

will

It's the freakiest thing.

When Jessica Watson set out to sail solo around the world, Mum and I followed her blog, like half of Australia I reckon. Everyone had an opinion about whether Jessica should be allowed to go, but her belief in herself never faltered. Mum was in favour. You only get one life, she used to say. Often. Just recently I finished reading Jessica's book, *True Spirit*, so today I get out my laptop and get online, onto her Facebook site, to let her know how much I enjoyed it. I'm not a big Facebook fan, but I'll make an exception for her. She's a celebrity now, but still seems pretty down to earth. And she's still sailing. Looks like there's going to be a movie based on *True Spirit*! As I check out some of the comments people have left, I notice a recent one from a girl called Summer Rainbird, *who lives in Kettering*! Her Facebook photo is not of her but of a small wombat, and her comment begins like this:

Summer Rainbird Hi Jessica! I live in Kettering, on the south-east coast of Tasmania, where there are hundreds of yachts

I click on *Read more*.

moored in the marina. Hundreds! Big yachts, small yachts and everything in between. Mostly they stay in the marina, which seems like an incredible waste. On the weekends, some of the yachts head off across the channel to Bruny Island, which is one of the most beautiful islands you'll ever see. I've never even been on a yacht! But thanks to you I have a dream of one day sailing on one, maybe not round the world like you did, but perhaps round Bruny Island. That would do me. I'm reading *True Spirit* and loving it. You're awesome, Jessica. Thanks for the inspiration.

A pang of homesickness hits me as I imagine the sun on the channel and sailing across to Bruny with Dad the way we used to. It's been a year and a half and it feels like too long.

I leave my own comment on Jessica's Facebook page.

Will Lane You have another fan from Kettering, Jessica! I used to live there. Maybe you'll sail down that way one day. As a previous comment says, it's worth it. I've just finished reading *True Spirit*. It was cool to relive the whole journey. Go girl!

Then I click on the wombat. Summer's Facebook page must have strict privacy settings as I'm not able to see other posts. I wouldn't normally friend random girls I don't know, but she lives in Kettering and suddenly I'd give anything to talk to

someone from home. I hit *Add Friend*. And now I'm waiting to see if she'll friend me. She'll see my post on Jessica's page. I'm hoping that's enough to persuade her.

The next day when I check, nothing.

The next day, nothing again.

Three days later and Facebook Messenger has a personal message for me. Please, let it be Summer.

Hi Will Lane,

I saw your comment on Jessica's Facebook page today and realised it was you who sent the friend request. So you used to live in Kettering. Cool. Don't you just love Jessica Watson to bits! You've read *True Spirit*! I'm reading it now. It's awesome. Jessica is awesome. Your Facebook picture is of a yacht. Guess that means you sail, right? And where do you live now? There wasn't much about that on your Facebook page. Mainly about doing parkour! Hey, here's my email address. stillsummer@gmail.com I prefer email – it's more private. I normally only use Facebook for things like following Jessica's career.

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

i still cant believe you live in kettering. thats just freaky. its a great place to live. we still have our house there. i wonder if you know it. its just past the jetty where the ferry leaves for bruny. its painted green or used to be when we were living there up until april last year. my fathers brother has been living there for twelve months but its empty now. where do you live? im living

in eden at the moment. thats in nsw. and living on that yacht in my facebook picture.

will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hey Will

I know your house! Yes, green and there's a big shed or studio or something up the back of the yard. What a cool place to live. You must be able to see the ferry coming and going all the time from the windows. Sometimes I take it over to Bruny and back just for the fun. Just to be on the water. Yesterday I did that and there was this amazing sea fog. It was sort of spooky and wonderful at the same time, being in middle of fog and everything else disappearing, all the land at the sides of the channel. I was standing up on the top deck by myself. No cars. No other people. If it hadn't been for the fact that I could feel the thrumming of the engines through the deck I might have been on a galleon. Definitely spooky. You must miss living here.

Do you really live in a place called Eden? Is there a garden? Is it beautiful? Do you eat apples? And you live on a yacht! That is super cool. Do you go sailing all the time, too?

We live in a house up the back of the hill, up behind the shop, so it overlooks the whole bay and the marina. They added a new section to the marina last year and you wouldn't believe how many boats there are. Hundreds. I wonder if anyone lives on any of them.

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

i used to do that – take the ferry over to bruny just for fun. sometimes i took my fishing rod and fished from the jetty on the other side. sometimes i took my bike and rode out along the road towards the big cherry farm. you know where i mean? once all the cars off the ferry had gone id have the road to myself. hard going up the hill, but great fun coming down. wheeeeeeee! i just thought of something. maybe you know my best friend cully? do you? hes been my friend since prep class and even though i dont live there these days he emails me from time to time. or sends a facebook message. probably when hes bored in a school class! hes my link with home. and i guess hes still my best mate really. you must go to school with him down at woodbridge where i used to go. hes sixteen too so youd be in the same class. let me know wont you? btw cully only lives in kettering part of the time, when hes with his mum. most of the time he lives with his dad closer to the school. ps is the ferry still free if you walk on or only have a bike? ps eden is ok but maybe not all its cracked up to be. will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

First of all, yes, the ferry is still free but they charge for bikes now. Must be one of the last best rides you can do free. I even went over with my little sister Hannah on the replacement ferry in the winter, when the Mirambeena was up on the slip for repairs and they didn't charge me anything. They were a nice crew, too. One guy had sailed yachts all over the place for other

people, in all parts of world, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, you name it, he was there. Maybe you'll do that sort of stuff one day. You said you live on a yacht now. How come? I'd really love to sail some day. I'm surrounded by yachts and I've never been on one. It's on my To Do list!

Sorry, I don't know Cully. I don't actually go to school. I'm home schooled by my mum. Which is cool because it means I get to do the things I like to do, like grow a vegie garden, but it's lonely in other ways.

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

youre home schooled. really? dad home schooled me last year when we were first away on the boat sailing up the coast. up and down and round about really. but his heart wasnt in it after a while so we came into eden and now i go to the high school here. he taught me almost everything you need to know on a boat in that time though. even proper celestial navigation in case the gps breaks down. that was pretty much my maths lessons. and he showed me how to take the engine apart and put it back together again and how to do the maintenance on the hull although id always helped him back in kettering. now i go to the local high school which is totally boring. i miss living in kettering. and i especially miss cully. we used to do everything together. we were like this (imagine my index and middle finger tight together!). how come we live on a boat? its a long story. maybe ill tell you some day.

will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

Living on a boat sounds like an adventure to me. It's good that you learnt all those sailing skills. You are probably just like Jessica Watson with all that knowledge and could sail around the world too! Is that something you'd like to do?

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

the truth is what id really like to do is move back home. get on with my life. not very adventurous is it?

will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

Guess what? I got my little sister Hannah to ask around at school about Cully. She's only eight and in Grade 3 but Woodbridge is still a district school so everyone are in together. My other sister Violet goes to college in Hobart. She's in Grade 12. But I couldn't ask her even if she is still at school locally. She'd just roll her eyes at me and say, What did your last slave die of? Overwork? Hannah found out who Cully is and said she checked him out. He was playing basketball with some other kids. She said he was all lanky and uncoordinated, like someone had put wrong parts together. Does that sound right?

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

lanky? no that doesnt sound like cully at all. hes small and compact and was always a good soccer player. we played soccer together from about grade 2. and he plays cricket too. maybe she was looking at the wrong guy. but then i havent seen him for a year and a half. hey do you want to skype some time? we could talk instead of email. thatd be cool dont you think?

how come your sisters go to school and you dont?

will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

My mum won't let me use Skype with someone I haven't actually met in person. Sorry she's really strict about some online stuff. It would be cool but it isn't going to happen. Do you have a mobile phone? We could text.

Hannah and Violet do well at school. I never did. Just the way it is I guess.

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

dont worry about skype. happy to email. i feel sort of connected to the place again through you. im attaching a photo of me on the boat so you know im really me and all that. i dont blame your mum though. of course you still wont know its me in

the photo and that im not some weirdo but you could always take the photo down to the shop and have it checked by mrs maloney – assuming shes still got the shop. everyone around there knows me. do you like living there? what does your mum do? you know a lot about my life but i don't know much about yours. can you send a picture too?

ps dont have a mobile. didnt have any use for one when we were sailing last year. but dads promised me one for christmas. will

will

On Saturday morning I open up my laptop to see if there's an email from Summer. There is! I look over at Dad on the bunk in the main cabin. He looks all slumped in on himself, snoring softly. I didn't hear him get back to the boat but it was probably late – as usual on a Friday night, or rather a Saturday morning. Suddenly, this life we're living seems impossible. We can't keep doing this over and over. Can we?

On impulse, instead of opening Summer's email, I get onto a jobs network for Hobart and scroll through the science jobs. Then there's this image. A bird with spread wings. I know it's a seabird from its shape before I even notice the stylised waves beneath it.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Centre for Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (CCAP) is seeking to engage a person with relevant experience to provide scientific services in support of the Centre's work. The position is available for a fixed-term of four years, based in Hobart, Tasmania. A position profile and details of the vacancy are available at: www.ccap.aq

Hobart! We could live in Kettering again and I'd get to hang out with Cully. And meet Summer.

I glance over at Dad. There is probably no way he'll consider it, even though it's right up his alley. I read the ad again. He ought to jump at this. It's international. This is a chance for him to be involved at the highest levels in helping to protect his beloved albatrosses. It could just do the trick. I plug in the printer and print out the ad.

The kettle starts to whistle and I turn the burner off. I pour boiling water into the big coffee plunger. It's the smell of coffee that wakes Dad most Saturday mornings. After I pour myself one I set the plunger down next to Dad's cup all ready to go with lots of sugar in it. I put the printout next to it. Then I take my laptop up on deck. Over and over in my mind, I keep hearing those words: for a fixed-term of four years in Hobart, Tasmania. Home.

