

Whose reality essay

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



We were down at the beach house – all 8 of us, nestled in a little cove off Bay Road. We'd worked hard to secure this respite after the final exams. John had repainted the local church a hideous green, Peter had mowed all of the lawns in Hamilton and I'd experienced the wealth of insults that come with manning a Coles cash register. Ah, freedom tasted so good. Not just in the figurative sense, but in the literal one too. There was a small fish and chippery hidden behind the beach's shower block and everyday we'd meander towards the grey brick shack in pursuit of those brown paper bags filled with hot chips. The owner of the place was kind – always throwing in a few extra dim sims here and there.

His toothless grin shone against the blue sea. Every now and then he'd be replaced by his wife. Cigarette forever running from her lips, her scowl had the same acidity as the lemon that we squeezed over our fish.

We weren't sure why this was the case. Could it be a built up envy of the young? A dissatisfaction of days spent sorting 5 dollar notes and 10 cent pieces? Peter, in his wit and charm, offered other suggestions: perhaps it was something personal with her husband. That was better than his other alternative, in which the woman was cultivating illicit drugs.

I don't think he was serious. I hope he wasn't. These discussions continued for hours upon hours until we collectively decided to solve the mystery. We couldn't quite pinpoint the source of her bitterness: she had the same home environment as her husband (unless, of course, Peter's first theory held true), yet her disposition was completely different. In our youth and innocence, we constructed a plan. Flawless, we thought, as the details of our

pursuit became etched into our minds. After going to Main Street in the morning, we'd stop by Smith's chocolates and buy her a box of truffles. John, the looker of the group, would go over to her stall later in the day and would chat her up.

Flawless, as I said. The aim was to be astute experimenters. We'd observe her reaction from afar, emulating the scientific matter we'd studied back in our VCE. "If she doesn't smile, there's something psychologically wrong with her," John had noted. We set off that morning, the scent of dew moistening the grass as the surf crashed against the sandstone cliffs.

The seagulls swooped above my head. For some reason, this seemed to instil fear within me. It was a fear that I could taste – a phobia which burnt my tongue, which stung my eyes. Fleeting, an image of the woman ran through my mind. Lip upturned, hands on hips, she seemed to condemn our actions through the eye of the seagull.

The other didn't notice. We continued on our way through Main Street, past the rusting Toyota utes and the stacks of Women's Weekly outside the grocers. We saw children playing football against the dry dirt. Young mothers clad in thongs and cotton skirts pushed blue prams. We went on our way into the chocolate shop, to be greeted by a man with greying hair.

Interesting, I thought. A little like Dad back home – bald at the top, grey at the sides. "So, what are you young'uns doing here?" He smiled over the truffles. "Saw you lot 'round near Bill and Mary's fish and chipper. To tell

you the truth, I've been a bit worried about Mary myself lately. Tough time she's going through, she is.

" Mary? Up until this point, the woman – well, Mary – had been simply that: a woman. The description of her using a name added a new dimension of colour: previously, she'd been a two dimensional concept to contemplate. But now, she was a human being – a person with friends, family and woven into the complexity of human life. He handed us the truffles.

And then he winked. I'm not sure what the wink was – perhaps it was an amicable gesture, maybe he knew what we were doing. But how could he? Were we, as teenagers, such transparent people? Could he peer into our reality, comprehend the immaturity of our actions? Were we immature? By the time we arrived at the beach, the truffles had melted in their paper cases.

John stopped maintaining that the plan was flawless. We'd taken quite a while to get there – stopping by the 7-11 to grab slurpees, we'd encountered another group of schoolies students and everyone had hit it off. We were going to their place tomorrow evening. But in the time it'd taken us to finish our cola flavoured slurpees, stroll down main street and turn into beach road, much had changed. In preparation for a good night's sleep, the sun had descended into its bed, sending streaks of purple and orange across the clouds. And then we saw her. It was poignant, really.

Suspended on the end of the pier, her silver hair clinging to the back of her neck, the sandstone cliffs seemed to revere her presence. She saw us, all 8

of us, standing paralysed on the sand. We didn't move. We couldn't. She saw John's freshly spiked hair, the box of truffles held limply in his hands.

And she smiled. But it wasn't a smile of joy. It was something of resignation, of destitution, of worthlessness. It seemed final.

For a moment, I thought she would jump. But she simply stood there, a soft sadness spreading across the indigo sea.