

FULL GREY SKY

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They say that the house stinks - but I don't notice it. I live - lonely; the same clothes freshened in the dryer weekly. I don't like it too bright, so the blinds stay closed. Not that it matters. In Karori it is always overcast. Grey skies rule here.

An endless stream of phonies come. The parents; the mental health navigators; the cleaner: they pretend - but I know no one cares. No friends come. No one without an obligation to be here. Hopeless nihilism or pessimism they say. I think it might be the walls: damp; paint starting to peel. They get closer every day. I don't see beauty. Definitely not in this house anyway.

Today, however, is different. No one has appeared on my doorstep, and there is light filtering through my curtains. Light that could only come from a blue sky. I've kept my bike. It hibernates outside the back door, waiting to be sun-kissed one final time. The gears, once shiny, are now dull and smattered with rust. It squeals as I mount it, and I destroy a spider metropolis when I begin to pedal.

When I look up the sky is clear and pure blue. The kind of blue that makes me feel joyous, but sick with nostalgia. When I look down, I'm back cruising the streets of Turramurra. The sun of many years ago soaks me with swimming waves of warmth. Warmth that extends into the shade of the eucalyptus lined streets my friends escort me down. Our pockets jingle with coins collected around the house. They're ready to be counted out in exchange for chips and lollies, or perhaps a slushy at the bakery next door. Once collected; bounty in one hand and steering precariously with the other, we round endless corners, an ever-increasing sugar high propelling us until we crash, drop the bikes, and throw ourselves into the grass. From the corner of my eye, I can see grey on the horizon, closing in. My friends don't ride with me anymore. I roll over to get up - but there's a hand already eager to lift me. I take it and I'm standing, sky restored to perfect blue, in the slips holding a cricket ball. I'm donned in grass-stained, rip-kneed whites. The team is crowding around me. I've taken the catch to end the innings. We tip the bails and run eager to bat.

Parents from both sides have claimed the clubhouse. We see our mothers fraternising with the enemy, and our fathers more appropriately sharing beers in small groups. We all crowd into the only remaining shade on the field under two wattle trees. We feast on the watermelon and orange slices that magically appear every week, and our openers get sent in. Aeons seem to slide away, laying mesmerised by blue sky, as we wait to bat - but finally

it's time for me to pad up. I tighten strap after strap with care and pride. Lining up every piece of Velcro perfectly. As I fiddle with one last buckle stormy clouds rapidly close in. They encircle the sky, blacking it out from all angles. Chaotic and gleeful pitch hunting all light, "NO ONE CARES!" they scream at me, but before they can pull me out the buckle finally goes - around my chest...? I dare to look around. Bag strapped on back; wattle and eucalyptus, silhouetted on blue, surround us. The colours feel more vibrant than ever before. Dry red dirt; dust settling on white shoes. We're on a bush walk. Thin leaves, on a spectrum of pale green to burnt amber, cover everything. I'm standing on a rock and below me are endless treetops springing off sharp hills. They swell into ridges that follow hard angles, appearing like waves on a rough sea but in the colours of the Australian bush.

We've taken a break. A few families are here, friends of ours. We're sitting, the rock dusty and hot beneath us, vulnerable to the full power of the sun. My dad, from his pack, pulls scroggin portioned in snaplock bags, bright plastic cups, and a thermos full of what can only be hot cocoa. It's too hot for cocoa; the tantalising thought of an ice block pains me. Sunscreen appears from my mum's pack. It's transferred to my back, my arms. I do my face. I close my eyes, but as I do so I feel the sun go behind a cloud. I feel the chill as I rub it into my nose and cheeks. The air has become cold and moist around me. Whisperings from the clouds: "No one cares". All of a sudden, I feel warmth on my eyelids. Opening them I see there are no clouds in sight; my dad is handing me the ice block. With protection from the sun I'm ready to swim. Calipso in hand I walk towards the water. Giant fig trees, planted on the grass but hanging all the way to the shore, follow me. The branches cast long thick shadows on the sand. When I look down, I can see that the speckles of blue sky threading through the leaves are reflected in a crowd of misshapen brilliances on the ground.

The water is beaming at me. I bound sporadically; briefly stamping out light after light; feet leaving little divots leading towards the water. A final sprint, a few more steps and I dive. For a dazzling second, I fly through the sunshine.

My arms should break the water - but they don't; I'm flying down through shade.

Memories can never be taken away, but there are seldom chances to create new ones; cash-grab sequels at best. Reliving them a final time I could not be more content. Maybe people don't care - maybe they do - regardless; I've escaped.

I twist up and see a full grey sky: overcast in all its glory - but, bike propped on bridge, I'm falling away from it.