

MAYHEM



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Mayhem Literary Journal 1 | March 2014

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Mayhem Literary Journal

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Tracey Slaughter

Editorial

There is a moment in a creative writing workshop when the air is utterly charged, the tension visceral. You raise your page to begin to read and your throat dries, your voice catches under your ribs, your gut contracts. The words you've prepared spill over the paper, a quake of dark marks that follow the faultlines in your hand, no longer under your control. The shaking spreads to your breath, your self-belief. But you go on. And although the story cracks and halts, the poem shivers, the room is transformed around you. The scene you have faced—raw loss, dark laughter, the memory that haunts, the shadow you've dared to give voice and shape—lifts off the page, unlocks from your body, and enters the silent circle of those who listen. And their response, before any critique is offered, any insight phrased, is palpable. Your words have reached them, made their chest wall ache, made them blink and sweat, unsettled their pulse rate. The mayhem of sick nerves that rushed your circuits when you started to speak has been worth every perilous thrill. Your words have touched down on skin, made contact with your reader.

Mayhem Literary Journal is a tribute to moments like this. The fuse that leads to our opening issue was lit when I first stepped into a creative writing workshop on campus: from the outset, as I listened to students exchanging their work-in-progress, I knew I was in the presence of explosive talent that demanded a wider audience. Session after session in the workshops on my papers—during the original Summer School 'taster' ENGL318, the core Undergraduate papers which developed from Summer School's success, ENGL215 Voice and Image and ENGL314 Creative Nonfiction, and the Graduate paper ENGL546 Writing and Embodiment which was freshly instituted in 2013—I continued to encounter voices that needed to

be heard, visions that deserved to be hung in a public space. The aim of establishing an online forum in which this exciting work could be stored and shared became more urgent. And from the moment that I first approached FASS to seek support for the initiative, the response (for which *Mayhem* is crazily grateful, particularly to Cathy Cross, our cyber-angel of all things mysterious and technical) was a resounding yes. *Mayhem* sparked, *Mayhem* spread.

The concrete task of building a space where this work could be showcased might still have seemed insurmountable however without the active and on-fire input of students themselves. Like most of the writing collected here, the editorial team of *Mayhem* was ignited within on-campus workshops. Intoxicated with the sense of creative connection that came from the workshop experience, a number of students found themselves unwilling to surrender the process at semester's end, and went on to form a splinter cell they christened Write Club. This radically gifted group of students continued to meet with ruthless devotion to their workshop, to trade, celebrate, and sensitively question their developing work—and Write Club became the core of *Mayhem*, its engine room and hands-on inspiration. When confronted with the step-by-step reality of putting together a literary journal, I knew in this dynamic body of students I had the source of energy I needed—they possessed that strange rare blend of traits that every writer must have a streak of: drive mixed with mad flair, disciplined practicality spliced with passion, commitment to both craft and wildness, rigorous practice and reckless audacity.

It is my hope that in opening the pages of our inaugural issue the reader is drawn back into some echo of the workshop space where most of these pieces were originally shared. When these works of creative intensity first arrived in the room they altered the atmosphere. When the searching grief of Carl Unternahrer's 'Hollow Point,' the gritty political assault of Jeanie Richards' 'Sorry,' the rhythmic psychic fragmentation of Stephen Henderson's 'Pill Time,' the carnal chant of Rachael Elliott's 'Write the Body Bloody,' the brutal vulnerability of K-t Harrison's 'The Things I Carry by J-O-R-D-A-N,' the fierce testimony of Kristy Lagarto's 'Coloured Dirty'

were witnessed in the workshops and readings where they were first delivered, the air was electrified. Listeners knew the power of a fine piece of writing to warm the skin of the heart, to chill the back of the brain, to use language to colour outside the lines, to deepen, complicate, invert, irradiate our view of the world and our fragile selves within it. We knew in our spines the risk that had been taken, knew what it had cost the author to speak. Other pieces collected here may have been slipped silently into portfolios, but their capacity to seize the reader's senses was no less palpable: only a few hallucinatory images from Monique Van Lamoen's 'By God I'll Never Touch Another's Heart Again' surfaced in the workshop, only a bare hint of the rough authentic voice of Chris Lee's 'Gone Riding' was heard in class, but I clearly remember the awe I felt when the finished pieces—luminous, warm, disturbing—unfolded from their final portfolios. And perhaps this demonstrates another truth about the writing gathered here: these poems and stories are not just objects unleashed from dream, pain and instinct (although few writers would deny the centrality of those sources)—they are also artefacts of acute control and strict commitment, their lines weighed and balanced, their sound tasted, their images precise and honed. And lest you get the impression that creative writing is solely a misery business, the slick observational nuances of Erin Doyle's 'Burlesque,' the eloquent black wit of Hamish Ansley's 'Room 101' and the slapstick striptease of Onyx Lily's 'A Short History of My Vagina' led the workshop from wry smirks to dirty chuckles to belly (or lower) laughter.

So: in launching our first edition of *Mayhem* we pay homage to the workshop moments that have stilled and stirred us, to the words that have entered our bloodstreams because they seem to have issued from the writer's own. For each writer who stepped into that moment of intimate jeopardy in the workshop circle, there was another watching who was fired by their act of courage, a catalyzing process we hope the experience of reading *Mayhem* will continue on. Welcome to our online gallery of voices.

Erin Doyle

Burlesque

I'm not sure I like this. The women around me are clapping and emitting high pitched yowls of appreciation. I don't really see why. It's weird. The chair I'm sitting on is black and hard, and because it's normal sized and I'm a bit short, my lap slopes downward, forcing me to hold onto my sketch book and pencil with tired, sweaty hands.

The woman in front of me is wearing a fur coat, of all things. She keeps shuffling, moving in her seat, blocking my view. She and her friends have brought strawberry cider with them, their pee coloured bottles sit under their chairs. I had thought this thing was going to happen at a bar, that there would be tables, and drinks, that I could split a bowl of curly fries with my friends. Instead, it's in a bare room, with stackable chairs and a small stereo on a rickety table in the corner.

The music stutters again, throwing off the illusion of the one woman show before us. This time she doesn't look up, only tries to carry out her choreography unaccompanied. One by one she grips her gloved finger tips with her teeth, pulling the fabric loose. She rests her high heeled shoe on the seat of a chair, and steps on the fingers of her glove, sliding her arm free in one slow, fluid motion. She swings the glove over her head and sends it flying into the audience. My friends yowl. I uncross my knees for half a minute, then cross them the other way. The music resumes. I'm not sure that I'm into this.

The second glove lands by my feet. The woman unties the black ribbon lacing at her back. The knot holds, and she abandons it, turning in circles with a flourish of her naked hand. The turns don't

work with the music, she must be trying to cover the awkward struggle with the ribbon. I look down at my sketch book and the faceless pencil woman, seated in a red, wing backed chair with a black furred cushion covering her from bust to knee, the lines of her massive thighs worked and reworked.

When I look back up, the woman is opening the front of her corset. The ribbon was just for show. The audience yowl and clap as she reveals her pasty wobble of a stomach. I feel bad that I'm being judgemental, and quickly decide that while I'm not impressed with the view, I am impressed with the woman's courage, so I join the clapping. My pencil rolls across the sketchbook and hits the floor. I try not to scramble after it, I try to pick it up in a smooth movement, but my sketchbook is in the way, and it takes me half a minute of shuffling to get it. This wouldn't be happening if we were at a bar.

The woman unhooks her bra, a black thing with a fringe of white tassels. She slips her arms out, and holds it onto herself, her fingers spread out across the fabric. She turns, she steps towards the audience, leaning forward, shaking her breasts. People clap and call. She spins away, and flings the bra off. Her breasts are smaller than I had thought. She's wearing pasties, stick on nipple covers. They look like green felt bullseyes, looking down at her toes. I don't think I'm into this.

Catcalls and clapping follow her off stage, not that there is a stage, just an open floor space. She returns with the bra back on, and poses, side on, straight backed, hands on knees. Throughout the audience pencils fly over paper. I rub out the first line I make. Someone told me once that every time I draw a person they look like they have Down syndrome. All the drawings will go on display at the end of the evening. I try not to draw these women fat, it's bad enough I'm drawing them retarded. I leave empty space where her hands, feet and face go, and focus on the curves of her back and legs, the lines of her bra. The MC announces that there's only a minute of drawing

time left. I glance at my friend's page. She catches my eye and holds up work a thousand times better than mine and laughs at how bad it is.

I'm not into this.

The MC announces the next dancer, the headline act, as it were. Just back from the Miss Burlesque 2013 competition. I saw a documentary on it once, so I expect to see some real skill on display. The woman who comes out of the back room is old enough to be my grandmother.

In a room of thirty or so people, she dances to a song I don't recognize, but I love the irony of the chorus using the phrase, "For your eyes only". She's wearing a cheap mask, with three purple feathers sticking up to form a lazy head piece. I wait for her to use it, to tell a story, but she doesn't. She takes her gloves and corset off in the same way as the others. She's wearing pale blue high rise knickers that look like they've seen better days, but that could just be the colour. They could be new.

I'm bored. I flick through my drawings trying to decide if I can make them any better in the time I have left. I rub out a few lines. Add a few smudged suggestions of eyes, so they look a little less faceless. The old woman whips her bra off. Her breasts hang, wrinkled skin over deflated balloons. I make an effort to keep my face politely blank, try not to let my eyes go wide, scream "Holy shit!"

I'm really not into this.

The audience yowls and claps, she sweeps a braless bow and people cheer. I clap too. This woman is brave. I like bravery.

The MC invites us to bring our drawings up to the front of the room for all to see. I only bring up two of mine, strange faceless pencil

beings in detailed lingerie. I hide them at the back where no one can see them properly. Prizes are given for the best three. I talk to some of the dancers. I am given a business card by a woman with breasts the size of my head exploding out of a red, white and blue corset. Her pasties are hearts of red glitter. She tells me dance lessons start in a month. I say, I'll be there! Because, I'm not at all into watching other women take their clothes off, but I would like to be brave.

Windows

Cheryl Ward has a lovely voice,
Delicate and precise.
Cheryl Ward speaks softly,
About the adaptations of horses.
Cheryl Ward looks like
Alice.

Alice fancies older men,
Who break her heart again,
And again.

Another
Alice sits in the crowd,
And smiles when the speaker looks her way.
She wears a scarf that blends into her
Hair.

The Alices have no accents, not
Like Cheryl Ward.
Cheryl Ward has an accent, the same
As Jeff's.

Jeff breaks all the rules,
He doesn't think they are important.
Jeff calls you foolish
With his superior, twitching,
Librarian nose.

The second Alice has a lovely nose,
Though it is often red
In the mornings, when she talks
About the genetics of cows.

The first Alice doesn't care for cows, or for horses,
She much prefers her office.
Her office has windows that overlook the city
And a photo of an older man, about to
Break her heart,
Sitting by the telephone.

In Cheryl Ward's office, a picture of Jeff sits
Between the computer monitor and a tray of paper clips.
Cheryl Ward's office is underground.
Cheryl Ward has no windows.

The American Woman

The American woman stands in front of the room. She is wearing a sun shine yellow quilted jacket, the thread outlining circles that the thin padding swells to fill. I imagine it is plum instead. Straight lined wrinkles radiate out from her upper lip, pulling the eye into the thin curve of lip. When she stops talking to listen to a question, her tiny mouth looks like a soft red beak.

The flesh on the backs of her hands is withered, and almost solid brown with liver spots, except where it stretches white over the fine bones that run from fingers to wrist. She has old lady finger nails, strangely translucent and oval. She leans on the table, her fingers together, pressing against the wood, and they look more flexible than fingers should. Her knuckles are knobbly and wider than the lengths of bone that separate them.

Her hands dance as she talks, and I don't hear a word she says.

I imagine her hands masked by grey coloured clay. I imagine her right hand shaking beyond control, the pale skin on the pads of the fingers deflated, descending toward me, whipping my wet skin with the tips of the fingers. I imagine her hands wrapped around the metal handle of a walking stick. I imagine her hands buttering bread, and placing a cold cloth on my forehead. I imagine her left hand resting on my own, feather light, to still my twitching. I imagine those hands curled around a tiny posy from the garden, folded over a still chest.

I miss the American woman when she goes.

Rachael Elliott

Enamel

enclosed in pink
I slice my way through
squash down on hard baked rusks
tear free
test my edge on nipples,
cucumber and sweet peas
months later
I am growing a better me
far inside
but fever burns a hole in my replacement
not to be seen for seven years
my defect caves inward
brown stained reminder
of sweat and fears

years later
I break at this seam
on the handlebars
of a blue and black mountain bike
I snap and bury a piece of myself in a lip
paint myself red
fly into the dirt
under a tiny kauri tree
leech into the soil
pull up through the roots
splay out on a branch

My emergency repairman is late for golf

he fashions me a yellow brick hat
to cover my sharp edge
sends me to heal under a fleshy blanket
days later
my regular guy
trims my hat back
rasps sharp edges
puts me in a firing line
buffs me clean

years later
I tremble over a glass of water
split in half the other way
not short, but thin
behind the shine
a flake of myself floats away
no one notices
so I dance

Write the Body Bloody

At the back of the body is a label that says “This
body belongs to...”
There is no name in the gap.
I would write my own name
but no matter how I stretch I cannot reach
the neck grows strained and pinched with trying
and I trust no one to write it for me.
No one will know who owns the body if it is lost
it will exchange its tag for a Jane Doe labelled toe
and be explored by med students.

The body has a secret name which not even I can
know
How does one look at a tiny child and see their name
blooming from them?
Men who glimpse letters from the body’s name make
its world spin
but none has scooped it with his tongue and poured it
in my ear
Some have not even looked for the name
but named the body themselves
(which the body does not care for)
Names which the body cannot forget
Names tattooed through the body’s skin onto bone
‘gorgeous’, ‘bitch’, ‘honey’, ‘slut’
It is hard for the body to move with these names
cracking in its joints.

Perhaps its true name is so long that no one will ever
read it
or it is tattooed near its spine
curving black brushstrokes beneath its skin
pulsing in the red blood of its pages
perhaps that is how the man with the fists
saw part of the body's name and used it
to keep me locked to him, longing.
By spilling the blood of the body
with his hard centre
wiping it from his body with such care
I couldn't help but think he knew its name
and would not share.

The body has a currency of touching
and a market for parts
lips go for a kiss
legs for a stroking
vagina for the voice that cracks the body open
and grunting, sews it together with purple thread
but what costs the body the most
are the things left behind

the body is not a rubbish bin
but a receptacle for needles
marked 'Hazard' and painted the colour of warning
people want to take the needles away
clean the plastic bottom of the body
with sour disinfectant
but they are afraid of where the body has been
so it grows larger with sharpness
and no one will touch it for the brokenness within.

the body is afraid of pain, but craves it
if I do not provide

the body will create its own pain
so for years I cut the body
with the blade of a blue pencil sharpener
and while I passed out the body danced
flicking blood into the shadows
and we were friends.

Then I could not slice the body anymore
but I knew it needed hurt
so I scratched the body with a pin
but it scowled at me and punished
my lack of commitment to the body's pain.
I forced the body to lash out
so I bled after three months of not bleeding
and its gift to me was washed away in the tide
I did not give the body the opportunity again.

The body practices its relationship with violence
but weakens in the final moments
crumpling to the dirt
shaking, clammy
it leaves me to clean up its messes
and makes choices before I can think
the body puts me places I shouldn't be
like amidst a bar brawl
arms up, swinging
before I realise I've crossed the room
and my friend saves me from the body
and I am left spent as though the body has run a great
distance
wishing she had let the body go
so I would not have to hurt the body myself
only search through the blood for its name

the body will love no one until they learn its name

but it's not telling
so I lie cold in bed with it
in dread with it
clean sheets shushing over shaved legs
lavender pillow against its head
and wait for the body to kill me
as I am nothing to it.
The body knows no sorry
knows no fear
the body exists with animal blood
running from between its teeth and hands
and gasping wet
dies without permission

Cancelled

the head is the stain
of blood run from my nose
to the sheet beneath

the neck is the whip
that lashes the back
to shreds of paper that blow

the shoulders are the shelves
that hold the knowledge

the breasts are the bags
for the rocks and the fear

the ribs are the chains
that hold me close
so I can wriggle and writhe
but never escape

the stomach is the site of the struggle
where, with your wolf grin
and your red hands
you took me

the hips are the rails
that hold back the crowd

the thighs are the headstones

in the broken graveyard

The knees and the ankles
hinges to the door
the lock you broke open

the feet are the paws
of the rabbit
ripped off for luck

but the stomach
is the site
of the struggle
where,
with your wolf teeth
you split me
from my mother

you clamped our cord
clipped me free

and I didn't
breathe
just spread my stain
from the neck

my stomach now
the site of the struggle

so you wrapped me
in blue plastic

and I died

and you smiled

lifted the lid
and threw me
away

K-t Harrison

The Things I Carry: By J-O-R-D-A-N

People around me talk about me and around me. Around-about me. I'm a roundabout. And in normal talk to them-normal-talk-selves, and to my mother and to my sister and to my brothers who know normal-talk, they talk only to them-normal-talk-selves.

They say around about me, he's not all there.

So it must be that I am not here. That's because I'm all over here and I can see you.

Hey, I say. Hey. Here I am.

And I wave and I wave. And I flap my hands, but roundabout me, they cannot see. He's a handicap, they say. They're all like that, they say. Handicaps.

He's a good looking boy, they say.

I'm a good looking boy.

What a waste.

Waste.

Pity.

Tee.

If I could talk to you in normal-talk language so you can understand me, this is what I would say to you.

And then you would know.

My name is Jordan Te Awanui Taurima. Jordan Big River, one-more-river-to-cross.

My sister Rosie says to me. Look at me, look at me and say, Jaw.

Jaw.

Din.

Din.

Look at me, look at me and say it together.

It together.

No, say Jaw-Din, Jordan.

Jaw-Din-Jordan. Jaw-Din-Jordan. Jaw-Din-Jordan. Jaw-Din-Jordan.

Good Boy,

Boy.

I go to school in a taxi-van-bus. I put my lunch in my bag and my bag on my back, and my colour red underpants for accidents in my bag on my back. And my ticket taped to my bag on my back for when I get lost and found.

I am Jordan Te Awanui Taurima.

Special Needs Class.

Satellite Unit. Victoria Street Normal School.

I am lost.

Please ring 095) 2765-9990111,

And say you found me.

Thank-you.

I wait at the gate at my home-matey. And all my special needs are in my bag on my back. And those are the things I carry. And I hop on the taxi-van-bus that takes me to school. See you when you get home-matey my mummy says.

I wear a colour red hat and a colour red jersey and colour red over-pants because I like colour red. Glo-heart lollies: but not tomatoes. Strawberries: but not tomatoes. Tomato sauce: but not tomatoes. And I count to four and get a glo-heart, and I write,

J-O-R-D-A-N and I get a glo-heart, and I have clean underpants all day, and I get a glo-heart.

I'm a good-boy-Jordan.

I go to my classroom, Special needs class. Satellite Unit. Victoria Street Normal School. I go past the two legs children. Handicap, handicap the two legs children say and to me they point and to them

I point too. And they say bugger off you doongy egg. And I say egg. Don't like eggs. And they show me two fingers and I show them two fingers too.

And they hahahahaha. And I hahahahaha all the way to my special needs class. And I hang up my bag on the hook where my bag-tag says J-O-R-D-A-N, that's where it goes because that's my label above my bag hook. And everyone has beaten me to class again, because they don't stop to play and their bags are all under their name labels. Hello Mrs Bo Bell, hello Danika, hello Mathew, hello Jerry, hello Derek, hello Monty, hello Andrew. Hello.

At my Nanny Jo's house, in my Nanny Jo's garden at her house grow lots and lots of flowers. Red, and yellow, and pink, and green. Violet and purple and blue. We go to her house to visit her. She is not well.

Rosie, take Jordan outside in the garden, Mummy says. Go play in the garden Jordan. Go play on the swing. My sister Rosie picks some flowers. Not like that Jordan. Pick them nicely.

Lee.

We put the water in the bucket and we put the flowers in the bucket and Rosie says smell Jordan and I say, smell Jordan and I haaachooo. Haaachooo, haaachooo, haaachooo. And Rosie says yucky Jordan you put your snot everywhere.

Yucky Jordan. Yucky Jordan. Use paper towel!

Come have a see-saw Jordan. Up, down. Up, down. Up, down. Then I get off and walk away and Rosie gets a sore bum she says. Ow Jordan not spose to just get off. I hurt my bum.

At my Nanny Jo's house, the children with two legs and two arms each laugh and laugh. Hahahahaha. So I laugh too. Hahahahaha.

What a doongy egg. Hahahahaha. So I laugh too. Hahahahaha.

Laughing at us you doongy egg?

Egg. Don't like eggs.

I'll bash you.

You.

And I laugh. Hahahahaha.

And I play the game. With them.

I stand in the middle and the children hold hands and dance in a circle around me. We play Simple Simon Says and they make me win that game every-time because I am Simon now, not Jordan. And the children say, and I do. And I scratch my bum because Simple Simon says to. And the children hahahahaha.

Then we play look who is there punch-a-nellow funny fellow and I am in the middle and I am punch-a-nellow funny fellow, not Simon, not Jordan. And I pull down my colour red over-pants and my colour red underpants because, 'what can you do punch-a-nellow funny fellow? What can you do punch-a-nellow funny man?' Then I cover my eyes with my two hands and I wait for them to, 'we'll do it too punch-a-nellow funny fellow, we'll do it too punch-a-nellow funny man.' And I hear them teeheehee and hahaha and when that stops I put my hands down but the children have all gone away. Then they come back and I stand against the wall and the children throw the ball at me. I stand against the wall. I play the game. I spread my arms out and I spread my legs out too. The children throw the ball at me and when it hits me they teeheehee and hahaha. And I ow-ow-ow.

Teeheehee and hahaha. Ow-ow-ow.

Handicap, handicap all the children say and to me they point and to them I point too.

I play the game. With them.

I'm a handicap, but I'm not a wheel-chair handicap. I'm a normal one. I walk on my two legs. So, I don't line up with the wheel-chairs when the taxi-van-bus comes to take us home-matey. The wheel-chairs go first. Danika is a wheel-chair; she's got no legs, just empty pants legs and no arms just empty arm sleeves. At lunches-time the teacher aids feed Danika, but I can feed myself. Mrs Bo Bell says, use the knife and fork, don't stuff and use the paper towel to wipe your lips. So, I use the knife and fork, don't stuff and use the paper towel. And Mrs Bo Bell says now you may have a drink Jaw-Din.

*

After lunches-time the teacher aids take Danika and the other wheel-chairs to change. But when they come back they are still the same. Jerry Timu, said, 'Underpants. They change underpants.' And I'm happy I'm not a wheel-chair, I don't want to change underpants with Jerry Timu, I don't want to have colour blue underpants.

Mathew's got one leg that can come off and one leg that can't. He's got one long arm and one half-arm, and a big head with a motorbike helmet on it. And when he has an epileptic fit, the teacher aids yell out, Mathew's having an epileptic fit. And Mathew's leg that can't come off goes bang, bang on the floor and when it stops he has to go and change underpants and over-pants. And no, good-boy-Mathew glo-heart for him. And I want it. But Mrs Bo-Bell says no Jaw-Din. You may not have it.

Derek has got two legs and his two feet touch at his toes when he takes his big boots off to remove his over-pants and underpants and get washed up and put new underpants and over-pants on when he has an accident. And the teacher aid says, please go back to class Jaw-Din, but I want the glo-heart for Derek's accident. No says the teacher aid, no Jaw-Din. Monty wears big boots with knitting needles strapped to his legs. Monty's eyes don't work. He cannot see. So he wears dark glasses to let everyone know his eyes don't work. Andrew is a normal handicap like me. Jordan. We hold hands because we have two each. I can write my name and get a glo-heart. Andrew can't because I hold his writing hand and I don't let it go so I can have his glo-heart too.

We hop in the taxi-van-bus for normal handicaps. I'm the first one in so I sit in the back seat. Go away Andrew don't hold hands in taxi-van-bus. No glo-hearts here. We go through the town around and around and we all look out the window. Jerry Timu over there rocks backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, and his tongue won't stay in his mouth. And he does the pukana at the people on

the streets. And to us they point and we hahahahaha at them and wave-out, wave-out Jordan to the funny people standing on the footpaths and laughing. And the taxi-van-bus takes Jerry Timu to his house and I wave-out, wave-out Jordan. And the taxi-van-bus takes Andrew to his house and I

wave -out, wave-out Jordan. And the taxi-van-bus takes me to my home-matey and mummy says wave out Jordan, wave out. And I wave-out wave-out Jordan.

At my Nanny Jo's house, Rosie says come here Jordan. So I go there and she says, all of youse, to the two legs children big ones and small ones, all of youse just leave my brother alone.

Lone.

And Eli my brother, Rosie's brother too, comes out and he says, kai time everyone, go wash your hands.

Wash, wash, wash. Dry, dry, dry.

We have kai in the garage. We have some soup. We have some fried bread and golden syrup. And we have some pizza with no tomatoes. Rosie says it's alright Jordan I picked them off. Tomato sauce: but no tomatoes.

'Hey look you fellas, that doongy can 'nuse a knife and fork.' And all the children look at me. What a doongy egg eating pizza with a knife and fork. And they ha,ha,ha,ha,ha. And stuff their mouths and wipe their lips with their sleeve ends.

Nanny Jo's sick. Rosie says I'm sad. Eli says I'm sad. I say I am hungry Jaw-Din. And I use the knife and fork, don't stuff and use the paper towel. Chew-chew- chew- chew- chew- chew- chew- chew- chew- chew ten times. Swallow. And now you may have a drink. Wipe mouth.

