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Beneath the Acacia

I started off life in this world alone. Abandoned by a mother I can't say I knew; and my father, a ghost that took to the skies long before that. But do not think me a lonely soul, my metamorphosis came long ago, and I have accepted my path as a day-to-day drifter; fulfilling life as the universe mapped out for me.

I call a park my home. Not just your mundane neighbourhood park, but acreage of botanical gardens awash with a palette of colours as far as my eye can see, pregnant with lifeblood and hope.

As dusk descends upon the grounds and people trickle out to nestle in their cosy houses, I secrete myself amongst the soft kangaroo grasses that grow tall. Here I am safe from the sometimes-harsh elements, and the odd opportunistic predator roaming amongst the shadows.

As the tropical tangerine sky transitions to inky indigos, it is here that I listen to the screech and squawk of galahs foraging in the bottlebrush, runaway seeds raining down and escaping their hungry beaks. Mischievous brushtail possums skittle about, brawling siblings squabbling at one another until finally a truce is reached- who gets the top bunk has now been decided.

Like clockwork, before the cityscape has come alive with the wink of lights and neon glare, a rainbow lorikeet takes flight on a brief journey towards that urban sprawl. Her destination a nearby apartment balcony, her purpose to show off her new baby to a man who has built trust and friendship by handfeeding her grapes.

When the night does take full ownership of the sky, a myriad of activity ceases: parents having tucked their little ones into bed; bream reposing, unmoving behind the coral. But in a parallel world, the night creatures are resurrected from their hibernation: drag queens securing their fake lashes, and fruit bats leaving trails of mulberry bombs upon unsuspecting victims.

On a spring day, as the sacred Sun steals the stage from Mother Moon, I too stir from my resting place. I stretch and allow it to fuel my every solar-panelled cell with energy. Slowly, slowly my blood warms and my body comes to life once again. It is then that I venture out from my hideaway refuge.

The season has kindly blessed us with fervourous fertility: barrages of babies, buds bursting at their seams to proudly show off their fabulousness. And yet in the not-so-far distance, the glistening bay water remains calm, not sure what the fuss is about, quietly recollecting the time strangers once arrived on her shores from faraway lands.

The park is abuzz, the toasty air resounding with joy drawn from simple pleasures: a stray football abandoned by the call for a devon and tomato sauce sandwich, the unmistakeable red, green and white of a VB can tossed into the recycling, an animated tourist taking a selfie with a well-spotted goanna; idle and sunbaking. Somewhere there is the faint whir of a generator from a Mr Whippy van, the culprit that has caused many a sticky face; mother's tutting at stained t-shirts, and ants marching in to claim the victory of the loot that drips into the grass.

I begin to head towards the pavilion where the herbs flourish, currawongs wolf-whistling at me above. I pass a scraggly bin chicken, perched atop a wheely bin scavenging for scraps. And though its putrid stench muddles my senses, I see that we are no different in our quest to find some for food essential to our survival.

I move stealthily and with purpose; a spectre that is usually so adept in the art of being unseen. Yet here lies in wait a group of wicked boys hungry to goad me, one coming at me reaching and making a spectacle, as the others cackle like kookaburras. My senses burn and twitch; I have been bruised and marred by others before him. I do not oblige his grubby outstretched hand. I will not be lured in, and I promptly flee from such a trap.

When I arrive at the otherwise-empty pavilion skittish and needing pause, to my surprise, there sits a stranger; exotic-looking and bold. And this meeting is so very different- we both innately know we are of the same kind: nomads, vagabonds. As so I allow any fear to be dusted away. And there in that clandestine space and time do we communicate softly, gently; bonding as the universe intended us to. And as more and more time passes, so does any timidity, at last our bodies circle one another in a kind of enchanted bush dance. The energy between us builds and builds into a zealous and dizzying tryst; hearts flutter, flutter, flutter. But as quickly as it started, we reach a crescendo, and then the chemistry evaporates, the moment over. Silently parting ways, we know we shall never cross paths again.

Sufficiently exhausted by my encounter, I move on to lunch between the pig faces and billy buttons, a favourite spot for pinickers. I go here and there, searching for food that the other seekers may not have yet found and hungrily devoured. Today is a good day indeed; there is a banquet of morsels to be had. And thrilled, I stumble across some untouched sweets, honey-like and delectable, and I greedily swallow this dessert like my last supper.

But too soon, the cool nip of the afternoon begins tiptoeing in, and there is illness inside my satiated belly. Harmed by misdeeds and exposure, and without proper care, my body has been pushed to its limits, and every weary part of me aches and craves warmth. I forgo the too-far sanctuary of my beloved kangaroo grasses, and instead tuck myself beneath the nearest acacia, coarse and prickly. I am consumed by the desire to wrap myself up tight, swaddled in a womb-like cocoon. Instead, I draw my limbs in tight around my abdomen, in a feeble attempt to insulate. The last loop of the icecream van's Greensleeves track fades as no more sweets are served.

Down here there are no boisterous birds or animals, just the quiet scratching sound of cicadas, and the swashing of waves on sandstone walls; the faint scent of rose from the English gardens skating through the air.

And now as the wind exhales, the reeds bend in yoga poses; the Birds of Paradise watch on majestically, and the weeping willows bow their heads silently. It was not my fate to join cousins who migrated south. No children were borne from me.

My body shifts and stirs with the now ever-so- gentle breath of the earth, creating the illusion that there is still life within me. But the trees have folded their boughs, their leafy curtains are drawn closed. And silently summoned, here do come the dutiful ants to be pallbearers.

Such is the life of a butterfly.

Unfurl your wings, dance with strangers, drink from the flowers.

