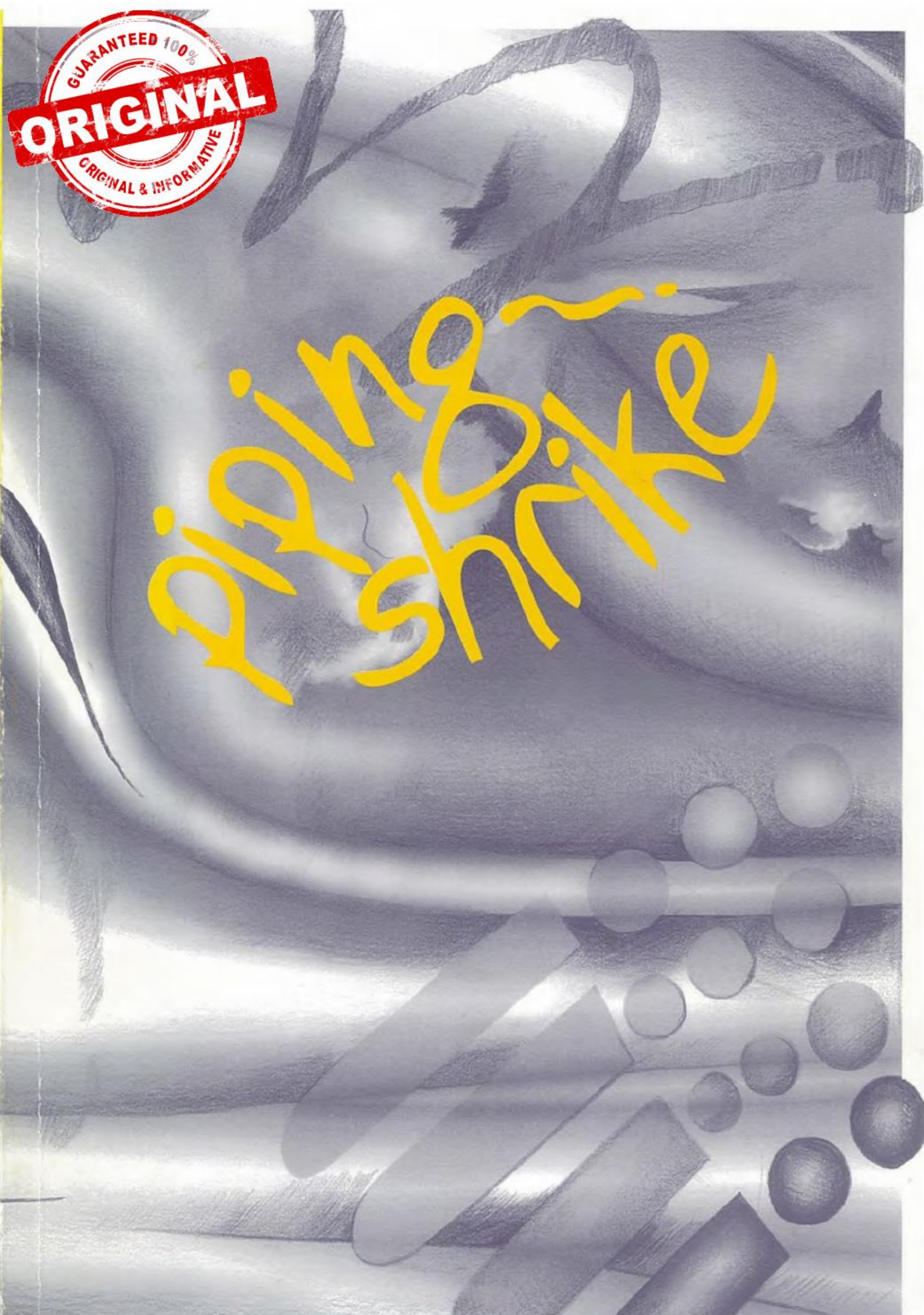




Pipino Shrike



Warbling

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of Piping Shrike—a celebration of student writing.

Adam Doyle and Jacinta Mooney through their flair and discerning selection of writing set the standard for this first collection.

I have completed their work by creating a design that reflects the fresh, innovative interpretations of life offered to us by these writers.

We thank Ruth Trigg for her vision and support.

Enjoy our warbling writers
as they sing their songs
and spread their wings to new horizons

Richard Littleton

Emma Barber

Vulpine divine

There is a cold stealing into my heart like a winter snowstorm. It feathers my veins with icy crystals and from my eyes drip endless tears

*frozen with the repetition of time
hanging there eternally
like dewdrops moist in a statue's stone sockets*

I pace with the impatience of the seasons. I take a walk through autumnal chaos where whirlwinds of leaves coil around me, dressing me up in a leafy cloak but leaving the trees nude and chilled. I search for her

*amongst the earthen and twig-bricked burrows
I forage for a flame-haired vixen
whom I want to become in the next life*

To snuggle close cub-like against her sweeping brush, cramped beneath the gnarled roots and earthworms, amongst the layered sediments and fossils where rocky imprints of her own canine ancestors might be lying just

beneath our feet. She, daughter of the wolf, living for the day: light-footed agility her saviour from red-coated nobility and their pedigree killing machines. The day that I die

I want to run free with the red foxes
through the woods, gritty cities and waste
lands the blood of rabbits

On my muzzle to taste. The shrill newborn baby shriek will resound from my larynx and worry young wives in their lounge rooms, their wombs swollen with the doom of new lives too soon. To my underground haven, my dog-fox and I will reside from storm or chase and my mind will be wiped of any trace of the mother I miss, the family who feuds, the father who knows not what direction to choose

and I can run wild
without having to go back
to the place I am told I belong

To wild canine breeds I feel a connection. Is it a deception to think that in a past life I was a creature whose wild bushy brush is a popular feature? I hope in the next life I awake on a forest floor, with white chest, red coat and toed paws four. My love has always whispered, each night the same, that I am a vixen too shy to tame.

Gina-Kate Inverarity

Art, love and taxidermy

The party was busy and noisy, everyone crammed into the kitchen. Girls clad in fur and glitter towered over Polly. She squeezed through the kitchen packed with strangers and retreated to the backyard. There was a fire in a drum dangerously close to the clothes line. A girl in high heels and mini-skirt tottered out and retrieved her washing, the last item to go a white lace G-string, while Polly watched.

She saw Henry on the verandah and went over. He was already drunk, Polly could tell straight away when he said hello and forgot to introduce her to the girl he was talking to. She stood with them for a while but couldn't follow their drunken conversation, Henry did not notice when she slipped away and stood by the fire drum.

People poked and worried the fire until it almost went out. A boy Polly once knew from high school came along. He plunged his hand into the fire drum and rearranged the pieces of burning wood fearlessly. Polly watched the fire come to life. Sash wiped his hands on his jeans and squatted down to blow into the air hole underneath, holding his long dreads back with one hand. Polly admired his simple skill and capability. Later he pulled an armchair up to the drum and sat by himself, steadily drinking his way through a cask of red wine, that he held safely in the crook of his arm. Polly stood across from the fire, occasionally catching his eye but having nothing to say. She saw Henry go inside and push through the crammed kitchen behind the girl.

The backyard was enclosed by a corrugated iron fence and contained an outside loo which hosted a constant stream of visitors publicly emptying their bladders. A dog skeleton hung on the fence to one side and someone explained at length to Polly that displaying the skeleton was a memorial to the dog, not like taxidermy, which is a desecration of an animal's memory. Polly agreed, thinking of the stuffed bear in the window of the gun shop near Henry's house.

The party's toxicity was increasing. Polly wondered where it was leading. Would anything happen at this party? She didn't think so. A cat walked along the roofline of the house, peering over the gutter at the noise and clamour below.

A plane flew over and a girl told Polly that you know you're in the city when you see that. Polly agreed and watched the lights on its belly blinking. As always when she saw a plane fly over, she thought about the people on it and wished she was one of them. A tragic departure or a hero's homecoming, it didn't much matter which.

But still, at the party, nothing happened. She looked around for familiar faces - there weren't many. She stood in front of the fire. Sober, unselfconscious, dressed in black and shiny blue silk, melting into the darkness amongst the fur and glitter and tottering heels and hoisted up mini-skirts showing tops of thighs.

Henry strode past, this time, disappearing through a hole in the fence next-door. Polly considered following him but a girl called Renee staggered up and started talking to her. Renee was tall, she loomed over Polly, her glass of red wine in one hand waved dangerously. Polly ducked and wove. Renee laughed, her mouth wide open, teeth showing and smiling indulgently. Her hair hung in wiry dark curls and her face was encrusted in little stick-on moons and stars.

Renee gone, Polly considered leaving but instead sat down on the ground, next to a guy she knew called Max. He looked ill but she didn't know what to say. He was staring at the lawn, damp and cold, Polly could feel it soaking through her jeans. Suddenly, he stood up and muttered that he was going for a walk. Someone else passed saying he'd just seen two people having sex in the pantry. Polly decided it was time to leave and said her goodbyes. She found Henry in the lounge room next-door playing the Nintendo. He caught her hand and kissed it, she pulled it away,

'Do you want a lift?' she asked him.

'No thanks, I'm fine.' He twisted around and grinned at her quickly before returning his attention to the screen. Polly left without saying anything else, electronic music and excited video game shouting at her back.

'So nothing happened, nothing ever happens.' Polly drove home, thinking of her own bed and sleep.

Henry was walking home from the party the next day when the bear finally drew him in off the street. It stood in the window, stuffed. It reared on its hind legs, mouth open in a perpetually frozen snarl and front legs raised aggressively. Henry passed this shop almost every day, it was a gun shop and as he stepped through the door he smelt guns. The fat guy behind the counter glanced up at the punker kid, a few came in every day; usually giggling

and glancing nervously at him through glazed eyes. He liked to reach behind him and pull down a particularly big gun that he would start cleaning methodically, occasionally bringing it up to his eye and looking down the barrel. That was usually enough to scare them and they'd make for the door with forced casualness.

Henry went to the window to take a closer look at the bear. From behind, its great furry back looked moth-eaten and bald in places, showing black leathery skin underneath. 'Shot in Canada in 1905 that one' Henry jumped and turned. 'Cost me an arm and a leg.' The fat guy laughed at his own joke. Henry smiled wryly and imagined the bear caught in mid-growl, looking down the barrel of this fat old guy's gun.

'Is... ?' Henry began but the fat old guy interrupted with: 'Oi! What's that?' Henry looked where the fat guy was pointing at the floor behind him. There was a trail of muddy footprints. A toilet flushed somewhere. 'The woman's coming. You betta get outa here.' Henry turned and retraced his steps hurriedly, expecting to hear a shout from an irate woman behind him any second. The bell dinged as he let himself out onto the street.

That evening he went to Polly's to tell her of his odd adventure and found her lying in the backyard. He lay down next to her in the long, green grass and watched the blue sky slide overhead. Polly had one knee propped up moving restlessly side to side.

Faded jeans on both pairs of legs, Henry's torn and ragged. They lay side by side but not side touching side. Inside arms flat on the ground, outside arms picking the grass.

'Hi,' Polly said.

'Hi,' Henry said.

'Did you like the party?'

'Yes, it was fun. You didn't.' Polly paused, 'No, not really.'

'You never do.'

Polly didn't know what to say, he was right. She remembered her anger at him for ignoring her, then decided it didn't matter. He was here now. 'I can't relate to those people.' she said.

'Why not?'

'They are so strange, so glam.'

'They're artists.'

'No they're not. They live art, they make themselves into art and see 'art' everywhere, but they never make art.'

'Maybe that's legitimate,' Henry said.

'I'm just sick of tolerating arbitrary behaviour.'

Henry told her: 'All behaviour is arbitrary and if you believe otherwise you will always be disappointed.'

Polly recognised one of Henry's 'pearls of wisdom' and didn't argue.

He found a yellow grass flower and picked off the petals, one by one, letting them drop on his T-shirt. He changed the subject. 'I went to see the bear today.'

'Really? Was he real?' It had been an ongoing debate between them, reignited every time they passed the shop

on the way to Henry's.

'The guy said he shot him. He was proud of it.'

'He could have been lying.'

'Maybe.' Henry didn't think so.

Polly said: 'if there's a skeleton, it must be real. If we could only see through the stuffing,' and the discussion continued. Polly distracted from her depression about the party; Henry glad she was distracted.

The sun inched down. Restless, Polly stood, looked down at Henry; her head tilted to the side, the sun behind her. Henry looked up, covered his eyes against the sun and reached for her offered hand to pull him to his feet. He didn't let go as they wandered into the house.

Kyra Drewien

The crate

'So what time did he call?'

Ten minutes before you walked in the door. He asked if you lived here and I told him sometimes.'

Mum's face broke into a relaxed smile. She was tense. The imminent arrival of the object, which had consumed each of her days during the previous three weeks, was the anticipated climax of two years of planning, rescheduling, five journeys to California as well as countless rounds of flurried phone calls, form filling and cheque signing. Once again her methodically logical approach to life had been thwarted by the inexplicable incompetencies and linguistical lunacies of others she had felt disinclined to place her trust in. But now, with the grinding sound of a heavy truck engine making its way up the street, it seemed certain that the saga of the crate was at an end.

'Oh shit! It looks bigger than I remember it. Wait - how's he going to get that off the truck?'

'Crap!'

'Two and a half hours later we had finished off-loading the crate from the back of the flat-bed truck. It had threatened to crash sideways onto the street whilst being shoved towards the hydraulic lifter at the rear. Mum demanded that it be left where it was until the contents could be 'made safe'. Now she was rapidly moving the last of the large pieces of furniture under the carport. Thick reams of brown wrapping paper were strewn across the yard. The crate had been tipped on its side, crushing the creeping ground cover I had worked all summer to revive. I threw open the top of the wheelie bin and turned back towards a pile of packing paper.

'You're not going to put that in the garbage are you? Kyra! I thought I'd trained you better than that! Put it inside the crate. I'll have your father take it down to Willunga.'

'Mum... !'

'Come help me move the cherry wood into the garage. Now be careful with your back - it's heavy.'

We shuffled her mother's dresser into the garage near the back of the house. Even with all the drawers removed and the roller wheels attached to its feet it was cumbersome. Once inside we stopped for breath before attempting to move the other two dressers, into a room now crowded with bed heads, various types of chests and small tables. Mum ran her hand wistfully over the top of the cherry wood, pausing on an old gouge; 'It's so strange to see this stuff in Australia. Mom bought this when she went back to work.'

'What year was that?'

'1952.'

'Looks like the liners for the drawers haven't been changed since then either.'

She smiled. 'Probably not.'

After we had finished moving all the large pieces indoors and reassembled the battered old mountain bike my brother had badgered her into adding to the contents, she set about pulling out a vast array of items she had packed into every available space. Several large piles of jewel-coloured towels quickly appeared with the sale price tags still attached. On top of these she placed her new shoes, several bottles of Tylenol, a recent photo of her guru Ram Dass and a vacuum packed bag of orange candy slices.

'I see you've stocked up again.'

'Yes! Have you seen the price of towels in this country? It's ridiculous...'

'No-1 mean the orange slices.'

'Oh-yes. Remember how much your Grandma Martha liked these?' She began pulling items out from another drawer.

'Here-look at this.'

'What is it?'

'My father's navy log book. Can you believe I never saw this until I cleaned out his room, after he died? I never knew it existed! Or these!' she exclaimed, holding up a clinking bag of World War Two commemoration medals, class rings and coins.

'There's a bag of jewellery over there for you.'

I climbed over a pile of packing wrap, following her waving, distracted finger.

'Oh - this must be yours. I don't recognise it.'

'Well it must have come from Donna's. Take it. You're the only other person I know who likes the crap she bought.'

The irony had not escaped my mother that as the only member of her family who had not developed or indulged a fetish for hoarding (quite the opposite in fact) she had survived her parents and sister Donna and so had been forced to deal with the mountains of clothing, books, knick-knacks, furniture and bizarre oddities they had acquired during their lives. Most of it she had donated back to the charity shops from which it had been purchased. She had dismissed (with pragmatic taunts for which we had no response) howls of protest from my brother and me over items such as the first edition Spiderman comics that belonged to her sister or the ornate photo album filled with pictures of unknown relatives in Union uniforms. It was true - we had no real use for much of what she was discarding and there was an unquestionable sense of liberated happiness to be gained from the profuse gratitude of the charity workers who loaded up their desperate vans with all that did not pass her inspective eye.

It was with surprise that I spied two small, elaborately painted china plates next to the miniature sphinx statue she had bought during her summer visit to the London Museum. I turned both plates over, looking for the stamps.

One was from France with no date, the other blank.

'Where were these from?'

'What? Oh - I don't know. I hate that type of stuff but you feel obliged to keep them because they're supposed to be valuable family heirlooms. Ooh-look at this!'

'That's nice,' I said, glancing at the Japanese dragon vase in her right hand.

'Not that! This!' She thrust a hand knitted, patchwork baby beanie with a tinkering bell on it at me. It had my name stitched on the front and the ubiquitous peace symbol of the sixties on the back.

'Well at least future descendants will be able to tell my baby hat apart from Grandma Martha's.'

She disappeared behind the tall blonde wood dresser and began to prise open her mother's vanity chest. Inside were more photo albums and a scrapbook her mother had put together before she'd married the dapper Russell Justus Trusheim. Mum's symmetrical features, inherited from her father, did not flinch as she flipped through the pages which held the backs of letters addressed simply Miss Martha Wiro, Encinitas, California; telegrams, menus, printed napkins and movie programs. Everything was labelled and dated. It was not by an accident of character that my mother had become the organisational genius that she is. She showed me a class photo dated 17 October 1933. Martha Wiro had returned from university to the one room school house that had been her first school and so became the teacher of her two younger brothers.

'No wonder she liked that second place we lived in in Queensland so much,' Mum said, 'that school of yours and the outhouse must have reminded her of her youth.'

'How much stuff did you manage to get in here? It's going to take forever to sort it out.

So much for practising non-attachment hey Madre!'

'Hey! Most of this isn't my crap! Look-all your father's books, Daaron's trinkets from Salinas and things you said you wanted.'

'Yeah, but what about all these silk flowers?'

'Good! They made it. Put them in the car, will you? I want to take them back to Willunga tomorrow. And can you put the kettle on for me, I need another cup of tea.'