Nanny Jo sleeps in the box bed in the sitting room. The flowers that Rosie and me picked are in jars on the tables and on the floor and on the window ledges. All the ladies and mothers cry. Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. Blow nose. Use paper towel not

sleeve. Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo some more and some

more. Falesi at school is from some more. I go to Nanny Jo and I say to her, listen to me, listen to me. Look at me, look at me and I say, 'Wake up Nanny Jo, wake up.' Because I want to hop in the box-bed. And I try to open up her eyes but they won't stay open and her eyes close down again. And Eli says, 'Bugger off you gross egg and Lily-Belle and Tarn and Kaa go, 'Eeeeuuw Jordan.'

Then we go for a ride in the car and we put Nanny Jo-in-the-box in a big, big hole-in-the-ground and we make her into a flower garden. My Daddy is a flower garden. And the people sing my song to me one-more-river-to-cross and I sing back to them one-more-river-to-cross. And Rosie puts all the flowers in the garden and we take the jars home to put some more flowers in on another day. Violet and purple and blue.

At my school, the sports day is for the children with two legs to run and run and get a ribbon prize. Red ribbon: first best prize, blue ribbon: next best prize, yellow ribbon last best prize. No ribbon, no best prize. Yellow like eggs ribbon, don't like eggs. Blue like Jerrys' underpants ribbon, don't like Jerrys' underpants. Red like strawberries and sauce and my jersey and underpants and glo-heart lollies ribbon. I like red, but not tomatoes.

Danika has tomatoes for her lunch. I want a red ribbon: first best prize. Danika has eggs for her lunch. Don't like eggs. The teacher aid gives Danika lunch. Open wide Danika. Good girl Danika. Eat eggs and tomatoes all up. Close mouth on spoon and egg, and look like egg-'n-spoon race going backwards on sports for two legs children day. Open mouth Danika. There's a good girl. Danika, open your mouth. Open your mouth, open your mouth Danika, *you-little-bitch*.

The teacher aid ties one leg each from the two legs children and: on your marks, get set. Loud, loud clap goes bang. Go. And run and win the three legs race. And get a red ribbon. And the other children

clap and clap and clap and yayyyyyy. I want a red ribbon and I get Mathew's leg that can come off and I run in the three legs race and run fast past the other three legs children and I am the first. I get the red ribbon and I put it in my over-pants pocket and the teacher aid says hey you give that back, but I won the race and I don't give it back and I ahhhhhhh scream. And I keep the ribbon. And I throw Mathew's leg at the teacher aid. And I want to have an accident but I don't because I have a colour red ribbon for first best prize.

The wheelbarrow race is for two, two legs children. One of them walks on their hands he's the wheelbarrow and one of them holds legs and pushes harder and faster. On your marks, get set. Loud, loud clap goes bang. Go. My mummy and Dick play wheelbarrow racing and go harder and faster my mummy says to Dick and he goes harder and faster and mummy screams and she gets the red ribbon. And I clap and clap and clap and yayyyyyy loud and Dick says, 'Piss off.'

Danika, I say to her, you can be a wheelbarrow instead of a wheelchair, and I push Danika hard and fast past the wheelbarrow children and they all fall down and Danika says weeeeeee and we cross the end line and Mrs Bo Bell says, 'No Jordan, no red ribbon.' And I tip Danika's wheelchair over and she is underneath it and I lie down beside the wheel that spins and spins rounrounroun, rounrounroun. And I aaahhhhh and have an accident.

On a not school morning my mummy was sleeping so I went to wake her up. 'Wake up mummy, wake up.' And her eyes were like a rainbow, violet and purple and blue. So I said, listen to me, listen to me, look at me, look at me. 'Wake up mummy, wake up.' And I touched the rainbow to make her eyes open and she did. Violet and purple and blue. And colour red dripped from her nose and coloured the white pillow-case. Mummy had a real rainbow face.

'Get out of this room,' Dick said.

'Leave him alone,' Mummy said.

‘He’s pissed on the toilet floor,’ Dick said.

‘Psst,’ I said.

‘I said get out.’

‘Out,’ I said.

‘Go now,’ He said.

‘No ow,’ I said.

Violet and purple and blue, Mummy got out of bed. ‘Get out of my house,’ she said to Dick. Then Dick threw all his things in his big school bag and he said, ‘I’ll be back to waste you all.’

And Eli came in the room, ‘Being a clown you Dick egg,’ he said.

‘Egg,’ I said. I hate eggs. And tomatoes. And Eli he said, go in the sitting room to me. And he said to mummy, you too. I heard Dick go ‘Ooof.’ Then he drove away on his truck.

I bounce, bounce, and bounce on the trampoline. Bob, Eli’s friend and Emma, Eli’s friend and Muzz-Kutu, Eli’s friend, but my best friend, and Billy, Eli’s friend with the dread knots on his head, they fill the empty beer cans up with the sand-pit. I bounce, bounce, and bounce on the trampoline.

‘My brother Eli says, right you fellas we’ll wait for the prick Dick to come back and we’ll bombard him with these. We’ll have turns at keeping watch. Who wants to go first?’

And I say pick me Eli and I wave and wave and get off the trampoline. I wave and I wave. And flap my hands and wave and wave some more and Eli says, ‘Get out of the way you doongy egg.’ And he says to Sammy my brother, ‘You Sammy bags you to go first.’

‘I’m not playing Eli.’

‘It’s not a game egg you’re going first. It’s five o’clock now so we don’t have to start until dark, say nine-ish.’

‘Ish,’ I say.

‘Get,’ Eli says.

So I get on the trampoline and I bounce, bounce bounce and Muzz-Kutu hops on and we bounce, bounce, bounce and mmmmm

together.

My nanny not my Nanny Jo because she's in her garden, but my Nanny Martha comes to our house one day. Say hello to nanny mummy says and I, mmmmm and Nanny Martha says, 'What does he make that stupid noise for?' and my mummy says because he's happy. And Nanny Martha says, 'What's he got to be bloody happy about?' And I put my hand out to shake hands and bump shoulders like Eli and Muzz-Kutu and Bob and Billy and Emma and Nanny Martha says at me I don't know where your stink hands have been.

And she says to my mummy, he might have been scratching his bum. And mummy says go and play with your toys Jordan. I wave and I wave. And flap my hands. I spin the knife that cuts the bread because that's the one that spins the best. Rounrounroun, rounrounroun. And I look sideways over there that way and I don't move my head and I look sideways over there the other way and I don't move my head. Nanny Martha says,

'Take that bloody knife off that kid, he'll hurt my mokopuna.'

'Nanny, hey Nanny Martha I'm your mokopuna, I'm Jaw-Din.' Say Jaw-Din Nanny, say Jaw-Din to me faster. Jaw-Din, Jaw-Din, Jaw-Din. She can't see me and she can't hear me. And I spin the knife. Rounrounroun, rounrounroun.

'I said take that berluddy knife off that dopey looking monster, he'll hurt Tai.'

Mummy says to her that I'm not a monster. And I say monster and Nanny Martha wants the knife to cut some bread for Tai so I give her the knife and I mmmmm and she 'Ahhhhhhh.' Screams. And I ahhhhhhh scream too. My Nanny Martha has to go home because my mummy said, go home. I wave and I wave-out Jaw-Din. And flap my hands. Ahhhhhhhh, mmmmm.

Bob and Emma and Muzz-Kutu my best friend, and Billy with the dread knots on his head and Eli wait on the trampoline for Dick to come and waste us all. And I bounce, bounce, bounce and Eli says,

‘Get to bed.’

‘Bed.’

Sammy waves and waves at me. He’s up on Ellen-over-the road’s roof because it’s his first turn. And I wave and wave and wave. And Eli says, ‘What’s that clown waving for?’ And I hear a truck noise. ‘It’s him, get inside Jordan.’ And I don’t want to so I don’t go. And Bob and Emma and Muzz-Kutu my best friend, and Billy with the dread knots on his head and Eli hide behind the hedge and Dick can’t see them. I wave and wave at him and he walks down the drive way and Emma and Muzz-Kutu my best friend, and Billy with the dread knots on his head and Eli throw the cans of sand at Dick and he, a haaachooo. A haaachooo, and he all falls down. They throw and they throw then they run out of cans and Sammy is doing the ka mate ka mate, ka ora ka ora on Ellen-over-the road’s roof. Then when Sammy’s run out of the ka mate ka mate two more times he does the Le Manu some more. Then Ellen comes out of her house and mummy comes out of our house. And Ellen says, ‘Youse stop wasting beer.’

‘That’s enough Eli,’ Mummy says. She brings Dick’s school bags out and puts them on the drive way beside him sitting up now. He’s got the rainbow face. Look who is here

punch-a-nellow funny fellow look who is here punch-a-nellow funny man. And I bounce, bounce, and bounce. And Eli, Bob, Emma, Billy and Muzz-Kutu stand in a circle around Dick. They want to play Simple Simon says, I want to play too. So I go over and Eli says, ‘Mum, take Jordan inside. Ellen, go home.’

Eli looks like the monster on Sesame Street, come and play everything’s ay ok.

‘Help me Maia, please?’ Dick says to mummy. Somebody-help-me-please, I say, somebody-help-me-please.

‘Help yourself,’ Mummy says and she spits some spit out of her rainbow face and then it’s on his shirt. She holds her hand out to me, and says to Ellen come inside Ellen. And Ellen goes inside. And I

flap my hands and go inside. And Mummy and Ellen drink beer not sand and I spin, and spin, spin and spin the pot lids.

And Dick's truck noise goes away. And then I have to go to bed and to sleep.

I think I am all here. I touch my face and my head and my chest and my puku. I touch in my underpants. I am the same as Jerry and Monty and Derek and Mathew and Andrew in their underpants. But not Danika. I tell my toes to wriggle and they do. And my eyes work to let the light in and out when I blink-blink-blink. I have got all the parts that normal-talk people and two legs people have. I just don't have normal-talk. And I can play games. With them. And I can have an accident when I want to. And I can write my name, and read it too, so I will always know where to hang my bag. And the things that I carry in my bag on my back are all that I need for my special needs.

I am Jordan Te Awanui Taurima. Special Needs Class.
Satellite Unit. Victoria Street Normal School.

I am lost.

Please ring 095) 2765-9990111

And say you found me.

Thank-you.

Close eyes. Now mista Mummy says. And she offs the light.

Growing up Lily

When I was one I had just begun but that means
fuck-all to me
Then I was two and not so new but I must have had
my uses
Next is nothingness
then I am three
I sit, sore I cry beneath the Merry Christmas tree
G-I Joe and Barbie bleed on the ground
And Uncle Santa leaves to complete his festive round

Then I am four
I crawl on the floor
I can't find the door
I can't see any more
And the doggie in the corner cowers; for hours. And
hours.
'Hey girl, here girly.'
Now I am five I think I'm alive but the sky falls down
and lands on my face
I gag I swallow because I can't spit

See her now when she is six
The P-baked birthday cake Nanny made sits
Midst paraphernalia
She blows out
the candles one
by-fucken-one
And eyes-closed-wishes to be dead

but instead
she's at school where she learns how to write
to follow the rainbow swirls
and twirl to the music of the magic game at the secret
place
Where Uncle keeps his gumboots

Once more at eight and again at nine
Bitten by a snake that makes her blind
That twists and charms inside her mind
She looks down on the Diamond head
it jerks it spits then it is dead
And Uncle goes to bed

Ten fingers
ten toes
a chocolate rose dried flower arrangement
the deranged brain profane
when God made her do it again
Legs are eleven that widen that spread to open up for
the Diamond Head
This is the twelfth night Lily implodes
The black engulfs the golden spot
The gold and black of the glittery dots
Forever and ever and ever

And while the purple headed dragon blew green
smoke from its arse
Jimi Hendrix hammered purple haze on his
Stratocaster
Finger-fretted vibrating riffs along the pearl-inlaid
shaft
piercing screams echoed, from the lady shaped arcs

Inside my hand a garden grows

The perfumed fate-line a bloody rose
This prism my prison locked up each night
The yellowed bands grip ankles tight and cuff the
silver fettered tryst
And flog the cowering whimpering dog

Playing huts under the kitchen table
Cat-in-the-hat games and green eggs are fables
Enhanced I danced altered my footsteps faltered
The pusher, the tripper and Bacchus was willing me
Bent my mind then blew it
And I can fucken fly

Brother Love

Eli's traveling home today
The plane touches down at three
From Oz
Where Eli's been working at the Cross

My mother, the uncles, my Koro and Nan
Piled into the whanau Toyota van
Left for Mangere early this morning
Just as the bell-throated Tui was calling
Wailing its wake up song

The whanau have all gathered here
To welcome Eli home
They wait, some smoke, and some drink tea
I just sit here
Keep the fire burning
Think about Eli
And me

Eli was form four High school
I was standard three
I remember us walking to school each morning
Eli and me
Half way down Moemoea Street
Around the corner from ours
There was an ugly place
With a black guard dog
Next door to Billy-Jack's house

Eli said that the devil lived there
Punched me and said, 'Don't fucken stare'
At the upturned bottles; the garden edge
The man-on standing by the sticky-leafed hedge
'Don't lie Eli, telling Mum on you.'
Then the man-on growled us
in the manner that dogs do

One Summer me, Eli and Billy-Jack
Went for a swim down the water-hole
Billy-Jack and Eli
Sat
On the bank
And shared a roll
-your own smoke

and after that
they had another one
Then Eli said
We won't be long Boy
You wait here
And then they disappeared

When I'd had enough of the water
I climbed up on the bank
I slipped
I fell
Must have cracked my skull
Saw stars
Saw an angel
Then at last
Heard Eli and Billy-Jack
'Fuck,' said Eli
and he picked me up off the ground
slung me on his back
and ran

and ran
and then
I woke up in hospital

Three days later in the room we shared
I said, 'Thanks Eli.'
He rubbed my head, said, 'Did you think I would
leave you there to die?'
And later somewhere in my dreaming time
I thought I heard Eli cry

I don't remember the exact time when
I walked to school alone
I just remember Eli telling me
'Fuck all this, I'm staying home, you go to school
don't be no fool
learn what they say, work hard.'
And each morning I crossed the road
Before the ugly place
Didn't look
Turned my face
And raced
Till I saw the school yard

Billy Jack and Eli moved up to Auckland
From there they went to Sydney
In the beginning he sent me cards and stuff
Then there was nothing in the mail for me
Mum said the devil had got him
But I knew better than that
Eli'd left home, said he wasn't normal
Because he loved Billy-Jack

The beast hangs in the chiller
Manuka is stacked

Pots boil over on the hissing stove
Fish smokes on the racks
Everyone has gathered, to welcome Eli home
Fuck, if they'd been there for him way back then
He never would have gone

Two vehicles return from Auckland
Their lights turned to full beam
Shows up the whare-nui
Dressed in mourning green
Eli man
Fuck you bro'
Should have told you
a long time ago
well anyway Eli
I love you
Bro'

The uncles wait silent at the gate
And hold their heavy burden
Nanny Kataraina calls to them
As they carry Eli in

Haere mai te rangatira e
Haere mai
Haere mai
Haere mai ra...

Coffee to go

The black tulipped dyke who came in for a session
Moccona Madonna post partum depression
Her nether regions in Manukau City
Relaxes and sighs and shotguns and then she
Stores in a dry place that is so cool
Or a cool place that is dry
Trade mark patented distinguished and packeted
Or
Bold intense espresso in flashy glass jars
Dot matrixed expiry date indelible on its arse
Douwe headed Egberts Anno 1753
Imported beans for Sara Lee
Zebra striped bar code 8 is the mother lode
Laced up racy caffeinated demi-god
Nicotine combo long black to go
On through the dark night
Transitions into daylight
Spring times into action

Time between times to
Find the meaning of life Brian
Like many who think they
No: it isn't what you drink
It's how you think that matters
The latte Italian invasion into Wellington
Wasn't them it was Dutch.

Javanese lady peeps from behind the bunyan tree

Dutch East Indies Company
Seductress inductees Bali hai conscience
Uncouth flightless Kiwi and the milky barred kid
Four and twenty Maori girls home baked on the fries
Kentuckified Colonel drinking whiskey eating pork
pie
Waiata
That'll be the day that I fly.

Robert Taylor

Hyacinths

Of the few remaining flashes of imagery that remain from my early childhood, the most prominent would be grape hyacinths. They were a fascination, and I would pluck them ardently from the wild flower beds that popped up in spring. So much so that my mum became completely fed up with these perennial presents to her. Their rubbery purple bulbs clustered neatly around the green stem, scattered in clumps on the slopes of our property. Flowers were of no interest, but these hyacinths—bulbs I thought, seeds, forever youthful—were different, never blooming. We didn't bloom, but ceased, happily stagnated on hyacinth hills. They bounced amiably, jelly jiggling in the hilltop wind. Scattered beds soon grew, turning the gradient into a purple haze—psychedelic, without psychedelics. Their somber grassy musk became overwhelming with numbers. This is how it has settled at least; the image becoming louder, busier, more purple and more grand, since that time.

Eventually bulbuls would droop, sagging and desiccated. Dripping off their shoots, a carpet of tiny, deflated balls stretched across the grass. They'd squish underfoot and stick to my gumboots, bleeding from my soles. I'd smear an eviscerated paste with every step, the musk now rotting the air. Then the hills, snaking with a vile purple river, flood the fading scenery being dragged away.

The house was a hundred years old, you almost expected to find cave like drawings on the outside, but there was just fading yellow; chipped paint flaking away. Despite this, the building sits vivid and proud inside me.

It overlooked the entire city; from the Hut, Somes Island and across the harbour—where radio tower lights jovially winked back—to Happy Valley and Island Bay, the latter bleeding just out of sight. The panorama stretched endlessly, my silhouette on its backdrop. It rushed up to the ancient house, and tumbled back down the other side. The yellow, and then purple, washing over the landscape in an acrylic trip.

The former owner was an old woman, a housewife, whose border patrol husband had died while vacationing in Scotland. She returned to sell the house, before joining her husband, dying a few days later in a nursing home.

The property was a mess, and my dad soon began the arduous process of tidying up the tangled shrubbery and dense macrocarpa that strangled the backyard slopes. There was an old dilapidated garage amongst all this, which he decided to tear down. He soon discovered, through the back wall of the garage, a secret hiding place dug into the hillside, filled to the brim with spirit bottles. It turned out the previous owner didn't like her husband drinking, so he would sneak off to the garage at night, drink surreptitiously, and then stash the empties in a little dug out cavern. Dad was sure she had some idea of this prohibited activity—as all good wives would—but feigned ignorance for the sake of their marriage. However, dad was convinced she was oblivious to the next discovery. In another nook, in a deep corner of the macrocarpa trees, he found a second hiding place. Again it was filled with glass paraphernalia, but not liquor bottles. Instead, they were skinny, corked tubes with powdered residue inside. This soon brought the cause of the man's recently fatal stroke into question, as, by all likelihood, the old man was a coke head. His closet secret lingered in those hideouts, knowledge adopted by my father.

When we moved away a bulldozer levelled the backyard. The new

owner proceeded to build another house that, although squished vapidly close to the original, held fortune bringing potential. So the hyacinths were dragged away under the roar of the machine, and the crusty yellow was eventually painted white. The acrylic trip suddenly dead.

Although paining, this allowed the exaggerated illusion to remain, my mind's romancing of the period had an excuse to stay. Memory with severed roots, allows it to soar. The stories—the ambiguity—behind things like acrylic hills and hyacinths, behind constructed thoughts, faux grandiosity and dusty ghosts, becomes the truth. I left the dull reality in hillside hideouts, hauled away by bulldozers.

Nick Pearce

Breakfast at Mucko's

I remember Ray's face, that summer
morning on the island, all of us
seedy I think from new year's the
night before, everyone on auto groove
and pale cloud over the mainland

miles away, ages ago now, the oily
diner hidden away in the shadows
behind him as he strolled a man
complete, belly first, skinny smile
fat like the sun, satisfied, replete

down the path towards the road as
we drove slowly past, pulled down
windows, stopped and called out where
you been? and he replies chin shining
breakfast at mucko's, with a face full

of a thousand stories and all the time
in the world to tell them... and if you were
to see him outside mucko's today, one of
the stories he might just tell you could be
about me, and the dip in the sea I took, with

my kids, later that new year and told back
to him on our deck at surfdale one warm
evening, after he'd said something to

me, something chilling, something very
unlike breakfast at mucko's, that

story... that particular day, a dull hot after
noon I and my three, none older than nine,
had gone down to the beach, pulled
out the inflatable and paddled out into
the deep, they sat inside as I swam

behind, tapping them along to the mussel
rocks right out in the bay, smooth
on the water, breezing, me dreaming
in the cool of what feast we might find and
then, in liquid slow motion, my mind turned

to scenes from Jaws and visions of sharks
in the shadows beneath me, finding
me, unflensing me in front of the kids in
a single moment of horror, gore on
the water, white meat bled out and

three stunned, ruined young souls a
drift in that red-black plastic balloon
of a boat waiting for someone to
see them, bring them in, too shocked
even to cry... smart move I think, that kind of

mind-game, laughing to myself, at myself, as I reach
the rocks and get out, find nothing to excite me
in the end, nothing to bring back for evening
supper and feeling tired from the swim, wind
getting up, finally coax the boat back

to shore as clouds begin to darken the
sky and the water around us... and so it

was later with night coming on, me and
Ray by the bar-be-que, him chewing on
one of my special rare steaks, crimson

on his teeth, and me with the cool skinned
memory of that swim in my mind he says, between
mouthfuls... *see a couple of guys caught a
shark this afternoon, next bay round... yeah
a big one... twelve foot mako a'parently.*

Alison Robertson

If you knew then what I know now

You would know that hot water can sear the skin off a
baby's soft limbs in seconds
You would know that no phone has to be answered
You would know the difference between like and
love, loving but not liking
You would know that some people die quickly, others
linger for decades in a lost mind
You would know that just because you never hear
your parents argue, they do
You would know that sunscreen is better than coconut oil
That your father is a sulker
And you will never grow to like tripe
or feijoas
You would know that nobody is 100 per cent happy
100 per cent of the time
You would know that Bata Ponytails are no longer the
in-thing for way-out girls at school
You would know that sometimes conflict is healthy
You would know that your mother is too busy
cooking, bottling, vacuuming, sewing, gardening and
doing your father's accounts
that she has no time for matters emotional
hers or yours
You would know that Chesdale is not the only cheese
You would know that whacking someone's head
against the weatherboards can cause concussion
That your eyelashes are sharp as stubble when they
grow back after cutting

That if only you'd practised more you could be in the
NZSO by now
Or played doubles at Wimbledon—perhaps
You would know that sometimes your friends aren't
That people lie to escape punishment and lie to save
hurt feelings
You will know that the little café at the top of the
Taupo Road is called the Summit Kiosk and you will
get an ice-cream.
But you will never know why that boy liked you,
riding his motorbike up and down your street, never
stopping to knock on your door except on Christmas
Eve when he gave you an LP, and you gave it back.

When you were there

She arrives over-revving in her yellow Cortina,
always with a pudding
apple sponge/crumble/shortcake/pie/
Dutch/Irish/Charlotte
She's round as a moon

Her hair is sometimes blue, sometimes a shade of pink
She combs wool straight from sheep
spins it through a wheel she drives with her foot
up—down, up—down
The wool becomes a long thin strand
We hold our arms out straight while she winds it into
balls from our skinny limbs
Round 'n' round
She knits us jerseys that smell like a paddock

In her spare room, she tucks you into crisp white
sheets so tight it's hard to breathe
In the morning, her cornflakes are crisper, her
peaches sweeter
She plays Mah jong
Her bloomers reach her knees
Her knees!
On the clothes line, flapping, they look like empty
flour sacks
She laughs a lot, and her big, big bosom bounces

And when she's even older

In her room with nothing but a bed, a single chair and
skinny wardrobe
When her teeth are loose
Her volume's gone
She cannot hear and barely see
and there's biscuit hanging from her lip
I want to say:
Remember when I used to climb into your warm bed
of a morning
Remember that hot pool at your house, its noisy
pump
That house where all the furniture was stuck-fast to
the floor
Where you taught me how to knit
Had good supplies of Dr Seuss
Refilled my hottie, made mousetraps and cheesecakes
When you took us to the lake
Where you nursed me through the mumps...

But she doesn't know who I am
Or why I'm there
And all I can do is swallow hard
Kiss her craggy cheek
Scoop up my children and almost run away

Jeanie Richards

Sorry

Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

The right honourable Mal Brough, Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs said SORRY there's only one law for ALL Australians. We oppose the United Nations, we oppose the declaration, we oppose special treatment, we oppose saying sorry.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

Sorry, a simple two syllable word, overly used and rendered meaningless. A word sought and a word withheld, a word that choked on a liberal tongue.

A word powerful enough to resurrect the rainbow serpent.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our national history.

They left a man in a cell on Palm Island

They bashed a man, they left in a cell, in a jail, on Palm Island

They found a dead man in a cell, in a jail, on Palm Island

The court told: he bashed himself to death, broke four of his own ribs and ruptured his spleen and liver.

Cameron Doomadgee was 36, swingin' a bucket full of mud crabs and singin' "Who Let the Dogs Out" when he was arrested for disorderly conduct.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page, a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so

moving forward with confidence to the future.

On the 26th November 2004, Cameron Doomadgee's autopsy results were released.

Officer Hurley, coming in at a burly 115 kilos, fell onto 74 kilo Cameron whilst in the cells, inadvertently causing the injuries.

