

WORDS of
WYNDHAM



Words of Wyndham Anthology

2017

**SHORT STORY
POETRY
FLASH FICTION
GRAPHIC SHORT STORY**

WYNDHAM CITY LIBRARIES

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Words of Wyndham
anthology
—— 2017 ——

Short Story
Graphic Short Story
Poetry
Flash Fiction



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* Local Encouragement Award

INTRODUCTION

It is an incredible honour to be able to pen the Introduction to the Words of Wyndham Anthology. This collection includes short-listed entries from our inaugural Wyndham City Libraries Words of Wyndham Writing Competition, ranging from short stories to poetry and flash fiction, and I congratulate each and every one of you on your work.

Judges Adam Ford and Bernard Caleo had a great responsibility in choosing the winners for each category. I thank them for their expertise and for completing this very difficult task.

Wyndham City Council recognises the important role that literary works play in enriching society and fostering creativity and thought provoking conversations. That's why we invest in competitions like this one to develop and foster current and future generation writers, not just in Wyndham but across the country.

Literature helps us define right from wrong, develop and define human relationships and enhance our understanding of the world we live in.

Indeed, some would argue that pieces like those included in this anthology have never been more important in the modern world as we see the emergence of the digital sphere.

I think former U.S. President, Barack Obama, sums up the contemporary challenge best when he said that literature helps to teach us “how to be a citizen” and the subsequent threat of “flashier ways to pass the time” instead of enjoying the power of literature.

I couldn’t agree more.

Keep doing what you do well.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Josh", is positioned above the printed name.

Councillor Josh Gilligan
Chaffey Ward
Wyndham City Council



JUDGES' COMMENTS

ADAM FORD

The authors of these stories and poems have called upon their skills at observation and depiction to share with us a series of dark, sometimes comic, certainly unsettling, scenarios. As dark as they are, though, the compassion these writers demonstrate, and the universality of the situations they confront, gives the reader hope that, however hard things may become, we are not alone in facing what we must face.

BERNARD CALEO

The graphic stories submitted for the 'Words of Wyndham' competition are all of them fine examples of the visual storyteller's art. The voice and sensibility in each piece rings out clear and true, and each one leaves me wanting more, like all good comics should.

SHORT STORIES

AVIARY
Tess Corbel

A COLOUR OF LOSS
Freya Cox

FORECAST
Audrey Di Martino

IN THE NEW LAND
Caroline Miley

ONE HUNDRED STROKES
Chris Childs

SHORT STORY WINNER

AVIARY by Tess Corbel—This story shows a sophisticated understanding of the commercial realities of our online existence and an equally sophisticated understanding of what is missing from that existence.—*ADAM FORD*

AVIARY

Tess Corbel

The only thing that got Mischa out of bed in the morning was the lure of gold. That, and the intrusive beeps coming from whichever app wanted her attention.

Today the beeps were telling her to water Josh's potato crop. Mischa groaned and forced her body out of bed. She reached for her phone, eyes still half-closed, and checked her stats as she walked to the wall computer.

The stats were bad. Five animals had visited overnight: four commons and one uncommon. Three cats, a rabbit and a sheep; that was only six gold. It wasn't nearly enough. If there had only been one bird Mischa might have felt better. Any bird, even a common, was better than another bloody cat.

She squinted at the tablet on the wall. A grinning potato bounced up and down on the screen. A speech bubble said, 'Water me!' Mischa scowled at the potato and pressed the screen so that the beeping stopped. She had ten minutes to water the crop before the potato started hassling her again.

Mischa pressed the button to open the privacy screen that covered the apartment windows. She had long ago given up on looking decent for her neighbours. She barely saw them anyway. Occasionally the woman opposite would appear in her courtyard. Her thing was cactus plants, a good collecting choice for those who were away from home a lot. The man on the left never raised his screen and his courtyard was overgrown with weeds. The right apartment had once been the home of a prolific farmer, a man who grew fruit trees and other expensive plants in every available square

of courtyard. Josh had been obsessed with the man's collection, constantly giving Mischa updates on how the plants were growing. She had secretly been pleased when the man suddenly sold everything and disappeared overnight. Nobody else had moved in.

Mischa grimaced as the screen rose upwards and sunlight washed over the room, exposing the bed, the table covered in detritus, the kitchenette piled with dishes and takeaway containers. She scanned the courtyard beyond the window. Two cats were still there. One sat on top of the cat tower, washing its leg; the other was curled up, asleep, on a cushion. A small amount of all-purpose animal chow was left in the nearest food bowl. In the bird feeder Mischa could see a handful of birdseed. The food she had out wasn't good enough to attract the best animals. Mischa needed to invest in a better product if she wanted a better collection. Birds were particularly difficult to lure without quality food, but the best bird seed cost at least five gold a bag.

And then, a little jolt of pleasure: in the far corner, on top of the umbrella that had taken Mischa a month to save for, sat a colourful bird. Mischa's stomach gave a little squirm of excitement. *A bird of paradise!* But a moment later the excitement was gone: looking closer, she realised it wasn't a bird of paradise, but merely a parrot of some sort. She looked at the wall computer for more information: an uncommon scarlet macaw. Mischa closed her eyes, willing the disappointment away.

She filled the watering can at the kitchen sink, silently cursing Josh for losing their hose privileges. The macaw watched her as she stepped out into the courtyard and headed to the little square of potato plants. Water dribbled haphazardly from the watering can's spout as Mischa held it over the crop. *Damn.* The plants were surrounded by small weeds. Mischa checked the price of weed killer

on the vending machine. Only a couple of silver. Josh would have a meltdown if this crop died. She placed an order for a spray bottle of weed killer, which had ten uses. After a few seconds she heard a loud clunk in the vending machine as the spray bottle was delivered.

She sprayed and watered the potatoes, and tended to Josh's other crops. If only Josh wasn't so resistant to immersion, he could make himself a permanent part of MyOrchard and make some extra money. He could at least do some temporary immersions. But Josh always focused on the horror stories, those of addiction and obsession. Mischa didn't understand him. So what if someone was so dedicated to collecting cats that they immersed themselves fully into CatClub? If that's what they wanted, well, so be it. Both temporary and permanent immersions were a completely legitimate way of collecting and of making money. Mischa knew a woman, a high school classmate, who now made a living from photographing her rare pet collection and sharing the photos online. Anyone could do it.

Her phone buzzed with a message from Josh. *Working til 11. Did you water the potatoes?* Mischa gritted her teeth. She gave herself a few moments to compose a polite response. Josh couldn't help himself: it was like a tic, this need of his to check that she was maintaining his crops. All because of one measly tomato plant that she had forgotten to water. The plant had only been worth a few silver, but Josh had reacted as though Mischa had intentionally slaughtered a rare crop.

They spent so much time arguing about money. Versions of the same argument—Josh wanting to buy a new plant, Mischa wanting a new animal—had been going on for months. Josh valued the steady income of crops; the certainty that, as long as you maintained them, they could be sold. The prices never changed: you knew that a box of potatoes would always make precisely one gold and

seventy-five silver. They couldn't afford to gamble, he said.

To a certain extent, Mischa knew he was right. But she also knew that if she could collect just one rare animal, everything would change. A rare sitting in their courtyard for just one day could generate hundreds, even thousands, of gold. She would take an imprint of it and its image would be forever in her collection for her to enjoy. She could share the image on one of the collecting sites and the pay-per-clicks would generate even more gold.

Mischa took out her phone and held up the camera. She lined the macaw up in the frame and clicked the button. The true appeal of permanent immersion in a collecting app was that it was all *real*. Every animal you caught was yours forever, not just as an imprint. You had your own house to keep your collection in, and your own garden to lure in even more creatures. Users always started with a base amount of quality food and furnishings to help capture and tempt the animals they wanted. Paying a monthly fee to the app ensured you would never be sitting around waiting for something to show up. And by sharing and selling your collection with other users as well as the outside world, you made a lot of gold.

Back inside the apartment, Mischa sat at the table with her computer. She pulled up the website that she had been obsessed with lately. The banner across the top of the page read, 'Infinity Immersions, Australia's leading immersive application provider.' Beneath the banner, a friendly-looking woman stood holding out a tablet computer to a young man and woman, both of whom looked delighted.

A box popped up in the corner of the screen. "Hi! Would you like to chat with one of our friendly customer care representatives?"

On a whim, Mischa touched 'yes'. The box grew so that it filled most of the screen, and a blonde woman appeared. She gave Mischa

a bright smile. “Hi! My name is Karen. How can I help you?”

“Um, hi.” Mischa lowered her voice despite being alone in the apartment. “I’m interested in immersion ...” She trailed off, feeling silly.

Karen didn’t seem fazed. “No problem,” she said. “Would you like me to go over the services we offer?”

“Ah, sure.”

Karen reeled off a list of applications created and maintained by Infinity Immersions. “Often people like to try a temporary immersive experience before committing to something more permanent,” Karen said. “Our most popular are temporary applications MyOrchard and CatClub. They are both available as permanent immersions for those who want to upgrade. You don’t even need to leave the app; if you decide you like it, the option of going permanent is available as an in-app purchase. This is now a very popular option. More people are choosing to upgrade rather than jump straight in to a full immersion. In the future our apps will have multiple levels of immersion, so that clients can work their way in at their own pace.”

Mischa looked out at the courtyard. “It all sounds great, but I have to admit I’m worried about how safe it is.”

Karen launched into a well-rehearsed response. “We guarantee the safety of anyone who correctly uses our temporary apps. We have systems in place to immediately extract clients from immersions should they request it. These extractions have no long-term effects.”

“What about full immersion?”

Again, Karen didn’t hesitate. “Infinity is one of the only companies that has had no app-related fatalities. That said, we cannot, of course, guarantee absolute safety for those who choose full immersion. Extractions from full immersions are possible, but

they carry inherent risks.” She smiled reassuringly at Mischa. Her teeth seemed incredibly large and white. “Our customers understand that the very small risk of injury is a fair exchange for the sheer earning potential these apps offer.”

Mischa thought of Josh. “I’m willing to take the risk.”

“Good on you.” Karen beamed. “I’m sure I can find the perfect app for you. Can you tell me what your dream immersion would be? Do you like cultivation and harvesting, or are you more of a collector?”

“Definitely a collector.” Mischa felt a warmth spread through her. *I am a collector.*

“Fantastic.” Karen looked genuinely excited. “We have so many wonderful collecting apps. I’m guessing you probably like animals? Maybe cats?”

Mischa could feel herself getting excited too. “I’m into animals, but not really cats. Actually, I like birds.”

“Oh, then you would just love Aviary. We’ve made it specifically for bird lovers. The landscapes are just gorgeous and there are so many amazing birds to collect. Would you like to try it?”

Mischa realised she was grinning. “Yeah.”

“I can sign you up for a two-hour free trial.” Karen was looking down now, her fingers tapping away at a keyboard. “After two hours, you can either leave or you can pay to stay on. I’ll just get some details from you, then I’ll send you your welcome package via email, and you’ll be all ready to go.”

Ten minutes later Mischa sat reading the email from Karen. It contained screenshots of Aviary: a tropical jungle, complete with waterfalls. Mischa’s heart beat faster as she noticed a large bird of paradise sitting on the branch of a tree. No doubt Karen had placed it there specifically for her. Infinity Immersions would

have scanned her computer and would know how many internet searches she had done for the bird of paradise.

The immersion process seemed straightforward. No need to tell Josh what she was doing. It would only cause a fight. She watered Josh's plants and put out the last of her pet food. Getting into bed, she logged into the Aviary app on her phone. She put her earphones in. The phone lit up with images of birds: they swooped in and out of the screen, calling in different voices. A shot dissolved into view of a waterfall and a woman's voice began to speak.

"Welcome to Aviary. Please make sure your headphones are comfortably and securely inserted. Your immersion process will begin once you have reached a deep enough level of sleep." A box popped up: did Mischa want to listen to soothing rainforest music as she went to sleep? She selected 'yes' and settled back against her pillow, her phone in her hand. She breathed in and out as deeply as possible.

A harsh screech woke her. Mischa's body jerked. She automatically reached for her phone, then realised that she was already holding it. After a couple of moments, her brain registered that she was in a foreign bed. She sat up quickly. The bed she lay on was in a small room. It seemed to be a wooden cabin: other than the bed, there was a table and chair, and a sink in the corner. There were no windows, just a door on the far side of the room.

