

## The Green Room

The old man, fragile and ancient as a sea mist, drifted away. In his mind he ran his hand over his malibu, stroking it like the downy head of a newborn. He used to surf every day. It was his ritual, his meditation.

At the water's edge he would wax his board, keeping one eye on the movement of the sea. The wax was soft and pliant as the island's temperature was too cool for the harder wax used on the mainland. Rubbing sand across the board to roughen the surface for grip, he would slip into a wetsuit, plunge into the water and paddle out towards the foaming break.

Searching his memory for a picture of his wife's face, he found nothing but the sound of their conversation. He had told her about dropping in, watching the horizon for the big sets and paddling out to sea.

'Watch me,' he said, taking a dry run, lying flat with his hands flat on the board. 'I'm a goofy,' he said.

'A what?' she had giggled, impressed with his prowess.

'Watch. Right foot to the front. Jump. Arms out for balance, aiming with your eyes.'

Picking up his board, he waded straight-backed into the sea. The swell lifted his body and he pushed out a little further until the water reached chest deep. He shifted his weight to allow the board to plane then moved slightly forward into the break. Jumping to his feet, he traversed the face of the foam. The cold waves pounded his chest.

People stood around his hospital bed watching the slow rise and fall of his chest. He didn't know who they were and couldn't hear what they were saying. The only sound he heard were the waves crashing on the shore.

The conditions were perfect with a powerful break and a light offshore breeze, holding up the face of the wave so it could pitch out and roll. The rip took him out past the break and a set of three rolled towards him, each wave gathering in force.

His lungs began to rattle and his breathing slowed.

Jumping up onto the last in the set, he let his board stall on the top as he pushed his weight onto the back foot. The swell curled above him and he overtook, just far enough away from the foam ball to remain upright.

The people around him held his hands, stroking his translucent skin.

Shifting to the front of the board, he accelerated out of the barrel for a moment before disappearing into the green room.

— *Caro Flood*