey’s end North Yelta,
Moonta, and the bays.’

It’s like she’s a whirling dervish —
there’s nothing I can say
to stop whatever she is doing
but wait it out
till it settles down.

Then, check out
the lie of the land.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

As the whistle blows —
I think how much I want to win,
prove myself to my father
so he can see
just what I'm made of.

That the season has come to this —
the last match a grudge,
and Moonta lads
hardier, I figure,
than the Eastern Farmers.

And it's off in the centre,
me sending the ball flying
straight to Flathead,
the winger booting it good
to forward, Butcher,
then punching it on.

Sam taking a mark
in the goal square,
finessing it through
to a first score.

Those first six points
the clincher, really —
never looking back

but barrelling forward.
Each of the four quarters
to a solid enough win:
ten goals, ten behinds
to seven goals, fourteen points.

And I'm carried off the field
when the final siren blares,
holding the cup high.

§

I won't complain about growing up
in a country town.

I reckon
I've had more freedom here
than any city slickers,
until now —
league final's won
and all my mates
heading off to family farms
or on the big boats,
real fishermen now.

And my dream
of more study —
something in theatre?
or somewhere else
(who knows?) is over —
well, nearly.

As long as I pretend to myself
it's still holidays
and put off the evil day
of stepping into overalls,
strapping myself into business



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

We dawdle through
a roadside village surrounded
by the unmistakable signs of old mining,
a bit like back home,
with the skimp heaps of earth.
Halfway through Ginn slows,
'Cross Roads. Train track's gone, see?
By the church.
Oh, not a church anymore.'

Then her silence gets weird
like a stillness floating down
soft as shaking out a duvet.

'They're called shacks here, but
these're really miners' cottages.'

Then she points,
'Like that one.'

'Looks derelict now,' I say,
voice as bored as I can make it
to mask my misery.
'Manky garden.'

Ginn puts her foot down
and we rocket away.

§

At the entrance
to the next
near-ghost town
a weathered sign reads:
*Welcome to Australia's
Little Cornwall.*

I can't help it,
like hysteria
can't stop
but I laugh and laugh.
Then I notice
Mum's coughing's really bad
and her hands holding the steering wheel
are burning bright as coals.

'What now?' I ask her.

She gives me a funny look.
'Go claim my inheritance, of course.
The solicitor's in George Street.
That's the main street here.'

But when we find the right building
in this one-horse hoedown town
a notice in the window says:
Appointments — Thursdays and Fridays
and it's only Monday.

Ginn slumps over the wheel
and I realise she's too unwell
to drive the two hours' journey
back to Adelaide.

'Mum, listen to me.
We've got to find somewhere to stay.'

She mumbles through her hair,
'The witch's place, North Yelta.
It's mine now, anyway.'

She lifts her eyes to the road
starts up the car again.

The derelict cottage?
She's fricken kidding, right?
We haven't come all the way
across the universe
away from all we know,
from not even staying close in Cornwall,
or saying a proper goodbye
to my dad
for this,
have we?



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

*I've made friends
with your cats.*

*I like Ben better than Barbara
he's more of a smooch —
prefers my lap to Alex's,
while we watch the teev.
Or when I sit alone
in our room.*

*Mum says Barbara's the real lady,
nothing like the sculptor
she was named after.*

*So I searched Barbara Hepworth
and Ben Nicholson, and remembered
your mum used to tell us
we should go for a date
to their garden, you know the one,
that's now a part of the Tate.
Mebbe I'll go some weekend.*

*I'm missing you, pussycat
me luvver
and wish I'd been, like, kinder
when you left.*

*I just felt
so unready.
Should have scratched you
behind your ears.
You'd like that
wouldn't you?*



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

I'm waiting in the dark
outside the hotel
with the noise of metal beer barrels
rolled from the delivery truck
down the side to the basement
under the splintering wood hatch.
There's the sour smell of hops and barley
ground into hotel flagstones,
probably here since settlement.

Tonight the local councillors
are having a pow-wow.
In the dining room
Foxie's serving schnitzels
where the new developers
are meeting them,
aiming for concessions.

When the door swings
I think it's my girlfriend,
but it's a slight woman
clicking out in the highest stilettos
this town's ever seen.

She leans against the wall
next to me.

‘I’ve come outside for a fag.’
She speaks like she’s a conspirator.
‘We’re not ejected from premises
back home like that, ya know.’

Her skirt is pencil thin
and she unbuttons her tight jacket
revealing a low-cut top
and even in this poor light
I see the shadow
of a gorgeous cleavage.

‘I can tell you, those fellows in there,
they’re no eejits,’ she says
her words spoken in such a lilt
I could swoon.
‘We can do good business here,
oy, jimmy-boy?’

She twists her foot,
grinds the butt under her shoe,
winks, and is gone.

I drink in
the departing scent of her.



FOXIE

Moonta, South Australia

When I sniff the air
it's as easy as putting two
and two together, working out
who was just then outside
with my boy.

A knife twists in my guts
thinking how seductive was the woman
who might have been here,
alone with him.

'Owey!' I snap my boyfriend
to attention, away from that
day-dreamy look on his face
I recognise
and want to squash.

'Bloody Irish,' I say,
knowing the party they're having inside
means I'll be working late.

'Give us a quick cuddle,' I say.
'You'd better head home.
I won't be off early tonight,
by the look of it.'

And my heart pangs at the thought
of me stuck here
with my old man,
slaving me away.

I see Owey safely off
out the way of any future
potential distraction
of the Irish kind
and make my way back inside,

cigarette smoke still hanging
in my head.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Back home I can tell something's up.
I could slice the silence
between Mum and Dad.
Mum looks like she's stopped mid-sentence
saying something to my father.

He spits out, taking no notice of me,
'I'm too good for all this,'
turns, sees me,
gathers his wits fast enough,
and takes the usual, easy option
of twisting the attack on me.

'Helen, you molly-coddle him.'
His voice is snaky as Mum puts out
Milo and a slice of fruitcake
on the kitchen table in front of me.

'He's a growing boy, David.
Don't you remember?
How different were you
at his age? Not one bit.'

But he's left the room by the time
she adds, in a little voice,
'I remember you then.
A big baby you were.'

She gathers a smile to her face
and her eyes soften, watching me eat.

‘Not like you, Owen. My own true one.
You make everything worthwhile.
I’d be lost without you home, with me.’

§

I remember my father used to say
Mum was the one and only.
His story runs — how she chose him
at the Civic Town Hall dance —
her, ‘old’ at nineteen years of age,
him a full two years younger.

Younger than me now
and I can’t imagine it.
Or him claiming
he’d never been kissed
till then.
But I dunno.
Mum’s had his measure
I suppose, and
from what I can tell
kept him on a rein.
He’s always had a sort of effect.
I’ve seen how women
waggle themselves at him.
Even Foxie —
something I can’t stand.



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

It feels freakish
to be breaking and entering.
Mum drove the back road
up Muddy Lane
(They've paved it?!)
to a backyard iron bedstead
forming half a broken gate.

I tell Mum to rest in the car.
'Key's usually under the rock
next to the rainwater tank,' she manages.
It's an effort for her just to talk.

Now I have the large old-fashioned key
like from a Grimms' tale,
ghost or horror story.

Dusk's fallen and the sky's pink,
dogs are barking
the sound of chickens roosting,
geese in the distance,
and a smell in the air that's sharp,
like dust and chemicals.

I twist the monster in the brass lock
and it turns reluctantly,
thunking a final clunk to unlock.

The low wooden door
scrapes over flagstones
and I squeal
as a bird flutters out
past my hair.
Musty air is overlaid with other
awful smells — mice?

It looks like the back enters straight
into a little laundry, then
there's a break before a tiny kitchen
I have to duck my head to enter.
To the right there are two bedrooms
and two reception rooms with fireplaces
sooty-dusty, their last fires unswept.
But there are mattresses on the beds
and when I open the creaking wardrobe door
I find satin quilts, woollen blankets,
threadbare sheets and feather pillows.
I sneeze as I fluff them out.
They'll do, I think.
I can bring my sick mother inside.

§

I can't find a toilet,
so I whisper to Ginn, 'Where's the loo?'
but she's nearly asleep
in the front room bed I've made.

'Outside,' she says, as if I should know
or remember those choice details,
fables from her childhood.

Now it's dark and cold
of course there's no power
and who thought of bringing a torch?

I root around the back of the car
— no luck,
but in the kitchen I find matches,
can light a candle stub, waxed to a saucer
set by the wood stove.

She instructed,
*Turn on the water meter, too
near the front gate by the tap.*

Great, I think. A fricken time warp.
Find it, wrench it, till it starts to tick.

I hear a car on the road and it takes an age
— never have I heard the distance so clearly
coming towards then drawing past.

I stand alone as the night-silence engulfs me,
decide to wee by the water tank instead,
not brave the lone walk to the longdrop,
not until I can see if there are spiders, snakes
or any other blasted Aussie beasties,
out to get me.

§

The growling pit
of my stomach reminds me I have to eat,
that the last thing was honey ice-cream
a lifetime ago for lunch.

There's nothing for it but to hunt around,
scavenge in the kitchen dresser
where I find a tin of Heinz baked beans
and a tube of Nestlé squeezable coffee.

When I try to light the wood fire stove
I wish I'd joined Girl Guides
but there's some yellowing newspaper
twigs and sticks, all set to light up
and it's not too hard to get it going —
find an enamel pot, curl the can's ring-pull,
slot out the beans.

I turn the groaning faucet,
run rusty water till it's clear,
then the kettle heats,
shrieking when it boils.

So I quickly pull the whistle off,
hoping it won't wake my mum,
fill a mug, warm my hands,
gloomy in this candlelit hovel.

The place where I've learnt the witch lived
and where my mother was a baby.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Foxie fronts up to the shop
puts on her biggest smile
for my father
who's always eyed her off
in a way I don't appreciate.
Like, he's the same age as her father —
they even went to school together.

Her shift at the pub isn't for a while
and she wants an early lunch
at the new café.
'Gotta get these holidays sorted,
Mr Chenoweth!' she waggles to my dad.

'You know, I told you,
just call me David.'

Foxie giggles.
When she tries to take my hand
as we walk round the corner
I first of all shake it off
then let her, after all.

'It's a beautiful day, Owey, isn't it?
Let's go down the jetty tonight, so?'

She enjoys fishing, like Dad,
and I don't mind sometimes
going out with the old man
on his fancy tinny,
but the thought of sitting
out alone with Foxie,
like a married couple already,
means the air and the night sky
won't be open and free
but closed and heavy,
oppressing me.

I think of the fish, the bait, and the hooks.
Go on, Foxie, reel me in, I think,
dreading the consequences.



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

Me luvver

I can't bear it without you, babe.

Why'd you ever go?

I stare into my last lager
at the pub at closing time,
imagine myself
singing a song
to my girl,
my faraway bird,
the one I let slip,
fly off,
and away.

*Want to write to you each night,
but can't. 'Cos the ache's getting worse,
the longer you're gone.*

Joolz says she knows I need her help.

And my voice feels like it's growing weak.

