



MAYHEM4

Mayhem Literary Journal 4 | October 2016

*Mayhem 4* | October 2016

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*Mayhem Literary Journal*

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# Tracey Slaughter

## Editorial

A workshop has six to ten hearts. It has the bent legs of many uncomfortable chairs. It has windows you can't lever open to breathe through. It has shoes to be stared at – munted tread, shredded laces – the skin around thumbnails to pick. It has polygon tables in wipe- clean brown that will never make a circle no matter how you rig them. It has belly laughs, and bad memories. It has a relentless background track of kids wielding hammers in a corner of a crèche, or a crane dismantling a chainlinked classroom block, or the churn of the aircon set to nuclear winter. Or silence. It has plenty of silence. It has metal drink bottles drained to the bottom (if only it had something stronger – sometimes a workshop could sure use its own bar). It has pages tweaked with doubts, clamped with sweat – but, most important, scattershot with words. It has a communal voicebox. Its voice gets traded round the room. Some places it's used with bass, with spit, with aggro. Other places it's quiet in the solar-plexus, the trace of a whisper, twisted. Sometimes a word weighs it down, a word that sits on the page with a whole life at stake in it. It has to wait, for the throat to clear, the pulse to drop, the memory to blur. It doesn't matter. In those spaces, there's the sound of six to ten hearts, listening. Creative writing, says Natalie Goldberg, is up to 90% listening – workshop, where you have to tune in, strain, receive, is the best training there could be.

I know I've said before how the genesis of *Mayhem* was in the workshop space – but I feel compelled to say it again because so much of the writing which fills fresh volumes still pours out of that crucial zone, that grubby classroom or hungover lounge or glassbowl booked at the library – wherever writers group together to switch pages and hook up a life-support system of words. You

can't overestimate the sustenance, the empathy, the fix, the drive, the fellowship that writers get from stumbling into one of these units. It's intravenous. It's catalytic. Sure there'll be the odd clash, there will be finicky spats and syntactical nit-picking – there have to be. You're not here for sweet-talk afterall – you need critique. You need it targeted, constructive and deep. Workshopping is acupuncture, says Conor Maxwell – 'it's trusting other people to poke and stab at your writing in ways that improve it, in ways that make it read better. Sometimes the critique hits a nerve and you have a spasm or some shit, but you come out of the experience wiser.' A good writer's workshop is 'a group of people who will hold your writing at arm's length when you are too close to it to do so. Who you trust to murder your darlings and save your first drafts from the fire,' says Aimee-Jane Anderson-O'Connor. Sometimes it takes other eyes to pinpoint that elusive fragment you need to lock your image into frame, your story into focus: 'Workshopping,' says Loren Thomas, can be 'like finding the final piece of your puzzle a week after you were so sure it had gone up the vacuum.' Sometimes it takes other voices, battering you with hallelujahs and hellyeahs, to convince you that the scribble you've dared to bring to group is worth the breath. Nothing can replace the workshop mix of deadlines and tenderness, pressure and infinite faith. It takes time to build the trust that allows you to foster and push each other, to hassle and brace: 'Workshopping is like stripping completely naked in a room with others, except you're expected to stare, and expected to see through the skin, and expected to help everyone get the heart out' says essa ranapiri. Mayhem 4 is full of the brave bare work that comes from sharing pages six to ten hearts at a time.



# Aimee-Jane Anderson-O'Connor

## Filament

He told me that the laugh tracks they use in these shows are pulled from corrugated boxes out the back of some studio. He told me that they are mostly all compost now and we laugh alongside old dead people coz we don't know what else to do. He twisted my ponytail in his hand and sighed. Changed the channel.

He told me that electricity runs in two kinds of currents. Direct current and alternating current. Direct current stays positive. It is an electric fence that bites your tongue into the back of your throat. An alternating current switches from positive to negative sixty times a second. Staccato rib rhythm.

On. Off. On. Off.

If you flick a lightbulb on off too many times then the filament melts and you hear a crack. If someone turns a lightbulb on at the wall when you're still changing it then your muscles contract and you can't let go and you just keep on burning and burning.

He kept plates under the bed and the noodles eventually dried up and the green specks became part of the design. He used my Oma's Delft saucers as ashtrays. They lay like blue windmill breadcrumbs between the sheets and the fire escape. We ran out of clean cutlery so we drank soup with teaspoons. He said maybe I'd eat less that way.

The smell that ants make when you squash them is rancid butter and they drown in marmalade. He told me that they don't have a backbone and have no sight and work until they die and they are like us in that way. They reach for one another so they can feel which way to go, and I like that.

He told me that when I laugh I open my mouth too wide. He told me that silver molar fillings are made of mercury. It causes blindness

and insomnia and madness. When it freezes over it groans and cries. They used to put it in the lining of hats but now they just put it in our mouths.

He told me that Venice will sink by the end of this century. We are up to our knees in it. Maybe my grandchildren will dive down to see St Mark's Basilica. They will be stitched with apologies and gasoline excuses. They will pray oxygen mask prayers. They will read about trees and climb concrete stairwells. They will wear stilts and learn to waltz ten feet above the pavement.

He said that they would be better off at the bottom of the ocean anyway. I held my breath until I saw pinprick shadow. There will soon be alligators in the Antarctic. He said that if you put a frog in a pot of lukewarm water and slowly heat it up, it will not hop out and it will slow boil with the water. Its marrow will harden and its brain will cook and it will not even twitch. In the eighteenth century, physicist Luigi Galvani applied a metal scalpel to the skinned legs of a dead frog and it kicked. This was the first time a dead thing danced upon a table. The electricity was not alternating or direct. It was static.

Off.

He told me that inside Chernobyl's ruins, there is a radioactive blob called Medusa. He said that after two minutes in front of her, your cells start to haemorrhage. Fluoxetine stays in your bloodstream for ninety six hours. It makes the roof of your mouth dry. Your saliva like hot glue.

He said that every robot sent into the reactor has been fried.

I wanted to see her.

## Understand: Temporary

You are unblinking,  
wet rusk gum cry.  
You will not miss a thing.  
Aluminium black  
backed glass shows you  
what you already know.  
Reach out and touch the chartered,  
obsidian slip.  
You will learn absence  
one vowel at a time.  
Carpet fuzz crumbs,  
fist your hands,  
lull your tongue.  
Powdered wrist  
warm puddle.  
Seize it in your hands  
and watch it scatter,  
bumblebee tick.  
You will soon forget  
copper pinched lungs,  
sun lit cobweb,  
these four torn walls.  
Do not close your eyes for more than a moment.  
You are an abundance of bone,  
an unfractured,  
cornered,  
falling,  
juggernaut.

You  
are elastic.  
Do not slow down.  
Devour yourself from the bottom up,  
one  
toe  
at a time.

## Guardian

Strangled whimpers  
beneath spider spun lace,  
She sits  
despairing child,  
clutching at Her sides to keep Her stitches in,  
the thump of meat on unmopped floor.

She turns toward me  
and I  
with an affinity for the broken and  
bleeding  
step forward.  
My throat closes,  
stifles acid.

Her eyes rest upon me  
crackle upon my skin and keep burning like  
the shower when  
a distant cold tap is turned on and kept there.

The lace yellows,  
breaks off in rigid clumps  
and She reaches out,  
pleads.  
I reach too,  
grasp a chipped ceramic bowl,  
the same mottled blue of  
an argument gone wrong.

The bowl is empty but I smile,  
spoon in hand  
and begin to swallow air.

# Conor Maxwell

## Sympathetic

It's funny  
Seeing you in  
White satin  
In an azure sash  
In a rush-laced corset

Backwards  
*Because men wear it that way*

It's funny  
Seeing you bare  
Sheer slip evening wear  
Cherry gloss lip stain  
Half a glass of scotch

Seeing you

Smoking electronic nicotine  
In a wrinkled shower cap  
In fuzzy size tens

It's funny  
Seeing you cry  
Pinstripe waistcoat

Soaked in merlot  
Soaked in sauvignon

Shattered wood  
Glass splinter sanguineous cuffs  
Southern country fowl  
Tied yellow

With a little yellow bow  
You're a little yellow bow

It's funny when

Executions  
Limp wristed regicide  
Balmorals polished with  
Lacrima  
Urea  
Sodium

When

Decorated soldier  
Christen virgin cleaver  
Soar rubber  
Citrus ligaments sever

At the ankles

When

Ivory knuckles  
Tenderise human flesh

When she

Cradles tongue  
In a molar vice



Saliva violation  
A flute of vomit  
Load of fresh hundreds  
Between her breasts

It's funny when you're the gun  
The safe behind the varnish  
Chipped auburn paint  
Exposed wires  
Hi-Point 995 9mm Carbine  
Ten rounds  
Two dimensions

It's only funny  
because it's you

**Lux Aeterna**

Freezing  
Under eight jackets  
On a street  
Where it never

Fucking

Snows  
Sweat should not be this  
Cold  
Vacuum-sealed  
Cheeks  
And a  
Liquorice ironed fringe  
War paint  
One thin layer  
Your mother's eyes  
How

Did you  
Not

*Learn*

She said she wouldn't fuck him  
But the heat is out  
This week

Pay for blow

In bruises

Sell your  
Love

Cunt

So you can

...

With him

All angles in a cerulean sweater  
Room for two  
At this rate

*What will two heads get you  
And how deep  
Do they have  
To go*

Misery is three colours  
Ending in green  
Every night  
The same time  
Thirty minutes before

Bed

TV  
Is his mother  
But not your son  
One more serving of grapefruit  
And salt  
Double-dosage

So it tastes like mushroom soup

Ink  
Spilled outside the lines  
Often blue

But never black

One sleeve too many

The television  
Is  
Off

Power surge on both sides

A serving of eggs

Sunny side

somewhere

In a red dress

## Leap of Faith

I want out. I'm not fucking around this time. I can excuse the fact that I have a court-ordered roommate whose entire job it is to stop me getting into trouble. I can deal with living in a room that looks like it's straight outta *Silent Hill*, but minus the sexy nurses and guys with pyramids for heads. I've even gotten used to having a 60" TV at my disposal that only has two available channels—Disney and Nick Jr. All of that is ufuckingtopia compared to what Happy Madison did to one of my favourite games. Me 'n Happy Madison, my roommate/supervisor (his name is actually Brett) were about to play Noughts and Crosses on the back of the Manukau Courier and you know how crosses are pretty essential because they're one third of the name of the game? Well Happy, he's like "Crosses represent death and I need to steer you away from death-related imagery if you're going to recover." So you know what we played instead? Circles and Smiles. He even made me draw a circle around the smiles so they became happy faces. From a distance, it probably looked like we were playing Noughts and Noughts. It fucking sucked. I let him win.

In case it wasn't clear, I'm currently in this programme for survivors of suicide attempts to get better and start loving life or some shit. You want to know what that's like? Imagine having to slice your toast with a spoon and spread the Nutella with your finger because God forbid I ever come in contact with a butter knife. Last week I had a killer headache because I stayed up 'till 4am watching Phineas and Ferb and Happy wouldn't even give me any Panadol to make it go away. Apparently one Panadol is a gateway drug to more Panadol and after five or six headaches I'll want to skull the entire bottle.

Oh, I forgot to mention the worst part! I'm not actually suicidal. No, seriously. I mean technically I jumped off a building, but it

wasn't like that. I was doing some hard core parkour like Ezio Auditore da Firenze from *Assassin's Creed II* and while jumping between the Liquor King and the \$2 Shop, I fell. Two stories, feet first onto concrete. The ambulance driver that took me to the hospital was really hot, so I may have exaggerated the details of the fall a little. Told her I was a lone wolf, a rebel without a cause. Told her I was too mysterious and intense for this world, and thus, had decided to leave it. She wasn't exactly impressed and next thing I know—Boom! I'm sent here. "For my own good," apparently. I want out. I would just wheel my way out the door in the middle of the night if it wasn't for the stairs.

I forgot to mention the wheelchair, didn't I? Yeah, I'm in one of those now. At least until I get my leg casts off. Those fuckers itch like crazy. And they won't even let me have a fork or something sharp to scratch under the mould when it's a warm day and the heat makes living in these casts unbearable. I have to resort to using my toast spoon. The crumbs just make my legs itch more.

So I had this thought, right? The assassins, the ones from *Assassin's Creed* (Ezio and Altair and the like), they do this thing where they jump off ginormous buildings and they land in hay bales, somehow completely okay. I was just thinking, in real life, you wouldn't survive jumps like that. Not a chance. So what if the first assassin to try it wasn't actually expecting to land safely? What if he was trying to kill himself, landed in some hay instead and was all like "Dude, what the fuck? How the hell?" and then his assassin buddies showed up and were like "Woah, that was amazing!" and he was all "Yeah, pffh, totally meant to do that" and from that point on it just became a thing that all assassins do? That's just been in my head for a bit, don't ask me why.

Anyway, that's been my life for the last 14 days. I'm broken from the knees down (my junk still works, in case you're wondering) and the TV and a handful of newspapers are all I have to keep me from blowing my brains out due to boredom. I'm not suicidal, that was an expression. Happy keeps a real close eye on me. As well as all the stupid restrictions I mentioned before, I'm never allowed

to be in a room on my own with the door closed, which is fucking dumb, because when I turn the air conditioner on, I lose all of the coolness. And I definitely can't masturbate. Yeah, you laugh, but I dare you to go two whole weeks without touching yourself because your supervisor thinks there's a chance you might be into autoerotic asphyxiation. You know, when you beat off with a tie around your neck? I've never been into that, but after 14 days, I'd be willing to try just about anything.

I don't actually want to die, but sometimes I consider eating the batteries in the back of the remote just to show Happy and the rest of the world that, with enough determination, anyone can off themselves with anything. I could throw myself down the stairs. Drown myself in the toilet. Watch *Peppa Pig* until my eyeballs melt. It's easy enough with the right attitude. I want my butter knife back.

I'm not suicidal, but I wonder if they do parkour in Heaven.

# Jeanie Richards

## The Dead Room

the sun-drenched room in my house  
is called the dead room  
it's where I go  
to make memories

a nephew holding a half empty bottle of steiny  
sits next to his cousin in her piupiu  
singing whale songs  
in mahesian melodies

a dreadlocked bro  
carves a waka and  
blows us away  
with the lead and melody  
of Hey Joe  
on a three string guitar

an old mate holds a snapper  
way out in front of him  
makes it look bigger...he reckons

dad in a turban  
plays a stick flute  
to tame an imaginary cobra  
that strikes at mum

in a silly xmas hat  
my tane with the toothy grin



wears the taonga  
carved by guitar hero bro

sitting next to our  
beautiful nephew  
whose neck was snapped  
at a roundabout  
in the fog

I hang out in the dead room  
a lot  
always toasty warm

sometimes I shiver  
sometimes I want to join them

# Henry Lee

## The Worst of One Another

*You remind me of someone I loved  
And you fuck like them*

Alone tastes like your perfume  
    Wrapped around the shaft  
of tongue marked absence

I feel eight below  
Four times a night

You boys are good for one thing  
A southern heartbeat

Young  
dumb  
full of cum

Jokes and high fives  
You're in the clear  
    You still get laid  
And you don't have to deal with her bullshit

Kept at cunt's length  
A top draw vibrator  
with an ash tray heart

The wedding band makes for  
    a short leash

Every nineteen year old dreams of being fuck zoned  
there's nothing so awful as a friend

Detonate  
Rubbed into a dressing table  
My grandfather the rosewood king  
You weigh more than I ever could

Sift through  
the remnants of a pelvis  
lined with  
dead letter lips  
A circus of bite marks

Hold down your no's  
I refuse to be  
A woman's wound

It's not rape if you push back  
Not when you're on top  
Not when you text me first  
Not when it's once a week

You can't be raped in love  
Get off me and hold me

You are penance  
And I the briquette  
smothered through  
your sundress

After all  
I deserve this  
I once did this to someone else

And she fucked just like you  
Cuts and all.

