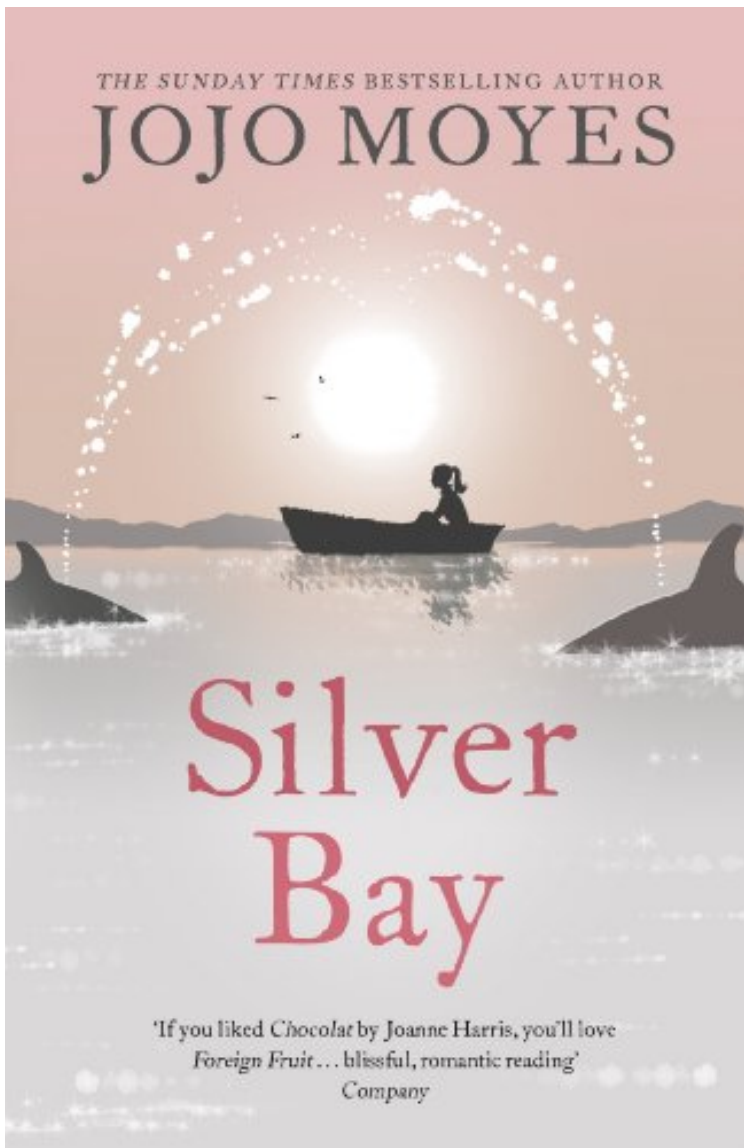


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Silver Bay (English Edition)



Par Jojo Moyes
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe moving and romantic novel from the bestselling author of Me Before You and The Girl You Left Behind. Shortlisted for the 2007 RNA Novel of the Year award. 'Compelling tale' - HeatLiza McCullen will never escape her past. But the unspoilt beaches and tight-knit community of Silver Bay offer the freedom and safety she craves - if not for herself, then for her young daughter, Hannah.Until Mike Dormer arrives as a guest in her aunt's hotel, and the peace of Silver Bay is shattered. The mild-mannered Englishman with his too-smart clothes and disturbing eyes could destroy everything Liza has worked so hard to protect: not only the family business and the bay that harbours her beloved whales, but also her conviction that she will never love - never deserve to love - again.ExtraitACKNOWLEDGMENTSJojo Moyes July

2006 Prologue KATHLEEN My name is Kathleen Whittier Mostyn, and when I was seventeen I became famous for catching the biggest shark New South Wales had ever seen: a gray nurse with an eye so mean it still looked like it wanted to rip me in two several days after we laid it out. That was back in the days when all of Silver Bay was given over to game fishing, and for three straight weeks all anyone could talk about was that shark. A newspaper reporter came all the way from Newcastle and took a picture of me standing next to it (I'm the one in the bathing suit). It's several feet taller than I am, in that picture, and the photographer made me wear my heels. What you can see is a tall, rather stern-seeming girl, better-looking than she knew, shoulders broad enough to be the despair of her mother, and a waist trim enough from reeling and bending that she never needed a corset. There I am, unable to hide my pride, not yet aware that I would be tied to that beast for the rest of my days as surely as if we had been married. What you can't see is that he is held up by two wires, supported by my father and his business partner Mr. Brent Newhaven hauling it ashore had ripped several tendons in my right shoulder and by the time the photographer arrived I couldn't lift a mug of tea, let alone a shark. Still, it was enough to cement my reputation. For years I was known as the Shark Girl, even when my girlhood was well over. My sister Norah always joked that, given the state of my appearance, they should have called me the Sea Urchin. But my success, my father always said, made the Bay Hotel. Two days after that picture appeared in the newspaper we were booked solid, and stayed booked solid until the west wing of the hotel burned down in 1962. Men came because they wanted to beat my record. Or because they assumed that if a girl could land a creature like that, why, what was possible for a proper fisherman? A few came to ask me to marry them, but my father always said he could smell them before they'd hit Port Stephens and sent them packing. Women came because until then they had never thought it possible that they could catch game fish, let alone compete with the men. And families came because Silver Bay, with its protected bay, endless dunes and calm waters, was a fine place to be. Two more jetties were hurriedly constructed to cope with the extra boat traffic, and every day the air was filled with the sound of clipped oars and outboard motors as the bay and the sea around it was virtually dredged of aquatic life. The night air was filled with the revving of car engines, soft bursts of music and glasses clinking. There was a time, during the 1950s, when it is not too fanciful to say that we were the place to be. Now we still have our boats, and our jetties, although we only use one now, and what people are chasing is pretty different. I haven't picked up a rod in almost twenty years. I don't much care for killing things anymore. Were pretty quiet, even in the summer. Most of the holiday traffic heads to the clubs and high-rise hotels, the more obvious delights of Coffs Harbour or Byron Bay and, to tell the truth, that suits most of us just fine. I still hold that record. It's noted in one of those doorstep-sized books that sell in huge numbers, and no one you know ever buys. The editors do me the honor of ringing me now and then to let me know my name will be included for another year. Occasionally the local schoolchildren stop by to tell me they've found me in the library, and I always act surprised, just to keep them happy. But I still hold that record. I tell you that not out of any desire to boast, or because I'm a seventy-six-year-old woman and it's nice to feel I once did something of note, but because when you're surrounded by as many secrets as I am, it feels good to get things straight out in the open occasionally. One HANNAH If you stuck your hand in right up to the wrist, you could usually uncover at least three different kinds of biscuit in Moby One's jar. Yoshi said that the crews on the other boats always skimmed on biscuits, buying the cheapest arrowroot in value packs at the supermarket. But she reckoned that if you'd paid nearly a hundred and fifty dollars to go out chasing dolphins, the least you could expect was a decent biscuit. So she bought all-butter Anzac's thick, oaty, double-layered with chocolate Scotch Fingers, Mint Slices wrapped in foil and very occasionally, if she could get away with it, home-baked cookies. Lance, the skipper, said she got decent biscuits because they were pretty well all she had to eat. He also said that if their boss ever caught her spending that much on biscuits he'd squash her like a Garibaldi. I stared at the biscuits, as Moby One headed out into Silver Bay, holding up the tray as Yoshi offered the passengers tea and coffee. I was hoping they wouldn't eat all the Anzacs before I had a chance to take one. I'd snuck out without breakfast, and I knew it was only when we headed into the cockpit that she'd let me dip in. Moby One to Suzanne, how many beers did you sink last night? You're steering a course like a one-legged drunk. Lance was on the radio. As we went in, I dropped my hand straight into the biscuit jar and pulled out the last Anzac. The ship-to-ship radio crackled, and a voice muttered something I couldn't make out. He tried again: Moby One to Sweet Suzanne. Look, you'd better straighten up, mate... you've got four passengers up front hanging over the rails. Every time you swerve they're decorating your starboard windows. Lance MacGregor's voice sounded like it had been rubbed down with wire wool, like the boats' sides. He took one hand off the wheel and Yoshi gave him a mug of coffee. I tucked myself in behind her.

