January 2007

Tide fourth edition

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Editors’ note

WRIT316

‘Time and tide waits for no man [sic]’

14th century proverb

Steady as the stars, Tide returns for 2007. Welcome to the fourth edition. The stories in this issue are both painful and beautiful. The poetry will glass you and the prose will lick your wounds. This issue is that note you wrote to an ex-lover or that mix tape your best friend gave you. They are the dirty secrets and bright dreams of the writers and artists from the University of Wollongong and greater Illawarra.

The Tide literary journal showcases the works of talented emerging poets, prose writers, playwrights and visual artists. It is entirely produced by third-year editing students at the University of Wollongong. It aims to support the local literary arts and reinstate its importance in the community by providing a platform for publication without censorship.

Tide is the summation of effort and compromise shared by our editors, fundraisers, designers, print officers, teachers, businesses, community members, artists and writers who have worked so hard to make this publication possible. To the students Tide is teamwork, stress and sleepless nights—but more importantly it is a source of great pride and a bastion of confidence that together anything can be achieved.
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The ocean knows this
Bridget Lutherborrow

1
Your skin more yellow where I can’t see it,
face like plasticine
your mouth
a hollow carved out for sound—
a cave on the beach
empty, but I
can hear
water in it.

2
Pale
curled over:
as the tip
of a young
fern frond
rubbing your
toes pink
with your
hands, hidden
in your legs.
I am
clothed again
mouth in a pillow
about to put my ear
where I’ve just
dribbled, as you
unfold to take
a shower.
Bridging the gap

Paloma Durán

My mother always told me that she raised us kids by providing us with examples of what one ought not to do with one's life. However, she didn't phrase it quite so eloquently.

'I raised you kids real good. I showed y'all what not to do,' she would drawl with an only slightly exaggerated accent. Her uninhibited grin revealed several gaps between her irregularly shaped teeth, not all of which were even hers, unless you consider 'bought and paid for' a legitimate claim to the ownership of teeth.

My older brother and sister were blessed with perfect teeth. I inherited my mother's gaps-along with her lifelong weight problem, abysmal eyesight and an astonishingly terrible singing voice. Lucky me. I begged to have my teeth fixed when I graduated high school and my mother, always sympathetic to teenage vanity, acquiesced by putting the $1200 dentist bill on her credit card. Now we both have purchased smiles.

Before she went into the hospital for a surgery a few years back, she shaved her head because she didn't want to worry about her hair during recovery. She was carrying an extra hundred pounds and looked very much like a pumpkin trying to balance a fuzzy peach atop its short, squat stem. I was in awe of her courage. I couldn't imagine any other woman I knew voluntarily lopping off their hair for the sake of convenience.

It wasn't out of character for her at the time, though. After my father left us when I was about thirteen, she pretty much gave up on femininity altogether. She stopped shaving her legs and wore nothing but T-shirts and a pair of faded and threadbare blue pyjama pants with snowmen printed on them. She had a masculine uniform for her job at the post office and on the rare occasions when
she left the house otherwise, she had a single pair of black pants and two plain blouses. This is where I proudly claim a marked difference from my mother. I squeal with delight whenever something pink and sparkly crosses my path and I’m rarely as happy as when I get to dress up and curl my hair for some big event. It’s never the event that excites me so much as the time spent dressing up.

I recently began this inventory of similarities and differences between my mother and I after a rather singular event—one that I wasn’t dressed up for at all.

A boy asked me to marry him. Well, actually he asked me if I would marry him, which is hardly the same thing. And he should probably point out that he was a bit drunk at the time. And in all honesty we were kind of in the middle of having sex. Whatever. The point is that I said yes and I meant it. I may have been a bit drunk as well, but I remembered the quasi-conversation the next day and my answer remained the same. Luckily, he asked again when he was sober, or at least hung over. Unfortunately, marriage proposals do not seem the purely romantic and wondrous affairs they once were. If a ring does materialize in this situation—and please keep the ‘if’ in mind, since I write this now with a bare finger—it’s unlikely I’ll go running off to a bevy of pastel girlfriends and take turns screaming excitedly. Paranoia seems to be a much more likely reaction since I will be constantly worrying that everyone who sees it is inwardly smirking and making bets as to how long it will last. I worry because that’s exactly what I do when I see a young girl in the flush of a new engagement. I give the customary mouth open, eyebrows raised expression while I ogle her new bling and all the while I’m thinking, ‘What a sucker! I wonder if he’s going to ditch her before or after she gets pregnant.’

That’s pretty bad, I know. I really can’t help it though—my mother and my grandmother, both of whom married assholes, don’t have the most idyllic view of the holy state of matrimony. My sister and I used to call our mother Miss Havisham and then snicker delightedly at our own cleverness. It was a joke to be sure, but it wouldn’t be funny if there wasn’t some truth to it. My sister and I were simply not raised to be married. As far as my mother was concerned, she had already given it a try, more than once, and discovered it to be nothing more than a degrading prison.

My sister is brilliant. She has a master’s degree and works for the government in Washington D.C. Just over thirty now, she has no children and has never married. My mother couldn’t be more proud. She worries about me though—I’m more like her. The similarities between my mother’s past and my current situation are a cause for concern.

The guy who popped the hypothetical question is Australian, and I’m American. Travel back twenty-five years and my Mexican father is seducing my American mother. Either we both share a fascination for exotic accents, or possess an uncanny ability to attract men seeking American citizenship, or both.

He is nineteen and I’m twenty-three. The exact same age as my parents when they got married. Dating an older woman when you’re a teenager may be cool at the time, but having your wife turn thirty when you’re only twenty-six doesn’t seem nearly as sexy.

We’ve only been dating for one month and my parents married after only having known each other for three. History has a funny way of repeating itself. I used to laugh at the war generals in my history books for making the same mistakes time and again. Now I feel a bit like Hitler trying to invade Russia using the same strategy that Napoleon used.

In her defence, my mother, who already had my sister from another man, was pregnant with my brother when she married my father. I remember doing the math one year with my parents’ anniversary and my brother’s birthday and then I called him a bastard for the rest of
Ironically, she says that her only achievement and happiness in life have been her three children, none of whom would exist if she had not foolishly followed her heart. I have a picture taken about six years ago at my sister's college graduation. My mother, brother, sister and myself are all smiling, but only I share my mother's checkered teeth. She is thirty years older than me—with five pregnancies, three childbirths and two husbands separating us—but while standing with the only pride and happiness that her life has yielded, her smile is as bright and pure and hopeful as my own.

The lover's promise
Daniel East

love had come to rest below my window and i resolved myself to let him in— for he looked ragged and wild, well in need of the rum i offered (a slick inch of wine in the tumbler, neat—my own with a squeeze of lemon) also there was the matter of the dove whose heart i had recently come to acquire: at first, she had lain in the dirt with her cotton-whites around her shoulders (as often i see ballerinas' legs in windows lingering like lightless lamps) a curve of her down in the grass sparse and dry and i thinking: perhaps she dances for me—she giving me no indication (such a sly little one) keeping to her dance, folded in an ivory silence.

that night i dreamed oddly warm (for my room is cold where the wind rips through) and i wound her clockwork round and round, and in a wooden box feathered we danced until dawn candled us.

in the morning i took a cupful of rice and simmered it in cream, cloves and brown sugar—and i too lay it in the dirt like worn snow. she came to rest there once more and stopped, a blue clarinet from her hard lips, the wind in her white collar.

love stretched two thick fingers (the nails black) down his throat and a diamond of moth trembled along them shaking her soft furs, coming to alight on my upturned palm.

love nodded, stood to leave, but i:

'her heart—i need to know' and he sighed, nodding all the while, motioning for another rum if i was up. from under the loose board, i drew the thin, in case—inside, a lump as black as liver, the wet flap of blood i found on my sill. the moth fell looping from me to it and at her touch, the heart again began to beat.
finishing his drink, love said —
'what she has given you are free to eat'
that it would be like almonds, and drier than i would expect, pulling the door to, shivering though the air was warm, the moth, that fine, soft storm twitched her feelers in anxious circles, so keeping to my promise, i closed the tin case and put it back below the boards — two days hence, the dove lay in the dirt.
what else to do? i plucked her: seasoned the skin with salt; roasted garlic in her chest; sucked the brown flesh from her ankles, the moth wailed for three days before the curse died clear away, still i miss her dearly.
and in the yellow days of summer, when i think of love's obscene suggestion, i take the dove heart and clank it to and fro, my consummated flame, to and fro

Sagittarius
Janine Hauber

The generous Moon sends an avalanche of men near the 17th suffocating me under a cold, barren deluge of men overwhelming me with their sudden presence.
Men falling from their perches at the summit footing lost as they stumble in step with my clumsiness and answer my reverberating hellos from the mountain face.
The generous Moon sends an avalanche of men near the 17th because there never was a man on the moon but great formations of them, peaks and valleys of men and this month the moon shall invite us Sagitarians to share in her stock enchanting reflections of the sun to brighten our nights.
The generous Moon sends an avalanche of men near the 17th each one’s heart bowed by the arrows of goddess Moon; pursuing with irrational amour; fighting walls of men to quench desire, to look in my eyes; blinding me with the lure of necklaces and rings; wishing, hoping, begging to have, to hold, to please.
The generous Moon sends an avalanche of men near the 17th gravitous rock pulling tides of men over my shore hurling waves of men across my doorstep tornadoes swirling with men hurricanes pelting me with men, volcanoes oozing with men, gales sailing me great ships of men.
The generous Moon sends an avalanche of men near the 17th
It was only after dying that I realised I had all these blank pages left over. My face was still pale and smooth then. I had never bothered to grow any lines or to smile. I didn’t think to create those little tracks or worlds inside me—the kind you take with you when you die. My eyes used to be clear water and they used to say nothing at all. I liked it that way once.

