

TRASHED:

sex, gender and death on Magnetic Island

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I am reclining on an inflatable unicorn in a far too full swimming pool with a beverage nestled between my thighs. Soggy Woolworths hors d'oeuvres are stacked on my belly; some warm hummus and a box of barbecue flavored bikkies. I am somewhere in the Great Barrier Reef on a tropical island. This is paradise; I am distant enough from any kind of physical discomfort that may threaten my reclining state, while the picturesque view is spread wide before me for my uncut pleasure. I suck red flavoring from wrinkled witch fingers. It zings and pops on my salt saturated tongue.

Muscular male bodies slosh about in the green pool water trying to outmaneuver one another with a volley ball, boinging me into the side of the pool with their splashing. My hors d'oeuvres jest dangerously toward the water. Here comes the ball! The ball sails heroically over my head and bounces into a fellow recliner on the pool's fleshy edge - "Hey! Watch it!" - up and over the balcony, rolling down the beach toward the hideously dangerous sea. It's odd to be in a pool right beside the ocean but there is a good reason to value the glass barrier. It protects the water of the pool party from the nasty jellyfish-infested H2O of the coral sea. The man who launched the missile guffaws through his neat little moustache. It is Movember and these young men are

floating their manliness in hairy displays of the upper lip. I fold my neck forward and drink my beer with extruded lips, so I don't have to sit up.

The dj jiggles. The beat rumbles.

I'm trying to hide the fact that I don't want to be here, and I am averting my eyes from the female figures; tanned and shapely, they half dance, half converse in shouted phrases, "OMG, I LOOOVE THIS SONG." The song is Dizzie Rascal's immortal noughties hit, *Bonkers*. I catch the eye of a woman in contemplative thought, and she springs into movement as though she too is hiding her insecurity. I try to imagine having a conversation with somebody, but I can't for the life of me recall what the content of a conversation sounds like. To people whose eyes lock onto mine with a yearning to communicate, I smile goofishly and bury the desire in another sip of beer.

I finish my beverage, crush the cup, and throw it to the pool side. Splosh. I roll off my plastic steed and drown the dj's beats in thick green pool water. Bikkies disperse on the surface and someone swoops down to dredge them out of the water with a gull-like bite.

Legs. Golden legs in a chlorine green halo. I want to reach out and pull at one. No, bite one. That's right. I want to sink my teeth into a calf muscle and hear the gurgling whine of a human scream coming from the surface as I thrash from side to side, latched onto the leg flesh of my victim. Ka-plonk. The leg pops right out of its socket and with it, a slow puff of red fills the pool with panic. The others are screaming now and from below I hear the wet roar of the crowd. Legs. Legs everywhere.

I pull myself onto the terracotta tiles of the pools edge and pour another beer out of the keg. I ooze under the shade of an umbrella, dripping, and gulp from the cool frothy cup. Disused plastic cups vibrate across the hot clay tiles with each thud of the computer simulated kick drum. *Some people think I'm crazy, but I just think I'm free.* The cups travel silently toward the ocean, transparent and disposable, they are designed to exist as little as possible and yet their mass accumulation reels back at us in waves of pollution. Islands of stuff that isn't supposed to exist, nothing-things, are adrift in an ocean more plastic than fish.

None of that matters. Like everyone else, I am here to unwind from the stresses of labor and be a slob, to discharge my sloth in plastic cups and hangovers and extended glances at sexy bodies. Here's to me! Another memory collapses, another desire numbed. In the friction-less space of luxury I can't remember who I am, what I want or why I am here.

This is escapism. Our culture's *raison d'être*. It is islands like this one that are the victims of our desire to switch off, drink up and dumb down. This place is a testament to the extremes that our culture; working ourselves into mind altering states of depression and anxiety throughout the year and then venting it in one long drug-induced barf. We must remember, this is NOT normal. "Everyone! Listen to me! We don't have to do this! There is another way! Put down the chemical weapons. Make peace with yourself!"

Two huge Afghan hounds sniffing their way around the pool, look up at me as I'm shouting this. "Another one's losing his mind," it barks. "Best we get a spliff to him before he cracks." Says the other.

And sure enough, a hand pinching a joint looms into my vision. I sit up to smoke it and I realise I'm deep in plastic cups and cigarette butts. Bonkers.

One of the moustacheod bros, a concreter from Melbourne, has just swallowed a cigarette butt and is now attempting to snort his cocktail through a straw. Others are in their underpants at the bar playing musical beanbags for the prize of a jug of Canadian Club and Dry. I reach for the keg tap and it dribbles the last of its contents into my cup. A terrible pain lurches from deep within my chest. The impending doom of sobriety. I scabble crab-wise through the debris. In a fog of alcoholic nonsense I claw up the balcony, peering out at the expanse of smooth ocean. Swim with me, it says. But I am reminded of the tentacular horrors lurking beneath the wide blue beauty and recoil from the thought. In the far distance I see the mainland, a smear of purple on the horizon. That's where I was last seen, eagerly waiting for the ferry in a terminal crowded with other excited holidaymakers, chatting away with Dean, the guy who takes the tickets. He's the one that told me about the jellyfish. "Are you heading to the full moon party?" "The what?" "A party, we have every full moon." "I wasn't aware of it," I say. "You should go, it's a great time." And he takes my ticket. "Sure." I say and before I enter the on-board ramp he leans in and whispers, "Beware the Irukandji!"

