

SCRIPSI



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It is now 20 years since the inaugural Isobelle Carmody Creative Writing Competition at Ruyton and this year we were honoured to have the original judge, Isobelle Carmody herself, return to speak to the girls regarding the craft of writing.

While the whole school was fortunate to hear Isobelle's stories of how she became a storyteller, students in Years 7 and 8 were treated to writing workshops during her visit. She entertained and educated with a focus on how to direct emotion in writing and the importance of editing and structure.

Isobelle focussed on body language, unspoken communication and tone. 'Trust your audience and don't think they are fools,' she suggested, 'they understand subtle implications and emotional cues.' She taught the girls how to direct the audience to the emotion, not just show them how to respond.

Another focus of Isobelle's workshop was how to gather the ingredients of the story and she reiterated that one must get to the detail through one's senses. 'Paint a picture and make your audience do some work, this draws them into your story, trust your detail. Most details arise out of the 'where' of your story, what can we see?'

Isobelle encouraged the students to draw from something deep and profound; she explained that the students needed to find a link to themselves. She admitted that it requires courage when you write by 'using yourself deeply', yet the story will be more powerful. 'You need to care about your writing and explore something deep, true and real,' she stated. Similarly, Virginia Woolf believed the importance of "every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, [be] written large in his works."

The students were inspired by Isobelle Carmody's enthusiasm and expertise, which has then translated into their writing, the fruits of which are on display in this, the seventh volume of *Scriptsi*.

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I would like to acknowledge the help of the following staff who assisted in making this anthology possible: The English teachers who have aided in supporting and focussing the creativity of the students: Mrs Diane Berold, Ms Danielle Cooper, Ms Tracey Glen, Ms Alison Paisley, Ms Alison Shackell, Mr Paul Upperton, Mr Walter Zavattiero and Ms Tonya Peters, Director of Development for her involvement in helping us publish these wonderful examples of student work.



The fierce waves turned white and frothy when they collided with the ferry, rocking it backwards and forwards in a dangerous manner. Being on the top of the boat, Isabelle found it impossible to sit without falling, so decided to stand at the front instead, feeling the wind lash at her face and the ocean spray shower her with its iciness. Eileen stood beside her, laughing. They looked past the bottomless blue sea at the horizon, and watched as they gradually approached the island.

After a while, Isabelle found herself deep in thought. She thought about how she had woken up early in the morning as the sun slowly ascended in the azure sky, the beginning of another hot summer day. Not long after, once she and Eileen had assembled their luggage, they headed off in the car for a three hour drive before taking a break and boarding the ferry.

It was now early afternoon, and not long before they stopped at their destination, Kangaroo Island.

'Hey, Isabelle,' Eileen exclaimed over the crash of the waves. 'Look at the dolphins!'

'Where are they?' Isabelle asked, before seeing half a dozen grey creatures diving in and out of the sea.

*

The next day, Eileen and Isabelle drove straight to the Kelly Caves. There they went on a tour together, and learnt about the history of the caves. In their group there was a middle-aged man with salt and pepper hair, a lady with a wrinkled face and two girls who appeared to be best friends, wearing matching silver lockets. Their tour guide was a sharp lady who seemed to be in her early forties. She wore a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses that concealed at least half her face, and a dull green uniform that had 'Kelly Caves' written on it in yellow. Both her skin and hair were dark.

Isabelle followed her around the cave, hearing the click of the lady's boots echoing throughout the cave, and listening to the story of how the cave had formed, millions of years ago. Very few questions were asked. In fact, the only people asking questions were the two girls.

One of the girls was thin with auburn hair, soft brown eyes, and a pale face dotted with freckles. Her friend was taller, had eyes that glowed like sapphires, and curly honey-coloured hair. They would ask peculiar questions, and the tour guide appeared to dislike them, sighing loudly whenever either of them said anything.



The tour had finished and Isabelle and Eileen were following the tour guide who seemed eager to finally exit the caves. Isabelle was in the middle of a conversation with Eileen, when she said suddenly,

‘What was that? I thought I heard something.’

Not long after, Isabelle saw a flash of silver out of the corner of her eye. She turned.

‘Look at that locket!’ she whispered to Eileen, before picking it up.

‘Isn’t it beautiful?’

‘It sure is, but who does it belong to?’

‘I don’t know. I guess that means we can keep it.’ Isabelle turned the locket over in her hands. It was dull silver and had a square engraved on it, as well as complex patterns. There was a diamante in the centre. It must have been ancient, and precious. Its shape vaguely resembled a flower and it was on a long, thin chain. It was unlike any locket they had ever seen. Isabelle wasn’t even sure it could be opened.

Over the next week or so, the girls shared that locket between them.

The next place Isabelle and Eileen travelled to was the Remarkable Rocks. It was a rough day with turbulent winds that slapped at their cheeks and threatened to push them over. The girls eventually succeeded in completing the short walk to their destination, and sought protection from the wind. They climbed up the awkwardly shaped rocks, sat on top of them, and decided to entertain each other until the weather calmed down a little.

Soon it did, and Isabelle and Eileen stood near the edge of the cliff in front with the stunning vista ahead of the pure blue sea. After that, they took a short drive up to the Admiral’s Arch, an immense rock formation in the shape of an arch. The girls saw about a dozen seals lazing on the rocks by the sea. By early evening, they had returned home.

On their third day they visited Stokes Bay. At first, they weren’t sure where the beach was. Then they saw a sign directing them towards the beach. Isabelle and Eileen had to make their way through a maze of rocks.

Isabelle walked ahead, the locket around her neck. As she cautiously stepped between rocks, she passed two girls on their way back from the beach. Something about their faces was frustratingly familiar. Then she recognised the locket around one of the girls’ necks.

‘Um... Excuse me,’ Isabelle mumbled softly. When she realised that the girls hadn’t heard her, she cleared her throat quickly, before they



were about to pass her altogether.

'Excuse me!' she cried.

All of a sudden one of the girls turned. It was the one with auburn hair.

'Yes?'

'I um... is this um... yours?' Isabelle stuttered. She held up the locket around her neck.

'Why, it is so,' the girl replied, 'where did you find it?'

By this time Eileen had caught up. Together, Isabelle and Eileen explained their story.

'Thank you very much. My name's Sally by the way,' Sally smiled politely.

'And I'm Adelaide,' the girl with the honey-coloured hair introduced herself. 'Thank you. That locket had something very important in it.'

Without another word, the two girls left.



The girls had a very pleasant time at the beach, staying for about four hours. As they slowly and tiredly walked back, they noticed something. It was a silver locket.



7

THE BEAUTY OF WINTER

I watch as the snowflakes fall
Falling, pure and small
I see them dance to songs unknown
Unknowing, they are, but not alone.
As white as a full moon
Purer than the sky at noon
Dancing to a timeless tune
Beginning at the start of June.

Nothing can be heard on a winter's day
When all are inside, somewhere faraway
Silence, wearing a cloak dark and cold
Roams around, or so I've been told.
I hear the rustle of the trees
The last few leaves
Are on their knees
The wind whispers in the cool breeze.

The sweet scent of the dying trees
Fills the air with agony
And I smell the leaves of the evergreens
As they stand like soldiers, tall and pleased.
Those autumn trees are tender flowers
In their final hours
Losing all their power
Yet they will never cower.

I taste the snowflakes on my tongue
It's early morning, the birds have sung
A silver mist surrounds this place
While a cruel wind slaps my face.
The bitter cool air
Of winter, so fair
The evergreens stare
Proud, without a care.

THE BEAUTY
OF WINTER

CIARA BRENNAN



THE BEAUTY
OF WINTER

I feel the roughness of the bark
Around the blackened trees, that mark
Where fires burned, yet they were brave
Determined to last these dreadful days.
But time it does race
Fragile as a vase
So in my heart there's a place
For winter's cold face.



7

Nothing is not peaceful, its blinding; blank white floor, walls, ceiling; a perfect cube, four metres by four metres, my worst nightmare. Because in here there is nothing but me and my thoughts. I might have been in here for minutes or hours, years or a century. Time blurs into an endless mass of shadowy numbers, drifting and lost in the abyss of my mind. Though I am nothing, I have learnt something: Hell does not burn. Hell is not cold. Hell is empty.

Memories come in glimpses and flashes, sounds and scents, lost as soon as I try to focus on them.

*Flickering light,
The crunch of straw underfoot,
The crisp smell of fresh cut grass,
A burnt sugar taste invading my mouth,
Then a rush of pain, sudden and violent.*

I'm shaking now, pressed to the floor. A bright drop of blood gives me comfort, a shock of red in this immaculate, snowy-white space. My nails leave pale half-moons on my palms. The pain is good, it means I'm still here. But am I still alive? Was I ever?

'Who am I?' I beg my identity of the empty walls, but they are merciless. I glare at them; they taunt me with their steadiness. I want only a name, a picture, something, anything to reassure myself that I exist.

I look at my hands, petite and pale, nothing like his. His were always tanned and strong, and always moving, weaving and tying; never idle.

*Something burning,
Someone screaming,
Tears track cool trails down my cheeks.
'Go, please, I am lost, but there is still hope for you. Please'
'Never.' a whispered promise I am forced to break.*

Staggering now, I struggle to make sense of it. It was the straw, those new bales, ready to be turned into marvellous sculptures. The fire burned; too fast, too bright, too hot, and he burned with it.

LE FEU

ELLA CROSBY

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED

7

But who am I? How do I fit into this story of fire and pain; this story made of broken puzzle pieces?

*His laugh, warm and rich, lighting up the room,
Fireworks overhead,
Quick fingering weaving, showing me how,
Sand under my toes,
Cruel whispers 'pyro', 'insane', 'killed'.*

I'm rocking on the floor now, hands over my ears, trying to block out everything; those never ending wary eyes, whispers following me, the people who pull their children away from me, the taunts and insults, the doctors, all of it! I want it to end, I want someone to have mercy and end it. But worst of all the stares, everyone always watching, like I'm a wild animal, trapped in a cage, straining to break free. I wanted to explain, to show them how pretty fire is, how it doesn't care what my file says, or deign to listen to the rumours that follow me like a plague.

7

*His eyes, calm and gentle, even as he lay dying,
My screams as the light faded from them,
Dragging myself from the burning ruins,
Rain on the wind,
Rain too late to save him;
To save me.*

No, no I didn't. I scream my innocence to these unfeeling walls. I beg them to believe me, to reassure me that I didn't do it. That I didn't kill the only person who ever accepted me, ever trusted me, ever welcomed me; who ever, ever cared for the poor, broken thing that is my soul. But I am not innocent, I am horribly guilty, and I am a monster.

Maybe this is God's way of punishing me, trapping me in this empty, faceless room. But I do not feel this punishment; it does not affect me, for I have already punished myself in the only way that matters. I have killed the only person who will ever, ever love me, and now I am dead inside.

I sink to my knees and pray. Not for my soul; I doubt I even have one. No, I pray for Daniel's soul. I pray that it made its way to heaven. I pray that he found happiness. And I pray that one day he might forgive me. And then I remember.

Lying on the grass, choking on the smoke as I watch my home burn, along with everything I care about. Rain and tears mixing in a sad trickle of death and despair. Everything gone, burnt to ashes in a fire of my own making. Daniel is in there. Daniel with clear blue eyes that will never wink again. Daniel with a heart that will never beat again. Daniel with arms that will never hug again. Daniel who is now a 'was' not an 'is'. Because of me. I do not feel the agony of burnt skin, scorched muscles or broken bones as I reach out. I am a hollow doll now, with nothing left to live for. I reach for a lonely straw hat, only slightly singed, lying at the edge of the rubble. This is me now, slightly charred while everything I know and love lies smouldering in ruins. The straw hat and I are the only things of Daniel's left. I clutch it to my chest as I sink into darkness. We are both broken survivors of the train wreck that is my life.



7

THE FENCE

ELLA CROSBY

TIME TO WRITE

FINALIST

We are birds, we are free.

The Fence stretched forever, across the world, but to most it was invisible. It was there, tall, endless and oppressive, yet one could never reach it. It was always on the horizon, no one could ever reach it. And on the other side were those who tried to cling to life, though they should have passed on. They are from all times, all places, all races, but on the other side of the fence it matters not. They simply stand there, staring into oblivion, trapped in an endless reliving of sad memories; in limbo for all eternity.

Only those who had longed for a love lost to the other side could see it, and they are taunted by brief glimpses of what is on the other side.

And the most heartbreaking of the people stranded on the other side of the fence are the children. They are lonely. Confused. Bewildered. Lost. And most heartbreaking of all: Completely alone. They reach out into the ghostly space around them, searching fruitlessly for the warm hand that had always been there before; for the hugs that they once took for granted; for the people who love them, and ask for nothing in return. They are the saddest to watch.

Some of the children are stronger. They stand bravely. They patiently wait for the loved ones who never, ever, come. They press themselves against the fence, staring at the living, trying in vain for a tiny piece of recognition.

One of these children, one of the strongest, tried in futile hope to reach the other side. She was determined to reach the other side.

Her name was Amora.

And on the other side was her twin.

They were two halves of a whole. Without her sister she was nothing. Her only thought was to be reunited with her sister, regardless of the consequences.

And so it was that she made a bargain with Death.

One day on the other side, in exchange for the rest of eternity as a servant to Death. Her only condition being that if anything happened to her, or her twin, one of them would be granted freedom from death, to travel freely between worlds, a spirit to rival Death himself.

And so it was that Amora returned to her twin, Carmen, for one final day.

And they wandered around the city, admiring the grand houses as they had always done, splashing in the fountains, scaring the pigeons, as if nothing had changed.



But it had.

And as dark drew closer, wrapping the city in a cloak of muted pinks and oranges, Carmen spoke. She talked of their parents, and drew out the one photo they had left of them.

We were all so happy before pneumonia took you from us, she reflected, almost paralyzed by grief. The words too painful to speak.

And as they stepped out across the road that held the home they had treasured before, Carmen took her final breath, still looking at the photo of their parents.

To Amora, it was simply brief images.

A dark shape plowing out of the darkness.

A sound of crunching metal.

A brief cry.

Bright lights.

And then she was kneeling on the road by the prone body of Carmen. Her sister. Her other half. And the sound that came out of her mouth was an animal one. A scream of primal grief. And then she did the only thing she could.

She stood, and as she spoke, she made the greatest sacrifice.

‘Carmen shall be the one to live.’

And with that she dissolved into a burst of pure white feathers, and as they floated slowly up into the sky, she was at peace at last.

On the ground Carmen gasped and rose again.

So now, on the other side of the fence, a girl tends to those trapped there. She glides between them, offering a few words of comfort, anything to keep them from attempting the same desperate act as her sister.

And the children on the other side are still there, but with a touch by her soft hand to their foreheads they do not relive sad memories, but rather lie in an endless sleep of peaceful dreams.

As Carmen tends to the souls on the other side, she occasionally glances to the sky and whispers her prayer for her sister’s soul, and her own.

‘We are birds, we are free.’



KINDERGARTEN
PARTY

KATIE FLINN

7

KINDERGARTEN PARTY

One at a time! One at a time!
The teacher screeches as they form a line
Walking in, looking eager
Can't decide, both or neither?
Cakes and jellies, in a row
1, 2, 3 where did they go?
Bang and sizzle, bonbon cracks
Crunch and 'mmm', teacher snacks,
That is when the child cries
The round, fake tears rolling down from her eyes
Shouting 'all the chips are gone'
'And I blame it all on John.'
The boy retorts 'Now, that's just silly'
'I think that it was Lily.'
A fight breaks out
More children scream
No longer distracted by sweet strawberries and cream.
But wait a bit, the children sit
They laugh and play once more
The bell then rings
The teacher sings
As they file out the door.



The moon glistens in the sky as I run as fast as my legs can carry me. Branches whip my face as I scramble helplessly for my life. It's nearly got me now. I can hear its menacing footsteps just behind me, teasing me, or is that just the thumping of my panicked heart? Tears stream down my face as I grasp the straw hat tightly. I shut my eyes as the monster attacks, feeling it rip me apart, making me suffer. A root catches my foot and I tumble onto the hard ground. Darkness creeps into the corners of my eyes, pulling me under, flooding my cold, trembling body.

*

A picture appears in my mind. My parents are smiling, resting on our bright red picnic rug. My mother's sweet, beautiful face is shaded by her favourite hat, a straw one with colourful intricately detailed ribbons. I can't remember a time happier than this. I begin to wade into the shallows of a nearby stream, surrounded by sky high trees swaying freely in the breeze. My younger brother follows and soon we find ourselves surrounded by small fish that twirl in-between our legs. I move deeper into the stream so that the water is just up to my hip, not daring to go any further for fear of being swept away by the current.

'Timmy, stay there, it's too deep for you over here.'

'But I want to be with you!'

'No, I said stay there!'

But Timmy was stubborn and made his way over to me.

'What are you doing?! I told you not to come!'

'Well I'm here now...'

'Timmy!'

It all happened so quickly. One second he was there and the next he was gone.

'Timmy! Timmy!' I cry.

Hearing the commotion my parents come rushing over. It doesn't take long for them to realise what has occurred. My mother, eyes filled with terror, dives desperately into the stream. I hold my breath. It seems like hours before she finally resurfaces, all her energy drained, holding a small figure. Timmy. My father races into the water where my mother stands, takes him from her grasp and clings to him helplessly. He hurries up the river bank and quickly lays Timmy on the bright green grass. I pray silently as I watch my father frantically try to revive him. Witnessing the diminishing possibilities

GONE FOREVER

JESSICA HEPWORTH
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
WINNER

7

of saving Timmy, I eventually lose all hope. I bury myself in my hands, weeping and quivering. All it takes is a small cough for me to rise from the depths of this darkness. It's Timmy; he's going to be okay. My father sweeps him into his arms and cradles him like a baby. 'Daddy!' Timmy gasps.

'It's okay. I'm right here. You're okay, you're okay.'

'Where's mummy?' Timmy's face is filled with concern.

I look around to where my mother had only been a few moments before, she isn't there. I turn frantically, searching in every direction for her, but she is nowhere to be found.

'Mum' I call, 'Mum!'

That's when I see it, her lovely straw hat floating on top of the river innocently. The scene is so deceptively peaceful, the river masking the crime it has just committed. I slowly walk towards the hat and kneel down by the river. Realisation sweeps over me, as I pick it up with shaky hands. There I lie, clasping the hat, weeping for my mother.

7

*

A new image consumes me. The room is silent apart from my soft sniffing. All I see is a sea of darkness, nameless faces dressed in black. I hate the colour black. It drains life from anything it can get its evil hands on. My mother wouldn't have liked this. She would have wanted to be farewelled with beautiful flowers of all colours, not like this at all. My father is standing next to me, his face completely impassive. I tug on his arm, but he brushes me off absent-mindedly. I decide to hold Timmy's hand instead.

*

I am now kneeling around a game of Chinese checkers. It's Timmy's turn. I look over to my father, who is sitting lifelessly on our small couch, staring out the window. I follow his gaze, but there's nothing there. Sorrow has drained his soul. Despair has changed him. I remember a time when he would be playing with us, his eyes dancing with life, a happier time.

*

I awaken from the darkness of my memories, willing myself to get up and fight this monster. But that's when I realise, there is no monster. The real monster is my own fear and sorrow, eating me up from the inside. I still clutch the straw hat in my arms; its ribbons now faded. I begin to walk. I walk and walk, until I finally reach my destination.

Before me is a beautiful river, surrounded by sky high trees swaying freely in the breeze. I reach the edge of the river and kneel down gently. I must put all this behind me, forget all that has happened. I must, or I will never feel happiness again.

With soft lips, I carefully plant a kiss on the top of the hat, then I let go.

The hat falls onto the calm river, and begins to float away. Further and further away, taking all my sorrows with it. Soon it is gone forever.



7

THE JADE
JEWELLERY BOX

HAINI JIANG

TIME TO WRITE

COMPETITION

FINALIST AND

HONOURABLE MENTION

PROLOGUE

“You are like a bull in a china shop, Alice!”

My mother was always yelling at me and scolding me for my clumsiness. Vases, dinner plates, photo frames; I was forever breaking something by accident. But the day I broke my mother’s treasured jade jewellery box was an entirely different matter. This was no accident. I wanted to punish her in the harshest way possible.

MELBOURNE, 15TH OF APRIL 2012

THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON

My family came to Australia 20 years ago, fleeing Beijing after Tiananmen Square. My parents and sister left with nothing but a few possessions, their reminders of home.

And here I am, scolded by my mother for breaking her precious jade jewellery box. It was the only thing she bought with her from China. My mum has humiliated me and I hate her. She’s mean to me just because I was an unplanned child. Dad ran off because of me. Mum hates me because I shouldn’t exist. There was never supposed to be me. I was never supposed to be here.

I had invited some friends over for a party and we had had a pretty good time. We had a great time turning the music up really loud and dancing but Mum came home. She took in the scene and didn’t say anything. She just grabbed me and slapped me across the cheek. I couldn’t help but let a tear slip out the corner of my eye. She yelled out to everyone in broken English: “Get out of house! Go away! Out! Nobody allowed here! Now!” I was so embarrassed. Everyone got up and left. I saw people muttering to themselves. I just stood there, feeling the pain in my cheek gradually dim to numbness.

I wanted to leave with them. I watched them all file out the door, looking at the walls of my house covered in pictures of China and scripts of Chinese writing. For the first time, I noticed how truly Asian I was and I hated it.

I hated her. I hated my sister.

They were always in the clever Chinese world, speaking a language I only barely understood. I was a child born in Australia and was treated differently in this house. I didn’t belong here amongst the cheongsams, lanterns and lucky bamboo. I longed for a big backyard, a cricket pitch and a barbecue.

7

So, when she embarrassed me like that, I wanted to hurt her. I wanted to prove that I didn't care about the past and the old stories. So, after my friends had all left and my mother had finished berating me, I walked down the hall and into her room.

The jade jewellery box. The last piece of Beijing she has here in suburban Melbourne.

I stared down at it. I ran my fingers over those fine, intricate designs. Dragons danced around the box. I ran my finger over those so fine pieces of artwork. Then, I picked it up, hesitating for a few seconds, and then smashed it onto the timber floor. My mum, upon hearing the noise, came rushing in. She saw the mess, the flushed look on my face and my shaking hands. She didn't move. Just stared blankly at the scene in front of her. I pushed roughly past her and walked out of her room, leaving my mother, shocked.

I called Thalia, my closest friend, and asked if I could stay with her for a few days. She immediately asked me what was wrong, whilst calling out to her mum if I could stay. I heard a 'yes' in reply and immediately relaxed. I couldn't stay with my mother now. I told Thalia I would explain everything later and asked her if she could pick me up. Again, she asked her mum and another 'yes' was heard in the distance. I busied myself into packing an overnight bag. I only brought my school uniform, knowing that Thalia would have everything else at her house. I heard a honk outside and I walked to the front door via my mum's room. She was sitting on the bed, staring at the broken pieces of jade. I announced I was leaving but she didn't reply. I shrugged and walked out the front door, slamming the door behind me. I got into Thalia's car and we embraced.

BEIJING, 17TH OF APRIL 1989

THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Fear surrounded the city now, as democracy supporters continue to be hunted down and killed. It is not safe for us here now. We have said too much and written too much against the government.

We have a safe passage to Shanghai from where we can fly to Australia. They are providing safety for people like us. But we must hurry. We cannot take much.

How would you decide what to take? A lifetime of memories and objects that mean so much. I look around our small apartment, not knowing where to start. What will we need? What will I miss the most?

THE JADE
JEWELLERY BOX

HAINI JIANG

TIME TO WRITE

COMPETITION

FINALIST AND

HONOURABLE MENTION

7

THE JADE
JEWELLERY BOX

The jade jewellery box.

Part of the Lau family for generations, handed to brides to keep reminding them of their past. Their family. Centuries of precious rings, bangles and jewels have been stored in here. Safe. Stories of great love gone by in the past.

Yes.

The jewellery box can be my link. My reminder of my home. I can build a new life with clothes, furniture and paintings. This box will be my link, my tie to my home.

MELBOURNE, 15TH OF APRIL 2012

THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON

I arrived at Thalia's house just in time for dinner. But I first went to their guest room and plonked all my things on the bed. I sat on the bed and fell back, sighing with exasperation.

"What happened?" asked Thalia, sitting down next to me. I sat up again.

"Mum's jewellery box. I smashed it into a thousand pieces." I replied simply. She gasped; her hand flying to her mouth. Knowing she was going to continue to question me, I started to tell the story of the party. I arrived at the part where she slapped me and she interrupted:

"Oh my God! I forgot! How's your cheek?" she gasped. I shrugged again. I kept talking 'til I finished the story. She thought for a while then asked me, "Why did you ask them over in the first place?"

"I dunno. I wanted to piss her off." I replied, staring at the floor. Our 'girl talk' ended when Thalia's mum called us down for dinner.

I watched their easy relationship with jealousy. Mutual respect, laughter.

Then I pictured my mum. Alone in her room with the shattered pieces of her beloved jewellery box all around her.

"I have to go," I said as I ran out of the door.

I ran all the way home, tears streaming down my face. Guilt, sadness, sympathy, all boiling over.

I flung open the door and saw her still sitting on the floor of her room. But she was no longer crying. "Alice. I love you. I'm sorry I hurt you. I just want you to be safe." She whispered. I hugged her for the longest time. I realised that all the rules and regulations were not to punish me but to protect me. She only remembers her youth full

7

of danger and violence. “I’m sorry Mum. I will try to be a better daughter.”

THE JADE
JEWELLERY BOX

MELBOURNE, 10TH OF FEBRUARY 2013

CHINESE NEW YEAR, THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE

My mother and I stroll, arm in arm, through the sights and smells of New Year celebrations in St Barice Street.

In the corner of my eye, I spot a small store selling jade.

“I’ll be back in a minute...”

I search through my purse and I find just enough money to buy the intricate jade box. It’s not very old. It may not even be from China. But it is a new heirloom. Symbolising a new beginning.



7

WHY?

HAINI JIANG

7

WHY?

As I am a very curious person; you see,
I like to ask questions; too many to name.
Whenever I'm bored; I like to annoy,
The people around me with questions of mine.

Why do combs have teeth but don't bite?
Why do chairs have legs but don't run?
Why do we have two eyes and two ears?
Why do we only have one mouth and one nose?

But sometimes I'm in a more gloomier mood,
I ask people questions I don't understand,
Things that don't really concern me just yet,
Things that Einstein would not even get.

We have the same blood underneath our skin,
Then, why is there racism?
We treat everyone as equals; yes,
Then, why is there sexism?
We are taught to give to the poor in need,
Then, why are there still people around with greed?
We all are special; you always say,
Then, why's there rejection and bullying today?

You see, I'm a very curious person,
And I like to ask these questions.
I do a lot of thinking; too much people think,
I'm just too curious; I say.

Why is it always one goose and two geese?
Why is it never one moose and two meese?
Why is it always one mouse and two mice?
Why is it never one house and two hicc?

The world is full of questions to me,
Full of wonders and things to explore.
I love to think of 'Whys' and 'What ifs?'
But that's a story for another time.



Teachers and friends, picture this: You've just been given an assignment to do on a notable historical figure. Would you do it on Hitler? Genghis Khan? Or Osama Bin Ladin? The answer is definitely not! They all evoke feelings of hatred and disgust. They all stood for violence and brutal force. This is the legacy of the sword.

On the other hand would you do it on William Shakespeare? Mahatma Gandhi? Or even Tagore? Who've all made a great contribution to our lives by expressing their thoughts to the world without violence? Of course you'd do it on them. This is the legacy of the pen. I ardently believe that the pen is mightier than the sword. But what does this mean?

The pen is the fuel for mental strength. Books have been known to help imbibe new thoughts and inspire to explore new frontiers that could be in the field of Science, Philosophy or Literature. It is through the might of the pen that cultures have been preserved from one generation to the next. Research has been passed down from decades and a myriad of ideologies have been exchanged among various societies. Our lives would have been barren of entertainment and enlightenment had there been no way of expressing our thoughts without the help of written words.

The sword implies force. By forcing one's views on others through violence and undue duress, only results in evoking feelings of terror and oppression. So reason takes a backseat when the sword is used to overpower society to one's views.

However, some people argue that the sword is necessary under certain circumstances, against the will of such things as terrorism. It is an understanding that in such situations the sword does have a role to play. But it is the thought process that counts in the end. In order to understand the right from the wrong, and to shape our own personality, words and your own public and personal thoughts have the biggest role to play. It is quite clear from historical references that, give a man a sword for good purpose, it is highly likely that it will be used for corrupt and selfish ends.

There was one famous Indian hero. His name was Mahatma Gandhi and what this one man did was remarkable. He was against the whole system of violence and brutal force. He did not help India become a free nation by violence. No he didn't. He was a passionate and masterful speaker who shaped people's opinions with words, and soon he had enticed the entire nation, even when they still had

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

NAVYA KATARIA

ORATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER



THE PEN IS
MIGHTIER THAN
THE SWORD

all the rights to hold their own views.

I'd like to end with a quote from J.Michael Straczynski, an American writer and film producer. *'Like everyone else I'm going to die, but the words – the words live on for as long as there are readers to read them, audiences to hear them. It's immortality by proxy. It's not really a bad deal all things considered.'*

Thank you so much for listening.



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THE CALL OF THE WIND

Can you hear it calling, whispering in your ear?
Sneaking around corners, as it comes near.
Howling at the moon in the dead of night,
Lifting the leaves, making them take flight.
Screaming at walls, begging to come in,
Biting at toe nails, nipping at skin.
Carrying the rain east and west,
Always moving, unable to rest.
Flying past, did you see as it grinned?
Can you hear it, the call of the wind?



THE CALL OF THE WIND

CLAUDIA SCHONFELDT



BEST FRIENDS

A best friend is someone who is there,
During the good and the bad,
Someone who doesn't judge you for your weirdness,
Someone who doesn't laugh at you but laughs with you,
Someone whose heart is as big as the universe but,
They're as loud as a blaring stereo and as crazy as a clown,
Someone who would do anything for you,
Someone who cares about you,
A best friend is someone whom you cherish,
A best friend stays in your heart forever.



BEST FRIENDS

JEMIMA JACOBSON

THE INSTITUTION

SARAH CHEANG
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
WINNER



I don't believe in coincidences, but this wasn't a coincidence.

The train was late; it was never late. But it wasn't just late, it was practically empty. I blasted music through my headphones and shut my eyes to soothe the restless thoughts buzzing madly in my mind. Ever since I had left Evelyn at the station, all by herself, I had a burden of guilt thrust upon my shoulders. I was the last one to see her, I should have stayed with her and maybe she wouldn't have disappeared. Maybe she would still be here with me, two friends catching the train to school. There I was, sitting innocently and blindly, so blind not to notice a man hiding his eyes shadily behind a pair of aviators, observing my every move.

I don't remember much after that, with an exception of the firm hands gripping me tightly and the intoxicating aroma that lured me into darkness. The next time I regained consciousness was at the institution, well, that's what everyone called it. I never saw the outside, but the doctor said maybe revisiting it would spark some of my memories, so here I now. From the outside it is a dilapidated building, with its grey paint peeling off like dry, lifeless autumn leaves. However, its bleak facade masked the reality of its torturous realm and its single inhabitant.

She wasn't your typical nurse. Her piercing glare was a crackling whip ready to strike and her movements were like those of an automaton, robotic and merciless. Everyone knew her by the straw hat she wore upon her chestnut hair, which reeked with the stench of rotting flesh. The other inmates seemed like they had already surrendered to her power and I couldn't blame them; she was indeed a most terrifying figure. Not one morsel of compassion could be found in her bitter heart.

I gently pushed open the broken door into the derelict building and strode into the main hall. The room was barely recognisable; it was once swarming with gaunt bodies and downcast faces. I remember the blankets strewn in the corners of the room from where we slept, crumbs of the stale bread given to us and that wretched room which they called a bathroom. On my first day there, I witnessed the treachery of that godforsaken place.

She stormed in and flung the door open, revealing the morning sun, and walked mechanically through the huddled crowds of children to where I stood. To my relief, she didn't grab me, but a boy who looked about ten, and just from the expression on his face I could tell that he was dreading every moment that her bony fingers had seized him. He never returned.

Life in imprisonment was tedious and, day by day, we lost faith. Faith that someone would come to save us, hope that those gone

were somewhere safe. I would have fallen into line as well, in despair and tragically miserable, were it not for one particular person.

I scanned through a sea of gloomy eyes, until I came upon a pair of familiar olive eyes. Evelyn. I was rendered speechless when I saw her; everyone thought that she was gone. She had vanished from the small town of Bellhallow in the blink of an eye, but then again, so had I. She had an imperturbable expression as her dainty fingers fumbled with the drawstrings of her jumper. I eagerly pushed my way to her and hugged her for the sight of her was a mere miracle.

