



MAYHEM

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See the back page for information about submitting to
Mayhem Literary Journal

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Tracey Slaughter

Editorial

Sometimes the page is a mess. The sentences won't hold their weight. The characters stiffen and hide their faces, or stand at centrestage and shriek. The plot takes corners you can't follow, a dark figure with back turned, distant steps. The set is a series of shadows, or postcards of overused plastic towns. The voice sounds lifted from an answering machine – or an emergency room. The mood floods, or flatlines. The words tick, bloodless, from left to right. Or animals appear in the alphabet, things with raw faces that make shapes of pain and bare their teeth. The page goes into spasm. The page goes into stasis. You spend days staring down the vanishing point of the mess.

But mess is good. Mess is learning. The writer needs permission to make a mess. No musician was ever expected to come to their instrument fresh and bring forth faultless symphonies from the first strike. When we pick up our instrument we're pitchy, rigid, fingers in the wrong frets, strum clumsy, tempo stalling, key deaf. But we learn to make the sounds, and we learn to hear them, we learn the feel of them under the stretch of our hands, the mood of the notes as they thrum in our chests. Learning to play language is no different. We discover how to tune the string of the sentence, where to pluck, where to chug. We learn because we just won't put the instrument down, it grows into a part of us, it grafts into our muscle, we lug it everywhere, stroke it and punish it every second we can. We learn by riffing, by just plain stuffing around. Every writer needs permission to jam, to play about, tamper, hazard, have accidents, crash through syntax, detour from formula, mangle expected tone. The capacity to give up perfect, to rush past restriction and unleash a piece in the raw is the practice of surrender that every artist needs. I recently attended a literary festival where a panel of writers was asked, in essence, what is the

point of teaching writing? One of the speakers, the flash fiction writer Tania Hershman, answered without hesitation: permission. It struck an instant chord, and in talks with her afterwards I wholeheartedly agreed: the crucial thing that students often receive in writing classes is as simple as that – permission to speak, to face a subject, to free a character, to use a phrase that once would have led to their mothers washing out their mouths. Permission is the first step. Nothing stifles artistry like those two other dreaded P words: perfection, prohibition. Censor the mess, you stub out the story, you stunt the poem, before it draws breath. It's a state of havoc that gives rise to the creative upsurge, it's surrender, it's disorder, it's risk. You have to give yourself permission to cause mayhem.

The pieces collected in *Mayhem 2* exist because the writers gave themselves permission: to blunder drunk through the streets of 'Shibuya,' to blink headon into the 'Shark Teeth' of relationships, to guzzle the musky juice of seduction in 'Peach,' to "rub gasoline behind the ears" in 'Mechanics,' to burrow the "airless rooms" of memory in 'Disclosed,' to watch the strange blood of childhood run in 'Just Like Dad,' to bare 'Autobiography' in its simple longing, to deal the man a stinging taste of lip in 'Your Life, My Rules,' to "cough up the meaning of family" in 'Alexander the Great,' to commemorate the fragments of everyday grace that need saving in 'Write.' They are testament to the work that issues from writers who seize permission to speak, who demand and exercise that right with fully focused passion.

But for those of you who submitted to *Mayhem* and found themselves not selected: the answer is...keep making a mess, fail harder, fail better (to paraphrase that mantra of Samuel Beckett that should be nailed above every writer's desk). And above all fail with feeling – for if there is a grain of feel, a trace of heat left in the wrecked page then there is always something to salvage, a seed to keep on working with. In my classes that's what we learn to listen for: the place in the flawed page where we can feel the pulse, the moment in the mess of words where the blood really beats. That's where the thing that needs to be written lives. That's the thing, most often, you haven't yet given permission.

Boris Cookson

Alexander the Great

1: A Morning Walk

Winter rests its flat palms
On either side of my face
Each finger conducting frost

Your dark shock
Of wiry black hair
Rests on top of a body
Two hands taller than me
Yet
You are still short enough to be considered
My brother

Power lines stretch
Crawling gently over
Mile high wooden posts
Sagging in rest
Stirring for the air
You said They hid thieves up there.

Hedges shoot their
Ambitious green growth
Outwards
Arching over the footpath
Swaying
You pull it taut
Ripping each leaf from it
In one playful motion

Yellow lines on the tarmac
Dull in the sun's
Lazy gaze
Wait for headlights
From a speeding night car
To bring out their colour

Ahead of us to the right
On the other side of the road
Your mother
Is jogging
A pair of white trainers
Clapping against the ground

My hand grazes against
A brown fence
Unfinished edges
Held in gaps
Deliver
Furry splinters
To each tiny member

The world
Was made
Of fingers
Once locked
Together
In a grip
That meant
I was safe

You turn and cross the road without me

2: At The Dock

The straight wooden boards
Rest on the back of mile high
Supports
Feet press
Into the wet planks
Hold me in place
I feel the sway
Dock dances with the swell
Hand
On
Back

Pushes

My body
Bends over itself
And
Collapses into the water
Crooked laugh
Propels me
Outwards
My face breaks the surface
Backwards
Eyes shut
Eyes open
Sting
Lips break
Apart
Surrender
Oxygen pulls
The ocean in through the gap
Draining the harbour
Lungs shrivel

Ball up
Swallowing themselves
My body becomes one giant contraction
Gnawing against the rocks
Flop like a fish
Bloated

I cough up the meaning of family
It tastes like salt

3: Nose Bleed on my Eighth Birthday

The
Bigger
Stronger
Older
Boy
Played with his little brother's
Arse like a whore
Not sure if he didn't enjoy it
Though he might not have
Understood the situation
He understood the sensation
Warm and radiating outwards
And upwards

A blanket
That wrapped the front of the brain
In a numbness born of pleasure

Hermit settles back into the shell
Pink and promising
A sheet of foam holding the world
Pressing inwards

Fingernail scraping
Down the back of a hairless leg
To the callused and cracked pads
Of intrepid feet

White hands explore everywhere

I am not sure if
The tiny prick
Dangling innocently

Uncovered by any growth of hair
Was left untouched

All I know is it didn't make a fucking difference

My brother would never
Do me wrong

Adele McKelvie

Your Life, My Rules

Rule 1: Don't ever sit there and eat your cake before your pie comes. Or that's it. I'll tell you I'm going to the bathroom, and I'll walk straight out of that lunch-bar. And that'll be the last you see of me.

Rule 2: You open my car door for me on our first date. Otherwise I'll say I've got a headache and want to watch TV. It's a matter of respect. 'They don't treat you right from the start, they never will.' Same goes for my drinks. You pay. Or it's never going to happen.

Rule 3: Never ask if you can kiss me. You do that, I'll reply 'negative.' Your small, dry mouth will fall open anyway, and I'll probably snort loudly, because that's the dumbest thing you could ever say. I'll leave you whimpering in the corner with your coat ticket butt in my pocket.

Rule 4: Don't even think about wearing a checked shirt tucked in, and ironed, and shit. Or put crap in your hair. You turn up like that and I will play you. I'll let you show me how to use the cue in a game of pool and then I'll invite you home. I'll serve you a cup of green tea, and lead you to my deserted flatmate's room, where you can use a sleeping bag on top of his bed. And you will go along with it. Because A you're the polite type and B you think there's a chance I'll appear in your doorway in a black lace g-string. But I won't. I'll be getting my beauty sleep down the hall, with a big fat smile on my face. And eventually you'll leave as quiet as a mouse with your tail dangling between your legs.

Rule 5: You eye up any slut, and you're history. If I put on my silver

sparkle strapless dress and pink heels that just maxed out my credit card, and you take me to a place where a tiger-print bikini bitch is shaking her arse in a cage, and you so much as peek, the hell I'll take that. Next date, I won't laugh when you laugh in the movie, and I'll point out bald guys who really do it for me, and we'll go to an Adults Only shop to check out a new dildo for me. And even though I still look pretty by your side, you'll start to doubt yourself. And feel insecure. Then you'll stop texting me, and it'll be six months before you can ask anyone else out.

Rule 6: Don't get cocky. In other words, don't ever think I want you as desperately as you want me. Or else I'll drop you like dead meat. If you say you don't dance, guarantee I'll make you. I'll fetch you a cold one, 'hon.' You'll feel my lips on your sweaty neck, my fingers pull back through your curls. And you'll follow me like a lamb onto the dance floor, where the shame of your pathetic-as robot moves will end you up in a sad heap on the lounge carpet. And I'll be grinding my happy hips against my flatmate's friend from Peru.

Rule 7: Don't use me. If you need a fancy girl to parade round your mates, and we go bar hopping, and a waiter whispers in my ear, 'Did you know he's gay,' I'm going to squeeze those saggy balls of yours so hard they'll pop. When you've got no choice but to take me back to your place, and you keep talking all goddamn night, and we finally head for your room for fuck-knows what, and you tell me three times not to leave my purse out in the kitchen for your so-called flatmate to see, I'm going leave it there. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. I'll send you real intense stuff in the mail, magazines and shit, addressed to you at your home and place of work. And your cover, mate, will be blown.

Rule 8: Don't play me. I can play you (see Rule 4) but playing me is strictly out of bounds. You step over the line and I will break your precious dream. I'll smash it into tiny pieces. Easy. If you and I get close, but not real close quick enough, according to you, and you get

another girl on the scene to make me jealous, to drive me fast into your arms, you'll have lifted my game to a whole new level. You screw me like that? I screw you back and leave off the condom, so you think we've got a future together. But what you don't know is, I'll get hold of that pill, and I'll swallow it. And I'll wait till a tender moment to tell you why we have nothing in the works together. Then I'll wash my hands of your chicken-shit tears. For good.

So.

You ready?

Kristy Lagarto

Shark Teeth

The route to your house
in the daylight
is different at night.
The road turns to currents
and the buildings are coral
blooming in their lawns,
the sand gardens.
The headlights of cars
are tiny fish.
They catch the edges
of mirrors in the water's
light and bleed white and gold,
fog the windshield, a tide of
loss and shadow,
muffled music.

The second time I went
to see you I couldn't
swim fast enough. You
make me feel light.
You turn my lungs
over in your palms
until they become windpipes
and pierce a hole
through the sky with
their sound. I spin
out through my ears,
rush to a beat with

drunken feet, wide eyed
and slick bird winged
with a panicked pulse.

I wish I could have done
something, anything
to be the ribbon sent
across the sky flying
like a star stained lighthouse
beacon, one that wraps you
up on the glassy surface,
keeps you afloat in the
present, banishes dark
underneath, sweeps away sharp
rocks, shark teeth.

Thigh Gap

I do not
want to be beautiful.

I want to be small, minuscule,
I want to be compact.
I do not want to be held
in your arms.
I want to be held in your hand
like a piece of lint.
I want to be the lines
across your palms.

But I am the finger nails
you never let grow out,
the ones you chew off and spit
on the floor, crush into
the ground with your feet.
I am your dirty habit.

I want my sister to hate me
for my glass torso and
cardboard arms, covered in
translucent film.
I want my finger tips to turn blue
like I dip them inside my heart,
like I dyed my hair and did not wear gloves.
I want my skin to be frail,
to rip like rice paper when crinkled,

and I want you to see my spine
through my T-Shirt,
a jagged map.

I want you to drink
soup out of my collar bones.
I want you to build New York City
in the gap between my thighs
that I love like I love myself,
and I despise it so much.

I do not
want to be beautiful.

Fixers

When I fuck with
the lights on
there is a reason
my body creaks and
closes like a casket lid.
It's the same reason
I set fire to photographs
of a little blonde girl
in a green dress
with flowers in her hair,
while my eyes
follow the smoke
and the doctors
prescribe me more pills.
And more pills. And more
pills, until my stomach rattles,
full of round pink 'fixers'
that I want to chase down with vodka.
But they won't let me
because they know I'll
try to drown myself.

I tied my tongue
like ribbons in my hair
but my silence came
out my eyes, sunken,
like debris when no one chose to hear
my roots being ripped up,

my body eroding to the sound
of daddy's zipper,
And 12 years later I wake
in damp sheets and
my bones rattle
to the echo of his voice
knocking in my skull
as it cracks like a frozen lake
moves through the haemorrhage
of a once perfect child.

I twist my body and look back
at my whimper lowered
to half mast, and at him as he
stands over me with his sticky
hand down my pants,
laughing as I wake with
body bags beneath my eyes
and enough blame and
shame in my gut
to name the hurricane
after myself.

If I could face him I'd say
that he created me a storm,
that his claws carved me animal,
that I throw my fists
at every man who lays
his hands on me when I'm sober
because I'm convinced every
man's hands belong to him.

I'd say that I sat on
the side of the road at midnight
and waited for any creature

to identify my body as a carcass,
to swallow every cell of sweat
and leave nothing behind.

I'd say I remember the cracked
fault line that ran through
his eyes, and the way he
shook hands with my father.

I'd say how I counted
out pills on my kitchen counter,
ripped razors apart so I could
stash the blades in my undie drawer
to bring out again and
again when I couldn't stop
the feeling of his fingers
running over my skin
after begging the bodies
of strange men to erase
the canvas he painted
deep inside me, to
not respect me
just fuck me.

And in the morning I would
shovel my body out of their
beds and walk home swollen,
a little more broken,
and no closer to scraping out
the remnants that he
sewed into the pit.

Helena Dow

Disclosed

He was the man who slicked down his hair with gel
and enjoyed the power he held
in a place with cold walls,
with dank air,
with the dead sheep by the fire,
and a single light bulb over the bed.

He was the man who had trouble breathing through
his nose,
who slept with his mouth open,
under the cast of a small circle of semidarkness
in the quarters of oppression
with cluttered memos,
with a coffee maker beside the soda machine,
with a bottle of linctus,
and the hide of a rabbit on the table
in the abode with the locked door.

He was the man with a man's laugh
and the divine face,
created by the last stroke of genius
who underestimated his inner world,
who miscalculated mathematics,
who puffed him up with pure science
and gave him the go-ahead
to blast his prey down the stairwell;
his eyes numb and eerie
as he played the foul game.

He was the man who wanted it all,
who wanted it now,
who wanted it then,
who wanted it broken.
He was the one who did not want to be runner-up.

He was the man who said 'too bad' with his tongue
licking his lips,
with his smile
askew through his wry façade,
with a whiff of smut from his mouth
in his sluggish voice
and the empty bottle in his hand.