No-one thought to say sorry.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

Cold blooded murder they cried and ran in unison to burn baby burn: the courthouse, the cells, the dog kennels. Nineteen deported to Townsville, charged with arson, rioting and assault. Nineteen missed Cameron's funeral, the court would not allow it. Hundreds of mourners walked the coffin the couple of kilometres to the graveyard led by Doomadgee's 15-year-old son, Eric, holding a white wooden cross to place on his father's grave.

The nineteen who couldn't go were sorry.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

Eighteen had charges dropped or acquitted. One warned to discontinue his public appearances at rallies and marches and told to stop stirring up trouble.

He plead guilty and he wasn't sorry.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

At the 2005 Coronial Inquiry into the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee, the family asked that the deceased be referred to by his

tribal name Mulrunji.

Coroner Barnes agreed, he also agreed that in a previous life, as head of the Criminal Justice Commission, he'd ruled on complaints about Hurley. Barnes, finding nothing untoward, deemed the complaints to be unsubstantiated. Barnes said sorry and disqualified himself.

A year later Coroner Christine Clements found Mulrunji was killed as a result of punches thrown by Hurley.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

Amalie was about 7 or 8 when her Mum started giving her Valium. She was a koori from Mildura and her mother an exotically attractive quarter caste, fair enough to fool the white boys and quickly move them in as step fathers. Mum had her fair share of problems: alcoholism, depression, manic episodes, aboriginality. When the current boyfriend started showing signs of boredom, or of moving on, she'd bring in Amalie to liven things up.

John, Henry, Jacko, Steve, Bob and/or Phil enjoyed feeding the 8 year old alcohol and pills and got aroused watching her go down on her mother.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

Amalie adored her older brother Farren, who was also sexually initiated by his mother. Amalie and Farren got drunk together, they shared secrets together, they had sex together, they loved each other and Farren protected her. His first laggin' was for smashing some whitey he found raping Amalie while Mum was passed out drunk.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

Amalie and Farren left and went to live under the Murray Bridge

with the other kooris. There she met and married Sam, there she had Sandawarra and Jindalee. There the five of them decided to leave and go live with the Murri mob up north.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

They settled in Logan just outside of Brisbane. Pretty hard for Koori to fit in with the Murri mob, pretty hard for quarter caste to fit in with full blood, pretty hard to accept you are aboriginal by degree, full blood when the law is involved, by percentage and birthplace within your own mob.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A hot-spot is a small area that has statistically significant high levels of crime relative to surrounding areas. The Gold Coast is Queensland's top hot-spot and a burglar's dream, transient visitors, open doors and fat wallets. Sam and Farren were opportunists, they called themselves the 'Black Spidermen'; they scaled tall buildings over 150 times and were arrested.

Amalie was contacted as next of kin and asked to bring in some court clothes for her husband and brother, the cops took her into an interview room where she was told "If those black cunts don't start co-operating they'll be another black death in custody".

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

Have you ever heard about black deaths in custody?—if you're an Aussie you must have. If not, I'm not surprised, it doesn't get much publicity. From 1980 to 1989 there were 99 Aboriginal deaths in custody, leading to a Royal Commission in 1991 which promised change, which promised reform. In the next decade Aboriginal deaths in custody increased by 150%, and 22 years later it is still rising. Aboriginals are jailed more than any other indigenous people in the

world. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginals make up 30.3% of the population, but 82.3% of the adult prison population and 96.9% of the juvenile detainees. Australia is sending Aboriginal adult males to jail at five times the rate South Africa was imprisoning its black adult males towards the end of Apartheid; in Western Australia the figure is eight times the rate.

Aboriginal men are locked up more than any other mob in Australia, mostly for drunkenness, failing to pay fines, not carrying the correct identification, not getting a pass from the governor, not being white.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

In 1983, off duty police officers in a remote town in WA, started racially abusing Aboriginal patrons at a hotel, sparking a brawl outside. 16-year-old John Pat stepped in to help his mate and was punched in the face by a police officer, kicked in the head after he fell and dragged to their waiting van. The forensic pathologist, reported that John died of multiple injuries, suffering at least ten blows to his head and the half a dozen bruises above his right ear led the pathologist to conclude that John was little more than a punching bag. The bruises and injuries to the rest of his body were so horrific that his aorta was torn. One witness described the beating by police and said that when they were finished John was just “thrown in (the van) like a dead kangaroo”. An all-white jury acquitted the police of manslaughter charges and it was this action that sparked the movement against black deaths in custody.

*Write of Life
The pious said
Forget the past
But all that I can see*

*In front of me
Is a cell door
a concrete floor
and John Pat*

In 2008 an Aboriginal elder, Mr Ward, was driving on a remote, road in the West Australian desert when he was stopped by police and arrested for drunk driving. In 42 degree heat, Mr Ward was placed in a rundown van with no air conditioning and transported the 400 kilometres back to the lock up in Kalgoorlie. Despite knowing there was no air conditioning in the prisoner pod, he was never checked or let out for the whole 400 long, dusty, bumpy and scorching hot kilometres. Just before they got to Kalgoorlie, the guards heard a thump in the back and drove to the hospital. He'd been cooked to death, with severe burns from the hot metal surfaces in the van all over his body.

In a discussion about Aboriginal rights following Mr Ward's death one campaigner was told "I would have been concerned if it was a dog or some other animal who died in those conditions, but since it was only a black-fella ..."

Three years later, Nina Stokoe was found guilty of failing to take reasonable care to avoid adversely affecting the safety or health of another person through an act or omission at work and, by that failure, causing a third degree burn to Mr Ward and his death.

In sentencing, Magistrate Benn was critical of the mitigating arguments put forward by Stokoe's lawyer. "I'm not convinced she actually understands and appreciates her level of wrongdoing.... Stokoe is most sorry about the effect this has had on her life, rather than the impact her wrongdoing has had on others".

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

Amalie was all too familiar with the Aboriginal deaths in custody and was scared stiff. They let her visit her brother and she could tell he was low, they let her visit her husband and she knew he wouldn't last. They showed her the bruises, but she saw the shadow on their heart and the dark film cast by the prison walls.

So she did a crazy thing, she told the cops it wasn't Sam or Farren, it was actually her alone who'd scaled the high rise and robbed all 150 motel units. They took her for a drive and got her to point out all the motels she burgled. They just drove from motel to motel asking, "what about that one, did you do that one too?" Amalie kept answering yes to everything under the agreement that they'd let Farren and Sam go in exchange for her statement and confession. She had no idea which motels they'd done, she was 8 months pregnant at the time and at home with the kids. She was charged with something like 360 offences and of course they reneged. They didn't let Sam or Farren go and now had three black bastards in court instead of two. She got something like 12 years in dirty and notorious Boggo Rd Prison Queensland. That was where I met her and she was my girl for a while...

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

Mulrunji's only son, 18 year old Eric, was found hanged in Palm Island bushland on July 19, 2010—it was said this occurred after earlier being taken for a drive by police.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

A brother who stabbed his violent younger sister during a struggle at a caravan park was jailed yesterday for 14 years for murder. Justice John Coldrey said the "spur-of-the-moment" stabbing occurred after Amalie Badenoch, 34, aggressively approached her

brother Farren Deacon Badenoch, 37, near his home at the Sun Siesta Caravan Park in Mildura. Justice Coldrey said Ms Badenoch had been diagnosed with major depression and treated for drug abuse. Witnesses, including her mother, told the jury of her violent outbreaks. Badenoch was convicted by a jury of murdering his sister on March 1, 2000.

In the Supreme Court, Justice Coldrey fixed a nine-year minimum term for Farren Badenoch, who sought help for his sister after the stabbing and regretted her death.

and I'm sorry...

Tim Shipton

Death Rattle

Her voice is a suicide bathtub
It is white spattered with red
It is panting
Exasperation
So fucking blue I can't breathe
It clacks like a super 8 film reel
A 1950s pre-film countdown
5

4

3

2

1

I squint hard and pray for a spark to ignite the volatile
nitrate
Her voice is the creak of the rope
The tips of toes scrambling for the kicked away chair
Like save me
Like don't let me die
Like Father forgive me for I know not what I do
It scrapes with the soft cleaving
sweep of a blade
across thin veined skin
Confessions dripping
pouring from the tips of her fingers
Her voice brings me flowers
and burns down
an orphanage
It is the whirl of bodies falling from thirty story
buildings.

Thirteen reasons this is not a love poem

One.

Because there isn't time to explain the way your voice made my ears ring the first time we spoke.

Two.

Because it's unfair to recall how I'd turn the other way with an Oh shit here she comes type skip and an awkward smile when I discovered my escape route was a wall, and you laughed. My cheeks burned.

Three.

Because there aren't the words.

Four.

Because it would be a drop in the bucket of words I'd overuse like fate and destiny and every after-school special, Saved by the Bell, Party of Five, that warned me that if this were love I'd never get out alive.

Five.

Because I couldn't do justice to the night we first explored each other's lips. My fake I know what I'm doing courage falling flat as we stumbled through shyness laced with heat and an inability to stop.

Six.

Because I loved you.

Seven.

Because your Mother's a bitch.

Eight.

Because I'm not a stoner I'm an artist. I'm a musician. I'm a Christian. I'm whatever they need me to be for you. For us to be together.

Nine.

Because I wasn't raised right. Because the only nuclear part of my family was the bomb that blew my Father out of the house.

Ten.

Because I can taste the fear on your tongue. Because forbidden love isn't a Titanic loyal tragedy. We aren't Romeo and Juliet. I drank the poison with time enough to see you drop the dagger and run crying through the mausoleum doors.

Eleven.

Because you killed me.

Twelve.

Because somewhere in the smiles and depth of your proclamations I couldn't quite make out the fact that I was Forest Gump and you were my Jenny. That the whole movie I loved you while you were content with shutting me out until cancer came to tear you away, but all you wanted from me was to look after the kid... Or something.

Thirteen.

This isn't a love poem because there's no such fucking thing.

Hamish Ansley

from Room 101 (or things that can fuck off)

Part I—Gender Stereotypes

I grew up in a household comprised largely of females, and where the only other male present wasn't exactly someone I aspired to be like. And while it wasn't all evenings spent listening to show tunes and braiding each other's hair, it probably goes some way to explaining my okay-ness with conversations about menstruation, and the fact that I think most men are oversexed, insensitive Neanderthals. But, apparently, because I possess the kind of genitalia that I do, I'm not supposed to think that way. I'm supposed to conform to the ideas that society has formulated about what a man is. And those ideas tend not to include the ability to write coherently or expressively. Nor do they include having an expansive vocabulary, or an appreciation of literature. Nope, I'm supposed to be a beer-guzzling, rugby mad tit-fancier. Actually, while I intended that to be disparaging, I love beer, don't mind rugby, and have a perfectly healthy interest in female protuberances. Perhaps I'm manlier than I thought. But, certainly, the idea that a man could not possibly, or even want to, be a writer is complete loose stool-water. I think I'm right in saying that the majority of writers throughout history have been male. Of course, the oppression of women for ages has a lot to answer for there. There would, no doubt, have been more female writers if they weren't simply kept chained in the cellar for acts of sexual abasement and getting stains out of shirts. Still, men wrote literature (even the nanciest of all nancies, poetry) and it was generally okay and acceptable for them to do so. They weren't accused of being frilly-knicker-wearing sissies. Well, except Oscar Wilde, of course. And Byron was rather fond of expensive silk handkerchiefs. Anyway,

Wilde's preference of bed-fellow or Byron's ardour for posh nose-rags (or my preference for doing the vacuuming over mowing the lawn, for that matter), doesn't make either of them less of a man. Just as the ability to do lots of press ups or survive in the wilderness doesn't make one more of a man. Or even likeable. Let's face it; Bear Grylls is an annoying twat.

Part II—'Cockfighting'

In recent history (i.e., within the last year) I embarked on my first flattering experience. I figured I was growing a bit old to still be swinging from the apron strings, as 'twere, and hoped that I might miraculously be cured of the chronic social ineptitude which kept me living at home for so long, by forcing myself to share a house with a bunch of relative strangers and their idiosyncrasies (by which, of course, I mean propensity for using my shit without first asking permission, using all the lavatory paper and neglecting to buy more, sexual jollity at obscene hours, untidiness, general absence of personal hygiene, and many other charming and endearing quirks). So far, I feel more socially retarded than ever. But it has been an... interesting experience. And by 'interesting' I mean it has provided fuel for a (hopefully) comedic rant that I am desperately penning in order to meet a decent word limit for this journal—a fact I am self-reflexively making light of in an effort to further pad out the piece and to try to explain why it is probably terrible without resorting to putting a little self-conscious note at the end which makes me feel so utterly pretentious as it seems to suggest that I think my work is so unfathomably complex and more difficult to penetrate than even the most aloof woman wearing a chastity belt made of barbed wire and steel recycled from decommissioned aircraft carriers and therefore requires explanatory notes.

Anyway... back to the main narrative, if there ever was one in the first place. I live with two of the fairer sex and a male who is not-totally-fabulous-but-more-than-a-little-bit-queeny. An ideal group for me (I thought), as (and not to generalise too much about the

latter) I am much more comfortable (perhaps surprisingly given the aforementioned gaping black hole in my social skills) in feminine company. This is largely due to my upbringing. I grew up in a household comprised largely of females and, consequently, bask in the magnificent radiance and reclining, leather-upholstered-comfort of conversations about menstruation and all of the other things that women talk about which seem ceaselessly to revolve around their gynaecological functions. I'm being facetious. Obviously (I hope). Women talk about myriad things and that's precisely my point. The openness and depth of women's (now there's a sentence teetering precariously on the edge of smut given its proximity to one mentioning gynaecology...or maybe I just have an excessively debauched mind) conversation is something I very much relish. I'm not particularly masculinely minded—another happy (and this, for once in my miniscule, pus-filled life, is not sarcasm) consequence of my upbringing. I don't really consider myself a man, except in the sense that I possess the requisite genitalia.

Subsequently, I find male conversation rather unsatisfying. When men stop masturbating for long enough to talk to other men (or, indeed, to women—usually after an extended period of open-mouthed ogling), the conversation invariably involves a succession of monosyllables and grunting. Not unlike the masturbation, really. It's also a scientifically proven fact that, if male conversation lasts longer than nought-point-two-five seconds, it will inevitably and rapidly descend to the verbal equivalent of comparing reproductive appendages. This, I have termed 'cockfighting,' for obvious punning reasons. In the minds of men, there must always be an alpha-male—even in conversation.

Except, it's not really conversation at all. There is no mutually beneficial imparting of wisdom or sharing of interesting information. And being good at conversation, knowing lots of words and what order to put them in to create wit or irony or a bitter scathing dry sarcastic insult of the clearly vapid, pubescent-stubble-faced arse-pimple stood opposite does not win one the 'cockfight.' No, words are intelligent, and therefore un-masculine. How we (and by 'we,'

I mean, ‘they.’ I refuse to accept any responsibility) evolved as a gender is beyond me. Men don’t listen to each other. Not properly. They only listen to the statistics. If one man claims to be able to lift lots of heavy things or chug vast quantities of hard liquor (and these are the things that men like to claim), the man next to him will probably boast that he can manage double. While riding a horse. In a rodeo. On LSD. Over red hot coals. While wearing an eye patch. And having sex with... whatever her name is... that exoskeletal one from the Fast and Furious movies (which I refuse to refer to as ‘films,’ and the titles of which I, likewise, refuse to italicise out of respect to decent cinema, and because they are such undeserving piles of utter steaming turgid dross) whom they all salivate over but whom I think possesses all the beauty of two of the coarsest, blackest, strayest pubic hairs sellotaped (with that cheap nasty stuff that doesn’t stick very well) to the end of a broom handle. Men, you’re giving (y)our gender a bad name. Just stop being such dicks.

Part III—A boy, a girl, and a pizza

In a previous edition of these rants bearing the frankly plagiarised title of *Room 101*, I made reference to my chronic and, it’s no exaggeration to say, catastrophic social ineptitude. It has become something of a fun, albeit self-indulgent, tradition for me to do so. Or perhaps, for those of you reading, it’s a torture. Like family Christmas, it could so easily fall into either category. Anyway, I cannot claim to be a social butterfly, or any of the similarly luridly coloured and proverbially socially agile majestic winged creatures of that particular phylum. In reality, I am the butterfly’s lowly, distant, and, given that its species outnumber those of butterflies by a factor of ten, probably massively inbred cousin, the rather more monochromatic social moth. I live much of my life in darkness about social things and how to deal with them so, consequently, when the blinding bright lightbulb of a social occasion or conversation or potential friendship is illuminated, I clumsily and repeatedly bang my head against it.

Fortunately, I am occasionally given a reprieve from being a complete social retard. It's a rare act but a powerful one. Indeed, if I were to take a lot of LSD or a similarly psychoactive substance, it might give me cause to believe in a divine and sympathetic being who floats around on a cloud consuming Mars bars all day and toying with the puny humans on... whatever the supercharged, celestial equivalent of the Xbox is. Instead, I believe (or at least hope) that there are people out there who possess enough goodness, or simply a healthy enough dose of their own special intoxicating blend of weirdness, to look past my social failings and perhaps want to get to know me better. Believe it or not, I have actually met some of these people. Bless their poor unfortunate souls. Indeed, these people often have a not ungodlike ability to make me feel at ease and to bring out my best bits. No, not my genitals. They bring out the best bits of my character, if such bits do actually exist. Like a video technician compiling the highlights of the latest gripping encounter between two opposing bunches of sweaty, bulbous, bum-grabbing men chasing a ball around a paddock for no discernable purpose. Or like alcohol. But with much less heavy-headedness. Or embarrassment. Or raging self-disgust. Or waking up cling filmed to a lamp post wearing little more than a pair of pink stiletto heels (which, after the initial shock, actually looked pretty cute).

Anyway, I was fortunate enough to meet one of those reassuring creatures recently, at my place of work. This was a double blessing, as my place of work is a depressing sinkhole for individuality. It's a death ship, piloted largely by a pack of joyless cretins, whose idea of comedy is the most appalling, primary school toilet humour imaginable. Arses. So, to meet one of those rare people who enables me to feel less like a social fish out of water meant that the red mist became a rather lovely cabernet sauvignon. The dreary working hours are made infinitely more tolerable in the company of someone whose head my deadpan wit doesn't slide straight over like a dog struggling for traction on a hardwood floor. In fact we got along sufficiently well that our acquaintance extended outside of work and, among other occasions where we 'hung out,' as I believe young

people say, she and I began a tradition of sharing a pizza and a yarn once a week after one of our coinciding shifts aboard the HMS Imminent Suicide.

Yes, that's right, she and I. She's a girl. A female. Holder of two X chromosomes. A lady person. A fact I find completely unremarkable but which, in the rest of the population, induces cocked eyebrows and a deafening cacophony of jawbones slapping pavement. Why this should be so is beyond me. The small circle of friends I havemanaged to accrue as a social science experiment gone wrong consists entirely of the fairer sex. This is not a boast. It is merely because men's tendency to turn everything into the World Trouser-Snake Championship (by which I mean an endeavour to determine who has the mightiest man-parts, rather than some kind of late night adult channel nudist snooker competition in which the penis is used as a cue) makes me want to cut off my own equipment and fling it from a tall building, or into the nearest fast moving body of water. I simply find women less of a frustration to get along with. But, apparently, sharing a pizza with a member of the opposite sex is a noteworthy phenomenon. Indeed, we became the subject of rumour at work. Tongues were wagging about... well, where we might have been putting our tongues. I am, of course, referring to cataglottism, typically known as 'French kissing,' and not the C word for that other kind of oral aerobics. Kindly remove your mind from the gutter, will you? Having never, to my knowledge, been the hot topic on the gossip mill, I have to confess that I was, for the briefest of moments, mildly chuffed at being the talk of the sewing circle. That was until I realised it was much more conducive to comedy ranting if I was annoyed about it. But it is truly irksome that a boy and a girl can't have a conversation, or be in the same room, or even within the same postal code, without it being presumed that there's something more than friendship going on between them. Unfathomable as it seems, some men and women (i.e. this man and basically any woman) are capable of occupying the same piece of real estate without their genitals suddenly and inevitably aligning and rushing towards each other with flaming ardour. Sharing a meat-

lovers' pizza does not mean that I hoped my meat would get some lovin'. It's not some highly codified method of informing the world that we've arranged the fleshy, salty-sweet areas of our respective anatomies in a similarly harmonious, delicious, and orgasmic way. I mean call me old fashioned, but my idea of a romantic bedroom soiree involves slightly less barbecue sauce.

Glowstick

Somewhere in the bush on the side of a mountain. That's where we were. One hundred and fifty fourth-form students subdivided into smaller groups and led by teachers we had previously known only as figures in brown suits behind desks or in front of whiteboards. The same as every other school camp, as far as I could tell. A sensory overload of gravel tracks and greenery that the curriculum deemed somehow character building. I watched the sportive among my group leaping confidently over mud-filled ruts and climbing steep rock grades with ease. I heard their energetic shouts ahead of me and, behind me, the wheezing of the asthmatics and those who spent intervals and lunchtimes smoking in the C-block toilets. The track wound and descended to a clearing by a ford, which we were to cross to continue our hike. I lingered at the edge of the clearing for a bit, sitting on a stump, not wanting to join the others and their enthused chatter just yet.

She appeared beside me at the edge. Two white legs in denim shorts and hiking shoes. She paused for a moment. Said nothing. I just looked up at her and then back down at the mud. She leapt child-like down the short drop, joining the rest of the group. I followed. A few had already begun to cross the ford, stepping deftly from rock to rock, avoiding the stream which was shin-deep in places. I did my best to appear confident and did the same—making it nearly all the way, before hesitating between two rocks which could both have taken me across. I thrust my foot at one courageously, before changing my mind, overbalancing, and slipping into the water. Laughter and sarcastic applause hit me, colder than the stream. One wet shoe and one dry. She gave me a sympathetic smile as I climbed the bank.

—You ok? She asked. The first words she had ever addressed to me.

—Fine. I said, not knowing what more to add.

She walked several places ahead of me—an exquisite creature among the incessant repetition of nettles and ferns. The greens and browns of the world around me swirled with her image in my mind, muddying the clarity I sought about how to confess my adoration. The twisted branches were bars between me and my desire to speak to her. I wished to set fire to them all, and was thankful when we finally emerged from their oppressive arms. The long summer day was just fading as we gained the lodge, greeted by warm chicken wraps and cool drinks. I watched her assemble hers delicately, with a pair of fine white hands and a turquoise bracelet on her wrist. She sat with friends, chatting amiably but not finishing her meal. She became sullen and quiet as it grew dark, turning the bracelet around her wrist nervously. The colour of her confidence had disappeared along with the daylight.

Though the night was clear and warm she grew visibly more anxious as we were led up the hill. It was only then I realised why. We would each be dropped off, one by one, in the bush and left for two hours. Alone. Two girls nearby were carrying torches, but they were soon confiscated. We were to sit in complete darkness. That was the point. I relished the thought. Two hours to just sit and be! She clearly detested it. Even in the low light I could see her pupils wide and her cheeks flushed with triangles of red. She spoke frantically to her friends, saying she didn't want to do it, she wanted to go back, could she be left somewhere where she could see the stars? Her voice was hoarse and her breathing shallow. I had smuggled a glowstick in my jacket pocket. Much easier to conceal than a torch. I knew it would shine yellow when I snapped it.

I could give it to her. She'll appreciate it more than me. I don't mind the dark. How I wished to be the one to assuage her anxiety.

We reached the edge of the bush, and stood in loose clusters, waiting to be delivered into the darkness. I approached her. Her anxiety had reached its peak. Her hands were clasped under her chin

and she was trying not to shake. Her friends continued to console her. I willed them away silently. I wanted to speak to her alone but they wouldn't leave. She shivered though it was warm. I stood sheepishly on the edge of her group, my hand clasping the glowstick in my jacket pocket.

A stern voice in the dark called for us to form a queue. Quickly. We were led into the bush, a procession of bodies, and dropped off one by one. I sat on a patch of decaying leaves and took out the glowstick. It had snapped in my pocket and radiated yellow.

I saw myself in the darkness and threw the glowstick into the night.

Mike Bilodeau

Ohhhshitoohshit

The scene:

Me, 7.

My brother, 11.

Home alone while my parents are out to lunch.

The setting:

Our lounge.

Light blue carpet. Plush red leather couches.

Television.

And a grandiose framed oil painting of an abstract landscape

hanging above an inset brick fireplace.

The issue:

I don't know.

Probably involves TV channels.

What else do kids fight about?

My solution:

Scream.

Jump up and down on the spot.

Try to break my little feet through the floorboards.

Scream louder.

The outcome:

Now, here's where shit gets real.

With that smug little asshole standing in front of me, grinning his shit-eating little front-tooth-missing

fucking grin, I feel all the pent up rage, all the pent up injustice of him being insurmountably bigger and stronger than me.

So I jump higher. And my feet come down harder. The fury that my parents would leave this fucker in charge.

Jump higher. Come down harder.

The tears streaming down my face in a well of frustration.

Higher. Harder.

And stop.

The oil painting on the wall silences us with a sharp snap of its string.

What happens next can well be summed up as the longest 5 seconds of my entire fucking life.

The giant frame, jostled on by my plea for retribution, tears itself from its anchored walls and takes a short jump onto the mantelpiece ledge.

And pause.

4 wide eyes, 2 open mouths.

Perhaps not as stable on its feet as it once was, the top begins its slow (painfully slow) geriatric tumble forward.

In a spread eagled sprawl it hurtles towards the floor and comes to a ground-shaking, belly-wrenching crash at both of our feet.

Silence. Silence and whatever stupid goddamn TV show my brother got to pick playing in the background.

What occurs to me:

1. Holy shit, I'm pretty much the Incredible Hulk.
2. The Incredible Hulk was probably never this pants-

shittingly terrified of what his dad was going to do when he got back from lunch.