# Tyla Bidois

## Wuthering Heights (Seven Roads to Self-Prophecy)

one.

mine is a fear of knowing. if everything should  
happen for a reason, then all hurts are preconceived sacrifices,  
capsized rose petals for the pestle, that which fed too long  
on too many in this garden, and my,  
my roses bloom wild. my roses sing. they hack my waist to  
taste the fissure, loving as the gardener's shears. both  
calamities are made in a kind of love.

two.

there are chariots in my lover's eyes.  
and my body is a dock, landlocked close enough  
to bear vessel. white flags. a season of plenty. a tear to the tragic  
tendency of the too-kind too-foolish type of woman to carve  
homes out of her flesh for they  
whose lack subsists in the artificial distance, that imparted  
between your eyes and the sheets that charter their  
truest bowers, his secrets too black to tell you now, a chessboard  
of affection's darker face in his silhouette asleep, or roused, her  
perfume on the pillowslip,  
no doubt, the stink of where his mouth left her cheeks a rubied  
tangerine of trembling thigh and dew, and mine, turned away  
somewhere in the ether, in the quiet of cigarette ash and running  
mascara, to feign sanctuary in the open sea when voluntary  
entrapment is the only anchor for the hands that don't let go.

we are a plague of weak wrists, rough fingers, arms that  
can't hold flesh in stillness no more than they can puncture  
a fistful of time, yet there are moments in the curl of my  
elbow about his neck that contradicts the earth's  
ordinance. i hang from him, a living noose, with a mercy  
always to release first. recompose myself, the wind.  
live in an intimacy of small things and take  
back the wild, pretending the hunger is yet the same.  
i am a wolf, but i wasn't born with such appetite.

three.

no need for armour when a wordsmith  
has accepted all her nectar, the fire and the flood,  
the disease of theoria, to twist the talents of  
self-preservation into the same evil she sought to fight  
in the first place. she makes a chain with old enemies  
in the lace of her voice; that same lazy steel;  
doeish coos of silver-backed automation,  
wielded at the right flick as all  
best knives are, indiscriminate; numbness  
is not emotion, it is activity, a subscription to  
unfeeling one's own woe in the certain, innumerable  
gestures made to steer ship closer to icecap,  
comfort these moth-like romantics into the empty promise  
of a veiled flame they will never touch. i will not  
hurt you, it says, but i will not let you matter.  
and though sweet as a little candle, if given the opportunity,  
i will use your hope to perfect my open sprint.

four.

to love you for your pretense, a cross-stitched  
visage of practice sewn into each leather lapel  
would be to unsee you from the root, that which does  
as ever betold a nubile tree maturing in a shock  
of season, pose the mere increase of its elysian  
origin, that which might be outgrown, but never  
abandoned.

we are two cars playing chicken, and you will  
always make me lose.

five.

my favourite pharaoh is ramses the great, because  
he loved his wife into oblivion, loved her body into monument,  
bust, hieroglyph, enshrined her tomb in stanza proclaiming her  
the gateway of sunshine. suppose i should project my image  
onto the admired, but rather i, the mourner bowed, rather i,  
sceptred sonneteer, boasting a love to an unreachable eunoia.  
rather i, writing your name across my scriptures again,  
trying to exorcise you, funnel your shadow from every asylum  
i swore you wouldn't get to see, though i also call you architect.  
i could love you into oblivion, too.

six.

it is 4am and i hold your hand, ignoring the  
restless hum of pre-dawn foliage, the  
blackbird mothers breakfasting in the  
smog of your eyes, black, as the kettle  
my fingers ruse to settle your rustling  
and mostly my own. she who tried

to read herself into a dependable solitude, she  
who tried to learn her way into unhurt, she with  
enough humour to see how far wish and  
star fell, and laugh into the sepia.

seven.

every day brings with it the shadow of departure, and in  
their mounting backs is the funeral to old madness,  
i am the evening thunder, the midnight storm, the sunlight  
breaking at the execution of dusk. i am all night-faced  
nobility, mysticism dead and alive, intolerant of untruths,  
weak excuses for carnal brutalities and the habituation  
of cowards. i am the smoke rising and the barking jaw,  
honeyed syllable dripping off fangs to perihelion hymn. in me,  
truth is simple kisses of loyal fibres dismissed by age and  
naivete howling  
and  
all of me is golden



# Fiona Wells-Lakeland

## Seventeen

I am naked legs on the playground  
24 white pills washed down inside the school bus  
a distant whisper over black Bakelite phone  
crow's caw on the west wind  
a burst boiler in the grey-green waves  
four suitcases and an oil-painted horse

burnt weeds behind a state-house  
steel wool against peach skin  
shredded diesel smoke in the forest

bitter tea undercut with honey  
rusted chains in a chicken wire pen  
a garage sale patchwork quilt.

# Norman Franke

## **Funde beim Abriss eines Kinder-Baumhauses**

Die lange verschollene Woldecke  
und ein halbes Sägeblatt, ein Comicbuch,  
zwei Ladungen Staniolpapier der Weihnachtsedition  
von ‚Quality Street‘, jede Menge Kakerlaken  
und Tropfstein aus Kerzenwachs,

die erste Seite eines handgeschriebenen  
Detektivromans, ein Plastikfernrohr  
und ein Plastikdolch, ein Radiobausatz,  
Straßenkreiden, eine Broschüre der Mormonen  
und eine von Fluoridbefürwortern des Jahres 2009,

eine All-Black Fahne, ein Vogelnest,  
eine Paua-Muschel auf einem Ytong Block  
gleichsam als Aschebecher, ein Brandfleck,  
die Seitenwand mit ausgesägtem Fenster  
in der Form des Sterns von Bethlehem.

## **Finds at the demolition of a children's treehouse**

The long-lost woollen blanket  
and half a saw blade, a comic book,  
wrappings of Quality Street's Christmas edition,  
lots of cockroaches, stalactites  
and stalagmites of candle wax,

the first page of a handwritten  
detective novel, plastic binoculars  
and a plastic dagger, a radio kit,  
street chalk, brochures by Latter Day Saints  
and fluoride supporters in 2008,

an All Black flag, a bird's nest,  
a paua shell on a concrete block:  
a kind of ash tray; a burn in the roof,  
the side wall with the window  
in the shape of the Star of Bethlehem.

## Für Miquel de Cervantes

Ich war acht. In einer Kinderfunk-Bearbeitung  
des Norddeutschen Rundfunk  
begegnete ich dem Mann aus La Mancha.

Das Geräusch der Windmühlen  
ähnelte dem Tischventilator meiner Großmutter.

Doch ich sah deutlich den Klepper, den Esel  
des umtriebigen Sancho, den pergamentenen  
Teint der Dulcinea, welche die Kinderfunk-  
Bearbeiter zu einer älteren Witwe  
entschärft hatten. Rötlichen Staub.

Bis zum Grab werde ich nicht lachen  
über den Ritter von der Traurigen Gestalt,

der die ganze verwirrende Welt  
in den kargen Ebenen  
vorn Bücherregal durchschritt,  
alles verstehend und nichts gesehen,  
gesehen alles, verstanden nichts-

das brennende Meer von Lepanto,  
die Füße der Catalina, bereit  
zur gemeinsamen Flucht, blankgescheuerte  
Bäder von Algier aus dem Blick der Sklaven  
einen reglos herabhängenden Arm,  
die zwangsverheiratete Mutter, Schuld-

Türme, philosophische Strategien zum Beweis  
des Allmächtigen, Heidengold;

nächtliches Murmeln der Zwangsbekehrten,  
stumme Schreie der barfüßigen Trinitarierinnen,  
die letzte Verwünschung der Abencerragen,  
die verbürgt ist, weil kein ernstzunehmender  
Historiker sie jemals erwähnt.

Dein Als-Ob: die nobelste Gesinnung

der Liebe, Gott, alte Freunde  
und dein Roman, jeder Roman,  
sich verdanken,

So lag ich als Kind fiebrig  
unter dem Wohnzimmer-Sofa  
Radio hörend; und wusste:  
Der höchste Schmerz ist Ironie,

Ironie höchster Schmerz.

## For Miquel de Cervantes

I was eight. In a radio play for children, aired  
by the Northern German Broadcasting Cooperation  
I met the man from La Mancha.

The windmills were my Grandma's table fan,

Yet I clearly saw the mare, the donkey,  
the enterprising Sancho, the parched  
complexion of Dulcinea, whom  
the children's radio editors had turned  
into an old widow. Ruddy dust.

To the grave, I will not laugh  
about the despondent Knight

and his adventures in the arid plains  
on the foothills of his book shelf  
A childish man who understood everything  
and saw nothing. Had seen everything,  
but not understood-

the burning Sea of Lepanto,  
the feet of Catalina, ready  
to run away with him. Scrubbed clean  
by slaves, the baths of Algiers,  
a motionless arm,  
the forcibly married mother, guilt,  
towers, philosophical attempts to prove

the existence of the Almighty, gold of the heathens;

nocturnal murmurs  
of those converted by force,  
silent screams of the barefooted Trinitarians,  
the last spell of the Abencerrages  
that are to be believed, since no scholar  
has ever mentioned them,

Your as-if: the noblest sentiment

without it we would have no idea  
of love, god, old friends  
and your novel, any novel.

Thus I lay, a feverish child,  
under the living room sofa  
and, listening to the radio,  
understood:  
highest pain is irony;  
irony is highest pain.

**Last entry on a Mark 5.41 website (Talitha's song)**

Alphabetical:

which and by child  
get girl hand

He her I

koumwhich kumkum

Little means

said

say

Taking Talitha

TalithaTalitha

took

translated up

you



# Hella Bauer

## **Introduction to writing poetry (*After Billy Collins*)**

I ask them to share  
the fragrance of the day

or to describe the man  
by his socks

I say extract the eyelash  
from the face and show me  
its wink

I want to find the soul  
of the yellow T-Shirt  
the moment  
in the black curls  
bobbing away

All they want to do is  
extract and collate  
from 'how to' guides

They torture rhyme  
into empty lines.

## Word Song

Words with little brown shoes march  
from behind my brow  
they reach my teeth  
they slide down my tongue and leave  
in cadence in 30-inch steps

the words with brown shoes  
are nice and tidy they belong  
to a correct world  
they make sense and follow the rules.

From the back of my head  
other words dance  
on tippy toes  
they flit  
like fantails

they run zig zag through my brain  
they visit the left ear and the right  
they rest for hours  
behind each eye

when they are ready  
they pause  
and somersault  
out of my mouth.

# Nikki Crutchley

## Worry Dolls

I sit on the park bench, the slats poking at my curved spine, paper bag in hand. I take sips from the gin bottle, enjoying the flavourless heat.

The square in the middle of the city at lunchtime is home to a mixture of vagrants, drug dealers, kids drinking hot chocolate with their parents and women balancing in stilettos wrapping blood red lips around yellow filters, inhaling nicotine for lunch.

I catch a smell of myself as the breeze shifts direction. Sweating onions in a hot pan comes to mind, but the mother and daughter who sit down on the other end of my bench don't seem to care.

The girl, no more than six, leaps up and dances around her mother, a red balloon with a white ribbon clutched in her hand.

'Shall I tie your balloon to your wrist?' her mother asks.

'Yes please,' says the girl holding out the balloon to her mother.

The mother ties the balloon and then caresses the top of the girl's hand with her thumb.

That show of motherly devotion hurts.

I dig my thumb nail into the pad of my index finger, enjoying the pain, and do the same to every other finger.

I don't break the skin.

I can't.

Or won't.

'Worry dolls, worry dolls. Can I see my worry dolls?' the girl asks her mother.

The mother opens a brown paper package, breaking the tape with her nails. She brings out a swatch of rainbow coloured material, not bright and garish like Barbie or everything Disney, but the colours Inca women wear – deep blues, rusty reds and oranges. Lined up on

the strip of material are five dolls, each the size of my pinky finger. They are made of felt, each baring thread slits for eyes and mouths and wearing a knitted outfit of wool.

‘They don’t look very worried,’ the girl said.

‘That’s because they don’t hold on to all your worries. You tell them your worries and they send them away.’

The girl seems happy with this. I, however, am dubious.

The mother consults a diamond and gold timepiece around her slim wrist. ‘Come on, your father should be done by now.’

The girl rolls up her dolls and runs after her mother with the balloon anchored to her wrist following along like a faithful dog.

As she runs by me one doll tumbles out and falls to the ground.

I scoop it up and look at the girl’s retreating back. She already has four. Surely she won’t miss this one. Surely I need it more.

It’s still warm from being grasped in her hand. I hold it to my cheek for just a second. I rub the coarse material with my forefinger, ready to tell it my secrets. I’d try anything.

# Vicky Curtin

## Hush

Hush might have stayed awake for the morepork that was cloistered in the pines beside the house; but in the first days of her second year, a sheep had kicked the sense from her ears. Her mother said it happened. She also said Hush had a father who sailed and a brother that went to India. Hush considered the idea of a father or brother as the joggers took her mother down the hill. One or the other might have braced the coffin on a shoulder, the eyes low. He might have sunk beneath the box as if the weight of her death had bent his bones. But the woman was bungled down the gravel path at an undignified lean; so that Hush pictured her mother's brittle hair flat against the wood.

The house was not quite upon the hill. A bungalow, painted white, plain as a goose; it sat amidst four large pines. There was no garden, and no netting at the windows. From the outside, with the curtains flung, you could see yourself - a guilty mug upon the shadows. The front door was swept of living things, and had a bulbous handle. A priest had seen the inside, but that was long ago. At the mother's death, a stranger moved in. He was only a stranger in the sense that he hadn't put a toe inside the house.

Seb was the first man who didn't tell Hush what the wind said as it pushed up the hill. He didn't purse his lips, like a boy kissing, and imitate the birds. He didn't take her hand to his throat and hum, like the one who caused Hush to be unnerved by the point of an Adam's apple. When Seb cradled Hush, he held her hand and murmured. The first kiss had been in the wild grass in front of the house. It was dusk. The sky was aloof and the distant sea was steel in her eye. He pushed her back, crushing the paspalum, and wound her hair tight in his fingers. Her mother watched from a window.

Beyond the mother's figure, was boredom; walls with pastel

shades that met with architraves like leaves to a branch. The ceilings were stained with the rain that once got through, and the furniture was cold, delicate; feminine. When he came, Seb gave Hush a new bed. She couldn't have him in her mother's because of the hollow in the mattress. He also bought a set of drawers, third-hand, for a hundred dollars. She had dashed down the lawn to see the joggers carting the mahogany chest up the hill. It's alive, she thought, as it kicked about with its short legs.

The first night he slept in their room, Hush took hours to fall to sleep for all the excitement of his finally being there. At intervals, she felt him shift or scratch. But, just before the dawn, she woke alone. She had not expected to find, so quickly, that all was a dream. She cast out her hand to bar the glare and found the moon burning through a gap in the drape. Her deafness poured, new again; and her eyes wouldn't see. She spun her face from the window and blinked upon a shape at the doorway – soon, a head; shoulders. It could not be her mother who was stiff within the darkness of the churchyard far below the hill. At once it was Seb moving toward the bed. He bumped the mattress; fell hard upon her foot with his knee. She laughed then, lurching out to clutch the pain. And soon, with him beside her, she felt “Hush...” upon her ear; a warm breath that, somehow, she heard.