Mischa crossed to the door and opened it. At first, she could see no birds. There was nothing but the jungle, hot and thick. And then, there it was. A bird of paradise. It sat quietly on the branch of a tree a few metres away. It seemed to be looking at her, waiting. *Of course it's waiting. It exists for me to collect it.*

Slowly, Mischa held up her phone, framing the bird within her camera screen. She clicked the button, and what looked like a net

materialised in the air. The net swiftly wrapped itself around the bird, pulling it off its branch. The bird shrieked as it fell, its wings tangled in the net. As the bird hit the ground, the net vanished, and in its place was a small cage, barely big enough for the bird to fit inside. Its long tail protruded through the bars.

Mischa's heart thudded. The bird continued to shriek, and then, to Mischa's horror, it started to throw itself against the bars of the cage. Mischa couldn't bear to watch. She rushed forward and crouched down. The bird didn't seem to notice her. It continued to cry out and press against the bars, its beak stabbing through one of the holes. Mischa scanned the cage's exterior until she found a latch and pulled it, yanking open the door. The bird shot out instantly, still crying. Mischa watched as it disappeared into the trees, its voice gradually fading.

She collapsed on the ground, trembling and shocked. Had she hurt the bird? Would it be okay? Around her, the heat of the jungle seemed to make the air throb. Mischa glimpsed something through the trees: another building. She pushed her way through vines and leaves until she came to a small clearing. In the centre was a basic wooden hut. As she looked at it, her eyes seemed to lose focus. She blinked rapidly. It wasn't her eyes, but the building itself. It seemed to be shuddering.

As Mischa approached the hut it continued to shimmer faintly. As she reached for the door she almost expected her hand to go straight through it. But no: her hand gripped the doorknob, and although it kept shuddering, she was able to open the door. The stench of dust and mould hit her and she coughed. Light from the open doorway fanned across the space, illuminating the walls. The hut was just one small room, but it was full.

Every wall was covered in crates and cages. They were stacked

floor to ceiling, one on top of the other, some at odd angles. There were cages on the floor, doors hanging open. And everywhere—in the crates, in the cages, strewn across the floor—were bones. Tiny bones: delicate rib cages; long, slim femurs, miniature craniums with empty eye sockets and pointed beaks. Everywhere Mischa looked were the remains of birds, hundreds of birds. A skull lying on top of a nearby crate looked prehistoric, like the skull of a pterodactyl. Mischa could almost believe that this was an ancient site, that what she was looking at were the remains of dinosaurs, of creatures beyond her time. A closer look, however, told her that these bones hadn't been there for very long at all.

Each cage had a label on it. Mischa peered at those nearest to her. 'MadMum61'. 'LuvBirdz'. They were usernames. These had been people's collections, people who had used the app but then abandoned it. When they left, the birds remained, trapped in their cages until they died.

Mischa gripped the door frame and took a step backwards. Bones crunched beneath her foot. Feathers swirled in the dust. She stumbled outside, attempting to breathe in the muggy air. What had she expected? Just because it was in an app didn't mean it wasn't real. The birds here may have been programmed into existence, but they were still very much alive.

Around her, the jungle was shimmering in the same manner as the hut. A nearby tree flickered on and off like a faulty lamp. *How could they let people in when they haven't worked out the kinks?* The odd movements everywhere made Mischa feel nauseous.

She crouched down and looked at her phone, searching for the extraction option within the Aviary app. She scrolled and tapped, unable to find what she was looking for. Anxiety began to grip her chest. Finally, Mischa opened up the 'settings' option within

the app and saw something she'd missed. Beneath the option to upgrade was a small sentence: "You must purchase a full immersion in order to request an extraction."

Beneath Mischa's feet, the grass wobbled. She lost her balance and fell forward onto her knees. A clump of bushes nearby vanished. Looking at her phone, Mischa navigated back to the app's home page. A cartoon bird opened its beak and squawked at her, "Would you like to purchase a full immersion?" Mischa pressed her finger against 'yes'.

A COLOUR OF LOSS

Freya Cox

I named you Bai, meaning *White*, because that was the colour of the sky you were born under. A colour of mourning. A colour of loss. The clouds blanketed the sky, only allowing a weak trickle of sunlight through. I squatted on the ground, behind the rice paddies, out of sight of the village that curved around the edge of the fields. My fingers dug into the wet dirt in front of my toes, my thighs strained.

I gritted my teeth, holding in the agonised cries that threatened to burst out of me. My jaw ached where it was clenched tight. Blood slid down my thighs and stained the dirt black.

I hunched for hours behind the fields, watching tiny people bob through the rows of rice, conical hats of dry grass strapped to their heads. A crow flapped across the sky in front of me, its dark wings a bad omen.

When you finally came, I cupped my hands beneath me and felt you slip into my waiting palms, filling them with your warm, damp weight. I held your wrinkled, bloody body to my breast, marvelling at the life I held in my hands.

Your nose was the size of my thumbnail and as soft as a petal of the lotus flowers that grow in the pond next to our house. Your tiny eyelids were like two halves of velvet bean pods, sheltering your eyes from the cruelties of this world. Your crumpled mouth opened just a slit to take in the morning air, exposing your waving, pink tongue.

You started to cry, mewling whimpers at first, then your face scrunched up and you wailed to the sky. I cried with you, tears streaming down my face.

I was married to Zhang Wei when I was sixteen. His village was a morning's walk from mine, and my father had met him and agreed to the match when they were both at the autumn market.

On our wedding day I wore a new red dress, the most expensive garment I'd ever owned. The fabric scratched, but I felt like a princess. I was excited right up until the moment I had to say goodbye to my mother. Then it hit me I was leaving home forever and I sobbed, suddenly nothing more than a scared child.

I moved into the house Zhang shared with his elderly mother. It was built from earthen bricks, with a thatched roof that needed mending each summer. There were three rooms, one that Zhang and I slept in, lying together on woven mats, one for his mother, and a cooking room where I spent most of my time.

It wasn't a bad marriage. Zhang worked in the fields during the day, coming home in the evening to shovel up the rice I had cooked for dinner.

He was quietly pleased when I announced I was pregnant. He sipped his tea from a clay cup, sitting on a wooden stool, and nodded. "Good. It will be a boy."

I placed my hands upon my stomach, feeling the slight bulge that would become you, and prayed that he was right.

One of our neighbours had been pregnant during winter, when food was scarce. Her family had been struggling to make ends meet, and a baby would be an extra strain on the family. If the child was a boy all would be well. A boy will help bring in food, and bring a wife to care for you in your old age. Girls only take. Take food, and then money for a dowry, leaving you alone as your body grows weak and your eyesight fails.

We heard the woman's screams tearing open the night as she gave birth. There was never any sign of a baby though.

When I got up to go to the toilet in the night I saw her husband carrying a small bundle outside. There was a large wooden bucket next to their back door, where they kept water. In the morning, tiny fine black hairs floated in it and there was a smear of blood upon the rim.

The woman never seemed quite right after that, a haunted look in her eyes.

The first time I saw you was in a dream. You danced through my mind. A child already, running on chubby legs. I loved you so much. But a black crow flapped in the corner of my dream, casting a shadow where you played. When I woke I was filled with fear. Lying next to Zhang, feeling the heat radiating from his body, I stared into the dark, my heart racing.

When I felt the pains start and knew my time had come, I told my mother-in-law I was going to visit my mother in her village. "Don't wait up," I said. "I will be gone late."

"You shouldn't go, not in your condition." My mother-in-law frowned at me.

"I feel fine. Don't worry. I will see you tomorrow morning." I feared she would stop me, but she let me leave.

I walked in the direction of my family's village, before staggering off the path and finding a secluded spot behind the fields. There I gave birth, alone beneath a wide, white sky. The crow perched on a tree branch across the field and cawed at me.

Then I did something I had hoped I would never have to do.

When I was done, the day had slipped away. I went back to the house. It was dark now, my husband in bed. I stuffed some rags between my legs to stem the bleeding and crawled into bed.

Unable to sleep, I recited a poem to myself that my grandfather had taught to me.

*The thread in the hands of a fond-hearted mother
Makes clothes for the body of her wayward boy;
Carefully she sews and thoroughly she mends,
Dreading the delays that will keep him late from home.
But how much love has the inch-long grass.
For three spring months of the light of the sun?*

The ancient poem speaks of the strength of a mother's love. It is a timeless thing. That's when I realised that this hollow, leaden ache in my chest, the feeling that part of me is missing, would never leave me.

I woke up with the sun and walked out into the cooking room, where my mother-in-law was already lighting a fire to boil water for breakfast. She looked up when I came in. "How was your visit to your village?"

Before I could answer, her eyes latched onto the bloody rags clutched in my hand and she blanched.

"I didn't make it to the village," I said. My free hand rested on my belly, still swollen from carrying you, but now empty and sagging.

In an instant she was on her feet, grabbing my wrist. Her claw-like fingers dug into my skin.

"Where is the baby?"

Zhang came into the room, yawning sleepily. "You have delivered already? Where is my son?"

"I miscarried on the way to the village," I whispered. "It was a boy. I buried him outside our house."

"Why would you not keep him for me to see?" he roared, suddenly awake, his eyes blazing with anger.

"He was not right," I said softly. "Not formed properly. It was best to bury him before the neighbours saw."

I took them both behind the house, and showed them a dug-up plot of earth underneath a tree with low hanging branches.

“I buried him here.”

Zhang knelt in the dirt, and prayed over the grave of his son. He bent his head and asked his ancestors to protect our child, not knowing he knelt above nothing but dirt and earthworms.

After I held you in my arms I paid a man who was travelling to the city to take you with him. He promised to deliver you to an orphanage.

I remembered the dream I'd had, the dream that had seemed so clear it was almost a vision. The dream that had set in me a fear of things to come, and made me realise I could not give birth in this house.

In that dream you twirled in the grass. Your little feet were bare, a red skirt swung around your knees, and your long dark hair swished over your shoulders. A sight I would never be able to see in this life.

You could not stay with me, my heart, my life, my daughter.

FORECAST

Audrey Di Martino

Third night in a week he's woken up early. Unintended. She's still asleep, beside him. She won't wake up for another hour or so. A few more hours' worth of sleep wouldn't be any harm. He might need that.

... In fact, yes. Yes. He definitely needs that.

But tonight will be another late night, tomorrow will be another early morning, the day after that, the same, the same again, the same once more. Repeat.

Now that he's awake, there's no chance he'll go back to sleep. Now he's awake, he'll have to get up, up out of bed, get dressed, do his hair, eat breakfast, brush his teeth, because there's no chance he'll go back to sleep. Up, up, out of bed, away from sleep, away from warmth—what's the weather going to be like today, he wonders? Probably cold, like yesterday, and the day before that—and even though it's two hours before he's supposed to get up, he can't go back to sleep.

His jeans feel looser today. He checks the waistband. No, they're the same size as every other day. No change there. Perhaps a belt might fix things, he supposes. He goes to the wardrobe to fetch a belt, a brown one, it'll go nicely with his denim jeans. Hold on, jeans. Jeans. He doesn't wear jeans. Not to work. Not on any weekday. And it's a Wednesday, a work day. Of course the jeans feel odd. Of course, he was just confused, it's the sleep he's missing, his head's all over the place. On a better day, he would have remembered to put on his suit pants, then his shirt—do up the buttons—then the tie, then the jacket, don't forget the socks or the shoes. He

does exactly that now, although he might have fished out a pair of mismatched socks, but in the barely lit room, he can't tell.

Breakfast is eggs on toast, scrambled, with a little salt and pepper; no tea, the kettle would have woken her up. It wouldn't be enough to wake him up, though, but tea would be warm. Warm is good. The weather is going to be cold today, the forecast declares. Lucky he remembered to put on his jacket. Is it going to rain, he wonders; should he take his umbrella with him? Overcast, the meteorologist says. Overcast, no rain, but cold, no sun. No sun for another week, he says.

You look tired, he's told, within five minutes of having arrived at work. You look really tired. Did you get enough sleep last night? Tried to, he answers. Tried to. What happened, they ask; neighbours being noisy again? That's what he told them last time. Maybe the neighbours were noisy. It's not impossible. They wouldn't know if the neighbours had been noisy or not. They won't care, past a minute into this conversation. Their neighbours aren't noisy, their houses aren't noisy, there's no constant dripping of taps or cracking of walls, they've had their full night's worth of sleep. Yes, he answers, the neighbours were noisy, very noisy, they're always noisy, it is hard to get sleep with such noisy neighbours. That's a shame, they tell him. They don't say any more.

