



ROOMERS

#73 Spring 2024

Authenticity

For residents
By residents

Almost all contributors to ROOMERS are residents or former residents of rooming houses, private hotels, public housing or special accommodation in Port Phillip

The *Roomers* magazine is developed with participants from Creative Writing Workshops run by the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre (ESNLC) with the support of the City of Port Phillip. Almost all contributors to *Roomers* are residents or former residents of rooming houses, public housing or supported residential services in the City of Port Phillip.

Discover what you can create by getting involved in our supportive workshops.
We welcome new members, mentors, and guest artists.

Please contact Janet to find out how you can get involved in this innovative project.

Email us at roomers@esnlc.org.au

Phone us on (03) 9531 1954

Write to **Roomers C/O PO Box 57 Elwood 3184**

#73

CONTENTS

- | | |
|---|--|
| Editorial — Janet Donald 1 | Reverse Roles — Davida Winefield 29 |
| Inventories — Roderick Waller 2 | My Dream Home – Maybe — Toni McLaughlin 29 |
| I am, He is, We are. — Roderick Waller 5 | POEMS — Paul F Donnelly 30 |
| Miracle haven — Roderick Waller 6 | Remembering Joy — Danielle 32 |
| A DOMESTIC — Anthony Cheshire 8 | The Never-Ending Story — Sam Taplin 33 |
| Little Things, Little Things... — Danielle 16 | Pride — Danielle_aka_Tiger-Mouse 34 |
| Red Seaweed — Anonymous 17 | Psychosis [episode 3+] — Danielle_aka_Tiger-Mouse 35 |
| Wattle Birds & Fax Machines — Danielle Hassall 18 | Bougie Habits Die Hard — Danielle_AKA_Tiger_mouse 36 |
| You — Danielle Hassall 18 | Trickey-Crickey the Crickey — Danielle Hassall 38 |
| Pensioners and Bus Drivers — Danielle Hassall 19 | The Marsh Warrior's Charge — Danielle 40 |
| A Mothers Love — Brenda Kelly 20 | I'm Quitting — Phu-Linh Tran 42 |
| A Jacket — Brenda Kelly 21 | Not Getting Out of Bed — Phu-Linh Tran 44 |
| Authentic Australia — Roderick Waller 22 | On Heroin in St Kilda — Phu-Linh Tran 44 |
| Big Love — John King 28 | The Bunyip — Tanya Paige 46 |
| But Why? — Toni McLaughlin 28 | Older Wiser Self — Ronald Paul Terrick 47 |
| The Shovel in the Bog — Tanya Paige 28 | McDonald's Mum — Marianna Jans 48 |
| How the Worm Became a Snake — Toni McLaughlin 28 | Girl and her Son — Davida Winefield 49 |
| Sometimes — Paul F Donnelly 28 | Let Me Tell You ... — Rank Amateur 50 |
| Up the Mountain — Andrew Fraser 28 | Everything is Going to be OK — Juliana Banken 51 |
| The Trainer — Brenda Kelly 29 | Australian Nightmare — Marianna Jans 52 |
| Madness — Tanya Paige 29 | Just another day — Marianna Jans 53 |
| The App — Marianna Jans 29 | |

Roomers Editor

Janet Donald

Design

Sweet Creative

Cover Artwork

Portrait by Tamara Hayes

2024

Roomers is a community arts program run by Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre with the support of the City of Port Phillip.

Back issues are available on our website

www.esnlc.com.au/roomers

The articles and artwork presented in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of ESNLC and its partners.

No responsibility or liability will be accepted for any loss or damage which may result from inaccuracy or omission with respect to any of the articles contained within.

Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre respectfully acknowledges the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present. We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to this land.

Authenticity

From the Editor



Roomers is a space where we can be our authentic selves, where we discover who we are and what our stories inform us about ourselves. When we reveal them to the broader community, we show that we all have a story to tell.

In the past twelve months we have provided a welcoming space for people who have lived experience of disadvantage to come together, to connect, to create and to share stories. Our stories inform, they provide hope, they acknowledge despair and manifest connection.

Our diverse community of writers and artists include the voices of those who are not always given the air time they deserve. They include the voices of indigenous Australians, people who are managing a mental illness and people who are experiencing insecure housing and financial and social disadvantage.

A high point of this year was having renowned author, Ray Mooney run a writing workshop for us. This inspiring session ended with Ray gifting his book on how to write to all the Roomer's attendees. Another highlight this year was having Peter Hammersley, an indigenous artist, create a painting for the Roomers group to collaborate with him on. The painting represents the coming together of the community and it has a permanent home in the entrance hall at the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

We were fortunate this year to celebrate the publishing success of several members of the Roomers project. Phu-Lihn had two poems published in the Melbourne Poets

Anthology, *Finding My Feet*, her poems were *Princes Pier Port Melbourne* and *There are Birds I Hear*. Marianna Jans had her short story, *The Wedding User* published in *Whack*. *A Domestic* by Anthony Cheshire was performed at the iconic La Mama theatre. And last but by no means least Roderick Waller published *Toward Another Sun* a collection of his poetry from 1994 – 2023. It is with great sadness that this will be his last hurrah as Roderick has passed away. His contribution to Roomers lasted decades and his presence will be felt for time immemorial.

If you would like to be part of Roomers, we run weekly classes that are available free of charge to residents of City of Port Phillip who have experienced insecure housing and/or financial or social disadvantage. To get involved please contact Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre to find out more.

We are authentically grateful to the City of Port Phillip and the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre for providing the space for people to come together and learn creative writing skills that enable them to share their work with you.

Please take some time out of your day to envelop yourself in the original and authentic moments captured by the creative writers of Roomers.

Janet Donald
Editor and Tutor
Roomers



Inventories

by Roderick Waller

Tins of tuna under the bed, sounds of hidden clocks, toaster in the microwave, electric fan behind the cistern, national geographics in the fridge, microscope behind the tv, bronze sculpture on the washstand. Under the pillow, ten doc martins barring the entrance, wistful, sighing for employment, never to be walked again, a solitary shoehorn sobbing, abandoned ties and belts. The museum of lost clothes. Crying for a home 'at least wrap me round a mummy.'

Coats dreaming of rain, sadly prone on a scrap heap, gloves for a princess sharing a drawer with a fork, fighting off a teaspoon, bow ties and necklaces vying for supremacy with salt and pepper shakers. Who will rescue her? Beyond rescue sadly, museum of lost clothes for her.

Prince charming without a compass, or the charm. Lost a shoe! Ah! We may have a spare one, now where? Mmm Florsheim's guard the exit. Try the 3rd ornate bin behind the 2nd washstand. But refuse to give up their posts. Ah yes Clark shoe may fit, I'll just get the shoehorn, it's behind the bookshelf. Where it belongs. It has no legal claim, but we'll let that one go. 3rd ornate bin is taken up with dirty linen, where cash and passport are hidden.

One day I dug through Alpha and grabbed a lime-green shirt, two sizes too large, but love it. Haven't worn it for two months. I began to tunnel backwards when a phone rang, its musical tone, Beethoven's fifth. Haven't used that phone for six months I realised. Sounds like its coming from Delta. I crawled toward it. My hearing being better than Beethoven's I soon located it, pounced, and read the text: 'your presence at the opportunity shop urgently required' my heart stopped. Haven't been to the Salvos for two days. How could I have left it so long. I panicked, rummaged through a hillock, and prised a pair of scarlet, velvet flares, perfect match for the shirt. I prepared to exit the museum. It was dusk before I managed to exit to the strange world outside the sectors. Plucking courage, heart racing I half ran to the Salvos. I'm on a mission, they need me, I thought, as the excitement rose. I felt the fat welfare check in my money belt (Vinnie's \$2).

I anticipated the adoring looks of the Salvos staff. True to my purpose I crashed through the door, ten minutes before closing. Sweet Scottish Heidi faced off, 'So, Sassenach Englishman, you decided to honour us.' she spat. I looked down, the sole of my doc martin flapped once, then went limp, separated from its mum. I groaned, cost me \$15 two years ago. First time I've worn them. I felt a pain in my chest. I looked at Heidi. Remember these. She looked wistful, a tear in her eye.

Then, ever bright, motioned me to the glass cabinet, to the top shelf. Hand-made Italian loafers. thus the urgent text. Shakily, I felt for the welfare check, the tension unbearable. Would they fit? I squeezed into them, crushed my toes, they went numb. Close enough I thought as I looked at Heidi's penetrating eyes. My heart fluttered with joy as we went through the charade of bargaining. Inevitably me on the losing end. The loafers inhibited fast motion. I'll wear them home; the leather will stretch (home truth from mother). Crab-like I set out, puffed with pride and happy, as Heidi, her Scottish sense of economy obliged. I couldn't wait to find the Armani suit to match the loafers. Now where is it? I guessed Omega sector. (Three points off Delta). A year ago the Armani pants await to bring new life in the sewing basket. Now where?

I hurried to the writing desk snug behind the bamboo room divider. The notepad and map, yes. 'Back of the cupboard above the camera cupboard.' Smugly I snatched the basket, took the Armani pants. The rear was a little tired but would go unnoticed. I opened the stitching to widen the waist. Needle threaded, I commenced to sew and inevitably drew blood. But as with many other hours of sewing I found it calming and a sense of accomplishment in bringing to life these dignified sultry garments. I fixed the pants and found a mirror lurking behind a bookshelf in Delta. Elegant I squeaked to myself.

I mused over my morning tea. If I had been deaf like old Beethoven, I would not have received the text from Heidi. If my doc martin sole hadn't decided to rebel, I may not have bought the loafers. Wait on! You're kidding. Whenever did you pass up a brand. Now I had a task I'd put off for some time. Shirt inventory. Which meant forays into camouflaged closets, the shower recess, and various half-hidden rails glued to walls. Last count was 350 shirts. So I piled all the shirts on the bed. I began to enjoy myself. Taking inventory has always satisfied a latent desire in me. I am methodical. Make mini piles of business, casual, colour. Then subdivide short-sleeve, long-sleeve, winter, summer. Subdivide again by material: cotton, wool, synthetic, then design: lines, whirls, spots. Then by brand: Pierre Cardin, Gap, Yves Saint Laurent, then a potpourri of nondescripts, no brands, just appealed to my eye, put in one pile.

I sat back and perused the piles, now filled the bed and surrounding floor, coffee table and desk. Definitely increased over two years I twinged, excessive. Then I gazed at the beautiful textures and styles and was pleased with my acquisitions. This time I made a special pile, ones I wore the most, at least twice a month, that silent aesthetically acquired

sense reaching out. Then every six months, once a year, and lastly, beyond memory.

The obvious distinction was the piles got bigger as time elapsed between each wearing. It occurred I should store some of the larger piles in the outer world. But the need to have variety prevailed, and I gathered all 550 shirts into one pile and in shifts moved them to various locations in delta, omega, and alpha. I congratulated myself, wouldn't have to wash a shirt for two years. Though I do use a stain removing soap on the collars when the mood takes me.



I slept well that night knowing I'd have a fresh start, and I could resume the rounds of the op-shops. I tingled with excitement, like having chocolate ice-cream in bed before sleep. I dreamt of new frontiers; shops in other suburbs to explore. But I stayed loyal to Heidi, she kept the high-end brands to one side for me. I was a privileged customer. Two years ago, I received a pension discount card. 20% on Thursdays. Thursday's have been locked in ever since. I was even given a free bag with each purchase, with the Salvos logo a year ago. And three or four huge piles of salvos bags are scattered among the sectors. There's a disquieting thought that these must be sent outside the sector.

The housing manager is doing a routine inspection, which concerns me. They can be fussy about space; cluttering is the polite euphemism they use. The don't realise how inventive and artistic I am. So far, they've turned a blind eye. But tomorrow, after the exertions of inventory, I will set about what I term compression. Squeezing things together, filling every available space, a variety of packaging techniques, transferring garments from bag to case, salvos bags to polyethene space-savers. It will take two days, I must begin. The shoe rack behind the cistern is gathering grime. 24 pairs at last count stacked on an 8-shoe rack. shiny, two-tone Italians, heavy duty hikers, never worn, bought 3 years ago at the Red Cross. Church brogues, brown, suede, classy, an array of casuals, laces, velour, black oxfords from a thrift store in Asia, last wear: 8 years ago. Luckily my feet have neither enlarged nor diminished. And I adapt to a size too large or small. I have set limits of course. more than two inches gap between big toe and shoe toe I unhappily surrender. If my big toe bleeds or a sliver of skin comes off my heel, I concede the shoes will remain unsold. I do bear in mind that leather, and all my shoes are leather, I'm a shoe-snob, leather will stretch over time, and in a certain mood this will heavily influence the success of potential foot embalming shoes purchase. One only thinks of the fortitude of brave Japanese women, their feet bound for beauty or servitude or both. As with the shirts I decided on a snap inventory. 26 pairs! Two pairs have wormed their way in. but wait! Two odd shoes. I thought that was in the domain

of socks only. I made a note and put the vagrants to one side, determined to find their partners. I see that none of these shoes in Alpha have been employed in at least a year. I scurry to the kitchen, a feeling the shoe cleaning bag (a salvos bag), is tucked behind the cupboard of DVD's and cassettes. But it may have to wait. Only a day and a half to room inspection. I venture to the border post of Alpha and Delta. Last time I looked there was a 16-shoe rack, a proper man's rack! I'm smiled upon and trip over it as I negotiate a plastic laundry basket filled with anonymous odd-looking tat. 16 rack, delicately balanced four levels of shoes....64 pairs I note on my pad. My eagle eye spots a furtive Nike shoe, runaway from the cistern rack in Alpha. I put it to one side, its cocky grin now sour. You have had your fling young man I admonish. I feel a warm accomplishment. I give the four levels of shoe a delicate dust. They tremor as I do, I pause at a sad leather sandal, its buckle tarnished, it appears to weep. Where's your partner I whisper, carefully probing under the bottom shelf. A phone rings, not Beethoven's majestic fifth. I jerk and slip. The four stories come tumbling down. I groan, heels graze tongues, laces knot round alien lace holes, toe-caps brush suede. I panic. Lift gently each blasted shoe and arrange frantically some order. At least upright. But now no partners are together. a sandal with a dress shoe, a brogue with a German, French clog with a flipflop. (So that's where they are).

I do a final count of the shambolic ranks. Two infiltrators, one deserter! How does this happen, what aliens move within these sectors. No wonder it's hard to breathe, all that oxygen feeding illegal entrants to this holiest of holies museum. A smart-arse \$300 shoe I paid \$20 for, three weeks ago winks at me. How did you cross the border I sternly question. The coward slides under the calf-leather tongue. He'll get his comeuppance I mutter.



I don't have time to match up the forlorn victims of desertion. They can wait. I did though, note the deserter, a youngish Ted Baker, a \$100 pair. I picked up at random a Sebago, a shiny brown leather loafer, handsewn, all leather sole, made in the Dominican Republic. I felt the heel, and to my dismay the leather heel step had loosened. Two of the three tacks had come loose. I recalled how sad he looked in Heidi's top-shelf, down at heel and his tongue lolling. He had an inch overhang from my big toe, but thick socks would compensate. I made a mental note to fix tomorrow. I will operate my dear friend, get you on your feet. I recall the happy summer day we spent together on Clarendon St. you literally shined humbly below the grey turns up of the Saville-row suit. We really made a show together. I put him gently inside my shirt.

There are now 66 pairs of shoes. I think. With the 26 from alpha, that's 92 pairs. A different pair each week for nearly two years. then I realised there is a cupboard under the sink chocabloc with shoes, in Beta sector. Shoe leather costs will be practically nil! A pleasant tingle rose on my neck. With thoughts of poor Sebago, whimpering on my chest I resolved

to find the shoebox. It was well-supplied, tacks, glue, small hammer, pliers, punch, knife, toecaps, heel caps, a few full heel caps, grey, brown, and black. I've spent many a relaxing hour, cutting leather, gluing, tapping tacks, restoring life to old fading sorrowful shoes, new lives picked up to dance the flamingo, hike Lake St Clair, accessory to business suits, fine head-turning suits, English woollen suits, tweed suits. Now I'm positive it's in the wicker basket in the shower recess. First job after the room inspection. This thought jolted my reverie. I curled my upper body and swung round to exit the sector.

