

Silver Bay

Jojo Moyes

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Extract

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Prologue

Kathleen

My name is Kathleen Whittier Mostyn, and when I was seventeen I became famous for catching the biggest shark New South Wales had ever seen: a grey nurse with an eye so mean it still looked like it wanted to rip me in two several days after we'd laid it out. That was back in the days when all of Silver Bay was given over to game fishing, and for three straight weeks all anyone could talk about was that shark. A newspaper reporter came all the way from Newcastle and took a picture of me standing next to it (I'm the one in the bathing-suit). It's several feet taller than I am, in that picture, and the photographer made me wear my heels.

What you can see is a tall, rather stern-seeming girl, better-looking than she knew, shoulders broad enough to be the despair of her mother, and a waist trim enough from reeling and bending that she never needed a corset. There I am, unable to hide my pride, not yet aware that I would be tied to that beast for the rest of my days as surely as if we had been married. What you can't see is that he is held up by two wires, supported by my father and his business partner Mr Brent Newhaven – hauling it ashore had ripped several tendons in my right shoulder and by the time the photographer arrived I couldn't lift a mug of tea, let alone a shark.

Still, it was enough to cement my reputation. For years I was known as the Shark Girl, even when my girlhood was well over. My sister Norah always joked that, given the state of my appearance, they should have called me the Sea Urchin. But my success, my father always said, made the Bay Hotel. Two days after that picture appeared in the newspaper we were booked solid, and stayed booked solid until the west wing of the hotel burnt down in 1962. Men came because they wanted to beat my record. Or because they assumed that if a *girl* could land a creature like that, why, what was possible for a *proper* fisherman? A few came to ask me to marry them, but my father always said he could smell them before they'd hit Port Stephens and sent them packing. Women came because until then they had never thought it possible that they could catch game fish, let alone compete with the men. And families came because Silver Bay, with its protected bay, endless dunes and calm waters, was a fine place to be.

Two more jetties were hurriedly constructed to cope with the extra boat traffic, and every day the air was filled with the sound of clipped oars and outboard motors as the bay and the sea around it was virtually dredged of aquatic life. The night air was filled with the revving of car engines, soft bursts of music and glasses clinking. There was a time, during the 1950s, when it is not too fanciful to say that we were *the* place to be.

Now we still have our boats, and our jetties, although we only use one now, and what people are chasing is pretty different. I haven't picked up a rod in almost twenty years. I don't much care for killing things any more. We're pretty quiet, even in the summer. Most of the holiday traffic heads to the clubs and high-rise hotels, the more obvious delights of Coffs Harbour or Byron Bay and, to tell the truth, that suits most of us just fine.

I still hold that record. It's noted in one of those doorstep-sized books that sell in huge numbers, and no one you know ever buys. The editors do me the honour of ringing me now and then to let me know my name will be included for another year. Occasionally the local schoolchildren stop by to tell me they've found me in the library, and I always act surprised, just to keep them happy.

But I still hold that record. I tell you that not out of any desire to boast, or because I'm a seventy-six-year-old woman and it's nice to feel I once did something of note, but because when you're surrounded by as many secrets as I am, it feels good to get things straight out in the open occasionally.

One

Hannah

If you stuck your hand in right up to the wrist, you could usually uncover at least three different kinds of biscuit in *Moby One's* jar. Yoshi said that the crews on the other boats always skimped on biscuits, buying the cheapest arrowroot in value packs at the supermarket. But she reckoned that if you'd paid nearly a hundred and fifty dollars to go out chasing dolphins, the least you could expect was a decent biscuit. So she bought all-butter Anzacs – thick, oaty, double-layered with chocolate – Scotch Fingers, Mint Slices wrapped in foil and very occasionally, if she could get away with it, home-baked cookies. Lance, the skipper, said she got decent biscuits because they were pretty well all she had to eat. He also said that if their boss ever caught her spending that much on biscuits he'd squash her like a Garibaldi. I stared at the biscuits, as *Moby One* headed out into Silver Bay, holding up the tray as Yoshi offered the passengers tea and coffee. I was hoping they wouldn't eat all the Anzacs before I had a chance to take one. I'd snuck out without breakfast, and I knew it was only when we headed into the cockpit that she'd let me dip in.

'*Moby One* to *Suzanne*, how many beers did you sink last night? You're steering a course like a one-legged drunk.'

