



Magnetic Island Nature Care Association Inc.

ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING COMPETITION

2024

All entries

Environmental themes relevant to Magnetic Island in essay,
prose, poetry or hybrid (max 1500 words).

Thank you to all who participated. It is a great honour to read reflections on Magnetic Island's environment!

Gratitude to MINCA for all the work they've done over the years, and for supporting this literary project! Thank you to John Ryan's exceptional support with this endeavour!

I've had the honor to judge the Junior's category for competition. The prize was awarded to "Listening," by Mia Rodemark, which is a lovely, lyrical expository and philosophic meditation on the island.

Maureen Alsop

Competition Organiser and judge of Junior entries.

Judge's Comments

Although the task of selecting and ranking creative writing submissions is never an easy one, it was a pleasure to take part, as a judge, in the inaugural MINCA Environmental Writing Competition. In reading the poetry, fiction, non-fiction, plays, and hybrid pieces submitted to the competition, I looked for works that evoke the ecological and cultural uniqueness of Magnetic Island. Within vast webs of experience, particular moments of encounter emerge in these pieces. Interactions between the Island's inhabitants—human and otherwise—create a distinctive sense of place, a local character, a *genius loci*.

First Place goes to “Myrtle” by Christine Johnson, a beautifully written and poignant first-person account of Magnetic Island that crosses seamlessly between environment, family, and memory. Of note is the essay's use of the senses of smell and touch to convey the Island's place-character. Christine brings a personal memory of loss into dialogue with the ecological and the botanical. I was struck, for instance, by the double meaning of the term “Terminal” (referring to both a place of arrival and the nature of human mortality). A love of the Island's flora, especially its long-lived myrtle trees, connects generations of people across time and space.

In Second Place is “EOFY” by George Hirst, a lively work of short fiction dealing with the ethical dilemmas of wildlife conservation and the complexities of dwelling with other creatures in a place. The piece is distinguished by its command of satire, irony, and dialogue including the language of local residents. The “grey blur” of a wallaby interrupts the commute of the main character, an accountant rushing to his office because it's “End of Financial Year.” Despite the conservation stickers adorning his car, he speeds off but remains haunted by the repercussions of his choice, some of which surface in conversation with his 12-year-old daughter about wildlife caring.

In Third Place is Liz Downes' “Blue Tigers,” a poem full of lucid images of this stunning butterfly species, “like marionettes on chocolate wings / spattered with blue sky-paint.” Liz's poem captures the sensuousness of contact with more-than-human life as the butterfly ‘transferred each thin black foot / from twig to finger’. Through clear, simple yet engrossing language and images, the poem transports the reader to that transformative moment of encounter that lingers in memory.

In the Highly Commended category, we have ‘Kookaburras Sit in an Old Gum Tree’ by Karen Conrad, a clever one-act play structured around a morning dialogue between two kookaburra brothers, Omni and Presci (short for Omniscient and Prescient). The play animates its avian characters as they ruminate on the ecological issues impacting Magnetic Island from their high perch. Through a blend of humour and seriousness, the kookaburras’ exchange raises questions about the pitfalls of the tourist economy as pollution and other environmental urgencies grip the Island.

In the Commended category, we have ‘A Moment on Magnetic Island’ by Daniella Conser, a first-person account of the sights, sounds, and sensations of the Island, accompanied by a video narrative. What distinguishes Daniella’s work is its reflection on the Indigenous cultures of Magnetic Island. Crossing between personal essay and video diary, the work issues a compelling call for the conservation of Magnetic Island’s unique habitats, histories, and heritages.

Commended, as well, is ‘True North’ by Nathan King, a non-fiction piece marked by a richness of language that echoes the richness of the Island’s ecologies. Nathan evokes the profound connectivities between animals, plants, and elements through well-crafted images: ‘From beneath the waves, silvered angels in their shoals revel in their synchronised maneuvers’. The essay offers a meditation on the deep geological time of the Island.

The above selections represent the excellence of all submissions to the MINCA Environmental Writing Competition. With this, I feel confident that the MINCA Prize will become a fixture within future place-based environmental writing in Australia. In closing I’d like to thank Maureen Alsop and Magnetic Island Nature Care Association Inc. for bringing this competition to life.

John Charles Ryan, 2024 Judge for Adult Entries

04 August 2024

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LISTEN

Mia Rodemark

The waves, involuntarily, crash into the shore. The beating heart of the island is ripe and strong. And as I'm still, full of wonder, I decipher the similarities from past to present. Is the motion of wind to water all that different from that of the molten rock? And the heart in the centre, is she different from the thud of the plates below? Or is all beauty I find beneath my feet, a memorial to the life-giving destruction that once happened here? The ruptures, the heat and, the burn; all that may be seen as tragic, are now here to stay holding me and many in a comfortable safety.

As some may say the mother's hot lava cries are satanic or a punishment, I argue back that it is a testament to her love. The shallow seas and rippled stones take care of her creations. I see now from my vantage point that animal life is so free. Turtles and Rays; Koalas and Possums, I see all as such living in the cyclic harmony she offered so kindly. It is truly a gift. Yes, it was birthed from shaky impulses but that doesn't take from the ecstatic soul within.

The sky is clear and the sun is warm. I feel the salt-dipped wind tickle my skin as I continue in my thoughts. I take this moment now, as we all should, to breathe. Slow and steady as the mother will allow me. I open my ears to her heart. Rumour has it that you can hear her life force beating strong in the centre of this moon-shaped bay. It's as magnetic as its name describes, drawing you into the pure serenity of such. How could this ever be villainous? I ask you this again, for the volcanic eruptions are simply part of the cycle. And I reiterate, it's all one of mother's gifts and I will not allow for the history of such beauty to be trampled on as a misunderstanding of nature.

Here we are and I find myself asking more of you. If you choose to listen, I am asking if you may consider the connections between yourself and the mother. As the beauty of the bay comes from disconnection and eruption so may yours. We struggle, suffer, fail and, are refused for periods that feel as though they are our indefinite forever. However, not all is lost. All will never be lost no matter how hot it burns, what remains will be beauty and life ready to sprout and grow. Water it, my love, and take care of it. Do such with gentle hands even if you don't see it just yet, you will.

Take care of the bay as you take care of yourself; Walk along your twisted paths with an open mind just as you walk along hers. And, when you see yourself in the reflection of the waves, you'll find that the past cannot predict the future, only the present may. So don't hold the eruptions of your past against what you may flourish to be; but instead-just like our beloved bay- take care of the light inside of you. Then... you will see.

MYRTLE

Christine Johnson

Ahead of me, the sapphire sea shimmers. The water dances, waves striking the ferry's sides as it motors along, churning up turbulence on the water's top. I listen to the *plop-plash* sound, and notice a sprinkling of foam floating past on the ocean's surface. My gaze follows the whiteness disappearing in the flow, as if sucked down into a salty depth of tears.

Yunbenun, or Magnetic Island, is getting closer. Eyes closing, I breathe pungent air, an aroma my imagination links to a moist, primeval rainforest. I slip my hand into my pocket. Finger yet again the puzzling photograph that has inspired this unexpected journey.

Within me, images, sounds and memories, past and present, merge...

Beep, beep, beep. Weeks earlier, a world away in Intensive Care, it was that high-pitched noise, the sound of a frail human heartbeat, which maintained a flicker of hope. Tubes and wires invaded the unconscious body in the hospital bed. Alongside the beeping, the repetitive rise and plunge of a thin line that pulsed across a screen was both excruciating and hypnotic. It only added to the tiredness I fought that numbed my whole being.

Did I yield, my head sinking? But warning signals flashed, lurching me back. The crisis I'd dreaded became real as the pulsing line leapt and staggered in a single mad misstep. The continuous whine of an insistent note pierced me as the pulsating stopped. Overwhelmed, I didn't cry out, unable to find a phrase to meet the moment. It was as if I had dissolved.

My anxious eyes fixed upon those who hurried across. Desperate to ask questions, my throat remained dry. I couldn't speak. After checking, one efficient nurse placed a kind hand on my shoulder.

'I'm so sorry.'

I look out now towards the Terminal as the ferry slows. Its tranquil chugging runs through the veins of my body, soothing the hurt throbbing there. My fingers reach again to my talisman, the photograph. But the pain attached to the time of my mother's death, the memory of it lingers, and makes me ache.

At home, days passed, but grief persisted. It gnawed. I realised when someone you

love dies, your greed to remember and understand them can become insatiable.

One thing that puzzled me was our last conversation. It was the morning of Mum's surgery. I clung to her, forced a smile, fighting a result I refused to recognise as likely.

'You'll be fine. Anyway, you can't leave me, Mum. How can I face the world alone?'

