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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/skovron-alex



TEMPTATION

we are never where we are, but somewhere else ...
—Derek Walcott, 'In Italy'

The devil's in the detail you don't know.
I'm sorry, but I won't apologize
for my position. Can't you let it go?
If only you could see things through my eyes.

I'm sorry that I can't apologize
for the misfortunes others choose to grieve.
If you could only reason with my eyes...
Feeling insecure, you'll want to believe

in the misfortunes others bear; you'll grieve,
anxious by everything. We nurse our false
feelings of insecurity—we believe
we're never where we are but somewhere else;

anxious by everything, we nurse a forced
compassion that compels our hearts to bleed;
everything, it would seem, is somewhere else
than what's in front of us—that starving need,

compassion, it beguiles our hearts to bleed
when stark realities (admittedly unkind)
become our daily front. Yet you don't need
to do much more than shield a guilty mind

from those do-good brigades: you'll realize
then that my position's sound ... Let it go!
Most stories are repositories of lies.
The devil's in the detail you don't know.

JOLSON SINGS AGAIN

When I was, I don't know, seventeen
I used to visit a friend in the high suburb
and we discussed many things, like music.

He was a thin, melancholy individual
with sparse black curly hair already fading
and a teasing humour that could get personal.

He played Barbra Streisand records for me
in his room, she was the most talented singer
in the world, he told me, what a voice.

How can you like Al Jolson, so unrefined,
he mocked. Maybe that was not exactly
how he put it but you get the gist.

I listened to Barbra with him in his room
and agreed that she was very talented, yes,
but I defended Al Jolson, because it was

Jolson who stirred my heart. This was just
one of the things my friend teased me about
but here is not the place to indulge old hurts.

I knew all the Jolson songs, I sang them
to myself on the way home from lectures
in the evenings, trying to mimic his voice.

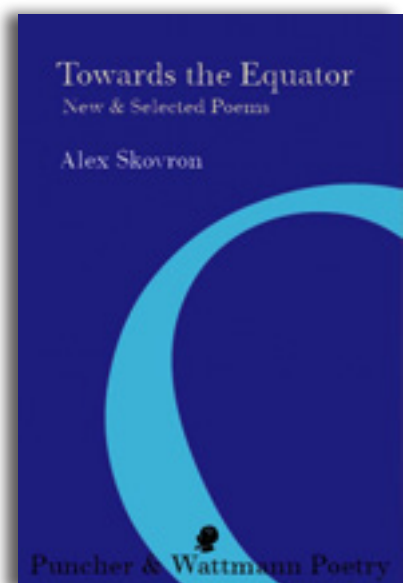
When my son was a small boy, he learnt
every word in the two films about Al Jolson.
We watched them together, many times over.

WHAT THE TWILIGHT TELLS ME

The future is a stubborn upstart
too proud to share his secret
too distracted by the importunings of the planets
to hold it for long – it slides off
like a discarded prophecy into the waiting pages
of the thing we decipher as Time
with cracked spectacles in a grainy half-light
under a moonless sky in our sleep.

The past is an ignorant aristocrat
who understands nothing of herself
even less of all those magisterial conjugations
that magnify her into a realm
we label Remembrance – a poor old
substitute for forgetting as it hurtles back
into oblivion or forward
into the winking eye of knowledge.

While the present, cynical provocateur
forever coy and prevaricating
confuses its several tenses, jumbles its grammars
of be and become – but is confident
we'll mistrust it once again
to slip gladly into memory's rainbow dusk
or wedge ourselves at the ramp of dawn
while twilight dances its glory.



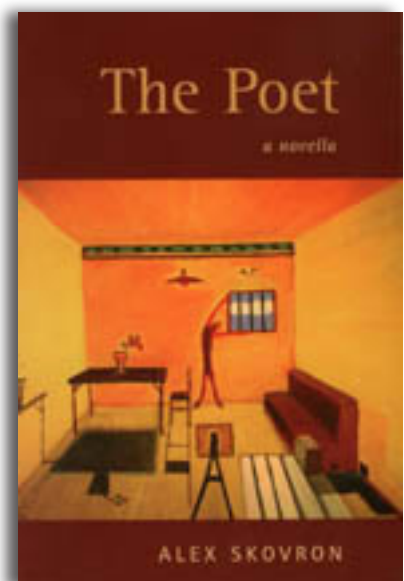
SLIP LANE

Having exited his quotidian freeway, he'd sit through many a rare book as the season dwindled. His interests were both quadrivial and trivial, and when jaded by the illuminati he would repair to the convenience mart, check out the latest checkout chick. He tended to impress, well-versed in the cosmetics of conviviality. And yet all he ever embraced rapidly fled, for rock-headed he became should a crunch come home—he would burrow straight to the point, putting off nothing but the promising guest (for you see, his was an uncompromising thirst, skittery and impolitical); whereupon he'd assail his wall with fresh A4s of oily mergers and glossied fantastical quenchings. But one swig, frequency no matter, won't a swallow make—while his libido fattened his spirit sagged. So he retired into villanelle imaginings whose repetitions rhymed, sooner or late, whose closing conceits always connoted *'Welcome to my bed,' she said*, etcetera. They crackled, like his operatic 78s, and whenever his needle jumped he would raise and relieve the arm of its burden, or illumine the home theatre, return whatever antique tome to its oaken shelf, open the cabinet to select self-medication; or else he'd saunter martward to check what new release might be perching there.

GUILLEMETS

« Rosin your words, they're too squeaky clean! » the fiddler with the soundbox said; she bristled – I mean it: hairline fairly moved, a critic (you see), oh, a songstress was she – sans song, but the melos mistakeless still & the message not all unkind. « You've made a name for yourself [quoth she] once you make it into lower case! » I was meant to chuckle at this (so I did, I did), she was trying to slap the stuffery of clubs & of cliques, & impress with her cool, her charm, her chic (her curvature too) (you see) – in fact, I was starting to think maybe she wanted me?

« Your G-string needs tuning [she suddenly squealed], don't forget they'll *want* a little sleaze – but don't overdo it [she grinned], your art! » & straddled her chair with slinky jeans & that tight magnificent seat! Oh, I'd have given a bagful of poems & prizes & grants there & then, if she'd flexed (there & then) concupiscently forward & breathed « You're a *poet*, put your mouth where your mind is! » But she merely scribbled at one itchy knee, huddled the hock between those hips, & reaching clean around me, shunted my opus aside, secured the flask & poured me a frothy quaff. So I bowed, loosened my bow, & took a post-Freudian sip.



SAILING TO VENEZUELA

You know the type: you've scarcely cornered
the closing flakes of a Caesar salad
and he's there already, twiddling above you,
itching to whisk your dishes away.

Meanwhile the duo dealing noisily
metres along scratch at the remnants
of hurt attention to the page you're on:
worse than the doof-doof seeping somewhere,

walled with such craft you can't locate it –
you think to ask the congenial waitress
to twirl a knob, explain you're working
and need to focus. You know the type:

you'd scarcely whisper your nerdy secret,
apologetic, but emblematic
of noble breeding, peerless decorum,
when almost before you turn to saunter

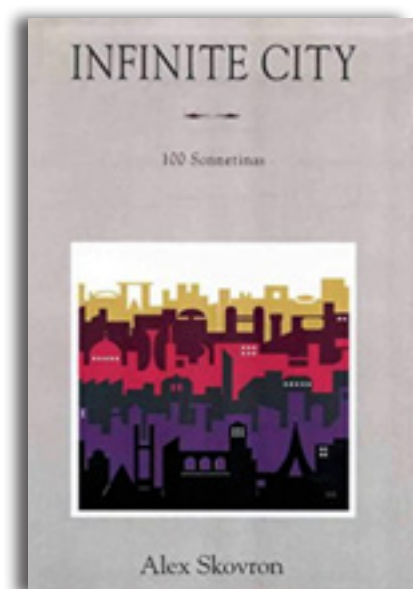
back to your coffee, she's folded double
under the counter – the music softens,
she rises, glowing with admiration,
ready perhaps to drop her apron

and sail with you to Venezuela –
you know the type, you've no illusion,
she plainly fancies your mind, your body,
the classic Penguin under your pencil,

she'll shove her notepad into the vest
of the pesky waiter, dribble her hair
with lewd abandon out of its primmed-back
incarceration and wait politely

for you to finish your Caesar salad,
your chapter, verse, your cooling coffee,
viciously wink at the frazzled owner
inching alarmed to your waning table, kick

at the chairs of the loudmouth duo,
sizzle a grin in your poor direction
and, flinging open the café doorway,
beckon you crudely to follow.



