

Movement

by Caroline Taylor

Stingrays are quiet gliders. Steel-grey above and creamy-white below; beautifully camouflaged.

Chris and I saw them occasionally. Paddling up our estuary, the flat streak and whip of the tail under the front of our kayaks would give us a safe thrill. An encounter wading through the creek was different. A spurt of sand might be an escaping ray, and we would shriek in fright: “I nearly freakin’ stepped on it!!” Images of Steve Irwin, and of our mate with a slash in his calf, scuttled around our minds.

We had swum, surfed and wagged school together since Chris had appeared in Grade 5. ‘Christopher Belcher sir’, he replied to our teacher when first asked his name.

‘Sir, siiiirr’ Our ringleader Deano taunted him at recess, burping crudely, with the rest of us goons echoing along. Chris said nothing.

When we sat down for the next lesson Deano squealed and leapt out of his seat, a thumbtack from the picture wall sticking out of the back of his shorts. The code of no dobbing, no matter what, meant that he sullenly refused to name anyone, but Belcher was in his sights after school.

I saved Chris’s hide though; I saw a way out of the pack and walked after him as he was leaving the schoolyard. Dean and company were lurking a bit away, uncertainly muttering their biggest insult: “Girls!”.

“Which way are you going?” I asked.

“That way” he thumbed left up the road. I was pleased; it was in my direction. We pushed each other about, and talked and laughed all the way home. “Mum!” I called out. “I’ve got a friend to play.”

“Okay!” she said from her bedroom.

“Do you wanna Milo?” I offered him the best drink we had.

My older brother Goose and I taught him how to play Diabolo, and how to get oysters from the rocks and cook them on the BBQ. Chris taught me how to kayak. We learned together how to talk about our lives, how to trust another person with secret ideas and embarrassments. As we got older we kissed and got hard and jerked off. I always wanted more.

He would leave my place a bit before his Mum was due home from work. I didn’t like the approach of five o’clock in the afternoon; the feeling of pleasures and intimacies soon to be over.

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The guy from Brisbane nearly dropped in on Chris paddling near the peak of the wave. He pulled out in time, flicking his board in a perfect gymnastic manoeuvre to roll down the back. ‘Nice move!’ Chris gestured.

When we were back on the sand the newcomer said ‘Raymond’, and offered his hand. All my senses said ‘Spunk!’ Glowing skin, muscles, long beautiful legs. Absolute corker of a smile.

Chris was taken with him as well. ‘Hey Raymond’ he smiled back. ‘Christopher’, he said of himself, and pointing my way: ‘Jaxon’.

It was All Over Red Rover for me. ‘Hi Jax,’ Raymond would say when we met for sunrise surfs, gazing at Chris who had already locked on to him. They were both

strong swimmers and shit-hot on the boards. Chris had always waited for me, but now he didn't seem to notice that he was leaving me behind.

Raymond went back to Brisbane and Christopher Belcher followed him. 'Come up mate,' he said to me "we'll find you a guy at The Beat.' But all I wanted was for Ray to ditch the love of my life. I visited them in their crimson Queenslander in Highgate Hill. Ray was teaching Chris pottery. They had a kiln in the back yard. 'Have a go Jaxon,' Chris stood at the wheel, "it's great fun'. Ray was putting freshly turned cups and saucers on a tray ready for firing.

The furnace made me think of Hansel and Gretel.

I was going down a bad track. I had to move on. 'Chop chop!' I heard my big brother say.

I went back to the ocean. It took a while, but the time came when I floated in the warm sea and felt free and peaceful. There is someone out there for me, I dreamed. At the reef colours of fish darted in and out of the rocks. I could see rays gliding in the deep. They are beautiful. You have to keep your distance though. They can mortally wound you, with one acrobatic flick.