



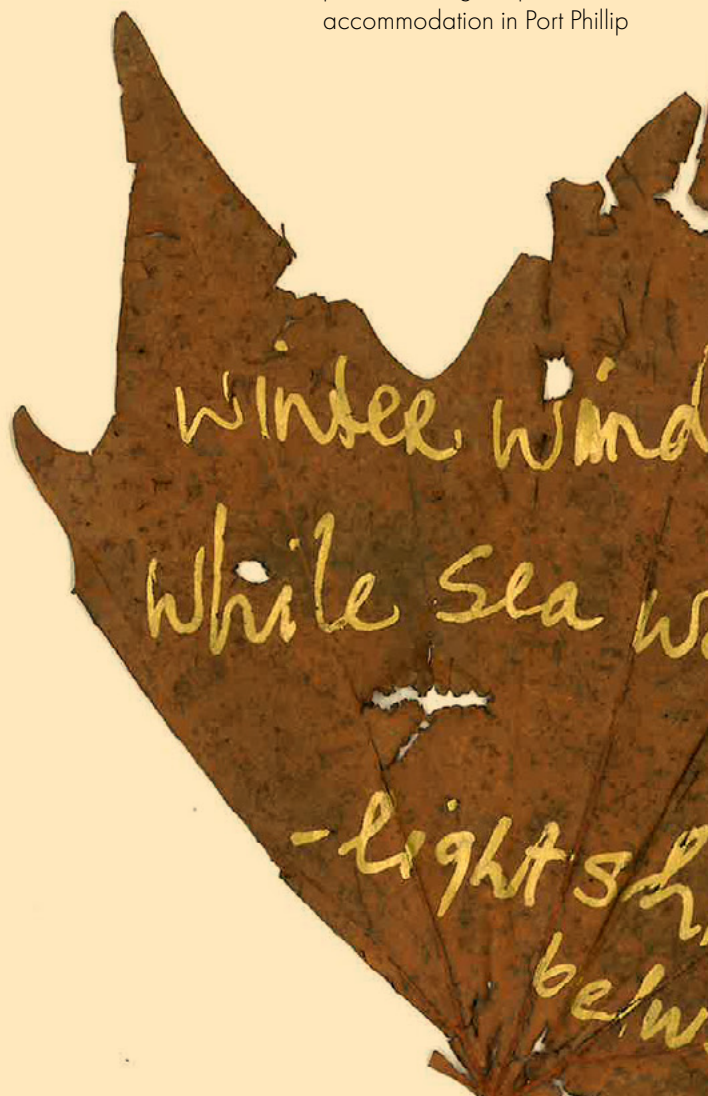
ROOMERS

#74 Summer 2025

Connection

For residents
By residents

Almost all contributors to ROOMERS are residents or former residents of rooming houses, private hotels, public housing or special accommodation in Port Phillip



The *Roomers* magazine is developed with participants from Creative Writing Workshops run by the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre (ESNLC) with the support of the City of Port Phillip. Almost all contributors to *Roomers* are residents or former residents of rooming houses, public housing or supported residential services in the City of Port Philip.

Discover what you can create by getting involved in our supportive workshops.
We welcome new members, mentors, and guest artists.

Please contact ESNLC to find out how you can get involved in this innovative project.

Email us at roomers@esnlc.org.au
Phone us on (03) 9531 1954
Write to Roomers C/O PO Box 57 Elwood 3184

#74

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Roomers Editor
Dr Scott Welsh

Design
Sweet Creative

Cover Artwork
susanne I harford

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www.esnlc.com.au/roomers

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Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre respectfully acknowledges the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present. We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to this land.

Connection

From the Editor



Over the past six months, it has been my great pleasure and privilege to be a part of the Elwood ‘Roomers’ community, as the editor and contributor to this very unique collection of writings. My own contribution, ‘In-between Places’ offered me the opportunity to revisit my life and identity as the ‘Outcaste Weakly Poet,’ a voice that I so often feel shame around in my everyday professional life as an academic, or whatever that thing is. My time at the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre was filled with light, laughter, love and genuine engagement with the craft of writing.

The warmth of the place was a stark contrast with the coldness of teaching in the large and often impersonal contexts of large institutions. Additionally, there were no results, other than the publication, no “marks” or scores for what we did, so nobody ever felt like they really had to do anything! We were completely free. It was true education, in this sense, and an existential experience. The workshops, that elicited some of the work within these pages, were

intended as a path toward liberatory education, or education for freedom, emancipatory learning, a journey toward empowerment. I hope some of us got that, though I’m not sure we can ever be empowered by anyone or anything! We can only empower ourselves.

Ultimately, this collection, consisting of diverse and exiled cultural experiences, some dark and disturbing corners of our lives, the questioning of the Establishment and some political idealism, is really a celebration of a moment in time. We are post-covid, post-lockdown, re-establishing our public selves, keeping close our private revelations and somehow seeming to know more about the world. I hope you enjoy this edition of *Roomers* as much as I enjoyed participating in this brilliant little community! With much love to all my life-long friends from Roomers, and the many readers who will receive the gift of our collective voice.

Dr Scott Welsh

A Journey to a Symphony of Farewells

Part one: Echoes of Life at the Edge of Eternity

by Ali Keshtkar

The story of Tolstoy's "*Parable of Honey*"¹ within his Book of "*Confessions*" is an amazing and thought-provoking story. This narrative, at once impossible yet profoundly real, possesses a luminous quality that can pierce even the darkest recesses of human experience. Today, I invite you to journey with me into one such shadowy moment of my own life, where I encountered this very brilliance. The destination: Iran, the summer of 1988. Our setting: a cell in the bowels of Shiraz's Revolutionary Court and Prosecutor's Office. For twelve fateful hours, from dusk till dawn, this subterranean chamber became my world—a crucible where life's most poignant truths would be revealed.

In the sweltering summer of 1988, the iron-clad doors of Shiraz's Revolutionary Court basement became a portal to eternity. As dusk settled over Iran, twelve souls found themselves ensnared in a 12-hour vigil with death.

As the clock struck six, the iron door's small window creaked open, a portal between two worlds—life and death. The guard's voice, devoid of emotion, sliced through the stale air. Twelve names fell from his lips like leaden weights, each syllable a death knell. "Tomorrow at 5:00 a.m.," he intoned, "is the execution time. Be ready." The words hung in the air, palpable and poisonous. Death, once an abstract concept, now had a schedule, a time stamp on twelve souls. The guard's pronouncement was not just an announcement; it was an invocation of fate, a summoning of the reaper. In that moment, time itself seemed to warp, the hours ahead stretching into an eternity of anticipation, yet simultaneously collapsing into a terrifyingly brief reprieve.

In an instant, the room metamorphosed. The spectre of death, heavy and absolute, descended like a suffocating shroud, extinguishing all light and hope. Our world, once vibrant, now existed in shades of darkness so profound that even the faintest glimmer of life was swallowed whole. We, the condemned, stood transformed—no longer men, but wraiths caught in the twilight between existence and oblivion. Our faces, once animated with the spark of life, now wore the dull pallor of the grave. Silence reigned supreme, for what words could navigate the chasm between the living and the soon-to-be dead? The only sound that dared to pierce this deathly quiet was the lingering echo of our sentence, reverberating off the walls like the tolling of a funeral bell. "Execution," it whispered, a ghostly refrain that seemed to have bypassed our ears and shot straight through our hearts. In that moment, vitality fled, leaving behind a void so complete it negated all sense of being. We stood, breathing yet not alive, our pulses beating a countdown to nothingness.

Into the vacuum of despair, a primal scream erupted—a sonic bolt of lightning that ricocheted off the cell's confines. This cry, raw and visceral, was nothing short of a cosmic event, a Big Bang that breathed life back into our moribund world. It came from one of us, a fellow prisoner, his wail a defiant hymn to existence itself.

Like celestial bodies hurtling through the newborn universe, his voice accelerated, gathering force and meaning. It was at once a requiem for lives soon to end and a barbaric yawp celebrating all that had been lived. This sonic explosion shattered the silence, its reverberations filling the void that death had left.

¹ A traveller, facing imminent death from a beast and a dragon, clings to a branch in a well, distracted by the fleeting sweetness of honey while time slips away.

The last temptation of Spartacus

Part two

by Ali Keshtkar

Spartacus was my utopian hero—a slave who dared to rebel against the very institution that bound him. Though he fell in an unequal war, the movement he ignited blazed on long after he and his fellow fighters perished. In time, slavery was not only abolished but branded as one of humanity's greatest disgraces.

From the moment I embarked on my own political journey to change the society and to improve people's living conditions, I knew I might not live to see the fruits of my struggle. I understood that in this struggle, my comrades and I might sacrifice our lives for a victory that would come later. This realization forged a profound kinship with Spartacus within me, as if his spirit had been reborn in my soul.

This feeling crystallized after Hamid's cry—a sound that reverberated through me like a cataclysmic earthquake, jolting every neuron in my brain. In that instant, time and space seemed to intertwine, becoming inseparable. I felt myself hurled into the depths of history; the cell walls expanded to encompass the breadth of time itself to the history of 2000 years ago, as history poured into our confines and our confines etched themselves into history.

I lifted my head, drawing in a deep breath that seemed to consume all the oxygen in the cell. With a face set in determination and a proud, defiant smile, I placed my hand on Hamid's trembling shoulder and said:

"Dry your tears, my comrade. Your children and the generations to come will be liberated from this bondage. The price of their salvation is these moments we endure—our final moments of life. Tomorrow, we may cease to exist, but our souls, more rebellious and hopeful than ever, will infuse the very essence of the future."

"Let him weep for our eternal bondage," Reza continued, his voice dripping with bitter irony. "Humanity is condemned to perpetual slavery. Spartacus' rebellion was in vain; slavery merely donned new masks, persisting through the ages. Weep for our futile struggle. Shed tears for the chains that will bind your children and the generations yet unborn. Yes, we may scale the loftiest peaks of the future, but atop the highest summit, we'll discover an inscription that mocks our quest for freedom. It will read: 'The secret of your salvation lies with the one who can turn me from this side to the other.'" And thus, our liberation remains forever just beyond our grasp."

Reza was a 35-year-old electrical engineer, a graduate of an American university. His face, though fleshy, bore the weathered look of one who had endured much. Small eyes quivered behind the thick lenses of his glasses, their trembling mirrored in his bushy moustache and the quaver of his voice. His body, once robust, now sagged like a deflated mountain.

¹ In "Katibeh," Akhavan-Sales tells of a group of men, women, and youths bound by a common chain at the foot of a colossal rock. An inner voice, mysterious and compelling, urges them to uncover the secret inscribed on the stone—a secret that promises their liberation from bondage. In the poem, one among them climbs the rock and reads the dust-covered inscription: "He who knows my secret is the one who can turn me from this side to the other." With triumphant joy, they struggle and finally succeed in turning the massive stone. But when they send one of their own to read the other side, he is struck dumb with shock and disbelief. The inscription on the reverse is identical: "He who knows my secret..."

For six years, Reza had languished in prison, the early days of his incarceration spent in the south of Iran. A thoughtful writer, he had penned political articles for his political organization's publications. The authorities had accused him of membership in and collaboration with illegal Marxist groups. Initially sentenced to 20 years, Reza's fate took a darker turn in the summer of 1988 when, along with other political prisoners, he was retried and condemned to death.

