

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by clouds, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds. The ocean is visible in the foreground, with a pier railing in the lower right corner.

BCUK Writing Competition July 2008

“A Sunset on the Beach”

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You Won't Hurt Me No More by [SeasideMan](#)

In a low, broken voice he chanted over and over:

"You won't hurt me no more, you won't hurt me no more".

The gentle waves lapped a few feet short of the wheels of his chair where he sat, staring outwards to where the golden, August sun was poised to plunge into the sea. His fists clenched his blanket tightly and moved up and down minutely in rhythm with his words.

I sighed deeply, opened my mouth and closed it again.

"I love to see a sunset on the beach, don't you", I said and gave him a smile, but he gave no sign of having heard me.

"Are you alright, mate"?

No response, his chant continued. The old feller looked grey and gaunt, just like my father near the end. Dad could never keep warm either.

"Are you OK"? I leaned over him, and reached out a hand to touch his arm.

His chant grew louder, and the vertical motion of his hands increased. His knuckles were white from their fierce grip and he was smacking his hands into his thighs. A single tear rolled down his left cheek.

"You'll hurt yourself if you carry on like that"!

The chant became a shout. His hands pounded forcefully and his face was bright red. I couldn't move and the pulse throbbed in my temple.

He paused momentarily and glared downwards, drew a huge breath and gave one last monstrous bellow of his chant, each word distinct and accompanied by terrific blows upon both legs as he glowered at them:

"YOU. WON'T. HURT. ME. NO. MORE"!

He fell silent and slumped back into his chair, eyes closed. His fingers uncurled and as they did so, a pill bottle fell onto the sand. It was empty.

Gap year by [rowtheboat](#)

She was beautiful.

From her curly auburn mop, whose tendrils bounced tantalisingly with the slightest tilt of her pale, delicate face; to the flirtatious twist of her elegant ankles as she danced around him, winking a joyful, sky-blue eye in promise of what was to follow.

God, how she bored him.

He watched distantly as she went down on him, red hair aglow in the glorious blaze of light snaking in from the gaps in the blinds, like a sunset on the beach that waited patiently outside for the true romantics.

What was he even doing here?

He sighed, and she mirrored it in Alice-through-the-looking-glass fashion; a misguided, unintentional parody of his complete lack of enthusiasm. He could disillusion her easily, now, if he could be bothered. Which, of course, he couldn't.

Escapism. What a joke.

Hop on a plane, sure. Travel to the outer end of nowhere, immersing yourself in sun, sea, sand and anonymity. Slap a smile on your face; let the banter dribble out of your mouth; hop, skip, jump and entertain to your heart's content as everyone you meet cascades into laughter, accepting you unquestioningly for who you appear to be, in *exactly* the way that you hoped they would.

How cruel, then, to discover that you actually despise them for doing so.

She rose, smiling. He forced a smile back, focusing on the tiny, cute gap between her front teeth.

There it was. The emptiness.

"I've got to go," she said. "I know," he said.

And he watched, unmoving, as she collected herself, flung her head back and drew breath, looked at him as she exhaled and smiled again. And left.

And he sighed.

Because the truth of it is that you can't, simply can *never* escape the fact that you continue to be you.

Dead man talking by [lledeb](#)

I've been a long time dead, 237 years, six months and three weeks if you want to be precise. Do you want to know something else? Death, it's the best thing that ever happened to me. I've loved every second of it. I never truly started living until after I died, on the day of my death it was like a great weight was lifted from my shoulders, and the pain in my heart went away for the first time in many years. Of course the pain went away. How could I have felt heartache when my heart was no longer beating?

There used to be a bar, on the outskirts, the fringes. I'd go there sometimes when I craved the taste of flesh, the touch of a woman. The women who frequented the bar may have lacked sophistication but at that point in my life I wasn't looking for deep and meaningful, I had no desire to put the world to rights I had done my share of the good Samaritan bollocks, and look where that had got me, laying on a mortuary slab for a couple of nights before I rose again. I just look out for number one these days, because let's face it; nobody else is going to care for them?

It's nice to not have to think about anyone but yourself. You should try it sometime, not to have a care in the world, to see all the suffering, to know that it's there but to not give a damn. You may think that's a selfish attitude, but I'm not selfish, I'm dead. How can I care and love when I feel nothing, when I'm barren, hollow, empty. How can I feel when my heart is static in my chest and my blood no longer flows? So what if I never see a sunset on the beach again? Those things are over rated anyway.

