

For Isaac, Emmy
and adventurous kids everywhere

To THE LIGHTHOUSE

CRISTY BURNE
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The creators of this book recognise the cultural significance and sad history that Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) holds for Aboriginal people and acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as Wadjemup's traditional custodians.



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LANDiNG

Isaac stepped off the boat. The island was waiting for him, he could feel it. At the other end of the long jetty, there was white sand to sprint across, sandpaper cliffs to explore, massive fig trees just waiting to be climbed.

‘Stay close,’ warned Mum. ‘You don’t want to fall in.’

Isaac looked around. The jetty was wide enough to race monster trucks. One side was bounded by a tumbling wall of giant boulders. The other was roped off at least three metres from the edge. The only way he could possibly fall in was if he took a running leap.

Yeah right, Mum, he thought.

‘Okay Mum,’ he said out loud.



Seagulls soared and waves lapped and people laughed as they whizzed by on their bicycles. He couldn't wait to start adventuring, but first he had to manage Mum. Convincing her to even come to the island had taken him ages.

School holidays usually meant Isaac was shipped off to vacation care while Mum went to work. These holidays, he'd planted the idea of a winter getaway. She'd studied the website for ages.

'Peace, quiet, fresh air and a good book. It does sound perfect,' she'd said. Then she'd looked at Isaac and frowned.

'I'll be fine,' Isaac had promised. 'Seriously, Mum, you can relax all you like.'

Mum had wrung her hands. She wrung her hands a lot.

'We can play cards, and ride our bikes, and bake cakes ...' Isaac hesitated.

Mum hated baking.

'I just worry that something might happen,' she'd said.

Isaac had nodded. Something *might* happen.
An awesome holiday might happen.

‘I’ll be fine,’ he promised.

‘You’ll make sensible decisions?’ Mum asked.

‘Super-sensible,’ Isaac had assured her.

So here he was, sensibly standing in the middle of a jetty the size of a small nation, trying not to fall off or jump in. He scanned for kids his age, but only saw littlies, running and screaming and drooling. There was no one interesting. No one to hang out with and explore with.

And then he saw the girl.

She was climbing on the wall of boulders. Racing across them. If Mum saw, she’d have a heart attack. The girl had long, bronzed hair, and although it was winter, she was wearing just a T-shirt with shorts, the khaki sort, with lots of pockets. Isaac checked his own clothes. He was trussed up in so many layers he could hardly bend his arms to scratch his nose. Mum had smiled

and called that a sensible decision. It didn’t feel so sensible now.

The girl saw Isaac staring and made a horrible face at him. Isaac made his own face back. She grinned right at him.

‘Isaac,’ said Mum. ‘Keep an eye out for our bikes.’

High above them loads of bicycles were lined across the ferry’s deck in a twist of colourful metal. There weren’t many cars on the island, so almost everyone rode bikes. Up on deck, a man with sticking-up hair was rolling bikes down a narrow ramp and onto the jetty. Isaac’s bike was up there. Somewhere. It was a blue mountain bike with an all-black helmet and chunky pedals. He’d never done actual mountain biking, because Mum thought actual mountain biking was dangerous, but since there were no actual mountains on the island he might be okay. There were loads of hills and trails. He couldn’t wait.

The next bike down the ramp wasn't a mountain bike. It was a white BMX, with pegs out the sides for doing tricks.

The bronze-haired girl in the khaki shorts jumped down from the boulders. She thanked the crewman, grabbed the BMX in her strong, brown hands and rode away down the jetty. Alone. With her helmet dangling on her handlebars.

'There's your bike,' Mum said, pointing to the sticking-up hair guy, high above them on the deck.

Isaac watched the girl. Was she really alone? Where were her parents?

Then he spotted a tall man in jeans and a red jacket. He seemed to be calling out to the girl, but Isaac couldn't hear what he was saying. Neither could the girl, because she didn't stop and she didn't turn around. The man's words were swept into the salty wind, where only seagulls would hear them. Isaac watched as the man swung a bag

onto his back, then heaved a wriggling toddler into the seat on the front of his bike. A kindly kid streaked past him on a balance bike.

