



THE SONGS OF JESSE ADAMS

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*We are the music makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea breakers
And sitting by desolate streams;—
World-losers and world-forsakers
On whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems.*

‘Ode’

Arthur O’Shaughnessy (1844–1881)

Vanished. There were rumours. Some swore they'd seen him slipping like holy smoke through the town he'd once owned. Others, the crazy ones, said that this was always the plan, always the way things were going to be.



Prologue

'Dinger' Bell straddled his ancient blue Norton Domi, puffing and barking like the mangy old dog he was, thinking about death. He'd been off the smokes for three or more years but now sucked on his Turf Filter like there was no tomorrow. Which was the plan. No tomorrow.

Ahead, Nicholson Street breathed emptiness; one long, deserted strip of scattered streetlights and shadows. A stray car showed up here and there, a punctured muffler occasionally breaking the cold, whispering crackle of fog. The rest of the world was stumbling around in its pyjamas, oblivious. Bell arched his back a little, knocking his helmet onto the bitumen. He stared at it coldly and blew smoke at the moon. Bigger it, it could stay there. No need for it now anyway. He was a mess, his hair long and lank and glued, his jeans greasy and rank like week-old codfish. Bell wiped his nostril with the shoulder of his T-shirt then gunned the motorcycle into life.

Five blocks away Annie Martin was running for her life, banshees or angels in pursuit, she wasn't sure which. Her feet were torn and bleeding, and she heaved and cried with the rhythm of her desperate

steps. Upon reaching Mullaly's Lane, she stopped and doubled over, gasping for air. The Doubtful Stranger was now only a few streets away, and all her instincts were pulling her to its door.

The Domi rumbled and jerked beneath Bell like an old compressor. He reckoned he could reach sixty in eight seconds, maybe close to a hundred in twelve. After that it wouldn't matter. He ripped the throttle and the motorcycle growled and rumbled just short of a roar. She's weathered but still in good shape, he mused. If only he could say the same about himself. Thirty-eight wasn't old but he felt bent and fractured, like the world was closing in on him.

Annie edged closer to the old pub then tripped and stumbled, her hands breaking her fall. Her chest ached, her lungs pushed to their limits. They would be there, upstairs and no doubt depressed and probably drunk. She'd seen them go down like parade soldiers in a heatwave when things began to unravel. They wouldn't know what to make of her. *She* didn't know what to make of her and what she'd seen. But she had to tell someone.

Bell's ponytail swirled and slapped, a knight's standard trailing behind him. He threw aside the VB he'd been swilling as a last rite then whooped and hooted as the machine rattled and lurched and pulled him forward. Sixty-five ... sixty-eight ... seventy-five ...

He swallowed hard, just a second's emotion, but enough to make him ease his grip on the throttle. A salty film glazed his eyes, the wind pooling a tear in each corner. Isn't that what they say, about eyeballing death, how everything rushes back? A face, old before its time, flooded his mind, the distant faded smile of a mate now dead. A good mate. He wrenched the throttle, coaxing more from the old machine, then flushed the sentiment from his head and focused on the brewery wall ahead, thick and unyielding. Come on you bastard, harder, he urged, the machine rattling and shaking as it strained to its limits. It would be all over soon enough, a mangy old blowie, swatted, gone.

Then it choked. Just lost something and died. Bell's heart

throbbled through his throat. He flexed the throttle once, then again, but nothing, and the engine groaned and dropped away, like an old cow on her last. Bell dropped his head between his extended arms as the bike glided to a stop. God, I can't even kill myself properly.

After a moment's benediction, he looked up and caught the shape of a woman, known to him, bent over in the shadows. He dropped the bike into the gutter and moved towards her to be sure.

'Annie?'

She was too exhausted to react but knew the voice.

'Annie ... it's me ... Dinger.'

The woman slowly lifted her head. 'Dinger? Oh God ...' Annie rose slowly and slumped forward into his arms. Bell stank but she smelt nothing. She was barefoot and bleeding but he didn't notice. The heat of exertion had drained from her, the fear, the elation, the confusion displaced by nothingness. She was white and shivering and spent. Bell pulled back and gripped her shoulders.

'What are you doing, out like this? You look like you've seen a ghost.'

Annie slowly lifted her chin. 'Dinger ... I-I have.'