The spray on the back of her navy blue uniform sparkled like sequins. You seen Greg? Lance asked. She nodded. I got a good look before we set off. Hes so done in he cant steer straight. He pointed out of the droplet-flecked window toward the smaller boat. I tell you, Yoshi, his passengers will be asking for refunds. The one in the green hat hasnt lifted his head since we passed Break Nose Island. What the hells got into him? Yoshi Takomura had the prettiest hair Id ever seen. It hung in black clouds around her face, never tangling despite the effects of wind and saltwater. I took one of my own mousy locks between my fingers; it felt gritty, although we had been on the water only half an hour. My friend Lara said that when she hit fourteen, in four years time, her mum was going to let her put streaks in hers. It was then that Lance had caught sight of me. I guess Id known he would. What are you doing here, Squirt? Your mumll have my guts for garters. Dont you have school or something? Holidays. I stepped back behind Yoshi, a little embarrassed. Lance always talked to me like I was five years younger than I was. Shell stay out of sight, Yoshi said. She just wanted to see the dolphins. I stared at him, pulling my sleeves down over my hands. He stared back, then shrugged. You gonna wear a life jacket? I nodded. And not get under my feet? I tilted my head. As if, my eyes said. Be nice to her, said Yoshi. Shes been ill twice already. Its nerves, I said. My tummy always does it. Ah... Hell. Look, just make sure your mum knows it was nothing to do with me, okay? And listen, Squirt, head for Moby Two next time or, even better, someone elses boat. You never saw her, said Yoshi. Anyway, Gregs steerings not the half of it. She grinned. Wait till he turns and you see what hes done to the side of his prow. It was, Yoshi said, as we headed back out, a good day to be on the water. The sea was a little choppy, but the winds were mild, and the air so clear that you could see the white horses riding the little breakers miles into the distance. I followed her to the main restaurant deck, my legs easily absorbing the rise and fall of the catamaran beneath me, a little less self-conscious now that the skipper knew I was onboard. This, she had told me, would be the busiest part of todays dolphin-watching trip, the time between setting off and our arrival at the sheltered waters around the bay where the pods of bottlenoses tended to gather. While the passengers sat up on the top deck, enjoying the crisp May day through woolen mufflers, Yoshi, the steward, was laying out the buffet, offering drinks and, if the water was choppy, which it was most days now that winter was coming, preparing the disinfectant and bucket for seasickness. It didnt matter how many times you told them, she grumbled, glancing at the well-dressed Asians who made up most of the mornings custom, they would stay belowdecks, they would eat and drink too quickly and they would go into the tiny lavatories to be sick, rather than hanging over the edge, thereby making them unusable by anyone else. And if they were Japanese, she added, with a hint of malicious pleasure, they would spend the rest of the voyage in a silent frenzy of humiliation, hiding behind dark glasses and raised collars, their ashen faces turned resolutely to sea. Tea? Coffee? Biscuits? Tea? Coffee? Biscuits? I followed her out on to the foredeck, pulling my windbreaker up around my neck. The wind had dropped a little but I could still feel the chill in the air, biting at my nose and the tips of my ears. Most of the passengers didnt want anything they were chatting loudly, to be heard above the engines, gazing out at the distant horizon, and taking pictures of each other. Now and then I dipped my hand into the biscuits until Id taken what I thought they would have eaten anyway. Moby One was the biggest catamaran or cat, as the crews called them in Silver Bay. It was usually a two-steward vessel, but the tourists were tailing off as the temperature dropped, so it was just Yoshi now until trade picked up again. I didnt mind it was easier to persuade her to let me aboard. I helped her put the tea and coffeepots back in their holders, then stepped back out onto the narrow side deck, where we braced ourselves against the windows, and gazed across the sea to where the smaller boat was still making its uneven path across the waves. Even from this distance we could see that more people now were hanging over Suzannes rails, their heads lower than their shoulders, oblivious of the spattered red paint just below them. We can take ten minutes now. Here. Yoshi cracked open a can of cola and handed it to me. You ever heard of chaos theory? Mmm. I made it sound like I might. If only those people knew, she wagged a finger as we felt the engines slow, that their long-awaited trip to go see the wild dolphins has been ruined by an ex-girlfriend they will never meet and a man who now lives with her more than two hundred and fifty kilometers away in Sydney and thinks that purple cycling shorts are acceptable daywear. I took a gulp of my drink. The fizz made my eyes water and I swallowed hard. Youre saying the tourists being sick on Gregs boat is down to chaos theory? Id thought it was because hed got drunk again the night before. Yoshi smiled. Something like that. The engines had stopped, and Moby One quieted, the sea growing silent around us, except for the tourist chatter and the waves slapping against the sides. I loved it out here, loved watching my house become a white dot against the narrow strip of beach, then disappear behind the endless coves. Perhaps my pleasure was made greater by the knowledge that what I was doing was against the rules. I

wasnt rebellious, not really, but I kind of liked the idea of it. Lara had a dinghy that she was allowed to take out by herself, staying within the buoys that marked out the old oyster beds, and I envied her. My mother wouldnt let me roam around the bay, even though I was nearly eleven. All in good time, she would murmur.