In the institution, we stuck together like peas in a pod, literally. We talked for hours on end, about everything; the past, present and most importantly the future. We made a plan, an ingenious concoction that had about as much to chance of success as the sun rising in the west, but the one thing that I had almost lost, kept me going. Hope.

We knew the schedule and meticulously planned everything to the smallest of details. 'Remember to do this... don't forget that...' Evelyn was a perfectionist and she scrupulously strived for precision. Just after the chime of eight in the morning, the nurse would charge to her next victim, leaving the door wide open. None of us knew what was outside, but that was a risk we were willing to take. We spread the word of our escape and tomorrow, we confirmed, would be the breakout.

The plan was an organised chaos. The diversions we planned had stirred up a complete sense of confusion over everyone, especially the nurse. Thunderous noises boomed in the hall and we bolted out of the open door. To anyone watching, we were a gigantic cluster of children running amok. When the monumental fire of the building was lit, we didn't look back.

A shroud of smoke filled the sky but that didn't stop the sun. It was a refuge, generously spreading its tendrils of warmth and we rushed towards it like water to a sponge. We were finally free.

A pair of footprints I had not noticed struck my curiosity. Was I hallucinating or could I smell rotting meat? I followed the footprints, careful not to tread on them as they snaked outside onto the pristine layer of snow that had just begun to fall.

The footprints in the snow suddenly ended and lying on the ground was a straw hat.



MY FRIEND

CALIDA EVANS

When we were little we used to ransack the house for pillows and blankets and build the biggest cubby that the world had ever seen. He'd pull every single blanket off of his bed and I would temporarily forget that he'd probably peed on those blankets last night. We would spend the day under blankets, pillows and coffee tables and the air would be hot and stuffy and it would smell like pee. We didn't care.

He didn't stop wetting his bed for years, even though he got into huge trouble. It was like it was his way to get back at the world. He always had his ways to get at people. He would never eat with knives and forks properly or use a napkin. It was disturbing and disgusting to watch him eat, he gave me a front seat view to the insides of his mouth full of mashed up food that had a reddish colour to it because he lived on a diet of tomato sauce. I asked him once if he even tried to use the cutlery and he just giggled and said 'Nope' and went back to stuffing his face.

I have never seen him brush his hair willingly. His hair did what it wanted and it was never exactly the same. Once, when he hadn't been dragged kicking and screaming to the hairdressers for a while, his hair was so long that all I could see of his face was a great big blond mane of hair.

I'm not sure what colour his eyes are. One of our friends swears that they are green, like hers, but when I looked they were hazelnut. Whenever he wanted something he would open his eyes really wide and present a creepy half smile, half smirk. I think it was meant to be cute but it looked disturbing to me.

He had this vendetta against buttons and refused to wear anything with them. He spent half the time in too short sweatpants and t-shirts that were actually long sleeved shirts that he'd grown out of and hadn't bothered to buy new clothing. It wasn't that he couldn't afford it, our parents certainly could, he just didn't like anything. He absolutely hated jeans and didn't even try to learn how to tie shoe laces 'til the end of grade four. He got it eventually, but I think it was only because of the threat of losing computer privileges.

He would often spend the whole day on the computer playing games. He would groan, complain when I wanted to have a go and he would walk slowly while trying to elbow me as he stomped his way up the stairs into his room. If he wasn't on his computer, he was watching television or playing on the Wii. The only sport he ever did was swimming and I really wish that he wasn't that good at it.

Most of the time he was a harmless kid but sometimes he would



go into these frightening rages and they nearly always ended with all parties involved getting hurt. One day we were swimming alone in his pool and for some reason he was mad at me. I was cornered in the deep end against the wall and he was pushing down on me. His teeth were gritted and he wouldn't let go. I was struggling to stay above water and I was trying to grab the edge of the pool to pull myself up. I've never felt so scared in my life: after all, what kind of friend tries to drown you? He still swears that it never happened. It's like the person that tried to drown me was some stranger that I only see in fleeting flashes and glimpses, like a tiger in the trees.

There was a time when he was talking to me and he said: 'When I get angry everything goes blank.' It's funny that the colour white is meant to be associated with peace and calm, but really I think that it represents anger.

A couple of months ago we tried to build another cubby house but it wasn't really the same. Maybe it was that I was too big to crawl around under coffee tables. It could have been that we kept fighting and arguing. Or maybe it was that I'd grown up. Either way, the blankets still smelled like pee.



FRIEND
YIYING FANG

When I was little, I had a very close friend. She had thick shoulder-length hair that was black, dry and smelt of artificial peaches. It was always swept back in messy pigtail braids. It was neatly tied at the start of the day, but by the afternoon, large strands of hair were hanging loose and her hair looked like a mountain range of bumps. She often said that she didn't want to take out the braids in fear that she couldn't tie her hair up again. I managed to persuade her once. After she attempted to tie her hair back, it looked worse than it did before. She had to leave her hair out for the rest of the day.

Her large ears stuck straight out, like handles, on both sides of her head. She said it was because she made too many silly faces. I said it was because of her large round glasses. We used to make a joke that they were the reason why she couldn't run very fast. Once, we taped her ears back and tried to race to see if she could run any faster. She looked so ridiculous, I couldn't help laughing, and we ended up not racing at all.

I remember when I made a joke or said something funny, her eyes would go slightly cross-eyed as she smiled and showed a row of perfect teeth. She had beautiful eyes. They would change colour almost as often as she blinked. They would reflect the colour of whatever was in front of her, but they would always have the same tree-bark coloured ring around the pupil. She said that it changed colour according to her mood. I never believed her.

When she talked, she would talk very softly, just loud enough so that only the people close to her could hear her. She never laughed around me, just chuckled or giggled. Her shoulders would shake ever so slightly and she would cover her toothy grin with both hands. This gesture would always make the adults frown. The rare sound of her laughter sometimes seeped through the cracks of the walls and reached my ears and I would always ask myself, what was she laughing about, and who could make her laugh, when I couldn't.

She loved the playground. Whenever I asked her what she wanted to do, she would grin happily and drag me by the arm to the playground. She would run around, spinning the wheel, staring through the plastic telescope and yell at me to join her. It was one of the only times I have ever heard her shout. Some days we were successful and threatening pirates, swimming in gold and loot, eating lavishly in a ship that sliced the ocean in half as it dashed off into the sunset. On other days, we were a gentle and welcoming



family of four, complete with pets, dolls and tea sets. Our imagination was as wild as a toddler's first candy land dream.

FRIEND

One day, my friend slipped at the top of the playground. One of her feet got stuck on the top rung of the ladder and she fell off. Her pigtails flew up into the air and fluttered like flames in the wind. Her eyes widened in surprise and fear and her mouth opened to scream moments before she crashed into the ground. The crack more than signified the coming of weeks of pain, inconvenience and worry.

She was whisked off to hospital almost immediately. I never saw her again. She suddenly moved out of the country, for reasons unknown to me. I have forgotten the look of her face and the sound of her voice, but I will always remember her changing eyes, her little chuckle and the faint whiff of artificial peaches.



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ONE FINE SUNNY
MORNING SET BY
THE CREEK

HANNAH WILSON



ONE FINE SUNNY MORNING SET BY THE CREEK

One fine sunny morning set by the creek,
Busy Chris Smith was getting ready to seek,
He'd got his dusty pan ready, ready for gold,
But what he did not know, was about to unfold.

Right by his side, was his best mate Nick Pound,
He was smiling and laughing and mucking around,
'Eureka, Eureka!' Suddenly Chris Smith screamed,
The dirt in his pan had started to gleam!

'I've got it, I've got it' he yelled with pride,
'It's mine forever, look at me' he cried,
'I've searched and searched all through the stream,
This is the answer to my dream.'

He picked up the gold and he held it up high,
Then suddenly a mysterious stranger whooshed by,
He grabbed the shiny gold, holding on tight,
Got on his brown horse, and rode out of sight.

'I've got it, I've got it' he yelled with pride,
'It's mine forever, look at me' he cried,
'I've searched and searched all through the stream,
This is the answer to my dream.'

'I am Nick Pound, and you have stolen from my friend,
To run from us, I do not recommend,
He has looked and looked, given up all of his time,
If you don't come back you will pay for your crime.'

Nick jumped on his horse, rode quickly away,
He wasn't afraid of getting into the fray,
The stranger slowed down, his horse was tired,
So he jumped on his feet, he was inspired.

'I've got it, I've got it' he yelled with pride,
'It's mine forever, look at me' he cried,
'I've searched and searched all through the stream,
This is the answer to my dream.'

The two men got closer, the stranger had stopped,
He had no energy left, his head had dropped,
'Ha' Pound said with a smile on his face,
'I knew I'd win, I run this place.'

He snatched the gold from the hand of the stranger,
'Stay away from this man, I say he is danger!'

'I've got it, I've got it' he yelled with pride,
'It's mine forever, look at me' he cried,
'I've worked and worked to catch this man,
'You are a trouble maker! You are you banned!'

Nick took the stranger to the police,
'You will go to jail, and will never be released,
The fray was over, Smith got his gold back,
Nick Pound was the hero, there's no doubt in that.



SHARK FINNING

ANGELA YAN
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER



Sitting at a large round table in a noisy restaurant, I tasted my first mouthful of shark fin soup. At first it looked strange, but when I tasted it, it didn't taste strange at all, it was surprisingly delicious! What is shark fin soup you may ask? Well, it's a thick soup made with chicken and ham broth with shark fin and shredded chicken or crab meat. When I was younger, I certainly thought all that flavour came from the shark fin, but really, it doesn't even contribute to the taste.

Shark fin is regarded a delicacy and a health tonic in Asia, particularly China, and is traditionally consumed by the wealthy minority of Chinese people who believe that it can cure most serious illnesses. It sounds perfect with all its 'benefits', don't you think? But do we really know how it comes to our tables? Shark fin is extremely expensive with a kilo of it selling for up to \$650! This explains why so many people have joined this multi-billion dollar industry. Firstly, the sharks are pulled onto a boat and, still alive, all of their fins are sliced off with a hot knife before the sharks are thrown back into the water. With no fins left and losing blood, the sharks can no longer swim and sink to the bottom of the ocean. They then endure a slow, painful death. This is the common and brutal routine of shark finning in 145 countries, particularly Indonesia, India, Spain, Taiwan, Argentina, Mexico, Pakistan, United States, Japan and Malaysia. The fins are then traded, harvested, dried and sold to restaurants to be made into soup. Approximately 73 million sharks are slaughtered annually by humans for their fins. On the other hand, approximately 6 people are killed by sharks each year. Sharks are killed for their precious fins to be served to us in gleaming bowls of soup. Sharks are killed for soup?

For medicinal benefits and display of wealth, we are sacrificing the 'wolves' and the 'bears' of the sea that help to maintain the marine ecosystem. When you think of sharks, you may think of movies such as, Jaws, where sharks are portrayed as killing machines. In fact, when they do harm someone, they are just curious and do not have this intention. The biggest predator is mankind. Sharks help keep the fish population healthy by only preying on the old, sick, or weak fish to prevent disease. Sharks are so special that scientists say that they are the 'keystone' species and without them, the whole food web will collapse and become unbalanced. A loss of sharks leads to not just a devastation in the marine environment, but it can also lead to the loss of certain foods we need for *our* survival.

Sharks have existed for 450 million years but if we continue to slaughter them, they may be gone within a few decades. When is shark finning going to stop? When there are no sharks left? Famous restaurants like Flower Drum in Melbourne, and hotel groups like the Peninsula and Shangri-La have banned shark fin from their menus. Sharks are animals that we cannot afford to be eating anymore because they are too important to lose. Instead of killing sharks, humans should be living in harmony with them. For example, in a village called Oslob in the Philippines, fishermen catch shrimp but they are not the only ones. In that area, whale sharks come to feed on those shrimp too. The fishermen could have kept all of the shrimp for themselves and sold the fins of the whale sharks, but instead they decided to share their shrimp with the whale sharks after every catch. Many organisations, such as Shark Savers, have been trying to recover shark populations after finning. Shark Savers is an organisation which works to protect sharks and manta rays by building awareness and educating people about these animals and about the importance to take action.

Shark sanctuaries should be established to reverse the falling population of sharks. All fishing countries and international organisations should regulate shark fishing and trading of their fins. On 23rd August 2013, India, the second largest catcher of sharks in the world, announced a ban on finning sharks at sea. This ban has now effectively allowed the country to monitor how many sharks and what species of sharks are being caught. We hope that India's recent ban on shark finning at sea will be a turning point for shark conservation in the region.



THE ASYLUM
SEEKER ISSUE

ROSE ADAMS
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER



Imagine you are in a boat. Not your pristine white boat that we see occupying the docks at Portsea, but a boat darkened with smoke and grime, shabby and discoloured. Now imagine the constant rock of the rumbling waves below, making your body sway from side to side. You are suddenly overcome by motion sickness, you try to make a run for the side, but you can't. You can't move. There is no air around you. There is not a familiar face in sight.

Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.' The Labor Party's new asylum seeker policy, of sending asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea, has made it practically impossible for thousands of people seeking asylum to claim that right.

Today we commonly see the screaming headlines about asylum seekers and how they are 'Clogging our nation's shores' or 'Taking away our land.' Well, according to a survey recently conducted by Amnesty International, the number of asylum seekers to arrive in Australia by boat would only take up 6.8% of the MCG. In 2012 only 14, 415 people sought asylum in Australia, not such a big number when compared to the 45, 197 people who sought asylum in the UK. But most importantly, the number of asylum seekers who have arrived by boat and have been found to be terrorists – 0. Asylum seekers are fleeing conditions that we could never endure or understand and yet both major political parties would remove all hope and safety from these individuals' lives and place them in terrible conditions.

Najeeba Wazefadost is 22 years old and is currently completing a degree in medicine and hopes to become a doctor. As a young girl, many of her relatives and friends were killed by the Taliban. With her parents she fled Pakistan, which she said is one of the hardest decisions you can be forced to make. For her it meant a break with all that she knew – family and friends. All the familiar sights, sounds, smells and tastes are left behind. They were eventually crammed into a tiny fishing boat with 100 other people.

But when Najeeba and her family saw the barbed wire at Curtin Processing Centre, and they knew the months ahead were going to be tough. Finally, after months of uncertainty, the family was granted refugee status. Now a student, Najeeba deeply appreciates the help she has received and sums up her views on the asylum seekers' issue she quotes a line from Advance Australia Fair: 'We've boundless

plains to share, with courage let us all combine...'

Unfortunately the mainstream media does not show us the full picture. Behind the scenes, hundreds of campaigns are being run to reach out to the population and let them know what they can do to help. The Hot Potato campaign, which launched in Melbourne recently, is a people's campaign and road trip, aiming to debunk myths about asylum seekers and inform Australians with 'facts, not fears.' It asks people to add their name 'to the growing list of Australians who believe that asylum seekers in Australia should be treated fairly and with compassion.'

Over the last 50 years, Amnesty International have realised that messages of support can make a real difference to people who have lost their freedom. That's why Amnesty has devised a new 'Freedom from Fences' appeal where you can send in heart-warming messages to asylum seekers in detention centres. The United Nations has released a scathing report on the Manus Island detention centre in Papua New Guinea. The report expressed serious concern with the conditions and processes currently in place, and has released a series of recommendations to the Australian and PNG government.

Why would people pay money to knowingly board a leaky boat that may not make the journey? As Harper Lee said 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.' I don't understand how the Government could make the decision to send all asylum seekers to PNG and we know that the opposition intend to continue this policy and try to turn the boats back. We don't know the terrible conditions they've lived in, corrupt governments, abuse, we have hope for the future, and they don't. A leaky boat is a chance to them, a chance for a better life. These people need to be shown compassion. Australia needs to help those most in need, who can't even afford to arrive by boat.

We do have the right to decide who enters our borders, but as a privileged nation we must offer help to those in genuine need. Unless Australia significantly increases the number of refugee visas granted and its foreign aid, sending asylum seekers to PNG, possibly to suffer more abuse, or using the navy, as if these people were the enemy, is both unacceptable and shameful.



DESIRE

ROSE ADAMS

9

DESIRE

Oh true pilgrim, why do your eyes not love?
Am I truly that monster of the night?
A black raven in the midst of a dove,
Shunned into the dark shadows by his light.
He does not know I live for he exists,
Not in the eyes of love and devotion,
For friendship desperately persists
Forcing away his hidden attraction.
Death I beg, take me by your hand tonight
As my unrequited love hath no end,
It stays cold and wounded, it does not fight,
Away in a dark place, never to mend.
To burn with desire and keep it hidden,
Is a monstrous act, never forgiven.



ARLES, FRANCE 1888

My life is plagued by colour. Colour rains down on me like a storm, immersing everything around me in passionate reds, soothing blues, jealous greens and effervescent pinks. They all seem to melt together, like paint on a canvas, each of them crying louder than the other, begging me to paint them.

The cacophony of noise drags me out of yet another daydream, bringing me back into the present in the café. Le Forum was busy during all hours of the day and night, housing patrons of different statuses and wealth all under the one roof. The orange glow from inside the café beckoned weary wayfarers in from the night like a beacon guiding ships into the bay. I run my paint-stained hands over the delicate stem of the wine glass, drinking deeply from a bottle of wine bought with the last of my francs. The burden of this tough week was finally taking its toll with the dull ache in my feet growing more and more. I had been wandering from galleries to strangers, trying to persuade anyone I could find to buy anything from my motley collection of oil paintings. 'Too strange,' 'Too different,' they would all say. The people of Arles didn't like anything different. If only selling was as easy as drinking.

Suddenly my gaze is drawn towards a particular newcomer to the café. He stands in the doorway with his back to the cold night, a hand running erratically through his ginger hair and in his other hand, clutched tightly to his chest was a worn out, old straw hat. His eyes scan around the already full café, looking for an empty seat. Moments later, the bar stool next to me is pulled out with a dull scrape and the stranger takes his seat. 'One glass of red, s'il vous plait,' he says to the bar tender in a thick accent that I can't quite pick. I glance over at him, taking in his dishevelled beard and aged face, long ago creased with worry. He catches my glance and raises his glass. 'Salut,' he gestures at me before raising it to his lips. I attempt a half-hearted smile. His gaze drifts down towards the stack of paintings by my feet. 'You're an artist?' he asks.

'I was,' I reply, scoffing at my own work.

'Was?' he stares at me incredulously.

'No one ever seems to appreciate anything I've ever created. All I see around me is a world full of colour, bleeding out through life and all I can do is soak it up through the strokes of a paint brush and disperse it onto a canvas. Why can't people understand what I'm

COLOUR

ANNIE GLEISNER

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED



COLOUR

trying to say?’ I ask through an exasperated breath. He reaches down to examine the pictures more closely. The hardened look on his face starts to soften as he leafs through them, his lips curling up into a faint smile.

Finally he turns his gaze back on me. ‘These are incredible,’ he mutters softly. I set down my glass and stare at him with a sceptical gaze. ‘You must be mad to think that this rubbish is any good,’ I scoff.

‘Maybe I am,’ he laughs, picking out one of the smaller canvases covered with the sky. The cool, muted blues lay softly behind the vibrant yellows of stars that ignite the picture with a burning gleam. The man stares at it for a long time, running his calloused hands across the rough paint. ‘How much do you charge for these?’ his soft green eyes are fixated upon mine.

I let out a small chuckle. ‘Whatever I can scrape up. Anything is better than nothing.’ He reaches across the table and places his timeworn, withered straw hat gingerly in front of me. ‘I don’t have much, but this has gotten me through many tough days of painting, drinking and sadness,’ he explains. I take it in my hands, turning it over and feeling the worn out, rough yet soft straw under my fingers, weathered over time. When I look up he is standing over me, money to pay for his wine already placed on the table, my painting still in his hands. He mutters a quiet thank you and turns on his heels, ready to walk away.

‘What’s your name?’ I inquire after him, not willing to let this stranger leave still clouded in mystery. He turns to face me one last time. His soft eyes catch the gleam of the light cast by the lamp and his mouth spreads into a smirk, accentuating the wrinkles etched in his skin over time.

‘Vincent,’ he says, before slowly walking into the night, out of the café, and my life forever.



9

I wake up and stare at the ceiling for a good ten minutes, water my plants like I normally do and air my sheets. I'm still learning to do various mundane adulthood activities like getting the mail and not being disappointed upon hearing phrases such as 'I'd rather just be friends'. There's a cafe I go to almost every day because their music isn't amplified. I sit indoors and get a cup of coffee with as much cream and sugar as I normally do and a sandwich. A familiar tune is playing. Ah yes, *Norwegian Wood* by The Beatles. I was in the company of people I didn't know, staring at the empty parts of their face pretending I knew what I wanted to see. A small bug crawled beside the windowsill, its speed suggesting it was more than the average amount of sad. A man orders a hard-boiled egg from a coffee shop. He only eats the egg white and leaves the untouched yolk as a perfect round ball in the porcelain plate that kind of resembles the sun.

In the afternoon I work part time at a record shop. The shelves were filled with vinyl records covered in thin layers of dust, certain ones more than others. One day, a girl entered the shop and said she's a new worker. Her job was to listen to The Beatle's Rubber Soul album to make sure the quality was up to scratch. She had a flattering side profile and wore a straw hat. Her clothes looked at least three times too big for her body, as was her soul. We went to a café after our shift, because since we were the only workers there we might as well get to know each other.

I asked her why she always wore the same straw hat. She gently brushed off a fly to reveal text written in small print on the side reading *18 Till I Die*. It was a song by Bryan Adams. I laughed because it was obviously a joke, being 18 till you die means you die when you're 18. I've always wondered why people talked about death so carelessly. The conversation drifted on, each weary line chained to a cigarette. Her name was Dawn and her birthday was in April. We talked about similar things but my idea of lilac was a bit darker than hers. I started to feel my chest tied down by a weight, or something more sinister and the unfamiliar black in her eyes became my favourite colour. It takes time to understand things, the same as it took me time to understand why sometimes I see people looking at the ground and smiling a lot. My love was subtle but deep, like water you first mistaken as shallow, but it wasn't the type of love Shakespeare wrote about, with flowery language and iambic pentameter.

Autumn came and I went to the cafe for lunch. Many girls went



in and out of the cafe but none ordered black coffee or had a straw hat. I went to the record shop and the man who owned the place told me not to wait for Dawn that day. As she said, she had died at 18. I was left in my own nostalgic silence. Everything that happened that day became water and slowly evaporated, condensing again only to come back to me again in its original form.

When a female fly falls in love with a male fly she accepts his pheromones and her brain is re-written. Her pheromone receptors are destroyed and the male senses the change and does the same. They can never love anything again and if either of them dies, both sets of genetics are lost forever. Humans cannot love each other with the same dedication as insects. For the rest of my life I will commit petty crimes like stealing things I could easily afford and taking up more seats than I need. I hope reincarnation is real so this can cause me to be reborn as a lesser creature.

A man wakes up with strong coffee and persistent pessimism. His bed is empty. I fill my gas tank to 41 dollars and 41 cents, because it was her favourite number. I bought flowers from a homeless man. I want to bring them to her before they wilt, because I don't have the ability to nurture a living thing. My mind is like a heavy fog in Spring when all the snow has melted and the remainder of Winter was just melted snow and mud, rain and solitude. She would say 'What would I do without you?' I guess that's what I'm wondering now, what she is doing without me. There are always other 'worst days of my life', so I guess I'm just being all sorts of melancholy.

I wake up and stare at the ceiling for a good ten minutes, water my plants like I normally do and have my coffee with a much cream and sugar as I normally do. Instead of cleaning my sheets I take them straight downstairs and put them in the dumpster. We just slowly grew up and started caring for various mundane adulthood activities like getting the mail and watering flowers in window boxes. I'm reading my favourite message inside my head and it's raining outside. I read it over until it's lost its feeling and then read it another twenty times until it's lost its meaning as well. It's hard to feel anything when no one's talking to you. I don't think lonely is a feeling because it's really hard to feel anything when no one's talking to you.

Are we perhaps as insignificant as insects?



Crisp, white snow clung to the sign hanging outside the café. The bell above the door tinkled as I raised my hands up to the fogging glass, gently pushing the door open. A waft of warm coffee-scented air greeted me, making my white cheeks tingle after the cold outside. Muffled chatter and clinking teaspoons were interspersed with hisses from the coffee machine as I shuffled slowly over to the corner of the room, slipping into a worn chair. I mumbled my coffee order to the waitress standing before me, and turned the newspaper sitting on the table towards me.

His small, soft hands trembled as the floor underneath him began to shiver. The winds were no longer whispering, but began to howl over the clatter of plates and cutlery rattling.

'Mum?' Billy whispered.

'Mum?' This time more desperate.

'Mum!' Billy's voice could hardly be heard as cracks ran across the windows, spreading to the edges of the window frame, before exploding towards his face, despite the layers of tape that had covered the glass. Billy turned away from the window, holding his head protectively to his knees, as he crouched on the floor. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to close himself off, but could still see the whirl of snapped beams, overturned chairs and broken plates dancing around him. Photographs that had occupied the broken frames from the mantel piece skipped along the floor, as if re-enacting Billy and their mother's lives.

Despite the warmth around me, I shivered. Reading about the recent events happening near my hometown gave me a longing to be at home, and I hoped my family hadn't been affected, although I was quickly distracted by the movement of an approaching waitress, who looked as worn as the smudged apron she was wearing. She carelessly plonked my mocha on the table, letting the dark liquid slosh over the edges of the mug. I sipped gingerly at the coffee, rolling it over my tongue, tickling each and every one of my tastebuds, before swallowing and letting the smooth, river of warmth run down my throat and into my growling stomach. I turned my attention back to the newspaper, scanning the map of cities and towns affected by a hurricane in the very state in which I had grown up.

Just hours after the hurricane struck, the remaining members of the town were already clearing up the houses that were still in a relatively good condition, and searching among fallen wreckage for survivors. Helicopters surveyed the mess like eagles preparing to swoop upon their prey, as volunteer workers clambered over piles of debris. By the time the sun was sitting on the horizon, a fine drizzle



THE RUSH
OF WIND

had begun to fall, which seemed like nothing compared to the remorseless rains that had pelted down that very morning.

The small black letters danced on the delicate grey page in my peripheral vision as my eyes fixed on the last drops of coffee clinging to the bottom of the cup, which now had cream coloured rings around the inside of it. As I swallowed, my eyes deviated back to the newspaper. The letters were still blurry, but I could quickly recognise letters as my eyes came back to focus. C. A. D. W. My eyes snapped back into focus, and my heart pounded unmistakably into my throat. Cardwell. I could no longer hear the other people in the café murmuring like flies, or the rush of wind beating against the windows. There were only two things on my mind: Mum and Billy.



9

She curled the brush in a tight arc, continuing a line that tapered at the end. Sheltered from the cold wind by the restaurant's supporting pillar, with only the neon glow of the city's night time to see by, she created a crouching tiger in smooth lines and neat strokes.

Finally the tiger stilled, crouching protectively around the second pillar that framed the door of the restaurant. Pleased, Audrey stepped back but then, little by little, the streetlights revealed tiny imperfections: she should have raised the front leg, she should have narrowed the jaw a little. The end result was a lopsided, ungainly figure, staring with eyes that mimicked flames trapped in sea glass. It looked messy. Childish.

'I might as well have used crayons,' Audrey muttered.

The tiger on the wall shivered, flickering as if caught in a strobe light, colours bleeding into an ugly slurry of orange and black, and slowly peeled away from the wall. She stepped aside to let it pass. The big cat stumbled into the cold air, oddly-shaped jaw opening questioningly as it quested forward into the night.

Audrey counted.

By the fifth count, the tiger disintegrated. It made no sound, its head whipping back, those sea-glass eyes staring at her accusingly. By the seventh count the tiger had gone, leaving only an ugly smear of paint against the concrete pavement.

It always happens, Audrey thought miserably, packing her bag and slinging it over her shoulder. The snow was falling faster now, papering the street in a litter of soft white flakes. As she walked through the snow, she passed several more failed murals: a large eagle reduced to a grey stain on the wall of an alley, an angel that hovered protectively on a church wall was now a distended blemish.

Ever since she had first started drawing, her art would come to life. She had tried pens, she had tried brushes, she had tried every type of paint she could lay her hands on, but the results were always the same.

Audrey hadn't told anyone. Who would believe her?

She turned out of the alley into the main street. The street was crowded with all manner of people huddling into thick winter coats, their breaths steaming in the frigid air. The Primavera Art Gallery was the goliath of the street, dwarfing other buildings.

Audrey adjusted the strap of her bag as she walked. Her keys fell from the opening onto the snowy concrete. With a muffled curse she

PORTRAIT

HANNAH WINSPEAR-
SCHILLINGS
BOROONDARA
LITERARY AWARDS
WINNER OR HIGHLY
COMMENDED



bent to snatch them up, only to freeze in surprise as something caught her eye.

A straw hat was sitting innocuously in the snow beside her. Straightening, she grabbed it and glanced around. 'Is this any...?'

Her voice died as her eyes grew riveted to the name scratched in black on the underside of the hat's brim.

Chelsea Abbot.

She trembled. Her sister Chelsea had been an artist, possibly even better than her, yet few of her paintings had been sold during her lifetime. The remainder were probably lost forever in dusty packing crates abandoned in lonely attics. For Chelsea had certainly died, and died of cancer, no matter how many times Audrey had painted under the watchful light of the stars, trying to bring her back, trying and never succeeding...

Look, the wind whispered, and guided her gaze upwards.

A figure was standing on the steps of the gallery: a slender, girlish figure dressed in faded jeans and a dark shirt. Audrey's memory supplied the image of a faded, listing straw hat perched atop waves of unruly, curly blonde hair that shadowed her forehead and darkened her eyes...

Chelsea smiled and walked into the gallery.

Audrey's legs moved, muscles reacting – suddenly, she was on her feet and climbing the stairs to the gallery.

It was insane. Her sister had died; she had been there in the hospital when Chelsea had slipped away, her last breath fading away beneath halogen lights and masked doctors, her beloved sister's grip on life growing weaker by the minute until, at last, it finally slipped...

But she had *seen* her...

The lobby smelt of polish and lavender, the marble floor stretching over to dark panelled walls. A slowly revolving chandelier flung bright spots of light around the room, dappling the walls and floors with glimmers of brightness. The corridors were almost religious in their silence, an undeterminable feeling of solemnity trapped within their dazzlingly white walls. Silver moonlight grappled cheerfully with shadows in the edge of the room, where the windows scarred the floor with lines of darkness. Audrey's footsteps sounded oddly metallic as they connected with the floorboards; it seemed eerily familiar, like she was caught inside a well-watched black and white film, watching as her sister worked, painting wide,



vivid tableaus. Large canvases blossomed in the whiteness like roses, dazzling splashes of colour – a house in a meadow, the backlit panorama of city streets, a red room, an abstract, grid-like array of red and yellow lights, a forest lit by the ethereal rays of the sunrise...

Audrey looked at them all as she passed, and her throat constricted.

The last painting stopped her in her tracks.

The painting was a portrait of a young blonde girl holding a paintbrush and wearing a straw hat, and it could not have been any clearer to her that it was Chelsea.

Her heart lightened for the first time in weeks.



PORTRAIT

9

THE BEAST

GRACE ZIMMERMAN
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HIGHLY COMMENDED

The hot summer sun beat down against the ramshackle cottage and wheat fields of Sunshine Farm. A little girl, purring gently in her sleep, was curled tightly in her bed under a moth-bitten blanket. Her soft blonde hair draped delicately over the pillow. She opened her hazel eyes and got up from the eroded bed frame. The bright heat of morning had melted away the trauma that the dark brings. The vicious, roaring beast that was awoken at nightfall was now laid to rest. The little girl felt safe while the sun was out, banishing the shadows. It was the moon she didn't trust; its pale, crevassed face glared down on her. The distilled light seemed to sicken her father's spirit, transforming him.

As the little girl arose from her bed, its rusty springs squeaked with displeasure. She tensed; she could hear stirring in her father's bedroom. His soft growling erupted into a howling yawn. The little girl tiptoed gingerly across the faded laminate floor towards the doorway. She glanced up at a photo frame hung crookedly in the finger stained hallway. The photo was of her father; he wore a shaggy mane and a crooked smile. He looked happier than the little girl could ever remember. Now he was a weather-beaten shell, drinking every night to numb the dull ache in his heart. There was someone else in the picture. The woman's thin frame was draped loosely in a floral dress. Her cropped blonde hair settled on her shoulders. A light dusting of freckles brushed her cheeks and wide hazel eyes stared directly at the camera. Atop this young woman's head was a humble straw hat. The little girl now looked at the ugly crack through the centre of the frame; a product of one of the beast's rampages.