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

Thanks for the photo. You don't look anything like I imagined. Maybe because you sail I thought you have sunbleached blond hair and faded blue eyes! Silly stereotyping eh. Instead you've got dark hair and brown eyes and a really nice smile. Thanks. I'll take the photo down to the shop tomorrow to have it checked.

Just kidding! LOL!

My mum. Well she's pretty cool. She's a nurse. Or used to be. Occasionally she does shifts here, but mostly she home schools me and she paints. She's really a painter. She's also a wildlife carer. You know, for injured native animals or orphaned joeys. At the moment we've got a baby wombat called Brick. He's three months old now. We've had him since he was really tiny. He weighed a hundred grams and was smaller than a tennis ball. He had no hair and his eyes were still fused shut. We had this special humidicrib for a while for him to sleep in. And we still have to make regular feeds. I help and Hannah helps. Violet's not interested. But really Mum does most of the work.

In case you're wondering, Hannah named Brick Brick. She always gets to name the animals. I suppose there has to be some benefit from being the youngest in the family!

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hey summer

sorry to disappoint you re the sailor image. guess you thought id look like johnny depp in pirates of the caribbean. i wish! have

you seen those movies? my hair did get a bit bleached last year when we were out on the water the whole time. does that count? he he.

so its brick on your facebook page photo!

thats cool about your mum being a painter and looking after wildlife. sounds like your mum and my dad would have a lot in common. not the painting part but the wildlife bit. dads a wildlife biologist.

i noticed you didnt send a photo. dont be shy. i know girls get all weird about appearances and all but id just like to have a face to talk to even if its by email. no pressure.

will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

I think boys are fairly weird about appearances too but they just try not to show it or talk about it.

As you see, I've sent a picture.

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

i had a sort of a picture in my mind which was different but now ive got the real thing. if id seen you before i would have been too scared to talk to you! maybe i am anyway.

will

will

All day I think Dad's going to mention the ad any moment. He doesn't. He comes up on deck looking wasted, and drinks lots of coffee.

I go below and find the job ad in the bin. What should I do? Go up and plead with him to apply? Tell him I need to go home, to have a home, even if he doesn't? Or. Or what? I read the ad through again. It would be perfect for him. Might even make him happy again.

I know what I have to do.

In the evening Dad gets ready to go up to the pub. We usually go together on a Saturday night and have a meal there and then I come back to the boat and he goes round to the other bar and stays on. And on.

You getting ready to go up for dinner? he asks.

Nah, think I'll stay here tonight, I say. A few school things I want to catch up on. And I want to read that New Scientist article you showed me. The one on how smart an octopus is.

Righto, suit yourself, he says.

There's something sort of sad about the way he pulls himself together to go, shaving and combing his hair carefully. Digging out some clothes that don't smell of diesel. He looks okay, I suppose. In a busted kind of way.

Hey, Dad, I call out as he climbs the steps to the cockpit.

Yep? He half turns in the companionway. Behind him the sky is scattered with stars.

Have a good night, I say.

Right okay, you too.

With that he hauls himself out into the night air. One, two, three steps on deck and then he's up onto the marina and away, leaving the boat bobbing slightly as he goes.

As soon as he's gone I pull the ad out of the bin, race to his laptop and type in the address. When I print out the position description, it's five pages long. This is not going to be easy.

I read through the list of duties, essential requirements, and selection criteria. The job has Dad's name written all over it. It would be perfect for him. It's taking the plight of the albatross to the international level and that's where Dad's always said change has to happen. Everywhere.

Luckily Dad's never bothered with passwords on his computer. I trawl through his documents and discover a folder with all his work-related material. There's a CV, application letters from other jobs he's had, and copies of reports. I start cutting and pasting.

When I look up at the cabin clock it's nearly midnight, so I stick everything onto my school USB, delete the originals and empty the recycle bin. I can finish off the application on

my laptop and send it from Dad's email next time he's out.

I drop into my bunk and lie there thinking about how surprised (and happy?) Summer would be if I got to go and live back in Kettering. And how happy I'd be to meet her in person.

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

So what sort of stuff do you like to do when you're not at school? I know you like fishing and riding your bike (or you used to). I like fishing, too. I go fishing as often as I can, from the jetty or round on the rocks. There's often a lot of other kids fishing on the jetty. I don't like killing the fish part. I mainly like the sitting for a long time watching the water and birds and clouds. Clouds are fantastic. You can never get bored if there are good clouds. Have you made friend with other kids there? Do you play school sports or anything? Do you go to the movies?

I can send you a questionnaire if you like. Ha ha!

Summer

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

list of likes:

sailing

fishing

bit of parkour

clouds (really!)

reading, about science, especially astronomy, but really anything
poetry

mum always said i was going to be fine when i retired because i was accumulating so many hobbies already.

list of dislikes:

um

maybe im not old enough to have too many dislikes yet

you haven't mentioned your dad. is he around?
will

williamlane@gmail.com

summer?

