

# n-SCRIBE



12 | 2017 | free publication

# 12

fiction | non-fiction | poetry | art

# WORKING GROUP

Laura Brinson has worked as an aerial photographer, shelf stacker, library technician, seamstress, funeral celebrant, project director and more – but writing has been a constant in her life. Published in *n-SCRIBE 10*.

Flavia Dent is a photographer, drawer and words-woman. French born but Melbourne based. Drawn to public housing estates and concrete, she had a strong aversion to poetry at school but seems to be writing nonsensical ones as of late. Flavia is also the director of *Y37*, an independent picture and word program based in Collingwood.

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# CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Thompson is a multi-award winning writer who works in theatre, film and television.

Cynthia Troup's publications range from scripts and podcasts to scholarly papers, catalogue essays, interviews. Her creative work is often concerned with the allusive richness of fragments.

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Kaye Roberts Palmer has been writing creatively for many years and especially enjoys the short story form. She lives in Reservoir with her husband, rabbit and very naughty cat.

Jo Cumberland writes short stories, creative non-fiction, poetry and scripts. She is currently working on creative non-fiction novel exploring her relationship to motherhood.

Bec Blakeney is a musician and writer from Thornbury. She is studying Professional Writing and Editing, RMIT.

Kathryn Tafra is currently undertaking her Masters in Creative Writing, Publishing and Editing. She is the founder of Writing Date, a local writers group, and lives in Preston with her daughter and an axolotl.

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Gino Tomisich lives and works in the City of Darebin. He is currently completing his Masters in Creative Writing and is a volunteer writing tutor at Reservoir Community House.

Annelise Balsamo is a writer and an English teacher.

Mary Rawson. This is a story about my experience coming to Australia, after a year of being married to my husband and meeting my new Australian family

Sarah Thomson is a writer and editor living in Melbourne. She has written a variety of non-fiction, fiction and dabbled briefly in poetry. She is currently working on a novel.

and *Poetry NZ*. In her copious spare time, she moonlights as indie musician, Grace Pageant. She is the convenor of feminist poetry event, *Girls on Key*, held monthly at Open Studio.

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TTo. Editor of "*Unusual Work*" magazine. Recent publication "*Fitzroy -- the Biography*". Am a retired Draughtsman, living in Darebin. Came out to Australia from Greece in 1954. Escaped Bonegilla/Migrant Reception Centre. Grew up in Fitzroy.

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Jaz Stutley has been writing and singing all her life, and she sees no reason to stop now.

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Stephen Perera, retired engineer of 72. My passionate hobby is reading and writing. Though I have written many unpublished proses and verses, this is the first submission for a publication.

Janneke Hall, a scribbler from way back

Gully Thompson is 12 years old, and has always been passionate about writing. He also enjoys composing music, making short films and comics. He is the founding editor of his own e-publication called *Class Mag*, and occasionally reviews children's movies for *Vision Australia radio*.

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Terry Donnelly is a teacher and writer who lives in Melbourne. He is the winner of previous short story competitions. In 2017 he was Highly Commended for the Victorian Premier's Unpublished Manuscript award for his book of short stories, 'Hey Luna, and Other Stories'. *Winner Darebin Mayors Writing Awards*.



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*n*-SCRIBE is a collection of new works from writers who, live work or study in the City of Darebin. A project of the Creative Culture Department, Darebin City Council. Information, past editions can be found at our website.

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*Some works contain language which may offend.*

# ADVICE TO A YOUNG MIGRANT

Terry Donnelley

Don't pack. Get your paperwork in order and walk, unshod, by the riverbank instead. Consider how the Liffey flows from your island within an island to the ends of the earth. Don't tell your friends; no leave-taking. In a box, on a plane, it's the same thing. The others will get on with their lives. Kiss your mother but don't hug your father. You will remember it more clearly that way. Amongst your people sorrow is hidden. When you arrive in Queensland stay out of the sun, there will be plenty of sun. Drive slowly and abide by their laws. It is important to keep your head up. The land will appear yellow, like paint spilt from a bottle and dried. In time you will see rainbows in it. Admire the cockatoos squabbling over sea-almonds, for the flame of red in their tails, the dark sheen of their plumage the colour of twilight.

Melted tar pooling on the road,  
friendships that blistered, English  
as a foreign tongue

Settle in Melbourne. Work. Play. Don't get nostalgic. Give enough but not everything. Tell them you grew up near-Dublin even though it's a lie; Dublin was as far then as Vladivostok or Anchorage. In the street an Aboriginal man will shout, Go home Captain Cook. Pretend he is not addressing you. Pretend solutions are beyond the self; that a country is a construct; that birth is exile. On the phone home they will ask you about snakes, spiders, sharks. There will be an edge of resentment, as if you forsook your heritage for a holiday. Don't try to explain. Please them, tell them what they want to hear. Agree too with those who say the Irish are similar. Agree, even though the Irish are as different from the Australians as a Kerry man is from a Dubliner. Miss the dark humour, the understatement, the softness. How to explain? Ration your memories, like fresh water after the storm. Allow yourself the pain of going back to where she found you; the ocean overflowing with swell, a stack of driftwood by the fireplace, the welcoming rain. Nostos.

In time, not-fitting-in becomes another type of fitting-in. Start a family, three boys. Even before they take breath they will be moving away from you. Hold them. More strangers to live amongst. Wasn't it always thus? No, the first family was real; the later one, a type of make-believe, a fairytale. More precious for it, more fragile. Holidays within the holiday. Bills, birthdays, sickness, health. Your homeland reduced to long-distance voices; a trickle winding down from a great dam. The flooded village made way for the future; always below the surface, the still wreckage of a lost world. Apply for citizenship even though you will never be Australian. When it comes to Manus, Nauru, and all that, it is not your place to make excuses, but believe always there are more good people. Trust. Smile at the old Greeks in your neighbourhood as they are kind, as you are from their western-most isle. Forget the original, there is only translation now.

Pledge allegiance, become Australian, even though long distant summers somehow seem more real. Melted tar pooling on the road, friendships that blistered, English as a foreign tongue. Dream of the old places. Dream of islands within islands, a dizzying and impossible archipelago. Look at the ruins in the mirror. Who made the wet footprints on the tiles? Over the years the mythologies become confused. Northcote echoes Ithaca; she plays Calypso; you are part-Friday, native to foreignness. Such is make-believe. There are only two days on the island, the day you arrive and the next, seemingly endless. But those little boys, the ones you lived for, have gone. Remember the smallness of their hands; their tinkling, carefree laughter. The problem is not being castaway; the problem is contact, rescue, living with others. Loving is a slow form of grieving.

As the rosella flits through the branches of the pepper tree realise the only home was childhood. A grá in your heart that never left you, that throbs thickly even now. The horizon narrows to a laneway at dusk. Hurry. Hide your sorrow; get your paperwork in order; don't worry about the others. They will get on with their lives.

*Winner Darebin Mayors Writing Awards*

# LAST WEEK'S LUNCH

Prithi Raor

'What's that smell?' Megan whined, her nose crinkling in distaste as she spun around to face her two friends, Rangi and Gina. They had fallen a few paces behind as they walked home from school.

'Oh yeah, I can smell that too!' Gina said, turning her head from side to side, as though she expected the source of the smell to suddenly materialize behind the electricity pole or the wire fence of Number 96.

'I can't really smell anything,' Rangi responded. She took some hesitant steps forward hoping that the others would follow. 'Oh my god Rangi! It's coming from your bag!' Megan squealed. 'Yuk!' Gina spat out.

Rangi looked at them and shuddered slightly. She always knew this day would come after Gina had joined their duo. Three was always a dangerous number in a group of friends. The memory of Megan's trampoline, which only accommodated two jumpers, was still too recent for Rangi to forget the experience of being left out. It was basic mathematics.

And now that same mathematics was at play today. Gina and Megan stared at Rangi, their faces partly shadowed by their floppy broad-brimmed hats. Once they had all worn legionnaires' caps but Rangi had missed that memo and now the back flap of her cap stuck to her neck uncomfortably.

'Mmmn yes. It's definitely coming from your bag' Gina confirmed while prodding at the faded nylon school-issue bag.

'What do you have in there Rangi?' Megan asked.

What was in there? Rangi thought hard – she had her maths textbook and exercise books. There were probably a thousand sheets of paper, half-finished worksheets, or scraps of drawings. But there must have been something else. Something that was making that smell that she had somehow failed to notice. Seconds before Megan spoke, Rangi knew what she would say.

'Let's see what it is then!'

'Yeah. I can't walk home with that smell following us the whole way.' Gina agreed.

There was nothing Rangi could do but submit her bag to scrutiny. This was not new to her. After all Amma made her do it almost every day to check that she had eaten her lunch. But ever since Rakesh, her older brother, had spotted the bin at the corner of their street, she had passed the test quite easily. When they had walked home together, a stop at the bin was as much a part of their routine as Mr Zhang's milkbar. But Raki was in high school now and Rangi didn't always remember. She had been in trouble a few times already. Amma had yelled and berated her, sometimes even giving her a smack with the wooden spoon. All those soggy chapatis, fragrant mint pulaus and tangy pickles left untouched in her lunchbox.

Gina and Megan had been efficient and all her things were now piled haphazardly on the nature strip. Gina had discovered a stick somewhere and gingerly poked at the offending lunchbox. Megan wrapped her hands with the excess sleeves of her jumper and proceeded to hold up the box into the light.

'What is it?' Megan spluttered, choking on the fumes.

Rangi stared at the container. And that's when she remembered what it was – it was the idlis from last week. She had begged for those soft, round, fluffy patties of rice, which had now been stewing in the coconut chutney for far too long.

Once those idlis had been little half snowballs but now green mould had turned the white mounds into something entirely alien. But even if they hadn't, how could Rangi explain idlis? What would she say? That they were made of soaked and steamed rice combined with two different types of lentils? That they had to ferment in a big bowl for days to give them that slightly sour taste? That in spite of Rangi's love of idlis she still hadn't eaten any. Just as she hadn't eaten her lunches every day since prep?

Rangi didn't say any of these things. Instead she drew her breath in and announced:

'They're stale cupcakes. I completely forgot about them!'

And without another word she raced down the street to dispose of the evidence.

*There were probably a thousand sheets of paper, half-finished worksheets, or scraps of drawings*

*Highly Commended Darebin Mayors Writing Awards*

# SPREAD

Sarah Walker

The biggest change wasn't the language – the garbled wide syllables she had to force into sentences inside her head. Nor the suddenness of being foreign, of drawing the attention of eyes she used to stare at, at home.

It was the space. On suburban trains, rattling through tunnels and pressed in against hot, tired humans (the sweat taking on some delicate new tang – old perfume; new lover) – there it was almost normal. But the first time she took a train out – really out, to where the trees fell away to scrub and huge trucks bawled their bitumen lullabies – that was where it hit. She walked, shoes salted in dust, until the horizon ran flat in all directions. And she felt herself spread. Diluted, somehow, trying to fill the space, trying to touch the sky. She couldn't think. Thoughts lazed across kilometres, missed her brain on the circuit back home and shot out into infinity. She felt terribly, terrifyingly light. Like a sugar low that reached out from her body and into everything. She shook. She stayed until the sun set, blood raking everything, light leaping off the edge of the world, and when the night came she wept.

Back in her apartment, she kissed the walls, every one. She thanked the ceiling with a hand to her heart and cheeks shining. That night, she dreamed of dying, woke choked and tacky-skinned. Cried out names that could not hear her, even on a wind that screamed. The dawn purred in through the catflap blinds.

At the market, hefting armfuls of greens, her fingers grazed the dirt caught in the leaves. Some shape in her stomach shifted. She licked her fingers, raked earth across her tongue, bit down. Her teeth caught the grit. The sound was loud enough to almost be pain. Later, chopping the vegetables, she did not wash them. The dirt like pepper. Each mouthful shrieked.

She had always been able to weave, liquid, through a crowd. The street a living thing, and her part of some reactive, atomic hive. But now, she found herself nudging bodies. Accidental, awkward. She collided with a woman bowed low with shopping bags, forgot her words, could not apologise. She rushed across a road after the crossing beeps ceased, and stopped midway across, complete, arrested by some impulse. A sudden wave of rightness, standing there alone, clutching a string bag, thinking of nothing. Car horns broke her reverie. She dashed to the pavement through air blue with invective.

She felt that she was holding her breath, no matter how deep she breathed. Stopped, somehow. She felt newly afraid. Her reactions grown strange. Her body a stranger. A changeling.

She took the train far out again once voices started sounding like shrieks. Alone in the carriage on the earliest service out, she folded her fingers on her knees and drove the rubber of her shoes across the floor. The doors hissed open, and she stumbled a little on the way out, but there was no-one on the platform to see.

When she came to the place where the horizon circled perfectly around, something went quiet inside her. A lick of cold hung in the air, and she breathed out steam. She watched it hang for a moment, visible, then dissolve, dissipate into nothing. She dug into her stomach for more air and breathed it up, breathed it out, breathed it into the vastness of the sky, and as it disappeared, she smiled. As the sun grew warm, she spread her hands out wide, threw her head back and laughed and laughed.

# THE PRAYERS OF THE PAGANS

Chris Thompson

On the nights that Pyotr's snoring keeps her awake – which is most nights – Ludmilla stretches her thick neck so as to look past the Saviour on the cross that hangs above their bed, and through the small window that opens out to the heavens above. There she looks for a star – any star – upon which to make a wish. Her wish is always the same; for a baby to occupy the crib that waits in the next room, roughhewn by the same coarse and calloused hands that move so tenderly over her body on the many occasions she and Pyotr try to conceive. But like the seed on stony ground in the Book of Matthew, their frequent couplings have come to nothing.

Ludmilla knows that wishes are neither holy nor sacred. That they are the *prayers of the pagans* for which she seeks and receives forgiveness in Father Anatoly's confessional each Sunday. But in her secret heart she has long ago given up on the hope that God will answer her prayers with a child. Although she will not confess it to Father Anatoly or even to Pyotr, she has lost her faith. For Ludmilla, a wish upon a star seems as good as any prayer, or just as futile.