The Annex by [HektorRevisited](#)

At the top of the stairs, we turned into what would become The Lord Cardigan Memorial Annex - a large room, containing one floor-to-ceiling bookshelf and, on the floor, crate upon crate of books.

My employer told me that the noble Lord had collected these books throughout his life and had, in his will, left them to the University. Given the nature of Lord Cardigan's demise (he had gone missing, together with his lover (his children's au pair), in a boating accident six years ago, leaving his wife (Lady Victoria) and family almost destitute), the collection was smaller than originally intended. Nevertheless, cataloguing approximately fourteen thousand books in less than four months would be quite a task.

It was a task that I relished, however, for the collection contained so many rare and original works. I took time to study the instructions set out in Lord Cardigan's will (these set out where each category should be placed on the shelves and also specified that none but the person cataloguing the books may visit the Annex until they were completely arranged). Despite the fact that I was often working sixteen or seventeen hours each day, my work captivated me in such a way that I hardly felt any fatigue. As the crates emptied and the collection took shape, I barely noticed that which would later be obvious to all.

Finally, on the seventh anniversary of his Lordship's disappearance, the grand opening of the Annex took place. Looking up at the finished work, the assembled dignitaries stood in silence, mouthing the words that were now spelled out by the spines the duly arranged books "Victoria - you fool! By the time you read this, I shall be watching a sunset on the beach."

Job Satisfaction by [shakeberry](#)

The rain was falling down hard, the bus stop was cramped...looking at my watch I realised I would be late, "Damn!" I thought, as I clutched the black leather briefcase to my chest...remembering lightly running my fingers over the contents, feeling the smoothness, the contours and watching it glisten in the new daylight...That was the perk to my new found life and job.

Finally the number 48 is here, we all jostled to get on, the rowdy schoolkids were on again, I find a seat and tap my briefcase, smirking to myself, and contemplating using the contents on the little shits. The world around me is busy and loud, yet I feel a sense of calmness, like a sunset on the beach..this always happens when I'm focused on the task ahead. A timid girl comes and sits next to me, she smiles and it's the smile I've seen before, the one where you keep your head down, don't make eye contact, in hopes no one notices you...but the problem is certain people do...those are the ones my job deals with.

The bell rings and the girl gets up, instinctively knowing I have to get passed. The rain is beating down hard, as I step off, I look and see I'm back in the place I've been before. My job mostly entails nightwork, but this job was a special case, it couldn't be done any other time. I walk up to the familiar pathway, and walk around to the backdoor, I feel under the plantpot, ahh i think to myself, there as always. I quietly unlock the door, my breathing heavier, although still controlled. I remember where all the creaks where, but there's no sound he will hear.

Except the one of my gun.

Men! by [LandersUK](#)

Like treading on fresh dog vomit on a shag pile carpet the soft wet sand flooded the gaps of my toes as I walked along the beach.

It had been a while since I'd been back here but the memories came flooding back as though it was only yesterday. The bright white foam of the lapping sea on the shore broken only by the rotting flesh of a dead jelly-fish covered in seaweed. I closed my eyes and saw myself as a twelve year old child running up and down the beach, watching boats bob along the coast and people on air-filled death traps floating on the reflective surface of the water.

A breaking wave, bigger than I'd been expecting, broke me from my memories as it splashed water over my feet and up to my knees, soaking my jeans and showing the world that I was unprepared for where I was. When I looked up she was there.

Her beauty was stunning and the sunset on the beach had given her a radiance I'd not seen for so long.

"You look good," I said.

"Thank you."

"I hate that."

As her face broke into a smile I realised I'd missed her so much more than I knew. I'd paid for that smile and not seen a penny in return but if I asked her for it she'd tell me that her years of 'service' had been repayment enough.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"To give you this."

I handed her the envelope. She looked hopeful, as though she was expecting a letter from me announcing my unending love for her and telling her I so desperately wanted her back.

"Are you having me one?" she asked with a wry smile.

"No. The totals are correct. If you could pop a cheque through the door that'd be great. Anyway, I've gotta run, I'm meeting the lads for a beer. See ya later."

Working 27-Heaven by [ajns Spencer](#)

The Sun-God Apollo looked down on the world, evaluated the day and summed up the previous 15 hours in a single sentence.

