

## The Hitchhiker



# Contents

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Underground Writers would like to respectfully acknowledge this magazine was produced and edited on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and also on the traditional lands of the Wadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation. As an internationally-reaching magazine, we also pay our respects to the traditional custodians of all the lands from which the stories and poems in this issue were sourced.

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## Letter from the Editor

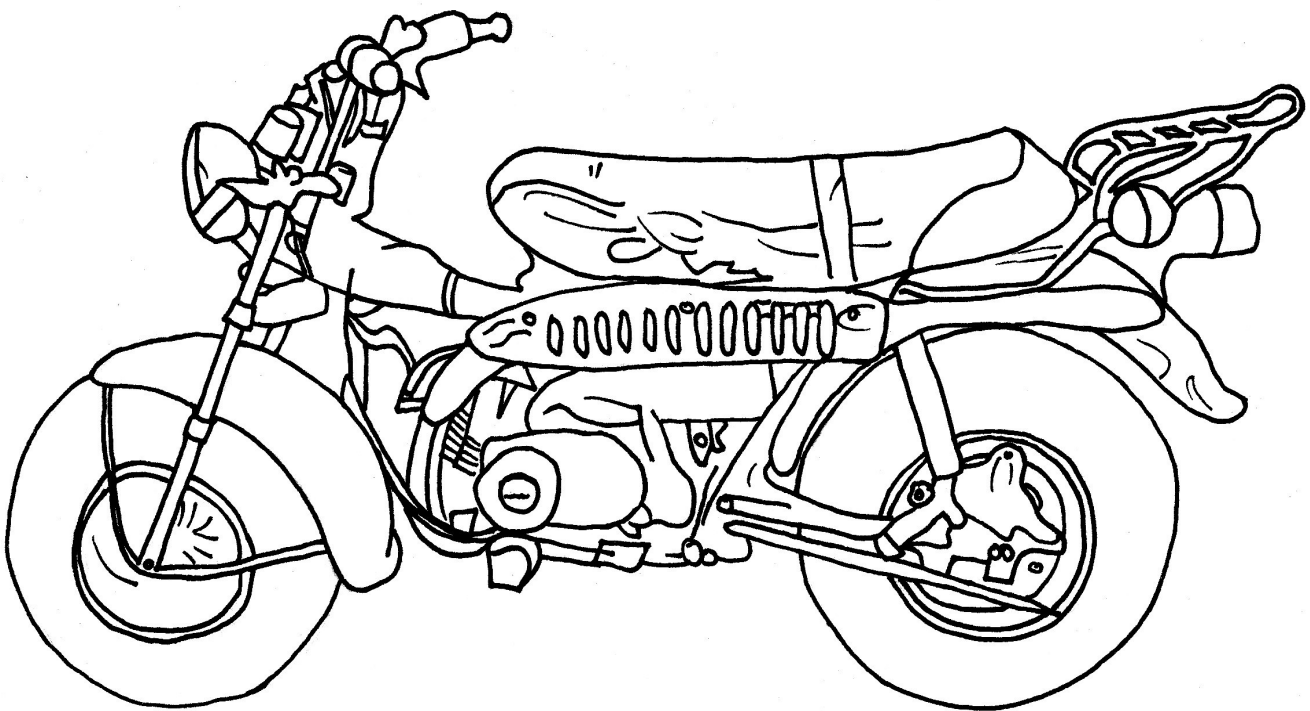
As some of you know, Underground Writers has very humble beginnings. In 2009 a group of writing students in their late teens and early twenties sat in a cafeteria after class and lamented the lack of accessible opportunities for creative writers just starting on their journey into the world of professional publication. And so Underground Writers was born.

Browsing through our early issues it is clear that we have long run on a shoe-string budget, subsisting on the passion of our volunteers, all of us writers and editors and emerging creatives who just can't contain our love of the written word. From this history was born issue 17: The Hitchhiker, because much like a hitchhiker Underground Writers continues to move through the world with little money to our name, our only resources those which we bring with us to the table, and, most importantly, a restless beating heart that cannot be discouraged. Along the way we have had the privilege of travelling and conversing with writers from around the world, many just starting out, some veterans of small-scale publishing, but all supportive of our vision and our mission to be the first step in the journey that we have been taking for years: casting wonderful stories into the world and believing that they will reach new and vibrant destinations in the minds of other readers and writers.

Sometimes the world that we live in is exhausting and discouraging, not least of all when the little funding that the writing community receives is pared down even further. As a result, Underground Writers is a big supporter of and believer in the writingWA campaign #writingmatters. Passion is often justified by the phrase 'As One cannot live on bread alone', but when one's bread is taken away, one cannot survive on passion alone (although we have tried). But we are still here, travelling continents, countries and county lines, spanning hundreds of writers published over 17 issues in eight years. We are still on a shoe-string budget, we still survive on the skills that we are teaching ourselves, and we all study and work full or part time, running Underground Writers around our 'real' commitments. So woe betide anyone who calls what we do a 'hobby'; they may find themselves unfavourably cast in a story and disliked by who-knows-who, out there on the road to the minds of others.

*Jemimah Halbert*

Editor-in-Chief



# The Other Woman by Kylie Jones

by editors Kate Lomas Glendenning, Shelley Timms & Jessica Wilson-Smith

**T**he *Other Woman* is the heart-wrenching true story of a woman coming to terms with her husband transitioning into a woman, and subsequent fall out from his confession. Author, Kylie Jones, bravely reopens old wounds to reveal a raw and poignant story to readers, divulging a side of transitioning that is rarely discussed in literature.

Kylie's grief and anger are keenly felt throughout the book, and she often compares losing her husband to "The Other Woman" as to mourning his death. From the beginning we know the inevitable end but the journey is unknown. The events that unravel are not shocking but the reactions of the characters are memorable and words between them are

unforgettable and cruel. This book is about someone within and without. This process isn't happening to Kylie but it still affects her.

"I never got to say goodbye."

A poignant part of the autobiography is the discussion of transitioning being similar to experiencing a death. Not only was Colin lost physically but also emotionally he changed before Kylie's eyes, becoming someone unrecognisable.

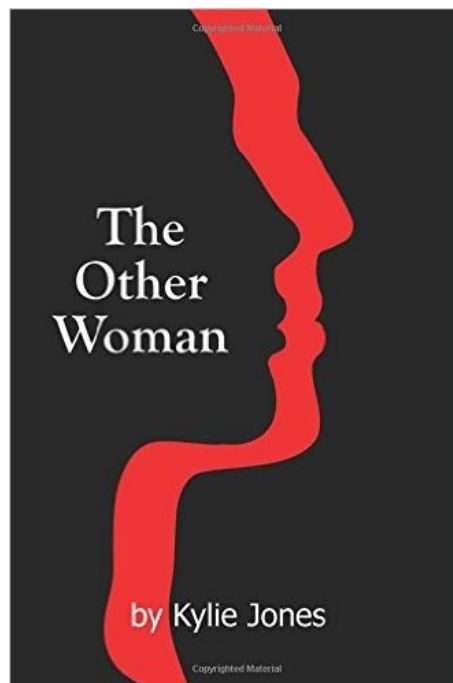
Ambiguous loss isn't something talked about often; how can you grieve for someone who technically is still alive but no longer exists? However the tone Kylie uses describes a very raw and painful grieving process to her readers.

The topic of transitioning is discussed with sensitivity, but Kylie boldly offers an uncensored

insight into her own personal experiences, which can make the reader uncomfortable. Anne, her husband, Colin's, chosen transgender name, is described at times as selfish and disrespectful, especially around their children. There are reoccurring scenes in the book where Kylie drives Anne to her therapy appointments, going out of her way to drive Anne then wait in the car for her session to be over. Whilst driving her home

Anne would naively discuss her appointment and declare how unhappy she was with her life and marriage as a man. Kylie never confronts Anne about these statements but silently basks in the humiliation.

One of the most heartbreaking scenes is when Anne reveals that she has never enjoyed making love to Kylie, and did so out of pity. It was a jaw-dropping moment in the book and one that stood out to all of the reviewers. The scene was brutal,



her husband was relaxed, glad to get this off his chest and oblivious to the pain he had inflicted on her. What punctures the scene is Kylie's silence and disbelief and anguish, her humiliation is keenly felt and adds to the depth of the story.

Kylie's resentment towards her husband's transition is evident through comments that are sometimes played as humorous. An

example of this would be when she says, just because he was becoming a woman doesn't mean he was becoming a housewife. All the 'wifely duties' were being left to her. In that regard, he remained just as he was. Whilst she makes jokes like this, it is obvious she is still in great pain.

Colin didn't just transition from a man to a woman. He also became a different

person, he was manipulative and down right cruel in some scenes.

Kylie's unapologetic re-telling of the events of her family being torn apart by Anne, is incredibly brave. The grueling process of transitioning is one that we have seen in the media a lot recently, with people like Caitlyn Jenner being the figurehead of the issue.

Family and friend's reactions to the transitioning is something we rarely see if at all and hence Kylie's account should be commended for not sugar-

coating her reactions to the events. "The Other Woman" opens up a dialogue between people transitioning and their family and friends; it gives an insight into the pain experienced by both sides.

Despite being a book about losing her husband to *The Other Woman*, Kylie manages to sprinkle in

some comic relief throughout, which made the book more enjoyable. When Kylie's girls are asked why they don't wear denim skirts anymore, their response? "Blame my dad." Or after putting a load of washing out Kylie realizes her husband has nicer clothes than her. Whilst these scenes are hilarious they are mingled with a touch of sadness but they are a break from the tension of the other scenes.

*The Other Woman* is an

enjoyable read but has you squirming in your seats at Kylie's honesty. Kylie is open with her emotions and doesn't doctor them to readers. This can be uncomfortable but it rings true and is a bold move. Some parts of the book are slightly problematic, but overall the Underground Writers team found the story captivating, heartbreaking and enlightening to current social issues.

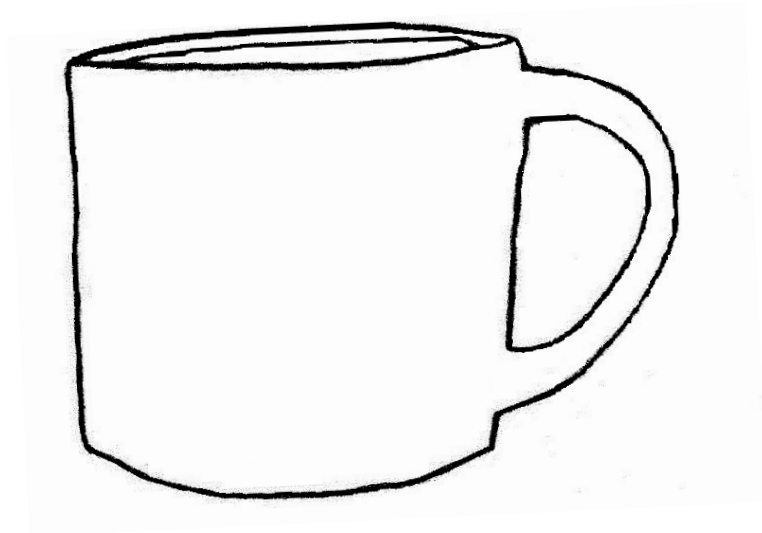
3/5 stars



## Feature Piece

### Fictitious

Sarah Giles





The problem with killing a Character is figuring out what to do with the body. The Writer usually waits for the smell to start bothering him before he cleans up and he applies the same rule to the dishes that sit in the sink. The body lies there, slowly rotting on the varnish peeled floorboards and in the next room the Writer continues the story without them.

He pulls himself out of the world the dead Character is from; the sweet smell of decay clings to the air. The doorbell. It rang.

The Writer writes. The doorbell rings. He writes. It rings.

A voice.

'Dad, it's me.'

The Writer is at the door. He opens it.

'Hi Dad,' says Hilary, the Writer's only child.

'Hi.'

They walk to the kitchen with the same tilted gait.

'Oh Dad,' she says looking at the plates and mugs that have begun growing new life.

'Tea?' the Writer says.

'Sure.'

Hilary pulls on the rubber gloves she keeps under the sink for visits.

The tin teapot rattles on the stove. The Writer finds two clean mugs and adds two tea bags to his, one to hers and a spoonful of sugar in each.

'The milk's gone bad,' the Writer says.

