

### ***Utopia: Suburbia Exotica***

They always come at the same time of year but it takes time to notice these cyclical changes. You might not yet realize if this is your first dry season. You get used to the relentless spin of the fans and watch the geckoes stalk their prey nightly on the living room wall. The dry is crystalline, clean, lucid. The sea is glassy, the air clear and you can swim in the ocean. There is a feeling of space. There is openness and clarity and a certain optimism. It truly does seem utopian, some land of milk and honey - everyday perfect - cloudless blue skies, warmth and abundance. There's lots to do and there's energy to do it. You can sleep. The fan goes off. The air is at rest and, unbelievably, there might be a nip in the air and you actually search out a small patch of sun. For one night you might even have to put socks on. Every year you forget the bliss, the normalcy, the civilised, un-extreme abatement of the dry.

Eventually. The dry is fully upon us. The grass is crisp and the bush desiccated. Still the sprinklers keep things looking green. More birds come back: the iridescent rainbow bee-eaters perch on the Hills Hoist in the back yard. The red headed honey-eaters, visit from the nearby mangroves. They share this suburban plot with a little forest kingfisher, an orange-footed scrub fowl, figbirds, yellow orioles, parrots, finches and an amazing variety of ants.

Occasionally a frill-necked lizard appears on the avocado tree, chased out of the park next door by the council's huge ride-on mowers whose job it is to keep a lid on all this abundance and make sure those artificially green edges are trimmed. It can't go on forever.

### ***Dystopia: The Tyranny of Paradise***

And eventually the clouds start forming, building up, inside and out. It all happens quite quickly. I'm always surprised by this. An intense, relentless stickiness start to oppress the soul and the being. You are surrounded by that soup, slowly basting in your own juices, cooking, sweating, sweltering, wet. It is the opposite of the clarity of the dry. It is unclear, murky, soggy, smelly, pungent, fetid and mouldering. The brain works in a different way – more sluggish yet somehow more open/quick to irritation. You are deeply aware of the pull of gravity, the need to lie down, to be prostrate, to procrastinate, to winge and to engage in mindless reverie and to drink.

Fuses are short, fuses are blowing. Electricity is in the air and an unreasonable level of moisture invades both sensitive electrical equipment and the sensitive wiring of the brain. Both work only intermittently, short circuits occur, things don't compute.

It says it's only 33 degrees on the news, cooler than in Sydney on some days. But it's not the same. It's not the heat itself or even the humidity, it's the relentlessness...that mass of air, oppressive and palpable, pressing in on you. That sense that the air is something solid that you butt up against, that hits you like a wall when you leave the confines of some airconned haven.

It's the lack of relief at night. That terrible feeling of oppression when, after you've somehow managed to slip off under a fan set to cyclone speed, you wake bathed in sweat, the pillow soaked. You stare at the insects on the ceiling, you drift off again then wake up in a lather of sweat and start the day feeling enervated, coruscated and strung/wrung out. Then you do it again. You ask why do I feel so angry and on edge yet lacking any ability to do anything about it.

It's called the build-up because that's what it does...slowly builds to a crescendo of life and blessed relief. But before it does that it teases and taunts and flirts, first promising then denying relief. The humidity and tension build up to some kind of critical mass. You can feel the moisture in the air almost forming droplets before the eyes, on the edge of being visible. The clouds form towering thunderheads that darken in the middle like bruises. A strange yellow light appears and all goes still and feels electric. It's going to happen, you're sure its going to drop...you can almost feel the relief... then a small patch of blue appears and then a small breeze and, the unthinkable....the sun comes out and the clouds uniform and move on. It gets hotter. The louvres seem as sharp as knives.

Here 'nature as nature' dominates your experience, literally creeping in to your environment, battering down the door, living in the closet, and on the lounge room wall, laughing at you at night, growing, creeping, crawling, overwhelming, especially as the humidity rises.

There are compensations however. It's incredibly beautiful. The lightening emanates from huge thunderheads like enormous chariots in the sky or fluffy ten story buildings. The sunsets are worthy of a romantic painter -Turneresque - in their improbable majesty. It's hard not to reach for cliché's with these sunsets. They are good. Then there's the view from the beach, all greys and silvers, the mass of bruised clouds following the horizon line seemingly metres from the surface of the sea, dumping straight into it for about a kilometre, like a funnel from the sky. Huge forks of lightening dart across the horizon, hitting the land and the sea near the beach. Your hair stands on end. It's so totally alive...there's electricity spinning around, the wind starts to blow...maybe this time it'll reach the land and it will happen....and it does. The heavens open.

### **Relief**

The rain rapturously breaks through in huge thick drops so heavy they leave a mark on the ground. People run into it, arms open, mouths open, drinking in the relief. Letting it run in rivulets over the body, into the recesses and on to the parched earth, hugging one another. The sense of euphoria is catching. The pre-menstrual becomes menstrual and everything begins to flow, grow and calm down. Sense and rationality return. The mind clears and the funk is gone.

Things grow at an alarming rate. Not just the plants but the underworld of moulds, mildew and fungi. Trees fruit and animals and birds get drunk on the profusion. Everything multiplies, blooms and proliferates, not just in the garden but in the wardrobe or any dank space. Mould grows on mould and tiny, invisible webs permeate every organic orifice, breaking down matter and transforming things into stuff. There are phallic fungi, yellow stemmed, white knobbed, with

the most delicate lacy mantle clothing their proud nakedness. They pop up overnight and then slowly subside into the earth. The cycle is swift.

There is a dangerous underbelly visible from time to time: soft, scaly and white. There are many things in the balance, precarious and eggshell thin, dying and disappearing before your eyes. At times the place could threaten to overwhelm. There was also a somewhat different reality bubbling under the surface.

A large flock of black cockatoos take off, the shafts of brilliant red visible now and again. The kites start circling in the sky and the season was starting to change again.