"Bugger that for a game of soldiers."

Flicking through the gears he sped up his journey to the horizon, giving the lifeforms below a stunning sunset on the beach but unfortunately increasing his motion sickness.

Cracking open his 9th packet of Polos the deity closed his eyes and sucked, wondering yet again how he knew all the knowledge of the world and still have no idea how the holey mint could settle his stomach.

The religion crunch had hit Olympus Industries hard, he could only thank Dad he had a necessary position in the grand scheme of things, unlike some of his siblings.

Genetically modified crops meant Demeter was making ends meet with a pick-your-own farm outside Illfracombe and Aphrodite, made redundant by Harley Street, was at this moment squeezing into her day-glo orange shorts for the graveyard shift at Hooters.

Parking the Sun in its lockup for the night he sighed, picked up his thermos and slammed the corrugated iron door behind him, not even bothering to slip on the padlock.

Of course his day wasn't over, it never was now the prayer-flow had dried up and the price of Mana had increased tenfold at Lidl.

Banging through his front door he heard the clock strike 10pm and the ringing of the phone that heralded the start of his second job...

"Hello, you've reached the Oracle Psychic Hotline... Yes, I know what you want to know, the whole experience is a let down, he's premature and you never get the stain out of the ottoman... Hey, you wanted to know... Same to you, bitch!"

Reality... They just didn't want to know...

Ouch by [NotBob](#)

Well, that went disastrously wrong.

Picture the scene – she a tall, leggy brunette, and he a short skinny guy with a penchant for tall, leggy brunettes but little imagination, in a beach-front bar on a tropical island getaway.

I first noticed her when she ordered a sunset on the beach, which the barman prepared and delivered with the flair of one who knows their cocktails. I was impressed. The way she sipped her drink had my heart fluttering – is it right for a man's heart to behave like that just at the sight of an attractive woman sipping a drink?

I knew right from that moment that I had to be with her. The thought of being with her brightened my sullen mood, lifting me up rapturously from the deep blue funk that I had found myself in through debts and casinos. I tried my best to strike up a conversation with this beautiful apparition, yet all I could muster was a slurred "Tha' looksh goodnuff to schlurp, whasinnit?"

"Malibu, Grenadine and cola over ice. Wanna try a sip?" she said.

"Shoundsh good to me. Go on then." I replied, swaying slightly. She passed me her glass and I took a sip.

And that's the last I remember, but for some reason I have a nasty lump on the back of my head, my brain feels like it wants to escape because it's banging on the inside of my skull like a lunatic and my wallet is missing. Along with my watch, bracelet and rings.

I never did catch her name.

Doctor Fish throws a wobbly by [Znethru](#)