## Beautiful Sleep

Through shadow,  
eyes contort: I am  
an animal asleep, paws  
iron a winter sheet; a sight,  
tomb, boxed alive - alive - and sweet  
abandoned brain, at liberty to bite.

## Scrutiny

I would scrutinise  
the bulk  
of her thigh, this

best expressed  
by the infant-art  
of staring; but

I looked out  
a squinted eye,  
and halved the crime.

Could this  
anaesthetised limb,  
bleed with oil;

or gesticulate  
in the sea?  
I'm a kid - thin,

and palpitate  
my pins  
in vicious glee

against the enemy  
(I'll soon become)  
doused in



a gush of  
femininity,  
as bold as that thigh;

and the rude tide  
that flicks at the door  
like a tongue.

I was young  
to be twisting  
the fate of women;

and distantly scathing  
a poor thick sole  
of a foot glazed

at the sand  
like  
ham.

It was, I think,  
a banquet  
for the new-born poet;

inflating  
reality;  
ogling the shore;

and bossed  
by inconsistent waves.

# Katarina Barker

## There, at the Deep End

I know I like someone when they leave and I don't feel the need to burn their sweat from my pores. Instead of going straight to the shower and turning the temperature to flesh-boiling, I crawl back into bed and wrap my body in the dank, sex-stained remnants of the hours before. When I really like them, I move the side of my face along the pastel cotton of the places they've slept; breathing in the flakes of their dead skin, imagining it finding the warmth of my chambers, imagining it filling all the holes.

It takes me weeks to wash my sheets.

The first time I understood the attraction of having a guy come in me, he collapsed on top of me and my body didn't shrink in response. I held his head in my arms, all of him rested between my hands and I felt something other than biology. I went to sleep and woke up feeling full knowing there was a part of him still swimming around in my abdomen.

I like it. The closeness. It's disgusting but I need it. His body is my body and nothing else matters. I live in his skin and my skin is thicker, less aware, less anxious, less brittle. The bite marks on my collar bone, the bruises on my thighs – they remind me of how much it hurt, of how much I demanded it. I take photographs as evidence for when they disappear. Because they always do. They always do. I glue their faces onto pages next to words that I know will one day break my heart. Even as they come out of their mouth I know they'll break my heart. I write and I write until I can't even look at my sheets anymore. I'd burn my mattress if that wasn't so dramatic. I'd burn his fucking house down. I scrub at my limbs until there's nothing but red bubbles pulsating, inflamed. Get him off me. Get him off me. Get him off me. But that doesn't work so I cut off my hair, bleach what's

left. I throw out all the clothes he once used his hands to rip off me; his tongue to slide through me. The purple lace knickers induce a particular acidic spin. I drag mutilated fingers through everything he's touched and fill black rubbish bags with everything that's left. It's over but I know better than to expect to be clean.

I sleep and wake on the surfaces of past lovers. They're not in my body, they're in my mind. I'd cut out what's in my head if it meant something other than death.

# Dylan Byrne

## **This is a Poem**

This is not a house,  
this architecture is impossible,  
it's views cannot be  
inside single frames of glass,  
there are no rafters  
for tarbucks to be tied

This is not a blue pearl  
tossed on black velvet  
with pinpricks and smears of light.  
No, the tenants that are scrawled  
cannot hope to hammer  
its movements in place

This comes from a tree  
with branching currents;  
it can live in a house,  
perch on a pearl,  
but it is the only thing  
not knotted by them.

# Melody Wilkinson

## Will you marry me in Marina

Will you marry me in the sand  
in the dirt.  
Engraved in the mud

Will you marry me in the rain  
running scared  
in  
soaked jeans  
and  
a useless purple hoodie

Will you exchange vows in the sticks  
with stones.

Can we get a pastor to preside in the blinding dark  
that hides trenches  
and jellyfish guilt

Can we exchange chamber rings in the wind  
with knotted hair.

Will we honeymoon in Normandy  
or Omaha.  
Spend every morning  
combing for shells

Will you marry me in burning logs.  
on the crumbling cliffs of sand dunes

in Fort Ord

Will you marry me in dead windows on decomposing buildings.  
before they blow away?

# Luana Leupolu

## **You Should Never Leave Home**

When you're a child your home will stretch as far as the walk to the corner shop with your parents or your two older brothers. One brother will be skinny and passive and the other will have a large skull and make a lot of jokes. End up a mix of the two. Splash around the inflatable swimming pool during summer and squish pink playdough in front of the gas heater during winter. Accompany your dad to work one day because you like how it feels to write on a whiteboard. Go with your Mum whenever she goes to get a packet of Pall Mall Green 25s, Baseline, and hold her hand because sometimes she gets you a piece of raspberry liquorice as well. The shop owner will like your big brown eyes and wild black hair. Go for years without knowing his name but assuming it is something like Akash or Maneet. When you're fifteen his family will leave the business and he will give you purple freesias to say goodbye. Learn that his name was Dan.

Your high school will be poor and degenerating, and no one there will really seem to mind. Get to school late every day and complain to everyone that you hate it. Exert minimal effort and receive mediocre results. Sit next to the popular girl in Year 11 history and observe her very childlike handwriting. Spend the remaining three years of school wishing the boy you liked preferred you rather than her. Dream of the moment you finally get to leave. Struggle to picture what exactly you want to do when you leave, but be sure that you want to leave. Learn to drive to aid this desire. Make the transition from car park to road prematurely and pop the front tyre on a drain when you try to turn your first corner. Cry because you have to call your dad now and you're embarrassed. Stop crying when he calmly – almost cheerfully – changes your tyre and says, these things just

happen when you're learning. A few weeks later at your graduation prizegiving the guest speaker will be a former student who got rich and famous for playing rugby really well. He will address his audience as Youse Guys and everybody will leave feeling really inspired.

But most of the people from your year will stay at home after that and you should too. Spend the first summer swimming at the local pool and telling relatives you're looking for a job. Spend so much time at the pool that the lifeguard asks you if you would like to work there. Accept on the spot with a big smile and nod and do a really good job for four years. End up in a semi-serious relationship with your much older co-worker which appears to accelerate your mental growth exponentially, then just as you move in together on the other side of town, watch it fall apart. Cite the twelve year age gap and observe him getting really upset because he was hoping you'd have his kids. Begin to feel the blue of the chlorinated pools make your eyes sting and your head spin. Hand in your whistle, keys, log book and sorries.

Move back into the sleep-out at Mum and Dad's. Talk for hours with Dad about the town's gradual gentrification and get your mum's Pall Mall Green 25s, Baseline, for her when she's too tired. Notice that it's been ten years since Dan's family left the corner store and not once have the new owners shown any interest in who you are. Consider that you aren't as interesting as you were when you were a child. Reconnect with your girlfriends from high school to see if you're still interesting at all. A couple of them have kids and husbands. Be unsure of what to make of this. Go to the bar with them and bump into the boy you liked as a teenager. Let him notice that your cheeks are now acne-free and your chest has developed from a pale, featureless plane into a strong, shadowy B-cup. Accept his advances with the same eagerness you would've had at seventeen and try not to wonder why he's not with the same pretty girl from high school, even when, six months into the relationship, you keep catching him talking to her. Put up a good fight for him because the two of you have shared numerous delicate intimacies in the early hours of the morning - sometimes partially drunk but always com-



pletely honest conversations about being lost and unsure and scared but okay because you have each other. Be in love. Be sure of it. Forgive his shortcomings and meet his family and have two kids in the next five years to prove it.

Do all of these things, and do all of them with sturdy righteousness, because you don't want to be like Freya. Freya left here after graduation, and is the kind of person who will go on to become another of those ghastly guest speakers. She will present a speech about getting into a prestigious dance school we haven't heard of and working for three tough years with teachers whose names she announces as if anyone might have a clue who they were. She'll talk about how, even when she landed all the roles and won all the prizes, she felt like she wanted more. She'll talk about how her craving for adventure saw her take up a yearlong internship teaching English in Laos. She'll mention her moments of uncertainty and tell the kids it's okay to have them. She'll put up a goddam slideshow of her OE, and have the whole school in awe, thinking that's the kind of lives they want to live.

She'll look striking and beautiful and happy in all of her photos with her weight loss and her haircut and her bird tattoos but she won't say what it was about the real world that made her change her appearance like that. She won't mention watching her parents balding and greying through blurry Skype calls home that kept cutting out or the evenings she would burst into tears when she got home because there was never anyone there waiting for her. She'll show you waterfalls of the most brilliant blue and shots of real-life wild baby tigers and she'll tell you the world is yours but she'll leave out all the bad parts because she's no different from anyone who never leaves home, just sadder and lonelier.

Ignore her. Ignore anyone like her as well.

## A Poem I Didn't Think to Write

it was the shining bougainvillea on the western corner of the rooftop:  
its colour, its glow,  
its annual summer speech

it was the children who played across the street:  
a stream of babble, pierced by the girl's *Simon, you're not allowed!*  
when their ball rolled out onto the road;  
and the meek one, with the golden skin,  
who cried at the same time every afternoon

it was the small dog who whisked about  
between the pohutukawa shade and the shallows of the sea  
sniffing, snuffling, upturning strange rocks;  
unable to understand why we drove all the way out there  
to lie still on the sand

it was the boozy january night of his birthday party,  
and pressing our left cheek against the cool, silent glass  
that overlooked the harbour;

it was the scent of the breeze that filled the house each morning  
after she had kissed us goodbye and descended the front steps.

*yes, but what bougainvillea? what children?  
whose dog? whose birthday?*

*after who kissed you goodbye and descended the front steps?*

it was being:  
getting it wrong, then getting it right

# Karl Guethert

## Walking Sideways

The young woman  
grips an empty baby carriage.  
Placental ghost tucked  
under the blanket.  
A statue glare rides her eyes.

There's a restricted area road cone  
half submerged  
in the lake.  
Forbidden access.  
Authorised personnel only.

She throws her corsage  
into the algae  
drenched water.  
It floats near living.

Her beer and pretzel husband  
takes their fridge to the curb.  
Writes *Working Well* on the door.  
Leaves it for the rain.

Her blank  
eyes  
speak of the umbilical  
secret she shares with her  
midwife.  
Every third footstep sinks her heart

backwards  
through her marrow.

A shattered ceramic Buddha  
huddles in the gutter  
while *A Hard Day's Night* plays  
for sweat-beaten road-workers.  
They scratch their arms  
and shrug  
boredom into their bones.

Half-hearted cat calls follow  
through the front door.  
Down the hallway  
of smiling photographs of  
lost family  
to the kitchen where they fill  
the wine glasses.  
She drinks them down  
to slosh  
where she is numb.

# Maryana Garcia

## **Memorial in Binary**

He was both intimate and esoteric.  
He lived a sketch of parallel lines.

A march, never made without a partner.  
A violin, never played solo.

The smell of wet, and drying concrete.  
The feel of deserts churned by a transient sea.

Shrivelling pairs of papaya seeds on tissue paper.  
Breeding pastel budgies with binary names.

His life, balanced like a throwing knife.  
His death, cut down the middle.

# Evelyn Birch

## Photograph of Illegal Campfire

Sand sawed wood stabbed into dunes  
pitched up as a tent without the fly  
stark in the flash, and so are our faces  
Sarah's covered hers though, of course.

My smile is only at my mouth  
his attention on the burning of stars, or driftwood.  
Cold sand as our seats.

Yes, this was before  
when rashes washed away  
when Sarah could at least try  
to eat marshmallows melted over campfire.

Was it before  
fresh air goosebumps?  
Before debt to cover toss-ready textbooks  
and fractured frustrations of empty pens  
interrupting the progress of procrastinated paragraphs  
when only eyelashes made eyes water.

There were sticks over me, earlier that afternoon  
arching like the ribs of ship wreck  
my skin aching from sunlight and salt  
A frame of sanctuary without protection.

## 7 ways of looking at lipstick

7.

An olive mug sits on the narrow bench. It's the kind of mug that would fit nicely in a staffroom amongst the branded cups and glasses. However, this mug sits on the bench at home. It's the last dirty dish, and has been for twenty-six weeks. There's a fuchsia stencil of lips. A partial smudge of Flirt. The coffee was tipped out already, but not before it laid boundary lines. You watch him stare at the mug. His arms are damp from the sink, but the warm water doesn't slick down his goose bumps. You wonder if he's thinking about those times you kissed him with that shade. How you thumbed the transfer, tempted to print more. The shadow of leaves flicker across his eyes, but there is no reflection. You pretend the tree is waving to him for you. Like a howl, he pulls the mug into the sink. Metallic clunks and plastic scrapings churn out then stop as fast as they started. The mug joins the other drying dishes with a bark. Bubbles from the drying stack of silver and ceramics scatter and pop. He turns his head as if he can see you. If he could, he would see you translucent and then gone.

5.

The conference flows through the motions with slowness and ease. The team at Public Relations back and forth over problematic areas of company representation. You haven't yawned at all this meeting. The glass of water you brought in has been empty for the majority of the time, and it leads you to believe that it is the reason why you haven't yawned yet. Hydration does wonders.

"We believe that our staff should dress more respectfully in the office. Our clients have expressed... distaste of the appearance of some staff members."

The man droning on about personal appearances studies you as he speaks.

“I think it best we request supervisors to address the issues their team might have.”

Your mind wanders, taking you to the restaurant with the red velvet curtains and the candle-lit booths. There hasn't been a time there that you sat at a table you didn't like.

“...starting with a ban on boldly coloured make up, specifically lipstick...”

Your eyes spark at the words. Most of the people were staring your way, some openly raising eyebrows and puffing their cheeks in disapproval. Of course, you had decided to wear your orange lipstick today.

You divert your eyes down. The minutes of the meeting lay on the table and you slide them aimlessly for a moment. Your head flicks through the pages of questions. People still stare.

“I don't see how bold lipstick is relevant to poor professional appearances, Andy,” a woman says.

She, too, is wearing vibrance on her lips. The shade resembles the purple of pomegranate shells.

“Our client believes it makes the women look like, ahem, hookers.”

She scoffs. It's a sound caught between shoes scraping concrete and cardboard tearing.

“And if I found the men's hair product use to remind me of a seventies soft porn model, would you order them to restyle?”

The man, unfortunately styled with slicked hair and sideburns, blanched at the question. You stifle a chuckle.

After a continued debate, the woman defending the right to wear lipstick, bold or bland, leaves triumphantly – there's a swishing of hips that only confidence can invoke. The men in the conference shuffle in their seats. The matter has left them bruised in places they don't have names for. You make a note to yourself to never let anyone tell you that you can't wear bright colours on your lips if you want to be professional.



4.

Keys knocking on the doorknob give way to the scrap, click. He walks in, all light rain and street lamp glow. Boots, coat, and scarf are tossed on the couch. There's a feeling you get from the way he scuffs to the kitchen. It makes your skin itch on the cushions. Your right elbow scrounges for crumbs. The weaved threads pull. He's gasping water down. Under the nicotine tinge of the kitchen bulb, a blood stain the shape of pursing lips bob on the current of his swallows.

3.

Leon glances at you, biting his inner cheeks. The dress he is wearing hangs from his shoulders. He's still wearing leggings despite shaving his legs. You wonder if leg hair gives much warmth.

You're both standing in front of his vanity and the mirror seems to absorb more light than your skin. Despite that, the foundation you taught him to apply has a bumpy shine. Today was just for the basics. Somehow, he got the medium beige liquid on the basin. It made the squeak you feel in your toes when you rubbed a wet finger over it. You'll have to use Spray 'n' Wipe on it later.