A deep, buried breath escaped her.

'I *have* ...'



Chapter 1

Three months earlier.

On a steamy December day, some time around dusk, Jesse Adams edged open the screen door of the family farmhouse and leaned into the kitchen.

‘Think I’ll take the ute into Melbourne tonight, Mum.’

Anna looked up from her potatoes, stared at him silently, then went back to peeling. ‘Melbourne? That’s hours away ... what’s the occasion?’

Jesse edged inside. ‘Oh, you know, just some music ’n’ stuff.’

The potato skins curled and rolled onto the table like planed wood shavings.

‘Who’s playing?’ she asked. Jesse stared at the patterned lino floor silently.

Anna looked up at her son, her heartbeat lifting a notch. ‘A girl?’

‘Nah, nothing like that. It’s Billy, actually.’

Anna exhaled slowly, then returned to her vegetables. Poor Billy. Ted was always carrying on about him, saying he was a ratbag and a layabout musician and ought to get a real job. He is your nephew after all, she’d say, and he’d say ‘nephew be damned’ and rant some more about how he’d be the death of his poor mother. Margie had fallen pregnant the year Anna discovered Jesse was on the way. They were a fine pair, the two of them, Anna unmarried and stupid, Margie ancient and past it. At least that’s how it appeared. But they carried secrets, the two of them, stories they’d only share with each other. Faded stories now, from way back. Ted knew too, but he had let the memories drop away.

Dear Ted. She still missed her husband, for all his bullheaded ways.

‘Well go on then, have a good night,’ she said, still avoiding his eyes. ‘But not too good. Your work’ll still be here when you get back you know, just the same.’

No it won't, she thought to herself. She had known this day was coming. Secrets can haunt you.



The Friday night traffic moved like lava down St Kilda's main drag. Jesse inched the Holden FX along unfamiliar roads, straining to find street names among the shadows and cheap decadence, spruikers with megaphones, prostitutes leaning against doorways, The George thumping out its siren call of fleshy delight to men in pinstripes and bored sailors looking for a harbour.

A drunk toppled and fell onto the pavement to his left and Jesse's first impulse was to brake and get out to help. But this wasn't the bush, and the tide of cars nudged him on. When he passed the Espy he knew he was closing in on his destination. He pulled left then left again into a small side street, hoping to find a park, and was startled by a couple going at it in the shadows. Geez, Melbourne. He reversed out rapidly and found a space that had him jutting slightly across a lane. It would do. A light show played out in the distance as he made his way down the hill. It was Luna Park fanning neon behind the Big Dipper. For a moment he wished he were a kid again.

His eyes were drawn back to the street by a figure lurching towards him, a shambling bull of a man reeking of vomit and shooting obscenities through the darkness like cannon fire. Above his head he swung a metal shopping basket in big violent loops. Welcome to the Big Smoke, thought Jesse. The man stopped and paused, squinting in Jesse's direction. He stepped closer then broke into a run, charging toward him, basket aloft. Jesse stood rooted to the pavement until the basket was swinging above his own head, then he reached out and pinned the man's arms to his sides, stopping him cold. A bleeding, thickly stubbled face stared back at him, wide-eyed and desperate, and the basket clattered to the concrete. He must have only been about thirty, but he wore the look of a man twice that age. Jesse lifted his hands and cupped the cheeks of the broken figure. It was raw impulse. He felt something pass through him, pure and electric. Both men felt it. Then he walked away bathed in

beads of cold sweat, leaving the man silent and still. On the other side of the road a bloke in a pork-pie hat leaned against a lamp post and lit a cigarette. Another Friday night in crazy-town, he thought, blowing a deep, exhilarating puff at the night sky, then stepped into a taxi.

The Wrecking Ball was buried a couple of blocks away from Fitzroy Street, a seedier, saltier stretch of poolrooms, brothels and dimly lit boarding houses whose curtains never opened and you didn't ask why. Jesse was drawn by the orange glow in the club's front window and the poster of his cousin. Billy Rave was about as close as you got to a Beat poet in Melbourne at the time. He had read Kerouac and Ginsberg and channelled Seeger through his songs, but he was also an original, a guitar man who'd gone electric long before Dylan dared.

