

2010 - 2024



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
SPECIAL HUMOUR EDITION
JUNE 2024

LES WICKS
"Ya Gotta Laugh"?

COVER ARTWORK 'I SHUT MY EYES IN ORDER TO SEE'
BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS. DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2024

Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:

Live Encounters Magazine (2010), Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (2016), Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers (2019) and now, Live Encounters Books (August 2020).

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

[Donate](#)

All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home country and/or elsewhere.



HUMOUR
JUNE 2024

CONTRIBUTORS

LES WICKS – GUEST EDITORIAL
ALAN JEFFERIES
ANGELA STRETCH
BRENDA SAUNDERS
BRENDAN RYAN
BRIAN PURCELL
CECILIA MORRIS
DANNY GARDNER
DOMINIQUE HECQ
FRANCES ROUSE
JAN NAPIER
JANE DOWNING
JELTJE FANOY
JENNIFER ALLEN
JENNIFER DICKERSON
JILL JONES
JONATHAN CANT
JOHN CAREY
KIT KELEN

MARGARET BRADSTOCK
MARGARET OWEN RUCKERT
MARK O'FLYNN
MARK ROBERTS
MARK LANGFORD
MICHELE SEMINARA
NEIL BROSNAN
NORM NEILL
PETER BAKOWSKI
RAY LIVERSIDGE
RON WILKINS
ROSS DONLON
SAARA LAMBERG
SARAH ST VINCENT WELCH
SUZI MEZEI
TIM TRAIN
TUG DUMBLY
USHA AKELLA

Les Wicks has been published across 38 countries in 17 languages. His 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022). He can be found at leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm



LES WICKS “YA GOTTA LAUGH”?

There have been a panoply of themes in literary magazines ranging from carpe diem to carp. But never, to my knowledge, one that looks at humour.

I believe it's a potentially rich and fresh area for exploration. The very words 'humour' and 'comedy' can be ill-laden to some. Perhaps there's a fear that poetry will “not be taken seriously” if it contains humour. Some may think it downgrades the “lofty” position our artform occupies.

Of course, humour can be broad and obvious, but conversely it can be dry, subtle, ironic, understated. It can make points and move emotions without having to sledge people over the head.

If communication and connection remain core aims of we practitioners, then humour is a demonstrably highly effective entry point to the consciousness of our readership.

One of the interesting challenges in this collection was to showcase the variation of humour across gender, cultures and generations. I'm grateful for this opportunity, thanks Mark Ulyseas!

I hope the issue elicits a few laughs and introspections!

Distilled from a dialogue between myself & Tug Dumbly

Alan Jefferies is a poet and children's author born in Brisbane and raised in Quandamooka Country, the Redlands. He started writing in High School and publishing after moving to Sydney in the mid-seventies. For many years he worked as a librarian and teacher at The Workers' Educational Association, Sydney. Between 1998 and 2007 he lived and worked in Hong Kong where he co-founded *OutLoud* – Hong Kong's longest running English language poetry reading. He's published six books of poetry, his most recent being *'in the same breath'* (Flying Islands) which was launched in Sydney in February, 2022.



PLANS

I live around friendly people
why, even I will occasionally be asked
at the check-out:
"Any plans for the rest of your day?"

and my answer's always the same
"Stay outta jail..."
just to see their reaction.

Like I said,
I live around friendly people.

Alan Jefferies

Angela Stretch is a Sydney based poet, curator, writer and organiser from Otautahi, Christchurch, Aotearoa, New Zealand. The artist uses language and poetry through different mediums and has been exhibited and published nationally, and internationally. She is the director of Poetry Sydney and intelligent animal. She produces Arts Friday on Eastside Radio and is an administrator at Arts Law Centre of Australia.



REMOTE

*Fly, while you choose
this room to Zoom in
hot-wired, swift as a disease
visible enough to swipe
the buzz you reply with
suggests my timing extends
the time of your life*

Angela Stretch

Brenda Saunders is a Wiradjuri writer and performer. Her poetry and short fiction appear in edited anthologies and journals both on-line and in print, including *Westerly*, *Mascara*, *Anthology of Best Australian Prose Poems 2021* (Melbourne University Press) *Best Australian Poems 2022* (Australian Poetry) and *Best Australian Science Writing 2021 and 2023* (New South Books). She has performed her memoirs and microfiction in several Sonic City Sydney events and won International Awards for her Short Films: *The White Leopard Award*, Canada, 2022, *Best Script Prize* (London Independent Short Films) and the *New York Arthouse Film Fest Award* in 2023.



CATWALK

She was lying there, lifeless. We were taking our places for the parade, found her stretched out at the foot of the staircase, glittering in silver blue lamé. So dramatic. I thought she was just creating, playing the star, until I saw the blood. She was not popular. Some girls gave her a hard time, thought her too pushy. It is a cut throat business. Still, she didn't deserve this. No one saw anything. We were all too busy with makeup and last-minute fittings. The place was spinning with Press. This is a disaster. Today was our one big chance on the catwalk. To shine, be noticed by top designers. I didn't know her well but dying today ruined it for everyone.

- after Darren Sylvester, 'Broken Model' 2016, light jet print 240 x 320 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

Brenda Saunders

Brendan Ryan lives in Geelong. His poetry, reviews and essays have been published in literary journals and newspapers, including Contemporary Australian Poetry (Puncher and Wattman) and The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry. The author of seven collections of poetry, his memoir, *Walk Like a Cow*, was published in 2020 by Walleah Press. His latest collection of poetry is *Feldspar*, published by Recent Work Press 2023. His *New and Selected Poems* will be published in 2025 by Recent Work Press.



WHAT'S IN A CARAVAN NAME?

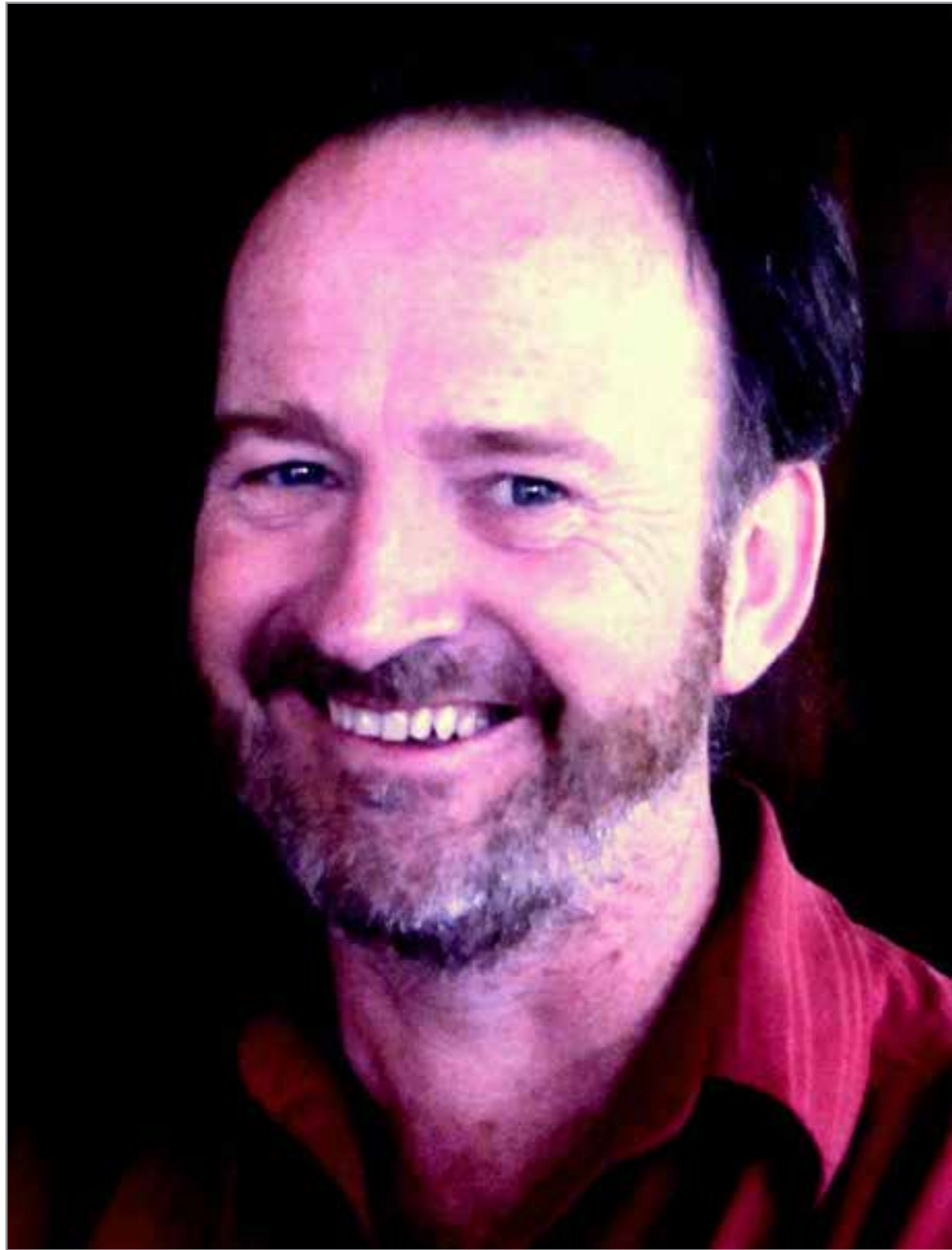
Swift, Dove, Penguin
 Hawk, Eagle, Swan
 Goldstream, Millard, Viscount
 Genesis, Esperance, Blue Sky
 Leader, Serenity Source, Wonderland
 Evernew, Cruisin', Esperance
 Silverline, Starcraft, Outlander
 Atlantis, Elegance, Destiny
 Galaxy, Supreme, Expanda
 Good life, Golden Child, Bellagio

Scorpion, Patriot, Dirt Roader
 Enforcer, Bush Tracker, Razorback
 Defender, Counterstrike, Crusader
 Gator, Road Owl, Manta Ray
 Trooper, Razor, Eliminator

often towed by a Defender, Ram or Raptor.

Brendan Ryan

Brian Purcell is a poet/painter from Bellingen, NSW. Publishing credits include Meanjin, Plumwood Mountain, Southerly, and anthologies like *Australian Love Poems*. He's had two exhibitions at the Shop Gallery in Glebe, *The Day on Fire*, and *Estuary*. His book *The Leaving* was published in 2022 by Flying Islands Pocket Poets.



Brian Purcell

DUSTY CRIES

Every time
 Dusty cries
 her love for the Preacher Man
 a man with a horse's head
 dances on a table
 Lewis Carroll thinks
 of his lust for Alice
 or her sister
 or their governess
 before his head hits the glass
 and absinthe tips
 to the whirling floor.
 Victoria approves
 as Albert spins the grooves
 and Dusty melts
 slowly
 into a hot Memphis night
 like a Dali dog
 pursuing lost memories.

2001 spins around
 as Kubrick fakes the moon landings.
 It's the sixties, 19 or 18
 and everyone's tripping
 on laudanum or LSD.
 They exchange dirty postcards
 and end up on Brighton Pier
 with Dickens or James Dean
 and a note from Graham Greene
 to George who's failed to find
 the road to Wigan Pier
 and coughs out the dust
 from the streets of his people's tears.

continued overleaf...