As I spoke, I regretted my words. It seemed inconsiderate, thinking of self at such a time. But she responded with the affection and common sense I loved and admired.

'We all leave our mark.' She smiled. 'Look at my garden. All native plants. Remember, you're unique. Seek what helps you stand strong. You'll know, discovering it.'

As I sorted her possessions after she died, this exchange revolved in my mind, an unsolved riddle. I viewed myself as nothing special. So little remarkable about me. I had no lasting aims and ambitions.

Distracted, I'd almost tossed away an old notebook. But when the covers opened, I saw Mum's flowing hand. My pulse quickened. A diary! What a fluke, stumbling upon such a personal thing. It was like her returning to talk to me, tell me about travelling to out-of-the-way places, youthful getaways she never mentioned in later life. All come and gone, well before career, marriage and motherhood tied her to the urban experience.

Regret rose in me and a deep sadness. Years slipping past, not enough shared. Mum, so wise, tending her trees and shrubs, how little I knew about the real inner journeying it had taken her to reach that calm place. It was then, as if to shunt grief aside, that something fluttered from between the pages: the photograph.

I drag my gaze from the promised beauty of this small island with its beaches, wildlife, and botanical riches I'm about to disembark and explore. Draw the photograph out into the light and gaze at its black and white surface for the umpteenth time.

Young features, fine-drawn and feminine. Intelligent eyes. The hands fold at her slim waist. So pretty. Not yet disfigured by age, a lifetime of robust work. The profound mother-and-daughter resemblance so clear in the image strikes me as odd. Unrecognised before, while Mum was alive, now it's inexplicable, going far beyond nearness in looks.

In the photograph's background looms a tree.

That first time I discovered the picture, something struggled to click in my brain. Something puzzling I failed to see. Fascinated, I'd turned the photo over. I found, in Mum's writing, a single word.

The photograph bore the enigmatic message: 'Myrtle.' My name? One I'd never liked.

The night after finding the snapshot, I propped it by my bedside, keeping it close. I whispered into the darkness.

'Goodnight, Mum.'

I lay awake missing her, and imagined being rocked by her as a child, as if by the sea. Safer than the ocean of grief overwhelming me. The rocking suggested travel towards asylum. And like a refugee, I needed relief, somewhere to ease sorrow. I fell asleep and glided on through the night. One hour stretched into the next, waves lapping at the edge of my consciousness.

I woke lacklustre, wanting that fading memory to continue. It occurred to me. This photograph, even the dream, both might offer something soothing. There seemed such happiness emblazoned upon Mum's youthful face. Where did she travel, finding such joy? Was the photograph a clue left behind? At least it drove me away from misery, towards the unfamiliar.

Instinct drove me to seek hints in Mum's diary, to research places she mentioned visiting where the Myrtle was endemic. A gardener and nature enthusiast, she called a place just off the coast of Townsville 'alluring.' I needed a positive getaway and planned my trip. Whenever sorrow reared up like a wave waiting to crash down and shatter me, I held it back. In a fluster of preparations, I showed it my determination to prevail.

Upon arrival I hire a car, setting out to discover a hidden wonderland. This mesmerising island, with its ecological diversity, makes my head spin. One beautiful bay beach, coral reef offshore, follows another. When I walk hiking trails, the earthy smell of undergrowth mixes dampness with freshness, the air pristine. It intoxicates. I peer into the forest where tall timbers thrive, awed by the stars in this arboreal opera. All seem to share the limelight.

Urban ignoramus that I am, I have asked my local librarian in advance.

'Which one is Myrtle?'

She shows me pictures and botanical sketches.

'Dominant tree of the rainforest, up to fifty metres, beautiful hardwood, brown or deep red to pink,' she says. 'A beauty. Smaller varieties, too. Amongst the oldest kinds of

flowering plants worldwide, dates back two hundred million, can live over five hundred years, a true survivor.’

The image returns to me of Mum in the photograph, shoulders leaning against a tree’s trunk as if soaking up its strength. I yearn for connectedness with something so vast.

I’ve followed a track that finishes in a clearing strewn with moss-laden fallen trunks. Nature’s tumbled limbs create a sculptural masterpiece. I stand, enchanted. A slight *splish-splash* suggests a water source close by. I tremble. The sound, its murmur, travels the distance and whispers to me. Like a heartbeat.

I connect what I see, hear, and feel to a place of my imagination ignited by the photograph. Fantasy fades, replaced by reality. The journey, this setting, becomes a magical step back in time. I move closer to one tree I believe I have recognised - a Myrtle.

The widespread roots at its base stretch out, beckon me forward. I climb across them, reach a position where I can turn and lean my shoulders against the trunk. I cross my hands at my waist and stand like the image in the photograph. I’m like Mum, all those years ago.

I sense something growing clearer. A longed-for glow permeates me. My mind shifts. A surge brings things into congruence. Myrtle, my mother’s cradling hands, her joyous face. No longer torn by loss, things within me lock and fit.

‘I’ve been here in spirit,’ I whisper, ‘with you, the tree. You named me then, and I’m returning. You’ve led me back.’

Within me, Mum’s advice resonates. *Seek what helps you stand strong*. This tree, my namesake, tells me I’ll persist. It keeps my mother’s counsel alive within me. Not just now, but forever. Tears of relief fall.

At rest under the Myrtle, I explore my link to this place. It is somewhere I know I will return to. And when I board the ferry, I will carry a deeper understanding, ready to begin my journey home. And a new urge to keep alive and add to Mum’s native garden that waits there, calling out for my attention.

The Myrtle stands firm.

EOFY

George Hirst

This is a work of fiction. Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in this story are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

With the hill road fixed, Brian could now just make the ferry. Not finding his wallet wasn't fatal anymore. He had his phone.

Brian loved the 7am. Friendly crowd. Even a bit posh with all those sciencey types.

Then. A grey blur. A tap. Barely a bump. What the? No! Then the replay. Wallaby. Probably. Shit. Poor bugger.

Should stop and check. Coulda been a joey. But, it's friggin' end of financial year!

Brian kept driving as if on auto. This is me just driving to the ferry, he told himself. Same as everyday, he told himself.

And there's someone else behind. Woulda seen it too. Where are they? Musta stopped. Good.

Brian loved the drive. Glimpsing Alma, Geoffrey Bay coconuts. Bowls Club, tidy and prim. And the habit, the weekday pattern- a comforting order to it.

But Jesus. Who was behind? Everybody knows the ute. It'll get around.

The grey blur, again. The little tap, again. The car behind, again. I have to work. EOFY!
Can't be late today. Wasn't my fault. They just leap out of nowhere. Then Jasmine's voice, 12 going on 20. 'Can we be wildlife carers dad?

Jasmine was that kind of kid. Passionate for animals, even snakes! Always soft for nature. Like the island had planted this inside her. He'd noticed his pride in her for this too. So could he say no to the, 'Slow down for wildlife' and 'I brake for snakes,' stickers she'd just stuck across his tailgate?

Left at the round-about, hole in the ground, no time for a reverse-in park. His morning routine was preserved but the moment on the hill gnawed at him. If I stopped I'd miss the boat for sure. Couldn't. Not today. EOFY. He quickly inspected the front of the ute. No blood. No scratches.

The low cloud which had followed the unexpected winter showers seemed to both climb and slump down the rockfall behind Nelly Bay. Pinkish silver strands catching the morning sun had several locals join the backpackers holding their phone screens aloft. The ferry accelerated and Brian watched too but felt accused by the beauty. As if it knew.

The scene from the hill replayed. And, with it, the growing dread that whoever saw it, most likely, knew his twin cab.

Work was EOFY madness. Bank statements, clearing accounts, payroll, reporting, stocktakes, outstanding bills and invoices- the emails kept coming. Brian pushed himself but the the achieving, couldn't block a dull, persisting regret pricked with anxiety - of word getting out. Jasmine's face.

The replay ran again: Curlew Flat approaching; grey blur and tap! Then, oh my God: the hotline! Yeah, there's the bloody hotline. Should'a rung. Jasmine even stuck it to the fridge! But that's four hours ago! Call now and it will be like, 'Why didn't you call us sooner? You'd leave an injured animal suffering for hours?' The car behind. They would have sorted it. Surely? Who was it?

What could he do? Keep his mouth shut and hope who was following were tourists. A weekend of anxiety lay ahead.

Better check facebook. A quick scroll of the island pages. Nup. Good.

He'd ploughed through work which had kept the grey blur somewhat at bay. He'd stayed back to check the stocktake. Rang Bec. 'Let's do fish n Chippies on the beach. Shit of a day.'

Nothing to see where it happened on the way home.

Jas was full of beans. 'Dad, Selina's are gonna let me volunteer with the animals on Saturdays. I'm starting in the morning!'

