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Tide Issue #2

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Editors' note - This has not been an easy process. At every point along the way we have deliberated, argued, fought, fucked around and, eventually, forgiven. From the circle of love to the visiting postgrads, from cinnamon rolls to glamour shots, from violent ethical debates to wine lists, in the deep dark underbelly of building twenty-five, we have finally finished the publication. The collection draws on the work of University of Wollongong creative writers and the Illawarra community. Including poetry, prose, a manifesto, a monologue and photographs, this literary endeavour represents the collective effort of sixteen committed editors. Enjoy. - Ed(s)

Authors

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Editors’ Note

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From the circle of love to the visiting postgrads, from cinnamon rolls to glamour shots, from violent ethical debates to wine lists, in the deep dark underbelly of building twenty-five, we have finally finished this publication.

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—Ed(s)

Warning: this 'zine contains violence, sexual references, coarse language and other material that readers may find offensive. Read with care!
alise blayney

Poems

Bankrupt

My head lingers
back of a courtesy bus
pressing
emergency buttons.

Like the Queen of the Nile,
poker spews out of me.
The ace of spades flies
right out of
Forster RSL.

His head dangling
by a thread of smoke,
I call a city courier
to transport me
to Sydney
where the back harbour
is darling.

I dream of
ridiculous stars and
they invade me
like the sword.

He’s random as
breath test.
I never could concoct
the acrobatics the heart
performs
when in debt.

Cupid

You play Casanova
to the toilet bowl,
Bacardi and Coke
caress
shiny porcelain,
cold pink tiles
lick and carry
your feet.

He builds his city on
pharmaceuticals
and calls it
paradise
in December.

Love.
It’s not called
dying –
it’s called
disappearing.
I'm sorry, Sydney Water; it's just not possible to lift that much red South Australian dust from a car without the aid of my trusty garden hose. See, it's bad enough that first I had to move my car to the lawn, (me being what the RTA calls inexperienced, what old ladies call irresponsible teenager and overworked overpaid overweight undersexed middle-aged grey-suited white men call moron) the neighbours on their front verandahs got a good giggle as I struggled to get my car onto our tiny patch of grass without injuring Mum's rosemary—and, if that wasn't enough, I had to put up with comfortable middle-class families in their comfortable middle-class cars pointing amusedly at this misguided (crazy) suburban miss watering her Mazda as if it would grow into a Porsche. Look, I'm sorry, Sydney Water, but it's simply not possible to lift three-point-four tons of stubborn clinging bright red South Australian desert dust from a car with a bucket of soapy water and a one-point-five litre bottle-green Hortico watering can.
“So I said if he damaged the green again I wasn’t going to keep playing with him.”

Mr Jones wipes food pellet granules from a clean-shaven cheek. “Well, I mean, what else can you do? You’ve gotta have the least association with him as possible.”

“I know. I can’t put my membership on the line just because he can’t control the cart.”

“Hi fellas,” I say.

“Hey Joe,” they chorus.

“What’s up?” says Mr Smith.

“I heard you scored Laker tickets,” says Mr Jones.

“Nah, they fell through,” I say. “Do you guys know where Chairman Godot’s office is?”

“I haven’t seen him,” says Mr Smith.

“I’ve never been to his office,” says Mr Jones.

“He’s around,” says Mr Smith.

“You could try the gym,” says Mr Jones. “I think his son Patrick works out sometimes.”

“Yeah, he could show you the way,” says Mr Smith.

In the gym Mr Davids is on the wheel, his baggy singlet soaked in sweat. The wheel goes round and round, with Mr Davids inside trying to outrun repression. He’s listening to a self-help tape softly buzzing out wise meaninglessness: “To be truly free within, you must first be free without ... ”

“Mr Davids!” I yell, and he almost falls over as he looks around and sees me. He slows to a steady walk, taking out his earphones and pausing the tape. When the wheel stops spinning he climbs out through the spokes, his feet crunching on sawdust.

“Joe,” he says, sniffing at me vaguely. “What can I do for you?”

“Ah, I was just after Patrick Godot,” I say.

“No, sorry, Patrick wasn’t in the mood for working out today. He must have had a big weekend. He’s a file clerk on the fifteenth floor.”

Okay, thanks, I’ll go up,” I say. “Have a good workout.”

“Thanks Joe. Hey, how was the Laker game?”

“Tickets fell through; I missed out,” I say.

The fifteenth floor is grey-carpeted and dusty. I scurry through a short plastic tube into the archives section.

“Ah, Patrick?” I offer the empty room uncertainly. Patrick emerges from a large ceramic shoe, ascending a ladder and sniffing the files in his hands before placing them on a shelf.

“Yes? I’m Patrick, how can I help you sir?” He climbs down into the shoe and out through a hole in the toe. He licks my cheek casually.

“Ah, I was wondering if you could help me. I’m after your father, but I can’t seem to find his office.”

“Oh right, yeah, I can show you where it is; I was going to see him soon anyway.”

We arrive and Patrick waves to Chairman Godot’s secretary as we pass.

Chairman Godot hasn’t bothered to clean up his droppings for a few days.

Millions of back issues of the Wall Street Journal are ripped up and compacted into a moist, reeking nest.

“I wonder where he is?” says Patrick.

Chairman Godot’s secretary says he’s gone to see a ‘Mr Joe White’—me.

“Thanks for your help, Patrick,” I say.

As I’m walking out, Patrick and the secretary begin to mate over her desk.

I step out of the lift. The hallway is quiet, lit with halogen, humming like a fridge. I start walking towards my office but I take a wrong turn, become disoriented and lose my way. I walk past endless reception desks with friendly secretaries directing me past healthy plastic plants in pots. I walk and the air conditioning recycles my panicked breathing. I run.
I trip over and drop my briefcase; sawdust and food pellets spill out everywhere. I get up and keep running, turning corner after corner. I run on and on past office doors with meaningless numbers. I'm becoming tired and sweat is running down my body, staining my shirt.

Finally I get to my office.

"Is Chairman Godot here?" I ask Suzie.

"He stopped by, but you weren't in, so he left," says Suzie.

I squeeze a sigh out through my teeth.

"Have there been any calls?"

"No," says Suzie, "but there was a delivery."

Walking into my office I find an enormous block of cheese. I walk over to it, sniffing. I reach out to pull a piece off and snap rigid as an electric current pulses through my body. When I let go the pain subsides. I rub my hands.

Suzie's voice crackles from the intercom. "Is everything okay, sir?"

I look around frowning, feeling cheated.

I grab at the cheese once more, but again I'm electrocuted.

It's more painful this time, and I scream out.

"Are you okay, sir?" asks Suzie from outside. She knocks.

I back away from the cheese.

"Sir?" Knock, knock, knock.

"It's okay, Suzie. Just, you know, got a delivery again," I say.

"Oh, I see sir," says Suzie, and the intercom's static clicks to silence.
Bourgeois Dinner Sestina

Arrive unannounced, artistic freak
at packaged bourgeois dinner. Mourvèdre
licks oversized crystal glass, incense
covers the walls. I loathe this estate,
all credit-card floors and tacky balloons,
muzak placating the speakers.

A greeting erupts. I address the speaker:
some badly-shaved professional freak,
wife a dress stuffed with balloons
(she absently strokes a carafe of Mourvèdre).
Churns out muck – "See my estate!
Always open to guests, incense,
even sometimes new investors!" Incense
billows, the wife speaks, her
strangled whine circling real estate.

Speaker ruins post-coffee state
– incensed, I rise and smash my balloon.
"It's Mourvèdre," I scream "you freak!"
Wet your fucking whistle

Smoke saturates the breath, revives, kills.
Stained fingers tremble, stoking inner fires.
Chemical self-pity thrives amongst your ills.

Memories haze in, crowd mills
‘round the bar, excuse a drunk requires.
Smoke saturates the breath, revives, kills
foggy recollections. Unease smears, fills
foolish hearts with tar, desires
chemical self-pity, thrives amongst your ills.

Hurt feeds rage, you run for the hills.
Retreat. Seek the whispers of liars,
smoke, saturate the breath—it revives, kills
your need for pain, for love, spills
over the edges, into the cracks, expires.
Chemical self-pity thrives amongst your ills,

strangles the soul, chokes the mind, thrills
for a time then drains the strength, tires.
Smoke saturates the breath, revives, kills;
chemical self-pity thrives amongst your ills

Station

Jovial goons score drugs from the payphone, kick around down the end of the platform, do chin-ups to celebrate. Their voices float merrily on the green-tinted night as a train flashes in to cloak them.

Sickly orange broken record, monotone of computer malfunction in symphony. The payphone watches, silent. Cream jumper slouches, adorned with cigarette, pleading tiny gasps of bitter no-show hair-grease. Trendy’s ugh boots approve, but she doesn’t seem to notice.
Train arrives, venomous hiss, a pause. Tapping sneakers scream nappy-san blanc. Train suffers nervous breakdown, is replaced by D6191. Impersonal “i” floats by the control room, pensive.

Cronulla? I think not.
One lesson I learned quickly about society was that a stable, full-time job made life easy and kept you fat and pliable.