He was the man delivered from evil
who wanted to be
where he belonged
deep inside himself as sworn
and not in the airless room,
scarred.

Hannah Dewhurst

Just Like Dad

The sun's going down, it'll be dark soon. Almost dinner time. Dad said there'd be fish and chips. Not from the chip store though. Not the newspaper kind. Dad took the boat out real early and caught some fish. I said I'd help clean them. I'd watched dad often enough. Scales flake away like weird glitter, sticking to his arms. Watery blood everywhere and ropey guts, chucked stinking in a bucket. There were always a million flies in that bucket. But he'd said no again. Every time. 'Your hands aren't big enough for the knives yet lad, you won't hold 'em right. You an' Kimmy go on to the beach for a while.'

No boats on the lake now. The holidays are nearly finished. Me and Kimmy had seen the Trents tow their boat off earlier. She'd waved but not me. Callum Trent was a loser. We have the beach to ourselves now. It isn't a proper beach, not really. There's only sand on this bit, where we come every year. The rest is mud and stones and weeds. It's quiet now, I can hear the flick-buzz of some bug's wings. I wriggle my toes deeper into the sand, still sun-warm and look over at Kimmy. Only her head is showing after the bury-me game. Last summer she said it'd be funny so I let her and Mum bury me with my own plastic shovel. They spent ages patting the sand down, leaving hand prints everywhere. Then they ran away, laughing. Now she's the one waiting to be dug up. I don't think I will.

I look at the knife, holding it up in front of the water. It's not true Dad. I can so hold it right. Kimmy had seen me nick it as we left, whispered she'd tell unless we played her game first, tell Mum how I was a crazy boy who stole things. So we'd played pretend animals. Hers were boring; a cat, a horse. But when we were swimming she was a fish.

My stomach growls. I'm hungry again. Don't know why. Mum had made us sandwiches for lunch. Not very good ones. Just luncheon and cheese. She'd been busy in the kitchen all day. Lots of people were coming later. Kimmy said Mum was making a cake today. Like she'd know. It had been really hot in the kitchen. The window latch had rusted shut last year and Dad hadn't fixed it yet. Mum's face was all red and her hair had stuck to her forehead. She'd given Kimmy the sandwich bag to hold. One each, she'd called after us.

I'd eaten mine earlier, before the sun could turn it too warm and squishy. Later I'd had Kimmy's too, pulling the tomato out onto the sand first. Kimmy's always had extras in them. It's still there, staining the white sand. I grab a double handful and pour clean sand over it, patting it into a perfect hill. That's better. There's a hill like that on Kimmy's belly. It makes her look really fat. Or like the lady at the lolly shop. Mum said that lady was having a baby. I'd said it must be fat too. There are shadows on Kimmy's belly-hill. Carefully I add more sand, till it's nice and white again.

Something tickles my hand. I have to squint really hard to see now. This side of the lake is already dark. Across the water the hills are still lit red. Ants. There are a line of ants crawling over my hand. Hissing in disgust I run and shove my whole arm into the water. Little black specks spin off over the waves. Going back to Kimmy I can see the ants climbing up onto her face, crawling all over it. There are some tangled and kicking in her hair. Urgh! A couple are even marching into her nose. Kimmy hates bugs even more than I do. She'd scream if she knew. Then they'd go in her mouth too.

Waving a bug away from my ear I stand up. I want dinner now. The sandwiches were ages ago. I pass a third sand hill. That one had a million flies earlier, until I made it bigger. There are none now. Heading up the path I start hearing voices moving towards the lake. They were calling for us. For Kimmy and me. We're late but the party will be even better now. I've never liked sharing my birthday.

Renée Boyer

Peach

Bite me.

Go on,
bite me.
I'm ripe but not
overdone.

My flesh
gives a little at
your touch
but resists
a little too.
Just the way you
like it.

Be gentle.
I don't like
to be
bruised.

My skin is lightly
downed, soft,
strokeable.
Lick me.

Inhale me,
stop resisting and
bite me.

I'm golden on the
inside too.

Sweet and musky my
nectar zings on your
tongue like a
thousand tiny
tap-dancing bees.

A drop of my
juice makes a bid for
freedom but you
stem the flow with a
quick finger.

Bite follows glorious
bite, the urge to
savour warring
with the urge to
guzzle.

At last I'm spent, my final
morsels of flesh
stripped and
juice sucked
from my stone by your
questing, satiated
tongue.

Another?

The Far Part of Us

KATHY

It didn't go to birth-plan, but she'd had enough candid conversations with various friends with babies, that she'd been ready for that anyway. Planned to have no plan.

She'd been on edge for a week, every twitch and pang examined in minute detail in case it was a contraction. That was one thing no-one had been able to tell her – what a contraction felt like. It was really irritating at the time, but funnily enough, now that it was all over she realised she would be hard pushed (no pun intended) to describe the sensation to anyone else. Everyone at work had, for no good reason, convinced themselves she was going to give birth at 38 weeks, and they'd half convinced her as well. So when that date came and went with no baby, she wasn't sure what to do with herself. They'd decided on names, – Kirrin for a girl, Edgar for a boy – the nursery was ready, clothes, pushchair, car seat, books and toys had been purchased, all waiting now, like Kathy, for their owner to claim them. Finally, at 39 weeks and one day, a tense, tightening, pushing sensation gripped her belly and she knew this was it.

KIRRIN

We are here. We are warm and floating. Getting tighter but warm and safe. We are joined by this. This part of us doesn't move. It is nice to hold. The far part of us, not so far now, fades and glows. We push this part of us into the far part of us, and sometimes the out part of us pushes back. We like the push back. We can hear. There are lots of things to hear but our favourite thing to hear is outside-us. It is soft and warm and makes us buzz. This is the thing we hear more often than any of the other things. There is another thing we hear which is

not-us, but low and rumbly and we like this one too. The far part is glowing. We push and it is easier to push.

We used to turn and twist but now the far parts are very close and it is hard to move far. Now this part of us stays here; it feels right. The far part is gold and glowing.

KATHY

It came on hard and strong, but this was her first pregnancy so she thought maybe that was normal. There didn't seem to be much respite between contractions though, so she called her midwife.

'Jo, it's Kathy, i think the baby's coming.' She was nervous, tripping over her words.

'OK Kath, just try to relax. When was your first contraction?' Jo's calm, capable voice made Kathy feel better immediately.

'About half an hour ago,' she replied.

'OK, we should have plenty of time then. Do you want to take a bath? How far apart are the contractions?'

Kathy tried to reply, but another intense contraction gripped her and she almost dropped the phone.

'Kathy? Don't forget to breathe. Remember the colours exercise?'

Kathy concentrated on imagining each breath blowing out a different colour, and surprisingly the pain diminished a bit, became more manageable. She breathed her way through the rest of the contraction, gripping the phone like a lifeline. The relief when it stopped was so intense it was something like ecstasy.

'Kathy? You through that one? It seemed pretty intense, how often are you getting them?'

'I don't know, I haven't timed exactly, but every five minutes or so?'

There was a brief silence on the end of the line.

'OK, Kathy, I don't want to alarm you, but I think your baby is coming pretty quickly.' The slight edge in Jo's voice scared Kathy even more than the anticipation of the next contraction. 'I'm coming round – is Ben home?'

BEN

No-one told me there would be so much blood.

I was at work, I'd spoken to Kathy at lunchtime, she was fine, just frustrated at the waiting you know? She was restless, couldn't even sit down and read, it was driving her mad. She'd been great all through the pregnancy, hardly any mood swings and no demands to get her asparagus ice cream at 3am or anything.

We went to all those ante-natal class things. They were ok, but mostly they just pointed out how useless us fathers are once we're finished with the whole impregnating business. In one class we watched one of those birth videos and I got the giggles. The midwife wasn't too impressed, especially when Kathy started too. But it was just so... seventies. The father had these big sideburns and flares on, and they were all humming together and talking about the wonder of nature. 'Yeah, it's far out man.' But then the actual birth bit started and we stopped giggling pretty quick. Kath was quiet in the car on the way home. I think she was more scared than she wanted to let on.

KATHY

'He's at work, he doesn't know, I need to call him.' Kathy was starting to panic, wondering if it was too late to change her mind, back out of this whole venture.

'Listen, you need to stay calm. Babies only come fast if they are really ready and fast births are nearly always straightforward.'

Kathy heard the word 'nearly' and wanted to scream it at Jo, but another contraction gripped her and her scream turned into something more primal.

'Kathy? I'm going to hang up now. I need you to remember your breathing. I want you unlock the front door and find somewhere in the house you'll be comfortable giving birth. If you feel up to it, get some sheets and towels. I'll call Ben and be there as quick as I can.'

'Giving birth? But I don't want a homebirth... Jo?'

KIRRIN

Something new. The far part is not soft. It is hard and squeezing,

pushing us this way. We don't want to go this way. It stops and goes soft again and we are glad. But then it is hard and squeezing and pushing again and we don't like it. We don't like it! Stop.

But when it stops it starts again and we don't like it, the squeezing and pushing on this part of us and this part and this part. Stop.

KATHY

There was a click and the line went dead. Kathy felt panic rise up to overwhelm her, but then a small kick and wriggle deep inside stopped her, breathing hard. This wasn't about her now. An incredibly warm, calm feeling spread through her, filling her up. She made it to the front door and unlocked it before the next contraction gripped her. She breathed through it, thinking through the colours and the dragon's fiery breath like she'd practiced. She was starting to feel an urge to push, but she stroked her belly and murmured 'not yet, hold on little one, just for a bit longer.'

Some time passed, it could have been 10 minutes, it could have been an hour, but Kathy was so deeply focused on her baby and her breathing, she couldn't have said. Suddenly the door burst wide and a flurry of action invaded her calm.

BEN

Why don't they tell you about the blood? Someone should warn you. I thought...

When Jo called, I was expecting to be told to drive Kathy to the birthing centre. Not that Kath was about to give birth at home. That wasn't on her plan thing. What was the point of that?

I got there with Jo and she was all busy and Kathy, I've never seen her like that, her face was so... serene. And then the contraction came and I could tell it was just pain like nothing I've ever experienced, and I wanted to do something, to take the pain away and I couldn't.

It was everywhere. How can anyone lose that much and not...

KATHY

Jo and Ben arrived simultaneously, Jo organising with practised efficiency, flicking sheets and fluffing pillows to create a cosy, clean space for Kathy to birth in. Ben was standing in the doorway, wide-eyed and twisting his wedding ring, a sure sign of stress. When a particularly intense contraction gripped Kathy his eyes grew even wider and his face took on a green tinge. When she could speak, Kathy smiled at her husband and his shoulders relaxed slightly. ‘Could you get me some water babe?’ she asked ‘And a cup of tea for Jo?’

Relieved, he rushed out to the kitchen, and Kathy and Jo exchanged a knowing smile. But just then another contraction arrived, along with an irrepressible urge to push. Jo hurried to help Kathy undress, leaving her in her tee-shirt – Ben’s actually, it was all she fit.

‘You’re ten centimetres, it’s time to push. How do you want to do this?’ Jo asked.

Kathy knew she needed to crouch, and then it was nothing but pushing and pain and relief and Ben and sweating and screaming and pain and stretching and tearing and pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and finally, finally... there.

KIRRIN

It doesn’t stop, and then we are moving, to a new place we haven’t been before. It is a tight place, a hard place, we don’t like the new place, we don’t want to go there. Stop, stop. But the far part of us keeps pushing and squeezing us into the new place. This is a new feeling, this is down, pushing down, squeezing down, forcing down, we don’t want to go down, stop, stop, stop. And there is pushing and we don’t like it and squeezing and we don’t like it, and down and down and down. And the new place brings a new feeling – cold on the down part of us and blowing. And the warm is going away, out of the down place and we are going away into the down place and it is hard and pushing and squeezing and we don’t like it, stop, we don’t like it, stop. Stop.

BEN

They sent me off on a busy-job, but I was so grateful for something to do at that point, I didn't care. And then I heard Kathy scream and I rushed back in and just held her hand and she squeezed it, and then Jo said the baby was coming. I knelt down and Kathy's body stretched and stretched, how the hell it does that I don't know.

KIRRIN

The down is getting faster and harder and it hurts and we don't like it. Stop. And then we are through and out of the squeezing and down place and into a new place where is it not warm and we are not floating we are falling. But we stop against something like the far place but not as soft but safe. It belongs to the rumbly sound.

BEN

And out she came, in a rush of blood and slime and just body stuff, and I caught her. This tiny thing, warm and covered in gunk and wrinkled up like a pink prune.

But there was so much blood. The smell of it, and slashing across the white sheets. Even as I held my daughter in my hands, I didn't know if...

KATHY

A gusty cry rent the air, and there she was, their daughter, purple and wrinkly and oh, so beautiful.

There was afterbirth and stitching and business being taken care of, but all Kathy and Ben could do was stare at each other, and at her, the thing they had made, in awe.

BEN

She cried. My daughter. My daughter. The most incredible sound. And then I looked up into Kathy's eyes and passed her our baby, and Jo was smiling and she handed me some scissors. I cut the cord, which was bizarre and completely different to what I was expecting. We'd talked about it and I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it, but it just

happened so fast so I did, without even thinking about it. It crunched which I really wasn't expecting, and there was even more blood till Jo tied it all off. And then I looked at Kath and the baby and I knew, finally, everything, everyone was ok.

KIRRIN

The rumbly sound not-soft far place moves us to another place and it is you. And you are not we and you are the outside place.

And I am me. And I am here.

BEN

They should warn you about the blood.

JO

Surname: Harvey

First names: Kirrin Lucy

Sex: F

D.O.B: 14/01/2011

NHI number: ZWS8676

Place of birth: Homebirth

Length of pregnancy: 39 weeks

Type of delivery: Vaginal

Birth weight: 3.54kg (7lbs 13 oz)

Length: 48cm

Head circumference: 35cm

Comments:

Fast labour, 90 minute duration, mother had intended to give birth in birthing centre but was unable to reach in time. Straightforward labour, no pain relief administered.

Placenta delivered intact, infant not given vit k, will need this administered in next 1-3 days.

Infant latched successfully soon after birth, feeding well.

Mother and infant both well, no follow up required.

