



# MENISCUS

L I T E R A R Y   J O U R N A L

Volume 7, Issue 1 2019



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Meniscus, Vol 7. Issue 1 2019

Meniscus is published by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs  
www.aawp.org.au



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ISSN: 2202-8862

Meniscus, an online literary journal featuring poetry and creative prose, is published twice a year. The editors read submissions twice a year; for details, please see www.meniscus.org.au.

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### About Meniscus

Meniscus is a literary journal, published and supported by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) with editors from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

The title of the journal was the result of a visit made by two of the editors to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, where James Turrell's extraordinary installation, 'Within without' (2010), led them to think about how surfaces, curves, tension and openness interact. In particular, they were struck by the way in which the surface of the water features, and the uncertainty of the water's containment, seems to analogise the excitement and anxiety inherent in creative practice, and the delicate balance between possibility and impossibility that is found in much good writing.

### Australian Copyright Agency

Meniscus would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Australian Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.



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## Editorial

When the Australasian Association of Writing Programs decided in 2013 to establish a literary journal, those of us who took on the role of editors settled on the name 'Meniscus' and drafted the explanatory statement that is now located in the 'About Us' section of the website:

*Meniscus* is named for the curve that forms at the top surface of a container of liquid. The curve is caused by surface tension, which not only holds the fluid in, but also allows the passage of objects through the surface. It creates uncertainty for anyone attempting a precise measurement because of the parallax effect. The combination of tension, openness and uncertainty can be read as an analogy for creative writing.

While Sandra Arnold and I were working on this issue, the shattering news of the mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand emerged in the media, and this grim, heartbreaking evidence of xenophobia, hate speech and cultural supremacy coloured the remaining time we spent selecting, editing and preparing the issue for publication. It also hardened our resolve, as editors, to remain firmly committed to publishing creative works that are open to differences and possibilities (like the meniscus itself, which affords both a border and permeability); that allow nuance and complexity (avoiding any 'precise measurement'), and are able to express, and even celebrate, the 'tension, openness and uncertainty' that are so much part of human society.

Well over 300 poems, flash fictions and short stories were submitted to this issue of *Meniscus*, from across the globe, and together they showcase a remarkable variety of form, genre, voice and creative concerns. Of those, we have selected 75 works, from 57 authors. Rejecting submissions is always a difficult process, but as US comedian Steven Wright has it: 'you can't have everything; where would you put it?'

It took a considerable time to decide which of the submissions should be included, and our selection was based on a combination of elements. Primarily, these included: language, image and/or story that captures attention, and has sufficient traction to retain that attention; a voice that is curious about the world, and respectful of other cultures, other values; a work that is doing something fresh with the form; and—dare we say it—beauty. This is always a contentious criterion, because 'beauty' is

an empty signifier, meaning what it is made to mean, and always highly subjective. However, there is a framework for 'beauty' in the literary arts that steps aside from the 'well-made', the decorous, the tame, the tidy; that cuts to the visceral, the impact of natural and cultural phenomena; that arrests the reader. The Pushcart Prize winning poet Carol Frost explicitly adopts this notion in her 2003 collection *I Will Say Beauty*, and it is exemplified in a poem in that collection, 'The Part of the Bee's Body Embedded in the Flesh':

Whatever it means, why not say it hurts—  
the mind's raw, gold coiling whirled against  
air currents, want, beauty? I will say beauty.

Beauty, in this definition, is a characteristic of the poems, flash fictions and short stories in this issue. They may prove to be like the sting of a bee, or like the mind's coiling; they may be about want and need; in each case, they are worth the reading.

As always, we acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the Copyright Agency of Australia's Cultural Fund, which provides a 'prize' for the best prose work and poem of each issue. This issue, the prose prize is shared by Chris Muscardin, for his short story 'The Dream Dispels on Waking', and Jenna Heller, for her flash fiction 'Haere rā'. Each takes the reader somewhere else, somewhere a little bit strange, and pushes at the boundaries of language. Kathryn Hummel's 'Gentillesse' was selected for the best poem, with the judge remarking on its quality of 'quietness' in a noisy world.

Please read and enjoy these works; please pass them on to others; and please submit your own creative writing to future issues of *Meniscus*.

Jen Webb,  
for the *Meniscus* editors

## Guest editorial: flash fiction

Flash fiction is not what it appears to be at first glance. Its brevity does not equate to easy writing or easy reading. The best kind of flash takes the reader into liminal spaces where much of the story unfolds. Working within a restricted word limit the writer cannot delve into background or peripheral detail and must distil the story to its essence. It is this distillation that gives flash fiction its strength. Whether it focuses on one moment or a lifetime of moments there are layers of ambiguity and allusion to penetrate before reaching the story's heart. For the fourteen flashes we have in this issue of *Meniscus*, the effort to find that heart is well and truly worth it. In these tiny stories there is adventure, humour, sadness, irony, memory, metaphor and mystery from twelve accomplished writers from around the world. We had a large number of submissions with some excellent stories, but those that stood out impressed me with their ability to stay in my head and make me want to read them again and again. Each story is individual in style, technique and subject matter. Each is written with skill and precision. From this strong list we chose Jenna Heller's 'Haere rā' to share the Prose Prize. Congratulations, Jenna, on your beautiful story on the poignancy of memory, love and loss.

Sandra Arnold  
Guest editor



KATHRYN HUMMEL

'Gentillesse'

KATHRYN HUMMEL

### Gentillesse

The deluge soon dries up  
like a valve has been eased off  
& the strum of the cicada, always  
present, never warm  
breaks in.

Someone has had an accident  
setting the fish colder & dosing  
the milk with a sour note. [No, no  
I do not feel  
it was I  
alone.]

Paradises need a more  
elegant plural. They have been  
lost before.  
As worthless as it is  
to uncoil ancient narratives,  
some are too compact  
to find at the start.

The animals of this house  
act out their quiet mischief  
without interruption.  
Everything –

the deep civility of these  
stones, the careful measure  
of manners  
compressing the cool  
like clay –

flows easily, indifferently  
from the mouth twitching over  
the rapidly  
spinning wheel.



CHRIS MUSCARDIN

‘The Dream Dispels on Waking’

CHRIS MUSCARDIN

## The Dream Dispels on Waking

It’s one of those nights.

You know the kind. The sort which, with the slightest shift in breeze, in humidity index, marks the end of the hot-hot season, the one that torches off the nerve endings and leaves one numb to the heat for months; the kind when patio tables are full with couples knocking back crisp alvarinho because it’s finally of a tolerable temperature to drink outside; the kind when a woman can finally step outside for a cigarette or two at the end of the night and not sweat her careful face off. Let’s call it October. A still night in October, the transition between seasons.

A still night—but not in the quiet way. The heavy air buzzed with sounds of those creatures who only come out in the dark, realising their season is winding down—rustlings of gators in the grass, the high erotic creak of coqui, grasshoppers playing violin legs, owls hunting them, et al. The night, abounding with life. With threats, some say. Or perhaps with wonders; it all depends on which side of the screen enclosure one finds oneself. With the gator creating the miracle of life un-lived, warming eggs that won’t hatch by the lakeside. And, of course, with her, sitting in the wicker chair on the lanai looking out at the pond behind the house, with one hand tugging down the hem of her dress, with the other lighting another smoke with the butt of the last, adding her inhale and sizzle to the symphony of the night.

Through it all, a squeak cuts through: a sound of glass encased in plastic being dragged on its rail; artificiality.

Go to bed, dear; I’ll come in just a minute.’ Through the squeak she recognises the sound of her husband.

‘It’s late, Evie.’

(She does *have* a name, after all, though she tries not to use it. The product of being hatched from the wrong egg, she says. Call me something, though. So they call her Evelyn.)

‘Shh, I know, I know dear.’ He’s still buzzed as well at this moment and speaking too loudly; she wants to herd him back inside and put him



away so she can finish in peace, can't she have a moment of peace, just finish the damn cigarette without him there? But that would only cause more grief, and she can already smell the fight to come in the air. She needs to be gentler on him, they tell her.

'Go on, get to bed. I'm almost done with my cigarette, then I'll be in,' she tells him.

A grumble of something incoherent, the squeak again; she divines by the play of shadow puppetry on her back the moment when he finally has walked himself to bed. She marks it with a heavy sigh and the undoing of her hair, dampened in its bun with the humidity. She crushes her second cigarette next to the first in the ashtray, watches the gator warming its eggs at the edge of the pond outside the screen enclosure, golden coin eye reflecting starlight back at her.

'Be careful. It's still technically mating season,' he'd said when they'd first arrived; his mother, the signs, the whole world had echoed as much. Be careful. Be restrained. You can't ever tell what the crafty bitch will do.

But the old girl seemed fine enough. It was a girl—they're more intense, the females, that's what her husband said. Evelyn had never seen a gator before; she'd lived in the north her whole life, where *Alligator mississippiensis* was a hypothetical manifestation, something she'd heard about as a child but hadn't ever dreamed of seeing in the flesh. One could almost assume it's a myth, a gator, some exquisite corpse of a beast invented from hearsay and tall tales, but certainly not a *real being*. Not until the two of them had come down to this here Middle Florida to help her mother-in-law move into the new house had she thought she'd *actually* meet one.

They were everywhere down here, she learned—gator paradise, or it was. It was drained land now, these suburbs—marshes gone, reduced to retention ponds and drainage ditches folded into rears of prefab neighbourhoods—but they clung on, tracing paved avenues and backyards with scaly toes, made into monsters on their own turf; bulldozed by invaders who came in, terraformed, and then told them they had to go, that there wasn't no place for them no more. Evelyn felt sorry for them.

Her husband on the other hand was a Florida native and so bore the beasts no sympathy. He saw them plenty growing up, he'd said; years of near-mishaps and stories of tourists with their limbs or kids snatched up injured him to their plight. 'They're dangerous fuckers, quiet, shifty—never know what's going on in their heads, but they pack a punch. Seen enough news 'bout dumb tourists lettin' kids run down by the water and then they

get themselves or they legs or arms snapped up—don't be one of them, Evie. Watch yourself is all.'

At dinner they almost forced the whole lot of them inside, because some young girl thought she saw a gator in the bushes. Everyone got up in a hushed panic, bludgeoning the waiters and hostesses for tables inside, her husband one of them. Or, almost everyone. Evelyn sat still in her chair, sipped her wine, studied the shrubbery closely. Far from frightened, she was excited, intrigued. She had a rapport with gatorkind, she felt: she too was intense, quiet; so she was told over and over, directly and in overheard whispers. She could grow some scales and slither right into those bushes, to hell with her husband.

'Evelyn! Come inside, it's not safe.'

It turned out to be a false alarm, and everyone took up their places outside around her again after, and dinner resumed. For there *was* dinner after all. She'd insisted on it, wanting to see something more than just her mother-in-law's cul-de-sac in this extended vacation, before they returned up north next week. But it was too late; the mood had soured. They may as well just go home now. She looked at the woman next to them, drinking her wine and eating her salad by herself; perhaps she'd have been better being on her own tonight too.

'What is it now, Evie? What do you want?' he asked, watching her distance as sure as if she were curling into a shell. 'This dinner was your idea. Eat up.'

*What do you want?* The question that repeats, first this reason, then that. Her husband, their therapist, her mother-in-law, all the same.

'Try being a little ... less, you know? Just not so intense. Or know what you want when you are. For your husband's sake.'

'What do you want? I don't know what to do with your moods.'

'What more could she want? You give her everything.'

What now, what now, what now? She couldn't quite answer, so she'd shut herself up tight instead.

The gator, on the other hand, asked no questions. Nothing of her at all. Though they weren't quite well-acquainted enough to get personal, Evelyn conceded. After all, they'd only been eyeing each other up for less than two weeks, in these sporadic late-night smokes. Who dictates

when it's been long enough, though, she'd like to demand to know, even if it's just her being difficult.

She didn't tell him about her. He'd corral Evelyn inside the rest of the trip if he knew there was a gator lurking, she knew. Then she'd suffocate with their presence (his and his mother's, expectation's), even more so than with the fetid close October air of the outside. Or worse yet, he'd call animal control and have her glittering, magnificent monstrousness hauled off and executed.

How would they do it? Evelyn wondered. She pictured the grandiose, like the guillotine or electrocution—make a spectacle of it for the rest of her and gatorkind; 'Y'all aren't welcome round here no more, didn't you get the memo?' In reality it would be, she supposed, probably mundane, hush-hush—bullet between the eyes, or injection. How dismal, how underwhelming a prospect it is (and not just the execution). But either avenue the idea horrified Evie; no, she had to keep the meetings clandestine, should *they* find out and put a moratorium on the whole business.

They'd hardly had time to get personal. There's never time enough to get personal, Evelyn considered, though everyone else seemed to think otherwise with their interrogations, What's the matter? Why can't we have a night's peace anymore? What did I do wrong now? What do you want? and on. Intense, dangerous or not, at least she had manners out there, sprawling herself out on the edge of the lake, inching forward, back, not saying anything at all to reach an understanding, just giving the lustrous vision of shiny scales to Evelyn without demanding anything more and more every night.

More. There's an answer, she supposed. Perhaps more. The gator's eye blinks. She does only after. She wants to fly away, so let her be a bird; she tries her hand at drifting between countless worlds, of her own making and others', she breathes in them all but cannot live in any one—then let her be amphibian. She shudders and wriggles and casts off her skin when it fits too close, so let her be reptilian, just something else and more than Evelyn.

It wouldn't even have to be foreign skin, she rationalises. Let her be the alvarinho in her belly, warming her still from dinner, let her be the legs of the woman from the next table over at dinner with the red lips and tattooed thighs and confidence, also drinking alvarinho (does it warm her in the same way? let her become the belly's hollow and find out) and eating

her salad alone; let her be her husband's eyes on those thighs—better than her own; she sees them too, with her husband's eyes and her own.

She could wear that woman's skin. She wants to touch it first, appraise it, and only then after to slip inside, kiss and consume with that mouth, smoke her cigarette with those fingers. She'd swallowed the last of her wine all at once, and called the waiter—'Let's have another bottle, please'—and her husband looked back at her, 'More, really?' but gave up the argument when he saw the yellow intensity in her eyes. Yes, more. The answer she has found, there it is. Perhaps.

There will have to be a fight about it. Evelyn understands this. The one she's been delaying with her cigarettes while she composes herself. She lights yet another cigarette in preparation—Achilles donning armour but from the inside, filling herself, all her empty spaces, with smoke as sure as feeding a gator, making strong and hardened those scales. Do you think the other woman has fights with her lovers? Do you think the gator does? Gators come together for the season to do their deed and then go their separate ways after, that's what she read; that seems sensible. She wants to go away. She wants to ask the gator about it, ask it permission. 'Mamma, teach me your ways.'

She doesn't want to fight tonight. She'd fold herself up tight, rather; pour herself into one of the gator's eggs, mix with the albumen, give it new life. After a time she'll hatch again, right this time, easy this time, and first of a new kind; try another hand at this thing named life; call herself Helen, perhaps, the woman from the egg, and paint her lips red and tattoo her thighs, launch a thousand ships or more, start a war even, but never get into an argument with her lover, husband, wife; drink alvarinho and eat a salad all by herself at a table for two and ignore the couple ogling her from the next table over who both want her to come and fill the silence between them, though for different reasons. Start this whole nonsense called living over again, have another go. This time she'll be the thing which fills the void that stretches; slippery, indefinable more; she'll have no need to keep moulting her scales and finding new ways to fit herself into the world.

Evelyn stands up from the wicker chair; the gator mimes—rises up, creeps closer to the screen, hisses, but she answers, 'Mamma, don't worry. I'm yours if you'll have me.' She understands me, she thinks; she opens the screen door, it creaks, the gator darts, and *bang*, falls still,

the yellow eyes dull, the essence leaks from the hole in the top of her head. The dream dispels on waking.

'Evelyn!' There he is, there is her husband behind her, holding the still shaking, still smoking gun—Lord knows where he found it, here in his mother's house. Where he found the gun, where he found strength to shoot it, him of all people, where he found pathway so close to graze her skin nearly—*was* it the gator he shot at? she wonders for a moment. Now she straightens, drops the cigarette, cools the last embers with the heel of her shoe.

'I tol' you to be careful,' he says. His voice quivers. He's still waiting for her to turn around, unharmed—mostly—and so she waits, thinks.

'Sorry, dear. I just needed fresh air. The smoke got too thick under the covering here. My mistake. I'll be inside in a moment,' she says.

It is dead. There will be no argument tonight after all, she decides. It's no longer one of those nights after all, perhaps. The gator is dead, and so there is no point. And she will get up, and she will go inside. They will take hands now, he and her, kiss each other goodnight, go to bed, each drunk and thinking of scales red lips and thigh tattoos and what they mean each in their own way, snore next to each other, mumble something like forgiveness or forgetting, and in the twisting of the blanket shed their skins and wake up new in the morning. And the gator, dead, will be swept away—he won't leave it out there to rot, not in this heat, where it will attract all kinds of scavengers, and worse where he and Evelyn and the world will then watch the beast turn itself inside out, magic tricks not for the squeamish. No, Evelyn knows that by the time they set out toast and orange juice for breakfast on the lanai the carcass will be gone, as if the whole episode had never occurred, and they will clink glasses, kiss each other on the cheek, unfold the *Sentinel*, wait for the next truck of movers to arrive. They will be a couple, and a good one, and lively, and not quiet, and not intense, not the gator, not her alone. But where the grass lays pressed flat, where the dark spot of stubbed cigarette ash marks the concrete patio floor, she will still be Evelyn, for another one of those nights at least.

Oh, *how* underwhelming a prospect she is.



JENNA HELLER

'Haere Rā'

## JENNA HELLER

### Haere Rā

Large brown seals dot the craggy flat like giant cigars spilled from a box. They roll and scratch against the rough rock, big blobs blending in with brown seaweed. Mātai reaches down over his own fat blubber and rubs his swollen ankles. Hot to the touch and he can barely feel his toes but still he walks out onto the bleached-white limestone, stumbles along the sea floor at low tide and works his way to the cool water.

He coughs and all 150 kilos of him convulses. Needles of pain shoot through his feet and he wobbles then wipes at his mouth, growls at the stubborn whiskers tucked under his bottom lip. He shouts at the sky and shakes his fist—*Pai kare!*—then carries on, feet teetering on the jagged stone, hands grabbing at the rock that grates the soft flesh of his palms. His breathing is heavy and laboured.

Back home his near-empty tea cup sits on the kitchen bench, tea leaves speckle the bottom of the sink, a fly feasts from an open jam jar. A trio of half-packed boxes fill the tiny lounge while the shower runs hot and steam fills the room.

Mātai is halfway to the sea and sand flies swarm his calves while the sun beats down. Bull kelp tangles in large puddles and black-billed gulls soar on the breeze. He looks out to the water lapping at the edge, remembers the time he and Tane and Wiremu ran out to the water in bare feet, how they came back with their soles sliced up, how it was worth it swimming far out to the rocks to collect mussels for tea.

He remembers how a few days later they went out again and Tane said he'd get crayfish and he went down a few times but came up empty-handed. Then went down one more time and never came back up.

He remembers how that night Wiremu held his hand, and how a few years later they swam bare in the moonlight then climbed out and kissed beneath the rata. How they carved their initials into the trunk and how later the council cut the tree down to make way for a carpark.

He remembers how Wiremu left for the city the first chance he got. How he turned his back on Kaikōura and barely waved goodbye. And how Wiremu wrote every week. Until he didn't.

Mātai feels the sun burning, imagines the days ahead of flaking skin

while sitting in a room full of other people's breath.

He is determined to touch the sea one last time, but he feels lightheaded and his feet are numb. He sucks in the salty air and then the coast twists and swirls before him, a closing kaleidoscope of colour and sound.

He falls to his knees while the ground sways and the nearby seals roar and roll out to the water. The waves slosh in, wetting his hands up to his wrists. He dry retches and a line of spittle forms between his bottom lip and a limpet hugging tight to the rock. He wipes it away, wets his forehead and weeps.

Haere rā, haere rā, haere rā.

## MOYA PACEY

### At the Circus

Don't let the clowns choose me to go into the ring. They pretend to throw buckets of water but they're paper stars. Gold and silver stars glittering. I don't want everyone staring. I don't like clown faces. The one with the pointed hat has round hard eyes like the steel ball bearings my brother plays marbles with. He smashes glass ones when he fires them hard. There are gaps in the wooden slats under my seat. I am keeping my legs straight together and my feet neat because my brother says underneath is where the lions are waiting to go into the ring. I smell their smell and hear their roars.

Elephants have kind eyes. Small and soft not like the eyes of the clown with the pointy hat. Elephants watch each other and walk in a line hooking their trunk on to the one in front's tail. Making a circle around the ringmaster so they don't have to be whipped. They are careful stepping in case they step on a mouse. They are scared of mice like I am scared of lions. The stars on their heads crease like my bed sheet when I've slept on it too long and their skin wrinkles. They are old elephants.

I can't see the girl on the trapeze's eyes she's too far away. Her partner is putting something on his hands so they won't slip when he catches her. She swings and swings and then she leaves go and throws herself at him. I peep through my fingers. She's caught but one day she will fall I know into the net below. One day I will fall between the slats beneath my seat and the lions will be there.

### The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962

at school they say that when the bomb goes off, we have to get under the table. and our mothers must whitewash all our windows.

our teacher asks us to put up our hands if we have questions

i have some but i don't say.

1/ what happens if your table is too small to fit everyone underneath – there are 6 of us and the baby and we can't all sit around it at the same time so how can we all sit underneath it?

2/ how can we whitewash the upstairs windows when we don't have a ladder. the window cleaner does them but it's not his week to come. and how much extra will it cost. and what's whitewash?

## SUE BRENNAN

## Luftikus

For almost eight weeks and across five countries—six if you counted a day in Luxembourg, and Carin was—she'd been beguiled by Tanya.

And now here they were in Vienna.

The fairground on that cold, brilliant Wednesday in December, was almost deserted. The stalls, the shooting gallery, the rides, were all open and attended, but the operators didn't tout for business; one young man leaned against his booth reading a folded paperback and smoking a cigarette, oblivious to their passing. The most hair-raising attractions had been corralled off in the furthest end of the park, like recalcitrant teenagers at a family gathering. The rollercoaster loomed ominously in the distance. The enormous Ferris wheel, their destination, turned slowly in its endless revolution. The music—lilting and gay, but tinny though the park's antiquated amplifiers—was drowned out by some dirty techno the closer they drifted away from the main entrance. Pervading it all was the smell of sausages and potatoes, clogging everyone's olfactory system, disgusting some and tempting others.

Carin slowed, falling behind her companion's leggy stride, and stopped in front of the luridly coloured flying swing carousel. The underbelly of the twisting top was covered in paintings of women, birds, and flowers, though they were difficult to make out under the relentlessly gyrating top. Two people were being hurled around and around and around. On top of the ticket booth beside her, *Luftikus* was spelt out in a cursive line of lightbulbs.

It was spectacular.

≈

They'd met over a mix-up at a juice bar near a backpackers in Lyon where, Carin later learned, Tanya had been staying for a month, cleaning for board.

'Bleh!' Tanya had exclaimed upon being handed her plastic cup by Dan, a surly Australian that Carin had been trying to flirt with for the last ten minutes. As it turned out, being a fellow Australian on the other side of the globe was not enough to capture the likes of him; he spoke fluent

French with his co-worker and had biceps the size of bowling balls. She didn't stand a chance.

'If I wanted a cup of mowed grass I'd have fucking well asked,' Tanya said when she lifted the lid. Carin immediately coveted her Irish accent.

Dan looked at her, expressionless.

'That's mine,' Carin said. 'I think.'

'What the fuck is it?' Tanya asked.

She swore a lot.

'Kale, apple, kiwi, ging—'

'—oh for fucks sake,' Tanya interrupted.

Carin was speechless. She was also dehydrated, exhausted, and had a cricked neck from the matchbox-sized pillow the backpackers had issued her with when she rolled in at midnight the night before. She reached out and meekly took the cup.

The tiny place was packed with people waiting to place orders or pick them up. There was one communal table laden with iPads, guidebooks, and other travel related paraphernalia. Half a dozen people stood waiting outside. Through the door, she spotted a bench across the street next to a garbage bin. It'd do.

It was almost 10 a.m. and the coolness of the morning was burning away. She hoped it was going to be another unseasonably warm day. She unlaced her trainers and placed her sock-less feet on top of them. Tanya came out of the juice-bar, paused for a moment to check her phone and tucked it in the back of her shorts. Then she headed directly towards Carin.

'Move up,' she said, and Carin did as she was told.

She was about to introduce herself when there was a tinkling sound, like crickets at dusk, and Tanya pulled out her phone, looked at it, and showed it to her.

Carin read the text—*I love you. Please, please, baby. I need you*—and raised her eyebrows, impressed.

'Saudi guy,' Tanya said, putting the phone on the bench between them. 'Slept with him once and he's been texting me every day, like, twenty times a day.'

'Wow,' Carin said. 'Since when?'

'Week ago? Two?' she said vaguely.

'You going to answer?'

‘Fuck no,’ she said and sniffed. ‘Might need to get out of town soon though.’

Carin nodded and looked uncomfortably up and down the street.

‘Where’d you just come from?’ Tanya asked.

‘Greece,’ she replied. ‘Turkey before that.’ This was the way every new interaction started—a way of sussing out who were the tourists and who were the travellers.

‘God, tell me it wasn’t because of *Mamma Mia*. Where next?’

‘Well,’ she hesitated, wondering how to defend her herself against the implied criticism that she was one of *those* tourists. God knows she’d seen enough of them in Greece. She decided to ignore it. ‘I want to see the rest of France and Spain, but ...’ She trailed off, thinking guiltily of her promise, heartfelt two months ago in Sydney, to meet her mum in London for Christmas.

Tanya had already been through most of central Europe and argued that what Carin really needed to do was head east: Riga, Bucharest, Helsinki—

‘Hang on, isn’t that north?’ Carin asked, unsure of her geography.

‘Whatever,’ Tanya retorted. ‘Is it important?’

‘Well,’ Carin said and snorted, ‘kind of. Yeah.’

Tanya, it turned out, was heartily sick of Lyon and needed no prompting in listing all its demerits which, as far as Carin could tell, were focused on the backpackers—how it was managed, the tedium of cleaning toilets and burnt pots full of fuck-knows-what, the other backpackers. Carin found her entertaining as long as the attention wasn’t on her.

‘Where the hell did you get those?’ she asked looking down at Carin’s super comfortable, slightly stinky, yellow Converse sneakers.

It was a beginning.

≈

For the first couple of weeks, they somehow managed to avoid the places that Tanya had already been—Provence, Cairnes, Nimes—and Carin told herself that she’d see them next time; now, she was on a different kind of holiday. Paris, though overrated according to Tanya, was one place she was willing to revisit. Carin was surprised to find her enthusiastic about all the touristy things—the Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre—even trawling through one tacky souvenir shop after the other for magnets, coasters and key-chains.

She bought a black beret and made Carin photograph her looking moody in every café or bar they went to. It became a running gag. Carin took the photo on Tanya’s phone, together they photoshopped it—black-and-white, grainy, tilting, blurred—and then Tanya posted it on her blog. She spent a lot of time blogging. She never took a selfie of the two of them, and the first time Carin tried to, Tanya shook her head with disgust and said, ‘I don’t do that shit.’

But she did! Tanya saw on her blog photos with other people, grinning broadly and labelled with captions such as, ‘The Utterly Awesome Christoph!’ and ‘The Endlessly Beautiful Maeve’. She wondered what it was about herself that didn’t make the cut. She also learned from the blog that Tanya was a little older than she first thought—in her early thirties, not mid-twenties like herself—and divorced. On her blog, she claimed to be ‘an open book’ and a ‘lost pilgrim searching for something to worship other than the Self.’ Carin hadn’t a clue what that bit meant.

*An open book, my arse.*

The occasional standoffishness, the overt criticism, the downright rudeness to other people she observed, the refusal to be in a photograph with her, were all easily ignored when Carin considered the fun she was having: caving at Grotte de la Salamandre; a random road trip from Pau to La Rochelle with a couple of comedically lecherous American businessmen; being taken in by an elderly couple in Minerve who claimed to have ancestral ties to the village dating back centuries. Whenever Tanya was obnoxious, or they’d just snapped at each other, she told herself, *I’d never be doing all this if I were alone*. For most of the three weeks she’d spent in Greece and the month in Turkey, she’d been lonely and scared; the courage that had launched her out of Brisbane and her boring public service job had petered out shortly after arriving in Istanbul.

‘Whore ... I lick you. I fuck you,’ a man had said in a low voice as he followed her through the Grand Bazaar.

When Carin suggested an overnight trip to Mont Saint Michel just outside Paris, Tanya looked up from her iPad.

‘Been.’

Carin gnawed at the inside of her cheek as she scrolled through the Lonely Planet entry for *Places to Stay*, and did a quick Google search on train times.

‘Think I’ll go,’ she said with feigned casualness. ‘Like, now.’

For a split second Tanya looked startled, and then her expression

settled once again into its usual who-gives-a-fuck.

'See you back here tomorrow,' Carin said (despising herself for the upward inflection) half an hour later as she headed out of their dorm room.

'Probably,' Tanya said and yawned.

An hour later, she stared out the window at the bleak, urban landscape from the half-empty train. She went onto Facebook and saw that her mum was online. It would be afternoon back home.

-Oi, mum!

-Baby girrrrrr!!!! What you up to?

-I'm heading to Mont Sant Michel. You?

-God, I envy you. I've just finished work. At the pub waiting for Max.

-Tell him 'hi'

-Will do. You good? Those Greece photos were fab

-I'm great! You know how long I've wanted to see France. I can't believe I'm here

-I know, honey. You with your friend?

-Solo on this one

-Max is here. Take care xxxxx mwah xxxxx

-Course!

She sighed and fought the urge to check Tanya's blog.

≈

Mont Sant Michel was everything she'd imagined, and she'd been imagining it for some time. In Year 8 there'd been an exchange program at her high school, and although her parents were unable to cough up for her to go to France, they'd happily accepted a student into their home for a month.

Mathilde.

For some reason, mostly likely because she was suddenly on her own now, the memory of Mathilde lodged in her thoughts; a tiny shard of eggshell that could not be removed from the white. That frizzy blond hair, the almond-shaped green eyes, the largish nose—it seemed that every female, every male, she passed on her way up to the Abbey was surely somehow related to Mathilde.

Carin's parents had done everything they could to make this girl feel

welcome in their home: Edwin, her younger brother, was booted out of his room; they rearranged their schedules so they were home to cook dinner and drive them to school; they put on a *fair dinkum* Aussie barbecue in the backyard; they went bushwalking at a National Park outside of Brisbane.

'You think this is something?' Mathilde had said, looking at the vista in front of them and sighing dismissively; the ancient undulations of the Glasshouse Mountains lay before them, the sunset casting violent magenta slashes across the sky.

When the time came for the French students to give a short presentation about their experience, Mathilde stood confidently at the podium and said that she thought her homestay hosts were, 'how shall I say it? Er ... quaint,' and Australia was, 'too big, too massive ... too ... too much sky.' The audience—teachers, students, parents, but thankfully not hers—all chuckled in agreement. Mathilde was pretty and charming. Yep, Australia was a damn big place, all right.

But then, about the architecture: 'Everything's so new. So bland to my ... I'm sorry ... I don't want to offend ... but to my French eyes they are awful. You know the Gold Coast? My God! How is it possible to compare it to ... to ... Notre Dame ... Versailles ... Mont San Michel ...' She looked helplessly at the audience.

When she'd started in on Aboriginal art, she was dead.

≈

By the time they hit Budapest they were wearing each other's clothing. Tanya owned a black jumper that seemed to go with everything, made every outfit look just a little more chic. When Carin saw a scarf she'd bought in Turkey wound around Tanya's neck, she thought, *game on*.

One night at a ruin pub in the Jewish quarter, they ended up sharing a table with three film students from Germany. Andreas, the best looking of the three, appeared from the start to be most interested in Tanya and Carin accepted this as a matter of course. She happily chatted with Kurt and Peter, admonishing them for their lack of knowledge about Australian movies—'Not even *Crocodile* bloody *Dundee*?'—while occasionally catching Andreas' eye and looking quickly away.

'I can't believe you went to Trier and not Mainz,' Kurt said to her when she told them about their travels in Germany.

'Hey,' Carin protested, 'I wanted to go. Blame her.'

'I will!' he said and threw a french fry across the table to catch Tanya's



attention.

During the ensuing argument about Trier vs Mainz, Andreas picked up his beer and came and sat beside Carin. She smiled bravely at him and took a long drink.

'I know *The Boys, Strictly Ballroom, Bad Boy Bubby,*' he recited, counting them off on his fingers, '*Romper Stomper, The Piano—*'

'From New Zealand,' she corrected.

'*The Babadook* ... should I go on?'

'No,' she said, 'you're just being boring now.'

≈

In Brno, things came to an unexpected head.

'I don't know what the fuck I'm hanging out with you for,' Carin muttered as she threw her clothing into her pack, punching each item into submission.

'Then don't,' Tanya said with her usual indifference.

They stared at each other for almost a minute. Carin had no idea how things had escalated so quickly, or how to get back to normal. Their normal.

'Don't take my fucking jumper,' Tanya finally said.

'Then give me back my tights.'

Tanya stood up abruptly, yanked up her skirt and pulled the thick knitted tights down. She wasn't wearing any underwear and Carin, who was squatting on the floor surrounded by the detritus of three month's travel, found herself eye level with Tanya's crotch. One of their dorm mates, a Norwegian woman they'd not spoken to the whole three days they'd been there, opened the door, smiled, inclined her head and backed out.

Carin was furious, but Tanya fell back on the bed and laughed.

'Oh, Jesus,' she said, wiping her eyes. 'She thought you were about to eat my snatch.'

≈

The train to Vienna was packed, and without reserved seats they found themselves standing in the vestibule staring hawkishly into the carriage when each impending stop was announced. Carin arranged their accommodation and figured out how to get to it from the station. She read the reviews of coffee houses and the history of *sacher torte*, bookmarking

places to eat, places to see.

'Here's what we're going to do,' Tanya said taking off her earphones. '*The Third Man* is known for ... wow, I mean, have you seen it?'

'Nope.'

'You got to. Every scene—I mean *every* fucking scene—is a photographer's wet dream. Kurt put me onto it. We're going to find all the places—the cemetery, the Ferris wheel, the sewage system—and recreate it, but differently. I'll pose, you shoot. I've downloaded some more professional photoshopping apps Kurt told me about—'

'Kurt this, Kurt that,' Carin murmured and immediately regretted.

Tanya rolled her eyes. 'He's a film student.'

'Yeah, I know,' Carin said quickly. 'Sorry, sorry.'

'You got what you wanted,' Tanya said and looked back down at her iPad.

Of course, Carin knew she was referring to her hooking up with Andreas. They'd gone AWOL for a couple of days in Szentendre, just outside Budapest, before he had to head back to college.

*I think it's what you wanted, too,* Carin thought smugly, remembering the sullenness when she'd returned to Budapest.

'You're a fucking idiot if you think I care you got boned by him.'

'You wanted him,' Carin said.

*Shit, what have I said?*

'Sure I did,' Tanya said, 'who wouldn't? Those lips ... that fucking hair ... but, you? You think these guys matter. You think that—'

They were interrupted by the train's arrival at a station, a major one judging from the number of people who were jostling to get off. Tanya slipped into the carriage and sat down in an empty seat. When everyone who was getting off got off, Carin went in and sat opposite her. They both had to put their bags in the overhead racks to allow for people who were getting on. Tanya smiled sweetly at the elderly woman who asked her to take her feet off the seat.

'Where are you off to, love?' Tanya asked the woman when she'd settled in.

Shortly before they pulled into Vienna station they got their packs down and stood in the aisle waiting. Carin said—she'd been working on her line for the last hour—'I think this is probably the end.'

Tanya smiled, shook her head and elbowed her affectionately. 'Come on. Where're we staying then? What've you got planned?'

≈

*Luftikus.*

The magnificent machine churned. Only two people had chosen this time of day, this amusement park, this ride. All the other seats were empty.

Carin watched the couple—young, in love probably—being flung round and round. She heard Tanya calling. She followed their revolution round the sensuously gyrating top and tried to catch a glimpse of their faces. Her name was called again. Surely this thing would stop soon. The operator would rouse himself, flick a switch and the swings would lower to the ground. She wanted to see the couple get off. Perhaps they'd be dizzy and slightly delirious. Perhaps one of them would be sick and pale. They might be wobbly, one blaming the other for choosing the ride. They might even play it real cool.

FRANCES GAPPER

## Ghost on a Bridge

February, pale blue frozen sun. We'll just stop here—Mum swerved into a car park. She let the dog out and he started galloping around. I'm afraid your nan's killed herself, Mum said. The dog jumped up and bit my arm, panting through a silly grin. I hit him on the nose.

Nan was lonely after her sister died. She told Mum she wished she could believe in God, since religion would be a support. Does God exist, I asked, sounding to myself a bit melodramatic, but Mum looked impressed. Our parish priest could answer that, she said, better than her.

So having settled him in the lounge: Well Father, Geraldine has asked the big question. Is there a God?

Father Duffy didn't say anything for a while. Then he told us about a job he'd had as a half-starved boy, serving meat porridge to a woman's cherished dog. I ate the porridge, he said, and gave the dog a few scraps. One cold, dark night around Candlemas, after feeding the dog or rather myself, I was going home through the woods. I'd nearly reached a footbridge when a huge dog came running towards me, upright on its hind legs. And as it crossed the bridge, this was the strangest thing, the wooden planks made no sound ...

I liked how he'd dodged the religious challenge. He accepted another cup of tea and Mum passed round the biscuits.

## KEN COCKBURN

### Beach Book

We came across a C-shaped  
shell and you said  
your ambition now was to find  
the whole alphabet

but it turns out the sea while  
never less than diligent  
has a clumsy hand that's  
more or less illegible.

### Lifebelt

We were on a ship, sailing  
from mainland to island.  
When I realised I hadn't seen you  
for a while I looked over the rail  
and there you were in the water,  
swimming in circles.

I called, you waved,

and I threw you a lifebelt  
which splashed the grey waters  
beside you. Half surprised,  
half irritated, you looked at me,  
kicked your legs and swam  
in the opposite direction.

## Moving Schedule

When after months of drift and mishap our  
life had steadied, you showed me the schedule  
for a house you said you thought might suit us.

We glimpsed a future as we opened doors  
to empty rooms and climbed to marvel  
at the light and spacious loft conversion.

If at the front good double-glazing damped  
the constant traffic noise, then at the back  
a quiet path meandered to the Hermitage.

The lawyers and the bank both seemed OK  
but something kept us up at night – not yet,  
but soon, surely, soon we'd make the right move.

## ALASDAIR CANNON

### Numinousness

To the kid, who sees the halogen floors  
Without the generational flaws  
& the chemical lights  
At delirious heights  
& the patented air space  
Olfactory engagement  
& feels like a smear of light  
On marble so smooth I crack and diffuse  
Refract and minuscule  
The message being bedazzled kid  
Flattened, 2D under the weight of spectacle  
Just a receptacle but thrilled to be there  
Feeling the air-conditioning under my skin, bone deep  
Seeing the world like a butcher,  
Styrofoam blood tray perspective,  
Time and consciousness diced and packed in the  
Hands of the supplier  
& asks Mum to go back next Saturday  
For the weekly provision of service  
To see the motion of thousands this way  
& the million dollar power bill  
Coursing through the walls.  
Well, of course I thought  
God lived there.

## OZ HARDWICK

### Hold the Front Page

A brown briefcase spills leaves, and the pavement's thick with newspapers. The world is tired of keys and combinations, so it rips the front from all reports and affidavits, peeling down to their pith and juice. News breaks so often that it's frightened to get out of bed, and the unwary are elbowed to oblivion by newshounds and paparazzi, lucky if they spot themselves naked and misspelled in a column on page 58. Insult or injury: lawyers chase ambulances, police cars and icecream vans; anything with a bell is fair game for compensation. And by the road, that briefcase fills with rain; fills with young boys bombing, and with escapologists struggling in the chains their lovers locked before they walked away. All policies are null and void as, in brown water scudded with brown leaves, headlines rewrite themselves as myths, and Orpheus dons mask and flippers, his lyre warped, his strings rusty.

### TV Times

After the scandals with the presenters – the girls, the boys, the drugs – the network decided to hire owls instead. At first there were comments, complaints, letters to Points of View, but the public adapted surprisingly fast, settling down to TV dinners to watch their wide eyes staring in studio lights, their heads bobbing like eager lawyers cutting to the nub. We all had our favourites: mine was the long-eared owl on the house makeover show. As hapless couples poured their savings into loft conversions and renovations, burning cash to cook up dreams of nuclear families and lives in the country, the owl would wink like a camera's slow exposure, capturing the moments of staged drama. It was the little owls on the talk show that caught the nation's hearts, though, their quizzical zigzag ballet upstaging even the most dazzling A-lister, flummoxing the Hollywood elite with a tip of the head, a casual hoot. They were heady days for ratings, an Indian summer for event TV, an unexpected last hurrah for the water cooler. I still have a couple of scratchily signed photos, but most people have already forgotten, their attention pinballed by the next fad, the latest distraction. If prompted, they'd maybe recall something about bloodied wrists and revelations concerning irregular pellets, about questions in parliament, about uncomfortable silences in skeletal half-moon nights.

## A Folktale for Every Occasion

The building is empty as a well, so I shout for the help I'm too embarrassed to ask for when anyone's home, relieved when no one comes running. There's a numbered list of actions In Case of Emergency, and though it would be hard to frame this afternoon as an emergency, I follow them, just in case, dialling 999 on a bad line and assembling myself in the car park, like flat-pack furniture with inscrutable diagrams and poorly translated instructions. We're miles from the sea, so by the time the coastguard arrives, clammy in his oilskins, my thumbs are blistered from Allen keys, but I look complete to the casual eye. He anchors the launch he has dragged from Scarborough, throws a lifebelt over my head with his first shot, winning a goldfish in a bag full of tap water. We look at each other, each acknowledging a part well played. The goldfish's lips are moving, so I loosen the neck of the bag to hear. *Go back to your empty life*, it says in a voice that echoes from the bottom of a well, *there's nothing to see here*.

## GEMMA NETHERCOTE WAY

### Exile

*after Camille Claudel*

This barren place.  
How the world  
has pressed

its mouth to you  
and blown you out  
like an egg.

– Silence?  
This is not  
silence.

This is not  
the cathedral  
air

of solitude,  
not the lucent  
arch

of a throat  
in space,

not the milk  
pale mass

of a stone  
in your palm.  
Brother, Mother –

this is abyss.

There can be no communion here.

Note: In 1934, Camille Claudel wrote from the asylum to Eugène Blot: 'I have fallen into an abyss... Of the dream that was my life, this is the nightmare.'

## PEYCHO KANEV

### Afterlife

Let me visit the word  
*night* now.

Three crows alight on the branches,  
unusually silent and motionless,  
and black as the word itself.

Everything else is gone ...  
Everything is not here ...

So

is the light coming or going  
after

the night?

## FLEUR BEAUPERT

### Pressed Voices

I am a citizen making a phone call.  
The vase topples over, voice breaking.

Irises escape like sounds from a mouth –  
purple circles authenticating the light.

The Bureau asks a breathless question.  
Do you want to enrol your voiceprint?

The irises are sunbathers sprawled  
over a cove, edging toward the water.

I wait for the next available operator.  
Do you want to enrol your voiceprint?

My voice stutters as iris buds unfurl –  
a bouquet of beach umbrellas opening.

As they approach the processing bay,  
they shrink back from the separation

in to micro s copic im pul s e s  
glo s s y over expo s ed im age s

cre s t s  
anther s            fall s

len s e s    s tandard s    cadence s  
lip s        accent s

vein s  
beard s.

They want only to suggest the visual—  
to be dug out of cool, airtight databases,

to be spoken and heard until they swell  
and grow chronic. Temporary silence.

PETER ROBERTS

holding on

we reach  
in silence  
for snowflakes  
with tongues or  
hands,  
wanting to hold  
what is melting

wind penetrates  
to skin, makes us  
shiver



## midmorning field/eye of the storm

no cloud sails the deep clear sky;  
no wind stirs the tall grass;  
no sound penetrates the burning silence.  
sunlight perfumes the air.

like air masses, armies  
converge on this  
field, forming  
a battle front. soldiers  
run in packs,  
like cigarettes,  
killers  
caught  
in the jaws of time.  
a mortar shell  
explodes; a helicopter  
bursts into tears.  
legs are severed; brains ooze  
through shattered skulls.  
the armies withdraw. nothing  
is resolved.  
time  
fills the air. the change winds always  
follow. night comes. the moon  
rises. stars drift across the sky.

the sun slowly usurps the moon  
saying in a strongdeep voice  
i'll take over now  
but the moon lingers still, without potency.

## OWEN BULLOCK

### flight

are we sky or land  
dying like sweet death  
with cherries unimagined in a penitent hand

we sup guilt fond punishments  
scale turbulence holding on  
with blue veins purpling  
as we swing to ground

help me the mind like an enemy  
penetrates eyelids washed with eyes

a cupboard of mock plaster  
the ring encloses its handle a riddle  
I open an old jewel  
that tries to cook itself into usefulness

you don't notice things they tell me –  
what about the scuffed edges of the New Scientist?  
soles of the child's shoes like panda eyes?

flight is green over green earth  
pock-marked clouds miraged sky  
mirrors

sky crustaceans hover under engines  
awkward accents

hoping to squeeze through screens  
red earth

selling daffodils they make us cling  
to gravity

we don't want to be the famous poets selling daffodils  
on a seabed of cloud perishing slowly  
drawing tea and orange juice gazing at water

but to fly  
fleeing

### sitting

*after Ryokan*

a yellowhammer lands on a rock  
water gleaming

I can't follow the path of ripples  
on the stream

among brown cows  
one black cow

sparrows and mynahs pick at the ground  
where cows have been

how slowly  
can I walk through the meadow

koromiko we planted  
next to koromiko that came up

scratch marks on the old totara  
where the possum scurries

clothes in bundles  
in the gypsy wagon

plans to read  
but the river more inviting

what passes  
glimpsing what passes

## THUY ON

### Verb

You came at me  
knife and fork in your eyes  
I was curled like a comma  
but there were no pauses  
no space at all  
your column frame hard  
your weight on top  
your height stretched out  
you in fast motion  
a blur a slickness  
a verb on rapid repeat.

## ARNA RADOVICH

### The Elephant in the Room

My elephant has an aggressive personality and a long trunk that it sticks into places where it is not wanted—it is a dangerous time for trumpeting. My elephant barks and bites and kicks. It is not always attentive, nor sociable.

Some believe it purely anthropomorphic to allocate personality to elephants, but people who study elephants would disagree. Elephants are smart, everyone knows that. An elephant never forgets, remember?

Research on ‘working’ elephants, like those in the Myanmar timber industry, shows that holding wild elephants in captivity shortens their lives. If born captive, you don’t know any better. But if you’ve lived wild—you know the possibilities. The fact is, an elephant must be tamed, trained, *broken* in to captivity and the working life. But my elephant refuses to be broken, controlled or managed. It will not simply obey commands, or accept the dominance of its mahout. It rampages through consciousness, trampling logic, tossing executive orders asunder. My elephant will not be medicated or coerced to behave. It remains wild and untamed and unpredictable. I never know when my elephant may escape and charge and I will be left exposed, unprotected, helpless in the path of its fury.

## We Take Our Comfort Where We Can

In the dusty doorways of Town,  
pigeons, like old women, coo and cluster.  
The bus stops and starts and jerks  
to the stop. The doors suck open and  
she steps out, clumps  
in heavy workboots and high-vis vest  
to The Big Sheep Country Café  
and a table at the back, near the toilets.  
'The usual?' the waitress calls  
in a hiss of espresso steam.  
She nods assent. Licks her lips,  
anticipates each bite  
of soft dough filled with  
squishy red jam and spray pack cream,  
fingers gummy and gooey in  
the delicious comforting mess of it,  
filling her up, like he used to,  
bite by bite.

## JANE O'SULLIVAN

### Growth Mindset

Evie heaves in another breath and rises up in salutation to the sun. It's only 7 a.m., and there is already a shit-ton of it, spilling in through the first-floor windows and drowning them in white. Outside, the sea is nothing but glare. She's seen whales before, pocking the blue with the breath as they pass by, but that was months ago and the whales are long gone now.

Natasha moves between their bodies as they rise and bend and fall.

The hot air cycles in and out of their bodies.

Everything comes to the surface.

There's no breeze and there's nothing across the windows except a limp strip of prayer flags. Natasha doesn't believe in curtains, of course. She believes in saluting the sun properly; in feeling it on the skin.

Evie's hands slip on her mat.

She's still getting used to Natasha. When she first started, back in winter with the whales, she'd been in a beginners class with a different teacher—one who didn't tell them to draw beams of light through their perineum, or expel the negative energy through their anus, or do anything in shavasana except shut up for a minute.

Yoga had seemed reasonable then. Achievable even. It had been a pleasant way to unkink while staring at the tonal shift of sea and sky. Evie had left those classes feeling tall and calm. Her shoulder blades had sat in their right little hollows. But that feeling never lasted for long. It had to be maintained.

She had come more often.

At the same time, Natasha had started tweaking the timetable, here and there, and then all over. And just like that Evie's old teacher disappeared, banished across town to a gym underneath an office tower, and she had found herself with Natasha.

At first, she'd circled her like a shelter dog, unsure what to make of the tiny, barrel-waisted woman with her sudden backfire of a laugh. But those circles had got smaller, over time.

Natasha was too old to take any more shit. She said that often enough,

anyway, as a kind of shorthand for something. Evie was learning that all Natasha's stories worked like that. She found rough phrases to talk about negative energy and letting it go.

Now huff it out, really huff it out. I want to hear.

That was not what you said to a woman with a recovering pelvic floor, but Evie tried her best. And it wasn't the feared prolapse that fell out of her.

Natasha made it okay to be visceral, that was one thing. She was not ashamed of her body. She wore faded shorts and T-shirts that had not been cut or altered or made cool in any way. As Evie hauled her post-baby body into position alongside the lithe young things, she felt neither wrong nor fat. It was a fucking yoga miracle.

Natasha was pushing them now, as relentless as an incoming tide, moving them on from the salutation cycle they all knew so well. She wants to try something, she says.

I'm telling you now, you will feel emptied out. It's going to be hard, not to fill it all up straight away, but sit with it. Learn from it.

Evie is unsure, but she follows Natasha anyway as she shows them how to stretch their fascia and their patience and their minds. Natasha is right. It is hard. Evie feels a headache setting in. It's too hot, too bright. She has not drunk enough water and that thing with the eyes has really done her in.

She feels it then, not so much the empty space, but the strain of her body trying to reach around the space and knit it shut. A sigh breaks out of her. It is shaping up to be one fucking long, hot February day.

That's the thing about miracles, she realises. They weren't gifts. You had to earn them. You had to prove you were one of the deserving few.

Evie feels a line being drawn just ahead of her toes. She is there, she is trying. But either she is not doing enough, or Natasha wants too much. Even thinking it is treason—a treason that tells her what side of the line she's on.

It's just luck, of course. Natasha plans her classes around the cycle of the moon, Evie knows that. It's just luck (of one kind or other) that this attempt to clear out their emotional and psychic junk has fallen on a day predicted to hit the forties.

Evie's head is pounding now. She wonders how it's possible to feel overfull and yawning all at once. She watches sweat bead and drop to her mat. Splat.

Then, finally, it's over.

They end in silence.

Whatever they'd just expelled hangs in a steamy miasma around them. There's no breeze; not even a flutter from the prayer flags. Natasha stands by the one open window and fans her chest with her hands.

Hoo, that got some stuff out. And again. Hoo boy.

Evie kneels on her mat and tries to gather up her limbs and reattach them. The other women move slowly too, falling back to scoop up bottles and Chux wipes from the basket next to the orchid. Evie gets the last one and sets to work spraying her mat and rubbing it dry. Normally the studio fills with chatter at the end of a session, but there's not even a lazy call of *who's getting coffee?* The session has emptied them all.

Evie rolls up her mat and carries it to the back of the room, the spray bottle hooked over a finger. Her body feels like a Caramello Koala left in the car, squishy inside its packet. She waits for the feeling to pass, staring at nothing: the slick of sweat on a shoulder in front of her; a crack in the wall; the orchid on the shelf. Marvellous thing. It's been blooming for months. She lets her eyes wander over the dust coating its broad leaves, its long stem, and the tiny curling beards on its open flowers. Her mind lags and then catches up. No, back.

Yes, there.

And Evie finds the tiniest of tells: a raised line where the stem has been lifted from its mould.

The women move around her, spent and downcast. A gap opens and Evie steps into it. She slides her mat on top of the pile and drops her bottle in with the others. Then she slips her feet into her thongs and walks out into the blazing day, bright and cloudless except for the banking headache and rumbling thoughts of kids and work and deadlines.

All she wants to do is lie on the floor.

The spell lasts another fifteen days, like an unbearable lassitude hanging over the city, and then the weather finally breaks. Evie wakes to grey skies and puts the kettle on to boil. She has half an hour, maybe, before her boys are up. She has missed hot tea.

The caffeine makes her heart pound. She feels something like glee: thoroughly capable and not at all sweaty. Then the boys wake up and she is laughing, hurrying them into the day. She takes them with her, moving

through the weekend to-do list like a snake on the dunes. Then, last of all, Ikea—that hellhole—but Evie has her strategy now and knows the shortcuts. A reading light, a caddy for the kids' textas, and a basket for the balls in the garage.

She prises a pasta ladle from the toddler's hands and puts it back on the shelf, pushing them all swiftly through his tears.

She stops.

At the end of the market hall there is a bank of green wrapped up in shiny cellophane. She wheels them closer.

This one, guys? What do you think?

No!

Puh-ple, mummy! PUH-ple!

Ok, one of each then.

She puts one purple and one white orchid into the trolley.

She takes them home and sets them on the kitchen counter. She boils the kettle again and pours it over a bowl of potting mix and ancient sphagnum moss. When it cools, she prises their roots from their Ikea sludge and repots them both gently. She could give one to Natasha, for the studio, but she knows she won't.

Then she squeezes them onto the windowsill that all the plants seem to like best, the one that sees the sky but never feels the sun straight up. She twists them this way and that until they look just right.

She leaves them.

They grow.

## MARY CRESSWELL

### The Stock Exchange Makes Landfall

Collecting their wits, lesser waders wander across the inlet. Will spoonbills be here by noon or will they hoon away to the heat of the north? Red buckets bob in the backwater, empty now of everything but broken sticks and bits of flotsam. Three days ago oystercatchers argued, scrunched and scuttling, back and forth, saving their graces; they will have no way of sectioning sand until the southerly ceases.

It was true serendipity that seven men in search of seals settled their sacks upon the shore, simultaneous with the ships' arrival. White sails were no strangers to this coast, as the stilts and the wrybills had always known. Clichés collected at the quay while gulls cawed, kree kree they called, and on the jetty the black dog skulked in vain.

Bring down the bags, bellowed the boss, and the boom lowered. The sky lowered at the end of the day, and when that was all done and dusted, low clouds collected in the quartan quarter, and driving sheets of rain propelled both schooners out to sea. *Morning and evening*, the red-bearded captain wrote in his log, *the first day*.

## SIMON PERCHIK

\*

Everything on this wall clouds over  
at first, a window then opens  
swallowing the sky midair

though here you are, hammering  
– this picture frame was already too heavy  
is pressing against the glass

as the unbearable sorrow when its likeness  
can only be found in wood  
where you no longer hear your fingers tighten

from soaking in the sweat that clings to a nail  
bent and bleeding then hidden in back, holds on  
to what it remembers falling from the sky

as one after another, yet there it is  
in drops – don't you hear them telling you  
to step back from her photograph.

\*

This rainbow is all that's left  
which means the bombardier  
is still facing you

and though the rain has stopped  
you take back the colour that is yours – black  
from when you became the first night on Earth

with nothing in your hand to press  
except the small stones kicked up for stars  
are still fed the darkness they need

to break open the ground for more air  
—a glance could save them now, spread  
the way flames are wet from crossing borders

in the same formation you dead arrived  
to mark the day, build this fortress  
put an end to who knows why each well

goes off somewhere after you're finished  
are digging for rain as nothing more to empty  
is there on the map that's now silent

no longer wanting the ground  
as something that will lead you out  
side by side knowing what night after night is.

## GERARD SARNAT

### Francine's Memorial

(from *DISSOLUTE COOT HOOTS*)

Her slow growing plant bloomed an adult. That's cause to celebrate even when wilted.  
During early morning's regathering of old community, our children and theirs show up demonstrating you can't put fetters on love. Second time in 2 weeks, what once served as a post birthday suit, at first I wore to brisses, bat mitzvahs then to weddings, has become what one uses for funerals. From this moment on, my change of plans is to leave dress shirt with its tie tied plus belt already looped—till homebound thusly no longer able to attend such events. Both women had made earth much better extending themselves to whomever needs. I admit overlooking those impacts compared to less transcendent men's curriculum vitae ... She laughed just like bells which now toll.

## ANTHONY MACRIS

### Four-Poem Suite for My Son, Who Has Autism

I.

From the top of your white wardrobe,  
through the deadness  
of a winter night  
a stuffed panther  
with an oversized head  
stares down at your bare-chested  
infant's body,  
indifferent to your hours of suffering.

Wreathed in the dull glow  
of damp twisted sheets  
you make your final whimpers,  
each small cry  
each flutter of your eyelids  
diminishing your pain  
diminishing my pain  
until you fall asleep.

Your bed becomes a leaf-shaped boat.  
I watch it glide down a black glass river  
that reflects a sky of frozen stars.

From the muddy riverbanks  
woodland creatures  
help me keep watch over you  
– a rabbit, a frog, an owl,  
a spider on its trembling web –  
as you drift silently away.



*Once upon a time  
there was a pretty fly  
but one night he flew away  
flew away  
into the sky  
into the moon.*

I want to fill the darkness  
of your empty room  
with a different song  
that will bring you back to me.

II.

When you finally returned  
you were changed.  
Did you understand what had been taken from you?  
Did you know you could no longer speak?  
Did you know you could no longer  
see what others saw  
hear what other heard  
feel what others felt?

Did you know you lived at our whim?  
That if we chose not to feed you,  
you would die of starvation?  
That if we chose not to love you  
we, too, would die,  
die of a sickness  
no senses could grasp  
no words could name?

III.

Before we see ourselves reflected  
we are coextensive with the world.  
But now the wooden ruler

bends in the pure clear water,  
the voices stagger  
in the patchwork fog,  
the thorn that stabs  
evokes only mild surprise,  
the drop of blood it draws  
a beading jewel on your arm,  
a lady bird that catches your eye,  
that swells, bursts, then trickles.

Je n'est pas un autre.

Maybe there was never an I  
to become another.

Maybe there was never a reflection.

Maybe there was never a coextensivity.

Maybe there was only undifferentiation  
pierced by

the creaking bed, the fevered sheet,  
the freezing air in the burning throat that tickles,  
that sets you giggling so hard  
I want to slap you.

IV.

Late summer afternoon.

It hasn't rained for months.

In our back yard  
sheltered by the frangipani tree,  
you stand ankle-deep in the water  
that fills the blue plastic shell  
I'd hauled up from K-Mart.

You pour precise measures  
from your lidless sippy cup.

You watch the spangles of water  
lit by fading sun

plummet through the drought dry air.

Splash, splash, splash.

Your mother and I  
peg clothes  
to the washing line.  
You pause, smile,  
look in our direction.  
You pucker your  
mute lips in pleasure.  
Your eyes are glassy,  
one-way mirrors  
that you can see out  
but that we can't see in.

## MARJORY WOODFIELD

### Into the Desert

Children are packed into the bus. PE shorts and T-shirts, picnic boxes, large plastic canisters full of water. *Make sure you drink plenty.* The risk matrix completed. Scorpions, snakes and sandstorms. In the distance, we saw it coming. Thick swirling clouds. Turned back.

Today the air is hot, clogged with sand. Sky the same colour as earth. At Thumamah there are large Bedouin tents and desert rats. No scorpions, no snakes and the sandstorm was yesterday.

Lily holds my hand. We walk together. Slowly over barren ground. Stones and tamarisks. The others ahead. Shouting, laughing, running to the next small rise. *Look for the fossils. Pull back a rock. What can you see? There. Hold it carefully in the palm of your hand. Now, tell its story.* In the afternoon, group initiatives. *Can you solve this problem? Take planks and tyres. Cross the alligator swamp.* The stinging sand all around.

Once I walked to Living Springs. Children following. Green bush. *Watch out for the ongaonga.* Small waterfalls. Kahikatea, rimu, manuka. *Pick that leaf. The taste. Early settlers called it Tea Tree.* And now, this desert. Alligators and swamps. No scorpions, no snakes and the sandstorm was yesterday.

## Sorting the Earthquake China

1. At Jane Austen's house they showed us the door that creaked, pushed it open so we could hear. They said she liked it that way, just enough time to put away her writing. Over the road, I bought a plate. Pink trailing roses. In the playground, Beryl and I sat together on the end of a slide, because there was nowhere else, while Sophie swung higher and higher calling, *push me push me push me*.
2. I shopped at Tanglin Mall as my daughter played an upright Yamaha one floor higher. A celadon bowl. Willow green. Her Grade Eight exam. Bach, Beethoven, Chopin.
3. Clarinet, saxophone, guitar. They follow each other. Around and around. I never liked it.
4. Wild violets on a cup. Parsonage afternoon teas. She made lamingtons. Edmond's Cook Book. Whipped the cream, added icing sugar. Offered them on a matching plate. Melting moments to follow.

## SUDHA BALAGOPAL

### Excess Baggage

Suman's in-laws in India have taught her how luggage must be arranged. They put locks on the cases—disregarding airport regulations—for her maiden foreign trip.

She stacks and restacks her bags outside Denver International Airport, light atop heavy.

*I waited ten months after the wedding for a US visa. Now I'm here, still waiting for my husband.*

Her legs wobble after twenty hours of flying. Around her, tender airport meetings and greetings. A fellow traveler opens his arms to a woman who melts into him. Suman's sigh lodges, tightens in her throat.

A tap on her shoulder breaks her daydream. Tendrils of expectation zigzag through her veins.

'That's a lot of luggage,' her husband, Vish, says.

She trains her gaze on the suitcase with the missing lock, hopes nothing was stolen. She thinks of parents and in-laws, the money spent on excess baggage. Not how lean and tall Vish is, nor the attractive mould of the shirt on his shoulders. Anything to stop her from dwelling on this crushing moment. No satiating hug, no liquifying kiss.

In the car, Vish's elbow rests on the console between them, the angular bone a knobby stranger. The only voice in the car comes from the radio. The announcer speaks in an unfamiliar American accent, urging caution against an impending storm. She lifts nervous hands to re-tie her droopy pony tail, accidentally brushes against her husband's shoulder. His muscles tense. She knots her fingers.

He pulls up at an apartment complex, struggles to park within the white lines. 'Leave the suitcases,' he says, sounding tired. 'We'll get them later.'

'Will they be safe?'

He walks ahead without answering, up a flight of stairs. She follows, ignoring the clench in her belly as he fumbles with keys.

'Please, take a seat. I'll make some tea,' he says.

*So formal? I'm his wife, not a guest.*

She sits on the edge of a chair, her jet-lagged eyes following the rattling

keys from his hands to his pocket to the coffee table. Her head's floaty, as if she's still above the Atlantic.

He turns the kettle on, places three cups on a tray, adds teabags.

'My roommate, Bennington, will be here soon,' he says, his back to her.

She absorbs his words and the neat living room with a couch, pictures, vase, and anniversary clock. She drinks it all in.

Including the silver-framed photograph of the roommates on the sideboard, their arms around each other. She picks up the frame for a closer look.

'When did you ...' she begins to the crashing sound of ceramic splintering on the tiled floor.

She replaces the photograph, swallows, gathers herself.

'I'll help you take care of this mess,' she says. 'And then, can we get my luggage? Your parents insisted on locking those suitcases. There's no point, is there?'

His shoulders sag. She touches his arm gently, notices the muscles don't tense.

## JANE FRANK

### Channelling a *Wabi Sabi* World View, For You

In an hour, sun won't wash this rough-hewn wall,  
or palm fronds stripe the palings and my face:

a morning dead. The yielding grey of the silky oak,  
when it came down, was like your wizened legs

when your mind wouldn't let them move –  
but you carried your burden with quiet grace

that spoke to me of the *bloom of time* as  
you winked somehow over the shoulder of the nurse.

I draw on your lessons of old and imperfect things,  
the joy of oiling leather. Beautiful stages on the path

to decay – the bliss of the little monk in his wind-torn  
*robes*. Leaf tea from crazed Cornishware mugs:

the bloodshot lines in all-knowing eyes. There's a peace  
in reading your marginalia in *The Coral Island*

as there was in helping you clean your teeth those last  
few weeks. I keep your chequered hanky in my pocket.

DUNCAN RICHARDSON

from the train

i see a woman  
leaning to pick up leaves  
from her driveway  
like a genuflection  
to the spirit of movement

a rich green strip  
of remnant bush  
between track and street  
where the morning slides in shadows  
and the dew  
like a spell  
is ready to  
vanish.

the brickworks dream  
abandoned by all but dust  
and piles of bricks crumbling  
like unfinished sphinxes  
graffiti twines around walls  
vines clamber over roof tops  
pressing them into  
the hard red earth

beyond the fringe of stringy gum trees  
a murder stained the leaf litter  
long ago  
a horse and a boy  
the culprit sped away  
by sail to England  
a friend of the Archbishop they said  
the evidence scuffed  
and stacked in boxes  
for a century of  
forgetting

if this window held more  
than its own slow flowing  
i could see right back  
to swaggies camps  
and timber getters  
instead the Vietnamese mini-mart  
raises its shutters  
blinking at the light

concrete, brick and glass  
continue their static choreography  
fostering faith in permanence

but the crushers and the swinging ball  
are always  
and always  
coming

ready  
or  
not

## BRENT CANTWELL

### left out

Behind the diamond coach grinds an axe  
to keen each wasted afternoon  
to a disciplined edge such control lacks  
the mischief of distance me a mere moon

away left out field watching a red 'n white kite  
suffer the plunge, the deep-blue of the wait,  
not seeing an easy high ball and like  
an axe coach hacks *on y' bike, mate!*

To me coach, the mitted and the boast  
are no great tether: to me a plan's like  
spitting in the sea, strategy the ghost  
of a sailor's hope, my *on y' bike!*

Some people just want to be left out  
to suffer the plunge and the doubt ...

## MICHAEL GOULD

### The Fog of Love

Over the years  
and over the waves  
on the sea voyages I've made  
on sunny days, or in rain  
or fog and mist  
recalling the lovers I've kissed  
over the years  
I wonder, *Am I missed?*  
And I wonder about the men  
long ago forsaken  
*Was I the one mistaken?*  
Oh, love.

## IAN GANASSI

### Is This a Test?

The professor would have done anything  
To acquire a babysitter, including lying and flattery.

Think about it though,  
It must have had some humanistic value,  
Some redeeming feature.

*'Ilegitimi non carborundum';*  
I will never be a classicist.

The dog ate my coupon book on the way to the store;  
No patties for me today.

The overachiever considered cooking a waste of time  
When he could be studying for the next exam.

I guess it depends on how much time you have.

How long will the borage last in storage?  
What's the price of eggs in China?

'What is the role of plot in the postmodern novel?'

'Poverty makes men ridiculous.'  
But satisfaction brings them back.

What is the role of peanut butter in the postmodern brothel?

I can't get none. I try and I try.

It's a little discouraging  
The way we are always looking  
In the wrong direction.

But I'm sure I think about them  
More than they think about me.

Let me reassure you,  
The answer is at hand.

PAUL BECKMAN

### You Never Really Win at Carnivals

I was coming back from the carnival, happy with a goldfish in a plastic bag half-filled with water, when the neighbourhood bully, Ray, snuck up behind me and snatched it. 'Hey!' I yelled. He threw it up and caught it. I grabbed a garbage can lid from an overstuffed garbage can on the curb. Ray smashed the plastic bag at my feet, water ran—the goldfish flopped. I fought back tears. Ray laughed. I swung the lid wildly, aiming at his arm—caught his throat. He tried to talk but his words were all twisted like a flopping goldfish.

ANUM SATTAR

### Four Haiku

light bulb  
death's-head hawkmoth  
lost in its warm glow

rain doves –  
their fledgling fallen  
under a dangling flower pot

stingless bee  
flies to the warré hive  
from the hyacinth

first rainbow trout caught –  
leaps from the clumsy paws  
of an eager bear cub



## PAUL TURLEY

### The Desert Dawn

The sun blowtorches the rusty ruined ridge  
and scorches the sand at your feet.

The temperature climbs ten degrees in an hour –  
it will be forty by noon and still be going up.

Heat hammers at your forehead  
like a migraine trying to get in.

In the distance the land shimmers and  
turns liquid to your squinting eyes.

And while you stand hunched against  
the bright heat seeking the shallow shade

of the only tree for miles around, under  
your very feet, a world of creatures

prepares to wait out the day in the lee of  
rocks, waiting for a teeming twilight.

## HESTER J ROOK

### Glass and Hollow Lands

This land is a falling rush  
of mountain air and crumbled stones, of  
greyglass skies and the muddled  
flap of seals against wet rock and stretching weed.  
The sea is suckling,  
milky water lapping gentle as a sigh along greyslicked coast  
and the roads are lined with purple:  
a double-laned parade of spiking blooms, wind-whipped and  
swaying in the car's exhaust.  
The hills don't roll, they reach  
thick with dried out feed,  
and the gardens are full,  
fragrant,  
lily and rose-hush,  
red hot firepokers bursting red blooms, harsh  
in the sunlight.  
I bury my hands in the dirt  
until seedlings spurt under my fingernails –  
a rebirth –  
in a land that is salt and blossoms  
like my own but soft as rain in the pines  
a resting place,  
until I am rooted in earth  
toes sucking at the pearled water  
and branches growing strong and sure from each  
fingertip,  
blooms cusping the sky.

## GAYELENE CARBIS

### John Christopher

We all stand along the corridor and hear Lorraine crying behind those doors where my cousin John Christopher lies in a coma and then we all look up when Alfie arrives late and comes up to his brother and stands there silent at a safe distance twisting his fingers in his hands and his eyes tilted strangely as if he is sussing something out weighing up an opponent and Johnnie comes straight up to him and clasps him crying as if they were still speaking only yesterday and before he can get out 'Thanks for com -' Alfie pulls no punches makes his point quickly '*I came for the kid*' and we all hold our breaths as if we're suspended like John Christopher and a single gasp goes up howling along the corridor and we are a Greek chorus watching Johnnie who staggers back up against the wall as if he's in one of his fights and has been winded by a blow he never expected it's below the belt he shuts his eyes so tight the tears spurt out from the sides and his arms flail in the air and he is something wild and crazy and hungry for blood when he screams out: '*Get him out of here!*' and we all rush into him and surround him like the ropes of a boxing ring with some of us middle-men holding him back but he's doing nothing just flailing there with his arms stiff and sore and very straight and flung out hard into fists that clench but Alfie's already gone he's out of there so fast you'd think he was running we can hear his Reeboks fleeing along the corridor but what I can never forget is Uncle Graham's face in that split second after Alfie finally said something and what came out of his mouth and Graham's face how he'd bent over holding his stomach wincing with his eyes shut tight and how much he looked just like Johnnie as if he'd been hit with one knockout punch that was as painful as life at the Alfred Hospital that dusk when we all stood waiting for John Christopher to come through the coma and live and if he had I sometimes think Johnnie might have forgiven his brother because you make pacts like that when your son is slipping away behind a door and you're outside

### Daylight Ghosts

*(Reading 'John Christopher' at La Mama Poetica)*

Looking up catches them unawares: no time to change or mould expressions: you see straight through faces, Lot's wives looking beyond you at the sand in your wake.

What's on the page is easy and more palatable. You tell it straighter and cleaner than usual: they've known it's there inside you, like a disease and a promise.

You catch them out, unguarded as innocents abroad. What's captured there is hard on the eye like a text by Derrida, denser than a dream.

You have jolted them out of polite lapse and thoughts wandering wilder than monkeys: they bring themselves back now but they're travelling far

into territories you've barely heard about – kept close, defended at all costs – the small things large and the big ones beating in chests like giant Pandora's boxes, with hope

like a last chimp loose in the jungle, aping its own reflection. I see straight away that she is thinking of someone else somewhere else: in my poem,

my cousin lies in a coma, his baby-face marred by only a scratch; his face is peaceful, sleeping. We all see it, the golden glow, as if sunlight is swimming

through the window, lapping across his young face like shadows: his father paces the corridor, hot words in his head of what he'd said, the last words – *Don't take the car out.*

She sees her brother, Christos, fled for Cyprus to escape cocaine in  
suburban Carnegie, his Porsche shipped out  
like a final green flare.

When it's over, you've shifted, moved into the clutches of  
other poems with messages like lifelines, summing up the world  
as if you hold it in your hand like a balloon

you'll soon be letting go. But she hears nothing now. She's  
going down into depths of self seldom seen, though she glistens  
on the surface. She's as bright and new as a facelift.

She says later: I'd forgotten ...  
your cousin ...  
*That that happened to them ...*

I see the expression on my father's face, I see he's right there  
in the corridor, his wrung hands wrenched over his knees like he's  
pulling at the ropes of a lifeboat;

holding up the wall as if he's seasick: I see him running  
after Johnnie, the way he's always run after Johnnie while  
John Christopher lies almost forgotten.

I can hear again the most passive man I know, my father,  
say he'd like to deck Alfie for what he did that day.  
When Alfie turns up at my mother's house, my father walks out,

moving faster than he's moved in a long time. It's as if Johnnie  
is a blood brother my father never had. The one he lost. Keith,  
run over in Lee St. And not quite three. His small life lingers

in my father's stories like a wheel that just won't stop turning.  
I bring it all back, the past in the present  
like a living thing that's tangible.

I almost say *I'm sorry*, afterwards – as if poems are like sins  
I'm ashamed of, knowledge I shouldn't have. I see the expressions  
her face, on his, and I want to cry the tears that they won't.

But neither of them mention it. We bury the past like skeletons.  
What you can't control leaves traces on your face  
like a ghostly presence glimpsed in daylight.

## FRANCINE WITTE

### In the Checkout Line

Getting ready for the meatball weekend I have planned for Harry and me. It's a custom I'm hoping will take and keep us together, though to tell you the truth I'm about to give up.

Harry says the romance thing's not working but is willing to try it as friends.

So, I'm in the checkout line with the meatballs, and the pasta, and the parmesan cheese. There are three ahead, and up behind me comes a young woman, maybe eighteen, with two loaves of bread in one arm and a crying baby in the other. I'm in kind of a hurry, and don't have that much, but I figure a baby is extra so I motion her ahead.

She thanks me and says the baby's father is in the parking lot and really should come in but he can't make up his mind how much he's gonna commit.

I wonder if she somehow knows about Harry and me, and I tell her well isn't a baby kind of a commitment.

She laughs, but only a little. She looks at the meatballs I have placed on the conveyor belt. 'I used to like meatballs,' she says. 'But the baby's father didn't.'

I gave up tennis and pork chops for Harry. I even gave up my cat. I think of him some nights after Harry goes home. I think of the little cat eyes shining that last time in the pet carrier.

When it's her turn to pay, she asks me to hold the baby while she gets her wallet. 'The baby's father,' she says, 'doesn't like to hold him.'

She says she's sorry to be telling so much to a stranger, but I guess we're all strangers, huh? She takes back the baby and hefts him in her arms.

When it's my turn to check out, I notice an old man behind me in line. Crumbs in his beard, opened cracker box in his hand. 'Got hungry,' he shrugs.

I motion him ahead. I can do this all day.

### Echo and Thin

I was tired of always planning our dates, and so I let Martin. I said, Martin it's up to you. What I meant was this better be good bozo boy. I'm halfway out the door.

Next thing I know, he shows up, hands filled with pamphlets—skydiving, hot air balloons, and zipline. Something to do in the air, he says. Says he wants to feel wingy and free.

Next morning, we are on the edge of a cliff, a precipice sticking out like a tongue. Suddenly, Martin pats down his pockets. Car keys, he says, and takes off.

The sun also sets and with it, the warmth. I call out for Martin. It's cold, I yell, and also, I love you. It comes back echo and thin.

When the sun comes up next morning, I look around for the trail. When I can't find it, I whisper 'goodbye Martin' into the cool mountain air.

I reach in my purse for the pamphlets. I pick out hot air balloon. Come get me, I say when I call them. I have no idea where I am.

I figure now would be a good time to start telling the truth.

## SARAH PENWARDEN

### Less

Driving up, we're on the roof of the world. Clouds scud over the dryness of hills in tones and semi-tones. Gold-fawn, taupe mounds, grey plains. In a blue washed down from the mountain, a sudden lake floods the valley in reflected light. Halfway up the incline, clouds hang on invisible wires. Through the church window, behind the altar cross, rain approaches. Hills whiten and blanch to the lightest of greens; near, then far, then near. A scatter of stones: rain on the roof. Back then you announced it was the loveliest place you had yet seen. By rights, from then on, all your eyes beheld could only be thought of as less.

## EVE NUCIFORA

### Pain au Chocolat

I went to a life drawing class once. Back home, in a boutique hotel in something called the 'Mosaic Room', a bit of a misnomer. The tiled walls formed no pattern. No tessellation. No image or colour. Just mismatched and washed out tiles. Brown and greige. Late afternoon sun streamed in through the windows and the willowy model stood white and clean in the centre of the room. She had long red hair like a storybook princess and a full tuft of strawberry blonde pubes that were so fine they were translucent gold in the warm sunlight. Spun sugar. Rumpelstiltskin threads of gold. I could tell already that this wasn't going to be like that. My own pubic hair was pathetic. A smattering of brown-black wires. No golden-red, strawberry goose-down pubes for me. Just sparse little dark strands. The hair on my head wasn't much to look at either. Thick curls knotted at the back where my scarf rests. I tried to rake my hands through it before I rang the doorbell, but there wasn't much use, so I punched in the apartment number and stamped my wet boots against the stone step. The door buzzed and I climbed the slippery stairs. The artist led me inside, through a small kitchen and into her studio space. I noticed that her fridge was covered in postcards. She'd stuck them wrong side out, with the pictures hidden.

She allowed me to remove my clothes behind a screen and gestured toward a faded green-velvet chaise longue. I bunched up my robe and threw it on the floor behind the lounge. I dropped heavily. Inelegantly. A failure already. The velvet was old and worn and prickled my flesh with its escaping fibres. Oddly, I felt aroused. I worried I was wet and hoped I wouldn't leave a mark on the scratchy old fabric.

This will be your pose, she said, pointing at a not-quite-finished painting propped against the wall. The model was a woman, around my age—no older than thirty, in a gauzy white dress. Her body was softer than my own, her breasts were full and her eyes languid. She was draped and docile. Classical art.

'Please tell me if you are uncomfortable or need to make any adjustments,' she said. Her accent was British, mellowed by years abroad. Once she was happy with the way I'd positioned myself, she began to work in silence. She let the timer ring to let me know when it was time to

pose and time to rest. Twenty-five minutes sitting. Five minutes in which to move. I wanted to further interrogate the woman in white, ask her questions about how she came into being. How she came to be incomplete. From where I was lying, all I could see clearly was a painting of a little girl by a window. The restrained, muted olives and grey-blues clouded the girl with melancholy, though her expression was so vague that she could be staring out the window in hopeful anticipation of playing outside in what was left of winter sunlight. The longer I stared at her, the further away she became, until she was just shapes and colours and sadness.

I watched the artist work out of the corner of my eye. She had the same flat, distant quality as the paintings. Her movements were restrained. Barely there. When our three hours were over, she told me I was very good and that she would give her friend at the art academy my details in case I was looking for more work. She handed me a fifty euro note and asked me if I wanted some tea. I was starving and accepted a cold cup of earl grey and a piece of apricot crostata. With my back to the kitchen, I hadn't seen who had brought in the tea tray and she offered no explanation as to whether anyone else had been in the room.

No matter how many times I took the number eleven bus, leaving the centre of Florence always gave me the feeling of a holiday being over. The crowds thinned and gave way to regular life. Even in winter, long queues of tourists shiver-quivered with cold and eagerness to cross the classics of their must-see lists. Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael. Madonna and Child. Madonna and Child. Madonna and Child. The bus was empty and overheated and I dozed with my head on the cold window, dreaming up ways to entertain myself until my boyfriend came home from work. I toyed with the idea of going to the supermarket and gently squeezing the tomatoes with my un-gloved hands to annoy the old Italian shoppers. I liked telling them in English to fuck off when they yelled at me for handling the produce, but that day I decided I couldn't handle the look in their mean, dark little eyes.

I was slumped on the mattress that served as both our bed and our lounge flipping through an old copy of *Vogue Italia* ('Perfect buttocks: prosthesis, lipofilling or hyaluronic acid?') when my boyfriend came home. I had all the blankets twisted around me like a nest. He leaned his big, blonde, boyish face over mine and kissed me upside down. I love you, he told me, loosening the bow tie that the hotel made him wear and lumbering toward the shower.

He came back a little while later wearing a towel and holding a

whetstone in one hand and a hunting knife in the other. He sat at the dining table with his legs stretched out in front of him and began to sharpen the knife. Stroke. Stroke. Stroke. His bare chest was heaving in time with each slick of metal on metal, his skin was pink from the hot shower. He was staring at my bare feet and I realised I had them crossed in exactly the position I'd had them in for the artist in earlier that day. My ankle bone hurt from the pressure, but I thought I might break his focus if I moved, so I kept still.

Sometimes my boyfriend lets me go to the hotel while he's working, and I sit in the kitchen and eat the crispy bits of fried sweet-potato the chefs use as garnish. One of the waitresses, Claudia, got me the job with the artist. Claudia is slim and brown and finds her beauty in her vivacious gestures, in her ability to be lively and languid, cool and feisty at once. I'm jealous of Claudia's tight little body and big, bold gestures. I think the artist surely couldn't make her look flat or far away. I tell my boyfriend I want to look like her. He tells me I'm silly and that I'm beautiful. I don't tell my boyfriend that I have a crush on the pastry chef. Her name is Angelique and she's from Brittany and she has a large gap between her two front teeth and sometimes I imagine plucking hot syrupy cherries from her *clafoutis* and dropping them into her open mouth. She starts her shift at 2 a.m., just before my boyfriend finishes his, so I get to see her for no more than an hour at a time. When she comes in she's dressed in men's lace up shoes and navy culottes with two rows of buttons up the waist and I think I'm probably in love with her. Her earrings are miniature anatomical hearts.

She clasps me hard on the shoulders and shakes me. 'You can't sit here. I need to knead the pastry,' she says. I shrug and ask whether I can help. She smiles in response and so I walk around the bench so that I can watch her work. I watch as she cleans the bench and fetches the pastry from the fridge.

'I brought you something,' I tell her.

She doesn't look up from where she's folding the pastry into huge books. Fat, buttery folklore. She'll fold and roll these sixteen times before she shapes them into the little crescents that will eventually be piled into baskets for the breakfast buffet. They'll end up cold and hard and shoved into mouths and purses of big American tourists. I suddenly feel very sad. I watch the muscles in her thin bronzed forearms as she throws the pastry around like a battered lover. Thwack. Thwack. Fold. Gentle fold. Smooth sorry. A sprinkle of flour. A gentle caress. I pinch the little mound of flesh above my jeans. Barely enough for a *pain au chocolat*.

‘I have Thursday morning off,’ she says, ‘Meet me for a drink on Wednesday night you can give me what you brought me. Meet me at Volume. You know it, near the Basilica Santo Spirito. They have live music on Wednesdays.’

I modelled again on Wednesday morning. The artist offered me an espresso and a biscotti. The coffee was cold, and I was beginning to think she was serving me someone’s uneaten breakfast. Last week it was a cappuccino with all the foam dissolved and the chocolate in sad streaks across a tepid skin of milk. I didn’t mind, really. The pastries were fresh, and even though I’d throw them up in the alley on the way to the bus, I couldn’t say no to those too-sweet treats with their shiny-glazed facades and powdered sugar like snowflakes on little-lattice windows. I keep a particular lace hanky in my handbag for after I vomit the sweets. I stole it from a market stall where an old woman was slinging them to tourists for way too much money. It’s not a hanky at all, really. It’s more of a doily, or maybe a placemat. It’s plain white linen with intricate edges. I take it out on the bus on my way home to see if I can smell sticky-sweet jam or if it’s only saliva and bile.

I don’t tell my boyfriend that I’m meeting Angelique for a drink; he’ll only want to come with me and dominate the conversation with all the big thoughts and big feelings he has about the world. I can’t tell if Angelique likes him, or if she finds him repulsive. I don’t ask. I want to look nice when I meet Angelique, but effortless. I want to rid myself of the Australianness I haven’t been able to shake since living here. I decide on black jeans and boots and a long green woollen scarf. I put on some lipstick that I stole from a shiny department store display. It’s brick-red and makes my skin look sallow.

I arrive early at the bar, in time for *aperitivo*. There are little open sandwiches across the top of the bar. Little cathedrals with bamboo toothpick spires, anchored in congregations of salami, roasted peppers, and anchovies. I order an Aperol spritz and stare for a long time at all the cheeses, before the waiter makes me a plate and tells me to take a seat by a stack of old records on a wooden shelf. I catch both my hair and my scarf on the rough wood as I sit down and try to pull them free without anyone noticing my awkwardness. By the time Angelique arrives, the cheeses are sweating and so am I. I ate the salamis too quickly and threw them up into my napkin. I held the little parcel of hot sick in my palm too long, looking for a place to dispose of it before eventually shoving it on the shelf behind the records. As she walks over to me, looking perfect, I am terrified that I

smell like pork and garlic and stomach acid. She kisses me gently on the right cheek, then the left. Full, warm lips against my face. She smells like pears in sticky vanilla syrup. Her face is cold and flushed from the wind. I want to cup her cheek in my hand, but I don’t.

She tells me no details about her life. How she came to be in Florence. I know only what my boyfriend has told me about her. She speaks only in abstract feelings and from this I glean little meaning. The questions I want to ask are too boring. Too concrete. She talks around things and so I have to guess at what she means.

I drink. I eat the slice of orange from my Aperol spritz and I order a gin and tonic and eat the slice of cucumber out of that.

She smiles at me and in her smile is desire. A knowing. She tells me she knew this would happen from the first time she met me. I think she must be so wise to have known. I tingle with the thought that she will hold me. Fold me. Eat me like her pastries.

We go back to her apartment.

I’m surprised when she kisses me that her lips are not as soft as they look. They’re holding something back from me and it only makes me want to kiss her harder, to open them. I’m more surprised that her mouth tastes like nothing at all. She’s completely neutral. I try to taste her neck, her shoulders, the curve of the underside of her breast. It seems impossible that she should have no flavour. I grab handfuls of her hair and breathe her in. There’s a difference between neutrality and blandness. She’s not bland, it’s more like she tastes like everything than she tastes like nothing. It’s like the way you can’t smell what your own house smells like, the way you smell other people’s. It’s like I’ve always known what she tastes like. Her body is small and firm. Underneath her buttery-soft skin her muscles are electric. It hurts to touch her. Aches between my legs. Hours pass in her bed and no matter how she touches me or I touch her, I can’t come. I feel so filled with love and swollen with pleasure that I want to burst, but there is no release. I didn’t want to leave, but my boyfriend will be home and will be upset with me if I’m home late. As I was putting my jacket on she asked what I had brought her at the kitchen the other day.

I had forgotten about the postcard. I dug around in my handbag and handed it over, crumpled and covered in pencil shavings. The bright blue ocean of St Malo split in two by the ocean wall stretching out to sea. I figured it must’ve been from the artist’s daughter, because the note began with ‘*chere maman*’. It was all in French. I told her about the artist, the postcards with the pictures hidden, and the strange, flat intrigue of the

subjects in her paintings.

She finished reading the postcard and asked me why I'd taken it. She didn't tell me what it said. I felt humiliated. I couldn't tell her why it reminded me of her. How do you explain why everything reminds you of the person you can't stop thinking about? She was disappointed in me. She didn't say so, but she suggested I put the postcard back on the fridge. She said it was probably important to the artist.

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In my dreams, I travel the world. Places I've been and places I haven't. I go to markets and museum gift shops to look for the perfect pair of earrings for Angelique. No matter where I go, the display is the same. The same amethysts and hands of Fatima and trees of life made of flimsy silver. No matter where I am in the world, the same small, hunched Asian woman sits on a low stool, restocking the display. The same shelves. The same stock. Every morning I wake with no earrings for Angelique and the knowledge that I've let her down. I'm hungry all the time, but I can't eat. I leave my boyfriend sleeping and I go to work with the artist. I find it difficult to sit still. I feel like I'm moving, and I apologise. Though the way my legs tremble must be imperceptible to her because she waves a hand at me dismissively. The little girl in the painting wants to tell me something. For the first time I notice that her lips are just slightly apart. So are mine, but I can't open them any further to ask her what she wants to say.

≈

My boyfriend throws his bow tie down onto the kitchen bench and uses his Swiss army knife to open a beer from the fridge. 'I think Angelique really likes you,' he says.

My heart beats in my chest and in my ears. My stomach turns to hot, guilty acid. 'I like her, too,' I say. 'She's cool,' I add. Nonchalant.

'She said the two of you hung out the other night,' he says, finishing his beer. Unbuttoning his shirt. I can't stand the mass of him. The broadness of his chest. He takes up too much space in the little kitchen and makes me shrink. Slink away to the other side of the doorway. I drop onto the mattress and curl myself into my nest. I've been eating *baci* in the sheets and I've left a smear of chocolate on a pillow. I lick my finger and try to rub it clean. Embarrassed. All the little love notes in the silver foil packages made me think of Angelique, so I ate them too and threw the whole lot

up into the sink. Brown, stringy, sticky mucous. Little white lumps of paper. My boyfriend joins me on the mattress, tears away the blankets that I had curled around my back and replaces them with his too-warm, too-big, too-hard body. I curl tighter into myself. He curls tighter around me. Forces his way inside. I let him fuck me while I lie there and look at the chocolate stains.



## GAYELENE CARBIS

### Hungry

We don't usually deal with the coalface.  
We send food out for them, we don't *deal* with them.  
We don't even really think about them.  
I mean, we think about them but we don't *think* about them.  
He wouldn't move. He just walked in and wouldn't walk out. He plonked himself in a corner and sat there, on the floor.  
We asked him what he wanted; we offered him food.  
He didn't want it.  
He said he wanted a home. He wanted somewhere to live. He said he had nowhere to live and nowhere to go.  
He said he wanted to throw himself off a bridge.  
We didn't know what to do.  
None of us had ever *talked* to a homeless man before, which is ironic.  
The irony wasn't lost on us. We could barely look each other in the eyes.  
Even when he'd just walked in like that, you could feel everyone in the room was uneasy.  
It was the surprise of him there. The smell. His clothes.  
You could tell who he was. He didn't have to tell us, he didn't have to say anything.  
But he did. He wouldn't shut up even though we wanted him to stop.  
He just told us the truth, which can sound crazy. People get crucified for it.  
He was and he wasn't. Mad, I mean. I don't mean, angry mad, I mean *mad* mad. No more than the rest of us.  
We were out of our depth. Not a single one of us knowing what to say, what to do.  
And besides, he was saying he wanted to throw himself off a bridge.  
If we turned him away, what then.  
Of course we couldn't.  
We couldn't let him stay and we couldn't let him leave.  
Someone said we should call the cops.  
Someone said the cops would just put him in jail for a night and he'd be back on the street.  
Someone said we had to do something. We all agreed, but we didn't know what.

Then someone simply said, it was an emergency and we all seemed relieved.  
So we called an ambulance and the ambulance came and took him away and we got on with our work, feeding the homeless.

## AMELIA WALKER

## Through the Cracks

I washed a lot of dishes at Clauscen Street. Not because anybody said I should or even to try and be nice. It was just what I felt like doing. Washing dishes is an ABC equation: take things that are filthy, all strewn out of order, and make them clean—somehow new again—then put them in places where they belong. Hot water is a nice thing in the Melbourne winter, too. I got chilblains, but they were worth it. Waking at two, three, four a.m., I'd trace the fingers of one hand over the bumpy knuckles of my other and know I wasn't totally adrift: one thing I did in life, at least, was useful and made a difference, if only to the state of our kitchen.

We used Trix detergent—sometimes lavender, sometimes lemon. I preferred the lavender. It's calming, whereas the lemon could put me on edge. Our plates were mostly of seventies vintage—big flowers and geometric arrays of shapes in faded shades of what would once have been lime green, orange and/or brown—acquired at op shops and garage sales and/or left behind by housemates who had lived there before us. They were all similar, and none precisely the same—the plates, that is. Nearly all of them were chipped. Trav blamed this on Jake, who he reckoned was clumsy. But Trav also blamed Jake for all the beer stains on the carpet, whereas I had witnessed events suggesting otherwise. I just nodded when he said it, though—let him rave and feel justified. It wasn't worth an argument.

Trav was my boyfriend, Jake our other housemate. I hadn't really planned, at twenty-one, to be living with a boyfriend—especially not after just two months. But when my previous sharehouse fell apart unexpectedly, he offered, and I was spending most nights there anyway at that stage, so it seemed a simple solution. Like dishes. Dishes were a simple solution to the ever-pressing question of what I should be doing in this moment—and the next—and the next—

Those plates resembled the set my parents owned when I was small and threw out when I was nine or so: the flowers were too faded, too many pieces were missing or cracked. Mum and Dad replaced our warm, wonderful flower plates with a plain white set—K-Mart's standard issue, which made it easy to source matching replacements whenever the need arose. I wept. I wept for those gone plates, the source of my sustenance

for as long as memory stretched. Then at Clauscen Street I got them back. Not the same plates, but close enough, probably given away under similar circumstances—and prior to that, purchased under similar circumstances too. They were, I suppose, not so different from the white plates after all. They were simply the standard issue of a time when the standard was a little more out there: mass produced, sold cheaply to newlyweds wide-eyed over their spanking new laminex and mortgagages.

Trav and I were the farthest thing imaginable from those newlyweds, I used to think as I traced my chilblained fingers along the patterns of cracks in the plates. I liked the cracks. They suggested stories I couldn't read, but knew were there, and lent, I thought, an inadvertent kind of *wabi sabi* quality—an individuality, an artfulness to the otherwise ultimately generic, purpose-driven objects. In truth, I knew almost nothing about *wabi sabi* except that people whose clothes were cooler than mine had been saying it a lot at recent parties. In truth, it may not have been the cracks themselves I liked, but the act of liking the cracks—liking the very thing that had given others a basis to reject these beautiful objects, to call them ugly. I liked being the one to see through all that, to see the cracks as beauty. Running my fingers along them felt, sometimes, like crawling inside them, into a place that was dark and warm and safe. The brokenness of the plates was a brokenness that spoke of ways to fit.

The other attraction to dishes was that they seemed a thing I couldn't get wrong—or so I thought. Then Trav cut sick at me for washing plates before glassware. *For fuck's sake, how stupid are you? You're making the wine glasses cloudy.* By wine glasses he meant vegemite jars. Part of me wanted to say that if he wanted it done his way he could do it himself. But I was worried he would, and then what would I do at two, three, four a.m.?

After that I made sure not just to clean up the mess, but to clean the right parts of the mess in their rightful order. Trav didn't complain again. Nor did he acknowledge the improvement. But then, he was passed out a lot of the time. I didn't mind. I was happy just to keep breathing the lavender-scented dishwasher that made me feel so warm. Bliss: staring through the window, thinking things I never said out loud because who would I say them to? They were too stupid. For instance, I dreamed sometimes about pasting signs on all the university and bookstore notice boards, inviting fellow sharehouse dwellers to join a great plate swap on our lawn. The idea was that if we pooled enough people with enough mixed-up plate sets, we'd be able to sort all the stray pieces into matching sets. Then everybody could take a set home and our kitchens, our lives

would be like new, like it was nineteen seventy-five once more, or maybe even nineteen fifty-three. Except was that what I wanted? I didn't know. All I knew was that I didn't like being called stupid. So I kept my mouth shut and made certain to wash glassware before crockery.

## ANTONIA PONT

### Personal Dinner

Eating at the *Waldfee* [forest fairy] which had a lot of straw stars painted silver, a lot of walls made out of the ends of small raw logs stacked, and blue light to draw attention to the alcohol behind the bar, was perhaps better than having to eat while looking at the over-used image of the nude woman, kneeling, watched from behind, but with face turned to camera, divided up like a beef into named cuts, saying to the Munich hipster (—are they ever really local?) tending the bar: I have to leave, I don't want to eat looking at that, even though you have a small *Pfifferlinge* [Chanterelle] *Tarte* on the menu which would suit me, given the jet lag, low appetite and the long day walking around trying to make myself tired enough for sleep, for touching the hotel room's impersonal void, but I can't sit here and eat the *Pfifferlinge Tarte*, with rocket salad and cherry tomatoes, if I have to look at the nude sepia buttocks of a woman depicted like a cow or a pork with black marker on her body—did it come off in the shower, scrubbed at with face washer, how hard with scrubbing to get the lines to go away: till redness? till it didn't seem so funny anymore? a mainstream white-American or British image and quite large on the wall above the side of the bar, framed under glass—did she somehow feel that those with the camera who set her up for the shot that day had slipped away with her soul? she was paid for it surely, for her time or it was a favour! something avantgarde, spontaneous, a room at a party or a white studio, she walked there in a coat and fur-trimmed second-hand hat, risqué, even witty (a lot can be made to happen if you make the encounter light-hearted, so much is possible with everybody having a light-hearted time, it banishes glumness, refusal, aversion, but she looked a little glum, or was it sultry?)—I couldn't have eaten that *Tarte* even though hipsters are down with a bit of retro misogyny that can make everybody light-hearted eating our US-style burgers, the *Rind* [beef] sourced from reputable sources (not ÖKO though) and earlier the woman in exercise-wear whom I saw trotting back to her home presumably after a day of living stylishly-enough in Munich's foodchain, with her paper bag printed with the name of same establishment, she wouldn't quibble about the photo, nostalgic for a moment when women were light-hearted and depicted softly as soft cows, as tender-hearted meat, which to be eaten by logical extension requires that

they be dead—she looked lively right now, right then, early evening, in compression pants, clutching her personal dinner.

Over at the *Waldfee*: heavy dough-pockets of porcini; the other kind of exposed wood; families bickering; vegetarian.

## AIDAN COLEMAN

### AI

Meanwhile  
we're waiting to buy coffee  
with hardly a glitch

to staying in bed.  
For now, our texts are mis-  
corrected; this film,

as Skynet, too self-aware.  
At least the poem,  
like retro-gaming,

is safe as submarines  
from tanks,  
so even an army

of volunteers can't cajole  
the keynote speaker  
to doctor wounds

at short notice.  
A West Texas accent  
opens doors

in West Texas;  
your work remains  
remote, a controlled fortress.

## Interruptions in Blue

Sharper than a MiG-jet, your first surfboard  
was your last. Waves peel off  
the bedroom wall with tropical girls  
of implausible islands.  
All things pass  
like Soviet denim: a chill that soaks  
the hanging whites.

    The diving light  
of living rooms, in the flash  
and wash of temperate news. Amid a rush,  
as bright as hail, the servo sets  
its welcome. When vendors  
take in signs, you hear your mettle  
in that cold clank.

## JON HOSKIN

### Sanctuary

It is nothing more  
than an overexposed  
memory from childhood.  
I am kneeling in a posture of prayer,  
but I am not praying, I am crying.  
I crawl through the small arched door  
of a chicken coop, scraping my back  
on the roughly cut wire mesh,  
to prostrate myself on the sawdust.  
I listen to the hens coddling their eggs,  
and watch the sun-bleached washing sway  
through the diamond shaped windows  
of this wire church.

WES LEE

## Sequelae

*for Christine Blasey Ford*

Imagine wanting two front doors  
because one is not enough –  
there must be another means of escape.  
She argues with her husband without  
telling him why  
two exit ways, two vanishings into the night  
the hounds following ... following.

Imagine the labyrinthine lake of terror  
driving choices, dreams  
driving desire.

Imagine a train where things wobble out  
on mechanical levers – the leering  
translucent plastic ghosts  
and laughter. *Laughter.*

Imagine the rapist who tooled  
a false space beneath his kitchen counter.  
Hollowed-out matter for himself  
to hide.

Imagine men's ingenuity and planning.  
Their patience.

YAEL KLANGWISAN

## Ariadne

this bed  
is smooth, cold stone,  
I roll away to the edge and my fingers slowly turn  
like a tree slowly turning to stone under layers of soil  
floating, rippling cotton is allusion only  
this is the artisan's work  
carved edges, smooth, curved, embossed  
this bed  
will endure, marble base  
does it look like life?  
this cold marble  
I recline  
forever  
rolled to the far side  
draped by stone, finely chiselled  
smooth angle of the spine, shaped  
etched, the emotion, expression on my face  
etched forever  
impossibly still  
could I even turn to see him  
across  
on the far side  
stone image of a man  
there he is hand clasped to head  
sinews of his shoulders pronounced  
frozen  
every muscle carved with glorious precision  
impenetrable –  
the tension of the scene  
an everlasting memorial  
this bed, carved out of stone  
bearing the figure of a woman  
and a man on the opposite side

## PAIGE CLARK

### Fortune

Missy and I read each other's horoscopes. Missy reads mine to know what I'm up to. 'Did you know I had the stomach flu?' I ask.

'Mars is giving you real trouble right now,' she says.

'I had a fever of 39,' I say.

I read Missy's horoscope because her sign is the same as my ex-boyfriend and I want to know why he's not calling. I think it's my fault, but Missy blames the stars. She says I need to be patient and wait until my moon is in Venus. 'Cancers are incredibly sensitive right now,' she says. 'Trust me. I should know.'

I believe in horoscopes because I only have two ex-boyfriends and they were both born on the 5th of July. When Missy told me her birthdate, I couldn't not believe.

Missy says we're all connected and she knows it for a fact because of Jasper, her recently deceased Labrador. When Missy took a pregnancy test and the test was positive, Jasper waited outside the bathroom door. When she hid his Christmas present in her sock drawer, he discovered it and unwrapped it on Christmas Eve. When she decided not to keep the baby, she found the present returned, nestled between a pair of athletic socks and fraying pantyhose.

At Missy's apartment after her surgery, I talk about my ex-boyfriend. I tell her about his soft grey hair and nervous hands. How he admired my nose even though it is slightly crooked. I say I met him at a friend's wedding, but leave out the part where the caterer caught us kissing in the greasy, portable kitchen, my hand around his neck. The part where, in the morning, he did not mention the bruising.

I scroll to a photograph the bride sent to me. In it, my ex-boyfriend's hand is lower than it should be on my back. My eyes are small moons. Things are often more and less than how I remember them.

'It smells like death in here,' Missy says and I don't disagree.

I search her apartment for a candle to light and find three glass Santeria

candles—one for fast luck, one for love, one for health. Missy lights the candle for fast luck, I light the one for love; who cares about health. The love candle is decorated with the words 'follow me' and a hummingbird with hearts where there should be eyes. 'Follow me, follow me,' I say, but my phone doesn't ring.

I tell Missy my ex-boyfriend never forgot to call. I try to explain the sound of his voice over the phone, how everything he knows comes out like a question.

'What did you talk about?' she asks. She suspects he is boring. She suspects this of everyone. So I don't explain his laugh, breathless as a child blowing out his birthday candles.

Missy tells me about the one who got away. He is not the reason why now I give her a painkiller and a glass of water. He is a man she never met. The night of her mother's fourth wedding she slept with her new stepbrother in the hotel lobby. She woke up in the morning naked underneath a hotel robe. She found out later from the concierge it was the night shift bellboy who covered her in her sleep. By the time Missy looked for him to thank him, his shift was over. 'Would Jasper have liked him?' she asks.

'He would have loved him,' I say.

Missy and I, we're not sentimental, but we are superstitious. Missy keeps Jasper's water bowl on the back porch filled. I keep a note my ex-boyfriend gave me, the paper worn smooth between my fingers. Missy keeps her ultrasound in her sock drawer. I didn't mean to find it there.

Most of the time, I want a thing back because it's gone.

There are stories I don't tell Missy. My ex-boyfriend was the first person to ever take me to the beach. We were at the edge of the world then. His grey hair shimmered in the sun. I buried my toes in the sand to hold on. I tell Missy it's hard for me to be happy, don't ask me why.

'My love,' she says, 'wait until the stars align.'

I do not want to remind her how quickly she lit the fast luck candle, her eyes flickering with the flame. Instead I say, 'When my moon is in Venus.'

'Exactly,' she says.

So I leave out the part where for Christmas my ex-boyfriend made me Monopoly money with his photograph in the place of Mr. Moneybags. We went out to a fancy dinner and my ex-boyfriend paid the bill. When the

waiter returned, he said, ‘Your money is no good here!’ then showed me the currency they accepted, my ex-boyfriend’s face beaming at me from a marigold five-hundred-dollar note. I shorted the bill by fifty and tucked the remaining blue note into my wallet.

I make Missy a cup of tea and watch her gulp it down. I follow her eyes as they scan the bottom of the cup for patterns. She looks for meaning in everything.

‘Missy,’ I ask, ‘can you see the future?’

‘Not from here,’ she says.

In Missy’s favourite photograph of Jasper, he is holding two chew toys in his mouth, a third at his feet. There is a string of drool suspended mid-air. Missy can’t bear to look at my favourite, a photo of Jasper as a puppy cradled in her hand. His black fur shines. His eyes are not yet open.

Missy shows me pictures of when she was a baby on her phone. There is one from her fourth birthday party. Her mother’s second husband has his arm around her as she glares at a cake decorated to look like a swimming pool. ‘I refused to blow out the candles,’ she says. ‘My mother kept begging, shrieking, the guests at the pool party will drown! I wish I’d said *let them*.’

There is one of her father holding Missy as a baby. Her face is flush from crying. Her father’s face is unremarkable. ‘Sometimes,’ she says, ‘I can’t even remember his name.’

We are starving, so I order Chinese food. I ask for extra fortune cookies. We need as much luck as we can get.

‘Remember,’ Missy says, ‘it only comes true if you eat the whole cookie.’

‘And if you keep the fortune,’ I say.

The deliveryman calls me for directions and it is the first time my phone rings in days. Missy and I sit on opposite sides of her couch, eating straight from the takeout cartons and watching tele. An ad comes on for pet food, the one where the animals’ mouths move along to a funny jingle. ‘The chicken is spicy,’ Missy says, ‘It’s making my eyes water.’

‘It’s not so bad,’ I say.

I think of Jasper, cradled in her hand. I think of the guests at the pool party, drowning in rainbow wax. I think of the candles, still lit. *Follow me, follow me*, I think.

My first fortune reads *a wise lumberjack always carries a sharp saw*. I eat the cookie and discard the proverb.

Missy’s first reads *an agreeable romance might begin to take on the appearance*. ‘The bellboy!’ she says.

She says the bellboys at the hotel wore velvet coats with yellow-tasselled shoulder pads. They wore caps with medallions stitched on front. She imagines the colour of her bellboy’s hair, his eyes. She wonders if he blushed when he covered her with the hotel robe. ‘Did he steal it from a guest’s room?’ she asks.

‘And why not a blanket?’ I say.

Her next cookie reads *a light heart carries you through all the hard times*. She discards the cookie, smashing it between her fingers. ‘That’s not a fortune,’ she says, ‘that’s a fact.’

Mine reads *your dearest wish will come true*. I slip it in my pocket. When Missy asks me to read it to her, I say it was blank. ‘That’s good luck,’ she says. I eat every crumb, licking my finger and running it across the plastic wrapper.

I don’t believe in fate, but I do believe in fortune, especially when it’s a cookie.

Missy falls asleep on the couch. The pet food ad comes on again and I change the channel. I rub my fortune between my fingers. Soon it will be worn smooth. The flames of the candles burn low. I wonder whose will go out first.

There is a story I want to tell Missy but I can’t. It begins at a wedding, his hand too low on my back. It begins on a beach day when I can see where the world ends. It begins with Christmas presents, what was given and what was not given back.

It concludes like this—on New Year’s Eve, on the balcony of his apartment, with my hand around another man’s throat. I won’t stay long enough to find out if it leaves a bruise.

Missy is sleeping, so I walk around the corner to the bottle shop. I drift through the aisles thumbing the wine labels—the embossed lettering and recycled paper—and examining the pictures. There is a Shiraz with a five-legged dog on a ladder. There is a Grenache with a tarot card



ornamented with skulls and a giant serpent.

I decide to buy both. At the checkout, I give the cashier a wad of bills, focusing on his nose—slightly crooked. He says, ‘I can’t take this, love,’ and hands me back the counterfeit note. I examine it and my eyes lock with my ex-boyfriend’s, miniature and paper blue.

‘I’m so sorry,’ I hear myself say.

When I get back to the apartment, Missy is waiting for me.

‘I messed up,’ I say.

‘Tell me everything,’ she says.

I pour us both glasses of wine.

I tell her I kissed the man on the balcony. I tell her he had an unremarkable face. How when I turned around to find my ex-boyfriend, my lipstick stained the stranger’s mouth in the shape of a wound.

She tells me her stepbrother tasted like wedding cake. She tells me she still checks her sock drawer for Jaspar’s present. How she doesn’t like what she finds there instead.

‘What can a person forgive?’ I ask.

‘I don’t know,’ she says. She does not mention my horoscope.

I pour us both another glass of wine and another. We crawl into her bed with the second bottle, passing it between us. I tell her at the edge of the world, you can see everything. Sometimes, you can even see Mars. I tell her that at the beach the waves pull your body towards the moon. I dig my toes into the covers and pretend they are made of sand.

We finish the entire bottle. I wrap my arms around my friend, resting my hands on the exact right part of her back. Our teeth are stained, our cheeks are flushed, but we are laughing—drunk and rich with fortune.

ELIZABETH MACFARLANE

## If It’s Not Rape You Can Tell the Story

We got drunk and I wanted to tell you the story.

It’s not my only story, but maybe it’s the best one.

It begins, ‘My science teacher in high school, his name was Mr S—.’ And right there you stopped me. Wait wait, you said. Is this going to be awful.

I’m having a good time here. Wait.

It’s not awful I said, and I was laughing. It’s not awful I promise.

You were quiet, and shifted your wine glass across one centimetre.

Are you sure, you said. Cos like. It starts with high school and a teacher.

And you said you’d only told a few other people.

No no it’s fine! I said and inside myself I just really wanted to tell you this story. The red wine was all in my head.

You said, Okay okay but ...

And I was like hmm?

And you said.

If it’s not rape you can tell the story.

Haha it’s not rape I promise! I said. It’s nothing like that. I’ve never been raped, I promise.

And you said, Good. Good, okay.

But it was like that. It was a bit like that.

So I told you the story. I told it so the sentences were lying there waiting for me to say them. Like I’d written them down before. I picked up those sentences like they’d been waiting their whole lives for me. And I laid them out on the table between our wine glasses.

I had you. Right there on the edge of your seat. With your heart there in your mouth. Only just okay. Because you knew it wasn’t rape; I’d promised you that.

And afterwards you stood up and took our glasses to the sink. And turned to lean with your back against the bench. I could see the story now over there behind your eyes. Animating you.

You didn’t say sorry. You didn’t say anything.

How lucky that the conditions were just right for you. To hear it. A stroke of luck on a warm night with just a table and a bottle of wine.

## MELINDA SMITH

### Afternoon at La Pietra

Someone has silk-stockinged the sun.  
Every yellow villa wall is a spread net  
of marigold. For afternoons like this,

marble is hewn and placed as an offering;  
a creamy glowline flares along a pale brow,  
a marvel of cheekbone; a spread palm

cups its blessing of radiance. For afternoons like this,  
words like *burnish* and *mellow* are required,  
are called into being. Words like *worship*.

Do not say them yet.  
Stand a moment in the late gold day.  
Look upon the rock, the brick, the carved, the uncarved,

taking their bright, slant benediction. See and stay silent, see  
stone itself anointed and caused to speak,  
blindingly eloquent with light.

### Past Perfect

You were always receding That day  
there was sun striking the rocks

You crossed, smiled back  
Too late, I snapped you

In the picture you blur, turning,  
your toe grazing the skin of the creek

It still feels like nothing –  
the blue-white milk tears

welling from a pulled weed  
or water warming on a leaf,

slick and disappearing  
Even the fine hairs lie down

and will not tickle  
You were always a *had-been*

– not petrichor, not portent,  
but the air drying, after rain;

light, refocusing itself  
returning from lace to window

## JOHN BRANTINGHAM

### Like a Ton of Bricks

Of course Rudy's grandmother calls him last minute to get a load of bricks to build a patio off the back of her double wide, and of course she insists on coming in this truck with a stick shift he's never used, saying, 'What kind of grown-ass man stalls a car in an intersection?'; helpful comments like that.

Of course, when he gets to her place to unload, he forgets to set the brake, the car rolling backward toward Gayle's Breakfast and Lunch Cafe at the end of the block.

His grandma folds her arms and shakes her head, not even willing to participate in her rescue as he runs, fingers stretching for the front bumper as it rolls out of his reach, smashing through the front window, glass shattering into a beautiful arch in the moment before it all goes into the gas lines in the back wall.

## MARTIN STANNARD

### A Message in Autumn

*after* 秋登兰山寄张五 *by* Mèng Hàorán (689-740)

I think about you up there in the mountains to the North  
Secluded and at peace, thoughts floating with the white clouds

Here, people are returning home after the day's work  
I can see some of them resting on the sand waiting for the ferry

Evening and encroaching darkness may bring melancholy, as can Autumn  
I'm unsettled, my head is away, flying with the wild geese

From the riverbank I can see an island floating on the water like the moon  
Please, like the moon, come and drink wine with me

## In Late Autumn

*after* 寄全椒山中道士 *by* Wéi Yingwù (737-792)

The hermit priest collects kindling on the mountain  
That he might dine on a few potatoes by a small fire

I would take wine to him  
So he might better endure

But where fallen leaves carpet the earth  
I would not know how to find him

It's so cold in here as I write this

## PAUL ILECHKO

### Loss of Wilderness

Coyote spits hot fur  
his heightened blood  
alert to every change

a smell of sugared peach  
a blackening of  
the cloud's evisceration

such a sweet machine  
dripping golden  
against the porch divergent

paths into the depth  
of mapless space as  
shrapnel clears the undergrowth

the iron-flanged bitterness  
the constant drift  
of maple streams.

## MICHAEL MINTROM

### The Banana Republic

From the coast, the train climbed through jungle.  
Our parents, by habit, were well dressed, with  
A parrot in its cage. Our father had a knack  
For losing tickets, then panicking, then  
Finding them just before the inspector  
Arrived, but not before our mother had  
Let loose an emasculating rebuke –  
The parrot squawking for good measure.  
Aside from this, our parents talked nonstop  
Politics. Our mother could do this while  
Smoking, texting, and applying eye-liner.  
'Give me London,' she'd say. 'Screw bananas!'  
She spoke with distain of the fruit, as if  
She'd discovered turds in the parlour.

## NOD GHOSH

### Philately

When I was seven, I stole a stamp.

The stamp had a letter attached to it. The letter had a plea attached to it. The plea had a life attached to it.

The summer I turned seven burned with the fire of a hundred changes. The smoke of protest hung in the air. The beat of revolution pounded our flat chests. There was a call for peace, music in our minds and understanding in our nation. We were part of something larger than ourselves, only at seven, you don't know what you're already part of.

The static of television burned our eyelids when we stayed up later than we ought, fighting sleep and parental dogma. Brothers learned to talk, chit-chat, chit-chat. Sisters fell in love. Cousins balanced precariously on the bridge between adolescence and responsibility.

I felt it all. I understood none of it.

I stole a stamp.

We lived in a house of high-ceilinged bedsit rooms. Each had its own cooker, cream-enamelled, where occupants fried, broiled, tenderised, marinated, dated and created their own cuisine. The essence of Canton, Punjab, Niger and everywhere lingered in our hair. The flavours took tenants to a ship of mothers they had left behind.

Crickets thrummed. Lovers drummed. The air was clammy, damp with the fever of the era.

But all I wanted was a stamp.

The tenants came and went.

Unanswered mail collected in disorderly stacks.

Seven-year-old fingers plundered the post, searching for circulars to cut and paste, questionnaires to practise ticking boxes and forging signatures.

Personal letters were sacrosanct. I knew that.

But.

At seven, I heard the word philately for the first time. Learned about stamp corners and watermarks. First-day covers and Penny Blacks. Perforation gauges and commemorative packs. At seven, I wanted to caress the most rare, the most picturesque, and also the stamps with no intrinsic value. No worth beyond being new to my eyes, like butterflies against white-card skies.

It was a stamp, larger than most, with a kaleidoscope of colours that gave it wings. It had flown by pale blue airmail to find its final destination.

I longed for that stamp.

I waited.

Perhaps six weeks, perhaps two.

Perhaps I went back the very afternoon I'd found it.

I took the letter, ran upstairs.

And still, there was half a thought I should put it back.

It took me a while to ease my treasure off the paper. The paper: a gentleman's last plea.

*. . . My brother, I fear I may have perished before you read this . . . you are the only one who can help . . . to find a better life as you have done . . . may be our last . . .*

I don't recall what became of the stamp. It was lost among all the other flotsam and jetsam of the time. Along with the letter. Along with innocence.

The plea had a life attached to it.

And I threw it away without a thought.

## JAMES GRABILL

### Irreversible Sense

I

Out of the smallest light-strike  
tinctures of midnight  
and dawn on the barges,

out of preconditional capture and release  
of the atmosphere bearing down  
on pilgrimages in the era before belief  
in evolutionary intelligence of cells

where time has been the water  
and mineral urgency progresses  
more slowly than telephone-sky cameras  
or an unprecedented word for *critical*  
emerging from cell-to-cell kindred

at the root of being in a life,  
improvised, out of being alive  
as one among many, not many

with a whole lot of money of the grasses  
under distant fields of the cumulative  
stars in heavy revolution, leaving  
in their wake the original dust  
that even now circles the planet

as almost an endless number of sounds  
in a voice, encompassing each possible  
picture, yet every one preternatural,

every longing and conscious  
sense, each further person born,  
new to the planets circling the sun.

II

The tin drum under seismic pressure  
compresses into a little bell  
still ringing in the underground home  
where ants are running their big cities  
at the edge of an asking root hair

down in soil which is packed with being,  
where mineral exchanges happen fast  
on slopes of concussive gravity  
shaping emptiness within the bowl  
which has never stopped working  
since it was made by exploding methane  
released in the middle of thawing tundra

the bowl that promises an answer to hunger,  
the bowl created to hold what's in it,  
what's dropped into it without breaking it  
like almost every ancient Mayan bowl  
with circumferential lips of pi  
revolving with the equator  
that encompasses what's adapted

the way the flower of the tree  
turns over weeks into fruit  
on the last branches to appear

before the face absorbed by air  
can hear the sounds within voices  
that communicate between species.

DIANA MARIETTA PAPAS

Pore Bearers

'How deep can they go?' Thanasis asks.

'Who, son?'

'The new men.'

Christos and Manolis stand near the moorings, expanding their chests  
with guttural puffs.

Petros leans over the hold and starts the count. Two harpoons, five  
scrapers, four knives, six weights, stones for the ballast, six skin water bags  
and a sack of white beans. Dried sardines. Rusks. Olives.

'My guess is seventeen—they're from Kalymnos. All lungs,' Petros says,  
'but you'll see, they'll wait for me to dive in first.'

His eyes skim the harbour. Blue-white boats grind sides and clip bells  
before ringing. Black sponges hang from riggings. Petros scratches his  
beard. Yesterday's catch? The wet entrails of the sea for all to see.

The new men climb on board, springing themselves over the side.

'Welcome, friends, Christos, Manolis, come,' Giorgos shouts from the  
stern, hands extended toward them, 'You won't be dragged,' he points up  
to the mast, 'See? Two new top sails, three jibs, a foresail, spritsail—they  
hold their line—give more draught. The mastoras added a little leg of  
mutton behind the rudder—there—keeps us steady when you're in.'

'I've seen fishermen row faster,' Petros says into his beard. 'It'll be slow  
with six.'

'Will they take our share?' Thanasis asks.

Petros closes the hold.

'They'll be too busy fighting off dogfish, son. They won't know where  
to look.'

'Stavros—' Giorgos shouts, 'hurry up boy, untie the lines and get on.'

'Coming papa—'

'Did you light a candle?'

'Yes, at the Panagia.'

'Listen all. We'll head south between Rhodes and Tilos,' Giorgos says.  
'Good crop grow there but in these calms we'll ghost, anchor by noon.'

At first light, Symi's port appears, long, dark and narrow. Morning picarel silver and black break the surface.

Windward against light gusts. And behind them now, the merchants' villas—yellow-red-white-blue—stare down from the hills. Some have eyes that shine.

Petros crouches beneath the riggings next to Thanasis—shoulders warm and toes as black as ripened figs.

'Where do they go, papa?'

'Who?'

'The sponges.'

'You know—'

The meltemi blows. Petros scratches his beard. But where? The porous cleaners of the bedrock. Constantinople, Smyrna, the Sea of Marmara, the Black Sea to Venice to its floating churches, to the walls of Saints, into soldiers' pails, into the hands of servants, into harems into women into whores of Chorio. Sea, salt, piss, blood, water, vinegar, sand and stone.

'Tell me, papa.'

'But you know, boy. To doctors, servants, to the Sultan's palace, to soldiers cleaning soot from cannons, to—'

'How long can you hold, old goat?' Christos leans back into the bow.

'At your age, up to ten, easy.'

'Seconds?'

Do they know? The trick is to lengthen the hold. Father to son. All the lines before and beyond. Petros taught Thanasis like his father taught him: take an amphora to twelve fathoms with your mouth over the lid, remove its cork with your teeth, and before it fills up, suck in its air and stay under for another three minutes.

'Don't forget to tug the ropes,' Christos laughs.

'Be careful.' Petros takes a rusk from his waist band. 'Dogfish around here like to bite.'

Petros bites into the rusk, rubs tiny worms from his lips and hands half to Thanasis. Thanasis shakes it and when his father turns, throws the rusk over the side. Petros waves the remnant of his rusk at Thanasis. Perhaps they're better off selling pipes in the tavern. They're easy to make and, on a good night, they might sell a dozen. But the sponge—it grows—so long as men don't harvest more than the sea can grow.

'Clear your ears son, go on. Hold your nose. Swallow.'

'How deep will we go?'

'Twelve fathoms, maybe more.'

Thanasis. Golden hair curled by the sea. His baby boy. Skin of bronze, his body lean. He needs meat. Baby Thanasis. Eleutheria feeds him goat's milk when her milk stops. She says—take the baby—freeing her hands from yarn. His little toes touch the water for the first time, his eyes widen and he pisses into the tide. Eleutheria watches from the rocks, coins around her headscarf clinking, the sun on the water on the rocks against her eyes. How long? she asks, staring all the way out to Turtle Rock. How many rope knots? Her hands are filled with stones. Her eyes are fixed to the rock.

The boy can read and write. If he were to leave Symi, he might end up in Rhodes fetching wood in season when boats are pressed, gratis for the Pasha. In Symi, the only Turk is the Aga ruled by the richest Greeks, Vasilis among them. Giorgos has to pay his loan back to Vasilis, and Vasilis has to sell the whole haul at auction, and Petros has to find the best sponges—not the wild ones, the good ones, Kapadiko and Fino as soft as silk—and squeeze out the spores, remove their milk, hit them with pine in the sun, dip them into the sea, hang them from riggings and soak them in barrels of vinegar until they're a stain of the sun.

Vasilis' house has eight glass windows.

≈

The back of Turtle Rock, black, between Tilos and Rhodes.

'Shorten,' Giorgos shouts.

Petros turns the main in a close haul head to wind, boom over. Giorgos fastens the rudder and drops the anchor. Boats sail toward them.

'Here come the vultures,' Giorgos says and he starts the count. 'Ten fathoms, thirteen, fifteen.' He drops the rope.

Petros and Thanasis furl the sails. Stavros leans over the side, holds the cylinder to the surface and stares through the eye to the bedrock.

'Good crop,' he shouts.

'You'll see, son,' Petros says, 'they'll wait for me to dive in first.'

Petros removes his trousers. Stavros and Thanasis gather the weights and nets from the hold. Petros and Christos tie the weight-ropes through the oar-holes. Thanasis puts the loop of the cone-shaped net around his neck so it hangs to his knees and looks to his father, eyelids half-closed



against the sun.

Some drown in their own ropes. Others are taken by dogfish or the crippling stoop. There are those who find no work but with the Archangel's protection, their best chances are in Symi. He's found a girl for Thanasis—a good girl from a family in Chorio. They'll be ready in a few years.

'Remember, Thanasis, tie the loop of the rope over your wrist. Hold the stone and free your hands—'

'I know.'

'Drop the stone if it gets heavy. The skin of a peach. Stay close. One hundred, no more—'

Naked. Skin and bone. Petros pours oil onto two sponges, puts one in his mouth and gives the other to Thanasis.

'Not diving?' Petros glares at Christos and Manolis, naked and waiting.

Stones. The sound of glass. The sting of salt. And if his feet tangle in the ropes, who will take care of the boy? He'd rather him drown than become a slave in Rhodes. Once a year, the collector comes to Symi to take the kharatch—a tax he can barely afford but for the price of freedom, he pays it.

Thanasis knows the best sponges. He never cuts them whole but cuts them cleanly at the base, squeezing out the spores. He knows the wild sponges from the good sponges because the wild ones have shiny surfaces and are not easily scratched, and the good ones are dull and soft and defend themselves by squirting milk, and have lots and lots of tiny holes from small red crabs which eventually disappear. A sponge heals itself. Thanasis knows the currents and the meltemi, how to fight off sargos and dogfish, how to stay under for the count of one hundred, to tug the ropes, to chase the sun before the mast's shadow crosses the deck, to catch the light the same way fishermen catch gilt-head bream until the last of the good light falls. Thanasis knows. Close your eyes, clear your mind, repeat quick breaths, practise holding, spit out oil, clear the water, count no more than one hundred, tug the rope, never harvest more in a season than the sea can grow.

A school of gilt-head sweeps between them.

Christos and Manolis swim behind Petros. Petros kicks back.

Closer to the bedrock. Kapadiko, Honeycomb, Turkey Cup, Elephant's Ear, Leather, Fino, the silky Fino. Their hundreds and hundreds of pores swallow and spit out the sea—the immeasurable—and what is it? Animal or plant? How does it grow out of being?

Kapadiko. Soft as a peach.

Thanasis counts one hundred. Tiny bubbles lift from his fingers.

Does the boy conserve air?

Petros spits out the sponge. Oil clears the water. He cuts from the base, squeezes out the spores and pulls them into his net.

He tugs the rope.

The boy?

Petros. The tug of the rope.

His feet tangled in the coil.

Thanasis?

head

down

Petros untangles his feet.

He drops the stone.

He pushes toward the boy.

A sharp pain pierces his ears and nose.

He hooks him under his armpit and swims to the surface like a spinner chasing bait.

'Giorgos—take the boy,' Petros screams.

Giorgos and Stavros drag him up. Petros throws himself over the side and pushes the others away. He turns the boy onto his back, places his lips over his mouth, water falling from his eyes and mouth.

He forgot to light a lamp for Elevation.

Thanasis throws up the sea.

≈

Thanasis lies on his mat. Petros brings him the broth of a sea urchin. But the boy doesn't move. He places it next to his cushion. Maybe he needs a drop of raki. But he needs Eleutheria. She came from a good family, five hundred grossi and a furnished house in Chorio. They moved into the house after the wedding. Thanasis was born. And Petros couldn't pay the kharatch. The collector demanded he show his ticket or go to prison. They sold everything and moved to a fisherman's kalyva by the harbour. One stone-walled room. Two stools, a pine table, a wicker chair, three mats for sleeping. On the shelf stands an icon of the Archangel, a starfish-crucifix, three blue plates, and sea sponges so old their skeletons show. Over the back of a wicker chair is Eleutheria's gown of crimson shalloon, stuffed with wild black sponges.

He leans over Thanasis, strokes his hair and covers him with the blanket.

Petros doesn't have the golden hands of Eleutheria. His cooking is plain—charred octopus, fish stew, flat bread stuck to the pan. He doesn't know much about healing, and when he should talk to Thanasis about leaving home and starting a family of his own.

'I'll be back soon, son. Don't get up.'

Petros goes to the harbour and passes by the blue-white boats rubbing sides. Black sponges hang from riggings. He finds Giorgos counting his haul.

'The boy needs Kalothouka. Can you send Stavros to find him?'

'I'll send word to Chorio.'

≈

By noon the doctor arrives at the house.

'How long was he under?'

'Four minutes at most.'

The doctor places a silver instrument over the boy's left eye to hold it open.

'Only three?'

He turns the boy over, places a wooden cylinder to his back.

'Breath in and out, slowly.'

The doctor rests his ear over the cylinder and listens.

'Again.'

Thanasis starts coughing and spitting.

'How long does the boy usually hold his breath?'

'Three minutes, sometimes more.'

'It's a bad case of hydrophobia. The boy needs rest, aloe for the rash on his chest, raki and goat's milk for his lungs.'

'How long?'

'Long?'

'When can he dive again?'

'He's lucky to be alive, at least without the stoop. He's not to dive.'

'But the boy needs to eat.'

Petros gives the doctor two of his best sponges.

'It's not necessary to give—keep them. I'm sorry but the boy's lungs are too weak.'

≈

All afternoon along the harbour's steps, Petros presses sponges. The salt stings his heels and toes. In the sun, he beats sponges with palm branches to remove sand and stones. The clack-clack-clack runs along the wall. The taste of brine burns his throat. He trims the sponges and warms them in the sun under cloth. He places the warm sponges into nets, strings them on a line along Giorgos' boat and lowers them into the sea. He beats more sponges. Giorgos tells him to pull up the nets. He put the sponges into sacks and soaks them in barrels of vinegar.

'How's the boy?' Giorgos asks.

Petros nods and hurries his step toward home. He knows his share of the crop will be given to Christos and Manolis. Giorgos wants younger men on board so he fixes their count in the book. Vasilis will keep them on for another season. But praise God, Petros will work another. There are days when his nets are full and bright, and other days when sponges die in their own toxins. He earns enough to buy bread, raki, corn and beans, and teaches Thanasis to gather nettles from the hills, to spear octopus through the eyes, to beat it against rocks, cook it over pine and preserve the ash.

≈

The boy has risen, slouched on the front step carving a pipe from a piece of pine with a short knife. Petros sits next to him on a low stool and lights his pipe. An octopus with a spear between its eyes lies at their feet.

'How was the harvest?' Thanasis asks.

'Good enough. Plenty for the next season.'

Petros removes the spear and takes the octopus to the shore. He beats it against a smooth rock, counting one hundred. He lights a fire over rocks and cooks the tentacles on pine needles. When the tentacles have curled and the meat is tender, he cuts them into pieces and places them into two bowls filled with sea salt broth.

When they finish eating, Petros rubs pine ash over the plates and takes them to the water's edge, one in each hand. Thanasis scoops the remaining ash from the rocks into a bowl and sprinkles it around and inside the house. He crushes pine needles and rubs them over his arms.

At the edge of the harbour's mouth, the caretaker lights the church. Boats still out light their lamps. Thanasis looks up to the darkening sky. Stars float to the surface.

≈

Petros stumbles out of the tavern and down the five hundred steps from Chorio to the harbour. Fishermen lie tangled in their nets. He staggers into the house and grabs a bottle of raki and pours two cups. Thanasis sits at the table scraping his pipe. Shavings of pine cover a plate of pistachio shells.

'Have this for your chest,' Petros hands him the cup.

Thanasis takes a sip and spits it back. He leaves the cup on the table and goes to his mat.

'Tell me the story about Jesus and the sponge.'

Petros shakes his empty cup and rubs the pain in his right temple. The sound of the sea. His father told him the story. Jesus on the cross, a sponge on a spear, vinegar, bile and blood, the sponge cursed to the deepest—

≈

The first sun. Thanasis is not on his mat. Petros trips down the step into the dust. He dips a sponge into an urn and rubs his face. The fresh water stings. He looks across the harbour. To the mouth. To the boats. To the steps. Foreign men in wide black hats, blue coats and black boots to the knees circle Christos and Manolis. Thanasis is with them. Petros hastens toward them, water crawling down his neck.

The men speak an old style of Greek with foreign accents.

'A brig from Athens—lost in a storm between Cerigo and Tainaron. Bottom of the ocean. Seventeen crates. Stones of no value. Owned by Lord Elgin. He wants to buy divers from Symi and Kalymnos.'

One boot forward.

'How much will this Elgin pay?'

'How deep can you go?'

## ROBERT SCOTELLARO

### A Neighbour in the Rain

She was standing in the rain in a gray bikini. It was coming down hard. The bathing suit was modest by bikini standards, and she wore it like the Mona Lisa wore a smile. I could see her from my deck. Earlier she had slathered herself with sunscreen and lay on a blanket with her nose deep into a paperback. Now the book was mush and the blanket soaked and she didn't seem to mind. I was under an overhang so I was dry and enjoying the music the rain made against the corrugated plastic.

She looked up at the heavens through the pelting downpour. A cat came to the edge of her sliding door, sniffed the air, then ran back in as if chased. Our kids went to the same school, but were in different grades, so never played together. Her husband was an airline pilot and was rarely home. He liked to travel, she told me once. 'I've got the kids,' she said. It was a solemn declaration.

She looked up at the sky and I thought she might curse it, but she opened her mouth and welcomed in the rain. Held her arms out, palms up, taking it all in. I wondered if she hated what she was reading, baked and sweaty. If the characters were in some exotic land, madly in love or trapped in a foreign prison, or just the usual suspects trying to get by—feeling the carousel breeze on a hot day—if one stood close enough—the world turning. These summer storms were rare and perhaps this was an unexpected adventure. An oasis that suddenly appeared. There was all that sand.

One of her children came to the door and called out, 'Mom!' and the trance was broken. A black lab ran out into the rain and beat its tail against her leg until she lowered her arms and petted it. She gathered up the soggy blanket and book, and I hoped she'd turn and wave. But she didn't, and went inside instead with the dog in tow.

I picked up my own book from my lap. But somehow the words that had sparked, moments earlier, seemed dull and plodding.

Moments come and go. And clocks do not always tell the truth, and moments have their own sense of time, and that one did not last nearly long enough. The rain too was shortlived. The way summer storms often are.

My own child called out from two rooms away to tell me 'Come quick!'—

that Cupcake had knocked over the lamp. I folded the edge of the page and closed the novel. Gave it a chance to recharge. Was sure it would read better when I'd find the time to get back to it, with an empty head again.

## Sumo Wrestlers' Heating Service

During the harshest winters their phones are ringing off the hook. The chilling goosebumps that are rising as the north wind hurls its weight around. Loss-chilled women, willowy winter-bitten widows, all frozen stiff by life, by weather, by life's weather. The calls come in.

They always arrive in pairs at night. Their enormous heft through a doorway suddenly becoming smaller. An osmosis nearly, of fleshy immensity. Heating up the room at a glance. The sight of them.

A king-size bed is required as a precursor. There is an elaborate tea ceremony. They remove their clothes with a ritualistic poetry, an origami master's art for folding, till they are (in full and ample bulk) left in only their mawashi. They ease under the covers ironically like a whisper with only a bedsprings complaint. Positioning themselves, a belly-pointing sandwich of heat and comfort. Bookending a client, but not touching. An onionskin paper-thin margin between. The chills of winter withering for a time.

In the dark, a sweet song of Mt Fuji and the flapping of cranes overhead. Of lovers outside a red pagoda. And then later, alternating, first one reciting a haiku, softly in broken English and then the other, to oohs and aahs in the dark:

'The summer moon.  
There are a lot of paper lanterns  
on the street.'

And then (as the cold wind falters against the window glass like an incompetent would-be intruder):

'The butterfly  
perfuming its wings  
fans the orchid ...'

## ISI UNIKOWSKI

### Exeunt

The paddocks present their blind flanks to the sun and to the two of them, the storm king (a little winded) and his daughter. She helps him with his intricate, familiar coat, its pattern for today gold-finished clouds, impasto sky.

She remains silent, unaware that her needlepoint art has unstitched the moment's design. Her insouciant ship tacks into a harbour of exams and friends.

Following the track along evening's lingering channels he thinks he recognises those clouds from old British movies, billowing behind villages, over grey and white moors, silent as a soundtrack except for the projector's pulse.

Settling over suburbs spilled into late autumn's crucible, lights come on like diadems in lit crescents; tiny people are moving across the rugby fields, shouts of encouragement rising with the mist.

Though assigned to its restraint the weather reminds him he is in harness, must placate as he is petitioned. If she bears instruments about her ears, he is struggling to remember the music he heard in the body's bronze climate.

Perhaps they'll talk again when saying less is not a weakening. For now his cry for the topsails echoes from promontories of the past. For the departing audience there is no further scene, only loose threads of colour, threshed and flailing in the harried air.

## VAUGHAN RAPATAHANA

### ko taku whānau

ko he whānau pāwhati taku whānau  
ki nui ngā whakawehewehe  
mō nui ngā tau.

ko he urupā taku whānau  
e putaputa ki ngā mate  
o ngā tane  
me ngā wāhine matapōrehu etahi o te wa.

taku wāhine i mua  
taku tama i mate  
he pāpara wara waipiro  
me ngā hoa tino ngaro ināiane.

ko taku whānau  
ko taku whānau  
ko taku whānau  
te ngare o he koroua.

heoi anō  
ko te pai katoa.

ko taku mahi  
kia tuhituhi te tika  
me kia wewete ngā roimata  
mō katoa o tātou ki te tangi.  
nō te mea,  
ki muri ngā roimata anake tātou kia kata.

my family is a broken family  
with many schisms  
for many years.

my family is a cemetery  
pitted with the deaths  
of men  
and sometimes the sadness of women.

my former wives  
my dead son  
an alcoholic father  
and now very lost friends.

my family  
my family  
my family,  
the kith and kin of an old man.

however  
all is good.

it is my task  
to write the truth  
to release the tears  
for all of us to cry.  
because  
only after the tears  
can we laugh.

## RUTH BRANDT

### The Portrait

'My husband says I must complete you within the afternoon.' Suzanne turns from the easel to smear Naples yellow paint on her fingertip.

'Your husband is a fool,' the man says.

Frank is indeed a fool, for how could he require her to remain alone with a man who exudes the scent of marzipan, whose words judder with cobalt tones, and whose fingers jitter over her back from across the studio. This man who makes her head swirl from trying to focus, except she hasn't focussed for four years, hasn't seen a glint of sunlight or the shudder of a breeze through leaves. Nothing.

'He has lined up three more for me to paint by the weekend.'

The man says nothing. The yellow is all wrong. She wipes it off on her apron. How tired she is.

'Please tell me,' she asks, 'the angle of your head?'

'So so.'

Ah, yes. It couldn't be otherwise.

'And your feet, how are they set?'

'Aghast. No, perhaps elegant. One of those.'

His serge waistcoat rustles. A finger eases round a starched collar. The smell of oil paint. The aroma of solvent. Suzanne's hand wavers over the palette. None is right. What is this man?

'Are you a poet?' she asks.

He laughs. 'Ridiculous.'

Paint feels like lard in this man's presence, smoother than lard, more lubricating, more sensual. Suzanne raises her finger to her nose, breathes in vermilion, tastes ripening plums, no, tomatoes.

'Your cheeks are flushed today?' she asks.

'How am I to know?'

She smooths the side of her finger across the canvas and the portrait is full of Sauterne and cedar wood. A smear of terre verte and his feet are no longer cocooned in brogues; instead he is running barefooted through a meadow. Is this him?

His chair squeaks, the inhalation of a compacted cushion refilling.

'Wait,' she says, but he is coming towards her, rubbing his fingers and thumb together with the rustle of a cashier. His viridian step. His fingers. Her breath.

He leans between her and the canvas.

'What have you done?' she asks.

'I've added a bruise.' His breath whispers over her cheek.