“Uh oh,” my brother announces.
He knows he’s as culpable as me.
Sure, he wasn’t bouncing up and down like some hyped up little crack-head, but we can all be damned sure that he’d exacerbated this whole mess. Inciting it all like some little toe-sock wearing Che Guevara. We’re in this together cabrón.

I walk over to the fallen frame and prod it with my toe.

....

I’m not sure what outcome I’m expecting.
We know not to touch it. We’ve broken enough glass shit in our time to know that mum’s the only one who’s allowed to get near it.

Without a word, we both shuffle back to the couch and prop ourselves onto it using both hands.
His smugness, gone.
My rage, gone.
Both replaced with a matching interior monologue along the lines of, “ohhhshitohshitohshit”.

After what seems like hours of sitting in blank-stared silence, the familiar sound of the garage door opening grinds its way into our eardrums.
Our day of reckoning has come.
The angry hand of God is steering his Jeep Cherokee into our closed off little world.
The engine goes silent. The car doors open.

And BAM! The closing of the doors set us sprinting

like a starter pistol.

As if my dad will only believe the first story he hears
walking in the door.

We're stupid, but shit, it's worth a shot.

The front door opens and I see the smiling faces of
both my parents, mid-conversation as they take their
first carefree steps into this warzone. Little do they
know the mayhem that awaits them.

We meet their warm, heart-felt smiles with a torrent
of furious, emotionally fuelled defense of a crime
they don't know we've committed yet.

Get your words in first.

Get 'em in first and, if that fails, get 'em in louder.

I pray for misery

I pray for misery
Give me a war.
Give me my cause—filled with righteous indignation
—to stand and fight for freedom and faith.
Coke my boots in mud and send bullets screaming
past me.
Drill them into the soft, warm bodies; the cold, brittle
bones, of my friends and countrymen.
Give me mortar blasts and shrapnel wounds.
I want to feel my eardrums shatter as buildings tear
like paper.
I want to taste the concrete dust as it coats my nose
and throat.
Give me battle scars and necrotized tissue.
Let me be a martyr. A hero. A savior.

I feel soft. Useless. Forgettable.
Give me my people to protect and an excuse to
unleash violence onto another human being.
Give me a fire in my belly and a coldness to my eyes.
I want a purpose.

I pray for heartbreak.
Give me trauma.
Interrupt my quiet drive home with screeching tyres
and a God-waking crash.
Throw me amongst cutting glass and crushing steel.
Coat my tongue in iron red and watch me desperately

drag my childhood sweetheart from the burning wreckage.

Wake me to the acrid smell of sterility; the constant beep of monitors.

Give me I.V drips and life-saving surgery.

Roll tears down my gravel-cut cheek and mourn my loss for my one and only.

I don't want my life to be a road, littered with close-calls and dreary passers-by.

I want my life to be a crater—a bombsight with shockwaves stretching from birth to death.

I want to separate it all into 'before' and 'after.'

I pray for struggle.

Give me a great depression.

Make every living day a battle.

Lower the bar and make prevailing the pinnacle of success. Let me embrace the animal within.

I want to scrounge and scavenge and fight to survive.

Drag me to a hell filled with the sick and hungry.

Watch me claw my way through existence.

I want to dream of greener pastures and a better time.

Feel my stomach tear at its walls. Feel my mouth dry to dust.

I want to collapse in the street and not be alone.

Give me stories my children will be too frightened to hear.

Give me a book I will be too harrowed to write.

Paint the pages with my blood. My heartache. My struggle.

Let them weigh heavy with a gravity that crushes my shoulders and breaks my back.

I pray for a legacy to be forced upon me.

I pray for a simpler time.

Mayhem Literary Journal

I pray for the moment that defines who I am.

I pray for misery. long stretch of gravel

thick with

woodchip dandruff &

broken cell

phone

birdsong

running away from

my mountain

its weight under my thumb

rising up through crooked

grates in the earth

there's no reception

here

Carl Unternahrer

Hollow Point

Firing a rifle is a simple thing.

You pull the trigger. This releases a spring that flicks the rifle's hammer forward, striking the firing pin. This in turn, is thrust forward to strike a primer at the base of the ammunition cartridge that sits in the barrel. The firing pin striking the primer creates a spark that ignites the gunpowder contained within the cartridge. The explosive force of this combusting gunpowder separates the projectile from the tip of the cartridge. This force then continues to propel the projectile forward, out of the barrel and towards the target.

Firing a rifle is a simple thing.

The projectile impacts the target. Most hunting cartridges use jacketed hollow point rounds. A JHP round features a hole bored in its tip. This hole creates a point of structural weakness in the projectile, causing it to fragment upon contact with the target. In what is commonly referred to as a 'mushroom effect', the fragmenting projectile expands as it penetrates, ensuring maximal tissue damage and shock to the target's nervous system.

Firing a rifle is a simple thing...

What is not so simple, however, is why somebody would turn that rifle around and fire it at himself.

The first question that springs to mind in regard to this scenario is a simple one— why?

Why would you do it? Why would you pull the trigger that trips the spring that flicks the hammer that hits the pin that strikes the primer that sparks the powder that fires the bullet down the barrel and into yourself?

Why?

It is a simple question—but one that apparently lacks a simple answer. So, allow me to ask you something a little more direct:

Have you ever seen the impact of a suicide upon a family?

Have you ever seen your mother sitting at the computer, chin resting on clenched fist as she clicks her way like clockwork through an old slide-show of photos?

Have you ever seen your sister embrace the Love of her Everlasting Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

What about your grandparents? Have you ever seen them struck down by a stroke as their teary-eyed children deliver the news to their doorstep one Tuesday afternoon?

And your father. Your father that cracked jokes at the end of the Green Mile. Have you ever seen him shed a single tear before? Try seeing him break down at the kitchen table, hiding his face in one hand as he sobs away, pleading: He was my son! He was my son!

Have you ever beat at the ground with your fists? Have you slammed them into the damp dirt over and over and over until your watch has broken off and been flung away, forgotten; until the grass gives way to mud that smears itself into the cuts on your knuckles; until the dew soaks through your socks and your jeans and the front of your shirt as you're lying there? As you're lying there face down—alone in the middle of a crowd of people reaching down to tell you that everything will be okay.

So have you seen those things? If you had then you'd know this: That a suicide impacts just like a jacketed hollow point—it penetrates before expanding for maximal damage.

And if you had seen those things then you wouldn't have done it.

You wouldn't have stuck the tip of that rifle in your mouth. You wouldn't have left us with nothing but impotent questions and a box that we couldn't open—they said it would be better if we didn't see the body.

I can still see you though.

I see you smiling in all those damned photos that Mum puts up around the house. I see you smiling on green couches. I see you smiling under green trees. I see you smiling arm in arm with other smiling people. I see you smiling alone with the sun. You're always smiling. You're a smiling fucking ghost leering down out of the walls...

Always smiling.

But I don't even need the photos to see you.

I see you sifting through your pile of possessions in the family room: Your red and tan Swandri, your shearing kit, your rugby boots, your washing basket, your chilly-bin—all slowly disappearing on TradeMe. I see you sitting in Grandad's old rocking chair as we got pissed and talked shit about guns and girls in your lounge. I see you rolling around on the grass with Tess as she taps me on the leg with her paw, mooching for a tummy-rub. I see you laughing in the driver's seat as your Hilux spirals its way sideways around the paddock.

I see you whenever I pick up a rifle.

I see you standing there, alone in your house on that wide, lonely field. The TV is switched off. There's nothing worth watching on a Sunday evening anyway. Hunting & Fishing pamphlets lie scattered on the table alongside loose matches and stray shotgun shells. You close the vent on the fire and let it dwindle down to crimson embers.

As you do so, a dusting of ash drifts wearily through the air, only to end up smudged underfoot into the carpet.

You wander past the kitchen, with its piles of dirty dishes covering every surface, and into the bathroom where mould is growing on the ceiling... But fuck it, you can worry about the mess some other time. Leaning on the sink you look into the mirror and the guy who looks back at you has a nose that is too crooked and a complexion that is too red and eyes that keep avoiding your gaze so you turn away.

You go to get your phone from that one spot on the top of the couch where it can get a bar of reception:

She hasn't texted you back.
She stopped replying hours ago.
But maybe that's for the best.

The land-line sleeps in its cradle and you consider calling Mum again but end up deciding that it would be weird to call her twice in one night. Besides, you didn't really have anything to say to her the first time you called and its getting too late now. The red bars on your clock glare down at you.

Yeah, Mum would definitely be in bed by now.

So you pick up a pen and start writing. It takes a while. You haven't written this much in one go since you finished school, but once you get started it all begins flowing again—down your arm, through the pen and out onto the paper. All of the texts that shrivel your guts up into your chest. All of the embraces sent unspoken down the phone-line. All of the claws that scrape along the inside of your skull. You release those things that you kept tucked away inside yourself. Locked up to simmer and boil and blister and burst. You pour each of them out, page after page.

Then when you're done you fold them up into a neat little package. On that package you write three simple words. To My Family. And now that it's all sitting there in front of you, wrapped

up nicely on the table; you realise that you have nothing left inside. You are a shell. A blank. A hollow in the shape of a human being.

So you pick up your rifle.

You take it into your room and sit on the edge of your bed. The curtains are closed but the door is open. You get up and close the door as well. Sitting back down, you rest the rifle across your lap and look at it for a while. Synthetic stock. Floating barrel. 6X optical zoom. You aren't crying.

The rifle doesn't say anything.

Your eyes may be red, but that's just from yesterday's sun. You know that you aren't crying.

The rifle doesn't say anything at all.

You get up again and open up your gun-cabinet in the wardrobe. After tossing up between the three-shot and the five-shot magazine you decide that it really doesn't matter which one you use so you grab the nearest. It happens to be the five-shot. You grab a round as well.

Sitting down once more, you rest the rifle again over your knees. You roll the round between thumb and forefinger a few times before you click it into the magazine and then click the magazine into the rifle. Holding the rifle in your right hand, you lift the bolt with your left and slide it back without thinking. You've slid that bolt back and forward so many times before, but now you catch yourself while it's still open. You slide it forward again—but more slowly this time, more deliberately. With a long exhale you press it back down again.

The actions are solid. Simple.

You place the butt of the rifle on the ground and hold the forestock in both hands as you close your eyes and lower your head. The end of the barrel is bitter and smells faintly of sulphur but it rests cool against your tongue. Your foot glides up the side of the stock, inching closer and closer toward the trigger.

Then I drop the rifle and the bang of wooden butt meeting wooden floor sends me ricocheting back into my own life and back to my question.

Why?

And I don't like to hold rifles any more. So instead I pick up a pen. I sit down and I pour it all out; all of the questions, all of the accusations, all of the morbid fantasies that flick around the darkest corners of my mind. Then once it's all sitting there wrapped up nicely in front of me—I come to realise something.

I realise that I'm hollow myself.

And I'm not alone either... Because everyone else is hollow too. We are all just jacketed hollow points. We're tiny packages hurtling blissfully towards our targets, only realising that we're empty as we burst apart on impact.

And yet... I am okay with this. Who would ever introspect while they're whizzing through the air at four thousand one hundred and four kilometres per hour? Who would begrudge a cubic millimetre of empty space when they're surging with one thousand five hundred and twenty eight Joules of kinetic energy? We're tiny packages hurtling blissfully through life—and that is enough for me.

But it wasn't enough for you. And now I'm left back where I started. Left with that same, simple, endless question.

Why?

But I won't ask you any more.

There's no point—the question is hollow.

Faith Wilson

Smokers

Pink smokers taste like the inside
Of my Mum's bag.
An unfortunate few from
An absentmindedly opened packet
(Maycey's)
find themselves
hanging about with the other
derelicts of her rucksack
crumbs stick to hanging out
in the corners
an antisocial bunch,
chewing gum wrappers
social butterflies,
and coins, five cent pieces
the occasional fifty,
gold?
You're dreamin'
Loud as church bells
So you have to be sneaky
Or Mum will snap you when
You try to pinch a few.

Karl Guethert

Conscience

I'm being hunted by
Jiminy Cricket.

Everywhere I go
I see him.

Massive, black, in random locations.

The supermarket.

The Men's room.

The Library door.

Backstroke in the fountain.

Lurking about in no-man's land.

The Men's room.
Again.

(Seriously?)

I'm starting to doubt my sanity
Question my subconscious
Ponder my dilemmas
Ramble unnecessarily...
I mean, seriously—the Men's room?

What's up with that?

Voyeurism?

Creepy, much?

Need to pee? You're a cricket damn it. Pee outside.

Wait, are you even male? 'Cause that's a little shady if
you're not but still hanging out in the Men's room...

Cricket.

Are you a hallucination?

Why are you here?

Are you even here?

What does this mean?

Oh god, where did you go?

I'd better not see you at my house

That'll be the final straw...

A line crossed.

Make me doubt myself when I'm out

That's fine.

But.

My house is my castle.

My mind is my fortress.

My body is my temple.

No man is an island.

Time waits for no-one.

For whom the bell tolls.

I am the... walrus...?

Rambling again...

Damn you, Mr. Jiminy!

What have you done to my mind?!

...Good Book Down

“I’m an introverted extrovert.”

I’d tell people this with a toothy grin. But what the fuck did that even mean? Nothing really. It was a bullshit category for a bullshit sense of self-worth. I wanted a label, and this one made me feel special. Made me feel unique. Gave me a mask to hide behind. It was almost liberating. But most people just looked at me with a raised eyebrow whenever I mentioned it. The best part was that it helped me to sink further into my own shell. I blanketed myself with another layer of distance.

I wasn’t always like this, however. This sounds cliché, but High school was the catalyst. Things were going fine. I had a plan. I had a girlfriend. I had a future with rainbows and pots of gold. Then one day I didn’t have any of those things. All I did have were three conflicting points of view. I can’t say that it was all her fault, but she certainly kicked my brain in the balls.

“No-one loves a balding teen”

“It’s not your fault.”

**“Do it. Kill yourself.
No-one will care.”**

*“At least wait until you’re finished reading
Lord of the Rings.”*

**“I told you—no-one loves
a balding teen.”**

*“Don’t forget what your dad said. Puberty
is just a time for your hormones to act up.
Your thoughts are messed up by hormones.”*

“Just do it already!”

“...”

“Where’s the other guy?”

“Who cares? Just do IT!”

I’m glad I decided to wait for another reply. When I looked back much later on I noticed the dust ridden sign:

“Out to lunch. Back in 12 years.”

At least he had the decency to come back to lock the door and leave me a final kernel of helpful advice.

Of course, even the end of High School didn’t make a difference. I tried to focus on my education in order to rebuild a dream. I’ve never touched the stuff, but my ego began to take the hardest drugs available. Cue the years of:

**“You Suck!
YOU SUCK!
YOU SUCK!”**

“Tell me something I don’t know!”

“Y’know, your sister has schizophrenia.

Pretty good chance you're a nut bag too."

I started to believe my own lies. I really did become useless. I buried my loves. I exsanguinated my hopes. I turned my dreams into roadblock sized nightmares. Every single spark in my body was doused. I started simply living from day to day. I had no idea what I wanted anymore, no idea where to go. I wasn't good enough. I wasn't talented. I hid. Slithered. I only put half of my arse behind everything I did. Hell, even the High School cleaning job was exciting. And that job was boring as fuck.

And then a friend of mine told me how low she had gotten. Much lower than myself. Her contemplations and plans were far darker. More gut-wrenching. It was like she punched me right in the heart. The storm clouds in my own mind were pushed aside. I wouldn't say I became a new man. That's not only terribly clichéd, but it's also a lie. In reality, I became the man I already was. I simply learned instead how to discard the mask of bullshit, the suit of lies, the shoes of self-deception. It took a while, but I stopped hiding behind paranoid walls:

"Shit, I should have said that differently."

"They think you're a dick."

"I've gotta remember to say it better next time."

"Get your shit together and think before you speak."

Eventually, I realised that I wasn't a dick. My subconscious, however, had somehow become an asshole. Once I started combating my paranoia, things started looking brighter. I dropkicked my second-guessing. I blasted my frozen heart with a flamethrower. I took a sword to my soul. I started to compartmentalise what was really hurtful, and what was simply something to ignore. And that was just

the tip of the iceberg. I finally put some earplugs in and decided to ignore the dickhead voice on my shoulder.

**“I told you, no-one loves
a balding man-child.”**

“Did anyone hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“Hey, don’t you forget about me!”

“Seriously, can anyone hear a buzzing sound?”

*“I can’t hear anything over the
sound of how awesome you are.”*

“That’s exactly what I thought.”

“Fuck.”

Chris Lee

Gone Riding

I had a headache last night.

You weren't here and I won't tell you. I couldn't sleep much with that old woman up and down the hall all night. Her voice is like the cows lowing for their lost calves when the milking starts. I spent half the night wanting to put her in a paddock down the back of the farm, the other half remembering.

Do you remember the competition we had on the bridge that first time we went out? I wanted to let you win but when it came to it you couldn't spit further than your foot so I showed you what a King Country bloke could do. I had a long ride home on the horse and all the way I worried you'd not want to see me again. I thought you'd think me crude. Well, that was thirty and more years ago and here we are. Looking back I reckon tragedy knocked any pretence from us both. My dad dying crushed by a tree and leaving six kids and Mum on the farm and your brother killed by the mill machinery when he took dinner to your dad, then your dad turning drunkard. I guess a girl who helped old Edward home drunk as often as you did could find a spitting competition fit courting.

I wanted to chop wood last night. My competition axes are sharp and in the shed. I'd even use them on firewood now. I never told you but I chop wood on washdays so I can watch you work over the copper and washboard. You wiping sweat from your forehead, eyes all fiery with the smoke when the wind blows contrary and then with ire when I tell you to get a hurry on. There's nothing like the aching of muscles and sweat on his shirt and a blister or two to make a man feel he's used a day from his life properly. Being near you gave it all purpose.

The headache's strong now. I'm closing an eye while I write. It'll be gone tonight or tomorrow, I'm expecting. I'll go riding then. Not

on Judge, sadly. That old horse has jumped enough hurdles carrying my oversize frame to keep you polishing trophy cups for a lifetime. I'll be riding though, you remember that. I might go in the bush. Last night I remembered fencing on the bush line as a young fellah. I imagined you would have been picking coal up from train tracks beside your house with your dad or practicing your violin while I was felling totara, neither of us knowing the other existed or what we would become together. A long time gone now but the memories haven't faded at all. I can still recollect the scent of the sap and the feel of woodchips hitting my arms as I swung the axe and the dust falling into my socks from the two man crosscut saw Fred and I used on the big trees and to cut the lengths. The sounds are still clear too, the tree tearing itself free from the stump, creaking and groaning, the leaves rustling on the way down, then the branches cracking and the thud of the trunk shaking the ground. I can even recall the rain dripping on the tent canvas beneath the tree canopy and the smell of bread baking in the camp oven when it was too wet to split the logs into battens or dig posts in and string wire.

I remembered building the house too. Four of us mates building four houses. Hard work. Evenings while the sun allowed and all weekends. You feeding us, speckled with paint. At the time it was the greatest achievement of our lives. Our own home on ten acres. A horse paddock, sheep and a milk cow. Then you brought Laura Kay home from the hospital, then Nanette. Everything else faded. You three are my life, and now Laura and Nan's daughters of course.

Since I'm laying things out true for you I'll say I snuck lots of your preserves over the years. I gave the jars away when people down in the village struck hard times. Maybe some money went the same way now and then without anyone knowing, but maybe you figured that. Not sure if you know though, I don't much like photography. I'm not saying it's burdensome. I enjoyed the time together looking for photo shots for you, the day trips and camping with the girls when they were young, always with a camera. Sometimes on the farm I see a scene and I wish I could call you in that moment and watch you look through the viewfinder, all intense and purposeful. The dark room was different altogether, a private place for just you and I. I

can feel you now, your arm against mine as we stand, red bathed and peering at the images coming from nowhere onto the paper.

The simple things came back most vivid in the night. Horses stamping their hooves and blowing warm breath in the mist of a winter morning when I bring them feed. A fantail flitting in the trees around the camp. Getting a ewe to take an orphan lamb. Seeing the dogs bring the cows in on the whistle. But the best memories are filled with you. Thirty years. When I leave here I want you to take me to the back of the farm, where you and I walked, across paddocks grazed clean and smooth by sheep, insects flying through the air, bright in the sunlight, you holding my hand, sitting under a Kahikatea tree, drinking tea from the thermos and eating your sandwiches while the birds sang.

You visited just now. I wanted to talk more but the headache was strong. Grumble all you like but I didn't tell you because I don't want you to worry. That's my last gift to you, Ivy my love, a few more hours of hope.

We knew it was a long shot, surgery into the brain. A man's face can travel almost anywhere in the country and appear on one of those new televisions, but fixing the inside of his head when it's broken is taming a different kind of animal.

I don't want you upset when I'm gone. I know it'll be hard on you but I'll be content like I told you. It will be just like the book says. Everything good from here, none of the bad. You prattle on about paying the ferryman to cross the River Styx, but I know that's you being stubborn with God and prideful with the rest of us. I'll go riding. Maybe Dad will be there waiting with horses from his farm. Mum and your brothers Keith and Laurence too.

The headache's a six pound hammer now, almost as bad as your moaning for days on end the time I rode Judge through the house. I think maybe the nurse's voice won't be a bother tonight after all. It's getting hard holding the pen too, worse than shearing the last sheep of a twelve hour day, so I'll stop. I'll think of you and the girls while I ride. It won't be right without you, but I'll wait.

Helena Dow

Breakdown

Set me free from the barred enclosure
and scratch off the ice
where my mouth persists against the wall of solid,
my lips still in the shape of my last offering.

Drill two holes where my lashes
and upper eyelids
are bonded to the frozen window.
Separate the deep pocket of spikes from my eyeballs
and release the terror from my manifested eyes.

Chisel gentle around my compacted breasts,
and scrape free my lungs.
De-ice the slime and mucus in my throat
to ventilate the grievance, the silent arguments
and inaudible lyrics.

Open a passage to my heart and my coronary atrium.
Let the phlegm in my isolated veins liquefy,
and kindly remodel
and control my atrial pacing.

Carve out my elongated body,
and sculpt with care along my spiny back
to retain the image of my vertical stability.

Pare sensibly around my front and dorsal limbs.
Untangle my wispy fingers, one by one,

and slowly undo my folded hands across my groin.

Slice the ice between my legs.
The reckless stroke of the blade
intends to shatter the last relics of my constraint.

Let my limp body glide to the surface,
let me feel the light,
and leave behind the toxin-filled piles and slivers...

Impressionism

She sits on an angle
in the left corner of the wooden window sill
on a tangerine shade of fleece.
Her inactive body covered with an olive stroke
exhales harmony.
Her right foot, pixyish and ashen
dangles from the knee downwards.
Her freckled arms loose aside
appear bronzed in the reflection
of her setting and the reddened blush
of her let-down mane.
Her modest mouth vaguely open;
engaging, calm and ginger dyed.
Golden sprays in sea-green eyes
framed by a flaxen spread of lashes.
Last sunbeams flashing by
and holding the instant for a moment
longer.

Stephen Henderson

Pill Time

Hi there, my name is Stephen. It is so nice to meet you. Would you like to hear a little bit about me? Or me? Or me? Or him? I could tell you all about him? No fucking, shit balls. I'm getting frustrated here. How frustrated? As much as a two fingered retard trying to send a text message. Sorry are you confused? No I am not going to change this, I am not going to re-assign anything. The paragraph structure is fucking perfect so don't even fucking sugges-

Pill time.

Sorry about that, I get like that sometimes. Anyway I am Stephen. I'm 16 years old and I currently don't really live anywhere. Awesome huh? Of course it is, it's soooooooooooooo awesome. I was kicked out of home at fifteen... aren't I lucky, go on tell me I'm lucky. That's right mum couldn't handle me, haha, hilarious isn't it. And so fucking lucky! I am my own man, my own sixteen year old, on the street, dirty, grotty, pubescent, scared, lonely, a guilty horrible, terrible weak man. I don't know who I am, do you know who you are? Where am i? I don't know you, who are you? Who am i? WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON!

Pill time.

Ahhh there we go. Anyway as I was saying, I suffer from a very rare condition. Being a dick. That's right, I remember being out with my friends when some drunk guy threw a rock at us. Yeap, big mistake buddy. Did I tell you I did boxing? No? I did boxing. I was the under eighteen North Island champion for a while there.

No I was. No I was. Shut up, you only got to do any of that because I was there pushing you. You were there, what the bloody hell are you talking about? You know what I'm talking about you ungrateful little twat! I like the word twat... it's hilarious. It can be pronounced twat or twot. Hahahhahahahahaha. So fucking funny! Like the time I told Mr Weeds to lick my balls... then he died. Death is fucking hilarious. Ladedadedadededa plonk dead HAAAAAAAAAAAA.

Pill time.

My name is Stephen and I have been diagnosed with post traumatic bipolar schizophrenic disorder. I don't know either. I heard a couple of people talking the other day. "Oh give me drugs I love drugs"—really? Really? Really? Really? Really? Really? Really? Really? Really enjoy cakes. Especially chocolate cakes. Wait a second, I'm confused...

Pill time.

The other person said back, "Oh you wouldn't want to see me when I am on my pills." Well I really think you wouldn't want to see me not on mine either. It's kind of a Banner and Hulk thing. Stephen smash! Like the time those guys threw a rock at me in town. My friends all stood there staring, why were they staring? We could be punching, crushing, destroying! We could overwhelm them, yes consume them. I could smell their fear, they threw it because they are drunk, let me out! LET ME DESTROY THEM. I have to say I let him out, he did destroy them. In fact, Stephen. Yes Stephen? Would you like to take it from here Stephen? Of course I would Stephen. So they threw a rock and yelled something out at Matt. Now they were in more trouble than a Cub Scout at the Neverland ranch. Hahahahaha it's funny? Why aren't you laughing? Paedophilia is hilarious isn't it? ISNT IT?

