

as another day assembles
to adumbrate a young girl's life.

* *Chichewa is the predominant language in Malawi*

† *Chambo is a fish, native to Lake Malawi*



Lynette Russell

NONE SO BLIND

A green snake in the toilet
startled me startling him,
thumped insanely above the thunder box
over the flapping corrugated tin
and the din made my heart race
and caught off guard by the
jolt of the snake I faced squarely
that alien bottle of pills
resting on the wood ...
the wood nailed across the tin
to keep the sides from falling in ...
in reach of my father's hand.
My peripheral vision safety net let down.

WASHED IN ON THE TIDE

Why not escape to somewhere decent?
Why drag the caravan up the coast to stop
where mangroves creep along the sea
and rubber vines infest the land?

Our final camp is six miles north of a dirt air strip
fringing a Gulf backwater where two hundred folk
exist near a pub, a one room school, and a
General Store with a bowser ... post office attached.

All built from rusting tin
and dwarfed by the prawn factory.
Everything on one side of a green river
that snakes past on the tide,
then curves out to sea.

Town is too big for dad, so we hug a
bumpy track along the river, and pass
a fenced wasteland where normally skittish
wallabies indolently raise their heads
to watch us pass.

What's on that sign? Dad asks.

Golf club mum says.

The wallabies drop their gaze.

It is so hot my nose bleeds. The track turns
north to a vast salt flat. Dad hesitates,
finds some wheel ruts, and drives to the other
side. We find a humpy built from scraps of
tin; it looks like a kennel crowned by a jaunty sign.

What's it say? squints mum.

Utopia dad says.

At this point the river spills into the sea, the
coastline flows north till Australia ends,
and an unfenced airstrip straddles the coast.
A trio of brolga fitfully step out on the runway.
We cross a barely discernible track for six miles
till the track disappears in a tangle of vines.
Dad stops the jeep.

We walk to a beach of grey sand. Where it
ends, black mud stretches to the horizon.
It oozes. It squelches and plops. It smells
of sulphur. The mangroves begin. I hear
mosquitoes, and a sand fly stings my
Melbourne skin. We have found Hell.
Dad says it will be better when the tide comes in.