I met you at a party down the South Coast. Jenny had a beach house in Sanctuary Point past Nowra, a cottage that was once owned by her parents. It was more land than house—only three tiny, carpeted rooms that had that musky ‘closed’ smell. It had white-laced windows, a balcony that wrapped all the way around and no neighbours either side.

Jenny and I had been friends since preschool. We shared this broadband connection that Telstra installed and forgot to charge us for. We stayed close because we didn’t have to go about hiding words from each other. Jenny hooked up her mp3 player, set it on random and tilted the speakers out the windows.

Meeting you there, Delmar, was like Halloween. You emerged like a twisted metal vampire from a bat cave on King Street and decided to stick around. You stared me up and down on the back porch and gave me a drag from the cigarette you held in a polished silver pirate hook. You were visible, grotesque—gorgeous like a shipwreck that’s been in the water so long it looks like earth art. Your nose was snake-like. Your skin had burned away and sat in small pink islands. I had known you for only three minutes before I invited you in.

At the end of the night, crushed silver cans littered that yard, along with orphaned multicoloured condoms, hidden by the flowers.

I remember walking around Sydney’s CBD hand-in-hand with you on my lunch breaks. You would meet me on the Town Hall steps at twelve-fifteen exactly.
We played this game where I closed my eyes and you would lead me around the city. As we walked I became an electrical storm and lightning bolts of laughter shot out my mouth whenever I tripped or put a foot wrong. 'You need to trust me more,' you'd whisper, and I held on tighter to your arm.

We lived together for what seemed then to be a long time. We rented an apartment in Surry Hills that the owners had renovated. You used to draw on all the walls when you were bored with watching movies or reading books or men's health magazines. You painted symbols with a glow-in-the-dark texta. They started where the ceiling connected to the wall and rolled down in perfectly straight lines. As the months went, the apartment grew to be covered in them, even the bedroom. Sometimes they made sense but more often they looked something like this: ONONONONONONO—which could mean anything. So I'd hug you and kiss you with my eyes closed in the hope that we could make it make sense.

My mouth was a zoo, with uncontrollable words that came stampeding out. Sometimes these words were little promises. I always made you promises that I never intended to keep. Stuff like: 'I'm going to take you to YUM CHA, the Sky Phoenix.' With you, these animals would disintegrate and turn into piles of sand that I felt sorry for 'cause I remembered what they used to be. You gave me little animals too. Yours looked like this when written down: 'One day, one day maybe we're going to get married.' And I waited.

Instead, next summer you took my hand and said you were going to show me your 'favourite place in the world'. We followed a dirt track that was arched in eucalyptus trees and we climbed down black rocks to get to a cove no bigger than god's teacup. You spoke seriously and held my hands tightly in yours but I was captured by the grey ocean and the place where it connected with the sky. You kept trying to tell me something but the wind suddenly picked up—and where the sea darkens the sand a dry tree cracked and fell, and tiny silver fish swam away.

After that, I wore my heart on my middle finger. It was plastic, shiny and fake. Jenny gave it to me the day she and I drove back to the beach house—the day I threw those dam shoes you had forgotten out the window of the moving car—the day that I set fire to those fucking koalas that hung about in the eucalyptus arch. I had sworn never to go back but it was summer again and thirty million degrees, so we went to the beach. That beach I had attacked with a nuclear bomb in my head. I shivered as the wind picked up.

We decided to make bottle cap necklaces for the moon and started drinking. We uncapped wine and made a glass house for Ariel. The sky looked like your zebra-print collar that brushed your jaw. I remembered when I had put my tongue there and like an ocean wave your smell dumped my body onto a sandbank. I cut my feet on the black rocks still wet from high tide. I found that dripped-up tree that had fallen down so long ago, half-submerged and shivering. And there was Ariel clinging to its brittle branches.

She invited me down to the castle for a drink and pearl hermit crabs carried sand over my lips and into my mouth. It wasn't until after I drowsted that she told me I had all this blank paper. So I decided to grow on it like black vines that will eventually, slowly, curl to cover these pages. Unfurl over these 'no spaces'. And if you were to take them and glue them up on a wall, maybe they would look like very complex heartbeats or even like little animals before they turn to sand.

But that's not what I wanted.
Tonight
Camilla Casson

Tonight, rain enough to float a fleet of boats out our window as black bloodstains catch in teacups, fine and delicate damp ashtrays smell of old desire and irritation
I (bewildered by the colours behind tight closed lids), opened them and all your white-light failings come rushing in.
But tonight, I close my eyes. I am wiser against the rain and send my sight to guide those ships to docks far away.

At this grey hour

Tonight, at this grey hour with a two o'clock green glow marking hailstone heartbeats one a hummingbird smatter the other, metronome regular a tick tock boredom

Lento.
Tonight, at two o'clock, I know.
I know though incoherent words and tacit caresses say otherwise.
I am tired of you—playing. Our love sodden, waterlogged.

‘Doctor’s orders,’ you say listening for my anesthetised core. Oh, I have played your nurse long enough.
INT. JOHN AND ANNE’S LOUNGEROOM – DAY
ANNE is cleaning an immaculate room. A knock sounds. Anne opens the front door partway to GRAHAM.

NOTE: DIALOGUE IN ALL SCENES IS SPOKEN IN AN UNCONVINCING ORIENTAL ACCENT

ANNE
Whatever it is, we don’t want it.
GRAHAM
No, no. I’m not selling anything. I’m Graham, John’s friend.
ANNE
Right … He’s at work.

Anne eyes Graham up and down. He wears faded oriental clothing and holds a wooden staff and duffel bag.

GRAHAM
Can I come in?

Anne opens the door further. Graham enters the perfect, white house.

INT. JOHN AND ANNE’S HOUSE – DAY
Anne and Graham sit in an awkward silence. Graham is stiff and looks around repeatedly.

GRAHAM
Can I use your bathroom?

Suddenly, Anne springs forward and, in a blur of motion, looses a flurry of punches at Graham. He is flung back over the lounge and lands on his feet.

ANNE
One of Master Li’s students would not have been attacked so easily.

GRAHAM
Anyone can be caught by surprise.

Twirling his staff, Graham propels himself off a wall and strikes at Anne. Anne raises her arms and blocks the blow. Graham continues striking. Anne continues to block his attempts with her hands and arms. Graham smacks Anne’s legs then face. As she spins from the blows, he hits her across the buttocks.

GRANDPA
Convinced yet?

INT. JOHN AND ANNE’S BEDROOM – DAY.
JOHN lies in bed with CYNTHIA. Clothes lay strewn about the room.

JOHN
We’ll have to cool it for a couple of days.

CYNTHIA
Too much of a good thing?

JOHN
No, an old friend of mine is staying over ’til he finds his own place.

CYNTHIA
Can I meet him?

JOHN
Graham’s not your type.
CYNTHIA
Oh, and what is my type, huh?

JOHN
Well, he's not married.

CYNTHIA
Oh!

Cynthia kicks John in the face.

INT. JOHN AND ANNE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT
A bruised John is half-asleep in bed while Anne sits on a chair facing him. She draws a dagger and throws it into the wall next to John's head.

ANNE
Are you having an affair?

JOHN
No! No. Why are you even asking me? You're the one who doesn't touch me anymore.

Anne attacks John with a sword. John rolls off the bed and pulls up the sheets, twisting it into a lariat. John defends himself with the makeshift weapon and eventually disarms Anne with it. Drawn by the sounds of fighting, Graham sticks his head in the door, which stops Anne and John.

GRAHAM
Is everything alright?

Anne and John look at Graham, then John returns the sword to Anne and goes to bed. Graham exits.

INT. GRAHAM'S APARTMENT – DAY
Anne and Graham wander around an almost empty apartment.

GRAHAM
This is it. Wait here and I'll bring some stuff in.

Graham exits to get some of his belongings. Anne comes across some videotapes. She studies them for a moment and is visibly shocked. She turns and drops one tape as Graham re-enters the apartment. They stare at each other, then the tape and then back to each other. Suddenly, Anne kicks at Graham's head. In the ensuing fight Graham only retreats and blocks, he never attacks. Anne always stays on the attack.

ANNE
I can't believe you ... I—I thought you were different.

GRAHAM
Anne, wait, you don't understand ...

Anne hits Graham hard and becomes upset, stops and leaves, slamming the door as she goes.

INT. JOHN AND ANNE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT
Anne is vigorously cleaning her already immaculate room. She finds an earring under the bed and becomes furious and runs downstairs.

IN THE DININGROOM
John is eating alone at the dinner-table. Anne enters and throws the earring at him.

JOHN
Anne, let's be reasonable ...

Anne throws herself at John, who falls backwards off his chair. John draws a sword as he rises. Anne nimbly evades all John's strokes and then kicks him in the wrist, disarming him. Anne grins.

JOHN
You've improved.

John charges but Anne flips over him and kicks him in the back propelling him into the wall.

JOHN
(rising)
Impressive.

ANNE
You're slipping.

John and Anne leap at each other, they meet in the centre of the room and exchange a series of quick strikes.
ANNE
By the way, Graham has something you've been looking for.

JOHN
And what might that be?

ANNE
Master Feng Li's missing videotapes.

JOHN
But I was his protege... They were meant to be passed to me on Master Li's death... They hold the final secrets to mastering Jeet Kune Do...

INT. GRAHAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Graham is meditating in the middle of the room. Old oil lamps are lighting the room. John barges in.

JOHN
What are you doing with Master Li's tapes? They belong to me!

GRAHAM
He gave them to me.

JOHN
Liar! I checked his will before I left his mountain retreat!

GRAHAM
Master Li knew you would forsake him.