Entranced by the photo, the little girl clinked her foot against an empty scotch bottle on the floor. She cowered in fear as the noise echoed through the hallway. The beast was rising; she began to hear it rambling a name. Not her own, but one she recognised. She could feel terror bubbling in the pit of her stomach. She crept towards the paint-chipped doorway and opened the torn fly screen. The ancient hinges creaked and the little girl cringed with dread. She stepped out onto the veranda and a warm morning breeze whipped across her face. She could hear the beast's feet thud on the floor in the house and she heard the familiar clink of bottles knocked over. The little girl ran quickly through the wheat fields of Sunshine Farm, the golden spears of grass whipping against her bare legs.

Loose dust exploded under the little girl's feet as she ran, dirtying



the hem of her cotton nightgown. She could make out the distinct screech of the front door and instinctively crouched, hidden in the beige sea of wheat. The long strands swayed in the wind, lashing softly across her face. The beast stumbled down the veranda, hunting through the grass for its prey. A slurred guttural call emanated from the back of its throat. 'Sarah!' the beast bayed, over and over again.

A memory arose in the little girl's mind; she began to hear a faint scream echo through her head. A ruckus in the lounge room had awoken her in the night. She remembered Sarah, tears streaked across her freckled face. She was yelling, her hazel eyes wild and her arms flailing. Blonde hair fell out of her loose ponytail with every angry shake, yet her straw hat held steady upon her head.

Sarah was screeching at the little girl's father. He stood snarling, heated by the acrimonious argument. A pile of worn leather bags were snuggled securely by the doorway and Sarah stamped towards them. Terror arose in her father's chest and he snatched her arm, baring his teeth, like a lion pouncing on its prey. Calm washed over Sarah; her eyes pierced directly through the man as she firmly pushed him away. He stumbled, winded by the shove. She now strode over to collect her bags; grunting as she lifted the weight of her life's possessions. The little girl clawed at Sarah's leg crying out, 'Mummy, please don't leave.' Sarah kissed the little girl on her forehead and gently pushed her away as she strode towards the doorway. The front door creaked harshly as Sarah, burdened by her bags, passed through. The door slammed shut and a gust of cool air wafted through the stuffy room. Her father slumped to the floor, his whimpers and cries breaking the silence.

The little girl remembered standing confused, watching her father, a soundless mass collapsed on the floor. She stood, watching him, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. Her father sat, absorbed within himself, staring at the picture frame in the hallway. From the corner of the room, the little girl heard heavy feet scrape across the floor. She watched as the beast skulked into the room, hissing and snarling. Its eyes watched her with pleasure, an almost grin appearing on its face. Its claws embraced her father, whispering in his ear as it dragged him, sluggishly into the shadows.

The little girl was still crouched, listening to the rustle of the summer wind.



THE UNSINKABLE
HAT

MARINA ALTSON
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Seagulls squawked noisily above, mirroring the human chaos below. They circled and swarmed in the blue-blanket sky, commentating on the scene beneath which looked like grey, brown and black ants wearing intricate patterns of industry around the dock. But the ants were really people and many of them smiled and exclaimed as they clung to their hats and stared up at the towering ship.

Water sloshed around the bottom of the ship. Its vibrant, red base was just surfacing in between waves, while its high black walls stood tall above the minute people. Four gigantic, yellow funnels topped with black paint sat on the deck resembling enlarged cigarettes. Planks leading up to different levels of the ship carried lines of passengers waiting to come aboard or porters carrying the luggage of the wealthy. They turned around and beamed at the spectators below, shuffling their bags to present their gleaming white tickets. Other passengers lined the deck of the ship, some yelling and waving down to the crowd.

A seagull settled on a pile of luggage and watched a little girl cling to the leg of her father as he tried to pick up his bags. The father's eyebrows pinched together as he stared down at his crying daughter.

'Mary,' he pleaded, 'I'll be back soon, I promise!'

When Mary continued to wail, her mother leaned down and placed an arm around her shoulders.

'Mary, darling, he needs to go. He needs to work, you understand this?'

'No! No, he's not leaving!' Mary lifted her head to face her father, 'Daddy you're not leaving, *please!*'

The father knelt down and put Mary's hands in his own. 'Mary, I don't want to leave you —'

'Then d-'

Her father raised his hand and the girl quietened.

'Mary, I don't want to leave you, but don't you like your new dress?' He pinched the dress' collar between his fingers and Mary couldn't help but smile at her pretty new dress. 'Don't you like your new toys and your new shoes?'

Mary looked down at her shoes, fresh and clean and she shuffled her feet.

Her father continued; 'well I'll be able to buy you even more dresses and shoes and toys, and we can go and live in a fancy house and maybe own a car! Don't you want that?'

Mary's eyes glimmered as she imagined the dresses and the shoes

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and the house and the car. She nodded and smiled up at her father.

'Well, darling, that can all be yours but I must go and work first. It will only be for a little while.' The father folded the cardboard holder which held his ticket, reached up for his straw hat and tucked the card into the band so that the ship's name showed and he placed the hat atop Mary's head. It was much too big and fell down over her eyes. She giggled and readjusted the hat, tugging down with both hands as she stared up at her dad. 'Keep it safe for me,' her father said, beaming down at his daughter. 'Now you're going to let me go, alright?' he asked.

A cheeky grin spread across Mary's face, 'Well...'

Her father reached out and grabbed Mary around the waist, lifting her up above his shoulders. He shook her playfully and Mary let out squeals of delights, frantically trying to hold down her hat. 'Alright?' he repeated.

'Alight, alright!' she managed between giggles. Her father, satisfied, placed her down on the floor next to her mother. Mary pushed her hat down at the back again to look up at her parents' last embrace. She noticed her mother was sobbing but her father was stroking her back and whispering something quietly into her ear which seemed to calm her.

The hollow drone of the ship's horn sounded behind the family, triggering an escalation in tempo and activity in the crowd. Mary's parents separated as her father quickly picked up his luggage. Her mother leaned down again and scooped Mary up, holding her with one arm while she wiped her tears away with the other.

Her father gave a final nod before jogging towards the planks. He presented his ticket and proceeded to climb up before disappearing into the ship's door. Mary could no longer see the ship with the mass of people in front of her and asked her mother to put her down. She held down her hat with one hand and clung onto her mother's hand with the other, skilfully weaving and guiding their way through the thick crowd. She passed many different people of all ages and riches but everyone shared the same look of awe and jealousy on their faces.

The dense smell of the salt water became stronger as Mary squeezed through two men and came to the dock's end. There was a low metal railing separating her from the five metre drop to the ocean and the splashing water seemed to roar in her ears. Mary let go

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of her mother's hand to press firmly down on her hat as she slowly raised her head up and up. The ship towered over her, its size so overwhelming she gasped and couldn't help opening her mouth. The people leaning over the railing of the ship waved frantically to their friends and family. Even from so far below, Mary could see the pure excitement and anticipation on the passengers' faces as they cheered and laughed.

Suddenly, thick black smoke began billowing out of the top of the cigarette-like funnels and the planks linking to the side of the ship were hastily taken away. More hollow drones sounded as the thick ropes tying the vessel to the harbour were reeled in and the ship began to move. Mary scanned the deck trying to find her father's face among the ecstatic people.

She leaned further over the railing on her tiptoes, squinting her eyes as she continued searching. Suddenly the world around her froze as she began falling. She whirled her arms in front of herself and grasped the railing. Mary breathed a sigh of relief as she gaped down at the thrashing sea below.

A gust of wind came, carrying with it the strong stench of the sea. As Mary lifted her head again to watch the ship slowly depart, her straw hat was swept away, slowly tumbling through the air.

'No!' Mary screamed as she desperately jumped up to seize it.

'Mary!' her mother shrieked from behind, 'get away from the railing at once! You are going to fall right off.'

'But mama! My hat, look! My hat, my hat from daddy!' Mary frantically pointed towards the falling hat and clung onto the rail as she watched it land on the water. Small, sloshy waves kept it nodding along and tears welled up in Mary's eyes. 'Mum, I have to get it! I have to!'

'Mary,' her mother said gently, 'look, see? There's nothing to worry about – straw hats float. They can't sink!' She placed an arm around Mary's shoulders and they both stared down at the bobbing hat with its jaunty card still proudly proclaiming its name. 'We can go get it later.'

Mary nodded and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. Her gaze shifted to the vessel now picking up speed and started waving regardless of whether her father could see her or not. She kept on waving until her arm tired and she could no longer see the people's faces aboard the ship. Her straw hat kept floating and she smiled down at it. Her straw hat. Her titanic, unsinkable straw hat.



Watch for its eyes, the calm gentle hand,
its fake words of kindness which crumble to sand.
The light hasn't left yet, though it never was bright,
slowly light leaves you to dark wretched night.

I feel like I have swallowed broken glass, like my throat has been raked by my words. But I can't stop yelling, every time I feel the hot flash of pain I know I deserve it. I am the one who lost him, left him alone. This is my punishment.

I had watched him play by the television, enthralled by his latest find; a straw hat, one of those old ones that you imagine an old farmer working in or the type that a scarecrow wears. I watched him place it on his small head and pull the brim down until it covered his face, his chubby little fingers tightening on the coarse straw until his knuckles whitened with force.

"If I can't see you, you can't see me!" Rowan called to me, the sound of his voice mixing with the chatter from the television.

Never did I think that this would be the last time I would see him happy and smiling, so content with the presence of a straw hat. Never did I think that it would have been the last time I saw him.

The sky is as dark as a raven's wing with clouds stealing the moon's light, casting the earth in an embracing shadow. The industrial flashlight in my hands is the only thing that cuts through the darkness with sharp precision, but all the light brought me is mounting fear. Where was he, where did he go? Trees that stretch across our great expanse of land loom over me, their roots sneaking out of the dank earth to create knobby hurdles that succeed in their mission of tripping me repetitively. I can't find him, how have I let him get away?

I watched him with a smile, rolling my eyes at the bubbling laughter that had erupted from beneath the hat. Then the telephone rang and my attention slipped. I wasn't thinking, why didn't I think? I walked to the other room. My mind wandered as I talked, so did Rowan.

All that was left was the straw hat and the open door. The silence was deafening, even with the T.V on full blast. Rowan was gone, and it was my fault.

A cracking and grinding of wheels on dirt alert me of my parents' arrival home. I can't tell them, but I have to. Air abandons me as my lungs fill with fear and guilt, I turn on my heel back toward the house, my heart breaking with every step.

We don't stop looking for him until the sun paints the clouds

DARKNESS
WITHIN

EMMA BANNISTER
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HIGHLY COMMENDED

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DARKNESS
WITHIN

tangerine, and the morning birds fill the air with a sweet melody that was meant for a beautiful day. It is my father who remembers the back creek that snakes its way through our property, but by the time he remembers, it's too late.

The sunshine is leaving, the shadows are here,
slowly it comes, your one greatest fear.
Watch out for its words, watch out for its brain,
with nothing to lose it has something to gain.

Night casts the landscape in a silver light, painting the world with a grey and blue palette. I tug my curtains shut, trying not to remember. Night is the enemy.

Everyone blames me for what happened to Rowan, even I blame myself. Mum puts on a good face, she tries to tell me that it never was my fault. However, she can't stop her eyes from filling with tears whenever I enter a room, even her soft words whispered to me at night can't counteract my father's accusations. Every time I hear his voice shake the walls with the force of grief and loss, it shakes me too. Soon I may turn to rubble. All I have left is this shell of the person I used to be, this distorted reflection seen in a fractured looking-glass, happy person that once watched her little brother play with a silly straw hat is gone, that person died with Rowan.

I feel the darkness drawing nearer, every day it advances closer to me, reaching out with wispy fingers beckoning me to give in. I can't give in, I have to keep fighting... but I don't know what I'm fighting for.

Try not to tremble, your light has gone out,
soon it will find you and feed off your doubt.
The darkness draws closer, don't let it win.
Inside it will break you, destroy from within.

The sun hangs like an ornament on a rich blue backdrop, its unwavering beams promising a beautiful day. Rowan is laughing as he runs through the trees, stretching his hand out as he runs, fingers lightly touching the trunks that surround us. I inhale the rich musky air and follow him, taking more time to admire the vibrant reds and yellows that decorate the trees' branches. The pattering of feet causes me to turn and watch as Rowan skips up to me, his cheeks rosy with excitement and cold. He lifts up a hand and presents a deep red leaf to me, letting

IO

it flutter into my waiting hand. His wide grin settles into a peaceful smile as the excitement of before moves into steady content. Without a word, Rowan turns from me and runs into the golden light that filters through the tree and in a second he vanishes, leaving only a hollow ache in my chest and a crumpled leaf in my hand.

My body lurches, and I'm grasping at thin air. My legs beat out wildly against the mattress as my yells bring only silence. The darkness around me is more blinding than light could ever be. I stretch out my hand and fumble around the bedside table until I clasp the small knob. I flick the switch and a dim light wards off the smothering shadows, keeping them at a safe distance. *It was a dream, only a dream.* I tell myself, lowering my body back down on the mattress. I press a hand to my heart, feeling the rapid thudding against my fingers, a well practised habit. I focus on my breathing to try and steady myself, but I give up after a few minutes. Tears start to sting my eyes as the familiar lump at the back of my throat forms. I reach for the old stuffed bunny that used to be Rowan's and clutch it to my chest.

Why did he have to leave? Why did he have to disappear from our lives like the final note in a song? All we have left of him is that haunting echo of the note, the life he used to have, only reserved in photo frames and memories.

My battle is ending. I can feel a change in the cage which is my mind. My fight is nearly over, only one more shot to go, one more moment in time before I fall. The darkness that once caused my pain will take me away.



Open your eyes, darling, give me your heart,
The whispers of strangers have torn you apart.
Leave pain behind you, as well as your fears,
I'll take care of you, darling, no need for tears.



IO

GOLDIE

MADELEINE

BENALLACK

As she sat she stared, and as she stared she tried to remember. But there was nothing. Goldie's room was still and filled with objects and memories which she couldn't place, treasures that could be seen but not found. Faces surrounded her begging to be remembered but to her they had no meaning. Confused and tired she resorted to staring. Looking at the trees that swayed in the scene, new every time. It was a sad end but not one that could be changed.

Round and round the goldfish went with both his mind and body like a dog chasing their tail. It was never dull in his glass bowl. With the time it took him to venture to one end on the way back would be new and different. Well to him anyway.

Gold hair fluttered across in the breeze. Tendrils floating. Her skin now delicate with age and a sun kissed glow. She was definitely once beautiful. A real stunner. Her loose clothes cascaded around her, holding her attention for a short while. Something was going to happen today. Yet as hard as she tried she did not know what would happen. A recurring theme for Goldie. Thoughts swimming through her brain never seemed to rest and when they did those were the moments of reprieve from this sad end. The times when her eyes widened with recognition or knowledge of some sort, which gave hints to how little she could remember. In an instant it is gone and her eyes are glassing over with forget and gloom. Wading through life once again.

The goldfish swam, up and down, not ever growing tired of his glass bowl. The pebbles shined but not one meant something to him. As the goldfish swam, the light hitting his scaly skin reflected off him, shimmering around the bowl, always changing the scene conveying the reason for his large glassy eyes. He flittered around, gliding through the water with his feathery fins which cascaded around his body, looking like a loose veil. One thing was true, if not a beautiful creature then it was nothing else.

The oak door squeaked open with warning, frightening Goldie a bit. She did not know who was entering, not an ounce of recognition filled her when hopeful eyes gazed at her, waiting and expecting a response. She could not remember who this was, just a nameless fish in the pond. She stared into distantly familiar eyes wishing for some sort of recognition. "Grandma, how are you feeling?" the young man asked in a sedated tone that could only be called tiredly hopeful, giving Goldie the feeling that this man meant something to her. Worry began to well up from the pit of her stomach, gliding up to her chest making anxiety bubble over. She whipped her head back

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and forth, trying to recognise something, trying desperately to grab onto something familiar yet finding nothing. Unease settled deep in her bones as she once again stared at this man.

The goldfish drifted through the still water, looking and taking it all in; the mini treasure chest, the pebbles and fake seaweed. He looked at it with familiarity until, if possible, his eyes enlarged. With panicky movements the goldfish darted through the water in a mad craze. It gave the impression that he was lost. Lost in his bowl and lost in life.

Like a flick of a switch the young man in front of her changed into her loving grandson. Relief dripped off Goldie and air once again rushed into her lungs. She didn't know how she could forget her own grandson and it frightened her, making her realise that she could slip into the unknown once again with a flip of a tail she could be going back in circles until her end came.

The goldfish calmed and returned to pacing its bowl. Paddling through the water with ease. However if you looked deep into those innocent eyes you would see fear. Fear of the unidentified.



IO

Guinevere brushed the hair out of her eyes and huffed in exasperation, as Mordie stubbornly stopped once again to rest. Tucking the blonde strands behind her ears, she lay back on the pile of wood in the wagon behind her. She closed her eyes, listening to the traffic moving around her, all traveling towards the distant tournament. She opened them once more, making to sit up, when in the corner of her eye she saw a glimmer of bright green in the dark woods to her right. Suddenly, Mordie jerked forward and Gwen fell off the wagon, along with all the wood. Luckily, she managed to roll to the side to avoid the mountain of wood about to crush her.

She watched, aghast, as the wood for the knights' tents fell on top of poor Mordie. He whinnied in pain and tried to shake himself free of the reins, but collapsed under the growing pile. Gwen jumped up, scrabbling desperately to salvage as much firewood from the muddy ground as she could, while at the same time trying to free Mordie. Clearing enough wood so her steed could hobble to his feet, she quickly started to load the undamaged wood. She was so intent on doing this that she did not notice another pair of hands helping her until she crashed into their owner and fell to the ground again.

'Oh, sorry, forgive me, miss,' came a boy's voice.

Gwen looked up at the boy, but his face was hidden beneath a broad, straw hat.

'You don't have to call me miss. I'm not a lady,' she looked down at herself in disgust. 'And I really fail to see how you could've mistaken me for one.'

The boy took off his hat and twisted it in his hands. He looked a few years older than she was, maybe seventeen. He had floppy brown hair and solid, green eyes. There was an odd, regal sense about him that Gwen couldn't place, he certainly had no airs or graces.

'Well, I didn't want to seem rude,' the boy mumbled, his ears steadily turning red.

He helped her to her feet. 'Do you want me to help you finish loading the wagon?' he asked, as Gwen tried to rid her dress of mud and horse dung.

She sighed, 'Yes, thank you.'

'My name's Wart, by the way.'

Gwen thought she had heard wrong. 'Did you say *Wart*?'

'Yes, everyone calls me that because it more or less rhymes with my real name.' He didn't care to divulge what it was.

IO

'Well, my name's Guinevere, but everyone calls me Gwen.'

'That's a pretty name.'

Gwen didn't blush. She was too hardened to care whether a boy thought her name was nice.

Wart helped Gwen load the wagon again, and since Wart's party had left him behind, Gwen felt obligated to give Wart a lift to the tournament.

As they reached the gates of the town where the tournament was being held, Mordie's legs started to shake. The weight of two people and a pile of wood seemed to be too much for him to bear after his fall.

'Come on boy, just a little further, we're almost there,' Gwen said soothingly.

'What's his name?' Wart asked.

'Mordie, short for Mordred.'

Wart gave her a smile.

'What?'

'Nothing. I've just always liked that name.'

They continued on in silence until they reached the town square, where a huge crowd had gathered around the front of a little chapel. They lodged Mordie in a stall and delivered the wood to the irritated herald in charge.

'You're lucky I don't box your ears!' he said gruffly.

The two of them returned to the square, but before they could push their way through the crowd, there was a sharp, 'Wart!'

Gwen's head snapped around and Wart flinched as a man in armour, little older than a boy, strode towards them, metal jostling.

'Where have you been? I need a sword for the tournament! Mine's missing! Honestly, Wart, can't you do anything...'

Gwen, who was not at all interested in this conversation, and also thought that Wart didn't appreciate his knight berating him in front of her, decided to go ahead and force her way to the front of the crowd. Being of quite a small frame, this was easy.

An odd sight greeted her. A large, beefy man in armour was straining with all his might on something that was stuck fast through a great stone placed below an anvil. The man, panting and bent almost double, drew away, so that Gwen could see that it was a sword.

Just then, an odd feeling filled her from top to toe. Regarding the weapon, even from a distance, with its intricate golden handle and gleaming silver blade, gave her an unusual sense of hope. As her eyes

IO

raked down this peculiar sight, she saw, etched in the stone, a short inscription.

'Whoso Pulleth Out This Sword of this Stone and Anvil is Rightwise King Born of All England.'

She was so engrossed in contemplating the lettering, that she didn't notice Wart had joined her. He too was staring at the sword with utmost awe.

'Can you hear that?' he asked abruptly.

'Hear what?'

'That – that whispering,' he murmured, slightly dazed.

'You mean the whispering of the crowd?' Gwen asked confusedly.

'No, no. It's like the sword – it – it's calling my name.'

Gwen looked at him. 'The *sword* is whispering *Wart*?'

'Not Wart,' he said softly, 'my real name...'

Just then, a muscely, thin-faced, scarred man strolled slowly up to the sword, and placed his hand upon the hilt. A green light, like the one Gwen saw in the woods, illuminated the sword. The crowd seemed not have noticed anything, but Wart suddenly fell to his knees and clapped his hands over his ears.

'Wart? Wart! What...'

'The sword,' he said through gritted teeth, 'It's screaming.'

Gwen heard nothing, but a sense of dread came over her as she recognised the scarred man. He was Sir Lucif, the most ruthless and twisted of knights, who had a reputation as a servant-killer, and who had long since tried to find a way to the throne. If he succeeded in pulling out that sword, he may have a genuine claim for it.

Lucif curled his fingers around the handle and gently pulled, and the sword came out noiselessly, to apparently everyone but Wart, who fell on his side, and groaned in agony from the sounds in his head.

Lucif held out the green-tinged sword with a sneer and opened his mouth to speak –

And suddenly Gwen wasn't there anymore. She was above the scene, in the bell tower of the church, Wart kneeling beside her.

'What – ?'

'This is not meant to be. Someone has meddled with destiny.'

An old man with a snowy white beard, and matching hair as long as Gwen's own stood before them.

'Lucif should not be king; a magician of Chaos is interfering with an act of God.'

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Gwen understood about a word of that, but she remained silent. 'A Pendragon should be on the throne. Uther's son.' The man looked expectantly at Wart.

At first, the boy just stared at him mutely. Then, with wild eyes, the boy slowly shook his head.

'Impossible.' He whispered.

'What is going on!' Gwen asked, her eyes darting between them. 'Who are you?'

'Me?' the old man asked lightly. 'I am Merlin the magician. As for this young man, he is the last Pendragon, the Rightwise King Born of All England.'

Gwen sucked in a breath, and looked at the boy. 'Wart?' she asked.

'No, not Wart,' he said hollowly. 'Arthur.'

'Yes, Arthur,' Merlin said cheerfully. 'It's time to swap your straw hat for a crown, boy.'



IO

BUSHFIRE

ZOE FITZGIBBON

BOROONDARA LITERARY

AWARDS

WINNER OR HIGHLY

COMMENDED

The wireless crackled that it was to be the hottest day on record tomorrow. My little ones, Bev and Val, had been put to bed and I was enjoying a brief moment of solitude; rocking to and fro on my white wicker chair perched on our veranda, watching the sun pull its last remaining beams from the dry earth under the apple trees and fall gracefully over the horizon. It was dark when I finally stood and took my sewing and hat inside, although the sun's light was gone, the heat had remained and I felt no relief as I stepped through the backdoor into our weatherboard home.

The next morning, whilst the children were still asleep, I walked down the back steps towards the copper tap against the tin shed, putting on my hat and tying my apron around my waist. The tap's muddy trickle did not need to remind me that the drought had almost evaporated the little water we had left, leaving the ground cracked and the grass brown. As I lifted the bucket, my straw hat, with a sudden gust of hot wind, went tumbling across the vegetable patch lifting the soil in dusty clouds to settle back down in its wake. I dropped the bucket clumsily on the ground spilling some of its contents over the brittle grass at my feet and rushed after the runaway. Wind thrust me forward and back, tangling my uncovered hair into messy curls. I spotted the source of this unwanted chaos in a momentary lull in the gusting air, caught up in the branches of a hawthorn bush. I slowed my chase when I knew the hat had no chance of escaping into the next paddock. I untangled the hat and tugged it onto my knotted hair and damp brow, pulling it down firmly. I turned into the wind with one hand holding my hat and the other shielding my eyes from the dust.

Hot air, like an unwanted intruder, brushed past my skirts as I came through the back door. I wiped the perspiration trickling down my temples with my handkerchief and hung my mischievous straw hat on its hook by the door. I told the girls to play inside today for it was too hot to be running about in this weather. A sense of foreboding warned me this was not going to be an ordinary hot summer's day. I had lived in the country all my life and I knew the land: I could almost feel it breathe. My father had taught me how to read nature; the language of fogs and frosts, spring rains and warnings of danger. He taught me that if the bark from the eucalypt trees started to peel and fall off it was going to rain. 'Florrie, nature has the power to create sheer wonder, good or bad. However, it will

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always tell us, so that those who understand and feel it, they will be able to predict what the future will bring.'

The chime of the clock in the hall awoke me from my reverie. I dashed over to the wireless sitting above the empty fireplace and switched it on to listen to the morning news. My feelings of dread had been correct, for the news reader crackled, 'A strong North wind has brought several small fires together and has created a strong front heading south.' Grasping my hat off the hook, I ran outside towards the horse paddock where Norman was filling the water troughs for the animals. The air was thick with shimmering heat. When I reached my husband I told him breathlessly the menacing news, our clothes flapping in protest against the increasingly savage wind.

Norm ran to the stables to collect hessian bags and wet them in the troughs to put them around the house and stables and to fight the fire if necessary. Val, being the eldest of the two girls and the best with horses, was asked to bring the horses in from the paddock and into the stables. I asked Bev to run a cold bath, not too full, so that we could then put all our precious things in there. I hurried outside to round up the chickens and put them in their coop. It took longer than it normally would with them clucking noisily in their confusion. As I saw Norm wheeling a barrow full of wet hessian bags toward the back of the house I called out to him, 'Don't forget to put some on the chicken coop!'

I quickly went inside to check on Bev. She was in her room collecting her dolls.

'Have you run the bath, Bev?' I asked.

'Yes,' she replied calmly.

'What are you doing now?' I asked slightly confused.

'I am collecting all my precious things to put in the bath to protect them,' she replied emphatically.

I smiled, 'Okay, but don't put them in the bath just yet, just lay them out for now.' I thought it was best that I keep her busy with something, even though I was not sure how I was going to explain that we were not going to be putting her dolls in the bath.

Scrunching my hat on and opening the back door again, with all hope of keeping the house cool gone, Val came running up the veranda stairs towards me exclaiming breathlessly, 'I have put all the horses in the stables and as I was running back I started smelling the smoke on the wind.' As we moved down across the garden together

IO

towards Norman, a gush of dry air blew across our faces bringing with it sharp grey blades of the acrid smoke of burning eucalyptus trees and undergrowth.

'It's coming closer,' Norman said as we reached him at the stables and started helping him lay out the damp hessian.

'Do you think the fire will reach us?' said Val concerned.

'I don't know, love, I hope not, but if it does we just have to be ready for it,' I said.

Norm was outside preparing the last few hessian bags and pouring water on all the plants growing close to the house. The job was done quickly and he soon joined us, watering down the outside of the house with the little water we had. I got the girls to help me collect all the crockery out of the cupboards and put it carefully into the bath tub. Fortunately, Bev had told Val of her plans to put her dolls into the bath to protect them and Val had explained, 'You are silly to have thought that! There are much more important things to put into the bath tub than just your dollies.' Although Val had told Bev much more sharply than I would have done, at least it wasn't me who had to tell her that she would just have to hold onto her dolls to keep them safe.

Amongst the chaos we would make sure to listen to the latest report on the wireless. The fire front was now just over the hill and we were all standing silently against the window looking out across the garden, over the orchard and paddocks, and up Aumann's Hill. Beyond was a sky so different: it was glowing orange and grey and shadowing over the house. Suddenly, the light from the sun darkened and outside was no longer a mid-afternoon on a summer's day. We anxiously looked towards the hilltop once more. Radiant gold embers billowed up into the sky with charcoal grey smoke as its backdrop. The silence, apart from the wireless and our breathing, quickly turned into a tremendous roar. The trees on the top of the hill were ablaze with red flame menacingly licking the top of the hill. It was odd. If it were not for my fear I would have thought it the most wondrous sight. The children gasped and hid their faces in my skirt and their hands. Bev clutching onto her doll, buried her face into its hair.

No one spoke. We just watched.

For an agonizing moment we watched, until Norm said, 'It hasn't moved any further down the hill. Can you see that? The same trees

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are on fire. There are no new ones.' He was pointing up to the hilltop. It was true. I was so busy concentrating on the fire itself that I had not noticed that its ferocity had diminished. 'By Jove, I think you might be right Norm!' I said excitedly. The girls were starting to detach their faces from my skirts and lower their hands from their faces. 'In fact I think it might be moving along the top of the hill towards the West.' I pointed towards the right hand side of the hill. None of us dared to move or to look away, even briefly, from the hilltop. We watched the fire creep across the ridge. It was not until the wireless announced the news that we all relaxed. 'Our latest update of the bushfire is that there has been a wind change and it is believed that the district of Warrandyte is now out of danger.'

I stood with my hands on the window sill watching the last remaining smouldering trees and the smoke drifting off up into the sky. I reached up to run my fingers through my hair but my hand found my straw hat instead. I must have forgotten to take it off in all my rushing about. I left the window and walked slowly over to the back door taking off my hat.

I hung the hat back on its hook.



IO

THE KINDNESS
OF STRANGERS

JANE FLOOD

The rustic bench sagged awkwardly against the sidewalk; a sad comparison to the modernised world around it. The clock above the square ticked rhythmically, and one person remained a fixed presence in the ever changing world that surrounded him. The clock struck twelve, and still the old man sat; his weathered face shaped by tired lines and a wealth of wisdom. Slender fingers fluttered up to close around the blemished pendant encircling his throat. As with most of the things he owned, this heirloom had been passed down through the generations until it came to reside with him. The beggar looked up eagerly as people gathered in the square. These were the 'social butterflies' of society; the people who stayed out until the early hours of the morning. Slim hands reached out, palms turned towards the skies in a soundless plea. The smell of food was tantalizing; an insatiable desire so close, yet just out of reach. His stomach rumbled; a constant ache he couldn't satisfy. He closed his eyes in denial; desperately clinging to his perception of reality, even through the truth was so painfully obvious.

Mahogany eyes glittered in the half-light of dawn. A pale frost crept across the land, enveloping the leaves in a fine crust of ice. A hyena slunk close to the ground, belly fur brushing the dry earth as he stole towards his prey. Sleek muscles rippled beneath a smooth expanse of golden fur, and dark spots marred his silky hairs; contorting and shifting as the hyena moved ever closer to his unsuspecting victim. For years it had hunted alongside others of his kind. In the prime of his life he had been a handsome brute, with little to fear. Now, aging bones creaked in faint protest as he prowled forward. The rabbit, mere metres away, suddenly became aware of the immense beast stalking it. The elderly hyena made a fruitless grab for the fleeing animal, but the quick creature slipped past him and darted away.

Lifting himself from the gnarled chair, the aged man meandered slowly down the worn path ahead. In his youth he had worked tirelessly to build up a business that ensured he was financially stable. He was a leader, well respected amongst his peers and employees. But as appliances became modern he fell behind and eventually his business began to crumble. Money that had taken years to build up took mere months to disappear. He had struggled unsuccessfully to revive his company, but it was too far gone for any real restoration. The money had dwindled away, and now he was a beggar; a scavenger. His head jerked up, narrow eyes penetrating the dark night. An unfamiliar man stood before him. In his hand he clutched a small parcel. The beggar reached out tentatively, as though afraid the food

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might suddenly jump out of his reach. Slim hands worked meticulously to remove the stained wrapping. He hesitated for a moment; then lifted the wrap to his mouth. He took a long time to finish the food; savouring each bite as though it was his last. When he looked up, the stranger was gone. He leant back contentedly, willowy hands hovering over the small pendant at his throat; the last reminder of his former life.

