

Sunny
side
up

marion
roberts


ALLEN & UNWIN

2.



I know you can't blame *everything* on global warming, but it sure seemed as if it was around the time the massive heat-wave came, and the wind grew all mad and blustery, that my whole life got blown around in circles and whipped out of shape. It was as though we were fighting a war against high temperatures,

keeping all our doors and windows closed during the day to stop the hotness stealing inside and smothering the last patches of cool. Even thinking

about how hot it was makes me start to wilt, and to wonder if I can continue with this story. But I will, because I'm trying to become the sort of person who finishes what they start.

After Christmas, Mum got into a lot of gardening at night, which is how I knew she was feeling positive about life. When she lets the vegies die and the grass get wild, I can tell she's sad and feels like giving up. But Mum had been pulling weeds and planting lettuces and singing songs and watering at night, so I knew she must be feeling *up*. She was still sneaking around the side of the house to smoke, though, and still pretending she'd quit, which is the totally pathetic part of this story.

There were days when it was perfect and summery, and days when it was a bit too hot, and then there were the forty-something degree days that made it an official heat-wave. After about four days of totally mad temperatures, I started to wonder whether God might actually be bored and that maybe we should think about getting a place in Tasmania. Somewhere inland and up high, so that we'd still have a home when Greenland melts and the sea levels rise, or if God gets *extra* bored and causes another tsunami.

I was lying on the couch, waiting for Mum to get home. We'd planned to walk to the beach together, after

dinner, even though Willow couldn't come because dogs aren't allowed on the beach at night in December. I wanted to escape from the unbearableness of living in my own warm-blooded skin, so I closed my eyes and tried some creative visualisation techniques. That's when you imagine things exactly the way you want them to be, and then your life is meant to just turn out that way. Don't ask me why, but I visualised myself as a pink rubber hot-water bottle lying flat on the racks inside an empty refrigerator. I could hear the gentle fridge hum as I became colder and colder, from the outside in. The only problem was that imagining myself with cold blood led me to thinking about cold-bloodedness in general, and after a bit I was thinking of cold-bloodedness in particular.

Pretty soon I had forgotten about being a pink hot-water bottle in the refrigerator and found myself thinking about the very thing I was absolutely and undeniably afraid of; the most sinister creatures of sneakiness and cold-bloodedness, which, as far as I'm concerned, have no place of value on this earth. You guessed it. Snakes. See? Even the word *snake* doesn't sound like something you could trust. They're just so . . . *snakey*.

I closed my eyes very tightly and tried to focus on all the things that were the opposite of snakes, so I could hotfoot it right off the topic. I thought about animals

with fur and pouches and big paws; animals that roll around and never squirm or hiss; animals you can snuggle up to, and ones that smell nice when they're asleep; animals with ears and cute button noses and fluffy parts that you can brush; animals that make you feel warm. But then I started feeling all warm, on top of already feeling impossibly hot, so I had to open my eyes and abandon visualising completely.

I stood up on the couch and jumped off as far as I could into the middle of the lounge room, just in case my visualisation had backfired and actually created a snake (or two) and it was waiting under the couch to lurch at my ankle. I thumped into the laundry (snakes are scared of big vibrations), took off my T-shirt, wet it in the laundry tub, wrung it out and put it back on again. This is *the* best method of cooling down if you can't actually have a swim.

I don't know why I'm so scared of snakes, I mean they're just a tube with fangs, and most of the time they're so scared of you they slink off when they hear (feel) you coming. Only some of them chase you, like tiger snakes for instance . . . I think I'd better get off the topic now or I might be reminded of that old lady in Heidelberg who was innocently picking passion-fruit, which she probably needed for a pavlova she was

making. She was a nice old lady, the sort with blue hair and a shopping buggy, who wouldn't hurt anybody. And I could imagine her thinking pleasant, old-lady-cakey thoughts as she plucked a passionfruit from the vine on her back fence, not knowing that it was the home of a *mean* old tiger snake who bit her fair and square on her thin, veiny hand. And if it wasn't for her Jack Russell terrier, who barked and barked (as they do) until the neighbours came to see what the fuss was about – and noticed the old lady lying on the grass with just enough life left in her to tell them about the tube with fangs – if it wasn't for that incredibly loyal and yappy dog, she'd be deadibums. I don't reckon Willow would be like that, though. She'd probably catch the snake and throw it back on me, thinking it was a game of Dog, Snake and Dying Owner.



See what I mean about the tangents? According to Mum, it's because I'm an introvert. I should also mention that apart from being an introvert and an entrepreneur I'm also an inventor, a poet, a dog trainer and part-owner of Pizza-A-Go-Girl, our deluxe, wood-fired, Friday night pizza delivery service. I also like learning about psychological theories. I used to be very good at keeping secrets, but have noticed lately that I'm getting worse. Oh, and

I also have the hugest collection of stripey toe-socks, and my favourite dessert is bombe alaska (even though I haven't actually tried it yet).