I ate cheaply, with little concern for nutritional content or taste, occasionally lashing out on a fresh loaf of bread or a kilogram of oranges. It was all to serve one purpose—keeping money aside for security. My expeditions outside were limited to depositing cheques, making one large shop for food, and working at the newsagent. In this way as much as three hundred dollars a week could be deposited.

My days consisted of the job in the mornings; dense volumes of philosophy, biology or chemistry in the afternoons and two or three hours of hardcore pornography over a light dinner. Finally, there was an hour or two of working out with the weights or on the treadmill, broad and powerful compositions by Albinoni or Berlioz crashing from my headphones.

Sometimes, after the timetable had been completed, I would lie on my bed heaving and sweating then fall asleep. No thoughts would circle in the shallow seas of my mind—all that was left was the bitter tang of heat rising from my body, a solitary nocturne by Chopin and dots jumping from focus. During sleep, all my dreams were flashes, distorted, gibberish.

The plan was flexible, and if the need for sleep was not pressing, the shower would rub tension from my muscles. The bed would then feel clean and crisp against my naked body, a great pleasure. Some nights I would not sleep for that feeling, for the sensation would be lost. The pile of books by my bed kept the hours ticking along, my mind nubile and immersed. Waking up early, I would do my stretches for half an hour, a light exercise, breakfast, then walk to work.

There were changes to the schedule, such as trips to the library on weekends; expeditions into the city for a new pair of socks or second-hand books; carbon steel blades; video tapes in brown paper bags; whetstones and leather.

Everything was fine in my neat life—except for the dog.

The beast was a German Shepherd, and his owners called him “Zack”. He was big and dumb, his neutered, monotone bark rattling up the street, filling me with rage as I strove to work. He would gallop centimetres away from the fence and woof! woof! woof! his stupid head off until he could no longer see me.

Twice a day I suffered this vulgar disturbance, but it was no worse than the whores selling Avon on billboards or the screaming of unkempt children in supermarkets. I had systems to deal with these things.

One morning, as the bright chill of winter rose, Zack was standing by the road. He was sniffing in circles, yelping and whining at the front gate of his owner’s house. As was my routine, I calmly unfocused my thoughts until the rage was suppressed.

Except the shepherd was scared and wild. It rolled its eyes back and started drinking up my scent, whining and moaning. The horrible, ignorant dog followed me for two blocks until I kicked savagely at his hind-quarters. The well-fed, tamed mutt only jumped back a little, lost and thick with the wet-fur scent of fear. The inconvenience of the dog’s presence was greater than the small task required to calm it, so I walked back to the house and stood there with the gate open. It whined and urinated on the hubcaps of cars across the street. Finally, taking the scruff of his neck, I led Zack into the backyard of his suburban kennel.
What met me there was nauseating.

The fences were white-picket, new and eight feet high. In the centre of the too-perfect turf an empty birdbath stood, white marble and spotless, shaped like a tiny, happy pig. In the left corner a corrugated shed had been erected poorly. A small pile of wood was stacked under the overhang, untouched in months, meticulously arranged. The residence’s windows were double-glazed and the back door solid and egg-shell. The doormat resting in front of it read “Bless this house”. The backyard was so neat, so tidy, so perfectly constructed.

Zack’s kennel was a careful alabaster. It was chosen to match the fence and of the clichéd design so common to children’s cartoons—peaked roof with a diagonal overhang and semi-circular arch. In letters curving around the door, “Z-A-C-K” was spelt with the “k” back-to-front.

There is a moment in Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* that reminds me of that moment – in the fifth movement, the violins skitter and close; an organ thumps like the devil’s artillery; church bells chime on vermilion chaos.

Rage rose within me and I nearly beat Zack to death just for the sake of taste. Within seconds the rage had turned to hope, as the realisation dawned that the family could have gone on vacation. A long vacation.

My only regret, standing in that alien yard, was an absence of contingencies for this eventuality. The tools required for this job were not on my person: they were at home, locked in steel boxes. I rechecked the height of the fence, Zack’s kennel, and the cover provided by the few saplings struggling towards the sky. Zack was gratefully running around the yard, barking at birds and urinating on everything. I tied him to the doghouse with a doubled piece of the rope he had chewed through, and started fumbling around in my wallet. Ever since my time in retail, I carried codeine tablets on me at all times in case anger began tearing open my skull, or to calm my nerves and prevent me grinding my teeth.

I broke two of the tablets into Zack’s water bowl and left quickly, running to work, eager for the cover of nightfall.

At two o’clock in the morning the drive was still empty, the curtains were drawn, and every light in the neighbourhood was out. On me were a pair of heavy-duty bolt cutters, a small torch and half a towel I had dyed black. Gloves had been an option, but the only pair at home were my black leather ones, and they were too valuable too waste on this.

Zack was lethargic as planned, and just rolled his imbecilic head towards me as I made straight for the shed. The pale glow of the penlight illuminated the brass of the padlock. The lock was quickly cut open. Inside the shack was an axe, a fluoro-green pair of hedge clippers and a small gas nailgun. What an inner-suburban family was doing with a nailgun I had no idea, but it was perfect for my purposes.

Zack tried to get to his feet as I floated across the yard, so the first blow to his neck was mostly handle. It clubbed him straight down, and in the dim moonlight the second arc severed most of his head from his torso. Two efficient chops later and the Shepherd was decapitated. I went to work on the tongue, deftly cutting it from his mouth with the clippers and nailing it to the door with a pleasing pneumatic whump. I placed the head with shaking hands in the bird bath, a little blood collecting in the basin and shining blackly under the sapphire stars. I then defecated on the mat and buried the bloody axe into the chopping block by the shed. I wiped down all my utensils, left them on the turf and sauntered my way back into the night, the blood grimy under my fingernails.

Had Zack been a smaller, or even quieter dog, I would have liked to torture him first. Unfortunately, the proximity of the neighbours prevented me from really letting go. This was somewhat disappointing, but upon arriving home a beautific splendour still coursed through my body. When my eyes closed, I saw the family minivan pull into the driveway. Their faces through the tinted glass were all at once terrified, intrigued, in awe.

After, I kept my distance. But I did keep the single, lousy column my act got in the local rag. On my fridge it was a pleasing
spectacle, stuck down with a large, kitsch German shepherd magnet I'd bought at a discount store. To keep on the safe side, I changed my path to work, which involved cutting through a park.

This worked out well, as it was a much quicker route.
I watched him while waiting for a train. "Observed", I should say. My eyes followed the little ball on the end of his cane as it trundled across those strips of bumpy blue plastic, rolled over the painted yellow line and off the lip of the platform. He turned to walk along the edge and a recorded announcement reminded all of us to stay behind the yellow line, a rule he was now flagrantly ignoring. Every so often he'd stop, check with his cane, realign himself and continue skirting the edge.

He barged into a businesswoman. She was reading the Sydney Morning Herald. Wore one of those power suits, a laptop bag leaning against her shin. She must have worked near a station because she had high heels on, not trainers. It was the back of her heel that overhung the yellow line. Spinning around, her eyes challenged the apology from behind her. But his face, already held a little higher, displayed his disability. She held herself in check. Still annoyed, her eyes followed him as he brushed past her. I think he skinned the back of her ankle—it has that irritating, teeth-clenching pain, you know? I’ve stubbed my toe on a chair and spent a good couple of minutes telling that chair what a fucking useless piece of furniture it is. You need to blame someone.

I wondered if he lifted his face like that automatically. Perhaps, subconsciously, it had become the quicker, easier, way to make amends. She could see: he couldn’t. Her clothes were ironed: his weren’t—and then it dawned on me why he braved the edge like that. Fewer people. They were all behind the yellow line.

I wanted, you know, to go up to him. "Would he prefer to sit?" I could escort him to a vacant seat. No. No, he obviously catches trains everyday—manages fine—I’d patronise him. So I viewed his progress. Like watching television. I mean, everyone else was “observing” him too. You know that sensation when you feel a large group of people seeing what you’re seeing. It kind of connects you. Their inaction supports your inaction.

He was a front-carriage-rider. Walked the forbidden line all the way to the end of the platform—people were moving out of his way now. He stood right where the first doors open. Impressive. He must have counted his steps. There are always less people in the first carriage.

Look, I want to tell you something—confess something. I used to work for Woolworths. Loser! I know. I drove the home delivery van. I was supposed to knock on the front doors, wait for them to answer then with a big smile say, “May I carry these in for you? Have a nice day!” But I used to knock, drop the shopping on the doorstep and sprint off to the van. That way I’d get to my next delivery quicker. I’d wring a two and half-hour lunchbreak out of most days. Watch a video, go for a surf, a couple of times I even went to the movies.

Knocking on one of the same doors I’d knocked on every week, I dropped the shopping, started to run, but my shirt snagged on the railing of the stairs. I was trying to get it unsnagged when the door opened and a broomstick poked through the doorway. Sellotaped to the end was a coat-hanger bent into a hook. An old lady hooked one of the handles and started to drag a bag inside. The stick was clamped under her armpit and her hands, her bent, arthritic fingers were clutching it the best they could. I’d been doing this to her for months. I don’t know about you—I don’t know about you! I’d hate to make any generalisations, but I don’t, other people don’t... They don’t occur to me. I’m lost behind that fucking yellow
line—and listen, I wasn’t a totally changed person from then on!
That’s just too bloody corny! And it’s hard to be pleasant, delivering
shopping early Saturday with a hangover. I’d let Ghandi’s shopping
rot on his doorstep some mornings. That month I was fired anyway,
didn’t get much chance at being the Good Samaritan.