Lance was on the radio. As we went in, I dropped my hand straight into the biscuit jar and pulled out the last

Anzac. The ship-to-ship radio crackled, and a voice muttered something I couldn't make out. He tried again: '*Moby One to Sweet Suzanne*. Look, you'd better straighten up, mate . . . you've got four passengers up front hanging over the rails. Every time you swerve they're decorating your starboard windows.'

Lance MacGregor's voice sounded like it had been rubbed down with wire wool, like the boat's sides. He took one hand off the wheel and Yoshi gave him a mug of coffee. I tucked myself in behind her. The spray on the back of her navy blue uniform sparkled like sequins.

'You seen Greg?' Lance asked.

She nodded. 'I got a good look before we set off.'

'He's so done in he can't steer straight.' He pointed out of the droplet-flecked window towards the smaller boat. 'I tell you, Yoshi, his passengers will be asking for refunds. The one in the green hat hasn't lifted his head since we passed Break Nose Island. What the hell's got into him?'

Yoshi Takomura had the prettiest hair I'd ever seen. It hung in black clouds round her face, never tangling despite the effects of wind and salt water. I took one of my own mousy locks between my fingers; it felt gritty, although we had been on the water only half an hour. My friend Lara said that when she hit fourteen, in four years' time, her mum was going to let her put streaks in hers. It was then that Lance had caught sight of me. I guess I'd known he would.

'What are you doing here, Squirt? Your mum'll have my guts for garters. Don't you have school or something?'

'Holidays.' I stepped back behind Yoshi, a little embarrassed. Lance always talked to me like I was five years younger than I was.

'She'll stay out of sight,' Yoshi said. 'She just wanted to see the dolphins.'

I stared at him, pulling my sleeves down over my hands.

He stared back, then shrugged. 'You gonna wear a life-jacket?'

I nodded.

'And not get under my feet?'

I tilted my head. As if, my eyes said.

'Be nice to her,' said Yoshi. 'She's been ill twice already.'

'It's nerves,' I said. 'My tummy always does it.'

'Ah . . . Hell. Look, just make sure your mum knows it was nothing to do with me, okay? And listen, Squirt, head for *Moby Two* next time – or, even better, someone else's boat.'

'You never saw her,' said Yoshi. 'Anyway, Greg's steering's not the half of it.' She grinned. 'Wait till he turns and you see what he's done to the side of his prow.'

It was, Yoshi said, as we headed back out, a good day to be on the water. The sea was a little choppy, but the winds were mild, and the air so clear that you could see the white horses riding the little breakers miles into the distance. I followed her to the main restaurant deck, my legs easily absorbing the rise and fall of the catamaran beneath me, a little less self-conscious now that the skipper knew I was on board.

This, she had told me, would be the busiest part of today's dolphin-watching trip, the time between setting off and our arrival at the sheltered waters round the bay where the pods of bottlenoses tended to gather. While the passengers sat up on the top deck, enjoying the crisp May day through woollen mufflers, Yoshi, the steward, was laying out the buffet, offering drinks and, if the water was choppy, which it was most days now that winter was coming, preparing the disinfectant and bucket for seasickness. It didn't matter how many times you told them, she grumbled, glancing at the well-dressed Asians who made up most of the morning's custom, they *would* stay below decks, they *would* eat and

drink too quickly and they *would* go into the tiny lavatories to be sick, rather than hanging over the edge, thereby making them unusable by anyone else. And if they were Japanese, she added, with a hint of malicious pleasure, they would spend the rest of the voyage in a silent frenzy of humiliation, hiding behind dark glasses and raised collars, their ashen faces turned resolutely to sea.

‘Tea? Coffee? Biscuits? Tea? Coffee? Biscuits?’

I followed her out on to the foredeck, pulling my windcheater up round my neck. The wind had dropped a little but I could still feel the chill in the air, biting at my nose and the tips of my ears. Most of the passengers didn’t want anything – they were chatting loudly, to be heard above the engines, gazing out at the distant horizon, and taking pictures of each other. Now and then I dipped my hand into the biscuits until I’d taken what I thought they would have eaten anyway.

