

VISITING TOM

It's low tide. The sea peels back, and opens the caves. We scabble under the wind, skin our hands and stick our fingers in anemones. I slide smack into the hidden rock pool, like we did when we were real little. Water and sand slicks against my back and smells like ash and lemons. I'm smaller than I really am. There is a rock shelf that hangs over the pool, shadows the sun and the light ripples the roof. I open my hands like stars or an unfolded map against the water. I am weightless and without time. I listen. And then there's this sound – as wide and loud as a mouth. I can't scream. I can't move. The tide crashes in. I'm cemented in the sand, crushed in white wash and shadow. In that dark space between the rocks and the sea, I'm breathing glassed air and water.

I'm drowning.

It's always the same, the night before I visit Tom. I used to wake up a metre out of my body, the colour of ice. Now I just wait it out.

I wait until the light changes and I welt over: like the scar that runs from Tom's eyebrow to his chin or the skin where Kate's leg should be.

I shuffle around my room looking for my backpack stuffed with water crackers, cheese and a jar of sundried tomatoes. Mum reckons if she buys expensive food, we'll be better people. She doesn't buy muesli bars anymore. I remember when Tom won school captain. He looked at the principal, hard and hot as a stone and, in front of the whole assembly, told him to shove it up his ass. He wouldn't make the food at the canteen cheaper. I carry my shoes and don't turn on the light. I try to slip the front door without it creaking. But she's already waiting outside.

'I don't want you seeing him' Mum tightens her dressing gown

'I'm going to a barbeque. I told you this yesterday.'

‘At quarter to six in the morning?’

‘Yeah – I already *told* you this!’ I pull my hoodie up so she can’t see my face.

‘Daniel!’ she calls when I’m away from the house, ‘You... you tell Tom I’ll always love him, yeah?’

I keep walking.

‘Tell him your friggen self.’ I mutter when I think she can’t hear me

My fingers are numb; I can’t get the change out for a ticket. I love the train station. It’s so loud or noiseless. No one wants to be here.

The suits with daily telegraphs – they’re all somewhere else.

Sometimes I want to sit her all day and be no one at all. The train smells of imitation leather and skin and the world scatters like

photographs outside the window. I remember when Tom jumped off white cliffs into the sea. It was about this time of morning,

where the light was high and clear and full of salt. Everyone said

he would die, but he kept his eyes open and shone. This is what he

would have seen, rushed through the sky the world breaking past him. I look out the window. I have three hours to work out something good to say to him.

‘Dan the man!’ Tom grins.

I look away from the dark spaces where the steering wheel knocked his teeth out and stir my Milo. They let us have Milo. I thought jails, even juvenile ones, would be like those war movies. Shaved heads, starving and real good-looking guards cut from stone. I watch a lot of those movies now. The room is full of people. Close enough to make out chips of what they’re saying. And what they’re not

‘What’s doing?’ he asks

‘Nothing. We moved.’

He tightens, ‘Where?’

‘Past Penrith, up the mountain. It’s cold there.’

‘But Mum loves the coast’ he says.

‘It was her idea. She thought everyone was looking at her different after... everything’

Tom closes his fists and stares. I should have thought of something better to say.

‘Kate ok?’ he asks

‘She’s doing some physio thing.’

‘I gotta to talk to you about that. Hey, I know Mum doesn’t want you to have anything to do with me’

‘No!’ I cut in, ‘she wants us to stick together.’

‘Dan, its all good,’ He twists his twisted face, ‘she sent me a letter saying you need a clean break from me’

No it’s not all good, it’s stuffed! You and Mum are both stuffed!

I want to scream at him *Things that break aren’t clean, they’re just broken!*

‘I wouldn’t ask ...but,” he looks over at the correctional officers, ‘You remember that track that runs near the caves at our beach?’

I feel itchy all over, like my clothes are too tight or I'm dreaming.

I nod my head.

He looks straight at me.

'I buried something there, just in case. I want you to give it to Kate. Her parents don't have cash for doctors and all that. Its my fault she got hurt.'

Something tears around my stomach. Something red and phosphorous. Something with teeth.

'Is this the money from that service station? You want me to run around the beach digging up stolen money? I don't want to end up in here! I don't want to end up like you!'

It's like all his bones turn to elastic.

Softly, 'Neither do I.'

My brother still has the same dirty blue eyes and a promise of fire. Now he's still. He can sit without twitching and is scarred up and exposed like earth that's been dug raw. If I said those things to him a year ago he would have laughed his wild laugh, lit up like

headlights and punched me in the guts til I cried. But he just nods his head; once. He walks back toward his block, a green tracksuit, grey bricks and a shadow. All I can smell is ash and lemon and his frame against the sun, down at the rock pools when we were little.

Part of him isn't there anymore. And I don't know whether to miss it or not.