She calls him, at lunchtime. Worried, she says. I'm worried. You weren't here when I woke up. Did you run away, did you leave me? No, he says. No, I'm still here. I'm at work, it's almost the end of the day, I'll be home soon. He hears her sigh on the other end. Do you have insomnia, she asks? He shakes his head, then realises that she can't see that. No, he says. There's a pause on her end. Are you cheating on me? I'm not, he replies. Of course I'm not. I love you. I wouldn't do that to you. She sighs again. Thank god, she

breathes, okay, I'll see you tonight. I love you. I love you, too.

How was your day, she asks him, as he steps inside the house and hangs his coat on the rack. All right, he answers, leaning over to kiss her cheek, it was all right. She smiles up at him, a little wistfully, a little sadly. You don't look all right, she notes, as she reaches over to brush the light dandruff off his shoulder. He opens his mouth to let out an empty chuckle, barely smiling. I'm all right, he says, to reassure her. Don't read too much into it. I'm all right.

Well, she says, I just got home, no time to cook, do you want to order something? He nods, hardly paying attention, suddenly more fascinated by the loose thread on the carpet underneath the coffee table. A loose thread. A skip in the pattern. Unravelling. They should probably get that fixed, he thinks. Probably.

Hey, she says, I asked you something, are you ignoring me? He looks up at her, one hand firmly on her hip, her eyebrows drawn into a neat raise. She blinks. Hey, are you sure you're all right, she asks. Yes, yes, I'm fine, he says. The carpet's unravelling, he thinks. He asks her, what did you ask me? What you wanted for dinner, she says, I didn't cook, we'll have to order something.

That's fine, what about Chinese, he suggests. She smiles faintly. I'd love that, she admits, her hands falling back to her sides, I'll call them now. I can pick it up, he offers. Do you want me to come with you, she asks. He tries a smile. If you like, he says.

She goes to their room to get dressed, out of her pantsuit, probably into some jeans and perhaps even one of her t-shirts. Or maybe one of his. She wears his, sometimes—or maybe, all the time; he can't tell whose is whose anymore, maybe she's been wearing his for the entire year, and he's been wearing hers. He can't tell.

He doesn't forget about the carpet, leaning down now to gently tug at the loose thread. A stitch comes undone. He's vaguely aware

that his hands are trembling now, the thin white string now tight between his index finger and thumb. How did the carpet get like this, he wonders. They don't have children. They don't walk on it. The coffee table sits squarely in the middle, a round, circular table, squarely in the middle. Nobody ever steps on the carpet. How did it get like this? It doesn't deserve such an imperfection.

It shouldn't be bothering him this much.

He'll fix it after dinner, he decides. He'll think about it then. Right now, he should be thinking about her, about what she'll wear, about whether or not they'll have soya sauce or sweet chilli sauce with their snow peas.

The thread is loose.

He'll fix it after dinner. Leave him alone. He'll do it eventually. He sighs, thinking about clothes and sauce and snow peas, and not the strand of white poking out from the edge of the carpet.

Very loose.

After dinner. After. Not now. It shouldn't be bothering him this much. He'll do it after.

Very, very l—

She reappears, in sweatpants and a grey t-shirt. Is that his t-shirt? He can't be sure. It doesn't matter. It looks very nice on her, either way. If it is his, she can have it. Is that yours, he asks her. She gives him a confused look. Yes, she says, you bought it for me for my birthday. Oh, he sighs, trying to smile again. It looks very nice on you, he says. She beams. Thank you, it's one of my favourites, she says, taking his hand, taking him to the car.

Wait! he hisses, his hand trembling a little. She turns around. What is it, she asks him. Is something wrong? Did you forget something? His veins pulse lowly in his palm. No, he whispers, not that, you can't wear that shirt. She furrows her eyebrows. Why not?

The thread's coming undone, he says.

She turns around, looks at him. Where, she asks. Your shoulder, he answers. She turns her head to her left shoulder. This one? No, he says, the other one. She turns the other way. I don't see anything, she says.

It's there, he says, you can't wear that, we need to fix it! He pulls on the shoulder. Ow, she exclaims, stop, you're going to ruin it! No, he says, no, we're going to fix it, we have to fix it ...

She bats his hand away. Stop that, will you, she asks. There's nothing there. Stop that! What is wrong with you today?

He pulls his hands back down to his sides, still feels the blood racing through them. Sorry, he says. Sorry, you were right, there's nothing wrong with it. What is wrong with you, she asks, under her breath. You need to sleep more. You're imagining things.

Yes, he answers, dazed, that's probably it. Tell you what, we should get some sleeping pills on the way home, he suggests. Her shoulders relax. That might help, she says. I've heard good things about those.

The trip to the takeaway store is a short one, but she makes it feel longer, she's always talking; about things at work, things at home, things on the road. They stop at the traffic light. She points at the group of people that pass by the street. Look at them, she talks, they look so happy. He looks at them. They're dressed up, not in formal wear, but in costumes, bright, strange costumes. They're going to a party I think, she says. They look so happy.

When they get to the takeaway shop, the party of people are there, too. She's excited. Oh! she exclaims, you all look fantastic, what are your costumes for? One of the party grins. Movie premiere, they tell her. She smiles, that's so exciting, she says, I've always wanted to go to one of those.

He goes to get the food. She keeps talking to them.

He has the food. I'll see you later, she waves, as he takes her hand and they leave the store. No she won't, he thinks, she doesn't even know their names, there's no chance she'll see them again.

Where are you going, he asks her, as she pulls over to the shopping centre on the drive home. Your pills, she reminds him, your sleeping pills. You want to sleep tonight, don't you? Of course, he says, I've been so tired lately. She chuckles. I'm surprised you forgot, she says, it was your idea.

The pills come in a small brown bottle, a thick white cap around the neck. Take three an hour after dinner each day, the bottle reads. He stares into the brown glass. The tablets are large. Three is a lot. Can he take that many?

When they get home, their takeaway is lukewarm, would have been hotter if they hadn't stopped for the tablets. They eat together, with the television blaring quietly in the background. Regretfully, she pokes at her snow peas, thoroughly drenched in soya sauce and sweet chilli sauce. They're cold, she says, sighing, do you want them? I suppose, he says, twirling a noodle around his plastic fork. If you don't want them, I suppose I'll have them.

They drink tea in front of the television after dinner, and that is warm. Warm is good. They're watching the news. Overcast tomorrow, the forecast declares. No rain, but cold, no sun. What a shame, she says, I was going to go to the beach tomorrow. He doesn't say anything. Of course it's overcast. He's used to it.

She goes to bed after that. Don't stay up too late, she tells him before she goes, and don't forget to take your sleeping pills, you need to sleep tonight, all right? Yes, all right, he says, I'll sleep just fine, I won't forget to take them. She smiles. Good, she says, I'll see you in the morning, and then she kisses him on the cheek, and then she goes to bed.

He stands in the kitchen, opening the bottle of sleeping pills. The pills are large. He takes two, swallowing them in one gulp, with a glass of water. He takes the third, finishing off the glass of water. Take three an hour after dinner each day. He can feel them sinking down his throat.

Will tonight will be another late night, will tomorrow be another early morning, the day after that, the same, the same again, the same once more?

He goes to cap the bottle, then stays his hand, staring down into the neck at the green pills.

Is three a lot?

The pills are large. The pills stare back at him. There are so many in the bottle. So many.

Is three enough?

IN THE NEW LAND

Caroline Miley

The tars flicked their oars upright in a shower of spray as the longboat surged into the shore and two of them sprang into the surf with ropes in their hands. Sergeant Edgcombe called out to us and we clambered after them, up to the ballocks in brine, holding our flintlocks and pouches over our heads to keep the powder dry. Stumbling on the uneven bottom and hampered with weed we got onto dry land and took up our positions so that Captain might step ashore in safety. By Gaw it was good to have land underfoot again, although my knees seemed feeble and the sand tilting. A flock of great white pigeons wheeled over us making a noise like a creaking wain; but when they settled on a tree nearby I saw they flaunted yellow crests. I wondered if they made good eating and thought I would take my musket to them after the ceremony was finished, for I was sick to the gizzards of salt junk and biscuit. I'd only joined because the beak said it was that or Newgate so of course I said I was for the service. They never found Hackett's body so they couldn't say I'd done for him, but he ruined my life anyway with what he did with my Mary Anne and it was all his fault that I was here instead of tucked up warm at home.

As we got on shore some of the black savages we'd seen waving their spears at us from the headlands came up, and Sergeant ordered us to make ready to fire on them if they got too close. We formed up, but they stayed off a little and we held our fire, although I made sure I had my piece well cocked. Some of them were women as I saw by their bare breasts, and some clutching babbies to them. Sure the men would not attack while they had their babbies and

womenfolk with them, but they looked fierce enough.

Carpenter and his mates had got a spar that was the old main topmast that split in the storm, and they were setting it up digging a hole in the sand where it went to earth. They put rocks at the bottom to hold it and rigged up a line and block to the top so they could raise the flag. Meanwhile Captain was talking to Lieutenant Hicks and we were let to stand easy and wander about a bit while a squad still kept a sharp eye on the natives. I knew what was coming, for we had done it all before. Captain liked to 'take possession' as he called it, wherever he landed, since it was a new land. Lieutenant Hicks told us once it was so the Frenchies wouldn't get it, which seemed right to me. A man should lay firm hold on what he claimed for his own.

I gave my piece to Webb to hold and got a bit of furze-like bush and brushed down my coat and hat and then held his while he did the same. We looked dashing enough, his Majesty's Royal Marines in our red coats and white belts that Sergeant had us cleaning this morning with a bit of pipeclay he'd saved. For certain this place had never seen anything so smart before. My knees strengthened with the walking about and the air smelled good, the smell of leaves and trees and earth reminded me of home but there was a whiff about it that was sharp and different. The white birds had flown off but I spotted some others, brown and some pink and grey and big as rooks. There was a lot of forest in the hills behind and although there was no pasture I thought there would be plenty of animals in the forest to eat and it looked rich enough. There were dozens of the big grey beasts about that we had seen before, like to a deer but with great long tails and bounding away like a huge coney on their hinder legs when we approached. I could bring them down easy with my musket and they would make good eating, and their skins for coats.

When Carpenter had finished fooling about with the spar and young Mr Bootie had bent the flag on we'd all line up next to it and Captain would step up and raise his hand. *In the Name of His Majesty King George the Third, I hereby take possession of the whole Eastern Coast by the name of New South Wales, together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast.* I always liked the sound of that. He wasn't a bad fellow, the Captain, and he got us plenty to eat when we was on shore if he could, and was not too stingy with the rum. Then we would fire three volleys, and the ship would fire from the big guns on the main deck, and the thunder and smoke would roll out over the water and Lieutenant Hicks would say *Three cheers for the Captain, boys*, and we'd all throw up our hats and cheer. And there'd be an extra tot when we got on board again.

This land would be a good place to stop, once people had come and made a settlement. It'd be just tents and that to start with, and then buildings and clearing some pasture. Maybe the blacks could be put to work, although Captain said we wasn't to molest them. There was a big-breasted one standing by the side of the crowd on the hill that I wouldn't mind molesting. By Gaw it had been a long time since I'd seen so much of a woman and all of us were staring at them until Sergeant came and told us to get away.

I scratched a bit in the earth and began to fancy that I, too, took possession of this new land. I would form a colony, consisting of myself and some nice young piece if I could lay my hands upon one, and I'd leave the service and find a new life. It was all right being a marine but I wasn't bred to it and I'd seen enough of the sea to last me all my life.

But there was no need to be thinking about all that now, it was over and done and maybe I could make a new start. And next thing little Tommy Rossiter was heaving up the big drum and beating

the Assembly so we could all help Captain claim the new land. He wasn't a big man but well-looking and very dignified in his blue coat with the gold buttons. He gave Bootie the signal and the King's jack unfurled and fluttered up the mast and Tommy beat a ruffle. At the sound of the drum all the birds flew up in a cloud screaming and the blacks, who were standing by with their spears in their hands, all jumped and the women crouched behind them and the babbies squalled, and we all laughed. We knew what we were waiting for, now all was ready, the fellows from the other ship, which was standing out into the bay to cover our landing, so it was a long haul for the tars at the oars.

Now the longboat was pulling up on shore from the other ship, and when it was well on land some of the gentry stepped out, Parson and one of those artist fellows and his servant to hold his box of paints. I looked round at them for it was a treat to see a new face after near two years at sea with the same old mugs day in day out, and I thought the servant looked something familiar. There was a woman with them too holding Parson's coat and by Gaw it was my Mary Anne who I hadn't seen since the trouble that brought me here. And while I stared at her completely mazed (her not seeing me, busy as she were with Parson's things) I saw that the servant fellow was none other than that bastard Hackett who I thought I had killed when he ran off with her and it landed me in the jug. I couldn't take it in, here he was trespassing in my new land as large as life and laughing with her. He wasn't dead after all, he was here instead, the bugger, and I couldn't have that after all he'd done to me, and I could hear Captain saying his words and Sergeant called out *Fire!*, so I lifted my musket and shot him fair and square.

