

FAR FROM MADDY

## Logline

Twenty-two year old Jo takes the unusual step of opting out of the mainstream and a promising career in architecture, to take up life as a homeless person. The move shatters Maddy, her girlfriend, and immerses both women in unraveling a past trauma linked to Jo's mother suicide.

## Synopsis

On the eve of moving in with her lover, Maddy, Jo simply vanishes. So begins the strange tale of her self-determined disappearance and Maddy's desperate search to find her.

As a child, Jo had tried to survive her mother's illness, alcoholism and suicide the best way she could. There was also her father's emotional distance and the loss of a much older sister when that sibling left home. Years later, Jo's interactions with Maddy, within their loving relationship, trigger the memory of these unresolved childhood issues.

Jo's fear of emotional dependence on her lover reflects her fear of abandonment as a child and, so, in a pre-emptive strike, she runs away from Maddy before Maddy might think to abandon her. Eventually, Maddy makes contact with Jo but is frustrated by her refusal to return to mainstream society, and even more afraid for Jo's safety when she learns that she has reverted to heavy drug use.

FADE IN:

EXT. BURLEIGH HEADS ESPLANADE - AUSTRALIA - NIGHT

Pounding waves O/S

Only a few lights shine inside the apartment towers that border the esplanade. MADDY, twenty-five, strides towards a seaside picnic table, sets a bottle of brandy and two plastic tumblers on the wooden table and looks around. Short spiky red hair, a silver loop splits her bottom lip. She has the wide shoulders of an athlete, a loose muscle shirt shows off her chiseled arms, low slung jeans hug her boyish hips.

MADDY

Wooohooo! Jo, I'm back.

She ambles to the edge of the esplanade. Waves crash against glistening black boulders.

MADDY(CONT'D)

Sneaking a leak behind a bush?  
Very, very naughty, that.

Walks back to the table, retrieves a backpack from the ground, drops her keys in it and sets it on the table near the bottle. She peers under the table.

MADDY(CONT'D)

Why d'ya take your bag with you?  
It's anything but peak hour  
traffic at this end. Welcome to  
Sleepy Hollow by the sea!

Pours a slug of brandy in both tumblers and sips from hers.

Rustling nearby O/S

Maddy turns around expectantly.

MADDY(CONT'D)

Jo! Honey!

Glances at her watch. 12.15 AM. Restless, she flips into a handstand, looks at the park upside down.

MADDY(CONT'D)

Jo? I'm getting pissed off, now.  
C'mon! Stop foolin'. Let's sip on  
that brandy. Then, we head back  
upstairs. Then, we chill and make  
love. That was the plan, wasn't it?

Snaps back to her feet, begins pacing anxiously, sips her drink. Edgy, she winces at the glittery lights across the bay.

MADDY (CONT'D)  
 Too fuckin' bright. Like, it's  
 one big party over there.

Pours the content of the 2nd tumbler back into the bottle.

INT. PUBLIC TOILET BLOCK - ESPLANADE - NIGHT

The toilet block is deserted. Maddy checks every stall.

MADDY  
 Here Joey, Jo! Come to Maddy,  
 Maddy, Maddy.

INT. POLICE STATION - LOCKUP - NIGHT

Insert: a wall clock - 3.10 AM

A burly Pacific Islander YOUTH paces inside the enclosure. Clad in jeans that hang under his bum and T shirt, he swings his head drowsily but his steps becomes firmer as his body tenses up. Suddenly, he throws himself against the wall. Bouncing back, he grabs the bars of the holding cell with two hands and hits his head against them. He is as silent as the blows he inflicts his forehead are hard and methodical.

Three POLICEMEN rush into the cell to restrain the youth. A third one snaps on latex gloves. Constable JONES pulls the youth's head away from the bars while the other pries his hands off. The third cop tackles him sideways though it is clear that, in a bid to not hurt the lad, the cops are not using maximum force. Though genetically thickset, the youth's strength is that of a demented man. He drags the three cops to the floor.

The duty DOCTOR arrives as the youth is being restrained, face down, against the concrete the floor. The cops are breathing hard. Constable Jones, a fresh face, still has his arm around the boy's neck while the other two keep him pinned down.

DOCTOR  
 What's the story?

CONSTABLE JONES  
 He threw himself at the bars, Doc,  
 and wouldn't let go.

DOCTOR  
 First things first. Flip 'im over.