I must move on, it's a sweat shop here and I'm short-breathed. Which reminds me, that oxygen tank I picked up from Vinnies three years ago, that would come in handy in a bust lung and oxygen deprived sectors situation. I think it's in



the shower recess. But first I retreat to Delta, to the comfort of my bed, the only brand-new piece in the place. Paid for by the department of health to improve posture. Thankyou government.

Its dark now, a whole day in the sweatshop, counting, sorting, cramming to gain a few extra square inches of wall or floor. I'm exhausted, for fashion and looking good. I berate myself for a while. Then nod off and dream of undiscovered opportunity shops.

On awakening I'm horrified at my first thought. I dreamt of hundreds of coat-hangers, armed, marching on the citadel. I hurled a treefull of ties and a bucketful of belts at the invaders. We came to a truce. The coat hangers were up in arms over their sudden sacking during the recent inventory. We smoked a peace-pipe, followed by a tank of oxygen, which the night before I retrieved from behind the fridge (not in the shower recess as I had thought). I would reinstate half their platoon, repair damaged hangers with cello tape and bundle the unemployed into tens and lay them nicely in some quiet corner. They appeared to be appeased. Their leader, a daunting, four-rail pants hanger called for a review in a few weeks.

I rise and dispelling the coat hanger misery, I focused on the oxygen tank. I texted a Nokia I believed to be in Omega, hoping to quickly find the elusive tank. I would need it. I had a day to compress the three sectors, by the very least, a third. First things first though I needed nourishment. I reached under the bed for a can of baked beans, warily made way to the microwave. I rummaged for the microwave proof bowl, I unbelievably, only had one. Now where is it? Four large drawers in the kitchen (still visible), I knew had exquisite bone China from various shops throughout the city. Japanese Macassar in a top drawer, Wedgwood in a drawer beneath the oven. And the sixty-piece set I bought on impulse from Vinnie's in a remote suburb. My hands were red and sore as I struggled with two large bags on trains and trams to get them safely home. Cost me \$40, never opened them since, but one day!

A recent inventory revealed a total of 400 cups, saucers, side, dinner, soup, desert bowls, from minimalist



Japanese lines and cherry trees to quintessential English meadow, girls with daisies and frolicking lambs. They all arrived early, about six years ago, I used 2 cups and one plate when I invited Heidi for morning tea on the occasion of my 74th birthday. The exquisitely painted Wedgwood teacups sat happily on the tiny coffee table. I tried not to look at the grotesque teabags hanging impudently on their lips. Rather spoil the effect. But never mind. The tea went well as we discussed my future purchases from her shop. They're in perfect order, an investment I thought, or the remote chance I'd move into a mansion with a dining table with seating for thirty. For high political conferences and huge family get-togethers of the squires, that sort of thing. So they sit, patiently, side by side waiting for a grand entrance. There were a few catastrophes in the beginning. A Mikasa fruit bowl fell from place, cracked in four places, two tubes of super glue later, left to convalesce in a far corner of a cupboard under the sink. A couple of Wedgwood's, oh I cried, feeling frivolous, they jumped out my hand onto the floor and sadly expired. They were beyond even super glue and my furtive imagination. I recall going into mourning for days, not venturing out of the sectors.

The microwave proof bowl came up from behind the Shakespeare collection on the second shelf in Gamma sector. I couldn't understand this. It's the most used item in the sectors. I remove the toaster from the microwave and heat up the beans. I'll need energy today, squeezing space is a highly skilled job requiring focus and steady nerves. I gobble the beans and swill down a mug of tea. My three mugs are very close, almost snobbish, and are very protective of each other. They are the one thing I can always rely on; always sit smug behind the Deloitte coffee machine. But my breathing is laboured, and my mind turns to the oxygen.

The Nokia had not responded. I knew it was unreliable sometimes. I'd found it sulking on a bottom shelf at the community shop five years ago. It's possible the battery's flat I surmised. It means going in cold, but then I remembered the boutique Oppo phone I'd bought 10 years ago. I wonder. I sent a text. I remembered charging it only a month ago and it will still receive emergency calls without credit. Success! 'I am in Gamma and feeling useless and unwanted. What do you want?' It replied petulantly. I was a little offended, but I asked it to photograph its surroundings. Silence! Then a photo sent and presto, the scowling little oxygen tank in the corner, behind the fridge. Got you I smirked and ventured into the day.



I am, He is, We are.

by Roderick Waller



We were to take a boat out on the harbour, but it was so full of craft we drove on and stopped at the pub. Hamish bought a tray of hot toddies for us. He bought two rounds. I went to pay the second round but kept the notes in my pocket. I got tipsy. Hamish had known to stop here. We played pool, I potted a green ball, then miscued the second, then Hamish cleared the table and potted the black. He offered a tankard of a drink, half beer, to me but I declined. We drove to the farm.

Hamish cosied up to my wife, my handsome lady and they drafted my sheep and my cattle. I watched him as he drafted at my gate; a pillar of assurance, protector, and provider, happy and generous, and I saw my wife tall, handsome, neat, and capable in jeans and white shirt and Akubra looking to him with her back to me. He was tall, manly, with a confidence, a calmness, that could take control of any unforeseen occurrence and I burned with sexual jealousy. I went to the shed and sulked, removing crap and dusting off a pile of hats. I returned to the house. She said I am busy, I replied WE are busy. I went to the cow shed and saw them putting sheaves of hay into the stalls where the cows moored and settled down to chew. They were with my sheep and cattle, my cattle in their stalls, my sheep in their pens. I noticed he'd made a roaring fire, with my logs. He'd created smiles and warmth in the home. I felt my life slip away. He had firm control of my wife, my farm, my life.

Hamish left without a word. I was confused; was this a dream, an hallucination from the toddies I'd consumed at the pub. No, it was real, I was sure. I looked at my hard dirty palms and the red welts where I'd pushed with the chisel. Was Hamish the man I wanted to be, should be, but can I be? Was I watching my second self-stood by the drafting gate?

We sat down to dinner in silence and the night filled the room with darkness. I didn't turn on the lamp and she reached over and held my hand. In her soft way she said. "It's alright, it was just a fleeting moment." Tears ran down my cheeks and I was grateful she didn't see them. She held my hand as the

night lengthened. Our hands were cold and rough, and we said nothing. The bright cheerful fire the man had lit and spread warmth and new life to the home had died to embers and I didn't get up to stoke it. We sat still and shivered and then went to bed. We'd returned to the status quo. We laid apart and she said "We are. Not I am." So, we knew our place with each other, in indifference and detachment but all the while knowing, We Are.

Since then, when we had a spat or there were harsh words she would go out to the yard and stare at the drafting grate knowing I was watching her. Through my fog she was sending a signal; if you don't value me as your partner in love and work, I can revert to 'I am' in the wink of an eye. And she knew I would revert to a jealous rage and that I would again love her. The man unwittingly had saved us. He had taken my wife, farm, and my life and my wife had used him to return them back to me. If ever he came to visit, I would welcome him for that.

She followed me to the shed one day and saw the cleaned-up worktable and ran her fingers over the deep chisel marks in the old wood where I'd scraped the years of dirt away; the crushed beetles, mouse parts, dried rat faeces, and congealed dust that had formed into flaky cardboard. And she saw how I had slashed my chisel at the table in my jealous rage. Her tears fell and she took my hand. "Yes, that's when I am and He is." When harsh words came again, she would later go to the shed and look for fresh chisel marks. If there weren't any, the next day she would stand in the yard and stare at the drafting gate.

Hamish never did return but the memory was in us all the time. I knew to be careful to attend to the love I had for her. We loved and worked on the farm, segregated the sheep into pens and took hay to the cattle stalls. And in the winter, I cut logs and made a roaring bright fire to keep us from the chill. It had been a close call and we both knew it was a lucky escape.

Miracle haven

by Roderick Waller



Benjie joined the crew one morning, Chubby-cheeked, short of stature, slim, bandy-legged, green eyed, with jet-black hair, and stumpy fingers, he was attired in creased shorts, checked shirt, and hob-nailed boots. An hour later Benjie threw the shovel across the shed, over the heads of the others, screaming fuck you, fuck the lot of yous'. The shovel barely missed the short-haired scalp of the manager. There was a loud uproar of laughter and oaths from the fifteen other men for a moment silencing the grunting and squealing of around five-hundred pigs, their snouts in the trough at the morning feed. Benjie stormed toward the doorway, the men looking on, resting on their shovels from the scraping of pig shit in the pens. Thomas intercepted him. "Go see the major, Benjie."

The piggery was, for the army, an anger management plan. These were men on charges, on court orders or plain alkies and addicts, faced with life and death issues. Beaten by addiction, at least for now. Thomas knew how they felt; he had ten years ago faced the same dilemmas; sort out the anger or prepare for relapse. So he had a soft spot for his charges. Each man spent on average twelve weeks in the piggery, some walked the gate, back to degradation, some stayed on having found an interest in pig-raising, many experienced a lowering of anger. They were miracles, the major would say.

Benjie was a heroin addict, with seven years jailtime for breaking into pharmacies, and threatening with violence for drugs. Found lying in blood in an alleyway in the Cross, one night, he was taken to the ICU in critical condition. He pulled through and once again was beaten and his shrink advising the farm, and he relented. His anger was at a peak at the time of the incident with the shovel. A flying shovel thrown by an angry man can be a lethal weapon.

The major assigned Benjie light duties in the office and increased his counselling sessions. Bit by bit his anger subsided as his councillor probed into Benjie's childhood and the present. He remained arrogant and belligerent though. From a well to do family in Vacluse, the pressure on him to do well had been enormous. Also sexually abused by his uncle when he was seven. He'd rebelled, joined the hippie trail in the sixties, then drugs and crime. He was educated and literate and a promise of artistic merit, but under the spell of drugs, it was wasted. His resistance to change was more so than the less privileged men on this farm and a bigger challenge for those trying to help me.

But the saving grace of the army was persistence and walking the extra mile. After a month, Benjie was reassigned to the piggery. He objected and became heated. But the major and Thomas brought him round. He was assigned to the

mating supervision, a critical role in the piggery. The councillor was hopeful this would bring to the surface the horrors of his childhood abuse. Benjie recoiled, but after gentle persuasion assented. There were seven boars at one end of the shed, in individual pens. Named after Old Testament figures as was the army's want: Jeremiah, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Abraham, and Noah. Fifty sows and gilts in pens adjacent to the boars to be easily identified as on heat and brought in for mating. This would test Benjie, especially with the young boars, patience, and dexterity important, and it didn't pay to be angry in a pen with a lusty boar however incompetent the boar was. Guiding the boars into the sows was the breaking point for many mating supervisors. Even the most hardened men couldn't stomach this part of the job. Though it was necessary for the young boars to be taught. For the piggery was not a natural place for essentially wild animals. Pigs are intelligent creatures and recognise and adapt to artificial surroundings. Thomas recognised this, working in a semi-fantasy world, which to the addict wasn't too hard to adapt to.

The first time, Benjie gagged, threw up and ran down the lane, cursing. He'd made one pal, Henry, an ex-con, and mechanic who kept repairs to the shed. Henry coaxed him back. It was these friendships that contributed to successful rehabilitation. Then Benjie began to transform almost overnight. Thomas was hard put to why. He became an expert teacher to the boars, conception rates were high, and the farrowing shed was full to capacity. Even more so was how jovial and accommodating Benjie had become.

What was startling was the smell in the piggery. Thomas was proud of the cleanliness of the shed, the pens were mucked out daily, which kept the pungent smell of five-hundred animals to a minimum, as well as, of course, an important strategy of anger management for the men. But now there was a distinctly seductive old spice after shave aroma over the boar pens. When questioned Benjie admitted to using it. The major was not impressed. Apart from two staff there were no females on the farm, and any artificial scents was forbidden. Benjie was upset but took it in his stride and his unexpected turn of mood was not diminished. Thomas was impressed with his new-found maturity.

There was still some shovel throwing in the fattening pens, but Benjie's example had become legendary and was

useful in resolving the outbreaks. Except a month later all hell broke loose. In a pen of fifty porkers, the slats in the dunging area had come loose, and one morning Thomas glanced at the empty pen and heard the squealing of the pigs stamping beneath the concrete floors of the shed. Remarkably there was no shortage of volunteers to dive underground and retrieve the pigs; the greasy pig contest. For it was a matter of macho to crawl in the sewer, head to foot in pig shit. Thomas and the major saw it as a blessing, a lot of anger would dissipate from these volunteers. But Benjie and Henry refused to volunteer. They were above all that. On later inspection Henry reported that the slats had been levered and loosened. Each man was questioned, and no-one owned up; it remained a mystery.

One day old Isaiah, eight years old could barely mount and Benjie threw up his arms in exasperation. "He has to go, poor old bugger." Major Hamer came one day with a sledgehammer. He hammered on Isaiah's head desperately for what seemed an eternity. Some of the men threw up, left the shed. This was rage on a grand scale for old Isaiah would not succumb. This was entirely against the anger management plan set by the army. Finally, Thomas was given the .22 from the Major's office and put Isaiah out of his misery. Major Hamer was relieved and sent home not long after.

Just before Benjie's three-month spell was due, Thomas found a cache of bottles in the workshop. There were used bottles of mouthwash, and after shave lotion, both ten percent alcohol. So that was how Benjie and Henry had kept such a happy demeanour for so long. Though banned from applying the lotion, they had been dosing their morning tea with aftershave old spice, and swallowing, rather than gargling mouthwash. They were effectively a little inebriated most of the time. Thomas knew this would progress back to the hard stuff. He told the major and they felt a dilemma. Their anger had been addressed, but a confrontation would bubble it back up. What could they do, confront the men, and leave it be. The truth would prevail, so the major brought them into the office. They admitted to aftershave lotion and mouth wash, and then confessed to opening the slats in the pen. Benjie and Henry walked the gate one morning before breakfast. Rehabilitation had worked only so far. We'd tried the best; the major had said to Thomas.

A DOMESTIC

by

Anthony Cheshire

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR

NIC

MELINDA

STEVE

ROSEMARY

SYNOPSIS:

Still fervently jealous of an old school friend from years ago Nic wants Steve dead. With his companion, Melinda, they set up a trap for Steve, and his partner, Rosemary. Death is in the air but in the end, everything goes pear shaped.

NARRATOR:

A Domestic, by Anthony Cheshire.
This is how it starts.

Scene 1 – Exterior of a Café in the daytime.
(Nic and Melinda sit at a table with their coffees.)

● NIC
I'll never forget how the breeze beat me at the long jump in a major athletic meeting.

MELINDA
(curious)
What happened Nic?

NIC
It was a close call but then came the breeze, Melinda.
(pause)

● It was the breeze that made him win. I'm certain of it.

MELINDA
Them the breaks.

NIC
It's just like the accounting exam.
I cheated from the Breeze all the way along.
It still ended for me to fall short by a few marks from him.
I was gutted.

● MELINDA
It turns out that things are not so well for the Breeze.
He is on the skids, financial distress, embezzlement, but the truth is he is in jail for domestic violence.
At the moment Rosemary thinks everything will work out.

NARRATOR: SCENE 2.INT. PRISON – DAY

(Talking across a table STEVE seems apprehensive, but MELINDA cuts to the chase)

MELINDA
How are you going Breeze?

● STEVE
Don't keep calling me Breeze....and don't talk about Nic. It's a long time ago.

MELINDA
You know, I'm prepared to help you and pay for a place. And that includes bail.

The only thing is you have to live with Rosemary.
What do you say Steve?

● STEVE
It's all self-explanatory.
I love it with Rosemary. We have a special bond.

MELINDA
OK that's that. I'm a great friend of both of yours. Let it go according to plan.

