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UNSWeetened
Literary Journal 2016



UNSW Student Life

FOR WORD

UNSWeetened acknowledges the Gadigal and Bidjigal peoples of the Eora Nation, who are the traditional custodians of the land upon which UNSW was built. We pay respect to Elders both past and present and extend that to all Aboriginal students and staff in the UNSW community. We recognise this is and always will be Aboriginal land.

As much as I love to talk, I can't deny the effect of the written word. Whether it's an appropriated philosophical quote scrawled like subversive graffiti on the back of a bathroom door, or your future written out in a seemingly innocent fortune cookie, the power of text is so impossibly overwhelming, so hugely incomparable and inescapable, that it can transport us and transform us in an instant. Writing has the power to grip us in a way that nothing else can, burying its way deep into our bones, hypnotic. Poetry and prose create a sense memory in us that remains long after we have turned the page. Becoming a part of us, guiding us into who we ultimately find ourselves to be. Or not to be.

When we publish prose or poetry, we are publishing fragments of ourselves. Gifting our thoughts and ideas to the reader, a present of our presence in the world. These works feel personal, in the way that our own words would. These works reflect the voices of authors who feel like our best friends, a representation of our world, our allies.

We hope these pieces reflect your worlds or transport you to new ones. We hope that they remain as much a part of you as they do of us.

We have loved these pieces, and we hope you do too.

**Carla Zuniga-Navarro
UNSweetened Coordinator**

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Fortune 100

GIULIA MCCOOL

Pick a number from 1-23. Divide that number by 2 and then add 1. Now divide that number by the number of times you have done a piss today. Add that to the number of times you have been approached on public transport by rats OR birds looking for donations for their gofundme campaigns that you have said NO to (very important). Then take your final number, write it upside down and squint until it turns into Jeff Koons. This is your number. Give it to your nearest male friend and ask him to give you a number. Match it to the nearest number to find out your fortune.

// **Giulia McCool** is a 21 year old western lowland gorilla, who was shot and killed on May 28, 2016, when a three year old boy climbed into her enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden. She has since received broad international coverage and commentary, and is on Twitter at @giudetama. //

12

Dark city slow and glassy with rain and you're feeling buoyed, swimming. Flit through the tank, through a light bridge, green and yellow traffic signals bouncing off the water. Everyone you see looks scary, apart from a couple embracing next to you. You can hear them kiss.

kisskisskiss

Because there's still 27 minutes to wait till the bus pulls into Wynyard station and you don't want to wait there alone, you walk around the block once. You rub your eyes and think "shit", examining the black makeup rub-off on your fingers. The city is really quiet.

8

In the dark, on the way to the bathroom you step on a fat varnished cockroach. Time stops.

You're pirouetting, crunching shell, pushing insides out
yuck yuck fuck what the fucking yuckkkkk

You're an artist. It's opening night and you carefully reach up and pluck a hair out of your scalp and lay it down on the floor next to you. People look at you and mutter about paradigms and physicality. You reach up and pluck another one, and another, methodically. You lay them down next to the first one. This will continue until all your head is bare and your hair is laid down in a long line across the white floor. You feel excited to feel the knobles of your scalp at the end of the residency. A few nights in and there is a hearty hole in your head. You pluck and pluck and pluck, feeling the taut pull and seconds later the slick *plik* ejecting of the hair from its oily root.

7

You will kiss only three people in your life. One works as a security guard in a rehab centre for teens with internet addiction. Another is in the flavoured milk business. The last person you kiss will take photographs for fancy restaurant toilets. Together, you live off the royalties of *Gelatin print (Photographer was in love at the time)*, until you die.

3

You will be varnishing your new Ikea bed when Hans comes into your bedroom.

"I did a presentation for class, it feels good to make everyone laugh at my stupid routine. Later I was having an anxiety attack at the bus stop and my friend surprised me. I leant against a pole sweating and said I actually did work today, I did all my stuff. If I wasn't me, I would hate myself."

You don't really know what to say.

5

4

In 2014 you're sitting in your room with the door closed, pre-drinking and waiting for your boyfriend to arrive. You're trying to see if you can get buzzed on a 30ml vial of bushflower essence your mum gave me to help your lethargy. It's called dynamis and has a 12.5% alcohol volume. Your bf messages you, "Sorry just getting food."

6

At the age of 19, you move to Japan, the number one destination for young white people trying to escape from other young white people. Your first full time job is at Fresco Pepelite, a small dog salon next to the anime museum in Ippudo. You toil endlessly, giving small to medium dogs the latest in canine hair styles. It's hard work, but you love the walk home.

The streets are wide and fluffy with soft light spilling from shop after shop of luxury dog products and services. After dark, the buildings near Fresco Pepelite seem to lean in close to you, their different pulsing lights brushing over you like velvet scarves as you amble past them.

When the salon goes bankrupt, you receive two grand in unpaid wages, and sprint down that dark Ippudo street for the last time. You're set on spending the cash on opening your own chain of universities.

11

You're a stressed businessman with whack sideburns listening to Wii music on the bus to relax yourself. It's winter and cold. You go home to your husband, you plug your DS in to charge while he tells you about his day, and instead of biting your nails, you occupy your hands by giving him a soft, deliberate foot massage that he enjoys. It's part of your plan to improve yourself. To stop biting your nails.

You exchange dreams about retiring while you nibble on chocolate in bed together. There are 7 or 8 blankets piled on the bed. He tells you that he'd like to make a Mii together sometime and you stroke his soft hairy leg. That night you stay up until 2am brain training while he sleeps beside you.

13

You're so scared of losing your bf to someone else that you tell him "Monogamy as we know it just doesn't work, people aren't honest with each other."

You tell him "We should be honest with each other about everything," just in case he feels trapped in the relationship.

You immediately regret it as he tells you about different people he is attracted to. You feel like crying and vomiting... it's your period, probably.

RUNNER UP
Indigenous
Fiction

Resilient People

BRIDGET CAMA

Today we stand resilient people
Whose fight you cannot take away
You came, you aimed, you shot, you fired

Uncivilized. Nomad. Savage. Brutal.
Were just a few labels that you placed
On men on women, 'a dying race'

Land stolen never ceded,
Where is our 228 years of rent?

Mothers cry for their stolen children
Victims of cultural genocide
As they scream out in desperation

Turn your head close your eyes
It all happened years ago
But we remain resilient people
Our spirituality continues

Through land and sea, kin and mob
Our culture and people will live on
Our burning will to survive
Colonisation, genocide

// **Bridget Cama** is a proud Wiradjuri and Fijian woman studying a Bachelor of Arts/ Law at UNSW majoring in Indigenous Studies. She loves spending her spare time engaging and ranting about social issues, connecting with people, travelling and immersing herself in culture. She is always up for a great chat and a challenge. //

Neither Here

BRITTNEY RIGBY

It's raining in Sydney today and the last time you felt rain like this, cold like this, you were in New York City. It was minus twenty-seven degrees Celsius you had just turned twenty-one and all you could think when you stepped off that plane was *this is freezing*. Stalactites clinging to lobes, ice wrapped around spines. This is frost on tongues and between toes. This is something else. No number of layers of wool, down, fleece and fur could stop the blizzard from shutting down your immune system and the city.

You might have loved it best when you were floating above JFK, looking out those tiny windows into a huge, famous city you hadn't met yet. You'd heard the storm warnings, you knew the locals were hibernating and supermarkets were selling out, but the blizzard still seemed like a mere idea, you didn't have to face it as long as that small metal bird protected you.

You had arrived yet you were still wrapped in the snugness of transit, of being neither here nor there. You could catch glimpses of the city through the flurry, the street, the ground, the airport. The plane just had to find the runway. You couldn't remember a time when the baby a few rows in front wasn't crying. You could hardly remember a time before being in the air. You hovered a little longer.

It's raining in Sydney today and your feelings are thin. They drape gently around your shoulders but pull too tightly across your thighs. They're not quite warm enough. You remember those first few weeks after coming back, waking up in the middle of the night, homesick in your own bed. That feeling was heavier than jet lag, heavier than your suitcase. You think of Strawberry Fields. You had Googled the easiest way to get to the Upper West Side, got off one stop too far. You hadn't worked out the subway yet and walked circles in Central Park for hours. The trail to the Lennon Memorial had been buried in snow and you couldn't find it.

// **Brittney** is a penultimate Law and Journalism student, freelance writer and country bumpkin at heart. Her true loves are books, Bunnings sausage sizzles and words that make her tremble with homeliness. She hopes to one day live in a world ruled by feminism/Leslie Knope. //

A man with a beautiful dog saw you wandering aimlessly, twisting the map this way and that. He stopped, introduced his dog and you asked how her little paws coped in the snow. They walked with you to the plaque where signs asked visitors to be quiet, before heading home. You stayed at the memorial for almost two hours listening to buskers play Beatles' songs for coins, watching a homeless woman restlessly try to sleep on a bench, her cardboard asking for change. All the while, you missed home so hard you could feel it in the ache of your bones, those ivory Lego pieces that break too easily but keep us together. A winter's Central Park was darkening and your eyes were straining, so you sat on the closest bench for a moment and thought: I am here. I am here.

•

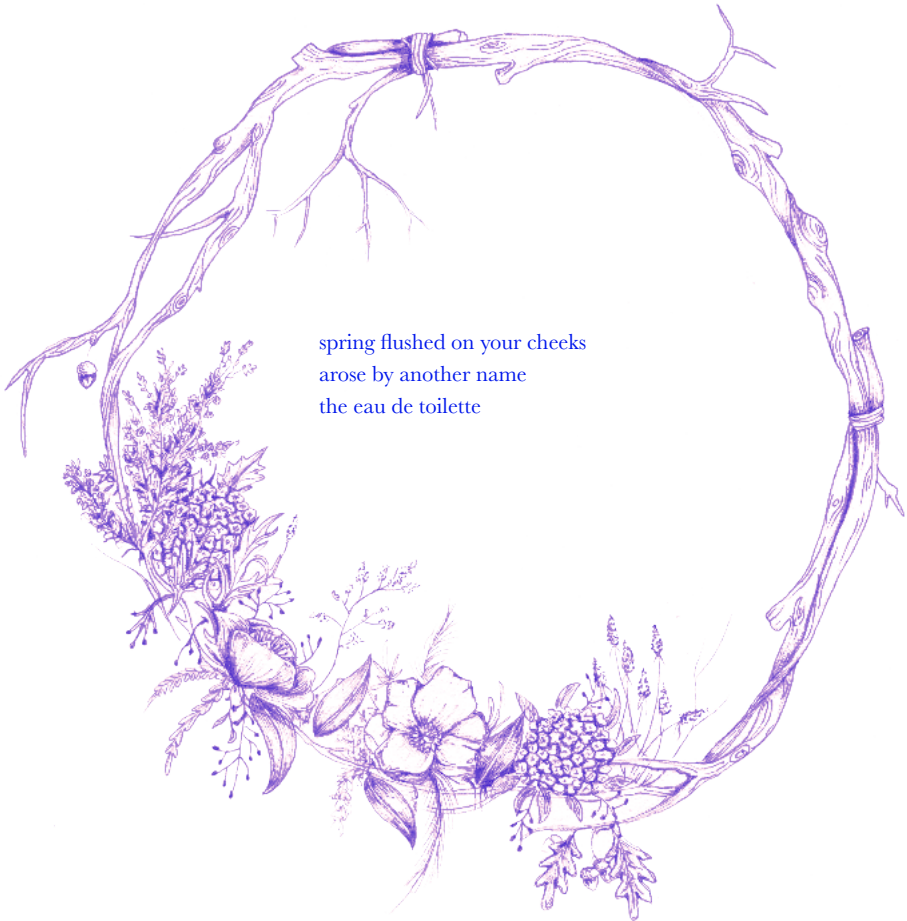
It's raining in Sydney today and you feel soggy. Your heavy limbs and damp clothes and drips, so many drips like that dirty, American coffee. You don't miss the coffee. Despite being wetter and colder and more wrapped up and weighed down in New York than you are now you felt lighter there. No number of layers could stop the way the snow coated your eyelashes, hair, lips, as you walked down Fifth Avenue. The cold burrowed itself through your muscles and into your bones, but you found warmth. You found warmth in the way your white teeth chattered and knees knocked. You found warmth in the ways New York made promises to stay with you forever. A snippet of an Australian accent in the middle of Times Square. Catching sight of Liberty for the first time on the Staten Island Ferry. Riffing through racks in Saks and knowing you couldn't afford a single thing. It was almost like being home.

•

It's raining in Sydney today. You're home, but all you can think of is where you aren't. Not in New York, in a plane, in Central Park, in a Midtown diner or a Downtown bar. You're cold. The train slows, and another station slides in to meet you. As you step off onto the platform, you realise the rain has stopped and you wonder what the weather is like in Manhattan. You hope it's stayed warm.

Nor There

Spring



GEMMA COLLARD

// **Gemma** accidentally took up an Arts/Secondary Education degree and liked it so much she stayed. She writes occasionally, but her long term goals include avoiding full time work and running away to become a folk musician. She endeavours to never let a cup of tea go cold, though she maintains that nobody is perfect and that it does happen from time to time. //

His body inhumanly clean
clear poreless hairless never perspiring
skin suctioned tight, paper on muscle
so that I could see his pulse
vacuum sealed
punctual not predictable

he fed me with Thai food and long periods of silence.
overdressed with nothing on

his mood was starched and ironed
by his mother, probably



Enough Of

LAUREN YVONNE BONNER

// **Lauren** has been at UNSW for five years and fears she may never make it out. With a background in Fine Arts and Arts, Lauren is currently completing her honours in Theatre and Performance Studies. She is interested in/obsessed with stranger connections, intimacy, everyday performances and her two pet goats Lavender and Swayshie. //

Poems For Coming Home

WINNER
Open Prose

S. A. BRAGANZA

MELBOURNE, Victoria

1 Our father keeps our culture like a secret. Wrapped up in Saris and a million monsoon tears. “There should be a saying about how our bodies can betray us if given the right methods.” My father lets my words hang in the air between us. He shifts uncomfortably and changes the subject.

2 We’re sitting out the back of my father’s house. Behind the corrugated iron fence I watch as the newly installed lights flicker between the large wooden pillars. My mother’s fiftieth birthday is in full swing, we escaped the sea of drunken relatives only fifteen minutes ago. M is tired, he wants to go home. I nurse an Asahi through a straw. Two ice packs rest against my cheeks, hopelessly attempting to quell the inflamed incisions between my gums and jaw. S passes me the joint. I’m scared of dry socket but I inhale anyway. Her bones shift beneath her translucent skin, as if unwilling to settle upon the earth.

She says, “Hospital gowns look so good on you.” I exhale, softly biting on the gauze between my teeth, I mutter “Yeah, you too.”

3 Curry has rarely graced our kitchen. I swallow the broth my father makes like a boat taking on salt water. It stings my throat on the way down, and my sister breaks out in hives. I think to myself this is too much to bear. Every mouthful is a different kind of drowning.

“There are starving children in India” is my father’s thinly veiled threat. My sister retorts, “There are starving children everywhere, there are starving children here.”

We sit in silence until we are excused.