Robert Taylor

fuhck

Dribbling out of TV screens. Blanket bleeps.
Party lips.
fuh
Me.
Eardrums twitch. To this beat.
Chest.
Ichthys. Rasta. Big fat belly.
ck
We.
Crouch behind classrooms. Changing rooms.
Puff illegal letters.
Hissed out on urinals.
fuh
ck
You.
Hulking free. Unshackled now.
Bounce.

Shibuya

Breathing in, breathing out, Shibuya. Shibuya station. Its grand intersection. Inhaling. Exhaling. Palpitate. Waves that break with each green man. Trembling like the tides. A flow of figures – an entity – from Tokyo’s endless populace, raging on and whittling off those stretched zebra stripes. Every light change. Thousands. Vertical, horizontal, diagonal. Refilling abundant at red man’s command. The warden of Shibuya.

We’d arrived from Shinjuku station – itself the holder of a hectic record: busiest train station in the world – at five p.m., the universal hour of madness.

There are people. Many. Hordes, yes. But no lunacy. The masses drift briskly by one another, a key settling seamlessly into its lock. A skill intrinsic to people from such crowded lands.

Pausing at the warden till he tags out, we merge with the animal. Under the glare of billboard sized screens screaming kitsch, we cross, and split our separate ways.

Vending machines are littered throughout this city. Every building floor, street corner, alley way and station platform. Lit lively like a cartoon, that even Pikachu’s epileptics can’t refuse. Most sell ice tea, iced coffee, bottled water, Pocari Sweat or Coca Cora, but others work on a loyalty system that trade cigarettes and biru for anybody’s yen. Yet, beer may quench my brother’s thirst, but mine requires less volume. So I grab his Asahi and a pack of Peace and wander into 7-Eleven.

As an automatic door ushers me in, the store-keep babbles jovially at the linguistic wall I’ve become. I smile and nod vacuously, muttering how’s it? Some eigo to shove my feelings back on him.

Head for the corner, my daily pilgrimage, a signal of my ablution – resurrection – confirming a triumph over another wee hangover.

We'll battle again.

The array glows gorgeous, more piquant than any vending machine could be. There's Johnny and Jameson, Glenlivet, Glenmorangie, Glenfiddich. But, the transitory patriot I am, I reach for my new brand. Hakushu. Part of the Suntory line. Bill Murray echoes in my ear; for relaxing times, make it...Suntory time.

Lost in translation.

*

I was that pale face, stumbling with the waiter. Whisky. Huh? Uh. Whii-Skii. Yeah? Scotch. Hai. Um. How bout. Hakshu? Hakushu? Yeah. Hai. On the rocks. Ice, you know? But small ice. Little ice. Yeah? Yes. Good. Thanks. Hai. Arigato.

The menu had it priced moderately. Good enough for me. And it was fresh, crisp, without that rough edge. The little man, grinning like a maniac – mouth as wide as Hokkaido – delivered the glass. No regular dram here. I met eyes with it when it was still coming across the room. I swooned on sight. This dram was roided – doubled up – melted ice snaking through the alcohol like veins on a bicep.

With my kneejerk gasp, he chuckled. They know what they're doing, get ol' whitey plump and drunk; content enough to drain his deep Western pockets. Russian doll drinks, smaller and smaller with each one. Like a movie on TV, advert-less for the first half hour, to entice you, and slowly increased from then on, till you're trapped watching the last act broadcast like it's buffering.

Still, shamelessly I submitted to their strategy.

A strategy that pulled off, and soon had me creeping through the streets crooning like Nina Simone. Oh Baltimore. Oh Tokyo. Nippon. Hakushu, you put a spell on me. You know I've smoked a lot of grass. Oh lord. And I popped a lotta pills. So Sinnerman, where ya gonna run to then? Please help me out with directions here, Lord.

Fluidly slipping into other acts. Tribe Called Quest among others. Here we go y'all. Here we go y'all. So what's the what's the what's

the: Scenario. Felt like an oriental Phife, five foot assassin. Knockin fleas of his collar. Hip-Hop scholar. A million stories. Without the diabetes. So I ran to the Devil, he was waitin'.

All on that day.

Oughta be praying.

I cried power.

Power, Lord.

Crash into a bowling alley – mah na na na nah na – we got the jazz, everything is fair – crash into a bowling alley – when you livin' in the city. My brother muffling my Afrocentric energy. My power. Crash into a bowling alley.

Don't ya know I need ya Lord.

All on that day.

Where ya gonna run to?

*

I return to Shibuya crossing, little leather satchel at my side, impregnated with supplies. Climbing the stairs of Starbucks, I weave through people in search of my brother. He's managed to occupy two spots at the in-demand bench overlooking the intersection. Panorama window spread ahead. He's hunched over. I crack a can for him and, hidden up sleeve, grip the bottle of my own. His camera, screwed on a mini tripod, is set up under the barracks of his body – protected like a half-back presented with the ball in a ruck, a ball like a Fabergé egg – in both a defence and offense against stray elbows. This is the second reason to come at such a time, the sun drooping, along with commute hour, allows for a time-lapse of fading pastels, rising neon, and fluctuating throngs.

Memories, in retrospect, will jitter like clay animation.
Below us. The players perform.

From here it's still some entity, but perception garnered from distance – from our Starbucks auditorium – magnifies the individual. The cell, follicle, gland: makeup of the organism. Each citizen – a single strand of mane – can slip like an eyelash onto the pupil, becoming greater than its ostensive insignificance.

And the crossing is an eyeball teeming with lashes.

The girl in all pink, robotic with the histrionics of her rigid gait. The old bearded yank, jumping into the sea with each light change; posing for shots for his new folk-rock album. The gothic couple floating like spectres. The eastern Louis-Vuittons. Summer collection. Cigarettes. So many sweet cigarettes. Grey wafting afros. Fringes falling like diagonal cut curtains. Jet black bobs. Billowing baby-blue shoulders. Strangled navy hips. Pale thighs. Delectable and spry.

*

During our stay in the country I had been reading Zadie Smith's NW and mixing up my metropolises, so a week earlier we journeyed to the top floor of a high-rise to absorb the urban sprawl in all its detailed grandeur. It bled from sight like nothing I'd ever witnessed. A CBD that stretched further than sights limit. The horizon, usually reserved for waterfall drop offs, was stolen by a grey smear. But, unlike Starbucks view of Shibuya, my perception was not reinvigorated. Distance doesn't always equal understanding. A painter must step back from the canvas to gain perspective, but squinting at it from the end of a runway will transform it into an ink blot.

So instead I stood staring at blobs of concrete and glass, with absurd minimalist sculptures adorning their courtyards. A pattern of expectations. Expectations of how a city should be built. And I could be in any one. With everything that goes along. Sporadic wafts of shit stink, noise, blinding light, bums, and so on.

The bowling alley we found ourselves in, too, looked like it came from anywhere.

Poppy bubble-gum blares from screens and speakers, beer is bought overpriced, and wearing those greasy shoes is like stepping through a ghost. We go alright, despite our mental state. Intensity

the alcohol brings amplifying our approach. Flanked on one side is a group of young male Europeans, playing with the cheat lanes up, and on the other, three Japanese guys around our age. I catch a snippet of the Aryan's conversation: 'oh yah, is crazy, the guards will even follow you into the bathroom to make sure you don't finish yourself off and leave before the show ends. You know, stay horny so the girls get all your money.' And then the other side, near gibberish, with a smattering of Japanese words I comprehend that make me feel like a fluent speaker.

One of the Japanese notices us having trouble with the scoring machine and wanders over. A burly man, with a big gap in his front teeth you could slide a two dollar coin in between, speaks broken English as he fixes the device. 'Me. Good with machines. See.' He then points to his friends in a form of introduction. Him – he points to a long haired guy – Musician. Him – he points to a giggling shadow – Alcoholic. He has a perpetual grin on his face and asks what we are doing. Holding up our beers, he proceeds to explain that they are doing the same. They are from Yokohama, but work in the city, and naturally, are drinking till their shift starts. We explain that we're catching the Shinkansen in the morning, so we 'guess we're sort of doing the same thing.'

'Ah good. You come our drinking spot then.'

As we walk I'm envisioning a poky little jazz bar or sake tavern, something quant and cosy. Maybe an unnecessary fire place or discreet band tucked in the corner whose music I can pretend to ponder. Instead, we are led to a derelict stall slumped on the side of the road. The size of a caravan, it has three stools where an aging man coughs and splutters as he pours beers and serves uncertain foods. The menu plastered on the side of the stall seems particularly proud of two dishes. Written in Kanji, I would be unable to decipher their details had the symbols not been accompanied by photographs; one displaying a horse, the other a whale. So as I drink my beer, and eat the food generously offered to me, I – despite an attempt to be open to new foods – pray the gooey battered balls I am chewing are not horse testicles.

To this day I am unsure of what I ate.

They ask our names. My brother tells them he is Sam, to which they enthusiastically mimic in hushed tones: ‘Ohh...Samu,’ as if they have just been presented with some mystic secret about life.

I then tell them mine. ‘Ohh...Lobu,’ they reply with that same vigour.

‘Uh, not quite. Rob,’ I correct them.

‘Lob?’

‘No. Repeat after me. Ruh’

‘Rah’

‘Roh’

‘Roowh’

‘Rob...’

‘...Lob’

‘Okay, sure.’ I’m Lob.

Before we leave, they become intent on us trying some type of mustard. ‘Very very hot. Hot mustard.’ I think they just wanted to impress us with their capabilities, while reaping a laugh from our feeble thresholds. But, I was confident. I like my spicy food and felt obliged on some grandiose level – in my drunken stupor – to defend all Western faculties. We are given another horse testicle each, this time slathered in the yellow paste. As we throw it back, I clench my eyes and fists shut to focus on the task. I swallow, but hear a burst of laughter as I look up. Damn my brother, letting down the white man. Never been good with hot food. But no, he is still struggling, but getting there. The laughter is directed instead at one of their own. Alcoholic, so cocky beforehand, now sits, dizzy, red eyed, weltered in his own tears, with chunks of testicle splattered down his front and smeared over his fingers like a yellow glove.

A pungent mix of mustard, batter, beer and stomach acid rises in the stalls skinny shelter.

I eventually leave – feeling triumphant – our new friends from Yokohama who we will never see again.

The next day we board the bullet train. We’ll be back in a week, but for now head south to Fukuoka. I concentrate intently on keeping

my demons at bay, studying the train layout on the seat ahead of me, memorising the nearest toilet and creating a contingency plan for when the storm of Hakushu and Asahi decide to rip from one of my ends. Outside, the obtrusive view of buildings are slowly replaced by the tranquil sight of rice fields. Still early in the season, kawaii little plants stem from shallow ponds, peppering the countryside. The further south we travel, the more prominent face masks become. Apparently China's smog drifts across the Sea of Japan, encroaching on the southern areas air. Foreign pollution.

Fukuoka soon looms. My hangover subsides. I look with blood-shot eyes at the acrylic city where my half-brother will marry. A wedding in a temple, where sake will be drunk to consummate the kekkon, raw fish, shelly crab and seaweed will be consumed, washed down with green tea and, hopefully, no whale or horse meat.

*

We wait with the warden. He continues his eternal job. Indefatigably tapping in and out, circulating the flow of traffic.

Flashing red and green.

I admire his precision. A just representation of his country.

Metronomic.

And soon the needle will click again, and I will be released, released back into the animal, the animal from where I came.

Loren Thomas

Mechanics

Scratch at skin marks
Wrapped in old tissues
Paint warrior stains with the leftovers
watch it melt down your eroded cheeks

Carve a new face
With plastic features
Movement is a difficult sub plot

Pick up your lips, honey
They're drooping
Do we need to get the safety pins?

Depth of breath is important here
It should reach the bottom of your lungs
For maximum effect

Callus your fingertips
To avoid future pain
Run them across tables
For a final polish

See your eyelids?
Slide them down a bit
Don't let all your secrets out at once

Stopper the wine bottle
Keep the content pure

And sweet
None of those nasty additives

And rub gasoline
Behind your ears
Down your neck
And on your wrists
For good luck

Normal

And she's the girl who writes fires with her words
Singing at the lips of greatness
Kills confidence with a look
Crush organs with a flick of her wrist
And she's the girl who removes her cloth shell each
night
To find a fresh start in the morning
Lives free in that warm ultraviolet
And she's the girl who doesn't live wrapped up
In a cozy blanket of fear
Instead reaches for her own hand in darkened rooms
And leads herself to the edge of cliffs
To view
Not jump
And she's the girl who can sleep like the dead
And still wake up in the morning
With a smile you get
From listening to clean vinyl
No scratches in sight
And she's the girl with a lifeline that's perfection
To her sweet ending
The smooth dance routine
Of a chess game
And she's the girl who likes feeling low
Cause she knows tomorrow will be a day of highs
That'll lead to infinity
And she's the girl
I wish I could be

Strokes

Some people like to paint their nails
The ripe red of ruby
Or lips
A crimson to entice

I like to paint my right thigh
A stinging red
The bite of a sharp edge
That hardens to an earthy brown

Most like to flaunt
And publicise their strokes
Mine stay behind cloth
A secret self-confidence

They like to break at
inconvenient moments
My normal stride
Becomes a stagger
I'd almost
forgotten the night
before

It's crawling down my leg now
A sickening drip that stains
My well-worn thigh
A safe place

The strokes are spreading
My left wrist
More dangerous to the eye
Maybe my life

But who's worried about health

Viv Aitken

Moonflower

Lonely she.
The moonflower quivers.
Coiled,
Contained.
Defying villain sun.

Only she
Maintains resistance.
Purer sister
To those wanton ones
Parading multi-coloured selves
To heat and light and insect tongues.

Slowly, she -
Dusk descending -
Leans in.
Burns for cool of night.

Silent, she -
Unfurling petals -
Flagrant, fragrant,
Lures her lover in

The craven moth beats wings against her heart
And, cradled in his darkness,
There
She blooms.