STEVE
OK

● MELINDA
OK

NARRATOR: SCENE 3. INT. STEVE & ROSEMARY APARTMENT – DAY

NARRATOR: (The apartment is spacious. It is double story, three ample bedrooms, a modest size kitchen and a living area.)

STEVE

This apartment is spacious enough.

ROSEMARY

How did you score all this?

STEVE

Let's say I found friends in the right places.

ROSEMARY

Well, the fridge and pantry are empty, so we better fill them up.

STEVE

Sounds like a good idea. Let's make the list.

NARRATOR: 4. INT. STEVE&ROSEMARY APARTMENT-LATE AFTERNOON

NARRATOR: (STEVE and ROSEMARY enter the apartment with bags of groceries)

STEVE

I think I have everything.

ROSEMARY

A sandwich would be nice.

STEVE

Right on.

NARRATOR: (STEVE goes through the bags and frowns. It dawns on ROSEMARY what she has done.)

ROSEMARY

I forgot the margarine. I am sorry.

STEVE

There's no excuse. I wrote it down on the list. You fucked up.

ROSEMARY

For god's sake don't say that. It was an innocent mistake.

STEVE

(initially fuming but then checks his temper and calms down)
I will have to go to the local shop. Won't be long.

● NARRATOR: (STEVE turns and kisses ROSEMARY)

ROSEMARY

Thank you Steve.

NARRATOR

It was the breeze. It came out of nowhere and dashed a young man's dreams. He has never recovered.

NARRATOR: Scene 5. INT. CAFÉ - DAY

NARRATOR: (NIC and MELINDA are sitting at a table with their coffees)

NIC
How is this going?

MELINDA

● Could not be better. I've set them up in an apartment and they are more than content.

NIC
We'll see....

Now we wait for the drama to unfold.

Do you know sweet Rosemary has killed a man through self defense?

MELINDA
I know that.

●

NARRATOR: SCENE 6. INT. STEVE & ROSEMARY APARTMENT – MORNING

STEVE

It's a beautiful day darling. What are you planning on doing?

ROSEMARY
Nothing much.

STEVE

Well I'm off to play golf.

NARRATOR: (STEVE inspects his golf clubs)

STEVE

There seems to be one missing. The 9er.
You haven't knocked it off, have you?

ROSEMARY
Why would I?

STEVE

I know you detest me playing too much golf. You've said it before.
You've knocked off my 9er.

Thanks to you I'll have to borrow one but I'm not impressed.
When I find out, I'll hit you over the head.

NARRATOR: (on that STEVE storms out)

●

NARRATOR: Scene 7. INT. CAFÉ - DAY

(Now MELINDA and ROSEMARY are having coffees at a table.)

MELINDA

How do you have your coffee?

ROSEMARY

Strong with an equal.

MELINDA

How are things going?

ROSEMARY

On the outset it is just divine. We have this lovely apartment and it is just dreamy. I've never been in such a large place.

MELINDA

And what about Steve? Is he behaving himself?

ROSEMARY

I'm not sure where he gets his golf players. He's very quiet about it. He reckons he has got good friends.
What if Steve has links to crime?

MELINDA

I think you're letting your imagination get away from you.
He's an ordinary guy so just live with it.

ROSEMARY

Not all together. He threatened me. Just yesterday he said he'd hit me over the head with a golf club. By the looks in his eyes he could have.
But mark my word I can stand up for myself.

MELINDA

I suggest you see a psychiatrist.

ROSEMARY
(non-committal)
Maybe....

MELINDA

I know one. He has helped so many people and their relationships have grown stronger.

ROSEMARY

I guess it's worth a try.

MELINDA

Good. Here's his card.

NARRATOR: (Melinda hands Rosemary a business card)

MELINDA

Ring him. What have you got to lose?

ROSEMARY

I'll take your word for it.

NARRATOR: Scene 8.INT. PUB – LATE AFTERNOON

(STEVE and MELINDA are having a drink at a table.)

MELINDA
Hi Steve.

STEVE
Hi back.

MELINDA
You seem happy. What's the occasion?

STEVE
Aren't I allowed to be happy.
Well, it's better than being in prison.

MELINDA
That's a good reason.

STEVE
I'm still finding my way around Rosemary?

MELINDA
In what way?

STEVE
She's lovely but she can sure push my buttons.
. You know I have a history of physical abuse but that hasn't reared its
ugly head yet.

MELINDA
(whispering to herself)
We'll wait.

NARRATOR: Scene 9.INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S SUITE - DAY

NARRATOR: (NIC, parading as a PSYCHIATRIST, is sitting at a desk
opposite ROSEMARY.)

NIC
What did you do to your face?

ROSEMARY
It's nothing. I'll get over it.

NIC
(compassionately)
It seems too severe to overlook.

ROSEMARY (suddenly overwhelmed)
It was terrible.

I was dusting the house and I hit and broke a vase full of his mother's
ashes. They were everywhere but the time I got the broom and shovel he
hit me.

I didn't know what to do. I ran to you.

NIC
It was a mistake.
It's only human to make mistakes.
But I do prescribe that you retaliate next time.
You don't want to become a door mat.
You understand.

NARRATOR: Scene 10. INT. STEVE & ROSEMARY APARTMENT - DAY

NARRATOR: (In a flux STEVE has found the card on the table reading 'Nic Playford, Psychiatrist'. STEVE runs out in a hurry.)

NARRATOR: Scene 11. EXT. CAR PARK - OPPOSITE PSYCHIATRIST'S SUITE) - DAY

NARRATOR:
(STEVE is in his car. He has the card with him. STEVE sees ROSEMARY leaving the Psychiatrist's suite.)

(STEVE then also sees the Psychiatrist leave. STEVE is quick to discern the Psychiatrist happens to be NIC, his old rival friend from school.)

(Unseen by ROSEMARY, STEVE drives home to talk through this all with her.)

NARRATOR: Scene 11. INT. STEVE & ROSEMARY APARTMENT - DAY

ROSEMARY
Are you going to hit me again?

STEVE
In actual fact I want a word with you.

ROSEMARY
What about?

STEVE
It's got to do with my honesty. I've got an ugly side, You've seen it. Tell me about yourself.

ROSEMARY
I killed a man in self defence.

STEVE
That's what I thought.
I know about your Psychiatrist. A rival school friend of mine from years ago. I saw him. I took to follow him.
He told you to retaliate against me didn't he?

ROSEMARY (exasperated as it dawns on her that they've been played)
What are we going to do?

STEVE
We need to talk to Melinda and "this psychiatrist"

NARRATOR: Scene 12. MELINDA & NIC'S APARTMENT - EVENING

STEVE
(Sarcastically)
So this is quite a party.

MELINDA
So what's the occasion?

STEVE
You had me dead.

NIC
(looking at Melinda)
I think we should leave.

STEVE
I think you are dead right. I know your game now and if I ever see you again, I will deal with you.

NARRATOR: (NIC and MELINDA feeling threatened leave their apartment in a hurry.)

ROSEMARY
Let's go home now.

Little Things, Little Things...

(Roughly to the tune of 'Little Pigs, Little Pigs')

by Danielle



'Little Pigs, Little Pigs'

Little Things, Little things, how'd you get in?
 Little things, little things, who can I put in the bin?
 You grew and you grew over the years of my life,
 And now you're so big I can't look; it makes me sick in my mind.
 The piles need to go in the bin, bin, bin, bin!

Little things Little Things, you need to get out!
 Little-things, all these things how'd you get in?
 You acquired us – it's called Capitalism!
 I'll fluff and I'll fluff whilst procrastinating, trying to lose you and get rid of my frown!
 So, I'll purge and I'll bin, I'll purge and I'll bin, until I feel free of sin...
 Until you're all gone, recycled and gifted,
 Until I feel like my spirit has lifted

Little things, little things, I'll start all over again,
 Yes, I'll start life again, fresh without you,
 My visual past,
 Don't look back,
 This time **it's going to last!**

Red Seaweed by Anonymous

Newly arrived from the east, after fleeing violence

A welcome respite to score a place not too far from the bay

Still on edge and in survival mode from being on the run, the third time in her life,

Finding it difficult to trust, although, the neighbours weren't making it any easier, with their cliquy-lockdown alliances

There was one kind enough to show her she could relax enough to go down and actually get in the water...

But

Survival mode was triggered, and the hyper-vigilance of the trauma from, well a few traumas back to be honest, was still fresh when near the bay...

Going into the water even close to someone she barely knew, put her on-guard... wildly looking around for who was on the beach at every point, who was idling, if anyone was watching her... if it was a trap...

That summer at Elwood beach for 3 months a strange red seaweed blew into Port Phillip Bay from somewhere else, in a storm or something, it didn't grow here... It hadn't been there for 5 months... or maybe it was a late-summer seasonal thing? But it sent her back to the mix of languages that sounded similar and all used Cyrillic... Anyway, most of the time, Elwood was clear of seaweed,

Unlike the beach at Sozopol, that was actually renowned for **Red Seaweed**,

And corruption, how convenient that those things were so close together, for the mob

She'll never forget Harmanite Beach, and unfortunately this untimely reminder at Elwood, on the other side of the world, made it difficult to get in for a dip, and enjoy being here, now and present, but left 'trying to look normal', swimming next to her neighbour, whilst the red seaweed was making her hypervigilant...

Her bathing habits when retrIGGERED went straight back to the routine of copying the "Stara Dama's", the Old Bulgarian ladies on the beaches of the black sea, in their black bathers, like widows of the black market, Red sea with Black money more like it.

Splish - splash, drip - dash, wipe the water off each arm, and then stand in the sun and let it's rays dry you, before walking back home in a towel...

Quickly in and quickly out, don't linger in the water long enough for a sniper to line you up, from the empty buildings behind you, somewhere between Via Pontika Straat and ul. Professor Venedikov (at a rough guess). There were almost as many buildings as there were tourists, was it a soviet hang-up or something to ensure there was only 1 couple per floor?

Don't get tricked into believing in love, especially if it's two to one,

Arrogance will get you left **FOR DEAD**, literally, at Harmanite Beach, by two **incredibly hot** women you thought you had power over, with wealth... are you kidding? Arrogance

Three people walked to the edge and put down three towels, and then went into the water...

5 minutes later, (after the couple on the beach next to us seemed to have a lot of issue with a laptop and a joystick suddenly, in desperate voices, **like something else was actually happening...**)

Then two women walked out, picked up the three towels, including their unsuspecting lover's, who had strangely disappeared in the 5 minutes since they went into the water, and walked off. Whilst I watched the renowned red seaweed of Sozopol tossing in the waves... that moments ago hadn't seemed quite so crimson, watching the vibrant red disperse, slightly, time seemed to stop, but then, almost within a minute, it was just red seaweed in the salt water again, tossing like clothes in the washing machine as every wave cracked onto the beach ... leaving me blinking and replaying the last 5 minutes over and over in my mind a hundred times to check myself out, I really saw that, yes I really saw that, but what the... no I really saw that.

How can such a brief ten minutes of life be etched in my mind, every detail as if it were in slow motion twelve years later? Chronic replay - that's how!

The couple with the laptop who'd been frantically talking into a phone switching between English and Russian after we sat (not too close, but close enough to hear) to them, had packed up shortly after the two young gorgeous women, (who'd been with the fat, old ugly man who disappeared) had left...

As if anyone legitimately took a laptop to the beach in post-recession - 2008, most people in eastern Europe didn't even have a smartphone back then.

Why was my partner so insistent on walking 4 kilometres to a secluded section 'away from everyone else'?

I know why; because we were tight-arses and Australian's didn't like paying someone to sit under an umbrella, when they'd covered every inch of sand in umbrellas, that were mostly empty... it's possible he actually had argued with the guy collecting money about how could he own the sand? But we were tourists, pay, or go for a hike to where the rules are different... So, we hiked, grumpy and annoyed about this 'sand paying injustice scheme', what was wrong with this place, highway robbery... That's how it had started anyway...

12 years later she always halted, she couldn't swim with anyone new in her life, without twitching in paranoia, looking for an imaginary triangle between herself and some creepy looking men, looking at their phones, it's 2024 now, you don't need a laptop to line up a sniper shot, could probably do it on a phone these days. Or maybe that wasn't how it worked...

She could never be sure of anything, afterwards, it was like the Black Sea gaslit her into a permanent runaway, twitching state. One thing she did know for certain, she preferred to swim alone, and could never really believe anyone young and hot actually could be attracted to her (sleeping with someone might end her up dead). Why is there a half-processed ghost memory in the back of her mind, growing cobwebs and preventing her from intimacy?

One day at Elwood, she was actually able to be present, and enjoy herself, she wasn't checking everyone out on the beach, or looking for creeps. And then a man swam out to one side of her, totally normal, but gross, I don't want to make eye contact, she thinks, so she swims out further in the other direction. Then she notices another man to her other side exactly parallel to the other one still there, and they have a very familiar style and air about them, both similar to one another. Then there's a guy point-blank opposite, on his phone, pointed at her and looking up and down at her and it occasionally, or was it just the horizon? The building behind him is the sailing club attic, mostly empty, like the hotels of Sozopol.

She freaks she's in the middle of a triangle, just when she'd started to settle into the area and relax again. She thumps her way back, erratic freestyle to the edge of the water, anxiety rising, almost hyperventilating. Quickly, resurfaced, can't shoot me now, I'm out of the water, someone on the esplanade would notice! She grabs her towel, dabs her face and looks carefully over the fabric at the guy with the phone, then up at the attic to see if it's empty, or if there's someone standing there pointing a long-barrelled telescope.

He looks up and smiles, a half-smile.

Don't **dob** on the mob luv, we see you, the smile seems to say.

I guess she'll never know. **Gaslit**

She looks back at the water to see the other two from the triangle, just looks like normal swimmers now, not intensely violating and scary like it had minutes ago. Grabs her things, and walks quickly to the outdoor shower, to rinse off the saltwater, and the feeling of the triangle. Trying to look normal, whilst insanely wired, and then to get away, walking slowly, whilst heart racing, to anywhere from here, easier to go back home to her desk, hide behind some books, it's safety.