The corpse of a buck, bloated with the oppressive heat of late summer loomed in the distance. Unwanted meat had been left to rot after venison was stripped from the bones. Two young hyenas cackled gleefully over the tender meat. The old hyena's nose quivered inquisitively as he approached, brown eyes gazing avidly at the food only metres away. It was unlike hyenas to share what they scavenged, but perhaps the ones before him realised the dire urgency of his situation; the unfortunate predicament he had found himself in. He moved in as they stepped aside, barely acknowledging the aged hyena. Nose stained with blood, but stomach blessedly full he retreated away from the other hyenas. The tree beneath which he settled cast an elongated shadow across the ground; it was welcoming shade from the blistering heat. Drowsiness washed over him and he fell into a deep slumber. The sweltering sun crept ever closer to the horizon. He would welcome the night. For the great, star scattered chasm brought with it the cool breath, of a new day.



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THE WITCH-
HUNT

SOPHIE KLEIMAN
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER

Witch is a powerful word. Images of ugly, old, wart-ridden women brewing evil spring readily to mind. The word 'witch' came to prominence early in Julia Gillard's reign as Australia's Prime Minister, when the leader of the opposition's photograph was splashed across the media in front of a placard reading "ditch the witch." It was sexist, rude and downright disrespectful, but little did we realize that it was the beginning of something that soon became nothing less than a witch-hunt.

I want to make it clear that I am not interested in whether you support Liberal or Labor, or even if you agree with the policies under her government. I don't care if you think she was a good Prime Minister or a terrible one. We are entitled to agree and disagree as we see fit. That is not the point. The point is that Australia's first female Prime Minister was subject to unrelenting, unreasonable demeaning treatment. Why? Largely because she was female and the first.

From the moment she was sworn in as our first female Prime Minister, Gillard was fair game it seemed, for Australia's sexist blokey, stereotyped attitudes. When she was deputy Prime Minister it was okay. We could tolerate her. When she was photographed in her kitchen with an empty fruit bowl and gleaming benches there were tut-tuts, but we satisfied ourselves with the knowledge that women of the modern era were entitled to be career women. Fast forward to the prime ministership and it quickly became evident Gillard was damned if she did and damned if she didn't. The most scary part of the witch-hunt was that it was not simply orchestrated by men; women also were ready to burn her at the stake for her shortcomings.

It is impossible within the scope of this speech to detail every slur. But here are a selection: Criticism of her fashion sense and figure that was demeaning to Gillard and the office of Prime Minister. The cut of her jackets, the cut of her hair. When she visited Japan in the wake of the tsunami she was told by Gai Waterhouse to "smarten up her appearance and pay a visit to the hairdresser." Please correct me if I'm wrong, but Gillard didn't visit Japan as a contestant in a Miss Universe pageant, but as a political leader visiting a country battered by a natural disaster. Were the victims of the tsunami, whom she met, judging her appearance or taking some consolation from her interest and support?

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The witch-hunt was already in full swing when Australia's most famous feminist, Germaine Greer, criticized Gillard for the cut of her jackets which was supposedly an attempt to cover a big bum! Gillard was restrained in calling these remarks, "catty and stupid." Both men and women thought it appropriate to comment on and criticize highly personal choices over which no male Prime Minister has ever faced scrutiny; her sexuality, her partner's sexuality, her partner's suitability as a Prime Minister's companion, her childless state. Was she deliberately barren? Her big thighs and small breasts. The list goes on.

Many accused Gillard of merely playing the 'gender card' in order to deflect from the real issues of government. In her resignation speech as Prime Minister, Gillard directly addressed the question of her fate as the first female Prime Minister. Her intelligent response was to state, "her gender was not everything but nor was it nothing." She requested sophisticated analysis of the issue and Rightly so. For while she is justifiably proud of being the first female Prime Minister and undoubtedly thereby making it easier for the next woman and the one after that, she is well aware of the battle she faced and the forces against her whilst in office. She knows that despite her success, women are still, for the most part, paid less than men, and are underrepresented in senior ranks in almost all disciplines.

Think about this. It is certainly possible that someone sitting in this room may go on to be Prime Minister of this country. Not beyond possibility but not a given either. Gillard admirably showed that the work to champion gender equality is still far from done. The females in this room being subject to the privilege of a good education have a responsibility to take up this challenge. To have the courage to take on sexism, speak out for gender equality; these are the legacies of Julia Gillard. It is up to us to make witch-hunts a thing of the past.



I O

TICKET
INSPECTOR

VIVIAN LIU

The scrawny inspector lurked around the tram station, turning his delicate head from left to right. His marble-like eyes were squinting into the distance, searching for the next tram. He was eager to fine someone. He paced back and forth, back and forth on his spindly legs. It had been a while since he received a nifty bonus cheque. The tram was approaching and he could sense today would be the day he would get a bonus, he was impatient.

Anxious for a meal, the mosquito flew back and forth in the long but confined tram. Her circular eyes spun around the humid vehicle. There were green chairs, green poles and orange chairs in view. Onion bagels lurked somewhere within the tram, however it was not bagels for which she was restless. Her wings smacked against each other as she flew towards the tinted windows impatiently. Her eyes looked keen and ready.

His arms like thin branches, waved to hail in the tram. He raised his leg onto the tram, and stepped in. Standing straight and tall with his shirt tucked tightly into his pants, he hovered enthusiastically around the sweaty and nervous passengers as they saw him enter. As the tram suddenly drove forward, he jerked backwards. His hand clutched at the pole in front of him. His beady eyes scanned everyone, from one end of the tram to the other end. The smell of rain and sweat overwhelmed the cluttered tram. He could sense the fear as some people twitched, and some moved quickly towards the door, trying to escape from the inspector. He studied each person, observing them from head to toe. He was not here for fun and games, but here for a luxury at the end of the night. Some people didn't notice him, others pretended not to. The majority had their heads down, fiddling with something in the palm of their hands. With people packed up against each other, some thought they were invisible, therefore safe from any fine.

She hovered above the people that seemed to slowly fill the tram. Her senses were tingling, the smell of sweet sweat was satisfying. As the tram became more and more crowded with the smell of body odour and minty gum, her wings smacked together faster and faster, beating to the beat of every noise that was made. Her beady eyes searched through the crowd, inspecting and sorting through each and everyone. As people knocked themselves against each other by accident or purpose, the mosquito was blood thirsty and having a whiff of everyone. Some people slapped their ankles and arms in frustration of her presence, others didn't notice she was lingering. The mosquito would have to single out one person to be her target, as this meal would have to last her a week.

IO

He weaved himself through the crowd. His target was a young male boy who had a suspicious presence. He approached him in one swift motion.

'Do you have your ticket with you today?' He demanded. The young boy itched and scratched. His forehead creased in frustration as sweat slowly trickled down the side of his face. The ticket inspector smirked whilst he waited for the boy to confess his evasion.

Her six thin, knobbly legs landed on the arm of a thin man whose smell was quite appealing. This man was the one from whom she would feed. The man slapped his arm as soon as he saw her; she flew away as quickly as possible. She decided to hover at his ankles to keep herself alive in the midst of her feed. This man would have an unfortunate reminder; however she was delighted and content with her choice of person. At his ankles, she injected her numbing saliva.

With a smile as bright as the sun on his face, he scribbled down the details of the young man.

'A \$167 fine is going your way, young man.' He chuckled, whilst the boy peered down at his feet in embarrassment. He knew tonight his pay cheque would arrive with a bonus. Inside, he felt full and warm with joy, and soon with cash as well.

At his ankles, the mosquito pierced his skin. She started to suck blood out and she instantly felt full and warm. It had been a week since her last meal. The man kicked his ankles together and she was propelled off. The blood she has sucked was by far enough. With her heavy body, she flew to the ceiling for a safer environment. She rested and slept off her appetizing and long overdue feast.

He gripped his \$50 bonus with pride and pleasure. He paced out of his office and suddenly stopped in his path, bent down and stretched out his fingers to scratch his itchy ankle.



I O

DEAD BY HER
OWN HAND

LAURA MARSHALL

The fox circled, looking for a way in. The sitting targets lay in wait. All he needed was an entrance point. The tinged black of his ears stood out from the warmth of his brown coat. Always listening, always watching.

Ruth was listening as the city flashed by, snippets of train conversations wafting towards her becoming the accompaniment to her thoughts. 'Adam... Adam Wynn Jones. I'm new here. I've just been hired to raise the profile of market research. I'll be taking a look at potential deals, like you, only more from the money side.' Why had they hired Adam? Ruth thought she was doing a perfectly good job at market research. He had to be a replacement. Her heart sped and her hands moved instinctively to her mouth. The dirt under the surface of the cracked nails was perhaps her only imperfection. The rest of Ruth shone. Her hair was a silky brown and her eyes darted with curiosity and cunning. She thought of her contacts. Who did she know that had the expertise to break into Adam's firewall – planting potentially illegal documents?

The hole was almost just large enough. With dirt flying off around him getting under his claws dirtying his almost perfect appearance. The fox's eyes were encased in a sea of dappled brown, they flitted quickly around displaying his shrewdness. Panic filled the henhouse as feathers fell in a frenzied snowstorm. He was in, looking around he saw in his peripheral vision a brown hen. Pouncing quickly, his agility and cunning outsmarted the hen. The crescendo of life and movement excited the fox's instinct for the hunt. The clutter of the tin buckets hitting the ground was drowned out by the forte of shrill squawks, agitated calls for help made by the hens. With hen in mouth the fox scampered away having got what he had come for.

Ruth took off her high-heels and left them at the door. The polished marble felt smooth through her sheer stockings. Ruth dialled the number whilst looking out onto the city skyline illuminated in the evening sun.

'Ralf, this is Zoe... Do you remember me? You did some work for me a couple of years back – helped me get into a few places. I was wondering if you still supplied the same services.'

'Yes, Zoe I do recall the work. And yes I do still operate in, let's say, pest extermination. Same fees apply if you could send me the stuff and the name the pest will be gone, I guarantee.'

'Right – and the money, box 24?'

'By Monday.'

'Monday.'

IO

A rush sped through Ruth, her heart was racing – caught up in the thrill of the hunt. Her prey was weak in her hands; unbeknownst to Adam, Ruth was digging a hole. Her nails are scraping up against his security, gouging right into the heart of the henhouse.

Upon the leaves sat the fox, blending into the autumnal warmth. Next to him lay the hen crumpled up, all its lines cracked. Red smeared over the feathers. The regal gaze demonstrated the overwhelming superiority and cunning of the fox to the hen. The remaining hint of blood on the fox's palate was a reminder of his victory. Nature had taken its course, the ruthlessness of the wild had been shown. For the fox to survive he must eat the hen. As serene and stately as he may appear – the fox's victory is tainted. For nothing comes free.

Waiting was a pain – she knew it was coming. They would be unpacking the issue in a small discussion group. The honest Joe would say ‘give him a chance, innocent until proven guilty.’ The others would laugh. Damage control would take its ruthless course and eventually Adam would be forced to leave. Ruth pressed the up button and waited. The lift voiced its arrival with a friendly ding – the doors opened to reveal Adam Wynn Jones. In his arms was a box filled with papers and trinkets – a Tax File report, a photo of a smiling family. Ruth could not contain her glee. Adam's business life lay dead by her hands, cracked and disfigured. Smeared with the dirt she had planted.

‘Adam, are you off?’

He did not reply – just slid past, out of her life. The scent of his cologne hung in the air before fading into the background. Ruth walked into the lift pressing the button for the 19th floor. Ruth glowed with a sense of empowerment. She gleamed with a grandiose gaze, and if you looked closely you might even catch a smile in the corner of her mouth.

‘Ruth, the meeting starts in ten. See you there?’

‘Yes yes, I'll be there.’ Ruth replied silently sliding her hands into her pockets hiding her nails once more.

The fox circled and found a way out.



IO

THE LITTLE
HOUSE IN THE
VALLEY

NIAMH MCCARTHY

When one looked down from the hills and into the valley, the only sign of life was the small spiral of smoke coming from the chimney of a small cottage. If one stared closely, they could make out a narrow stream snaking alongside a grassy trail leading to the front of the dilapidated gate of the property. The house was once pure white; however, over the years the crisp white had faded to grey. Rogue vines and moss clung to the spouting of the roof and the wooden façade had begun to rot away in several places. The cottage was enclosed by majestic oak trees, as if to keep others out, and the only facet not in disrepair was the vivid rose bushes which brushed the front fenceline. With no other properties in the valley, the house was surrounded for miles with fields upon fields of untamed grass. No one from the nearest town had ever seen who lived there.

Mrs Russell, who was notorisouly known as the town's gossip, would gush at anyone and everyone she could about who resided in the house in the valley. 'It's an elderly spinster who lives there,' she would start with, 'I saw her once while I was looking down into the valley. She was a hunchback with a hideous tattered hat and ragged clothes. Honestly Mrs Hughes and Miss Johnson, it's true! I don't lie about these things. If you don't believe me, you should go take a closer look yourself. But I'd be careful if I were you. Apparently she's gone insane due to living there by herself.' Of course no one ever did look.

Mrs Russell was quite wrong. The elderly woman of whom Mrs Russell had spoken was an elderly man. He did not wear ragged clothes; his clothes were in fact neat and clean. And the man was not insane, just withdrawn and a recluse. However, of one fact Mrs Russell was somewhat accurate. Although he was an old man, he wore an aged, tattered straw hat perched upon his head at all times during the day. It was once a grand, wide brimmed straw hat adorned with elaborate faux roses. Now, the edges of the rim had worn away and strands of straw poked out at odd angles. The once vibrant roses had faded to a speckled grey and were on the verge of falling apart.

The old man who lived there was called Henry. The townspeople speculated as to how he could live being so isolated. But Henry had his treasured Collie, Atticus. And Yvonne. She was always there whenever he needed company. He would often talk to her throughout the day; she usually sat above the fireplace unless it was dinner or lunch. Then he would set the table for her and put her opposite him so that he could see her smile locked in place in the old black and

IO

white photograph. It was his favourite photograph of his deceased wife. Wearing her smartest straw hat, she looked so alive and blissful.

Henry was leaning against the mantelpiece gazing at Yvonne when, for the first time in many years, the old man took the photograph out of the frame and turned it over to read the faded script on the other side.

18TH AUGUST 1963

Yvonne and I have just finished building our house; a charming white cottage. With our first child due to arrive any day now, I have decided to plant roses in the front garden to flourish and grow as our new child will.

Henry looked forlornly out of the window and his gaze settled on two moss covered gravestones. One was labelled *Yvonne* and dated 20th August 1963 and the other had engraved *Thomas*, a name which Henry and his wife had chosen before the baby had been born. Stricken with grief after the death of his only family, the widower resolved to stay in the valley for the remainder of his life to live alone with the memory of his wife.

Henry was disrupted from his nostalgic thoughts as the Collie, Atticus, awoke from his slumber and pressed his nose against the front window, ears pricked up in alarm. The old man peered through the dusty window pane to see four boys crouching noticeably amongst the oak trees in the garden.

One of them, who had spiky black hair, pointed at the startled old man. The others looked at him with shock and began to whisper hurriedly. Henry edged closer to the window. Suddenly the spiky haired boy let out a loud and spiteful laugh.

'Look at his hat,' he jeered, 'it's got *flowers* on it! Mother was right, the old thing is crazy!'

The group of boys came out from behind the tree, their confidence swelling like a balloon. Another one marched up purposefully to the rose bush against the fence, right in Henry's line of vision. In a sudden movement, the boy swung his right leg right at the rose bush. The old man cried out as if in pain as several roses were destroyed. Petals rained down to the ground as the rest of the boys joined in. Henry hobbled hastily over to the door.

'Please... please stop. Those roses are precious to me!'

The spiky haired boy laughed, 'hahaha! Look at it's hat more closely! It's so ugly, let's get it and tear it to pieces!'

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'No,' Henry croaked, 'please!'

But the wicked child ran forward and snatched the hat from Henry's head. Henry stooped lower and lower. The boy stood back and twirled the straw hat in his hands. Abruptly he stopped and peered inside the rim of the hat at the name written.

"'Yvonne.'" Ha! Who's that,' he sneered, 'your imaginary wife?'

The boy's malicious remark was met with loud laughter. Looking around at his companions, the boy began to pick off the flower petals from the hat.

'Loves me, loves me not, loves me, loves me not... oops,' he ripped off a handful of the last petals, 'looks like Yvonne your imaginary wife doesn't love you after all, what a shame,' he mocked.

The boy tossed the hat onto the ground and sent more rose petals flying through the air. Henry's face was crumpled and he suddenly felt overwhelming fatigue. With the group of boys watching him closely, he slowly and painfully reached down to pick up Yvonne's straw hat, which had meant so much to him but which was now in a state of ruin. His head down, the old man turned slowly back towards his house. The spiky haired boy, who was dissatisfied with not receiving the desired reaction for his taunting, settled on one last spiteful act. Two hands outstretched, he took a step forward and pushed Henry hard.

The boys ran away before they could see Henry fall towards the ground and strike his head on Yvonne's gravestone. Atticus tried desperately to stir his master, but his body lay motionless. Defeated, the owner's companion took the straw hat gently in his mouth and placed it on his owner's head and lay down softly next to him. The old man was once again with his wife.



IO

She doesn't remember me. She doesn't remember those blissful summer afternoons we used to spend lounging on her porch doing nothing and just basking in one another's company. She doesn't remember how we used to have our weekly chess tournaments, when neither of us really knew how to play at all. She doesn't remember how I would tell her everything dwelling on my mind, and she would tell me everything on hers. She doesn't remember anything. She doesn't even remember my name. Gran doesn't remember me; to her I am a stranger. A *stranger*. The thought resonates in my head, bouncing within like an aggravating tennis ball. I cannot grasp what has happened, I cannot fully comprehend it. My feet pound on the dirt ground, conjuring billowing clouds of dust, as I fly down the lane leading to Gran's. Tears streaking down my face, I struggle to breathe through my constricted, collapsed lungs. I would give anything to be here with Gran right now, cheerfully ambling along the lane arm in arm as we used to.

I reach the familiar bright orange door that represents everything that Gran is: eccentric, loving, bright, beautiful. Wherever she goes, happiness and inner beauty seem to radiate from her. I look over to the array of clay flowerpots Gran had tenderly aligned on the timber shelf under the curtained windows. Fourth one from the door. I reach into it, letting my fingers slightly slide through the granular soil, and grasp the rusty brass key. Gran won't remember which pot contains the key, I bitterly think. Such a trivial thing, but knowing that Gran won't remember the simple things hurts the most. Hovering over this thought triggers another cascade of tears. I nudge the door open, wincing at the screeching creak that reverberates from the hinges. Taking in all the familiar things before me wrenches my heart with pain. The delicate china teapot set. The tiny three-legged stool I used to use when I was little. The worn out rocking chair in the corner. Gran's scruffy baby blue slippers.

I blindly make my way into Gran's room, flinging myself onto her bed, breathing in the musky scent of her pillow. Burying my face into her supple pillow, every now and then, bursts of realisation hit me. Gran doesn't remember anything. But my brain, and my heart, refuses to accept it. The pain just gets worse as reality strikes me again and again. I feel as if I am in a never-ending nightmare. My thigh brushes against a textured item. Without so much as a look, I know what it is. Gran's straw hat. My breath catches in my throat. It

STRAWS OF MEMORIES

GRACE YUAN

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

WINNER

IO

is by no means fancy or expensive; to anyone it would seem inferior and simple; just straw and a tattered lilac bow. But to me, it is invaluable. I climb under the covers with the straw hat in hand, running my fingers over its intricate weaving. It's Gran's straw hat. The definition of beautiful.

*

The door tinkled as I pushed open the old oak door. I looked over my shoulder with a grin plastered on my face.

'Gran, it's your birthday, I'll get you whatever you want!' I exclaimed, excitedly.

Gran had a sparkle in her eye as we stepped into the dimly lit store. This was Gran's favourite shop, tucked away in a quiet alley of the bustling city. It had all sorts of interesting objects and antiques. Elaborate Russian dolls, sets of collector figurines, porcelain dolls from decades ago, carved carousel music boxes. This place had a homely vibe about it which is what Gran loved about it. She headed straight for the shelves in a manner that resembled a frenzied Christmas shopper. I smiled to myself as I followed in pursuit.

I was examining an exquisite jewel encrusted brooch, thinking that it would make a lovely present for Gran when I heard her call out in glee, 'Tilly, come, I've found the perfect thing!'

In her hands, she was clutching a floppy looking straw hat with a limp ribbon tied around it.

'Isn't it wonderful?' she exclaimed with earnest, her eyes shining.

And that was one of the many things I loved about Gran. She appreciated the simple things of the world. She gave them value.

*

'Okay Gran, let's go! Don't forget the straw hat!'

'Of course not!' said Gran indignantly, grabbing it off the hat rack.

It was a beautiful day, the willows were swaying in the wind to their own rhythmic beat and the sun was streaming down onto our trademark pale skin. I swung my picnic basket merrily as Gran and I strolled through the little forest we had discovered many years ago. It was our special place.

We settled down beside the shimmering lake that was home to a hoard of ravenous ducks. Gran and I never ceased to forget to pack in a loaf of bread dedicated to them.

'Celia looks as if she's extra hungry today, Tils,' Gran commented, munching on her chicken and avocado sandwich contentedly. She fondly tossed a morsel of bread towards the scruffy duck.

We had given each duck a name over the years, all twenty three of them. Sitting on the bank and christening them with Gran was my escape from the

IO

worries of the outside world. Just being with Gran out amongst the peaceful trees and a beautiful lake gave me the belief and reassurance that nothing could ever go wrong. Gran was my happy place.

*

'Pass me the spade will you, Tils?' Gran murmured lazily as she swatted at a fly. She was crouching down in front of a patch of dirt with grass stained gloves donning her hands. Her eyes crinkled at the corners as she beamed up at me.

I squatted down next to her and smiled at her with affection. We had been looking forward to this day for quite some time. Gran had always wanted to have a little vegie patch of her own, so I had decided that it was time she had one. The afternoon sun beat down on us as we worked away at planting and nurturing each individual seed. Gran found joy in creating and nourishing life. The lemon tree had flourished last summer, growing to a remarkable height as a result of Gran's love and attention. Gran's soothing voice interrupted my thoughts.

'You need to get a hat like mine, Tils,' she said, with a wink. 'The sun is scorching today!'

She yanked her straw hat off her silver hair and plonked it on my head.

'There's no hat that could ever be like yours, Gran.'

And there wasn't. It was Gran who made the hat special.

*

I visit the hospital that night, bringing the straw hat with me. Once I had it, I was never going to let it go. It evokes memories of Gran and me, and memories are no doubt precious. I fight against the tears threatening to overflow from the corners of my eyes when I see Gran's frail figure lying in the hospital bed, propped up against a pillow. Wordlessly, I place the straw hat gently in front of her, my hands trembling uncontrollably in nervous anticipation. For a moment, she does nothing. Nothing except blink and stare. And then, slowly, she picks up the hat and traces the individual pieces of straw, as I had just hours ago. For the agonising seconds that follow, Gran fights an internal battle, struggling to reclaim her mind, fighting against herself to regain control. And for a sweet, brief moment, there is recognition reflected in her hazel eyes as she whispers in a voice thick with emotion, 'Tilly.'

*

IO

A SCARECROW'S
SINS

ELAINE CHAN
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Under the scorching heat of the sun, your reflection lingers constantly in my marble eyes. I greet you with arms wide as you walk towards me in your mud-crusted boots and faded overalls. How is your day? How is the business? A million questions press against the seams of my mouth, threatening to slither out. You look around at the vast green plains surrounding us, the fruits of our labour. 'Look at all this!' You praise me with a bright smile, 'You've worked hard, my friend!' I struggle against the lifted corners of my mouth. But then you reach out for the straw hat sitting on the hollow surface of my head, and my smile fades as fast as it had appeared.

Greed: a source of motivation, it leads to a path of self-destruction. The farmer looks around alarmingly, like a blind man seeing the world for the first time. The shallow colour of the fruits and the worm-bitten leaves suddenly seem apparent to him. Confusion and dissatisfaction rush through him as he tries to grasp the root of the problem. His thoughts are interrupted by the dismal arrival of grey, stormy clouds from above, and the farmer soon finds himself drenched in sweat and rainwater, his hat shaking unsteadily at the turbulence. Pushing past the walls of humidity, he wades clumsily towards the brightly lit house, leaving a trail of broken stalks behind him in his unease.

The farmer leans into the doorway, a puddle of water forming where he stepped along with a muddy footprint on the polished floor. 'Monica, how 'bout a beer?' He glances at the boy beside him who is staring with a gaping mouth at something on the ceiling. 'Look son, you're going to have to step up your game,' the farmer crosses his arms, 'after expanding the business, there'll be plenty of supply and demand flooding in, and I want you beside me, alright?' The farmer feels a tap on the shoulders, and takes the beer from his wife's outreached hands.

'We're expanding the business?' A look of worry fleets across her face, 'but we've just gotten back on our feet with the mortgage and Emily's school fees.'

The farmer takes a swig of the beer, 'You don't understand Mon, I can make multimillions out of this,' he gestures at the farm and chuckles, 'and isn't it about time we take Em out of school? She can help out around here. You know she loves the farm.' He grins at the boy who remains aloof from the conversation for its entirety, 'but you, young man, we'll be the father and son pair at the top of our game.' For a second, the farmer thought he saw a shift of fabric in the

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curtain, a slight movement of shadow, but he brushes it away with another gulp of beer, erasing his mind with thoughts of a bloated wallet and the scent of money as dollar bills rain on him, bathing him in a sea of green. He removes the straw hat and plops it on the boy's head, 'come out and join me when the rain's stopped, son.'

One loses one's goals and ambitions in the pursuit of self-indulgence: gluttony. Tick. Tick. Tick. The boy's hand rummages through the empty platters of food beside him before licking the grease and crumbs off his fingers. 'Mom, can you get more chips?' The boy yells and turns his head ever so slightly. When there is no reply, he leans back and returns to an entranced state of watching the water droplets, his previous endeavour for food quickly slipping from his simple mind.

Lust: drives one into a state of depression from wanting something that one does not have. The tired housewife picks up the straw hat which was left lying carelessly in the hallway with one hand, and carries the basket of dirty laundry in the other. She lets out a sigh and rolls her shoulders back to ease the tightness in her neck, straightening her crooked posture. Looking beyond the clothesline which is a constant reminder of her unfinished chores, and past the silhouette of her husband working earnestly at the farm which means nothing to her, the housewife sees the faint outline of high-rise buildings and feels the sense of longing that it brings. She sees a realm of possibilities, a realm that offered her a quiet exit, years ago, and an entrance that is now non-existent. She longs to stand under the bright light once more, not to face a muddy field of vegetables, but to greet an audience filled with admiration. Reaching a hand to her wan face, aged and sunken from a life of endurance, she longs for an escape from this cancerous life which slowly and painfully drains her of her livelihood.

Envy: when one desires the fortune of another. The girl turns to see her brother who is lazing on the veranda, his pot belly showing beneath the shirt that he had long outgrown. 'Bring out some more chips, will ya?' He slurs through the toothpick in his mouth whilst gesturing at the empty platters beside him. She exhales quickly, releasing her fury and frustration at the unfairness in her life. Upon unclenching her fist, she discovers deep marks that she had left on the brim of the hat. Pointedly ignoring her brother, the girl spins around and slowly walks away, counting to her breath as she goes, *one...* the farm is her passion, *two...* it is also her brother's inheritance, *three...* her brother



gets everything handed to him on a silver platter, *four...* she had gotten the grades, done the hard yards, *five...* yet she can only watch in silence as her dream slips through her fingers. The girl's jealousy only grows with each step. Bring the hat to her father? She tosses it aside, watching it roll into the shadows in guilty satisfaction.

Sloth: a lack of energy to confront the obstacles in life. The old dog yawns at the sudden intrusion of the disk. Slowly extending onto all fours, it swerves around to avoid the strange object, unintentionally knocking over some metallic cylinders. It yawns again, and lies down to resume its sleep, completely unaware of the mess it had just stirred up.

Wrath: caused by a betrayal, it threatens the vows which bond two people together. In the events which followed, I cursed my marble eyes for having no lids to blind me from all that was happening. The farmer, red and shaking, had raised his fist. Clenched in his hand was the housewife's one-way ticket to freedom, stained by food scraps and odour. The housewife cowered in response. The two children sat on the staircase banister, eyes wide and terrified at the commotion. The housewife, suitcase in one hand, crumpled slip of paper in the other, walked out of his life, having garnered the courage to search once again for the entrance to that dream.

You have shut yourself away for endless days, sinking deeply into bottles of misery and self-pity, ignoring the calls of nature. You have been a friend and my creator, you gave me life and a purpose, and for that I am grateful. Tomorrow, your crops will be gone, as will the purpose that you gave me. But until then, I cannot abandon my duty. With the straw hat back on my head, where it should never have left, I will stand tall, completely at ease, scanning for intruders with my marble eyes, my lips tightly sealed to never reveal the secrets entangled in the strands of straw. Pride: it's a deadly sin.



II

No. 23 Lowvale Lane looks just as you remembered it to be. The grass is still uncut, the rose bushes still unpruned and the gate is still unlatched. Moonlight shines down over the dilapidated two storey house in the middle of the property as you walk towards it. You push open the door and step inside. The house has been empty for years now, as most potential buyers steer clear of it, scared away by the vast collection of rumoured murders, poltergeists and hauntings which have 'occurred' over the years. You walk up the creaking stairs, trailing your hands up the bannister and feeling the familiar bumps and scratches left in the tarnished wooden beams, reminding you of the years you spent here.

An uneasy feeling runs through your veins as you step into the attic. The deathly silence pierces your ears, and the heavy musty air of the room clouds your senses. Flashes of childhood memories flood your vision; there was laughter here, days were spent exploring this treasure trove, forts were built and wars were fought over who was the rightful king of the attic. Now the attic is cluttered with various articles of abandonment. Peeling wallpaper covers the walls; and piles of furniture, books and antiques clutter the dusty floor. A fine film of dust covers everything, the attic has been left untouched all these years since you left, almost as if it has been waiting for you; patiently, unmoving and unchanging as the years have slowly passed on. You reach into your pocket and take out a lighter. You have thought about this moment for many years, you've toyed with the idea, of ending it, of finally moving on. You flick open the lighter, bend down, and light the closest thing in your path; a straw hat.

The flames lick away at the straw hat. Slowly they crawl, bit by bit up its braided edges, twining around the raw fibres of the hat until they engulf it whole. The hat burns for a moment, lighting up the attic in its wavering warm light, chasing away the shadows into the far corners of the room. It's a bonfire of sorts, the beautiful calm before the storm, the hungry flames reaching leisurely towards the dark ceiling, producing tiny embers which jump and spread from the straw hat to the other neglected pieces of furniture in the attic.

The aged, musty carpet catches fire next, followed by the tattered armchair, and then soon the numerous piles of leather bound books. The fire grows bigger, it gains strength as it burns, eager to consume the antique objects in its hungry appetite and doing so, until it blazes like a great flaming beast, the devoured bodies of its victims still

THE FIRE

NINA GUO

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

OVERALL WINNER



visible through the blackening fumes. One by one the framed paintings on the wall fall to the ground and are swallowed up by the fire. The gold lead paint of the armchair begins to crackle and peel off in the heat from the flames; falling, curling, and floating to the ground as the tarnished gold fades further to a dull brown.

Look around; you stand in the middle of an inferno, hungry sparks of fire bite into your skin, trails of sweat run down your back. Look down; the straw hat still lies at your feet, it's charred and destroyed, just a pile of blackened straw. You've finally done it, you told yourself you would one day, and now you have. You're burning those memories away, you've made the decision to forget and to move on, but now that the straw hat is gone, are you satisfied or are you scared?

II

Glass windows shatter, wooden beams splinter and clouds of flaking paint and black ash fill the air. You watch as a framed photograph of a smiling family falls to the ground. The face of the father begins to burn first; the flames eat away his face, then move onto the mother, and then finally to the identical, grinning faces of the two boys. There are good memories that tie you to this house, but the ones of pain, hurt and fear override them. Those are the ones you would rather forget but will be permanently reminded of by the scars marring your skin. You know you are alone in this world, everyone has been taken away from you, there is no one left who knows where you are, no one left who cares. The flames begin to advance toward you; they slither and crawl, twisting themselves around beams and pushing themselves higher and higher, until you are enclosed in a circle of fire. The heat is overwhelming, you feel your skin begin to blister and the stench of burning hair reaches your nostrils. But this is what you wanted wasn't it? Closure? No more pain, no more memories, no more stares. You close your eyes.

