

# SORRY BUSINESS

*Penni has a history of colossal fuck-ups. I'm done picking up the pieces.*

# BETH



# PENNI

Who is Penelope Palmer?

I think I know one Penni and maybe Pia knows another, and there is another one again that none of us really know. But isn't everyone like that?

Penni is my younger sister. Almost a daughter in some ways. When mum died, I took over, looked after Penni and also Pia, our youngest sister. I was so young, barely eighteen. Penni was thirteen, Pia eleven. We really struggled. Neighbours helped, school helped, but it didn't really work out for any of us.

Much as I love her, Penni is a selfish cow. An anthropologist at the ANU in Canberra, she spends a lot of time roughing it in the Northern Territory. And now she's gone off on one of her jaunts. I'm so angry. She's caused a lot of worry and heartbreak.

Penn keeps to herself. Always did—never confided in me. She can be ok when she wants to. She can be warm and funny. And she can be an ungrateful, self-centred bitch.

Penni likes to spend time by herself. Sometimes for months at a time. She has depths no one can penetrate. Certainly not me.

Penni's high school boyfriend was Pete—or so I thought. Turns out, her first lover was actually her best friend Clare. I only found out later, from someone else. Penni never confided in me, never talked about being gay.

She decided all by herself she would study in Canberra. Sent off the applications in secret, told us a week before she took off on a scholarship.

I kept in touch of course, phoning every once in a while. Same as now, all those years later. I really try to be her friend, but we're not that close. Sisters can love and hate each other at the same time.

Penni never told us why she disappeared for eight months when she finished her Masters. All she ever said was that she was looking for someone.

One day Penni had a Ph.D. And a job at the university. She started going bush. Way up north.

Penni never announced she had a partner till I put two and two together. A Singaporean Chinese named Li Jen. Met her just once. Lovely woman. After four years together, they separated last October. As usual I had no forewarning of any trouble.

Poor Li Jen.

Penni never said why she split from Li Jen.

Penni never mentioned a new girlfriend, either. Li Jen knew though. She's just told us.

I really do love Penni. I pray for her every night, even though God and I aren't as close as we used to be. The trauma of mum's death scarred us all. I tried to hide the uglier details from the girls, but, typical Penni, she looked up the newspapers in the library and told Pia. I swear I could have thrashed her.

So now Penni is out there somewhere, not telling anyone what she's up to. Stuck in the middle of nowhere in the Wet. She's caused all sorts of grief, and now the police are involved. Not that they'll do much. I've got to get my shit together and go find her.

And when I do, I'll give her a good piece of my mind.



Kristin Krychek, *Pretty Penni P.*, 2013, From the collection of the NSWAG.

## BETH: THE WOUND, THE SCAR, THE LIE

### Beth's Wound: Resentment

Beth took on caring for her two sisters at an early age. Partially as a result of this, she can be dominating, unyielding and bitter, particularly to Penni and Pia. She resents her lost youth and having to act as mother.

### Possible Causes

Absence of father and mother, need to bring up her sisters, Control issues, being fiercely independent, having an intense drive to succeed, win, or be right, excessive pride, selfishness, fear of appearing weak to others

### Beth's Scar: Stubbornness

Resentment, reluctance to compromise, defending one's ideas and beliefs, having a strong moral compass (recovering Christian), reacting negatively to any criticism, refusing to admit defeat or past mistakes, tenaciousness and determination, Seeing one's flaws as being part of oneself and refusing to change, difficulty communicating when upset, rarely admitting to being wrong, Not asking for help when one needs it, feeling misunderstood, arguing when opposed, not working well with others, not letting others help or instruct, judging others, pushiness, competitiveness

### Beth's Lie: Pride

*I do things my way. Such a nasty woman! Asking for help is a sign of weakness. No one understands what I've been through. I gave up everything for Pia and Penni. They don't really love me. But I know I'm right. I'll never be like mum.*

### Associated Emotions

Anger, confidence, contempt, determination, fear, frustration, pride

### Positive Aspects

Beth keeps people on their toes. However, there is no limit to what she will do for friends and family, even if she complains about it. Beth's sense of morality means she will always fight for what is right. (To be fair, her experience of Christianity has mellowed her behaviour considerably).

### Negative Aspects

Beth doesn't always know when enough is enough, and can push people to the breaking point with her inability to compromise. She often struggles with adaptability and misses the forest for the trees: she

can only view problems from a single angle. Letting stubbornness dictate her actions can cause challenges and ruin relationships, bringing pain to everyone involved.