NB the term 'mob' here is used to describe the mafia.

by Danielle Hassall

Wattle Birds & Fax Machines

I've been trying to imitate a fax machine like a skilled musician,
 Ever since
 The episode
 They call **IT** psychosis,
 But I swear I felt intrinsically connected to every current riding the wind,
 Every bird seemed to be talking straight at me, blinking their beady eyes
 in snappy recognition, just like that black dot on my phone, behind which
 sits the selfie-camera
 The birds screeching sending out spells onto and into the airwaves, riding
 the air waves upwards, screeching into them as they spiralled down
 Not looking at me, though, I later realised, I was no one, just got lucky
 enough to get tied up in their wind, they weren't talking to me at all... they
 just let me connect in...
 For weeks later after the episode I was always mesmerised when I saw a
 Wattle Bird, catching my ear suddenly,
 Did they copy the Fax machine?
 Or did the Fax machine impersonate them?
 (maybe I was still only taking half the meds)
 An endless circular never ending question, what came first? : - the Wattle
 Bird's call or the Fax machine dial up sound? I must've been born in the
 eighties, who even remembers the fax machine...
 But it can still be heard sometimes, if you call the wrong number, or a
 creepy automated number rings you...
 I had to snap myself out of it, many a time...
 Anyway, A Fax machine gets plenty of work still right? So maybe I'll
 finally get a job again if I can talk like a fax machine...? But I don't think
 I'm skilled enough:
 "beeeeeeeeeppppppurrp__trssschhuuucrccrccrccrk__
 ssscsiscsciscscich__qiiiiqiqiqiqiqiqu__
 Scwoscwoscwozzscowwwwzzzowowsch__qqqiiiick"
 Anthochaera, Anthochaera, Anthochaera, Anthochaera
 Go-on! Search the sound of a fax machine, then the sound of a wattle
 bird, or Wattle birds of Australia to be precise and you tell me!!
 Did the Wattle bird survive the first destruction of the human race, and
 was the keeper of the Fax machine sound, until it was reinvented 120,000
 years later? Totally possible right?
 The Wattle Bird lived on, since the last time the human race self-destructed
 in the last 'late stage of capitalism', and is here to remind us not to repeat
 what happened last time... 120,000 years later, with the noise from the
FIRST, the **ORIGINAL** Fax Machine, and we aren't just in a constant
 120,000 year cycle – hmmm?
Totally plausible!
 Or did the Wattle Bird add to it's calling cries when sitting outside an
 office one day in the 1980's, listening to the
 "beeeeeeeeeppppppurrp__trssschhuuucrccrccrccrk__
 ssscsiscsciscscich__qiiiiqiqiqiqiqiqu__
 Scwoscwoscwozzscowwwwzzzowowsch__qqqiiiick"
 Dial-up...
 Or maybe I'm unemployed because of the psychosis (several of them)

You

In my room, you are there for the first time,
 On my 'Single bed'
 Holding me softly, but internally I burn
 Knowing I have to wait, or it will be ruined
 I'm too old for images of being thrown on the couch, or against a table,
 clothes being viciously ripped off... and too traumatised...
 I just want to imagine longevity, peace and calm, all the things I feel near
 you...
 In addition to the ridiculous desire of youth sitting in my mind, because I
 never learned anything different –
 Young and feisty, then stopped abruptly, a long dry break...
 Feelings changed
 I feel your breath on my neck, without words like a sigh of relief,
 One arm heavily weighted around my torso, from behind
 after so long, your hands and fingers, playing with my fingers, elbow,
 nipple
 I, I can't even look at you, I'll never be able to, even worse now...
 You match no other part of my life except this, this intimacy
 This touch, this longing, this need
 Fuck everyone else's ideas, I don't care right now
 Matching here, right now, this feels like enough
 We lay there softly, gently, calmly
 Your fingers on my skin, your weighted arm,
 And a heat throbbing internally it's almost painful, the heat burns
 and is matched by you, I can feel it in my back
 But heat rises, it can't be helped, at this proximity
 Eventually my fingers start running over your skin, they want to know
 every millimetre, every crevice
 I hear you groan, as fingers apply pressure to **that** muscle, running
 the length from the outer hip to the inner thigh, pressing on the lower
 abdomen
 Close, but still at a distance
 Then it starts, the tension and peace we no longer contain
 I feel your cheek brush my jawline, searching, a pressed nose on mine,
 kind of squashing faces, weirdly
 It's hard to meet mouth's, it's like an affirmation, **this is enough**
 Your breath seems to be waiting on my chin to sign-up to this affirmation
 Your breath grows, you turn over, your mouth is enclosing my ear, like a
 wet puddle of warmth (sounds gross yeah? But feels good)
 before your face somehow merges into mine
 Mouths merge, urgently, with pressure
 Your hands are soft, but have become erratic and needy,
 Grabbing parts of my body, hips, thighs, pressing them to you
 Supporting my back with your hand
 Both our fingers seem to be dancing some tune across each other's skin
 It can't be helped, sensations all over, escalating through what feels like
 every nerve ending
 Until you sink... in

A Mothers Love

by Brenda Kelly

In the depths of night, a love so pure.
A bond eternal, steadfast and sure.
A mother's love, a beacon of light, hiding
us through the darkest of night.

Like a gentle breeze, she softly sings a
lullaby that lifts our weary wings.
Her tender touch, a soothing balm,
calming storms, bringing us to calm.

Through every triumph, through very strife,
she stands beside us, our guiding life.
Her love knows no bounds, no end in sight.

A flame that burns, no end in sight. A flame
that burns with unwavering might.

In her embrace, we find solace and peace.
A sanctuary where all worries cease.
Her words of wisdom, a steady stream,
nurturing our dreams like a gentle beam.

With a heart so selfless, she gives it all,
sacrificing answering every call. Her love,
a fortress that shields and protects.
A shelter that no storm can ever wreck.

Through laughter and tears, she's always
there. A constant presence, a love beyond
compares.

Her warmth and grace, a guiding star.
Illuminating our lives, no matter how far.

The love of a mother, a precious treasure

A bond that time and distancer cannot
measure.

Forever grateful, our hearts will proclaim for
the love a mother, forever the same.



Title: River Dreams

Artist: Holly Taplin 26,

Born: Castlemaine, Victoria

Medium: Black ink pen on paper

Artist statement: River Dreams is a mindscape based on the journey of River, raised in the desert on Wongai Country, now residing on Kulin Biik, paying homage to both the literal and figurative Mother: Protection, Provision, Dedication, Sacrifice. Without old people who come before us, we are nothing. Without young ones to share knowledge with, our fires burn only for warmth.

In the heart of a bustling city amidst the ebb and flow of life, a moment of pure humanity unfolded.

A stranger moved by the sight of a homeless man braving the cold, extended a gesture of kindness as simple it was profound the gift of a jacket.

This wasn't just a piece of clothing, it was warmth, it was a care. It was a message that said, you are seen, you are valued. The homeless man's reaction? Pure gratitude. His eyes lit up not from comfort of the jacket but from the warmth of human connection, a reminder that kindness can bridge worlds.

This act, small in execution but limitless in impact serves as a beacon of hope and call to action. It reminds us that within each of us lies the power to touch lives, to make a difference, to show love in its most tangible form.

So, let's take a page from this beautiful story. Look around, see who might need a little warmth, and don't hesitate to extend your hand, your heart of even just a jacket. Because sometimes, it's the simplest acts that carry the most profound messages of love and humanity. Let's spread kindness, like it's our job, because in many ways, it is.

A Jacket

by Brenda Kelly



Authentic Australia

by Roderick Waller

South Melbourne
24th March 2024

1917

Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie 1917 Tea and sugar train

To Kybo, The Tea and Sugar slogged
along the Nullabor, exhaled its dying breath,
last steam billowed, whistle winnowed coal dust.
Cold ash, dog-turds, potato peel, rancid mutton fat

lingered round the camp. Greyish starched
pantaloons hung on rope, under the blistering
sun; the scattered tents, white against the high blue sky;
blemished by a black specked cav.

Prospectors, surveyors clambered, fettlers
bulge muscled, belted iron wedges in, and
leant on hammers, iron picks, giant iron nails,
hungry for the news:

The latest bush-ranger raid.
Fresh mine opens, A huge nugget found in
Boulder. New Governor of Port Sydney. Convict
escapes Van Diemen's land. The Tudor Rose barrack

docks at Melbourne Port. Brawls on Egan Street. Talk
of a railway track to Perth. Bronze statue of Paddy Hannan.
Public houses sprouting. Thirst of the miners
unquenchable. Sergeants and barmaids busy.

Men heaved bags of sugar, sacks of
salt, boxed tea; the guard on the flat-bed
opened sacks, brown parcels string-tied
laid about. The guard puffed up, hollered, "stand back."

Brown envelopes flapped; quiet excitement rippled
round broad-brimmed hats that shaded leather faces.
Spittle on brown strong hands held onto picks,
shovels, wheelbarrows, crowbars,

sledgehammers, cast-iron camp ovens.
Rough-tongued with sardonic smiles,
bedraggled tall, thin men stood in two's and
three's on the spinifex, the blue bush, the

salt bush, under sparse withered acacia trees.
Sam and Jenna Colt sat apart on their rough-hewed cart,
fresh from the boat to set up their lease miles inland.
Iron-bark posts to load and loops of wire

will keep Sam fourteen-hour long days.
Sheep coming next week on the Tea and Sugar--
Five-hundred ewes, ten merino rams from Adelaide to Kybo,
to Sam's one hundred thousand acre spread.

Nothing here but the wind
blows over the million-mile square plain,
rails and men out of depth
somehow wheedled in. Rouseabouts hauled

beer kegs, blankets, rolls of cotton, branding irons
from box-cars. Then the whistle silenced everything.
The engine snorts, steam puffs, the boiler heats
the coaler shovels faster. Smiles, scowls, mongrels

yap, wheels turn, inch then
faster, the Tea and Sugar chugs, builds speed.
The camp dies, the settlers, migrant workers,
railwaymen sullen, mooch, slied away with

tea and sugar; the Colts nip the nag, the
cart tied rough, walks out to the burning
eastern Kybo plain, the stranger on the back,
engaged from Kal. Water diviner, wells to find

to kick in new life. In endless toil, a loneliness
beyond the pale, the settlers,
brave pioneers, penniless, pitiful creatures
settle for this infertile scraggly land,.

Down the track towards Kalgoorlie
diminished specks, the railwaymen
eager for the pub, a game of two-up with the
China man, while the settlers settle to the

wind-chill night, blazed with a soundless
billion stars. And the folk will grind, though
back of mind, that the iron-horse (the Tea
and Sugar), comes round again.

1898

Federation drought on the Mallee 1898

I dragged me back, turned me out and upside down, coaxed me into city life, though one month on I turned and ran back to my run on the mallee scrub. Took to the woods For

possum and bark to feed my wife and thirteen kids. Sheep dying on the bank of the dried-up dam, goannas stripped their flesh in their dying breath. Gathered the moss in the dry

riverbed to keep old Bess from dropping dead. Hired me mallee rake for a tanner a day to settlers clearing paddy melon and Salvation Jane. My wife churned butter

dawn to dusk to hold off famine in our wattle-bark hut. Bone-brittled cattle livers Patterson cursed and half-clothed sheep strangled by Bathurst Burr died like flies in the papery

wind. So I rolled me swag once again and beat to town to the fog and the malarial swamps, broke rocks in the quarry, dug tracks in the roads, caught between the devil and the

mud-cracked road. Oh I miss the musk of the mallee scrub, hoot of the owl and the scream of the fox, sparrows, and rabbits stripping the corn, the dingo ravaging my flock,

droving the long paddock for a stem of grass, dust storm and fire that threatens the home. Oh, I miss the musk of the mallee scrub the thick of the fight. For I'm challenged to

grow bigger than myself, tame adversity and grow fuller pride in that, learn humility in the vagaries of nature, all she can throw at: the fields are swept clean as a

yard, the wells are salted and the river sucked dry, so we tighten the belt, wait we must for the ocean winds to send rain-bearing clouds, either that or we'll perish, succumb

to skeletal bones. We stare long at the purple banked horizon, forked lightning strikes blinding, but not one drop of rain would fall. So, I stripped the mallee for tannin

at a penny a yard, trapped a possum for threepence for the fur on its back and shot a dingo for a shilling for its tail and scalp. What's left of the flock and the herd I

drive to the market town to pocket a few shillings for their bony-scarred hides. My wife made rabbit stew on the mallee charcoal fire, fed the guts of possums to the bacon

swine. The kids ran barefoot, no place for school, learning the ways of the world on the mallee scrub. What little is left goes on the government tax, sixpence a square mile for the vermin

fence. We dammed the river to conserve the pools to our downstream neighbours lament. But when push comes to shove it's all we can do to live from hand to mouth on the mallee

scrub. So I dragged me back, turned me out and upside down, coaxed me in, but me, the wife and kids fell to the tally of the mallee ghosts in the years of the federation drought.

1898

Drill on the Mallee 1898

Tears vaporise in the sand, skin scrawls in the dry west wind, heart bled for strength under the merciless southern sky. Come child to the mossy bank by the shrunken river

bed, grip with me the drill to the artesian sea. Come wife, draw the pail for we must drink or die. Come boy, flex your arm, push with all your might. For if bedrock struck we must dig

again and curse the water diviner's wand. The dirt's turned to dust, our mouths gone dry, so strain the sap from the peppermint, fill the muslin bag with the morning dew that

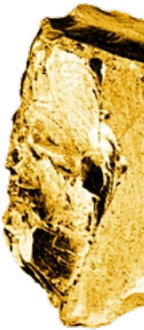
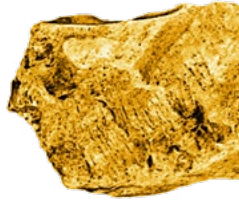
the drillers may moisten their throats. Sweeten inhaling breaths to drill again to the artesian well. The sheep bleat forlorn, the fox's angry bark echo our elegy,

sparrows scrap for cocksfoot seed, thistle bleeds the bovine, Salvation Jane drove Bess insane. So come on son, put your back in it, on a prayer, a whim and the diviner's wand,

we'll hit the artesian well. Come wife, squeeze the rag of morning dew. Come lad flex the muscle in the western sun. We'll drill for water til Kingdom's Come. We'll take you

to the fight til you succumb to sovereign rights. The paper wind darkens the east, the ground cool but hard cracked dry. Come wife, join hands at the drill, now't to lose, we're all

worn out. Prayer, whim, and wand again have failed, so come on boy let's dig the grave for our tears have vapourised in to the ground, our skin scrawled in the dry west



1894

Kimberley Flood March 1894

The thunderheads are darker as
Lightening rents the western sky.
And the rain falls down on Derby.
And the Fitzroy bursts its banks.

Ten miles wide the eastern Kimberley
A massive flow swirls the land.
Taking trees and cattle in its wake.
Bloated cattle hang on boab crowns.

And barramundi gutted 'gainst barbed wire.
Their startled eyes in stricken terror.

Swagman's Lament

Except for the willow that waves to the
trains, the aspect is of iron and slanting
rain. My hope was for a view of the deep
blue sea, but I accept the brave willow

and bid her adieu. For the time is approaching
when I'll be laid in the ground and two copper
coins will cover my eyes. Except for the
roses that wave gaily in the street, the

walk is tiresome, grey, and mundane. My hope
was to walk in meadows, along languid
streams, but I bow to the brave roses and
bid them adieu, for the time is approaching

when I'll sleep in the ground where their perfume
cannot go. Except for the love that rained
down on me, life was toil, trouble, and pain.
My hope was that love's caress would never

cease but I thank the kisses that were bestowed
on me and bid them adieu for the time is
approaching when I'll be laid in the ground
where love's arrows cannot penetrate to my resting place.