*Mum says it's a crying shame
and she says it every day —
your mum and you leaving,
so quick there was no time,
never getting used to it.*

Can you hear me cry?



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Flathead's taken a job on the trawler.
I didn't know that's what he wanted —
he spoke of nothing but music at school.
But his uncle works on
Port Lincoln tuna boats,
so I sort of knew the family connection.

When I walked the dog on the jetty today
I saw him. In his big rubber boots
right past his knees,
waterproof bib'n'braces and a beanie,
laughing with the crew.
I tugged Plonk to heel beside me.

'Owey, ol' mate,' he said,
smile cracking his face wide,
'I've been thinking of you.
Heard about your dad,
wondered how you'd take it.'

Dad? His boat? The business?
It didn't make sense.
Flathead passed on by,
a rueful glance
back over his shoulder.



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

I realise in the morning
I'll have to go find a doctor.
That I won't be able to drive,
obviously,
but the old-fashioned bicycle
I find in the shed
should do the trick.

The ride's only about a mile
down a slight hill
past old mine workings
where a mini train toots beside me
round to a fancy railway station
that looks like a tourist stop.

A black and white flash swoops,
dive-bombs my head,
and I nearly skid off the bike
on the slippery roadside stones.

George Street is busier today
and I stand outside the lawyer's shut shop
wondering where to go
to find medical help,
when from behind, someone speaks.

‘You lost?’ There’s a big wide-open smile
and blond curls flopping over blue eyes.

‘Whatcha, I need a doctor.
My mum’s really not well.’

‘Funny accent,’ he says, cocking an eyebrow,
‘You sound like some pommy farmer.’

Mebbe he sees my desperation.
He says, no teasing now,
‘You’d better come with me’,
wheels my bike
across the road and up to the next street
then around the corner,
opens a door and calls out down the hall.

He tells me, ‘Dr Singh’ll see you right.
She’s good with home visits.
Where’re you staying?’

Before I realise it I say,
‘The witch’s house’.
I add, ‘North Yelta’,
feeling like a daft twat.

‘You’re joking, yeah?’

I’m embarrassed as all hell
and bang go any credentials.
I scurry to recover any dignity.

‘I’m not taking the mickey or anything,
that’s just what Ginn calls the place.’

‘I can give you and your bike a lift back,’
he says, awkward as a stand-up comic
who’s unexpectedly developed stage fright.

He leads me back to the main street,
then back one to a parked work vehicle.

‘The ute’s my dad’s.
I’m doing some work for him.’

‘Trenerry’s Building Supplies,’
I read aloud off its side.

‘Yeah, well, right,’ he replies,
closed-in, all of a sudden.

The drive back to the cottage
takes only minutes,
but when the stones crunch
under the wheels as the utility leaves,
I realise I forgot to ask his name.

‘Ginn,’ I tell my feverish mother
when I get in,
‘The doctor won’t be long.’



FOXIE

Moonta, South Australia

The bruises on my arm
have purpled from the black
by tomorrow they'll start
with haloes of yellow-gold
— I know the way they go.

How that pig of a man
who calls himself my loving father
is just a vicious thug
who
swipes
and grabs
and knocks and prods.

That end in these,
my private colours,
I can't ever show
to the girls at school,
or Owey,
who can never know.



MADDY

Moonta, South Australia

In the lawyer's office Thursday morning
Mr Butterworth is giving Ginn his opinion.
'Miners' cottages are considered special
by the National Trust,' he says,
'but they're hardly worth any money,
m'dear.'

Somehow, I got her up out of bed
to drive here, but only just.
She'll be back in bed, I reckon,
the minute we're back.

'Let me put it in Century 21's hands
so they can sell it for you.
Take the money and return to the UK.
There's nothing for you here.'

My mother sits up straight.
'No, we're already living in it.'

I cringe with humiliation
as she admits we're trespassing —
expect this lawyer to take us down,
tell us we're in breach of a zillion regulations.
But he just laughs.

‘Don’t s’pose much has been done, m’dear,’
he says when he’s recovered.
‘If I know Minnie and her ways,
there isn’t even an inside toilet.’

He brings his eyebrows together,
bushy as the thorny things
that line the road from North Yelta
into here — this great big township
that it isn’t.

The lawyer turns to me.
‘And I don’t s’pose you’re used to
such amenities, eh?’
He’s almost guffawing with glee,
I can imagine, thinking of me
facing that dreaded outhouse.

‘David Chenoweth’s branched out,
you know,
his sideline is home extensions and repairs —
plumbing and building.
He’s a fellow you might remember
and trust.’
Butterworth squints sideways at Ginn.
‘Or not.’

Mum goes white
and I worry she might pass out
— that it’s only day three of the antibiotics
and she’s still in the grip of severe bronchitis.

‘I’ll drop by and ask him, then?’
he barrels on regardless.

It sounds like he's teasing her,
as if it's a dare.

'Sure. Toilet, shower,
and plumb the bath,' she replies.
'That's all we'll need.'
She doesn't add,
as I bet she's already worked out
— *or can afford.*

§

In the small back bedroom
I can't get to sleep.
At least two miles from the gulf water
there's no waves to hear
or seagulls squawking,
only the silence, dense silence
of the starlit night outside.

Similar to Ginn's in the front room
I have a double bed to myself,
hers more ornate, with brass knobs and rails,
mine just golden curlicues
painted over the black metal.

Covering my six-pane window
is a curtain, threadbare,
looking as if it were once a dress.
If the wind blows in
it flutters, over toward the other wall
to a spiderweb over the jamb
of the tiniest door I've ever seen;
a storage space, Ginn says,

that she never entered
when this was her room.
I've seen a resident daddy longlegs —
but haven't the heart
to destroy his home.

So I do what I do so much now,
go over the sequence in my head
of the aftermath of Dad's death,
in my mind's eye,
again and again.

In preparation for the wake
Mrs Penwith had helped stack
the house full of food.

Ginn wasn't really into her
'I'm psycho-moving forward' phase
but was sloping around,
stooped and mute.

Tyson was tough. Only the year before
he'd cried at his grandfather's funeral —
at Dad's he let me wrap myself around him,
not let go.

I was all wrung out, felt like
I'd been abandoned.
Was angry Dad had done a runner —
off to the afterlife, leaving us
alone
to navigate this one.

That I'd have to act even older

than I already felt —
parent to the remaining parent
with all my back-up gone,
the fun gone,
carefree, silly family times
a thing of the past.
My only future
one of constant duty.

I keep going over the feelings
and though I know I'm at fault
by being selfish
I see things have changed,
they've gotten worse.

Then I'm back to feeling guilty,
thinking about me again.
Telling myself I'm not missing Dad,
when I really miss him so —
can't imagine
being so alone.

Not even one of his beloved cats
here on the bed beside
to comfort me.

§

There's no reprieve
from looking after Ginn
in this Godzone black hole.
However manic she got back in Cornwall,
she's sick and helpless now.

It's still me who gets the shopping,
does the cooking —
on some ancient black enamel stove
lit only with branches and leaves.

Now the washing's in a trough,
rubbing by hand, hanging out to dry
on a rope line propped up by an old branch.

In a heavy cane basket
I lug our week's clothing
as my mother sleeps, still sick.
That funny coppery smell
drifts on the air.

Idly, I look at the back of the cottage.
The lean-to laundry
with its back door,
then the back of the kitchen
with its thick rough stone chimney
caked with plaster, painted white,
like the rest of the ramshackle place.
Then, beside the kitchen
what looks like another room, I realise.

Mid-pegging, I put down the jeans
and walk around the house.
I haven't done this before,
only navigated
from inside.
My own back room
is tucked around the other side
beside this hidden room.
This other room sure looks bigger

by the shape of it
than just storage space.
But can be only be accessed, I figure,
via that little door,
lower than others in the house,
found specially in my room.
I promise myself
to check it out sometime.

§

On Friday
Ginn rouses enough
to insist I go visit the school
for the interview Butterworth arranged.

Your Future is in Our Hands
says the motto out the front of the place
that's as empty of any students
as it is of greenery —
a desert of a place, of dust,
gum trees, and spiky bushy things.

Inside the principal's office
I look at the hands of the woman
charged with booking me in.
She squeezes a tube of Nivea
as she speaks, rubs the cream
onto the back of her hands
while she talks, casual as anything
and they sure look weathered,
like everyone I've seen so far in Australia —
skin dry and wrinkly
like the yard,

like the weather,
drought-ridden and windy,
when I rode my bike in.

§

As I'm shown around the grounds
with netball courts — asphalted
and pot-holed —
I'm spooked at how much it feels,
however different it may look,
feels like St Ives School —
my proper school back home.
Not here.
Though, without any students yet,
who's to say?
Friends are what school's about,
aren't they?
Pains in my sides are aches
with specific names —
Tiksha, Joolz, Tyson — always Tyson.

'There's over a week to go yet
before start of last term,' says the principal.
'Instead, take it easy on your holidays.'

*Great, I think. It should be first
not last term of the year.*

And I know I'm lost
here in this effing sun and glare
with my mother gone odd,
still sick to boot,
and me stranded,
a creature from outer space.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Dad's setting me up for a job.
'First, I'll head off
and see the client in question, alone,'
he says, rubbing his hands together.

Foxie has come across the road
from The Shaft again,
seems to have a nose for when
I'm on deck in Trenergy's,
even when I haven't told her.

She is straining to work out
just whose place
Dad is talking about.
'You mean that new widow
who's moved into Minnie's place?'
She runs her hands through her hair,
smooths down her shirt.

'I heard all about her from Bob Butterworth
last night in the front bar.
He said she'd come back with a fortune.
That her husband represented
famous actors, you know?'

'She's worth a bit now, then, is she?'
Dad looks pleased.

‘Well, Owen,
I understand she needs new plumbing.
I’ll just go take a gecko
at what we might be needing.’

I lift my eyebrows at Foxie
as an expression of my dismay,
but she’s all serious,
helping my father choose
a bath and toilet cistern.

‘You don’t even know
what size the room is,’
I complain to them both.

‘Oh, I remember the place,’ Dad says.
‘Though it’s a long time since I was there.
A very long time, indeed.’



MADDY

Moonta, South Australia

After seeing round the school
I find a market, Drake's,
to pick up more supplies.

At least the power's back on in the cottage
and the ancient refrigerator
seems to be working.

Scanning the shelves for what I want
takes ages, and though there's food
I just don't know the brands
or what they have to offer.

At least the bike has a basket
and I can bring home Golden North milk,
Flinders Ranges free range eggs,
and thick-slice country bacon
to cook Mum up a meal
she should enjoy.

On my way out of town
I recognise from behind
the boy who gave me a lift.

He's walking down the street with a girl
half his height, dark hair
spiked up with cherry streaks

wearing stovepipe black jeans
and a long-sleeve shirt that's been cropped
especially, I bet, to show her lower back
tattoo — an anchor, swallow, and rose.

While I push the pedals hard
to get up the slight incline back
to the North Yelta cottage
I'm overtaken by the Trenerry's ute,
someone else driving.