They draw swords and advance, the weapons a silver blur of motion. They fight frenetically, somersaulting and dashing around the room. They begin to tire and, as they do, they forego acrobatics and lumber around the room. Finally they stand before each other, drenched in sweat, concentrating instead on swordplay. Anne rushes in.

ANNE
(to John)
What are you doing?!

John flicks his wrist and points his sword at Anne's face, and she is forced to take two steps back.

GRAHAM
Master Li knew you would forsake him.

ANNE
Stay out of this, woman.

Graham distracts John with a feint, swinging his sword wildly towards him, while Anne leaps on John's neck and uses her momentum to flip him. During the fight an oil lamp falls over. Flames spread quickly and reach another nearby lamp, which explodes spectacularly. The intensity of the flames separate John from the others. Graham tries to overcome the flames and get to John but Anne stops him.

ANNE
You won't make it.

Another oil lamp explodes. The pair rush out of the apartment and stand watching as the building is consumed by the blaze. At the sound of another explosion from within the burning building they both jump and strike defensive poses. When they see there is no danger, they notice each other standing ready for battle. They smile at one another and Graham reaches for Anne's hand.

FADE OUT.

END
for d.a. levy,
a third-class outlaw
who died a first-class death

Lacllan Williams

... but I think you'd prefer this
to the thrilling mediocrity
of cartoonish monuments—you see it's all accelerated now
the lies are looped in sixty-minute slots
as the besotted dying living watch
the living dying in Iraq, in
Nicaragua, in Afghanistan, and laugh
at how it all goes so fast and free like
Wal-Mart's return/refund policy & I
envy you now that obscurity's become
The Place to Be

Untitled excerpt
Stephanie Barker

Jay was the first boy I ever saw with a punk haircut, and I fell for him instantly.
At the time I was waiting out the front of a café for a friend's older brother to
drive a group of us to a party. Jay was talking to his friends about the merits
of anarchy, his hairy, muscular arms gesturing animatedly. He was so wrapped
up in what he was saying that he was totally uninhibited. I had no idea what
anarchy was but I decided I was all for it. His first words to me were: 'Wanna
come back to my place for pizzaso & sex? What, you don't like pizza?' And I
thought I'd found the Holy Grail.

I'd always imagined having an older boyfriend but was sure I'd never
experience it. I wasn't a cute blonde surfer, a 'classically beautiful' brunette
or an elusive and sexy redhead. My hair was black and I hadn't brushed it in
years. I liked to think I looked wild and hip (in a totally alternative way) but,
probably, most boys just thought I was a mess.

It took me a minute to realise Jay wasn't like any boy I'd met before. He
was loud and compulsively honest, a trait most people found annoying, but I
adored. We started talking about our favourite bands, me dropping
in as many obscure names as I could to prove how cool I was. At one point Jay pulled up
his t-shirt to show me a scar he'd gotten falling drunkenly from a speaker at a
Guttermouth concert—it was so romantic.

He spoke with such passion that I believed every word he said, even when
he sounded like an idiot. The only other boys I'd talked to before were from
school—wimpy and immature and forever talking about how hard it must be
to undo a bra. They paled in comparison to Jay's sexy bravado.

When we were finally ready to go I followed Jay to his car without a
backward glance at my friends. Another guy tried to get in but Jay drove off
before he could open the door. I’d never appreciated cars so much before in my life. As we drove he played one of my favourite songs. I started singing along, impressed by my own courage. He shot me a look out of the corner of his eye and when we pulled up to a traffic light, it became a full-on stare.

‘No! Don’t look at me!’

‘Why not?’

‘It’s embarrassing!’

‘What? You have a beautiful voice!’

The lights changed and we were moving again. I mentally congratulated myself for managing to sound cute, vulnerable and rebellious all at the same time.

‘You know, you should sing in my band. But your boyfriend might get jealous. You’d have to spend a lot of time with me.’ He shot me a cocky smile and I returned it, pretending I had no idea he was coming onto me.

‘Actually, I’m not really dating anyone right now.’

‘Oh, I see.’

It was like we already had our own inside joke, and when we pulled up outside the party I didn’t want to get out of his car. He asked me four times if I was going to be ‘around’ next weekend and by the time I left him, I was certain I was in love.

Next weekend the same crowd of us went to see a concert out the back of a local café. I deliberately left home about two hours after the concert started—punctuality was so not hot. When I finally got there he was standing up and looking around in a crowd of seated people. He waved me over to sit next to him and we spent most of the night in the courtyard outside, hardly paying attention to the bands. Even when he talked to someone else, he kept smiling at me and putting his hand on my knee or his arms around my shoulders. Every time he touched me the bottom of my stomach dropped out. I felt hot and nervous and amazing.

By the time we were leaving it was close to 2 am, and it felt like I’d stolen a night from someone else’s life. I’d never stayed out so late before, talked to so many new and interesting people, or been given a jumper by a boy because he’d noticed I was cold. I was exhausted but determined not to show it (of course I stayed out ‘til 2 am all the time). I was standing in a courtyard doorway waiting for someone to find their bag so we could go home when Jay came up and put his arms around my shoulders.

‘So, is this thing permanent?’

I wanted to scream like I was in a porn film—Yes, YES, OH GOD YES!

‘I don’t know, I was just about to ask you that.’
Shower
Bede Payne

a naked toddler drools hot water on my toupee disposition
gummed bubble glop squeezes from his nose and
bursts viscous covering me (and the walls) with a styled deception
(or the studs in my recession)
this quiet moment is blunt and crowded fury.
my forehead drills the ceramic like feet, sand osmosed, on a pippie hunt. flakes of
Malaysian china swirl floating and stick red precipitate on thighs wired allegro
but for once, this is my own.
at least I'm not worried about crabs or the clap.
my forehead drills the ceramic like middle-age come early, like "are you Carl?" in an
unmistakably empty bar when your name's Steve or James or Jimmy DeRusso.
it's 'what's your number?' when she's ten years younger and uglier than your
bloodied up handprint. it's f*cked now, f*cked later.
hold your hands up and wash my face.
watch the scissors. watch your hand watching your hands. watch
as a group of newscasters on an MDMA field trip take residence in your fingertips.
tuning out isn't as easy as when I was a child.
my forehead drills the ceramic like CityRail sudoku frustration and underweight school
boy uneasy.
sleeping in on poached breakfast pears and sex and answering an email from
Viagra.com sad
the water runs out.

Self-portrait #4

'we accept no denials, no excuses, none.'

What's the opposite of instantaneous?
A Stevie Ray solo?
The blues murdering a beautiful jazz
guitar.
Picking at an unrelenting lint trail?
My best woollen socks falling to pieces.
Brushing until my gums run?
I can't see to clean the pink
stains
frothed across my chest.
My hands pulses
as you loosen the saddle straps
and blood rushes to my extremities.
I was born to bear this
yet I throw it off
and off
and off
and Jesus is allergic to myrrh
and Castro wakes up coughing
and Ghandi eats little white dogs
and Geldof drives a merc
and Garrett showers too long
and fuck and fuck and fuck
Just call.
It's not easy being as dim as me.
The mulberry tree
Michelle Peterie

It's cold outside, this early. The ribbony grass is wet with dew. My feet dampen as I tiptoe across the lawn, white nightie warm with sleep. In the middle of our yard the mulberry tree is stretching. When I get there I stretch my arms up too. My flat fingers curl around a branch and I think about mulberry leaves—they shape of paper hearts. Gripping the branch like monkey bars, I swing a leg up over the bough, kink my knee around the wood and pull myself up after. Already my feet have crusted with bark dust. Across the back brick wall, Pyramus's yard is still.

As I edge along the branch, thin fabric brushes at my knees. It's as soft as the broken bird I found last summer. I find my perch and rub the material of my nightdress between my fingers—that feathered body had seemed heavy in my palm; those eyes were rounded pebbles. Across the wall, Pie's door opens. He doesn't release the handle 'till the door has closed behind him. Our neighbour’s asleep. On skinny legs Pie jogs across his yard. Glancing behind him he places his hands on the waist-high wall, pushes his weight into the brick and kicks his legs up over. Landling on my grass he looks up at the tree. He walks toward it leaving imprints on the lawn. Climbing up, Pie’s moves are nimble—he knows the footholds and branches as well as I do. In a moment he's beside me and our hands touch. Loosed from the ground we huddle here together, tearing veined leaves into green confetti, then letting it fall beneath us.

When Pie strokes my wrist I close my eyes and bend to press my ear against the branch. The tree is throbbing, its heartbeat pumping life to feed each bough. Inside my eyelids I see the secret pulse of black dirt, feel those rhythms beat around in my bones. Lowering his face, Pie too starts to listen. His mouth opens and I can just make out the lining of his cheeks, his thin-tipped tongue. I grip the tree between my thighs; my skin tightens in the cold air. Pie's mouth looks warm. The tree's pulse strengthens and I look up to see the fruit fit from—dark and moist. I reach a hand towards the berries, fingers closing on their dimpled skins. Plucking one from the est, I place it between my lips and draw that berry into my mouth. The flesh is sweet, surprising. Juice seeps around my tongue, filling up crevices. I swallow it, and reddened hands grasp for more. Pie shifts away from me along the branch, staring. I pile my palm with fruit, lower my mouth to the bowl I've formed, and eat. He jumps from the tree as I go on feasting. My princess nightie is flecked as with blood.

At breakfast, Mum doesn't speak. We sit at her family's ancestral table eating cereal from bowls. Our spoons scrape at their ceramic sides. I drink from an heirloom glass and even my milk echoes with the sweetness of mulberries. It travels through my teeth, becoming a part of me. Mum stands up, clears her throat, and takes my bowl.

'Take your nightie off,' she says, walking to the kitchen. Her voice has no emotion. 'I'll fill up the sink and soak it in the laundry.' For a moment my mother turns to survey me—juice-stained face, red hands and clothes, rumpled hair.