ONE HUNDRED STROKES

Chris Childs

The old woman looks back at me, through her weary, wrinkled eyes, her silver-grey hair lopsidedly falling out of its pinned bun. I sigh and start removing the pins. An evening chore performed thousands of times, at this very dressing table. I look at the familiar objects, as if seeing them for the first time. I run my finger over the silver backed hairbrush, tracing the ubiquitous thistle design. Then I gently lift the empty glass bottle to my nose and sniff. Its sweet perfume still lingers. Next, I lovingly caress the tortoiseshell frame displaying an old daguerreotype of a young buck in his thirties, my beloved Andrew.

A gilded candlestick, with flickering flame casts shadows and an eerie glow, across my familiar, eighty-year old face. I pick up my brush and begin the next stage of the ritual.

One. Two. Three.

Steel myself for the effort. Just me, today, I think. I am completely alone. I allow a moment of uncharacteristic self-pity. Eight children, seventeen grandchildren and a house full of servants, but today I am the only soul in this huge mausoleum. Five living children, I correct myself. One baby, another child of six and my first son, Robert, named for his father and grandfather, died eight years ago. He was only forty-six.

Four. Five. Six.

My mother was the first to brush my hair. She'd make me sit straight as a ramrod, while she pulled and tugged at my chestnut waves, often starting with impatience, using the moment to lecture me on various childish misdemeanors, but then she'd lose herself

to the rhythm and start to sing softly, Scottish ballads of yearning and love lost. So many years ago, yet I can hear her lilting voice as though it were yesterday. So many years ago, the old queen hadn't come to the throne yet, and she the longest serving monarch, now seven years departed. I don't have many regrets, but I wish my mother could have visited Australia to see how well her daughter lived.

Seven. Eight. Nine.

Of course, the early days in the colony were quite harsh: the heat, the flies, the relentless dust. I think that if Mother had known how rough it was she would have demanded that Andrew bring me back on the first available steamer. My parents had been very reluctant to let me leave Scotland to go half way around the world with one of my eccentric cousins. They refused the first offer from Thomas.

Ten. Eleven. Twelve. I tug hard on my hair as I cringe with embarrassment, nearly sixty years later.

I was initially flattered by the amorous attentions of my older first cousin, recently arrived from several years farming in Australia. I was still several years off attaining my majority, but Thomas was already approaching thirty. He was brooding and intense, deeply religious and he spoke like a zealot when he described his future plans for life in the colony. I was mesmerized, but a little bit frightened of him. He left for Australia, sad and dejected, but would soon find a more suitable colonial match, I thought. How wrong I was. Thomas, I thought your affection for me would be a fleeting thing, but your love didn't waver over forty years.

Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen.

Several years after I rejected Thomas, his brother, Andrew,

returned to Scotland. By then my parents had lost confidence that a suitable local husband would be found. Business was booming in the colony and my cousins were now considered to be serious marriage prospects. I warmed to the gentle, more sociable, younger brother. At first he seemed to be intent on pleading his brother's case, but gradually this shifted as we found how much we enjoyed each other's company. My cheeks flush hot at the memory.

Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen.

We were married in July 1850 at my home in Scotland. Andrew appeared in no hurry to return to Australia. There was always another horse to buy or flock of sheep to investigate. "Better to wait until the gold fever has died down in the colony", he said. "It's not safe to travel yet". He seemed to be stalling for time. I didn't complain. Those early, married years in Scotland were among my happiest. I gasp out loud as I see his reflection in the mirror as he brushes my curls until they gleam, my strong, handsome husband.

Nineteen. Twenty. The hairbrush slowly glides down my, now silver, hair.

By the time we arrived in Port Phillip Bay, on the *Admiral*, it was late 1852. Baby Margaret was fifteen months old and I knew there was already a second on the way. Robert was our first Australian-born child. Those early days are all mixed up in my mind now; numerous bluestone cottages on sheep runs across Western Victoria, hazardous journeys by carriage, the fear of bushrangers, Andrew riding on ahead, with shot gun at the ready. A new baby every couple of years; the two little ones that didn't make it. I put the hairbrush down on the dresser, as my eyes fill with salty tears.

At first I was petrified of the local aborigines, but quickly learned that they meant us no harm. Thomas and Andrew had a reputation for fair and generous treatment. We co-existed with the natives

in relative harmony, compared with some of the other settlers. The aborigines weren't our enemy. The colonial land office was. Thomas was constantly battling to obtain more and more land, so that there was a clear pathway to drive livestock, between all the properties. His appetite for land knew no limits. He fought long and hard and always won. Almost always, I reflect, the irony not lost on me.

Thirty. Thirty-one. Thirty-two. I speed up the pace. At this rate it'll be morning before I finish.

Thomas. At first, it was awkward for both of us. I wasn't sure how you would react to my presence in your colonial home. You set out to demonstrate your approval of my marriage to your younger brother, with ever increasing deeds, if not words. Nothing was good enough for me, your sister-in-law. You built bigger and more elaborate homes for our growing family, whilst living frugally yourself in a modest blue stone hut. You kept your distance, but never too far away should help be needed. You didn't stop until I was established as Lady of the most magnificent mansion in the colony. It was an all-consuming project. Some would say, obsession. Yes, it was an obsession, Thomas.

Forty-five. Forty-six. Forty-seven.

What a mansion it was. It continues to be. I'm still intimidated by its acres of manicured grounds and imposing façade. They were such gay times; parties, picnics and gala balls. Hard to imagine now in the dead of night when the only sound is the wind whistling through the Norfolk Island pines. Thomas released some of his land for the building of the railway line, on the condition that a station was built at Werribee. This enabled hundreds of society people to come from Melbourne for the hunting parties and grand balls, by train and then transported to Werribee Park via a fleet of horse-drawn carriages.

Music, champagne, ice cream, fireworks; nothing was spared for our guests. Each event was more spectacular than the last.

Fifty-nine. Sixty.

My favourite social event was the annual picnic for the local tenants. What a show we put on. Everyone would cheer when Thomas rode up on his white mare. He really was the Laird of the manor. There were jugglers and magicians and roving minstrels. The local children competed in sack and three legged races for bags of sweets. Trestle tables groaned under the weight of sandwiches and cakes. Things got out-of-hand one year, with far too many people pushing and shoving to get at the food. They turned into an ugly mob; tables were overturned, children were squashed under foot. It was very frightening. After that we limited numbers and stuck to a strict invitation-only approach.

Seventy-one. Seventy-two.

It wasn't the house or balls or picnics that gave me the greatest pleasure. At heart I think I remained a simple Scottish lass. The men had their hunting and riding, but I was happy rambling over the coastal sands at Point Cook picking up seashells, my children in tow. I amassed a huge collection of shells so was delighted when Thomas suggested we build a folly on an artificial lake. As always his plans were extensive and elaborate. The central feature, however, was a little grotto impregnated with my shell collection and other special objects, including my younger bairns' baby teeth. How I loved to sit in the cool grotto in the heat of summer, with a glass of lemonade and a good book. That, to me, was luxury.

Eighty-four. Eighty-five. The end is in sight now. I need to wind up my reminiscences, or I'll never sleep.

Dear Thomas, for all of your success and endeavours you seemed to take little pleasure for yourself. Andrew and I became

concerned for your welfare as you became increasingly unsettled and withdrawn in later years. I'm pleased we insisted you move into the house, where we could keep a closer eye on you. You became convinced you were losing your fortune and there would be nothing left. We all tried to reassure you that your thoughts were misguided, but no one could get through to you. Only two days after the Queen Victoria's Jubilee ball, at Government House, you took your own life. I can still hear the gun shot echo through the park. Andrew was inconsolable.

Ninety-three. Ninety-four.

Less than three years' later my beloved husband died. I thought my heart would break, but I was determined to set a good example and soldier on, unlike our late Queen, whose grief consumed decades of her own and her children's lives. Nearly eighteen years ago and so many things have happened since then, bad and good. I think of my first son's death at the turn of the century and then cheer myself up with memories of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York's visit and John Percy's telegram from King Edward the Seventh, investing him with the Companionship of St Michael and St George for his political and philanthropic contribution to the Commonwealth. Such a proud mother.

Ninety-nine. One Hundred.

The candle flickers wildly as I complete the one-hundredth stroke. The wind seems to whisper my name. Mary. Mary. Mary Beiby. Mary Chirnside. A shiver travels down my spine. Suddenly I feel chilled to the bone. I make the decision to quickly get into bed without plaiting my hair or putting on a cotton nightcap. I leave my hair loose and flowing and grasp the candlestick. Perhaps I'll manage another chapter of my book, Ada Cambridge's *A Platonic Friendship*, before the candle burns down.

Mary Chirnside, widow of Andren, died on 4th March 1908, aged eighty. Accounts differ as to her cause of death. A commonly told story is that she fell asleep while reading in bed and the candle set fire to her hair and curtains.

GRAPHIC SHORT STORY

MODERN TRANSPORT

Tegan New

CURIOUS-01

Eric Le

KATABATIC

Jennifer Reuter

THE SECRET DREAMS OF MUM

C. A. Clark


UMARA'S DRAGONS

Sharra Veltheer

GRAPHIC SHORT STORY WINNER

Modern Transport by Tegan New—This story is really really sweet—beautiful cartooning, great characterisations, a recognisable situation. Just great comedy. Nice, nice work—we want to see more of these characters ... —*BERNARD CALEO*


MODERN TRANSPORT




How far is the Uber?



Uhhh...




I think their GPS not working.



You Should've called a Taxi!

Here we go again...





Well yes it is
I've just modified a bit
but it is still a Commodore
...

...64...

What was that?

Hmm?
We should get going
before the clouds come
in.


Where are
the seats?








CURIOUS-01



It's been a century since 2017, the year humanity destroyed itself, a nuclear war that left nothing but a charred barren landscape.

A few of us survived in military grade bunkers. The majority of survivors being scientists, politicians, engineers, researchers, leaders, those who had time to prepare for an event that ultimately resulted from their contributions.

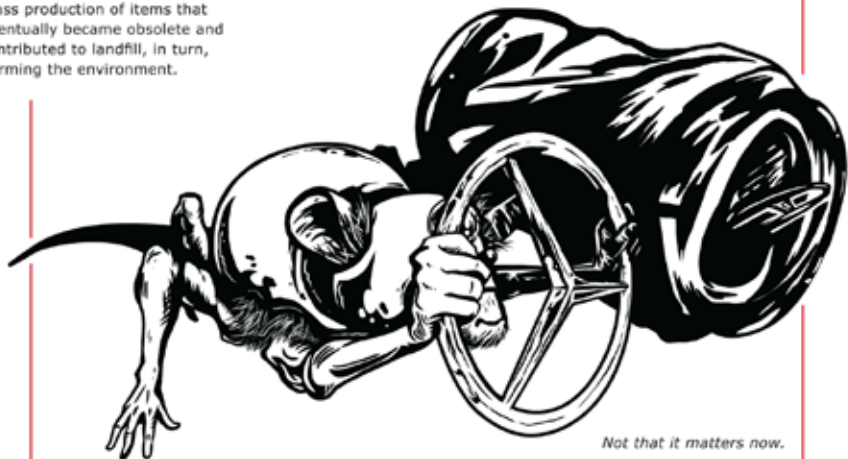


I'm amongst the 3rd generation of survivors and have been secretly conducting research into life pre-nuke. Knowledge and history of humans then have either been suppressed or erased, whatever remains is hidden in archives - through connections, I am able to access.

