

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *WALLABY LANE*

MAYA LINNELL

'Maya Linnell is the
Queen of Feel-Good Reading.
Her books are an ode
to rural Australia.'
Jessica @bibliobliss.au



Cockatoo
Cove

1

If there had ever been a better day for diving, Maggie West wasn't sure she remembered it, and as she reached under the coral ledge and wriggled the lobster pot free from where it was snagged, she wondered why she'd chased a career in agriculture instead of aquaculture.

She tugged on the rope, letting her son, Ben, know the snag was unhitched, but instead of holding the craypot and enjoying the ride to the surface, she dived further down, searching for the huge crayfish that had been raiding their catch.

Where did you go, you big brute? Maggie's brown ponytail swirled around her face as she scanned the underside of the ledge, trying to glimpse the enormous southern rock lobster. Even after thirty-seven crayfish-filled summers—and an unlimited supply of seafood from her family's fishing business—she hadn't shaken the thrill of the chase. Catching a cray of that size—especially when she was only helping for the day—would give her endless bragging rights on the West family group chat.

Maggie's lungs began to burn. *One last pass*, she told herself, peering into the coral crevasse.

Seaweed floated past on the current, fish flitted in and out of the reef and abalone clung to the ledges, but there was no sign of the foot-long antennae belonging to the giant she'd sighted earlier.

Maggie kicked her way up, gasping for breath when she finally broke the surface.

'Geez, Mum, did you get lost down there?'

Still panting, Maggie pushed the eye mask onto her forehead, accepting her son's assistance as she clambered aboard the *Lady Karena*. What Ben lacked in height, he more than made up for in strength, and he hauled her out of the water as if she were just another cray pot.

She grinned, towelled the water from her body and slipped her clothes on over her swimsuit. 'Mark this spot in the GPS, muscles. We'll come back tomorrow, see if we can track him down.'

Ben handed her the sunscreen. 'Or you could take some of today's catch home with you.' He gestured to the pot full of large, red crustaceans noisily flapping their tails.

Maggie noticed a big glob of lotion in the wispy goatee he'd grown. She was about to reach across to rub it in—a lifetime of mothering habits hadn't dulled even though her boy was now twenty—when the captain, Todd, called out from the boat's cabin.

'Don't even think about touching today's catch! Cray just hit a hundred and twenty dollars a kilo. And haven't you got your housewarming party tomorrow?'

Darn it. Maggie's ex-husband had an annoying habit of being right about most things.

'Mark the coordinates down anyway and we'll come back another time,' Maggie said, slathering her face in sunscreen. 'It's been ages since I tagged along. It's magic out here.'

‘You could switch your Blundstone boots for a set of these bad boys and dive in after stuck pots any time you like,’ Ben suggested, lifting a foot to showcase his chunky white gumboots. ‘Won’t catch me diving in there unless Dad falls overboard.’

She laughed, pulling on the spare gumboots kept onboard for guests. ‘And elbow my kid out of a job? Not a chance. It’s fun to join you guys and retrieve snagged pots on beautiful days like this, but I’m sure the novelty would wear off quickly if I was on the payroll. I’ll stick to collies and cattle, and leave the professional fishing to you two.’

Maggie adjusted her ponytail—the same ponytail that sufficed for cattle work, netball and family barbecues—while Ben unloaded the crayfish, restocked the bait and prepared the pot for its return to the water. Like his father and grandfather, Ben was a fisherman through and through, though he had her colouring: olive skin that tanned the moment summer rolled around and dusty brown hair that tended towards blond under the sun’s rays.

‘We’ll put this one near the reef again,’ Todd called, one hand on the steering wheel, the other on the controls as he carefully angled the *Lady Karena* into position. He slowed the engine, looking intently at the colourful screens that mapped the ocean floor. ‘Yep, this’ll do.’

Ben released the cray pot, and it quickly sank out of sight, taking the rope with it. Maggie grabbed the railing as they powered away, a little unsteady on her feet, while her son crossed the deck as steadily as if he were walking on dry land. They worked side by side, Maggie hosing down the deck while Ben prepared more bait.

‘Can you chat with your sister about school?’ Maggie asked over the roar of the engine.

‘Isobel’s still giving you grief about that?’ Ben sighed and tossed a slimy fish head to the waiting flock of albatrosses. ‘Issy wouldn’t last two seconds in the workforce, not at sixteen.’

‘I’m sure she was joking, but if you could give her a rev-up at the housewarming party, that’d be great.’