Claude Monet,
*The House among
Roses* (1925)



Australia Penny 9.45 g, 30.8 mm diameter, Bronze: Cu 97.5%, Zn 2.0%, Sn 0.5%
Source: Museum Victoria Collections Author: Naomi Andzrejcki
<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/35902>



Eucalyptus piperita

1835

wind, bled of strength under the southern sky.
John Batman 1835 Port Melbourne

Children on the creamy beach with a plastic
bag and sand. The girl is at the head of
the pecking order, filling the bag; patting,
then filling, giggling and tears; the children

in their world. I would love to join them but
the way is barred. Above, the chrome edges
of clouds caught in sunlight in the powder
blue sky flick a memory of lovers

arm in arm, heads on shoulders, tinkling laughter.
An old woman shuffles along. I stop
to stare at the yacht heeling on the wave.
White fluffy clouds dotted in the sky buff the

sharp wind off the bay to the foreshore to
brush sea-grass, tussocks, salt bush, peppermint tree
and straggly acacia, landscape of
a time before when explorer's first sighted

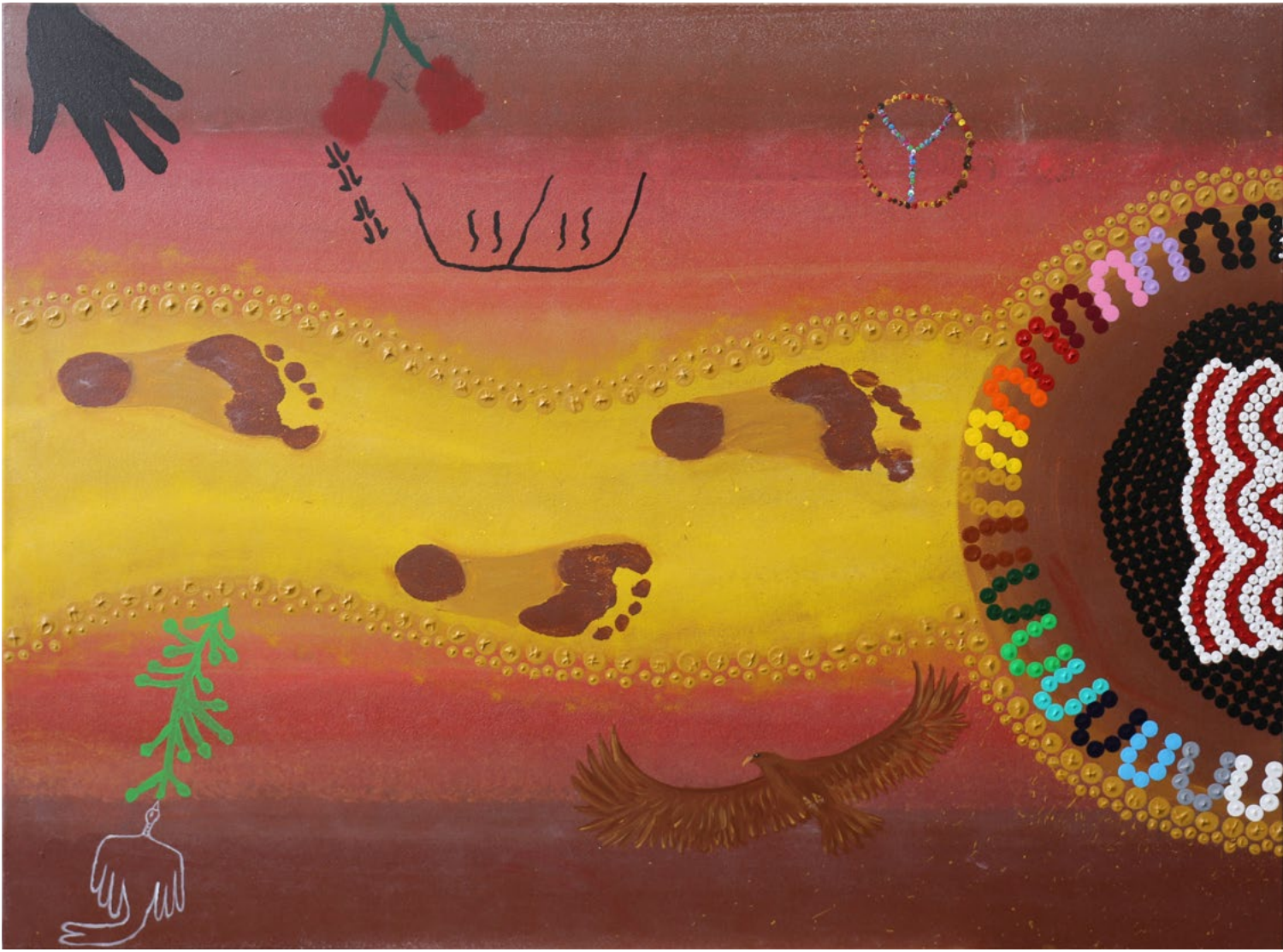
this land. A time before: playing in the
creamy sand, walking arm in arm, my lover's
head resting on my shoulder. Mother shuffling
home with shopping bags. Matthew Flinders

spying the foreshore of sea-grass, tussock,
wattles. Pidgeon and seagull flap on the
rippling bay, a wallaby firm on her
haunches, whiskers aquiver stares.

A First Nation family is startled by the
tall ship anchored in the bay. I would
love to have joined them but that way
is enveloped in the past.



Holly Taplin, *Submerged Whimsy*





A collaborative community artwork created by Roomers participants, led by indigenous artist, Peter Hammersley

Big Love by John King

You are worthy of big love
 In fact, you deserve big love.
 If you can't find it out there at this
 moment
 Learn to look inside and love yourself
 You are a wonderful, kind and patient
 person.
 You deserve love
 Still heart, calm mind,
 Do good, be kind

-

But Why? by Toni McLaughlin

Why are you always angry?
 Because I feel frustrated.
 Why are you frustrated?
 Because everything is going wrong.
 What happened?
 I missed the bus and was late.
 Why's that?
 Because I got a call, and my house
 rent is overdue, and I have days to find
 a new home.
 Why's that happening?
 Because my work hours have been cut
 down and my pay has been cut and I
 can't come up with my rent.

-

The Shovel in the Bog by Tanya Paige

Floating in the mossy swamp
 Her body cries with anguish in the wet
 Father and son work as the sun beats
 down on their sweat and toil
 They cut the bog and layer the
 briquettes in the field at midday.
 The church bells ring.
 His father strikes him with the back of
 his hand.
 Her body swollen like the ripe
 blackberries that her mother picked
 from the thorny bush bleeds.
 The young man
 His youth stolen and his
 fury marks her.

How the Worm Became a Snake by Toni McLaughlin

Once upon a time there was a worm
 named Frankie.

Frankie would always watch the
 snakes, Kevin and Ben playing in the
 garden. Frankie wanted to join in and
 play in the garden with Kevin and Ben.
 Kevin and Ben would say 'you can't
 play in the garden with us, you're just
 a worm.'

So, Frankie got upset and sat by the
 tree.

Frankie would cry and say, 'why don't
 they like me? I haven't done anything
 wrong.'

Kevin and Ben were playing in the
 ground and didn't notice the hole in
 the ground. Kevin and Ben fell down
 the hole and yelled out, 'HELP, HELP,
 somebody HELP'.

Frankie went over and saw Kevin and
 Ben stuck in the hole. Frankie found a
 long piece of rope and put it the hole
 and helped Ben and Kevin to get out.
 Kevin and Ben were so happy they
 turned to Frankie and said, 'thank you,
 would you like to hang out with us?'
 Frankie said, 'I would love to join you.'
 And all three of them, Kevin, Ben
 and Frankie went and played in the
 garden. Frankie was so relieved that
 he could play in the garden with Kevin
 and Ben and felt just like a snake.

Sometimes by Paul F Donnelly

Sometimes
 I worry
 That when I step outside
 And see the sky above
 So many stars
 in clear but light polluted skies
 That sometimes
 I feel as though the moon follows me
 There, above, reflecting away
 a star shining down across its face
 Staring down from space at mine own
 Until, one night hence,
 I notice it's not there
 And I feel as though the moon
 is following someone else
 And I worry, and feel alone
 Sometimes

-

Up the Mountain by Andrew Fraser

Took a trip up the mountain
 Didn't like what I saw
 Road was long but it was easy
 As day after night before

There's a light upon the river
 Burning strong and shining bright
 Going to be there, noon tomorrow
 And I know I'll be alright

Said take a look at what you're doing
 Is it wrong or is it right?
 Got to keep myself together
 And I'll make it through the night

Go on then and turn it over
 Let it go and start the way
 Keep your best friends all around you
 Let the night turn into day

The Trainer by Brenda Kelly

In the dimly lit training arena, the dog and his trainer shared a bittersweet moment. The loyal canine gripping the training sleeve, revelling the cherished bond. As they faced their final session the trainer masked his sorrow with strength. While the dog unaware of the impending farewell poured his heart into each tug and pull. Despite the weight of knowing the dog had cancer, the trainer whispered words of encouragement, showering him with praise and committed every detail to memory. With a heavy heart, the trainer gave the final command, a poignant reminder of their unspoken connection.

Amidst playful barks, he found solace in knowing he had granted his friend peace. As they parted ways, their bond remained unbroken carrying memories that would live on forever.

-

Madness by Tanya Paige

Madness Lunatic
Mary, Queen of Scots

In her madness
His honour prescribed
The severing of her head

Spring came
And the flowers bloomed

The dew fell
Upon the fields
In the early morning

As the moon descended and
The ties washed the sand

Particles of light upon this earth
Her hysteria could be heard
everywhere

The App by Marianna Jans

Charlotte kept checking the CommBank App on her phone to see if Damon would stick to his word and pay for the child support, she had been waiting so desperately for. She could hear the children crying from hunger and for a moment she was frustrated that they could not be content with not eating as she had been growing up. But then, she realized how ridiculous that thought was and went back to checking the banking app. Still no money.

-

Reverse Roles by Davida Winefield

'Mum' said the little girl with a puzzled look on her face.

'What's the matter' says the mum, looking tired and deflated with exhaustion.

'Are you okay?' she asked her mum.

'I'm tired' says the mother.

'Why mum?'

'Because I'm losing sleep.'

'Why are you losing sleep, what's that mean?'

'When you can't sleep properly and think too much.'

'Why are you thinking too much?'

'It's just what grown-ups do.'

'Why do grown-ups do that, mum?'

'It's their job and my job as your mum.'

'Why are you, my mum?'

'Because God gave you to me.'

'I love God, mummy.'

'Why do you love God, honey?'

'Because he made you, my mummy.'

My Dream Home – Maybe by Toni McLaughlin

As I drive down the country road, the weather is calm. The sun is out, and the sky is vibrant blue. I turn down a long dirt road as I'm entering the bush setting. I can hear the birds chirping and the sticks breaking and cracking as I drive over them.

As I'm driving through the bush, I turn up my driveway which is 500 meters long, and I have no neighbours. As I drive down the driveway, I come to a stop. I get out of the car and start walking up the path to two steps and onto my veranda which wraps around the house. My home has a wooden veranda with red wood finishings. My front door is red with windows that are frosted. My home is made of stone.

As I walk through the front door I come to an open planned kitchen and living room with floating floorboards. My windows are cottage style with red wood frames and my benches are black marble with red wood cupboards.

I have a feature wall in the living room and each of the bedrooms. I open the sliding door in my bedroom, walk onto the veranda and down the steps, and sit by the fire pit with coffee. Frankie and Spirit, my two cats are playing.

My backyard is open, and the bush surrounds me and my whole house.

As I sit with my cuppa, all I can hear is nature.

My Name

They call me Impulsiveness.
 They call me Disorganisation.
 They call me Poor Planning.
 They call me Low Frustration Tolerance.
 They call me Mood Swings.
 They call me Executive Dysfunction.
 They call me Avolition.
 They call me Delusions.
 They call me Hallucinations.
 They call me Positive Effect.
 They call me Pain.
 But Paul's my name.

-

Contents

I am made of
 stardust and sunlight;
 water bonds me.

Trillions of trees
 fill my lungs,
 the breath of life
 fuels my function.

The blood pumped
 from my heart so full,
 is the same as yours.
 Blood may be thicker
 than the water of origin,
 but it is light and life
 that propels us.

-

Receipts of Suffering

Take receipts of your suffering Add
 them to the piles mounting
 Ever so high inside your house of Grief
 Walk the stairs to reach the top
 Narrowing slightly as they turn
 Around and around your tower.
 Take note out your windows
 Of all the other spikes
 Reaching to the stars
 Of other people's towers,
 And try not to weep,

Or become distracted,
 As your receipts need piling
 From the injustices you face.

-

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia
 Is a storm of reality questioning itself
 Masquerading as a person
 Attempting to better themselves
 Against a reality worth continued
 interrogation
 Propagation and poeticism
 For they tell me my mind creates
 The lives of others, contacting me
 Across the great divide of a diaspora
 Elsewhere in the universe we were all
 created
 Elsewhere together, but forever alone
 reacted
 Into reality we coalesced from others
 Standing on the shoulders of giants
 We were but small variations in an
 infancy
 Of both thought and form,
 function and capacity but always vital
 we split and divide as cells and eggs
 and tadpoles
 Undergoing a persecution of believed
 character

-

A Poet of No Renown

I fear if I do not
 put my thoughts to the screen,
 from the screen to the feed,
 to the appearance
 of being seen and/or understood,
 I will have but thought not at all,
 not been at all,
 not thrived, strived or been deprived
 my understanding of what it means to
 be alive;
 alive without renown,
 or being known
 to have been at all.

Presence in the Now

Older, yet wiser
 youth fading,
 a hue of experience
 mottled memories spark
 alike flame dancing in sight
 casting reflection of action.

My heart only grows
 for love and lust of life;
 days, months, years, decades
 scoring time spent
 both foolishly and purposefully
 I live to express and process
 the unquity of each moment
 and regrets regress,
 making way for nostalgic reminiscence
 and the loss of the past,
 for presence in the now.

-

Holiday Horror

I awoke in terror, from a nightmare,
 to push away the fear and pull
 at one of the only threads of emotional
 support in my life, for what felt like
 minutes
 in the darkness of an unfamiliar room.
 I pulled and pushed on my partner,
 to rouse some empathy only
 to foster fear more fiercely
 at my inability to cope with fiction
 to wake my love and shake my dread
 hoping that she wasn't dead
 to discover moments later, the fiction
 had not ended, that I was still asleep.
 The dull and dreary darkness,
 marred by a figure by the corner
 darker still than night, a deeper black,
 to my vision a figment that cast such a
 shadow of doubt; did I sleep still,
 not nearly slumbering but clambering
 between the figments and the facts?
 My torch turned on to touch of tip
 to tempered glass of fingers grasping,
 cold metal frame of phone comforting,
 elucidating the vision of the deep dark
 figure of slight stature, my focussed eyes

bearing witness to illuminated clothes,
 hanging from a stand discarded at end
 of day to welcome sleep, not knowing
 what awaited nor wanting such a fright,
 a frenzied act via skilful tact of trusty
 technology
 to deny a feared fiction foothold in
 reality,
 denied in moments my fear retreated at
 a glacial pace.
 Four hours later, still awake now dawn
 of day,
 with sight of sun sought simply,
 seeping from behind drawn curtains
 to slick across the wood panelled walls
 of a holiday home in which I feel
 unwelcome to sleep further still, and
 as I seek the courage to dispel the
 dreams
 unwelcome, I find no solace in the
 stillness,
 only questions still.

-

The Urge to Write a Better Future

When I want to tell a tale
 I type ferocious truths
 Art as distraction, hail
 All I seek to write, soothes

When I want to tell a tale
 I type hopeful proofs
 Science Fiction from a Gael
 Solving prosperity alike mysteries for
 sleuths

When I want to tell a tale
 I write from an Aussie perspective,
 strowth
 Utopian fair go to which reality pales
 Technology to provide and protect
 everlasting life
 in health as aged youths

When I want to tell a tale
 I pray for a better future, forsooth
 For conflictual present, oftener offer a
 horrid wail
 To universal progress, I seek the way to
 smooth

When I want to tell a tale
 I write with blinders, about a culture of
 life less uncouth
 Working as one, together without fail
 I know, this Utopian future fiction can
 be made truth

-

As I Wish to Be

To be born screaming and crying in
 relative peace,
 To enduring emotional conflict seeming
 never to cease
 To be born my father's first son, never
 feeling as though
 I identified with such a notion a whole
 tonne
 To be introspective, craving to see
 sides of
 being both biologically male and
 female at once,
 To be and be respected as possessing
 both sets of sexual organs
 To live and experience such a
 hormonal flux
 of what such humanity has to offer
 To hold a life grown inside me, from my
 own ovum grown
 down the line of my progenitor's genes
 To birth a life outside me, and parent
 such a beauteous creature
 through all the trials and tribulations
 To love myself and others, as I wish to
 be.