§

When I get home
I dump the shopping
on the kitchen table,
tiptoe in to Mum's room
to see if she's awake yet
and find a man standing there,
watching her sleep.

'Whatcha doing?'
My whisper is harsh.
I'm too shocked to be scared,
just angry with this stranger
for entering uninvited.

'She okay?' he asks,
his startling blue eyes
crinkled in concern.

I motion for him to come out
and I stand in the laundry, shaking.

‘Bob, the lawyer, said to come.
That Ginny needed help.’
He eyes me up and down.
‘And you are...?’ he asks.

*Like, that’s not the question
I should be asking you,
you berk, I think.*

‘Oh, David, Chenoweth.
Of Trenergy’s,’ he adds,
reading my mind.
‘I parked out back,
off the back lane.’

‘Madeline Kitto. Daughter
of sick mother,’ I say,
wondering if he can also read
the sarcasm in my voice, or whether
he’ll just think my accent is odd,
like the boy who I now wonder
might be this man’s son.

‘I parked my bike out front.
From the main road.’

I think he finally gets I’m furious
and he cracks a winning smile.
‘Well, show me what you need,’
he says.

But his gaze still strays from me
to the front bedroom,
like he has to drag his face

round to mine
and concentrate.

Finally, he says,
‘Then I can quote
for the job.’



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

*You're not answering
your phone, or email. So I'll speak it
in my head, in bed, looking up to the lump
Alex makes in the bunk above.*

*Yo, I've been to that sculptor's place,
had a hell sick time as it's awesome!
Know I said I'd go alone,
imagined I'd drag around,
wishing you were there.*

*But Tiksha and Joolz came too,
said they were missing your smile
and Joolz said the gang didn't seem the same
without your organisation.*

We've been aimless, she said.

*I don't know, thinking mebbe
you'd magically appear —
be back here with us.
Joolz told me to get over it,
said we had to do things for ourselves
now you can't arrange it for us.*

I felt much better with them there.



FOXIE

Moonta, South Australia

Tonight
like usual
I count the beers
Dad pulls for himself.

Some bloke at the bar
from Adelaide
is showing off
and shouting extra rounds.

They think the jolly host
is being a bloody jolly blast.

Not.

When I find the whisky glass
half-filled
on the shelf behind the coasters

I know I'll have to watch myself:

try keeping out of reach
tonight.



OWEN

North Yelta, South Australia

The holidays end in tiling
and Dad was right, there isn't much
to the job at Minnie's,
once the plumbing's done.

Though of course I should be studying
it's something I don't mind doing,
grouting shiny white tiles,
dragging the old cottage into this century.
Especially bringing the dunny inside.

Crikey, it was a bit primitive
and the kitchen should be next.
It's like something from the museum.

I've been pretty much left to myself,
except when her mum's asleep
and the girl, Maddy, hangs around.
There's no one else to talk to
with Dad leaving me here
to finish the job.

And we start talking...



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

‘So your name’s Owen?’

I ask, and note how he blushes
as he slots a tile over the bath
and checks to see it’s straight.

There’s a silence
and I think how handsome he looks,
so tall and tanned and strong
and those blond curls flopping
into his eyes
all the time as he works.

We both speak at the same time —
‘What do you want to do
after this year?’ I’m saying.

‘What’s it like
over there?’ he’s asking.

We laugh together, too.

‘You first,’ I go.



OWEN

North Yelta, South Australia

I want to unburden myself
to this extraordinary girl
who's out of place here —
not just her voice,
plummy posh and farmer-yokel
all at the same time —
even the air she has
about her,
the way she's dressed,
all retro and modern at once.

I reckon when Foxie sees her haircut
she'll go wild and want to copy it.
Only, her fine hair's not gonna do that —
short bob long over her shoulders
swooping over her brow —
Maddy a more stylish number
than anyone from round here.

My urge is to spill the beans
about how I feel.

*Trapped, stuck
expected to enter the shop
never really
seeing the big wide world,
dreaming of study,
or just getting out of here.*

*Not stick around
like everybody else
their whole life mapped out
before it's even begun.*
Of course I don't say
anything important.

'Er, I dunno. Nothing. Anything.'

She gives a little snort
while I keep on fitting tiles.

What are the things I've done?
Been a kid, gone to school, played sport.
Best and Fairest last year,
team captain this.
Expectation of the family business.

'Your turn now.'
I want to take the focus off me,
switch it to her,
whose story will always be
more interesting than mine.

'So what's it like over there?' she repeats.
'Well, I thought I lived in a smallish place
till I came here!' She snorts again
but it sounds bitter, disappointed.

'I've got a boyfriend
called Tyson. He's a surfer
who's really good at it.
He builds his own boards
he might even start selling them and all.'

Her face has gone a bit soft
when I turn to look at her.

‘Heard you had a mansion,’ I say.
‘You must be in the money.
Why would you come out
to a dump like this?’
And I could kick myself,
meaning this town,
not Minnie’s home
that they’re living in now.

‘Who told you that?’
Her voice sounds tense.

‘My girlfriend,’ I reply. ‘Foxye.
Her father runs The Shaft Hotel.
You’ll see her at school on Monday.’

‘Great,’ she says. ‘That’s all I need.
Misinformation
before I’ve even begun.’



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

After he's gone
Ginn walks in, groggy,
admires the new-look bathroom
that's been carved off
the lean-to laundry.

'I need a walk,' she announces.

Out the window the dusk is tawny-gold —
best time of day here
I catch myself thinking.

'Quick, let's walk before the light goes.
It's like honey, dribbling over the land,'
says my mother, the artist in her rousing.
'Then I think I'll try painting it.'

'You must be feeling better.'
At last, some colour to her cheeks.

Mum leads me across the road
down a dirt road that trails into a track.
The sky is ablaze
orange streaks, then blue, hazing to green.
A crow caws overhead.
The air is cooling
and smells of acrid land.

Still the sky is changing.
To the east flushes pink,
clouds to violet.

‘Look, there, at the horizon!’ Ginn points
and a dob of creamy light thickens
into a rising moon.

Up and up it comes over the flat land
nothing like any other moon I’ve ever seen.
Ginn treads her way across the low bushes
out to flat pans of hardened earth
and I follow, picking up pebbles tinged green.

‘From the copper, Maddy.
That’s why they came —
the tin miners from Cornwall
all that time ago.’

The moon is now lifting higher,
lighting the view of the pans
scarred with mining debris.
Stars appear, but they don’t look right.

‘There’s the Southern Cross,’ she tells me,
‘Up there,’ she points.

Stars in a shape
I’ve never seen.

‘Whatever,’ I say. ‘Come on,
I wanna head back.’
This place so unfamiliar
I’m completely spooked.

Ginn stares off towards the west
where the sliver of sea
looks silver under the moon.

‘I’m hungry. Let’s eat.’
I tug at my mother to come.

She reluctantly turns.
A dog sets up a howl
and it’s suddenly so cold
I begin to shiver.

PART 3



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

The tasks of adolescence,
I thought I had them sorted,
all those stages of growth
you're meant to go through,
I'd sorted them.

Knew I was normal —
okay, my stick legs
and mud-blond hair bugged me and
I won't mention the knobbly knees,
but my body performed as much
as I reckoned it should
and I'd fallen in love with Tyson —
was a good enough girlfriend, I think,
and one to keep true.

Thought I understood
who I was —
my brain kept its temper,
at school I coped okay,
was good at Home Ec
and Business Studies
(no surprises there!)

And I'd worked out
my place in the scheme of things —
first it was going to be

helping Dad with his bookings
part-time, looking after Mum,
immabe moving Tyson in
for company in our home.

Then when Dad died,
with not much time
to get over the shock,
I'd imagined I'd be
Ginn's own art agent, or secretary.
Hadn't she always been
my responsibility?

Now, here, it's all changed.
She's got other things
on her mind.
Seems like she's in charge.
And I don't like it.

§

My biggest frustration
is trying to make contact
with Tyson.
My cell phone
isn't set for overseas
and there aren't any places
with internet I can find
to write.

In desperation I wangle
from Mum the money
to exchange at the Post Office
a bag of two dollar coins —

our Queen's head one side
the other an old Aborigine,
behind him that star constellation
not visible from home
only here, down bloody under,
and the money itself
stupid coins
smaller, thinner, lighter
than the satisfaction of pounds.
Whatever, I slot them into the machine
in the half-open booth
outside the pulled-up rails
at the Cross Roads public phone.

The time zone difference
means I've woken in the dark
skipped out first thing before breakfast
to catch the Penwiths
at their tea
with the teev blaring.
Tyson's brother Alex answers,
wanting an idle chat,
then his mother then his father,
finally Tyson, who asks me
down the line
to say hello to the cats.
Then he meows at me,
tells me he'll be scratching me,
right behind my ears.
It's bizarre, 'cos he's
not really listening
or giving me any chance to say
— anything —
and I go spare hearing

about the moves
Joolz is making,
Tiksha in on it, too.

Then it's over, the call,
while the flush of salmon
in the sky all around
announces dawn.
The verge-side weeds as I
trudge back to the cottage
crackle underfoot.

§

Growing up in an artistic household —
they're right what they say,
artistic temperament
gives licence to the famous ones
not to live as ordinary people do.

Mum was penny-pinching but zany,
afame when the paintings were coming —
full of fire and zeal,
housework could go whistle,
it was all about what *she* had to do.

Dad's business kept the cash flowing in
but even he knew when to keep clear,
whether or not he was keeper of good causes.

'I'm needed elsewhere,'
he would stage-whisper, winking,
slinking out the door.
He'd ring from London to chat,

ask how Mum's latest painting was going,
tell me about his days.

But it was all a bit long-distance for me
I was the one left on the ground.
Come too close to Mum
when she was working?
No fear.
And if we did, the arguments flew.
I can't remember about what.

I tended to make myself scarce,
snuggle down with Tyson on his couch
or walk to the top of the hill,
imagine the ferry
and the voyage to France.

Now she's out of bed and painting
it's happening again.
This time, I'm here alone —
no one coming
to my rescue.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

At lunch on the first day
of the last term ever of school
Foxie's dragging off my arm
telling me all about the new girl
and preparation for the Year 11 Formal.

'What's it to you?' I ask.
'We've been there, done that
last year.'

'Nah, s'part of my assessment
for the Cert II in Hospitality.
I'm on the committee.
Don't you listen to anything I tell you?'

Then she explains
how she's roping me in to play guitar
at the dance.

'Er... my exams?' I remind her.

She waves her hands.
'That's cool. You're smart. No problems.'

'Anyway,' she adds,
'you should see that new kid.
A real number with a ticket on herself.'

‘We’ve met already, Foxie.
I’ve been doing Minnie’s place.’
I catch myself before I add
Don’t you listen to anything I tell you?
but say aloud,
‘She seems really nice to me.’

Then my girlfriend shoots
a warning shot across my bow.
‘Oh, does she now?’
Foxie gouges her nails into my palm.
‘Then, after school
I’d better come home with you,
hadn’t I?’

§

After classes
Foxie hijacks me
on my way out the yard.

‘Really, no, I have to study. True.’
I pull my hand loose from her.