Snakes are kind of relevant though, because if they're not hiding under your couch they often live in holes, and that summer was making me feel all holed-up, like an animal that needs to shelter all day. We'd been forced to become all in-doorsy – and not the type of indoors that has air-conditioning, either, because Mum and Carl say air-conditioners add to the problems we've got going with greenhouse gas.



I know you're probably thinking that going for walks with your Mum at night would be a dead bore, and that if I'd had a brother or a sister I could be making prank calls or throwing rotten tomatoes at next door's roller-blind, but I like going for walks with Mum because of the conversations we have. It's true. We have really good ones when there's no one else to butt in. As long as the conversations don't involve Granny Carmelene, that is. Plus, I had arranged to meet Claud down at Elwood beach, because she had *finally* come back from visiting her grandparents, in Queensland, who not only had a freezer in the garage *full* of *Weiss Bars* but also took her and Walter to The Worlds, three times. Seriously, neither

of my parents has ever taken me to see anything bigger than the Giant Worm, which is why I should report them to the Kids Help Line.



It was almost dark and the whole of the foreshore smelt of burnt chops. The air was cooler, though, and felt like a substance you could actually breathe with. There were people dotted all over the grass and the sand, and bobbing out in the water as if they were desperately waiting for a rescue mission to take them to Antarctica.

‘Where did you say you’d meet Claud?’ asked Mum.

‘Under the tower thingy,’ I said, pointing to the top of the hill at Point Ormond, which was brown and dry and almost completely bald of grass.

‘Poor Willow,’ said Mum. ‘You’ll have to give her a big walk in the morning, before it gets too hot.’

‘I will,’ I said. ‘Promise!’ I raced ahead of her, up to the top of the hill, because sometimes it’s easier to run when hills are steep, plus it takes less time. From up top I could see right over the city. The huge scorching sun was making the mirrored skyscrapers all orange as it swooped over the sea to the horizon. It was comforting up there because not only was it breezy but I like the way life feels from above: almost as if you’re looking at a map. My favourite feeling, though, is when you lean your forehead

on the inside of an aeroplane window and peer down at the earth below. Everything becomes minute and insignificant, and trees look like florets of broccoli, and your life starts to change shape and feel like a toy-life in a board game, and all your worries go away. That evening, from seat 44K of my imaginary aeroplane, I saw the beach as a big swirling paisley carpet. But I didn't think about it for too long because I spotted Claud jogging towards me.

She was wearing new green boardies and her frisbee was poking out of her bag. She's an absolutely and undeniably impressive frisbee thrower, as well as being good at practically everything, and a tom-boy in general. I, on the other hand, am a wobbly frisbee thrower with incredibly dodgy aim, who always blames it on the wind. Luckily, I've since been learning about wrist action and following through.

'Hey, Sunny!' said Claud, puffing and smiling. She was tanned and her hair was blonder (I think from chlorine, or maybe just from being in Queensland where the sun is a little gentler and you can actually go outside).

'Hi, Claud,' I beamed. I really wanted to hug her but ended up just giving her a nudge with my shoulder in a leaning-in sort of a way, because Claud's not the kind of girl who's into hugging. I also wanted to avoid the situation where I was hugging her but she wasn't hugging me

back. That's a bad scene. Plus, I was distracted by Mum's mobile phone ringing and I noticed she was sitting on the bluestone wall kicking off her thongs and looking all smily and girly, which meant pretty much for certain she was talking to Carl, who makes her act all teenagey sometimes because she's in love.

I was reminded of one of Carl's jokes that I wanted to tell Claud, but then I realised I'd forgotten the punch line. It's like that with jokes – I've usually forgotten the punchline before I even stop laughing. They tend to go all slippery when I try to make them stick to my memory.

Ouch! The Tangent Police just blew their whistles *really* loudly in my ear, which is a good sign because it means they're actually doing some work for a change.



Claud and I raced each other down the hill and she beat me onto the sand, where we dumped our bags. Claud laughed at the T-shirt Carl gave me, but I figured it was better than one saying Piping Hot or Superman or Roxy, which is the sort everyone else wears and it makes you feel as ordinary as a number 14 BBQ chicken all basted and lined up in the bain-marie at Tennyson Street *Foodworks*, ready to be stuffed into a silver-lined bag.

We waded into the water, being super careful not to

kick any rocks disguised as sponges. As soon as it was deep enough we duck dived and came up at exactly the same time. I kicked out to sea a bit, to make some space for a game of frisbee.

‘So how was it?’ I shouted to Claud as I threw her the frisbee, meaning Queensland in general, and The Worlds in particular.

‘It was so cool,’ said Claud. ‘Even the third time.’ She hurled herself sideways to catch one of my wobbly throws and disappeared under the water, holding the frisbee up above her like a trophy.

‘There were these guys,’ Claud said when she surfaced. ‘I met them in the queue for The Tower of Terror, and they were sort of bogans, but one of them was really cute. He went on the Giant Drop with me because Walter was too scared. His name was Mitch, and we hung out for, like, the whole day. It was so cool.’

‘Was it really scary?’

