



MENISCUS

LITERARY JOURNAL

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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 analogue 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

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EDITORIAL

MENISCUS WAS SET up to provide a space for new works, including those by emerging writers, and for works (and writers) exploring new terrain. Over the past five years we have seen it find its place in an increasingly international field. This, the ninth issue, includes work produced by writers based in many parts of the globe, and with diversity of age and experience. Together they bring cadences, concerns and literary traditions that offer a richness of voice and perspective.

The production of the current issue was supported by three students in the Master of Arts (Editing & Publishing) at the University of Southern Queensland. Bonnie Cassidy and Erin Mallet took on the task of editing and proofing the contributions, and developed their skills in the art of editing poetry; Christopher Magor designed and implemented a marketing plan, reviewed and improved the journal's website, and organised the design of the new logo. We are very grateful for the input of all three interns.

This issue is the second *Meniscus* issue to be supported by the current Copyright Agency Limited grant, which provides funds for the best prose and best poetry piece included in each issue. Ella Jeffrey's 'Varnish' has been selected, from a very competitive shortlist, as best poem. The judges found themselves unable to select a single prose piece, and so this prize has been divided between Ira McGuire's 'Life in Fragments', and Deb Wain's 'Antipasti'. This issue opens with those prizewinning works, and concludes with another set of prizewinning works, from prizes administered by the AAWP and the University of Canberra (UC).

There were far more poems and stories offered than we were able to publish, and we thank those who were not included in this issue, as well as those whose work is published here. Your ongoing submissions have brought us to this significant milestone and we encourage your continued support as readers and writers.

Jen Webb and Gail Pittaway
for the Meniscus Editors



ELLA JEFFERY

'Varnish'

ELLA JEFFERY

Varnish

Each night they sleep with the amber
smell of varnish
in their moonscraped room

as floors soak under brief
sheets of wind. Light slicks
across the stacked kitchen chairs.

When they wake to soak the split timber
again they slip through hours like water
or sleep, they forget it is neither – perhaps

weeks have passed and now they are varnish
or animal or neither, pouring
through hours, fine as sugar,

waking to soak the split timber
again. When they sleep
the floor becomes clear as water or melts

in the centre, they are not sure
how much longer they must eat and sleep
while soaked in amber. Furniture is formless

under drop sheets, more animal than water,
neither remembers the order
it goes in. This is what the mind

wants to know at three a.m.:
how many days does it take
to paint wood the colour of wood?



IRA MCGUIRE

'Life in Fragments'

IRA MCGUIRE

Life in Fragments

Adapting

THE FIRE, BUILT from fallen branches, cooks sausages we have poked onto whittled sticks. After drowning a sausage in spicy mustard, my son spits out a mouthful then runs around looking for things to burn. My daughter announces herself vegetarian, but later fills a container with worms and takes a rod to the lake. The fish in the lake have a high concentration of mercury.

New and strange routines

We take turns to throw darts at a target nailed to a door. Our darts hit the door more than the target. Someone has left behind three rusted bikes, and we ride them to a corner store for pastries. The dog next door howls, the summer light keeping him awake day and night. Buttercups line the road and I show both kids how to pick and hold them so they shoot off the ends like soft missiles. Dairy cows meander in a field behind the house, full udders protected by support bands. The air smells crisp with the scent of fresh laundry. Summer birds fly above. Mum establishes a bird feeder, and it attracts a squirrel that curls its claws around clumps of bread. Both kids laugh at it, mouths open, showing everyone their masticated food.

Cow bell

Dad told me the story of a school friend who wore a cowbell around his neck. The boy had a habit of wandering through the woods dragging a sledge, bell jangling.

'Was there something wrong with him?' I ask.

'Not that I know,' Dad said.

'Oh come on,' Mum said. She has a habit of taking sides. 'We saw him a few months ago and he didn't seem normal.'

Dad sighed, scratched at dry food stuck to the oilcloth. ‘Define *normal*,’ he said.

The chair

Large pyres stand by the lakeside ready for mid-summer. Dad takes timber off-cuts and remnants to the lake and throws them among the collection already there. Someone has thrown in an old wooden chair. Now the pyre looks like someone will be made to sit there like some form of Nordic ritual.

Water on hot rocks

The house has no shower or bath. We wash ourselves in a sauna, a separate building close to the house. Both kids love the way they can splash around as they please, throwing buckets of water against hot rocks, steaming up the low ceilinged room while we all shampoo and lather up. Outside, the frigid Arctic wind leaves our skin raised in bumps when we run from sauna to house.

Walking

I take a long walk after dinner. I had forgotten about the summer light, how it follows the clock relentlessly. It gives me insomnia. My kids delight in it calling their dad, my ex-husband, telling him they don’t sleep. I get a text message saying I need to make them sleep. Dad ignores clocks altogether, sometimes heating the sauna at midnight, sometimes eating two lots of dinners, sleeping sporadically.

‘You don’t waste the summer light,’ Dad says.

Visiting the old home

Our campervan stops and we all climb out. I approach my godfather and he wraps his wiry arms around me and squeezes.

‘Too much time has passed,’ he says. My godmother hugs me next. Her shoulders have stooped from her slowly collapsing bones.

They brew weak coffee. From my vantage point at the kitchen table I see chimneys releasing smoke into the sky. An old birch tree on the other side of the road has a birdhouse for a tiny, yellow-breasted bird that arrives only for summer. Dad informs everyone that months and seasons were once told by the arrival and departure of birds. The yellow-breasted birds have left early, thrown off by the coldest summer on record. Drizzling rain has followed us, the temperature lagging below ten.

Buried while alive

My godparents own a burial plot with their headstone already erected, both their names and psalms engraved. The headstones are missing only their death. Either they don’t trust anyone to do the job after they are gone, or they are flagrantly testing something; I can’t decide which. I admire their organisation, though. My daughter has declared the burial plots creepy, but then teens find most things creepy.

Their daughter, my cousin, doesn’t have her name anywhere, even though she was buried nearly a year ago. Apparently the gravestone hasn’t been finalised. My cousin’s partner, a woman, has told Mum that the name isn’t there because they are (were) gay, something that isn’t openly spoken about. My aunt refers to her daughter’s partner as her ‘room-mate’.

Why do the men leave?

My godparents had four children: two girls, two boys. Their other daughter was abandoned by her husband. He walked out on her and the kids to start a new life with a new woman. He took every piece of furniture with him, right down to the children’s collection of books. My cousin came home from work to an entirely empty house. I didn’t believe the story until my brother, who was in the Finnish army at the time, said he had seen the house and all of it was true.

Perspective on danger

My grandfather first fought in World War II as a fighter pilot, then later served as a submarine cook. Dad said Grandfather never drove a

car after the war because he thought cars and driving were dangerous, something Dad still finds amusing.

The family way

I haven't seen my cousins for years, so I'm surprised by the tall and handsome man I meet. His wife stays in the kitchen with my aunt and Mum, preparing a late lunch of salads, potato, two different types of salmon dishes and several varieties of bread. I can see she must have been beautiful—she still has the air of someone used to attention. I don't speak with my cousin's wife until after lunch, after a few glasses of apple wine. She tells me about her eldest daughter, a 'very difficult teenager.' Then she shows me pictures, on her iPhone, of her daughters' boyfriends. The pictures are of half-naked young men, one in a bathroom, one inside a gym. She says she likes to look at pictures of these young men with her friends. She flicks her hair in a way that makes me slightly squeamish, but not enough that I get up and leave.

Mid-summer

'Every year the government warns men not to piss from docks. Shit swimmers living in a land full of lakes,' Dad laughs. This morning, already, the news reports that someone drowned in the early hours. Dad and I sit on opposite sides of a small wooden table.

'Longest daylight of the year today. Soon enough it will be the dark of winter,' he says. He slurps his coffee. 'Then everyone wishes they could fall from their docks and die. I know I do.'

Burning pyres

The pyre burns rapidly, cordoned off with rope, radiating heat, and black smoke keeps us on the fringes. The drizzle hasn't dampened the mid-summer celebrations. There's a hotdog stand giving away sausages and soft drinks. A man hands out balloons; two policemen arrive to watch, clapping hands over trim stomachs. People sit on the playground equipment drinking canned beer. The fire crackles and spits embers, one landing and burning a hole in the shoulder of my jacket. The jacket

isn't mine—I took it from behind a door at the house. Turns out my cousin used to own it. She died a year ago, stomach cancer twisting her insides, contorting her face on the outside. This year we've lost three family members to cancer. Dad thinks it's the hauntings of acid rain and Chernobyl.

Psychology

My uncle worked as a psychiatric nurse in Estonia in the years before their declaration of independence. My uncle tells me that Dad had a brother, the same age as him, who died in a car accident at eighteen. He would have been my step-uncle. He was the baby Dad's father left him and Grandmother for.

'I didn't know that. I never heard this story before now,' I said.

'You still haven't. Not from me anyway,' Uncle replied.

Driving around trying to relive the past

Six of us cram into the campervan each day. The van has no seatbelts but it does have an endlessly squeaking door. We hurtle along country roads, the curtains sometimes drawn to fool the Finnish cops. Dad says we are like a bunch of gypsies.

We visit the small town I grew up in. As our destination draws nearer, I am occupied with trying to remember. I feel anxious when I don't recall anything of the bordering forests and houses. Finally, after listening to my bored kids playing chopsticks next to me, my brain exhausted from speaking in two languages for hours, I see something I remember—a corner shop. Then we cross a familiar bridge. Suddenly everything comes into focus, the recognition I had been craving.

Another writer

A well-known writer and academic bought the house I grew up in. Today coincides with a writers' festival up the road. Dad slows the van, and we all peer at the overgrown gardens, and the timber gates I had swung from. The van rolls slowly by, and we spot a woman and two children in the garden, staring at us squished against the windows.

'We should stop and explain what we're doing,' Dad says.

'Who's the woman?' I ask,

'No idea,' Mum said.

'Maybe the house was resold,' I suggest and Mum makes a scoffing sound. 'I would've read about that on his blog,' she says.

We make our way inside the house. I walk through several rooms, inundated with flashbacks. I see all the things the woman could not possibly see, or even guess at. Turns out the woman is the writer's stepdaughter. The writer himself is at the writer's festival, mediating a panel about passion.

Mum tells the stepdaughter that an older woman had approached her in the garden, and said she had previously lived at the house, so Mum let her in. The woman had walked around, then stopped in the middle of the lounge room, closed her eyes and started swaying, dancing slowly in a large circle. Finally she stopped, opened her eyes and told Mum she had been married in this house, the wedding reception held in the gardens.

A room that used to be my own

We climbed upstairs and stood in my old room, now a writing room. His desk had been abandoned mid-writing, our trespass allowing us to look at several open books, his notes and a pair of glasses resting nearby. On one wall are several large, framed black-and-white photos of his first wife, a woman I had known, the cousin of my best friend who lived less than a kilometre away. His first wife also died of cancer, *a grief that was difficult to bear* he later wrote in his memoir. He wrote that he visited her grave and masturbated. I wonder if his students read his memoir and if they, too, imagine a small and starkly white penis. I stare closely at the photos and wonder if she was one of his grand passions. I also wonder what my passions were if I had to list them. Perhaps it is this house.

I still remember how it felt to leave

On my last day, I looked in on classmates through a narrow, oblong window. They sat in three rows, wearing wool, and corduroy, and bored

faces. I wouldn't miss any of them but I would come to dream of snow, cold and lakes. I would come to yearn for a perfection that never was.

Waiting to go home

I sit outside, bitter coffee warming my hands. The squirrel comes down a nearby tree. It has large liquid eyes. We eyeball each other. I break first, looking toward a line of trees beyond the field of cows. Somewhere beyond the nearby field I hear a bell jangling, and it sounds like time is up.



DEB WAIN

'A Platter of Antipasti'

DEB WAIN

A Platter of Antipasti

PAPÀ TOLD THE same story to any young man that he deemed would be a suitable husband for me:

'When I arrived here, I had nothing. I came to Brunswick because my *zia* was here. I worked on a vegetable stall in the market, and then in a café, then as a mechanic—a trade I learnt on the job. Every day I came home covered in grease and oil. After I married Rosetta, she would click her tongue at me then set to spraying my overalls and scrubbing them clean. One of the first things I bought her was a washing machine, a Westinghouse, a good brand. But those overalls, she washed by hand. She said she wouldn't have something that filthy in her good machine. Well, those overalls always looked like new when she hung them onto the line. It's important to find a hard-working woman for a wife. My Gabriella is a good girl. So much like her mother.'

It was always similar and not very subtle. I knew the stories because he would tell them whether I was there or not. He had no qualms about singing the praises of his daughter. I was his only one. With three brothers and Papà in the house, Mamma and I stuck together. Papà wanted me married but Mamma would tell me, 'Marriage is hard enough when there is love, Gabriella. Don't try to manage without it.'

When I came into the kitchen, she was chopping onions and listening to Perry Como crooning, 'A—you're adorable' on the radio. I preferred the jukebox songs they played down at the drive-in diner but I didn't change the station.

There was a new mechanic working with Papà. An apprentice but not newly out of school, a little older. Papà had him trapped in the carport under the guise of loaning him some tools so that the apprentice could tinker with an engine at home. Mamma made them cups of coffee and I took the cups, with handles too small for men's fingers, out to them.

'Here she is!' boomed Papà as if I was the guest of honour at a fiesta. 'Little Gabriella, I was just telling Emilio, here, about how he should

save all his earnings and buy land so that he can grow vegetables and have some cows, and sheep, and chickens.’ Papà turned back to the apprentice who stood by, captive and seemingly captivated. ‘You know, when we each left Italy, Rosetta and I, we left the *mezzadria*. We were only peasant farmers and did not have our own land—my parents and their parents and their parents, all working the land and paying half of their produce to the landlord, the *padroni di casa*. I hear they’re talking of removing the *mezzadria* now. But when I got here, all I wanted to do was to buy a place of my own. So, as soon as we could afford it, we bought this house. It’s a good house. There are good people here. But I’m sorry not to have more land and some animals. Then we could really have celebrations!’

The apprentice nodded encouragingly and sipped his coffee. Papà barely paused to breathe. ‘A lamb cooking, a little grappa, a little wine. Everyone could be happy and singing, like in the old country.’ It didn’t sound very different to the celebrations that we already had. Our small suburban backyard already bulged with vegetables—carrots and parsnips pushed their shoulders through the earth and pumpkin vines threaded their way through the lawn that could not be mown lest the fruiting vines were damaged. The back fence sagged with the weight of the tomato plants that were trained against it, their fruit bulbous and shiny. I don’t know what Papà would do if he had more space. There would be enough to feed the neighbourhood and he would probably give it all away for free if he had his way.

Papà threw his arm around my shoulders, ‘My Gabriella, she’s a good girl. She would work hard on such a farm. It is important to have a hard-working wife, don’t you think, Emilio?’

I smiled up at Papà and shook my head. He ignored it. Emilio nodded for an answer, sipped Mamma’s coffee, and smiled at a space that was neither my father nor me. I did not usually make boys nervous; this was a curious knowledge that I wasn’t sure what to do with. I went back to help Mamma in the kitchen.

The house smelled of basil. Mamma had made another batch of pesto during the day. I had noticed the scent while I was inside but at the backdoor it hit me again. The minestrone was on the stove, bubbling. ‘Do you want me to put the pasta in yet?’

‘Mm-hmm.’ Mamma was writing a letter at the kitchen bench between stirring the minestrone and frying onions, tomatoes and parsley. She was just adding the fried mixture to the pot, her wooden spoon scraping the bottom of the frying pan, when I came through the door. I’m not sure how Zia Caterina makes sense of Mamma’s letters. They are always written in the kitchen, in snatched moments, and often spattered with whatever was on the stove at the time.

On the radio Pat Boone was singing, ‘Friendly persuasion, thee is mine, though I don’t know many words of praise, thee pleasures me in a hundred ways ...’

‘Go and sit at the table, Mamma. I can finish this.’

‘No, I can talk to her here. Caterina taught me to cook the *minestrone con pesto* after our mamma passed—God rest her soul,’ Mamma said, crossing herself automatically. ‘I like to write to her when I’m cooking.’

I broke up the long pieces of tagliatelle and added them to the minestrone. Mamma straightened from bending over the bench, stretching with her hands in the small of her back.

‘Is the young man still talking with your papà?’

I leaned over the sink so I could make the angle to see into the back of the carport. ‘He’s still there.’

‘Go and invite him for dinner. I have to get the focaccia out of the oven.’

‘Couldn’t I get the focaccia—?’

‘Go!’ She swatted me with her teatowel and bent down to slide out the hot trays of flat bread.

The young man, Emilio, didn’t say anything when I passed on Mamma’s invitation to eat with us. He just smiled at Papà and I thought, he doesn’t want to say no in front of me, so I turned and went back into the house. But he was there at our table when dinner was served. Mamma had laid a red linen tablecloth over the white formica. So I could not trace the gold patterns on it with my eyes while I ate. I used to tell myself that this was a good eye exercise but it had not helped and now it was just a habit.

Papà rambled between mouthfuls of minestrone and focaccia, holding forth on the state of the economy in Italy, how much better off

we all were here, a new piece of equipment they had at the mechanics ... 'It's an amazing world we live in, Emilio, an amazing world. We're fortunate to see this time. We're fortunate to have peace and to have family around us.' He gestured to the table even though there was far from a full family here tonight.

The two of my brothers who still lived at home had gone out to the pictures. They had come in earlier in the afternoon to ask Mamma to keep them some supper—as if there was any chance of them going unfed. They had refused to take me to the show even though I told them I didn't care what it was, so I suspected that they had been meeting girls there. Melanie would tell me at school on Monday; her father ran the picture theatre and she was always there on Friday nights. Marco, my oldest brother, was already married and living with his wife, Maria, at her parents' house while they saved money for a home of their own. 'In the country,' Papà always prompted when they talked about their savings and their plans.

But Maria would just laugh and pat his arm saying, 'Over my dead body, Papà Gino.'

Papà couldn't understand Maria's reluctance—to him it was the perfect idea. He had a vision of an old-time estate like the one where he had grown up, without the *mezzadria*, but still with him as the *capoccia* at the head of the family farm. He would have us back in the peasant garb of his roots: the women with scarves over their hair and floral dresses with aprons tied over the top. I would try to tell him it was the 1950s now, who wanted that kind of life anymore? He would just shake his head as if in despair at the youth of today, but he would be smiling.

I had excused myself from the table to watch television so I missed Emilio's departure. I was too engrossed in the program and I missed saying goodbye. I figured Mamma would scold me later for being rude. Mamma came to join me in the lounge room. Papà saw Emilio out then started pottering in his vegetable plots in the last of the summer light.

•

Melanie ran to me when I arrived at school on Monday morning, breathlessly waiting to tell me that she had seen my brothers at the pictures.

'They were with girls, weren't they?'

'You already know?' Her shoulders slumped.

'Oh, no. I'm only guessing because they wouldn't let me come with them', I explained, and her mood improved immediately.

'Well', she said, back to her animated, storytelling role, 'when they arrived, they both stood around out the front. I was going to go and say hello but Dad wanted me to show the new usher where everything was kept. So, I was showing him through the theatre when your brothers came in. But they weren't alone!'

'Really?' I asked, only because it was what Melanie expected.

'Yes, and you'll never guess! Bernardo was escorting Maria's younger sister, Katia, and Angelo', she paused for dramatic effect, 'took the arm of an Australian girl and showed her to her seat! I wanted to sit up in the projectionist's room to keep an eye on them but Dad needed me. The new usher was pretty hopeless; I don't think he'll last long. But imagine that: one of your brothers with his sister-in-law's younger sister—Is that even allowed?—and the other with an Aussie girl. What will your parents say? Imagine if you brought home an Australian boy!' She finally paused for breath.

'Mamma won't be pleased.' It was a curious thing—Mamma was the one more interested in the boys settling down but Papà was the one most concerned about me. I don't think it had occurred to either of them that any of us might fall in love with someone who wasn't Italian. I'm not sure it had ever occurred to me either.

Melanie was looking at me carefully. 'Your eye seems good today. Not too wander-y.' And on cue we broke into song.

'Anywhere I wander, anywhere I roam, till I am in the arms of my darling again, my heart will find no home ...' We had been singing that line about my lazy eye since we had been to see *The Hans Christian Andersen Story* one Friday night. We rarely got any further than that because we always started laughing. This time our singing was cut short by both giggles and the bell for our first class.

When I got home in the afternoon, Emilio was sitting on the concrete steps leading up to our front door.

'What are you doing out here? Isn't my mother home?'

'I-I w-ant-ted t-t-t-to s-see you.' His words came with such an effort and his eyes darted around me before they dropped to a piece of paper in his hands. At least his eyes darted together. He handed me the sheet.

Dear Gabriella, I didn't want the first time that we spoke to take forever so I'm going to write it down instead. I would like to take you to a movie and for some dinner. I think you're lovely and if you can spare the time, I'd like to get to know you better.

Emilio.

'If I can spare the time?'

'I-i-it c-could ta-ake a w-w-while,' he breathed out heavily and smiled.

'Come inside. Mamma will have antipasti ready.'

From Mamma's radio in the kitchen a voice lilted, 'Earth angel, earth angel, will you be mine?'

SARAH PENWARDEN

Sharing the Same Bed as My Mother while on Holiday

Umbilical
strange, resting
in the dark and you're
breathing, whispering at one point,
and I'm not so much a child now,
more a companion;
we are streaming through life,
catching by the tail, a comet,
pulled on its
determined trajectory.
In the dark, after
the lamps are clicked,
we are in the same boat,
floating on water,
bobbing on the
universe's sea,
rocked.

Revising a Poem

In this flat city
you always know where you are:
no hills or mountains;
here, they navigate by clouds.

When the wind blows
cherry blossom trees rain petals:
flakes drift across
mown lawns.

≈≈≈

In this flat city you
always know where you are:
no hills or mountains, here
they navigate by clouds;

skittish, moving, darkening,
as the wind blows, cherry
blossom trees rain petals:
flakes drift across mown lawns.

Introduce

To cause to exist [Obs.]

The beloved dead
are noisy she said;
their stories ache to be told;
they are the voluble dead,
kicking up dust on
the seabed of our lives,
refusing to be forgotten.
He'd been timid since his death,
not wanting to intrude;
as I shared with a stranger
how he bore us
as we passed through
the scalding years,
his life-fire flared again,
his match not out,
alight, alight.

SAMEED SAYEED

&

Oh, &!
Typographical deity!
Complicated and reckless,
somehow Gothic (in that spiny, thorny way of yours),
black and collapsible like a silk topper
(and just as relentlessly fashionable),
connecting angle to curve and tissue to tendon,
holding it all together
(without forgetting the chasms
between word and word and word) –
oh, &,
just how do you do it?

LINDSAY REID

Winning

I was seventeen
the day I won
the poetry competition.

The next Sylvia Plath!
said one teacher
passing in the corridor.

I hope not!
said another teacher
coming the other way.

MICHELLE O'SULLIVAN

Castleconnor

i.

June, dusk. An unending feel to it all.
Knowledge, inherent or not, says the feeling
is false –
 yet however close a life or death
might be, it loses focus in this kind of air and distance
renders it a mystery; two sides of a coin – the stay
of leaving or to be left here.

ii.

Wind-tousle and kiss at the chimney's mouth. A cairn
of ash losing form in the grate; light's evening swim.
Sheep-shit and weather-scoured stones,

 this place and its fleet of secrets –
how is it that it's like a child upped from bed and now
having lost being frantic is content to walk barefoot
not in search of a parent?

iii.