‘Honest, see you tomorrow.
Tell me about the concert then.’

She flounces off across the road,
catches up with her mates,
grimaces at me over her shoulder.

Then Maddy’s next to me
hopping off her bike.

Down the street Foxie turns again,
spots us talking.

I can feel the fish hooks
cast out
all the way.



MADDY

Moonta, South Australia

I complain to Owen —
my first day a real wash-out,
not knowing a soul or
getting even half what teachers
were on about.

‘But it’s an okay school,’
says Owen.

‘Yes, but it’s not *my* school
or *what* I know
or *where* I know,’ I tell him.

‘Back in Cornwall
I’ve, like, already finished Year 11,
so what a fricken’ waste
doing it all over again.’

‘Well, only the last term
of it,’ he mumbles.

I am wheeling my bike
while Owen walks
down the town’s main drag
of George Street
past all the little-village shops
and the Aussies walking in and out,
talking in their funny voices

— the only thing the same as home is
they speak like they've got
all the time in the world.
And it makes me mad,
so I push on, over the top,
to the one person
who's willing to talk to me
as if I'm normal, or real.

'Just because my mother
wants to be in this place
doesn't mean I do.
It's not fair of her
jumping up, lumping me here.
Any shop I go into,'
I gesture wildly
waving my arm around,
'the oldies I meet
remember her,
so she's got connections.
But I don't.'

I add in my mind
but don't say it aloud
in case it hurts Owen's feelings,
And I don't want any.

§

Owen takes a left
at the next intersection
and I follow him home
to a big place on a corner
up the town's slight hill —

a block twice the size
of others nearby.
It's an old house made of stone
with a veranda all around
and in the middle of this town
of spindly struggling stumps of trees
is a garden
someone obviously cares about.

A woman unbends from a shrub.
She pulls off her gardening gloves
and a dog bounds over.

'Er, this's my mum. And Plonk.
Mum, Maddy.
She's new at school.'

'Hello, Mrs Chenoweth,' I say,
rubbing the dog's head.
When I speak I see her look of surprise,
perhaps because my vowels aren't flat.

'So it's true,' she says.
'Ginny's come home to Minnie's,'
she pauses, 'with a daughter.'

'Sure, that's me awwright.'
Still holding my bike with one hand
I sweep the other into an exaggerated bow
then wonder if it'll be seen as rude,
but there's something in the way
she's looking at me
I don't like.

‘How old are you?’
She fires off the question.

‘Mum!’
I can tell Owen is surprised.

‘Seventeen, Christmas Day.’

Owen blushes while his mum
continues staring at me.

‘Maddy, I’ve got to study now,
I’d better go inside.
Seeya,’ he says,
leading the dog inside.

‘Seeya!’ I return,
in my first-go Aussie accent.

Owen laughs and Plonk barks,
but his mother isn’t smiling.

§

On my way back
pedalling hard the distance
between town and North Yelta,
it strikes me so suddenly
I have to hop off the bike
and sit down for a bit.

I’m under the shade of a tree
on the round pebbly stones
that slip under my shoes

with a view of the mine diggings
now tourist area
where the real old workings
look tidied up and linked
by a tiny train track.

It's a blasted landscape.
One, I've just realised,
I can leave behind.

Why didn't I think this before?
I slap my palm to my forehead.
Of course, I don't have to stay.
I can fly back home.
Somehow — beg, borrow or steal.
I'm old enough. Can get a job
somewhere in St Ives.
Even though it's off-season there now
and the tourists will've gone,
freezing-cold on the sleety streets,
I could find somewhere to stay.
Lodgings, maybe?
The thing'll be the money,
finding the fare back home.

Then I remember my mother
who's still recovering from being so ill,
and even when she gets better
can't look after herself.

Or, rather,
won't.



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

My brother must be growing up.
When I couldn't hold in
that stuff anymore,
I spluttered with it all.
Told him how confused I felt,
how sorry I was,
not keeping in touch with Mads
and the distance between us
both real, physical
and more than that —
missing her
but spending time instead with the girls.
How I felt like telling her, if I could,
Tiksha was out of order
and I'm not going out with her,
or Joolz for that matter
— just for the record —
but geez, she could be jealous.
I never realised.

Alex was chill. Said how much
he'd always admired her,
she was like a sister to him
one we'd never had.
How I should make it up somehow.
Be a better boyfriend
whatever the miles there were between us.

§

Then, something amazing happens —
all my years surfing at the academy
awesomely finally worth it —
I've scored the part-time job as instructor.
I think of all the times
I assisted the juniors —
it's like that on the water
you'd help others, whatever,
it's not always safe, I know.

Now I'm on my way —
they want me to compete,
sponsored by the shop
a ticket for the carnival
surfing the Great Australian Bight.
With the blessings of Mum and Dad
who says Uncle Pete'll help,
his brother who works near,
I traced it in the atlas.
Ponde on the Eyre Peninsula
back towards Moonta
on the Yorke Peninsula —
the place
where Mads can be found
and I can track her
down.



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

Did I remember dreams?
In St Ives I slept well —
early to bed, early to rise.
Well, not really,
but plummeting into
dreamless sleep
was what it felt.

How can that pattern
so dramatically have changed?

It's getting to the point
where I stay up late
willing myself
not to sleep.

The woman from the dream
who I now call the witch
is mostly there,
sometimes not.

So many brightly lit dreams!
As if I've uncovered
a different life, another world.

And the witch seems so insistent
that I learn something.

What is it
I need to know?

I don't want to know,
don't want to dream.
I daydream of not dreaming.

§

On Saturday Mum drives us to town
and we're walking down George Street
when it all overheats for me:
'You think I can be beaten
into whatever shape fits.'
My tone is as rough as the footpath.

'You just want me to be like that.'
I gesture to the copper pot collection
in the podiatrist's window.
'A receptacle for your plans.
But I'm my own self, you know.'

'I know.' She sighs.
'I'm learning that.'
She pulls at my elbow.

'Come on,
I'll buy us afternoon tea.
Look! They've even got scones.'

My heart rate slows from its pounding
by the time the food arrives
at Henry on George.

If I squint
I can almost imagine
I'm back in Cornwall,
a smaller village than my own
but back at where I am from.
This café the only modern corner
— even though there's no internet —
of a town small enough
to mean
nothing.

§

In Trenergy's
Mum's asking the shop assistant
how much she thinks it'll be
to line the cottage's stone shed
to be her new studio project.
Great, at least the paint and canvases
we brought from home
can be moved out of the tiny laundry
and front reception room.

Then I spot Owen
lurking in a corner,
head buried,
deep in a textbook.

I sneak up and pounce,
land my hands on his shoulders.
'Gotcha!'

I grin.
'Yo, can you tell me where

in this land-that-time-forgot
there's some place I can get my
cell phone looked at?
Y'know, it's driving me crazy.
I haven't even spoken to my boyfriend
— our only communication's
been on the school's computers.
Even then, I've hardly heard.'

After my monologue outburst
Owen's look is considered.
'There's a spot in Kadina
I can take you there this arvo,
when I've got deliveries.'

Righto, I think, progress.

'If you like, I can drive you round a bit,
show you the other parts
of the Copper Coast.'

I smile and nod.

Anything.

Anything.



OWEN

Copper Coast, South Australia

I'm a bit nervous
with Maddy in the ute's front seat
slumped and grim
not cheery like this morning
when she was in the shop.

'Your mum knows my dad
from the old days?'

'Apparently,' she answers.
'Y'know, he's round our place
all the time.
Now Ginn's doing a picture
with him in it.'

I think back how the atmosphere
changed in the shop
when Dad walked in.

I saw his frame stiffen
and a smile twitch onto his face.
Then his mobile rang
and I could hear from her voice in the air
it was the Irish woman,
though what business we have
with the developers
he didn't reveal.

As if he would
to me, anyway.

§

‘This is Wallaroo,’
I tell Maddy, who’s now more perky
after texting overseas.

‘The three towns form a triangle —
Moonta with its mines,
Kadina, central admin,
and Wallaroo’s wharf for shipping.

‘Now it’s grain from farmers,
not copper or gold like before.
And Moonta, which used to be busiest
just has the beaches, jetties, and the sea.’

‘This is bleeping sick!’
Maddy is amazed as I drive her around.
‘What’s going on?’

‘It’s Wallaroo’s new development
— houses on created marinas.’
Even before you reach
the Copper Cove Marina
you can tell
new-build development
is cashing in.

‘I’ll show you the sort of berth
my father would love
for his boat.’

She's looking around
the houses being built.
On every third block
stands a big house.
The ones Dad covets
hulk on Stately Way,
places so pretentious,
full of grandeur,
where each home
boasts its own mooring,
metal gangplanks leading down.

Maddy's gazing around,
like she's interested.
'Is that real grass?
It's so green,'
She's squinting
with her nose pushed
to the window pane.
'No way.'

Her voice,
her accent,
send shivers up my spine.

'It's fake!' She's incredulous.
'Why?'

'Er. The drought?
Basically, didn't rain
last summer. Not much
in winter, either.
Or year before.'

I turn my head to look at her.
'Haven't you heard
Australia's been in drought?'

'Every second place
has an artificial front lawn!'
She's laughing at me,
I think, and I'm embarrassed
all at once.

As I negotiate a dead-end u-turn
I pick up the courage to admit to her,
'This is where Dad wants to live,
then he could moor his big fishing boat
straight out the front
on its own private pontoon.'

I can almost hear Maddy's brain ticking over.
'These houses are massive, aren't they?
But a bit sterile. And the gardens
are nothing like your mum's.
What does she say about it?'

'Refuses. Point blank.' Out flow
what feel like family secrets.
'It's not the cost, she says
but her heritage,
how her family struggled
for generations
to make it where they are.
But that doesn't matter to Dad.
His parents were battlers,
never making good
like him.'

‘Crikey, mate,’ she says in a
mock Aussie accent.

‘Then you’re all bloody stuffed.’

I drive us round
then out of the contained development
along to North Beach
where without thinking
anything of it
I drive down the ramp
onto the beach.

Maddy squeals.

‘Oh,’ I act nonchalant.

‘Can’t you do that in England?’

‘I’m not from England
I’m from Cornwall.’

She sounds grumpy
so I pull over to a stop.

‘C’mon,’ I say,
‘let’s walk for a bit.’



MADDY

Wallaroo, South Australia

North Beach fish shacks
are a million miles away from
the Copper Cove development places
we drove around before.

Up on dead-end esplanades
they're decrepit and wind-blown.

Along the white sand
is a line of seaweed
and I pull up a handful,
fling it at Owen.

I have to squelch
into the heaps of weed
when he chases me
out along to the lapping waves
so I call a stop,
pull off my shoes
feel the sand between my toes.

That same familiar smell —
of salt and sea — of home.

Above all, the squawking of seagulls.

'Where is everybody?' I ask.

'Why aren't they here?'

And I think I truly mean it
when I marvel,

'It's so beautiful. But we're all alone.'

‘Well, apart from the bloody jetty
and the silo relentlessly pumping wheat
into whacking great ships,’ says Owen,
more than usually careful
in how he talks.