There was no point arguing with her about stuff like that. Lance appeared beside us: hed just had his photograph taken with two giggling teenagers. He was often asked to pose with young women, and hadnt yet been known to refuse. It was why he liked to wear his captains peaked cap, Yoshi said, even when the sun was hot enough to melt his head. Whats he written on the side of his boat? He squinted at Gregs cruiser in the distance. He seemed to have forgiven me for being onboard. Ill tell you back at the jetty. I caught the eyebrow cocked toward me. I can read what it says, you know, I said. The other boat, which had until yesterday described itself as the Sweet Suzanne, now suggested, in red paint, that Suzanne do something Yoshi said was a biological impossibility. She turned to him, lowering her voice as far as possible as if she thought I couldnt hear her. The missus told him there was another man after all. Lance let out a long whistle. He said as much. And she denied it. She was hardly going to admit it, not when she knew how Greg was going to react. And he was hardly an innocent... She glanced at me. Anyway, shes off to live in Sydney, and she said she wants half the boat. And he says? I think the boat probably says it all. Cant believe hed take tourists out with it like that. Lance lifted his binoculars better to study the scrawled red lettering. Yoshi gestured at him to pass them to her. He was so ill this morning Im not sure hes even remembered what hes done. We were interrupted by the excited yells of the tourists on the upper deck. They were jostling toward the pulpit at the front. Here we go, muttered Lance, straightening up and grinning at me. Theres our pocket money, Squirt. Time to get back to work. Sometimes, Yoshi said, they could run the whole bay but the bottlenoses would refuse to show, and a boat full of unsatisfied dolphin-watchers was a boat full of free second trips and fifty-percent refunds, both guaranteed to send the boss into meltdown. At the bow, a group of tourists were pressed together, cameras whirring as they tried to catch the glossy gray shapes that were now riding the breaking waves below. I checked the water to see who had come to play. Belowdecks, Yoshi had covered a wall with photographs of the fins of every dolphin in the area. She had given them all names: Zigzag, One Cut, Piper... The other crews had laughed at her, but now they could all recognize the distinctive fins it was the second time theyd seen Butterknife that week, theyd murmur. I knew the name of every one by heart. Looks like Polo and Broolly, Yoshi said, leaning over the side. Is that Broollys baby? The dolphins were silent gray arcs, circling the boat as if they were the sightseers. Every time one broke the surface the air was filled with the sound of clacking camera shutters. What did they think of us gawping at them? I knew they were as smart as humans. I used to imagine them meeting up by the rocks afterward, laughing in dolphin language about us the one in the blue hat, or the one with the funny glasses. Lances voice came over the PA system: Ladies and gentlemen, please do not rush to one side to see the dolphins. We will slowly turn the ship so that everyone can get a good view. If you rush to one side we are likely to capsize. Dolphins do not like boats that fall over. Glancing up, I noticed two albatross; pausing in midair, they folded their wings and dived, sending up only the faintest splash as they hit the water. One rose again, wheeling in search of some unseen prey, then the other rejoined it, soaring above the little bay and disappeared. I watched them go. Then, as Moby One slowly shifted position, I leaned over the side, sticking my feet under the bottom rail to see my new trainers. Yoshi had promised shed let me sit in the boom nets when the weather got warmer, so that I could touch the dolphins, perhaps even swim with them. But only if my mother agreed. And we all knew what that meant. I stumbled as the boat moved unexpectedly. It took me a second to register that the engines had started up. Startled, I grabbed the handrail. I had grown up in Silver Bay and knew there was a way of doing things around dolphins. Shut down engines if you want them to play. If they keep moving, hold a parallel course, be guided by them. Dolphins made things pretty clear: if they liked you they came close, or kept an even distance. If they didnt want you around they swam away. Yoshi frowned at me, and as the catamaran lurched, we grabbed the lifelines. My confusion was mirrored in her face. A sudden acceleration sent the boat shooting forward, and, above, squealing tourists collapsed onto their seats. We were flying. Lance was on the radio. As we clambered into the cockpit behind him, Sweet Suzanne was scudding along some distance away, bouncing over the waves, apparently heedless of the increasing numbers of miserable people now hanging over her rails. Lance! What are you doing? Yoshi grabbed at a rail. See you there, bud... Ladies and gentlemen Lance pulled a face and reached for the PA system button. I need a translation, he mouthed. We have something a bit special for you this morning. Youve already enjoyed the magical sight of our Silver Bay dolphins, but if you hold on tight, wed like to take you to something really special. Weve had a sighting of the first whales of the season, a little further out to sea.

These are the humpbacked whales who come past our waters every year on their long migration north from the Antarctic. I can promise you that this is a sight you wont forget. Now, please sit down, or hold on tight. Things may get a little choppy as, from the south, theres a little more size in the swell, but I want to make sure we get you there in time to see them. Anyone who wants to stay at the front of the boat, I suggest you borrow a raincoat. There are plenty inside at the back. He spun the wheel and nodded to Yoshi, who took the PA system. She repeated what he had said in Japanese, then in Korean for good measure. It was entirely possible, she said afterward, that she had simply recited the previous days lunch menu: she had been unable to focus since Lance had made his announcement. One word sang through, as it did in my own mind: whale! How far? Yoshis body was rigid as she scanned the glinting waters. The earlier relaxed atmosphere had disappeared completely. My stomach was in knots. Four, five miles? Dunno. The tourist helicopter was flying over and said theyd seen what looked like two a couple of miles off Torn Point. Its a little early in the season, but... Fourteenth of June last year. Were not that far out, said Yoshi. Bloody hell! Look at Greg! Hes going to lose passengers if he carries on at that pace. His boats not big enough to soak up those waves. He doesnt want us to get there before him. Lance shook his head and checked the speed dial. Full throttle. Lets make sure Moby Ones first this year. Just for once. Some crew members were doing the job to make up their shipping hours, on course for bigger vessels and bigger jobs. Some, like Yoshi, had begun as part of their education and had simply forgotten to go home. But, whatever reason they might have for being there, I had grasped long ago that there was magic in the first whale sighting of the migration season. It was as if, until that creature had been seen, it was impossible to believe they would be back. To be the first to see one didnt mean much once the whales were known to be out there, all five boats that operated off Whale Jetty would switch their business from dolphins to whale-watching. But it was of importance to the crew. And, like all great passions, it made them mad. Boy, did it make them mad. Look at that great idiot. Funny how he can hold a straight course now, Lance spat. Greg was portside of us, but seemed to be gaining. He cant bear the thought of us getting there before him. Yoshi grabbed a raincoat and threw it at me. There! Just in case we go out front. Its going to get pretty wet. I dont bloody believe it. Lance had spied another boat on the horizon. He must have forgotten I was there, to be swearing. Theres Mitchell! I bet you hes been sitting on the radio all afternoon and now he swans up, probably with a cabinful of passengers. Im going to swing for that bloke one of these days. They were always moaning about Mitchell Dray. He never bothered to look for the dolphins, like the others: he would just wait until he overheard a sighting on the ship-to-ship radio and go where everyone else was headed. Am I really going to see a whale? I asked. Beneath our feet, the hull smacked noisily against the waves, forcing me to hang on to the side. Through the open window, I could hear the excited shouts of the tourists, the laughter of those who had been hit by rogue waves. Fingers crossed. Yoshis eyes were trained on the horizon. A real whale. I had only once seen a whale, with my aunt Kathleen. Usually I wasnt allowed this far out to sea. There... There! No, its just spray. Yoshi had lifted the binoculars. Cant you change course? Theres too much glare. Not if you want me to get there first. Lance swung the boat to starboard, trying to alter the angle of the sun on the waves. We should radio ashore. Find out exactly where the chopper saw it. No point, said Lance. It could have traveled two miles by now. And Mitchell will be listening in. Im not giving that bugger any more information. Hes been stealing passengers from us all summer. Just watch for the blow. Yeah. And the little flag that says, Whale. Just trying to help, Lance. There! I could just make out the shape, like a distant black pebble dipping below the water. North-northeast. Heading behind Break Nose Island. Just dived. I thought I might be sick with excitement. I heard Lance start counting behind me. One... two... three... four... whale! An unmistakable plume of water rose joyously above the horizon. Yoshi let out a squeal. Lance glanced toward Greg, who, from his course, hadnt seen it. We got her! Lance hissed. All whales were her to Lance, just as all kids were squirt. Whale. I took the word into my mouth, rolled it around and savored it. My eyes did not leave the water. Moby One shifted course, the huge catamaran slapping hard as it bounded over each wave. Behind the island I imagined the whale breaching, displaying its white belly to the world in an unseen display of buoyancy. Whale, I whispered. Were going to be first, muttered Yoshi, excitedly. Just for once were going to get there first. I watched Lance swing the wheel, counting under his breath to mark the number of times the whale blew. More than thirty seconds apart and it was likely to dive deep. Then we would have lost it. Closer together meant it had already dived, and we would have a chance to follow. Seven... eight... Shes up. Yessss. Lance hit the wheel with his palm, then grabbed the PA system. Ladies and gentlemen, if you look over to your right, you might make out the whale, which is headed behind that piece of land there. Gregs realized where were headed. Yoshi grinned. Hell never catch us now. His engine isnt powerful enough. Moby One to Blue