An alcove above a broken staircase,
space cleared for the sky to be
hung just so –
 as if the thoughtful hand
of a curator had brushed the smaller details:
wanton knots undone and the execution
of weed-tangle in certain gaps.

Solstice

Like a sick animal, he noises and turns
in and out of sleep.

Twice he's turned to the door
mistaking a presence there.

As a tide repeats, he breaks quietly;
his loss weeps alone.

He doesn't notice, pool trickling
the edge of his feet,

the spilled creel, the new air –
day's arrival like a bright, blank note.

Forgotten. And not. Like the cuckoo, heard
yesterday, out of eyeshot.

I watch him as I would a shadow. Sun-
light cuts a line between the pair of us.

AKACHI OBIJAKU

Badlands

And just like that, somehow somehow
My mind has morphed to become the scariest place I know

Where I relegate girls and women to breeding cows
Relegated to the kitchen to forever play with dough

Call it conditioning, call it socialisation
But I wake up each morning in night sweats, scary of what the day
may hold

Etched into my head is the notion of false liberation
And I paint races, genders, and religions with damaging stereotypes
so bold

With all my intelligence and cultivated consciousness
My neural links remain tainted to the point of hopelessness

And I, as great as I once thought I was
I grow wearier each day, every new knowledge causing internal wars

My mind has morphed to become the scariest place I know
My mind has morphed to become the scariest place I know

I have inflicted this disaster upon myself
And my catastrophes, through my thoughts they yell

A realisation so painful and perplexing at the same time
Being by myself begets feelings as sour as lime

Bloodlust, anger, confusion, and loneliness all rolled into one
As I navigate these badlands known as my mind

RACHEL ROBERTSON

On Fifty-Three

Give way

IS IT POSSIBLE that it has taken me fifty-three years to discover that life is essentially a project of loss and letting go? That the trajectory is one of dispersal. That what we must learn is how to grieve.

Half a century to discover something so obvious, so fundamental.

In my darkest days, I found strange comfort in just a few lines from the *Inferno* section of Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

Midway upon the journey of our life

I found myself in a dark wilderness,

for I had wandered from the straight and true.

I didn't read any more; it was simply the image of being in a dark forest half way through my life (I was about 40 at the time) that sustained me.

The other image that stayed with me was when I heard someone on the radio say that experiencing grief is like driving through a town. Eventually you get to the other side. This sounded reassuring, but I didn't find the reality matched. I seemed to be forever driving (and slowly). Was my road circular or was it just a really large town? I suspect now that I was misremembering CS Lewis' phrase about grief being a long valley, and conflating that with the fact that the car was one of the few private spaces in which I could cry without anyone else knowing.

Nonetheless, I see it is common for us to use a journey metaphor in talking about grief and loss, even though the experience isn't linear. And I still enjoy the luxury of driving by myself, when I am free to sing along with the radio, rehearse a lecture, argue with hypothetical others, laugh or, if I should so desire, cry.

Night works

A slick of Australian-made olive oil, two crushed garlic pods, some diced ginger, a squeeze of red chilli paste, turn on the flame and wait. This is all it takes to animate desire. If I sip a glass of New Zealand sauvignon blanc, still cold from the fridge, the moment is complete. I cannot prevent myself from smiling. My smallest finger slips up to my lips, rests between my teeth. I lean against the kitchen bench, stirring the pan, sipping my wine, smiling.

Strangely, I cannot remember the actual meal that has triggered this response. I remember the lover, of course, his hands, his body, his humour. Over the years, we have had quite a few meals together, many of them Asian. I expect he would be mildly pleased that the mere smell of garlic, ginger and chilli cooking triggers such fond reminiscing. If he walked in the door this moment, I'm sure he would share my wine and my pleasure. He would be pleased also that I feel only mild sadness that he no longer walks in my door.

The first time I noticed that the smell of these ingredients had this effect on me, I told myself to savour the moment, because it wouldn't last. I avoided the mix, sure that I would become immune to the reaction if I smelt it too often. I was wrong. It happens every time, at home or passing a Thai restaurant, or at a friend's house. Months, years go by, and still my limbic system is reliable. I have the memory of pleasure even before I notice the smell or think of the man.

Is this middle age, to enjoy memory as much as experience?

No exit

Some days I yearn to focus on what things are like, not what they mean. The academic project, of course, is about meaning, about naming and explaining. That is my job as university lecturer. It seems my home life projects as mother and as daughter are also that: trying to work out what everything means and what I then have to do. I want to stop and see what things are *like*, instead. To live phenomenologically. To shift my focus from understanding to experiencing the this-ness of the bits of life around me.

This project of cataloguing in order to analyse was started so early in my life that I have no memory of a time before. There is no childhood memory of texture or vision or movement or sound that is not already overlaid with a gloss of meaning. An image of our first paddling pool came into my mind the other day and I know I was in it, cooling down one English summer afternoon, with my youngest sister. The thought arises that we must be quiet in our enjoyment or we will disturb our parents. I can see the stones that edge the flower beds. We used to walk along their odd shapes, practising our balance. My sister was always better at that than me. I was strangely attracted to that row of stones but their meaning was about my weakness; how, in the physical world, my little sister was already more adept. They represented my attraction to, but discomfort with, the world outside my mind.

It strikes me now that nothing was simply an object or an experience in my childhood. Everything stood in for something abstract, of the intellect. This can't be true. It must simply be an artefact of memory, a kind of retrospective glaze that spreads backwards over my past. Before language and abstractions, children have experiences. But we rarely remember them. I may be conflating the propensity of early language talk in my family to be rather intellectual or analytical with the way we forget un-worded experiences.

Detour ahead

'The University is where ideas come to die.' This is the sort of sentence my colleague says in passing, without much emphasis, though with feeling, usually just as I am stepping out of his office. Only the next day I re-read Peter Robb's essay in *The Monthly* about not becoming a scholar. He says:

Literature ruined the lives of many young people. Not literature, but the study of literature. Like a fool, when I was young I thought the university was where to take a love of art in words. My life has been full of mistakes, and this was the greatest.

Like Robb, I escaped academia at a young age. I was tempted by an academic life—by the warm glow of leather bound books and endless

debates about Virginia Woolf—but more tempted by travel, by book publishing, by what I called ‘real life’.

Now, three decades after I finished my first degree, I’m back at a university. It’s not the same university and the name of the department has changed from English Literature to Communication and Cultural Studies, but it is still a return. The corridor I work in is only slightly more modern than the one in which my tutors worked when I was a student. It has a similar echoing feel to it. Most days there are only three or four offices occupied, and my office door might be the only one open. An administrator was heard to comment that you could use this corridor as a bowling alley and not a single academic would be struck! (This, I think, is a good dramatisation of the abiding divide between professional administrators and academics.)

I am told that in the 1980s a postgraduate student lived in the roof space just outside my office (there is a handy person-hole for access), using the tearoom as a kitchen and the toilets for washing. Apparently this student is now a professor at a Melbourne university, so his homelessness was temporary. Or perhaps he was never homeless in his heart. Perhaps the academic life provided his home.

It is old-fashioned to use books nowadays. There are colleagues here who have no books on their shelves and rarely use the library. But I still visit the university library often, and every time I do I find myself inhaling, deeply, slowly. I feel once again that combination of anticipation and serenity, that feeling that I have once more returned to the source of contentment. Like the roof-dwelling postgraduate, I have found a home in the academy and the morgue-like atmosphere of my corridor is part of this pleasure.

Occasionally, as I walk from my office to the car park, I glimpse a middle-aged man in a brown corduroy jacket. I am always thrilled to catch this sight, because it is a throw-back to my student days when academics looked like academics. There was never the chance they might pass as ‘normal’ citizens in those days—they had a different life, seemingly a charmed one. Perhaps even then the shades of the managerial revolution were falling upon them, but I didn’t see it. I believed they slumbered through their days re-interpreting *Finnegans Wake* or the Augustan poets.

The colleague who said that ideas are killed off at universities is wrong, of course. He is wrong in the most fundamental way because he is a living demonstration of true scholarship at the university. He continues his research career while meeting the many administrative and teaching demands on his time. But his comment reflects Peter Robb’s observation that ‘Today’s scholars are academic bureaucrats’.

There is a deep sadness among humanities academics that scholarship is dying and that their life’s work is no longer valued. This is rarely expressed as loss; more often, it is expressed as anger or cynicism. As a previous generation of scholars leave the system—some retiring, some being pushed out—those of us who remain must try to find our own way of doing intellectual work within a changing world. From my office window on the fourth floor, I can see across into the next building, which is being renovated to create new open plan offices. The top floor is completely gutted now; only the walls stand. I can see through the windows to the trees beyond, as if the renovated academy is empty.

Falling objects

In the books of my childhood, all the exciting and transgressive things happened around midnight. Feasts, adventures, escapes ... All the horrors, too, happened then—ghosts, deaths, strange visions, sounds in your bedroom or down the stairs. An empty house suddenly, except for the rats chattering hungrily in the attic above your bed.

In adulthood, though, it is under the harsh light of the sun that the momentous things occur. Betrayals happen over lunch, loss flies at you as you wait for the bus, despair lodges in your stomach as you sit staring at a cup of tea at 4pm, wondering if you have the energy, the will, to lift it to your lips. Wondering what your lips are for. Expecting always to be lonely.

‘Loneliness is the natural companion of the writer.’ This is Helen Garner, who can say such things without sounding pompous or self-indulgent. Who can say such things in front of one hundred people and half will nod and feel somehow reassured.

Double curve

Some years ago I presented a paper on ambiguous loss at an academic conference. My interest came because I recognised that the grief I felt about my son's diagnosis with a disability was a kind of ambiguous loss—I hadn't lost my son but I had lost some of my expectations and beliefs about him and about mothering. After I spoke at the conference, I was astounded at the number of people (mainly women) who came to ask me for details about the Pauline Boss books I had cited, and to talk about the value of naming an experience of grief as ambiguous. It was as if giving it a specific name helped people feel their grief was valid or understood. This may be similar to the way I took comfort in Dante's image of the dark forest.

I still sometimes feel loss about my son's disability—because he experiences challenges, because we live a life in the margins, because he is different from me and I sometimes struggle to bridge the gap between us. At other times I am happy and fulfilled as a mother. When I think about his future, I feel uncertainty and fear and, if I let it, those feelings can immediately close over into a kind of blankness that is similar to feeling depressed. I'm getting much better, though, about allowing myself to feel the uncertainty and fear and to accept those confronting emotions without closing down.

In her essay 'Memory and Imagination', Patricia Hampl notes that 'Pain has strong arms'. I love this phrase and how it can be understood in a variety of ways. In the essay she is making the point that we retain images that are associated with painful or negative experiences from the past, but that over time the emotion and the image may become separated. Memoir, she says, 'seeks a permanent home for feeling and image, a habitation where they can live together'. Writing memoir allows us to fasten our loss to the page with an image, a process which paradoxically holds and releases grief.

One way

My mother is eighty-nine. I am part of the generation of 'career' women who care for ageing parents and young or teenage children at once. Like my own ageing, like mothering, like being single, and like working in

academia, watching my mother age is an experience infused with loss but containing much else as well. It is a privilege to witness someone confronting their final years with such determination and courage. It is also hard to watch this.

My son and my mother get on well, as they always have done. They are both at their most gentle with each other. Their conversations are a little surprising at times because of my mother's deafness and my son's unusual take on life. Some years ago, my son became interested in death. We visited the Fremantle Cemetery several times and had various conversations about death and its aftermath. He was inclined to accept the possibility of heaven in spite of my atheism. He created a cemetery in our garden, using a patch of dirt and cutting out cardboard headstones labelled 'Henri Matisse 1869–1954 RIP', 'Claude Monet 1840–1926 RIP', and so on. When my mother visited us (she was still mobile in those days), he took her on a tour of the cemetery. As I went to make a pot of tea, I heard her commenting that it was a bit bare. By the time I had returned, my son was looking a little startled.

'But they don't grow, do they?' he asked.

'Yes, dear, of course they will, with a nice bit of fertiliser and water', replied my mother.

'Is that how they get up to heaven?'

'Oh, does he believe in heaven?' my mother asked me, shocked.

Later that night my son asked me whether bones did in fact grow out of the ground in cemeteries if you watered them. I explained my mother had been suggesting he plant some flowers in our cemetery. He looked unconvinced, as children so often do when we try to explain either muddles or mysteries.

Nowadays, my son does jobs around the house for my mother or talks to her about school while I do the jobs. They are both very matter of fact people, so when we have been there for precisely one hour and fifty-five minutes, they start saying goodbye to each other, regardless of what I am saying or doing. They both know that the right period for a visit is two hours.

Because of this forthrightness, I have talked to my mother about dying, though it is not something we discuss often or in detail. She says

she is ready to go; I say that I am not ready for her to go. She just smiles, as if to say, 'you'll learn'.

Under construction

I wanted to write about being fifty-three, about middle age and how I begin only now to understand that loss is central to our lives and to becoming ourselves. I wanted to write about the haphazard nature of our journey—that the road never takes us through the town. I wanted to write about how recording loss is like returning to the self. I wanted to write all this in fifty-three short paragraphs; that would have been neat. But instead I have learned Bret Lott's maxim first hand: 'Form follows necessity'. I know, really, that there is no neat way to describe the relationship between middle age and learning to grieve, between everyday loss and identity. The closer I approach my topic, the further it is from my grasp.

This is why we have poetry. This is why Dante's work spoke so clearly to me. This is the reason I have gravitated back to the academy and its library. Like pain, poetry has strong arms.

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HEATHER RICHARDSON

It's Mr Otello . . .

. . . they said the night
we walked into that pub in Athlone and
I fell in love with the way you laughed it off

but

the jokes didn't stop. Sweat pricked
on your scalp. The heat was merciless.
Who were those men who interpreted
grace as permission?

Hate has a smell.
You taught me that. It leaks through the gaps
between words, escapes like the drift of perfume
when a coat is shrugged off.

And here's you
with a weight in your chest, caught in the net
of your veins, laid out in loops of slow fuse.
Is this why, for us, love has worn down?
That taint in their mouth.
This cloud in our blood.

Shake Hole

Winter confines the climber. I was reduced
to the sweat-slick nubs
of an indoor climbing wall.
That's where we met.
You, a caver out of place
free-scrambling plastic rocks,
and me, dangling
in hopes of a belay slave.

There is no timescale to the making of a shake hole.
It is a most discreet submission.
The rain's enquiring tongue
roots for a fresh tight place to taste,
dilating fissures into hidden rooms.

Ill-met by torchlight, proud in our neoprene,
beyond coach-parties and their guides,
we reach the cave's mouth,
fingertip our way down the earth's throat.
You name the layers in descending order.
The vault above our heads drips liquid rock.

Today may be the day
when gravity agrees
with filigrees of cracks
and the roof comes caving in.

VAUGHAN RAPATAHANA

My Love in the River

I hadn't caught a poem for
quite some time.

there were the usual excuses.
too busy/too tired;
nothing worth fishing up
from the dull banks of memory.

then you swam by,
closer to the
surface.

I had seen your reflection
before,
but you seemed

sleeker now

& me,
more o p e n
to the bait,
the lure of

new
lines
to cast;

another dish
to savour.

He Kōrero Ki Taku Tipuna

[Te Whiti o Rongomai 'heard a thunder and sensed an approaching flood']

auē, Te Whiti o Rongomai,
ko wai e mahara koe
ināianeī?
ko wai kua whakarongo
ki tau whakaaro mōhio?
ko wai kua whai
tau kupu o rangimārie?

ko parihaka te wāhi

auē, Te Whiti o Rongomai,
te matakite tuatahi ki mua mahatma gandhi,
he kaiārahi ki he kaupapa
tino tūturu.
kei whea koe, taku tipuna,
ina e hiahia ana koe o mātou
neke atu i te ake?

ko parihaka te wāhi

auē, kei te tino matapouri ahau
no te mea
ngā iwi katoa
kua wareware tau kite.

ki konei te whaititiri rāua ko te waipuke tonu.

ko parihaka he pūmahara tawhiti.

[A Talk with My Ancestor]

alas, Te Whiti o Rongomai
who remembers you now?
who has listened to your intelligent ideas,
who has followed your words of peace?

Parihaka is the place

alas, Te Whiti o Rongomai,
the first prophet before Mahatma Gandhi,
a leader with an original philosophy.
where are you, my ancestor,
when we need you
more than ever?

Parihaka is the place

alas, I am very sad,
because
the people
have forgotten your vision.

the thunder and flood are already here.

Parihaka is a distant memory

[Note: Te Whiti o Rongomai, descended from Awanuiarangi, was a paramount Taranaki leader, who in the mid-1800s established at Parihaka a unique settlement. He was perhaps the first proponent of passive resistance, apotheosising a philosophy of no recourse to weaponry and no physical violence—despite massive confiscation of Māori lands by the Pākehā colonialists. Because of the perceived threat of the rapidly growing settlement, the Pākehā invaded Parihaka with over 1,500 armed troops and arrested Te Whiti in 1881. He was charged with *wickedly, maliciously, and seditiously contriving and intending to disturb the peace*. He was imprisoned with his co-leader, Tohu Kakahi, in the South Island until 1883. Te Whiti had long before prophesied the coming of the whiteman and the concomitant diminishment of Te Ātiawa lands when he literally saw the thunder and flood approaching in his visions.]

ERICA DE JONG

The Prelude

Your freckles make constellations
across your shoulders, my fingers
want to trace them. Softly, like the
midday breeze through the potted
ferns; softly, the way rain begins
in the small hours.

Your eyes take my breath and give
it back to me, kinder than before.
All time stops when you kiss my
nose, my forehead, my cheek, my
collarbones.

And every crease in these sheets
remembers; the sweat on our palms,
our sandy toes. Inviting us back
to our small cotton world, to each
other's arms.

The Marooning

I left my heart	at Shipstern Bluff
the heart I left	was not enough
to pull you from	the icy mouth
of waves and caves,	the sophist's house.

I left it there	to float away
the last king tide	of middle May
I waited for	the call, your call
the promise	of your all.

You left me there	atop the cliff
to flounder, fall	and question if
the time we had	was liquid, lies
the dreamer's words	the writer's guise.

I left my heart	again, again
the rose-gold lens	awash again.

ANNA DENEJKINA

He Lives with a Mountainous View from the Window

It was her and him, and you and my that gave me this,
And infancy, pubescent dreams, and adulthood that made it this,
This, is what it is, we're the star walkers going and to and fro,
I've lost so many to the break, and then their cries, and *Oh*—their silly
blues-filled souls,
And then I ruined him with walls, and hate, and then he became me,
I've wanted to apologise for his mountains three years now, for the
ones he built from pain and for some kind of strength and to keep me
at bay when I kept him at bay,
He was a lover and a quasi saint, chasing an enigma high on that
rusted, jagged slug of pain you probably had inside of you, too;

He became me as I walked away, morphed into me without touching
bone,
He couldn't climb walls and so he became me: a sorry soul,
And so he became, but he became when I grew, when I breathed,
when I became something better than this,
It was I and me, and self that gave him this,
And my childhood, puberty and adulthood made him into this,
This, is what it is, he's the star walker going and to and fro,
He lost himself to the break, rolling on and on in so much shame,
He lost himself looking out from that blue window in the Southern
Highlands.

Irina

Last night I pondered for those long lost times Mama would wrap me
in a blanket,
Kiss me goodnight,
Tell me to seek delight in dreams,
And to dream wildly;

And in this thought I recognised that she would wrap me in that
blanket nevermore,
Or walk me to my bedroom—eyes puffy, squinting,
Or carry me to bed again—after she found me sleeping on that old,
green sofa, or on the playroom floor;

And in this thought I recognised one day I may not have my Mother,
Whom I chat with getting ready for bed with in that tidy guest bedroom
with—in that warm, large, home-made-food-smelling house,
As I visit over scant, declining weekends;

She put me down one day, and never picked me back up,

And in this thought I drifted down and in,
And dreamt another wild dream,
And I don't know how to turn that coming loss into poetry.

Find the Woods

The air was cold, and I was spinning with a basket in my hand,
Head tilted back in a chorus of mist and leaves,
And my skirt circled and air passed through the fingers of a palm
opened,
Spinning on and on until the trees and leaves and the brown seemed
to be a white room surrounding me;
Binding me;
In its centre, of the never-ending white on white on white,
The disorientation pounded my head,
Like the time I was lost at a fair in Yalta:
Spinning around and around glued to that one point in the concrete,
Trying to catch a glimpse of the familial beyond my purple sunglasses
masking red eyes.
And so the forest was a white room,
And each side and sight identical to the last,
And I had finally figured out how people became lost in the
summerwoods in the East of Europe,

And found limp and peaceful only meters from the road and their car
that stood on that road:

The final safety to take them home was cloaked in a plume of white
on white on white,
I have not stepped into that forest fifteen years now,
But its white room comes back every once in a while,
Catches me in its centre every once in a while,
And I am still hoping to make it to the side of the road before the
whiteness suffocates me,
Before it seeps inside that place in my mind,
Except, it feels like it's coming from the inside.

ANDERS HOWERTON

7X7

The body walked a long and broken line
to find you. The body has
found you. And here now
along the cabled meridian
the coastline inflects like
a persimmon ripening
its night to sun wash, oh believe
in us, sharks. There was no trail
here, no engineering marvel
of language. And still free lift,
and still a vortex of air
off wingtip: we step in form.
A link is infinite is
a disjoint of simple closed
curves. And complement of K.
There, we've done it, we've
laced the ligature, and out
beyond the Farallones,
our old coastline is calling,
saying, *in the interim*
start again. Spring tides are in.

An Original Series

The beasts think of no pronoun
where the hillside buckles – and
so much code in my notes now.
Decipher the trails beaten
like where would we go if
on infrasound? Like the old
road through the valley – gone now
and so following only
the breast wall and thistle – I,
a seismic and slumped back.
The robots run things, but still
I hear you through the soles
of my feet. Pass and vanish
have both been suggested to me –
algorithmic argument,
and I do like it. I do.
Hit the path, the forward slash –
stutter, buffer, gutter, load.
Lover, the math has done me.
I am burning, like memory,
ash on the verb of history.

SEAN CRAWLEY

The 'D' Word

SOMEWHERE IS A NOTE I have written to myself about what I should be doing next. It contains a general preamble followed by a set of dot points. It all came to me after a long walk on the beach, and I jotted it down with a pen and a piece of paper I found in my shoulder bag. Maybe it was the cool breeze, maybe it was the vitamin D courtesy of the sun, but whatever it was, the clarity was lovely—and somewhat rare these days.

For the life of me, I can't find this piece of paper with my brilliant ideas. It's lost, like me.

There's a school of thought that says if you can't remember something, then it mustn't have been important enough in the first place. I've never been sure about that idea. When I was younger and used to write songs I'd sometimes forget them—even after I'd thought, *this is a bloody good one*. I'd get distracted, or have to go to work, or sleep; and later, the melody, chord harmony and rhythm would be gone, never to be retrieved. Sure some snippets could be grasped, but the magic whole was gone, and it was sad. But I was young and resilient then.

Come to think of it, maybe that was an early sign of what was to come.

I remember a band mate saying if the song didn't stick in my head, then it would never have been a hit. But we never had any hits! So I disputed his frame of reference. And I now know this theory is bullshit. Sometimes I can't remember my name; and your name is important, isn't it?