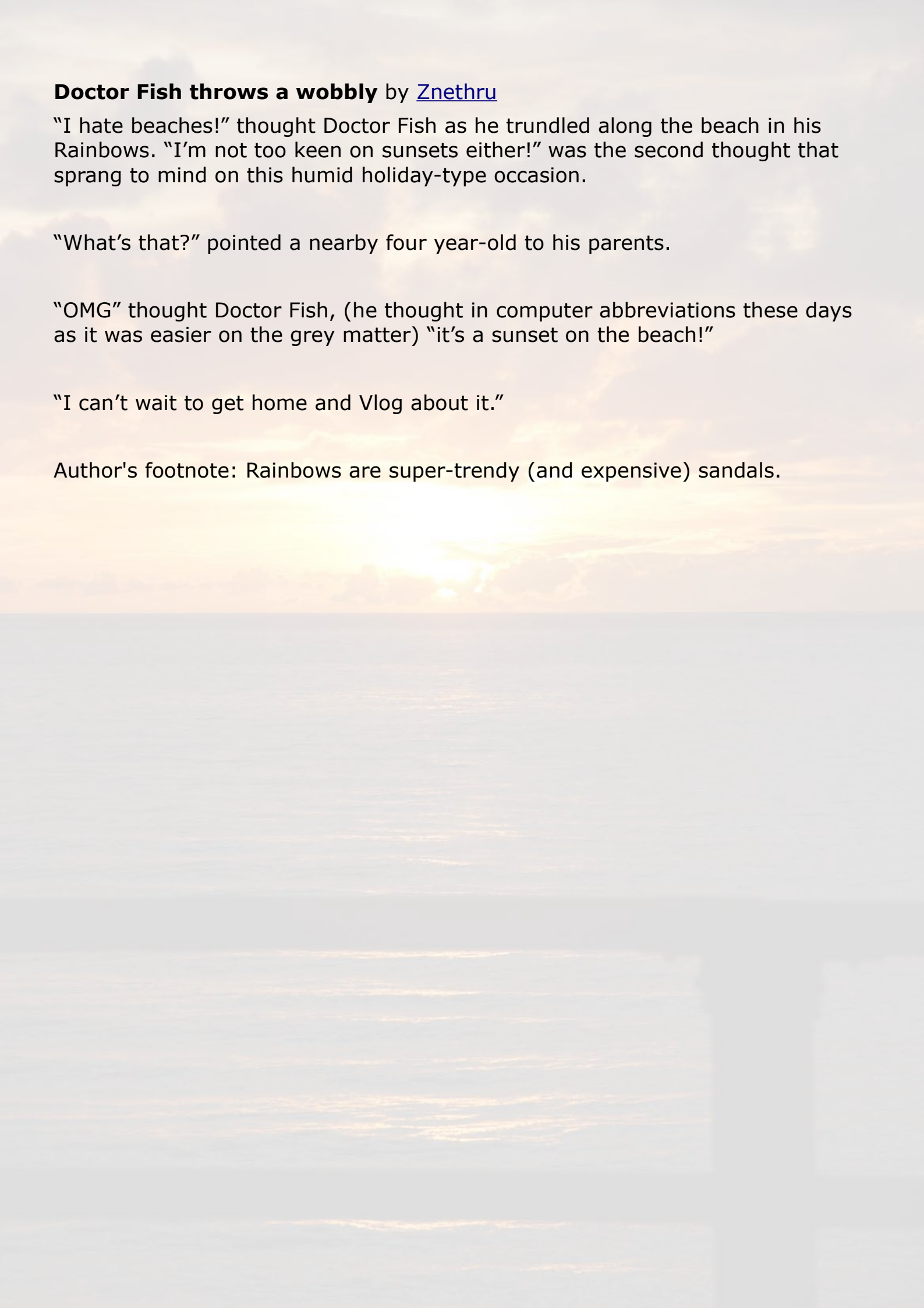
"I hate beaches!" thought Doctor Fish as he trundled along the beach in his Rainbows. "I'm not too keen on sunsets either!" was the second thought that sprang to mind on this humid holiday-type occasion.

"What's that?" pointed a nearby four year-old to his parents.

"OMG" thought Doctor Fish, (he thought in computer abbreviations these days as it was easier on the grey matter) "it's a sunset on the beach!"

"I can't wait to get home and Vlog about it."

Author's footnote: Rainbows are super-trendy (and expensive) sandals.



Out Of The Shadow by [moltsplace](#)

This wasn't suppose to happen.

It had only been a few months earlier that I'd lost sense and purpose. I had become a shadow.

I'd been asked one simple question. "Can you help me?"

I watched the rain fall against the car window, losing myself as each droplet trickled it's own path only to disappear to the ground.

Even now I couldn't remember when, I knew it had been a long time ago.

I smiled to myself, catching my own reflection in the window, I couldn't help but smile back at myself as I ran the recent events through my mind. No one would believe me, I didn't believe it and yet there it was. It was quite clearly there.

I wonder what they'd say. Then again what did it matter.

My thoughts turned and twisted to the negative. I thought "there's always something, come on, spit it out, put that doubt in my mind" but for once there was nothing.

The rain had stopped.

The driver's window mechanically slowly whirred itself down and the sound of the lapping sea returned to my ears rather than the voice of reason.

Mesmerised I stared into the crashing waves, looking for the white horses. The stare became a gentle gaze and then yet again I lost myself to my thoughts.

"Come on" I woke myself "it's time to go"

I didn't move. Calm, real calm had consumed me, I had no desire to go anywhere, not at that moment.

I sat, I watched and I smiled, again.

The sun started to peak through the grey clouds, I'd even forgotten how grey the day had been. Nothing was grey anymore.

I'd dreamed of a sunset on the beach, this moment wasn't it but perhaps, just perhaps it wasn't too far away.

beep beep

Girls' night out by [sminchin](#)

"There's something about the names of these drinks that makes me giggle like a kid," said Sally, as she picked up the cocktail list from the bar and waved it at her friends.