'Good Jas,' said Brian, struggling to sound alive.

'You orright?' said Bec.

'Yeah, yeah. Long day' '

Brian, Bec and Jasmine found their favourite picnic table on the foreshore and rolled out the dinner. Jasmine blew onto her first chip, 'Dad, did you know that the agile wallabies could make the little Island rockies go extinct?'

'Really sweetheart,' Brian felt heavy and his back suddenly ached.

'They shouldn't be here dad.'

'Didn't they just let them go from the old wildlife park when it closed?'

'We're gonna need a big high fence if we want a garden' said Bec. 'They eat everything'

'They chase the rockies away when they come down to eat at night,' said Jasmine.

'You need to eat too, Brian!' said Bec.

Brian picked up a chip, but stares beyond it .

'Sure you're ok darling?'

'Yeah. I'm good.'

Jasmine devoured her chips while the gulls arrived for the late shift under the lights.

'Can we go down the far end on Sunday dad?' asked Jasmine.

'Min said she saw an echidna there and (in the the squeakiest, tiniest voice), it was having a swim!'

'Magical darling!' said Bec.

Brian stared at the squeezed lemon.

‘We could have a swim too.’ said Bec.

‘Need a pee’ he said, standing to leave.

The gulls parted as Brian shuffled away.

The argument in his head rolled on: They jump out of nowhere -no road sense. But shit, I was probably doing 70. Car behind woulda noticed. Wouldn’t deliberately hit wildlife! ‘Cept toads. They’re different. But Jas will go nuts and cop it at school. Bec will be really shitty and the island’s gonna call me a friggin’ hypocrite.

Brian passed Manfred and Naomi from Sommerset Street.

‘Hello Brian’ said Manfred. There was a hint of a grin and the tone sounded just a little proper. Did he know? Was Manfred in the car behind? Were people talking already?

‘Hello you two,’ said Brian, walking on.

Just beyond earshot Naomi said something. Manfred groaned and laughed. What was that?

Damn. Haven’t checked Facebook. Brian lumbered past the jetski hire, his sagging face glowing pale blue from the screen. Nothing. Phew!

Sunday afternoon. Jasmine had found Zhang Min and invited her for a swim with them to where she saw the echidna. These two were inseparable and Jasmine was just a little in awe of Min who had a pet blue-tongue she fed huge maggots from the compost bin to and had now posted 25 of her wildlife sightings on inaturalist. The girls ran off down the beach splashing in the foam and squealing with joy.

Bec looks ahead. ‘Where are you Brian? What is it? ‘Interest rates?’

‘Everything’s gone up. Everything!’ Brian was relieved for the alibi.

‘We can cut back hun. We can still walk on this beach!’

‘Yeah!’

A few more paces and the whining drone of an outboard slapping the chop at full throttle, fifty metres offshore, and a cheerful wave from the silhouetted fisher.

‘Must think we like his noise. Watch out turtles!’ said Bec.

Brian lurched in the soft sand.

Monday morning. Is that supercilious grin at me? Lily

Rodrigo is sharing her screen with Jeremy. Did Lily just grimace? Are they ignoring me? Cold shoulders?

Facebook! Shoulda checked after the beach. His heart begins to race as his finger swipes greedily past pictures of more South Americans wanting island work. Then he felt the words before he'd read them: 'Road killer!' With shots of a tiny joey, saved and in the arms of, oh no, not that self-righteous bitch!

It reads, 'We know who you are! Dude hit and left a rock wallaby and her joey to die at Curlew Flat on Friday morning.'

With, wait for it, save wildlife stickers on your tailgate.

There's a word for that! Poor mum's gone but after a touch and go weekend and amazing carers, looks like this little fella will make it.' All followed by a chorus of 'So cutes,' abuse and fuming emojis and plenty from people who'd never lift a finger for anything. Let alone, wildlife.

Brian felt full of lead as he stared at the symmetrical, arrow-shaped backwash and the accusing island behind.

He turns to cast an eye over the commuter crowd, chatting or glued to their phones. Eyes mostly averted except for Jo Cowper. Of course. He feels sick and heads for the stairs, 'I hope it wasn't you who hit the wallaby Brian?' says Jo with that sweet precision she saved for her public speaking voice.

Brian felt the blood pump in his neck. Faces turned. Some hints of pity but others were grinning.

'I couldn't... End of financial year! End of financial year,' he spluttered, palms squeaking on the railing as his feet staccatoed down the stairs to the disabled toilet.

The floor is wet and there's pee on the seat. He wipes it and sits, fearfully examining the space beneath the door where, outside, shuffling feet cast shadows and random voices drown in the roar of the big cat's motors.

BLUE TIGERS

Liz Downes

Running down the track we came breathlessly
upon the place of butterflies.
Here where the air was green-shadowed,
sun-dappled,
they danced, the blue tigers, in their scented lair.

We stood huge and heavy
rooted to the ground
while they spun shimmering haloes round our hair,
bobbed like marionettes on chocolate wings
spattered with blue sky-paint.

Returning after sun-down
we thought they'd gone,
felt the dim stillness in the empty air,
until our eyes picked out on every branch
the alien leaves,
darkly triangled.

Reaching my hand to one
it slowly, sleepily
transferred each thin black foot
from twig to finger
and, till my warm breath woke it,
clung briefly there,
a dreaming tiger,
captured in its lair.

KOOKABURRAS SIT IN AN OLD GUM TREE

Karen Conrad

A one act play.

CHARACTERS

OMNI – 14-year-old kookaburra born on Magnetic Island

PRESCI (pronounce Prezzy) – Omni’s brother who is twelve years old

SCENE

Two kookaburras, brothers, sit on a very high branch of an enormous gum tree in a Horseshoe Bay backyard, looking out over the bay. They meet on that branch every morning at 10 o’clock to check in with each other and the island home they love so much.

OMNI

How’s the serenity, Presci?

PRESCI

Serene Place’s not even in our bay, Omni. We’ve enough to do here in Horseshoe without stressing over what’s going on over the hill at Nelly. *(said jokingly)*

OMNI

With jokes like that Presci, no wonder we laugh. But you’re right *(groaning, showing how much he dislikes agreeing with his younger brother)*.

We should be concerned about OUR bay. I do worry that it’s not as serene as it was when we were boys growing up here.

Remember Mum used to be so proud teaching us about the island when we were kids. She knew so much about all the plants and animals here, biodiversity she called it. She knew all the birds practically by name she was so fond of them. She was like those birdwatcher humans.

She loved how different Maggie was from some of the faraway places Dad told her about when they were dating. I miss her. And Dad, don't you, Pres? *(said forlornly, without expecting a response)*

PRESCI

Like Noo-sa! *(said pretentiously, impersonating Kath and Kim)*

OMNI

Yeah, Noo-sa! *(said the same way)*

Yes Mum loved the island so much she said she was going to call one of us Maggie, but she never had a girl. Shame. Maggie is a beautiful name. Not like ours. What was she thinking with our names? Who calls their sons Omniscient and Prescient? What was she trying to prove?

PRESCI

Did she think we were gonna go to Town Grammar? La Di Da!

OMNI

(laughing) Dad would never have let that happen! Can you imagine?

PRESCI

(laughing) Well she must have known that you would be a know-all. She was right about everything after all. *(said teasing his older brother)*

OMNI

She WAS right! *(said with chest puffed out)*. I do know everything!

I see everything sitting up here on our branch.

I see the water. I like to count the boats. I see humans standing on the sand counting the boats too. Is that our way of keeping things in check I wonder? Does knowing how many boats

there are make us think we are somehow in control? That there is order and we play a part in it? Hardly, but we do it anyway, Pres. Humans and kookaburras alike.

I see the market on Sundays. I hear the live music. I see the jet skis and the kayaks and the yacht that sends its little boat into the sand to pick up passengers.

I see humans fishing. Sometimes I see them throwing flaming sticks. But even I - Omniscient - don't know why! (*said incredulously*)

I see the butterflies in their very own forest, I see the wallabies. Have you noticed how many more there are since we were kids? I see lots of our bird friends. I see those funny-looking echidnas sometimes. Oh, and Pres, the sunsets.

PRESCI

OK know-all. Oh great one! (*said mocking his brother like he has been doing his whole life*)
You see everything, you hear everything. Merry merry king of the bush are you!

So, what's worrying you? How's the island different from when we were fledglings? When Mum showed us everything. 'Learning about our home', she called it. How much can it have changed?

OMNI

Well a lot I think, Pres. I can see the humans are trying to keep things beautiful. They have governments, councils, not-for-profits all making up rules and working to protect the island's habitat and biodiversity. They seem to really care about our bay.

PRESCI

That all sounds good. Sounds like they have it sorted. Then what's the problem?

