2012

Tide Edition 9

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Abstract
Writers are very much united in their love of stories; however, it is important to note that we are unique in temperament, influence, style, taste and attitude. We’d be lying if we told you that the process of producing Tide was all peaches and lavender. Tide is difficult. It is the clash of creative opinions, perspectives and goals—as diverse as we are as people. Despite the struggle, it was the culmination and transcendence of these aspects which gives rise to Tide: something unique in both the experience and the finished product. Tide is a foray into the scary world of organised creativity. It’s mighty hopeful to ask creative writers to take on the roles of editors, designers, fundraisers and production managers. We may have eaten far more Caramello Koalas than any human should consume, and did not receive the recommended eight hours of sleep per night, but we reached the finish line and are proud to present to you the ninth edition of Tide. This year we have asked contributors to explore the theme of ‘endings’. The finality of such a topic is sometimes dark, sometimes nostalgic and often illuminating. It encompasses the cyclic nature of not only the writing process but also of life. While we may never re-friend each other on Facebook, we will always have our memories and, like us, you will always have Tide.
Acknowledgments

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Editorial

Writers are very much united in their love of stories; however, it is important to note that we are unique in temperament, influence, style, taste and attitude. We’d be lying if we told you that the process of producing *Tide* was all peaches and lavender. *Tide* is difficult. It is the clash of creative opinions, perspectives and goals—as diverse as we are as people.

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The *Tide* team.
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How Endings Start
JAYMIE HOOPER

Remember when I was only a sound, swirling around in your ears? I waited, restless, wading through amniotic fluid until you were ready to push. And when you listened, dear, my lungs began to grow, the bones hardened, and my breath came slow and steady. You found my pulse, I found a voice, and when I spoke it made you sigh as if you’d finally found what you’d been looking for.

You smiled when you thought of me. It made you wonder who I was and how I got here, inside of you. You let me speak, and the more you listened the stronger I grew. The colour of my eyes, the scar on my thigh, my name ... It all began to bloom inside that pretty head of yours. My crinkly eyes and milk-tipped nails were negatives saved for your dark room. Oh, you wanted to see me, to feel me—but I didn’t quite make it to print.

Perfect imperfection is what I had been; you called me your oxymoron. But after too many years by your side, pressed between the pages of your favourite book, my smile rusted and my lungs grew sore. You forgot my name. You referred to me as ‘she,’ and thought it better to leave me there, undeveloped.

I cried: remember. You sighed: forget. Then you back spaced my laughter and took the colour out of my eyes. Lost in the shadows, I called out, but you didn’t hear. You were too busy with other flecks of inspiration, other smiles and other stories that made your tongue curl with expectation. You began to flatten me out and make them round. I was rotten to the core, but they were ripe and ready. They made your pretty head swell with so many new words that you went out and bought another fountain pen.

You wanted me gone. So why didn’t you kill me? You could have conjured a dagger, a vial, or a churning sea to cast me out in. I could have been so many things, but now I’m at an impasse: trapped in
your lack of motivation.

Oh, my dear, why don’t you remember when you set me free? I was persistent, running my mouth at inconvenient times, like while you were in the shower, talking to friends, or cooking dinner. Maybe I should have waited for you to grab that pen of yours. But you can’t tell me, love, that you didn’t taste me long after I’d gone to sleep. Why couldn’t you write it down?

I was an idea that grew like a cluster of mutated cells. You stayed up those first few nights, dissecting my brain, trying to purge yourself of the inconsistencies and banalities you spewed across the page. I was not the girl you intended me to be, and for a while you enjoyed the surprises I offered. But then you said my plot was moot, and that my story was lacking suspense and direction. I couldn’t be fixed because I wasn’t broken. Remember what you called me? A dead end, a scrap of paper, a blank file. At least in death you’d have to write me. But you left me hanging, like a dead star alone in its orbit. You took your hands off the keyboard. Put my skeletons in your drawer.

Was my voice not strong enough?
Were my lines too unconvincing?

I wonder, dear author, do you even know what all of this means? Will you ever think, that just maybe, the only inconsistency was you?
The wheels of the trolley clicked as Julia wheeled it around. She smiled at other shoppers who glanced her way, but nobody held her gaze for more than a few seconds. All they wanted was to get home. They weaved their trolleys through the crowded aisles, hands darting out to snatch what they wanted off the shelves, as if they thought all the other shoppers wanted that exact item.

Julia rested against the bar of her trolley, letting other people push past as she loitered around the fresh produce. She ran her fingers over the smooth skin of a capsicum, testing its firmness, before slipping it into a clear bag and lowering it into the trolley next to the carrots and apples. A busy shopper brushed past, his breath snorting through his nostrils, without turning back to apologise for knocking into her. More people hurried past as she moved to pick out some potatoes.

Clean or dirty? she pondered as she pulled another plastic bag from the dispenser. Clean would save her time, but she enjoyed washing off the soil and watching the dirty water swirl down the drain. Her teeth bit down on her bottom lip. Her husband and daughter didn’t like having to wait for dinner. She picked up the clean potatoes.

Julia let out a low sigh as she pushed the trolley to the deli. Steph wanted the chicken satay kebabs tonight. She breathed in deeply as she waited for her ticket number to be called, savouring the smell of cooked chooks. The attendant gave a tired smile as he asked what she wanted. Somebody leaned forwards, bumping Julia’s arm as the attendant passed the packet of kebabs over the counter. Julia backed away and wandered through the aisles, pausing to study the different options before selecting the items she needed.

She glanced down at her watch. Rob would’ve just finished work.
She pictured him locking up the store and carrying his bags to his car. He always drove home in a rush, eager to rest after working all day. When Julia got home, Steph would be sitting in front of the TV, the cat asleep beside her. Or maybe she would be texting the friends that she had just spent all day with. Steph might glance up when the front door opened but she wouldn’t offer to help. She might not even say ‘hello’. If Julia was late her family might wonder where she was and why she hadn’t started dinner, but they wouldn’t think to start something themselves.

Julia watched the people around her as they raced to get home. She stood still.
Means
Samantha Lewis

There’s a gun somewhere, a pair of binoculars and a decorated voice that told you to kill this man in the photograph for whatever reason (you can’t ask), so you’re on your belly in another blue desert night watching a mud-brick house through the lens, whose single window flickers in your mind.

Back to your mother; she raised you well enough and cried when you told her Afghanistan was whistling a tune and she gave you beads that you keep in your pocket (they fell apart when you raided that place—remember? Red cement glued the bodies together like tiles). You rub them sometimes asking if what you did was right, not really wanting an answer. One night you scooped out the beads and counted off how many people your bullets had killed, all warm and unforgiving in their little love-shells and you ran out of beads and they spilled to the floor.

There’s a scented letter from a woman you knew asking whether god would think this was okay, whether the bodies were necessary, and you stopped reading halfway through to hide it in the sole of your boot—it’s not as heavy as you expected.

The window flickers and he’s having a cigarette out the back with a dog that lost its tail. They both look like they enjoy each other’s company. Maybe they grew up together,
played soccer in the dirt,
maybe he kicked to death
the other dog and wrapped the tail-stump in his shirt.

Now they’re here and old and forgetful
and you’re old too and this is your last one;
you forget about the beads and the letter
and the bodies keep piling
and all the cement in the world
is red.

*Zoom in, be quick, don’t miss*

Your mother died while you were away
and now your gun is a cane—
the beads were thrown into a sea somewhere.
A letter from years ago presses against your toenail,
it says the man you killed that night was not the man
they thought he was but they got the right guy
eventually, and it is your mantra:

*it was my job it was my job it was my job*
*it was my job it was my job it was my job?*

You’ve been home a while now—
all the letters in all your boots have been buried in the yard;
you shuffle through newspapers in the kitchen
and forget about the cracks in the tiles
as the red thickens and glues
your soles to the ground.
<Blood>
Paul Chicharo

Even gods get Alzheimer’s. Orcus was eaten long ago for deeds too floral to leave bite.

See,
glass eyes separate a great many things.

Hiroshima cradles Hades in a hurricane of ash and is forgotten, screaming thousands forgotten they linger but are still forgotten blood remembers [victory]

it spits a lyric a double helix clashing in flux.

The wind alone whispers to eternity. Whispers nothing for nothing is.
The Music Box
REBECCA PROKOP

Life inside the music box is dark and strange. The ballerina waits among her pink silk shadows; waits for the next girl to open the cage and send her dancing. It’s a long wait, a quiet wait. No kaleidoscopic melody tingles through the room. She is a windup convict chained to her silver pedestal, and has been since the very day she was made.

The first time the box was opened, it was by a golden-haired girl. She clapped along to the raindrop music as the ballerina danced, and then admired her own rosebud lips and new dress in the winking oval mirror. The ballerina was dazzled; her painted eyes grew soft and wide with wonder when she peered out into the strange new world. It was so warm, so light.

Porcelain dolls looked down at her curiously from where they lined the shelves, each dressed in an outfit much loved and picked with painstaking care. The ballerina wanted to smile, to reach out and wave so that they would want to be friends forever. But her arms remained frozen and her lips lingered in their gentle pout. The dolls stopped looking after a while and carried on with their own friendships and freedom. The golden-haired girl, though, would wind up the box again and again just to see her ballerina pirouette on satin toes—until she wasn’t a girl anymore. Then the box stayed closed for a very long time.

The second time, a different girl opened the ballerina’s box. She puffed the chalky dust away and fingered the flaky gold paint that clung to the lid. The ballerina stretched her stiff arms, white from so many years spent in the icy dark. This girl was younger than the first. Her eyes were bright and blue and she never closed the music box.
She scrambled madly through the room and tossed a jumble of words over her shoulder that the ballerina did not understand. But the ballerina noticed that the girl wore a tiny pink tutu that matched the one around her own hips. She watched how the young girl copied her slow turns over and over, and around and around in time with the tinkling tune. She basked in her newfound friendship, and thought her tutoring was of the utmost importance. Soon, however, she had taught all she could and was shut back into unwilling retirement.

The third time, her wooden home creaked with age and so did the woman who opened it. Her rumpled cheeks were still rosy and she stroked the ballerina’s delicate skin tenderly. Her fingers brushed the peeling lips like a first kiss. The ballerina ached at the touch; she knew she wouldn’t have company again if her world was forgotten and turned dark once more. As she turned, not smoothly but in arthritic clicks, she saw the old lady peer into the spotted mirror. The ballerina was tugged along by her rusty life-lines, and then watched as her puppet master turned away, yet again.
Harry looked at the clock on the wall and groaned. A quarter past two. Less than forty-eight hours until his flight would leave. The second hand seemed to swing halfway around the face every time he blinked—but a habitual sense of responsibility urged him to fill one more box before bed. It was times like this, with fatigue gnawing on all his bones, that he doubted the wisdom of his choice. Was a promotion worth chasing halfway across the world?

He wove-slash-stumbled his way through the maze of cardboard boxes and sat down in the far corner of the room. The place was a mess even apart from the boxes. He did not remember where the vacuum cleaner was kept—the room made that no secret.

It would never have gotten to this point if Adrienne were still around.

He catalogued the boxes around him. ‘Baby clothes.’ He wouldn’t even bother with that one—he’d drop it off at Vinnies first thing tomorrow. ‘Photo albums.’ He couldn’t exactly throw those out. He’d wait until the last minute and go through them, then maybe have a glass of whiskey to help himself along. ‘Blankets/linen.’ That was safe. That would do.

He leaned forward but the box remained elusive, inches from his fingers. He mustered all his strength and rose to all fours. He grabbed it and dragged it towards him. It released a noxious cloud of dust and fragments of cobwebs. He hadn’t touched this box since he’d stopped sleeping in the double bed. As he pulled, it toppled over and a dozen old VHS tapes tumbled out.

Harry buried his face in his hands. Perfect. He pulled over one of the empty boxes and scribbled ‘storage’ on the side.

The first tape was labelled ‘Troy’s first Christmas—25/12/91.’ It was written in his handwriting, with big block letters in black
texta. He tossed it in the box. ‘Wedding—8/11/89.’ This was in Adrienne’s hand, a fine calligraphy compared to his scrawl. The tail of the ‘g’ wound its way under the rest of the word with a flourish. It went in too. ‘Troy’s Funeral—17/2/07.’ Harry paused. He remembered their psychologist telling them to film the funeral. Something to do with the process of grieving. He could see that the tape was still wound around the first spool—they never had sat down to watch it together.

Harry stood so quickly his vision swam. He placed the tape in the box with the others and made his way towards the door. As he did, one of the unsorted tapes caught his eye. This tape had no markings at all. He sat back down beside it. He would probably regret this, but curiosity compelled him. The old VHS player was still in the cabinet under the TV, collecting more dust than even the box had. Its face flashed 13:27, still unset from the blackout three months ago.

He clicked through the channels until a banshee’s shriek and a screen of bright, colourful rectangles told him that he’d found the right one. The rainbow screen morphed into monochromatic static, which quickly faded.

The TV showed the same room Harry was in now. The table held breakfast—steaming eggs and toast that was just a little burnt. Now, the table held piles of paperwork and dirty plates that had been there for weeks.

Troy was wearing his school uniform. It was still that ugly khaki colour, so he must have been in year seven or eight. His shirt was untucked as usual and his tie was next to his plate, curled like a creased and dirty snake. Adrienne sat with him, filling the morning with a meaningless melody.