'Black is fine.'

Hilary rinses the mould and grime from the dishes with water hot enough to melt candle wax.

On the table the mugs, one tin, one plastic, wait.

'You don't have to do that,' the Writer says.

'You say that every time,' Hilary says.

'I mean it every time,' the Writer says.

'My tea needs to cool anyway.'

Hilary finally sits and sips her tea, now lukewarm. 'How's the new novel coming along?'

'It's getting there,' he says, 'I'm working on a few new angles. But I've got another one.'

'A dead one?'

The Writer stands up to empty the remaining tea from his mug.

'You've heard what they do to them in those camps haven't you?' Hilary says.

'That's just rubbish. It wouldn't matter what they made 'em do. They're not real.'

'Real enough to die.'

'How's uni?' the Writer says as he sits back at the table, across from Hilary.

'Fine,' she says. 'Where is it?'

'What?'

'The Character?'

The two stand in the doorway looking at the rotting corpse.

'How long have you left it like this?'

'Not sure. Coupla days maybe.'

'A couple of days? Dad, the skin is fucking falling off the bone like a slow cooked lamb shank. It must have been weeks.'

'You should write, Hilary. You've got the knack.'

'Thanks, but it's a little too cruel a job for me.'

'You don't have to kill 'em—'

'It's what happens to the living ones that sickens me.' Hilary says,

'What's its name? What's its story?'

Hilary kneels by the corpse, rests her chin on the bend of her knee.

'Solomon. She was a philosopher, a sidekick who got caught in a cross fire of sorts.'

'Did she love any one?'

'Yes.'

'Did they love her back?'

'No.'

'Let's bury her.'

'Okay.'

Hilary slides the shovel into the soil with the sole of her boot. She makes a neat pile of dirt next to the hole. The Writer sits on a fold out chair and watches.

'What did she look like?'

'She wasn't beautiful. Conventionally anyway. But she was smart.'

'Why don't you ever make smart women beautiful? Do we have to be ugly to be clever?'

FICTITIOUS

She slices through the earth with a practiced technique.

'I don't know.'

'Let me guess. Her love interest was an equally smart but handsome man who "loved her like a sister"?'

'Something like that.'

'Where's he now?'

'I sent him off to that camp in Warrigal.'

'Don't you have to transfer copyright to do that? Are you finished with him yet?'

'No, but they've got him in isolation until I'm done.'

'What about the rest?'

'There's not that many Characters in it. But they're the same as him.'

'They're just free labour to the government you know. That's all they're used for.' Hilary says.

She slips off her jumper and tosses it to the Writer.

'They're not real. They don't have any brain waves or organs. They don't even have any kind of detectable DNA. They don't think. They don't feel. Not unless I tell 'em to,' the Writer says.

'What do you think the government Writers in those camps make them think and feel?'

'They're just doing their jobs, Hilary.'

There is silence between them. The Writer listens to the sound of dirt piling on dirt, and Hilary's sharp breaths as they form white clouds in the air in front of her face.

'Have you read those articles?' Hilary says.

'Articles?'

'The research articles released by Melbourne uni this week. They've been studying the Characters since they first started appearing in 2018, and their most recent research shows that they have the ability to learn.'

'That's ridiculous.'

'I brought copies with me. You can read them for yourself.'

'What rubbish.'

SARAH GILES

'It's true. You should visit one of the camps. You should see what they  
put them through. Even the children...'

'I think the hole's big enough now, love.'

Together they drag the body out on an old frayed rug from the  
lounge room. They lower Solomon down into the hole, and Hilary takes  
care in arranging a bouquet of flowers from the garden on the cavity  
that was once Solomon's chest.

The Writer and his child stand by the side of the grave and look down  
at the corpse.

'How did she die?' Hilary says.

'Painlessly.'

'How though?'

'She was drugged. She just went to sleep. I promise it was painless.'

The Writer wraps a long arm around his daughter as she rests her  
head on his shoulder.

'I'll finish this, you go in and make us some fresh tea,' he says.

The sound is different depending on where the dirt lands. A thud when  
it falls in a clump on more soil, a spray like rain when it lands on her  
hollow body. Thud. Spray. Thud. Spray. Thud. Thud. Thud.

He sits at the table with Hilary.

'All done.'

One sip of his tea tells him she only used one tea bag in his mug.

'Thanks,' he says.

'I knew one,' she says.

'Hmm?'

'I mean, when I was a kid and you used to keep the Characters in the  
house, before the camps, I knew one. He was my friend.'

The Writer looks down into the mug of muddy brown water.

'Christian. The boy from my second novel. I remember.'

Hilary nods silently and leans back into her chair. She examines the  
ceiling in an attempt to stifle her tears.

'You know the other kids didn't like me in school. But I had Christian to

keep me company. To play games with me while you were working.'

'You told me about him once,' says the Writer, 'one afternoon you came into my study and you told me a joke. Um...'

'Why did the Koala cross the road?' Hilary says, a small smile on her lips.

'Yeah, that's it, because it was stapled to the chicken. You said Christian had told you it. You told me he had been talking to you and playing with you, that he was your best friend.'

'He was.'

'It was unnatural.'

Hilary sniffs. Her efforts to hide her sadness fail.

'It was the most natural thing in the world to me. I didn't know what he was,' she says, 'he was just Christian.'

'I know.'

'You didn't even kill him off. I read your second novel when I was 16 and he wasn't in it.'

'I thought it was the right thing.'

'He doesn't even exist anymore, not even a corpse in the ground. He's just a memory to me.'

'That's the way characters are supposed to exist. That's how it was in the old days.'

'That's exactly the thing though Dad. It's not like it was in the old days. Characters come to life. They live. And now there's proof that they can learn—'

'Don't start that nonsense again, Hilary. They are figments. Just because they have mass doesn't mean they are human.'

'Of course they're not human. But they're something. They're somebody, and they deserve better than slavery!'

'It's a Character's job to do as it's told, it's their purpose,' the Writer says.

'Would you have a Character kill someone?'

'Another Character, yes. A human being, no.'

'Christian learned how to act without you.'

'I know.'

'If you know then how can you deny them rights?'

'I'd never get published again if I started spouting this nonsense.'

'You Writers are selfish. The lot of you are sick.' Hilary says, and she drains her mug of its contents.

'They're not people. They're not like us. When will you understand?'

'I'll never understand why they are forced to live out your sick fantasies.'

'If it wasn't for my "sick fantasies" they wouldn't be here in the first place! There'd be no Christian for you to remember without me.'

Hilary stands up and walks to the sink. She rinses her mug.

'I'm going to do something,' she says.

'I love you, Hilary, but please just leave this alone.'

'I have to go.'

The Writer watches her drive away from the front veranda and down the long gravel road. He watches until she's out of sight, until the upset dust of the road settles, and then he turns and walks back inside to his study.

The Writer sees a pile of documents on his desk, the research articles from Melbourne University. He glances over them.

'Rubbish. The whole damn lot of it,' he says, and tosses the articles in the paper wastebasket in the corner.

The Writer sits at his desk and picks up his story where he left off.

# Bus Trip

Cindy Tomamichel

You step down from the bus, your pack landing with a dusty sounding thump beside you. Watching the bus roar off, red dust envelops the vehicle as it speeds away. Behind you lies a discarded life and a job that sucked the joy from life. With you is all you have, yourself and your pack. No one knows your destination, for you know it not yourself. Behind are the lost dreams of another person, hoping to leave the pain, you try to cherish the experience. The town in front of you is nothing, another small scattering of houses that have sprung up by the roadhouse and continue through inertia. Here and there, small wizened attempts at gardens flourish under the drip of an air cooler or tank stand. It seems to just exist, past, present and future merging into an eternal now. A battered yellow sign offers accommodation and inside, out of the bright sunlight, your eyes gradually take in the brown wire fly screens, the battered furniture, the tired looking owner. A ceiling fan spins erratically, vainly trying to cool the air, bone dry as an oven in the corrugated iron structure. You book in, lying on a faded quilt on a sagging veranda. Watching the empty street, as the sun cools, a few skinny dogs sniff posts along the main street. A feeling of being alone, isolated from the world you knew steals over you. Isolated and free, you realise, the past behind you, and in a town where no one knows your name. You doze contentedly, thinking of the next bus, and all your tomorrows. By nightfall you are rested and the lights shine from the scattered houses, yellow beacons in the dust-flavoured darkness.

The stars have come out and you stand in the main street looking down the road that stretches to forever. A flyspecked noticeboard advertises lost dogs and one sidles up to you, its tongue lolling out of its smiling jaws. A small yellowed scrap of paper crackles in the breeze and you tear it off. A job at the hotel, it nestles next to the bus timetable in your pocket. The dog follows you to the pub, settling beside you as you sit outside, chewing and thinking and watching the stars.

# Powder

Jan Price

My father cries

in a car

four strides from a country church door

wherein those who greeted her warm cheeks;

breathed in her signature L'Aimant face powder

listen now to the long list of jobs she'd held

from thirteen to sixty my brother reads out;

his mic-trained voice regresses to childhood

on her last line which reads

'Stay tuned for more!'

My father waits

in a car

outside the gate; inside prayers hover afraid

they'll be forgotten as white roses

fall freshening in the placid rain. A small bird

the colour through blue cellophane over grey sky

swoops and sweeps its startled cry

over the abysmal *cheaper for two* hole

into which my sister memory-flutters

rainbow-flitter then says follow me

for afternoon tea when it was lunchtime.

My father laughs

in my sister's house

half hour later masticating cake guzzling tea;

milk first two level sugars - but

make sure the teabag dips once only.

He pulls and pats the travel-rug cocoon

into position like the priest the mourners

the husbands the wives ...

And I

hunting

like a winter-hungry squirrel

dig deep into her cosmetic bag

slide up and off the circular top and stop

as the fragrance fills the room and settles

my anger. Pressing and lifting the puff

I thickly powder L'Aimant over my face

in the dark.



# Locked Room

Jan Price

Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
rock me a song  
last it forever  
beyond this room long

Never! Oh Never! I'll  
Not strain your reigns!  
Hurry up now  
before The Voice gains!

Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
do not look back  
don't turn your head  
it's time now to act

Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
Ready to go?  
Why is your body  
so wooden and slow?

Break through this glass  
shatter it out!  
Rush to the winds  
before The Voice shouts

Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
times almost past  
I'm rocking so hard  
faster than fast!

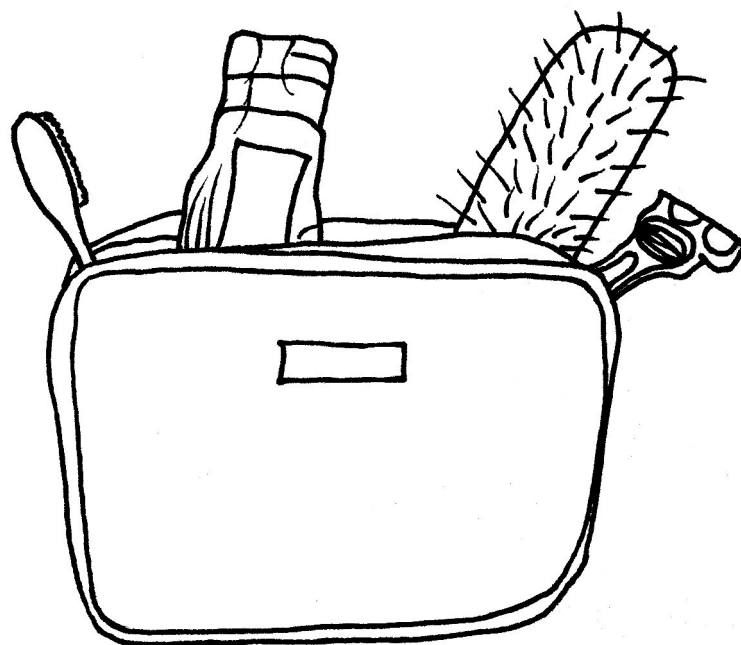
Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
why don't you fly?  
Lift up your knees  
let hope be your eyes.

Out through the pain  
into the sun!  
Now we are free  
The Voice hasn't won!

Rocking Horse Rocking Horse  
why are you still  
are you afraid  
I might crush your will?

# The Passenger

Daniel Campbell



The kitchen's linoleum floor sparkled, just as it had done when they first moved in. It was the last of the household chores to be completed before the big trip, so she wanted to make sure it was perfect.