Horizon. Mitchell, Lance yelled into his radio, you want to see this baby youre going to have to get off my coattails. Mitchells voice came over the radio: Blue Horizon to Moby One. Im just here to make sure theres someone to pick up Gregs overboards. Oh, nothing to do with the big fish? Lance responded tersely. Blue Horizon to Moby One. Big old sea, Lance. Plenty of room for everyone. I gripped the wooden rim of the chart table so tightly that my knuckles turned white as I watched the scrubby headland grow. I wondered whether the whale would slow there, allow us to come closer. Perhaps it would lift its head and eye us. Perhaps it would swim up to the side of the boat and reveal its calf. Two minutes, said Lance. Well be around the head in about two minutes. Hopefully get up close. Come on, girlie. Give us a good show. Yoshi was talking to herself, binoculars still raised. Whale, I told it silently, wait for us, whale. I wondered whether it would notice me. Whether it could sense that I, of all the people on the boat, had a special empathy with sea creatures. I was pretty sure I did. I dont bloody believe it. Lance had taken off his peaked cap, and was scowling out of the window. What? Yoshi leaned toward him. Look. I followed their gaze. As Moby One came around the headland, all of us fell silent. A short distance from the scrub-covered landmass, half a mile out to sea in aquamarine waters, the stationary Ishmael sat, its newly painted sides glinting under the midday sun. At the helm stood my mother, leaning over the rail, her hair whipping around her face under the bleached cap she insisted on wearing out to sea. She had her weight on one leg and Milly, our dog, lay apparently asleep across the wheel. She looked as if she had been there, waiting for this whale, for years. How the bloody hell did she do that? Lance caught Yoshis warning glare and shrugged an apology at me. Nothing personal, but Jeez... Shes always there first. Yoshis response was half amused, half resigned. Every year Ive been here. Shes always first. Beaten by a bloody Brit. Its as bad as the cricket. Lance lit a cigarette, then tossed away the match in disgust. I stepped out onto the deck. At that moment the whale emerged. As we gasped, it loblotted, sending a huge spray of water toward Ishmael. The tourists on Moby Ones top deck cheered. It was enormous, close enough that we could see the barnacled growths along its body, the corrugated white belly; near enough that I could look briefly into its eye. But ridiculously swift something of that bulk had no right to be so agile. My breath had stalled in my throat. One hand clutching the lifelines, I lifted the binoculars with the other and gazed through them, not at the whale but at my mother, hardly hearing the exclamations about the creatures size, the swell it sent before the smaller boat, forgetting briefly that I should not allow myself to be seen. Even from that distance I could make out that Liza McCullen was smiling, her eyes creased upward. It was an expression she rarely, if ever, wore on dry land. Aunt Kathleen walked to the end of the veranda to put a large bowl of prawns and some lemon slices on the bleached wooden table with a large basket of bread. Shes actually my great-aunt but she says that makes her feel like an antique, so most of the time I call her Auntie K. Behind her the white weatherboard of the hotels frontage glowed softly in the evening sun, eight fiery red peaches sliding down the windows. The wind had picked up a little, and the hotel sign whined as it swung back and forth. Whats this for? Greg lifted his head from the bottle of beer hed been nursing. He had finally taken off his dark glasses, and the shadows under his eyes betrayed the events of the previous evening. I heard you needed your stomach lined, she said, thwacking a napkin in front of him. He tell you four of his passengers asked for their money back when they caught sight of his hull? Lance laughed. Sorry, Greg mate, but what a damn fool thing to do. Of all the things to write. Youre a gent, Kathleen. Greg, ignoring him, reached for the bread. My aunt gave him one of her looks. And Ill be something else entirely if you write those words where young Hannah can see them again. Shark Ladys still got teeth. Lance mimed a snapping motion at Greg. Aunt Kathleen ignored him. Hannah, you dig in now. Ill bet you never had a bite to eat for lunch. Im going to fetch the salad. She ate the biscuits, said Yoshi, expertly undressing a prawn. Biscuits. Aunt Kathleen snorted. We were gathered, as the Whale Jetty crews were most evenings, outside the hotel kitchens. There were few days when the crews wouldnt share a beer or two before they headed home. Some of the younger members, my aunt often said, shared so many that they barely made it home at all. As I bit into a juicy tiger prawn, I noticed that the burners were outside; few guests at the Silver Bay Hotel wanted to sit out in June, but in winter the whale-watching crews congregated here to discuss events on the water, no matter the weather. Their members changed from year to year, as people moved on to different jobs or went to uni, but Lance, Greg, Yoshi and the others had been a constant in my life for as long as I had lived there. Aunt Kathleen usually lit the burners at the start of the month and they stayed on most evenings until September. Did you have many out? She had returned with the salad. She tossed it with brisk, expert fingers, then put some onto my plate before I could protest. Ive had no one at the museum. Moby One was pretty full. Lot of Koreans. Yoshi shrugged. Greg nearly lost half of his over the side. They got a good sight of the

whale. Greg reached for another piece of bread. No complaints. No refunds necessary. Got anymore beers, Miss M? You know where the bar is. You see it, Hannah? It was enormous. I could see its barnacles. For some reason I'd expected it to be smooth, but the skin had been lined, ridged, studded with fellow sea creatures, as if it were a living island. It was close. I've told her we wouldn't normally get that close, said Yoshi. Greg narrowed his eyes. If she'd been out on her mother's boat she could have brushed its teeth. Yes, well, the least said about that... Aunt Kathleen shook her head. Not a word, she mouthed at me. That was a one-off. I nodded dutifully. It was the third one-off that month. That Mitchell turn up? You want to watch him. I've heard he's joining those Sydney-siders with the big boats. They all looked up. Thought the National Parks and Wildlife Service had frightened them off, said Lance. When I went to the fish market, Aunt Kathleen said, they told me they'd seen one all the way out by the heads. Music at top volume, people dancing on the decks. Like a discothèque. Ruined the night's fishing. But by the time the Parks and Wildlife people got out there they were long gone. Impossible to prove a thing. The balance in Silver Bay was delicate: too few whale-watching tourists and the business would be unsustainable; too many, and it would disturb the creatures it wanted to display. Lance and Greg had come up against the triple-decker catamarans from around the bay, often blaring loud music, decks heaving with passengers, and were of similar opinion. They'll be the death of us all, that lot, Lance said. Irresponsible. Money-mad. Should suit Mitchell down to the ground. I hadn't realized how hungry I was. I ate six of the huge prawns in quick succession, chasing Greg's fingers around the empty bowl. He grinned and waved a prawn head at me. I stuck out my tongue at him. I think I'm a little bit in love with Greg, not that I'd ever tell anybody. Aye aye, here she is. Princess of Whales. Very funny. My mother dumped her keys on the table and gestured to Yoshi to move down so that she could squeeze in next to me. She dropped a kiss onto my head. Good day, lovey? She smelt of sunscreen and salt air. I shot a look at my aunt. Fine. I bent to fondle Milly's ears, grateful that my mother could not see the pinking in my face. My head still sang with the sight of that whale. I thought it must radiate out of me, but she was reaching for a glass and pouring herself some water. What have you been doing? my mother asked. Yeah. What have you been doing, Hannah? Greg winked at me. She helped me with the beds this morning. Aunt Kathleen glared at him. Heard you had a good afternoon. Not bad. My mother downed the water. God, I'm thirsty. Did you drink enough today, Hannah? Did she drink enough, Kathleen? Her English accent was still pronounced, even after so many years in Australia. She's had plenty. How many did you see? She never drinks enough. Just the one. Big girl. Lobtailed half a bath of water into my bag. Look. She held up her checkbook, its edges frilled and warped. Well, there's an amateur's mistake. Aunt Kathleen sighed in disgust. Didn't you have anyone out with you? My mother shook her head. I wanted to try out that new rudder, see how well it worked in choppy waters. The boatyard warned me it might stick. And you just happened on a whale, said Lance. She took another swig of water. Something like that. Her face had closed. She had closed. It was as if the whale thing had never happened. For a few minutes we ate in silence, as the sun sank slowly toward the horizon. Two fishermen walked past, and raised their arms in greeting. I recognized one as Laras dad, but I'm not sure he saw me. My mother ate a piece of bread and a tiny plateful of salad, less even than I eat and I don't like salad. Then she glanced up at Greg. I heard about Suzanne. Half of Port Stephens has heard about Suzanne. Greg's eyes were tired and he looked as if he hadn't shaved for a week. Yes. Well. I'm sorry. Sorry enough to come out with me Friday? Nope. She stood up, checked her watch, stuffed her sodden checkbook back into her bag and made for the kitchen door. That rudders still not right. I've got to ring the yard before they head off. Don't stay out without your sweater, Hannah. The winds getting up. I watched as she strode away, pursued by the dog. We were silent until we heard the slam of the screen door. Then Lance leaned back in his chair to gaze out at the darkening bay, where a cruiser was just visible on the far horizon. Our first whale of the season, Greg's first refusal of the season. Got a nice kind of symmetry to it, don't you think? He ducked as a piece of bread bounced off the chair behind him. Two