‘Harry, I told you to set the toaster to three. I heard a program the other day say charcoal is carcinogenic.’ She looked up, staring straight at him. He had forgotten how much her face had glowed.

‘Morning, Dad. Can Cameron come over after school? And
where are your pants? And why do you have the camera?’ How could he have forgotten the sound of his son’s voice?

‘Harry, put that away dear. It’s early, and I haven’t got my makeup on.’ He honestly couldn’t tell. ‘You’ve got to leave for work in a minute—go put some pants on.’ The camera bobbed towards her, then spun out of control. The image flickered as it settled on one of the lights hanging from the roof on the other side of the room. He heard the quick sound of a kiss and an ‘I love you’ buried in Adrienne’s hair. The screen returned to bright rectangles and Harry ejected the tape.

He sat with the tape, oblivious to the hiss of static behind him. He added the tape to the box with the others. He struck out ‘storage’ and wrote ‘London’.
My First
Evelyn Kandris

He’s been down there a while, feeling around, taking his sweet time. I chew down on my lip. Am I meant to say something? How am I supposed to know the social decorum? I’ve only just managed to get my legs to stop quivering; no strength left to speak up. I just lie there, the guy’s head nestled between my wide-open thighs, trying to keep my breathing steady.

_In, out. In, out._

It’s fine, you see; it’s exactly what I wanted.

‘You ready?’ he asks, blunt as if he were asking me the time. _Oh god._

Swallow, nod, attempt to squeeze lips into a smile and here we go. I feel his fingers spreading me apart and shut my eyes as blood pools in my cheeks.

One deep breath and in it slides, foreign, uncomfortable, _inside._

I gnaw on my lip harder as it moves. He holds my thigh up further and pushes deeper, discomfort graduating to pain, my fingers curling into the sides of the thin mattress.
‘It’s okay,’ he says
‘Just relax.’

Just relax?
Deeper still and I wish I had the guts to say something.
But I lie there, stewing in cowardice,
trying to focus on wanting this.
I made the right choice.

I feel it wrench out of me. A wetness spreads, trickling down my thighs getting into the crevices.
I see him wiping away the blood, streaking stains of red across my skin.
‘All done,’ he says, pressing a wad of padding against me to ease the flow. Yes, this had to happen, the choice had to be made.

‘Usually it takes a few days for the bleeding to stop, and it’ll be fairly heavy. But if it continues an unnatural amount, come straight back to the clinic and we’ll take a look. It’ll feel a bit tender, too. It’s all normal.’
Nod. Close eyes again.
Blood is normal.
Is the feeling?

I look at the machine that they will clean out later and wonder what they do with it. How they dispose of them. Is there a special place they put them: in the soil, in an urn? Or will they spill it in a plastic baggie, toss it with the rest
of the medical waste?
Bodily matter, as if someone had
shit their pants and they were left with a
soiled nappy. I’m the only one that will
look at the machine and
see my first

*my almost*
churned up in the guts of that whirring
container, vacuumed out and tossed by a
face in a lab coat.

I hold my underwear in trembling
fingers, hoping the thoughts caught in the
back of my throat will ebb away
with the rest of the blood that
trickles out of me.
I am all split ends today
standing littoral with you
(between the darkening street
and the peeling door;
between the freezing sea
and the biting shore.)
Children of the ocean, water sprites both,
we have grown so weak and weary
from sleepless nights spent swimming
until we disappeared.
But we are floating now
flotsam and jetsam driven
to land by wind and waves themselves.
It is time we recovered
what we have lost.

Behind that door; two steps forward
(one step back)
is where this has to end.
If
‘God is love’
then I’ve never felt love before.
Never raised my eyes to the heavens
or watched my knees hit the floor.
My face rests at the waist level of the devil but
kept out of trouble by a pitchfork
and high-pitched treble.
Apparently death comes in threes:
belief, prayer and loyalty, please:
God forgive me for
I know not what to do.
Most of us seem lost amongst the few,
cradling pages of a book between the pews,
empty views and hollow vessels.
Mortar and pestle a couple grains of what is true
with freeze frames of mind games,
rendezvous
and bathroom floor tiles cracked in two.

Love
is a word I seldom use in poetry ‘cause it’s cliché,
at least the version that is known to me—
and I don’t want to repeat my lack of wisdom like a rosary
but a rose is a rose you know,
and any other name would smell as sweet.
So God or love, push or shove,
worship the lover as we hide
beneath bedcovers
from this God who’s lying above us.
The silver cross around his neck lowers its chain to my chest
‘cause sometimes I confuse love with something less,
and confuse God with a man dressed in a robe;

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barefoot into the bathroom he strode,
floor tiles cracking beneath his toes, book of Job,
tap water splashing the crown of his frontal lobe
and a sliver of mirror from the ceiling falls
as God calls from the ensuite:
not
why do the righteous suffer?
but
how did we first meet?

From that splintered glimmer of reflection,
I met my former dereliction and realised
love has always been inside of me
see; I notice the colour purple in a field of green
and I feel the energy of the congregation as they sing.
We have soul as a people but controlling the people
is like creating the apple and then suppressing the fall.
Or is the testament meant as a complete metaphor?
Dios es amor!
I need more to work with God, hear me roar
from the curl of my toes
where honesty in loving shows a sleeve worth scrubbing
clean of my heart once worn there,
but worn down now by cautious care.
Love growing between sheets
of paper and cotton,
caught up in that tangle of pillow talk and prayer.

And on the seventh day, caught unaware
by the room service lady’s food tray,
vulnerable and malleable my thoughts, like soft clay,
his arms enveloping pale rays at the railing
of a balcony scene matinee.
She doesn’t see him but I’m tongue-tied and I
bare my wrists to her, guilty, call it a sin, it’s suicide.
Cut my clay with fishing line and watch
as love and God flow as the artery sprays.
Heartbeat a rhyme as my artistry creates
a situation out of two words, two ideologies, two birds with one stone,
and if both of them leave, then we’re alone and I cannot
press my palms together like we’ve all been shown.
Instead they press against his chest, written in stone
and he raises one eyebrow as the clock tower chimes—
but church is in session now so we’ve got to leave to be on time.
I think of my mother sometimes when I’m in Grace Bros. I don’t know why, she never went there—considered it far too expensive. Of course, I think of her when I see somebody on the street with the ravaged signs of cancer. And I see her more often when I notice my own body. My hands and arms resemble her most: etched with freckles that bear witness to our unsung song lines.

Not long before she died, we went to Parramatta Mall. I’d managed to get her day release from the hospice to ‘tidy up a few loose ends’—so funny how we use these terms. I pushed my mother in and out of banks on the loaned wheelchair, and then we rested and drank orange juice. It was a sobering moment. Neither of us spoke about the reality of it being her last time out on a day like this. This was not surprising of course, as my mother and I had never really had that kind of relationship. Over the seven months since her diagnosis, I’d exhausted myself trying to get her to tell me the truth about the things that really mattered. But she just did her usual ploy of turning her head and pouting like a child.

But this day, in Parramatta Mall, I just wanted her to enjoy the warmth of the sun and the taste of the oranges. As it turned out, before we headed back to the hospice my mother had managed to vomit up all of her juice and her dentures. We didn’t realise her teeth had gone until we were almost back to the car. It must have been a sight: me fossicking through the garbage bin outside Grace Bros with my mother quietly crying in her chair beside me.

The growing brain tumour somehow managed to bring all her malignant ugliness to the surface. Snarling, she spat out words that had for so long festered in pretense. My kid, her granddaughter, was an ugly and horrible child. Who did I think I was, little miss hoity-toity, letting myself get so fat. I watched her, torn between fury
and rage and compassion and embarrassment. And guilt. Just for a moment in the swirling eddy of emotions, I saw a pathetic, cruel, narcissistic shell of a woman who was clutching onto the last bit of power she could muster.

I often wonder if I should have tried one more time. The last relatively pleasant time we had was about a month before she died, and the cancer had spread to her brain by this stage. On the wall opposite my mother’s hospital bed there was a photo of snow-covered mountains, devoid of human life. When she earnestly told me that the girl in the purely landscape picture reminded her of me, I was pretty sure the tumour and the drugs were affecting her. That night we lay together on the bed and watched the news.

Then she died. She waited until I had driven up to Sydney in the early hours and took her final breath as I walked in the door. She always did like having the last say.
The Girl and the Moon

Audra de la Torre

Every month it’s the same. The full moon wakes her from her restless sleep: the price she pays for taking her life. Her bare feet crunch on the ice-cold grass and the sound crackles in her ears. The breeze nudges the white cotton dress hanging from her frail body, and the silence whips her regretful heart. Regret that she gave up on life. Now all that is left is the restless girl. The girl and the moon that pulls her forward. Her body is cold and tired but it responds; her silver lips part slightly and breathe out transparent clouds. It is the only thing she sees that lets her know she once existed.

Up ahead are two narrow railway tracks running side by side. She knows that she must move towards them—to act out the scene of the last ten minutes of her life. She must play this game every time the full moon wakes. How long is her sentence? How long must she endure? The moon will not say.

The cold grass is replaced with prickles from the splintered sleepers before she rests her feet on the metal tracks. With one foot on the other, she lifts her arms out to the side. Palms and face look up to heaven. As she waits she remembers the foretaste of freedom that whispered inside when she chose to end her life; she wouldn’t have to beg to be heard anymore, or to face the torments of her peers. But the afterlife had no eyes to see or ears to hear her pleas for peace.

The steel blades tickle her feet as the train rumbles closer. Her body responds, swaying back and forth, back and forth. The moon looks down at her, winking. They share a secret, the girl and the moon. The stars’ brightness intensifies: they are the unblinking witness of the last twenty-seven cycles.

The pebbles begin to shudder to the train’s vibrations and the girl’s swaying quickens. On the outside her lips are crescents
like they were that fatal night, but on the inside there is only the darkness of her eternal sentence. The distant spotlight swells and the ghostly train becomes louder. The earth shakes and there will be no mercy; she knows this. She had wanted it, welcomed it. And now it’s too late to undo. The whistle screams and metal wheels screech as they skate across the rails. The train crashes into her body—again. Then the apparition disappears, the stars’ glint fades, and all that remains is the memory of a girl with blurred edges. The moon holds onto the secret.

It is the twenty-eighth cycle.
Elegy (for Thomas Grey)
Written in a Country Hotel Room

Arcadia Lyons

Full many a man of purest heart unheeded
In gentle wary arms will briefly laze;
Full many a tear will swell to drip unneeded
And waste its saltiness with a sliding graze.
I’ll set the scene,
write it down
black words on
paper, blue night and
a silver moon. Then
you’ll set the tone
all fogged windows
and dimmed headlights
that cut through the night
the way you tear into me—
shredding heart and tearing soul,
pain’s pleasure and pleasure’s pain.
Then we’ll set the pace
with hearts racing
and fingers ghosting
as breath dances
on supple skin
that hovers in
the winter chill
twisting, moving
shaking & trembling.
They’ll tip the hourglass,
as precious seconds pass on
our journey towards
discovering.
Devotion
ELIZABETH STEVENSON

She sat on the divan, eyes narrowed and cold, looking down at him while he cleaned up the wine she’d deliberately spilled, tap-tap-tapping her fan on her smirking lips. They were painted a deep red. Red like the wine. Red like blood. He hated the colour. It had looked good on her, though, striking against her green eyes and pale skin, matching her dress. She always stood out from the white marble and white panelled walls. She was bright and alive.

She mattered.

She’d always treated him poorly. He could handle that. He’d handled it for years. She’d spend the whole day treating him like a slave and the whole night looking down her nose at him. It was nothing new.

The way she sat draped across the gold fabric in her red, red dress was like royalty. She sat like she deserved to use him like this. And he let her.

It was better if he didn’t look, if he just focused on the red wine on white marble. He could pretend that his sister was still little, still tucked in bed, and that it was Mother sitting on the divan, tap-tap-tapping a fan.

It was a beautiful fan, straight from China—a gift from one of his sister’s many suitors. He’d seen it earlier in the evening, when the hall had been filled with people and all he’d had to do was refill glasses. It was blue like the sky, with a green dragon stretched across it. It wasn’t so beautiful now that it was closed and tap-tap-tapping.

It was too sharp. Too much like his mother’s click-click-clicking heels on the polished marble floors of the halls. Too much like the drip-drip-dripping of his blood onto those same floors.

He had never expected love from either of them; he had expected her to remember how much he hated that sound.
Then he glanced up at her and saw it in the curl of her lips. She knew. She just didn’t care.
Why would she care when she was the one in control?

_Why did you do it Michael?’_ The officer holds his palms out—reassuring.

He tightened his grip around her neck and her scream was cut short.
Why did he do it? Did he need a reason? They’d never had one. Why should he?
Or maybe he did have one:
The repetitive cracks as he smashed her skull onto that once pristine marble floor, too loud and ever-changing to be connected to heels or blood or a fan. He could make noises too. He could stain the white tile red.
The way her eyes glazed, green to grey. No more looking down on him. No more disapproving stares.
The way the fan slipped from her fingers with a final tap. The echoing endless silence following that last sharp sound.

