



UNSWeetened acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands of UNSW and all of our places of home and study. We acknowledge the Bedegal people, the Darug people, the Gandagara people, the Ngunnuwal people, and the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of UNSW, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytellers. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Foreword

The Rainbow Serpent is a guardian of water and of life. It appears in many Aboriginal Australian nations and is one of the world's oldest stories. When it first broke through the Earth, it created the ridges, mountains, and rivers of the land. Tales of it are myriad, as it is everywhen – is, was, and will be. This year has been one of many firsts for UNSWeetened. 2021 was the first year which began and ended in lockdown, the first year the theme has been featured in the logo, and the first year with a team of thirteen people, the largest yet – most of whom have never met each other in person. Perhaps most significantly, this is the first ever crowd-funded edition of UNSWeetened. In August, UNSWeetened's budget was entirely cut due to the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to the generosity of our community, we will be able to print more than 200 copies. It is an extraordinary gift to the authors, volunteers, and UNSW.

I had chosen this year's theme, 'Mythos', months before announcing it, and what it meant to me then was that people self-create through the stories we tell. When we search and find no answer, we create the answer, and throughout history that has been through stories. The seasons changed; we did not know why, so we told the story of Demeter, Hades, and Persephone. It's a love story, a grief story, a power story, and a story that we have been telling for nearly 3000 years. We know now why the seasons change, but that essential act of creation has stayed with us. I still think of that story when Autumn comes.

The perseverance of mythology through history shows a fundamental human ability for the sharing of stories. Telling stories of joy and of agony alike with the same reverence is, in my view, one of the most beautiful things in the world.

2021 has, for many, not been a beautiful year but a harrowing one. Twenty-one authors have shared their short stories, poems, and essays with us despite this, and I couldn't be more grateful. They have given their time and their talent to bring together something so beautiful amidst great strife. The work that goes into the writing, revising, and editing of a creative work is immense, and it is a great privilege to be presenting that work here. UNSWeetened has always had the goal of championing the work of emerging writers at its heart, and while I'm excited to see what each of our writers does next, for now, I'm simply proud of all they have done to get to this point.

While I coordinated UNSWeetened this year, I'm not the one who brought it to life – it is thanks first and foremost to the team of twelve volunteer designers, editors, illustrators, and publicists. I thank you with all my heart for your artistry, conversation, diligence, humour, and passion. I can't say how much your work means to me. I needn't dedicate this Journal to you – it's already yours.

I thank you all, and I hope you enjoy UNSWeetened 2021: MYTHOS.





Contenta



Types of Fire	01
Alexa Stevens	
Various Spirits Fucking with	02
Me Throughout the Years	
Vivienne Salcedo	
A Morning's Tapestry	80
Ishrat Zaman	
Camelot	13
Aileen Wang	
The Heat	15
Hannah Smith	
Luo Song Tang	17
(aka Chinese Borscht)	
Isabelle Shaw	
Raw Pustule Sun	24
jorvn jones	



The Tower	29
Alexa Stevens	
An Echo of Embodiment	31
Benedicte McGowen	
The Death of Orpheus	35
Jack Zhou	
Echo (To Be Wanted)	37
Jaimie Lee	
The Cailleach	39
Hannah Cutmore	
The Great Whale	43
Isaac Hogarth	
The Flood	45
Shaye Easton	
Ouroboros	51
Deborah Marcus	

Teeth	52
Juliet Manolias	
Farewell to an angel in death	54
Bianca Nanales	
In Smoke	55
Emma Papworth	
Red Jacarandas	59
Geordie Timmins	
Martyrs or Miracles	64
Stacey Fredericks	
Beneath the Gingko Tree	65
Cheryl Till	
Child of the Stars	72
Anaya Vora	
Acknowledgements	73

Types of Fire

I have eaten mountains and they Poke through my eyes, Stone headache through my temples and dirt Heartache through my thighs. An eagle's cry, the blinking sky -Prometheus heaves a heavy sigh and offers me His liver, to chew on as I die. I almost do not take it, this Olive branch, this thought to try. Through my stomach flows the Acheron of Buried tears I've had to cry. But Through my lungs, the river runs, just Thoughts of tears (the shivering ones), the ones Forced out of me, to dry. I've dug Two graves and there I lie. My body in one, mangled mind in the other, With the fire and its thief. The one I called 'brother'. His olive branch withers Underneath my eyes unblinking,

For the depth that waits beneath his gaze Is pity not fit for drinking. Here, the rock devours my flesh Like waves that gnaw at the shore, And I know that his caress On the brow could not be anything more Than a sinewy vine to bind me down, Flesh chained to mountain floor.

Alexa Stevens

Oh, if my hands could form fists, That would be the day.

We are both hungry, So Prometheus heaves another sigh And chews through my liver, Through the thoughts of tears, Until all that is left to do is Cry.

(At least I burned with the fire I stole).



Vanous Spints Fucking with Me Through the Years

Unknown. 2001. Less than a year old.

My aunt found me below the open window of the secondfloor bedroom. She had left me cooing and babbling in the crib to go to the bathroom. When she came back, the door was locked, and the room was silent.

She said I was nearly stolen. My grandfather had to break the hinges to get to me, and by the time he was able to, they could see a shadow was moving past the window. She didn't know who or what tried to take me, but some neighbors said they saw something fly away from the second-floor window. Others said it jumped. The only thing they agreed on is that they were sure they saw a long tongue.

They all say that it was either a TikTik or a Manananggal. I was nearly taken by either a jumping spirit that *Tiktiktiked* loudly while it was far away but *Tiktiktiked* quietly when it was near. Or a woman who detached her lower half and sprouted batwings to fly around with her intestines hanging out. I don't think it matters to know which it really was, because both do the same thing: they eat babies. I wasn't nearly stolen. I was nearly eaten. *Fucking eaten*.

I wasn't allowed back in my grandfather's house until I turned six. They nailed a stingray's tail to the front door when I came, to use as a ward and whip against the spirits and creatures. Nobody has tried to steal me since then.

Duwende. 2008. Seven years old.

Nay Soling was the local manghihilot, a healer with blessed hands. She was getting a headache while she rubbed my feet to pull the fever out through my toes. I was counting how many times she burped, but I lost count after 30. She said I had a lot of air in my body and a lot of spirits looking at me. I had thought it was a good thing. I didn't realize there was a difference between looking at me and looking out for me.

I left the hut with my nanny after Nay Soling rubbed her spit on my stomach and pinned ginger to my shirt. We were walking home when I tripped and lodged my knee into a mound of dirt. I didn't know why my nanny was so worried even though I wasn't wounded.

Then I found out why, three days later, when I couldn't stand. My knee was ugly and bruised, swollen with red and purple dots all over. It didn't hurt. I couldn't feel it hurt, because it felt like the leg wasn't there at all.

My nanny carried me to the hut to see Nay Soling. She told me I knocked over a Duwende's house – spirits of the earth small enough to live inside mounds of dirt. Then she spat on my knee and told me to apologize to the homeowner I made homeless.

I placed a plain rice cake, absolutely no salt or sugar, as Nay Soling instructed, on the Duwende's home – a now nearly flat dirt mound. I knelt and bowed until my forehead touched the ground.

"Sorry, mang Duwende. Indi ko hungod." Sorry, elder dwarf. I did not mean to.

When I walked to Nay Soling the next day with a less ugly knee that could hold my weight, the dirt mound looked freshly made and the rice cake was gone. I bowed when I passed and said a phrase, one I now say nearly every day: "Tabi tabi, po." *Excuse me, sir.*

Unnamed Bathroom Ghost. 2010. 10 years old.

I was locked in the second stall of the bathroom by the stairwell. I just wanted to pee in peace, so I went to the 'quiet' bathroom, which was quiet because nobody ever used it. Nobody ever used it because it was more often called the 'haunted bathroom by the stairwell', but haunted bathroom rumors are pretty staple in every Catholic School alongside Pugot, *the cut*, aptly named because they're nuns and priests whose heads were cut off. I didn't think much of the haunted bathroom rumor until I was locked inside.

I heard the toilet in the other stall flush, but I didn't hear any doors open, any stalls shut, or any footsteps enter. I wanted to get the fuck out. But I couldn't.

The latch was stuck. The hinges wouldn't snap. The door wouldn't move.

The door had a significant space between its bottom and the floor, and while it was a privacy concern most of the time, I didn't care much in that moment. What I cared about was that it was large enough for me to crawl under.

I remember ducking down and muttering "Fudge," because God forbid that I curse out loud, when I saw a pair of shoes outside the cubicle, to the right of my head.

Fuck that.

My eyes were fixed on the exit as I squirmed, crawled, and ran left. I did *not* want to meet the bathroom ghost.

I started peeing in the bathroom on the opposite side of the building. The *not* haunted bathroom by the stairwell.

Kapre and Engkanto. 2013. 13 years old.

The dermatologists didn't know what was wrong with me. I looked like the opposite of a Dalmatian with large white spots all over my dark skin. I didn't itch or feel pain. I didn't have a temperature, nor was I responding to creams or pills. They thought I simply had a harmless pigmentation issue.

The albularyo said I was going to die.

Albularyos are herbal healers, and while I knew that they diagnosed ailments, I didn't expect to be diagnosed with death. I didn't fully understand how I was going to die, and I didn't have time to think about it. I was naked and standing in the middle of a basin while the albularyo, covered in beaded necklaces and gold bracelets, scrubbed my skin raw with a rag that felt like sandpaper.

I thought she was trying to rub the white away, but she was doing something entirely different. She was coating me in tree sap. It was sticky and the rag was rough. It felt like my skin was coming off, but the sap kept me together.

I began to sweat sticks and stones, and I remember thinking *sticks and stones may break my bones and now they're coming out of me*. It didn't hurt. I didn't feel my pores stretch. I wasn't bleeding. But they were there, and they covered the bottom of the basin. It almost felt like I was standing in a garden.

The albularyo said there were two spirits who were upset with me.

First was a Kapre. They're giants that sit in trees, smoke cigars, and occasionally kidnap girls – turns out we had one taking residence in the mango tree in our yard. Second was an Engkanto, a nature spirit. A little one was living in my mother's flowers. She said they filled me with sticks and stones to get back at me for ignoring them. I didn't realise I was interacting with any spirits at that time.

I did play outside a lot as a child. I stopped when school started demanding more of me. Spirits like watching children, and I suppose that's what Nay Soling meant when she said I had a lot of spirits looking at me. The spots on my skin were nearly scrubbed out, but they only really disappeared after a week of burning salt at sunset and sitting in the smoke for an hour. The spots never came back. I started studying outside.

Puti na Espiritu. 2016. 16 years old.

I saw someone peeking through my windows one night. My mother built a house near my grandfather's, and my room had windows that started at the floor and went up to the ceiling. The white woven blinds didn't fully cover them. The curtain rods were hung a foot or so lower than normal so that moonlight could come in even with the blinds drawn.

Something else tried to get in, too. It was a girl, and she would have been pretty if her eyes weren't so beady and her face so gaunt. She was upside-down, and I wondered if this was the girl my niece told me about – her friend in the ceiling.

I didn't scream. I didn't panic. I sighed, and she stared. She didn't seem scared of me, nor was I of her. I was tired and I wanted to sleep, and I did. Well, I tried. Sleeping is hard when someone's staring at you.

She stared the whole night.

In the morning, I asked my mom to raise the curtain rods higher, high enough to cover the window, and she did.

I didn't see the girl anymore, but I could hear quiet *taptaptaps* on the glass. So, I wore headphones to bed. When I started hearing quiet footsteps that echoed my own, I started wearing them around the house too.

After a week of window-tapping and following footsteps, my mother took notice of my exhaustion. I told her about the girl in the window who wouldn't leave me alone. The next day, a man with six dots on his forehead came inside our home with a bag of raw chicken hearts. He said they were halad, offerings for our 'friend'.

He rubbed them on our windows and doors to mark them with blood, and he pressed one to my forehead while he prayed over me. He said that the girl was nothing more than a Puti na Espiritu, a White Spirit – pure and innocent – and that she was harmless, just curious.

He told me I should get used to visitors.

Itom na Espiritu. 2021. 21 years old.

For the first time since I was a child, I stayed over at my grandfather's house. I shared a room with my siblings, and we planned to wake at five to drive to the beach and catch the sunrise. That night, I wrote this note on my phone:

I just woke up. Somebody held my ankles and wrists. I thought it was morning and Achi was trying to wake me up. It felt like someone was blowing in my ear and when I tried to speak a hand came upon my face. I couldn't open my eyes and my body refused to move. There was a weight on my chest like somebody sitting on me. It started to hurt. It felt real. It felt like somebody was pushing me down. I snapped my head to the left so fast my neck cracked. It's 3:37 now as I write this. I don't want to sleep yet.

I remember sitting up and staring at my siblings. I sat and stared until alarms started blaring, the sounds pounding into my eardrums as everyone started waking up to get ready for the beach.

I told them I had a rough night and showed them the note. I was always my grandfather's favourite, they said, and because nothing has ever happened to me, they thought \dot{u} was gone. Then they told me about what \dot{u} did to the others.

About six people have died in my grandfather's house. All of them passed in their sleep, and all of them were, at one point, my grandfather's 'favourite'. One was his gardener, who he considered a close friend. I wasn't alive when he died, but I was told that he was found with eyes wide open. One was a driver who accompanied my grandfather to events. He was found lying on his stomach with his face flat against his pillow.

They told me that they believe that it was someone in the house that liked my grandfather a lot and disliked those close to him. Itom na Espiritu, they called it. *A jealous spirit, an angry one. Fuck that.*

We got ready to leave, but each step closer to the door felt heavier than the last. My body felt stiff and rigid as I walked, as if it was disagreeing with me. A voice that sounded almost like my own told me to *stay, stay, stay.*

I stopped sleeping at my grandfather's house after that.

A Morning's Tapestry

Ishrat Zaman

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth

- Buddha

The night has shattered.

She creeps down the stairs, her footsteps deft and nimble. Her stomach sags, shrouding spools of silken threads. A loose strand trails behind her as she slips across the hallway, afraid to be seen by someone else. Outside, the sun swells over the horizon, its yolky edge flooding into the sky, spilling rays of molten gold that seep across the strawberry fields.

The house slumbers on, a dormant volcano that stirs gently as minutes pass by. As the sun takes his throne in his vast blue dominion, he beckons to the world with a lazy hand and spears night through the stomach, yielding him to his knees. The tranquillity of his empire is fractured by twittering from swallows and blackcaps. In the distance, an owl hoots and tucks its head beneath its tawny wing, dozing for the day.

She scuttles down the steps of the house, twisting past the front door, and shudders as she glances down at the family crest etched into the wood. A face, whose features emanate choler as potent as poison, sneers back at her. Her head protrudes with hissing snakes that coil about her like an ornate wreath, a token of an irreversible deed. Human, but monstrous. The gorgon has haunted her dreams for acons, jolting her out of Hypnos's pleasant embrace and rousing her in a clammy sweat, while her last words echo in her ear.



"Don't make my mistakes."

A grave warning she hadn't heeded. It was never prudent to cultivate jealousy in the heart of a goddess, but to be youthful and talented is to be bold and arrogant. A mortal challenging Pallas Athene was unheard of. It should have remained that way.

She had been confident that her deft hands could sculpt beauty that no divinity could ever be capable of; that her clever fingers could weave their way to victory with ease. Challenging a goddess refined in her artisanship was a risky affair, but she had proved her worth and emerged triumphant. For a single euphoric moment, the glory was all hers.

But at what cost?

The glow of victory had barely lasted seconds before it was stripped away, and she was shamed. No longer human, and no longer worthy.

