



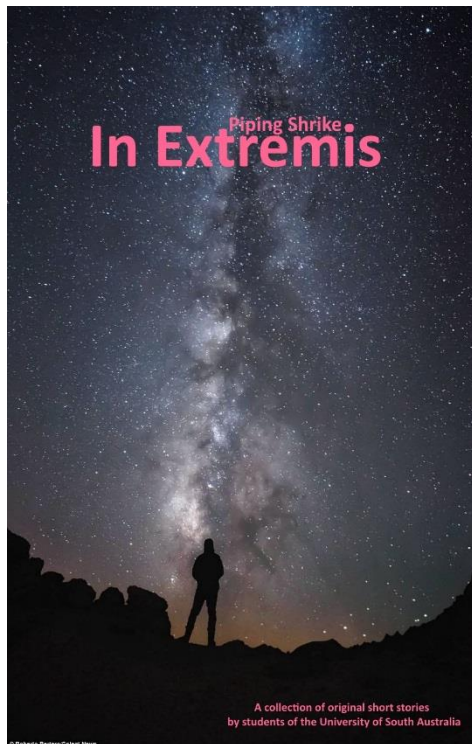
Piping Shrike

In Extremis

A collection of original short stories
by students of the University of South Australia

In Extremis

Piping Shrike 2017



Compiled and edited by Steven Pappin

Produced by Dr Ioana Petrescu, Senior Lecturer, English and Creative Writing.

This Edition is a product of the School of Creative Industries, University of South Australia.

Publication rights remain with the authors, distribution rights, under agreement, UniSA 2018.



Editor's Notes



Hello Everybody.

I would like to start off by saying: I am proud to be a part of this project. We are moving from hard-copy to online, for future publication of our creative writing students' work. Dr Ioana Petrescu has secured funding and nurtured a 20-year tradition of UniSA publishing the best of our creative writing students' work regularly. The university periodical *Piping Shrike* began with *Warbling* (1998). Keeping in that tradition, in 2018, we see the online release of the *In Extremis* (2017).

This is a new and exciting direction for *Piping Shrike*. The University of South Australia is a young university, which is future oriented. This means that a focus will be kept on upgrading and improving the website, future editions, and the visibility of our students amazing achievements.

<http://unisa.edu.au/education-arts-and-social-sciences/school-of-creative-industries/student-work/piping-shrike/>

Steven Pappin

Steven Pappin | Project Officer – Aboriginal Graduate Position
School of Creative Industries | University of South Australia



Contents

Editor's Notes	Steven Pappin
100% Dead	Erinn Flavel
A New Chapter: A Sonnet	Jenna Leigh Raddatz
AS IT GETS DARKER	Nur Fazdlin
Breathless, The Kiwi and Somebody New	Chloe Rose Checkley
Diary of a Very Alive Man	Thanatos Kim
My Poems	Emily Jayne Downs
GUARDIAN OF THE DRAMATIC PATH	Madison Patricia Kirby
My Nephew, a Superstar	James Westley
Outside, the wind howls	Jack Harben
Walking among Zombies	Steven Pappin
Ava; Dad; Unexpected Return & Dogs Delight	Laura Hayden
Macha Iri	Sam Cameron Mackee
Sestina	Maria Diane Wang
Shallow Victory	Sara Eitzen
Slightly Drunk & Disney and Pixar's Cars	Nicholas William Brodley
Ten Hours	Victoria Knight
The Ever-Diminishing Pool	Jordan Irvine-Creaser
The Ghost in the Puddle	Sarah Donnellan
Assorted Poems	Toni Walsh
Gypsy dress, Wildflowers, Seville and Nefelibata	Zoe Kassiotis
Wired Up	Annon (name to be added)
Writer's block	John Mockford
You Took My Heaven Away	Jessie Salamon
ZIMNO	Jessie Salamon
Incomplete People	Steven Pappin



Erinn Flavel

100% Dead

Today, I woke up half-deaf.
Last week, my extremities went numb.
Tomorrow, it'll be my mouth.
Oh my god, I am going to die.
It's going to get harder and harder to pretend.
If anyone knew, I'd be even more dead. Deader.
Oh my god.
I am 100% dead.

Today the death toll continues to rise, as thousands of people across the globe are culled, in what people are calling the...

"C'mon Daisy, turn that stuff off," I groan.

My sister rolls her eyes in her typical rebel fashion, and pulls herself up from the dirty recliner. Clunking over to our battered old TV in her heavy black boots, she kicks the off button and shoots me a distasteful look before turning to leave, flicking her long black hair over her shoulder.

"James, stop being such a pussy, Jesus. I think it's good that people are killing them off.

I bought a gun just in case. Who knows when they might become a danger to society? I should be out there now, shooting them down and actually doing the world a favour," she spits back at me, stomping to her room and smashing the door shut.

I sigh. Surprisingly, not much has changed since the end of the world. My sister's still a bitch.

Petrol prices are still insane. Everything still seems pretty shit. There's just the added bonus of the undead. Or rather, the fear of them.

As soon as everyone heard that people were slowly 'zombifying', anyone with a limp, slur or slight difficulty hearing was being murdered left right and centre. Nobody wanted to catch literal death. Never mind that no one knew how the 'virus' was transferred, or if it was even contagious at all. Fear makes stupid people do stupid things. And God knows, there are a lot of stupid people in the world.

It's not like dead people were coming to life, no. That's way too fiction. Nobody is eating anyone either. At least, not yet. It's just, people slowly died, but didn't. They would lose movement, slowly, from their extremities working in, until they started shuffling and groaning. Their muscles would stiffen, organs would stop and then, eventually, their hearts would stop. They would become mindless, pointless, lost beasts with no purpose. No place. It's like building a robot without giving them a purpose, just motion. They walk forever and ever until they rot. It's a scary thought, that you might die, but your body is left to wander around your front yard until one of your neighbours shoots you down or chops you up.

Kind of makes you want to believe your soul might be saved.

Brushing toast crumbs from my shirt I sit up from the couch and stretch.



Unlike some people, who are taking to this situation gung-ho like it's goddamned Zombieland, I'm still trying to maintain the normalcy of my life.

Well, as normal as it can get.

I stand up, slouch into the kitchen, wash my dishes, and head towards the front door. I can hear Daisy thudding about upstairs, trying as hard as possible to be as annoying as she can. She never used to be this cold. But, seeing so much death and heartbreak changes people and affects their minds. We never really had parents to worry about; they left the picture pretty quickly, but to see neighbours and friends disappear without a word, or shot down in the street, really poisons your soul. I know she still resents that I won't let her leave to fight her 'good fight' against the oncoming horde, but I would rather have her hatred than the knowledge that my sister is a murderer.

From Daisy's room, the pounding sound of heavy rock rattles the house and shatters the silence. The shaky singer shrieks about murder and death to the 'undead' who 'ate up the life and love'. Nice to know the entertainment industry still thrives during Armageddon. I slam the front door, sealing the dysfunction and noise behind me.

Outside, I blink to adjust my eyes to the blinding light. It's sort of idyllic out here. It's almost easy to forget the apocalypse. I wave and yell a cheery hello at my elderly neighbour, Mrs. Morrison, and her 8-year-old grandson Frankie who enthusiastically shakes his hand back, as she waters the hedges and he plays with Hot Wheels cars. The cars seem to be getting in some kind of crazy accident, by the explosion noises coming from him. He vrooms at me as I pass. I kick my skateboard onto the road, and head towards the library, dodging the cracks and potholes. Like I said, the world hasn't really got its shit together still. I'm trying to continue my studies, even with university cancelled in this craziness. I'm trying to study law. *Trying* being the operative word. It's not like much of the 'law' as we knew it is still upheld, with the line between murder and public service so blurred. These last few months since the outbreak, it's a wonder the world still functions with how much of our social and legal system has been dumped in favour of the kind of rules only Big Brother would approve of.

Of course, these rules aren't legal, but to most people, they live by them to feel safe.

I guess ignorance really is bliss. Or, at least, it's comforting.

I fumblingly skate up to the library, hunkering and grey, it's like entering a fortress.

My only safe place, a haven of knowledge, untouched by whatever goes on outside of the doors.

It's so nice to just be able to forget.

I'm looking to lose myself for a little while, do some mindless reading, and just go through the motions.

Kind of ironic, really.

What kind of motions will I be going through in a month or two?

Not many at all, even if I haven't been shot by then.

I'm pulled out of my little ball of concentration, all curled up on the lounge chair, by a soft monotonous voice over my shoulder.

"Excuse me... Excuse me... Sir, the library is closing, you have to go. Sir? Excuse me, you have to go."



I blink at the little old librarian man, and my brain takes a few seconds to process his words. I fumblingly come back to reality. Closing my law tome with a thud, I check my watch. 7:30 pm. Shit, Daisy's going to be pissed. I'm late for dinner. The numbness in my fingers makes it difficult to keep a hold of the heavy text, and the librarian shoots me a confused look. I rub my hands together to blame the cold on their stiffness, not un-death. I don't think I was that convincing, but I'm sure he also wasn't getting paid enough to care, so he quickly shuffled off, leaving me scurrying to return the book and leave the untouched peace and timelessness of the library behind.

Outside, the sky has faded to a soft grey. Skating back towards my house, past busy roads and quiet cul-de-sacs, the situation of the world is more pronounced. No one wants to be out at night with monsters on our streets. Except, you know, there are no monsters outside, and all the news hype is full of shit. I should know, technically I am one, or I would be soon, and I certainly didn't feel monstrous. But still, down these monochromatic streets, there's a creepy silence in the air, like everyone is just waiting for the horror to actually hit, and come flooding into suburbia.

I pass shops too dilapidated to recognise, with smashed windows and signs torn down, evidence of what looks like years of disuse, but is really only a few months. Evidence of desperate people who tried to flee from the cities, leaving their lives behind them, and who now have nothing to return to. Only the shell of their normal lives and a few shards of broken glass, ransacked by people trapped in their panic, or those freed by the panic of others. It's funny how widespread hysteria brings out the kind of person you are. Do you succumb to the lunacy? Or do you thrive in it?

Or maybe you're more like me, someone who tries to avoid it at all costs.

Turning onto my street, my feet start to tingle, and it's an effort to forget what that means and keep going.

I hear shooting close

by. No. Not here.

Fear runs up and down my spine, making my hair bristle. I hear screaming and sobbing.

Oh God.

There's a small crowd of people around Mrs. Morrison's house. Not her. She was fine, why would she be shot? Oh my god.

I see blood trickling down the driveway in a steady stream, like a dribble of paint on a stark grey canvas. I follow it up the concrete. There's a body. It's slumped over some tiny cars. Frankie.

Mrs. Morrison's gun is still smoking.

Her hand is shaking and her cheeks are streaked with spattered blood and tears, sitting in the wrinkles of her face like gruesome war paint.

She looks me dead in the eye and whispers, "He hasn't said a full word all day. Only mumbles and noises. I sent him out to play with his cars again. I was talking to him for a full minute before I realised he couldn't hear me. He couldn't hear me or talk... He must have been dead. I saved him. I saved him..."

My stomach drops below my feet.



Frankie had waved at me this morning. He could hear me.
His vrooming. He was so caught up in his cars. And now he's dead.
My numb fingers suddenly feel heavy, and my hands tingle. My feet feel like lead. There's a
buzzing in my ears, then nothing altogether.
She's talking to me, but I can't hear it.
The blood on her face straightens and settles as her face displays more and more
suspicion. I back away, trying to apologise, say something consoling, anything.
But nothing comes out but garbled moans.
Shit.

I bolt towards my door, focusing all my energy on making my run look as normal as
possible, before slamming the door behind me.
I lean with my back against the wood, panting and gasping, as I slide down the door like
the tears down my cheeks.
It's funny; I almost forgot I was slowly dying. Until I was presented with so much life,
now splattered against the dirty pavement for the suburb to pick at.
Oh God.
If anyone knew, I'd be shot. That is
certain. Especially if Daisy knew.
Oh my God.
I am 100% dead.

I feel pounding on the
door. They know.
They're waiting for my blood, like dogs.
Waiting for my blood to trickle down the door and under, down onto the
pavement. Just like Frankie.
A child's life wasn't enough for them to feel vindicated.
I feel Daisy's footsteps cautiously coming slowly down the stairs.
My heart is pounding, which for an 'undead' person is
ironic. I try to calm it, timing my breaths with her slow
steps. Thump. *In*
Thump. *Out*
She stops. She can hear them outside, even if I can't, and she knows what it means.
This is the chance she's been waiting for, isn't it?
She finally has the chance to do her part.
Danger to society.
Well, here I am, danger to society, curled up and
pathetic. I'm crying now, I don't want to die.
I wanted so much.
I'm not ready.
Here she comes; I can see her
shadow. I can see her gun.
I squeeze my eyes shut, lay my head in my arms, and bring my body into my chest.
The world fades away. I see my future as it could have been. I'm a lawyer, father,
grandfather, husband, and uncle.



I see so much life.
Then I see a flash.
Then I see
nothing.



Jenna Leigh Raddatz

A New Chapter: A Sonnet

You press your lips onto my fitted sheets.

The beat of the world continues to play.

The sound of your heart never obsolete,

to the drum of my ear every day.

Intertwined in sheets that no longer fit

the bed but rather, around feet instead.

I gaze into your eyes, ever starlit,

overwhelmed by our title, newlywed.

Nostrils ablaze in the waves of the morn,

the sun peers over with a gentle kiss.

The window of your soul unleashed and born,

this is a modern day calling of bliss.

The gates of your ocean beckon me in,

imprisoned entirely, from within.



Nur Fazdlin

AS IT GETS DARKER

This is a story about what I fear most. I'm always afraid with the fact of being left alone.

Since I was little, my mother would never leave my room until I fell into a deep sleep. Call me a spoiled kid, I was just afraid of people leaving and not coming back. Like grandpa who went fishing and suddenly didn't come home. Or like Sarah that said she's going to be my best friend forever, but left. A dark bedroom I had to stay in every night made me wonder if tomorrow would be bright again. Growing up, I realised that it's just ridiculous to be scared of staying alone a little while, or depending too much on people.

But I do hate to do anything all alone. Not that I'm being too dependent, it's just everything would be so much fun if you can do it together with your loved ones. I give my very best to always be friendly, be nice to everyone, be a good listener and love unconditionally. I like that everyone knows that I will always be there for them. I want them to get used to me being around. They just could not be as happy when I'm not there. But this is a story about what I fear most, about how I am alone and this time, I'm the one who's leaving...

A blinding bright light shines into my eyes the second I open them. I don't know how long I have slept, but God... it feels like my eyes are glued. I turn my head a little bit to shift my sight. I see an unfamiliar long curtain by the window, a chair next to the bed, and a big vase at the corner of the room. This is not my bedroom.

I slowly drag myself out of the bed but fail. My whole body feels very weak and my head is so heavy I'm barely able to lift it up. It feels like I just fell down from the third floor. Or did I? The last thing I remember... I was in the car with my friends. We were on our way back to Adelaide after spending two nights camping at Johanna Beach, Victoria. Hannah was the one taking the turn to drive us home that evening and I was sitting next to her. Diana and two other girls were sitting at the back and we were already halfway when Diana decided to play a guessing game where a person gets to describe one word about anything and everyone else needs to guess what it is.

'Let me start!' Hannah said. 'It's something looonngg.'

'Is it the road?' I took the first guess.



'No,' Hannah denied.

'Is it the overhead lines?' Diana guessed.

'No.'

'Is it our friendship?' Diana gave another try. 'Well... it will last looonngg right?'

Everyone was in awe at Diana's answer but... 'Nope. Try again.' And we all giggled.

I glance at the side of my bed while pushing myself up to sit and I can clearly see the life support machine running its reading. There are a few wires and tubes attaching to my body. No, I mean they are linking to – I turn around slowly following where the wires are connected and suddenly see that my body is actually still lying on the bed unconscious. I jump off the bed quickly and ran to the other side of the room, ignoring ripples of pain I feel at once. It is me on the hospital bed. I can see how miserable I am with that pale face. My lips are so dry, they're turning blue and cracking. I look so helpless. I can see that my left leg is broken and I am wearing a neck brace.

I fall down to the floor confused and lonely. With this coldness and numbness my whole body suddenly feels, has scared me even more. Is this something you have to go through when you are dying? To die. That means I have to be alone for a very long time before I get sent to heaven or hell. Does that even exist? Is it going to be as dark as my bedroom when all the lights are turned off or will it be darker? But everything else I do after this will definitely be me, being on my own, won't it? My eyes start to well up and I feel dizzy. I just want to wake up in my real body. The one that is on the bed dying.

A doctor walks into the room with my parents and Mr. Jensen, my neighbour. All of them look worried. My mother's face has turned red and her eyes are swollen from crying too much.

'I'm not sure how long she's going to stay. It has been three days now and she barely shows any improvement. We've covered all internal injuries she might have. Now we just have to wait for her body to respond,' the doctor explains my condition calmly but it is not enough to calm my mother down.

Dad holds her close to his chest while he himself holds back his tears.

'How about the other girls?' Mr. Jensen asks.

'They are –'



'Doctor, we need you in room 403.' A nurse comes abruptly before the doctor finishes talking and she rushes back to the room she has mentioned.

Everyone in the room runs quickly to room 403. I follow them too but nobody is allowed to get into the room except the doctor and some of the nurses. I know they aren't able to see me but I am not strong enough to see what is happening. As they pull the curtain around the patient's bed, I manage to catch a glimpse of Hannah on the bed.

'Okay, Maya. It's your turn,' Hannah pointed out to me.

'No. I'm going to be so predictable.'

'Give it a try! Come on,' Diana shouted from the back seat.

'Okay. The object is... BRIGHT!'

'Do you mean the sun?' Diana guessed.

'Oh god. I told you I'm easy to read!' Everybody laughed.

They knew I wasn't good at this game. I grinned at Hannah who barely stopped laughing at me.

'I don't know either you are predictable or the way you describe it was too easy.'

'She'll be fine.' The doctor's voice drags me back to where I am. 'The blood pressure was dropping a bit but she's stable now. Our main concern should be your daughter, Maya. It looks like she's having a battle with herself.' The doctor pats my father's shoulder and walks away.

It hurts my heart terribly to hear what the doctor has just said. It seems impossible to tell them that I'm just right here. I walk down the hallway and sit in the waiting room where all families take turns to visit the patients. It's 2.45 am. The room is a bit empty. A couple of middle aged men come into the room and sit just right in front of me. Both have a look of despair. I recognize one of them is Hannah's father.