Moby One was the biggest catamaran – or ‘cat’, as the crews called them – in Silver Bay. It was usually a two-steward vessel, but the tourists were tailing off as the temperature dropped, so it was just Yoshi now until trade picked up again. I didn’t mind – it was easier to persuade her to let me aboard. I helped her put the tea and coffee pots back in their holders, then stepped back out on to the narrow side deck, where we braced ourselves against the windows, and gazed across the sea to where the smaller boat was still making its uneven path across the waves. Even from this distance we could see that more people now were hanging over *Suzanne’s* rails, their heads lower than their shoulders, oblivious of the spattered red paint just below them. ‘We can take ten minutes now. Here.’ Yoshi cracked open a can of cola and handed it to me. ‘You ever heard of chaos theory?’

‘Mmm.’ I made it sound like I might.

‘If only those people knew,’ she wagged a finger as we

felt the engines slow, 'that their long-awaited trip to go see the wild dolphins has been ruined by an ex-girlfriend they will never meet and a man who now lives with her more than two hundred and fifty kilometres away in Sydney and thinks that purple cycling shorts are acceptable daywear.'

I took a gulp of my drink. The fizz made my eyes water and I swallowed hard. 'You're saying the tourists being sick on Greg's boat is down to chaos theory?' I'd thought it was because he'd got drunk again the night before.

Yoshi smiled. 'Something like that.'

The engines had stopped, and *Moby One* quieted, the sea growing silent around us, except for the tourist chatter and the waves slapping against the sides. I loved it out here, loved watching my house become a white dot against the narrow strip of beach, then disappear behind the endless coves. Perhaps my pleasure was made greater by the knowledge that what I was doing was against the rules. I wasn't rebellious, not really, but I kind of liked the idea of it.

Lara had a dinghy that she was allowed to take out by herself, staying within the buoys that marked out the old oyster beds, and I envied her. My mother wouldn't let me roam around the bay, even though I was nearly eleven. 'All in good time,' she would murmur. There was no point arguing with her about stuff like that.

Lance appeared beside us: he'd just had his photograph taken with two giggling teenagers. He was often asked to pose with young women, and hadn't yet been known to refuse. It was why he liked to wear his captain's peaked cap, Yoshi said, even when the sun was hot enough to melt his head.

'What's he written on the side of his boat?' He squinted at Greg's cruiser in the distance. He seemed to have forgiven me for being on board.

'I'll tell you back at the jetty.'

I caught the eyebrow cocked towards me. 'I *can* read what it says, you know,' I said. The other boat, which had until yesterday described itself as the *Sweet Suzanne*, now suggested, in red paint, that 'Suzanne' do something Yoshi said was a biological impossibility. She turned to him, lowering her voice as far as possible – as if she thought I couldn't hear her. 'The missus told him there was another man after all.'

Lance let out a long whistle. 'He said as much. And she denied it.'

'She was hardly going to admit it, not when she knew how Greg was going to react. And he was hardly an innocent . . .' She glanced at me. 'Anyway, she's off to live in Sydney, and she said she wants half the boat.'

'And he says?'

'I think the boat probably says it all.'

'Can't believe he'd take tourists out with it like that.' Lance lifted his binoculars better to study the scrawled red lettering.

Yoshi gestured at him to pass them to her. 'He was so crook this morning I'm not sure he's even remembered what he's done.'

We were interrupted by the excited yells of the tourists on the upper deck. They were jostling towards the pulpit at the front.

'Here we go,' muttered Lance, straightening up and grinning at me. 'There's our pocket money, Squirt. Time to get back to work.'

Sometimes, Yoshi said, they could run the whole bay but the bottlenoses would refuse to show, and a boat full of unsatisfied dolphin-watchers was a boat full of free second trips and fifty-per-cent refunds, both guaranteed to send the boss into meltdown.

At the bow, a group of tourists were pressed together, cameras whirring as they tried to catch the glossy grey shapes

that were now riding the breaking waves below. I checked the water to see who had come to play. Below decks, Yoshi had covered a wall with photographs of the fins of every dolphin in the area. She had given them all names: Zigzag, One Cut, Piper . . . The other crews had laughed at her, but now they could all recognise the distinctive fins – it was the second time they'd seen Butterknife that week, they'd murmur. I knew the name of every one by heart.

'Looks like Polo and Brolly,' Yoshi said, leaning over the side.

'Is that Brolly's baby?'

The dolphins were silent grey arcs, circling the boat as if they were the sightseers. Every time one broke the surface the air was filled with the sound of clacking camera shutters. What did they think of us gawping at them? I knew they were as smart as humans. I used to imagine them meeting up by the rocks afterwards, laughing in dolphin language about us – the one in the blue hat, or the one with the funny glasses.