Mostly spent and unfocused, the youth still thrashes about. The back of his hands hits one of the cops across the nose. The cops tighten their hold. The doctor checks the boy's pupils and pulse. He palpates around the forehead gash.

DOCTOR  
Nasty business. Did that all by  
himself?

POLICEMAN #2  
Sure did, Doc. He just lost it!

POLICEMAN #3  
He went for the bars like a  
fighting bull at the gates.

The doctor lifts the white bone carving hanging around the  
youth's neck.

DOCTOR  
You mean like a *Samoan* bull at  
the gate.

The cops chuckle. The doctor tilts his chin at Constable  
Jones.

DOCTOR  
I'd let go of his neck altogether  
if I were you. Wouldn't look good  
on camera.

Constable Jones scoots away from the youth, as if just  
bitten by a Taipan. The boy's head thuds dully on the  
concrete floor. The doctor prepares an injection.

DOCTOR  
Keep 'im steady, lads, or don't  
blame me if I needle the wrong  
bloke.

INT. POLICE STATION - FRONT DESK- NIGHT

Non-descript OFFICER COMINO at the duty desk. Conversation  
already in progress. Maddy looks very frazzled.

OFFICER COMINO  
Before anything else, young lady,  
you need to confirm your identity.  
So, do you have a driver's  
license on your person?

Maddy plucks the plastic card from her back pocket.

OFFICER COMINO(CONT'D)  
Maddy Collins, residing at number  
24 Tamar Street, Annerley,  
Queensland in our glorious land  
of OZ. 4103, that'd be a Brisbane  
suburb. Current?

Maddy nods tensely. The cop slides the license out of her  
reach.

OFFICER COMINO (CONT'D)  
And the person you've misplaced is?

MADDY  
Jo Brenner. Joanna Brenner. But I  
haven't mispla--

OFFICER COMINO (CONT'D)  
Any distinctive features on this  
Joanna Brenner? Tattoos,  
piercings? Scars?

MADDY  
No tattoos. No scars. No  
piercings. But she's 5 ft 11.  
Short black hair cut weird. Tall  
and thin. Very thin. Jo's 22.

Locks eyes with the officer.

MADDY (CONT'D)  
She could be lying somewhere,  
anywhere, hurt and --

An office door swings open. A strapping policewoman steps out, an armload of files under one arm. CHRISTEN JENSEN is thirty-five, palomino-blonde hair in a slick 8-strand plait that offsets her Swede's high cheekbones. She catches the look of frustration on Maddy's face and hovers near the duty desk.

OFFICER COMINO  
Do you know this person's address?

MADDY  
Sure, I know this person's  
address. But she's not *there*.  
She's right here on the coast!  
We've come down for the long  
weekend, get it? Australia Day.  
She was right here, right next to  
me till about midnight. So, how  
about you start --

OFFICER COMINO  
Now, now, young lady, hold your  
horses. My bet is that you don't  
know this young lady well enough  
to know where she might've run  
off to. Why don't you have a chat  
with the boyfriend and see how he  
feels about reporting her missing.

Maddy sucks in the silver lip loop. Eyes tense, she cocks her head at Christen who is listening in on the conversation. The chevrons on her epaulets are impressive. Maddy addresses her directly.

MADDY

My friend's been missing for over three hours.

Nibbling at her lip loop, she looks close to defeat.

OFFICER COMINO

Much ado about nothing, young lady. The first thing girls do the moment there's an upset with the best girl friend is run back to the boyfriend.

The glare of irritation in Christen's eyes buoys Maddy's sinking spirit. She perks up.

MADDY

Not likely scenario, Officer. We're two dykes in love. No boyfriend. I'm it.

OFFICER COMINO

As I was saying, you --

Christen walks up to Maddy.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN

Knock it off, John! Give her back her ID, please.

(to Maddy)

I'm DS Jensen. Christen. And you are -

Looking smug, in spite of the public rebuff, Officer Comino hands Maddy back her license.

MADDY

Maddy Collins.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN

A cup of something hot will do you good, Maddy Collins. Tea? Coffee? Milo?

MADDY

Something hot would be good, thank you. Coffee, black. No sugar.

INT. POLICE STATION - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

The doctor walks past, rearranges his tie. Gives an All Okay thumbs-up grin to Christen who nods back.

Maddy sits stiffly on a chair, a steamy mug between both hands.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN

Just about everyone who disappears in the middle of the night shows up in the morning, or the next day, with one hell of a good story to tell.

