

dialogue fragments Lawrence Upton / Richard Kessling

The creek is gouging lower into the beach,
has been since curbing groynes have been removed:
quite perceptibly steeper; and low tide waves
wreck, rather than lap.
Dog crunches urchins.

We walk up the bed of the low tide creek
and back, then turn south and observe, restless.
Maybe a century and a half ago,
it was a wooded spit half a mile out
into the bay.

We both investigate.

We pass a dead baby seal, its skull scraped
by gulls, the rest of its carcass unbroached;
a puffer fish, distended and untouched.
Last night's rough weather; and another seal,
dead, too; but eyes intact despite the birds
crowding yards further on.

A banjo shark
that had been caught from the beach, fins removed
and carcass left.

No wavelets breaking.

A pod of three dolphins languidly working
between reefs, fifty yards offshore, and beach.

A whiting moving only with the water
slapping the sand at the ocean's edge; eagle ray,
two or three yards off shore, is watching it.

The dog eating the whiting. The ray, foiled,
moves away. And the rain starts; but I stay
to watch the dolphins for some time, wondering.

Moving along, near weeping. I won't rant
through sense of duty to battered judgment.
Enough of this. The pre-dawn tide was high,

turbulent and wind-threshed: beach's escarpment
astonishingly eroded from yesterday's,
and its usual passive mixing with sea.

Silent sheen of an acre of moisture,
deep for a far off observer;
I strode across it. Not an eighth inch depth.

South, the sea's grabbed the few corpses, leaving

only seaweed at the tide mark. The dog,
eyeing a sandpiper, leash-cheated.

Went to the lake hide. Spent an hour
watching the roosting cormorants at work,
fascinating in the parents chasing
then feeding their undeparted young;

the last of the fledged ibis cajoling.

We wonder at bird flight.
Remarking repeatedly
on galahs' rapid weaving
through woodland allows one
to emulate the parrot,
to listen to fine squawk and shriek;
and glance up, a galah dazingly
near me, perhaps only a yard;
rushing itself South, and others,
closer, and further, rolling, not
tumbling, I am sure, from their wings
vertically angled at the other,
all at a seemingly impossible speed,
playfighting; a picture too much for words

An extraordinarily low tide.

We walk along the remnant of a spit
that once stretched itself, delineating
two distinct bays. It had been wooded, brought down
by Europeans in the second half
of the nineteenth century. Now it's a hedge,
submarine, perhaps two yards wide at base
from the gently sloping floor of the bay,
reaching out clearly about thirty yards;
and then deep blue. Further off, here and there,
one discerns the brighter water of a ridge
that has escaped from mere shore. It persists.
One does. Those who decline cease existence.

A woman and a man, grey-haired, long-limbed,
walking along the shoreline, away from the rising sun.
They are in most ways almost identical.

He's earnest; and she's looking straight ahead
as they pass; but he swings above his head
both hands, whilst gasping "over the volcano".

the beach, sea-cut and spread-wide by swell surges,
faces the Pole

across the water

island

township illuminated by light shining
through falling showers

compacted seaweed filigrees
ocean thrown dyke bounces back the rising tides

walking the firm sand
dry yet disconcerted

sea mist

Twining twin eyes of storm whip high eucalypts
into frenzies that are thunderous.

They conjoin, becoming cyclopean, splinting
from pieces; splint again; split. One eye hovers,
opening; the racing moon becomes static;
Mercury rushes West, clouds closing. Wind blows
stronger than it ever did, quite out of
experience. A small flight of cockatoos,
some twenty or thirty, noisily making

a roost in high branches before sundown,
whipped out metres each way, challenging talons.

The dog sleeps quietly, secure in mind
by our feet. That tree, one of the many,
may fall across the house. I shan't worry;
it probably wouldn't kill us; certainly
not the dog. Strange storm surges on the beach
in past weeks. More so today, I'd hazard.

Orion descends, brilliantly, through turbulent skies.

The five dolphin pod, having survived storms
yesterday, bobs between reef and beach, thrashing,
signifying – if you think it – a great success
against a cowed, swarming school of baitfish;
too small without tight nets, but, for dolphins,
mouthfuls. The young, just two months since, back-flipping
in their nursery of water, are learning
to trap fish in the parents' wake, effortlessly,
or so it seems to one who's undolphin.

Two young ladies, backs plumb as their quick speech,
ride West, by the sign that says 'No Horses'.

The dog runs free, out on the low tide strand,
to chomp sea tossed sea urchins at its will.

We skip across the out-flowing delta,
keeping a calm watch on the dolphin pod;
seven hooded plovers skit around us.

I was thinking of gulls on English coasts.
Malignantly conventional they are.
Grey herring gulls. Then I was distracted
by the arrival of hooded plovers.
It was a loud wee group which broke open
and entered my growing silence, reading;
and then you wrote of screaming gulls near you.
I too think them always noisy boring.
In my memory. Standard English issue.
That's gulls, not girls, flying, not on high heels.
We've had days of King Parrots. And Lorikeets,
they, especially, seeming to fear nothing.
With them came sulphur-crested cockatoos
and a few flights of Yellow Tailed Parrots
which flew languidly, slowly, swinging their wings,
tumbling. Cockatoos screech as they land high up
maybe sixty metres in the eucalypts,
to screech again, flurrying their yellow crests.
Lorikeets fly in very fast, at head height
sometimes, to denude fruit trees; and off again.
King parrots sit on their thrones. Thinking high heels.
I am. Not you; but maybe you as well.

Or perhaps you're just thinking raucous gulls.
Standard English issues. Think high heels, man.

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