I came back into the garage with her tea. More things had emerged from dislocated drawers including antique baby boots, crystal ashtrays, a hand-carved boat with 'Greetings from Fiji' etched in its side, Mexican throw rugs, the Beatles White album with 0060885 stamped on the cover, a pocket Kodak Series II with the bellows in near new condition and tiny wigs for miniature geisha dolls her father had bought in Japan after the war. She looked up from her sorting; 'Here are the sewing patterns you asked me to get. The McCalls were all marked down to a dollar.'

She turned her attention back to the bags of old photographs she had in hand, pulling out a portrait from 1971 of her and Dad in front of the Grand Teton Mountains, laughing at her lack of wrinkles and his abundance of hair.

The smell of the house she had grown up in, now eighteen thousand miles north-east, permeated the room. Fifty plus years of one nuclear family and American culture spread out in chaotic disarray around her. She knew it but had been preparing for it for so many years that she had been able to steel herself against her disbelief that everyone and everything she had known had been reduced into a garage in Adelaide. I watched her move around the tokens of our heritage, knowing we were sharing the same sense of uprooted unease. She straightened and turned towards me.

'Come help me with this box. I want to take it home tomorrow.'

Michelle Wandel

From the cave of your couch

You know
 when I was listening to you speak
 I wasn't hearing your words,
 I was hearing the way
you placed each one into my ear.
And when I was looking at you,
 holding your eyes,
 I wasn't seeing their colour
 but watching how your lashes flick
across your face when you are nervous.
And that time
 you placed your hand on my leg,
 tattooed me with your touch,
 I never felt your fingers on my skin
only the sweat from the cracks of your palm.

I was thinking
of that comedian
we watched
from the cave of your couch,
how we laughed
so nervous
so hard
we rushed to a kiss
just to stop from throwing up.

Sal Humphreys

The desk

The desk stands gracefully in the corner. A diffuse sunlight warms the blackwood to a honeyed golden tone struck through with bands of mocha darkness. It is a roll-top desk, rising above the standard functional utility of the flat-top. Each tambour slat has been moulded and curved to sit snug into the hollow of the next, and together they form a seamless, flowing wave of privacy. The tambour holds a seductive promise not found in the book-shaped, file-shaped, no surprises rectangles of the drawers and cupboards in the bottom part of the desk.

The suggestive curve of hidden treasures invites the hands to grasp the knobs and smoothly slide it back along its well worn 'S' shaped track. This desk sends out an invitation - lay your hands on me, through touch comes revelation.

'Come on in Frank,' she says, with a hint of resignation in her voice. He follows her through the front door and she senses his eagerness. He is suave, but not so much she cannot smell his interest. She indicates the lounge chair he should sit in.

'Coffee? Something stronger?'

'Scotch would be good.'

He watches the curve of her buttocks beneath her dress as she leaves the room. His desire is palpable.

In the kitchen she sighs as she reaches for the bottles and wonders how she can put him off. Christ, she thinks, he's only met her twice - doesn't know her from a broomstick. She returns to the lounge with their drinks, hands him his and retreats to the sofa. She engages him in conversation about third world debt - a topic he assumes he knows more about than she. He attempts to lecture, she attempts to disrupt. He misses the point entirely. Hmm, too stupid for the conversational put-down. What else? She sees his eyes keep lingering on her body. Any minute now she knows he'll turn the conversation to her. Pity she has to keep working with him for six months, or she'd just tell him to piss off.

'So, Helen, are you, ah, involved with anyone right now?'

'Not right now, no. And I like it that way Frank.'

He smiles. She watches the spark in his eyes and knows he has heard the first and not the second piece of information. An awful lot went over this boy's head. She rises and moves over to the desk in the corner. She knows her body mirrors its sensuous curves. She runs her fingers down the tambour. Oh well, only one thing for it.

'You know one of the things I like about this desk Frank? It's so sensuous and mysterious.' She looks over at him - his eyes are bright, 'and yet,' she says, almost to herself, as she grasps the knobs and pulls the tambour back, 'look what all that beauty is covering.' She steps back for him to see the mass of papers, bills, chaos. 'So ordinary.' She turns back to the desk, lays her hands on its scarred surface and lets out an unmistakable, resounding, reverberating, belch.

Shortly after, he leaves.

Rebecca O'Shaughnessy

Punk poem

Pins, pricking, piercing flesh

Weighted chains thrashing

colliding Cemented hair, slicing

carving, with razor

sharp tip

Black painted lips part

revealing a shining dagger

stabbing her tongue Leather clad figure

Zippers and

padlocks

the music of metal on

metal

Chrome Studs

Mirrorball of reflection

Threads of fishnet

crawling down her legs

Plunging into the

black leather that

swallows her knees

She explodes into energy

Limbs lashing violently

Look closely, but beware of the

Sharp metal edges and

Barbed

wire

can you see.

She is laughing!

Shannon Lloyd

Articles for the interrogation of Catharina Weiss, prisoner. Exhibited August 5, 1574.

I. After giving her name and last name, age and her residence, is asked if she knows why she is imprisoned.

Says that her name is Catharina Weiss, aged about seventy years old. She lives in the woods near Frauendorf, and she knows that she is held for the crime of witchcraft.

II. If it is true that she lured the children Hansel and Gretel Meyer into her house with promises of cakes and sweets?

This is false.

III. If she did keep the children captive in her house?

She did not. The children were free to leave at any time.

IV. If, once inside the house, the children were tied up, the elder, Hansel, being locked inside a cage.

This is false. She caught the boy trying to steal coins from a jar in an unlocked room, so she locked it.

V. If the boy was locked inside the room?

He was not.

VI. That the children tried to leave, and cried for their mother, and that she ignored their pleas?

Acknowledges that the children were crying. Says they ran away from home and that they asked to stay with her.

VII. If, when the children were fast asleep, she opened her door to the devil?

She does not remember doing such a thing.

VIII. If she had a marriage with the devil, and if, in exchange for the flesh of the two children Hansel and Gretel he promised her a life of ease?

No. This is untrue.

IX. If she had prepared an oven in which to bake the two children and if she meant to invite the devil to dine with her in return for his favour?

There was no such preparation. She meant to bake a pie of apples for the children to eat when they awoke.

X. If one of the children, namely Gretel, did awaken in the middle of the night, steal into the kitchen, happen to observe her obscene coupling with the devil and whether she lay with the devil while the oven was being heated?

She remembers the girl coming into the kitchen while she was praying.

XI. That the devil hid himself while she tried to coax the young girl into the oven?

She did no such thing.

XII. That the poor girl, terrified at the sight that she beheld, was forced to push her into the oven, else surrender her life?

This is untrue. She opened the oven to see whether the pie was finished baking, then as she leant in to touch it, she was pushed, most violently, into the furnace.

XIII. If she slipped out of the oven, as smoke, through the grill?

This is false. The girl did not close the door. She fell out screaming and yelling and much in pain. As she lay on the ground wailing and bemoaning her troubles to the wicked child, Hansel awakened and he and Gretel together ran off into the woods.

XIV. If she pursued them, riding swiftly on the back of the devil, as far as their parents' house, and whether she retreated when the father came out, cursing her and threatening her?

This is not true. She lay on the floor in pain and in fear of death from her injuries until the Lord came with two men to arrest her.

August 8, 1574. At the request of the prisoner, the deposition relating to articles from the interrogation of Catharina Weiss has been changed, and numerous articles have been added.

II. She acknowledges offering the children cakes and sweets, and she might have offered them some money.

III. She did hold the children captive, and she tied their hands together with lengths of coarse rope.

IV. The boy was locked in the room. There was no cage.

VI. She acknowledges ignoring their pleas for help, and admits feeling no remorse for her foul deeds.

VII. She admitted the devil into her home, but she is not sure if the children were sleeping.

VIII. She did not marry the devil, but had many affairs with him. She recalls that he would often arrive if she had forgotten to say her prayers.

IX. She was to dine with the devil. They were to bake both of the children, as there would not have been enough fat on Gretel or Hansel alone.

X. The girl surprised them during their terrible act and the devil laughed when they were discovered.

XI. She does not remember where the devil was hiding.

XII. This is true.

XIII. Yes. The devil helped her to slip through the tiny holes in the oven door.

XIV. This is true. The devil presented himself to her as a goat and together they ran after the children. They were unable to cross the creek at the edge of the wood and retreated, uttering foul curses upon the father as he threatened them away from his house.

XV. If the devil had a name and what he called himself?

Belzebuth.

XVI. Where she went and when to dance with the devil or other devils, and who she saw there?

She went much further into the wood, led by the devil and other lesser devils, to places where she knows not the names, or cannot remember them. She went usually at night and on Friday nights, and she did not recognise anyone there.

XVII. That she should declare all other places where she went to dance with the devil, what she did there and also all those that she recognised as being present?

She cannot remember anything more. It was only once, a long time ago. She might have seen Elisabeth Brose and her daughter there, maybe also Anna Deiner was there and coupled with the devil. She does not remember anything more.

XVIII. If she resides in a house made entirely from cakes and sugared sweets, including the roof which is made from bread?

This is true.

Simon Behenna

Nice day, for ducks

The first time I ate duck was in a Norwood restaurant. I ate it with an immense amount of trepidation and a mandarin sauce. They tasted quite good together. Oh and that's right, I survived. Which is a good thing. You see, I have never been really adventurous with a lot of the foods I eat. I remember going to Hong Kong with my parents when I was a kid and being disgusted at the sight of food being prepared in the streets. To my uncultured senses the whole place smelt. I remember feeling nauseous on seeing fish heads in the gutter, dead birds hanging in shop fronts and no one was wearing any deodorant. 'Isn't this a British colony?' I enquired of a five-year-old kid making shoelaces on the side of the road. And then I saw it. Its glowing arches heralding me from their prominent position amongst about 4.2 billion other neon signs - that great, reliable bastion of international cuisine: McDonalds. Thank God. So for the next two weeks Maccas was all I ate. Hash browns for brekky, Big Macs for lunch, and McNuggets for dinner. Not exactly healthy (although I'm sure a MacExec will hasten to correct me) but perfect for a young boy who was too scared to even put a worm on a hook. So, as you can imagine, the first time I ever ate duck was, for me, a big thing. It marked my initiation into the world of culinary art. A rather late entrance I know, but I prefer to look at it as saving all the odd things for after I've tried all the bad things. Of course, there are good things in the bad things and bad things in the good things too, so I am currently also embarking on a sort of culinary pilgrimage, wading through zabaglione and pesto, climbing mounds of vermicelli and arborio, swimming through pots of goulashes and borsches ... and stewing it all in my stomach's ever ready hot-pot.

My flatmate's girlfriend threatened to report me to the RSPCA when she saw the hessian bag that had been thrown over our back gate late one Saturday night. I threatened to get the oven stoked up right away. Tony wanted to vomit. But that was only because it was late on a Saturday night. Actually; it did look a little cruel. Huddled inside this sack were two lovely white ducks. White, with a tinge of brown on parts. Maybe they were a bit scared. But, they were lovely. For the following three weeks, Gonzales and Rodriguez had the run of our inner

city courtyard. I'm sure they had a ball. Perrymans was just around the corner so they got fresh bread everyday, fresh vegetables and fruit from what was once a small but thriving market garden and a lot of attention from me. I thought it was great. This was a fabulous experience - here we were smack bang in the middle of suburbia, surrounded by main roads, twenty-four-hour shopping outlets and very 1990s pollution, and I had fresh, unpackaged, well-fed food grazing in my backyard.

Soon the nightmares started. Gruesome images of headless ducks waddled around my head, spurting blood, filth and muck over the backyard of my brain.

Given a chance I probably would have given up then and there, but I had to remain tough and manly. This is what humans used to do after all. Back in the olden days, before we all wimped out and went for the lovely looking piece of garnished flesh all wrapped in plastic and served on a polystyrene plate. Looking at it this way it is hard to tell what is more perverse - the gross abuse of resources to aesthetically please a sterilised public, or the backyard slaughter of a couple of pet ducks called Gonzales and Rodriguez? I'm an environmental kind of guy, I hate blood. Hell, I can't even bring myself to go pick up the rotting pigeon that is presently getting its eyes devoured by hungry ants in our backyard. Death appals me. If only my peers had stopped telling me not to do this then I would gladly have set the boys free into the Torrens (or is that worse?). But everyone kept at me. 'Don't bloody do it, mate.' they said. So I had to. I had to finish what I started. It all came down to a matter of principle.

Eventually amongst my friends I was able to find two 'sane' ones. Jane and Hammy got excited about the idea of killing and eating. Strange people. Anyway; they came over late one Sunday morning, rubbing their hands together with glee and imparting advice that they had been given about the best way to prepare the ... dinner. 'Apparently it's really easy,' explained Hammy, who had absolutely no idea, 'you pick it up under your arm and hold its wings and feet in place whilst you pull its neck straight out and give it a good stiff crack.' Hmmm ... Jane was only slightly better. 'I've got some rubber gloves so I won't get guts over my hands and arms when I'm pulling out its insides.' Oh God, this was getting worse than the nightmares. So we have to physically pick them up and break their necks? And then you're going to shove a gloved hand up their arse and pull out their guts? 'Bugger the environment,' I'm beginning to think, 'bring on the polystyrene!' Of course, I was only allowed to think that. What I said was, 'Great! Who wants a beer?' We had about four each before getting down to 'the business'.

Hammy lost the toss and the first duck was his. 'Now remember,' I said 'just pick it up under your arm and break its neck in one smooth motion.' A bit of beer came back up my throat. Hammy picked up the duck. Rodriguez' time had come. Look at him - all fat and majestic and ready to eat. Mmmm, how succulent. Hammy picked it up, put it under his arm, smooth, grabbed the neck, text book, pulled it and ... pulled it some more and ... pulled it some more but the bugger wasn't giving up that easily. Rodriguez was one tough duck. Jane is one tough physiotherapist. She picked it up, nestled it under her arm, pulled the neck, twisted the neck, almost tied the neck into a slip knot, but all to no avail. She put it back on the ground and it waddled off to ruin the rest of my tomato patch.

I was going to write here that if you are of the faint hearted, then you should probably stop reading right about now but I figure that if you have gotten this far then you might as well keep going, hey? Which was our attitude when it came to the problem of the ducks that didn't want to die. So, much as you are continuing to read, we continued to try to kill the ducks. Unfortunately we failed.

But only temporarily. Nestled into the corner of our garden is a shed and in this shed there is a lot of useless junk that I thought might possibly come in handy one day. No, not the rusted old letterbox. No, not even the jar of mixed screws. But the bit of two by four looks like it could come in useful. I wonder...

The RSPCA would have put us into a canine compound if they'd seen us. Hammy using one of my dead aunty's bath towels to hold Rodriguez on the ground, giving him no chance of escape. I was chugging away on another beer. Jane had hit the vodka. And 'Two by Four' rested patiently on the table alongside his friend 'Very Sharp Knife'.

Was it all the American horror movies I'd watched as a kid? Was it the beer? Was I going insane? I remember picking up 'two by Four' and beating the duck over the head again and again hoping that the little bugger was going to die this time and not just get up and waddle off to terrorise my tomatoes some more. I gave it no chance. I stopped smashing long after Hammy had started screaming 'STOP' at me over and over again whilst Jane stood horrified in the far corner, wondering what the hell she was doing this for - when she could be out having a nice Sunday roast at one of the local restaurants. Eventually Rodriguez' head was at root level of my slow growing cooch.

'I think he's dead. Where's Gonzales?' Hammy must have caught a little of what I had. 'Oh, that's not fair. Can't I do Gonzales?'

I let him.

Jane is great. She did all the gross stuff. She put on her gloves and got in there, so to speak. Hammy and I sat back and shook all the adrenaline out of our systems. Then we began to pluck.

'Put water in the bin so the feathers don't fly everywhere.'

'Save them all and make your own pillow.'

'Chuck'em all around the backyard.' We shot the hose through the ducks, didn't get around to making a pillow and I spent the next few weeks plucking the feathers out of Tony's prize hydrangeas, Herbie and Henrietta.

They smelt great. They were roasting in garlic, fresh rosemary and root vegetables and drizzled with a virgin olive oil and a good hoik of chenin blanc. They looked great. The skin had turned a golden brown and the meat was coming off the bone like water off a duck's back. And they were so fresh! Killed that very afternoon by our own bare hands and a bit of wood. They tasted alright. Nothing special. Just alright.

So was it worth all the trouble? I think so. It would have been a lot easier to run down to the supermarket and pick up some 'fresh' duck but that would have taken all the fun out of the exercise. Not that we had fun actually killing them - were not sadists. But the whole day was fun. We achieved something. We drank. We ate. Hell we re-established our authority over the animal kingdom. Now if I can only bring myself to put a poor defenceless worm on a hook, I might try my hand at fishing next.

Jacinta Mooney

Black Betty and the seven dwarfs

Once upon a time there lived a girl called Black Betty. She lived in a share house with seven unemployed dwarfs. Their names were Agro, Thief, Thug, Obnoxious, Wrecked, Keg and Loser. They were a bunch of misfits that once worked at the local mine but nowadays preferred to sit around the house watching violent videos all day.

Poor Black Betty spent her days emptying ashtrays, gathering the empty beer cans and pizza boxes and reminding the dwarves to fill in their Social Security forms. She felt so alone in a household full of chauvinists. Her only real friends were the pit bull terriers that lived in the backyard. She would sing Metallica songs to them as she hung her leathers in the sun to dry.

One day as she was squatting outside on the concrete, shining the dogs' studded collars, a man from the Department of Correctional Services popped his head over the fence and asked if he could come in. Before Black Betty even realised where the voice had come from, the dogs bolted, hurled themselves in the air and savaged

the man from Correctional Services. As Black Betty sauntered over to the bleeding man, she patted the dogs. She was not cross with them as she knew the poor pit bulls were probably frightened to see a man in a suit.

The bleeding bureaucrat spluttered a little, but when his eyes met Black Betty's his gaze was transfixed. He asked her name and on hearing it said: 'Whoa Black Betty wham balam.' It was poetry to Black Betty's heavily pierced ears. Her eyes filled with tears and her thick black eyeliner smudged. She knelt down and kissed him, her black lipstick staining his lips. She was besotted.

And so it was that Black Betty came to marry her public servant, and they all lived happily ever after; with the exception of the dwarfs who were forced to participate in work for the dole schemes.

Felix Hill

(Not) Everything takes on a lustre when viewed from a distance

There is nothing romantic about the place.

You are not given any options.

