

I can't remember exactly when it was. The end of the summer, I suppose. The sea was colder than the week before and grey like the sky above. Still heads and arms and legs appeared from nowhere. They say it's good for the body, a tonic for the soul, that it's cheaper than a therapist. I don't know. Maybe it's just that your brain freezes, that your emotions seize up, so it takes you a while to get back to your usual self. Though this day it seemed like a miracle cure. My mind wasn't running rings around me, sticking its tongue out at me. I wasn't pushing bags of old clothes from one building to another. The books weren't piling up faster than I could eat them. The freaks and the circus clowns weren't tumbling on the grass. There was no alligator lifted from a coffin. No, it was getting on for low tide now, and maybe that man who was really a woman walking a dog would sink down into the sand but not me. Not today. Not again.

Looking out at the bay, I thought of all the times I walked this way. All the walks by the coast. It seemed this late afternoon as you might walk all the way across. The signs warned of tides catching you off guard, but I paid no heed. I walked on anyway. A man with a beard was digging up worms and a woman was burying all her worries in the sand. There were young women in capri pants and men in woolen pullovers on the strand. They'd cycled all the way from the mid 1960s to be here. I waved at them. Saw a boy with his mother's silk scarf around his neck running out to the water. I walked into the embrace of the bay, thinking I could make it all the way. But I didn't know I wouldn't be able to make it, to make it there from where I was here. Well I mean, everything would have changed when I could get there. When I'd reached there it wouldn't be the same spot as how it looked from here. I'd be looking back at myself, all those reflections and those little prints where my feet had touched the sand.

Sure enough the water came in all around. I watched and tried to go quicker and then stop and peeled some skin off my ear. Then I put my finger right inside my head and threw a bit of me into the sea. I could have gotten away then, there was a real chance if I made a dash for it. But there were tiny little mermaids with long dark hair lolling on the ridges of sand. Mischievous mermaids and they were giggling and I got distracted and when I looked for the bridge that used to be somewhere it was gone, had fallen down. Oh no!

Well, I managed to pull myself back to dry land in the end, but it wasn't too far from where I'd started out to cross the bay. There was a big old stone building, and I could see pairs and pairs of runners without any legs in them dashing along the street, like they were all searching for something, all madly searching for something. Lots of glass boxes hung from the sky and there were people with big eyes cleaning the windows inside and staring down at me. I rushed on, but I'm sure I saw somebody in a suit walking a tightrope above the water. I thought I recognised him but I didn't want to stop. Besides, all those other men getting massages on those floating things on the water, well it just gave me the creeps.

So I quickened my step. The closer I got to where I was going though, the harder this whole walk seemed. Suddenly there was a man falling slowly out of the sky, a man with blond hair and tears in his eyes. And then a woman with pale skin and rosy cheeks. Long red hair. She came tumbling in slow motion through the clouds, somersaulting backwards. I looked at the two of them, saw there were others too, and then I looked away. On the other side of road where I stopped at the traffic lights there was a set of thick legs in pair of football shorts climbing up a wall. Just climbing up a wall in the evening like it was the most natural thing in the world.

There was nothing for it. I just ran on, got across town to meet my friend as quickly as I could. I smiled and said everything was fine. We had an Oom Bop and a plate of dumplings and then we each went on a different bus home afterwards. I could still taste the salt of my skin when I lay in bed, my wet towel whispering on the radiator in the hall. It was just another day really, just a normal day. I closed my eyes and walked into the water. I can't remember exactly when it was.

—essay by **Denise Kehoe** in response to the exhibition **Beyond the Sandy Suburbs**