I did stay in contact with Beryl. The old lady with the stick.
Felt like gagging the first time I walked in. It stank. Stank of age.
She made me a cup of tea, I didn’t want to drink it. I asked if she
had a husband, she said he was upstairs, but hadn’t said much for
a couple of years. Jesus, I’d visions of this corpse sitting up in bed—
her chatting, making cups of tea for it. But she was pissing herself
laughing and emptied a packet of Montes onto a plate. I drank my
tea.

She needed things doing. Tap washers, doors swelled with
damp. Little things. It was an old house—I realised how ignorant I
was! Cobwebs started to snap—things inside, dead since I was little!
I tried to tell her that once. She laughed and started calling me
her little Amoeba. I thought it was a compliment. Thought it was
foreign. Probably meant “handsome helper” or something. Imagined
French grandmothers pinching cheeks, giving wet moustache kisses.
I looked it up and found out it was a single cell organism.

Beryl collapsed on the footpath. I was with her at the time,
carrying her shopping back from Woolworths. All the inactive
people, I wanted to fucking scream at them. But they came running
from everywhere. All those cobwebs tangling up for this old, smelly
lady dying by the side of the road. There was something between all
of us. They could see what I could see. I can’t explain.

I sat, holding her hand, waiting for the ambulance. Staring
at my toes resting on this painted yellow line by the gutter.

I am Jean. Jeanne sits across the courtyard from me, outside a café
just off the Champs-Elyseé, her cup encrusted with stale coffee
and a divine scent wafting from her hair—perfumed leaves falling
in an autumn wind. Nineteen Thirty-Eight. The linen of her beige
skirt flutters in the breeze. I find it difficult to recall when I first saw
her—possibly a cocktail party in Montparnasse, the usual group of
intellectuals crowding around her with their new theories—because
now, it is as though she has always been there, sitting somewhere
near me; too near, not near enough.

Cocteau is beside me... He speaks of nothing but his latest
film idea (Orpheus trailing Eurydice through the Underworld) but
my ears hear only Jeanne’s voice, her soft, escaping breath. She
sits like Mona (who, only a short distance away, is encased in the
old world by a layer of thick Italian varnish), her eyes wide and
mouth curling around a long-dead secret, until her arm gracefully
raises the cigarette to her lips, parting a moment later to release a
stream of smoke. I follow its path with my eyes, higher, higher then
dissolving into the thick, grey clouds. In an attempt to settle my
nerves, I run three fingers through my hair.

One of the men at my table is getting excited,
“I’ve never felt much sympathy for Orpheus, myself, always
chasing that which evades him, unable to content himself with the
life he was chosen for. He disgusts me.” Cocteau laughs. I lower my eyes to the table opposite as Jeanne taps its surface with a long, pointed fingernail. The sound seems to fill the entire courtyard.

Her eyelashes flutter and interlock and I struggle against an instinct to imitate the languid gesture. If I were to, I am sure my own body would cheapen the movement. Oh, to be observed as I observe you. To be worth watching. Cocteau follows my gaze...

“Ah, Jean—but you. You have an affinity with the beautiful and the damned, non?”

I grin and smirk innocuously, indulgently.

“Perhaps,” I murmur, sneaking a glance over the cup at her as I speak. The debate turns from Orpheus to that of Narcissus and the men insipidly discuss their similarities while Jeanne’s short, dark bob dances in the breeze.

“Narcissus,” I offer in a hushed voice, “Narcissus is not an artist. His adoration for his own reflection is not a weakness, or a fatal flaw—it is a punishment. So how can you compare him to Orpheus, who imitates everything and learns nothing?”

The men laugh raucously as if I am an imbecile and Cocteau pats my shoulder. “Jean ... things are never as simple as you would like them to be. Narcissus is punished because he could not love another—and thus he would only see himself as beautiful to begin with. Finish your coffee and... Jean?” My eyes are closed for the moment; I can feel a headache forming in my right temple and slam my palm against it angrily. Cocteau grasps my arm.

“You need to rest, Jean,” I shake my head and push away his hand, his half-hearted concern. The throbbing moves from my head to my chest—one more sudden movement and the hammers will begin to grind. Not again, I can’t stand another afternoon in the bedroom.

Across the courtyard, Jeanne continues to tap, tap, tap at her table—and now I am irritated by the constant noise, ticking through the seconds as time passes me by... tap, tap, tap ... the pounding increases and I wince from the pain. The sun appears from behind the grey and shines on her dark head. Her hair seems dull and lank in the sudden brightness. The light hurts my eyes. The tapping ceases.

The world around me begins to swirl and distort; Jeanne’s face changing from Da Vinci to Monet to Picasso—the garish colours hurting my eyes. I concentrate instead on the conversation surrounding me. “Orpheus isn’t narcissistic, that isn’t what the myth is telling us. He’s more obsessed with discovering the beauty in others, exploiting it, and then discarding the subject... like all artists.” Laughter. I’m ready to scream from the monotony.

“Then why does he follow Eurydice? Isn’t that out of character for an artiste such as himself?” Cocteau’s voice cuts momentarily through the pain.


“Yes?” Their voices hover in the stagnant air. The wind has died.

“Unless Eurydice is simply an after-thought. Maybe Orpheus’ real quest is to find the beauty in the realm of the dead—in the hands of Death him... no, herself. That is his true punishment; why he finally looks back—not at Eurydice, but at Death. It’s a challenge. The myth is wrong.” The myth is dead, I think as Cocteau’s face brightens with the afterglow of a realization. Jeanne no longer draws my attention; in one solitary thought, Cocteau has regained my respect and adoration. My hand slips into his coyly... the migraine is fading.

Across the courtyard, Jeanne barks out an order to the waiter—commanding, virile and brusque. I sigh. She pays her bill; silver francs gleaming in the sudden light pushing through the clouds. Her step is arrogant, self-assured. The mirror shatters. Leaves jump in over the deserted ground.

I only see my flaws reflected in her eyes.
They called her Rhiannon to please his traditionalist mother. In Welsh mythology Rhiannon was the goddess of fertility and the moon. In Glendowner she was simply a goddess loved and feared accordingly.

The earliest important event in the divine life of Rhiannon occurred when she was only six. It was a conversation, in a dark carpeted hallway, which the child should never have heard and never would have heard if her elder brother had not dared her to walk the old log fence.

"Walk?" she exclaimed. The sparse gums in the paddock shivered; strands of hair were lifted by the breeze and blown back across her face. Rhiannon shook them loose and climbed onto the fence. James looked up at his sister as she took two careful steps then stopped. Ten dirty toes wriggled impatiently. "Too easy! I can skip across." The logs were smooth and silver after years of buffing from wind and rain. Her bare foot slid over the log's surface and her small body found the earth. Immediately James was beside her but she pushed him away, stunned and humiliated.

"I'm fine!" She rapidly blinked her eyes, trying to fight off tears.

"But you're bleeding."

"I said I'm fine. You put me off, you were staring at me!"
Assured that she was all right, her brother began to laugh. "You can’t blame me. Just admit that you couldn’t do it." But she was already stalking away towards the house.

The cut on her knee would not stop bleeding and on her way to the bathroom Rhiannon heard voices on the front porch. Only Mormons or important people came to the heavy door with the gaudy stained glass: the Eames household rarely saw either type of caller. Curious, Rhiannon stopped and listened. The hallway was always cold, touched by sun only in the late afternoon when its rays were watery and weak. She crouched on the floor, just around the corner, shivering and out of breath, trying to stop the trickle of blood from dripping onto the carpet. Her mother cried and demanded money from a man on the doorstep.

"Please, please. I need it, I need you. You know she’s your daughter. This is your responsibility."

"Come on Bron, don’t work yourself into a state. You can’t call me anymore; we’ve ended this. Now let’s be sensible; I have a family to support too."

When the front door slammed, Rhiannon fled to her room. Tiny crimson spots soaked into the patterned carpet and nothing more about parentage was said. For years she kept this knowledge to herself. In many ways it had no effect on her life. The night after the hallway conversation her father ignored her at the dinner table, her grandmother watched her sternly, told her to stop slouching and made sure she dried the dishes properly. At bedtime her mother kissed her briefly then hurried from the room. Nothing was changed, but an understanding of why things were the way they were began to grow in the crevices of Rhiannon’s mind.

By sixteen Rhiannon was the image of her mother, a regal likeness to Nefertiti, beauty like a black and white picture. They shared the same dark tresses, the same feline eyes and the same rare smile. The only place they truly differed was in the chin. Like a ripe peach, the daughter’s was pink, firm and cleft. It did not come from the maternal side and, as Oakley’s mother indignantly announced, “No Eames in the history of Wales has ever been born with a crack chin.” After the initial observation, made shortly after the birth, the chin was never mentioned again. A mystery, for the better, left unexplored. So Oakley knew. He was not a smart man, but this evidence was undeniable and for the first decade of Rhiannon’s life he was silently incensed. By the time she was sixteen he had become weary with fury and merely sulked. Until the day his pride was threatened further.