Susan Hawthorne is the author of two novels, a verse novel, six collections of poetry, two chapbooks and three non-fiction titles. Her poetry collection, *Cow* (2011) was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Award in the 2012 New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards as well as being a finalist in the 2012 Audre Lorde Lesbian Poetry Award (USA). *Earth's Breath* was shortlisted for the 2010 Judith Wright Poetry Prize. She has been the recipient of two international residencies: in 2013 from the Australia Council for the Arts for six months to write *Lupa and Lamb*, the BR Whiting Library in Rome; and in 2009 a four month residency for Arts Queensland and the Australia Council to Chennai, India to write *Cow*.

Her fiction works include *Dark Matters* (2017), a verse novel, *Limen* (2013) and *The Falling Woman* (1992). Susan is the winner of the Penguin Random House Best Achievement in Writing, 2017 Inspire Award for her work as an outstanding lifetime contributor to increasing people's awareness of disability. She is also a publisher and Adjunct Professor in the Writing Program at James Cook University, Townsville.



DOUBLE EMBRACE

sit in the embrace of language
sharing sister tongues double
entendres whisperings veiled

write in code as we must
elephants trumpet their rage
hide our lives in shrouded words

syllables are star-stitched
as ancient as galaxies
or Pluto's hidden oceans

liquid nitrogen frozen burning
the Buddhist nun inflamed
above pachyderm clouds

threaten rain like a woman
carrying a gourd speaking
with her friend in nüshu

her tongue a faith hard as marble
Sistine sybils with ambiguous
oracles speak in rhyming couplets

language as embrace poetry
as architecture holds up the sky
like ancient Nut stable as

a celestial table no easy camouflage
sky stars dark light our two-tongue
speaking knitting underground

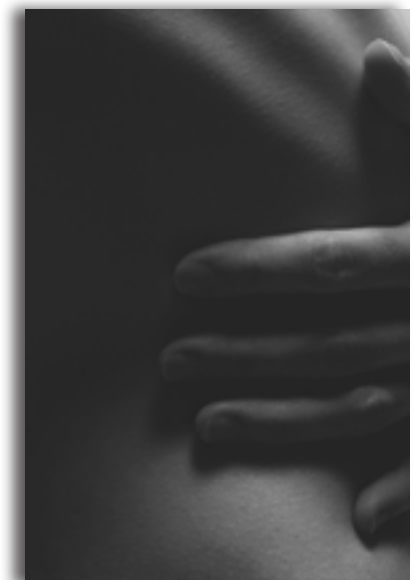
knowledge poems committed
to memory and transformation
our dissertations excavated

to snuffle out meaning today
she was murdered by someone
sent by the government

Draupadi brings bees in her
flower-braided hair the queen
smoldering her diffracted lyrics

her fury as great at the Erinyes
her rapture disbelieved just
as Cassandra's words were

a woman who speaks truth
registers her revenge but history
unwraps her story and it is lost



HARROW

on our farm my father had a harrow
used during the planting season

from Old Dutch and Norse languages
harrowing the ground is a kind of wounding

Indian goddess Sita was born in a furrow
it too had been harrowed

her experience was harrowing
abducted held hostage by Ravana

when Rama finally arrives to bring her home
he accuses her of unfaithfulness

she enters a fire only to emerge whole
her purity proven
so when I see an image

of the harrowing of hell a giant animal maw
sharp teeth like the tines on a harrow

naked people walking out of the maw
of hell I think of Sita found in a furrow

returning to the earth when she dies
and the earth harrowed by my father

UNDERWORLDS

everyone is looking for underworlds
all over the earth but when it lands
on them they are not so happy

death is the key character there
and he is not a nice fellow
controlling and the heat is too high
or so cold your toes and fingers freeze
but death comes in female form too
usually cloaked for death is hidden

some underworlds come with return
tickets Orpheus had one of these
but blew it as did Job some of us
have multiple city round trips
but we never know the departure
or return dates so have to live
as if today will be our very last

drugs allow day trips to the underworld
like looking for a house to buy or rent
every location is filled with fantasy
and it all looks so much brighter
than the everyday mundane world

underworlds are with us all the time
we fail to notice their intersecting
presences until our number is up



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LLANDUDNO

Alice was once here in this hotel
the girl who went down the rabbit hole
she is still here and is watching
the seagulls fight over chips

she lost her sense of reality
when the world spun out of control
he is so much bigger than me
the legs of this table have grown
I am too small too small too small

*

the red queen stands in the street
shouting at the passers by
Alice is afraid of her
as she calls out punishments
at the pier clowns swallow balls
dodgem cars dodge
machines screech for money
Wales' beachside holidays
with grandeur and hidden shame

POST SEIZURE

they say she spoke gibberish
but iambic pentameter is not
that easy in a post seizure state

falling into the chasm of darkness
she returns with oracles on her
tongue only she returns from trance

the cleft not so frenzied but divine
words bundled into poems
Pythia ecstatic on earth's vapours

divination a chthonic not clonic
seizure an underworld of words
sliding out of her old snake skin



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John Foulcher has written eleven books of poetry, most recently *101 Poems* (Pitt Street Poetry 2015), a selection from his previous books, and *A Casual Penance* (Pitt Street Poetry 2017). His work has appeared in Australian magazines and anthologies for over thirty years and has been set for study in Australian schools. In 2010-11 he was the Literature Board of the Australia Council's resident at the Keesing Studio in Paris. He lives in the national capital, Canberra. His books can be purchased from www.pittstreetpoetry.com



THE LINGUIST IN LOVE

Despite advertisements, letters
to the editor and popular novelists,
I am resisting fads in the use of *however*.
I maintain *however* never joins
but creates things anew, therefore
stands in goalpost upper case
behind a sure point of conclusion
thus: *I love you, still. However,*
she has taken your heart.
Reluctantly, I concede the semi-colon,
for nothing is discreet, all things
defer to others, as in *I love you,*
still; however, she has taken
your heart. But these days it seems
that anything will do, however
clamps sentence with sentence
in parody of comma, and we say:
Oh how I love you, still,
however she has taken your heart,
and I don't know what I will do.
This however spells out how
little we care about getting things
right, about punctuating truth.
In the end, however, I'll learn to live
with it. Words, after all, are only words.

THE NIGHT STAIR

Furness Abbey, Cumbria

On the crumbling night stair,
the monks' back entrance to prayer,
small shoots of sunlight grow to great oaks.
The roof and the windows are gone,
the stair drops away to the grass.
Henry! I hope the monks' money and land
were worth the vanished floor,
this gap that no one now can cross
between the church and the sunny night stair.

THE EXISTENTIAL WALLABY

A small black wallaby down-wind from me, bristling and snorting like a horse, its breath suspended in the weak winter light. It shoves the scrub aside, chocks a block of distance between us, pauses, tree stump among tree stumps.