OMNI

Well it's a ruggedly beautiful island. Everything should be pristine. I should see natural beauty. Sand, sea, plants and trees. Rocks. But I see so many signs. Why do the humans make the place look so ugly with so many stupid signs?

PRESCI

Signs? What on earth are you talking about now? Are they showing us the way?

OMNI

No not messages from the heavens Pres, A-frames. Dozens of them. Jet Ski for sale, Fishing Tour tickets available here, Camp Sites unpowered, powered, and the dumbest of all - get this Pres! - No Vacancy! Who needs a sign to say something isn't available? I truly think I may have literally seen it all with that one. Ugly AND pointless!

PRESCI

I hear you, but do a few signs really matter, Om?

OMNI

It's not a few, Pres. Dozens of them. Just in OUR bay. Imagine how much more beautiful the bay would look without them. The serenity!

It is the kind of thing Mum used to say about what she had heard about Noosa. Too many signs, too many cars, too many shops, too much of everything.

PRESCI

Yeah but we need tourism to keep the island going. How are we going to be in business without signs? We won't turn into a town on the mainland like Noosa just because of a few signs. We're Maggie, we're special.

OMNI

Well do you see us turning into Hamilton Island then? Will we have golf carts here instead of those cute little pink cars the backpackers drive?

Do you seriously think we can't have tourism without A-frames? I guess the humans think that so maybe that explains why you do too, Pres. Anyone heard of the internet? Put the signs up here in the clouds with us handsome fellas.

PRESCI

Brothers! *(said with the same exasperation he has felt about his serious older brother his whole life)*

What's the big deal? Just a few signs. Who are they going to hurt? Maggie is still Maggie. Nothing is gonna change that.

OMNI

Just a few? *(said with agitation, and the beginnings of delivering a monologue he has kept contained until now)*

That's just the A-frames. What about all the signs on the fences?

Green Energy. Would be greener without the sign!

Holiday Rental. No kidding. Hey humans, that's what websites are for. What is this? The 1960s? *(said with a disparaging, mocking tone)*

And are all those lime green For Sale signs really the best of Magnetic? *(joking)* Huh!

I can't fly down any street in Horseshoe without ugly signs everywhere. Look over toward the beach Presci – how many signs are spoiling your view?

PRESCI

OK, smarty pants. You are making your point, great omniscient one! *(mocking)*

Signs are ugly. Most of them are not necessary and our beautiful bay would look more like it did when we were boys if they just weren't there. I get it.

OMNI

Glad you're on-board Pres. How easy would it be if the humans just didn't allow them?

PRESCI

I see what you mean about signs being ugly but you said they were affecting the serenity. I don't get it - isn't serenity about quiet?

I'm a guy who looks to the universe for signs but I don't understand what actual signs have to do with noise.

OMNI

Because serenity is a feeling, Presci. *(Omni goes into monologue mode)*

It's about all of the senses. It's why people visit Maggie. Why they live here. For the peace and quiet, for the natural beauty, for the national park, to see koalas and us handsome kookaburras sitting in the old gum trees.

They come to swim, to walk, to unwind. For a gentler life. Or for a break from their life.

All those unnecessary signs are just visual noise, a layer of perceptible pollution marring everyone's experience.

Serenity's about being in a state of calm and peace and feeling untroubled. That is so Maggie! It's the desire for serenity that attracts the humans to come here. It's why they book an Airbnb in Horseshoe instead of a ritzy hotel in Noosa.

We have to save it, Pres.

PRESCI

I see that. *(wistfully, looking out over the bay, echoing Omni's monologue)*

It's our home. Our castle. I can see the humans are focusing on the island's big environmental issues but their children, our chicks will wonder why we didn't do the simple things too. I know they will.

OMNI

Hey Pres, imagine being able to fly all the way down Horseshoe Bay Road without all those signs. It'd be like a green runway to the bay. An environmental superhighway.

PRESCI

An EN-VIRON-MEN-TAL-SUP-ER-HIGH-WAY. Geez, listen to yourself, Om!

Mum sure was right Omniscient - you would have fitted in at the Grammar perfectly!
(mocking)

And they both laughed and laughed. They would solve some of the island's other problems at 10 o'clock the next day. And the next.

ENDS

A MOMENT ON MAGNETIC ISLAND

Daniella Conser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5mdELdV41w>

Sitting on the rugged cliffs of Magnetic Island, I hear the island's whispers carried by the wind. The fallen rocks and granite speak stories of time and ancient beginnings, the soils and stones sentences in the island's history. Eucalypt trees sway, their leaves murmuring the songs of the Wulgurukaba people. I picture their footsteps tracing these paths, their Dreaming stories etched into the landscape. Gabul, the great python, ripples the earth beneath me as I gaze toward the surrounding islands. High in the branches, a blue-winged kookaburra embodies the evolutionary wonders of this island. Nearby, rock wallabies confidently trace the landscape, their presence a testament to survival in isolation. These animals, endemic to the island, reflect the delicate balance of life crafted over millennia. As I wander these paths, I am filled with wonder. The island's history weighs heavy, yet the present feels light, a fleeting moment within an eternal story. Magnetic Island's beauty lies not just in its scenery but in the intricate tales embedded in its landscape. Here, I see the hand of evolution, the care of the Wulgurukaba, and nature's relentless forces woven into a mosaic of life. Beneath the surrounding waters, the reef bursts with color and life. Corals spread like intricate lace, fish weaving through their patterns choreographed by time. This underwater world mirrors the land. The island speaks of endurance, a dialogue between land and sea, past and present. Its story unfolding, inviting us to listen, learn, and protect. Listening, I find a connection to nature and a deeper understanding of my place within it. We've altered and changed so much of our earth in the plight of perceived progress. Yet here, a sanctuary remains, withstanding time and the harshness of humanity's touch. This island offers a glimpse into the past and, if protected, a hopeful vision for the future. In this moment of stillness, I honor the land's history, savor its presence, and guard its future. The island is a delicate link in the chain of life. May it remind us of nature's intrinsic value and implore us to protect it.

TRUE NORTH

Nathan King

This island dreamed its dream of the north. True magnetic north. Is this true north, as true as north is? Well, I couldn't say. With its island temperament defined by the surrounding sea, it embarked on its own adventure in rock, plant and animal in lush green surrounds bordered by bouldered shores. This island, fulfilling its own dream, stretched itself out under a basking sun and puffed into shape out of the foaming sea. In floating folds of misty-green hills it rides the horizon, framed under a wide expanse of azure blue. Birthing a landform with such a diverse congregation of creatures: crawling, walking, swooping, pecking, hopping, screeching, squeaking, and loping in and out of furrows and burrows, reaching up to the very nape and neck, folds and hollows of its verdant trees.

Icy breezes down south carry whispers to visit up north. A call to all wanderers, wayfarers and adventurers, anchor-less drifters running from lands of forgotten dreams. Shadowed souls, urged to escape their shadow lives and set aside time, reset their compass and venture true North where the magic of Magnetic Island draws dreamers to explore their dreams. No-one is an island, and every islander must discover the way to be an island amidst a crowd. No island is solitary as an island, it attracts those who need to explore, spawn a family, create a species and found a new land.

Whose vision drove this island to create such a rich life tapestry? A new existence created from a dropped seed or a serendipitous landfall for a winged creature, taken off course through the vagaries of wind or elusive, invisible currents. Birds of all feathers flocking together here and now in their own new land. Drawn to take flight, impulsively called by magnetite. Kites and curlews, osprey, peregrine, kingfisher and egret, heron, currawong, ibis and boobook and so many more, embedded in the primordial fabric of this magic island-landscape. Each play their part in establishing an island web of being with an invisible, fragile thread binding each to all. This island's sheer forest of animals may be wild by name but not by nature. Supported sustained, complimented and connected in a homeland of uncommon wilderness. 'Wild' life? No, only seen as an oddity from a 'tamed' perspective on life. An unfortunate term and coined from a civil-ised view full of assumptions. For all

species that play in this and every other wilderness, are living out the very nature of life. Mammals, shaped into echidna, possum and koala and timid rock wallaby are reveling in their very own creature-hood, unique. Only a feather's divide between one bird and the next distinguishes one bird from another: one as black as spades, the other, starched stark white.

What the sea knows the sea shares amongst all creatures, both terrestrial and marine. From beneath the waves, silvered angels in their shoals revel in their synchronised maneuvers. Meanwhile, a green-eyed bird walks and stalks a little to the right then a little to the left, lifting its bent-back knee as it rests on the spindle of one leg to pause dramatically in its frozen dance. A wind from out of the sea draws up dolphins diving in and out of the wake under a boat's bow. High above a rocky escarpment, sea eagle and kite hover and fall in a synchronised spiral, egging each other on to fly ever-higher, unwavering in their faith in the support of nothing but thin air in their sky shaped haven. In a single, simultaneous sequence here is one moment out of an island's daily grace. All and everything entwined becomes a rhyme under Maggie's milky blue sky.