'The car overtook on the opposite road and it didn't manage to get back to its side in time. That's how the car crashed the girls, in a second,' Hannah's father explain to the other man.

'One last question!' It was back to Diana's turn.

'The object is... RED.'



'Is it around us now?' Hannah looked around trying to find anything which could possibly be in red.

Just when she got her eyes back to the road, an old Cherokee jeep was right in front of our car. Hannah gripped on the wheels quickly trying to shift the car to the roadside but the jeep was too fast, we didn't make it. I closed my eyes while my hand held on to the seat belt firmly. And all I could remember then... the jeep was red.

I open my eyes widely. The waiting room has suddenly turned dark and I barely see a thing. Not even my hands.

'Hello!' I shout loudly, not sure if anyone could hear me.

'Hello, can someone turn the light on?' My voice is getting shaky.

I try to get up and reach anything near to guide me to the door but I can't even tell which direction the door is.

A few seconds later, a yellowish light appears in the middle of the dark. It's glowing like a candle but much brighter. I blink my eyes many times for I only see the light but no one is really there.

'Maya.' A soft echoed female voice startles me. All of a sudden a cold air rushes through my body.

'Who is it?' I ask.

'Maya. What made you stay?'

'Who are you?' I'm getting nervous but can't help being curious.

'Why are you still here?' She asks again, calmly but louder. 'It's time for you to go.'

'I... I don't know... I guess I don't want to see how my family and friends accept my death. I don't want them to forget me,' I try to speak clearly hiding my shaking voice.

I'm not sure if I answered it right. It always come to my thought of how my friends and family are going to be after I die. Am I going to be forgotten, after all the great moments we shared together? Maybe they're just going to grieve a little, but they will eventually move on.

'It's time for you to go, Maya,' the voice repeats and slowly drifts away.

It takes me a moment to realise that the room has turned the light back on and I can see again but I'm not in the waiting room anymore. It's my ward where my unconscious body is



laying. I see my parents at the side of the hospital bed. My mother holds my hand tightly, even my spirit here can feel the grip.

My friends are standing close to the door hugging each other. It breaks my heart to see their sad faces. The reading of the heart rate machine has become unstable. I know I haven't got much time left. Diana has already got hiccups for pouring her tears out but she doesn't want to stop.

A friend comes closer to sooth Diana, and she whispers to Diana's ear in a low voice, 'Remember how Maya is so predictable? I bet she is standing there right now looking at your ugly face crying.' She points right towards where I stand as if she sees me.

Diana smiles while wiping her wet cheeks. I smile too. I guess my friends know me too well. 'She's always gonna be our Maya.' Diana murmurs and this has welled up my eyes and trembled my body.

I realise I was being too selfish to only think of myself. They must be tired of wanting me to wake up, or waiting for this mess to end. I walk to my lifeless body and climb up the bed as if trying to fit my spirit back to its human figure. I take a look again at each of the people in the room. I am afraid of being alone, but I'm pretty sure these people's prayers will always be with me as much as my love stays with them. I have learned that maybe one day people will forget what we said, they will forget what we did, but they will never forget how we made them feel.

Darkness fills the edge of my vision and in no time I no longer see anything. I suddenly feel cold, freezing really. I feel my lungs are about to explode making it impossible for me to even breathe in. I gasp for air as I hear voices. The chaos of people screaming my name are no longer bothering me. I can't feel my legs anymore nor can I tell if my heart's still beating. Is this how dying feels like? Is this time for me to be alone forever? Because on that very moment I hear the beeping of the heart rate machine slowly goes off to a flat line.



Chloe Rose Checkley

Breathless, The Kiwi and Somebody New -

Breathless

By Chloe Checkley – Free Verse

Following the footsteps of those before me

My eyes touch the hills

Rolling and intertwining, mapping the journey I am yet to take

Little black birds sing and gain distance effortlessly

Envious, exhausted

The incessant thump of my heart; a distraction from the looming fatigue

Breathless

The Kiwi

By Chloe Checkley- Sequence Haiku

A growth from a tree

A great fruit often overseen

Downgraded by looks

Enclosed in brown tuft

And a texture far too rough

It wallows in gross

But on the inside

It bursts with tangy and sweet

And colours are freed



Yellow, green and black
With seeds exploding inside
A texture now soft

Somebody New

By Chloe Checkley- Villanelle

So you found someone new
Our love story now covered in dust
Did you forget us too?

A toxic clash that nearly blew
There was never any trust
So you found someone new

At the beginning our love grew
So connected we were forever intertwined in lust
Did you forget us too?

So much anger our knuckles stained blue
Fighting so hard for love we combust
So you found someone new

I'm sure our love was once true
With everything glowing in stardust
Did you forget us too?

I still miss you



But us being together felt so unjust

So you found someone new

Did you forget us too?



Thanatos Kim

Diary of a Very Alive Man

Day 4

The doctor lady recommends that I keep a journal. It is supposed to help with working out some kinks in my head after my revival from cryostasis. Well, this wasn't exactly what she said but I have taken some liberty with the interpretation.

Let's start with my name. If I can trust my memories, it's Jin Segeom. I'm 20-years-old, at least physically. I used to have a normal family – two parents and a sister – but it's safe to assume they're dead by now. Before waking up four days ago in this hospital, I had been under cryogenic sleep. According to my caretaker (the doctor lady), I am now 736 years old.

My world – the world I belonged in – was 716 years ago. For those of you who're reading this diary and knowing your history, you probably know how the world was back then. For the non-history buffs, I'll spell it out for you. The world back then was a zombie apocalypse. No joke. No metaphor. Pure, unadulterated truth. Real, living – well, sort of – zombies. It feels so bizarre that those comic book geeks in high school were ultimately correct. I wonder how they died.

I'm not the science type. Learning the mechanics of the zombie virus was never something of interest to me. I'm sure the doctor could tell me if I asked but, to be frank, I'm not too keen. Most of my knowledge on the zombies are first-hand experiences. Bites are infectious. Zombies run like champion sprinters. Overall, the comic books' depictions of zombies were correct; except one specific trait: destroying the brain alone doesn't do anything. You needed to get both the head and the spine. Most of the time, it was easier to cut off the limbs.

Anyway, it doesn't matter now. Zombies are gone. Not only did the humans beat the zombies, they have even found ways to cure the disease. Unbelievable? But it's true. I should know.

You see, I never survived the zombie apocalypse. About one year in, I was killed.

Bitten.

I'll write later. I don't feel like it anymore.

Day 8

The doctor lady's name is Cieliena 163. Yes, her surname is a number. When I asked her about it, she explained that her ancestors lived in Bunker Colonies. I'm not sure what that means; perhaps the number belonged to the bunker they lived in? Anyway, back to the doctor. She's an Asian woman about my age, maybe a year or two older. She has a face that looks great with a smile on.

I asked her why her first name was western when she looked like an Asian. She told me continents weren't divided like that anymore. According to her, the zombie apocalypse lasted about 90 years, destroying a lot of the old world in its duration. When humans cleared the mess, a power struggle ignited between major survivor factions. Resulting war destroyed even more of what was left. When the dust finally settled, it was too much hassle trying to revive the old ways. A lot of things were



simply renamed. There were bigger problems than figuring out the name of the ground they were standing on.

I asked her about Korea. She said she's never heard of it.

Day 18

I hate future food. It consists mostly of nutrition pastes and fluids; not filling at all.

Man, I miss McDonalds. I asked Ciel – that's what I call the doctor. She hates it – about it. She told me she has never heard of it. She says that rather often.

I showed her the logo, which she recognised rather excitedly. Apparently, archaeologists have been unearthing the symbol across the globe. They knew it represented a restaurant franchise but had been unaware of its actual name. She told me the archaeology community would consider this revelation the find of the century.

Huh. I guess Ronald should be proud his legacy lives on centuries into the future.

Day 32

I hate mirrors.

Being a zombie had immensely damaged my body. Much of it is now prosthetics. Most notable of the replacements are my left arm, right leg and face. Among all the changes, it is my face that perturbs me the most. My ears, left eye and lower jaw are all artificial. When I look at the mirror, it's not my face that looks back.

Credits where it's due though. Future prosthetics is incredible. The artificial limbs feel just like parts of my body. They respond to my thoughts seamlessly and transmit feelings when I touch.

I should be happy to be alive. Ciel told me that among the many attempts to revive the zombies, I was the only success. I asked her how they possessed so many zombies to test the cure. She informed me that at the end of the zombie apocalypse, the last remaining zombies were frozen as samples for future study. Considering I died in the second year of the apocalypse and it lasted about 90 years, I'm amazed I even 'lived' that long.

So many things I should be grateful about. I don't know if I am.

Day 44

Ciel has been pestering me to let her read this diary. She said I write in the old ways and wished to study it. Her English differs significantly from mine (700 years are a long time for a language to develop), to an extent that we need translating devices to communicate. Still, that's better than Korean, which I suspect no longer exists. If it does, neither this datapad nor the translator supports it. How I wish there were pencil and paper in the future so I can write in Korean.

Anyway, I digress; I haven't let her read yet because I plan on eventually trading it for a favour. Plus, there's also the fact that Ciel is a gem to tease, getting all pouty whenever I deny her curiosities.



While she's incredibly smart (I suspect average intelligence increased over the centuries), she's not very cunning. I could lie about numerous things of the past and she would accept them naively. It's not just her either. I have knowledge on multitudes of things these people have no ideas about.

All cryogenically preserved bodies before the apocalypse were lost when civilisations failed. As the only cured zombie in existence, I could distort a lot of history if I wanted. However, I won't do such a thing. If you look at it from another point of view, I am the only lifeline for my old world. I won't abandon it just for amusement.

Day 59

I have been suffering from nightmares these few days. I cannot remember the details but whenever I awaken from them, I'm drenched in sweat and my heart's pounding madly. Whatever I'm dreaming, it must be terrifying.

Although I can't recall the contents of these nightmares, I have a hunch they're always the same.

Day 63

I asked her whether she was married. She told me marriage system was outdated and nobody kept it anymore. Her answer made me laugh uncontrollably, reminding me of my divorced parents. Eventually the laughter turned into tears. Way to go, Segeom; bawling like a baby in front of a girl.

Why did they need to fight so much? Looking back, I cannot help but feel contempt at their tiny conflicts. It's funny how it seems so petty now, when at the time, it had engulfed my entire world.

People often assign values to things inaccurately, often overestimating their actual worth, blinded by the emotions of the moment.

Ugh. Too complicated a thought for my puny brain. I'm going to stop here.

I wonder how they died.

Day 77

Recently... Recently, my recollections of the nightmares are more vivid. As they become clearer, I realize they are more than just nightmares. They're memories of my past.

I am back in the old world. There are people sprinting for their lives, the smart ones keeping their silence while those soon-to-be-dead scream their lungs out in fear. I am running too, although I cannot remember which of the two groups I belong to. The roads are littered with corpses in various states of decay, some of them animating in response to the ruckus. We all ignore them, too focused on sprinting, never stopping. I don't see what chases us; I look only ahead, staring at the backs of those ahead of me. The urge to reach them is overpowering; those who were behind others were the ones who died, after all.

The nightmare ends at this juncture. It leaves a bitter feeling when I wake up, now that I remember with clarity. Ciel warns me to brace for any further remembrance, saying there may still be more to come.



Day 80

I wish they had never revived me. I wish I remembered nothing. My life ended when I became a zombie, and it should have remained that way.

Ciel is on the other side of the door. I can hear the door tremble from the pounding. Looks like the future really considers epidemic threats seriously; the manual lockdown works flawlessly. If what Ciel had said was true, it cannot be overridden for 24 hours. I still have two hours.

These nightmares are not my memories; that became revoltingly clear yesterday. No. What exists in this head of mine is something far more grotesque. I wasn't running with those people. I was pursuing them. The urge to reach them was not for safety. It was to hunt. Yesterday, I finally got to see myself catch up to one of the runners. And then... and then...

I have not eaten since yesterday and have vomited thrice already.

You know what's the worst part? Whenever I think of food, I recall the sensation. It cannot be suppressed. I recall that moment vividly, with such blinding clarity, and even as it sickens and horrifies me, I remember the ecstasy.

It lingers on my tongue and refuses to leave me alone

Ciel. If you're reading this, I hope you understand my decision. This moment in future was time I was never meant to have anyway. Regardless of the outcome, I'm thankful for being given one last chance at life. I also wish we'd met under different circumstances.

Bye.

Day 85

As I reread the previous journal entry, overwhelming embarrassment assails my very being. Embarrassment and shame.

First, let me clear the question I'm sure anyone currently reading would be asking. Well, it turns out that I had grossly underestimated resuscitation capability of the future. My attempt at... suicide... was easily thwarted. I have been in intensive care for three days afterwards.

My condition is stable, if I ignore the aching caused by Ciel's fists upon my return from ICU. I do not deny I deserve a pounding. Also, she was crying the whole time and that weighs on my mind more than the physical pain.

Since then I have been resting a lot. With the time I had, I revisited my past journal entries. A certain phrase jumped at me; 'People often assign values to things inaccurately, often overestimating their actual worth, blinded by the emotions of the moment.' When I read that, it felt like a slap to my own face.

In my head, I know the answers. It will go away with time. What I experienced is terrible – and unique to me – but it is not the worst thing on Earth. The memories still burn, acrid and searing in their acuity. However, no matter how bad it is now, it cannot haunt me forever. Time renders all things obsolete in its wake. All I need to do is to hunker down and wait it out.



I know all these but it's still so hard.

I'm still alive, so very alive, and it sucks to be so.

Day 98

Ciel's planning something. She tries to be sneaky about it – which is cute to watch, if nothing else – but she is abysmal at the task. I deliberated on pressuring her about it but decided otherwise.

Ever since the 'incident', there has been an air of awkwardness hanging between us. I'm still feeling apologetic about the whole fiasco and I'm sure it occupies her mind whenever we're together. Sometimes I catch her looking at me, eyeing me as if I'm a fragile piece of china. I would love to assure her I'm alright but I suspect my insistence will only worsen her worries.

I don't know what to do.

Day 100

That gorgeous angel. I can't believe she did this.

Today, Ciel arrived seven in the morning – which, by the way, is way before my usual waking hours – with the news that my relative will be coming to visit. It took my sleep-addled brain half an hour to understand her words because as far as I was concerned, my relatives were dead centuries ago. As it turned out, the hospital has been tracing anyone who could be genetically related to me. They found a possible candidate (a middle-aged lady, I'm told) and asked her to visit; a request which she accepted.

This was what Ciel had been planning. While I was contemplating stupid things, influenced by bad dreams, she was trying to find me family. I... don't know how I can ever repay her. I don't know how but I promise to try.

That, however, is a puzzle for later. Currently, I'm a nervous wreck, incapable of higher order thinking. There is still an hour left before the meeting so I'm typing away to keep my composure. I wonder what she's like? I wonder whose descendant she is; I never had any kids of my own. I wonder if my appearance will scare her? I wonder if my sister had children after I died? What kind of questions should I ask her? What questions will she ask? My mind is a whirlwind.

I cannot wait.



Emily Jayne Downs

My Poems

My rose garden - Haiku Sequence

My garden grows big roses
The roses are flowering in every corner
The green grass surrounds them

Grass is wavy and tall
Red, white and yellow roses everywhere
They make the yard beautiful

The yard is very large
It's square and stunning, with its flowers
Hopefully new flowers will bloom

When bright new flowers bloom
They will hopefully be seen in spring
Spring comes and brings roses.

The roses are very big
They make the garden look extremely beautiful
Hope more will grow soon

Once they have fully grown
The smell of roses surrounds the garden
Creating a scented garden atmosphere

The delicious plum

Round plump, beautiful juicy plum



Is so good to eat out in the sun
Just take one bite slowly each time
Licking the fruity plum taste from your fingers,
One finger at a time to enrich the taste buds
Delicious fruit that tingles your senses
Makes you feel cosy and sweet
Purple on the outside that tastes so good
Makes you feel healthy and strong
So tender and moist, against sweet lips
A vibrant taste that tickles your nose
The perfect fruit to adore during spring
Every taste is a journey towards fruity goodness

Beach day sonnet

Huge waves crash onto my shore,
The dreary dry sand turns to wet,
Cold air brings shivers down my spine.
The beach does not change much through time,
It may change its shape and size,
But will not change through time.
Happy children play in the sand,
Building sand castles with bare hands,
They laugh and play with parents on guard.
The sun starts to set for the night,
This brings the children to scream
They are terrified of the dark
So, it must be time to head off
Then they leave and off they go to bed

Adelaide Show experience



Show time begins in Adelaide
The fun starts with crowds of people
Every food imaginable to eat
Children laughing with enjoyment
Show bags flying off the shelves,
Being chosen by excited people
Workers wondering around working hard
Volunteers helping to keep things flowing
Everyone enjoying themselves with smiles
The day is so long, but the fun has just begun

Dancing - Music Poem

Loud, fun, exciting sounds playing
Makes you feel like jumping up and dancing
People showing no fear of fun
Having some crazy times in the sun
Like no one around is watching
Feelings of happiness and freedom,
Running through their veins
Being brave and showing passion
The wonderful desire for crazy dancing

Fruit and flower poem

Dark fruit lying in a bowl
Darkness surrounds the room
Black and orange flowers bloom
Peacefully standing in a vase
Nicely centred on a table
Quiet and peaceful to admire
Making people start to think,
Why are they even there?



Salt-Symbol poem

Over the left shoulder it goes, small and precious.

It is placed on meals to fill most needs

Will make you weak if you have too much

Makes the food taste so good



Madison Patricia Kirby

GUARDIAN OF THE DRAMATIC PATH.

Drama.

Houdini, a man turned green.

My shoes for another's,

An escapist game.

Drama.

Lost in the present,

Avoiding an unwanted hunt,

A story yet untold.

Drama.

Carried by the Muse of inspiration.

Like a Caterpillar to a Butterfly,

From a Muse to a Guardian.

A Guardian.

With quiet guidance,

A gentle nudge.

Power Unknown.

A Guardian.

Of Athena Blessed,

Wise but not all knowing,

Revealing a path.

A Path,

Made transparent,

Welcoming me to my Journey,

A student guided.