I just saw a small black wallaby I say when I get home. My husband, who's been walking somewhere away from me, says *Well I didn't see it.*

Therefore it doesn't exist, I mutter.

What did you say? he asks. *I said you, my dear, are the ultimate empiricist.* *Damn right he says. That's why I'm an Anglican priest.*

As the afternoon crayons shadows over the glass, we talk about God and things, how hard it is to believe, how hard not to believe. The day drifts above us, catches in the skylight.

In the evening, he goes out again. *Did you see the wallaby?* I ask, when darkness brings him back. *No, but I saw a lot of other things. Bats, possums, some kind of owl.*

Later, his breath sounds like someone dying, as he sleeps. Outside, there's a scratching in the grass, a shuffling in the dirt. He starts to wake, his breath less desperate, a waking breath. *What's that scratching?* he whispers. *It could be the wallaby* I say. *Want to get up and take a look?* He knots his arm around my neck, breath clots in my lungs. *You don't give up, do you?* he says.

The scratching goes on, closer now, outside.

Jane Williams is an award-winning Australian writer based in Tasmania. Her most recent book is *Days Like These* – new and selected poems. Her sixth collection of poems *Parts of the Main* is forthcoming. While best known for her poetry, she writes in a variety of forms and genres for both adults and children and combining photography with poetry. She has been a featured reader at venues in several countries including Slovakia where she held a three month artist residency in 2016.

www.janewilliams.wordpress.com



DISCOVERING IRIS

The boys drag their early teens
through the streets,
camouflaged in uniforms
they'll soon slake off.

They're talking about Iris or
at least one of them is
trying to make a point,
trying to illuminate
some memory or other.

You know Iris? he begins ...

Blank stares, shoulder shrugs.

He tries again
separating the two syllables
of her name slowly
so as to not damage the whole -

I ris?

No response.

Perhaps the old fashioned
has thrown them.
Now Brianna or Madison ...
but Iris?
Like an eye? Like the flower?

*Iris from school, from the skate park,
from last night he prods.*

They're oblivious, disinterested
and he can't understand it because
to him

Iris is everywhere ...

then he too falls silent shakes his head
as the realization sinks in

some boyhood discoveries can't be shared

not when there's nothing
not when there's no one
to compare.

WEARING WHITE

Wearing white is all it takes for memory to snag me
like some dopey fish, for the years to slip and settle
into the low key center of my twenty-first.

A sister just old enough with parental permission
(our friendship in the wings biding time, gaining trust).
A brother who had yet to make the worst kind
of bad choice, his vanity still a stranger to mutant cells.

A baby (incredibly mine) somewhere in the background,
perfect dreamless sleep hers alone.
A husband I would take back twice in five years
then never again.

Friends loyally fixed in time, celebrating
in the flattering light. Conflicting truths unimaginable.

It was 1985. Someone gave me a bottle of Kahlua.
Pop music was trying to feed Ethiopia.

A hole in the ozone layer had just been discovered.
Orwell's year of Big Brother had come and gone
and stayed.

I could not know then how much of life is spent striving
to bridge the gaps between the tenses, between the indefinite
wait to grow up and the missed opportunity of a blinked eye.

I was simply twenty one, between perms, a coral pink smile
rising above the collar of my white cheesecloth dress.

SAME SAME BUT DIFFERENT

(Hoi An, Vietnam 2017)

though they're blue
speckled as sparrow eggs
I'm told my eyes are almond shaped
yours dark enough but everything else
sets us apart gives us away

Your long hair. My short hair.
The altogether too much of us.

Our wary gait as we navigate the gaps
between motor bikes and diacritics,

as we count the zeros on each note
stacking our wallets in ascending order

as we stand on a street corner
sweat-drenched by 11 A.M.
squinting at the tourist map
before turning it right-way up

as a family sits down to bowls
of breakfast noodles and I order
a double espresso with fresh
not condensed milk and do they
have anything in chocolate?

Here we are difference par excellence
and the people smile at us good-naturedly
and only sometimes do they laugh out loud.

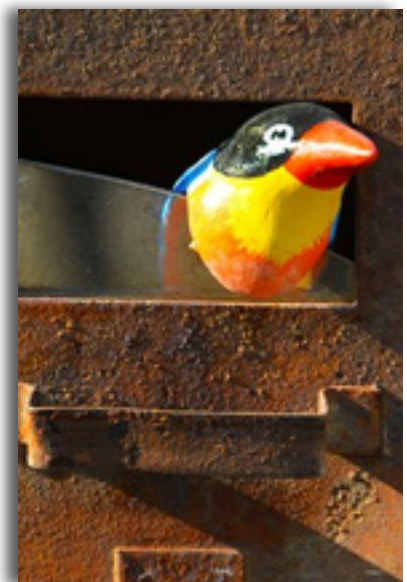


THE LETTER

A rare one these days from my mother who mastered social media before me. Learning in her seventies to text like a teen, abbreviating the world in tiny bytes. *All the better to travel through cyberspace, to travel light* she might say. But not today. Today there's this letter ambiguous as the view from my kitchen window; the peak of mountain, clouds at their springtime moodiest, long wet grass. A rainy day minus the rain. A day of stasis. Of inwardness. A good day for stocktaking or soul searching. For opening and reading snail-mail.

Inside the envelope, two unwritten postcards - images she thought I might like. One a painted kaleidoscope of colour; a bull's head tattooed between a woman's breasts. The other a black and white photograph; an old man nursing a pint, one bar stool over, a small child clutching a bag of crisps. My mother knows adaptation is the key, that the heart can inhabit more than one life. Still, she believes some are things are best served with pen in hand, a careful measure of time through ink on paper. Faintly ruled paper, centre folded. In the top left hand corners trademark numerals underscored. Her looping cursive slants right like rows of trees shaped by wind. Then somewhere between talk of food and wine, adventure and settling down, the question of where, when the time comes, to scatter my parents' ashes.

His in the Inch Abbey and out to sea. A return to roots. For her any body of water will do. A tidal pool perhaps. Any storm in a port. This woman. This man. Different breeds of the same love. How ever have they managed - worlds apart - their life? Through my kitchen window: mountain, clouds, grass, not quite as I left them. Nothing ever wholly as we leave it. If we're lucky or blessed someone else to draw the longing from our story, hold it up to catch the soft benevolent light.



© Jane Williams

Professor Kevin Brophy is the author of fifteen books of poetry, fiction and essays. His latest books are *Misericordia* (Salt Wattle Press, 2016 - a chapbook), *This is What Gives Us Time* (Gloria SMH Press, 2016 <http://gloriasmh.com>) and *Walking: New and Selected Poems* (John Leonard Press 2013 (<http://johnleonardpress.com>)). He teaches mainly poetry and the art of the personal essay in the Creative Writing program in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. He was a chief investigator with a team of researchers in the ARC funded Discovery Project 'Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case Study in Poetry' (2013-2016). He is co-editor of the journal of Creative Writing theory, *TEXT* (<http://www.textjournal.com.au/index.html>).



BURIAL

How far is it across the dark floor
of your moonless night?

Have you started out
in a certain direction already
and discovered it doesn't matter which way you go

because however enclosed or free you are,
there'll be nothing forever on every side?

I'm thinking you can imagine now
how long it will take you to go
from one side of that darkness to the other.

How much, I wonder, have you forgotten?
Are we already last night's dream

too shadowy to distinguish from everything
else that was once alive?

I watched you go staring up at the roof of the night
you were sealed inside.

Here, I must tell you, our moonlight
still thins out the night,
our sunsets caress the shadows,
our clouds still act like blessings and curses.

Each day becomes a burning martyr
we watch, wonder at, and turn from.

TOO FAR

We're far from the men in ties talking on television.
We're far from falling stars and fires on the horizon.
We're far from old ideas throwing new grenades
at city streets of starry fusillades.
We're far from cities, from valleys.
Night stains the sky a deep shadow.
We run. We hide. We tell our phones what we know,
what we've seen.
Our sunflower minds close down as we lie down and dream.
Someone's missing, someone says, and someone else is hiding,
someone's run far enough away to think of this.

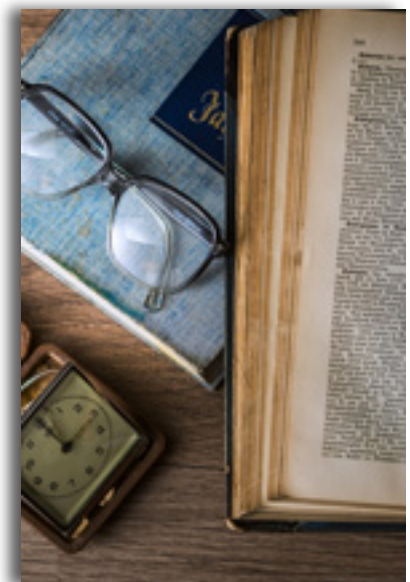


AN ADJECTIVE WORLD

When was it that mortal came to be needed to describe men?
 And why is flawed used only for those we call geniuses?
 Egos became fragile, like Easter eggs and champagne flutes.
 Fun is good and clean though that's ironic these days.
 When did God come to need his infinitely redundant Almighty?
 Leave a road unmentioned long enough and the next time you get round to it,
 it will have gone long and winding on you, dusty too.
 Barren old women will be carrying firewood along it.
 The good book is distinguished from all others
 which must all be the bad ones we should shun.
 And yes, the plain truth is a warning sign, as all signs are.
 And when was hope ever not perverse?
 Remember, too, a mark is what you miss.

PROMISE

Bright finches in the morning sprinkle through the tree
 the cow was eating yesterday, its strong tongue pink,
 its lips stretched for the brighter leaves the cockatoos
 had not come down for; last night's dogs are back,
 they drag their hopes like ghosts along with them
 and glance coolly at me as they might at taps or trees;
 the moon was full, and small as well, in last night's sky,
 the sky that dripped its shadows through the trees
 on us sitting out with dogs, silent finches, a fire,
 and a world of smoke we put at last to sleep.
 The morning finches move in families of fright
 among the trees below the cockatoos that rule
 the day; children lead dark dogs along the track
 to school; someone said (last night) we need a coin
 to spin below the moon for luck, a dog to lick one hand,
 and this, the next day's daylight spun round us.



Loretta Collins Klobah is a professor of Caribbean Literature and creative writing at the University of Puerto Rico. She lives in San Juan. Her poetry collection *The Twelve-Foot Neon Woman* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011) received the 2012 OCM Bocas Prize in Caribbean Literature in the category of poetry and was short listed for the 2012 Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection in the Forward poetry prizes. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Best American Poetry 2016*, *BIM*, *Caribbean Beat Magazine*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *The Caribbean Review of Books*, *Poui* and more.



SONG OF THE HARPY

Maybe it's true that we were eating paella,
 singing along with the bohemia music,
 sipping a bucket of iced cervezas under pink sky
 at Playa los Machos, our toes sifting shell fragments
 out of the sand, when the truck backed up to our table.
 Manejo de Emergencias de Ceiba, DRNA,
 and in the back, a rhesus macaque in a wire cage.
 Mange sores knitting her eyebrows, crust rimming nose holes,
 white chin hair, a bloodied knee. No chatter—
 her cauled eyes aimed below the sea horizon.
 The driver perched on the bumper to have his coffee.
 None of us talked to her.
 I asked the driver, y su amiguita?
Pues, mono guisa'o.
 Monkey stew, bound for euthanasia.
 Did she lope through city alleys or plunder peppers,
 pineapple, pumpkins or melons from a farmer's field?
 Was she a swimmer from that island in Cayo Santiago,
 where specimens in the free-ranging colony are tattooed
 with numbers or names and studied by social biologists,
 who motor-boat deliver monkey chow every day?
 I've heard that one scientist there proved that adult macaques
 are better at counting apple slices than human babies
 are at counting graham cracker cookies.
 The behaviorists seek to know
What is fear?
How does one choose a mate?
How does one use power to overcome another?

At a party, I once met a scientist who travelled
 every day to the monkey island to study male aggression
 in the seven bands the macaques have formed.
 She told us that some funded researcher from somewhere
 borrowed a harpy eagle from an institution.
 He wanted to know if it could be true
 that harpies can carry off a small child,
 so he released the eagle on Cayo Santiago.
 Was it a trained harpy that would return at his whistle?
 Did it grab a macaque and fly off into the blue?
 How would he return the escaped harpy to the loaner facility?
 If it wasn't a wild harpy, how would he prove
 anything about harpies in the wild?
 Is it ethical to unleash an airborne agent of terror
 on an isleta of a thousand East Indian monkeys
 kept ½ mile off the coast of Puerto Rico?
 What is fear?
 What made her decide to swim for it?
 Miss Macaque, look at the palms lining the bay across the water,
 look back at the seven tribes of your island,
 submerge yourself in the sea and paddle
 to somewhere else,
 where there are bohemia nights,
 and paella,
 and melons,
 and beer.

MUSE

She always walks at the threshold of shadows
under the awnings of the locked car lot,
through flood lights of the war monument,
past clinking pool tables of Confetti Drink Confetti
and the unlit storefront of Iglesia el Cielo de Fuego,
late, under rain, through night, into day.

In the heat, she walks by el Cuartel de Policia
near botánicas and kioskos of Plaza Mercado,
treading through crushed ruins of Roxy Hotel,
which once kept a carousel pony at its doorway.

White hair, worn to her shoulders,
a grim, school girl face, and a decade
in the same clothes, an embroidered vest
and jeans skirt, street-dingy, pockets filled.

Like the children who pack pockets with rice
for pigeons in the Plaza de Armas, or like
my father who plugged his pockets with nuts
when my self-starved mother no longer ate meals,
this woman fills up her pockets with nubs,
the last morsel of pencils.

As she walks, she writes,
a notebook always in hand. *Untie me* say the tennis shoes
dangling over high wires; *firma tu nombre*
en mis paredes utters a boarded-up bank;
it's your unlucky day cries a lotto ticket booth.

She walks, and she writes. Always, I wanted
to know what station she was tuned to, what
she was observing, which frequencies of dawn
and casualties of dusk, memories of family lost,
chance happenings, or confessions filled her book.

One day in el Paseo, I almost collided
with her. She held her notebook open like a preacher
holds a Bible, and I saw the pages— many times
and in many styles, I had imagined her handwriting!
Constricted cursive, shaky print, or slanting loops?
The pages were shiny slick with lead, written on
over and over again until letters merged into a solid
sea of pencil gloss. Not one word decipherable!



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Educator, lecturer, performance poet, eclectic thinker, mentor with staunch multi-cultural mindset and entrepreneurial attitude, Anca Mihaela Bruma considers herself a global citizen, having lived in four continents. Her eclecticism can be seen in her intertwined studies, she pursued: a Bachelor of Arts (Romania) and a Master of Business Administration (Australia).



IN ANOTHER WORLD... IN ANOTHER STORY...

I want to exist in your mind,
in other stories, books or chapters,
other worlds, paragraphs or dreams...
behind forgotten Math equations
and your favorite song lyrics ...

I want to exist in another world, another story
in dazzled rhymes, auroras with galvanized emotions,
beneath your hundred moons and agonizing sunsets,
in the buzz of a tree or inside a spectral dance,
beyond the shades of some turquoise drops,
so my coral wings to converse in circles
while irises still bleed the purple roses...

We are passengers of life in this geography of time
in another world, another story, another chapter...

While you are still the middle of a sentence
about your own lifetime,
I am posting the headlines of Tomorrow...

HERMETIC LOVE

Once, in early mystical times, a sage was challenged:

“Master, why is Love considered as a magus?”

His amaranthine eyes glistening, the sage revealed:

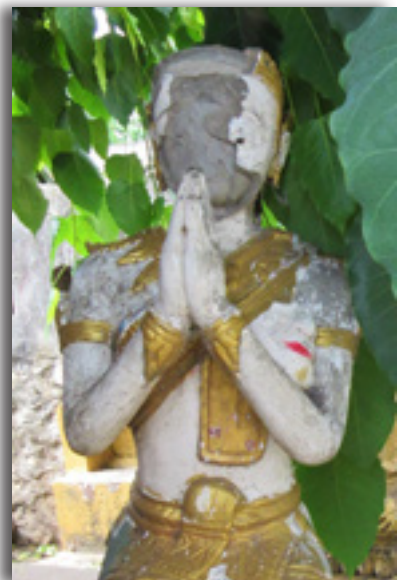
“When finally
the dormant and awakened universes meet
as two beginnings unending
through quixotic alchemy of metal designs,
where quantum mysteries disguised as flowers of life,
it is then, when Love transmutes and transfigures everything,
as one is everything, and everything is one.

The sage absorbed in his own inner thinking,
looked beyond tangibility then prophesized:
“Love is the Quintessence of the Essence of Reality,
when two are one and one is billions,
momentum when the quantum point becomes the Infinite,
then Love reveals beyond Space and Time,
expanded yet contracted within millennial raindrops of wisdom
endless cerulean skies captured within edgeless time frames
recognized solely by harmonious souls.

It holds the alchemic Key of the seven Truths,
the greatest of the Great and mastery of the ALL,
Grail of Beauty of inner Knowledge,
with its cosmic signatures and esoteric Biology,
Mercurial Chemistry and protean hermetism
inside crimson pulsations and vibrations of Time,
during empyrean reveries and sacred silences,
inside – outside diverse cradles of dimensional spaces,
when “Me” and “You” is not excluded by “We”,
beyond worldly triviality and persistent frivolity.

“How will you be able to immortalize such Love?”
The inquisitive student besought his ruminative master.

“Leave your Eternities to become before your Time,
let the Life extend measurelessly without boundaries,
between suspended realities of everlastingness,
as the parable of your own Existence dwells only within you!”



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Hongri Yuan, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. Representative works include *Platinum City*, *Gold City*, *Golden Paradise*, *Gold Sun* and *Golden Giant*. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria.

Translated by Yuanbing Zhang.

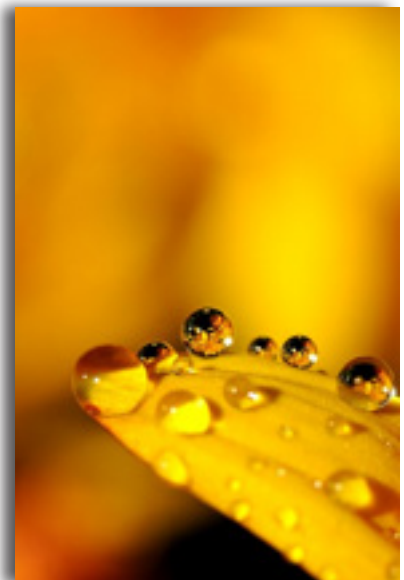


MEMORY OF HEAVEN

I love the peach orchard in early summer
Peaches with deep red and pale red
as if the stars are hanging in the kingdom of branches and leaves
And it seems as sweet as the garden in the universe
The wind in the moment made time transparent
I saw the eternal smile
Twinkling in the branches
And the singing of birds
draw a picture of the heaven memory

ALL WITHOUT EXCEPTION ARE FRAGRANT

Daub the day with the red, white and gold of the sun
Daub the night with the silver of the moon
Inlay lines of verse with the diamond of the stars
Make the earth transparent until you see the palace of the gods
Layer upon layer, in the deep
Those giant gods who are smiling solemnly, they live in the space of light
All without exception are fragrant, like dreams of the soul in heaven



Susan Condon, a native of Dublin, is currently working on her second novel. She was awarded a Certificate in Creative Writing from NUI Maynooth while her short stories have won numerous awards including first prize in the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award. Publications include *My Weekly*, *Ireland's Own Anthology*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Spelk* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Susan blogs at: www.susancondon.wordpress.com or you can find her on Twitter: @SusanCondon



PARTING WORDS

They advised me not to visit today.

But I couldn't stay away.

I mount the stone steps and enter the old building. The doors seal shut behind me, muffling the noise of rush-hour traffic. Each day I've walked these narrow corridors, I've come across a cleaner buffering the parquet floors. Today is no exception. The fluorescent lights produce a warm reflection, but the lavender wax never quite masks the pungent smell that hangs in the air; strong and cloying.

I turn left, up three flights of stairs. Reaching the top, I pause a moment before continuing down the corridor. I need to know that everything is okay, yet I'm afraid. My heart hammers loudly in my chest, drowning out every other noise around me, but I slap on my happy face and push through the doors.

Each of the four occupants is hooked up to an array of tubes and beeping screens. Gurgling masks cover half their faces, pumping life into their bodies, while below each bed transparent bags drain bodily fluids. I see his dark hair curling on the white pillow.

"I'm sorry," a nurse cuts me off, "you can't be in here."

"It's my husband," I say. "Tom. Tom Dwyer."

She looks towards his bed, then nods.



My eyes tear. It's more difficult than I'd imagined. I'm used to seeing my big, strong husband shouting to his team-mates as they careen up and down the rugby pitch, not lying here, looking frail and helpless. His face is so pale it's nearly translucent, the cheeks sunken.

I kiss him on the forehead, trailing my fingers along his cheek.

His eyes flicker, the dark lashes eventually parting to reveal his blue eyes. "You came," he says, the words barely audible.

"Of course, Tom." I bend closer, taking his hand.

His eyes close and a smile crosses his face. "You came, Amy. You came."

Then mayhem ensues.

Machines screech. Lights flash. An army of medical staff appear shouting orders to each other. I'm pushed further and further back until all I can see is the end of the green coverlet.

"Charge to 100."

"Clear," a young girl in scrubs shouts. Her voice is loud. Commanding. As everyone moves back, I realise that she's the one holding the paddles. My husband's life is – quite literally – in her hands.

I can see his limp body. She presses the paddles to his bare chest. Electricity courses through his body as they attempt to shock him back to life.

The coverlet jerks up, then back down again.

"Charge to 150."

"Clear."

The line on the screen remains flat.

"Once more. Charge to 150."

"Clear."

Again his body rises from the bed.

A nurse notices me standing there. She attempts to pull the curtain, then stops, her eyes catching mine.

For a moment there is only silence.

"Time of death ..."

My mouth opens, closes, but no words escape. I stand there, numb and unbelieving. I begin to sway. A firm hand rests on my shoulder and guides me to the family room. I sit, my body bending forward until my head rests on my knees and the tears begin to flow.

A young doctor appears. He sits opposite me.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs Dwyer.

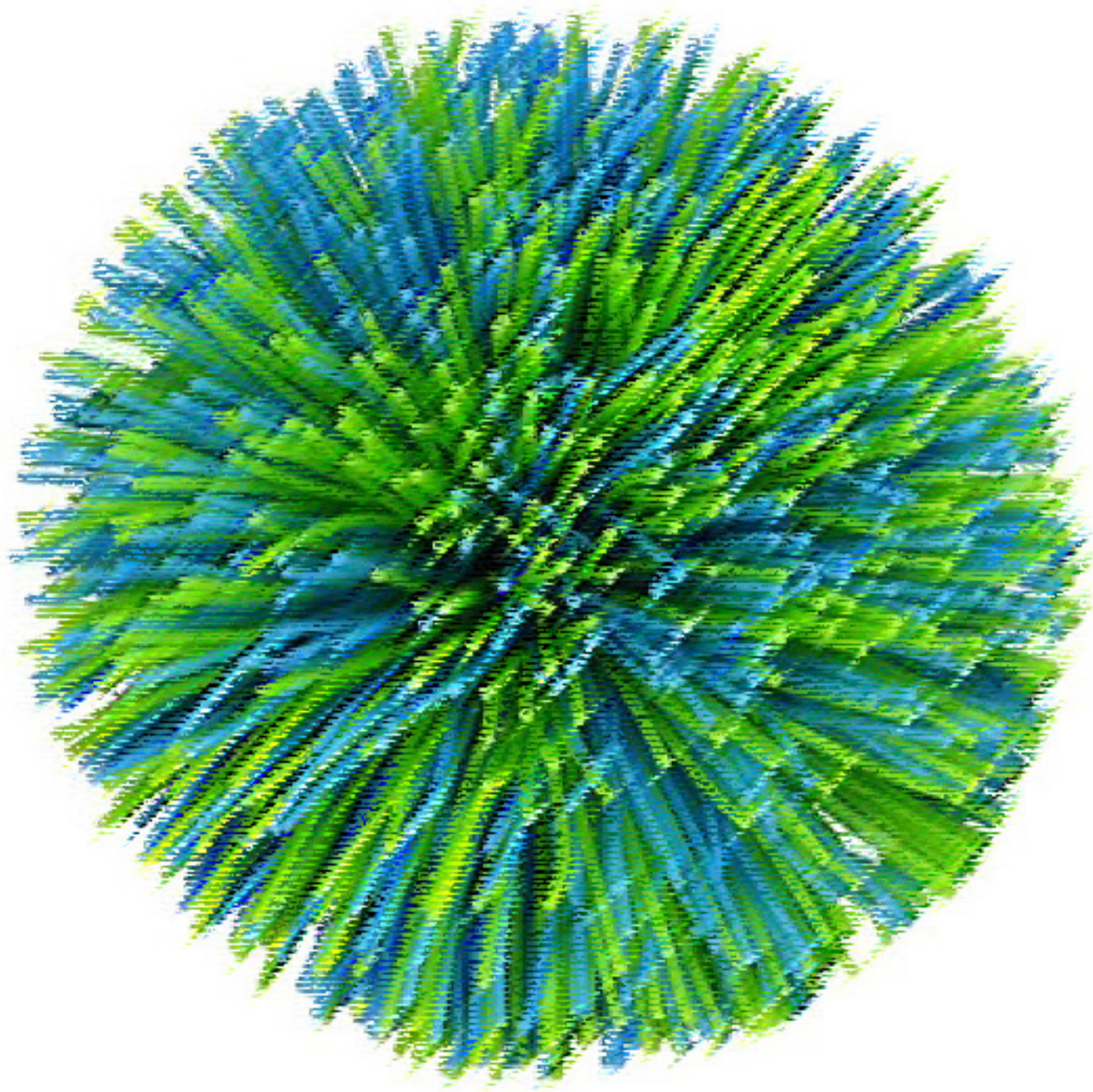
"Sarah," I say, standing up.

"Surgery went well earlier but there's always a possibility, with these type of injuries, that there would be complications. We did everything we could but—"

I walk from the room. Tears streaming down my face while an angry rage threatens to erupt at the man I thought I knew.

"My name is Sarah."

Jim Meirose's work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including Calliope, [Off-beat/Quirky \(Journal of Exp. Fiction pub.\)](#), Permafrost, North Atlantic Review, Blueline, Witness, and Xavier Review, and has been nominated for several awards. His E-book "[Inferno](#)" is available from Amazon. Underground Voices. His novels, "[Mount Everest](#)" and "[Eli the Rat](#)", are available from Amazon. "Mount Everest" has been adapted to a play by a leading west coast playwright. www.jimmeirose.com



HUH? (#1)

Huh? He stood waiting to get an answer but the answer would have to be, God, that is ridiculous you can't play catch to keep busy on a plane where once in a while they'll let Janie play in the aisle but where most of the time she'll be between me and Jamed, plus so what they're soft and all that, number one; you can't play catch good with less than a solid hard ball, and, number two; so what they're soft and won't hurt anybody they go off course or they get thrown wrong wild or whatever, nobody in a cramped airplane on an intercontinental flight will take kindly to being pummeled at random intervals by a feather-weight yucky little wisp of a ball, no matter how cute the players, because on a long flight everything around everybody turns black-hearted ugly and so—

What about it, ma'am? Like the Koosh balls?

Not sure, spit from my lips, as the final and worse problem with playing ball in tight crowded spaces full of bad air and bad vibes broke all surf-like and foamy, obliterating the clerk fully, erasing his fairly unimportant question, flowed down and down showing its reason for having appeared to me; yes, it needed to come and tell me, curving down before me like a scroll, upon which words came in great black block letters, yelling up into my face there is one more problem about playing catch for air travel amusement, that being that it assumes you have friends to play with. You know? Sorry, let's forget the Koosh balls. What else you got huh?



Doreen Duffy studied creative writing at Oxford University online, University College Dublin & National University of Ireland (NUIM) Maynooth. She is a member of Platform One Writers. Her work has been published internationally. She won The Jonathan Swift Award and was delighted to be presented with The Deirdre Purcell Cup by the Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival. Doreen is a Creative Writing tutor with Creative Writing Ink. <http://doreenduffy.blogspot.ie/>



Dad let me sit on his knee while mom got his dinner ready. She was turning the liver over and back on the white plate with the blue trim, dusting it with flour before putting it into the pan. The flour barely hid the wetness of the red. It made a loud hissing sound as it went in. I hated liver. I hated the look of it in the tray in the butchers. It made me think of the bags of blood in the hospital that they hang on the high metal stands and the machine that beeps while the bag empties into me. I hated the way when the butcher scooped it up into the shiny white paper; he was never quick enough to stop a splash of blood drop and pool in the tray.

Mom poured steaming hot tea into dad's big blue and white striped mug and he drank it as if he hadn't had a drink of tea for weeks.

It was Friday night, sweets and comic night. We had sat in the front room after it got dark. Amy and Patrick were supposed to be doing homework and I was supposed to be resting, so we had to keep quiet. We were really listening for the door though. The clock ticking was really loud, it sounded like it was getting louder the longer we waited. My dad always got home late.

"There's no work for him nearby." Mom said earlier, when Amy was moaning again.

"It's not fair mom."

Mom banged the cupboard door shut, the noise blocked out something else she said.

As soon as we heard the latch lift on the side gate we piled into the tiny kitchen, a huddle of three small bodies lit up under the long bright kitchen light. When the back door opened and the light shone out, there was our dad. Black hair brushed back in waves, tanned skin, the three of us tumbled into him while he tried to come in.

Mom used to say he was weather beaten. I didn't like that. I didn't ever want anything to beat my dad. He was the tallest man on our street. When he carried me on his shoulders I felt like I was just short of touching the sky. When I was up there I could do anything, it made everything else look so small.



There were squeals of excitement as he handed out our comics, rolled tight with elastic bands and like a magician he pulled long red liquorice laces from his jacket pockets. He had little paper bags of sweets with two twists on the top of each where the lady in the shop at the top of the road had twirled them around after weighing them out.

“And how’s small fry?” he said smiling, as he swept me up in his arms his unshaven face gently scraping my cheek.

“How has she been today?” He said looking at mom’s back. He’d stopped smiling. “Any better?”

I knew he was talking about me. They always asked each other first. They might ask me later but I never knew what to say anyway. I always just felt the same.

From where I watched I could see mom’s eyes looked too shiny and a drop fell onto her hand, she wiped it quickly on her apron and picked up the corner of it and squashed it against her eyes.

“This pan is too smoky, it’s stinging my eyes.” She whispered to me but I didn’t think it was smoky.

I thought I was ‘small fry’ because I was the youngest. I heard my big sister one day telling my brother it was because I was sick. She said that was why they were always bringing me to the hospital, why I had to get all the attention.

Amy and Patrick went into the living room to read their comics but I stayed. Mom didn’t say anything about how they’d driven her mad earlier fighting with each other even though she’d said she would. She’d shouted at them until she seemed to wear herself out and then she stopped as suddenly as she’d started and dropped down onto the couch beside me.

Dad stood up and put his arm across mom’s shoulder and kissed her on her cheek, she didn’t look up from the cooker until he turned to take off his jacket. He bent down to unlace his work boots; he pressed his toe against the heel and eased each foot out. Some dry mud off the bottom of his boots fell out onto the mat and he lifted it and shook it outside the door, then he went to wash his hands.

“I have to go soon.” She said when dad came back into the kitchen.

She’d got a job. When dad came in on a Friday night she went out, and all day Saturday as well. His shoulders dropped down on the end of a deep breath.

“It’s not worth it, this job. You’re going out when I’m coming in and two buses to get to it and after being in and out of the hospital all week.”

I didn’t like that she had to go but I was so happy having dad at home. He never got so stressed that he’d start to cry and he stayed really calm while he cleaned out the tube that gave me my medicine.

His jacket hung of the back of the chair I leaned my face against it. I could feel the roughness of the wool. Without looking I could see the little squares of dark red in the grey and I could smell the work off him when he moved. I traced my fingers along the thick veins that ran like rivers along his forearms and heard the rough skin on his hands as he rubbed his face trying to massage the tiredness away. I put my two small arms around his neck and tried my hardest to hug the tiredness out of him when I said goodnight.

I woke up later I didn’t know how much later and I heard them talking. I was glad mom was home, I hated the thought of her out in the dark, getting buses on her own. I crept downstairs. Through the crack in the door I could see her, she was sitting on the arm chair, she had slipped off her shoes and was stretching her toes out, they looked like they were trying to get away, grabbing on to the carpet until she clawed them back.

“It’s too much.” Dad said. “For you, and it’s hard on the kids as well.”

When he said that, her voice got a bit too high, like she was trying not to cry.

“We have no choice, we need the money, and if we can get enough to go home it will be worth it. It’s not like they’ll be scarred for life we’re doing our best, for God’s sake. We have to get home. I’ve had enough of all this and at least at home we’ll have family around us, it’ll help, with...”

She put her hands up to cover her face; I could hear her voice, it sounded like something was hurting her. “With everything” she said and then dad got up and pushed the door closed.



I went down the rest of the stairs and crossed the hall over to the front room. I couldn't hear mom's words, I just heard my name. I stared down at my bare feet and realised how cold they were. My head felt really sore again but I didn't want to go in to tell them in case they'd get mad at me for still being up. I went back up to bed as quietly as I could. I kind of knew they wouldn't want to see me and know I heard them talking. Sometimes when they thought I was asleep I heard them whispering in the dark. I heard my name and some words I didn't understand but I remember one of those words. They always whispered it, tumour. I hated the sound of that word.

On Saturday morning I woke up and heard dad's music playing. I was glad to see everything just the way it always was on a Saturday. The smell of the fry cooking, the sizzle of sausages and the way Dad never left the pan, not even for a minute but stayed holding it steady, kept it tilted to stop the fried bread getting soaked in grease. I sat curled up in my pyjamas watching him. I felt really tired. I had a page and colouring pencils and I drew a picture copying the pink flowers on my pyjama top. I told him it was a present for mom.

After breakfast he took off his watch and folded the face against the strap so it stood like a tiny clock on the window sill and he opened his wash bag and laid out his silver razor and short soft shaving brush. I dragged my chair over beside him to watch.

He brushed the soap all over his face and chin and then swept the silver razor, revealing smooth clean tracks of skin. His movements were slow like someone painting a picture, the razor held gently between his fingers and thumb. When he was finished he wiped thin lines of soap left on his face with the towel and bent down to kiss me. We could hear the noise of the other two arguing upstairs and breathing loudly he went to sort out whatever the argument was about.

I reached up and picked up the silver razor. It was heavier than I thought it would be but I was sure I would be able to use it. I had watched him so closely so many times. I made an attempt at swirling the lather brush over my face it was lovely and soft. I loved the soapy smell. I drew the razor down my face in lines just the way he did. I was almost finished when he came back into the room. I smiled at him but when I saw his face, I stopped smiling and I bit my lip, it tasted weird.

The other two had followed him still pushing and shoving each other until they saw me and stopped. He reached me in two long steps and took the razor out of my hand. He looked scared and that scared me. He grabbed the towel and twisted it and held it under the tap. His arm caught the mirror

on the sink and tilted it downwards. It was flipped over to the side that made everything seem really big and I saw what looked like my eyes peeping out above shiny red liver and then the blood began to drip onto my hands, down onto my pink pyjama top, while he pressed the wet towel against my face. It stung, little stings becoming bigger like when mom brought me to the hospital to get the needles but this time the stings were all over my face.

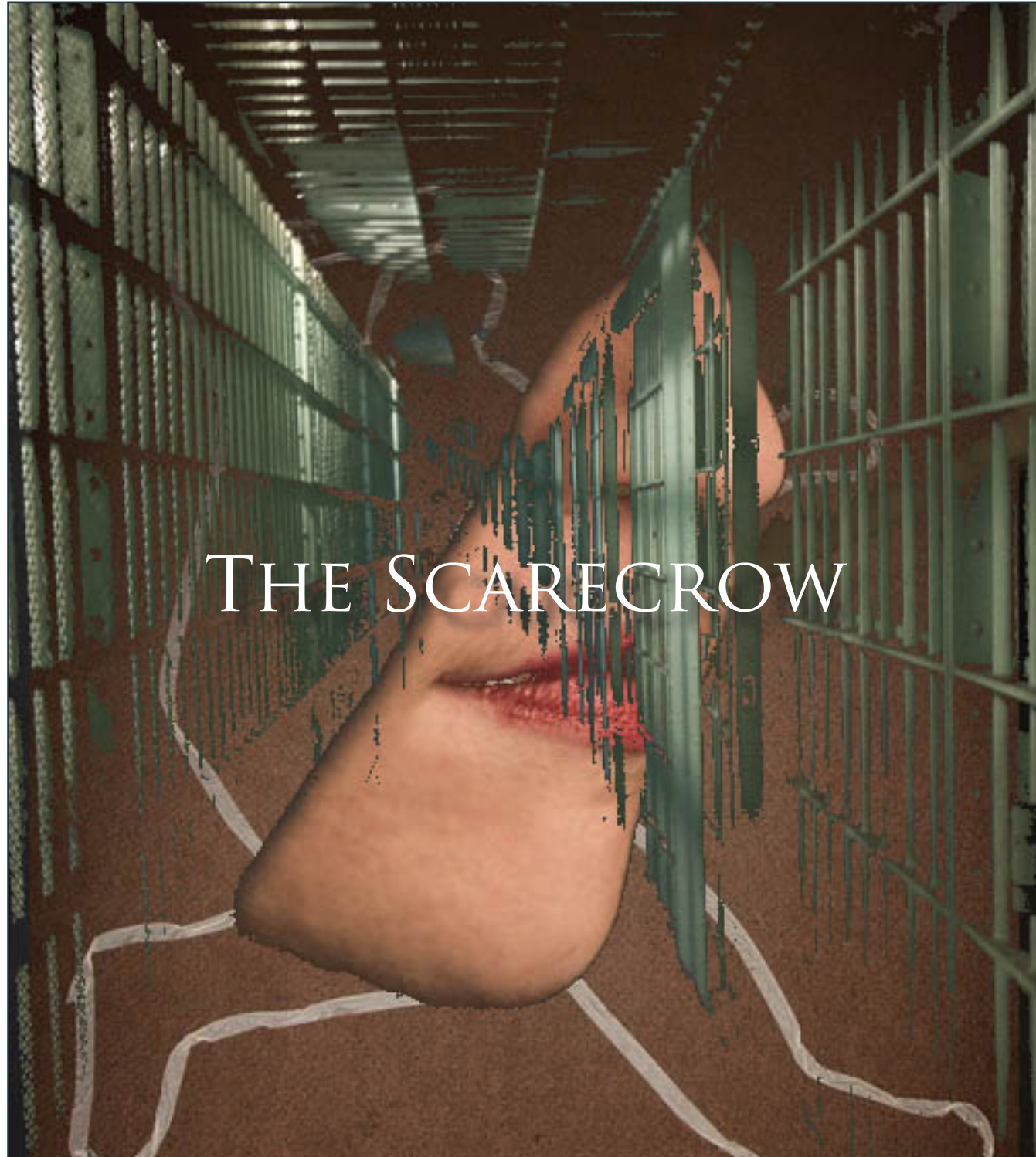
Mom always said everything would be okay in a while, it would make me better. She would hold me close all the way home from hospital telling me how brave I was. I didn't feel brave. I knew mom would have to get the two buses home and that it would take a long time and I didn't know if she could make me better this time.