Chris Lee

Happiness

Happiness fell from the roots of heaven, great clods of joy that dropped all over the world and missed us almost entirely. That's what mum used to say before the Parkinson's got real bad. She reckoned all we got was the rain the world wept over the tragedy around and about. You'll understand what that's like a bit now. Rain was okay though. Rain kept the grass green, the grass kept the cows fed, the cows made milk and we worked most of the daylight and some of the dark, milking and haymaking and fencing and a thousand tasks too many for a family of three short on money to pay for workers we needed. I doubt you've ever worked till dirt ingrained your callouses and that was about all the reward you got.

I did. From eight years old my day began long before dawn in the milking season. While Dad set up the cowshed I drove the four wheeler motorbike around the farm, setting gates so the cows would find the milking shed then opening the paddock and driving in behind the herd to chase them from the grass. I helped with milking until the time came to run from the shed to catch the school bus. At school the townie kids held their noses when I sat near them and they teased me when they saw cow dung on my clothes or hair. After school and weekends it all started again, milking, drenching, spraying thistles, moving irrigation units, always more work and never no mind for rain or frost or scorching heat. Other kids played rugby or football. Some got paid jobs. I worked harder than the lot for free.

Yep, happiness from anywhere missed our family altogether back then. The old man worked every waking minute, even if just gnawing over bills and stock losses and low milk solid payouts and the weather and old or broken machinery. Our share milking contract saw the farm owner Hamish Anderson driving new vehicles

and holidaying in Europe and Asia while mum grew all our veges and bottled fruit and bought our clothes from charity shops.

A bit of good fortune looked like it was coming our way when I was fifteen. Twenty years of managed breeding saw the old man's herd producing the most milk ever. Rain fell regularly deep into summer so the grass grew thick and green and we were looking to milk longer than any previous season. The old man and old lady began talking about buying their own farm, about sending me to Lincoln University to study agriculture when my schooling was done. But planet earth had other plans. One small thunderstorm on a Sunday afternoon. Nothing we would notice much on a regular day, but the cows bunched like they do in the wind and rain in the corner of a paddock up close to the fence. Lightning hit the fence and jumped from a wire to a cow and then through all the animals touching each other. Twenty-nine milk cows were lying dead when I went to get them for milking. Dad shot six more by the next afternoon. Others dried off from the stress. A good milker was worth over a thousand dollars back then. The pet food company paid us around forty dollars for each carcass. The insurance company said it was an act of God so they didn't pay out.

Dad borrowed more money to restock the herd. The next spring was dry and cool, not much grass growth and then summer brought drought so we needed more money to buy feed. I left school and worked around the district driving machinery just so I could bring money in to help service the family debt. Dad and mum worked the farm. Another drought two years later and the bank sold the herd. Dad and mum came out debt free but not a possum-fart to keep for themselves after twenty-three years of working a herd. The old man got work as a farm hand. Same work but old Derek Jenkin's land and cows and his orders with manure for pay. The old lady milked free until her body shook too much to work properly.

You'll be thinking low of me because I left you sitting there in the field, but I've got my reasons and they go way back like I've been saying. I drive long-haul now. Seventy hours regular in the logbook but eighty-five and more behind the wheel most weeks. The

company pays okay money under the table for the overtime but we live in the city and there's not much left after running a car and paying food and power and rent. The landlords are good sorts but it's still a bummer knowing they'll retire early on me and Sherrie's money. Sherrie's about as good as a woman can get, not a heifer anymore but still a hot looker and a good partner and mother too. I'd choose my kids and Sherrie over owning the best farm in New Zealand, but I don't see them much with my hours. Mary is in the school play tonight. If I get back to the yard on time, the boys can unload the truck and I'll take off to the show. That's why I'm in a hurry.

I stopped for you, and parking a b-train safely on a narrow country road isn't easy. I walked all the way back to the broken fence then across the field to your car. It beats me how you managed to crash it on a long straight, though by the looks of the wreck and the damage trail you went fast enough to turn a pebble into a judder bar. I'm picking your speed overtook your driving skills. Whatever, the farmer will be wild when he sees the dead sheep and the mess you made of his fence. Not that you'll have any trouble paying for everything. It was an act of stupidity not of God so your insurance might pay out, and driving a new Merc all suited up means you've most likely stashed a store of happiness away for stuff ups and what not.

You'll need a new suit as well as a car. That leg bone tore your pants and you blooded up your jacket from the cut on your face. But you won't die, unless you scream your lungs clear out your mouth. You begged me to stay after I phoned the ambulance. Most times I would, but like I said there's this young girl acting in town tonight. Little Bethany is coming out of the hospital just to watch her sister and my old man will be there too. He's getting past leaving the old folks home but he wanted to see Beth before we tell her the lump in her neck is cancer. He says he's planning on complaining to the big fellah that our lot didn't get a fair share of happiness in this world but I'm picking mum already did that as soon as the Parkinson's took her.

So that's why I left you there. Drought's coming again and me and mine are going to need a good memory or two to get us through the next months. You won't understand me leaving you alone in the cold with just my torch but they'll cut you out of the wreck soon enough anyways. You'll be speeding again in a couple of months. In the meantime you can stare at the stars while you moan. When I was a youngster Mum used to say they were holes in heaven letting the glory shine through.

Wasted

I got hard words for you, Son. Harder than the house foundations we dug by shovel back in your first summer on the tools so I'll work up to them.

The doc says you can't hear nothin. He thinks I'm wastin words but he's just a man an he's got wrong in him same as the rest of us. Give him a nail gun on a building site an he'd be a five-hundred an hour menace. Back when you were twelve I sat at your homework desk in the dark. I watched you sleep deep for a while then I whispered I'd take you pig huntin next time I took the dogs out. Next mornin you were at my bedside all dressed an waitin with your air rifle for me to wake up. Your mother spat nails but I took you into the Pirongia forest like I'd promised; showed you how to stick a pig an gut it. Somehow you heard me that night an I'm hopin you can hear me now. Sue reckons people in comas can hear easy as. She found it on the internet an she's right about most things, your sister.

If you can hear me I know you'll man-up and take it. You're young yet, twenty-four is a pup when you look from the back end of your forties. You're tough enough though. I bred that into you. Rugby and boxing hardened you more than most. That time in the Stag Bar when you punched it out with that biker you didn't back down when his mate up an swung the bottle into your head. You floored them both. Proud I was standing with you drinkin from jugs; blokes an skirts all around watchin bikers groanin in puddles of spilt beer on the floor an you with blood on your face an knuckles. You were hard at nineteen. You'll cope son.

Your mother helped put good in your bones that's still there. The time you thieved from your Uncle Allen's wallet she made you volunteer at the hospice for three months. 'Theivin's a short cut to

jail, Dean!' she raved over and over. You volunteered an extra month just to put the smile back on her face an to see that old soldier you made friends with into his grave. Proud you made us. She taught you the rewards of work too. Years of pestering you into practicin the guitar then one day you're eighteen an in the pub jumpin around with your band playin that indie rubbish an you stop mid-set to come off the stage an thank her public. You grew into a good bloke, Dean.

The hard part's comin, Son. For me an you. I've always been straight-up with you. Showed you how to build everything from a dog kennel to a mansion. Made sure you respected women an property. Taught you tools an life I did, but I taught you wrong some an now it's payin us back big time.

I always liked my green. I kept you off it till you quit school an came on site with me then I thought it better you learn from me than young fools hoonin their way to court and jail time. It sure was fun that first time. Stoned around the campfire after a hunt in the Puriora forest. Tokin primo head an drinkin the hard stuff beneath the stars. Eatin slabs of venison cooked over coals and workin out how to fix the world with my son.

I tried to do you right. I never let you drive after a smoke or a beer. I took all the risks, drove slow so cars honked an we laughed till I could hardly see an had to pull over. I always bought the weed an carried the stash on me so you couldn't get busted an convicted. Didn't matter in the end. I dug the foundation in you Son, gave you the taste for a high. I warned you against taking that P crap. Wish now you'd listened longer than you did. One taste at that prick Gav's tinny house an it had you. You changed son. Six months an I have to speak words no father ought to.

You dropped the ball Son. Did real bad. The papers and TV news blame the police for chasin you at high speed but you took the meth an drove an I taught you how. It was me that crashed into that bus stop even if I wasn't there and you were drivin. A little girl an her mother died, Son. We killed them.

Your girlfriend Amy's in a rehab in Auckland now. She called your mother an sends her love. She got cut on her face in the passen-

ger seat but she'll be okay – not so pretty but that's her bill for using P with you. We're all paying heavy, Dean. Your mother sits up nights cryin an watchin your clips on the internet. Sue stays out all night or comes home drunk. I'll visit that Gav one day with the dogs an see he gets what's due him. He won't be dealin that crap anymore.

There's more, Son. You lost your right arm an most of that shoulder along with a chunk of rib cage when the car busted into the building behind the bus stop. Your head on that side was stove in too but the docs fixed it so it'll look okay when the bandages come off. It's not so good on the inside though. The doc says your brain's munted an the machinery's breathin for you. He says keepin you alive will take resources from others who can be saved. He wants your mother an I to let you die. I almost punched him out. All he sees is a stoner who's killed people. He never seen you pick flowers for your mum an girlfriends or give half your holiday job pay to earthquake victims over in some country you'd never visit. He can't hum the songs you wrote an he never seen you score a try or work eighteen hours to see a job through. He can't remember you laughin in the firelight on the top of Mount Pirongia like I do.

The cops say you'll go to jail if you ever wake up. The doc says you'll wither away lyin in bed for decades an then die young anyway. Your mother an Sue want to turn the machinery off an let you rest – but I won't let them, Son. If you can't hear me it won't matter a damn but if you can then you'll spend years in darkness. Those are the hardest words for me Son. I been a lucky man havin my best friend an son all wrapped up in one. I can't kill them both – not when I put you here.

Jessica Tuakeu

Photograph of My Mother

There's a girl I'll never know, barely old enough to make her own bed
She's captured in a square of muted summer colours
That brilliant, soft, early 60's blue that feels like a hug when you're
looking at it
The mixed pale pea green and sun bleached blonde of wild grass
And then the more lustrous green of sprouts,
Flattened before they had a chance to grow
Much like her

She sits slightly left of center
Most of her body covered in a puffy, light cotton tie up shirt
the supposed red and white pattern looking more pink with the light
on it
Her hands are hidden in the pockets, but her little legs stretch in
front of her
The light reflecting so smoothly off them that they are a gradient of
dark sand and white
And then her toes, pointed forward in a way that speaks of ease and
contentment

Such lightness and softness that I have never known from the present
you
The hard shell of skin that holds the woman I know together makes
me think
That this young version of her isn't real,
As if, were I physically able to peel back the visible layer
I would find that she is filled with cotton balls and jelly beans

But her face is alive and it paints her as a thing of nature
The short curls of her hair, barely long enough to be anything but
wisps
Slightly wet
Her eyes, looking at something beyond the frame, have been reduced
to dark slants
the balls of her cheeks pushed up
by a mouth, open wide in a casual, candid laugh

The shadows barely touch her
Unlike the way the shadows cling to her now
Swarming her body like wasps circling their nest
They are ghosts of unwanted hands
Caresses that froze her skin
Explosive, supernatural hearing
that turns the usual silence into
a roaring of dripping taps and ticking clocks and swaying curtains
and a thunderous pounding of blood punching through veins
They are whispers of terror, insecurity, self hate
You can't do anything, they say
It's embarrassing. And who would believe you anyway.
They say, You're disgusting

But the girl frozen in the 60's has a little pebble of a nose
And tiny apple shoulders
I want to jump through the sheen of ink
And travel years back
I want to reverse our maternal roles
And be the hard shell so her skin can remain a smooth, sandy gra-
dient
I want to cut off hands before they became unwanted touches
I want to shout out the shadows with glittering words
You can do anything, I would tell her
I believe in you
I would tell her, *You're perfect*

Melody Wilkinson

Seasoning

I remember the dive
I remember stinging sunburned eyelids and hating
sticky ice cream cones
Mud and water skippers
I remember the ceiling fan; would today be the day it
would fall and decapitate us all?
The babysitter and the chicken potpies
I remember the shoes with the red button on the heel
that made me super fast
The slide dragged into the ditch
I remember burned thighs from sticking to the metal
That lie I told

I remember hiding in the basement from the wind
When the witch kept me prisoner in the shed. My
only food: poison berries
I remember street lamps and bike wheels kicking up
leaves
Running from Bonnie in Sunday shoes and how they
never quite made it up the playhouse ramp in time
I remember the Winnebago – flying in the bed up top
The whoosh through the trees I used to think only in
Estes
I remember Teddy's Teeth
Clicking fingernails on ivory keys
I remember I hate Stranger on the Shore
The failed lie for my sister – she never asked again

I remember the igloo – never finished – hands numb
in the dark
The blizzard when the snow from the roof met the
snow on the ground
I remember Grandpa’s sled – the fastest in the neigh-
borhood
The hill of death and the profanities it caused
I remember creamy mac and cheese and mashed
potatoes at Wyatt’s on Wednesdays
Falling asleep to meetings in the living room; the way
the prayers crept under the door
The Australian and the shock that he had removed his
shoes
I remember... even now the shame squeezes my head
cold and my face goes red

I remember the reversible rain coat and the basket it
arrived in
Dyed eggs – the way they stuck in my throat – I
always hated the white bit
I remember the world tours in the red wagon – its
squeak and the bumps that made my butt numb
The flowers we pulled to sell and Mom trying to
replant them with her tears
I remember my frustration with watermelon
its seeds interrupting its flavor
the way it seemed to be everywhere
gummy drips of pink clinging to my arms and my
party dress
I remember the apology and how it was powerless to
fix anything

Musings of an Aging Mind

Every year, around my birthday, I get very pensive and often have some deep, philosophical insights. This year it seems I have discovered fewer insights and more questions. I wonder, is this because I am getting more confused or smarter? Here are some examples:

1.

Is it okay to let pandas starve in order to get a smart phone? If you are looking for money in your budget for a smart phone and you notice that the monthly payments to the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) is almost the exact amount you would have to pay to have a smart phone, could it be time to let the Pandas fend for themselves? I mean, they have always been pretty good at finding food before. Can't they just go back to eating bamboo? Do they have to have a three course meal every day? I know I am willing to go without food sometimes for the sake of my phone so maybe they will be fine...

2.

I wonder if, at my very core, I am a terrible person who would take money from pandas to buy a smart phone. The jury is still out. I still have my kindergarten phone but I have made the trip to the shiny phone store twice now...it's starting to look ominous for the pandas... maybe they could start saving up? Like those doomsday preppers?