_‘Michael.’_ Again the officer’s voice is gentle. _Why did you kill your sister?’_ He looks up at the officer, tears falling, and taps the bloodstained fan against the table. Tap-tap-tap, like blood dripping on marble, like heels clicking on marble, like a fan on painted lips. He smiles.
Funeral at Montparnasse Cemetery

Jonathan Park

that sing the funeral
Hebrew men and Hebrew boys
provoke our regal voices, Judaic
listen also
the painted, wooden bench attends
to someone’s pre-empted cigarette
entombed by a new jacket pocket
and churning the lungs in a hushed halo,
the holy garnish of nicotine
the whisking, soulless wind
relieves the symmetry in the trees
as an outburst of water begins to retire
like fallen goodbyes
lined by the order of flowers
divorced from a canopy of vines
the rain says ‘sparkle’
and an umbrella tumbles
into a glass of red wine celebration
I hear the toast
‘to an entirety of time’
as the awnings of my eyes
become saturated
isolated
watching a fearful procession of lies
together we vanish
beneath an abiding sky.
The Trophy

Joshua Lund

Wednesday the 11th of April, 2012. Sixty-eight days, twelve hours, seven minutes and eight seconds until Armageddon. Dr Peters says I need to keep a journal to help me express my feelings and so we can monitor what makes me angry. I told him keeping a journal makes me fucking angry. Dr Peters gave me some pills. I felt better.

There was a dead cat in front of Sophie’s house today; I considered going out and removing it from her driveway but decided she may have killed the cat herself and was keeping it as some kind of memento or trophy like that alien from the movie Predator, my 276th favourite movie of all time, not including pornography. I’ve never been given a trophy even though I’m good at lots of things like licking envelopes, Morse code, changing the batteries in fire alarms and train simulators. I bet Sophie has lots of trophies: big trophies, medium trophies, small trophies. After thinking about all Sophie’s trophies I became sad; I contemplated stealing the cat and displaying it on the mantelpiece next to Grandma’s ashes but then I remembered Grandma was allergic to cats and would keep me awake all night with her sneezes.

A man came to Sophie’s house today. He was six feet tall and wore a suit. He knocked on her door and talked to her for exactly two minutes and thirty-three seconds. They may have had sex in the brief time span when my eyes blinked. Uncertain, but probable. The man then came to my house; I could still smell the sex on him ... It smelt like aftershave and mandarin skin. He said he was one of Jehovah’s witnesses and asked me if he could come in to talk. I considered letting him in to bludgeon him to death with Grandma’s ashes, but recalled what Dr Peters said to do whenever I get angry. So I let the man go and wrote my anger into my journal. I was proud of myself so I rang Dr Peters and told him what had
occurred. He said he was proud of me but wanted me to take a double dosage of pills so that I wouldn't think about bludgeoning innocent men to death with Grandma's ashes. I took the pills. I felt better.

I retrieved the cat from Sophie's driveway and placed it on the mantelpiece. Despite her allergies I'm sure Grandma would be proud of my first trophy.
Google Search: Beauty and the Beast

Susie Lenehan

Beauty and the Geek, Beauty and the Greek,
Beauty hide and seek, Baby Beauty Ball,
Royal Baby Beauty Pageant: in Austin, Texas during the Fall.

Reality television tells a tale as old as time—
she waits in her dressing room pondering a nursery rhyme.
In a pink dress, pink shoes, pinks cheeks, pink feathers—stuck—
to her fake pink ringlets; pinned to her blonde waves;
piercing her scalp like thorns.
In a dress that can never get dirty or torn.
A simple stain could break the spell.

‘My baby’s going to win that cash,
she’s the most beautiful little girl in all the land.’
The princess complains she’s hot
and rubs her neck raw.

The witch knocks on the door and offers her little Rose
to the world of beasts.
She warns them to not be deceived by appearances,
for beauty was now found—within—
hers dear little Rose, with a freshly pressed face:
plump and preened, ready for the show.

‘These new little lips will surely be a threat for that Eden Wood.
That snotty little brat with the ‘all-that’ act!
My baby knows the difference between Prada and Louis Vuitton,
doesn’t complain when work is at the same time Sponge Bob is on.
We’ll see who’s the real beauty this time.’

Tide 2012 • 41
‘Eden, can you tell us what you like to do when you’re not modelling or acting or singing or dancing?’
‘Go play, play in the mud.’
Low Priority Mail  
Clancy Noakes

pills for pain
and beer for company

disaffected cunts
could ask for nothing more

a hollow-point prescription
delivers the doctor’s orders

painting a pretty picture
for the coroner

100% organic
art with a conscience

dripping from the walls
i'm probably crying for help
I hold the Styrofoam cup of soup and hope that its faint warmth can reach through my gloves. My breath makes wisps in the night air, spiralling upwards with the soup steam to disappear among the stars. Children run around, writing their names with the glowing tips of sparklers, sometimes bumping into me as I stand in the crowd.

Smoke and gunpowder slip through the cold air. The shuffling of feet and the crowd murmuring reverberate off the town’s buildings. I pull my beanie down to cover my ears and tighten the embrace of my scarf as I head to the main event.

It’s a familiar celebration.

Most of the town has already moved to the square in anticipation of the bonfire. The outlines of faces blur against sparkler light in the darkness. Instinct doesn’t need to tell us where to go. This town has always celebrated Guy Fawkes Day in the same place.

When I arrive, the Hellings family has already set up the effigy. It’s almost time. Men in the town square circle the pile and bend in preparation to light it. The fire brigade watches from the sidelines, always ready.

Everything falls silent just before the mayor casts the first spark. The rest of the men follow his lead. Our attention focuses beyond the fence. We stand heaped like firewood.

The wood and debris take light and soon the entire heap blazes, the nearby windows scattering its light across the square. A sudden wave of heat rises to collapse on the crowd and everyone warms to it. I ease as if I were before the fire at home but this one holds a kind of captivating savagery. Behind me the first round of fireworks ignite.

Warm orange envelops us as we look up at the sky. Children shout and cheer while adults stand back and smile, nostalgic of their
younger days. I settle aside and watch the glow of a fire lit every year without fail.

The bonfire burns through the night and falls to glowing embers as the crowd thins. I sit on damp concrete on the sidelines and watch as the firemen poke at what remains of the figure that started this whole celebration.

A teen to my right is still playing with his sparkler. I pull one from my pocket and edge towards him, holding it out. He taps it twice and smiles at the new light.

We draw.

I weave the form of the bonfire into the sky and he imitates the form of the crowd. It’s like shadow puppetry of the night. Everything burns with tempered excitement but only because of the fire.

The sparklers quickly fade and we nod our goodbyes. I turn, reluctant, to the path back and take careful steps on the cracked concrete. Soon the bonfire would be in the hearth, each sparkler a candle and each person a relative. It’s just one routine celebration after the other. They won’t know why I found celebrations repetitive, nor will they suspect I’d left so soon. There’s no excitement in the house’s hearth and the candles have lost their brightness.

I only have one sparkler left in my pocket and I won’t burn it out here.
Mornings are a series of problems. I know the routine. I can recite it. I have, occasionally, been made to recite it. It hasn’t helped. I know the exact shape and texture of every problem before me, but it doesn’t help me overcome them. The underwear, the pants, the shoes and on to the jacket and tie. My wife wants me to wear easier clothes—things that are more about pulling and pushing than the complicated tying and buttoning, but keeping the routine is important. Maybe not to the neurologist, but important to me. I’ve known them since I was old enough to reach the shower taps. Old enough to get a job. Old enough to leave home. These routines are in every little callus, every rote sequence of muscle twitches that know how to pop a button home. Every routine I give up is its own small surrender to my condition. But still there are the problem days. The days when Julie finds me staring at the bed where she’s carefully laid out my clothes for the morning. The days when her arms fold briefly before she consciously unfolds them. The days when I just don’t know where to begin.

‘Underwear first,’ comes her infinitely calm voice. I reach for the smallest thing I can find, the most likely candidate. Her hands gently take it away from me.

‘No Robert, that’s your tie.’ She moves it back to its accustomed position. Of course it’s my tie. It’s perfectly obvious now that she says it to me.

I look at my options. The two brown things. The white thing. The small black things. This should be easy and Julie is waiting patiently. I know what underwear is. My memory, the neurologist has explained time and again, is not the problem. I can remember the Superman undies I wore as a kid until they fell apart. I can remember the lucky boxers I used to wear when Julie and I first
started dating. I could probably learn and recite some things about the history and cultural significance of underwear. I just can’t recognise them on the bed. Eventually I cheat, knowing that the clothes layout always started from the top left, but my hand still hesitates as it reaches. I still glance at Julie for approval before I grab the unfamiliar cloth in my fist. Julie nods, curtly. Her face is an omelette of unfamiliar shapes, but I recognise the expression in her voice. The forced encouragement spread over the frustration.

‘Very good, Robert. Now your socks.’

And again I reach hesitantly, narrowing down from alternatives. I dress by process of elimination. Julie steps in occasionally to stop me from flipping my shirt inside out, to help me pick my left shoe from my right. I know the routine. But since the accident I’ve also come to know the exact extent of my limits. Some days I’m fine, or can fake ‘fine’. But then there are the problem days, the days my wife has to dress me like a child. Or the days when she walks in and I can’t even recognise her from the shapes that make her up.

Julie runs the tie around my neck, folding it into my collar. For a moment, I catch her hands in my own. Then, without thinking, the muscles of my fingers twitch in the old familiar pattern of the full Windsor—left, under, right, in ... Julie moves to tighten it for me, but decides against it. It’s best to leave the small victories where they’re found. Some mornings are problems, but at least this one is not the worst.
Betty Bell
ANDREA JOHNSON

Take that thing away from me!
As if she knew what I’d said,
she turned to me and yowled it out.
We was both all cold and crimson.
The nursies watched me all disapproval
and like I was maybe devilish.
So I took on the sweet,
real Sunday-girl and bashful like,
pulling my latties in the best I could,
pretending pain and bravery and confusion.
They still think me nasty so I get nasty:
Where’s my Mary?
You thieves, lug her back to my arms.
I must have her—I love her in an instant.

They turn from me worried and to the girl,
reaching down with their fingers,
could bust her bitty nose.

They bring her watchful over me
and she corpses as I pull her in
like she’s savvy of her daddy.
Looks to me with micey big eyes
dancing on my face like to remember.

She grasps at me
fierce with her eyes,
cries and maintains watchful over me
(the nursies watchful three)
and I bump her a bit like Mother should.
Staring back at her I see a nothing.
I cover her leaden eyes,
her micey face and throat,
her slaver messing up my fingers.
The nurses say NO and take her back again
You don’t do that Miss

Why? Can it kill her?
I ask back at them.
They stare prang-like and po-faced
and turn away like I were the girl.
Aideen Weingarth

She rested her chin on the windowsill, staring at the patch of fog her breath painted on the glass. She could still remember colours. They had lived around her, reaching out to a gamboge sun with soft, faintly veined hands and a dewy smile. Once sewn into cloth, splashed onto walls or brushed onto skin, colour had been everywhere, a myriad of tones that delighted and reassured her.

The colours had left slowly. Awkwardly tiptoeing from the clothes first, then disappearing patchily from buildings, dying in the ground, fading from the sky, until finally they dripped from the faces, puddling far below at tired feet. The world was a rainbow of dirty browns, faded greys and charcoal blacks.

Through the window she could see cloudy figures, marching up and down the street like inky ants. The umbrellas moved slowly but raincoats weaved between them, desperation in their strides. All the ants were hard and thin, arms swinging heavily at their sides, weighed down by the sadness held in their clenched fists. Shadows scraped along the footpath, dragging in time with their steps.

The curtains on either side of the window were thick and suffocating. When the fabric was drawn it was as if she became blind; no light entered the room. Her mother used to carefully tie them aside with a ribbon, even making a bow in an attempt to brighten the living room, but now the curtains were almost always closed, and the ribbon had disappeared.

The fire was low in the grate behind her. It ducked and wobbled between the former legs of a chair, nibbling on splinters and licking bent nails. It looked cold, barely tinged with the memory of red. She turned away from it again, wiping her sleeve along the window pane and smudging her breath.
She watched as a man two houses away opened his door, letting a thin rusty-coloured cat slip inside with a flick of its tail. The man glanced up and down the street, slamming the door as a hassled mother walked past, children clinging to her legs and arms. The paper bag in her hands ripped as she fumbled with a key, and she began to cry as cans hit the pavement.

A whine started to needle at the back of her head, making her nose prickle. All along the street people started to slow, and then, in an instant, the whine grew ten times louder, pushing through her body, shaking it quickly and urgently before slithering venomously into the house. A wail chased it, the sickening screech of a giant hungry baby.

Hands grabbed her elbow, pulling her frame under an arm, holding her against a wildly beating heart. She clutched at her mother’s scratchy brown dress, tiny fingers winding into the material. Her parents rushed down the staircase, opening the peeling door. The smooth cobblestones were slippery in the rain and she could hear the clang of cans as people kicked them. She could see her father throwing glances over his shoulder as he led them down the street, thick eyebrows like shutters over his eyes. His curly hair stuck to his forehead as rain pattered their skin.

Something pushed her to the ground, out of her mother’s arms, away from her father’s eyes. She leapt back up, and as she did a kaleidoscope of colours greeted her with open arms. Hues the like of which she had never dreamed were all around her, a delicate steam of tints that had escaped her desperate memories, and shades that she had not known existed. Warmth kissed her cheeks. The wail had stopped. There was no sound. Only swirling light and the distant scent of churned earth.
Casey’s Land

Casey once owned these grassy acres
we bought for family rates
after he grew too old to use them
and his cows died of bloat.
Him and May grew vegies on the flats,
fished for mullet in the summer.
The river’s frame of silver thread—
their own galaxy of liquid lights
with its cliffs, those cliffs,
loomed with scalloped faces over Casey
till he packed his things and left.