Curious 01, a small cyborg I created, has been running data collection missions in the no-zones. In combination with archived data and C-01's findings, the following are a few excerpts from my logs:

Log C-01 0099

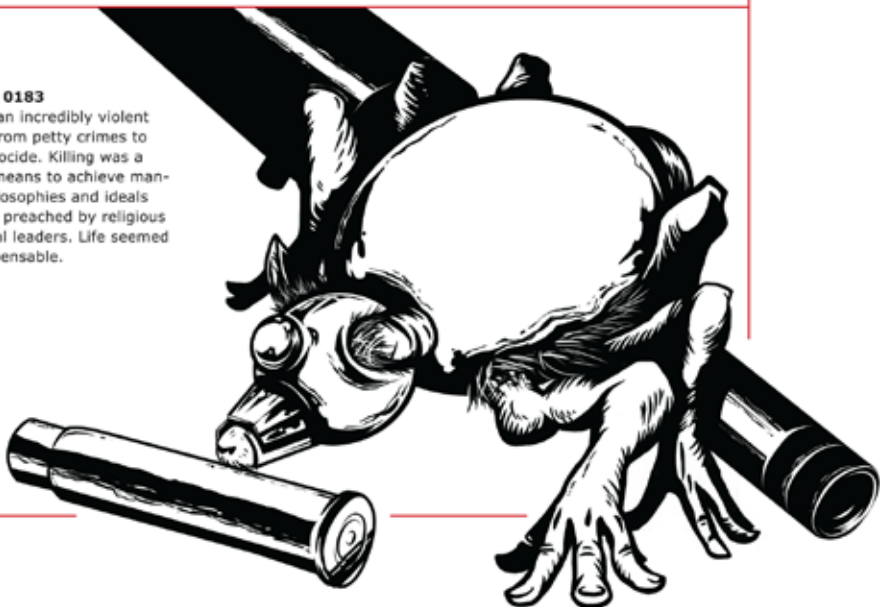
Humans had an obsession with obtaining and hoarding material things that were excessive to their essential needs, placing undue value on items that contributed very little to their survival. This fueled a need for mass production of items that eventually became obsolete and contributed to landfill, in turn, harming the environment.



Not that it matters now.

Log C-01 0183

We were an incredibly violent species, from petty crimes to mass genocide. Killing was a justified means to achieve man-made philosophies and ideals that were preached by religious or national leaders. Life seemed to be dispensable.



I guess that's how we ended up in here.

Log C-01 0257

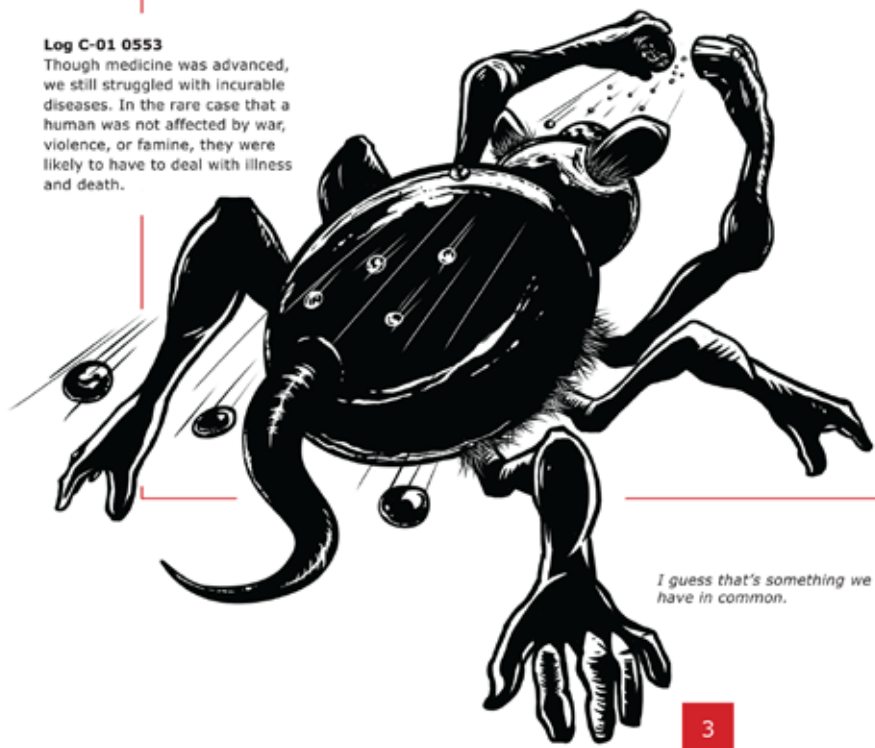
According to archived data there was a dangerous level of food shortage in many parts of the world, causing famine and death of millions. However, in other areas food was abundant, even in excess.



The imbalance intrigues me, there must be a significant reason why this is the case.

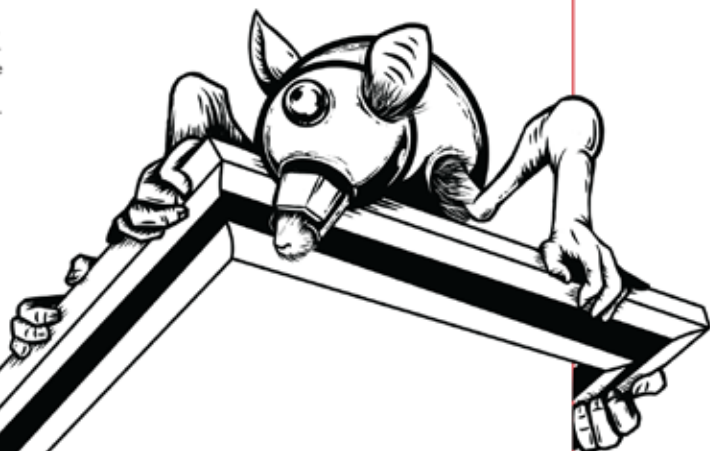
Log C-01 0553

Though medicine was advanced, we still struggled with incurable diseases. In the rare case that a human was not affected by war, violence, or famine, they were likely to have to deal with illness and death.



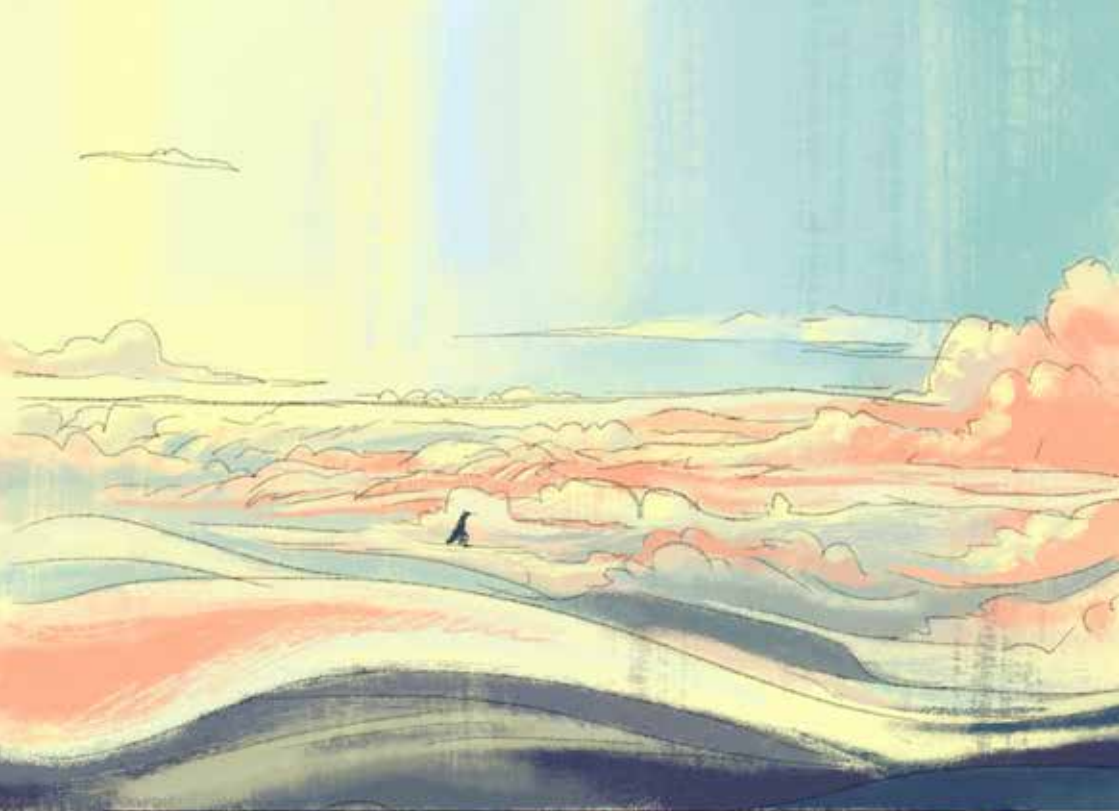
I guess that's something we still have in common.

I'm not exactly sure what the goal of humans were pre-nuke, some actions could be justified by survival but others phase me. Perhaps they were pursuing happiness, but their insatiable desire for continuous gain eliminates any opportunity for contentment.



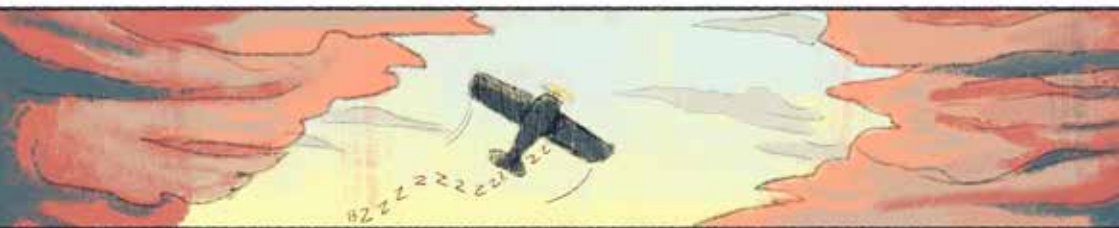
Whatever the reason, their ignorance and inaction has led to now, if only they knew.

The research continues...



Katabatic BY JENNIFER REUTER







PROOARRF





Nonononono
NONO!



I'm not
LOSING
IT!

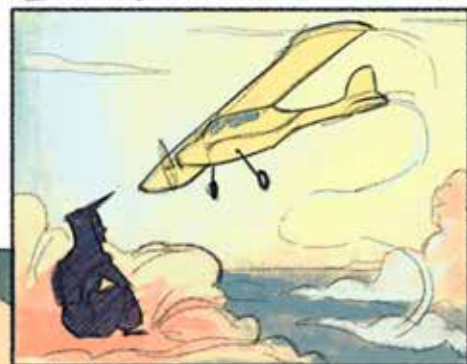
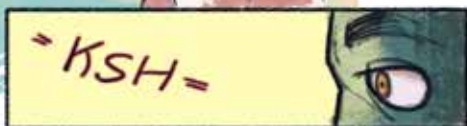
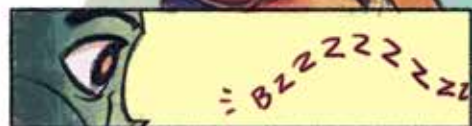


FWAP=



I don't think
you're 'old
enough either







Not too
long 'til I
catch you!

Kids would
cramp our
style

you've
let yourself
go a bit

home all day?
What do you do with
all that spare
time?

we're just back from Spain!

Need a design

Hubby works so hard

my
with a tyrant?

My work has a chain low, need it ASAP.

can you
make me a
coffee drink?

Honey!
What's for
dinner?