Pill time.

So I ran over to them, I knew what I was doing. There was three of them, my friends were there, but they were trying to stop me. Good luck. Hit the first one, the drunk guys, not my friends. We don't drink why would you think that! Fuck off, no we don't, we do not fucking drink! Anyways, so where was I? Ahh yes in the ring, this was it the big fight. I could smell sweat and blood. Anyone aroused yet? No, let me continue then. He came at me... see what I did there, ahahahhahahahaha lol at violence. Anyways so he came at me and tried with a combo 113223124. HA! Fucking amateur, who ends on a 4? Paddy only lasted four. If you know what I mean. The intensity was getting to me, one overhand. That's all it took, down he went. I shattered part of his spine. It's not a very good shock absorber.

Pill time.

So anyway I hit the first guy, he went down. It was awesome, I felt his jaw lock around my knuckles like glove. Beautiful, he went straight back into the window of Michael Hill Jeweller. I should have said something witty like "gold," yes very witty Stephen, incredibly well done Stephen, thank you Stephens. So I beat them up, story over fucking yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay.

Pill time.

Story not over, I was put into prison. They told me I could never leave. They told me I was sick. I'm still here, I don't know why. I have to get out. She needs me. Tash needs me. She hasn't been acting normally lately. I DON'T WANT ANOTHER FUCKING PILL! I want to see my girlfriend. We are going to get married. I love her so much and she loves me too. I know, I'm so lucky. Even though I am in here she will wait for me, you will see. She loves me. They keep telling me she's gone. Please. She's not gone. She hasn't gone anywhere. I don't know why they keep telling me that she has. I don't know why they keep telling me she's dead. I love her. She loves me. How could she? She can't. I love her. She loves me. We are

Stephen and Tash. You know us, the whole fucking world knows us. We have been the time bomb that society needs since day one. You know us. I love her. She loves me. Love. I would die for her. And when I get out, I am going to marry her. I love her. She loves me. You'll see. We picked out a ring, I'm saving for it, I'm about halfway there. We want to go to Israel for our honey moon. We are so happy. You can never take that away from me. I won't let you, what are you doing? Get away from me. Get the fuck away from me. I don't want another pill, I want to see Tash! I want to see my girlfriend, I want to see the girl that I

Pill time.

Report

Stephen doesn't fit the bill. He is simply: too short, too fat, too loud, too quiet, too red, too blue, too imaginative, too lazy, too Stephen. He is never what people want. Never the first pick. Never the winner. He is the other story; he is the story that doesn't deserve that triumphant brass band playing in the background. He is more of a case of the bottom feeder of society to be. I would like to say he has potential, but that would be a lie. I would like to say he can make people smile, but that would be a lie. I would like to say that he is a deep insightful person with a bright future, but once again, that would be a lie.

Most children find what they're good at around the age of fifteen. Stephen found that he was good at fucking things up. We are pleased that he has found something that he can do consistently. Once again I would like to mention that he is stupid. Completely and utterly stupid. He is not good at math. Not like Brendan Harris. Brendan Harris knows all of his timetables and is often the fastest to recount them when asked. Stephen looks out of the window while we do maths because he is too stupid to carry out the tasks or memorize the formulas required. Not like Brendan Harris. Once again... stupid very, very stupid.

When it comes to English his hand writing is appalling. It is almost at the level of one of the Special Needs children. Almost. I think his struggles with penmanship are linked to his inexplicable inability to look good in photos. He always has his eye closed or his mouth open. With his rotting teeth and drool hanging from his mouth. He is truly a disgusting little freak. Obviously he doesn't take pride in his appearance. Quite often he will come to school without shoes wearing the same track pants he had on the day previously and holes

in his T-shirt. He is nothing like Sophia Roberts. Sophia Roberts always wears pretty little dresses. Sophia Roberts' hair is always brushed to perfection and tied with a ribbon or head band. Sophia Roberts is so beautiful, not like ugly, short, disgusting Stephen.

When it comes to physical education Stephen struggles to keep up with the other children. The staff see him try and move his fat little legs and can't help but laugh. Oh it is very humorous to see him sucking on his little blue inhaler. I think it should be taken away from him. I think he should have to survive without it. He is nothing like Potama Brown. Potama Brown is such a fast little boy. Potama Brown is always picked first for all of the sports teams and you can tell that he cares about a healthy lifestyle. That is because Potama Brown is a good little boy that is on three different sports teams. Not like Stephen who probably couldn't even stomach one.

Stephen also seems to struggle when it comes to making friends. This is probably because all of the other children have picked up on how inferior he is. He tries to make jokes and just receives blank faces. He doesn't seem to understand that he is not invited to play with them at playtime or lunch. When he came to the school social, not one girl would dance with him. Not that I can blame them. We educate girls to choose carefully who they dance with. Not to pick any losers. All the girls danced with Troy Heywood. Troy Heywood is such a good looking boy, and he always knows how to make the children laugh. Troy Heywood goes to a private school to teach him how to dance. Troy Heywood is going to be a little star. Stephen on the other hand is second rate. He doesn't deserve the same attention.

I'm so sorry to inform you that Stephen has been found inadequate at this current juncture called life. He was too inadequate to receive a father. In fact, his inadequacies are so great that we don't believe he should have been given a mother either. We believe that his father made a correct judgement call when he left. All the arguments, yelling and beating in the world administered by his father to his mother still couldn't get the message across. The silly woman still clung onto him like he was something special. In spite of his mother's continual belief in him he constantly displays

a complete lack in anything of any real value. He is boring, he is stupid and he is grotesque and we definitely do not think he is worth investing any time, money or energy into. We would go so far as to say that we would recommend a complete write-off.

In summary he deserves everything that he gets for being so pathetic. He deserves to be kicked out of home. He deserves to move from one psych ward to another, he deserves to be beaten by his uncle, he deserves to be robbed, mugged, hospitalized, we do however recommend that he receives one person who will love him in spite of it all, one who will kiss him, hug him and tell him he is worth everything, one who will promise to marry him and make him feel worthwhile, then she will commit suicide, he will not be allowed at the funeral, he will not be allowed back home he will not be allowed access to her at all and he will only have a few photos to remember her by, he will then proceed to sit at night and stare at a blank white wall while he hears her voice inside his head, while he hears her sing, while he hears her whisper, while he hears her scream, while he tries to piece together what happened, why the one thing that loved him left him, why everything leaves him, why he is even here, if he will ever recover, if anything can ever tell him he is worth more than his father, that he is worth something anything that h hne ishby wornmsth sompnvzjme ahfnL Jthing, Fj thoo so VoMoe one a thjahknh WJGHWGNLsdkgwnngiwnbowglmqwv NBSabignskgnsngsjkhvbkldsgnw,.

Why I Write

You wonder why I write like this. It's not about trying to bury myself in some sappy love story, or some high end fantasy. I can't sit down and write detective fiction. I can't touch my keyboard without pouring out a dead rainbow. All of the browns, and greys, the yellows, the blacks. This is my palate. So let me paint you a picture.

I have a picture on my wall. It hangs there in purple and red. It has greens and oranges. It is there to fight off the black that seeps between the cracks on the stark white paint. The black moves in the lines between each brick. The black slugs its way down the wall. It crushes me. The black whispers to me: "Stupid." It doesn't want me to write. It smoothers me. It tastes like it's halfway between banana skin and marmite. It oozes over my hands and forces my nails into my palms. My childhood flashes before me. Moments of absolute misery, being told that I could be retarded because of my hands. Why can't you write, and draw and tie your shoelaces like all of the other children? Because I was stupid. It slips in between each finger and one by one undermines everything. Past and present. She doesn't love you, they don't like you, it's all a game of being polite. It forces my nails down harder and I let it. I let it because I'm not worth the struggle.

My palms split under the pressure and blood rushes to meet the darkness. The colours twist together but remain distinct. They weave through my fingers. Red wraps itself around my knuckles and my soaks into my skin: "Punch." It doesn't want me to write either. It flashes me a new way to see the world. The world in all of its fucked up glory. That keeps my tongue in check and makes me think that words aren't enough. It whispers to the marrow in my bones that if I don't do something if I don't cause some kind of violent protest nobody will listen. Nobody will change. The red hisses and rises through my veins

towards my brain. People only listen when you do something you don't want to do. When you show them how angry you can be.

The red hisses and slithers away as a drop of green hits the top of my head. It drips off the stairs above me. Slow, rhythmic drips. It sins directly in though my head and fights the red off. Because in the end. It doesn't matter. "Sleep" echoes around my skull as the green, little by little lulls me away. It doesn't want me to write. It wants me to sit in front of a television, playing the latest video game and do nothing. It wants me to watch countless porn videos and never step outside. It tells me there is no point going to Uni, or going anywhere. All green does is tell me to sit, and rot and chase little things of laziness. It leaks onto my brain and starts corroding it. Burning it like acid. You don't need a brain, you don't need to write, you don't need to do anything. It twists itself around my mind and wrestles it away from anything I actually want.

This is why I have to write. These three colours come at me from all angles. I have to write to prove them wrong. I understand that your colours are different. That your yellows and your pinks and your blues don't compel you to do or think the way I do. You can write about some other world, some other person. You can tell stories that have nothing real in them, but I can't. I can't because every single fucking day of my life is a struggle. A struggle to keep from going under all of the colours. They threaten to burn me, to smother me, to build up within my veins and make me explode. So if you dare to ask me why I write what I write, you might find something that you don't like. You might find that I smile and joke and piss people off so that they don't ask if I'm feeling okay. You think you can put up a good act? One of my "friends" doesn't believe me when I tell them that I went through hell and back because I'm too happy. I don't have moments where I can slow down, or stop and think, because if I do I don't know what's going to happen. If I do my skin will peel itself off and show you all of my colours. It will show you what it truly means to be me. Why I don't choose to write a nice little story, why I don't choose what I write at all. I write what I have to write because if I don't I'll get swallowed whole.

Emily Laing

Five Ways Not to Play Poker

1.

You don't play poker with your hands,
you play it with your eyes.
Some wear glasses,
I call them cheats
Nick doesn't have a poker face for nothing.

2.

You don't play poker with your heart,
you play it with your head.
Fold unsuited two's and three's,
but raise your pockie aces
Simon doesn't part with his money easily.

3.

You don't play poker for a handshake,
you play for cold hard cash.
Bring your queens
and a box of beer
Nads' place is always social.

4.

You don't play poker to look cool,
you play to lose yourself.
Pray to the card gods
and stare down the dealer
I know Dan's bluffing the flush.

5.

You don't play poker if you don't enjoy it,
you play something else instead.

Part with your money,

I'm happy to take it.

I know I've got you covered.

Ngatea

Backyard summers and sausages with sauce.
Beer, bourbon and underage trouble.
Garages that smelt like JPS reds and too much LYNX,
skateboards worn down and wobbly.
T shirts three sizes too big and knees raw with excitement,
dirty jokes and dusty pick-up lines.
Smiles only expanding for the lip of a bottle,
tongues moistened for blue Zig Zags.
Feet graze the road doing forty,
hands are waved at regular faces.
Stolen flowers and torn books,
shoes too big to fill.
Faces tell stories of fathers' temper,
and dreams bigger than gas station forecourts.
Twelves, eighteens, twenty fours on special,
Scrumpy hands on occasion.
Listening to music some parents would call old,
dancing to our own tune something sweet.
Drinking from the hose, green skin so thick,
navigating streets blindly with ease.
Wasteland, rocks chipped and concrete gaping,
tyres that have never reversed.
Rivers in which nothing could survive,
dirty brown, tainted womb,
giving life, or some form of.
Freckles on peeling noses and shoulders
weathered by confines and picket fence.

Kay Ramsbottom

Moving on

painting in the hot sun
Tony sulked inside
(he claimed a headache)
Jonathan had come to
help me finish the house
so I could sell

we coloured over the cracks
that were filled with putty
Jonathan ran out of paint
(or so he said)
climbed my ladder to
dip in my paint can

I knew from the way
that my skin lit up
all the way from the
backs of my knees
to my buttocks
that he wanted more from me
than a brushful of
Eucalyptus Green

Jo Buer

Rabbit Skin

You took my hand in your own. Your fingers were rough against my nine-year-old skin. I wanted to pull away; you smelt like spoilt milk... but I couldn't...

Your eyes were shiny and sad. Your lips moved soundlessly as if you'd forgotten how to speak. A bubble of spit gathered at the corner of your mouth. I waited, twitching in my seat and eager to go outside. I saw you swallow; your Adam's apple bobbed under prickly ripples of skin...and then you spoke...

'You have to tell your stories while you can,' you said, 'before they stop listening.'

We almost caught a bunny yesterday...Rachel and I...We were making daisy chains...splitting holes in the stalks with our fingernails and weaving the daisies together...It was sitting on its back legs...the bunny...front paws pulled into its chest...watching us...perked ears, twitching nose and fluffy candy-floss tail...but we only saw the tail when it ran...and it did run...zigzagging and bouncing through the grass...we were going to make it our pet but it was too fast, and we lost it under the fence by the Poplars...

You were quiet for a while. Were you going to tell me a story? Or should I tell you about the bunny...I was just thinking about the bunny...maybe we should go outside and look for it...

You just sat there gripping my hand; it was beginning to hurt. Your eyes burrowed into mine and I fidgeted some more in my seat. 'Do you understand?' you finally asked, but I couldn't remember what you'd said before. Your eyebrows pitched; two furry white

caterpillars... ‘You’ll be old one day too, Bunting...’

*...Bye, baby bunting
Grandpa’s gone a hunting
To get a little rabbit skin
To wrap his baby bunting in...*

‘And when you’re old,’ you said, ‘they *all* stop listening.’

*

You came to live with us some time after Grandma died. You only had one small suitcase. Where was everything else? Mum said this was temporary, but she didn’t say for how long. You could have slept in Jamie’s room; he was away at boarding school. You would have had more space...and a T.V...but Mum put you in the spare room, the smallest in the house. No one ever went in there...it was largely left forgotten.

One little window looked out onto the garden where the apple tree grew. We forgot about the tree too. Sometimes, in summer, I’d remember the tree and it would be bursting with apples...but there would be too many...and the ground turned to mush where they fell and began rotting...sickly-sweet in the heat...but the wasps loved it; they swarmed over it like lunch...and I had to stay away or I’d be stung...I thought maybe I should tell you not to open the window. There wasn’t much furniture in your room, just a single bed pushed up against the wall, and an old oak dining-chair we sometimes borrowed when we had guests. There was a chest of drawers that used to be my brother’s, and a single built-in closet with a cupboard above too tall to reach. There was barely room for you.

You left your suitcase on the bed, open and still packed. No one was around so I had to take a look. Your clothes were neatly folded in two stacks. The smell of mothballs and old age tickled my nose. A tortoiseshell pocketknife with the blade folded inside, lay on top of one pile. I picked it up and twisted it in my hand, engrossed in its

smooth symmetry...until I found the chip, an ugly scar on a pretty face. I put it back down where I'd found it.

You'd left old-man slippers on the floor beside the bed, and I almost tripped as I moved around the space. On the dresser stood a photo of you and Grandma; it was your wedding day...I remember it from that day at the hospital. That man didn't look like you. He was young. He didn't have your wrinkles, or your tummy. And he had dark black hair, where now you had almost none. But Grandma told me it was you. And she told me you were happy, but I'd never known you to be happy...so Grandma might have been wrong.

*

Mum said Grandma was dying. I overheard her on the phone to Auntie Jean. I was supposed to be in bed but I was thirsty; I knew I'd get a growling if I got caught...so... I'd been so careful creeping down the hallway...and I'd kept my eyes down too. *If you can't see them, then they can't see you.* But I was still aware of them...the monster heads...watching me...following me with their dead glassy eyes. They were only really deer heads...I knew that...in the daytime... Dad's trophies. But it was nighttime and their antlers looked like ghostly fingers reaching for me in the dark, and even with the hall light on they made scary shadows on the wall. *But...if you can't see them, then they can't see you...if you can't see them, then they can't see you...* I knew this way was best. Rachel disagreed. When she stayed over she made us run...as fast as we could, so we wouldn't be snagged on their antlers as they reached down for us. But Rachel didn't live here. I think for her it was a game.

Mum said Grandma was dying. She choked the words in a troubled whisper into the handset of the phone. She told Auntie Jean she had to come and say goodbye as if Grandma was going somewhere...and I had to think for a moment where Grandma would be going to...

Dad took me hunting once. Mum thought I was too small

but Dad thought it would be good for me...We took the four-wheeler all the way to the boundary line where we met with Dad's friend Barry...then we walked for forever...weaving our way upward through pine and bush...and it was cold...and it was damp... and I didn't really want to be there...And then we had to wait...hidden in the brush...and I ate cheese sandwiches while Dad and Barry talked in whispers and fiddled with their rifles. They lay on their bellies...aiming, readjusting, peering through their scopes...until Bambi wandered into sight...and I forgot that we were hunting...and it came into the clearing...lifting its delicate neck and sniffing at the breeze. I saw its body go rigid...it flicked its little tail...its ears half turned...

BANG!

...a ricochet through the trees. The deer dropped, hind legs kicking as if it were still running...my cheeks were wet and I closed my eyes...and I wanted Mum...

She was going to be dead. *Death* was the destination. I thought of the monster heads I'd tip-toed past in the hallway, and I imagined Grandma's head being one of them, leering at me in the dark...and my hands got really sweaty and I began to shake, and I held onto the doorjamb with both hands...but Mum still didn't notice me.

'What are we going to do about Dad?' Mum asked. For a moment I thought she was talking to me but her back was to the door. She hmmm-ed and haaa-ed into the phone. Her shoulders slumped as a sigh heaved through her body, then she shook with belly-aching mouse like sniffles, and I knew that she was crying...but I didn't know what that had to do with my Dad...

*

You were there at the hospital. You were slumped in a chair by the window looking at your hands, twisting them palm up, palm down, as if you'd never seen them before. As if they didn't belong to you.

Grandma was sitting upright in the hospital bed. She didn't look like she was dying. She had a tube that went up her nose, and another one in her hand, taped so it wouldn't move. I tried not to look at that one for long; I don't like needles...

Screens around her beeped and lights flashed but she didn't seem to mind. She was chatting to Aunty Jean when we arrived.

'Bridget! Jamie!' Grandma cried on seeing us. I flung myself into her arms and pressed my face into her flannel nightgown, you know the one...with little yellow daisies... Jamie barely moved. He shuffled his feet a little towards the bed then stood there, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. We'd picked him up from boarding school. He was still wearing his uniform. He didn't want to come to the hospital. He said they smelt bad; they had a hospital smell...bleach and belches and bodies-in-closed-spaces stuffiness. He was right. It made my nose crinkle.

You still hadn't looked up.

Mum shook and started sniffing at the end of the bed. I nestled into the crook of Grandma's arm being careful not to touch the tubes. I really didn't like the tubes... Mum's nose went red and blotchy and she started dabbing at her eyes. Aunty Jean gave her a hug. 'Why don't you kids stay here with Grandma a moment, and we'll take Grandpa for a coffee?' I think Jamie tried to argue with Mum. There were some tense murmurs. I traced the daisies with my fingers...like a daisy chain. Grandma kissed the top of my head. You still didn't look up. Mum won. Jamie had to stay.

Mum straightened her shoulders, walked over to the window... 'Come on Dad, let's go for a walk,' and she reached down and took one of your hands in hers, and you looked up then...and I saw your eyes...they were pink...and your face was broken somehow...and you stood up...slowly...carefully...wobbling...and you tugged at your belt with your free hand, pulling your pants higher up your belly...

*Do you remember that belt, Grandpa? Of course you do!
I remember it too... You always wore it...but you didn't*

always wear it right. It was brown leather. Faded. Worn. You use to wear it under your belly...tightly cinched. Your tummy would spill over so that I never saw the buckle until you started to wear it higher...higher...higher...almost on top of your belly. I don't know why you started doing this. It didn't look comfy...but I could see the holes then...and the brass buckle...and the hole where the tongue slipped through. Sometimes you had to make new holes...you could have just brought a new belt...but you'd take out your polished pocket knife, flicking the blade out from the handle, working the leather with the tip of the knife until a hole was made...and you'd thread the belt back through your pant hoops...But, you didn't always wear it right. In the end you wore it wrong.

*

Grandma said she wanted to tell us a story. *You have to tell your stories while you can*, so Grandma wanted to tell hers. She made Jamie fetch a book from the bottom of the closet. It was a great big book with a dark green cover. He plonked it down on my lap, and I had to wriggle around so my legs wouldn't fall asleep. I thought it must've been a really special story to be written in such a big book.

It wasn't a real story, not like the books Mum reads to me at night. There were photos, lots of photos, full of faces peering back. And the photos were old and black and white, or faded brown with yellowed edges. The tape that had held their corners had curled or come off, leaving dusty marks and making my fingers feel dirty. I had to keep wiping them on my skirt, but Grandma never told me off. And I didn't know any of the people, even when Grandma pointed them out; this was Uncle Robin, Aunt Jean, this was Mum as a little girl. She showed me a

picture of herself as a child, and I looked real close. But I couldn't find her face behind the one in the picture. There were too many lines and too much time, and the child with the porcelain skin was some other child.

There were pictures of you too. At least, she said they were of you. There was the one of your wedding, if it really was your wedding. And one where you were holding a baby, and you were smiling, and you were happy, and so I just can't be sure that you were you. There was the bunny one. The bunny one...

You were smiling in this one too but I could almost make you out. I recognized you in the brown leather belt that circled your waist. You wore it low back then, when you didn't have a belly. And you had your knife in your hand, the pretty one you'd brought with you and put inside your suitcase.

And I knew you for the bunnies. The long rows of bunny skins you'd hung along the fence. You were smiling. You were proud. Your shotgun lay forgotten beside you. Your pocketknife had done the real work.

*...Bye, baby bunting
Grandpa's gone a hunting
To get a little rabbit skin
To wrap his baby bunting in...*

These were your trophies.

*

You came to live with us after Grandma died, you and your belt and your pocketknife. It was a temporary thing, Mum had said, before you went to live in an old-folks home.

I almost told you about the bunny that day...the one Rachel and I had seen... twitchy nose and candy-floss tail...we couldn't have got to it in time, it was too fast...we lost it under the fence by the Poplars...I had wanted to...tell you about the bunny...but you looked funny, like your face was about to splinter into a thousand pieces, and then you said you had a story for me, or at least, that's what I thought you said...And I liked your stories, Grandpa...so I was good...

and I waited, even though now I was feeling funny, and I wanted to go outside...see if I could find the bunny again... But then you said that when you're old, they all stop listening...and I guess I had stopped listening too...because I never heard it happen.

*

If you can't see them, then they can't see you. If you can't see them, then they can't see you. It is your fault, Grandpa, that I can see them, and they do see me, and I can't run fast enough, like Rachel says I should, because I am always seeing them, those dead, glassy eyes, only they don't belong to the deer any more, they're not Dad's trophies...those eyes belong to you. It is your fault, Grandpa...

You wore your belt too high...it slipped around your neck...

I had wanted to tell you about the bunny...my story...I wanted to tell you my story...that's why I opened the door. Your knife lay open on the floor. A wasp buzzed against the window...I should have told you about the apple tree, never open the window...but in the end it didn't matter...a belt was all you needed...hung up like a rabbit skin against the closet door...

You never finished your story, Grandpa...you quit before the end.

Dewey Decimals

He leaves the night behind and slinks in through the doors. Keeps close to the wall. Hood is up, eyes downcast. Slips past towering rows; rows and rows of books. Their shadows weigh him down. Paper and ink. Ink and paper. The AC churns out recycled air. He stays away from the issues desk. He shies away from the people. He hides himself as a piece of furniture, and when he sits, he dissolves into the desk.

Tick, tick, tick. The red hand tiptoes round the face. 6pm. Time to begin.

Watch the woman move from shelf to shelf, top to bottom, left to right; next row and the next, pulling books forward. She aligns them against the palm of her hand, flush with the edge of the shelf. Each row lines up vertically. Standing, crouching, standing...next.

Count the rows of books. Count them, one, two, three...no. STOP!

Watch the woman, the one with the auburn hair. It falls down her back, ironed straight. She bends down to pick a book up off the floor; discarded, left in calculated chaos. Her fringe falls into her eyes.

He picks at a scab on his hand with his fingernail. He tears the thick crust off. He lets it fall, losing it on the carpeted floor. Newborn blood fills the crater. Red. Brilliant. It begins to trickle down his hand. He uses the sleeve of his sweatshirt to cover it up. It bleeds through the fabric, and dries rust red. Another stain. Another imperfection.

Watch the woman. She sweeps her fringe out of her eyes. She tucks her hair behind her ear. He can breathe again...

In and out. In and out. Tick, tick, tick. He swallows the seconds. He measures them against the pace of his heart. Slow it down.

Start again.

He follows her with his eyes. He fidgets in his chair. He places his phone upon the desk. He skirts his eyes back and forth between its screen and the woman.

There is another woman. An older one with a pinched nose. He sees her every time. She works here almost every day. She scuttles around like a crab. She tells the teens off for being too loud. She hands runaway children back to unconcerned parents with a reprimand. She tells the others what to do. She presses the buzzer. One; Buzz. Two; Buzz, buzz. Three; Buzz, buzz, buzz. They all come running. A buzz to rule them all...

She glares at him; a line etched between her brows. She sees his shifty eyes. She's seen him watching. She suspects...something.

He shifts his attention to his phone. He touches the screen as if he's scrolling, reading...but he's watching. Always watching, from the corner of his eye. He waits for the moment she finds some other prey and scuttles away...scuttles away.

Watch the woman, the one with the perfect hair. She stands in front of him. Her left arm is laden with books. She reads their spines and finds their homes on the shelf. She shuffles and squeezes and shuffles and squeezes them into position. It is a process of counting and numbers. 611: Human Anatomy. 613: Health and Safety.

Watch the woman. Through the lens of a camera. Watch him zoom

in. See her fill the screen of his phone. He compares the real with the digital. With the digital he can touch her. With the digital he can save her. He taps the shutter button. It is on silent. No one has heard. No one has seen.

Tick, tick, tick. It is 6:38pm. One hour and twenty-two minutes. One hour and twenty-two minutes until she leaves. He knows this. He has watched her before. She leaves much earlier than all the others. Tonight is special. Tonight he leaves at 8pm. Tonight he leaves with her.

He touches his pocket. His gift to her, it sits there, folded safely in on itself.

A woman enters pushing a pram. A small child in tow wears pajamas and slippers. It should probably be in bed. The child swings the DVD rack round and round. Some of the DVD's fall forward in their stands. One tumbles to the floor. It spills its guts, its round shiny disc, face-up and exposed to the world.

The child keeps turning the stand. Around and around, it picks up speed. The mother bends over the pram. She does not notice her other child.

The sound prickles under his skin. He doesn't like it. Make it stop. The rack scrapes as it turns, scooping out his insides.

He counts; one, two, three...make it stop, make it stop... He closes his eyes. There's a roaring in his ears. Four, five, six...stop...stop... seven, eight...His leg vibrates, jostling the table. Nine, ten!

The mother looks up, grabs the child's arm and pulls it away. He can breathe again.

In and out. In and out.

In and out. In and out.

It is 7:14pm. Forty-six minutes until he can leave. He feels inside his pocket. Turns her gift over in his hand. Forty-six minutes and he'll give it to her.

The security guard has a button missing. His shirt is one button short. Count them; one, two, three, four...the gap shows his under-shirt...four, four, four...there's more...can't count, he's stuck at four. STOP!

He is old and balding. He has no weapon, only a radio. Static churns from his belt. He is no threat. He wanders through the stacks. He chats to some of the staff. He picks up and fingers through a book that's fallen to the floor. He puts it on a shelf, any shelf, in no order. No one sees...but him. He sees. Watch the man, the man that undoes the work of the woman.

Watch the woman, the one with the auburn hair. She chats to the guard and smiles at his jokes. He is taunting her with his sloppiness. Next time...next time, but not tonight. Tonight is special.

It is 7:33pm, Twenty-seven minutes and counting.

Watch the woman. Watch the woman rearrange the books on the cart. First by author: Grafton, Gregory, Grimshaw. Then by title: "A" is for Alibi, "I" is for Innocent, "S" is for Silence.

It is 7:42pm. Tick, tick, tick...Time creeps closer.

Swish, clunk, swish, clunk, swish clunk. Books through the self-issue machine. The beats don't line up, it trips up his heart.

Swish, clunk, swish, clunk. The mother and children are leaving. It

hurries them through the door.

7:58pm. Time to prepare. The red hand tiptoes round the clock.

His hood is up, his eyes downcast. One hand rests uneasily in his pocket.

Count the seconds...fifty-seven, fifty-six, fifty-five...

He shies away from the people. He stays away from the Issue desk. He shuffles past the security guard; an old man asleep on his feet. He slips past the rows and rows of books. Count them; one, two, three... no! STOP. He will lose track of time.

He slinks into the night. He'll meet her round the back as she's walking to her car.

He pulls her gift from his pocket and unfolds it in the dark. He strokes its cutting edge.

Watch the woman.

It is 8pm.

It is time.

Kelsey Toombs

To victim blamers, slut shamers and those who think rape jokes are funny

You say I'm overdressed.
You say take off your jacket,
I want to see you.
But that's not what you want at all,
We both know that.

If I refuse, you call me a prude
and if I give in, I'm a slut.
The double standards at a time
like this are running high to
No end.

Headline. Young girl,
raped by neighbour. You sigh,
you're sick of hearing about
all this negativity.

What if it were me? I ask you.
You tell me that would never happen
to a girl like me. So tell me,
What type of girl would it happen to?
You say she was probably asking for it.

Yet you didn't read that she was
Four years old and the boy
was someone her parents trusted.
Tell me how a four year old girl is

the type of girl that could happen to.

I don't joke about this sort of thing
but you might think it's funny.
Teaching girls not to get raped
is about as useful as teaching a
Dog long division.

He thought I was overdressed.
He said he wanted to see me.
That wasn't what he wanted, but
You never taught me that.
I was probably asking for it.

essa may ranapiri

Grace

I touch Jesus with questions on my finger tips
 Bubbling like thoughts in a fish tank
 Drowning in the taste of salt water
 Stinging the holes in your hands
How can you see with my breath fogging up your
 lens?
This isn't a conversation; all I do is cry like a child
 Without a light
 And too many nightmares
Am I just a story you'll return to after dinner?
 Please don't dog ear the pages
 And keep your elbows off the table
 These questions swarm like locusts
 Screaming "Only the Devil doubts"
 Painting red on floorboards
 Which I chew to pulp in my mouth
 Waiting
 For a voice in my head
 To tell the truth
 Poor John never had a chance
 You would say something like
 "It is your face that draws my gaze
 And not the artistry of this platter"
 Blood stains the silverware
 Now these two pink fists
 Trapped in problems
 Clenched in rigor mortis
 Gaze in awe at the sun

In the belief that a blanket
Could provide me any warmth
When every thread is a tripwire
Set up to a Middle Eastern mine

I

Can't

Do

This

Peel off my whitewashed skin
Separate my flesh from brittle bones
Trace a hot blade over my heart
And cut out the filth in my veins
With your sword of forgiveness

Renée Boyer

from *Probably Nothing*

Ember is sticking magnetic letters to the wall in the convenient little play cubby the clinic has set up under the stairs. She is playing with another little girl about her age, although they alternate between playing nicely and tussling over the best toys, in line with the usual pre-schooler politics. She is happy enough at the moment, but I can tell she is getting tired, and bored, and hungry, and grumpy. On cue she turns to me.

“Mummy, let’s go home” she drawls in that singsong whiny pitch they seem to learn on their third birthdays. Hers was only a couple of weeks ago and she has perfected it already.

“We can’t go home yet sweetie, we have to wait to see Dr Dickson again.” She sighs, but is pacified for now.

I stand in my usual night-time pose, leaning against the ladder of Ember’s loft bed, finishing the final pages of ‘Hairy Maclary Mini-monster’—Em’s current favourite book which I can recite in my sleep (and sometimes do). I look at her, my mouth opening to say goodnight, when I notice something strange about her eye. In the lengthening dark of her room, her pupils are wide, surrounded by a thin circling of deep brown. The left pupil is solid and infinite black, but something white and grey and milky twists in behind the surface of the right. The whole pupil seems translucent, like the proverbial window, (although I am sure I am not seeing her soul). I frown, but shrug it off. Probably nothing to worry about.

The nurse approaches. “We need to put in some more drops”.

My heart settles into the pit of my stomach. The drops sting; we have had one lot already. The first time was an unknown; getting another lot in is not going to be so easy.

“Ember, come here sweetie, the nurse needs to put some more drops in your eye.” She approaches but with trepidation, seeing the nurse holding the bottle of drops. She slithers onto my lap, buries her head into my chest and snakes her little arms around my neck.

“Don’t want them” she mutters, my body feeling her words more than hearing them.

I hold her tight for an extra moment then pull back, so she has to look at me. Her eyes are already dilated from the first lot of drops and behind her right pupil I see it again, the filmy white thread which has led us here.

“Can you be a brave girl Em? Dr Dickson needs the drops in your eyes so he can have a really good look into them and check them with his special machine.” She just buries herself further into me, so I resort to that time-honoured parenting method: bribery. “I’ll get you a lollypop when we go home.”

She sighs a little, then turns herself to lie across my lap, head lolling back, the new position already starting to become familiar. The nurse quickly pulls Ember’s eyelids open, and drops in the stinging liquid, one eye then the other, before Em can change her mind. Em blinks, rubs her eyes and whimpers a little, but doesn’t cry. She is already braver than I am.

I notice it again the next night, and the next. After a week or so I mention it to Simon, who hasn’t noticed it, and can’t really see what I am talking about. I try Googling a few search terms, but nothing really comes up. It begins to bother me though, so I ask Simon to

make Ember an appointment with the GP. He is at home with her two days a week, so makes her an appointment for the next Monday. I am almost convinced that I am just being a silly, paranoid mother, that it is probably nothing.

That Sunday we go to visit friends. Amber and I have been friends since our mothers met when at playgroup when we were babies, and now we are both mothers ourselves. I tell her about what I have seen, can see. She has four kids and is an early childhood teacher, but this isn't anything she has ever heard of either. "Have you tried Googling it?" she asks. "Yes," I reply, "but nothing came up. So it's probably nothing."

Ember has had enough of playing, enough of being at the clinic, and is on my lap. She keeps rubbing at her eyes and pulling at various bits of me, trying to inveigle me to take her home. I wish I could. Finally the nurse calls us through, but it's only to another waiting room. I have spent time in hospitals—I know this tactic. I can never work out whether I appreciate the change of scenery or resent the disappointment after presuming I will actually be seen. Nevertheless, the fresh set of slightly mangled grubby toys, books with no covers, and covers with no books in the toy basket is enough to distract Ember from her moaning, so I am grateful, at least, for that.

When we are called in, we find ourselves in a room that reminds me, bizarrely, of my school dental clinic. The standard eye chart of somersaulting capital Es is at one end, a chair and a collection of vaguely threatening-looking implements is at the other. I sit on the 'patient' chair with Ember on my knee; I try not to clutch her too tightly. She is mute with nerves at first, but the nurse slowly coaxes smiles out of her, and gets her to do what is needed with talk of cleverness and sticker rewards.

The nurse takes her through a flip book of shapes—a circle, a square, a heart, a house—these shapes will become very familiar to me

over the next few months. The nurse places a patch over Ember's right eye, and goes to the other end of the room, holding up a chart with the same shapes in decreasingly smaller rows. Ember has a great time showing how clever she is, telling the nurse every shape correctly. At least I think she does; it gets a bit small for me to see down at the bottom. "Perfect vision" the nurse says. Then she swaps the patch over to Ember's left eye, leaving the right eye to prove itself one way or the other. I hold my breath.

Back home that afternoon, Simon at the "shop" (i.e. pub) and Ember happily ensconced in front of a DVD, I mull over the conversation I had with Amber. I decide to consult the online oracle one more time. As before, 'transparent pupil' brings no results. Then I type in 'white pupil' and the world ends.

Suddenly a list of websites fills my screen. The word that keeps jumping out at me is 'leukocoria'. I don't know what that means, but I know it doesn't sound good. A few clicks later I am terrified.

*"**Leukocoria** (or **white pupillary reflex**) is an abnormal white reflection from the retina of the eye. Leukocoria is a medical sign for a number of conditions, including Coats disease, congenital cataract, corneal scarring, melanoma of the ciliary body, Norrie disease, ocular toxocariasis, persistence of the tunica vasculosa lentis (PFV/PHPV), retinoblastoma, and retrolental fibroplasia. Because of the potential life-threatening nature of retinoblastoma, a cancer, that condition is usually considered in the evaluation of leukocoria."*

None of the links say "Leukocoria—probably nothing."

Immediately Ember starts picking at the plaster patch over her right eye; she is squirming and clearly unhappy. The nurse briefly tries the picture poster, but Ember won't even look in that direction so there is no way to tell how much she can see. Then the nurse sits in front of Ember and takes a small tub of hundreds and thousands from

amongst the scary-looking medical implements. It seems strangely out of place, as if I have been mistaken and all the implements are in fact odd-shaped baking trays and measuring spoons. The nurse takes one out of the tub, and places it on her hand. I am momentarily distracted by wondering what the singular of ‘hundreds and thousands’ is. Then the nurse asks Ember to pick it up off her hand.

Ember reaches out and tries to grab the tiny ball from the nurse’s hand, but she is reaching under the nurse’s hand, not even close to where she needs to be. Her hand is wavering and uncertain. This is the moment when I know, I know everything the doctors will tell me from this point on, and I have to blink hard to hold back the dam that is about to break behind my eyes. My heart has leapt up my throat and is sitting in my mouth, choking me.

“That’s not good, is it?” I manage to get out.

“No.” The nurse is brusque. In hindsight I realise this is hard for her too.

I sit in shock, scrolling through hundreds of links, searching for the one that will offer me some relief. Ember is still sitting happily watching “Dora the Explorer”, completely oblivious. I leap up from my chair and hug her violently. The internet has told me that another way to check for leukocoria is to take a flash photograph—a normal eye will produce the red-eye reflex; an eye with leukocoria will flash back milky white, like the eyes of a cat or dog caught in a flashbulb. I let go of Ember and find the camera. Taking a deep, shaky breath I turn the flash on, and snap off a couple of pictures, Ember waving me out of her way crossly. She has seen this episode a thousand times already, but perhaps at three it is still uncertain whether this time Swiper will actually succeed in his swiping or be thwarted yet again by the ever-resourceful Dora and Boots.

I don’t want to look at the photos. I don’t want to see, don’t want

to have to accept what my brain is screaming at me while bursts of adrenaline fire through my body.

I look. The left eye contains a perfect circle of red, but all I can look at is the right. It beams back at me—grey and white and milky. I am cold and shaky and panicky and I wish Simon would come home to tell me it's all ok, it's nothing, it's probably nothing. I keep clicking through the links, needing to know more even as my body desperately tries to reject what my brain is insisting.

Back in the waiting room I feel like my limbs have become longer and I don't know what to do with them. My phone rings and I clutch it like a lifeline—having something concrete to do is exactly what I need. It is Sarah from work—she knows where I am, but not the magnitude of what is unfolding.

“Everything ok?” Her cheerful concern is my undoing and I can't speak for a moment.

“No” I manage.

“Is Simon there?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to come?”

I am an independent person; I hate asking for help.

“Yes, please.”

Before she can arrive we are called back in to see Dr Dickson. He sits Ember in front of the eye machine and looks again into each eye in turn. She is having a great time, resting her chin on the chinrest and sitting super-still while he looks. For some reason she loves this machine, thank goodness, and is bristling with pride at having been told how good and clever and grown up she is, over and over again, all day.

Dr Dickson tells Ember she can get down, presents her with yet another basket of toys and she busies herself with a one-armed

plastic super hero. He turns back to me.

“Do you have anyone here with you? Your husband?”

“No, he’s at home. We have a new puppy.” I offer, lamely. “My friend is coming, from work.”

“I think you know what I’m going to tell you, don’t you?”

I swallow, then utter the word that has been pulsing in my brain since yesterday afternoon.

“Cancer.”

Cradle Vilanelle

Close your weary eyes and rest your head.
The slanted sunlight signals close of day.
Let my eyes be your eyes; my arms your bed.

Life coils beneath your skin in striking red,
stark contrast to your face: forgotten grey.
Please close your weary eyes and rest your head.

The air is thick with all the things unsaid,
but lips on cheek say all I need to say:
let my eyes be your eyes; my arms your bed.

The floor is wet with tears I haven't shed.
Your meal sits uneaten on its tray.
No matter—close your eyes and rest your head.

Your feet are soft with paths you've yet to tread,
for mind's adventures body can't obey—
so let my eyes be yours; my arms your bed.

I'll put away the book you haven't read,
and clear away the game we've yet to play.
Just close your eyes my love, and rest your head.
My eyes always your eyes; my arms your bed.

Onyx Lily

A short history of my vagina

Fanny. Snatch. Muffin. Slit. Slot. Box. Flaps. Cunt. Lady garden. Pussy. Punani. Coochie. Quim. Neden. Beaver. Front bum. Vajayjay. Clit. Gash. Minge. Bush. Twat.

I finally get comfortable calling it a vagina, and it turns out it's technically a 'vulva'.

My vagina and I had a pretty good relationship at first. It held the usual fascination for me as a child—I would look at and play with myself in the bath or in bed, trying to figure out which bit did what, and how and why. I was convinced for years that my clitoris was a little penis, and that that was where my wee came from. James probably told me that.

James and I were best friends practically from birth, after our mums met at Plunket Playgroup, and he was my main source of 'information' for a number of years. I have no idea where he got his information from, but he was usually at least partly right. His explanation of periods went something along the lines of "When girls get older, and they do PE, sometimes they get blood in their knickers and have to tell the teacher so they can go to the bathroom and wash it out." Thankfully Mum was forthright and not at all squeamish, so she filled me in on a few essential details James had left out.

I was 11 when I started getting pubic hair. Thick curly black hair I would have loved on my head was more liability than asset on other areas of my body. It was shortly after that that I also began my war

against my body hair—a lifetime of waxing, shaving, plucking and chemical assault; a battle I show no signs of winning any time soon.

I was 12 and playing Barbies with my friend Dee the day I realised that something very new was going on with my vagina. Sure enough, the cramp of my belly heralded the scarlet stain in the crotch of my knickers. I chucked my knickers in the wash, got a new pair from my drawer and carefully stuck a mattress-thick pad into the crotch; a free sample we had received during ‘the talk’ at school earlier that year. I don’t recall being too perturbed by it, but I was mortified later that evening when I heard Mum on the phone, telling half the neighbourhood.

I was the second of my group of friends to get her period, and we conspired in complaining about the cramps, the pads, the stained knickers, whilst secretly delighting in our quick thrust ahead of our friends towards womanhood. At least until our puberty-hormone-fuelled brains and bodies caused us to fall out with each other, again.

The period (no pun intended) of adjustment to my new womanly vagina was not a lot of fun. We weren’t great friends for a few years, my vagina and me, as I spent three nights each month sleeping on a towel for fear of leaks and the shame of stained sheets, avoiding white knickers and light-coloured trousers, and bursting into tears any time anyone looked at me the wrong way. I guess I can’t blame the crying entirely on my vagina, but it all seemed interlinked. The discovery that most changed my life in those years was ultra-thin pads with wings. My only virginal experiment with tampons left me crying in pain, in a very awkward situation in the bathroom with my mum. Thank god I got it out myself in the end.

My vagina and I spent my late tween and teenage years in shared experimentation—by myself, with girl friends and eventually with boys. I certainly discovered the fun side of my vagina during those years, although it wasn’t without its hazards either. But perhaps

some things are better left imagined and untold...

In my early twenties my vagina and I fell out again when I started having smear tests (even the word ‘smear’ is vile, and I challenge any woman to utter the word ‘speculum’ without repressing a shudder). Typically, mine were not straightforward, and anyone who doesn’t know what a colposcopy or letz-cone biopsy is can count themselves very lucky. Look it up if you’re curious; the invasive pulling ache of having your cervix sliced and then cauterised with liquid silver nitrate is not something I feel up to describing. Why any man wants to be a gynaecologist is beyond me.

But the greatest adventure my vagina and I have embarked upon together thus far would have to be giving birth. We had a lovely plan involving water for pain relief and natural, drug-free delivery, using the breathing techniques I had learned in my pregnancy yoga class. I’m glad I got to use the breathing anyway. I will refrain from resorting to clichéd analogies about squeezing watermelons out of lemon-sized holes, but the image of a 30-hour induced labour resulting in episiotomy (a surgical incision between the vagina and perineum, for the uninitiated) and forceps delivery of an 8 pound 7 ounce baby probably packs enough punch without the need for too much metaphor.

So that, in a nutshell, is a brief history of my vagina. I haven’t mentioned everything we have done together, but I figure my vagina and I are entitled to keep a few secrets to ourselves. These days, my vagina and I seem to have reached a shared understanding—we have good times and bad times together, but there aren’t many new surprises along the way. We share a few scars, some visible and some not, but generally I’d say, she’s been a pretty good cunt.

R.P. Wood

The Lake

Early in the morning, before sunrise, the men separated themselves into three small dinghies and puttered out onto the cold stillness of the lake. Tom and his father were in one; Tom sat up against the bow, while his father sat at the back, his hand on the tiller of the outboard motor. He steered them silently through the fog, trying to see the peaks of the hills through the mist.

The lake used to be a valley filled with trees, until they built the dam. They cut the trees down, but left the sharp stumps sticking up from the mud. When they flooded the valley they left these stakes behind. On a clear day, Tom could look over the side of the dinghy and see them waiting just below the waterline.

It was too cold to talk. Tom stuffed his hands into his lifejacket, and listened to the lapping of the water against the bow, and the splutter of the motor. Soon, they came across the other side of the lake, and Tom's father turned the motor right down. There were stakes all across this side, and banks of weed, too.

"How many decoys can you see?" Tom's father asked.

Tom twisted around and leaned on the bow. He peered through the mist and carefully counted the dark smudges outside their maimai.

"Fifteen," he said.

"Yeah," his father agreed, "fifteen."

Tom's father manoeuvred the dinghy into the shore, beneath the cover of a large tree. Tom climbed out and tied the boat to the trunk while his father pulled a camouflage tarp over the motor. Then Tom climbed up into the maimai and waited for his father to pass up their bags and guns.

The fog faded after an hour, and the sun began to appear over

the hills behind them. Tom sat near the back of the maimai while his father stood at the front, scanning from left to right and back again. They both had semi-automatic shotguns, painted in camouflage, with a seven shell capacity. They were loaded and waiting at either end of the maimai.

The morning crept up on them slowly. Dark birds flew past, but they were mostly shags. Sometimes, Tom would see one coming, and grab his gun and follow it with the sights. He imagined it was a duck that his father had not seen.

“It’s a shag, Tom,” his father said.

“Oh, yeah,” Tom said, lowering his gun. He returned it to its corner and sat back down.

There were ducks that day, of course, but they mostly hung around the opposite side of the lake, which had the sun in the morning. Tom’s father spent long stretches of time crouched down in the maimai, craning his neck and blowing on his duck call. Tom had one around his neck, too, but did not use it. Out in front of the maimai the decoys bobbed on the water, while the real ducks ignored them and tried to land among the decoys on the other side. Late in the morning, Tom saw a pair try to land outside his uncles’ maimai. Just as they closed their wings, a volley of shots was fired, echoing like thunder between the hills. Their light brown bodies fell in an arc through the sunlight. Tom peered over the side of the maimai and saw the little splashes in the distance.

“That’ll be your uncles,” Tom’s father said, pulling out his binoculars. Tom kept watching the opposite side of the lake, and soon he saw a steel dinghy drifting out from the other maimai. The boat circled around the spot where the ducks had hit the water. He saw his uncle reach into the water, before returning to the shore.

“What were they, Steve?” Tom’s father said over the walkie-talkie.

Uncle Steve’s voice came back over the radio. “Couple of mallards; almost didn’t see them!” He laughed.

“Oh, yeah,” Tom’s father replied. “Not having much luck over here.”

The radio crackled. “Ha.”

They hung around in the maimai for another few hours, until the sun appeared across from them. But the ducks did not come. The other side of the lake was a much better spot, it was true, but Tom’s father thought they should have both covered. It would have been frustrating to be all on one side and watch ducks landing on the opposite bank unmolested.

Uncle Steve had been shooting with his brother, who had gone back to the hut that afternoon in the dinghy. When the men decided to call it a day, Tom’s father called Uncle Steve over the walkie-talkie and told him he and Tom would pick him up.

They packed their bags and guns back into the dinghy and Tom’s father rowed them out onto the lake. Once they were far enough out he started up the motor and continued on towards Uncle Steve’s maimai. He was standing in the little doorway waiting for them, his lifejacket already on.

“Pass us your gun, mate,” Tom’s father said. Uncle Steve tossed him the gun bag and he placed it with the others up against the side of the dinghy.

“Here’s the precious cargo,” Uncle Steve said, bringing out the ducks. He handed one to Tom’s father first, who put it at the back. He waited for the other one, but Uncle Steve just stood there, holding it by the neck.

“Uh, this one’s not quite dead, I think.”

Tom looked at it, and sure enough, he could see its feet moving. If he looked hard enough he could even see the tiny tremors in its chest.

“Fuck, mate,” Tom’s father said. He stretched out his arm. “Give it here.”

Uncle Steve was all too happy to hand it over. Tom watched his father take it, and wondered what he was going to do. Once, his father had shot a duck. Tom had watched him from the maimai as he rowed out to get it. When he picked it up, it had flapped its wings, so he’d thrust it back under the water. He had stayed like that for a while, sitting in the dinghy, his arm submerged in the lake, staring

up at the hills, while Tom stared at him.

Tom's father held the duck by the neck, but did not try to drown it. Instead, he twisted it around and around, like a boy with a wet towel in a changing room. Tom and Uncle Steve watched silently as the duck's body spun around and around. After a while his father stopped and tossed the duck to the back of the boat, where it sat nestled beside its friend.

Tom's father rowed them out onto the lake again, before starting the motor back up. Uncle Steve sat up in the bow, leaving Tom wedged in the middle. He was facing the back, although he wished he had chosen to sit facing the other way. He could see the ducks huddled together at the back. One of them was dead, but the other was not. It was still breathing gently, and he could see its webbed foot curling and uncurling slightly. Its small, black eye was still wide open, too. It was looking up, not at Tom, or Tom's father, or even Uncle Steve. But it was looking at something. Tom glanced up and saw the thick clouds tinted red by the setting sun. He stared at them for much longer than he normally would. When he looked back down at the duck, he saw its foot uncurl and stop. He looked at its eye, and watched it narrow to a dark slit. After that, it did not move.

