The Bay
by Lillian Armstrong (15)

Saturthily the sea mist ascended from the cove, clambering the cliffs; dragging itself to consume the land. As I closed the oak gate behind me and entered the desolate cliff moorlands, I stared out at the horizon. I squinted, struggling to accustom my eyes to the darkened haze. Spread out in the far distance a small number of fishing cottages resided; a few lights still glowed warmly from their welcoming windows. It was a long way home from my present position, exposed on the high cliffs...alone.

Shuddering against the silence of the cliffs, I flung my glove, trying desperately to warm whatever part of my flesh was exposed to the autumn chill. Making my way across the land, my gaze fell to the ground; the evening dew settled upon the marsh, dusting the surface. Tufts of gorse sprouted out from the land, coarse and cobweb woven. The heather usually bursting with colour, was drab and miserable. For the view in its entirety was a bleak landscape, a dismal canvas of insidious and dampened watercolours.

Stumbling further along the plain of cliffland I couldn’t evade the notion that I was alone. Torturously, my thoughts taunted me. Something had always plagued me about this path; a constant nagging on my mind, a fisherman at the net. I could almost sense there was something here. Something’s presence was lurking, dwelling in the impending night.

The dusk, ever darkening had nearly swallowed the isle and soon I would be plunged into darkness. The waves tumbled and fell, like the heaving of broken sailors from long ago. The night drew in and with it the silence shattered. A thunderous verbration echoed through the misted cliffs. Halting the light, I clamped forth. I searched like a midnight owl, for a source. In the measure incandescence performed by my light, barely the shore was visible, only a rowing boat drawing inland could be seen. Failing in my attempt to find a source and convincing myself it was a figment of my imagination, I hastily moved on.

The inked water churned in the depths below as the descending echo sounded once more. Frozen, I stood – ears pricked, listening intensely through the silence...Nothing. The night was soundless once more.

As a gunman in position, my eyes darted to every angle. Vigilant and timorously, I proceeded, every fibre of my body alert. In the bay, the lights were now slowly being extinguished and again silence filled my ears, yet there remained an ominous sensation of something nearing me. The pebbles crashed on the shore below, almost sounding metallic. Leader and leader still the crashes grew until it was impossible for the noises to be coming from the shore. It was behind me. Whatever it was, was coming from behind me, bound in chains, that rattled like a criminal wrongly engaged. It bounded towards me.

Knowing that I could not outrun it, and as my own light extinguished I sought a place to hide. Blindly, feeling at a nearby gorse bush, I flung violently at its branches, seeking an entrance. Wrenching at it to part, the gnarled wood reluctantly revealed a small gap.

The gorse ripped and snagged at my skin in protest as I crammed my body inside for shelter. My hair ripped at my head as it entwined with brambles. Blood oozed down my hands, my whole body in agony from the tearing pain as the elements reached my scratched skin. I slapsed my hand over my mouth in an effort to muffle my hysterical inhalations. Crouching, concealed by gorse, I remained still, careful not to reveal myself to it. The creature ceased its bounding as it reached the gorse bush. Sniffing at the air, evidently confounded by my disappearance, the creature bayed, its scent was vile and vulgar; like the stale stench of slaughter. Encapsulated by gorse, clutching so tightly to my mouth so as not to scream, I cringed against the fierce pricks of the bush. The creature bayed once more, and it began to circle the bush. Slowly at first, but then faster and faster. The bush shook violently as it picked up speed. It was reeling in me in its grasp. All I could sense was just one blur of noise and one single mad-dled vision of raven fur.

I halted. Then, almost by command, retreated to whence it came. I remained in my concealed position. My mind was over-flowing, each thought contradicting the next. Should I move? Should I stay? Had it gone? I waited, minutes passed and still nothing. I clenched my tear-stung eyelids together, blinking away the residue.

As my eyes familiarised with the darkness, there was no obvious sign of the creature. I, like a child in search of a nocturnal light, reached my pale hand through the branches of gorse, every movement agonising as each clawing spike grasped me. As the branches parted I could only distinguish the ocean and upon it the boat sailing away from the port of Bouley Bay.

Battered by thorns and fear, and with neither sight nor sound of the creature, I wearily uncoupled myself and prepared to clamber from the bush. Gradually, freeing my skin from the brambles and raising my head from the confines of the bush I breathed in the fresh, night air. Sickened, I stood still, I could feel it - the vile, warm exhale of breath on the nape of my neck. I wasn’t alone...

Summer Mischief
by Deborah Taylor

A HEAT shimmer, a sea breeze. Along the white sand, figures are searching, stooping, crouching. Treasures of spirals and coloured bands and lustre are selected, examined. Favourites are turned over, shared, and stored in buckets and pockets and palms of hands of all sizes, discarded returned to the shore. Small fingers part big ones, placing mischievous in soft flesh. Digits curled over, enclosing, with secret smiles and giggles.

The prisoner, trapped, starts pinching and wriggling, fingers suddenly part and release, throwing the captive high into the air where it is sent spinning then falling and rolling onto sunbaked grains. The hermit crab scurries to freedom amidst gaps and shoves as laughter rises, sprinkling and dispersing in the heat shimmer and sea breeze.