Want
purpur one

Super

35

Mum
I need
a phone
every

May
he has
more
than me

Mum! You drive me to Mum
I need new needs for me

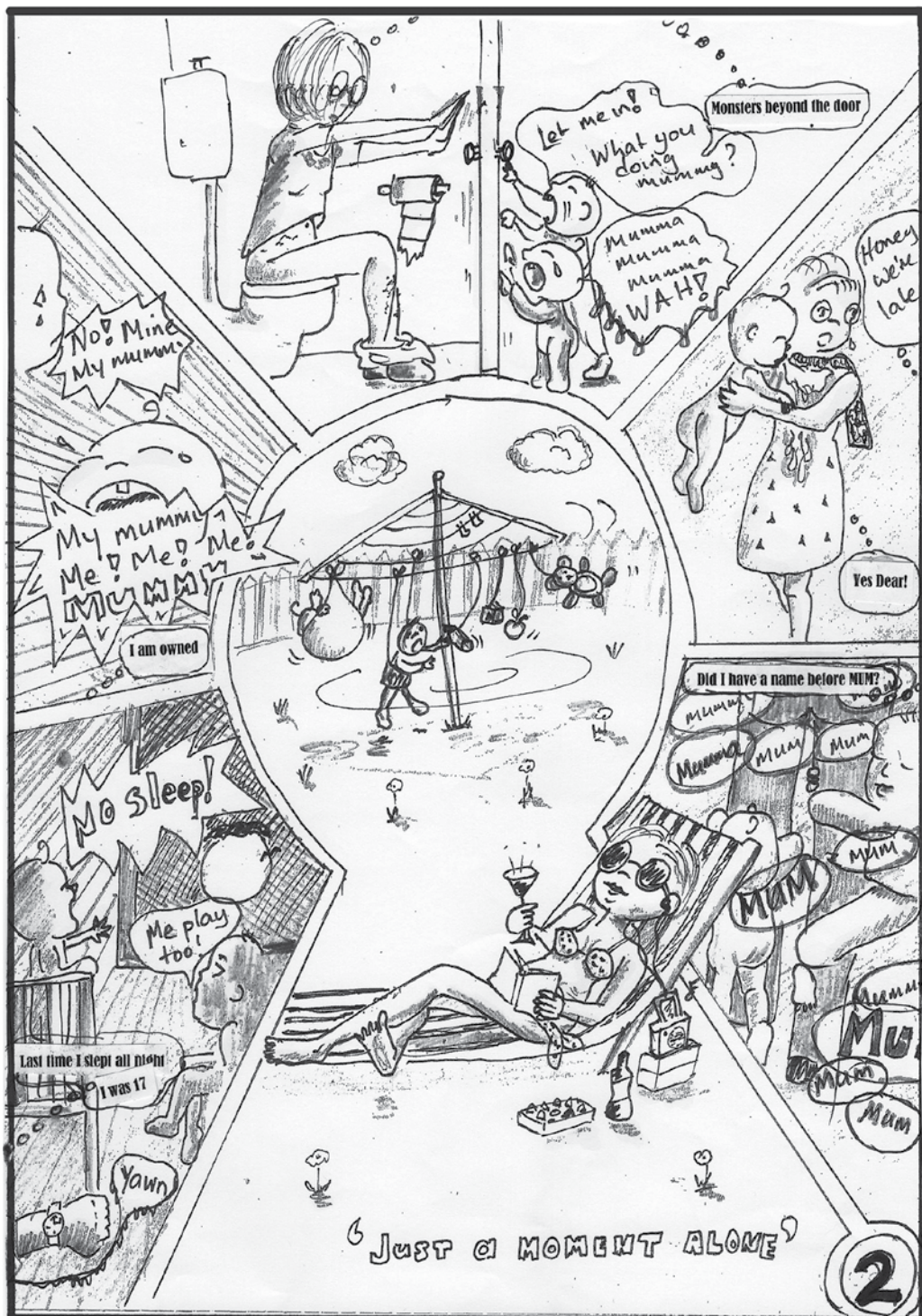
Mum
I wanna
learn
drum

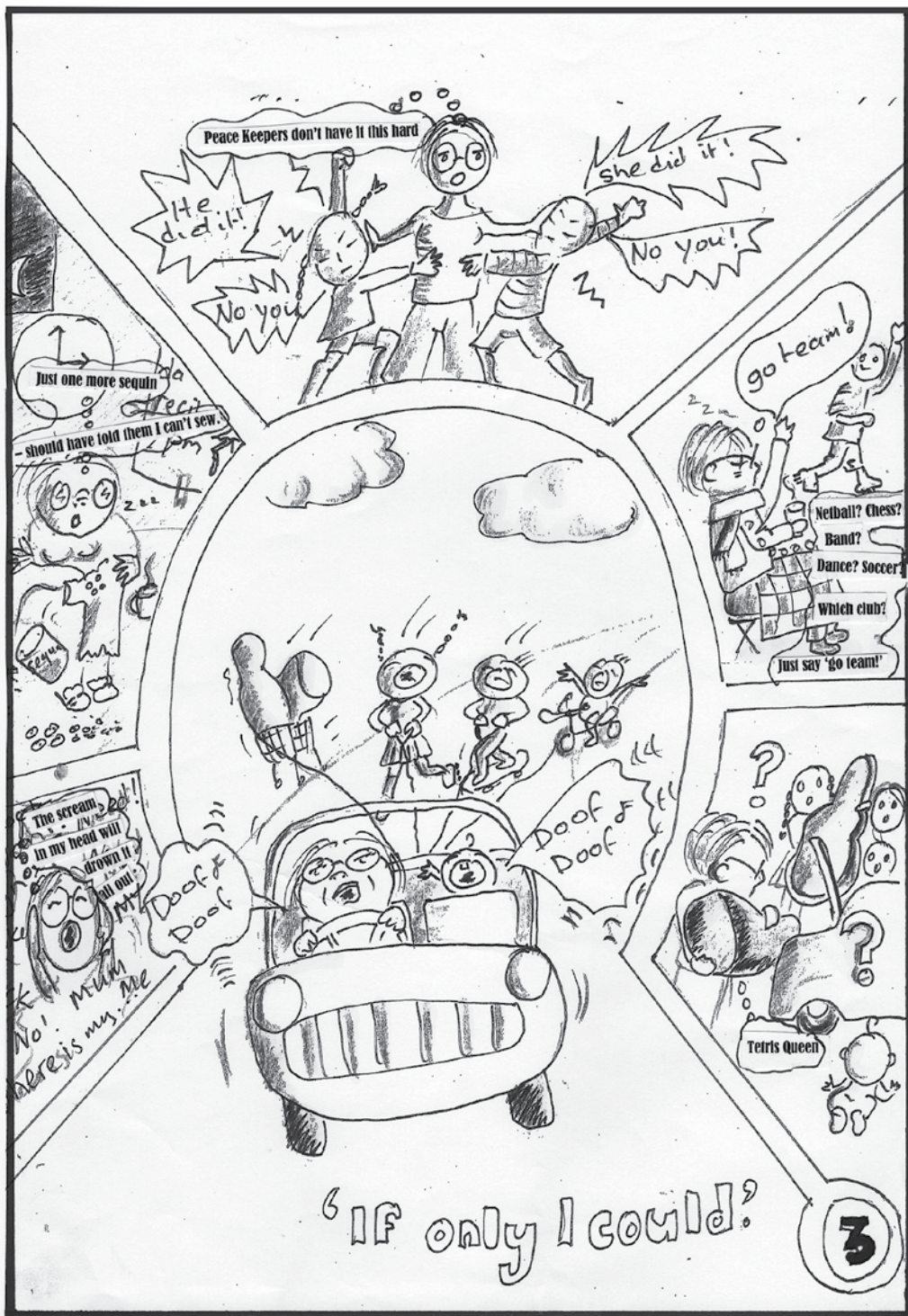
Mum where is my sports bag

Mum
can
Sleep
over
at
R1

THE SECRET DREAMS

OF MUM





Peace Keepers don't have it this hard

He did it!

she did it!

No you!

No you!

Just one more sequin

should have told them I can't sew.

go team!

Netball? Chess?
Band?
Dance? Soccer?
Which club?

Just say 'go team!'

The scream
in my head will
drawn it
all out!

No! Mum
isn't my...

Doof
Doof

Tetris Queen

'If only I could?'

3

Friends remind me of old dreams.

We'll pick her
up some real
coffee o/s.
Cat poo coffee from
Indonesia?

She needs
a complete
makeover
not just
coffee!

did you
notice the
pasta
necklace?

but
With
Friends like
them who needs
cat litter?

If I had another
chance would I
choose kids
or money,
travel and
expensive
stuff?

My dear
You can bake
a few dozen
cup cakes
for the
church
bake
sale.
You are
so good at
it.
I don't want to?

Of course I will, of course I can, but I don't want to?

SWEET
SATISFACTION

They lied, 'only a little of your time...'

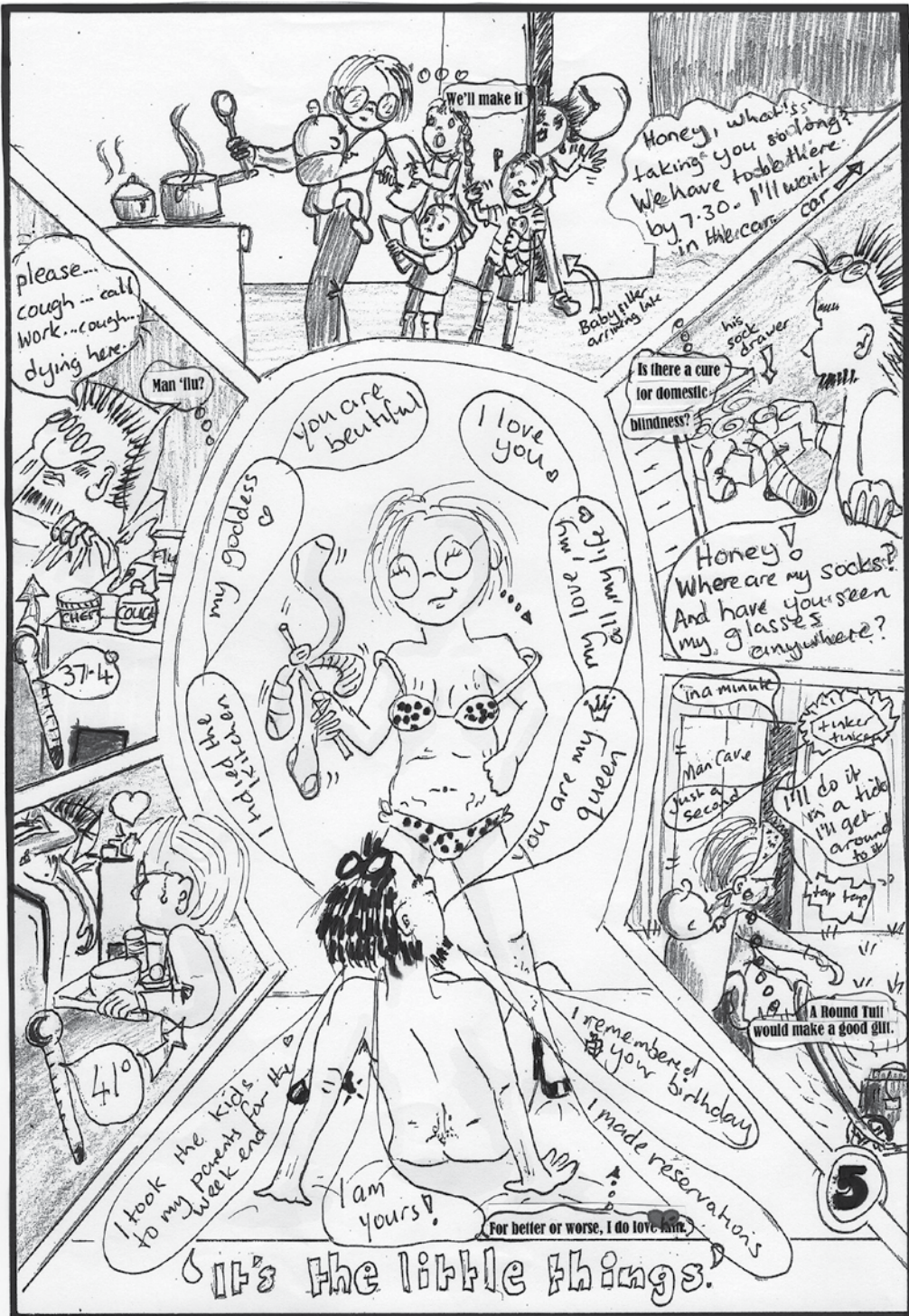
Kinda
committee
Play group
Club
Committee
Dance
committee
Sch
Comm

I put you on the
fundraising
BBQ
Being at home
all day you
have plenty
of time
on your
hands

Condescending
much?

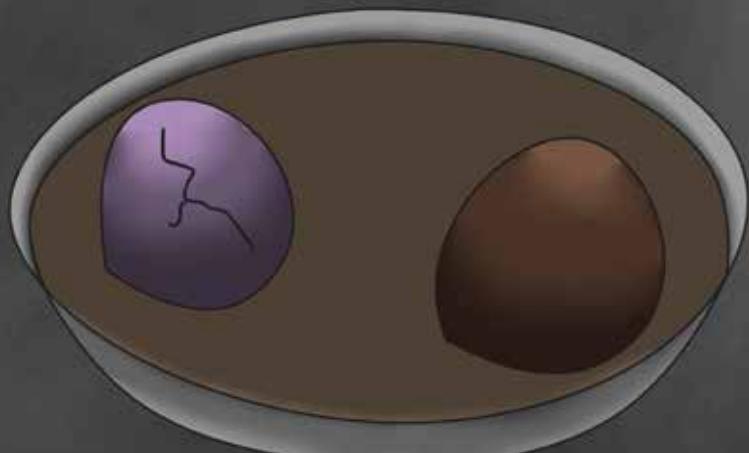
4

Minutes















POETRY

YOUR GREATEST TRICK

Kris Tammer

THE WATCH

Melissa Favasuli

AS OLD AS THE HILLS

Helen Cerne

CHARLES SAID

Mitchell Shepherd

HYMN OF THE WIND

Christine L. Bulandus

VAGRANT

Ruth Macaulay

POETRY WINNER

Your Greatest Trick by Kris Tammer—The poet's unique voice weaves a range of disparate observations into this story of grief as an illustration of the way random thoughts can come to use in even the most serious of times.—*ADAM FORD*

YOUR GREATEST TRICK

Kris Tammer

And then there's that thing you do where
you swing by a rope from a tree
and magically disappear
without announcing if you will reappear
or not, and everyone left standing
asks, "Where's Ben?", some claiming
there's nobody by that name in our databases,
then suddenly you're on display in a box
in a strange room filled with solemn organs
and everyone is bringing you flowers.