Lance's voice came over the PA system: 'Ladies and gentlemen, please do not rush to one side to see the dolphins. We will slowly turn the ship so that everyone can get a good view. If you rush to one side we are likely to capsize. Dolphins do not like boats that fall over.'

Glancing up, I noticed two albatross; pausing in mid-air, they folded their wings and dived, sending up only the faintest splash as they hit the water. One rose again, wheeling in search of some unseen prey, then the other rejoined it, soaring above the little bay and disappeared. I watched them go. Then, as *Moby One* slowly shifted position, I leant over the side, sticking my feet under the bottom rail to see my new trainers. Yoshi had promised she'd let me sit in the boom nets when the weather got warmer, so that I could touch the dolphins, perhaps even swim with

them. But only if my mother agreed. And we all knew what that meant.

I stumbled as the boat moved unexpectedly. It took me a second to register that the engines had started up. Startled, I grabbed the handrail. I had grown up in Silver Bay and knew there was a way of doing things around dolphins. Shut down engines if you want them to play. If they keep moving, hold a parallel course, be guided by them. Dolphins made things pretty clear: if they liked you they came close, or kept an even distance. If they didn't want you around they swam away. Yoshi frowned at me, and as the catamaran lurched, we grabbed the lifelines. My confusion was mirrored in her face.

A sudden acceleration sent the boat shooting forward, and, above, squealing tourists collapsed on to their seats. We were flying.

Lance was on the radio. As we clambered into the cockpit behind him, *Sweet Suzanne* was scudding along some distance away, bouncing over the waves, apparently heedless of the increasing numbers of miserable people now hanging over her rails.

'Lance! What are you doing?' Yoshi grabbed at a rail.

'See you there, bud . . . Ladies and gentlemen—' Lance pulled a face and reached for the PA system button. *I need a translation*, he mouthed. 'We have something a bit special for you this morning. You've already enjoyed the magical sight of our Silver Bay dolphins, but if you hold on tight, we'd like to take you to something *really* special. We've had a sighting of the first whales of the season, a little further out to sea. These are the humpbacked whales who come past our waters every year on their long migration north from the Antarctic. I can promise you that this is a sight you won't forget. Now, please sit down, or hold on tight. Things may get a little choppy as, from the south, there's

a little more size in the swell, but I want to make sure we get you there in time to see them. Anyone who wants to stay at the front of the boat, I suggest you borrow a waterproof. There are plenty inside at the back.'

He spun the wheel and nodded to Yoshi, who took the PA system. She repeated what he had said in Japanese, then in Korean for good measure. It was entirely possible, she said afterwards, that she had simply recited the previous day's lunch menu: she had been unable to focus since Lance had made his announcement. One word sang through, as it did in my own mind: *whale*!

'How far?' Yoshi's body was rigid as she scanned the glinting waters. The earlier relaxed atmosphere had disappeared completely. My stomach was in knots.

'Four, five miles? Dunno. The tourist helicopter was flying over and said they'd seen what looked like two a couple of miles off Torn Point. It's a little early in the season, but . . .'

'Fourteenth of June last year. We're not that far out,' said Yoshi. 'Bloody hell! Look at Greg! He's going to lose passengers if he carries on at that pace. His boat's not big enough to soak up those waves.'

'He doesn't want us to get there before him.' Lance shook his head and checked the speed dial. 'Full throttle. Let's make sure *Moby One*'s first this year. Just for once.'

Some crew members were doing the job to make up their shipping hours, on course for bigger vessels and bigger jobs. Some, like Yoshi, had begun as part of their education and had simply forgotten to go home. But, whatever reason they might have for being there, I had grasped long ago that there was magic in the first whale sighting of the migration season. It was as if, until that creature had been seen, it was impossible to believe they would be back.

To be the first to see one didn't mean much – once the whales were known to be out there, all five boats that

operated off Whale Jetty would switch their business from dolphins to whale-watching. But it was of importance to the crew. And, like all great passions, it made them mad. Boy, did it make them mad.

'Look at that great idiot. Funny how he can hold a straight course now,' Lance spat. Greg was portside of us, but seemed to be gaining.

