

*Jane Sloan recently completed a PhD at the University of Sydney. "The Letter," was inspired by an interest in the epistolary form - the kinds of familiarities it allows, the possibilities it offers for being at once oblique and compelling. I like the idea that it can feel like reading over someone's shoulder, and not quite knowing the details, the reader is left to fill in the gaps imaginatively.*

## The Letter

She wrote: It was as if it had never been.

And she wanted this to be true; to do away with the whole lousy mess in just a few words. To believe things had been otherwise; not yet begun and therefore...

She wrote: He was a man looking for a mother in order to be born.

She remembered the shape of his skull under her hands. As he eased his way out of her she held his head, stroking against the grey stubble, feeling for him, his thoughts, the ones he never spoke.

She wrote: This is the place where I know myself.

Pale pink light on grey green gums; the grass wet, the tide out. The mud stinking of harbour brine and the sweet rot of something dead. The dogs trotting along, oblivious to all except the leavings of their kind; sprays of piss against tree trunks and bushes.

She could walk forever.

She wrote: These are the things that bind.

Children at a picnic. The parents lie on brightly coloured rugs (she misses the itch of the woollen plaid they spread out in the shade, sandwiches wrapped in silver foil), watching and talking, in the way parents do. The children chase the geese that have sidled out of the water onto the shore. Cockatoos tearing at pinecones screech and flap clumsy wings. At night there are bats here, when the figs are ripe and the ground underfoot seeded and slippery.

A father lifts his child onto his shoulders; she feels a dizziness in her belly: this riding high.

She wrote: This is where you've never been.

The dark space at the bottom of the wardrobe. She is little, though how little she's unsure; but after grandma died, certainly. She wakes. Enough light slides between the curtains for her not to fumble and disturb her sister. She crawls in, jamming the door shut behind her with a wedge of folded paper. Knees to chest she sleeps again.

She wrote: Days that were but can never be.



Learning the word *minnow*, which was so like the movement of the fish.  
Copper coins at the bottom of a fountain where you made a wish.  
Holding his hand.

She wrote: But I wanted you to see me.

The coffee stain on the desktop. Bookmarks. The jumper bundled up at  
the back of a shelf. Tarnished teaspoons and a wooden ladle. Footprints  
evaporating from a tiled floor.

She wrote: It was meant to be a lifetime.

Deep water. An ocean. The curve of a beach. A vast green hill from a  
Wyeth painting. A cliff. Tumbled boulders. The sense of falling as she  
looks upward, towards clouds in a blue sky. Seagulls.

She wrote: They never knew.

A tumbled bed and the sound of a shower running. Light from the lamp  
pooling on the floorboards; she runs her fingernail along the cracks  
between them.

She wrote: I don't write this for you.