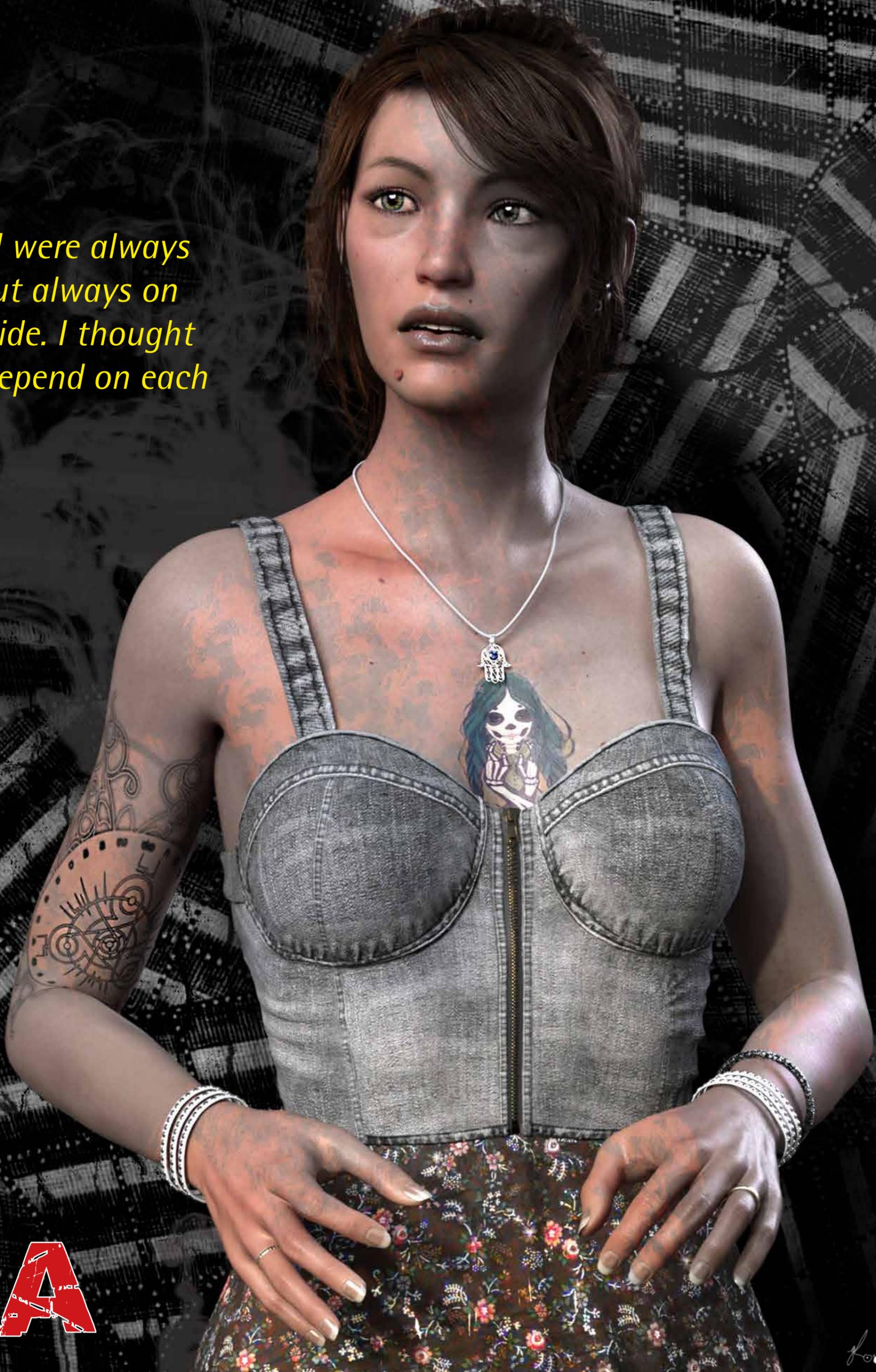


SORRY BUSINESS

Penni and I were always fighting, but always on the same side. I thought we could depend on each other.



PIA

fo.

PENNI

Who is Penni Palmer?