10 REASONS THE BRUSSEL SPROUT IS THE LEAST SEXY VEGETABLE.

1. A brussel sprout is a compressed ball of air from the start.
and can you lust after what is essentially a fart?
2. The little green pea can make you laugh till your sore,
But I'm not sure if you can brussel the floor!
3. The sweet baby corn is sweeter than most.
Don't you agree, the brussel makes a bitter host?
4. Roasted vegetables spiced and hot.
The boiled brussel is simply not!
5. The humble potato can be done many ways.
Have you ever seen a brussel in an adventurous phase?
6. The exclusion of the tomato has been a tussle,
But shouldn't they just eliminate the brussel?
7. A truffle can make you feel luxurious and rich.
Yet, Isn't the brussel sprout a cheap little snitch?
8. Pak choi from China is quite exotic.
Aren't people who like brussels...psychotic?
9. Lots of vegetables help you build muscle
But I'd rather eat a broccoli than a Brussel!
10. The spinach with B6 is very smart,
But say 'aye' if you agree the brussel is simply a fart.

A PARASITE

A parasite, I picked up when I was young,
sits inside my brain.
he tells me who I am,
and never lets me smile.
I try to stretch the corners of my silenced lips.
Though, he quickly throws his tantrums.
Beginning his draining puppetry act.
He plays games of torture in the corners of my mind.
And there in that corner I sit and cry.

A CHILD

(Inspired by All That Was Left to Love a painting by George Elgar Hicks)

An innocent girl
Who cannot fly.
Sits alone trying desperately to stay alive.
She holds a bird in her finger tips.
Trying to bring him back to life.
Though, he shrivels in her hands.
As his heart no longer bleeds,
Her heart does,



She decides, for the bird,
She must keep on climbing.
And maybe one day this girl that cannot fly
Will soar higher than that little bird.
And from this day she will climb,
Until she becomes a cloud,
On which she lets her family rest.
She holds them close like a sponge.
Finding it hard to let her family go
But she is not a weightlifter
And slowly her hold weakens.
She holds on tighter, turning grey.
Up against her deep blue sky.
Created by a little girl who still cannot fly.
She can't hold on any more
And her tears form in puddles.
She hides them beneath her pillowcase,
Wipes her tears and straightens up.
Everyday happens just like this.
She bottles up the rain from her cloud
So, all her family sees is her innocent smile.

LOVE AND IMAGINATION.

Words are just words
This much is true
Sometimes I look into the sky and see the sun
And other times the moon
But when I'm with you I see unicorns
Well they do say this thing we have makes you crazy
And I am a leprechaun and you a pot of gold
That is not to say I am short and you are a treasure
Though I am and you be so too
It is to say that what we have is like imagination
Too hard to describe to someone who has not seen it themselves
And then sometimes when I'm not with you
I want to see dragons
But I'm not a damsel
And you don't ride a white horse
Unless you count a ford ranger
This thing we have is not made in fairy tales
It's made in two hearts
Yours and mine.



James Westley

My Nephew, a Superstar

“Well, well. Look who’s coming to stay with us. What happened to being too good for the couch?”

I was at the end of the road. Nowhere to go. Nobody left in the world. No reason to smile.

“Thanks for letting me stay here Tom. I haven’t been feeling great today.” I didn’t deserve my brother, and he was still going out of his way to help me. In hindsight he was probably paying off a personal debt. A debt I never held over him.

Thomas was the only family I had after my father died.

“Just be out of here by Thursday. That’s when I have yoga.” I had never needed to rely on my brother for any support, financial, emotional or otherwise. Being the elder brother, he was my responsibility, not that he ever asked for my help. So in this position, needing to ask him to inconvenience himself and his family, had me feeling uneasy.

“Didn’t know you were embracing your feminine side.” Unlike Bill, I was more forgiving and tolerant of Thomas’ hobbies and habits that neither of us could identify with. “You remember Old Bill hated that, don’t you?”

“Dad loved my performances. He was just trying to make me tough.”

As I walked past Thomas, I saw the lounge room where I had once caught him dancing as he watched television. The empty fireplace, the lightly-damaged rug in the centre on the floor, the cabinet full of old sports shows and action films were all there. The room had remained unchanged for the most part.

More often than not I was the one supporting Thomas’ love for singing and dancing, and his passion for musicals, theatrical or otherwise. Our father instead encouraged Thomas and I to love football and boogie and to enjoy film over theatre. I assume Bill was just worried for Thomas’ comfort with his flamboyance, as he often told us about the bullying he witnessed growing up.

I hadn’t expected my sister-in-law to be here. Thomas gave me a reason on the phone, but I wasn’t paying attention. I did notice somebody was missing from my welcoming party. “Where’s Will?”

Old Bill was a good dad to me and an even better one to Thomas. Our mother had died many years earlier. I got over it and later on Thomas got over it. Thomas and I have always been very different people, so it took him more time to get over her death than it took me. It was more than enough for Bill to give up on life, despite having spent many years as happy as a married man can get. Bill stayed with us for a long time afterwards. He promised himself to be a better father than his, so he was determined to stay with us until we were old enough to take care of ourselves.

To Bill’s dismay, he couldn’t handle his own grief. He waited until Thomas had reached nineteen before he drowned himself.



I was more disappointed than surprised by this turn of events. Thomas was understandably devastated.

“I’m sorry to tell you this boys.” I don’t remember the man’s name or face, or remember what his occupation was. “Your father was found in the bathroom this morning...” I was at my shared apartment, where Thomas had been staying for the last three weeks. It was small and cramped, and didn’t smell particularly welcoming, but it was all I could afford at twenty-three.

I remember when I first left my home, what seems like a long time ago. I remember fighting with Old Bill, though the reason leaves me in question to this day. I was nineteen at the time, so I suppose it was the right time for me to move out. But a typical falling out is the only thing I can recall about what happened.

There was a reconciliation, but I haven’t lived in that house since the conflict. I wasn’t kicked out, and I wasn’t exiled from the house. When I left, it was my brother yelling after me, begging me to stay. It was the last time I saw our house. I kept in regular contact with Thomas, making sure to see him at least once a week. But then a week became a fortnight. Then a fortnight, a month. It was a full year before Old Bill and I spoke again. If there was anything positive to take from Old Bill’s passing, it’s the relief knowing that we made peace long before he ended it all.

I loved my old house, but it wasn’t for me. I considered it home as a child. The older I got, the less familiar I became with the place. By the time I had left, I didn’t enjoy living there and I would never consider living there again. Thomas must have been surprised to hear me getting kicked out of my apartment, but he seemed delighted to let me sleep on his furniture. Like the good brother he is.

Maybe that’s why Tommy gets to go home.

Even at such a young age, Thomas and I were very different people. We knew our father better than anybody, so when we heard about Bill’s death, neither of us were surprised. Well, I didn’t think Thomas would be surprised when the news came, but my brother had the most shocked look on his face, that I had never seen before.

I never married. I never wanted to be married. I doubt I’ll ever understand what it means to be with the same person for the rest of your life, bored together but condemned for trying to find fun elsewhere. I don’t believe in God, but I do believe in boredom. I don’t think I’m destined to be with one person forever, so I think if I did get married, I would be caught unfaithful within the first month. So my lack of faith mixed with a lack of care would result in one unhappy person and one disinteresting marriage. Which is why I never chose to get married.

I know that my brother and I are very different people, but I was still a bit upset when he told me that he was going to propose to his girlfriend of three years. I gave him a speech or two about how I felt about marriage, but he insisted that his life was his to waste however he saw fit. Very different people.

I walked out to the backyard, where I found myself instantly overcome by the lifetime of nostalgia and memories of a childhood well lived. Overgrown grass filled with bats and balls. A basketball hoop hanging from the house gutter. A big tree in the corner of the fence. A childhood filled with toys, games and fun. A childhood filled with broken bones and huge



scratches from climbing the tree, or swinging from the hoop. I fought back tears as I heard my brother approaching.

“Just like old times.” Thomas extended his left hand in front of me, holding a can of beer whilst he stood beside me. Thomas was holding a can of lemonade in his other hand. I could hear him breathing quite heavily, probably to mask his own emotions.

“Mind if I go check upstairs?”

“Sure ya can. Last I remembered, this was your house. Besides, you were here first.”

I headed back inside, careful to avoid any eye-contact with my brother. “Thanks Tommy.”

I felt strange asking permission to inspect my old house. It felt stranger requesting that permission from my younger brother of all people. To examine of my own free will would have been an intrusion, so I understood why I did it. Knowing that didn’t make it any less uncomfortable.

I passed a closed door, knowing full well that it led to the bathroom. The bathroom is the first room you see when going upstairs. We had another one downstairs, but I can’t recall a time when I used it for anything other than when I would get angry.

I can’t really remember the last time I’ve been angry. After I grew out of a stage of being easy to anger as a child, I sort of just learned to remain relaxed and calm.

I passed an open door, to Thomas’ room. When I was younger I respected my brother’s privacy, which would explain why I felt no emotional attachment to it. Taking a brief look, I closed the door behind me as I left the bedroom.

I knew what came next. My heart was racing. My forehead greasy with sweat. I started to feel shooting pains in my legs and my neck from anticipation of reaching the wooden door I had been dreading all day. A door reading “Dean”.

I fought myself to do it. I wanted to ask Thomas to open the door for me, but I didn’t want to rely on him. I finally saw my old bedroom.

Except when I got to my room the door was open and I found no reason to be afraid. The bedroom that used to belong to Dean was now occupied my nephew, Will.

“Hello Uncle Dean.” The voice of my nephew always managed to fill my heart with bliss. “What are you doing?”

“I’m just checking out my old room, little buddy.”

“Did this use to be your room too?!” He looked up at me as he spoke, his voice filled with amazement.

“It sure did!” I exclaimed with the same level of enthusiasm.

Thomas was overjoyed the day Will was born. The most ecstatic phone call I ever had. I was away at the time so I didn’t get the chance to meet my nephew for months. It was hard to understand what Thomas was saying because he was choked up on tears. He tells me it was vomit from the birth, but he was never a good liar.



When I did meet Will, it was the happiest I'd felt since leaving home. The way he looked at me with his big eyes, smiling as he played with his toys. I tried to talk to him, but we didn't speak the same language. He tried to use his voice, but Will was only capable of making loud noises.

I made sure to visit Thomas and Will as often as I could. I'm not sure if I agreed on the choice of my nephew's name, but Old Bill would have been happy. Whatever the case, I realised I felt the same way. I was happy too.

“Grandad's house is very big, isn't it Uncle Dean?”

I looked around his new bedroom. Big indeed. I had no problem with my old bedroom decorated with Will's toys and clothes. My dilemma was the knowledge that this room was no longer mine. The house was no longer mine. My father would always be my father, but he was no longer with us.

“It sure is Will.” I looked around the room again. I didn't agree with my nephew. Everything was smaller. A big house surely, especially for someone as young as Will. To me, it all seemed smaller. Like a great moment having become a distant memory. “Wanna go play outside?”

Will's eyes lit up with excitement, clamouring for the opportunity to play. “Yes! Let's go outside!” In that instant I saw the fierceness and innocence of his dad — of my brother. “Can we play basketball outside?”

“We can play whatever game you want, champ.” I followed Will down the stairs and outside. These were the stairs that Thomas once sat on as Old Bill tended to his scraped knee. I followed Will through the kitchen, where I remember Old Bill would burn himself trying to cook steak. He'd burn himself cooking pasta if he ever tried.

So here I am, playing basketball outside with my nephew Will. Named after my father. Trying his best to throw his small blow-up basketball. Trying his best to catch it after bouncing it on the pavement. Getting distracted by clouds, trees, and plenty of his other toys dumped outside. Here I am with nowhere to go. Nobody else in the world. With a reason to smile.



Jack Harben

Outside, the wind howls.

I blow desperately on the small spark at my feet, willing it to grow underneath the forest of twigs and wood as I take a shuddering breath. The rock floor is cold and hard, an uncomfortable reminder of my distance from home. The snow covering my shoulders flakes and falls away as I shift, littering the ground with pinpricks of white, as though whatever deity made this cave forgot to give it a few final touches in its colouring. The spark beneath my hands flickers, a tiny child that makes my heart lurch with each tribulation and danger it faces. I blow onto the wood again, urging the spark to take hold. My heart is in my throat as the spark seems to almost fade for a moment, then let out a small breath of triumph as the flames begin to grow.

I fall back onto the rock floor, sitting with my body facing the now slowly burning campfire. As I watch the flames, I hear the blizzard outside begin to intensify. Soon the light from the outside world fades, the sun setting from its lofty perch to leave only frigid darkness behind. I shiver as I shuffle closer to the fire, feeding a few extra twigs to the blaze in the hopes of intensifying the heat.

As I watch the flames, I am drawn to a question that bounces around in my head, rapping a staccato beat inside my mind with only the accompaniment of the crackling flames and popping twigs.

What is the nature of light?

I am unsure as to where the question came from, only that it takes hold of my mind in the most curious, gentle of ways. I cannot say, from where this hunger to understand such an elemental force appeared, only that I am struck with the realisation that humans as a species are all drawn to light. From all cultures and backgrounds, despite some never interacting with the outside world, we all discovered fire. We hungered for it, as though deep within our cores something reached out to us, beseeching our minds to discover the dancing flames.

The fire is now burning brightly at my feet, and I sigh, the chill of the icy winter now lessened. Light is inevitably heat, it is always warmth. From an electric bulb to a raging bonfire, all these things make heat. Indeed, perhaps it is the warmth we are drawn to more than the light itself. There are so many different types of warmth, all connected across the planet by our desire to obtain them. But the one we all are connected by is the sun. Perhaps that is where this hunger came from, this need to find light. We are as dependent on the sun as a babe to its mother's breast, nourishing us as its children. We all long to reconnect with our mother, in whatever form they take. Earth is always spoken of as the mother of life, but without the sun, it would be as a barren rock. Staring into the fire, I see the shadows on the wall flicker and writhe, looking for a moment as if they were alive. I idly wonder what it would be like to see only this flickering fire as the sole source of light in a person's life. I wonder what it would be like to never have seen the sun. I cannot help but feel that the first time I saw it – the true outside world, I would be terrified.

As I ruminate, I find myself slipping into slumber, lulled to sleep by the soothing sound of the crackling logs, overshadowed by the howling gale outside my hideaway. I dream of flashing colours, of nonsensical shapes and geometries, of impossible things made normal. Then my dreams calm, slowing and settling. I dream only of one thing now, a small house surrounded by a sea of wheat.

I dream of a wife and two children, their faces blank and unknowable. My wife has raven black hair, my children golden blonde. The children laugh and play near the house, running back and forth with endless energy. The sun streams down, bathing the land in a yellow glow. I can feel the heat in the



air, it is both draining and invigorating, a bizarre oxymoron that somehow exists despite all logic and reason. It is a dry heat, a comforting heat. I revel in it, I bathe in its rays. I am contented.

Abruptly time shifts, the sun rapidly moving across the sky towards the horizon as the children scamper back and forth, made into flashes of colour from the speed at which time proceeds. The clouds race by in the endless blue, as though they were late to cover the opposite side of the globe. Only my faceless wife remains motionless, looking back at me with invisible eyes. I cannot see her features but somehow, I know she is smiling at me.

Time begins to slow, returning to its natural pace. It is just before the end of twilight, with the sun hanging fat and red in the sky. The warmth is still there, but lessened, more fragile. I long to reach out and cup it in my hands, this fleeting warmth.

Then my wife moves.

She steps backwards, beckoning for me to follow her. Her deep black hair entices me forwards, pulling me towards her as though on an invisible lead. We walk into the fields of barley that cover the ground as far as the eye can see, small dirt roads the only indents in this plain of wheat. A silent laugh echoes from my wife as she motions for me to stop, then takes a few final steps backwards. The red sky makes the fields a strange crimson rose. I hear nothing but the sounds of wheat whispering as it is buffeted by the wind. As I watch my wife I feel her smile, moving her foot slightly. Then, to some soundless music, some invisible orchestra, she begins to dance.

Back and forth through the barley she glides, her arms swaying from side to side. Her steps are fluid and graceful, the smile gracing her unseen lips widening as she cavorts through the grain. As she moves the light hits her, staining her movements red. But as I stare at her, she seems to glow from within as well as without, a light that has no real luminosity, but makes me narrow my eyes as I smile back, my heart filled with a strange tumbling sensation as I stare at her. Despite the chill that now begins to nip the air around me, my core is utterly warm. She is my sun.

Perhaps it is a different warmth we seek. Perhaps the warmth of the sun is only preparing us for another warmth, a slowly burning bed of embers within us. Perhaps those embers reignite when we find this closer warmth. We seek a deep warmth at our very centre to nourish and care for, to cultivate. This deeper warmth has a thousand names, a thousand stories. Perhaps this warmth is the true reason we discovered fire. Not to keep ourselves warm, but to warm those we love.

I awaken with a jolt, shocked by the crash of a log collapsing in the campfire. The image of my dancing wife hangs in the air for a moment, then fades. The heat in my heart stills, freezing over in seconds as a dull ache runs through me. Without knowing quite why, I feel tears drip down my face. Try as I might, I cannot recall my wife's features, her shape or what her hair smelt like. I cannot remember what her voice sounded like. I cannot remember, and these tears are all I have left.

The fire at my feet flickers, a harsh, bitter wind finding its way briefly into the cave. I shudder, wiping the tears from my face and shuffling closer to the flames. The heat finds me again, and the pain still echoing in my chest prompts me to sink back into thought. Sleep eludes me as I ponder the pain. It is a heavy, crushing weight, interspersed with brief moments of breath as though my lungs cease to work but for spare moments. I know this is a lie, my lungs are strong, my body in its prime. I am not ill. I am not wounded. So why? Why this pain? Why am I reduced to holding my chest as though if I were able, I would cradle my core in my hands? Why is this pain deeper than my lungs, my bones, my cartilage? Why is this pain in my very soul? Why does each breath hurt in a strange way that is not physical and leaves no mark, yet scars me all the same?



It is heartache.

Another breath crawls through me as I realise what it is. The heat in my centre was too bright, too strong. The distant whisper of a memory slides past me, a laughing face I do not recognise. The scent of thyme in a garden. My home.

The heat raged through me, igniting my nerves and body in a beautiful symphony of sound, feeling and life. Such life! I was more alive when I burned from within than ever before! Yet now the fire has faded and the nerves that once exalted as they blazed are deadened husks. Cauterised by the flames and heat, my body feels nothing but a dull ache. From joy to nothingness, the transition is too much to bear. Heartache, what a pitiful word to describe the pain. What a sad attempt to explain that need for heat, for warmth. To define the maddening agony of having that need denied. For now my desire to seek the warmth I once felt is all consuming, it is controlling. It has multiplied by thousands. I cannot imagine going on without the gentle warmth of my sun. The gentle touch we shared as I danced in a field of wheat.

Perhaps this is our fatal flaw. The need for heat. We seek and seek, reaching out with our desperate, grasping hands to find the sun we wish to orbit, never considering what will happen if it dies. Never thinking of the pain we might feel, reduced to a barren hunk of rock spinning away into the void as the warmth we embraced drifts away.