‘Ah, well, there is that, I suppose,’
I laugh,
splashing at the water’s edge.

Then Owen suggests we head
to the jetty
where there’s a café
and we can eat lunch,
drink real cappuccinos.

I can fortify myself
for the home run.



OWEN

Copper Coast, South Australia

On the drive back
Maddy's quiet. Happier, though
than the drive out.

I think of the Pot'o'Gold development
back between Moonta and Port Hughes,
where Foxie's most desperate longing
is to buy a plot of land with me,
build the house of her grandest desire
burrow in good, forever.

§

After church on Sunday
Mum invites Foxie for lunch.
Earlier, Dad said he couldn't stay,
left straight after breakfast,
shouldn't be expected back
till after dark.

I'm pretty keen to swot
the last few days of classes
cramming for exams
but it's a chance to talk
Formal talk —
what Foxie wants — this year's theme
and the music I'm gonna have to play.

‘Can’t it just be easy,
like last year?’
I plead to deaf ears.

But it’s being assessed for grades,
she explains to my mother,
so she can get her Cert II,
that’ll help her chances next year
for better paid full-time work
outside her father’s hotel.

She fingers her spiked-up hair
and I think once again
how she looks so pixie-like,
a sort of spiteful sprite
twisted full of restless energy,
that attracted me in the first place.

‘I’m the boss of the show, Owey.
In charge of it all.
I’ve themed it, “Ghosts of the Past”
D’ya like that?’

My mother concentrates
on serving the roast lamb.
‘You are a funny little thing, Frances.
Would you like me to dig out
that bonnet and apron again,
like you wore for the last
Kernewek Lowender?’

These women at the table,
forces to be reckoned with.

§

For the afternoon
Dad left instructions
for me to start more work at Minnie's —
this time beginning a new studio —
and I've brought Plonk
for company.

Lucky, 'cos when I get to the site
neither Maddy nor her mum
are anywhere to be seen.

I start unloading, anyhow,
whistling away
when a van
rattles into the front yard.

I put down the plasterboard,
walk round the side to investigate.
When I spot the surfboards on the roof racks
and the guy who's climbed
out of the Vee Dub Kombi speaks,
I get it.

'Is Mads here?' he asks,
same yokel-pommy farmer accent
Maddy has.

'You must be Tyson.'
I feel a stab of pleasure
to see his surprise.

I'm holding Plonk back
from slobbering on the guy.

‘She and her mum
aren’t here right now.’

His shoulders slump.
He speaks into the van
where a girl in the driver’s seat
leans out her freckle-tanned arm
and reaches down to Plonk
who stretches up on hind legs
to get his ears rubbed.
Then she pops her head out.

‘We can’t stop,’ she explains.
‘Gotta get to the West Coast
by first thing tomorrow.’

He looks worried.
‘Don’t tell her I’m here, awwright?
I wannit to be a surprise.’

He hops back in
and they clatter away,
tailpipe smoking.



MADDY

Moonta Mines, South Australia

We're out exploring,
fossicking around cottages of Moonta Mines
so Ginn can get ideas
— where the stones of the houses
are chunks of limestone,
not flat or nice,
and the soil's unforgiving.
A relentless wind is blowing
dust off the skimp heaps
and the sun burns down,
rusty sand whipping against my skin,
shredding it, hurting.

The sky so huge
you could fall into it
upside-down.

I feel like cowering beneath it
hoping for some clouds —
anything to shelter under.

'It's like the sky's going to eat me up
all open and wide,' I say.
'I'd rather be somewhere
with the comfort of walls and covering.
You know...' I feel I'm not making sense,
'where the sky was closer or something.'

‘See,’ says Ginn, ‘it’s the opposite for me.
I realise all those years in Cornwall
I longed for this great big clear blue space.’

She squeezes her eyes shut then opens them.
‘Back there I felt hemmed in, constrained,
captive, under a low sky.
I could’ve screamed.
Often, the feeling of containment,
of not being myself.’

‘But it’s different for me,’ I tell her,
shaking my head.
‘I wasn’t born here
and this place feels foreign,
like I don’t belong.’

§

Back at the cottage there’s a note
Owen has left in the back door
to say the work’s begun,
and an instruction for us
not to go into the shed
just yet.

I wish he’d written more
or was still here, so I could talk.
Instead, Ginn is in a flurry
of passion for her fresh conception —
something from today’s research
she wants to sketch right down, right now.

I'm scratching around in the kitchen
wondering what to make for our dinner
when out the window I see Trenerry's truck
pull up from the back lane in a cloud of dust
and I think, *Good, it'll be Owen back.*

But it's his father who leaps out,
calls 'Ginny!'
and she emerges from the laundry
smoothing down her painting smock,
her curly bronze hair flying
wildly about her face.

'Davy,' she mouths at him,
and I can't believe it
but he takes her in his arms
and kisses her.

§

All thoughts of cooking forgotten,
my blood is thumping
in my throat.
I bellow, 'Mum!
I need to find something for the Formal.
Okay if I scavenge around?'

Do whatever you want,
her standard answer,
but I register they've parted,
flustered and flushed,
at least, Ginn, not David Chenoweth
who grins like a wolf,
pleased he's caught himself a victim.

So I'm quivering,
wrenching at the knob
in the tiny door of my back bedroom,
time to open the secret chamber.

The wind's picked up even more,
and the roof iron is flapping,
the thick wavy window glass panes
loose in the wood, jangling
and when I prise the mechanism open
the door pushes in.

A waft of dusky, musty air
hits me, like the memory
of all things past.

§

I have goosebumps
as the dream of old
that's haunted me
jingles up my spine.
Wooden steps lead down,
into the complete dark.
I grope the roughcast wall
but no light switch here.

So I have to return to the kitchen,
strike a match to flame the candlewick,
pluck up the courage
to go back down
into the cellar.

Cobwebs are thick
though nothing seems to be moving
and I'm the sole living thing
down here.
Seven treads only
to the dirt floor
and the tin trunk
jammed against foundations —
its lock I break,
creaking open the lid.

§

On top of a pile of folded linen
an envelope addressed
in shaky, old-fashioned writing:

To My Dearest Ginnifer

but I won't give it to her
not while she's so hot to trot —
let her paint her paint,
make doe eyes at Owen's dad.

I mean, how long
has my father been gone?
It makes me puke.

So I drag out some clothes
from the neat stacked piles,
tuck the letter
into their folds.

PART 4



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

Mum comes in to find me staring
at the newspaper on the kitchen table,
open at a double-page spread,
an advertising feature
about how it isn't too late to apply
and country applications
are most welcome.

She sees, I think,
the look of longing
— or desperation —
left in my eyes,
not extinguished.

She takes the paper to the phone,
rings right there and then,
finds out what we have to do
and books me in.

'Why shouldn't you apply?'
she says, standing tall.
'Don't talk about it much,
but I had what it took
to go to university
all those years ago.'

She looks down at the paper.
‘That’s not what girls did in those days.
But I won’t have him stopping you.
You study hard, Owen, I know you do,
as well as keeping up your sport.
I’m really proud of you
and want to do what’s right.’

She hugs me and I’m surprised —
it’s not often she shows
any such physical affection.

§

We’re at the Formal rehearsal
and Foxie’s sorting out the score
in the marquee
erected in the Mines Museum carpark.
But she’s acting very peculiar.

‘Your father told me
you’ve been doing more work
— at Minnie’s,’ she says,
cornering me on stage
next to the flapping canvas.

‘What of it?’ I say,
holding my breath.

‘With that girl.
That’s where you were
the other day, too,
when I thought you said
homework.’

She says it like I'm the devil
enacting evil rites.

'Then I heard from the girls
you were spotted.
In Wallaroo.
Having lunch together at
Jetty Road Bakehouse!'

'Everyone has to eat,' I shrug.
'It was just pasties.'
But I should have known better
what was coming.

She backs me right up against the tent
she slides her hand over my hips
over my backside
pinching my cheeks,
her breath warm and musk
and her breasts,
nipples erect,
scratching into my chest.

'You don't want to go mucking around
wrecking any chances we have,
do you, Owey?'

My body is responding,
as usual,
whether I like it
or not.

'Foxye, don't take it that way.'

And I'm flooding
with hormones
on top of remorse
as I haven't yet told her
about applying to study,
or how I now have Mum on side,
with plans to be out of here
by next year.

'You're still my girlfriend,'
I manage, guilt pouring over me
like the tankard of Coopers Ale
at the end of the footy season.
I'm sweat-ridden,
drenched,
scared of facing her.

'Good,' she says.
'Because if I don't get my way
I might just get
very angry.'

§

Back at home
Maddy's waiting with her bike
propped at the corner before my place.

I usher her away
suggest a walk in the cemetery.

'My mother's a bit cracked
about your mother being back —
I heard her telling my father.'

I don't add
that it was a screaming fight:
my father thumping the table,
slamming the door,
driving away —

or that my girlfriend
would commit murder
if she saw us
together.



MADDY

Moonta, South Australia

I want to blurt out
about their kiss,
but as Owen guides me
zigzagging through rows —
broken marble headstones,
mended angels
and the little mounds,
a century old,
Unmarked graves of children,
he tells me,
I lose the courage to tell him.
Instead, feel crippled with guilt
even though it's my mother,
snogging his dad,
not me doing anything wrong.

I'm a bundle of miseries
and the cemetery seems a good place,
though almost too beautiful
despite the dirt and the flies,
just to see how hard
settling over here must have been —
how young some of the dead were,
how elaborate their memorials.

Owen guides a silent me
to the modern section

and together we see the name
on a new plaque,
a site freshly turned-over.

Millicent Jean Pardoe
Born January 1st 1937
Died May 11th 2012

In prime of her life, most suddenly
Sad tidings so near.
Lord pardon for the sorrow
Lord pardon for the tears
Unto the garden tomorrow
Belay thee all thy fears.

‘That’s Minnie,
your grandmother,’ says Owen.

When I look at him he adds,
‘She was pretty bitter
after your mum ran away.’

I’m stumped.
Pillock me who’s never
thought to ask my mother
how she came to the UK,
why she hated her own mum,
and never spoke of growing up here.

‘It’s like Minnie didn’t even exist
and I didn’t know I had another gran —
except in theory,’ I admit to Owen.
Perhaps one who might have liked me,
I wonder.

‘Minnie was pretty harsh.
Small, but she packed a punch.’

I look at Owen. ‘True?’

‘Oh, I don’t think real punches,
just at church, she was very...’
he searches for the word,
‘strict.’

‘Maybe that’s why Ginn’s fairly...
un-traditional,’ I add, then laugh.

‘But I think her karma
presented her with another hag
for a mother-in-law.’

I get a flash of Paulette, not small, of course
nor punching, but severe. Mean-spirited.

‘Minnie was okay,’ says Owen.

‘I liked her, and you know
I can see the family resemblance
with you.’

He smiles. Then adds,

‘But boy, did she hate my dad’s guts.’

‘Really?’ I say, politely
thinking, *I don’t wonder why* —
I’m still churning over their kiss
— the usurper who’s entered my life,
enticing my mother from the memory
of her own true husband.
And right now from me, too.