'He can't bear the thought of us getting there before him.' Yoshi grabbed a waterproof and threw it at me. 'There! Just in case we go out front. It's going to get pretty wet.'

'I don't bloody believe it.' Lance had spied another boat on the horizon. He must have forgotten I was there, to be swearing. 'There's Mitchell! I bet you he's been sitting on the radio all afternoon and now he swans up, probably with a cabinful of passengers. I'm going to swing for that bloke one of these days.'

They were always moaning about Mitchell Dray. He never bothered to look for the dolphins, like the others: he would just wait until he overheard a sighting on the ship-to-ship radio and go where everyone else was headed.

'Am I really going to see a whale?' I asked. Beneath our feet, the hull smacked noisily against the waves, forcing me to hang on to the side. Through the open window, I could hear the excited shouts of the tourists, the laughter of those who had been hit by rogue waves.

'Fingers crossed.' Yoshi's eyes were trained on the horizon.

A real whale. I had only once seen a whale, with my aunt Kathleen. Usually I wasn't allowed this far out to sea.

'There . . . There! No, it's just spray.' Yoshi had lifted the binoculars. 'Can't you change course? There's too much glare.'

'Not if you want me to get there first.' Lance swung the boat to starboard, trying to alter the angle of the sun on the waves.

'We should radio ashore. Find out exactly where the chopper saw it.'

'No point,' said Lance. 'It could have travelled two miles by now. And Mitchell will be listening in. I'm not giving that bugger any more information. He's been stealing passengers from us all summer.'

'Just watch for the blow.'

'Yeah. And the little flag that says, "Whale."'

'Just trying to help, Lance.'

'There!' I could just make out the shape, like a distant black pebble dipping below the water. 'North-north-east. Heading behind Break Nose Island. Just dived.' I thought I might be sick with excitement. I heard Lance start counting behind me. 'One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . *whale!*' An unmistakable plume of water rose joyously above the horizon. Yoshi let out a squeal. Lance glanced towards Greg, who, from his course, hadn't seen it. 'We got her!' Lance hissed. All whales were 'her' to Lance, just as all kids were 'squirt'.

Whale. I took the word into my mouth, rolled it around and savoured it. My eyes did not leave the water. *Moby One* shifted course, the huge catamaran slapping hard as it bounded over each wave. Behind the island I imagined the whale breaching, displaying its white belly to the world in an unseen display of buoyancy. 'Whale,' I whispered.

'We're going to be first,' muttered Yoshi, excitedly. 'Just for once we're going to get there first.'

I watched Lance swing the wheel, counting under his breath to mark the number of times the whale blew. More than thirty seconds apart and it was likely to dive deep. Then we would have lost it. Closer together meant it had already dived, and we would have a chance to follow.

'Seven . . . eight . . . She's up. *Yéssss.*' Lance hit the wheel with his palm, then grabbed the PA system. 'Ladies and gentlemen, if you look over to your right, you might make

out the whale, which is headed behind that piece of land there.'

'Greg's realised where we're headed.' Yoshi grinned. 'He'll never catch us now. His engine isn't powerful enough.'

'*Moby One* to *Blue Horizon*. Mitchell,' Lance yelled into his radio, 'you want to see this baby you're going to have to get off my coat tails.'

Mitchell's voice came over the radio: '*Blue Horizon* to *Moby One*. I'm just here to make sure there's someone to pick up Greg's overboards.'

'Oh, nothing to do with the big fish?' Lance responded tersely.

'*Blue Horizon* to *Moby One*. Big old sea, Lance. Plenty of room for everyone.'

I gripped the wooden rim of the chart table so tightly that my knuckles turned white as I watched the scrubby headland grow. I wondered whether the whale would slow there, allow us to come closer. Perhaps it would lift its head and eye us. Perhaps it would swim up to the side of the boat and reveal its calf.

'Two minutes,' said Lance. 'We'll be round the head in about two minutes. Hopefully get up close.'

'Come on, girlie. Give us a good show.' Yoshi was talking to herself, binoculars still raised.

Whale, I told it silently, *wait for us, whale*. I wondered whether it would notice me. Whether it could sense that I, of all the people on the boat, had a special empathy with sea creatures. I was pretty sure I did.

'I don't – bloody – believe – it.' Lance had taken off his peaked cap, and was scowling out of the window.

'What?' Yoshi leant towards him.