3.

Can we be dressed feminists or do we all have to be naked? Can we be liberated and dressed? Do we have to be naked, riding on construction equipment in order to show how liberated we are? I want

my daughter to grow up free, breaking through all the glass ceilings, and not sexually repressed but I would like her to be able to do this while dressed. Is this not possible

4.

Why am I a sucker for shiny technology, even though I am pretty inept at using it? I like looking at it and pretending I know how to use it. I also say things like data and gigabyte and nod convincingly when others talk to me about these things. I have no idea what any of it actually means. Basically I just read their expressions: if they look happy, I smile, if they look sad or stressed, I frown. The only time this backfires is when my husband waves shiny technology in front of my face and then he and the sales guy do an interpretive dance about how my life will never be the same, and how I will rule over all computers and phones for only \$1299.99! My eyes glaze over and I try to think of all the clever words I know, throwing in things like pixels and storage capacity. They continue to spin and dance around me. I watch as the salesman's eyes grow wide (and a little shinier, weirdly) as he can sense my weakness growing. His eyes dart between my husband and me as we argue. He and Alan seem to be following some sort of script from a scene in a Broadway musical (you know, the ones where the two evil geniuses sing songs of advice as they slink around the hero, convincing her to become part of their diabolical plan even though she has no idea about their diabolical plan and they just keep singing 'Yes you can!' over and over as the orchestra builds until the hero is convinced that it is a solid plan and steps forward, arms raised to sing in declaration – 'YES I CAN!' and the evil villains slink off, out of the spotlight, crouching and rubbing their beards in greedy anticipation of their crime and the utter demise of the Hero. You know; one of those scenes.) I finally cave and spend the money. But the heroine is bested in the end because, even though the shiny technology is pretending to work for me, it is carrying a secret weapon innocuously named 'Windows 8.' Which suddenly decides while you are editing very important, world changing literature that you would actually

rather be looking at an alternative document. I yell and scream at my nemesis but it just smirks at me and reminds me that I asked for this when I purchased the computer, in the store, during a musical number, with two villains.

5.

Why does advertising still work? I mean, it is basically lying. What they are selling will not make us prettier, happier or spend more time with family driving off road. And besides, is that really what we want? Driving off the roads jarring your back and neck, killing local plant life and you're smiling because you're supposed to be so you bite your tongue as you go over a huge rock. Now you are bleeding but still 'havin' a great time!' And, if scientists really had worked out how to make us all thin, wouldn't we all be thin? I love how it is always 'as part of a healthy diet and exercise program!' Really? Your pill combined with a healthy diet and exercise program 'Burns the fat away!' but not just the diet and exercise. And it's 'scientifically tested' Really? Amazing! I just ran my own scientific test. All the results aren't in yet but initial data reveals you think we are all stupid and you want our money. So drawing from these incomplete facts this researcher feels that by projecting the estimated figures she can with 85% confidence state: you are evil.

6.

Speaking of which, can being a little overweight be okay, not great, but okay? I would like to weigh less than the maximum weight that a firefighter can carry down a flight of stairs, you know, just in case... but we can't have everything and sometimes I just want a damn piece of chocolate. (Plus, really body, I will throw you against the wall again if you don't sort yourself out. I should be able to replace the calories from a meal with the calories in chocolate and you should not freak out. I mean, calm down, it is the same calories! You need to understand that I care about you and I will give you the nutrients you need. But if I want a double-shot mocha with whipped cream on top and I choose not to eat lunch you should be able to

cope just fine. I looked up the calories: it is the same as the healthy sandwich! So calm down for fudge sake! Also, if you are hungry could you just snack on my ass or my belly or my arms or my thighs first THEN send the signal that I need to eat because really, it is all there, buffet style, so just fix it. Plus, you know you hate going to the gym so if you can't sort yourself out I will drag you back there. You know I will, so watch it!)

7.

And on that note, this is not really a lesson but a desperate plea. To the skinny, perfect girls at the gym. Umm... could you stop coming? Why are you coming in the first place? Why would you spend money to get on MY bikes, put them on the lowest gear and then chat so loud that the entire gym can hear your conversation? Just to let you know, if you are able to carry on a conversation that loud for that long you are NOT getting a workout. So why must I be subjected to the dangers of the Stairmaster AND your ridiculous conversation about fattening foods and 'OMG I ate so much yesterday!!!' while your bony ass sits on MY bike that I sweat blood on, when you could have gotten just as much accomplished at your local coffee shop? And as a bonus, you would have saved your voice because you wouldn't have had to shout over the whirl of the machines. Sorry, I am sure you are really nice? And I have no problem with skinny people sweating and running their asses off (literally) but don't come to my gym in your cute little outfits, stay for an hour and never even break a sweat or get out of breath. It's really insulting. Thank you for your attention – now you may go about your perfect, skinny lives.

Faith Wilson

Bag o' Bones

My mother wakes up in the mornings, a fleshy wobbling mother, a bosomly mother, she has very big brown nipples and little black hairs stab out from her Samoan calves: they have never been shaved, but her thighs are tattooed.

A woman once called my mother rotund, and O! my mother is round, this woman gave her a recipe for a 7 day soup diet and then for a week she was skin and bone, but now she is an O with a figure, and always will be.

My mother lies down and like a lover, I lift her shirt slowly so as not to startle her, she is ticklish, and I fondle her stretchmarks, lifelines that span her belly like a hand but harder to read, they are silken and jiggly like tofu, I nuzzle her belly with my entire face, suffocating in her folds I open my mouth over her belly button, pressing down with my tongue I'm a cub again and suck and suck, I eat it all, I get very fat, I suck until a cord like a muscle tongue sticks out, I lure it out with my tongue, and swallow it into my body, and we get very very hungry.

We eat the frozen placenta we've been saving for a special occasion, our teeth

chatter and we pretend we're enjoying it
as you shrink and I grow,
shrink and grow,
you become so little I swallow you
like a sugar pill,
you are sweet and do nothing,
I swell and spew
give birth to you,
you come into the world
sweet and shining, a bundle of good
things, a Christmas hamper,
a lolly mixture.

You're so tired from a long day
birthing, I place you in your cradle, nestle
you into the crook of Dad's elbow.
He rocks-a-bye baby, a dulcet
hum, winks a sweet breath
from you, little sigh, you fall
asleep, a dolly mixture with all of
my faves, you sleep sleep sweetly,
Mama, little bag o' bones.

Wunderkind

I've been an alcoholic
since I was eleven:
a good year, eleven.

We snuck some crème de menthe
at a St Paddy's party hosted
by the Honiss family, kiss me
quick, I'm a 64th Irish.

Round Two, I'm twelve.
We're drinking St. Remy
from reused Nutella glasses, you know
the ones with cartoon characters
licked on the sides, Blinky Bill
or The Simpsons or something, and
all these drinks take names of saints
so I must be doing something holy.

I was made to practice abstinence
at high school. Sacred
Heart Girls' and you'd think I'd
be able to find a shitty cask of
Velluto Rosso somewhere in
this nunnery; they must've
locked it up in preparation
for my arrival, it seems, my
reputation precedes me.

In 4th Form the DTs hit.
I told everyone I had early onset
Parkinson's so best not
hand me your inkwell, or
I'm doing my best impersonation
of Ms. Crook.
I can be a real joker sometimes,

so I was cast in the school play as
Lear's Fool, but no one laughed
so they gave me Cordelia but
I wasn't white enough, I was a fine
Goneril, but drank all the medicine
intended for Regan, as Regan,
I never died, too legit to be
Edmund, too sane for Edgar
/too rich for Poor Tom,
way too crazy for Lear, and
soon I had too many faces but
none had reflections, I was
the whole play, the entire
shit-storm, sturm und drang,
and the audience would ask
'who are you?', 'what's it all about?' and
I could only shake my head, blow
winds, crack cheeks, and all
I could say was
nothing.

The Virgins Chewing the Kava Leaves

Watch the virgins chew the kava leaves
chew chew spit
chew chew spit

Do they have to take a virgin test
before they're chosen?
A hymen inspection?
Signs of blood on
their bedding?

Watch the virgins smoke the tobacco leaves
behind their fathers' backs
puff puff pass
puff puff pass

they blow smoke up his arse
and in front of mirrors,
obscuring with cloud yellow
fingertips to dip into blooded
dye, to smear across each cheek,
virginal, yes but virgin?

Watch the virgins lick the dicks of matai
under ancestors' roofs
suck suck slurp
suck suck slurp

limps up in her juju-lipped mouth

her eyes level with pe'a thighs and
when he turns around to wipe himself
she reads the story of his butt-cheeks

sings it like a song, dirties it with her
semen-painted tongue, replicates it
on her semen-smearred cheeks, they're
ready for the tanoa,

chew chew spit
chew chew spit
back into the tanoa

watch the virgins' eyes glow
as the matai pass the 'ava round,
mouth to mouth,
lip to lip,
dick to dick,

the Most Solemn of Rituals
the Great Circle Jerk.

Onyx Lily

The confession you will never hear

This is the confession you will never hear. This is the truth I can never tell you.

It's not just about the sex. The sex is not great, sure, and even less frequent now that you're having, well, trouble getting your soldier to stand to attention. And there are things I enjoy and I've tried to tell you – I have told you, once or twice, but you don't remember and you don't do them and it's not the kind of stuff that's easy to say over and over. So yeah. It's a bit about the sex.

It's not just about money. I mean, I certainly didn't anticipate being the sole breadwinner for this long and I wish you would actually try to get a job instead of waiting for one to fall into your lap, or waiting for your book to make you famous, or waiting for me to sort something out for you, like I have to do all the time. And if I was the one not working, I don't think I could justify spending as much on beer and wine as you do. And I buy all my clothes from the op shop, and I rarely get haircuts and I can't see how we will ever be able to save up enough to go on a decent holiday. So yeah. It's a bit about the money.

It's not just about all the little things. I mean, I don't quite understand how it can be so difficult to put the damn lid back on the toothpaste tube, and put it back in the holder. I don't get why you think that putting the dishes into a sink full of water and then leaving them there is in any way helpful. I don't know why you need to have the TV so loud when the kids' room is right next to the lounge, and why you don't turn it down when the ads are on. I don't understand how

you can't use just one towel and put it back on the rail to dry, instead of dumping it in a crumpled heap on the floor or folding it neatly and leaving it sitting on top of the washing machine, I mean hello, it's a wet towel, how is that going to help? And all the towels end up smelling like your armpits because clearly you don't wash properly and then you dry your still-smelly armpits on every towel in the house. So, yeah. It's a bit about the little things.

It's not just that you make me be the 'bad cop' all the time, or that you always want to talk when I'm reading, or that you go off and have a nap on weekend afternoons when I've been at work all week or that you never want to come to birthday parties or playdates, or that your immediate reaction to anything new or unexpected is to get cross or whinge, or that when I'm cross at you for a good reason you get cross with me for being cross and make me feel like crap, or that you drive like a nana and clutch the seat when I drive even though I'm only driving at the actual speed limit, or that when you take a crap and it sticks to the back of the toilet bowl you don't clean it off, or that you never remember that I hate pepper or that you berate me for the fact that I've changed without even trying to support any of my choices. But it's a bit about all those things.

But then, I know that I've never really been into sex, with anyone. In fact I ended most of my relationships because of it (and I think I probably prefer women). So I can't blame you for that.

And I do see the benefit in having you home with the kids, and you do more of the housework than I do, and you're great at DIY.

And the little things aren't really important and I know I have plenty of my own.

And there are lots of things about you that I love.

The truth is, you're my best friend, and I love you, but I'm not in

love with you any more. I'm not in love with anyone. I'm not really sure if I've ever been in love. It's probably not about you, it's probably about me.

And then, I can't bear the thought of shared custody, child support, lonely weekends. I can't bear the thought of selling the house, dividing up the assets, deciding who gets the dog. I can't bear the thought of finding a way to leave you.

Sometimes I wish you'd cheat.

Sometimes I wish you'd hit me.

Sometimes I wish you'd die.

If you live a lie for long enough, does it become a kind of truth?

Erin Doyle

Bottles

See-through wings and
Red eyed heads
Float like dust
In the light

Pigments leak from
Blue and green shells
Staining the alcohol yellow

Replace it with fresh
Drum-grade
Ethanol that chills through
Gloved fingers
Vanishes into air
Leaving a scent of
Sweetness that burns

Photograph
Separate by
Morphospecies and date
Assign numbers instead of names

Write labels in
Pencil and
Number lids with
Black ink

Pull legs off with

Flamed tweezers to
Send to
Sequence

Then pack in
Mason jars and
Leave in a
Non-sparking fridge

PCR Idol

Toy plastic,
Pink cactus costume wearing bear,
Personal PCR idol,
Totem of laboratory Paganism.

You stand to four legged attention,
Ready to guard,
With your Japanese styled cuteness,
Bristled in darkened spikes,
Inhibitors and foreign DNA,
Beware.

But I am a scientist,
So you do nothing, but
Lie forgotten in the orange shadows
Of running thermocyclers,
Collecting contaminants and dust.

I wipe you down with seventy-five percent ethanol,
And pack you away,
To another sterile room,
Air thickened by humming machines and
Sweet smelling nucleic acid destroyers.

I used my own tips

1. They have to be sterile.
2. The black lines on the unbroken autoclave tape prove that my tips are sterile.
3. The plastic tips have white filters on the inside. The filters keep the tips clean.
4. An auto-pipette is used and stored upright. So nothing in the tip can touch the pipette.
5. The filter makes it impossible to fill the tip all the way up.
6. The pipette should be clean.
7. Except.
8. The pipettes are shared.
9. You can't know if others keep the pipettes clean. Or, keep the lid closed on their tips.
10. DNA and inhibitors get inside when the lid is off.
11. So I used my own tips.
12. And, flooded the laminar flow with blue light, UV radiation.
13. It reduced the risk of contamination.

