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# Tracey Slaughter

## Editorial

In the beginning was the ache. Before a word could be scratched on the paper, before a vowel sound could be mouthed, the writer knew the ache, felt its hum under their ribcage, sensed its rhythm catching in their breath, weighing their steps. And the ache hurt. And the ache thrilled. It was what they longed to say, lodged and looming in their body, before it could be said. And the writer learned to open themselves to the ache – to nurse it in their belly, sleep in its shadow, blink in its strange glare, yield to its drop in temperature, run with its spike in heartrate. And the ache started stretching, a fine line, a thin sentence, joining the page to the solar plexus. It was slow, it was risky. But it was the point of writing any words at all.

I'm a believer that the ache is what the reader wants to hear, wants to share in. They don't want to hear another piece mirroring the rules, following the formula. They don't want the stale and expected and uniform to be placed in an order that their eyes have travelled many times already, bored before they reach the predictable place they have always known was coming at the end of the model sentence. They want the familiar defied, the norm cracked open. They want their own ache echoed, answered, woken. They want to be stirred and rocked. Readers crave a little mayhem.

It's best in the beginning then, as writer Neil Gaiman points out, not to know the rules.<sup>1</sup> Rules like to stem the ache, to camouflage it, cancel it. They like to disavow that the words ever came from that dark place of yesterday and need under your diaphragm. They do that by toning down your voice, muting your heartbeat, colouring your imagery... even by bleaching your skin – as K-T Harrison

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1 See Neil Gaiman's "Make Good Art: Do The Stuff That Only You Can Do." <http://www.uarts.edu/neil-gaiman-keynote-address-2012>

illustrates so powerfully in her work in this issue. You need to watch what the rules would have you whitewash, marginalize, take care what they urge you to forget. Obey instructions to forget – as D. A. Taylor’s luminous prose-poem that opens this volume demonstrates – and you’ve erased the raw disordered music of desire, the lush and painful vocabulary of life that made you thirst for language in the first place, that drove you to expose the ache by letting loose words. It’s a piece, along with much else in this issue, which pushes past limits, past genres, letting the ache overrule, the feel decide the form. In Mark Anthony Houlahan’s “still life with beer and a karl maughan painting” the artist remembers the blooms of obsession “over and over and over and over” letting his impulses swallow vast canvases that burst beyond containing walls, his paints driven by the same engulfing ache but “always find[ing] a new way” to flood the garden. In Alicia Gray’s “The World Is What You See” the artist tunnels into strange pinpoints of stilled perception to tease and trick “surprise[s] of existence” from microscopic details. These pieces refuse to conform to categories: are they poetry? are they prose? Who cares – they are what the ache has grown. As Renee Boyer’s “Ars Poetica” testifies, the unruly call to write grips the body, invading the eardrums in the midst of meetings, welling in the bloodstream when you’re “running, showering,/fucking, sitting/an exam.” It’s just as well that readers go on wanting words that speak from the viscera, words that “bite” and “burrow,” “stroke” and “rake.”

So welcome to another issue of Mayhem, to another sampling of voices that know how to move and rattle, seduce and haunt. It is always exciting to present another flush of fresh work from writers who know, as Mark Ravenhill puts it, that the job of artists is not “making do with the way things are right now, being nice and obedient, ticking the boxes that someone else has defined for you.” The task of artists, Ravenhill insists, is to be “new, a freak, challenging, disruptive, naughty, angry, irresponsibly playful”<sup>2</sup> –

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2 Mark Ravenhill, “We need to have a Plan B: Edinburgh Festival Speech.” <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/aug/03/mark-ravenhill-edinburgh-festival-speech-full-text>

it's a pleasure to present another volume of *Mayhem* packed with beautiful rebellious work by writers fulfilling the holy misrule of this calling.



## D.A. Taylor

### **These are the things I want you to forget**

I want you to forget the beginning. Forget the mercurochrome drum, the long Senecan bath, the first fluorescent aches (as if colour were all that mattered). Do this for the sake of your brand new bellows. Sing.

Has all this slipped away?

Good.

Now pour six-by-fours into the void and see yourself bundled in your mother's arms, 1:30 frozen on the hospital clock, one hour old biroed on your backs. Take three or four, Daddy, just in case. Preserve the sweat and stickly hair, off-white walls, Property of Waikato Hospital rolled around pale and pink in a hundredth-second. Here comes Doctor Bowen and the cold aluminium and acetal for your chest. Look for the buckling faultlines of his forehead, the how did I miss this before? look. Listen for the following words: Ventricular; Cardiology; Electrocardiogram; Chambers; Valve; Septum; Defect. Listen for the thunderstone in your chest muttering brontide prayers. Diagnosis: benign. Appointments: quinquennial. Exit Doctor, pursued by a nurse.

You have contributed nine pounds to the surname; you have that in writing. Let this pickle of gelatin and silver do the work for you.

Do not look back. You cannot afford the salt.

Forget your first memory. You have not made three revolutions. Daddy made a pomegranate from kitchen water, gave it a knotted crown. Take it back to the grain, little Proserpino; this is the season for the big starlight, and we need a little glow. On the front doorstep: hold the cold and pregnant skin in both hands. Roll it a little too far to the left; to the right; back; forward; to the bank of the front

doorstep. Look for summer in mica flashes. Gravity will take it all away from you. Imagine the first bounce as a surprise; imagine the vibrating sequels more so. Let it burst and hiss on the path without any fuss. Enter audient left: Kasi, Weimaraner Vorstehhund (trotting to the puddle) to taste a little Lethe. Cigarette burn top-right. End of reel. Ratatatata. Ta ta.

This is a refugee camp. Take Pausanias' advice. Do not let this memory wander your bone locker and rattle in the night. Hush.

Forget, for this is of no consequence.

\*

Forget Roses. Forget the broken thorns, the licking sticking summer flesh. One. Two. Three's a triceratops knocking at the gate with pricks round his mortal temples. Four. Six. The crown slips when you crumple your eyes. Five. Do not blink, do not tempt this hollow delight, do not hiss and blubber over punctuated heels, do not hobble up the metal driveway. You are not blood-shod. This is not a test.

\*

Forget Rosie, Rosanne. She has seen two thousand stars more than you. She will not live up to her name, but she will symphonise soil and make her own chutneys from market onions and you will love her despite the sinister way she holds her ink. She will ache before the blackboards and she will never keep tiny time upside down on her breast. Tick lub. Tock dub. No no. No kicking. No wailing. There, there is the pale blue coffin that looks so small in Mummy and Daddy's lounge. A teddy bear, brass gut full of carbon. Wrinkled pewter arches on the wall. (Do not feel anything when you walk past this frame. I tell you, do not feel at all.) Seal the cracks before water heaves its way in and fractures the winter. And after the cakes and coleslaw, the barbeques and beasts, the words of kindness, the acres of tea, the light that bothers the window panes, the oh isn't it a shame that this is the only time we all meet, the slow drive west

and the sag of headlights, the loam to clay, you will see one last time her daughters of liliun and November that she grew among the strawberries and know that you have done as you were told.

There, there (it can still be new). Frown; it runs in the family. What wonder; how brave. Do not dwell on high tide while the water is out. For that matter, do not dwell on high tide when the water is in. Do not dwell on it at all. No, do not dwell at all.

\*

Forget Michael before two decades, and forget Mike after. He knew them all from Cordelia to Ferdinand before your turn. Character study: he sits in a gorse yellow pedal car, platinum hair; you, still in nappies, push him between the ponga log fence and a six foot by six foot litter box. Show diastema dentals, drunk on vitamin D and the pollen of suburbia. Pull at his blue ribs just for the fingertip itch. Unravel him in your temporal lobe. Wind him loose around your proximals, then fold him into a ball and roll him down the stairs. Or take the fractured light of December: the garden hose, dish soap on woven polypropylene. A spring to the groin is brief; a seam over vermilion lip less so (both parties were at fault, m'lud). Pace out a year or two; keep going until it slides out of focus (this negative is no longer printable). Bring him his green, his strawberry third of ice cream, his whispering grommets, his grimaces and mulligrubs, his broken little key six weeks slung. Look up to him by three inches. He is made of perseverance and oak; you are the coward of the family (you do not need to forget this, it is buried in your coils). Forget concertina laughter, Mark Knopfler dialled to thirty, the brazening of forearms, chests bruised and brined from nylon and polystyrene and the Pacific. Give up on the gossip of his suit, Granddad's golden pin in his lapel, the silver of his tie, Dad's pearlescent cufflinks. If you must hold on, do so to the hesitations and exhalations of your best man speech, the truncated dances, the Frangipani of your ex on the friend of a friend.

Forget how he enpurpled your soft young arms; breathe once (or

twice), button the white twill, adjust his tie, and close the lid.

\*

What do you want for Christmas, Nuncle?

Not nothing. Now. No; not now. More now. More then. Now then.

\*

*Ma mère a dit que je ne devais jamais  
Jouer avec les gitans dans le bois.*

\*

They stole Mummy from you, piecewise. They wore long Latin names to cover their tracks. First the fluttering flies poached her mantle; they tore at her vitreous humour until the cherry blossoms lost their plural. Showmen brought out ivory on safari and sold her china instead. A hungry ghost gave her a peroxide drip and fractured the colour of her leather. Some came in white and some in red. They took the respite of dreams, the distant sand bars, an outcrop of sweet Bridlington rock, Thalassa singing hurrah, hurrah. (Vale, vale). They stole her radio, station to station, and fined for an ocean of noise. They scratched and splintered her vinyl. They moved her shoes, replaced her baking powder with moon dust, sold her belt holes in back streets. They collected the percussion and moved on to the brass. They blacked out pages of her dictionary; they swapped entries in her encyclopaedia.

They left for her an unfine millennium of dimensions. (*What did you put down for tomorrow's breakfast?*)

Dig through camphor for a slice of 1999, you and her triangulated a thousand metres superbrine, fringes and December in your eyes. Frame it in the hallway until Janus takes back the kahikatea green.

She will leave you: the Edmonds Cookbook New Revised

Edition (1992); threads of mitochondria (1989); chocolate eyes (1990); a hollow trifle bowl packed in tea (1968); grey and yellow polyester sweatshirts, fading elbows, chewed cords (1994-1999).

Let the rest go to the tide. If you know what's good for you, you won't go looking for her (even if you could).

\*

Daddy can take the fluff from between goats' horns, blue pohutukawa flowers, upside-down tui feathers and glow-worm snares and spin them all together to make story-cloth.

It's made strong by wide eyes; patched thick by receipts and medical records; worn tired by the rolling doubt of adolescence. In some places it's so thin we daren't breathe in case it breaks. In others it's the strongest stuff in the world. Take Moira's word on that.

He will pass it to you in great heaps and folds, and on cold nights it will keep you safe.

If you find a loose thread of cotton on your clothes, keep it safe.  
He was felled as quick as a sneeze.

\*

You will have a dozen loves:

One for the bad luck of January;  
one for Viola, smiling patient on a monument;  
one for Mona Tessa, outwearied with the weight of the sun  
(My mistress' eyes are nothing like);  
one for the eye of the day (I would be Fool of anything);  
one for Mary's tears (how I envied those willow bells);  
one for the dark seas of Diana;  
one for the three or four virtues of Carmen Lúcia;  
one for the long sleep of Flanders;  
one for glory of mourning;  
one for little weather-glasses;  
one for chrysanthemums;

and one for the Echo,  
and blood for the bulbs.

You could do your own bit of drowning, I tell you.

So you knead the waxless midday sea. On a small island on the southwest coast you see her sitting on the rocks, wet face in hands. The sea kisses her ankles. She looks up to see your bark of daisies. And, tired of faces in the water, she adjusts her hair, fixes her Acheron stare, takes the garnet plumeria from behind her ear, and smiles across the blue.

While you row past right to left.

\*

There are no rocks in the black. There is no wind but slack.

You will think of her that day and know you could go back.