Pennikins is my big sister. We're close. At least, I think we're close.

Penni is a quiet one. Like me, Penni is from Brisbane. Penni is a Aborigine specialist at university, and spends a lot of time going bush in the Northern Territory.

I think I know one Penni and maybe Beth knows another, and there is another one again that none of us knows. Isn't everyone like that though?

Penni is a great person. Funny, smart, just lovely.

Penni is missing.

Penni is often pretty quiet. You remember her presence rather than what she says. She can be quirky; all little dances, and goofy grins. She is capable of surprising demonstrations of love and support. And she can be a complete and infuriating utter bitch.

We're always fighting, always making up. That's what sisters do.

Penni likes to spend time by herself. Sometimes for months at a time. She has a deep sense of privacy. She won't let anyone in—not me, not our big sister Beth, not her partner Li Jen.

Her ex-partner. They've been having a rough time.

Dad died early, and Penni was only thirteen when mum disappeared. There's a weird story in that. Penni and I were raised by Beth, our big sister. Beth sacrificed a lot for us both. I should be grateful I guess, but Beth is still always telling me what to do. She judges me, puts me down.

Penni is queer. Her high school boyfriend was Pete—I don't know how she controlled him. Penni's first lover was actually her best friend Clare. I only found out years later, at her hens' night. Clare was drunk. Penni wasn't there. Clare married Pete.

Penni never told us she was gay. I never guessed.

Penni never announced beforehand that she was going to study in Canberra.

Penni never told us why she disappeared for eight months after finishing her Masters. Travelling, she said.

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

Penni never mentioned her big anthropology project.

Penni never announced she had a partner until we met her. Li Jen is lovely. After four good years together, they separated last October.

Poor Jen.

Penni never said why she split from Jen.

Penni never mentioned her new girlfriend to anyone. Jen knew though. She told me.

Penni never said goodbye.

I hope that Pennikins knows how much I love her. That would be the saddest thing, to think she might not know.

I hope that Penni is alive. I fear that Penni is dead.

Who is Penni? I've no idea. Midst all this grief and numbness, I'm not even sure who I am any more.



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

PIA: THE WOUND, THE SCAR, THE LIE

Pia's Wound: Abandonment

Pia is dispirited and easily cowed; lacking courage, bravery, and self-assurance. She has turned to illegal drugs in order to self-medicate.

Possible Causes

Trauma of mother's death at early age, childhood neglect, shame, history of isolation, insecurity and low self-esteem

Pia's Scar: Timidity

Avoiding change, self-doubt, isolation, amphetamine (speed, whiz) stimulant abuse, nervousness around strangers, flinching at too much noise, becoming tongue-tied, always going along with what others want, freezing under pressure, avoiding scary movies, shakiness, using a quiet voice, negative self-talk, fearing rejection, social awkwardness, not going after goals if doing so will require assertiveness

Pia's Lie: Insecurity

People scare me, I should remain distant. I'll never be a success at anything, so why bother trying.

Associated Emotions

Anxiety, conflicted, doubt, dread, fear, resignation, unease, worry

Positive Aspects

Though timid, Pia is a careful thinker; she can see deeper into situations and problems than those who are more reactive and simply want to act. Unthreatening by nature, Pia is very approachable. She gains energy and confidence from helping people.

Negative Aspects

Pia can be so afraid of life that she fails to experience it. Fear often controls her decision making, and she rarely ventures into challenging situations or tries new things. She can be easily taken advantage of.

Healing: Overcoming Abandonment as a Major Flaw

Pia has always depended on Penni. Pia respects Beth for raising her, but feels constantly bullied and dominated by her older sister, even at a distance. Pia needs to understand how much she is limited by her lack of bravery. Exposing herself to new situations and trying new things will help build self-confidence and diminish fear. Understanding her relationship to both Beth and Penni may help her re-evaluate the trajectory of her life.

Traits in Other Characters that may cause Conflict

Adventurous, ambitious, bold, confrontational, manipulative, melodramatic, pushy, temperamental

Amphetamine abuse: Pia uses illegal amphetamines ('speed', 'whiz') to self-medicate. Taking these uppers temporarily increases her happiness and confidence, allowing her to talk more freely and feel energetic. Symptoms of the drug include itching and scratching, large pupils and dry mouth, teeth grinding, reduced appetite, excessive sweating, and increased sex drive.

