

Regional Echoes

Will Farnsworth

Hello, my name is Will Farnsworth and I am a writer living and working in Wadararrung land. I am currently overlooking some of the farmlands on the outskirts of Geelong on McPherson Road, where the road ends next to some abandoned houses and looks down upon acres of rolling farmland.. It is cold but the sun is shining down brightly so I may need to be careful of how much sun I am currently exposed to. This area reminds me of when I used to work on a commercial dairy farm near Ballarat when I was a teenager. Some of the memories are better than others but for some reason one sticks out in my head more than the others. For EWF, I decided to write about this. This is a small piece about memory and reflection.

It was after a storm would pass through, where the rare slithers of light would briefly warm the battered landscape, that we would take a walk up the softened terrain across the hill that would oversee the estate, where a small pack of tree's would rest. When the rain passed over we didn't care about the cold, or the sinking mud beneath our worn and flacking shoes. We sipped at the cool drink that collected across the corners of our mouths, letting the frost collect in our lungs, letting winter drink our warmth. Out of the treeline we could briefly see the farm, the long stretches of land struck by brief columns of light. We could see the house glimmering with warmth and feel that comforting, broth-like smell of a delicate fire drifting alongside our laboured breath...but we stayed back, in the dark, amongst the trees. Out there was visibility, a lonely stretch of nothing, unwelcoming even if you were with someone. We stayed in a small patch of trees, tall as any house, looming as partial shade against the spit of a dissolving storm, darkening against a blue sky; a small reminder of the type of land that used to thrive here. As the sun dipped beneath a sky bellowing like the last coal in a dying fire, colour seemed to wash away, leaving everything awash with blue. The silence, or what little there was after the brief sounds of faraway birds breaching the delicate emptiness, was tangible, like it could be punctured by a single incorrect, unrhythmic movement of a muscle. It is hard not to feel something, not impossible to imagine the wild futures, not out of rhythm, to want a single touch, a delicate word, that shortened breath before a kiss.

Memory though, plays its tricks. To tell anyone what happened next would be a small impossibility, all I can remember is a feeling, raw and harsh, undulating the landscape, sinking with the light. Memory forces me to make this moment more than it probably was. I remember that we smoked his mums Winfield's, we stared in silence at the lightning that drifted away, the hail frost disappearing among the grass. I breathed in the cigarette, trying to hide a cough. He laughs, head down, kicking away the small weeds trampled beneath his heavy boots. I try to laugh with him but only end up coughing all the more loudly. The smell of the nicotine mixed in with the drifting smell of firewood being calmly burned in the distant chimney's infused my clothes in a stench that would be hard to ignore when I got back home. These expeditions were usually small. We'd find ways of leaving our homes and smoke in the most secluded, far reaching places we could find. We found many places before our family would eventually leave the farm, but this place, that small collection of titanic tree's was the place that still finds its way back to me, infiltrating the vistas of my dreams and the various visions of safe places I could ascend to when all seemed hopeless and the world seemed viciously uncaring.

I wanted to kiss him, but I don't think it would have ended well. That doesn't stop me from thinking about it though. It was always difficult to try and rationalise that adolescent tunnel vision, where whole futures could have arisen from mere moments of instinctual assurance. I'm older now though, and I look at these old hills with a wry sense of dismissal. He wasn't just a farm hand—his path was very different. One of the blokes, one of those men whose life would be linked almost psychologically to those weathered, wrinkled and embittered lives that guided him along the ways of farm life. That was never my life, and maybe that kiss might have changed something. Perhaps he grappled with the same questions, I wouldn't know. I could ask, but I am happy with my strange romance with memory.