

“Growing Pains” - Inspired by Shaun Tan’s “*Tales from Outer Suburbia*”

Revealing the quiet mysteries of everyday life - and how place, poetry and people intersect. How insignificant objects, events, colours stick with us. - Shaun Tan

*Then. Coffee Beans. Hand-bag. Mandarins. Phone Calls. Night drive. Dark purple nail polish. Checked quilt. Woollen socks. Hot water bottle. Vinnies vest. Thighs. White headphones. Cold hands. Scarves. Sewing. Mascara. Milo. The Catcher in the Rye. Coloured pencil drawings. Oil diffuser. Lather. Control. Impulse. Laps of the pool. Hiking boots. Plaits. Loafers. Leaves falling in your hair. Greta’s house. Soup. Ordinary. Red pen. Art books from Grandpa. Hair brush. Future. Past. Tennis. Present. Push. Pull. Button up shirts. Stockings. Red wine. Running for the bus. Apple crumble. Sit ups. Capsicum. Second place. Scrambled Egg.*

When she was a child, she had a table at her house. Where she collected things from around the garden. A gum-leaf, a snail, a birds nest, an egg. She ran home from the beach with her arms full of objects. There was a bower bird that lived in her garden. It collected bits of blue from here and there and around the bend. A blue string, a button, a peg. The shell of a sea urchin, a branch, a bone and the salt from her hair. She placed them on her wooden table; a slab of angophora. She had her favourite egg cup in the corner, with a dandelion sitting inside it. It was in that moment, with the afternoon sun falling on her strawberry blonde hair, that she could lay her world out using objects of perceived insignificance.

*Before. Masterchef Australia. Broken film camera. Killing time. High. Drifting. Meditation. Bleach. Lazy. Hummus. Coffee with oat milk. Noodle soup. Quiet. Loud. Reminiscing. Endless dishes. Faded black. Socks and slippers. Missed deliveries. Pulp. Toast. Inside out. Up. Winter sun. Down. A closed door. Lemon water. Ebb. Flow. Brown box. Yearn. Passenger seat. Inequality. Fear. Orange bed side lamp. Sewing machine. Philosophy. Safety pin. Corked wine. Pork bun. Walking. Running. Candles in bottles. Cancelled plans. Days slipping away. Nail clippers. Family. Growing pains. Disorganisation. Job interview. Men. Boys.*

It was mandarin season. She sat on the couch as the sea breeze rolled through the window. She spat pips down the back of the couch. Everything in her Grandpas beach house was blue. “My Blue Heaven” she called it. Each picture that hung on the walls stood in a blue frame. The veranda that wrapped itself around the houses exterior, was a deep blue, that almost melted into the horizon. In the late afternoon sun, her and her sister would take their pillows out onto the steps and fall asleep there, only to be woken when the sky had turned from a peachy glow to a deep purple. The salt from that beach will always be with her. In her hair, her bellybutton, the arm chair in her living room.

*Again. Ocean Swim. Sitting behind the break. I want to cut my hair. Blue swimmer crab. Hand Cream. Burnt Feet. Silver on my wrist. Days slipping away. Milkshake. Wine. Blush. Salad at Midday. Essays. Humidity. Four leaf clover. Cinderella. Yearning for something different. Korean rice wine. An envelope with a heart on it. Euphonium. Growing Pains. Pen pal. Conflict. Breeze. Home made lemonade. Dinner party. Cinema. The edge of a dream. Irish folk songs. Ocean shack. Haiku. Work Doc Martins. Habit. Carrot Cake. Batch brew.*

There was the faint outline of a hopscotch, etched in blue chalk on the footpath outside her house. Those days were lived in the fleeting picture of her childhood. Her sister, dirt in

her blonde hair, trailed after her each morning as she counted the things she put in her school bag. An HB pencil, the poem she wrote the night before, water, a mandarin, an iPod.

*Now. Older. Younger. Salty hair. Salty toes. Sleepless nights. Poetry. Tim Winton. Ponds. Rivers. Streams. Eight hour trains ride. Sneeze. Laura Marling. A house on the Hill. Sunglasses. Hand-cream. Doing the dishes. HB Pencils. Chipped Nails. Corduroy. Test cricket. Weak black coffee. Newspaper sudoku. Stars. Gum nuts. Shadow. Mugs. Electrical storms. Cowrie shells. A tree house. Early nights. Freckles on my ear. Asleep on warm rocks. Scrabble. Dancing as the sun slips down the horizon. Wear Sunscreen. Soft Boiled Egg. Floating. Falling. Catching. Washing on the line. Storm in the sky.*

She sat on Greta's back porch. It was one that wrapped itself around the house, standing tall over a river. She then walked through Marrickville in what felt like the early winter air. She was going to play tennis with the boy round the corner and buy green apples and raisins for the crumble. Her hair and thighs shone in the light. They still clung to the golden brown of summer. She wore a blue knitted cardigan and her winter hat. In her hands she held her keys, her mother's old sunglasses and a crochet bag. She had just come from tea. They had jumped back and forth from one life to another. Sally had her hair tied up. Shoes on the floor and a mug in the hand. Do any of them really know what's going on? What are the things that tether them to the world? And why are they found in insignificant objects, colours, places and moments.