Mehrdad paced along the cell walls, his voice rising with each repetition: "Death is liberation. Death itself is liberation." His gaze fixed on the concrete floor, he continued, "It matters not whether you're a hero or a slave, bound in chains or adorned with garlands of honour. Tomorrow, we'll be free from all of this. Tomorrow, we'll touch true happiness. We'll embrace it. You are not happy."

At 25, Mehrdad had already spent seven years behind bars. A devoted Marxist, his political activism had begun in high school, leading to a 12-year sentence. But the summer of 1988 brought a grim twist of fate—along with other political prisoners, he was retried and condemned to death.

Despite his lanky frame, Mehrdad possessed a remarkable agility. His long strides ate up the ground as he walked, leaving me breathless whenever we walked together in the prison yard. Unyielding to his core, he consistently defied the prison officers' rules and orders, earning numerous punishments. Yet, for all his stubbornness and indomitable spirit, Mehrdad harboured a surprising lightness of being. He found joy in simple pastimes, his wit and thoughtfulness shining through even in the bleakest moments. With a talent for humour, he often articulated the most profound philosophical concepts through jest, his insights piercing the gloom of their circumstances.

But this nothingness is agonizing. It's painful," Hamid began, his voice barely above a whisper. "This isn't true nothingness. This nothingness springs from my existence. It's me. I, who once had been before. I, who created existence. I, whose very presence sustains the lives of others. They breathe, they hope, they weave dreams. My parents, my children—I am their hope. My non-existence will drag their beings through the mire, filling them with pain, suffering, and wounds."

His body trembled as he continued, tears streaming unceasingly from his eyes. "How can I bear this? I, who couldn't endure the pain of a single thorn in their fingers. My heart is being shredded to pieces. I can't stop thinking about the nightmares, the immense suffering and pain that will befall my parents and children from tomorrow. Their anguish has already transformed into lashes that rain down upon my body, my spirit, my very soul."

Hamid's weeping and lamentations swirled through the air, each sob striking my mind like a hammer blow. "Spartacus, do something, hero!" I silently implored. "Didn't you fight to free slaves from their chains? Now, break the chains of your comrade. You have only hours left to be Spartacus, right here, right now."

I paced, lost in thought. "Spartacus isn't Spartacus only on the battlefield. Spartacus is Spartacus everywhere, at all times—the eternal warrior against human suffering. Ease your comrade's pain."

The spectre of death, which had taken residence in our cell, had transformed into a formidable gladiator. This colossus now challenged each of us to a terrifying, individual combat. As I grappled with these thoughts, I realized that being Spartacus meant more than physical rebellion—it meant offering solace and strength in our darkest hour.

Golgotha¹

Part three

by Ali Keshtkar

The painful screams pierced the ears like arrows. It was the highest pitch a human voice could reach, showing the most unbearable and terrifying physical pain. The pain started at the point where the blow landed, twisting like a fiery thread, putting all the sensory nerves under crushing pressure. It grabbed the howls of each nerve, whirling them through the body like a cyclone, finally vibrating the vocal cords into screaming shrieks thrown out of the throat.

This scream blended with the torturer's roars, which he used to back up his power as he brought down heavy lashes of the whip. They became one - two different screams in contrast. A scream from pain and a scream to create pain. The screams synced up with heavy distortions². The powerful notes of the whip cords split the air with full force, crashing down brutally on the body made of skin, flesh, and bone.

The ground and sky, doors and walls, everywhere echoed with this music of violence, pain, and terror, shaking like earthquakes that rattled the roof, floor, and walls with a terrible roar. An earthquake that violently aimed to bring down the entire prison building. The space was dark, eyes and hands and feet tied, a dampness felt on the iron bed that could've been urine or blood. The smell of blood, urine, and sweat all mixed together. It wasn't clear whose sweat it was – the torturer's or the tortured's.

Three years ago, when I was first arrested, I was facing this experience in this building. Every day I witnessed this genre of horror and violence. From the first day I entered this building until the last day I left, this music was constantly heard. Even in the middle of the night. On my first day in this building, the interrogator said to me as a welcome: "This is the 'apocalypse', welcome to judgment day". I laughed because I don't believe in their existence and I couldn't imagine what Judgment Day would be like in this building. But it didn't take long before I gradually realised what Judgment Day meant. I realised 'apocalypse means everything ends here. All attachments, all motivations for life and living. It meant a dry and scorching desert. A desert that burns every seedling. From freedom to hope, dreams, ideals. This is the end of everything. The end of having a home, family, affection, love, friends and comrades. The end of social and group affiliations.

They're right, there is justice at the 'apocalypse'. Here in the punishment of the desert, there's no discrimination. It doesn't matter if you're poor or wealthy. Whether you're a professor or illiterate. Whether you're an artist or artless. Here, ideas and beliefs evaporate like water in the desert and don't even leave a cloud behind. It doesn't matter if you're Muslim or non-religious. Whether you're a woman or a man, gay or straight. This is the end of everything you had before entering here. 'Apocalypse' means erasure of any of your identification's marks.

This is Golgotha Hill itself. The place of skulls. The heart of the most painful human pains. The most agonising human sufferings. Pain and suffering for others to be free from pain and suffering. This is the killing field of all Iranian Jesuses in the 1980s. Humans who carried the cross of pain and suffering with the hope of freeing others from pain and suffering.

But if on Jesus' Golgotha, Jesus' blood cleansed human sins to connect humans with God and happiness, here even this hope for salvation is crucified. This is also the Golgotha of hope for any liberation. A place where the happiness and well-being of all are crucified along with the Jesuses themselves in the most painful way. Here, hopes are also butchered.

A year after I'd been transferred from this Golgotha to another prison, I returned to this place again with 12 other blokes. They wanted to finish what hadn't been completed three years ago. The clock started ticking towards Judgment Day. A Judgment Day that doesn't happen at the end, but unfolds within these twelve hours.

Majid, with his hands on his hips and a mischievous, secretive smile as if he'd discovered an important secret, said to everyone: "This is just another bit of hocus-pocus. It's a show. They want to scare us. It's not like they haven't made these kinds of threats before. Nothing will happen tomorrow. They just want to put dread and fear in our hearts."

Abbas, sitting with his legs pulled up to his chest, was cleaning his thick-lensed glasses with his faded blue checkered shirt. With his thick Abadani accent, he said:

"Nah, mate. They don't need to put on a show to scare us now. They're really killing people. Very simply and coolly. Whether you believe it or not. Tomorrow our bodies will be in the prepared plastic bags."

Then he stood in front of Majid, looked him straight in the eye, and this time said in a choked and husky voice:

"Do you know what I saw two weeks ago? I haven't wanted to tell anyone until now. Because I neither had the courage and power to express it, nor the need to say it. Telling this story would only cause terror, useless terror before death."

Majid, still with the same mysterious and humorous face, asked: "Well, tell us what you saw? If they're really killing prisoners, why didn't they kill you two weeks ago? How did you manage to get away?"

Abbas leaned against the wall, looked up at the ceiling, and whispered softly: "I don't know why they didn't kill me. Maybe they want to torture me more than the others. Because I saw them killing and I saw how they kill. I got into a fight with them. Maybe they want to take revenge by torturing me. I don't know. Maybe they deliberately didn't kill me so I could come as a witness and living messenger of death to tell you and put more fear in the prisoners' hearts. That's why I haven't said anything until now. Because I don't want to be their messenger. I don't know why they didn't kill me and I don't know what they want to do with me. But I saw with my own eyes that they're killing."

"I saw with my own eyes that they're killing." This sentence echoed like the bottom of a valley, spinning several times in the empty space of the prison, hitting the walls, ceiling, and floor, bouncing back and resonating in minds. All eyes, ears, and gazes were on Abbas.

Hamid, whose eyes were full of tears, asked: "Well, now what did you see? Tell us what's going to happen to us."

Abbas's body began to shake. Remembering what he had seen was difficult for him. He tried to control himself. But the lump in his throat had made his voice quiet, shaky, and deep. But he explained:

"The Death Panel (the extraordinary court that had been set up at that time to issue mass death sentences for political prisoners) consisted of three people. They only asked four questions:

First, they asked if I still support the opponent political organisation? I said no.

The next question was if I accept the Iranian regime and nothing to do anything against them?

I said yes.

They asked if I'm willing to cooperate with them?

I said yes, what kind of cooperation?

They asked if I'm willing to execute the enemies of the regime?

I was sure this was a bluff and a trick, and they wanted to test me.

I said yes.

They said take him away.

They brought me to my solitary cell. After an hour or two, they came for me and said 'blindfold'. I put on the blindfold and they took me through various corridors and staircases until we reached a hallway. There was a strong smell of camphor. Several times I felt my foot hit plastic bags with something wrapped inside. I couldn't understand what it was. So I didn't think about it. Then at some point in the hallway, they told me to sit here until they call me. And not to make a sound.

I realised there was someone in front of me because I could hear their breathing. Whoever it was, I knew they weren't a stranger and we must know each other. After a few minutes, I tried to communicate with the person in front. Very quietly, under my breath, I said: 'It's Abbas, who are you?' He replied: 'Oh mate, is that you, Abbas? I'm Ali.'

(Ali was one of Abbas's close friends. They had grown up together in a neighbourhood in Abadan, a city in southern Iran. They had studied at the same school, in the same class. They had been active in the same political organisation, were arrested together, and were always seen together in prison. Two very close mates who were like brothers. But since they had been brought to this place, they had been kept separate.)

I asked: "Hey Ali, do you know what's going on? What are they doing with the boys?"

He said, "Mate, Abbas, they're executing the boys. Mehdi, Mohammad, Mozaffar, they've taken them all and executed them. Didn't you notice the bodies in the plastic bags?"

I said: "No, but my foot hit some plastic bags a few times. I didn't know what they were." Then I continued, "But why, mate? We had prison sentences and we were serving our time. We've even stepped away from politics and the organisation. We're not a problem for them anymore, are we?"

Before Ali could answer, the guard hit me hard on the back of the head and said: "Shut up. Didn't I tell you not to make a sound?"

Then they took Ali away. After a few minutes, they came for me and took me to a room. One of the guards asked:

"You said you're willing to cooperate and execute the enemies of the regime, right?"

I didn't know whether to say yes or no, I was hesitant. I didn't know if they were testing me or not. I was stuck on what answer to give. But a voice inside me said this might be your last chance to escape death, say yes. You're not going to actually do anything. It's just a word and a moment in the air, nothing more. So, I answered yes. Then they gave me a rope and told me to pull it. I took the rope. I felt the rope was heavy. So, this isn't a test. It's not a show. It's reality. They've put me on the brink of murder. They want to make me an executioner. They want to stain my hands with my mates' blood. Me, who fought for a better life for people. Now they want to turn me into a killer of the most noble people. Then another voice inside me shouted: "Abbas, this is Ali's noose. You're pulling Ali's noose. You're killing your brother. What are you doing, Abbas?"

This thought created a riot in me. I lost control of myself. I clawed at my blindfold and took it off. I saw that it was true, they had put a noose around Ali's neck and placed him on a wooden platform that would empty under his feet when I pulled the rope in my hand, leaving Ali hanging in the air. I started shouting: "You bastards, murderers, criminals, you want me to kill my brother. You scumbags. Life isn't worth so much to me that I'd kill for it. Come and execute me right now. Criminals." And I went madly towards Ali to remove the rope from his neck. Then, several guards attacked me with whips, punches, and kicks. I was so full of anger and hatred that I didn't feel any of their whip strikes, punches, or kicks. I was clawing at their faces and kicking them too. Until one of them hit me on the head with a rifle butt and I fell unconscious.