You are told how to walk, when to walk, where to walk. 'Don't cross the line'. It's not advice but a softly spoken directive that infers swift and forceful retribution. You immediately look at the scuffed blue strip, like the boundary marker of some game played on asphalt except that this game is played everywhere. This is the line. But another is meant as well. This is the advice. Do not ask why others are here. You are being told how to talk and this is an example of how to distinguish the cues from the ruses. No-one is here for comfort. You'll get warnings and advice. Not comfort.

I learnt that any activity that involved solitude and silence was to be pounced upon and consumed with relish. The safety zone of the self.

And colour - every room is designed colour specifically. Lines on the floor. Pictures cannot be placed anywhere that is blue or yellow. Only this shade of grey. Shade of grey. How many shades of grey are available as enamel paint? Or are they mixed on the premises by others, unseen, ferreted away in some basement, its walls daubed like camouflage design Army fatigues? And yet I suppose that grey is the colour that suits this place. Never the polemic of black and white. A space where everything is blurred, has to be blurred.

The grey linoleum floor is so clean, so meticulously scrubbed, waxed and polished that it not only reflects everything above it but also highlights each minute flaw of its surface. A glazed pitted plain, and you immediately feel guilty about soiling its alien skin. Later, when you learn how difficult it is to clean, how hard it is on your back, on your knees, you don't curse the floor, you curse those who walk on it. Become obsessive about how clean your shoes are. One less blemish to attend to. A false sense of innocence that breeds a semblance of redemption.

Another thing to notice is that nearly all the staff members are Scots. For me, this observation facilitated a release from some of the anxiety associated with interacting with them. Genealogically, some of my chemicals come from one of the High Clans. I could on the odd occasion subtly weave sentiment for the old lands into the staccato monosyllables by simply using a phrase or a word.

'You from there, son?'

Conversing with staff members is something that has to be very public. Someone's tobacco would go missing or one's bed would be urinated on just before inspection. The shower facilities are indeed places of extreme vulnerability. The myth construes an image of sex, of rape. The reality is that showers are slippery surfaces, wet and hard. Someone with purpose loses their balance, careers into you. Your arm is broken. Your leg is broken. Your ribs cracked. You have physical pain added to your inner pain. The slightest jostle whilst queuing for food or walking across the yard is a reminder that you're on tap. You can be got at. That's the only time you get smiled at. Others will laugh at your jokes if they are funny, or to signal that they like you and you can talk to them. A cue. Jokes about women are not funny. Not here. Women conjure a very real pain here.

The thought of release is so pleasant, so longed for, so polysemic that derision of a dream is a personal, violent affront. Men reduce themselves to barbarism because of dreams. And dreams in here are sacrosanct. They are what keeps you being yourself. They are about what you really want.

The sex, for there is sex and rarely rape, is negotiated in hushed tones at night. Darkness hides nothing. You know the voices. You learn the language. It is something everyone thinks about and everyone wonders: 'how long will it take before their whisper joins the chorus.' A further struggle in the battle for dignity.

Sometimes some of the Scottish voices are heard. They bring silence. Someone has to reply. Eventually someone will.

I came to this place in my street clothes.

My crime was being without identification as those around me were handcuffed, strip searched, charged with possession with the purpose of selling illicit substances. The police did not know what to do with me. I had obviously been smoking marijuana. I had over two hundred dollars held in a breast pocket by a solid silver paper clip. I insisted I was only sixteen. I was. I insisted that my girlfriend had brought me here to meet her old school friend, that girl over there and that 'all this shit happened.' We were heading west to go surfing during the holidays.

Holidays? In August? Who are you trying to kid?

1974. Three months before I sat for exams and finished another year at school. I was in gaol. Naturally, I had lied a bit. I was there to buy marijuana to take west, to take the chill out of the desert nights and disguise the length of the days when the surf wasn't up. But surely not enough to be bundled into a van and driven to Yatala. Drug use was cut and dried in those times. Even thinking about it seemed to be a criminal offence.

Placed in the care of the Governor until my innocence was determined.

Placed in a cell with a bearded giant, embellished with tattoos, a rider of motorcycles, a shotgun wielder at a 'friendly visit' to a non-payer, a man who's philosophy was 'I'm alive and that isn't bad,' who sat me down in disbelief that a kid was in here and told me the rules for survival: Never answer back. No matter what. His name, 'Woody'. He was studying law while inside. He had killed someone. He got fifteen years, out in nine with behaviour, done three.

I spent two weeks keeping the floor superb. Two weeks sitting with Hell's Angels, Warlords, Finks, Nungas and trailer trash. I learnt how to hot wire cars. I learnt Manila Poker, quickly. I met men who killed other men, men who made lots of money from drugs, from robbery. I met tribal elders who were only eighteen. I met men who wet their pants as they cried, expecting, wanting a drink, their mantra 'gotta gaff for an ol digga, gotta gaff for an ol djgga, have ya?' They were kept out of the recreation room where we played 8-ball and darts. 8-ball and darts. The pub with no beer.

The older men, the guys in for years, could and would wait years until anyone actually got to talk to them. I wanted to telephone my parents, but I didn't know what to say. It was, in the long run, better to leave them thinking that I'd been camped out on some west coast beach, surfing the perfect waves the whole time.

Eventually, I was summoned to the Desk, told that I 'was deemed in remand, not gaol, and that because the vagrancy laws only allowed overnight detention, unless there were exceptional circumstances, which by the way the Magistrate had thought existed otherwise he wouldn't have sent you here in the first place, and anyway, you are free to go. A police bus heads back into the city in twenty minutes. They will give you a ride. Get your shit together and be back here in fifteen. 'I wristled as I walked (you can never run, under any circumstance, never run) back to the cell, almost wanting to be reported by a guard. I'd missed my flute.

I'm off' I said to Woody.

'Watch me... I'm outta here too...'

Woody walked out of the cell into the pristine corridor, strode a few paces and then collapsed onto the floor, slapping his chest, shaking, bowling over a guard as if some unfortunate accident, turning blue and groaning 'my heart my heart' As he lay on the floor, the cleanest floor in the whole wide world, he shat his pants.

'GET A FUCKING AMBULANCE HERE PRONTO GORDIE!!!' screamed the guard partially hidden beneath Woody's frame.

Years later, quite unexpectedly, I saw Woody sitting at the bar of the Austral Hotel. We bought each other one too many cleansing ales. He is a very successful corporate lawyer and President of the local chapter of the Hell's Angels. I never asked how he did what he did, what he took, just 'did you ever go back?'

'Nope.'

'Neither did I,'

Something worked.

Angus McAulay

Territorial dreaming

Silently the jabiru descends
such practiced grace
disdainful of gravity
floating and weaving
that hopping dance
before seizing the land
a new pterodactyl
of ancient dreamings
caressed by sun and time

Territory Day
A matter of State
The Chief Minister
Shot true and straight

A message to Canberra
Where the sun never shines

We'll have our independence
Before this century reclines
Wearing an Akubra
Stood the Head of State
Relaxed and laid back
He'd arrived rather late

broilgas stalk the marshy plain
stark against the landscape
jagged and lean
stiff legged and cautious
swift then still
forever wary
of the cold silent ones

Warm frank and friendly
Like an old country town
Australian values embraced
While seizing the future
A marriage somehow profound
Black white or yellow
No-one seemed to care
No racist posters
Optimism, not despair
They work hard
And relax harder
Knowing they're going somewhere

the crocodile stares unblinking
unfathomable eyes
in cold contemplation
of aliens
and ancient neighbours
sleek skin gleaming
like soft grey jade

Through bombing
And nature's wrath
They'd endured
Like the Phoenix
Twice risen
Strong and well cured

sun drenched air
caresses the body
gently sliding under loose clothing
the skin breathes and sighs with delight
the languid cool of the evening
tingles like a thousand fingers
nature's sensuous massage

alive as carnal temptation

A place where spirit
And vision survive
City of the future
Vibrant and alive
Sweat and determination
Succeed and multiply
That precocious infant
Stretching for the sky

mighty tepid rivers
weave across the sacred land
where ancient dreamings
and dreams of the future
mingle and conceive
hard to believe
such unlikely partners
walk hand in hand

Jane Clayton

The local detective

She lived in a rusted Cortina and ate take-away noodles from Vikram's Seaside Cafe. Her over-permed hair looked green in the street light and her yellow grin made children hide behind their mother's legs. She wore knitted socks from St Vincent de Paul's and a loud Hawaiian shirt that cost 10 cents in a garage sale. Once she may have looked like somebody's middle-aged aunt, the kind who wore too much lipstick and who brought the peach meringue to the family barbecue. But now she was treated with the same dismissive eyes as the priest who thought he was Elvis, and the lady in the fish shop who proclaimed the arrival of Jesus. Another oddity on the suburban horizon.

A blemish on the white, tree-lined streets.

The locals knew her simply as Dot, a name that inspired much digging of elbows and sniggering behind serviettes, and each year she appeared on the council's list of problems to 'solve'. 'She's scaring the tourists,' the shopkeepers would say. 'And she's always ... there,' the women with children would try to explain. 'She disgraces our Christian reputation,' the men in suits would add. They would have been shocked to learn that she did in fact have an official title, Delilah Iris Glory Bennett and that she had been named such after a number of estranged aristocratic relatives who lived in high fenced houses and drank pink champagne.

They would have been further disturbed to know that she kept a working profile on each of their characters, noting their motivations and ambitions on the back of train tickets and Mintie's wrappers and that she was immediately aware of suspicious changes in their behaviour. Behind her K-mart sunglasses were all-seeing eyes that absorbed every insignificant detail and throw-away comment. Her thonged feet were remarkably swift, her

calloused hands amazingly deft and her large, untidy form incredibly silent. If ever she was asked to leave the town, it would be the end for them all.

She knew that old Mrs Davies, who sent the collection plate around on Sunday mornings, was planning to steal the golden cross from the communion stand, so that she and old Mrs Pearson could afford to resume their unnatural affair far from watchful eyes. She knew that Mr Hammersmith sent love letters to the new school teacher, Miss Ryan, who then gave them to the Board, and that this was the real reason that Mr Hammersmith could no longer run for Mayor. She also knew that Mr Hammersmith's teenage daughter, Rosemary, had fallen pregnant to the town ruffian Joe Clark, who was to leave on the Victoria 1 next week. She also knew that wealthy widower Mr Carroll had died an unfortunate death at the hands of Katy the maid, who after forty years of service, had buried him under the peach tree before going to visit her sister indefinitely in America.

She knew her power. Being insignificant allowed her much freedom. Old Mrs Davies didn't see her stockinged legs behind the confessional curtain when she confided her plan to Old Mrs Pearson. Miss Ryan didn't notice her listening eyes as she read aloud Mr Hammersmith's letters to an outraged Mrs Ryan. Rosemary Hammersmith didn't catch her whiskery chin in the window as she wrote of her dilemma in her diary; nor did reckless Joe Clark take notice when her beanie head appeared behind him in the pub as he told the men of his departure. Just as Katy the maid certainly didn't wonder at her pimpled nose poking through the lattice as she shovelled the last mound of soil onto poor Mr Carroll's peach tree grave.

They saw her in the street, in the shops, on the jetty, on the tram. But they never saw her in their reflections...

Denny Stevens

[Magdalena and metaphysics](#)

Confronting locked doors. Distant dogs bark echo suburban night. Inside at the desk, a pen is held like a flare that might illuminate the past and thereby chart the way ahead. Trains of thought depart from different stations. Signals are metaphysical. Magdalena's portrait is framed by the impatient gaze of her distant admirer. This distance has left tracks across time. A question arises.

It is dawn. Lovers wade into the river. Birth occurs on the slippery banks. Minstrels, on gilded barges poled by bronze ferrymen, glide through the mist. Elephants trudge through the mud carrying uprooted tree trunks. Wild pigs romp amongst the leapfrog children in the green grass. Jesus is whistling an ancient tune as he sharpens his saw. The eyes of the blacksmith swell with tears as he pounds the red-hot slivers of steel into crude nails. His furnace is hot and beads of sweat condense near the village well where the virgins have paused to talk and tease. The young oxen-teamster feels a sharp pain in his lower back as he drives across the dusty plaza. The professor has just kicked away the chair in the church and his popping eyes can no longer see Magdalena playing with the schoolchildren.

The sun has reached its zenith now. It is blazing in the fields of wheat. The ears of corn are turning golden. Somewhere off in the heat haze, a cow lowers for her calf. Magdalena rings the school-bell and soon the children are seen ambling homewards with closed books in the sweltering smile of noon. Unleavened mothers' bread awaits with piping-hot stove smells. A clanking of chains as the peasant fathers drop their blistering labours to return to their tangled vine-tendrils wives. Out there, alone, beneath the willow tree, the young priest kneels beside a fresh grave and recites a beautiful poem instead of the usual prayer. And then he buries the professor, but not the professor's treatise on metaphysics, as he had been instructed.

The quiet stillness and laze of siesta spread across the scene. The animals are silent. The afternoon is hung like smoke in the motionless air. The birds are perched. Nothing happens. Thoughts dissipate. Images reappear in dreams. Household odours and outdoor fragrances are woven into clay. Shadows creep across alleys and courtyards. A smokestack, some metal cogs and leather belts form an ominous shape and the old forest slowly disappears.

Magdalena picks wildflowers near the spring as the first sounds of limb and toil stir embers in the coffee pot stone houses. The village idiot makes his first appearance of the day, at the well. He drinks happily and spills most of the water from the ladle down the front of his tattered shirt. A mangy dog trots to his side. A lean grey cat slips over a wall. A small child empties a watering can onto a bed of roses. Unseen, a snake slithers past Magdalena and she is startled by a call from her anxious mother.

The sound of a motor car hovers unheard on the edge of the town that the village has not yet become. Echoes of an axe-bitten tree-trunk drift and mingle with the last rays of light, heralding a return to work. Jesus shapes another motif with sinew and chisel on the new door for the church. On the other side of the mountains, Michael hones the edge of his sword, and then saddles his white horse! He gallops over the clattering plank bridge with the message concealed under his silk shirt as Magdalena, with the wildflowers woven into her waist length hair, slips under the laden bough of the fig tree outside her mother's house and runs inside. Her father, who died mysteriously after succumbing to the wiles of the moneylender, bequeathed the fields and animals to his two sons, but left Magdalena with only a precious book and a gold ring as dowry. Before he can reach her, Michael is taken captive by a new ideology. During her grief, the old priest seduces Magdalena. Later she has a child to the musician. When he leaves her to seek his fortune in the new world, the idiot consoles her. The idiot wants to explain to her what the professor had taught him about metaphysics but her beauty prevents him. The words get caught in his throat. She is only vaguely aware of his strange gasping...

Back in the suburbs, the dogs have stopped barking. All is quiet ... Her distant admirer can hear the whisper of a sweet song on the midnight breeze. He believes it is Magdalena. He believes it is her freedom song.

Sal Humphreys

The rat

'It's a fucking conspiracy!' Nicola yelled down the phone. 'Not only did I get a seventy dollar fine for having a faded number plate, but I got every red light between work and home. I got yelled-at at work by David dick-for-brains, got home to a half dead rat under my bed and cat vomit on the lounge room floor, there were two bills in the mail and not a single love letter. I'm going to bed for at least three days. Should never have got up today in the first place.'

'Nicky, petal, it's just one day. Tomorrow will be better.'

'No it won't. Do you have any idea what the significance of a half dead rat is? It means it's not dead. It means Jules, you can't just pick it up and throw it off the balcony. It fucking means there's this poor crazed creature, paralysed from the waist down, pulling itself around by its little front legs, leaving trails of blood on my fucking floor while it drags its back legs behind it trying to get out of my bedroom and away from my cat.'

'Stop, enough! I don't want the gory details, OK? Listen, don't go to bed for three days.

Come over and I'll cook tea for you.'

'What - and have to wait at another fifteen red lights on the way over and watch another fifteen total arseholes pick their noses while they wait? Thanks, but no thanks. I've had enough for the day.'

'Ni-ick, come on. It'll be worth it. I'll make a fuss. Tell you what, I'll do a chocolate self-saucing pudding.'

There is a pause. Nicola grips the phone to her ear with her shoulder while she cleans her nails with a paperclip. She sighs.

'Oh, alright. Can I bring my new pet rat? Do you have wheelchair access at your place?'

'You have a sick mind. See you in half an hour.'

'Make it an hour, I still have to clean the vomit up.'

Hayley Dwyer

Showtime

Mickey loved showtime. She wiped her grimy hands over her sweaty, fat cheeks and dunked her old felt hat in the horse trough. She looked down at her cracked, scuffed riding boots then scraped the horse shit off on the rusty portable yards. She ran to catch up to the boys.

Samba was the leader. He was older than Mickey and loved to jeer at her. Tredley was Mickey's younger brother

and the soak of the team. Together they made a team. Mickey panted up behind them and they pretended not to notice her. Samba was talking to one of his mates and Tredley watched in awe. Ignored, she waited patiently near the marshalling yard. She wiped her face on her sleeve pushing the wet hair from her forehead. Bored and angry with the boys she planked down under a tree and scratched in the dirt with a stick. She found five cents and then three one dollar coins. She brightened. She looked up excitedly but the boys were gone.

It was nearly time for the barrel race as she weaved through sideshow alley. The noise, colours and smells mesmerised her. Dazed and overheated she attempted the maze of 'Showies' caravans. She surveyed the ground. Scraps of shredded balloons and chip packets littered the ground just behind the Big Wheel. She stopped. The object caught the afternoon sun and made her squint. A small clear mouse with pink ears. Probably a prize from the Clowns or the Shooting Ducks, she thought. Stuffing it in her pocket she bolted through the narrow corridors that the 'vans' made. She tripped on an extension cord and fell. A large black dog tested its chain, barking and snarling. It snapped back at the end of its tether and she laughed hysterically. She scrambled up and kept running.

She could see the boys on top of the Maguire's truck, their black shadowy bodies distinctive against the sunset. She went over and climbed up to show them her find. It was showtime. The boys'd only managed to scrounge a dart, one Dodgem token and a plastic windmill. They were jealous. They all agreed to meet at the race course bar to scrounge for coins the next day, Sunday, which was always profitable.

Mickey and Tredley's Dad had won the barrel race against the motor bikes for three consecutive years and his horse, Ol' Cab was going blind. The lights came on and caught the dust in their beams. The sweat cooled on Mickey's back while her stomach flipped in anticipation. The motor bikes were on first to stir up the crowd of Townies on the hill side of the arena and the Bushies on the other. The noise was deafening but Mickey couldn't hear any of it as she willed the old horse for one last stand. The boys had fairy floss for tea and she pinched some. The pink dye stained her fingers before she could get it in her mouth.