'I guess you're a woman now.'
Seasons
Madeleine Wilson

The stark bones of trees
upset my mother, she pulls them out
from the black soil
and breaks them, tosses them
into that bin
with the bright, red lip. And her mother
cries out, says, ‘They’re not dead yet,
you’ve killed them,
they’re not dead,’
and herself gets upset
in the winter neither are accustomed to.

A maker of clocks

A maker of clocks, then, whose wares
are bright and sharp as coral,
must listen at each hour of the day
for footsteps
retreating down the hall. Always with the same sound
as a sudden gust through a grove of figs:
that same dull thud, thud, on the wood
that informs the making
of the hearts. It is a strange thing
that though rains may stream like milk
down glass panes set in stone,
a clock relies upon a harsher sound
for the splitting of its maker. Alone
in the evenings, pulling on boots
old and careworn
filled with water and with salt,
a maker may review the time
taken to undo knots in the laces. A maker
whose years were carried
in a tortoiseshell comb
given her by her mother
some forty years before
when her skin was creased with flour
and the fine white stuck in her hair—
always with the thud, thud,
of the fruit on the ground, on yellow grass
dry as the thoughts
of crabs in the sand. And though
the heart of a clock
is not
the torn skin of any sac or fruit,
it is buried in the yards of wood and cloth
and, living apart from its maker,
steals her life, and ticks appropriately.
Toby fumbled through the stack of envelopes in his leather pouch as Mr Jessop Cole waited, arms folded across his wide chest. Toby remained just outside the yard of the Cole property, his knees bent awkwardly as he leaned back to catch his pouch upon his belly. He hurriedly slipped his forefinger between the envelopes one by one, lifting an edge to glimpse a scribbled title then trying to hook the next before the bundle fell flat.

‘It’s here,’ Toby said, craning his neck. ‘I saw it.’

It was late afternoon. The sun was well behind the Cole house, and the surrounding trees let only slivers of a deep yellow glow past their trunks. Jessop’s expression was tired, but his broad chin was tight and his grey-flecked brows arched.

‘Well,’ Toby said, and he knelt, his tongue jutting a little from the comer of his mouth. He pulled the side of his pouch out wide and in two handfuls he had piled all the letters on the ground before him. He spread them over the flat, grassy ground with his palms, turning over any that were face down. His face grew hot, and being on his hands and knees with his head hanging over his task did little to prevent the blood from rushing to his head.

The front door to the Cole house slammed. Toby flinched. He raised his head slightly to see Jessop’s sister, Frieda, draping a pink woollen shawl over her shoulders as she strode towards them. She was a little younger than Jessop but had already turned completely grey. She reached them far too quickly for Toby’s liking.

He glimpsed Frieda’s hem swirling violently around her boots as she stopped in front of Jessop. Toby kept his head down, hurriedly turning over the few remaining letters. He stretched himself over as much ground as possible and started reading names from the top left of the collection, hands and knees grinding envelopes into the dirt. After a long silence, he heard the crunching of grass that meant Frieda was returning to the house.

This was the third time she had emerged and retreated wordlessly. The first time she had walked eagerly, carrying a coat under one arm and a bundle under the other, but when she saw Toby she stopped suddenly, her face twisting in annoyance, and turned on her heel. Minutes later she wandered out lazily, carrying nothing and folding her arms in a much more threatening manner than Jessop, before stalking back to the house.

Toby spotted an envelope of brown parchment. Jessop’s name covered it in handwriting so large he thought it must have been written by a child younger than himself. He resolved that the delay was a fault of the letter and its being too obvious—not his reading ability after all—and he snatched it up and held it high in the air. ‘I knew it was browner than the rest!’ He paused, brushing grains of dirt from the back. ‘Well, not like that.’ He smiled widely and held the letter forward.

Jessop took it, said, ‘Thank you, Toby’, and sighed as he walked to the house. His gait was brisk and probably the most thankful of his actions, but Toby wasn’t bothered. He quickly gathered the letters in his arms, unmindful of the grass he collected, and shoved them into his pouch. He walked west, planning to unload a few more letters before day’s end.

He found a tree with a thick trunk and he sat behind it, well out of view of the property he had just left. He leaned back against its smooth surface; these were his favourite trees. They were extremely rare, with long, low, tangly branches and were without bark almost all year round. They made for good resting places. He tipped out the contents of his pouch and started to smooth and sort the half-crushed letters.

The Cole door swung shut once again and Toby leaned around the trunk, curious to observe Frieda’s movements from the safety of his tree. Both the Cole siblings were walking east, dressed in thick coats. Though Toby could not hear her nor see her face, he could tell Frieda was speaking incessantly. Her hands and head moved energetically with her speech as she set a quick pace for Jessop to follow. Toby could not guess where they were going. They were almost at the edge of Westerbine and only more trees and a couple of houses—including Toby’s—could be found in that direction.

Not taking his eyes off them, Toby patted the envelopes into an even stack, slid them into his pouch and closed it. He did not know why, but he was bothered.
by the whole thing and would not be satisfied until he figured it out. He waited until their movements could not be distinguished beyond their forward motion, then he cautiously began to follow.

The path they walked was not worn, though Toby took it almost every day. Jessop and Frieda wove around trees that were familiar to Toby, sometimes straying from his normal route and lengthening the walk unnecessarily.

They passed a property where the Netherclifts lived, a family with four children all younger than Toby. The house sat high behind treetops on four brown poles with only a long staircase to inform passers-by of its position—but Toby often delivered there and knew its appearance well. At the tops of the stairs the house looked like a wooden cube that had its front half pinched at the sides by giant fingers. Double doors covered almost the entire front of the house and its width grew as it deepened.

Jessop and Frieda made no glances in its direction as they walked, and in a matter of minutes they reached a clearing. In the middle sat a hexagonal house on eight poles, a steep staircase spiralling from the centre beneath. It was the last and tallest house: Toby’s house. He was close enough now to hear the hushed tones of their conversation, but none of its content. He could not imagine what business they might have here. His father was not home mid-week—as he worked at the council—and everyone in the village knew it.

But again they passed it, disinterested, as they had the Netherclift home. Toby was perplexed. He slowed to a stop at the clearing’s edge and watched them disappear into the trees again. He waited and let the distance between them grow. After counting to a rushed thirty, he stepped out. He walked as casually as if he were approaching his own home and, when he reached the house, sped towards the forest on the other side.
Welcome to the palace of condiments

Arcadia Lyons

After salt water wreckage, clusters of men alight on the beach. He said he couldn’t get home. Then he banked on my cool shore.

Clusters of men; a light on the beach. He trailed the path up, then he banked on my cool shore. I slipped him a light syrup. He trailed the path up my saffron robe. I slipped him a light syrup of honey, cloves and my saffron robe.

His mouth tasted, the smoke of wood fire in his hair. Long-haired women: each had numbed the last.

The smoke of wood fire in his hair. A queue of boys leads backwards from Aeaea; each had numbed the last. He only wanted directions. A queue of buoys leads backwards from Aeaea. He said he couldn’t get home, he only wanted directions after salt water wreckage.

This farmer

Luke Johnson

Sees in gritworn blustering beaten reds, browns that lick the ribcage of every starved breeder and, from the feb-rimmed sunken sallow of each eye, sees colours of mud that aren’t there. Leather boots, belt, knife blade thirsty as a stone, measures his own trunk against the hide of a yellow box gum, his fortune to the contour of the dam bank, resolve in the number of fire breaks along the road; though, in front of the kennel, dog twisting and seizuring like a snake rapping at the end of a shovel, he weighs nothing, no word, hue or sentiment, only the shell of the bullet spent.
Covered
Alida Fellows

He seemed completely apart from the world where he sat, leaning into the shade of the bluestone building. I stood across from him, a paved alleyway between us, counting the minutes before I stepped back into work.

On the street, machinery was operating, filling my ears with what sounded like exploding balloons. People walked past in both directions to get to the confined road spaces, their footsteps and voices blending with the blasts and encouraging my headache. I continued watching him.

He was still. His eyes were closed and his hands were folded on his knees, a mahogany walking stick beside them. My lunch break was almost over. I pulled my handbag tighter to my side and cut through the flow of people to where he was, serene in the midst of the city's activities.

His age-etched skin didn't weaken the features of his face. A Roman nose, big and aquiline, complemented the sharp contour of his jaw, and his forehead stretched past the boundary of a hairline to meet a few grey-tinted strands. His skin was pale.

"Excuse me, sir," I asked, raising my voice against the noise.

His eyelids blinked open. A smile slowly tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"Are you alright?" I ventured.

He stared at me a long while. "If everybody abandoned this city, how long would it take before it was covered over with plants?"

I paused. There were certainly enough crazies in this town.

"Why would people want to abandon the city?"

"It's not a why question. It's a how." His voice, like his bright blue eyes, contradicted his appearance—clear and steady with conviction. He barely blinked. A yell sounded from the roadside and I turned to see a businessman and a middle-aged woman in an argument over a taxi. When I looked back the old man's eyes were still on me. I took a guess.

"Forever."

The man raised his eyebrows. "Why forever?"

"Well, the city is so large," I said, waving my hands lazily, "that it would take forever for plants to break through the concrete, envelop the streets and cover the buildings."

He paused. "A building grows, layer by layer, in concrete. It's aided by hundreds of workers—but a plant has to grow by itself. A plant, left on its own has only nature's benevolence to make it bloom."

I nodded, incredulous. "You want the plants to cover the city?"

His eyes fell to the ground and he suddenly looked delicate in the dark shadows. The skin of his hands, still folded in his lap, was thin and translucent over swollen veins. "I've lived and worked here for most of my life and now I'm breathing exhaust fumes. I go for walks when my nurses aren't looking but the landscape's all the same—"

He sounded forlorn and as I glanced down the grey side of the building I knew I couldn't dispute it. There wasn't even a token shrubbery or tree in sight—not out in the street beside us, or the next. The buildings allowed only patches of blue sky from where we were; the sunlight barely reached the ground.

"Well, maybe one day it'll happen," I offered pathetically, turning away.

"It's already started."

I turned back to see him gesturing towards a gap in the pavement. A dark green weed with thick, round leaves sat between two pavers. The old man smiled conspiratorially.

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"I'll just sit here until the nurses come after me. If they're game," he said, patting the walking stick beside him and looking pleased with himself.

I felt a small smile cross my lips. "I suppose they'll have to at some point." He winked and I turned slowly to walk away. I gained speed as I came closer to the double doors of my building. I heard a cry of surprise and glanced sideways to see a woman tripping over a large crack in the pavement. Then I continued inside.
I never bowed down to be a haiku flash in the sham
Alise Blayney

Does my syntax look big in this?
What do you think of me in a balalaika body trap?
He floor kills the cherry blossoms 'til my head severs.

Let's call it a joyride blackout day,
With these blues at hullabaloo level,
I'd be as loaded as old Rockefeller.

Hanging maniacal,
his ethereal critical level.
With these blues on parade
I'd be as loaded as old Rockefeller.

Remember the sky, darkening like a burglar,
bashed to death on the floor
to the red rover side of anaemia,
walkin' around, clutching my kidney.

But come on in and see Sassa the snake dancer.
She shimmies, she shakes
under immense pressure.
Now that's the heaven's jester—in your grin where r left it.

Opium
Samira Lloyd

Once upon a time there lived a poor tinker and his wife. They had five children and another on the way, for they enjoyed their marital relations overmuch and had thus exceeded the income. The tinker's wife was much enamoured of the drug known as opium and, despite their lack of means, she begged her husband to procure some for her. Night and day she pleaded, withholding her favour and making a misery of their married life, until he consented to fix her craving.

It just so happened that the house this couple inhabited was very near the property of a witch. The witch owned a house full of pretty girls who were trained to take a man to themselves and cause him pleasure. These girls were then paid for their labour and paid well, for they were known and respected far and wide.

Despite their elevated standing, many of these girls enjoyed the drug opium. Knowing this, the tinker snuck into the witch's grounds to steal some for his wife. He did so with trepidation, as the witch was said to be most unforgiving. He was much dismayed then to find himself facing two guards whose arms were well shaped by labour. His dismay increased when the silk-clad witch descended a large staircase, a sharp dagger in hand.

Overcome with fear, he begged her to spare his life, offering anything in return. Now the witch—being a crafty woman—knew that profit held greater rewards than revenge, so instead of demanding his life in payment she asked for his five children.

The tinker was loath to agree, for he knew the work the witch desired of his children was distasteful. But the impressive build of her guards and the well-defined edge of her dagger quieted his doubts.
The witch sent for them at once and the wife was struck with horror and grief. Though she shrieked mightily, the guards held her down and pressed opium upon her until she fell into a daze and forgot to feel.

The witch was happy with her purchase and used the children most cruelly for profit. But the youngest child, a girl of five, possessed uncommon beauty. And the witch was practised enough to know this beauty would only increase with age. She locked her away to prepare her for the most wealthy and cultured of clients.

She called the child Opium, for the drug that had bought her. She believed that by the time she was finished the child would be as seductive and addictive as the drug itself, fit to please even a prince. Her long, golden hair was washed and brushed every day; she learned to play the lute and sing and dance most gracefully. She was kept from the company of men, as the witch was taking no chances with this prize for whom many would pay handsomely.

Opium was happy in the witch's care. Every week she was bathed in scented water and she never went hungry. She had many pretty dresses to wear and a silken canopy above her bed. In the dark of night she liked to gaze out her window at the lantern that hung above the door and watch it glow red as a rose. The witch came to visit her every day to see how she was progressing. She told Opium that if she was very good and worked very hard she would be paired with a prince. Opium knew this meant she would be a princess one day and she looked forward to it with delight.

As she grew older her study became more strenuous, but she thought often of how she would soon meet her prince. The witch would come to Opium every day and bid her undo her golden hair and take off her clothes so that she could touch her all over her body. Opium did not like these lessons but the witch told her she must be learned in order to please a man, and so she grew willing and docile under the terrible caress.

It came to pass that one of the witch's guards caught a glimpse of Opium and became overcome with lust. He possessed great stealth and thus waited until the witch had gone before sneaking into Opium's room. Opium was shocked to discover him there but she quickly reasoned this must be her prince: he was broad of shoulder, square of jaw and hard of muscle. When he bid her undo her hair and remove her clothes she was convinced of his identity. She complied willingly as the witch had taught her and made not a murmur at the pain she felt as he fell upon her with delight.

But, as chance would have it, the witch entered the room while he was still much engaged. She came at him with dreadful anger and used her small knife to gouge the eyes from his sockets, causing him to sink down his cheeks. She then punished him from her and he was condemned to wander the streets blind, begging for morsels for the rest of his days.

Opium was much distressed to discover the man was not a prince and ran to the witch for comfort. But the witch was unmoved. Opium no longer had virtue to sell and was set to work the very next day. The witch was determined Opium would earn back every penny spent on her and so she was given out to any man who would take her. She wept bitter tears but they did no good for they were just salt and water.

42
Absolution
Chris Jaeger

The sky is a baptismal font.
The people of Cronulla
offer up hand massages to the Lord:
in return rain falls on Wanda Beach
four times a week, in the spot
where men with noses like street directories
take gulps of bottom-dollar whisky
and hold pissing contests against the sea wall.
Their squirts are sent to meet graffiti;
the last few droplets weave
a trail down their legs:
if more than three shakes is for wankers
then dripping denim is for men

Permission to speak from a nervous disposition

You string up our summer home
between two palms that slouch
in their armchairs
escaping the weight
of our waterlogged canvas:
a ruptured artefact supposed
to separate us from mosquitoes
who travel from whisper to howl
once the sun sags behind the Owen Stanley Ranges.

Your hairless hands snatch tobacco
from the khaki pockets of snoozing men
I watch you roll plump cigarettes,
lay them back in your dimpled tin
pretending to be home.
Settled around the wooden table
I shuffle cards, dealing hand after hand
to the parish priest, the boys from our street
my mother stands at the kitchen bench
pouring tea from her china pot, the one
laid away for company.
I pick at the bites that
line my forearms like needlepoint
until you fall asleep.
Where there were walls, there is rubble. Broken bricks lie in a heap, their colour long since stripped away. They aren't alone: there is a small black box amongst them. It has little perforations on one end. On top, there is a row of small boxes that can be pushed in. One has a triangle, another a square. There is also a red button. Don't push the red button, the Olders say. I don't. It's the triangle button that makes it talk, but not with words. The sound works in a pattern and the pattern seems sad like it's mourning a loss; it's so quiet I can barely hear. Then a man's voice is speaking at me.

My name is Sydney Thompson and, for a while, I controlled the world. It started, as many disasters do, on a Cityrail train. It was the last train heading south and I just wanted to get back to my shoebox, put on the Dimplex and fall asleep in front of Danoz commercials. If I was lucky, the train would be just dim enough that I could nap in between the lurches at stops.

Unfortunately, I wasn't lucky that night. I made the mistake of taking a middle carriage and middle carriages attract arseholes, and damned if I didn't have two of the biggest pricks in the state. They opened their mouths and torrents of self-aggrandising, turgidly uninformed noise that they called conversation came twanging out. They'd done more drugs than a gonzo journalist, had sexual encounters that'd leave a master of the Tantric arts blushing and the younger, less believable of the two had fought nine cops once.

There is another sound, clenching and sour. It's as if the pattern is building to something and quickening. The sounds become windy and light, like someone whistling, but more focused. The pattern isn't sad anymore: it's elated.

That's how it went for over an hour; I was desperate to hear something else by the time I noticed it—a pristine iPod lying next to my foot, complete with headset. It seemed like a gift. It could have belonged to someone on the carriage but I didn't really care, so I took it and set it to 'shuffle'. It didn't matter what I was listening to, just as long as it was different. It came up with the discordant sounds of Limp Bizkit's 'Break stuff'—usually too angry for my taste but I was willing to make an exception. For that moment, the overbearing guitar and yelled lyrics of violence were total relief. The relief passed when things turned strange. Now the kids looked like they were yelling at each other, except their mouths seemed to be moving to the lyrics—then the older one leapt on the younger one and wouldn't stop hitting him. I panicked; this wasn't the sort of anger that just went away. I ran off the train two stops early. It was a long walk home through early morning winter. I fell asleep on the couch, curled up in the cold. I stayed out of sight the next day and so did the sun, apparently.

The spidery, sour sounds return, hastier this time. It's as if the pattern is building and gathering speed. Something strong and new seems to blast over the top of the other sounds, deeper than the concentrated whistling; it's like a punch of noise.

It took nearly two weeks to work out. The songs I listened to on that iPod controlled nearly everything. Of course there were limitations: I couldn't play a song to get to the start of the post office queue for instance. However, I could easily control people. Like, if I played Nick Cave's 'Nobody's baby now', a guy would dump his girlfriend. If I followed that with 'Janie's got a gun', she'd shoot him. For five years I paid more attention to the music than anything else: work, health, friends and family—nothing came before the music. Naturally there were mistakes, each costly to someone else. My carelessness could ruin lives, tear apart families, cause disasters. I made the mistake of listening to 'Leaving on a jet plane' and it shook the world.

The spidery sounds whirl from the heights, pulled down by a dizzying vortex. They keep getting lower in the same cascading pattern.