Haven't you gone to ground yet
or found the whirling tunnel?
Tell all to look up
at the satellite
moving through the skies
of parallel times
as it sells its fears
to an ecstatic world
and Dusty smiles, sighs
and falls into bed
with a beehive on her head –
there's no easy way down



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Cecilia Morris is a Melbourne writer/poet and had three non fiction books on relationships published. Her poetry has been published in various magazines and books such as Quadrant, Poetry Monash, Australian Award Winning Poetry, The Age, Poetici Christi, Reflecting on Melbourne, Everyday Splendour. Awarded first prize in Bayside Poetry, Positive Words and Poetica Christi. She's had four poetry anthologies published. She has facilitated a poetry group which she initiated 17 years ago. This year she will also be running a workshop on poetry in Cairns.



WHAT I HAVE NOW LOST

Grandfathers gold fob watch
 Two husbands
 Uterus and fallopian tubes
 Part detachment of retina in eyes
 Recipes I was always going to make
 Teeth teeth teeth
 Glossy hair
 Friends
 Fathers only letter
 Socks
 Knickers
 Ordered cupboards
 Bone density
 Height
 7 hours straight sleep

Cecilia Morris

Danny Gardner is a poet, novelist and freelance journalist. He has published several books of poetry – latest collection 'Figure in a Landscape' (Ginninderra Press) 2022. A book of non-fiction 'Brains in My Feet – Encounters While Travelling' was launched in 2014. He has been convening Live Poets @ Don Bank (North Sydney) since 2003. He first appeared with Auburn Poets & Writers Group at the Sydney Writers Festival 2008. He has been the group's co-ordinator since 2014.



OPERA HOUSE EXHIBITION

Everyman's crockery on a drying rack.
 Kingston's bark raft under a nightmare of the Kimberley Heads.
 Brett Whiteley had forgotten to remove a rainy-day unmentionable.
 Brother Bridge, Sister Aria,
 the ugly ladies lost at Luna.
 For Ken Done it was all sticks of a popsicle.
 For Martin Sharp it was Tiny Tim in his jim jams.
 A native engraving the hut-site where Barangaroo wept.
 A burning desire Lloyd Rees could hardly see.
 Much less Reg Mombasa's Jesus as Santa with local fauna.
 No match for Kevin Connor's sweaty viles!
 Or John Coburn's exotic windows.
 We look at the night-harbour through others sipping champers . . .
 Where the fizz are we indeed?
 Bring me your poor, your dispossessed
 I'll give them a snow dome.

Danny Gardner

Dominique Hecq is a widely anthologised and award-winning prose poet, fiction writer, essayist and translator. She lives and works on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land (Naarm / Melbourne). Her latest bilingual collection, *Pistes de rêve* has just been released by Transignum. *Volte Face* (Liquid Amber Press) and *OTOPOS* (Beltway Editions) are slated for publication in June 2024.



Dominique Hecq

HONEYMOON, AGAIN

Son's driving, beanie pulled low over his head. Hubby and Dolly are in the back. I'm seated shotgun, staring out the window, wishing we were there already. But it will be another hour yet.

Hubby mutters something about air. That he's not feeling well.

Hazza, open your window.

Naff you. Open your own damn window.

Water beads on the windscreen. Trickles. *Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.* A flash of sunshine cuts through the grey of the morning.

This was once grazing country, spotted with orchards and market gardens. Now it's a wasteland of rib-roofed factories, fast food joints, storage facilities and new housing developments.

Look at those burbs, says Dolly who doesn't seem to have ventured beyond her old one. And what's that dust bowl?

A raceway, I say.

Our suitcases are so heavy the car's moving at one mile per hour. It smells like Dolly the widow. And the odour of a musty bookshop. I imagine it's the whiff of her dead husband—smoked rollies to the end.

I look in the rear-vision mirror. Hubby looks like a missionary of the Sacred Heart. His eyes have a faraway look. He's cranky, but long-suffering. The window, and too much of butter and honey on his morning crumpet. It seeped through the bottom and out onto his sleeve. Dolly looks miles ahead, a hand-woven scarf over her white bob, creases behind her designer specs, lined face and a frilled dragon throat poking out of purple mohair. Miles ahead of this expedition to Disney town, spa country that drowned years of my life. She too needs a change.

continued overleaf...

Rain soft but persistent. Windscreen constantly fogging up. Eucalypts shrouded in fog glide in and out of view as we cruise down the valley. We're nearly at Woodend. Little way to go yet. Above the tree line, snow clouds threaten: sullen, angry fronds scouring the ground. It's mid-winter; soon this rolling expanse of grass and heath will disappear beneath a thin crust of snow. The snow won't last. It never does. Even at Bullarto.

I look in the side rear-view mirror. Hubby leans forward as if wanting to say something. Sinks back in his snow beard and tweed. He rubs shoulders with Dolly, ready to offer sympathy, give succour.

Don't know what to think of Dolly anymore. A convert. They're the worst. Always needing comfort. The only daughter who disappoints. The spouse who self-hangs. The best friend who dies. The difficult wife who rocks the boat—the brittle one who creates out of her flesh *and* pen.

I see snatches of my life in the febrile silence. Snowflakes falling like lint from the night sky on our wedding night as he turns his back to me, his Bible on the bedside table, gold letters glaring. The bone-splitting cold. Flaring gossip of a far-flung town. Weatherboard church. Unkempt graveyard. Six kids I barely know. Days and days full of nothings: wake to a baby's crying, split wood, gather kindling, light the fire. Dump self-rising flour, cream and lemonade into a bowl. Mix, roll dough onto a floured board. Cut out circles, bake. And scrub and scrub. Hold words close to heart and run them to ground through the night under a fluorescent lamp, glass of wine at hand. Drift in a direction that's not your own. Sex, birthdays only. Sometimes Christmas—missionary.

Forecast is snow in Disney town, I say, glee in my voice.

Son casts me a sideways glance. The first born; a burst condom. We were not there yet, but when his brother, another condom, died, the long Catholic Road seemed to wound and wound until it caught up with my sleepwalking. Four girls I prised open from the nuns' clutches after I stopped drinking. Two estranged.

Mum, a hawk.

Watch the road, love.

I accepted her invitation, said Hubby the first time he and Dolly went out for dinner. I bet! Look at him: all smiles with her. Never mind his bad faith: she's just a friend; a nice old lady.

One night, for fuck's sake. What's in these bloody suitcases, anyway, I ask.

Show some respect, Hezza.

Not interested.

We're in the same boat.

That's only for you to say.

I'm pulling over, says Son. At least I can get some blood pumping back into these legs. And get some fresh air.

Frosty gravel, roadside pull-over spot. Son's sitting on the bonnet of the car, eating a sandwich I packed—ham and cheese with pickles. He looks down on the gravel, hunched over a little. I watch him eat, wonder what he makes of this party.

Dolly's standing on a big, jagged boulder, looking at the trees above, squinting as though a noose might materialise. I'm thinking about the four of us in that bubble of a car. What we're doing here. The rift between us.

Where's dad?

A piss, maybe.

continued overleaf...

He emerges from the bushes, beams at Dolly: sorry, call of nature.

I shuffle across the back seat, not to get close to Dolly, but to check on the cases that poke out behind. They're army suitcases. RAF badges embossed. I meet Dolly's gaze. Will's cases. Two crates of Shiraz. Brokenwood Rayner vineyard. The best. Ever. She sniggers.

Son starts the car. It whirrs like a fridge that's about to conk out.

Come on. Mum, in your seat.

I sit. Shut my eyes. Where has my life gone—run out of road, rolled over?

Oooh, little lambs, says Dolly.

Manly grunt. Bit early for lambing season.

Only one lamb in a fenced paddock. One munching ram and one ewe. Nice old lady. Meek and calm. Compliant. And sentimental. Why be anything than that? Is this Woodend? she asks like she can't read.

Yup.

Why be *that* when you can *create*?

Fancy scones over an open fire? asks Son. Winks at me.

Nah. Push on.

Left turn. Right. On towards Spring Hill. Romantic way. Mostly open paddocks right down to the narrow bridge where we once waited for yonks as an echidna crossed over, a tiny snout poking out of its pouch. Clumps of iron barks, scruffy she-oaks, skinny barks. Out the front of lone farmhouses, post-boxes like miniature barrels. Pulling over, sorry, says Son. Not too good.

But we're only minutes away from Daylesford, says Dolly.

Hubby's quiet.

No offence, Heather, but why d'you call it Disney town?

Hubby shrugs.

Such a *lovely* place.

Gotta go, I say. Hop out. Crouch behind a bush.

Pink and white heather in bloom. Wild orchids. Swell of wattle.

The car drives away, weatherbound. I watch it getting smaller and smaller. Air in equipoise. Snowflakes twirl through it. The heather hums.

Hallelujah! Let it be done. I turn back to the promise of a wood fire and scones. Waltz on the open road, snow sweet on my tongue. In the distance, wings spread out against the shellacked sky, a hawk.

Frances Rouse lives in Toowoomba, Queensland. Her poems have regularly appeared in *Island*, *Overland*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly* and *Quadrant* etc, and overseas journals. She was also *The Sydney Morning Herald's* one-time poetry editor. Her short stories have also been published, radio plays broadcast, and a stage play received public readings Australia-wide, in Hawaii and New Zealand, and a production in Ukraine. After a period of family responsibilities, her poems have appeared in *Red Room Poetry* online, the collection "Goya en la Poesía (Zaragoza, Spain), and *Antipodes* (USA).



WALKING THE LINE

(With apologies to Johnny Cash and Kevin Costner)

Of course it's a highway;
no, make that a viaduct:
the yellow plastic tight-rope
stretched taut over '70's jungle
of *camellia*, *lagerstroemia*,
acanthus, *agapanthus*,
salvia and *via concretum*;
paralleling, 300 metres east,
the ragged edge of Great Divide,
border between western Giabal
and eastern Jagara lands.

Now, as I hang the washing,
there is *movement* across my eyeline:
a multi-lingual patrol of *ants* –
(*Paiamba*, *English*, *Latin?* No probs) -
but without Multuggera
or Jeffrey Smart signs
to alternative Caminos,
steadily they must perambulate,
passing on to colleagues
handy hints for negotiating
miniature-high-rise pegs,
corrugations of towels,
cliff-edges of sheets,
and convolutions of bras ...

After all, if you build it
they will come.

Frances Rouse

Jan Napier is a Western Australian writer. 'Early: a morning,' won the 2023 KSP Poetry Prize and her villanelle 'Wiltshire 1840,' won the 2022 Ethel Webb Blundell Poetry Prize. Jan's work has been published in journals and anthologies both here and overseas.



MY NEIGHBOUR AT SIXTY-NINE

She's an *early girly*, strides the beach by the light of fading stars, hair like a white bushfire flickering around walnut features. Daybreak is honey pudding porridge, news channel on mute. She comes out at dawn and dusk, says she'll puff to dust in sunlight, doesn't believe in high cholesterol, shouts at her doctor that he's not going to stop her eating chocolate, wriggles into Mary Quant minis and stilletoes on birthdays, says husbands are *like helium balloons, full of gas and bad for the environment*. Old photos of her Cocker, Toffee, make her face a waterfall. She'll never get another. *They just die*. The orange tree goes unwatered, drops bitter little bombs in winter because she's *over taking care of things*. She adores all things French except Marcel Marceau, *he's creepy*, wafts around the house singing La Vie en Rose in a vodka contralto, op shop beret at a risque angle, swears there's nanobots in covid vaccines, mutters *bloody Russians or do I mean Chinese?* Anyway, she's off to read Nora Roberts. Who else is there? And her horoscope naturally. She's a Gemini but can't quite make her mind up about that...