She had been bold. She had been arrogant.

She had paid for her misdeeds.

Running through the courtyard, she turns toward the orchards, the scent of fruit heady in the air. She scrambles over the broad cap of a mushroom, her legs slipping against the silky surface. Verdant grass ripples against her body as she leaves invisible footprints upon the earth.

Encompassed in the break of dawn, she feels as if she were perched in the eye of a hurricane. The morning's tempest burgeons upon her, crackling with hostility. Yet now, she is impervious, enraptured, hanging in a bubble of silence.

Settling down between two olive trees, she eases the thread through her body, raising it as she starts to weave. Sunrise had always been her treasured time to indulge in her craftsmanship – a moment unfettered by the tumult of life. As she works, the tension floods out of her and her body relaxes, moulding against the rough bark of the tree trunk. Her limbs quicken, twisting the gossamer thread delicately as droplets of fresh dew speckle the threads.

Her body works mechanically, and her limbs are dominated by an innate rhythm, manoeuvred precisely as though she were in a trance. Her mind is blissfully blank, but unease coils in the pit of her stomach. She can't possibly do this – she isn't who she was before. If only there was a way to unravel the past, reverse the damage that she had inflicted upon herself. Her fingers falter as her turmoil grows, rearing towards her chest. The thread moves slower, and slower, and slower, until she stops.

The sun is waxing. The moon is waning. The truth is eclipsed.

Sweat trickles down her back. She turns to her craftsmanship, but her legs are paralysed, her body immobile, as though she were dangling from a stretch of rope, hanging in the balance. It would only take a second to fall.

Her mouth has dried up. Abandoning her work, she crawls through the long grass, searching for respite at the edge of the creek. The grass rakes against her body, raw, and limb by limb she drags herself to the water's edge. White and amber narcissus flowers are peppered amongst obsidian rocks and haphazard dandelions. She clambers up a rock, her gait unsteady, and almost tips forward into the glacial water. Gasping, she drags herself up and closes her eyes.

Imprinted against her eyelids, her reflection smiles back, and she collapses in relief at the familiarity of her umber eyes and bronzed hair.

Still, the truth cowers in the shadows.

Like rotting fruit, her reflection shrivels and sags in her mind's eye. She grasps her face in horror, only to feel her arms and legs split in two, while her midriff collapses inwards. Her eyes protrude, the sclera clouding with darkness. As she shrinks, her chiton gapes across her figure, cavernous, and her humanity sloughs off her body like a serpent shedding its skin. Her mouth tightens, and a thousand regrets are silenced indefinitely. She opens her eyes and recoils.

A breeze ripples through the valley, carrying a whisper.

"I warned you."

Heart pumping in her chest, she tentatively stares at her reflection in the water.

Gingerly, she feels her face. Velvety fangs jut from the corners of her mouth, dripping with venom. An excess of limbs crowd her body, and her bulbous eyes reach every single crevice around her with startling ease. Thin strands of hair are fuzzed all over her. She wants to scream – but who would hear?

Bile rises in her throat, but she swallows it down and creeps back to the trees where her weaving hangs, discarded. Bathed in the morning's glow, the silvery thread glistens, criss-crossing to form a gauzy spiral. It caves under the force of the wind, hollowing out; yet the stitches stay firm against nature's adversity. As she stares at it, her pulse quickens.

People would never flock to see the works of art that she could no longer yield. Her hands were fragments of what they were. The vestiges of her beauty had decayed. Like an old coin, her reputation was tarnished. All was lost – all except the tattered remains of her talent.



With every loss comes a gain.

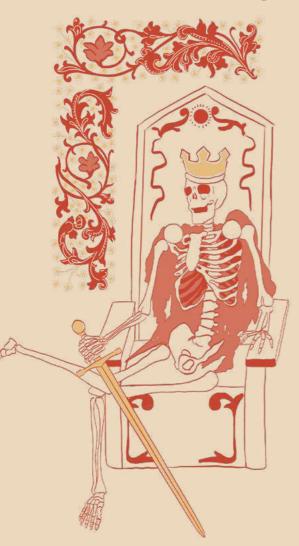
She wrenches herself away from the water's edge, tripping over a tangle of roots in her haste, and resumes stitching in a passionate frenzy.

The earth is hushed as it beholds a sovereign who establishes her territory, weaving as no mortal or deity ever could. The four winds hold their breath as they gaze in wonder at the marionette who harnesses her own strings. Her heart swells as she discharges the final details, euphoria blossoming in her chest. Behind her, the sun rises.

Two olive trees frame a spider's web, luminescent in the morning light.

Her tapestry is complete.





In deepest heart of forest wild The last of fairies in exile Will sometimes flit by evening mild To settle on a mossy tile Of ancient Camelot. In samite white she sits and sings And plays upon her lyre sweet. Beating softly ghost-thin wings She sings of Camelot.

On strings of gold she carefully plucks With fingers long and callused be, And wakes the nested sleeping ducks With half-forgotten history Of ancient Camelot. Of damosel and armoured knight And table round and questing beast, Held dear though lost, she sings by night Remembering Camelot:

'Yea Arthur, bastard, ill-conceived On magic night in masked deceit. For years well-hid, by none perceived, Till he did sword from stone unseat, O king of Camelot. So young, and fair, and fresh was he A bairn! They cried, of no import And in his eyes they could not see The future, Camelot.

On yonder hill with oaken rings Did bright Excalibur from its sheath There fell the many English kings And drive the Saxons from the heath Where would stand Camelot. Then much was sung of the king new-crowned, Of all his feats of axe and sword, But not on arms did he then found The kingdom, Camelot. For in the filth of bloody war He turned away from tyrant might. No more for him those hills of gore – He swore instead for gentle right Within his Camelot. O sweet head bearing gentle crown Not strength of arms he used, instead With chivalry did he lay down The bricks of Camelot.

A table round he fixed in place For all to feast abundantly. And round the table's wooden face He called them to as equals be, The knights of Camelot. Before the boy-king Arthur each Would swear their oath of fealty, And of each he would then beseech, Rise, o knight of Camelot!

To right and dignity forsworn, To gentleness not tyranny. By Christian cross and old hawthorn, By oak or Mary's heraldry, They swore in Camelot. Then merriment for all day long, And feasting by the dimming coals, And in the night the whitethroat's song, In wooded Camelot.

O blessed realm of hearth and stone O flame of silk and chivalry! As high as highest bird has flown So blazed its holy revelry, Such was Camelot! A place of strange and fairy sights, With tourney jousted in the day And dance to last throughout the night, Remember Camelot! So all the village girls and boys Now dream of quests and domed mead halls And beg of wooden swords for toys And practice dance to troubadours That sing of Camelot. And even now in woodland deep There wander still some hapless youths That stumble by; I watch them they weep: 'O, where is Camelot?'

In vain they seek, 'tis here no more, On Camlann Plains its ashes fell Where friend slew friend in dreadful war And mournful rang the low death knell Of beloved Camelot. To sword at last its beauty gave And all its magic put to torch And hidden even is the grave Of ruined Camelot.

Remain I here, the fairy sings, Within these walls of ivy green, Where moss the shattered column rings And buried low there lays unseen The bricks of Camelot. Of all of us who guard this lake I the last, and I too fade, But still from dreams I cannot wake Of golden Camelot.'

The Heat_____Hannah Smith

When the generators splutter to silence and the birds have performed their final encore, the only sound left in the world is the thick simmer of heat. Like a bonfire's red crackle, it pulsates through the earth louder than Men At Work on January twenty-six. The locals pay it no mind – genetically predisposed to tune it out. But a weathered stranger cocks his head. He crawls under the stars with shut eyes and listens with an open heart. It sounds like a ballad. It looks like a spirit. Dry weeks crumble to scorching years and still he lies in the dirt, listening to her song.

* * *

In the days long ago when velvet blazers were trending and supermarkets were still in the business of handing out plastic bags, there was a hero who listened to the Siren in his gut more than the logic of his own head. He wore the apparition of a cape in his blue button-up shirt and replaced hot red shoes with inky Magnum boots. Years of scouring the red outback had taught him the single epitome of all his principles: whether they be suspects, victims, or runaways, the things you search for are never in the first place you look. He may not have been an idol to many, but he was always a hero to me. And his name? Stubbs. Randy Stubbs.

Friday morning, December 7th, 1998. This is my favourite date: the day Stubbs became my hero. Conditions were brutal that year, or so I have been told. Temperatures broke records (fifty and a half Celsius in Mardie), winds howled over skeletal eucalypt limbs and any rumours of approaching cloud cover were promptly silenced by the unrelenting sun. But my hero is no sissy and so, wedged between a luminescent service station and the barren North West Coastal Highway, he stood swathing onyx flies like a ninja flicks away pellets of gunpowder.

"What are we doing here?" a voice crooned beside a dusty Ford Falcon.

Perhaps it was a mistake to bring the cynic, Stubbs mused. It had been over twenty-four hours and his loyal band of three musketeers had done nothing but cross off their lead suspect. Wanda Robinson was little more than an eccentric lady looking for her lost niece as much of the rest of them. Hope was quickly becoming a luxury only God could afford and yet there he stood, sweating under the BP's green rays, listening to her song.

The Siren's voice was louder this time. For thirty years he had listened to her distant coos, guiding him up and down the Pilbara as a member of State Highway Patrol.

How many times had her calls led him to nothing but mirages and empty pockets a fanged shadow had once occupied? Realistically, the eight-day-old could have been anywhere between Karratha and Karlamilyi. But there was something in her voice, something in her song that prickled his ears when the Ford Falcon scuttled past this service station.

"If you're looking for go-go juice, I wouldn't buy from here, mate," said Stubbs' partner, ignorant to the Siren. The beige outback hat that contradicted his blue uniform flapped impatiently in front of his face.

His partner was right. The BP wasn't much to look at. Like much of the state, its thin stream of income had dried up synchronously with the rain. Ivory paint flaked like dead skin, asphalt cracked like dinosaur knuckles, and the tangy stench of decay from rusted taps and drooping walls wafted all around like unabridged body odour. He shut his eyes, twisted his head, and listened. Listened like a narwhal listens to echolocation. Listened like a copper listens to Sirens, wooing him to kidnapped bubs abandoned at servos after realising newborns are no walk in the park.

Stubbs's eyes snapped open. There. Between the sweaty skip bin and the sporadic cool breaths radiating from the outdoor icebox (likely a watery slosh by now), a single tote container had been hurriedly discarded. The Siren purred. Stubbs, ever the obedient soldier, followed without question. Out of habit, his long fingers danced across the handle of the Glock 22 holstered to his thigh. *Silly man*, she sang, *the danger has already passed*. His breath, choppy against the backdrop of crooning cicadas and the croak of an occasional cricket, faded into an anxious silence. He couldn't breathe, couldn't think. The tote, almost searing to touch, cracked open with a small pop as a black insulation blanket boiled to the surface. Stubbs wondered if this hue was the dark before the dawn or a resonating fingerprint from death herself. He waited once more for her song to pierce the silence. He looked for some sort of *sign an* answer before the true conclusion unravelled but his vision was clogged in sticky desperation. The child was either here or gone to ethereal eternity. The hourglass had run dry. The clock had struck reckoning hour. No more second chances would be offered if he had misheard her tunes. Blinking once, gulping twice, and praying thrice, Stubbs took the plunge and unwrapped the swaddling blankets.

* * *

When all the lights flicker to black and the banshee in the attic transfigures back into a possum, a girl steers me beneath the stars. Shoulders in the dirt, eyelids relaxed. We bathe in a thick heat, as tangible as a shimmering summer road. It boils like a shanty. It tastes like nostalgia. And when I ask the Siren of it, she smiles beside me. It's a song from my past – the same as the one my hero murmured when he found me sweat-stained but breathing, all those years ago.

luo song tang Isabelle Shaw (aka Chinese Borscht)

Beef, onions, potatoes, cabbage, carrots. Tomato paste, garlic, and ginger.

These came out from the Sainsbury's bag resting on the kitchen bench.

Salt, szechuan peppers, star anise. These, from the back of her pantry. Stuck far at the back, near the packet of vegan chocolate protein powder Charlotte had tried only once because a friend had promised, "It tastes like a chocolate thick shake" (it didn't). Measuring the spices out into a bowl, one teaspoon, two pinches, three stars, she inhales deeply and imagines the rich aromas of the final product of thick stew once all combined. A strange blend of Russian and Chinese heritage brought together by a robust richness reminiscent of Italian cooking.

un lo

RE

Charlotte's mother, Xiaoqing, had always made the soup once the summer ended. Charlotte remembered the Melbourne skies would lose their colour and the world would transition from an over-saturated vibrancy of blues, pinks, and orange to grey. Only then would the large silver pot come out, its base blackened by the gas stove, the left handle almost burnt off. Loud battle-scars from the chaos in the kitchen at the hands of the girls. Souvenirs from their cooking adventures: pumpkin-infused macaroni and cheese with rosemary breadcrumbs and Parmesan crusted on top. Thick uneven hand-ripped noodles in a soy broth with edamame and seaweed and left-over braised duck from last night's dinner. Tart strawberry jam and slightly over-whipped cream on tall, buttery scones still steaming slightly from the oven. All this reminded her of home.

Charlotte heats a generous pad of butter in a pan and throws in the peppers and star anise, tossing them around, letting them release their flavour into the butter and the air of the cluttered apartment.

* * *

"Zdrah-stvooy," Xiaoqing had sounded out. "Zdrah," she repeated.
"Zdrah," Ginny and Charlotte chorused back.
"Stvooy."
"Stvooy."
"And now try them together?" She smiled.
"Zdrahstvooy," the young girls sang.
"Yes, zdrahstvooy," she congratulated, before moving onto the next word.

Language lessons were always informal and spoken. Sporadic and at the mercy of the tides of interest that came with growing up, the girls always preferred Russian to Chinese because it seemed more exotic. For them, Chinese was boring, mundane, common. But Russian? That was European, that was cool.

The lessons were accompanied by tales of their mother's experiences of growing up near the border of China and the USSR. Xiaoqing told them stories of how her childhood had changed in the aftermath of Mao's rise and The Great Leap Forward. How, as the eldest, she helped her own mother, Charlotte's grandmother, look after her four younger sisters when her father had gone off to fight in the war.

Charlotte often wondered whether her mother missed the harsh seasons of the North. The bouts of torrential rain interspersed with bright sunshine that made up Melbourne's fickle winter must have seemed mild in comparison to the frost of the Ice City she'd grown up in. Now, Charlotte knew even the endless grey winters of London surely could not compare to the thick snow canopies of Harbin.

* * *

Charlotte slices the onion into thick strips and crushes the garlic cloves under the blade of a knife. They all go into the pan with the dry spices. She adds in the tomato paste and lets it sizzle as the tartness and the bitterness of the tinned tomato cook away – *tsssss, ahhhhh*. She turns off the heat and sets it aside. In a separate pan, she watches water come to the boil as she begins to parboil the beef.

Her mother would never admit that she was from the North. Instead, she shaved off the sharpness of her accent and gave up Chinese-Russian words: *lieba, gewasi, bulaji*. Xiaoqing moved south to the city as soon as she could and eagerly took up the soft flowing Shanghainese dialect of her first love, incorporating the -er lilt to her words to imitate the dulcet up-and-down rhythms of the South. Leading up to her wedding, she learnt the more delicate umami flavours of the South-East from her mother-in-law, Jingyu.

