



...the first thing I did was to go to the
...and I was not in a hospital
...but here in the backblocks. In this actual house. It is
...crumbling round me ears now, but the roof hardly leaks

Me name be Hannah O'Brien
and I be seventy-six years old.
Me first thing is an apology – me
language is bad cos I lost it and had
to learn it again. But here's me story and
I be glad to tell it before I hop the twig.

I were born in Tasmania, born not in a hospital
but here in the backblocks. In this actual house. It is
crumbling round me ears now, but the roof hardly leaks

and if I chop enough wood I can heat the place when it snows. Though I live here by meself I am not lonely. I got a wedding photograph of me mother and me father when men wore beards and sat down for the picture while me mother wears a wedding dress and stands beside him. And there's me father's harpoon hanging from the living room wall with its cracked wooden handle and rusted blade. Me only new thing is the cabinet with a radio in it which Mr Dixon down at the general store gave me. I can't hack it. There always be mongrel music in it, like it's shouting all the time. Anyway, I'd sooner yabber to meself than listen to those voices inside that box. I reckon I need new curtains, these are a bit dusty and fraying, but they keep out the summer light when it's so strong it hurts me eyes.



I think me uncle built this house. He gave it to me father. It were a present. At that time we were the only house for miles and miles. Me father wanted to live in a place near water – if not the sea, then a river. Me mother liked rivers and so the house were a give-and-take for the both of them. From the verandah we could almost touch the Munro River as it flowed down to the sea. I had no brothers or sisters. I don't know why. There were a problem, I think. I'd hear me mother crying buckets in me father's arms and hear him say, like to a child, *There, there, we got Hannah.*

Me first memories, well, the thing is, and this be

strange when I think about it, but me first memories, they are really me father's. Maybe not even his memories, maybe his stories. I'd drop into a swoon of gladness when he come to me bedroom to put me to sleep and he'd tell me 'bout his adventures. He were a whaler and when he came back after travelling the seas, he'd tell me these stories, stories about places and things he'd set eyes on. I s'pose me mind made them me own so I thought it was me, Hannah, in the Philippines and I could see two black men in a boat, the sort hacked out of a log, and they were waiting for a whale shark. When it came, one fisherman jumped out of the boat onto the back of the whale shark and rode it like it were a brumby and at the same time he stabbed it in the back til it croaked. In the South Seas, in water so clear you could see right down to the bottom where queer fish swim, a fisherman jumped into the sea with a banana in his mouth. He spitted bits of the banana at a huge groper which gobbled them up, all the time coming closer and closer til the fisherman caught that big fish in his bare hands. There were another time when me father were at the bow and a sperm whale, big as a house, were harpooned and the whale boat, stuck fast to the wounded whale, were dragged along at a wild speed towards the sun on the horizon til the monster carked it of exhaustion. One time me father were at anchor in Western Australia when he seen a gin on a beach and she were singing a song, an uncanny song like you sing to ghosts, but it called to the whales. One whale,