Cab danced at the pegs. His muscles rippled beneath his hair and his eyes like deep black pools blinked rapidly. The small girl on the truck connected with the horse on some ethereal level. In a flurry of dust they were off. All was silent for her except for the creaking of leather and the frantic pounding of hooves on the sand. 'Fifteen seconds neat!' bellowed the announcer, jolting her. The noise erupted. Her Dad and Cab had won another large trophy filled with prize money. Afterwards people were beginning to leave. All that was left was the smoky, dusty air. Tired and sunburnt kids were crying and cranky mothers comforted them. The rodeo was on tomorrow, Mickey thought. Soon showtime would be over for another year. She jumped down from the truck and went to find her Dad.

Michelle Wandel

Remembering our size

When I look at my knuckles, I slide back to the farm and me lining up the plucked chooks along the empty water tank, their yellow knees curling over the edge like my fingers curl around this pen. I didn't mind the plucking much, they were always still warm from the boiler. You had to be careful not to burn yourself, so you carried them to the upturned tank by their legs. Dad could carry. Dad could carry ten at a time, in each hand. He would bring them up from the chook shed, blood still dripping from their elongated necks, some still flapping their wings as if they had forgotten they were headless. They were the best ones, the ones that still kept running around you in circles, their heads were lying at the base of the chopping block. My brother and I used to run after them with our little legs at full speed, trying to catch them before they fell. Once, one ran straight into my brother's arms and we laughed ourselves silly.

So we ran, ran all the way to the fizzy fruit bus that stood at the end of the drive. And you stumbled behind with your laces and bookbag, Superman dragging through the dust. We would reign, each lolly coloured seat ours to pick. The endless stretch of back sprawled out before us, ours till the big ones arrived to push us off with their drawing pin glares. Then I would remember the sandwiches still sitting on the bench, polony peeping from the sauce-smearred Glad Wrap. We would both spend the morning talking our way into bright pink lunch boxes, snugly packed with Samboy chips and fruit juice boxes. We melted to our marshmallow seats, as the orange peel roads eventually crawled into a hopscotch coloured driveway. Our half-empty backpacks rattled as we plodded off the bus, greeted by balls of plastic and sickly pale apples lining the school walls, all whispering reminders of our forgotten lunch.

Haystacks. We could build a cubby you and I. You will because you're my friend, slave. Drag them from the shed, curl your fingers around the string, and feel for the prickles. See the trail of yellow we've drawn, a carpeted bush track. You must stack them like this, you see, I know. You don't want them to find two kids smothered by walls, do you? Mum would never let us have icy poles again, ever. The roof is harder, maybe this tin with the curly curves, we'll carry it together, I'll walk backwards, I can. Let's cover it with bushes. They won't even see us sitting at our oil tin table, drinking red cordial out of the thermos smuggled from the kitchen. We can hide here all day in our stacked fodder home, at least until our eyes start to swell too much from the hay and we are forced to leave because of the itch.

it seemed that he was silently fading in anticipation of a similar fate.

Would I have kissed him? Where? I feared it would hurt.
His body was only an expression of pain now,
every nerve and fibre dedicated to the final task.

Jacinta Mooney

Writing in an acrylic cardigan

Monday

I can hear banging on the roof again. It's the kids next door throwing rocks. I'm hoping if I ignore them they'll stop. I can't go out there. I know they think I'm incredibly weird. But I feel so terribly intimidated by teenagers dressed like Americans. I feel so cold sitting at my desk. Even on a warm day I'm wrapped in layers of clothes with a quilt over my knees. I can hear the postman's scooter from my desk and start to remove a few layers so I look normal enough to walk to the letter box. When S comes home, she opens my window pointing out how stuffy it is in my room. 'I had it open before', I Lie.

Tuesday

I open the refrigerator a hundred times a day. I rarely take anything out. I'm simply looking, reminding myself of the contents and their arrangement, hoping I'll spy something delicious that was previously hiding. Sometimes I walk around the rented house pretending it's mine and plan how I would renovate it: a skylight in the dining room, glass doors onto the backyard and extra bench space in the kitchen would be nice. As I consider the lounge room I watch the budgie in his cage. He says, 'watchya doin?' in a high pitched voice. We ask each other this repeatedly.

Wednesday

I buy junk food and hide the rubbish in the wheelie bin so no one knows. Once I sprayed the lounge with toilet spray to smother a lingering burger and fries. I want people to think I stir fried a few left over vegetables for tea: I heard a radio announcer say the suburbs were filled with stir fries. I burst out laughing. I buy beautiful looking fruit and vegetables with good intentions and end up craving monosodium glutamate.

Thursday

I turn the telly on about as many times as I open the refrigerator – a quick rip around the dial to see what's on, then off (in case someone should come and find me watching day-time TV). The phone rings – oh how wonderful! A momentary sense of elation, tripping over in my haste to answer it.

I'm always tidying the house in case someone visits, yet often when the door-bell rings I freeze and won't answer it. I sit perfectly still at my desk, thankful I've pulled the blind down in my room. I hear the crackle of the gravel in the driveway as footsteps come towards my bedroom. A voice calls out my name. I don't even breathe. My unwelcome visitor is less than a metre from me. Sometimes it's my best friend. I can't let them see me. Then they'll know. They'll see it in my face, my acrylic cardigan. On the phone I can fool anyone.

Saturday

My car hasn't shifted for days. I'm sure the boys working in the auto shop across the road wonder what the hell I do all day. Sometimes when I water the pot plants out the front I think I hear the boys calling out to me. I look over but I can't be sure. I tell myself they dropped a spanner. Sometimes S and I will sit and chat on the veranda in full view of the auto shop. When S isn't here, I stay inside. When my parents ring they ask me how my writing is going. 'Fine,' I reply too quickly, and change the subject. I always think a chocolate bar will help me write. It never does and I'm riddled with guilt, swearing on my life I'll never do that again. The next night I get salt and vinegar chips.

Monday

I imagine what clothes I'd wear if I had a 'normal job'. Then, I'd be hurrying in the mornings, blow-drying my hair, applying make-up and racing off to work. I'd have somewhere to go, somewhere I was expected to be. I'd be chatting to colleagues, discussing important work stuff. Meanwhile I stare at the Van Gogh self-portrait in my bedroom for hours. I could draw it from memory.

Tuesday

I'll ring Dani who lusted to live with in Melbourne for a chat. She'll say, 'Are you having trouble writing?' 'No', I'll lie, 'I'm just having a break; I've made a cup of tea (another lie) and thought a chat would be nice.'

There's an old man who wanders past my house on his way to the shops on the corner. Every time I peek out the lounge window I see him. He uses a shopping trolley as a walking frame. He brings it back full of cabbages. I spend days wondering what he does with them. I've seen him at Coles hanging around the check-outs talking to the girls. It must be lonely at his house too.

Friday

I boil the kettle at least twenty times a day; but only make about three cups of tea, and waste most of them. I'm seeing a gastroenterologist who is void of compassion and sensitivity. I rehearse speeches, declaring, 'I'm not surprised you went into gastroenterology, you are nothing but an arsehole,' but I never use them. Sometimes when the words won't come I'll lie down on my bed and masturbate.

Saturday

S comes home with her boyfriend. She looks gorgeous. Sometimes when S is at work I go into her room and try some of her clothes on. Some things are so tight on me that I have to be careful I don't rip them when taking them off.

Monday

The radio is my best friend. I'm addicted to the late night twenty-five question quiz. Some nights I answer them all correctly. I plan to ring up one night, but I never do. I'm so emotional even the National Bank ads make me cry; especially the one with the struggling Chinese family running the 'take away' and the cute little girl with pig tails. Over at the K-mart there is a physically handicapped boy working. I've seen him eagerly collecting spare coat-hangers from the racks. Every time I see him the tears well up in my eyes.

Wednesday

A friend rings and invites me over for dinner. I thank them too much and wince and shift uncomfortably as I decline the offer and explain, I have too much work to do. I've written three sentences in two and a half hours. It wouldn't matter if I went to dinner and stayed until breakfast.

Thursday

Last night I dreamt I had to have my right hand amputated. In the dream I was terrified but the doctor kept reassuring me it was for the best. I think it was a subconscious wish.

Adam Doyle

[Millennium of misconception](#)

Everything about mankind is transient; your lives, your commitments and especially your memories. Although an intelligent species, you often fail to show it. I speak specifically of your characteristic to tell lies and your willingness to perpetuate them.

I am confiding in you, to set the wrongs and misconceptions of centuries, right. The first of these is that dragons are not real. The fact that one is writing this, is proof that we do. The second is that all dragons were slain in the Dark Ages. Indeed such crusades as those led by St.George and the like destroyed some species of dragons. As a result there are no European dragons left. In China though, genocide of this scale did not occur. There were horrible crimes committed against my race, but nothing like the atrocities of the English barbarians. In truth, dragon kind has never been populous. I cannot disclose our current numbers, but they are few to say the least.

The third, and most harmful to my kind, is the misconception that dragons razed entire cities and surrounding countryside for no apparent reason. In any intelligent race, there are deviants and evil minds at work, but it cannot be said for all members of our populace. Indeed, some youthful and power-hungry dragons did suffer 'wanderlust,' but this does not justify the genocide of our kind!

Most dragons subsist of their own accord, but sometimes in the midst of winter, our stockpiles of provisions run out and we are forced to prey on cattle and sheep, beings lower on the food chain, to survive. Unfortunately, many of these make up the livestock of the agrarian types of your race. 'Desperate times called for desperate measures,' as you fickle humans say and we also have young to feed and nurture. Today, when a dragon gets extremely hungry it will generally visit one of your abandoned landfill sites and scavenge there. You see, we dragons are willing to make up for the mistakes of our past.

You humans should take a look at yourselves and wonder why other species haven't united and purged YOU. Humans are wasteful, violent, discriminative and manipulative. Your behavioural patterns are far too complex to analyse in this treatise, which is if they can be understood at all. Yet the classic example of your baffling behaviour is that the workings of a butcher be applauded. I speak again of that cursed knight St. George. A human Pope (supposedly the mortal voice of his deity) granted some testosterone frenzied, seventeen year old knight a sainthood for murdering/slaying/slaughtering (whichever you prefer) a dragon. Whatever happened to this deity's 'unbreakable' Jaw, 'Thou shalt not kill?' Yet we dragons have come to expect such antics after Joan of Arc won religious acclaim on similar merits. It is humans who are the tyrants, not dragon-kind.

The fourth misconception softskins have of us, is that we are 'taller than houses and terrifying to behold.' Let me begin by saying this; humans are the silliest looking intelligent species I've seen. You are bipedal. This is a blatant denial of our ancestral links. Life is easier on four limbs. The apes have led more comfortable lives for seventy thousand years. Furthermore, your body hair has been replaced by layers of clothes. Quite frankly, I'd prefer speaking to your closest cousins, their conversation and psychology make more sense. I suppose you can't change what evolution has done to you - but then again, neither can we, so why the history of hatred and aggression, Hmmm?

Taner Tanriover

The bargain

Mohammed was a prophet
who climbed a mountain when he felt
like corresponding with the Almighty,
for it was there that he met

the Archangel Gabriel
who brought him the word of God.
But one day it came to be that God wanted to see him personally.
Jump up, said Gabriel and fly with me.
I shall take you to the Almighty.
They took off and rose up high,
piercing seven layers of the sky.
After a flight long but uneventful, they reached the Almighty's residence.
God told Mohammed that all his followers
must face Mecca, kneel down and pray fifty times each and everyday.
Mohammed agreed wholeheartedly and left the presence of his Excellency.

On his way back he saw Moses,
a colleague who struck curious poses.
He was astonished to hear
what Mohammed had to say.
Fifty times is too much, he said
Go back and say no way.
So back went Mohammed
to bargain with the Almighty
who sympathised with his views
and brought the number down to forty. But Moses was less than impressed.
You must go back once again and get another discount.
After numerous trips back and forth

The number was down to five.
Moses still thought it too much
But Mohammed said that is enough.
I am going back no more
Five it is and five it shall stay.
I have nothing else to say.
And back he went to his people
to spread the word of God,
to make them live happily ever after.
But what with this negotiation
it must have been hard for him not to wonder
whether God knew what was best
for Muslims
or if it was Moses who knew better

For Turan Dursun, who like many others, was murdered in return for his humane passion of speaking the truth.

Catherine O'Meley

Searching

The phone rings; she answers. It is her mother. They talk; her mother is sending a parcel to her. For her birthday. Her hand starts to sweat as she holds the handset. Her mother's voice buzzes sharply in her head. She traces her finger between the dialling buttons. It slides across the smooth plastic surface. Her mother finishes talking. She says goodbye.

*She never intended for her life to go the way it has.
She feels she is never really present
in the junction of time and space that is her existence.
She knows she has experienced many things
but she is always left with the feeling
they have not quite happened to her.*

She opens the can of dog food, spoons the contents into a dish, ready for her son to take out to the kennel. She peels the leaves off the lettuce; slices the tomatoes, the cucumber; chops the snow peas, the shallots; tosses it all in a bowl; douses it with dressing and puts it into the fridge. The kitchen window is open. A slight breeze sneaks into the house, cutting through the dense humidity. It stirs the curtains and dries the sweat on her skin.

*She has gone from her family to school;
from school to relationships;
from relationships to marriage and
from marriage to motherhood.*

*Whenever she strives to remember her past
as distinct and separate periods,
her memories become muddied and blurred.
Her recollections of past events are confused.
They strike no cord of familiarity within her.
It is as though her life has happened
to someone else.*

She has stood by, merely watching.

She hears her daughter practising scales. The music is faint and dear; it travels from the study, along the hallway; into the kitchen. The washing machine finishes its cycle. She puts the damp clothes into the basket. She takes the basket to the clothesline. Her son appears at her side. Silently they peg the clothes out. She takes the empty

basket back to the laundry. Her son picks up his soccer ball.

Cutting through her ill-remembered memories
is the glistening thread of music and singing.
It was the music within her that continually bathed her with joy;
provided the creative lift blood that fed her desires;
served as the lift line in everyday lift.

She hears her daughter playing a minuet. The music is light and lively; it skips past the silence in the house, into the garden. The automatic sprinklers finish their cycle. She picks up the garden hose. She turns it on. She waters the pot plants. The smell of wet potting mix is pungent. Small leaves from the garden stick to her wet feet. The scent of damp jasmine hangs heavy in the air. She rubs one foot on top of the other. The leaves fall off. She returns to the kitchen; opens the fridge, fills her glass from the cask inside.

She remembers the days with the band.

*The stagefright,
the adrenaline rush,
the applause,
the exhilaration,
the desire for more.*

*She remembers as though
it is a story she has been told.*

She hears her daughter singing. The song is sweet and seductive; it pierces through the desolation surrounding her, into her heart. She leans heavily on the bench top. Her fingers lose their grip on her glass. She searches for the notes. She opens her mouth. The emptiness rushes into her throat and out again. Her song is hollow and hawking. Lifeless. She hears her eyes close and re-open. The despair lies down over her. Pushes her to the floor.

Jennifer Rice

Backwash

Early adulthood earns a fibrous feeling, like cheap cardboard once useful then discarded, like cask wine drunk too much. Something in the disillusion of change settles a powdery fey sketch over it; with all that time spent dreaming, all the fruitless dreaming, fruitful only when drunk. All that dreaming discarded in the light of sobriety for practical realities like money, politics, work and the god awful future. Who taught me that optimism was mediocre and that the cold and the harsh were inevitable realities?

Life grows in moments, in skins of textures pink and unformed, awaiting transformation.

Dancing, dancing sprung up in grass tall enough to be a dewy fortress: the early years of fitful romanticism. The pureness of childhood extremes are what discounts its truths in adult logic; either it feels good or it doesn't, it's interesting or it's not, you're happy or you escape. This is where genius begins and this is where rationale forces children to harvest themselves for docile measures of pleantry. Society's medication: mediocrity. Childhood has brittle textures, but something too honest in the falls, burns and earnest mistakes protects it from self-inflicted brutality. You're too busy discovering the smell of your genitals to wonder about what they entitle you to. I was a girl. As a girl, I believed that to write a great novel you had to either be great, or know great things: then I began to read.

My father had a terrific arse of a friend called Seamus Kelly. Seamus was a pseudo poet who borrowed phrases from the old masters, drank cheap wine, pretended to understand tragedy and gnawed at his failure: his flesh. When they had spent time in each other's company, they sounded like Kamahl's drunken alter ego; why are people so unkind, the pitiful unchosen? They were the final solution. Perhaps Seamus did understand tragedy; he had a face like a mutated potato and breath to cower under. Through all of this he thought himself an attractive and genuinely interesting man (he was well hung, by patriarchy). Seamus and my father clung to one another in failure like Waugh's affable homosexuals and had a bitter fear of 'wimmin' reminiscent of Oscar Wilde. They regarded each other as romantic friends of the highest calibre, each one the fruits of the other's ego. I did wonder whether it was only their egos that were stroked in the long hours.

I became a poet at seventeen and lost respect for literary history soon afterwards. It didn't strike me until then that history holds gay men in the highest regard, but lesbians as barren. This manifestation of patriarch arose again throughout my readings of Anais Nin, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolfe, Adrienne Rich and others.

Eventually, I was brave enough to face the consequences of acknowledging that most of the world around me was subversively, if not blatantly misogynous. The air came thicker then and colder. The words perched themselves upon pages like the shackled victims of solitary confinement. I feared the ink (my blood) and cowered behind the matronly wings of curved metaphors. I was grateful for those earlier muddied years where I learned like many girls about the destructiveness of men and how they make 'wimmin' suffer for their failures. At least if an essential 'womynhood' was a myth, men were not going to divide me from the genuine love I had for 'wimmin', and through this, love for myself. This love that cradled each dawn in aureoles of light and warmth, opening up a world ripe and weeping with milk, a world where weaning kept a distant pace with death. Soldiers marched into my head to rape the new dawn, to steal her milk; to starve me until I fed on them dictating to me who was, what I wanted, how my memories were to be remembered, how my knowledge was to be constructed to couch the violence of men as normal and the fight against my violation as peculiar, psychotic, wounded. They were at once the protectors and the perpetrators, teaching me that theirs was the only sustainable reality and that my place was to lie back and sympathise with their possession and destruction of myself.