Jan Napier

Jane Downing's poetry has appeared in journals at home in Australia and overseas, including previously in Live Encounters. Her collection, 'When Figs Fly' (Close-Up Books) was published in 2019. She can be found at janedowning.wordpress.com



7 HABITS FOR MODERATELY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

do stuff
 stuff what they say
 ignore stuff and nonsense
 stuff as much as you can into your day
 when the stuffing is knocked out of you
 if you can help it never say 'stuff it'
 just try not to stuff it up
 keep doing stuff

Jane Downing

Jeltje Fanoy has been involved with poetry and poetry small presses in Melbourne since the nineteen seventies. This poem is part of a series of park poems. She's been spending a lot of time in a little park near her home these last couple of years, as a carer for a close friend. However, birds do appear everywhere in her work.



MID-AUTUMN FLEDGLING

Laughing at us -
strutting willy-nilly,
here and there

or dreamlike,
purposeless strutting

or irritable gait
of stressed-out fledgling,
magpies in the park

Jeltje Fanoy

Jennifer Allen is a satirical poet who lives in Melbourne, Australia with two daughters, a husband and a cat. Jennifer's second collection of poems titled 'Everything Feeds It' was published by Recent Work Press in March 2024.



EXCERPT FROM: THE AMORTAL'S GUIDE TO SIDESTEPPING AWKWARD SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Avoid mentioning death, it will only offend.
The augmented over-sensitivities of amortals
are accident-prone, flesh-eating minefields.

Possessors of life-extensions are excruciatingly
aware of the risks posed by plane crashes, random
killings and decapitations by delivery drone.

Subtle dark humour will not be appreciated.
Of course all possible precautions for averting life
and aging are taken, but accidents still happen.

Elude the dreaded D-word; prefer euphemisms
such as 'leaving a digital legacy' or 'wearing
the wooden onesie' to eschew being ghosted.

Jennifer Allen

Jennifer Dickerson First work published in 1940s in a school magazine, and Woman magazine (later renamed Womans Day).1955 Melbourne Herald-Sun Melbourne as a cadet journalist. Set up a South coast writers group Kitchen Table Poets under auspices of Chris Mansell. Books: "DICKERSON Against the tide", "Chiaroscuro", "Quirky Verse" (2015, Turpentine) & "The Claimants Daughter" (2017, Turpentine).



Jennifer Dickerson

ON AN AVERAGE DAY

On an average day
young men in the street notice me,
perhaps it's my wildly weaving trolley.

"Can I help you?" is asked.
Too late for that, I think,
where were you when I was 18?

Then I reboot, because they weren't alive,
and make a joke "Only if you've
a spare pair of legs." They laugh.

Five seats to take a breather,
between the shops and home.
Wait time about ten minutes each!

First outside the perfumier -inhale deeply,
Then the hairdresser, he'll give a wave.
How does my hair look today?

Third is the newsagent- I wonder...
Do I need to know the news?
Pick up a paper for the crossword.

Fourth seat there's an array of cakes.
Speed up to give this stop a miss,
drooling with sugar desire.

Five the last revival seat by the antique shop.
Appropriate I think, with my ancient trolley
we become part of the display.

My front door and another "Can I help you?"
I smile as I pull my gear through the gate.
If I die today at least I am at home.

Jill Jones latest book: *Acrobat Music: New & Selected Poems* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2023).



MODES (OF NOTHING)

There's a long shadow under the tree.

Heat's expensive at the switch or outside.
Asphalt wriggles towards the beach.

We make bright portraits of anything flavourless
or mashups of cats and Fortnite.

Time to rizz up? Pink shoes kind of.

Retail fills car-boots in the long afternoon.

Day glitters with sunscreen. How much loss
is left in aquifers, the Black Sea, a cancelled series.

Fruit and vegetables need a new climate.

A monologue ensues in the supermarket aisle.
We know we're being spied on. We accept cookies.

'Are salads now extinct?' Use the 'sniff test'.

Locate your missing artefacts. Call Triple Zero.

'Think twice before sending.'

Rules are breaking, even the mosquitoes are winning.

'The synthetic voice is so cosy.'
Come out at night. Feed on blood.

Jill Jones

Jonathan Cant is a Sydney-based writer, poet, and musician. He won the 2023 Banjo Paterson Writing Awards for Contemporary Poetry, was Longlisted for the 2023 Fish Poetry Prize, and the 2022 Flying Islands Poetry Manuscript Prize, Commended in the W. B. Yeats Poetry Prize, Highly Commended in the South Coast Writers Centre Poetry Awards, and twice selected for the Ros Spencer Anthology *Brushstrokes*. Jonathan's poems have appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Otoliths*, and Booranga Writers' Centre's *fourW thirty-four*.



ACROSTIC FOR PAM

Down on her Valium supply, my ex (let's call her *Pam*) wore a short skirt and stockings
 Into the clinic to impress the doctor at prescription time. If it all went to script—
 And it always did, he'd come out renewed, too. And so, with a newfound
 Zeal, she'd return home with all she needed to take the edge off her speed comedown.
 Examining the packet label one day, I found for her the fineprint warning didn't apply:
*Prescription only medicine. May cause DROWSINESS and may increase the effects of
 Alcohol. If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate
 Machinery.* No problem there. At 33, she'd never held a driver's licence.

Jonathan Cant

John Carey was a Sydney poet who had six collections published, the last being "Dead Cat Bounce" (Puncher & Wattmann 2021). He enjoyed writing playful humorous and satirical poems (often best heard in his own voice) as well as writing lyrical and personal poems.



COME ALL YE LITIGANTS...

It's your right to be blissfully happy and your duty too.
So subject each moment of contentment to the closest scrutiny
to see if it measures up. If it doesn't, find someone to sue:
unlovable neighbours, uncivil authorities, mutinous
partners, travel agents, jewellers, doctors, as a last resort,
God. At least be noticed. Drag someone through the courts.
Don't even go to the toilet without your lawyer
like at school when you hired the biggest bully
to out-bully the other bullies. The first step
is to admit you're powerless before fate and seek
professional help. Happiness shared is happiness gained:
fifty-fifty (or in practice, twenty-eighty.)

John Carey

Kit Kelen is Australia's most consistently persistent minor poet. Find him every day at <https://thedailykitkelen.blogspot.com/>



PUT ON A FRESH SHIRT TO BID AT THE AUCTION

how many beans in the jar?
adrenalin pumps

make up numbers no one's heard before
will never hear again

it's something and one
said just for fun

oh and oh for the dice' next throw

the script has
termites
no kitchen
falling walls
plumbing never quite paid for

who'll meet me at 643?
do we get in the door at 644?

if the increment fits
and starts

do I hold up
how many paws, paddles?
why can't we live together?
wasn't that soul?

Kit Kelen

continued overleaf...

count backwards
that will get 'em riled
play for the zero sum

and where it trends nobody knows
egg on
with confidence and zeal

this beast
like a magic bean graph
will reach the heavens yet

mind of the hive says something and five

be breathless
don't wait

a next fresh number ends in nine
fresh paint and the multitude sins

will this hovel yet be mine?

so solemn po
the auctioneer

all the good ones go to heaven
all our sixes now are seven

like in the waiting room
and everyone wants the job
so we interview each other

still not too late at eighty eight

who has the baton?

you say bingo

once twice
three times the spell
that hammer is only my heart

Margaret Bradstock has nine published collections of poetry, including *The Pomelo Tree* (winner of the Wesley Michel Wright Prize) and *Barnacle Rock* (winner of the Woollahra Festival Award, 2014). Editor of *Antipodes* (2011) and *Caring for Country* (2017), Margaret won the Banjo Paterson Poetry Award in 2014, 2015 and 2017. Her latest collection, from Puncher & Wattmann, is *Alchemy of the Sun* (2024).



A PIECE OF DOGGEREL

My townhouse neighbour snubs me
bald head averted, sniffs with disdain
as I pass by.

Because I won't contribute
to the cost of his solar panels.

His dog loves me. A feisty Labradoodle,
she always stops at my front door
to sniff the plants, waits
for her pat and a cuddle.

He's left on the stairs
nose out of joint, shouting for her
in his twangy accent, dangling
the empty leash.
And I am glad!

Margaret Bradstock

Margaret Owen Ruckert is a prize-winning poet, with a wide variety of poetry published. Two books *You Deserve Dessert* and *musefood* explore café culture. Five books of tanka explore landscape through ekphrasis. Living in Sydney, she facilitates Hurstville's Discovery Writers, presenting monthly writing workshops.



STILETTO CAKE

stacked on self-esteem cow-bull confident the cake called 'stiletto' takes direction from its unisex name potent as painted toenails controversial as daggers targets a rich market those flamboyant clients dressed to kill with coffee conversation the extreme life syndicate

this cake will invariably be tall enough to allow even the shortest of paparazzi a shot at best cake photograph of the year even best shoe photograph too soon the crumbs are bird food all evidence of a tête-à-tête deleted a body removed for analysis

this cake understands no limits being bred for stilettos it teeters on the heels of fame is mention from food-fashion writers sufficient for celebrity status diamond engagements must it wait to become a staple on restaurant menus before achieving five-star status

the recommended daily size for a portion of this cake refuses recognition being too shrewd an individual a chameleon in the wilds of the lunch jungle a dinner sinner dream slice of action with chocolate and its dancing partner that energetic cream

a stiletto cake foot-art food evolutionary intimate café visionary evades the table games played by café cognoscenti it survives the buzz words of style bees swarming like flies who ready their venom of foul food words for a public stabbing this cake says ... try me

Margaret Owen Ruckert

Mark O'Flynn works across various forms and has published poetry and fiction. He has published several collections of poetry as well as three novels.



THE HANKY DRAWER

Going through my father's precious debris
I came across a shared drawer.
In it, beneath handkerchiefs

and doilies, I found a small cardboard box
of great, withered age. In this, under a greasy rag
I discovered what I thought were triple A batteries

but on closer inspection turned out to be
DETONATORS – with the proviso – DANGER.
My father was an engineer

wasn't there a story about some sweaty
gelignite found in a farmer's shed
buried under blackberry twenty years ago?

And didn't he once blow up tree stumps
to clear the ground to grow jojoba beans?
But why here in the handkerchief drawer?

where at any time in the last two decades
they might have blown my mother's
fingers off while reaching for a hanky.

So I took them to the cops.
I could have thrown them in the fire, or held
them in a vice and hit them with a shovel

Mark O'Flynn

continued overleaf...

but, no, I was acting responsibly,
unlike some.
When I placed them on the desk and explained

what they were, both policemen visibly
stiffened. Glanced
at each other, edging crabwise towards the door.

One said: 'You shouldn't have brought them in here.'
I asked, rhetorically, 'Do you want me to take
them back out?' 'No,' he cried, 'don't touch them!'

DANGER – DETONATORS sat between us on the desk.
Palpably worried they asked if my father
kept any other weapons at home.

My father – weapons? No, he was an engineer.
You couldn't move a metre in his house without
being able to put your hand on a screwdriver.

As executor of the estate I was civility itself,
all apologies and *mea culpas*,
more than glad to hand the problem over.