Billy also had a way of bolting himself on to whatever causes got his pulse going. Without a second thought he would chain himself to the steps of Parliament House, play havoc with police horses and scream invective at passing politicians. Sure, he'd lost a couple of teeth and a few friends along the way, but he'd picked up a heap of followers as well. Billy was an agitator, a maverick, and Jesse wanted to follow his lead even though they were poles apart in so many ways.

Jesse pushed through into the main lounge of the club where Billy was holding court. Candles danced through red glass and beer hung in the air like a brewery. Around the room, photographs of freeloading big shots and past performers peered down on the night's crowd. Something like panic rose up inside him, telling him he wasn't ready for this next step, and he backed out and slipped into the men's toilets and shut himself up inside one of the stalls.

What are you doing? he asked himself, leaning against a wall and closing his eyes. He could hear Billy's muffled voice on the stage and that only made it worse. What are you doing? All his life he'd wrestled with who he was and the ache he felt in his bones about where he was meant to be. He knew it wasn't the farm. Even when

he was out in the paddocks prodding sheep and cursing his dogs, they wouldn't leave him alone, those voices urging him to up and go. Well here I am, up and gone, why the hesitation? Something bigger was pulling him, he knew that, knew it like you did when the rains were coming. You could smell it. He hankered for his uni days too, sweet and unfulfilled, when his voice breathed life into anyone who'd listen. He saw it with his own eyes, felt the power. Destined for other things. He couldn't deny it, not any more. That's why he'd come to see Billy—to get his blessing for the road, for the new turning in the river. But the incident with the vagrant on the street had unnerved him. Everything seemed to be moving too fast.

*Every night I hear it, the beating of a drum,
Every place I see it, the sign of things to come.*

The words blew from the stage and streamed through the rapt crowd like Billy was taking them for a ride in a convertible, one part blues, two parts rant, shaken and stirred into his own cocktail of heaven and earth. He would never land a record contract but the regulars loved him and he sold booze, which was all that mattered to management. He could sing a symphony of sea shanties for all they cared, as long as the bar was kept busy. Billy was just happy to have a platform to do his thing and earn a quid.

*Here it comes again, like the sound of rushing wind,
Like the stars are fallin' round me, like the world's about to end.*

His eyes bulged now, his face crimson and wet in the full gaze of the spotlight.

*There's a locomotion comin', goin' to blow away your mind,
It ain't me, I'm just the point man, somethin' bigger down the line,
Somethin' bigger down the line—*

Billy stopped as though someone had pulled the plug on his voice. Something had disturbed his musical frenzy. He strained his head towards the back of the room, through the blue smoke to a darkened corner. Heads turned, curious. Billy mumbled something and motioned for the spot to be turned around and trained on a figure huddled in the corner.

Jesse looked down and away, knowing what was coming. I'm not ready for this, he thought, not yet.

The spot wouldn't swivel far enough. Jesse shuffled nervously, not knowing where to look.

'Hey Jess, hey mate, come up here, come on ...' shouted Billy, motioning him forward.

Jesse edged towards the stage to join Billy, wanting more than anything to sink down into his jacket and disappear forever.

'Come on people, this is Jesse Adams! How 'bout a little encouragement, make him feel welcome ...'

There was scattered applause. Who cares? We want Billy.

The two men had clearly sprung from the same tree, but physically their branches had snaked in different directions. Billy was tall and thickset, his face ruddy and weathered and framed by a wild shock of red hair and outrageous ginger whiskers. Jesse was shorter, farm-muscle lean, clean-shaven, his hair a thatch of hay. Neither was movie-star good-looking, but both had the presence of men carved from something sturdy.

'Okay, Okay, now listen up,' commanded Billy. 'This is my cousin Jesse Adams. Now I know a lot of you lot think I'm the greatest—' he grinned cheekily.

'Marry me, Billy!' shouted some clown, and a few laughed.

'But, but ...,' and Billy held up a hand in a stopping motion, 'now listen up. If you think I'm good, if you think I can play, well, let me tell you, until you hear this boy play you haven't *heard* playing ...'

There was a sprinkling of applause, polite, unenthusiastic.

'It's true, it's true. I'm not even fit to string his guitar. But, most importantly, and I know what I'm about to say *is* important to you lot—'

Someone yelled 'You're our man, Billy!' and Billy nodded.

'*Most* importantly, Jesse here is someone who gets it, who understands the struggle and what it's like to be crushed beneath someone's boot.'