Five years. Every day I was up before dawn to play 'Morning has broken' to bring the sunrise. Every disaster, I spent days in front of the television listening to 'Fanfare of the common man', just so some poor sap could survive. Copland was such a fucking hack.

Bells now peal over one another.

An idea came to me a few weeks ago. It might not work, but I have to try. We might be free.

All the sounds are barrelling out, louder than ever.
Auschwitz prelude in D minor

Adam Norris

'I have sometimes secured decisions for him, even ones about important matters, without his ever asking to see the relevant files. He took the view that many things sorted themselves out if one did not interfere.'

Hitler's aide, 1937

I swear, their impetus to liberate those Spanish hearts from Christian chests came not through fear of emerald eyes —gringo has not translated well, you see— or the jaguar blood that turned bare chests to gardens ripe, nipples to berries, as though a jungle soul could pass through reaching ribs and colourflesh to better swipe away their galons. No. Those movements through the boughs, separated, pure

like lizards scrying upon rivulets, this alone was their simulacrum—the separation of anecdotal truths from annals composed of bone meal and devildust.
those hallways shimmer like lanterns drenched in algae,
truth inscribed in windowless (lightless)
rooms, gulags,
children's dreams, tearful men, violins, minarets,
women raped and forgotten, paranoid indifference,
neo-everything, Byzantine memory and shaking
hands, oyster-red eyes existing in daguerreotype alone
— it means what it will, or what
you will. The
Milanese girl whose tongue was hacked out
stood as long as the Colossus of Rhodes
— mother visits monthly father drowned in ice
Yet who did they salvage from the harbour floor?
muskets flare from shoreline,
bronze bodies pirouette, spear and rain like rose petals,
like stilled tongues, or
perhaps
like memory
on sand.
Thus we bloom. We rise,
which as you know, Dear Heart,
relies always on perspective
I swear
and what we fashion from gold may not
always be so mineral
but saltiness, like skin love and rapture,
torn apart disassembled—
who cares for what immobile hands may
once have wrought?
No. Those movements through the
boughs, those resplendent palaces, the
ruin of her mouth:
Dear Heart
I lost you in the forest transept
in the dissidence of bloodmist air falling
through the
leaves
falling
through
Don’t what I remember I
see I
swear
you.

The woodrose cottage excerpt
Joanna Feely
When Stella’s mobile rang, she knew it would be Dennis. He was calling to say he’d missed the bus and could he please get a ride. Said he’d just nipped into the pub to take a leak. But when he climbed into her car ten minutes later she could smell the beer on his breath.

Stella had come straight from work, still in her tweed skirt and heels that click-clacked when she walked. The heels hurt her bunions but the click-clack sound reminded her of their mother—whose face was becoming fluid in her memory, losing the precise location of its freckles and moles. She couldn’t even remember the colour of those ratty slippers her mother had worn around for years, refusing to get a new pair until they gave out.

These uncertainties could have been solved with a glance at a photograph, a peek in the bag of personal effects still stuffed in her closet, or even by asking her brother now, as he slouched next to her jingling his unspent bus fare. She accelerated through an amber traffic light; she didn’t want to keep the agent waiting.

The trip took them past wharves and factory warehouses and into the suburbs that cuddled the city. They reached a street where every garden was blooming and lush. The house sat atop a hill so steep they had to park at the bottom and walk up, the property so leafy that sunshine had to force its way between the trees in shafts.

The agent stood waiting by the letterbox. She looked up, brushing thick grey hair out of her blue eyes. ‘Mister and Missus Milton? I’m Maria.’

‘We’re not—I mean, we’re both Miltons. But we’re not married,’ said Stella. ‘He’s my brother.’

‘Oh?’ The agent shifted her smile to Dennis. ‘Let’s have a look through.’
It was the sort of home Stella had dreamed of as a child—antique and squat, with a paved path to the front door. Once they entered she realised the design flaw of her childhood ideal: a house built entirely of toffee and caramel is dark and sticky on the inside. The tiny windows, adorned with lace curtains like dusted sugar, allowed little natural light to enter the room and just standing there made her feel like she was drowning in molasses.

Dennis seemed unaffected. He exclaimed happily over the mulberry stencilling in the bathroom and asked the agent endless questions about property depreciation, wood rot and solar heating.

Stella strayed from room to room, ignoring the path her brother and the agent followed, until she found herself on the back veranda. She noted the soggy timber and admired the green of the lawn.

If Hansel and Gretel had more discerning taste in houses, thought Stella, perhaps they would never have had to kill the witch. She jabbed at a set of abandoned wind chimes, which gave a series of hollow clunks. A stout spider was dislodged from one of the pipes and it scrambled away before Stella could squash it. She pursed her lips. Perhaps the witch had merely been fighting off home invaders.

She waited as Dennis farewelled Maria with a wink and a handshake, then the pair wordlessly started down the path.

“What did you do that for?” she asked after a few steps.

“What, wink at her? Just figured if I charmed her she might give us a better deal on the place.”

Stella stopped alongside a neighbouring fence, putting her nose to a purple flower hanging from a vine.

“No, say we’d call her back.”

Dennis trailed after her. “Why don’t you like the house?”

“They’re poison, you know. The seeds at least. I think the rest of the flower is okay. People crush the seeds into water and drink the tea to get high. The toxins cause hallucinations.”

“You won’t even consider it? I think I could die here.” He drew a deep breath and let it out with a sigh of contentment. “I don’t know, Dennis.”

“Is it the paint-job? I’m a house painter, Stell. That’s an easy fix.”

“It’s too small. We’re adults. We don’t want to be living in each other’s pockets.”

“We wouldn’t be. We’d have our own rooms. And imagine what you could do with the yard.”

They reached the car. Already leaves had drifted from the canopy overhead and settled over its worn finish. It looked to Stella like her car was trying to camouflage itself in its surrounds. Like it was on Dennis’s side and didn’t want to leave.

Stella fingered the flower behind her ear, trying to imagine a whole yard where she could grow whatever plants she liked. When she realised she couldn’t picture it, she nodded.

“Alright. We’ll call her back.”
Fuck Stalin
Patrick Lenton

Stucco light and
dust motes the size of
centuries
drift through the halls
of the History Faculty
where 'fuck you Stalin'
is written on a toilet cubicle
and this means something
still
each student suddenly hating
Hitler and Chernobyl
for the first time
tragedies seep through
their pastel halternecks
timelines looping around
their livers.

Memory

I am not an efficient nomad
my camels all crippled
with fatty deposits of water
and hypochondria
humps swollen and lopsided

My tent lacks a wall
and while asymmetry
seems pretty carefree
I keep losing things
to those damn desert rats

These days
dates and cactus fruits
lack vitamin B7 in sufficient quantities
so I exchange trinkets
for fossilised shark teeth
and follow the stars in a circle
Starting over  excerpt
Freya Nichol

Jessica and I loved to play with worms when we were kids. We'd pluck the fat ones from our dad's award-winning worm farm and allow them to infiltrate the mud pies we molded into ice-cream tubs and then baked in the sun. Jessica often collected a few extra worms and sat them on our concrete patio to give them English lessons. 'Z is for Zebra,' she'd say, before stepping on them. Apparently this was an experiment to see if worms had organs. At this stage in her life, Jess was considering whether to become a teacher, a doctor, or possibly a fire truck. I usually played with one worm at a time, having rescued them from Jessica's school while she had her back turned. I loved the sensation of a worm wriggling through the cracks of my fingers, leaving a trail of dirt on my palm in its search for escape.

I feel like I'm covered in worms now. My hair droops over a toilet bowl that I've splattered with congealed blood and lumps from the lining of my stomach. And all I can feel are Dad's fleshy worms swarming over and underneath my skin.

My prickly legs kick out from underneath my sheet and release the corners of my double bed, giving me room to breathe. Twisting hair around my middle finger, I tug hard—and then harder and harder to draw blood to distract myself from the rising desire that's causing my stomach to burn and clench again. Burn and clench, burn and clench: my body is covered in a cold sweat and trembling from the effort of trying to control it. The hair turns the tip of my finger a purplish crimson colour. I pull harder still, wanting to break the joint of my finger and distract my mind. I want to run. Leave the cold floorboards and sunset paintings on beige walls for the elderly, and just run.

I've never been able to sleep with sheets tucked under my mattress. There's something really claustrophobic about it, a sense of being tied down. I feel the same way about wearing socks. My toes have always demanded to wriggle free and twist themselves around shaggy carpets, or burn across the hot concrete of playgrounds. Jessica hated hospital sheets as well. We had to share a room when we were growing up. Every night we slipped from our beds and crept across the peach carpeted hallways to spy on Mum and Dad. Perched behind shadowed doorframes, we'd giggle into our hands as they watched the evening news and commented on the latest water restrictions. We were delighted to be listening to conversations we were not meant to hear.

My door swings open; it's Mary, the team member with a plastic smile and the mothering disposition who welcomed me to the Picton Rehabilitation Institution while I was strung out from my mission: a crack binge that peaked long ago. I thought she was pretty then. Now she appears generic, as if she's been plucked off a Baywatch assembly line.

Mary leaves the door wide open and speaks in a loud, clear voice. 'Oh, Imogen. How are you doing? Can I get you some water, Imogen?'

No, Mary. I do not want some fucking water. I thrash around in sheets that feel pasted onto my bones and sob until my eyes bulge. Mary stands, smiles and waits, unwavering in her stance.

Curling my legs into my chest I suck on my right knee. The skin is salty with sweat. I nib my tongue over a leathery kneecap and then push teeth into bone, increasing the pressure until I have drooled saliva down my leg and left the blue indentations of my teeth.

I unclasp my jaw from my kneecap. 'Panadol. I need some painkillers; I need morphine or sleeping pills. Pills, I can't sleep. Please, if I could just fucking sleep: Tears mix with snot and dribble down my chin.