It is at Easter, on that most holy of Sundays, as the sweet spring breezes of April bring blossoms to the fruit trees and draw jonquils from the hard winter earth that Father Anatoly takes her aside and reproaches her for continuing with this folly of wishes over prayers. Ludmilla promises to be more devout in her yearnings for a child but it is barely a week later when she finds herself wide awake beside her snoring husband, still sticky with the possibility of their efforts, and staring at the stars that twinkle above her in the frame of the high window. Try as she might, though, she cannot stop herself from wishing once more for what her heart most desires.

*Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight.*

In the morning as Pyotr gobbles down the last of his porridge, kisses his wife and hobbles out the door, she wonders if her wish, like her prayers, has fallen on deaf ears; whether she will need to admit her weakness, shame-faced in the darkness of the confessional, or if this will be the day when the answer will come. She gives Pyotr his lunch wrapped in a clean rag and waves him off. Smoke belches from the old tractor as the engine coughs to life and clatters off taking her husband into the far away paddocks for the work of the day.

It will be the last she ever sees of him.

When they find him, he will be trapped beneath the overturned machine on the side of a hill, his lunch spilling from the open rag just beyond the reach of his stubby workman's fingers. But that will not be until much later in the day.

What happens to Ludmilla in the morning will be just as profound.

It's while she's in the garden, cracking open the earth with a hoe in readiness for the planting of summer vegetables that she sees the day-star. A bright burning orb in the clear blue sky. It seems to fall from the heavens away to the south towards the Volga but before she can even think of making a wish, the angel appears – vivid orange with a white halo and wings spread like a canopy. She watches in awe as the angel floats to earth and disappears behind a stand of Siberian Pines a mile or so from the house.

Ludmilla is rooted to the spot, blinking the disbelief from her eyes. Is this God's messenger, here to reprimand her for the betrayal of her pagan prayer the night before? For breaking the promise she made to

Father Anatoly? Or is it the answer to her wishes in the form of Gabriel here to deliver the blessed news as he did with Mary at the annunciation?

Or did she imagine the whole thing?

Surely that is it. Nothing more than the sun in her eyes as an eagle flew by. Or maybe something stranger, like St Elmo's fire. Pyotr told her once about that phenomenon. He'd seen it himself, like a ball of lightning in the sky. That would explain it. She has almost convinced herself that this must be what she saw when the orange figure with the white halo emerges from the midst of the Siberian Pines dragging its wings beside it.

Slowly, the angel makes his way towards her.

*Don't be afraid,* he says.

*I'm not.*

She tries to look into his face but the white halo is glassy, like a window and all she sees are the sky and clouds reflected back to her.

*Do you know where I come from?* asks the angel.

She nods and points to the heavens.

*Are we near Baikonur?*

She shakes her head. *This is the Saratov region. We are near Engels.*

The angel looks perplexed.

*Are you lost?* she asks.

The angel shakes his head. *Not lost. Just off course.*

*You are an angel? Is your name Gabriel?*

*My name is Yuri. I am a Cosmonaut.*

Ludmilla doesn't know what that means. Father Anatoly has spoken

of Cherubims and Seraphims and Archangels, but not of Cosmonauts. She wonders whether that means this is an angel from the cosmos who will answer her pagan prayer.

She indicates the house behind her. *Would you like to sit? Drink some tea?*

The angel removes his halo to reveal the face of a man. Then he discards the draped canopy of his wings and follows her inside. There are two wooden chairs at the bare table. The angel sits in one and whistles a tune while Ludmilla puts a flame to the kettle.

*What is that song?* she asks.

*It is the song I sang in the heavens.*

The angel sings for her, *the Motherland knows where her son flies in the sky...*

*A celestial song,* she says. The angel nods.

Ludmilla gathers cups and slices a loaf of fruit scone. She looks hopefully at the angel from the cosmos. *Did you see God up there? Do you have news for me?*

*I saw the Earth. It is a splendid sight.*

The angel takes the fine china cup from her hands. It is a delicate thing, beautiful and anachronistic amongst the plain and functional features of Ludmilla and Pyotr's home. The angel tells her so.

*It was handed down to me from my mother and from her mother before that.*

The angel looks about the room, through the door into the next room where Ludmilla and Pyotr's bed sits beneath the crucified Christ. Through the next door into the room with the roughhewn crib. He sips and admires the pattern of children at play etched into both cup and saucer. *And you will pass it on to your child.*

The angel's words give Ludmilla a thrill. *Do you think so?*

*I do.*

The angel places the cup and saucer on the table. *Do you have a telephone?*

The question surprises her. *What use does an angel have for such things?*

*I am a cosmonaut. I must report my whereabouts. And that I have come to Earth safely.*

Ludmilla doesn't really hear him. She is too absorbed in thoughts about the possibility that she might one day pass on her grandmother's tea cups. *There is a phone. For public use.* She points. *Outside the store at the crossroads a mile and a half in that direction.*

The angel stands and thanks his hostess. He kisses her on the cheek and leaves Ludmilla standing in her kitchen, flushed with joy and anticipation. By the time she remembers her manners and runs to the door, her angel is already a good way down the road, his white halo restored to his head. His silken wings bunched under his arm.

But Ludmilla's joy is short-lived and not too long after the orange figure of her cosmonaut angel has disappeared, the bailiff arrives with the news of her husband. Ludmilla's tears come in a flood, as much for the sadness that Pyotr will never know of the news the angel brought to them, as for the grief of her loss.

At church on Sunday, as Father Anatoly holds back the curtain of the confessional for her, he makes a comment that laces his condolence with a suggestion that the tractor accident was a punishment from God, angry at Ludmilla for her pagan prayers. But Ludmilla knows better. She refuses Father Anatoly's invitation to make her confession. She turns and, hand on her belly, walks away from the church, never to return.

On her way home, as she walks by the store at the crossroads with its telephone there for the public to use, she is drawn to a commotion of old

men gathered around a newspaper. Ludmilla has never had education enough to make meaning of words on a page, but she recognises the image of her cosmonaut angel beneath the bold black letters of the headline. She is too embarrassed to ask the old men what it all means, lest it refer in some way to her afternoon with her heavenly guest. Instead, she walks on the mile and a half towards her home.

And then April becomes May and spring becomes summer, becomes autumn, becomes winter until nine months has past; until the faded calendar has given way to 1962 when the eyes of the world are turning to the possibility of the moon.

On the nights when the baby's crying keeps her awake – which is most nights – Ludmilla stretches her thick body, climbs out of her lonely bed, wraps herself in Pyotr's old robe and shuffles into the next room where her mal'chik lies. She sits by the roughhewn crib and gazes up through the small window speaking to her boy about the animals she sees in the constellations or the sickle of the moon that shines down on them, or the hard hands of his gentle father who never knew his son. And sometimes of the orange angel with the white halo who came down from the heavens to bring her the answer to her pagan's prayer – her wish come true.

*On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human to leave the planet and orbit the Earth in Vostok 1. After one hour and forty-eight minutes in space, he returned to the Earth, ejecting from the spacecraft and parachuting to the ground in the Saratov region, 2800 kilometres west of the intended landing site near Baikonur Cosmodrome. After walking for a time, he met a farmer and his daughter who directed him to a telephone so that he could contact Moscow and report his location and the success of his mission.*

# THE STORY STARTS NOW

Annelise Balsamo

A cop tells me later that Peggy is a bit of a panic merchant; they log calls from her weekly about strange sounds

## The story starts now

I mean, it was weird. No cop I spoke with had seen anything like this before.

Right now, there was one dead and one alive. Clearly, I needed to begin with Roy Arthurson, the man who survived that afternoon. Interview him and find out what had happened.

That interview never happened. In the end, the police will conduct the only interview with Roy. I'll get to that.

The one who died that afternoon was a woman. What was she doing? Why was she walking the Merri Creek path?

Her name was Jeanette Wood. Not that her neighbours knew this was her name. One calls her 'Jan' and says he would wave to her when he saw her. The only reason he knew her name was because she had once got his mail by mistake and had come around to give it to him. 'I'm Jan', she reportedly told him. Now he regrets a bit that he didn't know her. 'Grim', he offers about the death. 'But fascinating.' Another neighbour knew her by sight but had never spoken with her. He is also a little despondent he didn't have more to say. 'Tell me about the body again,' he says. Someone else tells me that the street is friendly. And then she qualifies this by saying it feels friendly. A friendly vibe. But she doesn't know the names of anyone around her. Who has the time? Right? But tragic about that girl. What happened again?

There is no confirmed, final sighting of Jeanette Wood on Thursday August 3. The police talk to everyone on the street but no one remembers anything about her that day. Mail guy wants to be involved, tells me thought he might have seen her the day before but he can't be sure. It's useless.

And I think: come on. How could you miss her?

She was literally found wearing a bright pink coat. That's how they found her. The coat.

Oh yeah, the neighbours say. She dressed strangely. One neighbour suggests, in a whisper, that the way Jeanette dressed actually made her a bit wary. Others said that after a few months of seeing her in the street, they barely registered her clothes anymore. Pink, orange. It was all a bit attention seeking. A clue? one neighbour queries.

I want to know what had happened on that ordinary Thursday afternoon when she left her house to walk by the Merri Creek for... what? Exercise? The clothing she was wearing didn't suggest exercise. To meet Roy Arthurson?

She was found in the reeds by the creek, mostly in the water and almost invisible but for the pink coat. It was the pink coat that caught the attention of two women, Sara B and Ainslie R, who were walking that evening. Both reported they were chatting, and there was no reason for them to look closely at the reeds and the water at that particular spot. But they did. The bright pink, they thought. Yet in the end, they weren't sure how they saw her. Sometimes it's like, one of them said, the universe wants these things exposed.

They were terrified. They rang to the nearest house and called the police. The cops arrived quickly. In minutes, Ainslie said. The police log indicates that the time between the call made by Sara, and the arrival of the police was five minutes twenty-four seconds. Quick. This was 5.37pm.

Upon examination, it was determined that Jeanette died sometime between three and four that afternoon.

No one on her street saw anything. Her leaving, her walking along the street to the creek. Nothing. So no way to really establish when she left her home, and

no way to narrow down the time frame.

But that wasn't the end of the story. At around eleven o'clock pm that same day, Peggy W let her dog out into her backyard before she locked him in the laundry for the night. The dog ran immediately to the back fence and began to bark. Peggy could hear a faint thumping noise, as if someone was kicking the back fence, and as she followed the dog, she heard what sounded like moaning. She got spooked and went back inside, taking the dog. She called the police. This time the cops took longer – but they were there within the hour; the police log records 11.53pm. Just before midnight. (A cop tells me later that Peggy is a bit of a panic merchant; they log calls from her weekly about strange sounds.) They went around the back of Peggy's house, which backs on to the Merri Creek, and discovered an older man, lying in the long grass (unmowed over winter). He was in bad shape. He had bite marks and scratches on his hands and face, and his right arm was broken. He had an eye gouged out. He was soaking wet. He was only just conscious.

This was Roy Arthurson.

The police didn't immediately put the two individuals together – he was found almost a kilometre from Jeanette – but within hours they had linked the two, and were beginning to put together what becomes a truly baffling crime. On testing the matter under the fingernails of Jeanette's left hand – the hand that had not been submerged in water – Roy's DNA was recovered. Jeanette's dental records matched the bite marks on Roy's face, hands and arms. Clearly, these two had been together. Less clearly was what had brought them together. And, other than what looked like a fight to the death, what they had been doing together.

While Roy was in the hospital, the police tried to find connections between Jeanette and Roy. On the surface, there was nothing to connect them other than they lived vaguely proximate to each other, several streets apart. Jeanette in her tiny flat, and Roy in the garage of his sister's house.

Roy's sister, Beverly, didn't know anything about Jeanette. Hadn't even seen her around the streets. But she worked night shifts and wasn't about in the day much. I sleep during the day, she tells me when I knock on her door to chat. Roy, on the other hand, she saw daily. She had taken him in when things had gone badly for him.

Badly how? I ask, standing on her porch. She has not invited me in and is speaking to me through the flywire screen. I'm lucky. I'm the first to speak to Beverly. Within hours of my interview, she will stop speaking to the media altogether.

Just badly. Jobs dried up. That kind of thing.

Beverly tells me that things between her and Roy were just ok. They tolerated each other. His space was in the garage. She had put plaster on the walls, and had installed a heater. He had a bed and a couch, a kettle and a microwave. He came into her house for the toilet, to have a shower.

When I ask Roy and Beverly's neighbours about him, none of them seem to know anything about Roy. That guy out the back? Yeah. We knew he was there. But we never talked to him. Didn't know his name. But, now that we think about it, he was a bit strange. I was a bit scared of him, one neighbour murmurs, eyes darting about.

Predictably, no one had seen Roy on the street that Thursday either.

But somehow they had both ended up in or by the Merri Creek that Thursday afternoon.

I go in search of Jeanette's friends and family. Her family is up North, she had no one living in Melbourne.

They spoke with her sporadically. She seemed happy according to them. Jeanette worked casually at a health service where she was a receptionist. Colleagues at the service said she was nice, polite. Great with the clients. But they didn't know much about her. One remembers that Jeanette had told him, in passing, that she was a writer. Or that she was writing a novel. Something like that. He hadn't asked her any questions. He was worried, he tells me, that she would feel that she needed to tell him the plot of her book. Someone had done this to him once at a party and he had never been so bored in his life.

I put out a call for any of her friends to get in touch with me. All contacts turn out to be frauds; most have never met her. But they are thrilled by the crime.

The link between Jeanette and Roy, via DNA, turns the police investigation, always flagged as a homicide, into something more complex. However, the police initially decide, on evidence, that Roy had murdered Jeanette.

But here is the problem. The autopsy on Jeanette described injuries almost identical to Roy's. Like Roy, Jeanette had bites and scratches. She had a broken arm. The cause of death was drowning. But she also had serious damage to her liver, as if she had fallen heavily or something had fallen on her.

Six days after Roy was found, and Jeanette was retrieved from the creek, Roy himself died. It turned out that he, too, had serious liver damage from a fall, or something falling on him.

Two victims, it now seems. And two perpetrators. Or some other perpetrator who killed both of them.

In the transcript of the police interview with Roy – conducted two days after he was found (the Saturday) – when he had regained consciousness and was momentarily stable, Roy had told police that Jeanette was the loveliest person he had ever seen. The police had asked: were they friends? Roy had been a little evasive here. Not friends exactly, he had said. More that he had admired her

from a distance. He always said hello to her when he saw her. She was polite back to him. Had they ever met for coffee? A drink? No, said Roy. Never.