Irene Becker or Rene to her friends at work, was nearing 50. Her 25th wedding anniversary was fast approaching and a vacation with her husband Mark was the reward.

The couple never had children – oh, they had talked about it plenty of times, of course they had – but there was never a good time to try – career, money, Mark's indiscretions (a no-go topic) – life just seemed to end up getting in the way. Rene had her cat Kibbles though, well, she did. But that was before he was hit by a car. She'd found him pushed hard into the side of the concrete gutter of their narrow tree-lined street. His little bones crushed, his fur falling out in patches. The exposed skin pecked at by Magpies in a cruel irony that befitted his short life.

Rene worked as an E.R nurse and was always exhausted, she needed a break, but again, as it was when talk turned to children, Mark found ways of putting it off. The couple had always struggled with money and he had only recently come into steady employment at the factory. "The economy is bad, we can't afford it," he would say to Rene every time she broached the idea. But not this year.

Rene finished cleaning; wringing the mop of all the harsh chemicals dry, the heavy stench of bleach hanging in the air.

### **11:47pm – Day One**

The air was cool in the leafy suburbs of Melbourne. A gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the surrounding Plane trees. While the street slept Rene Becker hauled something heavy out to the '99 midnight blue Holden Commodore station wagon that was parked outside of their modest home. As a way to appease Mark she suggested that they fold the back seats of the car down and squeeze in a small foam mattress to save money on accommodation. It would be romantic sleeping out of the back of the wagon, she said. Just like

when they were young; camping out by the river, listening to the sounds of nature.

### **5:30am – Day Two**

The plan was to head west, cross the Nullarbor follow the coastal route north and circumnavigate the country. Time wasn't a factor, although Mark *had* wanted to be back before the month was out.

"If you're back by Feb you can keep your job," his supervisor had told him in his usual disappointedly gruff voice a week earlier.

Apart from the gradual crawl through the city, traffic was light. The working masses inching along the motorway like ants; filing off to jobs they hated, wearing grey suits on grey days.

Finally with the city in their rear-view mirror, they could enjoy their vacation; no work, no bills, just freedom – for now. Rene packed sandwiches, coffee, potato chips and plenty of water. She had a full

tank of petrol as well as two 20 litre jerry cans so there was no need to stop for quite a while.

Mark remained quiet the whole morning. But Rene just assumed he was brooding.

"It's happened, you may as well try and enjoy yourself," she said in her most soothing voice.

"C'mon look at that view."

Outside the once blackened Gum Trees were slowly regenerating following recent bush fires as they entered the Grampians National Park.

But Mark didn't reply, didn't say a word. He just continued to stare forward, motionless, out of the windshield with nary a blink of his eyes.

After four hours of driving Rene decided to stop for a rest break. At Dadswell Bridge, not much more than a stop on the highway, there is a local landmark. The Giant Koala, a 46 feet high sculpture that stands out against the bushels of native Eucalypts; Stringybarks, Ghost Gums. Rene parked the station wagon half a kilometre away and made her way on foot to the tavern next to the massive figure.

*For the exercise*, she told herself. Mark stayed behind in the car.

Rene took photos of the Koala with her phone, she got herself a coffee and a bag of Allen's Snakes Alive, not that she needed them, and walked back to the car. Rene was a shapely woman, some may even say she had a paunch. Working in the E.R meant her diet had suffered over the last 25 years. Dinner during those late nights at the hospital consisted of salty treats, sugary sweets and all of the good fats, which are the bad ones; trans, saturated, deep fried everything. Mark never complained though, never said a word. But why would he? He had grown distant and they hadn't made love in over five years. And when they did manage it all those years earlier it had only been a few grunted heaves at best.

Mark blamed their money woes. Rene blamed herself.

Back in the car Rene threw a bottle of water on Mark's lap before turning the ignition and pulling back onto the highway. She drove and drove continuing west before eventually crossing the South Australian border around midday. Mark still hadn't said a word.

“Oh look, a herd of Kangaroos,” she exclaimed. “Wait, what is the name of a group of kangaroos? A herd, a mob, a murder?”

Still nothing.

“I wish you’d get out of your mood,” she said to him. Placing her hand on his knee and giving it a gentle, loving squeeze.

### **9:00pm – Day Two**

Rene continued on, as was the plan, until nightfall. She did it for another eight hours or so before she could go no more, her vision becoming strained as her eyes watered and stung from fatigue.

They made it to the small town of Kyancutta near the Gawler Ranges.

There she found an out of the way road – one she figured would have minimal traffic – to rest for the night.

Climbing into the back of the wagon she immediately dropped onto the mattress dead to the world.

“Are you coming to bed?” Rene asked Mark after dozing off for a minute.

Mark remained silent in the front seat so Rene threw him a blanket.

“Fine. Stay there if you want, but remember it’s your turn to drive tomorrow.”

### **7:30am – Day Three**

The next day Rene woke refreshed after 10 hours sleep, the intensity of the early morning sun had begun to cook the car and she felt sticky with sweat. Climbing out of the back as quietly as she could, she tried not to raise her husband.

Behind the cover of Spinifex bushes Rene went to pee. While on her way back to the car she saw her husband still seated in the passenger seat.

In the driver’s seat Rene was fuming but she remained silent, grinding her teeth as she seethed. The contempt she felt growing more and more.

“I don’t care if I’m going to end up doing all of the driving. I don’t, you know. And I get why you’re mad and why you didn’t want to come on this trip,” her eyes a fire of rage.

“But what I don’t get, and why I’m so upset, is the fact that you still

continue to carry on with the silent treatment like a damn child,” she barked with teeth gnashing intensity as tears began to fill her eyes. After a moment of silence Rene turned to him. Taking his hand in hers: “I’m sorry. Look, we’re here now so let’s just enjoy ourselves,” she had calmed and knew that Mark had also.

Again Mark continued to look forward, in silence, at the road ahead with nary a blink of his eyes.

The Becker’s were approaching the Nullarbor Regional Reserve, an area that bisects the country in the south of Australia. It was here, for no reason in particular, that Rene decided to stop and rest. The flat plains that surrounded them reached north towards Alice Springs. And to the south, the Bunda Cliffs and the Great Australian Bight. As she looked around her eating her service station BLT, the bread becoming soggy from the tomato, Rene took in the landscape. The vivid colour of red sands distinguishing heat. The red broken only by the white, dry salt flats on ancient lakes. Normally giving life to an abundance of waterfowl on the lookout for respite from the desert heat – but not today, not now – today the lakes are dry. The skeletons and decomposing remains of the unfortunate now litter this desolate landscape.

She offered half of the sandwich to Mark, but figured he wasn’t hungry when he didn’t take it. Afterwards she didn’t say a word, automatically getting into the driver’s seat. This is exactly what she had needed. *Even with Gloomy Gus riding shotgun*, she thought.

They didn’t stop again as planned that day. Rene drove until dark finally pulling over exhausted just outside of Cocklebiddy. It was as good a stop as any, she reckoned.

#### **4:30am – Day Four**

Awakened by the sense that she was once again sleeping alone Rene looked towards her husband. His shadowy figure in the passenger seat bright in the moonlight as an abundance of stars radiated the desert skyline. It’s a good deal colder than Rene expected it to be at

the height of summer. But she didn't know, couldn't have known. She'd lived her entire life in the city, she wasn't aware of just how cold it could get during the desert nightfall. "Mark? Mark, are you awake?" Rene whispered to her husband but received nothing but silence in return. "Mark if you're awake can you please come back and sleep here next to me. It's really cold."

Again there was nothing but silence, no sleep induced grunts or snorts made under his breath. It was silent outside also, the air was still. No stirrings from the desert inhabitants; crickets all fast asleep. The road too was as desolate as the landscape. The occasional road train thundered by, but Rene hadn't heard one since before going to sleep. The car's proximity to the highway ensured the hissing airbrakes and rumbling diesel engines made by the passing beasts wouldn't fail to rouse her; no matter how tired she was. She placed her head back down on the pillow, her husband still seated in the passenger seat undisturbed by his wife's nocturnal callings.

#### **8:30am – Day Four**

Again Rene woke in the back of the station wagon alone, but to her surprise, draped over her shoulders was the blanket that Mark had been using the night before in the passenger seat. "Thanks for the blanket, I needed it. I didn't realize how cold it got at night here," she said to her husband after returning from the truck stop; jerry cans once again full, a plastic bag thrown over her shoulder filled with sandwiches and other supplies. "You know what, I don't mind driving today. You can get some extra sleep. I'm sure it would have been hard to get any at all last night. You must have been freezing."

The vast landscape of the island continent flew by them through the dusty windows of the car. The heat raging, stifling the air was making it difficult to breathe. Rene flicked on the AC and pushed her foot down hard on the accelerator as dust particles danced on the

cool air rushing through the rattling vents. Desert grasses swayed and bent in the blisteringly hot, arid wind. Hummocks of Daisy Bush flourished on the sand dunes as Mulga grew in the swales and flats between them. The dead straight, flat road ahead.

#### **2:30pm – Day Four**

The sirens surrounded the car as the men and women in uniform leapt out with guns raised towards the midnight blue station wagon. They were screaming words at her but she could barely hear them over the sirens. Rene raised her hands to her head thinking that was what they wanted. Two officers ran towards her while the rest remained; taking cover behind their vehicles. As one of officers arrived at the driver's side window he screamed for her to slowly get out of the vehicle.

Mark remained perfectly still, staring forward with nary a blink of his eyes.

Rene did as the police officer said and opened the door. As she did so the officer reeled back in disgust; the stench taking his breath away. He began to gag letting the hand holding the revolver drop from Rene's chest. The officer standing at the passenger door's face began to distort into a sickening caricature of its former expression.

But Mark just sat there perfectly still, staring forward at the road ahead, with nary a blink of his eyes.

At this stage the decomposing body of Rene's husband barely resembled a man anymore. His sunken eyes hardly able to contain the eyeballs that for four days had stared out of the windshield of the midnight blue station wagon. The stage of putrefaction suggested

Mark Becker had been dead for more than a week.

The putrid stench of death was overwhelming but Rene couldn't smell it. She turned her head to her husband who was still sitting in the passenger seat. His eyes still fixed on the road ahead. She saw the man she married; the man she loved. Not the greying, fleshy mass of decay that had been sitting beside her in the passenger seat.



As Rene sat handcuffed up against the hood of the car, the sun blasting the asphalt causing the illusion of waves to form in the distance, her pocket lit up as her phone rang. It rang four times before she turned to the police officer.

"I'm not answering it," she said to him, a blank expression on her face.

"I'm on vacation."

# Counted

Jane Downing



The crowd on the foreshore gasped and then shushed themselves, not wanting to scare the first rush of penguins coming home for the night. Everyone was quiet, except Jack, who squealed up into the range of bat with suppressed excitement let loose.

Felicity Brown put her hand on Jack's shoulder and his voice dropped back.

Their immediate neighbours tore their eyes off them, the word 'spastics' hung in the air, died. Everyone looked back to the flight of the fairy penguins. Two, three, ten, thirty tumbled full tilt out of the waves and up the beach. Felicity decided this was a good idea after all. When she looked at her charges, all nine of them from the supported accommodation were agog. Faces glowed between beanies and scarves.

Most of the pint-sized penguins had the good sense to dash straight past the audience and into the dark. Tussocks rippled and surged and stilled. The burrows were safe underground.

The ocean lapped loudly on the sand. Too quickly, the shore was clear. With the parade over, families started to pack up. They'd be able to see some burrows as they trod the boardwalk back to the car park. A penguin or two stood sentinel each night, spied in halos of torchlight.

Jack and Colin were quick to be off too but Mr Mulligan jumped up and herded them back into the group. 'We'll hold back,' he told Felicity.

'Yes, easier,' she agreed. She moved Emma's wheelchair further to the edge of the boardwalk where she'd been parked so there was more room and less jostling.

'Pretty,' Emma whispered in her ear as she bent to fix the brake back into position.

'Pretty penguins,' Felicity Brown beamed back.

'Samantha, can you make sure Philip keeps up?' Felicity called.

She watched the young volunteer, on a 120-hour community service order, turn and put her gloved hand out to Philip. Philip didn't take it, but he did shuffle forward a little quicker, his sports bag hugged to his chest.

There was always something. For Philip it was the bag he took everywhere. He'd been carrying it when his cousin dropped him at the supported accommodation three years before. His mum had cared for him as long as she could, more than fifty years, until she was put in a nursing home and told big, burly disabled sons were not allowed. So he carried the bag, ready at every moment of the day for his mum to come and take him home.

The lights of the reception centre and restaurant were a guide in the distance. Felicity did a 360° every few steps and counted to nine, Jack and Colin up the front, back to Philip at the rear. The risk assessment forms for the excursion had been a nightmare.

She lost none of her charges in the sand hills. They regrouped and stood on the edge of the car park, nine adult residents, two workers, one volunteer. They waited until most of the cars had shot off to

Melbourne. When the coast – real and metaphorical – was clear, their embarkation process began. Mr M got the lift going for Emma's wheelchair, while Felicity counted the rest of them through the side door of the minibus.

The warmth inside was more stuffy than comforting. She helped Raj get his beanie into the pocket of the seat in front and repositioned his coke-bottle glasses squarely. Lucy and Peta's gloves were all wet with sucking.

'Were they really fairies?' Lucy asked. 'Their wings were so little.'  
'They're called Little Penguins now,' Samantha called from further down the back where she'd made herself comfortable away from the residents – equidistant from those sitting at the front and Emma, high and enthroned in her wheelchair at the back.  
'Pretty,' added Emma as Mr M slammed the rear door.

Half an hour later the bus was quiet. Taillights snaked away in front of them. Mr M drove, Felicity closed her eyes for a brief moment. With sight and hearing lulled, smell intruded. Now she was aware of it, there was no subtlety to it. The stink hit her like the blunt hand of a flailing child.

She exhaled, then hauled herself out of her seat. She walked slowly down the aisle trying not to disturb the exhausted silence. Jack was chittering when she got to him, and Peta snoring. She sniffed. It was like a school kids' game, you're hotter now, colder now, her nose told her. She let it lead her to Philip.

He was asleep too, his big floppy head resting against the window. A car passed in the other direction, briefly lighting up his features. His thick eyelashes settled like lady's fans against his cheeks. Let sleeping dogs lie, she thought. The saying jarred. Never wake a sleeping child. That was better: child, not animal. But the cliché still didn't convince her.

She went back to the front of the bus.

'You can smell it too?' Mr M whispered.

'Is there a rest stop, petrol station, something, close? It's Philip. I'll have to change him. Can't let him sit in it all the way back.'

Mr M fiddled with the GPS. 'Ten minutes to the next one.'

He turned. His moustache was a shock of white in the night. 'On second thoughts, should we let him sleep?'

Felicity really wanted to. Really, really wanted to. 'Best not. God it's bad. What has he eaten?'

It was more like twenty minutes before the service station dazzled into view.

Felicity had opened all the windows. Jack and Raj were awake and fractious, and Samantha on her community service order, had a bolshie look, behind which Felicity hoped she was promising never to commit fraud again.

After the bus stopped, Felicity tugged Philip's elbow and shifted him into wakefulness.

'We'll be home soon,' she said to soothe everyone as she shepherded him down the aisle. He was taller than her; she kept her hand on the small of his back to keep him moving. He had the bag to his chest so it wouldn't knock against the seats as they went. Samantha was close behind, an unlit cigarette hanging off her bottom lip and her right thumb running over the little silver wheel of her lighter.

'I don't know why you don't just put them in nappies,' Samantha said as soon as they were out in the fresh air. Felicity didn't turn. She guided Philip across the concourse and past the barbeque charcoal and wood chips and the ice machine.

There was no handicap toilet, no family toilet, and only two cubicles in the women's. It was a tight squeeze.

'Can you leave your bag near the sink do you think Philip?'

His mouth opened but no word came out. He hung onto the bag.

'We'll only be a sec,' she lied. She didn't need to imagine what she was going to find when she pulled his trousers down. This was her job. She faced Philip in the cubicle and gingerly pulled the tracksuit

cloth over Philip's bottom and let it fall.

Dignity. That's why we don't put them in nappies, she belatedly answered Samantha – in her head. They are not babies. Their dignity.

'Can you step out of your trousers, Philip, carefully. Good boy, you're doing great.' The trousers looked unsoiled in the flickering purple light of the toilet. She counted this small blessing.

'Now your undies. Bend over a little. Ah, your favourite red ones.'

'Red for special,' Philip muttered somewhere into her belly. She thought: dignity, that's all we've got. She was stretching around him, peering. His exposed bum was a cratered moon of dimples and cellulite. The stink was no worse. Nothing. Toilet paper came up with nothing either.

'This can't have been farting Philip.'

She stood Philip up straight and looked him in the eye. Nothing. Not even a giggle at the word.

The stink had not abated.

'Give us a look at the bottom of your shoes.'

Nothing. There was only one last place to look. She put her hand on his sports bag and he hugged it closer and turned into the wall.

Felicity was tired. She was all out of cajoling phrases. He couldn't escape from here, backed into the cubicle. She forcibly pulled the bag out of his grasp and stumbled backwards into the toilet door.

Philip was panting hard so she hurried. She knelt on the grimy washroom tiles to unzip the bag. Two eyes stared out. They blinked.

The penguin yapped like a little dog.

'Don't hold it so tight,' Felicity hissed as she force-marched Philip back to the bus.

'All set?' Mr M called out through the open driver's window.

'I counted wrong. We didn't lose one – we gained one. He's only gone and got himself a penguin.'

'Shit, how?'

'It must have run straight at him. There's no other way he could have

caught it.'

Once on the bus, all the lights on, she unzipped Philip's bag for the second time. The hitchhiker rocked itself like a tumbling clown doll. It's white chest glowed in the light. The other residents poured over backs of seats to see it shake its little wings.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck,' said Jack, using up his word quota for the day. Raj readjusted his glasses with his thumbs. Emma urged her head forward from her wheelchair's neck support.

Felicity was the only one not excited. 'They're protected.'

'We should ring the rangers and let them know,' suggested Mr M. He got out and paced the concourse with his mobile to his ear.

The penguin yapped and trod his nest of Philip's clothes – a full set for when his mum came to take him home. What were the symptoms of stress? Felicity's hand hovered. A touch calmed some of the residents, but sent others into meltdown. 'Which are you?' she whispered to the penguin in cooing tones.

Mr M stuck his head through the window. 'They're coming to get it. I persuaded them Philip hasn't the capacity to steal anything so I think we're clear of charges.'

Felicity needed a comforting hand on *her* shoulder. Instead she had another responsibility: nine plus one extra equaled ten lives now to take care of and keep safe. 'How long?' she asked. She was calculating in her head: more counting. The minutes it'd take for the rangers to get to their jeep, the road, the speed limit.

'Samantha, go and get chips. Lots of them.' At last the volunteer jumped to a request.

Felicity got up and closed all the windows in case the penguin decided hitching with someone else was preferable to Philip's bag, now cradled back in Philip's arms. Shutting the windows locked the dead fish and malign poo smell in as well. The penguin's new quietness might have been distress. Philip's could have been anything. She stuck on a CD. The Wiggles looped through the speakers. As the wheels on the bus stayed stationary, she sang about them going

round and round and Lucy and Peta and Raj and Eric sang along and Emma hummed and Jack chirruped.

The blades on a helicopter go round and round too. It was a whooping noise, as physically felt in the chest as on the ear drums. Its lights were the starkest, brightest going. They could have been alien technology they were so bright. The helicopter settled like a hybrid firefly-dragonfly in the middle of the road adjacent to the service station.

Mr M popped his head in through the bus's side door.

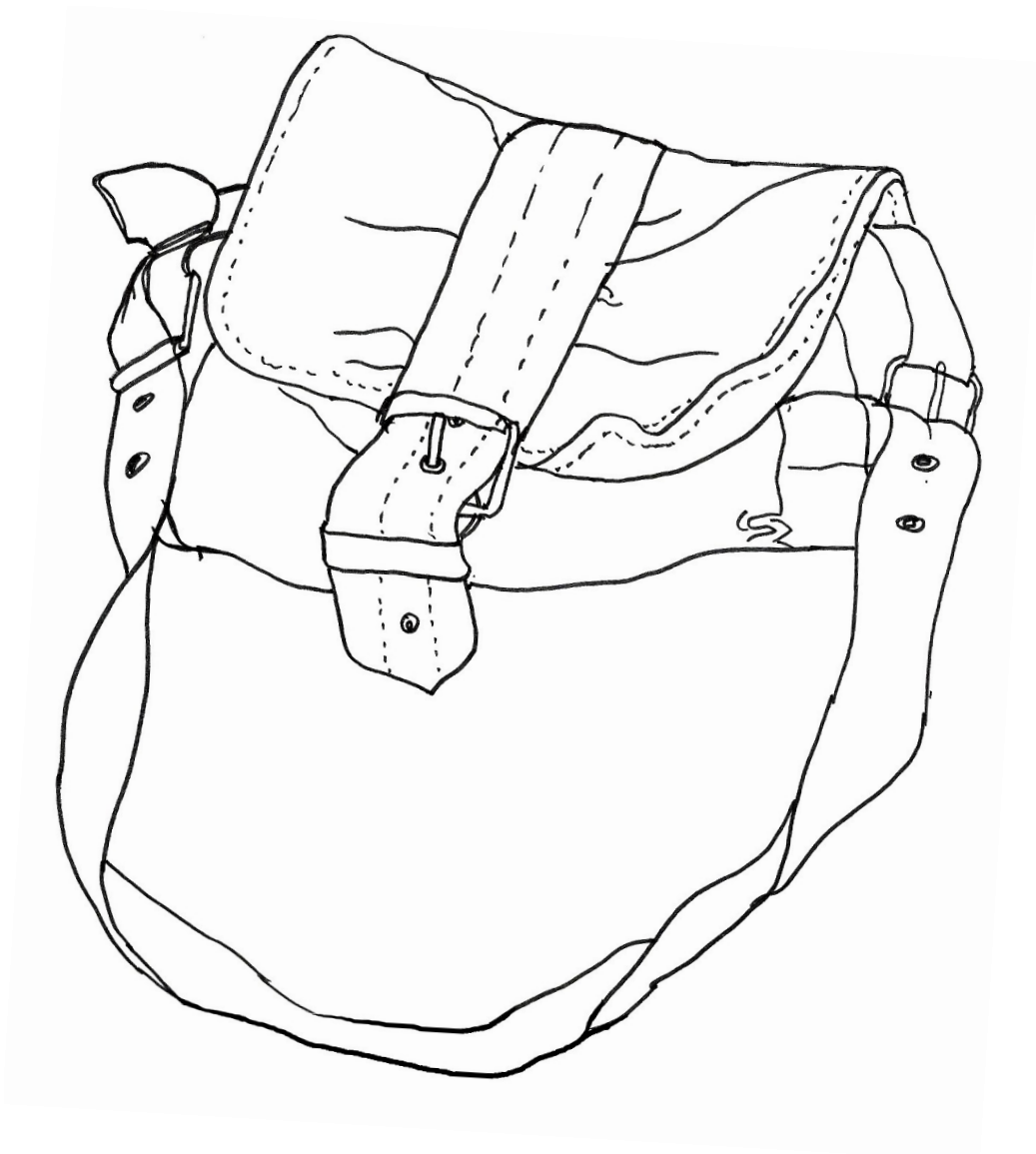
'A helicopter?' Felicity shouted stupidly above the noise.

'Your chariot awaits,' he pronounced.

The penguin hitched onto his next ride.

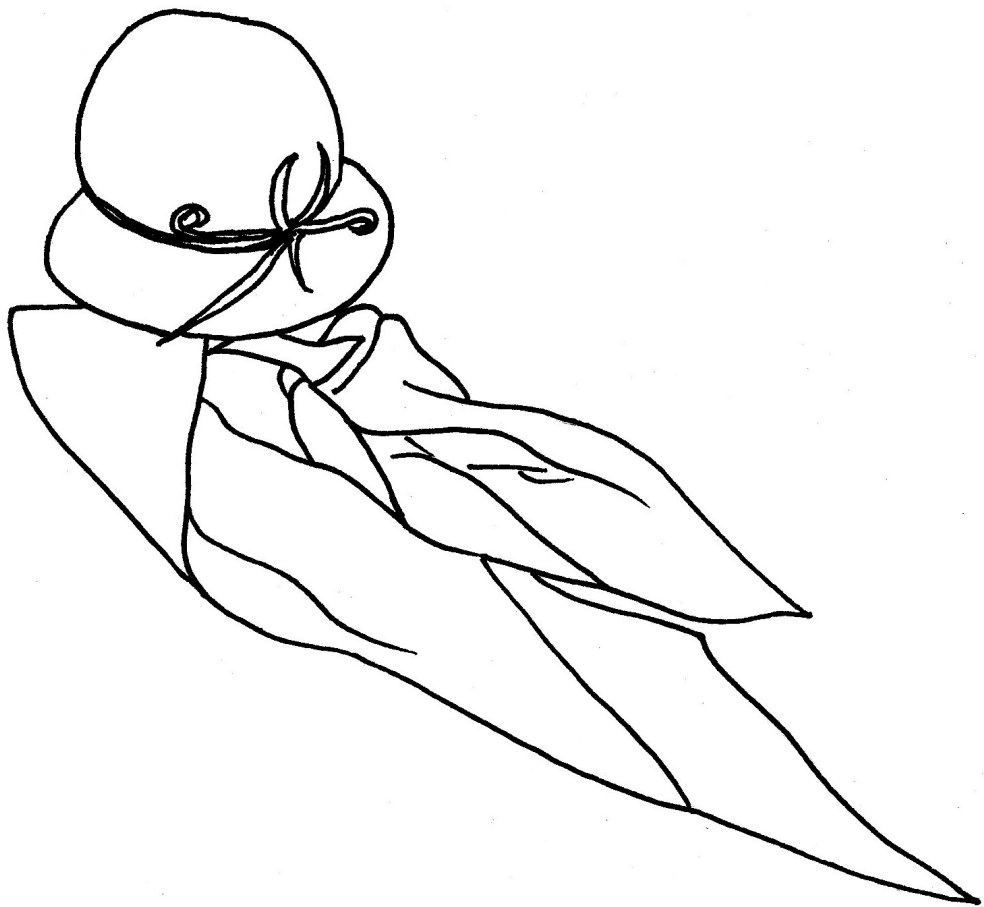
The lights on the helicopter lit up the logos of the twenty-three separate charities and businesses they'd persuaded to donate to buy the minibus for the disabled in the community. Felicity physically pinned the distraught Philip to the side of it. 'My little one,' he sobbed. 'Goodbye, goodbye. Come visit soon. See you later alligator.'





# The Cause and an Effect

Kerri Turner



It was around lunchtime and she had just been released from the police station. The charge was obstructing traffic. They had been unable to make it stick. One woman atop a soapbox, doling out pamphlets and intoning her message to uninterested passers-by was not much of an obstruction. Sending her to court hadn't been the intention, anyway. They were hoping a night behind bars would frighten her. As though she'd never been there before. As though the cause weren't worth sixteen hours shoulder-to-shoulder with prostitutes whose perfume couldn't hide the smell of alcohol, and thieves who protested their innocence with varying levels of conviction.

Hetty straightened the hat they had returned to her on her release. They'd bent the wide brim, but if they did it deliberately to annoy her, it didn't work. She squinted up at the sky. The day was cold. Not as bad as it had been, though. The temperature had plummeted below zero, the air, now lacking its usual frigid grip. It was a sudden change from the icy winds of late, and Hetty imagined it to be some small embrace from the city. Boston was like that; as fickle in her weather as she was in her people. She was glad it was on her side today.

Her stomach made a noise. They hadn't provided dinner or breakfast. Amusing, given the stories of other women being force-fed when imprisoned. Perhaps she should have threatened a hunger strike. Hetty had been too focussed on sitting upright, continuing her sermon on women's right to the vote, to notice her own appetite at the time, though. Now that there was no one to listen to her message, hunger was forcing itself on her. She looked from left to right, using her thumbs to knead the crick which had formed halfway down her spine. She should head to the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association. They would want to record her experience.

But a night and morning of strength was resulting in an afternoon of weakness. Nothing could be lost by holding off an hour or two, while she went home, had something to eat, and changed into fresh clothes, Hetty told herself. It would revitalise her, give her a sharper focus on her memories of the night. Allow her to continue the never-ending fight.

Turning her back on the direction of Back Bay, she headed for the Atlantic Avenue El.

The walk to Battery Street Station was reviving. The cold air was pleasant instead of brutal, and she walked with her face tilted upward, catching it on her skin. She'd lost her gloves when they'd dragged her off her soapbox, and she tucked her arms into the sleeves of her dress, holding on to her elbows. Her back still ached. She tried to tell herself the nagging pain was a small victory; she hadn't cried in a corner, or curled up on a bench to sleep. Their punishment had not gotten to her. She was not sure anyone had noticed, though.

Battery Street Station was busy for that time of day. That suited Hetty; she had only a few small coins on her, and she used those to buy a copy of *The Suffragist* from a news vendor who shook his head at

her. Hetty bared her teeth at him in a wolf-like smile, then wearily climbed the stairs to the elevated platform. While she waited for the train to arrive, she held the newspaper out in front of her, spread wide. Her eyes were unfocussed, blurred from lack of sleep, but she wanted to make a show.

She heard the tell-tale 'tut tut' of a man who had noticed. He stood to her right, with a well-dressed woman hanging on his arm. His glasses were pushed down his nose, and he was peering over them at Hetty with hot eyes. For a second, she wished she hadn't made a display of herself by showcasing the newspaper. But then anger flared; why shouldn't she read what she liked? She wasn't disturbing anyone; if they didn't like the paper's contents, they should look away.

"It's females like you who are running this country to ruin," the man announced. His companion, who hadn't noticed Hetty before, glanced at her. Her eyes travelled from Hetty's sleep-deprived face to her newspaper; her cheeks and neck coloured, and she looked away. Hetty kept her own face blank. She'd long ago learned that the best way to disturb opponents to suffrage was to show you were unruffled by them.

It worked. The man hitched his trousers up with one hand and puffed out a hefty sigh which made his moustache tremble.

"The one thing your sex is better at than men is keeping house and raising babies. Why can't you just focus on that, like a proper woman?"

The first time Hetty had heard that sentiment, she'd been enraged. Now, it was simply old. She couldn't even be bothered to point out that was two things, not one. She turned her gaze back to her paper.

"A lovely image of Susan Walker Fitzgerald," Hetty murmured, as though speaking to herself. "A suffragist *and* a mother. How strange."

"Why don't you take yourself and that rag away from here? There's decent people, and they shouldn't have to see that." The man was practically shouting now. The eyes of the others on the platform were drawn to them, but Hetty was not embarrassed. You needed attention if you were going to change the world.

"I'm a paying customer, just the same as you," she said. It wasn't strictly true; she was planning on hitching a free ride, ducking on the train under cover of the crowd. But this man didn't know that.

His nose moved up and down, an indignant rabbit with a walrus moustache. Hetty wasn't sure if it were hunger or laughter that made her stomach bubble.

"If women get the vote, it'll be chaos! The end of America! Next, they'll be taking jobs from men, and sitting on juries, and-and," he spluttered. Hetty cut him off.

"I can only hope so."

The train was pulling in, making further conversation impossible, and Hetty shouldered past the man. She knocked him with more force than intended, causing him to stumble into his companion. She didn't stop; a family were boarding the train, and hoping to look like one of them, she stepped on board. Back on the platform, the man was flailing his fists in the air, a caricature of anger.

"I'll not get on a train with a suffragist!" he bellowed, forcing those whose attention had wandered to stare once more. Hetty gave him a salute, but he was storming away, pulling hard on the arm of his silent wife. Hetty wondered if she understood the suffragists were fighting to give her a voice.

Probably not. She would reap the benefit once the rest of them had done all the hard work.

Hetty sighed, leaning on the edge of the open door where the air was still cool and fresh, not clouded with the scent of human bodies.

She was ready to make a quick escape if she was caught out hitching a ride with no ticket. Pressing thumbs once more to the sore spot in her back, she stared ahead at the track which threaded its way among the roofs of Boston. A billboard stretched the length of one of these roofs, advertising Lowney's Cocoa and Chocolates from atop a square brick building. Hetty's stomach rumbled.

A crack of thunder broke the sky apart and made Hetty jump. A woman on the train cried out, and heads began to turn, this time not to gawk at Hetty and her antagonist. Hetty's eyebrows lowered;

above, the sky was blue as cornflowers.

Where had that noise come from?

She looked behind her; confusion etched the faces of the other passengers. Had something gone wrong on the train? The tracks broken apart, perhaps?

Hetty poked her head out the still-open door, hoping to get a glimpse of whatever had caused that startling sound. She breathed in, then the air caught in her nose and throat.

The air was sweet. Like sugar, only richer. Hetty stepped off the train, hurrying to the edge of the elevated walkway. Rising to her tiptoes, she leaned as far over the handrail as she could, holding her bent hat on her head with one hand. On the paved street below, about two hundred yards away, was the man who had accosted her, hustling his wife away from the station. Hetty was tempted to yell something rude, but there was still that mysterious smell catching her attention. It was almost like candy, or honey. She couldn't understand where it was coming from.

A second later, a brown wave broke between the gaps of the brick buildings. It was like something out of a frightening dream; a tidal wave knocking bricks free from walls, pulling trees up by the roots.

Only no tidal wave was ever this dark in colour.

It took a second for Hetty's mouth to catch up with what she was seeing; then she was shouting, waving her arms frantically at the couple. They had stopped in their tracks, staring with open mouths at that wall of liquid headed straight for them. There was nothing else they could do. Two seconds, and they were engulfed. The wave hit waist-high, with enough force to knock them over. Then they were tumbling, turning with the current, heads submerged and limbs flailing but never breaking the surface. A second later, and the wave connected with the supports of the elevated track. Again, the sound of thunder; this time Hetty knew where it came from. Two supports cracked under the impact. Hetty felt herself tugged downward as the track fell in on itself. She shrieked, grasping on to

the rail, feet scrabbling at the suddenly tilting ground. There were screams all around, splashes as metal and timber fell.

Hetty had closed her eyes, but she forced them open again.

Passengers were clambering off a train that tilted at an angle, like a drunk falling face-first into the gutter. It was still in its place, though; the broken tracks hadn't been enough to let the wave claim it, and those aboard were managing to get off with nothing more than faces driven white by fright.

Hetty pulled herself up; she strained once more over the handrail. The couple were gone, either swept out of Hetty's sight or crumpled underneath the mess of twisted metal and broken timber which had once been part of the Elevated Railway track. The street was still flooded, but it was less deep already. Hetty's hands trembled, and she licked her lips; on them, the sweet taste of molasses.

It was a tidal wave of molasses. It made no sense, but that's what it was. Some part of Hetty's mind knew she should be running down to help; the coolness of the air would only make the molasses thicken, trapping those caught in more than water or even quicksand could.

But her legs couldn't support her, and she sat on the ground, hard.

If she hadn't been arrested the night before, she would have been on her soapbox again today. She wouldn't have used her few remaining coins on a newspaper, and wouldn't have waited on the safety of an elevated platform to hitch a train ride back home.

She would have been in the same position as that man and his wife.

Only moments ago, he had been yelling at her, thinking his worst worries were a future in which he'd have to share the voting booth with women. And now he had no future at all.

Both gone, in a matter of seconds.

When it came to death and disaster, it seemed there was no discriminating. Man or woman: fate didn't care. They were both equal.

## Toronto Bomb

Carmenn Alexander King Koczur





I've always loved Toronto. The hustle and the bustle keeps me alive, know what I mean? Keeps me going. I love the people and their widely diverse cultures. Toronto is what you would call a melting pot of cultures. You can experience every nation in the world right here. I wouldn't have it any other way. This is my city.

Every morning going to my car I run into my neighbor, Suleiman, heading to his office. He's the sales manager at Lexus Downtown Toronto. Known him for years. I wanted to warn him, you know. Oh sure, I told him about the old man's ramblings in passing after it was all over, but of course he didn't take me seriously. Hell, I didn't take myself seriously either. Yet, here I am driving away. Suleiman must have left for the office early because I didn't see him this morning.

I just hope I know what I'm doing. That old man must be crazy, right? Must be. Has to be. Look, I'm not the type to believe everything I hear, certainly not from any random bum on the street, but I'll be damned if I didn't start thinking the old man was on to something. Maybe he was telling the truth.