Billy slapped his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

‘So man, tonight my stage is your stage. Take my guitar. Let’s hear a little magic.’

This is it, thought Jesse. Now it begins. Goodbye chooks and fence-fixing and suffocating rural backwaters; hello centre stage. But it was too early for spotlights—too much too soon; this was a journey that needed to unfold, step by step, person by person.

‘Not yet, mate. Now’s not the time for any of this.’

‘Come on Jess, you know—’

‘Billy—no.’

The two men locked eyes. Someone knocked over a bottle and the small talk got louder. The crowd had had enough and were restless for a song.

‘All I want is your okay, Billy. That’s why I came down. That’s all. It would mean a lot to me.’

The two men continued to stare at each other, then Billy leaned across and embraced his cousin and kissed him unselfconsciously on the cheek.

‘I’ve been waiting for this day, Jess, for you to take over,’ he said quietly. ‘Get out there, do this thing. You were made for it.’

What happened after that was anybody’s guess. The main lights shut down, that much was clear. Only the candles flickering in their little glasses resisted the blackness—and a single spot trained on Jesse. It was like a miraculous sign—‘Here is the new star!’ Some swore they heard a voice trumpeting Jesse’s name too, but that was probably Billy playing funny buggers over the PA, trying to fill in time until the main lights came back on. It was all very weird and strange and magical, but then weird and strange things were always on the cards at *The Ball*—magical less so, except when Billy was in full flight.

When the lights did come on again, Billy took control once more, and a lone figure weaved its way past the tables and out into the kind of night chill that made you wish you were crouched cosy and low by a kero heater somewhere. In a doorway nearby a woman in a leather mini shuffled notes. Twenty more quid and I can go home, she thought. Around the corner the gentle clink of bottles signalled a milko starting his rounds, making sure he saved one for the missus

and the poor old duck next door. Jesse Adams didn't see or hear any of it, just walked and walked until the world leaked morning light at its edges once more. Then, shivering and alone, he slid onto the cold vinyl bench seat of the FX, turned the ignition and swung the wheel for home.



Three hundred miles away, Annie Martin scrumpled up another attempt at writing a meaningful piece about labradors and personal wellbeing and threw it at the paper-choked bin. She missed. She'd missed a lot lately: deadlines, her muse, finding the right bloke. Maybe she could write about wellbeing and its absence in a newspaper office. Maybe she needed a labrador. Maybe her life was a joke. What was she now, nearly thirty-five? Good God.

The place was practically deserted, save for a few tragics who had no home to go to, which of course wasn't her. Of course. She pulled open a drawer looking for a distraction. A decomposing Cadbury Flake (so, *so* like her last boyfriend); half-chewed Bics in assorted colours; a mother-of-pearl compact; some Avon (what *was* she thinking when she bought that?); an empty promotional packet of those slim cigarettes for women that someone had brought back from the States ('You've come a long way, baby'—yeah, right).

The drawer below was equally lacking in promise, mostly old folders and a copy of *Peyton Place*, but she pulled it open anyway. A file had caught on the drawer above, and a second, harder wrench caused its contents to splay at her feet like an upturned box of police evidence: drafts, cuttings, story leads, blind alleys and assorted bollocks (everything was 'bollocks' to Harry, her Pommy boss).

A folded music poster poked out from under the pile, an insert from *Farrago*, the Melbourne University student newspaper. It was from an ancient time, about eight years ago, when she had been trying to kickstart her life all over again. She'd done the 'I need some life experience' thing and quit the paper after starting as a cadet, but it was mostly an excuse to run away to Byron, drink a lot, dabble in weed and engage in mostly boring sex. Harry took her back when

she came begging—mainly, she suspected, because he fancied his chances with her. Fat chance. Now, here she was again, looking for something, anything, to break her out of this rat-trap. Fatter chance.

Annie picked up the poster, unfolded it and it all came rushing back. He was a Melbourne Uni student activist, a singer. Always in trouble, always saved by his academic brilliance. His campus following had grown so large that it became news. She had gone along to hear him sing and see what all the fuss was about, a bone thrown to her by Harry. Not for her the protest marches or chasing Bob Menzies around the place. The PM and his lot were for the big boys. Or the boys, anyway.

‘See if you can find an angle,’ was all he said.