He saw them in the bath together. It was something that had once occurred to him, but like nuclear bombs, aliens or Christ, so long as he wasn’t confronted with the truth he could pretend it didn’t exist. The image, however, of his son in the bath with the cuckoo child was one that would not leave him. An echoing trill sounded from the bathroom accompanied by a softer, deeper laugh. Oakley paused in the hallway and nudged the door open a fraction. Afternoon sun poured in on them from the high windows. The cracked and peeling walls were invisible beneath the light that reflected off the cheap white paint. Squinting he saw them. James and Rhiannon, naked in the big, old tub. His son kissing her, stroking her face, pressing his body, the body filled with Eames blood, against her slender figure. The scene burned itself onto Oakley’s retina. But most distressing of all was the look. The look that bastard child gave him when she glanced up and saw him near fainting in the doorway. It said something like, “fuck you, you fucking failure”, then she turned away and pretended he had never been there while his son disappeared below the rim of the tub.

Rhiannon told me, once, about her and James. James. The only member of her family who could look her in the eye without flinching. The one person in the world who cared when she won a prize for poetry. The only one who listened to her indignant ranting when the poem was further examined and proclaimed obscene and the title taken away from her, though she would never give them back their stupid ribbon. For a long time he was the only one who loved her and the only one for whom she could return the favour.
James knew about the origin of her chin. He told her it didn’t matter. Later on, she would say it was just as well he had dared her to walk that log fence, because if she had never heard that conversation they would surely feel much worse for doing the things they did.

**Inspiration**

A light bulb flashed above Thomas Edison’s head and he invented it.
Intake, Compression, Ignition, Exhaust

I thrill to feel the engine go.
The four-stroke’s strong and well-rehearsed:
*Suck squeeze bang blow! Suck squeeze bang blow!*

Especially at the motor show
When rev-head fever’s at its worst
I thrill to feel the engine go.

My boyish spirits swell and glow,
Propelled by each explosive burst:
*Suck squeeze bang blow! Suck squeeze bang blow!*

Testosterone commands me so
That even when it’s still in first
I thrill to feel the engine go.

The ultimate fellatio
Is guzzling fuel with vicious thirst:
*Suck squeeze bang blow! Suck squeeze bang blow!*

With dipstick dipped deep down below
In thick oil thoroughly immersed,
I thrill to feel the engine go
*Suck squeeze bang blow! Suck squeeze bang blow!*

melissa jones
Lotto Winner

Mum smelled like hairspray when she came into the kitchen looking for her purse and keys. “Tell your Dad I’ll be ‘bout half an hour. I’ll pick up something for dinner while I’m out too.” Over the blare of the afternoon TV and Dad mowing outside I could still hear her humming softly. She busied about, wiping down the bench-top around me. “Put your plate in the sink when you’re finished, sweetie.”

I watched her as she walked down the hallway to leave. The last thing I ever said to her was: “Can you bring me back a Coke, as a treat?”

We thought she must have got a flat tyre. But she would’ve called, and even if the shops had been really busy she should have been back in an hour. Dad piled us into his wagon and we drove around trying to spot Mum’s car on the side of the road. We drove aimlessly, up and down the streets.

Usually you try to find an answer so at least you can think you understand why. But Mum was never selfish, greedy or frivolous. All she ever complained about was that our bathroom was too small.

After our Aunty, Nanna, and a reporter had left, my sister and I were allowed out of the bedroom. Dad sat us down at the table.
The last of the light was fading and the darkness began to fall over Dad’s face: his baggy eyes, his thin-lipped mouth.

"Your Mother—she liked Vanuatu, you remember the pictures? Anyway. Mum isn’t coming home—I mean she loved you both, she really did, she does, she still does... but... God."

"Are we going to Vanuatu? As a treat?"

"No. Your Mum, um... won the lotto. She won a lot of money... so she’s going away. For a while. By herself. You know... for, for a little holiday. So you should be happy for her. She’s going to have fun."

A holiday can last forever if you’ve won three million. You can stay as long as you want and never think about coming home. That night when Dad told us she wasn’t coming back he mentioned Vanuatu. So that’s where I used to think she was. I’d imagine her laughing and dancing on the beaches. When she got back she would give us presents and all the free stuff from the plane trip and we could look at all the silly photos she’d taken.

But as little pieces of the truth accidentally escaped, the story kept changing. Next: Mum didn’t love Dad, she was sick of being a housewife, by fluke won the lotto and ran away for good. She saved her own life but ruined ours. Maybe she didn’t come back because she didn’t want us to be spoilt brats. Kids can turn out spoilt if they’re rich and have three million dollars.

We got a Christmas card every year with the same apology; merry Christmas and I love you’s in it. Dad never looked at them. He would sit in his chair for ages, silent. He just sat away from us and sipped on a beer. He got really upset if we ever asked about Mum. After my sister begged him to find Mum’s new phone number so she could ring her to come home, he stood up and walked outside. For the next two and a half hours he marched around the yard, mowing the lawn shorter and shorter until the mower seized up.

After a while I stopped praying to Jesus and Santa for her money to run out so she’d have to come back home. All Dad said was that he thought it was for the best. By now Mum was just something from the past, and the memories of her grew and changed with how angry I felt. I couldn’t help it. She was happy and rich and we were still here waiting. I wanted to hate her and tell her how I felt. She was lucky, she got out. We didn’t even have a TV anymore; it broke the day she left.

After Dad died my Aunty gave me a letter. She said everybody was sorry it had turned out this way. It was from Dad. He had kept it secret, along with the Christmas cards he had forged in Mum’s handwriting. We were only little kids back then so he didn’t have the heart to tell us the truth.

The letter was crumpled and soft. Dad himself had probably read it over and over again trying to make sense of what he’d written. That night when Mum didn’t come home, she’d been packing the car with groceries and someone had come up to her. That night when she was supposed to have her lotto ticket checked, someone put her in the boot and drove her away. Dad must’ve been dying inside—but he thought it was the way it should be, so he lived that lie and made us believe in Vanuatu. Remembering, I can see how Dad managed to orchestrate the whole thing. The TV conveniently breaking—so we wouldn’t see the news reports. The front door always locked, the phone always off the hook.

The box under Dad’s bed had been covered in old wrapping paper and was all dusty and worn now. It was filled with yellowed newspaper articles. The gaudy, bold headings and grim facts stood alongside Mum’s pretty face.

Dad wrote he hadn’t meant for it to go on like this. He was just going to tell us she’d gone on holidays. That she wasn’t coming back because she had a better life. But we had become so fixated on Mum coming home one day as a millionaire and he couldn’t stop it. He didn’t want us to know. Dad had it all in that shoebox. Everything. The police reports, the court orders, the details of the gaol records.
I studied pictures of him. I knew what he had said, his personal account. Without Mum, he was all I had. An addict who forgot reality for a moment and mistook Mum for someone else, and was so messed up he didn’t realise what he was doing, then panicked when he did.

That last day, I don’t know much about it. I sit for ages trying to remember. She had her favourite jeans on, and a new white top with a ruffle down the middle. Her fringe had grown out and occasionally flicked in her eyes. She had planned to go to the hairdresser’s the next day to get it cut.

I’d waited so long for Mum to come home; I still sort of believed she would. And now there’s nothing.

I stare at the article, at this stranger’s weathered face, his dark beady eyes, the last pair of eyes my mother ever saw, and they’re looking back at me now.

lisa busuttil

Nanna

The cupboard’s creak sends my mind into orbit:
I back into a corner.

She sits—a pale face,
with greying hair—and tries to be strong.

On my visits I smile
though doubt is everywhere;
at night, it tosses me.
Alarms. Machines. Morphine.

When you described Malta,
it was more beautiful than I will ever see it. The sand,
fine against my feet
and the warmth of the sea.

I watch grown men
crying openly; they massage the hands
of a mother who has done the same for them.
Her mind fades to black,
She closes her eyes.
And leaves.
Judy was one of those girls who are dead. You know the type—decomposing and rotting all over the place. Tonight she was fixing me with a grin that said, without words, "my neck is broken". She was a saucy minx. It didn't look as if she was going anywhere, having draped her entrails over the bed-head, so I pulled out something I was working on.

"You don't mind if I read this to you? I always like a second opinion."

She didn't say anything, so I took her glazed stare as a yes. Judy had her fair share of faults, but she had amazing powers of concentration. I put on my neat little pair of reading glasses and cleared my throat.

"For a long time I have been concerned with the matter of reputation. We are brought up to revere heroes and to hate villains. A valid enough system, but one that doesn't truly take into consideration the full spectrum of one's personality."

I paused for a second, trying to gauge Judy's reaction. There was only that same measuring stare. No doubt she was waiting for more of my speech to make an educated decision. Sitting on a chair next to her, I patted her leg as I continued speaking. She was always an accommodating girl.

"For example, we all know the name of the man who walked on the moon—Neil Armstrong is a generation's hero—but did anyone ask him what was important to him? Perhaps his greatest joy was in his rosebush. No one, besides maybe his wife or children, will remember him as 'Neil Armstrong: the man who grew roses'. And my point applies to villains."