That night the men talked and joked and drank around the fire. Tom did not talk much, or even listen. He ate, helped clean up, and said good night. He went to bed and lay on one of the hut's top bunks. Wrapped in his sleeping bag he stared at the ceiling, which was lined with a kind of silvery material like tin foil, maybe to keep the cold out. He thought about the duck, and his father, and decided that he did not want to be a duck shooter. He still wanted to come up, though. He liked the lake. He liked the hut. He liked cooking food over the fire and living rough for a few days. But he did not want to be a duck shooter. He imagined coming up and having his own maimai, where he could sit and read while his gun sat beside him, unloaded, never firing. He would be a kind of outdoorsman rebel. He would still know how to start a fire, fix a motor, even take a gun apart, but he would never kill anything. That was a good

compromise, he thought.

The next morning the men got up early again. As they bustled around in the next room getting ready, Tom stayed in bed. Eventually his father came back into the bunkroom and shook him lightly.

“Are you coming?”

“No,” Tom said, “I’m ok.”

There was silence. “Alright, well, we might be back for breakfast or something, we don’t know,” Tom’s father said. “You can come back with us then, if you like.”

“Ok,” Tom replied, although he knew he would not be going out.

Tom spent the morning reading a book one of his uncle’s had brought. Every now and then he would put another piece of wood on the fire.

Around nine his father reappeared at the hut. He was not there for breakfast, though.

“The others want to stay out,” he said. “I thought I’d come and get you; see if you wanted to shoot with Uncle Steve.”

Tom did not know what made him go. He supposed he didn’t want to waste his father’s time. Still, he was not going to shoot anything.

Tom’s father pattered back up the lake and dropped Tom and his gun off at Uncle Steve’s maimai. They watched as the dinghy continued across the lake, before turning their attention back on the sky. It was much quieter than yesterday, which Tom had thought impossible. He talked with Uncle Steve briefly, about school and other things. It was enough to distract them, as they failed to notice two ducks approaching. The ducks had failed to notice the white faces of the hunters, too, for they landed only a few feet from the maimai.

“Don’t move,” Uncle Steve said. “Two ducks just landed... turn around slowly...”

Tom did what he was told, slowly turning around. He saw the two mallards paddling in and out of the decoys. He reached carefully for his gun, which Uncle Steve had insisted on loading. The thoughts of the previous night disappeared as he aimed down the sights at the

pair. Usually, shooting ducks on the water was not allowed, but it was unusual to see ducks on the lake at all. He fired.

A radius of pellets spread across the lake, throwing up a shimmer of water. Tom thought he had hit both, but then saw one of them fly off. He followed it with his sights, firing furiously, as did his uncle, but the bird got away.

“Shit,” Uncle Steve said, watching the lone duck fly off into the distance. “We must have shot about ten rounds at that bastard!”

He kept talking, but Tom wasn't listening. He could see the duck floating in the water, face down, with only its tail and feet showing. It reminded him of the duck his father had once shot. He opened the chamber of his gun and slipped a shell from his pocket inside. He heard Uncle Steve say something about going out and getting it, but Tom ignored him. He aimed down the sights and shot it again.

Carrie Cornsweet Barber

Mission Statement

Mission statement for the month:

Remain steady on planet Earth, moving in the direction intended,
which may soon become clear.

Operating instructions:

When in doubt,

drink tea, and look for flowers
or other signs of life.

On a daily basis,

pray, which is to say,

remember where you come from,

and try to peel back the layers and let in a bit of spring air.

When you run up against despair,

hold it tightly like a sad child,

just until the knot loosens.

At seven thirty, consult the calendar, begin work, and keep going.

Quake

Just a small shift, but deep
below the solid
surface unfurls the wave
to rattle reason: deep
below the unbent shell
secret shock is driven: deep
inside the dark sweet heart
sorrow sleeps sealed undreaming
in that cracked coffin of forgetfulness:
listen—quick—
the heads of all swallows turn
to look: the great face of earth
crumples like a child
who tried too long
to fight the tears.

Kirsty Lagarto

Nightmare

He comes for
the weekly gutting.

He will cup your
face; a white egg,
bend your neck
Like a wave
until it snaps in two.

You are a ripe apple,
bitter skinned.
You burst inside his fist.

He is a gaping bowl.

Your lips: untranslatable
sewed shut
to stifle your scream.
Your tongue is silver ink,
his throat, smooth paper.

You crack yourself.
Let the yolk of
your chest spill.

Words are so simple
and stale in your mouth.

You're messy
in his fingers,
and he cuts out your tongue.
A glossy plate
ripped free.

He'll say your jaw
is a splendid bridge
as he climbs your bones
while the moon blinks.

He knows no language
but the taste of
your blistered skin.

Inherent Star

I was never taught
how to contort
the opening of myself
I know how to paint
myself an empty vessel
before the first
crawl of skin
I am an inherent star
my limbs splayed
like living points.

I was born only
to be filled
a spacious corridor
an incomplete puzzle
with edges that
don't connect.

I am a waiting meal
a glistening display
of meat and skin
I flip inside and out
and back again
my bones click
and snap when touched.

When I drink
in a person

take them into my caves
I am a complete vision
a pulsating stitched
creature rocking in
the lulls of breath.

There are bowls that
a body builds
echoing cups
isn't every fill
a privilege?
A silky flavour?

To choke the begging,
warm shelter
to quench the drought
of the body
to be complete,
an organised mess
of skin and bone and hearts
crushed whole.

Coloured Dirty

Truth...

Daddy bent it more than he should have.
Over backwards.
Forwards.
Twisted at angles.
Confused...
Left her stained and
showed her filth was lovely.

Taught her his love
was like the new black;
She just had to have it,
as he kissed her lips
and secretly erased
the crease of her childhood.
38 inches of violated property...

A pretty product of drunken lust.

Mummy was a closet freak.
Blind
to how much daddy cared
and how much it hurt her.
A toothless pro,
who never had a bite of reality.
Only good for one night.
A screwed up
staggering

get—in—here—free pass.
So what could mummy teach?
Her dirty philosophy?..
Daddy's got it covered

You're learning to dismantle
the makings of the world.
Bricks are red, the sky is blue.
While she is learning
to be dismantled.
She sees red, she feels blue..
Daddy poked colours with his fingers..
but it's okay to feel that way.
(So he said)
Red is only the beginning.

Tongue dipped in scotch.
Solid between the thighs.
Wet on the lips..
Lying in her bed
on top of Cinderella's face.

He wants to fuck a rainbow....

Mummy blacked out again..
And daddy likes them conscious...

...young
&
...squirming.

Alice

Alice, could you tell me how that day started?

I went to school.

What happened before you went to school?

I wanted breakfast but there was no food in the house so I thought I'd make a hot chocolate but there was none of that either I got angry really angry at her there's never any food there should be food because I get hungry I want to eat but there isn't anything to eat.

And then what happened?

Then she walked in she stood there looking at me judging me I know she hates me never wanted me and I had hair in pigtails my daddy said he thought I was beautiful she said it was not appropriate I didn't actually have my hair in pigtails I am sorry I lied to you I don't know why I did that.

Why were you angry at her, Alice?

Because I was hungry and she never let me go to the fair that came in summer every single year it would come to town and Chloe would say the fair is here I liked Chloe very much so did all of the boys because she was extra pretty and always told them no the first year I asked her if I could go she said I should never trust something that could be built in a day and that even though I had been searching for my breath I thought I could catch it at the top of the super-loop

I could not go I did not cry because that is not what ladies do at the time I didn't even know what country ladies came from but when I was eight I wished I was American like Chloe because her mother let her ride the super-loop and didn't even mind when she cried sometimes.

We're getting off track. What did you do after you got angry?

Am I boring you oh I am so sorry I promise this story will make you smile you'll laugh and laugh your face will split open right down the middle seeds will spill out and each one will grow into another smile but I'm getting ahead of myself a few days ago I found out that she is English so ladies must be from England where they never cry they always keep their knees together brush their hair and say yes ma'am and yes sir even when they want to use that word that Chloe taught me while we were waiting in lines for the swings it was a very naughty word I tried it on my tongue it tickled like when I giggle I liked the way it felt very much.

I won't ask you again. What did you do after you got angry, Alice?

I wanted to end all of my problems so I ended all of my problems after that I felt a lot better.

How did you end your problems?

You know.

I would like you to tell me. Why do you think you had problems? As far as I can see you had a fine upbringing.

You don't know anything I didn't have a fine upbringing I got a new bike for my fourth birthday a purple bike with training wheels on it and ribbons hanging off the handle bars I didn't like the training wheels I didn't need them I was a big girl and I asked her if could

be a fairy but she said no because fairies aren't real but they are she just didn't know that I dressed up in my fairy tutu anyway and played with my wand while she plaited my hair she pulled too hard and hurt me.

She was just trying to help you dress up for your birthday, Alice. What's wrong with that?

She did it on purpose I hated her touching my hair but I wanted to be a dancer I wanted to put on the pretty shoes and stand on my toes I wanted to twirl and jump be able to do pretty pirouettes like the girls in my class at school I begged mum to let me join but she said no I was too fat to do ballet I got sad she always said no to me called me names kids at school called me names they were allowed cause they were nasty she was supposed to be nice she wasn't she was mean.

I don't think that its cause enough to do what you did though.

But one year a boy came to town and I couldn't help but say "yes sir" because I had paid real close attention when she told me to never talk back a lady never says no I wasn't sure how I was supposed to keep my knees together while I was saying yes but my legs were growing so I thought maybe that rule didn't count anymore this boy picked me up one night and my parents loved him because he had freckles on his nose and she said that freckles were angel kisses and I could always tell she was ashamed that no angels wanted to kiss me. But one night he picked me up and took me to the fair you know the fair I was talking about we did not tell my parents because I told him, "Shhh, it's a secret" and we did not say a word because she would have hurt me.

Would she? I don't believe you, Alice.

You don't have to when we got there I was very empty so the boy it doesn't really matter his name anymore even though I've got it

written all over old notebooks some memories and names and places have grown out to the very tips of my hair and every six months or so I trim them off I promise I won't forget the boy's name he said to fill me up we would get candy floss and I thought this was lovely because I had never tasted candy floss before it looked like a pink clouds it melted in my mouth the sugar sat on my tongue it made me feel warm.

We need to focus on what actually happened.

No we don't it never happened I didn't do it I don't know what you're talking about let me tell you what I found out candy floss is what is wrong with the world no matter how much I would shove into my mouth with my fingers sticky pink it would never reach the back of my throat and it never filled me up people were walking up and down past the rides and the prizes they were talking about how they simply just adored the candy floss I wanted to scream at them tell them that it wasn't something to praise it was sweet when it touched your lips but then it was gone I hated the way it left me knowing that I would never be able to fill myself up that just wasn't okay I wanted to tell them that but ladies are empty they're not filled with yelling words so I just followed the boy as he led me to the super-loop I was still very sad when we climbed in the seats.

What does this have to do with what happened, Alice?

Here this is the part you will smile at this is the joke we swung right to the top of the super-loop the very very top and stopped I was still just as empty I still never caught my breath we went around and around I still didn't feel a thing but when we stopped we hung upside down it came into my mind I wanted to dangle her from the tippy top of the super-loop and drop her on her head so she would bleed and bleed and never breathe again when we walked back to my house and he took a kiss from me I knew my lips tasted like candy floss I had spent all of my time waiting once I got what I

wanted what I had always wanted it still wasn't enough isn't that just wild don't you think that's just a riot you should be laughing you should be laughing I don't understand why aren't you smiling please smile oh I've ruined it again I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'll try better next time I promise I will I promise to make you smile next time I know I can do it here let me try again let me try again.

Just tell me what you did, Alice.

I killed her and I went to school.

Melody Wilkinson

I Wasn't Worried

Tuesday

I am optimistic.

I am not worried. I reach over and grab my husband's hand before he changes the station on the truck radio. I hear the words "World Trade Center bombed." In the twenty minute drive across Denver to Regis University (where I am studying nursing), we learn it was not a bomb but a plane and a second one has just hit the other tower. No way, they must have it wrong... first news reports can be completely misleading. They are saying we are under attack. That seems like an irresponsible exaggeration. I hate how the media plays on our fears and insecurities to keep us listening. I get to class. Today is the mid-term exam, worth 50% of the grade. My classmates are outraged the test is not cancelled and will continue as planned. I think that would be a bit extreme, as it is all media hype: it is sad, but it was an early morning flight and not too many will be killed. Besides I studied hard for this exam and I want to get it over with. I keep my eye on Curt, a Navy man in our class as he will not stop pacing... I'm pretty sure he wants his gun. And a jeep.

I ace the exam and, back at home, call my sister Marleen. Her tone is serious, which is unlike her. I keep trying to make jokes to cheer her up but she will not laugh. I am a little worried, but I have confidence in those brave heroes, the ones who run toward, not away from danger. I know that the injured will be transported away and taken care of. I know our military is ready: they know how to protect us.

I felt I had the right temperament to be a nurse; calm in emergencies, empathetic. In the US, nurses are an integral part of emergency preparedness plans. The other nurses and I form a critical link in a strong chain of excellent emergency care. I have heard us referred to as heroes, but nurses know who the real heroes are: the first responders.

The fire crews, police and ambulance officers are the ones on the front line in a disaster. They are not volunteers; they are trained experts, the best in their field. Nurses in particular have secret crushes on first responders. We love our patients and fight for them every day. But there is something about those first responders; they are real men and women who put their lives on the line to save others. We understand it. We admire it. We love it. When they come to the unit because a fire alarm goes off, due to some overworked nurse forgetting her popcorn was in the microwave, we all suddenly have urgent business at the front desk, quickly pulling our 4am hair into something slightly presentable on the way to the nurse's station.

These were the men and women I saw responding to the Twin Towers; if they were there, everyone would be OK. The injured would be rescued and passed on to nurses like me who knew exactly what to do, doctors hovering behind, overseeing it all. I know they would have evacuated the buildings; everyone able-bodied would be on their way home. The system is in place, we all know what to do. Sure, the media is tossing around numbers like "30,000 people work in the World Trade Center" but the media always exaggerates. The buildings come down. People are freaking out. I am confident no one was in there: they are American heroes, they know how to get everyone out, there was enough time. They know exactly what to do, particularly after that bombing of the WTC in '93; they would have rehearsed this very scenario.

As the day wears on, my optimism is fading. When news arrives about the Pentagon and then the Pennsylvania crash, I talk myself

through it using a rather valuable little tool called Denial. Very useful when one wishes to remain upbeat in the face of such dire evidence. For the first time in a long time that night, I say my prayers.

Wednesday

I turn on the TV in the morning, optimistic that the numbers projected for the injured and dead will be down significantly. I am concerned for the wellbeing of the New York hospital staff, knowing they will be ‘pulling doubles’. They must be exhausted. But that’s when I see it, the news footage of a Manhattan hospital: there are rows of empty wheelchairs and stretchers and two stationary ambulances. There are two doctors and a nurse standing outside, talking. I recognize it. It is the picture of readiness for increased volume of patients in a disaster. I had to learn about it in nursing school. The hospital staff is prepared but they are not running around ragged, triaging patients on the go, as I expected. They were ready. But no one came.

Now I understand. Now I cry.

I can’t breathe, and my eyes are blurry. I sink to the couch. The images keep coming: the smoke cloud, the piles of rubble, the corpse of a fire truck, my heroes covered in dust looking so ...human. And the sound. It is the sound of the fire fighters’ locaters—the signal that a fire fighter has been lying motionless for too long. The tears come... “... but... but they’re invincible!”

Tom Brokaw is telling me that hundreds of fire fighters are unaccounted for... hundreds? ...but they are invincible. He shows pictures of our now-human counterparts helpless to save their comrades, and the hospital staff with nothing to do... just a normal day at work.

Who did this? What do you mean, the military is scrambling? Our military doesn’t scramble. The terrorists had been on the planes? How? Why? Nothing makes sense. My optimism is gone.

Thursday

I turn off the TV. I can't watch another person falling to their death. I can't watch as helpless firemen dig with their bare hands, trying to reach their comrades. I go for a walk to clear my head. But all I see is a sky empty of planes, reminding me that everything has changed. I long to see the contrails from planes criss-crossing the endless Colorado sky. But they are gone; the clouds left unaware of the fear we now live in. Monday we were safe. Thursday we are not.

Rules on how to remain an optimist and a nice person while still having contact with other humans

You may think that, in today's world, it is impossible to remain an optimist and nice person but let me start out by saying: don't despair! It can be mastered but you must follow my instructions to the letter. Any misstep and I will disavow any knowledge of you and the fact that you may or may not have read and studied these rules.

Rule Number 1—Avoid conflict. This is problematic because you must be able to spot conflict before it erupts. If you don't see it coming, you are likely to be caught right in the middle of it with no way out except crying on the ground in a foetal position. (This does work but it is recommended that you use it only in emergencies... if you overuse it, people will just think you are crazy.) So, learn to spot conflict. For instance, two friends are miscommunicating. I am assuming of course that you are a good communicator yourself. If not you will fail this step and there is no reason to continue reading. At this point I wish you well, adieu, and other such words of goodbye mixed with endearment. If, however, you are a good communicator you should be able to see the germination of conflict before it occurs. It is important to then avoid these two particular friends any time that they are likely to meet and thus further their grounds for miscommunication.

Now you may be thinking, 'why don't I just step in and clear up the misunderstanding?' This is noble and I applaud you for your bravery. However, this will only lead to your demise. And it brings me to another point: When trying to avoid conflict ALWAYS listen to the voice inside your head that says SHUT UP! It usually chimes in

when you have a really good and noble thing to say about something you find important. You think, ‘I should really speak up about that’ and the other voice says ‘SHUT UP’. Always shut up.

Rule Number 2—Avoid drama. Now I can see that you may think this is exactly like the first rule. But I assure you the difference is critical. I think of drama as having caused conflict, despite having followed rule number one to the letter. Sometimes, in the course of trying to be a nice person, you have inadvertently helped too much, said the wrong helpful thing, or, even worse, the sound of your voice or your intonation has reminded them of a truly hated person. They may not realize it, they just suddenly hate you. In which case, you may be confronted with a raving lunatic. If this occurs, do not under any circumstances try and make your point of view clearer: just apologise! You don’t even need to know why. Just say I am sorry in as many ways and in as many languages as you can think of. I have included a list of multilingual apologies for you to peruse at your leisure. Then try to maintain a sort of bowing profile: keep your body low and eyes down. You never know, avoiding eye contact could mean the difference between life and death in these moments.

Rule Number 3—Avoid all scary movies. You can catch the occasional crime show but keep this to a minimum. If at any stage, while viewing a television show or movie or reading a book you start to think that the world is really fucked up, people are just too mean and sadistic and we deserve to have the ozone layer disintegrate around us... STOP WATCHING! You will be teetering on the edge of cynicism and before you know it you will be walking around sporting the latest sneer and flipping old people off for driving too slow. I’m afraid if you have gone this far there will be no hope for you and you should just resign yourself to sitting in your basement listening to rap music. (I should mention at this point that if you want to remain an optimist you should avoid almost all rap music... sorry) Also, a good indication of a problem is, you have started using the term ‘fucked up’. Nice people don’t do this.

Rule Number 4—Keep your friends in very well-organized categories. Friends that you love, but who drain every ounce of energy from you, should never be mixed with friends who fill your love tank. Think of it like cyanide—one drop and it ruins the whole batch.

SKIP THIS IF YOU TALK IN MOVIES

As a side note about friends, try to avoid going to the movies with friends who like to talk. You will have to suppress the urge to punch them in the throat. Now this is a very scary feeling for an optimist/nice person because we are generally non-violent. If you must take the talker to a movie make sure to see it first, enjoy it, absorb it, study it and then you are ready to sit back and have the experience ruined.

Rule Number 5—Try not to get a long-term debilitating illness. If this does happen (as this is likely out of your control) try not to talk about it. If you do, you will get all sorts of stupid things said to you. For instance, “Here, take these pills filled with cherry juice! They helped my dad with his back pain”. If you have too many conversations like this you are in danger of becoming jaded and forgetting that they offer this advice because they care about you and feel helpless. Or because they are stupid and think if they cure you they can’t get your disease. I find when people see you limping and they say “Oh what did you do to your leg?”, you should just mumble while shrugging your shoulders. They will think you have answered and will say something like “You poor thing.” This is slightly annoying but the conversation will end quickly. Or you could say I have a disease that is ravaging my body and every movement is agony! Thanks for asking.

Rule Number 6—If you are a mother (this is good advice even for non-parents), try to avoid Soccer Moms. Now let me be clear; this

is not ‘moms whose children happen to play soccer’, who drive a minivan for convenience; these moms are usually lovely and they may even become friends that fill your love tank. I am talking about those moms, you know, the ones who are offended because you haven’t joined the PTA. The ones who yell at you for not helping at the fundraising barbecue. The ones who make you feel guilty about every moment you spend away from your child. The ones who think there must be some health reason you only have one kid and feel free to discuss it with you even though you don’t even know their last name. If you hang around them too much, you will begin to think that children run the world and you will end up hiding in a bunker waiting for them to invade. Because their mom said they could and made them a sandwich on whole-wheat bread so that they would have enough energy to launch a full scale assault on your household and neighbourhood. It is really important to avoid these soccer moms and their children, but if you do have the unfortunate experience of being in a conversation with one, avoid eye contact at all times. This serves several purposes. You may seem shy, in which case they might leave you alone. If they do not think you are shy, you will seem contrite and they will assume that you have packed your bags and booked your guilt trip with their travel agency. A significant thing to mention here is avoiding the trifecta: the soccer mom with more than four children who does not believe in immunization. This is an emergency situation; just turn and run. Otherwise you will be unable to hold your tongue and, before you know it, you will have broken rule number one.

Rule Number 7—Try to avoid (ever!) discussing politics or religion. You may find this difficult, particularly if you have strong beliefs around these subjects. This is often when you will find you can talk the ‘shut up voice’ into being quieter. This is never a good idea. In fact, a good general rule is, when you are trying to tell the ‘shut up voice’ to shut up, you should excuse yourself to the bathroom. It helps if people already think you are funny because then it seems like you are doing a ‘bit’. If people do not think you are funny, run

to the bathroom anyway. Having people thinking you are weird is a great start to avoiding conflict.

Rule Number 8—Never underestimate the sympathetic smile. When attempting to be an optimistic/nice person there is one category of person that will very often catch you off your guard. A scenario sounds like this: you say, ‘how are you? They say ‘uhgg, I am so tired!’ and they look pretty upset about it. So, you say, ‘Oh no, why?’ They then regale you with their tale of woe of having to stay up late with friends. This is a crucial moment because at this point you may be tempted to give them some friendly advice about what real suffering is. This is a mistake! Just keep your mouth shut, smile sympathetically, and add a sentiment like ‘that sucks, I am so sorry’. You might, at this point, want to argue that it is better to say nothing, as the above statement is bordering on lying (I know because I would have said such a thing before I went on my pilgrimage to Disneyland and became enlightened in all things happy and sunny and studied the lyrics to ‘It’s A Small World’ till I can sing them backwards, which incidentally makes you sound like a demon but then you have faced the fear of sounding like a demon and are no longer afraid). Anyway, you may think it is better to say nothing. But saying nothing is a very big trap. Your eyes will give you away or, worse, you will actually roll your eyes. Then you will be enmeshed in extricating yourself from breaking rule number one, and forced to come up with a horrible lie like ‘my eyes roll like that because I have an eye condition’... So instead, you must come up with a half-lie. Now only a skilled optimist/nice person should attempt the half-lie. You need to summon within yourself every ounce of empathy and put yourself in the shoes of the immature nothing-bad-ever-happens-to-me-so-I-have-to-complain-about-good-things-and-make-them-sound-like-bad-things person. You can do it if you really try. It comes from a place where you really do hope that all they ever have to complain about is that they had to stay out late with friends. You genuinely want that for them; only then can you muster the empathy required. Or you could say: Your silly little complaint

about how tired you are, because you had to hang out with your friends, is overall irrelevant to my life and has nothing on the fact that I only get 20 minutes of sleep at one time EVERY NIGHT. Oh... Excuse me.

Rule Number 9—Avoid road rage. Now, this can be very tricky, but if you succumb to road rage you are in danger of arriving at your destination angry and twitching. This will leave you unable to focus on the rules and you will inevitably break one (most likely Numbers 1, 7 or 8— actually, come to think of it, probably 5 and 6 as well... oh hell... you are in danger of falling completely apart). So, when you are driving to your destination and the person in front of you has decided to drive 20 Km/hr below the speed limit, including when you go through a reduced speed zone, making it clear that they will never go fast, ever, you should try to picture them as having a baby in the back seat or on their way to visit a new born baby. Or even picture them as a baby, driving. Of course, this can backfire quite dramatically when you get the chance to pass them and they are actually in their thirties and give you a smirk that says ‘fuck you’. The only thing to do here is breathe deeply or follow them to their destination and stand at the back of their car so that when they get out they have to walk past a psychopath who is just staring at them oh... uh... I mean... give them a friendly wave.

Rule Number 10 –If you have been following my rules so far, you may be successfully functioning as an optimist and generally nice person. But, no matter how much you try, inevitably your feelings will get hurt by someone not following these rules. By those who chose to live by their own “I am the centre of the universe” rules. People who live by these, tend to leave piles of destroyed optimists/nice persons in their wake, while still managing to refer to the crumpled humans as “friends”. This brings me to Rule Number 10: when you have encountered this person, it is important to close ranks, hide out at a real friend’s house (only ones who fill your love tank). If possible, find that one person you can rant to. This is the

person who you can tell everything to, how you really feel about the above mentioned “friends” who you would like to say ‘go fuck yourself’ to but you can’t because you are nice and, depressingly, still love them. This kind of friend is very hard to find and needs to pass several, critical tests:

1. He/she should be able to keep a relaxed attitude, no matter how stressed you get.
2. He /she should be able to understand the difference between anger and extreme hunger or fatigue.
3. When you have a complete meltdown, (which you will, with more frequency than you would expect, as living by these rules requires a significant amount of suppression) and irrationally say to this person “I hate you!” he/she should be able to not over-react but ask ‘why?’ When you say ‘I don’t know’, this person should reply ‘because I am the only person in the world you can say it to’ and then that person should hug you. (You should let him/her hug you).

