

The Path Down to the Shore, a Haibun

I'd not been down it for a year, not since the dog's arthritis got worse. It was our cunning way: from an unpromising corner of a municipal lawn, a steep descent into wilderness, a few blind turns, then some scrubground where the dog can go off lead, looking for fox and the black snake, an eastern whip bird right there in the casuarinas.

Today it's so overgrown it barely exists. Morning glory, lantana, bittou bush and coastal banksia have closed over—it's as impenetrable as paradise. Crouch thru low doors and tunnels, foot down in weeds and puddles, the green rained-on vegetation is like a shroud over what promise there is in the day.

All its history gone: schoolkids, dog walkers, shoplifters fleeing security guards, masturbators in their groves, workers with their lunch pails taking the back route down to the works, and men like me, huffing up and down hills, determined to stave off the heart-attack that'll inevitably take us too early.

(My ex-wife jokes about what a buff corpse I'll leave.)

Surely there's some wisdom about paths needing to be used, remade by walkers lest they vanish?

At last that engine the sea—the grey rollers full throttle against the rockshelf, spray snatched by the southerly. The remains of the swimming pool built in the twenties to keep the kids and the sharks apart—rafts of twigs and plastic.

Gone also that house. It had occupied this block for more than 100 years, with a nice aspect to the pool and the yawn of the beach. Lead-light windows, curated succulents in coffee tins up the front steps. I imagined the dark of the sitting room, a photo of her son in his uniform on the mantle, the chime of the clock on the quarter hour, a tabby on the sofa sniffing the day.

How quickly houses become meadows. And meadows become houses. Surely there's a Buddhist sutra about impermanence and abandonment?

bleached shell
tossed on this midden
five thousand years ago
just yesterday