(jovially)

Of course, if we're talking about alien abductions, the return process has been known to take a bit longer.

Maddy stares ahead.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN(CONT'D)

OK, bad joke. Maddy, is Jo married?

Maddy stands up too quickly. Hot coffee sloshes over her hand. Without thinking, she flicks her fingers too close to DS Jensen's white shirt. The police woman remains impassive.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN(CONT'D)

Maddy, is Jo married?

Maddy sighs, shakes her head.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN(CONT'D)

Does Jo have a brother? Has she been having any sorts of relations recently with a male, any male? A friend? A colleague?

Maddy shakes her head again, eyes planted on the space between both her boots.

DS CHRISTEN JENSEN(CONT'D)

Can you say categorically that no male might be involved, directly or indirectly, if Jo is really missing?

Maddy swallows hard, jaw tight.

MADDY

I'm her lover, not her keeper.

INT. TERRY'S ALL TREADS - TIRE BAY - LATE AFTERNOON (9 MONTHS EARLIER)

A tire bay on one side, a mechanics' workshop on the other.

Maddy, perched high on a ladder, mechanic's overalls, stacks and marks tires with a piece of chalk. Rambles off stats for each of the tires she picks up.

MADDY

Large lugs notched and tapered  
for max traction. Interlocking  
center tread blocks for stability  
and a quiet ride. Timberline MT.

Grabs a huge tire, climbs up the ladder. In one fluid movement, she stacks the tire on the top shelf. As she half-turns, she catches a glimpse of a young woman pushing a bicycle in front of her.

This is JO: willowy in faded black jeans and well-worn cardigan. Seattle Sound Grunge is her style, jet black hair cut short and unevenly.

Maddy's eyes travel from Jo's face to her dark green combat boots, glances at the bike. The front tire is pancake flat.

A male mechanic, DREW, intercepts Jo. In his thirties, he supercilious and arrogant.

DREW

Lady, we carry everything from  
truck tires to car tires, but  
what we don't stock, ever, are  
bicycle tires.

Jo points to the sign *Terry's **All** Treads*.

DREW(CONT'D)

All real treads, lady. None of  
that garden-hose variety you'd be  
needing for that bike of yours.

Maddy jumps off the ladder, tosses aside the piece of chalk. Quick smile at Jo, lifts the bike by the handlebar, pinches the front tire. A long rip opens up between her fingers.

MADDY

Not even a good patch-up job  
would get you as far as next  
block. Your tire's too dead gone.

Runs her hand over the rusty frame.

MADDY

Paint's dead as, too, but that  
don't kill a bike. Rust is  
showing through, but the joints  
are still solid. Buy it a new set  
of tire and you'll have yourself  
a decent rod that's got plenty of  
life left in it.

Ushers Jo towards the entrance, glances at the wall clock.

EXT. OUTSIDE TERRY'S ALL TREADS - PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

Insert: dashboard clock 4:54 pm

Maddy tosses her backpack on the seat, pops open the trunk of her old car, settles the bicycle in it. She quickly secures the lid over the handlebars with an elastic strap.

INT. MADDY'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Hands on the steering wheel, Maddy is distracted by the long fingers, bare of jewelry, that tap-dance on the dashboard. She down-shifts, sneaks a glance at Jo, who is all arms and legs.

MADDY

So, your name's Jo?

JO

Short for Joanna. Only ever got called that by my mother, my father, my sister and every single teacher I've had since Miss Hardwood in Grade 1.

Maddy grins, eyes on the road.

MADDY

D'you really have a room in that boarding house on Fairfield Road? No foolin'?

JO

That's where I hang my hat, my bag, and tie up my bike. You? Middle-class aspirations and all strings attached?

MADDY

My hat hangs in a shoe box of a house, but it's a house and it's mine. Well, almost.

JO

Sounds like it's important to you that, having a house.

MADDY

You bet it is. But the bank still owns more of it than I do. You're new to Brisbane?

Jo looks out of the car window. Working-class neighborhood. Split-wood cottages in various need of repair.

JO  
Five months on location, give or  
take.

MADDY  
Five months in a *boarding* house?  
You're kidding, right?

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT - 2 AM

From the grassy mound overlooking the beach, Maddy watches on as two yellow Zodiacs from the Surf Lifesaving Rescue squad comb the rolling surf. Nearby, Christen is leaning against a white police car. Both women look grim. The rescue boats, crew in fluorescent life jackets, crisscross the waves. Huge spotlights sweep over each cresting swell.