Our new home comes into view as mummy and daddy turn into Lowvale Lane. Willy, my brother, and I sit side by side, we're twins, identical and inseparable in our matching overalls and straw hats. We are excited! A new home means a new beginning, mummy and daddy say they won't yell anymore, we'll be a happy family like we used to. Daddy says he will buy us ice-cream every weekend, as long as we help mummy around the house. We are excited; daddy says this new home will change everything.



I cannot remember the first time I died. It was in my mother's womb where I had barely reached six months. You could say I was a miracle in that I was able to be brought back into the world after being dead for so long, but, as these stories always go, I was a disappointment in my father's eyes. He found little success in my birth although I am his only son; to him I am still a failed attempt at the cure for all ills. My birth came after my death and I was cut from the cryogenically frozen corpse of my mother. I squealed in my first lungful of cold, cold air, to a room of sterile hands and sterile gazes.

I have died 47 times since.

The House of M stands tall and arrogant. After the Concourse it will be surrounded by four glass spires which will pierce the sky, these modern tower-like projections which will suspend upon great metallic statues defy both gravity and architecture, yet it will exist, unnaturally like the majority of things found in the New World. The four statues in each bottom corner are horsemen; crushed horsemen. The engravings on their plaques are in a cruel and perfect font and read: Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death. If there was a god this would be the cosmic insult, however, as everyone knows, in the New World there is no god. The belief that an omnipresent being is existent will have faded over time, a forgotten plaything left to attract dust, and if it were ever picked up again it would be done so in the deep recesses of a solitary mind.

This is will soon be the tallest building of Sector 5; a building permit will be placed that allows no other to surpass its height.

It is the year 2080 AD and humanity has reached Type I civilisation. Mankind has just begun to start terra forming Mars, there are no longer delays in the teleporting system, the World Parliament is holding its 59th biannual council concerning a new disease found in Sector 51 that has the potential to wipe out all life on Earth. It only wipes out 67%. I do not know yet that in less than a decade I will lead the New World.

When I wake up, it will seem to be an insignificant day as any other, and I now cannot remember the date although I know it was my birthday. In the New World, such things lack significance. This day, in hindsight, marks the beginning of my empire.

At this point in time I have dreams; it is nothing unusual to have dreams as I am still part of the old world. Looking back, these are premonitions.



Sometimes in such dreams, I am visited by a prepubescent girl; her hair is metallic with a soft, unique green sheen as light reflects off it. She isn't beautiful, more like exquisite and strange but I think it's all the same. She had seen colours that do not exist and her skin is like marble. There is something eerily dissimilar about her existence that I could never place, now I know it all too well. In the New World she is part of the *Homo eximius*, a new strain of humans; a new strain that will evolve from my creation – my cure. They become the dominant race. In the New World, I find her, the *real* her but only when she is all grown up and she becomes mine as I am hers. She is my Delilah.

Balthazar is already there by the time I get to Yggdrasil. It is often called the Warehouse of Youth, here people are able to buy new body parts to replace the old, technically grasping at immortality. Although Sector 5 is the most clean of all the soon-to-be 200 sectors, it is most renowned for the infamous clubs that slip beneath the surface.

'You're early,' is all I say as I enter the skin branch.

'So are you,' Balthazar's back is unmoving as he continues to print off new sheets of skin.

I ignore this and ask with an exaggerated tone, 'Do you *need* any more skin?'

To this he turns around, normally purple eyes glinting grey with the blue light that reflects off the white, clinical walls, 'Even with all the ReJuv I'm taking, being 60 years old and looking like you're 21 is hard work.'

'Do you have the stuff?' I ask and he envelops me in a strong embrace.

'Happy Quarter-century Oz,' he says as he slips the package into the inner folds of my parka. I am oblivious at the time to his lingering glance and prolonged touch. The loyalty he has to me costs him his life in the dying embers of my soured empire.

I take the elevator hidden behind the Lungs branch and I descend into Club Kerosene. I open the package and shoot up the syringe of amber liquid in the corner of my eye as I enter the throng. The sudden paralysing pain only empowers my anticipation of what is to come.

I am already lost in the bass line of the pulsing music as I pass the Tube Room. I remember being scared of this room, the hive of humans attached to drips releasing the addictive liquefied soundwaves, black

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ichor injected in their veins as they throb together like beasts in the artificial light.

THE HOUSE OF M

My fear tells me that the amber drug is working. This will be the 32nd time I have died, my 31st pseudo-death. Dimethyltryptamine, more commonly known as DMT is only a chemical similar to that of the one released at death. It is the year 2080 AD and we cannot die without the help of those called the Euthanisers.

In between the thrum of perfect bodies, I remember seeing green. Her green.

I fall in love.

It is not until the night passes that news of the plague seeping through to other sectors begins to spread. The population becomes a state of mass hysteria.

My father closes the doors of the House of Medical-Advancement, shutting in, along with me, hundreds of doctors, researchers and scientists to try, try, try again.

Three-thousand-six-hundred-and-one days and three-thousand-six-hundred nights will pass with us, untouched by the toxic outside world and I will finally become a success in my father's eyes. In history this will be called the Concourse. I will have found Panacea.

But I do not know yet of the consequences. I will become Oz the curer, the hope, the leader to New World after the plague, and like all leaders named Ozymandias, my great empire falls.



Cold.

Everywhere is cold and numb. Slowly, the numbness disappears and I begin to move my fingers, my toes, my hands, everything. Last of all I open my eyes to a blinding white ceiling. Where am I? I feel as if I've been asleep forever, my arms and legs are aching and my eyelids feel heavy. A door opens and a man wearing a ridiculous silver suit walks in.

'Hello Jeremy, now I know this may be confusing..'

I turn around and face the man, 'Who are you? Where am I?' The man smiles to himself like I'm missing some personal joke.

'My name is Charlie, you are in New New York, the year is 2120 and you have been cryogenically frozen for 100 years.' His words echo in my head. Cryogenically frozen for 100 years.

Charlie explains to me that he is my minder or host until I complete initiation, which will take approximately two weeks.

'So where are we going now?' I ask my new companion as we turn the corner of a wide long hallway.

'Now, we go home and get you some rest.'

I follow him into what seems to be an elevator although it is made of glass and has no buttons. As the doors slide open they reveal a long glass pathway heading to a tube at the end. At the end of the path Charlie presses his hand onto a keypad, then a few seconds later two seats arrive in the tube and he ushers me to take one.

'Welcome to the tube Jeremy, this is the only transport to and from The Centre.' I take my seat and the ride begins.

During our journey I look below, it is New York but not New York. All around me are buildings without character, stark white, shiny plastic. On the ground I see a silver pavement; no street signs, no shops, no cafes, no life. In the middle of this perfect abyss lies a gigantic ball of glass and colour. Above the glittering streets and white buildings is a network of tubes identical to the one in which I'm confined, all leading to the centre.

Charlie lives in one of the white fortresses, his is called Block 18. When we reach the door of his home no keys are used, instead he places his hand on a keypad and the door slides open ominously. As I step into the room I feel like I am entering a hospital; everything is sterile, too clean. There is a kitchen but it isn't a kitchen. There are no appliances just a bench, table, metal cupboard and a large TV screen.

I awake the next morning to an awful song that is resonating



through the apartment.

‘What the bloody hell is that?’ I yell, expecting no answer but then Charlie peeps round my door and says in his monotonous voice, ‘That is the nation’s anthem. Please respect it.’

As I look around my room, I find a silver suit sitting on the end of my bed and reluctantly put it on to make Charlie happy. It feels too smooth and smells of toilet cleaner. As I enter the kitchen, the television flutters on and a man with silver hair appears on screen.

‘Good Morning New New York, today is Wednesday the 7th of April 2120, the weather will be 23 degrees today and it will rain at exactly 12:30pm. As usual no problems to report from The Centre, so that is all. Remember control is key, yours truly Mayor Fink.’

I start to laugh but then see Charlie mesmerised by the screen, ‘Control is key.’ He repeats softly. A buzzer sounds and the metal cupboard doors open revealing two plates of breakfast.

Later on in the morning I find myself in the tube again, heading towards The Centre for my initiation. I feel sad and lonely on this sky journey, uncomfortable in my new world. The doors of the tube open, I take a deep breath in and then step into The Centre. At lunchtime I ditch the containers of bland food and head to the windows lining the sides of The Centre. As I look out over the city I no longer recognise, I think back to this morning’s intensive lessons on the nation of New New York.

I first learnt that there is a schedule for everyday, which everyone follows: wake up is at 7am and breakfast and announcements are at 7:30am. At 8am work commences at The Centre for everyone. Lunch is at 12:30pm and work finishes every day at 4pm. Dinner is served at 7:30pm, all lights in the whole city go off at 9pm and at this time no one is allowed outside or an alarm sounds. Jobs in the society are split into four different levels: Technology, which involves all broadcasts, electricity, data sorting etc. Health, which is medics and researchers. Policy, which includes politics, and officials who are like policeman that roam the streets and make weekly checks on everyone. Last of all, there is the maintenance sector which includes cooks and cleaners.

On the way home in the tube all I can think about is how I want a coffee from Mario’s, my old local café. How did I end up here? I don’t remember wanting to be frozen, but here I am, stuck in this horrific era. This society is the extreme of control. People here are



robots with no emotions and all their decisions made for them. There is an element of fear towards imperfection and freedom. The council has strived for a perfect city of order and control, but in the process they have taken away life and all its glory. When I get to Charlie's I don't make my way to the leisure hall or gym; instead, I move to the generic window of his apartment and think about how imperfect this perfect world is.

By the time Charlie comes home from the leisure hall the sun is setting over the field of white buildings. As the dinner dishes are cleared back into the metal cupboard I suddenly think of something and turn to Charlie. 'Charlie, where are all the children? All this time I've only seen adults, where are the children?' Charlie closes the cupboard doors and sits down next me. 'Children are taken from their mothers at birth and are sent to the development complex outside New New York until the age of 18 where they are given a partner and sent to a block.'

As Charlie's mechanical voice echoed through the apartment, I get up and run. I had to get out of there, away, somewhere far away. There must be a way somehow to get out of this prison. As the glass elevator arrived at the ground floor I sprint to the nearest exit, desperate to feel something natural, the wind on my face or a fresh breath of air.

A loud siren rang throughout the streets. I'd forgotten about the curfew. It must have been past nine. Before I had time to think, lights shone in the streets and the sound of officials filled the air.

I began to run, no direction or plans, just running.



II

I write this to you, because maybe you too will doubt yourself like I did.

I write this in the hopes that you are living in a reality where your future is safe, despite the relentless attempts to tear it down. I leave you with my experiences and my life, because maybe you can distinguish what's black and what's white from the world I live in that is tainted by a hazy grey.

Before I continue though, may I ask you a question? A simple hypothetical situation. Say I presented to you a switch, and I told you that if you pulled the switch, half the population of the world would die immediately. Would you pull the switch?

If I look, outside the window is a towering scape built of glass and steel, held together by faith and ignorance. Ignorance is bliss, and perhaps that's true because peace has settled. War is non-existent, poverty has been eradicated and old fears of a dying environment are gone. I suppose this era, in the pure and righteous Republic of Elysium, could almost be considered a paradise. Almost.

In this city of glass, we often forget how only fifty years ago humanity was on the brink of annihilation. The future that occurred was the version everybody denied, because truthfully, nobody wanted to believe it could happen. But it did, and denial couldn't hold it back. The morning sky was technicoloured: a different shade of poison every morning. Burning rain streamed down the cracked tarmac like the Earth's veins, swirling with bile, blood and sewage. Wheezing breaths pulled at constricted lungs and bony fingers desperately clawed at their flesh trying to reach the blazing fire in their veins. Pale bodies spilled out of the congested hospitals, clogging doorways and alleys, disease pulling their skin taut and casting delusions in their wide, yellow eyes. Another week and those yellow eyes would be staring blankly at the ceiling, at where the stars might have been. The living became the dead, and the dead looked so peaceful in their sleep that many others simply lay down beside them and never rose again.

They called it the Purge and it reigned over the Earth for years, striding relentlessly through cities and stretching its shadows into the furthest recesses of the country. Nobody knew where it came from, how it started or why. Some people blamed the crumbling environment, others blamed nuclear war or an uncontrolled experiment. Many blamed fate or a greater power who sought to

THE MORTAL
STATE

GILLIAN LIM



punish humanity and bring judgement upon us all. But nobody knew. All that anybody knew is that when it finally left, there was a silence. A soft white hush fell, so unfamiliar in the stricken and tortured landscape that at first, it was deafening. It was the quiet of a planet freed of four billion lives. The Purge had left behind a lost people, ghosts of the former reality stranded in this nightmare of a future.

From the ashes of the Purge rose the Sanctuary. A light in this blackened world, the Sanctuary provided a purpose for humanity to rebuild their lives. The Sanctuary gave people hope; it provided resources, laws and a vision of a world reborn from destruction. That vision grew into the Republic of Elysium, as crystalline and idyllic as they could envision. The Sanctuary taught to learn from the mistakes of the past and to create a future where no such errors could be made again. The only way this could be ensured was to keep the people thinking as one, as only when the population is under a single belief can peace be attained. Have faith in the Sanctuary, they preached. Change is the poison of mankind. Thoughts in unison become a people in union. This, they assured, was the only way humanity could survive.

Every Monday at 0800, the Sanctuary officials herded the city into the Central Square, forming a vast sea of grey suits and glazed expressions. In the midst of it all, I always felt like I was drowning. Sometimes I would glance furtively at the congregation, searching for something, some kind of spark of emotion. But each head was upturned dutifully to the immense screen above. It crackled to life, as it did every Monday, and vivid images flicked past whilst a sombre voice washed over the crowd. The voice-over described the terrible divided world before the Purge, how humanity was slowly pushing itself closer over the edge. Graphs illuminated the screen, steep lines depicting the sudden surge in world population in the 21st century. 'Humanity's population bordered on 8 billion,' the voice drummed steadily. 'And still mankind insisted on finding methods to cure illnesses, prolong life. They denied that their lives were limited and constantly in a fragile, mortal state. The world could only sustain 4 billion lives, but still the population grew and humans spread over the globe like a disease. Greed festered, and the few who charged ahead turned a blind eye to the masses that were left behind.' Images of children flashed above, their bony legs collapsed under their

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protruding rib cages and sunken skulls. 'The Purge was a miracle, a gift. The Earth granted humanity a second chance to survive. Change is the poison of mankind. Have faith in the Sanctuary. Thoughts in unison become — ' A cry pierced the velvety rhythm. 'LIES!' Nobody turned, all heads angled faithfully to the screen. But an elderly man in the pool of bodies screamed at the screen again, his wiry frame trembling but his voice erupting off the glass buildings. 'Lies! You're the ones who killed her!' he screeched. 'You killed my Angie! YOU KILLED THEM ALL!' Sanctuary officials swiftly swarmed around the man, seizing his flailing limbs. 'You killed the people! ALL OF THEM! The human race is DEAD!' The shrieking halted with a sickening crack. The Sanctuary officials dragged his limp frame away, disappearing into the alleys. And thousands of eyes watched the flickering screen.

The old man's screams echoed in my head for days afterwards, and the small seed of doubt that had always rested there began to grow. These were dangerous thoughts to have, and I knew that, and the words might have been nothing more than the insane rant of a senile mind. But the notion began to consume me, because something had always felt like it was *missing* in Elysium. I had always dismissed it though, because it seemed as though nobody else noticed or cared. Until now.



The Sanctuary is a lie.
The more I turn the idea over, the more I start to believe in it.
The Sanctuary killed the human race. The Sanctuary killed us all.
And then another thoughts creeps in,
The Sanctuary created the Purge.

They were the ones who destroyed nations, the ones who slaughtered billions of innocents before shamelessly praising their deaths as a miracle.

But then, what if the Purge had never happened? What if the population was allowed to continue to grow and consume? The imminence of the planet's doom breathed down its neck, but people continued to obliviously claim it wouldn't happen. Not now. Not for a while longer. Civilisation of the 21st century was on the brink of killing itself out of sheer overpopulation, the endless want for more, and the impossible desire for the future. But then... it was gone. The

Purge took not only 4 billion lives, but the spark that fuelled change and purpose. Was this spark what some called the human soul? How could humanity live without that spark?

And the truth is, we cannot. We don't live. We are only surviving, and by the crudest means possible.

But humanity was dead either way.

But now, may I ask you another question? A simple hypothetical situation. Say I presented to you the same switch. If you pull it, half the population of the world will die immediately. But now, what if I told you that if you didn't pull the switch, the entire human race will become extinct in one hundred years?

Would you pull the switch?

I have had my doubts and my delusions, but I have made my decision. My eyes have been opened and I can see the world from a side I did not know existed. I have realised that humanity cannot live any other way. Reader, I hope you have learnt from this, in whatever kind of reality your world has become. If you ever find yourself in doubt, have faith.

II



Imagine you have a fishbowl. In this fishbowl, you start with a grand total of one goldfish. Exciting, I know. You give this fish as much food as it desires, the water's pretty clean and life is going swimmingly for your little friend. Now your fish is pretty lonely, so the next day you drop another goldfish into the bowl. However, you are only allowed to give the same amount of food as you did when you had one fish. In other words, your two fish will have to live on half the amount of food.

Now imagine that every day, you have to add another fish to the bowl, but you can still only give the same amount of food. A few days pass, and I think you can tell that there will be a few problems here. First of all, you're still trying to sustain the entire school of fish with only enough food to sustain one, and obviously there is just not enough food for all of them. Second of all, the bowl is starting to overflow with the fish you keep dropping in there and it's by no means going to expand if you keep doing this. Thirdly, the water isn't exactly looking pristine anymore. All of these points are leading to a pretty dire fate for your goldfish.

Now I know what you might be thinking, there are some easy solutions to these problems. Give the fish enough food, buy another bowl, change the water once in a while and most of all, just stop dropping fish into the bowl like some sort of obsessive lunatic. But it might be a bit harder than that for us, because we are the fish. The world is our fishbowl. And those problems are staring us in the face while the human population continues to grow without any show of stopping.

We can define an area as overpopulated when the civilisation can't be maintained without degrading the capacity of the environment. Overpopulation is not just a question of cramming more humans onto the planet, because we have space. Considering density only, Africa would in fact be underpopulated, with only 55 people per square mile. However, we also have to consider what these people need to survive, whether the environment can actually sustain their impact, and people's living standards. Overpopulation has become a question of basic survival. Can the human race survive with this many people on earth? Could your goldfish survive under those circumstances? Answer to both: no, not with this rate of growth.

Throughout the history of mankind, the world's population has increased unrestrained. The world took thousands of years to reach just one billion people. Now, this was doubled in just over 100 years.

THE DANGERS OF OVER- POPULATION

GILLIAN LIM

SUZANNE NORTHEY PUBLIC

SPEAKING COMPETITION

WINNER



In just 33 years, the population hit 3 billion people, until now it has just taken 12 years to jump from 6 billion people to the 7 billion we have today. With this kind of exponential growth though, realistically, there has to be a limit. If we simply keep going as we are, there will be a point where the planet can no longer support us. Human civilisation is approaching collapse.

Firstly, we are continually consuming more than our earth can provide. In less than 50 years we are expected to have more than 9 billion people on the earth. This means that there will be an increased demand for diminishing resources such as coal, oil, wood. Agricultural demand, which is already stretched thin, is estimated to double. Even now, we are facing difficulties in sourcing enough drinking water for the population. How do we expect billions more people to be able to live on this planet without energy? How are we going to survive without water?

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Following on from this notion of limited resources is the impact that our spreading race has on the environment. Clearly, as the population grows, our environmental impact is going to grow as well. Ozone depletion, consumption of ocean resources, carbon dioxide concentration, all of these and more have been rising at terrifying rates. And all of these can be linked back to overpopulation. If you want the oceans to replenish their fish, you need fewer people eating fish. If you want to produce less carbon emissions, you need fewer people producing them.

We all know that our 'first-world problems' are pathetic in comparison to many serious problems that people face, especially those in impoverished countries. Here in Australia, many of us shrug off the differences and problems that other countries face, because they don't affect us, right? But what we fail to realise is that our ignorance is the problem.

Underdeveloped countries have the highest growth rates, statistically doubling their population in between 20 to 35 years. Think about that for a minute. Just to maintain that level of inadequacy, the food available must be doubled. The amount of power available has to be doubled. The number of trained doctors, nurses, teachers and administrators must be doubled. This would be difficult enough in a developed country, with access to plentiful resources. How would this be possible in a country with none of

these? The overall effects of this are increases in famine, malnutrition and disease.

With all of these pressing issues in mind, why has nearly nothing been done? The answer is simply that for many governments, it's a difficult problem to face. A famous example of a government taking action against overpopulation is China's One-Child Policy, which has been claimed to have prevented around 400 million births between 1979 and 2011. Whilst drastic action such as this is very effective, the policy has also been faced with apprehension. To be able to have a family and as many children as we desire is one of our freedoms.

And of course, to imply that any kind of freedom might be taken away is going to be protested. However, governments need to realise that first of all, some form of action is better than none at all. The population isn't simply going to stop growing if we will it to or if we ignore the problem. Secondly, actions do not have to be as dramatic as the One-Child Policy. Another solution could be to improve the standards of education in developing countries. Education and the improvement of financial situations have a visible impact on population growth rates, so that birth rates in a few developed countries have even begun to decline.

We have the capacity to come up with solutions and put an end to overpopulation. The author Dan Brown once wrote 'Denial is a critical part of the human coping mechanism. Without it, we would all wake up terrified every morning about all the ways we could die.' But it's about time we woke up. And it's about time that those in power realise humanity's growing pains, before we're all forced to face the consequences.



THE FEAR OF
FALLING

CARLA MILEO

It became the very fear that preyed on our minds. Unwillingly, unknowingly, we gave it life and purpose. The fear of losing ourselves to other forces, of climbing too high, digging too deep, then falling. But what have we now become? Living in a jungle of concrete brutality, blocking out all that once was beautiful, making us lose our grip on reality. Our memories are precious, rare, treasured. Nobody loves anymore; emotion is senseless to our cold hearts. We are driven, determined and fighting, but towards what end? We have fallen from grace.

Change is thick in the air, infectious, a warning of danger, of coming hardship and pain. Walking through dimly lit alleys, darkness seems to encumber me, the ghostly wisps of fog drifting past give me an uneasy feeling. The path ahead is illuminated by an eerie light, an ethereal man-made luminescence. Not a light of the living. The mind is quick to sense fear, shadows are given life and whispers uttered onto the evening breeze echo eerily through the obscurity; noises in the distance, invisible eyes pursuing every move. I look to the sky, hoping to see a soaring bird, the glowing sun, a symbol of hope on which to hold. Yet only thin rays of sunlight trickle through the thick fog; there is nothing left of the old world.

The darkness begins to fade and the fog clears. Crowds swarm in their orderly lines as they exit the hostile buildings on their way home; cloaked in grey and black, faces down, long purposeful strides, cold. Even now among the movement, there is silence. The flow pushes me, sways me, and pulls me down along with the current. A sudden pain in my chest forces me to gasp for air, how they suffocate me. I try, but I cannot be like them, the crowd. I am different and they know. Yet I feel a part of it, somehow joined to the force of the river, bound to its fate. And they know.

Demands are higher, work is harder, needs are greater than simple humans can conjure. And so, that is how it happened, the merging of man and steel, of life and death, human and machine. A choice, they say, for the better, they assure us. But I will not, I cannot.

Those who refuse suffer. They swim and fight hard against the current, but the current will always win and wash them defeated onto the sharp rocks of the shore. Their destinies lie beyond the city walls with the derelict of this world. The poor and the worthless – their lives are labelled and feared. I can see them from my apartment high above the grip of the great wall. They huddle together against

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the cold of the night which bites deep into their flesh. Despite their perpetual misery, a gnawing envy grows within me.

A piercing jet of water soothes me as I prepare to enter its rising wake. My fingers slide through the glistening velvet liquid delivering an icy bite. Savouring the moment, my eyelids close and I remember the sea, the majestic waves rolling in then away, and the constant motion of simplicity calming my aching mind. The peace of the deep. A place where thought and time are granted no entrance. I wander there in my sleep, the gentle motion of the waves lull me into a deep comfort, they carry me away from this world.

As I slide in to night, the icy velvet caresses me, extracting my troubles, my fears. I float, rocking gently, softly, slowly away from reality. Then I open my eyes, the crystal liquid obscuring my sight. Maybe if I stay under I can dream forever. No. Just one more day...

The sound of static rouses me from my dreams, pulling me out of peace. Grey walls, grey floors, grey rooms, grey clothing and grey light are all harsh reminders of my reality. But what choice do I have? What choice did I ever have? Daily, as I am injected into the flowing current of people, the familiar sense of piercing eyes burning through my back makes me wary. They have eyes everywhere, down the darkest alley to the busiest street. Always watching them; watching me.

Another minute, another hour, another day slips by without significance. Time was once precious, now I welcome the thief of my youth, it is my only friend, my one companion in this life. The shadows dance around me as I pace along the dark lanes towards home, yet even there I can find no solitude.

The door doesn't click shut behind me; the lights fail to eliminate the darkness and a cool draft breathes life into the sheer drapes that billow and glide in the ghostly, chilling breeze. There are unseen eyes buried in the shadows, I can feel them. The air is disturbed by the deep breaths hidden within the darkness. I am frozen. Silence consumes me. My heart beats so ferociously that I fear it may rip open my ribs. I wait. A deep laughter erupts from the shadows, piercing through the thick silence, echoing throughout the apartment, rattling the windows and shaking the ground. My legs give way under the sheer force of the sound, it weakens me. Desperately, I crawl along the ground digging my fingertips into the rough carpet, searching for shelter. I fall, the abrasive floor scrapes



deeply into my cheek. A suffocating silence once again smothers the room. The faint glistening of an object in the corner of the room draws my attention, reflecting the distant light into a peculiar pattern on the wall, a metal hand. My mind screams at my body as it desperately tries to command my unresponsive muscles to move, to run. I struggle to bring enough air into my lungs as they burn for more, I choke and splutter. The gleaming hand comes ever closer. It glides closer and closer to my face, then begins to stroke my whitening cheek.

“Welcome to our world.”

Then darkness.

I have no living memory of the events that followed, only an indescribable terror and the profound sense of inner alteration.

Then darkness.

II

A single beam of moonlight caresses my pale face. After a brief moment of remembrance I cautiously begin to move. Stiff from the pain, I limp to the bathroom where I can see my weary reflection in the mirror. As I gently remove my night gown, I see numerous deep crevices around my wrists and shoulders. So they have done it after all.

I can feel something deep within me, a foreign force crawling up my arms, twisting around my spine, a cold, sharp sensation. They have penetrated my mind, I am altered. Overcome by helplessness, complete and utter weakness, I begin to scratch at my wrists, deeper, deeper, harder, and faster. Dissatisfied and hungry. My body screams and I gasp for air. Relentless, tears of defeat and frustration fall down my cheeks. I slip on the cold, hard tiles, once again writhing like a fading beast.

I am losing myself, I fear that this is my end. Life may continue to carry me forward, but I will not be the owner of my soul. Today a new life begins as another ends. As my body ceases to tremble and my head no longer spins, I lie still, endlessly gazing at the ceiling. All the while the deep chilling pain crawls up my spine, inching ever closer to my neck, towards my brain.

It is coming.



JACKSON, Feb. 25 1917 – Today, Miss Lucille Whittier became the bride of Mr Stanley Gates at a ceremony performed at the Whittier Mansion. They were attended by Miss Phyllis Whittier as maid of honour, sister of the of the bride, and Mr Thomas ‘Tommy’ Colbeck as best man, fellow graduate and good friend of the happy couple. The bride donned a blond lace and slate chiffon gown.

The pair graduated from the University of Mississippi’s class of 1916 last summer. They were each part of the Delta Gamma sorority and Kappa Sigma fraternity and met in their first year at the college. After a brief honeymoon the Ole Miss alumni will make their home in downtown Jackson.



SECOND LIEUTENANT STANLEY GRANT
FIRST DIVISION, 16TH INFANTRY
AMERICAN E.F. FRANCE

SUNDAY 15 JULY 1917
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Dearest Sweetheart Stanley,

How lovely it was to receive news from you at last! It relieves me greatly to hear that you’re alive and well.

I apologise that I did not thank you for the straw boater you left me! Mother visited yesterday and she let me know that it is indeed a fine and expensive hat. I shall wear it everywhere I go and speak of the handsome gentleman who gave it to me whenever it garners a compliment. All the better that it is a cream ribbon that hugs the crown of the hat – this will go nicely with any of my dresses and matches perfectly with the diamond hatpins you gave me many moons ago.

How I long for you to fill the cold and empty space on your side of the bed. I comfort myself with the thought that every night I that endure your absence and pray for your safe return, I am one day closer to having you in my arms again. Be careful, my love, and do not forget the girl who is waiting for you in Jackson.

With love,
Lucille



OLE MISS
GRADUATES
WED IN JACKSON

PEARL PAGUIO



OLE MISS
GRADUATES
WED IN JACKSON

20 JANUARY 1918

Once again I am at the front line of the trenches. Fortunately, today has been a quiet day so I have found the time to write an entry.

Tommy has become quite popular amongst the boys which I suspect is to do with his grand elocutions. He speaks often of the enemy as the virus we must purge from this earth. I suppose this is his idea of patriotism.

Yet it is thanks to God's will that I find myself alive today and I cannot decide if this is a blessing or a curse. I am no more deserving of another sunrise than the countless 'enemies' that I have killed. I have stolen the futures of men and the girls waiting for them at home. I have devastated the dreams of his very own Lucille who speaks fondly of her beloved soldier. I have written, with the tip of my rifle, a compendium of deaths into the history books.

*

II

MISS PHYLLIS WHITTIER
DELTA GAMMA HOUSE,
UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
OXFORD, MS

WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 1919
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Darling Phyllis,
Congratulations are in order – what an achievement to be at Ole Miss, and a Delta Gamma girl no less. How I love reading of your college adventures!

Unfortunately, things aren't looking as bright for me. Since he returned from the war, Stanley's behaviour has been erratic and disturbed. I am struggling to find the passion that bound us when we were first married. There are days he cannot look me in the eye, let alone display an affectionate caress. I sent my husband to war, and received back a stranger.

Last week I took him to the fairgrounds, hoping that the atmosphere would evoke some sort of lively spirit. I'd almost succeeded – mind you, I'd fed him no less than a dozen salt water taffies – when the fireworks display began. With the bang of the

firecrackers he fairly dropped to the ground, wailing like a newborn. He caused a great scene, with the onlookers left wondering why a grown man was screaming for them to 'take cover'. After that there was no more enjoying the fair for us. My life has stagnated and staled. I have fallen into a routine of taking care of Stanley.

I admit that I could not cope without the help of Thomas, for he has been such a good friend to me since the return from France. It angers me that Stanley can't just rid himself of the war the way Tommy has. To make matters worse, Stanley berates me for spending too much time with Tommy, but this issue is caused by his own fault. Tommy calms me – he is the warm first shower of spring that thaws my frosty winter.

I do hope to visit you soon and I'm well aware it's been much too long since I've had the chance to see you! Looking after Stanley has taken up all of my time. May God find me a way out of this.

Your loving sister,
Lucille

*

I can't stop thinking about you. 209 Edward. 9 o'clock. Destroy once received, lest S finds this.

– T

*

PRIMARY REPORT – JACKSON POLICE DEPARTMENT
FILED BY OFFICER GRANT ON TUESDAY 17 JUNE, 1919

Police were called to the Edwards Hotel (Jackson, MS) by hotel staff after the discovery of a dead body. A staff member found the body at 1400 hours in suite 209. The cause of death appears to be a ladies' hatpin, forced through the neck of the victim as well as other physical trauma around the head which is also evident. The victim has been identified as GATES, Stanley (27) (male). Although much of the furniture was found considerably disorderly and toppled, few personal belongings were found in the suite (see note). Only one witness, who had been staying in the adjacent room, has been spoken to – GRIFFITH, Genevieve (43) (female). Mrs Griffith reported that,

OLE MISS
GRADUATES
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OLE MISS
GRADUATES WED
IN JACKSON

at approximately 0930 hours as she was leaving her hotel room, she heard what was 'undoubtedly a row' involving 'two distinct male voices, and one female, too'. Circumstances are considered to be very suspicious and the case will be treated as a murder investigation as proceedings continue.

Note: the only item present was a crushed straw boater hat, with a bloodstained cream ribbon on the crown.



