

Undertow

by Rosie McCrossin

Drawn away from the soft-crested waves
Which haunt these boys in sleep, incessant,
Longboards clatter in footpath cracks,
Along dirty-white boulevards
Of endless pun-named takeaways,
Haunted and owned by cloudy-eyed immigrants.
While their younger siblings frolic in cool and safe shallows,
Urban sweat infects the skin of their necks
And they are burnt and burnt again by their enemy sun of escape.
And feel the frozen Coke shimmer,
Cold and sugar-water sweet in their throats.
Running between the boys' legs,
Watch it melt and run like biblical floods,
Crushing and absorbing the warm bodies of the green-black ants.
Watch the insects struggle, fall defeated into the thick ice floe.
The undertow towards the blunt grey gutter which these boys must feel as well,
As years of school deliver their failings printed neatly
On a five-letter scale of inadequacies mailed directly home.
And the promises of improvement dribble, intoxicating, from tired lips.
But now it is in the summer holiday.
Bare feet on scorching pavement.
The girls they kiss here have chapped lips and skin which peels at their tailbones.
The beach is a place to show pain-forged shadows of muscle.
At home they are boys in uniforms pressed by motherhood's iron but here
Here they are hidden in the shadows of the salt-swept monsterias.
Here they are free in a world of adult sensations and it sets them alight
And they are *on fire*.
The nights lit in orange red blue bonfire flames on the yellow beach
Blind ghost crabs shimmer across the sand
Lying back on the sand with eyes closed to weightlessness
Kissing with warm breath and hand and body
Waking up with eyes red like the morning sun and residual smile fading
Nights fade into mornings into days and into nights again.
Finally the joy of simply being alive
Defeats the endless failure.

But surely they must feel something when
The rip under the harsh blue-cream waves,
Drags them, close-eyed, far, far away from shore,
When the blind pull feels too familiar not to hurt.
When far away from the melting bitumen,
There is only them,
And their burning futures.