'Come on, Dad!' the kindly kid yelled, racing ahead. *Balance bikes have no brakes*, Isaac thought. Mum would've been wailing about the edge and the cracks and be careful of seagull poop. But the man was busy juggling his bike and backpack and small child. He had no time for anything else. And the bronze-haired girl was way ahead.

'And there's mine!' Mum sounded relieved to spot her slightly larger but equally unused bike.

Isaac got his bike and waited while Mum collected hers, and waited while she double-checked that the luggage truck wouldn't forget their bags and that the weather wasn't going to be stormy. Then he waited while she triple-checked that the island wouldn't sink or flood or otherwise be struck by catastrophe. Then, about an hour

later, she and Isaac finally wheeled their bikes away, very carefully, down the centre of the jetty. Isaac stared into the lapping water and wanted to jump. Sometimes Mum could be too much.

At last, they stepped off the jetty and onto the island. Isaac breathed deep, just as the bronze-haired girl whizzed past on her BMX. She made an even worse face at Isaac, grinned, then pulled an awesome wheelie, her front wheel spinning in the breeze. She disappeared up the hill and around the corner.

Isaac's stomach tangled into itself. He'd tried wheelies a few times, but they'd never really worked. Perhaps this was the place to learn how. Perhaps this island was the place for



loads of new things, like making friends with the bronze-haired girl, for a start. Only, he wasn't sure Mum would agree.

What he needed was a plan.

Later that afternoon, Mum and Isaac settled quietly in their little yellow house. Mum

unpacked her case, read up about their gas heater, tucked all the extra blankets onto their beds, and photographed the evacuation instructions, in case the real instructions were stolen/burnt/swept away in a freak tsunami. Then she stood on one foot, and then the other. Isaac sat at the kitchen table, trying to focus on drawing the view. Mum liked it when he drew. She thought it was safe.

She shifted back to her other foot.

‘Why don’t you read your book?’ he suggested helpfully.

‘Really?’ Mum looked lost.

‘Really.’ He smiled his most calming smile.

She fetched her book and incredibly, finally, actually relaxed, even putting her feet up on the couch. Isaac returned to his drawing, but mostly he was staring out the window at the rippling bay beyond. The sky was blue, the water was bluer. It was time to put his plan into action. He cleared his throat.

‘Can I get you a cup of tea?’ he asked.

Mum looked up. Her face softened into such a loving smile that Isaac felt almost guilty. ‘That’d be great,’ she said. ‘Thank you.’ But then she added ‘Will you be alright with the kettle?’

No, Mum. The kettle has a black belt. I won’t stand a chance, Isaac thought.

‘I’ll be careful,’ he said.

He filled the kettle, switched it on. He made a big show of finding a mug, and then unearthing a tea bag, then opening the fridge.

‘Oh no! Mum, there’s no milk.’ He pulled his best responsible face. He’d practised it about a million times. ‘No worries, I’ll just jump on my bike. Ride down to the shops.’

He waited. Mum hesitated. Isaac’s heart thumped. He knew she preferred milky tea.

‘I’ll grab some fresh bread, too,’ he added, to sweeten the deal. Tea and toast. How could she resist?

Mum didn't look convinced. 'Are you sure? To the shops? By yourself?'

Isaac nodded. Smiling. Three times.

'You'll be sensible?' Mum asked.

'Super-sensible.' He nodded again for good measure. Then tilted his head like a waiting puppy, in case he'd already done too much nodding. Mum could worry about anything, even nodding. It wasn't really her fault. It was just that Isaac was all Mum had left.

'Well, if you're sure you'll be okay,' she said.

Isaac felt like awarding her a Certificate of Achievement. She was really progressing.

I will be totally excellent, he thought.

Mum checked her watch. 'Make sure you're back in half an hour,' she said.

'Can we make it forty-five minutes?' he asked, still doing his waiting puppy face.

She wrung her hands.

'It might take a while to find the wholegrain

bread,' he added.

She nodded, then agreed. There was so much white bread around these days. Sometimes sensible decisions could take a little longer.

'Back soon, Mum,' he said, and he dashed out the door before she remembered they hadn't synchronised their watches.