What I can't understand,
is how it's this guy's father —
that I should be yelling at him
but, however raw and open,
the wound of my mother's faithlessness,
I somehow don't blame Owen.

'Yeah, anyway,' he poses the mystery
natural-like, as if it wasn't odd,
'if you and your mum didn't know about it,
or pay any money for it,
when she died,
who put up the headstone?'



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

I see Maddy looking confused
and she's been so quiet,
so closed-in.

Suddenly, I don't want to be
in a graveyard
with this girl.

'Hey,' I suggest,
'so much for deep down
in the earth.

How 'bout I show you
the view from above?'

'What, round here?'
she seems incredulous.

'Follow me...' I put on a voice
like in a mysterious movie
late at night.

I go back for the car, then
drive us to Moonta Mines.

'There are the pits round here,' I say.
'And shafts. Be careful of them!'
I point, 'That's where
copper was first discovered.'

‘Poor ol’ shepherd Paddy Ryan
died of the drink.’

Maddy can’t believe
when I park beside the plaque
surrounded by hulking red heaps
that show the extent of diggings:
buildings, mines workings,
in the distance, Hughes Pump House
and to the right,
the Mines School.

‘That’s where our Formal
will be, isn’t it?’ asks Maddy.

‘Yeah,’ I say, ‘Foxie’s probably there
right now, fussing around.’

I take Maddy’s hand
and pull her up the skimp heap
with its wobbly tourist railings,
crumbling wooden steps.

On top of the hardened red
ground-up tailings,
the view is full-circle.
She marvels and spins around.
‘It’s like we’re on some other planet,
and that smell, it’s quite sharp.’

‘After they got copper from underground
these huge piles left
were given another going over.
Along with water pumped from the sea,’

‘they poured sulphuric acid down,
extracted a whole lot more metal.’

‘Cripes, this really is
environmental damage
that’s been left, isn’t it?’

‘Hmm, it’s called mining heritage,
now,’ and I’m thinking
for the first time,
*What must this look like
from the outside?*

‘Is that North Yelta there?’
Maddy is screwing up her face.
‘I think I can see the place.’

Then her face sets hard
and her mouth clamps.
‘Take me somewhere,’
she begs. ‘You know,
I haven’t had a swim yet
and this is Australia,
land of great surf, white beaches.’

We both stare at the water
glinting on the horizon.

I flick through ideas of where to take her.
It’s late afternoon so the wind’ll be up
and it won’t be so nice at the Bay
or even at South Beach,
the whitest, sandiest beach,
pristine sand hills, perfect for relaxing.

Sims Cove is the ideal spot.
Lots of steps down the cliff-face stairs,
but to a small sheltered bay.
It'll be the site of tomorrow night's
After-Formal party, at Sam's place,
and though there might be people there
setting up, like at the Mines Museum,
as long as Foxie's nowhere near
she won't see me there with Maddy.

*There's nothing to this
she should be jealous of,*

I tell myself.

*We're only friends,
outsiders who can talk.*

It's freedom, 'cos
we don't know each other
and likely never will.

'Got some bathers?' I ask,
suddenly embarrassed.

'Chillax!' She grins.
If no one's about we'll go starkers,
otherwise I'm sure knickers
and bras are fine.'
She points. 'You got boxers?'

I feel my face flame, but nod.

Yes, I say to myself.

Yes.



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

I sleep in
Saturday morning —
Mum must be painting
and the cottage is quiet.
I trace my hands over the wall
beside my iron bed.
Tyson, I think. Where's my Tyson?
Have I been forsaken?
It's been over a week since
only a scrappy email,
then no answers to my texts.
Has he so quickly forgotten me?

I think of back home, where
the weather will've changed,
would need real coats and scarves now,
not trainers, but boots,
woollen tights under uniform.
They'd be well into classes
for GCSEs.
This time last year
Dad was asking what I wanted
for my birthday, and for Christmas —
two presents always,
differently wrapped,
so I wouldn't feel left out of
all the other celebrations.

Tears prick at my lids
and I brush them away.
Think up something good,
I force myself. *Think of the swim.*

*Sun over the empty water
thrill of the first feel
stepping into lapping waves
past delicate seaweed
over tiny shells and sparkly grit...
I lower myself into the sea,
float, with arms out wide
looking up
red-yellow ochre of the cliffs
reflecting the light
of the setting sun.
Somewhere on the cliff top
I register students
readying for a party.*

Now, from the laundry
I hear the sounds of Ginn
washing out her paintbrushes.

*That's it, I decide.
Time to confront her.
Ask just what she thinks
she's doing.*

§

Ginn widens her eyes
as I stand in my Paddington Bear nightie
my hands on my hips.

‘Are you going to tell me
what’s going on?
Why you seem to care
so much about this
other man?’
*And not me,
or the memory of my father?*
echoes in my head.

She straightens up
and wipes her wet hands
over her smock.
‘You want the truth?’

‘Sure.’

‘The terrible truth?’

‘Mum. It’s pissed me off
you haven’t been straight.
None of it makes sense
so far.’

‘Okay then.’
She stands at the trough
very still, head bent.

‘Davy... should have been mine.’

‘What? But you married Richard.’

‘It should have been Davy.’
She looks petulant.
‘It was my mother’s fault.’

‘And he’d promised.’

She looks decided. ‘Let’s get dressed.
We can go down the Bay,’
she says. ‘I should get it all out
in the salt air.’

She drives like a maniac
and I scream
when she nearly
runs down someone
on George Street.

On the bend in the jetty
down from fishermen
with their lines and nets,
we stand side by side,
watch the slap of water
against wet steps
and the calm of the fishers
waiting.

I wait too.

‘I’ve come back,’
she says.

A man in a cap and check shirt
reels in his dragging line.
He’s jagged a squid and lands it
pearlescent and pulsing
on the wooden planks
and out squirts a bellyful
of blue-black ink.

'I was sixteen.
Davy said to keep it secret
because my mother disapproved
— his parents didn't come to church —
but we'd be married, he promised,
as soon as he was fully employed
then could afford a wedding.
But I got a fever and was sick,
had to stay home, couldn't go to the dance.
Davy still went.

One day, not long after,
when I was getting better,
Mum sent me to the bakery.
It was there I heard the news
of his engagement.
To Helen!
I couldn't believe it.
Confronted him.
He said he had to —
Helen was pregnant.'

Mum's lip is trembling.
'So I took off, to London.
Didn't look behind.
But now, I've returned.'

A wind picks up
and plastic bags flap
in fishing buckets.

'You shouldn't have come back,'
I wave my arm
to where I imagine

Britain should be.
'It's not decent.
We shouldn't be here.'

Then I feel a flip-flop
back from mothering my mother
to being a kid myself,
wrenched away from all I knew
for no good real reason
but her own tawdry past.

'I don't have to stay here, you know.
I'll go back!' I feel brutal, awful.

'But you can't leave me!'
Her cry is pitiful
like a seagull's, a small child's.

'Why not? You've got *him* now
and that should be enough.'

I turn on my heel,
head back along the rough slats
of the grey ink-splattered jetty
to the car.

§

When Ginn tries to tell me
later in the day
how beautiful I look
in Minnie's old clothes,
I ignore her and don't talk
all the drive to the Mines.

‘Pick you up at midnight,’ she sing-songs,
but I don’t confirm it.

My mind’s on my Year 11 Dance
at St Ives sports stadium
only six months ago, a forever ago,
with Tyson my handsome partner
and me his *luvver*.

Well, I’m fine on my own now.
Will find some way back there.
Meanwhile, here,
just go through the motions.

§

When I make my entrance
into the marquee
a girl from my class
whose name I don’t know
hi-fives me, says, ‘Wicked bun.’
I pat my hair, despite myself.

Owen is on the podium,
playing guitar,
looks down at me, and smiles.
His girlfriend, Foxie,
glitters her eyes at me
across the dance floor.
He doesn’t know yet
how faithless is his father,
yet I wonder what he’ll say
when I let him know
what Mum’s revealed to me.

§

Later in the dance
Sam Hellyer's been telling me
how there's gonna be another party
at his place.

'Yesh, I know,' I slur.
'But you never invited me before.'

He replies that I can go with him,
but I've drunk so much
of his pocket bottle hooch,
I'm near catted.

'I'll drive her,' says Foxie,
poking out from behind my elbow,
taking my arm, leading me away.

'But Ginn...' I trail off.
What was it about her?

'Oh, more to drink there,
don't you worry,' she says.

I am shaking my head,
slowly, confused.

'She's fine,' I hear Foxie tell the boys.
'Leave her with me.'
The cold outside the marquee
hits my face square on
and it's so dark
I'm completely disoriented.

I can tell I'm still not at all sober.
For a girl who's been used to
throwing back the scrumpy,
got rat-faced with Joolz
so many nights
I couldn't count,
maybe I'm not used to
what's on offer here.

Foxie points to a car.
'The Shaft Hotel,' I read
off the advert painted
on its doors, and laugh.

'You can laugh.' She laughs too.
Under her breath
I swear she mutters,
Bitch, bitch, bitch.

I lever myself in,
close my eyes as she drives,
darkness spinning behind my lids.
The car bumps along then stops.
Stars, when I open my eyes,
are a blur in the pitch sky.

§

'Yo, where's thish place?'
I'm trying not to slur my words.
'It's not Sims Cove.'

'Nup, it's not where you *wanted* to go,
but it's where you *need* to go,' says Foxie,

her voice sounding strangled.

‘Just come look,

I’ll show you.’

While she helps me from the car

I feel confused —

we’re not in the car park

on top of the cliff —

we’re somewhere different in the Mines.

I can’t get my bearings,

seem to be overshadowed by a heap.

I’m wondering if Owen

brought me to this part before.

Try and puzzle out

whether the skinny rail tracks

lead into a tiny tunnel

burrowing through the skimp.

‘There’s no party here!’

I say, turning round and round,

twisting into my long dress,

almost tripping myself up.

She leads me to a low wire fence

against it, two fat rocks.

‘Step up!’ Foxie prods me,

so I do what I’m told.

‘Look down,’ she says.

‘See, we’re not going to Sims Cove.’

And I’m clutching the wire rail,

bending over, looking into the dark,

trying to read a sign on the fence —
its words, bizarrely, written in Cornish.

Foxie says, like she's telling a story,
'I won't take you there.
For that was the place
you seduced my fiancé.'

I twist up, try to explain to her,
'No! It wasn't like that.'

'Don't worry, you toffee-nosed bitch,'
she says. 'It wasn't like this,'
she shoves my back, 'either.'

I overbalance the fence, topple,
but there's no ordinary ground
just the gaping rocky hole,
and I'm falling,
down
into the black.



TYSON

West Coast, South Australia

I was blissed out from the waves
then crashed out asleep,
sunburnt from the wind,
whacked with all the buzz
of the competition.

Sure, I've got a trophy in hand
but also meeting new family,
my uncle the bobby
on the Eyre Peninsula,
further west but close enough,
and cousin Kari,
on her way back to college in Adelaide,
who can drop me at the Kittos.

