

Short Story : Senior

Winner – Phillipa McMenamin, Yr13, Villa Maria College



“The Nightmare at Noyer Bay”

Moving to Noyer Bay had left my chest half hollow, the town was so thick with winter, so absolutely bathed in it. The waves crashed loudly, alive even if the bay was well and truly dead, against the battered shore. Throwing themselves, beating themselves to death against the pyres of pointed rock and the lonely dock which reached out to the ocean. The anorexic trees wept their leaves, the evenings grew heavy, and all the tourists had left the bay, returned to their homes, to real life. Of course it was not entirely abandoned, but it really did starve half to death in the winter months. The population thinned out, and the whole shore was overcome by an unbelievable loneliness. In the summer the beach was so alive, it pulsed and throbbed with life, the screams of kids, the splashing of water, the hot thick breath of the sun swamped the whole place in a pleasant glow of sleepy, hazy warmth. We had moved here some months ago, my mother who seemed so vague these days, had been adamant that this was where we needed to be. So far away from civilisation, in a holiday destination which felt so unreal in the winter, like two separate places, one glowing and the other dull. We had needed a change, Mum was waning, and my sleep was only getting worse. I have since my youngest years, and earliest memories been plagued by strange and startling dreams. The kind which rob me of my desire to sleep, but leave me so tired that I must once more give in to them. The dreams had become so harsh since we had arrived in Noyer, the bony boy who had always been present seemed so much more frightening, he was crying out desperately with words I couldn't

understand. He would speak as if his mouth was full of some kind of liquid, speaking in gurgles and choking on his own ragged expressions. The boy had always been in my dreams, since I was young, and I felt he must have been an imaginary friend, conjured up when I was in my most subconscious, but he had stuck with me. At seventeen, I still fell asleep waiting to meet him, fell asleep ready for him to lead me down some ravaged path, to some abundant nightmare. My dreams had grown so preoccupied, so obsessed with the wild, the cruel dark ocean, the eerie forest which traced around the bay. They were beautiful and startling, all within the same breath. I had been having a series of specific nightmares since we had arrived two months ago. In my dreams I would stand in an empty forest, I'd never been to the woods by the shore, but somehow from the outside I felt they might look like this. The sky was a patchwork of loose light and shaking leaf, a shocking white fell in through the treetops, and beneath my feet lay a floor of damp foliage. The trees felt alive, whispering to one another, as their swaying branches tapped each other in secrecy. Framed in green I would always spot the thin boy. He stared into my eyes, until the odd sound of broken bird song penetrated through the impossible calm of the forest and I awoke.

The dreams were so persistent I travelled to the old forest, wondering if what lay beyond those trees was what I saw within my dreams. The wood was just as quiet as I had dreamt it to be, there was no sound, nothing. Walking on I felt I was in a still nightmare, a calm to be corrupted by storm. A tree lay beyond me, tall and thick it reached into the sky like a great oaken arm. The tree erupted with the flight of several birds, all soaring into the grey sky. They sung out in the song which filled my dreams, which broke my dreams open so as I could wake. Frightened by the psychic abilities of the forest, I ran. Running between the trees, I slipped on damp wood, and gnarled branches. Brushing the dirt from my wounds, I continued running. But I felt heavy and clumsy, my feet felt tender and new. Collapsing onto myself, then resurrecting from the forest floor, I ran hazily until I reached the empty beach. Falling onto the sand, I was pulled deep into a dream. It wasn't clear like my others, instead it flickered through my mind like a faded film reel. Like staring at some far away object in the blinding bloody glare of the sun. I was very small, I was a child standing at the edge of the beach. The boy who always made himself known in my dreams, was standing his legs deep in the restless blue of the ocean. He seemed happy, happier than I'd ever seen him. Usually his face was so sullen, so sunken and severe. But he smiled and so did I, I think. Running towards him I stopped suddenly, and watched him tread further within the waves. He grew smaller and smaller disappearing into the horizon, then another image flashed past me. He and I trampling through the wood, I followed after him as his arm stretched lazily behind him, my tiny hand in his. The next minute he lay pale on the beach, the waves lapping at his side, a contradiction, the life of the surf and his still chest. In the word, covered in a hazy glow he calved his name into the old tree. Then I saw her, my mother, her hair was shorter than it is now, she held him in her arms, her shirt damp from his wet lifeless frame. Memories which had evaded me since my youngest years overpowered me, holding me down as if I were caught in the gut of a colossal wave.

I awoke, my mother leaning over me, her face looked very heavy. "Oh thank God, I thought maybe you had fainted." Her twisted expression faded with my waking, her eyes crackled with warmth, and her face betrayed the image of a woman who was weathered like the rusted pier at which the fierce waves beckoned. "What were you thinking falling asleep out on the beach this time of night?!"

"I'm not really sure." I had been asleep for some time, the dull light of the afternoon had collapsed under the weight of a deep black night. I gave her a look, and I'm not sure how, but it communicated

that I knew, as the hand of the wind tussled her light hair about her worn face, it was as if she had seen my dream, she knew that I had remembered.

We looked out over the flattened sea, the tide at its very calmest, the breeze so faint and the sun far away.

“If you look out, when the sea is really calm, sometimes you forget it took him from you. You look out, and it’s just water. I mean, that’s all it is. Sometimes I look out and I just see water.” Her eyes sparkled, attached it seemed to the sea.

My brother now belongs to the waves.