\*

And when they see you in the street they will not kill you; they will knock you down, rifle through your pockets for morphemes and desserts for two, the hum of car heater set to three-quarters, the moan of rolling friction. Think of her as you kiss the spaces between jaw and ear, above belt loops and foreheads, impressions of lace. Wonder, lightly, if her lips would too taste of cherry and vain orchids, distant tannins, the burning mound of Jacob's thunder, rain. Lose the only photo of you together, dark-eyed at 3 a.m., to pages sold to second-hand ghosts. Forget her when the street cleaner scrubs your Babel and ink down the drain.

And at five thousand you shall forget your globes, and at ten thousand you shall forget your knees, and at twenty thousand you shall forget the mouse's ear, and at thirty thousand you shall forget the little boy blue, at forty thousand you shall forget the storm and lightning will strike three billion and stop.

You have no more words to play with.

Do not ask more of the thunder.

D.A. Taylor

Do not speak ill of the living. Do not speak at all.

# Indigo Smith

## **Kissing (or the tale of why you shouldn't be 'best friends' with a boy who is in love with you, ever. Let alone twice.)**

2010

There was a blender and tequila. A lot of tequila. The cheap kind. And a drug.

We got the pill from a brick house on Edinburgh street. I don't know what drug it was, but they'd been legal up until a month ago. And he said he'd tried it before.

It was in the top drawer of the big wooden dresser. The room I'd rented had been furnished: a double bed, a chest of drawers, a desk and pin-board for study.

I hadn't put up my purple mosquito net, and the wardrobe had garbage bags of clothing I hadn't bothered to hang. The walls were already plastered with images of BDSM-style fashion and photocopies of naked, water-colour fairies.

The pill had been old when I'd got it, and had melted and flattened in its little plastic bag like gum stuck to the underside of a table. I fiddled with it, pushing it around in the slippery ziplock pocket. We were outside, on the deck. I'd just ground a cigarette butt under the toe of my red stiletto.

"I don't know. What's it like?"

I'd been reassured. And I trusted him. He was my friend. The only one to come and visit after I'd left. "Like a brother," I told my boyfriend. Us two would always discuss Fucking, and insult the other's current partner.

"Quit bitching and do it," he smiled.

I smiled back, and he pushed it between my lips. I washed it down with bitter slushy.



I asked him, “Can I kiss you?” And he shrugged.

We’d pulled the couch through the ranch slider, put it in the spotlight on the deck. I straddled him, and kissed him.

“Is that how you always kiss?” he asked.

I felt my eyebrows furrow through the numb haze of booze.

“Use more tongue.”

I took it as a challenge, and lead him down the hallway.

The next morning there was ash floating in my glass of water, and stains on my sheets.

2012

There was a wine glass, broken at the stem, and a hole burnt in my new stockings. There was always weed at his house, the curtains pulled on one side so his mother wouldn’t see the bong from next door. Mostly, I got smashed on bubbly. I liked the way it gave me energy, and made everyone else much more fun.

Everyone saw how he looked at me. And touched my skin. Kissed my shoulders when he was too loose to stand.

When I’d just moved into the grey house with the four boys, he was the one I had texted the next morning. He’d replied, “Are you telling me you were raped?” It hadn’t occurred to me to call what had happened ‘rape’. It hadn’t occurred to me that that is exactly what happened.

I could text him, when I lived out of town. When I’d been up at least three times to check the doors were locked, the windows shut, the curtains overlapped so there was no gap, the lights off, the switches in the correct position. When any sound would shock me out of bed, when I couldn’t relax and had nightmares about that neighbour coming into my bedroom again. I could text him and he’d talk to me until I fell asleep.

He would hug me when I was drunk, tell me not to worry. Let me cry the big, wet tears that come when your whole body shakes. The tears that come when you’re terrified of the dark and think there’s evil in the shadows.

“Don’t walk at night, just because it’s happened before doesn’t mean it won’t happen again.”

He used to tell me he was my BEST friend, my only true friend. He would text me to remind me that he loved me, and talk me through my break up.

“You don’t need that guy.” He made me believe that one day the crack inside would stitch itself up.

The night he met the latest guy I was screwing, his eyes turned to stone. I saw his jaw clench and his eyes dart over the body of the blonde boy with the drug contacts and the black car.

“You’re a slut.”

I tried to not let it hurt, reasoned that the technical definition of ‘slut’ was someone who had a lot of sex. And I did, so he was right.

“Don’t tell me about these guys. I don’t wanna hear about it.”

I had thought it was just virgin envy. But then the night came when I was lonely, I’d had two bottles of Lindauer, and an affectionate hug turned into a clumsy, heated embrace. I kissed him back.

In the morning his freckles were pressed right up against my skin, and there was a text from my ex.

## An open letter to an old friend

If you knew then what I know now...

You wouldn't have cared so much about how you looked. You would have woken up in the morning thrown on some canvas sneakers, and pulled your wavy black hair into a French plait.

But you groan and swear and curse the four Woodies that you drunk the night before. You sit up in bed and think about how much you hate your life, how much everything sucks and you just want to leave.

You put on your fishnets and hooker-heels, pencil skirt and push-up bra, red lipstick and mascara.

Then you walk to school.

Across the field you stalk, weight thrown forward, back arched as your heels stab the ground.

You stomp down the corridor, burst into D4 and hurl your faux leather bag at the desk. No apologies for lateness, you swear about the sunrise.

You still think you're smarter than anyone else, you think you can trick your boss that you're vomiting from food poisoning, and fool your teachers that you missed the test because you had the flu.

If you knew then what I know now, you wouldn't have written an essay on *The Handmaid's Tale* and called a rape victim "pathetic."

You feel like you're stuck. You believe in Candace Bushnell's *Happily Ever After*, where the women are:

beautiful and smart

and mothers and powerful

and rich and sexy

and married and having an affair

and the CEO of their own company,

and a size 6  
and fit enough to run a marathon  
and wear bright lipstick and stiletto heels.

You wouldn't have been a fashion student. You wouldn't have been prescribed quetiapine, or fluoxetine. You wouldn't have thrown your phone across the room because you didn't like a text.

If you knew then what I know now...

You would never have cheated on your boyfriend.

You would have dumped him instead.

But you flirt with boys, and bask in male attention. Flick glances over your shoulder, and smirk through your bleach blonde hair. You swing your hips as you strut through school, and never have any female friends.

You read about Monroe's magnetism, learn the history of Madonna and Gaultier, and misinterpret Vivienne Westwood's claim that "fashion is about sex."

You talk about fucking with your best mate as he hands you his cigarette. You fancy yourself as a femme fatale. You leave red marks around the filter, as you suck the thick smoke into your young lungs.

You text strangers and practice saying slutty things, remember what Cosmo said about 'What Men Want.'

You try to start fights with your boyfriend because you're so bored of doing the same thing. He's broke, so whenever you go to McDonald's and ask what he wants – "McChicken burger" – you order a hamburger Happy Meal, just to get him worked up.

You laugh when he looks at you, with those blue eyes that are telling you to "grow up."

You wouldn't have been a temporary lesbian or a topless waitress.

You wouldn't have slept with your brother's slut of a friend.

If you knew then what I know now...

You would never have thrown a door against your mother's face, letting the glass pane shatter against the woman who never cries. You would never have left her to dissolve onto the lino, into a puddle on the kitchen floor.

But you do, you leave her alone, and go to the boy in the car with the bottle of wine.

When you fight, you declare just how independent you are. At the top of your lungs, standing on the cobblestones your voice rips through the grapevine, smashes into the sparrows on the wire, and knocks over the saplings that line the street.

You scream the house down, shriek “I know what the fuck I’m doing.”

You shout at your mother to “Stop! Stop parenting me.”

Your heart really hurts sometimes, when you think about how your sister said “I hate you.”

Sometimes you cry because everyone thinks you’re a bitch and you’re terrified that they might just be right. Your friends joke that you’re “really hot, but such a bitch that it’s not worth it.”

You can’t stand being around your brother because he shushes you, closes his eyes and blocks his ears. He laughs with your father after you’ve stormed down the hall in a whirl of tears. You slam doors with gale force winds.

But.

If you knew then what I know now...

You wouldn’t have met your short, sassy fashion friend, or your scarily intelligent fine arts friend.

You wouldn’t have had the chance to be brave enough, proud that you told your father to fuck off.

You wouldn’t have begun listening to your mother when she said things like, “This too shall pass.”

You wouldn’t have learnt to be grateful, that change is inevitable. You wouldn’t have learnt that life is fluid. You wouldn’t have ended up at University,

and you sure as shit  
would not  
be writing  
this.

# Kay Ramsbottom

## Marion, née Gerard

Somewhere in my past you vanished. I wonder if you're still alive. I've looked for you on Facebook but I only know the name you had at school. Maybe you shed that identity, like you shed that first baby, something too difficult to deal with. You were my golden girl, my Gerry, my bestie. So compact and lively, the one I wanted to be. Did you know I wanted to kiss you that night at the beach, with the moonlight on the water and the taste of cigarettes on our lips? But I didn't dare; it might have ruined our friendship.

I moved away after school, started work, got engaged. You partied hard and moved from job to job. We kept in touch, phone calls and visits. One day a letter from you. You were pregnant, you weren't ready, you were broke – could I help? I drove you to the clinic, held your hand as we passed the hissing women. They called you whore and baby-killer. I wanted to defend you, told them to shut up, mind their own business. At the door a big security guard urged us in. “Don't argue with them, it only makes them worse.” Afterwards he let us out the back door. I gave you the money. Five hundred was a lot back then.

I heard from you less often. You were still the party girl, still seeing the same guy. If you missed the Pill three days in a row you'd wash it down with vodkas and hope for the best. You got pregnant again. You waited too long to go to the clinic and they wouldn't let you terminate. You wore baggy clothes and told your mother when you were two weeks away from due. I visited you and we sat at the picnic table with the baby playing in the dirt at your feet. His skin was all red and crusty. You looked at him with nothing in your face as you flicked ash off your cigarette, and said, “He has eczema. He cries all the time.” I thought of you drinking and smoking your way

through the pregnancy. I'm sure you loved your dog more.

There was another letter. You needed more money, for reasons I can't remember. I wrote back explaining why I couldn't lend you more. I gave you details: my income, my bills. After Len left me I was scraping by on \$70 a week. Couldn't you ask your mum, your boyfriend Greg? What were you doing with your own money, were you in trouble, on drugs? I probably wasn't tactful, but I had my own shit to deal with. I'm sorry I sent it.

We talked. You understood, you said. Forget it. Come over and visit me this weekend. When I got there, you were out. Forty minute's drive, petrol wasted. After it happened again, I learned to ring your mother first to check you were home.

"Hi Mrs Gerard. It's Kay here. Can I speak to Marion, please?"

"Hello Kay. I'm sorry dear, she's at Greg's today."

"Oh, she asked me to come over. Do you think she'll be back later?"

"I don't think so, dear. She only just left."

Maybe you were just forgetful. I cut you lots of slack.

"Hello Kay. Sorry, dear, Marion's on holiday."

"On holiday? But... how could she afford that? She, um – this is embarrassing – she owes me money."

Mrs Gerard sighed.

"She owes me money too, dear. Quite a lot actually."

I finally took the hint, and I let you slip away. Over the years I heard about you through mutual friends. You had four more sons. Five boys! You married their father Greg. If only I could remember his last name. I'd love to talk to you again. I don't understand what I did wrong.

I wish I'd risked the kiss on the beach instead.

## Childhood

I remember fear first  
opening the letterbox and finding a huge spider inside.  
later it ran up my arm and sat on my head in the backseat. I screamed.  
My father laughed and shoed it out of the car. I wouldn't sit in the  
backseat for weeks. I hate spiders.

I remember  
strange symbols on the bedroom walls and a man's voice droning  
low in a language I couldn't understand. Then a different bed, cool  
dry sheets, a bubbling kettle making steam to soothe my cough.

I remember  
sharing chocolates with the boy behind me in the plane, he passed  
them through the gap between the seats. Orange-filled chocolate  
squares. We ate the whole box. Later he vomited. The smell forever  
linked with orange-cream chocolate.

I remember  
the attic room in my grandma's house with a pretty eiderdown,  
impression of silk and golden dragons, a magic plant on the  
windowsill whose leaves folded up as I stroked them.

I remember  
a huge park, an empty nutshell, a squirrel's neat paws on my white  
ankle sock.

I remember  
fingers sinking into warm red squishy paint lined up in white buckets



in the sun patch on the classroom floor.

I remember

icy sweet silky milk from crates, the concrete bunker shaded under trees, keeping it cold until playtime.

I remember

Lauren and Bob standing over me in class, arguing about what girls have down there. I lifted my skirt up, pulled my knickers out, show-and-tell. I showed. Lauren told. Mrs Dodds made me sit in the corridor. “If someone told you to jump off a bridge, would you?”

I remember

breathing deep enough for two as Mr Kelloway carried me on his shoulders into the pool where the water was over his head. I really believed that vital air could pass from my skin to his.

I remember

my brother and his best friend Greg, they were ten years older than me.

They told me cows were horses, and horses were cows.

They told me fleas lived in my hair and used my nose as a ski ramp.

They smeared Vegemite on my face and pinned me down while the dog licked it off.

They held me upside-down by the ankles and tickled until I wet myself.

They pegged my dolly to the washing line and shot her full of holes.

They made sparrows disappear from the garage roof (little puffs of feathers drifting on the wind).

They showed me a dead rat floating in an ice-cream container of its own blood.

They put me to bed after telling me monsters lived in the wardrobe but only came out if the doors were open; they left the doors open.

They closed the bedroom door slowly – “goodnight Kay, sleep tight” – while one crawled under my bed, then shook the frame and

made ghost noises; the other investigated and said no-one was there.  
They showed me how to climb the big tree.  
They took me with them sliding on sheets of cardboard down the  
faces of the sand hills.  
They taught me to punch like a boy.

I remember  
cycling home with plants to make a terrarium for my mum in  
hospital. Flash of white car, black tyre. Lying on the road looking  
up at the silhouette of trees against the sky. Trying to sit up. Passing  
out from the pain.

I remember  
reading my brother's hidden pornography. Such riveting cartoons!  
Playing boyfriend and girlfriend with other girls, kissing squeezing  
humping throbbing. Boys weren't as interesting back then.

I remember a feeling too big to name  
my mother wracked with waves of pain, tears wetting my hand as  
she pressed it to her face, kissing my fingers when the worst had  
passed, whispering "thank you, thank you". Don't look at her grey  
short chemo hair, don't look at her wasted body, don't hate her.  
Feel nothing, feel nothing, feel nothing.

# Mark Anthony Houlahan

## **Still life with beer and a karl maughan painting**

I've never met karl maughan but I chaired a session his wife the writer emily perkins spoke at once. She might have thought I was a husband stalker because I talked a lot about karl maughan at lunch and hardly anything about emily perkins. I loved her first book of short stories not her real name which sat up right and said hello the way good stories should. Now that I think of it I can't find my copy maybe I lent it to you.

It looks like karl would be a great guy to lunch with perhaps drink a nice cold beer. He seems friendly for a painter of course I know painters can be all shapes sizes etceteras but if you didn't know he painted you would not guess. He wears trainers jeans t-shirt could be hallensteins sometimes even a hoodie. He hooks his thumbs in his jean pockets when he stands proud in front of his large beautiful paintings.

There are a lot of karl maughan paintings now it's over twenty years since he was at art school. He makes the same painting again and again. This is not boring as he always finds a new way to paint the same garden and this is why a walk around a karl maughan painting is something you should do.

One glorious saturday morning at the milford gallery in dunedin the dealer showed me his backroom with dozens of karl maughan paintings small ones large ones against the wall on the wall and suspended from the ceiling in metal storage racks designed to show large canvases. I realised I would never buy a karl maughan painting as the best of them are 64,000 plus gst & I would need a new house

to show them. I only now have one wall big enough in the bedroom and then I would be sleeping with a nightmare on canvas 2 metres squared.

The garden in karl maughan's painting terrifies me but I can't take my eyes away. There's a worn dirt path in the middle that leads from the bottom of the painting to the top. You can always see blue sky and a soft thread like a thin string cloud of white light but never sun or moon so is it early morning or twilight I don't know. You cannot get out to the sky as rows of fat round flowers shrubs and conical trees hem the path on both sides and make a plant wall across the whole painting.

These are english plants hyacinth hydrangea cypress trees karl maughan knows more about them than I do his mother taught botany and when he was a boy she took him to plant nurseries all over the manawatu. The painting remembers flowers over and over and over and over. Up close in galleries or in google image petals purple yellow red open wide I think they might swallow me whole like the tulips in sylvia plath's poem. When I finally drink beer with karl maughan my first question will be karl karl karl karl karl karl karl?

## **If this was a Plath Poem**

it would rage with spleen. It would claw your brain with hyperbolic, mythologised imagery. But this is not a Plath poem. This is a found poem. A Plath poem seeks power within the volcano of the angry self. A found poem by consent finds language anywhere it may be lying waiting: on line on a billboard or for instance in the bottom of a three drawer office unit where I found these words: school certificate sixth form certificate university entrance a bursary [three fails in scholarship I warned my parents this would happen but they wasted the entry fee anyway], b.a. (history & english), masters (english), teacher training certificate (social studies & english), doctor of philosophy (english), a fat brown envelope of accomplishment.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves, sunshine. Your teachers have some suggestions. Has difficulty with ball handling activities. Needs to ... mix with others in sports before he can mature fully as a person [that was my standard three teacher we spent all of 1968 really not liking each other]. Untidy work doesn't help [he means it is better to use a compass to draw circles than a twenty cent piece]. Crayon work fair [that was in form three]. He could have done better had he been more constant in his studies particularly in English.

# Karl Guethert

## O-Week Eulogy

Rain on  
student's stone.  
O-week put to rest.

*...rite of passage...*  
*...what he loved...*  
*...it's just what's done...*

Felled before semester's start  
dudes all share a round,  
a bitter case.

'Cos let's get drunk  
Up on the roof.  
*Or are ya pussy, mate?*

## From Me to Me

Write. You need to keep it in your veins. The marrow in your bones is full of words, full of power, full of everything that makes you. You're going to hate your work. A bile that will burn through your pages. A hatred that will envelop your fingers and dribble out through your pen. But just keep writing. Write when you have inspiration. Write when you are punching your head in boredom. Write when you want to curl into a tight lump of nothing and fade from the world.

Seven years of darkness is the reward for being you. An entire life condensed into a single day, over and over again. An existence inside of everyone else's world. You'll crave the shushed pity from your family, but will slap it aside. You'll keep up appearances and hide behind the same face daily. A smile held up by invisible fingers. A lie smothered over layers of nothing. Mint sauce over burnt lamb. Lean on the kitchen doorframe and convince your parents that you are fine. Take this lie and work it into myth. Shape it until not even you can tell the difference. Wear it every day. Those seven years will pound on you, but never leave. The myth will stay forever. Or, perhaps, it was always there.

Write yourself to suit the occasion. You'll know who you are, and that's all that matters. But no one else should see this. Give them the part of you that they need to see. In classrooms, never joke. In public, stay reserved. There are only a few people you can share your whole self with. You'll never share your whole self, because even you will be ashamed. Even you don't want to live with the entirety of who you really are. You'll sit on a student couch until 3am with a girl you'll later fall in love with. And you will talk about this with her. But that's where it will end. That's where it will always end. An acid drop through the heart.

No one wants to commit to loving you. There will only be that one time, and it will boil in your throat until you have no more words. She'll write a letter, a numbered list, telling you that you're not her boyfriend anymore. That there's nothing you can do about it. That you're still friends. Turn from her. Never expect a single thing in return. Turn off the radio with a thump when it plays that song that reminds you of her. Or her. Or even her. Play it to yourself when your fists want to punch the wall. Smile and nod when those you hold close offer their warmth. You don't know if they're handing you the truth, or babbling what they think you want to hear. You'll feel like you're only there because you're convenient - someone who'll do things when no one else gives a fuck. Not because you're genuinely wanted. The wrong person in the right place at the right time.

You won't even remember if you love yourself. But remember to write. Carry a red notebook in your backpack. Fill it with your chicken scratch penmanship. You'll hate the cold words that stare at you from the page, or the mocking cursor flashing on the computer screen. They are a twisted mutation of attempted skill. You'll never wear heart-forged pride for anything you do. But you'll know that you hate yourself if you never. Write. At all.



# Helena Dow

## Chronometer

She stands by the mirror  
dissecting the woman crosswise –  
corner to corner.

Red-rimmed eyes narrowed –  
blank.

Mouth pinched.  
Horizontal lines  
show the tag of dashing turns –  
the branded trunk of cattle –

Arms hang loose –  
loomed by veins and patches.  
Her body bare  
in burst-out bumps  
stands rigid,  
static.

A metallic sheet  
posed in dual panic mode –  
A miscast  
of implied anti-thrill  
in the still of the night.

She stands by the mirror  
to hear from the rival's mouth.  
A voice ticks against walls of matter –  
The voice breathing from the back of her brow –  
against the hollow of tomorrow  
in the room where the child sleeps.

She stands beside herself  
detached from body, crown and arms –  
scissors against scalp  
eyes split by glooms  
while auburn curls fall like shavings  
lost for a while  
in the curve of her view.

How fast is the clock in the darkness  
when you ask for redemption?

# Melody Wilkinson

## **Delinquent English Major**

This prose chases me  
off the computer and into the dark house behind me.  
This piece is disturbing the melody in me.  
I don't mind reading about sex  
But this is not what I wanted.  
This prose may give me nightmares  
I will have to blot it out with a picture of flowers or puppies.  
'Desire' and 'Burn' in the same stanza?  
Maybe that's what's good about this poem.  
Damn it  
I like this piece  
it doesn't make me cry without knowing why.  
I can't pay attention with all this rhyming.  
My dislike of this prose indicates  
I may, in fact, be culturally stupid.  
Maybe it's my sex bias?  
This poem makes my feminism feisty  
but maybe I'm doing it wrong.  
This piece confirms  
I should never even try to be a writer with a genius like her out there  
also, I would like to be her friend.  
I really like forgiveness.  
I know I have a Jesus bias but I like it.  
I will be dropping  
more  
necessary  
words in the coming minutes.  
I hope the end is not the truth

or is it a metaphor?  
I like the prose better.

## Lee Kimber

### Who is Nana Kip?

The little girl is six. She stands as close to her mother as she can and stares at the bed, its sheet folded in a strict hospital line across the old woman's chest. There are metal bars sticking up from the other side. The nurse who'd pointed the bed out to the two visitors, had said casually that Mrs Kippenberger had fallen out of it a few nights ago. The girl looks into the nurse's face to see whether she is telling the truth and wonders how an adult, especially an old adult could possibly fall out of bed.

Her curious gaze is just above that of the woman's looking up from the pillow. She sees the pale blue nighty with a string twisted out from under the wrinkled neck. The skin on the woman's arms and hands is stretched over bones white with blurry brown patches. Her hair is spindly. She is gripping the girl's mother's hand.

'Is that you Diana?' The old woman struggles to focus, then she searches the mother's face and fixes on her eyes. Her mouth is mostly open, tongue muscle moving breaking and creating strings of wet. She needs moisture to lubricate her words, they are air which barely reaches the mother although she is bent in close.

'Hello, Nana Kip. Yes, I'm Diana, Rufa's daughter.'

'Ah ... yes.' She's forgotten who Diana is but remembers the name. 'Ah ... yes, Diana.' The eyes close for a moment and pop open again. 'Ah Diana ... and who is this?' The eyes are now on the child who has turned slightly away and is looking down wondering where the woman's slippers are and looks around for a dressing gown – she can't see either.

There is a shriek, 'Where's he going?' The girl jumps and searches the room with startled eyes. There is no one there; the passage separating the lines of beds is empty. Her mother hasn't

turned, she is focussed hard on her grandmother's face, eyes pleading for further signs of recognition.

Suddenly laughter is coming from the same bed where the yell had come from. It sounds wild. The child, eyes closed, moves into her mother and is nearly standing on one of the cream shoes. Her nostrils sting with the smell of urine and disinfectant and there is a faint whiff of stale talcum powder.

The woman has closed her eyes. Has she gone to sleep? She doesn't open them again.

Diana is saying goodbye, her voice heavy. The girl looks into the familiar face, searching for tears because she sounds quivery, but there are none. Diana now stands up straight. She shakes the girl from her coat, catches her hand and leaves.

As they approach the doors at the end of the passage, the little girl looks up again. 'Who is Nana Kip?'

## Her Hands

I watched  
her hands fold the sheet,  
turn its edge over,  
pick at it,  
pull it a little  
this way and that.  
That's what they do,  
the nurse said,  
in their last few days.

I'd watched  
her hands for years,  
rolling jam drops, peanut brownies,  
pressing each ball flat with fork tines,  
handing us the spoons to lick,  
air warm, full with biscuits baking.

I'd watched  
her hands years ago  
fondle my baby brother,  
soap his skin,  
stroke his damp hair,  
brush his warm cheek.  
Her fingers  
gripped for his first step,  
and her hands  
lifting him from his first bike crash.

I'd watched  
her hand  
curled around a smoke  
with blue wisping up  
to the yellowed ceiling.  
I'd seen the ashtray full,  
the other hand holding her head  
weary with the worry of teenagers.

I'd watched  
her hands  
in her garden,  
scratched from thorns,  
nails browned from the soil,  
pruning, pulling carrots, picking fruit,  
taking every flower  
to arrange in our lounge  
on my wedding day.

I watch  
her hands now  
on her last day,  
pinching at the sheet.

I still them with mine -  
they stop.

I am holding both hands -  
she has stopped.

We never held hands.  
I feel I am breaking her rules –  
but can't help it.



# Renée Boyer

## The Scarlet Brocade

*So, Ms Myers, tell us how you came to write “The Scarlet Brocade”?*

Well I believe it’s common knowledge that I prefer to write naked. It’s incredibly freeing and puts me in touch with my... muse.

Sadly, people are very closed-minded and prudish these days, much more so than in the 70s, and it caused me to be evicted from any number of cafes, as well as the public library. Which did make it difficult with Scarlet as I couldn’t get much writing done at home either. Darling Rupert is retired now you see, and the sight of me naked sent him into such paroxysms of lust that it was impossible for me not to tend to the poor boy. My editor told me to ignore him; she may be able to ignore a man sulking about the house with a gigantic erection and a pout, but I most certainly can’t. At first I thought it was excellent research for the intimate scenes in Scarlet, of which you’ll be aware there are scores, but I said to myself, Fenella, the time has come to put pen to paper rather than pen... you get my drift. You’d think I’d be able to sort him out in the mornings and write in the afternoons, but my Rupert is very energetic for a man in his late 60s.

So there I was, with characters and scenes swirling wildly through my brain, but with a concupiscent husband at home, and a trespass order from most of town. I write all my manuscripts longhand, and I did try sneaking in a few sentences while Rupert and I were assuaging his lust, but it was just too hard. So to speak. Oh, I could get the sentences down alright, but it was awfully difficult to decipher them later. That was, in fact, my inspiration for the scene where Charlotte writes her terribly moving letter to Mr Reynolds while on the stagecoach to London, explaining why their love can

never be, but he can't make out what it says and pursues her anyway. As you'll recall, that turned out very well for both of them.

Anyway, given that I write longhand, with no need for power sockets, I finally struck upon the perfect solution. You may be aware that there's a nudist beach not more than 10 miles from here. Do you know it? No? Oh, you really must visit it sometime. I'll confess that sand can be uncomfortable, but a quick dip in the sea washes it out of all the intimate places, which is a rather pleasant sensation. You'll recall the scene where Mrs Banting and her stable boy end up at the seaside? Quite direct inspiration I had for that scene. Lifeguard rather than stable boy of course. Don't mention it to Rupert will you? He's open-minded but of a somewhat jealous disposition.

So that is, in essence, how I wrote *Scarlet*. Nude, on the beach, in longhand in my notebook. I did have a couple of unfortunate sunburn incidents, when I was particularly absorbed in a scene and lost track of the time, but once the peeling was over I was able to sit down again. I engaged a lovely young typist to transcribe the longhand into the word processor - I can't stand the things, but a typed manuscript is a necessity these days, apparently. She did rather excite Rupert, despite being clothed, but as I was free to occupy him it wasn't a problem.

I've just started writing my new novel, *The Salt on his Lips*, but as it's winter I've been having renewed trouble with finding a suitable location. Too cold on the beach of course, and the drop in temperature has not cooled Rupert's ardour in the slightest. However, I believe the trespass orders expire very soon...

## Ars Poetica

Poetry is the soft pink  
inside of your ear,  
the slightly-too-sweet  
of strawberries left out  
on a summer's  
day. Poetry  
needles, burrows its way  
into your bloodstream. It does not  
care about sleep, or meetings, or  
bags with no pens.

Poetry bites, just hard  
enough to break  
the skin.

Poetry tangles itself in  
your fingers, old  
gum stuck under a desk,  
still stringy.  
It arrives when you  
are running, showering,  
fucking, sitting  
an exam.

It wrenches you from  
dreams and demands to be listened to.

It strokes you inside

until you gasp with longed-for  
pleasure,  
then rakes you  
with claws, bone deep.

Poetry is the  
catch in your throat,  
the wobble,  
the water welling unbidden in  
the corner of your eye.  
It is the jolt in  
your stomach that  
liquefies you, and  
the whine of the  
mosquito you can't  
kill.

It is the powder soft scent of a baby's head  
the rough of two-day stubble  
on cotton  
the thick of fresh wet clay.

Poetry whispers, it screams,  
it climbs into your  
ears and dances on your eardrums.

## Alicia Gray

### **The World Is What You See**

On a sunny day with light steps if the pavement is clear, I like to walk with my eyes closed. I pour trust into my feet, spilling it out of the holes where my laces loop. Vision flickers through my lashes. Light blurs and bleeds through the fine hair as I doubt my direction; but my feet know their home.

When I can't trust a reflection or photos for true identity, I like to look at my own face. Alternatively closing each lid, I see my nose from two camera angles. I see the rise of my peach cheekbones. If I stick my tongue out far enough, his little pink head greets me with a surprise of existence.

On a rainy day, when every game is played and every book read, I like to look at the world upside down. My head lolls from the corners of couch cushions. Light-bulbs illuminate the floor and each door frame must be stepped over. A pregnant throb pulsates behind the sockets. If our camera eyes were unaligned by our mind, we would forever be stepping on the ceiling; narrowly avoiding floating off into the sky.

When I wake and shadowed curtains say the day is still arriving, I like to play tricks on my eyes. With a wiggle and flick of the finger, I can't keep up. Lingering lines of where my fingers once were tell me of their motion. But I will never see each step.

When I close my eyes, I like to look at the insides of my eyelids. When the light shines, they glow golden with veins and flesh; but when it is dark, I see pictures. Shape-shifting kaleidoscopes of colour etch spirals through the charged blackness. Sometimes I like to open them, and see how nothing changes.

# Liam Hinton

## **You Do Your Best Theatre Offstage**

Sorry  
She said to me  
I already used all the God I got  
You'd be an animal after the transaction

He was bacteria by wavelength  
I can't cum on his mattress  
Just got the privilege of witnessing you re-enter the atmosphere  
Fourteen dead

She's true white but manually darkened  
Music in disease form  
Yellow shines through  
She's sorry  
to break a butterfly upon a solar eclipse

But you're entitled  
to your raping me back and forth  
Devil in a deck chair  
You're entitled  
to your one once more

Water is forgetting  
I am broken  
And too fucked up to believe in time  
Choke this infant here before me  
Life tossed between three categories

You're entitled  
To your live theatre placebo  
Just a wad of honey that I can't feel

Sorry for all those I have to be  
My androgynous excuse of will  
Therapist in distance

Turn condom inside out  
Brand new

Walk in long hair  
leave short  
She told me it's because I am far less  
atmospheric than my predecessor  
I'm more of a dog person  
Don't shit on the lawn  
Haunches back  
Bark  
Bite  
You're entitled  
to your half of the scraps

## K-t Harrison

### Theoretical Fringe Benefits

I.  
The pages that I write  
My black stories on  
Are all white.  
And when I  
Turn each page,  
I see  
Resistance  
In the white papers  
To soak up my ink taggings  
From the other side

See – here’s me, black as ever  
And just as menacing  
As the beast  
Beauty loved  
And looked for  
Beneath the bed  
Each night...  
To sate a curious appetite

...let us merge  
On the page at least:  
    He iwi tahi tatou?  
    Nah bro’  
I live inside the sentences passed down  
When you gave me your word  
Your honour



Let my people go  
Edward said  
To re-orient towards the reference points of the occident  
See – we got lost on our way  
Along the pathway to the fringe  
To this, to here; senselessly decentered; homeless & demented.

A non-essentialist unity  
Homogenizes me – see  
A commonality – my black face  
Over-written to dislocate  
By one stroke of the goose feather pen  
Hordes displaced to othered space  
Shoved to the string-tied outer apron  
Of the not-negotiable settler nation  
Across a maintained difference  
Of mapped out treacherous seas.  
By  
Foucault's institutional power lines

&

Fanon's wretched fact of my whenua scorched black,  
Where I was left to die  
But did not  
Fall off the edge of the tarnished parchment,  
Tainted at conception a well-conceived deception.  
Learnt instead how to think in ink and bled  
And bled all over that page  
Now read & redressed  
Confiscation compensated.  
"Kia ora for that."

See – we cannot distance ourselves  
Too far from the implications of our histories  
It was,

Not too long ago,  
When,  
At the intertextual frontiers  
Of our black and white beginnings  
When,  
The Cross of good and evil came; and in the name of  
Ruptured harmony and balance:  
    Where Kauri were felled, and now die-back  
    Where water was poisoned, and now poisons  
    Where stoat killed Kiwi  
    And iwi died-out  
Or were supposed to.

Ahi kaa, keepers of the fire  
Kept the embers aglow  
Let's sit down and there we'll toast  
The bread we broke  
And drink the water of life – to life – kia ora koutou katoa.

II

...allow me entry into the institutions of dominant discourse  
And estrange the basis of its authority and identification  
Where my sub-texted sacred is reduced to simulacrum

But, hey ehoa, my treaty partner  
    Take my hand  
    I'll show you how to poi – ay?  
Watch me, see me spiral away,  
From a con-structured narrative centre  
To a thematically, culturally safe one  
I watch; learn, know, perfect  
See – I make myself my own.  
*Nemesis in mimesis.*

## Once Upon a Pretty Girl

There was this girl one time. It was autumn graduation when all the pretty brainy people at the university graduate in something important or another. The girl was very pretty. Pretty blonde hair, pretty blue eyes, a pretty white-skin face made-up with make-up and pretty sparkly earrings dangling from her ears. She wore a pretty short dress and pretty high heeled shoes. She went inside the club with some other pretty brainy people – I knew that from the way they all talked different to me, used big words, and talked them like the Queen does on television.

She was pretty drunk when she came out. She fell over, landed right there in the street. And the other pretty drunk people – her friends, I think – laughed at her, cheered at her, jeered at her, sneered at her. Some peered at her. One leered at her and ran his beery tongue over his ginga-tufted top lip.

“She’s hemo bro,” Adam, my partner on the door, said.

“Call an ambulance,” I said.

Her friends tried to pick her up but she was too drunken floppy and loose limbed to stand and she dropped to the ground and she took some of them with her. And there they all were, limb-entwined, but all their brains combined could not make them stand straight at that time. And they ended up – on the footpath – closer to the gutter than even I’d been despite my growing up far from where they’d ever known. Then the girl started retching, doubling over and clutching at her puku. I had to help her.

I walked over to where she lay, to where her friends knelt around her and gave each other advice about holding her hair-by-Wayne back. Hold her hair back one girl said, it’s by Wayne. Whatever that meant and whoever Wayne was, he couldn’t have helped her then –

but I could.

“Please don’t touch her,” another girl friend said to me.

“Don’t you dare touch her,” a boy shouted at me.

I rolled her on her side and placed her in the recovery position like I’d learned to at staff training. I pulled her dress over her arse; it barely covered her before, now, scrunched up, it bared everything. One of her friends took the scarf from around her own neck and together we draped it over her bottom part. Not to keep her warm, but to keep her from being displayed.

“You, hey you, get your filthy black hands off her. I’ll do you for indecent assault. You all saw him didn’t you? Copping a free white feel aye darkie? Here feel this.”

I stood up. He made a fist, I took a step back, he swung with all the power his face could show. The might behind what he wanted me to feel carried him down to kiss the asphalt walk-way. He raised his bloodied face, and on all fours he howled like a werewolf. He sat with his legs under him, he ripped his shirt off and then he beat at his chest. He howled again. Two constables on the Friday night street beat cuffed him and took him away – to the cells, I think.

“I’ll get you for this Tarzan,” he said.

“Look after your friend,” I said to the girl.

“Come back to the door bro,” Adam said.

By the time the ambos arrived, the girl was sitting up. She’d spewed up and spewed up and spewed up and right there in the gutter was where that sick would stay. Until at four o’clock when the spray from the street cleaning truck would wash the spew away as it did every morning. It seemed that all the gutters in the CBD in those days ran wild with pretty girl spew every Friday night.

The ambos covered her up properly and put her on a gurney. One attendant hopped inside the ambulance to lift it from behind. Just before she disappeared through the door, the folding wheels got stuck. Light from the street-lamp shone on her face, she looked pretty sick. She opened her eyes, she looked at me, and she mouthed thank you. And I wanted that shift to end right then. I wanted to go home. I wanted to be home with my baby girls – to read them

a story; and my wife – to give her the rose I'd bought off Adam's wife. I wanted to love them and for them to love me back. That was a while ago now, but I've never forgotten, thank-you, she said.

\*

You might see me while out clubbing one night. I'd be the other one at the entrance. There's always two of us on the door. Mostly we're big and usually we're dark skinned. I'm the one you flip your ID at, flick your photo at, and flash your face at while you carry on your conversation with your mates. Perhaps you don't see me at all, but I see you. I've always seen you.

You are the girl who wants Manu – because I'm too old – to pose with you while you take a beauty-and-the-beast selfie. You are the boy that calls me hey you. You are the lady who tells me to mind my own effin business when I step between you and the man who I think might hit you. And you are that man who tells me to eff off. You are that woman who tried to squeeze my arse that time, but could only pat it because your hand was too small. And if I wanted, I could have taken that hand and crushed it, twisted your wrist and snapped it but instead I denied you entry because you were intoxicated – and when you called me a monkey, I offered to phone you a taxi – so you could get home safely.

You are the man who misread my name badge and called me Jasey-boy. You are the lady who leant forward so I could see down your dress, the girl who dropped your keys and bent over or squatted to pick them up, so I could see up your dress, you are the girl who called me Honey while you groped at my nuts, the same one I saw at the supermarket – who pushed in front of me at the check-out and laughed about it with the boy whose hand you held.

Maybe you are the boy whose father refused me credit that time, all I wanted was to feed my kids. Maybe you are the woman who taught my daughters how to read, but tried to tell them what to read so I ripped your books up. It might be that you are the lady at the bank who said no to our loan application. Maybe you're the man

who cut our power off. We all do the jobs we get paid to do. But you, you are that pretty girl and if you were my daughter, I would boot your arse.

## R.V. ten Hove

### Fleece

Share this chunk of me.

Yes shear this lamb,  
That underneath  
The white-snow fleece  
You meat the mud-dark beast.

He feasts on malcontentment  
Maggots that bevel  
deep in winter cloaks.

He dregs the wine for clots of blood  
Hid in the magenta fluid.

Yes shear this lamb, revealing  
Coarse hide baldened in pink patches

Where crusted heads of wounds peel  
Places the rider's leather saddle chafed.

The crook'd driver whipped from cratered lips  
The honeyed ooze and drip

Mingle with spittle  
Creaturely mass you collapse  
With the twang of a shaft

Muffled bleet, bleet,  
The thrash of groundless, cloven feet

That knife will not do  
Perhaps one sword  
to sever the neck

Next an axe  
Two pummels to the head  
Render those wormy nerves dead.

Pull those stringy seams free  
Serve them veins on a platter for all to see  
Lying in limpid delicacy.

Taste them  
Spit them up if you must  
Or thrust them through your guts

Devoured or half chewed

Served to my audience  
This chunk of me  
Slathered in snow-white fleece.



# essa ranapiri

## It's Their Wedding Day

Flies buzz  
Cow tail  
Flick the air  
Piss off it's their wedding day

Flags tethered to electric fence  
Trapped in a pen  
Clucking hens oblivious

Celebrate  
Strangers in their very best  
A stream of people  
Trickle into the crowd

Wind into the shallows

Pink flowers dangle over the lip  
Of the glass jar  
Ginger hair and observation  
Clipping the day into  
A photo album

Logs for seats

Generic in their fine attire  
Black suits summer dresses  
Floral alignments  
Autumn is tempted

Leaves let go  
Shiver on new shoes

Quad for drinks  
Liquor store on wheels  
We have to keep hydrated on hot days like these

Plectrum on strings  
Lower tone  
You got me  
The motor hums  
Mop cut short  
Musicians cleaned up

*It would be cool living in that place*

Shaded grass tides  
Languorous blanket  
Brown criss-crossed yellow  
Stag horns protruding  
Bunk beds

Soft ambiance, polite conversation  
*Oh how long has it been*  
*And what have you been up to lately*  
*And that sounds nice*  
Mingled with the wind

Shuffle  
In a tight blue number  
Stubble and nerves  
The bride traditionally late

On time  
Cows hum

Deep throated bass of the milk

Smile wave and turn

Tics

That you've adopted

The eco-system is that fragile

Trees boo and cheer

Or whatever it is trees do

Kids play chase

Through the maze

Of adult bodies

Dream catchers and Chinese lanterns

White sweaty hands ruffle the hair

Part it just right

Enough for the rest of your life

There's no organ playing

Two letters in an equation

Packets of confetti

220SEB

The chariot

In maroon

Veil caught opening the door

Persuade it to run

Discuss the next move

Laugh it out

Slow motion procession

Flower girls then

Brides maids

Then

All stand  
Wind takes the veil  
Trip over words  
Repeat sentimentalities  
And that most human of looks  
A glorious laugh

Staring  
Into such bigness  
Hold hands and  
Take a  
Plunge

The clap of a case  
Fumble  
They fit  
Just right

Sweet as high five  
You may kiss

Sign the register  
Quivering flowers

A do-I-love-you warble over  
Windswept ceremony

The very air shivers with joy  
At something pretty fucking close  
To love

## MAKEDAMNSURE

You wrapped my neck in nylon you found by the rocks at the wharf  
And attached tiny shells  
Sliding each one into place  
Naturally I showed my parents  
Who didn't know what to think of you

You bring down a forest in your attempts  
To share your feelings  
*I like you*  
Is a story you never cease to illustrate  
With the frame of your hazel eyes  
Trying to trap a memory of me

You would spend each and every recess  
Spying on me  
Enlisting others into your  
*I-just-want-to-play-with-yoyos*  
Scheme

Checking the mail box is a habit  
I know you took from me  
Pulling scrunched up circulars  
Through the slot

And you scared me when you took your  
Hollow death threat  
From a *Taking Back Sunday* song  
*You want to break me down?*

My parents took it a lot more seriously than I did.

The school counsellor  
Gave you a restraining order  
Despite the fact  
Every single class we took was the same

Your heart bled on your sleeve  
And it became increasingly hard to avoid  
The arterial spray  
Bursting  
Over the bush where you hid your  
Pencil case for a laugh

For three years I had to survive  
Under the barrage of your misplaced  
Love

But I did  
And I hope  
I  
Hope  
Eight years from now  
The guilt still weighs you down  
Enough to write a poem about it

# Katarina Barker

## Before I Left

I'm standing next to my best friend. This is the only photo I don't hate because my face isn't pale like it is in the others. Looking back, I realise I probably should have put in some kind of effort, bought my own shade of foundation and sloped that on my face instead of digging out a forgotten bottle from under my friend's sink. The only thing I'm proud of is my dress: pink lace and perfect.

Feet throbbing in my glittering Cinderella heels, pretending not to feel bad that my dad would rather watch the cricket than see me at my high school formal, I fall down into the ugly limo I paid fifty two dollars for and look around at the people next to me. *I don't like any of you but I'm going to smile anyway.*

Stepping onto the yellow-tinged pavement outside the Stamford Plaza I notice three year eleven film and television students standing behind a massive camera resting on a massive tripod. *Well, that's going to be HD as fuck.* Sometimes I watch back the three second slow-motion clip that they played at my graduation, but I don't think much other than the fact that we all look seventeen and awkward.

Waiting for my best friend to arrive with the annoying boy she doesn't like but can't say no to, I look across Edward Street and notice the Brisbane River. It's been ten months since it all started but Southbank's beaches are still drained, parts of the city still smells like sewage and damp soil and the image of the kid, clinging to the power pole while the muddy waters run over him, is still stuck in a cave, deep in my head.

I'm sixteen and watch the news for fun. All of my friends think it's weird but they don't complain when they need the answer to a random current affairs fact and I'm the only one that knows it. I don't remember much now but I remember it raining. I remember

the word ‘inundated.’ “*But in all seriousness though, Brenna, can’t they come up with another word? They’re supposed to be journalists. ‘Inundated’. ‘Inundated’. ‘Inundated’. We get it; all of Queensland is fucking soaked.*” My friend frowns, her eyes focused on the T.V. She doesn’t say anything.

Maybe I’m too detached. I don’t cry at sob-stories like my mum. If a friend asks if she looks bad in her jeans and I think she does, I tell her. I don’t see the point in getting upset if it isn’t necessary. But then they release the Wivenhoe dam.

Schools are closed and people die. Everyone’s hysterical and mad. Why would they build a city in an area they were warned could flood? Why did they not see the flash-flood in Toowoomba coming? What the hell was the government doing? There are television specials demanding answers to all the big questions. I’m interested but not upset. It’s like I said, I don’t remember much other than the rain. And the boy.

I’m sitting on my couch eating marmite toast – six pieces even though I know I’m going to be yelled at for finishing all the bread. I accidentally knock the remote and the channel changes. There’s a Queensland 7NEWS presenter talking about the flood. Her voice is loud and forceful and they cut to footage of the boy, seven or eight, to support what she’s saying. My mind slows down. His eyes are shut and I can hear him screaming over the sound of the water around him. I move closer to the T.V, quiet.

At school the next day we have a moment of silence. I look over at my teacher. He’s been my teacher since I was fourteen. His eyes are red and he’s digging his nails into his palms. I hear the boy, crying, screaming, muffled as he chokes on the water. I feel my eyes start to sting and my best friend notices. She wraps her arm around my waist.

It’s the end of the night and I’m standing in line to get on the bus for the mystery bus tour. I can’t believe we all made it. I focus my eyes on the lights behind the police officer breath-testing each person as they step onto the bus. I clutch my best friend’s hand. A strange sadness hits my chest. I can’t see it in the dark but I imagine the river



and remember all the things it's been my backdrop to: waiting three hours to see the Queen and only seeing the top of her hat, my first Riverfire where I couldn't keep it together and cried over the boy I now feel nothing for, the party on the grass with the balloons and streamers thrown carelessly into the trees, and the flood.

Only, it wasn't a backdrop to the flood – it was the main character.

On the bus, I lift my head when I get to the top of the stairs. Two people are sleeping, the back half's singing, everyone else is laughing. They all look so pretty with their faded make-up and styled hair. I shrug my shoulders. I don't like any of you but I do love all of you. Turns out I'm kind of sad I have to leave. I cling tighter to my best friend's hand. Four years down, two days to go.

# Fabian Tipene

## Yellow-Gap-Grin

Who put you up to it?  
Is your laugh a nervous or defiant one?  
Either way, we all managed to inherit it  
Broad and devoid of fucks  
Breath expelled like chips in a game of craps  
Did they give you the suit?  
So we could give a face to your savagery  
Folded in bush of green and brown  
The bowler capping your head  
Like a blunt bullet at the end of a shell  
You could fall asleep  
Inside the barrel of a gun, I bet  
More than one set of lines  
Cut into your face like the spinal grooves  
Of cabbage tree leaves  
Side by side with the gutters  
That time etched into your collagen  
I'd wager you were a survivor  
Because you should have been sinking  
Like a pipi escaping hungry hands  
But you didn't  
you kept  
fucking  
smiling  
Because a walk down a trail of tears  
Don't mean shit to you, brother

# Alison Robertson

## Percussion

My Chinese neighbour plays a mean marimba  
like sunlight shafting through trees  
woody and bright  
a giant xylophone  
down in his basement with his mallet  
hitting the smooth wood, making sweet sounds  
when he should be in a concert hall bowing  
to loud applause.  
Percussion is my life he says  
in his shabby English  
But no orchestra here seem  
to want me.

# Hunter Martoncik

## Blue

She puts the alcohol to her lips. Each sip stitching her insides. Nylon twists in and out of her heart, trailing down between her lungs. Yanking tight so that each part works properly again.

The nylon wraps around her toes and tugs her to the shore. She spends her nights here. The cold sand cutting into her feet.

Along the watery path of the ocean, the stars reflect up at her face. Two infinities, two wonders. She is sandwiched between the immensity of both.

She sleeps fast, lying on her hands from the weight of it all. No one can answer the questions on her mind. She walks with her face to the ground, hoping no one will ask. It is a curse, one that she loves.

Along the shore, a paddle crab grabs ahold of her pinky toe. She sits as the tide comes in, slowly sucking the blood from her.

She grows empty under the sun. She closes her eyes and rubs them with her small fists. She rubs and rubs until lights twinkle beneath her eyelids, making her own starry night.

One night her parents drove her away from her watery home. She pressed her head hard against the window of the car. Squinting her eyes just enough to stretch the street lights into the sky. Her faith crumbling as the lights did not live up to the stars.

The sand eventually escaped the cracks between her toes. The salt washed out of her long hair. She feared she would grow too big, no longer sandwiched between her two great loves.

She soaks her head until the hair turns white. At the tips she colors it blue. She lives trapped in her head between the ocean and the stars.

During the day she has forgotten the beauty of her loves. Instead

she rubs joints between her fingers. A different set of stars plague her mind now. Instead of paddle crabs, she watches the blade slowly draw blood from her arm. The water in the bathtub draining her, turning the water pink. No stars, no sand.

She spends her nights here.

# Conor Maxwell

## Carmen Sandiego

Let's talk a lot. Let's make talking an important part of our daily routines. Let's wake each other up in the morning and prevent each other from going to sleep at night with our embarrassingly cute texts. When we fall asleep in Literary Theory and our friends ask what kept us up all night, I'll say that I was partying and blazing it 4/20 and that sleep is for the weak. You'll probably tell your friends some version of the truth, because girls are allowed to talk about that stuff without getting ridiculed. Let me be the reason you spend all day with your eyes on your study notes, your hand in your pocket and your attention firmly on thoughts of me. I'll let you be the reason I smile like an idiot every time you light up my phone. Again, I'll probably blame that smile on illegal substances, because having a crush is 'so high school' and these days it's all about finding love in Bar 101 and having a brief, drunken sexual relationship, that ends when she discovers you didn't swipe right that time you came across her Tinder profile. You know how it is. Let's talk about everything and when we've done that, let's talk about nothing. It's not what you say but the fact you're saying it that makes me like you. But what you say does count as well, because you're smooth as hell and you make me feel special. Consider me well and truly wooed.

Let's hang out on the couch and watch movies. We have very different tastes, but it doesn't matter. I argue with my friends about my favourite films for hours until they accept my opinion as law, but I'll spare you that experience. You're hot and I'm into you, so as long as you appreciate *The Dark Knight* at least half as much as I do, I'll still let you touch my body. I'll even let you do it if you like *Twilight*, but I'll probably feel dirty afterwards. Don't put on *Shutter Island*, *Inception* or any movie that requires concentration, because

my attention is going to be elsewhere. And definitely nothing with subtitles. Don't make me read tiny words on the screen when I'd rather be reading you. Let's cuddle during the movie. Cuddling is mandatory, and you know that, 'cos if you weren't a cuddler then we wouldn't be together. I can forgive most movie tastes, but non-cuddlers are not allowed in my house.

Let's kiss. Let's kiss again after we're done with the first kiss. Hell, let's just full-on make out. Kissing is great and any couple who aren't kissing every chance they get are missing out. Let's go out to dinner or to the movies and suck face with only minimal regard for those around us. They can't complain about the noise if they're slurping their Coke or making a fuckin' mess of their chicken carbonara. You know that I only give other people grief for PDA when I'm not committing that heinous offense myself. People will call me a hypocrite, but mackin' on you tastes better than being "appropriate" feels. Let's communicate with our mouths in a way that isn't talking. Then, let's forget that I said that last part, because I don't think there's ever been a less sexy way to describe kissing. It's okay, I know you like me for my succulent hair and not my brains, so you'll be forever forgiving the stupid things I say.

When the time's right, let's have sex. Let's not rush it because we have all the time in the world. I don't have a secret girlfriend and we don't have to worry about your parents walking in, because they've gone out to dinner at The Cook and you locked the door. You did lock the door, right? It's just you and me, for as long as we want. Let's not just fuck, let's make love. I know 'make love' sounds cheesy, lofty and kind of impersonal, but there is a real difference between the two. Let's not skip the foreplay, because I've been told I'm really good at that. Don't worry about me for this bit- right now I'm all about pleasing you. Of course, I have an ulterior motive. If the sex is anything less than perfect on our first time together, at least we can say the foreplay rocked. Let me work out your rhythm and find out what you like. Let's take our time because you and I will have many, many more times like this, and some things can wait until another day. Let's have awkward, messy, clumsy, awesome

sex. Let's lie there; sweating, breathing, drowned in our thoughts and feelings. And lying there, together, staring into each other's eyes, let's say it.

Let's always remember this moment. The moment that changed us for good. Let this be the climax of our origin story. The instant that we knew that we were in this together, forever. When our kids are old enough let's tell them the story of how we met in a Comedy lecture and bonded over our mutual dislike of Jane Austen. How we grew closer by the day as we learned we had so much more in common than we thought. I helped you learn the difference between colons and semicolons, and you helped me learn how to accept compliments and be less self-conscious about my stupid glasses. You told me later that you thought I had always seemed bright, cheerful and a little bit cocky, but you didn't know me before. You couldn't know just how much you changed me. Let's tell our children about our accidental first date, when our friends set us up without our knowledge, how we realised that maybe they had seen something between us that we hadn't noticed ourselves. Let's tell them all about our relationship, skipping the sex parts because that's not appropriate and I'm not Ted Mosby. Let's draw them in and hit them with the climax. That moment we will always remember. The moment I said "I love you", and you said "I love you, too." Let's tell them about the moment we started loving each other, and never stopped.



## Jane Forkert

### **Should I tell you that you have your cardy on inside out?**

I wander around the tables, looking  
for my own space. The stack room  
is full, I was hoping for quiet, but  
you, you and your pupil  
don't know the rules.

Your head is forward,  
a razor-cut fringe shields a razor-sharp stare.  
Linguistic lines fly toward  
a far away dialect,  
causing thick brows to close  
around foreign fingers.

Legs entwine,  
foot tapping in time with your desire  
to jump further than the language barrier.  
More than the carpet burns as you rise.  
You say you have walked here,  
he replies he has a car.

Hands blur,  
the zip of your bag  
nags the unanswered question.  
His chair glides smoothly over your intentions.

Arms reach,  
stripping bare the chairs,  
revealing the promise of

togetherness in a small space.

Soles slide,  
spaces widen  
to his step,  
and close  
with your breath.

Yes, it's parked at home in the garage.  
Should I tell you that you have your cardy on inside out?

# James Warner

## Scratching Memories

I remember  
the salt and sand on mustard coloured shores  
superman capes  
yummy strawberry dreams  
I stepped on a hedgehog

I remember  
cloudless skies on land that shook  
staple bombs  
disrupting the brown murky depths  
summer splashing away days

I remember  
crying white lightning and freezing hands  
bronze medal moments  
chewed and lost  
never to catch my mother's warm blue gaze

I remember  
yellow nicotine fingers with a red faced fuse  
ears pricked and wild eyes  
wait to snap and demean  
my example of a man

I remember  
legless daddy and muddy pants  
alcohol breath  
slurred scarlet wine lies, stained white shirt

my example of a man

I remember  
amongst fog and chaos on a silent hill  
scratched on the stone walls of nothing  
buried in the colours of the now

# Brittany Rose

## Parachutes and Daisies

A black-haired girl and her blond brother  
under the hand-built table.  
Beneath S P A C E D L E T T E R S  
a voided love note  
a red Crayola heart.

Net curtains  
white,  
dance with flecks  
of dust, and skin.  
Billow, drift, waft  
in the yellow air.  
Wooden sills and  
golden latches.

I walk down the hallway,  
past the room  
where my sister sleeps  
with the bassinet and  
rose pinstripe paper.

I walk past the Roman blind,  
with the braided cord  
handcrafted by my mother.

I walk to the big room where  
my brother is busy.  
He ties knots.

Sweaters

in knots.

Ribbons

in knots.

Trousers

in knots.

Knotted doorknobs,

locked in knots.

Yellow earmuffs & plastic parachutes.

The little girl and her blond brother,

leap

from the double doors,

to the prickle patch.

In hand-me-down shoes, my sister slips.

Her teeth

split

her bottom lip.

The chainsaw rips

the hedged edge,

and shreds

kowhai confetti.

The scarlet

sun

sets

into the lake.

Water-

colour spills, and

eats

Ruapehu's pencil edge.

Now

the house is smeared  
with primary yellow paint.  
A fucking kayak on the wall  
in the room where I  
pirouette around my sister.

I click through the photos and see my brother  
collide with timber, decked,  
when he jumps from the double doors  
with plastic bags  
looped  
around his shoulders.

## Jeanie Richards

### Today

Today I feel like the torn off corner  
of a chocolate block wrapper.  
The ripped strip  
that ends up on the floor  
stuck to the bottom of your shoes  
or under the cupboard door  
swept up with other dust and cat hair.  
The piece of shit the vacuum won't pick up  
and if it does, blocks the hose.  
The ashtray full of late night butts  
and thick yellow toenail clippings.

I shuffle around, disordered metre.  
Open the wardrobe to look for  
the black clothes I'll need for the next three days.

There is no shortage of options.

Pull out the felt covered coat hanger for my 'best blacks,'  
the ones I'll wear on the last day.  
Close the wardrobe  
...later...later...

Shuffle back to the lounge room  
where the cats are curled up on the mattress  
you were on when the ambulance arrived.  
One has its head on your beanie  
purring loudly, waiting for the usual pat.

He'll be waiting a while...



# Hamish Ansley

## **This is your brain on depression**

Wake up.

Blink yourself back to life and for the first slow beats of morning feel hopeful.

Today is the day.

Yes.

Finally.

You'll start to feel better.

Crowbar yourself out of bed and pray that this feeling doesn't fall to the floor like the flanges of pyjama bottoms twisted around your knees.

Stir this feeling into your morning coffee and drink it down. Every last gulp.

Make sure it's by your side when you lock the door. Don't leave it at home in your empty house to die slowly like a potted plant.

Hold it and use it but make it last. This feeling that exists because of the drugs.

Venla-this. Fluoxi-whatever.

You've been on so many that the names no longer mean anything. The syllables click on your tongue like poprocks. Like useless phrases of some foreign language.

But the doctor persists. Signs you another prescription with his toddler-doodle scrawl. His public bathroom scribble that wouldn't look out of place on the same wall as a phone number and a crude drawing of a cock.

How appropriate when your brain feels like a toilet. Full of all the shit of the world and there's piss up the walls and the sink you hope to wash your hands in is hanging broken.

But the language you use to describe this to the doctor is more

polite. Like the phone manner of the receptionist you mimic every time you call to make another appointment.

Another appointment because the drugs aren't working. Another prescription for something new, folded in a little leaflet about possible side effects.

Every time you sit in the waiting room with the part of you that really wants the doctor to help eroded just a little bit more.

Every time you sit there with all the real sick people. You're a fraud. You're not bleeding from the side of your head or honking seven shades of mucus into a handkerchief. Not blowing chunks into a desperately undersized vomit cup.

You don't have genital warts, you're not a baby with a fever, you're not wheezing from behind an oxygen mask, and you don't have bowel cancer.

You've never even broken a bone.

Your illness is inside your head and you're sure the doctor thinks it's hysterical. That you're just making this shit up because your mother didn't love you or you don't get enough attention or something.

You're sure he rolls his eyes every time your name comes up on his schedule and says:

– Ugh. Not you again.

And at least once a day you think you are full of shit.

You don't need drugs.

You don't need someone to save you. You need to snap the fuck out of this and get on with your life. But you won't because you love this really.

Love wallowing in whatever black ceaseless inner turmoil you're pretending is going on inside your brain.

It's comfortable down here, in the make-believe pit of despair with everyone shitting on you from above.

It means you don't have to try and not trying means not failing.

But then you tell yourself no.

No way. No fucking way.

You know how you feel and this is not some made up, phony

illness.

You wouldn't endure this. Sitting across from some poor bastard in a plaster exoskeleton as he tries to scratch an itch beneath his cast with a pencil.

Some guy with a nut allergy, the avalanche of his swollen brow caving in on his face and his hands red and craggy like yams.

You wouldn't keep taking the drugs if this wasn't real.

And you do. You take them every day and every day you wake with the same forlorn hope that.

Yes.

Finally.

You'll start to feel better.

The same little embers of optimism. You tell yourself it's up to you to blow them into roaring flame.

The drugs will only do so much.

And your psychologist latches onto this. This glowing-ember-stroke-roaring-flame imagery that you absent-mindedly brought up in one of your sessions to keep things moving and to keep your psychologist from looking at you looking at the floor.

He latches onto this image and he tells you to keep visualising it. To visualise situations in which you felt high and strong and confident.

He tells you to distil that feeling and carry it around with you in your daily life so you can conjure it up when you need it. Pull it out of your sleeve like a TV magician would a bunch of flowers.

And it works. For a while it works and you can trick your brain into thinking that everything is ok and you're healed.

It works until you start to focus on that word. Trick.

Trick.

Trick.

It's all a trick. You're not really fixing the problem, just pretending it isn't there. Like plugging a leak with WeetBix.

A film isn't real, merely a representation of reality. The people and the scenery aren't real. They're actors and it's a set and you're no better.

You're an actor on a set.

The set of your life.

This is your life.

This is your brain on depression.

The drugs are a trick too. They're in your system now and working on your body. More than any other part of you. The act of putting something apparently medicinal into your body makes you feel hopeful that something real might happen. That you might suddenly find the toggle that inflates your life vest, and you'll float to the surface.

But all you're really getting is side effects.

First it's the headache.

The kind of headache that rakes the back of your skull and turns every pulse of blood in your temples into a pervasive night club subwoofer thump.

Every time you blink your eyelids set off mini sonic booms.

Then it's the vertigo.

Which leads to nausea.

Muscle weakness.

Sweating. Your bed sheets stick to the small of your back.

Dry mouth. All the moisture that should be here has migrated to your back and your throat is welded shut. You couldn't seal an envelope if you tried.

That leaflet the doctor gave you with the list of side effects. You might as well punch two holes in it and wear it as a vest.

You can't even beat off. That's been taken away too.

All you want to do is shoot your goo. Distract yourself from your rollercoaster, rodeo horse brain.

Just a single white healing moment of release from it all.

But it never happens.

It's been taken away and replaced with pain.

Everything has been replaced with pain.

Your fleshy blood-filled column taunts you from between your thighs. A proud soldier ready for action.

But nothing.

Like holding a beach ball underwater. You think you've done it.  
You think you've succeeded.

You think finally.

Yes.

Today is the day.

But it gets away and leaves you with nothing. Just pain.

No sweet release.

No thundering, thigh rattling, aching deliverance.

The bath towel. The shower drain. The wadded tissue. They've  
all become strangers to your precious fluid and witness to your pain.

Everything has been replaced with pain. Hideous black unending  
bastard fucking pain.

And you think I'm so.

Tired.

So fucking.

Tired. And I want this to stop.

I want everything to stop.

Wake up.

Blink yourself to life. Or some approximation of it. Some  
water-colour version of it.

Crowbar yourself out of bed and for the first slow beats of  
morning feel.

Nothing.

## Maryana Garcia

### Return to Sender (or To Me)

If I close my eyes I can still see her –  
My Grandma – making words.  
She liked sitting in sunny spaces,  
Soaking up the light between lines.  
I loved watching her pepper paper with ink  
‘Til there were hardly any blanks left.  
She’d let me draw the same little circles  
Over and over, until they were  
Pools of cold wet dark,  
Like reverse black holes that  
Ate things up by spreading out  
Instead of sucking in.  
Simple, deep, and dark:  
That is how words used to look  
To me.

If I cover my ears I can still hear her –  
My Grandma – making words.  
She liked beating out an ivory acoustic.  
And I loved her typewriter rhythm...  
Tack, tack, tickitty tack, ting!  
Slick, roll back, click, repeat...  
All to the thrumming bass  
Of swirling electric fans.  
She’d let wide-eyed little me  
Lean in so close I could hear her pen  
Scratching the soft white,  
Loud against our thinking.

Strong, clean, and sharp:  
That is how words used to sound  
To me.

I've since discovered  
The symphonics of words;  
Listened for trills and plosives,  
Learned the rules of lexical stress,  
Soaked in the subtle tints and shades,  
Until my stare was saturated.  
Until I couldn't see the logos for the font.  
Mixing the texture in the typeface,  
I got lost in the typography.  
Then I started to wonder...  
In our always search for more,  
How many times do we  
Find messages in sparkled glass  
Only to stamp them with  
Return to sender?

My Grandma still uses a typewriter.  
The same ivory tick-tacking treasure  
That I loved on first sound.  
It's just a little slower now –  
The letters take a while in coming,  
Their impact is softer, harder to see.  
And sometimes, if you lean in close,  
You can hear its bones strain to catch.  
But her pen is still going strong.  
She shoots me long stories  
With hardly any blanks  
On barely-there thin copy paper  
That crinkles and smells like home.

And I will always need to write back.

My story is a little shorter.  
There will be blanks by the hundreds  
Because I'm still spreading out.

I'm still wide-eyed leaning in.



# Shelby Managh

## The Body Is

The body is  
a lifetime  
of spinning cogs  
ticking arrows  
moves at half speed  
while her arm reaches for me  
but I am too slow.

The body is  
a sheet of thin ice  
bracing for impact  
hitting the ground before  
I can get a solid grip.

The body is  
held together with super glue  
a bag of skin  
with the weight of  
shadows and keys

The body is  
late nights and  
half cured cancer  
the phone that rings  
at 4 am  
I bury into  
my sheets  
and wait for the moment

I can give my pain a 10  
and let my body lie.

## Goodbye

As a child I wore goodbyes  
to hold me in slow motion  
so that tears would out run me.

I couldn't understand  
the function of seven little letters.  
But without them I couldn't breathe.

With goodbye came the loneliness  
a monster of hands and gestures.

Goodbye doesn't mean see you later.  
It doesn't have a happy ending.

Goodbye is stunting the sunlight as it stalks clouds,  
And pulling the shades on your dress  
Riddled with mud fights and daisy chains.

It is the dark horse that charges  
my dreams, the hooded rider

that carves out the last glance

# Te Rina Ransfield

## Before the Battle Begins

The bell rings, a chill is swept across the sacred ground of Tu Te Ao Marae. A call is sent and in rolls the blood of a thousand years. Heads are bowed in silence and up rise 50 staunch hands. “He hōnore he korōria he maungarongo ki te whenua he whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa, Āmine.” A quiet like no other fills the whare, a holy presence embraces my bones. Such a voice demands all ears, demands all focus and all spirit. Te reo o te rangatira, te pou. The voice of Te Kāhautu, of Uncle Dudu. He lays his karakia upon us and in that moment we are a whole spirit, we are united and we are one. We are Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti.

As the spiritual dust settles, the call is given “On the floor!” With a quick breath of release the rows fill one by one; one by one jandals are carelessly flung against walls. One by one poi begin to flutter and solidarity becomes unveiled. Deep strums of guitar lead the way and harmonic voices quickly fill the wharekai. Bad acoustics disguise the guitar’s beat as the sound bashes walls and explodes with a force so overbearing it echoes in my ears. In that moment we are a whole spirit, united, one. We are Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti.

Hours pass, puku tremble. Ringawera are preparing a kai that could easily feed a platoon of men returning from world war. Delectable scents of sweetcorn swirl and swipe past the nostrils of the roopu. Eyes begin to brighten and lips are licked, awaiting practise to be stopped just a few hours so the widening gap in stomachs can be filled. Over and over lines are sung, replaying in their head a voice: “One more time pleeeeeease... I’m staaaaaarving!” At last, the table is tapped with a knife, heads are bowed and the buffet begins. In that moment we are whole, united and one. Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti: that’s who we are.

One last run through of the waiata as moonlight caresses the Paa. Countless hours spent to perfect a mere 30 minute stand. Passion drips from faces, hands swipe across foreheads and then down the side of shorts. The men are shadowed outside as the haka is boomed from the Atea. Tongues are out, eyes are wide and feet pound the ground in repetitive beat as if Ruaumoko has awoken ready to engulf anyone who dares challenge their mana. The women are just as staunch. Their poi become heavy and their wrists become weak but they carry on, knowing that perfection is the only way they can rest their tired bodies. Unruly hair swallows faces and sticky feet are screaming to be washed. As night grows darker so too do the eyes, a long day soon turns into long night. In that moment we are a whole spirit. We are united. We are one. We are Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti.

Forty exhausted faces pace to the shower and wash the sweat from aching bodies. One more smoke and cup of tea before they go to rest, waiting to be drilled again tomorrow. Once again the bell rings, a chill sweeps across the sacred ground of Tu Te Ao Marae. A call is sent and in rolls the blood, a thousand years. Heads bow in silence. Up rise 50 staunch hands. “He hōnore he korōria he maungarongo ki te whenua he whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa, Āmine.” A quiet like no other, a holy presence, has filled the whare and my bones. Such a voice demands all ears, demands all focus and all spirit. Te reo o te rangatira, te pou. The voice of Te Kāhautu, of Uncle Dudu. We are all under his watchful eye. He lays his karakia upon us and in that moment we are a whole spirit, we are united and we are one. We are Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti.

Pomarie.

# Rachael Elliott

## Mother's Garage Cleanout

The first box smells sweeter than wet newspaper  
drag it under the light  
earwigs crouch  
top layer of cardboard peels off  
like skin  
ridges soften underneath  
old magazines eaten  
by acidic snails  
frame a self in pink  
sealed sections  
how to keep a man happy  
the word 'breathe'  
looks wrong  
I don't remember how  
to stare at a mirror in a dark room  
trying not to pick pimples

The second box flies into my hands  
I cannot see over its lightness  
friends for every year, louder  
lie over each other  
brown the shade of 16  
teeth soft,  
still  
felt  
white of 4 worn into grey freckles of 9  
but vivid eyebrows are permanent  
small Dalmatians

corners missing  
I remember the price of everything  
close the lid  
write “to go”

The third box opens  
on a field of fleece  
unpeel its membrane  
for a frog, cool in my hand  
as I crouch in the pool  
fish flicking my calves  
porcelain chips fall and click each other  
at the bottom of the box  
stroke presents from women  
I cannot name  
but every time I cry  
I smell their lavender shoulders  
I set aside my first yellow fence  
two locked diaries to break into  
handmade denim pencil case  
red zip for keeping  
I leave the snakeskin behind  
he can't find his tail  
for eating

I feed the boxes left behind  
into the fire  
of the rusted barrel  
only one translucent container  
to fill  
magazines melt from my eyes  
the ash of my childhood  
covers everything  
I am grey

but shoots of green  
peep through



## Nailed

I bend backward  
break  
below the quick  
and blood becomes my hair

I clip myself  
on your doors  
bags  
and broken locks

I paint myself  
to blend a coloured mask  
to hide beneath

I file myself  
down  
in the bottom drawer  
under k

I hoard  
pieces of my day  
around me  
to pack the hollow I hide

I want to sink into your skin  
pool blood there  
stain myself red  
ready

re-do  
start over  
with ice water

to make me set  
concrete  
so you can't chip  
at what I have left

# Carmen Penny

## **The Beginning**

They exchange high fives with him  
while my stomach turns.  
It wasn't what I expected at all.  
Nobody told me it wasn't normal to cry.

They brush against me  
and comment on the softness of my skin.  
I don't mention the water running cold as I scrub till I'm raw.  
He still smells of dollar cologne and aftershave.  
My flesh is decorated red and purple.  
Nobody told me I couldn't cut away the feeling of his hands.

# Hannah Dewhurst

## **Looking for Hannah Leigh** *(after Iain Sharp)*

Hannah Leigh is a label hand-stitched into a baby's face  
Hannah Leigh is a collection of glass jars filled with sand

Hannah Leigh is a high, hollow ring  
The afterthought of a gunshot

Hannah Leigh is the middle seat of a patched up grey couch  
Hannah Leigh is thirteen cinnamon quills propped against misted  
glass

A piled wall surrounds Hannah Leigh  
Stones, driftwood and rusted wire  
Where all the doors are mirrors

Hannah Leigh is a tangle of red spattered ivy  
Hannah Leigh is a dust drowned bible

No wax-eyed masks  
Or copper pyres

Hannah Leigh is the child off chasing butterflies  
While others sit and draw them

## Beth Pearsall-Peters

### **The Grandmother Speaks**

I was only a baby when I first saw her. Lying in my cot, the late morning sun poking through the slats. My colourful camel mobile spun in the breeze above my head. A lone fly buzzed. It was just a flash of lank grey hair hanging like curtains, half-heartedly thrown open across her face. She had chocolate eyes. I wanted to follow her then. But I didn't know how to walk.

My eyes were bright blue when I was born and I came out with them open, staring. I learned to talk before I could walk and my mother enjoyed the short time before I caught at her heels and chatted endlessly. She would leave me talking or humming to myself in the living room, on a sheep skin, while she went about her day. As if overnight my eyes went a deep brown. Sometime around my second birthday. And I saw the old woman again. Now I could walk and I followed her into the garden. It was raining. She dug a hole at the end of a row of silverbeet and buried a softly looped coil of bright red hair. The colour of a star fish I found under a rock at the beach. She left on a bicycle far too small for her. It was pink with a white banana seat and rusted bolts where the training wheels used to be.

I was five when I learned to ride a bike. My father pretending to hold the back of the seat so I felt safe. I practiced on my grandparents' driveway under the dappled sunlight of the arch made by trees that had grown together. I saw the old woman and peddled after her along the street. She was leaving a trail of salt water that dried into crystals on the pavement. She turned the corner in front of me and by the time I got there she was gone. I saw something glint in the sun next to my right foot. I leaned over and picked up a salt encrusted compass. It had a solid bronze base that sat with a comfortable weight in my hand. The numbers were worn off the

circle that spun when I nudged it.

I was fifteen with golden locks down to the small of my back. I decided to soak them in henna and turn them into flames that licked my cheeks and clashed wonderfully with my favourite rainbow tied-died dress. I could run fast but not fast enough to catch her. I ran through the fields and rolling hills that spilled onto the beach and disappeared into the ocean. Like her. I just wanted to grab her elephant skin elbow and hold her still long enough to ask her why she had been riding my bike. But all she left was a puddle of blood and tears and a hospital band.

I told everyone I was afraid of flying. But not of the sea. The liquid mountains grey and angry against the firmament. The stars stretched taut across the black ceiling. I was twenty three and invincible. I didn't see her out there in the rain tossed sky or the finger painted dawn, but I swam with her in my dreams. The mother had chocolate eyes and I followed her without thinking. I would log our heading from the needle floating in the compass and calculate our position every three hours, marking the chart with a small grey pencil cross. Slowly but surely I inched my way home.

I tried to have a baby. My body ached every month and I cried. I tried to accept that this was the lot life had handed me. That I could be happy and fill my life with other things. Hobbies. I tried Zumba, rock climbing and yoga. I tried painting, taking photographs and writing poetry. I went to counselling and thought about adopting. Everywhere I looked were swollen bellies and soft breasted mothers. The babies crying on the bus echoed my own despair. I saw her when I had a needle in my arm. Sucking blood to test for god knows what this time. She was wearing white and blended in with the walls of the ward, her skin tallow under the fluorescent lights. I could only follow her with my eyes. She left the smell of onions and lemongrass frying in hot oil, with fish. Of hot streets teeming with rats and freshly squeezed lime juice. The nurse brought me a small wreath of yellow flowers. Their delicate scent mingled with the salt tang of sweat and hard earned luck.

I moved to Thailand. I meditated. The crowded streets calmed

me and the luxurious quiet gold of the temples eased the clamps on my heart. I wore white cotton to combat the heat and keep the mosquitoes at bay. One day I caught myself reflected in a window full of bright fabric. My grey hair, haphazard curtains drawn. My chocolate eyes with their smiling crow's feet looked back. I saw the old woman, bent, a brass coin falling from her fingertips into the outstretched hands of a saffron monk. I approached slowly, never taking my eyes from the soft curve of her cheek. I tucked my fingers into her elbow and slid my hand down the inside of her arm. I curled my fingers around her palm and without looking, knew the lines there were identical to mine.

## How to remember dreams

There are two boats.  
Reflections sitting in still water.  
A woman in a blue dress  
leans over a cooking pot.  
Thin sticks hold a thatched triangle over her head.  
Floating, her life contained in the curve of a wooden moon  
I cannot see her face.

A boy stands at the bow with a dripping rope,  
considering the progress of the faded river.  
Blue blotches of jungle balanced on the point  
of his white, wide brimmed hat.

A smaller moon cradles two men.  
One working a long pole, holding the depths  
easing the crescent through a liquid sky.  
The other is watching ripples stroke  
the skin of the river.

It is silent.  
No birds sing or shuffle the palm trees.  
No monkeys swing in the fruit filled canopy.  
No smoke rises from the solitary hut  
that squats in the mud  
of the far bank.

The further I travel, the less I can see.



## Contributors' Notes

**Dr Tracey Slaughter** lectures in Creative Writing in the English Programme at the University of Waikato. Her short story 'scenes of a long term nature' won the Bridport Prize 2014 and she is the 2015 winner of the *Landfall* Essay Competition. Her novella *The Longest Drink in Town* was published in 2015 by Pania Press, and her latest collection of short fiction *deleted scenes for lovers* is due out in 2016 from Victoria University Press.

**D.A. Taylor** is a graduate of Tracey Slaughter and Catherine Chidgey's writing programme at the University of Waikato.

As an avid childhood reader with a librarian for a grandmother, **Indigo Smith** takes delight in everything word-related... although her grandmother may not take delight in the particular words published here.

**Kay Ramsbottom:** Approaching the final semester of my degree in Computer Graphic Design, I was inspired by the readings at the Mayhem launch to enrol in ENGL314 – Creative Non-Fiction as my elective. I've explored childhood memories I thought I'd forgotten, and discovered I really enjoyed this genre of writing.

**Mark Anthony Houlahan** These are interim drafts of the first poems I have written for thirty years. I hope to write more. I hope to get better.

**Karl Guethert** has realised that some of his best work comes from the "angry boys and girls" genre of writing. This doesn't phase him in the least.

**Helena Dow:** BA, Postgraduate Student University of Waikato. Interests: Modern languages, Art history & Creative writing (fiction, non-fiction; prose & poetry). My ambition is to observe, explore & challenge cultural assumptions, beliefs, human sufferings, traumatic experiences & biographical details in my writings.

**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.

**Lee Kimber:** My background is in biology and education, but at this moment I am writing and writing. I've authored Bug in the Dark, a children's picture book (in its second print run), now I'm a wannabe writer of adult stuff so have dipped into this single third-year Creative Writing paper (ENGL314) and who knows?

**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.

**Alicia Gray** is a quiet English student who prefers to write than speak. One day, she would like to see a worn book of her words on a library shelf.

My name is **Liam Hinton** and I am "A red headed petulant little shit who likes to write poems" - Karl. I am a first year studying at Waikato university majoring in English and Theatre who has, about five hours from the deadline, buckled to peer pressure because spinelessness... Done.

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.

**R.V. ten Hove** [bio not provided]

**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.

**Katarina Barker** is a third year English major and yet she never knows what to write for these.

**Fabian Tipene** [bio not provided]

**Alison Robertson** is part of the Communications team at University of Waikato. She was a sports reporter for Radio New Zealand in the '80s, has edited a community newspaper in Porirua, written three children's novels and several short stories and until now has never had the courage to publish any poetry.

After finding her way to New Zealand from America, **Hunter Martoncik** has recently finished her Bachelor's degree in Writing Studies. She hopes to continue doing what she loves and traveling wherever life seems to take her. She is currently looking for a job.

**Conor Maxwell** is a full-time student at the University of Waikato studying English, Theatre and Secondary Education. In his spare time, Conor is also a playwright, director, actor and co-founder of the local up-and-coming Small Dynamite Theatre Company.

**Jane Forkert** specializes in fixing issues from the past for the future. Biographies, healing/past-life regression and energetic purification. She enjoys an interesting pastime - objective observation of humanity.

I am **James Warner**. I'm doing a bachelors degree in Screen and Media with a major in English. I hope to go from university into writing and directing my own films and using this goal as motivation to continue to write and be creative.

As an avid childhood reader with a librarian for a grandmother, **Brittany Rose** takes delight in everything word-related. At 23, she is very much enjoying poetry despite hating it with melodramatic passion throughout high school. This is her second appearance in *Mayhem*, and she will be published in *Poetry NZ* (no. 50), due out in October/November 2015.

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

**Hamish Ansley** is a writer of short prose - mainly in the creative non-fiction genre. He is currently studying towards a Masters degree in English and began writing his thesis in 2015.

**Maryana Garcia** is currently studying towards a Graduate Diploma in English at Waikato. One day, she would like to be remembered for something she wrote.

**Shelby Managh:** A drone who thought it'd be fun to do a BA/LLB. At least the creative writing is fun and rather therapeutic. I'd love to be a spoken word poet if I had the confidence and a mock Bowery Poetry Club to do it at.

**Te Rina Ransfield:** Ko Hikurangi Te maunga  
Ko Waiapu te awa  
Ko Horouta te waka  
Ko Hinerupe Te marae  
Ko Te Whanau a Hinerupe te hapu  
Ko Ngati Porou te iwi.

I love poetry and free writing because there is no right or wrong. No one can edit your imagination! I am currently in my second year of my bED at Te Whare Wanganga o Awanuiarangi. I have two beautiful children Hanaia -Bree (3) and Te Urutawa (2) who keep me on my toes every day. When I graduate I would love to teach children how to use their minds as tools and show that writing is more than a 20 minute subject taught at school. It can heal and you are not judged by what you write.

**Rachael Elliott** has an MA in creative writing from the University of Waikato. Last year she was Editor of *Nexus Magazine* (which received three Aotearoa Student Press Association awards) and she also won the 2degrees Poetry Slam. Her work has appeared in previous issues of *Poetry NZ*, *Mayhem*, *4th Floor* and *JAAM*. Rachael is also a weekly columnist for *Nexus* and on *Mayhem's* editorial board. She lives in Raglan.

**Carmen Penny:** I'm a 21 year old mother who is in the first year of my Bachelor. I'm majoring in Psychology, Sociology & English. I have always had a passion for writing and the arts in general. I think that art helps to change the way that people think, and helps to express how people feel.

**Hannah Dewhurst** is a third year student studying English, Japanese and Philosophy. Creative writing lurks around with her other hobbies, prefers to write drafts up a tree.

**Beth Pearsall-Peters:** I live in Raglan with my sister and her two kids. I love to surf, sail and grow organic veggies in my garden overlooking the harbour. I am in my second year of a Bachelor of Science majoring in Biology and want to use the knowledge to create beautiful, highly productive public spaces.

## 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.

You can find more information on submission requirements on our website [mayhemjournal.co.nz](http://mayhemjournal.co.nz) or by contacting [editor@mayhemjournal.co.nz](mailto:editor@mayhemjournal.co.nz)