Can’t forget his framed picture of Gunsynd:
that grey stallion ribboned after winning—
Casey’s gambling muse and other love.
That picture had a long, tattered feather
and a crumpled pound in the corner
now seared
on some grey matter of mine.

I recall May bagging her tamarilloes
to sell for two bob. Those reddy-orange ovals
bounced forever through the car. Anarchist
tamarilloes—under seats, smooshed in vinyl,
oxidising in sweaty consoles.
Thought I was adopted ‘cause I hated the taste
but Casey said I had his feet: long and thin.
I don’t think I had his anything
’cause he was tall, long like a poplar;
I was a flattened patty next to Pop.
Him and Keith used to cross at low tide, buckets hanging to raid the leases. Totally illegal but no-one’s there to see, anyway he would’ve told them where to go. He was aggressive, liked port more than he ought to. Had diabetes. Stashed a bright array of jellybeans in his top pocket—just in case.

One summer after they moved out Patterson’s Curse spread its purple throughout. Expansive burn-offs dampened spirits but the mauve kept coming, undefeated, hidden under bracken, under blackberries, making an alliance with tea-trees. Varicose veins spread—inoperable and stubborn

till one lowly ember flicked from stump to grass

and we woke to blazes no-one could stop. It ran through the horse trough and rolled it. Bugs scuttled: melanomas in an oven. Horses jumped or ran the fences, barbed wire made slashes deep. Brigades came late enough to watch the shed’s tractors burn black

till nothing stood but cindered shells.

Keith and Casey came a few weeks later to check damage and pinch oysters but shouldn’t have locked the gate.

The phone’s ring still gives chills.
From the window, I watched the figures, directly under cliffs, slightly shaded near the shallows, barely moving.

Ambulances had to cut the padlocks.

Keith stood on rocks with a half-full bucket as they drove his dad away for good—found with one hand in his top pocket and his head smashed on a rock. Poor Gunsynd had lost his greatest fan. May smashed down the stallion's picture like a piñata: carpet shone with crystals.

I go there all the time and try and guess which rock. Try and see it in my head, 'cause I feel the cold wisps of men hanging at the river's edge, there where he fell. There near the middens. I imagine jellies melting on pebbles and the oyster drying in the sun.

I know it's not his land yet always will be—a lolly-too-late, an oyster not worth it and acres and acres of land which can never be mine.
Dead to Remember
Megan Drapalski

When I bear you on my shoulders I realise you’re gone. Your weight, encased in polished mahogany, pushes the heels of my boots into the sodden soil. We walk in silence, gripping the gold-plated rails until our fingers mould to the metal. All we have are memories tainted by years of absence.

I fight to see your face in my mind: the face from my childhood, not the sunken skin and yellowed eyes of more recent times. The face that fit your smile, revealing teeth yellowed from years of tobacco use.

The sharp edges of the carved wood pinching my neck force me to focus on the pillared rows of damp cement.

I remember the feel of your leathered hand gripped in my grubby nine-year-old fingers, full and strong as we walked. I was too busy welding myself to your words to see the colours on the monstrous gums or the wilderness mirrored on the still water of the polluted lake. You told me you remembered me. You hadn’t in years and you wouldn’t again but I’d still wish for a miracle to bring you back to me. Sometimes I’d think you saw the face of your granddaughter, but it was only ever a glimmer.

Gran couldn’t care for you. It wasn’t when you got lost on your way home and told us the house you’d built by hand had moved and it wasn’t when cardboard boxes became an enigma you couldn’t solve. It was when Polish invaded English, leaving us with a chasm that no amount of love could cross. The phrases bled from your lips, words you’d refused to say in forty years. The taut lines of your mouth; two tongues warring inside you. Gran tried to resist. She told us you’d win, that English would be the victor, but Dad and I saw the truth. We saw how stilted it was when you spoke, how
quickly the Polish spilled from your tongue. She gave in when you couldn’t ask for food.

The nurses allowed you pictures so we stacked them on the scarred, rickety table beside your bed. At the front was a picture of you and Gran on your wedding day: she’s twirling in your arms, dress flailing out behind her like ribbons from a maypole. The rest of your world spanned out behind it like marshalled troops trapped in bronze-painted edges. Your children, your grandchildren and you: mouth curved gently upwards, content. They were the first things you saw in the morning, yet they meant nothing to you—we may as well have come with the frames.

I hoped you wouldn’t leave us on purpose but it didn’t make it easier to sit by your bedside as your gaze moved around the room. I hoped and dreaded your eyes finding me, their spheres empty and weightless. I couldn’t find the words to tell you how much I missed you so I moved the white plastic chair as close to your bed as I could and held your hand in mine, pretending I didn’t notice when your finger bones dented the soft flesh of my palms.

This wasn’t the first time you’d suffered. You’d lived through the war, lost your country and yourself. Dad told me the stories. You’d opened up once: during a blackout that stretched through the night. He had wished hard for a way to record you. Instead he’s clung to your words, tied them to himself so even if you never spoke of it again the burden wouldn’t be clamped on your once-strong shoulders. He told me of the piles of dead Jews you’d crawled over to get to school and the soldiers who’d herded you, guns ready with fingers poised over triggers. The way you’d tried to pretend they were just another rise in the landscape despite the dried blood and mud that built under your fingernails. How hard it had been to forget when their iced-over pupils had stalked your movements and begged to be remembered. The frozen eyes of your best friend, his skin peeling around the small wound in the centre of his forehead. Crimson had splattered the white picket fence behind him, a violent
pattern of his last moment.

Maybe by the end it was okay if you didn’t see them every time you closed your eyes.

Sometimes you still remembered Gran and that was enough for us. The doctors told us in their monotonous, baritone voices that it would get worse. They told us it was irreversible, but they couldn’t quell the hoping. The muted yellow light that strained through the dusty glass made you look sicker so we asked the nurses to have it cleaned. They stared at us with moist eyes and creased foreheads. The miniscule tilt of their heads gave away the pity they were trained to hide.

‘Honey, he isn’t coming back.’ Gran’s frame shrank by inches, weighed down by the nurse’s words and grief: her knees no longer able to hold her straight, her arms motionless at her sides like unused pendulums. ‘Three years of feigned ignorance is enough—it’s time to come to terms.’ All she needed was you and that was all she couldn’t have.

We visited you twice a week for three years. It would have been more often but the only home that would take people like you was an hour away. Each time I entered your room, you looked more emaciated. If I saw you every day maybe I wouldn’t notice the shadows grow or your greyed eyes retreat into their sockets. You lay propped up in the bleached white bedclothes, a piece of home draped over your reed-thin shoulders. Gran crocheted it out of tears, love and memories. The light shone through your skin, illuminating the bones that tried to escape your pyjamas. The blanket had originally been too small but as you lost your body it wrapped the whole way around.

You stayed the same for months; at least we assumed you did. Even if the signs had been plastered over the walls instead of the cheap nature paintings with amateur brushstrokes, I’m not sure it would have prepared us for seeing you like a child. The sight of your fingers fumbling with oversized plastic keys was crippling.
The same hands had pushed me on the swings you built in your backyard from unpolished pipes. Your eyes seemed dead and yet whenever I looked at you I saw them vivacious and intelligent, puzzling out a cryptic crossword. No matter how I squinted I couldn’t make two versions of you fit into one. We knew you’d gone when we saw you like that, when it became common for you to pluck at loose threads on your blankets with a dexterity that reminded us of how carefully you’d gardened. Fingers that had once moulded to stems and plucked weeds from the bed seemed better fitted to ghosting over brass draw handles and fumbling over food. It forced us to notice how little of you was really left, how short the time was.

Those who love you most move forward to the pile of dirt that shadows your open grave. One by one they stoop and grab a fistful. The excess slides through their fingers in a stream of brown interspersed with blacks and greys. They drop them onto your casket as tears race the grains to your body, desperate to tell you they love you before you’re covered. I don’t want my turn to come. It’s finally time to say goodbye. I want to hold on to you, to tell you the things you’ll never know (how I’ve stopped growing at five foot three; how my hair has grown back to the way you liked it) but a gentle hand on my shoulder pushes me to the present. I try to step forward with a grace that would have made you proud but the heels of my boots have become submerged in the drowned grass. I stumble with a gasp that forces the chill winter air into my throat and makes it hard to breathe. My hand finds the pile and I clutch the dirt in my fingers and weigh it for a moment, feel my goodbye. The smooth wooden planes of your coffin reflect my face until I can’t stand my own reflection any longer. With a control I hadn’t known I possessed I drop the dirt over you and step away. I try to hold my shoulders back, to be proud that you were mine but all I manage is a sob as my face plunges into the familiar smell of my father’s suit jacket.
Don’t Forget  
(My Birthday)  
M ō N İ Q U E  T A Y L O R

scrawled words and broken memories,  
you’ve intruded further than you were supposed to—  
into the harsh realities of my mistakes and broken dreams;  
these are the things you’re not supposed to see.  
I try to throw off what you deliver,  
the avoidance of harsh words and the lies I tell,  
I comfort your concern with words you’ll never know as mine.  
I hate this day and all it brings; I hate what’s in-between. 
we’re climbing different vines,  
we can’t help that they belong to the same plant.  
I’ll try to forget your scent  
the next time I’m thinking of growing a tree.

no one can help this dark place and sorrowed moment;  
it feels like no one knows the loss I’m bestowed with.  
but what is love if you can’t hold it close?  
what chance does it have when you can’t let it know?  
I try to shrug off all the weight you throw  
with a smirk.  
I know you’re on to me, like always, but I can’t escape.  
I’ve never been able to but it seems worse with age.  
and she’ll cover you with friendship and it’ll fill me with rage,  
I’ll discover my weakness while we both know you’re brave.  
just whip across my back with sparkling, scarlet feelings—  
the blood that flows is more than I have left.  
just promise you won’t forget. 
you can lose all you felt for me, frown on every memory—  
just promise you won’t forget.
I <3 You
JACK MICHEL

You know what?
I ‘less than symbol, three’ you too.
Despite that same brand of shampoo you bought,
which greys my hair and irritates my skin.
Because who am I to get angry at an honest mistake?
We’ll just ignore the fact
that you went out and bought it again,
solely for your own sake.

You know, it’s days like this that I realise—
things that help us discover
who we are and why we’re together.
Without them, I’d just be me
and you’d just be you
and we’d just have to make do
with the abundance of choices
we wouldn’t have to struggle through
—forever.
Think of all the meals we’d have to consume
without the assistance of each other
—what a pain!
Sometimes you only want
half the food on your plate.
You didn’t order it because you were hungry.
No! You ordered it because it’s just one more thing
that you can do and share with
your life partner/soulmate.

Don’t get me wrong. I love you!
Of course we must be soulmates.
Sometimes it feels like we’ve been doing
the same thing for years, sometimes even decades!
Like that time we went to see that film that you like.

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And then the next time we watched the same film—starring a different guy.
What were those films called, again?
They truly broke my heart.
Love something? Or something about a notebook?
They were basically both about sex,
(like you promised) just all the boring parts.
Not that I’m afraid of a good romance
or tending to a woman’s happiness—at times.
I mean, just the other day
I waited for four hours in line
so I could get you those tickets
to that show I wasn’t invited to
because your girlfriends don’t like me much
and don’t see the point in lying to you.

But I love your friends! Honestly, I do.
I love the fact that they take you out
in your short skirt and high-heeled boots,
marching around and gathering attention
from the local arseholes drooling over you.
That’s fine, because it’s the one time here
when I get some peace and quiet.
I respect your opinion and your right to talk.
It’s just that sometimes I wish you’d keep it to yourself
and let me respect your right to hide it.

But a love such as ours is something not to be tainted.
Hell! Why don’t we just marry?
It wouldn’t change much because
we haven’t had sex in ages.
Let us promise to spend the eternity
that is our lives together
—forever.
This happiness word I’ve heard seems truly overrated.
The Semiotics of Scar Tissue

PETER McLEOD

Do we really remember?
I mean, I could tell you the name of my first love,
the colour of her hair, underwear, perhaps the first position
(I think it was missionary),
but beyond that what else have we forgotten?
What details that create the picture got lost in the mixture of
days and weeks and years
until your lover becomes some other person’s memory?
I dated her, I lived with her,
we worked together
even when we stopped working.
I cooked, she washed, we dried,
playing house in an apartment.
In our house, together but apart,
our collection of domestic memories
mixed together with a wooden spoon.
We dated, kissed, fucked, married, fucked up, and forgot,
faded to a cliché you wait until the third date to tell.
Now a new me feels the lingering chemistry
divorced from the former insanity.
Pain and hard times drowned out by hard-ons.
Our minds at the mercy of the hurts we inflict through
6–9 inches (depending on your ruler) of emotional dick:
insinuating that love is better than masturbating,
that regulating hormones leads to celebrating milestones.
That repeating that process
will hurt less, and lead to kids, a house,
dogs, cats and domesticated people.
Security through the veil of matrimony, wrapped tight with a picket fence, like barbed wire, choking out your heart to somehow shield you from pain.

So yeah. We’re dating.
Red and White
PAUL PEARSON

I saw Ben’s car out the front when I arrived—a vomit-tan coloured ute from the 1980s older than most of the people I knew. His gear was still in the back: duffel bags and a snowblower piled onto one another and strapped down with stretched blue cords. White patches were forming on the bags and snowflakes landed on my face with jabs of freezing cold. I tugged at my beanie then shifted the collar of my parka just a few millimetres higher to cover my neck. Snow was crushed into wet patches beneath my feet, breaking apart with a sound that made me uncomfortable.