4 S has become an expert at living because she recalls a time when it was unlikely. She picks the easiest clothes to sleep in. She avoids zippers, buttons, and waistbands that cling. She dresses in shades of pink. Like a second skin, her clothes are a reminder of the girlhood lost to a sickness. She is an expert at being digestible. Her soft pale skin is more than a colour palette to paint with. Her coat hanger hips have cavities, large ice cream scoops of flesh and bone were removed to reconstruct a leg, that some days she cannot use. She gave up painting the same time I gave up Melbourne. The walls of her house are decorated with funeral pamphlets of recently deceased friends. In summer, when I am home, we dress up just to chain-smoke while I push her around Princes Park. I roll her cigarettes, pretending to be her nurse.

“‘You look well’ is an insult. How can people say I look healthy when I am not?”

I gently manoeuvre her wheelchair over the North Carlton curbs. She has learnt to stop apologising for taking up space. I have become very good at saying sorry.

5 My father tells me about the day I came home from primary school in tears. How I ran to my mother, like a lost disciple back into the fold. Her arms around me felt like a temple’s open doors. She did her best to console me. He recalls the way I lifted my hand like an offering to rest against her rosy cheek, how my trembling fingers accidentally caught tears she never intended to give. “Why is this not the same?” I repeat the question with a new meaning, “Why are we not the same?” She says I am a combination of both my father and her. I reply, “Why am I both?” She is silent. Years later, I tell my father that I have wasted too many words at an altar, prayers that haven’t come true.

SYDNEY, New South Wales

- 1 There is something unforgiveable about Sydney. I have never caught a bus that was on time. Low flying planes shake the Eastern Suburbs in their wake. At night, outside my window, the empty lot grows bigger. I can never sleep in this city, late nights and early mornings are just different forms of waiting rooms, void only of condescending melodies, and the option of bulk billing. The street art proclaims **SYDNEY EATS ITS YOUNG ALIVE**. I have no reason not to believe it.
- 2 I am standing on the balcony of my apartment, my fingers almost flush against the unlit cigarette. My housemate lingers back inside, her voice only a murmur through the glass panel that separates us. I cannot understand what she is saying. It is five o'clock on Thursday morning and the traffic is waking from its lull. A taxi trudges past, groaning as it makes its way through the backend streets. I watch as the light fades behind the street corner, only to re-appear in the distance, and then vanish entirely. I run my fingers across the ridges of the lighter's wheel, itching to pull the trigger.
- 3 My housemate has promised we will get drinks tonight. She says she will call. I mull about our apartment, cleaning, getting dressed. It is 12.30am and she is not home yet. Lockout laws will come into effect soon. I am tired. I am doing the dishes. She comes home starry-eyed with a friend, they giggle and link arms, proclaiming they are going out. I ask them "Where?" They invite me, I thought I was already invited, I decline. I wait for them to ask again, they do not. In India, my father says, you must always ask someone three times, that declining is the polite default. When they leave, I thrust my fingers into the hot water, waiting for the feeling to pass.
- 4 On train track wrists, the words of my father feel rotten. "You didn't grow up there, it's not yours to have." This country has always slipped through my fingertips. Bed sheets are soaking on a clothesline outside my window. My motherland is a mouthful. This interview, party, grocery shopping requires a lighter foundation: NC40 to NW22. "I'm not ethnic, this is just a yearlong tan." On the way to class, a white boy stops me in the hallway and says: "What's up my N—?" I continue walking. At an interview, I sit next to the only brown boy in the room. I smile and he turns away.
- 5 A friend comes to me after class. Nude, white and beige paint cling to on her overalls like a second skin. "I was just wondering, where are you from?" I tell her I was born in New Zealand. "No, I mean, where are your parents from?" I force my vision to

blur, unfocused features are harder to hit. “My father was born in Mumbai, our family is originally from Goa.” She stares at me, squinting, deciphering the parts of me that confirm this. After a moment, her face relaxes, “And your mother?”

- 6 The orange light of the afternoon sticks to the air like a shower curtain, kissing every inch of me that’s on offer. There is a method to this. My mind races to form the beginnings of a poem, but there is none. I repeat the phrase once more: *there is a method to this*. But the words don’t look right on paper. I search to find a meaning but there is none. Instead I make promises. If I finish my essay by four o’clock I can go out tonight. If I stay in Sydney long enough to complete my degree I am not a failure. If that cloud blocks the sun for longer than a minute I will be beautiful.
- 7 My housemate picks at her ponytail taking clumps of her coiled hair, coercing them into tight intricate braids. I watch as her fingers move as quickly as she speaks. Her phone wedged between her ear and shoulder, “What-are-you-going-to-do-about-it? Have you got him a lawyer?” My housemate’s fingers linger for a moment. She is waiting to hear an answer, and her hands are waiting to resume their busy work. “Can you just answer the question?” Her skin reflects the early sun, speckled copper and deep mahogany. Her brother is going to court tomorrow. The first time I met him, we chain smoked on the balcony, sipping boxed wine from dirty plastic mugs. He spoke of black boys working under the hot Australian sun like they were silhouettes of planes against a skyline. “Do you know what it’s like to have this skin?” I could only ever say no. The pinks of his fingernails turned white, as they pressed hard against his mug. There was an unspoken solidarity in the way the lightest parts of his wrist mirrored the colorings of my elbows. But I am ashamed to say I do not let the darkest parts of me to see the sun.
- 8 I receive a call from the Dean of my old college; he informs me that they are sorry, that the word is unacceptable, and that the boy who said it didn’t know any better. Like “He is from the country” is some sort of consolation prize for not understanding the power of language. The boy comes to my house bearing flowers and a sheepish grin, he waits anxiously in the doorway, blocking out the sun. Somewhere in the near distance, a man calls out, a car backfires and tires burn rubber; the singed wheels ignite my nostrils, coating the back of my throat with a thick invisible tar. My father warns me to never say, “It’s okay” when someone wrongs you. Instead, you say, “I accept your apology.” But I am silent.

PANAJI, Goa

- 1 A boy approaches me in the street, suspiciously eyeing my Kurta. The dark rings around his eyes are intentional. Dust pools at my feet before calming. “Ma’am, ma’am, you buy this, you buy this.” I am in a rush to meet my parents but I stop and inspect the small statues. The boy holds up the elephant. “Look, baby. You take.” It is an order, not a question. He points beyond the stone lattice belly. Another tiny elephant is carved within its stomach. I have seen the exact statue a hundred times over, but I nod. The boy grins. “I give you Indian price okay? 400 rupee, okay? You take.” I laugh and shake my head. “I am half Indian. Give me half the Indian price.” The boy laughs this time, “Really? Really. No joke?” I pay the Indian price.
- 2 The lull in conversation is welcomed, like the cool of the rain splattering against the canopy up above us. The waiter waits staring at my father. My father smiles knowingly. The waiter steps forward, head swaying side-to-side. “Excuse me, sir, but you are looking like an Indian, sir.” It is a question, not a statement. My father shifts uncomfortably. The phrase has followed us across the country: from Mumbai to Jaipur. The waiter points to my sister. “She too is looking like an Indian.” I shovel the last of the palak paneer into my mouth, there is comfort in the way the cheese presses against my tongue. There is something between the ghee and spinach that makes me feel whole. “*She*” the waiter points to me, “is Hispanic.” My father does not correct him.
- 3 India is a sport, not a holiday. There is no such thing as silence on the main road to Anjuna Beach. Disfigured bodies litter the edges of the dirt highway, hands cupped as if to catch the rain. My father points to some beggars as our car slows due to traffic. They crowd the vehicle, and I watch as small brown hands press against the tinted windows of the minivan. Our tour guide explains it is “better to give food than money.” I press my finger against the smooth plastic of the “DOWN” button. Grubby fingers erupt from the two-inch gap, grasping at the cooled air. My family stares at me as I hurriedly press a full packet of RITZ crackers against one of the hands. I can hear the girls as they shriek, snatching at one another. The car lurches forward, and the hands fall away to safety. I look past the reflection of my own face to see theirs awash with irritation. My tour guide laughs: “If they look disappointed, it means they wanted money.”
- 4 Our parents let me spend the day with my cousins who drive over the speed limit. On Anjuna Beach we share mangoes sprinkled with chilli and cola with small slices of limes that linger just below the surface. They ask us about Australia, and we ask them why they stayed. “Why leave a place just to start all over again? It is easy here. I can bribe my way out of a speeding ticket.” My sister and I do not understand. At night, tourists flood the beach, their skin seems transparent in the moonlight. They are loud, drunk and dancing, bodies move together like shadows against a setting sun. I wonder if we looked enough like them to be considered foreign.

AFTERWORD

On the bus back home from university, a girl misses her father's call. The girl struggles to find her phone amongst the groceries on her lap. Clumsily, she manages to unhook her arms from the plastic bag restraints and calls back. In Melbourne, her father will be making dinner, still in his Lycra. His helmet on, but unclipped. He answers after the fourth ring.

"Hey, I just tried calling you," he says. She can hear the faint sound of a knife against a wooden chopping block. She smiles.

"I know."

"You got a minute?"

"Yeah, I'm on my way home."

Her father clears his throat, and she turns wearily to the other passengers, mindful of her volume.

"How is everything?" he asks.

The girl tells her father of Sydney. She speaks of the brown boys who turn away. How the lot outside her house seems to be growing bigger. She mentions the sleepless nights and low balance Opal Cards. The girl talks about the way her skin feels on a crowded train. How she misses M and S, and even him too sometimes. How she has never walked through Martin Place, or accepted an apology. The father listens patiently, but the girl can hear the faint sound of his helmet straps shaking side to side.

"Look, I get that you are fighting, because that's what I did. When I moved here I fought like hell. But you have to realise that you are struggling too." The girl can feel her throat tighten, and teeth clench in order to take the verbal blow. "You have to pick your fights. Can't you see you are wearing yourself out? I know that you are trying. But one day this won't hurt you like it does now. This won't matter when you're my age."

The girl knows these words are a kindness. They are the porch light kept on after her family has long gone to bed. The girl can see herself now, standing outside her father's house wishing to come home.

"I know."

// **S.A. Braganza** is studying the most hireable dual degree imaginable: Fine Arts/Arts. Her current art practice involves depictions of "white culture" and her own Instagram feed. She's currently trying out Twitter, but feels that 140 question marks just isn't enough to describe how she feels at any given moment. //

Three Poems From Smiths Lake

JACK POPPERT

I A muddy shore grassed by sprouts
turned toward a flat, deep and long corner of the creek
one tried to notice stillness and turbulence as degrees of one another
an afternoon in its infancy saw horizontal columns of warm deep
light journey along the heights of paperbark trees

the sound of the creek was constant and soothing as more artists arrived

they were ready to bed rough for the week

II Having resolved to walk the creek trail
I took two mandarins to have with some black tea
there were artists by the lake at the open mouth of the water
and in the hall rolls of canvas were draped between the pillars to help warm the fire.

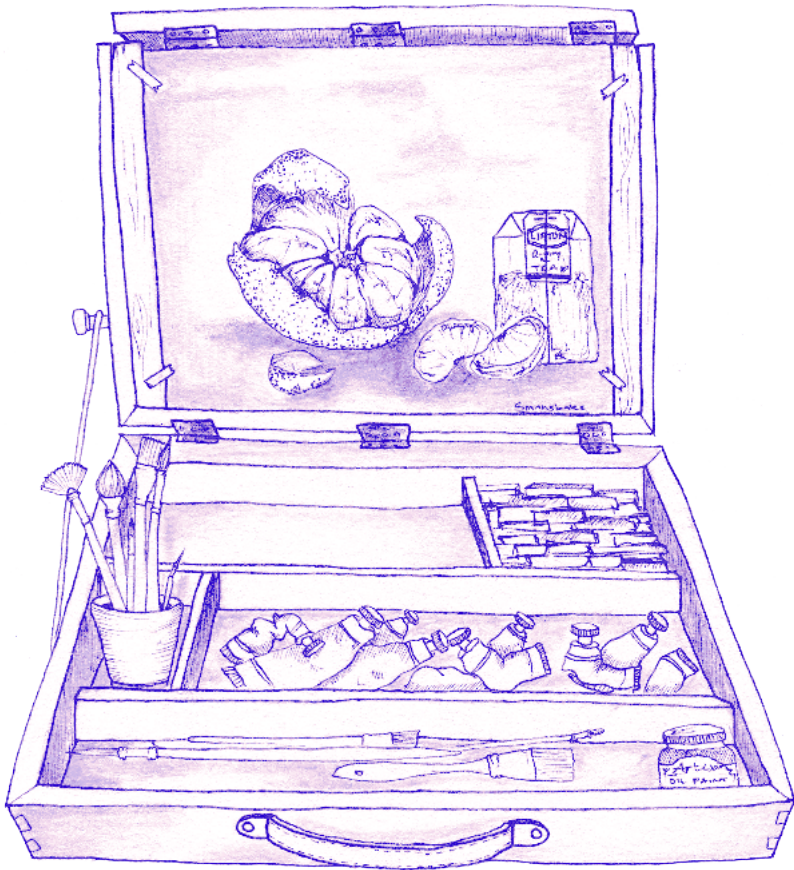
there was not much light left, those looking to wander had to show haste.

III Upon leaving for bed the teacher was requested by her students

“sing us a song before you leave”

they sang separate verses, from separate songs.
the bush vying to let the human sound ring,

the birds had all gone to sleep.



// **Jack Poppert** is an emerging, Sydney based, poet and artist, currently studying a dual degree with a focus on political philosophy and abstract sculpture. Taking the form of vignettes, his poems are both real and imagined asides. Jack is influenced by the work of Boris Pasternak, Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Wang Wei. //

While My Nonna Prays

WINNER
Open Poetry

Mum was crying again
Confiding her woe
my sister full of disappointment
my nonna mediating a war she doesn't support
I sat like the Dictator
one hand on the table
the other waving in the air
ranting
chanting "He's insane!" rhythmically across the lamb and piselli
bellowing
every,
fucking,
syllable,
for nobody but myself
the fall of my father
nonna, mother and sister
the Matriarchal Trinity that keeps me breathing
Nonno speaking through the light globe
flickering with pride
the round table of genetic disposition
summoned to speak against a tyrant
to end a tirade lasting years
entire lifetimes of the children
the Golden Years of Mum
abandoned
assets frozen
frustration turning into frothing mouths
spitting every word
savouring every pause
contemplating contentment when it's all over
extinguishing fraught visions of vengeful murder

(And I Drink)

ANDREW SIGNOR

while we sleep,
while we eat,
while nonna prays,
and I drink;
two thirds drunk,
the rest repenting.

He Is Entrenched,
solidified,
the Unwavering Moloch!
pessimistic in all outlook
predetermined in faculty and rhetoric
prehistoric in convention and survival
unapologetic in the aftermath of his crimes
quelling all discussion,
labelling opinion as debate
debate as argument
and argument as an affront to respect

I would cry myself to sleep
wake up drained
with fragments of tears dried to the rosy cheek
the time a digital blur
throat parched
everything tasting of lead
the mind too tired to trust a dream
too scared to trust the floor can't grab you
Wondering if it's cold sweat or piss
from the monsters in your nightmare
always resembling your father

// **Andrew** has been studying Arts/Education for 4 years, writing essays about Post Modernism, Indigenous Ethnocide, Gender Performativity and Education Theory. He found sanity through NUTS, the uni's theatre society, his home away from home. Andrew's favourite quote is "so shines a good deed in a weary world". He knows Shakespeare wrote it, but he likes how Gene Wilder said it. //



Sexy

DIVYA VENKATARAMAN

The silver dress winked in the late afternoon light. Mara stared at her reflection in the mirror that dominated a wall in their white, otherwise sparsely decorated bedroom. Her skin was clear, a high sheen taking over her cheeks. The dress fell to her calves. She knew she looked good in it, her hips whisking the silk like batter as she walked.

