

# 3

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Anyway, here are some great facts about Australia:

- 1 It's the sixth-largest country in the world, covering over 7.6 million square kilometres.
- 2 Which makes it thirty-two times bigger than the UK.
- 3 The population is only 24 million: less than half of England.
- 4 It has 200 different languages.
- 5 And three times more sheep than people.
- 6 There are only on average 2.66 humans per Km<sup>2</sup>.

You know what all this means?

It means that if you *happen* to have an Australian ex-boyfriend, and he *happens* to currently live in Australia, and you *happen* to also be there for a fortnight, the chances of bumping into him are so small they're not even worth worrying about.

Especially if he doesn't know you're in the same country



because you haven't spoken a word to each other in seven months.

They're minuscule. Ridiculous. Tiny.

There's *literally* three times more chance of being jumped on by one of Australia's sixty million kangaroos or being bitten by a particularly aggressive sheep.

So I'm not concerned or anxious about my new location in the slightest.

I just wish I could say the same for Nat.

"But, Harriet," she says as we wobble off the plane on aching legs, Bunty yawning and stretching in front of us like a jingling pink cat. "Shouldn't we at least *prepare* an... Emergency Ex-boyfriend Contingency Plan or something? Make a... pie chart or a... scatter graph? Just in case?"

Those are ridiculous suggestions, frankly.

We'd clearly need a flow chart: the other two options would be absolutely useless for this particular purpose.

"We don't need anything," I say reassuringly, patting her arm and trying to dredge up my newfound breezy attitude. "Life's more about going with the flow, isn't it? Embracing wherever fortune leads you. Gracefully gliding over the waves of chance and luck, like a bottlenose dolphin."

"Or an alpaca," Bunty says cheerfully from some

"I've rented it from an old friend," she beams. "It's a magical place, where you can bathe in warm rainwater and cook using the heat of the morning rays and grow vegetables out of your own poop."

"Really? Is there an instruction manual somewhere?"

Bunty laughs. "It's an environmentally friendly, organic, sustainable house, which means we'll leave no trace, sweetheart. When we go the universe won't even know we've been here."

"OH MY GOD, THERE'S A BOWL OF CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES IN THE BATHROOM!" Nat screams.

"Although it'll probably guess," my grandmother smiles.

With a tinkle of bells, Bunty picks up the *Daisy-Chain* book, pats it a few times and puts it inside her bag. "This is my room," she says firmly. "It's nearer the ocean and I like lots of tidal energy so I can synchronise my body with the moon."

Umm, scientifically in what way could you possibly...

Nope, not even going to ask.

"Is there Wi-Fi?" I say instead, grabbing my brand-new phone out of my bag. "Or is that... organic and sustainably sourced too?"

"Exactly, darling. All you have to do is climb to the top of that hill, hold your mobile device up to the moon at high tide and wait for the call of a migrating nightingale."

I look up in horror. At the last count there were ten billion Wi-Fi devices shipped worldwide. Is my grandmother actually telling me we don't have *any* of them? In which case *who* is taking ours?

I bet it's Toby somehow.

"Really?"

"No," Bunty laughs, holding out a little bit of crumpled paper with "DREAMCATCHER1234" written on it.

Within five seconds a message pops up on the screen.

### **HARRIET??? ARE YOU THERE? Jxx**

My stomach gives a little swoop of excitement.

And also guilt: I'm running forty minutes behind schedule, and it's *my* schedule.

Quickly, I type out the promised "immediately on landing" text to my parents.

### **The eagle has landed safely on The Other Side!**

**Harriet x**

I get two back straight away:

**Haha, who are you kidding – I'm the eagle, you're a little fluffy pigeon. Dad x**

again, Nat. We're going to launch your social media accounts. And I'm going to model your amazing, wonderful clothes so everybody can see them."

Then I show her the bullet-point list that is headed with:

### MAKE NAT A FASHION ICON

Apparently girls cry on average 5.3 times per month, but to the best of my knowledge Nat has done it three times in eleven years.

It looks like she's about to up that ratio.

"Harriet," she says in a quiet voice. "Your plan is *me*?"

And as she abruptly drags me on to the bed in the hardest cuddle of my life, I can feel myself filling from top to toe with a warm, happy, best-friend glow.

Because that's the thing I love *most* about plans.

Now and then, you get to put somebody else at the top of your list.

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Suffice to say, Nat's not sleepy any more.

The copepod is a one-millimetre crustacean that lives in the ocean, and is capable of accelerating to five hundred body lengths per second. In fact, it has the strongest legs in the world.

Judging by the speed with which Nat leaps out of bed and runs to the closet, she's trying to compete this morning.

"I'm going to need the white Mary Janes," she shouts as she runs back in with her empty suitcase bouncing behind her. "The high-waist cream trousers with black blouse. The blue leather dress with pockets, the striped shirt, the black fedora and the gold necklace and—"

The rest of her demands are lost in the pile as her head disappears. "Belts!" she yells, suddenly popping up like a manic meerkat. "Eyeliner! Bracelets!"

Then she disappears again.