So what had happened that Thursday afternoon? Here the police drew a blank with Roy. He was hazy. He didn't remember much. He remembered leaving his garage at about two or two thirty. He had just watched something on TV, some medical program, and needed some air. I checked the TV schedule for that day. There was a show on called 'The Doctors' between one thirty and two thirty, so his timeline checked out. He remembered walking towards the creek, he liked to see the water and to hear the birds. He had thrown some bread to the ducks. And then his memory failed. He remembered only fragments of the next few hours. Someone biting him hard on the face. The splashing of water close by. Darkness. The detectives pressed him. Was he hit from behind? He didn't know. Does he remember seeing Jeanette? No. Does he remember seeing anyone? No. What is the last thing he remembers? The ducks. He was close to the edge of the creek. They were quacking at him. He quacked back, he claimed.

The detectives wound up their interview, and then Roy died. There were no more witnesses. Just two bodies with almost identical injuries. Just two victims that no one seemed to know or to have seen.

I ask the police later if they are looking for a third person. They say no. The DNA is clear. The only DNA they find is Jeanette's on Roy and Roy's on Jeanette. There was some kind of terrible misadventure that we will never be able to piece together. Misadventure. That's the word the coroner uses.

That just leaves the ducks. When I go down to the creek, I can't find any. I retrace my steps around the neighbourhood in the hope someone remembers something.

No one does. But they are keen to speak about the murders. And one neighbour tells me that she won't be quite as friendly as she has been, and that she'll be locking up more carefully from now on.

# AFTERMATH OF THE 3RD WORLD WAR?

Stephen Perera

Parched land, bone dry  
Stretched in to the emptiness  
As far as eyes can see and beyond  
As far as to the horizon and beyond  
Silence whispered everywhere  
Broken by the wailing wind  
Gushed at times from nowhere

Not a living soul left in there  
No birds, no flies flew in the air  
But roasted disfigured bodies  
Littered here and there  
Feeble resilient cockroaches  
One or two, but hardly moved  
Departing the empty domain  
But clung to the blackish bones

Landscape was dotted by few trees  
Sun and dry wind stripped them bare  
Like one legged headless ghosts they stood  
With bony hands dangling in the air  
Some were already fallen, burnt 'ghosts'  
As moaners for the past glorious green

Giant red hot disk of the sun traversed  
From East to west in the orange tinged dome  
Shooting its fiery arrows through the haze  
Roasting and frying the grave land beneath

Dried rivers, streams and creaks  
Were bare grooves on the eerie land  
And disappearing under the red sand  
Piled up by the heated wind often blown

Swollen heated seas and oceans  
And screaming wind towards the land  
Pushed mountains of dead sea- animals  
And laid along every coast line  
But, lay rotten, boiled and fried

Ruins of famed metropolis  
Were swirls of dust in giant clouds  
Landed in heaps of grits and sand  
Lifted again by the howling dry wind  
Sounding like sobs from heaven  
Grieving for the annihilated civilisation

# JULIA

Edward Caruso

She too has an Italian surname,  
asks if I know any with hers in Italy,  
or elsewhere.

Allows me to stay for 10 *luca*<sup>1</sup>, cash,  
as long as I'm out first thing  
– the boss arrives at 8.

She works all day for little,  
beckons an 11:30 dinner  
to talk of entering Italy as a tourist  
to find work,  
and wants pictures.

While harbouring thoughts of migrating to Iquique  
she asks for impressions of Venice.

With her long black hair and white streak  
she'd knocked,

wanting me to go out  
for the half hour she could.

But I had to be up early,  
repeating her check-out time to reassure.

She asked my age and star sign.

My refusal to pay her bill,  
almost double a standard meal,  
failed to bring indignation.

The goodwill that followed  
a turn for knowledge  
and request to keep in touch.

To sit by the Valdivia River,  
watch the sunrise and fog cover the bank,  
hear my breath as the air froze.

Some kind of connection in this cold air.  
Some faint stirring, no one in sight.

<sup>1</sup>Ten thousand Chilean pesos (about A\$19.50).

# WALKING HOME

Henry Briffa

## 1. *Footscray*

dad longed to return  
to a home I didn't know

where he'd had sunset passigatti  
on which he'd meet his mates  
there were no fish and chiperies  
but piles of pastizzi bakeries  
the water was real blue  
and everyone was of the faith

for me .....Footscray was home  
trams rattled my attic window  
with its view of the Kinnears clock  
and pedestrians consisted mostly  
of Salvation Army band members  
who blew brass outside our door

when I became old enough  
to go and watch Ted Whitten play  
a few blows to the gut  
brought home to me  
that it wasn't always friends you met  
while walking on your own

he's long gone.....but I think  
that dad'd be more at home  
on the Maribynong path now  
with my son and I  
.....havin' a stroll

## 2. *bells*

I long  
to see you  
yearning your quiet presence  
your Mediterranean scent

after mum left you  
there was a period when  
we seemed estranged  
so memory frames it

(or so I dreamt)  
to fill  
that void

following your promise  
26 years ago  
that your daugh ter would  
*marry over (your) dead body*

then perfectly timing  
nuptial and funeral bells

## 3. *Il belt siekta Malta\**

I'm woken by walkers  
laughing loudly along  
echoing limestone lanes  
fighting their lack of noise

labouring to find peace in  
this mind altering quiet  
confined within my medieval cell's  
stone walls stone roof stone floor

I begin to hear  
the noise I make  
contemplating those  
who sleep no more

300 souls  
populate this citadel  
holding the fortitude  
to sleep in peace

*(\*Mdina is known to the Maltese as  
the silent city, 'Il belt siekta')*

# ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE DARK?

Kathryn Tafra

'I'm going part-way there,' my colleague says, as we leave after-work drinks, 'Just stay in the Uber when I get out and give me five bucks tomorrow.'

'Nah, it's all good,' I say, shrugging, 'I'll get out with you and go up to Smith Street. I like the tram, it's a character study.'

She rolls her eyes, but I know she understands. We say goodnight and I slog up an alley to Smith Street, and hop on the 86 tram. It squeals against the tracks as it stumbles onto Queens Parade; I wish I hadn't had that last drink.

The tram trundles up High Street, through Westgarth, Northcote, Thornbury. It passes my favourite Indian restaurant, and I pull the cord. I love the burring sound it makes as the little light up the front plinks on. We stop outside the laundromat and the doors blunder open, never quite synchronised. There's a moment of tension whenever I get off the tram at night. I always check to make sure no errant car is coming, but also to see who else is alighting at the same stop. There are usually several people clambering down the steep steps, and tonight is no different. We make our way to the crossing and disperse, each on their mission home or to the shops or wherever. Sometimes I am the only one that crosses both ways to head east, sometimes there is one other, or a few. I prefer not to walk alone. There's a perverse comfort in having someone within shouting distance. Just in case.

It's cold tonight. Heavy clouds scud between me and the moon, but the rain stopped half an hour ago. The orange street lights seem far apart; I wish the bus was still running. It's only a ten-minute walk, but it feels longer on a dark night. I'm on my own; the other two passengers who got off at my stop went the other way. My hearing feels acute; with each footstep I can hear the rattle of my boot buckles, but I know my reactions are gummy – like I'm walking underwater, preparing to be an astronaut. My breathing sounds loud inside my head. I speed up to a brisk walk and it makes

me puff and sweat. The darkness comes right up to my nose.

As I pass the Aldi, a police car slowly cruises out from the carpark and I don't know whether to be comforted or nervous. It's kind of nice to know they're there, but I can't help wonder what has summoned them. I hope they've just been to the Woolies. Part of me wonders if I should ask them for a ride home, but I tell myself not to be ridiculous. They have more important things to do. The thought occurs to me that if I had stayed in the Uber I would be home by now. I shake my head. The sudden movement reminds me of the red wine I wished I hadn't drunk earlier. All I want is to be home in bed. I hunch my shoulders against the bitter July wind and slouch onwards.

From behind a kerbside garbage bin, a dark shape looms suddenly before me. I shy to the left, adrenaline coursing, even as I see the wrinkled face of a local nonna. She nods at me in a friendly way and tugs the leash of her small white dog, dragging it off the grass and back towards the house. I keep walking, the sound of my pulse in my ears.

I am the only one walking away from High Street, but a few blocks along I hear quick footsteps heading towards me. I peer into the darkness between the streetlights and make out the shape of a woman, running. As she gets closer I can see that she is not dressed in gym gear or wearing joggers. She is not wearing headphones or a Fitbit. She looks like she is being chased. I have about five seconds to decide what to do. All the options, all the pros and cons, flood me. Before I can catch a coherent thought, she is gone, pelting through the night. I try to console myself about my lack of action; she's heading towards High Street, and help, at least. But I am left with the uncomfortable fact that whatever she was fleeing now lies between me and home.

I pass the crest of the hill and below me, bathed in the fanta-orange glow of the

street light, I see what initially looks like two youths crouched over a body. My stomach lurches up toward my mouth as my brain throws the horrific story together. Without slowing my pace, I cross to the opposite side of the road. As I get closer, I see that what looked like a crime scene is actually two women repacking their groceries. I feel sheepish, but still highly strung.

What was that first woman running away from?

Ahead of me I hear a man's laughter. Another moment of panic hits me.

Was she running from him? Should I also run?

The owner of the laugh appears around a corner, and his girlfriend's smile is suddenly directed at me. Instead of returning it, I throw her a look that rests somewhere between deer-in-the-headlights and resting-bitch-face. Feeling paranoid and on-edge, I scuttle back across the road. I'm nearly home. I feel the tension in my shoulders begin to dissipate when I am within sprinting distance of my front door, despite the fact that I have never felt threatened here.

I know women who walk from public transport to their car or home with their keyring grasped in their fist like an amulet, keys poking between their fingers like rays of light, a weapon at the ready. I don't get my keys out until I'm at my door. In a practiced act of defiance, I refuse to use them as a makeshift knuckleduster. Instead, I force myself to approach my home with a confidence I do not feel, while I casually check, with sideways glances, that nobody has followed me down the drive. I don't let my fingers hurry as I extract my keys and choose the one that will allow access to my sanctuary. When I finally get inside, I am awash with relief. But I don't lock the door behind me until I have switched on a light and assured myself that nobody else is there.

# THIS AFTERNOON I WALKED TO MEET A FRIEND FOR A CUP OF TEA IN HIGH STREET

Cynthia Troup

For now my garden is a narrow rectangle of balcony. So narrow that I water and pluck the leaf-tips of potted herbs and grasses from the doorway. I inhale. There are various mints, including lemon balm; Australian native lemongrass, and the sharp-edged ‘culinary’ lemongrass for curries. All can be used to make tea.

Only this morning I noticed: over the years I’ve moved closer to the water, closer to the veins of inner Melbourne. When I first left the family home I moved north-west – north of the area marked Fairfield on a map of Melbourne suburbs, where the course of the Yarra River traces the shape of a lobed leaf. Later my parents, too, moved north-west, and our songlines could more easily converge. For special occasions we’d plan that they converge at a local restaurant.

Many a father bestows on his children a silence about his childhood. Many a child comes to believe that the silence is weighted with suffering – stories are slighted by a wish to forget. Perhaps for this reason I know just a single tale my father told from his earliest memories. It’s an image of contentment, set in the highlands of Sri Lanka, which was known as Ceylon when my father was born. His father, from Aberdeenshire in Scotland, managed a tea plantation in forested hills above the Kandy plateau.

I know just a single tale  
my father told from his  
earliest memories

I can tell you this story because of a moment of alertness amid the ordinary flow of family talk. Suddenly I became the small furred animal that lowers itself into the dimness of the ground so as to listen and know. My father was remembering being a child in a large homestead kitchen... how he liked roaming through the lush rows of the vegetable garden.

Near the gate he had just seen a rat snake, *sara paambu*. Heard it hissing. The cook spoke to the boy in Tamil. Imagination hoists the warm, stocky body of my father at four years old onto a wooden work table. Knees stark, legs swinging, he sits facing the stove, being calmed. He inhales kind words that end in *kal*, *ga*, and *van* – they rise with scented steam as it mingles with the day’s thickening air. Soon, quite possibly, he feels more at ease than he will feel ever after.

The image is so distant. Suffused with sepia, like the waters of the Yarra River from the clay soils it has carried since European settlement. My father and his two older brothers arrived in Melbourne in September 1939. They made the journey straight after Britain and France declared war on Germany. Within a week they were enrolled at boarding school. The boarders’ dining room always smelled faintly sulfurous, from overcooked cabbage and brussels sprouts.

To mark my father’s eighty-first birthday I booked a table at Sigiri Sri Lankan Restaurant and Takeaway in High Street Northcote. Lalith and Rupathala were so welcoming. My father said little. He ate well. Then, still holding the paper napkin, he leant back from the table, and praised the hoppers, *appam* – the curved

rice-flour pancakes we’d been served warm from Rupathala’s kitchen. The edge of a hopper should be very thin and crisp, like a wafer, Dad declared; the middle, spongy, like a crumpet. The batter should pour... like single cream.

Despite the din and brightness of the restaurant, the small furred animal was roused. The image of my father by the fragrant homestead stove pulsed in vivid colour through my throat, in and out of my lungs. Of course he knew hoppers as a breakfast staple – how many times had he watched the batter being swirled in its oiled pan? As we left the restaurant, Lalith urged us, please, come for the Saturday night banquet, fresh hoppers with all you can eat!

During the last months of his life, my father became inexplicably thin, and ate more and more simply. Yet his taste for onions, pickle, and coriander persisted, as well as any acid, spicy, salty condiments featuring red chilli, *milagai*. Even supermarket products labelled ‘Hot Sauce’ seemed to evoke the pleasures of sambals that he knew from childhood.

Only since his death did I think of trying to discover the hills that cradled the plantation homestead. And wonder about the river closest to my father’s birthplace. Traced on a road map, Kandy has the outline of an upside-down heart. It’s contoured by the eastern turn of the Mahaweli Ganga, the ‘Great Sandy River’. Most highland streams flow into the Mahaweli.

This afternoon I walked to meet a friend for a cup of tea in High Street. There are hundreds of ways to let the dead follow you home.

