

## THIS IS WHERE WE SAY GOODBYE

HOWARD MCKENZIE-MURRAY

### ABOUT THE BOOK

The day after Maud Tarkington turns twenty-one, she is supposed to attend the funeral of her favourite brother Lloyd. But instead Maud is ricocheting around the city, looking for signs of life – will she even make it to her brother's send-off?

This quirky, bittersweet story dives into family, memory and the unexpected ways we hold it together when everything has fallen apart.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Howard McKenzie-Murray** is a fiction writer and playwright from the settler-state of Western Australia. His short fiction has been shortlisted nationally and internationally. Most recently, his short fiction can be found in the 2025 anthology *Stranger Weather*. *This Is Where We Say Goodbye* is his first novel, and was shortlisted for the 2024 Hungerford Award.

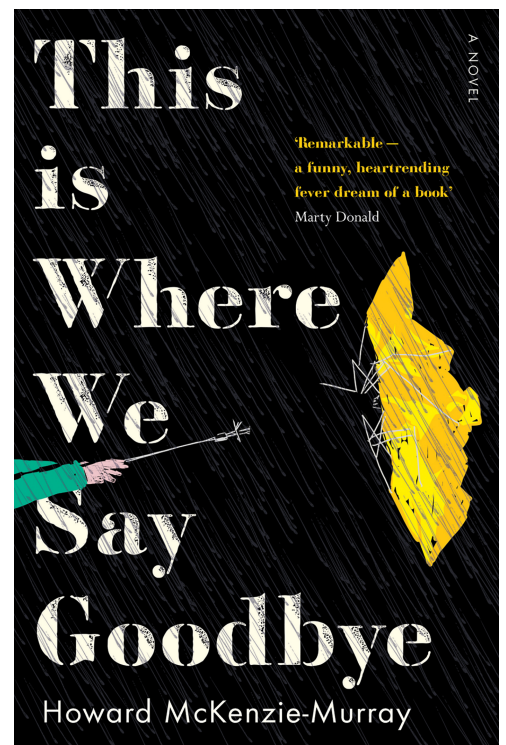
### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *This is Where We Say Goodbye*?
2. Why do you think the author has chosen to compress the narrative into such a short timeframe?
3. The author is a playwright. What evidence of writing for stage can you see in this work?
4. How would you describe the character of Maud? Is she a trustworthy narrator? Why do you think she is the way she is?
5. What glimpses do we get of Maud's loved ones in this time of crisis? How do they relate to each other and to Maud?
6. Why do characters keep encountering white feathers through the course of the book? Do you think these feathers are real?
7. Who is your favourite cameo character – e.g. the woman in the laundromat, Winnie, Alvin Milosz, Lettie, Brad, Otto?
8. Why has the author included so many, and what do these cameo characters teach us about Maud, and Lloyd?
9. What role does the 'bald, jockey-sized man' on the train play in revealing information about Lloyd?
10. What is the significance of the 'perfect hat' and the short story written by Lloyd?
11. What do we learn about Lloyd from his own letters?
12. How does Lloyd see his younger sister, and what do you think are his hopes for her?
13. How does the arrival of Jake affect Maud's trajectory?
14. How would you describe the relationship between Lloyd and Jake? Do you think that Lloyd and Jake might each describe this relationship differently?
15. Why do you think the novel ends where it does?

### INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

***How did your background as a playwright influence the way you approached the writing of this novel?***

I think it's a case of having to be who you are. I'm basically physically incapable of imagining people in wide-open rollicking settings where you cut casually in time. Where huge plot events are given in a single sentence. That's not me. That one sentence of another writer might be my entire work. I imagine things in discrete



moments and sometimes I find how they talk more interesting than what they're talking about. What I'm saying is that there's a staged quality to my imagination. Action happens in closed spaces, characters Enter and Exit and they bring with them play-like props. Writing this book was no different. My imagination operated out of the same old theatre it would if I was writing a play. As the writer, I'd jump up out of the director's chair and replace the Baseball Bat prop of one of the characters with an Old Ballet Shoe prop, and tell the characters to continue. Or draw a faint moustache on the poor old lady and then go chuckling back to my seat. The other influence of theatre writing is dialogue. My characters are almost always pathological chatterboxes.

***What did you learn about yourself through writing this novel?***

By accident, writing this novel gave me everything. I was at a dead-end. I wanted to belong to the Grand Old Club of Serious Writers (Tolstoy, Hemingway, Roth, Joyce). I tried to write about our war years – except we didn't have them – and I tried to write about our great famine – except we didn't have one – and I wrote a lot about my squalid, religious upbringing in Dublin – except I hadn't had that either. I learned to notice my own life.

***Your novel is full of vivid characters. Are any of them inspired by people in your own life?***

Most are. You can't beat life. So I just try to observe it and maybe, if push comes to shove, apply a bit of imagination to it. But I see myself in something like the role of the florist arranging flowers – I can't take credit for the flowers themselves. This ridiculous world created them. The premise of the book was to tell a story with the voice and narrative 'idiosyncrasies' of my younger sister. So Maud and my sister share about 98% of their DNA. In general, the genetic overlap with real people is more like 10% – more of a grab bag. The way a friend or love-rival or a self-help guru talks is always liable to find itself in the mouth of a character.

***What's next for Howard McKenzie-Murray?***

I'm going to fill back up, I'm going to disappear, I'm going to stare at the sky, I'm going to listen.