"Give her some food, darling," Bunty whispers to me as she and Moonstone appear with a tray of toast and eggs and two glasses of orange juice. "Or trust me: she's going to fall asleep in the rosemary bed of the Royal Botanic Gardens and smell like artisan pizza for a week."

So I spend the next fifteen minutes perched on the edge of the bed, trying to feed Fashion Cyclone Nat in tiny, encouraging mouthfuls like she's an over-stimulated hamster.

Finally, she emerges from the chaos: cheeks flushed, hair dishevelled, creative levels dangerously peaking. It's a good thing she's going to be *behind* the camera today because I don't think anyone wants to order clothes from a girl with eggshell in her fringe.

"I'm going to need a unique username," Nat fires out, yanking her overstuffed suitcase towards a taxi waiting outside. "A new website an updated blog a Twitter account Instagram tumblr a new biography isthecameraonmyphonegoodenoughdoyouthink? Haveyou—"

Humans can emit a maximum of fourteen sounds a second but I think my best friend is starting to test that theory.

"Nat," I say, putting a hand on her arm again. "Breathe."

Grinning, I tap my phone, hold it up and show her a

beautiful silver and white website with *NGrey Designs* etched on the front in curly writing. Then I open a few apps and show her a brand-new network of social media platforms.

"Toby did it while we were on the plane," I explain. "Jasper wrote the content and Rin... umm, sent lots of photos of baby goats wearing wigs."

Nat peers at the screen, then laughs loudly. "Let me guess," she says, pointing at the image under her name. "That bit was you."

Underneath *NGrey Designs* is a silver pair of scissors.

The kind you can make dresses, cut thread or shape fabric with. Or steal from the art room and use to chop off the ponytail of your best friend's arch-nemesis.

And across the bottom it says in tiny silver writing:

*Natalie Grey: Always at the Cutting Edge.*

"Obviously," I grin as we climb into the taxi. "Fame, glory and success, here we come."

Honestly, my plan for today is not particularly complicated.

It goes like this:

- Visit Sydney's most recognisable landmarks.
- Wear Nat's best designs.

Finally, a Wi-Fi signal appears.

Within seconds, a plethora of messages have popped up in a flurry of little beeps.

**7:29pm**

**Yo! I'm here! Found a quiet spot in the kitchen cupboard – should be able to talk uninterrupted! Jasper xx**

**7:43pm**

**Are you there? Did I get the times wrong? Maybe I needed that chart after all haha. ;) J xx**

**8:01pm**

**Sorry I couldn't say goodbye properly yesterday – it was awkward in front of the others and with Dad yelling. You're not mad, right? Jxx**

**8:28pm**

**Ok, guess you're either mad or you've been held up with THE FASHION. Got to work now but speak tomorrow. Jx**

With a flush of guilt, I look at the time stamps.

An *hour*. Jasper was sitting in a damp cupboard surrounded by smelly cloths, detergent and mops for nearly an entire hour, waiting to talk to me.

And yes, climbing into furniture may be something I historically do more often than I probably should, but it's not behaviour I want to force on others.

I ring back but it's too late: it goes straight to voicemail.

"Bat bat bat poop," I mutter, slamming my phone back in my sachel and scowling at the beautiful view. The sun went down a while ago and the lights of the Sydney sky are clear and bright, but I'm feeling far too guilty to count them properly.

"It's only one call," Nat reminds me, turning me round by the shoulders and leading me towards the lift. "Jasper will understand that we were busy."

"I *told* you I needed my satchel on me at all times," I say crossly. "But you just *had* to take it off me because it wasn't *fashionable* enough for your shots."

"No, it was because it still has the word GEEK written on it in red marker pen," Nat laughs, pointing at the scratched-up front pocket. "Or C-E-H, which must be a new insult developed since I left school."

The corner of my mouth reluctantly twitches. "It actually stands for Certified Elephant Herder, Natalie, so *you wish*."

"Or maybe Crazy Ewok Hoarder."

"Casual Egghead Hooligan."

"Fits you perfectly," Nat snorts in agreement. "I love

"Harriet," Nick says finally.

"The Edison Crater, the Earhart Crater, the Michael Jackson crater..."

"Harriet."

"The Newton Crater, the Marco Polo—"

"Harriet, I need to say something."

Flushing, I slowly lift my head and turn to face him in the dark. There are 300,000 moon craters and frankly I'm so nervous right now there's a good chance I was just going to keep naming them for the rest of the night.

*No, Harriet. No no no no no no no –*

Because *forelsket* is the Norwegian word for the euphoria you feel when you start falling in love. And I can suddenly feel the beginning of it: tumbling and plummeting and cascading inside me.

Except it's not really the beginning, is it?

All we did was hit *pause*.

"Harriet," Nick says again slowly, and...

I'm watching him sleep under a table;

I'm sitting on the pavement;

we're running through the snow,

walking through Manhattan,

spinning in a circle on a roundabout;

he's flicking mints at my window;

we're laughing in my bedroom,

my sock is wet;

we're standing on a bridge;

kissing

kissing

kissing...

There's a loud *bang*.

And suddenly the room is full of light.