The ute was parked outside Lily’s house, my destination as well. The thought of having to shovel snow off footpaths and driveways while more was coming down made my teeth grind so hard I thought some might shatter. A pretty smile and my Saturday was all but gone, I rued, but at the same time I didn’t mind. It was a very pretty smile. I only wondered why she needed both me and Ben.

The house had been lifted from some pop-up picture book. Small but cosy, it had a roof that arrowed towards the sky, flowerbeds under the windowsills and a small white fence around the front lawn. An even layer of snow hid the small gardens that grew there during summer; a tiny arc had been cleared away by the front gate to expose the footpath underneath, but it looked like the rest out front hadn’t been moved an inch.

I walked past the ute, glanced at it, and saw the patch of red snow. It was on the bonnet, above the left headlight. My first wild thought was that it was red cordial or strawberry jam, because it just looked so cartoonishly red. I walked over, curious. As I reached out a gloved hand, my instincts told me it couldn’t possibly be what the voices of morbid pessimism in the back of my mind were convinced it was.
I couldn’t feel it through the fabric, but the thin layer of snow seemed to melt away at my touch. Beneath it, the bonnet’s vomit-tan was stained with a red so deep and dark it could’ve been pitch-black in the right light. There was a lump in my throat, small and solid. I couldn’t breathe for a few moments. The chill suddenly had nothing to do with the snow or the breeze.

I ran for the gate. Another patch of red snow marked a point on the invisible footpath close to the house, and then I saw them. A white film had settled over their forms, and Lily’s dressing gown was whiter than anything that had fallen in the night. Her chest heaved, and her head rocked back and forth as she curled around the small, limp form on the icy ground. His skin was pale, pink and white all at once, and straw-coloured hair had been stained with smudges of dried blood.

Lily sobbed. Why I couldn’t hear it before I don’t know, but her sharp breaths, her tiny moans of pain, they were so raw they stabbed me. It was raw grief and I felt it right along with her. My legs seemed to move of their own accord, taking slow, retreating steps until I was standing on the road in front of the ute again.

In my mind’s eye I could see what had happened clear as day so I turned, looking around, trying to find Ben. Everything was white. The morning sun blinded me. So I tried to think. With waves crashing inside my stomach, I tried to think where I might go, what I might do, were I in Ben’s shoes. I looked again. And I started walking.

A tall row of trees had been planted opposite Lily’s house. They were just skeletons now, catching the snow and dropping it again. I ducked under the low-hanging branches and saw the children’s playground beyond. Like everything else, it had been abandoned to the elements, leaving strange white mounds in the middle of a flat white plain.

But it wasn’t silent, or motionless. Ben sat in one of the swings, his feet planted in the snow, and I walked towards him with no idea
what I’d say or do. Before I was fully aware of myself, I sat down in the swing next to him. The world rocked gently and I avoided looking at Ben by staring out at the slide and swing set, their shapes easy to trace beneath the layer of snow.

‘I didn’t mean to.’ Ben’s voice was soft, and broken, and for some reason I imagined his eyes closed and head bowed. In the fleeting moments when I blinked, I could see the tiny, bloodied figure lying in the yard with his mother weeping over him.

‘I know.’

‘It’s just ... I didn’t see ... It was so fast ...’

I just sat there, letting the swing move back and forth.

‘Is Lily still outside?’ Ben sniffled.

‘Yes.’

‘She, uh ...’ He sniffled again and rubbed his nose. ‘She shouldn’t be outside. She’ll freeze.’

‘I don’t think she cares.’

‘Yeah ... She shouldn’t see him like that.’

It took more willpower than I ever thought I’d need to turn and look at Ben. His clothes were black and thick, insulated against the weather. He wore no hat, the snow settled into short brown hair, and his gloves were the same black-red as the stain on the bonnet of his ute. One hand gripped the chain of metal links that held the swing in place. The other one hung limp by his side and squeezed a small, bulbous object.

‘She dragged him up to the house,’ he said. ‘She, uh, kept saying that he just needed to go inside and get warm, and then he’d be fine. She was gonna make him a cup of tea.’ He let his head rest against one of the chain links. ‘She dragged him through the snow, and he wouldn’t move. He wouldn’t fucking move. I didn’t mean to. I swear it was an accident. He ran out——’

‘I know.’
‘And I didn’t see him. I wasn’t fast enough. I didn’t see him. I
didn’t realise what’d happened. It didn’t sound like ... like ... like
anything, just a bump. Just nothing.’
I swallowed the lump in my throat. ‘Ben, we need to go back.’
He shook his head, vigorously. ‘No, no, no. I can’t, I can’t.’
‘Ben——’
‘I can’t go back there.’
‘You have to.’
‘No!’ He clutched two fists to his temples. I recognised the gun
in his hand and flinched away, even though it wasn’t pointed at me,
or even at him. His fingers were wrapped around the snub-nose like
he’d forgotten it was there.
‘Ben,’ I said carefully, ‘where’d you get a gun?’
He didn’t answer. He pushed his fists harder against his temples,
and I watched the lines of his mouth tighten and his eyelids scrunch
shut. A tear dribbled down his face.
‘I can’t be one of those people.’ His voice came in ragged sobs,
his whole body shaking. ‘The ones on the news, the ones in the
paper who killed ... It was an accident. It was ...’
My hand moved a fraction of an inch. The instinct was there, to
reach out, to put a hand on his shoulder and tell him things would
be okay. But I stopped myself. I couldn’t lie to him, to Lily, to the
boy lying in the snow.
‘Ben.’ My voice was firmer. ‘The gun.’
‘Mine,’ he sobbed.
‘Why do you have it?’
‘Because.’
‘Ben——’
‘Just go away. Tell her——’
‘Tell her yourself.’
‘No, no, no. I can’t. No ... Tell her ... God, I don’t know.’

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I don’t know how long I sat there. Ben didn’t talk. I didn’t talk. I just watched his face, watched his jaw set and his mouth tighten into a long, thin line. Then the sobbing stopped. I stood up, kicked the snow off my boots and began to walk. He was a hard man, determined, ready. He ignored me as I left, eyes locked on the gun, and I wondered if he’d even known I was there.
Drew’s Dad is watching television when I walk in. Something loud, mindless. A cigarette rests in an ashtray on the arm of the couch; smoke rises towards the ceiling.

‘Hi Pete,’ I say, projecting my voice over the volume. He looks across and forces a smile. ‘Hey El, how are ya darl?’

Before I answer his eyes are back on the screen, cigarette to his mouth. On the TV cabinet is a framed photo of Drew and me. It was taken at our Year 10 formal, two years ago. My hair’s up in a French twist and I’m holding a rose. Drew’s wearing a grey tuxedo, blue shirt, black tie. He’s smiling. We both are.

‘Vic’s got him upstairs, El,’ Pete says after a while, still staring at the TV.

‘Is Chad home yet?’ I ask.

He shuts his eyes and doesn’t look at me, but nods. I walk to the foot of the stairs and kick off my shoes. When I reach the top, the first thing I see is Drew’s wheelchair sitting at the end of the hallway and a strip of vertical light where the bathroom door has been left ajar. I can hear water running and Drew’s mum, Vicki, talking as she washes him.

The first room along is his and I stop at the doorway like always. Looking in, I see the bookshelf and soccer trophies, the surfboards standing upright in the corner. I see the bed where I lost my virginity and the record player I gave him for his eighteenth, unused, covered in dust. There’s a portrait of me stuck to the wall. A school photo. But looking at it—at the sun-bleached hair and relaxed smile—it doesn’t feel like me. Or, more accurately, doesn’t feel to me like it belongs there anymore. I turn away and walk a few more steps to Chad’s room.

He’s face down on the bed with his shirt off when I enter, still
in his work shorts, flicking through a copy of Rolling Stone. The afternoon sun shines through the window onto his back, which is lean and tan, like Drew’s used to be. He looks up at me as I quietly close the door.

‘Hey,’ he says with a weak smile.

‘Hi,’ I reply, trying to do the same.

He sits up on the bed and makes room for me. I lay down next to him, facing the ceiling.

‘How was your day?’ he asks.

‘Alright,’ I tell him.

‘No marks yet?’

‘Not yet. Still a couple more weeks till they’re released, I think.’ He nods, pushes the magazine off the bed.

‘How was work?’ I ask.

‘Yeah … it was okay. Can’t complain.’

I open my mouth to speak but can’t think of anything.

‘My apprenticeship goes up from second year rates to third next month,’ he tells me.

‘Cool.’

This is the nature of our conversations: minor, detached. A means to something else. The past is never mentioned. Drew’s eighteenth birthday, never mentioned.

By the time Vicki wheels out Drew, the talking has stopped altogether. We just listen as her footsteps and Drew’s incoherent murmurs disappear down the hall.

When we start kissing, I lay back and let him take off my shirt, my pants, everything. Then he climbs on top of me and I stare at the ceiling, thinking about what happened. About how we danced and did shots at the bar, and I styled my hair like my sister’s because I was still seventeen and had her ID, and afterwards at the kebab shop, all of us drunk and laughing, and that guy none of us knew

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and the argument that seemed to come from nowhere, followed by a punch, a cracking sound, and Drew lying on the pavement with blood coming from his head while we waited for an ambulance.

And the whole time I’m wondering if Chad’s thinking about it too.

Afterwards, we lay there silent and naked, waiting for the other one to say something. Today it’s me.

‘We’ve gotta stop this,’ I say. ‘It’s really fucked up.’

He nods. ‘I know.’

‘I think it’s best if maybe I stop coming around.’

‘Same here,’ he says.

I stand up and start getting dressed. He rolls away from me and faces the wall, turns on the radio.

‘Okay,’ I say when I’ve finished. ‘I guess I’ll see you around or something.’

‘I guess so,’ he says without looking at me, without the slightest sense of finality, as if he knows that tomorrow I’ll be back again.

And as I close the door, I know it too. I know that right now I’ll walk downstairs and Vicki will smile and greet me as if I’ve just come through the door, pretending not to notice me putting on my shoes, and Pete will ignore me while he smokes his cigarette and stares at the television, and Drew will sit there in his wheelchair, mumbling and drooling, staring off into space. Then Vicki will put the kettle on and make tea, and I’ll go over and hold Drew’s hand, planning his birthday with his mum, which is coming up soon. Which means it’s been a year since it happened. But we won’t mention this. We won’t mention the court appearance that’s coming up or the days and months we all spent in the hospital as he lay there in a coma, her and Pete and Chad and me, sometimes just Chad and me. And when we’ve finished and I go to leave, I know Vicki will give me a kiss and say, ‘See ya tomorrow El,’ and I’ll reply,
‘Okay Vicki, see you then.’ And as I walk back home I’ll think about the past, about what it used to mean to go to Drew’s house, and I’ll be on the verge of tears when I get inside, when I walk into my room and look at the calendar, counting down the days until my marks come in and I’ve finally got an excuse to leave.
Eulogy to You
Zachary Bryant

A small white dove's feathers caught in your skin you take flight, angelic bursting through the azure.

Plucked from a garden (where you belong) a work of art the ones you paint in books you curl in shyness their eyes and cameras wide.

You were an animal, your laugh unstoppable under the fur of the blanket your heart felt for all even if you didn't want it to.

A dream in life though yours, not mine fleeing in the winter freedom can be so bittersweet.
Cathy looked at the floor of the passenger’s side, empty except for left-behind petals. The seatbelt pulled at her left shoulder as she leaned over her folded legs to pick them up; in the darkness their bright orange looked more like brown. It had been hard to pick the flowers—her dad had never had a preference, but it didn’t feel right going empty-handed. So she’d chosen a small bunch of gerberas to lay on his grave. She arranged them on the dashboard, and looked at the clock. Nearly three years and one day, to the minute.

The music in the car was low, and it broke the silence between her and Scott. He had borrowed the car from his mum so they’d been stuck listening to Burl Ives every time the radio dropped out of range. Scott said he didn’t like country tunes, but Cathy noticed the subtle drumming of his fingers on the steering wheel.

Her stomach gurgled—she hadn’t felt like eating much at dinner, and now she had that sick feeling that came with hunger. She probably should have eaten more for breakfast too, instead of sitting hunched at the table, sinking Nutri-Grain ships with the back of her spoon.

‘Are you feeling okay?’ Scott looked at her, and she turned away.

‘I’m fine.’ It wasn’t convincing, but they returned to the silence they’d shared all day.

Cathy sighed quietly so Scott wouldn’t hear. Her dad would have known that fine never meant fine; he knew it meant she didn’t want to talk about it but he’d still try to get her to anyway. Either that or he’d leave her alone for a while and come back with a still-warm plate of blueberry pancakes. Cathy’s stomach grumbled again at the memory.
The indicator click-clicked and flicked off as the car pulled into her street. There were no streetlights, only dark silhouettes against the sky. It was one of those long rural streets where you can forget you have next-door neighbours. She and her mum had moved there after her dad died; her mum had said the old house held too many memories, but Cathy also knew that her mum needed to get away from the sad looks people were giving them. She had needed to get away, too. A couple of hours distance and none of the kids at her new school knew about her dad. It made it easier—especially when her mum started dating.