She is sensitive to bright sunlight and, rarely, episodes of paranoia when under stress.

Pia carries her uppers in a prescription pill case labelled as Valium.

PIA

I listen to the chatter in my head. My own voice. Sometimes, silence. Sometimes, angels. And sometimes, Penni.

We talk. "Hi Penni. Did you run away? Why did you run away? Why couldn't you tell me what was happening? Did you think I wouldn't get it?"

Penni replies. "I have important things to do. I love you sis. Don't worry about me." And then I imagine she gives me her Look. Her Secrets Look.

And that's when I know it's all going to shit.

Penni and I were always fighting, but we looked out for each other. That's what sisters do. We shared everything. Except when she had the Look.

We all grew up kinda strange. Mum died when I was nine, and big sister Beth tried to take care of us. It was a lot to ask of her and bent her all out of shape. She still mothers me, bullies me, and I can't stand up to her. I guess that's how it is.

Mum disappeared in the bush beneath Glasshouse. Fell into a creek and drowned, so they said. But later, Penni went and read all the papers. She told me that mum walked into the bush wearing a bridal dress, all decked out for a wedding. Beth was so pissed at Penni for telling me that. If mum's death made me sad, hearing that made me ever sadder. I went kinda quiet.

I was always kinda quiet.

After Beth ragged her out, Penni was always careful with what she said. And I started recognising her Secrets Look.

I first saw the Look when Penni started babysitting for the Tooheys when she was fifteen. I saw it when she got her first supposed boyfriend, Pete (she was sleeping with Clare). I saw it before she suddenly announced to us she had a scholarship to go to Canberra to study. And I saw it a few weeks ago at Melbourne airport.

Penni had split with Jen. When we met, she said they just needed some time apart, and that she had to go bush for some important work. It felt like she was saying goodbye.

I don't know. I just don't know. But I can hold on a little longer. I can be strong.

But when Penni has the Look, no one can get a word out of her about what's really going on. Not even me.

I haven't seen Sean for ten days. He's sort of like my boyfriend. He took my money and said he'd score us some ice, something with a bit more kick. He often disappears like that, weeks at a time. I'm not sure I'm ready for something that hard, but Sean is the only way I know to get my supply.

If the strain proves too much, give up right away. If the light hurts your eyes, stay in your room all day.

Growing up was hard for us all. I escaped Brisbane as soon as I could

and moved to Melbourne. I love it here. I've never done much with my life, but have become a real inner-city girl, kind of alt, but never butch enough to cut it.

I'm the cute one, the helpful one.

I also like to think I'm a little bit psychic. Sometimes I swear I can hear the angels talking. Whispering secrets. Giving me insight into people so I help them in small ways. I Sometimes I swear I can hear people's thoughts.

I've been lying to Beth. I told her I'm managing the office but I'm only temping, and I'm down to two days a week. The job is important though: I can help people there. I owe on the rent, but I'm scared to ask Beth for help.

I'm depending more and more on uppers to get by.

It's a new day of sunshine. I feel sick, but in a good way.

I'm just a liar, and I'm getting caught up in an escalating series of lies. 'Everything's ok.' Lying to others. Lying to myself. It's all too human—that overpowering mix of grief, rage, longing, fear and exhaustion, a heady batch of confusion and indecision.

I don't know. I just don't know. But I can hold on a little longer. I can be strong.

Thinking about mum, I start to fear that Penni is dead. It's like the family trauma repeating itself all over again.

I don't know what to believe. I don't know what to do. What would Penni say? Pennikins?

I throw up in the sink before I leave.

I don't know. I just don't know.



KRISTEN
A Sydney photographer and art curator. Kristen became Penni's lover after the separation from Li Jen. You've never met.



BETH
Penni's older sister. A Brisbane businesswoman, with a strong personality, Beth raised Penni and Pia when their mother disappeared.



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



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

SORRY BUSINESSS