# EXTINGUISH

Rebecca Blakeney

Sam packed the last box into the back of her Corolla and shut the boot. She looked back at Martha standing on the front porch, hunched over a cigarette, flicking her lighter repeatedly with her thumb. Sam felt a small rush of satisfaction. She'd packed the last working lighter in the box with the rest of the miscellaneous items that she'd collected from around the house.

A small victory.

Frank, their black and white border collie, nudged her leg, as though sensing something was wrong. She reached down and gently scratched the soft area behind his ear. A ripple of sadness swelled in her chest. There'd be no joint-custody arrangement – dogs and inner-city share-houses aren't a good mix. Cupping his face in her hands she told him she'd be back to visit, but she knew it was unlikely.

Sam headed back to the house and stood beside Martha. She fished a cigarette out of her bag and reached for the faulty lighter with a trembling hand. Martha hated her menthols. She said they reeked of desperation. Once Sam had laughed at this remark, but it wore thin over time. She kept smoking them anyway, until she felt it was the only part of her that remained. Her silent protest. Her strength.

They smoked in silence, surveying the car filled with Sam's possessions and a few of Martha's clothes that she had wanted her to take.

'These look better on you,' she'd said, tossing a pile of dresses, shirts and skirts at Sam. Sam packed them, silently promising herself a trip to the charity bin on the way to Fitzroy.

Martha had an eye for style, and

especially loved to shop at op shops and vintage-clothing stores. She could easily pull off hot-pants and sequined jackets without looking like a drag-queen. She liked to dress Sam when they were going out, like a child dresses a doll. Sam didn't mind, in some ways she enjoyed the confidence it gave her.

Martha stubbed the cigarette on the railing and dropped the remains into the empty terracotta pot beside the steps. Over the last two years they had tried growing a variety of plants in the pot, but they gave up when even the succulent, supposedly un-killable, wilted.

'I guess that's it then,' she said. 'Yeah,' said Sam, through the ache.

They turned to face each other. Even now, after all that had happened, Sam felt herself drawn to Martha. The glamorous, confident, effervescent Martha. She had the ability to draw anyone in.

Once, when they were high, they climbed the fig tree and lay on the flat section of corrugated iron which formed the roof of their tiny lean-to bathroom. Legs entwined, soaking up the moonlight and inhaling night-jasmine, Sam asked Martha how she did it. How she could make anyone and everyone like her.

'Interested and interesting,' she'd replied breezily.

Sam tried it. She attempted to show the same high-level of interest in others, to entertain with thrilling stories and exceptional wit, but she could never exude the same charm as Martha. She'd come to realise that she was quite boring.

In the early days, Martha had made her feel interesting. She'd ask her questions about herself and lean forward with intense focus when Sam replied, tipping her head slightly to the side. She'd listen with her eyebrows – the perfectly sculpted arches dancing just the right amount to indicate attentiveness and empathy. Over widened eyes, the little brown hairs would rise slightly, wordlessly urging her to continue. Sam found herself revealing more about herself in those first few hook-ups than she had ever revealed to anyone.

She felt embarrassed at times that she didn't remember to ask Martha the same questions. She felt like a bad girlfriend. She just didn't have the same social ability or the fine-tuned social skills. But she was good at f\*\*\*\*\*, and she knew Martha liked that. She felt that it made up for the rest of her flaws.

When the first criticisms began, after about six months of living together and almost nine months after their first tinder date, Sam initially took them as good advice. She stopped hanging out with Dave, and then Sarah, after Martha told her they were boring. She died her hair platinum blonde and got a tattoo when Martha suggested she was too straight. She stopped writing songs when Martha gave her 'honest feedback'.

When Martha first rejected her in bed, she assumed it was something she'd done wrong. She purchased new toys, new lingerie, even a 'light-bondage starter kit' from an online shop, but nothing changed.

Then Martha came home with someone else. She heard them f\*\*\*\*\* loudly in the spare room, as she lay sobbing on their old bed, hugging her knees to her chest. Early the next morning she woke to the click of the front screen door. Peering between the wooden slats of the venetians, she saw Sarah climbing into her ute, wearing one of Martha's beaded cardigans.



Martha's eyebrows pulled themselves into a shape of concern. She stepped forward suddenly, dragging Sam into an affected embrace.

'I'm sorry,' she said, a little too sincerely.

Sam flicked her cigarette into the pot, watched it smoulder then extinguish.

# MODERN DAY MICHAELANGLO

Isabelle McKenna



## WE MUST MAKE DO WITH SNIPPETS

Janneke Hall

Yesterday summer was in the air  
Warm and breezy  
The sun was shining  
We let out a collective sigh of relief  
Winter was finally withdrawing

I walk in the park  
A single yellow daffodil nods  
a snippet of bright pleasure  
My dog rolls sensuously on the thick grass  
she too welcomes this moment

Then this morning,  
A day of rain and wind dawns  
Grey clouds almost touch the earth,  
It's a stay-in-bed-as-long-as-you-can day  
Rain patters on the window

I groan inwardly  
Long for the sunshine and warm  
look again at the patterns of water  
That the wind sculpts on the  
window.

I long for what was yesterday  
But this too has its own beauty  
Rivulets meandering down the glass  
Transforming all I see

Yes, this too is a snippet to enjoy  
Not warm sunshine  
But water, wet and wind  
Making patterns on the glass

# RUBY

Jo Cumberland

Ruby was named for her red hair, and her father called her his ruby until the day he died. It was something she never questioned, just like the fact that he loved her, that he raised her 'from scratch', as he used to say, and taught her what she needed to know about life, life in the bush. When he died she was long gone from there. By that stage she was scraping away at plates and managing her money in the unit above the shop in Northcote. They slept in the one bedroom there, all of them. Ruby, the kids. And it was *she* who it fell on to raise them from scratch.

That was the kind of life they had, scratching, scraping. Steven grew, grew up in some ways, but wings, no, not Steven. Carrie on the other hand did well, went off with a man to Canada, had two young ones who'd be grown themselves by now. Everything goes on like that, up and down, round and round, and some days you just want to put your finger lightly on it, like a spinning top, so that it stops in mid-air.

This was Steven's business. This that brought her here to this giant room, like a factory, but for offices. Centrelink. She wondered if they had forgot her name on the list.

A woman came over to the waiting area.

'Ruby? Ruby Hartwell?'

Ruby got up and grabbed her shoulder bag.

'Yes,' she said.

The woman looked her in the eye, then turned quickly and walked to the back of the building. Ruby followed her. They passed an old couple hunching over a desk holding hands, then a man jangling his leg out in front of him who looked at Ruby all the way down the aisle. When she got to the last desk, the woman pulled up a chair for herself and started sliding it backwards and forwards while did the same with the mouse.

'What can we do for you today Ruby?' she said watching the computer screen.

'Um. What I was telling the lady at the front. It's about this letter I got,' Ruby said.

The woman stopped what she was doing. She pulled her chair closer to the desk and looked straight at Ruby, shocked.

'I haven't been told anything today Ruby so you'll have to tell me again. You say you have a letter?' she said, as though she never heard of letters before and couldn't believe it.

'They sent me this,' said Ruby pulling a page out of her bag, 'about my son.'

The way that woman read that page made Ruby think she should get up and go because there was no point in her even coming. She thought about doing it too.

'I'm sorry, Ruby. This letter, no wonder I can't find it on your file. This is addressed to someone else,' she said staring at Ruby.

'Yes, my son,' said Ruby.

'Are you an authorised person on your son's account?'

'Yes. He told you I could deal with his... with things for him.'

The woman was all in a flurry now and was shaking her head back and forth. She went back to her computer and starting clicking like crazy with the mouse and squinting at the screen. After a minute of these clicks and squints she took a deep breath in and calmed herself down.

'Your son, Steven Bainbridge,' she said.

'Yes.'

'Ok Ruby,' she said loudly now. Had Ruby suddenly gone deaf? Maybe there was someone else called Ruby, sitting further behind her, who she was shouting at. Ruby almost turned her head around to check.

'I am looking at Steven's account here,' said the woman, 'and I can see that you *are* an authorised person on his account.' She looked at Ruby and she let her mouth flop up into a smile, only because Ruby was right about the account.

'Ruby, this letter, dated the third of February, says that Steven did not attend

his two previous appointments which were...' she clicked, 'the twenty-first of December last year and...' click, click, slide, click, 'the sixteenth of January this year. Because of this his Newstart payments have been stopped.'

'He asked me to come in and tell you he's not very well. That's why he didn't make those appointments, see?'

'Okay Ruby,' she said louder. 'Well, his payments have been stopped now. That is not up to me. If he hasn't been well, he should have rescheduled his appointments. You coming in here now won't change that he has been cut off.'

'He's sick you see. What am I meant to do now? I mean, he can't live without the money.'

The woman looked Ruby sternly in the eyes.

'Okay Ruby. What I'm going to do here is make a note that you came in and put in a request for Steven's payment to be reinstated and make another appointment for him at our office.'

Steven left town without a word a couple of months back. Ruby found out when she went looking for him at his girlfriend's and found the girl a mess. She helped her clean up his junk in the garage, they put some of it out on the street, and she took his belongings from inside with her. That's how she found the letter, and it looked important and... She couldn't say if she would even see him again. Let alone in time for an appointment.

'Okay, thank you,' said Ruby.

Outside Centrelink she sat at the bus stop on the wooden bench. She watched two buses come by and all the people getting off and getting on. She enjoyed herself, watching those people all rugged up in their brightly coloured beanies, and not moving a muscle. The wind blew and she held her face right out to it, to meet it.

When a coach pulled to a halt in front of her Ruby got up to meet it too.

'This is a V-line service,' the driver said. 'Are you heading out of town?'

'Yes,' she said and stepped into the dark.

# THE ANNIVERSARY

Adam Fawcett

Liam nudges his coltish frame past the tree ferns and scrambles down the embankment. Cockatoos and pied currawongs perform in the canopy above him, their harmonies bookended by the occasional piercing cracks of a whipbird.

The silt on the riverbank melts under Liam's sneakers as he removes his puffer jacket. Coated in a shade of gunmetal usually only reserved for pointlessly large luxury cars, he holds it out in front of him for closer inspection.

Four hundred. *He* had announced the price of the puffer jacket after arriving last night, while Liam was still retrieving it from the gift bag. Wood smoke choked the cabin like too much incense and Liam couldn't stop himself wondering what *he* would have given *her* for their three-year anniversary.

He shrugs, flattens it out onto the damp bank, and assembles himself into the lotus position. Cluttered with twigs and a few plastic bags, the river moves at a glacial pace; the only sign of life a dead dragonfly drifting slowly downstream.

Liam closes his eyes and breathes the sharp morning air into his lungs. In-two-three-four, out-two-three-four - slow it down - in, two, three, four - drop the shoulders - out, two, three... four. Meditation was helping, but in these early stages it was still a bit hit and miss.

In. Two. Three. Four. Out. Two. Three. Four.

Eventually, the world slows down around him.

The chorus of birdsong suddenly drops away as a gush of air comes rushing down from the mountain range.

The treetops sway like intoxicated bodies as a wave of leaves shower over him.



Later they will drive into town for groceries. *He* will remain in the car at the bottom of the parking lot, handing *his* wallet to Liam with a sheepish grin.

The supermarket is the same chain from home but the lanes are arranged differently, and Liam will move through them in a fog: bread, milk, bacon, eggs, lube and - *his* favorite - cherry tomatoes.

At the self-serve checkout Liam will open *his* wallet. He will know the drill: always cash - but, wrapped in their knitted beanies and matching snow mitts, four rosy faces will gloat back at him through the faded plastic, and Liam will find himself pulling out *his* credit card instead.

They will spend the rest of the day on the verandah, drenched in sunlight and buried in the kind of crappy novels places like this always seem to attract. When the sun drops behind the ridge and the light turns from gloss to matte, *he* will scoop Liam up and take him to bed.

*He* will tell Liam that *he* loves him.

At night there will be a simple pasta dish with basil and cherry tomatoes, washed down with cheap wine. When they make love again on the lumpy couch, Liam will notice the persistent hissing of the damp logs as they fight for oxygen in the neon glow of the fireplace.



Sunday morning and Liam is back in the forest.

Ankle deep in wet leaves, he picks his way through a maze of thistles and blackberry vines as the crescendo of the river draws him further upstream.

When he finally reaches the other side, a waterfall several metres high opens up in front of him. Slabs of basalt the size of flat screen TVs press up against each other like dominos in mid-fall and all Liam can do is rest his claret speckled hands on his hips, transfixed.

In. Two. Three. Four. Out. Two. Three. Four.

Throwing off the jacket and undressing, he wades into the surging waters.

In, two, three, four, out, two, three, four.

Liam pushes his head into the deafening sheet of water. The torrent cuts into the back of his neck and the pressure brings his eardrums to breaking point, but he stands like this until he finds an answer to the question he's been too afraid to ask.

Intwothreefourouttwothreefour.

The sound of the torrent morphs into a scream as Liam howls like a wounded animal inside the womb-like cavity of the waterfall.



When he returns to the cabin, Liam will be greeted by the smell of bacon and eggs. *He* will have woken early and packed their bags. In the shower Liam will notice the lube has been moved to the windowsill. He will let the hot water rush down the back of his neck and spine until his skin blushes.

On the verandah they will embrace for the last time.

*He* will tell Liam that *he* loves him.

# THEY'RE ALL HERE

Mary Rawson

'They're all here' he whispers...and she feels her stomach drop.  
There's no time for hysterics,  
no time to run,  
she is his wife  
and they're all here,  
her new family,  
at Tullamarine Airport.  
Her little panicky bird ruffles it's feathers,  
wants to fly away ...  
but somehow she stumbles towards this group of strangers,  
four sisters, two brothers, mother, father  
and they are hugging her, kissing her,  
talking, talking,  
'You were so young when your mother died'  
the only comment she remembers from  
the strange woman that night,  
her mother in-law,  
and she has no memory of how she responds.