Yet as I lie here, the fire fading as the blizzard creeps further and further inside, I wonder...

Without this warmth I shared with another, without this pain as the warmth left, without having grown old together and laughed, loved and suffered...

Would I ever truly have been alive?

The fire dies.



Steven Pappin

Walking among Zombies

Only the shell of their normal lives and a few shards of broken glass, ransacked by people trapped in their panic, or those freed by the panic of others. – Erinn Flavel

In the late 1980s scientists were calling for a change in the industrial world before a global greenhouse effect took place. In the mid-90s France held a summit of leading meteorologists who suggested that in 15 years the world would be destroyed by the uncontrollable storms that would result from the drastic climate changes from the accelerated greenhouse effect. In the mid-2000s The Kyoto agreement was set to limit carbon emissions and in 2015 France again lead the charge to have the modern countries, which contribute the most to this danger, cut back ... All we saw was time and again that 'leading scientists' agreed with the governments to increase taxes. We took this as proof that they were wrong.

Slowly, little by little, everything they said happened – but the world did not end.

The end of our society was foretold, time and again. In 1949 George Orwell suggested that in as little as 35 years our world would be controlled by an unseen hand and that we would all be little more than cogs in a machine, unless we changed. Almost 35 years later we realised he had been right – but the world did not end.

I have lived long enough to see the end of my society – but the world did not end.

I live in a world over-run by zombies. An infection of our own design has gotten into the brains of people, who now walk the streets with fidget spinners. They are drones. They groan, chortle and sometimes have shrill, energetic outbursts.

They groan about how they think they should not have to pay for rent or for food if they live with their parents after high school.

They drone on and on in superfluously superlative terms when telling people about the most mundane and insignificant achievements, like flipping a water bottle with some water in it and it landing the right way up.

They let out their shrill calls and hollers when observing another of their kind make one of these utterly unimpressive achievements, that will resonate amongst them, joining together, to build into a cacophony-of-useless-dumb-arse-ary.

The source of these creatures is said to this thing called 'The Media'.

The Media was engineered by people, to control, I mean: 'direct the interests and actions of...'; other people. Now, it almost controls all of us. It is everywhere we look; in everything we read, on the side of everything we see and there is no escape.



Past dictators hated their people having strong will-power and free thought. Our modern leaders used The Media to engineer us into accepting a compromise. So, now we have lax will-power and cheap thoughts.

Some have hypothesised that The Media was an effort to pacify the proletariat before they could create social unrest leading to a reordering of the western social class structure.

Perhaps it worked.

We now have 40% of our population not knowing that 'un-rest' is a thing. All they do is rest.

There is no longer any threat of the working class becoming too strong and over-throwing the upper-class, as the numbers of working class are steadily decreasing.

There are different strains of this sickness; but, The Media is an infection in the brain. It did not infect the body proper. The Media does not change what is physical, tangible and can be measured. But no-one physically checks anything anymore. If a notion is not sourced from or confirmed by thy goddess Google, or her prophet Wiki, then its only acceptable use is to be publicly shunned in-front of one of the acolytes: facebook, twiter, et.al, so they can favour us with their 'likes'.

The Media crept in between the layers of the conscious and unconscious minds. It set old beliefs against new ideals. It entered all levels of multicultural communities and separated them by convincing the individuals that they had to segregating themselves behind the walls being constructed within their own minds, for their own protection. Like the children of Hamlet we just blindly followed the music.

I do not completely blame the media. It is a virus. It saw our weakness and infested, because the opportunity was there. I guess where we went wrong was raising our kids in a world where nothing had to be justified. They were taught not to compete, that they did not need to prove themselves and that they are not indebted to anyone for anything because our privileges, that we had to work for, were their rights, which they could expect – just because they are them.

We can not pinpoint the moment when The Media became a virus. There were warning signs. Perhaps letting our smart phones start communicating with our smart houses, so they could decide what our buying decisions would be in the coming month. Maybe we should have stopped with smart phones for stupid people.

I have resisted for as long as I can. Each day I try to have one original idea. Just one thought of my own. It CAN hold the symptoms at bay ... for a while.



Laura Hayden

POEMS: Ava; Dad; Unexpected Return & Dogs Delight

AVA

The room glows golden
With delighted squeals
And peals of laughter

A pink-cheeked
Cherub chortles
And dawdles forward

Carried along on
Exhilaration
And celebration of life

She lights up the room
And lifts the gloom with a smile
A mile wide

DAD

Dad recently moved in with us
I'm surprised by the sharpness
That finds its way into my voice
Sometimes. Sometimes often.

Dad tucks his chin
Against his neck
Seeking protection, forming armour
Against words. Against wounds.

He is smaller than he's ever been
Stripped of strength
A bird without flight
Smaller. Smaller and less.

My brows knit as I look at him
Warmth blossoms in my chest
And I let out a silent sigh
"It's ok. It's ok, Dad"



UNEXPECTED RETURN

I thought I'd left those years behind me
When flame leapt from belly to throat to jaw
I must look at where I've been and see where I can be

Now I'm tossed again upon a volatile sea
In a boat fuelled and filled with fear far from shore
I thought I'd left those years behind me

I learned to sew my scraps and patches into a tapestry
Stitched all the sharp edges in so you can't see them anymore
I must look at where I've been and see where I can be

I feel I'm back where I started - trapped in a memory
Stuck once more, caught on a nail, hooked by a claw
I thought I'd left those years behind me

To free myself from this trap I can't simply flee
Or the fear will chase me through the door with a crow's caw
I must look at where I've been and see where I can be

I won't surrender easily – I've fought hard for control of me
To not wake crying in the night, huddled on the floor
I thought I'd left those years behind me
I must look at where I've been and see where I can be

DOG'S DELIGHT

Ticky-tacky-ticky-tacky
Paws on the concrete path
Human footsteps following
-Softer and slower behind

Bubbling and swishing
Rain-swollen creek
Rushes by in the dark
-Almost invisible blackness

Puff and whoosh
Air in and out of lungs
Pushing and pushed by quick steps
-Sudden stops for investigation

Rustle and shuffle
As we are pressed on
Icy freshness pierces layers
-Rubbing my cheeks to a shine



Sam Cameron Mackee

Macha Iri -

In Cusco Sapa Inca sat, in roy'l regalia bold and black

His mien was finer than peach tree, but his dark eyes dull with ennui

Sapa inca sat to hear a plea, from his wife oe'r dark green tea

His wife decries, demands a decree, 'decree a palace for I and thee'

He nods for two things, to agree, and death to She who commands he

To build a palace all would see

Base built of black obsidian, aligned with the meridian -

Carved in Cusco by a sad sea, of slaves from the black mountain scree -

t'was laid by Sapa's calm decree. And with his dark mind it agreed.

A palace of gold glowing and growing, growing fast as a tree

Cleared from the manse was glass debris, and it was come, Macha Iri

A gold Ziggurat all could see

The structure o'er a mile high, blazing banners bright 'gainst the sky

Blood slaked the sorry slave sea, christens in red, Macha Iri

Within t'was glided, a gold sea, an unmatched royal panoply

All constructed for Sapa Inca's glee, glee was all t'was sought by he

And a thousand pilgrims agree, there's nought more great than Macha Iri -

And all came to Cusco to see

O'er twice five years, the ziggurat, on the carved obsidian flat;

Grew fat, gold, livery and lordly, proclaimed in perfect apogee.

The lords within lived lives carefree, carefree of all worldly worry.

They lay on silk and drank rich tea, and noble ilk became beastly

Took joy from flesh of detainees, and assaulted, killed and roamed free -

And starved slaves were all forced to see



The heady hedonistic lust, done under Sapa Inca's trust,
Brought him simple sadistic glee, were slave's souls not simply stones to he?
But slaves hearts were flamed to fury, fury flowed through Macha Iri.
T'was their flesh and faith used for free, souls dismissed by divine decree
T'was a callous reality, their flesh was forbidden to flee
They sought a solution to see

'tween their time as terrible toys, they meet away from noble noise -
'neath the shade of a gilded tree, talking change in Macha Iri.

To seek a future, to be free, free from fear at Sapa's decree -
After an age 'neath gilded tree, there was plan to which all agree
Pray to the sun to set them free, the burning blazing god, Inti,
And hoped that their prayer he would see

Sapa Inca in Cusco sat, as his slaves gather 'hind his back
Unaware of prayer to Inti, caught in perfect Macha Iri.

On the carved obsidian scree, scree spills blood for blazing Inti -
Red blood upon gold panoply, sacrifice 'neath the gilded tree.
Flame licks the sacrifice with glee, and scarlet sparks drink bloody sea
And smoke, from the mountain they see

Obsidian peak was broken, blazing godly words were spoken
"We Inti will hear your blood plea, we shall see to Macha Iri"

With flame a god came from debris, debris of shattered stone and scree.
Red fire melts the gilded tree, and all the lords and Sapa see.
There stands burning gold god Inti - Gazing down on Machi Iri
Nought by corruption did he see



A cross, the sun sat on his brow, his presence burns, commands a bow.

The hot air screams like a banshee, "Run all you wretches, run from he"

He's an inferno, god Inti. A flaming godly apogee.

Face a statue carved from ruby, graced by eyes of infinity.

His scarlet lips turn down to see, the gross gold grave, Macha Iri -

He begins to walk down to see

He sees the golden ziggurat, cut in the mountain, rich and fat.

Walks around the green grounds does he, his blazing soul needs no brass key.

Oxygen flame, he is unseen, unseen by servant, lord, or queen

His endless eyes' pure vision see, slave's blood soaked stones - Macha Iri

His blinding presence moves whilst screened, seeking the king is god Inti

To Sapa he moves through gold sea

Before Sapa burns see-through flame, replaced by Inti's burnished frame.

"What before our eyes do we see? What golden shining travesty?"

Casting wide in wrath is he, he speaks by his divine decree -

"What of your slaves that not you see? Is burned blood worth this panoply?"

Sapa Inca seemed strange, carefree, spake inti as an addressee.

And all turned to listen and see

He spoke with voice both dark and rich, like gold glimmer and running pitch.

"Why would I care for my slave sea, their souls are nought but stones to me -

And should be as simply stones to thee, thee who light melts my gilded tree.

I Sapa speak and do decree, and e're the court all shall agree -

Join in our revel God Inti, join us here in Macha Iri"

All looked for an answer to see.

God's red burning cross mark'ed brow, wrinkled as stormclouds drawing down

Endless eyes watch nobility, and vexed with thought and choice is he -

For what was said is clear to see, see slaves do not concern Inti



But nor for noble golden scree, does a sun god need to worry.

'Indeed slaves souls are stones to we, but the same small stone soul have thee -

So we shall take this golden sea'

He lashes forth a lambent lance, hand thrust forward like duellist's stance -

It strikes with god's morbidity, and as they burn the nobles flee.

A slave cries out 'Our God Inti! Inti we thought you'd set us free'

The slave burns like dry cherry tree, scent of death fills Macha Iri

Sapa stand's, before god a flea. But he stands, man of stone is he

Inti himself stops to see

Sapa inca in Cusco seethes, rank frustration he spits and breathes

A mighty voice he does decree, "Macha Iri belongs to me!"

Inti speaks soft "you misjudge we, we would rule more fairly than thee"

Sapa said "Only death I see, you rule with no humanity!"

So they both argued bitterly, till Sapa stood against Inti

Red rage in his eyes one could see

Sapa draws forth his royal blade, with edge of glass and core of jade -

"Thou art no god thou nobody! I art Sapa, I challenge thee!"

He lunged and lasted true steps three, three steps toward the god Inti.

Then with a flash too bright to see, so bright to bring insanity

Sapa was gone as gilded tree, and the lords looked to locate he -

Only burnt shadow could they see

And so In Cusco Inti sat, his flame scorched clothing red and black -

The ziggurat still stands there free, on the flat of black glass and scree.

Now it instead belongs to he, he the divine crossed apogee

Still works the bleeding seething sea, of slaves within Macha Iri

Still he seeks nought but his own glee, a perfect unchanged travesty

A single difference, none could see



Raindrops –

Drip, Drip, Drip

The whispered vibrato came

Stars loosening their grip

And giving the night to the rain

The thousand studs of quartz and glass

That once held their sway on the sky

Are engulfed in the wonderful, pitch-black morass

So darkening the calm-night thereby

Murmuring soft and calm the wind spoke

A cool breeze to suggest and decry

The withdrawing of summer's soft feather cloak

And that the cool and the bluster was nigh

And drops like bubbles in a glass of champagne

Fall in an announcement of a warm-night's goodbye

And purify the world with the rain

So came the omniscient splash of cleansing water

The torrent fell with a gentle sound

The bath of Neptune's sapphire daughter.

Worries of today, all now drowned

The rivers danced with aqueous excitement

As the drops of pearly mist reach the ground

Leaves and needles lend a motion to the indictment

But in this ablution, only raindrops abound

A relaxing solution, to cleanse a day of pain

With a darkened kingdom crowned

This eve belongs to the rain

The static-noise of the rainy night lulls a chaotic mind



Bringing music along with the shower
And the sharp bitter scent of the dripping pines
Brushing skin with touch soft as a flower
The distant sound of crickets and river-frogs call out
Echoing for miles at this hazy hour
And over it the song of the rain is all about
Maintaining the melodic balance of power
A million watery voices the song to sustain
Yet the multitude never seem to shout
So peaceful was this night of the rain

Thus the night was heady with rain
The sluice of heaven let slip
Playing a symphonic watery refrain
Drip, drip, drip



Mutually Assured Destruction –

Snow cools on the war

Till petty rage boils the frost

Creating white steam

Bombs rise with tensions

Hang suspended serenely

Then they fall to earth

Flowers bloom in red

Petals of nuclear fire

Their loving caress

Still the steel falls down

Hate becomes orange sorrow

And annihilates

A million white bones

Cremated to sombre black

By the bomb's white flash

The old world slaughtered

A baptism for the new

In atomic flame

Bloody sacrifice

Satisfies the hungry blaze

Enough flesh for now

The red cools to grey

And the cities bare their bones



To a sad morning

A calm earth remains

A ticking Geiger counter

And human ashes



Maria Diane Wang

Sestina

6 words repeated: *Crown, Kingdom, Island, Love, Beast, Boy*

Royalty

Thereupon, sat on the throne, is a man with a crown
Entrusted by his predecessor to rule his own kingdom.
Because the castle was small, in the middle of an island
The man, selfish and greedy, failed to rule with love.
And as we know, behind every man lies a beast,
No matter if they are a king or still a young boy.

And we know that a man grows from being a boy
Knowing growing up his entitlement to a crown.
And perhaps there's a reason why he turned into beast
Who cared little to none about an inherited kingdom
Might have they nurtured regally, though without love?
But then again, it's not unheard of for such a small island.

Soon there's joyous growth within the island
As a man becomes a father to a baby boy.
With a smile, proclaimed his never-ending love
to the son who will one day wear his crown.
And learn to rule, cherish, and care for the kingdom.
Only, he hopes the boy wouldn't end up a beast.

The man, the king or better known the beast,
With his son's help, learnt to cherish the island
And there they sat overlooking their kingdom.
Years later, at sixteen, come of age has the boy
And it's time that the man parts with his crown
There is no hatred from the man, only love.

The boy king rules with kindness and love,
The man relieved, his son is not a beast.
atop the boy's head, it's placed, the crown
as celebration takes place in the small Island
the coronation of a new king, yet still a boy
with a burden to carry: his very own kingdom

There's no easy way in ruling a kingdom
As much as he gives it time and love.
He may be a king now but he's still a boy
Who refuses to rule like his father, the beast
they're grateful, the inhabitants of the island,
to finally have someone worthy of the crown.

"Long live the boy king!" chants the entire kingdom
Truly deserving of the crown; of their love
That the beast came to be only a legend of the island.



Sara Eitzen

Shallow Victory

She sat staring out the open window feeling like her life was in tatters. She groaned at her very existence. Each day the morning sun filtered through the mouldy, torn curtains to rouse her. She struggled to gain the strength to get to her feet, yet she managed and she shuffled over to the small ensuite. Upon dealing with the morning necessities she would simply stare at her reflection in the broken mirror. Her once flawless complexion, now dotted with bruises in various stages of healing; her hair hung in matted tendrils. She cared not to correct her appearance. The many colours clung to her like a constant reminder of everything wrong in the world. Next the tears came; some from sorrow, some from pain, but mostly they came from frustration. Many days she found that she could not cry at all.

She moved away from the window, slammed the thin wooden door to her room and proceeded down the long winding corridor. No one else would be in the scant kitchen at this hour, no one to stare at her. Her legs were still damaged from yesterday's event and hindered her movement. She stumbled her way through the door not pausing when her hip jarred and fresh agony shot up her spine. The pain she wore as a second skin surrounding her completely. Fearing that she could be seen, she dared not show any outward notion of her hurt, but internally she winced and swore. She opened the well-worn cupboard and withdrew the only non-damaged glass from within. Cool, crisp water from a pitcher nearby filled the glass and she drank deeply.

Somehow she knew today would be different. She could tell that she would have the strength, she would have enough will to make the hurt stop. She would achieve her desire to escape. For many days and nights her mind was plagued with dark thoughts. They would tell her that she was a weak individual, that she was incapable of love. She would hear over and over how her sorry state was entirely her own fault and that if she were to ever reach out for help, she would become the laughing stock of the community. With the nasty things they said to her, she questioned why anyone should help her. This all resulted from her poor life choices. To escape the words of blame, hate and disgrace, she would find the strength today, she had to.

She stood under the sunlight streaming into the dreary room. The warmth it provided was a small comfort to her in her world of perdition. Her bones warmed and her eyes glazed over as she again re-lived that terrible time.

She was walking home from a friend's birthday party, perhaps a little more intoxicated than she thought she was. She didn't see him hiding there in the shadows. She didn't feel his stare upon her, the gaze of the hunter who had found his prey. She didn't realise that the tingling sensation down her spine was her primal reaction to being followed. She kept on walking until a blur of movement pushed her from stumbling down the road to being dragged down a dark, damp laneway. She felt calloused hands upon her, tearing at her skirt, bruising her flesh and she screamed. She was forced to the cold ground. The wind left her lungs, as she fought to scream again and no sound came.

