

Into the sun

Ian C Smith

A couple arrived early, kicked sand, posturing through courtship's universal game. The boy, thirteen, spied, shade his screen, tasting the scald of his breath. He had again fled the savagery of his war-damaged immigrant family, sleeping, lightly clad, shivering through the night in the storage space under a beach hut after hitchhiking there. Behind the hut sandy trails meandered through straggly tea trees where flies attended dead condoms. Beyond that slouched a town with employment problems, businesses mainly catering for summer visitors. Emerging into wan light, impatient, the boy welcomed morning's fresh slant on affairs. The woman facing his way undid her top like a conjuror's revelation, her breasts bouncing for the occasion. The man, that lucky sod, kissed the curve of her, the boy, statuesque under the hut's eaves, fearing being seen, her laughter and spent waves the only sounds so early. This would resemble a camera shot much later in memory's treasury.

That afternoon young men shouted to be noticed by a red bikini languid under a blue umbrella. A dog barked lunging at a beach ball bobbing on a silver-topped wavelet rushing into the hot embrace of yellow sand. Far out, painted on the convergence of blues, a white yacht navigated towards the estuary's expanse promising adventure in the wider world. The sun posed, golden on the sky's stage while the boy tried to imagine being loved. By anybody. He invented dialogue with himself cool and heroic like a starring actor, or a sports champion, or something equally far-fetched, a writer. All this to swelling orchestral music. A psychologist, his partner years later, said he was like the sorry Vietnam vets she counselled. He disagreed with her view that he carted anger around like a deadweight burden. The young men's shouts became airwave ghosts, froth gummed the tideline, the yacht became a dot, then disappeared, and the retiring sun flung out pink streaks as it sank. Waves the boy shunned all day, indefatigably designed, ignored this finality.

Without food or much money, possibly influenced by cinematic make-believe, the hungry boy decided to stalk gathered gulls, hurling a fusillade of weighty rocks their way then cooking and eating an unlucky one. He kept matches with his tobacco. Those gulls avoided his half-arsed potshots to skim the estuary's mud cracks like today's skateboarders, feathers ruffling in the sandsplit wind. These, and the shore littered with the emptiness of departure, are among what the sunburnt boy, grizzled now, recalls of that location known for its high crime rate. And, of course, shining in memory, his silent surveillance. And how he considered vanishing like a magic trick, but forever, so his people should be sorry, the flux of that possibility. Sunlight slanting through his French windows, he relives witnessed moments from one hazy day imagining a kind of happiness, the elusive ache of things.

Author Bio:

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, *So Fi Zine*, *Text: A Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, & *Westerly*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.