They spent long but quiet hours together as they folded and wrapped shrimp and pork wontons into their thin egg-dough wrappers, and pan-fried Chinese cabbage with rice cakes with a thick soy marinade. She subbed out cumin and spice with cooking wine and scallions. It was almost a relief to shed her rural roots and adopt the superior airs of the cosmopolitan city – the first city that was truly open to the world. But even then, she didn't change the recipe for that rich red soup.

Even after Charlotte's father passed, Xiaoqing had stayed in touch with his mother despite never being close. Jingyu, or Nainai as the girls would call her, would check in every few weeks and even occasionally visit. Xiaoqing said it was more out of loneliness than anything else. Jingyu had only moved to Australia to be with her son. The rest of her family had chosen to stay in Shanghai, and she had no intention of going back. Her justification was that the city was no longer the same and the air was too dirty.

It was awkward at first. A grieving mother, widower, and two now almost-teenage girls all sat around a table; the incandescent light brought out the lines on their faces. Conversations were limited by heartbreak as much as they were by language. The girls fumbled around with a patchwork of Harbin, Shanghainese, and Mandarin that they'd picked up over the years, all pronounced with a broad Australian accent as they tried their best to converse with their grandmother.

Jingyu would often offer to cook, but their mother would adamantly refuse. "Please sit down, let me do the cooking while you watch the girls. They're in the living room, go sit on the couch and relax," she'd say in Shanghainese.

One dinner, they had sat with the rich red soup in the middle of the table as an entree of sorts before the rest of the meal came out. The same way they serve it in Shanghai.

"You're not serving it with da lieba?" Jingyu had asked in Chinese.

"No, not today."

"What are they saying?" Ginny had whispered.

"Nainai is asking why we aren't eating bread with the soup," Charlotte whispered back.

Ginny ladled the soup up and took a sip, immediately spitting it back out into the bowl. "The soup tastes different today. It's sort of gross, don't you think?"

Charlotte rolled her eyes and shuffled in her seat, so she was positioned closer to the edge of the table. She swung her leg back and kicked Ginny from under the table, giving her a stern look.

"Ow, what was that for? Mum, she kicked me!"

"I cooked it differently today. It's how your grandma likes it," her mother responded in English, frowning discouragingly at Charlotte. "In Shanghai, they add ginger, and they don't fry the beef."

Charlotte sent her mother an apologetic smile and straightened up in her seat, determined to not get caught up in Ginny's immaturity.

"Isn't it supposed to be Russian? Russian's don't eat ginger. It tastes better when you cook it the normal way."

"Stop being so thick," Charlotte responded coolly, her earlier resolve to not engage quickly abandoned.

"Stop being so rude."

"Respect your elders."

"Both of you, stop fighting," their mother warned. "This is the way I'm making it from now on, so get used to it. I don't want to hear any complaints, or you can make yourself dinner."

* * *

"Fine."

Charlotte brings a large pot of water to the boil and chops the potatoes and carrots into large chunks. Salt the water slightly. The beef, vegetables and spices all go into a single pot and she adds water until the large silver pot is full. She brings everything to barely a simmer, watching as the water bubbles, softly and covers it with a lid. Then she waits.

She's always taken aback at how short the winter days are in London. It's barely four in the evening and the dark ink of the night has already spilt across the sky, leaving a scattering of warm yellow lights to shine through along the skyline.

Back home, it would be just past three in the morning. Too early for her family to be up yet. She tries to distract herself as she waits for the soup to reduce. There's hardly any laundry in the hamper, a few sweaters and some sweatpants. Barely half a load, but she puts it into the washing machine anyway. She folds away a stray scarf left hanging on a chair and checks the time again. Somehow, it's only been half an hour.

She is putting away the dishes from the rack back into their cupboards when she decides she's going to clear out her pantry. A bag of dried kidney beans, black wood ear mushrooms, and an expired box of baker's yeast all emerge from the depths of the cupboard. She gives the soup a stir every so often.

The pantry has been purged of all expired goods. Wiped down once with a wet sponge and another with an antibacterial wipe, she has had all the products re-organised and re-housed back in the pantry when the lock of the door clicks open.

"In here," she shouts from the floor. "How was work?"

Samuel unwraps his scarf and drapes it on the arm of the sofa, near the radiator. "Yeah, alright. How are you feeling? I see you've been busy." He wraps his arms around her.

"I needed something to do so I did some housework."

"What's the point in taking the day off if you're just going to work?"

"I know. I still had a good day though."

"If you say so." He lifts the lid off the pot and breathes in the soup.

"Leave it alone, it's not done yet." She swats him away. "Do you want to shower or are you good to go?"

"I'm good, the camera loves me regardless of whether I've showered." He grins cheekily.

They set up the laptop and sit together at the dining table. Charlotte fidgets with the laptop to adjust the camera angle as they wait for the others to join the call.

Ginny's face pops up onto the screen with Toto, her Shiba Inu puppy, laying in her lap. A closeup of their mother's face joins a few seconds after. Xiaoqing's camera jerks down and Charlotte sees she is wearing an old t-shirt from Charlotte and Ginny's high school. It has a big bear stretching up for a star and shouting "Reach towards higher things" on the front. Charlotte had always thought the t-shirt was ugly, but it made her smile when she saw her mother wearing it.

"Mama, put the phone down so we can see you properly. Where's Nainai?" Ginny asks, already exasperated.

"She's here, but we can't get the camera to work."

"It's working, you both just need to sit down and put the phone down," Charlotte interjects.

"Hi, hi! How is everyone?" Samuel's attempt to cut through are ignored as the back and forth between the women heats up.

"Nainai, how are you?" He tries again to no avail.

Eventually, everyone's video is set up and all five faces can be seen clearly.

"Are you two going to bed soon?" Xiaoqing asks.

"Yeah soon, in a bit. We have some news though, which is why we wanted to have this call," Charlotte responds.

"What time is it now? Almost midnight? You should already be sleeping. It's not good for the heart to go to bed so late."

"I'm not a child, Mum. You don't need to tell me when to go to bed. And it's early, only seven p.m. The clocks went back last week remember?"

"Aiya, you still need to sleep earlier, you both work too hard. I read on WeChat that there was a young doctor who worked too much. He got up very early in the morning every morning, five a.m. And he worked all day and didn't go to sleep until 12 every night. He was very healthy before but always went to bed late. Then suddenly, one day, he died from heart failure. He was still very young as well – only 34 years old!"

"That sounds... fake. I've told you so many times that not everything on WeChat is true."

"You never listen to me. Why don't you listen to your mother?"

"I do, you just think I don't." She tries to sound annoyed, but she'd missed this too much.

"I made luo song tang today. I think we'll be eating it for the rest of the year though, there's so much left over."

"That's alright, you can send some to me," her mother jokes. "Pay me back for all the times I cooked for you."

"Me too," Ginny pipes up.

"Sure, I'll pop it into the post first thing tomorrow," she smiles. "So, like I said, we have some news for you today." She shares a look with Samuel. There's a beat before it all comes out in a flurry, "I'm pregnant. We're having a baby."

Ginny lets out an uncharacteristically quiet, "Oh my god, that's amazing." Xiaoqing and Jingyu let out a shout. They hug and cry. Ginny and Charlotte smile as they watch.

"We're not sure whether it's going to be a boy or a girl just yet, but we just couldn't wait to tell you."

* * *

The rain softly begins to fall as they start to eat.

Charlotte takes a sip of soup and feels the warmth it brings to her chest. They chat about their

day sharing moments that made them laugh and smile and cry out in frustration. How Samuel's intern made palm cards to introduce himself in a meeting with the team, how she saw a dog wearing booties and a raincoat.

She teases him about the dribble of soup that splashes onto his shirt, and he laughs at her bread soaking technique. She breaks off strips and leaves them soaking on the rim of her bowl which he thinks looks like a bunch of old men lazing about in a hot spring.

As she packs the leftovers into plastic Tupperware and slots them into the refrigerator, he washes and dries the dishes. They have a comfortable rhythm as they finish cleaning and get ready for bed. Charlotte climbs into bed next to Samuel and pulls out the recipe card her mother wrote for her when she was first moving out. She starts a new page in her recipe book and begins writing.

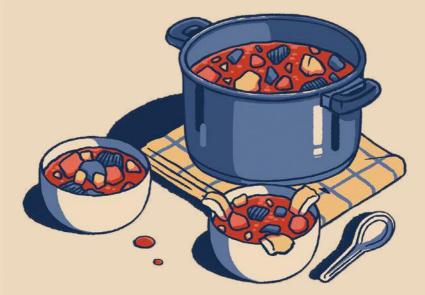
"You're copying the recipe into the notebook? Don't you just make it from memory?"

"Yeah, but I've made some changes over the years, and I want to give this to our daughter when she grows up."

"Daughter? You don't know it's going to be a girl."

"It'll be a girl," she counters. They laugh.

Eventually, she puts the notebook away and switches the lamp off. In the darkness, she pulls the duvet snug and tucks it under her chin, letting the soft humming of the heater and lingering scent of ginger and tomatoes lull her to sleep.



Raw Pustule Sun

jorvyn jones

Content warning: body horror, eating disorders, and child abuse

I could have known in advance. You must have been wondering how could it be that I could have ended up so abject. Such a bucket of bones, a sack of onions squirming against their sackcloth, a squeezed fist of boils seeming to balloon into forever... yet I can't even remember when was the first lesion. Probably an inner ulceration. Some mild discolouration. Grown hence, and grown upon grown upon and growing on... Oh that that fist may close upon my agonies, that they may demise. Until then, I remain a grotesque turnip mutation, some swamp excretion, not fit for vision.

When still growing, that body they called mine, still a pooling, slow opening, fissuring, puckering and closing, loop of strings of this and that, pale and droop and gone flat, or, you know, taut, they gone taught me what was me. The look, the look, the promise of the look, denied. The comment comment comment, meant, like a comet in my hormonal brain still not grown, but gone explode. On skin, in skin pustule, a little bit of brain drool. Drilled in so cruel, learn the way of the world, gone learn.

Learn shade, out of glare, out of the light, find that corner in which to hide, to screw yourself up into a ball, and wither, and curl some more. That corner don't have crease enough to fold yourself in, but there's within, within, you can't get in. Quite aware of the walls I was building, feet hopping over the sharp objects that came into display, as my head down, I walk that way, the path way, the side walk, away from the gaze, out of the light.

Your own family turning on you, as you twist and turn. Against glare, plated out. Spooned up tunnels attempting intricate knots of blights. Tunnelling against solid rock, ricochets back. Silent cataracts, shells off prawn hinds. Crunch, crunch. The body a resistance, the cruel turnings over of forks and knives and casual barbs designed to go down like those deadly carbs. Back then I could eat all I like, never gain weight. You soon learn you become a figure of hate. It lies in weight.

A wheezing shriek caught in the throat of a wildebeest. A gasp that went down too far too fast. Then got shovelled over with dirt and ash. That was mama. Mama stuck a fork in the meat and w so as to turn 'em over. She was always turning the soil, like a body was beneath it. Succulent little roses of greyed smoke fuming, always hanging around. Like wreaths for bodies buried in her garden. She'd shovelled so much shit out in her time that it wasn't another thing to shovel out some more. She could always shovel more dirt on me. Choke an answer out of me – "You can't do that." – always her first words. Choking any reply before it left the windpipe. A wheezing shriek caught in the throat of a wildebeest. A last gasp drawn out for so long that it became tar, outlining the body, shovelled over.

Her reflex, her multitask – "You can't do that. What were you thinking? You can't do that." – backed up with solids. Fork in the meat and two veg. Papa was rigid solid. Inflexible, unforceable – yet a flex of might, an enforcer. Might that might never entertain a possibility that something might... Firm and rigid. Solid. Monolithic. Dark and archaic like god, behind some cloud with thunderbolts, ready to strike down. Unforgiving. Punisher.

Or was I the unforgiving? Punishing myself with the laceration of tongue pushed firmly in clenched cheek, teeth gnashed down on 'til blood drawn. Swallowing words, swallowing words. They were shovelled over. They were solid. They were the rite of my birth... Each word detonated another seed deep inside me – another tendril loop. Erupting like arteries. Forcing the choke.

Staring into an egg like it was an atom smash sun. Words catapulting into tiny explosions – supernovae against my rictus mask – quivering. Like one jolt would disintegrate it to mash. Boiling over. Boils grow up. Splinter skin. Push towards the sun. The light a dumb yellow. Quiver, quiver. Shovelled over, and away. Solid. Mash. Every colour numbed.

You can't turn it in enough. Unheard, or heard too much, at the expense of hearing. They shout it down. They twist it around. They shut it down. Fold it in, take it in, take it in, spit it out, it solid the mouth. It solied the mouth, but grows mulch in the brain, with enough rain.

Little seeds that grow, in plain packaging, ruined by pustules that burst and twist the skin. You soon become used to the twisting of the skin. Twisting from within. No matter how twisting it's always your turn. Turn your voice in. Shouting at the plants won't make them grow. Shovel enough shit and you never know. Back then, those days, I could eat anything. Never grow.

What's gone makes me grow... A way with the strap was like bootlaces to my father: a way to pull up. You pull yourself up. Rattle against the cage. And though Time is a cage, cages can be timed against, pulled out from under, and then you've flown. But there is no horizon that comes any closer than through a lens, the horizon is all ways somewhere to go, is always reflected back. Yet that's where the light doesn't catch. Just reflects. There is no safe sanctuary where you can magically go. Weeds always get under the cracks that try to smooth, and smooth can just be a pressing down, eventually those pustules go, but the seeds are still there, folded in and turned over with a new soil. Flick through with your fingers you can see the many things that figure in a new day soil. Every day a new soil, and if you don't, that's a worry. You start to regulate based on the daily soil, and make predictions, and fold your day around, like fingers in a closed fist. And pay attention to the seasons, and how they change the flows.

Each day waiting for the new soil. Relying on soil.

Press it in, it's like concrete, it's so cold. Rub it down, it's so concrete. Like a chest. Like soil falls from a bank into a river and gets carried... silent silent silent all the way... carries more. Jumps over the river, but then, there are also the returns. Dividends. Turns. Turds and burns. Lessons learnt.

'Til you're meek at the dinner table, waiting for your crust and curds. Cos you know the value of a crust, underneath it is a quarry, it holds so many quarrels, and so much dust, get your teeth under that, you might find blood. Might have dried up. Left a stain on a wall. Like where a toddler crawled.

Under the table, those deals that are never spoken of, behind closed doors, they grease the palms, they make the world go around, so people get what they want.

But there is always someone who didn't get what they want. Or who don't want what they want. Or can't. Or is a cunt.

Can't complain, cunts reign. Or else everyone is stumbling to sweep one off its plate.

Pull the tablecloth out from under the plates? Better learn, tantrums don't work. They lie in wait. Better learn, bodies don't work forever. Blood dries up. Nappies on an eighty-three-yearold veteran. Circled the sun, a few sums, more losses, but add them up, and you're back where you begun, but of course it's spun. The body decays, maybe the brain is saved, maybe you want to switch it off. The noise is constant, even if it's a silent pitch, the debts and the worries. The world's a son of a bitch. And sometimes you even meet the original bitch. Fold in again, and the folds are on the surface. The wear and tear of a life's service.

Whose tears don't make nice patterns. Stuffed away, jeered away. Fold it in, or shake it out like impatient keys, or hide it under a matte base covering so that you just don't have to deal, because you prefer the ease. The ease of not knowing. Of discovering remains. Putting together peace. Against the strains. But like decay in teeth, it stains.

Collected a tear onto a necklace. Used that tear to smooth where tears had etched on me, etched onto the skin, into the skin. Smoothed over each raw pustule like sunlight dapples water, barely touching. Concealing in little ripples. A reflection of the sun, with none of its burns.



