

A Train to the Country

I believed in the benevolence of those trains, steam trains, on the Albury line, aboard with my mother's shoulder to lean against, her faintly perfumed smell, to breathe it like sleep, like love, to breathe easily within the rocking, rhythmic, forward-rushing double clack of them, the thrust and storm of them, but inside held calm in their containment, on their wings.

It was like a storybook, this travelling to the country, a tale that started with the heavy breathing, the huff-and-gruff and drawing in of determination to get moving, the gathering of momentum, the travelling long, the marvel that this train could carry, in its turmoil, comfort and assurance that we would arrive, and the world we knew would be there.

I was too young to know that my mother was lovely, the gentle half-frown as her thoughts drifted, the half-smile as she dozed, her face in profile against the window that framed the familiar landscape of our trips, spelling out the promise of our journey's ending, the prospect of our grandmother's scones, of a feather mattress to be burrowed into at the end of our line.

And then going out most days from our grandfather's house, my brother and sister and I, to watch the trains speed through, the exciting passing picture-show of men in uniform, heading perhaps to where our father was, in uniform too, us wondering would he be with them when the trains came back some day, waving to each carriage as it passed, three kids beside the tracks at Avenel.