KATHLEEN The Whalechasers Museum had been housed in the old processing plant, a few hundred yards from the Silver Bay Hotel, since commercial whaling was abandoned off Port Stephens in the early 1960s. It didn't have much to recommend it as a modern tourist attraction: the building was a great barn of a place, the floor a suspiciously darkened red-brown, wooden walls still leaching the salt that had been used on the catch. There was an outhouse at the back, and a fresh jug of lemon squash made up daily for the thirsty. Food, a sign observed, was available in the hotel. I'd say that the facilities, as they're now known, are probably twice what they were when my father was alive. Our centerpiece was a section of the hull of Maui II, a commercial whalechaser, a hunting vessel that had broken clean in two in 1935 when a minke had taken exception to it, and had risen beneath the boat, lifting it on its tail until it flipped and snapped. Mercifully a

fishing trawler had been nearby and had saved the hands and verified their story. For years local people had come to see the evidence of what nature could wreak on man when it felt man had harvested enough. I had kept the museum open since my father died in 1970, and had always allowed visitors to climb over the remains of the hull, to run their fingers over the splintered wood, their faces coming alive as they imagined what it must have been like to ride on the back of a whale. Long ago I had posed for pictures, when the sharp-eyed recognized me as the Shark Girl of the framed newspaper reports, and talked them through the stuffed game fish that adorned the glass cases on the walls. But there weren't too many people interested now. The tourists who came to stay at the hotel might pass a polite fifteen minutes walking around the museum's dusty interior, spend a few cents on some whale postcards, perhaps sign a petition against the resumption of commercial whaling. But it was usually because they were waiting for a taxi, or because the wind was up and it was raining and there was nothing doing out on the water. That day, behind the counter, I thought perhaps I couldn't blame them. Maui II was more and more like a heap of driftwood, while there were only so many times people could handle a whalebone or a bit of baleen, the strange plasticky filter from a humpback's mouth, before the delights of mini-golf or the gaming machines at the surf club became more inviting. For years people had been telling me to modernize, but I hadn't paid much heed. What was the point? Half the people who walked around the museum looked a little uncomfortable to be celebrating something that is now illegal. Sometimes even I didn't know why I stayed open, other than that whaling was part of Silver Bays history, and history is what it is, no matter how unpalatable. I adjusted Maui II's old harpoon, known for reasons I can't recall as Old Harry, on its hooks on the wall. Then, from below it, I took a rod, ran my duster up its length and wound the reel, to confirm that it still worked. Not that it mattered anymore, but I liked to know things were shipshape. I hesitated. Then, perhaps seduced by the familiar feel of it in my hand, I tilted it backward, as if I were about to cast a line. Won't catch much in here. I spun around, lifting a hand to my chest. Nino Gaines! You nearly made me drop my rod. Fat chance. He removed his hat and walked from the doorway into the middle of the floor. Never saw you drop a catch yet. He smiled, revealing a row of crooked teeth. I got a couple of cases of wine in the truck. Thought you might like to crack open a bottle with me over some lunch. I'd value your opinion. My orders not due till next week, if I remember rightly. I replaced the rod on the wall and wiped my hands on the front of my moleskin trousers. I'm old enough to be beyond such considerations, but it bugged me that he'd caught me in my work trousers with my hair all over the place. As I said, it's a good batch. I'd appreciate your opinion. He smiled. The lines on his face told of years spent in his vineyards, and a touch of pink around his nose hinted at the evenings afterward. I've got to get a room ready for a guest coming tomorrow. How long's it going to take you to tuck in a sheet, woman? Not too many visitors this deep in winter. I don't like to look a gift horse... I saw the disappointment in his face and relented. I should be able to spare a few minutes, long as you don't expect too much in the way of food to go with it. I'm waiting on my grocery delivery. That darned boy's late every week. Thought of that. He lifted up a paper bag. Got a couple of pies, and a couple of tamarillos for after. I know what you career girls are like. It's all work, work, work... Someone's got to keep your strength up. I couldn't help laughing. Nino Gaines had always got me like that, as long ago as the war, when he'd first come and announced his intention to set up here. Then the whole of the bay had been taken over by Australian and American servicemen, and my father had had to make pointed references to his accuracy with a shotgun when the young men whooped and catcalled at me behind the bar. Nino had been more gentlemanly: he had always removed his cap while he waited to be served, and he had never failed to call my mother ma'am. Still don't trust him, my father had muttered, and, on balance, I thought he had probably been right. Out at sea it was bright and calm, a good day for the whale crews, and as we sat down, I watched Moby One and Two heading out for the mouth of the bay. My eyes weren't as good as they had been, but from here it looked like they had a good number of passengers. Liza had headed out earlier; she was taking a group of pensioners from the Returned and Services League (RSL) club for nothing, as she did every month, even though I told her she was a fool. You shutting this place up for the winter? I shook my head, and took a bite of my pie. Nope. The Mobys are going to try out a deal with me, bed, board and a whaling trip for a fixed sum, plus admission to the museum. A bit like I do with Liza. They've printed some leaflets, and they're going to put something on a New South Wales tourism website. They say it's big business that way. I'd thought he would mutter something about technology being beyond him, but he said, Good idea. I sell maybe forty cases a month online now. You're on the Internet? I gazed at him over the top of my glasses. He lifted a glass, unable to hide his satisfaction at having surprised me. Plenty you don't know about me, Miss Kathleen Whittier Mostyn, no matter what you might think. I've been out there in cyberspace for a good eighteen months now.