'*Look.*'

I followed their gaze. As *Moby One* came round the headland, all of us fell silent. A short distance from the

scrub-covered landmass, half a mile out to sea in aquamarine waters, the stationary *Ishmael* sat, its newly painted sides glinting under the midday sun.

At the helm stood my mother, leaning over the rail, her hair whipping round her face under the bleached cap she insisted on wearing out to sea. She had her weight on one leg and Milly, our dog, lay apparently asleep across the wheel. She looked as if she had been there, waiting for this whale, for years.

‘How the bloody hell did she do that?’ Lance caught Yoshi’s warning glare and shrugged an apology at me. ‘Nothing personal, but – Jeez . . .’

‘She’s always there first.’ Yoshi’s response was half amused, half resigned. ‘Every year I’ve been here. She’s always first.’

‘Beaten by a bloody Pom. It’s as bad as the cricket.’ Lance lit a cigarette, then tossed away the match in disgust.

I stepped out on to the deck.

At that moment the whale emerged. As we gasped, it lobtailed, sending a huge spray of water towards *Ishmael*. The tourists on *Moby One*’s top deck cheered. It was enormous, close enough that we could see the barnacled growths along its body, the corrugated white belly; near enough that I could look briefly into its eye. But ridiculously swift – something of that bulk had no right to be so agile.

My breath had stalled in my throat. One hand clutching the lifelines, I lifted the binoculars with the other and gazed through them, not at the whale but at my mother, hardly hearing the exclamations about the creature’s size, the swell it sent before the smaller boat, forgetting briefly that I should not allow myself to be seen. Even from that distance I could make out that Liza McCullen was smiling, her eyes creased upwards. It was an expression she rarely, if ever, wore on dry land.

Aunt Kathleen walked to the end of the veranda to put a large bowl of prawns and some lemon slices on the bleached wooden table with a large basket of bread. She's actually my great-aunt but she says that makes her feel like an antique, so most of the time I call her Auntie K. Behind her the white weatherboard of the hotel's frontage glowed softly in the evening sun, eight fiery red peaches sliding down the windows. The wind had picked up a little, and the hotel sign whined as it swung back and forth.

'What's this for?' Greg lifted his head from the bottle of beer he'd been nursing. He had finally taken off his dark glasses, and the shadows under his eyes betrayed the events of the previous evening.

'I heard you needed your stomach lined,' she said, thwacking a napkin in front of him.

'He tell you four of his passengers asked for their money back when they caught sight of his hull?' Lance laughed. 'Sorry, Greg mate, but what a damn fool thing to do. Of all the things to write.'

'You're a gent, Kathleen.' Greg, ignoring him, reached for the bread.

My aunt gave him one of her looks. 'And I'll be something else entirely if you write those words where young Hannah can see them again.'

'Shark Lady's still got teeth.' Lance mimed a snapping motion at Greg.

Aunt Kathleen ignored him. 'Hannah, you dig in now. I'll bet you never had a bite to eat for lunch. I'm going to fetch the salad.'

'She ate the biscuits,' said Yoshi, expertly undressing a prawn.

'Biscuits.' Aunt Kathleen snorted.

We were gathered, as the Whale Jetty crews were most

evenings, outside the hotel kitchens. There were few days when the crews wouldn't share a beer or two before they headed home. Some of the younger members, my aunt often said, shared so many that they barely made it home at all.

As I bit into a juicy tiger prawn, I noticed that the burners were outside; few guests at the Silver Bay Hotel wanted to sit out in June, but in winter the whale-watching crews congregated here to discuss events on the water, no matter the weather. Their members changed from year to year, as people moved on to different jobs or went to uni, but Lance, Greg, Yoshi and the others had been a constant in my life for as long as I had lived there. Aunt Kathleen usually lit the burners at the start of the month and they stayed on most evenings until September.

'Did you have many out?' She had returned with the salad. She tossed it with brisk, expert fingers, then put some on to my plate before I could protest. 'I've had no one at the museum.'

'*Moby One* was pretty full. Lot of Koreans.' Yoshi shrugged. 'Greg nearly lost half of his over the side.'

'They got a good sight of the whale.' Greg reached for another piece of bread. 'No complaints. No refunds necessary. Got any more beers, Miss M?'

'You know where the bar is. You see it, Hannah?'

'It was enormous. I could see its barnacles.' For some reason I'd expected it to be smooth, but the skin had been lined, ridged, studded with fellow sea creatures, as if it were a living island.

