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Deb Fitzpatrick

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About the author

DEB FITZPATRICK is the author of more than a dozen books for readers of all ages, such as *Tawny Trouble* and *Kelpie Chaos,* the *Spencer Gray* books and her YA classic *90 Packets of Instant Noodles*. Deb loves bushwalking with her kelpie and, when she can, she sneaks away to a shack in the karri forest to be among wildlife and write adventure-in-nature stories. Deb has a Master of Arts in creative writing from UWA. She lived for several years in the cloudforest of Costa Rica, where she did a lot of hiking while toucans, three-toed sloths and spider monkeys crossed through the forest canopy above her.

For all the mums



The edge of the world

Straight over the water, right across from here, you can see Goolidja Goorda – Penguin Island. After that, the Indian Ocean stretches on and on and on and on, with its sharks and whales and gigantic tuna and schools of mackerel and container ships and albatrosses. There's no land after Penguin Island until you get to Mauritius. So it goes: my house, Penguin Island, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique. The three Ms. In that order.

Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique – they sound wild, exotic. I imagine glossy rainforests, lemurs and coconut palms. That Other Side of the Indian Ocean with its jungles and shock-eyed creatures and tropical fruit is *six thousand* kilometres away. The deli I ride

to after school is one kilometre away, and I'm always puffed when I get there. The three Ms are 5,999 more than that. No wonder it's so different from here. Here, on the south-west coast of Australia, it's dry with whitish sand and low grey shrubs, and the only stripes you're likely to see are the ones on a tiger snake – slithering away, hopefully.

Dad reckons he built his shed facing the water to keep an eye on the edge of the world. There's a panoramic window above his workbench, with its spanners and screws and scatterings of nails, its shreds of differently-rough sandpaper. The window looks out to the dunes, and then the blue.

He stares out of the window a lot, that's for sure.

It's after school and I'm in here to properly check out Dad's new fishing kayak. I run my fingers along the smooth fibreglass flank. It's not brand new; he got it second-hand on the weekend. But it's new for us. It's got pride of place in the shed – or 'Dad's salvage yard', as Mum always called it.

I don't linger on that thought.

The kayak is hi-vis orange with fat white stripes. Dad was super chuffed when he brought it home. He hadn't been excited like that in a long time. He rabbited on about how it's kitted out with All The Fruit: padded seat, rod-holders, and a crate for bait and sunscreen and other gear.

Standing next to it, here in the dry shade of the shed, I reckon this kayak's gotta be keen to get out into the water and do some fishing.

Later, as we chow down our dinner, Dad says, 'I launched the kayak today.'

My eyes snap wide. 'You did? Where'd you go?'

'Straight out in front,' he tilts his head. 'Our beach. I felt like a right goose, dragging it between people snoozing on their towels. But once I got her into the water we were right as rain.'

'How was it? Catch anything?' I ask.

Mouth full, he shakes his head. 'Didn't take a rod. Just wanted to christen her, you know? You boys are

welcome to take her out any time. Maybe after school one day, Jas?' he looks at our older brother.

Jasper shrugs.

'Could be good for squid-jigging,' Dad tries.

'Yeah …' Jasper's eyes stay fixed on his spag bol. 'I've got a freaking ton of homework at the moment.'

'*I'll* take it out!' chirps Liam, our little brother.

'Ha, well you'll have to be with one of your brothers when you do that,' Dad flicks us a look. 'Just until you're a bit older, mate.'

'I'd love to take it out,' I say. 'You can come with me, Liam. Not tomorrow, I've got training, but maybe the day after?'

'It's only got the one seat, don't forget,' Dad says. 'So, Mitch, you'll have to walk out beside the kayak if Liam's in it. As long as you're close by.'

'I *can* swim, Dad,' Liam protests.

'I know, I know, mate – you're a good swimmer. But you're only eight. So you'll need to be with one of us, okay?'

'Mitch is only two years older than me.'

'*Three,* thank you very much,' I correct.

'Don't worry, baby bear,' Jasper croons. 'You won't be the bub of the family forever. Oh … hang on – yes you will! You actually will, won't you?' he flashes Liam an awful face. 'You'll always be the baby, Leamy.'

'Shut up, Jas,' Liam mumbles.

'Jas*per*,' Dad growls.

'*Bay*-by.'

'Jasper, don't be a di—'

'Mitchell!'

I glare at Dad. 'What? It's not *me* you should be yelling at, it's him!' I jerk my head Jasper's way and stand up. 'Wednesday after school, Liam, you and me, we'll take the kayak to the beach.'

'Thank you, Mitch,' Dad says, voice low. 'That's good of you.'

I collect the plates more noisily than necessary.

Jasper pushes his chair back and picks up the salt and pepper. The smug look on his face makes me even dirtier.

Dad stays sitting at the table, scratching his head, while we all move around him.

'Thanks for dinner, Dad,' Liam says.

Man I miss Mum.



I wake early. Liam's still asleep, flat out on his front as always. Jasper gets his own room, of course, *being the eldest*. I peel back the curtain just enough to see the day. Blue and warming up, a classic summer start. Our place is one street back from the dunes. On the other side of the sand the ocean is blue and beautiful, with rocky coves and secret snorkelling spots tucked away if you know where to go. There are tiny sandy beaches with turquoise water that look like something out of a holiday brochure, but it's right here, directly in front of our street.

This area is a classified marine park. Penguin Island is about a kilometre offshore, right in the middle. Can you believe, there's a colony of little penguins living on the island. That's right, *penguins* – yep, in Western Australia.

There are no cars allowed on the island. You can walk around the whole hunk of sand and limestone

easily in about an hour. It's super peaceful with heaps of different birds nesting in the rocks and dunes, and sometimes sea lions come and play in the waters.

I last went to Penguin Island about eighteen months ago, with Mum. It was her favourite place in the whole world. I remember a few things really clearly from that day. The ranger gave a talk once everyone was off the ferry and told us that the little penguin – which is the actual name of this species – is the smallest species of penguin. There are eighteen species of penguin around the world, and ours are the smallest. 'There's something really cute about that,' Mum said.

She loved that day. 'Perfect Penguin Island,' she kept saying. 'It's so peaceful, but it's buzzing with life.' She was propped up next to me on the beach, sunglasses on. Big sunglasses, hiding how tired she looked.

We were still a whole family then.

The little penguins are fighting something now, like our family was then. The penguin problem has been all over the local papers. For some reason, their population

has been shrinking over the last couple of years. The headlines have been saying things like

DEVASTATING PENGUIN COLLAPSE

and

WILDLIFE COLONY APPROACHES EXTINCTION

People have even marched through our town holding banners and calling for action.

But the little penguins are still disappearing. And no-one's sure why.

Mum got so upset when it was first reported. It wasn't long after our visit to the island. It was on the front page of our local paper in massive **bold** CAPITAL LETTERS, and when she read the article, she cried. She cried for those penguins. I thought it was weird that she never cried about being sick, but man did she cry buckets for the little penguins. Dad tried to keep the local paper hidden after that so she couldn't read any more about the penguin problem, but she always found it – usually stashed in the dunny where Dad says he 'does his best reading'.

He doesn't know I know this, but he does his best crying in there, too.