If you know someone who does meet the above criteria, they should be the person you keep around forever. They are your fire extinguisher and should be used in all emergency angry or depressed situations. Just pull the pin and aim at the base of the fire. You can try aiming at the flames but this will just cause the fire to spread. You should always try to aim at what is really making you mad or sad.

As a side warning, you should note that this person does have feelings. But, in order to fulfil the above criteria, they must keep their feelings buried deep inside and this lack of emotion may hurt your feelings. For instance, he/she may be unable to smile when you are excited about something. Or they may react poorly when you show them an attempt at poetry and their insensitivity may make you cry. However, you should keep in mind that this very quality is what allows you to function as an optimist and nice person. I do advise, if possible, not to marry this person, but it may be inevitable. By now, you may be feeling rather overwhelmed. I am afraid this is unavoidable and if you feel you cannot follow these rules after all,

you have two options left. Either, allow yourself to become a self-absorbed, inconsiderate, opinionated jerk or, sequester yourself in the mountains and have your groceries delivered by Yak.

Multilingual Apology Guide

Sorry—English

Pardon—French

Siehe—German

Συγγώμη—Greek

מצטער—Hebrew

क्षमा करे—Hindi

Bocsánat—Hungarian

Maaf—Indonesian

Scusa!—Italian

사람—Korean

îmi pare rău—Romanian

Извините—Russian

Monique Van Lamoen

“...By God, I’ll Never Touch Another’s Heart Again...”

When I was seventeen I went on a beach holiday with a boyfriend. He had blonde hair and massive shoulders and a stomach that would rise and deflate like a pump. I could visualise his body filling with air every time he inhaled.

The drive there was long and windy. From the car window everything seemed more controllable than it really was; the sea seemed threadbare, the sky something touchable and real. I was really into The Veils at the time; I’d play their music in the car and the songs’ mood soaked into the landscape outside the window.

“...Am I on the right train headed in the wrong direction? What say you, Lord? What say you, Lord?...”

I watched the world clump together, peak over bumps and stretch out over planes. Everything was spacious and deserted and ridiculously scenic. This wedge of the world was rugged, remarkable. Everything was so wide-open it was almost threatening. There was nowhere to hide. The sea shrunk from your grip. The mountains enclosed you.

The house we stayed in sat at the end of a small lane. Mountains rose behind and to the left of us. Right opposite was a large bay that was separated from the ocean by a cathedral-shaped jumble of rocks.

He did set after set of sit-ups on the deck.

He said he wanted a fully-defined six pack.

I said they looked gross, plastic and unhealthy, as though toothed organs were trying to bite their way through his skin.

He huffed and groaned and exhaled.

I had come to associate beach holidays with sun and heat and the intrusive sauna-like air that ducks straight inside you and pushes the sweat out of your pores. Here the air was thin and heatless, and it grew damp and cold in the evenings. The light was pale and muted as though it streamed from the corners of an eclipse. The sky was white as a dried sea.

I never stopped touching my camera. Every picture was a postcard.

The road outside the beach house was worn, grimy like the trail of smoke rising from a steam train. Piecrust cracks ran down the edges. The sun had bleached it to the colour of ash. It looked as though a sooty finger had drawn a slapdash line between the houses and the beach.

Snap.

In the evening the sun bloated and smudged across the sky like a popped blood blister, sinking down in a pink or redwood haze that gradually cooled into purples and blues.

Snap.

At night the sky was acid-washed, slathered in stars. There was so much brightness that it looked as though someone had stretched a tattered rag over a dome of light.

Snap. Snap. Snap.

He said, "I had a dream that we got married."

I said, “I want to sleep in the other bedroom.”

The sea flickered between grey and azure, bleak and dramatic. When the sky was patched over with clouds, the water was bruise-green. When the sun flooded down and flecks of light shifted over the waves, it was eye-blue and camera-flash bright.

When I was too tired to sit outside and too wound-up to sleep, I would listen for the waves. They cut through each other with that oncoming-force sound, that heavy lisp.

He said one time him and his friend had stood in church, and during prayer, both of them saw a flower float down from the ceiling.

I thought, oh no.

“What say you, Lord? ...As they try for love and any form of ascension?... What say you Lord? Why is the truth of this so hard to unveil?...”

I started collecting shells; white ones with chalky ridges, orange clam-shaped ones, pearly cones. I avoided going inside the batch. It smelt like corn. The walls were coarse pink. The air was musty, the furniture boxed-in. Outside everything was clear and cool. Days were pale and atmospherically odd. Nights were hypnotic; disorienting and chilling.

“I have scars on my arms,” he said. “From where I cut myself.”

“You need to see a doctor,” I said.

“I used to be addicted to antidepressants,” he said. “They don’t do anything for me.”

“You need help.”

“I don’t trust anyone else.”

“...Talk down the girl, talk down the girl... So little knowledge known to me. So little colour left to see, but black and white, black and white...”

The landscape was vast and wild and I thought of the world as a snow globe; a scenic diorama in a glass ball. Everything seemed globular and concave. The sky curved from the edge of the ocean to the hills behind us like a cupped hand. The road outside our house looked like a hollowed tube of asphalt; edges arcing upwards and the middle dipping down. The mountains rose into the sky like knuckles; their peaks pushed through the air like cylinders. I took enough pictures to make a flipbook.

He said, “I’ll have nothing to live for if you leave.”

I said, “Stop it.”

We drove to a nearby town one afternoon. We drank milkshakes. I bought hot glue and a cork board to glue my shells to. We listened to Jesus For The Jugular on the way back.

“How do you preach the word if you don’t know how to read?...”

He said he hated the song and told me to turn it off.

“...They hold your soul once you sign the deed...”

He screamed for it to be turned off. His voice bounced off the windshield and bored into my ears.

“...Let him go, let him go, let him go from me... “

He said it had been his best friend's favourite song. He said two years ago she had called him crying, suicidal, and he had rushed to her house. When he'd opened her bedroom door he had found her dead.

"...Jesus for the jugular, one at a time. Oh, Jesus for the jugular, one at a time..."

I said that I thought he hadn't found out about his best friend's suicide until after her funeral.

He said that had been his other friend. He said he knew too many people who had killed themselves.

"... Ain't nobody ever gonna ever have to die."

Outside my window the clouds opened like a mouth and waves of pale light poured from its wispy tongue. The patch of water bordering the horizon shined like varnish. The picture I took was framed by the car window.

He's crazy.

Snap.

He's deluded.

Snap.

The house felt like a flesh-walled sauna. The rooms were stuffy. The towels smelled like stale water. The walls were covered in pink spit. It was like being in a whale's stomach.

"Let's go home," I said.

He said, “No.”

“I want to go home,” I said.

His shoulders started moving up-down-up-down in that violent pulsing way. Each heave rose straight from his gut and his body bulged in and out of itself as though his feet were planted over an earthquake.

“We’ll talk when we get back,” I said.

He said, “No one cares about me.” And tears flushed down his face.

“...I’ve been brought back to life so many times I don’t know what’s real. But this is all I’ve ever known, and no one does it like I do...”

“I care,” I said.

“You’ve ruined my life,” he said.

“...and the blood is going to my head. By God, I’ll never touch another’s heart again...”

“It will be okay”

“It won’t. I want to die.”

“What about your family?”

“I’ll make it look like an accident.”

Outside the waves rolled through each other, and liquid salt fizzed against the sand.

I walked around the beach in circles, in lines, in zigzags, loops,

crosses, squares. I fastened my shells to the board in loose spirals. Foam squirmed between my toes. I let the sea suck me into itself, roll me over, and push me back to shore. I lay in the sand with my head in the water. I sat and swam and dived in the sea. I swept my fingers through the loose sand at the bottom. I floated on the waves.

I thought, I need to go.

I thought, what if he hurts himself?

I wanted someone to deal with this for me, to scrape everything together and tuck it out of my sight. I tried to remember the self-defence my brother had taught me.

Put your thumb outside your fist when you punch someone. Extend your arm straight out.

You have better control that way.

And if anyone ever tries anything, go for the jugular. Don't even think about it. Go straight for the jugular.

He said, "Would you marry me tomorrow if I asked now?"

I said nothing.

He's dangerous.

Snap.

I decided to go home the following morning. I had to walk down to the gas station in order to get phone reception. I placed a can of deodorant on my bedside table as makeshift pepper spray.

You have better control that way.

Some time during the night my bedroom door opened. I turned the light on. His face was covered in a snoot mask. It had the organic gleam of homemade face treatments; coconut jelly and egg-whites.

He said he had woken up, and had found a demon hanging over him. Then he had dreamt about Satan. He had dreamt about Satan trying to kill him. And he wasn't sure whether it was a dream.

I could hear the water splash and blister on the sand. I could hear the waves breaking open against the rocks.

I said, "Let's watch Harry Potter."

He sat next to me on the couch and the hairs on my arms stabbed out of my pores like needles. Every time he shifted I'd jerk away from him. I would vomit if he touched me.

Harry Potter coughed up the snitch like a metal hairball. The walls were the colour of diluted flesh. The paint was one big stain.

"...Let him go, let him go, let him go from me..."

He fell asleep on the couch. I sat on my bed, and the walls spat at me.

"...Caught in a frenzy of elimination. Such an irreparable disintegration... What say you, Lord? What say you, Lord?..."

I'd learn about fear and sleep deprivation in psychology lectures two years later. Lecturers would tell me that lack of sleep dilutes the logical powers of your brain. Rational thought crumbles under the flood of adrenaline and fear.

Breathe, the brainstem says.

Fight or flight, the amygdala says.

There is no foolproof option, the frontal cortex says.

The room was lumpy and inflamed as a sandpapered rash. Everything felt itchy. The curtains were grainy. The prints on the wall were oily. And the walls, those damn pink walls; it was like being squashed inside a rancid grapefruit.

“...It must be something in my blood. By God, I’ll never touch another’s heart again...”

I walked out to the sea. Open air is safer. There’s room to run. There’s sky to look to. There’s water to hide in.

He said that the devil had red-black scales and that he could smell the blood on them. He said that the devil had made him drive off a cliff in his dream. Gravity had spun him round and round inside his car as it arched down towards the sea. He expected to be saved somehow, but the air wouldn’t clot and the sea wouldn’t dry. When his face burst through the window, the water was a meter away. He could taste the salt. Then he woke up.

Breathe.

The world seemed upended and alien, somehow. The sky was extraordinary; gunmetal and salt-stained. The sea was something wild and violent. It seemed feral, slick and oily; a sleazy mass of water crashing and shifting, flooding the horizon.

“What are you doing outside?” he asked.

Fight or flight.

We went inside and I pocketed my phone.

“Have a shower,” I said. “You’ll feel better.”

He said, “Okay.”

The slobbering of water hitting the shower floor sounded pathetic compared to the thick lulling of the sea. I slid the outside door shut behind me and the hot hiss stopped as abruptly as a voice recording ending mid-sentence.

There is no foolproof option.

I walked by the shoreline. The empty roads were too desolate and man-made to be safe. The streetlights drooled cheap light onto the asphalt. The reflections on the pavement looked like blotches of orange-candy spit.

I called my sister at the gas station. I watched a moth spiral upwards in the sleazy beam of the streetlight across the road.

She said, “I’ll come and get you.”

I said, “I’m scared.”

She said, “Scream if he does anything. Kick him in his balls. Call the police.”

Go for the jugular.

“What if he hurts himself?”

“What if he hurts you?”

On the walk back, the darkness started to stretch out and discolour. I sat by the water and waited for dawn.

“...Would the sun still rise if there was no one around?... Would the fox be as quick if he hadn’t his hound?...”

The sun bobbed up from the bottom of the world like a poker-hot buoy. The horizon sliced it open like a blood orange and squeezed its red light over the sea. Clouds drifted from the four corners of the horizon and joined in the middle. Slices of light cut down to Earth like streams of sand running between spread fingers. Wet reflections wrinkled over the sea.

I packed my bag. I drank coffee. I lay on the beach and traced patterns in the sky. The sea swallowed my hair. He said things. I said nothing back. I drew squiggles in the sand. The sea spat out my hair.

“...So little knowledge known to me. So little colour left to see, but black and white, black and white...”

I collected more seashells. I washed them and spaced them out on the deck. He arranged them into a heart shape. I smoothed them out into a circle. I took pictures of foam crusting on the sand. I made castles and thrones out of puckered rocks. I plastic-bagged the shells.

I told him he would be okay. He had everything he needed to be happy. He didn’t need me at all.

He said God had told him I could be trusted to handle his situation. God had told him that if it wasn’t for me, he would have killed himself.

“...Talk down the girl, talk down the girl...”

I said nothing.

“...Let him go, let him go, let him go from me...”

It was dark when I heard car wheels bounce across the edge of the driveway. Headlights shone through the glass doors. I grabbed my bag and shoved the shell-decorated board under my arm.

He stood in the living room and said, “What did you do?”

I tore my way through the door. My sister ran from the car and hurled her arms around me.

Her boyfriend said, “She’s okay.” He said, “She’s okay, she’s okay, she’s okay,”

I looked at the house and saw him looking at me through the sliding doors. Shadows cut off the top half of his face. I couldn’t tell if he was crying. Then he was gone.

What did you do?

Go straight for the jugular.

There is no foolproof option.

I heard the sound of glass. It could have been a glass door being slammed back into its frame. It could have been a wrist shredding through a slammed-in window.

What did you do?

I looked at the sky. The carbon mass reached from behind the house like a tsunami and curled down into the edge of the sea. Its fluid belly stretched over the world like a petrified wave.

Driving away, leaving the driveway, the tiny street, turning past the

gas station; it felt like escaping a place before it crumbled, before it was scrubbed from existence. It felt like pushing through the wall of a soap bubble.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

I watched the world gather mass and momentum. The sea dried into land. The mountains flattened into fields and roads. The white noise of city lights drowned out the stars.

“What if he does kill himself?” I said.

“That’s not your problem,” my sister said.

“It doesn’t matter,” her boyfriend said. “Because you’ll never know.”

By God, by God, by God, I’ll never touch another’s heart again.

Swallowing the Sky

My primary school had a massive playground. My best friend lived behind the gym and we would sometimes walk down to the school so we could hang from the swings and bounce on the trampoline. One day we were on our way back to her house when it started to rain. A constellation of drops broke open against the pavement like blisters. Strings of water pierced through the clouds like the bars of a liquid cage.

She loved rain. She yelled in awe as the sky broke open and crashed down against our faces. She spread her arms and spun round in a cocoon of water. The rain came faster and harder till there was more water than air in the sky. It didn't seem to be falling anymore. It was just there; in front of us, on our skin. It soaked through my clothes till my jeans weighed around my legs like casts. My shirt hung from my back, heavy as wings.

The water washed down like turpentine, swallowing colour and diluting texture. It was like being inside a marble as it's thrown into an aquarium. Everything looked eroded and transparent. It felt as though we were looking at an x-ray of the world. The school faded into smudges of grey. She blurred behind a gauze of rain. Liquid confetti shredded her face to a smear of flesh.

It was as if I saw her drown. Walls of water could have formed around her, slamming down like a trap closing. A fist of rain could have plunged down her throat and sponged the breath from her windpipe. And I wouldn't have been able to save her.

I told her we should go, but she shook her head and tilted her face towards the sky. Rain sluiced between her spread fingers and showered onto her face. It dripped into her open mouth in trails shiny and translucent as threads of light.

All that I can truly recall about her face is that her skin was pale and her hair was sand-brown. I like to think of her as having looked strikingly different, but she didn't. Her eyes weren't rain-coloured. Her hair didn't move in waves.

The things that were unusual about her are much harder to explain. She looked at people as though she could see inside somehow; as though the hinges of their bodies swung open and she could see their hearts bounce inside their ribcages. Her hands seemed boneless. They moved as if they were trying to flap away from her arms. The way she smiled, half-swallowing her lips, made it seem as though her mouth was razored onto her face.

And she drew wings. In breath-fogged windows, on poles in subway stations, on the ceiling of her bedroom. My skin has countless memories of the wings she drew on me. My palms remember the scratch of her ballpoint pen stretching ink into feathers; my forehead remembers the hot outlines of her finger-traced angels, my back remembers the wet of the painted wings sprouting from my spine.

When we were teenagers I moved to the other side of the world. I can fully recall the dread of having to say goodbye to her, but I only half-remember the last time I saw her. I think Pink Floyd was playing on the radio. I think it was sunny. I think she was crying.

If I had to reconstruct the scene in my head right now, I'd say her eyes were glazed with my reflection. I'd say that she looked at me with that childlike openness, as though the world was still spoon-feeding her visual information and it wasn't yet her responsibility to process any of it. I'd say the song was *Is There Anybody Out There?*

She handed me a corner of paper with her email address on it. I found it in a skirt pocket a few months later. I never emailed her.

Last month I heard she was addicted to heroin.

Guilt thumps like a fist of dirt, a second heart.

I didn't want to think about pain, or addiction, or the erosion of a life. So I thought about water. Its colour, its scent. Its clean, feathery sound. I wondered if it rained where she was, if water traced over her window like a hundred dissolving fingerprints. I wondered if heroin felt like rain breathing into her, through her. Maybe it made her feel like her skin was running over her bones like water. Maybe it made her feel as though her body was stretching out into a rope of rain, reaching for the ground and never getting there.

I once asked her what she loved about rain and she said that it had been part of her at some point. When rain sloshed over her skin, she felt like it tried to crawl back inside of her. The specks of cloud snaking into the folds and corners of her body, the water from an unreachable part of the world rolling down her throat; it felt like she was swallowing the sky.

When I think about it now, everything looks pulped somehow. It's as though I'm seeing the world from inside a bruise. Needles of rain cut through the sky like bloodless veins. Water hits the pavement with the crunch of toothless gums biting down on apples. And the rain gathers around her, hems her in. She loses her colour. Her spread arms crash down in liquid fringes. Her fingers flake off like feathers. And she drowns. She drowns.

Standing in the rain has become this surreal thing to me now. It's the closest I can get to feeling how she felt. It's how I know that when she looked up, she would have seen the liquid sky falling down

towards her. She would have felt all those cloudfuls of sky-water burst open against her face. The way rain arched around her would have made her feel like wings were fanning across her back. When she spun around like her body was uncoiling, she must have felt as though the rain was coming from inside of her. She must have felt as though the water behind her ribcage was spurting out into the sky.

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Fever

My body is a finger
Down a flaming throat.
I slide
Through a tube of blooming cells
And melt
Into shapeless red.

I'm swelling, pulsing,
Eating the sun;
Crackling mouthfuls
Of fire balled into fabric.

The grey sting of ash
Froths my breath into smoke
And thickens my blood to milk.

I think I swallowed the moon,
A ladle-full
Of luminous batter;
I glow the dead white
Of lychee flesh.

Damp with licks
From a pearly tongue,
My skin spreads over me
In smears of shoeshine,

Clinging like the lifeless film
On boiled cream,
It could be pinched
Straight from my bones.

My hands are the first things to go.
They smudge into doilies,
Flat and passive
As cleaned slates.

Then my arms drift away,
My scalp, my tongue, my chest
Fizz into salt water.

I'm shrinking, clotting,
Pooling like wax
In the cotton spoon of my bed.

Even the light mourns for me.
It dusts away my eyelids,
Showing how my body
Is blurring into air,
How I'm laid out like a veil
Of starry lace, how

Someone arranged my spine
Into rosary beads.

They stirred my breath
Into balm,

And wove my hair
Into a wreath.

Dream of a Man who Smiled with Blood

He unrolled my irises
Into ribbons
And walked straight into my brain.

Once there, he smiled,
His teeth glistening
Like slices of polished bone,

Clean
As milk pulled
Into glacial sheets.

And then the blood,
The pulp of life,
Squeezed through his teeth,
As though

His tongue was lit
Like a red candle.
The vascular grease
Slid through the cracks in that calcium dam,

Maiming
The seamless white,
The sinless God colour,

Slashing like stigmata
Across blameless palms.

Each red trickle was a smile,
A sad grimace

As his mouth splintered
Like an ivory temple,
Revealing its breathing centre:

All the holy marble
Was soft and wounded inside;
Even purity is made of meat.

The blood rolled towards me
Like a red carpet,
The out-pouring of an answer.
It's as if I had said,

Let me hide in your mouth;
I want to bury my heart
In sacred skin.
I want to slink into myself
And flood from view.

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.

Erin Doyle has been a cake decorator, and a florist. She is now studying towards a Masters, majoring in biology, at the University of Waikato. Her work has appeared in JAAM and Brief.

Rachael Elliott is currently studying towards her Masters in creative writing. She has just been appointed Editor of Waikato University's *Nexus Magazine* and her work has previously appeared in *4th Floor Literary Journal*. She recently won the 2014 2degrees Poetry Slam with her performance of 'Write the Body Bloody'.

K-t Harrison writes:

Ko Taupiri te Maunga

Ko Tainui te Waka

Ko Waikato te Awa

Ko Ngati Mahuta, Ngati Paoa, Ngati Haua nga iwi.

Ko Waiti te Marae.

Robert Taylor writes: Someone who's making their first attempt at getting published, so please, don't laugh too much.

Nick Pearce: Born in Somerset, raised in NZ. Professional career as an analyst, manager and business improvement specialist in various organisations. Passions: football, baseball, pastel painting, poetry... including collecting 20th century first editions. Influences Larkin, Lowell (R), Hughes, Armitage, Wantling, Eliot, Wordsworth, Gunn, Stevens and others.

Alison Robertson is part of the Communications team at University of Waikato. She was a sports reporter for Radio New Zealand in the '80s, has edited a community newspaper in Porirua, written three children's novels and several short stories and until now has never had the courage to publish any poetry.

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.

Tim Shipton: I am in my third year at Waikato University completing a BA (double major) in English and Screen and Media Studies. I am inspired by what I connect with emotionally. Love, humour and the morally questionable are all topics that I like to explore in the name of creative writing.

Hamish Ansley: I'm a writer of mainly short prose—a proportion of which is (hopefully) comedic—and poetry. Beginning graduate study in English in 2014.

Mike Bilodeau: I am a 26-year-old law student who uses creative writing as a brief repose from the tedious monotony of research and referencing that encompasses our legal system. As a result, I tend to swear in my writing.... a lot. Soz.

Carl Unternahrer is a student studying Creative Writing at the University of Waikato.

My name is **Faith Wilson**. I am half Samoan, half NZ European and I mostly like to write about my sustainedly fractured identification with multiple cultural ideas/ideals/identities. I grew up in Hamilton but currently live in Wellington.

Karl Guethert is a graduate of the Waikato Management School who earned a Bachelor of Management Studies. He also realized that Marketing was nowhere near as fun as his passion for creative writing, so he decided to pursue his passion, rather than waste away in the business of manipulating peoples' desires.

Chris Lee: Hobby writer learning new tricks. Thanks Dr Tracey Slaughter and the UOW English Department.

Helena Dow: BA, Postgraduate Student University of Waikato.

Interests: Modern languages, Art history & Creative writing (fiction, non-fiction; prose & poetry). My ambition is to observe, explore & challenge cultural assumptions, beliefs, human sufferings, traumatic experiences & biographical details in my writings.

Stephen Henderson: A 22 year old English and Psych major with a writing club and a passion for anger.

Emily Laing: Hello I am Emily. 20 years old from the Coromandel. This is my third and final year at Waikato Uni and the pieces I am submitting are from Tracey's 2nd and 3rd year creative writing papers.

Kay Ramsbottom: I'm a mature-age student doing a degree in Computer Graphic Design at Waikato. I have always enjoyed creative writing and took some courses in it when I lived in California for eight years. I grew up in the southern suburbs of Sydney, and moved to NZ in 2006.

Jo Buer is a writer, dreamer, and wannabe time-traveler. She lives in Cambridge, New Zealand, where she likes to spend her spare time conjuring ghost stories and tales with slightly dark twists. She has a Bachelor of Arts in History and English, with a specialization in Creative Writing.

Kelsey Toombs is about to begin her final year of a BA in English in Theatre Studies. Since high school she has been interested in various forms of writing, but found poetry to be too difficult. However, 2012 saw a newly-found love of poetry develop, which quickly became one of her favourite forms. She is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have her work published and read by a wider audience in Mayhem, and looks forward to future writing endeavours.

My name is **essa may ranapiri**. I am doing a BA with my two majors being English and History. I am now in the second semester of my second year at Waikato University and all is going well. I have been into writing stories and poetry for most of my life and I am very grateful for the opportunity that has been provided here.

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.

Onyx Lily is a creative non-fiction writer, campaigner for LGBTI rights, and one of the few people alive who knows the correct ways to use a semicolon. She blogs at <http://antisemantic.blogspot.co.nz>

R.P. Wood has completed a BA in History at the University of Waikato, and this year he intends to study at Honours level. This is his first published story.

Carrie Cornsweet Barber is a lecturer in the psychology department, and closet poet for many years. She lives in Hamilton with her daughter, two dogs, and a rabbit named Sirius Black.

Kristy Lagarto is about to start her last semester of her BA in English, and has just been selected to be published in the next issue of *Brief*. She is surrounded by amazing writing types that always encourage her.

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.

Monique Van Lamoen: I've recently completed a degree in psychology with English as a second major. I hope to continue studying creative writing in the future.

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