I guess that's why I'm on the Gardner Expressway trying to get out of here. Jeez. I must be nuts.

Look, so long as we're stuck in traffic here let me fill you in on what happened yesterday.

I was driving my usual route up Mt. Pleasant to get to the office Monday morning when I see this old man completely disheveled and disoriented like he's high. I drove up closer to keep with the traffic flow and suddenly he's looking right at me, right into my eyes.

All right, then.

He had his thumb sticking out for a ride, but like any other guy late for work I ignore him. Well, traffic being what it was I had no choice but to stop right in front of him. Wouldn't you know it? So naturally he hops in.

"Hey pal," I tell him, "would love to help but I'm in a rush."

"I need to get out of here," he says, like he's in a major panic,

"Get to the 400."

*The 400 highway?* I thought to myself. Who the hell was he telling me where to go?

"Listen, buddy, I can't take you anywhere. I'm 10 minutes late as is—"

All of a sudden this old guy pulls a long screwdriver on me. Fantastic.

"I don't want trouble," he says, shaking like a leaf, "Either you drive me out of here or get the hell out of the car."

No way in hell would I abandon my Kia Optima SX Turbo. I just paid over forty-five big ones for this baby and I'm certainly not losing her to some bum.

"Easy," I tell him, calmly and gently so he doesn't get crazy on me, "You win. Where are we going?"

"I told you," he shouts at me, "Drive us to the 400. Do it!"

So I do it. Who am I to argue with a lunatic with a screwdriver? I got us from Mt. Pleasant to Yonge and St. Edmunds and took the ramp up the 400.

About 20 minutes later we're heading north just like the old man wants. I ask him where we're going and he tells me Elmvale.

Terrific.

Who doesn't want to visit fucking Elmvale? At the time I hadn't even heard of the damn place. Now that I've been there, I have to say, it's not bad at all. Anyways, the old man says we're going to Elmvale, so by God we're going to Elmvale. The ride was awkwardly quiet, let me tell you.

"Sorry I gotta do this to you, friend," the old man says like he genuinely means it, "but this is urgent. It's an emergency. Christ. It's a national emergency. I won't hurt you unless you start something. So stay smart."

*National emergency?* This guy's high, I'm thinking to myself. I mean, wouldn't you? I've had some weird things happen to me in the city but this tops them all.

"Sure, pal," I tell him. "I'll be smart."

"I know you don't believe me," he says, "I don't blame you. But this is real. My God, they're going to do it!"

"Who's going to do what?" I ask him.

"I work for the government," he says. *Oh, sure. Here we go.* "They think they've erased me. They've been after me ever since they found out what I know."

"Is that right?"

"Damn right it's right. Listen carefully: On June 16 – this Friday – the government of Canada will drop a 100-megaton nuclear bomb on Toronto. 100-megatons! It'll wipe out everything from Toronto to Oshawa, even up to Barrie!"

He's off his rocker, I thought. Crazy, right?

"We don't even have nuclear bombs," I tell him, "Sure don't have any bombs that big."

“Don’t fucking fight me on this! I know what I’m saying!” the guy just freaks out on me like I ran over his cat. “They’re going to drop this thing at 11:25AM on Friday June 16! The aiming point is Casa Loma.

Do you hear what I’m telling you?”

“Okay,” I said, instinctively raising my hands so he wouldn’t stab me to death with the screwdriver. “Whatever you say, pal.”

“We’ve got the bombs! Had them for years. No one knows about it except the top brass. They know all about it. Now they’re going to use it on their own people. They’re lining their own pockets with cash.

Those bastards. They’re making it look like it’ll come from Iran or Russia or God knows where, then cash in on all that foreign aide that’ll pour in to help the country recover. Damn hypocrites want to start a goddamned war and they’re willing to slaughter their own people for it! Typical. This country’s no stranger to genocide. Why they hell should they care if they bomb their own people?”

I didn’t respond. What could I say? *It’s nuts!* I tell myself. The old man’s nuts! I happened to glance at him and noticed he had been fidgeting with some kind of trinket. I took another glance to see if he still had the screwdriver - he did. But the trinket was odd. I’d seen it before but never knew what it was exactly. I guess he caught me looking at it.

“This is the *asabikeshiinh*. It was woven by my grandmother.”

“Okay.” *Like that clarified anything*, I thought.

He continued, “According to the tradition of my people, Asibikasshi cared for the Ojibwe people until they spread far across the plains, from one ocean to the other. It became difficult for her to care for her children because they were far from her. So our mothers and our grandmothers spin the *asabikeshiinh* for us as infants, that our dreams be peaceful and our thoughts good. I have carried mine all my life.

Today I carry it with deeper meaning. Perhaps when the dawn awakens, this bad dream - this wicked, wicked dream - will go away, and peace and goodness will be restored.”

Sounded interesting, I have to say. I knew I had seen those things before but never knew what they were called or their origins. Then it

suddenly hit me that the old man's reference to genocide rang very true for him.

Well, we kept driving. And driving. After a while the old man got a craving for coffee and insisted we pull in to the next Tim Hortons. I certainly didn't protest, let me tell you. I hadn't had my coffee yet because the dishwasher chewed up my French Press. I wouldn't say no to good ol' Timmies, no matter how much of a coffee snob I am. Besides, my buddy the screwdriver-wielding hitchhiker tells me it's on him. Fine by me.

"No wrong moves," he tells me, jabbing my side with the screwdriver. I pull up to the speaker and a nice, friendly woman says, "Welcome to Tim Hortons drive-thru. Can I take your order?"

I look over at the old man.

"Small double-double," he tells me, "make sure they stir it well."

I repeat it back to the speaker. The old man tells me to order whatever I want. Okay, so I ordered an extra large two cream three sugar. We drive up to the window, the old man hands me five bucks, I pay the girl at the window (nice looking girl too, by the way – he tells her to keep the change), she gives us our drinks and off we go.

We kept driving for another hour or so. He rambled on and on. He told me how his mind was supposedly wiped by the government and that he was left for dead. But he survived somehow, regained his memories in the nick of time, and is now on the run knowing they'll find out he's still alive.

Sounds solid. *This is a live one*, I said to myself.

Once we reached Elmvale he finally tells me to let him off on a lonely road somewhere. As he stepped out of the car he simply said, "Stay out of Toronto. They're dropping it at 11:25AM on Friday. Remember that. Get as far away as you can! Here's something for your trouble."

He dropped a twenty in the seat then just walked away. Walking away like nothing happened. Crazy.

So naturally I called the cops, told them the whole story. Then I called work and filled them in on everything. Even told them the crazy stuff about the bomb dropping. They got a kick out of it. I spent the rest of

the day driving back to the city.

Anyway, that was Monday. It's Friday morning, as you already know. And what do you suppose I found out? The news said the mayor decided to leave town unexpectedly. Apparently, he was gone yesterday but the media didn't find out until today. I couldn't help but be just a little bit paranoid. Maybe I'm just as crazy as the old guy. I couldn't help it.

I was on my way to work but turned around and started driving southwest, heading towards Hamilton. That's why I'm stuck here on the Gardner. I figure I could drop by my cousin's place in London, pay him a visit. I know, I know, it's crazy. I'm out of my mind to believe the old guy. There's not a cloud in the sky. The only thing I've seen up there is a single high-flying jet. You see those all the time, you know.

I felt bad for not getting the chance to tell Suleiman that I'm leaving, so I got Siri to pull up the number to the Lexus Downtown Toronto dealership. The receptionist said Suleiman was busy. I told her this was important and to pass the message that the old man was right. He'd know what I mean, I said. Hell, now I've gotten Suleiman in on my paranoia. Jeez, I must be losing it. I should turn around. Call the dealership back and tell the receptionist to cancel that message.

Yeah, that's what I'll do. Next exit I'll get off and head back into the city. Ah, there's one up ahead. Perfect.

Well, it's 11:24 now and nothing's happened. Of course nothing's happened. Nothing will happen. Jeez. I must be insane to have entertained the old man's crazy talk. What am I, nuts? Oh well. I'll be late for work, but what're they going to do? I've put above and beyond into—

What's that smell? God, it's like burning metal.

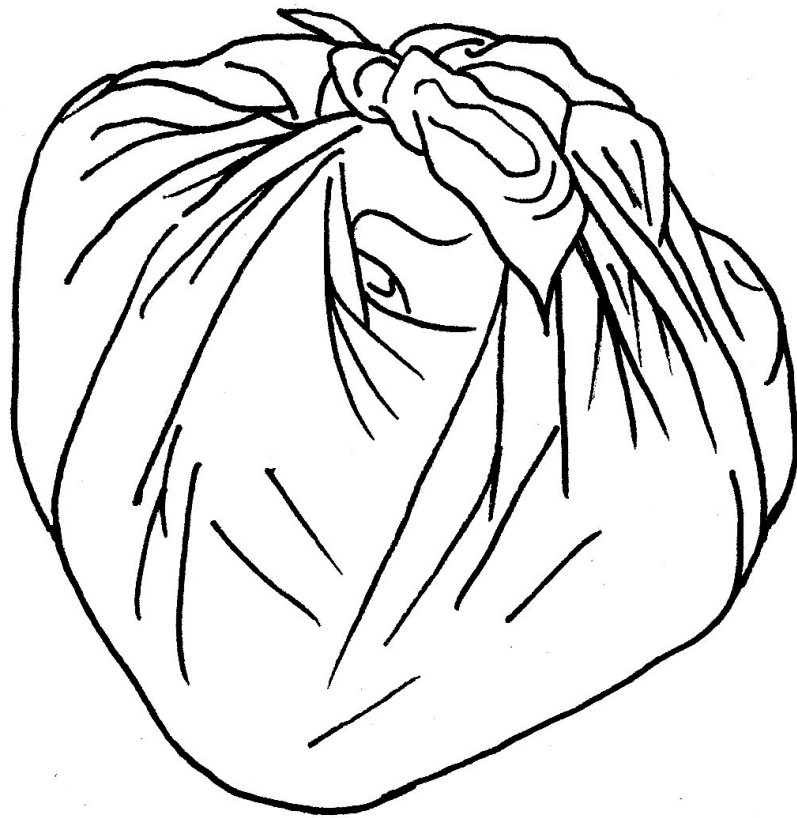
Why the hell is my car shaking? Jeez, the steering wheel's about to pop right off—oh, don't tell me...

Oh God, the light—!

THE END

# Roses to Dust

By Aline Mwezi-Niyonsenga



Ice hangs from dead street lamps. I wish I could blend in with the bleak landscape, but no dice. My face is too round. My hair is too big. With it down like this, I don't need to wear mufflers. My mufflers are in my palms and I carry them to a place that matches my dark skin.

Far from being buried, the tent towns outside the city centre are a barista's creation of cream and dirty brown. There I give my mufflers to a shivering boy in passing. Not like they're any good for a frostbitten heart.

A shorn head of curls peeks out of a tent and grins before announcing his departure. We both head even further out, up on a hill that overlooks it all. This hill isn't big. The land is just so flat.

The dumb grin on Markus's face reopens the cuts on his parched lips. Mine rub together, whole. How ironic. Markus rubs the bags under his eyes, then shoves his hands back in his pockets. The motion rips his coat zipper open. He's wearing multiple coats. It doesn't matter how many I wear.

"What a morning," he declares.

I glance at the view. Everything is ice. Even tears should be frozen. Maybe the icicles are frozen dew, frozen tears.

"How do you handle the cold?" I ask.

"Me?" Markus considers, then shrugs. "I'm used to it."

I bury my chin in my scarf. "So it's really something you're conditioned for since birth," I mutter.

"Yeah a rich person wouldn't get it," Markus laughs.

"What do you want to be reborn as?"

Markus turns to face me, then puts an arm around my shoulder while his lips scrape against my ear. "I won't tell you."

I sigh. "That's Method #49 of telling me that."

Markus chuckles and pats my back. "Cheer up! I haven't told anyone."

"But I can sponsor you to make it happen."

He shrugs. "And I don't want to be sponsored."

"That's not fair," I murmur. The cold seeps past my coat. I wish it could hurry up and seize my circulation. That way I could feel as if I'm filled with warm cotton. My friends' narcotics sometimes make me feel like that, but they don't kill me.

Markus crouches on the ground and stares at the city again. The tallest scrapers rise above our hill, but they're far enough that they seem to be the same height. Everything is an icy haze. I wish I could drown in it, but I'm too far. I'm always too far.

