

To my grandson

You are not yet born but in sixty years' time you will be found dead in your apartment by a neighbour who has not seen you for some time. The police will move quickly on to matters more important and they will omit to call your mother. She will find out by telephone from an acquaintance a few days later, and she will hear something mumbled about alcohol and drugs, and weeks.

Your mother will stand at the window, the shaded one facing the treeless hill and the ocean to the south. She will spot a new eucalypt planted by the neighbours near the fence line and her mouth will twitch. She will remind herself to get the poison from the garage next time she is outside. It is cold. It has been a cold summer, everyone is complaining. But the foolish exiles will keep preening themselves for summers that never arrive.

A robin red breast will plop itself down on a protea and your mother will follow its blood red flicker around her garden. When it darts off she will reach out and touch her right hand to the windowpane. She will hold it there, slowly stretching her palm out flat, feeling the tick of her joints as they uncurl. She will study her skin, drilling into the barren landscape, her dry, speckled, loveless hands.

Her eyes will be distracted ever so slightly by a ghostly image through the glass. She will think at first it is her own reflection, uneasy eyelids under an awning of cotton white hair. But then she will gasp and put her hand to her breast. Her cheeks will flush and she will force her eyes shut. And open again. It is me she will see in her reflection. And she will know in that moment that I hold the answer to the question she does not want to ask herself.

Of course I am not surprised. I watch the answer take flight on the air as I sit here writing to you at my formica kitchen table in a village on the edge of Belfast itself.

In a moment your grandmother will return home from the shops and I will tell her of my decision.

I will tell her, my wife, that I have resigned my job and that we can now migrate to Tasmania to be with her brother. Her eyes will glint triumphant. Those long dark lashes I have come to despise, hiding nasty surprises inside like clamshells with monsters. They will pin me to my chair and I will breathe in the full force of their silent accusation. I will bear my punishment in the noblest way I can and I will not cease my infidelity. But I will cease to feel.

The emptiness in my blood will stretch out its talons for miles and for years. It will enter your body, my grandson, as your final breath and it will curl itself around your barren heart.

And your mother will rest her temple against the cool of the glass and she will trace your name in her breath with her finger.

Your grandfather

*About the writer:*

Melinda Maddock has been writing for most of her life, she just hasn't shown anyone. She spent many years as a political adviser writing words for politicians to say. Now she is a consultant teaching people how to make change that matters. She lives in Hobart with her filmmaker husband and two children.