The windscreen was dirty, so Cathy looked out the side window instead. The dirt didn’t seem to bother Scott, who hadn’t flipped the wipers on the whole trip. Cathy cleaned her windscreen every time she drove.

She pressed her temple to the glass and let the cool bleed into her. She didn’t feel like being anywhere; much less at home where there was a blank square on the kitchen calendar, and her Mum, humming to unshared music, white cords wrapped like jewellery 'round her neck.

This was the first year Cathy and her mum hadn’t gone to his grave together. As she knelt on the grass beside the headstone, she’d felt embarrassed to whisper excuses to her dad for the absence—and to explain about Scott, who’d carried the flowers and held her hand.

The air in the car was getting warm, almost claustrophobic, so Cathy wound the window down and let the night air raise goose bumps on her arms. The petals fluttered. She was glad she wasn’t driving; she’d sometimes felt nervous after the accident, but Scott wasn’t a bad driver and if she closed her eyes she could forget that he often went 100km/h even though he was only a P-plater.

‘Hey Cathy, watch this.’ They were heading down the last straight
bit of road before her house, and Scott slowed down and cut the headlights. ‘Have you ever tried it?’

Wide-eyed, she stared into the darkness. They’d been crawling before, but with the lights off it was hard to tell how fast they were going. The road was a charcoal mass blending with the shadowed landscape. The semi-full moon turned the double white lines into grey ribbons visible in the moments before another car passed by.

They bounced over a pothole and Cathy shrieked.

‘It’s just like flying.’ Scott grinned, the lights on the dash reflecting on his teeth so that they hung in the darkness like the Cheshire Cat’s.

‘Turn the lights back on.’

He hesitated, and she dug her nails into the palms of her hands. ‘I’m not kidding!’

The headlights washed out the moonlight and lit up the next fifty metres of road. They were close to her house now, and through the trees, she could see that her mum had left a light on.

‘Stop the car.’

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to freak you out.’ Scott raked his nails across his skull—a self-conscious tic.

‘Stop the damn car!’

He pulled over on the side of the road and Cathy had the door open before the car had completely stopped. She slammed it behind her.

Scott cut the engine, but the headlights stayed on, and she let her shadow lead the way. Another shadow appeared, grew taller, and reached out a hand to graze her shoulder. She pushed it away as she turned at the hip.

‘Do you know how my dad died?’ The high-beams made her eyes blur.

‘No.’ It was only a whisper, but though the crickets dulled it,
they didn’t block it out. ‘I didn’t think you’d want to talk about it, especially not today’
‘I would have if you’d asked.’
‘Okay. What happened?’
‘Car accident. The other driver was distracted and ran a red light.’
The headlights tracked the progress of tears down her cheeks.
Stepping forward, Scott tried to fold her body against his. ‘Cathy, I didn’t know’
She pushed away. She jammed her fingers into her pockets and headed home, towards the light.
Grief
Kelsey Young

Absence is made more profound by the pain:
the chill of emptiness
where raging need once reigned.

New fear awakens,
blossoms from the void within.
Fear that you may never trust
or harbor hope again.

You would search the stars
for signs of your course.
Now the leaden weight of loss
bows your head.

There is no sky.
He is already home. His name is Edward but she just calls him Ed, as did his colleagues from the magazine. But, for his own reasons, he’s no longer in touch with those people. So now it’s just her and she uses it before she’s even through the door. She uses it while standing in the hallway, fiddling with the lock. She is eleven years younger than him. She is Amanda. In the six months they’ve been together, he’s never shortened it, never will.

She stands at the door and calls, ‘Ed, guess what?’ and it’s shrill, as though there are tears. She poses it as a question, but there’s fear in her voice, and he processes it as a statement. He’s annoyed. By imposing the topic on a place where she isn’t, she’s cheating. What he really wants to talk about is his day, the progress he’s made on the portrait, how quitting his job as an illustrator at the magazine was the best decision he ever made—they ever made. Then he wants to fuck her, no talk. This is honest. Living together requires honesty. He told her this when she insisted they move in together three weeks earlier. He said it’d be hard; she’s not from the city.

Edward was ready to go south when she got the job at David Jones. She was supposed to be visiting, not seeking employment. Her last semblance of work was on her father’s vineyard, where she spent the time licking her fingers and turning through magazines. Edward had quit and was ready to vacate Sydney for good. They were literally going in different directions. When she told him about the job, she was clutching a brochure at her breast. The brochure was of a place in Darlinghurst called The Armada. She found something amiable in the similarity to her birth name. The cover shot was of a fully furnished vanilla room—nothing like the flat Edward had occupied. She clutched at this new life and stood in his cheap flat and told him that visiting wasn’t enough: she needed this.
‘Ed, guess what?’ she asks again, now standing in the kitchen, brightly coloured bags dangling from her thin shoulders. Her mascara’s running. She’s wearing a lot of clothes because it’s cold out.

He’s sitting on the vanilla couch, prying the shell off a macadamia. ‘You want me to guess?’ he asks, apathetic. He wants to talk about himself.

‘I was followed, okay. I was followed here, to our fucking apartment.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Of course I’m sure.’

‘All the way?’

“All the way?” That’s what you’re asking me?’

He says, ‘Calm down. You’re home. You’re safe. Everything’s peachy. Vanilla even.’

He drinks draught beer and swirls it around his mouth, almost smug. His detached actions say: I knew you weren’t ready for City Life. He reaches over and dims the lamp to create tranquillity. He doesn’t leave his place on the couch. She doesn’t leave her place in the kitchen. This is the beauty of open plan living—you can argue from different rooms and maintain the appropriate eye contact, or lack thereof. There’s a balcony off the main room, and all that occupies the space is a chair and an ashtray. Edward prefers his old place. He finds it nauseating looking out over the city; it’s enough that he can hear it from every room. And the cigarette butts belong to her, all of them.

‘Well aren’t you gonna do anything?’ she says.

‘It was a man, I assume.’

‘It always is, isn’t it?’ She removes a layer of clothing.

‘If you say so,’ he says, clicking his tongue, aroused by the kitchen light reaching down her top. Amanda’s supervisor refers to her cleavage as ‘appropriate cleavage’. She could be a model, says the supervisor with the child’s cowlick and sloppy stomach. He’s
saying that; when he looks at her, sex is on his mind. Amanda is eleven years younger than Edward. The pair had met on a wine tour organised by the magazine. The age difference and the sex was apparently enough to make him stay in Sydney, on the proviso of ample solitude in which to finish his portrait for The Prize. When he says The Prize, he's referring to The Archibald Prize. He's never entered and this is something he has to do.

Amanda clears her throat. She's about to say something with weight. ‘Seedy arseholes, preying on young women. What do they get out of it? I mean, is it the thrill, or is it just rape? Is this a concern I should have?’

‘You’re being melodramatic.’

‘I’m being real. You hear about this all the time. It’s part of living in a place like this.’ She says it unconvincingly. She looks sexy with the mascara trailing down her cheeks. The cleavage is appropriate.

‘Where did he go then, this man with rape on his mind?’

‘I can’t believe you’re acting like this,’ she says, distracted by the contents of a bag on the kitchen counter. There’s a turquoise scarf. It’s going to look good with her brown jacket. She lingers just long enough and says, ‘The fucker followed me into the building. Can you believe that?’

Edward leaves the apartment and gets in the elevator, not sure what he’s really doing. At each floor, he prays for a blinking light, that subtle reduction of speed promising an abrupt stop. He needs people to get on. And now more than ever, he wants to be around people when he reaches the ground. He hesitates, thinks of his life here—the expectations of a life here, and how the people and the buildings can affect a person, how she’s pleaded with it to affect her. He can’t help but think: like the city, is he just a component of her romantic ideal?

He steps from the elevator. There’s a man in a long coat. He moves with purpose, low and close to the ground, back and forth
from one end of the lobby to the other. He has a round head, short
cropped hair. He looks like a family man. That’s all he looks like.
‘Are you waiting for someone?’ says Edward.
‘There’s a woman. She came in here. Went up the elevator I
think.’ He pauses. The two men are working each other out. ‘You’re
from the building? I was gonna wait. She left this.’ He opens his
coat and holds up a purse. Amanda’s purse.
‘I know her,’ says Edward.
‘She left it on the train. She ran when I called out. I don’t get it.’
‘Amanda’s new to this place. She wants it to be big and scary. She
finds something in this I’m yet to work out. Maybe it’s the innocent
upbringing. You know how it goes.’
The man smiles and turns to leave. ‘I wish I could’ve helped out.
I mean, I thought about it—she’s beautiful, but it’s just too cold to
get my dick up right now. She should’ve moved here in the summer.
Stuff tends to happen then.’
Desc(ending)
Tionne Hilder

The sea cucumber slithers through green muck on the sea-floor. Absently gazing as grey sky gathers, glistens, gurgles at the corners of the world and the stars spin all pretty in the foam.

(The sky snows detritus, dead shells crumbling sand-worms curl helpless as hungry fish hover.)

Curious, overextended, it slips in slime and slides from the safety of the rock-wall and as it begins its pathetic descent into darkness it keens. Not that you could hear it. Its voice is tiny and unimportant here where inchoate life forms begin amongst skeletons and weird creatures wander, watching from eye-sockets tasting tongues.
Grandmother
Cole Bubenik

Your eyes are closed
as my lips approach you
and kiss your forehead
for the last time.
And I think:
What do you think?
What do you know?
And I want to know—
lips pressed against your head—
what do you know,
what do you think,
and will I ever
understand?
He couldn’t remember much from that night. He remembered the party cans of Double Blacks and long-necked beer bottles glass glittering over the lawn as they were crushed underfoot there was rain beating down on gyrating teenagers their wet skin glistening in pulsing light.

He remembered car keys thrust into his sweaty palm four friends hanging off him, ready to leave he remembered how the P-plates looked fuzzy— why did he stick two on the back? He remembered the road, twisting beneath him leaning forward on the accelerator his rowdy friends screaming with laughter their drunken high intoxicating windows wound down and the wind beating in tossing girls’ hair around the boys aiming empty bottles at trees lining the road.

He remembered the fear, a stab losing control. Tyres screaming, slipping, swerving the squeal of brakes and the shatter of glass.
He didn’t remember the impact
The crunch of metal as the car
wrapped itself around the proud gum tree.
He remembered waking up in hospital.
The clean, crisp smell, and the pain in his temple.
He remembered the police, in blue, hats in hands
telling him he’d killed his four best friends.
I used to love hanging out at Guppy and Van’s place; a tiny wooden cottage at the end of a no through road, it invaded the bush at the edge of the outer suburbs. Guppy told me the previous owner had been his great-aunt; she had lived there alone for most of her life. He rented it cheap off his uncle, and since the nearest neighbour was several kilometres through dense bushland, Guppy and Van were free to indulge their passion for noise at all hours.

Guppy was a muso, he’d never accepted the term ‘musician’ ‘cause it sounded like ‘technician’ and he felt that there was nothing technical about the way he made music. Anyone who went into his house would disagree; there were amps, speakers, flat-screen and CRT monitors, data projectors, pedals, drum machines, mixing desks, instruments, effect racks, microphones, computers and all sorts of equipment I didn’t recognise crammed into every space. All of them were connected by just about every type of lead manufactured. There was less floor to stand on than lead. They even had ropes of Christmas lights winding through the chaos, so in the dark you wouldn’t trip and yank out something important. They’d often cart off pieces of equipment for gigs so the layout of the house was forever in flux, an amorphous technological mass that only they understood.

Guppy was a restless kind of guy, and his cropped red hair and a lanky build had ensured a rough time from kids at school. An apathy for schoolwork ensured a rough time from the teachers. He bought an electric guitar and an amp when he was fourteen and at that point must have taken some kind of solemn vow never to throw away a piece of gear again. Only music was important to him; endlessly in trouble for truancy, he’d offer the principal freshly cut-up fingers as explanation. I don’t think there was a time I ever knew
him when he wasn’t in at least three bands and always with another
two solo projects on top.

Van was a digital hoarder. His actual job seemed to be something
computer related, web-design or possibly coding. Somehow
he managed to get paid by never leaving his room. Van would
download absolutely any media he could find; he downloaded things
simply because they were available, not because he particularly
wanted them. Van had set the place up so that no matter where you
looked at any time of the day your eyes found an image stream. A
21” CRT Goliath balanced on an amp head, an ancient 14” LCD
gaffa-taped to a Lazy Susan on the kitchen counter. They even had
a data projector ratchet-strapped upside-down to the broken ceiling
fan so that it projected inverted images onto an otherwise bare
patch of wall.

The exception was Guppy’s room. It was the only place in the
house without a computer, and seemingly without lights too: just
a dark den of speaker stacks, road cases, effects racks and a whole
tree of different guitars.

More than images they seemed to worship noise. Van always
had some form of trance blasting from his bedroom; Guppy had
anything at all so long as it was loud. That was the default state the
house existed in, beyond that they would often have all of their
seven televisions on simultaneously and tuned to different channels.
I knew the place was silent sometimes, as Guppy had to record.
However, sleep was not a strong enough argument to cease the
racket.

One night we were smoking on the couch. Guppy had a beat-
up acoustic guitar he said he’d rescued from a Pete Townshend
wannabe by using bits of other beat-up guitars. He was idly
improvising while we watched about four different screens. I used
to like to sit there and feel overwhelmed, my brain couldn’t cope
with processing so much disparate information at once. Guppy’s
fingers ceased fretting and a moment later the plunge into silent
darkness came. It was like free falling, all I could see were white splotches burned into my vision.