His laptop balances on the corner of the vanity. It's playing classical pieces – Albéniz or something – and the guitar strokes hit the bathroom walls jaggedly.

“Last but not least, we have lipstick,” you say.

Leon bought three shades. They were still in the bag, and you learn he had to hide them under the bed all week.

You peel the plastic from the tubes with him. He selects the middle shade, a delicate rose colour with accents of gold. You demonstrate the motion needed, like the wiping of a napkin at a five star restaurant. He colours outside the line, smudging the colour over the Cupid's bow. Before upset creeps in, you hand him a wet wipe and guide the correction process.

The colour is subtle with his olive skin. It glitters slightly as he tilts his head.

“Welcome to the world of make-up, Leon.”

2.

You arrive with Amber after all the winter's day warmth has climbed through the clouds. A girl with black hair, ironed to a shining curtain, lets you in, introducing herself as Nicole. Amber's friends have already started drinking. There are sticky gummy bears seeping their colours around a white bowl. When Nicole offers you one, your nose tenses at the acidic tang. You try one anyway. Gluey globs of alcoholic gummy bear sink into your molars and it takes a while to eventually suck all the sweetness from your teeth and inner cheeks.

A large bed takes up most of the bedroom. One friend – the one you wish you knew the name of, but cannot remember for the bouncing curls of her blonde hair – has staked claim on the entire bed. Mascara tubes, foundation compacts, eyeshadow pots and palettes swim on the blankets.

As you crouch between the wall and the bed, you twist the lid off your bottle of wine. Following Amber's lead, you don't ask for a glass. The wine slips down your throat. By the time Nicole is applying bronzer, you only have three fingers of drink left.

"Oi. Do you 'av your lipstick on you?" Nicole asks.

At first you don't connect her talking to the fact that she's looking at you.

"Holly, Do you?" Amber nudges.

You blink at both girls. Like a stop-motion picture, you begin to fumble through your clutch for the lipstick. You find it and toss it over the bed to her.

"Do you mind if I use it on my cheeks? I'll clean it after."

On her cheeks? A flash of the club comes to mind: your little group grinding the air alongside a black and white clown. Monochromatic save for the red circled on her cheeks.

You say you don't mind. Your brows raised and a dimple poking the corner of your smirk.

1.

The doorframe is cold on your cheek and nose and ear. You watch Stace unlid the black stick. She twists the outside. Pink comes out, spinning like a ballerina. You tap your hip on the wood, making an empty noise. You're about to ask what is that when she puts the pink stuff on her lips. It stops you moving.

“Can I try that?”

Stace looks at mirror to you. She smiles and turns round and reaches to bring you closer. The stick made her lips like the colour of Barbie's wet hair. The one where it goes from yellow to the same pink as Barbie's car.

“Hold still so I can put the lipstick on you, okay? It's a bit cold, so get ready.”

Stace touches the lipstick on your face. It feels like playdough. She swipes it from right to left, or right to right, and it goes really far to each cheek.

“Nooo, you're getting it all over my face!”

You go grab the stick, but Stace holds it too high for you to get.

“Calm down it's just on your lips. Nowhere else, okay?”

You're still mad 'cause the lip stuff is slimy now it feels like wet playdough or mud. Stace places the lipstick on the sink table, and picks you up.

“Look! It's on your lips. You're so pretty, Holly,” Stace says.

She's smiling big and you are too now. You have the same lips!

6.

You enjoy driving. Sometimes you blow your budget on petrol just so you can get in more ks. There's a road that goes eastwards out of town. It has expansive fields framed by ranges. The green clouds of summer trees are better than any spearmint. The puffs of sheep are like freckles on the cheeks of hills. There are quaint farmhouses along this road – the villas with ornate trimmings lining the overhangs. Your grandfather had an olive green villa. One of the last on his street. He lived on the beach front and his neighbours had upgraded to weatherboard walls and electronic verandas.

You find deeper breaths when driving. The grip of the steering wheel turns your heartbeat on idle, just ticking over.

Today, you're driving to clear the smoke in your forehead. Snide comments built up over the day, causing a fence of traps and spikes. A bundle of possibilities has your brain in overdrive, forcing you to leave work with incomplete emails and reports. There were two other instances of this happening: When your grandfather died, and when you first went back to work after getting married.

The way to the idyllic road is on the opposite end of town. You tap your fingertips against the rubbery wheel despite the radio being all talk. The hosts jest about winter woes, such as showering without heater lights or a heater, period. You wonder if they're being premature in their discussion. It was only February.

The colour shining in the developing blue of the evening reminds you that your lippie has probably worn off. You rustle through your bag, finding the tube under your diary.

You trace your lips, dabbing where the colour doesn't stick completely. Today's shade is that of a peach soaked overnight in raspberry juice.

The light flips to green. The trail to where you want to be is a stuttering process. By the time you're on your road - Macfarlane Street - the grey cloud in your head ought to be dribbling from your nose and ears.

The summery evening clings to the sunlight stealing away to the other side of the world. It makes the trees shadows long and tangled. As you drive, the stars begin to peek out from the sheet of the night. Two of the villas have bonfires spotlighting in the fields. People are gathered, probably roasting an array of sweets and spilling beer on their shoes.

The drive you take offers you a warm hand on your aching shoulders. As you turn the car around, you sigh a smile.

The road is the same the second time, save for the spot where the livestock huddle, and the strength of the fires. You catch up to the group of party-goers. Their driving varies from over the speed limit,

and brushing half the limit. You let your car slow, adding a distance between you and the group.

Your stomach has begun begging for substance by the time you reach the intersection to get back to your home street. The group of erratic drivers have dispersed, leaving you and two other drivers on the road. You turn into the lane to take you home, but as you do, the lights outside drain into lines, and your car flings you inside it. It's paired with the crunching, glittering, and scratching of the metal and glass encasing you.

You feel cold as the machine cage settles in its new form.

The tinkling of glass lulls you away into a sleep you never wake from.

# Liam Hinton

## Lower Gan Eden

The walls of her temple  
    sound familiar  
    in black and white  
    Showerhead swansong  
    he holds her sub atomic  
    Presses her glass finger  
into ink print condensation  
    A southern pulse  
tongues the wrap around whip  
    of the tumble dryer  
    Her split tile figure  
    marks the air wet  
    Ecstasy spills  
from the megaphone  
    Lascia ch'io pianga  
    And into pink ears  
    hands that pluck  
    daddy  
    from the olive tree  
    Kiss  
    The Three Beggars  
    absent worthies  
plagiarised constellations  
    running a mouth  
    over supernova fog  
    Eros and Thanatos  
    hang umbilical  
from mothers waist

She saw her son climb  
The windowsill chips  
spat onto lavender forehead  
But Handel misspelt  
regret  
Transposed  
Rinaldo's overture  
Syncopated on parchment  
a Lover's cock in Braille

*If God won't catch him, the ground will.*

**Red**

It's a photo  
that took a lot of work to find  
and was taken when we were sixteen

By your father  
his nerveless calloused hands  
like skin sewn glove

And he called me his son that weekend  
as family felt their way  
through high tide

We are walking  
my bird bones bent  
around your hips

We are the same height  
on slanted ground

It was taken before your anorexia  
and just after mine  
A meeting of malnourished ribs  
I hope your parents blame me

I'm lagging slightly behind  
like I always did

It's overcast  
Like the earth was on the edge of  
thing some-



God's mouth stiched  
stapled  
You could taste the great collapse

We both love red  
We are red things  
Made in red shapes  
And so we wear

red

That weekend  
you saw me naked  
we all skinny dipped  
Sea spray wrapped around your waist

I'm Irish and you're German  
We hit the light flat

Let me be the first to tell you  
No it's not normal  
and yes your parents are weird  
Your mum's tits clapping  
Your dad's dick in the swing  
The least they could do is hate their bodies like everyone else

And before you ask yes tofu is fucking gross  
No one's ever been a closet vegetarian  
you communist

I feel  
pieces of me try to reform  
the curvature of your spine  
in the candlelight  
But I can't build heaven in a silhouette

So I stalk you on Facebook instead

It's a photo of you  
    and it's a photo of me  
        and it's a photo of us  
            and were together  
                and you are alone  
                    and I am alone  
                        and we are alone together

I want to be made in red with you  
again  
But I'm twisted around the highschool lifespan  
It's more than fitting to leave on a rose

It's not a photo of you cutting yourself  
Or us fucking  
It's a photo of us  
    walking away

# James Howell

## Ambush

At dusk on 3 May 1970, Delta Company moved into its ambush positions on the Vietnamese side of the Cambodian border. The three platoon-sized ambushes were about four hundred metres apart in this rice farming area northwest of Saigon. Starting two days before, other American and South Vietnamese units had gone into the North Vietnamese Army's former sanctuaries on the other side of the border. Our job was to welcome any NVA that were flushed out.

As the company's artillery forward observer, I was part of the command group. The other members of the command group were the company commander, his two radio operators, the company medic, the artillery reconnaissance sergeant, and the artillery radio operator. The seven of us were rear guard of the centre platoon ambush. We set up on slightly higher ground in an expanse of dry rice paddies. The spot had once been a farmstead, and was mostly surrounded by thin hedges of bamboo which are a cooler source of privacy in the tropics than the thick walls of a house. The rear guard set up twenty or thirty metres behind the main ambush, which was strung out behind the hedge closest to the border. Two big bomb craters between us and the main ambush explained why the house site was bare.

The moon was two days past new, so the night was going to be dark. The low clouds from horizon to horizon indicated that the night would be especially dark, and probably rainy.

About ten o'clock, a thump noise came from the right end of the main ambush, just where the hedge ended. Three or four streaks of yellow light skimmed away from the hedge, low and parallel to the ground. They were a star cluster from a 40 mm grenade launcher,

and indicated that we had customers. The whole hedge line began to sparkle and roar with M-16 and machine gun fire, and the detonations of claymore mines. Because of where we were, everyone was tense and alert, with fast reactions.

I got on the radio and started 155 mm illumination rounds coming on one of our pre-planned defensive targets. The time fuse of these forty-four kilogram projectiles ignites the magnesium parachute flare and blows it out of the base of its steel canister, at a point 750 metres above the target. The flare free falls for 150 metres then drifts down the remaining 600 metres over the course of a minute. So, by firing one round per minute, an area the size of a rugby field can be lit up continuously with a garish orange light. The deeply pitched whistle of the big shells coming in will make the hair stand up on the most hardened.

The bottom of the dense clouds was far closer to the earth than 600 metres. For about half of their drop, the flares were only providing a dull glow in the clouds, Halloween colours of orange and black. The lighting effect, combined with the red tracers arcing toward Cambodia and the roar of massed small arms fire made a perfect scene from hell.

In a few minutes, off to the right, we heard one of our other ambushes greet our surviving visitors.

When things had settled down, I asked the Fire Direction Centre to turn out the light, just in time for the torrential rain to begin.

At first light, we examined the area to figure out exactly what had happened in the night. Our ambush killed six men. The second ambush killed three. Of the dead men, two stand out in my mind.

Because the night was so very dark, the NVA single file column had been on top of the right edge of the bamboo when the first shot from the grenade launcher was fired. An M-16 round brought down the second man in their column, right at the feet of one of the infantrymen, who emptied an M-16 magazine into his head. In the morning, after the blood was washed away by the rain, his head looked like a truck had run over it: a flattened mass of white skull fragments and pink brains. He was face down in a position of prayer,

with his knees drawn up under him and his arms flung out to each side. Walking in the dark, his jandals had been a tripping hazard. That morning the jandals were still slipped over his wrists, where he had put them for safekeeping. The man who killed him reported that he had smelled a peculiar odour all night. In the daylight, his shins were covered with brains, the source of the smell. I wonder if the American infantryman ever dreams about that smell. He had to wear those pants for three more days in the heat.

The initial star cluster had been fired by the platoon sergeant, who had been sitting cross-legged at the right end of the hedge, and of the ambush. When a North Vietnamese lieutenant appeared in front of him at a range of about a metre, the sergeant shot him just below the breastbone. The star cluster went completely through the man and functioned on the other side.

The lieutenant had been carrying a big back pack, which had held him up in a sitting position through the night. His legs were V-ed out in front of him. He had a large hole in his abdomen, through which some viscera protruded. At the time of his last breath, his hand must have been in front of his middle; all that was left of it was a couple of tendons hanging from his wrist. His rain-washed face was flung back onto his pack so he looked up into the sky, and into my face. I will never forget looking at him and thinking he looked like a decent sort of fellow, who in different circumstances could easily be a friend.

# Loren Thomas

## Toddler in Motion

I found you  
under boxes of pills  
and plasters.

You,  
little girl.  
Stare away.  
The camera still  
calls for you.

Candied afternoon sun  
coddles,  
melts to your  
blushing shirt.

Look up  
three year old.  
Chubby bunny cheeks,  
lipo-suctioned feet.

Watch out for prickles,  
silent strangers  
hidden in alleys  
of bladed grass.

Be careful.  
Sensitive skin  
plagues you  
20 years down the road.

They'll stick you  
full of dead animals,  
line you with flesh.  
Cognitive dissonance:

you'll love puppies,  
cows too.  
But one is edible,  
one is friend.

The female body  
will be a mystery  
until the blood stains  
steal puberty tears.

That lady with  
a pity smile lied.  
You will not be beautiful,  
but you won't care.

Except for the sneers  
from boys.  
I just want to be your friend  
not your mid-day lover.

Advice,  
decades absent  
best left in the toy box.

You can't hear me  
under the roof of  
plastic and paper.

Baby,  
you're a goner.

## Exploitations of 'you'

You take the ring off  
loop it once around your hair,  
pull the strands taut,  
cut the circulation,  
feed the fish what's left.

Under your nails  
fungus rise  
eating your flesh  
like a \$5 buffet.

You tear new rivets  
into your thighs  
with each pounce of a nerve  
fresh off the daily pick.

Crack your bones  
under five layers of stress.  
You could make a blanket  
from the excess.

You shift your gaze  
like jump rope  
at any sense of fault.  
Puppy dog innocence  
like the wrong lip colour.

Hopeless  
adult child.  
Meander through your  
selfish mind.



Shatter your *self*  
with toy hammers.

I only wish you  
the best of your luck.

# Mark Prisco

## Romancing

I wonder that some devil  
doesn't show when you roll  
the dice across the wave-  
tossed board; and I, up all  
night turning some hot  
Latin word I once  
forgot; my love, we burn  
for this, good. I call  
upon the dead selves beneath  
my toes, the hollow stare  
of those Who Know; the livid  
look of freshmen; the lips  
still questioning; affirm  
you live still in the mind,  
which is real, anywhere  
anytime. We divine  
there's more to death than this  
lumpen flesh I pierce  
with a spade; a glint  
remains in the worm-soiled  
skull interred now some  
6 years, ah: that  
dress she was buried in!  
even, permeates  
the ground with stale perfume.

## Some other time

Was there a time  
the lips met  
a minute before  
the glass was knocked  
and the blood wine  
gushed? Today

is dry; a faint  
mark remains,  
but the sentiment  
is dead, from the waist  
down. The flag-stones  
now bare were

coveted by feet  
that knocked about,  
heels that dug the rose  
bed and the plush  
bed-side rug.

# Jo Buer

## The Rumahanga River

Weeping willows tickle the water in the breeze. Shadows dance on the river's surface. Other shadows skulk below: darker shadows; moving shadows. Eels weave themselves between goose-pimpled legs. Flounder hide in the mud. I remember them: flat fish with dead eyes staring.