So we're left wandering around from place
to place thinking if a glass is raised that somehow
you'll rise up through the floor or start
laughing at us from behind a curtain.
Of course, this never happens but we find ourselves
on tenterhooks, thinking we've caught a glimpse
of you ... lucidly there ... hazily not here.

We keep trying to replace the glazed gaze between us
with trappings fastened in some typical gesture
by the more traditional endowments of opposable thumbs
but mostly they seem to signal the end of
the end is nigh, and while it's safe to say
we'll be ok praying for less significant miracles,
every day is so vast and empty
we really don't know how to fill it.

THE WATCH

Melissa Favasuli

On the couch I sit,
Between fear and anxiety.
Our arms are interlinked and we hold hands firmly.
We three,
All staring at cat.
Sadness assails
And joins us on the couch.
We four,
All staring at cat.
Can she sense my companions?
They say cats can sense these things.
She shows no outward signs,
But she knows me well.
She knows me of old and has been able to tell,
Has shown signs of knowing
My feelings
Before.
Cat stares back for a moment,

Her eyes bright but sunken.
She purrs softly to herself
As she lies comfortably
On a soft blanket;
Her coat glowing
Before roaring flames.
Her frame is small now,
Old and ravaged
Amid the voluminous folds of wool
That surround her.
My tired,
Feverish eyes look on
As the television hums in the background;
Blue light mixing with orange on the wall.
Cat sleeps again.
Ginger spot on her tabby head.
Ginger toe on her tabby foot.
Soon but not tonight
As I watch over her;
Heartbroken.

AS OLD AS THE HILLS

Helen Cerne

In the fifties faster than weeds
the Hills Hoist grew in every backyard.
Ever reliable, a real true blue,
the Hills stood mid lawn,
next to the vegie patch or outdoor dunny
in full view through the flywired back door.
Usually on Mondays, mums in every street
battled the cold, wind or heat
or on rainy days ran for the Hills
to grab clothes and sheets and when
the weekly ritual was done
they folded laundry, their lives
and dreams, away. All spun dry.

Created and patented by Lance Hills in 1946
the Hills hoist was his proudest invention.
Wrong. With other cultural ‘facts’,
it’s a myth. Gilbert Toyne of Geelong,
a returned digger, invented the rotary line,
patented its fine pinion winding mechanism
in 1925. His recently published biography
was titled *Hung out to Dry*.

The whole country took to the Hills,
the witness of family life—saw barbeques,
garden fads, kids’ parties, punch ups, makeups,
matchups, breakups, mishaps too

freak accidents, kids lost front teeth,
and between beers, some broke hearts
by being too silly or far too mean.
Seventies saw adult party games—keen suburban
swingers rotated bored or sad partners
or The Goon of Fortune where wine casks
spun around the line as drunks chundered jokes:
What classic Australian film is set under a Hills Hoist?
Picnic at hanging frock.

Now the Hills are more over the hill,
superseded, even an eye sore ...
we buy ones that fold up, out of sight,
of landscaped gardens with pools and spas.
At the Sydney Olympics, on the last night
the Hills Hoist was a highlight,
not as a symbol of the future—
pure nostalgia for the past.

From the ridiculous to the sublime
the ubiquitous clothes line ...
The Art Gallery of New South Wales,
has a fine art installation
by indigenous Lin Onus,
depicting a flock of fibre glass bats,
decorated with aboriginal design,
hanging like hankies around
a Hills Hoist clothesline.
Precolonial meets coloniser:
the sacred defeats the mundane.

CHARLES SAID

Mitchell Shepherd

Charles announced wanting to die in his sleep rather than in his life.
I would play these words, over and over
as I walked the old streets on those nights,
when it was cold but the cold shook me alive.
I heard his words as I stumbled about at the hour when people all
began staring at one another.
Sometimes I would look for a drink,
because I knew I was alone but I wasn't the only one.
I could see those tall buildings and those lights on big nights,
big noise,
and his words would be constant
as he swore and got drunk and told me how life is death.
Sometimes he would cry and although he was floating
I knew that inside he had broken and his time meant nothing.
Time was interference, a reflection of existence.
All of the voices hated him
because his words ruptured worlds,
but I heard every one.
And those nights when I walked those streets,
when I listened to him wishing to die when in sleep rather than
during life,
I knew him well and I knew I was home.
It was lonely on those nights but those glistening concrete paths
told me not to worry because this is where I was to walk.
And I walked along in warm isolation.

HYMN OF THE WIND

Christine L. Bulandus

Be kind to me winter morning, because
I carry with me the heat that torches my homeland
I keep with me the scent of fear from the burning city tropics
I hide with me the over-ripened ambitions of my fellow women

Be understanding midday overcast, if
My hands build houses of bricks as smooth as Bamboo shoots
My feet walk on concrete pavements leaving muddy footprints all
the way
My heart cries and screeches mimicking the sound of crows by
the station grassland

Be true to me evening breeze, for
You make me want to eat red mangoes to have a taste of my roots
You create moments of money that make me see red instead of
green
You freed me from the unbound ropes of pearls to hold the stars
in my hand

Be Kind because
Be Understanding if
Be True for
Be.

VAGRANT

Ruth Macaulay

You lived in my life once.

For an age, it seemed, in the balmy Spring that only saw one rainy day.

We kicked up puddles like children and forsook the umbrella for surely the rain would depart.

Sometimes our palms, clasped in camaraderie, were marked with sweat as we ambled down King Street in evenings that crackled and sparked.

With minds soaked in gin and lime juice and tonic, we'd grin at oncoming night

just a few more passers-by under the yawning sun and rosy rays on the slowing street.

Store fronts closed, metal barriers clanging and clamping their silver teeth

and you would try to not step on the cracks in the pavement.

"It's a game!" you said, the dying day's light in your pupils catching like cobwebs blown on the breeze

with whiffs of coffee beans, perspiration and cigarettes; the Inner West's amphetamines.

I pressed my face against the cool bricks of a store front as Summer shyly peeked, apologetic, above the smoking chimneys and gutter-water creeks.

I lived in your life once,

in the blistering Summer that saw daisies grow on the sand dunes.

The smell of lemons lingered in your hair

"to make it lighter"—it was a natural bleach

that made citrus stings on sun kissed skin.
“There’s a hole in the ozone above us” you told me one time.
I scratched at sunburn and smiled,
watching you blend with the sand, all freckles and moles in your
biscotti tan—
a hue that became you so well.
I tried to capture every contour, every blemish and scar on your
back
and trace them, connecting the dots like a child sketching
constellations.
We sank into the sea as long as we could
stealing time all the time
as clouds made handprints on the sky.

Was it a delirium we’d fashioned and tried so hard to believe?
That love could overpower time
and deserts
and mountains
and selves.
We knew we were ticking down, scuffing our feet through our
numbered hours
kicking dust into dew dropped flowers.
Because transience is your trade.
You were the frost bitten fisherman, blowing in with the storm
and out with the tide.

And though my hand burns still with the heat from yours,
though your mug still sits unwashed in the sink,
your boots grace another’s doorstep,
your heart runs with the next outgoing trawler
and your calloused hands brush the frigid sea.

We live out our lives now,
and as oncoming Autumn shakes leaves from trees, and takes
the sun, the daisies, the blisters, the sea
I am content
knowing, just knowing that you lived in my life once.
Like suns and daisies and blisters and seas
we cannot weep over us
we too must pass.

FLASH STORIES

WINNIE CARVER
Rebecca Handler

CARROT CAKE
Linda Chen

DISSONANCE
Suzi Mezei

INTO THE MIST
Coral Waight

ON TRIAL
Daniel John Thompson

ROBBERY
C. A. Broadribb

FLASH FICTION WINNER

Winnie Carver by Rebecca Handler—I like the clever way this story loops back around to its darkly comic opening.—*ADAM FORD*

WINNIE CARVER

Rebecca Handler

Winnie Carver's father died when she was eight. He hung himself in the coat closet with the family dog's leash. Apparently he had stood on the portable television and then kicked it away. Due to some fluke, the battery-operated TV turned on when it tipped over. This is how he was found. When Winnie and her mother returned home that night from visiting Great Aunt Vera who was sick in bed with a stomach virus, they heard a jewelry commercial blaring in the closet. *Diamond Warehouse. Make it last forever.*

Winnie saw him for a brief moment before her mother shoved her out of the way shrieking, "Go to your room!" That moment was enough though. His navy blue pajamas and his mouth hanging wide open as if to say, *Wait. Wait a minute.*

Winnie is thirteen now, and has become an expert at faking illness. She begins at night, in her room above Davis Square in Somerville, Massachusetts. Looking out the window at the frozen yogurt place, the one with the strawberries on the awning, she starts fake coughing. She watches families strolling in and out, clutching paper cups and plastic spoons. *Cough, cough.* Teenagers flirting, and parents holding up their children to examine all the flavors. *Cough, cough.*

In the morning, she rubs her eyes repeatedly so they get red and puffy. She practices her despondent face and resumes fake coughing until her mother knocks on the door. "Winnie, you ok? Get up for school. You're late." *Cough, cough.* Her mother opens the door. "I said come on, you're late."

Winnie musters her finest sick voice, crackly and sad. "I think I came down with something." There's always a back and forth, a

feel of the forehead and questions about logistics. What about that math test? Don't you have soccer? Are you ok staying on your own?

Winnie's always ok on her own, in fact she plans on it. As soon as her mother leaves for work, Winnie kicks off her covers and runs down the hall to the closet. The portable television is about the size of a toaster oven but much heavier. With both hands on the plastic handle, Winnie lugs it back to her bedroom and heaves it onto the foot of her bed. *The Today Show* is over soon, and then it's reruns of *Leave It To Beaver* and *The Brady Bunch*. Huddled in the dark, she watches the well-dressed kids, the happy mothers, and the way the fathers come and go.

CARROT CAKE

Linda Chen

You said you liked carrot cake, right? Lemon cream cheese icing. I'll make one. With lashings and lashings of cream cheese, you can just eat that straight if you want. But there'll definitely be a cake for when you come to visit. I've already bought most of the ingredients.

I've never been so excited to see someone. You make me feel like—you make me feel like nothing else. You make me feel, and it's been so long, and I know. I just know that this is something special. This is it for me.

I'm so lucky to have found you. I hope you feel as lucky as I do. I can't wait for you to be able to kiss me the way you said you wanted to. Can't wait to touch you.

To finally meet you in person.

I'll make you carrot cake for the rest of our lives if it means you'll stay.

Pick you up on Tuesday.

I love you.

Send

[Message not sent.]

[We are sorry, this user has deleted their account.]

DISSONANCE

Suzi Mezei

I saw her once; long yellow hair. He wove his fingers through it, when her dragged her out of a taxi.

Mostly, I hear their lives through the wall. That small family next door; it's like blacking out the screen and turning up the volume on the TV. I hear him come home at all hours, wake the wife and child. I look outside my window. The sun hasn't risen yet. I imagine the husband wading through the cold that floods the corridors in these broke down apartments, stumbling to his wife's bed. But she's too tired and angry to love him. The disrupted child, listens to them argue. His parents' whispers vicious, accusatory. The back and forth hiss of suburban disappointment.

It's been bad lately. Families are complex. Children are boisterous. Around noon, Sunday, their fridge door slams. The man yells something about empty. The boy's trike wheels stop whirring over the lino. He stops humming the song from Peppa Pig. I only know kid's shows because of that boy. He wails loud and slow, his voice from somewhere low and then very high. It's as if he's been lifted but not the proper way; not by a good father's hands. Beast clutch. They trail away. A door squeals shut.

She comes home later. The rustling plastic bags, the sound of tins dumped on the bench, the tearing of a packet; it's music to the ears of anyone who's ever been hungry. *Where's your boy, Missy?* I whisper it with my ear pressed on faded wallpaper. Her husband's step in the kitchen is heavy but they don't raise their voices. They lark. There's the sound of bottles, tops wrenched from amber glass, dropping on the floor. Hours pass. She hasn't even asked.