'But you have no bruise,' she says.

'I'll deserve one shortly,' he says and his lips are on hers, and then she sees, as clearly as before her retina exploded lightning strikes through her head, as clearly as she imagines the outline of her husband waiting for his banknotes, that this man is not colour and sound and scent, he is not lyrics and rhyme. This man is touch, he is grind and probe. There is nothing to this man other than that.

She swipes her hand across the wet paint.

'I will not paint you,' she says

'Why?' he asks, and already she misses the alizarin of his voice.

'Because now I see you,' she replies.

## TONY BEYER

### This Time

already spring  
though the finches  
are still in flocks  
on the rugby park

they rise and scatter  
in front of my dog  
like fragments of one  
large consciousness

the sky blue  
the white mountain  
the touchlines  
fading into the grass

### Voyage

ruthlessness with which  
a hotel bathroom mirror  
shows a seventy-year-old face

and how the cliché of furrows  
suggests a consequent harvest  
from this ploughing

untrue unless the tall-nosed  
repose of the dead  
is to be the next outcome

for now the coiled spring's  
inevitable unwinding  
is for others to observe or ignore



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Sudha Balagopal's** short fiction appears in *Wigleaf*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Litro*, and *New World Writing*, among other journals. She is the author of a novel, *A New Dawn*. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best Small Fictions. More at [www.sudhabalagopal.com](http://www.sudhabalagopal.com)

**Fleur Beaupert** is an Australian poet and writer. Her poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Brain Drip*, *Pure Haiku*, *Coffin Bell*, *404 Ink Literary Magazine*, *Asylum Magazine*, *Yours & Mine*, *Verity La*, *Blue Pepper*, *Bimblebox 153 Birds*, *Regime and Cordite*. Her poem 'Apologies, I forgot you exist' was published in *Verity La's* ebook anthology *The Hunger* (2018).

**Paul Beckman's** new flash collection is *Kiss Kiss* (Truth Serum Press). He had a story selected for the 2018 *Norton Micro-fiction Anthology* and another nominated for The Best Small Fictions 2019. Some of his stories appeared in *Spelk*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Litro*, *Pank*, *Playboy*, *Thrice Fiction*, *The Lost Balloon* and *The Raleigh Review*. He curates the FBomb NY flash fiction reading series at KGB in New York's lower east side.

**Tony Beyer's** recent poetry has appeared in broadsheet, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Kokako*, *Landfall*, *Meniscus*, *Otoliths*, *Poetry NZ*, *Poetry Pacific* and *takahē*. He lives and writes in Taranaki, New Zealand.

**John Brantingham** is the first poet laureate of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, and his work has been featured in hundreds of magazines, and in *Writer's Almanac* and *The Best Small Fictions 2016*. He has eight books of poetry and fiction, including *The Green of Sunset* from Moon Tide Press, and he teaches at Mt San Antonio College.

**Ruth Brandt's** short stories and flash fiction have appeared in anthologies and magazines, including the *Bridport Prize 2018*, *Neon*, *Litro*, the *Aesthetica Creative Writing Annual 2017*, *Into the Void* and *The London Reader*. She won the Kingston University MFA Creative Writing Prize 2017 and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Write Well Award. She is Writer in Residence at the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

**Sue Brennan** is an Australian writer. She was shortlisted for the Wollongong Short Story Award (2018), the Alan Marshall Short Story Award (2016, 2018) and the Polestar Literary Award (2016). She has had poetry included in the *Poetry D'Amour Anthology* (2016, 2017, 2018) and short stories published in *ACE—Contemporary Stories by Emerging Writers*, *Meniscus*, *Lite Lit One!*, and *Adelaide* No. 20.

**Owen Bullock** has published three collections of poetry: *sometimes the sky isn't big enough* (Steele Roberts, 2010), *semi* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2017) and *Work & Play* (Recent Work Press, 2017), as well as four books of haiku and a novella. He has edited journals and anthologies, including *Poetry NZ*. He is originally from Cornwall and lived for 25 years in Aotearoa New Zealand before migrating to Australia. Owen has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Canberra, where he currently teaches. See <https://poetry-in-process.com/>

**Alasdair Cannon** is a writer and musician, residing in Brisbane. He frequently collaborates with the Voices of Colour poetry community, and has produced music for poets and rappers including Ozi Jarel and Anisa Nandaula.

**Brent Cantwell** is a New Zealand writer from Timaru, South Canterbury, who lives with his family in the hinterland of Queensland, Australia. He teaches high school English and has been writing for pleasure for 24 years. He has recently been published in *Sweet Mammalian*, *Turbine/ Kapohau*, *Verge*, *Brief*, *Blackmail Press*, *Foam:e* and *Landfall*.

**Gayelene Carbis** is an award-winning writer of poetry, prose and plays. Her first book of poetry, *Anecdotal Evidence*, was published in 2017 (Five Islands Press). Recently shortlisted/prizes include: MPU International Poetry Prize; Best Small Fiction; My Brother Jack Poetry and Short Story Prizes (awarded Third Prizes); *ABR*, *The Age* and various short story/poetry awards. Gayelene has read her work in Melbourne and internationally; and teaches Creative Writing, and EAL at ACU and Fitzroy Learning Network.

**Paige Clark** is an American-Australian writer of Chinese descent. Currently she is completing her Masters in Creative Writing, Editing and Publishing at the University of Melbourne. Her short fiction has appeared in *New World Writing* and *Menacing Hedge*.

**Ken Cockburn:** I am a poet based in Scotland, who published three books in 2018: *Floating the Woods*, a new collection of poems; *Heroines from Abroad*, translations from the German of poems by Christine Marendon; and *Gleann Badraig*, a book of photographs by Charles March of the Hebridean Isle of Jura, to which I contributed poems. I had two poems published in *Meniscus* vol.3 no.2.

**Aidan Coleman** is a visiting research fellow in Humanities at the University of Adelaide. His two collections of poetry, *Avenues & Runways* and *Asymmetry*, are published by Brandl & Schlesinger; a third collection, *Mount Sumptuous*, is forthcoming from Wakefield Press. He is currently writing a biography of the poet John Forbes.

**Mary Cresswell** is from California, and has lived on New Zealand's Kāpiti Coast for years and years. Her latest books are *Fish Stories: ghazals and glosas* (Canterbury University Press, 2015) and *Field Notes: A satiric miscellany* (Mākaro Press, 2017). Her poems are widely published and reflect her career as a science writer/editor as well as her lifetime interest in poetry. See [www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Cresswell,%20Mary](http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Cresswell,%20Mary)

**Jane Frank** lives and writes in Brisbane, where she teaches Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Griffith University. In 2018, her poems were published in *Not Very Quiet*, *takahē*, *Stilts Journal*, *Popshot Magazine*, *Algebra of Owls*, and in the *Heroines* anthology (Neo Perennial Press). Her work is forthcoming in *Antipodes*, *Hecate*, and *Pale Fire: New Writings on the Moon* (The Frogmore Press, 2019).

**Ian Ganassi's** poetry, prose, and translations have appeared in more than a hundred literary magazines, including *New American Writing*, *The Yale Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry* and *Bending Genres*. Recent news includes poems forthcoming in *Amp*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *Otoliths*. Ganassi's poetry collection *Mean Numbers* was published in 2016. His new collection, *True for the Moment*, is due out in the fall of this year from MadHat Press. Selections from an ongoing collaboration with a painter can be found at [www.thecorpses.com](http://www.thecorpses.com).

**Frances Gapper** has published three story collections: *In the Wild Wood* (2017), *The Tiny Key* (2009) and *Absent Kisses* (2002). Her 100-worger 'Plum Jam' won FlashBack Fiction's 2018 microfiction contest and is included in *Best Microfiction 2019*.

**Nod Ghosh** lives in Christchurch, New Zealand. Publications include a novella-in-flash *The Crazy Wind* (Truth Serum Press July 2018), inclusion in anthologies *Sleep is A Beautiful Colour* (UK 2017 NFFD), *Landmarks* (UK 2015 NFFD), *Love on the Road 2015* (Liberties Press) and various online or print journals. Further details: <http://www.nodghosh.com/about/>

**Michael Gould** is a queer Canadian New Zealand writer living in Wellington. His poetry has appeared in various Australasian publications including *Landfall*, and is included in the recent anthology from New Zealand, *The Friday Poem*.

**James Grabill's** work appears in *Caliban*, *Harvard Review*, *Terrain*, *Mobius*, *Shenandoah*, *Seattle Review*, *Stand*, and many others. Books: *Poem Rising Out of the Earth* (1994), *An Indigo Scent after the Rain* (2003), Lynx House Press. *Environmental prose poems: Sea-Level Nerve: Books One* (2014), *Two* (2015), Wordcraft of Oregon. For many years, he taught all kinds of writing, as well as 'systems thinking' and global issues relative to sustainability.

**Oz Hardwick** is a poet, photographer, would-be musician and reluctant academic. He has published seven collections of poetry and edited several more. His prose poetry chapbook *The Lithium Codex* was winner of the Hedgehog Press Full Fat Collection prize, and will be published by Hedgehog in July 2019. Oz is Programme Co-ordinator for Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University.

**Jenna Heller** is an American living in Christchurch, New Zealand. More of her writing can be found in *Star 82 Review*, *Poetry NZ*, *takahē* and *Popshot*.

**Jon Hoskin** is an artist and educator. He is extremely interested in what happens when we read a text. His work is interdisciplinary, exploring themes such as language, chance, and embodiment. His work has appeared in *Time of Signing* poetry journal, *Stories: An Anthology of Faith Journeys*, and *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice*. He lives in Auckland, where he coordinates academic services at New Zealand's largest and oldest theological college.

**Kathryn Hummel** is the working-class kid of a part-immigrant, part-home grown, all-socialist family. A PhD in Social Science, Kathryn has no formal qualifications in writing. Her creative and scholarly works have been widely published /presented/ translated/ anthologised; her poetry, nonfiction and fiction recognised with various awards and nominations. She is the current nonfiction and travel writing editor for *Verity La*. Forthcoming in 2019: *Lamentville* (Math Paper Press), 'splashback' and 'A Few Franks for Dearest Dominic' (Prote(s)xt Books). See [kathrynhummel.com](http://kathrynhummel.com)

**Paul Ilechko** is the author of the chapbooks *Bartok in Winter* (Flutter Press, 2018) and *Graph of Life* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). His work has appeared in a variety of journals, including *Manhattanville Review*, *formercactus*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Marsh Hawk Review* and *Rockvale Review*. He lives in Lambertville, NJ.

**Psycho Kanev** is the author of four poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review* and many others. His new chapbook, *Under Half-Empty Heaven*, was published in 2018 by Grey Book Press.

**Yael Klangwisan** is a West Auckland poet. She has published her creative writing in a number of journals (such as *Hecate*) as well as edited books, and her poetry in her book *Jouissance* published by Sheffield Phoenix (2015).

**Wes Lee** lives in New Zealand. Her writing has recently appeared in *The Stinging Fly*, *Turbine*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Westerly*, *fourW*, and *Poetry New Zealand*. She has won a number of awards for her writing. Most recently she was selected by American poet Eileen Myles as a finalist for the Sarah Broom Poetry Prize 2018, and awarded the Poetry New Zealand Prize 2019.

**Elizabeth MacFarlane** writes true fiction and essays. She is a senior lecturer in creative writing at the University of Melbourne, and co-directs the Comic Art Workshop and Twelve Panels Press.

**Anthony Macris** is Associate Professor of Writing at the University of Technology Sydney. He is author of the *Capital* novels, and the autism memoir *When Horse Became Saw*, which was shortlisted for the 2012 Prime Minister's Literary Awards. His poetry has appeared in *Griffith Review*. His most recent book, *Inexperience & Other Stories*, was named a 2016 ABR Book of the Year. In 2019/20 UWAP will publish his selected writings *Aftershocks*.

**Michael Mintrom** lives in Melbourne. He has published poetry in various literary journals including *Landfall*, *Quadrant*, *Sport*, and *takahē*. He is a past winner of the University of Canterbury's MacMillan Brown Prize for Writers.

**Chris Muscardin** is a writer most recently residing in Chicago, Illinois, although a longtime Floridian previously and a New York expat before that. As such, scenes of the south (and Central Florida in particular) feature often in his work, along with dissections of queerness: his own and others.

**Gemma Nethercote Way** is a creative writing student at the University of Canberra. Her poetry appears in Issue 4 of the journal *Not Very Quiet*.

**Eve Nucifora** is a PhD student at the University of Canberra. Her works of short fiction explore ways of disrupting tropes and archetypes for women and queer characters.

**Thuy On:** I'm a freelance literary critic and journalist, and emerging poet. My work has been published in a variety of publications including *The Age*, *The SMH*, *The Australian*, *Books+Publishing*, *Mascara Literary Review* and *Gargouille journal*. I'm also the books editor of *The Big Issue*.

**Jane O'Sullivan** is a writer based in Sydney. Her short fiction has previously appeared in *Island* and *Mascara Literary Review*, and has been highly commended in the Newcastle Short Story Award and Wollongong Writers Festival Short Story Prize. She works as an art writer and is a former editor of *Art Collector* magazine.

**Moya Pacey** published her second collection, *Black Tulips*, with Recent Work Press in 2017. It was shortlisted for the ACT Writers Centre Poetry Book of the Year. In October 2018, she was the poet in residence at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Great Village, Nova Scotia, Canada. She co-edits the online journal *Not Very Quiet*.

**Diana Marietta Papas:** My short fiction often re-imagines folkloric traditions of my Greek cultural heritage. I have a particular interest in poetic responses to the visual arts. Two of my stories are published in *Southerly* (2015 and 2017). This year, I was awarded the Elizabeth M Liggins Prize in English and Medieval Studies at Macquarie University where I am a PhD candidate. I recently read at the Emerging Writers' Festival 'Between the Covers' in Sydney.

**Sarah Penwarden** works as a therapist and counsellor educator in Auckland. She has had poems published in *Poetry New Zealand*, *Turbine*, *Meniscus*, *Southerly*, and *takahē*. She has had short stories published in *tākāhe*, *brief*, and a story broadcast on Radio New Zealand. She also writes for children and has had short stories and poems published in *The School Journal*.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Gūbson Poems* published by Cholla Needles, 2019. For more information including free e-books and his essay 'Magic, Illusion and Other Realities', please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com). To view one of his interviews please follow this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSK774rtfx8>

Dr **Antonia Pont** is Senior Lecturer in Writing & Literature at Deakin University, Australia. She practises as a writer and yogi, bringing twentieth-century French thought into conversation with contemporary practised-based modes of research. She publishes poetry, fiction, essays and scholarly writing. Recent works include 'On Consent, Rejecting and Being Rejected', *The Lifted Brow*, 2019, *Practising with Deleuze*, EUP 2017; 'Lurching', *Colloquy*, 2017, and poetry in *Westerly*, *Rabbit*, *Cordite*, and others. She is the current Chair of the AAWP.

**Arna Radovich** is a former adult literacy teacher and writer of short fiction and stories for children. In 2018, she was a finalist in the Carmel Bird Digital Literary Award, the Tasmanian Writers' Prize and the Joanne Burns Microlit Award, and her work has appeared in anthologies, online and in performance. She lives in the Blue Mountains of NSW.

**Vaughan Rapatahana** is Māori. He writes across several genres in his main languages and is widely published internationally. He won the inaugural Proverse Poetry Prize in 2016, was selected in *Best New Zealand Poems* in 2017 and recently had his novel, *Novel*, published to considerable positive reviews.

**Duncan Richardson** is a writer of fiction, poetry, haiku, radio drama and educational texts. He teaches English as a Second Language part time, in Brisbane, Australia.

**Peter Roberts:** I have poems forthcoming in *Illumen* and *Star\*Line*, and have had poems & stories published in a number of magazines & journals, including *Haikuniverse*, *Shoreline of Infinity*, *Scifaikuest*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Alba*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Nature 'Futures'*, *LabLit.com*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Lilliput Review*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Astropoetica*, *Café Irreal*, *Ars Medica*, *The Wisconsin Review*, *The William and Mary Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and many more.

**Hester J Rook** is a Rhysling Award nominated writer and co-editor of *Twisted Moon Magazine*, often found salt-scrunched on beaches, reading arcane tales and losing the moon in mugs of tea. Find Hester on Twitter @hesterjrook, and read more poems and fiction at <https://hesterjrook.com>.

**Gerry Sarnat** MD has won Poetry in the Arts First Place/Dorfman Prizes; was nominated for Pushcarts/Best of the Net Awards; authored *HOMELESS CHRONICLES* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014), *Melting The Ice King* (2016); and is widely published including recently by New Ulster, Gargoyle, Stanford, Oberlin, Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Edinburgh, Columbia, Brown, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Main Street Rag*, *New Delta Review*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *New York Times*. [gerardsarnat.com](http://gerardsarnat.com)

**Anum Sattar** is a senior studying English at the College of Wooster in Ohio, USA. Her poems have been published in the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Willard & Maple*, *Lullwater Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *HOBART*, *The Florida Review* and many national and international magazines. She won the first Grace Prize in Poetry and third Vonna Hicks poetry awards at the college. She reads her work at Brooklyn Poets, Spoonbill and Sugartown Bookstore, Forest Hills Library in New York City, Cuyahoga Valley Art Center at Cuyahoga Falls, OH, Bridgewater College in Shenandoah Valley, VA and was recently interviewed at Radio Free Brooklyn.

**Robert Scotellaro's** work has appeared widely in journals and anthologies including:

WW Norton's *Flash Fiction International*, *NANO Fiction*, *Gargoyle*, *Flash Frontier*, and many others. Two of his stories were Best Small Fictions winners (2016 and 2017). He is the author of seven literary chapbooks, and three full length flash fiction collections. He has, along with James Thomas, edited *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction*, by WW Norton (2018). Visit him at [rsflashfiction.com](http://rsflashfiction.com)

**Melinda Smith** is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Goodbye, Cruel* (Pitt St Poetry, 2017) and *Members Only* (with artist Caren Florance, Recent Work Press, 2017). She is a former winner of the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award for poetry, and her work has been widely anthologised and translated into multiple languages. She is based in the ACT, and was poetry editor of *The Canberra Times* from 2015 to 2017.

**Martin Stannard** lives in Nottingham, England, and has been publishing poetry and criticism for some 40 years. He was founding editor and publisher of *joe soap's canoe* (1978–93), and poetry editor of *Decals of Desire*. His poetry and reviews have appeared in numerous journals, and his recent collection is *Poems for the Young at Heart* (Leaf Press, 2016). A chapbook, *Items*, was published by [Red Ceilings](http://RedCeilings.com) (2018). After more than a decade teaching in China, he returned to the UK in early 2018.

**Paul Turley** lives in Adelaide, South Australia. He has just completed a Masters Degree in poetry through the University of Adelaide focusing on plain or accessible language poems. He has worked for much of his life in community development, in not for profit and church agencies. Paul has conducted poetry appreciation and writing workshops in the USA, the UK and Australia and enjoys seeing people who think they have no interest in poetry finding themselves surprised.

**Isi Unikowski:** I am currently completing a PhD in political science at the ANU. My poetry has been widely published in Australia and overseas, including the *Australian Book Review's States of Poetry* 2017. I was last published in *Meniscus* in the February 2017 edition.

**Amelia Walker** completed her PhD in creative writing in 2016 through the University of South Australia, where she is currently employed as a lecturer.

**Francine Witte** is the author of four poetry chapbooks and two flash fiction chapbooks. Her full-length poetry collection, *Café Crazy*, was published by (Kelsay Books.) Her play, *Love is a Bad Neighborhood*, was produced in NYC this past December. She is a former English teacher. She lives in NYC.

**Marjory Woodfield** is a New Zealand teacher and writer who has lived in the Middle

East. Her work has appeared in various publications, both print and online. These include the BBC, *takahē*, *Flash Frontier*, *Blue Five Notebook*, *Cargo Literary*, *Raven Chronicles*, and *Frogmore Press*. She is a Bath Ad Hoc Fiction winner, was longlisted for the Alpine Fellowship (Venice), and won the Dunedin UNESCO City of Literature 2018 Robert Burns Poetry Competition. She will also be published in *Best Small Fictions 2019*, later this year.

MENISCUS

L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

Volume 7 Issue 1 2019



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