She is living in his territory now  
her husband's family, his friends,  
and she watches from the outside  
wondering when these strangers will feel  
like family.  
Forever close to tears in those early days,  
rudderless,  
taken to bouts of crying ,  
and somehow  
she gets a job,  
bikes to work ,  
passes the marauding magpie.  
Time passes  
and she hasn't cried all day  
even though she is still friendless,  
and living in a flat place with no hills is a bit weird  
but she loves her bike,  
and the bike tracks  
along the Yarra  
near where they now live  
in a single fronted rental in Westgarth St, Northcote.  
The birds so vibrantly colourful,  
the souvlakis  
and chocolate- coated donuts  
to die for,  
the smell of wet gums,  
the early flowering wattles,  
the old and new houses,  
the proud vegetable gardens  
and a mother in law  
who is so kind,  
so motherly,  
and she has missed that.

Slowly the strange becomes familiar  
the harsh light seems softer  
and now she has two homes  
Australia,  
New Zealand  
and she'll be right,  
she'll be right now mate.

# WALL CLIPPING

Rowan Lewis

I don't really know what I'm expecting to happen. I lock my bike up to a chain link fence and start wandering along the edge of the train tracks. The crumbling bluestone pale and unstable beneath my boots, the chalky sound clear against the slumberous roar of trucks and Uber drivers in the distance. An occasional muffled horn or siren rising from the surrounding din.

Past corrugated-iron walls and splintered paling fences. An upturned white plastic chair, one leg looped around, hobbled. Littered plastic bags like roadkill bleached by the sun. Snapped cacti withering under buzzing halogen lights. Rusted wire cabling rising up to archaic electrical connections, bolted to skeletal poles cradling power lines, vibrating with invisible deadliness, jutting into the sky like splinters.

Around a bend in the track is the entrance to a narrow alley-way behind two silent houses, pooled in darkness. I leave the train line and enter the alley, turning on my headlamp so I can see. Flashes of dripped graffiti on the surrounding fences, swastikas and suburbanite pseudonyms vomited here and there, an overlapping field of dero-Pollock impressions. Somewhere, a dying smoke-alarm battery ticks.

I check the time. According to the information on the forum, the Break should still be open for another half hour or so. Plenty of time.

The alley seems a lot longer than it does in the day. It still smells of piss and grey-water though.

At the end is an overhanging palm tree, rising up from behind a tin shed with boarded-up windows. The fronds creak far above, teetering, top-heavy. Looking up, it's hard to tell if the thin black tree is swaying or the traffic-jammed clouds are shifting behind it.

Being here feels strange. I've watched the video of the guy climbing the tree and disappearing hundreds of times, and it was shot here, but it's not the same thing.

*It's like a few years ago we were in L.A, driving through the hills on the way to the Observatory, and we pass this tunnel and all of a sudden I recognise it as the entrance to Toon Town in Who Framed Roger Rabbit, and at the same time as the tunnel from Back To The Future 2, and I got this weird sense of disembodiment, like I was travelling in three different spaces or narratives at the same time, like there was a practical joke being played on me somehow. Being there and not being there. I'm getting the same feeling now, craning my neck up at this palm tree. Viewing memories from different camera angles, disconnecting from an original experience that I wasn't present for.*

That was before I got sick. After we got back from L.A, chronic pain and illness haunted my daily existence for about two years. It was awful. I spent most of that time incapacitated, watching youtube and reading stuff online (when I wasn't being violently ill). I became obsessed with this community of people that exploit glitches and weird things that happen in old games to get through them faster - breaking through walls, taking advantage of mistakes made by the people that created them. The videos bathed me in the healing glow of nostalgia, while whittling the world down into a manageable form. Through that community, I stumbled on the video of the guy disappearing up the palm tree, and the forum documenting known Breaks.

As I began to recover, I began riding my bike at night - short trips at first, building my wasted muscles back up to something resembling working order, gaining a few blocks each time, under the cover of darkness.

Riding down the bike path by the train tracks, feeble LED winking away, lost in the dull sparkle of tiny stones embedded in the concrete track, like a black kaleidoscope, I wondered if this was the first time I had done so, or had an original version written this beforehand, the data captured forever, and I was just connecting the dots, re-enacting someone's experience.

My electronic presence stretched out like a series of endless tram stops - free to move around the tram but unable to get off or choose which way it travels.

I think I only half-believe the idea, but it's one I can't shake off, I can feel it gnawing away at the base of my brain somewhere, as the misted air freezes street lights into hanging balls of soft static, traffic lights bleeding from one colour to the next.

Racing through the night, streetlights blurred neon bars in my chrome handlebars, my glasses misted over by a million airborne water molecules, visualising information stored on a server farm, deep underground, while the blackened earth smokes above in eternal winter, or in a lonely satellite shooting through space, ejaculated into the void, re-runs of history playing to no-one, endlessly, until a solar flare wipes the hard drives clean.

I imagined a replica version of the satellite floating through virtual space, and another inside that and then my brain started to hurt and I nearly smashed into a parked car.

I duck through a hole at the bottom of the fence, being careful not to scrape my head on the shards of metal peeking around the edges, and I'm in a gap between the fence and the shed, where the base of the tree is bulging out the metal in slow motion.

I take my backpack off one shoulder and unzip it, pulling out a length of thick rope. My shoes and socks come off next, placing them at the base of the tree, careful not to stand on any hidden syringes or broken glass. The concrete is damp and slimy between my toes.

I loop the rope around the trunk and attach it to my ankles. The treetop looks so far away, stretching into the damp night.

The trunk slips through my hands like it was a wet fish. I take a breath and try again, griping as hard as I possibly can. The rope barely takes, but bites into the armadillo-cracks in the bark, and I am on my way.

I'm about half way up when it starts to rain. Thundering down. Big heavy droplets that rocket into my face from above, quicksilver bullets lit from bellow by my headlamp. No matter where I move, vertical streaks pummel my glasses, reducing visibility to a cataract blur. I continue on and up, muscles screaming audibly to stop.

Right towards the top, the tree bends over almost 90 degrees, creating a horizontal surface to hang from. I rise up against the howling wind and collapse on my stomach, hugging the swaying tree to death. Below, the streaks stretch out into pinpoints, hammering the surrounding roofs, pooling in blocked gutters, a grid of shimmering tin and slick pavement.

I move forwards, towards the flickering palm fronds. I'm supposed to turn around and drop off with my back to the fronds. So I do it. I hang above suburbia with numb fingers, a tiny shape lost in a sea of frosted screens and windows, the deep black buildings cutting silhouettes into the faint orange glow of the city low on the horizon.

My foot touches something. A platform. I look down and there's nothing there. I let go of the tree and something is supporting me. The rain has stopped. A feeling like being in an elevator, like blind upward movement. There's someone at the base of the tree with a headlamp on.

A flash.

Tom sat in the gutter, dazzled by the floodlights. His hair was a nest of jpeg compression.

A policeman stood bent over him, baton raised between blows.

Tom's phone lay smashed near the policeman's feet, illumination from the cracked screen mirrored against the wet bitumen, as if it was hovering just above the surface. On the screen Tom could see part of some text that he had written:

'Hoardings of people were watched and tracked as they bought 1984 from online bookstores or searched the internet for information on the novel that has helped build a template for a surveillance state – a way to prime the oppressed into accepting the inevitable.'

A siren sounded, two notes chasing each other upwards, continuously rising.

•

There's arms under my shoulders, lifting me towards one of the work vans. I can hardly lift my head. There is vomit and blood all over my t-shirt. Andy's mouth is saying I'll be alright once we get to the hospital but his face doesn't believe it. My guts feel like they are bleeding acid. Something is dripping down the back of my legs, I hope it's sweat – but it doesn't smell like it.

I've been having dizzy spells for the past few months and haven't been able to eat anything without feeling like dying. I must have hit my head pretty hard, there is a pinkish glow around everything. I wipe blood away from my eyes, flicking it on the swirling pavement where some sneakers dangle uselessly. I've got a pair of those.

I'm about half way up when it starts to rain. Thundering down. Big heavy droplets that rocket into my face from above, quicksilver bullets lit from bellow by my headlamp.

# THE SHOE'S LONELY SOLE

Gully Thompson

Through, rain, hail and shine, in all of the weather's modes,  
The shoe stands atop the edge of the concrete curb beside the road,  
I watch, at night, the shoe. It stands alone.  
I wonder who would own such a shoe, and dump it atop the concrete curb beside the  
road at last, with metal clasp, a leather lace, a rubber base.  
It stands in place.  
In gloomy night, I see a sight, one to chill me to the bone.  
With movement, the shoe, footsteps it takes, in dirt, letters of the shoe's footsteps it makes.  
The letters spell ALONE.  
I ponder thought and feelings for an answer in the air. I come upon a conclusion; it is  
without a pair.  
In morning light, I see a sight as I walk the concrete footpath. The shoe is surrounded  
by liquid. Upon closer inspection, the water confirms my fears.  
The shoe cries tears.  
My own shoes pound along the walk. My face is twisted, as white as chalk.  
I run away from my fear and sadness that stands solely as a shoe. I step upon another  
street. I meet another shoe.  
I recognize the features; I now know what to do.  
Identical at first, (except this one is a lefty.) Same leather lace, same rubber base, it  
stands in place, with metal clasp.  
A pair, at last!  
I take the shoe from its place and set it down beside its pair. Their love is fair.  
In silent night, I see no sight, the shoes no longer move,  
Because their love is found, at last a pair of shoes.

# SHADOWS OF LOSS

Laura Brinson

We camp by Little River  
where mosquitoes swarm  
I listen to the slap of palm on skin  
the tent fills with the smell of repellent  
  
it drives them mad

We camp by soaring Candlebarks  
on a bed softened by leaf litter  
our ears open to rustling in the dark  
the scent of eucalypt  
overpowers citronella

We camp by the fire ring  
river smoothed stones  
shaped by water and stained by fire  
in its glowing heart  
we heat our beans

We camp in the shadow of Sugarloaf Peak  
in country of the Wurundjeri people  
we meet where they met  
in their place of belonging  
and ponder the loss

# SCREEN INTIMACY

Isabelle McKenna

Flick  
Tick  
Yes  
No  
Hot  
Cold  
Swipe left  
Swipe right  
Swiped out  
Wiped out  
New night/  
New date  
Wake up/  
Make up  
Morning after  
Make out  
(With the screen)  
Make out  
It's normal

*Screen Intimacy*

# MOVING ABOUT AND STANDING STILL

Sarah Thompson

I always wanted to be a migrant – rather, I wanted to be a vagrant: a wanderer. I read about gypsies in travelling wagons singing and dancing their way across the countryside.

I tried to befriend backyard birds, hoping to find a travelling companion to stare from my shoulder with piercing eyes as we sailed our way around the world. Are you my familiar, I would ask the crow perched on the fence, and sometimes I'd get a cocked head in reply. I thought if I gained eye contact, trust and telepathy would naturally follow. I was older than you probably think. I see, now, my mistake, of course: I should have targeted a migratory species. But we didn't live on the coast and options were limited.

In the end I became less wandering albatross and more homing pigeon. I travel, but don't wander. I never learned to sail.

I remain not unhappily earthbound by the same things as most: work, family, friends, responsibility. And the ever-alluring effortless of standing still.

'I think English is a very cold language,' Rosa tells me, and from her mouth it feels like a condemnation.

I tell her we write coldly to leave space for the reader. She shakes her head, slow and exaggerated, smiling.

'We are not like that.'

She is not like that. Everything about her is warm. She is outspoken, bossy, brimming with certainty. I feel, by comparison, like a shell of Anglo-nicety and reservation. But maybe that's why we like each other. I am her Australian daughter, she says. She tells me I am soft and kind and talented and I shrink from her praise.

Rosa was a citizen of Iran, but now she's a citizen of Northcote. She lives in a one-bed flat which is always warm and smells of flavour. She cooks mountains of food and sends me home with bucketfuls, so I don't have to cook for a week. They don't have vegetarians in her country, but she's adapted.

'Make me crazy,' she says, throwing up her hands. But she always cooks me lunch. 'Just simple today, sorry,' she says, covering the table with at least five dishes. If she cooks more than I can take, than she can eat, than her nephew can use (it happens), she takes leftovers to her neighbours.

Sometimes when she watches the news she becomes sick enough to vomit. She is worried about Iran; she is worried about the world. She is often sick and sometimes miserable but she smiles easily and, when I see her, has vitality enough for two.

She is kind and soft. Talented also. But I've never told her any of that. English is a cold language.

'Do you miss England?' I ask Lachlan.

'I sometimes miss the countryside.'

It's all he misses. He doesn't want to go back, but he barracks vociferously for England and says things like, 'that's the problem with this country...'

It seemed odd, but when I saw where he grew up I understood. It's the kind of place that etches itself on the heart in one visit and, once left, it leaves an ache. Everything is green except the flowers: fuchsia and gold, snapdragons growing effortless by the roadside. Walled lanes so overgrown with shrubbery that you never know where the car ends and stone begins. Tiny stone bridges over trickling streams and pointless gates on public paths as if put there for the very purpose of quaintness; rows of matching houses; cows standing about in fields of flowers, shaggy sheep roaming free over the roads. Everything adorable. I finally understood how you can love a place itself.

Greenness comes at a cost, though. Cold and drizzling, year-round. I loved that place, but I yearned for the scorching sun: the ozone hole, of all things. I wanted to stay, pack up everything back home and move across the globe to live in a magical place where forest fairies might just live in mushrooms. But I knew, with a lingering grief, that I couldn't live under a grey sky.

Weeks later, in a Slovenian forest, I had visions of eucalypts and I guessed that maybe I did love my country after all.