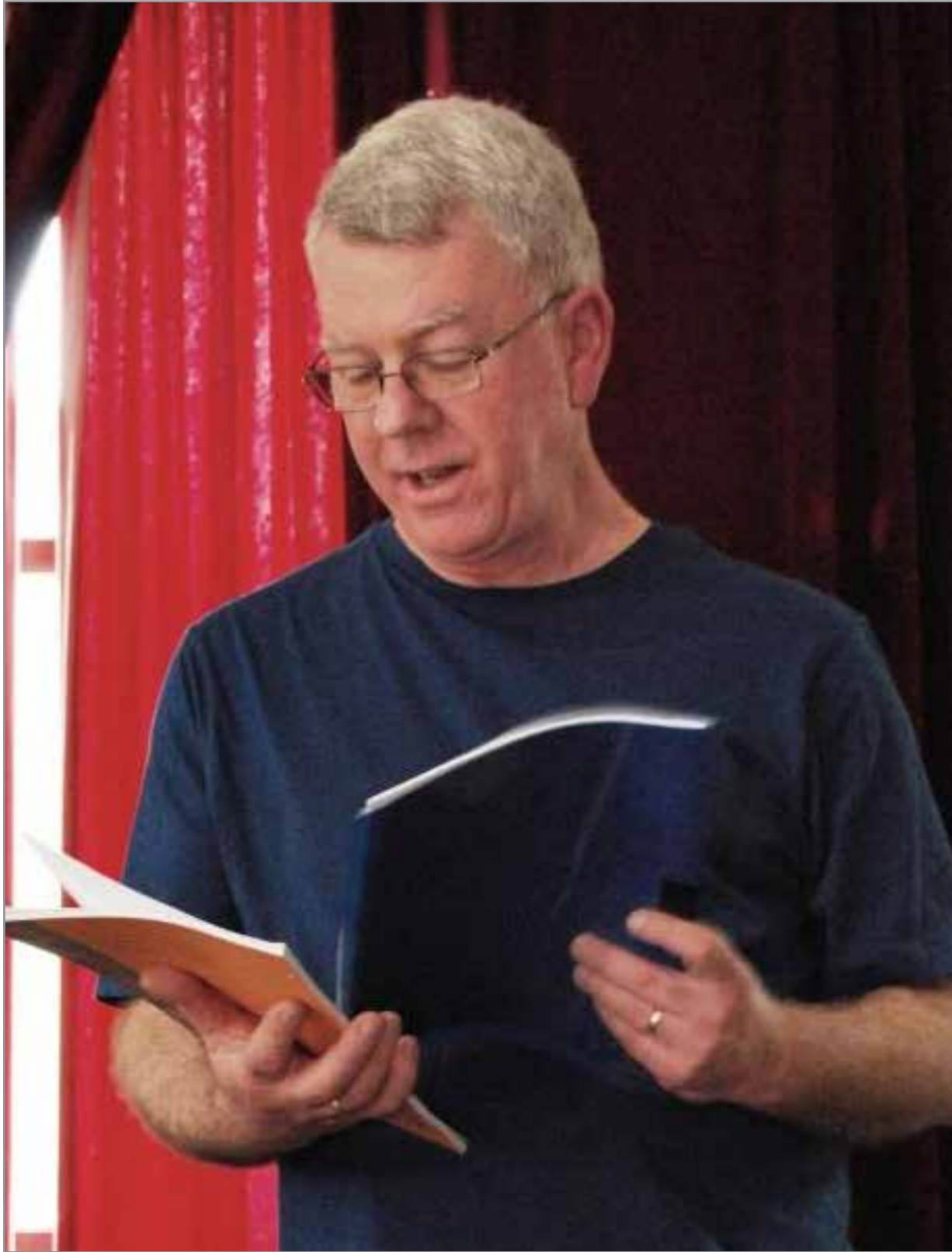
I went back outside to the cool, autumn sunshine,
a car full of bags of rubbish, once my
father's fleeting things, now destined for the tip.

Tomorrow the sock drawer.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mark Roberts lives and writes on unceded Darug and Gundungurra country. Along with Linda Adair he edits *Rochford Street Review* and *P76* magazine. His latest collection, *Concrete Flamingos* (2016) was published by Island Press and he currently has two manuscripts looking for a publisher.



THE DEMISE OF POETRY

This poem has no merit.
It has spent too much time
speeding around mountain curves
without considering the need for punctuation,
crossing to the wrong side of the page
while avoiding Capital Letters
and ending lines with its brake light
out.

This poem has been snapped by speed cameras
chased by critics driving modified sonnets
and pulled over to have its stanzas examined.
It has collected far too many demerit points
in sponsored workshops run by official poets.

If this poem gets caught breaking conventions one more time it is likely to dissolve
into messy prose and spill all over the page.

Mark Roberts

Martin Langford is the author of eight poetry books, the most recent of which is *The Boy from the War Veteran's Home* (2022), published by Puncher and Wattmann.



THE WESTERN SWAMP TURTLE

The Western Swamp Turtle
has a Bodhisattva's smile.
It knows *everything*
that can happen in a life –
the torpor of sunlight
on mud-infused water,
the slope for a good rock,
the slippage and bounce of mere twigs.
It can remember
the focused exhaustion of mating –
might go there again –
but just now it's happy
to let the sun rest on its forehead,
to grin as occasional bubbles
go pop! at its neck.

Martin Langford

Michele Seminara is a poet and editor from Sydney. She has published two chapbooks and two full-length collections, her most recent being *Suburban Fantasy* (University of Western Australia Publishing, 2021). <https://micheleseminara.net/>



MY LIFE AS A PIÑATA

Peering through my strange, solitary eyes, I saw those who sought to destroy me queuing at the clothesline for their turn to hit me with the big stick of shame. Some could barely contain their titillation as they strung me up, each taking precisely three strikes, the more cunning among them aiming for the soft spot everyone knows God leaves for the soul to escape.

I had snuck out long ago, entrusting the body to cosplay me. Now, my already lifeless avatar was proving resistant to further degradation — rousing their most ruthless to seize the stick and swing deliriously until my abdomen ruptured and all its lustrous sweetmeats slipped out. Then the mob morphed into a cawing murder of crows and descended to feast on everything, even the heart.

Having mistaken me for an effigy, nobody noticed that I was, in truth, standing off to one side, where I had been watching in horror all my life. And so, despite this fresh cruelty, I came to only the usual level of harm.

Michele Seminara

From Listowel, Ireland, Neil Brosnan's stories have appeared in print and digital anthologies and magazines in Ireland, Britain, Europe, Australia, India, the USA and Canada. A Pushcart nominee, he has won The Bryan MacMahon, The Maurice Walsh, and Ireland's Own short story awards, and has published two short story collections.



MISS GILBERT'S SISTER

There were two Miss Gilberts, but which was Miss Gilbert and which was Miss Gilbert's sister depended entirely on the gender of the perceiver. Spinsters both, the Misses Gilbert – as Dad referred to them – still lived in the house where they'd been born and reared, and they both spent their entire working lives in their home town. They were primary school teachers: Rachel, in St Mary's girls' school; Sarah, in St Malachy's boys', where she had been responsible for three of my first eight years of schooling. Teaching was in the sisters' blood: their father, known as *The Master*, was principal of St Malachy's during Dad's and granddad's schooldays, while Mam had been taught by his wife Ursula, who was the first lay teacher to attain the position of deputy to Mother Damien, the reverend principal of St Martha's convent secondary school. The Gilberts were a true teaching dynasty and excluding pre-teens and blow-ins, there wasn't a person in our town at that time who hadn't encountered one or more of the Gilberts in their formative years.

I was seven when I first encountered Sarah, in second class, where she treated me as if I was the only boy who'd ever stolen an apple from her orchard. There were no allowances for time already served when we met up again in fifth class, and then – insult to injury – in sixth, when she 'passed' with us before finally following Rachel into retirement. Hers was one face I thought I'd never forget, but midway through secondary school I began to understand my parents' difficulty in distinguishing one Gilbert from the other. Even to me, it seemed that the sisters grew more alike with each passing day.

The Miss Gilberts were actually our next-door neighbours but although our homes were separated by no more than fifty meters, our houses were centuries and worlds apart. The Gilberts lived in *Woodlands House*, an impressive Georgian edifice which had stood in solitary splendour at the western edge of town for almost two centuries. The economic lift of the mid-nineties saw a serious invasion of the Gilberts' privacy, with the construction of ten semi-detached, two-storey houses, known as *Woodside*, along the narrow cul-de-sac between Keeldowl wood and the crossroads at the bridge where the Suanamon River bisects the town.

As we lived in number ten Woodside, both Miss Gilberts would pass our gate at least twice each day during their many decades of school terms. Mam – who is sharper than most – would freely admit that she could tell the sisters apart only because Sarah would usually leave home about five minutes before Rachel, as St Malachy's – being south of the river – was a slightly longer journey. Though Rachel was a few years the elder, the tall, gaunt, ramrod-straight sisters could have easily passed as twins, and their outdated tweeds and headscarves – which Mam believed they regularly interchanged – did little to soften the sharp angular features or their spectrally pallid dials.

Though curious to the point of downright nosiness, Mam has never been a gossip. Mam treasures the power of knowledge, and she fully understands that – like most commodities – the more it is shared; the less valuable it becomes. On the other hand, Dad is a disaster when it comes to news: it seems to go in one ear and out the other. I've witnessed many occasions when Mam couldn't wait for Dad to return from work to pass on some juicy titbit, only for him to say that he'd heard it days before. He would then explain that the facts – as relayed by Mam – were not only out of date but also quite erroneous. When asked why he hadn't kept her informed, he would simply shrug and say something like: *ah sure, don't the dogs in the street know that?*

In retirement, the Gilberts had become even more reclusive than ever. Unconfirmed rumours that the sisters had been spotted together at first mass, or taking a summer stroll along the river walk, did little to allay Mam's concerns. Dad hadn't helped, suggesting that perhaps only one of the Gilberts was still alive; that one had murdered the other in order to appropriate her pension, and had then buried the body in the orchard behind the house. Part of me hoped he was right, that Rachel had done Sarah in; but what if Rachel was buried inside the high orchard walls; what if Sarah wasn't just getting away with murder but also reaping the rewards of her victim's pension? From the various punishments I had suffered at Sarah's hands, I could well believe her capable of murder, but the idea that she could not only cheat justice but also profit from such a heinous crime roused the sleuth that had long slumbered deep in the darkest depths of my psyche.

By August, I had decided to use the last few weeks of freedom before my sixth and final year in secondary school to put Dad's theory to the test. My bedroom was at the rear of our house and, as Woodlands House is set about fifty metres further back from the road than ours, my window offered the best view of the Gilberts' hall door. By mid-September, my dossier told me that the Gilberts' gardener had been on three occasions: mowing lawns, dead-heading roses, weeding flowerbeds, trimming hedges, and raking the gravelled driveway. There had also been regular Friday afternoon deliveries from *Tesco*, when a tall, thin female would admit the van driver through the front door. A TV & satellite contractor had visited about a fortnight into my vigil, a day or two after the electricity meter man had made his rounds.

While I'd caught several glimpses of *some* Miss Gilbert, there had been nothing to indicate that *both* sisters were still operational. I had intended to check out first mass on some Sunday but since returning to school I had really needed my weekend lie-ins. Also, I knew that the sisters parked their little *Fiesta* at the back of the house – which was blind to my vantage point – and by using their rear entrance to access the slip road they could drive wherever they wished without my knowledge.