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

I wondered when you ask me about my dad. He died just when Hannah was born. After that all Mum wanted to do was to leave the city and move back to the country. She just wanted some peace, she said. Anyway, it didn't happen for ages, but now we're here and that's why. Life isn't fair.

And what about your mum?

Summer

will

I'm in the middle of writing back to Summer when, as if on cue, an email pops up from Mum. It always gives me a shock when this happens. There's her name, Anna Martin, in bold. And the subject is, as usual, Hello. And, because of the way the email is set up, I see the beginning of the message. That's pretty standard, too. Given that my mother is a journalist you'd think she could come up with something new.

Dear Will, Am missing you as always. I'd really love to

I hit *delete*. My whole body shakes, as if I've just actually hit my mother. Again. Not saying I wouldn't like to. I'm still so mad at her. She must have guessed by now that's what I do. I've never read a single one of her messages. And don't intend to start. I don't want to know what she has to say or what I'd say back to her. Some not very nice things, that's for sure. To just up and leave like that. Who can you trust if

you can't trust your own mother? She didn't just leave Dad, she left me, too. Did she think about that at all?

The thoughts start circling around in my head again, the way they've done for months. I click back on Summer's email and read it again and again to distract myself. Life really isn't fair. Then I write back.

williamlane@gmail.com

oh summer

im really sorry about your dad. thats so hard for you all. thats just terrible. i can only imagine.

look thank you for telling me. that must have been hard. it must just be hard all the time. im really sorry summer.

my mum left us. as simple and complicated as that.
will

stillsummer@gmail.com

Hi Will

Oh no, I'm sorry to hear about your mum. That must be hard too.

Hannah's eight now. Dad's been gone for eight years. I don't know if it's harder for me who had him around for eight years. Or for Hannah who never knew him. Or for Violet who had him around for even longer. Or for Mum. Who knows? We're all going on with our own lives now and Mum always says we have to live them even better to live his part as well. That's bit of a big ask but I get what she means.

Summer

will

A letter arrives a week later. Naturally, it's addressed to Dad. After all he's the one who's supposed to have applied for the job. I pick it up from the marina office on the way home from school and straight away notice the CCAP logo on the envelope. I feel a bit sick. No – a lot sick! I feel as if I could throw up before I get out the door. Instead I stand there staring at the envelope as if I'll develop x-ray vision and be able to read what's inside.

Out ahead of me, all the yachts are settled at their moorings. A light breeze is making the rigging clank. The sea beyond the marina is swimming pool blue. It's not a bad place to stay. I could just toss this in the bin and no one would know. Dad wouldn't have a clue that I had basically impersonated him in order to apply for a job for him. There's bound to be a law against what I did, for one thing. But more importantly, Dad'll probably hit the roof. I mean, I knew. I knew all of this when I did it. But I still went ahead

and hit *Send*. They say that what you risk shows what you love. I guess it just goes to show how much I really want to go home.

It hits me suddenly that if the letter says, Thank you for your interest in this position but you were not in this instance successful and the vacancy has been filled, I'll get into trouble with Dad for no reason. But I've got a hunch it won't be that kind of letter. It's more likely to be asking him to go to Tasmania for an interview. But without opening the envelope, how would I know? Somehow opening it feels like snooping. I don't want to go there. Which is weird, given what I've done. I can't help thinking about that dumb old idea of steaming open an envelope. I could put the kettle on when I get back. But Dad will probably be on the boat at this time of day. Anyway, it seems to me that one way or another I'll have to face the music on this one. It needs to come out in the open.

Dad's not on board. I prop the envelope against the galley wall. Near that kettle. Maybe I should light the stove. Just to make a coffee. I pick the envelope up again and weigh it in my hand, but then put it down again carefully, right where Dad will see it as soon as he gets back.

Now I'm in two minds. Make myself scarce so that he can open it, work out what's gone on and let off some steam before he sees me. Or stick around and watch it happen. I've just decided to clear out, when I feel the boat sway a bit. I take a deep breath. Then comes a light thump that's Dad stepping down onto the deck. Too late! I'm going to have to face the music right from the opening bars.

Will!

He looks surprised to see me.

Hi Dad.

No parkour today then? he says, tossing a copy of the *Age* down on the seat next to me. I thought you'd be out harassing innocent shoppers by doing somersaults over the top of them.

Not today, I say.

The envelope catches his eye and he scoops it up.

What's this, then?

He flips it over, looks harder at the front.

I think I'll make a cuppa, I say and move to light the stove. Want one?

Yeah thanks, he says as he slides his thumb along under the envelope flap.

He sits down where I have just been sitting and I stand with my back to him, turning on the fuel, lighting it with the spark gun, waiting for the fuel to flare up and begin to burn away, then turning down the volume. I do each action with careful attention, distracting myself from what's going on behind me. All I hear is the rustle of papers.

Then Dad whistles. One long, slow, drawn-out whistle as if something has impressed him.

I have some news, he says.

Oh yeah? I'm being deliberately casual. I can't believe how calm his voice is.