# OFF THE OLD PACIFIC HIGHWAY

Laura Brinson

A drive through rest area  
off the old Pacific Highway  
a former cemetery re-purposed  
gravestones relocated  
seven stones unconnected by time or family  
lined up by a cream brick wall

I pass a white van  
under the trees, in the shadows  
a single male occupant

The oldest marble a stonemason's gem  
once smooth and white  
hand chiselled lettering  
holes drilled and tiny anchor pins tapped in  
molten lead poured into the letter channels  
buffed smooth

**In Loving Memory of  
MINNIE.  
Beloved daughter of James & Mary Ann Mills.  
Died 30th April 1886.  
Aged 3 years & 11 months.  
'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.'**

Behind me the van engine starts  
minutes pass, the motor idles  
finally it rolls out to the road  
I bend again to my task  
a sandstone marker worn almost smooth

**JULIA SEAL  
died...**

Another vehicle turns in  
suspension springs groan  
the driver's side window down  
music blares  
an elbow slides out  
single male occupant

As I walk back to the road  
A fine bronze-feathered cockerel with flowing black tail  
struts under the Council sign

**DO NOT DUMP ROOSTERS  
Penalties Apply**

# JOHN WESLEY BURTT 1839 – 1917

TT.O

John Wesley Burtt's father was a member of the Victorian Parliament (an ironmonger — a 'zinc and tin manufacturer'). His career was brief, and unremarkable, but, when it came to an allocation of '£400 for a Drawing Master' for the Museum of Art, he promptly spoke up in favour it, even tho John Wesley (his son) was no great Artist. We wince, when a lazy lyric aligns an unaccented-Note with an accented one, and *vice versa*. The *Argus* once gave him a backhanded compliment i.e. not bad, for a bloke with no training. To survive as an Artist (in those days) an Artist had to be innovative, one had to make copies of the Old Masters, such as Edward Tshaggeny's '*Sheep in Repose*'. Patrons would in the spirit of a raffle 'subscribe' for a chance to own such a copy. Marcus Clarke once complained that John Wesley was offering copies of a 'Dancing Girl', which he had as yet to paint. A shyster, is a disreputable character. In the 1870s, the family moved into *De Beauvoir Villa* in Brunswick St (in North Fitzroy). — People are all about numbers — In Dec 1881, 3,000 old men in dusty grey suits, stood beside an obelisk (in the Melbourne Cemetery) next to the inscription *This will be a great place for a village* to commemorate the founding of Melbourne by John Batman even tho Batman didn't actually go up that blessed river the Yarra Yarra // 6 miles, until much later. — His men did. When you embellish a Truth, you enter a domain of Lies. The i, me, my, mine, thine, in the diary, all pertains to what He did, whilst all the we, our, us, them, entries to what His Men, did. A Hero, is a Man. John Batman, was a Man. He was a Hero. (Only) no one to this day, really knows, what he actually looked like. Nature's mirror, is broken. No photograph, sketch, or painting of him is know to exist. Some say, the only image we have of him was borrowed from Benjamin West's *Penn's Treaty with the Indians in America*. — Close enough! We look to the past, for guidance, cos narrative begets narrative, and narratives — narratives. John Sutch remembers Batman (in his final years) being wheeled around the town, in a big wicker pram, carried by 4 Black men; his face covered in a bloodied bandage // , and his nose eaten away by syphilis. In *12 Angry Men* (the movie) the facts don't speak for themselves. In 1546, Henry VIII tried to close down 'the stews' (the brothels), but no one tried that stunt on frontier towns. There are no Heroes in History, only the Monsters win. Bonwick (the biographer) wrote a poem in *The Gazette* in praise of our Hero's purchase of Melbourne off the Aboriginals: *Purchased by right, and not by deeds of blood; he said, Not wrung by widows' tears nor orphans' cries, / Talk not of Ferdinand, nor of the tyrant Spain, / Australia Felix! if thou*

*think'st that name.* Some cells in the body, last longer than others. A louse is a Gentleman's companion. John Wesley Burtt however, was just an average Artist, one who stood at the crossroads of mediocrity. A painting can be varnished 3 times, egged twice, or oiled & waxed 4 times, and still be of no value. El Greco once said of Michelangelo, that he was a good man, but a bad painter. Light over darkness. High over low. The present is here. The past, close behind. With the coming of the Centennial Exhibition (in 1888) at the Exhibition buildings, John Wesley decided to enter a painting. An Artist generally welcomes a great difficulty, tho not necessarily a financial one. To sell a painting at all, is an accomplishment. What was needed (he thought) was a large painting on an important historical subject. Every work of Art belongs to a time and place. The ox ploughs on /// straight ahead of the farmer. He decided to paint *Batman's Treaty with the Aborigines at Merri Creek* — the Aboriginal Chief Jaga Jaga holding a 'clod of earth', and handing it to Batman holding 'a Deed' to all the land in Melbourne / Victoria / Australia. As William Morris put it, *I do not want an Art for a few.* (Only), a line in painting, cannot be reasoned in the mind, it must be reasoned on canvas. The scene in his painting, is calm and peaceful, and Batman has a pistol / tucked into his trousers. What makes a representation is one thing, what makes it Art is another. The rendering of light, is part of the science of painting, and John Wesley would have none of it. (Mixing colours, is a serious business). The figures in his canvas, were poorly painted, and he had trouble getting the right perspective. (It wasn't signed, or dated either). Needless to say, it had a poor showing. A bad Artist is often a bad judge of his own and other people's paintings. It's hard to know where he could have housed such a large work later, considering it was about 12ft long and 6ft high, make it unlikely to have been housed at the family home in North Fitzroy. In 1907 he sold it, to an Estate Agent, who later tried to have it Auction off later, only *no one* bid for it. No one liked it. Aspects and appearances don't belong to the same categories. It eventually went to a leather merchant in Collingwood, who lent it back to John Wesley to display in his new studio, in St. Kilda. But when John fell behind on his rent the Landlord, confiscated it, until it went to Court. It was eventually organised that it be hung in the Northcote Town Hall (at the top of Ruckers Hill overlooking the spot where the Treaty was supposed to have taken place). In 1932, the Trustees of the Public library organised an historical display when it was borrowed, and where it has remained ever since. No other paintings by John Wesley Burtt are known to have survived. The painting, is in the collection (in the State Library) now, because of its subject matter not because of its artistic merit. John Wesley continued to live in a boarding house in Napier St (in Fitzroy), and till his dying day called himself, an Artist.

# STARLIGHT ON SNOW

Gino Tomisich

Luciano rubbed his breath's mist away from the carriage window. With snow falling, it was difficult to see where the forest began and the clearing ended. He thought he saw figures appearing between tree trunks. Perhaps, they were the partisans he'd been warned about. He pulled his greatcoat closer around him, and tried to focus on what he would do if they attacked. This was a better alternative than thinking about the freezing and hungry peasants, appearing like wraiths out of the snow, coming up to the train every time it stopped at some little village. They reminding him of his own hungry and desperate times.

In the carriage, all his fellow soldiers were either trying to talk above the train's din or to sleep. He looked in front, to Pasquale – the only man who'd managed to nod off. Luciano envied him. He wished he could sleep and awake when the war was over.

Out of the corner of his eye, Luciano saw the connecting door of the carriage open letting in a blast of frigid air, followed by Sergio Gambolfini, their lieutenant and one of the party faithful. Luciano nudged Pasquale's foot to wake him, only managing to raise the sound of a pig's snort. He kicked his friend's ankle. Pasquale stirred; Luciano kicked him again.

'I'm not a bloody donkey!' Pasquale snapped, glaring at him. Luciano lifted his face, indicating toward Gambolfini. 'Grazie, peasano,' Pasquale said lowly, tightening his greatcoat, then adjusting his wool hat. 'What does that little stronzo want now?' 'Who knows? Maybe he just wants to be seen in charge.' 'Until the gnocchi tell him what to do,' Pasquale added. 'Then he tells us.' 'And we end up in shit, again.'

They turned their attention to the snow and forest, hoping to be ignored.

'Luciano Correnti, Pasquale Donato,' Gambolfini called out to them, above the rattle of the train, 'make sure you're ready. Check your equipment.'

'Yes, sir.' Luciano answered for both of them.

As Gambolfini was about to bark an order, the train began to slow and the men began to stir. 'Stay as you are,' Gambolfini ordered. 'I'll go and see what's happening.'

Luciano watched him march out the way he came, not bothering to close the connector door. Franco, nearest to it, leaned across and pushed it shut. He gave the retreating Gambolfini a backward flick of the hand under the chin before settling back into his seat.

The train stopped. Everyone turned to their window to see what had happened. As Luciano waited, some of the men began putting on their bandoliers, packs, and ensuring their trenching tools were secure.

'We may as well do the same,' Pasquale said, reaching up to the overhead rack to bring his kit down.

Gambolfini returned, pushing the carriage door open. Flakes of

snow swirled around him. 'Attenzione, soldati, this is as far as we go. The Bolsheviks have blown part of the track. You can thank uncle Stalin for your walk.'

Luciano looked again outside his carriage window. 'Do you think partisans are out there?' he asked Pasquale.

'No, Gambolfini made it back here without a bullet in him. First chance, put any paper you have in your boots. Your feet will stay warmer.'

o o o

In the low light, a cigarette's glow gave Luciano a direction to crawl toward. He could just make out three huddled men, behind the snow-covered log and branch hide. He wanted to run towards it, but the Russian snipers were good. Against the setting sun, a quick movement with even a feeble outline might give them enough to take a shot. Crawling through the snow, Luciano tried to picture the sands of Istria with its sun glimmering on the water, as cold, white flakes found their way through every gap in his clothes.

As he came closer to the hide one of the men lifted a rifle and pointed it in his direction.

'It's me,' he whispered as loudly as he dared. 'Don't shoot.' Luciano didn't move until the gun barrel pointed down to the ground. As he restarted his crawl, another one of the men indicated he approach from the side, to keep out of any direct line of sniper sight. Luciano cursed the extra twenty meters, but having the snow chill you was a better option than having a bullet put into your backside, or through your belly. As he entered the hide he cursed his luck – Gambolfini was there. Next to him, was the welcome sight of Pasquale, alive and smiling. Franco, the third man exhaled a stream of smoke.

'It's not much, but we call it home,' Franco grumbled, before returning into a huddle to keep warm.

'You're not on a school camp, soldato,' Gambolfini countered.

'No,' Franco muttered, taking the cigarette from his mouth.

'No, what?'

'No, sir, we're not a school camp.'

Pasquale smiled, looking heavenward, behind the lieutenant's back.

'What have you to report, Correnti?' asked Gambolfini

'The Germans are preparing for an assault, possibly the day after tomorrow. Most of the squads have finished their hides and are holding their positions. The Russians are quiet. The Germans think they're regrouping. I wasn't told any more than that.'

Gambolfini looked annoyed. 'I'll go back and get some proper orders. You're to wait here, until I return. Is that understood?'

'Yes, sir,' Franco replied. 'We're to hold our own.'

Pasquale's mouth twitched as he tried to remain deadpan.

'Good,' Gambolfini stated; then made his way out and towards the rear.

'Idiot,' Franco said, when the lieutenant was out of earshot. He reached into his top pocket and brought out a crumpled pack of Russian cigarettes. 'Three left. Three of us. It's fate.' He passed the pack around.

'Better have them now before he comes back. After dark, no fires.'

'Grazie, paesano,' Pasquale said, taking a cigarette.

'Grazie, Franco,' Luciano said, taking the other in his turn.

Franco lit the last cigarette off the stub of the one he was holding.

'Here,' he said, passing it around.

Pasquale lit his, took in the pungent smoke, and burst into a coughing fit. 'Mama del Dio,' he said when he had his breath back. 'Where did you get those?'

'Off a dead Commissar,' Franco said flatly. 'Imagine what poor Ivan in the trench gets.'

Luciano took the glowing stub, gently puffing his cigarette alight. 'So, my death is between snipers' bullets or Commissars' cigarettes.'

As they smoked they brought their rifles inside their greatcoats, to stop them from freezing. When they'd finished smoking, they extinguished their cigarettes in the snow.

Pasquale took his bayonet out of its scabbard and scraped away some ice and snow from the front of the hide, to peer into no-man's land.

'Anything?' Luciano asked.

'No.'

'Good,' Franco said.

Pasquale kept looking towards the Russian lines. 'Who ever fought a war like this?'

'Napoleon,' whispered Franco, 'and he lost.'

They kept their own counsel until they heard something coming from behind them. As one, they brought out their rifles out and released the safeties. Franco pointed to Pasquale, to where to aim his weapon; he did the same with Luciano, while he aimed his straight out.

Luciano felt his heart beating, heard his breath, then closed his eyes to steady his stomach. He opened them slowly, trying to make out anything in the snow. Not trusting his finger on the trigger, he moved it outside of the guard. Looking to his left, Luciano saw Franco crouching down, focusing on the snow. Past Franco, Pasquale was down on one knee, rifle to his shoulder. Luciano followed their lead. A few breaths later he heard, 'Franco'. Franco pointed his rifle to the voice's direction. Luciano's eye followed Franco's line of fire to where there was some movement. He spotted Gambolfini, crawling towards them, the falling snow beginning to cover him like a baptismal veil. 'It's the lieutenant,' he whispered.

Pasquale lowered rifle but Franco kept his trained on Gambolfini.

'It's the lieutenant,' Luciano repeated.

Franco turned his head to look at him – his eyes as cold as the snow.

'Franco...' Luciano released his breath as Franco's weapon lowered.

Gambolfini made it into the hide and brushed the snow off his greatcoat. He improvised a seat out of an empty ammunition box. 'Everyone's to hold their position. Nobody is clear what Ivan is doing. The Oberst wants a prisoner. We're to do it. Gattoni, Montagna, and Sipi will be going with us,' Gambolfini continued, 'We leave as soon as they arrive. Check your gear and make ready. No documents, no papers, no letters. Put everything that identifies you in this box.'

Luciano reached underneath his layers to his shirt pocket. He took out his mother's letter, the one the village priest patiently wrote,

along with the only photo he had of her and his sister. He kissed their image, said a prayer for them; then lowered his treasures into the ammunition box. He watched snowflakes falling and, like his companions, he waited.

'Lieutenant,' a voice came from somewhere in the snow.

'Avanti, presto, we don't want to be caught in the open when the sun comes,' Gambolfini ordered.

The other three men, who were to venture out, made their way into the hide.

'Ciao,' the middle one said.

Luciano, Franco and Pasquale replied in kind, exchanging nods with the other two.

Gambolfini didn't respond. Instead he produced the documents box. 'All papers in here.'

'Everything is back with our sergeant,' the taller of the three replied.

'Alright,' Gambolfini said his voice low. 'The Oberst suspects there's an observer outpost, about 300 meters in front. We're to take him if we can. I'll lead, three to my left; three to my right, spacing two meters apart. Keep low, keep going. Once we locate the position wait for my command. Understood?' He waited for a question. There wasn't one. 'Good. Let's go.'

Luciano, Franco and Pasquale took their position on Gambolfini's left. Everyone was hesitant to take the first step out into the open, their eyes fixed on the black copses and thickets across from them.

'Avanti,' Gambolfini whispered.