It's pretty late at night when we pull in
and I hope I don't have to wake them
to surprise me girl.

There's a light on over the back door
but when I walk around
Mrs Kitto's stepping into her car,
clearly going out.

'Tyson!' she yells,
surrounds me in a bear hug.

'Just wait till Maddy sees you!'

‘What a sight for sore eyes.
Come on, help me collect her.’

I grab my backpack from Kari,
kiss her cheek to send her off.
‘Seeya back in town,’ I promise.

I sit in the front seat of Mrs Kitto’s car
and we drive through the dark
on roads made only of dirt —
I think I’m more used to here now —
to the place where
vehicles are reversing,
parents and kids
streaming out
— but no Mads.
Mrs Kitto stops the guitarist
I recognise from before
at their house.

‘Owen, have you seen Maddy?
I was to pick her up from here now.’

‘Oh, hi Tyson,’ he says to me,
smart-arsed pratt.

‘I heard she’d gone to the Hellyers.
It’s on a property at Sims Cove.
I’m on my way now.
You can follow me if you like.’



OWEN

Sims Cove, South Australia

When it's clear at the party
Maddy never made it,
I join Tyson and Ginny.
Someone says she saw Foxie
taking Maddy from the Formal
and my heart's leaden,
since Foxie's not been seen
here, either.

Flathead roars up in his Commodore.
'Let's try back at the Mines,' he calls.
'Maybe there was car trouble,
or if she'd been drinking
instead of the main drag
Foxie might've taken a back road.'

Ginny is near hysterical
and Tyson is trying to comfort her
as I step out next to the marquee
in the Mines Museum car park.

'Where do we begin?' I say it in despair
out of Maddy's mother's hearing.
'Which road through the diggings?'

Flathead flashes me a torch.
'Owey,' his voice is low,

‘let’s start
with Ryan’s Shaft.’

§

At least the moon is out
so that when we hop out of his car
its silver-pale light
shines down the shaft hole
on a bundle
not far down the shaft at all
but on a lumpy ledge
where limestone boulders jut out
below the trash and thorny bushes.

The bundle is Maddy, unmoving,
slumped like a broken china doll.

Flathead has wound tow rope
round his waist, gets me to hold
as he lowers down.
He reaches out and touches her skin.

‘She’s alive,’ he says,
and my breath escapes,
as if I’d never breathed before.

‘Thank God,’ I say.
‘You go back then, tell the others.
I’ll wait with her for the ambo.’

I fasten the rope from me
to the fence and perch
beside her.

I touch my hand to her forehead
that feels so cool,
but she's breathing
like she's asleep.
So I shrug off my jacket
throw it over her old-fashioned dress,
listen to the night
and the sound of rabbits,
scurrying away.



MADDY

Moonta Mines, South Australia

The pain behind my ear
is blinding
and I feel ready to throw up —
can't understand why I'm so cold
or on wet ground
under stars and a moon
in the quiet
and I wonder if I'm dreaming again,
except my head hurts *so* much
that this has to be happening
until my blurry vision clears,
focusses on Owen,
looking down at me,
looking relieved.

'Thank God,' he says.

But I've no idea
why he looks so worried
or why I'm here at all.
Then there's the crunch on stones
of cars arriving
and Mum, looking down at me
sobbing, repeating that she's sorry.
And most unreal of all
the face behind her: Tyson.



OWEN

Moonta Mines, South Australia

When they've left for the hospital,
I turn to Flathead.
'Where's Foxie?' I ask.

'Already at the hospital.'
He answers me defensively.
'I got her somewhere
they could stop the bleeding
and before her old man
could go crook at her.'

He stares at me.
'Or... if we keep this quiet...
he won't go crook at her.
Well, not more than usual.'

'I'm in the dark, mate.
Nothing adds up.
How'd you know where to look?'

'I was at the Shaft's front bar.
When I went out back
saw Foxie slicing herself
with a great bloody steak knife.
I grabbed it off her and
she broke down, and told me.'

The shivers go up and down my spine,
up and down and back again.
My girlfriend the killer
pounds in my brain.

‘But I didn’t think she’d have the strength
to get her too far down the ditch.
Those mining shafts,
they’re all pretty well filled-in, aren’t they?
And she didn’t, did she?’

‘Yeah, but still...’ I leave it hanging.

‘Well, mate, reckon it was just
a misunderstanding.
Maybe the girls thought it’d be nice
going out for an evening stroll,
clear their heads a bit
from the grog at the dance...
but they got separated.’

‘Mm,’ I say.

‘That’s a pretty extreme interpretation.’

‘Think about it, Owey.

She’s a good girl underneath, really she is.’

Then in a different voice he adds,

‘Well, I always thought so, anyway.’

§

Back home
It’s like I’m sump oil
emptied from an engine.

When I slide into the dark kitchen
Mum's there, quiet as a garage mouse.
She's found out about Foxie
I think, *and Maddy.*

'Mum.' I talk gently.
'It's okay now,
everything's gonna be fine.
They're both safe with Dr Singh.'

She lifts head and stares blankly.
'How can it be?' she asks.
'Your father's left.'

It doesn't compute.

She tells me, though there's no note
she's looked at the books,
checked the bank accounts.
'Everything he could lay his hands on
has been cleaned out,' she says.

Bastard, I think.
I close my eyes.
'So, I wonder, where's he gone?'

§

What Dad's done
unravels the next day.
Flathead's mum comes round,
tells us about the sale of his boat
how the guy from town who bought it
had to pay cash, up front.

So the money couldn't be traced,
they now surmise.

Flathead himself comes by
to ask about Maddy and tell me how Foxie
knew about the lady Irish developer,
overhead her and Dad at the Shaft
discussing a job in China.

Our neighbour shakes her head.
'Must be a mid-life crisis,
but who'd want to go
gallivanting off over there?'

'Skipping out from his responsibilities
more like,' says Mrs Hellyer,
who's dropped in.
'Never wanted to be held accountable.'

Mum is pale and shaky. 'When he said
he wanted a part of the action,
and needed the money,
I imagined he meant development here.
Or, that house in Copper Cove marina.'

I am disgusted. 'You mean, instead of
buying into some overseas scheme
without us.'

Mum takes a minute to look levelly at me.
'This won't stop you going to uni,
if you still want to, Owen.'

She seems to rally some strength.

‘I grew up helping out in our business.
It’s my family’s heritage
and I can do it again.’

§

When I can leave Mum
safely in the hands of the women,
I head round to the hospital.

Ginny’s staring like a phantom,
positioned on the bench outside.

‘Owen,’ she says.
‘I heard about your father.’
She speaks in a rush. ‘I’d told him
last night, just before the Formal,
he came and asked
but I didn’t have any more —
all spare cash was gone
before I left England.’

She looks so shocked
and I wonder at how my dad
could have stooped so low,
taking money from a widow.

‘Go in,’ she waves.
‘Tyson’s with Maddy.
They’ll be glad to see you.’

§

I step in to the ward,
sunlight streaming through
striped curtains at the window.

‘Owen,’ says a bug-eyed Maddy,
bandages round her head.

Surfer boy’s gripping her hand,
stocky-set like a comic book hero.

‘Sit down,’ she commands.
‘You can fill me in.’

I’m shaking as I sit down,
trembling with the awareness
of just how beautiful
she is.

§

In the next room
Foxye lies waiting for me.
Her eyes are round full moons,
her skin waxy pale.

One arm is bandaged
and in the other there’s a drip
feeding into her vein.

Her mouth moves up and down,
quivering as if she wants to speak
but can’t.

I lean over the bed
plant a quick kiss on her cheek,

lower myself
onto the chair beside her bed.

‘Does she know?
Will she say?
Is she pressing charges?’

I shake my head,
trace my finger over her hand
that’s resting under the tubes.

‘Foxye, you’ve been my girlfriend
for thirteen months now.’
I pause, don’t know how to put it.

‘But I haven’t been straight with you.
I... don’t want to get married
or buy a block of land and build.
Nothing could be further from my thoughts.’

I glance up to check how she’s taking it,
but there seems no venom
darting my way.

‘When the exams are over
I want to study,
move down to Adelaide.
It’s not you,’ I say quickly, ‘or this.’
‘It’s just...’ Our eyes meet.

‘I never deserved, you, Owey.’ She sighs.

I flood with relief. ‘Nor me you, Foxye.’



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

When I'm back at the cottage
Ginn, Mum, spills
the full story
— at last.

I'm tucked up in my bed,
glad to have Tyson
and his scratching of my ears
out of the room,
putting on the kettle
for cups of tea.

'It was like something
out of a black and white movie.
Richard discovered me standing
on the wall of the Camden canal.
I wasn't crying, but he could tell.'

'You were going to throw yourself in?'
I don't know how I picked it.

She nods. 'After the gigantic effort
it took me to leave home
— and I have to tell you
I stole money from my mother
for the fare to fly out
from her special tin trunk

in the cellar
to go study art —’

She takes a breath.

‘I thought I’d show them all
then they’d see I was something.
But I failed. Slade, the art school
I’d longed so much to study in,
was so dismissive.

The teacher called me “Colonial”.’
Her mouth shapes a bad taste.

‘So Dad saved you. Our one and only
patron saint of lost causes.’

‘Yes, Richard took me off the wall
and home with him to St Ives.
I felt safe and secure there,
and was comfortable,
especially when Paulette moved out
into her own apartment.’

‘And I never mentioned Davy.
I didn’t tell you before,
but he didn’t see why
we couldn’t keep seeing each other,
even with Helen pregnant
and them getting married.’

Ginn has tears in her eyes.

‘I was worth more than that,
wasn’t I?

And I didn’t tell Richard about Mum,
and he didn’t ask.’

‘I learnt to paint, to prove to him,
or myself, I don’t know,
that I could succeed — make it.

And I did.

And we loved each other, I’m sure of that,
even if it wasn’t so physical
after you came along.’

I grapple with what she’s saying,
think how I would die to shriek with Tiksha
Too much information!

‘At least I was protection,’ she goes on,
‘from his ogre mother,
who’d always expected too much from him
but only ever expressed her disappointment.’

I feel it well up inside me —
my unbelief that my father was gone
then in denial
then anger.
Me, angry for so long,
blaming the world,
blaming my mother and her country.
Then suddenly, it all falls away
and what I feel now is so raw and real.

‘I miss Dad so much,’ I can’t help crying —
fat tears scorch down my cheeks.
‘That bloody idiot mother of his
never appreciated what a lovely son he was.’

My mother looks surprised and gulps,
tears running down her face, too.

It feels like the grief
we should always have felt
like water has flooded in,
swamped the diggings,
and we cling on to each other
for some time.

Tyson appears at the door
holding our cups of tea.
He puts them down
and disappears outside.

My head's still pounding,
blood in the gash on the back of my head
is smarting under scratchy bandages.

'So, we don't hang out
for Paulette's will,' I manage with a laugh.
'And it's any wonder your own mother,
Minnie,
ever left you this place.'



TYSON

North Yelta, South Australia

I sit at the foot of her bed.
It's strange being here.
As if this is some other girl,
not the Mads I knew
in the life she had before.

