

The Beach

Ana Louisa Davis

1.

Today you will go to the beach to seek succour.

It is early, not too hot yet. Another morning waking to the acrid smell of smoke. Reminds you of that week in Brunei – restless tropical nights, the stench of the rainforest on fire snaking through your open window. As you rode your bike to class each day, sulky troops of monkeys slunk across your path – black eyes darting. You avoided eye contact. *Don't let them think you're a challenge.*

What do people pack when they must flee their homes? Photo albums...passport... books... Definitely, books! Collected over a lifetime. But how to fit them all in the car?

Things like this worry at the corners of your mind – this 'Catastrophic Tuesday'.

The grassy slope behind the dunes is a brittle copper field. Ever-present smoke gauze frames a red sun.

Frantic news reports spool through your head as you round the top of the dunes and squint in the strange morning glare. You breathe out, your body ready to soften into the expanse.

But the sun's weak light coats the sea, glimmering like a sickly oil slick. And along the shore, there's a line of ash – scallop-shaped scarring. Small waves draw this black trim back into the ocean's body, staining the harder sand into gradations of grey.

The wings of some dead seabirds stick out at odd angles from clumps of seaweed. Crows feast on the carrion.

An airless, can't-be-bothered Northerly dries your skin, stings your eyes.

2.

You pad along the sand and think of families huddled on midnight southern beaches, flames licking the dunes.

About a kilometre north, you see a large dark shape mounding out of the wet sand. A turtle! Beached. It is massive and immovable. Ancient barnacles bulge from the smooth shell still moist and shiny.

The creature's flippers and loose wrinkled neck sway, half-hearted in the surge. Imitating life.

It's all you can do not to lay down with it.

3.

On your return, some people are plunging into the tepid cornflake soup.

Why not? You strip off your clothes, wade slowly into the viscous water, murky yellow. Laced with ash.

Ash – pieces of old-growth eucalypts, someone's house, perhaps... Pieces of fleeing animals? Carried on angry winds and now churned into the ocean.

4.

You drip back over the banksia hill. There's the bee-eater, trilling. Still trilling. Rainbow body shivering in the waxy light.

Past the pond; water lilies still turning their faces to the sun.

A long time non-fiction freelance writer with her work published across major yoga and wellbeing magazines, **Ana Louisa Davis** is now an emerging fiction writer. She is currently completing a Graduate Diploma in Creative Writing at Southern Cross University and is based on the North Coast of NSW on Arakawal land.