Dad was holding the phone in one hand talking fast, his other hand let the towel against my face fall for a second, it was soaking wet with blood. I looked down at the flowers on my pyjama top, they looked all wrong; the pale pink was turning brown, they looked like flowers that had been left lying out in the rain until they got buried in the mud.



Laura Solomon has a 2.1 in English Literature and a Masters degree in Computer Science. Her books include *Black Light, Nothing Lasting, Alternative Medicine, An Imitation of Life, Instant Messages, Vera Magpie, Hilary and David, In Vitro, The Shingle Bar Sea Monster and Other Stories, University Days, Frida Kahlo's Cry* and *Brain Graft*. She was short listed for the 2009 Virginia Prize and the 2014 International Rubery Award and won the 2009 Proverse Prize. She has had work accepted in the Edinburgh Review and Wasafiri. She has judged the Sentinel Quarterly Short Story competition. Laura's new collection *Tales of Love and Disability* will be out soon from Woven Words Publishers.

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THE SCARECROW

They had me written off for dead. They found me in the field behind Kev Thompson's place, my eyes wide open, staring at the sun, my mouth hanging open, slack-jawed. It was a group of skin heads that did me over – I must have looked at them the wrong way, next thing I knew they attacked me down a Christchurch city alleyway, did me over good. They drove with my body out to a farm on the outskirts of the city and dumped me. I was found the next morning by Kevin, the farmer.

He drove with me to the nearest A&E which was located at St George's Hospital. I was patched up and sent back out to face the world after being kept in overnight for observation. In their cruelty, they had beaten me violently around the head with an iron bar and when I went back to my old life, I noticed that I suffered short term memory loss. I worked as an usher at the local theatre, but I took three months off work to recover. I joined the local brain injury support group and thanked my lucky stars when I saw some of the members – perhaps I had gotten off lightly. Some of the group's members could not walk or talk – those were mostly the car crash victims. We also had a couple of people who'd had brain tumours removed and another man who had been beaten up. We used to meet for coffees, pumpkin and chocolate chip muffins and chat at the Dux de Lux each Thursday.

I did exercises to improve my memory – sudoku and luminosity. I also utilised mnemonic devices.

I ate a lot of fish and fresh fruit and vegetables and consumed vitamins B, C, E and Omega-3 fish oil supplements. I did all I could to help myself. I did not smoke or drink. I lived the life of a saint. I treated my brain as a precious commodity. I could not afford to damage any more of its cells.

I met Molly through the brain injury support group. She'd had an astrocytoma brain tumour removed the previous spring and although the operation had gone smoothly it had still been scary. She'd had to learn how to walk again, with the aid of a physiotherapist. She still couldn't run. I took her on a date to the movies – I got free tickets. We went to see *This Beautiful Fantastic* – a British romantic drama. I took her hand half an hour into the film. She squeezed my hand tightly which I took to be a good sign.



The doctor had told me not to drive, but I hated not having my independence, so I was driving Molly home from the film along a dark Christchurch back road to her flat. Molly got a bit frisky on the way home and unzipped my trousers. I got a bit excited and didn't mind my driving like perhaps I should have. I veered off the road – there was an awful thump; something heavy bounced off the bonnet and then the windscreen. O God what had I hit, a sheep? A dog?

I stopped the car told Molly to stay put and went out to investigate. The headlights were still on so I could clearly see what I had hit. It was a man. I rushed over he was lying so still. I bent down to hear if he was still breathing and could smell the overwhelming odour of alcohol. I panicked - I had hit a person!

"We hit him, it's our fault, we could go to jail." I jumped and turned Molly had gotten out of the car and was standing behind me. Her face registered shock and she was shaking. I stared at her not knowing what to say or do. She stared back at me then suddenly burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Don't worry." I squeaked. Surprised at my strained voice I cleared my throat. I think he's dead but I'll call an ambulance.

"No." she retorted back at me "We can't involve the authorities, it was my fault I was distracting you, I'll get into trouble. We will both get into trouble. We'll go to jail!"

"What are we going to do then?" I said "We can't just leave him here."

"We need to dispose of the body," she whispered back at me looking around as she did so as if there might be ears around to hear her outrageous idea.

"C'mon help me," she said bending over the body and grabbing the dead man's shoulders.

I was in shock - I didn't know what to do. I felt I wasn't in control of my body at that moment let alone my mind. I found myself mechanically moving and bending down to pick up his legs. We carried him to the car, placed him in the back seat in a lying down position, and got into the front seats. We drove without speaking. I had given up thinking of what to do I was just following Molly's orders on autopilot. We approached the Rakaia Bridge. Molly told me to stop, so I did.

Next thing you know we were dragging the body out of the back seat and hurling it over the edge of the bridge.

I drove Molly home in silence. Dropped her back at her flat and told her I hoped she could sleep ok after what we had done.

"I'll be ok," she said "I have some sleeping pills."

The body washed up six weeks later. There were news reports on TV and the radio. Molly and I argued about whether to confess or not. I wanted to come clean, she didn't.

"We could be had on manslaughter or even murder charges", said Molly. "Your doctor and the DVLA had told you not to drive and you were driving. I was distracting you. It doesn't look good. We didn't own up at the time. We tried to cover up. It'll look terrible in court."

The guilt started to get to us. I jumped at every knock at the door, imagining it to be a policeman come to handcuff me and take me away, and then the nightmares started up. They were terrible dark dreams where I was buried alive next to the man we had killed, locked in the coffin with him, unable to break free.

Somebody doxed us in. As it turns out somebody had seen our car stopped at the edge of the Rakaia Bridge and thought it odd and noted down our licence plate number in case something fishy was going on. Bloody snoops. We got ten years each – the judge said our brain injuries were a mitigating factor or it would have been longer. She served her sentence in Arohata Prison in Tawa, I did time at Christchurch Men's. We wrote longing love letters to each other from our cells, told each other to keep thinking of our release date, that glorious day in the future when we would have served our sentence and would be set free – free to roam planet earth once more, free to shop and cook and take delight in each other, free to console one another over our injuries, free to smile and understand.

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POETRY & WRITING

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