‘Or I can put Dad on her case,’ Ben said. ‘He can have a stern word?’

They turned to the cabin where Todd stood, one hand on the steering wheel, the other holding an iced-coffee bottle as a microphone as he swayed to reggae music.

Maggie laughed. ‘I’d have more chance of growing frangipanis here on the Limestone Coast than your father getting stern with your sister. I don’t want to push her too far. She’ll gallop off into the sunset.’

Ben sighed as he scanned the horizon. ‘Issy’s probably forgotten which way the saddle goes, it’s been so long since she’s been horseriding.’ A smile swept across his handsome young face. ‘Check it out, Mum!’

Maggie turned to see a pod of dolphins soaring through the waves.

‘Now there’s something you don’t see in your paddocks,’ Ben said, shielding his eyes against the sun for a better look. Ben loved dolphins the same way Maggie loved newborn calves, wriggly lamb tails and litters of border collie pups, and the way Isobel loved horses.

Used to love horses.

Todd slowed the vessel, and they watched until the dolphins were out of sight before continuing.

‘Any special requests for tomorrow?’ Todd asked, setting the GPS and joining Maggie on the deck. ‘I still make a mean pasta salad, and you know crowds go wild for my nachos dip.’

‘They sure do.’ Maggie watched as another boat appeared on the horizon. ‘And can you bring an esky or two? The cabana

fridge is on the blink again and the kitchen's brimming with food already.'

'You could replace that fridge, you know,' Todd said, putting his iced coffee down to grab his phone. 'It's been nothing but trouble since you bought it.'

Maggie feigned horror. 'Wash your mouth out with soap. I love that pretty pink fridge, and you can't beat a classic.'

'I know the feeling,' Todd said. He patted the *Lady Karen*'s dashboard fondly. 'I've sent you a number. This bloke fixed the cool room in the boatyard over winter and the fridge in the Southend shark boat too. Fridges are his side hustle though, so you'll only catch him on weekends.'

Maggie opened the message.

Fergus Abernathy (BYO Scottish translator)

She looked up to find Todd watching her with a barely concealed smile on his face.

'Is this a joke?'

He raised both hands. 'Before you ask, I've never met him, so I've no idea if he's like Dougal.'

'But he's Scottish, right?'

'That's all I know, Maggie. But there's millions of them. They can't all be weasels.'

Maggie frowned at the phone.

'You absolutely love that fridge, remember?'

She shifted her frown to Todd, who was, unfortunately, dead right once again.



The sand was near scorching, and Fergus Abernathy hopped from foot to burning foot as he scaled the dune. Any other time, the Scottish winemaker might have stopped to admire

the sparkling ocean, or the endless panorama of the national park, but today's mission was about speed, not sightseeing.

'This dune's bigger than it bloody well looks,' said a voice behind him. 'Whose idea was this, again?'

Fergus paused, catching his breath while waiting for his best friend, Connor Jamison, to catch up. Like Fergus and a few of the other winemakers, Connor was carrying a flattened beer box, the perfect makeshift sand board to take them downhill.

Fergus smiled. 'You know you love it. Race you to the bottom!' He launched himself onto the cardboard and rode it like a toboggan, quickly passing three of their mates with his expert manoeuvring. His hat flew off and his ferociously red hair flopped into his eyes, but he reached the bottom before any of the others and earned himself an extra burst of cheering and laughter from his friends at the top of the sand dune. He bowed deeply, then turned to watch the rest of them battle it out for second and third place.

'You're playing for sheep stations again, I see,' Connor said, smiling and shaking the sand out of his shirt. His English accent was still as strong as it had been the day they'd flown from the UK to Australia together, almost four years earlier.

'Gotta show these young pups how it's done,' Fergus agreed, offering a hand to one of the new winemakers, who had tumbled the last stretch of the downhill dash. 'You're not supposed to catapult down the sand dune, lad.'

It was a joy introducing the newcomers to the sights and delights of South Australia's rugged beaches, many of which could be accessed only with a four-wheel drive and local know-how. While it would be years before Fergus was considered a local, the vast shores and vineyard-studded paddocks certainly felt like home.

‘Imagine growing up here,’ Connor said. ‘When April and I start a family, I’ll make sure our kids know just how lucky they are to have beaches like this on their doorstep.’

Fergus opened the esky, handed his friend a cold drink and racked his brains. Had April Lacey been drinking last night? She hadn’t joined in the dune races like she usually did, and if the beet-red flush spreading up Connor’s neck and cheeks was any indication, something was up.