I risk a look over my shoulder. He's sitting there reading, perhaps rereading, the letter.

What do you mean, Dad? I try to make my voice sound calm – nothing like the way it felt on the way out through my throat. There it was more like a small bird trapped in a pipe and flapping.

Well this is CCAP, right, Dad says, the main conservation body for albatrosses and petrels. They work internationally, and that's what's needed to make any difference. I remember back when they set up I thought how much I'd love a job there.

There's a pause while he leans in to read a bit more.

And now they're offering me one!

He looks up at me and smiles. There hasn't been a lot of smiling going on for a hell of a long time. This is not what I'd expected.

You've got a job with CCAP? I say. More squeak than say, really. My hand on the coffee plunger shakes, making the lid rattle.

Uh huh.

He's still smiling. What the hell is going on?

That's fantastic, Dad!

Now he laughs out loud.

Surprised isn't the word for it. I'm stunned.

I know what you did, he says.

He studies my face and I look straight ahead. The kettle whistles and I turn away, fill the plunger and grab two mugs. Then there's nothing for it but to sit down with Dad and have it out. Here goes.

He puts the letter down beside him, pours some coffee and gets up to grab some milk from our little fridge. I wait. I've never really known what 'bated breath' means, but I think it's what I wait with.

I applied for the job, he says.

Surely that's not a grin on his face.

You *applied*! I try to get control over my mouth, which is wanting to stay open and catch a few flies.

Of course I applied, he says. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. It had my name written all over it.

That's what *I* thought! I say. I didn't think you'd seen the ad.

He laughs again, because I've given myself away.

I saw the ad, he says. And also they contacted me. Asked me to put in an application. That's the way these things go sometimes in the world of science.

I feel a bit deflated. After all the effort I put into that damn application!

Then they emailed me to say they'd received an application, but it was before I'd sent mine, so I figured out what had happened. Ten points for initiative, Will!

Maybe it was *my* application that got you the job, I say.

He laughs. Is this getting to be a habit with him, or what?

Maybe! he says. I had a Skype interview three days ago, while you were at school, and here's the result. Maybe we both got it, between the two of us.

It's right up your alley, Dad. It's the sort of job that could make a difference, like you always said. Doing things at an international level.

And then I realise he hasn't actually said he's going to take the job, just that they're offering it.

You're going to accept it, aren't you? I say. It's a job you'd like, right?

He looks up and out the cabin hatch and his face goes all sad again. He sighs and turns back to me.

Maybe more to the point here, he says, is what *you*'d like. I think going to all the trouble with the application tells me exactly what *that* is.

I just want to go home, Dad, I say. That's why I did it. I miss home. It wasn't my choice to leave. No one asked me. No one asked me about any of it!

I didn't know I was going to say that, but there it is. Out in the open. And I can feel an ache in my throat and my chest going all tight. At sixteen, I'm too old to cry of course. Although Mum used to say a good cry never did anyone any harm. I push that thought away, too.

Dad gazes out beyond the cabin again, off into the blue sky.

We seem to stay like that for ages, as if someone's pressed the Pause button on their DVD player and we're waiting for them to come and start us up again.

Maybe they do, because suddenly I find I'm saying it again, I just want to go home, Dad.

And then he nods. So do I. So do I.

williamlane@gmail.com

hi summer

you are never going to believe this summer but were coming home! to kettering! i cant wait to get there. were heading off in the next couple of days, soon as the weathers right. sailing away from eden. that sounds like the title of a book doesnt it. it should take us about a week all going well. im so excited. im excited about the sail. although i hope it doesnt get too bumpy across the strait. im excited about going home. but im extra excited because im going to get to meet you in person. how about that? its going to be so cool. dad has landed his dream job. the gods are looking after us, thats what mum used to say.

i know itll be weird living there without mum and thatll be hard for dad too. but i cant think of anywhere id rather be. look out kettering here i come.

ps see you soon
will

williamlane@gmail.com
summer?

williamlane@gmail.com
summer?

will

The next couple of days are full of packing our few belongings and making everything shipshape.

We're setting off very early in the morning so it's a surprise to find there's someone to see us off. A woman about Mum's age. She's got long brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. Dad introduces us on the quay.

This is Alannah, he says.

I shake hands with her. Nice to meet you, I say, trying to hide how downright gobsmacked I am.

I look up at Dad. All this time my father's had a secret.

I've wanted to meet you, Alannah says. What a gorgeous son you have, she says to him.

She kisses my father on the lips and they hug and stand together for a little while and I get a tight feeling in my throat and chest. Something just doesn't look right. I've only ever seen my father kiss my mother like that. But it's got to be good if he's hugging and kissing someone. And then I realise

that Dad's actually leaving something – someone – behind. It's not as straightforward as I'd imagined. He's never mentioned Alannah, but now I get it. All those Friday and Saturday late nights or early mornings.