"Funny you should say that," he replies in a low voice. "You get to choose."

I shake my head. "My family gets to choose."

"But it can't be bad."

"They'll never let me choose."

"What do you want to be?"

"I already told you."

I take a deep breath and lift my head up, feeling the breeze burn my cheeks. "Dust."

Markus doesn't respond. The sun doesn't show, but we can sense its steady progress across the sky. Soon it'll face us. Then it'll be good-bye.

"Why would you want that?" Markus asks again.

"I told you. I'm sick of being human."

"But why dust? Why not a rose or-"

"Roses cry," I blurt out. "I don't want to feel anything."

"But dust...?"

"Is everywhere."

Wind bashes our faces with tiny snow crystals. "I can neither die nor come back to life," I breathe. "I'll finally just be."

A small smile plays on my lips, but it quivers into a frown.

Markus takes one fist out of his pocket and unrolls it. A small rectangle sits in his palm, plated with a silver rose crest. With a flick, it transforms into a blade as slick as the streets. "Rose...I can't do it you know." But I know he can. I've seen him do it.

I nod. "You're right. You have yet to tell me what you want to be reborn as first."

"No. Rose, I can't."

His lips quiver too, but in and out of a nervous grin. His eyes are downcast, flicking left and right. His hand opens and closes around the knife, trembling.

"They'll never look here," I whisper.

He punches his fist back in his pocket.

Shrugging, I start down the hill. "I thought I'd given you more than enough reasons to hate me," I say, "but I guess I need to take action."

I aim a wide smile at him. "Then you'll really hate me."

What greets me is his hunger-panged face, the empty ghoul that he



hides behind a cheerful mask. For a second, I'm reassured, but a switch turns on. The pupils smoulder, but it isn't hunger that lit them. I look behind me. No, there's nothing that wasn't there before. Then what...?

Markus's arms wrap around me. Warmth huffs in my ear. "I'll kill you with something better."

I can feel his smile on my cheek. He kisses it.

"I'll kill you with love," Markus announces. "It doesn't have to be today or tomorrow. You'll live a long life, Rose. Between then and now, I'll kill you with my love."

Failure, I think. This one won't do it. I push him away. Fresh blood oozes from his stretched smile. I think of the crying rose in my garden but his tears don't come. Seconds pass, and he doesn't return my knife. I frown. What is he playing at?

The wind dies, settling its dust. My lips pop apart, scattering our silence. "As long as you kill me," I find myself agreeing.

Markus laughs, clapping his arms around me. He should smell like layers of sweat, but I swallow the tears of a fresh rose instead.

Sucking a breath, I reason with myself.

Dust doesn't cry.

# Upcoming Local Opportunities for Writers

For a monthly round-up of local opportunities for writers, including competitions, calls for submissions, awards, jobs, internships and residencies, check out [The Writers Bloc](#)

## **Boondooma Station Anzac Stories in Poetry Competition—Queensland**

Each poem must address at least one of the Queensland Anzac Centenary Commemoration theme—all are listed on writingWA's website. First prize: \$500, second prize: \$300, third prize: \$200. Closing 17th February  
[writingwa.org/articles/boondooma-station-anzac-stories-in-poetry-competit](http://writingwa.org/articles/boondooma-station-anzac-stories-in-poetry-competit)

## **Headland Literary Journal—New Zealand**

Headland journal is currently accepting submissions for issue 9. Accepting literary short fiction and creative non-fiction up to 5,000 words in length. Closing 17th February.

[headland.org.nz/guidelines/](http://headland.org.nz/guidelines/)

## **Sydney Theatre Company Rough Drafts Program—Sydney**

Rough Draft developments are offered to theatre makers who have a proven track record and a new project that needs floor time for development. More details about this program at the link below. Closing 25th February.

[sydneytheatre.com.au/about/information-for-artists/creative-development-opportunities-rough-drafts](http://sydneytheatre.com.au/about/information-for-artists/creative-development-opportunities-rough-drafts)

## **Kill Your Darlings—Melbourne**

Accepting fiction and non-fiction submissions in the forms of essays, memoir, reviews, interviews and commentary, published both online and in print. Some membership required. Closing 28th February.

[killyourdarlings.com.au/write-for-kyd/](http://killyourdarlings.com.au/write-for-kyd/)

## **Henry Kendall Poetry award—Central Coast Poets—New South Wales**

Open to Australian citizens of 18 years or older. Entries must be no more than 30 lines in length and no more than 500 words in substance. Closing 28th February.

[centralcoastpoets.com.au/henry-kendall-poetry-award-2017/](http://centralcoastpoets.com.au/henry-kendall-poetry-award-2017/)

## **Gargouille Literary Magazine—Melbourne**

The literary journal Gargouille is currently open for submissions of short stories, poetry, scripts and aesthetic essays that contain originality, sensuality and absolutely no didacticism. Submissions close 28th February.

[gargouille.com.au/submit/](http://gargouille.com.au/submit/)

## **Lower View call for submissions—Brisbane**

A new journal based in Brisbane, Lower View is seeking fiction submissions under 5,000 words—stories from the other side, stories with emphasis on the other, the outsiders. No set theme, just great writing. Closing 28th February.

[lowerview.com/](http://lowerview.com/)

**Rosanne Fitzgibbon Editorial Award—Queensland**

Also known as 'The Rosie', this award recognises excellence in editing, as demonstrated in one work, with testimony from author, publisher or editor—the nomination can come from any of these parties. The winner of

The Rosie receives a cash prize of \$4,000. Closing 1st March

[editorsqld.com/cms/details.asp?ID=590](http://editorsqld.com/cms/details.asp?ID=590)

**Calibre Essay Prize—Australian Book Review—Melbourne**

Seeking essay submissions 3,000-7,000 words on any non-fiction subject. Entry fees apply. Closes 15th March.

[australianbookreview.com.au/prizes/calibre-prize/current-prize](http://australianbookreview.com.au/prizes/calibre-prize/current-prize)

**Chapbook manuscript call-out—Subbed In—Sydney**

Subbed In is now accepting manuscript submissions for a new project involving the publication of three chapbooks by three NSW-based writers in 2017. Seeking NSW writers at any stage in their career, but in particular emerging, young, and previously unpublished writers are encouraged to submit both poetry and prose. Closing 20th March—only open to NSW residents.

[subbed.in/publications](http://subbed.in/publications)

**Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize—Australian Book Review—Melbourne**

Seeking original stories of 2,000-5,000 words. Open theme, entry fees apply. Closing 10th April.

[australianbookreview.com.au/prizes/elizabeth-jolley-story-prize/current-jolley](http://australianbookreview.com.au/prizes/elizabeth-jolley-story-prize/current-jolley)

**Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia call for submissions—Black Inc. Books—Melbourne**

Independent publisher Black Inc. Book is seeking submissions of autobiographical accounts for a new anthology called *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia*. Submissions can deal with any aspect of growing up Aboriginal in Australia, and must be engaging while providing insight into the diverse lives of Aboriginal people in Australia today. Submissions should be 800-3,000 words in length. Closing 1st May.

[blackincbooks.com.au/news/call-submissions-growing-aboriginal-australia](http://blackincbooks.com.au/news/call-submissions-growing-aboriginal-australia)

**Homer online journal—Canberra**

The online journal dedicated to shining a light on masculinity by redefining and broadening the definition of 'a man'. Homer welcomes submissions from everyone, regardless of gender, on a mission to take apart of the concept of masculinity *with men's help*. They are currently seeking submissions in the form of memoir, personal essays, interviews, think pieces and humour. They do not accept fiction, poetry or reviews.

[homeronline.com/submit/](http://homeronline.com/submit/)

# Upcoming International Opportunities for Writers

For a monthly round-up of international opportunities for writers, including competitions, calls for submissions, awards, jobs, internships and residencies, check out [Aerogramme Studio](#)

## **Glass Mountain**—Houston, USA

Is seeking fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry and art from undergraduates at any college or university. Submissions close 11th February

[glassmountainmag.com/submit/](http://glassmountainmag.com/submit/)

## **Litro Magazine**—London, UK

A literary platform producing Litro Magazine, Litro Online and a podcast called Litro Lab that accepts short fiction, flash and micro fiction, non-fiction in the form of memoir, literary journalism, travel narratives, and artwork based on the monthly designated theme. Currently seeking submissions for the April edition, theme 'Wants & Needs'. Closing 19th February.

[litro.co.uk/submit/](http://litro.co.uk/submit/)

## **Portland Review**—Oregon, USA

The Portland Review is currently open for submissions for nonfiction, poetry, fiction, artwork and photography. More about words limits and visual submission specifications on their Submittable page. Closing 28th February.

[portlandreview.org/submit/](http://portlandreview.org/submit/)

## **Jane Austen Short Story Competition**—UK

Seeking submissions for short stories based on the following quote from Mansfield Park:

"Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure."

Entry is £5 and submissions must be 2,017 words or less. Closing 28th February.

[janeausten200.co.uk/competitions](http://janeausten200.co.uk/competitions)

## **Jane Austen Children's Letter Writing Competition**—UK

Seeking submissions from children in two age categories: 7-11 years and 12-16 years. The challenge is to write a letter up to 400 words long addressed to a 'Dear Friend'. The 'Friend' can be real or imagined, humorous or adventurous. Entry is free, closing 28th February.

[janeausten200.co.uk/competitions](http://janeausten200.co.uk/competitions)

## **Stella Kupferberg Memorial Short Story Prize**—New York, USA

The winner of this prize receives US\$1,000 and a 10-week course with Gotham Writers. Entries must be 750 words or less, to an theme, and the entry fee is US\$25, applicable to each entry. Closing 1st March 2017

[writingclasses.com/contest/stella-kupferberg-memorial-short-story-prize-2017](http://writingclasses.com/contest/stella-kupferberg-memorial-short-story-prize-2017)

## **Body Parts magazine**—USA

BPM is a journal of horror and erotica based in the USA. Each themed issue honours Eros and Thanatos, the Greek gods of libido and mortido: life and death. They are currently seeking submissions of art, photography, essays and interviews (up to 1,200 words), flash fiction (up to 1,000), short stories (up to 8,000 words), and serialised fiction (up for negotiation).

Submissions close 1st March.

[bodypartsmagazine.com/](http://bodypartsmagazine.com/)

**Pilcrow & Digger Literary Magazine**—Georgia, USA

Seeking submissions for the theme 'Dirty Little Secrets'. They want to know what you're hiding in your closet. Accepting fiction, non-fiction and essays (up to 5,000 words), poetry, and recipes (if it's edible, it qualifies). Closing 1st March.

[pilcrowdagger.com/submissions/](http://pilcrowdagger.com/submissions/)

**Howard Frank Mosher Short Story Prize**—Vermont, USA

Seeking stories that linger, branch away from the cliché, and grow deep roots of originality, under 10,000 words.

Winners receive US\$1,000. Closing 1st March.

[hungermtn.org/contests/howard-frank-mosher-short-fiction-prize/](http://hungermtn.org/contests/howard-frank-mosher-short-fiction-prize/)

**Room Magazine Creative Non-Fiction Contest**—Vancouver, Canada

Accepting submissions of one essay up to 3,500 words, each entries from residents outside of Canada cost US\$42. All submissions include a one-year subscription to Room Magazine. Closing 8th March.

[roommagazine.com/rooms-annual-contests-2015](http://roommagazine.com/rooms-annual-contests-2015)

**Nelligan Prize for short fiction**—Colorado, USA

No theme restrictions, stories must be 2,500-12,500 words. Winners receive \$2,000 and the winning story is published in the autumn/winter issue of *Colorado Review*. Closing 17th March.

[coloradoreview.colostate.edu/nelligan-prize/](http://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/nelligan-prize/)

**Women's Short Fiction Prize**—Mslexia—Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

Entries must be 300-3,000 words, open to women of any nationality. All genres welcome, entry costs £10 per story.

Closing 20th March.

[mslexia.co.uk/competition/short-story-competition/](http://mslexia.co.uk/competition/short-story-competition/)

**Dangerous Creations: Real-Life Frankenstein Stories**—Philadelphia, USA

Seeking true stories that explore human's efforts to control and redirect nature, the evolving relationships between humanity and science/technology, and contemporary interpretations of monstrosity. Essays must be previously unpublished and no more than 4,000 words. Closing 20th March.