She tried to fight, truly she did. Every time she would bring her legs up to run they were pushed down again. Each defensive punch failed to reach its mark. Her attempts were inhibited by the alcohol. As soon as it began, it ended. Moments ago, she couldn't stop moving, now she could barely breathe. She was scared to make a noise, lest her attacker begin again. She was left there, barely conscious, laying cold and wet in the filthy puddles. Her blouse and bra torn from her, her skirt in



shreds beneath her. She cried for what felt like hours and when she could, she shakily gathered her clothes together and continued home.

She closed the door to her small apartment and ran the shower straight on to the highest temperature. The steam filled her small bathroom as she stepped in to try and remove all trace of him. The near boiling liquid cascaded around her, the rush of the water almost deafening. Yet she could still hear him laughing. She closed her eyes, but she could still see his satisfied sneer. Her loofah couldn't be harsh enough to scrape away his touch. No matter how hard she scrubbed, she could not find any comfort. She sagged against the tiles and sank to the floor; she didn't move again until the water ran cold.

She tried her best to continue with her life. She avoided being out after dark, she only went to work and came straight home after. For a few weeks that worked for her and she began to feel normal again until she realised she may have missed her period. A quick blood test at the medical centre confirmed her worst fears. The word 'shock' would never be strong enough to describe just how she felt right then. Her body went cold and numb. Her breath came in shaking gasps as she had to accept that she was now pregnant with her rapist's child. She could feel her control slipping and she knew that she could not raise this child without loathing its existence. She knew that her family and friends would never understand and she signed the paperwork to continue with the procedure to remove the cells within her womb. She hoped that removing the last remaining trace of what happened would be enough to return her to a normal life.

The following days were hard for her; the procedure was painful and everyone was asking what was wrong. Her hope turned to dismay as she realised that she could not go about her life without her body constantly reminding her that she was in pain. She could not hide what had happened to her any longer. Her anguish fuelled her silence. She still hadn't told them; her friends and family. Who would believe her that she was assaulted? They would blame her, telling her that it was her fault because she was drinking. That she deserved what she got because of her inability to act responsibly. Her self-preservation instincts took over and she packed up her life to move as far away from everyone she knew as fast as she could.

The cash she had in her purse paid for a room at a shoddy rundown motel in the middle of nowhere. She had driven as far as she could. This place was so far out of the way that she felt safe there for now. As she was certain that no one could find her. She was so exhausted that she didn't even bother to change into her sleepwear before she collapsed onto the grimy bed.

Her days here were fraught with frantic thoughts. She felt paranoid that at any moment someone she knew would find her and drag her back. Would she be persecuted? Would they lock her away? She wasn't crazy; but they wouldn't see it that way, they'd surely mock her for being weak and judge her harshly for her actions.

The worst of her thoughts came at night when those few in other rooms retired for the evening. When there were no distractions from her mind. When she was truly alone her conscience would creep into her rational thinking mind to plant its convictions of her actions. Her mind and her conscience fought for control of her. She felt possessed and that the demons hiding there in her mind blamed her, just like her friends and family. They screamed in her mind repeatedly that she was weak, that she was useless, she was unclean, filthy.

She fought with herself over her decision to remove her baby. Her conscience explained to her that she truly regretted eradicating the cells, as they would have grown into someone who would love her. Her rational mind fought back to tell her that she was scared; that the foetus would have grown



into an abusive man, like the one who put it there in her belly to begin with. In an epic battle her demonic conscience won, shoving her rationality aside so that she now felt indisputable despair and shame for her actions. How could she kill an innocent and blameless child? Her demons agreed with her and they told her that her repentance should be taken from her skin. They told her that she was so ungrateful to extinguish a blessing given to her. They told her that the only way she could make up for the evil she had done was to ensure that she couldn't harm another again.

So, she did as she was bid. Her hands would form fists and would find any part of her that they could reach to execute their punishment. Her self-harm came in the form of punches, pinching and beating herself with any object that she could lay her hands on. Some days she wouldn't stop until she physically was unable to continue. No part of her body was spared in this relentless torture. Her face became the victim of bashing with her fists. Her arms she would pinch sometimes so much so that they bled. Her hands she would slam between things, often it would be the bedside table drawers. Her belly she would punch over and over, the void where her baby should be. Her legs would also bare these marks of abuse as she would crush them with the door to her bathroom.

As she blinked to bring herself back, she realized that she hadn't left the desolate motel. For weeks, she had wallowed in her guilt, never speaking to anyone. How could she? They would only serve more judgement upon her. She knew it would be a matter of time before they converged upon her, they would attack her like ravenous wolves, as soon as they found out what she was hiding from. Moving as quickly as her injured legs would carry her, she made her way back to her room. Her water glass still in hand.

In her retreating, rational mind, she understood that she couldn't go on like this. That she would have to fight her demons or succumb to them. She had to win before they did. She knew that the days of punishing herself for her child's death would have to be finally over. To ensure that a resolute end could be brought to her agony, to silence her feverish demons forever, she opened her fingers to drop the glass. It fell to floor where it shattered; the pieces lay before her like precious gems. They glittered and beckoned to her. Promising her a reprieve from her torment. Whispering to her that she was moments away from the quiet bliss she sought so desperately. She knelt to the floor and grasped a shard that would suit her purpose. She did not feel the scraping of the glass as she drew the sharp edge across her wrist. She could not hear her hoarse screams as she pressed deeper. As the rush of deep red blood ran down her pale creamy skin, she did feel free, at last.



Nicholas William Brodley

Slightly Drunk & Disney and Pixar's Cars

Slightly Drunk

So I guess that I'm slightly drunk right now
How do I best convince you that I'm drunk?
I don't want you to think that I'm a fake
I'm starting to regret my last few beers
I hope it's iambic pentameter
Geez I still have like eight more lines to write
Corona doesn't mix with poetry
Both are things that can make me really sad
I don't know if the humour is a front
I don't know if it is the beers talking
This is a strange situation to me
I want to convince you this isn't fake
But I want to convince my mates it is
I'm confused and drunk this is the last line

Disney and Pixar's Cars

Why do they have seats in them?
I presume there are no humans in this universe,
So why do they have seats in them?
They are very bright and shiny
Almost plastic looking
Like brightly coloured Tupperware,
The sort you buy at a discount supermarket
Is Disney trying to say something about our plastic society?
Or is it just the abundance of Tupperware in my mum's pantry?
I don't have the answer
All I know is that my lunchbox has a steering wheel



Victoria Knight

Ten Hours

14:38

I'm standing in the spot where Amelia told me she was going to be and she isn't here. There's an envelope on the bench beside me with my name on it, clear as day, but I don't want to read it. I don't want to know what it says, don't want to know what's inside. She's going to have told me that she loves me, but that it just can't work. Her parents are strict and super harsh. She's scared that they're too close to finding out about us – she's twenty-fucking-two and they treat her like she's twelve. She needs to create some distance between us for her own safety – I wish I could understand. And honestly, sometimes I do. If she was ever hurt because of me, I couldn't forgive myself. But *god* I just love her too much to even consider distance an option. I thought she did too. Thought is, tragically, the operative word.



2:40pm

I'm running. My heart is racing faster than it ever has before, because today is the day my life changes. Tears and snot are streaming down my face despite myself – I don't want to cry. I try not to but I am just not strong enough. Pepper has always been the strong one. From the moment I met her, she was strong and self-assured and loud and... well, *drunk*. She walked over to me, all swagger and confidence, just trying to tell me through her intoxicated haze that she liked my cardigan. It wasn't my nicest one, and honestly I probably should have gotten rid of it months ago based on its state. I can't even imagine my life without that cardigan in it. It seems dramatic, but I suppose it's a metaphor for her and – I am *too busy* to rationalise this, I need to *go*. I pull my helmet back on but it takes me a few attempts to clip it up with how hard my hands are shaking. I finally clasp it, tightening the strap almost painfully under my chin. I'm crying too hard to notice.



14:41

I take not one, but three deep breaths. Honestly, I only intended to take the one but I can't make my arms move towards the envelope on the first or the second. The third breath has my arm shooting forward and with shaky hands, I open the envelope. It takes me another few breaths to read the note. I feel the tears stinging the backs of my eyes as I start to read. *To my dearest love*, she's written and I'm going to cry, she's going to *make me fucking cry in this park* and – wait. *Wait*. I read faster than I ever have before, my brain and my eyes struggling to work in tandem.

Packing my bags. Leaving. Staying with you. Come get me. I want to be with you. Come tonight. We can't be seen before but afterwards I will never leave your side.

I run as fast as I can to my car, and every nerve in my body is telling me to go to her, go to her now. But I know I can't. I go home and I wait. It is the longest seven hours and ten minutes of my life, not that I'm counting.



6:03pm

It is the last dinner I will ever have at this house. I try to look around for reasons to stay, desperately searching for some semblance of redemption for the people that raised me. I can't find it. For every half-hearted, feigned display of love, their true nature makes itself evident soon after. I still remember, years ago now, the first time my mother called me a whore after I stayed out past curfew with Pepper. At the age of twenty-one, no less. She accused us of going out to try and pick up boys and, well, she probably couldn't be further from the truth. I dread to think what she might have called me had she known what we'd really been doing. I remember when my father told me I was only to leave the house if I was running errands, as if I were some teenager who needed a scolding and to be grounded.

That was three months ago and right now, I am two weeks shy of twenty-three.

We sit down to eat dinner, and they smile as they always do, trying to maintain some veneer of a good Christian family. I smile back – it is small and plastered on but it's there. *Be good for a few more hours, Amelia.* My father says grace, and I clasp my hands together and bow my head as he does. This is the last time I will have to put up this guise. I've done it for this long, I can manage one more time.



21:59

I've been pacing for what seems like hours but for what has probably only been ten minutes. I tell myself I won't leave until ten, but this will have to do. I can't contain myself anymore, I have to go to her. I drive as fast as I can, and I swear fate *wants* this because I make every light, I fit in every gap, there are no more obstacles between us. I try not to let myself think that this is the part where it all falls to shit but I can't make those thoughts go away. Because this is the part where it is supposed to absolutely, irrevocably fall to shit. I've read enough shitty romance books to know. It's all I can think as I pull up and text her that I'm outside, swallowing the lump in my throat.



10:02pm

When I'm sure my parents are asleep, I finally go to write them a letter. I start the first time. *Dear Mother and Father. Please know I love you dearly.* It feels wrong immediately. It feels fake, and I'm so sick of faking it. I write another, and try to embody Pepper in starting it. *To Mother and Father. Fuck you.* There's a five-year-old inside me giggling, but the rest of me rips that letter up promptly. I finish one complete letter. *To Mother and Father. I'm a lesbian. And I figure that I'd save you the trouble of disowning me by leaving of my own accord. Don't bother looking for me. I'm with people that love me more than you ever did. Enjoy explaining this to the relatives.*

Personally, I am satisfied with the letter, but something is off. My parents spent my whole life teaching me to respect them at the price of love and genuine connection.

This is one last façade for them – a letter with no emotional weight, delivering the bare minimum. It only says that I am leaving, I do not want to be looked for but I am safe. In a kinder world, maybe my parents could find a way to accept their lesbian daughter and her bisexual girlfriend. I suppose the world isn't that kind.

Perhaps if I was stronger, I could leave the first letter I wrote, but I'm not there yet.

Still, I'm proud that I could even write it – I take it as a sign that I'm ready to leave.

I'm ready for this, I know, but that has me emotional again. What doesn't these days? The only thing that stops me from crying again is my phone vibrating against my hip. It's time.



22:34

From the second I hit send, I fear she isn't coming. Panic manifests itself as bile in my throat but then I see it, I see *her*. She has never looked so beautiful. She has a suitcase in hand and tears in her eyes but there is the sweetest, most beautiful feel of freedom in the air. She clambers into the car and I kiss her harder than I ever have before, and she cries and laughs and pushes me away all at once. She reminds me we need to leave, and I know she's right. She buckles in and my tyres skid against the bitumen below them before the car finally starts to move away from her former captive home. They say home is where the heart is and we both know we're there as we make the journey back to my apartment.



10:34pm

I leave the letter on my pillow, putting my house keys on top of them. There's no coming back now. I grab the suitcase I have packed – it has some basic essentials, but there is a lot I'm leaving behind. I bring the cardigan from mine and Pepper's first meeting, and most of the other garments are ones that she's complimented in one way or another. Despite myself, I have packed a family picture of myself and my parents, but deep down I feel that I may have just packed it to one day be able to get rid of it. But my things don't matter. I would leave it all behind if I had to, just to do what I'm doing now. I leave through the back door and rush to the front where I see my chariot awaiting in the form of an absolute rust bucket of a car. I have never been happier to see it or its driver. I all but throw my case into the back seat before leaning into a kiss Pepper is already pulling me into. This feels right; I feel safe. That is, until she starts driving, of course. She is a terrible driver, but I love her anyway.

The drive is hard, and not only because of Pepper's erratic manoeuvres. It all feels very final – because it is. I don't want to go back to my parents. That I know. I want to know who I am without them, maybe who I was supposed to be all along. Pepper tries to tell me that I'm so many things, but I think I need to find that out for myself. I know she'll give me the space to do that. The idea of having my own space to be my own self fills me with an excitement and a warmth that I haven't felt in a very long time. Tears well in my eyes for the umpteenth time that day, and if there's one



thing I truly know about myself, it's that I'm a crier. Pepper takes a hand off the wheel and puts it over mine, giving it a little squeeze without taking her eyes off the road. I feel safe again.

00:38

When we get back to the apartment, I make the mistake of calling it *our* apartment. It's true, that part isn't a mistake, but it makes Amelia a blubbering mess again. She leaves to shower and to collect herself as I take her case up to our room, putting it at the end of our bed. That is something we can deal with tomorrow. The day has been nothing short of exhausting. I only pop into the bathroom to put some of my clothes in there for Amelia to sleep in. She comes back into the bedroom about fifteen minutes later, absolutely swimming in the outfit. Just the sight of her in the billowy clothes has me laughing and for the first time that day, she joins me. She turns the light off and comes to lay beside me, and her skin is ever-so-slightly damp and warm. I let my mind wander as Amelia settles - I think about everything from what I have in the freezer for dinner tomorrow night to what song we'll play at our wedding, about when we'll change our home voicemail message to what we'll name our children. I can't be sure about the answers to any of those questions, but I can be sure about one thing. I am sure about never leaving her side, and as she falls asleep with her head tucked against me, I know that she is too.



Jordan Irvine-Creaser

The Ever-Diminishing Pool of Appropriate Male Counterparts

Okay, it's seven o'clock now. Where is he? Shit, I hope I haven't gone to the wrong bar. No that's impossible, I checked the message three times before I left the house. I'm just fretting. He'll be here soon, he probably just got caught in traffic. Do I have something in my teeth? I can definitely feel something in my teeth. Is that a seed or... oh crap here he is.

"I'm so sorry I got caught in traffic."

Nice, handsome, straight teeth – could be on a winner here. Oh, kiss on the cheek, classy. That's got to be a good sign, right?

"No problem at all. Hi, I'm Alice."

"Lovely to finally meet you Alice, I'm Matthew."

And so the interview we disguise as a social meeting and call a 'first date' begins. Chat, chat, chat. This is going well, no alarm bells ringing just yet, but then again it's only 7.45, plenty of time for disappointment.

"My mum makes the best marinated lamb." He says in response to my story about almost burning down my apartment cooking chops.

"You two sound close, do you catch-up often?"

"Yeah, I live with her." He laughs, I grimace. Oh Matthew, you were doing so well. "She does all the cooking for Hanukkah."

"You're Jewish?"

"You're not?"

"The only pig I worship is bacon." I laugh, he grimaces. Oh God, why did I say that? Now the wait for his excuse to leave begins. And it looks like I'm not going to have to wait long.

"I'm so sorry, I'm going to have to head off. I, ah, told mum I'd tape Grey's Anatomy for her."

Dammit, I really thought Matthew had potential. Then again, I thought Jake had potential and he turned out to have a criminal record – stalking of all things. And then there was Connor, the passionate, vegan hipster who shamed me into only eating the salad that came with my schnitzel.

I know someone in my position has no room to be picky. A thirty-five year old, single woman wanting a family, before all her bits shrivel up, should welcome any single, straight, fertile man with open arms. However, I am faced with maintaining an impossible equilibrium between being pathetically desperate and holding out for Mr One Hundred Per Cent Right. A so far unsolvable conundrum that has left me eating TV dinners and watching reruns of Friends alone in my apartment six days a week. Six, because the seventh is now my



assigned dating night. It has been that way ever since my dear mother decided to sign me up to a number of dating websites – in a last-ditched effort to secure herself grandchildren, I can only assume. That’s how I came to meet Jake, Connor and, tonight, Matthew. Another three members of the male species I can now safely cross off Mum’s potential son-in-law list.

So now, in usual Alice fashion, I’m sitting here alone, watching as a man walks away from me. I swivel back to face the bar and slump over the polished, sticky oak.

“Well that was a disaster, wasn’t it?” A voice from behind the bar laughs.

“Excuse me?” I respond as I look up and make eye contact with the tall bartender standing opposite me.

“Sorry, your date just did a runner, that’s got to be rough. Not to mention very embarrassing, considering a number of other people saw what just went down, myself included. I’m Adam by the way.”

What the heck do I say to that?

“He did not do a runner. He had to tape Grey’s Anatomy for his mum.” I retort.

“Yeah, no guy is going to leave a date that he thinks is going well to run off and tape Grey’s Anatomy for his mum.”

“Wow Adam, don’t you sugar coat it now.” I finally come out with.

“Sugar coating isn’t my style. Pouring sad, lonely people drinks is though. What can I get you sad, lonely girl?”

“Alice is fine and you can get me a gin and tonic, thanks.” I respond bluntly.

“On it.” He leaves to make the drink. Who is this guy? I’m just going to have this drink and then head home to the large tub of Ben and Jerry’s awaiting me in the freezer. Oh he’s back already, fantastic.

“Here we go.” He places the drink in front of me. “So what events lead you to your tragic date tonight and in particular, this bar? I haven’t seen you in here before.”

I inhale then exhale deeply and loudly to indicate how pathetic the story that is about to follow truly is. I explain about my mum signing me up to dating websites and my previous lack of luck with anything involving the opposite gender. Meanwhile, he laughs, mocks and criticises the entire time. Naively, I’m shocked every time he comes out with another cynical view on love and relationships or teases me for my groundless optimism towards either of the two.

“Sounds like you need a new hobby.” he says after I have finished divulging the details of my love life – or lack thereof.

“Are you always this cynical or am I just lucky tonight?”

“I’m not cynical, I just find it amusing – what desperation leads some people to do in the hopes of latching on to a prospective life partner.”



“I’m not desperate.” I blurt out defensively.