She has tears in her eyes when I say goodbye. She waves us off and she's still standing there waving when we nose our way out of the marina and into open water.

summer

Writing to Dad is not something I can do on a computer or an iPad. These are old-fashioned letters written with my favourite pen on an A4 pad of pale yellow lined paper, the kind Dad always used when he was teaching me to write. I like to continue the tradition. Postage is a problem, though.

Dear Dad

I've gone and done it now. Dug my own grave, as you used to say. I've dug a deep hole for myself and now I wish I could just jump right in and pull a lid over the top. I wish you are here to give me some advice. How to put things right? Why did I do what I did? Did you ever do any stupid things when you were young? Or even when you were older? You said marrying Mum was the smartest thing you ever did, but I wonder what the stupidest thing was. No one talks

about that really, do they? It would be interesting, I think. A book of stupidest things people have ever done, things they wish they haven't done, things they regret. I think you would say, We're only human, sweetheart. That was another thing you used to say. Especially to Mum when she was upset about not managing to do everything that needs doing. We're only human, sweetheart. Combined with a big hug. How I wish you are here to wrap me in one of your hugs. Or twenty for that matter. If I was a doctor I'd write a prescription. Twenty hugs, and a big pot of herbal tea. The problem is, that might make me feel a bit better, but it just won't fix things! I'm the only one who can fix things. I *could* if I was brave. But I'm not. I'm not brave. I used to be brave when you were alive, Dad. You made us all brave. It's too hard being brave without you.

Dad, the cowgirl boots fit me almost perfectly now. A bit loose but I wear thick socks and I might grow some more. I wear them all the time. And look after them as well as if they are saddle. I still remember the stories you wrote for me about Raspberry, the pony we had when I was tiny and we lived in the country. I loved those stories. You wrote about cleaning the saddle with Neatsfoot oil and I used to think it was name for horses having such neat feet. And now that's what I use on my boots – Neatsfoot oil. It's the best. When I was oiling my boots the other day I wondered why it was really called that so I googled it. The Neat in Neatsfoot is an old name for cattle. And Neatsfoot oil comes from the fat of cattle's shins and feet. I copied out why. It's because the slender legs and feet are adapted to tolerate and maintain much lower temperatures than those of the body

core. Other fat would be solid at this temperature but the fat there stays liquid. Isn't that *interesting*!

Dad I'm doing what you said and keeping up my reading all the time. Right now I'm reading *True Spirit*, Jessica Watson's book about sailing solo right around the world at age sixteen. She has a lot to say about being brave. She says it's mostly about preparing yourself well, and not letting what other people say stop you doing what you love. She even used to be scared of the water! Jessica's a hero for the boy, too. That's how we met. Through her Facebook page.

Pretty tired now, so goodnight, Dad.

Love Summer

I put the letter away inside my wardrobe, in my current letter box, next to all the other cartons. Besides having my own room, that's another reason it's good to be in a big old house with lots of space. Mum didn't even flinch when we moved and I said I wanted to bring them all with me.

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hello summer? has something happened?

will

will

Kettering looks much the same, though the road in off the highway has been widened and resurfaced since we've been away. And Summer's right, there seem to be many more yachts than I remember in the marina. Our house looks just the same. It's been here waiting for us. We step up onto the verandah. I take a deep breath and open the front door. It smells a bit musty. Uncle Bruce left for Queensland a month ago so it's been closed up. We throw open the windows. Dad walks around like a man in a daze, lifting up this and that. He avoids opening their bedroom door and when he does, he stands in the doorway for a long time looking in. It makes me wonder what he sees.

It won't be the same, he mumbles. But it will be home again. We'll make it home again.

And then, he cries, just lets the tears roll down. He did a lot of late night crying when Mum first left but not in front of me. It's hard to know who hurts more. Dad probably

thinks it's him. I probably think it's me.

Come on, Dad, I say eventually. Heaps to do. We need to get food in, put some clean sheets on the beds.

Who's the parent here? I wonder.

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summer? im getting really worried now. whats going on? is everything all right?

will

Mrs Maloney's general store looks exactly the same, like something from the sixties with its old petrol bowsers out the front. Probably because it *is* from the sixties! I go into the shop to buy some basics – milk, bread, eggs – to get us through our first day. Once Mrs Maloney has got over telling me how much I've grown and how she wouldn't have recognised me, I ask her about Summer's family and which house they live in.

Oh them, she says. The big old house up on the hill behind here. Where the Rogers family used to live. Bit *alternative*, I reckon they are, that family. There's more sea-changers since you've been gone.

I just smile and wave goodbye.

That afternoon I'm unpacking the rest of our stuff from boxes when there's a knock on the door. When I open it, on the verandah is a tall kid with sticking up hair and a basketball under one arm. Cully! It can't be. Cully's short, shorter than me, always has been. He was always the shortest in our class and he still was when I left.

But this tall version of Cully grabs me with a yell, the ball bouncing away to one side. It's a cross between a bear hug with an actual bear and a rugby tackle. I try to save myself and squirm out.