Most beautiful island nestled in its seabed of dreams wedded to the surrounding sea. A great cosmic breath of history brought forth such a land of natural wizardry. With numberless waves counting out the days in coves and wide sand flat bays. Moonlight rising over granite peaks speaks for the years in passing, and grandiose boulders locked shoulder to shoulder are the keepers of secret ancient history. These are the stone-faced guardians of sacred stories. What ancients left their imprint fossilised into rock? What past lives are locked inside the shadowed folds of dovetailed earth stones, randomly sculptured in granite masonry?

A white, innocent moon sits high above a fiery red sun bleeding out its last rays into an indigo sea, the final gaze from a life-giving sun offering up its day. A tranquil prayer for a solitary congregation seeking communion between everything, all beings, on this island home.

Ethereal Magnetic Island, forever hovering over a silver-green sea. Within its wide waters wake it gives rise to every idyllic wanderer's dreams.

MAGGIE, BIRDS OF PREY

Libby Matkin

Our dear Osprey
Observe today
Our precious island haunt

Wedge-tail magnificent
Glide and spy
What fish absent

Brahminy kites
Secure delights
Your offspring not assured

For this treasured land
At man's unthinking hand
Surrounding sea will taunt

NO PAPERBARK TEARS

Peter Jackson

It started out of nothing. She had a stall at the Sunday morning markets on the foreshore. “I don’t have any men’s stuff,” she said, then cheeked me with, “Unless you look good in a dress.”

We laughed

The next Sunday, and the one after that, I was back. I admitted to myself it was her I kept returning for and asked her for coffee.

“That would be lovely,” she said.

I wanted to go immediately, but she scoffed at me, “I’m working.” I felt foolish, too eager. We agreed upon a time and place.

Returning to the bay, we met, took our coffee and sat under the beach almonds. We started talking and it was easy between us. Like butterflies, we danced over and between subjects.

We flitted over histories of relating: parents, siblings, school friends, bosses. We fluttered close to, but never quite alighted on, ex-partners and money. We took long sips at the flowers of our similarities and correspondences. Soon we were in synchronous agreement. The colourful wings of our best selves beat in time, hovered in smiling connection.

“Come for a walk with me,” she said.

We walked up the main road, the beach behind us, until she showed me a sign, hidden in the undergrowth. We turned away from the road and stepped along a sandy track that wove between shrubs and trees. She walked us down to a timber deck under a massive tree with peeling bark.

The deck became a board walk, crossing a lagoon. To one side the lagoon rippled with the touches of dragonflies. Along the further bank, green reeds hid a honking bird

The other side of the board walk was a garden of trees on a lawn of sunshine-bright water.

“Paperbarks,” she said, “They call them Weeping Paperbarks.”

I nodded, entranced. From mounds of mud the thin trees rose, each crowned in long leaves hanging in the vibrant, golden sunshine.

“They don’t look sad,” I said.

“No,” she said, and, sliding her hand into mine, led me along the grey streaked boards.

We walked across the water, past some houses and turned back into the forest, upstream from the board walk. The soft damp earth was thick with paperbark trees.

Leaves crunched underfoot. Sea breezes whispered in the swaying leaves far above us. We said less and less, only a quiet word to draw each other’s attention to another wonder. More smiles. Our fingers laced together like vines in a tree’s limbs. Our hands released and the vines entwined our bodies and hugged close. Like the sunshine on the leaves in the crowns above our heads, we kissed.

We were together then.

She had her routines, and I had mine. We had our own rhythm, like the tides, predictable, yet never the same. We would yield and conform, like the wavering palm fronds to the wind. We were solid, like rocks of granite. In the time that was ours, we fit together like the shore fits the sea.

She was always waiting for me in her little cottage, like a possum in its hidden den. Happy to see me and full of questions. She followed up whatever we’d last spoken of, keen to know what I wanted next. She sniffed me over like a puppy does when you first return, licking and wriggling for a caress. I loved it, and like a puppy, I rolled onto my back and adored her.

There was always the sea. We lost ourselves in waves of joy. We plunged down beneath the diurnal banal and into breathless moments of connection. We floated in the fluid caress of lovemaking. The pulsing sensuality conflated the physical with every other perception. It swept us, like a cresting wave, into something that felt beyond either of us.

In the swell and return of all this she did not push against the current. She floated with my enthusiasms and desires. Like the broken lines of leaf and shell that mark the high tide line, she rose and fell without resisting.

I came to feel like there was an impasse between us. We were like two granite boulders pushed tight together, each one holding the other back. There was no moving forward.

The earth turned, the seasons turned, our relationship turned.

The rain would not fall, and the earth was thirsty. The creek beds were dry sand with no hint of dampness. The sunshine that once seemed a benison, now beat the parched leaves until they hung, dull and exhausted, like panting runners at race end. Dead leaves crackled underfoot, as though angry with their deprivation. There was an ache in the hills, a pining for relief.

It was broken by the fights. It was all clear skies and sunshine on the surface, but inside the pressure was building. It seemed that her thoughts and feelings swirled in tighter and tighter circles, looped in on themselves through the day.

Then, in the evening, it poured out. A torrent of words, furious and intense, swept all before it. Small twigs of past slights were embedded in the walls of my ignorance. I was thrashed with the boughs of her belligerence, drowned in her pelting scorn and anger.

She talked herself to speechlessness. I responded into the quiet and she blasted me from another direction. The fury, the verbal thrashing. The precipitate haste in which her feelings tumbled the pointed, hurtful words out.

Finally, she was done. I sat in the wreckage of my crushed self-respect and watched her subside. She came back to herself. The calm followed the storm.

There was no diving into the sensual to salve and heal. It was a raw wound, only bandaged with soft words and gentle embrace. Acknowledgement and commitment might splint the

jagged hurts and pointed truths, but the core was fractured.

Doubts and guilt ate at me for days. Each remembered infraction, be it disrespect or tease or scorn, came back to me. Little things. Nothing of themselves, like an ant bite – but I was not the one being bitten.

I was not innocent in all this. There were times when I was full of bluster, like a howling wind biting on a winter's day. I railed and whined about some frustration. She sat there, hugged herself, arms wrapped tight across her belly.

Later she soothed me. She never deserved my squalls. I was undeserving of her patient appeasement, like little waves lapping on the shore.

Today is market day. She is working and I skulk along the beach. I am uncomfortable in my skin, as though I need to shed my skin and grow. To my surprise I am back at the boardwalk over the lagoon, where we came that first day. This time, all the paperbarks in the lagoon look dead. They have no leaves and are like ghostly fingers pointing at the sky. The promise and beauty of that first day has disappeared, only the bones remain.

Like a scrub fowl I go scratching the claws of my memory into who we are and what we were. I grub over the bickering past. I scabble at the words, raking and ripping into each encounter, scouring off the laughter from past joy. The hard sharp beak of my self-righteousness pounces onto every wriggling weakness. But there is no point to this – chewing over her faults doesn't nourish me.

I sense a small insight. Which of my skittering crawlers am I hiding from view as I toss the detritus behind me? I am not innocent in this.

I feel a hard dark flaw, like a rusted steel picket, in my chest. It's like the scene in front of me. Something fertile and living has suffered and now appears dead to the core. I thought it was

her. I thought it was us. It is something inside me, hidden from myself.

I decide to tell her it is ended. It will not be comfortable, but I can do it.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. It is her. The message says: *It's over. I am away 4 a week, and wen come bck don't want to see you eva again.*

The sticky oppression of the past few months lifts, washed away with the news. My heart leaps, as though stripping off its clothes and running through the first warm rain of the Wet season. The fat drops of relief, the soaking cleansing of release.

We are done.

A SINGLE VOICE

Sweekriti Dhungana

Zzzzzz, zzzzzz. The alarm starts ringing. Before the sound could even beep for the third time Gabby jumps out of her bed and begins getting ready as the day is Saturday. Now you might wonder, what is with the Saturday? It comes once every week, four times a month and 52 times a year. Oh and yes 53 times if it is a leap year. But what is so special about it other than it being a weekend? For 11 years old Gabby it is the time of the week when she gets to see Shelly the small green sea turtle on the Magnetic Island.

Now the story is how they met? One fine Saturday morning Gabby was lying on the sandy beach next to her mother. While she was try to grab her sun glasses she suddenly felt something strange, something moving. “Mom, look! There is a turtle!” she shouted in delight. “Mom, look, look!” Then she took the turtle, played with it for a while and let it free. Starting from now, every Saturday the turtle returned and formed a bond with Gabby. Exploring the dense forest, swimming alongside Shelly on the crystal clear water soon became highlight of Gabby’s week.