About a week into my vigil I wasn't surprised to learn that Mam has been carrying out an investigation of her own.

"I didn't know what to do;" she was saying to Dad when I arrived at the Saturday breakfast table, "so I just smiled and nodded. She did the same, and then headed to the checkout. *Thanks, Sarah*, Tommy Mac says, and off with the Gilbert woman about her business." Mam paused for a sip of tea.

Dad continued to chew a mouthful of sausage; a mischievous twinkle brightened his eyes as Mam resumed.

continued overleaf...

"So, when I reach the checkout, I say: *Sarah is looking well, Tommy*, and I then mention how I hadn't seen Rachel for a while. *To be honest with you, Dorothy*, Tommy says, *I couldn't say when I've last seen Rachel in the shop. You see, Dorothy*, Tommy says, *if it wasn't for the cigarettes I'd never know which one of them I have. Oh, I used to know who was teaching in which school, all right; didn't I have Sarah in first class? But if they were both standing in front of me this minute, I couldn't tell one from the other...* So, I ask him about the cigarettes; he tells me that Sarah has always smoked *Rothmans*, while Rachel has recently changed from *Benson & Hedges* to *Silk Cut*, as a first step towards trying to give up. *So, Tommy*, I say, *you have it all sussed out*, but then he says, *I'm fine when they both buy their own fags, but if one of them buys for both, I'm none the wiser...Don't you see?*" Mam asked. before pausing for breath, her eyes flickering between Dad and me, "I'm as badly off as ever..."

"By God," Dad muttered, lighting a *Benson*.

"So, Jim," Mam said, "maybe you should try cutting down to the *Silk Cut*; what do you think, Jim?"

"I think," Dad said, exhaling a long stream of smoke, "that when I quit, I'll do it cold-turkey – after Christmas – like I do every year."

As twilight enveloped the late September evening, I switched my desk light on and went to close my curtains. There was a figure on the Gilberts' doorstep – pressing the doorbell. The door swung open; a thin little man with stooped, sloping shoulders was briefly illuminated in the glow from within. I kept watch until the undertaker stepped inside and pulled the door closed behind him.

"Mr Wallace has just gone into the Gilberts' house..." I blurted from the hallway.

"What; *Ned-the-dead* is courting?" Dad gasped; "won't he make some toyboy?"

"Jim!" Mam scolded; "has it not occurred to you that one of our neighbours may have died?"

"Which one do you think it is this time?" Dad chuckled, winking in my direction.

Unwilling to dignify the taunt with a reply, Mam despairingly rolled her eyes skywards. Undeterred, Dad nudged my elbow.

"Did you see any sign of a doctor, or a priest, or an ambulance, or a hearse coming or going beforehand?" I simply shook my head.

Even though several days passed without further news of the sisters, I continued to monitor their door. Ned Wallace reappeared on the sisters' doorstep exactly a week later – almost to the second. I didn't report this visit, but when he turned up again on the following week I resolved to be particularly vigilant on future Thursday evenings.

With the pre-Halloween buzz in full swing, and with ghosts and ghouls lurking around every corner, it seemed that Mam's darker side had come to the fore.

"I didn't say anything, but I've met her at least half-a-dozen times in the last month. It's definitely the same one; no doubt about it. She's had those scratches on her right cheek – Tommy says she got them while pruning a rosebush – they're completely healed now. So, where is the other one; what was the undertaker doing there a few weeks ago?" Mam was looking directly at me.

Deciding that the moment had come to reveal my findings, I took a deep breath.

"A rosebush, you say?" Dad interrupted. "Hah, that's a likely story! I'll wager 'twas a last dying swipe from her sister's fingernails. Sure, neither of those two has ever done a moment's gardening. Doesn't that simple lad from the hill do all their tidying-up? Ah, I have it now: she probably got him to bury the sister as well!"

continued overleaf...

"Ah, Jim;" Mam groaned, blessing herself; "this has gone way beyond a joke."

"Mr Wallace has been calling every week," I blurted; "I've seen him four Thursdays in a row, always at around eight o'clock." Mam blessed herself again – even more reverently than before.

"That's it!" Dad was in his element. "They're in it together. Her toyboy is taking the body parts, one piece at a time, and slipping the odd arm or leg into other people's coffins; you know – whenever he has a funeral, like. I can't wait for Gabriel's trumpet... to see who appears with an extra..."

Our doorbell buzzed. Dad jumped highest of all, but it was Mam who tiptoed into the hallway. The hollow rattle of the holy water font echoed through the silence.

"Tomm-eeee?" she gasped, relief rising like a treble clef between syllables.

"Sorry to disturb you, Dorothy; but is there any chance you could lend me a deck of cards, please?" It was Tommy Mac, the newsagent.

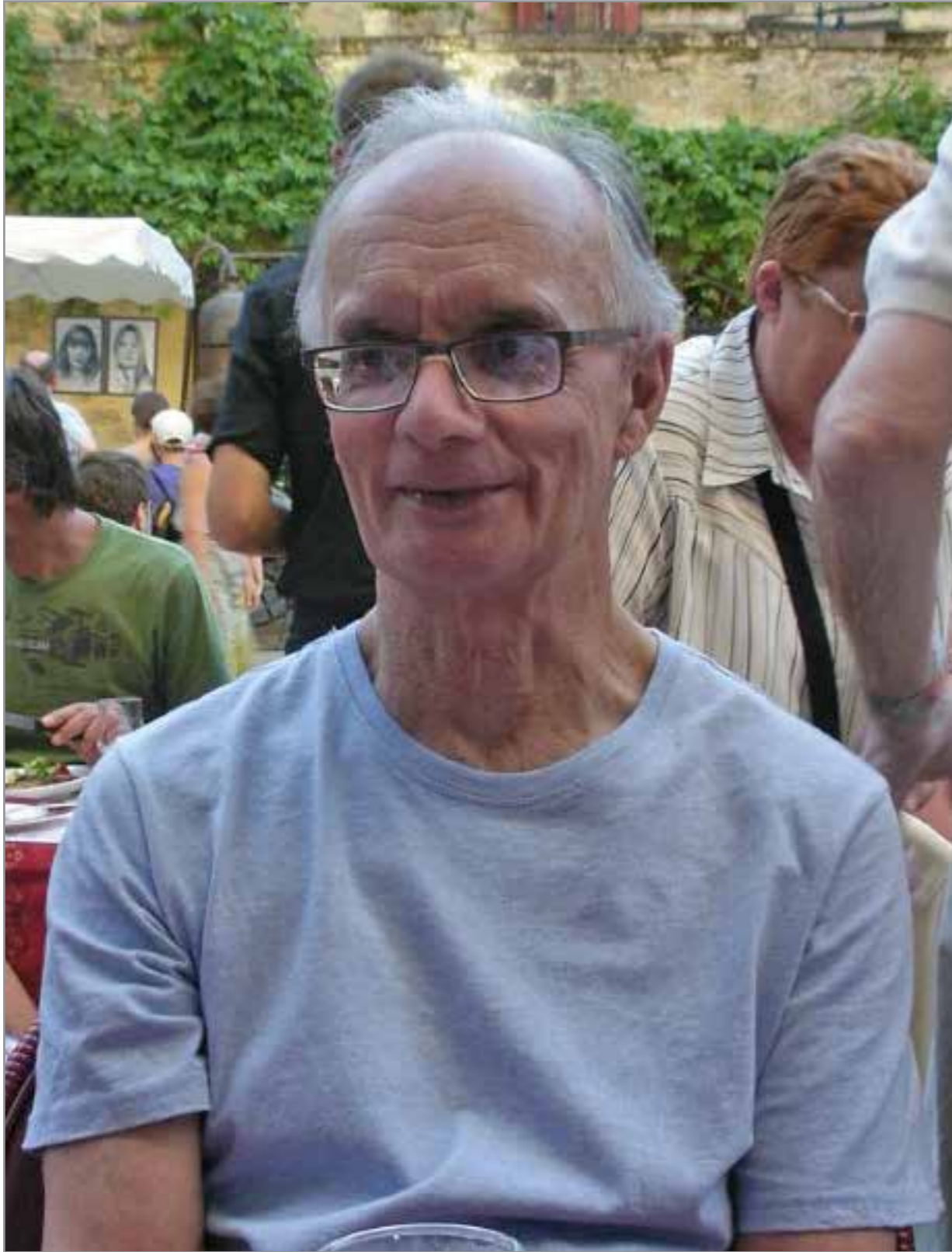
"Cards? Oh, *playing cards*," Mam's titter was bordering on hysteria.

"Ned the...em...Ned Wallace asked me to bring a new deck from the shop, but I forgot. You see, we play bridge at the Gilberts' on Thursday nights. The sisters haven't lost a hand since God knows when; Ned is convinced that they've been playing with a marked deck..."



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Norm Neill has been a timber-feller, fence-post splitter, shop assistant, market worker, money counter, tractor driver, factory worker, taxi driver, psychiatric nurse, door-to-door salesperson, part-time student, full-time student, teacher, historian and museum guide. His poetry has appeared in journals, anthologies and the *Sun-Herald* newspaper. He has convened a poetry workshop since 2002.



REVIEW

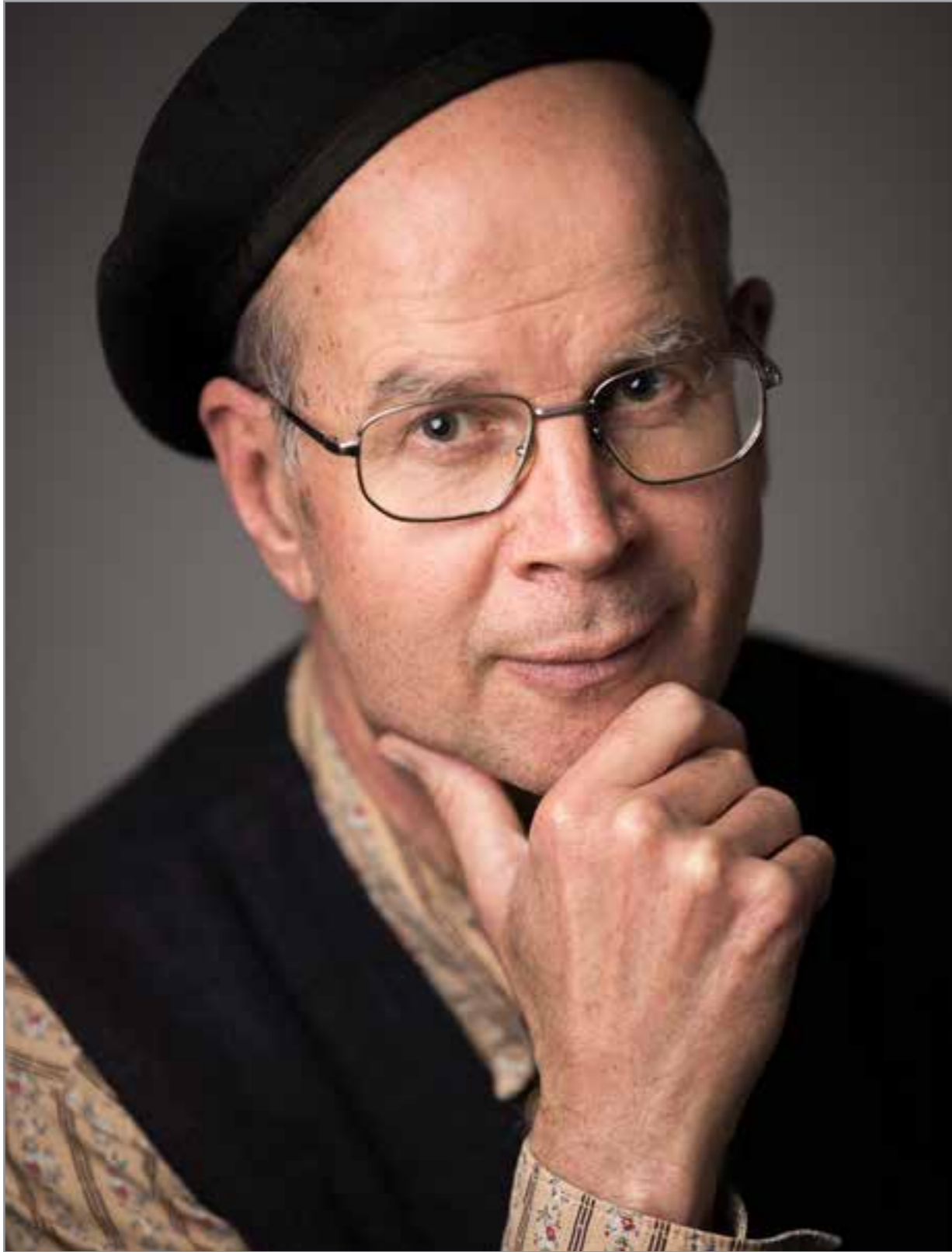
The play is neither funny nor dramatic but the actors, businesslike, conform as best they can – good actors are pragmatic – to the clichéd script they now perform.

The leading character makes lengthy speeches and the ingenue stands still too much. A priest appears and disappears and preaches, lacking any sacerdotal touch.

The set has brightly painted flats and drops, eight spotlights make a florid jamboree and every scene displays a range of props. The saving grace was that my seat was free.

Norm Neill

Peter Bakowski In 1983, he wrote his first poem at a farmhouse in Waco, Texas, upon receiving a "Dear John" letter. Peter then travelled for 7 years, caught a freight train across Montana, lived in a cave on a Mexican island, ate gazelle cooked in stale blood with road builders in the Central Africa Republic. 2024 represents his 42nd year of writing poems.



AFTERNOON NAP

A rest for my torso and toes...
 Flat on my back. There aren't any flies in a
 Tailspin above the tarmac of my forehead.
 Eyelids yield to the custom of sleep.
 Rivers are crossed, slaves are freed,
 Newly discovered species of plants are named after my children,
 Only I know how to make a decent martini,
 On the dark side of the moon, I find Elvis Presley.
 Noise. On the roof. Yowling...

Naked. I can't find my glasses, let alone my slingshot.
 Awake now, I look through a Myer catalogue.
 Pillows. A variety of colours and designs. Reasonable prices.

Peter Bakowski

Ray Liversidge's latest book is *...of a sudden*, a collection of short poems and flash fiction. His other books are: *Oradour-sur-Glane; no suspicious circumstances: portraits of poets (dead); The Barrier Range; Triptych Poets: Issue One; The Divorce Papers; Obeying the Call*. See: www.poetrytray.wordpress.com.



'WHAT SIDE OF THE BED DO YOU WANT?' HE ASKED HER.

'What do you mean?' she replied.

'Left or right?'

'Depends on which way you're looking at the bed.'

'Head to foot.'

'We haven't even done anything yet.'

'I'm thinking of afterwards.'

'Does it matter?'

'I just have a preference, that's all,' he said, removing his shoes.

'Is it that important?'

'I have a medical condition.'

'A medical condition?'

'I need to lie on my right side on the right-hand side of the bed.'

'That means then that you'll be right next to the bedroom door,' she said, reclassing her bra. 'So, when you put your shoes back on, you go out that door and turn right and you'll find the front door. And if it's all right with you, would you please lock the door when you've left.'

Ray Liversidge

Ron Wilkins is an earth scientist based in Sydney. His recent literary works have been published in The Shanghai Literary Review, The French Literary Review, StylusLit, Allegro (UK) and soon to appear in Quadrant and Science Write Now. A hobby he enjoys is identification of the more than 900 species of eucalyptus trees. He can be contacted through his poetry website www.fistfulofdust.com

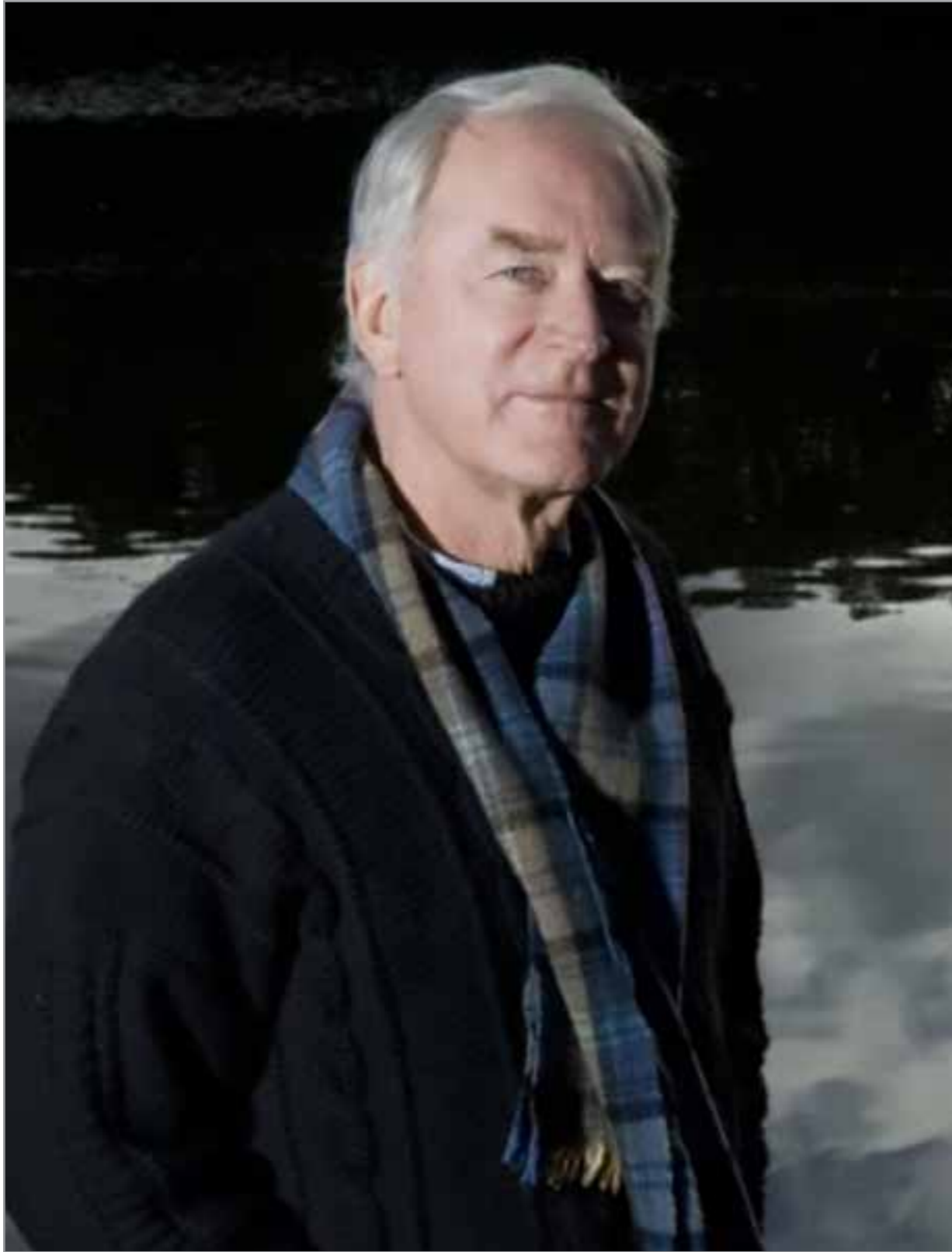


THE POËLE À MAZOUT

served as a combination room heater and stove for a one pot
 meal in the *gîte* where Madame Boschi and I most frequently
 conversed as she assisted me to fire the apparatus that I shivering
 in my greatcoat had failed to master her husband
un petit ouvrier drove a small work van also serving to transport
 the pack of dogs he took each weekend in season to hunt *sanglier*
 in the mountains towering over the valley but it was gossip that glued
 the village together and she liked to tell me of previous tenants
 like the Spanish couple who shouted at one another all holiday
 and eyebrow raised of a German *ménage à trois* with a furtive
 glance at the nudes from my life drawing class attached to the wall
 then the invitation she relayed one day with a knowing smile from
une jeune femme to go on a picnic the whole family turning out to see her
 car arrive to their immense disappointment with her husband
 without question all our confidences were relayed to *le facteur*
 whose bicycle was always propped against the house when I returned
 from work and I knew he would be seated at the kitchen table
 partaking of the fiery local *eau de vie* from the bottle
 containing a sunken wooden tablet with a badly inscribed
 skull and crossbones we drank from at our first meeting
 when the rent was agreed it being the custom in the French Alps
 to partake of alcohol to deaden the pain of financial transactions
 when oftentimes I would drink the *vin rouge of Monsieur Boschi*
c'est moi comme vigneron he would say with pride *buvez! buvez Monsieur!*
 refilling my glass again and again with his execrable concoction
 I would praise with a smile and an insincere *très bien* while I winced
 at the memory I could not shake of the large dehydrated grey rat
 that had drunk itself to death in his dusty wine press in the shed

Ron Wilkins

Ross Donlon has published five books of poetry, the latest being *The Bread Horse*. He is represented in numerous anthologies both in Australia and the U.K.



ACORN

The backyard was littered with bullet snubs of acorns
fired by an upstairs parent, the tree we called an 'acorn'.

Innocent inner city renters, no biology know-how
breached the backyard mystery of the exotic acorn.

And it was young then, slouched against the fence,
an adolescent clicking for attention. See me, A.Corn.

But softer, its cup shaped cupule of indurated bracts
were sweet gum nut babies in a nursery acorn.

Wars still thrived in the backyard since war fared
everywhere. Amo was a cache of ammunition acorn.

In time, of course, it became a sailing ship, just once
a mountain, prone to avalanche with falling acorns.

But it's as ship full sail, breasting a howling Southerly,
best remembered, cockpit sheering clouds of acorns.

Branches bent to the wind, veering over the neighbours
into Eternity. I hung on howling in the thrash of acorns.

The oak it was eventually, never stayed true to memory.
Oaks are another story. In Sherwood. Ours was an Acorn.

Ross Donlon

Finnish Australian Saara Lamberg is a director, actor, writer and producer. They have released three narrative feature films, all of which premiered at Cannes Cinephiles selection. They started writing poetry at 7. They make films, perform poetry and standup comedy, run marathons slowly but often and cuddle every cat and dog they come across when strolling the streets of Melbourne, the city that is their current home until love or art will whisk them away again. They travel light, but carry all the necessary emotional baggage that's required for the believable catharsis. You can follow their work at @saaralambergofficial on instagram



APOLOGIES

Yes I'm awful sorry
I couldn't make it
You see my train was delayed
and then I realised I
lived on a tiny island and
there were no train lines anyway

I'm so sorry
You see my dog was sick
and then I realised I
was allergic to pets
and that the dog was also dead
and attacked my neighbour at the same time
so there was that too

I am awful sorry
I couldn't make it
I had to go to the demonstration
because I am a good human
and the demonstration was //
about things that are really close to my good human heart
You know
The powerty, the human rights, the thing.... What have you

I think you would have actually loved it
Oh but of course you had your... Thingie and
To be honest
I have been really looking forward to seeing you

Saara Lamberg

continued overleaf...