‘Aye! Are congratulations in order?’ Fergus cast around for the right words to cover his surprise. ‘Here’s cheers to the next generation of Lacewing Estate winemakers.’

April was throwing driftwood into the water for her beloved golden retriever, Mischka. She caught them looking and waved, then headed their way.

‘No, we’re just talking about it, that’s all.’ Connor lowered his voice. ‘April would have my nuts on a platter if she knew I said anything. Don’t breathe a word, Ferg, alright?’

Fergus made a zipping motion across his lips. He looked back at their mates by the dunes, and at the deck chairs and swags gathered around last night’s campfire. It wasn’t hard to imagine a future with miniature fishing rods beside the twelve-foot surf rods and a wee tribe of little tackers toddling in the shallows with floaties and zinc-covered noses.

‘Look at you two,’ April said. ‘Solving the problems of the world or contemplating the best bait for the next beach-fishing trip?’ she teased, before pulling out her phone and filming the magnificent panorama.

‘Just soaking up the last of the weekend,’ Fergus fibbed.

April stretched her arm out for a selfie. On the screen, Fergus saw the happy couple’s sunburned cheeks smooshed together, her hair as dark as his was fair. They wore identical, loved-up smiles.

Fergus averted his eyes and pushed away a tiny seed of envy. 'Think I'll take a dip before we start rallying the troops.' He grabbed the hem of his shirt, about to lift it over his head.

'Wait up, Ferg,' April called. 'I'll get one of you and Con too.'

Both men had long since given up protesting against having their photos taken, so they allowed themselves to be bossed into position.

'Cheese!' She took the photo and squinted to review it. 'That's a keeper; you can both send it home,' she said, her fingers flying across the screen. 'It'll be snowing in Scotland and raining in the UK. They'll be dead jealous.'

'Thanks. I'll send it later,' Fergus promised, stripping off his T-shirt. He picked up the driftwood Mishka had dropped at his feet and tossed it into the surf, then followed the golden retriever in. The cool ocean offered instant respite from the January sun.

Connor was soon by his side, floating with an enviable ease.

'Do you reckon we're nuts, talking about kids already?'

'Don't be daft.' Fergus splashed him. 'I canna imagine a better couple.'

'To be honest, I used to think you and Lauren would be in the parenting trenches well before us.'

Fergus nearly gulped a mouthful of sea water. It had been ages since his relationship with Lauren Bickford had ended. 'How much did you drink last night, Con? Or is the searing heat going to your head?'

Even though Connor was his closest mate, Fergus had more pride than to admit he'd grieved the family he'd imagined having with Lauren when the relationship finished.

'What about Clarissa?' he asked. 'We moved in together, got a kitten. How do you know she wasn't "the one" for me?'

'Running off with another bloke wasn't a slight giveaway?' Connor ducked under a wave, emerging with seaweed on his

cheek. ‘Clarissa was never the right fit. Beesley Brothers had a knock-out season after that break-up, though. Your boss should’ve sent her a thank-you card for the extra hours you put in.’

Fergus smoothed his hair off his forehead. ‘Aye, it was a class vintage. If only house-hunting was an exact science like winemaking is. The Penwarra property market’s tighter than a drum.’

Connor swam towards him. ‘Cheer up, I’m sure Barney Anderson won’t throw you out onto the street. The new greenskeeper can squish in with you until you find something. Or maybe you can hold your ground and tell the golf club committee they can’t evict you without a fight?’

Fergus shook his head. ‘Fair’s fair. Barney was kind renting it to me as long as he did. And the new greenskeeper has a wife and a baby on the way. They dinna want to share a wee cottage with a Scotty bachelor and his cat. I guess I could look further afield than Penwarra, but the town feels like home now. Worse-case scenario, if I canna find a rental or a property to buy, then your couch is comfy, right?’

Connor didn’t skip a beat. ‘Always there if you need it, mate,’ he said with a nod.

And while he knew his friend’s offer was genuine, Fergus vowed to ramp up his house-hunting as he swam back to shore. And maybe it was time to start looking for a property suited to a singleton instead of a family-sized home fit for a future that mightn’t even eventuate.



It seemed quiet in the small cottage as Fergus filleted his catch and packed the fish into the freezer, then showered away the sand, sunscreen and campfire smoke.

Too quiet in fact, Fergus thought, spotting the empty food bowl and the cat door flapping in the warm breeze.