‘It was *so* scary! You drop really fast and you scream and scream. We went on it three times, then Mitch said we could go back to his resort, ’cos they were staying at Seaworld Nara, and we didn’t get out of the pool for, like, three hours. Seriously, it was awesome. And the next day he texted me, and we met at Wet’n’Wild and Mitch came with me on Terror Canyon 2.’

‘Was Walter too scared again?’ I asked, practising my wrist action.

‘Nah, I just wanted to go on it with Mitch,’ said Claud as she lunged out wide to catch another one of my dodgy throws.

‘Oh, sorry Claud!’

‘Tomorrow’s going to be 43 degrees,’ she said, skimming the frisbee back to me in the straightest line possible. It caught a breath of wind and sailed above the surface of the water like a low-flying sea bird.

‘I know,’ I said. ‘Not exactly *ideal* for pizza making, but it’s Friday, we’ve got orders.’

‘Business is business!’ said Claud.

We’ve got a wood-fired oven in our back shed, which is part of the reason Claud and I had the idea for our deluxe pizza delivery business, Pizza-A-Go-Girl. We’ve got regular satisfied customers and a jar full of profits, because if there’s one thing Claud and I are good at it’s having ideas that work.



When it was getting so dark we could hardly see, we waded out of the water and found our towels.

‘Hey, Claud? I did some more artwork for the pizza boxes while you were away.’

‘Great. Oh, you should see how much they charge for

pizza up on the Gold Coast, and they're not even good. My grandma nearly had a fit. They charge you four dollars just for a coke. Maybe we should put our prices up? Or maybe we should open Pizza-A-Go-Girl up there when we're a bit older.'

'Pizza-A-Go-Girl goes world wide,' I said, drawing a huge circle in the sand with the edge of the Frisbee.

'I can see it now,' said Claud. 'Elwood, Gold Coast, Paris, New York, London—'

'And Transylvania,' I said. 'Don't forget Transylvania.'

'Bags *not* doing home deliveries in Transylvania. Too many vampires.'

'What about Rome?'

'Forget it. Too much competition,' laughed Claud.

It's the fact Claud is good at absolutely everything that makes her an ideal business partner. It's not that I'm *not* good at things, but Claud is good at *different* things, and she's especially good at having conversations and making new friends. According to Mum, it's because Claud's an extrovert, which is the opposite of being an introvert like me. I read about it in one of Mum's psychology books, along with a whole lot of other interesting theories by Carl Jung (not Mum's Carl). Extroverts are chatty and outgoing and enjoy being social, whereas introverts tend to be quieter and think more. We are

happier being alone, so that we can think up theories and philosophies, and read.

Maybe Claud's extrovert nature is the reason she's already into dating. But it might also be because she watches *The OC*. I don't *get* dating. I mean, why would you want to hang about with some random boy like Ivan Vandenberg? Ivan asked me to go to a movie with him once. That's how I know I'm not into dating, because I would much rather have seen the movie with Claud or even with Mum. Going on a date with Ivan Vandenberg was a big yawn. That's why I dropped him, or 'nipped it in the bud', as *They* say – whoever *They* actually are . . .



Sometimes, I imagine a whole kingdom of *Theys* living in a castle in Transylvania. There is a huge stone wall with iron gates and written in magnificent gold lettering over the spikes are the words *The Theys*. There are enormous, meandering grounds full of spooky trees infested with peacocks that shriek in the night. The *Theys* spend their day sitting around a long table, having endless banquets where *They* think up, and make official, all the things that *They* say. It's sort of like parliament, although the *Theys* are dignified and don't scream at one another or have tanties like the politicians on tellie. Once the *Theys* have come up with something new that *They* say, one of

them whispers the new saying through the spiky iron gates to a town crier (who is really just a person who loves to gossip and say ‘*Ooh aaah, you know what they say, blah blah blah*’) and before you know it, the things *They say* are adopted world wide. Here are a few I can remember off the top of my head:

- ☀ They say that sometimes it’s best to nip things in the bud. (Which means to stop something before it starts, like dropping Ivan Vandenberg after one dud date.)
- ☀ They say you should wait for twenty minutes after eating before you swim, to avoid stomach cramps.
- ☀ They say no two snowflakes are ever alike.
- ☀ They say you should keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.
- ☀ They say girls’ brains develop faster than boys and that they’re better at maths (well, hello!).
- ☀ They say more people go crazy on the full moon.
- ☀ They say opposites attract (like introverts and extroverts).
- ☀ They say we only use ten per cent of our brains (less in some people I know, like Buster Conroy).
- ☀ They say love makes the world go round.
- ☀ They say there’s always calm before a storm.

See what happens? There I was talking about Claud when I ended up in Transylvania in the land of *The Theys*. The Tagent Police really need to be more on the ball, I can tell you, especially with school going back next week.

Anyway, I was glad to have Claud back. Sometimes you don't realise how much you've missed something until you get it back again. I don't always like to admit that I miss people, not even to myself. But I missed Claud a mountain, which I know doesn't really make sense, but it does to me because it's much much more than missing someone a mole-hill.