“You just told your entire life story, including the last time you had sex and your menstrual patterns, to a complete stranger. Sorry but it doesn’t get much more desperate than that.”

What a jerk! I don’t need this.

“Wow, okay. Um, thank you for this little chat. Really, thank you, I’ve never felt more uplifted. But I think I’ll go home now and watch Nicholas Sparks movies all night to try and reinspire myself. Real pleasure meeting you Adam.”

“Yeah, you too. Good luck with your mystical romance.”

I snatch my purse from the bar and head for the door. I’m not going to let this night discourage me. There’s a whole pool of guys out there with potential. Anyway, I have another date next week that I need to stay positive for, and I have a good feeling about this one – apparently he’s a dancer.

...

The date was a disaster! What is wrong with me? Is my radar for appropriate choices in men just broken or something because I see nice guys everywhere but when it comes to picking them, I only ever seem to pick the doozies? I need to take suitable life partner choosing classes, I think, or just get someone to do it for me. These are the thoughts that run through my head as I hang my coat up and mope around my apartment. I kick the ridiculous heels I’m wearing across the room. Time to curl up on the couch like the lonely hermit I... wait, hold up. I’m just thinking, maybe there is someone who can help. Is it worth the humiliation? Just calculating and... yes results show my desperation is greater than my pride. I jump up, grab the closest pair of shoes that aren’t designed by Satan and run back out the door.

...

“Ah Alice, isn’t it? I knew you’d be back. I had a feeling.” I think I’m already regretting coming back to this bar. I should really have more pride in myself. “Another date go down the gurgler?”

“How do you know?” I ask anxiously.

“You have that hopeless look on your face. Plus you’re all dressed up yet with ugg boots on so I’m guessing you made a detour home to down some ice-cream before deciding to come here.”

No witty comeback this time. He pretty much nailed it. Am I really that predictable?

“See the thing with girls like you Alice, is that you’re so anxious to get guys to like you that you scare them off with your over-preparedness. The more you try to get everything perfect the further off the mark you are.”

I want to rebut but what he’s saying makes sense.

“So what do I do then?” I ask. Pathetic, I know.



“Well, men are relatively simple creatures. They may not be looking for something long-term but if you’re clever enough, you can trick them into it. You’ve just got to make sure you hook them in the first few dates by appearing sexy and low-maintenance.”

I don’t want to trick them into it, I think. But not, what comes out?

“Okay I’m listening. How do I do that?” Tragic. I truly am.

Adam goes on to explain the contingency plan and I sit attentively, lapping up every last word. My brain wanders about ten minutes into his tutorial. Why must women go to this much effort to find a relationship? Is it actually all women or is it just me? Oh God, that’s a depressing thought, let’s bury that one and never consider it again. Why don’t men want the same thing? I see loads of men who seem genuinely happy in relationships. Are all the guys who want to actually settle down already taken? If not, why are they so bloody hard to find? If I go on a date with someone then I’m already sizing them up for their husband and father potential. I don’t want clubs and bars, I want movies and home cooked dinners after a long day at work and holding hands and taking the kids to school and...

“Hello? You still with me?” Adam snaps his fingers in front of my face and I’m torn from my daydream.

“Yeah I’m listening. I’m just thinking.” I respond and Adam continues on without missing a beat. By the time I end up leaving, it’s almost 1.30 in the morning.

...

So now I’m three more dates down the line and I have consulted Adam after every single one. I think I’m a little less intense now, thanks to his guidance. Nevertheless, tonight was not the night and thus, I am back, perched upon the same swivel bar stool seeking advice for the next round.

“But what is it that guys want to hear at the end of the night?” My questions have been flying in Adam’s direction tonight.

“Honestly, I don’t know.”

Unsatisfied with his answer I probe further, “Well, what would you want?”

“Me?” He seems taken aback, “I’m not a good person to ask.”

“Why not? You’re a guy, you know all about this stuff.”

“Yeah I know about how most guys work – I just don’t work that way.”

“Okay...” I try to encourage him to divulge more.

“You’re going to laugh but I’m not really a fan of the ‘date and no call’ kind of culture. When I find a girl I like, I want to hang onto her. One night doesn’t really take my fancy.”

“You’re kidding? So you’re basically a male me?” I smirk.

“I guess so.” He looks awkward, not his usual suave self.



“Why do you help me out?” I ask spontaneously

“You come into my bar every week and demand advice.” He laughs.

“But you don’t have to talk to me for hours like you do.”

He smiles, “I like you okay? You’re quirky and a bit of a nutter but sure as hell make me laugh and... I want to see you get the guy you deserve.”

“Guy I deserve?”

“Yeah, someone that loves you the way you are, without all this fake shit I’ve taught you to do. Someone that wants to see a date go further than a one night hook up. You shouldn’t have to change the way you are to suit some guy.”

“Wait... what?” He’s got to be shitting me, “I’ve just spent weeks learning how to change. That’s the whole point, you were teaching me. My dates are going better now.”

“Well, it’s crap. I was wrong. If a guy doesn’t like you for who you are it’s never going to work out. Unfortunately you’re just going to have to keep trying to find a guy who wants the romance you’re after from the get-go.”

“But the only guy I know like that is you. You said yourself, that’s the opposite of what most guys want.” The realisation of what I’ve implied washes over me.

A severely awkward silence ensues. Adam fidgets, wiping down the same part of the bar that he has now run the cloth over no fewer than eight times.

Before I have chance to mull that idea over in my head at all, Adam cuts in, “It’s not such a crazy idea is it? We get on, you’re reasonably attractive...” I roll my eyes, “What I mean to say is, we want the same things and I do really like you, Alice. Would you... want to go on a date with me?”

I shake my head and smirk. How desperate can you get?

“But who will I talk to if the date goes south?” I see him searching for a witty response but before he can find one, I continue, “I’d really like that. I know a great vegan restaurant nearby.”



Sarah Donnellan

Original Short Story: 'The Ghost in the Puddle'

"Thank you!" I shouted to the bus driver, as I hopped out of the bus. My boots made a smacking sound as I hit the concrete, which was then followed by the taps and splashes of my soles hitting the wet ground. I quickly pulled the hood of my yellow raincoat over my head to protect myself from the rain. "What a day to forget my umbrella."

My hair and clothes were already soaked as I shivered continually. I wrapped my arms around myself for comfort, and dreamt about how wonderful it would be to be inside my warm home. As I sped through the streets with my face to the ground and my hands in my pockets, I noticed all of the puddles which had magically appeared with the rain. In every dent in the ground and at the sides of streets were puddles of all sizes. But I didn't have a craving to jump in them, I was too miserable to enjoy life right now.

My thoughts froze as a splash of water surrounded me. I looked down to see an enormous puddle. The size astounded me - it was the largest one I've seen so far. It was placed right in front of my home, like it was there just for me. However, the fact that my boots were now filled with water was anything but pleasing. I groaned with anger as I shivered even more. I looked down into the puddle to see my reflection. My black, wet hair stuck to my face and my yellow hood was so big it almost covered my eyes. 'I look like a mess', I thought to myself. Before I could look up and disappear into my apartment, something in the reflection caught my eye. The image was the reflection of everything above it, the sky and the gum tree projected in a perfect image. It was also the dirty water and the ability to still see the concrete ground underneath. The image was also me, it was what you'd expect. But something wasn't quite how it should be. After moments of searching for this bizarre source, an eerie feeling flowed through my entire body. I looked up and quickly dashed inside while avoiding eye contact with the puddle. I needed to get away from it. But it's okay, it will be gone in the morning.



I stirred out of my deep sleep and pulled the white covers off to reveal the warm sunlight flowing into my bedroom. The rain was gone and with it my happiness returned. I jumped out of bed with a strong eagerness to face the day ahead. I walked down the staircase and towards the kitchen in which I turned on the bright red kettle. As steam started to float from the spout, I faced away from the clutter and stared out of the window. The sunlight filled every inch of my front yard as cars and trucks appeared and disappeared between the pieces of greenery, which filled the streets. As I admired such beauty, I became distracted by one thing. All of the puddles had almost disappeared, now decreased into specks and spots of water in various places, except for the one large puddle. I didn't think much of it, it was so big that it would take ages to evaporate – at least I think so. I really don't know much about all of that science-stuff.

I continued to drink my coffee and rushed to get ready for the day before I was ready to leave again. I wrapped on my scarf and pulled on my jacket before heading outside into the beaming sunlight. The steam poured out my mouth and mixed with the cold air as I locked the door and hopped down the stairs. I glanced around as I walked at a steady pace, the white picket fence, the mailbox, and the hedges – all how they should be. 'Mmmmmmm'. I paused as this sound filled the air around me. 'What was that?' I thought. I stayed quiet to listen, but there was now silence. I convinced myself this was probably the neighbours and continued to walk. 'Mmmmmmm'. Again, what is that? I looked around but there was nothing. Even a strange silence from the busy road in front of me. I looked towards the puddle and saw the stillness of the water. It was still exactly the same size as yesterday. How strange. 'Mmmmmmmmm'. As the noise reappeared within echoes, a ripple spread throughout the puddle – like the noise was a small earthquake which shook the water. But I could feel no movement whatsoever. The ground was still but this strange, echoing sound caused the water to dance along with it. A musical vibration, every note causing a new ripple before silence placed the water back into an awkward stillness. I stared at the puddle with a blank mind, unable to process what was happening. I stared at my reflection again through the ripples of every vibration that this sound created. 'It's me, but it's not me', I whispered to myself. I looked up and shook off the eerie feeling which had possessed my body again. 'Why am I talking to myself?' I thought. 'Stop being so strange. *Maybe you*



should come inside'. I stepped back and stared at the puddle. That was my mind, but it was not my thoughts or my voice. An urge to run overcame my mind. I wanted to escape and hope that this strange body of water would disappear by this evening, but my feet wouldn't move, as if they were nailed to the ground. I looked back down to the reflection and to the image of me. There was no difference, except that the ripples had stopped. The water was almost completely frozen from movement and the echoing sound had now become silence. I looked at myself again, my face surrounded by bright, blue sky. *'Do you want to come inside?'* The same voice reappeared in my mind and again, it wasn't mine. It was softly spoken and calm, but it echoed through every inch of my head and sent shivers down my spine. My eyes locked with my own, I could see the fear in my own face. *'Why am I not running?'* I thought as my heart started to pound against my chest. *'Because you want to come inside*'. As the calming but terrifying voice reappeared, the image started to change. My own head stayed frozen as I watched the reflection, but my reflections head started moving upwards, facing away from the water. I tried moving my feet even more so, but they were stuck. It was like my body was in a sleep paralysis state.

My reflections head moved back to face me again but my pupils were now white. *'Do you want to come inside?'* There was a moment of silence between this echoing voice and my thoughts. Everything became silent. No birds, no car engines in the distance, no rattling of the wind in the trees. It's almost like I've become deaf. Both my reflection and I stayed in this frozen state, staring at each other like a predator and its prey, carefully watching each other, before one moves in for the kill. There were no ripples in the water nor was there any movement in the background. A frozen mirror frame stood before me, but I could sense a strange motion. *'Is this finally getting to my head? Is this already in my head?'* I thought to myself. *'Am I going crazy? Am I imagining all of this? Please god, please I must be imagining all of this*'. The words in my head became faster and faster to match the speed of my heartbeat, although my lips and voice box stayed frozen, so I started to pray in my head. I didn't even believe in god, but what else can I do? The strange and small movements became more and more noticeable before I realised what was actually happening. Everything in the reflection stayed as a frozen mirror, except for me. My reflections body was slowly floating towards me, sinking into the reflection of the puddle and slowly



disappearing from sight. 'Please go away. Please leave me alone' I whispered in my mind. I waited for the soft voice to reply to me. I waited for the quiet soprano voice to calmly whisper troubling words to me – but my mind was quiet and empty besides my own thoughts. My reflection continued to sink into the puddle until I could no longer see it. The puddle was just an empty mirror, portraying everything but myself. I didn't question it, I didn't want to question it. None of these actions made sense to me anymore. I've completely lost every sense of logic in my mind. I stared at the motionless water before my body started to twitch in continuous spurts. My body suddenly moved, broke free from this sleepy spell and I was free. But I didn't run away, I remained staring at the puddle. Everything was still mirrored perfectly, except for me – my reflection was still missing from the image.

A sudden rush of common sense entered my mind. 'What am I doing?!' I thought. I turned my body away from the puddle. I ran as fast as I could away from my home. As each step slammed against the ground, I wondered where I was actually going. Who I was running to? Would anyone actually believe me? Would anyone try to help me? I continued to run for several blocks – past many houses and parklands, although each house caught my eye, I wouldn't dare ask for help from the people inside. They wouldn't believe me. They would only judge me. Twigs and leaves broke under each stomp as I continued to run. The breeze blew heavily through my hair and the sun beamed down on me. All things I could've enjoyed if I wasn't so terrified. Soon my body had begun to feel exhausted, I couldn't run anymore. I stopped and took several deep breaths before falling down against the brick fence next to me whilst clutching my cramped stomach in pain. As I breathed heavily, I anxiously continued to look over my shoulder – down the path which I had ran. It was empty, as I was half expecting. The other half of me was wondering if that thing would follow me, or if it could follow me in the least. But I took a deep sigh and tried to collect my thoughts. 'I'm safe now' I thought to myself. I stretched my hand into my thick jacket pocket and pulled my phone out. I anxiously rubbed my fingers against the black silicone case as I thought of who I could call. No one would believe me, but at least I could talk to someone who wouldn't judge me as much. I eventually realised who I could call and jumbled through my phone contacts trying to find them. My hands were still shaking and with every swipe and tap, I



struggled to press the right icons. As I continued the task at hand, I noticed something peculiar. My hand started to feel wet, like there was water laying between my skin and the silicon case. I moved my phone to the other hand and wiped the water off on my jacket. But then again, the water seeped from the case and onto my hand. 'Where is it coming from?' I thought to myself. The heaviness of the water continued to grow until the water started to drip. Soon enough this turned from a drip to a flow – a little waterfall falling from my hand and creating a new puddle on the ground below me. The water soon turned from a clear liquid to an inky black – staining the once pure puddle. I finally realised what was happening, it was melting. Turning into liquid and becoming immensely useless. It continued before my eyes, first the cover then the device itself. The phone started to turn into a sticky, liquid substance as the screen had begun to burst in black and white lines, dancing across the screen. Soon enough, the mess that was once a useful tool slid out of my grip and landed in the middle of the inky black water. As it dissolved into the water, I noticed it again, my reflection didn't appear at all, unlike how the trees and the fence appeared so perfectly. Although silence consumed my surroundings, the ripples in the black ink reappeared. One after the other in a rhythmic motion. My feet stayed in place yet again, unable to move or run. 'Why is this happening' I spoke in my mind, in hope that this thing would hear. 'Why me? Please leave me alone'. Silence followed my thoughts. No whispers, no humming, just pure silence. 'Leave me alone', I spoke again. '*But I want you to come inside*', the soft voice reappeared. 'Leave me alone', I sternly repeated. '*Come inside*' it whispered again. Before I could reply, my eyes started to become blurry. Everything become a mismatch of blurry colours. Along with this blur of colours, my mind became the same. A blur of words and thoughts with the quote '*come inside*' breaking through every now and then. The blur of colours started to mix, every image that I could once tell apart has now become a mess of colours and shapes. The mixed thoughts in my mind started to become silence except for the whispers of the soft voice every now and again. Finally, the colours blended into one – I could see nothing but blackness as the voice became an eerie silence. I was surrounded by pure nothingness.



I opened my eyes and the colours reappeared. My eyesight had begun to settle but my mind was still silenced. My eyesight became clear and I could see the mirror of the water again, but it was all I could see. The sky appeared so calm and the trees so still and where stood was a figure – but it wasn't me. It was the figure of man dressed in a suit with a blue tie and a briefcase in hand. He appeared very important, like he was travelling to a business meeting. But he appeared to be in a trance – staring emotionless towards me. I couldn't move and I couldn't speak. I was frozen in front of this still mirror unable to speak, move or beg this man for help. All that I could manage to say was *“Do you want to come inside?”*



Toni Walsh

Assorted Poems

[The Boy and the Fish](#)

[Genocide](#)

Culloden

[The Worth of a life](#)

[Monument](#)

[Dislocated](#)

[Moon](#)

[Midnight](#)



The Boy and the Fish

In your grandfather's house
beside the window
above the sink
there is a painting of a boy
holding a fish.

'That's me,' you say
in an offhand way
and continue to pull apart
the steaming chicken carcass
we brought for your grandfather's lunch.

Your hair was sand-coloured then,
not the brown that I adore,
(but I adore everything about you, so)
but I recognise
the lashes of the downcast eyes
that look at the fish
that look at the chicken.

The eye of the fish stares out
a flat, dark disk
like an inkblot
incredulous



to be held thus
in the pudgy white fist
of a boy, at a table.

You examine the fish
its oily silver back
and gasping lips
you're not looking at me
you are too engrossed in the fish.

You told me once,
your little brother drowned
in a neighbours' pool
you weren't any older then
than you are in this picture,
I wonder
was it painted before or after?

Your mother told me once,
by the glow of a lamp
on her worktable
that swam with the shadows
of scraps and pins
(while you were out with your father,
somewhere out there
in the black



that pressed
against the icy windows)
that when he died
you and your sister
went and raided his piggy bank.

I wonder, do you remember?
You can't have been much older
than you are in this picture.

You say you don't remember him much.

You say you don't remember
them hauling him from the water
but I think you must.

I think he's in the place you go
that dark place behind your eyes
every once and a while,
and I think you miss him still,
even though you weren't much older or younger
than the boy in this picture.



Genocide

My partner and I
are committing genocide
on the ants in our kitchen

a solution
of sugar and borax
(they can't differentiate
between the sugar granules
and the borax granules)

my partner didn't understand
the method
they weren't eating it
so he made a syrup
of hot water
and sugar
and borax
and left a small pool of it
in the crack between two tiles

they feast at the pool
like wildebeest at a watering hole
on a nature documentary



they feast
and they die
instead of taking the granules
of sugar and borax
back to the Queen

I say to my partner
'You don't understand
they're meant to take the borax
back to the Queen
kill her
and
kill the colony.'

meanwhile
their little black bodies
are clogging up the space
between the two tiles
as if it were a borderland

and I'm trying to feel okay about it
they're just ants
but it feels
like genocide

then I think



what a white thing to think
perhaps only the privileged
people with white kitchens
can see dead ants
as victims of genocide
and see themselves
as gods
ridding the world
of a nuisance

to equate
ants with people
what a white thing at all
to feel guilty

and we continue
committing genocide



Culloden

June, 2016

The birds chirrup at Culloden
planes howl in the sky
the wind moves over the plain
of shifting grasses
cars *whoosh* by on the road in the distance
cows moan hollowly, wallow
these sounds cover the silence
of Culloden

in the summer there are clouds of yellow gorse
and white daisies speckled here and there
like stars
and hidden sprinkles of purple thistle or heather
and clover
and tufts of grass like shaving brushes
the hills are blue in the distance
and stone mounds grown over
and crumbling tombstones
and glistening black bog pools
and shrubs of rust and iron
the colour of dried blood
at Culloden.