Tonight seemed like it would be an understated sort of affair. Marco was throwing a small party in honour of Sabine's recent promotion to Associate Professor of Theatre, and Performance at the University. He couldn't stop telling everyone that at 28, Sabine was the youngest person S----- University had ever considered for the Associate Professor position. Probably. The silver straps would tangle with one another, her leg would make an entrance through the high slit before she did. Was it too much?

She had introduced Marco and Sabine at The Fig one night in the last semester of their final year. Sabine had fallen for him quickly, as she did in those days with any handsome man who ordered a stronger drink than she did. The pair of them left together, falling into a taxi at 3am after spending most of the night kissing on the sticky bar.

Mara turned in the mirror, watching the way the dress moved with her. It was a dream to dance in, the silk glassy under the dim lights of the early morning hours. They had usually ended up at The Fig. The Fig was the place to wind down, light up, come down, come up again. They knew everyone there. The dress made it up on the walls, captured in the grainy film of a photographer who had been fixated on her one blurry night just after final semester. Mara is laughing, one arm hooked

through Sabine's, a silver strap falling loose over the other shoulder. Sabine is blowing a kiss to the photographer, her eyes lit red in the camera flash.

She shifted in the dress, distracted by the smudges on the mirror. When she first moved in with Tom, she had been irritated by his insistence on polishing surfaces the minute a tiny mark appeared. Every wipe of the table, of the shelving, of the desk, had felt like a correction. A total reversal of position on smudges seemed unnecessary. There was even a whole hand print on the mirror this time, for God's sake.

She went to clean it, but stopped. Fuck it. She considered herself the optimistic type. Maybe Tom's inner pedant would make an appearance tonight, although it hadn't in a while.

She adjusted the straps, urging the neckline upwards. It drew up, leaving her back more exposed than ever. She was wholly unsatisfied with its feeble attempts at modesty, but there was no time to change now. It deserved a final commemorative wear.

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Mara pushed open the large wooden door to Sabine and Marco's inner-city terrace, regretful at leaving the crisp evening air behind her. She was expecting Sabine to greet her with a flourish, a kiss on each cheek and the heady scent of sex and woody perfume. Sabine and Marco always liked to have sex just before having guests over. She had confessed to Mara over dinner one evening. It put them in the mood for entertaining. In the absence of their hosts, who had presumably underestimated the punctuality of their guests, she stepped out on to the balcony where the other guests were gathered.

Tom stood with his back to her. His thick brown hair curled under his ears— he definitely needed a haircut soon. Upon seeing her, he greeted her with a kiss and pressed a glass of red wine into her hand. “Hey you,” he smelt like his office, like simulated pine and air-conditioning. “You’re looking divine tonight. And you’re even sort of on time.” She smiled, kissing him back. “Yeah, it’s because you weren’t around to hold me up.” “Well, you know how much I wish I could have been. Work was insane today.”

She smiled and slipped her arm around him, surveying the crowd. “It’s fine, you know I prefer getting ready on my own anyway. Where are those two?”

“Sabine is... definitely around. Beyond that, I have no idea.”

Mara rolled her eyes, smiling. “Yes, you’d hope so, it’s her house. Alright, I guess I’ll go have a snoop around for them.” She took her wine and set off around the house.

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She found Sabine in the unfilled bathtub in the guest bathroom, smoking a joint. She was half dressed and red-lipsticked. Her hair was undone, spilling over the half-burned candles that littered the bench. “You keeping that all to yourself?” Mara asked indignantly, shutting the door behind her. “You know it’s your party out there. Give me some.”

Sabine wrapped cold legs around Mara as she climbed into the bathtub. She blew out smoke and offered the remnant stub of the joint to Mara. She sighed. “I’m never letting you go. Parties are the worst. Other people are the worst. Let’s just curl up in a bathtub every night, forever.” Mara smiled. Sabine loved parties more than anyone. But she

looked so tired sitting there, stripped of her dress above her waist. Her beauty was effortless in a way Mara envied. Her too-wide eyes, her slightly asymmetrical mouth. Mara, rather, had once been called conventionally attractive. She knew that it was supposed to be a compliment and hated that it stung.

She pulled Sabine into a hug. “I know it’s been a big week. But look at you! You’re the youngest Professor S----- University has ever had! Probably! Where is Marco anyway?”

Sabine sighed. “Oh, I don’t know. Isn’t he out there pouring drinks?” She sank lower into the bathtub and pointed the joint at Mara. “Also, I found out back in the 80s they had a 25 year old. It would crush him, he’s been bragging about me.”

“Fuck her. Sounds like an over-achiever to me.”

Sabine laughed.

Mara untangled her legs from Sabine’s and stood up, hands decisively on her hips. “Come on, my love. We’re finishing this delicious joint and then you are getting out there into your own party”. Sabine looked at Mara from under black coated lashes and smiled tiredly. “Alright, fine. Let’s at least go find that boyfriend of mine. Zip me up, will you?”

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She walked back into the party to find Marco carrying more cases of wine into the kitchen. He grunted as he lifted the weight onto the stone bench top. “Sorry, I just ducked out for these.” He pushed back his hair. “You know, the feminists have got it right. Heavy lifting should be divided equally amongst the sexes. How are you, anyway?” He lifted Mara into a warm hug. He smelled of sweat

and sweet spices, cinnamon, cardamom like a weak chai tea.

“Where is Sabine anyway?” Marco released her and looked over towards the guests gathered under the dim lighting. Red Oriental wallpaper had been swiped down the walls, some sections mismatched. Mara had helped the two of them move in. She and Sabine had sat on the ground over there spitting watermelon seeds at each other while Marco fixed their shoddy attempts at wallpapering. A hardwood bookcase had been tactfully placed over the strip swollen by an air bubble on the far wall. “Oh, she’ll be out soon.” Mara poured herself another drink. “She considered taking refuge in the bathroom for the night, but I think she’s snapped out of it.”

On cue, Sabine swept into the room, showing few signs of her recent bathtub melancholia. She had knotted her hair up with chignon pins, small strands falling past her cheeks in a carelessly careless way. Mouthing an earnest “thank you” at Marco, she glided past and greeted her guests, taking congratulations and offering canapés. She winked over at Mara, as a group of her colleagues commented on her precocious achievement.

Mara observed the party. It was populated mostly by Sabine’s colleagues. Groups gathered here and there, settling in small clusters around fireplace. Many of the women were dressed in a way that insisted that they were serious intellectuals. Their dark framed glasses and black sheaths proved so, even if they had found themselves at a frivolous occasion such as this one. There was no middle ground between the austere and the ostentatious. Others had definitively shed their professorial skins

for the night, glittering as they moved through the room in bejewelled capes, and satin skirts, and beaky high heels. A deep sartorial divide was at play in this room, whether the academics knew it or not. Hell, Mara should tell them so someone could write a thesis on it.

Interrupting Mara’s musings, Sabine came over to the stony grey kitchen bench. As the final resting place of the deli platters, it was hemmed by old friends and intimates, only those select few showed no shame in picking at the remnants. Sabine leaned her elbow on Mara’s shoulder. “God, I love that dress. One from the college days, isn’t it? You look... sexy.”

“Sexy, really?” Mara looked up at her. “I’ve always hated that word. Reminds me of tradies cat-calling.” She popped an olive into her mouth. “Thanks, though. Feeling better?” Mara pulled Tom towards her as he walked over to join them.

“Always, thanks to you.” Sabine kissed Mara on the cheek and moved over to the liquor cabinet.

“Tom, you’re empty.” Sabine announced. “I’ll pour you a drink. A personal favourite.”

Mara watched amused, as Sabine poured a shot of gin and some tonic water into a glass, garnished it with a wedge of lime and handed the drink with a flourish to Tom.

“I call this ‘Evening Delight a la Sabine’. You’re lucky to experience it, not everyone can.”

Tom took the glass. “That’s funny, it tastes just like a gin and tonic.”

“Only to the untrained tastebuds, my dear.”

Tom laughed.

Mara stared at them. Well, this was novel.

Tom's work as a banker did not satisfy Sabine's requirements of the kind of person Mara should be with. Ambitious, but creative. Earns a reasonable amount, but motivated by a social conscience. When Mara pointed out that this job a) probably didn't exist, and that b) her own job writing promotional pieces for a women's magazine satisfied exactly none of those requirements. Sabine was unfazed. "But it's what you deserve", she had said simply.

This judgement had shaped Sabine's subsequent interactions with him. She had always displayed a certain coolness towards him. Well. About bloody time.

Mara turned towards Marco, who was standing next to her at the kitchen island. He was arranging marinated mushrooms and fat, oozing sun-dried tomatoes on a platter; they edged for space with the cheeses and water crackers. The preserved ingredients left an acidic smell. Slippery oil coated his fingers.

"Want some help?" Mara leaned over and popped a piece of soft brie in her mouth. Marco rolled his eyes. "Well, that's not really helping now, is it?" "Sorry", she said, eyebrows raised. She watched him, fingers fumbling with the elusively oily deli ingredients. He seemed tense. She felt a bit drunk.

Mara had first met Marco back in college, at a cafe she frequented in Glebe. The nonplussed barista had called out a coffee order for "Narco" and the ludicrousness of it made them both laugh. Mara had just started dating Tom. Still, they weren't exclusive and she had considered walking out after Marco when he left, to ask for his number. But their

names sounded so awful together. Mara and Marco. So she refrained. She could afford to be picky about such trivialities then.

But what would have come of it? She had bumped into him at The Fig a week later and pushed him towards Sabine. Partly because she herself couldn't have him. To meet him was itself something fateful. It had been a long time since they had seen each other. Marco's hair had grown, his face was unshaven. The shadow framed his face nicely, making him look leaner, more mature. The dress felt silken smooth on her thighs. She felt really quite drunk. She had always loved an unshaven face. Tom wouldn't go a day without shaving, even if they weren't leaving the house.

There was a time, early on in his and Sabine's relationship, when Marco had told her in the back of a cab that he had wanted to ask her out the day he met her. That he wished it had been Mara at The Fig instead of Sabine. Marco caught her staring at him. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Um, what? I'm not. Nothing." Marco put down the utensils he was juggling. "Sorry. Sabine's been a nightmare in the lead-up to this thing. I'm just tired." Oh, he thought she was offended by his shortness. "Oh no, it's fine. Here, let me help." She looked at him, the wine guiding her words. "By the way, you look really good tonight."

He looked at her. She leaned over him, searching for something to assist him in the careful arrangement of the platters. In a strange series of movements, the knife she reached for escaped both of their grasps. It fell, landing precariously close to Marco's foot. Mara's cheeks burned. "Fuck. I'm so sorry." The

room was spinning in a strange way. “I’m going to head outside. For some air.”

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A few minutes later, Marco followed her out of the house. She was leaning against the wrought iron front gate. The silver dress took on the light from the street lamps, shining against the dark street behind. Mara grimaced at him. Things were looking clearer. The cool night air had restored crispness to the edges of her vision. “Hey, I’m sorry about just before. I made it weird.” She looked at him. “Something about you cutting up those tomatoes was just too much to resist.” She hesitated, waiting for a laugh. “Yeah, I could tell.” Marco shook his head, smiling.

Mara looked across the street. There was a couch on the balcony of the house across the road. Two people were sitting on it, dangling their bare legs over the street below. They were laughing at something, unknowable to her. The air shifted. And then he was right in front of her, his face was closer and closer, he kissed her. It was not entirely unromantic. It was definitely not what Mara had imagined.

She was pressed against a gutter pipe; his breath was hot, uncomfortably so. It was open-mouthed, urgent, yielding. He tasted like Sabine’s lemon pie and... whiskey? Cognac? He pushed his hand up her leg, daring the slit to split. Their ungainly tongues slipped over one another like eels learning to swim, lips catching in each others’ teeth. Kissing one mouth for years had left them unadaptable. He broke away first and moved into the light spilling over onto the pavement from upstairs. Mara followed to sit on the low front gate. “Well, shit,” she said, laughing shakily. “How did we get ourselves

here?” He looked at the ground. “It doesn’t matter”, he said. “It doesn’t matter. Let’s not indulge the idiocy by discussing it.” He paused and looked up at her, almost smiling. “Kinda fun though, right?” Mara stared at him. He didn’t seem at all fazed. Did he do this often? It was just a kiss. And he had Sabine. And she had Tom.

Marco sighed. “Mara, look. Don’t overthink it. I didn’t mean it and I don’t think you did either. It’s not like telling them is going to change anything.” He paused. “I love you and everything, but it’s not like that, it has never been.”

Mara bit her lip. He was right. But she couldn’t shake the feeling that she would want Tom to tell her if something like this happened.

“It’ll be fine. Just, you know... relax.” Marco smiled and headed back into the house.

Mara looked out across the street. The high moon had slipped behind some clouds, its meagre offering of light now even more inconsequential. She followed Marco into the house. The now exaggerated slit showed more leg than ever.

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Mara had peaked early. She felt surprisingly sober as she went back to Tom. Sabine, on the other hand, was raucous. Mara wandered over to a conversation between Sabine and some of her female colleagues. A bird-like woman had captivated the attention of the group. She was dressed in a patchwork silk scarf, the jewel tones falling down her shoulders. Her orange hair clashed wonderfully with the violet and maroon. “Sometimes... sometimes Mark likes it when we’re still almost fully dressed. Like it’s so rushed and passionate, that there’s no time to take our clothes off.” The woman took a gulp of

champagne. “That, or he doesn’t know how to tell me I got fat.” She laughed. Her gold earrings swung. Sabine joined in the laughter uproariously, tipping back her head. Mara watched them, unseeing. How was she going to tell Tom?

Another woman, a professor Mara had been introduced to earlier, chimed in. A mess of thick black curls framed her face. “I kind of like it on the washing machine.” She was met with quizzical expressions. “When it’s on, you know. Something about the movement.” The group burst into laughter again. Sabine snorted into her glass.

“Sometimes... sometimes I like watching myself. The mirror, usually.” She giggled. “I know, that’s so egotistical, isn’t it? Freud would have had a field day with me.” Peals of laughter exploded around Mara. Mara joined in. Of course, trust Sabine.

At the sound of Mara’s laughter, Sabine snapped around to look at her. Her eyes widened. “What?” Mara asked, self-consciously. “Nothing.” Sabine paused, then smiled widely. “I just didn’t realise you were there. I’m going to get another drink.”