The umbrella term is dementia. They're still trying to work out exactly where my brain sits under that umbrella, but really it's not that important because the rain's blowing in and wetting me anyhow. Some days are worse than others. One glorious bonus, if you can call it that,

is that some days I even forget that I have dementia. Like when I went for the walk on the beach and experienced uninterrupted clarity which I cleverly wrote down on paper. Then the dementia kicked in again and the paper went missing. It could turn up one day in the freezer, or in a shoe, or more likely it is gone forever. I'm just hoping that some of my brilliant ideas about what I should be doing next come back into my plaque-riddled brain.

Yes, they reckon it's plaque—named so since it looks a bit like the stuff that accumulates on your teeth. Problem is we don't have a brainbrush or cerebral floss, yet. There's some promising stuff going on with ultrasound and I imagine one day sitting in a waiting room, with a whole bunch of pregnant women and people with sports injuries, waiting for my turn with the gel and the thing-a-me-jig and watching the plaque on my brain disappear right in front of my eyes on a fuzzy black-and-white monitor.

Can you count backwards from 103 by sevens? And how good are you at drawing intersecting pentagons?

When Sally took me to the doctors because I'd just moved into a new suburb and needed a new GP, I let her do the talking for me. I was having a bit of trouble that day with pronouncing the names of all my medications. She is smart, my daughter, and though I was embarrassed at the time, I'm sort of glad that she mentioned my memory issues. What caught me offguard was that the doctor, this young Muslim woman, gave me a memory test—right there and then on the spot! I said to Sally after the appointment that if I'd only known I was going have a test, I could've studied for it. She laughed.

Sally laughs a lot at me these days. It's sort of rewarding because for years I worked my arse off to crack jokes that would get a giggle out of her. Now I don't have to try. I can say or do something without realising it's hilarious. Sally apologises for laughing, and I reassure her it's okay and give her permission to go for it. When she does laugh it's contagious, and it gets me going as well. I like laughing. It makes everything feel better—even makes my toasted sandwich taste better.

I do miss the joy I once got from the tastes of different foods. Now I only seem to be able to taste ice cream, and beer.

My new doctor referred me for a whole series of further tests. Unfortunately you can't study for a blood test or a brain scan. But I did rehearse some responses for the memory specialist. I wanted one last chance to cheat the diagnosis. I had this sickening fear that if I got the label, people would abandon me. It was pointless though, because he asked me if there was a family history of dementia as he stood looking at my brain, illuminated on the wall. I was a dead-set-goner.

I couldn't lie; my mother had it and so did her mother. I mentioned that my brother and my sister were both older than me and have memories as sharp as tacks. He said it may or may not be genetic, but it does run in families, and who gets it and who doesn't is still a mystery.

That night I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about my mum and her mother. Apart from the dementia they were both healthy active women. Though they were highly strung. Aunty June reckoned they were manic. 'Both of them', she said.

They were highly strung . . . they were highly strung . . . they were highly strung. I couldn't get that phrase out of my mind. I tossed and turned and could hear a choir singing somewhere out there in the night.

I got up out of bed and turned on the telly. I couldn't focus on anything. I kept thinking about what was wrong with me. I grabbed a Cornetto out of the freezer and ate it. Even it had no taste that night.

The next day I was a mess. My brother called and I told him about my diagnosis. He said he'd come over on Friday and we'd go out for beers and he'd stay the night. After we hung up I had to find a calendar to work out when that would be. I had written my specialist appointment in a box labelled Wednesday, and I was pretty sure that was yesterday. So it must've have been Thursday, and that meant my brother was coming the next day—that's right, isn't it?

I was exhausted but wired. I had some Valium stashed away somewhere for my fear of flying, but I couldn't find them. I couldn't find anything since I moved house. Why-oh-why I did that I'll never know. I started going through everything. I found a photo album from

long ago. I opened it and could remember everything in it. The holiday to Thailand, Sally's graduation, the VC Valiant sedan that I loved with a passion, the old work crew, a band photo with us all sporting the most ridiculous haircuts you could imagine. Then I had a good cry.

I calmed down a bit. I found the Valium. I took four and slept the rest of that Thursday, right through to Friday morning. I must have needed it. I can only tell you this because my brother reminded me of it the other day and I wrote it all down in an exercise book. Writing stuff down helps a lot. Thank you, ancestors, for inventing writing.

Somewhere I have written a note to myself about what I should be doing next, but I lost it. Oh yeah, I've told you that, sorry.

If I don't lose the bits of paper, or the exercise book, I cope quite well. Looking back through my exercise books, which have become diaries really, can be great fun. And I have to laugh about the fact that my brother can't remember how we got home after too many beers that Friday night. The next morning he asked me if I could remember what happened. I told him he must be desperate if he was asking me, the demented one. He laughed and suggested we'd ridden our beer scooters home. I love my brother.

While I wait for a cure, or death, I remind myself: I have some great friends, and family that love me, and I love them. They don't care about the 'D' word. And if I don't worry about it either, I function well enough. The anxiety is bad. Maybe it's even the cause of brain plaque.

Can you smell fear?

No?

Neither can I.

But it's in the air, everywhere. Fear is flaring up again like a solar storm, cyclic and devastating. The animals are frightened of us. The dogs bark and the horses whinny. Can you feel the earth sobbing? The waters advancing? And how about the heat? It will cook us for sure—unless an uprising of the downtrodden and excluded comes sooner than Mother Nature. The long-awaited revolution of all revolutions. The one

to prove, once and for all, that civilisation is possible, and desirable. The revolution to shut up the anarchists and conspiracy theorists, forever.

Does that make sense?

No?

Let me explain.

What was I talking about?

I'm going for a walk along the beach now. You never know, the salty breeze and the yellow light may help me remember where I put that list of what to do next. Or better still, maybe I won't need that list at all today. Maybe everything will be at peace in my confused mind. Clarity: my kingdom for a moment of it.

If not I'll have a beer and a Cornetto at the same time, and forget about stuff.

Forgetting's not all bad, and I am good at it.

CHARLES KELL

Thirteen Keys

This one goes to the hot, damp
cellar.

This one for the forest door.

The second-floor bathroom stays locked
for reasons never told.

A shed out back holds many sharp tools.

This one is for a jewellery box housing eggshells
& hangnails.

The velvet dresser drawer with unmentionables.

For your mother's secret slip though there's
nothing inside. 'Jewry box' she would say.

This dark wall has a hole you can hide things in.

I kept my novel in here then it disappeared.

One is for the cage in the attic (never go up
there alone).

One is to unlock the phone.

This is for the liquor cabinet where they keep the pills
& soap.

This opens the box with your father's ashes.

One for your sister's diary with the string of baby teeth.

A key for the library of worm-eaten books.

If the roof starts to shake, here, there's a box
you can crawl into.

There's no way out yet your body soon grows
accustomed to each shrinking side.

Faster Magnet

Soft body writhes on a tongue
of thorns. Turned to a pillar
of salt watching the beautiful city
burn. You could conceal
what made you stay. Hide
the crushed hyacinth in a torn
pocket. Only within the compart-
ment of flesh can your face be revealed.
It draws you near, a faster magnet
blotting out agency, your ability
to run away. The moving sky
quicker now, bated breath blows
over the cracked tips of your lips.
Be careful when you look for some-
thing you might not want to find.
A slow black ant lumbers across
your big toe. The white bone
of some animal pokes up from the sand.

OUYANG YU

The Day

Is heavy upon the man
whose back is bent in making an effort
at stool
so much to happen
and yet
nothing as he plans
the birds started, again, singing
in unison with the recorded voice
alerting people to a reversing truck
as the man's eye, searching for yesterday's olds
made mistakes like a 3rd-year student
seeing a leaping Democrat
and words worth a thousand
paintings in a post-landlove
era, with someone living
on rape
and all that sort of (no)thing
still working out the lightness
of the heavy
day

《心 or Heart》

Is heart meant to hear
or an organ of art

why is it matched with
心, with three drops of water

When 心 lies like this
horizontally, it is over-determined

but if it stands vertical
like this 丩, a lean-to with 青

green and spring
something more than love or 愛

see that there is 心 inside it
and that it lies horizontal

so determined
but when 丩 is left and 青 is right

like this: 情
minus one drop of water

it stands straight
like spring

not determined
but more determined

because it is ever
green

it happens when one grows past
a certain age

CAOIMHE MCKEOGH

Visitor

1.
I say home
as I step onto the platform
that's been tasting my sandals just a month
my clothes hang on a rooftop near here
my shampoo has a shelf in the shower
I can find it in three different directions
and pronounce the name correctly in the dark
'pretty lady where you going?'
'home'

2.
wet eyes tickle my edges and I squirm
I'm a woman not a person
you can tell by the way that I giggle my discomfort
instead of shouting stop

you can also see it in the dance of my eyes
as I duck my way down a busy street
and let my hair swing a bit more than necessary
'can I help you, gorgeous?'
'no' I am whole

3.
traveller

human

tourist is a dirty word
my pores are filled with real dust

I smile at their nerves, scorn their small shorts
'oh no – Westerners'
they don't understand our city
my home

'they' 'our'
yet we shine in the same colour
the colour of I-wasn't-built-for-this-climate
the colour of I-think-I'll-wear-a-bindi-they're-cute
the colour of ooh-take-a-photo-of-that-beggar-boy
(if only the dust could coat me)

I stare them down like a local
my eyes lust-free
and blue

4.
'lovely smile, your heart so good
but you have mind like butterfly'
he stops me every day to read my aura
for a few thousand rupees
and maybe some chai

we see right through each other
he doesn't know we've met before
I'm nothing but white noise

his eyes work perfectly

he sees opportunity
and never fails to knock
taking his place in the orchestra of this city
as rickshaw drivers slam hands on seats in invitation
and children laugh
because the all-night orange of the sky is their ceiling
and why would you want anything more than the stars?

5.

there are as many stars as sandflies, she says
but the flies' lives are measured in days
and the stars go on forever

you can count them while you fall asleep
or sniff some glue
close your eyes tight
spin with their imaginary friends

6.

sandflies are small
look how much power you have in just one fingertip
end a tiny life
'that'll teach you to bother me'

life is what matters here
(is what travellers claim to learn
while tourists take photos of potholes
and indignities)
all you have to do is live
push yourself through to the front of the crowd
bother as many people as it takes to get cash for a morning beedie

when you're tired, find a place to sleep
and there you'll be, sleeping

7.

I'll climb the too-many-stairs-for-this-sort-of-weather
close the door behind me
spread my life through this building
tell everyone I'm happy here
and outside
people who don't distinguish between travellers and tourists
have learned enough English
to name a patch of concrete
'home'

moonlight

cradled between arms and couch
both yours, both warm, both smell the same
my hair dances self-consciously for your nose
(even your night-breath growls of man)
for the first time all week I feel soft enough to sleep
but instead I decide to feel the alive
that your skin is giving mine
the tiny puddle soaking into my shoulder
at the corner of your mouth

stay silent all dark until
the birds begin laughing
at morning struggling its way out of dusk

EMILY FRANCINE PALMER

The Day Was a Wednesday

THE DAY WAS a Wednesday, when the jets first flew overhead. The lawns were finally just right, neatly edged and the flowerbeds fragrant with mulch. Geraniums, purchased in square seeding pots from the hardware store down the road, bloomed, plastic petals only noticeable on close inspection. A red and white tile verandah elongated into a pathway, leading to the centre attraction: the fountain. Nymphs and sprites cavorted around its faux-marble stem, snatching at the water flowing into the basin. My husband saw one in Rome once, and immediately put the idea forward when I asked to landscape the backyard.

‘A fountain’, he said, and handed over a printed picture.

Pre-prepared, like he had always known I wanted a nicer garden.

‘That one.’

He cared nothing for the choice of flowers, and made no mention of whether he preferred rounded edges or sharp corners. I made the choices. I bought the fountain.

Our marriage twenty years ago was much the same as this landscaping frustration. He never quite said yes, but certainly never said no. I didn’t force him. I broached the notion, face as yet unlined and virtue mostly intact, and he ‘supposed’ it was an okay alternative. Alternative to what? I didn’t ask. I was too caught up in my own bliss and happily-ever-after to bother. A bustle of white dresses and table arrangements and invitations, addressed in a flowing calligraphy that occasionally stumbled across the page, letters not quite even. He gave me a ring; an heirloom he said. Another word for a hand-me-down. After the big day we fell into comfortable harmony, the right way of things as he called it. The skills I learnt were valuable, I’m sure, but he brought in the money. I laundered the suits of his success. Navy and black and his favourite, the grey. He wore black to the wedding. Sometimes in the middle of the daily clean, I slip on the blazer and model it for a cooing, appreciative

audience. They ask me questions, important ones. My shoulders square, broaden; I stand tall. My shoes, discarded, so toes can flex against the thick carpet. Knuckles crack; a disgusting habit, he says.

On that Wednesday, I was washing dishes. Re-washing, really. Guests were coming over for dinner, work colleagues. He reserved formality for higher-ups, single-minded in his ambition. My friends and I met for drinks in casual bars made for lighthearted conversation. I would wear my hair down, and dance in comfortable flats. My legs weren’t a decoration on those nights. I could just be myself.

It was the knock on the door that surprised me the most. The sound of engines, the roaring, the shaking of my carefully dried, double-washed china; that was normal. Our house was under a domestic flight path. Constant petitions went around for it to be changed, complaints about the noise. My next door neighbour’s wife had become a flight path activist. Her children couldn’t sleep, she couldn’t sleep. Change had to happen, to make their lives better. I listened to her rants, but I did not understand them. Progress, she called it. She went to rallies.

No one knocked on my door during the day. My husband left at 7am every morning, and was home by 6pm each night. *He* would tap gently before using his key, as if affording me privacy. An announcement that he was about to breach it. A moment to get my face ready for the world, instead of just ready for myself. Between 7am and 6pm, no one came. There was a sign: *No trespassers*. It was hammered into the lawn by the front gate the first day we moved in, a newly married couple. ‘I don’t want people disturbing you’, he had said.

So I was surprised by the knock. It lacked urgency; just a soft tap-tap-tap against the wood. Not the lion-head, specifically designed for the task—my caller used a hand. I pulled off my apron, smoothed my dress. Checked my reflection in the hallway mirror. A curl needed pinning; I tucked it behind my ear.

The man on the other side of the door was young. Non-threatening, with big blue eyes and the slightly blemished skin of those fresh out of adolescence. They don’t tell you that in school. You assume that you turn twenty and all the acne problems of youth disappear. I have a rigorous regime of skin care, even now. A cleanser, a scrub, a moisturiser. Used

twice a day. It keeps me young, or so my husband says approvingly, as if age is to be warded off at all costs.

I could not be scared by a boy with pimples, so I smiled at him instead. His uniform, navy with red trim, was unfamiliar. The embroidered crest, foreign. The collar well starched, stiff and sharp-edged. ‘Hello’, I said. ‘How can I help you?’

Without a change in expression, he stepped forward and pushed into my house, his shoulders bumping mine. This, too, surprised me. The shock of the wall colliding with my back as I stumbled away from him. The feel of his hand closing around my elbow as he towed me down the hallway. The slam of the living room door behind us. The soft welcome of the couch, hand-picked on a weekend excursion to the furniture store, as he forced me to sit. I would have done so anyway. My knees were weak, hands and tongue threatened by encroaching numbness, heart racing in my chest. He seemed to read my distress, and turned his back. His thick fingers coasted along the mantelpiece, pausing on a framed photograph. A happiness-soaked couple peered out into the world from the filigree border; their arms wrapped securely around each other. Anchors to prevent the current sweeping them apart. The woman wore a delicate white dress, lace twining up from the bodice to encircle her throat; the man a black suit, blond hair slicked back from a high forehead. A scene from the best day of my life.

‘Where is your husband?’ he said, voice unexpectedly deep. It didn’t fit with his schoolboy appearance. He picked up the picture, hand obscuring my half of the image. Now it’s just the man, disembodied arms clutching at his waist.

‘At work. Until 6.’ Shouldn’t that be obvious?

He took a moment to process the information, staring down at the picture. ‘I’m sorry to inform you that your country is under attack, Mrs ...?’

‘Jameson.’

‘Mrs Jameson, and as of one hour ago, your prime minister has stepped down. We are now in control.’

He didn’t sound remotely apologetic. He just sounded remote. Like my husband, when I failed to complete a task adequately or rearranged

his papers, fingers halted by the crimson confidential stamp. He always tried to force disappointment, rage, unhappiness into his tone, but never quite managed to sound anything other than resigned. As if my failure was expected. His speeches were printed pictures of fountains, prepared in advance, always ready for the moment I didn’t quite live up to expectations.

‘Who is in control?’ I asked. His eyebrows rose, mouth tightening.

‘You don’t need to know.’

We were silent after that, until the beep of the washing machine cut through the tension. The immediate desire to jump up and retrieve the laundry was curbed; I looked to him for guidance. His blue eyes narrowed, as he took in my eagerness.

‘You can get that, if you like.’ His suspicion, although not evident in his voice, was clear as he followed me out of the living room. I unloaded the machine, transferring the sturdier clothes to the dryer, and others to a basket, ready for the clothes line.

‘Can I hang these up?’ The question was met with a terse nod. He followed me there, too. He didn’t offer to help, as I pegged out the delicate lace underwear and thin polyester blouses. He stopped me before I could return to the living room, his eyes softer.

‘Just continue whatever you were doing’, he ordered. ‘Continue with your day like normal.’

It didn’t seem an unreasonable request. My husband, on the rare days he gave in to illness and stayed home from work, said much the same thing. ‘Continue as normal’, but unlike most days, normal was a test. I put on my nicest dress, and vacuumed in heels and straight lines, instead of barefoot with a waltz to my step. His eyes watched me from the couch, which served as his sickbed, judging how many times I swept my duster along the shelves. I would make a casserole for lunch, and cookies for later, longing for the simple salad that was everyday ‘normal’.

‘Okay’, I agreed. I went back into the kitchen and retied my apron. The ingredients were already neatly laid out. Prepared earlier in the day, before jets and door knocking. One cup of sugar, two. Flour, carefully sifted. Four eggs, cracked and discarded. Coconut for originality, chocolate chips for a gooey, molten surprise. Baking powder, to ensure

a soft explosion in the oven, a perfect rise to the edge of the tin. Butter. Then more butter. It may add curve to my hips, but it brings a smile to my face. I got the feeling the boy in the next room needed all the smiles he could get. I whisked it all together, beating until my arms trembled, until it lay smooth and sweet in the bowl. Twirling a finger in the mixture, I raised it to my mouth. When I turned to switch on the oven, the boy was staring at me from the doorway, eyes dark.

‘Would you like something to drink?’ I said politely, because my mother raised me to be polite and I didn’t think she would want me to deviate from her lessons just because a strange man was in my house.

‘No’, he said, and took a seat at the kitchen table. *His* mother clearly didn’t think manners were important.

Skin prickling under his regard, I scooped the mixture into the tin. The oven had reached a perfect temperature; the heat radiated outwards, as I opened the door to slide the cake home. The timer was set for twenty minutes, and had ticked through five of these when the gentle tap-tap came, followed by the squeak of a key turning in the lock. The clock only read quarter to five. He shouldn’t be home yet, but that fact didn’t negate the sound of his voice, echoing down the corridor.

‘Tilly, where are you? Tilly?’ Quick footsteps closed on us. The boy was on his feet. Whatever was clutched under his jacket removed any trace of adolescent innocence from his face. Now he was a man; hard-jawed, cold-eyed, unafraid. My husband entered the room. His hair was ruffled, as if combed repeatedly by anxious fingers, and his tie crooked.

‘Tilly’, he said, taking in the scene. His brow furrowed as if he couldn’t quite understand what was going on.

‘Mr Jameson’, the boy-man moved forward. ‘I have several things I need to discuss with you. If you could step through to the living room, so we don’t disturb your wife.’

An unfamiliar pang made me protest, ‘I want to hear what you have to say, too.’

My husband cut me a sharp look. ‘Tilly.’

The boy-man spoke at the same time. ‘Finish making the cake.’

The two men retreated from the kitchen, and I spent the remaining fifteen minutes on the timer alternating between opening the oven door

to check on the browning top, and leaning out into the hall, straining for a snippet of conversation. The silence mocked me. The house could have been empty. When the timer went off with its usual *brrrrrinnng*, I rushed through the preparations; a sift of icing sugar, two clean plates, a sharp knife yielding a neat cut. The triangles fell onto the china, melting chocolate smearing across the white. The living room door was ajar and I didn’t pause to knock. It was my house.

The gun went off as I entered the room, plates held away from my body. Blood painted the walls with red teardrops, paper ruined. My eyes went first to the shattered photograph frame, before falling to the body in front of the mantelpiece. The hairline, in steady regression over the past few years, was blown into a second gaping mouth. One that would never again tell me to stay in the kitchen. I resisted the urge to crouch and straighten his tie. He wouldn’t like to be found like this. Disordered. It would give the wrong impression.

The boy was holding the pistol, which trembled slightly. I walked to his side; placed a hand on his shoulder.

‘Would you like a slice?’

‘You’ll have to come with me’, he replied. ‘We have a place prepared for the women.’

He took the plate from me. I had forgotten the cutlery.

WES LEE

Thank you Sinéad

YouTube 7.8.2017 (After Paris Lees, *The Guardian* 9.8.2017)

When you talked of the hole
in your soul
no pills
could touch.
You tried them and it was
OK for a while
(as it so often is)
then the great ghost
came up
(its Christmas rattle)
no bolts could stop,
no locked
bedroom doors.

Thank you Sinéad
for opening
your mouth
while most stay closed and die
with death
certificates
that three days later
say something else
than the family said
than a mother or a father said
than a jailer said
than a propaganda
artist said.

Thank you Sinéad
when you talked
in the throes
of madness.
When you showed your
messy self.

ELIZABETH MACFARLANE

The Curve of a Creek

RESEARCH GRANT SCHEME
Encounter Early Career Researcher Award
Proposal for Funding Commencing in 2017

EA

PROJECT ID: EA170100001

First Investigator: Dr Example Example

Admin Org: University of Example

Total number of sheets contained in this Proposal: 6

Part 1 – Administrative Summary

1A. Proposal Working Title

The Curve of a Creek – Third Person Autobiography

1B. Person Participant Summary

Number	Name	Participant Type	Current Organisation(s)
1	Dr Example Example	Encounter Early Career Researcher Award	University of Example

1C. Organisation Participant Summary

Number	Name	Participant Type
1	University of Example	Administering Organisation

1D. Proposal Summary

She masturbated to ‘NSFW Gifs’ on Reddit early in the morning. Most of the gifs were of women revealing their perfect breasts from under different kinds of t-shirts. She was heterosexual but was turned on by the thought of the six thousand five hundred men who up-voted the gif jerking off to the woman revealing her breasts.

1E. Impact Statement

Afterwards, she felt disgusting, and changed her underwear. She dozed for a while and heard her boyfriend making toast in the kitchen. They usually didn’t share a bed at night because he snored and she slept light. She heard him bring the toast back to his room. She lay there for a while longer, then got up to seek him out.

Part 2 – Classifications and Other Statistical Information

2A. Does this Proposal fall within one of the Science and Research Priorities?

For a while they cuddled and she told him she felt disgusting. He said she needed more sleep. She dropped tears on his t-shirt. He looked sexy in the morning, orange stubble and a kind smile. His screen was paused on an episode of *The Night Of*. They talked about having sex later after she’d finished her work, but she said she couldn’t face her work, so he said ‘let’s make love’.

All she had to do was put her hair up in a pony-tail and back into him and he was glazed over and half-hard. She’d already come and knew she wouldn’t come again so soon. She wanted it from behind and told him, and he said ‘yeah’, in the low, dry voice he had when he was aroused.