-

A Little Peace

Within my heart are chambers
 Wherein love fills and flows
 Within my heart are doors,
 Which without my blessing, open and
 close
 Each moment of love itself invited or
 rejected
 Each pitter patter of cardiac matter,
 love injected
 Within each blood vessel echoes
 emanate
 These feelings of love and pain
 A stream throughout my body, the
 same
 Throughout each cell and organ of my
 body, where
 Within my heart is noise, love and pain
 and each little peace, a moment
 pumped,
 To each and every part of me,
 From tip of top and deep bottom of my
 heart,
 every little peace to be, will be

-

Darkness

darkness you see clear
 daylight is what you most fear
 truth: still you are blind

darkness, you are bound
 daylight above humble mound
 lies: ever content

darkness you are due
 daylight you have abandoned
 truth: you feed others

darkness sustains you
 daylight sheds your being whole
 lies: lies counts your poll

darkness, your coffin
 daylight mocks your death often
 truth: life springs anew

POEMS

by Paul F Donnelly

Remembering Joy

by Danielle

I thought naïve was spelt "naive" – lol
 Everything was blissful, exciting, when I was naive,
 No care for the future, it felt like endless freedom,
 blissful naivety
 Life felt endless, when I was naive,
 Then I began to feel myself aging, youth was naive
 The freedom of immaturity and carelessness I lived for
 the "NOW"

Bike riding every path from Dee Why to Mossman;
 Circular Quay to Parramatta, Surry Hills to Bondi or
 Coodgee,

Then the change came, they forced it...
 Started in my head, they began a slow onslaught
 Always feeling watched, they reminded me repeatedly
 – "Cameras"
 The good times and the joy seemed t' disperse like
 steam,
 A reality check for me, they decided to deliver
 Or is it the connectivity of life? Maybe 'they' don't exist

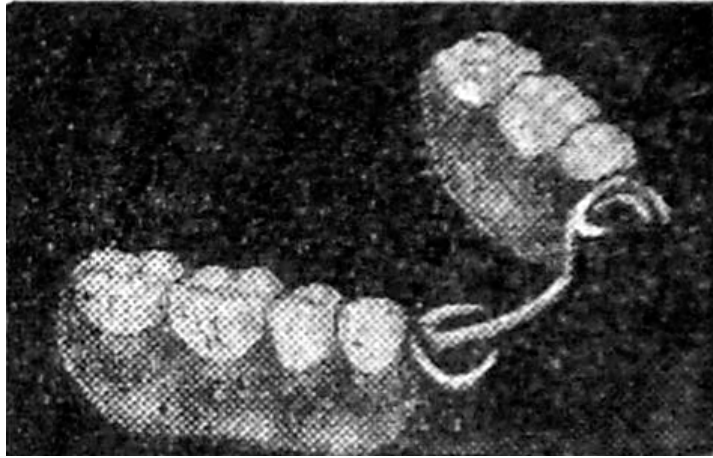
I used to eat to enjoy it, I used to take joy in a three-
 hour cooking process, I used to love browsing the
 market and choosing gorgeous produce, I used to find
 it easy to engage in the community,
 Now I wait for the monthly food parcel
 I used to sing loudly in the car, like no one was
 watching, with my new housemate, newly made lease
 holders...
 Now someone's always watching – aren't they?

Now remembering joy there is always sadness of loss,
 what once was.

There are only a few friends left who, when together,
 we create joy
 I don't see them often
 I talk to the ducks, I watch the water flow
 Focusing on the present are tiny moments of peace
 For now, peace is the stepping stone to joy
 A small stepping stone to the possibility of joy
 Joy, as I once knew it, or perhaps an older, wiser,
 subtler, more mellow joy?

The Never-Ending Story

by Sam Taplin



If I want to get a seat, I take out my false teeth
 I take them out and tell mums in the shops to buy your
 kids a toothbrush or they'll end up like me
 I used to barter alcohol for cleaning people's houses
 I'd flirt with the husband to make his life happier
 I got a dog for my daughter, a drug sniffer dog, a
 beagle, it didn't work out
 Then I got a little fluff nut, a shih tzu
 I treated her like a baby she was called Jeanie
 I used to take her to get hard rubbish
 I'm doing better than people who are working
 I was on the rock and roll
 I was a fake hippie from hell
 I left home at 15
 My kids didn't go to school
 I met my husband in Acland street
 I used to call it the cat walk
 Mum said he needed a shower
 But he had a good voice
 He could sing

He could sing until his balls bounced off the concrete
 And I gave him a rose, he put it on his guitar
 His friend said he was married
 I said I don't care
 I used to work at the Frankston Hospital
 I'd sleep on the floor of the train
 People thought I was drunk so they would leave me
 alone
 I used to work at Tuckerbag
 I'd get so nervous, I'd ring up \$2,000 instead of \$2.00
 I got the sack there
 I worked for carni' people when I was 13
 At school I didn't pick up a pen for two years
 I played on the tennis court
 Which is good if you wanted to be a tennis player
 Dad wad Greek
 Being Greek is like a religion itself
 We are all like a mixed up pizza

Pride

by Danielle_aka_Tiger-Mouse

Rich man says "Don't worry I didn't have anything at your age, I was 43 before I made my first million"

He doesn't mention inheritance

Whose land did you acquire cheap?

A generation of self-mades,

No acknowledgement of policies that gave advantage

Generational amnesia,

Intergenerational Wealth

Poor man beams "I grew up rough", explaining his world view, 'Cops tried to charge me for dealing, they had no proof, no need to admit it', he laughs

Visa overstayed, unregistered vehicle, no I.D., no medical treatment, no applying for a new lease.

A car full of unpaid fines, stuck in a self-fulfilling manifestation, Escaped Ireland, but never escape your world view

Stuck in the paradigm created,

As long as I die on the other side of the world, Mum can think I'm a successful man,

Go home in handcuffs, to a prison sentence, that's not freedom.

But these fines, this anonymity, driving paranoia through the roof.

Can't trust no body, never have, "I grew up rough"

I pay for women who keep their mouths shut,

No one knows my situation, if they do I tell 'em "Mind your own bloody business"

Neighbours don't like the trail of people in and out, I meet from the Pub,

Little Green smoke for me, and for them

Just a bit of pocket money, 'Cash is King'

Neighbour puts a phone looking thing in the window,

"He put a camera in the window, it's pointed at me"

'He said it was a phone charger', she says

'I asked him what it is, I'm paranoid too you know'

Low-budget accommodation - paranoia comes with the territory

'He said it's a solar charger, anyway it's pointed at my door not yours'

Stick to the cash jobs, stuck with the cash jobs, gotta watch my back...

My heart condition is getting worse

No medical treatment without my mate's I.D.

Pay for my last lover, clean the house, empty the fridge, then go on a two-week bender...

If I survive, I'll go home in handcuffs,

If I don't... I'll go home with Pride...

Sorry mate I didn't mean to leave you with me mess to clean-up,

Telling me mum, repatriating me body...

I ran out of choices

I couldn't hide no longer,

No freedom here, no freedom there, no freedom in me head

PRIDE of the 'Eldest Son'

Product defect: Hazardous to consumers: RECALL Feminism

Gender-equity raised her...

Toughen up 'son' you can do anything the boys can do better...

Independence can't take help

A product of 'gender equity' or Capitalism?

Independence or Individualism?

Detached from community

Tough chicks don't need help,

But the patriarchy still there, subtly chipping away her confidence –

"You can't do it all alone" it whispers, you need us

Alone, independent

Independence is pride, is loneliness

Product of Capitalism, false feminism of equity

The feminism that just said "Do it all" (by yourself)

Not the feminism we need –

Where they listen to women,

Where women's work is worth money,

Not capitalist feminism,

Not loneliness

But connectivity, where women are connected, heard, respected

Where people are connected, listening AND hearing, compassionate

Where thoughts, feelings and values are at the top of the social pillar,

Where we lift one another up...

Not this lonely "do it all by yourself 'til you succeed feminism"

Psychosis [episode 3+]

by Danielle_aka_Tiger-Mouse

Couldn't sleep, cracks in the floor,
 Movement, the sound of a human sized wombat rummaging
 under the floor
 Trying to get cosy amongst the dust, at 3am
 Under a house, in Footscray
He was there, she thought
Again, felt like he was sleeping under the house – was he?
 Distract, defer, refocus
 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12... 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
 12...
 She lies staring at the roof, the breeze easily flowing through
 the wooden panels,
 No insulation, budget accommodation,
 Mind wanders, all the things, the speed of the last 5 years,
 The escape from Sydney to Melbourne,
 Thinking she was safe
 Watch the percolator boil,
 She turns it off before it screams that it's ready, can't stand loud
 noises, harder to hear what's going on outside the thin walls,
 Flipping between sanity and safety,
 These paranoid thoughts aren't healthy, think of things that are
 tangible, known, certain...
 But acute awareness is safety, she listens to the empty night,
 for anything tiny amongst the silence...
 Defer outside before sunrise,
 Get away from these walls, that lock her in, easily surrounded,
 easily watched
 Too many intrusions, gotta be careful
 Get outside, go to the park, keep cup in hand
 Drink the coffee, look at the horizon,
 City lights in the dark a couple of kms away, sparkling
 Stars up above, twinkling, she looks for the stars with stories
 she knows, it's comforting, familiar
 Check the surrounds,
 Eyes alert to all edges of the Oval, surrounded by scrub
 Sits in a spot where she can see all angles just in case anything
 come from the bushes,
 Inhale, exhale, can never quite lose this smoke,
 Do some laps, fast, slow, sprint,

1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12... and on it goes
 A few early runners arrive at 5am
 Try to look normal, 'Same as you, just exercising too', she thinks
 Consciousness, watching the world end,
 Drones,
 Are any of the birds even real anymore?
 Their beady eyes, same size as a camera these days
 The birds swarm around
 She falls to her knees
 Their eyes all blinking at her, from all angles,
 The light is starting to break the darkness,
 The sun will soon appear
 With cameras so small they could be anywhere, watching
 anyone,
Who is 'just minding their own business' ?
 Who are these people, who watch? Who am I? Who cares?
 The hobby Club Oval ___ cameras?
 Are they there, at the club?
Connected?
 How far do their connections go? **The underworld**
 Now you see them, now you don't
 The pre-dawn light slowly creeps across the dome of sky over
 head,
 Looks like a moving line where the black line of night is being
 swallowed,
 Stars disappear as the light eats them up slowly, then faster,
 she watches as the brightest star fades from above her head,
 until no star is left
 In the middle of a sports oval, surrounded by seagulls
 The city lights fade replaced by the hazy ring of pollution
 She looks up and gives an aggressive finger to God, "Fuck you"
 she screams (internally)
 Then she runs, the need to be present and alert as she goes
 under dark bridges, stops her thinking of being watched
 She returns home, her coffee cup on the bench
 She left it in the park
 Does he have a key?

Bougie Habits Die Hard

Secluded, silent, enclosed, private, owned, paid for
 Outside world – public, proximity, open, varies, street life,
 unpredictable...
 Neatly mown, trees in lines, reconstructed, re-made, designed
 Concrete jungle, colonial dreams of destruction
 Distance yourself, alone, in righteousness, because you can,
 you can afford it

Living a dream, clocking off from the regime,
 Means toeing the Capitalist line,
 Mind your own Business!! Ignore legal crimes,
 Sign says “dob in a drug dealer”
 Meanwhile an exxy hybrid car zips past, made on negative-
 gearing rebates, what criminals?
 Drink 2 litres of water a day, she commands, from her cosy
Tower, and 5 -step face routine, with no demands on her, a
 loving partner (who works away from home a lot)
 Easy to love, when it’s fly in fly out, good times only
 Plenty of space to be alone, the unseen details of
 intergenerational privilege
 Never mind those squished into a 2-bedroom apartment with
 no private outdoor space to recover from the day,
 Cool off, reset their love, no space to get away when you need
 to tip toe around someone’s bad week
 Privilege can focus on the **minutinae**, words of advice from a
 woman with time fall to the wayside
 She’s no idea those surviving don’t have time to count litres of
 water, or micro-manage nutrients, or weigh their portions – do
 they?

Versus the bodies that wear out at 50, or earlier from non-stop,
 no-choice, physical hard labour, **slavin away**

Gotta know your class and stick to it, don’t wanna “down-grade
 yourself, do you?” – you deserve it, you earned what you got,
 says Father Government

Meanwhile there’s five generations of family under the same
 roof in Frankston, all connected, related, a community that
 supports one another

How do they live like that?

Space, proximity, is for the rich, the disconnected and the
 un-whole

Primary school promises of equality, giving false dreams to the
 aspirational,

Pitting the kids against one another in permanent competition,
 But there’s only so far you can climb the ladder,

We only need the occasional ‘Tall Poppy’, **Rags to Riches’** tale
 to keep everyone dreaming and disconnected.

Endless Competition.

“Ethics are for the Rich”, he warns me

And “Diets are for the rich” I add mentally imagining a square
 of butter attached above a belt clasp, just below the belly
 button, holding up the pants of an anorexic who just got out of
 rehab

Bougie Habits Die Hard,

Like purchasing swimwear, and not just wearing your undies

Like having a warped sense of money “it’s just the price of a
 coffee, yeah?” which is 80% the price of the daily budget on
 Social security after rent is paid.

by Danielle_AKA_Tiger_mouse

Like buying in bulk, because you grew up with more space to store things

Like thinking Op-shopping is so exotic, bohemian, instead of a necessity

Like you're saving the world by catching Public Transport, instead of agonising if you should pay for transport for 2 hours, because it's too expensive even with a discount card, and 20 minutes is barely using it right? Who pays on the 246 anyway?

Like not worrying about the last train, because you've got enough in the bank for a cab if needed

Like saying "I'm just looking" and not feeling watched

Like baking for fun, and not a job or a treat

Like feeling the Law protects you and you can call the cops if there's trouble

Like choosing a Uni course instead of a vocation, hell, being **able to** study these days, at all, it's for the dreamers, those going into debt, or those coming from money

Like putting the Dog down because there's not enough for the operation

Like having Insurance, any Insurance, on your belongings, on your health, on your car,

Hedge your bets, it's not in the budget anymore

Like car maintenance, or a gaffa-taped side mirror

Imagine thinking that Dental was normal? And was a non-negotiable in the budget?

Imagine being scared of the dentist, because it was never a priority in your childhood?

Having to eat at the soup kitchen to buy your daughter's birthday present, like not filling with dread and anxiety leading

up to your child's birthdays, because you can buy it whatever it wants

Like replacing your runners every six months, and your hand-me-downs go to the Op-shop, not worn until full of holes, destined for the bin

Like the spouse who can move their money to New Zealand, to avoid paying child support, international passports...

Like the man who can't get custody, no spare room in housing, without the 25% magic minimum parenting number

3 days a week, or no second room, say Housing, no second room, equals no access, say Child Welfare,

You do the maths on whose hands are tied,

There's always a back-up plan, someone or some money

Functional addicts, haven't been traumatised by poverty

Gotta admit to your addictions, can't hide your habits behind closed doors, as long as you've still got a job, you aren't

classed an addict

Like living, looking over your shoulder, everyone seems like they're faking it,

Their community, Our Community

Survival of the fittest, without connectivity,

That's me looking out from inside, that's me looking in from outside

All looks the same, just depends what side you started on

Fear of the Unknown

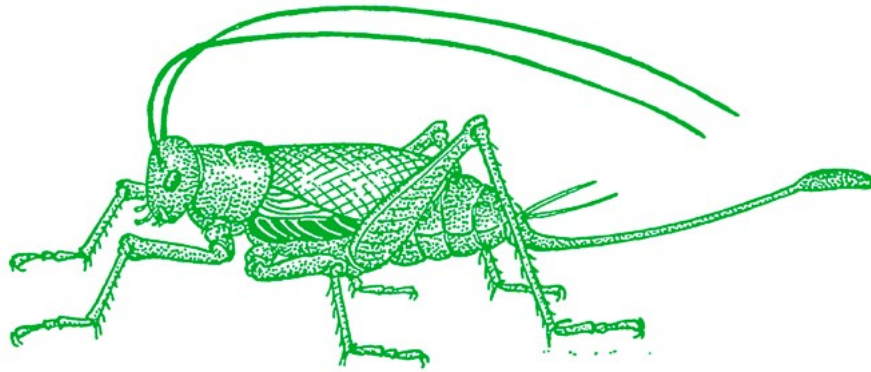
Trickey-Crickey the Cricker

by Danielle Hassall

It all started on a long hot spell of several days and nights. I'd been enjoying a cosy warm spot amongst a pile of fluffy smelly things sitting on a bed of carpet for weeks, when *the Giant* came and moved the pile I'd made my home, throwing it in the big white things round hole. *The Giant* shrieked seeing me, then went to get something, I bounced around as it chased me, "Come-on" it pleaded, "you'll be better off outside" – what would a *Giant* know about a cricket? It gave up eventually, unable to keep up with my Super-Trickey-Crickey- high jumps, I had to hide under the white box in a pile of grey fluff, until it moved on to something else.