The Rumahanga River is alive with memories: gumboots and whitebait nets, summer swims and birthday parties. My grandfather stands waist deep and throws my friends into the air. They hit the water with squeals and splashes and eagerly beg him, "Again! Again!"

Mud, silt and cow poo squish beneath my feet. I curl my toes into the blanket of goeey warmth. It is nice and repulsive all at once. There is a bloated cow carcass rotting on the bank. The smell is putrid; only flies will go near it. The river has its own distinct scent; a unique elixir of stagnant, swampy, and fast-moving water smells.

Cows moo in the paddock and cars thunder over the bridge. Beneath the bridge the water is murky green, almost black in places where taniwha sleep. The cool water gives relief from the hot summer sun. It flirts with us and lures us into its depths. It stores our memories: our romance with the river; the first blush of new love; the fear, the excitement and inevitable heartbreak. The river remembers us as we remember it: the canoeing, the swimming, the paddling...

It even remembers the drowning.

\*\*\*

Wading through murky river-water memories, I remember his

gumboots. The memory is strangely vivid. It is possible it is a lie.

His gumboots are black but muddied brown. They end upper-calf where his jeans tuck in. He is tall and skinny; this I know for sure. Duplicitous memory fills in the gaps: the dark woollen jersey with the odd pulled weave; the short dark hair and serious expression. Sometimes I see him with acne. Sometimes I don't.

He is eighteen and awkward, but not as awkward as me. I am eleven, self-conscious and weird around boys. I do not make eye-contact. I keep my expression serious, in defiance of my awkwardness and the heat that warms my cheeks. He stands in the driveway by the ute with two men beside him. His father? My father? They are shadows lingering on the margins of memory.

I know his parents well; they are close friends with my own. I have met his sisters too. They are pretty and confident and I want to look like them and be like them when I grow up. I have not met him until now. He is here to help on the farm. I do not remember his name.

The Rumahanga runs through many farms. It weaves its way between one family to the next, connecting us all. We cannot disentangle ourselves from the lives that share the river. This is part of the river's beauty, and also, part of its tragedy.

My family's favourite swimming place is a ten-minute drive to the outskirts of our farm: off a major highway; unlock the padlocked gate; follow the worn tyre marks; past the poplars; through the paddock; pull up near the muddy shoreline we pretend is a beach. We make-believe the hard black mud is really fine-grained sand.

Across from us the riverbank rises straight up. Vegetation juts out filtering the light and making patterns on the water. We aren't allowed to swim too close; there are unnamed dangers that reside there. My brother and I think we have it figured out; the shadows hide the lairs of giant eels eager to devour us.

Further down our makeshift beach willow trees have weeping branches that paddle in the water. We stay away by choice. The bridge looms nearby and heavy traffic thunders across it. The water

is almost black. Flounder make their homes in the mud beneath the trees. We don't think they live alone. Sometimes the current teases us and brings us too close, and in maddened fear we swim back to our safe little beach where taniwha avoid the open sunlight, and weeping willows can't wrap their tendrils around our limbs.

On the other side of the bridge the river is not our own. Kids from school live nearby and claim the river as theirs. No one ventures past the bridge.

I wasn't there, but I remember.

Because I know the kids on the other side of the bridge; because I know the gumboot-boy who happened to be their cousin; because I know his sisters. I can see them swimming there together.

Because I know the river, and because I know the taniwha; because I know the shadows that flutter on the water's surface, and spring from unknown depths; because I know the viscose feel of the water as it wraps itself around you, cooling and heavenly on sunburnt skin; because I know all these things, I was somehow there.

Maybe I knew the river better than they did? The river was only safe on sunny days when everyone was smiling, laughing, having fun. The boy with the gumboots must not have known this. I think the river forgot.

The girls sat on the bank, sunbathing, drying off and chatting between themselves. They thought he was goofing off; it was a favourite joke: swim out near the bank of willows; splash around; pretend invisible hands are pulling you under; wave your arms; yell for help... and then...then...with a final gulp of air...sink. Sink down. Let them wonder....Swim beneath the willow branches and hidden from sight come up for air. When their voices rise in pitch you can show yourself and laugh...and laugh. You fooled them!

The girls – they mock him with his thrashing arms and weak attempts at calling for help. “Stop messing around,” one of them yells. I don't need to be there to fill in the gaps of the story. I see them giggling, elbowing each other, and taking bets where among the willows he'll resurface. In absolute vividness I recall this fabricated memory.

They scour the river deep into the night until the water is the same colour as the sky. The police are there with neighbours and local farmers. My dad is there with the boy's father, in a small borrowed dingy with flashlights and grim down-turned mouths.

\*\*\*

His parents came to visit us many years later; we had moved away to where the arms of the river could no longer reach us. Grief had permanently settled on their features, etching a map of their journey in the lines on their faces. His father's eyes were dull, the colour of the depths where only taniwha reside. His mother's eyes held the hope of a nostalgic summer sky; they blazed and burned with belief and prayer. She looked at me, peered deep, as if searching for some sort of affirmation. She asked me if I thought intuition preceded death. I had no answer; nothing to say.

"I think he knew," she said. "Everyday when he got home he left his gumboots muddy and dirty, lying untidy on the doorstep. And everyday I told him off for it. It drove me crazy! Put them to the side and stand them up neatly, I would say. Yes, Mum, he'd say, and yet still he'd leave them lying there in everyone's way." With a gentle softening of her eyes she continued: "The day that he went swimming, and he rarely ever went swimming, he left them neat and tidy, standing upright against the wall."

# Jenny Jenkins

## Bath Night

Red and yellow coal flames catch  
Hot pans of bubbling water  
Mum drags the tin bathtub across the stone yard

Stepping in, water stings my feet  
Slipping down  
Water splashes my eyes  
Soap cleans my grubby knees

Mum scrubs my back  
Washes my jam tinged face  
Fingers curl around the edges  
By the fireplace  
draped towels hold back heat

I stand, making waves  
Hot towel envelopes me  
The smell of Nivea cream on Mum's face  
My cheek hides in her dark curls

Scoured face, body and soul  
Ready for Sunday Mass  
Who's next for the water?



# Hazel Brooking

## Down to Earth

I write my dreams down  
on creased A4  
sealed with the wax of a melted heart  
I use plastic biro  
because my inkwell cracked in the kiln  
and kiwis can't fly  
I try writing lyrics on dusty windshields  
though only birds sing my lullabies  
I've reached my cross road blues  
I turn left because nothing feels right anymore  
others circle high on the updraft  
but kiwis can't fly  
I'm a drop of water and it's raining  
count my bones as I hit the tarmac  
so I write my dreams down  
and snuff them out as shadows are chased across the grass by the  
setting sun  
don't reach for the tissues because when I land  
you will find they're just folded paper

# D.A. Taylor

## From the water (*After Tracey Slaughter*)

And the quarto salt-stiff winedarkdarkdarkdark drunks ... the darkdarkdarkdark lake ice crack ... back ... wet split black blonde unblooming below the surface unblooming ... Look ... Narcissus paused ... the dusty blue ... unblooming. Like ... hyacinths. Here. And here. And here. And here. And you, there you are among the quartos of cider, the coke and vodka half-castes abandoned on formica for a lounge of body heat and bassline hips; there you are in the slow gravity of ozone and coconut oil, sunpink shoulder blade flex, hair salt-stiff and teased into heaps, hoops; there in the winedark splotches like Rorschach tests for drunks and lovers.

Look.

Hyacinth. Demeter. Narcissus. The hiss of gauze and stainless steel, plastic slap, subterranean thunk of the shut-off valve, your arm brushing his back as you retract from the tap. There, always, illuminated by sixty watts of mint cabinets and the bleed of sodium through spider-frosted glass, the easy rise of crawlspace cool drifting between the floorboards like the stream of pearls bursting in his bottle green. Offer a wet plastic salutation; assent to a smile. Watch the rise of his sand-polished cheekbones, the harmonics of crooked teeth, the smoker's split along his bottom lip flattening with the diphthongs of pleasure as he tells you he loves your outfit. He doesn't see the milky smear of deodorant pits, the sprawl of overlocked hemlines, the zips that jam. He's taking a step back to better understand the calculus of your waist, your hips, tits. Lie to yourself; he believes he's appreciating your cotton. Black is always the new black, he'll say. Try to read the topology of his sins etched into his irises and the faultlines that cup his eyelids, the weight of his chest, digit ratios, bicep flex. He'll flick blonde from his brow, offer

a name and an open hand; move drink left and return the favour, palm tilted up to meet his. Promise some collection of letters etched over a weak-willed snapshot, plasticbound in your back pocket and wrapped in hide.

Compare referents. His is a handwave towards the lounge mass and an appeal to receding high school years; we've all known each other forever. I can introduce you. And you give some version of your truth, that you're new to the cobblestones and elms of the city, hunting places to earn brass, to haunt, pollen to breathe. This morning you paused at the smell of coffee and bookdust, wandered the fox-leaved pages; you hummed something made sad by Billie Holiday -- a detail you'll omit -- when a pixie cut floated across shelves. Then That one's great. We don't often get copies in appeared behind you, a blue strand tucked behind an ear, the triple-pierced lobe. And look -- it's a second edition. She brushes your fingers as she offers to cradle the dusty blue of the jacket, turn once to the corner clipped where the price used to be, one over, the paper tender, inviting, to the fineprint of second edition. You can taste each wet fingertip corner, the first spine crackle, the dog-ear abandon, and you tell her it's beautiful, the book, and you haven't seen one like it for an age. Stud-ripped ridgeline of her incisors, a pierced upper frenum when she smiles. A quip on the author, and if that's your style -- oh you've read this too? How about Kafka? Vonnegut? Joyce? Double-check the weight of bronze in your pocket. And the lake ice cracks, breaks; there's the Sorry, I get the feeling we've met?, the faint pull of memory, her plunging amber eyes. You've practiced your lines so many times you believe them now -- new to town, looking for work, fresh faces. A moment's hesitation. You're lonely and magnetic so she opens the doors to her party, a sort-of-New-Years'-thing, insists on the company of your loveliness. An invitation full of simply musts and can't nots, unpredicted, even by you. A restrained squeal at the counter when you assent. Place-stroke-time on the back of the receipt. Bring a bottle. See you there.

There's a lifetime here, just below the surface, if you behave.

And here you are between the dying Sauv and the greasy chip

bowl, repeating. Pixiecut's in her flatmate's bedroom, varnishing nails, so you feel a little untethered with six feet of blonde. He rasps a thumb across his chin, smiles, tells you the town's nice enough, thinks it's a city. But you like that.

Laugh at his quips; he'll laugh at yours. The eccentricities of your accent come from the tans and snowglobes and gilded leaf trinkets of 747s and homeschooling, you say; your vowels well-travelled, your consonants balanced. Compare field notes on pub leaners, the temperature of late-night pavements, fountains at Venice street corners, drying ridges of linseed and cadmium. Beer cap psst ting wobble, green cool and heavy in your hand. Did you know. You've got to climb Ex. You really should see Wye. Another. Replace all punctuation with the interrobangs of enthusiasm. A waterfall of red hair exposes a part of you on Polaroid, the only transcription of the fading night. It makes its way into his back pocket, rubs denim, memento. Look for the pulse of his Adam's apple as he finishes his beer.

He'll check the tension on your bra clips as he leads you out the back door and down the concrete steps, palm dropping down the curve of your spine to the small of your back, pencil lead against a sheet of paper, the cartography of friction. He's passing you his hip flask, whiskey torso warm, nightwarm, bringing it to his mouth. You'll walk-stumble together to the forest at the edge of a park while he lights a rollie, passes it to you, your lips touching his impression in the filter. On the other side there's the river. You can just make out statues. Chloride patina on felt brims, folds of wool. Another tip, another pull. There's the deep itch in your chest, the electricity on your tongue. In the streetlights he glows amber; in the shadow of ash his lips will be lavender. You'll pause, drop the smile, jaw relaxed, the cars on hold off; tilt your head.

He kisses you once, unflourished, and again with his hands cupping your face, like he's found someone worth aching for. Then hard with your back to the bark, ember falling to the roots, your arms gripping bunches of skin through the cotton of his shirt. Wonder what it would be like to have his bitter tang of hops, honey, tobacco

in the still-warm folds of your sheets. Lick. Suck. He's long Sunday afternoons, your hair trailing the narrow of your waist, the tacking of soles against a cool floor. This is good. You'll drink coffee and surround yourselves with first editions, grow herbs on the kitchen windowsill, ask questions of the dead. Bite. Forever. He's lowering you onto the soil, arm around the small of your back, gentle. He's found a way under your shirt, he's undoing buttons, zips, he's shucking his hand into you, clumsy, all spit and nail scratch, his breath acid hot, the yellow prick-curl of his beard in your jugular. Tilt. He's pressing you back to earth, and your neck is infant, lolling, and you're using your no and he's full of shush and baby and ohmygod and yes and fuck, and it's not enough to push back so the dull of your nails are for his chest, his neck, falling away at the basket weave of cotton, the scrag on his cheeks, and your larynx still holds, so you try a scream but his hand is over your mouth bite and taste the earth and grass and taste your wet and you bitch and your cheekbone is hot so you scream again something primal but both hands are on your throat and his hips are still beating and the light from the streetlamp by the road narrows to a whisper, by degrees, a flower unblooming.

Wake, cough; vomit on the yellow grass. There are fingerprints on your throat already, delicate night petals, hyacinth-blue. The air still, cooling. Fragments of Orion, Taurus, Perseus' heel through the branches. Tender situp, cum dirt-congealing. There are still firsts for anything.

Cry while the earth turns without you.

Something whispers to you of his path back to the party; how he's brushed past the apple tree, what'd I miss?, taken his time on the spliff when it's passed beneath the ribs of the clothesline. Until he next takes a piss the only reminder of you will be the tired feeling at the base of his spine and the sticky pink mess of his cock rubbing against satin. He'd gone out for a walk, needed air. Wash it off. Pass. He'll balance his own scales of need and want, peek through the blindfold, forget. And while you lay in the soil you see how he pumps his neck, burns his throat on an unguarded vodka bottle, slurs through to the lounge; there's Pixiecut, laughing over the amps, knees

soft, the division of her thighs, a scar where a fencenail caught, cup empty. Hey, he sloshes from the bottle. Great party. He's breathing into her ear; he wants to talk alone, to the back step, rolls fibres, pass to ash, confesses a history of desire by a shy and practiced smile. I'm drunk so I'm not afraid to tell you. More hands, more lips, let's go inside to the grey duvet, photo wall, pewter necklaces the mirror frame; they're lying on the bed, palms and ribcages and thighs, a sunhat on the door handle, the tide of his hip flask going out.

You need water, the river over the rise. So you hand-knee, hand-bark up, inhale sharp, wince across the green, across the arching bridge, blind to the fullbeams, down the steps to the river, danger: no swimming, through reeds and weeds, the water taking the gravity of your hips. Breathe; there is peace in the drift.

You sing, punctuated at first, something sad and ancient, his name rolling around the bruises on your skull, your feet in the silt, just for him. And he feels it across a patchwork of eighth-acres and ex-state housing: the grip on his throat, a distant I'd better go drawn from his tongue, sill stumble, Pixiecut left marooned on the duvet, and he's drunk off double-exposure shadows, the pavement to the water; you're casting ripples on the other side, a shadow downstream. He's never been so thirsty, so hard, so he runs to you, scrambles across the berm, knees knocking rocks, and he's thrashing the water, gasping, shuddering, the midstream fast, his denim heavy, he's struggling to keep afloat, and when he tips past the point of no return do you stop singing, and in the fall he sees everything in the blacks of your eyes.

There was something buried in his gloaming; you felt it, like a child discovering fire. Drag him to the bank. Reach in, clumsy, unsure. Pull at tendon, cartilage, sinus, sticky fat, liver, pulpy heart; hot, smooth organs the colour of leather. Eat the unyellowed parts of his lungs, cochlea crunch, kidney tang as they slide past some sacred, unnamable palate. And then buried deeper, the alchemy of youth, the verb made flesh, light and sibilants and seasons of sound and colour coming from each turn of his flesh. The high-school biro tattoos, grinding gears in his first car, orange butts mashed into cobblestone moss behind the bike sheds, the electricity of his cum; he's

walking across the park, checking the hip flask slosh, the bedroom, the river, and you.

Give something back -- the tearing of flesh, the untouchable aches, the tar in your lungs, a pound of December flesh, the slurry of sodium and beer spume in your gut, every monoxide and e-number; hide the hyacinths somewhere fleshy, succulent. Commit his body to the tangled downstream and a few pitying words of newsink, a promising young man.

And here I am, the eclipse finally broken, light pouring from behind the shadows. There are things I must ask about the undeveloping depth of the present, the secrets hidden from pith and soot, the permanence of light; questions dreamed long ago in the dying, plumsoaked summer, bathing with my mother and sisters, black hair loose and drifting in the stream. And it will be a voice of pitch and fury.

You've seen me in the water; when you could have sworn some pheromone lingered in a doorway, some laugh in the street, a denimed arse in the wine aisle belonged to someone you used to know, there I am. Like stained glass. You can find me whenever there are the bile-and-tears cowards; I fade into Pall Malls and gin breath and phosphorescent bursts, into side-eyes for lonely girls, waiting. And later, I'll have what burned your tongues, your first heartaches, the colours of childhood. Look for me in those slow February days, dandelion wine, the phonics of the seabreeze tipping the candle flames; or the snowboot slush and brandy tulip tears, pearls and paper stars collecting on the windowsills; the sawdust of this nightclub, the knotted pine of that bar; the ice melting in my glass, stool aching across polished concrete for another glass bouquet. I might have your niece's smile, the cadence of your last boyfriend's step, the lilt and drawl of your ex-wife's hips; she's opening the ranch slider and throwing toast at the starlings and the nine-to-fivers' crawl; there's the blackcurrant meniscus of the bathwater on your first girlfriend's cheeks, eyelashes behind folds of blue cotton; there's the slap of the high jump mat, the sinew of an electric blanket; there's your first guitar-string callous, waxy and white, your palms hot and metallic

from the jungle gym, you're running over the copper bark, breathless and pink, and there's the November breeze, the static of the sunyellow slide; there's the back seat of Dad's Cortina, the sticky lemon slurp and popsicle wrap hush; there's the ping and tug of your first snapper, the black and white rod bowing to the sea; a coin tossed in a fountain, fading, and you.



# Deborah Fraser

## Blessings

When stealth takes your love  
On a wet night  
And your heart  
Like the street cracks open,  
When your brother lies  
Dying abroad  
And your veins  
Are ports in a broiling sea,  
Feed the cat  
Stack the wood  
Fold the washing  
Watch the pitiless day unfurl.  
Lie upon the gold  
Of impossibly scattered leaves  
Let their warmth  
Seep deep  
Holding you still.  
And let the moon cast a blessing  
As only the moon can do.

# Shannan Wiltshire

## **The Season of Becoming Woman**

The old softness I had for you  
is falling through my fingertips.  
I need to say goodbye  
to the layer of petals  
you kissed into my skin.  
To the way  
you stained my bones blue.  
I have a whole universe  
resting inside my mouth  
and now  
I need  
to leave.  
Nostalgia burns me  
crisp and tinted  
in cidered- gold  
I rumble for that peached youth,  
I peel my skin back looking for it.  
Licking rose water  
into the curves.  
Slicing the baby skin  
to rough.  
Folding humanity  
into the womb.

# Rachael Elliott

## Grave

how far did you dig?  
how many colours  
did the dirt turn  
until it finally went  
yellow?  
how hard did you tamp  
tap  
pat

and where is the whine  
of the bullet that ended it?  
where is the roar  
of rain  
on the hood of your blue coat

motherfucker?

underground melody  
muffled, woundless  
it ended up dead anyway  
didn't it?

finger  
gullet  
hollow  
bone

it escaped through the hole you made

but now you won't find it  
see, pigskins rot  
and even though you hid it  
the red dog will  
bring  
it  
back

learn:  
old bones don't stay buried  
there's a kind of music to them  
dormant frets  
plucked from the dirt  
will thrum  
in your picking fingers  
soon  
everything will sing  
and everything will surface  
piece  
by piece  
by piece

**Hedge (after Plath's *Elm*)**

My grandfather winks and loses an eye  
No one notices.

It rolls between my legs into the gutter  
He reaches from his coffin with wet paper hands  
begs me to take his death picture  
no smiling

he flaps around my ankles  
as I  
    lean,  
        lean  
            lean  
                away

A sweater lies, panting  
in my shadow  
Coloured ladies flit to my shoulder  
to dig their pincers in  
pull my hair out  
one strand at a time  
to lacquer the ground

I stretch my fingers  
stroke hot concrete  
My limits burn, bleach yellow  
You want me to keep them out  
shriek when I keep them in  
you cut me  
down to a stump  
and roots

A feathered whiteness shelters beneath me  
They plant their futile children  
in my softness  
to rot  
beneath their shells  
for boys to fling  
for cats crack

Inside me, an itch has made its home  
It pecked itself  
a splintered place to hide at night  
I feel its fur turn  
brush against me  
the rhythmic thump  
of its leg  
scrabbling  
keeps me awake  
I feel it gnawing at its edges  
scuttling beneath my skin

I bloom  
the itch eats me  
the whiteness steals my colour  
joins the other painted ladies  
draped in my hair  
children pick me  
lick their hands  
reach between my legs  
for my Grandfather's eye  
spit  
shine  
eat it whole

## Accounting

first the great unpicking  
seams slit  
with the smallest  
curved blade you  
own  
thread pulled through  
every pin hole  
picture frame  
until it makes a  
hot cord sound

and now, a reading:  
headline written in  
the slash  
of a night time cigarette  
gospel  
thou shalt now  
push a lie  
push a lie  
push a lie, baby  
don't you cry  
the answer is five:

insecure little toadlings to strip  
the paint back  
caustic nose aches  
who  
melt lead paint (green)  
to find the wood  
but never, ever polish it  
it will never rain for

dried up husk children  
unless couched in  
vicious  
laughter

soon, reflections:  
my elbow is the corner of your eye  
my head, blackened to fit the definition  
of your constricted pupil  
view  
nothing flows here  
we are weightless  
in plain packaging  
I will strip  
your accounting of me  
and leave it on the floor  
to polish it



# Jack Kennedy

## Whatuwhiwhi Gates

The first.

Deterrent with heavy chain,  
hardy lock,  
and a hand painted,  
weather beaten sign

*Private Property:*

*Trespassers will be -*

A faded warning from my grandpop  
that never did its job.

Probably for the best too.

The marae across the road  
fed their scraps to the old kunekune  
Horace loved that.

The second.

Always warm from the blaring January sun.

Galvanised steel

should be solid,

should be strong.

Instead it barely hangs on its hinges  
decades of kids ignoring parent's orders

*Don't swing on that bloody gate!*

Tempers stretched

five hours in a car

four sets of small elbows crammed in the back seat.

The third.

Moss covered

always open.

We probably couldn't close it  
even if we wanted to.

*It's a part of that bush now boy*  
he told me.

With cicada shells and spider-webs.

Frayed blue twine  
tied it to the lone post  
of an unfinished fence.

## Kimberley Road

I remember  
the front yard of Kimberley Road  
hedged by blackbird-filled feijoa trees  
tyre swinging from the old oak  
dents in the soft earth by the vege-patch,  
dents that could only be filled by your gentle, gardening knees.  
You shouted at me,  
once,  
when you caught me throwing guavas  
at the neighbours over the fence.  
And then we made jam.

I remember  
the first time I heard you swear,  
we were playing poker  
drinking whiskey to the wee hours of the morning  
and listening to Van Morrison  
in a shed with more leaks than windows.  
You told me stories  
of when you were my age  
Young dumb and full of come;  
Gran was the hottest piece of ass in town.  
Your words not mine.

I remember  
the polished wooden pillars,  
walking proud by your side  
Heavy casket,  
ivory in my quivering grip  
wishing  
for your hand.

Choke back tears,  
save face.  
You wouldn't want to see me like this.  
Be brave.

I remember  
the cold porcelain bowl  
cut into my cheek  
burnt salt sting,  
throat in a vice grip.  
Asparagus rolls aren't so nice  
    the second time around  
this isn't the time for jokes.

I remember it all,  
every time  
that one song plays.

# Dadon Rowell

## Ten Easy Steps to Losing Your Virginity

Step 1. Kiss a boy then kiss a girl. Compare and contrast. You decide to go with boys for now, even though they smell gross. Buy a black lacy thong (apparently boys like them), hide it from your mum in your top drawer and never wear it.

Step 2. Arrange to meet someone who is a brother of your friend. Meet him in a quiet park or behind the bike shed; make sure it is somewhere appropriately dodgy. Pretend it doesn't feel like a dead slug when he puts his tongue in your mouth. Give it 5-10 minutes, then emerge after his roving hands get a bit too adventurous.

Step 3. Wait 4 years.

Step 4. Meet a guy with a suitably hipster shortening for his name, a guy who feels 'disenfranchised' by society. Spend several years in awe of him, make sure you are willing to do anything for him. Well anything except that thing – because deep, deep down you know he is a twat. Never introduce him to your friends as he is 'not that kind of guy', the domestic kind you guess he means. Don't call him your boyfriend as you both agree labels are dumb. When he cheats on you, wait two months then see his fiancée on Facebook. Realise fully that he is a dickhead.

Step 5. Spend several months generalising all men as scum of the earth. A tip: get drunk often, as that will help with concocting creative, man-hating similes. 'Men are like trees, they take forever to grow up.' 'Men are like puppies, they're cute and you take them home, then they shit over everything you love.' You can even

bond with other women over your shared disgust. Kiss a few more girls, have some fun but if you don't find the girl for you, return – grudgingly – to the male species.

Step 6. Have a sudden and urgent desire to get fucked. Lie awake at night agonizing over how fat and unattractive you are and constantly ask yourself 'why won't someone just do me?' Begin frequenting alcohol-fuelled parties and get tired of waiting for Mr Right. Settle for Mr Right Now. Wait for 10 minutes as he tries to undo your bra, get tired and buy a bag of M&Ms instead.

Step 7. Feel left out as friends discuss sex and give you superior looks. Get angry as it's not like you haven't done any 'research'. The end result of Step 7 should be crippling loneliness. Keep repeating until the loneliness really breaks your kneecaps.

Step 8. Have a range of men hit on you in increasingly creepy and inept ways. This should happen at work, on the bus, online and especially if you have the gall to walk anywhere at night. Slowly discover the courage to tell them to fuck off. Try to remember the last decent guy who was attracted to you; think on this for several hours and come up with the answer. Pour yourself a glass of wine.

Step 9. Regress to the first part of Step 6 but realise that not just anyone will do and you'll have to wait for a suitable person to show up. Resolve that when your person shows up you will punch them and demand to know what they think they've been doing for the past 3 years.

Step 10. There is no step ten. You will have to repeat Steps 7, 8 and 9 until the bastard shows up.

## Selfie

Heap on paint, chalk and dust  
– bleach might work too  
Fill every pothole then bury those ridges and hills.

Tar the filaments that are not black enough  
Drag them skyward, twist them, seal them in place  
Should they refuse, attach new ones instead.

Dip paintbrush in blood, smear it on thick  
Construct a bow, tie it tight  
- don't let it slip.

Edit the last defects of Mother Nature,  
Excavate cheekbones with hot coals  
Brand and sear until those false roses have bloomed.

Now a pose and a pout, capture the effigy  
And finally –  
string it up for the crowd to see.

## Because You're Worth It

You're worth it. Worth kicked-in knees and broken back. Worth white corridors and black boots; worth a cage and no oxygen. Worth torn clothes, ripped body, slashed mind. You're worth that one blanket.

Five years, ten years, the black cap you should know you're worth it.

No tears, no smiles, no face, peel back the skin – no skull. You burn that face with gasoline, you douse those eyes in bleach. It's not blind, it threw the scales away, it holds the sword and it fucks you up, because you're worth it.

Try to speak; open your mouth, clutch vocal chords and play tug of war. Ding ding, you lose, scalpel and gloves drip red, and you know why – because you're worth it.

Wrists out now, back you go. To blood-filled corridors, decaying hands, back down. You kiss the boots or they kiss you because they know you're worth it.

The camera is on, why won't you speak? Unwrap the bandages it's your striptease. No chink, no bruise, no mark at all. Some glue, some glitter, an airbrush, they'll make you shine because you're worth it.

Lights go out and bed for all, not you though because you're worth it. You're worth the day, the bright - no night. Cameras go out and your light's glued on, shutters come down – bolted in place because you're worth it.

Pick a sheet bend, a half hitch; pick a noose. You've chosen right; they all know you're worth it. Unless you agree to kneel now. Or would you prefer the row: five men, three words, the iron rain. No answer, oh well they'll choose for you.

The shout, the thunk, the spade, the pit. No marble, no words, no rest, no peace and you know why, because you're worth shit.



# Maria-Teresa Corino

## A is for Apple

Y is for yawn. Chilled, gassed, waxed apple zombies in supermarket bins, undead-never-alive fruit. The devil would have trouble tempting Eve with them apples, be she ever so bored with the endless perfection of paradise. I see her, naked but for her hair, spitting out a floury mouthful, puzzled in the New World produce section. Yeh, nah, Adam, I've no idea what the fuss was about, don't bother tasting that. Let her step into my garden instead, where gnarled, old-man-bearded trees are teaching me the magic of apples.

Bright fruit beckon from the very tips of the tallest branches. Birds answer their call, and carve one perfect cone deep into each fruit. Red apples sweep the garden into once-upon-a-time. I step carefully to avoid crushing sleeping princesses. Leaf-shaded fruit is green, yet so ripe that several thunk onto the grass at the least touch. The best apples are tiger-striped by the sun, translucent orange on green. Even the smallest swells its skin like Sophia Loren fills a skirt. I bite into fruit in the autumn sun, after just a Huckleberry wipe on my shorts. No poisons, no need to wash, but each bite is an adventure: ants, beetles, larvae have colonised most of them. Half the apple is corruption and decay --a happy home from the bug's viewpoint--half is pristine palest green crystalline flesh, so firm that it tests the strength of my teeth. A solid crunch echoes at the back of my head. A gentle sweetness, sharper at the skin, floods my mouth. Juice washes my chin.

Comfort me with apples says the song of Solomon. Yes, later, with wrinkled winter apples, with pies, jams and jellies and tarts. But for now, as the last of the year's heat melts my bones, tempt me, thrill me with red apples straight from the tree.

# Renée Boyer

## The Morning You Left

the sky is a hallmark card  
on acid.

blue (like my niece's eyes) with  
slashes of  
chemical peach

it smothers the horizon  
a volcano in slow motion  
spewing light  
over shadowed ground.

clouds scud across the surface, spelling out a  
morse code message.

things always sound more  
beautiful  
in a language you don't  
understand.

# Mel Martin

## Not Pretty Enough

Today, I watched the video on YouTube of a woman justifying her right by birth to feel beautiful.

She spoke phrases like “even though”, “in spite of”, and “despite everything” which brought tears to my eyes. I wanted to wrap my arms around her size and tell her that she is more than the lack of a gap between her thighs.

What I really wanted to know about her wasn't the number on the tag of her dress, but how she deals with stress. What it is that she thinks she gives to the universe, and how if she weren't on this planet, life for someone would be just a little bit worse.

I wanted to bathe in her charisma.

I wanted to pretentiously click my fingers in the front row to let her know that the poetry she's slamming is changing me... In a way that I will never be able to properly thank her for, her poetry was an attempt at saving me... I was inspired by that big beautiful woman to start writing a new poem of my own called 'People Who Love Me' and to finish it by crossing off the name of anyone who has ever made me feel ugly.

For a long time I loved a boy who couldn't tell me I was appealing, “even though” it was invariably him that instigated being with me sexually. I treasured him “in spite of” beautiful girl after beautiful girl he would love that wasn't me. And I loved him despite the words he spoke casually.

Like ordering from a drive through...

“I don't want to be with you.”

And then when I asked him to let me go, he said no.

Today I watched a woman speak about being adored in a way I've really only ever dreamed of. She smiled about being left behind

as if it were a favourite past time; she wrapped her heart around insecurity as something that needs a hug, and anxiety as if it were something to be loved.

I was caught off guard by that.

Because I also live within a social order that lets a scale dictate the way it is okay for me to look. I live in a world that will not consider my experience or qualifications because I use crutches to walk. I've never been in love which I suspect is because my world has spent this life insisting that I'm not pretty enough.

I am struggle, and strength. I am experience. If nothing else, objectify me for my tolerance, and my spirit; or the home-job tattoo on my paralysed leg that says "LOVER".

# Hamish Ansley

## OCD

Christmas lunch at my grandparents' house. Well, Boxing Day to be precise. Leftover turkey, salad, potatoes litter the table. I've locked myself in the bathroom and I'm doing lines off my grandfather's shaving mirror. The only uncluttered surface I could find. Even in the bathroom there are ornaments and knick-knacks.

The lace tissue box cover.

A frightening skeletal doll, her crocheted dress concealing a toilet roll.

I cut the coke with a new razor blade from a foil packet and honk it up through a fresh twenty. I'm running the tap to mask my snorting.

I've locked myself in the bathroom to escape the crimes being committed in the kitchen.

The spilt gravy staining the tablecloth.

The pus and blood layers of trifle leaking into each other. Fallen crumbs from the base of a cheesecake embedded in the carpet. My grandmother's habit of hanging the dish towel on the oven door and her good wine glasses with that faint puke smell of dusty cupboards.

The kitchen here is always filthy, not just at Christmas.

My kitchen is my favourite room in the house. Nowhere else are there so many surfaces to polish.

The granite benchtop. Dark and expansive as a galaxy. If galaxies had a thin film of disinfectant.

The grand stainless canyon of the sink. The shining faces of the appliances.

The fridge. A double door Westinghouse. Big as an antique wardrobe with an ice maker and on-demand chilled water.

The dishwasher with nineteen programmable cycles. Three for

delicate glassware.

The dual compartment, steam-assisted induction oven.

The La Marzocco coffee machine in Monza red. Fifteen bar pump and full three-sixty swivel head for frothing milk.

Nowhere else are there so many delicious decisions to be made.

How to arrange the cutlery. Left to right:

knives

forks

spoons;

teaspoons at the bottom.

Sundries in the big compartment on the far left. The Ready-Sharp vegetable peeler. The Finger-Saver can opener.

Bottle opener corkscrew gadget. Knives for spreading pâté and cutting soft cheeses.

Utensils go in the second drawer down.

Tongs.

Big spoons.

The fishslice.

A ladle that never sees use.

The garlic crusher. Cast aluminium. Hand wash only.

Glasses go on the top shelf of the corner cabinet with the transparent door. Then, working down:

coffee cups

breakfast bowls, bread plates

dinner plates, round and white, middle shelf

porcelain and glass serving bowls.

Wine and beer glasses in the pull-up cupboard over the fridge.

Sometimes I'd imagine being employed to go into other people's houses and arrange their shit. Standing there in the temple of my kitchen, I'd think:

I'd enjoy that. Being paid to put things into order. Alphabetising record collections and shelves of books.

Organising people's wardrobes. Left to right:

jeans

buttoned shirts

knitwear  
jackets;

shoes on a powder coated wire rack at the bottom. T-shirts folded into one foot by one foot squares and stacked in the drawer. Colour coded. Prints facing up for easy identification.

I dreamed of this at night. Between waves of Egyptian cotton and pillows the size of whole continents. I dreamed of being paid to deliver perfection. To make people's homes emptier so their lives seemed more full.

So I did it.

I took out a business loan. I shook the bank manager's hand and complimented him on the sharpness of his suit. In return he slammed APPROVED on my loan application form. Towering inky red block letters that gave birth to:

**Simply Neat: Solutions for Life**  
**Make it neat. Make it perfect**

I printed four thousand business cards with that slogan. Four thousand palm-sized billboards. Minimalist as a Mondrian painting. I specified thick, quality card stock. 600 grams per square metre. Twice the density of your average estate agent's card. Matte finish. White. Black seam.

A simple serif typeface. Also black.

—What is it you do exactly?

An uncle asks me this, staring blankly at the business card I handed him. Focussing more on dusting a strawberry with icing sugar. White powder falls onto his grey shirt. I sniff and rub my nose and vaguely recall how I got here. I remember a young cousin being furious I was taking so long in the bathroom.

—I help people de-clutter their lives, I say. The uncle looks from the card to me, his expression unchanging.

—So interior designer then? He makes a limp-wristed gesture.

—Of sorts.

—And there's a market for this? He sounds insulted.

—Yeah. I shrug.

—I mean, I can understand people needing what I do, he says.

They're building a house, they need earth moved. Drainage. But this?

I smile weakly and take the card from him before he soils it further. Just one of the many cards that started everything.

I left them in swanky wine bars and the better restaurants in town. Stuffed them into plastic holsters in paint shops and home improvement stores. Stores that sold shelves and curtains and clever ergonomic pressed plywood trays for balancing espresso on while reading in bed.

I had thirty clients within the first week. All kinds of clients.

There were the self-described 'young professionals.' Couples a few years out of university. They'd have advertising internships for developing Korean car companies under their belts and now work in middle management. They'd just bought their first house. Their boss was coming for a schmoozy dinner. Golf ball-sized portions on planet-sized plates and exchanging witticisms that contained barely trace elements of humour.

They wanted a raise. A corner office. They found my card while out shopping for the right bathroom hand towels and called me.

There were divorced middle-aged women too. Women who in the 1980s slathered themselves in baby oil and ignored the growing ozone hole so that later in life their husbands traded them in for younger, less leathery-skinned models.

Reformed drug addicts who had become addicted to organisation as a distraction from the latent desire for a hit.

I think I identified with them the most.

Instead of jamming needles into their veins they jammed their old clothes into black rubbish sacks and took them to charity shops or left them on the kerbside for collection.

I did the same.

With my company credit card I bought:

Two dozen linen Armani shirts in Eggshell and baby blue.

Six cashmere Burberry scarves in various tartans.

Six pairs dark selvedge denim jeans. Also Armani.

Six pairs brown patent leather brogues from a London boutique.



The latest Breitling watch. Brown leather strap.

I arrive in this get up to Christmas at my grandparents'. I park my new silver Alfa Romeo next to some American car. Some sixties throwback. All false vents and lurid colours.

—What sort of engine?

Someone's brother in law asks me this as I slide out of the hand-stitched leather seat.

—V6, I reply, removing my tortoiseshell Clubmasters.

—You're a couple of cylinders short. He gestures towards the American car.

—Yours, I gather. I gesture back.

—Supercharged, he says. 709 horsepower.

—Well, this is very quiet and comfortable, I say, and head inside to find the bathroom.

For a one man start up business, so many clients should have been a problem. I didn't let them know this. Instead I used it to my advantage.

When they called me and begged for a consultation—their word, not mine—I ummed and ahed and rustled papers and said I could probably, maybe, fit them in in two weeks. At the earliest.

When I did meet with them and they asked me how much I flipped open my leather agenda and pretended to consult a printed spreadsheet. Really there was nothing on the page. Really I pulled the prices from nowhere, letting my imagination take me.

At first my consultation was free and the work I carried out \$150 an hour plus travel expenses.

—Payment is eighty percent up front, I told them.

Fitting out a double wardrobe would be twelve hundred dollars for all the racks and cube storage shelves for storing ties and socks and underwear. I know because I'd done this in my own house with a laser cut modular system from a local manufacturer.

After the first four months I added a zero to my hourly fee and doubled the price of the wardrobe surgery.

Business continued to boom.

After the first year I refinanced and bought the factory that made

all the shelves—storage solutions—including the laser cutter, the staff. I hired fourteen more guys to go around fitting out wardrobes and other jobs that required power tools. I put them in practical but name brand clothing:

Dark-coloured Wrangler work shirts with detailed Western yokes. Selvedge jeans.

Clarks desert boots.

I put them in white Mercedes vans with my business card blown up and signwritten on the side and spent my time on less arduous jobs.

People paid me to wander around their house reassuring them that their Reservoir Dogs movie poster or their Jesus and Mary Chain 1994 tour bill in no way suggested a lack of taste. Teenage nostalgia was so in, I told them. A simple black frame would make them look as refined as any self-conscious piece of art.

And then they'd pay me to go and buy the frames. To slip the posters in behind the glass and secure the back with brown paper tape.

After that I realised it wasn't enough to organise. People wanted my opinion on style too. I started telling them if they chipped away the plaster on their kitchen wall to expose the brickwork and installed a stainless range they'd achieve the New York loft look. Some bullshit I read in a magazine in a doctor's waiting room.

These people were masochists. They'd always got what they wanted. They'd never been denied anything. So when I got all faux enraged and told them that their lives weren't perfect, that their sofa looked like something the 1970s had thrown up on, this was a kind of thrill for them.

This shit turned them on and when I left I knew they'd get right to fucking. To breaking in the new king slat bed with beech headboard and nautical striped duvet cover.

Sometimes their lusty advances were directed at me.

This job gets you a lot of attention. Usually from gay men who assume that because I can order weatherproof cushions that perfectly compliment their outdoor furniture online in like four seconds flat I

must bat for their team too.

When they ask I always wink and say:

—I can neither confirm nor deny.

I know it's cruel of me to lead them on. Especially as I've cornered—fuck it, pioneered—this market. Sex or the implication of it is not necessary for a repeat gig. But if their checking out my ass in skinny jeans while I'm aligning a wall hanging with the coffee table keeps me in Armani shirts, I'm not going to complain.

I've only ever gone there once. And never in lieu of actual payment.

She asked me to stay for dinner. I'd just helped her choose a new kitchen table, plates, napery. Most of my clients have Italian-made tiles on every bathroom surface and seven shelf laser cut glass hi-fi racks in the living room. She didn't seem to care about any of this. Her place was a mess but in the newly minted perfection of the dining room she came into focus.

Her hair looked like being afraid of the dark. Piano black and endless like a universe.

—I'm glad you talked me into new cutlery as well, she said, holding a knife and looking at me down its hand-sharpened edge.

After dinner she brought out dessert. A kind of miniature Death by Chocolate in a coupe glass. She sat opposite me again.

A few minutes later her foot was in my lap. The white half-moons of her French pedicure smiling at me from under the table.

Five perfect little seductive smiles.

A few minutes after that we were on the new table. We broke almost the entire set of new plates. She cut her ass on one of the clear white shards.

—That'll be tough to explain to the boyfriend, she said.

In the end she couldn't, so the boyfriend left.

I suggested a new floor rug. A gesture conciliatory for her and celebratory for me. You can guess how that got christened.

But it wasn't all fucking. Nothing as convenient as that.

She suggested we live together. Right there and then. Before either of us had put on the clean underwear necessary for thinking

these sorts of things through.

—Whose house? I asked.

We debated this naked in the kitchen. I poured the post-coital Shiraz and we stood on opposite sides of the kitchen island. After an hour she leaned over, pressing her breasts onto the cold granite benchtop. And then she played her joker:

—I'll let you do whatever you want. To this place I mean. Think of how much fun you'll have.

That weekend I was dragging suitcases up the stairs to her apartment.

Her apartment with its harbour views from the bedroom and deep divots in the floor rug in the shape of her knees. With its perfect dining room and mess everything else.

I'll admit I wanted a project. With my business practically running itself I never got to make anything neat anymore.

More than that, I wanted to make it neat for her.

So she'd come home to find new things in place of old and old things in new places.

Retro bedside lamps with braided cloth cords and big vintage bulbs. Filaments inside thick as fencing wire. The Swiss-made, galvanised wall clock above the coffee machine in the kitchen.

—Tonight. Anything you want, she whispered after she saw our toothbrushes in the same turquoise holder on the side of the bathroom vanity. Apparently toothbrushes are cosmically significant.

As if spreading saliva on intimate parts of each other is less of a big deal.

Three perfect weeks this went on before it happened. Like I always knew it would.

I was in the kitchen in a silk kimono, swinging my legs off a new native timber barstool. Reading the newspaper and pondering which part of the house to rearrange next. She came into the kitchen looking for breakfast.

—Where's the toaster? she asked.

—In the cupboard, I said without looking up.

—Why?

—Sorry?

—I mean why can't we just leave it on the bench?

—Oh, I said. It upsets the clean lines. Looks neater without it.

—But I use it every day. Her volume going up a couple of notches.

—It's so hard to get it out of the cupboard? I said. There was a pause.

—Why can't you just be happy with the way things are?

The new wall clock ticked by five seconds. The last thing she said to me before I left was:

—This could still work if you'd just lower your standards.

I returned to my apartment with its perfect rooms and my mess everything else.

—Do you have a girlfriend or a... partner?

An elderly aunt asks me this. She's clamped her hand round my arm and her fingers are red and craggy like boiled yams.

—No one steady, I say.

I don't tell her that there was someone and that to forget her I've buried myself in work. What this really means is that I've started giving in to my clients' flirtations.

I don't tell her that I've been tugged off into expensive face cloths and ridden in white leather tub chairs.

The aunt squeezes my arm tighter.

—You've no muscle, she says. Women like a man with muscle. You work indoors too much.

I don't tell her that the women I know like to be tied to headboards and doused in Dom Perignon. I don't tell her that instead of working out I take cocaine.

I don't tell any of them anything.

Not that a major national style magazine asked to interview me. Called my office one morning and said could they do a profile on me for a section about successful young business people.

So I agreed. And that's when I started doing coke.

They sent over an attractive junior reporter. I was pouring wine and imagining her in various positions on my sofa when a

hairy-knuckled photographer arrived.

I sighed and diligently answered her questions. Then the orangutan snapped some pictures of me in the kitchen. My favourite room in the house. There's me leaning on a chequered butchers block. Holding a cup of coffee and looking pensively out the window.

The interview was a complete success. There I was on glossy paper. Eleven inches high, action figure me. Not quite Bowie or Lou Reed cool but give me a guitar and I'm there. Choice quotes in sans-serif type scattered carefully on the page. At the bottom they printed my business card.

A week later I was getting calls from across the country. Rich arseholes demanding to see me.

Sometimes I was catching three flights a day. Flying five hours for a ninety minute consultation. Flying back again.

A client offered me some coke and I said yes.

After that I was honking the stuff in airplane bathrooms just before the seatbelt sign came on and the stewardess asked everyone to please return to their seats in preparation for landing. We will be taxiing past the main terminal and disembarking down the stairs. Please remain seated until the aircraft has come to a complete stop. The local time is...

—I don't know how you do it, my clients would say. All that travelling.

I fly back again. It's 2am and I'm wired. I spend the next three hours cleaning my apartment. Go to bed. Sleep till eight. Black coffee. And now Christmas lunch.

—Does your job take you anywhere interesting? A cousin's wife's sister asks me this.

—Oh, all over the place, I say vaguely.

I don't remember the names. They're printed right there on my boarding pass in a dot matrix of block letters. They're announced over the speaker system. A major chord as if to herald good news and a bored airport attendant's voice. The flight has been delayed by two hours.

Or worse. The flight is right on time.

I look at the gate number and the airport clock in screaming red letters. Where I'm going makes no difference. I only ever see the inside of people's houses. Their bedrooms.

I take some naughty salt and fly back again.

Back to my empty apartment. I sink into a replica Eames chair clad in calfskin. It's the blue hour. Not quite night and not quite day. When everything struggles for colour. When everything is a sort of pale blue.

I finish off the remnants of a gram but I don't get high. I just feel floaty.

I feel myself rising. Up towards the ceiling. I thank God for recessed light fittings.

I look down and vaguely recognise what I see. Some part of my brain feels warm with memory but the other parts fail to translate.

I know those polished concrete floors. That wall hanging. I know that kitchen.

The double door fridge. The dark granite benchtop. The coffee machine. I know them but I cannot place them.

There's a man I know too. His outline is familiar but I can see none of his details. Nothing to tell me who he is. He sits before an orange glow. The only source of colour in the pale blue room. He's dropping things into the orange ball. The same thing over and over. Little white rectangles of glossy card.

There's writing on them but I can't quite make it out.

# Brittany Rose

## Dad Weekends

The house is an a-frame, which means the second floor bedroom has a low sloping roof. Inside, there is a young girl with a shock of black hair, leaning against her friend's shoulder under the low ceiling. They flick through a magazine. She has a tendency to suck her thumb when she's tired or when she's concentrating even though people tell her she should have grown out of that habit by now. Her friend's dad always catches her. Even though he's downstairs she chews the nail on her index finger instead.

This is the fourth fortnightly sleepover that the girls have had at the mid-reno house. Last time they went for a bike along the river; the time before that they went fishing for eels in the gully under the moon. The dad calls them from downstairs in the lounge with the orange speckled carpet and log slab coffee table.

As they peel spuds the dad lights the fire. Scrunching newspaper he asks, "Why are women's feet smaller than men's?"

The girls don't know. The black haired girl chews on the inside of her cheek and her friend fiddles with the curl that falls behind her left ear, slightly matted.

"Why?" murmurs his daughter.

"So that they can stand closer to the bench."

They shuffle while he belly laughs.

The potatoes boil and the girls set Yahtzee, moving the hunting and fishing placemats away. Because her friend doesn't have any siblings, they always end up playing board games or card games with the dad, too. He growls them for counting on their fingers when they add up their scores.

The girl with the black hair needs to pee, so she goes to the bathroom and scrunches her nose as she flicks the toilet seat down.



The plastic seat hits the bowl with a bounce and an echo. She never has to do this at home because her mum taught her brother to put the seat back down, just in case his sisters fall into the cold ceramic bowl in the middle of the night. At her dad's the searing cold against upper-thigh is a startling way to wake from midnight toilet trips.

Sitting on the loo at her best friend's dad's house, the girl looks up at the calendar and wonders why the dad needs to check the date on the loo. Then she stares at the blonde girl with the big boobs while her pee tinkles against the bowl. She's never really seen pictures like that, not up close, just glances and flashes - pictures always whipped away before she can take a proper look.

Once - on a dad weekend - the girl's father had had a fight with her stepmum. They went to his friend's house to stay the night. Sitting at Craig's dining table with her brother and sister, the girl with the black hair played with a blue plastic spinning top from the Happy Meal she'd had for dinner. The girl's dad had picked up a magazine with a large red mast-head that read 'GIRLS'. There was a lady on the cover. She was holding tongs, and standing at a barbeque in a polka dot bikini. The girl's dad had flicked through it, leaning back, raised his eyebrows and passed comments over the girl's head. She'd tried to peer over the edge of the page to see what was so interesting about a girl magazine.

"Not for your eyes, Biddie."

He shut the magazine.

Sitting on the loo, the girl stares at the calendar on the wall. She doesn't wonder if the lady works at the welding place screenprinted across her ripped top, and she doesn't wonder what the tool in the lady's hand does. But, she does wonder, again, why her best friend's dad needs a calendar in the toilet. The young girl stares. She takes in the denim cut-off shorts, frayed at the edge, tanned thighs spilling from the hem; the mouth, with parted lips painted bold; the flat stomach, smeared with black grease and the swollen breasts bursting from the tight, tight tee. She kind of knows that she shouldn't be looking - that it's not for her eyes - but she can't help it.

The girl finishes peeing. She scrunches up some toilet paper,

wipes, and pulls up her pants. Then she flushes the toilet, washes her hands under the mismatched taps and goes back out into the lounge.

**a long body of water**

flooded from silver taps  
girl submerged

four feet,  
    twenty toes  
her glitter nails  
clipped jagged  
glisten  
beneath the faucet

hair floats between her legs  
ripples sit at her navel  
steam rises  
from her rosebud nipples.

when she releases the plug,  
pulls the chain,  
she feels water

drag  
against her thighs  
whirl down the drain

# essa may ranapiri

## impose Their language

You borrow from faggots  
and queers alike  
a thief riddled with

Foucault's chains-  
are not chains are  
linked at the opposable thumb  
scraping back the paint on your corneas

Imprint  
the context  
on your friends and family

with signifier of cloth  
projector screen  
warps at the edges where it isn't straight

Otherwise known as bullshit  
non-binary is complete  
and utter-  
It doesn't fit with zeroes and ones hun  
paint the nails and trim them back  
to raw

Your name is like the dusk  
a photosynthetic blip  
of masking tape

your beliefs  
have nothing to do with it

wrench in the gasket  
the piston is in and out and

Right in his fucking asshole  
lies the law  
a sun the size of a jungle  
feels like a fist

jolting the skull  
loosening the grey matter

should tear off your hair to make everything match  
the tool is pressed to your tail bone  
you know what to do

with the rest of the problem  
you c  
    all a genderless body

in the no man's field  
ripen beyond seeds  
ferment beyond willows

And swallow what you spit up.

## Circadian Rhythm

*There are so many nows and they keep  
happening*

I would love you on one knee.  
Turn each one of your quips into a dose,  
and consume.

the mouth open wide  
and the hand down the pants tracing paper  
on the thighs.  
Playing script down my throat.  
Something like *love me tender*  
or *choke on this*  
in your eyes.

Slide to the side, the words will never look finished.

Shared the couch at Wonderhorse  
you were to my left  
my whole body was swivelled to face you  
I talked about a fucking t-shirt for a good minute or so just to keep  
the focus on:

Dope-stunk-  
sick-range-  
*Aubergine* your favourite

A solipsistic dog insisting that the swimmer got it all wrong  
by placing a world within your eggplant basket;

The fish fell in love with you.

So I tattooed it onto my wrist

see here ichthys;

it weeps fertile, a circle with a point

Opening-----m-----

-----e-----

ichor thistle

You said the navel

You said

The knee is plastered to the ground and I can't suck your poison out  
fast enough

make a cup with my hands

draw discordant

like a satchel in a tight breeze

Not sure what you're getting at or how

but I want all of you down here and in all of me

like snapper or hoki or-

Sentiment

and bullshit on the lino;

Where bodies fuck/ and come

apart/ like dry leaves.

**not delivered due to lack of postage**

I want  
your dog of marriage  
hempel collected  
sketchbook bound  
to  
take up the plastic  
and teeth graze the  
marks of fibrous hooks  
into the epitaxy  
valium.

The sticker wasn't indication enough;  
Turn it.  
One out of two sides is not hidden.  
One out of two sides is a car door slam.

Nonsense;

*there was a tradition of that  
once*

Bottom lip twitch  
clear-throat cough,  
isolated spittle  
mottled oropharynx  
vibration.  
Cricket call at 300 bpm  
muted.



Trying to recoil the strength to do something about it.

Poltergeist of the inner ear

denies notification

to avoid empty serotonin rush

we would have called it a river if we could see it

but we can't.

## Contributors' Notes

**Dr Tracey Slaughter** lectures in Creative Writing in the English Programme at the University of Waikato. Her work has won numerous awards including the 2010 Louis Johnson New Writers Bursary and the 2004 BNZ Katherine Mansfield Award. Her collection of poems and short stories entitled *her body rises* was published by Random House.

**Aimee-Jane Anderson-O'Connor** is in her final year of a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Waikato. Her work has appeared in *Starling* and *Tearaway Magazine* thanks to the Waikato writing programme and the tireless support of some of the best people on this great watery rock.

**Conor Maxwell** is an actor, writer, tutor and post-graduate student of English at the University of Waikato. His claim to fame is that he once defeated national icon Jason Gunn in a fist fight, but don't ask him about that, because he'll just deny it.

**Jeanie Richards:** Aussie exile who has lived in NZ for the last 20 years. Studied Sociology/Philosophy at Waikato from 95-01. Returned to work at Waikato in 2012 where she has been dabbling in creative writing. Interested in social justice issues and prospecting.

**Henry Lee** is an unpleasant person who staggers into his writing every morning drunk on lethargy and wine.

**Tyla Bidois** is a BCS student & poet from Mount Maunganui, New Zealand.

**Fiona Wells-Lakeland:** I am currently a research student at Waikato University, preparing to take a Ph.D in English next year.

**Norman P. Franke** is the convenor of the German Programme at the University of Waikato. He has published widely about German Enlightenment and Romanticism (Lessing, Novalis) as well as German-speaking exile literature (Albert Einstein, Ernst Kantorowicz, Else Lasker-Schüler, Karl Wolfskehl) and Albert Schweitzer. Norman's poetry has been broadcasted on NDR radio and published in anthologies in Germany and New Zealand.

**Hella Bauer** reads and writes incessantly. She writes poetry and creative non-fiction to revisit and express the joys and challenges of being alive. For a living she creates web content, manuals and much else.

After seven years of working as a librarian in NZ and overseas, **Nikki Crutchley** now works as a freelance proofreader and copy editor. She is currently writing her first novel but enjoys the challenge of writing flash fiction, which is fast becoming a favourite pastime.

**Vicky Curtin:** I'm a mum, writer and painter.

**Katarina Barker:** One day I'll do more with words than just write them.

**Dylan Byrne:** I am a BCMS student at the University of Waikato, but I often take the opportunity to study English, Psychology, and Philosophy in my spare time, or as additional papers. My writing usually takes me into the realms of poetry, graphical stories, game design, and cartoons.

**Melody Wilkinson** is an RN BSN graduated Suma Cum Laude from Regis University in Denver CO where she grew up. She is currently writing a blog with the only goal to make people laugh. She received the Sam Barnes Award for excellence at Waikato University for her screenplay.

**Luana Leupolu** is in her second year of a violin performance degree at the University of Waikato. She is originally from Otahuhu, Auckland.

**Karl Guethert** is a graduate of Waikato University, currently awaiting graduation for his Masters in English. Writing is in his blood, which is concerning because he often bleeds ink...

A bibliophile to the core, **Maryana Garcia** is also an aspiring polyglot. She has a passion for all things beautiful, and continues to work towards the goal of changing the world with words.

**Evelyn Birch:** I'm an aspiring editor, halfway through completing the degree needed to prove I am competent enough to be an editor. I'm a great worrier with a knack to appear as tired as I really am. In the past I've been successful with my writing, and I hope to continue that trend.

**Liam Hinton** is an actor, writer and student of Theatre and English at the University of Waikato. His claim to fame is beating Conor Maxwell in a fist fight ask him about it because it's true. Plagiarism is bad.

**James Howell:** My wife Janet and I are both native Texans who migrated to New Zealand in 1999. Our daughter and two grandsons live near us in Cambridge. I am a retired drilling vessel construction consultant, and have worked in Northern Ireland, Denmark, Azerbaijan, South Korea and Singapore.

**Loren Thomas** is a University of Waikato student currently working towards completing her masters. She has previously been published in Mayhem and Poetry New Zealand.

**Mark Prisco:** I'd like to thank Winz. Without their support my poems would never have made it thru the womb.

**Jo Buer** is a Canadian-Kiwi who is easily enthralled by the written word. She has a B.A in English and History, and a Masters in Teaching. She is currently working on writing her first novel – a ghost story spanning the 1940s and present day.

**Jenny Jenkins** is a new writer, taking interest in poetry as an undergraduate student. Her interest is the past, the memories that linger and are given life again in her poetry. Jenny is keen to explore the structure and architecture of the display of words on the page.

**Hazel Brooking:** Bachelor of Arts student at Waikato University. Enjoys writing, theatre, as well as writing for theatre.

**D.A. Taylor** is a graduate of Tracey Slaughter and Catherine Chidgey's creative writing programme at the University of Waikato. His piece draws inspiration from Slaughter's short story 'consent'.

**Dr Deborah Fraser** was a Professor of Education at Te Kura Toi Tangata, University of Waikato. She retired this year and currently is taking lessons from her border collie in fitness and agility.

**Shannan Wiltshire:** Graduate in History and English Literature from The University of Waikato.

**Rachael Elliott** has an MA in creative writing from the University of Waikato. She was Editor of *Nexus Magazine* (which received three Aotearoa Student Press Association awards) and she won the 2degrees Poetry Slam in 2014. Her work has appeared in *Poetry NZ*, *4th Floor* and *JAAM*.

**Jack Kennedy** is currently in his final year of a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Waikato. When he's not playing golf (terribly) or serving beers, he writes the occasional poem or story.

**Dadon Rowell** is a second-year student studying English, History and Linguistics. She is addicted to writing and will one day be making use of her authorial initials – D H Rowell.

**Maria-Teresa Corino** arrived in New Zealand from Italy via Australia. She's been an under-age winery guide, flight attendant, broadcaster, researcher, almost a lawyer, had a bit of a book published. She's loving university now that the internet has been finally invented but there are still some paper books left.

**Renée Boyer** is a manager by day and a writer by night, and occasionally at lunchtime. She lives in beautiful Raglan, is studying part-time towards an MA in English, and while she enjoys most types of writing she has thus far had most success as a playwright.

**Mel Martin** is a Waikato-born and bred playwright, poet, stage manager, and director, with qualifications in journalism and communications. She is also a co-founder of Hamilton theatre collective BlackBox Creative; recent directorial credits include *Punk Rock* by Simon Stephens, and most recently the musical *Spring Awakening* staged at The Meteor.

**Hamish Ansley** is a writer of short prose inspired by reality but heavily fictionalised. He is some way through a Master's thesis about masculinity in contemporary fiction.

**Brittany Rose** was an avid childhood reader. Her grandmother was a librarian, so she spent most of her childhood with fiction. Now, as an adult, she's the Editor of *Nexus*, University of Waikato's student magazine, and very nearly an English teacher. Her pieces have been published in *Mayhem Anthology* and *Poetry New Zealand*.

**essa may ranapiri** is a gender-queer poet who writes a lot, some of it is good. They study English at the University of Waikato.

## Submit to *Mayhem*

*Mayhem* invites submissions of creative prose and poetry from across Aotearoa New Zealand. We consider all original, previously unpublished works that have not been simultaneously submitted elsewhere. We are open to submissions at any time.

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