

BY THE BAY

Making her way through the spinifex and dune thistles, she sat down on the little park bench overlooking the bay. Never did she tire of this view, the deep violet hues of the water on days like this one, now more frequent as winter had passed. The colours of summer were mostly turquoise and sparkling silver, while the colder months reflected deep navy blues spilling into grey. It was ever changing, unpredictable; a dangerous beauty. No single day was the same. She could understand an artist's need to sketch the sea, the poet's need to depict it's nature, a photographer's need to capture such a unique moment in time. Perhaps her appreciation of its beauty is what brought her here every day, perhaps the sea reminded her of her own tumultuous emotions.

Gone was the winter of constant navy and grey stormy seas, the waters treacherous and effervesce, violent waves crashing against the shore, threatening to pull her out with them. On days such as those the roar of the sea and the bellowing waves drowned out all else, making it difficult to think, difficult to draw together any coherent thought. Warmth and sunshine seemed both a distant memory, and a distant future.

The violet hues of the changing ocean were magnificent. The waves were short and rough, shifting continuously. The sea breeze was gentle, holding little sting and pleasant against the skin. She was coming to enjoy these days more and more. The water held so much depth on days like today, the darker hues hiding what lay beneath. She felt as though the sea would swallow up all her sadness, washing it out with the tide, only to bring it back when the tide returned. Some days she could hear cries of anguish rolling on the waves as they crashed against the shore. She wondered whether they were her own.

She heard movement behind her. No need to turn around, she was now so familiar with this daily ritual. The old man sat down beside her leaving the seat between them. They always left the seat empty, a reminder of a place within their hearts that would never again be filled. They spoke few words to each other, words were not adequate. Their eyes met, his blue eyes creasing at the

corners as he smiled at her. She smiled in return. His eyes held sorrow behind the smile, an expression she understood.

In silence they sat staring at the water, until at last the sun began to set, a golden cast outlining the horizon. This was her favourite part of the day. The last spectacular burst of sunlight, before darkness ensued. It was daylight's promise that it would return again tomorrow. As the rays of light disappeared, with a knowing smile she and the old man parted ways. Until next time.

The weather was changing yet again. Subtle at first, the violet waters began changing to turquoise, the sun's rays scattering sparkling silver sequins across the water. Sounds of laughter could be heard as children splashed and played at the waters edge; building sand castles and exploring rock pools. Watchful mothers sat close by with their newest offspring cradled in their arms.

The warmth of the sun brought with it new life. Dolphins surfed the waves, pups in tow. Young seabirds squawked to have their empty bellies filled. The turquoise and silver sea was filled with new life, a reason to smile, a reason for joy.

Splashes of colour were scattered across the water; snorkels bobbing along the surface. Occasional squeals of delight could be heard as rare and beautiful fish were spotted fleeing their hiding place. She laughed, a sound she had not heard in a long time. It sounded and felt foreign - it felt warm, like the sun.

She heard the sound of a walking stick on the pavement behind her. She smiled as the old man sat down, again leaving a seat between them. They watched as the pelicans, gulls and darters fought over the best positions to spot fish on the rocky outcrop that sheltered the bay.

"Sometimes I miss the grey stormy days" the old man lamented , his voice deep and gravelly.

They had broken their verbal silence.

"Yes" she admitted after a time, "me too". This was the most they had ever conversed with words. They fell back into contemplative silence before he spoke again. " I felt as though I could see glimpses of her in those dark, gloomy waters, her beautiful pearly smile taunting me from the foamy spray". She smiled over at him, nodding in understanding. His weathered blue eyes glistened, " sometimes" he added, "i miss the violet seas too. I could hear her calling to me in the rumble of those crashing waves. I miss that".

Yes, she understood. The turquoise water seemed too full of life to reflect what was lost, too glorious to hold sorrow. They laughed together as squeals of excitement and horror sounded over the passing of a lazy mantle ray, looking for a free meal as fishermen threw nets from the jetty.

"I sympathize with the fish on days like these" she professed, pointing towards the snorkels, seeing arms and flippers splashing wildly as more fish were spotted. "to be forced from your hiding place, a place of safety, only to be left feeling vulnerable and exposed". The old man smiled at her, drumming his fingers along the top of his walking stick. "Yes" he paused for a long moment, "Even a fish's most basic instinct is the need to feel safe". He scratched his chin, "but if they never left their place of safety, they would never find food. Eventually they would wither and die". He looked across at her, his kind eyes searching hers. She smiled a sigh, looking back towards the sparkling water.

"You know" she said, "i think they are here with us in the summer seas as well, we just need the time to find them". The old man looked at her with eyebrows raised, knowing the 'they' to whom she referred. "I am almost certain I can see his mischievous eyes in that sparkling water. I can hear his laughter echoed in my own and that of those excited children". In response more squeals of excitement could be heard as dolphins were spotted. She and the old man laughed together.

The snorkels and flippers began retreating to the shore as the sun crept closer towards the horizon. As sunset neared, the bay began to clear. Only the fishermen remained, and two people sitting on a park bench by the bay, the seat between them left empty.

Rays of sunlight lit the horizon, a blazing ring of gold skirting the water. These golden horizons were frequent at the bay, a beautiful ending to the day, whatever the colour.

"Until next time?" The old man asked.

"Until next time" she replied.