Crouching low, Luciano urged himself forward, the frigid air cutting into his lungs. He stopped to raise his scarf to his cheeks. Pasquale, Franco, and the others continued on. With effort, he re-joined their line; his steps desecrating the virgin snow.

When he was a child snow was a plaything, when he was a farmer it was an enemy, now, as a soldier it was a friend hiding him. Luciano put a hand to where he kept the picture of his family, only to remember it was back in the hide, in an ammunition box.

A low 'whump', as if the forest muffled a coughed, raced around him. A whistle, like that of a startled bird, followed it. Overhead, a yellow, drifting star appeared in the sky. Luciano looked to his companions, frozen in that moment. They were like snowmen, staring heavenward, strangely beautiful in the growing yellow light.

'Back, back!' Gambolfini shouted, coming to life.

Luciano watched his lieutenant clambering, as a staccato song of cracks and pops came from within the forest. What seemed like bright, little fairies sped past him, their wings whirring around his ears. One of them pushed Gambolfini headlong into the snow. Another touched Pasquale on the chest, who brought his hand up to it, as if he wanted to keep it there. Luciano looked back towards the trees, alive with faerie lights. A punch knocked him onto his back. He looked into the sky, to the glowing star turning orange like a setting sun. He reached out and took a handful of warm Istrian sand, letting it fall back onto the beach through his fingers.

# ACCIDENTAL MIGRANT

Imelda Cooney

My brother, an intelligent rascal whom London couldn't accommodate, landed in Adelaide with short hair. He'd travelled via Singapore where airport officials unceremoniously chopped his mane. This was a blow to a man who happened to have – though he didn't trade on them – looks and hair reminiscent of George Harrison.

Three years later I followed (hair red and frizzy), on an Air India flight to visit him and his new Australian family. I had a couple of months spare before starting a mental health nursing course.

My flight transited in Delhi. On reboarding, the official I encountered demanded money: her children were hungry, she said. I didn't understand. Wasn't there something wrong with an official asking for cash? Bewildered, I shook my head. She shot me an angry glare. 'Passport AND ticket', she barked, and punched out her hand. *Oh Jesus, this is it where everything unravels; the nightmares of being caught out become reality.* I hesitated, deliberating, frantically hoping my brain would sort something out. I'd bought my ticket from a friend; it had her name on it.

I opened my bag slowly; mind racing with images of Indian jails, poor sanitation and dreadful food conjured from the recently released 'Midnight Express'. *Will they send me to jail, what will they do?* My hands began shaking. I haltingly lifted my bag onto the counter, still desperately praying for a diversion. In slow motion my hand started its journey towards the buried assortment of papers, cosmetics and travel gadgets. Abruptly, another hand jerked mine aside and snatched out my swiss army knife. With the

tool in hand, the official raised her arm high, yelling in Hindi, waving, turning, yelling. Heads swivelled – expressions of confusion firstly toward her, then me. Saliva receded from my mouth; the muffled rhythmic thumping in my ears was my own throbbing blood.

A bored-looking security guard ambled over. The official yelled at him too; he tried to calm her. 'Look', I was sure she was saying, 'she has a weapon, she's going to kill us'.

'It's just a swiss army knife, every backpacker has one,' I imagined his reply.

The guard placated her with an odd blend of firm, hushed words and blunt gestures. I was desperate to pass, but couldn't advance. The official was blocking my path. She was still inflamed but now also humiliated, belittled. Nobody was looking any more; the drama was over. This woman stared hard at me, and I averted my eyes. She sensed my inner panic. The issue of the ticket and passport had clearly been forgotten. She dismissed me with a wave so rough it was almost a wallop.

My brother met me at Adelaide airport. His hair was long. Mine was frizzier than usual, after being blasted by an overhead air vent for hours on end.

In the Adelaide sunshine, I read 'I Never Promised You a Rose Garden' – about a young patient battling to regain her sanity in a mental institution. I realised I could never

become a mental health nurse. Surely I didn't have to go back to do the training, surely I could stay? *Why are there borders and immigration rules? I just want to stay here with my brother and his family.* I was twenty-one.

After a few months an Australian friend agreed to marry me. I filled in numerous forms, underwent interviews and ended up with the coveted rubber stamp on my passport: Permanent Resident.

My brother died 6 years ago. I had asked him just beforehand whether, because he was the first from our family to migrate, he wanted his name on the Welcome Wall in Sydney which 'stands in honour of all those who have migrated to live in Australia'.

'Why would I want my name up there when I didn't even want to come this country in the first place?' he asked. I had never known that.

I came to Australia forty years ago because of my brother. I never would have come otherwise.

A twist of fate I don't regret.

# MY COUNTRY

Maggie Jankuloska

My country has one name,  
without an asterisk or acronym.  
My country smells of paprika, hunger and pig shit.  
My country has outlasted Ottoman oppression,  
and Communist ideals of brotherhood and unity.  
My dress hangs here.  
My country exports its best and brightest  
and delays payslips every month.  
My country praises its heroes after they are dead.  
My country is made of red hot dirt,  
but it's fat from bribes.  
My dress hangs here.  
My country is alive during summer months,  
when tourists empty their pockets.  
My country is sold by men full of empty words.  
My country is held up by withered toothless women.  
Yes, my dress hangs here.

# HE WHO MUST NOT BE OBEYED

Jaz Stutley

Don't even speak his name.  
Every instance adds to the hubris,  
each word on a breath building the stormcloud:

black stain on horizons,  
night seeping into day,  
writers weeping at border control.

Anger climbs the steep hill  
with posters and megaphones.  
Don't even write his name.

The more it is spoken  
the more we are shaken – and stirred.  
Naming's a rite,

a right to be earned.  
As in faery tales, where names can hurt;  
we twist the knife further

inside against ourselves.  
Might is in words,  
writing worlds on a page:

naming is bringing into being,  
too close to triumph  
to be repeated.

The way we can show disgust  
is to turn our backs  
and store the power of sorrow in our hearts.

# WHITE FISH

Dianne Millet

It had been a large comfortable bedroom once in, an English style, bay windowed house. Now it was a room at the back of an old half demolished building, which nature had begun to reclaim. There was a wooden bed standing – in position – against the remaining back wall, as though in denial about its changed circumstances. The bed had an Edwardian slatted bedhead with a carved ace-of-spades at its centre. There was a mattress too, pungent, musty and growing. A dingy dust sheet was draped over an end post like a discarded robe. Piles of rubble: old tiles, concrete, plaster, bricks and stucco scrolls, that had once decorated a fireplace, and boxes half full with books – the rain had got to – their leaves puffed and distorted, sat oddly grouped in heaps. A green tinge coloured the walls and anything that had once been white. Other boxes with bits and pieces collected over years that were half wanted, half treasured, and finally left behind, sagged, spilling out, onto and around what appeared to be a small crated bath. Something thumped against its sides. Something alive and strong. It was a large fish, hemmed in like a sow in a farrowing box.

A woman I used to know, who had moved to a farm by the Irish coast, inherited a giant gold fish. A carp. A nuisance fish. It lived in a calf trough. It must have been there for ages to have grown to such a size. My fish had less room, but was in similar circumstances. That other fish died because the kids wouldn't leave it alone. They kept poking at it with sticks – worrying the poor thing to death. A giant golden brown toad with black horns was found on that farm too hiding under a piece of rusted corrugated iron sheeting. It was the biggest toad I had ever seen. Don't know what happened to it. Not sure about that family either. It was a long time ago.

A cautious closer inspection revealed a muscular back and a soft pinkish-white body struggling to escape. The fishes' scales were larger than a big man's thumb nails and caught iridescent mother-of-pearl in the light. The tail: olive tinted organza was pinned between pliable cream coloured bone struts and spread out like a ladies' fan to wave and flick in annoyance, while smaller side fins flapped like a toddler waving good-bye, then stretched, strained and held taut.

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I had seen pictures of giant fish painted on the edges of ancient maps: 'Here be monsters!' would be written to warn mariners not to go too far lest they are eaten whole by the Leviathan, or fall off the edge of the earth.

Water flowed over the sides of the bath rippled across debris and grass, and continued spreading to become a small lake, which widened into a river and like the graduated progression in a watercolour, bled on out to the horizon, where a deeper shade in the blue showed the water had met the sea, and a lighter hue, the sky.

The creature stilled, then as if it had received a secret signal – leapt – holding the moment like a holiday snapshot, while the room and the shell of the old house began to grow misty and fade.

My eye followed the fish as it dove and rose again skipping and casting off into the distance disappearing from sight.

And I caught by the last rays of the dying sun was happy for that fish and wishing the same freedom gave over to be absorbed into the mottled light. Until there was no one left to see or be seen. Leaving the ruin of the house to decay. It having no living thing to draw upon and no further point to its existence.

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# NOT YET LEGENDS

Chris Thompson

Never liked cricket...

Dragged along by my dad  
Zinc Cream beneath Terry Towelling  
A beer and The Herald for him  
Cottees Cordial and a colouring book for me  
Unwrap the greaseproof  
Warm tomato bleeds into soft white Tip Top  
Butter, pepper, salt  
Stings the chapped lips  
Waiting for the willow whack, for the roar  
Waiting...  
Waiting... for something to happen

Then...

Centenary Test, '77, MCG  
Watching from the Ponsford  
Greg faces Greig  
Lillee swings like a hammer  
Hair in the wind  
Red stains on white trousers  
Dougy Walters, Kerry O'Keefe, Maxy Walker  
'ave a good weekend Mister Walker  
Rodney Marsh, big gloves and baggy green behind the bails  
Their mythical 45 runs  
Not yet legends, but unexpected heroes to a teenage boy

And...

At stumps  
Me and my dad  
Tread the hallowed turf  
Inspect the pitch like a pro  
Rough, cracked and calloused  
Like a working man's hands  
Touch it, feel it, drink it in  
Indelible in memory

How's that?!

# SADAKO

Mel Denham

You glow at night and I see you as kin

-dred spirits. Soma, even at this height  
the ground swell of earth felt

gigantic. Akaya, keep them wearing their glass  
badges and breathing masks. Honour your Ukrainian

radiation counter. Please don't dwell in your hometown  
thoughts of pets, sweetshops and trucks who endure a half

-life I fear may be greater than your whole.  
Continue to bow to your white-faced elders

even though they are slow learners.  
Tell your cells not to grow

up too quickly. Tread gently by orphaned  
parents, whether they've buried

or are still digging the holy damaged dirt  
for the lost –

my radiant classmates, do you know  
what rots? Again and again my fingers wring

shapes from paper: boxes, boats, coffins, cranes.

# FOUR WOMEN FROM THREE GENERATIONS

Kate Groves

## MY GRANDMOTHER'S RING

She had a laugh that could make the magpies sing along in gurgled unison and could crack a smile on even the most tormented of war veterans (of which her husband was one). By the time I met her, her eyes had seen the bombs falling noiselessly from the skies as she volunteered as a fire spotter in Blitz-riddled London, she had sung 'Auld Lang Sein' countless times, and her heart had been broken more than is fair in one lifetime. A woman of the depression era, born into a loving family with money, she fell in love with a difficult man from across the seas who had none. But still she laughed. She was my grandmother.

Today, and every day, I wear her dress ring on the ring finger of my right hand. A yellow gold ring with five claw-cut diamonds that once adorned her small, dainty hands; now coated with white gold and expanded to accommodate the finger size of a different generation. As the remaining gold of the underside of the ring touches my finger, I am connected to this woman who continues to inspire me ten years after she took her final breath and found her place in the universe to soar as a shooting star. I can still see the deep wrinkles of her eyes creasing into each other in slow motion as she throws her head back, opens her mouth, closes her eyes and laughs - the gold fillings in her teeth shining as her curls bob up and down in time to her euphoric inhaled and exhaled. A woman of only 5 feet with the laugh of a happy and mischievous giant.

## MY MOTHER'S BRACELET

I don't know how her hair stays so soft and her skin so smooth. She uses supermarket brand shampoo and Sorbolene cream for her skin, completely discounting the myth that expensive products are essential for a youthful appearance. She has the same laugh as her mother. She is one link closer to me - she is my mother. A woman who is so selfless and so generous,

if she believed in God at all, she could and should be made a saint. Not that she sees that. She doesn't see that she is so special, so caring. She just carries on - it is who she is, who she has always been.

She had always been someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother. Finally, her parents, her husband, her daughters stopped constantly placing demands on her time and so she boarded a train in Beijing, bound for Moscow. An adventure she had waited for 50 years to undertake, where she wasn't someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother. When she disembarked the train at a small border town, she bought a bracelet from a local merchant - a simple, elegant silver bracelet for her first born daughter. A bracelet that I wear today, and every day, on my right wrist. As the silver dangles from my wrist, I imagine her soft touch as she draws me in to her chest, soothes my brow and tells me everything is going to be okay. I always believe in that moment, because she has said it and she would never lie.

## MY SISTER'S EARRINGS

We've been best friends for 40 years, and alive for 39. She is my twin. Small in stature but enormous in character, she is my heart and my soul. We don't have to speak to know each other. There is something telepathic about it, I'm sure of it. The one who laughs when I laugh, who cries when I cry. She has a strength of character as deep as a ravine and an empathetic spirit that knows no bounds.

She bought me these earrings before I went off to climb a mountain. Small, simple, silver studs in the shape of little flowers. She wasn't there physically with me as I climbed but the earrings that fastened through my ears kept her with me as I ascended towards the heavens. As the temperature around me froze, the earrings pierced through my skin; such a clear metaphor for the person who has stuck by me for 40 years. Today, and every day, I wear these earrings and can sense

her spirit just beside me along with her unwavering support, tolerance and friendship.

## MY OWN NECKLACE

The jewellery from the three most amazing women this world has known adorn my body but still I weep. My heart has been broken and the strength of these women can't bring me out of the despair that I feel. He hates me so I hate me. Of course he does - there is nothing to like about me. I cannot imagine ever feeling happy again.

But then I realise, really, what does it matter? What does HE matter? He doesn't have an amazing laugh like my grandmother, a most kind spirit like my mother, a strength of character like my sister. So he doesn't love me. So what? They do. They recognise my worth. So now I try to see what they see.

I buy myself a silver necklace with a compass charm sitting alongside a pendant with the word *Wanderlust* imprinted on it. The necklace and pendants signify my adventurous spirit, my independence, my need to learn more about the world through travel and adventure and exploration. I inscribe it with my initials - KMG.