II

'Keep it upright,' my father whispers. Crouched at the riverbed, my hands gently caress the paper lantern glowing against the night sky. Beside me, my sister, Akari, cautiously steps back from the riverbed, her back straight as she watches her lantern gently bob across the river, the light flickering against the wind. Slowly, she raises her hand to the hesitant stream that silently trickles down her cheek. Returning back to my lantern, my face glowed with glimmering luminance. A slow smile crept across my face; I enjoy the traditional ceremonies of our people, our connection to the land. I reluctantly release the lantern into the water where the current immediately begins to pull it downstream. I glance into the distant across the riverbed where families gather, each tenderly setting a radiant lantern free, a few ghostly faces holding back tears. The wind dances around us, picking and then dropping tendrils of hair, rustling against the paper lanterns as they progress into the night sky.

The lanterns join together, a growing force nestled against one another, lighting up the world as they flicker like the jewels of a cherry blossom tree. Tentatively placing a hand on my shoulders and my sister's, our father whispers, *guiding the spirits*. It is what has been taught to us, an ancient tradition, *Toro Nagashi*, the ceremony after a loved one has passed into the next world. Today it is our grandfather, a community elder well-respected and loved by all. After passing, you become a spirit, an ancestor to look down upon us, to watch our ways; the release of lanterns, guiding the spirit off into another land.

*

Stepping out of the hut, the icy wind stings my cheeks. Looking out, the community is silent, workers catching some rest before the rising sun signals another day within the rice fields. A cold chill passes through the front door, yet my family lies motionless; bodies at peace, at rest, rejuvenation of the mind and muscles before the onset of yet another strenuous day. Silently, I close the door, glancing across to the mountains with a dainty old tin bottle in one hand and an oil lamp in the other which is shining briefly into the distance, lighting my way into the dark land, my land. But this time, I am alone.

Today's climb, up into the hilltop that juts out across the land, is lonely. It feels unknown, the first time walking this route, climbing the mountain without my grandfather. It was our thing, discovering the countryside, the mountains that surrounded our fields. We found old bullets, the shells of bombs; signs of the war that shook

LANTERNS

SHALINI

PONNAMPALAM.

II

our community. This was the only time my grandfather talked about the war, reliving the past, calling on forbidden memories that he had shoved to the back of his mind. Shutting the hurt and pain away, his eyes pierced ours with a sense of grief and strife, a constant reminder of the past that traumatised and disturbed him. Yet he was at ease within the country; stories of his friends from the army with whom he had lost contact were set free from his mind. The crippling pain of his leg – easily forgotten. I never knew what had happened to his leg, but I always walked behind him, it was second nature, cautiously and anxiously waiting to catch him if his leg were to give way. At the conclusion of his stories, he would say, *Young son, be thankful to our ancestors above that you do not have to see what I saw, hear what I heard and live the way I had to live.* I always wanted him to tell me more, I wanted to know more about the war but being a respectful grandson, I did not question further.

II

Reaching the cliff top I fall to the ground, my hands raking through the soft grass, tiny drops delicately sitting on the fine slivers of the luscious lawn. Leaning against the old Kabushi magnolia tree, I see its delicate pink and white blossoms cascade from the branches which gently sway with the wind. The fragrant twist of floral scent lingers against my nose, tickling and teasing its way through my nostrils. The large glowing sphere of the sun rises slowly into the dull morning sky, casting radiant beams that illuminate our small town below. It is the first thing to pierce the darkness, casting an orange haze across the horizon, painting the sky with glimmers of delicate red, yellow and pink hues. The strength of the wind suddenly picks up as it wails between distorted trunks. Above the mountain cliff my eyes focus on my community; the first signs of life emerge from the huts into the vast abundance of rice fields that provides us with our sole source of income.

Like the cluster of lanterns that bob in time with the currents of the river, a group of yellow shapes assemble within the rice fields. It takes me a moment to recognise our traditional straw hat, the *kasa*, which protects the faces of workers from another daunting day's work. Beyond, the sun glimpses over the mountain ridges, with greetings of great reminders of the rice paddies that require tending. Bodies hunker down in the fields; women, men, neighbours, elders, aunts and uncles. The *kasa* is in its rightful place, protecting their precious faces from the darkening heat of the day. Dainty hands

with a single stock of rice seedlings skillfully push the seedlings into the soft earth below. A familiar rhythm beats within their bones.

Memories come flooding back of my grandfather wearing this hat. His lips pulled back with a grin that widened across his cheeks, it grew until a crescent lit up his face as if the sun was on the other side of his toothless grin. Looking to my left, I see the land that stretches around the rivers, engulfing the rice paddies. Somewhere into the distance lies the city with a pulse reverberating with a constant rush of life, people. Vehicles fight to get through, a myriad of sounds echo a muffled melody. I begin to search for traces of the past, hidden treasures within the trees and shrubs; signs of the past, of the forlorn, the unlucky.

Behind an old cherry blossom tree is an indication of the past, of war. I stumble across an unfamiliar object this time. I wait for grandfather to identify this mysterious piece, to hear the stories this piece triggers. But he is not there, he will never be here again to impart his knowledge, to hold me in his familiar ways, whispering myths of monsters and heroes of the war.

Resorting to the riverbed, the site of our ceremonies, of my last goodbye, tears stream down my cheeks as I long for my grandfather. Crouching down, my fingertips barely touch the surface of the water. The smell of the damp earth is strong. I remember a saying of grandfather's, *'You will always have family, Harami,' he pointed to my heart, 'they are always in there.'*

In the distance, the river winds its way around mountains, mapping a distinct course. I will not miss my grandfather anymore, for he is here, on the river, a single lantern floating downstream, flickering with a radiant glow.



MATTHEW AND HIS COMPANION

LAUREN SIBREE
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HIGHLY COMMENDED

If one was to walk past 63 Cogdon St Pittsborough, at around 6 o'clock, without fail one could spot Matthew Taylor. His strange evening ritual had become something of the small town's circular gossip. In the cool, blue crispness of the early evening, Matthew's bright yellow, rectangular window beamed in cosy happiness, unaware of the town's judgemental stare. Every night with religious punctuality, he sat on his maroon couch opposite his unusual companion, engaged in storytelling. Sometimes, on warmer nights, if the window was open wide enough, snippets of the tale were caught by eager young ears at the window and churned through the town's rumour mill. These tiny excerpts, rashly slapped together like an easy-bake cake, came together to form the infamous story. The story of Matthew and his companion. In order to ensure this story and its accuracies do not die with the current generation, I have decided to include it this journal. So follows, 'Matthew and The Straw Hat'.

II

About twenty years ago, that makes it 1920, when Pittsborough was a more quaint, respected country town, the Villors moved into The Grange. The Grange was a sublime country residence on the outskirts of Pittsborough, set on 480 acres of prime pasture land, with small forestation areas and a modest number of running creeks. This small mansion was something of a Tudor beauty, with intricate pale daffodil coloured lattice work climbing three stories high, hugged by mysteriously dark green ivy vines. The day the Villors arrived, the shutters were flung open by a cohort of no less than fifteen maids, and the family was helped from the carriage by a brigade of footmen. First came Mr and Mrs. Villor (who remain mostly unmentioned) followed by their daughter, Meredith, who poses centrally to this story.

Not an hour after their arrival, the town's milliner, Matthew Taylor, hoping to make a good spot of business promptly appeared at The Grange. Now, keep in mind Matthew was a country born lad, fairly simple-minded, but a handsome gentleman none-the-less. With the maids busily fixing the rooms, who else should open the door but Meredith herself. The anaemic beauty wrenched the door open in a flurry, her pale blonde ringlets swinging anxiously, falling about her narrow shoulders in terrific disarray. Upon seeing her visitor, her neat pink mouth formed a sweet little sideways smile, and her cheekbones dimpled in pleasure.

'Good Afternoon Ma'am,' Matthew breathed in surprise.

'Good afternoon,' she chimed back.

'I'd like to offer you a selection of hats. All half price for you today, milady.'

'Call me Meredith.'

And so the conversation continued, with little to do with hats. The animated

chatter swelled and lulled like a restless sea ridden with soft smiles and gentle laughter. Poor Matthew Taylor was helpless against the developed charms of a woman like Meredith Villor. Legend says it was her eyes that captured him. One expected a shade of pale bluey grey in continuation with her otherwise faint features. But there they were; those eyes, a warm glowing, radiant chestnut; eyes with fire. Those curious spheres of molten chocolate were crossed with strange hazel markings that dilated in excitement in the presence of Matthew. Finally she proclaimed:

‘That one!’ pointing imperiously to a delicate scrap of a thing. The hat was straw, dyed a soft beige in colour, with fine lace trimming tracing the brim. ‘Would you be a darling and fix it on me?’ Already half in love, Mathew Taylor set the hat upon her dainty head and wished her a good day, with every intention of returning in the morning. ‘Come and see me tomorrow,’ she called, her voice laughing like silver bells, echoing down the drive. Matthew Taylor waved and smiled back, not quite believing his good fortune.

The following day was the bright joyous type, the kind of day where the sun seemed delighted to shine, and the trees stretched their limbs with purpose towards the cloudless dream of a sky. As Matthew Taylor strolled down the lengthy drive towards The Grange, he lifted his arms up in mirror of the tall pine trees lining the way. This silent reverie of happiness became a ritual of sorts and every day following, he lifted his arms in a non-verbal prayer. And, day after day, his prayer was answered, as Meredith appeared in the doorway, smiling her charming pink little smile, her eyes meeting his in a show of seduction and intensity. Every morning she would ask him, ‘And what are we doing today?’ and he would reply, ‘Just adding a little something.’ By this, he was referring to her hat. Day after day, the two would cavort, adding bits and pieces to the straw structure. A daisy chain was the first to be added, lovingly woven and fixed by Matthew. Next came a piece of magenta ribbon, tied in glossy splendour around the brim, layered on the existing lace like some kind of exotically tiered cake. Most renowned was their trip to The River to source the water lily. In a moment of childish impulsiveness, Meredith demanded Matthew take her to the far ends of her property to find the flower. She skipped jubilantly through the long wet grass, catching water crystals in her ringlets as her hair flew behind her in tendrils of silken blonde. She turned around and laughed and laughed, her eyes crinkling gently into warm russet crescents. She grabbed his hand, pressing their palms together, leading him, running, to the river. They arrived breathless, collapsing on the damp bank, stumbling, laughing and embracing by the glittering grey surface.

These adventures continued days, months even, as Matthew Taylor fell deeper and deeper into his brown concentric circular love of Meredith Villor. Every day



he would stroll down her drive, raising his arms high above his head, until one day. One day, she didn't come. She didn't open the door to ask him, 'And what are we doing today?', and he wasn't given the chance to reply, 'Just adding a little something.' She didn't gaze at him, loving him, caressing him with her eyes only. She was gone. On this fateful day he approached the house, his feet bearing down audibly on the crunching gravel, stinging in the painful silence. 'Meredith!' he implored, his voice bouncing with hollow reverberation against the emptiness of the house.

Through tears he saw it. Sitting on the door step. The hat, with all its bizarre additions and amendments. On Meredith's head it was a masterpiece, an ingenious creation. Without Meredith, it looked ridiculous, overstated and ugly. There was no note, but the house was empty. Like the hat without Meredith, The Grange was nothing but a gaudy, vacant shell. Matthew Taylor picked up the hat, put it on his head and walked through town alone. He walked home and has stayed there until this very day. Quite alone, and quite mad.

II

So if one was to walk past 63 Cogdon St Pittsborough at around 6 o'clock, without fail one could spot Matthew Taylor. He sits there on his maroon couch. He sits there, opposite the hat. Her hat, his companion. And to the hat he talks, from 6 o'clock until half past eight, at which time he rises, pulls a chord to his left, revealing a massive bookshelf. Then with the utmost care, he places the hat on the far end of the top shelf next to another hat. Which is next to another hat. Which is next to another, which is above another, which is above another, which is part of a bookshelf consisting entirely of hats. Her hat, all the same, all in line.

He then gently taps each hat, before pulling the chord and turning out the light.



Since the day I arrived at Ruyton, I have known one thing – Lauren Yip would be school captain. The Year 12s have all known this deep down, but imagine for a minute that she hadn't been picked. Not through any fault of your own, Lauren, but because the school had decided they needed a celebrity captain who could boost the school's image in the wider community, and so brought back Olympian Kim Crow to captain the school. Okay, obviously, this is utterly ridiculous and is not a democratic process. But this is exactly what happened on the national stage with former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's so-called 'captain's pick' of indigenous Olympian Nova Peris. The controversy and the consequences that have followed in the wake of this decision only highlight that political parties must move away from choosing celebrity candidates.

When Ms Gillard first announced in mid-January that the first indigenous woman to compete for Australia at the Olympics would become the first indigenous woman to be a federal senator, it was hailed as the 'righting of a national wrong.' And while I admit that the move looks good, once you get into it, it becomes clear that it's not all sunshine and rainbows. First of all, in order to select Nova Peris for this senate seat in the Northern Territory, Julia Gillard had to ditch Trish Crossin, the hard-working senator who'd held that seat for 15 years. Crossin was ordered to fly to Canberra the day before the media announcement and was told that she'd basically been sacked. Ms Gillard saying, 'I'm offering you nothing.' Just like that, Crossin was gone. I mean, she was free to run for the seat, and she did, but Julia Gillard demanded Labor members vote for Peris, and they did. That's democracy for you.

But while intrinsically one would have thought Julia Gillard would have been a better prime minister for having selected the first indigenous Labor senator, her brutal method actually only damaged her already bruised image. When she announced the selection of Peris, she attempted to present herself as assertive and pioneering, but her sudden cruel dumping of a hard-working local only fuelled criticism from the media and even from within her own party that she was dictatorial and showing 'utter contempt' for the Northern Territory's local processes. We could see this selection for what it was; not as many had trumpeted, the 'righting of a national wrong', but mere celebrity politics, designed to shore up Labor's plummeting numbers in the NT. Why else would a popular Olympian have been

UNTITLED

JANET DAVEY

ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC

SPEAKING COMPETITION

FINALIST

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selected for Crossin's seat when there was already a lesser-known, but much more politically experienced, indigenous Labor member running for the seat? But she couldn't possibly have given Labor a boost in the polls like a politically inexperienced Olympian could. This simplistic thinking disregards the fact that celebrities are usually just a short-term fix for a party, and a long-term disappointment. And hasn't the past few weeks of politics illustrated this perfectly? At the end of June, Labor dumped the leader that the people of Australia actually voted for in 2010, replacing Julia Gillard with Kevin Rudd, as he's always been considered a politician who's popular with the electorate. Clearly, however, as last Saturday shows, this popularity has not been enough for him. In just over the two months since he was reinstated, Rudd's approval rating dropped from 8 per cent approval, to minus 9 per cent. This should only be reinforcing to political parties that when it comes to selecting candidates, as Professor Snape once remarked, 'Fame isn't everything.' Yes, a few star candidates do go on to become politically successful, but nonetheless, the mere selection of them undermines the process of democracy, as it denies the local members the right to choose their own candidate.

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This is also illustrated by Kevin Rudd's recent 'captain's pick' of Peter Beattie. Don't get me wrong, as far as celebrity politicians go, Beattie was a better choice than Nova Peris because he did actually have political experience. However, this did not excuse the trampling of another local ALP member, Des Hardman, in the name of boosting Rudd's numbers for the election. Not that it did that, as after Beattie was installed, there was a major swing in favour of the Liberal candidate, Mr van Manen. He may be unknown to those outside the seat of Forde, but clearly, van Manen is respected as a hard-working local to those who live there, and on September 7th won his seat decisively. Beattie only received 34% of the vote. Some celebrity that is.

So, it's clear that star candidates just do not work. Instead of bringing votes, they bring a backlash as they are just parachuted in and have no connection with the local issues. Witness Nova Peris. She has pledged her support for 'Stronger Futures', an indigenous policy widely condemned by human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, and also by Aboriginal communities. When she was asked about the widespread criticism, Peris admitted that she was

'not across that area.' So this candidate's opinion of the most important issue facing her locals is out of touch with their views. How is selecting a candidate without consulting the community she is representing and who will implement policies that they do not agree with, how is that *meant* to instil faith in this country's so-called democratic processes? Why would any passionate local run for candidacy when they know that their dream could be dashed on a whim, as they are cast aside for a star?

There was no consultation with the selection of Peris. The Labor government discounted, disregarded, and dismissed the democratic processes for selecting candidates. A long-serving member was axed. Ms Gillard's image was damaged. A politically experienced indigenous Labor member was ignored. And instead, a celebrity candidate was chosen to represent an electorate who do not share her views. Kevin Rudd's 'captain's pick' of Peter Beattie as well as his own unsuccessful reinstalment to the leadership shows that political parties have not learned from the controversy surrounding Peris' selection. These stars may seem like a good idea at the time, but ultimately they only undermine democracy, discouraging locals from putting their hands up, as they can no longer believe that have any chance of making it in a world that values votes over virtue.



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DISCUSS.

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Adults frequently lament that they wish teenagers cared as much about who was running the country as they do about the latest post on Facebook. They bewail the belief that young people really don't care that much about politics. But the truth is – young people do care about the issues facing Australia and what the future will be like. Yes, teenagers *seem* disengaged from politics. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the majority of young people care deeply about political issues, but find it difficult to engage with a political landscape utterly devoid of vision.

One does not have to follow Australian politics closely to have an understanding of its focus over the past few years. It's been pretty negative. Every day that Parliament sits seems to produce a new sound-bite of abuse from one politician to another. Both Labor and the Coalition have run campaigns attacking the character of the other leader. Who can forget the wall-punching affair? The AWU slush-fund scandal? Dr No, the misogynist? The objective seems largely to have been for the parties to portray themselves as being the 'lesser of two evils' rather than being capable of making a positive impact on Australian society. Voters have been left feeling pessimistic about those supposedly 'leading' the country, and young voters in particular have been affected. Obviously, young people haven't spent a great deal of time engaged with the political sphere, so this highly critical environment can seem the 'norm' to them, and can leave them feeling disillusioned with democracy itself. This is evidenced by a 2012 Lowy Institute Poll which reported that only 39% of young Australians (aged 18 to 29) chose democracy as the most preferable form of government for Australia.¹

The focus by the two major parties on character assessments has meant that there has been little time since the last election for a comprehensive public discussion of policies. Albeit, in recent months this has improved somewhat with the release of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the 'Gonski' school reforms, the budget, and Abbott's generous paid parental leave scheme. By and large, however, many policies have passed through Parliament with little public dialogue, or else if there has been debate, it has focused on the policy's writer – with cries that they will rob/desert/abandon Australian families/workers/middle-class voters – rather than on the merits of the policy itself. This has meant that the majority of Australian voters, and particularly less-experienced younger voters,

¹ Data from *The Lowy Institute Poll 2012: Australia and New Zealand in the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 2012

are lacking a comprehensive understanding of what the parties have actually achieved in the past few years, and what, if anything, binds each party's policy ideas together into a narrative.

Our policy proposals seem haphazard and out-of-the-blue in many cases. There is generally little explanation or background given to each idea. Maybe this is just the cynicism cultivated by the negativity of the politicians themselves that's talking, but each proposal seems more of a targeted incentive designed to appeal to a particular demographic of voters rather than a real game-changer in Australia's future. The fact that every politician and their dog seems to suddenly care about the problems of the swinging electorate of western Sydney is clear evidence of this. As is Abbott's paid parental leave scheme, which many analysts believe is directly designed to counteract Abbott's poorer approval ratings among women. It was intended to appeal to the female demographic, but it has also had its fair share of critics, who claim it is unsustainably expensive.² Put bluntly: there is not much in the way of a connective narrative to the major parties' policies; they only seem to present geographically-specific 'visions' full of expedient ideas.

Given the fact that we currently have a minority government, politicians cannot be criticised too harshly for trying to maximise their votes with each policy proposal. However, by lacking meaningful narrative for the future of Australia, they are inadvertently damaging their votes with young people. Young people are generally seen as more idealistic, hopeful, and optimistic than middle-aged to older adults. Brought up looking forward to the future and the opportunities that they will be given, many of them want to be a part of bringing about change in which they believe, as they finally – being young adults – have the power to do so. Hence, they tend to identify themselves with organisations and groups that have clear visions and objectives. The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC), for example, has over 70,000 members, all young Australians wanting to take action on climate change. That's more than double the national membership of the Australian Labor Party.³ Support for the Greens is also generally highest among young voters⁴. While this is in part due to the fact that young people commonly have more socially progressive values than the majority of the electorate, it is also because the Greens have a narrative. Their policy proposals connect together in a meaningful way that reflects their

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² Tanja Kovac, 'Abbott's paid parental leave at mercy of right-wing lobby', *The Age*, May 9, 2013

³ Michael Short, 'Voters have the chance to swing the nation in the right direction', *The Age*, April 14, 2013

⁴ Data from 'Youth Federal Election Voting Intentions' by Dr Ron Broker, The Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney, June, 2011

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values and the changes they want to see in Australia. Basically, their position on each individual issue makes sense in terms of what they stand for. And young people can easily identify themselves with a narrative if it appeals to their own beliefs. The contortions the major parties put themselves through to satisfy the needs of swinging voters and dissatisfied demographics means that the Liberals and Labor no longer have a clear direction or a specific demographic as their support base. Young idealistic voters can be left disappointed with the short-term politically-expedient vision of the major parties.

However, it must be noted that it is challenging for the major parties to find a meaningful long-term vision when they must always appeal to the general Australian population – the ‘moderate’ voters. With Australia’s preferential voting system, the disillusioned must always choose between Labor and Liberal in the end (unless they invalidate their vote). Therefore, these parties must balance different ideologies and purport diverse values in order to gain enough support for a majority. This makes it difficult for them to project a meaningful vision for Australia that reflects their true values.

That’s not to say that it can’t be done. The current political climate in the US shows that it’s possible for the major parties to have coherent narratives. This is specifically true for the Democrats under Barack Obama. No one can deny that Obama has a vision. For the 2008 election in particular, he gained office largely through his oration of hope and change to benefit all Americans. Clearly, his ideas appealed to the majority of voters, but he gained particular support from the young, receiving nearly two-thirds of their vote in 2008, and 60 per cent in 2012. He also maintained the same turnout of young voters at both elections⁵, showing that a man with vision can be very engaging to young people. In addition, a UMR Research poll reported last year that 72 per cent of Australians would vote for Obama if they had the chance.⁶ For voters stuck in a pessimistic electoral climate with little in the way of long-term grand ideas, Obama’s optimism can be compelling.

The state of the Republican Party after the US election is also a powerful case for promoting a clear narrative to the electorate. During the 2012 election campaign and after Mitt Romney’s defeat, many political analysts noted that the Republican Party seemed fractured and incongruous – the ‘moderate’ Mitt often appearing uncomfortable and insincere in purporting far-right ideas stemming

⁵ Data from ‘Young Voters Supported Obama Less, But May Have Mattered More’, Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press, November 26, 2012

⁶ UMR Research as cited in Peter Hartcher, ‘Australian voters would deliver Obama landslide victory’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 28, 2012

more from Tea Party ideology. The Republicans seemed unable to decide the level of conservatism they would bring to the election, and many political commentators attributed their defeat to their lack of a coherent and focussed vision.⁷

However, it would be unwise to conclude too much from the politics of the US, which is, after all, a different system to that of Australia. It is more crucial for US parties to have a clear vision encompassing their values as they must not only convince people to vote for them, they must convince them to turn up in the first place. Citizens in the US must *want* to vote for a particular party, whereas in Australia, all *must* vote; hence, the 'lesser of two evils' political strategy. Having a narrative, therefore, is less important in Australia, as the parties do not have to drive people to turn up at the poll booth. Indeed, having clear values embodied in a vision can disillusion a significant part of the moderate swinging middle and cost you the majority. This explains why the two major parties have little in way of a narrative for the future of Australia. So, while there are differences between the two countries in terms of the general need for a party narrative, the support among young people for Obama, the Greens, the AYCC, and other organisations demonstrates that an optimistic vision can engage young people in the political sphere.

Then again, lack of a political narrative is not the only reason that young people are generally disengaged with Australia's politics, though it is a considerably important one. Lack of a significantly detailed civics education in schooling years is also a factor. It is not that young people do not care about political issues – more often, it's that politics seems like an impenetrable world of jargon and historical knowledge. The major parties' inability to keep up with the 'digital age' is also considered to be contributing to youth disillusionment with politics. Since the launch of *OurSay* in 2010, an organisation that connects voters directly with politicians through social media, many young voters have debated and discussed issues with our political leaders – including Prime Minister Julia Gillard – on Facebook and other social networking sites. Tellingly, *OurSay*'s membership, like the AYCC, has already surpassed the ALP's.⁸ In little over two years.

Nonetheless, constructing a coherent narrative to connect seemingly arbitrary policies is the most considerable means by which Australia's political parties can engage younger voters. A

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THE FUTURE
IN ORDER TO
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⁷ Harold Evans, 'And, after all that jostling, the winner is... discord', *The Age*, November 3, 2012

⁸ Michael Short, 'Voters have the chance to swing the nation in the right direction', *The Age*, April 14, 2013

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comprehensive civics education and direct connection with politicians is little help if young voters cannot fathom the direction that the major parties are taking, if there is a direction at all. If they cannot see their values and ideas for change reflected in the vision of any political party, then obviously they are likely to feel disconnected from the world of politics.

The majority of young people are optimistic about the future and want to involve themselves in shaping Australia. They have vision and they have hope. Now it's time for the parties to have them too.



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Boobs, tits, melons, coconuts, jugs, or breasts. Whatever you want to call them, breasts serve one purpose and one purpose only; to provide milk for a pregnant woman in order for her to feed her child. When you put it like that, it's kind of gross to think about the fact that so many teenage boys and even adult males find females breasts, for a lack of a better word, absolutely awesome. However there still remains to be one exception to this notion that 'boobs are sick'... when a mother is breastfeeding her child in public, which in fact is the only purpose a female's breasts serve, and legitimately the sole reason she has them.

I think I can speak for all of us when I say we have been in the following scenario... you're sitting on an aeroplane, ecstatic to reach your warm sunny destination of Queensland or wherever you may be headed, when all of the sudden your excitement is drawn to an abrupt halt... You can hear a noise screeching over the top of your free, in-flight headphones... so you pause the newly released movie you've so hastily selected to watch for the flight and put down your complimentary peanuts... and then it hits you... You are seated directly in front of what appears to be a baby thirty seconds out of the womb, screaming and crying uncontrollably for what you know can only be hours and hours on end.

Now if you think beyond the anger and frustration you are currently feeling and think for a moment... hmm, this baby could be either hungry, or scared... both issues which could be aided if not solved by its mother's breast-milk... so now you're all sitting there thinking 'eughhhhh can its mum just feed the stupid thing!' So she does, and the baby halts its ghastly cries... but one minute later... the woman and the baby are kicked off the plane for indecent exposure. Sound ridiculous? It's true. In 2006, Emily Gillette was thrown off an aeroplane after attempting to halt the distressed cries of her infant, all for attempting to create peace for the others on the flight.

So, what are the reasons people find breastfeeding in public so outrageous and obscene? Because yes, it can be seen as confronting, however I pose to you a situation. Imagine you are out eating a delicious meal at a delicious restaurant, when all of the sudden you see a child being breastfed across the room. Now wait for a moment before you just automatically think 'AHHH BOOB!' and think about the situation logically, you are at restaurant because you are eating, which is what you need to do to stay alive. And despite what you may

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KARLA ELKINGTON

ALAN PATTERSON

PUBLIC SPEAKING

WINNER

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think, babies are human too, which means they also need food to survive – so why shouldn't they have the right to be eating too? And furthermore, does the fact a baby is being breastfed interrupt or change the fact that you are eating a delicious meal at a delicious restaurant? No, so why should one care?

It is this pattern of disgust for these breastfeeding mothers however can be most vividly seen among males, and here we must question the underlying feminist and cultural discrimination that may not be so long ago in the past. It seems for males, breasts are okay when they want them to be okay, which is very rarely, if ever, when they are seen breastfeeding a child in public. David Koch, or 'Kochie,' may be a familiar name to some of you early risers, became a topic of conversation in the media after some controversial comments made earlier this year. The Sunrise presenter is a vivid example of the double standards males have toward women's breasts, as he was noted stating *'women need to be more discreet about breastfeeding... and that they've got to be classy about it.'* The ironic thing about this is that the segment prior was in fact a montage of heaving-bosomed Bond girls and other famous bikini wearers, parading around a catwalk showing women how to get that perfect summer body. These girls weren't being discreet about their breasts on display, so why does one have to be when breastfeeding?

It appears that when attractive women are wearing minimal attire on their upper half, breasts are seen as a good thing, but otherwise, they are not. One must pose the question, how can breasts be considered with sexual connotations when purposely made in order to feed ones child? Creepy when you put it like that, I know.

Furthermore, it is crucial that we begin acknowledging the benefits of breastfeeding, with studies showing that breast-fed children are less likely to contract a number of diseases later in life, including juvenile diabetes, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, and cancer. The mothers also have a lesser chance of adopting such cancers as Ovarian and Uterine, and even Breast cancer.

So, in the scheme of things, what's showing a little bit of breast in public, which though may seem a little farfetched now, could be the difference between the life and death of a mother and her child? The really sad thing is, however, that a survey conducted in 2013 showed that 65% of women were no longer breastfeeding in public as they felt too self-conscious because of people staring. We have to ask ourselves as women if this is a world in which we want to live.

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A case which made headlines in 2003 was that of Kirstie Marshall a newly elected MP for Forest Hill in Victoria's State Parliament. Eleven days prior to her first seating, Ms Marshall gave birth to her child, Charlotte. Whilst seated in Parliament, Marshall began to silently breastfeed her child in order to halt her cries. However Marshall's good intentions were soon reproached as she was thrown out of the chamber on the grounds that the baby was not an elected member of Parliament, so it wasn't supposed to be there and told, *'there is a time and a place for such action.'*

These are means which I personally find hard to process. Reason one, of course the baby is not an elected member of our State Parliament it was 11 days old. Reason two, if apparently there is a time and a place to breastfeed, does this imply that an eleven day old infant, prior to the realisation that she is hungry and in need of milk from her mother, must pause for a moment and think in her eleven day old, hardly developed and unintelligent little head, *'hmmm better not start crying, I wouldn't want to disturb the people out around me so I'll just pretend I'm not hungry.'* No, absolutely not.

This case I found most outrageous, as it took place in the walls of our Parliament. If we as a nation or a state are attempting to make changes in the perception of breastfeeding in public, we have little to zero hope of doing so if those who govern and control us, refuse to give the situation the time of day. Here, it is important to note, however, that breastfeeding in Australia is a right, not a privilege. Under the federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984, it is illegal to discriminate against a person either directly or indirectly on the grounds of breastfeeding in public.

So, if the parliament makes the laws for society to follow, but then breaks the same laws under the roof of the same house they made the initial law, what on earth are we as a society supposed to follow? And here, lies the problem.

Okay, so what do we need to do? As a community we need to change the attitudes and views of our Members of Parliament and make sure that we as a nation are aware of the rights a female holds to breastfeed her newborn child. We need to appreciate the beauty housed in childbirth and the natural cycle of which I'm sure almost all of us were a part. Finally, we need to stop giving breastfeeding mothers in public that weird and disgusted look of which I know we are all capable, because you never know, one day it could be you.



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SOCIAL MEDIA
SHOULD NOT
BE ALLOWED
TO INTERFERE
WITH THE
ADMINISTRATION
OF JUSTICE

PHOEBE FRANICH
ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC
SPEAKING AWARD
FINALIST

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Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Linked In, Myspace – okay well, not as much MySpace, but Social media truly is ubiquitous – it is all around us. Gone is the time when you'd log on to Facebook once or twice a day, we are now living in an age where it is more uncommon to log out than it is to actually log on. We are constantly connected.

The vast majority of people in our year level would have Facebook, and let's just say each has around 600 friends online. Times that by the number of girls in the year you get over 36,000 people. Allow for some overlap and we have about 20,000 friends between us, clearly we are a pretty popular bunch. We've formed a web of connections, and in the 21st century, if we have an opinion, with the click of a button, we can share it.

But while social media platforms are beneficial to the public in terms of providing a forum for the sharing of information, we must appreciate the dangers. I will be focusing on the threats it poses to the administration of justice and the accused's right to a fair trial, which I consider to be most concerning.

Can you believe that it has almost been a year since a story broke that would capture the nation's attention like very few before it. We, as Australians, held our breath and hoped for the best when Jill Meagher first went missing, and we were collectively thrust into a state of shock and horror when her body was discovered six days later in a shallow grave at Gisborne South.

During Jill's disappearance extensive social media campaigns were launched. Thomas Meagher, Jill's husband, posted a missing persons poster on his Facebook account and this poster was then shared nearly 3,000 times by other users. Additionally a 'Help us find Jill Meagher' Facebook page was set up within hours of the announcement that Jill was missing. Within 4 days the page had received a massive 127,000 likes on Facebook. The level of interest in the case elicited by media attention and the CCTV footage of Jill that was broadcast led to a large number of people quickly coming forward to help in the case.

