

Widow Walk

by John Riley

The hotel's beach front has been made fresh. New jetties divert the waves and the feeding porpoises must seek new routes to fish the shallow water. Each morning the sand before the hotel is raked clean of broken shells to protect the feet of the guests. This afternoon, when a summer storm neared, hotel staff dashed around taking down umbrellas before the wind blew them away. Now it is past dusk and to move out of the hotel's white light she has to walk only a short distance toward where the island narrows to completion and a separate island twinkles across the shoal's cross-currents. Between the islands a lighthouse, deserted in the shallow water, makes a silhouette. School boys have built a fire on the point. The drift wood tossed onto the flame is soon consumed. The girlfriends stand together in a circle, their lovely girl hands fluttering before the fire like doves set free from a magician's hat.

She stops and stands in a dune's night shadow to hold her hermit hands against the light. The fingers are nearly transparent, as though the bones have been hollowed. The dark night, cooled by the summertime breeze, thickens as it stretches beyond the old seawall. The center of the seawall has collapsed and if you stand in the crease, on the submerged piles of slippery rock, in the wind and spray, all you can hear is the ocean. If you stood there tonight after the fire is gone the tide will shift and begin to heave toward the shore. If you step back, its fishing mouth will move in for you.