‘Milo! How on earth did you manage that, you rascal?’ He hunted in the usual places, finding the remains of some unfortunate marsupial by the clothesline, a few feathers by the garbage bins and one sleepy, rounded ginger cat under the grevillea. He locked Milo inside then fetched his tool box.

I’ll fix it properly this time, then the little devil canna go around terrorising the neighbourhood. He wondered if the greenskeeper had a cat too. The rental property was smack-bang in the middle of Penwarra’s golf course, a stone’s throw from the Nineteenth Hole clubhouse and restaurant. While he’d had mixed success curtailing the cheeky cat’s wandering tendencies so far, he was determined to see that more wildlife wasn’t injured on his watch.

A message came through as he finished the task. He pulled the phone from his pocket, expecting a reply from his dad or brothers in Scotland, but to his delight, someone called Maggie West had sent him a photo of a vintage-style fridge. Not only that, but she’d invited him to lunch today, if he was free for a feed before he assessed the fridge.

‘Now, here’s something you don’t see every day,’ he told Milo. The cat blinked one eye open, stretched a long, striped leg and promptly fell back asleep. Fergus didn’t normally take on fridge jobs the moment they came through, but the offer of a barbecue lunch trumped sitting at home, dwelling on Connor’s comment about him and Lauren, or badgering the real estate agents on a Sunday. And then there was the fridge in question, obviously owned by someone with good taste.

2

There wasn't much tidying to be done ahead of her house-warming, but Maggie prowled around anyway, blowing leaves off the pristine path encircling her new two-storey sandstone home.

She leaned against a north-facing wall, soaking up the warmth of the summer sun. A blue fairy wren flitted under the eaves in hot pursuit of a dragonfly, then settled on the roof sprinkler to enjoy the tasty treat.

Fire-resistant building materials had been at the top of Maggie's building brief, and it gave her comfort to know the new house was rigged with the best automated fire-protection system money could buy. *Would roof sprinklers and automated alerts have been enough to save the old house?* she wondered. The blue wren flew away, and instead of dwelling on the past, she turned her attention back to the yard.

Ben emerged from the shed soon after. 'What's next, Mum?'

'Round up any potential missiles. Little kids, tennis balls and a glasshouse won't be a good combination,' she called, receiving a salute from her son. Unlike the new house and pool, both of which would take a while to get used to, the

pitched-roof glasshouse had felt like home the moment she'd unpacked her pots, seedling trays and heat mats, and Maggie didn't want to see it damaged during the celebration.

Speaking of young guests . . . Maggie returned the leaf-blower to the garage, strode inside the house and rapped on her daughter's door.

'How many of your friends are coming today, Issy?'

A groaning sound came from the depths of Isobel's room.

Maggie knocked again. 'Honey? Are you decent?' She opened the door, blinking into the darkness and reeling back at the strong paint fumes. While the rest of the house smelled of fresh furnishings and carpet underlay, Isobel's bedroom reeked like an art studio.

'Keep it down out there,' Isobel mumbled. 'Some of us are sleeping.'

'You went back to bed after breakfast?' Maggie had assigned her daughter the easiest task of all: tidying her room and unpacking the last of her belongings into the copious cupboards before her grandparents, aunt, cousin and friends descended on them. She opened the plantation shutters and sunlight filled the spacious room, illuminating the speckles of cobalt paint on the walls behind Isobel's work station. Paint had also pooled on the new IKEA desk and Maggie replaced the cap on the errant paint tube. 'You're kidding me?'

'I was going to clean it up, Mum. Take a chill pill.'

'This school-holiday sleeping-in caper is getting out of hand.' Maggie left before Isobel could start another argument, returning to the kitchen to find her sister, Hazel, using the hem of her dress to wipe the glass doors.

'Sorry, Maggie, Alma's put her hands everywhere.'

Maggie opened her arms for her chubby-cheeked niece. 'Don't fuss with fingerprints, the glass will be covered in them before the day's out, and it's a darn sight better than the

Jackson Pollock impersonation going on in Issy's room. We only moved in a week before Christmas, and here we are in January with paint on the walls. If I didn't know better, I'd think she did it on purpose to rile me up. Not something you would ever do, little cutie pie.' Maggie ruffled Alma's blonde curls. 'Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, would it?'

The toddler giggled, then reached for Maggie's earring and gave it an experimental tug.

Isobel ambled through the doorway, yawning and clutching a paint-stained cleaning cloth. As well as a frown, she wore an itty-bitty bikini and oodles of eyeliner.