Then the heatwave came, perfect for calling a mate in. I sang all night from the exact moment the sun set, until dawn, from my hiding place, watching the Giant sleep, like a heavy, unmoveable lump, it seemed to be affected by my song. But I'm too small to date a Giant. I never understood why Giants called it '*cicadian* rhythms' Don't they know the difference from our cricket songs? Should be called 'Cricket-Thrums' or 'Sunset to Sunrise Humms', maybe I'll start a band when I find my mate 'Thrummers and the Hummers'.

The Giant seemed pleased with my company although a little sad; "Don't you want to go outside and find a mate?... They won't find you in here y'know?"



The Giant turned to the dehydrated spider to coax it to drink something, but it sat afraid behind an oven pan, well doesn't the Giant know it's pretty big, big things are scary - yeah? – of course we have to be careful around it... dumb giant. The spider eventually passed out, falling into the water bowl,

face first, all eight legs sprawled, playing dead (and drinking), whilst the Giant watched. The Giant fished it out, after a bit, and the spider seemed reinflated to three times

its window-scorched size. She put some water on the floor near me too, I mean I say 'she', but I'm not totally sure, it just smells a bit female. Maybe it's just superstitious, probably doesn't realise I can jump into the bath whenever I need a drink, it has no idea what I do when it's asleep.

After the heatwave the spider disappeared, I think it wandered out under the front door late at night, it was over that window, too hot... I didn't notice exactly, too busy cricking my tunes out to the moonlight 'thrummers and the hummers coming to a moonlit night near you' – haha dreamer.

The Giant seemed happier with the cool change, it put out an enormous plate of food under the couch, couldn't be for me surely? That's enough to feed 50 crickets. She **MUST** be superstitious! The Giant still hadn't worked out my hiding

spot, after a week, if the food **was** for me, it was on the other side of the room. When the Giant moved at night, I stopped my *Trickey-Crickey crick-ing*, so it couldn't work out my spot. Sometimes it walked around making thrums of it's own, trying to copy my crickin, or worse, make up some weird rhymes: "Trickey-Crickey, Trickey-Crickey, I don't need to rock a rhyme, because Crickey's doin double time, that's Crickey! Trickey-Crickey, Trickey-Crickey", nice to be appreciated buuuutt.. **Epic FAIL!** - stupid Giant was singing a song that sounded Black, it clearly wasn't, it should leave the crickin to the Crickets! Hmmp!

She doesn't have legs like mine – it's a special vibration, maybe that's a better name for the band, when I find my mate we gonna make a whole '**Vibration Nation**', yeeesss Ma'am! Anyway the noise I make is special, it can't be done with those Giant head holes...

A few weeks passed, every few days the Giant changed the plate of food and topped up the water (like the superstitious nut-job she was) – There ain't no Gods here babe – it's just me! Lol...

It started to get colder, and I couldn't work out the sunset time as accurately. I went into the Giant's room to hide in some warm fluffy hole, that was soft and brown on the outside, with a hard insulated underside. After an hour of cricking from the fluffy hole the Giant grabbed the fluffy brown things, I jumped out quickly and hopped to a new vantage point. The Giant squealed again, as if she'd had no idea I was in there – was she deaf? The giant put its feet in the fluffy holes, then walked around in them like a second skin. A whole house for me – was just a foot warmer for them.

It was real cold the last few night's, and being disoriented, I just cricked when the Giant lay down to be still in the evening, but I was hoarse, I couldn't warm my legs up enough to get a good thrum-on beat going, maybe I was about to carck-it? I felt like I was croaking, maybe death was near.

The next day was colder still, same old croaks, trying to get a beat up was useless. But then suddenly the Giant pushed a button and a heatwave came out of the white square thing on the wall!

It was great, I got my crick-on again, all night long, all night, all night long, all night... Maybe I'd still find a mate before it was too late.

Next day, the Giant left the door open during the day, but I was asleep, I couldn't move in the day, not even to go find a mate. Anyway, I guess I was going to die a bachelor, because I'd chosen this cushy life amongst the Giant's fluffy things, when I'd been too young to know any better. I was too '**in the moment**', that first day I was so busy running and hiding, jumping around like a smart-arse, playing a game with the Giant, my foolery was going to leave me without a mate.

Oh well, I've had a good life cricking all night (long, all night), nibbling on the Giant's superstitious offerings, there was plenty, the spirits couldn't care less.

Anyway, just be sure: It's **Crickey-Thrums**, not 'Cicadian rhythums' okay?

I'm sure the Giant will never forget the difference, after what – **feels like months** we've been together, at least I left a legacy, a memory with a Giant, now they know that crickets rule the night!

The Marsh Warrior's Charge

by Danielle

On Mt Akkaaron the ley lines moved their various chords along the winds past the mountain to intersect and merge, overlay, collide, re-emerge and bounce back reformed to reinspire and sooth the choirs. Known as the "cross-hatch" at Mt Akkaaron, was the peak where the chords crossed, hatching new choral movement and relaying it to all family chords. The Algorithm had been off-kilter since the drought of the 2050's, lasting almost a decade and changing the relational food source growth sequence.

She was of the Flutian chord. She was a marshland keeper, her sole job to keep, grow, mend the marshlands in the 8th centium. Until she was given a charge. The gift sent to her across many xxions, through marshland, rivers, frozen lake, desert, forest, swamp, rocky mountain and through ten different climate fields, summoned her.

Knee depth in water moving through the marsh, as did her companion, slowly, step, wiggle, feel the mud, they searched daily for the Quiblom and Jorank species. The Quibloms a small orange grub, the size of your palm, rose towards the first vertical mud sphere, when it reached an age for eating. Within its flesh, stored the nutrients from the deep that it surfaced with when ready, a powerhouse of energy and health... It had been about 2 weeks, she needed a dose as her sensory systems had just hit the peak, so she knew it was a week downhill without one. Her Avery companion ate three times what she needed as it only ate flesh proteins, not vegetals. The Jananks grew from the second sphere and sent shoots upwards that could be felt in the first sphere, then pulled to the neutral air zone. The Jarank tuber went well with any of the other vegetals from the air zones and were highly sought after as trade, at all borders to the other climate fields. Suddenly Mrajath cried out, in equal parts pain and shock, a single silver tear slid off her scales.

<<Tjaajut!>>

Tjaajut ran to Mrajath, who lifted her webbed paw, that had a small deep violet crystal protruding from it. They'd never seen, nor felt anything like it. It was exuding a warm spiced aroma, like the scent of cooked Quiblom – had it come from the 35th mud sphere, up with the rising Quiblom's? She'd have to take it to the forest plain interchange to discuss with her partner. She gently removed it from Mrajath's paw, who howled like she hadn't done since birth. But it was brief, the paw quickly melded back good as new. Tjaajut put it in a fasje clipped to her belt, the warmth reduced when no longer in contact with their flesh. She checked Mrajath for spirit levels. Mrajath

confirmed she was good to travel. Just then she felt a Quiblom underfoot, she quickly snapped it up to the neutral air-zone, and flipped it to Mrajath, whose tongue shot out to catch it. Even though she was on her downhill withdrawal, she gave it to Mrajath just in case the unknown crystal gave her some kind of depletion, Tjaajut could wait a few more days, the adrenaline to check the purpose of the crystal, was now pulsing through her, she could find more on the come down.

Tjaajut straddled Mrajath back and they flew to the interchange, thankfully the wind was with them. She played a chord for her partner Ifsul, to summon him to the forest border. Ifsul was ten years younger, it was unusual to have such a large age gap, but there was a drought between their births so the tidal season skipped five years adding time between them, so she had to wait a little longer for his apprenticeship in the terra-phlebiium forest to finish, before they would work together in the marshlands. Ifsul was waiting already when they arrived, most people of the forest plain chords loved watching a marsh dweller fly in, their companions were neutral zone beings. She dismounted, they touched palms in greeting and they made an eye-contact reading. Then she showed him the crystal. "I'll take it to the Laarshia for you and seek guidance"

He took them to a rest-hut at the interchange and introduced them to the rest-hut hosts, then left.

Tjaajut and Mrajath waited at the rest-hut where the hosts fed them the daily offering and gave them broth spiced for peace and healing. Some hours later Ifsul reemerged from the forest opening. He looked exhausted. Tjaajut and Mrajath watched him eat, once he was halfway through, he started to occasionally lift his head so she could do an eye scan. Ifsul was defragging in excited short bursts with the information from the old forest Laarshia. It was too erratic for Tjaajut's liking... she laughed – "You can eat calmly Ifsul, nothing that wasn't urgent yesterday comes before your sustenance."

He shot her a grateful but restless smirk. When he finished, he looked up for a full defragmentation, but she just passed him a calming broth and repeated for the unknownth "Take your time, Ifsul!" Their ten-year age gap had shown her a patience that would make most irritable.

**Once he finished, he put out his hands palm up, she took them in hers and they locked eyes so Ifsul could defrag the Laarshia's words.

<<You've been given a charge>> Ifsul streamed, as he began to relay the image-map and precedence.

<<Historical>> Ifsul streamed the old Laarshia's imagery, from the drought when the Trumpians joined the Hornians in an uprising as the plains became void of food. A war on Mt Akkaaron: the displacement of many rocks on the connecting peak, that was the point of intersection for all family lines to distribute the chords to one another, to keep harmony through constant exchange of choral messages.

The years that followed were the twenty-six years of her life, she'd only known this existence, but the data-bursts showed a choral imbalance that was creating an ever-greater food shortage. A first time for her to hear this historical truth. Even if a truce had been negotiated, the Trumpians and Hornians were mistrusted by other family chords, even if the younger generations weren't involved in the Drought uprising, they were still genetically attached to uprisers. The saying goes 'who knows what is passed down within private quarters' – she hated that saying, only bred mistrust and negativity. Previous wars took 900 years before all chords could re-align in trust harmony. The Laarshia believed maybe returning the crystal to Akkaaron would help the healing realignment process quicker. And hopefully the food sources grow better once again.

<<Route Maps>> Ifsul streamed

The last image was a direct vid-shot from Ifsul of the Laarshia asking her to direct all the marsh dwelling chords to keep looking for more missing pieces of Akkaaron in the 1st and 2nd vertical spheres.

As they finished defragging and Tjaajut saved the data to shared folders, they smiled, registering many surface face emotions, they clenched hands tight, then very slowly unfolded their grip on one another.

As they went out to see their companions Ifsul whispered "That's the longest defrag we've shared", he sounded nervous, he wanted to know what she thought. Tjaajut replied "yeah, it was nice, you're calmest one yet – better pre-order that broth for next time I see you hey?" They both laughed. As they waved goodbye, he was still grinning from his first heavy-weight data-transfer, she blew him a sound byte chord. The responsibility of the task and offload to his partner made him feel intoxicated, he felt light like he was flying home, but ofc he wasn't as his companion was always earthed.

Previously communication between all chords was transparent and open about all things and all ways. However, the truce included a change, that required Trumpian and Hornian chords to share all breeding details with the other chords, without reciprocity. It was supposed to prevent another



Portrait by Tamara Hayes

uprising. But based in mistrust of the Trumpian and Hornian chords, like all things based on mistrust, only allowed a slow fizzing resentment to brew by the mistrusted chords. The result was a thirty-year handicap of spirit equity between chords, this only created factions, alliances and enemies. The Trumpian and Hornian chords could probably estimate breeding of the other chords based on food supply, knowing they wouldn't out balance the food source growth that was the supply chain. But it wouldn't be accurate. (And it was possible that some chords unaccounted for after the war could have gone into hiding, or perhaps had unregistered births?)

The chords were also out of balance as not enough of the Saxaphonians, Flutians or Claranetians were offering partnership exchange at the tidal flux, preferring those old chord allies, which in turn created further disunity. The various chords were no longer connected, their lack of knowledge and lack of cross-breeding adding to the mistrust. Increasing the *fear of the unknown*.

Food trade had apparently returned to normal, most likely due to necessity, however, exchanges were often tense, the Trumpians hadn't benefitted in enough respectful choral interchange with the other chords, to soothe the spirit melody.

Strange that a marsh woman renowned for waiting and patience was given a charge to possibly speed up the healing process.

I'm Quitting

by Phu-Linh Tran

I'm quitting my job on Monday
I'm going to spend everyday
putting myself in a trance state
I will be closer to the words
that I will inscribe on a page
and while I'm in this trance
those words will be floating
around me like tropical fish
in an artificially constructed
aquarium and I will have my
net ready, baiting my prized
creation that will become

p o e t r y

people will judge me and
wonder how I will make ends
meet and how much longer I
will be able to keep up this caper
before being turfed out on the
street, I tell them this is not
their concern, that my only
concern is staring at those
moving lines in the mandala
expanding and contracting,
floating away on clouds of
blissful inspiration and that
world of work and worry and
stress and concern will no
longer matter as I take my pen
and write in invisible ink in thin
air, the same air that will take
me away into some other reality
that doesn't exist here
but is real on the other side
of the fence of perception.



Phu-Lihn Tran, *Untitled*



Not Getting Out of Bed

by Phu-Linh Tran

I'm not getting out of bed for you or for anything
 Nothing in me wants to rise
 or wants to be motivated to align to a standing position
 or wants to greet the rising sun
 or wants to open these heavy lidded eyes
 and face the reality of my day in which I will again be ignored
 or even adored for something I have or haven't done
 staying under the covers is its own universe
 the warmth, the security of not being judged, being scrutinised
 being assumed to be one mood or the other
 I am static in an unchanging environment
 and enjoy every minute that goes by in which nothing occurs
 There is a joy I derive from my lack of consent to action
 my lack of agreement to achievement
 my lack of reaction to creation and activity
 I lie still and time flies by in a flurry of meaningless form,
 running over me as an invisible stream of consciousness
 And letting that meaning slip away.....



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,
Your Mouth (from Les Vieilles Histoires)

On Heroin in St Kilda

by Phu-Linh Tran

We lived in the same share house in St Kilda
 during the early 80s when few cared who you were,

only that you could score dope and pay the rent
 You were strumming your acoustic guitar

on one nondescript Saturday morning,
 your hair shaggy and curly from months of neglecting

to groom yourself, yet you were totally nonplussed
 your pupils dilated large as dinner plates

from whatever you had injected the night before
 No doubt you had not slept, perhaps for days

It was the same line you sang over and over again
 I become fixated on the hook of its repetition

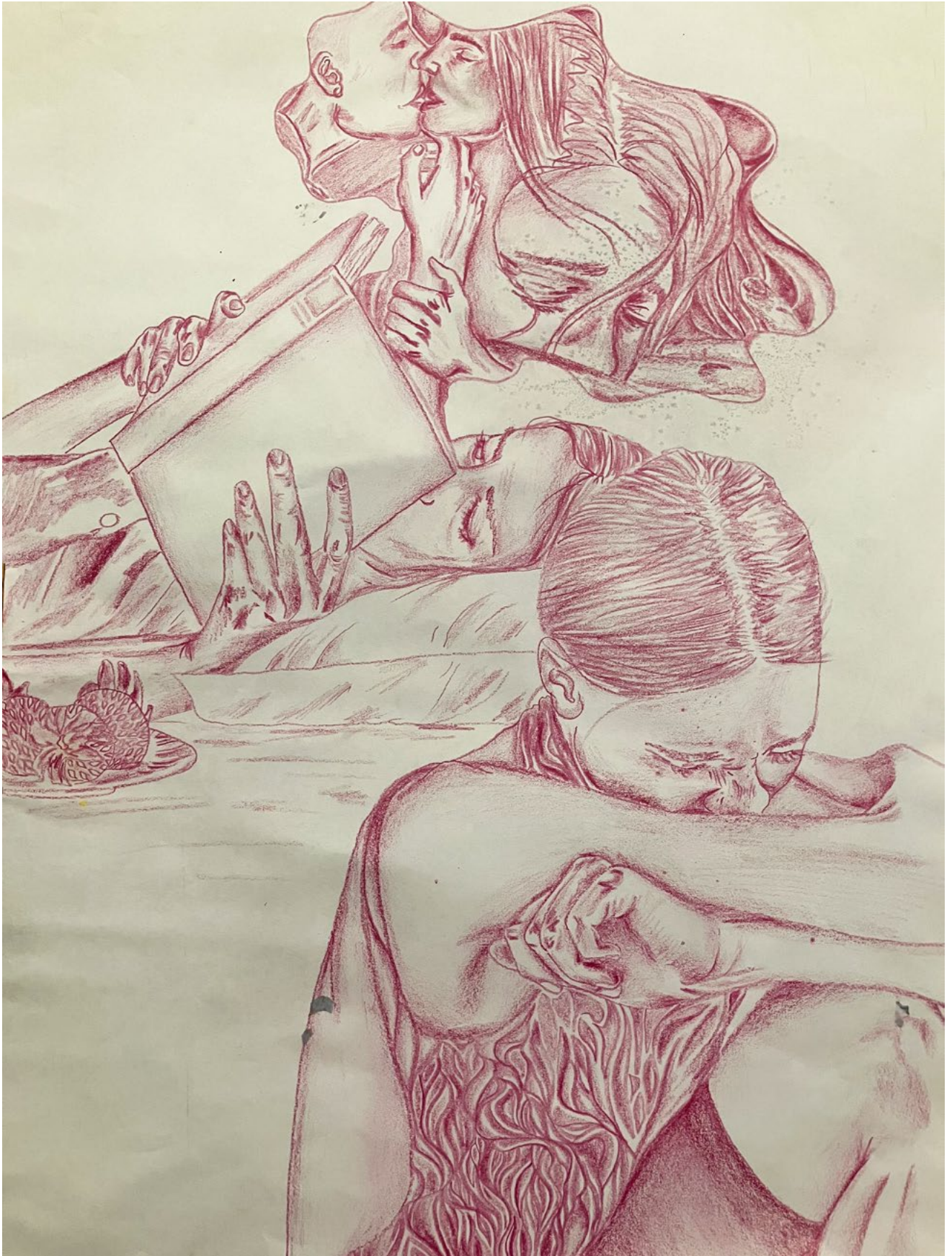
You had a drag of your cigarette every few minutes
 and a sip of black coffee every quarter on the hour

something methodical in your way I could not pinpoint
 My presence eventually eviscerated as you became

lost in the words, in the notes, in the meaning,
 into the evening and out onto the other side of the morning

You ask me to buy the milk as you've totally run out of dosh
 I smile and leave the room, the tune of whatever you are
 playing

trailing behind me as I close the door on another wasted day.