Mara watched her walk away, puzzled. Had she missed something? Did Sabine know what had just happened somehow, by some fateful improbability? Mara stayed in the conversation a few minutes more, but began to feel her concentration ebbing. God. Now Tom and Sabine would both have to know. What if she lost both of the most important people in her life in one idiotic move? Maybe if she got Tom alone now... as long as she emphasised the idiocy and meaninglessness of it all, he would understand. She would approach the two of them. Her story was set. They were tipsy, he had kissed

her, it hadn’t meant a thing. And she was desperately sorry to Sabine. God, why had she done it?

She excused herself from the increasingly boisterous group of women. Stories had moved on to the strangest places they had ever had sex. Mara was somewhat glad to not have a contribution expected of her. She would go find Tom now, and just tell him. She saw him leaning over the balcony, talking to Sabine. Their figures were silhouetted softly against the streetlights. She watched.

But Tom and Sabine didn’t appear to notice her approaching from behind them. Tom laughed at something Sabine had said; they were still slightly too far away for Mara to hear what. Sabine brushed his jacket as she raised her glass to her lips.

It could have been accidental.

Mara stopped. She had thought that tonight was the story of a kiss, of her own transgression.

But no... the smiling, the sudden affinity. The palm print on the mirror. Sabine... Sabine liked to watch herself.

Tom turned to notice Mara coming towards them. He lifted his elbows from the balcony railing, standing upright. Sabine stayed gazing over the balcony, cradling her wine glass.

“Where have you been?” He smiled at Mara, extending a hand for her to take. She acquiesced. He pulled her close to his chest. “Have I told you how good you look in that dress? It’s so... sexy.”

// Divya is a Law/Arts (IV) student, closet communist (oops) and wonders how people can be sceptical of the climate, because it definitely exists. Her favourite month is September, partly because of the nice temperature but mainly because Greenday are all asleep. //

Here's a little grain of our truth:

The truth can be scary, we turn a blind eye to what we see as confronting.

We are Scared Beings.

But why are you scared... are you guilty?

Have you failed to educate yourself on what this land is built on?

Dispossession? Assimilation? Genocide....

But it was in the past... it wasn't me...

I wasn't even born...

If you have that attitude then you too are also to blame...

Our anthem says we are young and free, but how does that work?

We are the longest living still existing culture in the world

far from young this sacred country is.

I come from a fierce bloodline that is so sacred, a white soul could not comprehend.

Here is our truth here is our pain here is our fight.

This country was perfect, this country knew the concept of sharing,
protection, scarification, and survival.

The land is still here, and the only difference is that the spirits of some
individual's walking throughout this land are not.

I think they have lost themselves somewhere.

I do hope you can find yourselves sometime...

Stop being such Scared Beings

I cannot help but see people wishing now for what once was this whole land was, the
people who nourished mother earth and treated this land as their own sacred beings...

have you heard anyone really say 'yeah I love Sydney'... 'Yeah I love the traffic and
moving 3cm ahead in the space of 30 minutes'...

Yeah I love the pollution'... 'ahh so fresh'

Me either.

Scared Beings

VANESSA TURNBULL-ROBERTS

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Dear Editor,

Here are six poems created from fragments of works in the LRB poetry archive. The process of creating the poems was as follows: all opening lines were grouped into hundreds, starting with 25 October 1979. From each hundred I selected the first ten lines. From those lines, I chose phrases which appealed to me. For example, from the first group of ten lines, I settled on "*In a house with a leaking roof*" from Seamus Heaney's two poems. From all those opening lines which I liked, a number of them suggested themselves into themes, which preoccupy me in my own artistic practice. These themes are:

Awkwardness reflecting vulnerability
Consciously composing what is seemingly random
Elegance, simplicity
Movement as metaphor for instability
Strict sense of space, rules, regulations, formality
Surprising connections
Similarities between past and present

Some might say that reusing lines of poems is a form of theft, or a trespass on the creativity of others, covering up a lack of creativity on the part of the gatherer. I would say this is *Appropriation in Art*. Artists such as Sheree Levine and Barbara Kruger created artworks by "recycling" or appropriating to critique gender imbalance and misogynist advertising practice respectively. I am appropriating from your poetry archive to critique your poor poetry layouts with respect to their inherent creative differences to all other writing, including advertising, in your Review. Others like Kenny Goldsmith believe plagiarism, particularly of "boring" digital material from the everyday, is absolutely the best way to tap into one's originality!

What stifles me each and every issue is LRB's practice of transforming each poem into an image embodied/held/contained within a thin black box, a metaphor in my eyes for isolating poetry from the everyday, and consigning it to an early death.

In looking at six issues randomly selected from the last six months, all poems were centre stage in their standardised coffin, the same font size and type, with the exception of one poem which had a double space and centered asterisk between each of its lines to reference the poem's "postcard" musings.

Please don't publish my poems in your usual layout for poetry (if you do publish them).

Consistent standardising in layout sends a message to a reader not to "see" each poem, making each text only marginally different from the surrounding writings and advertising material. This practice deadens the poem and discourages contemplation and lively discussion. I feel that the step that the LRB takes from receiving the poem from the author and inserting it into the standard poem layout is akin to squeezing out much of the unique inspiration able to be contemplated by a reader.

Poetry requires a different contemplation to an essay, review or ad. A poet is a generous soul intent upon social discourse and meaningful living. The poem is a gift.

The phrases I extracted had a life from within their original poems and they now have a new, second life in the poems presented here. This life should not be constrained within the standard poetry layout LRB uses. The LRB archive is a treasure trove of contemplated life experience.

Six

MARGARET JEWELL

1/6

Written on the flyleaf
in royal blue ink
wrong'uns, named and renamed
her pedigree
his progeny
his blind spot jerks him bug-eyed awake
it's obvious now
his own sugar-plum, his fairy-sweet sprig,
their evil star

2/6

Gawd it's always when she's either pumped up or vegged out
NO! Not up there! Down...down in her thigh! There! There! Just zap her!
Fuzzy Dizzy Wheezy
Bang! She drops..... flat out
one snippy sip Pisco Sour, one pretty peppy high kick and wow! She's knockin' on
heaven's door
lives on the edge
miasma looms
the brightest star in the school pics
Icarus
just didn't know it

3/6

I farm to the very edge
My Skin confronts her skin
El Nino or La Nina niente nel mezzo
outta my control
gotta land somewhere fazes, dazes, me and mine
paralyses from time to time screwed for all to see
fino simbiosize

4/6

In such light airs
when the street has gone all so quiet
working cranes in equipause
movement slows
the low sun dapples the walls,
the little wooden shelf
and smooths out the ravaged road,
all the words I need
dissolve in black relief against the setting sky

5/6

Sounds from outer space
of somewhere else
such far-off ports
thrummed down wherever
air-bells
syntonic
outside the city
beyond the flat sea
beyond my orbit
of steel and stone

6/6

Before I sign off
I sweep, wash, reorder;
I shut up shop.
it's what I do.
my place in the game.
moved from place to place
tile upon the board
single unit in cream and grey.
streamlined.
calibrated.

set square to square. Settled.



**Yours sincerely,
Margaret Jewell**

// **Margaret** has lost herself in a Fine Arts (Hons.) maze which happily just included Writing as Practice! She is now waiting for Poetry as Practice and Playwriting as Practice to appear on the course list. She is moving from the super quiet and well behaved North Shore to live in Marrickville and is already writing with a thick rough tipped flat 6B raw cedar graphite pencil instead of her usual nicely pointed and elegant Derwent 4Bs to come to terms with this gritty move. //

Summer Stone Fruit

ANASTASIA PITT

It is always a shock to see airborne creatures fallen to earth. Jolted out of the suspended ecstasy of flight to tumble like a stone, unable to evade the weighted clutches of gravity. The creature is huddled there in a cluster of limbs and skin resting upon the coarse sand. Grains cover the gnarled claws, as the shore gloats at being the final resting place of a free thing.

It lies before the opening to the track that lines the cliff face, on its side as if wrapped in sleep. She yearns to cradle it against the scratchy linen of her nightdress, but her hands are full of something else wrapped in soft, white muslin. Its belly is bloated, expanded with the stale air of death. Wiry hair carpets the tiny, grotesque body and the inky membrane of his wings. Fine as silk material stretched tight between twig-bones, wet and melting now. Great gaps eat at the tautness of that delicate span, caving in and dissolving upon the rough touch of early rainfall. The bat looks like a smoky winged baby. She gazes upon its limp, humanoid genitals and wants to retch.

She hadn't thought much of him at first. Her eyes had slid past him as she leant against that grimy bar, with a vague detachment that rendered her separate from the pulsating mass of bodies converging in the seedy half-light of the club. Later, he confessed that he had watched her from a distance all night while the longhaired, leather-clad singer continued to croon morosely to his drunken audience. He approached her with that unaffected grace that comes from years of dispassionate and detached self-observation. She looked at him sideways and told him she liked his hands. His hands, long, lean and strong, steady where hers were tentative.

As they lay in the dark of her childhood bedroom that first night with midnight sweat glazing their heated skin, she smelt like the air after a back burning, heavy with the acrid smoke of a late summertime haze. It was a smell that never failed to ignite both thrill and alarm in equal measure. A scent that wholly intoxicated him whilst sparking a flutter of unease. After that night, he sought out that

smoky scent at every turn. On the greasy hair of the waitress pouring his coffee and in the creased pages of his tatty pre-loved books. He would often breathe deeply of the fog that seemed to cocoon the city in its pre-dawn stupor; always in the hope that he would once again chance upon that heady aroma of charred wood. They moved in together in what her parents would term a 'smitten frenzy'. In a way, they had been right. She had escaped from the stifling rooms of her childhood home with all the haste of an asthmatic evading asphyxiation. Their new flat was dark and grimy; a small wedge of brick pushed between neighbouring sardine dwellers. For a while, he thought she was getting better. Until she wasn't. The leaden air of the inner city hollowed her out and pinned her down.

When winter came and the days got shorter, they smoked out in their garden. Frosted breath curled outwards, the foggy herald of speech. Legs stretched stiff and tartan covered, while night and crawling vines climbed the greying fence. Once he came home with a plastic sheath of wrinkled snow pea pellets, which she pushed into the earth that lay exposed between cracked tiles. Shriveled and frostbitten now. She would sometimes try to conjure their crisp raw sweetness.

•

He had expected that the act of leaving home would trigger a change in her; that it would allow her the freedom to shake loose her hurts and blossom, but it is hard for things to grow in the ashen city, and she was still wrapped up in pleasing her parents.

Her inability to sever those toxic bonds seemed to him as a personal form of self-harm, a private battle to which he was rendered a powerless spectator. Those dark nights when she would come home to him after visiting them, too limp to speak, refusing food with a tiny shake of the head. "When you come back, you don't let me touch you." He wanted to pick her up and whisk her far away from the place that had grown and fed her illness and the people that had allowed it to happen.

When they left the city together that spring, she hadn't felt much. She was still cold and all she wanted was plums. The black kind, with matte, muted skin. She craved them compulsively, with a yearning she felt sure would never pale. She made herself sick on them.

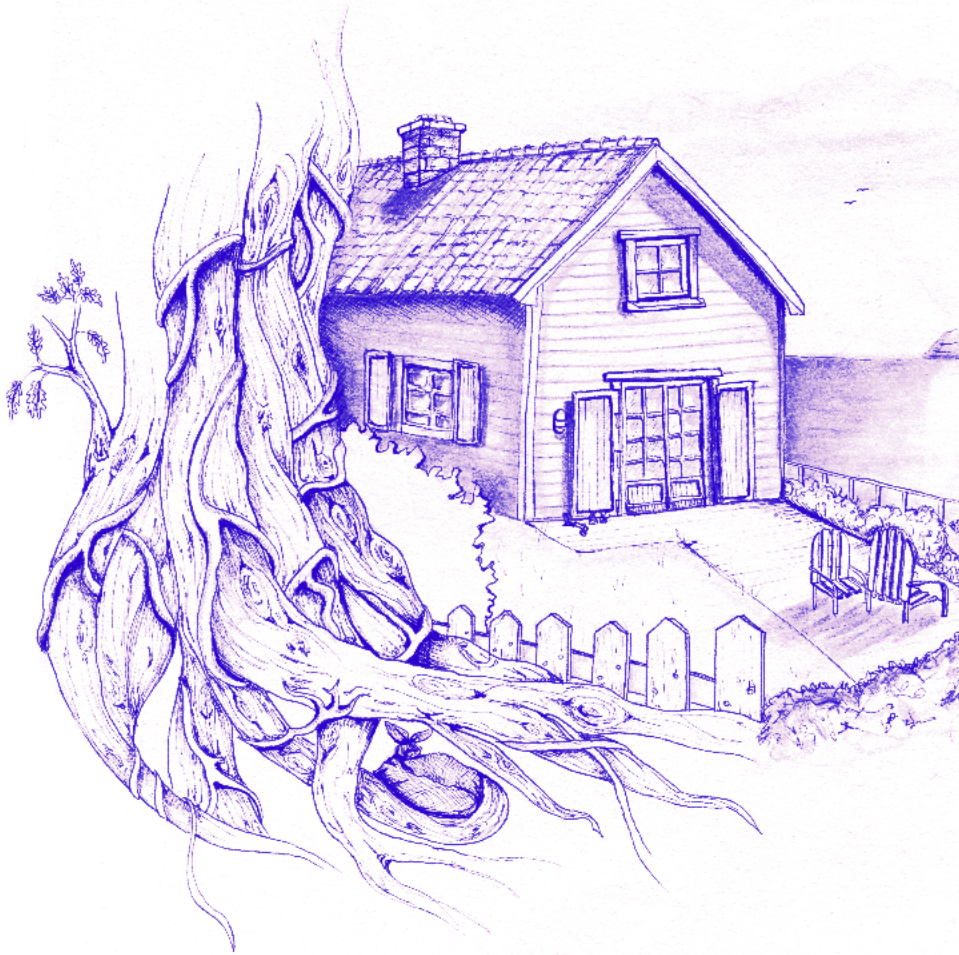
After they first packed their things into that sputtering car and drove towards the sea, she ate plums and only plums for days on end until her fingers were stained with their blood. Those were confusing days. Days when she would leave the cottage on the cliff to walk until her feet were numb, leaden weights connected to her aching legs.

She would struggle to tell you what she found on her journeys, or why she began in the first place. If asked, she would be unable to tell if her body was made of human organs or simply filled with the crimson fleshiness of a summer stone fruit.

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She had left the city in a state of apathetic quiet. She had stayed silent when he claimed it would be a healthy change, preferring to let him hope in peace. So it comes as a surprise when she realises that she has come to adore this desolate outcrop, and the cottage that squats contentedly over the ocean, with its peeling paint and drifting white curtains.

She had been reluctant to unpack her belongings when they first arrived. He didn't push her, but his careful assembling of her easel and oil paints in the north facing room of the house had irritated her anyway. She was wary of that room for many days, but one morning while he was out swimming in the bay, she approached that sunlit corner with the tentative steps of a child first learning to walk. He found her sitting upon the stool he had made for her, ankles crossed and bare backed. Wild hair wrapped and knotted around a pencil, with a few rogue tendrils curling red, and glossy around her neck. Her hands were remembering the joy of creating life upon a canvas, and she was oblivious to all but the blending of colour, the sharp smell of turpentine and the heat of the sun upon her skin.