But I just couldn't make it
because my aunt is at a hospital
and no it's not so serious she will die because
she will have to visit
many many more times
because what would my story otherwise be
but she is definitely so sick that I had to stay the whole time
and pray
and I'm not even religious, it's just something I do because
I like calling myself spiritual
mainly for dating profiles

Again, so deeply sorry
I just couldn't make it
Because //
I didn't want to come

and I really hope it went well and
You are amazing I am in such an awe of you,
always



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Sarah St Vincent Welch is a Canberra-based writer and image-maker. She is known for her #litchalk practice (chalking her poetry on the footpaths at arts festivals) and is the founder of the Kindred Trees project kindredtrees.com.au, which asks Canberra poets to respond to a local tree in poetry. Her 'chalk borders' (Flying Islands Books 2021) won a Canberra Circle of Critics Award. She edited the 'Tree' edition of FERAL: A Journal of Poetry and Art, and blogs at sarahstvincentwelch.com.



THE POET'S ELEVEN TOP LISTICLES PURPORTING TO BE POETRY

1. eleven odes impersonating sonnets
2. ten self-reflexive metaphors
3. nine line endings that won't return
4. eight rhymes continually forgotten
5. seven cinquains of six lines
6. six slams that opened doors
7. five elegies for our undead
8. four haikus that married epics
9. three ghazals that ate themselves
10. two iambs that skipped in place
11. one listicle of listicles

Sarah St Vincent Welch

Suzi Mezei is a Sri Lankan born Australian writer, living on the Boonwurrung land. Her work appears in Australia and overseas in anthologies and journals including *Island*, *Best of Australian Poetry*, *Aniko*, *Hecate*, *Cordite*, *Catchment*, *Folkways*, *Storm* and *Detours*. Her prizes include an Artist's Residency. She has written for stage and podcast.



LITERATI

The woman with the blue hair
steals drinks from deserted tables,
locks her lips 'round
the cold bottle holes of others,
quaffs their grog and saliva.
But don't the crowd love it?
She's like The Cat
in To Catch A Thief,

teeth like Grace Kelly's pearls,
small and shapely.
There's a book of haiku
with her name on the cover,
she's booked for a poetry slam in Berlin,
(some respite from a dank Northcote flat
that smells like stale bread and weed).
This is the literary world, she warns,

only the remarkable succeed.
She eyes me,
tries to conceal her doubt,
the ash tip of her fag
crashes like dead conversation
on a scarred carpet,
so what's your gimmick?
She probes.

Suzi Mezei

Tim Train lives in Lalor, on the outskirts of Melbourne. He was an MC for long running poetry reading Dan Poets, and is an MC for their successor reading Cherry Poets. Over the years he has read all over the world in pubs, clubs, trams, and other, stranger places. His book, 'Hangover Music', was published in 2018 by 'Ginninderra Press', and he has, somewhat improvidently, made and published many zines, including 'Ramblings', 'Love songs of the socially distanced', 'Ollie the Octopus', 'The Lacker Band', and 'Thing'. Out of frustration with the '100 word artistic biography' genre, he once wrote a 100 word artistic biography with one word so long that it takes over a hundred pages to print and several hours to say. This is not it.

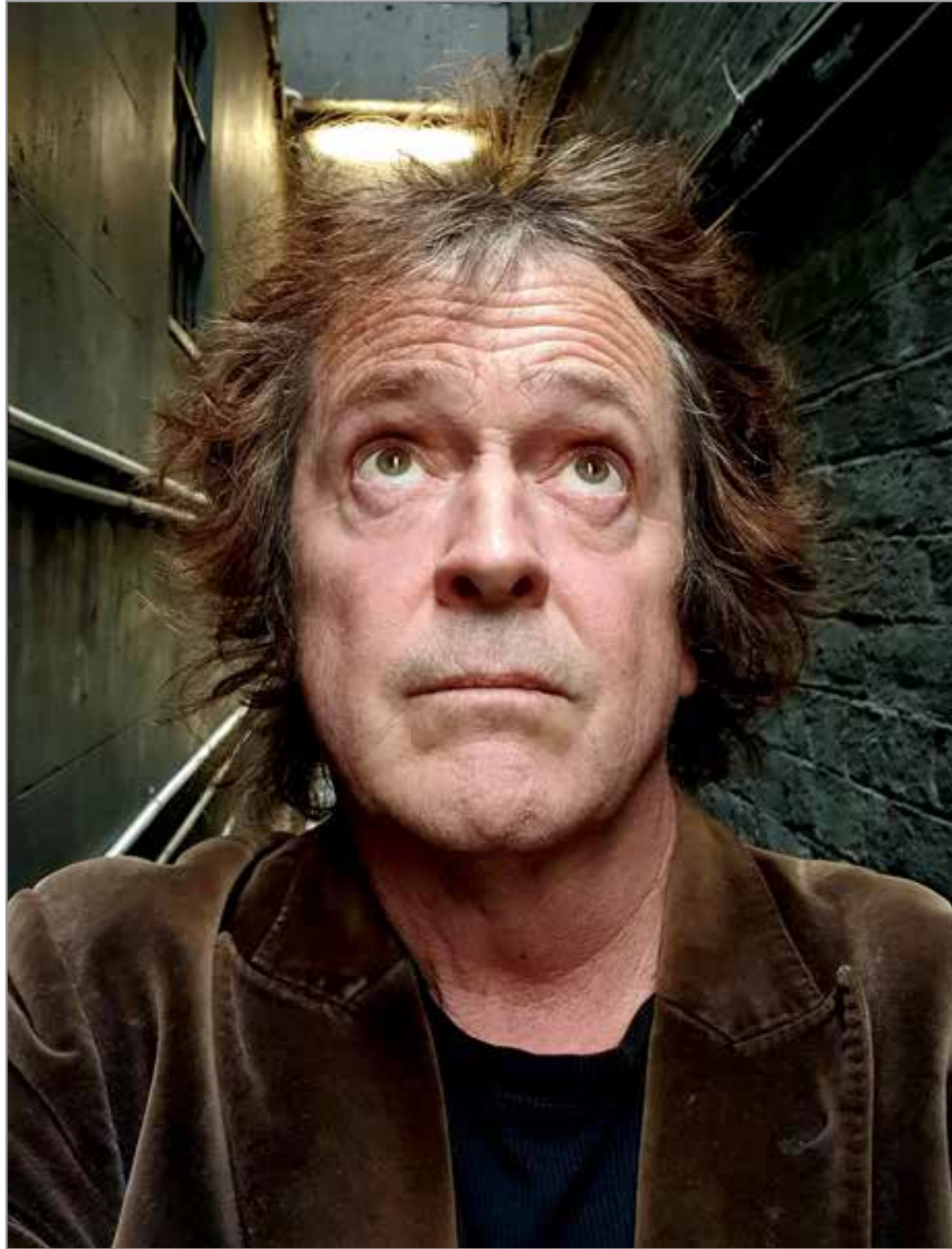
TOGETHER

I was having my fun together
When I heard a watcher moan,
But you can't have fun together
When you're standing on your own.
I knew his words were true then,
It stung me to the heart;
So I sadly left myself there
And I had my fun apart.



Tim Train

Tug Dumbly is the pen and stage name of Geoff Forrester, a Nowra-born poet and performer who has lived in Sydney for decades. He has worked lots in radio, venues and schools, and founded a couple of seminal poetry nights in Sydney. He has performed his work as resident-poet on ABC radio (Triple J, ABC 702), and released two spoken-word CDs through the ABC – Junk Culture Lullabies and Idiom Savant. His awards include the Banjo Paterson Prize for Comic Verse (twice), and Nimbin Performance Poetry World Cup (thrice). His poems have appeared in many publications and he has been shortlisted many times for big awards. In 2020 he won the Borranga Poetry Prize, in 2022 he won the Woorilla Poetry Prize, and in 2023 he won the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize. His first poetry collection, *Son Songs*, came out in 2018 through Flying Island Books. He is also a singer, songwriter and musician who likes photography and nature, especially cicadas.



FOUND IN TRANSLATION

I griped at my life,
bemoaned my fate.

A wizened Chinese lady
shuffled up to me,
a tiny sparrow
of bent bones

one arm dragged
a trolley, the other strained
a cabbage in a string bag.

Up to me she struggled
and beckoned me bend.

She whispered
'make suffering zhezhi,
make zhezhi ...'

I said 'sorry, no Chinese.'

She said 'make your
suffering zhezhi ...
you say it this ...'

And she pulled from her pocket
a little paper bird.

Tug Dumbly

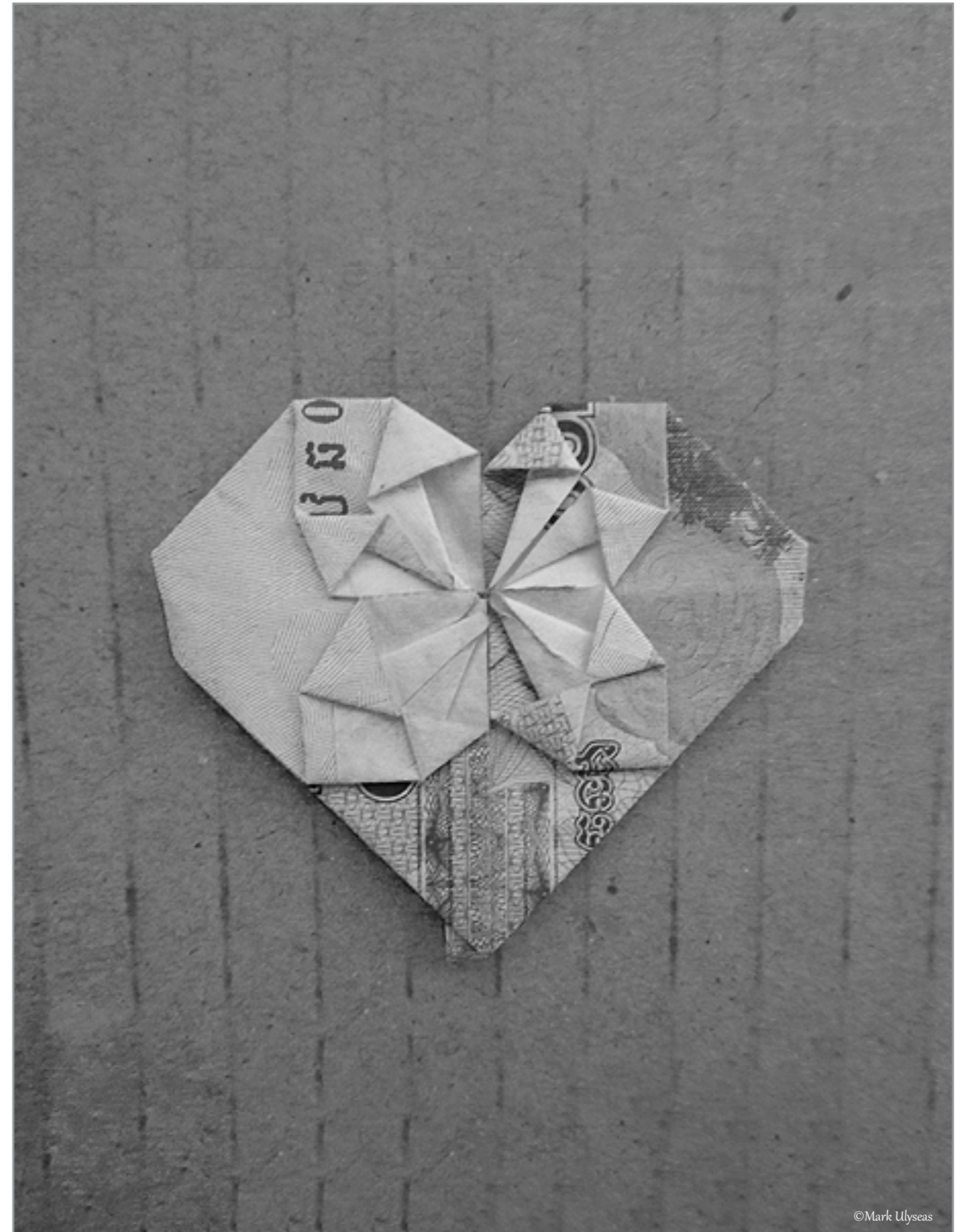
continued overleaf...

