

**TEXT prose****Phillip Edmonds*****Down the Mountain***

Shawn counted free-standing trees on his train trips to the city – he loved them no matter how scungy they were, or how boxed in and harnessed in backyards or designated bush reserves. They had shifted him to a city office away from his job as a ranger in the rainforest with wombats, kangaroos and different types of snake but he told himself to relax about the dislocation. The other passengers were mothers, with their hands full with toddlers and their distractions, stressed men performing calculations on iPads, and a few Chinese tourists photographing the world. Closer to the city, school children came on clutching sporting equipment and suburbs became denser, more crowded. The traffic was chaotic.

The trip took an hour and a half from newly minted places where residents could catch a glimpse of the sea, across working class semi-detached units and dilapidated public housing then into the inner city where being cramped and closed in had become convenient and fashionable.

Shawn imagined what it was like back on the mountain at that time of day; the odd car as parents dropped their kids off at school, swinging arcs of birds, and a few eagles setting out, huge trees, and places where white fellas shouldn't go. It was a part of his mind that hadn't been colonised or filled in. He also began to recall why he loved the place and the reason he was always called back to it.

\* \* \*

Even though most of the mountainous hinterland away from the coast had remained relatively untouched over the years, soft clichés had taken over the rest – eco resorts, houses with pacific ocean views, cute lifestyle cafes; 'untouched' rain forests; a whole range of ethical others validating business below. Shawn had lived there for years (as had his parents) and he went to the primary school on the crest of the mountain. He would always wander the back tracks finding animal scats and markings.

There were also other things up there, so they said; the Yowie, an elusive creature, dating back into aboriginal dreamtime, which farmers had seen in the half light of dusk, loping along and then disappearing into the bush. Some said, 'he' looked half man, half kangaroo, with luminous eyes and giant limbs – one of those stories that seemed to have been made up to suggest that Australia hasn't been totally tamed; thank God there was something we still couldn't control.

The irony, in this case was that Shawn had seen one when he was fourteen, way up a bush track, where there hadn't been a sound other than the cracking of a few twigs under foot. That day he was with a mate and it was also

dusk, and there was just enough light to encourage doubters and that part of the mind that needs logic. Always after that he noted the entrance to the track where it went sideways from the main road and a new cutting put in place after heavy rain. Shawn didn't want to tell anyone else, especially his tradie mates, as that might make it real which might encourage more interlopers. The secret though had got out to a few friends.

Intruders like the motorcyclists who made the road up the mountain a racetrack on weekends as they defied the hair-pinned bends and on-coming cars, creating enough noise to frighten away any yowies that were left. Relaxing at a coffee shop half way up the mountain, they compared close shaves, fiddled with their helmets and swaggered about in their leathers. And they gathered at a pub at the foot of the mountain, arranging their bikes in circles, and exchanging stories. 'We beat it today,' they told each other, as if the ride was one of the last frontiers. An uncharitable observer would have said, 'O really – some people shouldn't be allowed to travel'.

Shawn was always excited talking about the nature on the mountain; he laughed at his own allusions and how, like all the growth on the ground, they spread sideways, that there were linking stories, if only we were open to hearing them. Sometimes, he seemed terse, because he couldn't understand how others weren't as passionate as he was. Almost out of character he'd often forcefully say: 'I KNOW the place'. He had always confided in friends about his desire to write about it, and he had published a few bits, but apart from his day job, his kids, and his general enthusiasm, the energy hadn't been able to build up enough to take it anywhere.

Warwick, a mate from interstate (who wrote a bit) used to visit, even though he found the mountain road frightening, because he was used to flat places, where he could usually see what was coming, but he was always encouraging about the writing probably because he knew that there still weren't enough redemptive stories told by white men about 'country', by sometimes quoting a fishing friend of Shawn's who was also into stories of renewal. Warwick also knew that stories weren't 'about' anything as such.

Yet, one day, he told Shawn to shut up and not apologise anymore for his lack of confidence. Their banter had been all pervasive, sometimes touching at the edge of being unable to even approach the enormity of such a task. Shawn had been laughing at the end of most of his sentences, giggling and deflecting attention, and Warwick had heard the stories of people who wanted to write if only they had the time (and even though sympathetic) he was exasperated as it sounded a bit too much like his own laziness. Maybe Shawn was afraid of being alone, the loneliness of sitting with himself?

He was home, receiving the instant affection of his two children, their banter competing with the birds on the balcony and splashing from the swimming pool when Warwick said, 'You know like most people, your children are your books', a mushy thought he'd been entertaining for a long time. Perhaps it was his way of trying to find out where love comes from, and where it finally goes.

Shawn had always made notes, but his filing system always failed as he prided himself on being spontaneous, so on the whole, his idea of writing swung around a fulcrum of only doing it when he felt passionate. He could entertain friends with marvellous stories about the mating habits of birds, the signs to look for when investigating migratory ones; basically, why animals did things, and they were attentive as much as anyone could be surrounded by mobile phones and computer games. Warwick said, 'You shouldn't talk about it

so much, you'll exhaust the moment,' but Shawn always kept going, as he knew that he had to speak out for endangered species, and for that which we take for granted.