Maybe it was the liquid, chocolate eyes that pulled you in and wouldn’t let you go. The voice was seductive too, especially when he stopped singing and just talked; smoky and smooth, but deep and dark too, like black rum. She could hear it even now. It had bewitched her, never left her. Annie tried to make a story from it all when she got back to the office, but the heart of the piece escaped her, elusive, just like she had found him. Jesse Adams, mystery man. So she had buried the poster and her stirrings away in a bottom drawer and forgot about him.

Now the mystery had found her once more. Annie refolded the insert and slipped it into her bag.



Jesse turned off the ignition and stared into the yard. Above the main shed the windmill clacked in steady rhythm, just like his heart. He wondered if this was all a big mistake, that maybe he’d misread things. It was possible. He thought of Billy and what he had said. *Do this thing*. A rooster pecked and lurched his way across the path of the ute, uncaring. Simple lives, chooks, he thought.

Anna heard the soft clunk of the car door and rose from the gardening mat Ted had made for her knees years ago. It was thick and plush and a little frayed at the edges, like her. She thought of

Ted again, leaning against a paddock fence puffing his Navy Cuts, distant and alone, deep furrows etched across his forehead like plough marks, the bursts of anger now frozen by deep winters of silence.

Any wonder he drank, she sometimes said to friends. Those black nights in New Guinea when a cracking twig or brush of undergrowth could mean a bayonet in your side. Not that he ever spoke of it. But she'd read about these things. Then the baby, the rushed wedding, the kerfuffle and stress of moving away and trying to make a fist of a new place and a crusty, stubborn lump of land that refused to yield. She could forgive him the outbursts—forgive them now anyway. What's the use dwelling, she would muse.

The town hadn't made it easy. Rumours and whispers blew about the place like pie wrappers in a schoolyard. A kid out of wedlock was the word. That Ted was older than her by a long stretch was food enough for some gossipmongers. Mavis Blewett, the postmistress, said they were in hiding, and she'd know. No one really knew for sure and nobody ever asked, just treated them like any other blow-ins, keeping their distance, seeing how long they would last.

Ted felt like he'd worked every inch of their cursed lot with his fingernails and knuckles to get things right and fight off the banks, even when it meant staring down creditors and an empty plate. Jesse watched his mother weep into her apron and his father disappear into his shed for long, dark hours and never forgot how a strong arm had tried to do them over.

Ted's dream was for the boys to take over and maybe stretch the place to a few more acres. Ray, quiet and practical like his dad, seemed open. Jesse was the lost cause. It was music that ran through his veins, not wool. Before he was ten the boy had discovered an old Gibson Acoustic that Anna's brother had left behind and forgotten. Within days Jesse had worked out how to move his fingers and mirror the sounds of the odd itinerant shearer amusing himself by night with his six-string. It was like he'd been born to it.

Anna noticed too how more and more he took himself away, like his father, lost in God knows what. She worried at first, worried about the brooding and lost looks and where it was all headed. He

still kept up his work around the place and would take control when Ted was bedridden. But it was mechanical, without heart. He was lost in something else.

A scholarship to the agricultural college at Dookie didn't change things. Jesse hated every farming minute of it and slipped across into Arts at Melbourne without telling them. Ted was livid when he found out.

'Pissing his brains up against a wall with a bunch of pinheads,' he shouted, when the letter arrived. Anna thought of hiding it, but what was the use, he'd have to know eventually. Besides, Jesse seemed to have found a home in this world of 'pinheads' although Anna suspected it was the pull of other things that was the real attraction, things she probably didn't want to know about.

'The boy's not practical like you, Ted. He likes to make things up, tell stories, make music.'

'Yeah, well stories and music don't put food on the ruddy table, and the sooner he gets that the better off we'll all be.'

Anna silently let Ted's fury drift off into some far paddock and wished her boy happiness. She'd hoped for Law herself, he had the brains for it, but that wasn't to be. Nor were the Arts in the end. Ted's sudden death had ended all that, ended a lot of things.

The farm would have collapsed if Jesse hadn't picked up the reins.

There were four of them, three brothers and a sister, a good farm family. Ray was keen and ready to run the place, but Jesse, being the eldest, did what first sons did and took charge. Things were going alright and they'd picked up some more land when the Abraham's property was sold off. But the place still ran on sheep and, markets being markets, things fluctuated. Some years you buried more than you sold. Still, they got by with some casual help and a loyal crew of shearers.

'So, how was Billy?'

Jesse pecked Anna on the cheek and she forced a smile, hoping to charm away the demons she knew were coming.

‘Good. Good.’

The wind had eased a little and the old windmill groaned.

‘Big crowd?’

‘Yeah, good turn-up. Seemed to be right into it.’

‘It’d be nice to see him some time.’

‘Yeah, well, you know Billy. Never stops in the one place for long.’

Anna looked away.

‘Listen, Mum, I’ve been thinking I might go away for a while. Just take off somewhere, do a bit of surfing, get my head round a few things. It’s been ages since I came back and I haven’t really had a decent—’

‘Good idea.’ Anna wiped her hands on her apron and faced him. ‘Jesse—it’s okay. I understand.’

‘The boys’ll be okay. Ray’s virtually running the place now anyway, and I reckon if I don’t get away now I nev—’

‘Jesse—go.’ Anna placed her hand on his upper arm. ‘It’ll do you good, getting away for a while. Give you a chance to sort things out. We’ll manage alright.’

She lied. Anna knew the boy had things rising up inside of him, but she had feared this day, this moment.

‘So, when do you think you’ll go?’

‘Tomorrow.’

Anna’s cheeks flushed and she wanted to cry *no*, but she held back.

‘Think I’ll head west then hug the coast a while.’

‘Gee ... that’s quick. Can’t it wait a few days?’

Jesse looked away.

‘Well, I guess you know what you want to do, so ...’

Anna reached up and held him tightly, her chin bridged across his shoulder. She knew he would be gone early. There was only now.

‘So, how are you going to get there?’

‘I’ll hitch.’

‘Hitch? What, with a surfboard?’

‘It’ll be fine, I’ve done it before.’

‘Yes, up the road a little, not halfway across the country with a bag

and guitar and goodness knows what else. 'Take the ute.'

'No, I couldn't—'

'Take the ute. It's rusted and falling to bits anyway, and we've got the Ford and Ray's car. It doesn't matter.'

The words stuck in her mouth. It did matter, not the old rust-bucket of a car, but his leaving. But this was right. The boy had been brooding for too long. So had she. Let him go, let it out, let it happen. *Que sera, sera*. Just like her to bring Doris Day to mind.

'This is who I am, Mum. I've gotta to do this ...,' he said.

God help us, she thought.



Harry Presser shuffled the papers on his desk to see what had landed overnight. An envelope bearing his name stared back, daring him. He opened it casually, the handwriting vaguely familiar.

Dear Harry,

Sorry to do this. You've been great and so has the paper—taking me on for another spin as you did. But there are still things I need to do with my life even though it's not yet clear to me what they are (I know, it doesn't make sense to me either).

Let's just say I'm chasing up another lead.

Be good,

Annie.

Nothing surprised him anymore, but he hadn't seen this one coming. Stupid, impulsive female. Not that she was ever really at home in the joint, not if he was being honest. Well, good luck to her. He threw her note into the bin.



Anna stood at the window. No goodbyes; couldn't bear it. A tear streaked into her mouth, salty and bitter. She couldn't remember when she'd last cried—a matter of pride to her. It was long before Ted had died.

Jesse tracked the fence line, the Holden hesitating and hopping in the frosted air. They'd be okay. The boys would carry on well enough without him. His stomach churned fear and excitement. So this was it, as vivid and as nebulous as the sky in front of him. The grand adventure. Get moving boy, take it on, have a go. It's going to be alright. He drove on, no destination in mind other than a silent space and a strip of water.

Annie Martin pulled out of Elizabeth Street and headed towards Flemington Road. It was a slim lead, but she had nothing else to run with. She'd conned her journalistic way into the university records and discovered he had dropped out close to graduation. Home was somewhere west, sheep country. She knew this was her own brand of madness, taking off in search of someone for no good reason except some pathetic nostalgic relapse into a bewitching moment long gone. It was just an excuse, she knew that, a spur to get out and move and find something more. There had to be more.

'You're a flighty bird,' some bitter lover once cried after she told him she wanted to take a break.

Yes, I guess I am, she thought.

Two on the road and a mother weeping for the roads she knew would converge all too soon.