

I Don't Remember it Raining

Salt Air. Smooth, pale colour, like a cast on a broken limb. 20 cents each, for the treat, and for perhaps the pleasure of throwing something plastic into the sea. The old woman hands me one with a smile, apparently friends with my mum. Once we leave she will call her "chalkie" with derision. They are both white, but only one was born here. The treat is shaped like a disc, perhaps it tastes like bread or styrofoam, but I don't know about tea sets or aliens yet, so its significance is unknown to me. We leave. I bite. It feels like styrofoam that gives way to hypersour dust. The seasalt air and the rotten wood of the jetty provide a distinctly acrid terroir. I spit the dough onto the ground.

Hot December day. Plenty of light. Cream coloured tiles. Must be our second rental. My sister and I are unsupervised. We have found cubes, white like snow but rough, porous, soft, like a meringue that would kill you if you ate it. I must have a sister now, the first or the second? We tear them up. They separate easily into small ovular structures, and they fall, dusting the kitchen tiles. It is as if we are helping the styrofoam release its seeds in much the same way a child blows off the seeds of a dandelion. My sister (the first or the second?) and I toss the styrofoam up with glee. We say to ourselves it is like snow.

My mother and father are rushing about the house, bigger this time. The first rental? Towels, blankets, whatever, are stuffed at the foot of every door in the house. I sit on the floor and watch, dumbfounded, at the scenery outside the glass sliding door. Noon, cloudless desert summer. Cloudless but I can't see anything. The world has turned thick with ochre. The air itself roars. I do not know how I felt about the world disappearing.

A small van. An eight hour drive. My sisters and I are contained from each other in child car seats in the back, weary and annoyed and sore from a day of travel. In the twilight, on the very edge of Tarntanya (Adelaide), we pull into my paternal grandmother's driveway. All the thick olive green, all the flora so absent in my hometown, probably would have dazzled me if it weren't dark. My grandmother and aunt greet us. I know my nanna must have been fatter, my aunt much younger, but they appear there as they are now. I sleep on the floor of my nanna's lounge room. My mum asks if I want to sleep at my maternal grandmother's instead. I say yes. We, together, drive down the hill northward only witnessed by the streetlights. I asked her about this 18 years later and we both agreed that couldn't possibly have happened.

Salt air again. A strange work of art, it is not tall but I am very short. It stands proud among the plastic simulacra of joy. Some of the sculptures' technicolour has faded, having provided years of dutiful service to the town and its children. The art is a pole, metal; affixed to its top is a plastic basket that gapes open into the cloudless sky. Four sides and four holes. Each is inscribed with numbers I don't know yet. This artwork is standard issue throughout

Australia. I saw them many times in many places. Every time I saw one I always faintly wondered what it was for, apparently not being smart enough to piece it together or to generate the desire for a ball or other projectile. I haven't seen one of these works of art in maybe a decade.

Black littoral zone. Children that are giants engulfed in the scent of rot whipped up on the salt wind. Bathed in a blanket of crashing waves. The children, all about 10 years, are my mothers flock. To me they are unfathomably wise. I felt guarded by them, and they often did on my mum's behalf. A town of a thousand has less rules because there are less worries. I crouch down, touch the ground, and crush it. The blackgreen earth is dry and brittle, and gives way effortlessly, capitulating beneath my tiny powerful hands. The children and I make a snowman out of the seaweed.

Empty. Sterile. Plaster walls. The walls of the classroom couldn't possibly have been bare, my mum wouldn't have allowed it. She is near the blackboard. Were they still using blackboards at this time? She might be pregnant. The second or the third? I ask a girl what she's writing, distracting her from her schoolwork. She tells me but I cannot hear her dialogue. I do the same for many other children.

I'm a little older now; it's nearly time to leave. Great towers like oversized roman pillars. My father and I stand beneath them. I look up at their gargantuan blades, spinning, spinning, glacially spinning in the cloudless sky. I look down at the size of the tower's base, then back up, trying and failing to comprehend their scale. They put a sublime dread in my stomach, the kind that I crave. What scares me more are they ones that are still. I think hazily that they're dead. I'd like to go back there, but not enough to actually do it.

Hyperwhite. Quiet. Large open kitchen. A rich farmer family with a rich farmer house. A cubic TV, mounted on the wall. It has Disney, a great joy we didn't have at mine. The mother turns off the TV, one of my many baby sitters. She is tall and thin. No face, name lost, but she is fondly remembered. She had a son my age, whose name I surely knew at the time. She takes us both outside. She shows us her cows, a single horse, and a stack of hay. I look over her crop, indistinct but copper gold in colour, possibly stretching off into the horizon. I'm told I enjoyed riding in their tractor.

A curtsy and a scream. Told to try again and again, I don't understand. In a large dim open shed, the summer light casts a beam onto the concrete floor. The light halos a fierce old woman as if she is in this moment being beatified. I look down upon her. Again. Her entourage, younger women, think this is funny. She is humourless. They are here to crudely teach us to crudely dance. I am the only thing resembling a boy here, there was nothing else for a child to do in a town of a thousand. So, I only knew how to curtsy. I learned through imitation. I never learned any other way.

I learned once, on a date, 20 years later, that Cowell has a fresh meteorite strike, and for that it is well known among geology enthusiasts and no one else. There was not a second date.