The Worth of a Life

I watch a man degrade my father's life
into decimal points and dollar signs
and my mother's trying to be business-like
because she knows she must use the price
of her beloved's life
to have a life, now.

I wonder what it would be like
to know the cost of every person's life;
to know how much they are worth
in monetary terms, in graphs and pie charts
and dollar signs
instead of epitaphs.

How does one calculate
the monetary value that equates
a human life; and the rate
at which that value depreciates?

And if we can somehow save that much
in some form other than memories
(you know, proper capital)
could we buy back my father's life?
No?



Then life is priceless
and you are ripping us off, for the figure
you offer us here falls short
of priceless, and yet
goes too far.

Life is worth nothing
because it is everything.

Monument

They built for you a monument
of beer bottles
and cans
glass fogged by sand
there's a seat where they can drink with you
and watch the tide come in

the wind has stripped the words from the cross
and from the rocks
and some have reworked their pledges
and declarations of love
and loss

but not I
I figure that the wind
and the rain



and the sand took the words I wrote
back into themselves
and I figure they get closer to you then
their dust meeting your dust

a storm came
and to protect your monument
they moved it up the dune
and did it up nice
with more rocks and bottles and lights
and a fresh coat of paint

and though I don't feel you there
even though that's where you died
they say
(and there are witnesses that bear testament to this)
and breathed your last breath of sea air
beneath the stars --

I still make my pilgrimage
because while I don't feel you there
I feel you all around
the sea glistening in your hair
and your bare feet on the ground.



Dislocated

She came from a place of hills and green tangles
and was frightened of this flat expanse that baked beneath the sun
fields of pale green and ochre and wheat-gilded grasses
dry and cracking like her skin
that pulled and stung in the steaming evenings

she was deeply suspicious of that bareness
so exposed beneath the sky
she'd been to Alice, once, and felt similarly
stranded in the centre of a vast red sea
of salt and sand and hard earth
she'd never been so far from the water
so far she couldn't hear its murmurs
its steady exhale and inhale
and its salty whispers

They drove over the bridge like an eagle gliding
and that dry open space of tufty grasses
and boiling pools of reflected sky
and she could feel herself shrinking
drying up like a prune



Moon

There was a time
when you and I
were synchronised.

As you grew full
as did I
and as you waned
I waned.

I see you
a watermark
a pale stain
upon the sky
a drop of wax
half smeared
a ghost
of an eye
half open

we have nothing
in common
anymore
we have
grown



apart

(I suppose it's because

I'm living

and you're dead)

Midnight

It is hard to write

by windows blackened by night,

when the mind is a shifting kaleidoscope,

of pictures and impressions and memories

all dark, mostly

blues and greys

and black and silver, mostly

and sometimes the wan yellow glow

of incandescent lightbulbs,

fractured by the jagged edges of yelling

and the cutting corners of sarcasm

and the bruising pulses of shouting

like a mirror shattering

over and over again.

When your mind can only remember

ghosts and shadows that defy



the constraints of ink and paper
and the linearity of words.

But I think

if I can but trap them here

pin them to the page like moths

perhaps I can examine them

and create a taxonomy of thoughts

like a scientist

and it would be okay, then

it would be art.



Zoe Kassiotis

Gypsy dress, [Wildflowers](#), [Seville](#) and [Nefelibata](#) -

Seville

Evening sun kisses a sea of rooftops.
Birds sing a goodnight song of golden summer,
While you wake to August winter raindrops
Where heavy distance robs nights of wonder.
Oceans away now, but I see your skin glow
Golden on the terrace where we would start.
Alone in the plaza, where we gazed flamenco.
'Just stay' breathed a fool's hope that you would not depart.
Where buildings burn pink I only see your cheeks,
Rosy from fleeting passion of a Spanish spree
From lofty peaks I watch lovers enter the streets,
As the sun falls behind Saint Mary of The Sea;
Love grows in me still, like the Apple of Peru,
Pen to paper now - for you must know, I am you.

Gypsy dress

Crimson burns eyes that stare
At fabric yielding under passion.
The whirling vortex aches,
A fire so fierce writhing
Into climate of its own.
Gusts of lust pouring out
Torrential torments of love.
To see the delicate cloth dance
Is to but taste a fruitful life.
Delicate red frills seduce
With wild rage at men.
The fabric glares through souls,
Each flick of the dress



Punishes the floor for its wrongs.
Dragging along the hard wood
With the weight of a gypsy soul
The dress of substance discovers
Meaning through experience.
Red dances unapologetically
To unearth the meaning of love
Satisfaction closer with each twirl
But out of her delicate reach.
The dress that will not stop wanting
More of nothing and everything.

Nefelibata

Infected by the personality
Of people and places,
Authenticity is my disease,
Cured by walking the clouds
Of my imagination and dreams.
Catching experiences,
Profound and shallow
Released by sharing stories
And tales are my oxygen.
To dream of meaning
Is to dream of adventure.
A life that calms the hunger,
Never seduced by cheap glamour.
Satisfaction over the seas



Is the beating rhythm
Of a nefelibata's heart.
A gypsy soul does not
Live in the conventions
Of literature or art.
A life spent searching
For things she didn't find
Is not a life wasted but one of
Defining moments intertwined

Wildflowers

The flowers wilt
Uprooted out of guilty
Apologies that pluck
Femininity from us.
Show me wildflowers
Spreading with soul,
Feeding off the creativity
To roam where they want.
My thorns can stay on
If I want
To be protected
From the patriarchal hunt.
To pluck stray leaves
Changes God's image of me.



A wildflower feasts
Unapologetically in hopes
And dreams,
Growing
And re-growing
In ways you cannot hold.
We are wildflowers
Man cannot tame us.



(Student to be named)

Wired Up

Through the crowd of the busy mall Dana glances at her smart phone and is stunned at how quickly time has passed.

‘Please God,’ she mumbles in hope that the parking inspector has not booked her. She picks up her pace, but becomes overwhelmed by the crowd who block her walkway. The brushing of shoulders, amongst those walking into and against her direction, is inevitable. Several sharp edged shopping bags held within her lanky arms rock back and forth, as she strides against the direction of the light breeze in the late afternoon. The delicate fabric of her vintage dress sticks to her curvy thighs.

Her brows furrow, as guilt sets into her mind, on having spent more money than she had anticipated. The heels of her Spanish suede boots create a rhythmic clonking sound against the pavement where she walks impatiently.

As Dana approaches the corner of the busy main road she observes the stream of cars, then whizzes across just as several men riding bicycles break the traffic flow. A speckling of raindrops begin to hit Dana’s forehead and roll into her golden brown eyes. She yelps out at what appears to be a parking fine rippling around on the windscreen wiper of her car.

‘Damn it!’ says Dana. She pulls at it and tips her head forward a few moments to calm her rapid breaths. Dana hurriedly drops the shopping bags on the footpath beside her to free up her hands, as rain increasingly drizzles. She buries her hand deep within her crocheted shoulder bag to fiddle for her car keys. A man pushes open the door of a nearby Dry Cleaner Shop, clenching the hanger of his freshly pressed Sports Coat. He dashes across the footpath towards Dana, holding a folder filled with papers beneath his other arm. The oncoming gale interferes as he struggles to see over the Sports Coat which rattles vigorously in front of him. Rain drops pierce on to the strong features of his angular face causing him to squint. His ankle becomes entangled through the strap of Dana’s shopping bag and he tramples yet again, over another of her shopping bags plunging him to the concrete ground. Dana clasps her hand over her mouth, suddenly startled by the fine pages which wisp out from the folder, then spiral down into reflective puddles close by. Dana leaps over and squats down to the man who has fallen and grazed his knees. She holds her hand firmly over her thigh to prevent the hemline of her dress from withering about and exposing her toned smooth legs which tilt together to one side.

‘Oh, are you ok?’ asks Dana. His face tenses up with fine lines as he looks up to her.

‘Um yeah, I’ll survive. Just on my way to the Bus Stop. Was trying to avoid this crazy weather. I was in a rush I guess,’ he utters.

‘Here let me help you,’ says Dana extending out her hand. Skin to skin their palms meet, but slide apart as their embrace is weakened by the moisture caused by the hefty rain fall. He manages to pull himself up but limps from the pain caused by the impact of the pressure on his leg. He clamps on tightly to a bike ramp beside him and his broad chest expands each time he inhales. Dana becomes anxious by the sudden vibration of thunder which rumbles through the clustered clouds. A mass of rain jets down over the city. Dana jolts forward and grabs the Sports Coat and her shopping bags. She impulsively utters an outburst of words aiming to flee the drastic weather conditions.



‘Come on, get in,’ she screams. The two of them scramble towards her car, forcing everything into the back seat as they alight the vehicle at once. The rattling of keys swing within the ignition of her car as Dana turns on the motor to warm up her quivering damp skin. She subtly trembles and his eyelids slightly drop as his hazy eyes peer over her bare wet cleavage. A French soundtrack she had been humming to on her arrival earlier, continues to play from where it last left off. Their eyes lock into a brief hypnotic glare, but Dana turns away awkwardly and leans over to flip open the glove box to pass him some tissues. Whiffs of rich jasmine perfume drifts at nuzzling distance, arousing him as she fidgets about to wipe herself dry. Shavings of mist which appear across the windows of her car develop into opaque walls of fog and veil them within the confided space from the outside world.

‘Thanks for saving me from being drenched,’ he laughs nervously. ‘And by the way Thomas is my name. You are?’ he asks.

‘I’m Dana. No probs, that’s the least I could do for you as it was my fault,’ she replies. The intrusion of the pounding sound of rain drops hitting the rooftop and the gushing waterfall over the windscreen of her car in front of them captures their immediate attention.

‘Hey, how’s your leg?’ Dana calls out.

‘I’ll be fine,’ replies Thomas gently massaging over one of his knees.

‘What about the paperwork? I feel awful,’ asks Dana.

‘Just printed off some work stuff to go over a few ideas with a possible client. I’m a Builder by trade and have a meeting tomorrow. My printer at home died on me last night and I need to have it replaced, but I haven’t gotten around to it. So, the library printer was my only option today. And well, thought I’d also have my Sports Coat cleaned for the occasion,’ says Thomas nudging his head towards the back of the car, in the direction of his Sports coat.

‘Well if you have the USB handy I have a printer and live just on the outer skirts of the city, three minutes from here actually. That’s the least I can do for the damage I’ve caused,’ says Dana. A guilty, wide mouthed smirk frames her face as she glimpses at the faint blood stain visible through his torn denim jeans.

‘Err sure, that’ll be great,’ says Thomas. Dana observes for oncoming traffic and pulls out on to the road of the dreary early evening. She can’t help but shake off her peculiar fondness for Thomas but is distracted by the peak hour traffic and stormy conditions. She turns the wheel of her car weaving carefully through the slippery roads in and out of several narrow side streets which lead directly to her home.

‘Here we are, better make a run for it I think,’ says Dana. The scent of fresh pine fills the humid air as they hunch beneath an old umbrella shaped tree next to the gate, in hope to avoid being whipped by the oozing branches and wispy leaves as they cross over. Thomas follows Dana’s lead over the paved path and towards the golden sunflowers which lead to the entry of her tall but thin nestled cottage. As she opens the front door her Burmese cat slithers her silky fur over Dana’s calves as she purrs.

‘Hey Alice! Miss me?’ says Dana lunging down to tickle Alice’s fluffy chin. ‘Take a seat Thomas. Time for a quick coffee?’ she asks, as she presses on the button of her laptop on the kitchen table.

‘Yes please, that would be great. White with one sugar thanks,’ replies Thomas as he pulls out a chair. She flicks over the button of the kettle and prepares his hot beverage.

‘Here you go. Go for it,’ says Dana sliding over her laptop to him.

‘Thanks Dana. I appreciate it. Cosy place by the way,’ says Thomas. He skims over his shoulder at the hand woven ornaments and natural rich textures, which create a true



sanctuary feel within the open space area of her home. He pulls out his USB from his shirt pocket and brings up the file to reprint his lost work. They are disturbed by the ring tone of Dana's mobile phone. She notices her son's name appear on the screen.

'Oh. It's my son Jake,' says Dana. She fondles Alice as she picks her up and carries her down the hall way to let her outside awhile, as she listens to Jake discuss his plans to sleep at a friend's place for the evening. As Dana closes the front door a sudden crisp draft chills her bony spine. She grabs her soft cashmere cardigan from the wooden cloak stand in the corner of the foyer. Supporting her phone with her shoulder pressed to her ear Dana tries to pull over the cardigan as she continues to speak to Jake.

'Ok, well let me know if you need me to pick you up. See you tomorrow Jake,' says Dana ending the call. As she makes her way back into the kitchen she discovers Thomas leaning with both hands against the kitchen wall.

'Louise? Is that who you call yourself?' asks Thomas.

'Yes, but that's just my middle name. Why?' asks Dana. Thomas slides his hands over his mouth, creasing his skin as he rubs his cheeks. Undertones of huskiness divulge through his voice as he strains to speak.

'That bill addressed to you on the fridge. Your middle name,' he points out with his finger. 'Your son. We spoke of a son, Jake. Your interest in French music and the acoustic guitar you play, over there. Geez! I put the pieces together. I just can't believe it. You disappeared without a word on that date site, how could you after more than eighteen months online? It has been at least six years I'm sure,' says Thomas. He darts his almost black eyes at her as he seeks an explanation, for a reaction, anything! The moment feels unreal to Dana. A ghostly complexion appears on her face as she freezes up.

'But how could this be?' she utters. Dana slides the long thick layers of her deep brown fringe behind her ear. 'You! You told me you lived in New Zealand,' she adds. 'What was the point? You were merely an avenue for me to talk, to help me, to help you too through a difficult time. I wasn't expecting us to become so involved. It just happened!' Dana explains.

'That's it?' responds Thomas. 'That's how you justify yourself? We shared everything. We were there for each other and we even spoke of meeting,' he says.

'I was married Thomas. Ok? I couldn't. It wasn't that simple for me for goodness sake,' squealed Dana. 'I was in an abusive relationship for years, I had to hide away at an emergency shelter. I deleted my account, everything. It was too risky. You have no idea, no idea at all what it was like for me. Please! Stop being so hard on me,' she cries. These words of wrenching frustration cause her to feel extremely vulnerable. Blood rushes to her hot headed mind. The demons of her past which she had anchored flung to the surface once again. Thomas pulls her tightly against his body and hugs Dana. Her enigma puzzles yet excites him.

'Hey sorry Dana, I'm just so shocked okay? You were secretive about your private life at times and I understand why now. Although you opened up to me on some occasions I thought things may have been worse than you had lead on. I was drawn to you anyway and our chats truly impacted me unlike anyone ever. But, when you disappeared like that I couldn't get you out of my head. Do you know what it was like to login that morning and discover you had vanished? For so many days I wondered how I could feel so ridiculously bonded to a woman I had never met or seen. Yet it's as though I knew. Anyhow who cares now? Here you are. This is a miracle. Tell me are you involved with anyone?' he says.



‘Thomas, no I am not involved with anyone,’ says Dana stroking her hand behind her stiffened neck. ‘I tried to reach you on the site once I settled into my new place, but you were gone. I guess it was too late. I studied to become a Social Worker and I now dedicate my time to help other women, victims like myself. I put so much of my free time into my work. There really has been little time for anything more. Then there’s Jake, he lives with me. I thought of you often, but you too, never exposed your full name as I only knew you as Tom. Such a common name and I see you changed your line of work. What happened to Carpentry?’ asks Dana.

‘I pursued my dream to become a Builder. You inspired me. After Tania’s death I was afraid to open up again, to take risks but you changed that,’ says Thomas.

‘So tell me Thomas, what brings you here?’ asks Dana as her hopeful eyes gaze at him.

‘My daughter, last year. When she graduated from university she moved here for work. I have been helping her subcontract the new courtyard home she is building with her much older boyfriend. I wasn’t sure how long I’d be here but managed to bring in a few extra odd jobs here and there. As things have been a bit slow back home, I hung around. I asked about you but the name Louise was all I had to go on,’ he explained.

‘Wow Thomas. This is just still so bizarre’, says Dana. ‘Sorry I reacted the way I did. Maybe we should share some wine and talk things through. Seems we have a lot to discuss,’ she says.

‘I’m here, for as long as you like,’ says Thomas gripping his hands casually to his hips.

‘Merlot?’ suggests Dana.

‘Oh of course I haven’t forgotten. It’s your favourite,’ chuckles Thomas.

‘Come, let’s sit on the sofa,’ says Dana. They dawdle to the living room and sit closely together. Dana hands over the bottle opener to Thomas.

Lightning strikes and flashes at once and their eyes engage as they exchange unspoken words for several split seconds through their yearning facial expressions. The light globe flickers and zaps into darkness, blackening the environment. Dana’s pouted lower lip captures the warmth of Thomas’s earlobe as her chin leans into him.

‘A blackout it seems,’ she whispers.

The synchronising cries of crickets and the trickling of water drizzling along the tin gutter from the nearby window of her home casts a sense of peacefulness. Thomas smooths the back of his gentle fingers across Dana’s neck and along the edge of her collar bone surging a rush of goose bumps through her tingling flesh. The moment is intense as the depth of their emotions are far beyond, what others only dream of. This time, no wires, cords or Wi-Fi. They are only bound by the simple sense of touch. Somehow, someway, two complete strangers connect. Yet not merely strangers at all, united by some mysterious Universal force. It is the only explanation of how they understand why they came to be, which carries them through to the electrifying experience which follows.



John Mockford

Writer's block,

John sat at his desk, staring unseeingly at his computer screen. Well, that is to say, one can only assume he stared unseeingly because the screen was blank and there was, in fact, nothing to see even if he *had* been looking for it. He'd already done all of the routine, predictable things that a frustrated writer will employ at such times to try and edge open the rust-bound gates of creativity. The contents of his desk had been moved into various configurations, none of which produced any definitive improvement. He'd made several cups of tea, which, he privately admitted, acted as a poor substitute for his recently renounced smoking habit.