She ran her finger down the list and sniggered loudly as she said "Sex on the beach anyone? Or a slippery nipple?"

"Yes please," said Amy, a huge grin spreading across her face. "I'll have lots of those!" Her smile faded as she saw the look on the third girl's face. "What's up Clara?" she asked, rolling her eyes as she was pretty certain she knew what the answer would be.

"Why are they always so rude?" wailed Clara, her intense blush clearly visible despite the bar's dim lighting. "I could never ask for one of those!"

"Alright," said Amy, grabbing the list, "Let's find one that doesn't offend little Miss Prim over there... how about a sunset on a beach? No one can be embarrassed by that, not even you!"

"Okay," said Clara, "that's much more like it! I'll have one of those please." The 3 girls smiled at each other as they leant across the bar to attract the bar-man's attention, although Clara's blush returned when her friends decided to order the rudest possible drinks in their loudest possible voices...

The girls moved to a nearby table and sat down, sipping their drinks and watching the dance-floor.

"You girls are impossible!" sighed Clara. "Even the bar-man looked embarrassed when you were ordering those cocktails and he must see pretty much everything in his job."

"I'd like to see some more of him," laughed Sophie, provoking huge guffaws from Amy.

"Girls!" exclaimed Clara, but she joined in with the laughter this time. Her friends might be very rude but she loved them all the same.

Music of The Water by [sweetladyjane](#)

The many colors of her gown blended softly like a sunset on the beach. She walked now, her hair swaying with each step as her feet sank in the wet sand. It had been so long since she had listened to the sound of the waves as they moved against the rocks, making a music all their own, a music that carried her back in time.

She had never really forgotten but had pushed the memory into a quiet place, hiding it like a precious jewel, something to be protected. It was an evening much like this one, the sunset filled with color as she rested by her favourite rocks. She was waiting for the dawn when she would leave this place, starting a new life, one she had not chosen. He had not come to find her, but then she knew, he could not, for their lives though bound at the heart were from different places, different people.

Her life had not been unhappy and this place was now her home, but here in the open spaces the sound of the water seemed to carry his voice to her once again. The memories of him washed over her leaving the warmth of the bond they had always known. She gazed down into the water wondering where he was and what life had brought to him and in that moment she knew she was not alone.

As the moon rose over the water, the reflection lighting the night, the mist of the water blew gently across her face reminding her that it was time to go. She spoke some words, sending them out into the night and then turned, walking back to those who waited for her return.

Holiday 1987 by [Sienna](#)

When the argument started to get going properly, she was already a good distance away.

Even if they came out of the caravan now, she thought, they wouldn't be able to spot her so easily.

They were too caught up in the drama of it all anyway, as usual. She followed the path around another row of tents just behind the shower building, straining against the uneven surface as one wheel of the push chair got caught on a root.

Lately, she had begun to question whether all adults argued (the Gooding family, at least, appeared to be able to spend their holidays peacefully, laughing and joking over the dinner table set out under the pines), and whether it was normal that she got so afraid.

It had begun when her dad had caught her mum's finger in the car door outside a restaurant. Her mum screamed like she had never heard her scream before, and her dad said: "shut up, stupid bitch". Having freed her bleeding finger from the car, her mum then refused to enter "a restaurant where people know I'm a stupid bitch". She would have laughed at that if it wasn't so sad. "I want to go home", her mum said, and she had climbed back in the car as her dad drove them back to the campsite.

Immediately, he started to disassemble the tent. "I didn't mean 'home'", he mum cried, exhausted, "I meant, back here!"

She didn't want to hear anymore, so she took her little brother, put him in the push chair and started walking.

She didn't care that she was getting eaten alive by mosquitoes; all she wanted was a sunset on the beach.

"Look", she told her little brother as they watched the red sun go down over the bay.

Being Idle by [DominicGee](#)

What's the least a person can do?

This question has been on my mind for some time. I blink infrequently. Benumbed with fatigue I'm heaped on the sofa staring at nothing. Saliva is gathering into a pool, and I think about swallowing. Is this depression? It appears to be, yet, with guilty satisfaction I realise I'm not depressed, I'm just idle.