Then they took me back to my cell. I don't know how long I was unconscious. But when I came to, I was in my cell. My brain had locked up, I didn't have the courage to remember what had happened. My whole body was shaking, my body was extremely cold and icy, all my body hair was standing on end. And I never saw Ali again. They executed Ali right then. Yeah, that's how they're killing."

Then Abbas broke into sobs and burst out crying loudly.

Tears welled up in the eyes of all twelve men. Twelve men who were themselves scheduled to be hanged in twelve hours. Now all twelve were faced with this question: "Who will pull the hangman's rope tomorrow? Our mate or our enemy?!"

¹ (also known as Calvary) was the hill on which Jesus was crucified.

² In the music world, especially rock and metal, distortion refers to a change that makes the produced sound harsher and more intense.

The Game We Cannot Escape

Part four

by Ali Keshtkar

"When the Grim Reaper comes knocking and your number's up, with no way to dodge the bullet, what bloody difference does it make who's pulling the trigger? Could be a digger, a top brass, a tradie, a Muslim, a non-believer, even your best mate or any other bloke. What's it matter who's tightening the noose around your neck? Mateship doesn't mean a tinker's cuss to a dead man, does it?"

Reza muttered to himself as he paced about, his head bowed low. But he mumbled loud enough for all to hear. His words weren't just for himself, but for everyone around.

Majid replied, "Fair crack of the whip, mate. Maybe it doesn't make a lick of difference to the physical act of dying, but remember, we chose this path. We knew full well that the road we picked could lead to the slammer, to torture, even to the gallows. We made our choice, fair dinkum."

Abolghasem was stretching his pins. He had long, powerful legs. He was one of the famous footballers from Iran's youth team. He'd been a member of Iran's national football team and in 1976 was elected the best player by the youngsters in Cannes, France. By his own reckoning, he'd grown up with a footy in his hands since he was a little tacker.

Everyone knew him and remembered him for his beautiful play - from the political prisoners to the criminal prisoners, from the screws to the interrogators and judges. Everyone, regardless of their views, had a soft spot for him. Even the interrogators, deep down, couldn't help but like him.

I'd been to the sports stadium myself before to watch his games and cheer him on. When I first landed in the slammer, I couldn't believe Abolghasem was there too. I never thought he'd get mixed up in politics, let alone political struggle against the regime. Later, when I saw him in prison, I told him, "I'm one of your fans, one of the hundreds of spectators who used to yell, 'We love you, Abolghasem!'"

Some days during yard time, they'd let us have a kick-about. While playing with Abolghasem had been a pipe dream of mine, I finally got the chance to have a game with him. I was on the opposite team, and throughout the whole match, I was trying my darnedest to block his shots, dribble past him, and most importantly, nutmeg him. I managed to nutmeg him once, and everyone was cheering me on. He was both annoyed and impressed. He had a go at me, saying, "Mate, don't try that fancy footwork with me, or I'll make you pay." I laughed and said, "For now, you better keep an eye on your own feet. I don't care about scoring or conceding, what matters to me is nutmegging you."

He said, "Alright then, I'll spread my legs now, nutmeg all you want." I replied, "Nah, not like that. I want to do it in a real game, when you least expect it."

Abolghasem had copped a 10-year stint, of which he'd already done 6 years in the clink. He had a calm and reasonable demeanour. During this time, he hadn't caved in, despite copping all sorts of torture. He was like a heavy, resistant, and patient mountain. He stopped stretching his legs, stood up, and said to Reza:

"This death isn't just a physical one. It's not a natural death from illness. This death, like the prison, like the lash, goes beyond just bumping us off. They're trying to snuff out something more important inside us. Our physical selves, our bodies, our dough and wealth and property, our land and houses and farms - they couldn't give a rat's about any of that. It's our ideals, our values, our ideas, the things we're fighting for - that's what the enemy's after. They want to wipe out our ideas and values by wiping us out.

When they put mate against mate on death's doorstep, it's their last-ditch effort to crush those values in our minds. Make no mistake, if Abbas had pulled that rope, it wouldn't have just been Ali getting the chop. It would've been the human values inside Abbas getting the chop too. Don't forget how hard they tried in the slammer to pit mates against each other, even to throw a single punch."

Majid jumped in on Abolghasem's yarn and said, "Remember Parviz? The youngest political prisoner in Ward 4 of Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz. He was just 12 years old. They'd worked on his mind for so long that they finally convinced him to slap his mum during a face-to-face visit - she was in the same prison. They made him tell her that if she didn't play ball with the regime and the screws, and if she didn't give up her political views, he wouldn't recognise her as his mum anymore and wouldn't visit her again.

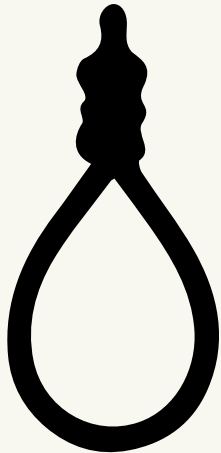
When his mum replied tearfully, 'My dear boy, my darling, I'm sorry they made you talk to me like this. My thoughts, views, and ideals are for your future, for kids like you, and for your children. I'm enduring this prison so that your children will never know what a prison is, only reading about them like fairy tale castles in history books.' Parviz's slap landed on his mum's face, and they both cried bitterly as they were separated.

After the visit, Parviz hid under his blanket and wept quietly. For hours, days, weeks, and months. Parviz's mum was executed. But Parviz, on that day with that slap to his mum, was executed in the most horrific way. They destroyed 12-year-old Parviz. They destroyed his mum. They destroyed the political prisoners. The nightmare and spectre of Parviz's scenario happening again still haunts political prisoners to this day. This nightmare stands like a ghost in front of us, against the wall, staring at all of us."

While Abolghasem and Majid were having a chinwag, I was lost in thought.

"Parviz's scenario is about killing humanity. Everything that makes us human. Killing human feelings and emotions."

And this ghost isn't just a spectre from the '60s or just in Shiraz prison. The ghost of this scenario hovers over all of humanity. Right now, anyone anywhere in the world who lifts their head can see this ghost and nightmare above them. The ghost of the murder of humanity."



Correspond

by Boris Pont

If not responsibilities, then what ?

The haves preach as much, and to
the have-nots ... culpability.

And power displays always
relentlessness, and in its perpetual
drive ... thus to rule, and to rule at
all costs.

The meek can't afford as much loss,
and *to* attrition, and possess merely
a superior wit, borne *of* insecurity,
and collusion.

And such that there be no confusion.

Guesswork

by Rank Amateur

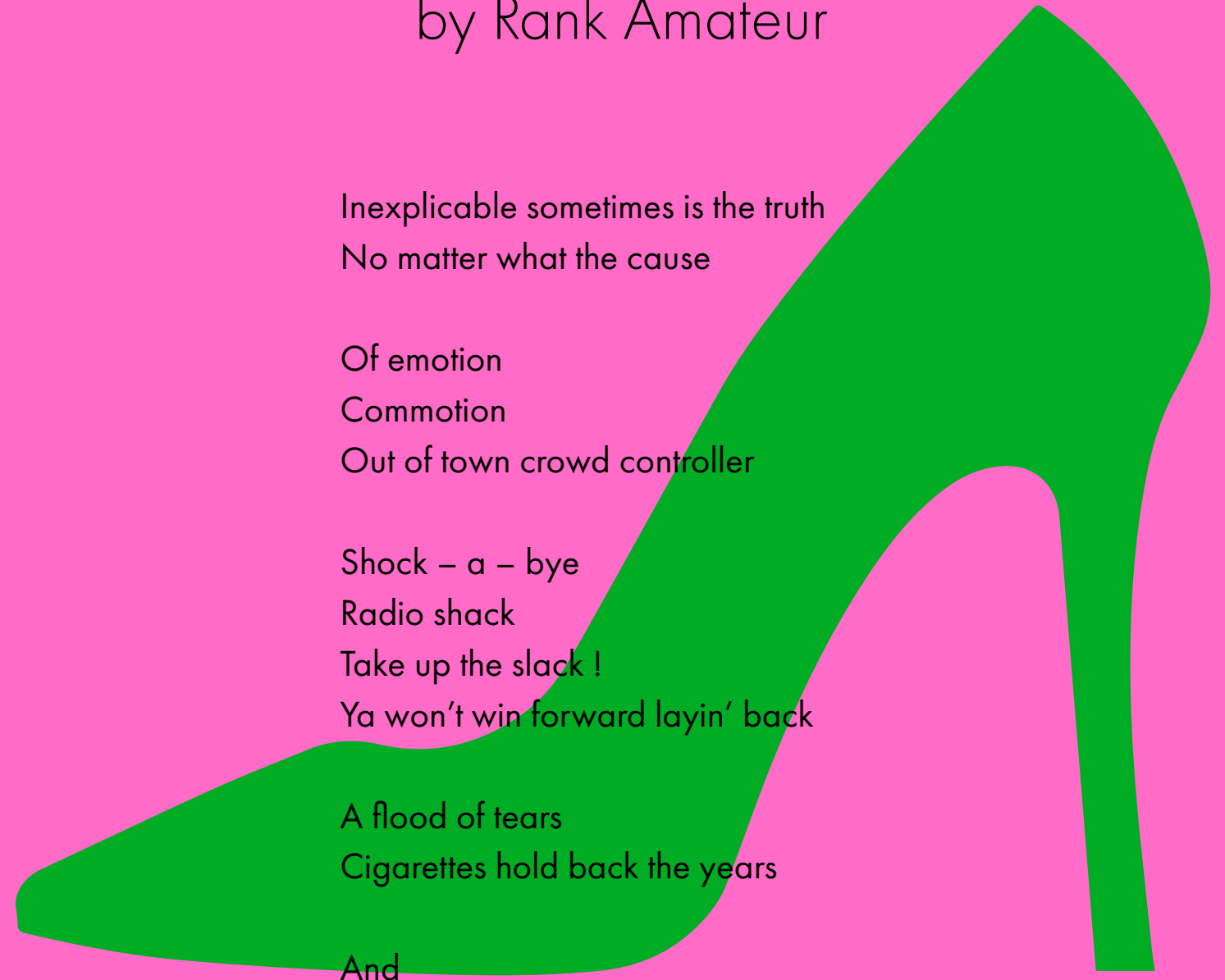
Inexplicable sometimes is the truth
No matter what the cause

Of emotion
Commotion
Out of town crowd controller

Shock – a – bye
Radio shack
Take up the slack !
Ya won't win forward layin' back

A flood of tears
Cigarettes hold back the years

And
Flying off the handle
For a second, 'cause ...
Somes got flat shoes for glamour
While others will stick a heel to your remaining prowess.



Like Butter

by Phu-Linh Tran

10

We are all living blindly under what we think are normal conditions until the light pierces through us and we see the truth that we were living in the darkness all along: smiling politely, saying the right words but feeling the twinge that something wasn't quite right. At the turning, we understood we were actors in a false script called OUR LIVES or REAL LIFE but nothing was real about it. Our director was calling out ACTION! and without knowing it, words tumbled out of our mouths, emotions poured out of our bodies, arguments erupted, plates smashed; we thought it was us, it wasn't. I was married to a ferocious man. I had his children and lived in a tiny caravan among a community of fringe dwellers. He thought I had been unfaithful and smashed my face into the kitchen floor, streams of blood spurting unconstrained. But I wasn't married or beaten up on a kitchen floor: I was sitting on an Eames chair watching like a giant eye outside of form, outside of time and space. Lord Jesus said it must

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happen this way because I am the way and the light. The name for light for a girl is 'Elektra' like electricity or 'Lucy' like Lucifer the fallen angel of Light. A beautiful woman I met at a laundrette told me how Jesus had turned her life around and her heart was never the same. She had red hair and soft shiny lips so tempting I wanted to meet them with mine. She told me at the point of the turning, you awaken and realise everything before this moment isn't real. You never look back, you become like butter, pierced right through you by the sword of the spirit. She said her name used to be 'Sienna' meaning red burnishing by the sun but now God rechristened her as 'Aurora' like *aurora borealis* the dancing colourful display of lights seen on the horizons of Antarctica and Tasmania. Aurora is the Roman goddess of the morning light, the dawn to an emerging consciousness. She held my hand and I saw God in her eyes. I fell back, struck by the power, leaving my flesh, my bones, my shape of everything I knew to be real. I no longer felt the curse of my humanity but the gentle breeze of grace sweeping over my face and body as I became one with it all.

Mama, It's Too Late

by Samantha Jane Duff

Why are you ringing up to say so much
When I am by myself
I am sailing with a drink in my hand
I am at peace like an open fire
Daddy will never know me
Like he never knew mama's love
All up in smoke
It's not nice like the silence in the darkness
This time I want my own happiness
Without trying anything

I open my music box
It plays a tune each time without having a comment
People like taking
It's so easy, taking and taking...
It's a big bad world
You never told me Mama
What can I say?!
I will never tell my children the truth
I will never leave them in the dark
Mama is a monk
She sees more in the good life and declares a vision of
Life for me
I lay my guns down
I let it flow out
So I won't hold onto nothing
When I am something

I am waking up from pain
So don't come down on me, Mama,
When I shut my door !!

I'm telling you now :
I'm sailing with a drink
It was just an invisible kiss
I am just in limbo waking up to myself

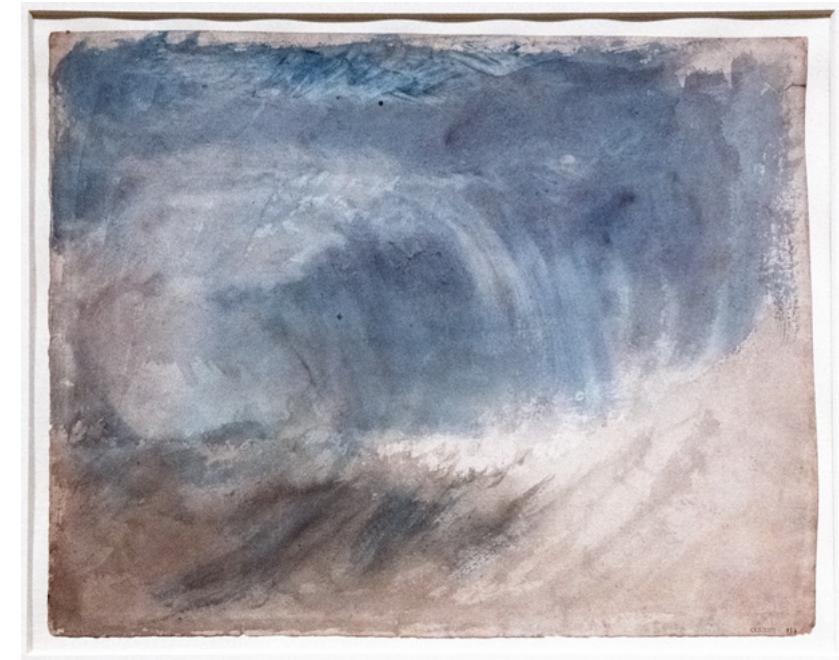
Pearl

by Tanya Page

Your skin, like satin silk, is a pearl
 I adore you
 A newborn baby is born and he is fearless
 I hear the sounds of fists banging with fury on the front door
 The sound of my father's fury comes like waves crashing
 on the sea shore where I live
 Created from sand and sea, this pearl
 your love is a betrayal
 Once so pure
 Now blood on the door
 The anger will passover
 And subside to the sound of silence

The Sea

by Tanya Page



J. M. W. Turner *Sea and Sky*, c.1820–30

The sea spits
 Her fury frightens
 The young man
 Taken by surprise
 Her wistful ways
 She carries him home across the water
 Deirdre betrayed by her lover
 Cannot forgive
 The seas
 Which took this young man away.

In-between

Spaces

by Scott Welsh

I've spent
A lot:
Of time-
In between spaces,
Malls and hang-outs,
Under trees in parks,
Bridges and beaches,
Neither crossing,
Nor sun-bathing-
Where nothingness resides.
Directionless,
Going-
Nowhere.
From-
Nowhere.
Arriving.
Nowhere.
Now, I am here.
YOU ARE HERE.
Says the Art,
That never hangs,
On walls-
In galleries.
YOU ARE NOWHERE.
NOTHING.
Says the sign,
Casts a shadow,
Over my identity.
You are neither,
Worker nor client.
Student nor teacher.
The nothingness,
Of lived experience.
You're a threat to established,
Treatments and pedagogies,
A danger to practised studies,
A walking, talking, teaching, treating
Threat, and you don't know whether,
To speak in your 'cultivated' dialect,
Or the one you know from the street,
You don't know how to relate,
And that's not just here,
It's always anywhere, everywhere,
Eventually: Time passes, things change.
Surroundings transform.
I am content,
To be neither,
Worker nor client.
In classical Philosophy,
From Europe-
I simply am.
I am.
I am,
Therefore,
I must be.
Or what I have learned,
From our First Nations,
Others and sisters:
I am the collective.
You are, we are,
Community.

A Message to War: I Want to Live

by Ali Keshkar

It has now been six days since the world began to witness yet another war, this time, between Israel and Iran. But this war is unlike any before it. It is a new kind of war in the long, tragic history of human conflict: a war of drones, missiles, and bombers; a war with no fixed frontlines. The entire land of Iran and the entire land of Israel are now the battlefield. The cities are the frontlines. And civilians, (those with no stake in this war and no say in its making) are its casualties.

This war is the continuation of political hostilities between two states. It is fought with political aims, but it targets human beings. It is war waged by humans, against humans.

Both governments try to justify their actions and claim moral superiority. The Israeli government calls it a war for regime change, for the liberation of the Iranian people from tyranny. The Iranian government calls it an act of resistance, a rightful defence of national sovereignty.

Among Iranians, confusion and division abound. Some ask: should we welcome this war, in the hope that it might bring an end to 45 years of authoritarian rule? Or should we oppose all foreign bombs falling on our cities, especially those dropped by governments with their own troubling records on human rights? Others fear the descent into chaos. Will Iran, too, face the fate of Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon? Will the images of smouldering ruins, dust-choked cities, and displaced families become the lasting portrait of Iran in the eyes of the world? In a time like this, can one truly feel joy—or only sorrow? Is neutrality possible, or is indifference itself a choice? Must we not feel, not speak, not take a stand?

Perhaps the most essential question for anyone seeking clarity is this:

“Will this war truly deliver people from violence? Can warring states ever be saviours of life? Is war really a path to freedom?”

The answer, surely, is no.

This war is not about ending tyranny or freeing a people. It was not launched to liberate lives, but by a nuclear-armed state seeking to deny nuclear capabilities to another. It is a spectacle of destruction, an arena for testing military might, missiles, drones, and bombs. A brutal performance of power, followed inevitably by negotiations.

This is not a war for the freedom of the people of Gaza or the people of Iran.

In this military-political choreography, humanity itself, the individual, the family, the will to live, the depth of emotion, the capacity to think and to love, has been erased. Bombs and missiles know nothing of feeling, nothing of thought, nothing of imagination.

War burns away human will. A person becomes as powerless as the bricks of buildings that crumble under fire.

The start of war is the end of humanity. And the end of humanity is the birth of brutality.

War is the hell of civilizations. In hell, no trees bloom.

And yet, no war has ever succeeded in fully extinguishing the human spirit. Whatever remains of our humanity eventually rises against the forces that seek to destroy it. That is the secret of how wars come to end, not by conquest, but by the quiet revolt of compassion.

Wherever that humanity is weak, war still burns.

I want to live.

Wherever I am on this earth, near or far from the battlefield, I want to represent humanity. I want to honour life. I want to hold it sacred.

And for that reason,
I am against war.

The Lowdown

by Rank Amateur

How much is that poem in the window?
The one with the tail whip
And the lickedy split

Took a bite
And then ran out of sight
Out of what were a decent set of trousers

Shout treason!
To even the Stevens
Peter caught him up on the bike

And then rocking back
And to a safe distance
Stuck a knife to his regions

Told the mutt to shut up
Not to squeak
And not for no reason

For none and were witness
To this
The turn of the season.

Beauty – Dublin

by Tanya Page

Among the coal, dirt, children, fear and warmth, my grandfather came around the corner in Magennis Square on his bicycle in the evening. He was a quiet gentle man. He never spoke much as he probably didn't have much to say among the rest of my mother's family. There were a lot of people around all the time. He sat in his rocking chair as I sat on his knee in my Granny's house. He placed tuppence in my hand and a Cadbury's chocolate bar. It was the lotto for a child in Dublin, among a lot of hardship.

Yes, there was a sense of place in terms of class structure and still today.

I watch her beauty as she stands in the window of a Georgian window.

The running stream ran blood as she cooled her temperament. It weighed down on her in his intolerance.

The Decision

by Anthony Cheshire

He held his gun in his right hand. Up his arm he had tattooed the name Patricia. He loaded his gun with bullets with his left hand and up this arm he had tattooed Naomi. Left or right.

Which one did he plan to kill?

Patricia was his first wife. She had a raw deal having to work full time in a leather factory, do the house-work and cover the bills, but he paid the mortgage-which made it his home.

He had no idea how hard done by and lonely she felt. Often, after a tough day's work, he would fall to sleep after the evening meal. On the weekends, he would spend his time under cars. Of course, he was oblivious to all this and was bitter and twisted when she decided to

leave him and live with her mother. He continued to keep (tabs on?) her whereabouts.

Naomi, his second wife, told him after him being away that she was having her period. That didn't bother him but they were never to have sex again. She blamed him for lack of money so in a fluster he looked for a better paid job. At night she wasn't around so he began to walk the streets. At the end, when it became glaringly obvious she was having an affair, there was a messy divorce. He knew where the man she had fallen for lived, by following her.

He had the gun clipped and he juggled it, one hand to the other. The tattoos were there and his decision had been made.

Siberia

by susanne I harford

A positive reality of this era, when we find ourselves a long way past post-structuralist, is that there continues to be new analyses of and discussion on the nature of the city, its development and life. This allows the engaged reader to cogitate upon the way we all clump together, gain some fragments of concepts of what, (if anything at all), the city might be, and mean. In this, moving from one city to another allows even the walking-dead flann  ur a bigger opportunity to develop their own personal vision about the countless, different landscapes city-man creates.

New York, NY, USA, still a city unlike any other, provides a perfect example. For The Big Apple displays all types of extreme and curious environments and it is still possible to be amazed and surprised, titillated (and yet, perhaps not) by, for example, New York as a civic "underbelly" (Giblett, 1996), as presented in Jack Bryan's art-movie, "Life After Dark: The Story of Siberia Bar" (2008) <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt1322336/>

Siberia provides a fine example of the "re-colonisation", or even "de-colonisation of the natural environment" Giblett repeatedly puzzles over and can only be seen as a "set of marks on the surface of the earth". As such, it remains, still, the only club ever situated on any part of the entire New York subway network, and in its depths. Certainly there were few aesthetics in play there in *Siberia*'s subway location, which so aptly fits Giblett's description of the modern city as "bewildering, untranslatable". Always a grimy, dangerous, dirty little den in a grimy, dangerous, dirty huge network, its own "inscription", graffiti-like, clearly demonstrates why it was constantly in serious trouble with The City as landlord, its safety controller, and in charge of its sanitation.

Yet *Siberia* survived, albeit through several reincarnations. In particular, as component of NY underground *Siberia* did not, does not need to pretend to be postmodern, deconstructed, or simulated. For it clearly displays the "metaphysical beauty of the ruined abstraction... or the truth that conceals there is none" (Baudrillard, 1983):

"It's a dreary place," noted barfly Bill Dolan says, "but Manhattan needs dreary places" (ClubPlanet, 2001).

That *Siberia* may have been the point of Giblett's "re-colonisation", represented the opening of an anti-aesthetic two-way doorway to return to the earlier state - of what? - certainly nothing "natural" or "of nature" - rather, perhaps, Russkiy Mir? (DGAP, 2025) - thinking laterally (and indulgently), its strong, continuous, and tight links with highest-quality

contemporary arts, and street journalism, and a diverse, international avant-garde following seem to support that idea.

For *Siberia* does seem founded, as Giblett describes all cities in general, on a dialectic of attack and defense, of aggression and paranoia, with a sublime vigour, yet a cowardly quail, with its forward and phallic thrusting into new territory while retaining a defensive desire to protect its own rear through its swampy backblocks (1996).

Yet Cronkite describes this as "a club of distinction, habituated by journalists, intellectuals and social entities", and conversely mentions it seems to have exhibited all the marks of an active arena of war – I suppose I was attracted to *Siberia* for nostalgic reasons. Jack's documentary is a cross-section of late 80s/early 90s urban culture. At that time, there was a sort-of self-gratifying anarchy penetrating the night world – a feeling of social chaos. The documentary is really a reflection of the dramatic shift in popular culture over the last generation...(in conversation with Johnson Calderon, 2008).

All of the above could be connected to Virilio's and Lotringer's statements on the very close association with the development of "the city" and that of the development of war; that the city is the result of war, at least of preparation for war...The city, which establishes itself as aggressor towards the natural world... [may also be] founded on a dillectic of accessibility and isolation; neither too vulnerable to be open to attack, nor too isolated to be inaccessible... but on the edges of the empire, colonizing the unknown (cited by Giblett, 1996) :

So: *Siberia*: holed up in the bowels of New York City: "awesome... with a great bartender.. all minor carnage and warfare... with fabulous hidden art... [where] verbal and physical intellectualized violence occurred during operating hours... butting up against the system... both a civilization and a wilderness".

Siberia welcomed all comers, made no distinction on who could walk in their doors (and some straight back out again). As a novel city-part, *Siberia* was "open to the [public's] suspicion, doubt, and attack, being construed as alien" (Giblett, 1996).

Yet this "un-seemly" NY-city night wonder-world welcomed all - women unaccompanied were freely accepted, provided they followed "the code". Which may be, confusingly, deliberately? read as a return of Giblett's "colonial repressed ... the unhomely [female]... invaded and conquered the homely [male?]" (1996). While this could describe many

city's behaviours (at that time) this generous gender balance, in what was an essentially masculine environment was unusual, is still. This mix of high and low intellectual, with the brutal and the beautiful and the sordid representing symbolic return to a far-earlier earth consciousness, de-pathologized, is, perhaps a kind of cultural 'talking cure' which raises the swamp as the cultural unconscious, indeed the culture, repressed.

This convulsion of fascinated-revulsion in a different guise, is the fight for removal of "the tide of culturally habituated opinion going against conservation and rehabilitation of [the under-foot/under-belly of the city, aka] wetlands". Compare this with how The Other, (in this case, the general populace), did, and probably do, still, view such a place as nothing but a confounded zoo... [with] the return of the swamp's... bad smells (Baudrillard, cited by Giblett 1996) with all its arrested or blocked processes.

What is here is in effect not only an inability to communicate (attributed to I forget!) but also a contest, where, construed as a health threat (one of its many types of threatening behaviours) and rightly, for deep within the bowels of NY the City, its massive subway, and *Siberia* were all physically situated within an ancient swamp, or Benjamin's "dark, deep, womb", presented a "scene" and an "obscene" area in which everything that cannot or may not happen on the street is relegated. Looking at the more recent, possibly similar cultural wrestling matches outlined by Beever; Dougan; Johnston & Harbiston; The Mangroves; Winslow & Hadfield; it is plain to see how ineffectual this struggle has become (refer to reference list, attached). Though, whatever is inadmissible, be it malefic or simply forbidden, still has its own hidden space on the near, or far sides of this frontier.

Or near *Siberia*'s rear exit door.
susanne

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To Remember What We Buried, Not What Died

A personal journey into NAIDOC Week 2025,
through the eyes of a refugee newly finding home

by Ali Keshtkar

The First nation people of Australia have always been a mystery to me. Their history, their languages, their stories and songs, their culture, beliefs, rituals, and way of life have long stirred in me a sense of wonder and reverence.

This year, for the first time, I found myself drawn to NAIDOC Week.

I decided to dedicate this week to listening, learning, and immersing myself in the living fragment of an ancient human past not just of this continent, but of the Earth itself.

To encounter and reflect deeply on a people whose roots stretch back over 60,000 years.

There is something profoundly philosophical and imaginatively rich in first nation culture
an imagination born of sun-scorched soil, crimson skies, lush forests, vast oceans, and the songlines of rivers and creatures.
A wisdom drawn not from books, but from the land itself.
A culture that was never academic,
shaped not by classrooms but by Country.

A people who neither read books nor attended schools or universities,
and yet beneath their feet lay some of the richest deposits of wealth on Earth: gold, diamonds, opals, treasures they never sought.

They bathed in rivers flowing with untold riches, catching only the fish they needed to eat.
They did not exploit other humans, nor did they exploit animals.
They had no human slaves, nor animal ones.

They lived with elegant simplicity, and with depth beyond measure.
Grounded, spiritual, untouched by the clutter of possession.
In every sense, they belonged to the land, and the land to them.
They were, in every sense, of the Earth, of Nature, and of the great mystery of the Universe

This week, I walk toward their Dreaming,
a sacred way of being shaped by an ancient relationship between people and place, where land, story, and spirit are one.
A worldview echoing with the metaphysics of a time before time.

I want to immerse myself in their whispers
to let my body, my mind, and my memory be drawn into the voice of this land.

I want to journey through time and space, thousands of years back.
To listen to their stories and oral traditions.
To the sorrowful, resilient voices of a people who, to survive, were torn from their own nature.

A people who fought not only for life,
but for the survival of their being, their kin, and their mother: the Earth.

I want to hear the struggle rising from the soil, from the sun, from the waters, from their tongues
a cry that does not belong to this land alone.

I, too, have been torn from my homeland,
driven out by the same life-denying forces:
the malignant winds of injustice,
the piercing screams of war,
the violence that targets life itself
and fires upon hope as if it were the enemy.

Perhaps that's why I need this voice so deeply now.
A voice that remembers. A voice that resists.
A voice that knows what it means to be severed from home,
and yet still sing.

I want to listen to the rivers,
do they remember history? Do they still carry the stories of this land?

And I find myself asking:
Have these people ever truly known justice in this modern nation?
Not symbolic justice. Not justice in words or apologies.
But justice that is lived, in land returned, in power shared, in futures rewritten together.
If not, why not?

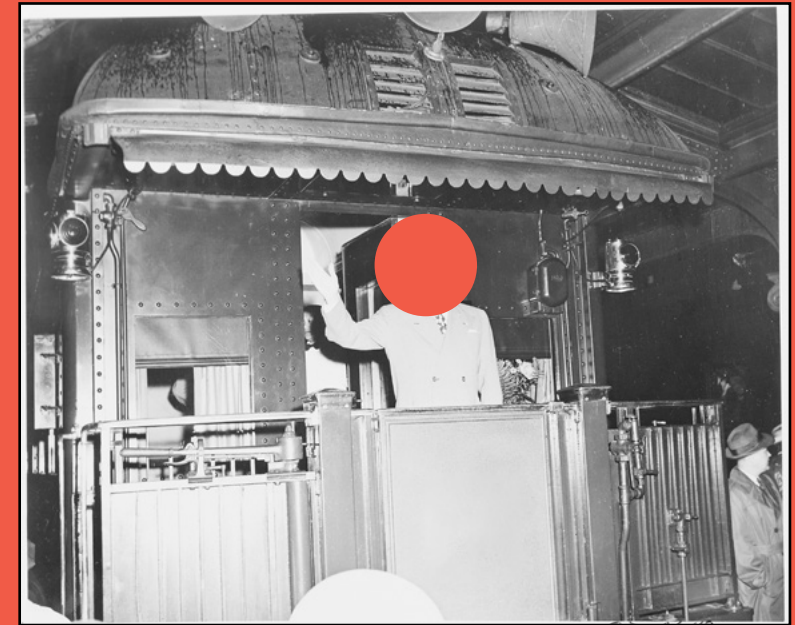
What kind of democracy forgets its first people, or remembers them only in ceremony, but not in law, not in policy, not in power?

This week becomes, for me, a time to re-examine my views, on history, on justice, on identity and belonging. On politics, yes, politics again.
On the world around me and on **"how I write stories."**

Perhaps, this is the beginning of a new story, a story written from the scorched voice of the land, and from the silences that have yet to be heard.

Light Rail Farewell

by Phu-Linh Tran



Last night I dreamt that I saw you waving me goodbye from the station platform.

You were dressed in your favourite paisley shirt, waistcoat and black felt brimmed hat that has become your signature look as you now mature into an elder statesman.

Your eyes are earnest, unadorned this time without spectacles, as you mouth to me:
"Never forget we are all players in the game, but not all of us are playing the same game."

I was standing inside an overcrowded tram heading for St. Kilda, but even in the bustle of protruding arms and obstructive heads, I saw your gaze fixed upon my slowly disappearing form.

Like a final bon voyage as I board a liner ship, you salute me: date of return unknown, final destination yet to be known.

This was always the way with us: so many questions and after all this time, so few answers.
We keep our expectations low and this is how we manage to mitigate any human annoyances that may crop up.

I mouth back: *"I'll see you again comrade in the next round. I'd like to think when we are in the same room again, we both won."*

Walking in Elwood in Winter

by susanne I harford

Hello Elwood! You have been a most welcoming winter home to me for the last 6 years or so. Each year I've learned a little more about Elwood, and each year I love it more, and, searching through the diverse English synonyms for "to walk", the Oxford Dictionary description of "to perambulate" seems closest to my daily travels, on foot, around Elwood. That's because what I'm doing apparently (although I didn't really realise it until I began writing this book), as both verb and noun, is perambulation... "the act of walking the boundaries of a parish or other area to establish or verify its limits, sometimes recorded in a document". So, this is a little "document" is created as a temporary record of Elwood, so charming, picturesque, diverse and mostly mild-weathered,

and mostly lends itself extremely well to such a daily walking by an oldie like me. Especially as there's always plenty of wonder for me to observe in Elwood, and its close surrounds.

Some of what I encounter ends up in my haiku or senryu, and maybe even, in the case of the leaves here, as **haiga**, which is explained as

"**Haiga** is a style of Japanese painting that includes both writing (calligraphy) and illustration as artistic expressions on paper. It includes three elements; haiku, illustration, and calligraphy. The haiku is written, and the illustrated images are inspired

by, or were what inspired the haiku. In haiga, often the arrangement of elements is playful. An artist often adds a red seal stamp mark (also, called a chop) beside the signature when it is complete." (Oxford, 2025).

Right now, my own personal "chop" is a work in progress, so maybe next year...

In the meantime, I've learned, and have subsequently discovered, on foot, with help from the following information from AI:

Elwood is surrounded by the suburbs of St Kilda to the north, Brighton to the south, and Elsternwick to the east. It is a bayside suburb located 8 kilometres south of Melbourne's city centre". (AI, July 2025)... Elwood Village has walking distance to shops, cafes, beach and the canal. Period homes, apartments and shop architecture. Elwood has its own culture

Thank you, Elwood, and Elwood people,
Susanne, June-September, 2025

Walking Elwood lanes and streets

1.
Dumping, depositing
leaves blast along black
shiny lanes
merry wind tonight
2.
rainy winter streets
painted leaf-strewn drifts
drained now
green and gold mountains

Along the canals

3.
At dusk man and dog
chat to me by the canal
heron listens in tree
4.
a fork in canal
extraordinarily
entrancing, mythic
5.
a waddling of ducks
a crowd of generations
exactly alike

In the St. Kilda City Gardens

6.
St. Kilda Gardens
old fashioned pelargoniums
cuttings requested
7.
winter-bared branches
bear no golden
ginko leaves
green until next fall
8.
Elwood streets maybe
someday will see ginko
leaves
on a paperbark tree
9.
Five, no seven bees
in a twirling poppy, see
six blue! all welcome
10.
Park water fountain
old but true-ly useful, still
bikers walk to it
11.
Stone-carved Buddha
contemplates pretty fish
pond
Red-Back weaves earring
12.
Winter wind blasting
while sea watches, smiles
with moon
light shines between trees
13.
Elwood's ancient pipe
fixtures display verdigris
richly green as Rome's
- 14
Park's winter poppies
Ignore dark days' cold-rain-
wind
Sun's out blossoms out

The households

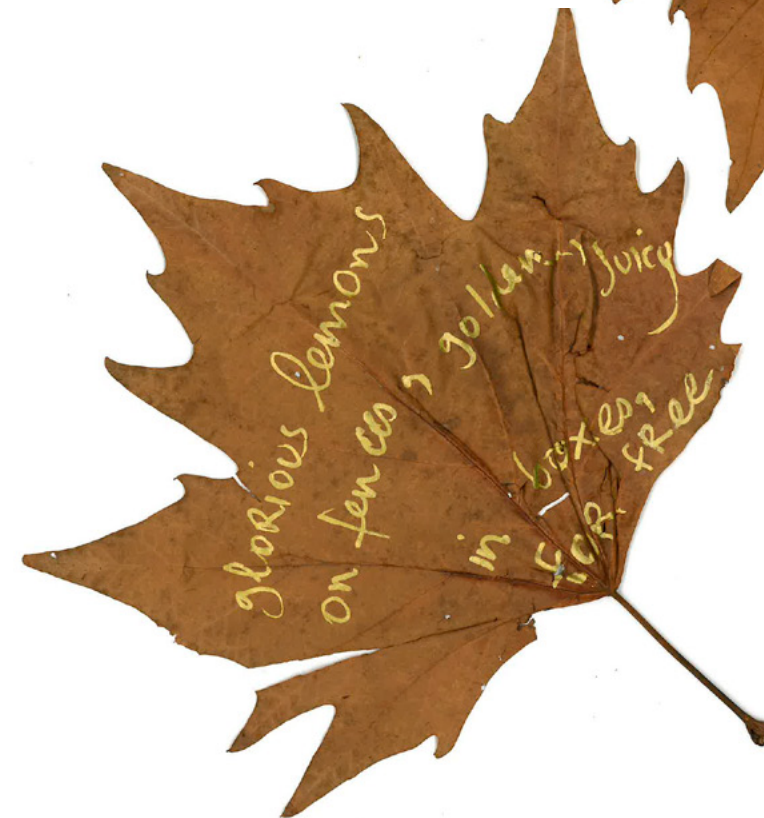
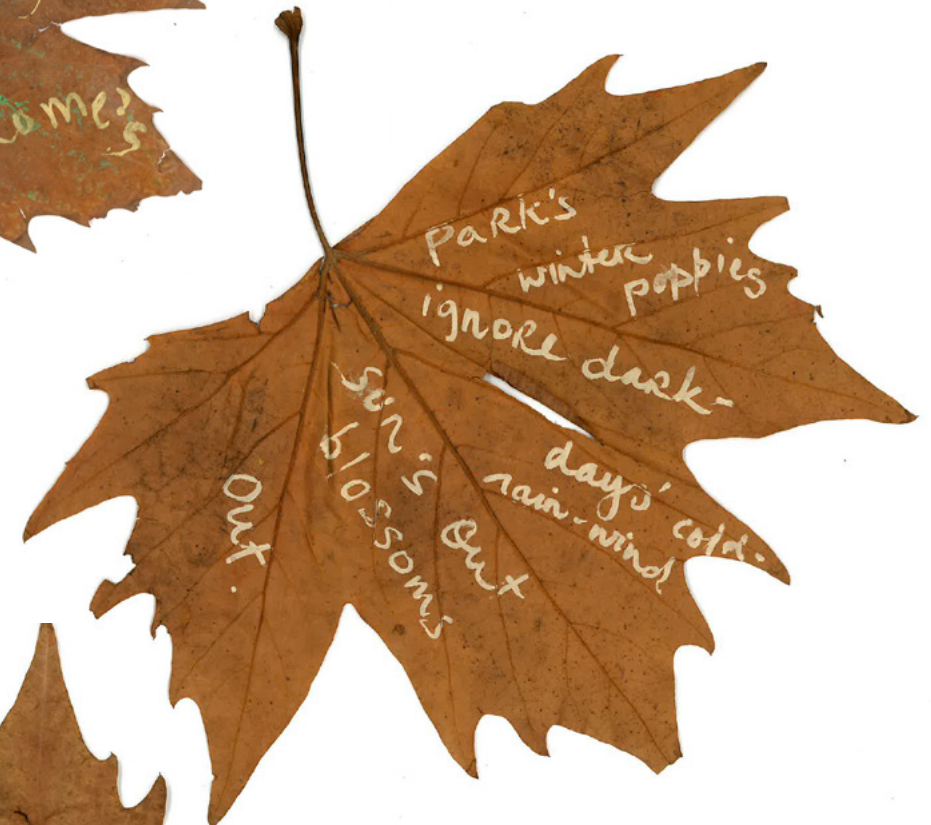
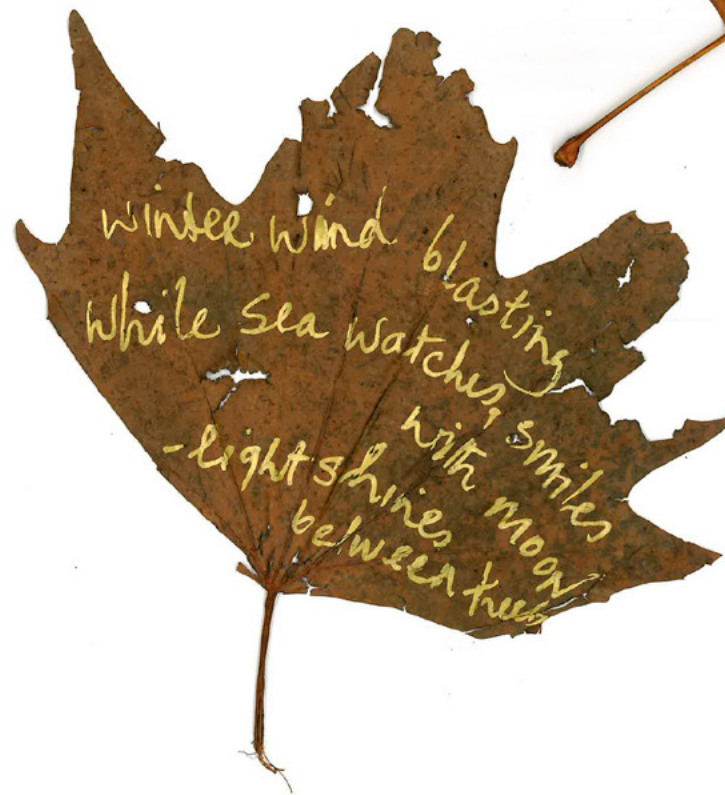
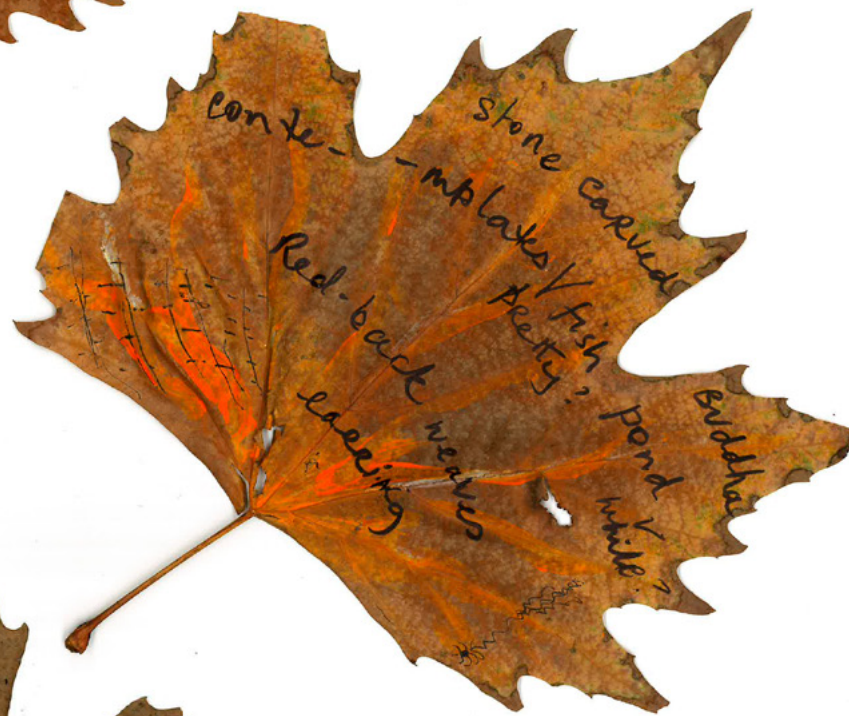
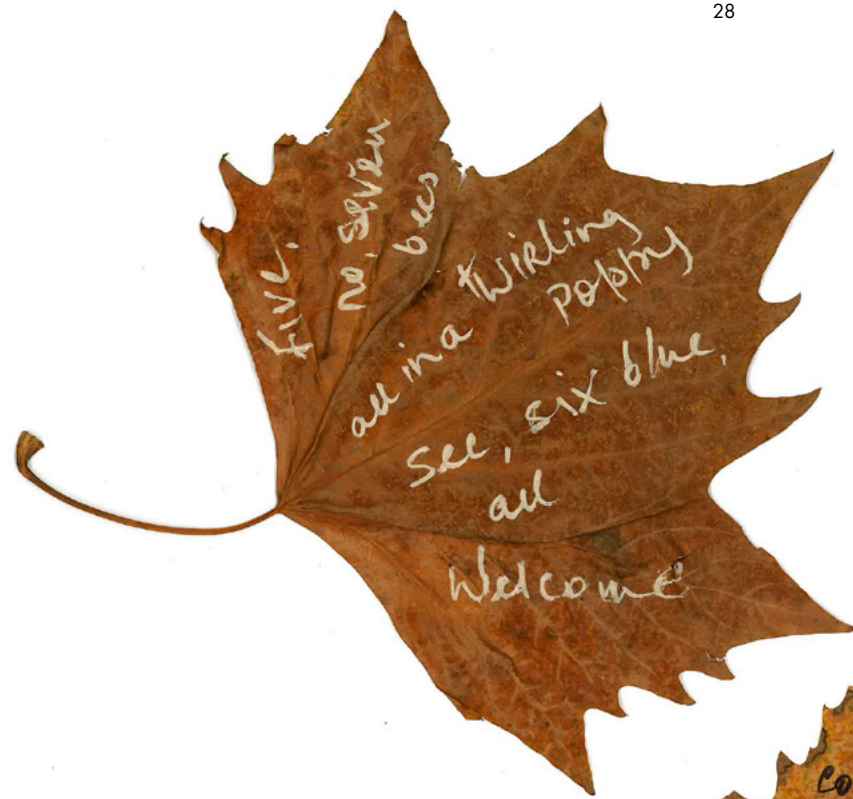
- 15
Glorious lemons
on fences, golden, juicy,
in boxes, for free
- 16
Gentrification
nails bolts screws screw
brand new tyres
better in houses
- 17
Camelias abound
occasional gardenias
but oh! the perfume
- 18
Orange pansy peeps
graffiti leaps across wood
each supports the other
- 19
Daily constructions
renovations, old and new
terrible singing
- 20
Geranium-num- nums'
colours give us Power to
be happy,
glad eyes, dance steps,
sing songs

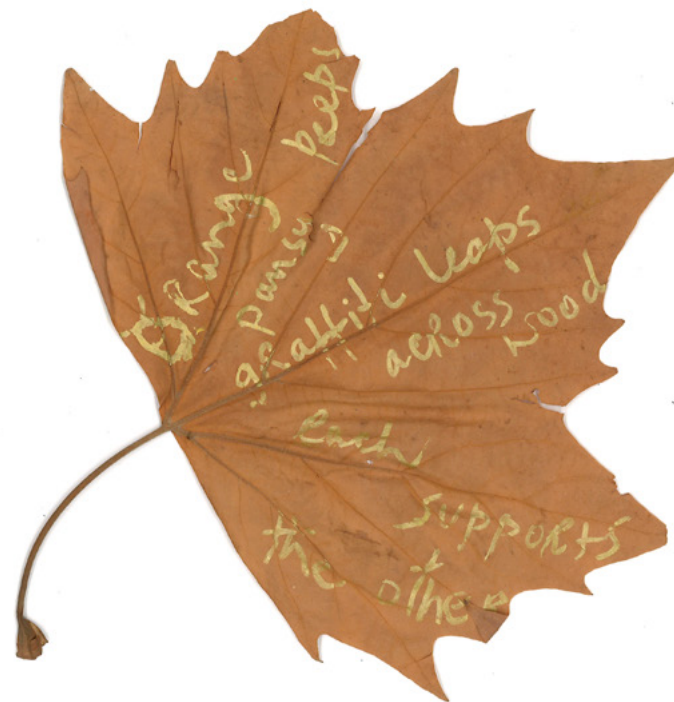
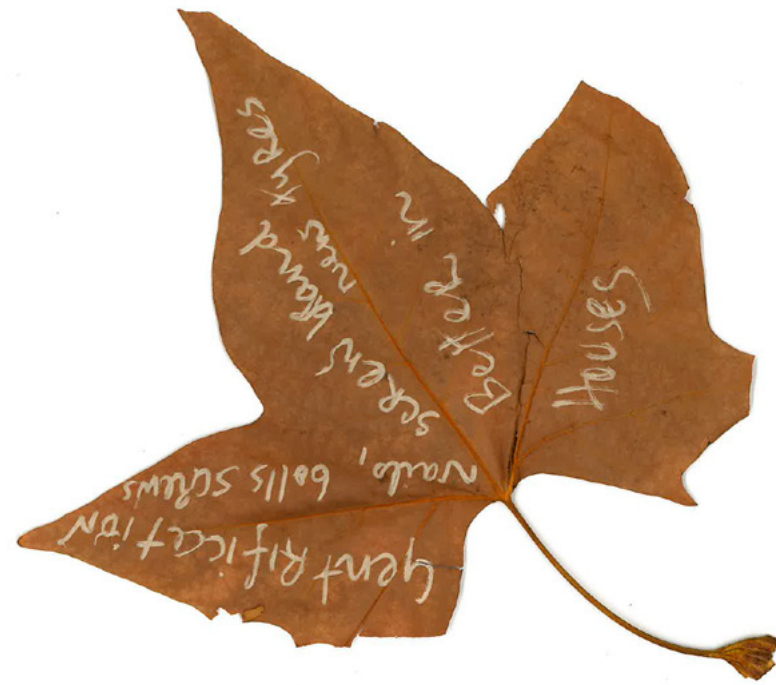
Elwood beachside walking

- 21
Locks on the bridge found
by the sea, eroding,
corroding
lost love ebbs away
- 22
sudden white sea spume
locks onto black granite
rocks
all clear, seas sparkling
- 23
ball stuck in sea rock
too far, never recovered
like a lump in throat
- 24
the sea's upended
blinding white road base,
icing atop
black asphalt
- 25
sea beats on old steps
old steps sleep in the sand,
safe
live another year
- 26
sea eagle tops pole
nearby mate also watches
moths, perhaps are yachts

Last or/and first in this list?

- 27
Does the do-not sign
lean tiredly on the tree?
or vice versa
- 28
Is Poet's Corner
singular or plural, here
many more than one
- 29
different freedoms
exist in Elwood today
available now





The "El" in Elwood

by susanne I harford

Hope to see you Elwood, again, next year, in winter 2026!
Always full of wonder for me, I've found some of its how,
when, what and why-fors now, such as in the Elwood Monash
University link, and other references at the bottom of this
page, where. Although such Anglo-Celt-based information
describes Elwood as meaning a place of elder trees, I also
recall the component "el" often occurs in the names of the
Archangels, such as Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, and that is
because they are special entities, with direct links to deities in
many diverse cultures, which link reminds there is more to life
than the physical world – and Elwood is definitely a place of
wide mystery to me, and as I walk that is where much of my
wonder while I wander comes from.

Peace, Best wishes to all, Susanne

Elwood. (2025). Victorian Places. Monash University and University of Queensland
<https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/elwood#>

Haiga. (2025). Beyond the Chalkboard. Boston Children's Museum.
<https://www.beyondthechalkboard.org/activity/sky-haiga/#>

Haiku. (2025). Oxford Dictionaries.
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095915672#>

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https://www.oed.com/dictionary/senryu_n

The Cold Hard Truth

by Marianna Jans

Before heading off to work, Taylor was looking at herself in the mirror as she was applying her make-up and found herself almost giggling with pride at just how quickly and masterfully she had become at doing her make-up. She knew exactly which colours to blend to make herself look perfect; she always knew which eyeshadow to use depending on what she needed to colour match. She delicately yet deliberately picked up each and every make-up brush she owned until she had used them all. Taylor always managed to make herself look absolutely beautiful; picture perfect on the surface. Looking back, she remembered that the first time she had tried to do her eye make-up, it had taken her over an hour because she just couldn't get it right. She either looked like a panda who hadn't slept or she looked too orange as if something had gone wrong with fake tan but only on her eyes. It was awful. But now, she had gotten so good at using the right colour foundation, with the right tone concealer, and just a touch of M.A.C skin finish. She was able to apply the perfect amalgamation of products in just under five minutes, and she was super proud of this even though deep down she knew that this really wasn't something to be proud of. Once her skin was airbrushed, Taylor buffed out some dark eyeshadow for a smokey eye look and took out her mascara wand, opening her mouth as she skillfully brushed each of her lashes. She then looked into the mirror and stared directly at her reflection, tilting her head side to side, up and down, to check that everything was blended to perfection. Of course it was perfect; so perfect that she couldn't recognise the person she saw in the mirror. To set in stone the reflection that she saw, she took out her fixing spray and held her breath, spraying her face to ensure her make-up lasts all day. There was just no way Taylor would let her make up fade, separate, or sweat off, and reveal her black eye at work.

Taylor's body was covered with scars, burns, track marks, and bruises. She was trying to remember how beautiful she was before her life turned upside down and she cried as she realised that all the of the damage was self-inflicted. She wished she could just go back in time, but she couldn't. She gently wiped her tears, being careful not to smudge her work, and began applying body make-up to cover up her scars, cuts and bruises; to cover up all the damage done by Brad the night before. This didn't take her long either as she was used to applying make-up to hide the ugly parts of her. Now she knew that the day after getting a black eye the best option would be to go with a black smokey eye. It was

easier to cover up this way by working with the darkness of the day-old bruise. However, as the days would go by and the colour would shift to a purple and a yellow, well then, a smokey eye wasn't so good. The first time she had to cover a black eye she almost went into a meltdown because she had never used make-up before and had no idea how to apply what were to her such foreign products. She had to experiment for hours trying to cover it up. Now, she does it all in minutes.

Taylor felt an immense amount of shame coupled with a heavy sense that she had to cover up the abuse, the bruises, the evidence. And not just because Brad didn't want the world to know, but because she didn't want the world to know. If the world acknowledged it, she would have to acknowledge it. She was embarrassed – it's so hard to even entertain the idea that she is her partner's; her husband's punching bag. The person that she shares so much of her life with whom is supposed to love her more than anything else in the world abuses her to the point that she has bruises, marks, and even breaks. She felt ashamed and alone, and the worst part was that if she said something to someone she was 'seeking attention' and a liar as 'if it were really that bad why had she not left yet'. And if she didn't tell a soul, she was isolated, marginalised, and seen as weird. After being with someone like Brad who she had to ask permission to even go to work, Taylor had become so ashamed and embarrassed that she was in a relationship so abusive that she did not want to admit to herself, let alone friends and family, that she had been so stupid. So stupid to allow herself to fall into an abusive relationship and now unable to find a way out.

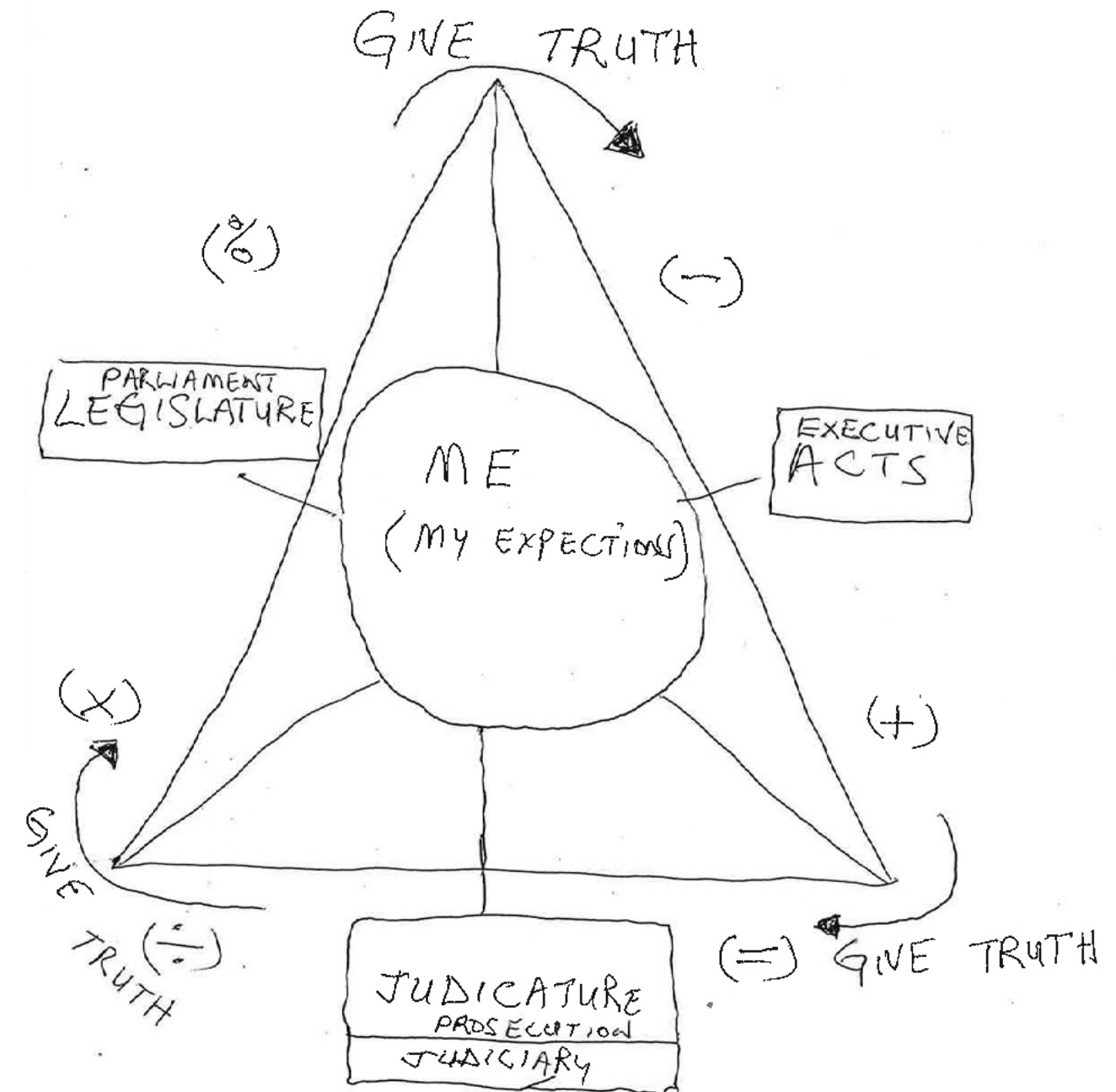
So instead of acknowledging the abuse and allowing the shame and humiliation to surface, she taught herself to conceal it. It was weird that she felt a sense of accomplishment in being so proficient at applying make-up to hide the abuse she endured, but that sense of pride quickly left when she remembered what events took place yielding her now unseen wounds. What stories that the scars she bore underneath all the make-up really told. Brad had changed her life entirely and not just because he had hit her. He had broken her down completely and made her so unsure of herself that she sometimes struggled to do anything without asking Brad first. Just the way he liked it. But now she had finished applying her make-up; there she looked almost beautiful. She ran her fingers through her hair and sighed. She stepped into her faded Coles' uniform and walked out into the cold. At least today she wouldn't be late for work.

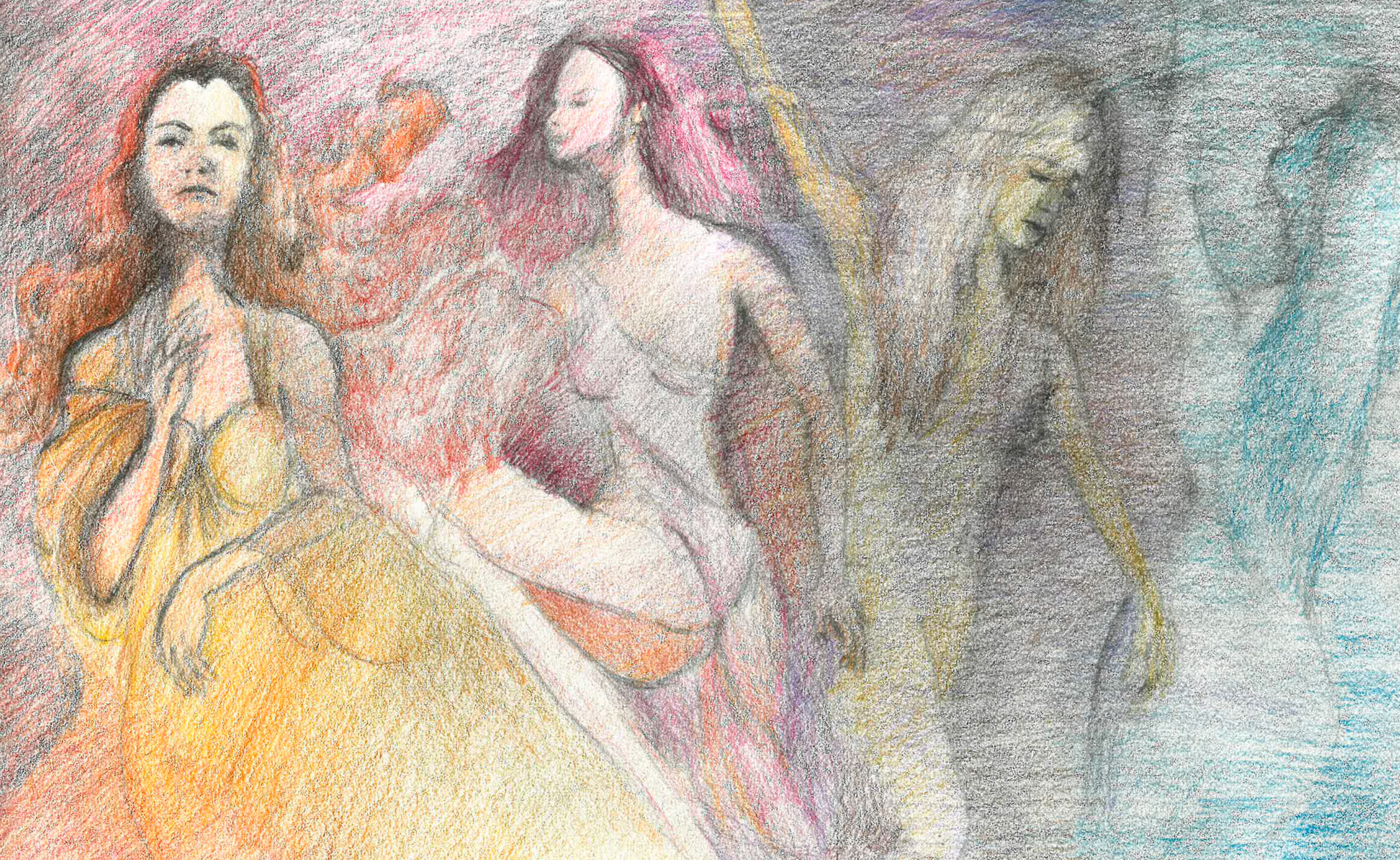
The Connection between Lost and Found

by Alan Menadue

My Expectations have created a clear truth that ~~lost~~ is a failure from Society for me and by a negative to that expected success.

Therefore My Expectations have created a clear truth that ~~is~~ found in a success from Society for me. This found to be a success however must be equal to the the Societies' previous equivalence of this minimum standard that is success for me.





Phu-Lihn Tran *Dark Muses*

The Sadness

by Danielle Hassall

■
I wake up early and can't get
back to sleep
I think of what's become of my life
and I'm filled with grief,
The tears well up uncontrollably,
I sit down exhausted, a few
minutes pass, the tears stop
But there is a pain under the skin
of my face, like the sadness is
there
Underlying cheeks, they feel
heavy with the weight of un-cried
tears,
A pain that cannot be fixed, and
will not leave my body
It feels completely helpless
What can I do to change this?
Nothing, it will not go
The other part of it sits in my gut,
a nervous, unsettled energy,
It can't be stopped, I don't know
how to stop it
They think I need antidepressants
But that won't change the
circumstances of my destitution
that are systemic issues
This pain could just be stopped if
they...
■
changed the system
Let us live
Let us live more than survival
Let us have some joy
Stop making us fight for a
pittance
Just let us live
It should be easy
Not to enslave the poor
The world would be a better place

2 weeks of every month the
sadness is amplified, as each
drop of blood leaves my body,
The nausea and cramps,
As unused would be stars fizzle
The possibility to carry a soul
Hundreds of tiny possibilities
Bursting and fizzing inside me,
turn to blood
Pressures the gas in my gut
Another chance at lost conception
drips out
To the lost souls still wandering
the Universe,
I'm sorry,
■
I couldn't,
Or I wouldn't.
I just didn't think of it, I was too
busy having fun,
Until I wasn't,
Then I was too busy feeling sad,
a body full of grief, immobilised
I didn't think life should be a
chore, I didn't think I could be
responsible,
Duty never seemed to call,
Love didn't either,
I was careful not to let it, until
The love on offer filled me with
fear, seemingly unreal
So did the world,
What point would it be to
contribute, care for a soul?
Fear that lead to anger, then to
grief
That was the sadness
Stolen years in fear,
No relief
■
Tapping, EMDR, try it they say,
'I completely and deeply accept
myself'
Affirm it
I am worthy of life, even if I didn't
produce one

A Year in an Office

by Stevie J

If the last two years were
anything to write about it would be
this.

To be chased and have chemical attacks along
with audio-visual attacks. That people
were out to get me and control my thoughts.
Well, that's scary.

And to think that I ran for all this time
from Sunshine to Glen Iris and then Melbourne CBD.
The office became my sanctuary and prison.

I lived there for a year trying to enjoy life. And I did,
for an extent, with the CBD at my doorstep. A misery
and party at the same time.

It's four walls only. One glass door.
The A/c mounted on the pillar.
The silence was golden except for
the sounds of others.

Up a glass elevator, down a hallway
and in the glass door to the sanctuary and prison.
A desk, a chair, a couch.

Woman or Wolf?

Phu-Lihn Tran



#74

Thanks for reading Roomers.

**These articles were written by the people
of the City of Port Phillip.**

Roomers Creative Writing Workshops run weekly at ESNLC and we welcome new members. The classes are free to attend and support people who have experienced insecure housing and/or financial or social hardship. Please reach out to find out more.

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CONTACT US

Email us at roomers@esnlc.org.au

Phone us on (03) 9531 1954

Write to Roomers C/O PO Box 57 Elwood 3184



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