Holly Taplin, *Shattered Silence*

The Bunyip

by Tanya Page



The blackbird calls as the morning lay still. It was Sunday morning when we had our usual routine. The washing hung in the courtyard as the cool sea breeze blew. All the neighbours were asleep. She saw his shadow in the doorway. She made breakfast.

"I saw the strangest creature last night" he said. He came in from fishing with his friends. The blackbird cried. The young man told her a story about the Bunyip that he saw on his ramblings. It was a cool morning as the sea breeze blew through the house. He brought her a bucket full of crayfish.

The blackbird cried in the stark eucalyptus tree.

"Where were you?" she asked. He started to speak. He was a pale and scrawny young man. Wiry like.

"The bunyip is a great creature that lives in the creek. He is loud and

bellows late at night. Boy, does he scare me aunty! He warns us not to take all the fish and beware of the riverbed as you can slip and drown. The river can give and take life." he said.

"What does he look like?" she said.

"A snake!" he said.

He laughed and fell over onto the floor.

"His eyes are red, and he looks strange. Half man and half fish like a seadog! He has a little head. He is black.

The bunyip lies in the billabongs, creeks, rivers and waterholes as a warning to those who cross where the blackbird cries in the stark eucalyptus tree. He still haunts the little boy late at night.

I wrote this based on inspiration from the author, Seamus Heaney and the yew which is a symbol of death.

Older Wiser Self

by Ronald Paul Terrick

Hi there old friend 'well here you are back again at O.H. and you found the strength and resolve to drag yourself out of the gutter and darkness of your addiction again after multiple attempts, but on this occasion, you know in your heart of hearts that it has to be now or never because the stats are against you as well as your age and your tiring body. To perform another recovery would be extremely difficult, so you have decided to give it all you have got this time and although you haven't shown you can, deep down you know you do have what it takes to apply yourself to a disciplined program that will require intense therapy and real structure but most of all a prolonged effort, meaning the rest of your life.

Ronald Paul, you do possess extraordinary abilities that you will need to draw upon and utilize if you are to succeed in your life plan of what you see your life looking like from here on in. These plans involve showing your children just how special they are to you and doubly so for your grandchildren especially your baby grandson who is your absolute pride and joy in this world.

Ron, you have been told you will most likely not succeed in this recovery by some, but this idea only makes you more determined to want your recovery, you have also been told that you can do this, but at the end of the day the only one you must convince is yourself. So go out of those gates to Lower Plenty put the quality time in and give it all you have my friend because I need you here with me sober and saving lives, with me enjoying life unlike many you know. You also have your lord and saviour Jesus Christ walking there beside you because of your simplicity in your faith that he is alive in your everyday and when you look back and see one set of footprints, you know those were the times he carried you when times were tough. So, God bless Culture man, spirit man and remember you are a champion and God loves you more than you know and that's more than you need to achieve anything you set your heart and mind to Ronald Paul Terrick, from your older wiser self.

McDonald's Mum

by Marianna Jans



Emily received the final notice for the electricity bill yesterday. She couldn't let the power get discontinued. Her kids have weak immune systems, and she couldn't afford to have time off work if either child got sick so to have the power off and no heater running was not an option. It forced Emily to get up and put her McDonald's uniform on and as she looked at her

reflection in the mirror, she looked at least 10 years older, and she felt at least twice her age as she struggled to pin her name tag on her faded uniform. She splashed cold water on her face and was disappointed that she didn't feel more awake. She let out a sigh and walked out the door hoping that her eight-hour shift would go quickly.

Girl and her Son

by Davida Winefield

Bell for her lunch break is just about to ring.

'Hey Patricia, do you wanna come for a walk on the oval?'

The bell rings and she is disappointed, she quickly finishes her lunch. When she walks over to the drinking trough, she sees the boy she desires. She dreams about him being her date to the year 12 formal. Patricia hurries off to class and gets her marks for second semester and feels like she can't do it anymore. After school she meets up with her friends. The boy she admires approaches and asked her the question. They go on dates and become very close.

Patricia and Sam are expecting a baby. 'What, I am going to be a mum says Patricia?' Sam is scarred and takes his feelings out on Patricia. She moves away and her son is born. Soon the time comes for his first birthday. She is frantic and well organised to make sure his birthday goes to plan.

'Hey Pat, hove you. Bought him a cake, you don't want to do what I did on your birthday' her mum giggled.'

'No mum, I've got this down pat and I love you too much to get it wrong'. She says in a strange tone.

Time comes and everyone sings happy birthday. Patricia blinks her eyes, in her mind she is taken to her son turning into a young man, with the potential to finish his schooling and become a graduate.

Sixteen years later James meets a lovely girl he adores. He is living the life that his mother wanted him to have. His nana happily shared with Patricia, 'I'm happy that he has found that path my girl, but I've got some bad news to share with you, your dad has passed away.' Patricia breaks down in tears and just wants to hold her son. She organises to meet up with her son, 'I've got some bad news son, grand dad has passed away.'

He's sad but cannot contain his happiness.

'I'm going to be a dad and you're going to be a nana'.

Let Me Tell You ...

Rank Amateur



John Singer Sargent,
Swans

... 'Cause I don't get to tell much, to confide, of what it's like to write, and to *be* a writer, and a poet and stuff, and all of the strange and mysterious things that happen, at the desk, at the witching hour, after you've published, all of the things that happen, and that ya overhear.

'Cause I live alone, because ya have to, just about, to have the time t' yaself, and to think and muse and contemplate and write and edit.

And 'cause I've got my menagerie, my collection of mainly timber sculptured animals, which all have eyes, and characters, and personalities, but no housemate, nor pets, just the halls, which I do share with all the other wonderful residents of our block in the here projects.

Anyway, 'cause sometimes, when you are onto something, like when ya know that what you are saying, via the keyboard, and the new inspiration that you've just had after a rather long scoob or a couple of drafts of spritza, is consequential, and this did happen once ...

'Cause the air above the keyboard crackled, audibly, and quite loudly, and *not* when I hit the SEND button of the email programme, ('cause publishing, and the very definition of publishing, which is the showing of a piece, and to only *one other person*, is, and can be, consequential in itself (depending upon the piece, and the person)), but crackled, the atmosphere, when I *decided* to hit the SEND button.

And 'cause too there was the time I spent in ICU, because politics *is* a blood sport, and love *gets* dangerous, and I were and was losing, and on both counts, and like I was saying I live alone, so I don't get pillow talk, which is incredibly important, all round, but there in the hospital, when you are critical, they watch ya, like a hawk, all night long while you are sleeping.

And 'cause this one night when I was awake with my head on the pillow, the nurse came up and I got to tell her all about what it is and were like to write, and to pour one's soul out *onto* the page and into the world, and she listened and nodded and stuff, and the next thing I remember she was asleep herself in the chair, and so for an hour or so I got to watch over her.

And but though 'cause, and saving the best till last, 'cause I wrote, and have written three main tracts, and dedicated these were, and to three loves in my life, and the tracts went out together, like packaged, to the 'zine shop, and dedicated they were, and such and thus to — 'Three White Swans'.

'Cause I like swans, and most times seemingly they are black in Australia, but I was on a train one time, running scared, of all things, ('cause I was losing (again)), and looking for something to distract my mind, and the train pulled in at Richmond Station, and so I tried to think of a nice street name *in* Richmond to rest my mind upon, 'cause I like navigating, and the only street I could think of was and were 'Fear Street', which did the situation no favours whatsoever.

And so, and 'cause this is the last story, and the *most* profound, and 'cause Fear Street were and was proving over time to be a useless distraction, I went back later on my bicycle to Richmond, again, to see if I could find another more appropriate location, street, and name.

And because I really like laneways I hammered around on my treadly, scooting down and along the back-ways and stuff, and I found 'Worker's Lane'. And Worker's Lane is quite short, very clean, bounded by high timber and corrugated iron fences, and shaded by large trees.

And so I were in there, on my bicycle, sitting on the saddle, and leaning up against the fence, and 'cause like I was saying the lane were and was *spotless*, apart from the immediate appearance of, and right by my front tyre, a plastic front bicycle reflector bracket, which were the very *only* item of flotsam jetsam *in* the entire alleyway, and which I took as a very good sign.

For and, and 'cause I was looking all about, and at the trees and the clouds and the skies and stuff, and the traffic noise lulled, and the wind dropped, and the light changed, and I looked up, and, high above, on the wing, and right overhead on Worker's Lane in Richmond, and on my bike while I were *looking* for love, and on the most picture perfect morning you could ever imagine, were three white swans, flying north, for the winter.

Thank you.

Everything is Going to be OK

by Juliana Banken



Phu-Lihn Tran,
Untitled

It's ok to cry
 It's ok to be sad
 It's ok if you want to be alone
 It's ok to be angry
 It's ok if you want to scream out loud to
 the craziness of the world we live in
 Get it all out from your head and chest!
 Be happy! be your best-self!
 I love you and I am here for you,
 Everything is going to be ok my friend!
 Let's closed that dark chapter!

Let's start a new adventure
 In the place where our friendship was
 born
 Where our dream was made
 The place where I will always love you...
 Between the rainbow and the thunder
 of our day...
 I will always be here for you, my friend
 Call me! Let's talk!
 Let's walk...
 Let's dance...
 Let's have some fun

Australian Nightmare

by Marianna Jans



Holly Taplin,
Awakening Gaze

Trigger warning, this piece talks about mental health and suicidal contemplation. Please take care reading it and reach out for help if this story is triggering.

Jamera kept thinking about how excited she was to come to Australia, “a land of opportunity and a better life”, but things weren't better and as for opportunities, well back home in Mexico she had been a doctor but here she was lucky to get a job as a cleaner.

She'd been trying so hard to be positive but that was getting to the point of being impossible. She was homesick, and she had no way of paying for a flight home. Someone suggested sex work, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She felt trapped, suffocated and lost. How could so many people back home talk about Australia being a wonderful country, full of opportunities and a chance at a better life, and all be so wrong? She had gotten so down and depressed since coming to Australia that she had contemplated taking her own life; at least she wouldn't feel all this pain anymore.

I get up early to make you breakfast, just like every other day,

But this time, you're already awake,

You're sitting at the breakfast table staring at me, your eyes full of fury,

My body starts to tremble just another earthquake

I know what's coming

'Where's my bloody breakfast? You stupid bitch'

I want to scream back at the top of my lungs, for once in your life make your own bloody breakfast', but I don't.

I whisper 'I'm sorry I slept in' as the hairs on the back of my neck stand up,

Being smacked around has become part of my daily routine,

and even though it's just another beating it doesn't make it any less scary,

he looks straight into my eyes, I try not to look at him, hoping that today he won't hit me, but he does because today's just another day and again I've done something to upset him

He lunges at me and throws me up against a wall,

I'm pinned up against the wall looking like a rag doll, my legs just dangling in the air,

He's choking me, I can't breathe, this has happened that many times that I don't bother fighting back,

he punches me a few times and then chokes me until I black out.

When I awake I'm lying on the kitchen floor and he's sitting on the chair just staring at me,

He comes over and uses his hands to wipe the tears from my eyes,

He tells me he's sorry and he won't hit me again,

And I know it's a lie because he says this every day

And we've done this a thousand times before,

And he says, 'you know I'm the only one who'll ever love you',

And because I'm so damaged and broken I believe him

Suddenly, an alarm goes off, he's running late for work,

We lock eyes, I'm petrified and he's furious,

'see now I have to go to work without breakfast because you're too stupid to make it',

I close my eyes, I try to imagine I'm somewhere else, I'm praying for him to leave the house and just go to work but he doesn't, he thinks I'm ignoring him,

Before I even have the chance to say anything he punches me in the face, my nose starts bleeding heavily,

I hold my nose trying to stop the blood from dripping onto the kitchen tiles,

But there's too much blood its going all over the tiles, he's really mad now,

I look into his eyes and this time I see something different, this time I realise,

Its not just another day, it's not just another beating,

this is the last beating, and the last time the neighbours will hear me screaming,

this time when he chokes me, I won't be waking up, I try to run towards the door but I'm too slow,

He drags me back by my hair, I can feel my hairs being ripped from my scalp he's pulling with such force, I scream but that only makes it worse,

He gets on top of me, and he starts to strangle me, I can't breathe,

I look into his eyes and all I see is darkness, I'm praying for him to stop, but he doesn't,

Things start to go dark, I'm suffocating, there's no air, I can't breathe, I'm dying,

I've finally stopped breathing,

I'm dead, I'm dead lying on the kitchen floor with my husband on top of me with his hands around my throat,

the one person who's supposed to love and care about me has killed me,

he realizes he's gone too far and that I'm not breathing, he slaps my face and screams my name, but it's too late I'm already dead.

There're tears streaming down his face but he's not crying because I'm dead, he's crying because he'll be doing life in prison for my death,

Had I known that today wasn't just another day and that today was going to be my last day, maybe, just maybe I would have gained the strength to run out the front door and never look back

Just another day

by Marianna Jans

#73

Thanks for reading Roomers.

**These articles were written by the people
of the City of Port Phillip.**

Roomers Creative Writing Workshops run every Tuesday at ESNLC and we welcome new members. The classes are free to attend and support people who have experienced insecure housing and/or financial or social hardship. Please reach out to find out more.

If you would like to support our work by making a donation, please donate via the ESNLC website (esnlc.com.au) or make a direct debit. Donations received will help us with production costs and provide opportunities for participants to develop their talents.

ESNLC

Bendigo Bank
BSB 633-000
Account No 147810758

Nominate Roomers in the description box.

CONTACT US

Email us at roomers@esnlc.org.au

Phone us on (03) 9531 1954

Write to Roomers C/O PO Box 57 Elwood 3184



Supported by the
City of Port Phillip



ROOMERS

ROOMERS