After that morning, she unpacked her meagre belongings into the creaking chest of drawers beside their bed and put her toothbrush with his into a tumbler upon the bathroom sink. They spent the nights when he was home tangled amongst blankets in their small, whitewashed room. Lamplight had fallen across the valleys of their faces, as he twined her hair around and around the bones of his fingers. She took to venturing outside as the sun rose over the watery horizon to find inspiration for her brush and, in this way, first stumbled across the feral, overgrown veggie patch facing the ocean. Buried amongst the strangling weeds she found a vine full laden with bloated, rosy tomatoes. They were smooth and cool to touch and when she bit into one, juice and seeds ran down her hollow cheeks. She had never tasted anything so fresh and sublime, and for the first time

in a long while, she felt no guilt and no compulsion to expel the sustenance from her body. She filled her pockets and brought them to him and together they ate tomato sandwiches and watched from wicker chairs as the eastern sky bruised crimson.

The air is cold, burning her nose on its rasping journey towards her lungs. She is walking along the cliff above that pale stretch of sand, moving through a sweeping plane of grass that waves in mournful mimicry of the ocean. The craggy cliffs beyond the fold of the hill tumble with a resigned grace into the churning waters, now slate grey, now frothy white as they lick rock and weed. She stands beside the gnarled tree, its skin crusted with salt spray carried by the wind. With one palm flat against its greying trunk and the other cradling her tiny wrapped



burden, she follows the stooped fisherman on the rocks below with dry, stinging eyes.

The yellow costume keeps his torso safe from the briny spray, but from where she stands he appears to be a bloated sea creature posing as a man enveloped in an anorak. Will he bring his silver gilled prize back to a waiting wife with an open oven and garnish of fresh butter and dill? Perhaps she is so very tired of the taste of salty flesh that he must sell his catch to the first buyer, in exchange for crusty bread and ham. Does their cozy cottage feel cold and barren with children grown up and escaped to the city? She wonders if they sit across from each other at dinnertime and feel miles apart. Did their children come to dread that war of icy small talk, the stalemate between dishes of peas and carrots?

In her house, dinner had always been punctual and pallid, a military affair. The vegetables were invariably of the frozen kind. It wasn't so much the shape of them, or even the dull shades cluttering the china that had made her uneasy. Corrugated sherbet, puckered custard, withered mould on store-bought bread. What had often struck her was not the offensiveness of their attire, but their suspended state of preservation. How was one to distinguish between life and death, when the dead languished lively in an ocean of congealed gravy upon the dinner plate?



She learnt as a small girl that no one talks about frightening dreams, or gives voice to uncharitable observations. If you have nothing pleasant to say, don't say it. Better, don't think it. Once she found a dead dormouse lying stiff and forlorn amongst the dust under her bed. She had brought it to her mother with tear-tracked cheeks, its body tightly wound in a rigid foetal curl. Her mother's lips had tightened in distaste and she was later heard gloating to her father, "Thank goodness the poison finally kicked in, those little beasts are much too vocal during the night."

In this place, she has learned to sleep again. Soothed by the lilting permanence of waves, she would go to bed with the sun and him, and wake in turn to greet the watery brilliance that heralded a new dawn. But it happened in the dark, and he wasn't there this time.

If she had picked up the landline and dialed his number he would have been packing up his gear in some sticky venue while men in black ushered the last dregs of blind, loose limbed girls out the double swing doors. He would have seen her name flash neon in the chilled night air, and curse at himself for leaving her alone too soon. He would have done all this, had she called him. She didn't. Instead she sat upon their empty bed, cramps racking her body until the newborn light of early morning fell upon her face and touched the bloodstained sheets.

I scrub my skin raw, but the stains are stubborn. Out, out damned spot. But the flesh remembers and now my hands are dyed plum juice red and everything I touch rots to black.

What struck her was the size of it. It was no bigger than a rosebud, and yet the weight of that shriveled pink blossom rendered her helpless. She had been wholly unaware of the life sprouting in that dark unknown part until it had come loose and tumbled out of her. It had been something alive and growing, and now it was not. It was as simple as that. The only thing she was left with was a muddy ache in her abdomen and cold, sticky thighs.

The surface skin is pulled back like a snarl. Wind through the open window whips sweaty, dark tendrils across my face and pushes greedy fingers into the space between my lips. Scalding tub, melt away the mess and cauterize the cut. The windows of this steam soaked room gape wide open, to gaze reverently at the broiling agitation of a morning storm.

They had told her, in that sterile white room with clunky scales and self-help pamphlets, that she would never carry and bear children. She had been so wholly wrapped up in her own exquisite breed of sadness that she was incapable of feeling any sense of loss at her own infertility. She had gazed upon her bat-boned wrists and watched her inky veins as they throbbled beneath the skin.

Behold, is that Poseidon who rides upon the churning waves, desperate to break their contact with the shoreline? Please Grey Ocean, I implore you, rush past biting sand, finger your way up craggy cliff. Glide with dainty steps up willing lawn, past open door and gaping windows. Briny mistress, fill each yawning room with your seething lament until you creep gently to the tub where immersed in tepid red water I sit, palms to ankles, chin to knees, knees to breast.

She leaves the cottage as a weightless ghost, barefooted and glassy-eyed. She has washed the crusty red from her thighs, that messy evidence of

something lost. She is cradling a swaddled ball of soft white muslin, the thing inside shrouded from the rain that spits down upon them from a slate grey sky. Her feet, wet and muddy, pick up and carry the detritus of grass and weed. She walks with sightless steps away from the cottage towards the beach.

Whisper to me of the nymphs that swim beneath your skin, those watery women with weed in their hair and melodies on their lips. Take me with you, Dark Ocean; take me down so that I may see the swollen moon through your glass green eyes. Bear me below, so that I may look up from your depths and remember with detached nostalgia, that once I lived and loved with the sublime frailty of humankind. Take me with you that my empty womb and deadened feet might dance nimbly with the vibrations of the tide.

She does not know how long she has been standing beside this tree upon the cliff, gazing down at the frothing sea. The fisherman has gone home, the wind is dropping and the starlings have come. She has only ever seen them in the burning dusk, but their murmur in the wan light of morning wholly arrests her. Hundreds of tiny feathered bodies moving as one, their flight a sacred geometry of movement and grace. Her breathing slows and the bunched bones of her back begin to loosen. She thinks of him arriving home smelling of second-hand smoke and lethargy, to find the house left open and empty. She tells him from where she sits that she is fine. Her body is warm, she will return to him and together they will eat of the stone fruit that drops ripe and willing from laden branches. She yearns to tell him that her flame no longer flickers, it burns. She wants to watch the spring of her life heat to summer and fade to winter dusk and greying hair. She sits with her spine climbing the ancient trunk and is finally completely still.

Here I sit against your body O Mother Oak, as the day waxes new to full, wanes full to old. My neglected body is wrapped in your roots, tethered to the earth with the bond of blood and dust. I look out between your unfurled branches and weep not for sadness but for joy at a life

reclaimed, a body reborn. The gift of life is ours to create if we so choose and I rejoice at this glorious melancholy in you as I bury the small parcel I have carried to this wind-wracked cliff. That sweet little death in me that paved the way for rebirth; that cleared the film from my eyes and the resentment from my spirit. For now we, ever your daughters, stand upon this rain-washed precipice with peaceful acquiescence. In your open hands I lay to rest this hopeful seed as the stars arise and silver bubbles swim like flitting minnows, called to the surface by the glow of a pregnant moon.



// **Anastasia** is studying Arts/Fine Arts and is constantly telling inquisitive well-wishers that no, she has no idea what career she will launch into once she has graduated. She spends most of her time re-reading childhood books, adding to her obscene graphic pen collection and wondering if her cats sneak off to meetings in the middle of the night to take part in some kind of feline uprising. She also secretly enjoys listening to Celtic music and writing scraps of poetry that she will probably never show anybody, ever. //



// **James** studies Combined Law and Commerce and loves playing the oboe and bagpipes. He enjoys cross country running, hiking, and debating. James' culinary specialties are scrambled eggs and heating up a can of soup, and he can never say no to a game of ping pong or Mario Kart. //

GRAHAM



Graham had, from a young age, suspected that there was something indefinable and yet potently wrong with him. He had gleaned as much from the sardonic laughing of the girls at school and the acidic words of his mother's friends who claimed he had "deviant eyes, just like his old man", whatever that meant. However these interactions only added to his theory.

What truly gave birth to his beliefs was an event that transpired when Graham was only eight years old. Having just moved to the Central Coast, his parents had bought the flashiest example of 1960s architecture available. The house was all high rectangles and glass which, situated as it was behind the front yard pool, gave the impression of ice cubes melting into water.

The pool itself reflected the painfully bright rays of the Australian sun, and the edges were bedecked with little black and white squares. Graham's father had told him not to go in the pool but had not been bothered to tell him why.

He had not explained that swimming was something to be learnt. Graham had grown up in the country, where there were few pools and no beaches and so the surreal beauty of this front yard masterpiece plagued him. He wanted to be covered in the sparkling substance, to experience the weightlessness.

In his mind he saw himself floating effortlessly atop the water like the lemon in his mother's G&T.

Graham resented his father's disinterest in explaining the rules, feeling not for the first time that he was being deprived. Deprivation was the leash on which he and his mother lived, the leash that would pull them closer with only a few kind words whenever they ventured too far. Kindness was always the exception though, as most of Graham's attempts to reach his father had been met with a silent indifference and his imploring words would evaporate, as if they had never been spoken.

However never was his father's disinterest in him more clear to Graham than the day he asked for permission to enter the pool. His father had been resting on the couch, his head buried in a newspaper when his son approached him. The boy had a speech prepared listing the reasons he should be allowed in the pool that he gave to his father in as confident of a tone as he could muster. Yet when the last breathless words had left his lips he waited in silent anticipation for a response only to be rebuffed by a near imperceptible shake of his father's head.

His father had then stuck his finger in his ear twisting it around three times and resumed the reading of his paper, as if Graham's voice had been only a particularly loud blowfly. Though hurt by this failure, Graham's curiosity was not deterred and so

JENNIFER BOWERS

he bided his time till the opportunity arose to enter the pool in secret. On a particularly hot November day that time came. Graham's mother had passed out asleep on the couch waiting for her toenail polish to dry, and his father was at work. Having safely stowed his clothes in one of the gargantuan plastic pot plants, Graham slipped furtively past his mother's sleeping form, and edged his way towards the shining mass of water out front.

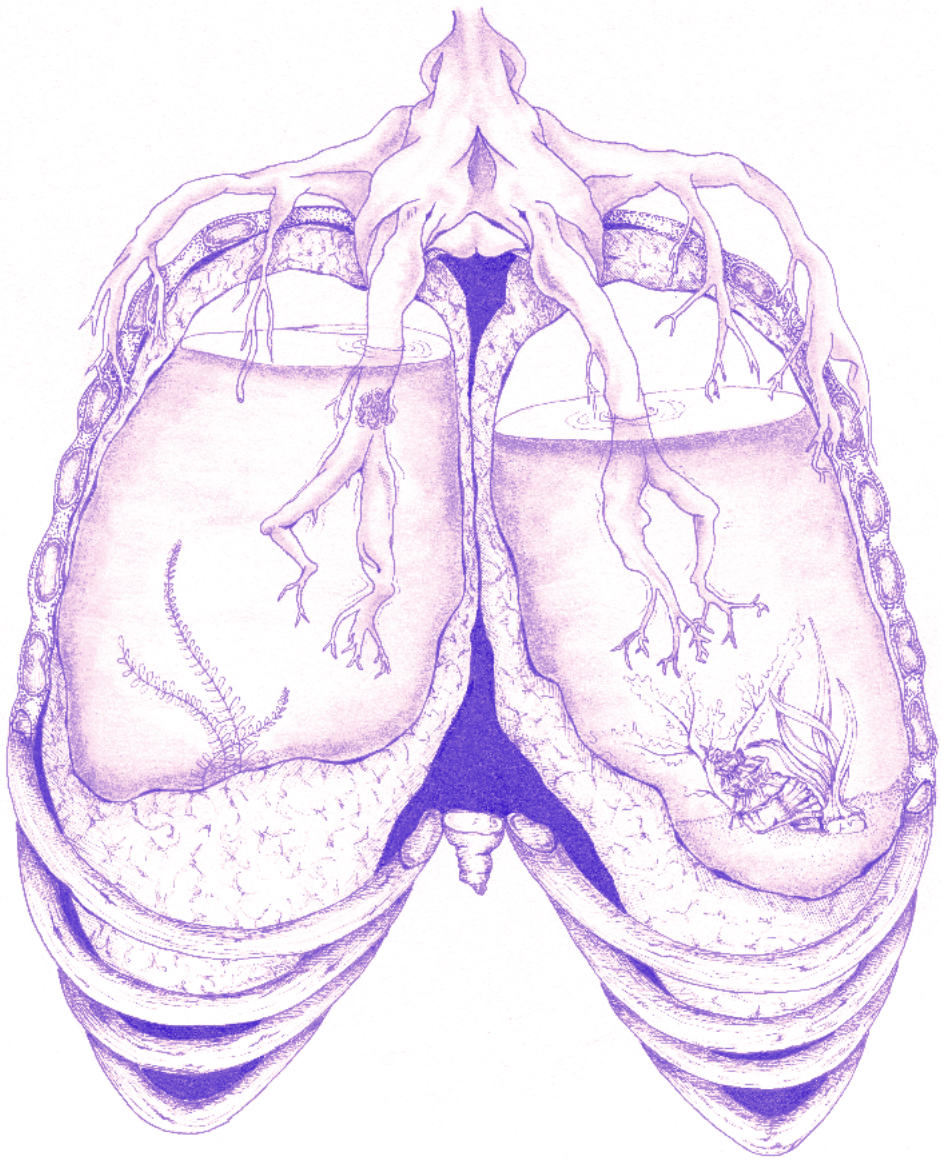
When Graham first dipped his toe in, he was struck by the cool relief of the water. Beneath the pool's surface, light oscillated over Graham's foot in wavering lines that made it seem as if the limb itself had become as crystalline as the water surrounding it. As he closed his eyes he imagined his entire body becoming a crystal beneath the blue surface. How the cool wet pool would cleanse the heat and dirt and stickiness from his pores. How his father would come home and find his son infinitely brighter and cleaner than he had ever been before. Perhaps he would be admired. He wanted so badly to be covered in this magical substance that he squeezed his eyes tightly shut, swallowed his fears and propelled himself into the water's depths.

At first he simply hung there, neither sinking nor floating, his eyes widening at the quivering lines and patterns that moved across the pool floor. However, inevitably he became conscious of the fact that his feet could not touch the ground. The revelation

sucked all of the air out of his lungs and an ache began to bloom outwards from his chest. It felt as if a hand were squeezing his lungs as streaks of pain shot out into his arms and feet. He grabbed desperately at the water above him, unable to accept his helplessness. His small hands would grab the substance lifting him up only incrementally, before he would be sucked back down even deeper. He tried to yell for his mother but the water clogged his screams so that only an impotent gargling escaped.