Dude! he says. It's true! I was just in the shop and Mrs Maloney told me. No way! I said to her, he would have let me know. Go and see for yourself then, she said. So I did. And it's true. Dude, good to see you!

Cully! I say, but he's gone racing after the ball.

He grabs the ball and comes back to the door where he looks me up and down. Well, I'll be stuffed, he says eventually. I thought I'd never see you again.

I laugh. No such luck, mate, I say.

He raises one large hand in the air and I realise he's waiting for a hi-five. We used to do that when we played soccer. I slap his hand. It's way bigger than mine. I can't believe this is the same guy.

Hey bro, he says. You missed a lot of school.

I laugh. Yeah, but I'll be back there tomorrow. How is it?

You know. Same old, same old. Why didn't you email me to say you were coming home? Or Facebook me?

It all happened fast. And then we had the sail back. That was fun!

But I know the truth is that my mind was on Summer. I change the subject.

What happened to you? I say.

Whaddaya mean?

I nod at his body. You got tall, I say.

Cully looks down in a surprised sort of way.

Oh yeah, he says. It happened just after you left, so I'm

used to it now. My old man said he was gonna have to raise our roof if I kept growing the way I was, but I didn't. Pretty tall though.

He holds out the basketball.

Good for this, anyway. That's what everyone said.

You used to say basketball was for wusses, I remind him.

Yeah well, he says. Tall wusses though.

We both crack up. I suddenly feel happy. My best friend Cully right in front of me.

The rest of the afternoon's a bit of a blur. He comes in for a while and we make nachos. We go for a walk around the point. By the time Cully has to go, I can almost feel things are back to normal.

See you at school tomorrow, dude, he calls. We can shoot a few hoops.

Yeah right, I say. Do you even need to jump to put that ball in?

Why hasn't Summer answered my emails? Maybe they've gone away. Or their computer's down. Who knows? But I want to find out.

I don't want to interrupt her home schooling so I wait till Saturday then walk along the road past all the cars waiting for the ferry and up the road to their house. Maybe living on the boat has made me soft and I don't have too much fitness and maybe that's why my knees are all weak. It's a steep hill after all. I turn around, and the view out over the marina and then away to Bruny is awesome. There's the sound of wind shifting the boats' rigging and the cry of seagulls and breeze rustling through the leaves of the big

gums up behind the house. The smell is of the sea and diesel and bush. I'm home! I take some deep breaths of that fresh home air and turn towards the house again. It's a big old farmhouse with peeling paint and a deep verandah along the front which seems to sag under its own weight.

I am so busy checking out the house that it makes me jump when I suddenly see there's a girl sitting on an old sofa on the verandah, watching me. Not just any girl. Summer! I feel as if I've been sprung snooping.

She has obviously been watching me try to pull myself together, although I'm hoping it looked as if I was taking in the view. A golden retriever sits at her feet, its head flat on the boards, oblivious to an intruder in its territory. Or maybe used to lots of visitors. Why doesn't Summer wave? Or say something? She must recognise me. Although of course she might still be thinking I'm in Eden. There have been no emails from her since I wrote that I was coming home.

I put one foot down deliberately in front of the other and walk across what seems like a kilometre but must be just the last fifteen metres to the verandah. In person, Summer is even more beautiful. Long chestnut hair down to her elbows and big widely spaced eyes. The eyes do not look welcoming. This doesn't fit at all with my picture of how things would go. We stare at each other and I wait for her to realise who I am. Come on, Summer. This is not how it's supposed to be.

She stands up. She's tall and stunning in a long-sleeved multi-coloured dress and flat shoes. The dog sits up and turns to stare at me just as she's doing.

Who the hell are you? she says.

Don't you recognise me? I say.

I've never seen you before in my life!

And she says it in a way that makes me think she doesn't want to be seeing me now either. What's going on?

This is private property, she says then. We don't have signs up to say so, but that doesn't mean anyone who feels like it can just wander up here and take a look at us. We're not a circus. No matter what anyone says, she adds.

She flicks the long hair back over her shoulders and stares.

You really don't recognise me? I say again. I'm Will.

I've never seen you before in my life. Didn't I just say that?

I realise that what she is saying is technically true since she's only ever seen my photo. Maybe I look different in person. Taller. Skinnier. Less interesting.

I'm Will, Summer, I say. How can you not recognise me?

Summer! She laughs, but sort of nastily. I don't think anyone'd get me mixed up with my sister.

Wha? Her sister? But. Wait a minute. How can that be? Are Summer and her sister twins? What was her sister's name again? Violet, that's it. But no, Violet's older.

Are you Violet? I say.

Of course I'm Violet, she says. I'm certainly not Summer.

I'm confused. I'm very confused. This is not the way I'd imagined it. I'd imagined some crazy scenario with Summer running up and throwing her arms around me and saying she was too scared of her own feelings for me to keep in touch. But now that she's seen me she knows it'll be all right. Ha! So much for that.

Are you just going to stand there or what? Violet says.

Well, I might since I'm not sure what else I should do just now.

