

## **Returning to Wyong by Karen Drummond**

Most mornings, Wyong wakes slowly. The fog lifts off the river like it is stretching after a long sleep, pelicans gliding past as if they have nowhere urgent to be. Locals know this quiet moment well. It is the pause before the town begins to stir.

Maggie loved that pause.

She grew up here, riding her bike along Alison Road, knees scuffed, hair messy, convinced Wyong was the centre of the world. Life pulled her away eventually, jobs, cities, the constant hum of somewhere else, but whenever things got too loud, she found herself back.

This morning, she sat on a worn bench near the river, coffee in hand, watching the trees across the water. They had been there for her childhood secrets, her first heartbreaks, the nights she felt like she might disappear. Wyong did not rush. It let you arrive in your own time.

She wandered into town, past the shopfronts that felt like old friends. The bakery smelled of bread and sugar, the butcher still asked about her mum, and the op shop held stories in every coat and teacup. Each place had its people, its history stacked gently like bricks.

At the station, she paused. Trains came and went, carrying people toward new beginnings or back to familiar arms. She had left from this platform once, heart pounding, sure she needed more. Now she knew more did not always mean somewhere else. Sometimes it meant deeper, closer, home.

Later, Maggie wandered through the Wyong Milk Factory, alive with chatter and creativity. Children ran ahead of parents, artists debated their work, couples lingered over coffee. Past and present met here, shaking hands and agreeing to get along.

As the sun dipped lower, she returned to the river. Families gathered, dogs tugged at leads, neighbours stopped to talk, really talk. Love here was not loud. It lived in nods, in shared sugar, in knowing which corner flooded first when it rained.

She sat on the bench again, watching the sky turn pink and gold. Wyong had shaped her, held her, waited for her return without judgement. Loving it was not about grand landmarks or perfect days. It was about the quiet constancy of people who waved, the places that welcomed you back, and a town that always felt like home.

And as the river darkened, Wyong did what it always did best. It held space for love, steady and sure, for anyone who belonged there, no matter how far they wandered.