At least, he thought ruefully, that rush of tobacco induced light-headedness had more than once given rise to a new idea or a flash of inspiration, as he conveniently forgot just how rare such occasions were. He'd put on some music, and then just as quickly turned it off again. He'd scrolled through Facebook repeatedly, looking for a message or even some sort of conversation he could legitimately barge into (none of the comments he'd posted had received even the slightest recognition).

He thought back to the strange dreams he'd had last night. As with most dreams, they'd seemed very real at the time, but the clarity with which he'd reviewed them on first waking had faded over the course of the day. He could recall being in a sort of classroom with other (students?), and that they had been workshopping some vague ideas. It seemed that, once they'd been talking for a while and had decided to do some work, nothing in the room had any real substance. The chair he went to sit on was made out of very flimsy plastic or cardboard and just folded under him. What seemed to be a pile of blank paper was just a white imprint on the desk, and the pens simply collapsed when he tried to write. *Clearly*, he mused, *there's a message in that lot somewhere.*



He moved on to a second dream where he'd driven a very long way to a remote beach somewhere to find a quiet spot to work. The place had looked deserted, but everywhere he went to sit turned out to be occupied. Some of the people he'd recognised, but when he tried to explain his frustration he hadn't been able to communicate. It had been weird, almost as if they had known he was there but couldn't, or wouldn't, acknowledge him.

He yawned, stretched and got up from his desk to put some coffee on. As he did so, he mulled over some of the training he'd done for just this sort of thing. He recalled reading Mark Tredinnick's *little red writing book* some years ago, and soon located it in the bookshelf. He browsed through the introduction, *Stepping Out*, where the author spoke of taking a walk to get the creative juices flowing, and thought that might be a good idea to start with. Pulling on a pair of boots, he set out for a brisk stroll around the city streets.

As soon as he stepped out of the front door, John realised he should have done this hours ago. The fresh air cleared his head, and he crossed into the parklands and headed toward the river. Aside from the occasional jogger or cyclist he had the place pretty much to himself, but he still crossed the footbridge to the northern bank where the path was indistinct and overgrown. Some of the debris from last year's floods was still caught in trees and bushes as a reminder of just how high the water had been. He noticed a length of orange plastic fencing snagged a few centimetres below the water's surface and stretched out by the current. A few ducks drifted lazily around and, at his approach, moorhens pecking away at the grass strutted awkwardly back into the reed beds along the bank, glimpses of electric blue emitting like sparks from their wing feathers.



He realised, somewhat guiltily, that he was lost in his surroundings and *still* not focussed on what he was going to write, but he was enjoying the moment and knew something would pop into his head before too long. A strikingly attractive female jogger flashed a smile as she ran past holding two huge dogs on a short leash, and he immediately thought of *Diana and the Hounds*, which just seemed to fit so well with this landscape. He found himself smiling at the lingering memory of the brief eye contact and then walked on, half-imagining himself in some ancient, mythical setting.

This pleasant reverie lasted only so long as it took him to get to the weir steps, and then he was climbing toward the car park above, breathing easily and still not really paying attention. As he mounted the top step, he heard a commotion from the far bank above the pounding roar of the water. He glanced round, but the drifting spray from the partly open weir gates blurred his vision and all he saw was a brief flash of fluorescent yellow. *Fuck*, he thought, *what was that?* He sprinted across the footbridge above the weir and, as he neared the other bank, looked down to see what looked like someone sprawled beside the path below.

Vaulting over the corner of the guardrail, he hurried down towards what he could now see was a young female cyclist, face down with the rear wheel of her bike protruding from the undergrowth alongside the path. As he bent down to her, he caught a further glimpse of bright yellow disappearing around the next bend downstream.

'Shit, are you ok?' he mouthed, putting one hand on her shoulder and grasping the edge of her helmet with the other. She groaned and shifted slightly at first, then moved her arm and made obvious efforts to turn over. 'Easy,' he said, kneeling beside her. 'Let's see if we can do this gently.' He placed one hand under her hip and slid the other under her shoulder, applying gentle pressure.



'Stop me if this hurts you,' he said, and then very slowly managed to roll her over. One side of her face was badly grazed, as were her knee and elbow, but she gradually managed to push herself up into a sitting position with his help.

He watched as she began to regain her senses, and then suddenly her eyes flew open and she gasped.

'That guy! He jumped right in front of me. It was..deliberate!' and then 'Oh my god, my bag, he's taken my bag!' By this time, two middle-aged women and a young man had stopped to investigate, and John quickly took charge.

'Could you please help here? This young lady's been assaulted, and robbed, by the look of it. If one of you could call the police and an ambulance, I'm going to see if I can find the bastard who did this.'

Grabbing a brief description of the bag, and before he had time to really consider his actions, he quickly set off down the path in search of the yellow-clad assailant. He ran downstream for a few hundred metres and passed a couple of walkers, but saw no sign of the bright colour that had grabbed his attention. Looking around the parklands, he realised that the thief could have gone off in any number of directions. Eventually, he turned and made his way back toward the crime scene, pausing on the way to fruitlessly question both of the walkers he had passed.

He arrived back to find a fair crowd. There were two paramedics kneeling next to the girl while an ambulance waited at the top of the slope. Two policemen were talking to bystanders and, as he approached, one of the women he'd left in charge pointed him out. What followed was a good 30 minutes of questioning which, at times, made him feel that he was a suspect himself. *So much for being a Good Samaritan*, he thought to himself, but he was still pleased to see the girl now on her



feet and checking over her bike, which someone had pulled out of the bushes. She caught his eye and managed a weak smile as he walked over.

'Thank you sooo much,' she said. 'I don't know what might've happened if you hadn't come along.'

He waved away her thanks.

'S'nothing. But I just wish I could have nabbed the bastard, or at least got your gear back.'

'Actually, the Police said there's a good chance they can trace him through my iPad. They've already got someone onto it, so I'm optimistic.'

They chatted for another few minutes, and then John headed off for the walk home, extricating himself just as the TV crew were arriving. He went upstream for a few hundred metres rather than retracing his steps, cutting around the back of the rowing club and up onto the bridge into the city.

Strolling down Hindley Street, he thought he'd grab a coffee before heading home. Ducking into a café, he ordered and then found a table near the window. The girl brought his coffee over and he slowly sipped it, only half watching the passers-by as he mused over his busy afternoon. All of a sudden, his head jerked back at a familiar flash of fluorescent yellow. He half leapt to his feet as a scrawny looking guy raced past, and it was only as he reached the door that he saw the two Police hot on his heels. It was all over in seconds, a brief struggle, what he guessed was capsicum spray and then Yellowjacket was rolling on the footpath, rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands. In no time at all they had him handcuffed and one of the officers was rifling through his backpack, holding up a tablet computer and raising his eyebrows at his companion.

John shook his head in disbelief. *What are the odds of that?* He thought, as he made his way back into the café and sank into his chair, picking up his still warm coffee. By the time he'd finished and wandered outside, the Police were remonstrating with a camera crew as Yellowjacket slumped in



the back of a waiting patrol car. *Vultures*, he thought. *Absolute fucking vultures! How the hell do they get to these things so bloody fast?*

He turned left, and slowly meandered up the footpath, still shaking his head as he went. The afternoon light was fading as he made his way across busy Currie Street, and a few of the cars had their lights on already. Up another side street, he turned right, and then he was walking past his local pub.

'John!' a familiar voice rang out. 'What are you up to? Got time for a pint?'

'Yeah, I guess,' he said hesitantly, then found himself drawn inside where, besides his friend and a few locals lounged around the bar. The publican poured him a beer. In no time, he found himself recounting his exploits to an avid audience. To round off the afternoon, he glanced up at the TV and suddenly realised he was looking at a report on the robbery, with pictures of the girl at the weir. Almost immediately, the scene switched to the Hindley Street arrest, with Yellowjacket ducking his head in the back of the Police car.

'Alright,' he said, as much to himself as to his companions, 'now I really *do* have to go home and write something.' And with that, he was out the front door and striding home, eager now to begin the process of getting this story written. Once inside, he quickly whipped up and ate a sandwich, tidied the kitchen, turned on his desk-lamp and sank into his chair.

John sat at his desk, staring unseeingly at his computer screen.

The End.



Jessie Salamon

[You Took My Heaven Away.](#)

It started with a thought. Or at least that's how it started for me. It usually always starts that way when this curse takes over. I'm talking about being unhappy. If I wanted to be real basic, I could explain how everything started for me.

With heartbeats that would give me fire and passion within what life would have to offer. The first heartbeat to be exact, my first heartbeat. My first look. My first smell. My first sound. My first touch. The first time my blood flooded my insides with new life or the first time my lungs were given a dollop of air. The first thought my brain would have. That's what lead me here.

The first real adventure I would ever have, with only one end - and one end, alone. Simply alone with myself and alone with my end. The first real adventure would have no twists, turns, pushes or pulls. It would be one of dying static energy.

Completely dead. Like my surroundings.

The taxi driver had done a marvellous job at finding what I was looking for, considering the vagueness of my directions. Or should I say, the vagueness of the directions given to me on the smallest piece of white paper. It had stayed screwed up in a tortured ball in the pocket of my coat for some time but never did I think I would need it.

I needed it... so soon too. The white piece of paper consisted of a simple set of lefts and rights after certain imprecise landmarks. Luckily, the middle of nowhere was forgiving with such things as ambiguity.

Leave town and head east, as far as you can go until you reach a dead-end. Turn left.

Go as far as you can from there until you reach a cattle farm. Turn right.

Keep going until you reach a forest. Go off road and keep going straight.

Continue until you reach a wild rose bush with red roses. Turn right.

Go far enough from there and you will find what you need.

I honestly didn't think it would work. I thought if I tried, I would most likely fail but then, I also wouldn't be following the instructions written on the opposing side of the piece of white paper.

Do not bring others.

Do not tell others.

Do not bring unnecessary things. They will end up destroyed.

Do not leave anything behind.

Do not forget to check in.

Do not come if you think you wish to leave.

I did exactly that... excluding the taxi driver of course but I included my car as an unnecessary thing. I had sold it as per the instruction of not leaving anything behind. I sold everything and



had nothing left to show except a wad of cash, an overnight bag with the simplest of things and then, myself.

The surroundings, outside the car, were growing darker the further we crept into the canopy of overgrown trees. There was no road but a simple trail of where previous vehicles had ventured before. The scenery the trail offered was rather peaceful but at the same time, it gave off an isolated and fearful feeling. I think it was the way the trees were perfectly parted to make a trail but still hung, contorted and bent inward. It was almost like their branched arms, sticking with splitters, could reach down and snatch you up if you were to walk past. No one would be able to hear you scream through the thick of the trunks. But it's not like people were to go looking around here anyway.

I could feel the car slowing as we reached a bend, following the dirt ridden trail until the car came to a complete halt, outside a house in a light opening amongst all the trees. Not a house, more a small mansion with a dark exterior covered with creeping vines and growing moss. It's pointed, paved roof resembled that of the tip of a knife; sharp and unforgiving. Despite being in the presence of such an attention seeking house, I couldn't help notice the blanket of orange leaves that coated the land. It's as if the house was floating on a sea of dying embers.

"I-Is this what you're looking for, Miss?" the taxi driver questioned, sounding unsure with the hidden location. I almost had forgotten he was there. I took my nose off the glass of the window, tearing my staring eyes away from such beauty that lay opposite.

"Yes. It's exactly what I was looking for. Sorry it took so long," I apologised, digging around in my bag for the wad of cash.

"Yeah, yeah. Just tell the driver that's picking you up to bring a snack. You gonna pay me?" he replied, disinterested in my apology. The trip was long and I did feel bad for not warning the driver. Looking at the money in the bag, I made my decision. It wasn't going to be used elsewhere anyway.

"Have you got a family, sir?" I asked, ignoring his fee completely.

"Yeah. Three kids and a bitch for a wife," he shrugged, giving a tired sigh. I took the wad of cash and dropped it into his lap carelessly from the backseat before smoothly making my escape.

"Hey! You overpaid me by... a couple thousand!?" he called as I shut the door.

"Keep it." I turned away from the car, not looking back as I stared at the large house before me. Even though the house looked severely old, it was extremely well kept. The porch was tidy, the windows were clean and the door to house looked impeccably polished, with its contrasting loud red colour compared to the dark brick structure. It looked as if the house was lived in but there wasn't a sign of a soul in sight.

With the car now gone, I found myself alone on the porch. Alone with the house. The house where all would come to an end. Feeling rather unconfident in my actions, I was nervous. So nervous that I could hear my heartbeat thump rapidly in my ears and my hands shake so much I could barely keep hold of my bag.

"Maybe... maybe I'm not unhappy. What am I doing?" I mumbled to myself, turning around to look behind me. The taxi was gone so I couldn't leave now. It was growing dark and the



orange hue of the night would settle soon to something darker. *No*, I thought. *No. You will finish this.*

Unsure of what actions to take, I did what all the people had done before me. Go inside. The knob to the door was warm and gave a comforting feeling as the door simply opened. No locks. The house was just as magnificent inside. Dark wood floors and white lining along walls that danced with damask wallpaper. Antique furniture riddled its floors, decorated with simple ornaments. Everything was set. Everything was perfect. Everything had a place.

Clutching my bag tightly, I tilted my head until a secure crack rung from the bones. I set off into the house in search of the room that held the book. It was the rules. Without checking in, nothing would happen. Well, no one knows what would happen because no one has ever left to be able to tell their story. That was rather a disappointing thought. To think I couldn't check the online reviews to see if this were a suitable place to leave myself behind. I searched every doorway, longing for the book until I found it placed in the centre of a white, bare room, staged like a piece of art on a table with a pen lying beside it. It looked so peaceful. There was nothing fancy or even remotely beautiful. Though, it was inviting. My fingers twitched with the excitement of finally being able to leave my name imprinted on its pages forever.

I abandoned myself to etch my name, to leave my print on the pages before me. My name was neatly carved into the book and my fate was sealed. *Grace Dolorem.*

Remembering the rules, I carried myself to upstairs. I was eager to find the room I would prepare myself in. The last moments of my life would be spent between four unfamiliar walls. The second room to the right of the stairs. The room resembled something of a simple hotel room. A bed, a dresser and two bedside tables. No character. No stories to be told here.

All I had to do was wait. Wait for the time to pass and the clock to strike midnight. That was when I must leave. Time did not drag though. It breezed over and allowed myself to become coated with patience. Preparing myself; I stripped off the clothes I came here with. I wanted to be left behind in something simple. I dug into my bag, looking for the only change of clothes I brought; plain black jeans and a black blazer. No shoes. No shirt. I considered them wasteful. I slipped the jacket over my shoulders, feeling the silk lining brush coldly on the bare skin of my arms. It had become dark and clouded outside, giving the room a blue hue as night had settled.

Everything was set. Everything was neat, clinical and isolated from one another. Including myself. As the clock struck midnight, I let myself go. With one last glance, my eyes shifted through the room, familiarising myself with what once was before it would all be forgotten. I smoothed a hand over the mahogany dresser, letting my finger catch the lace doily hanging over. Curling the fabric in my fingers, my lungs released a heavy breath of air as I let my eyes lock with my own, in the mirror.

"This is it. I am going to be happy here," I whispered, letting the sound linger on my lips. I dropped the lace and turned abruptly, pacing out of the room before I could change my mind.

It's not like I could. My fate was set.

My quick steps came to a halt as I exited the bedroom when I came to face the narrow dark hallway I had walked before. The stairs weren't too far and neither was the end of the hall but they seemed as if they were a lifetime away. With a deep breath filling my lungs, I let my hands



raise themselves, placing my fingers on the rough of the damasked wallpapered wall. My heart felt heavy and my brain felt dead as my feet began to move again.

One foot in front of the other. A breath with every step.

My fingers dragged, scrapping the wallpaper from behind me, letting my body carry on in front. My eyes were fixated on the door at the end of the hall, nowhere else. They did not dare to move. With the flicking globe above me giving momentarily light, I only felt more flattened by the feeling that was yet to come. My legs felt as if tar and wet cemented clung to the soles of my shoes, dragging me further into the ground, though I was still standing.

But as I grew closer, I felt myself leave. I felt the feelings of heaviness fly from my shoulders and my thoughts being compressed until there was nothing left to think about. The weight of my sobbing soul was becoming as light as air. I felt as if I was being freed. My worries left me with every breath I took. My fingers left the wallpaper as my body began to feel as if it were floating; no longer held down by the things that used to corrupt my mind.

But the emptiness felt exhausting.

Dizziness swirled and a whirlpool began in my head as I came to the door. My empty self was suddenly coming to terms with what was going on and I couldn't turn back. I stood still, apart from my curious hand reaching out to grab the silver doorknob in front of me. Barely needing to push, the white door floated opened and I was paralysed.

The shadow that graced me, terrified me but the offering hand the shadow gave was comforting. It didn't stop Death from greeting me as an old friend.



Jessie Salamon

ZIMNO

Frozen together in our own winter,
Nothing to reheat our icy-cold bones.
Hearts are shattering enough to splinter;
Making us waste more time by throwing stones.

We sit in silence and soak in sharp frost,
Waiting for one of us to break away.
Another will have to leave at a cost;
It's too chilly for you and I to stay.

There's nothing we can do to make us melt,
We have become slaves to raw bitterness.
If it helps, I have forgot what we felt;
But it only adds to your jitteriness.

Guess I'll steal some heat from another,
Please, go back home to your jealous lover.



Steven Pappin

Incomplete people

これは侘寂男と金繕い女の物語です。

This is the story of the imperfect man and the mended woman.

Two empty hearts. Standing alone. In a sea of people.
Completely isolated. They stand - shoulder to shoulder.
No human contact - but the constant bumping of strangers.

No-one speaks. No-one looks.
The only sounds are from the perfect metal wheels,
rolling over consistent lengths of metal tracks.

Kachi-kuda, kachi-kuda, kachi-kuda, kachi-kuda.

(The train driver's voice comes over the PA, braking the rhythmic veil of tranquillity,
immediately followed by a pre-recorded announcement: "Please watch your step when alighting.
The south bound train on platform 2 will leave for Togoshi-Ginza and Gotanda.")

The carriage is slowing, again.
The woman reaches down for her bag.
The train jolts slightly as it stops.

She stumbles and clutches the man's ankle.
Without raising her eyes, she apologises with a slight bow.
She retrieves her bag and looks for the exit.

Their eyes meet.
He smiles. He nods; but, he does not say a word.
She alights.

She stops.
With her back still towards the train, she smiles;
but, she does not look back.

They are alone, again

... until next time.

