

COPPER

Jerry de Gryse

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*It is as easy to dream a book  
as it is hard to write one.*

Honore de Balzac

# Foreword

THE romantic me could think I was drawn to unearth this 'loft rock', copper, by thoughts of K's copper-coloured wedding dress. The dress was a perfect choice for our perfect day: kunanyi/Mt Wellington and the Derwent River as a back drop, bright sun, surrounded by family and friends, loved ones all. K danced through the day with twists and turns of laughter, her dress catching the light. It was warm like the sun, striking in contrast to her blue eyes and pale skin, the latter rose rouged with sunburn as the day wore on.

It was the best of days, in a dress I picked out in the window of a shop in town, knowing instantly that it was right. That it would suit her in every way — non-traditional, cheeky, but stylish. A woman's dress, but young at heart — just the person I was marrying.

For once we agreed. As we walked along the foreshore that day, her with white roses in hand, we struck a perfect sartorial match chosen in

consultation with husband and wife, Migo and Samira. Kate, in her dress from Samira's shop, and I in my linen suit from Migo's men's boutique. Now, later in life we remain well matched, albeit she has maintained her sense of dress while I have descended into bushwalking and sporting clothes (neither of which have anything to do with copper).

Perhaps it was my rational brain imagining I could make a link and find some inspiration, a copper seam connecting home and place. In this imagining, I would have drawn on the fact that copper occurs in the state of my birth (Michigan) and here in my adopted state of Tasmania. Not that I knew anything about copper or its mining in either location but it would have seemed doable, that something of value would come of the exercise. Most likely it was a coiling of romantic and rational thoughts, copper wires inter-twining, that led me to accept this challenge.

Turns out, the challenge was easily assumed, achieving a worthwhile outcome, not so. Writing is hard. Not at all like the malleable element I've put my hand up to return from 'loftness'.

'Where do I begin to write a fictiōnella?' I asked J and M, quoting poetically from J. Alfred Prufrock's

lament, 'How do I begin to spit out all the butt-ends of my ways and days?'

J said, 'Write anything, just get it on paper and see what comes of it'. So, I have. M said, 'scour the net and read widely hoping for inspiration to get the creative writing energies flowing.' So, I did.

This is what I've come up with.

IF you are looking for a primer on the metal copper (Cu or #29 on the periodic table of elements) don't read any further. You won't find anything here about its mass, its boiling or melting point, its ionic radius, the measure of its electronegativity, its standard potential, the size of its electronic shell or its many isotopes nor of its numerous alloys. These concepts seem dry, lacking in imagination and difficult to grasp.

I am, nonetheless, intrigued by the onomatopoeia of such scientific concepts as 'Moh's hardness', the 'Poisson ratio' and the 'Vanderwaal's radius' of copper. I have no clue what these terms mean, nor the interest to understand them. It is the sound of the saying of the phrases that attracts me, much like the Latin names of some plants whose syllables roll off the tongue smooth and round (I know M to be particularly fond of saying *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* for instance).

My mind also wanders comically as I speak these terms. I ask, was 'hard Moh' on the Simpsons? Is the Poisson ratio a fish related measure? Is Vanderwall's radius the size of a hole that copper would plug should a Dutch dyke spring a leak?

I digress. Back to the topic.

SHOULD I write a factual account of copper? Sounds deadly boring. A fiction? I've never done that before. When I do write, it is usually fact, argumentative, building a case to support my concepts. As I write, I synthesise. I'm a synthesiser (I hear Christopher Pyne saying this in his 'I'm a fixer' voice). Synthesisers can be good with facts but often take things out of context, where the fact becomes fiction, the making up. Or is the twisting of facts not fiction but the 'fictionella' — the 'making-with'?

Perhaps.

Some months into writing (procrastinating?), I discover the study of copper for me is not altogether a story about home and place. Instead it has led to a deep thought, a novel idea and a few nostalgic stories. Together, the thought, the idea and the stories are the copper strands that twist together to make this fictionella whole and connect Michigan and Tasmania.

# A Deep Thought

*The capacity to leap across mountains of information, to land lightly on the wrong side represents the highest of human endowments.*

Lewis Thomas in  
*The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher*