Statement of Intention - "Mahogany"

"Mahogany" echoes into the future of Ana, the main character from "Whirlpool". The short story is set during the wake of her mother's funeral, whilst Ana is dealing with the grief of a miscarriage and attempting to justify the lack of sorrow she feels at her mother's passing. In "Like a House on Fire", Cate Kennedy often explores strained relationships that are strained and lack the harmony expected by society. Notably, this takes place in "Flexion", "Ashes" and "Whirlpool". This theme of strained relationships is depicted in "Mahogany" as Ana reflects upon her mother. Whilst she wants to remember her mother as kind and loving, she has to recognise that her mum "hated anything warm or bright", denoting the strained mother-daughter relationship. The piece utilises a second person narrative, as is used in "Whirlpool". The second narrative voice is a mature woman. The story incorporates mature language such as "arduous" and "insurmountable". The "Mahogany" also utilises complex, developed sentence structures and intermittent dialogue. The dialogue is often accompanied by
detailed description of how it is delivered. The piece is formatted into a fractured paragraph mimicking the style of "like a piece of paper". True to Kennedy's style, "Mahogany" begins in medias res, leaving the reader to piece together the prior circumstances that have led Ana to her current situation. "Mahogany" continues several motifs of "Woof/Whoo" throughout, including the shadow of the dad in the family photographs. However, within the piece the father's character development is highlighted as he steps into the sunlight portraying the freedom he has, now that the mother has passed. The title itself maintains Kennedy's use of symbolism as "Mahogany" represents the material of the mother's coffin denoting her harsh, penetrable nature. However, Mahogany comes from trees, often seen as a symbol of growth and nurture. This symbolises the character of the mother as she, being a matriarch, is expected to be kind, loving and nurturing, yet she is flawed. This symbol highlights the 'crux of Kennedy's writings', desires that juxtapose with reality.
"Maho gang"

Your sister Louise has one lamé curl hanging down against her back. The rest of her curls fell out hours ago, the ceremony long and arduous for those who hadn’t known your mother. For those that had the ceremony had been insurmountable.

You think back to that dark room, and how you stood there, unable to loosen your grip on the solid side-step mahogany side of the coffin.

You make eye contact with Louise as you move another curl hides from view. She has mascara that’s ill-placed, but she hasn’t cried.

"It was nice, wasn’t it? I think mum would have liked it." She speaks as though reading from a script, stepping closer to you and wrapping her arms around you. You wrap an arm around your belly, that ghost touch. Louise’s dress has a crease running horizontally across the navy fabric from sitting for so long in the church pews.
the words are lacking in you, surrounded by by the heat of the day and too many people in your childhood back yard. All wanting to talk about your mother, all wanting to share their grief.

"It was lovely, yeah. Would have happy." All you can only manage to hear, parrot back to your sister emptiness, words already said.

Louise moves closer yet again, wrapping a gentle arm around your waist. There's dark blue beneath her eyes. It reminds you of oceans that run too deep. As maybe it's just the mascara.

You think of your mum, of that smile, the one she used to stretch across her wide across her teeth, so saturated in sugar it hurt to look at." Great.

You can remember the last time you'd seen that smile, argued at you. You had waited three months to tell anybody waited until the danger period had passed.
for the life that was inside you. A
when you'd finally been able to tell
people you'd chosen her first. Good, patient,
subtle radiating.
You had expected eyes that glinted
with unshed tears, a happy, untethered
grin. Maybe questions about names.
genders. What you'd received was a
smile, laced with sugar and bitter
underneath.
Would she smile that same smile,
where she lay in that coffin? If she
knew? If she knew the lack of life
within you now?

Louise is shifting you, squeezing at the
soft fabric on your waist until you
move with her. Making your way
over to your father, where he is
stood in the shade of the gum tree.

He has creases across at the edges of
his eyes. His suit hangs skewed, an
unnatural garment draped across his
shoulders. When he sees Louise and
you making your way across to
He's strains his face into a smile.

"Amy, you look lovely, darling. He says, stepping towards you. The sunlight falls over him as he steps away from the trees' shadow. And something about him looks just a little too bright. "Glowing.""

You attempt, and succeed, at not flinching. Instead, you dodge the allusion to the baby talk that should be growing within you. Instead, you lean forward, embracing your father. You'll tell them, eventually.

Once everyone stops looking so sad.

Once they all stop acting like losing your mother was even truly a loss. Good voice going inside your character's intimate thoughts.

"Yes. 'Your mother would have liked it, don't you think? A lovely day for it too. Your mother always loved the summer. Maybe your father's just filling space with words. Or maybe he really believes it."
You think back to that church. The
stained glass windows shimmering
with the heat. How oppressive it had
felt. Images of your mother inside on
these same summer days, years ago. Iced
coffee in hand, the tennis on. The fan
whirring. No she didn’t. She hated anything warm or
bright or out of her control.* You want to say
* it to him, to remind him of who
you’ve truly lost. A mother who didn’t love.

But the touch of Louise is against your elbow,
steadying. A warning. “Mum would have liked
it.” Louise assents. It’s mundane, but in your
father straightens his back at it, just slightly.

It’s there in Louise’s tone. That shared understanding
that your mother was not the person your dad
is grieving. Perhaps he’s grieving for something
else, and using her death as a cover, just
like you. Or does he truly grieve for her?
For years of marriage that he responds to, through
rose-tinted memories? Beautiful.

The pangs of grief resonate, deep in your core.
The feeling comes back to you, the smooth,
*exaggerated* all capitals are used as Kate Kennedy uses italics
unforgiving surface of mahogany as you ran your hand over it, as the sun beat down on you through coloured glass. You were unable to shift that coffin, unable to make it bend or leave or make room for your unborn child to be held within it.

For a moment, the memory of the sunlight in the church becomes interchangeable with the fluorescent lights of the hospital on the day you’d found out. On that day you’d been told that sorry, your child was unsupposed in the womb, and has died. You remember how Tony had led you down those bleak halls, seemingly unshaken. Maybe you were the only one in the world who would grieve for that baby.

The grief weaves together, for a moment. Yearnings for what could have been, the family you could have had, until you are unable to distinguish death from miscarriage, mother from child.

A nudge from Louise has you blinking away those fluorescent lights and coming back to the family stood in front of you.

"We’ll all miss her." You say, just to make
the conversation stops feeling so stale. You force a smile to accompany the lie and in that moment you realize how your mother did it. Those sweet and sour smiles. She used to stretch her lips, baring her teeth, and force her eyes down. You can do it too, you find. Your father drops his gaze from you.

Strong imagery.

"Let's go offer round more sandwiches, just to keep the guests happy." Your father gestures around the back yard, where you've forgotten there are people clad in black, sweating in the heat. Before your father can leave, Louise steps closer to him, until they have both fallen back into the shade of the gum tree.

"Do you think you could take a photo of Anna and I first, please? Just quickly." Louise asks sweetly, like a thirteen year-old again, and your father nods.

Louise steps towards you, eyes squinting slightly into the sun. She holds out an arm and you slip under it, till you're standing side by side. "Smile," Louise says to you softly.

In front of you, your deaf father holds up his
phone. It's tilted on one angle, just a little bit, and his hand shakes slightly.

You stand with your sister, blinking into the sun as you hear the click of a shutter, and the flash flickers in front of your eyes. You smile. You know, somehow, that Louise is smiling too.

Months later, when the photograph is printed out and a copy of it placed above your kitchen bench, there you both are, standing together. In the corner of the print, you can see the grainy lines of your father's shadow, stretched across the grass. You stand in the center, one arm round Louise. Your other arm wraps across the blue material of your dress, spanning over your stomach. Louise's dress is creased.