I sighed, pushing aside Judy's leg as I stood up. It fell to the carpet with a light thud. I had apparently lost her attention, for one of her eyeballs had detached itself from her head and lay nestled in her armpit. How unbearably rude of her! It looked like I was going to have to get myself a new and more appreciative audience. I put on a clean shirt and left, throwing a kiss over my shoulder to Judy. I knew she would be there when I returned.

I cruised along the streets. About a hundred nightclubs, bars and casinos were open; some advertising in bright neon lights, others clearly more exclusive. I slowed down on one corner, looked at the wares available, made my choice and drove off.

I unlocked the door, the girl silent behind me. I had already told her not to speak and she was following the order dutifully. Deciding that discipline would be what I remembered her by, I ushered her in first without turning on the lights.

"Lucy, meet Judy. Judy, Lucy. Don't mind Judy; she's not a big talker. Has amazing concentration though."

When I flicked the lights on, Lucy screamed; but this was cut off quickly as I punched her in the back of the head.

Lucy had a body one could describe as mutilated, with an alluring sheen of blood over her wan skin. Dark hair flowed all the way down her back and was stuffed into her empty rib cage. For an ageing whore she had a decent body; but the full effect of her age showed in her face. There was something ugly about how the skin wrinkled around her gaping eye-sockets. She hit it off famously with Judy, and the two huddled together on the bed. They were holding each other's hands and had even exchanged breasts. Lucy's fuller breasts were much more attractive on Judy's slimmer body.

Sitting down again, I faced my audience. Their eyeballs were...
positioned carefully at their feet, so I knew they were terribly interested in what I had to say. I continued my speech, a glass of water in my hand.

"Undoubtedly I've been labelled a villain now. In fact, I believe I've been given an entire series of more vehement titles: monster, criminal, serial killer, insane—the list goes on and on. Perhaps I can even look forward to a snappy sobriquet, in the tradition of Jack the Ripper or Vlad the Impaler. Who knows? But I beg of people to remember me not only as a simple murderer. For my life has been pledged to a far different cause. That's right, I am ... "

I was interrupted by a rather embarrassing noise from Lucy. I waited for her to apologise, but she continued to watch me unerringly. I knew she couldn't stop a natural biological function. The myriad slashes and holes in her corpse meant it was inevitable that gas would seek to escape. Otherwise the body would bloat in a few days, possibly exploding. Still, it didn't excuse her rudeness, especially with the importance of my speech. I decided that Judy and Lucy were obviously uncultured, or at least lacking in patience. I just needed one more person to hear the end of my oration and I'd be set.

The car made its third trip that night down the shady streets of the city. It was getting late and few pedestrians were around. Then I saw her. She had none of the practised strut of the veterans. Her clothes seemed almost like a costume, designed so she would fit in. She had to be a newcomer, or perhaps that other more alluring option—a cop. She was perfect. I escorted her into my apartment.

"Lucy, Judy—I'd like you to meet our latest friend. This is Katy. She'll be staying for the night."

When I turned on the lights Katy gave a shocked gasp, but as I drew back my fist to knock her out she twirled, driving me back into the wall. A gun pressed hard into my middle section.

"The name is Officer Williams, and you have the right to remain silent

I reclined as far as I could, eyeing the people around me. The seat was quite possibly the most uncomfortable thing I had ever sat on—I suppose comfort isn't part of the electric chair's design features. My clothes were drab and standard, but I knew I had my audience's undivided attention. Anxiously I awaited my cue, tuning out the drone of the current speaker. Finally it came, and I answered, in my most resonant voice.

"Why, yes, warden; I would like to say something, thank you."

I cleared my throat and prepared to deliver the defining speech of my career. The people in the room viewed me as a mass murderer. They thought me insane or evil. But now I would reveal the true essence of my being. I would make history, would be noted in the Guinness Book of Records. I would be the only public speaker to ever perform on death row.

"For a long time I have been concerned with the matter of reputation ... "
The word SENDING flashed twice before my eyes and then froze. An alarm went off in my ears.

<Citizen Mackenzie: an illegal term was present in this text-based exchange. The message will not be delivered. First warning>

The undelivered message reappeared, the illegal word glowing red.

It wasn’t unusual for another word to become banned; many words were deleted from our regular vocabulary under the new Government movement. Usually an advisory notice was dispatched to the general populace and then the word was no longer used. But this was the first I had heard of that particular word being illegal. Perhaps I had missed the message from the “Censorship Movement”.

Of course, the Government hadn’t titled it the Censorship Movement; that was what the general populace called it ... in private. Legally, the word “censorship” was no longer permitted in casual vocal exchange. Should it ever be used in a text-based exchange the user would be gaolred.

Officially we were supposed to speak of it as the Purification of Vocal and Text-Based Communicative Language Movement.

It began years ago with the censorship of magazines, newspapers and television. At first it was only words or concepts the Government believed damaging to the sensibilities of young people, certain publications were restricted to “adult only” consumption. The Government developed a list of words considered inappropriate for minors. More words, terms and concepts were gradually added.

Citizens began to demand certain expressions be banned from all contexts and a second list was started. Some statements and ideas were soon considered inappropriate even for adult usage.

In just a few months the Government came to a conclusion: language was disrupting society. “Negative” words in the common vocabulary were accused of spreading discomfort and unrest and were consequently removed.

I pressed the tiny button behind my right ear, temporarily switching off the Communication Implant. It could never be totally disabled; privacy was becoming an unknown concept.

I pulled open my desk draw. Inside, hidden under a tangle of wires and spare electronic components, was a book. I had purchased it from a back-alley shop one rainy afternoon. To begin with it was empty, the pages clean, crisp and blank. Now it was filled with words. I had carefully drawn each character—a highly uncommon practice. I was probably one of very few people who actually knew how to write. Everything was now done electronically. By connecting a cable from a terminal to the outlet in the back of the neck, words needed only to be thought and they could be either printed out or saved to view-disk. I opened my secret book to the last page I had written on and used my nub of graphite pencil to scratch in the newly illegal word and a rough meaning for it.

I liked to browse through my book, flick through the pages and randomly select a word.

UGLY

I tried to recall how to use it in a sentence.

“Oh, yes! Mrs Potter in number twelve is a very UGLY woman,”
I said softly. I was quite proud of myself for remembering how to use that expression. Mrs Potter was indeed a very ugly woman, with a personality to match. She was always poking her turned up nose into my business, reminding me that I should do this, that or something else. Not only was she ugly, she was...

I scanned the pages, and found the right term.

**RUDE**

Yes, that's right ... very RUDE.

Of course, if I were to text my feelings about Mrs Potter to a companion I could never use those words. I would have to say:

"Mrs Potter has unique facial features, which match her personality. She reminds me daily of correct procedure and is always helpful, especially when unasked."

Positive, positive, positive.

I replaced my book, ensuring it was fully covered. A quiet beeping suddenly started in my ears.

<Citizen Mackenzie: your Communications Implant has been in sleep mode for ten minutes. This is a reminder to ensure use resumes. If there has been a malfunction the service personnel should be contacted immediately>

With a sigh I pressed the button behind my ear again. The undelivered message was still present, the illegal word still red. I erased the whole thing and recomposed it.

"I have positive feelings about your potato casserole, Dad. I look forward to consuming it this weekend."

As SENDING flashed briefly, I wondered how many people had complained about the word LOVE.

---

erica carter

**Spiritual**

The ancient man
wanders a thousand stairs
following the cranes and spiritual stars.
He believes
in the colour of jade
and the quiet sky.
Closing his eyes
and floating above somewhere
where there is no
desire for home,
the secrets of tea
and the swish of graceful moves.
The Sheriff strode into Jason Tillker’s bar-cum-general store early on an August morning. Sand was scattered across the loose floorboards, which made every stride a crunch under his weather-beaten boots. His bored gaze settled straight away on the liquor behind the counter. He pointed to the scotch.

“Make it a big glass today, Jason. By God, I’ll need it.”

“Step ahead of you, sir.” Tillker motioned at the glass in front of him. “Don’t know why I poured more than usual, but when I got out of bed this morning I thought to myself: Jason W. Tillker, it’s going to be one of those days. You know the ones I’m talking about?”

The Sheriff clutched the dusty glass and emptied half of the scotch down his throat.

“Son, I think I do. The past few days I’ve been listenin’ to the boys-in-blue down south on that radio transmitter in my car. Usually I can’t get the damn thing to work, and it’s been stuck on that one southern channel. Well, I don’t mind really. This town is too fucking boring. Soon I’ll be bustin’ that old coot Roy Depape for pissin’ in his sleep just for something to do. Military rifles, I think I heard.”

“Familiar? All I know is that every cop is shittin’ his pants down there right now.”

“Rightfully so, Mr. Sheriff. I know the man you’re talking about. Do you want the long version or...”

The Sheriff tipped the last contents of the glass down his throat. He didn’t cringe, but his tongue burnt a little.

“Nah Jas, better make it short. That scotch went straight through me.”

The small man behind the bar wet his lips.

“You’re telling me that this guy killed a man using wet guns?”

“That’s what I’m told. He should be misfiring wet cartridges, but he’s killed at least three people already using those rifles he snatched from the navy ship.”

“Bullshit.”

“I ... kid you not.”

Tillker shifted on his stool again, looking uncomfortable and playing with the dust on the bench.

“Son, why don’t you swear?”

“Look, Mister Sheriff, I ...”

