

Prologue

Maggie

When she'd been a young girl, back in Australia, she and her brother and sister had often slept, on hot summer nights, on the family's ancient deck boat. It was their thing. Their mum had kept some old sleeping bags and pillows on board, the faint scent of mildew mingling with her fabric softener on worn cotton pillowcases, utterly comfortable and familiar. The gentle rocking, small waves lapping against the hull, had been her favourite way to fall asleep. Her childhood lullaby.

In the dream, she was swimming. It had always been her favourite thing to do. It had always been what she did best. Her dad had called her Goldie. It made no sense to people – Maggie's hair was espresso dark – unless you knew that it was short for Goldfish. Because she swam like one, he said. She loved to swim. In the dream, right at the start, she clearly felt the surge of joy she was familiar with in water. Strong, confident, able. Her arms moving forward, the backs of her hands together, fingers stretching, arms straight. Then pushing her arms apart, feeling herself moving forward. Her lungs were relaxed. She could feel all her muscles, in her shoulders and her back, in her thighs, moving the way she wanted them to, at her command, the way they had been taught, and how she had practised, over the days and weeks and months of her adolescence, in the perfect rhythm. The water around her was the mythical turquoise-aqua clear of her childhood, cool and refreshing, with rays of the bright sunshine on the surface shining through the shallows and dappling on the wet sand below her. She was perfectly happy here. She was perfect, here.

But then, without warning, the sunshine receded, not gradually, but at once, as though a light switch had been suddenly flicked off. The water became darker, and became agitated, not moving with its age-old ebb and flow. Now it was no longer clear, and she couldn't see her hands in front of her face. She wanted to come to the surface – she knew she had to, but she couldn't. She wasn't even sure, after a few moments, which way the surface was – above her or below – only that she couldn't get there. It was the feeling you got when a wave dumped you, body surfing on Manly or on Bondi: total disorientation. Her lungs were tense and rigid, and panic was rising in her chest. Her limbs, the same arms and legs that had been moving in their perfect dance, were flailing now, ungainly and ugly. She was in pain, and she was afraid. So, so afraid. And she couldn't break the surface . . .

Kate

There were days when she didn't leave the house. Her home, this place – it was safe and it didn't challenge her. She knew every inch – everything in it. She slept poorly at night, but often drifted off as dawn broke and slept until ten. Waking so late, it felt as though the day had started without her and the energy to catch up sometimes – often – deserted her. She'd lost weight, though she had been slim enough before. The loss didn't suit her, but cooking for one held no appeal, whatever Delia Smith might have to say on the subject, and anyway, she didn't look at her shape much – she dressed without mirrors, and without variety. Most days the phone didn't ring, and she didn't dial.

It seemed to Kate, when she thought about it, and she thought about almost nothing else these days, that in her sixty-plus years of life, she'd been two distinct and very different people. There was the woman she had been, had allowed herself to be, for most of her adult life, and that woman lived her life in quiet black and white; and there was woman she had been for the last ten or fifteen years, before she lost him, who had basked in glorious Technicolor for all of that time. How quickly she had gone back to black and white. How weak she must be. And how she hated herself for it.