

2049

by Belinda Raposo

### First Prize

The water laps over Ella's legs, crashing gently in the small of her back.

'Tide's coming in' she hums.

The rooftop will be under in an hour.

'Yeah, we should make a move soon' replies the girl lazily.

The last day of summer has everyone rejoicing. Village Beach is packed. The Gold Coast Highway Pontoon has a constant rotation of day trippers, in and out like messy sets. Busier than before the 2040 Wipe Out when the shops were swallowed up for the last time. The whole strip was bought up by council in the 2030 Business Buyout. Not one business refused, despite the losses. The smart ones set up food trucks to move with the tides. Gypsy's parents refused the Residential Buyout offer and now live in a motorhome, following the seasons. She strokes a hand across the water pooling at the cupping of Ella's spine.

'Wanna come to my Auntie's next weekend?' asks Gypsy, slicing through the tiny waves as they roll across Ella's dip. A bold move, the hand on the back, but so far so good.

'What's at your Auntie's?' Ella asks, still belly down.

Gypsy pulls her legs up close to her chest, hugging them.

'She lives down Bronte. Knocked back the Buy Out. She lives on the 5th floor, says she's staying 'til she dies. We can grab a train to the Bondi Pontoon. She'll pick us up in the dinghy.'

'Yeah, sure, I'll have to check if mum and dad need me. They've got some Climate Refugees staying with them for a while' Ella replies.

'Cool. How's it all going?' asks Gypsy.

'Yeah, good. The house is always packed with families. Usually they stay a few months. This time they're from Fiji. Nice enough people.'

Ella's family are inland, in Mudgeeraba. If there's a king tide the garden floods, but otherwise it's a safe house for the Climate Refugees from the former South Pacific Islands. Families like Ella's receive a government allowance for housing stateless islanders whose countries were lost in the 2040 Wipe Out.

'That's good. What if I come over and we can ask together?' says Gypsy.

'Yeah that's cool. But you're just a friend, OK?' Ella grins.

'Oh' Gypsy teases. 'Why, we more than that?'

Ella rolls over, squinting. The sun is a halo behind Gypsy's amber curls. 'I mean, we could be... it's just my parents...'

'It's OK' Gypsy reassures her. 'Don't explain. I know not everyone's folks are like mine.'

A sudden growl startles them, and they sit up to investigate. Gypsy uses the distraction to check Ella out with a surreptitious sideways glance. Her long black hair is tied up above her head in a messy knot. Ella pretends not to notice her. Out where the old beach starts two jet skis are racing. They swerve, trying to cut each other off.

'Shit' Gypsy mumbles.

'What's up?'

'They're from my school. They ride those things to the school pontoon every day instead of taking the ferry. They think they're kings of the sea. That one there, the one that just threw his tinnie into the water, he wanted me to be his girlfriend. I rejected him, so he made my life hell.'

'Entitled little shit.'

'Yeah, started a rumour that I had ginger pubes. That pretty much made Year 10 unbearable. I just ignored it, like mum told me to. It's helped.'

Gypsy feels Ella's curious eyes on her now.

'Well, I mean, they are... but he wouldn't know!' Gypsy laughs.

'I wasn't asking, but thanks for the heads up' smirks Ella.

The jet ski hoons head toward Pirate Park wreck. The water rises over the tops of their thighs now.

'Gypsy, look!' calls Ella.

A pod of dolphins parades out to the south, just past the pontoon. The day trippers go wild. Ella and Gypsy look at one another and nod. It's getting busy, time to move on. They wade over the rooftops, toward the pontoon. Waiting for the shuttle, the girls watch the dolphins disappear south. The midday sun warms their faces.

'My parents will be making lunch about now. Hope you like Cantonese-Portuguese food,' Ella says.

'How could I not?'

'Good.'

'When did your family come here?' asks Gypsy.

'2035. They left Macao for mainland China, then dad got a job in Brisbane. He's in aquabotics. There's nothing there now, so we're staying.'

The ferry slows as it approaches. Gypsy hops up first, holding out a hand for Ella.

'I'm glad you're staying.'