The future beckons. A sunset on the beach, picnics midweek, slumping in some beer garden, getting a lift home. If I'd a million pounds it'd give me the luxury of slothfulness, inertia.

But I don't have a million pounds, I have ten. And, goddammit, that tenner is all the way in the bank. Parties on the beach? Picnics?

At some point someone is going to ask for money, and I've got rent to pay. Beer will definitely cost more than a tenner too. Whichever way I cut it, this is gonna require effort.

Bollocks. I don't want a picnic during the week anyway. The wind is always too windy. Beaches smell funny. Beer makes me wanna piss, and that means getting up.

So what about the future? I have images of laughter and frolics, abstract, saturated with colour. Is that a female? Is that... kids? I suppose I do want kids. And a car. I can't make out *what* car, but beggars can't be choosers. But anyone can have kids. And a girl – everyone's got one. I suppose I can make the effort for those things. It'd make my mother proud. Can't forget mum. I count to three and stand up. A quick scrub up and I treat myself to a cold sausage. I must work, I'll work so I can be lazy again. It's not the noblest motivation, but I don't need to tell anyone. That's my secret.

And they called it puppy love... by [timekillingkid](#)

My mother's corked her second successive bottle of wine.

My father's Bermuda shorts are as undignified as they are tight.

And the dog is in love.

Oh, and we're on holiday in a caravan park.

Please someone tell me that I was adopted.

Now mater and pater's regression to state o' nature, bottle and parental neglect was foretold.

But I had higher hopes for "man's best friend".

The pristine rubber bone and unclaimed tennis ball under the caravan proffered evidence that Hergé had woefully misjudged canine loyalty.

I pleaded with the dog that she was wasting her time, it would all end in tears and promises made on vacation are never packed into the suitcase for the journey home.

Her retort was that dogs have holiday romances too, standard anthropomorphic rules had been suspended in the name of literary fiction and, as an only child, shouldn't I have an imaginary friend waiting for me down at the arcades.

So I tried to find solace in the warmth of the 10p oasis.

But all I found were "bigger boys", and the law of the jungle.

My attempt at a boy's own fortnight had culminated in a boy on his own, hands rarely leaving the pockets of his shorts.

On the final evening, as punishment for kicking over the sandcastles made by the evil twins from the neighbouring caravan, I'd been banished to the sand dunes to find two lovesick, shagging Alsatians.

The two discarded dog collars at the end of the windbreaker left no doubt that true love finds a way for all species.

So as I trudged off, flimsy flip flops offering no resistance to landmine crabs and tripwire seaweed, I thought to myself:

Aren't poignant childhood moments supposed to take place under a sunset on a beach?

Romantic bliss by [cryxstals1](#)

Picture, a sunset on the beach, hot sunshine and a gentle breeze, palm trees on this tropical beach are the only shade. The beach is empty but for two people in love, she is beautiful and he handsome. Waves gently drift towards them, she is wearing a beautiful see through top over a swim suit, her figure is perfect, she kicks the dusty dry sand with her bare feet as she walks, his body ripples with tanned muscle, they can barely keep their hands off each other.

She sips the cold icy long drink in her hand and they make their way back to the house on the cliff above the sea where they will stay just exploring each other for the next few days, the beach is empty and they give in to the sun and sand and each other crumpling to the ground under the heat of the sun they make love then run into the sea, they swim together then run back onto the beach where they fall asleep in each other's arms.



The Sky's On Fire by [rithompson](#)

The smell of whiskey and wine mixed together in the air above the tents, as well as in the stomachs of the five young people sitting on the dry earth. The brand new and sparkling portable CD player was being put to good use, playing rock songs non stop.

They were drinking so much that they weren't sober long enough to be hungover, and frustrating Marianna constantly. She decided to walk down to the beach to take calm down and sober up. She walked through a gap in the sand dunes, with the sandy ground melting under her feet. Across the darkly coloured water, the sun was disappearing from Sweden for the day. Marianna felt the romance of watching a sunset on the beach, and sat down to absorb the sight.

As she sat on the sand, another ball of light appeared in the sky – rising instead of sinking beneath the horizon. It looked like someone had lit a match and just tossed it into the air, still burning. The orange and yellow flames stood out against the red sunset, and if her selfish friends couldn't see this, they were missing something. Then it started sinking like the sun, only it was not sinking towards the horizon, it was moving towards the beach!