The Irukandji. A word that evokes all the marine themed nightmares of my childhood, giant squids and electrified tentacles, the poison barbs of the blue ringed octopus, the razor toothed moray eels that shred the flesh from your limbs. Giant snapping clams. The sea is a place of

malicious primeval creatures, thoughtless and unreasoning. Swimming back to the mainland would be certain death but perhaps I could lash all these cups together and sail the trash back to the mainland where upon my return I will discover myself waiting for me at the ocean shore, and there I will lovingly embrace myself. Home at last.

But first, I must get rid of this aching chest pain. I drag myself through the crowd and wobble toward the naked bodies at the bar.

From inside the hysterical scene arses wobble menacingly and the tight clenching of muscular buttocks lust after them, loading ammunition into some unseen chamber, ready to launch at them with a - "Heeey, Mikalah! Get in the pool why don't yah!" They are at it again. Having retrieved the volleyball from the beach, the boys are thrusting it at passers by. I sulk into the shade of the bar.

The bar is called The Mutineer and it has a Polynesian theme. There are necklaces of plastic flowers on the bartenders, and it is decorated with tikki paraphernalia; plastic bamboo veneer on the walls and a coconut bowl for a tip jar. The aesthetics are just perfect. Validating the partial nudity of part goers and abstracting all exoticisms into one unreal world of fantasy, where what I do and who I am has no real world consequences. We convicts of mother England's brutal little colonial outpost have escaped our shackles and 'gone native'.

After some time squinting, blinking and adjusting the distance of my face from the drinks menu, I read on it the story of Christian Fletcher. He was the leader of a mutiny on the island of Tahiti where William Bligh's crew of the HMS Bounty overthrew their captain and 'went native' in 1789. Captain Bligh was a staunch and pious man who against all odds remained abstinent during the voyage, forgetting that God made islands so we could plunder the natives and forget we ever did it. "What could be the reason for such a revolt?" He wrote, "In answer to which I can only conjecture, that the mutineers have flattered themselves with the hopes of a more happy life among the Otaheiteans than they could possibly enjoy in England; and this, joined to some female connections, most probably occasioned the transaction."

The prospect of returning aboard the crowded, smelly Bounty to journey back to crowded, smelly England was unbearable for the crew. While some of the mutineers made a respectable life for themselves, accepting local custom and marrying into island society, others wallowed in drunkenness and murdered their friends.

I make the transaction for another beer. Beep goes the card machine. Another half hour of my labor spent on purging its memory.

I stagger backward and bump into the pile, collapsing back onto the inflatable unicorn. My old comrade. I surrender to the floating and I close my eyes, hearing the distant pump of a collective heart, thumping slavishly in service to the dj's desires. "Hey, hey, hey! Island babies! Get your arses ready for a conga liiiiiine!"

The crowd cheers in shambolic unison. My unicorn and I slide over the debris, riding a wave of human bodies that are linked by groping hands, circling around the trash. The unicorn boings her stunted rainbow wings and takes flight up and over the conga line, squeaking her way across the wide blue ocean.

She is returning to her homeland, the great pacific trash vortex, an 80,000 tonne island of plastic floating somewhere near Hawaii. She follows the currents and as we begin our journey across the surface of the planet she hums to the tune of Dizzie Rascal. *I wake up everyday it's a day dream, everything in my life ain't what it seems. I wake up just to go back to sleep. I act real shallow but I'm in too deep.* I take a large gulp from my jug and wipe the dribbles from my chin. The island shrinks to a green and yellow dot, a small peak in a large network of shallow coral. Islands are fictions of the colonial mind. Islands beget more islands as the modern tourist seeks disconnection, isolation and a feeling of awayness, running from the painful realisation that everything you do is consequential. Everything is forever. As we recoil from responsibility, we clutch at chemical enhancements, fantasies and self-isolation. Getting Away From It All is really just postponing the inevitable return of the centuries of shit that has clogged the pipes of human culture. A fatberg of human ignorance threatens to burst into the atmosphere. I am that fatberg. I soar through clouds flowing like rivers in the sky, and if you squint hard enough you can see... Freidrich Neitzche? There is a cough and a spit and the disembodied mouth clears the dust from its buried epiglottis. In the voice of a baritone that rumbles through time come the words:

“This life as you now live it and have lived it,

you will have to live once more and innumerable times... More.”

You must change your life!

“You plastics are adorable but sure as hell hard to kill.” I say and I brandish the pen I keep secure in the back pocket of my board shorts with a wad of sodden journal notes. Raising the weapon high above my head I plunge it into the unicorn's air-filled face. Psssssst, she squeals and begins to plummet downward, toward the trash island, bouncing half deflated into the mass of micro-plastics, toothbrushes, wads of toilet paper, cell phone cases, plastic bags and cups.

Splosh. I am suspended in a slushy polymer continent the size of two Australias and I feel a burning sensation crawling up my limbs. The irukandji? I hear the last whistle of words from my collapsing pal, “You are trashed, mate.” And we both sink deep into the polymer swamp. The disembodied moustache above bursts into an insectoid swarm of grey scarabs. They circumscurry around and around rushing into the space between light particles. Phosphenes dissolve to blackness and the facts of gravity crash my consciousness into the hotel mattress. I am trashed.