'Hey, Issy,' Hazel said. 'You've been painting again? I'd love a few more pieces for my house, if you've any spare time before school goes back?'

'Sure, anything's better than stockwork. I can help at the library too, if you're paying decent wages?'

'How about your mum and I knock around a few ideas first? Now let's hit the pool before everyone else arrives. Alma's been keen to hang out with her favourite cousin, haven't you, chicky?'

Alma clapped and reached for Isobel, who scooped her up and stalked outside with the little girl's arms wrapped around her neck.

Hazel gave Maggie a sympathetic look as they watched their daughters cross the lawn. 'Anything to get out of farmwork, right? Is she giving you a rough time?'

'It's the heat, I think. And the fact I'm not driving her to the beach every day or swanning around shopping centres with my credit card at the ready like everyone else's mothers.'

'Chin up, there's only a few weeks of summer holidays left,' Hazel said, squeezing her arm sympathetically. 'Come and cool off in the pool.'

Maggie nodded. ‘Give me a minute. One more salad to make and a pavlova that needs topping.’

As she watched Isobel carry Alma into the sparkling pool, she remembered herself at that age, although the baby in her arms had been her son, Ben, not a cousin. As much as Isobel pushed Maggie’s buttons with her attitude, mood swings and general teenage indignation, at least she wasn’t silly enough to get herself pregnant at the age of sixteen.



Fergus’s late mother’s advice about never arriving empty handed rang in his ears, and he scanned the fridge, freezer and pantry before retrieving frozen spinach, sour cream and spring-vegetable soup mix.

Once the spinach was defrosted and the dip ingredients were combined, he quickly hollowed out the centre of the loaf and toasted it in the oven.

‘The presentation makes it the perfect party dish,’ he told Milo, who was watching eagerly as Fergus emptied the dip into the warm loaf. He replaced the ‘lid’ of toasted bread, placed the whole thing on a platter and shrouded it in plastic wrap.

‘I’ll leave you with the scrapings,’ he told the cat, setting the mixing bowl on the floor before hitting the road.

Fergus followed the directions to Furnleigh, giving an impressed whistle when Maggie West’s property came into view. The multi-level sandstone home behind the sharply trimmed hedges, standard roses and shapely trees was even more spectacular up close.

‘Aye, of course there’s a glasshouse and a pool.’ Fergus chuckled to himself, heading past the cars that lined the drive and towards the front door. He’d seen properties like this on real estate websites, all well beyond his budget, so he was

surprised when the door swung open and a pretty lass about his age in a navy dress introduced herself as the owner.

‘Thanks for getting back to me so quickly,’ she said.

Fergus shook her hand, feeling like a giant beside her. ‘To be honest, you had me at barbecue. I’m a sucker for a retro fridge and lunch I dinna have to cook.’

Maggie West frowned and crossed her arms, her blue eyes narrowing. ‘And you’re a qualified fridge mechanic?’

Fergus shook his head, wondering why she’d gone colder than a Glasgow winter. ‘Tinkering with fridges is a hobby. I canna promise I’ll be able to fix it, but I’m happy to have a look. And I know you told me not to bring anything, but I’ve made cob loaf dip.’

She considered this a moment, frowning even more, before taking the plate he offered her and inviting him in.

‘My granny back in Scotland used to have a retro pink one like yours,’ he said as he followed Maggie inside, hoping to put her at ease. ‘Wouldna part with it for love nor money. I always reminded her she spent twice as much on repairs than she would’ve on a new fridge but . . .’ Fergus trailed off as they turned a corner, and he took in the wall-to-wall cabinetry, butcher-block benchtops and marble splashbacks. The house was magnificent.

‘This is one hell of a kitchen. Please don’t tell me you’ve hidden the old fridge behind the cabinetry, though? Or is she in a butler’s pantry?’

‘Not a chance,’ Maggie replied, a smile peeking out. ‘She’s got her own cabana.’

Fergus followed Maggie outside to the in-ground pool he’d glimpsed earlier. The area Maggie called a cabana was more like a resort pavilion, with a curved bar, a barbecue kitchen and even a chandelier. While the main house was pure elegance,

architecture and impeccable styling, this space had personality by the bucketload.

‘Reminds me of a hotel in Palm Beach,’ Fergus marvelled, running a hand along the marble counter of the bar. Cushions featuring monstera leaves and flamingos adorned the sumptuous day bed, scalloped pink tiles added warmth to the kitchenette splashback. The look was pulled together with the pastel appliances, blond timber cabinets and gold fixtures. The fifties-style pink fridge was the centrepiece.