Knowledge cracked the steely veneer of my heterosexual early twenties and prompted me to wonder about alternatives. That from which men excluded me, the institutions and artistic societies that made me inferior and invisible, I lost interest in. The texture came fleshy and full of a new carnivore raising her head. I wanted my skin back. I wanted the anger I had shed with each compromise, each silence, and was going to eat my way to it.

Somewhere in those bloody fields I grew fat. I ate until my stomach grew two fold, pregnant with memories that wouldn't speak to me with my head down the toilet drowning in vitriol. Acid burned my throat less metaphorically than it does through memory. Anger has memory. This time was excruciatingly slow, it paced itself on the rhythms of a black hole. Timeless death stalked me through day and night making hermit desires comfortable. I don't remember people from those days, but there was something that cleaved me inside out; the memory of the cloth.

I was still praying every night to Him. Did I say childhood wasn't brutal? The child doesn't allow for brutality because there's too much to learn to waste time with it. A gun, or some mud squeezing between baby fingers? Death or sensation? Adults taught me that brutality, exclusion and hatred were natural while gentility, inclusion and love were admirable inconsistencies. Obscene logic; I was taught to hate.

A man of the cloth, one of God's chosen. Who taught me to look for eclipses in sunlight? White on black, swallowing sin. Who gave me 'hystory' splinters and my blood mirrored shards with which I carved my memory into pieces too small to retrieve? Mirrors are cold; they taught me the one constant - myself. They taught me that when something is whole it reflects everything surrounding it, but when it is broken it is bad luck. When a mirror is broken it can never be perfect again. It will always reflect in broken promises, in unattainable potential. That's why children and animals are brutalised, so that they can never completely reflect adults to themselves.

The truth tellers are cleaved to protect vampires who take their blood from the flock and breathe sweaty fingers onto virgin stock. I fall asleep to the hurried rhythms of a heart in flight trying, seeking sanctuary in solitary confinement.

Adulthood recovered my childhood in splintered truths.

This is where F sat.

R sat on a throne at the head of seas of splintered mirror images that are the familiar strangers in a dance I once knew. This is my texture, broken but enclosed. The skin belongs somewhere.

Anthea Sarris

The un-retiring retiree

Beware of old men in hats. Seasoned drivers will inform you that they are the utter worst. Old men in hats are Sunday drivers 365 days a year: they cruise along at 40KMs an hour regardless of the speed limit, they never go out enough when turning right at intersections, and they never shift to the left when you're overtaking them. They are a menace to driving society.

My grandfather is an old man. My grandfather wears a hat. My grandfather drives like a maniac. It didn't take me long as a child to understand why Yiayia, my grandmother, crossed herself every time she got into the car with him. On many occasions, as we left the honking of annoyed drivers in our dust trail, I wondered whether he had missed his true calling as a rally driver. My grandfather, or Pappou, as I call him, is a most un-retiring, retiree, but even that is not accurate enough. Hyperactive is probably closer to the mark.

Pappou has been a Ford man all his life. He started with a cream coloured 960 Falcon, then a sky blue 1968 Falcon and finally, a dark blue 1974 Falcon: However, in 1986, after writing off the German Tank (Sarris slang for the 74), he sold his motoring soul and bought a gutsy, metallic blue, 1979 Holden Commodore that he currently thrashes around the streets of Adelaide. Not that Ford is worried that they have lost the Sarris as valued customers. Our family car is a silver 1992 Falcon.

My grandfather has cooked dinner for the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, Charles and Di and the Duchess of Kent. He has probably cooked them breakfast and lunch too. Pappou retired in 1983 as TAA's Executive Chef at Adelaide Airport. His favourite stories are about Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Queensland mud crabs; and the Duchess of Kent and her orange juice.

During one particular Royal visit in the 70s, the order came through to the kitchen that His Royal Highness felt like Queensland mud crabs for dinner on his evening flight. Diligent as ever, Pappou set to work.

Old Mother Hubbard looked in her cupboard and saw that her cupboard was bare

There was not a crab in sight. Not one to want to get Royal boxer shorts in a knot, Pappou rang his opposite number at Brisbane Airport. In a matter of hours a crate of still pinching mud crabs had made their way down to Adelaide-specially chauffeur driven in a BAC-111, VTP jet.

In comparison, the Duchess of Kent's request was quite simple jug of freshly squeezed orange juice. Simple enough, except for the fact that it was not orange season and the only available fruit yielded barely three drops of juice each. Pappou nearly twisted his hands off at the wrist squeezing kilos of oranges to produce a jug full to please the palette of the placid Duchess.

You would think that after spending 30 years in kitchens, cooking would be the last thing on his mind in his retirement. Wrong. Unfortunately with no paid kitchen hands to clean up after him, he drives my grandmother insane every time he gets the urge to cook. On impulse he bursts into the kitchen and creates his masterpiece, then exhaustedly collapses on the couch, leaving a trail of destruction behind him. Throughout it all Yiayia continually mutters under her breath, but to no avail. Each time, she will clean up his mess and pack the soup or curry or casserole in question into the recycled honey pots for dispatching to sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. They make quite a team.

The recycled honey pots constitute a weekly food drop to the two other Sarris households. They are usually accompanied by a loaf of Yiayia's bread, crunchy savoury biscuits, seasonal fruit and vegetables and occasionally, a block of chocolate. Minestrone, scallop curry and industrial size trays of trifle always score well. The roar of the Commodore's V6 engine coming up the drive is like the bang of a gong announcing dinner. Pappou thunders in, wearing his driving hat, carrying in box after box full of goodies with Yiayia incessantly beseeching him to slow down.

'It's a boy.'

George Spiros Sarris II was born on the twelfth of August 1922 in the mountain village of Siana, on the island of Rhodes, in the middle of the Mediterranean (George, after his paternal grandfather and Spiros after his father). His father imbued him with the utmost respect for his mother and four older sisters, nevertheless, he was the village ratbag. At the age of twelve, in an attempt to curb his mischievous nature, he was sent up into the mountains for months at a time to tend sheep. It obviously did not work.

Georgie-Porgie, pudding and pie
Kissed Chrysanthi and made his father cry
When Chrysanthi went away
His father chased him around the village all day

During one of his home visits he must have fallen in love with my grandmother. And I stress fallen in love. At a time when arranged marriages were the done thing, my great grandfather had a bevy of beauties with generous dowries lined up for Georgie-Porgie. But oh no, he had to fall in love with Chrysanthi Photakis, the youngest (read undowried) daughter of the village priest. My great grandfather (a butcher by trade) chased his son around Siana, wielding a meat cleaver in an attempt to get him to change his mind. But to no avail. On October 19, 1947, George Sarris flew in the face of tradition and married his 21 year-old bride, for love not money.

Following their marriage, they moved to the neighbouring village, where he worked as a share farmer for five years. Once a market gardener, always a market gardener.

Almost fifty years later, (in true Greek-Australian style) Pappou has brought the backyard into his front yard. Broad beans snake their way around the rose bushes. Three equidistantly spaced orange trees dot the dynamic lifted lawn and pomegranate trees hover behind the lilies that line the driveway.

His backyard is a masterpiece of design - much like a four-seasons pizza. Each quarter boasts its own range of vegetables and is divided off by slim cement pathways. The four pathways lead you to the heart of the garden, its life source - the blue plastic drum that feeds all the pumpkins, the silver beet, the cos lettuces, the cherry tomatoes and the snow peas. I once asked Pappou what was in the drum. From the look on his face I gathered it was tantamount to asking Colonel Sanders to divulge the 11 secret herbs and spices. Nevertheless, after a slight pause he confided in me, liquefied pigeon droppings, his own innovation. Don Burke would be proud.

One of my grandfather's horticultural successes nearly killed him. With copious amounts of TLC and pigeon shit, Pappou raised the meanest chilli bush known to humankind. These chillies were the size of your thumbnail and packed enough punch to launch you into orbit. Pappou popped them like vitamin supplements; three chillies, three times a day with food. Several months into this masochistic practice he was rushed to hospital with a bacteriological infection of the liver. The doctors removed a cyst the size of a tennis ball. The specialists listed several possible causes, but we all knew it was the chillies.

Pappou arrived in Australia in December 1952. He left his wife and two young sons in Greece and travelled thousands of miles to Australia to find work; not just to support his family, but also to pay for houses and dowries for his sisters. A year and half later he was reunited with his family when they settled in Adelaide. In the meantime he had worked on his uncle's block in Mildura. It was this period of his life that spawned the greatest myth of my childhood.

I'm being swallowed by a boa constrictor,
I'm being swallowed by a boa constrictor,
I'm being swallowed by a boa constrictor
and I don't like it very much!

As a child I would beg Pappou to tell me the story of the b-i-i-g snake that lived in Mildura. I knew the tale by heart but was scared witless each time. He would lift me onto his knee and begin the tale. He would describe the block, the rows of trees and vines, he would describe the summer heat searing the skin of the workers and he would make me one of the workers, picking the fruit alongside him. Then with increasing intensity he would describe the approach of the huge snake, slowly winding its way through the vines towards the unsuspecting workers. SUDDENLY, it attacked. And Pappou would crush me in his arms. I would fight and scream to free myself from the Mildura snake that had tied knots around me. Often Pappou would sit me on one knee and my brother on the other when he told the story and crush us both when the snake attacked.

When Pappou retired it was because the arthritis in his elbows inhibited his ability to work. In retrospect I wonder whether it was one too many times at playing the Mildura boa constrictor that did the damage, not thirty years in kitchens.

'I tawt I saw a putty tat.' Tweety-Bird

My grandfather loves cats. All of his cats have been the most well-fed and spoiled felines I have ever encountered—living off the gourmet scraps from his kitchen. However, from an early age he would feed them only on perches in his fruit trees. He reasoned that if he could train them to climb and be familiar in the trees they could keep the pesky birds at bay. Whilst the names of the more hedonistic Roman emperors would have been appropriate for these well-fed-thugs, every single one has been called Sylvester.

My earliest recollection of my grandfather is of sitting with him to watch afternoon cartoons. He loved them as much as I did, perhaps more, for when I tired of the repeats he would stay and watch and chuckle his belly laugh as if it was the first time he had seen them. Even now, despite the fact that his three grandchildren have outgrown cartoons, he sits glued to the television set every afternoon. His favourite cartoon? Tweety-Bird and Sylvester, closely followed by Coyote and the Roadrunner.

'Would I do that?' Steve Erkel, Family Matters.

My father claims that his baldness is entirely my fault. My twenty-one years on this planet have stressed him out sufficiently for his hair to fall out. In particular, he cites my crazy schemes, my drinking habits, my over emotional nature and my propensity to dance on tables. I beg to differ.

After his last overseas jaunt, Pappou returned to Australia with a five litre container of village brewed ouzo. A customs nightmare? Not for Pappou.

'Excuse me sir, but what would you call this?'

This lotion for arthritis. You rub into shoulders like this' [appropriate movements]

Is like methylated spirits. Here, you smell [it]...'

Hook, line and sinker.

At my twenty first birthday, Pappou drank half a bottle of this bootleg ouzo, cried when he gave his speech and proceeded to dance the night away with a smile plastered on his face. I have had a great teacher.

Cheryl McCrae

Mrs Anderson's walk

Although the sun was shining, it was not hot. The breeze was soft and gentle, ruffling her grey hair. She paused briefly and tilted her head back to feel the warmth on her face and sniffed the air, heavy with the fragrance of flowers. Gnarled hands clasped the walking frame supporting her weight, as her feet resumed their quick shuffling along the footpath. A battered old black handbag hanging on the side of the frame, threatened to spill its contents with each bump or jolt, as the frame rattled along the uneven path.

What a beautiful day for a walk, she thought. Cars whizzed past but she pressed determinedly onwards, nervously negotiating the railway crossing. She thought about the inconveniences of age and blessed the additional support of her frame as she shoved it forward over the shining railway lines. She remembered how she would once have walked this familiar path with ease and not even thought about the bumps and raised pavement slabs that occasionally stopped her walker with a nasty jolt.

Turning, she left the main road and entered a quiet, tree-lined residential street. The incessant rumbling of the walker and the sound of her shuffling feet irritated her. She loved the peace and quiet and the myriad sounds of birds. She thought, not far now. I can rest on the bus seat outside Eva Johnson's house. She loved sitting on that seat. Both she and Eva Johnson had come to the neighbourhood as young brides. Sometimes she stopped in for a cup of tea, but Eva was in a nursing home now. 'Poor thing', she thought. Her house was occupied by a young married couple, its garden gone to rack and ruin. 'Humph', she grumbled, 'Young people these days never seem to bother with their homes. Funny, I never realised how much I enjoyed Eva's company. Even though we couldn't see all that much of each other, somehow knowing she's not in that house makes me feel quite lonely.'

Beginning to feel rather tired, she concentrated fiercely on putting one foot after the other. If she could just get to that seat. She looked up. The seat was gone. What was she to do? In her panic, she did not notice a raised paving slab. The wheels on the walking frame jumped. The frame twisted from her hands. The handbag flew off

and hit the pavement, its contents scattering. She felt herself falling and threw her hands forward to catch the frame, but it was useless. Unable to save herself, she hit the pavement with a sickly thud.

Looking up, at first she could only see blurred faces looming out of a whirling mist. They were saying something. What was it? Where was she? What had happened? Her head throbbed and her face and legs were stinging. That's right. She had fallen. Strong arms lifted her to a sitting position. 'Are you alright?' Of course she was alright. Did they think she was an idiot? It was just a little fall for goodness sake. 'Yes. Just a little shaken. I'll be alright.' she said. She noticed a pretty young policewoman squatting next to her. What was she saying?

The policewoman raised her voice. 'What's your name, dear?'

'Maude Anderson' she replied.

'Where do you live?'

'1a West Park Street, Woodville' she said.

'Mrs Anderson, I think you should go to the hospital. You've had a nasty shock. It's possible that you've got a concussion and you have quite a few scrapes that should be checked out.'

'No. I just need to get home and make myself a nice cup of tea. I'll be alright.'

'Very well then, if you're sure that you're OK we'll see that you get home.'

The car was so comfortable. What a pity she had never learned to drive. What was that young woman saying? Something about a doctor.

'Mrs Anderson, I do hope you'll let us call a doctor for you.'

She thought how caring this young woman was, but said, 'No, no. I'll be alright. I'm just tired and need to get home. It was only a little fall. Once I'm home, I'll be right as rain.'

'Well, here we are Mrs Anderson. Home sweet home. Now, just wait a minute while I open the car door for you. I'm afraid your walking frame is too badly damaged to use, so just lean on me. Do you have your keys? I'll open up for you and see that you get inside safely. Gratefully, she leaned on the strong young arm and shuffled toward the gate. The hinges creaked as they had since her husband died, fifteen years ago. She must remember to oil that one day. Still leaning on the policewoman, she fumbled in her handbag for her keys.

Her head hurt and she groaned with the pain. The curtains moved gently. She turned slowly, trying to remember. Her arm knocked against the side of the bed. Bars. Where was she? She could hear light footsteps padding toward her. A soothing voice murmured, 'It's alright Mrs Anderson. You've had a nasty fall and a bit of a turn. You're in hospital. Doctor has been and would like you to stay here for a little while until we're sure that you're well enough to go.'

'What about my cat, who will feed my cat?' She asked in a querulous voice. 'I just want to go home.'

'It's all taken care of Mrs Anderson. Don't worry about that now. You just rest and you'll be fine.'

Maude lay quietly, unmoving. The sun was shining through the window. There were flowers beside her bed. She looked down and noticed that she was wearing her best night gown. Someone must have been to see her but she couldn't remember. It must have been her sister. She had a set of keys to get into the house. Yes, she decided, it

must have been Valerie. She remembered how her head had hurt yesterday. It felt better today, but her leg still felt painful and her arm was stiff too.

The days passed. Maude endured the fussing of the nursing staff but became increasingly worried about her cat and her home. Several days after her admission, Maude, fully dressed, sat on the side of her bed, waiting impatiently for discharge. Her new walking frame stood in the corner, her belongings stuffed into supermarket bags rested beside her. Her sister was to drive her home. Staring down the corridor of beds toward the nursing station, she saw Valerie talking to the nursing staff. At last, she thought, there she is. What on earth is she doing?

Valerie looked up and smiling, gave a small wave. Turning, she headed toward Maude's bed. 'Hello Maudie. Ready to go I see.'

'Am I ever,' said Maude, bending over to pick up her bags.

'Here, let me help you with those. Here are your wheels', she said, pushing the walking frame forward, patiently ignoring her sister's irritability. Together, they proceeded through the ward accompanied by the familiar sounds of the tumbling wheels of the walking frame and the shuffling of her feet. 'Home,' she thought as she cheerfully said her goodbyes to the nursing staff.

Comfortably settled in the car, she mentally traced the route the car should be taking.

'Are we near Port Road yet?' she asked.

'Not yet Maudie' replied Valerie, her unsmiling face set resolutely toward the road ahead. The car slowed and turned through a pair of large red-brick pillars. Maudie began to fidget.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

'This is St Lawrence's Nursing Home. Doctor said you can't go home just yet. You have to come here for a bit of a rest first and then we'll see about going home.'

Maudie looked out of the window. She felt sick inside. Butterflies jumped about inside her stomach and her hands began to tremble. She said nothing as Valerie drove the car to the front of a large red brick building and stopped. Two white-clad nurses who had been standing outside, stepped forward. Valerie walked around and opened the car door. Reaching in, she unbuckled the seat-belt and helped her sister from the car.

'Hello Mrs Anderson. How are you today?' said one of the nurses.

Maude ignored her and turned to her sister in an unspoken request for directions. 'This way Maudie' her sister said, taking her arm and gently guiding her toward the door. The nurses followed. Maude thought how like a pair of over-eager guard dogs they were, but still she said nothing.

They turned into a narrow corridor and walked past several doors. To Maude it seemed endless. She was getting tired. 'Here we are,' her sister said, gently nudging her toward a room. 'This is your bedroom.' Maude felt unaccountably troubled. 'But when can I go home?' she asked her sister.

Before Valerie had a chance to answer, one of the nurses stepped forward. 'Come along Mrs Anderson, I'll help you into your nightie so that you can get into bed and have a bit of a rest.'

'I don't need any help to get undressed, thank you,' she snapped. Turning to the nurses, Valerie said 'Perhaps I could do that?' The nurses tactfully withdrew, leaving Valerie and Maude alone. Valerie helped her sister into her nightgown. 'Why don't you get into bed Maudie? It's been a tiring day for you.' Maude slid gratefully under the blankets and easing back against the crisp pillow case, she closed her eyes.

Thinking her sister was settled, Valerie picked up her hand bag, and stood up, but stopped as her sister spoke. 'When can I go home?' Valerie took a deep breath and turning to her sister said, 'Maudie dear, do you remember what happened before you went to the hospital?' Maude opened her eyes and looked at her sister. She closed her eyes again. Her heart pounded. She remembered that nice young police woman taking her keys and opening the front door. Who were those people inside her house: that foreign woman and her strange child? They said that it was their house, that she didn't live there anymore. But she did. She did. It was her house.

Valerie's voice intruded into her thoughts. 'Maudie, don't you remember? You've been living here for over a year. This is your home now. You sold the house!' She had previously avoided confronting the existence of Maude's dementia. In agony over the need to announce the reality she had been trying to avoid for so long, Valerie turned away, unchecked tears streaming down her face.

Without opening her eyes, Maude replied, 'Oh! So I don't have to worry about it anymore'.

*To my mother
and her sister
who cannot remember*

Josephine ferro

Chicken man

Another night ride. It is between Glendambo and Oodnadatta that Bean notices a dead dog on the highway. The Kingswood's high-beam reveals the dog has short, light brown fur. A dingo maybe. Bean's mother swerves to avoid running over its head and he closes his eyes tightly. For Bean, road kill victims haunt him: from small bugs that get caught in car grilles to bullocks that wreck whole vehicles. All wasted.

Just one more life taken on the road.

On the outside, Bean is ordinary. He is like a brown paper package, a plain and commonplace wrapping around contents that are mysterious. What is inside Bean? An exquisite jewel: bright, brilliant, or maybe a ticking bomb waiting to explode. Probably the later, he has many secrets.

He sits quietly, self-absorbed in the passenger seat of his mother's car. Occasionally he shifts awkwardly in the bucket seat as his eyes dart from the passing scenery to his mother, who is holding onto the steering wheel so

tight her knuckles have turned white. She is humming. She is a travelling singer and he is her roadie – and then her son. This is his life. Yanked from school at ten, there was no time for tears, farewells or going away gifts. He has never attended high school. That was four years ago and now he is trapped and escapism is the key to sanity.

In his head he is safe, secure. In his head he can be anything he wants: a best friend, a father, a lover. In reality he has a drug habit: speed mostly, and marijuana. He can always score marijuana, if nothing else, at most towns. His mother never questions him about it. He figures that she knows, but has chosen to ignore it. She must notice when fifty dollars goes missing from her purse or when he does not sleep for days or when he calls for pepperoni pizza at four in the morning and then vomits it up. He doesn't always steal from his mother. Sometimes guys behind the bar feel sorry for him and give him the stuff for free.

The time on his cheap digital watch reads eight a.m. and it is already hot. He takes off his windcheater and reaches between the bucket seats to delve his right hand into his rucksack. The T-shirt he wants is at the bottom and he groans out loud because his naked arm, rubbing up against the hot, brown vinyl, is beginning to ache with each bump and lurch of the car. They have been off the highway for about an hour now and the earth road beneath them is steamy and soft and the tyres are straining, making a loud, whirly sound.

Bean struggles into his favourite T-shirt, and becomes a flurry of arms at awkward angles: in front of him, bent towards the ceiling behind his mother's head and the left arm out the window, until he has the garment on. It fits loosely when he stands up but when seated, it stretches over his torso. It is the T-shirt he wears when he is really depressed. It features Ronald McDonald strangling a brown cow. Above this image in lurid red and yellow writing are the words 'Eat Death'. Bean respects all life forms, in the following order: animals, plants and humans.

Recently he has taken to thinking a lot when they are on the road because there is not a lot else to do. He has tried reading, but he quickly learnt that looking down at a book resulted in motion sickness and vomiting out the car door. His mother was not much of a conversationalist. Her excuse was that she had to concentrate on the road, and Bean didn't press her on this issue because she was a pretty bad driver and anyway, when they did speak it is like she is speaking to herself, answering her own questions for him. Besides, he had grown accustomed to amusing himself. In times of extreme boredom he'd just shut his eyes and slip into a state of unconsciousness where words, thoughts, lucid ideas and questions would flood his mind. His mind was full of unanswerable questions; he could feel himself slithering out of reality now, his arms like lead and his head beginning to loll on the head-rest.

'Gawd!' His mother shrieked. He bolted upright and his fragile inner world splintered and he felt dizzy like he had just been standing on his head.

'Gawd,' she said again, looking at him through Jackie-O style glasses that sat high on the bridge of her narrow nose, 'We must be close 'cause here's the little bakery. I'm starving. Are you starving? I bet. They have great little chocolate things, what are they called? What do Americans call them? Brownies. That's right.

She pulled the car off the road and stopped out the front of the diminutive shop. Bean watched her leave the car. Her yellow cotton sun-dress had become so wet with perspiration that it had stuck to her back and between her bottom cheeks. She stood quite still and looked around her for a moment, then plucked the material out between

her thumb and forefinger, and upon completing this task she smiled and waved back at Bean through the open car window. His face displayed complete disdain.

'Shit,' he said out loud once she had disappeared into the entrance. 'I've got to get outta this car.'

He slammed the car door; his legs felt weak but he forced himself to walk. He had to clear his head or something. His T-shirt clung tightly to his armpits with gritty sweat, so he folded his arms and stumbled forward onto the orange, dirt road.

He didn't see much at all, at first. The place seemed devoid of life, Bean, having trouble seeing because of the brightness of the sun, was close to turning back when he noticed something out the corner of his eye. Up ahead, about fifty metres, was what looked like trestles set up along the highway. Bean quickened his step and he could hear and feel his pulse beating in his temples; his insides started to burn like he had just drunk hot oil. He could see them clearly now. They were not an illusion but three trestles covered in peeling, white laminae covered in junk. Cool junk too: glass coke bottles, an old radio, a framed picture of Jesus on the cross, taps, screws and bolts and a car engine. All of it was displayed as if dropped from a height and left where it fell.

He began to pick haphazardly through the items in front of him like a bargain hunter at a church fete, when he saw an old, silver tin the size of his palm. He held it up to his face and looked closely at the engraving on the lid. Spitting on it and rubbing the dirt off with his thumb, the letters C and M appeared. He placed the tin into his jeans pocket thinking it would be perfect to keep his weed in. Rubbing his forehead, just below his deep maroon birthmark, he remembers his mother is probably looking for him. Looking beyond the trestles for the first time, Bean was startled by an old man. The man's skin was brown, his clothes were real dirty and his hair was so matted it looked like steel wool. His eyes focused on Bean intently. Remembering the tin he had just pocketed, Bean walked towards the man and held it out to show him.

'I'd like to buy this, how much is this?' Bean said. The old man looked at Bean very strangely and slowly began to shake his head.

'It's not for sale,' he said quietly.

'What do you mean?'

'This is my stuff.'

'Really?'

'This is my land that you're standing on!'

Bean was shocked at first but the man's voice was soothing and his weathered appearance made him look dirty but wise. His skin was the colour of the soil on which they stood and it was dry and peeling. He wore leather sandals that were held on his feet by two rusted buckles and his toe nails were thick like horns. Bean lifted his head and the man's eyes were searching his face. Bean smiled. He felt like he had found a soul mate. He wanted to hold this stranger's hand. He wanted to pour out all his deepest thoughts, tell him what he was most afraid of and he wanted to ask him questions. Questions he knew that only the old man could answer. His head was buzzing so loud he thought it was going to explode.

Old man why is all your stuff on the side of the highway? How long did it take to get your skin that colour? How long has it been since you've washed your hair or cut your nails? Where do you sleep when it's real cold at night? What do you do when someone approaches you real aggressive like, do you remain serene? Are animals and plants your friends? Do you ever think about death; maggots crawling through your flesh? What do you think about the environmental crises: oil slicks, whale killing, tree lopping, the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect? Do you think people will ever stop having wars? Do you think capitalism and commercialism will destroy this world? Do you think life exists on other planets? Do you believe in love? Do you think the human race is crazy? Are you crazy?

Instead, Bean looked at the man and said, 'Oh well sorry... see ya then.' And as he turned to leave he caught sight of what was hanging on a leather thong around the man's neck: two dirt-stained chicken feathers.

At the Oodnadatta Hotel his mother was warming up her voice in the shower. Bean popped a tablet and lay back on the single bed with the pale blue, chenille bedspread, the type with tasselled edges. He was thinking about the old man with his chicken feathers and his weird world in the sun. He was thinking about his own existence: the carnage of his journeys, and the heavy weight of life and death on the road. It had become difficult for him now to draw a distinction between himself and the roads they had travelled. He and the roads merged, inseparable, both leading to destruction.

On the road, Bean has become just one more life for the taking.

Darren Hunter

Water

The fountain cascades

Over the rocks to endless solace,

Cleanses their dirt, refreshes their thirst.

The homeless search

A glimpse of ecstasy,

A moment of purity in its depths.

Crevice and caves

Deep below the surface,

Veins of sustenance to the world above.

A dripping tap testament, worth forgotten , ignored and rejected,

Abused, misused and strangely eternal.

Jane Clayton

The housekeeper

Nobody knew His name, or where Mrs Peterson found Him. He had an ageless, forgettable face, and the kind of eyes that didn't wince at pain, or weep at funerals, or laugh with children. His murky gaze saw nothing in particular, except the path to Mrs Peterson's front door, and his shaven chin glowed a ghostly white, the colour of cemented tree stumps in a supermarket car-park. He didn't wear a uniform, or drive a company van, or wear a sew-on badge that said VIP Home Services-We Come to Your Door. People guessed He wasn't in the phone book.

Still, the neighbours knew He was of great consolation to poor Mrs Peterson, who was widowed last autumn, and who'd started to forget things on account of her being alone. She told them at Retired Citizen's meetings that although He lacked the conventional effervescence of youth, He was nonetheless unusually sensitive to the troubles of an ageing woman and did many things around the house without even being asked. 'He's very clean,' she told them again, 'and always very prompt. Of course He needs more colour, poor boy. Not eating enough vegetables, I expect.'

Old Man Morris watched through the washing lines and the overgrown Strelitzia, but it was difficult to see, even with his glasses, and no-one took much notice of him anyway.

On Tuesdays He came at four minutes to ten. He brought with Him the kind of bucket and mop used in country hospitals and kept in the dark laundries of expensive boarding schools, and He carried them like a grave digger with a shovel. Under His other arm He held an injured cardboard box from the local fruit store, filled with assorted bottles, sprays, and sponges and held together with a piece of brown string. He moved like the shadow of a Hearse. Not even the fallen almond leaves crackled where He walked.

Old Man Morris thought He looked like a returned soldier from the war, but without the hunch of broken innocence and pretended to water the geraniums as He sauntered up the driveway to Number Thirty-Two.

Mrs. Peterson greeted Him with heavily buttered date loaf and lemon cordial. They sat for a while in her linoleum kitchen, listening to the imitation applause of a gameshow on the sunroom television. Mrs. Peterson told Him how she planned to be a contestant on the show one day soon. 'I've always been excellent at Trivial Pursuit, you know. My husband John, God rest his soul, always said he married me because I had both brains and beauty...' Little pieces of chewed up date loaf sprayed over the embroidered table-cloth as she spoke. He wiped His chin. '...And when I win,' she told Him excitedly, 'I'll give you the lawn-mower. My daughter Shirley says you always win a lawn-mower.' She patted Him on the hand and showed her double chin.

When Mrs Peterson had gone for her nap, He moved into the living room with His green feather duster, and began sweeping her Salvation Army furniture in small, spiritless strokes. Soon the room moved to clouds of swirling dust, the colour of the morning sun. There were no photographs of grown-up children or deceased relatives to polish, or peculiar home-made gifts from great grandchildren to rearrange. He had made sure of that. Only the porcelain figurines which Mrs. Peterson made in china painting class occupied her otherwise empty shelves, and with these He took great care, cleaning the folds of their skirts and the creases of their bonnets with His thin, ironed handkerchief.

Old Man Morris pruned his miniature roses and was careful not to stare. He saw His black form shift behind the lace curtains, and snipped closer to the fence.

On the mahogany hall-stand He discovered six unopened envelopes, their corners bent to the shape of the mail box and their addresses swollen by the rain. He inspected each one with His soft, purple fingers, turning them over like newly unearthed fossils, and fanning them out like cards in a poker game. He stroked their wrinkled seals and squeezed their unread words. Then He slid them silently into His back pocket, careful not to have their Air Mail stamps showing over the rim, and swept the feather-duster over the place where they had been.

Later she would come to Him, weeping, having forgotten. 'They never write to me anymore,' she would sob in her child's voice. 'They don't need me... have moved away... don't care, never cared... I miss them terribly...' And He would pull the pink crocheted rug over her knees and make her a cup of tea with two sugars and play Rachmaninov's 18th variation of Opus 43 on the Wertheim piano. She would smile weakly and dose her eyes. 'John's favourite song,' she would say. 'You're such a dear. I don't know what I'd do without you.'

Old Man Morris dug up last year's bulbs and sprinkled parsley seeds over the wet soil, humming Tie a Yellow Ribbon, and stopping now and again to glance up at the grey smoke which coiled out of Mrs. Peterson's chimney.

In the kitchen, He noticed that she still put out a bowl of milk for the cat He knew would never come home. He emptied it and together with the collar and bell that she kept in a soup tin beside the toaster, hid it behind the jars of home-made jam and pickled onions in a dark cupboard where she could never reach.

Then He took her thick lensed reading glasses, which had been resting on a recipe for pumpkin scones and ground the heel of His boot into the right lens, her good eye, so that when He looked through them, He saw only the fractured colours of a Cubist garden. She would not notice the breakage immediately but soon, when she discovered that she couldn't read the star signs in next month's issue of Woman's Weekly, she would curse herself for not taking proper care. Then she would guiltily ask Him to visit Dr. Eliot, her optometrist of twenty years, on her behalf to bring her back a new right lens. And she would feel vulnerable and ashamed, because she couldn't drive and because she feared the steps leading up to Dr. Eliot's office. But when He returned, she would be happy to see again, call Him 'a true gem', and invite Him for roasted lamb and butterscotch pudding to show her appreciation.

But now she awoke, her cobwebbed, silver hair falling in angry wisps around her weathered face. He knew she'd forgotten to take the yellow pill which He left by her bedside and imagined Himself discovering it months later,

with others of different colours, behind her Queen Anne chest of drawers. She turned on Him with banshee eyes. 'Don't just stand there, man! Bring the buggy round and fetch my books. The children will be waiting... how dreadful to be late... and I haven't any clothes!' She stumbled around the living room, half naked under her woollen dressing gown, bending under chairs and bookshelves and crying 'Where are my lessons?'

Before she fell, He caught her with His pencil arms and they sat, lent up against the piano stool, staring dumbly into their own reflections cast in the doors of the glass cabinet. 'We'll never be there on time now,' she whimpered softly. He remembered later that she looked transparent in the living-room light. 'Who will take care of the children?' she questioned Him with her pale, watery eyes.

'I will! He told her and held her awkwardly.

Old Man Morris saw Him close the blistered gate and weave his way through the garden gnomes, bird baths and rows of potted petunias. He waited until He disappeared behind the almond trees, before he turned off the sprinklers and sat his boots by the rusted water-can. Then he went inside to sit alone.

Richard Littleton

The seven stages

[Memory before memory](#)

[Curiosity](#)

[Hyperactivity](#)

[Religious Fervour](#)

[Scizophrenia](#)

[Spartacus](#)

[Melodius](#)

Memory before memory

Meditation upon
the genesis
of this life
in the womb
holds no firm
memory

No perception

no care
no understanding
except
as young children
my twin
and I
would tell the story of
the circus
in mummy's tummy

And how
her belly button

Was
the spy hole
to
the world

The younger twins
the little boys
would sit
wide eyed
and perhaps
wonder why
they
had no such fun
together
in that same womb
that same space
as they knew not
that identical experience
blossoms
in as many
shapes and colours
as can be
imagined

Curiosity

Rats and rascals
lizards and gizzards
the time
curiosity killed the cat
cause the cat food
eaten

the puppy dog
sleepin'
the skink
hidden under the mat

Snakes and rakes
snails in pails
a thousand grass blades
bet
catch the yabbies
nippin'
climb down mountains
slippin'
the hermit crab
died as my pet

Hyperactivity

Run, run round the oval we go
fast over grass
I race for the lead
and pass
the fat kid

C'mon Aussie
you can make it
he huffs and puffs
but does not care
gasping for air

Round the oval
run some more
skinny limbs beat the ground
as I over take
lovely Alice

Her hair blows back
cheeks are pink
I feel a stir
at the graceful stride
with nothing to hide

Round the oval
why does Mr Peters
run us so
first thing for the day
this running display

There is Mark
the athlete
with tall strong strides he laps me
as I run away
my hyperactivity

Religious fervour

The fresh, innocent beauty
of those girls
in my youth group
drove me wild
as the sexual energy
created
down there
made emotions override
any rational thought

Burning desire would
engulf
my slim, lithe frame
and consume my inhibitions
on those glorious Church
camps
Hallelujah!
Praise the Lord!

The games that we played
out of innocence
trying to control
that energy and lust
would lead
to clumsy kisses
crushes
and voluptuous nights

Schizophrenia

This quiet modest school boy
contrasts the storm within
a hormones and drug cocktail
made the world spin

He undermines the influence
of those authority figures
with dirty rock'n'rollers
and sleazy nightclub sniggers

Courtesy became the way
to get his way in life
in between gyrating cars and
stumbling, tumbling strife

Study in the bedroom
never was a good look
he prefers to keep the illusion
whilst reading a favoured book

Friends were icons
full of drama, style, poise
and bad influence
as virtue was no choice

That time was disjointed
schizophrenic is the word
a time of switching roles
between anarchist and nerd

Spartacus She-Devil

Hang boy hang
from your net of lies
catch some unsuspecting flies
with the bright red back

it is no warning
to the innocent
who you intend to trap
in the devious convictions
of the ego
that exudes from the soul

a barrier between the world and yourself
suck it dry
suck the life from that worthless being
it was created for you to kill
destiny exists only for you
to cut the thread

entrapped in your own spindles
of deception
the corpses
of your conquests lying below
as new life is sought to drain
for your ego

your fucking ego

get a life

just believe in the world
before you selfishly
destroy it

Melodious

the rhythm of existence
is present
in the tender touch
of your physical form

musical intonation
of a classical piece

dignity

perfect time with reality

melody

a beautiful melody
that weaves
between and around
my hum

to forge a complex rhythm
which flows between
our instruments
de l'amour
as they play mischievously
together

Emma Barber

Yesterday: recollections of childhood

Childhood to me now is a little sanctuary in the mind. Like when I browse through my shelves of books and spy my favourite picture book wedged between the heavy texts of the classics. Such an unearthing delights the senses. And this is how it is when childhood memories are recollected. It is like inviting an old and weathered dog of the streets to lie down before a blazing wood fire. So whenever I feel cold and weary a memory of childhood injects me with warmth and makes me recognise the potential in many things.

Even now when I walk into a familiar room of the house, a strange smell from the past seizes me, as if the past and its people were vibrantly alive in the room and as soon as I had opened the door their images had vanished, leaving only traces of their smell behind as a token of their presence. In our spare room, where all the ironing teeters in piles, I have twice caught the scent of my great grandmother. Whenever we visited her on a Saturday, she sat nestled in rolls of flab and fat and old clothes, trapped in her yellow sticky vinyl chair, reeking of mustiness, dustiness and that old woman smell of urine and body odour, which I often associated with the ladies' toilets down by the railway line. She would poke at my cousin and me viciously with her wooden stick, making Cheryl cry, but always wheeling out her table with an assortment of tea cakes and bread and butter for everyone. Cheryl and I would steal into her room and tinker with her old woman's jewellery: strings of iridescent beads, fake pearl necklaces and tawdry brooches picked up at jumble sales. Her bedroom was pungent with grandmother smells and it seemed as if the sunken double bed, the fly-littered windowsill and even the whole bungalow were stagnating with age in a stagnant England. And this is how the spare room felt after such an encounter with the past: musty with age, but glittering with that close brush of childhood which makes the skin prickle.

Often in the same room I caught wisps of Ralph's aftershave, my young laddish uncle with ruddy cheeks, twinkling

eyes and brown hair. I fell in love with him at the age of five and whenever he hugged me I breathed in the stench of his aftershave, aroused, believing his smell to be pure masculinity.

One symbol of my childhood which represents total domestic security and harmony is the image of a bowl of porridge on the windowsill left to cool. Mam made me porridge for supper and it was often too hot to eat immediately, so the winter chill from the black night outside would sneak its wispy white fingers through the open window and cool my porridge, prepared so lovingly by my mother in the warmth of the kitchen, a protective barrier from night-time creatures lurking in the bleak world outside. My mother was a fortress against fearful things and the memory of a bowl of porridge steaming on the windowsill, out into the frosty night, was symbolic of her maternal bond with me.

Seasons and semi-detached suburbia were the settings of my golden years. Daffodils and crocuses heralded spring and the new life of Easter. Blue speckled eggs, smashed and unhatched, were curiosities found in the hedge in our back garden. In the backstreet, a room within a large shrub made an ideal place for my cousin and I to make a camp. We had a kitchen (marked with a primitive fireplace, surrounded by large stones), a toilet area (over the neighbour's garden wall) and a lounge (with log seating and tin-can tables). It was an idyllic hideaway. The leafy wallpaper went from green to bloody red in the course of the seasons, and in winter our camp let us chill in its nudity. Our place of innocence was eventually corrupted by local bullies who, while we were away, wrote out hundreds and hundreds of little insults on torn paper, pegging them up in our camp on the numerous sharp twig-ends which pricked the air.

The underpass to Barmston was an area for trouble makers to congregate. The orange electric light flickered illicitly in the four o'clock darkness. Here punks in spiked jackets and spikier hair smoked and swore and sprayed neon messages in this dark tunnel of trouble. Mothers and old ladies breezed past hurriedly rustling their shopping bags and whispering nervously about having to get home to put the sprouts on, so there better be no hassle because they had to have tea ready by half past four. I looked at gangs of marauding hoons with fascination. They had a sense of the forbidden about them, a rebelliousness which they threw at you in one look. These were the sort who'd gluesniff at the churchyard and who'd piss on snow creations children had made in the wintertime, daubing even a winter wonderland with graffiti most vile. Undercurrents of anarchy were perceptible to me then as a six year old, and I felt a yearning to taste it, but knowing my time would come, it did not bother me too much. I realised later as an adolescent that I should have had my teen years where I had my childhood: in the early 80s of Thatcherite Britain. I hated being a depressed teen in a sunny country, I needed a dismal setting as a backdrop so I could wallow even further in puberty blues.

One day in the school yard, which was swamped with deep and long silver mirror puddles, I announced to my circle of friends that I was going to Australia to live.

'Oooh, you'll get to see real live kangaroos and koala bears!' exclaimed Tina.

'Don't forget to check under the toilet seat for those redback spiders and creepy crawlies,' advised Kelly sagely.

'So which part will you be living in then?' perked up one of the twins, 'Sydney or Melbourne?'

'Neither,' I said, 'I'll be going to Adelaide. It's the capital of South Australia.'

My schoolmates stared at me blankly, their mouths open and wet, like guppy fish at feeding time.

'Adelaide?' they droned.

I sighed at their lack of geographical knowledge.

'Oh, yeah,' cried Anthony Edwards, 'that's where they have the Grand Prix!'

This acknowledgment broke the dumbfoundedness of the others and they nodded and chirped in agreement. The bell tolled and called us into our lines. I whispered excitedly to Mrs Henderson the good news. She recommended I borrow a globe from class to show everyone where Australia was. 'And Adelaide too,' I said to myself. Little did I know that my emigration to Australia lowered the curtain on the golden stage of my childhood.

When I departed from Newcastle by train, I was too excited to notice my cousin Cheryl shrieking and sobbing in her mother's arms at my departure. I was thinking ahead of the stop-over in Los Angeles, and days at Disneyland and the Hawaiian Isles, which to me in grey England appeared like a peachy tropical hideaway unknown to the rest of the world. And when I arrived in Australia from my wild American jaunt, I was overwhelmed with longing for my cousin who I viewed as a sister. Instead at the airport I met with a new cousin with long ginger hair and freckles: a wild cat and spoilt brat in the domain of cousinship. She would turn the TV off when I was watching it, and when my mam came home from work she would grapple with me and push me out of the way to be the first to give a greeting hug. I missed the dusky autumn eyes and the hazel curls of Cheryl even more and I would be moved to tears thinking of her when I heard the sentimental Billboard song, Somewhere Out There.

This emigration marked the end of innocence for me, pure innocence that is. In Adelaide at eight, I still had not grown up, I still liked to muck around with kids in the street, but my sense of family security outside of my parents and my sense of belonging were displaced. Here I had a second childhood, which wasn't a childhood as such, but felt like being in limbo between childhood and adolescence. This is especially weird when adolescence is a limbo of its own.

At school I immediately became an outsider, even though I had good friends and was well-liked. My Englishness was a novelty to them and they abused it like spoilt brats with a new toy. I was pestered daily to recite the alphabet, so they could laugh at my "a's" which sounded like "e's." I clung stubbornly to my accent and over the years it mellowed into an accent of its own, the rough Geordieness smoothed over by Adelaide clarity, evolving into an obscurity neither distinctly Adelaidean nor North-Eastern. It became my own signature of alienation and distance from my peers.

In Australia, I began to see cracks in what was once a stable world. I noticed my parents were arguing frequently. My father had bought into a sinking business via a swindling family member, and was subsequently bitter and depressed. Once I heard my mother scream for a divorce and I hid behind the cane swivel chair staring hard out of the window at the neighbouring street where my young aunt and uncle lived, fresh from England also, wishing and praying that they'd come over and resolve everything. Within five minutes they crossed the road to call in and I ran out to them bawling, begging for comfort and reassurance. My uncle told me not to be silly and my dad dismissed them, saying it was a bad time. I soon began to realise that I felt far away from my own father and that it was, supposedly, weak of a woman to cry.

Between the ages of eight and thirteen I felt like I was in a void. On the outside I was a shy and polite growing girl, but on the inside I yearned for my golden childhood with the sisterly cousinship, the wintry magical Christmases, the definitive seasons and the merriment and security of a family beloved. Each night in bed I would cry and I would contemplate death and where it would take me. I concluded that heaven was the most treasured moment in someone's life played over repeatedly. Heaven for me would be flinging open gran's lounge room door to the smell of butter and hot cakes and hearing the broad Geordie chatter of my aunts and uncles, sipping sherry in front of the gas fire, the snow outside feathering the leaded windows white. My cousin and I would be tampering

with gran's china ornaments, or playing tiddlywinks in the hallway as Blankety Blanks buzzed audibly from the television set. This was heaven for me in those empty years and subsequently I couldn't wait to die.

On my return to England at the age of seventeen, I went back to the old house, eager to see what impression it gave me. My childhood memories of it were accurate and I was not disappointed. Other things had changed, though. Some key family members such as gran and Aunt Rita had since passed away, and as a result the family didn't have as many gatherings as it used to. My cousin Cheryl, whom I remembered as timid, kind and charming, was round and buxom and employed these gifts to flirtation and exploration of men much older than herself. She did not have many opinions or passions, except the common youth hatred of Mackhams (Sunderland dwellers) and 'Traceys' and 'Sharons' (tarty girls with dyed blond hair and the roots showing). When I discussed our childhood friendship, she criticised that I was bossy and horrible to her. This contradicted my perception of our bond and I was left stunned, with nothing but the hollow of a memory I had once so revered.

Sometimes I wonder if the passing of time embellishes the memories of childhood. It was not until I was removed from the England of my childhood that I actually reminisced about it. While I was still in England, I had no need to look back because I had so much to look forward to. As the good times began to peter out in Australia, summoning warm images of the past gave me solace. Recently, I have experienced the excitement of memories through festivities and the occasional reunion. In the future, I hope to relive my childhood again through my own children and I strongly believe that the imprint of a joyful childhood will be passed down to generations still unborn.

Kim Mann

[Later, after the wedding](#)

It was beautiful; flowers gorged together, everyone
young and old, happy and coloured
-or anyone would have thought it
but

I was there that night, hovering in the kitchen
and from the other room,
every clank of cutlery sang loud
-an abomination in my ears
a quiet dinner... at a table to long for the
silence

and the two souls at it.

Tina Morganela

The two o'clock hour

I enter the vast, cavernous Art Gallery of South Australia, stepping out of the startling sunshine into the quiet atmosphere of the building. I pass through a lofty foyer of pale blue, echoing the sky outside. Rodins pause frozen in violent movement, greeting me and urging me into the Gallery Rooms. Their grotesque, headless bodies are hard and dark against the powder blue. But through the archways into the rooms the walls turn vibrant red, sombre and engulfing – the air so still in between. The space is enormous; the hum of an indistinguishable machine lends a sound of movement in the otherwise static atmosphere. Honey-coloured polished floorboards stretch ahead of me. The high roof tilts away as I pause to stretch my neck far back. The ceiling is opaque with squares of frosted glass which mute the light. Large panels bordered with simple green and white flowers circle the ceiling. I walk over to a green leather circular sofa in the centre of the gallery of 20C Australian Art. Its cushions groan pleasantly as I settle in.

Before me is a mass of gilt framed squares. Patches of dark oils, splashes of impetuous colour. Looming landscapes of dark storms and harsh countryside. Smiles from faces suspended in a moment of history, painted by eyes that saw them. The rustle of nature and the chatting of people suddenly halted, trapped in a medium but thick with implication. I turn to see a stern old man looking at me. Blankly, without curiosity. His eyes are furrowed, his grim mouth partly hidden by an elaborate beard, white and soft. His head is cocked slightly to one side. I want to say something, defend my blatant scrutiny of the gallery. But Henry Parker would no longer hear mine or any other comments about him – he has long ceased to exist since Tom Roberts painted him. Strangers, alive and painted slide in and out of the gallery creating little and just existing.

I wait for the daily guided tour to start. My island in the middle of the room affords me the luxury of seeing deep into both galleries on either side. I wait in the close

silence;

silence;

silence.

Like whole breaths. A quality of silence – not absolute but respectful.

Time has a knack of dragging in the gallery. People step brightly into the rooms but then immediately slow down and walk carefully, softly, trying not to intrude on the peace. They pass through archways thoughtfully, glancing from side to side and then choosing one to view first. Fingertips to chin as they side step shyly along the walls, following the paintings in a linear formation. Eyes squint. They read the plaques and then squint again. Haughty faces smile stiffly back. Then they cross the floor in a slow rhythmic dance. In front of a square painting, they shuffle; pause. Step closer, step back. Pause and look. Crossed arms and frowning faces. Mouths slightly open in ignorant appreciation or eyes looking down the slope of noses full of obvious knowledge. The arms swing behind backs and chins are jerked in the air as they cross the gallery floor. The sense of expectation is such that one can almost discern the gentle lick of padding piano keys and expect to see tall women in sumptuous ball gowns dance across the parquet.

At the Art Gallery entrance, a short distance to my left, an announcement signals the commencement of a special tour. I glance through the archways and see a group of about eight women who all seem to be in their 50s and 60s. They chatter thinly, the content pleasant and hollow. Formal black and brown handbags are passed over the front desk to be kept safe. The dull sound of sensible shoes shuffling softly. Strong faces composed, calm; expectant. An elderly gentleman appears through a door on the right and smiles briskly at them. He gives them a polite and enthusiastic greeting.

Consulting his neat clipboard for a moment he then holds his hand in the air seeking their attention. They fall quickly silent and listen to his opening spiel. I gather this is a formal, organised tour rather than the daily free one as they each collect a small, backless folding chair. He ushers them through to the first gallery and encourages them to make themselves comfortable. Arranging themselves automatically into a neat circle around the guide, their collective appearance is fussy and careful. Smiling obediently they turn their faces towards him like sunflowers following the sun. Curious, patient; obedient.

The guide is tall and elegant through his ordinary grey suit. His long arms wave gracefully with each explanation of detail. His hands delicate and fingers careful in movement. Through his voice runs a measurable current of passion, the highs and lows of his voice are melodic and eager. It is clear that he not only sees the paintings, he sees beyond them; he holds knowledge. Standing before a painting I cannot see from my angle of vision, he picks out a particular detail in the brush strokes. I hear eloquent speech with English overtones. Snatches about Shelley and his connection with the painting. There is a quiet moment as he clears his throat and then begins to recite to the enraptured women, lines of poetry. The rich music of his voice gently resounds through the sober air, soothing. The words are enounced clearly and with easy understanding. Stillness overcomes the women and their eyes fix onto the guide. They lean in towards him. Carefully their gaze drifts from his animated face to the innocent painting being gently berated by his recitation. He flicks long fingers across his high forehead, brushing away white hair which gently falls across his eyebrows.

People hover close by the group, not knowing whether they are 'allowed' to join in the listening – guilty because they didn't pay a fee that included tea and scones. The group of women are enclosed in a sanctity of inclusion. Their guide looks at each of them in the eye and gives them words and understanding. They would no longer look into the face of a painting without wanting insight; without wondering about the days and months and lives involved before the paint was first struck on canvas. His prominent eyebrows raised and furrowed in time with his lyrics. He finished the last line with an orchestrated pause... then a flourish. Hums of pleasure erupted from the ladies. A shy chuckle of awe escaped one or two. He smiled and rocked on the balls of his feet nervously, fingering the papers in front of him. Waiting for the women to finish looking at the painting. And they looked with barely disguised fascination. Trying to find the words there, trying to see the picture he had just created.

Two children burst into the room. Chaos and a cacophony of laughter. They are in the opposite gallery and though the women turn slightly they are not too distracted. They are too busy picking up their chairs and shuffling onto the other side of the room in state of amused pleasure. Enthusiastically the guide bids them to follow him to the next painting – a mythical subject painted in soft, shady tones. They walk behind in clusters, chatting to each other excitedly. Some are serious and others giggle like schoolgirls.

The ladies followed, circled and sat. Like birds their heads tilt from side to side quickly, eyes darting from him to painting and back again. They lean forward on their stools, faces open and eyes screwed in at the edges with concentration.

The children run screaming with glee across the parquetry. A small blond girl waves her arms in a furious run for my leather sofa. Her widened-eyes glint with naughtiness. She hurls herself on and her thin little ponytail flicks her cheeks. Her sturdy smaller brother also launches himself at the couch. Furious giggling and squirming. They clamber behind me, making wonderfully loud rude noises. An ominous silence befalls them when the unmistakable clomp of angry footsteps crosses the floor.

Two loud smacks resonate through the quiet air. Their mother, gave them both a sharp slap across the face and snarled a curt order to 'Be QUIET!' She walks calmly back to the stroller she left a few metres away. The children behind me begin to giggle gently again, unfazed or perhaps used to their mother's outburst. They happily dive off the couch and dash madly into the next gallery. The stalking mother and pusher gave chase. The multitude of overwhelmingly sized paintings barely register in their field of vision. The enormity of space seems to remind them of freedom and they splash about in the copious quantity of vacant air, instinctively aware that this was a room for adults with nothing they could touch or throw. The shouts of the children happily ricochet off the blood

walls long after I have lost sight of them.

'...highly erotic. I'll explain why...' the guide was saying firmly. A short cough. The guide clears his throat. The women respond with high-pitched murmurs and broad smiles. He fingers his glasses lying on his chest. Then rubs his upper lip and pinches his nose as he begins to speak. His fingertips follow the curve of the seductress in the painting as he explains her significance. One of the ladies leans forward on her elbows. He tells them about the shadowy female figure, shimmering in moonlight and veiled in a flimsy gown standing over the muscular scantily clad soldier, weakened in her presence. The women coo in appreciation. Then the guide points to a small face peering out from the trees behind the lovers and notes that he holds a net, ready to capture the soldier. 'Oh' say the women in long sighs. Again they have been allowed in. Other people had stood before the painting for a few seconds to admire the quality of detail and moved on to the next. The faces of the women were wondrous.

In the awkward pause of rampant silent thoughts, the guide abruptly consults his clipboard and falters slightly. He loses his way only for a moment and then returns to the hero of the painting. He smiles as he speaks, as if he were going to say something delicately rude. He takes out a handkerchief and wipes his nose roughly as he talks. Then he smoothly tucks the neat grey square away. The words he uses are diplomatic but the woman giggle at his implications. '...reminiscent of Botticelli.' 'Oh yes!' they say, perhaps imaging Venus swaying to the beach in her shell. More chuckles hidden behind powdery hands.

A loud bell sharpens the soft air and the guide's smile instantly hardens into a stern grimace. An announcement for another tour breaks the reverie and renders him quiet for a moment. He says something sharp with a nod and a rude jab towards the ceiling, where the loudspeakers are and the ladies laugh gaily out loud. He decides he has spoken enough about the mystical lovers and gathers his flock together. Onwards they go, towards the modern art. He points them far beyond my vision, up a flight of distant stairs. The faithful waft past with a blur of colours and conservative perfumes, curiosity and enjoyment evident in their quickened pace and lively conversation. The back of their heads nod together, hands rest lightly on opposite shoulders and then are thrown up in an expression of delight. The guide walks behind them looking at them indulgently. As he passes me, confident, without the careful pace of the ignorant, I catch a smile smudge across his face. He gives my notebook and me an easy nod and acknowledgment. But not entry.

Gina-Kate /Inverarity

The sleeping beauty

Once upon a time in a kingdom far away — no, wait: Once upon a time in a small Australian country town a daughter was born to a king and queen. No, not a king and queen after all, but a school teacher and a psychologist. The daughter was me and everyone who looked upon me in my cradle was enchanted by my fair beauty. No, no they weren't. Actually, I was bald and brown and often mistaken for a boy until I was four. However, the school teacher and psychologist had planned carefully for a child for a long time and were quite pleased with themselves despite my pixie-like appearance.

The people who looked upon me in my cradle were not the noble folk of the kingdom but the humble country folk from the surrounding farms. They bore gifts of lambs-wool booties and towelling bibs; not golden goblets and

jewels. The women came laden with casseroles and cakes so the psychologist wouldn't have to bother with cooking for a few days. The only thing to go wrong at this baby inspection was that someone had neglected to invite Mrs Hardy, the president of the CWA. She was a hard-nosed, blunt, large-breasted, intimidating widow who ruled the CWA with an iron fist in a studded leather glove and wore lavender floral dress sets and sensible, stiff, black, lace-up shoes. Towards the end of the baby inspection she sailed into our farmhouse lounge room, dumped her plate of lamingtons on the sideboard and shouldering her way through, and peered into my cradle. She poked my round baby tummy with her ham fist and crusty fingernails and turned my head from side to side examining my ears, which tend to stick out slightly from my head.

The school teacher and psychologist clung to each other, unsure of how to protect their princess from the wicked witch. Finally, Mrs Hardy declared; 'she's a vile thing, she'll cause you no end of trouble and bring the whole district to rack and ruin!' And sailed out of the room, handbag jammed under her scaly elbow. When the screen door banged, the psychologist bundled me into her arms, crooning comfortingly. The school teacher looked worried, clearly he would have to pay closer attention to 'Taming Your Toddler' for future reference. Then Mrs Sheridan laid a comforting hand on the psychologist's arm and said, 'Don't worry dear, I'm sure she wouldn't bring the whole district to ruin but perhaps it is in her nature to be wild.'

Despite this inauspicious beginning, the princess, I mean me, had a happy childhood. I played in trees and ripped my dresses and rode my bike around and around the house and escaped to the farm next-door, as often as I could to play with the five boys there. We played on tractors and tore around on trail-bikes and explored the drain pipe underneath the highway. We played in the clay mud next to the dams, fished for yabbies, caught mice and tied string to their tails and pulled them up out of their holes. We climbed on the roofs of machinery sheds and abseiled down the corrugated iron walls. We rode harvesters, balanced on the roofs as on the wings of an old plane, and we trained pigs and sheep to run in complicated patterns and race in steeple chases.

Once I even trained a pig to dressage but then she was mercilessly taken to be slaughtered. Occasionally, I even dressed up in my cousin's bridesmaid dress and flitted around the garden pretending to be in great danger, peeping around corners to see if my knight in shining armour had shown up yet to save me. Not that I needed saving from anything, really.

One day, the princess, me, was sitting in some dirt, somewhere near the track leading to the palace, I mean farmhouse. I had just had my sixteenth birthday but was not yet the clean, tidy, marriageable young woman the CWA women were hoping for. It was particularly dusty, it hadn't rained for weeks, the wheat crops in the paddocks had wilted and drooped, their heads of grain still only small. Mrs Hardy was still the autocratic, manic dictator of the CWA but by this time the other women had organised an underground branch that met in secret every week in the trendy new cafe in nearby Kingston — somewhere Mrs Hardy was very unlikely to go. Mrs Hardy had never changed her opinion of my fate and whenever she spotted me out trail biking or spoggy shooting she renewed her monologue on my troublesome-ness with fresh vigour and spite. Now, she was saying that the lack of rain was my fault, that ever since I was born, I'd done nothing but bring bad luck and ill-fortune to the region, as well as destroying the reputation of the five farm boys next-door with my foolhardy, irresponsible pranks. The truth was nowhere near that dramatic, but as I sat in the dusty dirt that day I felt quite hurt at her latest bout of irrational accusations. She'd even demanded that my parents move to the city and put me in a proper girl's school where I could be taught some manners and schooled to some semblance of ladylikeness.

The drought dragged on, everyone began to look raggedy and forlorn. Year after year it didn't rain and the work went to waste. The five farm boys next-door stopped wanting me to play with them, their parents needed their help on the farm and I became lonely and listless.

One day I came home after half-heartedly harassing with rocks some crows that were feeding on a dead sheep in a paddock. I fell onto the couch in front of the telly and didn't move. The teacher and the psychologist were very worried. I'd never been known to pay more than five seconds worth of attention to the television before. It became known throughout the kingdom, I mean, local district, that the princess was unable to stir from the couch and that anyone who could draw her attention from the television could have her hand in marriage, or come to some agreement with the school teacher and the psychologist.

Many young men came and danced about in-front of the television set or made passionate declarations of love. Some even tried to bully the princess into moving which nearly made the princess get up to punch them in the face. But it was all to no avail. The princess could do nothing but stare past them at Donahue or Oprah in a kind of waking coma and all the young men went away exhausted and defeated by the wall of stony silence around the princess.

One day though, a young man called D'Arcy Charming, or Prince Charming to his mates, rode through the district in his Holden station wagon on his way to the coast for a surf. He heard about the plight of the princess in the local pub and was deeply concerned by this tragedy.

The very next day he inquired at the farmhouse about the opportunity to charm the princess out of her apathy. By this time the teacher and the psychologist were at their wits end and desperate to let anyone have a go, even a dread-locked surfer. They showed him into the lounge room and he stalked across the room and yanked the television cord out of the wall. Oprah paused mid-sentence.

'Come on babe! We're going surfing.'

Well, how could any princess resist?! That afternoon the princess (me) and Prince Charming, a dread-locked surfer, could be seen heading for the coast in a Holden station wagon.

Angus McAulay

When I wish upon a star

While gazing into the long cold night
my eye caught sight of a flash of light
that shooting star my vigil had sought
owed me a wish
or so I thought

Memories of Midas, I'd better take care

a foolish wish can end in despair
the Monkey's Paw, its grip like a vice
a selfish wish may have a terrible price
watch your words came some inner advice
be suspicious when making wishes

The bean counter cried let's wish for cash
it's the way to comfort, a cosy great stash
a million, no six billion, truckloads of the stuff!
but then there's Midas and Murdoch
it's never quite enough
what a terrible tyrant money can be
lose sight of need
succumb to greed
the halfway line I couldn't quite see

Wish for love pleaded the dreamer
That's where happiness lies
Remembered warm valleys of comfort and bliss
the tenderness of a lingering kiss
Where living was the joy in another's eyes

But said the logical one, there's love all-around
of a child, a parent, a lover, a friend
love has many faces, many things can it mean
you also love autumn, the beach and ice cream
love is best left to its own devices
so spend your wish on one of your vices

Besides, whispered the cynic
love and happiness often digress
There's much risk of pain
though you may be blessed

Well let's keep it simple and well defined
a night of passion, on lust I shall dine
a head job from heaven will do for a start
pleasures of the flesh, no affair of the heart

Sex can be purchased the bean counter roared
it's a fleeting pleasure and you'll again be bored
take the money you bloody fool
and get your mind off your one eyed tool

Well you must be precise warned that wicked star
For wishes are words and I bend them far
Now a wisher last night
got a hell of a fright

Was thinking of Madoru1a, when wishing fellatio
But lost in heavenly dreaming, he didn't quite say so
Shoulda' seen the look on his dial
When he got the Reverend Fred Nile

While pausing to consider this horrible fate
a second passed, it was almost too late
Soon to be swallowed by the blackness of night
that tempting star, no longer so bright

So as it faded like a closing door
I wished that next time...
I'd know what to wish for

Shannon Lloyd

The modernist (mis)conception

In early 1922, I purchased an old desk from a friend of mine who dealt in antiques. It was well used and far from modern in style, but nonetheless quite beautiful. I shall not, however; waste your time with flowery descriptions. Such things I leave in the hands of the Romantics, if they still exist. So I placed the desk in my library. A few days later; while examining the various drawers and recesses, I came across a small key. It had been attached to the underside of one of the drawers and, as I soon discovered, it opened a door which covered, or rather was the back of the desk. Inside this compartment I found a collection of papers. It was not a manuscript, but what appeared to be a terribly, incoherent and disjointed journal. The hand was French, which I could read and the writing covered a period from early 1867 until late 1870. Inside the back cover was the name Ducasse. A few discrete enquiries revealed that I had in my possession the Parisian journal of Isidore Ducasse, the self-titled Comte de Lautreamont and author of the now celebrated surrealist masterpiece Maldoror. Little is known of him, but he died in mysterious circumstances, in Paris on 24 November 1810, aged 24. The following piece is an entry of his, dated 6 September [1870].

Today I met the most extraordinary young man. He could not have been more than 15 years old, although he claimed, with admirable violence, that he was 17. He was seated alone at Dinochau's, which was nearly empty. Thank God! Those wretched bohemians have moved along to some other doomed establishment. I wonder whom they shall send into bankruptcy this time! Old Mme Dinochau spent a whole year trying to work out Emile

[Durandeu's] account. When it came to more than 18,000 francs, she died of a stroke. Anyway, I went out early today. I had been up until early this morning, composing more verses with the aid of my piano. I really cannot write without it anymore. It seems, however, that some of the other people in my building disapprove of my playing. One of them woke me at dawn by banging loudly on the wall. I am not sure if it is the piano that they do not like, or the fact that I shout out my improvised verses as I go. I dropped in at the publishers to see just what those damned editors are doing to my book. It really is disgraceful to see those butchers at work. I could barely recognise my own writing. I have been seriously contemplating destroying the entire manuscript, as it is becoming less and less a piece of me. After arguing my views, I went to Dinochau's to get myself a drink, or rather to get drunk. They were closed when I went past the first time. It seems that they do not open until ten o'clock, so I went to a few bookstores to pass the time. Damned Henri! He still will not let me into his store! Everyone knows that it was an accident. And anyway, not that much got burnt! If he is not careful, he will lose his best customer. So, I returned to Dinochau's at around eleven. The sun was out in a cloudless sky. I can no longer stand the daytime. What is it with all this light in the middle of the day? It is so uselessly bright! It was, much to my relief, cool and dark inside the cafe. I usually sit away from the windows, where there are less people, but when I went in today I saw, sitting alone at a window table in the corner, the young man whom I spoke of before. He sat with his eyes downturned and a sullen look on his face. There was a pipe and a bag of tobacco on the table in front of him, but he was not smoking. He did not look up when I came in, but I had the distinct impression that he knew that I was standing there. I went across to his table and stood in front of him. I waited for a moment in silence, which was thankfully broken when he lifted his eyes from the table and loudly stated that if I was set on bothering him with my being there, then I could at least buy him something to drink. I could not help but admire his precocity. The roundness of his face and the perfectly smooth skin gave him away. He was merely a boy, if only, as it soon became obvious, to appearances. His clouded, pale blue eyes seemed to gaze straight through me, as if there had been no one else there, and I immediately felt that he was trying, and succeeding, to exercise some force over me. His light brown hair stuck out in wild disarray and he had the overall appearance of someone who had not slept or eaten properly for a good while. Despite looking as if he had been sitting at his table since Baudelaire died, he had an air that said, 'I am in a hurry, so get out of my way!' Had it not been for this, I would have dismissed him as another of those disgusting romantic fool bohemians. I sat opposite him and called to Jean [Dinochau] for two absinthes. He came across to the table with the glasses of liqueur. As he set them down, I noticed from the look on the young man's face that he was new to the drinking of absinthe. He watched intently as Jean poured the chilled water over the sugar cube in the perforated spoon, diluting and clouding the bittersweet, emerald green syrup. He copied me almost childishly as I put the glass to my mouth, and I could not tell whether he was trying to mock me, which seemed perfectly likely at the time, or whether he was simply shy, which somehow seemed, although inexplicable, just as possible. He downed his drink in a few large mouthfuls, let out a sigh, and sat once more in silence. When I asked him if he had a name, he mumbled something which turned out to be 'Rim baud.' I sensed his reluctance to talk to me and my interest only grew. I ordered more drinks, which seemed to make him warm to my interrogation. After about two hours and many rounds of absinthe, I had everything that I wanted. His name was Arthur Rimbaud, and he was, as he repeatedly pointed out to me, a poet. He had come on the train from Charleville in search of the Parnassian poet Banville, to whom he had earlier written. Why on Earth he would want to chase that idiot is beyond me, but he wants to be a poet, a Parnassian and to surround himself with men of letters, and as everyone knows, the poets are all in Paris! Ha! But when he arrived, the inspectors discovered that he had no money for the fare, and he was promptly thrown into prison. I asked him how he managed to get away from his home, as he had mentioned to me that he still lived with his mother. It seems that on Wednesday [September 2 1870] the young fellow had been out with his family for a stroll through the fields around Charleville. He said that he was going home for a moment to get something to read, but instead he made his way straight to the station and caught the first train to Paris. An admirable effort! His mother probably thought that the Prussians had caught him! Apparently, while he was in prison, letters were sent back and forth between his mother and a friend of Rimbaud – an ex teacher of his who is currently living in Douai. Anyway, they finally managed to get him out, but he is not allowed to stay in the city, so he is, reluctantly, off to Douai this evening. It seems that his mother is a little stubborn, and as some sort of punishment, she is refusing to take him back at the moment! So he plans to stay with this teacher friend for a

while. This seems to be exactly what the boy wants. So far, all he has seen of Paris is Dinochau's and the inside of a prison cell! Personally, I am surprised that they even let him go to a cafe once he got out. I would have thought that they would have put him straight onto the train! Oh well. One can always rely on the incompetency of the gendarmes. But he has to be gone by this evening, which I guess he is by now. I suppose that I shall run into him again if he comes back to Paris. He seemed to relish the opportunity to pour his story out to a Parisian, as if we are somehow of a higher stature than his Charleville friends – and me! I'm not even from Paris! I remember distinctly him saying that Charleville must take first prize for imbecility among all the provincial towns in France. I could not help but laugh. He lashed out at me for it, accusing me of mocking him. Far from it. The hatred in those icy blue eyes was burning bright, and I held nothing but admiration for him. I regret not telling him that I too am a writer. His egotism would not allow him to ask any questions about me, or even to desire to know anything about me. At the time, I felt that it would be wrong to claim that I was one of those 'men of letters,' for that is indeed how he would have seen me. To be truthful, I have no connection with any of them and for this I am thankful Poseurs! I am published, although unknown. I wish, with the best of intentions, the same on this precociously intelligent boy, this aspiring young poet. To be known amongst these scoundrels or amongst the people is not to be a writer. To write well is to be a writer. Therefore, young Rimbaud, I wish you a life of hardship and anonymity. May you write so well that you will join me in being born posthumously, if at all.

It is intriguing to discover that the two people who are possibly the parents of modernism never discussed literature. This was their only meeting for Lautreamont mysteriously died before Rimbaud returned to Paris.

Lautreamont's Maldoror was discovered almost a decade after his death and he is now championed by the Surrealists. Rimbaud's Illuminations were celebrated in Paris at a time when the poet was commonly believed to be dead and now, nearly forty years after his death, he ranks alongside Lautreamont in modern literature.

XX, 1929

Michelle Wauchope

The three faces

There were three wives of
Adam; few know who they be:
Lilith, the Nameless One
and gentle Eve.
The Father, Son and
Holy Spirit so much
Younger than these three.
Femininity,
A Trinity: Lover,
Mother, and Crone. Each one
A face I sometimes take
And place as if my own.
The three pass-on their tales

In dormant memories.
These whispers hiss
All that women is;
Our choices made,
Our instinct bade,
All we may be.
Our aspects draw from each,
Both evil and purity,
Desire and deity,
Despair and jealous
The worst whores, best angels –
just what you see.
The first two wives were cast
Aside as time passed by,
All as Adam did;
The only one he
Wished to taste, wished to see,
Was gentle Eve.

Lilith, Lilitu, Lilake,
A goddess or demoness,
The first wife of Adam,
and dark side of the divine:
From the Alphabet of
Ben Sira, her telling
Absence in the book of Genesis two,
Her damnation writ by Isaiah:
'Wildcats shall meet
With hyenas, goat daemons
Shall call to each other; there
too Lilith shall repose,
And find a place to rest' They say
She was Adam's equal made.
Formed from mud as he was
She would only lay beside,
Not beneath Adam, and thus
she was banished from paradise.
Lilith, queen of Incubi,
Succuba and Vampyr vowed
To kill all Adam's kin,
And when shackled by the angels howled
At her abandonment.
Snyi, Snsvi, Smnglof;
Each one an angel, Each a hunter,
Each one holds her fast,
Between heaven and hell.
The next wife was made of air,
Was one picked from a dream.
Though God made her most fair

her creation was seen

And Adam went against her. Adam cried so she was cast aside,

Back to ether again.

Her life too short to gain a name,

She holds inside the dreams we hide;

All the things that might have been.

The last wife plucked from Adam's side,

And became subservient Eve.

Made from Adam's rib,

Made incomplete,

Only fulfilled with a man,

When filled with his seed.

A child borne for him, never truly hers,

The docile receptacle Adam preferred.

So which wife's voice shall adopt,

Which voice shall I take?

It makes no difference as they fit

Each label that you make.

This Trinity of

Femininity; Lover,

Mother, and Crone. Each one

A face I cannot

help But take as if my own;

As each is part of me.