And it dawned:
'Ah, zhezhi is origami!'

I looked down at her
brown face cracking
like old parchment,
tooth stumps like animal
bones in drought mud.

And 'Yes!' I said 'Yes!'
as I folded her in two
and put her away.

(She had no right being
in my bathroom anyway).



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Usha Akella has authored five books of poetry, three chapbooks, and scripted/produced two musical dramas. She earned an MSt in Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge, UK (2018). She is the host of a curated interviews website- www.the-pov.com. She is the founder and director of *Matwaala* (www.matwaala.com) a festival and collective initiated to increase the visibility of South Asian poets in the USA.



4.30 P.M.

'Hi Mike. How are you?' Anjana, waved to her neighbor across the fence ushering the kids as a lunch bag fell out of the car; its olive palm trees waving cheerily on a tropical red sunset contrasted with her state of mind. 'Move it kids, Pooja don't touch that. Come in and wash your hands first.' Oak pollen covered the driveway in what looked like heaps of brown wispy tendrils. Her windshield had steaks of yellow, she couldn't help thinking 'urine', every time she got into her car. Her handbag and water bottles slid off her shoulder. 'Don't leave your violin in the car, Vish. It's happened once and was good as firewood.' She looked at his scuffed shoes shaking her head. The garage door grated upward and they entered, a unit of banging backpacks, instruments, lunch bags and water bottles.

Vish muttered under his breath, 'It's Paulson mom, why do you call all Americans Mike. All Indians aren't Rahul.'

'Salty, aren't you,' said Ankita.

'Pirate,' said Vish scowling back.

'In the garage Vish! Leave your shoes. We go through this every day.'

'Where are you off to... hey, no slamming doors, no locked doors Ankita, we have an open-door policy,' Anjana said to the banging sound of the door above the stairs. She turned around, 'kids, let's get things going, I have to take a call soon.'

'Do you have a job mama?' said Pooja, 'Payal's mom goes to work in her car every morning.'

'Moron, mom doesn't need to go anywhere, she works from home, she's an architect, do you know what that means?' Vish furrowed his brows dramatically.

'Yes. Mama will you build a doll house for Barbie and Ken?'

'Double moron,' Vish said again, chewing his shoelaces.

'Vish, that's awful. Put that shoe down. Pooja, get along child, don't touch that orange. Wash your hands first.'

'They are clean mama, Pooja looked at her hands and waved them. Miss Marshall put sanitizer on when Barbie fell into the toilet. Mama, Vish didn't brush his teeth today.'

'Now!' Anjana said. 'Now!' Pooja curled her lip rebelliously. Anjana, hoisted her up, turned on the tap. 'Ouch, it's hoooot,' Pooja whined.

'Vish,' Anjana called out. Vish had disappeared. 'Brush your teeth. I know you can hear me.' Vish appeared. 'Did you really, that fast?' Anjana said, her voice rising.

'Did I what?' Vish said feigning ignorance.

'Teeth!'

'Yup. Kind of.'

Anjana let it go. 'I've made khichadi,' she said gaily. She opened the school bags, dumping various leftovers from the Nemo and Star Wars lunch boxes, Nature Trail wrappers floated into the trash. 'Was it so hard to eat 10 grapes, Vish?'

'They smell mom.'

'The grapes? Really, I am curious now, like what?'

'Like dolphin poo,' Vish said, thinking hard for a moment. Pooja giggled, 'You're funny.'

'You're not, Anjana said. Try earning 6.99 for a pound of organic seedless grapes. We never wasted food in India...'

Vish rolled his eyes. 'We don't live in India. We live in America. But you keep it weird here in Austin mom.'

'Take your socks off the table Vish,' she hauled Pooja up on to the dining chair and reached for the plates on the curio.

'I want my Barbie plate and bowl.' Anjana opened the pressure cooker lid and moved out of the steam's way which had already clouded her glasses. She spooned the khichadi into a corning dish while grabbing the Barbie plate from the dishwasher. She was broiling in her jeans even though the AC was on. She served a scoop on to the plate. 'I want chicken nuggets, Pooja said, 'I don't want *that*.'

'It's khichadi sweetie, Naani says it is good for health, it's got carrots, beans and peas as well.'

'I hate peas,' Pooja said, 'I want chicken nuggets and chocolate milk.'

'Did I say peas? I meant the other green thing, lima beans,' she pretended.

'Can I have cereal?' Vish said, texting. 'Or Mac N'Cheese. American food. Like real people'

'My tooth is wiggly.'

'Put your phone away Vish. I barely get enough time with you on Tuesdays, you have karate today.'

'Face to face,' Pooja said, giggling, putting her face close up to Vish's.

continued overleaf...

'Get off me, moron!'

'Vish language!'

'He always calls me a moro... you're a moro, moro moro, not me.'

The phone rang.

'Hi Sara. I know. The charts are almost done. I should be able to meet you here in half. Just need to get the local pricing on the bleached hard wood. See you soon,' she said, restraining Vish and Pooja making a go at each other.

'Like animals. This is ridiculous. Where is your sister?'

'Talking to her boyfriend,' Vish said snickering.

'Vish, they are friends. Boys and girls talk. In India when we grew up...'

'India 201,' Vish said cheekily. 'I think didi wants to drop out of school.'

'She told you that? You and your sister talk. That's nice' said sweetly. 'She's not dropping out of anything... she's got SATS next year. Daddy wants her to go to MIT.'

'He's not my boyfriend you idiot...' Ankita emerged from her room, plugs in her ears. I Phone tucked into her jeans pocket. 'When's Papa coming. He needs to sign this,' she put the form on the table. 'It's the forms for the field trip to San Antonio.'

'I can sign. I went to college,' Anjana said.

'Yes, he is.' Vish said slyly.

'No, he's not.'

'Yes, he is,' the decibels were spiralling.

'Well, at least he is real,' not like Taylor Swift.

Vish blushed and glared at his sister. 'Do you mind, I am eating my snack here.'

'We like the khichadi now, do we?' Ankita said smacking him on his head.

'Your eyes are still red Anki?' Anjana was concerned, 'the allergy medicine didn't work today?'

'I hate allergies mom, it's all through the year. I can't get sick again.'

'We'll go back to Dr. Davies next week.'

The gardener knocked on the glass patio door. Anjana was pouring milk in three glasses. He knocked again. 'Can one of you actually move. I am not Durga with a thousand hands.'

'Jai Durga Ma,' said Pooja, making a Namaste. The khichadi landed on the floor from her spoon in wet blobs.

'You go,' said Vish. Ankita smacked him on the head again and slid open the door.

'Ya?' she said questioningly. 'Need monies for this month,' Gonzales said, 'also for the mulch.'

'Mom, he needs money.'

'Don't yell. I am right here. Can you get the check book out of my bag?'

continued overleaf...

Ankita got her mom's handbag and rummaged. 'I can't find it.'

As Anjana turned around, she knocked a glass of chocolate milk, the light beige puddle dripped excruciatingly down the counter. 'Shit.'

'Language mom.'

'Mama said a bad word. Mama said a bad word.' Pooja was thrilled.

Anjana brandished the checkbook at Ankita, 'It's right here,' pulling the ear plugs from her daughter's ears.' She got a pen from the stack of pens by the landline and wrote out the check. Handed it to Gonzales and slid the glass door shut. She rubbed her forehead, 'Where was I?'

'At home,' said Pooja. 'You're home mama.'

Anjana tore out a bounty and picked up the khichadi from the floor on the way to the kitchen.

'Not one perfect day!'

'I love you mama,' said Pooja, 'Huggie.'

'After I clean up, sweetie... no, don't come into the kitchen.' The phone rang.

'Hi amma. Yes, the khichadi was better with the grated adrak. Teek tha. Yes, the kids are enjoying it.'

'No, we're not,' Vish corrected her grinning. Anjana glared at him.

Pooja clung to her. 'I love naani.'

'Yes amma. Yaad hai. I remember you wanted the Corning mailed to Sashi. Just haven't had time to go to the outlet. I did pick up the microwave cooker from Wal Mart. Tell Papa I'll talk to him later tonight... kids are just back. I have to go.'

Pooja was tugging hard at her shirt. 'What's up sweetie?'

'I want to talk to Naani. When is naani coming again?'

The microwave banged shut. 'Aren't you having the khichadi?'

'After the chips n' salsa. Can you sign my form?'

Anjana signed the form.

'Mom, did you do my laundry. I need my marathon T-shirt tomorrow?'

'You had the weekend to do it Ankita, you need to do some house chores and help out.' She melted, 'Ok, I know you've got a lot on your plate, here, help Pooja with her snack. Where is the laundry basket?'

'In the laundry room. Thanks mom. You're the best.'

'When it suits you,' Anjana smiled wryly.

She walked into the service room, quickly sorting out the whites and put the clothes in the washer. On the way, she picked up Pooja's bag and put it out of the way.

'Mama, didi isn't giving me chips. I don't want khichadi.' The salsa looked alarmingly red and juicy. Anjana thought of the mess she'd have to clean up.

continued overleaf...

'No Pooja, you have to eat a healthy snack. I told naani how much you love it. "How is my pyaari Pooja," naani asked. I told her what a good girl Pooja is and how she is eating the khichadi up so fast. Vish, get to your homework before we go to karate.' Pooja began to cry.

Vish was playing with her iPhone, eating the chips and salsa from Ankita's plate.

The salsa dripped on the phone. She exploded, 'Do you realizes how expensive that is? I can't do a thing after you fiddle with it every time. Wipe that right now!'

'Mom, there's one more form. It's for the museum trip in May. You have to write out a check for \$150 to the history club. Later?' Ankita looked apologetic.

She looked at her watch. A quick cup of chai would be good. The doorbell rang. She wiped her hands, straightened up, smoothed her hair, opened the door with a smile wobbly as an overripe banana.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

2010 - 2024



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
SPECIAL HUMOUR EDITION
JUNE 2024

COVER ARTWORK 'I SHUT MY EYES IN ORDER TO SEE'
BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE