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M a g a z i n e



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Find regular updates on Ricochet Magazine at
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We welcome submissions at any time and guidelines can be found on our website.

COVER IMAGE BY JACQUELINE MOLINA

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Editor's Note

After some teeth gnashing and computer battering - my forehead has produced several new age haikus in the form of '7yuyuhj' and 'egij;egi934gki' over the last few weeks - I am proud to be able to present to you the first issue of Ricochet Magazine: a modest collection of poetry, short fiction and artwork featuring both Australian and overseas contributors.

What started as a small project undertaken due to a love of editing has evolved into something with fourteen contributors, a small team of editors and a layout artist. It is my sincere hope that this ezine will be available for download on a quarterly basis, barring unfortunate real life dramas and work commitments, which are painful but inevitable interferences in artistic endeavours!

I wanted this to be an ezine rather than a print journal in part due to the fact that our budget was nonexistent, and therefore the cost of production and distribution was unthinkable, but also because I didn't want those interested to have to pay a fee to view works by some talented established and emerging artists. Having something you could access by a simple click of the mouse was important to me. I believe reading work by emerging authors is just as important to a writers' ongoing development as reading the vast array of published literature out there; because it allows you to recognise what literary magazines are looking for, to learn and hone your writing skills by studying the work of peers at a similar stage of development. Many of the writers included in this issue would consider themselves emerging, though we have some work by authors with several publications under their belts as well. But either way, we are all constantly learning and growing as artists. I find the pieces I read in my favourite literary magazines to be encouraging, instructive and inspiring when it comes to my own work. I can only hope that you find something located in these pages that has a similar affect on you. The best ideas often ricochet from one mind to another, after all; alternatively slowing down and picking up speed as they change shape, lose points and gain others, before finally hitting their target.

This issue wouldn't be possible without your contributions and hard work, so a big thank you to everyone who sent in pieces for our consideration. As we prepare to get cracking on issue two - hopefully a *little* wiser about the process of putting together a zine - I can only say to you keep writing, send your work to as many literary magazines as possible, READ, and enjoy our small collection of works!

Emily Tatti

Managing Editor

The Tick Tolk Polka

Sam van Zweden

This is how I march my way through history –
nailing down my memories
to stop them from
slipping
away.

My lover disappeared and came back to me in pieces.
I swallowed those pieces so I'd always have her near.
My insides groaned as the pieces remembered themselves
and tore at me to let them out.

My mother always told me,
“If you can catch a bird
and put salt on its tail feathers,
you get to take it home.”

I wanted to keep it in a drawer by my bed.



I found a swallow on the ground in our yard.
Its body was broken and still,
an awkward little nature study.
I put it in my drawer and salted its tail.
I pretended.

It wasn't the same.

I loved a girl who forgot how to love me back.
She switched herself off and shut herself away.
Late at night I climbed through her bedroom window
and, while she perspired dreams,
I severed the fingers of her left hand
leaving her only a thumb.
Her butchered digits sit mute in my pocket.

Tying down.
Putting away.
Holding too close.
This is how I claw through time.



She Freed Me

Bee Williamson

We made towers of language
so high
I fell off them
in lucid dreams

Deep inside of me
A soul
22 years

we sheltered in words

made a psychic haven
in beach sand with wings

in the darkness
these words scrawled fast
as swift as ripples
drawn with a single finger
in water

black ink
like the still depths
under an iceshelf
all murky and steel blue

these words
a child's
first tentative step

The first breath
of birth
gulped

A virgin girl
with fresh
nerves
sliced
like apples
from a single
touch

Jessie
radiant as the moonlight on a scribbly gum's
creamy white bark

She freed me

When she freed herself.



Some Words I did Keep

Tristan Foster

I wrote a novel when I was young. It's not my intention to boast, but it was easy.

I was not encouraged by this; in fact, I found it disconcerting – nothing that easily done is ever of worth. So I ripped up the pages it was typed on; not only as an act of catharsis but to help me meditate on what I would do next. I tore each page into tiny segments. It took me a long time and my fingers were dry and black with ink when I was finished, like they had been licked by flames.

Friends were curious about my novel and what I had done with it. They asked me what it was about. They asked me when it would be published. I answered them with, “soon,” and hoped I would not see them again.

After writing my novel I wrote a short story about writing a novel and how easy it was. I began to write it by the window. It was harder than writing a novel. My thoughts kept turning to symbols and parallels and secret themes, hidden under the text; like seldom-seen treasures in the base-

ment of a museum. It took me many nights to complete, when the sky was opaque and thick as syrup.

I needed time apart from it, so I left home. I pulled my collar up and my hat down. As I walked along the city's grimy streets, passing the rubbish and the beggars, I interrogated my work. Was I writing because I wanted to write or because I wanted somebody in particular to read my words? Though I walked for many hours I could not settle on an answer. This angered me and I decided, there, in the street's neon glow, perhaps with the methodical destruction of my novel not far from my thoughts, that I would dispose of my story.

I then realised I was lost.

When I returned home I discovered that somebody had broken into my apartment and stolen my short story. I could imagine him creeping through my home as noisy bats chuckled and fought in the trees outside, the light from his torch rippling across my sparse rooms. When he was

unable to find anything, my story must have caught his attention.

Seeing this, having it taken from me, made me wish I still had it.

I closed my door and sunk into my cold bed, then into sleep, just as she appeared on the threshold of my imagination.

My sleep was painful and each time I woke to find it was still night I cursed, wishing for it to be day. But as morning neared I dreamt of my story, like Coleridge and his incomplete poem. My dream saw my stolen story returned and I was given an idea about how to write it down without ever losing it.

In the light of dawn I cracked a tin of paint open, dipped in my brush and used my bedroom wall for a canvas. I took great care in writing each letter. There was still half a can of paint left when I was done. The completed piece was aesthetically stunning, but I reread my story and it was different.

It was then I understood that Coleridge was lying, that his lie was a metaphor for the wonders the imagination can create and the frustration left when they get lost in the turmoil of thought, remaining unfound as though they never were.

I needed to flee my home and the awful story it housed, so I took a trip out into the desert in my old car.

The austere landscape was soothing. I let the red soil sift into my shoes, I let the spinifex scrape my legs.

Out here, in the silent, hateful heat, I wrote an essay about writing a short story and having it stolen and then returned in a dream, only for it to be different, lesser than the original. I wrote it in a notebook and cited several texts which did not exist while skinks eyeballed busy insects at my feet.

When it was complete, I knew it was poor. The thought of it made me ill. The sun left my whole body feeling like I had been dragged along a gravel road. I dug a shallow grave, dropped the notebook in and pushed dirt over it with my foot.

As I splashed paint over the writing on my bedroom wall, I had the revelation that all this time I had been composing the superfluous. My novel was a hundred thousand words too long. My shorter pieces weren't short enough. Anything worth being written, I decided then, could be written in the margin of a page, on the flap of an envelope, on a bus ticket. I could scribble it on my napkin at a restaurant and leave it for the waiter. I could scrawl it on the footpath in crayon. I could scratch it onto train windows using a sharp piece of china. I could have it printed on billboards for motorists to read as they commuted to work.

My best piece, that which would define me as a writer, as a human being, as a human (because remember that's what I am – remember?) would be one sentence.

With one sentence I had no fear of being verbose or circumlocutory. But how long, or short, I wondered, should it be? Many eons of thought came and went before I committed anything to paper. I refused to write anything of substance. I acted like writing no longer interested me, spending hours at the beach, watching the tide creep in, then out again; trying to dupe myself into thinking it was no longer a part of my being. I would go so far as to construct imagined sentences, polishing and refining them, working them over like a carpenter, then ignoring my impulse to write them down.

This mortification of what had become so natural was, to a part of me, torture. I felt my mind question, as tangible as the cracking of a bone, why I was not at my desk with a pen in my hand.

What I did commit to paper during this period looked more like characters from a lost alphabet than intelligible words; they were free of structure and of little practical use. I read of failure at this time, to console myself about my own failed successes.

Many great men, I learnt, had failed – Proust, Flaubert and Hugo all met failure in their creative lives, before penning their masterpieces. Failure, it seemed, was more conducive to greatness, true and lasting greatness, than immediate success.

As I approached my desk, having decided to break my fast, I felt as though I should plunge my hands into chalk or do some preparatory stretches to speed my blood flow and warm my muscles.

Once I started writing words again, I found it difficult to stop. It was as though during my period of abstinence ideas had accumulated somewhere in my brain and upon creating they gushed forth with violence, perhaps fearful I would once again resign without warning. The words flowed to the beat of my heart, giving me ecstatic relief. I felt almost as though I was in love.

When I did put my pen down, again, very little of what I wrote I could use, but it gave me much to think about. Several words I did keep.

I pondered my sentence most minutes of most days. Even on the rare occasion I was a participant in some social outing, my thoughts were often on my work. It was during one of these occasions I felt, mid-conversation, that I was a single word away from perfection. I stood amid a group, outside, talking in the spring sun. I watched the clouds shifting in the distance and at the same time I was thinking about my sentence in relation to the tonal fluctuations of the different voices. I wondered if it was possible for a single sentence to display a unique timbre when not presented as lines of poetry, for it to have a varying yet consistent cadence reminiscent of everyday speech. I produced a pad and pencil from my pocket and walked away, writing. Everything was coming together. When I re-read what I'd written, I thought I was almost done.

I needed one more word.

I hurried home and searched the

dictionary for this word, but searching the dictionary for the word you want is like trawling the ocean floor for the shell you want. There are many like the one you desire, a very many, but you swiftly forget where you are and what you are doing. Madness was close, and when I finally acknowledged this I knew my near-perfect sentence was only a red-herring, nothing more than a step towards (one can only move closer in these matters) my masterpiece.

Our brains, I noted, compose unceasingly. Musicians, for instance, hear their internal compositions of music. Writers, on the other hand, listen or are attuned to that stream composing literature. I had constructed so many single sentences, including choosing words in degrees of randomness from the dictionary (a femme jointure transcript shibboleth, potato beetle sophisticate install quasi-judicial urbanism), even using the Dadaist technique of chance (a nearly quaint happens), yet none of these produced anything to rival the beauty capable of the human brain.

This helped me to understand that everybody was capable of greatness, we just need to dispose of distraction, all distraction, and listen. The drudgery was not in the creating, but in the wait for it to come. My sentence would come, and when it did I knew I'd better be paying attention, because the human mind was the sole purveyor of perfection.



image by Brooke Creus

Writing made it seem like she was forgotten to me. I often wondered if this was why I did it. I thought I had finally erased her from memory, all memory, until I read over what I had just put on the page and it was always about her. I still woke in the morning feeling as if we had spent the night together, like I had said everything I meant to and all was well. It felt like our souls were connected, finally, as they never were in reality.

I knew it would not be delight she would feel if I told her I still dreamt about an us that never was and that all I did was for her (even if it was to put her out of my mind).

I still await the arrival of my sentence. I remain inspired after so many years because I am inspired by the gods. And what I create must be godlike because mortals only respect creations that seem just beyond our means.

When it comes I will carve my sentence into sandstone, so it lasts. I will engrave it into the earth and write it in the sky, for all to see. My perfect sentence will be the subject of many discussions and even if I'm not remembered, this part of me will be. Upon completion, I could show her and prove to her it had not all been worthless.

METAMORPHOTOSYNTHESIS

Kirk Marshall

David Attenborough was sequestered beneath the tin-sharp foliage of a zelkova tree, brooding with a perverted glee in the sun – his hands beginning to assume an attractive lustre, and the crow's-feet at the apexes of his eyes starting to brown like a seam of shale in limestone – when he suddenly developed an awareness of the way the sunlight smelt.

Which is weird to say. It wasn't a circumstance of slow-lancing revelation for Attenborough, discerning this newfound ability to identify astrological scents; not a sudden development at all. The disconcerting foresight one might attribute to a common and diffuse epiphany was not to be characterised here. It was less poetic than all that, and more dangerous; like someone discovering the immediacy of hunger for the first time.

He was frightened by the startling clarity of the realisation, seized by a terrible curiosity that he was sufficiently stimulated, and canny enough to determine this was foolish for an old man to feel. But the curiosity lingered. He could taste the daylight blooming in monstrous clusters of sun-spawned fungus through the lid of his mouth.

It streamed through the vessels and troughs of his *hominid* flesh, wriggling in like a virus; he was conducting the heat of the day with mercurial speed. The sun stank of overripe and rotting tangerine (*citrus x tangerina*), of pomegranate (*punica granatum*), of honeydew (*cucumis melo*); it bristled with the singular but infinitely distorted perfume of sea brine and wine-cool citrus groves.

You couldn't reduce its power or beauty to a perfectly-wrought description. To endeavour was a dislocated, unfeeling and ferocious project. It meant you had been

compelled to sacrifice experience for insight, it meant you had betrayed your majestic plight for sensation by exalting in a remarkable moment, it meant you had embraced the quest for qualitative data. If you stopped to describe the smell, you would forget it.

He had been residing here, in the SSR botanical garden in Pamplemousses, the northernmost archipelago of Mauritius, plunging his weary heels into the sloping cool folds of island soil and dictating his extensive and multifaceted memoirs like the wraith of Lear into a portable handheld cassette-recorder, soliloquising about squirrel monkeys and aspirating over abalone, totally content for days. But now he understood it was time to succumb to a higher, more primal demand.

He gloried here in the daylight beneath his tree, permitting himself to submit to the hiss of the swamp wilds.

Attenborough's nostrils were abloom with the tangs and the bitter calmative of guava swarming in the trees, starfruit whistling through the arteries of the leaves. Everything began assuming a sharper velocity; it wasn't just the speed of smells that disarmed him now, but the veracity of that speed, of the world and its contents careening into the sea. He could hear it now; the furious dissonance of the ocean, like an ultraviolet song. It burned his brain. He was mesmeric, ensorcelled. How long had that hot, vivid, accusatory summons prevailed over the hush of Mauritius' coastal canopies?

He couldn't stand it; sweat was spraying from him in insinuations of an inner wilderness, in fat globules of fevered liquid, worming out of his pores, bursting through the white swale of his shocking bright hair.

Attenborough squinted, leaking jungle juices, his heart thundering with the glissando of a forgotten kiss beneath his narrow, travel-shuddered pigeon's chest, and he clutched at the zelkova, whilst gagging, the entirety of his human apparatus trembling for balance.

His skin burst asunder, revealing a leathery spectrum of tiger stripes. His hands exploded and then finessed into webbed mechanisms dappled with the hues of summer. His throat contracted, before snaking forth with a spastic grace, divorcing itself of his tired and life-distorted old cartilage. *Plethodon cinereus*. David Attenborough went into the lingering blaze of day, a newly morphed salamander, his eyes blinking to adjust. His vision was stroboscopic, but he was now blind to a past that didn't involve the geographies of the sea, and the fruits of the breeze.

Material Lust

Ben Stower

The minutes tick by
as I listen to her whine
of things not important
shoes, hats and nice garments.

It is clear why she's here
looking to get square
with her boyfriend the cheater -
he won't go near her used beaver.

As I down my sixth drink
she gives me a wink,
grazing my hand with her own
hinting she wants me alone.

But why should I go
I can tell she's a low
breed like the rest
of the girls similarly dressed

Her fake tan is the colour
of Hans Moleman's grandmother.
A cheap bottle at best,
her skin's now a mess.

The bleach in her hair
has made it as fair
as the skin on my arse.
It is hard not to laugh.

Her makeup has layer
after layer after layer
still not hiding the blemishes
caused by that which she cherishes.

She embellishes her breasts
in a dress fitted for less.
They look ready to burst.
A lot more could be worse.

The heels on her feet
are far from discreet.
They remind me of boots
worn by Mistress Cockbrute.

She looks like a porn star,
but one of the poor stars
having sex on a set
in the director's basement,

all full of the fetishes -
horses, dwarfs and cabbages.
She is such a poser.
A complete and utter loser.

She is not like the girl
who's aware of the world,
the one with no makeup
far from a pin-up,

yet it is her I adore
not the other fake whore.
My love has been secret -
and tonight I'll reveal it.

The porn star is angry,
gets the sense she has lost me.
Then she leans in closely,
whispering words oh so softly

of what she will do
if we go to a room.
Actions so outrageous
I feel bad for the neighbours,

and I think in my head
as we move to a bed
my revelation is a bust
but who said love is not lust.

THE ECOLOGY OF SINKHOLES

Erica Weatherlake

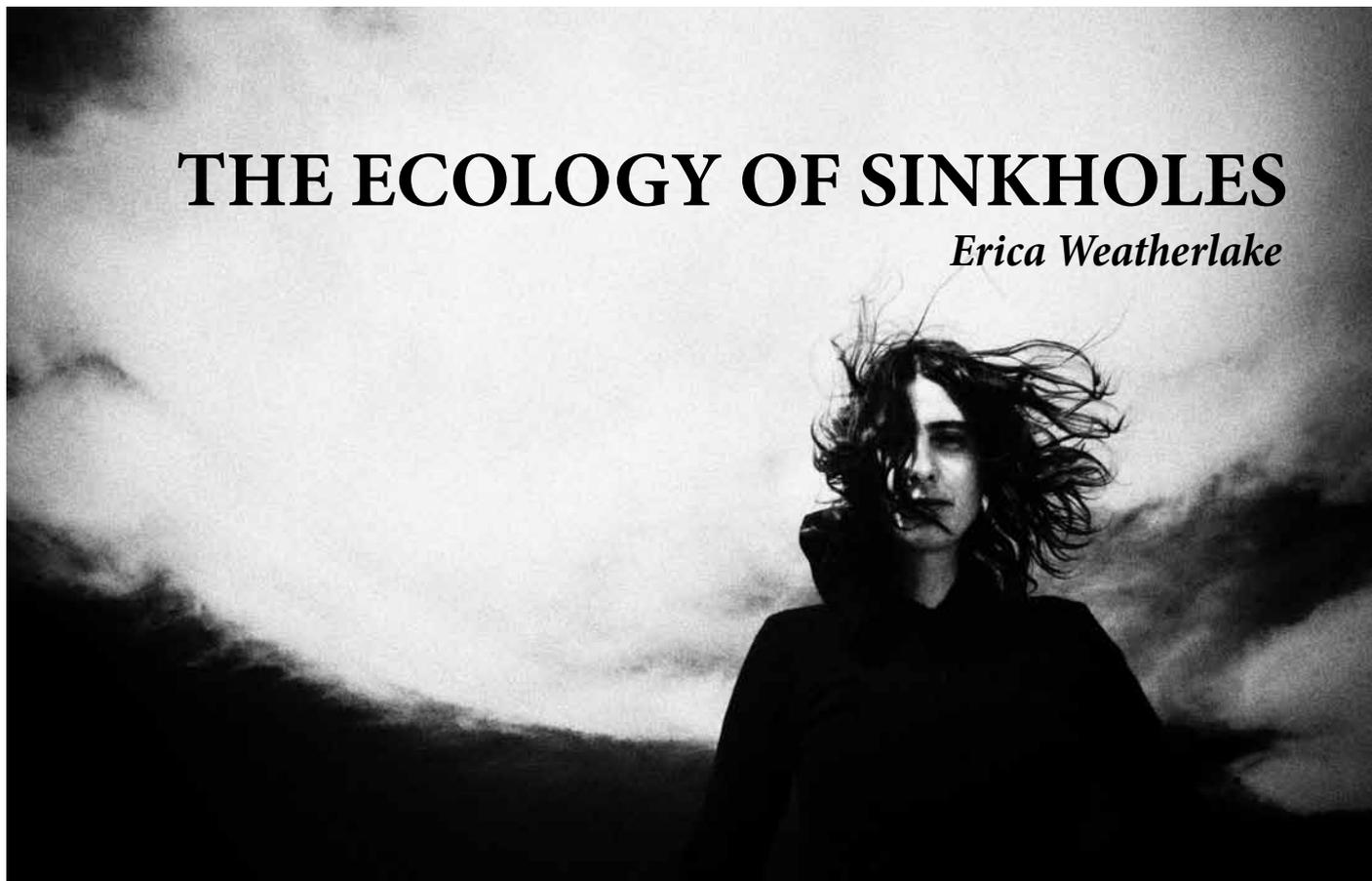


image by Jodie Barker

The wet spine of the last sad fruit
inserted into the oily upholstery
of a penultimate
summerbreakfasttime.

This kitchens' San Andreas fault –
it takes practice for a room
to smell of mouths that have
whispered, licked and eaten.

In the night I moan underwater.
You are the evidence of a failed aeroplane ditch -
frowning proud but mournful,
in the sharpest gasp of Arctic Ocean.

He Snaps, She Snaps

Stacy Barton

She never did like his hair. When they started dating, she said so to her friends, “There’s something wrong with his hair.”

It wasn’t until later she found out it was a toupee, attached to his head by tiny little snaps glued to what hair he had left.

Now he sat in front of her at night as they watched the evening news, the toupee on the dresser, and asked her to scratch his snaps. She did.

They weren’t married, of course, but they’d been together for years. She wasn’t exactly sure it was love, but she wasn’t getting any younger and so when it became easier to sleep over instead of drive home, she left a toothbrush.

She hadn’t planned to leave, but one morning there was something suddenly awful about the whole thing. She cooked his eggs in his pans, in his kitchen, but it wasn’t their house. She swept his pubic hair from around his toilet but she didn’t wear his ring. She scratched his snaps and washed his underwear and got older every day without ever becoming his wife.

That morning, before the day had completely filled the window, she decided she’d had enough. She pushed herself away from the breakfast table and stood up, surprising him.

“You’re going to have to find somebody else to scratch your snaps,” she said. Then she turned without stopping and headed out the back door.

She’d buy another toothbrush.

Ninth Birthday

Tiggy Johnson

He wanted to take me
for a ride
on his motorbike
and argued
with my mother
for hours.
Like sport.

Like always.

I wasn't allowed
to go.

If it had been
an argument
about anything else –
Luna park, the zoo –
he'd have taken me anyway.

Perhaps he contemplated
my mother's lack
of frivolous
retorts.

He explained later
he'd reconsidered.
Didn't think it
wise
for me to go.
As if
he believed
his own words.



WHEN THE ROCK HIT THE WINDOW

Melanie Seward

When the rock hit the window, The Girl had just spoken to Sam for the first time. In his head, they'd already had hundreds of conversations, but in real life they'd never spoken. All the way from the city, Sam had been trying to think of something they could talk about. But with her sitting beside him, talking about the weather or discussing the egg attacks didn't seem quite right. By the time they reached Bracken Ridge, he'd given up. And that was when she spoke to him.

Sam first saw The Girl the day after his mother moved to Hibiscus Village. He'd woken in the morning and felt the house's emptiness before he even left his bedroom. He left the radio on while he showered and dressed, but the tinny chatter couldn't take

his mind off the fact his mother had moved out.

Hibiscus Village was nice. There were lots of other people his mother's age. There was a pool, tennis courts and a van that took the residents on outings.

When they'd finished moving in her things, she'd cried and Sam had asked her to come home.

His father had been mean and selfish. He drank, gambled and then came home to scream at Sam and his mother. But no matter how frightened she was, his mother had always stood up for him. Now he wanted to look after her the way she'd looked after him. He wanted her to stay.

But she wouldn't come back. She hugged him and wiped away her tears.

“I can’t do that, love,” she said. “You can’t start your life properly with me hanging round like a piece of old furniture. This’ll be good for us, you’ll see.”

As he ate his breakfast alone at the head of the table, he wondered what his father would say if knew how much Sam missed having his mother around.

“Always knew you’d amount to nothing. Bloody mummy’s boy.”

Though he was only imagining the words, Sam felt wounded, just like he had when he was a kid. Back then, his mother would always find him as soon as his father was out of sight. She’d hug him and whisper: “Don’t listen to him, love. If you listen to his talk you’ll turn out just like him.”

Sam shook his head as though he could shake the memory away. He’d lost his appetite, so cleared the table and walked to the bus stop, an hour earlier than usual.

The Girl was on the early bus sitting on the seat just behind the rear door. She was staring out the window, but didn’t seem to be watching anything in particular. Her expression made Sam think she might be sad or even a little lonely.

He’d started catching the early bus every day just so he could see her. At first he just watched her and wondered what had made her so sad. Then, as more time passed, he began to fill the silence at home by having imaginary conversations with her. His job—entering survey data into a computer—was monotonous and his thoughts would often drift to other things. His fingers moved of their own accord, typing the endless *yes* and *no* answers while he imagined where she might go every day when she got off the bus.

Sometimes he even dreamed about her.

He’d stopped reading on the bus since he’d noticed her. He kept his book open on

his lap and turned a page every so often, just in case she glanced in his direction.

But she never did.

What he wanted, more than anything, was to sit next to her. Every morning when he got on the bus, he hoped it would be full. He’d pay his fare and glance up the aisle, seeking her out before he chose his seat. But he boarded at the third stop along the route and Sam knew it would be weird if he sat next to her when there were so many empty seats.

On the trip home he could easily have sat with her because the buses were fuller and there were fewer seats to choose from. Once or twice as he filed onto the evening bus, he almost slid onto the seat next to her. But he always panicked, and, at the last moment, sat next to someone else.

He’d endured countless trips sitting next to the man who chugged cans of Guinness between the hospital and Zillmere, alongside nose-pickers and nail-biters, seat-hogs and fidgeters. But no matter how unbearable his seatmates were, he couldn’t make himself sit next to The Girl.

The Girl was younger than Sam and he guessed she was in her twenties. Everything he knew about her came from the clothes she wore and the books she read. He knew she loved Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* because her copy was dog-eared and worn and he’d seen her reading it more than once. He was pleased to see that she liked biographies and memoirs because he liked them too. It was their shared interest in other people’s lives that made him certain they’d get along. He’d never told anyone about his parents but, if they ever got to talking, he’d be able to tell her, he was sure. She would have read a hundred stories about fathers who were mean drunks, mothers who would defend their children through anything and sons who had

wasted their lives and she would understand why Sam's life had turned out the way it had.

Other times, she was different. On the days she wore a business suit, he thought she was one of those strong women who could put her male co-workers in their places with a single look. She often wore her shiny, black hair in a ponytail that was the perfect balance of messy and neat. On those days, Sam thought she was playful and fun, the sort of girl who had a good time at work and was friends with everyone. On those days, Sam just wanted someone to have fun with too.

Sam was just starting to adjust to living alone when the egg attacks started. He'd developed little routines that helped pass the time. After the evening bus ride he went for a walk to the park. Some days he took his next-door neighbour's dog with him. He'd volunteered once when Mike, the owner, came over to see if the dog's barking was bothering Sam. Mike and his wife worked long hours and other neighbours had complained that Toby howled until someone got home at night.

"He probably just gets lonely," Sam told Mike. "I don't mind walking him sometimes."

On the weekend he often took a book and a sandwich down to the beachfront. He liked to watch people walking by: families with kids, the kite surfers running out of the cold water, and the women who wore fancy running gear and walked their little dogs. Sometimes he imagined meeting The Girl there. Other days, he visited his mother at Hibiscus Village and listened while she told him about her new bridge club and her walking group. A part of him wished she would hate it at the village and ask to come home, but he didn't tell her that.

He enjoyed going to the beach and walking Toby, but the best parts of Sam's days were still bus rides with The Girl. When neighbourhood kids started throwing eggs,

Sam looked forward to his two trips a day even more.

Normally the commuters travelled in silence. People read, listened to music or dozed and they very rarely had conversations. But every time an egg hit a bus, more and more passengers started talking to one another. They shook their heads and tutted and talked about the mongrel kids whose parents should be watching them. One morning, Sam heard a lady tell another passenger one of the attacked buses actually had a rotten egg land inside the bus. The driver had taken off after the kids who'd thrown it and all the passengers had gotten out there in Phillips Street. She said the smell was in her hair for days. No matter how many times she washed it, she could still smell rotten eggs.

The first time an egg hit a bus Sam was on, it smashed against window right next to where The Girl was sitting. She was engrossed in her reading, holding her book close to her face and chewing her fingernails. Sam was watching and smiling to himself. He loved that she could lose herself in a book even on a crowded bus. The egg hit the window with a loud thump. The noise and the white egg hurtling out of the darkness made both Sam and The Girl jump and she lost her grip on the book. It flipped out of her hands, smacking onto the floor. The driver hit the brakes just as the book landed and it slid down the aisle, scratching along the dirty floor.

From the backseat, Sam's gaze followed the book and for a moment, he contemplated getting up and collecting it for her. But the man in front bent down and scooped it up before Sam could make a move. When he passed it to her, he smiled and she said thank you. It was the first time Sam heard her speak. For the rest of the week, Sam sat in front of her hoping for a second chance.

On Sunday, Sam took Toby for a walk. When he dropped him home, he watched the dog tearing around Mike's backyard and he found himself wondering what it would be like to have a dog of his own. He went to sleep thinking about being alone and dreamt about The Girl. She sat next to him and held his hand. When they got to his stop, she turned to him, pressed her lips against his ear and whispered something that made his cheeks flush with warmth.

When he woke, he'd kicked all the blankets off and was shivering with cold. He tried to hold onto the happiness he'd felt in the dream. But he couldn't remember what she'd whispered to him and he couldn't go back to sleep.

He got out of bed and put on the kettle. He was ready to leave well before his bus was due, but catching an earlier one was out of the question. He spent the extra time looking through the dog ads in the Weekend Shopper and circling all the ones for Labradors.

It's the idea of getting a dog and not The Girl who dominated his thoughts during his work day. Even as he waited in line for the evening bus, Sam was much more interested in flipping through the pages of Labrador Quarterly than searching for her in the queue.

When the bus arrived, he folded his magazine under his arm and boarded. It was only as he searched for a place that he noticed The Girl wasn't on the bus yet. He slid into the last vacant double seat and ducked his head while he made sure his backpack was safely beneath his chair. As he sat up, he caught sight of The Girl walking down the aisle and he realised that while he'd been fiddling with his bag, all the other seats had been filled.

Even though it was the moment he'd been hoping for since the first day he saw

her, Sam half wished there was a spare place somewhere behind him. If she sat with him, he was sure to become one of the jittering, sweating seatmates he dreaded sitting next to himself. He didn't want her to dread sitting with him. But without any hesitation she took the seat and Sam felt his heart sink.

Sam forced himself to open his magazine and tried to read. It was hard to focus on the articles while his heart was beating so fast, and he looked at the pictures instead. It wasn't so bad once they got going. The driver was in a hurry, speeding along the busway and jerking on the breaks so hard everyone slid forward at each red light and stop. The rough ride helped to disguise Sam's nerves.

As he began to calm down, Sam thought about the situation. He was wasting his chance. He'd always been certain she was nice and that she'd like him no matter what. He should be making the most of this.

He started searching through his mental catalogue of their make-believe conversations. There was no way anything he had to say would sound as good as he'd imagined.

The bus exited the roundabout and crossed from Taigum to Bracken Ridge. As they passed the Mobil, Sam decided he couldn't do it. He lifted his magazine and forced himself to return to the article he'd been so interested in back at the station.

And then, as the bus turned into Phillips Street, The Girl turned to him and smiled.

"Do you have a Lab?" she asked.

No one, not even the driver, saw the rock come hurtling out of the darkness until it hit the windscreen. It was only the sound that alerted the passengers something was wrong. The bus was coming down the hill towards the last stop on Phillips Street. They were going fast, but buses always sped on that hill.

The teenagers, their confidence bolstered by weeks of throwing eggs without getting caught, had moved on to bigger and more dangerous objects. When it hit, the driver instinctively raised his hands to shield his face. By the time he remembered to brake, the bus had crossed the road and swiped an oncoming car.

There probably would have been time for Sam to reach out and grab the seat in front of him, or to brace himself against the swerve. But he hadn't been concentrating. He was putting his magazine onto his lap and turning to the right so he could see her better. He was trying to contain his surprise long enough to think of an answer to her question.

When the rock hit the window, Sam was flung forward by the motion of the bus. His head smashed against the seat in front of him and his magazine slipped off his lap onto the floor.

He wasn't dead when the bus stopped. All around him the other passengers were moving about. Some pressed their faces to the window to see what had happened, some of them rushed to check on the driver and some just sat in their seats and cried.

But for Sam, it was quiet and dark. The only thing he was aware of was The Girl sitting next to him, holding his hand and telling him everything would be all right. And he believed her.

Contributors' Biographies

AUTHORS

SAM VAN ZWEDEN is an RMIT Creative Writing student, who does book reviews for channel 31 show "Yartz", and has a blog at www.littlegirlwithabigpen.wordpress.com. She put the 'ram' in the 'ram-a-lama-ding-dong'. She is that man. You may shake her hand.

BEE WILLIAMSON is a Melbourne-based visual artist and poet. See her website at www.hive.id.au

TRISTAN FOSTER is a writer from Sydney. His work can be found in print and online. He blogs at <http://leadigloo.com/>

KIRK MARSHALL holds a Bachelor of Creative Industries (Creative Writing) with Distinction from the Queensland University of Technology, a first-class Honours degree in Professional Writing from Deakin University, and he is currently enrolled in a Post-graduate Diploma of Education at RMIT. He is the author of the short-story collection *Carnavalesque, And: Other Stories* (Black Rider Press; 2010), and *A Solution to Economic Depression in Little Tokyo, 1953*, a 2007 Aurealis Award-nominated full-colour illustrated graphic novelette. From 2009 onwards, he is also the editor *Red Leaves*, Australia's (and the world's!) first English-language / Japanese bi-lingual literary journal.

BEN STOWER is currently studying Creative Writing at the Queensland University of Technology. Writing is his dream profession because it grants him the freedom to work whenever he desires. Right now he divides his time between sport, writing and enjoying the nightlife with friends.

ERICA WEATHERLAKE'S life experience consists of growing up amid the tropical hostility of the Sunshine Coast, and relocating to Melbourne to study law. She is twenty-three, lives in Brunswick and is vastly impressed by pilots.

STACY BARTON'S stories have appeared in a variety of literary journals including *Potomac Review*, *Relief*, *Ruminate* and *Stonework*. Her collection of short stories, *Surviving Nashville*, was released in 2007. In addition to short fiction, Stacy is the author of two plays, a children's picture book, a Ringling Bros. circus and an animated short film. Currently she works as a freelance scriptwriter for the Disney Company.

TIGGY JOHNSON is a Melbourne writer whose stories and poems have appeared in various literary magazines and on Melbourne trains. She was awarded second prize in the Herald-Sun Short Story Competition in 2004. Her short story collection *Svetlana or otherwise* was published in 2008 and her poetry collection *First Taste* in 2010.

MELANIE SAWARD is an emerging writer based in Brisbane. She graduated from the Queensland University of Technology's creative writing program in 2009. She is currently completing post-graduate studies in writing, editing, and publishing at the University of Queensland, writing her first novel, and chasing her dream job in publishing. Her work has been published in the first issue of *Rex*, an anthology of writing from QUT.

ARTISTS

JACQUELINE MOLINA is an Australian abstract artist. She studied Visual Arts at the "Insituto Superior del Arte," National University of Paraguay. Her artistic journey began at a young age venturing into the world of illustration. Her passion for abstract painting grew during her studies and is her main focus, though she maintains a strong interest in a variety of art practices. Her work can be found at www.jacquelinema.com.

SHERWIN TORRES is the General Manager at Sherwin T Photography. Previously he held senior roles and was involved with various start up businesses. Sherwin holds a Diploma of IT (Network Engineering), a Bachelor of Business Information Systems/ Bachelor of Business and is completing a Master of Information Systems Management/ Master of Business Administration.

BROOKE CREWS is twenty one and works in retail, but would much rather be a photographer or writer. Her piece was taken at Matchum on the Central Coast of NSW.

JODIE BARKER is an emerging artist currently living in Sydney. Her work has been exhibited in Sydney and Perth and has won several awards including a William Fletcher Trust Grant. She was recently commissioned to produce an installation for *2042: art on the street in Newtown*.

CLARE MCCRAKEN graduated with a Bachelor of Creative Arts from Melbourne University in 2004. She then completed her Masters in Public Art at RMIT in 2008. Her practice is centred around interactive works within the public realm which encourage communities to develop a relationship with their local milieu.