The Morning Surf by *Samuel Eastwood*

My eyes flickered open, creating the slightest contrast between the black of my eyelids and the quiet, dark of the night. I knew it was time. The delicate cat-like movement, practised to perfection over the years, allowed me to escape my house. My family unawaken. Against the decrepit shed an old mountain bike rested. Subtly mounting, balancing my board on my knee and wet-suit on my shoulders, I pushed off the curb and flew down the steepest hill on the coast. The hill would have been lethal to new-comers but I maneuverer down at a dangerous pace, daily practise proving worthwhile once again.

After years of travelling the route the houses seemed the same and as the harsh wind hit my face like a right jab I looked up to the rapidly disappearing moon, following it. A beacon. Rounding the final corner the noise I yearned for the most at school and home lifted my spirits to the clouds. The crashing waves, dragging back the helpless sand, into the abyss that was the ocean. Jumping from my bike, I donned the wetsuit and flew to the water. The board glided through the weak waves of the shore with noticeable ease.

I felt the rush of freezing salt-infused water resisting the direction of my movement, yet I continued to paddle towards the greatest waves in the universe. Amateur waves were sliced clean through by the pointed, almost ​serrated, board​. The tide was high and the waves monstrous. The sun hinted on the blissful, deep blue horizon and I rested leaving the paddling to the current, dragging me towards the reef out the back.

Now accustomed to the piercing cold I felt something brush against my right foot. It was soft and smooth and I instantly knew that it was a kelp of some kind. Looking down to confirm my suspicion I was dazzled by a jaw-dropping natural beauty; The partially visible sun had reflected onto the water, creating a sort of censored light, which was illuminating the vivid coral. I was astounded and almost fell from my board. My attention was quickly diverted to readjusting my stature so upon looking back the miraculous sight had disappeared, a moment lost in time.

The first wave was a complete failure. I rose too quickly, nose-dived and emerged extremely disorientated. The second wave was a great success. I jumped to my feet on the board and was instantly enclosed in a tunnel of sparkling aqua-marine, foamy whitewash thundering towards the jagged rocks, a hungry predator. Shooting out the left side and copping a spray of straggling backwater, I lay back on the board and waited.

Perhaps twenty decent waves came and went. The usual gang of surfers did not arrive, leaving me with the whole beach to myself. Starving, I decided it was time for breakfast and rode a small wave back to the warm, welcoming sand. I ate a muesli bar and a banana.

Weekends were always a relief; Time to surf and a break from school. Breakfast was quick. The sand crunched under my toes as I retreated to my utopia of coral and swell. After a long paddle and an excruciating wait the biggest wave possible arose. In hindsight, I shouldn’t have taken any chances but it was just too good to miss. So I began to paddle. I was hoisted

to the crest, my powerful board powerless. I skidded across the top of the wave until I slipped and fell headfirst into the churning whitewash. Tumbling, my hand sliced across a stinging part of this glorious sea-garden. I had cut myself on a rose; beautiful to look at, agonising to touch. I resurfaced and swam to the board.

I probably should have gone in. Raindrops of blood could be dangerous considering the high number of shark sightings along the coast this time of year. Notorious predators dominating the waters, waiting like hawks for their next meal. Yet again risking my luck I stayed on the reef, the tide rising slowly.

The pattern of surfing for everyone on the coast revolved completely around the tide. Nothing else mattered. I realized just how important the moon was as I eyed down the line. If we didn’t have the moon, our waves would be so very different. What an interesting thought.

I felt the chill of the harsh wind battling against the warmth of the sun and it suddenly occurred to me just how close I was to the local shark colony. I was really walking on thin ice today. As my spine chilled to the bone, and not because of the cold, I started paddling to the far side of the reef, my mind set on returning to the ever-welcoming sand.

Another big set came and I knew trouble was coming. I paddled but lost my balance diving uncontrollably into the wash. Coughing and spluttering I pushed off the coral, agony for my foot this time.

Resurfacing, I started to panic. I seriously needed to get to shore. I lurched forward, plunging onto the board like a seal flopping onto a rock, trying not to think about pain. Or the tiny drops of blood seeping from the cut. I paddled for a small wave. I stood up, curved left and then right. The board stumbled towards the beach. I never felt the smooth shadow gliding behind me.

A race of life and death, the board rushed me towards safety. Eventually, I reached shallow water, now populated by the early-rising swimmers of the day. The shadow turned, it sulked back to the depths of the ocean. Hopefully never to be seen again.