'TM sorry, Imogen, but we can't administer any kind of medication during a detoxification. If you would like some water or food, please don't hesitate to let someone know. You will make it through this and feel better again. I promise.' Mary finishes her spiel and shuts the door.

I fall out of the bed and vomit a burning liquid over the floorboards, and hope that Mary will be the one who has to clean it up.

For what I'm certain is a few weeks I barely move from that position, sucking my knee and biting the insides
I could play you like a cello
and twice as long

Nita Green

I could play you like a cello
and twice as long

Nita Green

I can drink gin in the morning
if I want to.

Skate my fingers across
the frost
and fear
that today won't herald
the same ubiquitous love
and perfect concerto
yesterday
hid under its trench coat
snuggled in the nook
between your underarm
and your elbow.

I could launch a weak harangue
against your hung-over yellow
if I want to
calling you Romeo
by bastardo
or any other name belonging to
a man-man-slinging-dripping-fellow
and gentlemanly hermeneutic.

But I choose gin and longing
and tonic and hollow
resting vertically
on the floor between
your knees
until tomorrow.

of my cheek until I draw blood. Exhaustion gives way to
restless sleep. I find myself walking along a deserted St.
Kilda beach; my toes curl around the grit of coarse sand.

A cacophony of voices rings through the air and vibrates
against my body, delivering me into the ocean. Rising
water grips my ankles until I am engulfed, laughing with
the wind and shouting hymns to the night as the white-
wash weaves a film over my head. I wake to the smell
of urine, dampness between my legs and an ache for the
world beyond this sterile room.
Strangled by marriage
excerpt from a one-act play
C. Bramwell Pettett

Scene 2:
Monique enters. She is happy. She is holding the hand of an android Nanny, female, who moves mechanically despite looking lifelike. Monique and the Nanny stop. Monique is excited.

MONIQUE: It's virtually real. (Monique strokes its hair.) You'll need to wear your hair in a bun. It's so thin it's going to fall everywhere. Be a nightmare to vacuum. And that's your job now.

Monique hugs the Nanny. The Nanny is standing still.

MONIQUE: Go on, do the vacuuming. (Pause.) Walk to the broom cupboard.

The Nanny walks.

MONIQUE: You're going the wrong way. Come back.

The Nanny continues to walk.

MONIQUE: Stop!

The Nanny stops.

MONIQUE: Walk back here.

The Nanny walks in the direction it was going.

MONIQUE: No, stop!

The Nanny stops.

MONIQUE (anxious): Bloody machine! Come back here.

The Nanny does not move. Monique pours a glass of water from the jug, which is sitting on the kitchen table, and takes a pill with it.

MONIQUE: If you don't come back here android, I'll replace you. (Deliberate.) Walk back here!

The Nanny walks in the direction it was going.

MONIQUE: Stop it! That's it, I'm taking you back.

Monique takes the Nanny by the hand and it follows her. Craig enters, stopping Monique from exiting.

CRAIG: Sorry I wasn't home earlier. Overtime.

MONIQUE: This thing is a dud.

The Nanny stops.

MONIQUE: Stop!

CRAIG (in disbelief): Thing? She's gorgeous.

MONIQUE: She's the nanny.

CRAIG: The nanny! Well, sit her down. I'll get us some drinks.

MONIQUE: No. I'm taking her back.

CRAIG (to the Nanny): You can stay here as long as you want, sweetheart. (To Monique.) Can she speak much English?

MONIQUE: It's an android.

CRAIG: That's an android? How much was it?

MONIQUE: Thirty thousand. I'm taking it back. It won't do anything besides walk.

The Nanny walks.

CRAIG: Sorry I wasn't home earlier. Overtime. (To the Nanny.) I'm Craig.

MONIQUE: This thing is a dud.
CRAIG: She’s probably still in standby mode. Let me look for the instructions.

He searches her suit for the instruction manual. He finds the manual up the Nanny’s back. Monique snatches the manual from Craig.

MONIQUE: I think you’ve done enough searching.

CRAIG: Dennis’s got one of these. He told me they only respond to basic voice commands. They’re like trained dogs. Tell them to sit, stand, drop, jump—and they do it.

The Nanny sits, stands, drops to the floor and jumps as Craig says these words.

CRAIG: See, they’re so lifelike.

MONIQUE: Stop!

The Nanny stops jumping. Monique reads the instruction manual.

MONIQUE: The Trafalgar Class is designed to respond to your baby’s needs. The Trafalgar Class can also produce synthetic breast milk. To do so, she will need to drink one litre of full cream milk every day. To activate the Nanny Trafalgar Class, flick the switch between the android’s chest.

Craig flicks the switch. The Nanny slowly begins to move, as if waking from hibernation. Craig is in awe.

MONIQUE: The Trafalgar Class android is fitted with a self-defence system. Any attempt to deactivate the android into standby mode without reciting the access code could result in severe injury.

CRAIG: What’s the access code?

MONIQUE: In my case, it will not occur when your baby is being fed. (To herself) That’s a relief.

CRAIG: I want to see the code.

MONIQUE: Folds the instruction manual.

MONIQUE: Only I need to know it.

CRAIG: I’m the father. I want to help look after my child.

MONIQUE: If you actually bought the baby formula like I asked we wouldn’t need one of these.

The Nanny is now fully active; however, its movements are stilted and deliberate.

NANNY: Thank you for turning me au.

CRAIG: A British nanny.

MONIQUE: Do you look after children?

NANNY: Yes, dear, zero to nine.

MONIQUE: Do you clean?

NANNY: Yes, dear.

MONIQUE: Could you feed my baby? She’s so thin.

NANNY: Yes, dear. I just need to drink a splash of full cream milk.

Craig walks to the bin, picks out the milk carton and gives it to the Nanny. The Nanny drinks the milk.

NANNY: Marvellous. Not too foul but it will do, thank you, dear. (Walks to exit.)

MONIQUE: Wait! What do we call you?

NANNY: Call me? Why, anything you like, dear.

MONIQUE: Beryl?

NANNY: Yes, dear?

MONIQUE: Thank you, Beryl. Please feed my baby as soon as possible.

NANNY: Yes, dear. (Exit.)

CRAIG: You named it after your mother.

MONIQUE: She helped me with everything.

End Scene.
Waiting for the southerly

Susan McCreery

Blisters of sweat sit between my breasts as you and I watch our plates go dim and mad mosquitoes jab our heels through smoke from red-tipped coils.

The escarpment shrinks beneath a clotted fog the house gags for breath through fly-screens—we're sandbagged by February, the butt-end of summer.

In the bedrooms small socks lie limp as tongues pink feet twitch on cotton sheets fans hum and click, and now, blank as thumbnails, we wait for distances of sleep, sprawling towards our drop-offs desperate not to touch.

Curtains pulse in the dark, I glimpse a white-moon haze—murraya flowers gleam like pearls.

Dawn

Jennifer Law

The sky was much lighter generations ago. Parents have always told their children stories of how lively everything was, as if they had seen it. The stories say it was lit by the Sun, which looked like a thousand torch lights in a great circle.

I lie on the ground and stare at the infinite darkness. When will the Night end? Even the elders are lost for answers. They can only say that it will happen, as it has millions of times before. Yet the length of night and day still cannot be calculated because the earliest written records are from last Dawn. The oral histories go further back—way, way back—but they vary, and who can say which version is genuine?

'Jacob.' It's Susanna, my sister, doubled over and gasping. 'You must come and see this!' She runs back across the field, towards the southern gate, and I follow.

Hundreds of footsteps, mixed with voices, rumble up the eastern hill. People at the front gasp in amazement, while those behind them scramble for a glimpse of what they see. The elders follow, trudging at their own stately pace.

'Jacob!' Susanna is desperate. Her once-elegant hairpiece has lost all its diamonds and is slipping out of her matted hair.

My bones creak, even though I lay down only minutes ago for meditation. Susanna and I run up the eastern hill like the rest of the mob and fight our way towards the front. The crowd crushes around us as the eager people at the back struggle to find out what is happening. Those at the front suddenly begin to walk into each other. The people underneath vanish beneath others who fall.
Hands clutch at shoulders as confusion becomes panic. Susanna's grip on my hand tightens. 'Tell them not to look east. I don't know what's causing all this, but ----!'

'Sister, how can I? And why? This is madness ----!'

One of those in front of us turns around. His entire body is pink and so swollen that his clothes look too tight. Fluid pours from his scorched eye sockets and streams down his face. 'I can't see,' he shrieks. His voice rasps as though it, too, had been burned. 'Help!'

Simultaneously, the people that had reached the lip of the hill started falling to the ground and writhing in pain; the smell of cooking flesh turned my stomach. 'The light! The light!'

I turn slightly towards the east and from the corner of my eye I notice what is, so far, just a faint line on the horizon. I quickly turn away as my eyes begin to water and a searing pain shoots through my head. 'You mustn't look, You mustn't!' shouts my sister, trying futilely to stop the other onlookers from moving further over the top of the hill. Looking around helplessly, I spot our few doctors pushing through the crowd. I drag a burning man out of the path of crushing feet and realise that for some, help is too late.

Eventually we all burned. Our bodies were so accustomed to the night they had forgotten what the smallest trace of sunlight could do.

The sky is now far lighter than it has been for a long time. None of us can say that we have seen it in its current glory. The pre-Dawn records still exist. We just cannot read them. They are mere scraps of paper that the elders have proposed to burn, because they are now useless. We cannot copy from them, and the originals will have completely rotted by the time our descendants develop their eyesight. We must rely on storytelling, and do our best to remain loyal to the truth. And even we will stray eventually.

