

Home

Tessa Lunney

At Avalon, the cockatoos screech yellow
white streaks through the valley. I escape
to where the jade swell pushes the sand

to the horizon. But the local surfers,
with the five-star Southern Cross tattooed
across their back, tumble down the dunes

like a bigoted bombora, so I move on.
Up the coast are the seven-mile beaches,
ripe sliced melons bitten by the Pacific.

Only dolphins share the waves with me,
and each foam footprint is an imprint
of my childhood. I used to watch my naked

cousin almost drift off to New Zealand.
When she floated in to shore, we headed
back to Bellingen for trays of manoges.

Those were the days before I was trapped
by the city, and the incipient chill (did I swim
for too long?) now moves me on.

Wide skies over near deserted Broken Hill
blaze in a sunset symphony. Long-mined
dust still lingers in streaks of oxide black.

Mutawintje desert has only two modes,
and forces a decision – am I blue sky,
or orange sand? Blue skies can cloud

and change, but the earth remains.
My hands throb with heat; picking up
a schooner in the Silverton pub is painful.

I see no signs of the people Mutawintje
was named for, just a kangaroo skeleton
bleached like my vision. I choose blue,

and move on.

Maralinga shows no trace of any British
grandfather, who commanded his RAF men

to do their duty. His was the voice of 1957
when he said, "I suppose there were boongs
living there, but we never worried about them."

The sky has cleared now, but the Nullarbor
has lost even its geckos and frog spawn.
I breathe through my scarf, and move on.

The Coorong beckons, its salty seam calls
pelicans to brave the dying shallows. I see
only six people all day; no one criss-crosses

the yellow fields, and no boat glides over
the sheet steel water. I had chosen blue
in Mutawintje and was rewarded – the sky

embraces me all the way south. At night,
camping on the dunes at Beachport, the stars
blink; then swoop down to pluck at my hair,

pinch my skin, stroke my spine, and crush
my hips to the sand. At dawn, shivering sweat
and shaking, I stumble away from the campsite,

and move on.

My cousin lives in Melbourne, shaking
cocktails and concocting space-defined sculptures.

I wander through the jungle of retro diners
and tram stops, second-hand bookshops
that smell like the libraries I escaped to

when I was nine. Maybe if my grandma had
grown up here, instead of Parramatta, she might
have avoided the full force of the Depression

and World War Two. Her life was never saved
by washing machines or television or tailor-made
cigarettes; only by the friendship of Dicko,

my other grandma. But they only found peace
in the gardens of Arcadia and Leura, I realise,
and I move on.

Dicko grew up in Bombala, just south of Bega.
There was no work there then and there is no work
there now; though my Dad travels down every year

to catch and collar antechinus in Nadgee.
He four-wheel-drives past the sun-bleached
locals, through the Nadgee river, and deep

into the rainforest. I went trapping with him
when I was eight, the cold crept into Hope's
Hovel as I shivered in my sleeping bag.

The campfire was always lit, but the grey rustles
in the canopy were more exciting, as I padded down
to the beach. Dad made me throw back all the shell

skeletons I had collected from the national park,
but he bought me chocolate milkshakes on the way
home. But chocolate milkshakes don't taste the same

after a decade of coffee; I move on.
Flying foxes hang in a Balmain fig. Their chatter
reaches a crescendo, before they flap and squeak

to the sandstone figs of Darlington. I follow
them, moving inner westward like my parents
after they split. Newtown flashes alternatively

pink and black, red and Krishna, but I move
towards the leopard-print sky over the Marrickville
factories. There are brawls outside the Cathedral,

whose neon-blue cross barely illuminates
the stained footpath in front of the noodle houses.
My lover waits for me with Pho and ambrosia,

in our flat above a shop. This restless wandering
hasn't brought me home. It is home. My journey
from city to beach to desert to forest to city was

built by my family; by that Irish Lunney in 1830,
who fled the coming potato famine for the chance
to grow his own story; by that Lincolnshire lad

in 1900, a seventh son of a seventh son, who refused
to live a small life on a small farm on a small island;
by my mother in 1974 with a suitcase full of books,

and an anguished need to flee from the Oxbridge
pressures of her adolescence. They beat a trail
across the continent until they found they were home,

that their home was in the journey; and they kept
that same trail clear for me until I was ready.