But couldn't be contained. Fresh soil from the bank, dissolving into tears. A world laced with waterways. Lacerated. Pustules latching onto any surface. Bubbling up, the skin was porous, defying the matte plaster of makeup, defying containment. A network of bubbles, pooling, fissuring and puckering. Sprouting in solid sores, monuments to inner turmoil. Dark twists looking for their only way to light. A ravaged beast of sprouts. Vegetable matter. A pummelled meat. Fit for a mask.

You've folded into a corner for so long that it's become a pattern. And you've smoothed over defences so that conversations are fences and walls but there's some bright shrubbery that can be agreed on, even if it's to put it down. But occasionally there are clearings where it all bursts out again, like a hormonal teenager that can make a show of controlling his shit. 'Til he meets the madame who makes him sit. Or the master of his destiny that makes him sit in it.

Bent over the tiles, ass in the air, under the light, the standing up, the vibrating of every hair. The pustules again, not ready for their close up, in fact spread open, another of life's tears, and it's there in the open, and again the comments. But this time is a surprise. What was silent and inwards, innards, pushed outwards, now exposed. And what was comments and catcalls and shouting derision and crowings, is now delicate whispers, the parental concern. What hasn't been seeing since you were a rugrat, a rug burn ago.

This bridge is more like an aqueduct, with the stubble of puckering stucco, the pale where the sun don't shine. A reflection. Pustules like when you get too close to the sun, and it's popping, in little flares. And no choice but to being there. And there is care. A strange masculine bonding from a body knowing and not knowing the surprise until it was there, caught up in the hair, a puzzled stare.

Words aren't needed to convey the way things got this way. A most explicit re-telling, in the journey of the body the folds of the skin pulled taught pulled wide, and nowhere to hide. There's still what's gone inside. But what was folded in, is now spread open wide.

A scar, seated. A scar can be healed, yes. But never gone. An intimate moment of connection. A bond. Where thought was none. A simple touch. And never gone.





Here, in the cards, is the flow of Our conversation, and the ebb of promise, Shuffled like badly practised footwork. We pick From the turmoil, and begin.

In my tarot deck, the Fool's gold falls Into the maw of a waiting shark. Why is it hungry? All of God's creatures are Starving, and we are no exception. We are all shricks and nothing more. We are the sound of an airplane door sealing shut Against the world and thinking itself Invincible in flight. Think again. The door opens and we tumble Into a sky that will not catch us. Our burdens are too heavy. Our hearts are too light. In the days of sun gods, we Weighed our hearts against a feather but Now we weigh our hearts in each other's hands (In-between and up against our Guilt). We have not learned How not to squeeze. We are still falling. All of God's creatures strike the ground, and we are No exception. The earth has a patient, Open mouth. Hungry creature. The Sun watches our Swallowing, and there's no pity, Except from the watchful stars, Still worshipped and still Hidden by the flimsy folds Of an indelicately arranged dawn.

The Tower



Echo of Embodiment An essay on collapsing the body into memory

Benedicte McGowen

'They perished in the seamless grass, -

No eye could find the place;'

- XXXIX. - The Battle-field - Emily Dickinson¹

The body that is envisioned in memory is reproduced, performed as if it were still substantial, still able to be grasped. Like the configurations of brush strokes into image, memory gathers a series of impressions of the body in an attempt to visualise it. The traces of the body are collated in its absence. The body is mythologised as it is dislocated in the repeated utterance of memory. Despite being reproduced, made recurrent as an image held in memory, the body echoes its own absence through the impressions it leaves behind. Céline Sciamma's film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) reimagines the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, illustrating the body through characters' dress as woven into memory. The shifting of the body into recollection is reproduced through the gaze of another, the body is dislocated from itself, with dress an echo of its corporeality.

The white dress is distinctive against the darkened door frame. Its lace ripples into indentations, cast not by the lamp, but by the moon. The fabric is slit in its reflection; its glow is lit like a forced show of teeth. As the sleeves' corners seep into shadow, a rift forms between the forearm and their openings. Concealed in the cascades of fabric is their own shadow. This rift is an enclave, its outline webbed and delicate—cloth and shadow are both exit and entrance, their in-between translucent.

At the turn of a head, an exhalation of frozen breath, a chill inflamed, a grasp, fist clenched-

there is nothing but air, tinted cold.

"And now they were nearing the margin of the upper earth, when he, afraid that she might fail him, eager for sight of her, turned back his longing eyes; and instantly she slipped into the depths. He stretched out his arms, eager to catch her or to feel her clasp; but, unhappy one, he clasped nothing but the yielding air."

- Metamorphoses - Book X - Ovid ²

The artist Louise Bourgeois wrote: "You pile up associations the way you pile up bricks. Memory itself is a form of architecture."³ This assemblage of 'associations' conjures an intimacy with its envisioned spectral presences. We formulate disembodied connections with others-the brush of a hand against sleeve; a misdirected glance; the warmth of another when you settle into a vacant seat; the smudge on a glass; the flinch when you hear a cough-rough, from behind you. You visualise the droplets from the expulsion sinking into your scalp; there is an uncertain fear in deliberating whether to turn around, to resolve their anonymity. These 'associations' are unstable, incorporeal impressions, a semblance of connection with another that is conjured, which the mind crafts into an elusive solidity. These impressions left by the body are crafted by memory into myth, visualised as a recurrent image – a substitute for the body that is no longer visible, that can only be envisioned by the traces it leaves behind. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, the artist Marianne speculates on what motivates Orpheus's turn towards Eurydice on earth's brink. Following her friend and servant Sophie's disbelief at his decision, Marianne remarks, "He chooses the memory of her. That's why he turns. He doesn't make the lover's choice, but the poet's." This is disputed by Marianne's lover, Héloïse, who comments, "Perhaps she was the one who said, 'Turn around."⁴ She can not decide on whose voice, then, embodies the choice to turn.

In envisioning Héloïse in the darkened hallway, cloaked in a wedding gown and shadow, Marianne's memory fragments Héloïse's body. The dress is a substitute for remembrance of the woman. The dress alludes to another by performing as the wearer's impression. It is a trace of the body that wears it, and disrupts Marianne's remembrance, her performance of retaining Héloïse's body through projecting her presence, by attempting to materialise her body within her artistic practice. In vanishing, the image, protectively cradled in Marianne's gaze, slips into recollection. It is swallowed by the darkness, the abyss uneasily empty. Her memory is unable to latch onto a body, unable to obscure itself in another's reflection.

"replica village reality effect the bodice sits over the body know this well already cf. 'it mimics nature to filter' old sponge chunks of wattle slumping on your cheek gathering a full body testimonial."

- alkaway - Ella O'Keefe⁵

When looking at another in memory, there is an attempt to lodge yourself within the cavity of their actuality, to imagine them in conversation, once shared between you. But this fixation is disturbed in that conversation holds no solidity itself; a conversation can not be held by one person and the memory of another. By erratic gestures, uneven leveraging of tone, speech is broken in the desire to be interrupted, as if another's acknowledgement could make the lightness of one's memory heavy, sculpt it into a body, stable in its capacity to be held. Like an imagined conversation wavering into incoherence, Héloïse's wedding dress is an impression of the body that has been lost; it interrupts its fixation into image, the capacity for her body to be reproduced, her presence to be materialised in memory. Her body cannot step through it; she is envisioned standing behind it; the crevice in its flowing fabric folds like a curtain, slumping heavily. Later, Marianne exits the house where she painted Héloïse, and when Héloïse demands she "Turn around," the harsh daylight that slices through the half-opened door rinses the shadows from her sleeve's opening—her body is crafted into the dress's construction. Then the door closes and the shadows spill towards her once again, her arms outstretched, and like Eurydice after Orpheus "turned back his longing eyes; instantly she slipped into the depths"⁶.

"What if the body does not signify? Its wee lost cluster starts to fade the skin opening to the moisture of the season."

- The Seam - Lisa Robertson⁷

Eurydice slips not into the sunken realm of the afterlife, but through the pools of Orpheus's eyes. She slides uneasily into memory, like Héloïse, she is instead gathered into recollection. In the eyes of those who witness their departure, Eurydice and Héloïse are recalled as images, materialisations of memory itself. In being looked at, they are detached from their corporeality, envisioned as images that can be reproduced as recompense for their imminent absence.

Nearing the film's conclusion, Marianne positions her body protectively against her painting of Orpheus and Eurydice, the embroidered blue of her cloak imitating the cloth that pirouettes around Orpheus. His shoulders pull back, his extended arm bends at the elbow, as if hesitating, uncertain whether to reach forward or to turn away. Cloaked in white, Eurydice's body drifts downwards, the folds of her dress already sinking into the shadows of the rocks below. Her hand curls forward or backward—her gesture neither farewell or warning, nor invitation.

"the skin imprinted with actual memories skin as a media of production 'epidermal memory' traumatic 'after effects' sculptural dislocations."

- 'Blueberries' – Ellena Savage⁸

The dress performs as a ceremony, a production that memory retells-it becomes a myth through its utterance. In Mythologies Roland Barthes writes that "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message."9 In applying Barthes's interpretation of myth as a formation of meaning to the mythologising of the body, the body is formed from how its impression is expressed, the presence that is communicated through the traces it leaves behind. And yet, this attempt to exaggerate the body's reflection so that it can be recounted is an utterance that is a haunted discourse; the dress, a skin shedding. The body is dislocated by memory's performative possession. It is reproduced into an image that can be recounted by those who craft it. The weaving of the body into memory is a disturbance that hinders a complete image. By revealing the dress as substitute for the body, the gaze attempts to grasp Héloïse through recollection of something corporeal which is nonetheless only an impression, a trace, an echo wavered into being. In reproduction, materialised in paint, the represented body spills beneath the restoration of a situated frame. Like the webbed lace a child is swaddled in, the dress is baptismal, the utterance an announcement of rebirth, a paper gauze on a leaking wound-

soaked through.

As Marianne leaves the house, Héloïse commands that she "Turn around," redirecting her glance. The edges of the stairs are blurred by a translucent veil. Against the wall, the shadows of Héloïse's stance are distorted into anonymity. It is uncertain if she has emerged from them or whether they have forced themselves into our vision, incensed at the motion that will follow, where she drifts backwards through the stairs, until they vanish against the weight of cloth, pale with thinness, then heavy and white. The frame is bordered in shadow, there are no edges, no corners. If you looked at her, her outlines would glimmer, as if lit with heat.

Everything shimmers as she sinks beneath.

Works Cited

1 Dickinson, Emily. XXXIX. - The Battle-field. From Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson. (New York: Chatham River Press Classics, (1983) edition). 207.

2 Ovid. "Book X". From Ovid Mctamorphoses II. 8 AD. Translated by Frank Justus Miller. (Great Britain: Cambridge Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1916). 69.

3 Machado, Carmen Maria. In the Dream House. (Great Britain: Serpent's Tail, 2020). 1.

4 Portrait of a Lady on Fire. (2019). dir. Céline Sciamma. France.

5 O'Keefe, Ella. alkaway. From Slowlier. (Victoria, AUS.; Cordite Books, 2021). 9.

6 Ovid. "Book X". From Ovid Metamorphoses II, 69.

7 Robertson, Lisa. "The Seam." Literary Hub. June 3, 2015.

8 Savage, Ellena. Notes taken during a lecture by Marianne Hirsch in "Notes to Unlived Time". In Blueberries. (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company. 2020). 208.

9 Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today." In Mythologies. 1957. Translated by Jonathan Cape (1972). (London: Vintage, 2009). 131.

The Death of Orpheus

Orpheus, soothing his broken heart, sang with his hollow lyre,

Jack Zhou

"You, sweet wife," alone on the deserted shore. "You," from dawn to dusk he sang. He journeyed to the mouth of the Taenarus, the deep gates of Hades, Into the foggy grove, thick with darkness and fear. The Shades closed in on him, the rulers of the Underworld too, Whose hearts could not be softened by mortals' prayers. But Orpheus's song stirred the Shades from their deepest haunts: Those shadows and ghosts bereft of light, teeming Like the myriad birds who hid themselves in the trees When the evening came and the winter rain drove them from the mountains. Mothers and sons, the ghosts of brave heroes (their lives cut short); Boys and girls not yet married; the young men atop pyres before their parents' faces, All of whom entrapped in the black mud and deformed reeds Of the Coctyus, with its sluggish waters and hideous swamp, And the nine streams of the Styx block them off from the living. Even the whole realm, the innermost region of Death, The Furies with their twinned locks of blue serpents, and The three gaping jaws of Cerberus were stunned. The wheel of Ixion stopped its rotation with the wind. Now Orpheus doubling back cleared all the dangers, and Eurydice returned, coming into the regions above, When madness suddenly seized the careless lover – a forgivable mistake, If only the Underworld knew how to forgive. He halted, Forgetting that Eurydice was trailing behind his shadow - his spirit overcome, He looked back. All his labours wasted, and the pact with the cruel tyrant Hades broken. Thrice a crash was heard in the lakes of the Underworld. "What has befallen us," she said, "Orpheus, what madness? O! the cruel fates call me back, eternal sleep will stop my tears. Goodbye – I'll be taken by the all-surrounding night. I hold out my trembling hands to you – but they are no longer yours ..." She said this, and like thin smoke mixed in the wind, she disappeared Immediately before his eyes. Though he clutched vainly at her shadow, Wanting to say more, she could never see him again. Charon, the ferryman, would not let him pass the stream before him.

Orpheus, soothing his broken heart, sang with his hollow lyre, "You, sweet wife," alone on the deserted shore. "You," from dawn to dusk he sang. He journeyed to the mouth of the Taenarus, the deep gates of Hades, Into the foggy grove, thick with darkness and fear. The Shades closed in on him, the rulers of the Underworld too,

Whose hearts could not be softened by mortals' prayers. But Orpheus's song stirred the Shades from their deepest haunts: Those shadows and ghosts bereft of light, teeming Like the myriad birds who hid themselves in the trees When the evening came and the winter rain drove them from the mountains.

Mothers and sons, the ghosts of brave heroes (their lives cut short); Boys and girls not yet married; the young men atop pyres before their parents' faces, All of whom entrapped in the black mud and deformed reeds Of the Coctyus, with its sluggish waters and hideous swamp, And the nine streams of the Styx block them off from the living. Even the whole realm, the innermost region of Death, The Furies with their twinned locks of blue serpents, and The three gaping jaws of Cerberus were stunned. The wheel of Ixion stopped its rotation with the wind. Now Orpheus doubling back cleared all the dangers, and Eurydice returned, coming into the regions above, When madness suddenly seized the careless lover – a forgivable mistake,



Echo (To Be Wanted)

Jaimie Lee

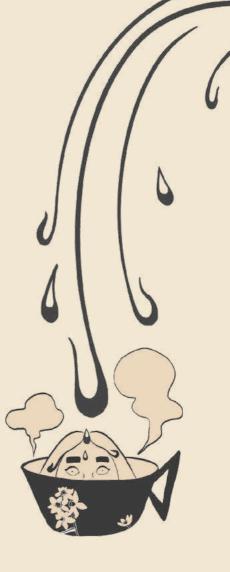
Content warning: misogyny

"I want you"

The Man borrows the baritone intonation used to buy that patchwork bag he liked in Kauai syllables strung together with the softness of silk scarfing around her neck until they tighten like a noose the kettle shrieks like a banshee because she cannot silently, she watches him pour scalding water into cold milk

from beneath him, The Man is the highest peak his shoulders block the view beyond the window hands rough as earth find her neck, breasts, hips, thighs, then carve initials into her back and etch promises on her ribcage with perfidious fingers the fall from his bluffs is tender on her brittle bones but she does not make a sound as she hits the ground

the water turns lukewarm like forgotten tea as she loses her aching body to the cast iron tub The Man returned the patchwork bag, *remember*, he wanted the smaller one with the fuller ass so she stopped eating her feelings and let them cat away at her instead but when she pulls the plug hopeful the swirl will suction her down with it her folded, naked limbs still prove too big for the drain, too big for him



she waits for The Man like leftovers on a refrigerator shelf wondering how many times he can freeze and thaw her before he decides the meat has gone bad she despises how hungry eyes give her purpose like a dead cow on a dinner plate but who is she, if not whetting someone's appetite

when he circles back, as he always does she polishes her words along with the silverware The Man talks politics, the fiction of gender gaps another tongue is bitten off swallowed down with a smile only to grow back like a lizard tail he pauses – "women say 'I think' too much" the old tongues writhe with wrath in her gut maybe some (but #notall) men need reminding that women fucking think

but she follows the script as he stirs the tea once more, The Man is kind enough to say "I want you" and when he gives her this gift of validation (even if that's all he is willing to give) then she may speak – she *must* speak – but only to echo, "You."



There is a word that is the hiss of campfire ash meeting snow or the groan of solid ice shifting. It is the sharp intake of breath when you step into cold water, the shock of a chill that startles your bones. The word is a name that is cold, sharp, and quiet. It belongs to a sleeping world and can only be voiced as a whisper.

A single name–a single story–giving birth to a thousand tellings. I will show you three.

1 Step softly through the shadows

"Step softly on the snow," the Story Hunter says, "and go quietly into the dawn."

His eyes track life. The sleepy murmurings of a bird, the soft-pawed wanderings of a forest rat. His hands bring death. Don't look at them if you find that disquieting. Just listen. The Story Hunter wants to teach you how to catch a story, how to skewer it on the tip of a spear.

"You must be wary here, in this hour of hushed breaths and frozen dreams. Stay clear of the deer – they nibble at weeds that can't remember the taste of the sun. Listen to the moans of the listless earth. Its bedsores are white and bloodless."

The Story Hunter looks at you, his face gleaming silver in the starlight, and tells you to climb the hill to the old woman's house.

"Do it carefully. You don't want to go sliding into the slush of yesterday's snow. It is a long climb. Arduous. But exercise is good; it thaws your blood."

He pauses, then, to ensure you are following him, to see that your footsteps match his on this meandering path through the snow.

"Skirt around the edges of the house when you reach it. Dodge the tin bucket of frosted water and that snow shovel propped against the wall. There is a fire in the old woman's hearth that makes the air smell like ash. Hear the flames cackle as they grind wood into dust. Taste the lost promise of warmth. It is the afterthought of the breeze, the afterbirth of a dream. The crumbling fantasy of a world that waits for its heart to slowly freeze."

The Story Hunter begins assembling a fire of his own. Branches crack and splinter beneath his fists. Twigs are transformed into kindling.

"This is the old woman's house and the old woman's fire. You cannot go inside. Her flames are not for you. Perhaps you shouldn't have looked. You can't stand there forever, watching an icy window catch your breath."

The Story Hunter looks up from his infant fire and leans closer to you, speaking with fierce intensity.

"Go. Survey the snow at the back of the house. Find the old woman's tracks. They will be shallow, like those of a child. Tiny indents made by a being who is not fully grounded in this world. Follow them. If you're fast, you might catch her. You might glimpse the back of the old woman's cloak."

The Story Hunter's fire splutters on mouthfuls of vivid, smoky life. As you stare into the flames, ask yourself if you see her. A hooded figure with hunched shoulders ambling towards the dawn.

2 Listen for a lost lullaby

The Story Teller likes drama. She relishes the stifling weight of tension, the sour tang of fear. That is why she is here, on a stage of dead leaves before a crowd of old trees. That is why she has chosen a costume. A muddy dress, wild hair, pet cat coiled around her neck. That is why she talks to you.

"It was winter," she says in a voice that makes the cool air tremble. "Deep winter, when everything is dark and cold, and the world curls itself into a ball to hide its face from the snow."

She strokes the cat, whose head is tucked in the tender dimple of her throat. It breathes in time with her words.

"The sun was huddled in a thumbprint of grey sky, hounded by dull clouds. A stranger surveying the cold world below. I wondered, briefly, if it could see me. I wondered, briefly, if it cared."

The Story Teller smiles sadly and shakes her head. The cat hisses.

"It did not. I was alone."

She wants to ensure you understand the extent of her solitude, so she is silent for one breath, and then two.

"The cold was sly. Subtle. It crept beneath my coat and rubbed its head against my shirt. It seeped onto my skin. When I shifted, it shrieked. When I stomped to wake my blood, the ice within me shattered and I was cut by the shards."

Her hands flutter, helping to mould her sentences and shape her thoughts.

"I gasped. It was a small cry, a whisper, but still it startled the trees. They groaned and murmured, roused from a dreamless slumber. A branch fell from high above and the powdery thump of wood meeting snow was met with silence. Not the kind of silence you're thinking of –" The Story Teller hesitates as she wonders exactly what kind of silence haunts your mind. "–but something thicker. Heavier. More demanding. A despotic silence that reverberated through the trees, settling into the cracks in the bark, the crevices in the snow. For a moment that endured for a dozen lifetimes I listened and heard nothing."

For a moment there is nothing except the drowsy purring of the cat.

"And then a wind woke and slipped past the silence. It carried with it a note that sounded faintly human. The longer I listened, the more certain I became. I could hear a woman's voice crooning an eerie lullaby."

She shivers and draws her coat closer to her chest. She wraps herself in a robe of woven words but even that won't keep out the chill.

"The sky grew petulant. Grey-faced. It gathered fistfuls of clouds to its breast and sent a droplet of icy water tumbling onto my tongue. That single droplet was a herald that announced the arrival of the legion that followed. Amidst the whirl of water and wind, I could still hear that song. It spoke of frost and slumber, of the dying and the dead. I saw the one who was singing: a pale-skinned spirit in a white dress. The old woman herself, dancing in the rain."

3 Do not let vourself dream

The Story Keeper's desk is thick with pages. Great, teetering mounds of yellowed paper scrawled back and front with dark ink. It is a whirl of loopy 'f's and conservative vowels, elaborate 'w's and misplaced commas – a swirling mess of letters tucked so tightly together they must feel claustrophobic. Yet one cluster stands out. It is a word, a name that sounds like a curse. Brigid.

The fire woman, the spring spirit. A physical manifestation of all that is chaotic, loud, and warm. The wind shivers as the Story Keeper writes her name again.

"Brigid can be heard in the earth, in the restless patches that dream of the thaw. Hers are the new shoots that push up through the snow and the tame fires that warm each hearth."

A piece of paper flutters, caught by a wandering breeze. The Story Keeper doesn't notice. He is absorbed by his pen and its spawn of infant words.

"But there are places where the promise of spring is missing. Frosty valleys of age-old rock. Shadowy forests half buried in snow. That is the domain of the old woman, the one they call Beira. They say that where Beira wanders, Brigid's voice is stifled. And Beira is making her yearly pilgrimage across the earth.

"The birds are the first to announce her coming. The geese scrawl her name in the sky when they flee south to escape her. The swans flutter in the old woman's wake. And then the deer begin to assemble, drawn to her presence by an instinct they cannot name.

"Frost spews from each thump of the old woman's cane. It spreads like crystalline fire, latching its teeth into the earth until Brigid's tomb is painted glossy white. Beira sings an eldritch lullaby as

she marches. 'Close your eyes,' she croons, 'but do not let yourself dream.'

"This is the old woman with snow-white hair and skin that carries the weight of innumerable years. The deer-friend, the frost-queen, the lone pilgrim wandering the woods. She reigns where Brigid slumbers. And the cold is hypnotic. It lulls lost deities into stasis; it draws them into dreams."

The Story Keeper hesitates, his pen tasting air instead of paper. He records stories. So many stories that sometimes he feels lost, sinking beneath the weight of countless words, countless differently shaped dreams.

"The old woman has many names. Beira. Digdi. Cailleach. None of them are true. The old woman is a fiction. A fantasy. A meeting place for wintery hopes and icy fears. Don't let her fool you."

* * *

Cailleach. That is the name that must be whispered, the word encrusted with frost. It tells of silent, snow-drenched landscapes and dark nights overlooked by distant moons. It is the name of the winter woman. If you listened to Hunter, Teller, or Keeper you would think her callous and cold, but I am not.

A single story. A thousand tellings. None of them capture me.



a sudden coldness brings attention to the heavens there, the Great Whale blots out the sun from brushy lips pours Her song reminiscent of those deep sea jazz singers with tight dresses and loose suits or of those coral reef operatic androgynes with painted white faces She tells me how much it hurts, asks me to take it away

swimming amongst celestial bodies, fins dispersing nebulae like petrol-scented candles blown out by the retiring monk the Great Whale sings and She cries, creating a biblical downpour saltwater teardrops, fallen angels from the ancient eyes of the Goddess of Song and Dance and Maternity

what have we done? She breaches the cosmos exposing Her bleeding underside breathy streams of starlight wine flowing into galaxies near and far Her song now reminds one of those folk singers with dead spouses and sad eyes trapped under ice sheets, the masses cruelly skating above them if only we'd heard Her song sooner

the Great Whale suffers the same indignity fat businesspeople with swollen lips twisted in an endless spiralling wormhole grin leer out from behind asteroids step into their bladed-boots, and slide across the black matter dancing about Her like a team of figure skaters in the sky

perhaps our indifference for Earth's giants began when david slew goliath

perhaps it began when extinction became a headline when ash fell on the jetty and smoke clogged the air in red twilight months

perhaps it began when kings and queens and khans and chancellors and chairmen turned their faces away from the sea the star-skaters continue their revelry drink from the lifeblood of Earth spin snort suck at Her punctured hull they discover the secret of time-travel disappear into wormholes then grow old and die leaving behind a broken world where nothing grows

deep sea jazz singers drown coral reef operatics impale themselves upon bleached pikes ice-sheet folk singers freeze the Great Whale now sings in a style that Her heavenly brothers and sisters have not yet deigned to share with us evoking at once the coexistence between the shark and the remora the depravity of the trawler and the haul the Great Whale uses Her dying breaths to tell me that we have failed Her

Her heart slows liberation from gravity exhausted the Great Whale plummets back to the Earth the centrepiece amongst the thousand corpses of its offspring bobbing lifelessly just off the headland the sea now stained a guilty red much like that of rosy checks dying stars carnations

sharks busy themselves about the Great Whale's husk mad in their frenzy, thankful for it coastal kingdoms are swallowed vengefully by the sea dolphins pay their respects to the Great Whale then swim willingly into the cavernous maw of megalodon who have come from an ancient place to say farewell to the last of the ocean's songbirds distant ships turn back home: there is nothing left to harpoon

Shaye Easton

The Flood

On the first day of Autumn, the lake overflows. Rainfall in the night had come in unprecedented amounts, and by the time Jen wakes in the morning her tulip garden is flooded. Immediately she sets to work digging up the survivors.

Maxine emerges from the house behind her, blinking wearily in the pale morning light.

"What are you doing?"

"There's been a flood," Jen explains a little breathlessly. "Help me with these, will you?"

* * *

Come breakfast the house is sprouting tulips from every table and every bench, every windowsill, and every shelf. Their vibrant reds, yellows, and pinks crowd in at the edge of every thought. When Jen takes a bite of her toast, she tastes tulip in the jam.

"Clearly we've done something wrong," Maxine says. She's wearing the same clothes as yesterday, her little silver cross glinting on top of her t-shirt. "It just happened."

Jen chews on a fingernail. "Something wrong? We've done nothing wrong."

"You don't go to church ever," she says, stabbing her breakfast with her spoon. "Maybe we're all being punished for your lack of faith."

"I don't see how a flood has anything to do with my lack of faith."

"Hello? Noah's Ark? That's what a flood is. It's the anger of God."

The nail Jen's been biting finally snaps off in her mouth. She spits it out in her palm. "Eat," she tells her daughter. "You've hardly touched your cereal."

* * *

Jen's car is parked out front, submerged in a foot of water. The road swirls and bubbles, carries broken branches, plastic bottles, a soccer ball, and what looks like communion wafers, drifting in congregation downstream. Her phone buzzes with a text.

I just heard. Are you okay?

Jen hoists her bag a little higher on her shoulder, pats down her hair. The moisture in the air has made it knot and frizz and expand like baked bread. She decides not to look at the land around her front fence which she knows is muddied and full of holes, like a ransacked graveyard. Maxine is behind her somewhere, dawdling. "Come on," she says.

Jen takes the drive to the store slow, water fountaining around the wheels of her Kia. Everywhere neighbours and community figures move through the streets like turbulent ghosts. Sodden couches stare at her with big, bloated eyes. People push water out doorways with brooms and carry damaged wares out onto the footpath.

The church is eerily unaffected, pointing like an arrow to the bulbous grey sky. It has acquired a collection of sullen townsfolk. They mill about out front, some wandering in forlorn circles, others crouched in tight huddles and whispering prayers. Amongst these a few people stand still and blank-faced. Jen swears she makes eye contact with one as she drives past. Their eyes swell large and dark and cold and Jen has the unsettling feeling that she's staring at and being stared at by her own soul.

They park down the road from Tom's grocer and walk up. Inside, the floor is covered in a thick layer of brown slurry. Tom's metal shelving has survived, but products on the lower tiers are disintegrating into the mud. Jen finds him behind the counter, silver wire-frames wedged low on his nose, a frown haunting the weathered skin between his eyebrows.

"The store ... " Maxine says sadly.

For a moment, Tom doesn't appear to recognise them-he looks up and his eyes seem to pass straight through Maxine's body. Then Jen says, "I'm so sorry, Tom," and his gaze focuses. He smiles a little in thanks.

"I'm starting to catalogue all the surviving stock, but we've lost at least a third of what we had."

Jen doesn't know what to say except to apologise again, so she says nothing. She looks down at an edition of The Daily Telegraph pasted on the linoleum floor, ink bleeding from every word and image. The face on the front cries black tears.

Her phone buzzes. She slips it in her pocket. "Can I do anything?"

"Mira's bagging up the ruined stock out back. She could do with some help."

"No problem."

He utters a great sigh of relief. "Thank you, Jen. This whole thing–" He pauses. "You know, I've lived here thirty years, and I've never once seen a flood like this."

She thinks she hears her daughter say something, but when she looks over Maxine is silent. She clears her throat, suddenly self-conscious. "What do you think brought it on?"

"Honestly? I haven't the foggiest. But it feels like we're being forced to make amends somehow."

"What for?" The question comes out sharper than intended.

Tom doesn't seem to notice. "Wastefulness. Selfishness. A failure to care about the messes we make." He takes a moment to stare at his grimy hands. "Did you know in ancient stories a flood almost always indicates the arrival of a new era?"

"That's not the worst way to look at it."

"Sure, of course. Until you remember that for a new era to begin, an old one has to end."

* * *

Jen finds Mira Farrell seated at a table in the back room, surrounded by ruin. The woman is dressed in tracksuit pants and a t-shirt, her usually bright face stripped bare of all makeup or glow. She stares down into a mug, slowly stirring. The tan-toned water eddies and swirls. "Man," she says.

"This has really fucked up my week."

"If only that weren't an understatement."

Mira looks up, grows worried. "What's the news on the home-front?"

"The garden was swamped. I'm keeping the tulips in the house."

"That's it?"

"What do you mean 'that's it'?"

"I mean–" She swallows. "Just the garden? We had water pouring under the goddamn door. Didn't know it either 'til we came downstairs this morning."

"Shouldn't one of you be looking after the house?"

Mira shakes her head. "We did what we could this morning. The store is more important."

Together the three of them examine the affected stock, stacking salvageable items on the shelves and loading the rest into the garbage bags. After a while Jen has trouble telling what can be saved from what can't. It all looks like mud: dissolving cardboard, bloated wood, burst plastic and brown, mushy food. Her bags fill fast. The strap of her bra keeps twisting on her back. Every now and then she glances over at her daughter who picks slowly through the wreckage. She doesn't look to be making any progress, and Jen is just about to snap at her when she sees Maxine pick a soggy tulip from a toppled pile of cans.

The words lodge in her throat. She leaves the room quickly, taking her filled bags out into the street where the rubbish bins are already overflowing. When she turns back, she finds Mira paused on the store threshold, watching with two bags in hand. "What is it?"

"I meant to ask," she says softly, "is Maxine doing okay today?" The question catches Jen offguard. Mira hurries on. "It's just...well, she's different–she has such a unique heart–and your phone call last night made it sound... I don't know."

"What phone call?"

Mira frowns at her for a moment then shakes her head. As if prompted, Jen's phone starts to buzz. "Do you need to get that?"

"No. It's nothing," she says, but on her way inside she removes it from her pocket.

From her mother: *Im always here for you honey. Please call me if you need.* From her father: *ur mothers worried plz call*

And then there's all the unopened texts from this morning. She can feel their thoughts growing around her, a veritable ocean of them, concerned and churning, pushing to get in. She buries her phone in her bag.

When Jen returns Maxine is no longer in the storeroom. In an instant, all the air is sucked out of the world. She hurries out into the store, moves wildly through the aisles. She's about to check the storeroom again when Mira comes flooding towards her. "*Jen*. There you are! I just got a call from your ex-husband."

"My what?"

Mira envelopes her in a hug before she can stop her. "Why haven't you said anything? *Oh*, what *are* you *doing* here?"

Jen panics. She pushes out of the hug, out of the store, shouts behind her bulging like nimbus clouds, ready to burst, her whole body cold, cold as unseeing eyes, cold as lake-water overwhelming its bounds.

* * *

Jendrives home, scanning the streets for Maxine. The sky's dark plate seems to be lowering towards the earth, and she has the feeling of being compressed between two slabs of concrete. The town is coated in a blue-grey underwater gloom. Foundations soften and suffer. A rugged man walks down the road, holding up a sign which reads, *Repent! God's Flood is Here!* The crowd out front the church has swelled, grey people spilling out onto the footpath like lost coins. At one point a girl runs out into the street, directly in front of her car. Jen slams on the breaks, nearly collides with the steering wheel. For a moment, she thinks, *Maxine!* But it's not Maxine. The stranger knocks into her bumper, looks around wildly for a moment, and, seeing nothing, hurries on.

As she's pulling into the driveway, she thinks she sees her daughter's pale face in the window, watching her, but the girl is gone by the time she's burst out of the car. At the door, her phone buzzes against her thigh. The heavens shiver with thunder. She feels the insistent pressure of the world, its unpredictable anger, and longs for her garden. She shuts it behind her.

"Mum, is that you?"

Tulips like candles fill the house, brightening it. Maxine comes downstairs, stands framed by the garden.

"Oh god, Maxine," she says, pulling her daughter into a hug, breathing in the warm, floral air. "You're here."

* * *

While dinner is cooking she wanders the house, letting her fingers drift over the different shapes and textures, the chairs and tables, the walls and decorations and utilities. All the perfect structures which rose up out of the ashes of her divorce. She thinks about how lasting it all seems and something inside her trembles.

In the lounge room Maxine absently flips through the channels on TV. Outside the sky has split open, water pouring forth from its dark cavernous mouth. But it's dulled here, distant. Tulips everywhere nod in approval. Jen's phone vibrates near-constantly on the coffee table. "You know I can't help wondering," Maxine says.

"Mm?"

"Is this what the last days of Atlantis were like before the city plunged into the sea?"

For a heartbeat her daughter, seated by the window and washed in the day's strange marine gloom, wobbles, becomes semi-translucent, like a person below the surface of a pool. Somebody halfway to another world. She has the abrupt and startling conviction that were she to touch Maxine, her hand would pass straight through.

Jen blinks and clears the water from her eyes. "Don't be silly. Come away from the window, Maxine."

* * *

The knocking starts halfway through dinner. It grows louder the longer she tries to ignore it.

"Uh, Mum?"

Gently, Jen sets down her knife and fork and pushes out of her chair. Her daughter watches her with an eyebrow raised, swivelling in her seat.

Her ex-husband stands on the doorstep, hair dripping, suede jacket slick with water. "This rain," he says. His eyes are red, the skin puffy. "It's awful heavy." Behind him water is filling up the street again, surging over the footpath, lapping at her empty garden bed. "Jen? Just tell me that you're alright. Please."

She says nothing. Her ex continues, "Your parents are scared that-well."

"I'm fine," Jen says. "The flood didn't reach us here."

"The flood? What-? Listen, that's not-that's not what I'm-"

"Mum, who is it?" Maxine asks from the dining table.

"You should go," Jen tells him.

"Can't I come in?"

"No."

"I see you've redecorated. That's a lot of tulips."

She starts to shut the door. He slams his palm against it. They watch each other. "I had to replant them," she explains. "The flood ruined the garden."

He looks at her strangely. "Jen-"

"Yes?"

"You know they're dead, right?"

"What?" She looks over her shoulder at their bright, bobbing heads. "No, they're not."

"Yes, they are."

"They're fine."

```
"Look at them - they're wilted."
```

"They're fine."

"Jen."

"Leave us alone!"

"*Us*?" He shoves into her perfect, husband-free home, turns towards the dining table. The door swings open uselessly behind him. "Who's *us*?"

Outside the sky releases a great crack of light that splits open the thick, blue gloom, throws everything into high contrast, into black and brilliant white. Jen collapses. The floor is coated in grime, the wooden boards warped and rippled as though remembering the water which passed over them. A stain where the flood swept through coats the walls. She collects some of the sludge with her hand – in it, tulips' petals, crushed and dark-veined and slowly dissolving away.

"You can't shut this out, Jen," her ex is saying. "I know-*I know* it was sudden, but I've been told it can happen. Her heart was abnormal. We knew this. We did everything right. It's just-sometimes-" His voice catches, sticks.

Slowly she stands up, walks past her ex, reclaims her seat at the table. Looks at the empty spot opposite her, a bowl of pasta cold on the placemat.

Divine anger, atonement–neither of these are right, Jen decides. The flood just is. It sweeps into one's life with indifference, claiming everything. We don't see it coming. We deal with it the best we can.



Content warning: body horror

necessarily compromised within the caveat I retreat

and take the time to remember the looping bend, surged began as the walking end

doubling, at the flip the chiasmus leads to concentrate as the initial beat the bending heat of blood

pulsing off, to the side cliffs of sinew constituting ventricular chambers, the dangers

of loops without bend



Deborah Marcus



Juliet Manolias

Content warning: body horror

My grandfather lost a few of his teeth recently. He's since stopped smiling around the house.

For a man entering his late 70s, he's had pretty good teeth up until now. Something that I would take pride in, although he never thought to. A few months ago, he had only been missing a single tooth, a well-hidden premolar, which he'd had a few decades to get used to already. I've never asked why it was missing; I only found out about it once his teeth had started becoming a hot topic around the house. Infection forced him to get the second one removed, but this time it was one of the bigger ones further back, a molar. He didn't seem to care about that one either. Out of sight, out of mind, I guess. At peace with a loss that I could not fathom experiencing. He was still smiling back then, despite being down two teeth, so it probably didn't bother him much.

The next tooth to go was a canine, the upper one on his left side. It split in two one day (trying to get that tooth count back up?) while he was working in the backyard. He still doesn't know why it did that – whatever English the dentist spoke to him hadn't gotten through – so all he came home with that night was a mystery and another gap in his teeth. He tried to crack a few jokes at his own expense, and everyone else joined in, but not once did he open his mouth to laugh. I felt sorry for him, but within a few days he was back to his normal self.

Two weeks later, I was sitting in the kitchen with my grandmother when he walked in from the living room. The plate in his hands held his half-finished dinner. He had a habit of taking the leg bone from our lamb roasts, gnawing it clean lest he waste any food and be reminded of his starved childhood. But in that moment, the bone lay obscured by meat.

Before he even said a word, I could tell. He said that he thought he swallowed one of his big front teeth while he was eating. He didn't know where else it could be.

I felt a wave of nausea roll over me, tried to swallow the teeth that were now lodged in my throat. My grandmother couldn't help but laugh at my grandfather, her disbelief echoing off the tiles.

Another one? Brought out of my waking dream, I soon joined in. But a biting pain still wrapped around my heart. When he spoke, it was hard not to stare. Between two dark holes a lateral incisor sat on its own, a peg out of place where it now felt like there were more gaps than teeth.

I now sit across the dinner table from one of my biggest anxieties. Losing teeth as a kid was fun, but as an adult it is the permanent destruction of a much too fragile and irreparable body. A grim reminder that the body starts to decay before death has any reason to be near. Getting wisdom teeth removed was a necessity, but it felt like a waste. What if I need these? I won't ever get them back.

The dreams have always added another layer to this. They haven't increased in frequency at all; they don't need to. They've been coming often enough already. Twice a month now, at minimum. It's not the exact same dream each time, so at least I don't have to worry about ever getting bored. Instead, I worry that my teeth are maybe becoming just a bit too loose, no longer firm in their places. I want to be sure, so I keep wobbling them with my fingers, and eventually they start to come out, one after the other. I'll try to close my mouth to stop them, but when my teeth crash together, they begin to crumble. My mouth feels so full I could gag, can no longer hold onto any of these precious pearls swirling around inside. I open, and they pour across my lower lip, an endless cascade that I quickly wake up from.

I lie in bed and check each of my teeth. Running my fingers along, applying pressure to each one, but not too much (you can never be too careful). They don't move, of course, but my heart doesn't slow down yet. It was a dream. Dream. A dream. Nightmare. I don't like the word nightmare—I believe that it gives the dream more power over you than it otherwise would. Admitting defeat, in a way. My chest aches, and the feeling won't leave me for the rest of the day. My tongue moves to eat, speak, while phantom teeth rattle and roll around it, clinking against my own.

farewell to an angel in death

_Bianca Nanales

Selfish souls sip bitter tea Laughing softly at the hint of sweet Sold each heart sealed with a kiss A smile spread from Hers to His

Crescent moonlight met crinkled eyes Souvenirs framed treasured, why? Red-loose ribbon threads two hearts Without a button they pull apart

Lucid dreams haunt one slowly; The other spends the night-time lonely Their spirits no longer dust the clouds Instead freefall past realms of doubt

Remember angels when they go Bask in the death of their afterglow



In Smoke

They sit opposite each other atop the apartment roof. The sun screams across the cement giants, clawing at the sky, evading the horizon. He passes her a cigarette with calloused hands, lingering to brush a thumb against her wrist, which he turns into a clambering check of her watch. But he knows the time.

Eve licks her lower lip, drawing the cigarette to her mouth as she watches apartment lights slowly switch on. Portals to the lives of others. She's been watching one in particular from this vantage point, looking down past a sweeping drop and into another complex below. A family, too large to exist within the confines of a two-bedroom apartment, but happy nonetheless. She'd watched them the night prior, and the night before that. Always in the company of Hugo, but never with. She glances back to him, focusing on the sounds around them. She loves listening to the city in the evening – cars heaving under their owners' weights and bells of restaurant doors.

His mouth moves on and on in murmurs of French. She loves the texture of his hair. Visibly thinning, yet individually, each strand is so coarse, her hand loses momentum at the nape where it thickens. In-between barber trips, hairs would birth upwards from around his neck, always sharp at first. She would yearn to grab her tweezers, yank them out at the root, but she never dared to voice the urge. He always batted her hand away by the time she'd reach the nape of his neck, usually keen to move on. Waiting for her to straddle him tighter or respond to his hands travelling down her back.

She looks at the family. Illuminated in the kitchen, the father stands at the stove, one hand on his hip and the other stirring a steaming pot. The steam travels beyond their apartment, easing through the open window, waltzing over to where she sits, cross-legged in the smoke and the dark. She breathes in - homemade meatballs in a rich red sauce. The scent encases her too tightly to be simply drawn from a recipe book. A family recipe, definitely, handled carefully and passed deftly down the generations. She wonders how far. She can see it in her mind's eye, a plump grandmother, long passed now, often found making cannoli for dessert. She slathers in the filling of ricotta, crushed pistachios and shards of milk chocolate with slithers of roasted almonds.

Her famous meatballs for the main. Fresh ingredients, all from the local markets around the corner.

She teaches the recipes to her daughter, who will pass it down when she ages to her three children, and theirs onto their own. At least four generations experiencing the heaviness of the meat and sweetness of the tomato.

She breathes out.

She realises how long she's had the cigarette, the smoke tightening a grip on her hand as she extends it outward. He shakes his head, not needing one yet. She studies his face. He has these beautiful pink, soft lips, and she'd eyed them long before the first moves were made, impressed with their smoothness. Less pleasant to kiss, however, which was a surprise. Soft, but too thin, and he'd press them far too hard onto hers. She hands the cigarette back. It's almost gone now.

Two young children linger around the father in the kitchen. Not nagging, but engaging. A girl, light brown hair collected in a lime green scrunchie, asks him to reach into the cupboard. He pauses at the stove, steam fogging his glasses, and reaches up for five bowls. On the other side of him, a young boy gazes out the window. He has darker hair, and the length of it tickles his eyebrows. He turns toward Eve's direction, and in the haze, she swears he catches her eye.

Hugo starts to stir, moving amidst the smoke. She can tell he wants her, wants to head. His eyes dart back and forth, between her and the endless nothingness behind her. She wants him too, but in a different way. She looks at the city beyond him, then reigns her gaze to his.

"One more?" she asks, motioning to the pack that lies abandoned between them. He nods, fingering his pocket for a lighter, as he passes her the exhausted eigarette. She forces the head into the ground. It'd been her first smoke in a long time when he'd stumbled into her room late that first night, during the witching hour. She loved being awake in those early hours when she was little, desperate for fragments of silence. In Winter, she'd blow gently into the air, watching her breath form small clouds that rose lazily above her. Now older, head lolling slightly off the mattress, she'd spend this time gazing out the floor-to-ceiling window to her right. She would watch thick coatings of fog devour building after building. Minutes after his arrival and he'd made her bedroom air as thick as the air outside.

He flicks the nubbin in the dark, and it erupts into their space. She loves to play with the sputtering flame; she reaches out to take it from him. She'd burnt her fingers the first time, but now she moves with more caution, watching the flame sway.

Light dances around the pair, climbing up her bare forearms and up her black tank, into a mess of brown hair, dancing along swinging gold earrings. She looks at her watch: seven p.m.

Right on cue, the mother erupts inward. A flurry of bright colours, she embraces the incoming children with open arms. The father looks up from the stove, smiling. The type of smile that seeps through your skin and softens your heart. The table is almost set, glasses and cutlery placed. The boy pauses to remember his water duty, obliging. He takes a jug of cool water from the fridge and fills up one glass after another. From the rooftop, Eve watches the mother as she motions toward her – it's dinner time, she says.

She tells Hugo she'll be back, just a second, but he has taken up shop amidst the smoke that suffocates the air, and he could not care less.

She stands, dusting off the ash that had pattered her jeans. She walks over to the ledge, looking up, eager to lock eyes with the mother, but she's already left the kitchen. She sees the father, setting a flourishing pot of parsley back onto the windowsill. The green smell reaches out to her, pulling along with it the nuttiness of the parmigiano cheese, the garlic too. They intertwine, dipping over the window and wait just beyond her roof.

She reaches the edge, stepping out to momentarily free fall, before being cocooned safely in the aroma, transported over.

The father pauses at the stove, reaching out to pull down the window. She's suspended in midair, attention captured not by the drop that lies beneath her, but rather the unfolding welcome into the glowing home. With a rattle, the window is pulled fully upward and the father takes her hand, helping her through the frame. She avoids a foot in the sink, stepping quickly instead onto the bare bench top and jumping lightly onto the carpeted floor. She takes her shoes off, placing them at the kitchen doorway.

"Go sit down," he says to her. "It's almost ready."The young boy pulls out the chair at the head of the table, grinning, motioning for her to sit. She walks over, sitting down onto the wooden seat, feeling underdressed. She attempts to tidy her hair and scratches at the blue pen smudges on her hands until the mother enters the room. The mother encases her in a sudden embrace, a warm rush of flowery materials and perfume. Eve holds her tight, head resting against her exhaling chest as she breathes in. A mother's embrace, searched for too long in all the wrong places. She holds on, just a little longer. The warmth lingers upon release. The mother looks at her, sweeping a curl behind her ear. The children greet her too, a squeeze of the hand or a kiss on the cheek. The motions of a family. The mother sits to her right, both the children to her left, as the father relocates the pot of parsley from atop the windowsill onto the table. The mother leans in, inhaling deeply, twirling the leaves between her fingers. He returns, one hand placing down a cork heat mat in the centre of the table, the other setting down the steaming meatballs swimming in thick red sauce, sprinkled with parsley. Always served out generously, head of the table first, and then everyone else. The light above beams down. Say grace before the meal, it reminds. Say what this means, say you feel it too, say please and thank you and take it in. She closes her eyes with theirs. And then they eat.

Salt and pepper are passed around, fingertips brushed. The mother squeezes her hand as she tells them of her day, catching Eve off guard. For a moment she forgets to eat, and she's the last to finish. Keep me here, she wants to say, but she knows she'll be back. As Eve stands, the mother draws her in again, deftly tucking something into her front pocket. But she hardly allows it to take her attention – she's hugging her now, and she wants to be here, to live in this embrace. Please? She wants to ask. Hold her here and she will do anything. She'll learn to cook, to actually cook, these meals that unite lives. She'll help with homework and fold warm laundry.

She'll give up the smoke that calls her name, this life of hers with people that do too much or too little, the life that she struggles to piece together. All fragments that do not make a complete puzzle. But she cannot open her mouth. The mother leans back, squeezing her hand. Wrinkles crease together in her smile.

They help her, the father on one hand and the mother holding the other, as she clambers over the sink, through the window. They watch as she's carried upward toward her rooftop, before turning away.

She steps back up onto the ledge, the green of the parsley lingering, snaking around her leg. Behind her, the father closes the window. She looks forward, making out Hugo's shadow. He looks up, fiddles with the front of his hair.

"Let's go?" he says. She nods. He stands up, stamping out the cigarette in one purposeful movement. He reaches down for the pack and lighter, grasping both in his hand as he moves toward the door.

She pauses for a moment, remembering something in her pocket, letting him go ahead. She reaches in, and takes out a crumpled sprig of parsley. She flattens it between her hands, letting the smell encase her, just for a moment longer. To live in that embrace, that home, for just a moment longer.

Red Jacarandas



Billy sat on a small bench of brick that stretched the perimeter of a group of small ferns and ate. The kebab was dry and tasteless, and the heat of the day shone down unrelenting. He watched a man sleeping on the concrete. Curled in a ball with his arm under his head, cradling a paper bag like a sleeping child with their favourite toy. As if at any moment the rightful parent would appear and scoop him up off the ground with a tenderness born from this witness of sleeping innocence, to carry him away to that awaiting bed. Billy felt the sweat swelling under his arms and loosened his tie. The sleeping man did not move. Baking in the sun among the stars that glittered in the concrete, in the microfibres of sand and gravel sealed within, the man had found his peace. Billy looked down at the remaining crescent of food. He looked at it a long time. Then he stood up and grabbed his blazer from the brick bench and walked up the road, tossing what remained in the nearby bin.

The pub was dark despite the sun shining through the street facing windows. The air was thick with the stench of stale beer. Portraits of famous faces from some unknown era hung from the walls, with small illegible signatures and *thank-yous* drawn shakily at the corners of the frame. There was a stage at the far end of the room and a large red curtain hung there from the roof like some enormous blood-soaked rag. Billy ordered a pint of beer from a bartender who simply nodded without a word. He handed Billy the beer. Billy nodded silently in return and went and sat in the corner by the window. When he looked back at the bar the bartender had vanished, as if he was sent only to fulfil that destiny and pass on. An old man sat by the entrance reading the paper and drinking a beer, his face a gnarled radish. Billy watched the people come and go – unrecognisable spectres drifting through the room.

He looked out the window and up the road until it vanished from his sight. Trees of eucalyptus, cedar and jacaranda lined the streets.

They grew no higher than the hands of humankind would allow and stood by like shrunken sentinels at the end of a fading lineage, fearless in the face of the buildings that towered overhead. For Billy, the city had always seemed like such a bastion of hope. Of change. And sitting in the yard under the bowing jacaranda years ago, the brothers had conjured that fabled city before them like a shimmering mirage on some ancient desert highway. Shining in welcome, it beckoned to them and whispered false promises and plans and plotted with the raging spirit that rallied against the cages in their chests. Whispers of a better life. Then their mother had died. And as they had sat in silence beneath the old jacaranda, they watched their father drink whiskey through the window in the fading light of day until he disappeared with the coming night. Billy left for the city the following year. His brother stayed behind. That was the last time they spoke.

A stray cloud moved out from behind one of the buildings and then disappeared behind another and then all was blue and empty sky as if the cloud had never been there at all.

Billy stood silently at the bar. The young bartender who had just clocked onto his shift looked around while pouring the beer.

"Drinking beer on a day like this. Nothing better," said the bartender, "and shots of whiskey are six with every beer. A boilermaker, y'know?"

"Yeah okay. I'll get a whiskey. Thanks."

"No worries. You on your lunch break?" The bartender turned around, talking to the backbar as if it were Billy still standing in front of him. "Or are you off early? Man, what I would give for that," he laughed.

"Something like that," said Billy with a forced smile. The bartender laughed loudly.

"Well, this'll top it off all right. All you need is a couple of the boys and a stereo down at the beach, and you'd be set."

"Yeah."

They stood in silence. Billy fumbled around his pockets for his wallet. The bartender shifted from side to side and looked around the bar.

"Man, what a day," said the bartender.

Billy pulled out his credit card and tapped the reader.

"Yeah," he said.

The bartender opened his mouth as if to say something, then smiled and turned his back and began polishing a glass. Billy shot back the whiskey and then sipped from his beer, licking the foam from his upper lip. He looked into the beer, as if the foam could provide some impossible truth like a mystic reading the dregs in a cup of tea. Then he too turned around and headed back to his seat in the corner.

Behind the buildings, the sun was a glowing yellow tear rolling down the face of the sky. Billy looked at the empty glasses in front of him. Like waiting pieces of an unfinished chess game; a game never to be won or lost. His father had taught him how to play, and he had taught his brother. But his brother was too headstrong, too offensive. Billy would let him win occasionally if only to see him smile, to see him happy. But he always knew how that game would go after the first few moves. He was always more strategic, pinning down the future on a corkboard that stretched across his mind as if he had power over all things, over all the moving parts. But he didn't. Nobody does. Maybe that's why his brother had stayed behind, knowing the impermanence of it all. Maybe that's why his brother did what he did. Knowing the impermanence of it all.

The bar had begun to fill, and people sat in groups and in pairs around him at the different tables. The old man with the radish face was gone. Billy looked at his phone and all those missed calls. He turned it off and placed it face down on the table. He watched the young bartender talking to the manager in the stairwell behind the bar. They kept glancing in his direction. Billy drank from his beer and looked around the room at everything and nothing all the same while the soft din of the bar continued to pulse. Like the sea, the room seemed to swell and subside. The rhythmic beating of the cocktail shaker stretched and elongated like a distant drum of hooves moving the march forever on. Cars went by the window in a stream like metcorites in space, flashing past in the growing twilight on that road with no beginning or end. As if the universe were encapsulated there in the tarmac. Endless.

The young bartender started collecting the pile of glasses from the table and nodded at Billy. Billy nodded back and drank from his beer as if to finish it. The bartender could feel Billy's gaze upon him and kept his eyes to the floor.

"You know my brother would've been about your age," Billy said. The bartender looked at the near-empty glass then looked away. "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty next month."

"Yeah. Twenty is right." Billy finished the beer and placed the glass on the table. "Twenty is right."

"My manager told me what happened," said the bartender. Billy didn't say anything. The bartender caught his stare and then looked at the floor. When he looked back up Billy was still staring. "I'm sorry," said the bartender. He grabbed the final glass and left with the glasses piled against his arm.

Billy waited in line at the bar. He was teetering like a puppet gone slack, some distant marionette trying desperately to keep the strings taught. He belched, and the people in front of him looked back in disgust. He simply shrugged and looked past them. He no longer saw the distinct lines of reality, looking at a world so hazy and blurred and simple – the sleeping man's world, so content on that hot concrete. The world Billy wished to stay in. And perhaps he would. He was dragged to the bar by that struggling marionette and stared at the young bartender once more. He looked at Billy.

"Sorry man, I'll be one second," the bartender said, putting up his index finger and glancing around the room. Then he turned and headed into the stairwell. The bottles of various spirits on the shelves behind the bar were lit by a dim orange light that shone beneath them like trophies in a cabinet. Some of the bottles were covered in dust, untouched. The same dust that had settled on his brothers trophies in that all too cherished cabinet of their empty home. On his medals. His pictures. On the last photo that was ever taken of them, standing arm in arm in front of that jacaranda tree, in full bloom. That tree now bare. Then the manager was standing in front of Billy and the trophies were nothing but old bottles of alcohol, the young bartender nowhere to be seen.

"I'll get a beer and a whiskey," said Billy, spluttering out the syllables.

"I think you've had enough for tonight."

"I'll get a beer and a whiskey."

"Come on mate, I can't do that."

"To hell you can't. I'll get a beer and a whiskey."

"Are you really going to make this hard?"

"You know what's hard, James? Losing your fucking brother. Now that's hard. That's the hardest damn thing you'd ever know. So please—" Billy slammed his fist on the bar. "– give me a god damn beer and whiskey." The people lining behind him looked around uncomfortably. The pulse of the bar had all but stopped.

"Look Billy, again, I'm real sorry about what happened, but I can't give you anything more to drink. How bout I give you a water and then we'll see in halfa?"

"Fuck you." "Come on Billy." "Fuck you," Billy said again. "Go home mate. Before I have to ban you."

Billy stared at the manager, his mouth agape, the stench of alcohol wafting out from between his open teeth, as if anger had made his breath more sour, more vile. The only sound in the bar was the music thumping from the speakers, as if it were the heart of all those who watched. As if the music could stop at any moment and all would fade to darkness.

"You son of a bitch," said Billy. He turned around and headed for the door. The people behind him parted to let him through, like a man on his way to the gallows. They all watched him in silence. He stumbled out the door and the manager watched him as he passed each of the windows and turned the corner. From within the pub the shaking of ice began to thump in the cocktail tins and that undecipherable chant of voices begun again and echoed out into the night. His blazer and phone were left on the table he had sat upon. Nobody touched them. Not even the manager. As if the items were evidence to some terrible crime.

Billy lurched down the street, walking in the middle of the road, his fists clenched, swearing. A car appeared at the end of the street, its headlights bright in the dark. Billy didn't move. The car beeped its horn and swerved around him. He turned around and stuck his middle fingers up and kept them up and then raised them towards the sky, walking backwards up the road. A message to that winking firmament. To that indifferent universe. He tried to turn around but the strings of that marionette were tangled and caught up amongst themselves. He fell down heavy upon the road. He rolled over and looked up at the sky so dark and unfathomable, stretching on and on without compromise. How gentle that night used to seem. How senseless it seemed now. A warmth was spreading through his hair and trickling down his cheek. He touched his face and his hand came away bloodied, shining crimson in the streetlight. His life glistening on his fingertips. Their bloodline now converged in a single stream. The past poured forth like a roll of film that flickered across the spool of time. And he watched it all. Up until the witness of that decaying branch on that bowing tree, the bark all scorched and maimed from the rope. And there it stopped.

He dragged himself to the curb and pressed his hand to his bleeding head. Small streams trickled through his fingertips and down into his sleeve. He watched the pool of blood that was left on the road slowly descend the bitumen, catching the fallen jacarandas and carrying them away as if they were unmoored boats in a rising tide. He watched those purple flowers slowly drift far down the road until a passing car swept them away upon the wind. And then he wept.

Martys or Miracles

Tell me why my eyes Are closed but I still see Dimples and baby-blue windows To souls and feel you hold me tight (The way you always did) In a cradle so my forehead Rests in just the right place.

I only remember your smell Like new books and sandalwood, Beads of sweat and pink cheeks. Salt trickles from my lashes, Gasping for air. The sound of your piano lullabies, Glimpses of sunsets in May.

I cry for you and I cry for myself When you crumble on the couch, Like sand slipping through my fingers. Anxious and equivocal with confessions, That you were lost from the beginning When you should have been held and Safe.

Thieves take things (Perhaps someone stole from them too) Makes me wonder how God could Exist and not save you. My words crash against the jagged horizon Tumbling into the murky water below.



Empty words, aren't they? When you sit with that shackle Stifling the stomach, Hungry not from lack of food -It does not sustain us. Gaze at those violent waves Thinking they will change the ending,

Clutch that watch that ticks with time To remind me of the choices and That I live in the past. (Most of my life is memory) Clench that stone to remind me of strength, Smooth and unyielding.

I die a thousand deaths (The loss of your body next to mine) But I reincarnate each time, Knowing I find myself in the ashes, My breath steady again. This existence is unforgiving, I shouldn't have to Save you or myself.

I don't believe in martyrs or miracles They are all just myths anyway. Content warning: drug use, addiction, child abuse, war, racism, and child separation.

From the tree of life springs forth many branches, each intricate as can be. Interwoven and interlocked, they form the family tree.

6

Ist Place pros

1926

He had done it. Up until this moment he wasn't sure that he would. He tugged at his left earlobe. An old, nervous habit. Too late to turn back now. Hurrying down the dock, an image of the wife he had met just hours ago waiting for him in her red silk *cheongsam* fleetingly crossed his mind. Swallowing the guilt, he handed over the wad of cash and boarded the merchant vessel. A stowaway in the hold, surrounded by crates of fine porcelain and bolts of silk. It would be clear that he had left on the day of the wedding. It would be embarrassing but she would be fine. Unconsummated, her family could take her back, arrange another marriage. Whims of the wind allowing, he would soon arrive in Nanyang. It was a new start for them both.

The Lion City

The muggy mid-morning heat was utterly suffocating. Every inch of her skin was drenched, drops of sweat rolling down her back and thighs, the backs of her knees clammy as a fevered child on his deathbed. She longed for stinging cold, so sharp it ached in your bones.

Beneath the

Gingko Tree

Chervl Till

Everyone said family was the most important thing in the world. But right now, she would gladly never see a single one of them again if she could just escape the sweltering heat of this claustrophobic city and go home to cool eucalyptus shade. She ran her tongue along her lower lip, brushing the ridge of the white scar, as if it might cool her off like a dog.

The throng of traffic, a cacophony in the concrete jungle, mocked her every step as she trudged her way past high rises and evenly planted trees each exactly eight steps from the next. Even the nature here was unnatural, less an urban sprawl than an orderly military outpost. The city never slept and the gods in the stars had abandoned her. Within the buildings and the cars and the buses, the masses continued on.

The Kopitiam Boss's Daughter

The air tasted delicious, filled with the heaty scents of fried foods. Crispy fish balls and prawn paste coated chicken, mingled with salty-sweet soya sauce and an array of delectable spices that flavoured the dishes they sold.

The auntie in the stall over to the left specialised in sweet treats, and she loved nothing more than biting into a crunchy *goreng pisang*. Letting the piping hot piece of battered banana dance on her tongue. Enjoying how the heat amplified the sweetness of the fruit. So soft, so gooey. The deep-fried batter seemed to be the only thing holding it together.

Sitting at Mama and Baba's *zhu chao* stall, dehulling a mountain of mung bean sprouts, the little girl would sneak glances at the uncle and his sons in the stall to their right. Deftly flipping and folding *roti prata*. Stirring up spicy smells from gargantuan pots of fish curry. Mesmerised.

Even in the heavy humidity of April, there was something comforting about being surrounded by orange-blue flames that leapt from the stove with every clang of the steel spatula on the round bottomed wok. Long hours, hard work, and grease settling in layers on her skin always called her home.

Letters Home

He hurried down the street, hoping to catch the scribe before day's end. It cost a pretty penny to pay someone to read and write his letters, but it was a small price to pay for the worry that his midnight disappearance and months of silence had no doubt caused.

娘,对不起。不要担心。 (Niang, dui bu qi. Bu yao dan xin.) *Mum, I'm sorry. Don't worry.*

* * *

Two seasons since his first apology and paycheque were sent and still no word back. Perhaps it hadn't yet been read. Those educated enough to do so seldom strayed out to the farms. Or perhaps he had simply been ignored for shame. Still, he felt it necessary to tell his *Niang* of his marriage. His *new* marriage. It was selfish to even think it, but he hoped in some small way that his mother might learn to be happy for her only son.

* * *

His guilt was immense and he averted his gaze, affecting not to have noticed the scribe's surprise as the words left his mouth.

I must show my gratitude the only way I know how. The baby who accompanies this letter is yours to name and raise. My first-born son will call you Niang and care for you in old age.

Taking the note from the scribe, he made his way with wet nurse and child down towards the docks. Pressing his lips into a hard line, he whispered a blessing to the boy and fought the urge to tug at his earlobe.

The Crazy Rich Asian

In theory, he disagreed with nepotism and flashy displays of power, but his principles didn't hold up against a charmed life offered on a platter. The theme park Aba built was a little gaudy, but it furthered the Feng Huang company name which was always good for business. And good business paid for private jets to Europe and a lavish three-storey mansion in a city where whole families were crammed into tiny *vi fang ban ting* one room flats.

He couldn't complain. Especially as one of three adopted sons, bought to replace the boys Aba had lost in the war. All he had to do in exchange was sit in as a figurehead for one of Aba's newspapers and show a little respect. Still, some nights he couldn't shake the feeling that he wasn't really loved. As it turned out there were things that money couldn't buy. Sometimes he wondered if his real family missed him. If he might have been cherished and happy, even if not crazy rich.

The Family Disappointment

He flipped the token, making it dance across his knuckles. Palming it in one hand, then nestling it behind his fingers, making a show, 'vanishing' it. Making it disappear, just like his ten years of sobriety. The chip, he could bring back. Pull it out of a little girl's ear. If only the other thing was that easy.

War and Other Cruelties

The *angmohs* couldn't tell or didn't care. They saw a man with chink eyes, at night, carrying packs of rice and labelled him a thief. He couldn't speak English and anyway the *angmohs* didn't care to understand. White was right, as far as those Brits were concerned.

He escaped Communism, arrived a stowaway on a boat. Worked to the bone to support three children, gave away three more. Lived through the war and survived a Japanese occupation. Only to be picked off the streets when the British returned to reclaim their abandoned colony. Thrown into Changi Prison, forgotten alongside Germans and Kempeitai.

He had been on his way to share food with family. He sat in filthy darkness, subconsciously fidgeting with his earlobe. For a year he wondered if they were starving.

In the crowded damp he grew grey and thin and developed a ceaseless racking cough that shook his bones from within. Then when he was so ashen and sickly he could barely walk, they let him go.

No charge. No apology.

He died two days later, in the same bed where his six children had been born. Of pneumonia or TB or cholera or something a doctor could have diagnosed or cured if he had had the money.

Open Ocean

The ship was being churned in the roiling waves of the open ocean. Sails flapped violently against the mast in the roaring wind that drowned out the smashing porcelain. Footfall thundered above. Unconsciously brushing his fingertips against the curve of his ear, he imagined the crew fighting to steady the vessel. In the dark below deck, he listened intently for any sign that there was an end in sight. Cowering amongst the cracked crates and fallen bolts, soaked and heavy, he prayed to his ancestors that they might make it through the night.

The First Son

Eighteen hours of labour. The mattress was soaked with blood and sweat. She had been physically split in two.

Just one more push, the midwife had promised. One more push and you'll have a baby.

And she did. And there he was. Scrawny and wrinkled and beautiful. And she wanted to hold him close forever.

Just one more minute, she had begged. But the baby came late, and there was no time to savour him. No time to spare. Passage was paid for a ship leaving that same morning. The wet nurse wrenched him from her arms, gentle but forceful. And she was split in two again.

Sobbing and reaching for a son who was no longer hers. A son who would call her husband's abandoned wife *Niang* and never know his real mother, sent across the oceans, half a world away. He might as well have been sent to the moon. At least then she would see him in the sky each night.

But she had no say. And they took her baby away. Not six hours after he was born.

Amah

It was a snail-paced crawl. She stepped carefully, shifting weight from one bowed leg to another. Yet every step was sure and confident, giving the withered woman an air of command, though she looked as if she could blow away in the wind. Small and fragile as she was, a fiery tongue could make her seem larger than life when she unleashed her fury in a guilt-inducing barely intelligible jumble of Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, Malay, and a smattering of broken English.

Still, as she leant back into the black leather couch, I noticed her vacant eyes and couldn't help but feel a pang of pity for a woman who had known no better than to beat her children. Shaming and guilting them for every choice they made. It wasn't a surprise that she'd turned out so bitter, with no mother to save her from being put to work young to fund the habits of an addicted father. She'd never been a warm or maternal figure. Now she stared, uncomprehending, at the television. The cataracts had been removed years ago, but the newspaper next to her lay untouched. She had never learnt to read. Too frail now to cook or clean, too deaf and too stupid to have a real conversation. She sat there, a husk. A bag of bones in sagging, liver spotted skin, simply waiting to die.

Chasing the Dragon

Swimming in a haze of thick blue smoke, he could forget what a useless deadbeat he had become. It wasn't even that he enjoyed the high. But once he'd had a taste, it was near impossible to function without. Deep down somewhere, he felt bad about putting his three boys to work, using them to fund the habit. Perhaps his daughter too. He couldn't even remember.

Then again, what else was he supposed to do? It wasn't like he could just give it up cold turkey. Besides, it was hardly his fault that the *angmohs* had encouraged them to try it, and for so cheap the first few times too.

All the thinking made his brain throb behind his eyes, and he reached again for the bamboo pipe, breathing in a lungful of sweet intoxicating vapour.

Iron and Ash

The Mark VI had rolled onto the tarmac at Butterworth three hours late. Part of the beauty of owning your own plane, the crew supposed, as they watched him climb out of the Bentley, all pomp and circumstance. He had a laugh about it with the other six passengers, already seated, while he got settled. Why shouldn't they wait for the heir to the Feng Huang empire?

But truth was, he'd had a bad feeling about getting on the flight today. The Douglas DC-3 with Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp engines was a fourteen-bed sleeper, and quite a luxury for 1951 – even for their family. Still, the inevitable turbulence of a propeller plane had him leaving half-moons on the soft leather arms of the seat. He just couldn't shake the feeling that he was about to die.

The crushed hunk of metal was found on the side of Bukit Besar mountain, four and a half weeks later, all ten bodies burnt to a crisp with not so much as a finger left to bury.

Murder in an Oriental Home

The rusty maroon stain on the carpet wouldn't shift. Of course, it had to be her mother's favourite Chinese silk carpet. White too. She'd tried everything from bleach to steam cleaning carpet treatments, and still the bloody spot stared back. A mocking reminder of her weakness.

Maybe it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't run, it laughed, maniacal.

"I had to get help," she muttered, scrubbing at it furiously.

Go on, just throw me away like you abandoned your own mother, it taunted.

She clenched her jaw and scrubbed. She couldn't tell if the ache in her arms was from the bruising of the bonds or all that cleaning.

Get rid of me, you still won't forget. You left her with him and now she's dead. It's your fault and you know it. All your fault.

She bit her cheek 'til iron filled her mouth, and scrubbed '*til* she wore a hole in the damned carpet.

Guilt

The second born was a daughter. Girls weren't of much use, but after making her give up their son, he didn't say no when she begged. He didn't mention it was because no one would take her at the time anyway.

A year later they had another boy. This one they did want. But bills were high, and babies were expensive. They sold him to one of the rich Feng Huang brothers and never saw him again.

The third son came nine years later. He was raised with a mixture of overbearing love and transferred guilt. Kept when his two older brothers and the little sister that followed the next year

were not. She was given to the childless couple who ran the *Kopitiam* food court down the road. The family visited sometimes and shared a meal.

The last was another boy, six years later on the first anniversary of the Japanese invasion. No one wanted another mouth during a war, but at least by then their girl was grown and married. Both working for their two boys, they thought they might just make it.

The Nanny

Born in the *kampongs* somewhere in the late 1930s. With three older brothers they hadn't expected complications. But her mother was twelve years younger the last time, so it shouldn't have been such a surprise that she died in childbirth.

Ba kept it together long enough to remarry before getting lost in the dens. Some point before she could remember, he pulled her brothers out of school and put them to work, funding his addictions. She didn't even get a chance at school – then again not many village girls did. She might've been smart if she'd been given the chance. But they'd never know now.

At eight her stepmother put her to work. After all, there were bills and mounding debts to be paid. She had to earn her keep. So she slaved from the crack of dawn '*til* long after dusk. Cooking, cleaning, and raising babies for families who paid her stepmother directly. She never saw a cent.

Eventually she married and raised her own babies. And then the grandbabies, who now have babies of their own. They don't let her touch the babies now, though. Maybe they think the illiterate stupid might rub off.

The Writer

With a chubby fist, she pushed the sweat soaked tendrils out of her muddy, almond shaped eyes, restlessly resettling her head in Mother's lap. Mother reached down and stroked her fine light brown hair and lightly traced the lines of her gently arched brows, snub nose, and thin lips, brushing against the fine cut on her lower lip that would almost certainly scar.

"You know, my grandfather came here from China. He ran away, hidden in the belly of a ship, on his wedding night..." Mother began.

She was staring at the waving autumn gold leaves overhead, tracking their lazy movement with her eyes and fidgeting her feet as Mother's words washed over her. Later that afternoon as she played in the sun, hair glowing almost auburn, she would hardly remember the details of the stories.

Not that it mattered. Three generations down, anything beyond basics was already fuzzy. And as she heard the tales time and time again over the next twenty years, her ample imagination would fill in the gaps. Moulding and reshaping stories like the clay she played with beneath the gingko tree.

Child of the Stars**

Anaya Vora

By the dense flames of the faltering fire, As lullabies turn to wretched choirs, I lie under the star-knit blue quilt, Consumed by my kismet. Dreams of Andromeda beckon to me, For we are the condemned maidens, Caressed by perilous swells and tender airs, Soothed by the tunes of the harpe.

Bathed in the burden of Charon's obol, An angel of the unholiest kind, I am but the boatman among the stars, Plagued by the groaning of carrion men.

In the fluorescent kingdom of Diana, Where northern lights guide pariahs, Pray I to the Goddess divine, She who offers me asylum.

There do I long to wrap my fragile mortality in her moonlight, Eluding the eye of the tempest, Receding into dream-like whispers, Of supernovas and nebulas.

But hark as they come, The treacherous Moirai, Revelling in their deranged creations, Of outlines stitched from alluring illusions.

Unravel then, The tragedy of my youth, Before I to return to the night sky, For it is there that I begin.

Acknowledgements

The UNSWeetened Literary Journal team would like to thank the Arc community for ceaseless support, warmth, and guidance. We would especially like to thank Nick Jordan, the coordinator's coordinator and the crème de la crème of supervisors and friends; Mitchell McBurnie, beating heart of Arc Marketing; Lydia Morgan, publicity wizard; Mollie Qui, tech saviour; and Caroline Fox Drinkwater and Nick Bentley, equal parts practical and magical mentors on all things artistic. We thank our sibling publications Blitz, Cookbook, and Tharunka, whose companionship in bringing forward student voices perpetually enriches the UNSW community.

Our thanks to all those who contributed to UNSWeetened – whether to the Journal itself or the community – you have weaved beauty from chaos into 2021.

Our especial thanks go to the guests of the UNSWeetened 2021 podcast: Professor Lucas Lixinski, Dr. Stephanie Bishop, Professor Ian Jacobs, Dr. Sean Pryor, Dr. John Attridge, and Ms. Chloe Kelly. This publication is indebted to all the past UNSWeetened Coordinators, and our thanks go to them – particularly to all those who spoke with us this year: Bettina Hodgson (1998), Adam Strang (2006), Nathan Mifsud (2012), Ria Andriani (2013), Sarah Fernandes (2015), Carla Zuniga (2016), and Haya Saboor (2017).

Our final thanks go to the dozens of people who donated to make the print production possible. You have continued UNSWeetened's beautiful legacy – a Journal we can now hold in our hands as much as our hearts.



Credits

Coordinator

Axel-Nathaniel Rose

Editors

Belle Campbell Elena Kaloudis Mia Lo Russo Rosie Bogumil Wen Yu Yang

Designers

Indi Sofyar Larae Kale Nathasha Shaju Mulakkal

Illustrators

Christine Le Eloise Griffiths Da Costa Talica Gummery

Acknowledgement of Country

.

Leilani Knight

Publicist

Margaret Miao



Judges

Sean Pryor, Associate Professor in English Stephanie Bishop, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing

Sponsors

Allen and Unwin Garden Lounge Creative Space Kill Your Darlings Meanjin Spicers The Monthly The Saturday Paper UNSW Department of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Voiceworks Westerly Writing NSW

Backers

Cai Holroyd Chloe Kelly Emma Papworth Emily and Sharif Olorin Jeanna Simmons Kirsty Bishop Margaret Miao Miranda Forner Miriam Teresa Rebecca and Wesley Dunlop Rita Lush Sherlock Jenkins



UNSWeetened 2021 ISSN 1441-1415 © 2021 by Arc @ UNSW Limited, UNSWeetened and individual contributors.

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of Arc @ UNSW unless expressly stated. Arc @ UNSW Limited accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of any of the opinions or information contained in this issue of UNSW etcened. Any complaints should be made in writing to the UNSW etcened Coordinator.

UNSWeetened is published by Arc @ UNSW Limited.

For more information about Arc's programs, please contact: Arc Clubs & Volunteerinng Arc @ UNSW Limited PO Box 173 Kingsford NSW Australia 2032 volunteer@arc.unsw.edu.au

arc.unsw.edu.au/UNSWeetened



•