Most of you would know that social media played an integral part in raising public awareness and bringing the accused closer to justice, but what you may not know is that at one point, this same social media threatened to compromise the entire legal process. Fairness and justice are indispensable in our legal system. In order for justice to be done, the accused must be presumed innocent until proven

guilty. This means that it is expected that the judge and jury will be impartial, that both sides of the case will be heard and that all the evidence will be considered without the risk of prejudice towards the person on trial. This principle must be upheld in all cases, regardless of how 'open or shut' we believe a matter to be.

Social media has the ability to greatly impact the accused's right to a fair trial. If a member of the jury has seen hate groups on Facebook, read articles on the internet, or anything that incriminates the accused, the juror could – and is likely to be – influenced by this information. This could lead to the juror being biased as they may have already formed a view of the accused's guilt before having heard the case. If the defence argues that it is impossible for the accused to be given a fair trial due to the vast amount of prejudicial information available to the public then the trial could be postponed or could even lead to a mistrial. This was a serious possibility in the trial of Adrian Ernest Bailey – the man charged and eventually jailed for those unspeakable crimes against Jill Meagher.

Many of you may have heard of the phrase 'trial by media' which is used to describe the impact of television and newspaper coverage on a person's reputation by creating a widespread perception of guilt or innocence before, or after, a verdict in a court of law. Now that technology has progressed the new phrase that is often heard is 'trial by *social media*.' In the information age, everyone is given a voice on the issue. But regardless of how guilty a person may seem, they deserve to have their case determined in court, not by you or me or Harry from Craigieburn or Sharon from Ivanhoe. Although I have heard that Sharon is quite an astute judge!

Traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, are restricted in what they can publish, however, some social media users play by different rules. The problem is that so many of us, would never even turn our minds to the fact that what we write online has the ability to corrupt the legal process.

When they arrested the accused, Ernest Bayley, Jill Meagher's name was published on Facebook and twitter once every 11 seconds. Jill's name appeared in more than 35 million Twitter feeds. People were so outraged by this incident that pages suggesting that the accused should be lynched were created. On Facebook a hate group against the accused had already attracted almost 18,000 'likes' before the trial began. Even though most people would have subscribed to

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these pages impulsively, this is the type of media attention that has the potential to interfere.

The case of Jill Meagher is certainly very recent and high profile, however, this is not the only time that social media has threatened the administration of justice. There was a case just last year involving 18-year old Kieren Loverage who was accused of killing Thomas Kelly in an unprovoked attack at Kings Cross. After Loverage's arrest, photos were published by social media users of the accused accompanied with captions such as 'murderer' and 'monster.' This is yet another example of how the public seems to decide on the guilt of a person and, through the use of social media, incriminates them before their trial has even commenced. The fundamental notion of innocent until proven guilty is being compromised.

It's clear that something needs to be done to address this problem, and the first step must be to raise awareness of the need for restraint and discretion in our online behaviour. The police made Facebook take down pages that incriminate the accused in Jill Meagher's case, but perhaps there should have been stricter regulations as to what can be published on social media in the first place.

I am in no way bemoaning the role of social media in our lives. I'm as partial to a cheeky photo 'like' and a hilarious meme as the next person. We should use Facebook, twitter and the like to enrich our lives. It should serve to keep us in touch, it should serve to entertain us, but it should NOT serve to administer justice.



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The sixth day started out the same. The unnatural silence was what woke her – her mind being more aware of her surroundings than she realized while in sleep. Azar underwent the same first few seconds of no recollection, and of bliss, before remembrance dawned on her. With it, the automatic fear – she jerked upright. Omid. Where was Omid? Her eyes darted from side to side until, through the dim surroundings, they zeroed in on Omid, nestled between their friend Arash and another woman they did not know. She saw Omid mumble something in her sleep, and knew what it was all too well – *firdaus*. Azar allowed herself to relax. With the desired calm, however, came fresh awareness of the omnipresent feelings of hunger and thirst. Azar closed her eyes. This is why sleeping is the best part of the day.

Her eyelids shielding her from the other breathing masses in the hull, Azar thought of her parents. They did not come with her and Omid. They said goodbye to them at home in Nikshahr, where they had organized for a man to take Azar and Omid to the coast. Azar remembered Omid crying. Her sister was young enough to understand the separation, but not yet old enough to understand that they must listen to their parents without question. Azar was suspicious of the man they were going with, Massoud. Azar’s mother had turned to her.

“Trust him, *azizam*. Trust him as you trust me.”

Azar had no choice. She and Omid had gone in Massoud’s truck to the coast. Their parents said they would meet them in Australia, and said goodbye – Azar missed them so much her chest ached. In the hull of the boat, she raised a hand to her heart, and thought of her mother and father. She remembered the conversation she overheard between Massoud and her parents – she didn’t understand at the time, what he meant by not drawing as much attention as Chābahār would have, but when the truck reached the smaller town of Konārak, she knew her mother was right. Massoud was the only person they could trust. And for Omid’s sake as well as her own, Azar must trust him to get them to Australia safely. Nobody else was invested in their arrival. Nobody else cared about the refugees.

It had taken them three days to reach Konārak. After that, they had to wait another four for their boat to be ready to leave. Massoud told them they were lucky –

“Not many people on this one, more room.”

Then he told them the next part of their journey. Azar and Omid

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would go on a boat with Massoud's friend Arash to Australia, and meet their aunt's husband Mahdi. He would then look after them until their parents came. Massoud said goodbye to them quickly. Azar asked him where he was going.

"To get more of you."

And then he had gone, his little truck, with the blankets in the back that had hidden them, wheezing up the hill, away from the water. Azar and Omid had turned to face the boat.

Azar opened her eyes now, again looking automatically for Omid. Seeing her sister was still sleeping, she stood and moved past the unmoving bodies around her, to the ladder that led up to the deck. Before she climbed out, she looked around again. She counted – 75 people. She turned again and shuddered. There had been 83 when they left Konarak. Azar made her way to the deck, passing the captain. He nodded to her, and kept walking. Looking over her shoulder, Azar saw him take a sip from a flask. She knew it wasn't water – they had almost run out. No, she knew, from the stories, that he had done this journey many times before. And she had been told that after the first, it wasn't water that kept him alive. She kept walking. Making her way to the side of the boat, she sat down. She breathed in the cool air, a welcome relief from the stuffiness inside. Massoud had been right, there weren't that many people on their boat. But still many more than it was built for.

The first few days on the boat had been frightening. Azar's fear of being caught lessened, but was replaced with a new one. What if they didn't reach Australia at all? This drifting in the middle of the ocean was maddening. She didn't know where they were, she didn't know how long they had to stay pent up in the boat with dwindling supplies, more people dying and being thrown overboard every day. But most of all, Azar was scared for Omid. Every day that passed, the spark in her eye diminished, and Azar knew they must reach land soon. Omid was her own beacon of hope, a personification of innocence. She couldn't lose her, or she would have nothing. But the duller Omid's eyes became, the more Azar realized that physical death isn't the only way to lose someone.

After acknowledging this, Azar found her hope dwindling more every day. She sat in the shade of the mast with Arash, watching Omid play with the other children. She saw her sister say something to the others, and knew immediately what it was. Once more, Omid

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was talking about paradise. Their soon-to-be home. Azar was young herself, but she knew that their escape had changed her – even though she missed the easy days of her childhood, she knew that she must be an adult, for Omid’s sake. Even so, Azar held a similar sense of naivety, in regards to their future. Arash saw her looking at her sister.

“Don’t lose hope yet, *doostam*.”

She didn’t look at him.

“We’re no closer to Australia than we were days ago, Arash. We have no food left. We have no water. We are dying, every day. How can I not?”

Noticing his lack of response, she murmured, more to herself than to him,

“There is no hope.”

Azar felt Arash shift next to her, and felt him grasp her hand. She looked at her friend. She was awed by the blaze in his eyes-

“We have made it this far. We are closer to escaping than we ever have been, than many others will be. We will get to Australia, *doostam*. I promise.”

Azar knew then that the most important thing on the boat wasn’t food to eat or water to drink. It was the belief that they would reach their haven. She turned back to watch her sister, renewed by the hope that the girl embodied, that even her *name* meant, and clasped Arash’s hand even tighter.

The next morning, Azar was woken again. This time, there weren’t shouts of excitement, but screams. She grabbed Omid, who had just stood up and was heading towards the deck,

“Stay here, Omi. Stay in this corner until I come back for you!”

Azar tried her best to ignore the look of utter fear in her sister’s eyes as she kissed the top of her head and ran to the deck. The captain was the first thing she saw, battling to steer the boat. She was nearly knocked over by the force of the water that hit them then, and looked overboard. The hazy sight of the rocks took her breath away more than any physical blow, and as she clenched her fist hard enough for her fingernails to cut into her palm, she felt hope vanishing once more. The captain yelled, the other refugees screamed, and a flash of lightning lit the boat for a mere second, but what she saw made her blood run cold. The rocks must have come up quickly; they now formed a terrifying façade on the right side of the boat. Azar shivered, and looked to the other side. She saw the

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waves that showed the tide, pushing towards them. Pushing their boat towards the jagged, shark-tooth shaped mounds of solidarity that stared ominously at them from only a few metres away. She inhaled sharply, and smelt something metallic. It reminded Azar of blood. She shuddered once more, and, as she took a step to make her way back to Omid, with only the thought, “Keep hope safe” in her head, she heard a sickening crunch.

That was days ago. Azar did not remember much once the boat lurched over. She remembered the water. She remembered thinking she had drowned. She remembered seeing Arash disappear underwater, and not seeing him come back up. Maybe she remembered more than she thought. Maybe she just wanted to forget. Azar later found herself surrounded by men and women in white coats. She tried moving from the bunk she was in, and finding someone she knew. She didn't recognize anyone. She shouted for her sister. She was not answered.

One afternoon, as she lay in her bunk, Azar heard the others talking. They said they had reached Christmas Island. They said that the refugee boat had hit the rocks. They said 44 people were taken to hospitals. They said 28 people died. Azar stopped listening then.

A week later, Azar was put on a bus. She recognized others from the boat, but not Omid or even Arash. They were told by an Australian man,

“Welcome to Australia. You will now be taken to a centre where you will be detained, until your papers...”

Azar could not understand more. She sat still, thinking about Omid. She would be waiting for her at the centre. She knew that there was an alternative, but she didn't consider it. She couldn't consider it. She remembered what her mother had told her the day they left.

“Australia is better than here. It is a *firdaus*, a paradise. We will all be together there soon.”

Azar thought to herself, maybe, when I see Omid again, Mother will be right. The bus drove into the compound, but Azar didn't notice, too lost in her own thoughts.

Maybe we are in paradise.



It is strange being an expat. That which was once familiar I can hardly find a trace of in my new country. Sights, smells, sounds. I did not think that hearing a different language on a day to day basis would surprise me so. Everything is very bright here. Certainly Australia has a similar brightness, the harsh white light shining on bright green grass and the white trunks of the eucalypts. The light here is different though. It's... yellower, if that makes sense. Incandescent. Everything shimmers in the heat haze – turning the horizon indistinct.

I do not regret coming here. Many would say that apart from Israel, Egypt is the most Westernised country in the Middle East. I would disagree. Certainly the planeloads of tourists affirm this; but they are visitors. They do not live here and I do not think they influence the local culture. The locals were friendlier to me once I explained I wasn't an American, and I have developed a strong friendship with Haddar, the grocer who lives near my apartment. He sells delicious produce, his stall packed with bright fruits and vegetables, some familiar, some not, in every shade from green to purple to yellow.

I have been here for a year now. I am working at the University of Cairo until the end of next year when my visa expires. I'm planning on applying for another so I can complete my fourth year here as well and then go back to Australia to complete my PHD. The organisation I have been communicating with and in the past year working for is called Women Walking Free. The name alludes to the goal of the organisation; to further the status of women so that they can walk through life free from harassment and oppression. A place where only women are allowed to go, where they can be informed of their choices regarding education, health, legal rights and have the support of their fellow women. At the moment my job is to inform young women of their educational rights and to support them through secondary and hopefully tertiary study. I have an assistant named Mari, who is a lawyer and well-versed in the realistic opportunities women in Egypt have. Initially, I had one to two girls come and see me in the first four months, none in the first month itself, as WWF is very new and different even in Cairo. It's the equivalent of a not-for-profit organisation so whilst the government keeps an eye on us and occasionally gives us 'suggestions' on what we do, mostly we are left alone. The 'women-only' policy helps as there aren't many women in politics so they can't come and physically

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bother us: though that is something of a curse not having women or any allies at all in the political sphere.

In the last six months, however, word has got around and I have been inundated with bright young women who are extremely self-aware, searching for ways to improve their lives and opportunities. I've even had a couple of older women come and talk to me. I am reminded daily by the extraordinary women with whom I meet of just how fortunate I am. I never understood the impact that simply the place of your birth can have on the rest of your life. In Australia, the world was my oyster. *I am Alison Tatchett and I can do anything.* Here, opportunities for women are, by comparison, severely limited. Most haven't had a secondary education and are incredulous when I tell them why I am here. Of course they have heard and seen on TV that women can do tertiary study, run a company, do anything a man can. In practice, however, the situation is different. I do believe that the Arab Spring has helped... but I am terrified of the Muslim Brotherhood. I fear that they are the Taliban in suits, enforcing *sharia* one bureaucratic step at a time. It's been ages since there has been any reform, and for women barely anything has changed.

I was so naïve a year ago – unaware of the subtle differences between Australian and Egyptian society. It was a rude awakening, one terrifying night out on the streets.

Walking through Cairo it's clear that it's a modern city with wide boulevards, stretches of suburbs, and shopping districts full of vibrant markets near the centre of the town. But it is not a safe city, which is painfully clear in this moment. Dusk has just fallen and I have not made it back to my apartment yet. I am the only woman currently walking the streets. I feel a thousand dark eyes following my every footstep as I briskly move through the crowded city centre. Walking within 'the light-spilled streets' narrow banks, the metal stream rolling ceaselessly between them' should not be such a terror. Yet as a white woman without a headscarf, I see hostility rolling off the pedestrians I pass like an inky black shadow, encircling me with its clinging tendrils and raising the hair at the back of my neck. I am not too far from my apartment now, thankfully. My shopping feels unnaturally heavy in my arms.

I find myself wishing for a headscarf to cover myself. My inner idealist has always railed against the social convention of having to wear one. A dog barks somewhere in the distance and I stumble, quickly righting myself. I find myself counting the alleys that I pass on the streets. I'm almost home. Ten minutes, six alleys. I cannot help but imagine what fate may befall me in one of them.

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Since then I have always worn a headscarf, only taking it off at home. This is not good enough, however, for certain people. A few of my colleagues at the university have taken my presence as a personal insult – they either patronise me or make advances, and then have the nerve to be angry when I stand my ground and rebuff them. One in particular, an Eli Wasim, is a problem. He is younger than me yet because he is a man he seems to think that grants him power.

He confronted me once.

Dr Fulani is telling me heartily about his opinions on my thesis over lunch. The university cafeteria is cool and loud. He is an extraordinary man, rare in his positivity toward women, and insists that my potential theories could help revolutionise the Middle East. He also appears quite protective, meaning he is aware of the ripples I am inadvertently causing.

Wasim and his friends are sitting on an adjacent table. I can hear them discussing politics in Arabic. I purposefully ignore them and begin to excitedly talk about why I am doing my thesis. I'm no more than three sentences into my little speech when Wasim decides to take offence.

He begins to accuse me of interfering where I am not wanted, his voice growing louder. I flinch as he throws 'the white man's burden' argument at me.

I angrily reply that I am doing no such thing, simply researching, and certainly not inflicting my opinions where they are not wanted. Appallingly enough, he begins to reply that my very presence is doing exactly that. I sit for a moment, shocked. Disgusted. I can't seem to find any words, my rage has paralysed me. Thankfully, Dr Fulani begins to rebuke Wasim and he wisely shuts up, turning back to his friends.

In the last few weeks there has been more bad press about Women Walking Free than usual. Many powerful men are saying that we are encouraging blasphemous ideas about a woman's place in society and should *at least* be advising these women if they *have* to go to university that their opportunities should be limited to *appropriate* courses, like midwifery, gynaecology or administration. I know that Amira, the woman who founded and runs WWF, has been receiving threats against herself and WWF unless we stop our supposedly illegal activities (usually they are quoting *sharia*). I have a great deal of respect for Islam, especially for the knowledge, architecture and music that it has inspired, and it's a great tragedy that only the angry, noisy minority get media coverage – but in my opinion, government should be separated from religion, to prevent the widespread oppression under which so many women in this region suffer.

I 2

We think we have come so far in the battle for equality. We are fools to think as much.

Zahira Massari is one girl I am focussing on in particular for my thesis. She is seventeen with a rapier wit and huge ambition, very unlike any other girl of her age that I have met, with short spiky black hair and a lip piercing, though both of these she covers in public for her own safety. She is fortunate to have grown up in an unusually liberal family; her father works in the Cairo Museum as an expert on Ancient Egyptian funereal practises and her mother is a nurse. Zahira's parents have done everything they can to ensure she gets through high school, and university is the next challenge. With the WWF, I am helping her apply for scholarships, particularly to Cairo University where she wants to study Archaeology like her father. Zahira is very active online too, a member of various feminist groups on Facebook and a staunch supporter of the Arab Spring. She is very politically aware and if not for her love of Egyptian history and archaeology, I would have advised her to pursue a career in politics or international relations, probably with a feminist angle.

By contrast, Aisha has a much harder time of it. Her family is very strict, particularly in regards to Islam and its tenets on appropriate feminine behaviour. Aisha wears a niqab at all times – it was only after a few meetings with me that she felt comfortable enough to remove her face veil but her hijab stays on all the time. I wouldn't mind except that I feel that she is wearing such veils under duress. Her hijab she willingly wears as she is a devout Muslim but she hates her face veil. Aisha is not nearly as ambitious as Zahira (the irony is not lost on me as Zahira's ambitions are perfectly normal in Australia – one is practically expected to go to university) and simply wishes to be trained as a midwife and be able to support herself independently. She was nearly married off at fourteen but then her family rescinded the engagement – her prospective husband wanted her to drop out of school and her parents thankfully rejected such a proposal. She wishes to marry one day and have a family – but wants to be an independent person in her own right (and for her future husband to respect that), so becoming a midwife is a smart career for her to pursue without compromising her faith.

By comparing Zahira's experiences to other girls her age who have not had the same opportunities, (and I will be following her, Aisha and another girl named Shada throughout the next few years)

I2

as well as combining those with the older women I have interviewed, I wish to show that by empowering women in the Middle East, this can solve a myriad of economic issues simply by getting more skilled women into the workforce and thus my thesis can be applied to countries throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Life for these women has got to change and Egypt is the ideal place to start, as it has a lot of influence in the region. Maybe I'm not being realistic as to how much I can really change, but aspiring to help these women who are not as lucky as I have been is not a bad thing by any means.

I think this is what my experiences here in Egypt have taught me the most. Being here during the uprising has been... enlightening, terrifying, empowering and incredible, sometimes even all at the same time. Standing in the square surrounded by tens of thousands of Egyptians crying out for justice and then *succeeding*. I think that really showed me that people can make a difference and change things for the better. It's hard to explain how it felt being right there in the middle of a revolution, and it wasn't even my revolution – I just stood back and watched as Mubarak fell.

In the coming year I will continue working on my thesis in conjunction with my job at WWF. It's a big year, as both Zahira and Aisha are in their final year of school and are preparing for the transition into university, so the WWF and I will be working hard to support them. I am also nervous but quite keen to watch as the political situation in Egypt unfolds and what that means for the women living here.

Egypt is a truly extraordinary place. Alien – but it is now home. From my apartment balcony, if I squint I can see the Pyramids on the horizon – gold, yellow, orange, pink or red depending on the time of day. Cars rush past me below, their lights leaving an incandescent stream that nearly blinds me whilst the pedestrians walk in the shadows under the looming buildings and trees. Women wrapped in their veils, black with the occasional vibrant spark of blue, red, green or purple, the wind whipping the fabric in a frenzied dance, without purpose, without pause. Egypt is light and dark in all shades. Brilliantly bright at midday, the boiling sun beating down. Icy cold at night, midnight spreading her black silken veils over the world.



I 2

IN A BURST
OF LIGHT

ANGELA LIU

Back home, in Cartagena, the night is cold and lonely. That is what my sister, Natalya tells me. She has come to visit. She sits on the hard concrete floor facing me, and she has brought *patacones* and arepas and breadfruit, which I will keep for later. She also brings a rifle, and ammunition. I look at the slender barrel and the sleek curve of the trigger. Its beauty reminds me of her. Just in case, she says. She tells me that my father is sick. He's turning this colour, she points at the rough skin of the breadfruit, and laughs. I do not care, of course. She looks at me.

You look well, she says.

I prod at the fruit carefully. I tell her that she should go home, before El Padre comes.

You look well, she says again.

I know that is not true. I have not eaten, and the food she has brought taunts me. I stand up, and she does too. Now, when I look forward, I see her beautiful angular collarbones. Goodnight Natalya, I say. Goodnight, sister.

I 2

MY NAME IS DAMITA MÁRQUEZ, and I live under the protection of El Padre, who has taken me in from the streets of Medellín. I am called *putana*, El Padre's little harlot. I lie awake on my cowhide mat, rolling a bullet between my fingers. I press the tip into my forefinger. The night is cold and lonely, I remember. I left Cartagena when I had but nine years, when my father told me I was worthless, and I reminded him of my mother. At that moment, I hear El Padre's voice ring through stale air of the house. He sounds like he has been drinking. As he makes his way up the stairs, I begin to smell it too, the sharp scent of cheap, concentrated wine, designed to intoxicate. He must have had a victory tonight. Out there, in the cold, lonely night, I imagine, is the body of a notorious gangleader, mangled and saturated with blood, head split open, like a coconut. My breathing becomes heavy, as I try to replicate sleep.

Damita! He chimes in a cloud of drunkenness.

He knows I am awake. Damita, what is this? His hand reaches over to mine, and peels away my curled fingers. A golden bullet rolls onto the mat. His black snake eyes flash in the moonlight, and laughter booms from him, like thunder. I hear more voices, more laughter, and I can taste liquor on my lips. I do not remember the rest of the night.

MY FATHER ONCE TOLD ME that I was worth nothing. I would become nothing. A few weeks later, I found myself in Medellín, scouring the dirty streets for money as the sharp, icy breeze slowly seeped into my lungs. You are cold, *darling*. A big man in a black coat pulled me up and put his warm coat around my shoulders. He took my hand and kissed it. I never felt so cherished.

Come with me, he said.

And I did.

That was how El Padre found me. I followed him home and I was plunged into darkness. But slowly, flames began to flicker around me. I could hear the drip, drip, dripping of water, which made me thirsty. When El Padre finished lighting the candles, the room looked like an *iglesia*, a basilica. My father took Natalya to one, and she came home and told me all about it. The candles, she said. The candles were mounted on every wall, every table. And there was a man. A man on the wall with arms outstretched, like this. She showed me. I did not see a man here except for El Padre. He looked at me, and I noticed there was no colour in his eyes. In the blackness, I could see the reflecting flashes of candlelight. I stayed in that room, watching the flames dance every night after he lit them. When he came home each night, he licked his finger, and squeezed out a single flame. Every night. The next evening, that candle would stand, untouched. One by one, the candles became neglected. I did not know why he did this. Maybe it was a game. Back then, I liked games. On the final night, when only one candle flickered, alight with hope, El Padre came home. He stood me up, and looked at me.

There were over five hundred candles in this room, he told me.

Yes.

You have spent over five hundred nights in my care.

I am grateful.

Tonight there is one candle left.

I looked at him, smiling. He took the candle off the wall and walked up to me.

Now you can pay me back what you owe.

WHEN I WAKE, I am lying on the mat once again. The damp smell of sweat permeates my senses. I stare at the roof, imagining the day a man, a hero, will come and rescue me, like in the fairy tales Mama used to tell me. A handsome man. A brave hero. My hand slides

I 2

towards the stash of food I left underneath the sheets, and I find that it is gone.

El Padre says he wants to see you.

I turn and find Leo, a young boy, my age maybe, and he is standing at the top of the stairs. He is holding my rifle.

El Padre gave it to me, he says. I will train to be his guard.

I look at him, amused. He is too fat to run a quarter of a mile. I grip the sheet and pull it over my exposed chest. I stand up and stagger to the door. Leo is slightly shorter than I am, and as I brush past him, I bare my teeth and hiss.

That rifle belongs to me.

Not anymore.

I turn and twist his arm, causing him to release a spray of bullets over the wall. El Padre's voice booms from underneath us. He calls my name. Come here, *darling*, he adds, teasingly.

I 2

HE IS THE SON OF GOD, Natalya says. He is a *dios*. What is a God? I did not know then, I do not know now. She was explaining who the man in the basilica was. It was raining that day. It had been raining for a long time, two days, maybe. Father had taken Natalya to the basilica.

To pray for Mother, he said.

I stayed at home and gave Mother *paella* and water. She told me a story about a young girl who was trapped in a castle, guarded by a dragon with fiery breath. I do not remember what happens, but I remember a hero riding on a horse to take her far away, to get married, maybe. I remember the dragon burning down the castle as he tried to stop them from leaving.

I imagine meeting my hero one day, and I think, when I look into his eyes, I will know that he is God.

El Padre is looking into my eyes. My sister is in the room.

Is this the one who brings you such wonderful treats? He asks.

I stare into the black void of his gaze, not letting any emotion slip from my face. Your sister is very beautiful, he says. I pull the sheet closer around my body, tensing my arms, so he can't see them shake.

Such a shame, he says. Is it her beauty that kept me from finding her instead of you dying on the streets?

I know that he is trying to break me, but I clench my jaw and imagine my hands around his thick neck, pressing into the cold, rubbery flesh.

Why did your father let you go and not her?

I imagine his blood seeping through the skin of the earth, watering the plants in the soil, which would one day grow into vile weeds.

Why are you so worthless?

A stinging pain burns my throat and threatens to burst. El Padre walks around me and takes the rifle from Leo's hands. He steps up behind me, puts his arm around my body, and places the rifle in my hands. His chin rests tenderly on my shoulder as he brings my arms up, aiming the rifle directly between Natalya's wild eyes. He whispers and I can feel his heated breath in my ear, but the toxicity of his tone chills my spine and makes me imagine a snake gliding down my neck, its perfect skin paralysing every petty nerve and muscle.

You will have my respect, Damita. I will make you beautiful, like her, he says. Otherwise, I'll take her in your place. You can have the streets again.

I look my sister. I imagine my hero again. I think of the day he will come. He will be brave and beautiful and intelligent. He will pull me into his arms and, in a burst of light, he will save me.



IN A BURST
OF LIGHT

I 2

LA FRONTERA

ANNABEL RODWAY

FUTURE LEADER'S

WRITING PRIZE

FINALIST

In the *Estados Unidos de América*, Mamá says, the women wear red rouge on their cheeks, and drape themselves in extravagant materials. The streets are unsullied by dirt or waste, rather, they gleam, spotless under the light of the *luna*. It's noisy alright, she laughs, but the sounds of the big city come together to form an astonishing harmony of taxi horns, flashing cameras and sociable chatter. Everything is bigger, brighter! Buildings grow towards the sky, she proclaims, energetically raising her arms up toward the cerulean sheet which is dotted with tiny, iridescent diamonds – she smiles and lets her eyes close in euphoric reminiscence, sighing, *paradíso*. I sit patiently, legs crossed, longing for her to continue with this fantastical recollection of a dream. She opens her eyes nearly unwillingly – as if entranced – edges herself closer to me and gently pulls me onto her lap – the sand from the bottom of my *falda* falling upon her coffee-coloured legs. She smells familiar – like Pears soap and paella. We stare out to sea, waiting for Eduardo. One day, *mi amor*, she whispers, brushing the rouge curls away from my face, one day. I unwind her arms from around my waist and stand up. I start to spin. Spinning so the sky twirls like when you mix *Sangría* with a straw. Even after I stop spiralling the sky keeps going. Mamá laughed. I fell to the ground.

If you head away from the industrialised city centre – away from where South America meets the North – and take a right turn on Corredeur Sur, you will find a diminished coastal community. Small, fragmented houses line the ascending dirt road – makeshift tin roofs producing intolerable heat inside during our tropical season. The lone, dirt street is littered with russet whiskey bottles and flattened cardboard boxes. Plastic bags crunch as they flap in the breeze like national flags – caught in the Alfajía trees. A single shopping trolley is parked at the top of the hill – a form of entertainment for the children alongside an ancient, discarded sofa that is placed purposefully in order for the adults to watch their children fly down the hill, only to end up in a giggling heap after toppling into the sand pile. From my house you can hear the waves breaking from the Gulf of Panama – the ocean dispersing all of its debris from faraway places, along our abandoned coastline. Last year, Miguel and I found a body there. I told Padre we should call the *policía* but he chided me and told me that it had probably drifted from the Américas anyway, and it wasn't our cross to bear. He reacted the same way when Eduardo never came home from work,

I 2

September past. Later, I pulled the corpse in off the beach and buried it with some pomegranate flowers.

My house sits slightly away from the road. It is protected from the sun by the Cedar trees, which means that I can lie on the roof and watch the ships. I have nothing else to do. I am usually alone. Women don't do much here. We don't do, we are – merely objects to the men. Our population is mainly comprised of the Box Men. All of my nine brothers are Box Men – from José who is twenty, all the way down to Miguel who is thirteen. Every day I watch as they walk from the house to the docks and unload crates into the boots of shiny black cars. But each *Domingo* – the Lord's day – a finer black car comes and picks up Padre and whisks him up to the Isthmus of Panama, the gateway between heaven and hell.

My name is Lucia Perez and I have but fourteen years. I live in Panama – near where the border lies. My padre, Fernando, and my nine brothers work for infamous *capo de la droge*, drug lord, El Padre-unloading hundreds of pesos worth of drugs from Columbia by day, and transporting them into Mexico by night. My brother Eduardo has been missing for two months. The last time I heard from him was the night before he was trying to cross *la frontera*, the border, for good. I think he's in América now, and I plan on following him. I want to get into Heaven too.

Today the ocean glimmers like one hundred individual suns have been placed under the surface and, like dominos, the palms sway down the road, one after the other, as if they are bowing down to the passers-by. The angled buildings – made of cement blocks and of plastic – filter through the auburn rays which form the bold shadows on the fractured pavement. I inhale deeply. The air is thick. It rained overnight, I think to myself – imagining the helpless droplets of rainwater evaporating as soon as they made contact with the sweltering wok that was the sidewalk. It is quiet. The only disruption to the serenity is the sound of men's shouts, travelling from the dock. From my position on the roof, I can see through the bottle-green foliage all the way to the distant horizon. The water must be flat out there, I reason, as I cannot see the ships stirring as though they are battling the white-capped, frothy waves of the Pacific Ocean. Big cargo ships, Padre labels them, all with their sterns directed toward the Américas.

Lucia!

I 2

Voy Padre, voy! I cry, as I quickly climb down the ladder that allows me to ascend to the roof. My hand-stitched, red falda catches on a splinted piece of wood of the bottom rung and causes me to trip. I hurry to my feet and dust myself off. I don't want to keep him waiting.

Lucia!

The inside of my house is musky and dark. It smells of cigars and rosary beads. Ever since Mamá became sick, all the windows were nailed shut so she could slumber in peace. The floor is covered in a thick layer of dust. I grit my teeth as it penetrates the slits between my toes. There is a tattered mattress on the floor that had become the confines of my mother's life. Her position is unnatural – it had only recently occurred to me that her rest was induced unnaturally too. She was too quiet. My observations of my deteriorating mother were interrupted by a purposeful grunt. I turned around. Padre stood in the corner of the room. His back turned to me.

Lucia, why do you make me wait so?

Pardon, good Padre.

On the table there was a hand rifle.

Armado hasta los dientes, he said insolently, turning around. Be armed to the teeth.

He smiled falsely, his absent canines allowing me to see the ulcers that lined his tongue – the result of chewing on tabs of splintered wood.

Lucia, there is something I need you to do for me.

I grimaced in the dark, begging an unrelenting, heedless God for refuge.

You must come with me to visit El Padre for his birthday fiesta. I was asked to bring a date. And since your Mamá is... – he gestured to the lump beneath the blankets in the corner – I must take you.

My stomach dropped and I felt the bile rise up my throat. I had met this lizard only once before – the night of the lanterns. I remembered grudgingly how after he had placed his grimy hand on the small of my back and traced an 'X' on my skin. *Magnifico*, he whispered.