Vicky Curtin

4 Tributes to Sappho

No Man

I might have felt
you were the gentle gender
had I voiced your name, a soft
Sappho; no,
a man is reflex
alone, in my vein.
 I have done the womb an injury.

lost

The first embrace
saddled me;
saw me home
in old stars

sea

It comes in;

the placid back
endears the moon
the model eye
can lift a dress

Music

It was all her,
that chronic tune;
I never heard you
singing then
in the steel tom
and sigh of the moon

I played with Kylie

Violent pierce;
a tender blood,
diabetic thumb straight
hitching for
the memory, long
of young hair
the brown tails
Arabian Nights
plaited through
the witch-smoke
skipping rope
Betty Boop
and iron swing
that nearly took my eye.

3 Garden Songs

Scented

He said,
'I will visit the garden
after the rain.'
Dulcet,
I thought,
is earth depressed;
ripe as rot,
the crape of fruit
failed on the vine,
and the spoor of the hunted.

Stunt

Words, now, I have pared to the seed
exposed eye – the poorly sewn;
when the cat arched its back
it said so much
and I wrote stretch; for that's
what it did.

Closer

I want to touch
the uncomfortable dew;
see the swivers
untamed inside;
I want to taste
the callow blade,
and stalk the earth
at the kitten's eye.

Brittany Rose

Strip

A sigh of relief
when soft black satin slumps to the ground.
Lace on the floor, with twisted straps,
frayed nylon and curling elastic.
Peeled from the body
it leaves its shadow behind.

A notched spine,
like a swollen fist with
knuckles protruding
curves the length of
the firmly grooved torso.
A ribcage bound by silky bands,
shows ridged flesh and pink skin
creased like pin-tuck pleats.

As she strips,
she rolls her shoulders and stretches her neck,
extends her arms above her head
as her breasts sit
heavy and tired.

Four AM

When you wake up, the daylight spills in through this window and bathes the spacious double bedroom in warmth.

Unless you can't sleep through the night, like Jess. When you're Jess, the stars sit stark against the dark sky, and taunt you. The moon hovers in a mist above the horror branches, laughing. When you're Jess you stare out over the lawn at four in the morning. You look at the street light, filtering through the hedge leaves and wonder how many days you can go without water before your insides shrivel up and you cark it.

The smoke drifts up from her cigarette held between extended fingers. She rests her chin on her palm, arm bent at the wrist. She tilts her head to one side, and long hair tangles on her shoulder.

...Ri-Ri isn't scared of Katy Perry's roaring, Queen B's going back to the drawing, Lorde smells blood, yeah, she's about to slay you, kid ain't one to fuck with when she's only on her debut...

When you're Jess, you listen to shitty pop music at top volume and wake your neighbours up. The bass rumbles through the ground and rattles their walls at four in the morning. It makes their ugly, rose-painted chinaware tremble next to the crystal cut wine glasses. And when you're Jess you really don't care.

She grinds the cigarette butt into the sea shell that sits on the ledge next to the dried-out potted fern. 'Warning: Smoking is highly addictive.'

... and everyone in line in the bathroom, tryna get a line in the bathroom, we all so turned up here, getting turned up, yeah...

When you're Jess, your flatmate rolls his eyes when you ask to pick a song. When you're Jess you hate it when people start to talk about music. You hate how arrogant your flatmate and his friends are, hate that they think they're a hardcore band who make Real Music. You hate when they scorn twenty year olds who are a product of the fucked up industry which is turning Disney super stars into 'little sluts.' As if Miley's agency and her PR manager are synonymous.

... I know, I know, I know, I know you want me. You're just a pig inside a human body. Squealer, squealer, squeal out you're so disgusting. You're just a pig inside...

Her lighter has a Photoshop-ed bitch in a slut-red bikini. She flicks the flint, once, twice, and the spark catches. She holds the flame to the paper. The tobacco burns behind the shield of her hand, and a stray hair sizzles as it falls into the flame. 'Warning: Smoking causes foul and offensive breath.'

...I love it, I love it, I love it when you eat it, I love it when you eat it, I love it when you eat it, suck my cockiness, lick my persuasion...

When you're Jess, you sit and chain smoke. You sit and breathe in the health warnings. You inhale the thousands of harmful chemicals and cause potential impotency. When you're Jess you find a twisted amusement in the shock-tactics used on ciggie packs. 'Warning: Smoking causes blindness.'

...wanna get dirty, it's about time that I came to start the party, sweat dripping over my body, dancing getting just a little naughty, wanna get dirty...

She sets light to the plastic packaging and watches scorched circles

eating the ink on the carton.

...If you want it, lets do it, ride it, my pony, my saddle is waiting, come and, jump on it...

When you're Jess, you wear a bright pink scarf, the kind that's a big tube of wool, and smells like stale smoke. You wear fingerless gloves, but your nails still freeze as you smoke out your bedroom window at four in the morning. Your flatmate always give you a hard time about the stench of cigs that coats your room. Gives you a hard time about not having a boyfriend. Gives you a hard time about cutting your hair short. When you're Jess you can't understand why your flatmate would bitch about music volume when she spends most Saturday nights screaming the house down like a pornstar on speed. When you're Jess you don't understand why your flatmate could idolise Taylor Swift. When you're Jess, you don't care how hypocritical it is to hate your flatmate for her shitty taste in shitty pop music.

...call me a bitch coz I speak what's on my mind, yeah it's easier for you to swallow if I sat and smiled...

She pulls the window towards her, and twists the latch to lock herself in. She pulls the curtain, flicks off the light and lies in total darkness, listening.

essa may ranapiri

School Playground circa 1999

Palms rub raw on monkey bars
Gripping tightly
Never letting go

Letting
Go

Contortions in the air
A circus performer
Holding on to emptiness

As the weight of a young body
Swings
Momentum carrying him upwards
Splay in all directions

Toes stretch
Wind rush between each tiny gap

Lurching

The heart careens
Into the throat
Before being forced back down with the rest of him

The ground greets his form with a soft crunch

Swimming
With zero motion
In an ocean of bark

Negative One of One

Cold aerial framed by cloud breaking light. Standing on roof tile, a scarecrow perched on a ledge. Below, a silver Nissan remembers to be patient. But it is hard to resist the temptation of tarmac. The houses do not share this feeling. They spend much of their time playing family. The black paths have no love for tyre marks. My eyes are not for driving down these roads that pass quiet neighbourhoods in a monochrome existence of cars and aerials.

This greyscale cage was only made for

one

A form

Maya could

never touch

Cocaine

white skin

Framed

by black folds

Snorted

through fingertips

(The high never wore off)

A per-

fect canvas of **stark contrast**

Black

white

grey

Touched

by a haunting smile

That leaves the eyes

half closed

the teeth like

Tyla Bidois

Styx

This is the crossroads.

And no, it isn't that in-between from old books in dust-spotted libraries. It isn't the dark port a ferryman passes through to carry one's soul from the land of the living to the land of the dead, or a fairytale halfway land where spirits push back and forth at their leisure. The world between worlds is nowhere so distant as the mythic labyrinth of souls and ghouls commanded by half-forgotten gods and goddesses.

It is on the other side of the vodka bottle mixed with ice and an assortment of candy-flavoured mixers, burning down the throats of figures dancing to a specific rhythm. It makes me lightheaded and bold — and impolite — and as the sweet warmth fills my cheeks, there is nothing that amuses me more than my own petulance. 'No,' I say, again and again, and laugh. It is in the music — a contradiction between the shallowness of words and the brilliance of keyboards and drum-kits, collected around a fast, throbbing heartbeat teetering on the edge of swallowing everything whole. The irritated tone of our favourite rapper reminds us of our function, of the use of our curves, and the conflict of our promiscuity through the lenses of men who isolate only their mothers from the design of women as whores, as vehicles, as things to be mounted from behind quite indiscriminately, like a horse or a motorcycle, and then exchanged for a newer one. We know every word, and I believe with red-faced sincerity that the song's message isn't for me -- though quietly, just to ourselves, we joke that if it is, then there is some power in that too. How cheap can a girl be, truly, if the unapologetic fist she wraps around her sexuality, inspires a man to three verses, one hook and a chorus repeated eight times?

It is in the timelessness between friends as we laugh until our faces are sore, and feel so sure that in that moment, the clocks have stopped and all that is and will be is what it is now. You are young and tall, painted gold from blossom to root, and our silences are filled with the unspoken understanding and backhanded sweetness of what could have been if our branches had crossed in another season. We huddle together, your hands cupped over my lips, as I light a cigarette and fill my mouth with the first plume of tobacco — and it is there, that limbo, in how arrogant we are of our youth to breathe that ash in. Our eyes are squinting over the glow of the flame and they smile at each other when our mouths are occupied — and, there it is! Empathy. It is in the cloud of faces that line the passages, yards and living rooms of what was once your home, your furniture twisted into corners, and the same rehearsed words of introduction that are used to placate each one. It is in the inevitable ‘are you having a good night?’ from the boys and occasional girl who struggles with opening words, but likes enough of what he or she sees that leaving in silence doesn’t seem right.

It is in his coolness where I find him, in the smell of peaches and cologne and all the things he allows to lather his skin like I do. His head turns to watch her — someone else; her skin is darker than mine, her hair the colour of sunsets in the tropics and all the wild flame I lack — walking by with a half-consumed glass, and in his cockiness he doesn’t realise that I watch his expression under the stiff brim of his new, overpriced hat as intently as he watches hers. Though his chest rests against and slightly above mine (and surely through the cotton and silk that separates us he can feel the pitter-patter of my pulse as certainly as I can feel his — steadier, harder) I am aware only of the walls that I can feel as solidly as any brick or iron fence I’ve ever skimmed my fingertips over as I pull his eyes toward me.

I take his hand and my nails dig in. Stop ruining my forever.

It is in the secrets we ignore and swallow back behind mouthfuls of liquor and blood. The gentleness of bare thigh against denim; the roughness of a shared joint on the bonnet of an old car, pondering the

constellations we might've known the names of in another life. He re-carves his name on some unknown part of me when we kiss. The gentleness of his hands in my hair as I bow against a tree, regretting all I've done between the regurgitation of syrup and half-digested carbohydrates; the roughness of my hand around the axe I bring up and down, on golden curls.

There it is — the crossroads. That small pocket between life and death where nothing much else seems to exist but the presence or absence of a heartbeat. He is stretched like a lazy cat, long and relaxed, as he carefully rolls another perfect cylinder compacted with I don't know what — I can't see if the dried coils are brown or green under the moonlight, but I hope for the best. He seems bored now, and is content to prepare the celebration before the event has even been accomplished. I cut her open alone in the grass, and her cries mingle with the shrill melody echoing down from the top of the hill before the speakers implode with another pounding bassdrop. I bury her beside his dog. He has already dug the hole. Her body is piled over the limbs of another boy I had danced with earlier in the night; my cell number is still on the back of his hand and even with grey eyes rolled up and jaw unslung and slack, he shines through the filth as a newly-dropped coin. It is you, and even against the soil and worms, you are beautiful.

He stands beside me when I'm done, removes my clothes and washes me with the hose. A steady hand directs the stream of cold water over my face, my shoulders, my hands, and soon we are laughing and playing like children again. And in that moment, we are as we will ever be, as are the stars and the unmoving moon, and there will be no sunrise after. This is all there is.

from *Two Things*

two. i miss you in glass

the reflection of a man behind me blurs
inside the silver rim of my bottle
and for a moment i think i see your outline
in the smear of color between elbow and shelf
a broad belt becomes
the wide curves of womanly hips
and shining teeth reconfigures into
a pair of spectacles balanced on a patrician nose
that would press against mine in lesson
the breath of life
i learned from you
when your arms encircled me
like iron bars
ironic, i battled then
yet now would make any payment
however stripped of morals
to feel them again
strong and warm as they were
before i saw you laid in grey and white
your cheeks coated in cold velvet
flesh stiff like wax
though that never stopped me from reaching
into your nest of woven flax
to tidy your hair
and kiss you while i could

before we returned you to the earth
and the closest thing to your hands became
your blossoms
and the closest thing to your voice became
your windchime
i've convinced myself that clanging metal
is your words, and not just empty breezes
but the void can't be filled
by wishful thinking
no matter the shooting stars i sacrifice
to my yearning for you
i drown myself in spirits
that taste too much like fairytales
even if i pinch my nose
when i swallow them in
and however light-headed they make me
i can't unlearn the name of my poison
denial
a reality where you can't hear me
where only in being buried atop of you
letting time sink me down into your soil
until my skull finds your ribcage
your spine and your fragile wrists
will i ever be home again

R.P. Wood

Autobiography

I am a strand of your hair
Waking in my mouth

I am the first tree you ever climbed
The table you hid under
The pile of leaves you fell into
The soft places you curled up in

I am the smallest bone you ever broke
The hem just above your knee
The braces you hated
The teacher you loved

I am the freckles you gathered one summer
The pools of warm water
The bonfire on the beach
The so-many stars; your first dance

I have been your hand resting against my face
For as long as I can remember

K-t Harrison

Where do you go to my lovely

from *Corina Goes to Wellington*

Off peak capacity packed carriages back to back
Brown girls on the train navel piercings exposed and
London talk guard purves brown sugar arse curves
Sees me looking then shrugs indifferent
Eyes shift then turn back to beginnings of pacific cracks
Tamure shaking guarded hand snaking
To hole in pocket the wanker the brief cased banker
That blocks his view his interest uncompounded
Hanging tongue dumfounded
Lip smacked his gob shut Adams lump salivated loco motion
exacerbated swallowed
Salty globules in hand discrete cum shot mistaken for snot
By wifey chinese washer woman handkerchief confessed in
Deep centered capital arterial leads
Congested lung and bronchi deep veined thrombi.

Hypnotic psychotic tickets please sit here and write this on my knees.

Honkey doll from Tawa dressed in Abercrombie and Fitch
Accented bastard from over the ditch
The flotsam jettisoned at Takapu Road. Stop.
Destination young man stand for Andy capped man
To sir with love fuss of the upper class crust no standing on the
bus to London.
Errol Braithe waited to gastric breathed smog based

Alcoholic blood lines cocaine speed blinds and opium den fed
The triads dead in blood red mob turf
I reminisce a Westie Auckland life to faraway Piha surf.
And to drink a cab sav at the Puhoi.
Paremoremo maxi don't take a taxi and don't go to Paris Diana
and Dodie
U2's roadie died, Bono in the shadze cried
96 Fahrenheit in the grave
Jo public doesn't know Kelvin by degrees.

Bob Dylan boy from Arkansaw
Leather boot talking to floor board walking
Picks guitar will not go far arpeggio blues glow
In vested roboticised part timer factory workers
Feed us seymoured on the train to bee hived squabble
Squall Amy's Winehouse said, 'No. No. No.'
And Cupid was drawing back his rain bow
The warrior trained mind
Eclectic kindnesses.

*Corina going in to Wellington for the first time on the train.
October 2008*

The Samoan boy with the law degree
Sat down one day and talked to me
For free
He: said he felt for the Maori ones
Who had to sit through laws 121
And hear about how they'd been done over
From the palagi lecturer who came from Eastbourne.

I told him to go home.

The Maori man with the pony tail
Told me he was out on bail

He'd failed
Jail; for him the last resort
Seeking justice at the district court
There was none to be found he thought
That the duty solicitor could have tried harder.

I told him to go home.

The Pakeha lady at the shopping centre
Backed up and dented my right front fender
Then her
Faux fur: hat that she'd bought in London

Was blown away by a gust of wind and
A Chinese man in a silver Nissan
Ran it over because he thought it was a dog

I told them both to go home.

Me and Al at the beach in Makara
Drinking Pinot Noir from a place in Marlborough
The car
Far: away from the spot where we were fishing
Feeling horny and I was wishing
Intermission
At the theatre in Paraparaumu was better.

I said Al let's go home.

*Corina and Al wasting bait at Makara.
December 2008.*

Stephen Henderson

Sorry for doing something right

The dog barked. I woke up. I was still half asleep. Mat swore. I got out of bed. The dog was still barking. I stood up. The ground rumbled.

This was not a normal rumble. It was as if mother earth herself had been awoken by my Jack Russell's bark. I froze. In the early morning air. I froze. A lightning bolt of panic. A moment of realisation. We were all going to die.

The ground shook. I grabbed the dog. His barks were now soft whimpers. I held him close. I ran to the doorway. We shook with terror. The ground shook with anger.

The walls bent. Our building swayed. Matts stereo hit the floor. The fridge leapt from its spot on the wall. Chaos in the early hours.

I could feel the ground beneath my feet. It was like water. It rippled. It came in waves. It came to destroy. It came to crush. And it came to kill. You could see it. The concrete slabs underneath our carpet start to distort. Crack. Break.

I was waiting. Waiting to die. Waiting to... see her again. It went on for too long. Seemed like days. Was only seconds.

The ground stopped. The dog still whimpered. We still shook. I slowly walked back to my bed. It must have been a dream. It must have been a dream. This doesn't happen here. In New Zealand.

I woke up again about five hours later. 62 texts on my phone. 'Are you alright?' Was I alright? The aftershocks had come and gone. My

mind was too numb to notice them. Our pantry was empty. Our floor was full. But we were alive.

That was the first. The second...

I was asleep. It was in the afternoon. But I was asleep. Joes 21st the night before. It shook. It was more violent. But it didn't last as long. The dog was asleep too. He fell out of the bed and sighed. We were over them now. I laughed it off.

185. 185. 185.

That number would be etched into my mind forever.

Sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, girlfriends boyfriends.

People.

185 people didn't laugh it off. 185 people died. It should have been 186. I slept in. I missed my bus. The bus that I caught in to work was crushed. Under the rubble. No survivors. No survivors.

Kelsey died. I felt guilty. She had a baby. She died too. I couldn't look at the pictures. I couldn't share the post. I couldn't watch the memorial. I texted her. I invited her to parties. It wasn't right. I'm sorry.

Where was I during the Christchurch earthquakes? In bed. Safe. Alive. 185 people. Weren't.

Yacht Club

‘I just don’t feel... happy.’

Ella lets a deep breath of smoke fill her body and cloud her eyes. She shivers and her toes writhe on the deck. I pause; I have no idea what to say next. We sit in the quiet, I take another sip; she takes another drag. The world crusts over in congealed smoke and brown beer bottles. I look across the lake. It’s different at night. The water may as well be ice. I let it sting the cracks in between my toes.

‘What if that’s how it’s supposed to be?’ I mumble. Ella’s hands surf her stockings from ankle to thigh before she realises what I’ve asked. The bruises on her legs flower in blues and pinks. Little soccer trophies, or so she says. Her stockings are black, but worn thin and ripped. Circles of her skin reflect the security light above us. I take another sip, she takes another drag.

‘What kind of answer is that?’ Her eyes narrow into two green lights that shine through the void. Her hair sweeps across face and neck. Her lips contort, she wears a natural shade of fuck you. Her cheeks hold fire; the tip of her lip.

‘Who do you know that’s actually happy?’ She leans back on the deck. Her white blouse; stained with nightlife hangs open at the top. Her necklace hangs low on her chest. A Christian pendulum, a gift from mother, 24 carats. Her skirt is a deep green. The kind of green that nobody would wear. Her finger tips nestle between her legs. Seeking protection from the cold. I take another sip, she takes another drag.

‘If pointing out how shitty the world’s become is supposed to make me feel better, you’re fucking it up.’ I watch her lips reseal around the cigarette. She breathes in more smoke. I let it roll out before I answer.

‘Why is happy so important?’ She reapplies her shade. ‘We are so much more than that. You’re selling yourself short. You’re far too amazing to worry about just being happy.’ I take another sip, she takes another drag.

‘You’re more fucked up than I give you credit for aren’t you?’ She forces a smile. Her skin wrinkles. It’s not real.

‘You have no idea.’ I take another sip, She takes one last drag and flicks the carcass into the water. It floats on the surface.

‘It works for you though doesn’t it?’ Her hands find their way into her jacket.

‘What?’ I stare as she fumbles in her leather. Her wrist glows red in the lamplight.

‘Being fucked up, it’s like you’re not even a real person. You’re just this thing, you just... are.’ She finishes with a hand gesture before lighting her new cigarette. For a moment a universe is created. A new spark, a new energy, a new life. Then it collapses back on itself.

‘I am a real person.’ I take another sip, she takes another drag.

‘Pinocchio, it’s time you got me home.’ She tries to stand but falters. I don’t want to take her home. Taking her home I go back to mum, to another bottle of empty pills. We stop outside her mail box. She forces another smile.

‘Don’t do that.’ I lock her eyes.

‘You are the strangest boy I have ever met.’ She flicks her hair back out of her face. She steps towards me steadying herself on her mail box. Her perfume is sweat and smoke. Her lips have lost their shade. Nothing forced, perfect.

‘Goodnight.’ I smile at her. She smiles back. A real smile. I take a drag.

C.M. Perry

Last Words

White pill shatters,
on rosewood floor.
A child with a rattle,
he shakes his film canister.
Even film
is out of date.

Another shot of gin
before we hit the road.
He empties the rattle,
into his hand, his mouth,
- pupils already dilated.
The clock ticks backwards.

Benzylpiperazine,
One too few, two too many.
chewing gum for the jaw
I don't know why,
the cracker is dry
on my tongue.

Do you remember
the chip shop,
on the Beach
in Kawhia?

A speed bump
in the road

- swallowed, swimming.
Road signs
come to meet us,
from up above the fever.

He's twenty six,
bearded, old,
to her young and leggy
- just fifteen.
The speedo says one thirty.
We call its bluff.

Will-o-wisps
in rainbow on the windscreen
- no one else sees.
Nails in fur.
what will mum think,
if it's still there in the morning?

At the beach,
the roar is suffocating.
He nearly drowned
on New Years eve.
A click of camera phones.
Let's go home.

Fabricated love
keeps me up,
above the sound of the fan.
The clock ticks forward
in an illicit cell.
Morning is coming.

On resolution
three twenty by four eighty,

in early 21st century pixelation,
that god awful fish and chip type
illuminated by cellular lights
- unremarkable.

A picture worth
three bottles,
five pills,
and a one-seventy dollar fine
- just to prove
we were there.

I don't remember the chip shop.

Do you remember the chip shop?

You bite my ankle,
laugh and run away.
I thought you didn't like me.
What's his name?
No one knows.

 He's missing.
In black biro,
messy,
you tickle bad poetry
and do equations on my arm.
You don't say a word.

 You were reckless.
Swinging from the ceiling,
hair in your eyes, noodle legs
wrapped carelessly around the rafters.
It's your first detention;
red eyes.

 Headlines say you're a lesson to others.
Help me turn the desks around?
I'm going to jump out the window.
I'll hide his bag
in the ceiling.
Don't tell.

Your parents are still looking.
You say I look good in daisies,
pretty dresses, and
ask me to eat lunch with you.
But I say,
I don't know your friends.

August the tenth.
Cold hands hide my eyes.
Guess who?
I guess wrong.
I love you,
a messy scrawl on a get well soon card.

I didn't get better.
You're alive! you shout, picking me up.
You smell like chocolate,
two years and 12 more inches.
Over your shoulder I mouth,
Who is this?

I'm drunk.
Rings on red fingers
- flowers and gold paint.
I like them, you say,
but they're stuck.
Do they suit me?

I'll never see them again.
I'm a giant on your shoulders.
Visit me?
We'll go clubbing,
drink coffee,
and draw pictures in the sand.

I don't believe in an afterlife.
Wet laces and hangovers,
at 7am,
searching for an earring in the frost.
A broken clock
ticks around your neck.

Everyone's given up.
You text lonely letters,
sending videos with
wine stained lips,
slurred.
Silence in the background.

I wish you'd worn a life jacket.
Pixelated eyes,
silver in half light.
Slow blinking and
a promise to write me a song
when I visit.

Your last adventure.
Let's get detention together
every now and again,
and drink ice cream
cocktails,
in the tripping tree.

Hundreds of people came to the memorial.
I wore floral, not black,
sharing salty cake
with the people you said
I was cool enough to sit with.
I wish I'd listened,

I waited too long.
and maybe, somehow
you wouldn't have said,

See you in the sunshine.

Shannon Newlands

Personality Test

1. You approach an escalator and your heart begins to race.
2. Often, you accidentally wear two left shoes.
3. Sometimes, you have more sense than money.
4. On a Sunday morning, your liver and your bank balance can't decide who hates you more.
5. Sometimes, you have more money than sense.
6. Scars map childhood adventures on your skin.
7. A person's knowledge of 'Finding Nemo' is an acceptable indicator of a potential relationship.
8. Sometimes, you forget how to think.
9. Your hearing automatically piques at the sound of the word 'dog.'
10. Birthdays are both the best day and the worst day.
11. It is an achievement to make it up a flight of stairs unscathed.
12. Bad TV shows call your name.
13. You usually find your new pet fish upside down at the top of the bowl.
14. You could spend hours thinking about how novels are just combinations of the same 26 letters.
15. The only person that enjoys your jokes is you.
16. Sometimes you wonder if your cell phone is your best friend.
17. Couples make you nauseous.
18. You sometimes wake up with your own hair wrapped around your fingers.
19. Often, you spend time thinking about your brain.
20. The word 'moist' makes your skin crawl.
21. You never fully understood the point of personality tests.

Gaia Church

Eight ways to look at a fat little girl

Six.

Strawberry cheeks, thick legs,
Wide belly, strong heart.
Second serving, dark glances,
Moment on the lips.
Lifetimes on the hips.

Eight.

Ursula.
Madam Mim.
Queen of Hearts.
A realisation that
good voices
don't spawn
from wide bodies and wiggly chins.

Eleven.

PE changing room.
Whispers behind pimpled cheeks
with valleys between their hipbones,
Archway armpits,
Wishbone thighs.
But her:
Mountainous stomach,
Rock knuckles,
Log legs.

Thirteen.

Long hair that her mother likes.
Hiding booming breasts
and swelling guts.
Picking at the ends,
forcing them apart,
wishing it was limb from limb,
fat from bone,
ripping her body at the seams.

Fifteen.
Long sleeves.
Loose sweats.
Bloody train tracks
carved into chubby wrists
by metal shards.
The meticulous art of self-hate
coached by parents
from whom she inherited the brush
to paint her body
into the backdrop
and disappear.

Seventeen.
A boy calls her beautiful.
She asks, "Why?"
Exclamations of inner beauty
cannot quell
the rising tides of shame.

Nineteen.
Wondering why
out of all of the words that one can be
that fat
is worse
than selfish

vain
boring
malicious.
That by being more
a woman is less.

Twenty-One.
Sick of shrinking to fit.

Five Sets

I.
Pure as driven snow
tarred a murky red-brown.
Womanhood
that cannot be washed away.

II.
Torn elastic.
Faded blue cotton.
Sagging in all the wrong places.
Hidden behind insecurities
from the clucking voices
with blossoming bosoms and perfect figures.
Self-hatred in a pimpled package.

III.
Self-assuring eyelet lace.
Strung up in lines
like blood red warriors
ready to be donned for battle.

IV.
Crumpled diamond heap.
Mess of golden string.
Kicked under the bed
to dance with bunnies of dust
under a thundering throne;
then forgotten with the morning dew
like a lewd Cinderella.

V.

Sturdy structure.

Staunch skeleton.

Burly waistband.

Best in beige.

Tucking away swollen bellies
and reddened tiger stripes.

A golden eagle
trapped in a birdcage.

Mary Wood

Father

Short man, small man,
He makes his piano sing,
Playing all day, his beautiful music,
whilst mum's out working,
making old ladies' grey hair blue.
In the candle-lit evening,
Exotic incense burns.
A tatty, red rug covers floorboards.
She sits and listens.
Smoking, she stares at an empty fireplace.
The door is closed to us children.
No written music, just his unwritten dreams,
Played-out on the black and white keys.
White and black,
Day and night.
Everyday,
No job.

Sometimes the mood changes,
Magical music from a needle on black vinyl.
Suddenly the room is full of striking clocks,
Or a hundred-million bicycle bells,
Ringing and ringing, louder and louder.
It's so loud now I cover my head with my pillow
Knowing the neighbours will bang on the wall...
But he doesn't hear them.
His eyes are closed,
In his head he sees his unwritten dreams.

Played-out on the black and white keys.
White and black,
Day and night,
Everyday,
No job.

They're out walking together, hand-in-hand,
Pretending together.
So secretly I sneak into
The Adults' Room and
Hunting around, I find the red-coloured Ravel,
Beneath the empty green bottle of sweet, ginger wine.
The smell from the ashtray spills into the air.
I've learnt music at school,
I can decipher these black marks and lines;
But I didn't know then, how those black marks and lines,
Like written words, frightened him.
White and black,
Day and night.
Everyday,
No job.