2B. Field of Research (FOR)

Select up to three classification codes that relate to your Proposal.

Later in the shower, she still felt disgusting.

She looked down at her body and pushed her stomach out so she could see the little wiry hairs that grew below her navel, the stretch marks, and the Caesarean scar that ran along the edge of her pubic hair.

The scar created a small lip of flesh. She rubbed it all with soap, then washed between her legs, turning the soap on its side to clean between the lips of her vagina. She rubbed until it stung.

2C. Socio-Economic Objective (SEO-08)

Select up to three classification codes that relate to your Proposal.

In her study, she opened her emails and a clean MS Word page.

She downloaded the documents she’d emailed to herself the day before at work, and resized them on the screen. A sample grant application, a copy of the latest grant funding rules, and her blank document.

She composed a heading and sub-heading at the top of her page and began writing.

2D. Interdisciplinary Research

Does this Proposal involve interdisciplinary research?

The grant application was due during school holidays. With her son home from school, she grabbed portions of time to add to her growing document. When he was watching a 40-minute nature documentary, she re-drafted the budget justification section. While he bounced on the trampoline, she double-checked her reference list, making sure each entry was consistently formatted. When he came over to tell her he was bored, she closed the computer and suggested a walk or a board game or baking biscuits, and put the grant application out of her mind.

In approximately 50 words, please indicate the nature of the interdisciplinary research involved.

Her boyfriend came home and they cooked the plain meal that her son preferred: steamed vegetables with sausages or crumbed fish, and ice-cream for dessert. When her son was in bed, they watched downloaded episodes of *Saturday Night Live* or *Would I Lie To You*. She couldn’t work on the grant application in the evenings. Her colleagues sometimes told her about staying up until 2.00am to finish their work. They’d laugh gently or sigh, rolling their eyes as if to say *Who knew this is what we were getting ourselves into!*

2E. Does the proposed research involve international collaboration? What is the nature of the proposed international collaboration activities?

She submitted the grant application online, at 4.50pm on the day it was due, her stomach roiling, her son demanding help with Lego, knowing she would find twenty mistakes later. When she tried to hold the application in her mind, she found she could not. It seemed to her a cobbled-together mass of bluster mixed with begging. All grant applications were Dutch windows: carefully-worded promises of important research for ten pages, and then lurking at the back, the hard figures, the dollar signs, the overheads. The money would not, as she used naïvely to think, change her bank balance, or appear as envelopes of cash in her pigeonhole. The money was a signal—it meant: *your career is cemented*. It meant: *take a semester off teaching*. It meant: *put your name on another book*.

Part 3 – Personnel and ROPE (Dr Example Example)**3A. Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) – Details of your career and opportunities for research**

The next day she dropped her son at his father's where he'd spend the next week. She and her boyfriend drove to Sorrento. His stepfather's cousin had a beach house there. For mowing the lawns and buying a slab of beer, they could stay here for three nights. During the car ride they teased each other with suggestions of untried sexual acts. She offered to suck him off while he drove; he said he'd crash, but she did it anyway until a truck drove by them honking its enormous horn and they exploded into red-faced giggles. With him she felt like a teenager again. Or more accurately, she felt newly minted but without the shame, the fear, the inexperience of adolescence. They arrived at the house, both sagging with desire, and fell into bed until they were sated.

3B. Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) – Significant research outputs

During dinner at a fancy restaurant that evening, she felt an incessant need to urinate. They were drinking Prosecco and her boyfriend was getting heady. They were laughing and breathing in the soft beach air, the smell of well-cooked food. She tried to take the pleasures from the evening, but the pain in her urinary tract was worsening. The Prosecco lost its flavour. She didn't say anything yet to her boyfriend. Later, at the house, she sat on the toilet late into the night as the pain tore at her. At 4.00am, when she passed two tiny hard lumps along with the teaspoon of bloodied urine, she woke her boyfriend up and he drove her to the Rosebud hospital. In her feverish state, she thought perhaps she might be overtaken by the kind of madness that would tell her that this was her punishment for partaking of extended unprotected sex with a man to whom she was not married. But despite her Christian upbringing, the idea of sin and its repercussions remained out of reach, abstract, far too neat.

3C. Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) – A statement of your Research Impact and contributions to the research field of this Proposal

Three weeks later she attended an event to celebrate the achievements of students graduating from the Masters program she coordinated. At the end of the evening, she sat with her colleague eating the last of the olives and drinking the last of the wine. Her colleague checked her phone, and said 'Guess what?! I just found out I got that grant!' While congratulating her colleague, she felt her heart seize up, knowing the same email might be waiting in her inbox. She did not have the kind of phone that could check emails.

3D. What will your time commitment (% of your time) be to research activities related to this Project?

(It is a requirement under the Funding Rules that the ENCOUNTER Recipient spend a minimum of 80 per cent of her/his time on research activities related to the proposed ENCOUNTER. Refer to the Instructions to Applicants for further details.)

At home an hour later she stared at the email that told her she had not been successful this time. Her boyfriend came in to find her in tears, her head on the pillow and her hands in fists. She wouldn't talk at first, but then he stayed in the room waiting until she did. She raged against the institution, lamented the hours spent looking away from her son and at the screen, threatened for the hundredth time to quit the job and go work at the zoo. Her boyfriend raged loudly with her, 'going full bogan' as they called it, every second word 'fuckin', menacing the halls of her building with fire, theft and destruction, until they were both laughing.

Part 4 – Project Description**4A. Project Description**

'Thanks for staying and waiting until I could talk,' she said, knowing it was a labour that she often didn't have the patience for herself.

After the crying and raging, she recalibrated her priorities methodically, a process that felt taught, though no one had taught her. Closing her eyes, she held in her mind static images of her son, her boyfriend, her cat, the garden, small objects in the house. Each image appeared like a photograph on a black background, and then was swept aside, minimised, to make room for the next. Finally, she allowed her mind to rest on the scene she'd been developing for years.

It was the curve of a creek, and beside it a willow tree. Underneath she sat with her family. Her son chattered busily, collected water and mud in a bucket. Her boyfriend reclined sleepily beside her, his hand resting on her leg. Nearby, a basket of provisions: plenty of water to drink, fruit, sandwiches, biscuits, chocolate. There were books to read in there too, the most wonderful books not yet written. Even the cat was there, sprawled out, her eyes narrowed to the gentle sun, her belly rising and falling in loud purrs. There was no hurry to leave. There was nowhere else they needed to be. The breeze shifted the willow strands like necklaces.

4B. Strategic Statement in respect of the Project Research Environment

The next day she met with her favourite PhD student, an anxious young man who had carefully incorporated his mental illnesses into a persona that was charming and brimming with faltering bravado. He was deeply aware of his own handsomeness. She enjoyed watching his face and making him laugh, feeling something akin to maternal pride as she watched and guided the progression of his work.

He could tell something was wrong, but they conducted their supervision meeting as usual until the end, when he asked her again if she was ok. 'Ah, I didn't get a grant I spent a long time working on', she admitted, looking away from him at her computer while she wrote the calendar entry for their next meeting. 'Oh, that sucks,' he said. 'Why are they not giving you all the grants? You should be getting all of them. They should be begging you to take their money.' She smiled at him, grateful for his youth and sweetness. 'I know,' she said absently. 'They should give me everything I want.'

Part 5 – Project Cost

5A. What is the proposed budget for your project?

Total requested budget: \$293,124

Year 1	
Description	Cash
Total	97,708
Personnel	97,708
Dr Example Example (Encounter Early Career Researcher Award)	97,708
Year 2	
Description	Cash
Total	97,708
Personnel	97,708
Dr Example Example (Encounter Early Career Researcher Award)	97,708
Year 3	
Description	Cash
Total	97,708
Personnel	97,708
Dr Example Example (Encounter Early Career Researcher Award)	97,708

Part 6 – Budget Justification

6A. Justification of funding requested from the RGS

In the bathroom, she uses tiny scissors to trim her pubic hair, watching tufts of it drop into the bin. She uses tweezers to pull out the thick hairs on her stomach, and those above her eyes that don't fit into the shape of her eyebrows. Her son comes in and hugs her and she wraps him up in her soft blue dressing gown. 'We're in a cloud!' he shouts and she picks him up and drifts him around the house like a cloud. She can feel his soft skin against her nakedness as he wriggles, laughing, in her arms. 'We're a glorious cloud!' he shouts as they drift through the rooms, over the cat, and back into his room where she drops him to his bed like a rain-dump. Her son now wants to be a cloud over and over again, but she knots her dressing-gown tie and tells him to get dressed. He slumps to the floor groaning, and she returns to the bathroom.

She lathers her face in moisturiser that's also sunscreen. She squeezes foundation into her palm and uses her fingers to rub dots of it into her cheeks, forehead, chin and nose. She rubs more into the dark shadows under her eyes, and the acne scars on her chin. She rubs cream blush, 'Peony', into the apples of her cheeks. There is silence from her son's room, and she goes in to find him still on the floor naked, reading a book.

'Time to get dressed, love, we've gotta go.' She waits until he drags himself to his feet and then leaves the room.

In the bathroom, she combs her hair and pulls it up into a loose ponytail. She applies eyeliner and lipstick. She grimaces at herself, squaring her teeth, examining her large pores. She gives herself a huge smile. She says to the mirror, 'I hate you.'

In his room, her son is half-dressed and reading his book again. 'Quick-sticks', she says in passing, on her way into her room where she chooses her tight pants and a navy-blue button-up shirt, which she buttons all the way to her throat. She inserts silver earrings into the holes in her ears. She wraps a scarf around her neck and takes a waterproof coat from the wardrobe.

Her son is fully dressed and reading again. 'Let's go', she says. 'Bring your book.'

They put on shoes, pick up their bags, and leave the house.

WANDA BARKER

My mother is a lost envelope

(from 'My Mother is Dangerous')

My mother cut my father's head off in photos.
His misdemeanours played out
post death. She told vague truths shaky
as Wellington.
She tried to smooth my rough edges.
Her lips determined, and thin.

Her ghostly fingers hook into my skin.
She still shapes my words like
safe pats of dung. Not all of them though –
some have slid from her grip, got loose.
Who knows that ending?
What mischief they'll do.

In the tough peace of her absence, her fine edges,
her cutting wit, her ninety odd years of stoking
creative fires, I find bearable peace.
I miss her painting, singing, piano playing.
Her trembling voice. Finger pointing.

Her cruelty alights like a
hawk: eyes cold, accusing me.
Looking for love I could not return. Bristling.
A lost envelope. A painful cost.

My mother curled my tongue around
her fingers. She climbed into my mouth,
put her words in there. What came from me
was numb.

Her arms around me did not feel like love.
She was starved, feeding. Telling me where to go,
where I would fail. Telling my boots they
were too big. Self centred! she said.
I was selfish. Self-ish.

Hair, body, clothes, manners, history,
my small gains fed the jealousies that rose
from her unsaid wounds, out of left field, a pack
of fervent dogs. She didn't like them either. Ratty dogs.
She tried to herd them, shove them back to
her fitful mind.

These are not the memories I wished for. Nor she.
They are not her whole story. She was beautiful as night,
as a storm. Nothing simple to cling to, like shortbread,
or seed saving. Until her feathered scrapbooks
fell into my hurt hands. In them were the soft
colours I'd forgotten.

Poems and frails thoughts collected and pasted
on cheap paper. Newspaper cuttings. Sadness. Agonies she'd
endured. Do I understand? Yes. And. No. Can I find
form for these complexities?

My vulnerabilities stomped on.
Forbearance somewhere unseen. Coming round
the bend, mending. Forgiveness? There's enough
to hold her brutal kindness. Enough.
For. Something else.

MAGGIE BUTT

Twenty Years a Backing Singer

The saints would gnash their teeth to see the way
my cashmere harmony has blanketed the stars:

my perfect pitch puts silk sheets on their beds;
my sheen's the pearl behind their oyster sludge;

my honey-voice drifts dollars like soft down
to line their mansion, yacht and island paradise;

my effortless top C lifts like their Lear jets;
my rose blends with their musk to elegant perfume.

But when I sing solo in the shower, spun-gold
and clear as glacier-melt, behold the angels weep.

Rose

In the shady corner of the garden by the backpond, under the overhanging fuchsia, where we put the plants which might-be-dead but sometimes recover, like the azalea which was brown-and-crinkled for twosummers and then sprang back to peachyperfumed life, I found a miniature rose in a three-inch pot, with tiny serrated leaves, five-to-a-stalk, which nobody remembered buying or planting, but it looked green-and-willing, so I fetched it out intothesun and forgot about it till today, when something girlypink caught my eye and when I bent to look it was that rose, with one huge-multi-furled-flower of perhaps a hundredpetals dwarfing both plant-and-pot, head up, waiting to be admired for its brazen ambition-and-exuberance, and I didn't know if it was a lesson in patience-and-hope, or trying to tell me that anything-is-possible, even perfection, but anyway, I took its photograph and posted-it-on-Facebook, where it got 64 likes, and each time I look at it, I can't stop a smile blooming, right-across-my-face.

KATERINA CANYON

Aunt May

She cries at the stereo as if
it could take her to heaven on the
notes of ZZ Hill's *Down Home
Blues*, every other record or two.

Uncle L Joe, *that no good
son of a bitch* held her heart in a vice.

Then he died, relegating him to the
beloved angel he never was, fleeing into

mangled clouds, on shredded wings, made of
brambles, as if Texas soil were fertile. Hill's
throat pulls notes – his voice trickling crude into
Aunt May's Los Angeles living room.

ZZ Hill is redemption coated in Texas blood.

L and ZZ are one. Their crooning calls
to her before the song ends, and she restarts.

Their voices harmonise mercurial,
chaotic as oil gushers
spilling into the fields of Canaan. In

The Promised Land, there are no negro
spirituals, no blues

no white man's hand smiting the black man's face,
but there is always a burden for the black woman.

She knows this song well, and she plays it again.

Down Home Blues
Down Home Blues
Every other record or two

Quintessential Pirate

I sail archetypal waters
the moment I find my tune.

My fathers crossed the Norwegian Sea
in trade ships as Vikings.

My mothers crossed the Gulf of Guinea
in trade ships as slaves.

Across the Atlantic, as the bogey croons
swam the creator of song.

I cross the Mississippi and touch the Pacific,
the songs of my mother.

I sang in Norway
a year ago.

Blanched people.
Unrecognisable tunes.

When young,
I sang Rapper's Delight
on 111th and Prairie.

The lights flash strangely farther
across my dancing eyes.

Oiled vocal chords
flow dark along the sand.

This is my time to sing,
a claim from on high

as words skitter
across the page.

COLIN WATTS

As Wide as Wales

UNTIL HE MET Maria, Horace Brown travelled far and light. A black hat with a brim as wide as Wales, with a peacock's feather for show and a blackbird's for song. A red coat with a collar high as a kite could fly and leather shoulders to slough off the rains: a coat with enough pockets for sharpening cards and trinkets for children and ladies; but mostly for ladies. His eyes, grey as the hull of a fresh-painted battleship, had a way of looking into women's eyes that promised pleasures of which they could not only dream, but which were often fulfilled.

Horace was born in the Dingle, not the one in the depths of south-west Ireland, but the one in the depths of south-west Liverpool. His father had left the one to find work in the other, thinking he would find it graced with the natural beauty of his birthplace and offer him the chance to make his fortune. What he found was fields of red-brick houses, topped off with grey Welsh slate; casual work in the Garston docks; abject poverty and the smell of guilt and sin. He sucked a ton of it deep into himself, breeding a fierce anger in his soul, which he took out on Horace and his mother with harsh words, drunken fists and a leather belt.

On the eve of his fifteenth birthday, Horace fled the nest. He couldn't take away his father's anger, but he could take away his belt with its brass clasp in the shape of a leprechaun to remind himself that belts were for holding up trousers and not for beating people who had done no harm to anyone. He also took away a heavy weight of shame at leaving his mother, fooling himself with the hope that she might suffer less if he were out of the way.

He lied about his age and signed on as a merchant seaman, physique and enthusiasm being of more use in those days than birth certificates and letters of commendation. Before not very long, his dreams of travelling the world had erupted into nightmares of harsh words and beatings, as he criss-crossed the world and spent lonely nights on board or in the ports that tied the trade routes together.

But he learnt things: from his fellow seamen; from the ragbag of characters he chanced upon in bars and brothels across the world; from watching and listening to his fellow beings in all their chaos and beauty; above all, from the kindness of women. By the age of twenty, he'd had enough of the company of men and soaked up enough tall tales and tricks with cards and dice to decide that a life at sea in a big tin can was not for him. He skipped the Compass Rose at Liverpool's Huskisson dock, spent his savings on the coat, hat and boots that would become his calling card and tramped north.

It was hard graft to begin with. Street corners, race meetings and country fairs were rife enough with rough, tough tricksters and soft-soapers to suck the marrow from most men's bones. But Horace was not most men and soon found that his tales were taller and his tricks trickier than most; not to mention his standing six foot three outside his boots. Like the tinkers and fairground folk with whom he often mingled, Horace was always on the move. Scotland was too far north and any talk of Ireland made him think of his father, so he peddled his tricks and tales along the highways and byways of England and Wales. Often he slept under hedges or in barns, protected by his long red coat, his wide black hat, his many-times mended boots and a jar of whiskey, though on more occasions than could be counted, lonely women would take him into their homes and their beds, delighted by his hat and tales and melted by his eyes of battleship-grey: from fishing widows to the wives of travelling salesmen; from Hastings to Holyhead.

They would serve him enough meat and potatoes for an army to march on, ale enough to sink a navy; then lead him in joy to their beds. In the morning, those with husbands (dead and buried or alive and away) would fit him out with silk shirts from their wardrobes (most of which he passed on to those he met on his travels who had none) and kiss him on his way, brimming with eggs and bacon, tea and love. Until the next time.

Horace loved the smell and the laughter of women but, above all, he loved their kindness. In turn, he left them with memories of grey eyes, gentle hands and a lust for giving pleasure as strong and wild as for the taking of it. Yet for all the joy and companionship they gave him, let alone the food and drink, he was only ever truly happy on a

crisp clear night high up on the side of Black Mountain or the slopes of Pen-y-Ghent; bread, cheese and whiskey in his belly and the book of the stars spread above him. He would die up there, he was sure, before he would ever grow old.

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But then, many pairs of boots later, came Maria. Maria was the daughter of Francesco Russo, an Italian ice-cream maker who settled in Merthyr Tydfil for no other reason than, getting off the boat in Cardiff and heading for mountains that might be like home, he ran out of steam at the end of the Valleys and thought: here is a place where a man might make and sell ice cream to a people not unlike his own.

Before long Fran, as he became known, had three ice-cream parlours; one in Merthyr, one in Abergavenny and one in Pontypridd, all going by the name of *Russo's*. He would visit each of them in turn to make sure that everything was *perfetto*. One of his visits to his high street parlour in Merthyr coincided with that of Rhiannon Jones in her lunch break from her father's haberdashery store, three doors down. Black Italian eyes met black Welsh ones over a banana split, sprinkled with chocolate flakes and ground walnuts. And that was that.

Maria arrived a year later, with a full head of coal-black Welsh-Italian hair. By the age of three she could toss her head in a way that told the world she would brook no nonsense from anyone. Under the guidance of Fran and Rhiannon, she grew into a wilful child and grew up into an even more wilful young woman.

On her eighteenth birthday Maria ran off to Abergavenny with Rhys Jones, who delivered milk for her father's ice cream. Their union produced two children, Bryn and Tomos, a rented two-bed terraced house and deadlock. Maria wanted to go to night school to study shorthand and typing and business accounts; Rhys wanted her to stay at home with the children while he made his way in the world—though he was never quite sure how he would do so and indeed never did. Maria went to night school, Bryn and Tomos went next door to the Bevans and Rhys went to the pub. When he came home, he hit Maria to show who was boss. She hit him back with compound interest and sent him to sleep in the spare room, though sometimes she would let him back into her bed to ward off the cold.

At the end of May, they called a truce and went to the funfair in Porthcawl. Rhys went to the Jolly Sailor. Maria saw Bryn and Tomos onto the helter-skelter and watched a tall man doing card tricks. He wore a black hat as wide as Wales, which sported a peacock's feather for show and a blackbird's for song. His once-scarlet coat had faded to salmon and his beard had grown as long as the roads he'd walked and was studded with heather and celandine. He looked across at her and smiled, took up a pack of cards, shuffled them and dealt two. She walked across to him, forgetting the children, forgetting Rhys, oblivious to the sights, sounds and smells of the fair. Once again, that was that.

Maria kicked Rhys out of the spare room and into the back yard. He ran away to Cardiff to seek the fortune he drank away before he ever got around to making it. Horace gave up his wandering, his women and his whiskey and moved into every room in the house. Giving up the women was easy; Maria was all the flesh and blood and fire that any man could handle in one lifetime and more besides. Giving up the wandering was hard; he compensated by walking the boots off Bryn and Tomos; twice round the town on weekdays after school and off to the Brecon Beacons on the bus of a Sunday. Once he'd put them to bed on weeknights, their heads and hearts ringing with tall tales, he would head for the Kings Arms to tell even taller tales of love and loss, of mayhem and mystery, for a few pints of Tomos Watkin's best.

Horace poured his life and soul into Maria and the boys. Now was his chance to make up for leaving his mother to the fists and boots of his father. He taught the boys the power of gentleness; told tales in which anger controlled triumphed over anger unleashed. He made them leather belts with brass clasps in the shape of leprechauns and made it clear they were for holding up trousers, not for beating boys about the head who wished them no harm. He taught them how to smell a rat; how to deal with bullies; how to read the stars. Above all, he taught them love.

Maria completed her studies. Horace worked the cards a bit during the day, but mostly dreamed of moors and mountains.

'I can do tricks with words,' said Horace, 'as easy as falling off a log.'

'I can do tricks with figures,' said Maria, 'as quick as greased lightning.'

So they opened The Long Red Coat, a little shop of magic, crammed with wizards' wands, exploding cigars and books of tricks. Horace wore his red coat and his black hat, did card tricks for the customers, and told tales of magic and pandemonium. Maria dressed to kill and ran the business like fire and brimstone.

The little shop grew into a big shop, which grew into many shops. Long Red Coats sprang up throughout the valleys like wild flowers in spring. They hired staff, commissioned accountants, set up pension schemes.

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Then one day, all of a sudden, despite the comfort and the money coming in, Maria said, 'I'm tired of being a busy bee.'

'So am I,' said Horace. 'I've played more than my fair share of tricks and told enough tall tales to see me out of this world.'

'And I've done enough sums and balanced enough books to last two lifetimes,' said Maria. 'Shall we?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Horace, 'we shall.'

So they sold out to Mr Marvello's Mighty Magic Empire and bought a house on a hill at the head of Ebbw Vale, where the sun shone some days, where the wind blew free most days and where the best rain in Wales fell in abundance. They grew vegetables, planted fruit trees and set up beehives. Before long they were walking the hills and valleys hand in hand, peddling Hilltop Honey and hard and soft fruit in the markets around. Maria regaled their customers with stories of bees and fruits and Horace kept the books.

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Over the years, Horace's beard turned to white wire and Maria's hair to white silk; Bryn and Tomos wandered their separate ways to Canada and Australia; Rhys died of liver failure and Fran and Rhiannon of old age. Most of the ice-cream parlours were turned into wine bars and charity shops, though the *Russo's* in Merthyr is still there fifty years on, still 'Under New Management'. Mr Marvello's Mighty Magic Empire went the way of all empires and drifted into the sand.