Well, why don't you talk to Summer herself? The girl points and I spin around.

Trudging up the hill is a girl with shoulder-length curly brown hair. She's wearing denim shorts, a long-sleeved blue and green T-shirt and dark green cowboy boots. She's carrying a bucket in one hand and a fishing rod in the other. She's got a large camera slung around her neck and she looks to be deep in thought.

You look like a boy, Summer, Violet says. Then she says to me, How could anyone with a brain mix us up? And she swishes off the verandah into the house, slamming the door behind her.

The other girl has kept walking up the hill with her head down, clearly so deep in thought that she hasn't even registered what her sister was saying. But now she looks up and sees me right ahead of her. She stops in her tracks. I'm still confused. This is not Summer. That other girl was Summer. The long hair, those eyes. Just the same as in the photograph.

The curly-haired girl's still staring at me. I'm staring at her. The boats are still clanking and the seagulls are still crying and the wind's still rustling. But there are no sounds from either of us.

A door opens in another building off to the left and a woman comes out to stand on the small deck. She's wearing a man's checked shirt splattered with paint and she's got a paintbrush in her hand. She crouches and puts the brush down carefully on the deck. I stare at the brush as if it

might hold the answer to this puzzle. But then I'm staring at the mother. She must be the mother, right? Because she's standing again and looking at the curly-haired girl called Summer and her hands are doing a sort of dance, sometimes together then up to her face or down to her paint-smearred shirt. I look at her and see that she's looking at the girl as she does this. I look back at the girl and her hands are doing the dance thing, too. Her face has so many expressions rushing over its surface, bigger expressions than usual, and changing with lightning speed as her hands fly. I look back at the mother. She's looking sternly at the girl but the look softens as I watch. She looks at me now and smiles.

Hello, Will, she says.

Hello, I say.

You must think we're deranged. She laughs.

Um.

It's Summer's doing. She's sorry she misled you.

I turn to look at the girl, Summer. She's dragging her feet now and getting closer to me. She stops right in front of me and puts down the rod and bucket. Inside the bucket a lone flathead gives a little squirm, possibly a final squirm. The girl lifts her brown eyes to mine, spreads her fingers in front of her face and moves her hand backwards and forwards. What the —? She looks so sorrowful that I feel for her. I still don't get it.

Then her mother says, She's saying she's sorry.

It hits me. I must be really slow. They're signing! This is Summer. And she's using sign language. She signs. She doesn't speak. Which means — she's deaf.

But —? I say.

And now she's signing again and the mother is telling me what she's saying.

She's sorry, the mother continues, because she sent you a photo of her sister and said it was her because her sister's more glamorous. She says she's not sorry about anything else.

I look at this girl who has tricked me. Now she's looking back at me. I can see she's all tortured because of what she's done. But what did she expect? What was she thinking? And Summer's deaf? She's *deaf*? That's a pretty damn big thing to forget to mention! My head's in a complete spin. I feel stupid, stupid and more stupid. I've been duped by a girl who seemed so nice and so on my wavelength that I thought – what did I think? Bloody internet's what I think now. First Mum, and now this girl.

My mind's swimming. I don't know what to say and even if I say anything Summer can't hear it, so what's the point. I look at her and shake my head and lift my shoulders and my hands in front of me and say, Why?

She looks down at her feet.

I turn to her mother and say, Tell Summer I'm sorry, too. I thought we were friends.

The mother stamps her foot on the deck and it makes me jump. I swing around and Summer's looking up. The mother makes a few quick signs to her. I look back at Summer and she's looking at me and nodding hard. She holds her two hands in front of her together as if she's wringing them. Her face is all sort of pleading but I'm so confused and upset I can't even think straight.

Her mother says, Summer says yes we *are* friends.

I turn back to Summer. Friends don't lie, I say and I walk straight past her down the road and I don't look back.

My brain doesn't know how to think about this. I walk with noise in my head, rather than thoughts. It's more like my skull's got a bunch of bats careening around in there the way they do along our verandah. I walk to the point and beyond and then back to the marina and up to the pub and all the way back to the jetty and the bats are still screeching and inside my body is this burning feeling, completely consuming me, and when I come to a standstill I know what it is. It's anger. I am white hot angry. I'm so angry I don't know what to do about it. I take some deep breaths. The bats settle down a bit. I go over to the edge of the jetty and sit down, dangling my legs and looking out to Bruny. The water is as calm as can be. I breathe in hard. Breathe out hard. I will my mind to glass out like the water. But it won't. I think about how angry I feel. I think about Summer, and our emails. It was all based on trust, and she's hasn't turned out to be someone I can trust.

When eventually I go home, I slam the kitchen door on the way in. I don't mean to slam it, but this thing's got a hold on my body. Dad's sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper and drinking a beer, and he slops a bit of the beer over the paper when he jolts in his seat.

Whoa! he says. What's up?

What can I say? I've never even mentioned Summer to him. I say the first thing that comes to mind.

Women! I say and keep moving for the door.

Tell me about it, he says quietly on my way out.