Today as usual she rushes her mother to the Island. All she ever talks about is meeting him. “Mom, I am going ahead. Hurry up! She starts running as soon as she reaches the island.” When she gets there she starts to growl. Shelly is lying motionless on the ground strangled by plastic waste. All teary she holds his lifeless body and shouts his name again and again. Over the following week more of the turtles washed ashore owing to the increasing pollution and neglect.

Gabby struggles to understand the situation and starts questioning everyone to get clarity. All she gets in response is disappointment. No one, including her parents, has an answer to what is killing the turtles. Moreover, they are unconcerned about what is happening. Once a thriving Magnetic island, where the sun kissed the sandy beaches, hoop pines danced gently in the breeze and the pristine water sparkled with sunlight has begun to transform. The fresh air and the serene view which created a sense of tranquillity is now giving way to hazards and has become inhospitable.

Feeling frustrate, desperate and overwhelm with emotions, Gabby decides to take matter into her own hands. She believes that if she does not do anything, then the island she loves will continue to suffer. First, she sneaks into the main switch of the society and turns it off. The today's people who can't go a moment without their gadgets and constant recharging feels disoriented when their devices are disrupt. She does this again and again. Further, she cuts off the water supply to make a point. For weeks, she continues to make a silent protest. Even in class, she tries to convince her friends. Luckily she succeeds in making a group of six. Together they work towards bringing reform. Slowly, they start to gain attention but instead of support, they are dismissed as mere mischievous kid.

January 24: The final cricket match between India and Australia is shown on a large projector in the society hall. Everyone fully pumped and happy to support their country are hooting in excitement. The captain of Australian team hits a six. Only few runs left to win the match. Thud, thud. Every heart is pounding. Some are crossing fingers while others are chanting prayers. The player hits the ball and begins to sprint. Will he make it? All eyes glued on the screen but suddenly the screen shifts. A video of dying marine creatures of the Magnetic Island is shown along with the before and after footage that presents the contrasts between the beauty that once was and the environment degradation that it experiences at present.

Initially everyone is stunned into silence, then yells in anger and confusion. In the midst of the turmoil, Gabby steps forward in teary eyes. In her cracking voice, choked with emotions she calls out for help. "We are not just harming the island; we are destroying the homes of fish, corals, turtles and all the creatures that lives there. It is not too late. We can still save others, if not Shelly. We can make a difference." As Gabby's words suspended in the mid-air, her parents look at her with new light. They feel that their child has been compelled to mature beyond her age because of their shortcomings. Everyone present there too begins to understand the depth of Gabby's conviction. One man stands up from his chair and shouts, "Gabby I am with you! Let's protect the nature!" His words spark a wave of support, as one by one, others stands up to join him, praising Gabby and her friends going to such lengths to convey such powerful message. "We won the match!" Someone shouts from the back. "Today, the Australian team and its supporters experienced a great win, but Magnetic Island and Gabby achieved an even greater one."

Later that night, Gabby's parents and society members hold a meeting regarding the issue. Mr. Clark, a local environmental scientist from the neighbouring society, is invited to provide guidance. Mr. Clark states, "Gabby is right. We have all been too busy with our lives and have neglected nature to the extent that it is dying. Recently, a boy was admitted to the hospital with a severe allergy after swimming on Magnetic Island. Creatures are dying in greater numbers than before. But it is not too late to turn things around. We can set up a clean-up efforts, implement strict rules regarding pollution and start raising awareness."

Everyone nods in agreement. A young man from the local council offers to help coordinate the plan. A few teenage girls and boys stand up to volunteer. Olivia, the society's influencer creates videos and even invite Gabby to her podcast. The school not only praises Gabby and her friends but also establishes weekly extra-curricular focused on environmental preservation. Slowly, the cleanliness and preservation initiative extends to greater number of people. Some donate supplies for clean-up, while other support financially. Over the next few years, many communities came together to join the cause and social foundation was created.

"Gabiella! Gabiella!" A voice starts shouting. "Hurry up! Are the kids ready? We don't want to be late to the Shelly Foundation's 30th Annual ceremony." Crack. A cup drops and breaks from a hand. "Mom, wait is this your story? Is not Gabby short for Gabiella? Mom, tell me more. Does the necklace in the left drawer, engraved 'Shelly,' belong to your turtle, Shelly? Are we not allowed to have pets because you are scared that we will be heartbroken like you if anything happens to them? Mom, do you still miss Shelly? If you had not taken a stand, would we not be able to see this beautiful Magnetic Island? Where would we swim? Where would we go on Saturdays if it was not there?"

"Baby, one question at a time. No, it is not because I am scared, but I don't want to confine these beautiful creatures. They need to be in their own home. And baby, I did not do everything alone. I raised my voice and took help. Everyone came together to preserve this beautiful gift from nature, our Magnetic Island. Always remember, we do not own nature by ourselves; we share it with countless flora and fauna, and it is our responsibility to preserve it for everyone. And yes, I do miss Shelly. She was strong, she was resilient, and her company made me love nature more than anything."

BALLAD OF THE SKINK

Ash Aldridge

Salted waves breach rock
Reaching high for the moon
You scamper into another night
Among the cackles of feathers on high
And superb croaks in the ponds
Listening for the flicker of adder's tongue
As your ancestors did before

Kites and keets caw and coo on high
Telling tales of a land beyond the turtled reefs
Lands your mothers have never seen
Where no cousins await your pilgrimage
In annual embrace and gossip
They are all here
Everything you could ever know is here

But why would you weep for unseen land
What could it compare to your castles of granite and kapok
Your riches of lolly and vine
This empire is yours
By right and by blood in your name
The beast only these magnetic sands have known
The magnificent *sadlieri*

PLANTING SEEDS AND POLYSTYRENE BEADS

Michael Wilson

There has to be someone who found it. They could have been walking in the light of a half moon, waves creeping with the rhythm of breathing. It would have felt a little like tiny stones in the sand, but with the smoothness that marked the hand of man.

Or it could have been sunset. Walking in the fleet heat of a scarlet evening, moving to the high chirp of a forest kingfisher, they would be little pearls in the sands. And you would have known that the Magnetic Island was polluted with beads. Little balls of polystyrene half buried in its pale sands, swallowed in the earth's shifting, carried like blood clots into the soil to rest beside the roots. They are land mines for *natator depressus*, the Flatback Sea Turtle which nests ashore Maggy Island and only lives around the seas of Queensland. They are a poison for plants and any hapless creature poised to swallow them. I had known about the beads from a small article titled: "Magnetic Island beaches once again polluted with thousands of bean bag beads." It was barely three paragraphs long, the fact of the act and the slow work of the island natives and residents to clean it up. It was buried in half a dozen articles of more pressing concern: How the ocean burns with a fever heat that sweeps through the churning deep, bleaching vermiform polypi, turning a living mosaic into dead, bone pale strata. Or how great barges sulk across the sea like worm-ridden boars, trailing plastics behind it that wash days later upon the beaches of The Island. But no matter how many things I read, I couldn't rid myself of the thought of those beads. Something about them troubled me beyond the obvious implications. It lay on my mind like so many stones, lingering long after my work had finished. The beads came from the torn open carcass of bean bag chairs set on the beaches.

Enough time passes that I begin to wonder why. Why this affront to nature would so distinguish itself when it's so paltry next to things like oil spills and invasive species. Why the thought of it burned in me. It was only when I saw someone toss trash into a lake near my home, an act of desecration so intimate that it awoke in me a realization that it was because it

was PERSONAL. Instead of the mindless industrial machines churning out pollution, it was a small group of people who had done it. People who came to the island to enjoy themselves and leave, to take what they could and leave behind what they would. It was borne from the carelessness of transient consumption, it was fixed by the work and dedication of the people who actually lived where the travelers had desecrated. They lived in places untouched by their own carelessness, places where they needed to live with what they did. All environmental degradation, all pollution, were the same as the beads. Same in a sense of procession, a sense of axiomatic assumption. It is a place all human cruelty comes from, which is a place of true Severance.