It's difficult, but I have time
To decipher these marks and lines;
Black music on white.
A few minutes, here; a few minutes there.
My brothers' upstairs,
They don't know my heart is beating – they don't care.
Memories of his fierce eyes,
The short, small man, transformed into a raging, angry man,
Just a Jealous Guy,
With Ravel's red face.
Carrying hatred, of me, my mum,
of the world.
Guilt makes me nervous, but the music is beautiful,

My small hands stretch to sharps and flats.
(The white keys unexpectedly cold).
My feet cannot quite reach the pedals.
Not yet.
It's difficult, but I have time.
Just no teacher.

Mike Bilodeau

The morning after

I want to say I love you.

I want to tell the world that your rich, golden eyes boiled the sapphire reflection of the moon from the night sky.

That we danced constellations, cleaving our bodies through the dark ebony night.

I want to tell tales of how my fingers never truly felt until they fell upon your ivory shoulders.

How my mouth had never drawn breath until your lips caressed me to life.

I want to feel time splinter, to feel space rip,

to see the earth careen past its slow arc into the blinding darkness.

I want the universe to crumble under the magnitude of what we've created.

But that will never happen.

Truth be told, you're the barnyard slut who wakes alongside my splitting headache and flooding feeling of regret.

You're that foreign, nameless stranger; tongue dripping stale whisky and awkward plans of getting breakfast together.

This isn't some blue-sky, golden-sun tale of star-crossed lovers and fulfilled destiny.

This is the very live and visible act of repression, taking place before your crusted, stagnant-coffee colored eyes.

Sorry to say sweetheart, but the flower-petal words I pumped into you last night were nothing but purpose driven pieces of rehearsed bullshit, strategically placed to weaken your knees and ease my path to that damp, well-used crawl space between your legs.

You, with your fat, marbled hips, constantly cold to the touch.

You, with your yellowed skin and nicotine filled pores.
Every word which crawls from your cracked lips splashes bile on to
the back of my whitened tongue.
Every inch of my body which fell under your clammy hands feels
diseased and dirty.
Feels as though it needs to be excised.
Feels as though it needs to be torn from me, lest your wretchedness
spread like gangrene.

I wish that the very thought of our love had the power to cripple me;
the power to drag the earth to a standstill,
the power to draw out the boundaries of the possible; but sweetheart,
I really just want you to get the fuck out of my bed.

Karl Guethert

8 Simple Rules

People often ask how I became such a successful author. I laugh, and tell them it was inevitable. But then they ask: ‘Well, how *did* you do it?’ I simply stare at them. Wild eyed. Really make them squirm. It’s best when I don’t blink. If that fails to scare them off, I’ll be forced to sigh and actually offer them advice. Something along the lines of:

Step 1: Get plenty of rest before you start writing. About 18 hours straight should suffice. If you have trouble getting to sleep, a few glasses of bourbon are likely to be beneficial.

Step 2: Use your dreams as inspiration. However, be careful how you word the story. Don’t outright state that you rode down the street on the back of a giant hotdog, for example. Especially leave out that your mother (in a bikini) was throwing handfuls of coins at you. Instead, be creative. Suggest that the person riding the hotdog was your nemesis. Strongly imply that this happened in real life. Deny that it was a dream. Fabricate photos if you have to.

Step 3: Pick up a pen and paper. You’ll want to glare at these for a long time. Keep glaring. Then throw them away and get out your laptop you Stone Age idiot.

Step 4: Set the mood. Some people suggest playing soft, non-intrusive music in the background. Others prefer sitting alone, in peace, listening to the ‘universe to guide them.’ Those writers are nothing more than stupid hippies. They need to get their heads out of their arses and actually learn how to write. All you need is to crank some

heavy metal and headbang your story onto the keyboard.

Step 5: Throw away your first draft. Everyone knows that those are always shit. Always. Don't be fooled into thinking that you can salvage parts of it for later use. Never even try to tuck the draft away somewhere for 'safe keeping.' No good will ever come of it. If possible, set fire to your laptop and throw it off a bridge.

Step 6: Re-write the whole thing from scratch. This time, do it properly. If you're as talented an author as you think, you won't need to do any editing. If you need to edit, you're not trying hard enough, and should repeat Step 5.

Step 7: Get published. Take your finished masterpiece into the nearest publishing house and get yourself into print. If they tell you to bugger off explain to them that they're missing out on the profit-maker of the century. Preferably via insightful hand gestures and profanity. Where viable, utilize flaming dog poo.

Step 8: Rest on your laurels. I like to recommend this step for any endeavour – especially if you have a large ego like myself. If you are not so ego-endowed, writing isn't for you. Get back to hugging those trees. If you've followed Steps 1 through 7 with precise care, your bank should start calling you (repeatedly) to ask if you'd like to move all your money to a larger facility.

Jessica Howatson

Clichés

Blue top – light not dark –
warm in a glass
just enough
to make your fingertips feel fire
before it hits the floor
a cacophony
of splinters on ceramics
rain on the roof
each breath is tequila
burning
it'll take more than alcohol
to drown this out

Submission comes
in the form of falling
Ear to the ground
cheek on tiles
shatter shards on skin
bleeding

to the whitewash
that's salted to taste
with the tears
that tricked their way
into battle
like so many Trojan horses
now is the time to cry
what else is spilt milk good for?

the world is
too many pieces
scattered across your palms
you've never seen suicide so close

Rachael Elliott

Kali goes to Christmas Dinner

Kali leaves her kitchen
behind
wet newspaper
becomes a kitten
scrabbling on the road
eyes shine
from coke cans
she drives into the rain
and the pain uncurls
behind her eyes

Her uterus is up for discussion
frayed female
flatmate wanted
the orange spanking spoon
left in the pan
burns
can't handle the heat
bin it

clamp
cut the cord
Exactly what sort of job
will you do
after all this university study?
strawberry tops
fall

like snow
to cover the tissues in the bin
and how much will you make?

The turkey reminds Kali
she needs new moisturiser
none for Christmas
just a pink lipstick
lotus flower candle holder
'Grow Your Own Boyfriend'
just add water.
scaled legs
wrap around her chest
squeeze

Kali clicks herself on the table
Isis and Demeter pull crackers
for foetuses and paper hats
Her mother gifts Kali
a 6 litre slow cooker
and a 5 piece platter set
in blue and yellow
to feed her unborn children
her unwed man
as Kali's Master's degree is for
husband hunting
but no crossbow
for Christmas

Her mother preaches the Christmas sermon:
Kali will never know love
she needs a husband
to look after her bills
equality comes later
wiping a man's ass

when he is old
repays
the financial debt
of a swollen belly

She does not notice
men's cheating hands
cut, spread over Kali's waist
their lie spun heads
hung from her ears

She does not see
Kali's lover kneel
beg her to put her feet on him
that he might kiss them
so he can sleep

Merry mother fucking Christmas.

Kali Looks at Facebook Photos of Her Friend's Baby

One month on
the worm has no name
they call her baby
tiny perfect fingernails
carve into her tiny
perfect face
Kali licks her finger
covers it
imagines it clicking
against the rest
around her
long
red
neck
They should call her Kali
akachan
the red one
wrap her in a red dress
full of pins
to draw up her
white
pudgy
arm
she'll like it sharp
and bloody

baby lives in a letter
sealed with spit

pink booties remove her hands
slap her bottom
smooth as a dog's headstone
pink
strain her through muslin
pink
double dose of baby ibuprofen
down for the night
pink
cosmopolitan for Kali

baby smiles
spits at you
farts on your arm
You never sleep
Your breasts
empty and cracked
learn to peel apples in one
spinning
swathe
of skin
for eating
and Kali lights her durrie
toasts the bags under your eyes
here's to your success

Kali gets a text message from her ex-boyfriend

The phone is a flare
in the night sea
that traps me

it spreads itself along
the darkened wall
I've woven over
the wound of body

it proclaims you miss me
with a heartfelt
sad face
emoticon.

That was Tuesday.

By Friday
(and despite a text reply)
there is still no word of you.

I can no longer smell
the smoke of your despair
floating towards
my waves.

I wonder if I imagined it
swimming towards me
through the dark
bait glowing
before the open sex of your mouth
(angler that you are)

but the time stamp's there
even if you are not.

What is it you miss?

My closed mouth?
Eyes sewn shut
with the nylon lies
you spun to keep me
on the hook of your bed?

Do you miss the burley
streaming from my lips
and the yips of my
encouragement?

Do you miss the way
my seaweed-salted hair
sways
in your current?

Do you miss the way I taste?

You do not speak,
but should know that
the thing you miss
is gone.

I rasped it from my flesh
with the coral necklace you gave me

now I am a red sponge
pulled from the tide
to dry
starless
on the rock of myself.

D.A. Taylor

Untitled, or Quaesivī

I watched Dresden burn.
If only you were among the ashes.

I'd hoped to follow your dance steps
through an old fool's
dog-eared diary.

Inches away from death
and still
I can't find your fingertips.

There are consonants
on the table
and a bottle of vowels
in the fridge.

I'm a pillar of salt.

Come home.

Write to Save

Write to save your father's black whiskers left on the high tide of the bathroom sink.

Write to save droplets of orange oil suspended in November sunlight.

Write to save your last breath of evening air in his doorway.

Write to save an impression of lace on her upper thigh.

Write to save the Mataī shavings your grandfather brushes from the bench.

Write to save the pomegranate juice on her lips from falling to the sand.

Write to save your grandmother forgetting your name.

Write to save the kisses he gives the lip of his coffee cup.

Write to save her name and number scrawled on the back of a cigarette packet.

Write to save your first orgasm.

Write to save the last time your daughter leaves scalding tears on your collarbone.

Write to save yourself from the water as it plunges down the drain.

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.

Boris Cookson is a poet living in Waikato.

Adele McKelvie has taken two papers in creative writing at Waikato University. After many years of dreaming about writing fiction, she's finally started – and loving it!

Kristy Lagarto has found publishing success with pieces published in *Brief* and *Mayhem*. She also squeezed all her studies into whirlwind year of classes in order to finish her degree (a BA in English and French) early, so she could travel overseas and end up living in New York City.

Helena Dow writes: 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.

Hannah Dewhurst is working towards a BA double major in Japanese and English, somehow fitting a grad cert in the three years as well. Creative writing is a hobby being taken further by the papers offered at the university.

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.

Robert Taylor: I'm an English student who washes old people's dishes for money in my spare time

Loren Thomas is currently finishing her BA majoring in Writing Studies. She writes mainly poetry but hopes to expand in to prose writing in the near future.

Viv Aitken is senior lecturer in Education at the University of Waikato. This is the first time she has ever shared any of her poetry and she would never have done it without the encouragement of Terry Locke and Tracey Savage – for which, thanks. The inspiration for this verse arose when someone told Viv all about the strange and wonderful behaviour of the moonflower – for which, also, thanks. A videoclip of a moonflower blooming can be viewed [on YouTube].

Chris Lee writes: Hobby writer learning new tricks. Thanks Dr Tracey Slaughter and the UOW English Department.

Jessica Tuakeu is an aspiring artist. She appreciates art in all forms but she tends towards film, drawing, making music and writing. She is inspired by everything, but more so by the things that confuse her. Jessica is currently working towards completing a Bachelor of Media and Creative Technologies.

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.

Faith Wilson writes: My writing explores ideas of what it is to be a twenty-something, half-caste (afakasi) Samoan female in the twenty-first century and the tropes or expectations of that personhood. I'm really into using language as a mechanism to upset or disturb these expectations, but mostly I like to write something that's a bit fun.

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>

Erin Doyle is currently working towards an MSc at the University of Waikato. Her creative work has appeared in *JAAM*, *Brief*, and *Mayhem*.

Vicky Curtin writes: I am a mother four, in my third year of a BA – English major. I want to master the art of prose; but you will see none of that here! Poetry is my pussy cat; a little bit mad, and always on my lap.

Brittany Rose used to dream of being an author when she grew up. She now very much doubts that this will happen, but loves writing anyway.

essa may ranapiri: A person who lives halfway between reality and a dream. Has a world of words to share. Studies English and History. Will be finished soon.

Tyla Bidois: 3rd Year Communications student from Mount Maunganui – and Awahou, Rotorua – who’s always had something of an addiction to literature and poetry, and just recently begun exploring it academically.

R.P. Wood is a graduate student at the University of Waikato, studying History and English. He divides his time between tutoring, dissertating, and milling about.

K-t Harrison: Kia ora koutou, these poems are part of a poetry sequence called ‘Corina Goes to Wellington.’

Ko Hapuakohe te maunga
ko Mangawara te awa
ko Tainui te waka
ko Ngati Paoa, Ngati Haua, Ngati Mahuta nga iwi,
ko Waiti, Kai-a te-mata, Wharekawa me Waahi nga marae.
No te Hoe-o-Tainui ahau
ko toku ingoa ko k-t Harrison.
He kaituhi ahau.

Stephen Henderson: A 23 year old theater and English major working towards teaching and writing professionally.

CM Perry: My therapist says I have trust issues.

Shannon Newsland is currently in her third year of a Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts conjoint degree. She always liked how words sound, but is just now figuring out how much better they sound when written by her.

Gaia Church: A fourth year Bachelor of Management Studies and Bachelor of Laws student with a passion for creative writing and a desire to stretch her wings.

Mary Wood was born in the UK. After working in diverse commercial sectors, she returned to her education to achieve her ambition to teach. Her spare time was spent travelling the world, sketching and writing. Later, she moved to New Zealand where currently she is a lecturer at the University of Waikato.

Mike Bilodeau: I am a 27-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.

Karl Guethert found great success with *Mayhem's* First Issue. Looking to build on that, he's back for another round. He still prefers all this over practising all that marketing malarkey. Writing is in his veins and sometimes he even bleeds ink.

Jessica Howatson: I'm a first year English student with a sordid backstory and a problem with punctuality. I write because I don't know how else to find a way to breathe.

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'.

D.A. Taylor plays the ukulele and bakes for catharsis. He completed his English degree at Waikato, specialising in Writing Studies.

Submit to *Mayhem*

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

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