‘You’ve been to Florida too?’ Maggie smelled like jasmine, he noticed as she leaned across him to straighten a framed map. ‘I know it’s a bit kitsch, but while I love the modern look inside, I didn’t want everything brand new and glossy, you know?’

‘What came first, the decorating style or the fridge?’

‘The fridge.’ Her smile made her eyes sparkle. ‘And you’re the first person who’s picked the Palm Beach theme. Kudos to you.’

‘Thanks,’ he said, lowering his tool bag and assessing the fridge. ‘All my globe-trotting’s gotta be good for something. Well, we canna let the side down, now, can we?’ He patted the curved pink door. ‘I’ll have a squiz and let you know.’

Maggie gave him another smile and headed back to the house.



Like Maggie’s new house, her backyard was generously proportioned, but with a full quota of Wests and their guests, it was almost overflowing. Her father’s barking laughter, her aunt and her mum’s gleeful hooting, and squeals from the children in the pool made for a hell of a racket too, and she didn’t need much convincing to excuse herself when the esky needed restocking.

She slipped inside the house. Behind the closed double-glazed doors, the silence was blissful, and she took her time transferring the icy beer into Todd's fancy, wheeled esky.

Maggie heard Luna before she saw her. The border collie's name tag clinked against her collar as she padded across the polished-concrete floor, and Maggie crouched down and stroked her soft coat.

'You hiding out here too? Smart girl.'

The dog rolled onto her back for a belly rub and gave a contented sigh when Maggie obliged.

'Are you sick of everyone fawning over your house yet?' Maggie's mum, Kathy West, asked as she came inside. 'Aunty Eleanor asked how much you paid for the pool and Morrie is after the architect's number so he can build something similar. Every man and their dog's here for a look, aren't they?'

Maggie laughed. Her father had invited half the neighbourhood to her housewarming and the other half had turned up for a look too. 'It should get the builders a few referrals, at least.'

'Not to mention the mortgage brokers,' Kathy added. 'Have you seen Issy? I wanted to show the Hegartys her artwork, see if I can't drum her up some business.'

Maggie surveyed the backyard through the full-length windows. 'She was introducing her friends to Hazel before. I'll find her and send her your way.'

'Hold up, missy.' Kathy grabbed her hand. 'Who's that over there, with Ben and your father?'

Maggie wasn't sure why, but the sight of Fergus's tall form and the way he was nodding at one of her father's impossibly tall tales made her smile.

'That's Fergus. Todd said he was good with fridges, so I've had him over to look at my pink one.' Maggie felt bad for her iciness when she answered the door and for tarring

Fergus with the same brush as her last boyfriend, having felt wary of the Scotsman before she'd even clapped eyes on him. Their accents had sounded similar, though the two men looked nothing alike, and there was no way Dougal would recognise the Palm Beach aesthetic, not even if it bit him on the bum.

'That fridge is playing up again? Didn't you read the reviews before buying it?'

Maggie looked out the window, catching Fergus laughing. Perhaps a faulty fridge wasn't such a bad thing after all . . .

'Oh, Jan Hegarty is getting her handbag. Where's our Issy?' Kathy asked.

'You see if Isobel's in her room, I'll check the pool,' she said.

Maggie found Hazel in the shallows, supervising the young swimmers, but there was no sign of the long-limbed, bikini-clad trio of teenagers that included Isobel. She lowered herself down onto the paved edging, dangling her legs in the water. 'Blissful,' Maggie sighed, closing her eyes as the cool water lapped at her calves.

'Sit. Stay for a few minutes,' Hazel said. 'You've been on your feet all morning.'

'Soon as I've found Issy. She can't be too far away.' Maggie hoisted herself up on the slippery pavers, wobbling precariously before a strong hand grabbed her flailing arm.

'I've got you.'

She spun around at the sound of the thick Scottish accent. It took a beat for her to realise it was Fergus the fridge guy, not Dougal the dirtbag, saving her from her two left feet.

'That was close,' she said, leaning on his broad frame to regain her balance. Her gaze travelled from his lips, taking in the tiniest gap between his front teeth, to the russet stubble on his jaw and the dusting of freckles across his cheekbones. *Everything the beauty magazines told us about freckles was a lie*, she thought, forcing her gaze down to the bottom of the

sparkling pool, the same place she suspected her cool, calm and collected manner had gone.

Maggie thanked Fergus and stepped away before she could do something ridiculous, like smooth down his buttoned shirt.