Where's your boy, Missy? But no one walks to that quiet end of the apartment where he should be.

I wake to the sound of crying. The woman next door spills red-hot rage into the sunrise. *Give him to me*, she screams. The sound of shove and tackle; someone is thrown against the thin wall that preserves our separation. She screams the boy's name. The man tells her to shut up. She screams it again.

I punch the keys of my mobile phone. Emergency. But my tongue refuses to make any words. Perhaps it's forgotten how. I rest my head on the other side of the wall from which their broken child lies noiseless.

When the paramedics come, they fling open ambulance doors. Through a crack between the drapes I see them hoist a stretcher. I don't see her because of the doors but I hear her bare feet slap the concrete driveway. I hear him punch the door of the police car.

Eventually they leave the cracked shell from which they emerged, raw and bleeding. All is silent. I hear myself breathe, steady, deep, solitary. I switch on the TV, find the kids' channel. Black out the picture and turn up the sound.

INTO THE MIST

Coral Waight

The trees muttered as the wind chafed at them. A chirrup issued from the nest in the prunus tree outside the window, then another. The babies were anxious. Their mother moved even closer and they settled, calmed in the warmth and security of their cocoon, lulled back to sleep by the swaying of their branch. My baby had copied the birds with her own sharp squeal.

“I’ll just check on her,” I said to my husband, Michael.

“Will you be long?”

“Just a minute.”

But he knew what would happen. I would go into her room and come back an hour later, unable to drag myself away. A soft radiance emanated from her. Fingers of light attached themselves and drew me, her Spirit searching out my own, discarded and long forgotten, and the wonder of it kept me there long past the time I had promised to join him back on the couch. I stroked her forehead and her eyes drifted open and shut, open and shut. At ten weeks her fine hair was sparse and her face round and already plump. Even in her sleep she seemed to be smiling.

The wind blew stronger and I moved across to the window to close it completely. I was terrified of draughts. My cousin had contracted pneumonia as a baby from a draught and nearly died.

“You want a coffee?” called Michael, my hint to return to him. I ran my fingers down her cheek.

“Goodnight, Gorgeous.” She grinned in her sleep. “Wind”, my mother would have said. Maybe, but she often grinned when I did that. I chose to believe she was just happy. Michael was at the

bench, pouring water into coffee mugs.

“Everything okay?”

I smiled and wrapped my arms around his waist and he leaned back against me.

“Yep.”

*

Someone is screaming. I want them to stop because if they don't they'll wake my baby. She's sleeping so soundly I don't want her disturbed. She's so still, no flickering eyelids, no snuffling or fidgeting. I stroke her forehead but she's cold.

“Michael, get a blanket.” I don't want her to get pneumonia. Babies can die of pneumonia. I pick her up and wrap my arms around her to keep her warm. “There you are, darling, just like a baby bird.” I run my fingers down her cheek but she doesn't grin. She's sleeping too soundly to grin.

Someone is wailing. I squeeze her head against me and cover her ears so she can't hear. Figures drift, in and out, in and out, ghosts, whispers. Michael is crying. He leans against me but I push him away.

“They have to take her,” he says. They try but I hold on. I have to keep her safe. I have to keep her warm.

Someone is moaning, in a ball, backwards, forwards, backwards, forwards. A white arm, a jab, and we drift, my shining baby and me, down a river of light and away into the mist.

ON TRIAL

Daniel John Thompson

“So you do not deny the charges?”

The creature blinked, still restrained in the dock. Under the glare of prosecutor Jihendri, it began to mumble incoherently.

“Please speak up sir! Don’t hide behind your incapable mouth. You clearly possess at least a modicum of intelligence. Do you deny the charges?”

The makeshift courtroom was packed with onlookers; half the ship’s crew had turned out for the proceedings. Dozens of eyes swiveled between the two criminals.

“I didn’t ...” the creature mumbled. “We always do it. There’s nothing wrong ... it came into our home.”

“Oh—it *came into your home?*” Jihendri screeched. He turned back to the bar table, where the body of their victim lay. It was a tiny thing, helpless, cute like a child’s toy. Jihendri’s hearts went out to it. He picked up the tray and held it in front of its killer’s face.

“That’s your excuse? That you have the right to murder anything that enters the structure you occupy? For that, you sentenced this poor soul to summary execution?”

The creature looked at his victim, clearly horror-struck.

“But it’s just ... how can it be murder? It’s only—”

“How can it be murder? Of course it’s still murder! What are you saying sir, that you reserve the right to murder anyone as you please? Is this normal behavior in your culture?”

The creature gasped, looking anywhere but into the prosecutor’s eyes.

“But it—she asked me to!” he said suddenly, jerking a thumb at

his female companion, bound up behind him. “She always makes me do it! I’m the husband, it’s my job.”

“Oh? So you were *just following orders* then?” Jihendri screamed. Gnashing his fangs, he turned his gaze to the female.

“Is this true? Did you order this assassination?”

The female looked equally terrified, clearly crumbling under the weight of justice.

“I don’t ... I don’t understand. Who—where are you from?”

“We are from the Great Interstellar Betelgeuse Alliance—and we are here to see justice done!”

Jihendri turned to the guards behind him.

“They have admitted their guilt. The evidence is incontrovertible.” He turned to face the crowd of onlookers. “In the name of the Alliance, I order these barbarians be thrown out the airlock!”

“No! No! Please!” the male cried, as the courtroom filled with applause. He continued to protest, and the female only screamed louder, as the guards grabbed the two of them and carried them out of the room. Down the corridor, there was a loud clang as the airlock was shut behind them. Jihendri turned to the ship’s captain, grim-faced.

“I have never seen such barbarity, and on our first reconnaissance! Living creatures killing one another for pure sport—not even for energy consumption! This whole world might have to be purged” he said grimly, staring at the airlock display as it counted down to zero. Through the speakers, they heard only further protestations.

“But—but it was only a spider! I hit it with a newspaper—what are you doing?”

ROBBERY

C. A. Broadribb

The store's crowded. The line's real slow. I clutch my pudding and listen to people talk about their daughters.

A car roars up outside. Two men rush in. Dark clothes, grave faces. One looks anaemic. He reaches beneath his shirt and pulls out a gun.

"Cash!" he shouts.

Everyone screams. I duck down behind a cabinet. A woman in front of me freezes. Her baby wails. I tug her arm. "Down."

The other man swings an iron bar. Smashes the register open. The checkout girl backs away, staring at him. The store manager glares at him.

"Stay back!" the gunman says. He has an odd foreign accent. The gun's a Colt .45—I've seen them before.

The other robber grabs wads of cash, stuffs them in his pockets. Both of them back out of the shop. One knocks over a pile of baskets. They run to their car. Doors slam. Wheels skid. The manager grabs a box from a shelf. He runs after the car, shouting, throwing things at it. Round, brightly coloured. Easter eggs. I laugh. I can't help it.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

C. A. Broadribb could describe herself in three words as either ‘intelligent, creative and humorous’ or ‘fat, lazy and tired’ depending on how she felt at the time. She has a few uni degrees, calls herself a writer, and lives in Sydney.

Christine Lining Bulandus is a Secondary English Teacher who just moved to Hoppers Crossing early this year after a lifetime spent in Manila, Philippines.

Helen Cerne has published a poetry collection *Just Heart Work*, a novel *Those who Can't* and a collaborative autobiography, *Shifting*, with her late husband Serge. She is a coordinator of Western Union Writers, based in Werribee and has completed a PhD creative thesis exploring the lives of Victorian women artists.

Linda Chen is a Canberran writer and actor. Her written work has won and been highly commended in local and international competitions. She has been a featured artist at Noted Writers’ Festival. Linda currently studies Arts/Commerce at the ANU, where she is an editor at *Woroni*—ANU Student Media.

Chris Childs is passionate about writing 19th century Australian stories. Her writing is influenced by academic studies in psychology and history. She likes to blend fact and fiction to bring forgotten characters and events to life. Chris is a Wyndham resident with a long interest in Werribee Park and the Chirnsides.

C. A. Clark loves comics in all forms. So she doesn’t know why this is her first exploration of combining her love of art and story telling. She will pursue this path with vigour. She studies all the time and will probably keel over if she ever stops.

Tess Corbel is a full-time mother and a part-time student in the Master of Creative Writing, Publishing and Editing program at the University of Melbourne

Freya Cox is eighteen and in Grade 12. She lives in the bush in Tasmania with numerous ducks, goats and possums. She has been writing since she was 12 and has won numerous awards, been published in *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *Melbourne Books*, and *40 Degrees South*, a Tasmanian magazine.

Audrey Di Martino is seldom seen without a notebook, a pen, and/or a bottle of maple syrup. She lives in Melbourne, Australia and is terribly susceptible to sunburn.

Melissa Favasuli is an aspiring author who enjoys writing poetry, short stories and is currently working on her first novel. When not writing, she reads avidly and fusses over her roses. Melissa lives with her husband and two tortoise shell cats, Lotty and Bebe.

Rebecca Handler is from San Francisco and currently lives in Perth. She has worked in the philanthropic sector for many years and writes the blog www.onewomanparty.com. She is writing a novel about grief. Some of it is funny.

Eric Le is a young and passionate graphic designer running his own studio in Werribee—specializing in café branding. A life learner, he is continuously seeking to improve his skills and knowledge. With a heightened sense of curiosity, Eric believes there is always something new to learn and apply.

Ruth Macauley is an emerging author and playwright from Gunnedah. She graduated with a BDA (2013) and was tutored under celebrated playwright, Donna Abela. Writing credits for theatre include *The Drunk Diaries* and *Cradle Me*. Ruth's stories appear in the *Newcastle Short Story Anthology*, *A Nice Boy* and *Grieve Volume 5*.

Suzi Mezei is a Melbourne writer of fiction, poetry and plays. She is also interested in biography and is lucky to have met some intriguing people to write about. She loves dogs and foreign films.

Caroline Miley is an art historian and writer with a long-time passion for art, the English landscape and literature. She has published several non-fiction books on art, craft and social comment. *The Competition*, about a Georgian artist who gets involved with radical politics and the Luddites, is her debut novel.

Tegan New is an Australian artist living in Hoppers Crossing where she creates illustrations and comics.

Jennifer Reuter is a German-born, Melbourne-raised illustrator and story-teller, sleuthing her way into the entertainment industry. Other than having dreams about flying (and missing the train), she delights in silly expressions and voices, animation, and tormenting herself with colour theory. More of her work may be seen at: www.jarodragon.com

Mitchell Shepherd is an emerging writer who is currently wrestling with his first novel. He also writes poetry and short stories.

Kris Tammer is a writer/escape artist from Melbourne Australia. He is currently working on his latest trick—how to escape mind/body/country without leaving.

Daniel J. Thompson is an English teacher and law graduate living in Melbourne. He is busy writing a scifi trilogy and hopes somebody else will read it someday.

Sharra Veltheer is a 25 year old from Ballarat who has been drawing all her life. *Umaru's Dragon* began as a gift for her mother. Seeing a visual opportunity, Sharra took the opening of the story and made it graphic. She is still working on the *Umaru's Dragon's* novel.

Coral Waight started travelling alone at the age of sixty. She has since written and published three memoirs on her travels around Tasmania, New Zealand and England. She also writes short stories and has been published in *TNT Magazine*, *The Weekend Australian* newspaper and *The Age* newspaper.

WYNDHAM CITY LIBRARIES

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Words of Wyndham Writing Competition

Included are the top shortlisted entries from each of the four categories:

SHORT STORY
POETRY
FLASH FICTION
GRAPHIC SHORT STORY

The works included in this anthology cover themes ranging from suicide, family violence and mourning, to online dating, easter eggs and birds.

"The graphic stories submitted for the 'Words of Wyndham' competition are all of them fine examples of the visual storyteller's art. The voice and sensibility in each piece rings out clear and true, and each one leaves me wanting more, like all good comics should."

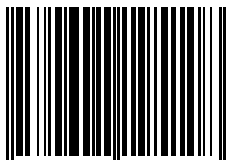
– BERNARD CALEO, comic artist and judge of the Words of Wyndham graphic short story category.

"The authors of these stories and poems have called upon their skills at observation and depiction to share with us a series of dark, sometimes comic, certainly unsettling, scenarios. As dark as they are, though, the compassion these writers demonstrate, and the universality of the situations they confront, gives the reader hope that, however hard things may become, we are not alone in facing what we must face."

– ADAM FORD, poetry, short and flash story judge.



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