I grabbed my back where the phantom signature lay.

But, Padre –

Lucia. *Hacer lo que hay que hacer*. Do what needs to be done.

A como de lugar, I reluctantly replied. At all costs.

I 2

The ocean broke beyond.

The sleek, coal-coloured vehicle arrived when the sun began to set. The light began to disappear, as the darkness hungrily swallowed it, like a crocodile digesting a Spanish bull after weeks of fasting. I heard the crunching of the gravel outside my window, and I began to habitually scratch my thumb. Padre had told me I must change into something beautiful so he would be proud to have me on his arm. He even bought me rouge for my cheeks. I choked, aghast at my striking reflection. This dress was made of buttery satin and fit closely around my waist. The first time, I was in a common *falda* and apron, running a delivery errand for Padre. The reptile lured me into his illuminated cave, gesturing me to sit with a movement of his claws. Candles flickered. He attacked me, pinning my arms down with his, forcing his venomous mouth upon mine. I could see his artery pounding in frenzy through the thick skin of his scaly neck.

The car ascended the dirt road and headed back into the centre of Panama. The ocean was chasing me beside the car before its weariness became too great and the greenery took over. Outside the tinted windows, I watched young children playing in the street, kicking an old *Coke* can – its red and silver metals throwing off a sparkling glimmer into my eye. As we drew closer to the border, I noticed the house on the hill. Spectacular. Towering over the whole city of Panama. One side overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the other, the Mexican border. The car decelerated, before coming to a complete halt-like the end of the Flamingo dance. I sat still.

Lucia. Now, he commanded.

I moved. The house stood erect, blocking my view of the Panama skyline. I followed my father into the colossal building, turning before entering, for one last view of the glassy ocean. My eyes were now glassy too. I picked at the dirt beneath my nails, my eyes focused ardently on the floor.

“Fernado. And, ah, you brought your lovely daughter! Sssso lovely,” he hissed.

I stopped breathing and bowed my head – refusing to lift my eyes to his glare. A claw touched the bottom of my chin – pulling up my face with disguised force. His mouth pressed against my cheek – stubble itching my face.

He paused there.

I swallowed – not again.

I 2

My father was happy to remain ignorant. His mind was not altered by the pills, but he plastered on a façade to pretend it was, and he turned away as I was whisked away from the crowds and onto the balcony. I had heard what had happened to his last harlot, Damita, when he was in Columbia. What happened to her when she tried to disobey – to remove herself from his firm grip. I too struggled against his clasp around my wrists – cuffing me to him. I cried for help, but the people behind the curtain chose to turn away – my calls fell upon deaf ears. I bit viciously into the chewy flesh of his hand. He shrieked in agony and his eyes turned dark – pushing my chest so I toppled to the ground – my back scraping against the panelled decking, my head spinning. Momentarily, I had a view of the blushing sky, swirling like when you mix *Sangría*. Then he picked me up by the collar, blood from his hand, staining my dress. He held me against the low railing of the balcony, threatening to throw me over – my body creating shadows on his face. I gripped his arm steadfastly and threw my weight backwards. We fell to the ground.

One day – what? Eduardo asked, moving out of the shadows of the rock pool into the soft touch of the sun's rays.

Américas, I whispered.



I 2

It is here, while standing under the dim orange light, with rain cascading down from the clouds, that I finally allowed myself a small smile. Carnegie Hall, New York City, drenched with rain that is trickling down my back, I smile back on that five year old girl forcing fear out of her system.

*

For a child of only five years old I remember being bright, if not a little peculiar. Even as a girl I rarely smiled, much less played with other children. My interests lay more with books, with history and languages and, most of all, with music. I never felt out of place in Russia. I felt at home there. I was a petite girl with a short, severe bob haircut, high cheekbones and deep set grey eyes. My mother said I was a vision of Russian beauty. I didn't really know what that meant. But I knew I liked the cold, monochrome streets of St Petersburg and the grand architecture of the old buildings in the city. I knew my mother was happy living in our small apartment outside of the city, even if it did smell like damp mould. She somehow managed to make it seem homely.

Nothing could have prepared me for that particular day. The day that everything changed. I had never seen a room so big in my life. The walls were tall and covered in decorative wallpaper, swirled with images of gold leaves and deep blue flowers. A dwarfing crystal chandelier hung from the centre of the ceiling, its cool florescence providing enough light to fill the whole space. There was a stunning beauty about the space, but also a distinct clinical feeling, like a hospital waiting room or a dentist's office. In the centre of the far wall, opposite the door, sat a single woman staring sternly at me, her cold black eyes unblinking. In the room's centre was a small black stool and a cello.

'Remember not to be scared. Miss Dernova has asked for you Elise, out of everyone she wants to hear you.'

I remember walking toward the cello, my footfalls echoing throughout the hall. My throat was as course as sandpaper. I sat on the stool, keeping my back tall and face neutral.

I picked up the Cello and placed it between my knees.

... remember not to be scared...

I didn't have time to smile, I was concentrating; concentrating on the piece, on the movement of her bow hand, on the feeling of the music vibrating.

*

I 2

'The dress for the Nikitin's performance next week alone was more than...'

'Darling, calm down...'

'No! Seven years of lessons with Miss Dernova, and the dresses for concerts and the new sheet music and moving into the city, Mama...'

'It's from your father.'

That caused me pause, just as my mother had known it would. Helen Kozlov is a kind woman, yes, but she is a crafty one too. She's viperous in her ability to strike people quickly with an argument, knowing when to pull back and allow others to win, and foremost, when to sink her fangs in and inject the venom.

'He bought it for you years ago, just after Miss Dernova selected you for the St Petersburg Conservatory. You were too small to use it then, obviously.' My mother's voice was curt, direct as she finished her small speech. I turned around and looked at the Guadagnini, propped up with an A-frame stand in the corner of the living room. The instrument was beautiful, handcrafted, delicate, and ancient. It reminded me then of the old books they had sold years before; of the architecture in the older parts of St Petersburg, the towering marble and stone giants that encompassed plush theatres and halls.

'Why didn't you tell me?'

'He's not a part of our lives anymore Elise. I don't want him to be. This was his last gift, his goodbye. I wanted you to be old enough to understand.' She had replied, cool as anything. But I noted the speed of her answer. She'd rehearsed this. She'd known exactly what she was going to say. I made eye contact with my mother for a brief moment before I nodded.

'Okay. It's... it's beautiful Mama.' I paused momentarily before adding, 'He must have really wanted to say goodbye.'

Then I turned and left, heading down the small hall into my room. Even then my father was always a bit of a mystery in my life, though not a complete one. I discovered his name – Henry – while rifling through my mother's boxes of old photos and dust years earlier. I knew he lived in New York, I knew he was an artist. I'd always been contented with knowing these few facts.

I remember turning on my bedroom light and being momentarily blinded by a flash as the bulb blew.



I was setting up my Guadagnini on stage, silently noting the other members of the orchestra as they went about preparing their instruments. Rococo Variations seemed a fitting piece to be playing amongst the grand St Petersburg Philharmonic. Everything about the orchestra and its surrounds appeared rococo to the point of being almost decadent. The expensive, impeccably kept instruments were delicately placed on stands or chairs, each owner dressed in black tie. The theatre we were to perform in that night was amongst the largest and most lavish in Russia, with beautiful acoustics and red velvet seating.

'Your father is here.' My fiancé looked at me, a stoic bird of prey staring with a glint in his eyes. The room felt colder. Tentatively I leant up and kissed him softly.

'Jason I... I can't here, not so soon and so... I thought I was ready. I really did, I... can you meet him for me?' It was a sudden idea, the thought had flown into my mind and straight out of my mouth. I felt ill, my heart beat was erratic, my brow glistening, my hands shook. It was new to me, odd to feel so volatile without the sound of music in my ears. My vision was slightly blurred, the strong stage lights causing a brightness to fill my immediate surrounds, a twister of mahogany instruments, crimson accents, golds and glinting whites. It struck me then that this was different from a simple release of adrenaline, not excitement or nerves that I associate with any stage, but something else. Something I hadn't felt since that day in the hall, with blue flowers and gold linings creating a twister of bright light in my world. I was scared. I was terrified.

*

I supposed that it might have been a kind of addiction earlier tonight, as I performed in Carnegie Hall. An addiction to the slow burning music of my cello. An addiction to the sadness I can hear in each note, and the melancholy sweetness that blends each note together. An addiction to losing myself each time I perform, to finding another place where I don't have to think about my father, or mother, or money or fame or happiness. I can never feel my hair scorching under the lights, my hand cramping around my bow, my knees shaking slightly or my back straining to stay straight. I can only feel my music.

After the performance I moved outside of the Hall and onto the street, where I now stand. In the rain it looks like I'm back on the monochrome streets of St Petersburg. I move a little down the street

I 2

toward a lamp whose light catches a mass of raindrops as they fall to the ground. I stand underneath it, hair billowing out, and think about my father. The man I never really knew.

I think back to his voice, that disgruntled harsh voice on the phone. He had sounded desperate. Pleading. Not unlike my own voice speaking to Jason only hours ago. I could hear that he wanted to meet me, whether to say hello or goodbye, I could hear it in his voice's notes. The rain swirled dark navy and black around me, but my mind was clear for the first time in weeks. He was scared. As much as I was.

My fear doesn't descend back into my mind, nor is it a weakness to be swallowed by a gleam of light or stripped from me. Because it's suddenly clear that this weakness is shared.

And now in this moment, while standing under the dim orange light, with rain cascading down from the clouds, I finally allow myself a small smile.



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Climate change is currently the single greatest threat faced by humanity and can no longer be ignored. Although the earth's temperatures naturally fluctuate, evidence has shown that human activity is mainly responsible for anthropogenic climate change. Global warming has become a catalyst for many natural disasters and it is clear that nature has been giving us warnings which seem to be accelerating and intensifying: Europe faced a freezing cold break; USA endured destructive hurricanes and harsh drought; England witnessed floods, droughts and deluges; Brazil saw severe heat waves; Israel and Palestinian territories faced heavy rain, high winds, snowstorms; earthquakes struck Italy, Iran, Afghanistan and the Philippines; China and India suffered their coldest winters in recent history.¹ In the past two decades, Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets have lost four trillion tonnes of ice. Analysis of satellite and weather station data by NASA has shown that Antarctica has warmed at a rate of about 0.12°C per decade since 1957², and a 1°C temperature rise has seen an 80% decrease in arctic ice.³ Devastation has been wrecked across the world. More closely to home we have seen Australia plagued with severe bushfires, floods and hurricanes.

Many scientists have cited these many natural disasters, and the increasing global warming rates as alarm bells warning us that we have a small – and shrinking – window left to avoid disastrous climate change. In 2011, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere was 390 parts per million (ppm) – much higher than the natural range of 170 to 300ppm during the past 800,000 years. On May 3rd 2013, for the first time ever National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Mauna Loa observatory recorded an average daily CO₂ concentration above 400ppm.⁴ Climate change is becoming a silent killer and many have just disregarded it as 'natural'. But it is not. We are the cause. And it is time to be the solution.

We must act to restore a safe climate. The indications are that the Earth needs to be cooled by between 0.3°C and 0.8°C. To achieve this it is likely that CO₂ levels will need to be reduced to somewhere around 280 to 350ppm.⁵ In Australia, a more sustainable approach is needed and the Australian Government must invest in renewable energy to ensure the future of Australia.

Currently, Australia has one of the world's highest per capita levels of greenhouse gas emissions and Newcastle in New South Wales is home to the biggest black coal port in the world. Our heavy

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¹ Sarah Lyall, 'Heat, Flood or Icy Cold, Extreme Weather Rages Worldwide', *New York Times*, January 10 2013

² Kathryn Hansen, 'Satellites Confirm Half-Century of West Antarctic Warming', NASA (*Goddard Space Flight Center*) January 2009

³ Data from Bill McKibben's Do The Math at 350.org, 2013

⁴ Data from Bill McKibben's Do The Math at 350.org, 2013

⁵ Data from The Australian Safe Climate Transition Plan Strategic Framework Report, 2009

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reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation has led to a point where the industry provides 93% of our electricity (83% coal, 10% gas) and renewables just 7%.⁶ As a prominent nation of the world, it is behaving that Australia takes responsibility for our earth's future and stops playing follower to other countries. It is time to become a leader to a zero carbon emissions economy based on 100% renewable energy.

Renewable energy is energy derived from natural sources that are naturally regenerative or are practically inexhaustible. It is the use of solar, wind, geothermal, bioenergy, hydroelectricity and ocean power to provide energy to us in sustainable ways. Around the world, other countries have already made impressive progress, but Australia has yet to get started – Germany is the number one solar energy producer in the world; China is the world's largest producer of solar technology and in 2010, invested \$51 billion on renewable energy; Finland introduced the world's first carbon price in 1990; New Zealand has two-thirds of its electricity produced from renewable sources; Scotland has a target of 100% renewable energy by 2020.⁷ Why cannot we strive for the same?

Australia is still such a young country with so much potential. Our renewable energy industry must stop being stalled and neglected and our government policies must start making judgement about new policies and financing sustainable solutions. Rigorous research has concluded that renewable energy can provide six times more power than the world's current energy needs entirely from natural sources.⁸

Foremost in focus in Australia is solar energy. As one of the sunniest countries in the world, Australia has a wonderful opportunity to harness this gift and use it to produce a source of power and energy that is safe, clean and plentiful. The conditions in Australia are excellent for profiting from solar radiation; in 100 square kilometres, 200PJ of solar energy is received. Compare this to the 11PJ (120GW) used by Australia per day.⁹ Solar plants have the ability to store and dispatch energy as needed, day or night. We have large, low-populated areas to build plants for an industry that can handle the technological development in the solar generation section. With our natural competitive advantage of abundant solar energy, Australia can and should be positioning itself as a global renewable superpower for future prosperity, thus we must begin

⁶ Data from the 'Clean Energy Solution's to Climate Change' report by Choose Nuclear Free, December 2010

⁷ Sarah Lyall, 'Heat, Flood or Icy Cold, Extreme Weather Rages Worldwide', *New York Times*, January 10 2013

⁸ Data From 100% Renewable Energy Organisation, March 2013

⁹ Keith Burrows, 'Renewable Energy' Presentation at the VCE Science Conferences, February 2013

building medium and large scale solar power plants.

The renewable energy industry is a young, sustainable and promising industry that has the ability to open doors in the sense of new investment, new industry and increased employment. For example, Port Augusta currently faces a choice to become home to Australia's first solar thermal plant as its large coal-fired station is being closed down. The realisation of the Port Augusta solar plant alone would create 1885 jobs over the span of 6 years while the current gas industry there would only provide 456 jobs over 2 years and the coal, 250 jobs.¹⁰

If so much information and research is stacked in favour of renewable energy, why is consequent action not being taken by the government? Australia is clearly not lacking in resources nor technology. No, what we lack is far worse – the moral ethics, social will and political agenda. Many politicians are unwilling to support the policy changes we need and have been postponing decisions in this area for too long. For years, they have continued supporting coal mining and gas industries as they hand out copious subsidies for fossil fuel use and production. In 2001, Australia's subsidies for the fossil fuel related market alone exceeded \$6.5 billion. Between 2005 and 2006, Australia's subsidies for the Energy Market ranged from \$9.3 to \$10.1 billion. In Queensland, the State Government has poured almost \$7 billion in subsidies into the coal seam gas industry in the past five years.¹¹ In total, the subsidies for fossil fuels account for 96%, with only 4% for renewable technologies.¹²

In fact, the Australian government and some Australian companies have actually planned multiple projects of massive coal expansion which would take the planet beyond the point of no return if they were to go ahead. Australia's coal and mining industry are our largest income industries and are currently comfortably thriving from sales, but in reality, how long can we continue relying on them? The Australian Energy Market Commission identified in its recent report that the three main causes of rising prices of electricity and energy were the investment in an ageing infrastructure, the augmentation of the cost of fossil fuels and uncertainty about carbon pricing.¹³

The system may have once worked, but as our world advances, Australia needs to as well. The Australian Government must to look at different pathways to boost our economy. The effects of climate change can only exacerbate economical trouble which is already

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¹⁰ Data from Beyond Zero Emissions: Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Report, 2011

¹¹ Data from Climate Institute and Australian Research Group's Marginal Electorates Election Campaign Poll, November 2007

¹² Data from Energy Policy of Australia, Wikipedia, last modified in May 2013

¹³ Data from the Australian Energy Market Commission Report, 2012

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reflected in the soaring commodity prices and impending shortages in the financial markets. We must realise that fossil-fuelled energy is unpromising for our future economy and world. The global environment with its finite resources should be a common concern of all peoples. Our country is one of the countries most at risk from climate change according to the Stern Review and the Garnaut Climate Change reports. Practical, efficient, sustainable solutions are in need and renewable energy technologies will provide these opportunities for mitigating greenhouse gases.

Investing in clean, safe and reliable technology is the most practical and obvious solution. Billions of dollars must be redirected from subsidiaries in the coal industry to be invested in renewable energy. Indeed, switching to 100% renewable energy is costly. Research undergone in the Zero Carbon Emission Stationary Energy Plan has demonstrated that a pathway to 100% renewable energy would require a total investment of \$370 billion over the period of 2010-2020, however, it also found the up-front capital costs would be paid back over time through energy sales, thus the expense would come with a very rapid economic payback. It is a strategic investment that would secure Australia's zero-emission future and would result in significant savings in future years. With our carbon pricing, this would ultimately raise total savings to \$1,550 billion.¹⁴ Not to mention the 2798 gigatons of CO₂ – five times the safe amount – that would be saved.¹⁵

We may have the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the Carbon Tax but, shamefully, Australia has only pledged a goal of 20% renewable energy by 2020 while reports from the Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Plan have illustrated a target of 100% renewable energy is affordable and achievable by the same date.¹⁶ This is not good enough. Why is the government not taking action if research has proven that it is cost-effective and beneficial to our economy and world?

In fact, a poll by The Australian Research Group in 2007 found that 91% of the public support the installation of solar panels, 82% support wind farms, 78% support energy efficiency.¹⁷ In 2009, Clean Energy Council's poll of 1200 Australians found that 80% believed the government should give priority to renewables. Similarly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported almost 90% of people took some kind of action in 2012 to reduce their power bills.¹⁸ These

¹⁴ Data from Beyond Zero Emissions: Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Report, 2011

¹⁵ Data from Bill McKibben's Do The Math at 350.org, 2013

¹⁶ Data from Beyond Zero Emissions: Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Report, 2011

¹⁷ Data from the Australian Research Group: Climate Change, November 2007

¹⁸ Data from Clean Energy Council Australia, 2009

figures show an outstanding endorsement of renewable energy in Australia from the public and highlight that Australians do want to see a greater investment in renewable energy. Furthermore, with over 26,000 young people petitioning for renewable energy in Australia¹⁹, it is clear that the inheritors of our earth are lobbying for change. This decision is ultimately a test of our moral compasses and our ability to act for the wellbeing of our present and our future.

At its core, the issues of climate change are those of humanity and the importance of protecting invaluable resources of our planet. Greed, politics and power are factors which should not be considered in regards to this matter where our health and future are involved. Australia now faces a choice. We can continue subsidising the coal industry, fuelling our dependence on fossil-fuels, keep mining and burning coal, keep polluting our air and water. We can keep damaging our country and health, be left behind with the rest of the world on investment and face an uncertain future with an unstable climate, despair and accept great losses. Or we can harness the potential of human ability of ingenuity, creativity and cooperation to overcome a seemingly impossible challenge by switching to 100% clean renewable energy, creating a safer, healthier, happier future for all.

For the benefit of Australia, her citizens and the world, a transition to low-carbon electrical sources and renewable energy is imperative in order for Australia to play its part in global efforts to minimise the adverse impacts of climate change. The earth is our most priceless possession and we must no longer exploit it. The sustenance of humanity depends upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, fertile soils, rich diversity of plants and animals, pure waters and clean air. It is time for the Australian government to confront the full force of the climate crisis and recognise the urgency of action and the scale of transition required to restore a safe climate future. Climatic change in mentality, approach and action must be overcome to tackle the pressing issue of catastrophic climate change.



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¹⁹ Data from the
Australian Youth
Climate Coalition, 2013

JAKE REMEMBERED the bite of the aggressive southerly. It nipped at his protruding ears and neck, unperturbed by any attempt to cover his face with his beanie. A lone seagull wafted unwillingly towards the jetty, the arc of its wings folded inwards as it battled feebly against the unrelenting wind. The weather was formidable – Redburn's inviting blue coast unrecognizable. Most had retreated from the jetty, the triumph of a catch not worth enduring the cold. Only Jake Camper and Jimmy Whett remained. Their fathers had gone for a drink. The scrawny kid was whimpering, hugging himself so tightly he might as well have been in a strait jacket.

Jake rolled his eyes. Stupid girl, he thought, what a wuss. Bored, he started breathing heavily out through his mouth, watching the fog that escaped mingle with the wind before disappearing completely. A sudden cuff of wind nearly knocked him off his feet and he ran to catch the upturned bucket before it fell into the depths of the ferocious waves below. When he looked up he was alone. Jerking his head around, he searched frantically for the red jacket that seemed to consume Jimmy Whett's lean body.

'Jimmy!' he shouted, peering desperately at the bleak horizon. The wind hollered back at him. 'Jimmy, where the hell are you, this isn't funny! Jimmy!' He stared down at the inky water. His stomach churned. A splash of red flashed in his peripheral vision and there was Jimmy waving his hands as his pale face bobbed between the rough waves. Jake didn't jump. He turned up towards the jetty, frantically searching for the men. But he was one insignificant, solitary figure standing at the end of the jetty, one step away from the infinite ocean.

The wind shifted.

The red jacket drifted further and further away. He stared at his worn out sneakers and willed them forward, but it was as if his body was frozen from the inside. He couldn't. Suddenly, he was spluttering violently – he had forgotten to breathe. *Splash*. Had he jumped? He felt dry, faint. Numb. His father's windbreaker sliced through the water, closing in on Jimmy's thrashing arms.

MONDAY MORNING. Miss Healy turned up her lips, winked at him. He avoided his teacher's gaze and disturbed the moaning herd of students as he sidled his way through the blocked corridor.

'Mate, we're going down to the jetty, you coming?' Ryan wiped his

mop of wiry blonde hair from his eyes. He was a good mate, Ryan. They'd known each other forever it seemed. When they were little Ryan used to pull Jake through the water in a yellow plastic tugboat – even when they were little he had always been taller and broader than Jake.

'I'll see you down there, I just gotta do something first.' He hadn't been down to the jetty since the day his dad had pulled Jimmy's coughing body from the water. He looked around the emptying school yard in an attempt to catch a glimpse of Emily. The day that Emily Longwood would wink at me... he wondered. What a joke. On the hill a car horned him onto the footpath. He spotted a smooth pebble and knocked it back and forth between his sneakers. Their house looked as if it was on its deathbed: the wooden planks bulged in certain places, the corrugated iron drooped precariously to one side, a large crack the shape of a fountain glistened in what was left of the front window. An annoying abundance of spiky weeds had conquered the garden and snuck into the pads of your feet if you weren't careful.

'What are you doing home so early?' His dad was sitting on the porch. What did he mean? He did not look up from the magazine he was holding – it was emblazoned with a photograph of a silver fish flitting in the air, the black mesh of a net lurking in the background. What was behind his father's words? The eye of the fish glowed white. Was he imagining it? No... there was something. Something there suppressed deep down by layers of control.

'Ryan had detention,' Jake muttered under his breath before sliding through the front door. His father had not spoken to him that whole day. He had looked at him for one fleeting moment when he clambered up onto the jetty, brushing off Jake's open hand. Disappointment? No, it was worse than that. It was contempt.

It was not the first time Jake had looked into his father's eyes and felt so alone. He had been a kid, fiddling with his thumbs while his father paced outside his bedroom, speaking in a low and urgent voice on the phone. That night Jake's mother had not come home. His mother. He could hardly remember her now. Just the sweet lullaby she used to sing – not to him – when she would scrub away at a blackened pan. What was it again? *Water and roses... droplets and petals...* He had seen her smile in old photographs – his parents' wedding photo was his favourite – but from Jake's birth it was as if alongside

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him, all her love and happiness had been pushed out of her. She had been hollowed out – an empty shell – and all that was left was a brittle skin that had shrivelled up in the sun. That night his dad had stood in the living room for hours. Head in hands. He had ignored the touch of the son who he blamed. His mother had not been in an accident. She had not slipped and fallen somewhere. She had filled up the car with petrol and left Redburn for good.

FROM REDBURN HILL you could see everything. The main street: a beaten down pharmacy, the local store and a surf shop painted with garish fluoro paint. The huddles of identical rooftops, and spots of gums that stretched their wispy arms above their arching heads. On the east side of Redburn was the heart of the town – the boats, the concrete wharf, the thirsty nets cast forgotten on the ground, and recently the shiny yachts. Redburn was changing – in the last few years glossy white apartments had shot up, towering over the broad stretch of shimmering blue.

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He could see Ryan and Jordan doing backflips and somersaults off the end of the jetty. Each time they landed, a spray of water engulfed their tanned bodies and he was reminded of the splash of his father's body that day. On the other side of town was Emily Longwood's house. For a moment, his eyes rested on the back door as if expecting her to burst out at any moment.

'I love the view from up here.' That voice. He jumped, stood up quickly, nearly snagging himself on the rocks. Emily was standing in front of him, blocking the sun so all he could see was the hazy silhouette of her long lean body. She was in a bright bikini: a pineapple yellow undertoned with crimson, zigzagging across until it met creamy pink – like the pink on the wings of the butterflies you find at Lorny's Corner. It looked as though the colours had melted away and been left to trickle down the curve of her breasts. He caught himself and looked away. 'You were there when Jimmy Whett nearly drowned, right?'

'Yeah, it's great... I mean yeah I guess I was,' he said. The words came out jilted, standoffish. He sounded like an idiot. She gave him a look. He turned so they were both facing out to the bay, then sneaked a quick look at her tanned skin – the peek of white skin where the two halves of her bikini met. He paused, and waited for her to say something. She flicked her hair. He softened his voice, 'We

were out on the jetty and the wind, you know...'

'You're lucky your dad's a hero. Mine's just a dick.' She was rubbing her foot in the dirt. He'd fantasised about the day they'd first talk. He would be smooth and cool. She'd giggle at his jokes. 'You gotta cigarette?'

'No.' She was bored with him. She was always laughing with those other guys – how did they do it? 'You going to Mitch's party?'

'Mmhhh... I thought you'd be with Ryan,' she said to herself.

He was losing her. 'I helped my dad save him,' he blurted out. He cringed as he thought of his father. 'Jimmy, I mean....,' he added as an afterthought.

'Yeah? I would have been shit scared... So Jake... would you be a hero and save me if I fell too?' She cocked her head at him and bit down on her bottom lip. He felt faint.

'Of course I would,' he laughed nervously. Something itched in his shoe.

'Would you leave with me too?'

'What... leave? Where to?'

'I've always wanted to go to Paris.'

'You can't speak French.'

'Don't be stupid, you don't have to know French to go to Paris.'

He was silent. 'So would you go with me?' She pursed her lips. He felt her hand on his and he was suddenly aware of her body, very close to his.

'How would we even get there? You do know Paris is on the other side of the world?'

'Yeah of course I know, I'm not thick. But just saying, would you go with me?' He'd of done anything for her. Even leave his dad, his house, his town. He looked at her then, right in the eyes. A dozen gulls swooped above the treetops – one breaking away in an elongated loop before plunging into the ocean. She blinked. 'They say Paris is the city of love.' Her lips were in a pout and she was starting to smile cheekily. And this is the town of stinking fish and old lonely men, he thought.

THAT NIGHT he dreamt of his mum. There was a ringing in his ears, then he was off balance – nothing, nothing under his feet. She was smiling. It was the sort of smile that comes right before a laugh. She stepped back and suddenly she was falling, and falling but she did not

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seem to notice. She was singing now, and waving her arms and he was shouting at her – it was dangerous, she should come back. He tried to reach her but he could not move. But why? Why couldn't he move? He felt a pressure on his arms, and tried to pull away. His dad was holding him, he was nodding. The song was filling his ears now. Her tone, her mouth. But she was no longer smiling.

THE NEXT DAY Emily wasn't at school.

He loitered around the schoolyard, peering into the rings of cross-legged girls, leaning back trying to phase off the heat. He had to tell her yes, yes he would go anywhere with her. They could take his dad's ute, and leave tomorrow before someone noticed they weren't at school. Yes, they would drive away and leave this town – the smell of fish and the old lonely men – to the next town, and then the next and work along the way. Under the stars: they would sleep, smoke cigarettes, swim naked, make love in the back of the ute and he would hold her and sing a lullaby in her ear. He'd promise her that one day, no matter what, one day he'd take her to Paris – indeed the city of love. At the end of the day he slipped out of the school gates before Ryan could catch him and walked to Emily's house. He knocked gently on the front door. Nothing. He was about to leave when the smell of cigarettes and sweat reached his nose. Her father opened the door. He was a big man, with thick legs and a beer gut to match. He stood so close to Jake that his stomach was almost touching him.

'What the hell do you want?'

'Where's Emily?'

'I could ask you the same goddamn thing. The bitch took my wallet and cigarettes and left while I was sleeping. You wait till I get my hands on her! I'm her goddamn father, and what do I get? I'll tell you what I don't ge-'

'Where did she go?'

'How should I know?' He snorted. Jake turned and ignored his hazy speech. He looked out at the murky shoreline where the greyish water met land. It seemed so strange that on the other side of the ocean people would speak French. He saw a couple, halfway up the jetty. A pink cardigan, chinos. Must be tourists. The man bent over to kiss the laughing girl. She left, he thought, she just left.

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IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON. The water was calm, the still surface broken only by a solitary seagull that landed for a swift second before thumping its wings and taking off again. Jake was lying at the very end of the deserted jetty, his feet dangling over the edge, his eyes wide. The sun blinded him but he refused to close his eyes. He was stronger than the sun, he thought, then laughed out loud.

'Dude, where you been?' He hadn't heard Ryan come up behind him. 'That chick you've been banging on about. She left. Man, what's with that, huh?

'Get lost.' There was perfection in the sun. He felt like saying a prayer, but no words came to mind.

'What the hell's up with you?' Ryan's head blocked out the sun as he bent over Jake's head.

He closed his eyes. 'Don't you see how stupid we all are? Here. We do nothing at school, we do backflips off the jetty. And that's all. Done for the rest of our life.'

'Man, you're talking rubbish,' Ryan said, holding his hand out to Jake. 'Hey c'mon, Mike's having drinks at his.'

'Just get lost would you.' He could see that Ryan was hurt but he avoided his puzzled gaze. The sun smirked at him and he clenched his jaw as it prised tears from his offering eyes. Ryan's footsteps receded. Then he stood up, at the very edge of wooden plank. He imagined he was sitting up at Redburn Hill and looking out at the lone figure at the end of the jetty.

He took a breath then jumped, feeling the momentary warmth of the sun on his outstretched arms before the water froze his thoughts.

HIS DAD WAS SITTING ON THE PORCH. He looked up, surprised as Jake slammed the gate behind him and marched up to where he was sitting.

'You know, it's not my fault she left.' His voice was unsteady. It cracked on the word she. His father stood up. Towered over him. Jake was suddenly aware of his father's broad shoulders and sinewy neck. He closed his eyes but they burned white through his tears. 'It's your fault. It's your – You were – I was only a kid.' He was choking on his words. His father stared coolly at him. Silence, then his words shocked Jake.

'Hit me,' his father said in a low voice. 'If you're angry son, hit me.' Jake was shaking now. He wanted to hit him. He wanted to kick and scream and yell and cry. It wasn't meant to be like this. His father was

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meant to fold Jake into his arms and weep and tell him he was sorry and that it wasn't his fault at all. Jake stood still. Unable to think, unable to react.

And there it was again. That look of sheer loathing. He felt as though he himself had been hit in the stomach. His dad broke Jake's gaze, sighed and stared out at the bay, his hands on his hips. Tired. Then suddenly his dad was propelled backwards, his hands reaching for his crumpled face. Jake froze – horrified at what he'd done. Something twitched in a mangled bush. He braced himself. Was it a bird?

'I didn't think you had it in you,' his dad said – a smile, a laugh?

He picked up the newspaper from his chair and sat down, breathing out simultaneously. He flicked through the paper before settling on something of interest. Jake sat down next to him and picked up the magazine with the dancing fish. It smiled at him. Out on the bay, water glided over rocks, after years of battering, now smooth and hard. They sat on the porch, two lonely men.



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