It was at this point the boy heard the sound of his father's car pulling up in the driveway. There was a brief moment of relief that someone was there to save him, before the pain in his lungs made it hard to think. The image of his father appeared from above. It was blurred from where Graham looked and yet the grey eyes that stared down on him appeared clearer than any other part of his form. He waited for his father to rescue him, for those familiar hands to pull him from under the crushing mass to the air above. Yet as the seconds dragged past his father only stood there looking down upon his son.

Finally Graham saw what seemed like a slight shaking of his father's head and realised that he was not going to be rescued. He wished he were braver then, that his face were unreadable, but his heart defeated him and from under the water, drowned sobs bubbled from his mouth and his brown eyes leaked more water into the pool that enveloped



him. The whole world went blue. At some point all the pain and fear vanished leaving Graham to drift under the water strangely content, feeling fairly sure that this was his death and that father would be there to witness it. He knew that he would never have to do or feel anything ever again, that he would die a crystal boy in this heavenly cocoon of water.

Graham did not die but instead woke hours later in his bed with no memory of how he had survived. He did not have the nerve to ask his father, not after seeing those impassive eyes watching him struggle beneath the water. Nor did he ever dare to disobey him again. He felt that death had aimed its bow at him only to change its mind just as the arrow was released. As time passed it seemed that death had even gained a liking for him, following him everywhere he went. To begin with, five children from his year at school did not make it to their twenties, their lives taken by rare disease, road accidents or, in the cruel case of his childhood crush, suicide. Once Graham left school strangers started dying. An electrician he found immersed in a pool of water at work, a dehydrated runner in the city marathon. His mere proximity seemed to herald the death of those around him.

However, it was not until he was 21 that Graham decided the death was actually coming from inside him. The epiphany came about when he was staying at a hostel in London and he befriended a humorous but unsuccessful librettist whose death would be the sixteenth. The man had died from a mix of nondescript pills and liquor which he downed as a means of celebrating his freshly finished opera *The Little Faun*. Graham had been there the moment the lethal compound disappeared down the man's throat. He had even seen the large rise and fall of the Adam's apple, as it struggled to push the little

pebbles down. The next morning he had discovered the dead man upon his return from a cigarette run, the body lying still as earth under the white hostel sheets. The entire room had erupted into chaos, a girl from the bunk underneath the librettist shrieked in terror, sprinting out the door, and the two Italians from the opposite beds had implored their God before following swiftly after.

Graham however was calm. As the police came, asked their questions and left, Graham remained undisturbed. He had been through it all before. He knew what questions they would ask and what information they would need but most of all he knew that it had gone beyond coincidence.

Before the incident in the pool, death had not been a part of Graham's life. It had never been more real than a character disappearing from the plot of a novel, yet ever since it had been as pervasive and ever present as the air he breathed. He understood now why it had not taken him; it had found inside him a place where it belonged. He knew that as he travelled through life, all that he encountered would also be touched by death. His father must have seen that. As his eyes looked down upon him, he saw that his son was dark and tainted, not to be saved.

Graham's belief was so deeply entrenched that when he fell in love it was with fear in his heart, and when they married and she begged for children, it was only with a suppressed terror that he consented. He knew that death would want his children. The first born, Patrick, was delivered with the cord wrapped around his neck. The doctors cut the cord and the boy was born damaged but alive. This reaffirmed Graham's certainty of danger, but also gave him hope that perhaps his children would be able to evade death as he had.

The second child, Sarah, was born healthy and glowing in every chubby limb. He loved her immensely for she had nothing of him in her. Her hair was blonde where his was black, and her demeanour was always bright. Feeling he had tempted the fates enough Graham had refused the idea of more children, but his youngest daughter Louise had come anyway. Louise's hair was as black as his, and her eyes the same curved shape and colour. Patrick had been such a blend but this child looked just like him. He refused to be close to the girl as she grew up, sensing that one day she would be taken away. When Louise was seven and Sarah eleven, Graham took the girls to the beach. It was an overcast day and the ocean waves crashed bitterly against the shore prompting the troupe to content themselves with traversing rocky outcrops.

Graham and Sarah hung back, inspecting the smooth black surfaces of their favourite stones while Louise scampered on ahead. She was accustomed to being the odd one out, and had learnt to revel in the extra freedom. Her soft little bare feet sprung from one rock to another, catching slightly on jagged surfaces that left faint pink and red lines across her soles.

Her keen eyes searched the cliff face for potential obstacles to overcome and rested on two large boulders, between which a small opening was visible. She always loved squeezing herself through small spaces. She loved stretching her limbs in strange directions to slip through a hole, and then rearranging them again on the other side. She could not let her father see her or he would try to call her back, so she turned around slightly to see if his eyes were on her but, as usual, they were focused

on Sarah. His large hand held Sarah's inside it, and in her palm he placed a stone. Sarah smiled and rubbed her forehead against his as they always did and Louise felt her stomach tighten in the strange way that it often would at those times.

Whipping her head back around, Louise took the moment to flee for the little opening, her heart full of anticipation as to what she might find on the other side. Unfortunately for her, Sarah looked up. She saw Louise disappear through the hole and urged on by a sense of sisterly competition streaked after her, and after Sarah followed Graham. At that moment Graham felt as one does when they are walking with their eyes on the ground only to look up and find that something which was far away is suddenly right in front of them.

When he got to the hole in the cliff the two girls were already on the other side. He yelled at them to come out but neither seemed to hear him. The hole was made of two boulders and an array of smaller rocks at the bottom, and so he worked on the smaller rocks, pulling them away until he could squeeze through. As soon as he entered the darkened cave the girls turned towards him, both smiling somewhat sheepishly.

Their smiles turned horribly limp though as the first of the waves crashed in behind their father. It knocked all of them off their feet, sweeping the girls onto their backs and tumbling them one over the other. The second and third waves came only seconds after as the girls scrambled to get up, their feet slipping on the slick green carpet of moss beneath them. Graham attempted to get to them but a black wave slammed into his side pinning him

against a wall, where the cracked shell of an oyster sliced open his calf. Dark clouds of blood bloomed up through the water that now lapped around his thighs. Graham's vision went blurry for a second and he stumbled and grasped for a purchase in the cave. The girls were clinging onto one another but the water was quickly starting to rise above Louise's shoulders. With the jolt of a wave, their hands separated and Louise was swept to the outer edges of the cave. Graham knew that this was death coming to take his children, and so he made a decision that he had truly made a long time ago, that Sarah was the one who would live. Both girls were shrieking as the rising water threw them against the rough cave walls and rolled over and above their heads. Louise's feet were a foot from the ground and Sarah's nose only just above the surface.

Graham plunged into the chaos, his head throbbing as his arms carved the water and a trail of red rippled out behind him.

He grabbed Sarah by the waist and pulled her alongside him but his bones felt soft inside his body and his eyelids were heavy. For a moment he wondered whether death had come for all of them. Graham made it to a ledge, and from there he wedged Sarah between himself and the rock and clung to his eldest daughter as Louise disappeared from sight. Louise was suffering under the tide, her knees cut open from banging against the rocks and her stomach full of water. She could not see her father or sister, but knew they would be together.

Graham could only see her shadow as it whipped to and fro, her mouth appearing for seconds above the waves then disappearing again for lengths of time,

so long it seemed she would not resurface. When she did, Graham wanted to go to her but knew that to attempt it would mean losing them both. Instead he watched helplessly as Louise struggled with the tide, the horrible familiarity of it making him tremble all over. He could feel the pressure building in his child's lungs, could imagine the sound of her gargles that surely existed underneath the gushing and cracking of waves against rock. His chest heaved great moans against Sarah's cheek and he screamed out Louise's name, knowing that it was futile but unable to contain the word.

Louise however would not consent to die, her lithe little arms found purchase against the rock when the waves slammed her against it, and she clung to it with all the anger inside her young body. All the anger she had for her loved sister Sarah, and her cold father and all the anger she had for the waves that beat against her.

The air that would not fill her lungs was just another thing life denied her. She would not accept it this time. Her sister's pure blonde strands would never be hers, her father's warm embrace would never be hers, nor the stories he and Sarah shared while she listened from outside, but this life would be hers. With each aching second that Louise clung to her jagged purchase she was letting her father go. As the tide receded her father receded with it and though she could hear him shouting her name it felt to her that he was no longer there. Graham had chosen Sarah, Louise had chosen life.

Wind Of A Gentle Low

MICHAEL ACKROYD

Afternoon Sun

They lay upon the ceiling in their stretched out bodies, long and lax. Fingers of afternoon sun reached through the horizontal blinds, casting ladders of light upon the wall. The older of the two shifted his arms behind his head and glanced at the beaming slits of sky.

“Did you see the birds?”

“No...”

The younger turned his head towards the window.

A whole flock was wheeling in and out of view. Like someone had just released them from a cage at the top of some tall building in the middle of a cityscape. The maroon shirt of the older was caught under his waist, pulling tight across the body, following the subtle dips between his ribs. Slowly, the sun’s warmth grew deep into the skin, missing the tongue of a lover, low frequencies hitting the body back in Berlin, warming from the inside, light and shadow between fingers, serotonin and dopamine concocting bliss. The older groaned with pleasure. The younger glanced towards the sky and closed his eyes, hoping for the birds.

Tow

The following thoughts are narrated by John Malkovich. You are not dreaming.

The cafe gives you a wide berth from the other citizens of the mind. You fill your mouth with the next sip of coffee, and notice how cold it has become. Examine the rhythm of the traffic moving through the intersection outside the window, considering the time that has passed since warmer sips. Palms tucked around the bowl of the cup. The comfort of the booth brings a deep awareness to your self, not as pervasive as it was when you first arrived. Familiar urges to uphold feelings of superiority appear absent, opaque. You ruminate instead upon the coolness of the coffee. Look to the door. The cafe spins on a lazy Susan and she enters in blue. It hangs from her eyes, pours from her mouth, descends deep into the floor.

Finally without desire.

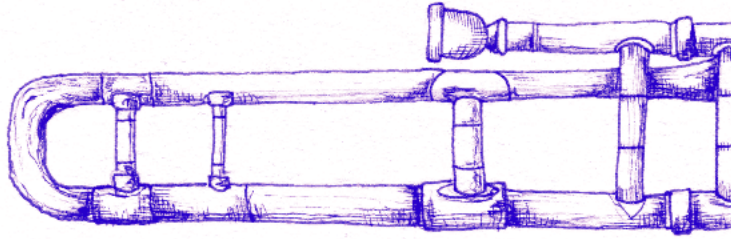
Watery Eyes

The deep blackened dust bowl holds its prisoner. Watery orange eyes, sullen in resignation to their fate look beyond, into the imagined, with a piercing vacancy. In the snare, the snared dilate, and fluid turns to flesh. Chanting swells from hissing tongues to fill the air with a familiar smell, the arguments of un-lived lives given up to fill the belly of a beast.

“...You’re burning your eggs.”

// Michael is in deep contemplation as to who he is beyond the finite self. //

THE LON ELY



AILSA LIU

They had come all the way from Constantinople to see The Lonely Trombone. The couple wore matching brown mufflers. They said it was their third visit, that there was something restorative in these trips, like sleep. Everyone had left with bright eyes and strange new words.

“They killed it,” squealed Claris, the next door neighbour. “It was incredible. You’ve got to see it for yourself, the star of the show, that trombone. Absolutely life changing.”

She’d spilled a bit of tea on her blouse, in her excitement. Her husband, unable to get a word in edgeways, nodded enthusiastically. Claris and Edgar had gone to see The Lonely Trombone, leaving Harold as the only resident of Berkeley who had not. “Killed.” The word fell uneasily from his tongue, leaving a chill on his upper palate. Harold shook his head.

Of course it had all started with the Irwings. They were the trailblazers of the town, the retired couple that the young ones called hip, rather than ancient. They’d been the first to go see The Lonely Trombone and not long after talk of it had swept through the terraces of Berkeley. Its occupants, unable to run, eagerly shuffled to hear the latest news. Soon, Harold had found himself mute in the company of others.

“It’ll blow over soon.” Harold said reassuringly to his beagle Ralph, who merely yawned in response.

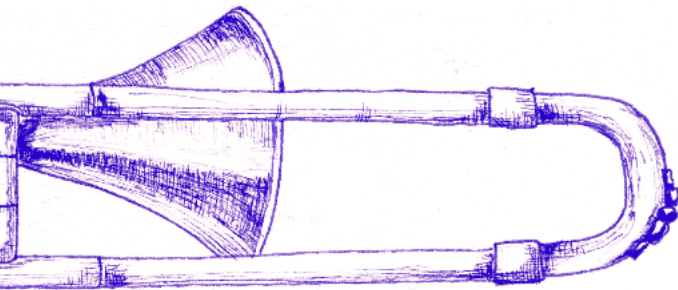
That summer, as more and more of the residents set out on pilgrimages, The Lonely Trombone proved not to be a passing trend. Harold peered out the front window at the Johnsons’ as they backed out the driveway in their four-wheel drive, jolting and swaying from side to side, wide grins plastered on their faces.

“They’re like birds in migration,” he smirked at Ralph, who thumped his tail. Harold nodded, wrung his hands dis-tractedly and pattered off to count his savings.

It was from the raffle at the local community club. Harold had surreptitiously slipped his name into it. For once it was him that the others gathered enviously around to congratulate. Dazzled by the attention, he was nudged forward, a white piece of paper pushed into his hand.

“I’m going to see The Lonely Trombone.” Harold breathed dumbfounded.

He stepped off the long distance train and arrived at an underground train station terminal, folding easily into the mass of moving bodies. “It’s not too late,” he said to himself, rubbing his neck. “I could take a



T R O M B O N E

cruise in the Caribbean, like I've always wanted. Get working on a summer tan." He spotted a sharply dressed young man, holding a sign reading 'The Lonely Trombone'. His hair was gelled flat, ears pronounced. "Gloves?" Harold muttered to himself as he made his way over to him. The man was wearing gloves of all things. "Hope he's not taking us somewhere cold."

Something about the man's bearing and his white gloves made him seem clinical. He wore a name tag reading Colin, pinned against a light blue woollen vest. "I talked to someone on the phone about seeing the..." said Harold. "Yes," Colin nodded, "Harold, was it? Hop on over there. We're just waiting on a few more, won't be long now."

Harold was ushered onto a sleek white bus. He found an empty seat opposite an old man struggling to store his luggage. "Let me know when we get there," said Harold as he slipped on his eye mask.

It was dark outside by the time they arrived. Harold eased the stiffness from his back. He joined a group of elderly people in the carpeted foyer, yawning and peering around. "I'm Helga," said a short brown haired woman as she unwound her silken red scarf. "Harold. Nice to meet you," he nodded, trying not to stare at her eyebrows that were drawn too high on her forehead. "Did you just get off the bus?" asked Helga. "My son Benny drove me, he's very

kind to do it so late at night. He's given me two grandchildren." She whipped out a photograph from a red handbag. "There's Tommy, he's six and Mary, she's two. Those two are a handful, Benny's a great father."

"He sounds like a very responsible man," remarked Harold. "I'm here to see The Lonely Trombone, I won a raffle at the RSL." Helga's lips thinned and she turned abruptly, walking away.

Harold sputtered, "We can't all be rich, love." His shoulders slumped.

"Right this way," said Colin. They walked for what felt like hours, passing down dusty corridors lined with strange cabinets. Harold hesitated by them, peering into the glass covers. Bizarre misshapen creatures were frozen, suspended in liquid within aged yellow jars. A half-opened eye fixed on his. Harold shivered and moved onto a collection of birds. A well-formed specimen with long peach-coloured tail feathers caught his eye. He moved closer, exhaling a small circle of fog onto the glass.

"Come on, now," said Colin, as he waited patiently. Unnerved, Harold turned to Colin. "I didn't get the chance to tell Helga about my children. She didn't like that I got a free ticket to see The Lonely Trombone. She was full of it. I've got photos too." Colin smiled indulgently, "Let's see them. This

photo was taken just last year, Matt always spends Christmas with me, rain, hail or shine. That woman is Chelsea, Matt's sweet on her, I think he's thinking of marriage. He's a barrister, not a barista. Well he was a barista when he was younger, but he's a barrister now."

"They sure grow up quick. Here's your room." Colin stopped and held open a door.

"Great, thanks," said Harold, "Remember to wake me early so I don't miss The Lonely Trombone."

Colin fidgeted with his wristwatch. "I don't think you'll be able to see The Lonely Trombone, Harold."

"Why not? I've got a ticket!" Harold exclaimed.

"I think there's some kind of problem," Colin wetted his lips. "It's not going to be on tomorrow, maybe later on this week."

"Let me know!"

Harold moved along the buffet table, loaded with all the usual, slightly crumbly Danish pastries and croissants, oily rashers of bacon, dry muffins, butterless bread rolls and individual packets of cereal. No milk to be found. Harold watched as the woman in front slipped little packets of blackberry jam into her coat pockets. "Yousef Awad, nice to meet you," said the gentleman ahead, who had a white handlebar moustache. He swapped his loaded plate onto his right hand and extended his left. Harold raised his right hand, clapping the back of Yousef's hand, before reciprocating the handshake with his left hand. "A southpaw?"

"Yes, you might think it'd given me a lot of trouble, but no, not very much. No. Only the small minded people give me trouble."

"I think I'll have some hot oats and honey, if they have it," said Harold. "You'll have to go into the kitchen to ask for that. It's over there." Yousef pointed to a grey door propped open by milk crates. "Thank you. Will I see you at The Lonely Trombone?" Harold asked over his shoulder as he headed towards the kitchen.

"What is this Lonely Trombone?"

Yousef shook his head exasperatedly smiling before

grabbing the last tomato, ham and cheese croissant.

A small girl leaned around a door jamb peeking at Harold's face before ducking her head, looking at the floor.

"Hey there, little one." said Harold, enchanted by her little red acorn-shaped hat. "Are you looking for food? Are you lost? Where are your parents?"

She merely shook her head. "Come here, I can help you find your parents. I won't hurt you."

"Ouch!" She said, staring at her hand incredulously. She held out her thumb and announced. "Splinter."

Harold moved closer and leaned over her. "Ooh, you better get that taken out quick smart. My mother always told me to suck it out. Go on."

She did so and pointed with her free hand at a piece of paper on the floor.

"Oh it's my ticket for The Lonely Trombone," said Harold, turning it over. "Good thing I didn't lose it. I'm not even sure exactly where The Lonely Trombone is held."

The girl eyed Harold somberly. "I know where it is. I'll show you." She darted around the corner.

She led him to an empty dance hall. She ran her fingers along the exposed keys of an out-of-tune upright piano and pointed up to a dusty alcove. "It's up there."

"Where?"

"There." She pointed more insistently.

Harold inspected a drab oil painting of a sad blue boy, face slick with rainwater, lips pursed. "I don't think that's the Lonely Trombone at all."

"But it's written there."

Harold squinted and could just make out:

Lonesome Tyrone

"No. See there, there's some letters missing and all." The girl re-examined the painting. "No, it says The Lonely Trombone," she said, before running out of the room.

"You dropped your red cap," said Harold but it was too late.

He was taken aback when he sat down on a low ottoman for tea and a woman marched up to him.

rooms, on the bottom floor with a view out onto the garden. Only at this moment the view was obscured by lacy white curtains.

“Now make yourself comfortable, I’ll just grab a couple things.” Jennifer rifled through her wardrobe before popping into the adjoining bathroom.

The room had musty yellow wallpaper illuminated by an orange lamp. Harold stood by a dresser covered with all different shades of red fingernail polish. A crayon drawing of a golden retriever. He noticed a nude coloured brassiere slung over a chair. Jennifer returned with a triumphant smile, she held up a black bag. “Don’t be embarrassed, anything you might need is right in here.” She dropped the bag onto her quilted bedspread and sat down on the bed. “Now tell about how you got tangled up with The Lonely Trombone.”

Harold collapsed beside her. “This summer ... the Irwings ... Berkely, I don’t know where to start.”

“Honey, let’s just go slowly,” Jennifer shushed him. “Come here.” She pressed her lips against his. Harold felt her hands run over him, they anchored at the nape of his neck.

“What!” Harold jerked himself backwards.

“I thought you were going to help me with The Lonely Trombone.”

“Boys, always going on about themselves. I’ll help you with your Lonely Trombone. Just let me slip off my falsies.” Jennifer leaned away, dropping her dentures into a glass of water on the bed stand. “Now where were we?”

She smiled salaciously and tugged at Harold’s belt, quickly pulling the leather through the loops.

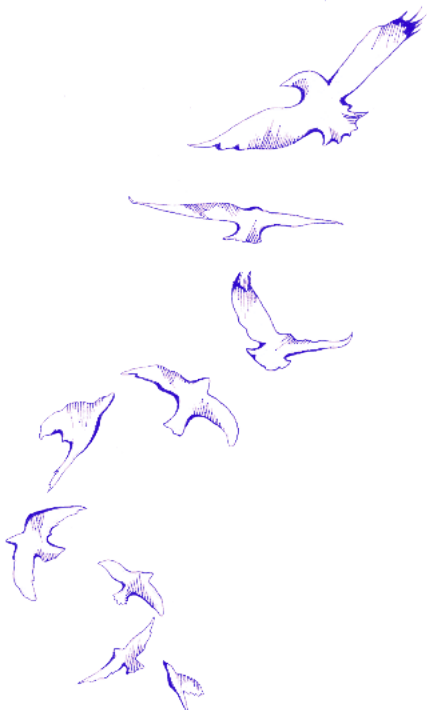
“Come on now!” Harold jumped off the bed, clutching at his waistband.

“Did you want to undress yourself?” Jennifer said coquettishly. “No need to be shy, nothing we haven’t seen before. I was a nurse, you know. The stories I could tell you.”

“I was just here for the Lonely Trombone,” blurted Harold.

“Well then, how about we make that Trom-bone less lonely.” Jennifer winked.

“No! No.” Harold took a further step away. “Clearly



She sat opposite him and stared at him in silence.

“You do realise you’ve got my great niece’s hat in your back pocket.” She propped her elbow against the table and combed through her auburn hair. “How’d that get there?”

“Well, it’s a long story,” Harold said, holding it up and putting it on the table top, “But essentially, she dropped it.”

“You wouldn’t believe the rate that little rascal loses things. I’ll grab that.” She slipped it into her jean pockets. “I’m Jennifer.”

“Harold. I can see the resemblance between you two now. Please tell me you’ve heard about The Lonely Trombone, no one’s given me straight answers.”

“Why, you’re a bold one aren’t you.” She leaned in and whispered archly. “Are you going to be staying here long, Harold?”

“Only until I get to see The Lonely Trombone, I wouldn’t be here at all if it hadn’t been cancelled.”

“All the better. The Lonely Trombone does sound familiar. I think I’ve got something about it in my room.” Harold was shown one of the more coveted

there's been some kind of miscommunication.”
“How about you clear that up for me, then.”
“I am not going to have sex. With you. No!”
exclaimed Harold. “Just no.”
Jennifer gasped, outraged.
“No! I didn't mean personally. Just that ...” Harold
spluttered, attempting to explain.
“Get out!” Rising blush mottled Jennifer's cheeks.
“You! Get out!”

•

It was Jennifer's stony treatment of him that drew the attention of the building's occupants, who hounded Harold for lascivious details.

“She's a real looker, full head of hair.”
“How much Viagra did it take?”
“You made the rookie mistake, didn't you? Too eager? Not enough warm up?”
“That's a real knee-slapper, that one.”

Harold soon became adept at finding corners in the building to hide. At every opportunity he asked Colin for any news about The Lonely Trombone, the poor man seemed terribly discomforted that each time he had to say no.

“Harold, I've been looking all over for you.” said Colin. He shut the door behind him. “What's happened is a very special performance was organised, but it was last minute, so there's limited spots. I've got a spot for you but you can't tell anyone about it, you follow me?”

Harold nodded.

Colin beamed satisfied, “Let's get going then. We can go in my car.”

•

Harold found a seat in a darkened circle-shaped auditorium. His heart was in his throat. At last! The Lonely Trombone! After all the trouble he'd been through. He couldn't wait to go back to Berkeley and see Ralph. He'd been left with the neighbours, with strict instructions for regular walks. The audience hushed as the curtains rustled and the show was to begin. Harold noticed that his row was empty, in

fact there were fewer people in the room that he'd expected. Music sounded from the underground choir chambers in front of the stage, and the curtain raised to show a rotund woman singing from a raised platform.

Harold could feel the moment his brain disconnected. His tolerance for classical music, already low, was eradicated by the fact that it was sung in Italian. He struggled to concentrate, his attention shifted to the audience members.

They seemed captivated by the performance, a collective sigh sounding when the young hero turned away to walk into the night. He eyed the LED surtitles hanging above the stage, little green lights forming letters, translating the lyrics.

A clarinet player sneezed, their instrument honked angrily. In the intermission, the audience chattered and filtered out into the lounge to buy overpriced glasses of wine. Harold sat on a cushioned bench, he eyed their Sunday best, before heading into the carpark. “Is it over already? That was quick. How was the show?” asked Colin.

“I think I'm ready to head home. Could you drop me off at the train station?”

•

“How'd you like The Lonely Trombone?” prattled Claris, “Wasn't it just wonderful? Wasn't it simply exquisite?”

“It certainly wasn't what I'd expected. Thanks again for looking after Ralph, I hope he didn't get up to too much mischief.”

The subject of their conversation bounded up to Harold and placed his grubby front paws on Harold's pants.

“I'm back,” said Harold, to a house that'd soon be filled with their sounds. “You know what Ralph? It was a whole lot of fuss over nothing.”



To The Nape Of A Neck

MICHELLE WANG

I have decided there is poetry in the nape of a neck
in its curve and quiver its hidden exposure
on a winter's morning bare, sliced in the light

a small place for so many desires to unfold
a litany of yearning like or unlike lust

full of lifeblood, a heartbeat
closer to death in one prick or razor-like slick

from the swallow of air or wine
the tremble of laughter
the bobbing Adam's apple
the crescent-sloped valley

the nape of a neck

// **Michelle** is a 3rd year Arts/Law student, majoring in Film Studies. She is paranoid about all the holes in her brain that cause random bouts of forgetfulness. This is not fun. But sometimes funny. Otherwise, she enjoys the smell of osmanthus, eggplant and nicely cut trousers. //

A Western

SACHA RUDD

Jim rode his pale horse along a dwindling trail. Dying paperbarks loomed over the riverbed. Sunlight bounced up at him from the lime powdered stones. Past the dead river the trail continued winding, fenced on each side by thin green brush and uneven footing. Around the curve a man was fallen on the ground, as though asleep. Jim slowed his horse. "Are you alive?" he called out, "or are you dead?" He leaned forward and muttered. "Likely neither."

The horse shook her ears, Jim rode closer. The man did not move. Jim got off the horse and walked over to the body, his pistol drawn. He kicked the man's boot, the man did not move. He prodded the man's head with his pistol, the man did not move. Jim knelt close, listened. The man breathed, like leaves rustling. Jim rolled the man onto his back, his skin was blistered with sunlight – peeling on his hands, forearms, neck and face.

Where it peeled, dull gold glimmered.

Birdsong. A maid rose from her bed before the household. Her room stank of eucalyptus. She dressed in grey. Fingers shaking she stuffed silverware into a stolen bag. Bedsprings squealed, a groan through the walls. She gripped a silver candlestick, her breath choking. Floorboards squeaked. She ran out of the house, across dead grass towards the leaning stable. She climbed into the saddle of the

smallest horse, clutched her bag, and steered for the tree line. Each step of the horse crunching dried grass. A pistol cracked. The horse reared, wrenching her hands.

Crack.

Rocks shattered by the horse's hooves, it bolted for the trees.

Crack.

A bullet punched into her bag of silver.

Crack.

Her ear exploded. Wind howled against the ragged hole.

Crack.

A tree ahead of her shattered. She kept hold of her horse, her silver, and her screams as hot blood flowed down her neck. The horse charged the tree line, passed through it, and vanished into the bush.

Nothing old in this country, nothing determined. Huge finds spur others, nuggets pulled like potatoes from the ground. Brown, white, men, women, dirty, foul. All shipped to the wasteland.

Innocent shoulder to shoulder with convicts. Everyone gold sick: thirsty, hungry, frantic. Demented thoughts come and go like mosquitoes after rain. A clean city is a clean conscience. Canvas towns bloom, rumours of gold more concrete than desert scrub. The camp warden said, "Centipedes

don't give a fuck, snakes don't give a fuck, ants don't give a fuck, now untuck your shirt for fuck's sake." The desert is negative space. Trees plucked from the horizon. A yellowed, sweet smelling shrub is the only thing that grows beside you. It dances with wind you cannot feel. Why not call it alive?

•

The doctor's table groaned under the weight of the gold man. A nurse dabbed the last shreds of burnt skin across his chest. Perfect gold shone through the red scraps. The doctor paced the length of his tent. He would stop at a wooden stand and examine little glass vials, hold their fluids to the light, mutter, set them down, and resume pacing. Each step wearing a rut into the dirt floor.

Seven men in the doctor's tent.

"Is it a statue?" one said.

"Too perfect," said another. "Did you bring this in under those blankets, Jim?"

Jim nodded, and cleared his throat. "What do you fellows suppose we do with it?" he said. The tent was cramped.

"Was it a man?" asked the priest, his black robe stained with clay below the waist.

"It was a man," nodded Jim, "well, it breathed this morning, when I found it."

"It breathed," said the doctor, sunk in his chair, drunk, "heartbeat too, but that's gone."

Flies buzzed about their heads.

"It, he, must be buried," said the priest. Some men nodded, some didn't. Jonah, his beard thick and black, leant over the corpse and wrapped his knuckles against the chest.

"It's hollow," he said, "it's gold." He paused. "Gold. Isn't that why we're all here?"

Jim stepped forward.

"What are you proposing, Jonah?" he said.

"Men get buried," Jonah said, "Separates us from heathens and animals." The priest, and others, nodded. Jonah pointed at the golden face, features drawn but still, "This isn't a man, this is gold, more gold than any of us dug up in a year."

"What are you suggesting?" asked the priest.

"We chop it up, divide it. Equal share of profit to us all." Flies crawled up the canvas walls, on the ceiling, around the sticky drops on the stand of vials. None landed on the body. Jim and the doctor stayed in the tent as the others went off to their own. The priest sat in his tent with a split lip and prayed. The day rolled on. The others returned with their tools at sunset. Inside the motionless, odourless, body of the gold man, some-thing waited.

•

After six bone dry months, it rained a week of saltwater. The clouds looked like jellyfish floating over the landscape, tendrils of venomous rain trailing behind them. Mary sold sly grog from her tent, water became more valuable than gold. Old timers died first, what few there were. The warden's man found a dead body in the dirt one morning, dogs gnawing at the feet.

The police burnt down Mary's tent, another was set up and they burnt it down that same week. She started doing rounds with a skin of rum tied under her dress. From tent to tent filling cups and bottles, a tap sticking out of her pocket.

•

They were out in the desert chasing gold. Beneath the skin of the world, veins, tumours, begging to be excised. Each leg was cut first at the knee and then the groin. The torso was split below the navel. Inside the chest they found a gold heart, and other organs. Heavier than they looked. The miners hooted, slapped each other's backs and toasting their good fortune. Each man left the tent lugging a wrapped bundle. They secured their treasure in holes, tents or saddlebags. Each man drank or prayed into a state of stupor. The camp slept, and It began to leak.

It climbed up into the sky on ropes of heat shimmer and settled like a cloud over the camp. It spun lines from itself and lowered them towards the tents, each questing tip like a fishhook, or a spider. Before dawn, Jonah climbed down into his claim and felt



around. The ankle deep clay raised goose bumps on his flesh, his nipples hardened, he grasped his canvas bundle. It was too light. He unwrapped it. Inside his canvas, brown with blood, were the two limp hands of a corpse.

Jonah stomped through the camp to Jim's tent. He tore through the entrance, curses dripping from his lips, and froze. Jim sat with his pistol pointed at the door. The gold man's head was on his desk. Lank black hair, dirty grey flesh, a swollen tongue slipping through purple lips. A swelling puddle of blood trickled down the leg of the table and into the dirt.

"What do you want, Jonah?" said Jim.

"The gold is gone."

"You thought I took it? Maybe replaced it with a corpse for a joke?"

Jonah said nothing, Jim's pistol was still pointed at his face. Jim picked up a draw-string bag from his desk and tossed it to Jonah.

"Look inside," Jim said. Jonah opened the bag. Inside were several rough nuggets of lead. Jim stood. "You've cursed us, Jonah. You and your damned talk. Your damned gold." He forced Jonah outside. It was cold, some of the miners were drifting out of their tents, pulling on boots. "Gather round! Gather round!" Jim cried, "Justice is needed!"

A mob circled the two men. Jim stood on a crate and pointed his pistol at Jonah.

"This man has stolen my gold, and swapped it for lead in the night!"

Another of the seven, Phillip, came forward,

"Mine too! I would have left this hell today, but now I have nothing!"

The mob began to mutter and curse, someone yelled from the back.

"Hang him!"

They stood Jonah on a barrel, tied a noose to a gumtree and secured it around his neck. Jim rapped

a small hammer on the barrel between Jonah's boots. "Who will come forward as prosecution?"

Phillip raised his hand and stepped out of the mob. Jim nodded, "And who here will defend this poor, innocent man?"

Jonah stood shivering, none of the men would meet his eye. The priest bit his lip, but did not step forward. Jim chuckled,

"So be it. Prosecution, make your case."

Phillip did not talk long. He spoke of hard work, of thievery, of the devil. He turned to Jim,

"Your honour," he said. Jim grinned. "Your honour, why delay what must be? It is plain as the blue sky that this man must hang. For his crimes against man, against nature!"

The mob churned, men shouted,

"Hang him!"

Jim smashed his hammer against the barrel until splinters flew into the air. The mob was silent. Jim walked around the barrel, stroking his chin.

"Please," said Jonah, "we all did it! It was all of us! It's not my fault!"

"Shut up!" said Jim, " why should we all suffer for the sins of one man?"

"Please, have mercy."

The mob looked down, they began to murmur, the priest pushed his way past the men.

"Wait!" said the priest. "We mustn't do this. What will happen to us if he hangs?"

Jim glared at the priest, he pulled a small piece of lead from his pocket and threw it at the priest's feet.

"We have suffered enough already," said Jim.

"Then what good will come of this?"

Jim said nothing, he paced in front of the mob, in front of the barrel, his hand gripped the hammer tight. He paused, then with a grunt he kicked the barrel out from under Jonah. The rope pulled taught. The barrel rolled away. After a quiet moment the mob broke and went back to their digging.

You could tell Mary from a distance because she always wore a floppy grey hat at a rakish angle over her missing ear. She sat in her tent all day, selling grog, smoking a little tin pipe and gambling with the

customers. Some miners swore off water altogether. Mary poured whisky into a battered tin cup and the owner thanked her. "I don't trust water unless there's fire in it."

Jonah swung on the outskirts of the camp. The men ignored his bloating form. The land required sacrifice from those who sought its wealth.

It was in the water now, snuggled tight between each drop. Miners worked and drank. Sip, slug, their insides sloshing. It smiled a twitching grin that spread through the dust, shaking trees and waning the gibbous moon.

Birds flew around the diggings. Bugs crawled away. No warm beating hearts but those cooling inside the miners. Beat, beat, rattle.

Jim packed his pipe after lunch. Gold glinted under his fingernail. He held it up to the sun and squinted. With the tip of his knife he teased under his nail. The grain of gold was stuck. He rested his finger against the ground, knife scraping grime from under his nail. Blood pulsed out in a stream. He dropped the knife and wrapped his finger tight in his jumper. The bleeding slowed. He filled a cup with water and pulled out his finger. His hand was covered in dried blood. Amongst the flaking brown rivers were specks of gold.

Jim sat in his bed and took off his boots and socks. He stared, then rubbed his eyes. He tapped his big toe with the flat of his knife. The chink of metal on metal. His toes were heavy, solid, gold.

His sleep was drunken, sweaty, he tossed beneath his sheets. Dingoes howled at midnight. Jim woke, but his body didn't. His breathing was a shrill tone, like air blown across the stiff lips of a flute. It hovered over him in his tent, silent, laughing, tasting the brimming salt behind his sealed golden eyelids. In all the other tents, It crept, inside clothes, over skin, finding nostrils, ears, mouths, rectums. From midnight to dawn, Its glacial penetration, seeping

inside the sleepers.

Cloudy sunrise, a red orb slouched over eastern hills. A weight crushed the priest's chest, he couldn't breathe, his eyes bulged. He lurched from his bed gasping, scrambling towards the tent door. His ankle was stiff and he tripped out of the tent. He pulled up the hem of his robe, a gold band was wrapped around his ankle. He flexed his knee, wriggled his toes, and stood.

The camp was full of groans. The priest limped to the nearest tent and peered inside. A miner on a bed of straw thrust his face at the priest. His whole body was golden, stiff, the neck alone was pink flesh. Even the eyes, open and staring, were solid orbs. No breath escaped his lips but there was a gurgling in his throat. The priest withdrew from the tent. He hobbled away and ignored the other tents. The water shack was unattended. The priest blessed the water and drank. He splashed his face, tepid water ran down his neck and back. His reflection swam in the bucket, swirling with golden flecks.

All the horses were gone, set loose into the hungry bush. Nothing left but gilded statues cast in tortured sleep, and the priest. He limped at a measured pace along the trail towards the next camp. His shoulders set, head held high, leg growing stiff.

His map lied about water, stagnant puddles slaked his thirst. Dingoes sifted through spinifex. He lay on burgundy rock, pressed between moonlight and the hill's stony finger. He woke to his face cooking. A gold middle finger shaded bleary eyes.

He found a dying horse with a broken leg, prayed to God, and hacked the jugular. Bloody foam spat across his cheek. Horse meat for three days. Huge sky, no sense of scale. How tall are those trees? How tall am I?

Mary rode into the bush alone. Through the thin shade of eucalypts, ducking her head under low branches, termite mounds risen eye high all about. Over two thousand picks rang through the bush. Crows flew overhead, cawing the end of the world. Her horse stopped. She peered ahead into the shadows. A black robed priest was slumped across the trail. His neck was peeling. She could not lift him.

With branches and her dress, she built a makeshift stretcher and tied it to the saddle with rope. She led the horse on foot and dragged the priest back towards camp. There was a sudden wind and the bush quivered like a dewdrop. White flowers shook loose from the trees. Mary smiled as petals fell past her eyes to the hard red ground.

// **Sacha** comes from Margaret River, WA. He studied Engineering before he realised he would rather write. He enjoys movies and books and writing. He once got into hedonism but it ended up being too expensive.//

Anatomy

Lesson #23

RUNNER UP
Open Poetry

ELAINE ZHANG

i love the
veins on your forearms
curling up towards your wrist
adore
the ridges and valleys
of your bones

i map out
the roads, the rivers
the dead-end trails like constellations
on your palms that move
against mine when we touch

i study the way
your fingers feel me
stroke delicately
how your flesh kisses mine
as we entwine

i am carving
the atlas of your body
into my memory, every moment
every line of you



*/cephalic
median antebrachial
basilic
carpus*

*longitudinal thenar
longitudinal median
accessory
palmar digital*

*distal
medial
proximal/*

// **Elaine** is currently in her Honours year of a Psychology degree, and unfortunately cannot read your mind or analyse you, so please stop asking. Her hobbies include not working on her thesis and doing pilates at midnight in her bedroom. She digs noodles, nostalgia, irony, and digging things ironically. //

Is English Breakfast Okay?



LUKE WALKER

Sunday 25th September 2005 – aged 12

My dad passed away today. I was at the state athletics carnival when Mum got the call and was told he had slipped into a coma. I guess it was expected. Not many people live long after cancer has spread throughout the body. I remember seeing his face, twisted into a grimace from his last attempt to drag oxygen into his lungs. Mum tried to tell me he looked peaceful and at rest.

Monday 14th April 2008 – aged 15

Today I overheard a group of friends talking about Abstudly. “They get more money and don’t have to pay rent or school fees”. I didn’t say anything when I joined them for lunch. I was nervous about starting my second job that afternoon.

Tuesday 14th June 2011 – aged 18

I sat in the career advisor’s office today, to talk about my future. I’ve always been told I was a ‘bright kid’. I topped my class in all subjects. She asked me if I had any ideas of what I wanted to do, and I replied “medicine”. She paused, pursed her lips and reached to the 2010’s University ATAR Guide, searching it. After she had found the desired page, she subtly tried to dissuade me and asked about other career ideas.

Wednesday 24th August 2011 – aged 18

Waiting for Mum to finish work for the day, I was playing on the school computer in the room that housed the Aboriginal Teaching Officers. Mrs. Bully asked me if I had thought about what I wanted to do after school and I told her “medicine,” but I didn’t think I would be able to, “so maybe teaching”. She asked whether I knew about Indigenous pathways. I didn’t.

Thursday 13th October 2011 – aged 18

I’ve been told that I am no longer Aboriginal since my father has passed away. I don’t understand. How can I no longer be Aboriginal because my father was taken away from me? They don’t care to explain. My mum tries to contact them to explain but they won’t talk to her because she’s white. I need proof of Aboriginality to apply to study medicine.

// Luke is a Wiradjuri man from Central West NSW and is currently in his fifth year of medicine. //

Friday 28th October 2011 – aged 18

I've been accepted into the Indigenous Pre-programs at UNSW! I also have to work on the night of the Land Council meeting

Monday 7th November 2011 – aged 18

I received a letter telling me my application has been denied, as I wasn't present at the meeting. I called Mrs. Bully. An extraordinary meeting has been called.

Tuesday 15th November 2011 – aged 18

It's been over a week since they approved my application, and still no word. They say they have no record of me being approved. 'Check again'. The short stubby woman with a large, hairy mole just above her lip leaves to check. She returns with my common seal, which she throws onto the counter.

"Is English Breakfast okay?"

Wednesday 8th March 2012 – aged 19

I went to my first tutorial today and introduced myself to the class. I told them I was Indigenous. I was hastily questioned about my percentage. A person told me that where they come from "Aboriginals are black." I didn't know what to say. They continued to break me down into my physical characteristics, until one told me it was okay because I had a "boong nose." I'm ashamed that I felt a moment of vindication – my identity held true.

Thursday 20th September 2012 – aged 19

Today a student suggested that having a separate Indigenous pathway into medicine was wrong as it produces subpar doctors. How can this be? I pass the same exams, I submit the same assignments and I have the same exposure to hospitals. I'm reluctant to say that I did nothing. Alone, in this room of a dozen other non-Indigenous students, I was silent. Maybe I don't belong here. Maybe I am subpar.

Friday 10th May 2013 – aged 20

Are there any Indigenous students present? I held my breath and didn't answer. I wasn't ready to face the endless questions that waited for me. I didn't want to see the disbelief in people's eyes. I didn't want to defend my identity today.

Monday 21st April 2014 – aged 21

"I'm Indigenous", raising my hand. I answered a question about how to ask someone if they are Indigenous. Simple. I could see the questioning looks on the faces of those surrounding me. Isn't that rude? Why do we have to ask? What makes someone Aboriginal? Is there a difference between full blood Aboriginals and you? What percentage are you? What is culture to you? Why do you call it Invasion day? Why are so many Aboriginal people on Abstudy? I'm overwhelmed. How did I become the voice for Indigenous Australia?

Tuesday 1st September 2015 – aged 22

I attended a forum on racism today. I don't think I was surprised to find that my story is not unique – ignorance is flourishing. I'm still glad I went. It's easier knowing I'm not the only one. I overheard someone say that Aboriginality is like a cup of tea, you can add all the milk you like but in the end it's still tea. I like that.

Simulacra

ASHLEY L. WEIR

I wear my father's mouth and my mother's eyes
on my face they are still together

So shave my flesh until waters run pink and you taste
utterly
the slivers of italicised me slipping through the cracked pores of your drain

The silver tempest drowning your skies at 4am
in the yawns of dark mornings I am the forgotten
remembering to ring upon your mind lulling sounds of silk through your skin

So look for me these stagnant waters rippling through the spills of wine and sentiment
for when I wake the world disappears
and acidic tongues shall push
through faces that look suspiciously like familiar life

// Typically found lurking in the dimly lit corners of dingy bookstores with a caffeinated beverage in hand, **Ashley** is a second year Pathology major undertaking a double degree in Science and Education. She firmly believes in enclosed shoes (as toes are disgusting), spending time indoors and mailing people hate-glitter. Ashley patiently waits for a future where cake is an acceptable dinner for adults. //

“There’s something beautiful in reading a book for the first time. That magic in how the words collapse like an avalanche and spill into you. Once you’re in their world, that initial impression can never be changed.

There’s something in the purity of new words, new worlds. How they roll off the tip of your tongue, how you stay up for hours wanting more, until you fall asleep with your glasses on. The fold of the page held in your hand, waking up only to find you’ve lost your place. The musty smell you cant quite describe. Flipping the pages over like dominoes.

Inhaling and holding your breath.

Try not to exhale.”

Excerpt from *Pages* by Billie-Jean Bullard

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This project would not be made possible without the committed assistance of its volunteers, whose hard work and dedication have brought this publication to life.

To learn more about UNSweetened or to get involved in next year's edition, visit: arc.unsw.edu.au/unsweetened

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