“Haven’t I always told you to call me ... anyway, that’s not the point. I mean, fuck Jas, it’s good to swear once in a while.”

Tillker’s finger made figure-eights in the dust.

“Swearing is barbaric. I’m not an ape. My vocabulary is an
elegant weapon from a more civilised time.”

“Jason, you’re not in a Star Wars fantasy. You own a store where bums buy booze and single mothers buy dog food for their trailer-trash hound. You can’t talk elegantly for ever; your head will explode. When I come back from draining the little sheriff here, I want you to have another scotch on the counter and a swear word in your head.”

Tillker mumbled softly under his breath as the Sheriff walked through the short aisle of old cereal boxes and new packets of condoms to the back of the store. He poured another glass of scotch and watched sunlight peek through windows layered with yellow grit; not really admiring, just absently watching.

“... holy shit, holy shit, holy shit, holy shit, holy shit ... ”

The Sheriff strode out of the toilet and smiled.

“I’m damn impressed, Jason. I was having doubts there for a while ... ”

“... holy shit, holy shit, holy shit ... ”

“Son, you can stop swearing now.”

Jason Tillker was staring at the doorway, his stool tipped over behind him. The Sheriff followed his gaze, and saw a man with two guns propped up in the door frame. His windswept face was masked in dull red blisters and his eyes were hardly open. The man’s pants were the colour of blood, bullet holes punched into both knees. His hair was matted over his forehead with sweat leaking under a sandy wide-brim hat. He held two rifles loosely in his wounded hands.

The long barrel of a revolver slid into the store and a gun-shot later the Sheriff was lying in his own blood.

“Jesus Christ!”

“No, I’m not, but thankyou anyway.”

The Count was the last person to step into Jason Tillker’s bar-cum-general store that morning. He nudged the Man with Two Guns who fell painfully out of the doorway.

“Nice day for a stroll isn’t it?”

The question was meant for Tillker, but the Count’s eyes never left the man lying on the floor. Tillker just shrunk behind the bar.
O Sister—mah dream was of
the devil lass night
his hans were ropes o’possum tails
that loathsome, touched me
on mah skinny arms

O Sister—mah dream was of
the devil and smelled of tin, all greasy-cold;
I wanna sleep with yore flower by mah bed.
Mah dream was offa stone-grey river
that He tole me ah could drink,
He tole me ah could swim in
The river dried away and roots grew up
all over mah feet,
roots moist from unnerground
pale and wet as worms
Mah devil tole me, eat’em.
Mah devil tole me, cut’em.
Sow’em in that funny-summer, when all yore soul is light
an warm
Water’em when the river floods.

He said, “Grow me a tree in yore heart,
so I might wrap you up blind in leaves.”
His possum-fingers
keeped touchin me - down - down
’til ah thoat ah would be sick on
mah pale roots, my fleshless feet beneath.

Sister, ah was scared.
Ah prayed just like you taught me.

Mah summer is another dream, mah sun is white there
the leaves are all witherin away to ash before the trees
have a chance to die
Ah play with other children with skin
as sickly-white as clouds

O Sister—mah dream tonight will be of Angels,
blind as devil-roots. They will ask me:
Are mah wings still open?
An if ah answer ah will pray
that ah will be forgiven; ah will scream mah prayers
over the music
of their teeth,
their clickin’ song of wicked children’s dreamin’.
I could murder a good moonshine. I will drink and you will watch aghast, like children shocked to see their father consume a pint of their own blood; and I will do nothing but smile down lovingly on you with gleaming teeth.

The Italians killed the moon for its impersonation of the stars, and you would persecute my teeth for their glow. DO NOT PERSECUTE MY TEETH!

They are pearls; they are the irritation of a vowel nestled like a prime number in a politician’s speech. My teeth are the universal language. See how easily they shed the plaque of consonantal drudgery?

My teeth are words. Can you see how falling off my bike at the age of eight has freed my smile of your syntagmatic historicisation? I smile not in any photo albums—I am not picture-perfect—I smile now.

Each word is a piece of art! Each word, like a tooth, has its usefulness and purpose writ large in its shape and sound.

Well, my teeth make no sound, save for the

\[
\text{clack clackack} \\
\text{ckc ck} \\
\text{chrrrg} \\
\text{tiu-tiu-tiu}
\]

of their clamorous grinding whenever the wandering Zucchini of Rome seeks to educate them. If they made sound they would be bells!

Discard the hieroglyphic horse-buggies of antiquity! Burn on their backs the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin and fuel the flames with archaeologists. Hieroglyphs are indecipherable; we will not read them as you have. Take your hats and your whips back to America; we alone have the map of our time.

The youthful wordsmithing train-riding jackeroos are the new government of the now. This is our bill of the poet’s word’s master’s rights:

1) We, in the first instance, hold the vital sufficiency of the word over the bloated corpse of the sentence;
2) Punctuation is the jackboot of the one-eyed and half-arsed. We propose the block of text be presented sans accoutrements so that it may reclaim its birthright as the verbal mass;
3) In the second instance, the word is a work of art unto itself, excepting in the third instance, wherein it is the vital sufficiency of the verbal mass over the bloated corpse of the sentence;
4) We reject all forms of glory and publicity;
5) We acknowledge the spasmodic compulsiveness in the act of writing, and stand steadfast under the black umbrella of ‘us’ in the face of a shower of Ritalin criticism and typography;
6) We wait patiently for the readers (even the Russians!) to cease throwing dirt and abuse and their mother’s snotty handkerchiefs at their betters, the victors of the war for the world: US!

I throw down into the fireplace all the clippings and love-letters this nation has collected in the course of its love affair with the writing of the past. We smell Chorny’s memento lock of hair burning, and the smoke of the past is bitter and smells a little like dirt.

“Clear out these shoeboxes!” my teeth cry, and the cities of man quail before their terrible breath wet with the blood of the moon.

Fear not, principalities of earth. We come not for your destruction, but to drink moonshine and throw mama from our speeding train with our word—and that word is

Iukh!

We heft her past-ward, where she belongs, and she sings our verse:

I E EEE
EEE E E
THD!

emily finlay

Untitled

I had wanted to dance for you. Like I did in my kitchen tonight, like you were watching through the window at the end of the hall.

I had wanted to cook for you. Cook with you, in front of you. Had wanted to peel strips off the skin of mushrooms, sauté them with almonds, feed them to you.

I wanted to bathe as you slept—in the sweat we left on my sheets—with candles, a glass of wine, Björk on a portable stereo. Wanted you to join me, to feel comfortable enough to open the door I had closed.
Spring Cleaning

The skirt had been made in an un-premeditated explosion of energy. All the fabrics she had dragged around for years, kept in garbage bags and broken hatboxes, were unpacked and cut into even squares then patched together, darted, zippered and hemmed. A loose thread still hung from it, tickling her leg as she stood before the mirror, the room growing heavy with dusk.

Richard’s key in the door startled her. He looked withered, though only she could see it, had learnt to see it, in a man who could wear linen all day without a crease. He placed his brief case on the floor and loosened his tie, looking her up and down with an expression she had not seen since the days before they were married.

“It sits all anyhow, I know—I didn’t think enough about mixing the kinds of fabric—the satin pulls at the cotton. But the overall tone, the mix of colours, isn’t it wonderful?”

Richard moved past her, into the lounge-room and settled in his chair. She followed.

“Do you think I’m potty?”

“No, Ruth. The skirt is potty. Not you.” He had developed a habit of sugaring his real opinions.

Morning Song

Tia wakes with the cries. She sits up in the fold-out bed, its springs digging into her hip bone. She coughs, wetly, and reaches for a cigarette but does not light it. Through the door, her brother—the boy who taught her to harvest grass and shotgun beer—is crouched over the edge of a cot, stroking his baby’s back, humming a tune that Tia does and does not know. He is—disappointingly—a man now: round at the waist, thin at the skull, dark-eyed from nights of singing to his child. Tia draws ring-heavy fingers through her hair, thinks of her house in Sydney, wonders what she is missing. She stands, watches the curve of her brother’s tired spine, and pulls on jeans.

“I’ll walk him,” she says, “you sleep.” He looks at her doubtfully, rubs his jaw. Tia pulls the sling over her shoulder the way she’s seen him do it and holds it wide as he lifts the child and slips it in against her stomach. It is heavy like a stone and smells of feathers and flax.
“Be careful on the stairs. And near the road.” Tia shrugs him off—how hard can it be? She steps outside and pulls a blanket over the downy head. Dawn opens behind cloud cover. Mist caps the roofs of the houses that line the street. She begins to walk. The weight of the baby increases with each step and Tia can feel the muscles in her lower back and the biceps that hold the bundle to her, contract in a foreign way. From beneath its blanket, the child watches her, waits. Tia begins to sing.

As she steps out into the main road, the melody fits itself to her footfall. She shifts the heavy weight to ease the strain and then tightens her hold, breaths. The child’s eyes grow heavy; their lids, thin and membranous, begin to pulse. The women who pass glance at it, then nod at Tia and lighten their step, silencing their heels as they go.

