

The sign says no removing pipis from the beach, so we eat them there in the sand. Bubbles marked the spot, we dug in with just our hands, desperate to beat the returning wave. We formed a small pit for the fire, protected by a wall of wet sand formed like clay, further up the beach where the bush breaks. A man stood in the shadows of the beach grass and masturbated towards us. We've seen him there before, lurking, and on the street too, walking upright and confident. You'd be none the wiser. We yelled and screamed, mouths crusted with dried salt, every insult we could think up. Any phrase our parents would disapprove of, we hollered at him. His arm just moved faster. We were too young to know the double meaning of finishing, but he was done just as I lobbed one final 'freak!' at him.

He walked towards us. Fear seized, empty pipis shells in hand a paper thin weapon. He turned right and walked off up the beach, a whistle lost in the breeze carried in his step.

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The moment is so mundane that without being shared, it falls away, an anecdote one day maybe but more likely never visited again.

Now that we don't talk anymore, it has started to fade.

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We didn't leave the beach immediately, didn't speak about him at all. We just shrugged, stoked the small flames until we'd finished our feast. The sun was down and the night was warm enough to not have to run home for a jumper before we headed off on the long walk to our favourite spot. Past the estuary where the ocean met the river mouth, past the caravan park with its smell of charring meats and the lightest touch of urine or sewerage, depending on how recently the council had been to empty out the waste.

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Memory alters with each mentioning, brought to life, changed and returned to where it was dug up, like our lunch. Without sharing, it keeps its purity but serves no purpose.

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We sung as we walked, the sand cooling on under our bare feet. It had been a goal of ours over the summer to toughen our feet up, to do away with what we felt was expected of us. Smooth skin, daint and grace. We'd done away with shoes, walked on the boiling tarmac instead of on the grassy makeshift sidewalks. The trade off was worth it, the burning preferable to the plentiful bindis.

We changed our gait as we walked, speeding up in excitement, jumping from wet sand to dry in an attempt, I think now, to slow down the moment at the same time. Savour something. We passed the last street of the town and trailed the river as it entered bush, the shade descending quickly. We never took a torch and always ate our carrots.

I want her dimples. I have my own, deep creases under my eyes that pock inwards when my mouth moves, but I want the smiling slits in her cheeks. When I tell her, she says she's never

thought of them before, fingers pressed against her face as though to keep them from appearing again.

The rainwater drain was the last man made landmark and the most important. We scurried up and on the other side, a blanket of dark. The sand disappeared. We looked to each other, counting down, and then jumped.

The sound is one you can't describe, the softest scrabbling, every piece of sand rolling over the other echoing through the silent night. The wave of crabs start to run, rippling from where our feet land, stark white left in their wake. They're tiny, you could hold almost ten in one palm. We run with them, pushing them to go faster and faster as we yelp and laugh and sprint. She turns cartwheels, confusing the crabs' ordered chaos. And then we change direction, running into the tide.

The first night we saw it we were sure we hadn't. Just the reflection of the moon, a trick of the light. Now we know. You have to move, shake, throw your whole body face first into the welcoming cold. In repayment, light. Bright blue, the colour of electricity. Pause, breathe, don't move a muscle. And again, one of us dives, the other experiences. Her turn first. The phosphorescence coats her momentarily as she rises from the water, her cheeks ballooned because she's bad at holding her breath properly.

I go. It's warm enough if you stay just below the surface. Further down you start to freeze. I swim down anyway. Goosebumps rise and I can hear her calling, first in excitement then it worry. It's nice, that you can just know that no matter the words. Come up, she yells, excitement blurring with fear. I want to reach the bottom, push up off sandbank. My chest starts to tighten. I open my eyes and even in the depths there's the light, like hundreds of angler fish showing the way. I could be swimming right into the mouth of one. I give a final kick, reach my hand out into the ocean's depths.

She could be crying when I return to the surface, but I'm not sure. She's further away than I expected, or I'm further out. You psycho, she yelled, and in the same way her words were both laughing and scared before, these are angry and happy in equal measure.

I swam to her slowly, my breath still uneven, the sudden influx of oxygen actually hurting slightly. The way you can't eat too much when you're hungry.

Sorry, I said. Being above the water, out of the darkness, has made the night almost bright. I can see her slight rolling eyes, relief quelling any frustration. She splashed me, said don't do that again. And then we raced to the shore, a race I still won despite my exhaustion. That's part of why she was so afraid, I think. She grew up here, but she's never been a strong swimmer.

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Going back to stay in the town during season was never an option, so I went once for a day trip. A bus, a train, another long bus and then a walk down a steep decline, where cars pass too closely. At the end, the largely cleared park, a newly erected playground in its centre covered in kids. The town strip was still pared back, the same old businesses had beaten the pressure to expand and flourished just as they were. The pub and the fish and chip shop attached to the convenience store.

The only signs of encroaching city folk were in the houses on the hills, large white and grey slab work that looked down over the place.

I walked through the town first, following its small grid, doubling back on myself to make sure I didn't miss anything. I might have gone to her street first, if it wasn't on the bush edge. When I get to her home, there's a different car in the driveway, children's toys on the lawn.

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We pulled ourselves out of the water, feeling our weight return as we left its sweet buoyancy and lay down in the sand. There were a few crabs still, you can hear them pushing through the sand, slow pokes.

The glow was gone but I felt it still. She pointed up at the sky, starts cloud spotting, a difficult activity in the nighttime. I count the stars instead. Much easier.

Slater beetle, she said. Eighty six, I said.

Person with a lasso, she said. Ninety two, I said.

She kissed me, I think. Awkward, rolling onto her elbow, moving in jolts to beat her better thinking to the punch. Or maybe I did that, the feeling of individual grains of sand pressing red into my elbow as I moved my weight.

We kissed, either way. It tasted, of course, like salt. Salt and the icy pole she'd eaten earlier, a rainbow of colours with no real flavour but sweetness.

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It is my first kiss. It is not hers, but she always refused to tell me about it. Someone unnamed, somewhere unknown. An experience she talked up at first as a point of pride, proof of maturity. Slowly, something she avoided, pushed to the side of conversations.

I wonder if she retells this story to others as a replacement.

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It wasn't immediate. The shock came later, retelling the story to a friend at home. Where was she now? They asked. I did not know.

The rest of that summer had been normal, though the night had gone unmentioned. There was no meanness involved, no shame. Just an unforgotten moment, perfectly preserved.