'It was close. I've told her we wouldn't normally get that close,' said Yoshi.

Greg narrowed his eyes. 'If she'd been out on her mother's boat she could have brushed its teeth.'

'Yes, well, the least said about that . . .' Aunt Kathleen

shook her head. 'Not a word,' she mouthed at me. 'That was a one-off.'

I nodded dutifully. It was the third one-off that month.

'That Mitchell turn up? You want to watch him. I've heard he's joining those Sydney-siders with the big boats.'

They all looked up.

'Thought the National Parks and Wildlife Service had frightened them off,' said Lance.

'When I went to the fish market,' Aunt Kathleen said, 'they told me they'd seen one all the way out by the heads. Music at top volume, people dancing on the decks. Like a discothèque. Ruined the night's fishing. But by the time the Parks and Wildlife people got out there they were long gone. Impossible to prove a thing.'

The balance in Silver Bay was delicate: too few whale-watching tourists and the business would be unsustainable; too many, and it would disturb the creatures it wanted to display.

Lance and Greg had come up against the triple-decker catamarans from round the bay, often blaring loud music, decks heaving with passengers, and were of similar opinion. 'They'll be the death of us all, that lot,' Lance said. 'Irresponsible. Money-mad. Should suit Mitchell down to the ground.'

I hadn't realised how hungry I was. I ate six of the huge prawns in quick succession, chasing Greg's fingers around the empty bowl. He grinned and waved a prawn head at me. I stuck out my tongue at him. I think I'm a little bit in love with Greg, not that I'd ever tell anybody.

'Aye aye, here she is. Princess of Whales.'

'Very funny.' My mother dumped her keys on the table and gestured to Yoshi to move down so that she could squeeze in next to me. She dropped a kiss on to my head. 'Good day, lovey?' She smelt of suncream and salt air.

I shot a look at my aunt. 'Fine.' I bent to fondle Milly's ears, grateful that my mother could not see the pinking in my face. My head still sang with the sight of that whale. I thought it must radiate out of me, but she was reaching for a glass and pouring herself some water.

'What have you been doing?' my mother asked.

'Yeah. What have you been doing, Hannah?' Greg winked at me.

'She helped me with the beds this morning.' Aunt Kathleen glared at him. 'Heard *you* had a good afternoon.'

'Not bad.' My mother downed the water. 'God, I'm thirsty. Did you drink enough today, Hannah? Did she drink enough, Kathleen?' Her English accent was still pronounced, even after so many years in Australia.

'She's had plenty. How many did you see?'

'She never drinks enough. Just the one. Big girl. Lobtailed half a bath of water into my bag. Look.' She held up her cheque book, its edges frilled and warped.

'Well, there's an amateur's mistake.' Aunt Kathleen sighed in disgust. 'Didn't you have anyone out with you?'

My mother shook her head. 'I wanted to try out that new rudder, see how well it worked in choppiest waters. The boat-yard warned me it might stick.'

'And you just happened on a whale,' said Lance.

She took another swig of water. 'Something like that.' Her face had closed. *She* had closed. It was as if the whale thing had never happened.

For a few minutes we ate in silence, as the sun sank slowly towards the horizon. Two fishermen walked past, and raised their arms in greeting. I recognised one as Lara's dad, but I'm not sure he saw me.

My mother ate a piece of bread and a tiny plateful of salad, less even than I eat and I don't like salad. Then she glanced up at Greg. 'I heard about *Suzanne*.'

'Half of Port Stephens has heard about *Suzanne*.' Greg's eyes were tired and he looked as if he hadn't shaved for a week.

'Yes. Well. I'm sorry.'

'Sorry enough to come out with me Friday?'

'Nope.' She stood up, checked her watch, stuffed her sodden cheque book back into her bag and made for the kitchen door. 'That rudder's still not right. I've got to ring the yard before they head off. Don't stay out without your sweater, Hannah. The wind's getting up.'

I watched as she strode away, pursued by the dog.

We were silent until we heard the slam of the screen door. Then Lance leant back in his chair to gaze out at the darkening bay, where a cruiser was just visible on the far horizon. 'Our first whale of the season, Greg's first knockback of the season. Got a nice kind of symmetry to it, don't you think?'

He ducked as a piece of bread bounced off the chair behind him.