### Healing: Overcoming Resentment as a Major Flaw

For Beth to overcome her stubborn nature, she needs to see that she doesn't know everything and that others have valid ideas and opinions, too. Not becoming defensive when advice or gentle criticism is given is a good step, along with seeking counsel from others. By asking for help and seeing a quick resolution to a problem, Beth may be more open to collaboration and advice in the future. And while her journey into Hillsong Christianity was not ultimately successful, she now privately talks to God and appreciates the healing potential of grace and forgiveness.

### Traits in Other Characters that may cause Conflict

Controlling, courteous, helpful, honest, nagging, nosy, pushy, sensible, uncooperative

# BEETH

*Am I scared of dying? Yeah, of course I'm scared of dying. Isn't everyone scared of dying?*

But maybe God has a surprise for us afterwards. I don't talk to people about God, and I don't attend Hillsong anymore, but I do talk to Him sometimes. God is a good listener.

Penni has gone missing all of a sudden, and poor Li Jen is terrified. There's been really strange behaviour and a weird, meaningless text message.

*Typical Penni.* The police have been called but there's not much they can do at this stage. I may have to track her down myself. I'm sooo angry at the little bitch. *Why do I still have to act as your mother!!*

It echoes of what happened to Maggie of course. Maggie, our own mother. No wonder Pia is so upset as well.

*Are you trying to be like mum? If you really ran away from us then you're a shit like her and I hate you.*

Maggie—mum—disappeared on 24 January 1991. That's 23 years, almost to the day. Parked her car and walked into coastal bushland by the Glasshouse Mountains. They never did find her body. The search made the papers in a big way, 'cause mum walked into the bush in a wedding dress, full bridal. Cops thought she'd drowned; body washed to sea.

I protected Penni and Pia from the worst of it, took over as their caregiver. I was so young—still a few months short of eighteen. Penny was thirteen and Pia just eleven.

It was hard, I had no idea. But somehow I did it. School and neighbours helped—the Tooheys, the Bianchis—but I did all the heavy lifting. Lost my own girlhood, my own best years. But I won through.

Not long after, Penni went to the library and read all the newspaper stories about mum. Told Pia everything as well, never bothered talking to me about it. I think that's when our trouble really started.

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***Time to get off our arses and do something.***

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There's stuff that never made the papers, stuff that only I know. Before she went mad, Maggie saw ghosts and angels. Sat at the kitchen table telling me what they had said to her.

Maybe that's why I don't talk to god too often.

*Feel the fear in my chest all day. Praise you anyway.*

I've done pretty well for myself. I like my home comforts. I live in a good suburb, drive a Nissan Patrol, and run a one-woman marketing business. I spend far too much on makeup. Appearances are important. I may not be educated but I sure can sell stuff. I can be pushy when I need to be. I like to *win*.

Hubbie and I have separated now, but to be honest I barely notice the

difference. Hillsong didn't work out for me either—I don't ever talk about religion now—but I learned a few things to help me along the way. Things like forgiveness. Things like grace. Maybe everything *will* work out in the end.

I guess Penni turned out ok in some ways, being a university doctor now. Pia, however, never did get her act together. She's living in Melbourne doing nothing much at all. We talk on the phone, I offer her advice, but she never listens.

Penni is out there in some god-forsaken swamp surrounded by blacks, probably looking to be rescued, wanting the attention because she screwed around and abandoned her partner. *Poor little possum.* I'm sooo angry...

And then that weird text message to Jen. 'LOUD'. What the fuck is that? Maybe it wasn't Penni—if so, who has her phone? Why are they doing this?

Pia will be ringing any minute. I don't need this.

I know I'm not perfect. I might wear my shadows where they're harder to see, but they still follow me everywhere. I guess that tells me that at least I'm walking toward the light. When I find Penni, maybe we will recognise each other, and see ourselves for the first time. See ourselves the way we really are.

Ghosts and angels.

*Time to get off our arses and do something.*



**KRISTEN**  
A Sydney photographer and art curator. Kristen became Penni's lover after the separation from Li Gen.



**LI JEN**  
Penni's former partner of five years. Originally from Hong Kong, Jen is a textile artist and teacher in Canberra.



**PIA**  
Our youngest sister, unmotivated and unsettled. Pia lives in Melbourne, and has a trendy inner city sensibility.



**GERDE**  
A curator at Maningrida Arts & Crafts, and a former student under Penni at ANU. Gerde has local knowledge of the area.

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