Berlin

ROSIE. Berlin. A winter coat. A travel bag. A red nose. And a broken heart.

I'm standing on the platform at the train station. It's cold. The train is late and my socks are wet. I'm not quite sure how I got here or where I'm meant to go next.

I met him four nights ago and he was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen. His name was Emmanuel, of course, and he came from Madrid.

I'd been travelling by myself for three months. The great European adventure. London. Dublin. Paris. Prague. Then Berlin. I'd been saving for a year. Café work, bar work, babysitting. Mum and Dad said don't go by yourself. It's too dangerous. Go on a tour or at least with some girlfriends.

I'll meet people. I told them. I'll be fine. But meeting people is harder than you think. I mean I did meet people, at hostels and stuff but mainly other Australians. And it was fun for a night or two. But the boys just wanted to have sex and I guess that's alright but if I wanted sex with an Australian boy I would have stayed in Hallett Cove.

So I go to the churches and the museums and the galleries and I walk through the cobbled streets and I sit in cafés trying to look mysterious and everything is so beautiful. Everything is what I was expecting it to be. And yet somehow I want it to be more.

I Skype home once a week and tell Mum and Dad what an amazing place Europe is. They've never been. I tell them I'm having the best time because I can't bear the thought of them being disappointed for me. And when I Skype my brother Mark, I pretend the camera on my iPad is broken because he knows me and he will see it in my face. He'll see that it's all a mess and he'll tell me to come home but I can't go home, not yet, I mean then, I couldn't go home then because it would be such a… defeat.

I don't know what it's meant to be. I don't know what I'm meant to do. I keep wondering when it will start. Life. When will life start?

And then there he is. At a club in Mitte. Dancing. With his shirt off. And I think, wow, that guy can really dance. That guy is like… fire. And then he looks over at me. Me? And I am gone. I pretend not to be. I try to be cool. To make it seem like I'm not interested. But I am so interested. And we dance until the sun comes up. And as we come out of the club into the light, I think this is it. This is life. I am living.

And I know he wants to take me home. To his place. Or to his friend's place. Or to someone's place, I'm not quite sure whose place it is, and I say okay. Because at last I am living and I don't want life to stop.

And when he kisses me I want to cry. Because I'd never been kissed like that. Not in Hallett Cove. And I'd never been kissed where he kissed me or touched quite like that. He seemed to know things and for once it didn't seem to matter that I didn't. Three days. Three days we stayed in bed. And after three days I knew some things too.

We don't even get up to eat. He disappears and comes back with a bowl of cereal and two spoons. And that's all we eat. Cereal. Out of the same bowl. For three days.

On the third night I watch him sleeping and I do that thing you shouldn't do. I think about the

future. I imagine taking him home to meet Mum and Dad and my sister and brothers and and and how they will all love him, like they love me. And how clever I am and brave to have found such a man, such a beautiful man, different but the same and brought him all the way back to Hallett Cove and then, there I am… Oh, I am so embarrassed but suddenly there I am in our backyard with Dad's roses all around us and I'm walking across the lawn on his arm, and he's got tears in his eyes and Mum's there in a new dress, which she never lets herself have and my sister Pip is there with her husband Steve and their two girls. She got married in the backyard too. And Mark, my oldest brother who I adore is there with his girlfriend, Taylor. And then there's Ben, my other brother who's there with a girl who's new and won't last because they just don't with Ben and I love them all so much, sometimes I think too much, if you can love too much but now I have to make room for Emmanuel who's standing there in a suit and he is just so, so… so handsome… And I… I'm wearing a white dress… And I'm kind of surprised, kind of shocked because I never even knew that that's what I wanted. And maybe it's not what I want, it's what I think Mum and Dad will want for me but anyway I'm there in a white dress, on my father's arm, walking across the lawn and…

Then he wakes up and he looks at me as if he knows what I'm thinking and as if he wants to get up and run so I kiss him on his lips before he can. And he smiles. And I'm gone all over again. And we make love, so tenderly, so sweetly and after, as I drift off to sleep, lying on his chest, listening to the beat of his heart, thinking I could listen to this for the rest of my life, I think is this it, is this what falling in love is?

And when I wake up in the morning he's gone… along with four hundred euros from my wallet, my iPad, my camera, my favourite scarf and a large piece of my heart. I find a girl in the house, smoking a cigarette at the kitchen table and ask if she's seen him. She shrugs and says that he said something about going to see his girlfriend in London. She tells me to get my things and to get out of her house.

I walk through the streets of Berlin. I feel small. I feel like I'm twelve years old, I feel ridiculous. I want to cry but I won't. Well I do, a bit. But not as much as I want to. I want my dad. I want my mum. I want my brothers and my sister. I want to hear them laugh and argue and fight and tease me. But I can't think of them much because if I do my chest will explode. I feel like I'm going to literally fall to pieces. That my arms are going to drop off and then my legs and my head. And so to stop myself coming apart I make a list of all the things I know…

I mean actually know for certain to be true and the really frightening thing is… It's a very short list.

I don't know much at all.

But I know that at 25 Windarie Avenue, Hallett Cove, things are the same as when I left and they always will be.

And I know that I have to go home.