The Undressing

The room stoops awkwardly whenever he tries to focus on her. She moves slowly around it, bringing glasses of water, collecting extra pillows, towels. She leans over him, pulling his jacket free, and through the residual smell of wine and smoke, he can detect soap and mothballs. How will he explain this to his mates? They had all laughed at her as she leant against the bar—the uneven lipstick, the thrift shop dress, the toothy grin. He’ll do it fast, so he can sleep. She steps out of her shift and walks over to the bed, her feet landing evenly on the floor. He closes his eyes and reaches for her breast, but his hand meets hers. She guides it back to his side and begins to undress him. Any electricity he had mustered evaporates, the darkness of sleep folding in. She works deftly, but slowly—buttons, zippers, cautious of his creases. Skin to skin, he makes one more grab for her and she keeps his hand, places it in the dip of her waist, guides it. Like this, she says, breaking their silence. Like this. Drawing her shape with his palm, she keeps his touch light. Up close, the grey of her eyes is both penetrating and indifferent. It is some time before he realises he is erect—the warmth is everywhere, not localised. He waits for her to end it but she doesn’t. Even when he gives into sleep, fades in and out, she doesn’t end it. She takes her pleasure slowly and evenly and all night she barely shifts the rhythm of her breath. In the morning he thinks that for once he’ll stay for breakfast, but she is gone—a note left for him on her kitchen table. He squints into the sunlight that bounces off her walls. His skin is clean, his mind clear as a struck bell.
sunrise at berry rodeo

i
a sun
languidly
makes its way from view
he does this every day
why hurry?
there's no fireworks display
this time
just another tarnish-edged cloud
and the PA crowing
loud
the horse girls are about to start

ii
"there's something about
girls and their horses"
artificial
barely clothed provocative smiles
they wear
akubras
and bare
their nation's flag
patriotic
and lipsticked
their pouting proud mothers
wave
in unison

iii
a six-year-old
placed on his first bull
makes his father proud
he needs two stitches
"but he'll mend"
tenagers stick around
till the real bulls come out
killing time
on carnival rides
avoiding their
parents and siblings
when they can
it's a family event
calorie-rich
and
cholesterol-high
Cento

Shine on in and around
broken flowers
where agony grows
like an old cat condemned to fidelity

I like them best of all
Mozart’s cascading thirds
just breathing
    for a moment
Yes, my standards of personal hygiene have reached an all-time low. My hands, once the delight of any instrument, are now reduced to the shameful state of “soiled”. When I place them to my face and look out from behind them, I see bars. Fleshy bars of black—fleshy bars of ink.

The window past them showcases concrete, concrete, more concrete, countryside and then skeletal poplars shivering sulkily on the horizon. Trees embossed in grey/green, kicking against the freezing blue sky. It’s winter. I could continue looking, admiring The View, but I don’t know who is watching.

Merriam Webster would say the flora looks radiant on the azure organza canvas.

She often spoke like that.

I could show you a picture of her, but I don’t know who’s watching.

My hands are like two swollen, overripe bunches of bananas. Like the ones my mum would use for baking.

It was all happening. We had apprenticeships, an ant problem, a plump filofax, a filter coffee machine, “Estelle” budget deluxe toilet paper, connections at major publishing houses, a slowly decaying standard of personal hygiene, and mates in England that could get us hooked up with the best agents. But mostly an ant problem.

Merriam and I had moved in together in summer. I was an editor. She was a baby hack. We seemed to be surviving on a diet of finger-food and ice confectionary. We left crumbs everywhere. The ants were invincible. They became a moving, swarming, constantly evolving paisley on our sticky lino. The ice-blocks were a novelty for Merriam. Over her December, in Massachusetts, the winters were cold. The ants loved her for her appetite and the mass of gooey colourful wrappers that would multiply on the kitchen counters before rubbish night. I spent summer editing contributions for a student magazine. My ants carried over-large metaphors, pretentious imagery, and gaping plot holes. My summer carried two red pens in her pocket—the current chewed and mangled one, and a replacement.

We spent summer nights on the balcony with our uni friends Mark and Theo, staring at the stars. We would watch the moon, the Big Dipper and Antlia.

Merriam worked for Antipodean Bride Annually, a publication with headlines that ranged in tone from apricot to mauve. She was a failed writer. Her poems looked like acne rosacea invading the epidermis of the paper.

At the time, it seemed to be the summer of success, maturity and personal development.

We seemed.

It had all been happening.

Happening like it wasn’t at home. In Mt. Gambier, where I’m from, the climate is also cold. That’s the problem I have with The View, you see, it’s almost as if I’ve regressed, and never gone to uni, never moved to Melbourne, never worked, never filled out a taxation form. Never met Merriam Webster.

The View was the same at home, countryside and shivering Poplars, only interrupted by my mother’s underwear strung across
that were broken within months of his release.

“I plan to marry you Shayne, and stay married to you forever, as I love you with all my heart.”

“Jed was a good bloke, just not so good with keeping promises,” mum explained.

She had a man’s name, mum. Her parents were hippies who had migrated from the UK, dramatists whose work focused on liberation in gender roles. She had a brother named Gertrude, a childhood dolly called Rameses II and a dog named Pineapple.

Merriam Webster liked to believe it was these letters that had made me an editor in the first place.

“Burton, sweetheart, it’s no longer part of your life. He’s made his contributions to your development—you’re a successful editor now, you’ve made it, you can let go of him.”

She had encouraged me to bury the letters in the backyard of the ant-run house.

She was a heavy sleeper.

She hadn’t noticed all the times I had left our bed at night and ventured silently to the garden. By moonlight, my hands looked as they do now. Like thick iron bars, confining me. You never know who is watching.

Under the length of the bedroom window. Greying triangles and near rectangles of sagging elastic; she never throws out anything, I swear. Undies from when Luce was born, marks from when Trev was born. Constant reminders of the seven hours spent in labour, the ten hours spent in labour, the fifteen hours spent in labour with “you lot”. My undies hanging alongside hers, the blue Superman ones, and the red Spiderman socks. The school hat I was continually losing.

“Burton, instead of just looking at it, could you bring the washing in?”

Sure mum, sure.

I shared a bedroom with Trev, my newest half-sibling. He was six years younger than me. This meant he didn’t appreciate my comic book collection, my bug catcher. I would come home from school to shredded, vandalized books and squashed ladybeetles on the floor.

I hated having half-siblings.

I didn’t understand my mother.

I didn’t understand the other mums on TV. In the year of the disappointing half-sibling, I remember seeing one of my mum’s friends on the ABC. She was so proud. Judy had been interviewed by some sort of “National Stories” program, wearing the parrot earrings mum had bought her for Christmas. They’d filmed her outside the prison, and then again with Nigel at her property in the mountains. They’d called her a shameful woman. The family had blamed her for taking away their precious, newly released Nigel. The question the program seemed to be asking was: “What kind of a Woman begins a relationship with an inmate?”

“What sort of a Woman would start a new life with a convicted criminal?”

I was ten.

It was also the year mum showed me Jed’s letters. He was a “great bloke” she told me, just not the “family man” he made himself out to be in his correspondence. His letters were grotesque chimerae of gross misspelling, clichéd romanticism and promises
The last light fades outside the window.
And inside, he’s lying on the floor motionless;
arms spread out, a sacrifice to the ceiling.
Small red burns mark
the inside of his wrist,
like stop signs strung along an empty highway.
He stares at the ceiling,
at the collage of newspaper cuttings,
he taped there weeks ago.
The black print glares at him,
paper yellowed from sunlight.
The curtains, closed now,
imprison the musty silence.
He rolls on his side,
searching for somewhere
to rest his dying cigarette.
His last real moments with her
almost forgotten.

You open your eyes and the clock is flashing eights. But that’s not
what strikes you as strange. What strikes you as strange is the
silence.

The white noise.
The dead air.

You look at the clock (still flashing eights), your office door opens
and she bursts in.

Gun to your head your
head to the desk.
One eye tightly closed, the other wide-wide open.

Right now it feels as though any more pressure on your skull and
the tendons holding your eye in place will snap. Your retina will
shatter, popping your pupil. Any more pressure and your eyeball is
just going to dribble out of your skull.

The truth is ... this obviously crazy woman with a gun to your head
and your head to the desk. This is not the real problem.
The truth is, the real problem is,

I can't remember her name. And if I don't move soon, the blood winding its way down my nose and over my lips. This blood is going to reach my tie.

Susan?
Karen?
Paula?

I've been working here over three years, and I know she's been here at least half of that. Treading softly down these carpet-coated alleys.

Rhonda?
Kathy?
Kim?

Three years and I can't remember her name.

By now my other problem (the whole blood-nose-tie thing), is reaching critical. Although I doubt you appreciate the severity of the situation. This is not some cheap B-grade tie your mother's sister bought you from Big W.

This is my FAVOURITE tie.

Double pressed 100% hand-woven triple-pleat vertically striped (white and blue) mohair meshed with Albanian cotton.

Right now, this tie is the issue. This woman, her gun, a distraction. Doesn't she know how hard it is to get blood out of mohair? Doesn't she know that each stich of this tie has been individually hand-woven? It's not that I support sweatshop labour or anything. But this is a really nice tie.

On my head, the gun is warmer than I thought it would be. As if it's been tucked up a blouse or down a skirt all day. Waiting for its moment. It's warm like body heat. Warm like anticipation.