Frank set it up for me. Tell you the truth, I quite like having a little surf around. Ive bought all sorts. He gestured at my glasshe wanted me to taste the wine. Bloody useful for seeing what the big growers in the Hunter Valley are offering too.I tried to concentrate on my wine, unable to admit quite how thrown I was by Nino Gainess apparent ease with technology. I felt wrongfooted, as I often did when talking to young people, as if some vital new knowledge had been dished out when Id had my back turned. I sniffed the glass, then sipped, letting the flavor flood my mouth. It was a little green, but none the worse for that. This is very nice, Nino. A hint of raspberry in there. At least I still understand wine.He nodded, pleased. Thought youd pick up on that. And you know you get a mention?A mention of what?The Shark Girl. Frank typed you into a search engine and there you arepicture and all. From newspaper archives.Theres a picture of me on the Internet?In your bathing suit. You always did look fetching in it. Theres a couple of pieces of writing about you too. Some girl at university in Victoria used you in her thesis on the role of women and hunting, or somesuch. Quite an impressive piece of writingfull of symbolism, classical references and goodness knows what else. I asked Frank to print it outmust have forgotten to pick it up. I thought you could put it in the museum.Now I felt very unbalanced indeed. I put my glass down on the table. Theres a picture of me in my bathing suit on the Internet?Nino Gaines laughed. Calm down, Kateits hardly Playboy magazine. Come over tomorrow and Ill show you.Im not sure if I like the idea of this. Me being out there for anyone to look at.Its the same photograph as youve got in there. He waved toward the museum. You dont mind people gawping at that.But thatsthatst different. Even as I said it, I knew the distinction made little sense. But the museum was my domain. I could dictate who entered it, who got to see what. The thought of people I didnt know being able to dip into my life, my history, as casually as if they were scanning the betting pages...You should put up a picture of Liza and her boat. You might get a few more visitors. Forget advertising the hotel with the Mobysa fine-looking girl like her could be quite a draw.Oh, you know Liza. She likes to pick who she takes out.No way to run a business. Why dont you focus on your own boat? Bed, board and a trip out on Ishmael with Liza. Shed get inquiries from all over the world.No. I began to tidy up. I dont think so. Very kind of you, Nino, but its really not for us.You never know, she might find herself a bloke. About time she was courting.It was a couple of minutes before he realized that the atmosphere had changed. Halfway through his pie, he saw something in my expression that gave him pause. He was disconcerted, trying to work out what hed said that had been so wrong. Didnt mean to offend you, Kate.You havent.Well, somethings wrong. Youre all twitchy.I have not gone all twitchy.There! Look at you. He pointed to my hand, which was playing restlessly up and down the bleached wood.Since when was tapping my fingers a crime? I placed my hand firmly on my lap.Whats the matter?Nino Gaines, I have a room to make up. Now, if youll excuse me, Ive already wasted half the day.Youre not going in? Aw, come on, Kate. You havent finished your lunch. Whats the matter? Is it what I said about your picture?No one except Nino Gaines calls me Kate. For some reason this intimacy just about finished me off. Ive got things to do. Will you stop going on?Ill e-mail them, ask them to take it down. Perhaps we can say its copyright.Oh, will you stop wittering on about that darned photograph? Im going in. I really have to get that room finished. Ill see you soon. I brushed imaginary crumbs from my trousers. Thank you for the lunch.He watched as Ithe woman he had loved and been perplexed by for more than half a centurystood up, less heavily than age should have allowed, and began to walk briskly toward the kitchen, leaving him with two half-eaten pies and a barely touched glass of his best vintage. I felt his eyes burn into my back all the way back to the house.Just for once, I imagined, he might have felt a bubble of frustration at the unfairness, at the arbitrary manner in which, once again, he had apparently been judged. Because I heard him stand and his voice on the soft wind. He was unable, just this once, to contain himself. Kathleen Whittier Mostynyoure the most contrary woman I ever met, he yelled after me.No ones asking you to come, I shot back. To my shame, I didnt even bother to turn my head.A long time ago, back when my parents died and I was left in charge of the Silver Bay Hotel, plenty of people told me I should take the opportunity to modernize, install en-suite bathrooms and satellite television, as they had at Port Stephens and Byron Bay, that I should advertise more to spread the word about the beauty of our little stretch of coast. I paid them heed for all of two minutesour lack of custom had long since ceased to worry me, as I suspect it had most of Silver Bay. We had watched our neighbors up and down the coast grow fat on their profits, but then have to live with the unexpected results of success: heavy traffic, drunken holidaymakers, an endless round of updating and installation. The loss of peace.In Silver Bay I liked to think we had the balance about righthenough visitors to provide us with a living, not so many that anyone was likely to start getting ideas. For years now I had watched Silver Bays population rise and double during the summer peak, drifting down in the winter months. The growth of interest in whale-

watching had caused the odd peak now and then, but in general it was steady business, likely neither to make us rich nor cause too many upsets. It was just us, the dolphins and the whales. And that suited most of us fine. Silver Bay had never been particularly hospitable to strangers. When the first Europeans arrived in the late eighteenth century, it was dismissed at first as uninhabitable, its rocky outcrops, its bushland and shifting dunes too barren to support human life. (I guess back then the Aborigines weren't considered human enough.) The coastal shoals and sandbars put paid to too much interest, grounding and wrecking visiting ships until the first lighthouses were erected. Then, as ever, greed did what curiosity could not: the discovery of lucrative timber forests up and down our volcanic hills, and the vast beds of oysters below did for the bays solitude. The trees were logged until the hillsides were near-barren. The oysters were harvested for lime and, later, for eating, until that was banned before they, too, were depleted. If I'm honest, when my father first landed here he was no better: he saw the seas leaping with game fish marlin and tuna, sharks and spearfish and he saw profit in what nature had provided. An endless array of prizes on his doorstep. And so, on this last rocky outcrop of Silver Bay, our hotel was built with every last penny of his and Mr. Newhaves savings. Back then, my family lived in quarters completely separate from the rest of the Silver Bay Hotel. My mother didn't like to be seen by guests in what she called domestic mode. I think that meant without her hair done while my father liked to know that there were limits on how much access my sister and I had to the world outside (not that that stopped Norah: she was off to England before she hit twenty-one). I always suspected they wanted to be sure that they could argue in private. Since the west wing burned down we, for the most part, had lived in what remains as if it were a private house and our guests boarders. They slept in the rooms off the main corridor, while we had the rooms on the other side of the stairs, and anyone was welcome to use the lounge. Only the kitchen was sacred, a rule we made when the girls first came to live with me a few years ago. They were complete opposites. When Liza was not outside with the crews, she spent all her time in the kitchen. She disliked casual conversation, and avoided the lounge and the dining room. She liked to have a closed door between her and the unexpected. Hannah, with the conviviality of youth, spent most of her time draped across the sofa in the lounge, Milly at her feet, watching television, reading or, more often now, on the telephone to her friends. Goodness knows what they found to talk about having already spent six hours together at school. Mum? Have you ever been to New Zealand? As she entered the kitchen, I saw a deep indent running down the side of her cheek from the binding of the sofa cushion where her face must have been resting on it. Liza reached out absently to try to smooth it away. No, sweetheart. I have, I said. I was darning an old pair of socks, which Liza told me was a waste of my energy when the supermarket sold them for a few dollars a pack. But I'm not the kind of person who can sit and do nothing. I went to Lake Taupo a few years ago on a fishing trip. I don't remember that, said Hannah. I calculated. Well... I suppose it was about twenty years ago, so that would be fourteen years before you came. Hannah looked at me with the blank incomprehension of a child who cannot imagine anything existing before they were born, let alone any period of time that long ago. I couldn't blame her. I can just about remember being that age, when an evening without one's friends seemed to stretch to the length of a prison sentence. Now whole years flash by. Have you been to Wellington? She sat down at the table. Yup. Got a lot of houses built into the hills around the harbor. Last time I went I couldn't imagine how they stayed up there. Were they on stilts? Something like that. Foolish, though. I heard the whole town was built on a fault line. I wouldn't want to be in a house on stilts when the earth moved. For a moment Hannah digested this. Why do you ask, sweetheart? Liza patted her legs for the dog to jump up. Milly never had to be asked twice. Hannah twisted a strand of hair in her fingers. There's a school trip. After Christmas. I was wondering if I could go. She looked from one of us to the other, as if she'd guessed what we would say. It's not that expensive. We'll be staying in hostels and you know what the teachers are like. We'd never be allowed to go anywhere without them. Her voice got a little quicker. And it's meant to be very educational. We'd be learning about Maori culture and volcanoes... It's a terrible thing to watch the face of a child who knows she is asking the impossible. I could help out with my savings if it costs too much. I don't think it's possible. Liza reached out a hand. I'm really sorry, lovey. Everyone else is going. She was too good a child to get angry. It was more a plea than a protest. Sometimes I would have preferred it if she had got angry. Please. We don't have the money. But I've got nearly three hundred dollars saved up and there's ages to go. We could all save up. Liza looked at me and shrugged. Well see, she said, in a tone that suggested even to me that she clearly wouldn't. I'll make a deal with you, Hannah. I put down my darning. I was doing a terrible job anyway. I've got some investments that are due to come in around spring next year. I thought I might pay for us all to take a trip up to the Northern Territory. I've always fancied a look around Kakadu National Park, maybe a wrestle

with the crocodiles. What do you think? I could see from her face what she thought: that she didn't want to be traveling around Australia with her mum and an old woman, that she would rather be headed for a foreign country, flying on an airplane with her friends, giggling, staying up late and sending homesick postcards. But that was the one thing we couldn't give her. I tried, Lord knows I tried. We could take Milly too, I said.

Perhaps if we've got enough money we could even ask Lara's mother if Lara would like to come with us. Hannah was staring at the table. That would be nice, she said eventually, and then, with a smile that wasn't very much like one, she added, I'm going next door. My programs on in a minute. Liza looked at me. Her eyes said everything we both knew: Silver Bay is a beautiful little town, but even a stretch of Paradise will become ugly if you're never allowed to leave it. There's no point blaming yourself, I said, when I was sure Hannah couldn't hear. There's nothing you can do. Not for now. I have seen many times over the past few years the doubt that flickered across her face. She'll get over it, I said. I laid a hand on hers, and she squeezed it gratefully. I'm not sure either of us was convinced. Three MIKE Tina Kennedy was wearing a violet brassiere, edged with lace and four, possibly five, mauve rosebuds at the top of each cup. It was not an observation I would normally have made in my working day. Tina Kennedy's lingerie was not something I wanted to think about and especially not now. But as she paused by my boss's shoulder to hand him the file of documents he had requested, she bent low and looked straight at me in a manner I could only describe afterward as challenging. That violet brassiere was sending me a message. That, and the moisturized, lightly tanned flesh it contained, was a souvenir of my promotion night two and a half weeks previously. I do not scare easy, but it was the most terrifying thing I had ever seen. In an involuntary gesture, I felt in my pocket for my phone. Vanessa, my girlfriend, had texted me three times in the past half hour, even though I had told her that this meeting was of vital importance and not to be interrupted. I had read the first message, and tried to ignore the insistent vibration of those that followed: Don't forget to get Mens Vogue re suit on page 46. You would look great in the dark one XXXSwtie pls call me we need 2 talk about seat plans Imp U call b4 2p.m. as I hv to give Gav answer about shoes. AM WAITING XXXI sighed, feeling the peculiar mix of nagging anxiety and stasis that two hours spent in a stuffy boardroom surrounded by other men in suits can bring. The bottom line, as with all such ventures, is unit capacity. We think we have put together a development plan that will give us the growth potential of the longer-term luxury-stay market, with the benefits of a more fluid short-term market, both designed to maximize revenue streams not just throughout the summer months but the whole year. The phone buzzed against my thigh, and I wondered absently if it was audible over the sound of Dennis Beaker's voice. I had to hand it to Nessa. She wouldn't give in. She'd seemed barely to hear me this morning when I explained that leaving work midafternoon or, for that matter, calling her would be difficult. But, then, she didn't seem to hear much these days, except wedding. Or, perhaps, baby. Below, the gray, lead-tarnished length of Liverpool Street stretched away toward the City. I could just see, if I tilted my head, the figures on the pavement: men and women dressed in blue, black or gray, marching smartly along below the sooty masonry to get plastic-boxed lunches that they would gobble at their desks. Some people thought of it as a rat race, but I had never felt like that: I had always felt comforted by the uniformity, the shared sense of purpose. Even if that purpose was money. On quiet days, Dennis would point out of the window and demand, What do you think he earns, eh, or her? And we would value them, depending on such variables as cut of jacket, type of shoes and how straight they stood as they walked. Twice, he had sent the office junior running downstairs to see if he had guessed right, and both times, to my surprise, he had. Dennis Beaker says that nothing and nobody on God's earth is without a monetary value. After four years working with him, I'm inclined to agree. On the slickly polished table in front of me sat the bound proposal, its glossy pages testament to the weeks Dennis, the other partners and I had spent clawing this deal back from the brink. Nessa had complained last night, as I checked it yet again for errors, that I was devoting far more energy to that one document than to what she considered our more pressing concerns. I protested, but mildly. I knew where I was with those pages. I was far more comfortable with revenue streams and income projections than with her amorphous, ever-shifting desires for this flower arrangement or that color-coordinated outfit. I couldn't tell her I preferred to leave the wedding to her on the few occasions I'd got properly involved, as she had requested, I'd reduced her to hysterics with things I'd apparently got wrong. I couldn't help it it was as if we were speaking different languages. So, what I'd like to do now is get my colleague to make a short presentation. Just to give you a flavor of what we consider a very exciting opportunity. Tina had crossed to the other side of the boardroom. She stood next to the coffee table, her stance deceptively relaxed. I could still glimpse that violet strap. I closed my eyes, trying to force away a sudden memory of her breasts, pushed up against me in the men's toilets at Bar Brazilia, the fluid ease with

which she had removed her blouse. Mike? She was staring at me again. I glanced up, then away, not wanting to encourage her. Mike? You still with us? There was the faintest edge to Dennis's voice. I rose from my seat, shuffling my notes. Yes, I said. And, more firmly, Yes. I raised a smile for the row of Vallance Equities' flint-eyed venture capitalists around the table, trying to convey some of Dennis's own confidence and bonhomie.

Just a mull over a couple of points you made. I took a deep breath and gestured across the room. Tina? Lights? I took hold of the remote-control device for my presentation, and as my phone vibrated again, wished I had thought to remove it. I fumbled in my pocket to try to turn it off. Unfortunately, glancing up through the dimmed light at Tina, I realized she thought this had been for her benefit. She responded with a slow smile, her eyes dropping to my groin. Right, I said, letting out a breath and refusing resolutely to look at her.

I'd like to show you lucky gentlemen a few images of what we modestly consider to be the investment opportunity of the decade. There was a low rumble of amusement. They liked me. There they sat, primed by Dennis's raw enthusiasm, ready for my sonorous list of facts and figures. Receptive, attentive, waiting to be reassured. My father often said I was ideally suited to a business environment. He meant business in the gray-suited sense, rather than the hyper-sexy megadeal sense. Because, although I had somehow ended up at the latter end, I had to admit that I was not a natural risk-taker. I was Mr. Due Diligence, one of life's careful, considered deliberators, who researched everything not just to the nth degree but several degrees beyond. As a child, before I spent my carefully saved pocket money, I would spend hours in a shop, weighing up the benefits of Action Man against his compatriots, fearful of the crushing disappointment that came when you made the wrong choice. Offered a choice of puddings, I would pit the potential infrequency of lemon meringue pie against the solid comfort of chocolate sponge, and double-check that raspberry jelly wasn't among the options. None of this meant I was unambitious. I knew exactly where I wanted to be, and had long since learned that taking the quiet path was the key to my success. While colleagues' more incendiary careers crashed and burned, I had become financially secure, due to my dogged monitoring of interest rates and investments. Now, six years into my tenure at Beaker Holdings, my promotion to junior partner apparently nothing to do with my engagement to the boss's daughter, I was valued as someone who would accurately assess the benefits of any choice geographically, socially or economically before making it. Two big deals and I would be senior partner. Another seven years until Dennis retired, and I would be ready to step into his shoes. I had it all planned. Which was why my behavior that night had been so out of character. I think you're having your teenage rebellion late, my sister Monica had observed, two days previously. I had taken her to lunch, in the smartest restaurant I knew, as a birthday treat. She worked on a national newspaper but earned less per month than I spent in expenses. I don't even like the girl, I said. Since when did sex have anything to do with liking someone? She sniffed. I think I'll have two puddings. I can't choose between the chocolate and the crème brûlée. She had ignored my look. It's a reaction against the wedding. You're trying unconsciously to impregnate someone else. Don't be ridiculous. I almost winced. God! The thought of it. All right. But it's obvious you're bucking against something. Bucking. She grinned. My sisters like that. You should tell Vanessa you're not ready. But she's right. I'll never be ready. I'm not that kind of bloke. So you'd rather she made the decisions? In our personal life, yes. It works well for us like that. So well that you felt the need to shag someone else? Keep your voice down, okay? You know what? I'll just have the chocolate. But if you have the crème brûlée I'll try it. What if she says something to Dennis? Then you're in big trouble but you must have known that when you slept with his secretary. Come on, Mike, you're thirty-four years old, hardly an innocent. I dropped my head into my hands. I don't know what the hell I was doing. Monica had been suddenly buoyant. God, it's nice to hear you say that. You don't know how cheering it is for me to know that you can mess up your life just like the rest of us. Can I tell Mum and Dad? Now, filled with a sudden picture of my sister's triumph, I forgot where I was and had to glance at my notes. I breathed out slowly, and looked up again at the expectant faces around me. It seemed to have become uncomfortably warm in the boardroom. I let my gaze settle on their team; no one was even remotely flushed. Dennis always said that venture capitalists had ice in their blood. Perhaps he was right. As Dennis has explained, I continued, the emphasis in this project is on the quality end of the market. The consumers well be targeting in this development are hungry for experiences. They are people who have spent the last decade acquiring material goods, which haven't made them happy. They are possession-rich, time-poor, and are searching for other ways to spend their money. And the real growth area, according to our research, is in their sense of well-being. To that end, this development will not just offer accommodation of a quality that will ensure it a slot at the top end of the market, but a variety of leisure opportunities suited to the surroundings. I clicked the remote control, bringing up the images that the artist had only delivered that morning, leaving Dennis turbocharging what

barely remained of his blood pressure. It will have a state-of-the-art spa, with six different pools, a full-time therapeutic staff and a range of the newest holistic treatments. If you turn to page thirteen you will see the space itself in more detail, as well as a menu of the kind of thing it will offer. And for those who prefer to get their sense of well-being from something a little more active and, let's face it, that's usually the men... here

I paused for the amused nods of recognition... we have the piece de resistance of the whole complex integrated center devoted entirely to watersports. This will include jet-skis, waveboards, speedboats and waterskiing. There will be game-fishing. There will also be PADI-trained instructors to take clients on tailor-made diving trips further out to sea. We believe a combination of top-class equipment with a highly skilled team will give clients a never-to-be-forgotten trip and offer them the chance to learn new skills. All while staying in a resort that will be a byword for service and luxury, Dennis put in. Mike, bring up the architect's pictures. As you can see, there are three levels of accommodation, to suit both the affluent singles and families, with a special penthouse for VIPs. You'll notice we have avoided the budget option. We've already had interest from I heard you lost the site for this. The voice had come from the back. The room fell quiet. Oh, Christ, I thought. Tina, bring up the lights. It was Dennis's voice, and I wondered if he was about to answer, but he was looking at me. I made my expression bland. I'm good at that. I'm sorry, I didn't catch that, Neville.

Did you have a question? I heard this was planned for South Africa and that you lost your site. There's nothing on this document about where it's going to be now. You can hardly expect us to consider investing in a holiday resort that has yet to find a site. The flicker in Dennis's jaw betrayed his own surprise. How the hell had they found out about South Africa? My voice cut through the air even before I knew what I was saying: I'm not quite sure where your information has come from, but South Africa was only ever an option for us. Having examined our potential location there in some detail, we decided that it couldn't provide our clients with the kind of holiday we had in mind. We're looking at a very specialized market and we... Why? Why what? Why was South Africa unsuitable? My understanding is that it's one of the fastest-growing holiday destinations in the world. My Turnbull and Asser shirt was sticking to the small of my back. I hesitated, wondering if Neville had any knowledge of the failure of our previous financing deal. Politics, interjected Dennis. Politics? It would have been an hour-and-a-half transfer from the airport to the resort. And whatever route we took would have brought us through some of the... shall we say less... affluent areas? Our research tells us that when they have paid a premium for a luxury holiday, clients don't want to be confronted by abject poverty. It makes them... Please don't smile sympathetically at their secretary, I pleaded silently. Too late. Dennis's empathetic beam was as treacherous as it was misjudged. ... uncomfortable. And that is the last emotion we want clients to feel at this resort. Joyous, yes. Excited, yes. Satisfied, of course. Guilty, or uncomfortable, at the plight of their... colored cousins, no. I closed my eyes. I felt, rather than saw, the black secretary do the same. No, Neville, politics and luxury holidays just do not mix. Dennis shook his head, sagely, as if delivering some oracle. And that is the kind of detailed research on which we at Beaker Holdings pride ourselves before we embark on a major project. So you have an alternative site in mind? Not just in mind but signed and sealed, I said. It's a bit of a departure, but it avoids all the potential minefields of South Africa, and other parts of the third world. It's full of English-speakers, it has a superb climate and it is, I can truly say, one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen. And in this line of work, Neville, you know as well as I do that there are some very beautiful destinations indeed. RJW Land had stolen the site from under our noses. Someone there must have tipped off Vallance. My mind raced: if RJW was attempting a similar development, would their people also have approached Vallance for funding? Were they attempting to sabotage our deal? I can't go into more detail, I said smoothly. But I can tell you in confidence that there were other things we discovered about the South African site that suggested much lower future revenues. And, as you know, we're all about maximizing profit here. In truth, I knew almost nothing about the new site. Out of desperation we had used a land agent, some old mate of Dennis's, and the deal had been closed only two days previously. I hated the sensation of flying blind. Tim, I smiled, you know I'm a boring sod when it comes to research, that there's nothing I like better for my bedtime reading than a pile of analysis. Believe me, if I'd thought the South African site was going to work better in the long run, I wouldn't have been so glad to let it go. But I like to go a layer deeper. Your bedtime reading is all very interesting, Mike, but it would be useful if and it's really all about the margins. That's the bottom line. No one cares about the margins more than us, but Dennis held up a pudgy hand. Tim. No. Not a word because there's something else I'd like to show you before we go any further. In fact, gentlemen, if you'd like to follow me through to the next room, we have a bit of fun lined up before we tell you exactly where it is. Venture capitalists, I mused, as we followed them, didn't look as though fun was a high priority on their agenda. Some were positively

disgruntled at having been uprooted from their comfort zone of boardroom table and leather-backed chair, muttering uneasily to each other. Then again, having come in half an hour late, I wasn't sure what Dennis had in mind. Please don't let him have asked Tina to dress up in a bikini, I prayed. I was still haunted by memories of the Hawaiian Hula Proposal. Revue de presse 'Moyes is a romantic, and there is a gloriously happy ending, but the story is also surprising and genuinely moving.' (The Times) 'Romance doesn't get much more topsy-turvy than this whale of a tale ...' (Daily Mirror) 'Engaging and poignant... Moyes writes both dialogue and descriptive passages with charm. (Glasgow Herald on The Ship of Brides) 'This irresistible novel is told through the eyes of four women with their own hopes, fears and secrets.' (Daily Express on The Ship of Brides) 'Gloriously entertaining (Mirror on The Ship of Brides) 'Wonderfully romantic and moving.' (Daily Mail on The Ship of Brides) 'Fascinating read . . . not only is THE SHIP OF BRIDES utterly compelling, it's educational. In a good way. (Heat)