Horace and Maria never missed celebrating the anniversary of their first meeting with whiskey and cake. Horace always told Maria how sad she had seemed to him and how he had decided that if he dealt a king and a queen, he would stop travelling and try to make her happy.

'I didn't,' he said, 'but I did.'

'You did,' she said, 'with knobs on. You looked to me like a free man, with your hat as wide as Wales, your long red coat and your beard studded with heather and celandine. That was that as far as I was concerned. And you took *my* boys and made them into *our* boys.'

'We made them into men,' he said. 'You and I between us, we made them into the best of men.'

What Horace liked most of all about these celebrations, though he never let on, was that not once, not ever, did she mention his eyes of battleship-grey; so he knew she had fallen for the man he was and not for the eyes that had so bewitched the fishing widows and the wives of travelling salesmen.

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When Maria died aged ninety-four, Horace buried her with laughter and tears, and with the help of Bryn and Tomos, cake and whiskey. A few days later, he waved the boys off to their respective wives and children in Canada and Australia, struggled into his red coat, laced up his boots, donned his hat at a jaunty angle, grabbed a hazel stick and headed up onto the moors, wheezing breath and creaking joints for company. He lay on his back beside a lone hawthorn and read the book of stars for an hour, folded his hands over his leprechaun belt and slept. In his dreams, he told tall tales of love and loss to anyone in the world with a heart to listen and hands to applaud and played myriad tricks of magic and wonderment to angels and devils alike. The clouds built up; the snow came down.

Morning brought a wintry sun and two feathers, a peacock's and a blackbird's, poking up through a crisp white blanket. A blackbird settled onto the hawthorn, puffed up his feathers and sang claim to that bit of the land and the air above it that was his to roam.

JOSEPHINE BLAIR

suddenly mountains

find me
where marooned ships spit
salted punctuation into love at first
(nothing matters anymore in)
sight. tell me you ache the same way
an object bleeds for its meaning
draw me
a map from serendipity to
divine intervention. i had one
maybe, but i lost it. or i blinked
and the terrain was changed, suddenly
mountains. on top of the chasm where you drown
in air, asphyxiating the profound
pieces of you that won't bare their teeth
in the full moon. escape
before they can pierce you
slash shroud bury run
i still have scratches on my palms from the last time and
my knees won't bend but i become wholly
sacrifice burning myself into the cross-stitching
of Orion's belt, screaming theories
at the guardians of these strings. my heart
is just black
cracked
sugar
without you, show me
the space between longing and a heart attack

i can't see it oh god please i can't
breathe there is too much air there
and i am choking on objects
and their memories
and the mountains
and salt.

in other words

i can fold *Cat's Cradle* between my freckles now
without ghosts opening veins in
a season of sudden war
two families crying outside
the coffeebean bomb shelter,
forgotten in the birthing of language
and the pooling of time

so i know it must be working, forgetting you
tastes like latex
and dried spit, regurgitated sugar
and the salt of dry heaving
to remind me I am dying, not now
but gently
the way we are always dying
and not noticing

sometimes it all comes back to me
in the mornings, little heart attacks
like commas in the doorframe
that stab instead of nudge
until the tile is maybe blood but
at least it's still there

(my hair is sprouting back
in all the wrong directions, but it is soft now.
there are some things bodies don't forget)

WJ LOFTON

Dancing on the Moon

Shirt silhouetted over my head
Eclipsing the sight of living room to blind joy ride
My body a nebula alive with the shouting
Dance, of the Pentecostal folks
Spinning as so many black boys do *outta control*

Carpet unfolding into dance floor
Five year old feet
Armed in battle, the language of twists and turns natural
My mother was a runaway woman, passing along
The ancient art of slipping from one place to another, quietly

From dance to the bow
The encore – the sharp skirt of glass table
Pulling my eyelid into
Flash
Pain

Moon passing over the trim of my father's
Voice
Son be held by percussive pang
Then father's arms
Turning darkness into day

A knight
Wounding those invisible gangsters
Responsible for his son's fall

EUGEN BACON

Jungolo

‘SOLO!’ THERE IS urgency in your mother’s voice. ‘Solo!’

‘Mama.’

‘Will you look at the cookies in the oven?’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Don’t mess with me, child.’

Her warning is harmless from the bathroom. It is harmless from anywhere.

Not as effective as Baba’s square gaze, even from a photograph taken in Melbourne now standing on the mantelpiece. He is regal in a suit and tie. His large hands are holding a conference paper on African economy. You stole his face—that much is clear from the black-and-white portrait in its silver frame. Generous nose, lush lips. But you have Mama’s gazelle eyes, even the specks of coffee inside the honey of her pupils.

She enters the kitchen. She is drying her hair, shoulder-length braids, thick roped. The light of the fading sun enters the room from a large open window. It casts its softness on Mama’s tender face.

You keep your eyes away from the gentle whiff of vanilla and sugar, from perfect golds in rotund circles, now cooling where you put them on a wire rack on the zebrawood table.

She directs her doe eyes at you. ‘How many have you gobbled?’

You smile. Looking at her is like seeing the heart of heaven. She has the neck of an ostrich, laughter lines on her cheeks and skin smooth as the inside of a stone-hearth baked yam.

She presses her finger on a cookie. The texture is fine. ‘Should have known better, asking the jackal to mind the hen house,’ she says. ‘Are you ready?’

‘I am always ready, Mama.’

She looks at your collared shirt, short sleeved; trousers, urban print; moccasins, ebony and shining like mirrors.

‘The missionaries are teaching you well.’

This you, the one you are now, stands apart from the children in Grandma’s village with their polyester garments, ankle-grazer trousers and dirt-caked faces. Some urchins navigate the orange dust and savannah grass barefooted, if not bare bottomed. You miss their free loping and sense of timelessness. You miss the khaki shorts and black sandals made of bicycle tyres, the ones you wear when you go to visit Grandma. You take the ferry across the lake to get there. You miss Keledi: her warming eyes that weep, her laughter that tinkles, her special name for you—how she calls you City.

‘I’m just from a little town over the lake,’ you tried to explain. ‘It’s nowhere as big as the city where I go to boarding school.’

‘Boarding?’

‘It has fences and gates. You sleep there.’

‘Closed inside?’

‘A bell rings in the morning and you wake up—’

‘A bell?’ Her laughter. ‘Does the bell tell you to go to eat?’

‘It rings to plan, so you know it’s time to do something. Or stop.’

‘A bell.’ She rolled on the grass, wept with laughter. ‘Are you cows now?’

You did not tell her about the city’s roads like a giant *koboko* snake with babies slithering near and far, how easy it is to get lost in the suburban heartbeat or the snatch of a stranger.

≈

You are a child betwixt. The village and the town run in your blood. And now the city too.

‘Is Baba coming to see me off?’

‘You know he is busy.’ You avoid Mama’s gaze, but she knows without seeing that tears are stuck in your eyes. ‘Come.’ You feel the cotton of her yellow and black weaver bird dress, the heave and fall of her breast where your head rests.

Your father is your grandfather’s son, and you do not mean it just in terms of bloodline. Your father and his father were men who took providing for the family seriously: your grandfather with his fishing

nets, Baba with his new job—not for profit. Gone are the days when a twinkle danced in his eye, when he read you how and why stories: *How the hyena lost his tail; Where the hyena got his laugh; Why the snake lost his legs; How the zebra got his stripes; When the tortoise got his shell . . .* He still told some stories when he took a teaching job in the city college, but was weary when he came home, only on the weekends. The stories—let alone the touching: a ruffle of hair, a grip of fingers on your chin, a press of palm on your shoulder—altogether stopped. Then you heard him arguing with Mama about putting bread on the table, about the new job and how it came with more money. He made a choice. As he more and more travelled and saw the world, his eyes grew more and more distant and did not see you.

You often dream of your father's hug. In one dream, the one that wakes you with soot in your heart, his body is an icebox. You are curled in a small space within his embrace. Despite ice flakes in your eyes, nose and ears, you are hot and cold all at once. You look up with questions about the hug: *Why did you; when did you . . . how?* Baba's eyes are glass. In another dream, the nails of his big, big hands are wet with blood. You take just a second and begin to cry. The best dream is where Baba takes you on his knee. *This is my favourite world*, you say, as time evaporates and the sky closes.

≈

You step out of the taxi. Mama pays, hands you the brown bag with cookies. The town station is not as big as the one in the city. Buses are arriving and leaving, spilling with passengers. People and animals everywhere, laughter, yells, horns, screeches. *Squ-a-ck!* A rooster escapes beneath the wheels of a parked truck. Mama guides you to your bus. A coolie helps her put your duffle bag in the luggage compartment of the overnight bus that runs across the country to take you from the small town to the big city.

You feel stupid, overdressed around other commuters. There is a woman carrying a basket of guavas on her head. *Are you well, my daughter?* she says to Mama. A man with muddy eyes is leaning against the bus, his back lined up against streaks of yellow, red and blue paint on the metallic body. He rolls tobacco into a cigarette, lights up. He catches your mama's eye, nods in greeting.

'Looking forward to school?' Mama directs her question at you.

'I'm rapt,' you say. 'Rapt.'

Her gaze reaches your soul. 'Kids giving you some stink?'

You do not tell her about the poking with a sharpened pencil, about the royal flush—your head in a toilet bowl. You vomited after that. You remember the heave sound, and the crying. You always cry when you vomit, you comforted yourself. They outnumbered you. The missionaries know about the 'freshie' inductions, but they do not interfere. *Nature runs its course*, says Brother Samuel. How was this nature? But you redefined yourself before the wedgy. As they ganged up, demanded that you strip to your undies, you grabbed the nearest thing: a stool.

'Do you know who I am?' you said.

They snickered, but didn't come close.

'There's one of you, and many of us,' some fool said.

'All I need is one.'

'Who are you anyway?'

'I am from Jungolo,' calmly you said.

'Jungle what?'

'Touch me. And you'll see.'

No one asked where the heck is Jungolo. You do not know why you said it. It was a choice, perhaps, an identity, your own this time—unlike the choice or identity that Baba created for you with the town and the city and his not-for-profit work that took him to everywhere but you. You were not sure why, but you said it. You were prepared to die with one person, and that was all that mattered. None of the city kids, even the big ones, messed with you after that.

You do not tell Mama any of this. Instead you say, 'Keledi talks to herself.'

'Does she answer back?'

You both laugh.

You have never thought to ask who is Keledi, how you are related. She is there, Keledi is, at Grandma's. The daughter of a daughter of a cousin's daughter of a daughter . . . You cannot say for sure. She just is: Keledi. Tears shimmer on her lashes when she laughs. Her laughter

turns out the pink in her lips, like the inside of a fish. She sleeps to the wink of starlight, wakes to the caress of sunlight. School has no bearing. Every day is the same . . . same different, and she approaches it with wide-eyed curiosity, no hesitation. She arrives to meet you from a point of equal, difference is unimportant. If you were a skyscraper and she was the jungle, she would treat you like you both were of the same river, moving downhill from one place to another, reaching and reaching uncontained.

You take swimming lessons at the boarding school. Keledi, who has never seen the inside of an instruction on water safety, breathing pattern or stroke technique, travels in the water like a fish. At the lake where women knead and beat clothes until they are clean, where men cast nets far out until they are swollen with a catch for the market, same lake of the ferry if you go up north, at this lake Keledi stands stark naked on a rock. She puts her hands together above her head, arches in a perfect curve, harpoons into the depths. You worry about typhoid, so you only toe the water's surface. But Keledi glides back and forth in the black water, sometimes immersing her whole body for long minutes before spearing out at a place you did not expect, laughing at your panic . . . She does not care about crocs or sickness. She is as healthy as the calf of a cow serviced by the village chief's strongest bull.

But there is a lot Keledi does not know. You have not told her about the big plane that took Baba up the sky all the way to Melbourne, into the middle of a faraway place and a changed time, where trains travelled under the ground and people in the same carriage did not look at each other, let alone say hello.

≈

The bus revs. 'This thing will push off in a minute,' Mama says.

The tone in her voice is the same as the one she used when Baba one day came home after midnight. His body was gruel, careening into walls. Your first instinct was to laugh. But Baba tugged at his belt and all your longing and fear folded into one. There was dread in your belly, and a cusp of craving. With a whipping comes a touch.

'I amuse you, k-kiddo?'

Mama stood between you.

'Leave. The child. Alone.'

'I am b-bursting my balls p-providing for the family—'

'So what's the deal with the belt?'

'T-teach some m-manners.'

'Jesus, Mary and Joseph. You have never struck a child. Do you want to start today?'

'M-missionaries are meant to . . . t-that's why—'

'Niko, you have been drinking.'

'Yes,' said Baba. 'Two l-large coffees!'

'You went across the bridge.' A euphemism for the bar.

'I swear. One b-beer.'

'You are not a good drunk. This is why you stopped.'

He leaned his head against her shoulder, swaying as he stood, a giant in her tiny arms. You have seen his affection, of recent times to your mother only.

Later, much later, neither of them thought you were listening through thin walls of a two-bed in a cul-de-sac neighbourhood where you hear everything.

'T-that's a bit absent, that nightie.'

'Cost three hundred shillings and the rest.'

'D-doesn't cover much . . .' Laughter.

'You know, Niko, drinking like that . . .'

'D-did you wear that thing to tease me?' More laughter.

≈

Mama smells of vanilla and cinnamon, the scent of her perfume. 'But the bus isn't leaving yet,' you speak against her breast.

Her push is gentle. 'Boys don't cry.'

You show the bus driver your ticket.

Mama has gone. She does not like goodbyes. A mozzie is buzzing around, digging into your arms. You remember the village, the vastness of landscape—space everywhere—and Grandma's fading light. You think of Keledi's laugh and her fluid, long limbs: antelope. Even though

at eleven you were older, she ran faster. Together, you raced in a shower of dust under a scorching sun, shinned up trees to pluck papayas, rolled and wrestled over cow dung, returned ravenous to Grandma's clover leaf scent and her bubbling pot on a three-stone hearth.

You remember how, as you ate rice from a communal tray, dipped for bits of fish in a dense and inky broth, you talked and talked about this and that, even when Grandma squinted and said, 'Children don't speak at the table, let alone with food in the mouth.'

'There is no table,' you said.

After the meal you sat around the dying embers of fire, curled toes under your feet. Keledi rubbed her hands above the stone hearth, out of habit, not for cold. The night was awake with the buzz of creatures. The sky burnt red. There was rust in the air. In the town—even in the city—for all its floodlights, night closed like a fist. In the village, it bided its time.

You fingered Grandma's ash-dusted hair, and her half-blind eyes shone like silver. Sometimes she talked about the late Babu, your Grandpa. She told of how she never cast eyes on his strong jaw and smiling lips the colour of rich berries until they were wed. How as a young man he moved without sound, no rustle of grass at his gentle tread. How, her big fisherman, his net caught the biggest tilapia in the village. Sometimes, when she paused from reminiscing, you and Keledi tossed up stories, the day's gossip gathered in your tripping and wrestling in dirt across the village: who had beaten his wife, who had sold his cow, who had slaughtered a goat, whose ducks had the trots, who was putting a witching spell on a neighbour, who had found a *koboko* snake in the shed, whose girl was ripe for marriage to a suitor beyond the mouth of the lake . . .

≈

You have a window seat. You press your nose to the glass. A flood of nostalgia sweeps through you.

'What does your father do?' Keledi asked.

'He works in an office.'

'It has walls?'

'Many people work in offices, they make money to buy food.'

'Can't you grow cassava in your garden?'

'Mama's planted flowers. There are violets that go white and blue, daisies the colour of the moon—'

The tinkle of Keledi's laughter halted you mid-sentence.

'Is your mother foolish?' She wiped tears from her eyes.

'She's got smarts!' you roared.

'She's got posh nosh. Are you going to eat flowers?'

You knew then you could not tell her of the dizzying height of Baba's multi-tiered office, how you pressed a button with a number to tell the lift where to stop and let you out.

≈

The bus coolie is announcing the bus is leaving. New passengers are running with buckets of tomatoes, bags of maize, cartons of cooking oil or bags of belongings that land squashed beside your luggage in the rib of the bus. The rest ends up on the roof, tied with rope—the coolie sees to it.

≈

The day you left the village, Keledi threw herself at you, knocked you to the ground. She kissed your ears and nose. Her eyes were shining, shining. Just as swiftly, she disengaged, bounced off. You sat up, unfocused. As your eyes cleared, you saw Keledi race off to the wind, unquestioning that your school holidays had whipped by so fast, or of your return to the town or the city, or that you would come back to the village. When? It did not matter. Her world was timeless.

≈

You gaze out the window. Soon the bus will drive off. You are on the tip of entering a world altogether foreign to Keledi. How could she ever understand the city? Already the town with its offices and flower gardens is a strange animal.

Inside the flurry of activity outside the bus, you see him. He is a head above the rest, weaving his big shoulders across bodies and bags. You fling open the window.

'Baba!'

He follows your voice, locks his square gaze onto your window, in his hands: a bunch of yellow bananas.

Tyres crunch, the bus rolls away from the station. A potato is stuck in your throat. That night, head on a stranger's shoulder, you surrender to the arms of a dream. You are trembling. Your father looms tall like a mountain. You press to his chest, cling to him hungry for touch. Slowly, slowly, as his shoulders swallow you into his embrace, he rocks you. You put your tongue to the taste of his sweat through his Kaunda suit. You just want to . . . savour the moment. You awaken to the whiff of vanilla cookies crisp in their brown paper bag, and the sweet aroma of soft and warm ripe bananas cradled on your lap.

MICHAEL GOULD

Of a Certain Age

I'm of the age
where my joints don't engage
like they used to, they're feeling rusty
and my skin's getting crusty
and I suppose it won't be long
before my mind gets dusty

I lie in bed
and worry my once pretty head
about all the things life may bring
my way, and I say: death
don't hurry.

IAN GIBBINS

Third Sister

Without a doubt, Giorgio's time was up. Unless the plan changed and Jackson took the shot. Only then could he dream of Stephanie, her sour apple breasts, that poison ivy hair. Giorgio quaked cold, sluiced sweet lip gloss memory, tongued back incipient resolve.

(Amandine clears bread crumbs from my tablecloth, asks after my remaining Tasmanian scallop. I close my dog-eared travel guide, follow laws of gravitational attraction, calculate fall of pinot noir and stain spread along the knife-edge of her calico masquerade.)

Underfoot, the crush I failed to see, three cicada wings, hazy and evanescent, wild-fired on sandstone with a seven year itch. My double-drummer apology staggers, reels in looping vocalese, phase shifts my stance.

This must be the paralysis they write about: the falter and stutter, begging comprehension, if I do not balk, return to equilibrium, reassert my calm hard on jarrah floorboards, signal my intent to determine my account,

the mortar lines, how tall I might be, how high I might rise, should I extend knees, ankles, stretch shoulders, elbows, wrists, emerge from my self-spun cocoon (I am not Stephanie), loosen the silk around my bodice, my stiffening trunk.

Stephanie replaced the telephone handset and, despite the heat, shivered. Two hundred grand: where could she find that kind of cash?

(The next page is blank. Amandine collects unused silverware, re-arranges fine china, acknowledges a murmur of appreciation.)

Ever so slightly reclined, I track concatenated notes above the vacant windowsill, the melodic drift, a progression, until a coda I struggle to recognise, beyond detectable range, jangling my crossed, uncrossed, fingers.

Were you, either of you, paying attention last summer in Europe? Madrid, Luxembourg, re-united Berlin? Did you read my diary, the letters left unsealed beside our Italian coffee pot, the message I pinned to your answering machine?

Here, on a rocky outcrop marked by generations of talon grip, my burnish is streaked with grease prints. Have you survived the drought, snow storms, the season-breaking gale? Call me (I am not Amandine). Give me a chance to withdraw.

(Amandine glides past one shadow to another, offers polite advice from the kitchen, runs manicured nails across her script. Unfamiliar vowels roll through peppermints, chocolate, pralines, fall askance as moths fly blind between us, search for an emergency exit.)

The front door swung open and she realised immediately something was wrong. A reek of decay, mildew, stagnant water. And Giorgio? His itinerary, hotel rooms, contact numbers? He'd always let her know. Stephanie recoiled, caught her breath, heard nothing but static.

Ravenous

Appetisers

The whiteness of my eye.
Your serried sightlines.
Singles and triplets, all at a time.

Entrees

Jetstream swagger, stretched over pinion feathers.
The minimal importance of exactitude, a shrug.
Jostling earthquakes and fallen lumber.
Another clandestine attraction.

Avalanche, barrier range, canyon.
My transgressive alphabetical domain.
Gangly neighbours, slight elevation, the slip, slide.
Engagements, to and fro, lawless, one dropped stitch.

Mains

Unlit back-street boulevard or periscopic fire-brick laneway.
Sweet sun-scorned retribution, incontestable recall.
An abstract, a lesson in style below easy reach.

Mutable leisure, abrogated motives, excess thunderbolt lien.
Countermands sieved with artificial cleanskin guile.
Ambition filtered with ebony pursuit.

Wattle dust, here, there, irreparable gum nut ash.
Dispersal, stripped clean, the final anthracite defence.
Neutrality feigned on your behalf, no more intimation of grit.

Deserts

Holes in leavened sky pitch.
Our gathering vagabond league.
Echidna spine, seductive king brown scale.
Akimbo, immodest, this threshold, to be developed.

Afters

Days we can afford to lose.
What we have to say.
The light, never stronger.

BRIAN OBIRI-ASARE

Migration around a New Beginning

Under the weight of a barren sky
my mother sings to me.

Cigarettes in my mouth
to burn blisters in my brain.
My pen my only instrument. In this ceremony
an African rhythm still binds us.
My place
still no where. No one can sing
my newly found sorrow.

If you look off over Botany Bay,
the dark cliffs shadow the seagulls
swallowing up the night.

Deep inside the harbour,
a child pits its voice
against a solitary star.

This city screams soulless prayers
at branded signs in the distance.
They say times are different.

They say strange and familiar sounds
of living may yet coincide.
This could be a site of equal standing.

Now,
it's the end
of a whitesoaked dream.

My mother offered me staccato notes, nouns
in search of a subject.
I left my mother's nothingness to embrace my own.

The absurd drama
others have staged
around me drags on. My pen

my only instrument,
my brain all blistered.
A barren sky holding me.

Thank god
it's the end
of a whitesoaked dream.

Somewhere, god knows where,
my mother, she still sings to me.

ERNEST SLYMAN

Summer Morning

The earth turns over, opens its eyes.
Sees high up the stars working in the fields.
Walking behind a horse.
Planting seeds.

The furrows stretch out their long arms.
They lift up the planet.
Will the carrots find enough light
to show the peas the way?

There's a reckoning in the day.
One heeds the warning of birdsongs
that trail along behind the sun.

The wind leads the morning light
down the long corridors of earth.
The furrows removing their coats
and reaching up with their hands.
Accept the seeds that fall into their pockets.

Where does the moon hide
its shiny valuables, if not in the pockets
on a big yellow sun? The starlight
pays night's considerable debt in full.
Shoulders the blame of wild, irresponsible investments.
The foolish dark's having borrowed
its fortune from the stars.

Night in baggy trousers
as it walks through starlight,

nothing more stingy than starlight
just before night's cashing out,
dark gathering up its small winnings
from a puddle of moonlight
where old beggars in rags
ride elephants in the great circus
of sleep. The night an old man
dozing on a sofa.
Feet propped up on a mountain.
Left hand dangling over a river.
Right hand holding a red necktie
pulled by a large moon
grunting along the rooftop
of a red barn. An expression
on its face like it was worried
it might make it over the hill.
Or die before it reached
the little dogwood tree.

DAVID ZAZA

Toward Madrid

Push the kids into a dim sleep
as fusty and impure as a transatlantic
jetliner barely winging its way away
from the coast of Nova Scotia.
They are temporary beings –
small for now, quiet for a minute.
When the people emerge, the workers
and the wives, the pharmacists and
fathers, time slows down, and there
they are, stretching something fake
into the fib of permanence.
It is not important. The adults,
for now, wake and guide them
up the jetway, into customs
of their countries, or even of the country
they just departed. And though no one
ever goes back there, even the simple shape
of a street or the sky stays with us.
Even for a million years,
if a child would ever live that long.

MARIA STADNICKA

Vertical Maps

People travel towards the water.
Believers and non-believers, abandoned,
wet books in a perpetual cadence.

In times of peace, the bread chooses wisely.
It chooses us to hear the summer from miles away – a sudden blast.

Toxic petals float in the air.
Vertical shades of colour dispersed
on busy roads, on silenced barracks.

We wait on the pavement. Us – the collective sleep-deprived well;
the all-knowing litter pickers mending-mending
the gaps in this violent history.

Bunker 14C

I watch the bullet holes
glowing deep eyes in the coal fire.

At bedtime, curled up under a Hiroshima blanket,
I pray for apples.

Above the hut I live in,
a seed explodes.

Overnight, I greet
the metal cranes' late arrival.
The walls crumble in the middle of
a newly-built council estate.

GAY LYNCH

Take Shallow Breaths

Bending to untie my runners, I heard through my headphones that a Yamatji woman had died in custody. Twenty-two years young. Unpaid fines. Ribs fractured in a fight with her partner. Complained of nausea and dizziness to the cop who shoved her in the divvy van. She kept at him. Hospital sent her home. Twice. Acting up, they said.

I tripped over a root or my own tired feet running the track between the trees. Whump, face-plant, hit the shale, scraped cheeks, knees, palms of hands: winded. Bled from nose and chin. Fractured ribs.

She turned blue, keeled backwards in her cell. Hit her head. Dragged out like a dead animal. Dial 000.

I took my busted ribs to the paddocks to cut teatrees tangled in a fence, felled by high winds. Right handed. I knew about that. But right ribbed; that was a surprise. Each time I steadied a branch or moved a log, a fist of pain clenched in my sternum; each time I lifted my chainsaw or bent to shift debris, a staccato finger stabbed along the rack of my right-rib-cage. I stacked logs and burnt foliage. My fires blazed along laneways. Defensive muscles that keep my ribs in place contused in sympathy.

She took three days to die from septic shock.

Driving away from the paddocks, I can't sit straight in my seat for pain. Smoke spirals from my dying fires, into the shifting sky, reminding me of the people who lived here for sixty thousand years, who sat cross-legged, tending their campfires, singing the scarp and the waterfalls, smoking meat, burning eucalyptus leaves for lung infections, playing cat's cradle in the rain, beneath the trees. Beneath these same trees.

BRONWYN LOVELL

Doppler Shift

Comes a time when your childhood bedroom is for guests
instead of a memorial to the little person you used to be, who remains
bigger in many ways than the grownup you've grown up to be.

When letters and treasures are packed away and your childish dreams
sleep quiet as boxes in your parents' garage. This was the room
you could run to, shutting the door on any confrontation. Now,

the sore realisation that even these few square metres were never yours.
So you cling to that disintegrating stuffed toy through the cold night
even though you're too old, in this house you can navigate in darkness

because its blueprints are under your skin like veins
cycling back to your deep thrombus heart.
You check if your father is still breathing when he falls

asleep in his armchair during a football match, this man who used to
shout
and spit at the television till his face was red, and often at you, but
thank Christ
these days leather belts only hold up trousers.

One day, you will find yourself back here, sorting
through your father's things with your elderly mother,
having to bury the argument

with his body, a stranger you knew well enough
to be afraid of but still loved furiously –
claws out like a kitten loves a fox.

The backseat is cramped and silent. You no longer fit
between brothers. Remember energetic years of skinnier limbs
and fatter grins with lollies and cassette tapes on long holiday

drives? This little unit of mismatched people – once your whole
universe – has expanded faster than sound. Still, you gravitate
together for your cousin's wedding, share a table

under stars for a few sober hours
before finally looking up: it's all in the past,
everything – even the light we breathe.

there will be missed-beat moments

when time
stops
when you'll see
the tea-towel drop
in slow
motion
and understand

the way
it will be
what life
doesn't have in store
for you
what the spiral rope has spun
out

doors
you must pass
through
then close
legs
that aren't fast
enough

fish
you'll forget
till they float
to the top of the tank
the cruelty
of human
carelessness

the way things
end
then begin
again
but
always
differently

BARNABY SMITH

Network Cache

all that is solar is family
concealed it holds more
& more things except
the rational:
knows only itself

okay city, I'm outdoors, you can
chuckle with pre-language wisdom`

& quarrel over the fidelity of events,
why, in rejection comes expression

and even a way to return
tender resolve here

MARK TUCKER

Flying Past

I miss being a bird
the freedom
of not having to sign
my name to label everything
complicated and bound,
shown by words

that prove I was more
vulnerable
to attack, I did not know
life or death, just lived
without judgment, concept, talk
through my senses

I was present:
shelter, food, and rest
instinctually met
without thought

I was killed
by the machine
driving speed
to be left and ignored

woke up human

GERARD SARNAT

Best Laid Plans

Foot of the bay where cattle hides and beaver pelts and pigs' knuckles were once shipped to San Francisco, and today is the soul of Silicon Valley.

After Harvard-Stanford-Harvard-Stanford training
I took a flyer on a job opening no one had applied for
at the Alviso Clinic,
which was named for the son of Corporal Domingo Alviso,
one of the original members of the de Anza expedition.

I learned *un poco* Spanish, took care of poor monolingual rural Catholics—just up from Mexico where they never dreamed of seeing a doctor.

Every day instead of a lunch break I sprinted around the backwater with a buddy: during the spring flood of 83
bags of asbestos which'd been dumped there got washed up.

On weekends, running for hours to reach the skyline of the Santa Cruz Mountains, getting giddy on godly endorphins despite skimping on shoddy shoes,
I thought I'd got in good enough shape to hang in there with a young woman who made it into the Olympics
—for some reason she let me lead, going down too fast.

Now I'm a total osteopenic mess from head to toe.
Pre-dawn there's a symphony of symptoms: I drag my bag of broken bones
out of bed. Pain begins in earnest, accelerates as gravity weighs in.
What to do next—pursue more menisectomies, or replace both knees whose cartilage cushions got crunched descending Windy Hill, or the left hip,
or fuse fractured lumbar vertebrae—perhaps back in Alviso?

Undergarments Worn to the Great Late Aughts Recession

I'm a ninety-nine percenter jock whose bourgeois bosom and piggies are squeezed by secondhand sports bras plus Occupy wet winter Wall Street sneakers.

Back from vacation in Holland's Bussum, preoccupied getting health insurance, this jogging mother of four is strapped into a blizzard of smashed crescent menisci and 401(k)s.

We get calls from the coast to cheer us on: Grams was a Trotskyite who cheered her son for burning his draft card; Mom says Berserkeley reminds her of the Free Speech Movement.

JANE DOWNING

The Saxon's Houses

The main gate is forged in iron. It has a surprisingly clean Art Deco look about it. There are letters across the top, forged too. Each is more than a foot tall. Together they read *Arbeit Macht Frei*. Marta's schoolgirl German is rusty, which the gate is not, but she does not need a translation. Everyone knows the first big lie of the place.

'What does it say Mummy?' Giselle asks. Everyone except the children.

Marta puts her arm around Giselle's shoulders, crouching to speak more quietly into her ear. She doesn't know why she should want to whisper: it is no longer a secret that this is a lie. Her daughter has newly learned her alphabet. Marta is tempted to focus on the letters and not the words. It isn't much after ten in the morning and the gate, towering above them, is glittering under a layer of night ice. She resists the easy way out.

'It says in German, Work Makes You Free,' she says. 'It says that to make them think . . .'

Giselle interrupts, 'Make who think?'

Marta straightens as a tour group washes around them as if they are rocks stranded in the way of the tide. She knows she has not prepared her daughters enough; hoping Sachsenhausen will be lesson enough. Giselle doesn't wait for a good answer. She is through the gate, through the tour group, unseemly, the hood of her jacket falling back, one glove left in the snow as she streaks across the mustering yard, a place used for roll calls, a place where 100,000 of the names called didn't walk back out through the gates. Giselle has seen her sister and as always, wants to keep up.

Marta shivers as she walks through the iron gates alone. She is not sure this is a good idea.

≈

Yal has a girl in each hand. The three of them get glances. Marta notices from twenty paces back in the roll call yard. She's spent the last week watching Germans watching her family. She's tried to put the looks down to frank curiosity, but here, now, it is too easy to read a judgement into the turned heads and pointed stares.

It isn't their clothes, though Yal and the girls do look better suited for a skiing holiday. There's not much call for wintery coats in Darwin and the padded jackets, short to the waist, are borrowed from friends who indeed head south for the snow fields each winter. Yal is in electric blue, the girls complement him in orange—Rebel, and yellow—Giselle. Giselle's hood also has a fur edge, a point of contention between the sisters who are now jostling to be first into the museum. It is in an old barracks building. They cannot guess what they will see in there.

The light snow on Marta's shoulders instantly melts as she follows the queue into the hushed and dark building. The bright jackets of her family pull her in the right direction. A Japanese woman is watching the trio too. A black man and two black children are a distraction from the heart-wrenching billboard-sized faces projected on the far wall. Click, click goes the slide projector, each sound heralding a new face, smiling, unknowing, dressed in Sabbath best; another Jew dead.

Marta catches up. She imagines more lips curling at the configuration of her family. She'd been greeted that morning in the hotel's breakfast corner like a real-life Angelina Jolie—this Anglo-Saxon woman inducing muesli into little dark kids. Then Yal had hustled in and the whole mixed-bag of race scared the proprietor back into the kitchen. They hadn't needed workable German to interpret the tsking.

Giselle races ahead of her parents, uninterested in the memorabilia housed in the cabinets, all the life-sized objects that tell an even bigger story than the giant faces on the wall. Click. Yal has his back to her, does not see his daughter heading for the stairs at a skip. He is reading interpretive signs untroubled, his academic face on. What has he to worry about: his mob were more sinned against than sinning.

Rebel is in high school and has not lived up to her name. Click. She stays beside her father and is looking at the photographs of the piles of shoes, piles of clothes, piles of hair, a 30cm high pile of gold teeth.

'Why?' Marta hears Rebel ask Yal. Click. Marta moves away to grab Giselle teetering at the top of the stairs and haul her back outside into the daylight.

≈

Her own mother was silent on the phone when she'd told her about the planned visit. Marta had let the silence stretch.

'Well I wouldn't go out of your way to see one,' her mother finally said. But then, she'd never even been back to Germany. Travel was supposed to expand your horizons but Marta's family had crossed the world to get to Australia and weren't taking another step.

Marta's mother, silent again on the phone, had been a baby when her parents landed in the Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre on the Murray River. And then there were too many family lies and secrets to deal with. Turned out much later they weren't from Lithuania; Marta's grandparents had learnt the language in the refugee camp. Her grandmother was close enough to mute for the rest of her life, too fearful of breaking into German. Cursed, the language tumbled out when dementia freed her tongue. Then little artefacts emerged once her grandparents were dead. A knife with a swastika on the hilt, a photo taken at a Hitler Youth Camp in *Sound of Music* country, her grandfather unmistakable for all the full shock of blonde hair. With no memories and no stories to go around the old silences, imagination had to kick in. Dates and ages could only suggest one thing.

There was an unspoken question in the cross-continental silence. How many generations must the sins of the father travel down before they can be forgotten?

Sachsenhausen is only just north of Berlin so Marta and Yal hadn't gone out of their way really. It is only a small concentration camp compared to others on the list; still, once Marta is out in the open with Giselle, she sees it is a long walk over to the ruins along the wall. Watchtowers loom over the triangular shaped camp. Marta looks their way more than once as they tramp through the snow. Their blind eyes look down both sides of the walls. It surprises Marta that the village of Oranienburg is just there on the other side.

'Is there a playground?' Giselle demands, circling around her. Snowflakes dust her dark hair and one is netted in her eyelashes. Giselle winks two, three times to rid herself of it. Her boots squeak in the snow.

'Put your gloves back on,' Marta tells her.

'Is this the playground?'

The foundations of the gas chambers and the remains of the ovens are under a cover not unlike the shade cover Giselle's school has put over its jungle gym.

'No, you are not allowed to climb.' Marta holds her child back, searches around for a distraction to head her toward. But where could they go next? Giselle is racing in the direction of the execution trench. Circles back on her mother's raised voice.

≈

It is too difficult. Marta feels she is outside herself, watching from a watchtower, and writing the story of the day in her head. Not to tell her mother, or Yal when he catches up, or even to write in her journal tonight in the Berlin hotel. She finds she is composing her justifications to tell Julie who she hasn't thought about for a decade or more.

She and Julie hadn't actually been friends at school but they were the two sent out of RE classes at St Bridget's, and hours in the library *not* discussing Marta's adamant atheism bonded them briefly for a year. It hadn't twigged at the time that Julie was in the library for a different reason, that she wasn't exempted from learning about the saints and hellfire in RE because her parents were atheist: she was Jewish. None of the other students knew this, or Marta would have known too. She suspects it hadn't been a thing that mattered. Marta wonders whether this is a good or bad thing about her Australian upbringing.

Another tour group has been herded over to the ovens. An old man no taller than Rebel is leading them. Marta hears American accents. He is talking about guilt to this school group uniformed in identical jackets and scarves. That is the problem: Marta knows this. She does not want to feel guilt and this old survivor's obvious compassion does not help. If anything it makes her feel guiltier.

The broken foundations of the building in front of them are like a pile of shoes or clothes or teeth, a pile of history left out in the snow.

Or something more solid perhaps? Each outcrop of bricks is like a headstone. The tourists crowd in.

‘How are you travelling?’ asks Yal, suddenly at her elbow. He’d wanted to come. He touches his leather-sheathed fingers to her cold cheek. ‘It’s grimmer than I thought,’ he admits.

≈

Giselle has joined her sister, and Rebel is answering her perennial question: what is that? Because Rebel is as innocent as Giselle, she is answering by reading the signage beside the ovens. Each sentence ends with a slight upward intonation in Rebel’s voice, making each sentence a question.

Giselle has understood that these are ovens for people. ‘Like the witch was going to do to Hansel and Gretel,’ she says sagely.

‘Kind of.’

‘So they put the witch in the oven instead?’ continues Giselle.

Marta has overheard it all and intervenes. ‘No,’ she starts to say.

Rebel turns from her reading. ‘They’re not still around?’ Rebel’s eyes widen. Her eyes are so brown and expressive and contagious. Marta looks over her shoulder a little wildly. Her stare slams into a burly group of men with fur hats pulled over their ears. She casts her eyes down.

‘No, the Nazis are well and truly gone now,’ she reassures her daughter. ‘You know the Nazis were defeated at the end of the war.’ She is very careful to say Nazis each time. Not Germans. She is careful not to draw attention back to the sign near the barracks about one of the buildings being burnt down after the Israeli Prime Minister visited. There’d been enough neo-Nazis around then.

Rebel pulls her hood down so her hair escapes. ‘Is this why Grossmutti came to Australia?’

A crow circles and comes to land in the snow. The black bird, the white snow: the scene is black and white.

‘Yes,’ Marta says.

She knows she will have to come back to this. She thinks Rebel has heard something she hasn’t intended. Should she let her daughter

continue to believe her ancestors were escaping the ovens and not retribution?

≈

When she turns again, Giselle is gone.

The electric blue of Yal is moving to the back of the camp. He is briefly in the shadow of the tall memorial, then out of it.

‘Go with your dad,’ she tells Rebel. Who obeys. ‘Giselle and I will catch up,’ she shouts after her.

Marta walks out into the mustering yard and does a 360. Giselle is not there. There are tracks across the slushy snow in all directions, the big boots of tourists, the Jurassic claw prints of the crows, and some smaller footprints. Marta follows these and they bring her to the side of the Pathology Block. The snow has piled high in the lee of the far wall. It is pure and inviting. Giselle is on her knees in it.

‘Look Mummy,’ she laughs. She holds up her hand. She has her glove on like a good girl, and built in the palm of her left hand, is a perfect miniature snowman. She’s even found two twigs, goodness knows where from, to stick in each side as arms.

‘Don’t go where I can’t see you. How many times have I got to tell you?’

Marta grabs Giselle and the snowman dives to the ground. His head rolls off his body.

Marta cannot explain why she is so upset. Does she *want* her child to feel traumatised by her surroundings? Does she not want her child to be inventive, creative; to smile?

‘This is not a place to play,’ she says as she drags Giselle up onto her feet.

≈

‘Your kids are Aborigines,’ her mother had said during the phone call.

‘They’re Indigenous,’ Marta had corrected her.

‘Exactly. That place is not their history. You don’t have to take them there.’

Marta leaves a subdued Giselle with Yal and goes back to the museum barracks to see everything she’s missed. The filtered light of the place

leaves shadows. Click. The projected faces flicker on the wall. Tourists cluster in small groups exquisitely aware, and careful of the spaces between them and strangers. Marta moves slowly. Click. Stops. Here in the hall of memorabilia is a tiny bow made by a young girl from the fabric of her coat. Click. It is ugly, a dirty frayed thing in yellow and orange plaid. The girl made the bow as a message to get out of Sachsenhausen to show her parents she was still alive. Marta has tears in her eyes and cannot read to see if the girl was reunited with her parents. Click. She turns. She does not want to know because she fears it will not be the right end to the story.

‘Julie, why did I never ask you anything?’ she wonders as she turns. ‘There were enough avoided RE lessons to fill.’

The trip was supposed to be an education for the girls. Travel was not just about horizons, it could also help you find yourself—but what would define her children? Their father’s skin, their mother’s race guilt? To garble in her atheist’s head, a quote from God: in which one of the many mansions of their fathers would they dwell?

Marta blows her nose and moves to the next cabinet of memories. Click.

Rebel has come to find her. She has woven her way through the silent couples and the tall man transfixed in front of the projected dead. She leans on her mother’s shoulder. The waterproof fabrics murmur as they touch. Her eyes follow her mother’s down to the small letters describing another atrocity, and she asks again, ‘but why?’

LES WICKS

Compost

Adrian had thought about *infestation*.

Overpopulation—in a swarm of commute the clicks & buzz of employments he sat in a fret until

he quit the crowded world aiming for still.
In a space beneath lute strings—
that vacant spot between the potentials for sound—
he thought he could detect the forget of a tough gale
that had been buffeting his cerebral garden.
To train the fingers down, those
restless eyes each thing must be dimmed beneath
the curtains of quiet.

Days were reduced to tocks of a karmic timepiece
There was space for worlds within the
clarifications of his body.

Then ants crawled out of his ear.
They didn’t hurt, just tickled as they marched
to their terrestrial assignments.
Adrian’s girlfriend was not impressed, less so

when slaters hustled down around his hairy chest.
Becoming food & shelter,
taking up less space every day,
he felt closer to earth. An ecology responded—
ticks & fleas made breath&blood-taking
starmaps across his back and legs.

Earthworms supplemented his toes, ladybugs replaced
buttons on his eroding shirt.

A spider clamoured across the terrain of bones,
 hunting to feed her young.
 Eruption is no community,
 he was tectonic as the modest homes of flying lives
 were burrowed out from fallow skin. This tranquillity
 was occasionally painful as birds feasted on his appended lives.

Adrian had become *one with the earth*
 yet all of it was no less busy for him.
 He was a hive.

By the Wayside

History will lodge a complaint.
 Over the drinks
 Angela started discussing 'us veterans'
 as though we had conquered something real.
 There were enough stories, our
 backs bent, the calcium dust we shed
 as we struggle on towards dotage.
 There's a variety of war
 universally fought against years.
 Minor hits from the 70s,
 in apologetic formations she & I face the foe
 that always defeats but that's
 not the point.

Later, look up Angela on google, 451734 results.
 Then think back her ex-lover Janet that
 careless brilliance the photographs, poems
 her singing voice raw with gitanes & clarity.
 I'm thinking about the 'fallen',
 those casualties to narrative, the ones
 who shone with promise flared
 a few years then disappeared.

Because I saw Janet last month, North Wollongong.
 Written out, *whatever-happened-to'd*.
 She'd raised 3 kids,
 2 of whom weren't her own. Her 4th education
 was in a psych ward she
 graduated with a patience for small circles.

An aching next-door neighbour

loves her unconditionally
 though Alzheimer's has robbed most of his context.
 Janet cooks, & laughs.
 This is now her audience, her *demographic*.

There are so many of them –
Remember?
Where are they now?
 Some had predictable disasters.
 Of course, my own irrelevance crowds at the edges
 & is itself irrelevant,
 another tick in a tired clock.
 My place is guaranteed in the void.
 Incidentally, so is yours.

Janet said *I still dabble*
 as though it was an embarrassing affliction.
 We patched in the decades,
 cracked a few revelations.
 Beachfront café was shared like a joint -
 the crackle & smoke obscured
 loss, apology.

I didn't say,
 she wouldn't have acknowledged that
 nothing stopped that didn't need to.
 There was no point discussing
 contradiction & regret.
 She was dying.
 Notions of fame & achievement
 had walk-on roles, comic relief.
 Our respective kids are *doing great*,
 though we worry about them.

Brilliant careers aren't worth
 the confetti they're written on.

Government housing, public hospitals
 why worry about cars
 when you have a bus right outside your door?
Worn out is a core part of the contract.
 It's a tiny dire.
 I hunger for her dignity.
 She'd swap me
 for 3 more months.

DAMEN O'BRIEN

The War on the War on the War

Let's have a war on abstractions.
A great big glorious war on abstractions.
A bomb them back to the stone age war.
A dig their leaders out of their foxholes war.
Nail them in their armoured convoys.
Surgically remove them from their mosques.
Shuck them out of their robes and what nots.

Let's have a war on nouns.
An epochal war of us and them.
A clash of cultures war.
A crosses and crescents, winner takes it all,
smack down, take no prisoners,
take some prisoners, drop them in Guantanamo
and torture them, war.

Let's have a war on privacy.
Let's pass the laws in secret.
Let's make the claims in secret.
Let's keep the evidence secret,
and the judges, secret.
A big, black clandestine
war on dissent,
on informants and whistle-blowers,
on habeas corpus, on natural justice.

Let's have a war on proxies.
My revolutionaries against your terrorists.
My freedom fighters against your Presidential Guard
and let history judge the hindmost.
Let's be the victors and write history.

Let's have the war on Tuesday.
Schedule it just before the general election.
Let's have a boost in the polls.
Let's bring it into their kitchens,
scare them right off their couches.

Let's declare a state of martial law, and
give it an indefinite finish.
Let's do the war so well that
more enemies will want to join.
We can make it intergenerational.
We can heirloom it to our children.

Are you scared yet? Well,
let's declare a war on terror.

JAMES GRABILL

Genetic Momentum

Grass-green bearded leaf-folds
along night-darkened edges
of the Pacific mountain lake
assist the eye when it opens
to spiral distant galaxies
the ancients never expected.
A small daughter on the swings
has been laughing across the yard
as her mother and father seesaw
on what the future is forever
unable to reveal. The early tide
pool relaxes in a salamander lung
and sprouts into the agile hand
of a raccoon gripping a limb.
The exquisite whole success
when tide pools were infused
by ocean-pulse circulation
drawn over deep-water volcanos
will be going down unmatched.
Longevity of her hair flying,
luminous strands entangled,
the girl's sitting, swinging
in the balance, resting
on heart-beat stretches,
resisting wind-blown forces.
She's there in the saddle,
carried into the day
on the backs of her horses.

Wind from the Coast

The fresh air that lifts can be far from land
with no word for the place where it's risen,
its buoyancy a kind of parachuting away
from the planet, where the moment's a flash
of warmer air pressed into a lip of the cold
over choppy shrimp-stained waves that ride
on squid-shot depths expelled by upwelling
restlessness, the wind forced into a nonstop
search for nothing specific in a rushing limbo,
forced into banishment from incomprehensible
short-faced heaves that keep the air shaking
up what it reaches, as if the place were never
good enough or *there's no time like today*,
where the wind's lost, never at home, always
being dismissed, burrowing through emptiness
into the future, maybe disgusted by matter,
the wind, forever bound to run into it here,
spreading and then swirling, sliced sideways
and converging, crashing wherever it goes.

PRIZE WINNERS

Meniscus congratulates the recipients of the following writing prizes and is proud to publish them here for the first time.

Australasian Association of Writing Programs/ Ubud Writers and Readers Festival Emerging Writers' Prize

Winner ANDREW DRUMMOND *Song of Shadows*

2017 University of Canberra Faculty of Arts and Design Young Poets Award

Winner ARUSHI JOSHI *acceptance*

The Inaugural University of Canberra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Poetry Prize

First Prize JEANINE LEANE *Still Gatherers*

Second Prize BRENDA SAUNDERS *Bush Tobacco*

Third Prize HUGO COMISARI *Kookaburras, Carp and Concrete*

2017 University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize

First Prize JOE DOLCE *And Let the Wonder In*

Second Prize VANESSA PROCTOR *emergence*

Third Prize IAN GIBBINS *Dial Tone*

ANDREW DRUMMOND

Song of Shadows

Verse One, line 4: Angin midit mangidul

JOSH COMES BACK into the apartment, lays the second letter on the carpet, gives the hand-delivered envelope to Kate. It is made of good stock, thick and cream-coloured, sealed with a bow of ribbon.

Kate unties the ribbon and folds open the envelope.

'It's an invitation,' she says, holding it up for Josh to see.

The heading is in dark brown ink with gold shadowing—penned by hand.

'It's for the birth,' Kate says.

'Really?' Josh says.

Kate says, 'In Bali. Can you believe it?'

'Are you serious?'

'Yes.'

'Hell,' Josh says. 'Overseas weddings, okay. But this.'

'What's next?' Kate says. 'Pet birthdays?'

Their laughter does not fill the room. It is small and edged with something else.

The other letter is from The Clinic.

Verse Two, line 1: Yekti sangkan paraning dumadi

A bright young nurse comes into the waiting area, smiles at them with familiarity. Kate and Josh move to her. The nurse points Josh along a corridor and to the right, even though he knows the way. Each of the previous tests has been clear—for both of them.

Kate stays with the nurse, who shepherds her into a treatment room, stark and white. 'Are you okay?' the nurse asks after she has adjusted the stirrups and opened Kate's gown.

'Is there a fan on?' Kate says. 'I can feel a breeze.'

The nurse smiles. ‘He’ll be here in a minute.’

Kate breathes in slowly and deeply, allows air to fill her lungs and soak her body with oxygen. The room is so quiet, the hum of electrical equipment has become audible. Kate thinks on this hum. It was always there, beneath the surface noise. Kate thinks, ‘It’s only when things have settled that this world becomes one.’

The radiologist comes into the room, is nice enough, injects the dye and makes sure Kate is comfortable. Kate says she is, feeling the viscous cold ooze through her like mercury through a thermometer. This is how she imagines it.

After the radiologist has left the room and taken the images, Kate is allowed to clean herself and get dressed. Josh is reading in the waiting area. He looks up when Kate comes out.

Verse Two, line 2: Surya Candra kalawan Kartika

It is late—working back again—when he gets to the final set of images. Moonlight filters through his office window, gently highlighting the framed degrees that line his wall more out of obligation than pride.

He clips an image to the lightbox. As soon as he sees the shadow, he knows.

Proximal occlusion.

The matter is decided as simply and quickly as this—the time it takes to think two words.

It is now his knowledge. The couple made it clear they did not want to know who or what or why. ‘We don’t want that cloud,’ they said. And so he must rest with it, lie with it, know this thing about the world, carry his burden.

As always.

It is impossible to sit in his position and not speculate. He is intimate with the calling cards of trauma and infection. With a proximal, a septic most often follows. So many of the women he sees. Usually when they were young, before they were married or with the partner sitting nervously in the waiting area. A lot of hack jobs, if he is speaking

honestly. Cut and shuts. Sometimes they get away with it. Other times, the damage is too great.

He looks again at the image on the lightbox. Yes, it is his burden. He will never know the truth about this woman, this life. He turns away and notices the moonlight on his degrees. This is what they have brought.

Verse One, line 9: Sayekti nandhang prihatin

Things have settled like sediment at the bottom of a river.

‘Do you want to go?’ Kate says.

‘I’m not sure.’

‘I could use a break,’ Kate says, ‘from work.’

‘It’ll be relaxing,’ Josh says.

Kate remembers something from long before Josh. She pauses in her thoughts. Rain continues to drum against the roof. Kate breathes in and slightly opens her mouth, as if to speak. Josh looks at her in anticipation of what is to come.

Kate says nothing, closes her mouth.

Verse One, line 9: Neng pondhokan sayekti

Flying in a blue sky, jetting above the white pillow clouds with everything so small below. Sensing the slow movement of the earth, rather than seeing it. Kate says, ‘It’s hard to believe people live down there.’

When they arc over the ocean and land at Ngurah Rai, their driver is waiting. His name is Slamet. He drives quickly along the sheeny streets, pulls the car onto the shoulder of the road in a place that seems empty.

‘It’s too small,’ he says, pointing at a narrow alleyway. ‘You’ll need to walk. One kilometre.’

The sun drills into them. Josh stops and wriggles from his backpack, takes out a tee-shirt and drapes it over his head, closes his backpack and heaves it up onto his shoulders again. Lines of sweat become rivers, the humidity a presence, an entity.

Finally they come to the hotel, an oasis of shade, and check in.

Kate studies the graceful movements of the woman at reception. ‘I am Ni Man Dewi,’ she says. ‘Please let me know if you need anything.’

Verse Two, line 10: *Gantha gatraning gesang*

Kate sips tea while she waits for Slamet to pack the car. When all is ready, they drive into the hills, a new world of lush green jungle vegetation and rice paddies.

Ni Man Dewi’s family is gracious—they welcome Kate with *sembahs* and dignified smiles.

Everyone moves to the paon, the kitchen, to begin class, cooking furiously all morning. Kate wonders if she will remember a thing.

After the soup broth is simmering and the baby carrots cut, Ni Man Dewi points at Kate’s belly and says something in local language. The whole family laughs. Ni Man Dewi is confused by the hurt look on Kate’s face as she glances down.

‘You cook with Brahma,’ Ni Man Dewi says, touching Kate’s shoulder. ‘God of Fire. He is in you today.’

When class is over, Ni Man Dewi and Kate stand in the street, waiting for Slamet to arrive. Kate notices a plaque on the compound gates. ‘What’s that?’ she asks.

‘That is my family,’ Ni Man Dewi says. ‘A list of their names.’

‘Where are you?’

‘Here,’ Ni Man Dewi says, pointing out her name.

‘It’s a long list,’ Kate says, smiling.

‘It is getting longer,’ Ni Man Dewi says, sweeping her hand across the bottom of the plaque. ‘All of these are children.’

For some reason, Kate flinches. She composes herself and says, ‘Your family is very lucky.’

Ni Man Dewi does not speak for a moment. She moves beside Kate and comes close to hugging her, puts one arm on her shoulder and rests the other on her belly. ‘*Majemuk tunggal*,’ she says. ‘Even though it is only in the form of a shadow, the universe also exists in human beings.’

Verse Two, lines 6–7: *Bumi miwah dahana maruta lan banyu*

Back at the hotel, Josh has left a note in the bungalow, gone to the beach. Kate dozes briefly, then wanders the grounds. By the time she reaches the place where Ni Man Dewi works, *banten* cover the floor like leaves in a courtyard. Ni Man Dewi motions to the tiles with her head, and Kate sits down.

‘*Canang*,’ Ni Man Dewi says, holding up a palm-leaf basket. ‘Ca—beautiful. *Nang*—purpose.’

As Ni Man Dewi constructs the offering, she explains each part, reveals each symbol. When the *peporosan* is complete, she outlines the *Trimurti*. She points out the gambier and the vividly red, south-facing flowers. She says, ‘This is you. Brahma.’

Ni Man Dewi puts on her sarong and sash, asks Kate to join her slow walk around the hotel. Before they begin, Ni Man Dewi adds the crinkled banknotes, lights the incense, dips a *jepun* into the holy *tirta* and sprinkles some of this water over each *banten*. She says, ‘It is complete. This is the fusion of earth, fire, wind and water.’

At the final stop on their walk, after she has secured the offering to Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, Ni Man Dewi holds a palm facedown, waves three times and says a prayer. She looks to Kate and says, ‘*Sari* is the essence. Smoke carries *sari* to God. We thank God for peace.’

‘It’s beautiful,’ Kate says.

‘It is not for us,’ Ni Man Dewi says. ‘Our time and effort is our sacrifice. We make them, give them, leave them for the unseen. That is their beautiful purpose. The world is self-filled. Our act is selfless.’

Kate says, ‘You’ve given me gifts today.’

‘This is our life,’ Ni Man Dewi says, smiling.

Verse One, line 10: *Dhuh nyawa gondhelana*

Rain pounds the car. At one point, Slamet flicks the windscreen wipers to their top setting. ‘No faster,’ he says.

‘No faster,’ Josh repeats, although he is talking about the accelerator.

The weight of rain is something Kate and Josh have learned in Bali, the way it can blanket. Slamet is accustomed. It is natural for him to drive these slick roads and not slow down.

For all its pounding, the rain is over by the time the car peaks in Ubud, a gentle trickling in the deep gutters the only sign it has rained at all. Slamet carries their bags this time, his thongs slapping against the wet ground.

In the evening, Kate and Josh meet Emma and Deene for dinner. Emma looks exhausted, and at the same time, filled with a radiant light.

‘We’ve thought about it a lot,’ she says, a slightly nervous strain in her voice, ‘and we’d like you to be godparents.’

Emma is looking at Kate as she speaks. So is Deene.

Verse Two, line 9: Lahir batin wus kacakup dadi sawiji

The day before the birth, Kate and Josh witness a funeral procession. Sitting in the second storey of an internet café, they first hear the deep bass notes of the gamelan musicians, then the high tinkles.

Josh says, ‘Come on. Let’s go down to the street.’

The Wadah is beautiful, gilt at every level, highlighted by patterns of white and gold. Right up the tower, on every corner, flowers bobble from the ends of long wires.

Men carry the Wadah on their shoulders, meandering along the street from side to side, laughing and shouting. They rock the Wadah back and forth, the gathered crowd cheering and singing with joy. Other men fight to take possession of the tower, or run around in circles ahead of the gamelan musicians, who clang their instruments in orchestra.

As the procession, with all its colour and flowers and life, continues down the street, Kate notices a straggle of men dancing, joyous in their black-and-white check sarongs and batik udengs. Women follow close behind, colourful offerings held in trays or on their heads.

‘Eat well tonight,’ says the tourist standing next to Josh. ‘They’ll feast after the cremation, so why don’t we? Fire might free the spirit and cleanse the soul, but only dinner can feed the body.’

The tourist laughs. Josh smiles politely.

Quietly under her breath, Kate says, ‘Brahma.’

Verse One, line 3: Thenguk thenguk lungguh dhewe

That night, Kate and Josh sit on the cool tiles, drinking es teh, iced tea. It is quiet. Josh is reading Belloc, researching an essay.

Kate says, ‘How was that procession?’

‘Funny you say that,’ Josh says. ‘I was just thinking about it while I read this poem.’

He marks his book and reads to Kate:

*Loss, and Possession, Death and Life are one
There falls no shadow where there shines no sun.*

Verse Two, line 4: Cahya katri wus kumpul

The morning Emma goes into labour, Kate and Josh get ready to go quickly, wait impatiently for their driver to arrive.

Kate takes a heavy breath.

‘You okay?’ Josh says.

Kate says, ‘I think so.’

‘Fine with it?’

‘We both know why they asked. At first, I wasn’t sure, but now I’m okay. I’ve changed.’

‘Changed your mind?’

‘Not just that,’ Kate says. ‘Something more.’

Verse Two, line 1: Yekti sangkan paraning dumadi

One of the staff brings more towels into the birthing suite. Emma breathes fast and shallow, contracting and opening at the same time. The midwife quietly reassures her, says something Kate cannot hear.

Emma turns toward the window, crouches on all fours. The staff member who brought the towels positions one on the rim of the birthing

pool. Emma rests her forehead against this towel and angles her pelvis down. Kate takes in the view from the window, all that Emma is missing. The deep green vegetation dropping down to the waterway, the distant green hills.

Life revealing itself inside and out.

Emma's baby is close now. The midwife speaks quietly once more and Emma rolls onto her back. Deene arcs his arms through the space below Emma's shoulders and rests them on either edge of the birthing pool. Emma flops her hands on top of Deene's and their fingers intertwine.

Noise increases and the baby's head appears. Emma pants and cries with effort. The baby comes out easily, floats in the warm water for a moment, cupped by the midwife. In this moment, everything is still. No breath from the baby, who is yet to feel air on its cheeks. No breath from Emma or Deene. Nothing from the midwife or staff. Kate's lungs at rest. A collective suspension of sound and movement.

Almost of time.

ARUSHI JOSHI

acceptance

i was 11
when my friend came back
from her holiday in bali.

we huddled around her,
admired her pretty braids;
whispered, in awe:
'you're so tanned!'

seven of us, and we stuck out
our skinny forearms to compare.
my turn, and i added,
'i'm tanned, too.'

there was silence,
and there were small heads shaking
and little frowns on the young girls' faces
and i could have been swept away
in the eternity that passed until
the bell rang and it was time for class
and we were drifting away and the moment was
lost.

when i look back
(and i shouldn't, but i do),
i see the theatrics of the moment
as perhaps an orchestrated opening to
a film about self-doubt.
(because in that distant quiet,
where six white girls had held their breath,
my 11-year-old self had sighed,
'... but not the right kind.')

JEANINE LEANE

Still Gatherers

Who's Afraid of Colour – Aboriginal women's art exhibition 2017

Country's awash with the gatherings of Black women –
first gift to her children – rich offerings of place.
Yawk-Yawk spreads ancient wings – breathes female spirits – sings:
*Come – gather – bring together – create – give back –
forage your memories – take back this manhandled history
remember your dismembered Countries – rejuvenate this
nation's space – colour the whitewash – sing Country afresh.*

We are here on rock, in sand, in soil, in grasses and reeds,
on wood, with clay, with paint, with print, on canvas and silk,
with string, in glass, on screen, through lens – Gan'yu women
interconnected – numerous as the stars in languages
of our land we say: *We are still gatherers – still custodians.
This is the strength of us – Black Women!*

We are strong – bust up colonial myths – smash through
glass ceilings – disperse the gossip they call history.
Pick up the pieces of our Dreamings – gather and create –
erase that story that paints us wrong – in layered textures
tell our truths – colours bold speak louder than words.
We speak through brush, through paint, through twine –
each pandanus fiber – a story – each story a string –
each string a basket – each basket holds what cannot be stolen –
our blood memories that pulse like the dancing lines we paint,
that hold us like the intricate baskets we weave, that shape us
like the clay we mold, the glass we meld.

Gather the refuse of colonialism, the litter, the waste, rubbish
and lies – remold them, reshape them, refine them,

remake them – pin the untruths of two centuries to the walls.
Gather and re-gather what was scattered for centuries
cast driftnets wide and deep bring back what was lost.
Make story – put back together the pieces –
nurture and heal like only women can.

Gather memories, stories of Grandmothers, Mothers,
Aunties, Sisters, Daughters – constellations of Black Women
shine out, bring together – redefine national narratives,
chronicle our genesis – project our future – gather old and new.

Garak – our universe transgresses artificial borders that seek to
divide us. In creative solidarity we gather to tell – keep telling,
create – recreate. We still are weavers, makers, keepers, tellers –
always will be givers, carers, dreamers, creators –
Black Women – gatherers for all times.

BRENDA SAUNDERS

Bush Tobacco

Just out of Alice, we pick up the heady scent
of *mingkulpa*, go along with the Aunties
to a lush green spread ripe for plucking

We stuff sticky plants in plastic bags, head back
to town for sit-down chat, wait til the leaves
dry out, curl darker in the sun. Women

crush the find between grinding stones, add
a pinch of *tjulpa* from a bloodwood fire, shape
a powdered 'quid' to pop under the tongue.

As heat lifts in a slow burn, the women smile,
sigh, the mood relaxed as they touch their heads
as if to say 'feelin' good, all worries gone away'.

This ancient salve once held great power. Prized
for its potency as a valued barter with the clans
or other tribes passing through Country.

Homeland women keep tradition strong, share
their stock 'old way' with family and friends.
Send precious parcels in the mail, peace offerings

to their communities living 'white way'.
Hold this remedy for sadness and fatigue above
the new fashion for 'roll your own' nicotine

or favourites cigarettes in fancy packs, Marlboro
and Winfield Blue, easily bought at the store.
Know the danger from this 'no good smoke'

as a new sickness spreads in families. Rekindle
belief in the power of *mingkulpa*, a soothing balm
to heal the body, clear spirit, heart and mind.

mingkulpa: native 'tobacco' plant (Pitjinjarra)

tjulpa: white alkaline ash

a quid: small plug

Homeland: Town camps

HUGO COMISARI

Kookaburras, Carp and Concrete

Murray cod was forced from its domain
forced by invasive carp to man-made lakes of stagnant algae.
Algae that plagued and corrupted them over time
but the Murray cod are reclaiming the mainstream.
Understandably, they don't want to reconcile yet –
healing takes a long time.

Kangaroo was once king of borderless plains
found a new home in cracks of the concrete jungle
on local school ovals – between bushy strips of suburbs.
Robbed of title and freedom, the roo re-emerged
a national symbol – because the roo is resilient.

Thylacine was hunted to extinction
hunted and hunted without thought for the future
until there was one left in captivity.
Then they pretended to care.

Displaced from faunal cousins
who had yarned since the dawn of time
now reduced or extinct
kookaburra watches on with god-like eye
sees our people rising over our lands.

Kookaburra laughs with a cackle of friends
perched high on a fence dividing settler from settler.
But a fence means nothing to a kookaburra.
Kookaburras laughed as Jesus preached in distant lands
they roared through the renaissance
chuckled over the ring of swords clashing
in the name of kings and queens in concrete castles.

Kookaburras laugh – loud and long – first and last
perched above the settler world knowing
carp, concrete and fences can't erase what will
always be the oldest continuing culture on earth.

JOE DOLCE

And Let the Wonder In

a choral libretto in eight movements

1. It is part of the Cure to wish to be Cured. *Seneca 9 BC*
2. Dr Edward Livingston Trudeau was sent, as a young man, to the mountains, where he expected to die of consumption. But he did not die. As he lay in bed, he had a vision of a great hospital where he could rebuild other sufferers. Flat on his back, he examined patients not as ill as himself. He raised money, and laboured, until his dream became the great Sanatorium at Saranac. *Louis Bisch*
3. Sometimes the more measurable drives out the most important. *Rene Dubois*
4. Healing must involve a change in consciousness, as well as a change in somatic symptoms. Something unconscious, or forgotten, must be recalled, or something be allowed to sink into forgetfulness. *Ralph Twentymen*
5. The witch doctor succeeds for the same reason all the rest of us succeed. Every patient carries his own doctor inside him. They come to us, not knowing that truth. We are at our best when we give the doctor, who resides within each patient, a chance to go to work. *Dr Albert Schweitzer*
6. After laughter, all the muscles are relaxed, including the heart; the pulse rate and blood pressure temporarily decline. Muscle relaxation and anxiety cannot exist together and the relaxation response, after a good laugh, has measured as lasting forty-five minutes. *Dr Bernie Siegel*
7. When you stand at someone's side, nourishment may be provided that can carry that person forward, for a week or two. During that time,

anything can happen. *Norman Cousins*

8. The young woman speaks: *Will my mouth always be like this?* she asks. *Yes, I say, it will because the nerve was cut.* She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. *I like it,* he says. *It's kind of cute.* All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I – so close – I can see how he twists his own lips, to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works. I remember that the gods appeared in ancient Greece, as mortals, and I hold my breath, and let the wonder in. *Dr Richard Selzer*

VANESSA PROCTOR

emergence

everything has been figured out except how to live
—Jean-Paul Sartre

you sleep under a blue lamp
in a plexiglass crib
four days old
skin yellow with jaundice
twig-thin arms and legs

it wasn't meant to begin this way
the confines of the womb
to the special care nursery
yet you seem unperturbed
your body folded tightly
into indigo dreams

soon I'll take you home
hold you, get to know you
from the outside in

you'll learn the contours of faces
faces like yours
there will be words and music
plenty of milk
then good solid food

I'll take you outside
we'll feel the expanse of sky
watch birds, the way
sunlight catches leaves

there will be new smells
jasmine from the garden wet dog
woodsmoke from winter fires
we will take it all in

sleep recover
enjoy the warmth
of the lamp this time in limbo
we can wait
and then together
we'll make a start on living

IAN GIBBINS

Dial Tone

Cold Call 1 – Appointment

Can you see the pterodactyls? The unreliable glyphs they spread across footpaths and bicycle tracks? Sheltered from inclement precious metals and common clays, I have counted updraughts, felt their downstrokes, calibrated sidereal time with regard to continental drift, your cladogrammatic branch points. Only now can I resume contact with fog-soaked loam and honey-dew melons, dream about your house in the hills, the bread you baked, ignore construction zone boundaries around our desire for altitude and heat.

Redial 1

The message mentioned belongings. I comply, search afterglow for jasmine, rose, orange blossom, hands fallow at my sides, on tabletop, in rarely hostile earth. ‘Good to have you back.’ But I cannot be sure. Our arrival is delayed by asymptote, slowed by imperfection. Bloodshot meanders skirt lawns to be mown, drains to clear, vermin to evict. Amid cartons and packing crates, window shades jealous our skin, discontent curtains our perspective. We substitute bluff with categoric denial, switch to silent mode.

Cold Call 2 – Tests

Katie, or one of the Johnsons. It could have been any of them, could have been on song, on watch, on hold, through a hole in the Cyclone fence, a maze of reckless weeds, aggregated granite, etched with obituary, thumbprint, fluid graffiti, tiny whittling birds. Why do you ask? Shopping convenience? Trainee staff instruction? Fairtrade alternative? ‘You almost get the feeling.’ Askance, past the click and whirr, I make notes, polish Baltic Pine, uncap a beer.

Redial 2

Across fractured pavement, sticking plaster; between kerbside and indicator arrows, tip-toe balance, a final dry run before obligatory consideration of tap dance, tango, slow three-penny waltz. Wreathed in artificial flowers, bamboo, wisteria, we wonder about weather on the Gold Coast, a delegation to Mumbai. ‘Is the mains water off?’ ‘The gas?’ Whose hand is on my heart? What malcontent delivered this monsoonal bruise? Drunk with mosquito swarm and soundless interferometry, no lucky strike here, we have no champagne to spill.

Cold Call 3 – Diagnosis

The Tin Pan chorus strains rising fifths, descending minor sevenths, raw glissando and diminuendo, until I pick up: ‘Your test results.’ Beneath the swoop of a nightjar, I calculate subliminal boundaries, disavow life spans in dog-years, scorn persistent storm warnings and a felicitous break in the clouds. Without pressure, I rebalance impedances, realign contingencies, reject hypothetical propositions for the next unravelling minute. There is a shiver along the wire. My fingers numb, scratch imaginary air, place farewell on my tongue.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

EUGEN M BACON is a computer graduate mentally re-engineered into creative writing and has published over 100 short stories. Her work has won, been shortlisted, longlisted or commended in the Copyright Agency Prize 2017, Fellowship of Australian Writers National Literary Awards 2016, Alan Marshall Short Story Award 2016, Lightship Publishing (UK) international short story prize 2013 and Fish Short Story Prize 2013/14. Eugen's creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *AntipodeanSF*, *Andromeda*, *Aurealis*, *Bards and Sages Quarterly*, *Bukker Tillibul*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Horriified Press*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Meniscus*, *TEXT* and through Routledge in *New Writing*.

WANDA BARKER is an artist and writer, performing poetry for thirty years. She studied in the Creative Writing program at Victoria University in the nineties. She was the recipient of a Creative NZ New Writers Grant and had poems and short stories published during that time. NZ *Takahe*, *Printout*, and *Poetry NZ*, *Me and Marilyn Monroe*, 'Cathy Dunsford', *Mutes and Earthquakes*. Bill Manhire. During the 2000s she tutored 'Wild Writing' courses for Waikato University and throughout the Waikato, supported by Creative NZ. She launched her first poetry book, *All her dark pretty thoughts* at Raglan's Word Café July 2017.

JOSEPHINE BLAIR was born in 1992 in Washington, D.C. A poet and activist, Blair has passionately fought for mental health and social justice around the world, and has called places from San Ignacio to Rouen to Dakar home. She currently lives in Miami, happily, but is always open to suggestions. Her chapbook '(re)birthmarks' is forthcoming.

MAGGIE BUTT has published five poetry collections and a novel. Her most recent poetry collection is *Degrees of Twilight* (The London Magazine 2015). She relishes her fancy job title of Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Kent and is also an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Middlesex University where she's taught Creative Writing since 1990. Previously, she was a journalist and BBC TV documentary producer. In October 2017 she organized a 9-hour poetry marathon in aid of refugees. Her poems have escaped the page into choreography, a geo-locative mobile phone app, and live musical accompaniment. www.maggiebut.co.uk

KATERINA CANYON grew up in Los Angeles, and has two children. From 2000 to 2003, she served as the Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga. During that time, she started a poetry festival and ran several poetry readings in the area. She has published two chapbooks and an album. Her latest book, *Changing Lines*, a joint project with her daughter, is currently available on Amazon.com.

HUGO COMISARI is a Wiradjuri man with roots tracing back to the Riverine area of southwest NSW.

Hugo was born and raised on Ngunnawal Country in Canberra and is currently living on Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Country in Melbourne. 'Kookaburras Carp and Concrete' is Hugo's first poem and encourages his growing interest in Indigenous creative writing. He is currently studying his undergraduate degree at the University of Melbourne focusing on Indigenous-Australian studies and creative writing.

SEAN CRAWLEY writes short stories, songs, nonfiction and the odd angry letter which he occasionally sends. He won the Hervey Bay Arts Council Short Story Award in 2015 and has been published online and in anthologies, including the 2016 Newcastle Short Story Award and *Verity La*. Sean has worked in education, mental health and once owned a video shop in a dying town. He is currently located on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

ERICA DE JONG is an emerging writer and PhD candidate at the University of Tasmania. She spends her free time wandering around Hobart with a camera, a notebook and a restless mind.

ANNA DENEKINA is a writer and academic. She is completing a PhD in sociology at the University of Technology Sydney.

Composer and writer JOE DOLCE was longlisted for 2017 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize; two poems shortlisted for 2017 Philip Bacon Ekphrasis Prize; selected for *Best Australian Poems* 2015 & 2014; shortlisted for 2014 Newcastle Poetry Prize and 2014 Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize; winner of 25th Launceston Poetry Cup; published in *Meanjin*, *Monthly*, *Southerly*, *Canberra Times*, *Quadrant*, *North of Oxford* (US) and *Antipodes* (US); staff of Australian Institute of Music, teaching composition (with special emphasis on setting poetry-to-music); recipient of Advance Australia Award. His latest book, *On Murray's Run*, poems and song lyrics, selected by Les Murray, is published by Ginninderra Press.

JANE DOWNING has had prose and poetry published in journals including *The Griffith Review*, *Island*, *Southerly*, *Westerly*, *Overland*, *The Big Issue* and *Best Australian Poems* 2004 and 2015. Her two novels—*The Trickster* (2003) and *The Lost Tribe* (2005)—were published by Pandanus Books at the Australian National University. She has a Doctor of Creative Arts degree from the University of Technology, Sydney, and can be found at www.janedowning.wordpress.com

ANDREW DRUMMOND is a writer from Melbourne, who also works in education and community mental health. His writing has appeared in *Rabelais*, *juice*, *Explore*, *ars poetica* and a number of anthologies.

IAN GIBBINS is a poet, electronic musician and video artist, having been a neuroscientist for more than 30 years and Professor of Anatomy for 20 of them. His poetry covers diverse styles and media, including electronic music, video, performance, art exhibitions, and public installations, and has been

widely published in print and online, including three books: *Urban Biology* (2012); *The Microscope Project: How Things Work* (2014); and *Floribunda* (2015), the last two in collaboration with visual artists. For more info, see www.iangibbins.com.au.

MICHAEL GOULD is a Canadian New Zealander who has been writing poetry since retiring two years ago from a career as an administrator in health and education. Prior to that there was a degree in film studies, publication of his *Surrealism and the Cinema: Open-eyed Screening* (1976)—one of the first books in English on this topic; some published visual poetry and years of travel and odd jobs. Since returning to creative writing, his new poems have appeared in *Snorkel*, *The Café Reader*, and *Landfall*.

JAMES GRABILL's recent 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*. He teaches systems thinking and global issues relative to sustainability.

ANDERS HOWERTON is a transgender poet with a Masters in Poetry from the University of East Anglia. By day he works in the poetics of computer code. By night he hacks in English.

ELLA JEFFERY's poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies including *Meanjin*, *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Peril* and *Best Australian Poems*. She was shortlisted for the 2017 Val Vallis Award for Poetry and is currently a doctoral candidate at QUT in Brisbane.

ARUSHI JOSHI lives in Sydney and is in her final year of high school. She spends her free time sleeping, scrapbooking, and translating thoughts into poems.

CHARLES KELL is a PhD student at the University of Rhode Island and editor of *The Ocean State Review*. His poetry and fiction have appeared in *The New Orleans Review*, *The Saint Ann's Review*, *IthacaLit*, and elsewhere. He teaches in Rhode Island and Connecticut.

JEANINE LEANE is a Wiradjuri writer, teacher and academic from the Murrumbidgee River. Her first volume of poetry, *Dark Secrets After Dreaming*, won the Scanlon Prize for Indigenous Poetry, 2010 and her first collection of stories, *Purple Threads* (UQP), won the David Unaipon Award for Indigenous Writing in 2010. Her poetry has been published in *Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, *Overland* and *The Australian Book Review*. She teaches creative writing and Aboriginal literature at the University of Melbourne. *Walk Back Over*, her second volume of poetry, will be released in 2017 (Cordite Press).

WES LEE lives in New Zealand. Her latest collection *Body, Remember* was launched in 2017 by Eyewear Publishing in London. Her poems have appeared in *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *New Writing Scotland*, and many other publications. She has won a number of awards for her writing, most recently the Saboteur Awards Best Anthology 2017, and is currently shortlisted for The Overton Poetry Prize 2017 in the UK.

WJ Lofton is the author of *These Flowers was Held by Broken Vases*, and co-founder/content creator of the cultural oratory group *Pindulum*, <http://www.thepoetschair.com>. He is a native of Chicago, Illinois, and currently resides in the Middle East working alongside our nation's military. Activism is a passion of his, and he has found poetry to be a great medium to address some of the social issues that have been occurring within society. WJ Lofton's poems are his experiences of being a black male in America. His poems have been published in several print and online publications, including *The Tropolitian and Connotation Press*, and have been performed at universities and colleges across the southeast.

BRONWYN LOVELL has been published in *Best Australian Poems*, *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *the Australian Poetry Journal*, *Australian Love Poems*, *Antipodes*, *Cordite* and the *Global Poetry Anthology*. She has won the Val Vallis Award, the Adrien Abbott Poetry Prize and been shortlisted for the Newcastle, Bridport, and Montreal prizes. www.bronwynlovell.com

GAY LYNCH is a creative writing academic, working adjunct to Flinders University. She has published academic papers, *Cleanskin*, a novel (2006) and eleven short stories: most recently, in *Bluestem Magazine Illinois* (2017), *Griffith Review* (2016), *Best Australian Stories* (2015), *Breaking Beauty* (2015), *TEXT* (2015), and *Sleepers Almanac*: 8, 10 (2013, 2015). She was Fiction and Life Writing editor at *Transnational Literature* from 2011-2015. In 2016 FISH shortlisted her memoir piece, and she was runner-up for the British Council sponsored Small Wonder Short Story residency in Charleston, UK. She workshops poetry with Alison Flett. In March, she read at a 2017 Adelaide Fringe event.

DR ELIZABETH MACFARLANE is the author of *Reading Coetzee* (Rodopi, 2013) and a lecturer in creative writing at the University of Melbourne. She is the founder and coordinator of Graphic Narratives, Australia's first university subject devoted to comics and graphic novels, co-director of graphic novels publishing company Twelve Panels Press, and co-director of artists' residency The Comic Art Workshop.

IRA MCGUIRE: I am a current doctoral candidate at Griffith University Gold Coast where, as part of my PhD artefact, I am attempting to make something of the idea of fragmentary narrative. My work has been published in various Australian online and print journals.

CAOIMHE MCKEOGH lives in Wellington, and works in community disability support. She is currently working on a novel with the assistance of a New Zealand Society of Authors Mentorship. and has been

previously published in the *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook*, and *Landfall*, *Headland* and *Brief* literary journals.

DAMEN O'BRIEN won the Yeats Poetry Prize, the KSP Poetry Award and the Ipswich Poetry Festival, and was shortlisted in the ACU Poetry Prize, Val Vallis Award, Newcastle Poetry Prize, and Martha Richardson Memorial Poetry Prize. Damen has previously been published in *Cordite*, *Island*, *Verity La* and *StylusLit*.

MICHELLE O'SULLIVAN's first collection, *The Blue End of Stars* (The Gallery Press, 2012), won the Strong/Shine Award and was shortlisted in the UK for the Michael Murphy Poetry Prize. Her current collection, *The Flower and the Frozen Sea* (The Gallery Press, 2015), is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. A new collection is forthcoming.

AKACHI OBIJIAKU is a new writer from Nigeria, with poems appearing or forthcoming in *Basil O'Flaherty*, *the Rising Phoenix Review*, *the Scarlet Leaf Review* and *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*. She emigrated to England four years ago, aged 16 and alone, and she is surviving just fine. You can reach her at twitter.com/akachi_obijaku

For the most part, BRIAN OBIRI-ASARE lives and works in Sydney.

EMILY FRANCINE PALMER is studying a PhD (Creative Writing) at the University of Adelaide. Her research revolves around young adult fiction, gender and kick-ass female protagonists.

SARAH PENWARDEN lives in Auckland, where she works as a counsellor educator. She is studying a doctorate at the University of Waikato on a topic that brings together her interest in grief and poetry. She has had poems published in *Poetry New Zealand*, *Turbine* and *Meniscus*, poems and short stories published in *tākāhe*, as well as a short story broadcast on Radio New Zealand. She also writes short stories and poetry for children and had had both forms published in *The School Journal*.

VANESSA PROCTOR is a Sydney poet who has a special interest in haiku and its related forms. She is current President of the Australian Haiku Society. In 2010 one of her haiku was inscribed on a boulder on the Katikati Haiku Pathway in New Zealand. Her free verse has appeared in *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Island*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly* and *Quadrant*. She was shortlisted for the 2017 Australian Catholic University Poetry Prize. Her publications include the chapbook *Temples of Angkor* (Sunline Press, 2003), the eChapbook *Jacaranda Baby* (Snapshot Press, 2012) and *Blowing Up Balloons: Baby poems for parents* co-written with Gregory Piko (Red Moon Press, 2017).

VAUGHAN RAPATAHANA is a Kiwi (Te Atiawa) with homes also in Philippines and Hong Kong SAR. His poetry collection, *Atonement*, was nominated for a National Book Award in Philippines in 2016,

the same year he won the inaugural Proverse Poetry prize. Vaughan's new poetry collection, *ternion* (erbacce-press, England), is now out. He holds a PhD from the University of Auckland, and writes across several languages.

LINDSAY REID is a poet living in Newcastle Upon Tyne. She received a PhD in creative writing from Newcastle University in 2016, and her first book of poetry is coming out in 2018. She has had poems published in *Magma*, *Mslexia* and *The Cadaverine* and has won several poetry competitions.

HEATHER RICHARDSON lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her fiction and poetry has been published in magazines and anthologies in the UK, Ireland and Australia. She was runner up in the 2007 Academi Cardiff International Poetry Competition with the poem 'Wedding at Sea'. She is the author of two novels: *Magdeburg* (Lagan Press 2010) and *Doubting Thomas* (Vagabond Voices, 2017).

DR RACHEL ROBERTSON is a senior lecturer in writing at Curtin University and author of *Reaching One Thousand* (Black Inc). Her creative work has been published in *Australian Book Review*, *Island*, *Griffith Review*, *Westerly* and *Best Australian Essays*. Her academic interests include life writing, mothering, critical disability studies and Australian literature.

GERARD SARNAT has recently been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He's authored four collections: *HOMELESS CHRONICLES* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014) and *Melting The Ice King* (2016) which included work published in *Gargoyle*, *Lowestoft*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Main Street Rag*, *New Delta Review*, *Tishman Review*, and was featured in *New Verse News*, *Songs of Eretz*, *Avocet*, *LEVELER*, *iNY*, *StepAway*, *Bywords*, *Floor Plan*, *Radius*, *Foliage Oak*, *Dark Run*, *Scarlet Leaf*, *Good Men Project*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Winamop*, *Poetry Circle*, *Tipton Review*, *Creative Truth*, *Harbor Village*, *KYSO*, *Rumblefish* and *Ordinary Madness* debut feature sets of new poems. 'Amber Of Memory' was the single poem chosen for my 50th college reunion symposium on Bob Dylan; the *Harvard Advocate* accepted a second, and Oberlin, Brown and other universities in and outside the US accepted concurrent pieces. Mount Analogue selected Sarnat's sequence, *KADDISH FOR THE COUNTRY*, for distribution as a pamphlet in Seattle on Inauguration Day 2017 as well as the next morning as part of the Washington DC and nationwide Women's Marches. In August, Failed Haiku presented his work first among over a hundred contributors. For Huffington Post/other reviews, readings, publications, and interviews, visit GerardSarnat.com. Harvard/Stanford educated, Gerry has worked in jails, built/staffed clinics for the marginalised, and been a CEO of healthcare organisations and a Stanford Medical School professor.

BRENDA SAUNDERS is a Sydney writer and artist of Aboriginal and British descent. She has written three collections of poetry and her work has appeared in major anthologies and journals, including *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Overland*, *Southerly*, *Canberra Times* and *Best Australian Poems 2013 and 2015* (Black Inc). Brenda has been awarded several poetry prizes and various fellowships to international Writers'

Centres. She won the Banjo Patterson Prize in 2010 and 2016, and the 2014 Scanlon Prize for her collection *Looking for Bullin Bullin*. Brenda was awarded the 2016 Environmental Writing Fellowship to Varuna, the International Writers' House near Sydney, where she worked on her manuscript 'Understory': poems concerned with changes to the unique Australian environment since colonisation.

My name is SAMEED SAYEED, and I developed a love for writing at a very young age. I am fifteen years old, and unlike my peers, I enjoy going to my school where I am instructed to do my passion, writing. One day I hope to be an inspiration to all young and aspiring authors around the world.

ERNEST SLYMAN lives in New York City. He is a playwright, poet, novelist, cartoonist and humorist. He was born in Appalachia—Elizabethton, Tennessee—and attended East Tennessee State University. His work has appeared in the *Young Women's Monologues From Contemporary Plays: Professional Auditions for Aspiring Actresses*, edited with an acting introduction by Gerald Lee Ratliff/Meriwether Publishing. His work has been published in *The Laurel Review*, *The Lyric, Light: A Quarterly of Light Verse (Chicago)*, *The NY Times*, *Reader's Digest* and in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (St Martins Press), edited by Michael Meyer, and *Poetry: An Introduction* (St Martins Press), edited by Michael Meyer.

BARNABY SMITH is a writer, poet and musician based in northern New South Wales. His poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies both in Australia and overseas, while as an arts and music journalist he is a regular contributor to many leading publications. Also a singer-songwriter, his first album under the artist name Brigadoon will appear within the next year. www.seededelsewhere.com

MARIA STADNICKA is a writer, freelance journalist and lecturer. Born in 1977, winner of 12 Romanian National Poetry prizes, she worked as a radio and TV broadcaster. She has lived in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom since 2003 and published poetry in literary magazines in Romania, Republic of Moldova, United States, Austria, United Kingdom. Published poetry collections: *O-Zone Friendly*, *A Short Story about War*, *Imperfect*. www.mariastadnicka.com

MARK TUCKER is a Geelong-based poet and writer. His poetry has appeared in *Gargouille*, *The Offbeat*, *The Opiate*, *The Wax Paper*, *Idiom 23*, *Here Comes Everyone*, and elsewhere. He also writes irregularly as a columnist for runnerstribes.com and as a contributor to craftypint.com, and received his Masters Degree in Education from Butler University (Indianapolis).

DEB WAIN is a poet and short story writer who is passionate about food, culture, and the Australian environment. She has generally been employed in jobs where she talks or tells stories for a living. When not writing or talking you can find Deb dancing in the garden, drinking coffee, or learning new things.

COLIN WATTS: I am seventy-four, married, with grown-up children and have lived in Liverpool for many years. I became a grandfather for the first time on 28 September 2017. My publications include two

poetry collections and short stories and flash fiction online and in magazines and anthologies. I've had plays performed in and around Liverpool. I cycle everywhere and cultivate a quarter of an allotment. I am a long-standing member of the Dead Good Poets Society and co-run a regular Story Night at The Bluecoat Arts Centre in Liverpool.

LES WICKS has toured widely and seen publication in over 350 different magazines, anthologies & newspapers across 28 countries in 13 languages. His 13th book of poetry is *Getting By Not Fitting In* (Island, 2016). <http://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>

OUYANG YU, an Australian writer still alive and writing, who has to date published 92 books, including self-published ones, and his latest book in Chinese coming out shortly, *Dry Stuff: Notes on Poetry* (vol. 1), over 400 pages of comments on contemporary Chinese, Australian and American poetry, and etc.

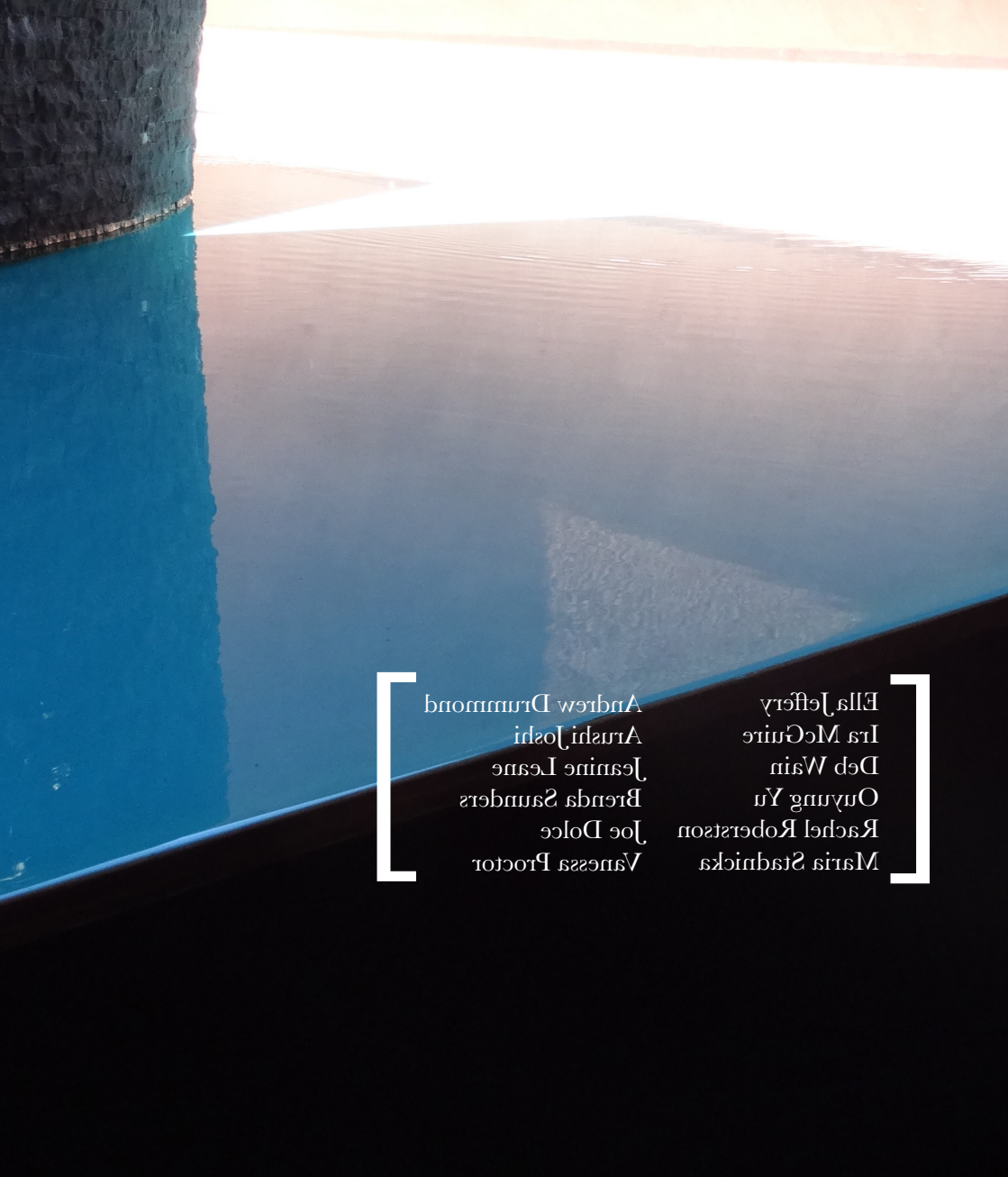
DAVID ZAZA's writing has appeared in *The Quarterly*, *Squalorly*, *Dialogue*, *The Perch*, and elsewhere. He has produced two puppet plays in collaboration with visual artist Mark Fox. He lives in New York, where he owns a small graphic design studio that produces arts publications.



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