Not that I'm in any way justifying this. Why there's a gun to my head, I don't know. This is an office block. We're all hardworking BBQ-manning under-10-cricket-sponsoring people. I even recycle.

For a moment I'm not sure if the liquid gathering behind my eye is a tear or the puss-green fluid seeping from behind my ruptured retina. Then I tilt my good eye down, just in time to see a small crimson drop slip off the cleft of my chin. It falls as though in slow motion. Like all the empty years of my life have been packed into the three centimetres between my chin and tie. Ignoring the ever-increasing pressure the gun places on my skull places on my eye, I watch as a small crimson bubble forms on the uppermost white stripe. Three small drops, like sprinkles, on the blue stripe.

And it's about now. Just when you're thinking fuck it. Just when you're thinking:
Kill me!
King size it!
Bring it on!

Just when you're thinking death is way trivial compared to your favourite tie—

She grabs your head. Pulling your cheeks together with her thumb and forefinger.
The gun leaves your head.
The pressure's off your eye.
The way she's grabbed my face, I look like a fish. A flounder. All lips and cheek. Suddenly there's a pain in my chest.
At the rate my heart’s beating, I’m thinking:
Heart attack.

I’m thinking:
Blood clot.

Then she speaks, her breath tequila and lime. She says 10 seconds.
This is it.
9 seconds.
The gun’s back at my head.
8 seconds.
And she’s dragging me towards the door, tie noose-like around my neck.
7 seconds.
Just in case you’re wondering,
6 seconds.
no, your life does not flash before your eyes.
5 seconds.
There’s a stab of white light before me. But it’s not a heavenly opening, just the shock of my head bouncing off the coffee table.
4 seconds.
When she opens my office door I’m not sure if the hum in the back of my mind is the drubbing wings of an angel or the photocopier in the hall.
3 seconds.
Just when you’re thinking: This is it, it’s over.
2 seconds.
She snaps your head around.
1 second.
And you’re looking into her eyes. Face to face. No gun.
“Zero”, she says.
Suddenly I remember her name.

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adam norris

Poems

The Time I Saw A Taxi (September ’79)

A bank of taxis are already anticipating us,
little yellow yellow yellow, little.
But ah, my mottled ladybugs, I know something you don’t.
My love for you is great—you crossed time for me once, for what is time if not the distance of space and the space between slight movements when lying in patches of sunlight on carpeted hallways in summertime night, when even if it is cold you can open a window to hear the sound of the air outside as it drifts in to hear the sound of you, and it often disturbs the dust on the windowsill (which proves, by the by, that time is malleable)—but not infinite, not like those big glass jars.
When do you sleep, my yittle brittle tellow foe? The drive-in—the rocking soothes you to sleep, reminding you of a time back when you were still a toddler taxi, safe in Mother Taxi’s arms—yes, I remember that too.
Bird with Jewelled Wing

Meanwhile, think nightstreet light dotted and flickering
driveways flat like tongues lapping asphalt
grainy vein that clogs as chalk
written-pavement as a music once told
inside candlebright breeze huddled corner I saw
a black bird with jewelled wings,
hook, crook and claw,
floorboards uneven
stripping honeyed papers from bleeding walls.
Ears pressed to knot and grain, this whispertrick
our house can’t contain swelled nauseous =
churning amber like heart carved above the mantle
better story could be told in this room,
from better mouths. Trembling, these halls are sour
windows washed red,
legerdemain of leaves and night and dining with
Kings & Councilors. My windoweye is dull and grey,
spidercracked, splintering, can’t end before it falls away
here in our place of transition, soiled brushstrokes
words like oily palms to other places.
Sightless expectation though
this everhouse of smoke and mirrors yields reflectionless,
or splintered again, my breathmist ‘gainst the windowpane
impermanent, twisting,
waiting to be moved by something
other than dead air
in empty rooms.
Contributers’ Biographies

jimmy andrews (editor)
Jimmy Andrews is a third-year Creative Writing student at UOW. His first short play, directed by Vanessa Badham, was staged in London in August 2004.

lisa busuttil (editor)
Lisa Busuttil lives in Bulli and enjoys writing short stories, poetry and scripts. She loves the beach, hanging out with close friends and playing her guitar.

erica carter
Erica Carter is originally from Newcastle but moved to Bulli to complete her degree at Wollongong. She enjoys spending time with friends, reading and music.

amelia chapman
Amelia Chapman plans to travel overseas as soon as she has completed her advertising course at Tafe. She enjoys writing poetry in her spare time.

rachel baker (editor)
When not majoring in the mysterious fields of Creative Writing and Information Studies, Rachel enjoys cooking, Haruki Murakami novels, singing in Mandarin, and going home alone.

daniel east
Daniel East is a mythical structure comprising of equal parts poetry, zaum and beer. When lost, which is frequently, he screams and shakes his fist at inanimate objects until they give up and point north. He is at his best when wine, fireplaces and musing all co-align.

rowan ellis
Rowan Ellis is a student of Creative Writing at the University of Wollongong. His plays Milk (2003) and Influence (2004) were produced by the Old Fitzroy Theatre Company.

emily finlay
Emily Finlay line dances (should that be hyphenated?). Sometimes (for reasons better undisclosed) she'd like to be a crocodile. Emily enjoys brackets more than hyphens. She is forty at present, but hopes to be twenty-five by July.

alinta goldsmith (editor)
Alinta has been reading and writing since before she can remember. She enjoys food, literature, conversation and correcting grammatical errors. Translated, her name means “the flame”.

lamar ico
Born a month after the release of David Bowie’s number three duet with Bing Crosby, the repeatedly-tattooed Lamar is proof that even pro-wrestling-obsessed heavy drinkers can be intermittently sensitive. A writer of poetry, prose and countless threatening letters, he is prone to concussions and enjoys Japanese food and mood rings.

melissa jones (editor)
Melissa Jones is a third-year Creative Writing student. Her dream job would be to write episodes for The Simpsons.

bonnie lander (editor)
Bonnie Lander is a student of English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Wollongong who feels short stories are not short enough. Her three microfictions were written in 2005.

mariko lees (editor)
Mariko Lees is a third-year Creative Writing student. She wishes she lived in the past and does so, vicariously. Mariko is currently obsessing over her novel/screenplay, ETHER.

patrick lenton (editor)
Patrick Lenton is like a locust, attacking the tasty wheat that is life. As well as writing, he enjoys coffee and caring for the rare breeds of Soviet attack dogs that he calls his friends. His favourite feature is his long, shiny mandibles. In the future, he hopes to retire to a dramatic Scottish castle funded by his billionaire sister.
xavier mayes (editor)
Xavier Mayes is a Creative Writing student at UOW and likes cheesecake, New York, New York cheesecake, and Buffy ... because she likes cheese (hopefully in cake-form).

jess moore (editor)
Jess occasionally studies Creative Writing between her duties as a pirate captain, office wench and co-ruler of a metaphysical nation state. She plans to save the world from bad punctuation, one apostrophe at a time.

richelle morris (editor)
Richelle Morris is a third year Creative Arts student. She lives in her own little world, where she can read and write fantasy to her heart’s content.

dane naoum
Dane Naoum is currently studying Creative Writing while looking forward to a long and prosperous career as a starving writer.

anna popoff
Anna is filled with polystyrene beads and has a plastic pink nose. She has large floppy ears, so be sure not to mention gigantism around her. Anna enjoys social activities, including Tupperware parties and holidays in Barbie’s campervan. She writes, occasionally, about the fluff she amasses on the curves of her bunny body.

john purvis (editor)
John Purvis is a fourth-year lesion on the underbelly of the HECS system. He enjoys bowlerism, fruitcake, words like ‘fruitcake’ and ‘bowlerism’, and the ballistic properties of tungsten (W).

jackie sayer (editor)
Jackie Sayer is a student of Creative Writing pursuing a career in teaching; you find the link. She loves her garden, Scorpio moons and ‘80s cartoons (and makes no apologies for it). One day, her picket-fence dream of two kids, acreage, lots of animals, having dinner parties and a novel on the shelf will be realised.

peta walz (editor)
Peta Walz has been described as mysterious, captivating, enormously gifted—and a flagrant liar. She enjoys writing about herself in the third person, developing obsessions and defending her sanity. Peta likes nothing more than good company, drinking coffee and eating muffins (banana nut) – preferably all at the same time.

cameron ward
Cameron is a Media and Communications student in his third year at UOW. He also partakes in a Creative writing prose class every semester for his own enjoyment. Currently residing in Stanwell Park, his first love is ‘The Shire.’

yasmin wilding (editor)
Yasmin is a third year Creative Writing student and also partakes in an Arts degree. Her current ambition in life (after completing her degree), is to be serenaded by Xavier Rudd, then to marry a rich pro-surfer and retire happy and content in Byron Bay.

daniel willis (editor)
A walking existential crisis, Willis masquerades variously as a reformed Bolshevik and swami of vice. Whilst occasionally performing illicit backyard marriages and plotting to overthrow the government, he maintains a healthy contempt for his liver, religion and the Crimes Act of NSW. He may be a bad idea.

graham ramsay (photographer)
Graham Ramsay is a local Sydney photographer from Mosman (minus the money, Gucci shoes and expensive European car). His photographic subjects range from landscapes to band-photos, but he still brings his own style to the images.
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