This is the curse of Night.
The fag man
Emma Farmer

The car rattles along the road. Its wheels pummel down on the potholes: huge cavities in the tar. The sticky steering wheel shudders under his brown, cigarette-stained fingers. They tap, tap, tap out the rhythm to the old Marley song playing on the radio.

He's driving home, just around the corner from the pub. Well, not just around the corner, maybe a bit further, but he'll tell his wife he only had two beers, not six. She'll be angry he hasn't tucked his daughter into bed. Again.

He reaches over to the pack of smokes that lie on the shabby passenger seat. He tongues out a straight, white fag, keeping one hand on the wheel, the other grasping at the packet. Burping, he can taste the small spores of stale amber liquid on his breath. He bites down on the fresh butt and thrusts the remainder of the packet back to its original position.

He searches for his red lighter. Glancing away from the road, he sees it lying on the floor of the car, visible through the gap between the seat and gearbox. He twists his arm under the seat, his hand weaving around old McDonalds wrappers: the remains of last week's dinner, last month's breakfast. Beer bottles lie scattered around the gearstick. He notices a set of small, red taillights off in the distance.

Balancing the fag on his bottom lip, he stretches further, almost touching the lighter. As his eyes level with the dash, he makes a silent promise never to buy such a small lighter again.

He doesn't see the pothole—a small-scale Grand Canyon in the road—as his Datsun is jolted. Jolted into the back of the red taillights. His own car spins off the other, into the smooth, cool white of a gum tree.

The Datsun creates a heated, oily shell around his mangled body. He doesn't see the crash, or the car he has destroyed. His own limbs interwine with those of the broken tree. The stink of fuel mingles with the smell of grass and gravel; his senses become confused.

He dies, his head lolling on a snapped neck, the metal creating a quiet cocoon around his form. Beside his matted hair lies the cigarette lighter. 'Smoking Kills': his glazed eyes stare at his unfinished packet of fags.
Toxic shock
Benjamin F. Hurley

I am under a general anesthetic, having my stomach surgically compartmentalised so that I can digest cud, when Germaine Greer sneaks into the O.R. and drops a maxi tampon into my gaping abdominal cavity—a little mean-spirited, maybe, but a gleeful reminder of Greer’s heyday, nonetheless.

Over the next fortnight my body is swathed in sweltering blisters. My stupor gives way to malaise, which drifts finally to coma. When I wake I have suffered multi-organ failure and my stomach is wasted.

So now I sit here rolling a desiccated bolus of semi-digested food around my mouth, unable to swallow it for fear of total digestive collapse, and cursing the has-been that botched my elective surgery.

Sex machine

When I dream I am a sex machine: a shiny industrial beast that sits in the corner of a basement, belching great clouds of smoke. My faded cherry chassis houses a fuel-injected eight cylinder engine. My face is a stainless steel sluice, clogged up with the meat of a hundred processed vulvas.

In my dreams I am a sex machine and when my electrical plug is flush against the socket I whirl and churn like a rusty lawnmower. And when you throw disembodied tits into my oscillating churner, a thousand barbed sprockets commingle and a dark brown paste coagulates in my refuse tray.
A good record

Donna Kilby

It sure took a while before he asked me. Granted, he'd been busy working for my dad and saving bond money for our flat. We found a good one in a real nice street in Redfern for only $160 a week. We might have to move again, money's a bit tight, but I try not to think about things like that.

When you're getting married, you really start thinking about things. Like, how am I supposed to know Sam's the only one who'll make me happy? He said he reckons he'll never meet anyone else better than me, and I thought that was real sweet. Then on the night he said that, we went out and had Thai food in a cozy place with candles on the table and everything. I reckon that's how you know you've found that one person: when you've got a bloke who'll take you to a nice restaurant after he's been working all day, that's who you should marry.

My dad can be a bit of an arse and it must be hard for Sam to work for him. Dad's having a row at the moment with one of his neighbours. When it turns nasty, he sometimes calls Sam as though he has a duty to come in as back up because he works with him. Sam's a real decent guy and I sure as hell don't want him getting a record over an overhanging tree branch. It's funny—if Dad hadn't given Sam a job I wouldn't have met him. I think it's really weird how things turn out like that, just the way they're meant to be.

Sometimes I wonder what those two talk about all day on the site. I'm not sure if that's even what it's called—they don't work on building sites per se, they paint all those just-built houses before the new plush carpet goes in. Sam says one day he'll build us a nice house like that, with a stainless steel kitchen and two bathrooms, so we won't have to share with the kids when we have them. When that happens, I'm going to ask him to paint the walls yellow.

I hope we have lots of kids. When I left school I started a course at TAFE doing child-minding and I really liked it, but then things just got in the way and I stopped going. My friend from the course, Allie, she says I should have stuck with it. She's got a good job now at a child care centre in one of those posh gyms where rich people drop their kids off. The rich people wearing lycra and makeup so that they look glamorous on a treadmill. Sam and I aren't into anything like that. But Allie gets to go there for free, so I reckon that's cool. I told her maybe she'll meet some rich fella there and then she can shout me drinks whenever we go out.

I promised Sam I'd go out a lot less from now on. Sometimes I really let things go, you know? I forget things that I have to do, like pay the bills or pick up the milk—small things. Sam came home from work last week and went to have a shower but there was no water because I'd forgotten to pay the water bill. He was really mad at first. He was shouting at me, things like: 'One little thing, Ash, after you've been sitting on your arse all day, one little thing's not so hard.' But then he said something that made me think. He said, 'Just get it together, Ash.' And I thought that sounded fair enough. He did ask me to marry him; the least I could do is pull myself together. I should start cooking his tea so it's ready when he comes home.

Today I'm making him steak with pasta salad. It's pretty fun to go and buy all the veggies and stuff and then cook them into something else. Plus I always like the look on his face when he's eating.

Sam will come home, tug off his boots and leave them next to the door. I'll tell him I've been bored in the house all day and that I'm glad he's home. He'll say something like 'Bored?' and laugh as he forks pasta into his mouth. 'How was your day?' I'll ask, and he gestures that he's eating and he'll talk to me when he's done. He'll say, 'Hey, how about you go catch a movie or something? I've got to go out for a bit.'

This is how our days go by. He'll roll in beside me around one and be up and dressed by six. But he does work hard and I reckon that's fair enough. That is fair enough, don't you think?
Degustation
Sally Evans

My husband's tiny, a baby, compared to me. He wasn't even born when I had my first kiss. Even stranger, he's short and thin and round-cheeked. He can't grow a moustache. He sleeps curled around himself like a foetus: tiny and gilled. When we have sex he's a desperate sucking mouth, greedy hands. He eats inch-long lolly frogs while I make dinner, tearing their heads off with his blunted molars. I try to find something else to eat while the roast cooks. I swallow caviar with glee and he tells me he thought it was live fish eggs. I keep eating. My little baby fish: slipping down my tight throat, being killed in my helly. He wants them to be alive inside me—all these creatures I swallow. I can feel them inside me, fusing, becoming blobby oyster-fish. All the little things I've eaten, waiting for him to join them.

I'm watching Joanna, Joanna in her one-piece swimsuit, Joanna holding her breath for forty seconds underwater as she glides along, feet flicking, belly glinting silver like a salmon. Joanna coming up for breath without a splutter, lips funneling the air like she's waiting for a kiss. The water falls away from her, a curtain that drops from her hair and into the river. Joanna, fifteen, and me, eighteen. I'm meant to make sure she doesn't crack her skull open and drown, to watch her like a good big sister, except I can't swim. I'm waist-deep and refuse to take another step, even one closer to the shore, because the mud of the riverbed has only just stopped slipping and moving under my feet. Jo's ten metres away but it might as well be a mile. She's fifteen and she's not waiting for me. So she dives into the water again, frog-kicking away from me towards the bridge, breathes, twists onto her back and sculls through the dark shadow to the water on the other side. I watch the little splashes of her motion, the ripples that disappear before they reach me. A part of me that's still there from when I was eleven wants to scream at her.
Her flatmate isn't home tonight. She wants me to come in and have coffee. It's nine o'clock on a night in May and I didn't wear a jacket. Her doormat has a kitten on it. There's an umbrella stand just inside with fire irons in it. Her hall table is covered in bills. Her parrot cage is covered by a flannelette sheet with threadbare blue daisies. Her coffee table has a remote control caddy. Her answering machine has no new messages. Her bedroom door is closed. Her couch has two fluffy cushions. Her kitchen doorway has a beaded curtain. Her fridge is smaller than her dishwasher. Her coffee machine is a Manfredi.

Her coffee is Lavazza Gold. She only has two teaspoons. Both her teaspoons are in the dishwasher. She has a shoe rack by the back door. Her feet are size eight. She has two sugars in her coffee. She puts two in mine without asking. She puts the coffee on the coffee table and her coat in her bedroom. Her bedroom is dark. Her dress is dark blue. Her eyes are dark brown. Her coffee is black. I don't want the coffee.

here endeth the lesson
The Tide 2007 team consists of several groups, each tackling a different face of this many-headed beast.

**Artist bios**

**Kim Fletcher** is twenty-nine and terrified of turning thirty. She is untrained but photography is her passion. She calls it her gift from the universe.

**Natalia Gubareva** was born and raised in a little Siberian town. Since childhood she has dreamed of travelling the world taking photographs of diverse cultures. It's been an unbelievably great journey.

**Sophie Kells** is an obsessive artist who loves to distort, explore and eroticise the body. She has a passion for dance, travel and drinking from steins.

**Marie Oborn** is a photographer who has completed Diplomas of Fine Art in Darwin and Wollongong. She has featured in many exhibitions, her latest being at the Project Contemporary Artspace, Wollongong.

**Andrew Ratter** is a photographer from Wollongong. He enjoys reliving his childhood and is actually going backwards in age.
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