Van unleashed a litany of angry obscenities. A pale LED beam cut the darkness and he stamped out into the cold to check the power box. We sat in silence until Van came back with the conclusion that the problem wasn't on our end, we could only wait for the power to be restored. Van went back into his room and started rooting around in there for something, swearing occasionally. Guppy plinked his guitar without thought, making no attempt at stringing notes together. He seemed somehow lost.

Since we had nothing to do in the dark, I asked him to play something. He just shook his head. I was confused; Guppy knew hundreds of songs on the guitar. Then Van emerged from his room with mosquito candles and a ratty old magazine about the cutting edge of technology circa three years ago. He set up the candles around the place and then settled down on the armchair to read by torchlight. Guppy played a couple of chords, sighed and shook his head again.

‘Hey, listen to this,’ Van said. He began to read out from an article attempting to forecast the success of some programming language. Van snorted at the journalist’s failed predictions. I didn’t understand a word of it and I knew Guppy didn’t either, but it didn’t matter, his fingers had begun to wind a melody again.

I’d never thought about it before, but that magazine was the only piece of print media I ever saw at their place. The printed word was not something they had the patience to engage in. When Van finished, I found out why. Guppy muted the strings and quietly asked Van to read him more; he just needed something to play to. Van hesitated for a second, and shot a quick glance at me, then with a nod he turned to the very front of the magazine and started with the first word. It clicked in my head.

Guppy was illiterate.
Dirty Needles
Stacey Linehan

The stranger walks into the house straight to the bathroom. I don't even put my ear to the door anymore because I know what he's doing. I've seen it all before. He's gotten terrible at hiding it because he knows I know and he doesn't care that I know.

I first found it in the pocket of an old jacket inside his closet. I shouldn't have been looking but I had to. The leather case was halfway unzipped, its contents: a spoon, three needles, fourteen Q-tips, eight alcohol swabs. I know because I counted. I counted twelve times.

Confrontation was necessary. 'What is this?' His face drooped and its colour disappeared as he saw his secret in my hand and a tear in my eye.

His lips were moving but I blocked out the lies. Why had it come to this?
After watching a friend, seventeen years old
get diagnosed with hepatitis.
After seeing Mum cry every day,
struggling to believe her son’s lies.
After stealing Dad’s cheques,
cashing them for himself.
After watching his sister struggle
with a sickness she had no control over.
He still can’t stop?

The stranger notices the missing bag from his truck
and its contents I flushed down the toilet.
He doesn’t remember what he says in his sleep
but he remembers to hide the stolen cheques.

Yesterday he told me he had a gun in his mouth—
he owes them something.
Lie or truth uncertain.
A part of me wanted to give him the money
but I knew I couldn’t.
Later I checked his pockets,
saw Mum’s jewellery
and he didn’t notice me cry.

I’m scared now
that this fury I have towards him
will hurt him.
I fear he will do something stupid
more illogical than he’s done before.
Because he thinks he has nothing left.

I wish that his mind was clear
just for a second
so he could see his family by his side.
Our mum
who feels she has failed as a mother
with him as her broken son.
I hate spoons.
I hate needles.
I hate alcohol swabs.
I hate plastic bags
and most of all,
I hate how he doesn’t hate it all too.

Now there are no more needles, no more pills.
RIP Stranger, my brother won.
On a Scale of One to Sex  
Victoria Lee

School holidays finally arrived and Daniel was home alone, waiting for his girl-of-the-moment to rock up. He knew he had a couple of hours before his parents got home from work, and he was pretty sure his sister Sophie was either at work, uni, or her boyfriend’s house. He was fairly sure that would be more than enough time.

He paced between his room and the bathroom mirror, making side-on faces to check whether all of the hairs at the back of his head were looking reasonable. He went to the toilet (he had to make sure that tank was empty) and as he plodded back to wash his hands, the doorbell rang. Crystal stood leaning against the door frame with her head tilted to the left and her hair thrown over her shoulder. She had positioned her top so that the red lace of her bra could make an appearance.

‘Well, are we doing this or what?’

Daniel laughed at her abrupt tone and said she’d have to come inside first. He asked if she wanted some lunch but she wasn’t in the mood for food, pinching his butt and saying she’d rather munch on his sausage to get things started.

The ceiling of Daniel’s room was just like any other ceiling. As he looked around the room, he noticed his childhood teddy bear’s arm was sticking out from underneath his small bed. Daniel kept one eye on it and the other on Crystal, but she didn’t seem to notice. If she saw it, she didn’t say anything.

It was over pretty quickly. Ten minutes or so of repositioning and is that okay which Daniel wasn’t exactly pleased about, but it could have been worse. He looked at the clock, and not wanting to
be rude, made a casual remark about his parents being due home. He pulled his track pants up and kicked the teddy further under his bed with the back of his heel as she stood up. He asked again if she was hungry—no, she was happy enough—so he gave her a one-armed, side-on hug at the bottom of the stairs and she left.

He stuck a pie in the microwave and sat on the kitchen bench, his shoulders rolling forwards. He stared at the pie, watching it spin around, seeing instead the way she’d rolled around on his single bed and wondering why everyone made sex out to be such a big deal.

Sophie’s uni work was spread out on the bench, getting in Daniel’s way as he tried to manoeuvre the cling wrap—making lunches for the following day. She was sitting on the other side of the bench, on the stool that always made his back ache. She was hunched over her laptop and he could tell she was only half-listening to him from her ‘mm’-ing and ‘oh yeah’s. She seemed to tune in when he said ‘It’s better than sex!’

‘Maybe you should wait until you’ve actually done it before you make statements like that, Daniel.’

Daniel chuckled at the opportunity to catch his sister off-guard. He muttered, ‘And what makes you so sure I haven’t already?’

Sophie’s fingers slowed on the keyboard and she looked up at Daniel, staring at him with her left eyebrow raised. He was forcing the knife through all the layers: the bread, the cold meat, the salads and then bread again and after scraping the chopping board he looked up, slightly pink and mumbled ‘You heard me.’

Sophie looked like she’d just found out Santa didn’t exist. Daniel remembered the way he used to follow her everywhere, dragging his favourite cricket bat around, back when they used to play superheroes and jump off the arm of the lounge together. She opened her mouth to say something and then closed it before any sound came out, and after she’d done this a few more times she started to resemble a goldfish.

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Daniel decided to make it a bit easier on her, saying ‘It was nothing, don’t worry about it, Soph.’

He could tell by her unusual silence that she’d presumed he wasn’t up to girls—not in that way—and now, given the way her face went from eyebrows lifted to all scrunched up, she looked like she was stuck between feeling grossed out and impressed.

‘How did you manage to keep that to yourself?’ she accused him. ‘How can you be so flippant about it? Oh my God I want to know everything and nothing at the same time ... Disgusting!’

Daniel ruffled his hair and rolled his eyes at Sophie, being her usual drama queen self. He wrapped up the last sandwich with some difficulty and shrugged.

Sophie pulled the neck of her hoodie over her chin and slid the sleeves over her hands. ‘Ew. So, how was it? I can’t believe we’re even talking about this.’

‘Ah, me either. It was average, I guess. I mean, if that’s what people go on about then I don’t get why.’

‘I wouldn’t stress Daniel. It seems to me that people say you’ll remember your first time forever because it’s generally so shit it makes any time from that point on seem so much better!’

Daniel laughed, taken aback by this new, confessional side of his sister. He leant over the bench and punched her jokingly in the arm. ‘I guess I’ll just have to take your word for it, sis.’

Sophie looked at Daniel. The same person he was fifteen minutes ago suddenly became so much more experienced. She’d been too busy to notice, but he’d been older for years.
Payment
MAGGIE COOPER

At the door, Roy selected his finest bowler hat. He placed it on his head, taking note not to disturb any of his carefully groomed hairs. He considered himself lucky; most of his friends were already showing signs of old age. One of his old workmates had even found a stray hair at the bottom of his hat just the other week.

‘Y’all see this?’ he had called. ‘They work us into the ground and we’re left with bugger all to show for it. Half the time I’m left wishing I’d lose a finger rather than me hair ... at least that way I’d get some hush money!’

‘We know—don’t lose your head over it,’ one of the other blokes had said, glancing up from the soiled piece of cloth that he’d been using to clean his face.

‘I’m not losing my head! I’m losing my bloody hair!’

Working at the mill did those kinds of things to a man. Everyone always arrived irritable and left irritated. Roy was just glad that he had a warm, well-lit house to come home to every night. Rose, his wife, had even surprised him last night by presenting him with his favourite overcoat, loosened a bit at the sides and with a couple of buttons replaced. Roy unhooked the very same overcoat from its wooden prong. The heavy material pressed on his shoulders as he slid each arm in. His hands caressed his bulging stomach, fingers clinging to the large buttons.

He admired his reflection in the old photograph hanging in the hallway. The photograph showed a young boy standing tall, his legs shoulder-width apart. He wore a pair of black school shoes, scuffed with mud-caked laces trailing behind. One long, grey sock was pulled up to his knee; the other had fallen down, forming a bundle around his ankle. He’d been athletic—a football player, just small-scale stuff between schools, but he’d had hope of being a country
player. The tilting shack behind the boy indicated a different future.

Roy had always worked dangerous jobs for mere coinage. It was only when something went wrong that real money would change hands ... Roy knew that sort of money could get someone off the street and out of the mill.

‘Rose. I’m ready to go,’ Roy called, eyes still on the photograph.

‘I’m coming dear!’ she replied, stopping next to her husband. She followed his eyes, ‘You still have exactly the same face: half covered by that mop of hair, of course. There’s a little more around the middle though.’

‘Alright, alright, that’ll be enough from you missy. Let’s get going.’

Rose placed her small carry bag on Roy’s lap, grasped the two hard handles and wheeled Roy out the door.
There was a small, indoor reception in Rienne where Iris was born. It was very windy that day, blowing clouds of snow from the other end of the lake. The reception was for Iris: her seventieth birthday.

Iris and I sat at an old oak table that faced the lake at the back of her sisters’ home. The radio played songs of a language unknown to me, but she hummed along in time to them, between our conversations. She told me about the jewellery she collected in Africa and the silk she bought from a Mediterranean merchant, the plums she ate in the south of France and the spicy nuts from the borders of India. She and her husband had fallen in love whilst on a naval ship in 1949. After he died, Iris would sit alone in her garden and read until her bare feet were covered with mosquito bites, slowly slipping away from the chronic routines of motherhood. I looked out at the salted lake; a small wooden boat sat at the edge, sinking into the melting snow.

Iris’s home is falling apart, fading away, senescent with rust and cracked floorboards. When I first visited her home, she was in the kitchen boiling empty jars, putting them in the sunshine to dry. Underneath this house her children buried three boxes of her jewellery, two bottles of Chanel, and sixty pounds. She confesses, ‘I have sometimes preferred my books to my children.’ She looks at me from the corners of her eyes. I can’t figure out why.

Iris is finally ready to let her house whither and fade away, to let the oven rust and for the warm water to run cold. I think of her house, her life.

‘Who are we to stop from growing old?’
Blood That Tastes Like Wretched Pride

JESSICA CANERO

Melancholic smiles seize my lips. Exhaustion plays upon them as they quiver—iced within pretence, repressed beneath the words that conceal themselves at my fingertip, cocooned within the feeble flesh of a liar. I press it to your lips, as your chicane-burned breath smothers my thought, ravenous in its possession of my dusk-flavoured fantasy.

You secrete words into my skin, poisonous words that form veins of diseased pleasantries, coiling themselves charily around the weakened limbs of credulity. Now for you to drench the doubt in saccharine—not to diminish it, but to dissect it, so when your virtue omits and my endurance weeps from my veins, flooding to the surface of my finger, you can press your lips against the bruise, watch them peel back, as your teeth abrade the contour of my bone with delicate precision.

False averseness suspends you, so as my cerulean skin percolates beneath your lips, I close my eyes, depress against your incisor and whisper, ‘Break it’.
Last Words (a Stream of Consciousness)

William English

In a very literal sense, I have been building to this moment all of my life. My sister and my children are here and for that I am very grateful. Were I to die in an empty room, there would be nobody to record my last words. That, I contend, would be an overwhelming shame, for I have been building to this moment all my life in a metaphorical sense, too.

My last words will be remembered. They shall be quoted. They shall be glorious. They shall serve as a fitting end to an already celebrated career. Whatever is thought of my films, whatever is thought of my books, it shall be my last words that will be immediately associated with me after I am gone. Despite all that I have done in my life they will be my greatest contributions to the arts, to culture, to all mankind.

I’m certain of this, mainly because of the amount of work I’ve put into them. I’ve fine-tuned them. I’ve rehearsed them. I’ve made fleeting references to them in my diaries (some of which have already been published to great acclaim, the rest of which I have dictated to be published posthumously), as a kind of gift to my more dedicated fans. Once my last words are publicised, people will look back over those entries and experience what I imagine to be a kind of wonderful epiphany. Ah-ha! So that’s what he meant!

Most people in my situation are probably nervous, or scared. Scared of what may come after this life, or nervous about what may not. I, however, am quivering with excitement. With the last of my strength, I shall deliver my lines, and then leave this world a better
place for having delivered them. What rapture! Not every man has such an opportunity as this, I’m sure. Of course, not every man has my gift. How many others have turned out as many successful novels? Few. How many others have received standing ovations from audiences at the finest universities in the world for their talks on topics ranging from finance to politics to the state of the arts? Fewer still. And how many will have their last words remembered?

Admittedly, there have been many thus far. Winston Churchill’s were quite moving, I suppose. To have expressed boredom at the moment of one’s passing; brilliant. The story of Albert Einstein’s last words has always fascinated me, too. Tragic to think that his attending nurse did not speak German. For a time, I considered that perhaps I might deliver mine in another tongue. Latin, perhaps. Speaking them in Latin would give them a wonderful weight, a terrific sense of occasion. I could never be sure, though, whether or not they would be translated properly, and the script is every bit as important as the delivery.

I’m beginning to think that it might be time. I feel very faint. I have no idea what any of the machines that are hooked up to me mean, so it’s difficult to judge whether or not I might be on the way out. God! Imagine the waste if I were gone already!

I consider propping myself up on my pillows. I ought to have a clear line of sight to my sister and my daughter. I should like to think that they will say of me that I mustered my strength to rise up and deliver my lines with squared shoulders and a determined jaw. Heroic. Classic. Also, eye contact is essential. They must be concentrating properly in order to hear what I have to say. My words shall not be many, but they are intricate. Precise.

How I wish I could return after a time to witness the impact of my final words. I have no doubt that their impact will be enormous, of course, but it would be so lovely to be able to see it firsthand.
Hear orators quote them. See schoolchildren scribble them in the margins. Marvel at an assembled crowd who hears them for the first time.

Yes, it is time. I don’t think I should risk putting it off any longer. Now is not the time for pause. Now is the time for greatness. Now is the time for my glory. Now is ... Now is ... ah.
In Which it is Revealed
What Became of the Expedition
LAURA E GOODIN

Seas dry and crack,
continents wear into delta mud.
We are flowers, petals shrivelled
on skeletons of stamen and stem
We are rueful smiles that for an instant bring wisdom,
then vanish into bewilderment.

Where is that damp, springy, jungle-fervid newness?
What has become of the savage and glorious wilds?
The map is many-folded, scrawled on, battered.
The land is known,
the knowers bitter.

Dogged, desperate, we collect our specimens,
evidence now, not of wonder,
but of the dull pain of ancient injuries.

It's been a while since I smiled.
Blood and Green Hills
Tajna Biščević

Your father’s photo sits beside your bed. Someone sent it to you months after he had left, perhaps one of the men you cut out to make it a portrait. He is handsome, his face grey like the air is now. In uniform he is all straight lines and symmetry. In photographs he always looks stern, and in this one his cheekbones are protruding more than ever and his eyebrows are more furrowed. He wears military badges pinned to his collar. Grandmother calls him beautiful but you’re confused by men and don’t know they can be beautiful.

Sometimes Grandmother will come in and her eyes will inadvertently fly to the portrait. She tells people she had a son in the war of ninety-four, but that he was no soldier: he had a poet-heart. Her son who longed for peace and green hills but was left in grey amongst rubble stained red. And he spewed blood whenever he sobbed. Would he have aestheticised his own death, the way he made everything more beautiful with words?

Darling, he would have written, my heart bled out today, against the cold stone of Sarajevo, in the heat of our mountaintop sun. It blazed, drying up my eyes, and I saw spots of white light shimmering amidst the sweltering. My blood, it boiled with the surge of hot lead, which they fired into my chest (the chest your baby head slept against, gurgled and puked on, the chest you cried into—I remember the hot streams of tears like welts in my skin). It bubbled against the stone, in the morning mist that finally cooled it. It’s all ruins now, of sun-faded red, like when the juice in a blood orange dries and the flesh shrivels up into itself.

I thought of you. As my mouth filled with blood and I choked out my lungs. I thought of you, and it filled me to the brim.
Melt

NICOLA SANCHEZ

I’ve hidden the pills in the hollowed-out centre of a book. The second-hand hardcover volume fits in nicely with the collection of battered classics I inherited from my grandmother. No one will think anything of it.

I only wrote the note last night. Until then, it wasn’t real. Now, the note is wrapped around the little bottle of pills. I have to wait to do it—I can’t afford to be interrupted—and Mum is milling around downstairs to make sure we all get out the door on time.

I don’t want to be saved.

After forcing my brawling twin brothers into the car, Mum drops me off. She’s gone before I can even wave, rushing off to leave the twins with their dad and still get to work on time. It’s early and I’m shivering. My school uniform is only a skirt, stockings and a thin woollen jumper. I hug myself and walk through the gates into the deserted quad, making my way towards the heater in the office.

I’m still frozen when the office ladies notice I’m there and kick me back out into the playground. I’m assaulted by the cacophony of voices. I look around for a place to sit. Anna, Miriam and the others haven’t spoken to me—not since I failed to show the proper degree of sympathy when Miriam spilled tomato sauce on her shirt, on photo day. I settle on a patch of asphalt between two groups of girls and doze until the bell rings, like an air raid siren.

First period is the scratching sound of chalk on the board. Second period and it’s the squeaking of a whiteboard marker in a lab that smells of dissected rats. I spend recess in the library, hidden between a pair of bookshelves in the Geography section. The next two periods are PE. I lie on the grass after my first lap around the oval and stare at the grey sky. The teacher ignores me, focusing on the boy who’s trying to upskirt a classmate. When it starts raining,
I stand and trail after the sound of squealing girls dashing to the hall. I’m soaked by the time I arrive, so I get permission to go to the office and dry myself by the heater.

I lie there with my eyes closed, ignoring the sound of bells. The office ladies must take pity on me, because they let me sit there through lunch. Eventually, footsteps approach and I open my eyes, ready to be sent to class. It’s an English teacher, on her way to fifth period. I’ve only had her once or twice as a substitute and I don’t remember her name. She smiles at me and I’m surprised when my facial muscles echo the expression.

‘My, you look wet,’ she says.

I shrug.

‘You must be cold.’ She ruffles around in her bag for a moment and pulls something out, offering it to me. ‘Chocolate. Hopefully the sugar is enough to make you feel a little warmer.’

I take it. ‘Thanks.’

Her eyes crinkle. ‘It’s nothing. I bought a pack for my class. You look like you need a pick-me-up, Maya.’ She nods and walks toward her classroom.

I peel back the wrapper and take a bite—a nibble really. The chocolate’s sweet. Maybe it’s the heater starting to break through, but I suddenly feel warmer. I take another bite and let the chocolate melt on my tongue.

When the bell rings again, I feel ready to go to class. In maths, I pull out my book and take notes, concentrating on sorting out the $x$s and $y$s in the teacher’s examples. Fifty minutes and I’m free. It’s only a short bus trip home and I’m turning the key in the lock. I avoid my room and set myself up on the kitchen table with my maths textbook.

It’s seven when Mum arrives home. The twins aren’t with her. They miss their dad, she says. They’re staying over at his place tonight. She turns the dial of the radio to an FM station and chats to me as she chops the potatoes for dinner.

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The pills are still there. The note is, too. I don’t throw them out. But after dinner, I sit in front of the TV with Mum, eyes blurred, taking in the bright colours and sounds. I get ready for bed, half-asleep, and snuggle up warm under the blankets.

When I wake the next morning, I look out the window. The sky is still grey and the road is damp, but it somehow seems slightly brighter and warmer.
Author Biographies

Aideen Weingarth believes a huge cup of tea is the solution to every problem and loves trying to use words like ‘bellibone’ and ‘mamihlapinatapai’ in everyday conversation.

Alice Reed is a girl from the country who spends her days watching the sky, pressing the backspace button on her computer, and mistrusting people who don’t read books.

Andrea Johnson, the original Andrea, made her fortune at the age of eleven diving for abalone and now has nothing to report, thank you.

Arcadia Lyons is a candy sailor, a nosy radical and a social randy. Some may say she is a sardonic lay, a scaly inroad or a cosy anal raid. But who could say she is not as cordial as any.

Ashleigh Kelman sees the world in Technicolor grey—a by-product of time spent on the computer. She often wonders how to express thoughts succinctly.

Audra De La Torre writes children’s fiction between the gaps of uni and motherhood. Her aim is to put the ‘k’ back into ‘magick’.

Benjamin Warren often slips in and out of various realities, never entirely sure which is real. He hopes to publish one of them one day.

Caitlin Morahan was born at a very young age. She is a girl who doesn’t know as much as she says she does.

Celeste Moore lives in perpetual fear that she’ll accidentally drop a book or a cup of coffee out her window. She apologizes in advance if either land on you.

Clancy Noakes invented the roast dinner and is stored in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight.
Cole Bubenik hails from the great state of Texas where he spends the majority of his time, reading, writing, and being an unknowing slave to the internet.

Donna Waters is a mature-aged student with a penchant for books, writing, all things tea, her partner, three kids, and cat called Hagrid.

Elizabeth Stevenson is a Canadian–Australian who spends more time in her fantasy worlds than in reality. She’s still dreaming of the day she finds a dragon to call her own.

Evelyn Kandris secretly speculates that most guys have ejaculated above their wrist and pretended they were Spiderman at least once. She also loves eating potatoes.

Gordon Knyvet: I know how to steer a computer. I don’t mind being sticky. Imagine my keyboard. I use it to write stories and play video games. Now get out of my room.

Harrison Cartwright writes for prose and screen. He was unreachable for comment due to filming commitments on season two of The Shire.

Jack Michel is a writer/performer from Wollongong who took up poetry as a means to one day gaining some depth in his character. He is waiting still, but is forever hopeful in his pursuits. He likes turtles.

Jayde Farrow is no artist. She writes only when time is sparse and her guinea fowls don’t need feeding.

Jaymie Hooper often imagines backstories and future romances for folk at Woolworths packing her groceries—she is obviously destined to be a wealthy prose writer.

Jess Southwell collects images to weave stories, and listens to fortune cookies when they advise her not to lose her ability to find beauty in ordinary things.
JESSICA CANERO is an ardent lover of sixties sitcoms. To her, being a ‘writer’ essentially consists of scribbling ideas on post-it notes and scattering them around her room like confetti.

JONATHAN PARK is a panty fetishist. He meditates on the bleak complexities of the human condition, writing with a cynical eye and a Christian naivety.

JOSHUA LUND’s mother told him he was an accident. Therefore every action since birth, including this submission, has been an attempt to justify his existence in life. #HopeMum’sProud.

KATE LISTON proudly comes from Pambula. She, along with three Herefords and a couple of stray water fowls, have ventured north to enjoy a life of writing and grazing.

KELSEY YOUNG has ambitions of becoming a crazy cat lady, should her plans of writing a bestseller and marrying various celebrity crushes prove impossible.

LAURA E GOODIN’s stories, plays, and poems have been published and performed internationally. She is pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Western Australia and spends her woefully insufficient spare time playing with swords.

LIAM COPLAND enjoys writing because it makes him forget, however briefly, that his parents hate him.

LORIN REID believes in the beauty and power of the spoken word. She is a poetry slammer and hip-hop advocate and she hopes you’ll read her poem out loud.

LUKE RULE, the world’s laziest perfectionist, has achieved nothing of consequence since the last time he was in Tide. He continues to scheme incessantly.

MAGGIE COOPER will continue writing about her leather-clad, motorcycle-riding parents until her list of adventures is at least half the length of theirs.
Megan Drapalski is a TV junkie, aspiring crazy cat lady and Harry Potter fanatic who occasionally writes tall tales.

Monique Taylor picks up the wooden pieces of a shipwreck and builds a house, in which she sits in front of a warm fire and writes the story of what happened to the ship.

Nicholas Brooks knows that Don Delillo, Bret Easton Ellis and Raymond Carver are much better writers than he is. He is currently in fierce negotiation with the devil to see if this can’t be amended.

Nicola Sanchez studies Creative Writing and Law; however, she has no intention of combining them through writing crime fiction or legal thrillers.

Paul Pearson is a published writer, Creative Writing graduate, Browncoat, podcaster, drinker, time traveller, lunatic, Hufflepuff, book ninja, zombie pimp, devious romantic, Magnificent Bastard and serial liar.

Paul Chicharo holds an unprecedented hatred for bio notes which is rivalled by none unfortunately. Is referred to as cute by friends. Has previously drowned and been revived. Lives at such and such address.

Peter McLeod is a dance instructor/comic book writer come Creative Writing student. His writing practice is informed by living in crappy apartments, eating poorly, and wishing he had more money.

Rebecca Prokop is an emotionally fragile young writer who runs to her sixteen-year-old sister every time she needs inspiration.

Samantha Lewis hopes that reading and writing poetry will help her better understand things. She’ll probably be a student forever, and is constantly paranoid that somebody has hidden snakes in her car.

Stacey Linehan fue a España.

Susie Lenehan says, ‘Fried fish in the morning and no socks on: good day ahead. That’s my motto! No further questions.’

Tajna Biscevic is a Bedouin nomad, with a bad habit. She speaks good English.

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Tione Hilder studies religion, reads fairytales, and falls out of trees. She likes to believe that traffic sounds like breaking waves and that falling stars are laughing.

Victoria Lee spends more time changing her mind about what she’s going to do with her life than actually writing, but still calls herself a writer. Gotta believe it to make it happen, right?

William English writes because mechanical engineering requires an appalling level of sobriety and a career in health science would be hypocritical.

Zachary Bryant writes prose, scripts and poetry while pretending he can make things explode like Piper from Charmed.
TIDE Team 2012

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Rebecca Prokop
Victoria Lee

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