HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS

Five Dials

NUMBER 32

New Zealand

FRANCIS UPRITCHARD *New Works*

PAUL EWEN *Space*

C.K. STEAD *Three Poems*

ASHLEIGH YOUNG *In Katherine Mansfield's House*

PAULA MORRIS *Stealing Red Wine in New Orleans*

...Plus: carved canoe prows, the Dunedin sound, potato-topped pie and lingering aftershocks

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Five Dials

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On New Zealand Issues

'Empire is now long gone,' writes Felicity Barnes in her book, *New Zealand's London: A Colony and its Metropolis*, 'but echoes of this old relationship remain.' Although it's no longer full of colonial pilgrims, 'London still functions,' she writes, 'as a New Zealand city.' Backpackers search Gumtree. The lovelorn search Antipodate. Some – perhaps after a successful Antipodate – head back to New Zealand as the homesickness becomes acute. Others stay. 'For many of these – perhaps the majority – London is home,' Barnes writes, 'and their presence weaves a new set of linkages between the metropolis and its former hinterland.'

London can offer much to a New Zealand writer. For crime writer Ngaio Marsh it seemed the city itself made her productive. Marsh returned home to New Zealand in response to her mother's illness, and stayed to look after her father when her mother died. 'While Marsh continued to write in New Zealand,' Barnes writes, 'she hoped to return to London, for "you get a certain freshness of impact each time you come. The London feeling which I get very strongly to an extraordinary extent, starts me off writing every time as soon as I come to England."'

So we knew, in assembling our issue, we would be able to find a few kiwis in our city. Still, 'New Zealand' is the lightest possible theme to drape over *Five Dials 32*. We approached a few New Zealand writers who were away from their home country. Many were thinking about subjects unrelated to national identity. What is the best way to steal expensive wine in New Orleans is one of the questions Paula Morris asks in her short story. What is best way to interview a French surgeon, Micah Ferris wonders in her short piece, 'Salt'. The homeland does appear, but often in a compromised form. The earthquake of 2011 rumbles through the issue. Its aftershocks are accompanied by other noises, including the jangle of the faded Dunedin sound in Roy Colbert's recollections and the silence of a group of Alzheimer's patients wandering through the garden of Katherine Mansfield's house in Ashleigh Young's dispatch.

The artwork in the issue was contributed by Francis Upritchard, who represented New Zealand at the 2009 Venice Biennale. In Italy she produced futuristic figurative sculptures painted in bold colours. She continues to explore the human form in our pages.

In previous generations, according to Barnes, most NZ writers eventually returned to their homeland. New Zealand could offer freedom from financial pressure, freedom from the city and, for some, freedom to write.

Poet A.R.D. Fairburn claimed he wanted to 'live in the backblocks of N. Z., and try to realise in my mind the real culture of that country. Somewhere where I might escape the vast halitosis of the Press, and the whole dreadful weight of modern art and literature. Because we really are people of a different race, and have no right to be monkeying about with European culture.'

Others might disagree. Nowadays New Zealand writers shuttle between, monkeying about with the cultures of other countries before returning to the vastness of NZ. Very long plane journeys are common. As Paul Ewen demonstrates in his contribution, sometimes these epic ascents, as they stretch from hour to hour, help the traveller conjure all sorts of memories. Sometimes the return is triumphant. Sometimes it's tragic.

Please read on. ◊

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Camping in Our House

Amidst the rubble and broken glass, John Ewen learns to go without

We live high up on Clifton Hill in Sumner, a seaside suburb of Christchurch. When a major earthquake struck the area on 22 February 2011 at 12.50 p.m., our house was so damaged that my wife Laura and I each thought the other dead. A brick wall fell, crushing the lounge suite and piercing the floor, and, along with the collapsed chimney and an exploding bedroom window, left great gaping holes in exterior walls. Everything fell over, every piece of furniture. Every cupboard door opened, every drawer fell out and emptied its contents. The floor was ankle-deep in broken glass and crockery. Our microwave was torn out of the wall. It struck Laura in the back. Her foot was cut by the broken glass.

As the aftershocks continued, we left the house and gathered with neighbours on open ground. The city was wrecked, we heard. Roads, bridges, essential services were all out. Our own steep, no-exit road was deeply crevassed. We would be on our own for some time. We began to right ourselves, shovelling out the wreckage – crockery, glass, foodstuffs – just to clear a space to stand (later we would be asked by our insurance company why we didn't have a complete list of everything we'd lost, even a detailed contents of the freezer). We found our little emergency gas ring and gas cartridges, and cooked a basic meal. We cleared our bed of fallen furniture and broken glass before dark. Sharp jolts continued all night. We had little sleep, not knowing whether the next aftershock would be the one that killed us. Little did we know there would be 13,000 more. Even now they're still coming.

The mild February summer weather held, and the following day our neighbours, who were to be married in two weeks, put on lunch. In their powerless freezer they had crayfish, venison and other delicacies for the wedding meal. They also had a gas barbecue. We had found an unbroken bottle of wine, so we all sat outside, feasting off our plastic picnic set. Later, we walked down our hill, looked at the wrecked houses, the deep fissures across the road, the collapsed footpaths, and two parked cars part-buried by slips.

We kept clearing and cleaning the house, room by room. We tied cupboard doors to stop them opening. We left fallen paintings leaning against the walls; they are still there. For months we would find broken glass, and every fresh shake produced more plaster fragments.

The following Sunday our congregation gathered for a service outdoors, near our ravaged church, giving thanks for our safety and praying for the many we learnt had died. A small transistor radio kept us in touch with the outside world. We dug out an old telephone that did not need mains power, and once the road's worst cracks were filled, newspapers began arriving again. It became clear that services would not be restored for a long time. People around us began moving out and soon ours was the only occupied house out of twelve. We had no immediate family in the South Island, and we did not intend to inflict ourselves on friends for an undeterminable time. It became quiet, apart from a neighbour's house gradually demolishing itself with any gust of wind. Without street lights the nights were densely dark. Our transistor and the paper reported looters around the city, and one night we woke to a torch shining up from the road below. He made off when we challenged him, but it was unsettling. It made us more determined to stay put. During the day, police and soldiers made house-to-house checks, establishing which houses were still occupied.

Two Portaloos had been placed down on the main road, we were told, but, both in our seventies, we were not going to walk over a kilometre down our steep hill every time we needed to go to the toilet. In our childhood on the West Coast we had been used to 'dunnies' with buckets, or 'longdrops', so it was no hardship for us to use one. I became adept at finding places in our hillside garden to dig a hole for the bucket's contents, always keeping clear of our vegetable garden. For those of us who were still in our homes, the council provided a water tank on a trailer higher up the hill, with a notice to boil the water. Daily we made the trek up there with our containers, and if there were other people there we would talk while waiting our turn. Now that there were fewer of us, people became more sociable, friendlier. A woman told me that her son had asked, 'What the heck do you do up there all day?' She said, 'I told him that I go to the well and talk to the villagers.' It sounded medieval, almost biblical.

We didn't have enough time during daylight to do everything. Just subsisting

'Some people felt that the earthquakes had shaken Nature into being more productive'

took up our day. We settled into a routine. I would fetch water, and heat it up outside in a borrowed Thermette (a small cylindrical metal container of water surrounding a central opening in which a fire is lit to heat the water, known outside New Zealand under various names, such as a 'Kelly Kettle'). To fuel the fire, I had to find dry twigs or small pieces of scrap wood to burn. The weather stayed dry and mild. We used the heated water to wash ourselves down. Water for drinking and cooking was boiled up on the gas ring; we were alarmed at how quickly we used up the gas cartridges. Soon, enough of the deep crevasses and holes in our road were filled in that we could nurse our car down the hill, and every few days we picked our way across the city along ruined roads, past collapsed cliffs and hillocks of liquefaction silt – a twenty-five-minute trip now took two hours – to friends, where we showered and washed our clothes. Then we would find somewhere to buy groceries; the six nearest supermarkets were closed because of damage, some never to reopen. Luckily, our vegetable garden was flourishing; some people felt that the earthquakes had shaken Nature into being more productive.

Later, a man in West Melton (a country area beyond the far side of the city) began regularly bringing a water tank up our hill to supplement the council tank. His was spring water that did not need boiling, which saved us time and effort. We ate simple meals, did what we could around the house, but, as it did for many generations long ago, our day finished when darkness came. In the gathering dusk we watched and listened as birds settled themselves down, and we would see a hawk make his regular patrol as if enforcing a curfew. Loath to go to bed, we sat at our table in candlelight for a while, until, outside, the absolute blackness gave us a wondrous night sky crammed with stars. The full moon created a wide strip of pleated shantung across the ocean's swells. But it was particularly hard for us when the remaining residents of Richmond Hill road, across the valley, had their electricity restored. We could see them moving around in their homes at night, reading, watching television – we could see the moving colours on their screens but even with binoculars we couldn't make out the programmes. They had street lights too; that alone would have helped illuminate the inside of our house as we groped our way to bed.

Twice more we lost crockery and glassware – replacements of previous losses – to sizeable shakes. We had already said goodbye to many treasured ornaments, pictures and keepsakes. Much of our furniture was broken beyond repair. Even as local shops and businesses began to reopen, the road up our hill was closed to non-essential vehicles because of fear of slips and the possible collapse of a crib wall. As we walked down with backpacks to buy groceries, a policeman stationed in the affected area would smile and greet us, then speak quietly into his handset, 'Two elderly, one male, one female.' At the other end, another policeman would repeat the performance. Why? we wondered. Perhaps it was in case we became buried under a slip, so that searchers would know how many to look for. The tremors were still continuing. It could happen, we knew. If we walked along the beach and looked across to the cliffs at the bottom of our hill, we could see houses hanging over the edge, and from time to time pieces of them fell down the face, along with rocks and clay.

Christchurch had become a city of two halves: there was very little damage of any consequence on the west side; and in spite of media coverage people there seemed to have little realization of how bad it was for residents on the east side, particularly those on the flat, coping with flooding and liquefaction as well as damaged homes. While friends from elsewhere expressed dismay at the state of our house and our new way of life, we considered ourselves among the more fortunate. You adapt. Temporary repairs were made, fixing most of the draughts. Our home is now relatively weathertight. What people remained on our hill drew closer: we stopped, we talked, we supported each other. Instead of asking, 'How are you?' the greeting became, 'How's your house?' Residents received many offers of help, donations of food, financial assistance from the Red Cross. Help centres sprang up, local newsletters gave advice.

Finally, electricity came back and we two oldies did a little dance in our kitchen. Although it went off again after two hours, we knew it was coming back. The water gurgled in our taps, dirty at first but gradually clearing, and once a plumber fixed our damaged hot-water cylinder we knew our camping adventure was over. And some day, perhaps in 2014, our house, too, will be fixed. ◊

THREE PIECES

1.

Salt

by Micah Ferris

The wine tasting was part of an initiative to showcase smaller wineries from across Europe. Two Frenchmen from Bordeaux conducted tastings at a boutique in London, dispersing stories from the different regions between generous glasses of Chardonnay and Pinot. They did not approve of vineyards too close to the sea, those in sandier locations or situated at higher altitudes. Such wines were overly minerally or too dramatic. Predictably, in his French way, one of the men told us that the character of the wine could be almost completely defined by its location. It is the soil density, the salt inside the dirt, the hours of light, the seclusion, he said. The little extra that you can taste with some wines, that is the spirit of the winemaker! In some glasses you can taste his years too, his dedication to the vines, the hands of the *créateur*.

After the official tasting, I talked with the two men for what seemed like hours. They explained why they did not use irrigation, how the location of the vineyard and the regulation of soil purity was governed by French law. And we spoke about the year 2010, an excellent year, I noted, for all varieties. They agreed and explained to me that this was owing to the perfect combination of rain and sunshine, which produced wines with extraordinary complexity, the optimal balance of sweetness and acidity.

My grandfather was a large man with red cheeks. As a very young child, I would perch high on his lap and study the little facial veins that ran over his cheeks. The closer I got to his face, the more they looked like a connected city – as gingham fabric – a game of focus. I would lean in to study the red and white squares, then lean back to see only pink. It was like this as I began descent, noting the trees, the shimmer of an occasional pool set into squares of patchwork grass and housing. From a descending plane, architecture and agriculture is clearly divided, organized into neat rectangles and squares. Then, as these kaleidoscopic shapes become life-sized, the sum of all the parts that make the city come together. The tarmac hits like a storm, as the plane rushes and jumps to the ground. It jolts you back at first and the whole machine shudders as it slows, a little like hesitation.

There was never aversion to blood, but I would never have imagined myself at a surgical conference, watching the guidewire being inserted into an incision in the patient's thigh. I close my eyes, imagining the veins and arteries as roads, the electronics of the heart. The patient is still conscious during the operation. They are laid in white bedclothes behind a screen where the operator performs keyhole surgery, inserting a catheter into the artery. This, he tells the camera, is his preferred technique.

Doctors and medical writers eat their lunch in the theatre where the operation streams live on to the screen in front of them. I had only written a handful of medical profiles before and had been seconded to Paris to report on the conference and to interview an established cardiac surgeon for a London-based medical journal. I met with him at a café on the rue du Château d'eau for a lunchtime interview.

Do you mind if I use the tape recorder?

He didn't.

We ordered escargot and chatted mindlessly about the city for a while. He ordered wine too, a sweet variety for the

'There was never aversion to blood, but I would never have imagined myself at a surgical conference'

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time of day. I half contemplated making an alternative suggestion, but, instead, settled for his choice.

What makes a good surgeon? I ask.

He twists the fork into the snail's shell; extracts the meat with a short pull. I watch carefully, mirroring his movements.

First time? He gestures at the escargot.

I nod, savouring the resistant texture, the earthiness.

The technical ability, he says, holding his hands up to expose the lifelines. These are my most useful tools.

I think back to the X-ray images at the conference: the guidewire moving inside the leg, wriggling like a foreign organism, like a piece of hair on an old film reel. The correcting twist of the hands as the guidewire was threaded down the thin branch of the correct vessel.

Doctors and Frenchmen both have such precise terms, don't they?

He grimaced. I don't speak French, only enough to ask for a table, order food and wine, request directions, he said. Though I have lived here nearly eight months now, I spend my life in the hospital, or talking to English speakers like you.

I apologize, half for the question and half for my ignorance, as I barely know a thing about the subject I have come here to cover for the journal.

Things have changed now, he says. Nowadays, my patients are treated from the inside, rather than opened up. We are guided by the image of what we see displayed on the screen in front of us. Without this, one cannot begin to imagine such a seemingly impossible task.

The first lie I remember is when I was ten. I was with my father and sister, planting sweet peas in our family garden. In the dirt, my sister found a broken bottle which cut her hands. I remember that my father mixed together sugar, grated bar soap and vinegar and added pumices to her hands. An old army trick, he told us, for sucking out the foreign bodies to avoid infection.

Later that day in the garden, we dug up a toy metal plane, our own, small discovery. My father turned it over and pointed to the sky.

This is a special one, he told us. When planes crash, shrinkage occurs upon entering the atmosphere, and by the time they return to Planet Earth they are only so big.

For years I wondered where the people went.

The surgeon looks up from his plate. You have to trust science these days with imaging, he says. You cannot cut someone open and work directly like you could in the past. Now it is all about digital visualization. The smallest incision and trust in the projection of what you see on the screen in front of you.

Is that difficult, I ask, having to trust a reflection of reality?

He smiles, thinking for a moment. The sky is blue today, isn't it?

I am frowning.

Blue is a fantastic trick of the light. You believe that the sky is blue because you're taught that it's blue, but the sky doesn't actually exist. Our atmosphere, our air is of course blue and when you look up at the sky on a sunny day, the Earth's blue layer appears as such against the darkness of outer space. But we believe in the sky because we can see it.

I must also believe that I have fixed a patient's problem before I sew them back up, despite not actually having seen the problem with my own eyes or touched it with my bare hands.

He talks about his family. They live in London. He works in Paris and travels home each weekend. We speak every other day on Skype, he says. My eight-year-old is a technical expert.

Being a doctor is not a job, though, you can never switch off, he says. A dying person has priority over time with my family because it is up to me to try to save them.

He twirls the stem of his wine glass between his thumb and first finger.

But this week, my wife and I have a trip planned to Cannes. It will be so good to spend time with the children. To be by the sea. ◊

2.

Things we learnt from watching classic films

that the world looks better
in black and white

that she will never be
killed by the train

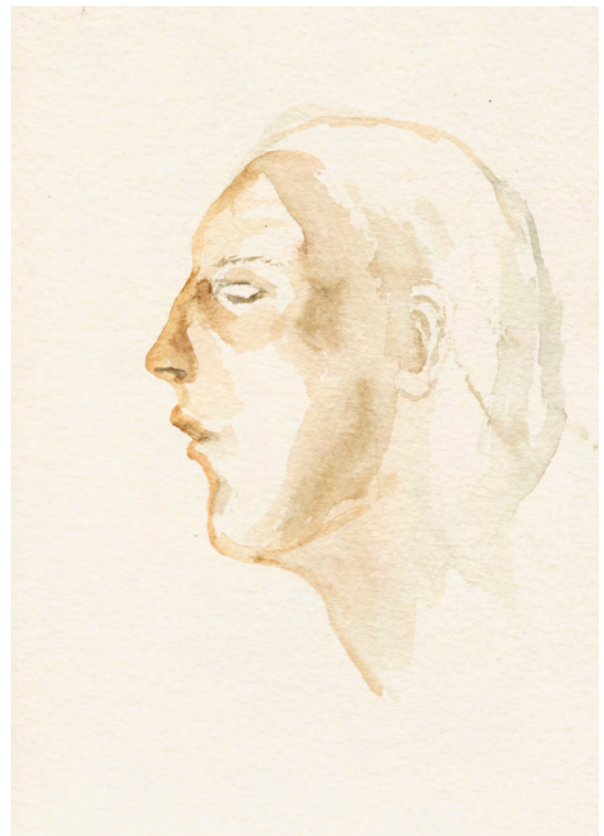
that undressing
is more provocative
behind a screen

and that you should always
dress up for dinner

that every home should have a basement

that the lipstick is always red

and that, above all, God enjoys
prayers in Italian



3.

Dolce Italia

I saw the ash gold glitter of it in their eyes
all those Italian guys who thought they were such men's men
in their tight tees, straddling Vespas like livestock.

You told me that the word rogue looked to you like rouge
which you associated with a lover scorned.

I preferred to get my heels stuck in cobblestones
my lemon dress flirting with my knees to the rock and slip
and the shrill whistle of stallions.

You held my waist atop a hill, looking out into Sienna.
I painted with my finger in the air a sunlit picture city –
the point and curve, full twist of lancet and rose church windows –
dear, you held me like an Englishman.

There, love implied a type of brevity.

My mother told me to only buy Italian shoes in Italy –
they are not like us, she said. They keep the best of it for their own.

AN ADDRESS

Tauihu

To a carved canoe prow on the occasion of New Zealand writers and artists being in residence at the Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt, 2012. By Tina Makereti

E te Rangatira

When I look at you I see ocean voyages, men at your back working in hard rhythm with hoe, thrust and sweep, salt ocean flicking foam over you, the slick of it pushed down and off fast by the wind. I see you at the front of your *waka*, parting the way – the bringer of life, the bringer of death, cutting a fine line between worlds. Opening the way to the *tapu* realm of war. You work like the *haka*, all *pukana* face and flashing eyes, bringing up the *ihi* and the *wehi* for these men who you protect with your wide-spread arms.

I see the *tohunga whakairo* with his chisel, carving deep lines and notches, his strong eye and arm for symmetry – the prayers that roll through his mind as he works. He cannot afford to make mistakes. There can be no wastage. The tree was taken from *te wao nui a Tane* with great ceremony and effort. There are no plans, no sketches, no pencil lines. Each cut is deep and permanent. What stories he has to carve, what teachings to pass on.

I see Papatuanuku and Ranginui, Tangaroa, Tūmatauenga, Tawhirimatea – stories reaching back into the past until we find ourselves at the dawn of time, just as light filters into the world, and further, to *te pō* – the many long dark nights of creation – and back again, to *te kore* – the place where time did not yet exist – where both the nothing and the everything had not yet come to be. I see the eternal moment before the Big Bang, the chaos in all its beauty, the moment of ignition where all the matter of the universe began to coalesce, spread, oscillate ever outwards. This is the *takarangi* spiral. Darkness and light come into being. Atoms find each other and create matter. Eventually there are worlds, planets and stars, the sky and earth. Day and night. The duality and perfect symmetry of the universe. The Sky, Ranginui, and Earth, Papatuanuku, have children, the Gods, who create all living things, including human beings, to clothe their mother. This is *whakapapa*. Genealogy that links humanity to the universe. All this I see in your design.

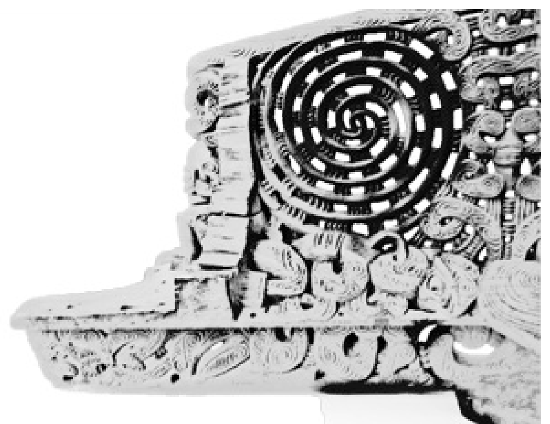
But I see the fire gone from your eyes now. No *paua* shell discs for the sun to ignite and reflect the ocean. Your arm is broken and lost, your tongue made blunt, your decorations and *harakeke* lashings long gone, along with the body of your *waka*. You sustained injuries on your way here, or maybe over those long years in basements and shelves, moved from one place of storage to another. You have seen wars, at home and in this walled city far from the sea.

I see blood spilt. Tribe against tribe, tribe against newcomers. Confusion. Instability. Fierceness and desperation and *taonga* taken apart and hidden. Were you lost? Stolen? Swapped to feed the tribe? Given in exchange for safety, allegiance or money? Perhaps you were gifted, though what a gift you must have been. It must have been a big promise made, whatever it was, or a great sadness when they took you away. I see many of you, piled up, taken to new homes, symbols of a dying race.

I see you come here, *e koro*, packed and processed and put in storage. Spoken about but never spoken to, not any more. A strange object in a strange land. I do not know what value is placed on your dark brown skin. I see you waiting. All that time, in the darkness. Displayed. Studied. But mostly darkness. Two wars come, bigger and noisier and more deadly than even the ones you witnessed in the flesh. Sounds like thunder and the city falling about you. They move you for protection. You are a treasure to them, but not the same way you are a treasure to us.

At home, your people did not die out after all. But what do you know of this, as the long twentieth century marches on. The people you live among rebuild after the war. They create the city and the cultural world anew. This is part of your story now. And strangely, it is not so different from the story of your people at home.

E koro, some of us have come to see you now. We bring with us the sounds and flavours of Aotearoa as it is today. You bring the *hā* of Aotearoa as it was then – *te ao hurihuri* – the tumultuous times. But you bring them to us too, and us to them – the *tangata whenua* of this place: their history, their culture – the *hā* of this place. Your being here creates a relationship between us. Your presence is not what I thought it would be. You are not lost.◊



ICH DANKE DEM WELTKULTUREN MUSEUM FÜR DIE GASTFREUNDSCHAFT.

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(IMAGES: TOP, LISA GARDINER; BOTTOM, TINA MAKERETI)

24 February 2011: A hot day

by Lynn Jenner

Two days after the Christchurch earthquake in which 185 people died, and half an hour after a phone call in which I failed to persuade my mother to leave her house and flee the city, I took up my place on the door of a poetry reading.

On the way home from that poetry reading I found a memory stick on the floor in the ladies' toilets at Wellington railway station. Once I was at home I opened the files to see if I could, and, after reading the names of all the files, I looked to see what they were about.

The memory stick contained the field notes of an anthropologist studying violence in an island society in the South Pacific. One file was titled 'The universal Glossary' (*sic*). Although it sounds like some sort of specific term, I have not been able to find any other reference to a 'universal glossary' except for one unexplained mention in an Indonesian software manual.

The words and phrases (that follow) made up 'The universal Glossary' on the memory stick. I have provided only the English, in the original order:

Customary Law
Traditional ruling class
Village
Sub-village
Neighbourhood
Head of Village
Bride price
Dowry
Rape
Slaves
Magic potions
Ritual experts
Sacred, having magical powers
Western
Native population, as defined by colonial classification system
Assimilated natives, as defined by colonial classification system
Important person, as defined by colonial classification system
Land cleared of forest
A bird, now extinct, greatly prized by colonists for its feathers
Abandoned gold mines
Forced labour system
Member of clandestine resistance network
Soldiers who have returned home
Soldiers who died
Soldiers who are still missing
Confiscated land
Sickness caused by hunger
Sickness caused by shame
Protective amulets
Prostitutes
Widows
Children of women raped by soldiers
Land thought to contain mass graves
Anti-western sentiment
Aid worker

*

Members of my writing community have expressed disapproval of my actions regarding the memory stick and also disgust that I picked up an object from such a dirty place. In my defence I will say that no password was required to open the files on the memory stick and that this carelessness is surely irresponsible.◊

Katherine Would Approve

The burden of working at the Mansfield birthplace. By Ashleigh Young

On Katherine Mansfield's birthday I walked up the edge of a long driveway in gale-force winds. I walked for a long time, with cars passing me. *The wind – the wind.* I was walking to Government House, which was at the top of the hill, where there would be a party. Katherine Mansfield was 125 years old today. The driveway to Government House has bushes and trees on either side, and these were beaten and pushed about by the wind. I thought about turning around and just going home, but that would mean walking past the guard at the entrance again. Every time someone drove past me I felt more self-conscious. Finally a Hybrid car stopped and a woman wound down the window. 'Are you going to the Katherine Mansfield party?' I was. 'That's a long way, dear. Do you want to hop in?' And as we zoomed up the hill between the trees, we should've talked about the end of Mansfield's story 'The Garden Party' where a big dog runs by like a shadow and Laura walks down that smoky dark lane, because that driveway recalled it somehow. But instead we talked about whether we'd been to Government House before. The woman had been many times. I hadn't been.

Government House was an enormous brown-and-cream house with dark jarrah weatherboards and a flag tower. A rectangular pond was feathered by the wind. Cars were still creeping over the pristine gravel or were parked nearby, and the new director of Katherine Mansfield Birthplace, Emma, was greeting people at the door with one of the Board members at her side. I'd met Emma that morning, my final morning as the acting director of the Birthplace. I'd shown her through the house: the tiny office stacked high with filing boxes, where she would sit each day; the scullery with its steel pots hung on the walls, and its meat grinder on which she too would bruise her leg as she went by; the dim, roped-off bedroom where Mansfield was born, where a hairbrush and hand mirror were fixed with catgut to a dressing table, and where a dehumidifier now hummed and slurped. At the end of every day, the birth-room dehumidifier was heavy with water. Now Emma would be the one to carry the bucket down the stairs and empty it in the little sink in the scullery. I'd handed her my lump of keys, which opened countless cupboards and cabinets and internal doors, and I'd wheeled my bike out from where I'd parked it behind a sack of blood-and-bone in the rose garden, and cycled down Tinakori Road, grinning, as the wind pushed me on.

I'd got the job at the Birthplace on a whim. The previous director had left suddenly, and the Board needed someone to look after the volunteers, to schedule tours and to organize that year's birthday party while a new permanent director was found. I'd visited the house – a square weatherboard building with a red corrugated-iron roof, built in 1887 – on a school trip when I was maybe nine or ten, and knew that Mansfield, a famous writer whose story about a garden party had frightened me, had lived there until she was five years old. But I couldn't remember much except the heavy Victorian furniture and dark drapes, and walls lined with photographs of Katherine and her family.

On my first morning I sat nervously in the cold kitchen. It was my first full-time job in a long while. The chairman of the Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society and the four paid staff were there, all in winter coats. 'Ashleigh will be here five days a week,' the chairman told us all firmly, 'and she'll be in charge. She is our director for the foreseeable future.' The kitchen had stained timber walls and a hefty coal range. Pretty floral plates were held in place with wire on a sideboard. A bowl of Granny Smith apples was set on a velvet tablecloth below a single window that overlooked the back garden. I later learned that the garden had once sloped into a gully. Mansfield had complained about wretched people throwing their empty tins into it. And also in the kitchen was the replica of Mansfield's doll's house, painted spinach green with yellow windowpanes and a red roof. Its frontage was locked but two figures collapsed in armchairs were visible through a window. *Open it, quickly, someone!* I knew that, inside, the rooms would be papered, and that in the middle of the dining-room table would be a tiny amber lamp.

Greg introduced me to Caryl, who managed the accounts, a pretty-faced, silver-haired woman with red lipstick; to Linda, whose current job was to sort all the files in the upstairs office (once a nursery) and who had a bad back and seemed to

communicate mainly in rapid eye blinks and hand gestures; and to Sue, who worked Sundays only but had made a special trip to meet me today. 'It's wonderful to have you here,' she said with glistening eyes, 'in the grotto.' I'd passed her a few minutes before, as I pushed my bike on the footpath towards the house, and she had beamed at me. 'I knew it must've been you,' she said now. 'You had Katherine's look about you.' Sue was in her sixties, with bright gold hair and a constant smile. Over the coming weeks, every Monday I would find long, barely readable notes written on scraps of paper and folded into the diary. 'Ash babe,' Sue wrote (or sometimes 'wonder bunny'), 'a very quiet day in the grotto today.' Then there was Daniel, who introduced himself as 'the education curator' and stared past my face when he shook my hand. He had one brown eye and one blue eye. He looked at my brooch, which was shaped like a blossom. 'Nice *brooch*. Katherine would approve,' he said. 'You know she called her brooch "the little eye".' I would soon learn that Daniel talked about Mansfield as if he had known her personally, as a friend.

When the chairman left us and the day got under way, Daniel instructed me to cut the scones he had baked for some visitors from a retirement village, who were coming for 'Victorian high tea'. The scones, hard and dry, disintegrated as I cut them, and when Daniel saw what had happened he cried out, 'Look! What an *absolute* mess. I don't think Katherine would be happy.' My scone mishap was the beginning of a fraught working relationship whereby I would try to please Daniel, and would feel pleased when he confided in me, usually about the flaws of the other staff, or about his regrets from his former teaching career. I felt calm when he was happy, and tense when he was flustered. 'Oh, Katherine,' he would say, when one of the volunteer gardeners brought in a posy of cinerarias or marigolds. 'Katherine loved these flowers.' Whenever a group of students came to tour the house, and if any of them didn't pay attention to his lecturing, or if they tried to sneak into roped-off areas of the house, he would shout, 'Katherine wouldn't approve of that!' Daniel seemed to see himself as Mansfield's guardian, her protector from twenty-first-century harshness.

I realized that Daniel was only one of many people who wielded a strong view of what Mansfield was like as a person. There was a particular set of statements that the volunteer tour guides would repeat, and that visitors would say back to them; these were deep within the narrative of the house. 'She was ahead of her time.' 'A radical in many ways.' 'Very stylish.' 'A truly modern woman who cast off convention.' And sometimes, conspiratorially, 'She was very likely a lesbian.' Sometimes visitors would talk about her life with admiration, and then confess to me as they left the house, 'I've never actually read any of her stuff. I should.' The tour guides who had led groups through the house for decades seemed to believe that Mansfield's childhood home was the most important part, the most telling part, of her life. And maybe it was. Because it was tangible. You could step inside and imagine yourself to be a child in another century. You could detect echoes of this house in some of Mansfield's stories – the deep tangled gully seen from a window in 'The Aloe'; a fireplace choked up with rubbish in 'Prelude' – and recognizing these echoes somehow felt like knowing her.

There were also visitors who didn't know where they were or who Katherine Mansfield was. These were mostly young schoolchildren, but one afternoon a group from Alzheimer's Wellington arrived. About twenty elderly men and women drifted slowly into the house, with canes and walkers, their minder following. 'Are you her?' a woman asked me, pointing at a poster of Mansfield on the wall. 'You have her hair.' I laughed and tried to explain, but the woman was wandering away. 'It's not as nice as my house,' someone else said. 'This isn't my house,' another woman snapped. None of the group could climb the stairs to see the room where Mansfield was born, so the volunteer tour guide and I ushered them into the garden, and the group began to drift slowly and silently apart, all of them with their heads bowed, looking down at their feet on the lawn. And after a few minutes of this, their minder from Alzheimer's Wellington had them return to the van and they drove away. I went back inside to the tiny office and thought how their childhoods were the closest in time to Mansfield's childhood, but in every other way they were so far away from her, she was invisible.

'It's wonderful to have you here,' she said with glistening eyes, 'in the grotto'

I learned a lot about the house from Daniel, because he led the most tours. His voice, often on the verge of a shout or sometimes a sob, twanged through the building. I learned that the chinoiserie-patterned wallpaper in the stairwell featured the ancient symbol for good luck, later appropriated by the Nazis, and that visitors often complained about it. That in an archaeological dig around the house, men had found tea-set fragments, marbles, a white ceramic mouse and pieces of a comb. That the grim-looking fruit cake on the dining table had been baked many years ago and then painted with resin – 'No, it *wouldn't* taste nice,' Daniel told children sharply. That the stuffed birds in display cases 'reflected a Victorian preoccupation with collecting'. That none of the furniture was original except for the three spindly chairs around a table in the drawing room, and that the sagging wooden bench in the kitchen, where I once spilled a full pot of coffee, also was. And that until she was five, Mansfield had lived here with her parents, Harold and Annie Beauchamp; her sisters, Vera, Charlotte and Jeanne; her two teenage aunts,

Belle and Kitty; and her grandmother, Margaret. There was another daughter, too – Gwendoline, who died from infantile cholera. In the dining room, where another dehumidifier droned, there was a photo of Granny Dyer holding the dead baby Gwendoline, who was dressed to look as if she were alive. Her mouth was slightly ajar, as if sleepily. Post-mortem photography wasn't unusual in the late 1800s – deceased people would be dressed and positioned as if posing steadily for the camera – but I could never bring myself to look at that picture for long, Granny Dyer watching so tenderly over her granddaughter. The Beauchamps had a son, too, when they moved to another house. Leslie was killed in the First World War when a grenade in his hand accidentally exploded.

The Birthplace existed in a space between exhilaration – some people were visibly excited, humbled, when they walked through the childhood home of their hero – and a deep stagnation that you could feel when you walked through the rooms alone at the end of the day. The air felt stale, as if it too were preserved in resin. It was important to unplug all electrical appliances at day's end, because there existed among all the volunteers, the staff and the Board a great fear of electrical fire. 'Gosh, I've had nightmares about it,' Sue told me. 'Just *imagine*,' and she put her hands over her mouth. It was as if fire were inevitable, just like 'the big one', Wellington's devastating earthquake of a future century. The fear infected me, too. In my first weeks, when I did my late afternoon rounds, unplugging lamps and heaters, crawling on hands and knees to reach sockets, my hands would tremble. And I did imagine. I imagined wheeling my bike up the driveway one morning, the house a charred shell before me, the dolls, the birds, the pretty plates just lumps in the ash. I would have to phone the chairman. 'Greg. I'm so sorry.' But part of me believed that fire just wasn't possible. The air in the house wouldn't carry fire.

I was in the office when an earthquake struck one Friday in August, of 6.6 magnitude. Until that moment there had been a profound quietness inside the house, except, as always, for one sound – a branch, outside the office, making a high-pitched fluting sound as it brushed against the window. It was the most mournful sound, and I couldn't help but imagine that Mansfield had heard the same noise once. The office, about the size of a linen cupboard and stacked high with yellowing boxes and ring-binders, had once been a washroom; Mansfield had bathed in here as a child.

When the quake hit, the office swerved from side to side, as if the house were trying to swim. Upstairs, I heard Daniel shouting. I ducked under the tiny desk and held my breath, while the house continued its strange, static shuffling. I could hear the staircase squeaking, as if hundreds of feet were going up and down all at once. Later, when I thought about that sound, I remembered how Mansfield had died shortly after running up a flight of stairs, perhaps to prove how well she was.

'It's not at all surprising, given it's survived since the 1880s,' said the chairman on the phone. He said it was probably the safest house in Wellington because it was all wood, and wood moved flexibly with the earth. The only thing that happened during the earthquake was that a photo of Mansfield as a young woman fell off a wall upstairs, but was undamaged.

Inside Government House there were chandeliers and a huge, gilt-framed portrait of Queen Elizabeth at the head of the ballroom. The room was filled with people. Lawyers, museum curators and politicians – Members of Parliament, councillors, ambassadors of all the countries that Mansfield had visited.

'Twenty-five years ago today,' the Governor General said, reading from his notes, 'Lady Beverley Reeves officially opened the restored Beauchamp family home at 25 Tinakori Road. The realization that the house where Mansfield was born still stood was the heritage equivalent of finding one of her unpublished short stories in an attic!' There was a roar of laughter. The Governor General spoke of how the restoration of the house brought Mansfield back to her own country; and of how desperate she was to escape 'the socially rigid life of Wellington, which she considered no match for the bohemian joys and intellectual delights she thought she'd find in London'. He spoke of how her character was shaped by New Zealand. Finally, he said, 'I have to admit I haven't actually read any Katherine Mansfield.'

At first there was laughter, but then I felt around me some ripples of consternation, of disbelief. Someone quavered, 'How awful.' And you could sense the Governor General realizing what he had done, and that he shouldn't have told the truth. He tried to save himself by raising his hands and chuckling. 'But, but, Katherine Mansfield has always been so' – he paused for a while, seeming to struggle – 'big. She's always been at the forefront of our literary consciousness. When I was growing up there was always a sense of how . . . big . . . she was.' He turned back to his notes, and was emboldened. 'She helped to revolutionize the English short story, and left behind a body of work that is as sharp, intriguing and fresh as the day it was written.'

Before I left the party I said goodbye to the volunteer gardeners. A group of them had come, and they were standing together drinking from wine glasses and eating egg sandwiches. I'd never seen them in formal clothes, instead of grubby pants and gloves. I liked the gardeners. I liked that they came every week, with their secateurs and trowels, rigorously tending the plants that were mentioned in Mansfield's stories and letters: cinerarias, arum lilies, pot marigolds, and the mignonette around the front doorway, whose perfume was 'recalled by a visitor' in the early 1900s.

I walked all the way back down the driveway, which was darkening now. *The wind – the wind*. I felt relieved to be free. I'd found it hard being at the Birthplace, but not as hard as Mansfield had. 'Horrid little piggy house,' she'd said. 'Wretched letter box. Awful cubbyhole.' The more I'd learned about Mansfield, the more I'd begun to imagine that if I ever met her, I wouldn't like her much, either. Perhaps worst and most shameful of all: because of my time at the house, I had begun to dislike her stories. Stories I'd once loved. I felt guilty that I hadn't enjoyed her house more, and I would miss having a place to go each day, as I went back to my rootless life as a freelancer. 'What a fantastic job for a writer,' people had said to me. 'To sit in Katherine Mansfield's house all day.'

At the bottom of the driveway I got caught in a stream of students leaving their school gates. A group of boys were shouting at each other about how far through an Xbox game they were, and how one of their teachers in particular was a dickhead and they couldn't wait to leave, they just couldn't wait to get out. ◊

This feels so good – I'm so grimy & a little bit drunk.

ALL THOSE CLEVER LITERARY PEOPLE.

THEY ARE HAPPY TO INVITE ME, TO BE ENTERTAINED BY ME . . .

BUT WILL THEY EVER LET ME BE ONE OF THEM? I HAVEN'T EVEN WRITTEN ANYTHING DECENT YET.

WHEN WILL I BE A PROPER WRITER?

IDA, WOULD YOU HELP ME BRUSH MY HAIR?
OF COURSE, KATIE DEAR.

OUCH! FOR GOD'S SAKE!
SORRY, KATIE, IT'S JUST SO KNOTTY. YOU'VE GOT CLUMPS.
WELL CUT IT THEN

ARE YOU SURE?
ABSOLUTELY. CUT THE DAMNED LOT OFF.
HISS

HERE YOU GO. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HERE I AM.

Alice Miller

The Lever

I spend hours as a gambler shovels coins
in whatever currency we keep

letting all our hours sleep
in the unbreakable brains of our machines.

When I pull the lever I know the lever.

I know each second before each second knows
me, but while I think this doubles me

I'm halved. When I pull
the lever I know the lever

pulls me; so I say the lever
has to do with love; because I want

to know you but know your being
makes me half-sad you're wholly here,

half-happy. I'm here to collect matter
that will let us build a new life. Still;

as the advertisements know,
there's nothing to it.

I ask for one more day, and it comes.

Air

He, the poet William Yeats
You, the reader, approach his forge
the cloud gulps, the rhyme's
not given.

As the plane crawls over
green lumped lands
cloud gives way and under, Ireland

its last white wisps
from the mouth of a god who's coughed
up sky since birth, not dared look down since;

where all the machines of the world in their honesty
are learning as once we learned the piano,
how to play the brain.

Over Dublin, a black cloud bloats
like a big chap bulging
off the edge of his seat;

asking how many towns
make a jewellery box: gold chains,
diamonds, occasional emeralds,

jewels strung by so many fingers,
hands, heads. On fat sharp threads
we dangle them before the eyes of our dead kings.

And above the plane
you, the poet, still watch,
as we knock on your forge.

We've come for your Byzantium.
Lower your golden wings.

Whaling headsmen from Kāpiti area. circa 1842

by Lynn Jenner

Horse Lewis
Long George
Bill the Steward
Bloody Jack
Worser Heberley
Black Murray
Flash Bill
Gypsy Smith
French Jim
Johnny Jones
Long Bob
Butcher Nott
Fat Jackson
Geordie Young
Geordie Bolts[1]

I have always believed that lists of any sort have a greater significance than is, at first, visible. After reading this list, a friend pointed out that Worser Heberley is one of her ancestors. At that moment and not a second before, I thought of him as a man.

This afternoon I have seen a photograph of James 'Worser' Heberley with his wife, Maata Te Naihi Te Owai, also called Te Wai Nahi. From now on I will always think of him as an older man, standing beside her with a worried look on his face. She is seated. He rests his arm on top of hers and wraps her hand in his. She looks straight at the camera, her expression unreadable.

I feel a weight upon my line
no hapuku is here
but a weight of history swimming up
into the summer air.[2]

[1] Barbara Macmorran, *In View of Kapiti* (Palmerston North, NZ: The Dunmore Press, 1977), p. 46.
[2] Ian Wedde, '*The Ballad for Worser Heberley*', Sport 9 (1992), p. 11–15.

A REMEMBRANCE

Space

Paul Ewen accompanies a friend home

Yes, he emphasised, a little country; and with inhabitants so much limited in number it was unlikely you would even hear them rattle on any occasion when the Almighty took it into his head to shake their little country . . . – Frank Sargeson

New Zealand is a country that is blessed with a great deal of space. This makes it a big drawcard for overseas visitors, a fact not lost on the tourism industry, who commission epic landscape photographs, usually barren and sparse, depicting vast mountain ranges, the purest lakes and fjords, untouched rolling countryside, and large majestic pools of bubbling mud. You could be forgiven for thinking that no people actually live there.

As a New Zealander, I have managed to see a great deal of my country. Much of this has been through the window of my mate's brown Cortina. In its day, Steve's Cortina transported the pair of us on a series of epic trips around the South and North Islands. Steve always drove (apart from one late-night incident in Cromwell when I mounted the footpath), and he always insisted the Cortina was in fact copper, not brown. At every new town we visited, a felt pennant of that province was added to the car aerial, and these flags rippled in the southern-hemisphere winds, most being reduced to tufty dags by the end of each given trip. To occupy ourselves while travelling through the undeniably magnificent landscape, we would sometimes play car cricket, scoring runs based on the plenitude of oncoming traffic. An approaching car, for instance, would be one run, a motorbike two, and a truck four, but a passing campervan meant the 'batsman' was out. Occasionally, driving in particularly sparse countryside, such as on the west coast of the South Island, we would wait bloody ages to score a single run. Some years later, I found myself living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and on the occasion when I attempted to play car cricket, I scored about a million runs purely in motorbike traffic before I had to pull over, cross-eyed.

One of my theories of why there's so much space in New Zealand is grounded in the fact that so many of my compatriots are out of the country on any given day. After Germany, New Zealand has the most nationals, per head of population, living or travelling abroad at any one time. A fair counter to my argument, however, may be that most of the space they leave behind is filled, in turn, with German tourists. Despite having loads of space at home, New Zealanders love to spend time in places where there isn't much space at all. Like aeroplanes. With backpacks crammed full of undies, T-shirts and woollen socks, they blast off, funded by student loans, attempting to bridge the vast gap between their country and the rest of the world. One of the furthest possible destinations for New Zealand travellers, and also one of the most popular, is England, some 11,000 miles away. Many English people claim New Zealand is just like England was fifty years ago, while most New Zealanders who travel to England believe its Underground system is just like it was a hundred years ago.

A few years back, Steve and I, both residing in London, flew home to New Zealand for a funeral. It takes twenty-four hours to fly from London to New Zealand, which is a very long way to go just for a church service, particularly if you need to return in a matter of days, like I did. There's also the time difference to consider. New Zealand is twelve hours ahead of the United Kingdom (or thirteen hours, depending on daylight savings), so when you fly back to England you lose half a day of your life. Steve, however, had a one-way ticket to New Zealand. He was stretching his legs in the cargo hold. It was his funeral.

Steven MacDonald and I grew up in the small farming town of Ashburton (affectionately referred to as Ashvegas), on the east coast of the South Island. Ashburton has a population of just over 15,000 people and, like many small provinces in New Zealand, it's a good place to get your driving licence because there's hardly any traffic. If you have a few too many drinks in Ashburton, you can always walk home, because that isn't far away either. The countryside around Ashburton is teeming with livestock, and there's quite an interesting clock feature in the town centre. When we were teenagers, Ashburton was also renowned for its high suicide rate. Livestock, suicides and a clock. It doesn't feature strongly in those tourism ads.

Steve and I became friends at primary school, staying close through high school and sharing a flat together when we moved to Christchurch. We also crossed paths again in Wellington, and when I got married in London, Steve was my best man.

Steve was an exceptional composer, musician and singer. While in the UK he worked as a music teacher, based at a school in Kent. Occasionally I would take the train out to see him, but more often we would meet at a London pub, such as the Champion in Fitzrovia, or the Effra in Brixton.

As a man, Steve took up a lot of space. He was both tall and big, and when he died he weighed in at an impressive twenty-five stone. His large head was completely bald, and from his face hung an awe-inspiring thick black beard of Rasputin proportions. He had brown eyes, and a body mass perfectly suited for heaving with said laughter. Occasionally he would don a look of mock abject fury, and to the uninitiated he must have appeared like the god of thunder himself. His size and his beard meant he was difficult to miss, and he had an awe-inspiring presence, something the Maori people term as *mana*. Steve had a lot of *mana*.

Whenever Steve got into the Cortina, it would shake like hell. On our first big New Zealand outing, travelling around the South Island, our plan was to camp each night in a two-man tent. On the second night it rained heavily, and Steve awoke in the early hours to find himself in a crater of water his own body had forged. My half was completely dry. We spent the remaining four weeks sleeping, contorted, in the Cortina.

In typeface terms, Steve was something like a 14pt, double-spaced Copperplate Gothic Light. Not bold or underlined: he was a very modest bloke. To those who knew him, Steve's physical appearance seemed to fit his exceptional intelligence, humour and principles perfectly. With that stature, wisdom and beard, I honestly believe that Steve would have made a truly great king.

Along with two of his closest UK friends and colleagues, I had the task of sorting out Steve's northern-hemisphere life once he'd stopped living. His student accommodation in Kent was nothing more than a tiny room, but he didn't want for much, and he'd been putting money aside to return to South America, a place he'd journeyed to, and became enamoured with, after first leaving home. The week after his death, we went through his quarters, packing things for his family in New Zealand, distributing selected items between his friends and selling the bulk of his possessions to raise money for his school's music department, as per his parents' wishes. Because there were three of us engaged in the task, cataloguing every item into an inventory like documenters at the British Museum, it was a less painful process than I'd expected. What I found more distressing was having to collect Steve's things from London University Hospital, where he was rushed by ambulance on the day he died.

Some of Steve's clothing had been cut end to end with scissors. These items were now bound up in bulky parcels. The contents of his pockets, such as his wallet, keys and loose change, together with his watch and necklace, were tightly pressed in clear plastic bags, like the standard bank-issue type used for coins. His possessions were dispensed from a small room off the hospital's Euston Road entrance, which resembled a downstairs cloakroom in a nightclub. In place of a numbered ticket stub, I presented my New Zealand passport, my arrival having been arranged via an earlier phone call from the New Zealand embassy. The greying woman who dealt with my collection was probably in her late fifties, and she had a caring and sympathetic manner befitting a funeral director, carefully unwrapping each bag and presenting the contents. In a way, I felt as if I were being handed another man's things on my release from jail, and despite all the items being familiar and recognizable, it felt somehow wrong to claim them.

Frank, one of my fellow documenters at Steve's flat, found me afterwards in the hospital reception with reddened eyes, so we walked around to the nearby Jeremy Bentham pub and drank to our close friend Steve.

The item of Steve's I chose to remember him by was a Maori greenstone necklace, carved in a *Toki* (adze) design, representing power, authority and wisdom. I still haven't adjusted the string strap, so today the greenstone slab hangs down near my belly button. If I'm running it makes a slap, slap noise on my stomach. As a short, thin person, I suppose I am the physical antithesis of Steve. At thirty, I was still getting asked for ID. When someone I know has a baby, I am told it looks, literally, like me. And my wife still laughs when we walk through a particular south London park, ever since I leapt up to grab an overhead tree branch, failed to reach the required height for a sturdy grip and landed flat on my back. Chances are, when I die, I'll be placed in an urn, uncremated.

If you can imagine the vast quantities of ocean that stretch between the United Kingdom and New Zealand, you can begin to understand how much I drank on that twenty-four-hour flight back home for Steve's funeral. I had a eulogy to write, and the drinks were free, so to say I got rather drunk would be putting it mildly. The problem with drinking too much is that, over time, gaps in your life mysteriously appear. Troublesome voids

of space. People talk about writers as vast consumers of alcohol, but I think it's the other way around. The way I see it, drinkers actually become writers in order to document everything they remember before they forget it all.

My suitcase was down with Steve, in the hold. Apart from a few necessities for my brief stay, the case was filled mainly with possessions belonging to him. It was as if he'd packed it himself. Among his things were journals of his South American trips, and also many printed poems, some dating back to our high-school days. There were other items too, such as his watch, his wallet, his bank cards, various souvenirs from his travels, a few reminders of home, and other personal documents and photographs for his family to sift through later. If Steve had known I'd be carting his things back to New Zealand, it's safe to assume he would have packed something special for the customs officials to discover in my presence. Our border-control laws are renowned for their strict stance when it comes to importing foodstuffs, plant life, wooden items and the like. A deep-fried shoe, therefore, may have raised some serious questions, and I would have been forced to answer bleary-eyed, melting the officials with my high-octane breath.

Coffins, like beds, are generally made to fit a particular human frame. Steve's casket was a cross between a dining table in a stately home and a Hummer. It was specially made with steel reinforcements, and at the funeral ceremony it had to come through the side doors because it wouldn't fit down the central aisle. Dave, one of the pallbearers, reminded me of a story from our student days. Once, in our dilapidated Christchurch flat, a few of us were teasing Steve about his cooking, and he responded, in mock god-of-thunder fury:

'Right, for that you bastards can carry my coffin!'

Before the general congregation arrived at the cemetery, Grant, another pallbearer, poured whiskey into the grave, on to Steve's coffin. This was whiskey from a bottle that Steve had left behind for his friends upon leaving New Zealand. It was a nice tribute, and after the ceremonies were concluded, a group of us, his old Ashburton mates, got drunk.

Recently, I came across a photo of some astronauts repairing a space-station satellite above New Zealand. You can quite clearly see the Canterbury region, just to the north of Ashburton, where the coastline juts out like a round, knotted piece of wood to form what is known as Banks Peninsular (Te Pataka o Rakaihautu). The top of the South Island is also visible, and even the distant beginnings of the North Island. The astronauts are not New Zealanders, so they probably don't appreciate the view as much as I do. They seem very intent on their work, and I imagine they're doing their best not to sneeze into their glass visors. Looking at an image such as that, it's easy to imagine souls ascending through the clouds, up to the heavens, or to conjure up a romantic vision of Steve's final journey, drifting through the black of space into another realm entirely.

Steve was a big fan of Hunter S. Thompson, and despite the thirty-two-year age gap between the two men, they would both die within two years of each other. Hunter's cremated ashes were inserted into a fist-shaped cannon that he'd designed with Ralph Steadman, and his particles were blasted skywards from a 153-foot tower in Aspen, USA. According to reports I have read, Hunter's ashes didn't actually leave the Earth's atmosphere, some 75 miles above ground level. The astronauts and the satellite in the photograph are 250 miles (400km) above New Zealand. When Steve died, however, he was projected on an epic 11,000-mile journey, and his magnificent person wasn't compressed to the width and depth of an urn. His flight may not have had the same bells and whistles as a massive fist-cannon financed by Johnny Depp, but I take some kind of consolation in the great journey that he undertook before being laid to rest.

Steve died suddenly in Covent Garden, dropping like a stone on a narrow cobbled street called New Row. The emergency services arrived very promptly, but Steve didn't respond to their treatment.

I'm sitting at the end of this cobbled street now, in a pub called the Roundhouse. There's a football match on and it's very crowded. Since the funeral, I haven't managed to get back to Ashburton, so I've yet to drop by on Steve in private and say a few words. I'm glad he wasn't cremated. But with all that space over there, it seems a shame that the only visible reminder of such a larger-than-life fellow is a modest slab of stone poking out of the ground. What Steve needs is some sort of monument, ideally situated next to Ashburton's famous clock. A full-size Cortina statue would be more in keeping, with Steve seated heroically at the wheel. Steve himself would be cast in bronze, but the Cortina would be made out of copper. Real copper. And instead of laying flowers at the wheels, fluffy pennant flags would be added to the aerial. Perhaps I'll write to Johnny Depp and ask for a grant.

I've just come back through the crowded bar with a fresh pint, only to find my table has been commandeered. That's what happens, you see, when there's no one to save your seat.◊

MUSIC

Pictures in the Head: Looking Back at the Dunedin Sound

Roy Colbert was there

The things you see when you don't have a camera. Well, the thing was, I DID have a camera. A video camera. And all these kids in my second-hand record store were saying, hey, we're in a band, you should come and see us.

The store was Records Records, around nine years old when those who would become the founding stones of the quixotically entitled Dunedin Sound began coming in and asking questions, holding up records, is this one like that one, better than this one, who came first, them or them, all those sorts of questions that furrow the owner's brow when he is reading a magazine or talking to a close friend about life. Can't you see I am busy here? Yes, but – pained needy look on childlike face – are there any other bands as good as The Velvet Underground, sir? I mean, how can you answer that?

I used the video camera at home all the time. Plonked the kids on the couch and made them talk about their teachers, their friends and their dreams. It's good to have children who are in their thirties on film when they were nine.

But I don't have any of the early Dunedin Sound bands on film. Hardly any of them even live on audio cassette. The ability to think historically ahead of time is something that should be inoculated into us at birth, just like rubella is inoculated out; I mean, they can do anything these days. But it's a rare skill, and I certainly didn't have it in the early 1980s as I bobbed and weaved around Dunedin's suburban halls, bars, practice rooms, warehouses and underground rabbit-holes, marvelling at this wave of young bands who all wrote their own songs. The alleged progenitors of this Dunedin Sound – isolation, university town, cold climate driving creativity indoors, the landscape – had not produced very much until 1981. And hardly any records, until Roger Shepherd and Flying Nun drove into town. The new young bands were not yet fully formed, but even in 2013 you could argue founding flag-bearers The Clean are still not fully formed, approaching the ending of each song with a wry grin, a little anxious perhaps, but not really. The Dunedin Sound was never about precision.

Oh, to start again. With a video camera. It's like that Garth Brooks song they always play at funerals, about leaving your life to chance so you won't miss the dance. Yes, it's called 'The Dance'. The dance is all. Going to those gigs was the all; you wouldn't really have wanted to peer at the bands through a tiny camera viewfinder, trying to keep absolutely still, no drink, no drugs, don't talk to me, I'm filming. No, let the memories replace what the Sony camera just might have captured. Might have.

A second-hand record store can play a part in a movement. No question. Teenage band members have no money, they have to buy second-hand. The odd teenage band member even stole

'Celia from King Loser, virtually naked, handed out toothpicks toothed with cheese and pineapple'

second-hand. Classy. And they met each other in second-hand record stores. Some of them advertised for band members on second-hand record-store noticeboards. Did I keep those signs, those witty, sometimes vividly/memorably illustrated sheets of torn paper? No, of course not; no sense of history, remember?

As the bands started making records, their reputations grew. People came from overseas to see them, bucket lists were formed at the age of twenty-five, how many Flying Nun bands could you see on one trip to the very bottom of the world? One day a young girl from Holland came into Records Records because she had been told if she hung around long enough she would probably meet a Chill or a Doublehappy. Maybe even a Look Blue Go Purple, though second-hand record stores tend to be boy places really, even though two Look Blue Go Purples ran my store at one time or another. So she came in. We just happened to be running a satirical art exhibition in the back room that afternoon. Three paintings on the wall, a triptych, The History of Rock 'n' Roll, all with red stickers, all sold, painted by the owner, bought by the owner. Celia from King Loser, virtually naked, handed out toothpicks toothed with cheese and pineapple, Dunedin Sounders wherever you looked. Free cardboard wine always brought them out of the woodwork. Only David Kilgour, satirizing the satire, wrote vehemently in the visitors' book. I went back there afterwards, and there was the Dutch girl on the sofa, gleefully drunk, as happy as a sand-girl. She's probably a key member in the Netherlands government now. After all, Graeme Downes of The Verlaines is currently the head of the Department of Music at Otago University, and David Pine of Sneaky Feelings is the New Zealand ambassador to Malaysia.

There were only ever three in-store gigs at Records Records; there just wasn't the room, with the owner's hoarder-driven desire never to throw anything out. But yes, they all came in. The Chills' Martin Phillipps was an early arrival, maybe twelve or thirteen? He would know. He would know what he bought as well. Definitely in short pants. Searching for The Right Stuff from a ridiculously early age. David and Hamish Kilgour were both regulars; Hamish would have loved to have stood on those rocks on the cover of the first Love album. And back at the start, the Flying Nun godfather, Chris Knox, pretty much lived in the worn carpet by the fifty-cent bin, offering advice, opinion and vitriol, always with a smile.

Sneaky Feelings were rock critics before they could even form a D chord. All of them. They would talk loudly about albums, so I couldn't help but hear their youthful wisdom, the Greil Marci of the Southern Pacific Basin. Funny. Schoolboy Graeme Downes worked at a record store down the street on Friday nights, and he came in stiffly suited to sell stuff. Serious face. I offered him very little for the PiL Metal Box. That made his face very serious.

Shayne Carter would advance on the store with his schoolboy posse and albums he had won on the same local radio station where he would later work and record the Bored Games EP. It was amusing listening to him tell the posse what price he would demand from the bearded gripper up the stairs as he came in off the street.

But they were all interested in music that had gone before, so when the quintessential Dunedin Double 12-inch EP came out in 1982, it was far more tied to the 1960s than it was to the cover of the NME. Ironic really, given so many overseas rock critics lauded this roughly hewn music as new, fresh and different.

Thirty-something years ago today. The founding stones are all still making excellent music, and even one who isn't, the Dunedin Double EP band, actually called The Stones, have a compilation including freshly found live fury that's due in my letterbox any day. Nobody might have been smart enough to film these bands back then, growing up in public on stage, but Flying Nun did manage to get a whole lot of it down on vinyl. The things you hear when you have a 4-track recorder. ◊

C.K. Stead

Hospitality

My mordant friend told me the story of
the woman he loved in youth in Oxford
who had, he said, 'a hospitable cunt'.

That was the obstacle – hospitable
to him, but to others too, and he was
in love. I met her once, in middle years

still beautiful, and with a voice to charm
and command. The slightest incisor gap
was that single imperfection they say

the gods must impose on those they favour.
Later again she had the gap repaired,
giving herself new beauty in old age.

Hospitable still, the cunt? I can't say.
My friend married of course, but he carried
that flame for her, and was unforgiving.

Stiff

One hundred years ago young Ezra writes
from Kensington to Miss Alice Kenny

of Paeroa, telling her he's setting
'the stiffest standard in Europe'. He wants

not 'stuff for magazines' but 'masterworks'.
'Absolute impulse, perfect rendering'

are what he requires. 'It's a tough hurdle',
he knows, but thinks she should 'give it a shot.'

Amsterdam

Tucked among books, look, a long-ago letter,
long ago lost, thanks me for poems – for one
especially in which she's named. I remember

saying goodbye at Regensberg. We'd eaten
a meal of meatballs and sauerkraut with beer
while snowflakes drifted and the Danube swirled

through ancient arches. She'd said she was pregnant,
her boyfriend gone, while those clever eyes told me
she wanted what I wanted, and quite as much.

In a movie your hero doesn't wonder,
'What about Amsterdam / my hotel / my meeting?'
And 'Could today's ticket be used tomorrow?'

I asked myself these questions. Sadly we kissed
and I boarded the train. The letter tells me
the baby was a girl, her name, Eva.

I should have stayed a while, found us a finer
place to dine, bought her a silver knife to slice
open the marvellous letters I might write.

Eva must be thirty now. I imagine
her saying goodbye on a station platform
to the ghost of a poet. I say to him, 'Friend,

fuck Amsterdam and don't think of home, just think
of Eva, and pleasure. Tell yourself virtue
will starve you of stories, and life's a movie.'

A LIST

A tchemodan

by Lynn Jenner

As far as I can see, nothing answers the question of how Jews were supposed to know when it was time to leave Europe. I think this unanswerable question is the reason that I, a full citizen of New Zealand, have inherited a sensitivity, common among Jewish people, to suitcases.

1. Ernst Toller had two suitcases.
2. Maurice Belgrave, who was also called Moshe Belgoraj, began in business by taking two suitcases of fabrics, buttons, needles and thread on to the Auckland-to-Wellington Express and selling from the aisles.
3. Rose Ausländer only owned two suitcases in her life. They are in a museum now, in Düsseldorf.
4. Jacques Austerlitz had a rucksack, which he describes as 'the only truly reliable thing' in his life. Sebald provides the reader with a picture of it.
5. I'm sure I heard that Jews living in Germany since the war have an expression which means 'living on top of their suitcases'.
6. At the Wellington Holocaust Research and Education Centre I saw thirty important books set out on a table. One had the word 'suitcase' in the title. Two had images of suitcases or rucksacks on the cover.
7. The newly re-launched Holocaust Centre of New Zealand now has two suitcases among its displays. One belonged to a man who, as a child, was sent away on the Kindertransport trains. The suitcase was the last thing his mother gave him. Inside the suitcase she had placed a list of every item of his clothing.
8. A Jewish man arrived in Australia after the war with only one suitcase. His friends laughed when they saw that the suitcase was entirely full of books in Yiddish. *The Communist Manifesto*, *Anna Karenina*. One suitcase and he could be at home anywhere. Home enough, anyway.

FICTION

False River *for Sarah Doerries*

by Paula Morris

The day my father-in-law died, I was back in New Orleans, pretending to be there on business. Really I was there to attend a funeral – not my father-in-law's funeral, someone else's. I couldn't tell my wife about this funeral because she would have said things or – far worse – said nothing. Either way, when I got back to Houston the house would feel even colder and emptier than usual, and she'd have her back to me all the time, shoulders tight with disapproval.

The house in Houston was too cold and air-tight anyway. Our old house in New Orleans was porous, cockroaches popping up between the floorboards, flying termites slipping in where the cracked wood of the window frame didn't quite meet the peeling sill. Dirt from the schoolyard across the road washed up underneath the front door and gritted up the Turkish rug. Even with the side shutters permanently closed, lines of light, cloudy with dust, pointed spindly accusing fingers at the living-room floor.

Once we found a tiny green lizard dozing on the Venetian blinds in the bedroom; another time my older daughter saw one scuttling down the hallway, and chased it with a Tupperware sandwich box, planning on capturing it and releasing it into the wild. But the wild was inside our house, and under it, and all around us. We could never shut it out.

After Katrina my company moved to Houston, and decided not to come back. That happened to lots of people; that was why they left New Orleans. And Greta, my wife, liked Houston, because there the wilderness was contained: stop lights worked and potholes were filled in, and nobody drove the wrong way down one-way streets. We didn't have to park the car on the neutral ground on Claiborne when there was an especially heavy rain and our street looked sure to flood. Also, Houston had a really big mall, maybe the biggest mall anywhere, and my wife and daughters liked that a lot. They were tired of living in a northern port in the Caribbean, Greta told people. They wanted to live in America.

At first we came back for parades, and sometimes for Jazz Fest, staying in the house on Napoleon that Bertie, my father-in-law, had bought when he moved to the city from Hammond, and kept even after he retired to Florida. But after six years, seven years, the girls had other things to do during parade season; in Houston they didn't get two days off school for Mardi Gras. In the summer they would rather go to Sarasota where their grandfather had a condo on the beach.

When Greta rang with the news about Bertie dying, I said I was in the lobby of my hotel, but really I'd just walked into the reception area at Lake Lawn Cemetery. I was looking for signs for the Fortier funeral.

Bertie had been felled by a heart attack, she said, when he was out buying a morning paper, shuffling along in his Adidas slip-ons. It wasn't his first heart attack, so no one was surprised. Greta's brother was already on his way out there, she told me, to take care of everything. But there was one problem. Bertie died in Florida, but his wine collection was in New Orleans.

'You need the wine for the funeral?' I asked, turning my face to an alcove decorated with an urn spouting fake flowers. I didn't want anyone to recognize me and start shouting out my name.

'No,' she said. 'We need to take it before LB gets back and grabs it all.'

LB was Little Bertie, Greta's brother. I called him Al, and his work colleagues and old college buddies did as well, but people from Hammond, people who had known him when he was a child, called him LB.

'I don't understand what you want me to do,' I said, and Greta made a clicking noise with her tongue, the way she always did when she thought I was being slow or obstructive.

She wanted, she said, for me to go to the house on Napoleon and find some of the wine – the most expensive bottles, the ones he'd brought back from France and was keeping for some important occasion that never came.

'You know the ones,' she said. 'He was always showing them off to you. He thought you were the only one who would appreciate them, and he was right. LB's happy with beer.'

'So why do we have to do this now? Can't it wait until the will is read, or whatever?' I'd seen this in movies, the reading of the will in some mahogany-panelled lawyer's office. I imagined Greta in a black veil and gloves, sobbing – ostentatiously, ferociously – into a scented handkerchief, though Greta was not really the sobbing kind.

'Are you kidding? LB and Christa will have stripped the house by then. The last time I went, I swear to you that half Mama's crystal was gone, and even some of the paintings. No way Daddy took them to that little box of his in Sarasota. You have to get in there now, while LB's gone. I didn't tell him that you were in town, otherwise he would have sent Christa to the house for a pre-emptive strike.'

'Rich was a big guy whose mouth always seemed full of fried oysters or hot dogs drowning in chilli'

As ever, I admired Greta's presence of mind. Her father dies, and her first thought was to keep my visit to New Orleans a secret, just in case she could talk me into lifting some wine.

'How am I going to get into that house?' I asked. 'You and LB have the keys.'

'Break in,' she said. 'Wait until it gets dark and then break in.'

'I don't know anything about breaking into houses,' I told her.

'Use your imagination.'

'What if someone sees me breaking in and calls the police?'

'People break into houses in New Orleans all the time. Nobody ever sees anything. And if they do, they never tell the po-lis.'

She always pronounced 'police' that way when we talked about New Orleans.

I got a few more orders – only pick five or six of the most valuable bottles; make sure I covered my tracks – but then I told Greta I had to go. My meeting, I said, meaning the funeral, was about to begin.

I guess it wasn't really a funeral, as such: Rich Fortier had already been cremated, and the family had summoned us all to Lake Lawn's visitation room, which looked like a hotel conference room with an altar wheeled in. Rich gave me my first real job in the oil business, and was generous about helping other people move up and out, so there were at least a hundred mourners eddying in and out, doing a bad job of keeping their voices down.

Rich was a big guy whose mouth always seemed full of fried oysters or hot dogs drowning in chilli. It's a miracle he made it to sixty. The carved wooden jewel-box of his ashes looked all wrong, mean and fancy at the same time, the opposite of Rich.

It was even worse once we were ushered to the mausoleum area, to stand around a shiny slab on the wall. This slab was the door to a tiny vault where the box of ashes would be hidden away. The gleaming wall with all its hidden doors reminded me of a fitted kitchen. Rich's grandchildren lolled on one of the polished wooden benches and his wife, Betty, wore the distracted, anxious expression I remembered from crawfish boils on their driveway. The giant flower arrangement on a stand wore a beauty-contestant sash that read PAW-PAW in royal-blue letters. We were waiting around, I heard, for some judge, a friend of the family's, to say a few words.

Jimmy Clark wriggled up out of nowhere and grappled me into an awkward hug.

'John!' he said. 'Look at you, old man. In a suit and all.'

Jimmy was Rich's nephew, and we'd grown up on the same street in Marksville. He was still as spidery as a skinny kid, even though he had to be thirty-two, maybe thirty-three. But these days his hair was sparse and fluffy at the front, and though his arms were matchsticks, a little belly stuck out over his belt. In his food-stained white shirt and black pants, he looked like an off-duty waiter.

Last time I heard, Jimmy was living in Alexandria, for no particular reason, selling coffee at the concession in Books-A-Million. Before that he'd sold coffee at Albertson's, further along the same stretch of highway, but he'd left under some kind of cloud. Jimmy carried clouds around with him, his brother once told me, the way kids carry balloons. Michael, Jimmy's brother, was a lawyer now but still lived in Marksville, representing the aggrieved of Avoyelles Parish at the old courthouse in the square.

'Is Michael here?' I asked. Michael was my age, and we used to share a ride to Menard, our high school in Alexandria. I looked around for him but it was hard to see much but the backs of people's heads; Jimmy and I were crushed into a corner, the afternoon light sickly through the window's chequerboard of stained glass.

'He couldn't get away. Big case, something to do with the prison. Or the hospital, maybe. I'm staying at his place right now, so we'll drive back up tonight.'

I didn't ask who he meant by 'we', though I had a pretty good idea. Anyway, Jimmy was already on another topic. He was in the city to do some research, he said. This was Jimmy all over. He was always doing some kind of research, but nobody ever knew why, and nothing seemed to come of it. Obsessions took hold of him, and he had to pursue them, and to talk about them until everybody was sick of hearing it. His latest passion, he told me, was Henry Morton Stanley, the explorer.

'He was born in Wales. Illegitimate. Ran away to sea when he was seventeen.'

'People were always running away to sea in those days,' I said. 'Does anybody do that any more?'

'Sometime in the 1850s he found work on a ship out of Liverpool and ended up in New Orleans.' The judge, tall and black-robed, had materialized near the flower stand, and people were shushing each other, but Jimmy didn't seem to notice. 'His real name was John Rowland, but in New Orleans he got himself adopted by a rich man, name of Henry Stanley. So he changed his name.'

'Really,' I said, though I wanted Jimmy to stop talking. At least he'd lowered his voice.

'Lots of people changed their names in New Orleans,' he told me, leaning in. A tattoo I didn't remember peeped out from under his shirt collar – maybe a bird's claw, or the spikes of a star. 'Tennessee Williams and O. Henry, for example. Did you know that Stanley fought for both sides during the Civil War?'

'Family and friends!' said the judge, in a molasses-thick voice. 'Let me say a few words.'

Some strung-together scripture followed, and a Lord's Prayer with the added lines for any Protestants in the crowd. I wondered why Stanley, the name-changing explorer, had chosen to fight for both sides. Not at the same time, I assumed, unless he was the Mata Hari of the Civil War.

The judge stepped away from the flowers, and an official-looking woman dressed in navy blue took over, pointing to the exits.

'That ends our proceedings today,' she said, her face blank of any emotion. 'You are dismissed.'

A murmur of disapproval echoed off the marble cupboard doors.

'That's just rude,' said a loud voice, and I almost laughed out loud. Thea.

I strained to see her, and she was easy to spot in the crowd, even with her back turned towards us, even though half the other women there were blonde, and even though she was wearing some kind of fur shrug, black streaked with grey, that wasn't her usual style at all. I knew the particular sway of Thea's hair, the pert way she held her head, the slope of her shoulders.

'Thea's supposed to drive me back to Marksville tonight,' Jimmy told me. 'But her car stopped running this afternoon, so I don't know what we'll do. I have to be home first thing in the morning.'

'You're working in Marksville now?' I asked. Jimmy shook his head, squinting up at the stained-glass window as though the weak show of sunlight annoyed him.

'Got to show my face there tomorrow. I'm kind of out on bond right now. And Thea needs to be there as well, because …' He glanced at me, then looked away again. 'It's a long story.'

It was always a long story with Jimmy.

'I could drive you,' I said without thinking. I didn't need to stay the night in New Orleans, I told myself. Tomorrow I had a meeting in Lake Charles – a real meeting, and the reason I was driving on this trip rather than flying. Tonight I could drive to Marksville and surprise my mother. She wouldn't say a word about it to Greta, not if I asked her to keep it quiet. My mother never told Greta anything any more.

'Man, that would save my life,' said Jimmy. People around us were walking away, complaining about being dismissed. 'Thea!'

She turned to look in our direction, not smiling, not surprised, imperious as ever, as though she knew I'd be standing there by the picnic-tablecloth of a window, waiting for her to notice me.

We parked outside Bertie's house, waiting for dusk and discussing possible plans of action.

'The neighbours may get suspicious,' Jimmy warned me.

'Please,' said Thea. 'Three white people in a Lexus?'

She had rolled her eyes when she saw I drove a Lexus, but it hadn't stopped her sliding into the front seat and obscuring the handbrake with her snakeskin purse. She kept the fur shrug on, even though the day was humid and not even slightly autumnal.

'For the record,' she continued, looking at me, 'I think this is a bad idea. If you're going to break in, at least take something of value. Make it worth the effort.'

'Some of that wine is worth a lot,' I told her, speaking loud to drown out

Jimmy in the back seat, humming the *Monday Night Football* theme music. When we were young, I used to tell him to quit making his strange noises, but now we were all peers, more or less.

'I was thinking sentimental value, but hey. It's your family.'

'It's Greta's family,' I said, and got out of the car. In the trunk I dug out the flashlight and the jack. Jimmy cracked open his door.

'Want some help?' he asked.

'No!' shrieked an unseen Thea. 'You're in enough trouble.'

I didn't need Jimmy's help, though the last time I broke into anywhere, Thea and I were teenagers looking for somewhere to get high on a wet Sunday afternoon: we kicked in the door of Bob Ritchie's tool shed and sat in there on deflated pool floats, each of us cradling one of the garden gnomes Bob liked to refurbish, giggling like fools. But I had a notion of how to get into Bertie's house, through the screen door around the back where rain had warped the wood. I wasn't worried about the neighbours, even though their house was close enough to touch, because I was family, kind of, with every right to be trudging through the side gate armed with a car jack, intent on breaking in through the back door.

To get there I had to navigate an obstacle course of upside-down plastic lawn furniture, rotten with mould spots, and a mountain range of tree roots that had forced its way up through the cracked paving stones. I hadn't been back here in years, and neither had anyone else, by the looks of it. But all it took to prise open the screen door was my penknife; the lever on the car jack got me through the back door and into what passed for a basement in New Orleans, a concrete floor spotted with roach carcasses, and the skeleton of framed internal walls that Al had stripped bare after Katrina. The washer and dryer were down here, and dusty plastic tubs jammed with bags of beads, relics from the days when Bertie rode with Thoth: he never threw it all, and everyone always nagged him about buying so much every year.

'She always pushed her seat right back and took her shoes off when she got in my car. That much hadn't changed'

Any wine left in the house was upstairs, I knew, where floodwaters couldn't reach it. Up there the house smelled stale and a little off, like garbage had been sitting around for too long, though that's the way it smelled when Bertie lived here full-time. He never had the air turned up high enough.

On my way in, I made a mess of the door at the top of the stairs, smashing and splintering a hole so I could turn the handle. This meant the police might be called at some point, when Al next came around and saw the damage, but I doubted they'd do anything, especially if nothing much was stolen.

There wasn't much in there to steal. The dining table and chairs were gone, something that would enrage Greta, and the wall of the front parlour was a blank of sallow rectangles, where paintings of doughy, dark-eyed Creoles used to hang. The silver-plate was missing from the credenza. When I investigated Bertie's usual hiding places for his wine – a box in the linen closet, the nest of beach towels under the bed – I found nothing. Either Al and Christa had been pillaging, or Bertie had transported his stash to Florida. The former, I decided, when I checked in the final place, the old laundry chute in the bathroom. Al would never think to look here for wine; he was devious, but not as devious as his father or sister. So there were still four bottles in there, something to brandish, like spoils of war, on my return to Houston.

They weren't bad bottles either, I realized, doubling up Rouses bags from the pantry to carry my stash. Romanée-Conti from 1988; Pétrus from 2001. A 1993 Pichon Lalande that I half remembered Bertie showing me once. The oldest was a 1978 La Mission Haut-Brion. They may have been worth a few hundred each, or maybe a lot more. Greta could have the fun of researching and tallying, of relishing the secret triumph over her brother and his wife. She would never drink the bottles of wine, and I doubted she would even sell them. The secret triumph would be enough.

I grabbed a six-pack of beer from the fridge as well, mainly to annoy Al, and let myself out through the front door. Back at the car, I slid the bagged wine into the back seat, next to Jimmy and my folded suit jacket, and offered him a beer. I threw another can into Thea's lap.

'I am surrounded by the criminal element,' said Thea. Her window was down and she was smoking, something I thought she'd given up years ago.

'Your wife doesn't have a key to her own daddy's house?' Jimmy asked. I told him that she did, in Houston, but all of this – the death, the demand – had gone down today, when I was already here. 'She couldn't come to Uncle Rich's funeral?'

I didn't say anything, because I didn't feel like lying on Greta's behalf: stealing was plenty for one day. We were driving between stop signs on Napoleon at high speed, because all I wanted now was to get out of town.

'What's her deal,' Thea said, not looking at me. It wasn't a question, but I answered anyway.

'She doesn't like New Orleans any more.'

'Tell her New Orleans doesn't care.'

'I can't tell her anything these days,' I said.

'Not a single thing she likes about the city?' Jimmy asked. In the rear-view mirror I spied him squirming and flinching in the back seat as though some bug was dive-bombing his face. 'That's crazy.'

'She still likes her daddy's wine, apparently,' said Thea, raising her stockinged

feet so they rested on the dashboard. She always pushed her seat right back and took her shoes off when she got in my car. That much hadn't changed.

Thea was the reason I couldn't tell my wife about the funeral. Just the mention of Thea's name could turn a day sour. Greta thought that Thea and I still had too much going on, too many stories and secrets and allegiances, even though I hadn't seen Thea or spoken to her since we had left New Orleans. Anything I heard about her these days was through Michael. She had boyfriends rather than husbands; she lived downtown. When she started working at the Historic New Orleans Collection, office rules dictated that women wore skirts and panty-

hose, but Thea insisted that the rules be changed.

'We could go see Henry Stanley's house right now,' said Jimmy. 'I know where it is. They moved it to Coliseum Street.'

'They're always moving things around,' Thea complained. She opened the beer and placed it in my cup-holder, twisting the can so I could pick it up and drink. 'Everything they can't tear down.'

When I told Jimmy that we didn't have time to look at Stanley's house, wherever it was, he sat in a sulk until we were half-way to Baton Rouge. He sat clutching the bag of wine the way he used to hold on to a cushion when he sat watching TV. The only sound that came from the back seat was the clank of the beer can hitting his teeth.

This was a drive I'd made many times before, of course, but not one I liked making, not since the storm. On I-10 across the Bonnet Carré Spillway with its stunted cypresses, past the refinery that sparkled like a spotlit city, all the way to Baton Rouge, and then across the Mississippi. At False River there was the turn before New Roads, then Morganza, Simmesport, and another river to cross, the Atchafalaya, with Avoyelles Parish waiting, poor and hot and dozy, on the other side. In the old days, whenever I passed Baton Rouge it always seemed to me I was back in Louisiana proper, where there was more time and more space, and hunting squirrels was a family activity.

By the time we turned off the Interstate, Jimmy was talking again. Two cans of beer, and he wouldn't shut up.

'The thing is,' he said, as though one of us had asked him a question, 'Dr Livingstone wasn't lost.'

'Why are you still talking about this?' Thea asked. She'd made him pass her another can, and she was keeping me supplied.

'It's history. You know that's my thing. What else I'ma talk about?'

'Maybe you could discuss why you've started saying "I'ma",' she said. 'And earlier today, I swear I heard you say "bu'on".'

'What does that mean?' I asked. We were passing False River now, and I was trying to distract myself, glad that someone was talking.

'Button,' she told me. 'I don't recall the context. I was too appalled to continue listening.'

'Dr Livingstone wasn't lost,' Jimmy said. 'He didn't need to be found. The whole thing was a publicity stunt. It was just Stanley trying to get famous. That's why people know him today – because of the whole "Dr Livingstone, I presume" thing.'

'So what you're saying is, it worked,' said Thea.

'He probably made that up as well. He probably never said, "Dr Livingstone, I presume." But he did lots of big things in Africa, like navigate the Congo River. No white man had ever done that before.'

'Maybe the Africans didn't want white men there, navigating their rivers. Maybe they could navigate their rivers themselves.'

'Nobody remembers things like that about Stanley. All they remember is this one thing that may not even be true.'

'Maybe he didn't navigate the Congo River either,' Thea said, giving me a sidelong look. She always knew what I was thinking. 'Maybe we shouldn't believe a word this man said. Stanley wasn't even his real name. He just picked it up in New Orleans the way John picked up that wine.'

'Hey!' said Jimmy. 'Look at the Legoniers' old house. Slow down!'

I slowed the car so we could take a long look at the house, lit up by fake gas lamps. It was a sherbet-orange, its storm shutters painted a watered-down purple. A fat Chevy Tahoe sat in the driveway like a giant toad. Beyond it, the water lay dark and unruffled, a gully of black between the houses lining the shores on either side.

'They painted it,' said Thea.

'Looks like Key Largo,' said Jimmy. 'It doesn't look like here.'

'What does "here" look like?' Thea asked him.

'Not like that.'

'That place used to be a fish camp,' I said. 'Now it looks like – well, Florida.

Jimmy's right.'

Against my better judgement, I kept the car at a crawl. Once, everything along the water here was brown boards; only a few houses were whitewashed, and most places were as dark and plain as the fish that people came here to catch. Twenty, thirty years ago, most of the houses were smaller than boat sheds, sprinkled close to the waterline. Now the old houses were going, sold for stupid prices to people with money in Baton Rouge, and pulled down. In their place the new owners built stucco bunkers or South Beach villas like this one, spreading to the boundary lines so the homes were practically touching. After Katrina, Greta and the girls stayed in a house along here, and that was a fortress. It even had electric gates.

'Not worth thinking about,' Thea said to me in a low voice. 'We should get going.'

'This used to be part of the real river,' Jimmy said. 'It got cut off after a spring flood, sometime in the 1700s.'

'You know I hate it when people say things like "1700s",' Thea said, her voice loud. 'What are we, Italians? In English we call it *the eighteenth century*. When someone says "1700s" to me, it's as though they don't trust me to work it out.'

'Everything I say, you complain.' Jimmy sounded sulky again, the way he used to when he was little and someone had rubbed love bugs into his hair. 'And you call me Jimmy, when you know I don't like it. People call me Jim now. Even MeMe remembers to call me Jim.'

'Well, I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.'

'Just be sorry because you're sorry. Don't qualify it.'

'I'm sorry. I really am. It's just hard for me to remember to say Jim.'

'Even MeMe remembers,' Jimmy muttered. 'And she's eighty-three.'

I was sorry too, because I'd been calling him Jimmy all day. The three of us weren't used to spending time together any more: we didn't know how to behave around each other. Jimmy was sulking, Thea was smoking, and I was driving around drinking beer. It was twenty years ago, except now I was driving a Lexus and Thea was wearing a fur shrug, and none of us lived in Marksville any more.

Thea must have felt guilty, or maybe she just wanted him to talk, to keep my mind off things. Either way, she nagged Jimmy all the way to the Morganza Spillway to tell us more about Stanley, and promised not to interrupt or complain or criticize.

'He wanted to be buried in Westminster Abbey,' Jimmy said. He nudged Thea's shoulder until she passed back another beer. 'Right next to Dr Livingstone. But the bishops and such said no.'

Before the storm, Thea had an old sailboat that she docked up on the lake. Once, long ago, I asked her about how far we could sail in a boat that size. Mexico, she reckoned. We'd head for the coast, where the brackish lakewater turned the sea into sludge, and then out into the blue waters of the Gulf. Eventually we'd hit the Yucatán. We could live in Mérida, she said, in a painted house with a string hammock hanging in the courtyard.

The lake swallowed up Thea's boat, Michael told me. I thought of it now but didn't mention it, just as she wasn't mentioning the house on False River, where my wife hid for six weeks after the storm, refusing to tell me where she and my daughters were living. It was better just to let Jimmy talk, to tell us about the bishops denying Stanley his place in history. Stanley was a nobody from nowhere, Jimmy said. To a lot of people, snobby people, he was just a guy who ran away to sea and made up a lot of stories.

We pulled on to the shoulder in Simmesport, just before the bridge, so Jimmy could take a piss in the trees along the levee. He said it was the beer, plus the proximity of Avoyelles Parish made him nervous. After he disappeared into the shadows, I asked Thea to give me a short version of the long story.

'I can tell you what happened,' she said, peering out the window at the straggly line of trees. 'He got drunk, rode off in Robbie DuBea's lawnmower and crashed it into a tree. It's unauthorized use of a moveable, and a felony. Unless we can talk Robbie into dropping the charges, Jimmy's going to jail. Maybe hard labour in Angola, depending on the judge.'

'That's ridiculous,' I said. 'The trial's tomorrow?'

'Not a trial. We're meeting with Robbie as a family, begging for mercy. We'll buy him one of those big fancy lawn tractor things, and Jimmy will cut his grass for a year. Or we'll pay someone more responsible. Whatever it takes.'

'Hopefully he'll be reasonable.'

'Robbie's just annoyed with Jimmy about what happened last year, that whole thing with burning down the tree house.' Thea waved away the question I was about to ask. 'I just wish Jimmy would stop turning up in Marksville and going crazy. He needs to run away to sea. Do people still do that?'

'He might be doing that now.' Jimmy hadn't re-emerged from the stand of trees along the river. Thea glanced at the back seat and pointed out that he must have taken the wine with him. We were both thinking the same thing, I knew. Nothing good could come of Jimmy Clark and four bottles of wine, out in the darkness alone, on the banks of the Atchafalaya River.

'Nothing good could come of Jimmy Clark and four bottles of wine'

Thea pulled on her shoes, and we tumbled out of the car. I didn't even stop to grab the flashlight. The ground was soft, the grass long and damp around my shins. Thea stalked ahead and then clambered up the bank on all fours, the moonlight picking out the silver streaks in her pelt.

'Jimmy!' she called, looking for a way

through the trees. 'Jimmy!'

We found him on the far side of the treeline, facing down the river. He was wearing my suit jacket, a bottle of wine bulging out of each of the front pockets. He'd managed to slip the Rouses bag handles over his head, so the bag still holding the other two bottles hung in front, like a bib. He wasn't planning to drink the wine, I realized. He was using it to weigh himself down.

Thea was calm again. She stood next to her brother on the levee, looking out at the river. From the bridge it always looked milky and benign, but this close to it you could hear it moving, dragging itself towards the sea.

'Some people,' said Jimmy, 'say that the Atchafalaya is so deep, you can't touch the bottom.'

'I've heard that,' I said, 'but no one really believes that, do they?'

'Up here it's a ditch,' said Thea, though this wasn't true either. 'People in Simmesport believe anything.'

'The Congo is the world's deepest river.' Jimmy turned to face Thea, and the bottles around his neck clanked. 'Not many people know that.'

'I didn't know that,' Thea admitted.

'I'm sorry I made you slow down,' Jimmy said to me. 'You know, back at False River. I wasn't thinking straight. All of this talk about Angola is making me crazy. I can't go to Angola.'

'You're not going to Angola,' Thea told him. 'I promise you. We'll fix everything tomorrow. All of this will blow over.'

Even Jimmy knew my business, I realized. Of course he did: half of Marksville knew my business. They knew that I was in Houston when Katrina hit, and that Greta decided to turn evacuation into a separation. At first I couldn't reach her and the girls because none of the 504 cell phones were working, then finally Al told me that Greta didn't want me to find her. She was leaving me, he said. When the waters receded, and the city opened up again, he said, Greta wanted to sell the house and get a divorce.

I hung around Marksville, staying with my mother and getting legal advice from Michael: there was no point in hiring a private detective, he told me, because the whole state was an uproar of displaced persons. Marksville alone had thousands of extra residents, sleeping in churches and on porches and in people's RVs. The casino parking lot was jammed with cars, people who had nowhere else to go. The sheriff turned a disused factory on the highway into a shelter and put inmates from the women's prison to work, unloading donations of food and bedding. Nobody knew anything. Everyone was lost.

Greta wasn't lost: she was hiding. But because this was Louisiana, I didn't need a private detective. One of Thea's friends spotted Greta at the Langlois' Grocery in New Roads, and after two days sleeping in my car on False River Road, I saw my youngest daughter skipping along the driveway of the house with the electronic gates.

We didn't get divorced, but we did sell the house in New Orleans. That was the deal. Thea and I argued; she told me I was getting rid of the wrong thing, and I hung up on her. That was the last time we'd spoken.

'Hey, Jim,' I said. 'Can I have one of those bottles of wine?'

Jimmy leaned forward to look at me, the breeze puffing up his dandelion hair.

'I guess,' he said. 'It's your wine.'

'No, it's not mine.'

Jimmy pulled a bottle out of one of the pockets and handed it to Thea, who handed it to me. It was too dark to read the label, but that didn't matter. I held it by the neck, and hurled it as hard as I could into the river. The splash sounded small and distant. Jimmy hooted – delight, disbelief – and Thea grabbed my sleeve.

'What are you *doing*?' she asked, her voice crackling to life, and I said it was Jimmy's turn next. He tossed in another bottle, almost tipping forward from the weight of the bag around his neck. When we heard it plop into the water, all three of us cheered.

'Now Thea,' I said, and we waited while Jimmy untangled himself from the plastic noose and pulled out a bottle.

'Pichon Lalande,' she said, squinting at the label. 'I hope it la-lands somewhere interesting.'

She threw it high in the air; we watched it arc into the darkness. The river gulped, and flushed it away.

There was one bottle left, and Jimmy presented it to me. I aimed for the bridge, trying to break the bottle, but either the bridge was too far or too high, or my arms were weak these days. I couldn't remember the last time I'd thrown a ball. The splash sounded tiny after so much effort.

'You are dismissed,' said Jimmy, jabbing an accusing finger at the river, and I started laughing. Thea was laughing as well, her head thrown back. Jimmy howled at the moon and raised his arms in triumph, and we laughed even more. I felt unsteady on my feet, giddy, as though we'd drunk the wine rather than thrown it all away into the river.

Back in Houston, I told Greta that the wine was already gone. All I'd been able to find in the house on Napoleon, I told her, was a six-pack of beer in the fridge. She spent the rest of the day making threats about contesting the will or having her brother arrested, though I doubted she'd do much of anything other than rant, especially once she got her hands on that condo in Sarasota.

I was hoping that Thea would call me with some news about Jimmy. In the end Michael was the one who called, days later. Jimmy was off the hook this time, but they were sending him to some cousin's place near Gulf Shores to stay out of trouble, or at least to get into trouble in another state. Thea, he said, was back at work at the Historic New Orleans Collection.

'She says to tell you she's planning a book about collectors of fine wine in Louisiana,' Michael told me. 'That'll be a short book, right?'

The day after we threw the wine in the river, I drove from Marksville to Lake Charles for my meeting. Somewhere along the Cajun Prairie, the sun hit the dashboard, and I saw the incriminating smudge of Thea's footprints up there. I decided to wait until I was almost home in Houston to clean them away, glancing over at them now and then to fix the shape of them in my mind. They were like a wild animal's print, a reminder of something dangerous close by, usually hidden from sight.

But when I stopped for gas and opened the passenger door to clean them away, I couldn't see anything at all there, not a trace of sweat or riverbank dirt. There wasn't a thing to see or smell or touch. The footprints had evaporated, if they'd ever been there at all. ◊

FICTION

Tragedy of the Commons

by Pip Adam

The screen fills with brown-green texture and the hhhhhh of wind in a small camera's microphone. The green wipes over the screen at speed; single blades of long grass blur, catching in the frame. In the top of the screen, water at the bottom of a great drop. A cliff, Arjean thinks, and look how rough the sea is. The scene swings again, grey sea, white caps, brown grass, rocks – two, in particular, cloven.

'Yeah, man, this is cool.' She mouths the words as he says them.

The rock, the slight sense of something moving on the rock.

'We've got a seal on the rock down there.'

'That thing.' The second voice. She knows him too. She's watched it for hours.

'That's some weird-looking seal.'

The two men are in Kiryat Yam. Forever, she thinks, caught on camera. It's Israel, but there have been sightings everywhere. China. Someone is sure they've seen something in China.

'Where's the zoom on this?'

The two rocks, they're almost black, clutched together or perhaps slowly wearing apart; the sea fights at them from either side.

'Press that button.'

They come in and out of focus.

'No, I got it.'

And then the scene swings by to the second man.

Why does he pan to him? the doubters say in the comments below, on websites under titles like 'WHY THIS IS FAKE'. *Why would he swing the whole camera to him when he could have kept it trained and just turned to talk to him?*

'It's a seal, man.'

Swing back to the rocks. In and out of focus, the shot takes Arjean closer and closer and then the sea animal on the rock turns.

'What is that?'

The animal on the rock. It turns, looks behind its shoulder, up at the men, at the camera. It's dark on top, grey, but when it turns there's a flash of pale, white almost. Like skin, she thinks. Like a stingray.

'Oh my God.'

It moves quickly then, pulling itself along on its human arms. On its human hands.

'It has hands,' she whispers. 'It has arms. And a shadow.'

It dives into the sea, its adult-human-sized caudal fin the last thing to slip under, and is gone.

'What is that? Tell me you got that.'

'What is that?'

'Real,' she replies, her hand tracing the path it took into the water, the path it disappeared into. Down. Deep. 'Real.'

Soon Simon would shout, Come to bed. He wouldn't want her in bed. The flick of the computer plays at him, even through his closed eyes, and he has to start out early. He's not supposed to be there. He's supposed to be at the barracks. He came into town though, for prasadam, to see everyone. For chanting. He came in to chant, and if she didn't like it he could stay somewhere else. Where? she said. Where else could he stay? Jivisvari Kesavi? Would he stay with her? No. No one wanted him back. No. He was dead to them.

'It wasn't like that.'

'Oh,' she said, 'but it was.'

'Come to bed,' and he would roll over slightly.

The flat was freezing. She was sleeping in the lounge because that's where the heater was and she kept it on all night. It glowed orange and gave her dreams of the dry, bright battlefield, the chariot, the killing cousins.

'You can't stay up all night watching your mermaids.' He'd hated them.

'Once more,' she said. 'Once more.'

'The flick of the computer plays at him, even through his closed eyes'

It felt like it hadn't rained for weeks, but it had and it was raining hard now. Simon would leave before the sun came up, before she was awake. He had to shower and change before reveille. He hated her house. She was filthy. He should stay somewhere else then. But where? No one would have him. He had plenty of places to go. 'Sure,' Arjean would say, nodding her head, walking to the other room, leaving him alone to really think about that, to think about the plenty of places he had to go, across burnt bridges. 'Your mum,' she'd shout from the other room. 'You could go and stay with your mum.'

'Fuck off.'

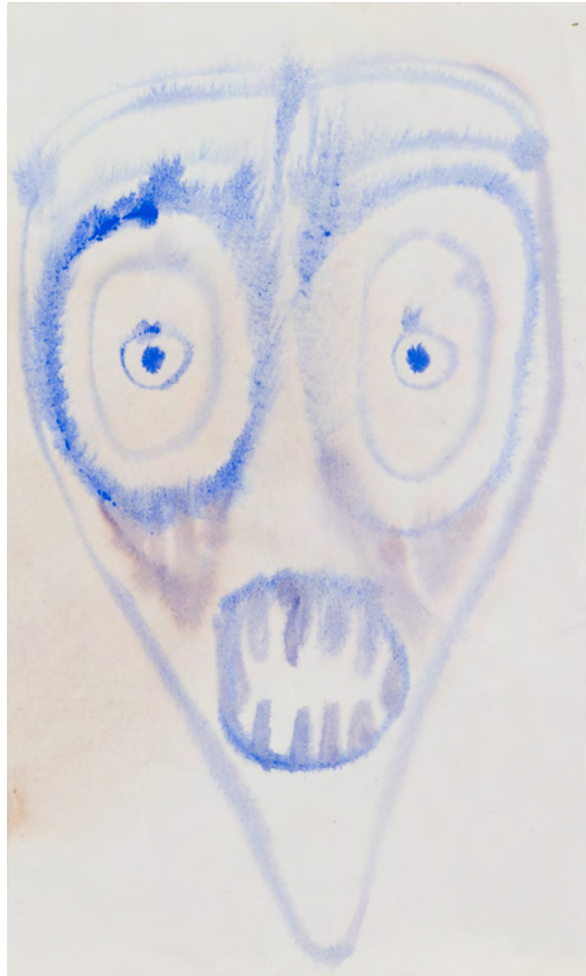
He might even throw something, or charge her, come into the other room and push her hard against a wall. Call her names. Tell her to sort it out. Spit at her. It wasn't her fault, she'd say, defiant, daring him, Go on. Go on. A human in a vast expanse of water, with huge fish. Whales. Go on. And then she'd see him deflate, realize there was nothing left for him to do but say, 'Fuck you,' and step down. Grab his jacket and his bag. 'Fuck you.' Chanting in his head. Chanting so hard that somehow Godhead would have him back. That Krishna would accept it and guide him from the darkness that had led him away from everything that could save him. That somehow, someone, something. Chance events, a storm, a long dry period, could lead him back. That somewhere he could find someone who would welcome him back. Rama Rama. Hare Hare. 'It's not my fault,' she said.

Anyway, it was raining and cold. She didn't have a decent coat. She had three umbrellas, none of which worked. They were all broken. And no coat. Nothing that could keep her dry in the heavy, fat rain. Simon would be marching in it. She just needed to get to work. To the mall. She had a car, but no money for petrol. He had plenty of money. He was saving up for something. Scheming. He wouldn't even pay for petrol. He had his own car. He didn't pay for food either. He never took her out to dinner. 'How was that working out?' she had said. 'Karmically? How's that looking in the universal judgement of things? How's your ledger looking?' But it was raining and he was gone and she didn't need to fight with him any more because who knew when she would see him again. She just needed to go to work. In the fucking rain. She'd had a bike. When her car had broken down. When it sat parked for months on the street, getting parking tickets. She'd got a bike. Simon said he hoped it would make her lose weight. She was so fucking fat. She'd really let the ripcord out. He could go fuck himself.

A bike was of no help in the rain. She'd walk. It was always better outside than it looked from inside. Take a change of clothes and walk. If she left now she could do her hair and make-up at the salon. She'd walk. She lifted clothes up from the floor, picked through the washing basket, found a pair of jeans and a large jumper. She put a pair of black stockings in a plastic bag, together with a black shift dress and some shiny boots with a small heel, but she couldn't find a cardigan that didn't stink, and as it got closer to the time she needed to leave, she didn't care and threw one of the stinking cardigans into the bag, picking some food off its sleeve before she did. There wasn't a clean dish or cup or piece of cutlery, they were all in the sink, so she decided to buy breakfast at the mall. She checked that the heater and electric blanket were off, then she shut the door on it all and walked down the driveway and up the street.

It rained the whole way. She understood that if she surrendered to it, just realized she was going to get wet, it would be better. It was the resistance that was causing the pain. She wasn't her body. He would shout it from a car as he drove past her. He wouldn't even stop. He could have stopped, but it was all part of his teaching her a lesson. She was lazy and she didn't surrender. She wanted to control everything. She wasn't the controller. Why did she not chant any more? He never heard her praying. Would she pray with him? They could sit somewhere quietly.

‘She walked in straight lines; Christchurch was a grid’



She could take counsel in it. Calm herself somehow. Why did she go to temple so infrequently?

Simon would drive off, fast.

He’d always driven so fucking fast. Water fizzed on either side of the tyres of a car that looked like his, and she walked. She was pretty sure one of her boots had a hole in it. She should start wearing leather again. This was taking it all too far. Why did she always take things too far? She should start wearing leather again. But she couldn’t bring herself to. It was like sliding into the skin of something. It was. It smelled so bad to her. She could hardly walk past the bag shop in the mall. She imagined all the bags still full of organs, blood, sinew, life. She hated touching it. When she saw it, she imagined it coming off. A knife between fat and skin, and then the pull. It was the pull that did it. The weight the puller had to put behind it. It didn’t slide off, it pulled back, like anything alive would pull back. No, it seemed to say. No, I want this. I want to keep it. She imagined it all and it buoyed her slightly as her feet got wetter and wetter. She should get some gumboots. She was so goddamn vain. He always came to mind, close to her face and spitting, but maybe he never had. There were very few cars on the road.

She walked in straight lines; Christchurch was a grid. This way, then a right angle, then this way. And then the mall. The doors hissed open and it was bright and warm. She squeaked her way through the food hall; she was hungry but she couldn’t eat. The salon wasn’t open yet, nothing in the mall was open, so she went to the toilet and scraped her wet clothes off. This was what she meant. Everything stuck. She hadn’t thought to bring a towel. She didn’t expect to get this wet. She walked in her underwear out of the stall and pulled some hand towels out of the dispenser. She patted herself. If she tried to wipe along her wet skin, the paper bundled and turned into tiny balls of mush. Her tights wouldn’t go on. She sat on the toilet with them just over her knees. She was tired. Every part of her ached with it.

Her head fell back and she looked at the ceiling. She wouldn’t ask for any help. That was her problem. When would she see him again? One night, at the army housing area, in their small, perfectly formed house, she’d been making dinner when helicopters went overhead. She’d waited and waited. The table set, the dinner served. Simon came back four weeks later. He’d been in the Solomons. She was so tired. The walk. The rain. The day she had ahead. She was so tired. It was tiring work.

She was fully booked. She looked at her book. Everyone did. Some of the stylists complained, pointing out places it wasn’t going to work. Places where things would take longer to process. Clients they knew had longer hair than they’d been booked in for. She went to the staffroom and made a cup of coffee.

‘I’m with you today,’ Fawn was already there.

‘Hm,’ Arjean nodded.

‘I’ve got the cards.’

‘Cool.’

Fawn looked through the cards. ‘I think we can sell one more colour today.’

‘Yeah. Marion.’

‘Marion.’

‘Oh well.’ Arjean drained her cup. ‘Let’s do it then.’

And they walked out of the staffroom and into the tasteful dim of the salon, and Arjean opened the drawer and started laying out her scissors and clips and combs. Fawn collected capes and put the cards in Arjean’s station.

The day was hard. The day was always hard. Some of the girls said Thursdays were the hardest. Some hated late nights; other couldn’t handle weekends. But every day was hard. They stood up for nine hours at a time. They were always thinking of at least three things at once. They had their eye on a colour, a perm, who was waiting for them, which one of their clients was looking round angrily. They ate lunch in the five minutes

the neutralizer took to work, with fingers that tasted like perfume and alkaline body odour. They all had stomach problems and allergies. Sometimes their fingernails would fall off. They walked for miles back and forth over the hard slate floor, catching themselves in almost every mirror. And they did it all in heels and with the receptionist, Donna, telling them to reapply lipstick. Not to slouch. 'Mrs Jones had been waiting,' Donna said. Mrs Smith wanted to just pop in, for a fringe-trim, for a blow-wave, for a chat about a new colour idea she'd had.

Arjean had been more enthusiastic. She knew a lot of the time she was on thin ice. Sometimes she didn't look happy at all. 'It's not an undertaker's,' Donna would say, if Arjean ended up at reception, looking at her book. 'I know this is your "thing", but people don't come here for cool silence.' Arjean breathed in and thought again about leaving, about what it would have been like if she'd made a decisive move. If she had moved back to the army housing area. Got a job in the Tegel factory like the rest of the wives of the infanteers. But Simon wouldn't have a bar of that. 'If you leave,' he'd called behind himself as he walked out the door. 'Don't fucking come back.' He'd be away for a week, he couldn't tell her where. Timor, she thought as he drove off. He took the car. If she left, she would have to do so on foot, carrying the little she had into town. Sleeping on the motorway as she went. If she left. She left anyway. Paid someone to come and fix her car one last time, found a flat, a horrible flat, packed everything up and drove away. He didn't think she'd do it. He told her constantly, after sex, when they were close and warm, he never thought she'd do it. It made him want her, he said. It made her like she was before. Before him. That's the rub, she said. She'd read it in some self-help book.

She wasn't happy. Simon had never been to the salon but he didn't leave her alone there. No one in the salon knew anything about her.

Every day was hard. The pointlessness of it made it harder. 'It's not brain surgery,' she'd say to Donna when she told her to smile more. 'No one's going to die.' She didn't know that, Donna said. Arjean looked at her. Really? 'We fill an important need,' Donna said. 'We make people feel good. This is the only touch some of them get.' Then she walked away. Arjean hadn't smiled in a very long time. She'd taken a day off for the funeral. Told them she wasn't well. 'I won't be in,' she said. 'It's a head cold.' They rang her up as the coffin was being taken away. Could she come in for the late night? Someone else had to go to a family thing. Sure. Sure. She didn't go to the graveside. Instead she went home, got changed, put on her make-up and walked into the salon, finishing a chocolate bar in a silver wrapper. 'Don't eat in the salon.' She didn't want to be at the funeral anyway. Not any of her. She had no idea why she'd gone. 'Because he left you money,' Simon's mother had said, loudly, so everyone could hear. 'Because you think you're so fucking special but you're not. Look around. How many other women are here?' No one from temple came. No one.

See?

She checked a foil.

See? There's nowhere else for you to go.

There were women who would have thrown themselves into the grave. She could feel it. She was happy to leave.

I was happy to leave.

So brave, he would have said. So fucking brave.

The foils at the top needed longer but the ones at the nape were finished. Fawn could handle it. 'I want these' – Arjean opened and closed one quickly – 'to look like these.' The nape was all done, probably up to the occipital bone.

'Sponge them down.'

'By the time you get to these' – she placed an open hand over the higher foils – 'they'll be done and there'll be a basin ready.' She touched the women on the shoulder but didn't make eye contact in the mirror. Arjean knew she was looking at her though. Everyone was looking at her. She'd put on weight. Let herself go, he would have thought. Pulled the ripcord. Everyone was looking. Occasionally her hips would hit the trolley she was using. She'd not be able to reach the power point on the floor. Everyone was looking. Something was up, but she didn't tell a soul. Where would he go? Sometimes she'd see Simon's wife on the streets. Chanting. Stopping people. Holding the Bhagavad Gita. Did they like yoga and vegetarian food? Arjean wasn't even sure if his wife knew. She kind of suspected she might, somewhere in her spirit, deep inside her soul. We are not our body. She seemed so much more of him than Arjean was. So much more. So much more. People assumed so much.

'She didn't go to the graveside. Instead she went home, got changed'

'Arjean,' Fawn was calling her. Every time she heard her name it surprised her. She was in the colour bay.

'I'm in the colour bay,' she shouted, and in a second Fawn was in front of her, holding a towel and a comb.

'She's in the station by the coffee machine. I talked to her about shampoo and conditioner. They're in front of her on the section. Ruth Brown has arrived. Donna's getting her a cup of coffee.'

Arjean nodded.

'What are you doing here?' Fawn asked.

'Waiting,' Arjean said. 'Resting.'

'Donna was looking for you.' She handed Arjean the towel. 'I told her you popped out.'

Arjean nodded. 'How do the foils look?'

'Good,' Fawn said. 'Great. I'll come and dry her off when you're done. I'll be cleaning up, but just come and get me. Fuck Donna.'

Arjean nodded. Fuck Donna. She'd been brought in from one of the other salons. There was a floor manager, a hairdresser, but Donna was the desk manager. She hated it when they called her a receptionist, so they did. She was ten years younger than Arjean. Arjean hid from her constantly, not meaning to, she just found herself, like now, in the colour bay, staring at the rakes of maroon tubes and boxes of tubes. She hadn't been that strong before, and this whole business, the whole fucking business, had just left her bored.

She cut the foils. The woman talked and talked. About a holiday she was going on, Arjean thought, but maybe she'd already been, maybe she was back. Either way, Arjean nodded and smiled and kept cutting her hair. Spending as much time behind her as possible. When she finished, she shook the long thick hair and it throbbed into damp, heavy life. She looked over and caught Fawn's eye and raised her eyebrows. Donna was talking to Fawn. Fawn raised her eyebrows back at Arjean and nodded in a way that Donna wouldn't see.

'Fawn will be with you in a moment,' Arjean said. The woman nodded.

The walk home was in the dark. Fawn offered her a ride, but Arjean said she was fine. Some of them were going out. Arjean was fine. Who knew when Simon would be back? He could be on the other side of the world by now. Closer to where he was going. Her mind wandered when she walked home. She often found herself at the front door of her flat not remembering anything about the walk home. Had she waited for the cross signal? Had she talked to anyone? Tonight she found herself chanting. That's how deep it goes. Brainwashing.

Your brain needs washing. It's fucking filthy.

Why didn't he go back if he loved it so much? That look. He could blame her all he wanted, but he was as much to blame as she was. That look. Just go back. Don't sit here blaming her. Go back. Start again. A rock? An animal? Even a bug. How bad would it be? Like if he really, really felt it had been a mistake to leave, if he really wanted to put it right, he could. Karma isn't eternal. He's not his piakriti. None of us are. Especially not him. Not now.

He was free. He needed to act like a free man. We think we are the enjoyer of our life, she would say, but we're not. We think we're the controllers. But are the arms and the legs the enjoyer? Do the arms and legs control? No. The stomach. The stomach is the true enjoyer. He needed to make right. No matter what. She'd been thinking, chanting on it. He needed to stop and ask himself who he was, where he'd been and where he was going. It was as simple as that and then he could go there and he needed to stop fighting where that was. He wasn't the enjoyer or the controller. He should know that. 'Cause he'd tried that. We aren't our bodies. She almost said it out loud. Almost shouted it to the cars that drove past, so he could hear her, wherever he was.

She should go back.

For fuck's sake, it wasn't about her. It was about him. He should stop with the 'she should go back'. She was bhakti, not even a very good bhakti, wavering at best, confused, wandering; he was devotee. If anyone went back, and given his present circumstances, he should go back.

She said it all the time: they wouldn't have him, and what if they wouldn't have him.

Just go back, she said. Her phone was ringing as she got to her front door. 'Hello,' she said, just to stop the other infernal conversation. 'You killed him.' She hung up. He should go back. He should come back. They'd had a community, he and she, they'd had family and they'd shunned it so they could have each other. They'd acted like that was all that mattered, like that was in charge. He'd left his wife. He needed to come back, it wasn't right. He needed to come back as whatever it was he needed to come back as. Maybe a cat. Surely that would be fitting? Surely.

She was finally inside. Finally back to the cliff, the coast, underwater. The dirty green of it, the way it almost looked grey from the power of the tide and the debris it lifted and carried. Back to the things that lived in the sea, the ones people knew about and the others. The slipperiness it left on everything, the way an orca felt, the bottom of a stingray. The weather down there. The throb and thrust people mistook for quiet. The sharks that would eat you but not as fast as the killer whale. The perfect predator. Perfect. It would eat you. It would eat you for sure.

If it was hungry, if it was home, if you really truly wanted it to. It would pull you down again and again, letting you resurface just to give you long enough to gasp in, gasp, suck in enough air so you don't die, don't pass out, so you are awake to see the full might of it. So you know exactly what it can do, what it is doing. Then, maybe, it would let you go for a second, so you would flounder somewhere, some deep animal part of you flapping away. The surface maybe. Maybe you would try to reach the surface and then it would grab you again. With one move of its head, one twist, it would have you again and it would pull you down, down, and rip off your leg and catch you again and rip off your arm. Is my arm the enjoyer? And then it would crush your skull. And then move on. Feeling slightly fuller, not even satisfied by you. Your body. You can't blame the black fish, because that's its nature. And maybe it is your mother? Maybe it is any one of your mothers because of eternity, because of how deep eternity goes, how high, how you can't find any way around eternity, because you're stuck with it. ◊

'You can't blame the black fish, because that's its nature'

A REMEMBRANCE

We're Not in Tokoroa Any More

by Stella Duffy

There is a rugby match today, All Blacks versus Lions. I will make cheese scones so I can eat them with a beer. It is a way of watching the rugby with both of my parents present. It is a way of keeping them going, of keeping 'my' New Zealand going.

I was born in London to a New Zealand father and a south London mother. They made a family after the war and in 1967 they moved back to New Zealand. She had been as far as Anglesey before then, stationed there during the war while in the army, he was a prisoner of war for four years in Germany and had never stopped dreaming of home. He was going back, she was going forward, at a time when the journey was six weeks by ship, airmail letters took a week to arrive, when phone calls needed to be booked in advance and the cost was prohibitive. Middle of the night phone calls could never mean good news. She was 46 and brave, he was 46 and I watched him cry – my father who never cried – as the ship sailed along the east coast. At Wellington Harbour my mother saw the painted wooden houses on the hills, turned to my father and said 'It looks like Butlins, Tom.'

We stayed with my nana in Martinborough, and she told me off for being scared of a weta. Then we stayed with cousins on their sheep farm near Atiamuri, and when my parents found work at the pulp and paper mill of Kinleith, we moved to Tokoroa. To the first house my parents had ever owned. Then we got a dog.

When I tell people I grew up in New Zealand, they ask about the scenery. They'll tell me about their amazing visit to Te Papa, or this gallery, that film. They will speak of great meals, stunning hotels, beautiful views. But they won't speak of my new Zealand, they can't. It's not where the tourists go.

Sometimes, when I meet yet another Aucklander in London, I think it's not where New Zealanders go either. I mostly meet Aucklanders in London. Or people from Christchurch, Dunedin maybe, Wellington sometimes, very occasionally Hamilton. Almost always a city, hardly ever small town New Zealand, rural New Zealand. Demographically that makes sense, but it also means that there is something missing between us, national boundaries can never matter as much as personal geography. When we are from is as important as where, and where we are from is invariably defined by when. My New Zealand, the one of my growing up, my childhood, the one I walked into, sea-leg shaky, two months before my fifth birthday, is as much a place of when as of where.

When I give talks I sometimes ask if anyone in the audience has been to New Zealand. Half a dozen people will put up their hands, and I say, 'You've been to Rotorua, where the boiling mud pools are?' They nod. 'You've been to Taupo? Big lake, mountains?' They nod. They are proud of these nods, they like to know these places. I tell them that they drove through my town. Often I'll have the same conversation with New Zealanders in London. Many will have driven through my town, on their way to somewhere else, that happens when you grow up just off State Highway 1. But for some of us, especially in the 60s and 70s, childhood was all about small town, even New Zealand cities were kind of small town back then. Tokoroa, with it's high Maori and Polynesian population was a special type of small town, and I was lucky to be part of it.

This means that my New Zealand isn't gorgeous baches with elegant art to enhance the view, it's not dinners in Wellington or theatre in Auckland, it's not even the Southern Alps or vibrant, post-earthquake Christchurch. Much as I love the Pacific, and miss the land with a true ache, the mountains and the ocean are not my New Zealand either.

My New Zealand is my mum making pikelets and the just-made raspberry jam that goes with those pikelets, raspberries my dad grew in the back garden. It is the smell of a roasting joint (hogget, my uncle is a sheep farmer) while watching the rugby, my dad's bottle of Waikato on the table, mum running from the kitchen, tea-towel in hand, whenever he'd roar

'Pass the bloody ball!' It is the ANZAC Day dawn parade, listening as my dad, the RSA president, intones, 'We will remember them.'

My New Zealand is the particular smell of candyfloss, watermelon and teenage passion, at the A&P show, cut through with pine woodchips from the chopping competitions. It is knowing today will have a high blue sky, all day, because the sharp frost is minus ten degrees and the smell of the mill is strong, and only a southerly brings those sunny winter days, and that stink. It is walking past the pub on a Friday night and crossing the road because a fight will spill out any minute.

It is the Samoan choir at church one week and the pakeha/palangi one the next, all nations sitting side by side in the pews. It is a feed of pipi brought home by the Gilberts next door, Arawa both. It is loud, late parties down the road, tents in the back yard and the ringy-dickey guitar as from the show. It is borrowing books from the library because although we had books at home, that one bookshelf-full went fast and there was so much more to know, to read and even if we'd had the money for more books, there was nowhere to keep them in the tiny weatherboard house that looked like all the others. ('Butlins, Tom.')

My New Zealand is short drives to the lake, longer ones to Papamoa and Maketu, decades before beaches became designer cafés and flat whites. It is the long winding journey down to the Wairarapa to the cousins, stopping in at Marton to see Aunt on the way (she was an aunt, they called her Aunt), eating her girdle scones that have never tasted as good, anywhere, since. It is also, years later, my Aunty Pat (a different aunt) sitting in the carport with her flagon of beer, saying, 'Have you seen what they've done to your nana's pub?' My nana owned the Martinborough Hotel in a time of six o'clock swills. kid wanting me to stop and play. 'Hey girlie, you wanna play tiggie?' It's games having seasons – marbles, hopscotch, four-square. It is playing in half a dozen front yards, eight kids from our street, all of us barefoot, games of kickball until the street lights come on and the dew makes running hard, slippery, cold.

It is dad getting me out of bed to come and look at the Southern Cross and hear again how he would look up when he was a PoW and dream of seeing these stars, this sky.

It is my south London mother, already a great baker, using the Edmond's Cookbook to 'get it right' for her kiwi friends.

It is knowing how to pronounce Tokoroa long before we became 'multicultural', when that was just who we were, saying it right because it sounds better that way.

It is knowing where I'm from. Woolwich and Tokoroa. Not Britain and New Zealand, but Woolwich and Tokoroa,

'My New Zealand is short drives to the lake'

strum of a neighbour's cousin, playing long into the night. It is going to school with kids who are Maori, Niuean, Tongan, Samoan, Cook Island, Swiss, Dutch, Welsh, Swedish, Scots, Irish, German, many of them speaking English at school and their other languages at home. It is all of our dads and most of our mums working at the mill. It is watching my dad take salt tablets to replace the fluid lost in an eight hour shift on a non-functioning boiler, and the new burns all over his hands. It is climbing Titiraupenga on a YMCA camp, Pohaturoa with the neighbours, swimming across Whakamaru at fourteen – just to see if I could. It is listening to my union-man dad argue ferocious Labour/National politics with his farmer brother. It is Little Theatre and Operatic Society plays twice a year being all I know of theatre, and then taking the long bus ride to Auckland with my mum to 'see a show', home at two in the morning, thrilled from the city as much Aunty Pat didn't sound as if she thought the shiny new was much of an improvement.

It is going to the bach with the cousins when I was little and going again just this year, eating crays that taste as good as ever, with beer and wine that might be a bit fancier, but the singing and guitar-playing and the view from the Cape Palliser bach still wild, that sea never-changing, ever-changing. It is the bach built by my uncle and grandfather on land our family never owned, land that will soon revert to the owners, leaving them to parcel it up and sell for a vast amount. That view is worth a vast amount. Fair enough too, but we'll always have the sepia images of my nana and granddad first camping there, and then building a two-room bach where nana cooked on the fire. It's a four room bach now and no more flash. I bless my cousins for leaving the formica intact.

My New Zealand is walking down the street and being called 'girlie' by another south London and south Waikato. And knowing that most of the things I describe above only exist in memory, in a scent I almost catch and then lose again – damp bush, lake weed, potato fritters, frost and wood smoke.

It is knowing that these are the good memories and there are darker ones I choose not to commit to paper.

It is knowing that these good memories make me sad when I fly in to Auckland airport, because I cannot have them again, people have died, times have changed, the world is different. And yet, a potato-topped pie can still do it. The smell of orange chocolate-chip ice cream. A flighty fantail. You can never go home, but there are tastes of it, scents of it, sometimes. And sometimes will have to do.

There is a match starting soon, I need to get the scones in the oven. The roar of the crowd, the beginning of a commentary, beer in one hand, plate of hot cheese scones. The haka. Yeah, that'll do. ◊

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