[creativenonfiction.org/submissions/dangerous-creations-real-life-frankenstein-stories](http://creativenonfiction.org/submissions/dangerous-creations-real-life-frankenstein-stories)

**Booth Journal**—Indiana, USA

Accepting open-theme poetry (up to 3 poems), fiction (up to 7,500 words), non-fiction (up to 7,500 words), comics (up to 20 pages) and lists. Closing 31st March.

[booth.butler.edu/submit/](http://booth.butler.edu/submit/)

**Wergle Flomp Humour Poetry contest**—Massachusetts, USA

This contest seeks the best humour poem of up to 250 lines. Entry is free, published or unpublished work may be entered, open to all ages and all nationalities. Closing 10th April

[winningwriters.com/our-contests/wergle-flomp-humor-poetry-contest-free](http://winningwriters.com/our-contests/wergle-flomp-humor-poetry-contest-free)

## Our Contributors

Sarah Giles  
*Fictitious*

Sarah Giles is a freelance writer and Social Media Intern at Swinburne University. She has written for The Victorian Writer, Backstory Journal, The Dirt Collective, Swine and Other Terrain. Sarah is a co-creator of Melbourne zine 'SMUT', and is dedicated to building up a solid pile of rejection letters / emails.

Sarah is studying a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Professional Writing and Editing at Swinburne University, and is the founder of online journal L'écriture Féminine.

Mostly she just wants to be able to pay her rent with money earned writing. That's the dream.

Cindy Tomamichel  
*Bus Trip*

Cindy Tomamichel is a writer of action adventure romance novels, spanning time travel, sci fi, fantasy, paranormal, and sword and sorcery genres. They all have something in common – swordfights! The heroines don't wait to be rescued, and the heroes earn that title the hard way. Her first book, Druid's Portal: The First Journey will be out with Soul Mate Publishing in 2017. An action adventure time travel with a touch of romance set in Roman Britain.

Contact Cindy on

Website: [www.cindytomamichel.com](http://www.cindytomamichel.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CindyTomamichelAuthor/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CindyTomamichel>

Goodreads: [https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/16194822.Cindy\\_Tomamichel](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/16194822.Cindy_Tomamichel)

Jan Price  
*Powder  
Locked Room*

Jan has both city and country in her. She has always been interested in the How, Why and When of everything. Poetry, people, painting, films, seasons and textures are irresistible to her. Jan's poetry wins prizes, and is published in Australia and overseas. Her paintings sell from art shows and appear on Literary covers. Jan belongs to three writing groups and loves to read her work at public readings.

Daniel is a journalist originally from rural NSW and currently living in Portland, Maine. Before relocating to the United States Daniel worked as a journalist at the Narrandera Argus where he covered council and community news along with sports. *The Passenger* is Daniel's first foray into fiction. He is currently working on a novel set in New England where he lives with his wife, Leigh.

Daniel Campbell  
*The Passenger*

Jane Downing is the writer of poetry and prose, shopping lists, reminders of things to do, and not enough letters to her friends. She can be found at [www.janedowning.wordpress.com](http://www.janedowning.wordpress.com)

Jane Downing  
*Counted*

Kerri Turner is an award-winning Australian writer based in Sydney. A graduate of Faber Academy and an avid history buff, she loves to write short stories which involve real people or events which have been largely forgotten. She holds both a Diploma in Publishing and an Associate Degree in Fine Arts, and hopes to publish her historical fiction novels. Her non-writing time is spent reading, teaching ballet, and having one-sided chats with her miniature schnauzer. More of her work can be found at: [kerriturner.weebly.com](http://kerriturner.weebly.com)

Kerri Turner  
*The Cause and an Effect*

I am a twenty-seven year old man with high ambitions of publishing innumerable stories. I live in Ontario, Canada with my beautiful wife and our amazing kids.

Carmenn Alexander King Koczur  
*Toronto Bomb*

Aline-Mwezi Niyonsenga is an author of short fiction and urban fantasy novels who currently studies Writing at the University of Canberra. Some of her short stories can be found on [Write4Fun.net](http://Write4Fun.net) and [The Short Stories Club](http://TheShortStoriesClub). She currently writes articles for [Quantumrun](http://Quantumrun). Her novel experiment, *Lady in Black*, *Lady in White*, can be found on [Wattpad](http://Wattpad).

Aline-Mwezi Niyonsenga  
*Roses to Dust*

## Issue 18: Black Hole

Due out 5th May, 2017

*Leaning over the railing the swirling black waters call to me. My mind whispers, urging me to let go of my hold and fall into the void. It's an incredible rush being at the edge of eternity.*

They are hard to find: a black mass hiding amongst infinite darkness. How do you find something you cannot see? Only by watching the light around them. Light and joy can never be snuffed out, not completely. But beyond the event horizon is a pressure so intense that it shapes galaxies, dragged into the blackness, compressed and crushed into a pocket of infinitesimal space. The best way to survive an encounter with a black hole is to stay away.

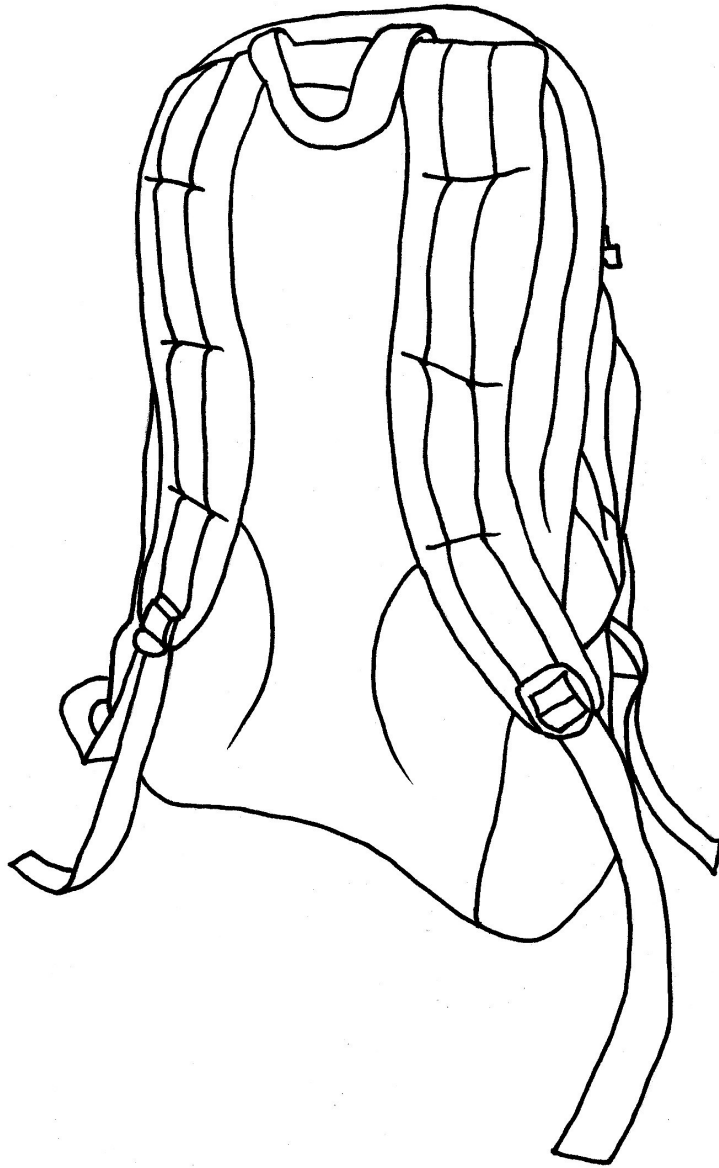
*Not many things are endless. Top of the list are black holes and souls, although the exact nature of each is shrouded in mystery. Souls, depending on one's particular beliefs, are also endless, are unique, are unquenchable, and project light. Life-light; the light of being alive.*

*Much like the Ouroboros,*

If a person were to fall into a black hole would they reappear in another's soul and, much like the Ouroboros, infinitely disappear and reappear into themselves?

*It must be a lonely existence. Always spinning, always hungry never sated, always hated, forever shrouded in darkness. Time grinds on slowly when entangled in the crushing downward spiral.*





## Contact

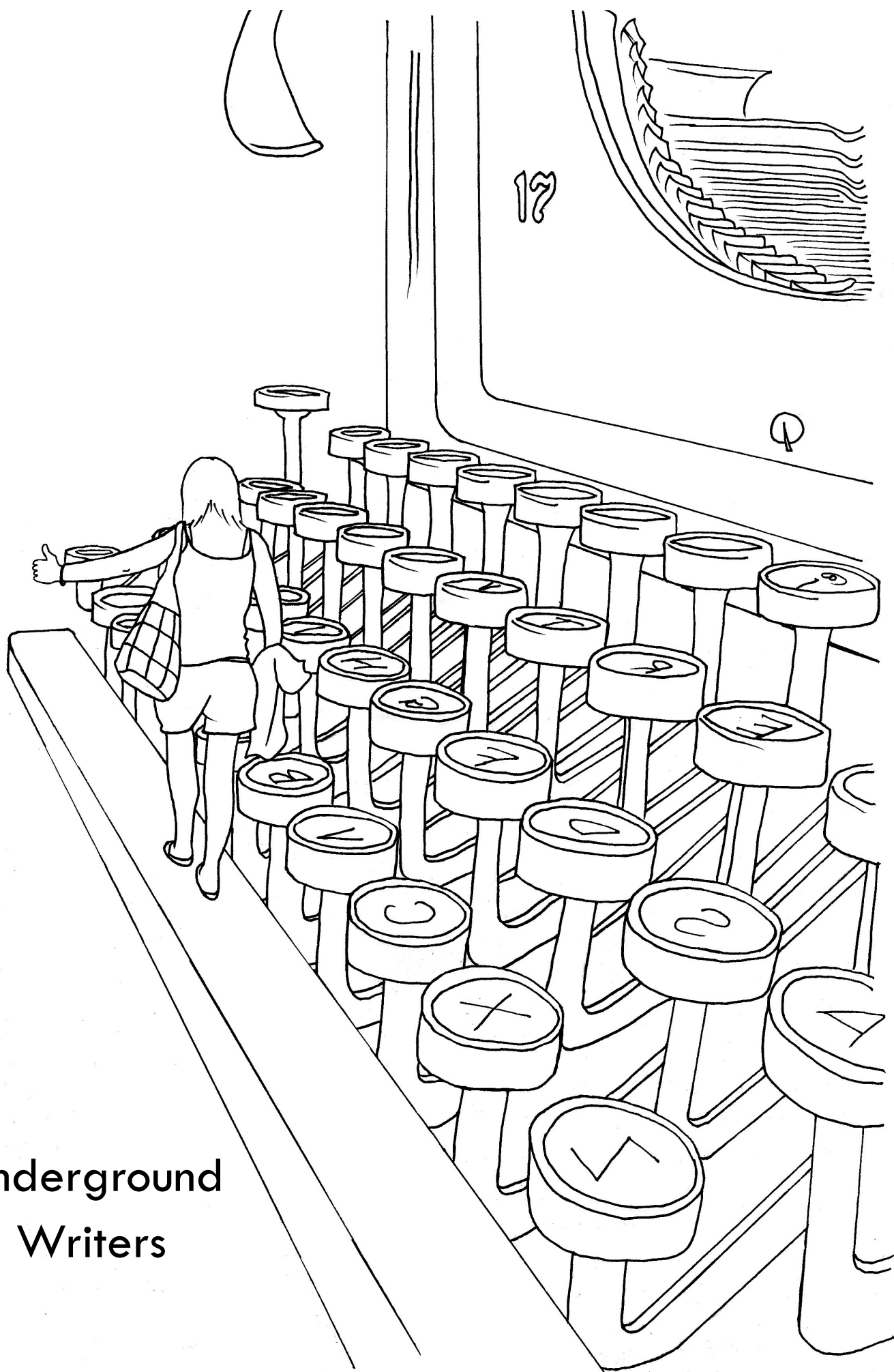
Submit your work to *Underground* at [submissions@underground-writers.org](mailto:submissions@underground-writers.org)

For general enquiries email us at [queries@underground-writers.org](mailto:queries@underground-writers.org)

Our website is [underground-writers.org](http://underground-writers.org)

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## Underground Writers