And so today, and every day, I wear this necklace around my neck and I am reminded of my innate curiosity and adventurous spirit, which may not have been loved by him but which is loved by many others who mean the world to me, and I in turn love the world which has been gifted to me for a very short time.

*I look in the mirror. I see my grandmother's ring, I see my mother's bracelet, I see my sister's earrings and I see my own necklace. Beyond that, and beyond the curly hair and pale skin, I see kindness and conviction and courage, and a strength that has been passed down from my 'Bergmann' Grandmother, my 'Hayes' Mother, and my 'Groves' Sister. Four women from three generations.*

# EIGHT MILE PLAINS

Mitch Welch

at the end of the pipeline and its billy goat's  
rope the knife was folded in its broken hilt,  
half engraved with the still-warm handle  
of a loner kid whose family name was mud.

we watched oil barrels float, and galaxies  
run down eastern browns' estimable necks.  
we found the white body of a front-loader  
and clobbered it with swamp gum shillelaghs.

we'd never have known the lake was a fake  
except a naked man standing figuratively  
in the lantana told us a horse had drowned  
slipping down its muddy, artificial banks.

the stash we found under a wooden bowl  
in the root compartment of a moreton bay fig  
seemed as good a place as any to hang a piss  
and in winter our streams produced a fine mist.

in spring we found what we could only guess  
was a grave covered over with a bit of fibro.  
a desperate measure awaiting its violent act  
at the agistment over the abandoned tracks.

you still reckon idiot mysteries taper off?  
the naked man malts his shadow; the grave  
estimates its horse; the moreton bay fig  
too big to hold our slippery minds by force.

# HOMETOWN CYCLE (KATOOMBA)

Mel Denham

I was not born here, but here  
I learnt to ride.

Place asserts itself in this landscape  
of willed amnesia – again on the old path

older, I recall only haltingly a half-  
formed sense of past

summer twilights soaked  
in the scent of lemon gums.

Cicada-static, frog-calls, droning traffic  
stay sounds unswayed by my wish

for hints of earlier cycles whirring  
under self's solitary spin.

Do other creatures stirring  
on this stamped track inhale

that era when evening seemed itself  
the intact skin of adolescence?

Then, bikes idled in sheds  
while the past-cycling self braked

hard against desire, legs unknissed for months  
by gravel ached, shadow-pedalled

that swooning plumb-line down Lurline  
past the Cascades, past evergreen *Everglades*...

O my town of forever-falling water, I was only once  
not born but ride again to learn.

# SONG PROMISE

Kaye Roberts-Palmer

As the early morning sun rose, she took off across the roofs, corrugated sheds, deserted football fields and street lights. She flew over satellite dishes, sagging lines of washing and swooped past a cat delicately cleaning its fur.

With cold, damp feathers she cut through the air, the scent of bitter coffee and burning toast stinging her delicate nostrils and she could sense below the sluggish movements of waking residents not yet ready to venture outside.

Her stomach rumbled as she passed over the petrol station remembering the feast once had on hiding mice and afterwards how she and her mate had swung and sang on thin phone wires above barking dogs. She flew onwards passing a flock of Indian myna birds who chirped their annoyance from the safety of trees, too sleepy for skirmishes.

She was at the edge of the creek following the undulating back fences with graffitied grey palings and rusted nails. She headed for the abandoned house and perched on the broken roof, hearing tiny movements of grasshoppers and spiders in the long grass. She hopped through a small hole, careful to not catch her feathers on the cracked tiles.

*She laid six, small speckled eggs, her brooding song warbling outwards through the broken walls across the grassy slopes mingling and rushing away with the creek*

Inside the scent of humans was replaced by mould, mice, and the lush smell of overgrown weeds. The window holes looked out onto a small jungle of dense shrubs swallowed by ivy and a once tame wisteria now turned wild stretching its way into the exposed room finding purchase in the beams above.

From her previous visits she had already located a sheltered position high in the corner resting on the twisted wisteria. Delicately, she put the final touches to the nest while the greedy mice gnawed out their tiny meals from the plaster skirting boards.

She laid six, small speckled eggs, her brooding song warbling outwards through the broken walls across the grassy slopes mingling and rushing away with the creek. As dusk fell, she sang softly for her mate who had never returned to their tall gum tree. As the last note faded there was a noise below.

Startled, she peered down into the room and noticed the huddled shape of a human covered in jackets and blankets. He leant back on crumpled plastic bags and she could smell him through the layers of dirt, he raised his head and the whites of his eyes shone dully in the gloom. Sensing danger she stayed silent hunching into her nest her heart pounding but the man did not move, he simply watched and hummed a tune complimenting hers and as the hours passed overcome by exhaustion, they finally slept in their own nests.

In the morning, the man climbed out from under the clothes and shuffled away from the house. Once he was gone she shook her feathers, bending her head towards her eggs but they were not ready yet and she flew off in search of a meal. She caught dragonflies over the creek and crunched on scarab beetles in the

bushes, she drank cool waters from puddles and stretched her wings flying in the warm updrafts above the asphalt roads.

The man returned in the evening talking quietly, the sound was slow and deep and he would sing his song for her. This happened each night until it became the last sound she heard.

One morning a sudden earthquake shook her from her slumber and in desperate terror she threw herself out of the nest, scrambling through the hole in the roof rising into the overcast sky. Below a monstrous machine was tearing the heart out of the house, the collapsing front veranda covering her frantic cries.

Around the back she saw the man escaping, she shrieked and dove bombed the sinking roof trying to find her way back choking on the clouds of dust and mortar. Above the machine's growl, she heard the man's song coming from over the fence. She flew high and spotted him walking down to the creek, the notes of the familiar song rising towards her. She flew closer and noticed his huddled form, he settled against a tree and in the distance, she could still faintly hear the machine's roar.

The man turned into a small groove of trees. Carefully he climbed up a few branches and reached into his dirty jacket. She sat cautiously on a nearby branch and as he climbed down she saw her small nest cradled in the crevice of two branches.

The man stood on the ground singing his song again and she hopped closer and carefully stepped into her nest covering the six eggs with her body.

As she did one the eggs cracked and for the first time the magpie felt the stirrings of new life underneath.

# PUNK'S NOT DEAD... A QUICK QUIZ

Carl Walsh

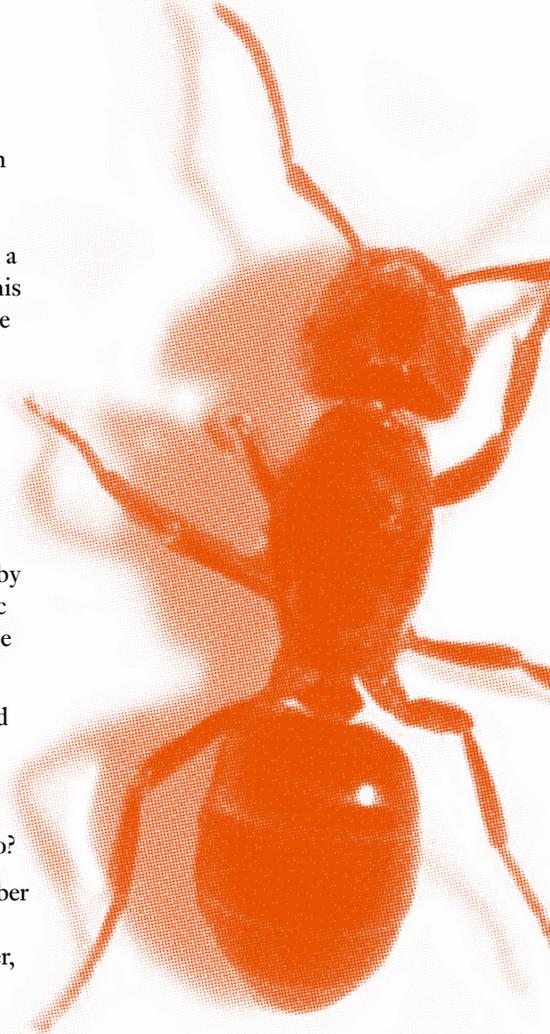
1977 is considered the year that punk broke. 40 years on it's time to test your punk cred:

- 1 In 1989 Rolling Stone magazine voted 'London Calling' the best album of the 1980s. What was the name of the band?  
**a. Bonus point:** what year was it released?
- 2 The name of Australian punk band the Celibate Rifles is a play on the name of which UK punk band?
- 3 Which member of Pink Floyd produced The Damned's second album?  
**a. Bonus Point:** who had they wanted to produce it?
- 4 Kevin Rowland was lead singer of the Birmingham punk band the Killjoys. His next band, Dexys Midnight Runners is better known for what 1982 hit?  
**a. Bonus point:** what was Dexys Midnight Runners a slang term for?
- 5 'Ça plane pour moi' was a hit song for the Belgian artist known as what?  
**a. Bonus Point:** an English language version was released using the same backing track – what was it called?
- 6 Billy Idol used his 'punk' look for a string of early 80s hits. What was the name of the punk band he fronted in the 1970s?  
**a. Bonus point:** what was his real name?

- 7 Guitar god, Captain Sensible (pictured), was perhaps more famous for his solo single titled?  
**a. Bonus point:** what band was he from?
- 8 In September 1976, an Australian band released a punk single before their famous UK contemporaries the Sex Pistols, the Clash etc. Who were they?  
**a. Bonus point:** what was the song?
- 9 Siouxsie Sioux was the famous lead singer of Siouxsie and the Banshees. What was the rather curious name of their longstanding drummer?  
**a. Bonus point:** a well-known singer/guitarist from another band filled in for Siouxsie and the Banshees on guitar during a 1979 tour (playing with both his own band and Siouxsie and the Banshees). Who was he?
- 10 Which Queensland premier was immortalised in the 1979 song 'Nuclear Device (the Wizard of Aus)' by UK band The Stranglers?  
**a. Bonus point:** a 1981 song by The Stranglers includes music played on a harpsichord. Name the song?
- 11 Feargal Sharkey is remembered for his 1985 hit song 'A good heart'. What was the name of the Northern Irish punk band he sang with prior to going solo?
- 12 Jon Moss drummed for a number of punk bands including The Damned. Which band, however, is he most associated with?

## Work it out:

Combine the pictures to work out the name of a punk/new wave artist:



- 1) The Clash 1a) 1979 2) The Sex Pistols 3) Nick Mason 3a) Syd Barrett 4) Come on Eileen 4a) Dexedrine [dextroamphetamine] 5) Plastic Bertrand 5a) Jet Boy Jet Girl 6) Generation X 6a) William Broad 7) Wot! 7a) The Damned 8) The Saints 8a) I'm Stranded 9) Budgie 9a) Robert Smith 10) Joh Bjelke-Petersen 10a) Golden Brown 11) The Undertones 12) Culture Club Work it out) Adam Ant

# PRAZNINA \*

Vasilka Pateras

The dusty road has seen more departures than arrivals  
the village now lies quiet  
thistle peeks through the rusted hoe  
– idle discarded.  
The schoolhouse is no longer  
its floor littered by old books and photographs, tables left upturned with  
wild neglect.  
Outside a plaque framed by nettles  
commemorates a massacre of women and children by Nazis  
– to remember.

Stones protrude  
I stumble in my ascent toward nasha mala\*\*  
distant cockcrows  
mudbrick crumbles in the sun's glare  
red peppers hang from rafters  
blistering for winter  
watermelon vine lies tangled  
curtains are drawn  
dogs wander with open wounds,  
in search of scraps.  
I search for a trace, a breath.

Iron-gate opens to the courtyard  
there is no homecoming, no welcome  
I step in  
wood stands piled  
grass long and yellow  
a scythe hangs on the shed  
next door cows unsettled protest in the heat,  
air is thick with the stench of dung  
the cow herd cursing as he milks.  
Dazed,  
I turn to the  
house built by the toil  
of factories afar.  
1954.  
A testament to a failed promise  
of reparation and return.

Inside – stairs are withered  
rats scatter over the earthen floor  
pictures hang uneven  
cellar lies bereft of winterstores  
clay pots broken, urns upturned, kettle rusted  
trunks filled with a lost dowry  
  
woven cloth has become a rat's nest  
vestiges of a family scattered.

I look out – deep into the mountains  
the protectorate of simple folk during war  
shrouded in pine  
the beauty is savage  
with luminous scars of neglect.

I retreat to the cemetery  
with small offerings  
wash the tombstones of my great-grandparents,  
light a solemn candle,  
and cross myself.

*Translations from Macedonian*

*\*Praznina – emptiness*

*\*\*nasha mala –my family's quarter of the village*

## SILHOUETTE

Edward Caruso

Windows, clouds,  
night has its own breath;  
curtains, heartbeats,  
the frost of morning.  
Starlight, a distant barking  
some kind of echo  
in time that clocks continue.  
In whatever shadow this momentary sleep,  
summer months;  
whoever passed this way  
when nothing was disturbed,  
a fleeting touch,  
these objects that witnessed it.  
Whatever can be deciphered,  
to posterity entire histories,  
revealed and just as unknowing.

# THE JUMPER MY SISTER KNIT

Eugene Donnini

The pattern  
was a fisherman's rib\*  
of the softest Merino fiber,  
aqua-blue and white.

Every night  
you'd sit by that old  
Broad-ford firelight,

your eyes,  
brimming with sisterly care,  
compassionate and bright,  
gracing with warmth,  
the drop and pearl  
of every stitch.

'Is it too loose? Too tight?'  
And me replying,  
with a hug and a kiss,  
'No Est',+ it feels just right.'

And now, against the evening frost,  
a cold morning's bite  
and the nip  
of a noon-day chill,  
three years in your grave,  
and your fisherman-ribbed jumper  
warms me still.

---

*\* A knitting pattern  
+ I would often call my sister Est', which is short for Esther.*

## MY PARENTS GARDEN

Ron West

Surrounded by plants and shrubs  
Standing where the house once was

I look around  
Imagine what I'd see  
If the sun were shining

Instead, under the light of the moon  
It's all texture and shapes

No colour  
No movement  
No sound

My eyes drift to the edges  
To the fence that stops all ambiguity  
And down the back – near the old McClelland place  
To a gate that opens into flatness, a field –

It's inviting, somehow

But I stay put  
Unable to move  
The viewer now part of the view.



**Darebin  
Arts**