Marianna gasped as she jumped up, the fiery thing was coming closer to the water's surface and to the land. She knew that the only thing to do was run, as fast as her legs could manage – she was determined not to be hit by an unidentified burning thing whilst admiring nature. As she ran, the thing burned away and came closer to the beach until she heard a loud splash behind her. She couldn't bring herself to look, she just kept running until both herself and the giant wave reached the tent.

Tomorrow by [Juzzzy](#)

Hungry, lonely, and scared, afraid not just of the dogs down below that had nipped and yapped at my shins, nor the red ants scurrying up and over my trembling thighs, I sat in silence watching what seemed a whole half world stretched out before me.

There was noise from the dogs, and flutters from the chickens, and slight murmurs from the unseen who lived just out of sight behind the palm canopy, steadily going about their business as though absolute terror and sheer beauty weren't just a hair's breadth away, as both were very much for me.

It was, I would later learn, a time like that which brings everything into a clear, ice cold sharp focus: The sudden gelling of a thousand mistakes, a hundred regrets, some half-hearted feelings of being wronged; of brain mathematics finally adding everything into a sickly, yet palatable, understandable, and unavoidable conclusion.

Any distraction will do – and a distraction that manifests itself in the shape of a horizon that sears into your eyes from left to right, earthy hues of bright orange turning a flat sea into fire, with a six-mile stretch of completely deserted sand gently coaxing it in, certainly does just that.

But a distraction is indeed only that: No matter where you run or hide, be it another's arms, the bottom of a bottle, the other side of the world, you take everything else along with you like skin.

It took a friend who was then very much a stranger to put that focus into place. Afterwards, we climbed down from that majestic rock sitting sullenly on the edge of the world, and set about putting things right.

The one thing satisfying about mournfully watching a sunset on a beach, is you can guarantee someone else the most beautiful daybreak.

Songs of the dead by [redleader](#)

Looking back on that crippled conversation with Verdun in New York, it occurs to me that almost everybody must have been in on the joke.

Everyone except me.

So understandably my sense of outrage encouraged a more aggressive approach.

I glanced across at Heinfield. He's laughing. His eyes are bright and he's writing something in his notebook.

You bastard, I thought.

Alas, poor Heinfield. I knew him well.

I knew him so well that he'd be dead soon enough. I have contacts.

The limo oozed out of West 47th onto Broadway.

Sitting tense in the cream leather, I was starting to feel a rising edge of panic.

Shit!

I shook my head. Open the tequila. Better now.

None of Verdun's goons had turned up to shoot. This was good.

I reached into my pocket and brought out the Mob money.

I almost didn't want to look at it.

I poured another tequila and, in my head, Nobody Smiled.

They owed me. I'd done their dirty work for six years and now it was time to...

To what? Get far away from the city. I was weary. But I had plans.

"You enjoy your sunset on the beach," Verdun drawled.

"You vindictive bastard," were my last words to him.

Years later and ten thousand miles away, I walk in the warm night rain, I see shapes and shrouds, and I always know what that sick lunatic meant.

I am a dead man.

Declan's Day Out by [rubychoo](#)

Auntie Kate had buried him in sand on their day out... it had looked all hot and golden but it was lovely and cold and muddy underneath... she had buried him in it up to his burning robust little red neck, which his mum had told him was her 'little choice cut' when she dried him after his Wednesday bath.

Auntie Kate had buried him in the sand with a blue spade, and it worried him a bit that he could still see his toes wriggling if he wanted them to when, for the first time in his life his head and the haircut his Auntie Jan had marched in and given him because she claimed he was 'lousy', were in two separate places entirely.

Declan was worried that his toes did not belong to him, that the curly pink widgets at the other end of the mound were pretenders.

'Nice' was a word his teacher Miss James said was overused and meaningless...

Declan felt disloyal in thinking that it did indeed feel nice here, but it would have been nicer if they hadn't all laughed and run away to do something that he couldn't see and come running back laughing again...

He'd thought it would be a lot more fun than it was now...

Like when Auntie Kate had married Uncle Chris last year and the grown-ups had fussed around him so much, tucking his big shirt in and making him feel like six, not five...

The grown-ups only wanted to see the sunset on the beach and have a laugh they say crossly, in the car going home...

Declan knows they're angry with him because he's crying, but Auntie Kate is crying too and holding him close under her coat...

But he doesn't know why.