Note the word, Severance. Not separation. Separation is an odd and necessary sleight of hand, a small distinction in the shape of things. Most would not claim, necessarily, that they ARE their hand. There is a powerful inclination to perceive the hand as part of oneself, but not exclusive. Studies show people mourn the loss of their limb like they do a brother, or a mother, but no man ever truly considers their personhood deprived by the loss of an appendage. Between the two, Hand and Person, there is a healthy respect in the separation of Being as it relates to identity and the flesh that lets us walk among the weeds. That, however, is far different from a feeling of Severance, a lingering doubt that the hand to your left is even yours in the first place. It is critical we never, ever lose sight of our connection to our own body. Dysmorphia of the body is evidence enough of this, the things we do to ourselves when we don't connect to our flesh is unspeakable. It allows for a level of distortion that shouldn't be, the severing of the clever knitwork of the soul. The most banal, basic, well tended evolutionary desire to eat can be overridden. We can safely, albeit tearfully, ignore the little voice that has been with us since our lungs touched air: "Pull your hand back, this lighter is hot!"

This example uses flesh, but it is not limited to it. Its foundation is kinship and connection, contextualized in the case of OTHER bodies as "empathy." To realize a person's struggles are not so different as your own, to make a mirror of another and see your own humanity stare back at you. It is profound that our connections require expanding our self-bound borders, that living in the skin of another through books increases empathy, that words like "We" can see the One in Many, that we are capable at all of understanding that our well beings are all tied up in resisting the urge to kill each other.

Yet, we all know that this is not how we live. It is a bone deep feeling, though difficult to articulate. We live in a society of disconnection and discontent, we live every day more fragmented than the last. Alienated from our economy, from our neighbors, from ourselves, a profound dysmorphia of the spirit occurs. Corporations become people, bodies that are not bodies in possession of central desires which relate not to human well-being, but a mathematical calculation that extends like a long shadow across time, that demands accumulation as ends in themselves, like a stomach which forgot its central goal is to provide nutrients. Separated from nature, nature becomes an object, and in our spiritual dysmorphia can be destroyed without cause for concern. Even the eco-poets and painters can lose sight of the truth about our relationship with nature, advocating for a return to it without ever realizing the silliness of the statement. Without realizing that trying to uncouple us from nature is to uncouple voice from air, to believe so foolishly that interdependence can be reversed to independence. That the presence of a relationship implies independent being.

But it does not. We are a required dichotomy, distinguishment necessary for there to be anything at all. As dark and light exist only in contrast, we exist to Nature as wholly separate and yet completely of it. We see what happens when people think otherwise. It becomes a place where men dine on food picked by their fellows, drink wine grown in human gardens, sit in chairs made and lacquered from across the earth and SNEER at the idea of community, who speak of self-reliance with words built with a million million minds. Who participate gleefully in the debasement of their spoken inheritance. But then, what remains is the question: “How do you clean up one million beads?”

Do you take your knees to the sand, picking with sore, cold fingers, each and every one?

One million little acts of duty against one negligence, one million acts of stewardship against one abandonment, one hour of compassion, set against one explosion of cruelty?

Yes. Yes, we must. It is hard, hard work to maintain ourselves. But to end our separation, both on the front of the economy and our conceptual separation from Nature is the only path to a future worth living. It is changing our stories to recognize that stewardship of earth begins and ends as self care, to expand our personal identities beyond white picket fences and to the lands we are connected to, to end all economic estrangement and

exploitation, and to evolve our language, because when uncoupled from the land the pillars of our language and memory, once stone, are borne away by time and worn to sand. And like sand, drift in any aimless wind. But we have said this all before.

The poet repeats himself, but only if that which his eyes see is unchanged. You whisper into the rushing air as you fall that there is a bottom, and it is as it is no matter how close to it you come. Hoping someone with strong arms will catch you, carry you away. Praying to something unseen for strength in the face of desolation. A power in you lighter than air. As the Magnetic Island faces its battle against ecological catastrophe, it will take a concentrated effort on all fronts to care for it. To reestablish our connections to it, not as merely a spot to park a beanbag but as a breathing community of life. Like all self-care, it takes one thing.

Work.

WHISPERS OF MAGNETIC ISLAND

Aasiyah Clarke

The sun was beginning to set over Magnetic Island, casting long, golden shadows over its lush landscapes. It was here that the whispers of nature could be heard, if one just took the time to listen. The island, known for its diverse ecosystems and vibrant wildlife, had stories to tell— stories of resilience, beauty, and the delicate balance of life.

As I walked along the winding trails, the rustling leaves seemed to murmur secrets of old. The towering eucalyptus trees, with their ancient bark, stood as silent witnesses to the island's history. They had seen the comings and goings of countless generations, both human and animal, each leaving an indelible mark on the land. In the distance, I could hear the gentle waves lapping against the rocky shore. The ocean, a vast expanse of blue, was a lifeline for the island's inhabitants. It provided sustenance, shaped the weather, and offered a serene backdrop to the vibrant coral reefs teeming with life beneath its surface. Every ripple and tide carried a story of interconnectedness. But not all was well on Magnetic Island. The whispers had turned to murmurs of concern, and the signs of distress were becoming harder to ignore. The once-thriving coral reefs were now struggling against the relentless onslaught of climate change. Rising temperatures and human activity had left scars on this underwater paradise. The vibrant hues of the corals were fading, and with them, the diversity of marine life that called them home. As I continued my journey, I encountered a family of koalas nestled high in the treetops. These gentle creatures, emblematic of Australia's unique wildlife, were facing their own battles. Habitat destruction and bushfires had forced them into smaller, more fragmented areas. Their plight was a stark reminder of the fragility of life and the urgent need for conservation efforts. Magnetic Island, with its breathtaking beauty, was at a crossroads. The island's future depended on the actions of those who called it home and those who visited its shores. It was a call to action, a plea to protect and preserve this natural wonder for future generations. In the heart of the island, a community was rising. People from all walks of life were coming together, united by a common goal: to save Magnetic Island. Conservationists, locals, and tourists alike were joining hands, participating in beach clean-ups, reforestation projects, and educational programs. Their collective efforts were beginning to make a difference, one small step at a time. As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm glow over the island, I felt a renewed sense of hope. The whispers of Magnetic Island were growing louder, transforming into a chorus of determination and resilience. The island's story was far from over; it was evolving, shaped by the hands and hearts of those who cared deeply for its future. The journey was far from easy, but it was a path worth taking. For in the end, the preservation of Magnetic Island was not just about saving a piece of land—it was about safeguarding a legacy, a way of life, and the very essence of nature itself.

ISLAND HAIKU TRILOGY

Anne Cole

Under the Jetty

gnarled thumbs support
creaking planks stretching to a
distant turquoise square

Geoffrey Bay

low tide sand expanse
sea recedes to a far line
creates winter space

Horseshoe Bay

space sky azure sea
granite boulders frame the bay
shelter boats floating

GRAINS OF SAND FOR A TRAVEL BUDDY

Charlie McColl

In 2005 when Sylvia Clarke died aged 105, her doctor said that the cause of her death was old age - a condition she had been enduring for about two weeks. But that's not the half of it.

A few years before, the Grade 6 class at the Magnetic Island State School began searching an Internet list for a school group somewhere else in the world to engage in the Travel Buddies program – a kind of email penpals project. While the Magnetic Island students were pondering their options they were chosen by a class at the Headley Park Primary School in Bristol, England. Knowing that William Bright, one of Magnetic Island's earliest European settlers, had originally come from Bristol in the 1880s, it was suggested that this might be an interesting starting point for developing the relationship between the two schools.

It was also known that a Bright relative was still living in Bristol because she occasionally wrote letters to the Townsville Bulletin expressing concern about the destructive Nelly Bay harbour project which was having such an impact on the landmark of Bright Point. The waterfront development, which had collapsed in financial ruin in the early 1990s, had also disturbed the remains of '*Presto*', an historic shipwreck beached as a breakwater against the prominent headland. Sylvia Clarke was out there and she had Magnetic Island on her mind.

Imagine the excitement when it was discovered that Sylvia Clarke, born 1900, was William Bright's niece and that she lived in the same street as the Headley Park Primary School. In addition, Sylvia's great granddaughter was a current pupil at the school and would be joining in the Travel Buddies connection.

At about this time it had been discovered that two old black and white photos of Bright Point featuring local notables John Shaw, William Bright and Otto Bottiger beside Bottiger's famous thatched beach hut with the '*Presto*' in the background, had originally been snapped as a panoramic pair. With some specialist digital repair, the previously separately mounted originals were joined perfectly together for the first time to create a unique panorama of the historic landscape. With Sylvia's 100th birthday rapidly approaching it was decided to make this picture the talking point for the celebration of the two schools' electronic and community connection.

The 100th birthday party in February 2000 was visited by a group of students from Headley Park School who presented Sylvia with a framed copy of the Bright Point picture sent from Magnetic Island. Sylvia posed for photos and showed the children the birthday card she had just received that day from Queen Elizabeth.

In February 2005, Queen Elizabeth had to call upon the Royal Mail to deliver a new birthday card to Mabel Sylvia Clarke on the occasion of her 105th birthday. Relatives and friends from around the world, including Magnetic Island, made the pilgrimage to Sylvia's home in Headley Park to celebrate the life and times of this great personality who was still occupied looking out for family and community in her home town.

What gift would be appropriate for this centenarian who had seen two world wars, a couple of kings and queens, had raised children, grandchildren and great grandchildren but had never ventured to the end of the earth where her uncles had gone so many years before? Of course, a handful of sand from Nelly Bay beach. It contained colourful granite grains, coral rubble, bones, shells, seeds and leaves that held all the textured stories of Magnetic Island down to the salty scent of the shining sea. Sylvia turned the sample over in her hand and recounted a story from the time when she left school in 1913 aged 13. The Head Teacher had reported to Sylvia's father, Tom Bright, that, "You can lead her but you can't drive her." Sylvia had remained a leader for her whole life.

In the Headley Park School just down the street from Sylvia's home the 300 students (compared with Magnetic Island's 200) are well aware of the long history of engineering excellence and maritime discovery attributed to their home town. Now they would also be fascinated by the curious Bright family connection with distant, exotic, tropical, Magnetic Island through their near neighbour Sylvia Clarke. On the occasion of the 2005 birthday a new class of pupils at Headley Park renewed their connection with the Magnetic Island school with an exchange of email letters. Within a few days one of the Magnetic Island schoolboys, who by then had connected with a seven year old pen pal at Headley Park School, told his mother, "We're going to meet up when we are men". The flukey link between the two school communities was alive and well.

THE LAST BEAUTIFUL ESCAPE

Ronald Groth

It may not seem like it, usually it remains un-noticed. Some of us are not aware its barely sedentary now, poised and awaiting the tipping point. It has begun to reveal its presence, that it is closer now than it has ever been. Even from paradise I can see it and I simply will not sit and wait and do nothing! We will all see the nothing, feast and grow until it has become too much bare.

Every time that I set sail just over the water. The shores of the crown jewel welcome me. The people, the creatures, its beings are all happy to share. They are aware. These people from the ancient land have stories they tell. They were told by the generation before them and so the pattern goes. Seasons pass and come and go, just roll on by. They never falter until now.

These wondrous tales from Wulgurukaba, custodians of the Mangroves, with all its creatures that would sustain the people if only they share. They would only ever take what was ever really needed. The flutter and sparkle from Mr Mangrove Jack. The persistent journey of the Dugong and its travel through the ecosystem, grazing on the underwater pasture, and the delicate Green turtle who takes his home with him. They have been custodians of their world as far as they could see. All the way to the reef. And as we all have grown by number some stories have been forgotten. It's just how things go, but they wait to be found again.

It's the 21st Century and the nothing has grown, even more from when I first heard its howl. The unpredictable bands of rain, that held so much downpour and downfall. I was waiting inside that cold room. The water dripping from the ceiling into the mixing bowl strategically placed on the ground. The echo of the water sounded into the night. That place, it wasn't so long ago and if we were to point fingers for why it happened we would be pointing at ourselves. But to wish for it not to happen would be to undo all that has been learnt, and all the progress that has been become. Look at how far we have come.

Its wonder and value is remarkable, so priceless and I remain here with passion and pride. The sunlight touches the brightest hues, it's a technicolour dreaming. It is my responsibility now and I have been given purpose to preserve for future generations because there are so many still to come.

Golden sunsets, outline the native gum, the sea side lapping at the shore. Mother nature's heart keeps on beating so I move in silence. I'm awe inspired with my surroundings. This moment is sent to my core memory and something that I will cherish forever.

Bloodwood and wiry old trees have scattered through the land. With dusk approaching, they seem to come to life. They move and dance to an ancient song. They creatures of the island

now nestle in for the night time. This place is a refuge, untouched by the needs of supply and demand.

There is much to do here! It is colossal and everyone knows it. But for me, for you, and for everyone we don't have to do this alone.

The familiar pattern of the seasons that has lasted for 200,000 years of humankind seems to falter even more but this paradise that I have found it still welcomes me ashore.

NOT AN ISLAND

Luna Prince

I am the island and the island is I
I float between waters and cerulean skies
I live by the tides under a golden eye
My body is bound but my spirit can fly

I am the island and the island is you
Walk in my rhythm, breathe with me too
Open your eyes for nothing is new
Your heart is longing for something more true

I am the island and the island is we
We knew all along what we came here to be
Both deeply committed as well as free
Our journeys are joined, is all we needed to see

CYCLONE

Julien van der Schouw

Cyclonic February and Yasi shook my hand
and the bones of the island in vexatious glee
as she stripped the laughter from the trees
and spat venom at a boiling sea,
delivering a maelstrom in natural ecstasy,
howling triumphantly at landfall
and claiming victory in our despair
whilst we battled our emotions
to clean and claim back our land
although this tormentor
still echoes in our souls

MAGNETIC ISLAND: A SYMPHONY OF NATURE

Phill Stephenson

In the heart of the Coral Sea, embraced by the arms of the Great Barrier Reef, Lies an island,
a jewel, where time seems to stand still and relief From the hustle of life is found in the
whisper of leaves, In the rugged beauty of granite boulders and the tales they weave.

I. The Land

Magnetic Island, or Yunbenun, as known by the Wulgurukaba, The ‘canoe people’, the
traditional custodians, the land’s first scribes.

A canvas of nature, painted with a palette so vivid and wide, From the hoop pines standing
tall, to the sandy bays at low tide.

Granite guardians, shaped by time, by wind, by rain, Their boulderous forms, a testament to
nature’s refrain. Eucalypt woodlands stretch across the island’s breadth, Bloodwoods,
ironbarks, stringy barks, in their silent depth.

II. The Flora

Kapok trees bloom, their yellow flowers a burst of fire, Cottonwool seeds drifting on the
breeze, a soft choir. Cabbage palms rise in the valleys, in the creeks’ embrace, While
mangroves guard the shores, a salt-kissed interface.

Littoral forests, rare and precious, cling to the dunes, Their roots entwined with the sands,
like ancient runes. Here, the beach scrub thrives, a haven for birds to feast, An ecosystem
delicate, a natural beauty not in the least.

III. The Fauna

Rock-wallabies leap, their forms a blur among the stones, Their subtle hues a camouflage, in the island's tones. Koalas cling to branches, a sleepy gaze upon their face, A serene presence in the woodlands, a symbol of grace.

The coral reefs, a kaleidoscope beneath the waves, A world teeming with life, where the curious dolphin plays. Fish dart among the corals, a flash of color, a streak of light, In this underwater realm, where day meets the night.

IV. The Spirit

But Magnetic Island is more than its landscapes, more than its views, It's a spirit, a feeling, a connection that one cannot refuse. It's the history, the culture, the stories untold, Of the people, the land, and the memories it holds.

So let us tread lightly, with respect and with care, For this island, this paradise, is precious and rare. Let's preserve its beauty, its magic, its song, For Magnetic Island, this symphony of nature, is where we all belong.

“This piece aims to encapsulate the diverse and rich environment of Magnetic Island, highlighting its natural landscapes, unique flora and fauna, and the deep connection between the land and its people. It resonates with my passion for sustainability and the island's beauty.”

ODE TO MAGNETIC ISLAND

Amana Newman

I stroll around the rugged cliffs, and shiny sandy bays,
While seabirds soar in endless dance, fading into haze.
I followed gravelled path uphill, among the emerald trees,
I breathe them in, with taste of pine and saltiness of breeze.

Each step I take, the island speaks, its secrets drawing near.
With every note of island's song, my sadness disappear.
The ancient rocks, in azure dived, the marine life's true home.
Reveal the graceful starfish cling, through veil of pearly foam.

The Kookaburras greet the dusk, their laughter fills the air,
And bluebirds' chorus, singing sweet to young koala bears.
The sway of trees, the waves embrace - a symphony of Grand,
Among those simple, precious things, I found my wonderland.

The sun descends in golden hues, painting sky with grace,
I watch the colours blend and fade, in this enchanted place.
When stars emerge to light the night, a sparkling, gentle dome,
I know, I lost to you my heart, but found a loving home.

MONT SAINT-MICHEL

Rebecca Faulkner

If I go further out with you
I may never return. Wet sand

on the causeway, how quickly
land becomes a memory.

Consider the monks who
made it as far as the Abbey

battling sleet the color of grief
Clutching chestnut cloaks, hems

barely hold the swell, hurrying
inside to rub each other's frozen feet

relief tempered by guilt every time
the tide ebbs they dream of floating

corpses, imagine their brothers
rocked in the Atlantic's icy arms.

No sign of solid ground, I face you
pathless, inhale the transept's cloying

dust. Stumbling through quicksand
I reach into your granite silence

a semaphore of surrender