'I got you an early birthday surprise,' I say.
'Didn't tell you, but with the surfing trophy
I won enough dosh for a ticket
for you to come home.'

I hold my breath
and don't hear another sound —
no cars on the road outside,
only in this room,
the thumping of my blood.

'Mum felt bad about you going,
how you'd asked to stay and all,
so she's inviting you to live with us,
if you can make it back.
And I'm offering you the way.
Come back, now,
me luvver.'



MADDY

North Yelta, South Australia

Pangs of something I can't name
stab at my side, below my ribcage —
the thought of leaving Ginn now
tears a rip in me.

'Money for the fare!' I say.

'Yeah,' says Tyson.

But I'm shaking my head.

'No, Ginn's fare. To England,' I tell him.
I flush hot with shame.

'Tyson. I'm sorry,' I say.

'I can't. I want to stay with my mother.
Could you go bring her in?
I've got something for her.'

I don't know how he's taking it,
if he'll be angry or not.
But right now it's not him
I'm worrying about.
Instead, in my memory
the image of Owen's face —
his happiness at me being alive.

Ginn rushes in, flustered.

— I realise she thinks
I'm about to tell her I'll be going.

'Mum,' I reach under my pillow.
'I've got something for you.
I should have handed it over before.
It's a letter from the tin trunk.'

She looks puzzled.

'It was down in the cellar
when I got the vintage clothes.'

Then I hear Tyson
thumping things around in the front room.
Packing his suitcase,
I realise.

'You read the letter, Mum.
I'll go help Tyson.
It's the least I can do.'

§

In the morning
Mum's in the garden
still dressed in her gown,
black coffee steaming at her feet
while she's painting
over the whited-out canvas,
the cad's face erased.
Now it's the beginnings
of the gnarled old almond tree,
sharp-edged and clear.

She hands me Minnie's letter
with its script spidery-fine
and I imagine the stout woman
of my constant dream
downloaded into her.

Minnie wrote how she forgave
her wee Ginnifer,
and longed
for the breach to heal.
She confessed her own
torment and sorrow,
for the daughter she had turned on
and how lonely she'd been
without her there.

I read how my mother's father
was a travelling salesman,
already married,
who never returned.
How he was friends with Bob Butterworth,
and in his own will,
left payment for Minnie's memorial.
No mention was made
of the daughter
he had never known.

I look at Ginn.
'I thought your dad died
before you were born.
Was a distant relation.'
It's the one bit of her history
I thought I knew.

Ginn looks thoughtful.
'My mother said she married
her cousin on her father's side,
from Peterborough,
who died of pneumonia
straight after their honeymoon.'

I can see my mum
trying to figure it out.

'I suppose that accounted
for her being out of town
nine months or so,
to avoid any gossip.'

'*Have* I got cousins there?' I ask her.

'I don't know,' she says. 'I daresay
we could find out.'

She shakes her head.

'But the thing is, it now looks like
it was just a story.

A cover-up. My father didn't die
before I was born.

He was already married
to someone else.'

Ginn opens her eyes wide,
'But didn't want to know me.'

I let this sink in.

Ginn has a lot of stuff
to process right now.

I don't want to even consider.

At least my father loved me
and I knew it.

I'm suddenly about eleven years old
and he's playing, joking around
teasing me, like I'm a little kid.

I'm begging him to stop,
telling him angrily

I'm not a baby anymore.

I'm already grown.

I remember thinking,

I'll show him

just how grown up I can be.

*See how I can look after Mummy
and run this house for you.*

*Fathers, I think,
and mothers.*

How we cope at home
then must lift up and out
into the great big
beckoning world.

Somehow,
try to make it work.

EPILOGUE



FOXIE

Moonta, South Australia

Mrs Trenerry's been good —
says she's giving me a job.
I can work in the shop full-time
since she'll be needing a helper,
she told me, what with
Mr Chenoweth gone and Owey away soon.
It's more than I could imagine,
but she says we get on well.

Just like Flathead reckons,
and he says he'll fix the old man,
if he ever comes near me again.
And his mother will take me in
to live with her,
'cos she needs the company.

He'll be busy on the big boats
across the Gulf,
but with time enough, he promises,
to keep an eye on me.
I like his joking, his light heart
and strong arms.
Hope to feel them round me.
Rest my face
against his capable chest.



TYSON

St Ives, Cornwall

It's only when I'm back home
I start to feel mebbe awwright.
I'm still shattered
Mads has broken it off,
couldn't be tempted
with even the promised Paris holiday.

But Joolz has a great idea,
her cousins have done it before —
we can go grape picking
in the south of France,
catch a wave or two there, too.

It suits my style.
The sea, the sun, the wine.
Why travel so far, anyway?
Stay close to home
and what I know,
and if Aussie surf ever calls again
Kari says come stay with them,
and I just might.

I'm who I am,
and that's pretty great
after all.



OWEN

Moonta, South Australia

In the middle of the last exam
I feel I'm gonna make it.
My brain is clear and functioning,
where the answers to the questions
come into my head
like songs from angels.

My pen is skipping over the paper
and my pleasure at the work
is equal,
I think,
to the expectation soon
of seeing Maddy.

Guessing it's gonna mean
a whole lot more.



MADDY

Moonta, South Australia

I'm swotting for the first time.
Mum hardly knows it's me,
head down, tail on the seat
preparing for my end-of-year exams.
She's even cooking meals!

I know I've finished them once before
but here it's as if
they're new and strange.

Owen's put the idea into my head
how next year
if I work at my studies
we could start up,
a student household
down in town.

I've promised him to give it my best shot.
He says he'll be my study buddy
but I hope, sometime soon,
there might be more to it.

And I've discovered something
I've never known before —
I love writing.
So all my journey here
and all that I've gone through,

I'm setting it all down.

Foxie, Tyson, Owen

I'll change their names —

it's the beginning of my

Stage 2 Research Project

I'll need it to complete my SACE.

And who knows *if*

maybe then I can use it —

portfolio for applying to uni

to judge if I can get in —

hoping to study Creative Writing

where I can craft my ideas.

Meanwhile, my art is my voice —

taking flight,

a passport into the great

beyond.

AUTHOR VOICE-ZONE

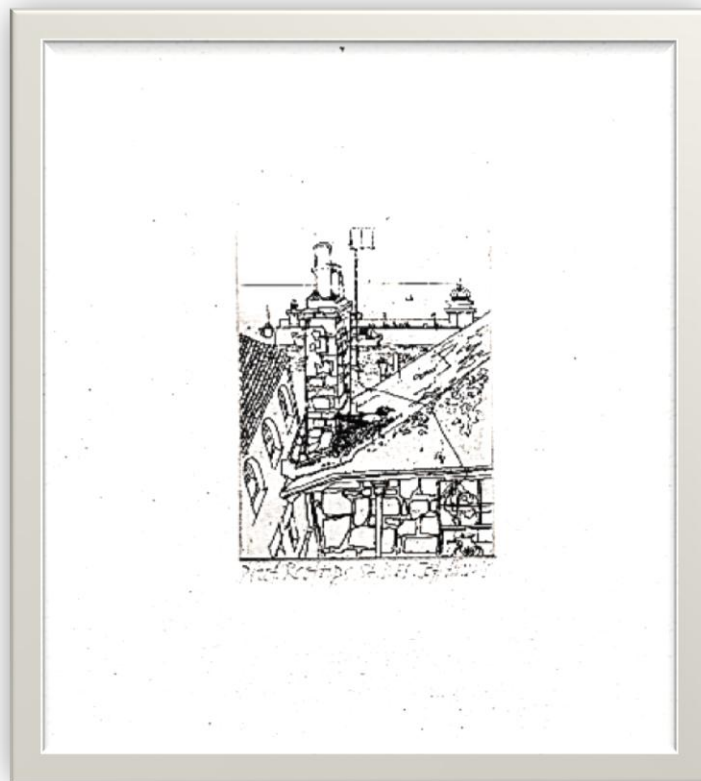


North Yelta miner's cottage – 1972

My mother bought a miner's cottage,
this novel's very one.
Moved my twin younger brothers and me
out of our city terrace —
an early sea change
away from all we knew.
That place haunts me still.
I remember my first driving lesson there
out on the copper-dust-covered flats
hoping to miss the disused mine shafts
not fenced off then, like now,
and the kids from the Area School
the sunsets, jetties, fairs.

I've travelled to St Ives, too.
On a pilgrimage
to a Britain I had never known.
St Ives spoke to me,

called for me to come know it better,
which I've never done,
except through art
— this writing —
and the one relic of the place,
an etching
my mother gave to me,
inspiration for this tale
— the vision of the rooftops,
a sticky-beak seagull —
and from the hillside road
the view, I recall,
down to the water
of surfers riding high.



'Rooftops, St. Ives', Jeff Harris, etching, artist's proof

A BRIEF HISTORY

Beginning as an office boy at 17 years old in the Moonta Mines and finishing as a surface manager by the time operations ceased in 1923, Oswald Pryor in *Australia's Little Cornwall* tells the story of how South Australia, only a young colony in the mid-1850s, risked financial ruin when so many free settlers flocked to Victoria's goldfields. The discovery of rich lodes of copper ore at Moonta effectively saved the state, providing for a resources boom requiring a massive influx of workers. Many migrated from Cornwall, where miners were expert at deep hard rock mining. Within two years the population of Moonta went from a few shepherds to 10,000. At one stage, Moonta Mines Model School held the register for the largest enrolment in the state. A township was planned and laid out where streets, shops and some fine houses were built. But across the diggings area was where many mining families lived:

...it seems to have been encouraged by the mining company, which no doubt realised that it would be better to have most of their employees living on the leases than in the towns. It was handier to their work; they were away from the hotels; they would be content with lower wages because they did not have to pay rates; and they knew that although mine management was an autocracy, it was also, in many ways, a benevolent one — so no well-behaved, hard-working employee had any need to fear eviction from a house built on one of the leases.

Wives, the 'bal-maidens' back in Cornwall, had been ore-dressers, and could wield shovels to assist their husbands build homes from the limestone rocks, sticks and clay. Floorboards were crafted from old packing cases. Though begun as one- or two-roomed dwellings, they were extended when family size increased. To keep out goats, cottages were surrounded by fences made from picket sticks or beaten-out 40-gallon tin drums. Even now, the diggings earth is flattened and bare from the poisonous process of leaching sulphuric acid and seawater through the huge tailings (skimp) heaps. Driving around the once mining area of Moonta Mines, East Moonta, Cross Roads and North Yelta today, some of these dwellings still exist. Others are sad piles of rubble. In 1975 the area was declared a National Heritage site.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Stories are magical winged beasts that fly in from uncharted lands. Many people, mostly unwittingly, assist in their creation. For *Copper Coast* I had memories of part of my childhood spent in the region and though the setting is crucial *that was then* and *this is now* — things change and I have taken liberties with places and institutions. This story and all of its characters are fictional. Back in 1982, as an Aussie abroad one of my favourite all-time weeks was spent in a VW Beetle with Margie Coonan (now Keating), discovering Cornwall.

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