In any case, he enrolled in a 'nature writing' course at the local library. The convener was an author who had a successful book based on a rainforest further north, and she saw the brimming life force in him. The other participants seemed to think that 'nature writing' was a good idea, and that was fine, but there was something indelible in her gorgeous portraits of owls and her delight in describing how rainbow lorikeets love to chat. 'It's all to do with the eye, whether you can trust yourself to see past the surface,' she added, as she illustrated her point with some of her ink wash paintings, where distance and objects were fused, and she also asked everyone whether they were able to take the point beyond their initial enthusiasm.

But Shawn was like friends who were struggling to survive, some driving up and down the mountain every day to work, or to ferry their kids to school; such was the price of living with nature, so it was hard to explain to his practical mates that there was another world, and to write about it legitimate, if there was little money involved. Warwick was always Zen about the task with clichés such as 'It is a marathon not a sprint', but Shawn's mates had concerned disbelief in their eyes.

Yet he was determined to take something from the workshop, instead of it being just another intellectual shopping trip of some kind, so he created a filing system to clear the mind of initial digressions, and to hopefully create a list of possibilities with headings such as, 'What to concentrate on?', 'What do I want to say?'

Robert and Ruth, his nearest neighbours on the mountain were enthused by the prospect of such organization as they had heard him going on and on at barbecues about his love of the place, and the need to get it down. Shawn had also been talking a lot about how distressed some white men and women are about wanting 'country', 'so much so they have to build everywhere to show us they are here, and they make a lot of noise doing it'. In more alcohol-fuelled moments he even repeated the refrain, 'The city has won', but it was more huff and puff than anything else as he knew that the land could never be totally defeated. The signs were there – the violent storms and the long dry spells of climate change, even on his mountain.

But Robert didn't quite understand what was at stake, because for him everything should be like his new addition to the house which opened up the possibility of a better view of the ranges from the dining room, and he was a driven man who was in search of specific explanations. His happiness then was always external, and it was no co-incidence that he had met a lost American (almost a mirror image of himself) in the Numinbah valley, who was into molecular biology, whose impatience was palpable. So, he set off to make Shawn into a successful author, and said he would organize for a publisher to meet him.

He told Shawn that he'd set it up, at the pub at the foot of the mountain, where yowie stories have been told. Somehow he knew a bloke who published books in Brisbane that were about 'searching'. He told Shawn that he'd ring him when he had a convenient date. 'You know, mate, he might be interested in your encounter with the yowie, it could be a bestseller as it has a hook, and a mystery to unravel.' Robert just wanted to solve the problem of Shawn's frustrated creativity in ways that only he could understand – be forthright,

research the market and try to create media interest where people are screaming for attention.

But the meeting with the publisher didn't come to much. The publisher arrived with his laptop, and of course, his mobile which rang constantly, giving the impression that he was sought after and always in motion. He was someone who thought to stay still would have been a death wish.

Shawn explained that he had hundreds of stories to tell to people who might listen, and on the question of writing about when he saw the yowie, he doubted whether it would work as there had been hundreds of such encounters over the years and that he was a ranger and he wasn't famous.

On a wall above the bar there were yellowing press cuttings, and a newspaper report of the day the Channel 7 chopper landed in the hotel car park, when they briefly needed a story about ancient Australia. But it really was just another story of conquest, so he told the publisher that, if he wasn't interested in some of his observations about the native animals and the illegal tree clearing that'd been going on, then he would go home and he was also changing his job and returning to work at an animal shelter near the mountain.

Also, that indigenous people had already told the story, so we should leave it alone, adding, 'I'm going home, up the mountain, but my eyes will be on the ground. I can't contain any of these stories – they aren't just mine'.

*Phillip Edmonds taught creative writing at Griffith University and the University of Adelaide. He was the editor of Wet Ink: the magazine of new writing between 2005 and 2012. His most recent books are Tilting at Windmills: The literary magazine in Australia, 1968- 2012 (University of Adelaide Press, 2015) and the short story collection The Soapbox (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018).*

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## TEXT

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**General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins**

**Creative works editor: Anthony Lawrence**  
**[text@textjournal.com.au](mailto:text@textjournal.com.au)**

**TEXT poetry**

**Timothy Loveday**

***Sunlight***

How do we know  
When it is done?  
Says the little  
Writer in me.

And  
the response  
I get  
So full  
Of fret  
Is that  
Of course  
It never is.

So I sit in the parks  
Watching the pigeons  
Peck and puzzle  
Over abandoned boxes  
Of cold, oily chips;  
Watch as half thought  
Winds  
Map the jitters  
Of angry leaves  
Throwing oscillating  
Shadows  
Over tear-drop  
Ponds;  
Watch the sweat  
Crest a knuckle,  
Descend a forefinger,  
Bloom upon  
A thumb so  
Caked with earth  
That forgotten  
Gardens are in  
Awe of me.

Sunlight. Sunlight. Heat thumping in my temples.

And sometimes  
While I drink and smoke  
And talk of beautiful women

And men so mad with envy  
 And loving and self-loathing,  
 So beautiful in their own self-right,  
 Muscular, taut, antithesis of weakness;  
 Things proposed in fiction, purely,  
 In their naked innocence,  
 Sunlight in their ego  
 Sunlight in their idiocy  
 Sunlight in their tragic self pursuit,  
 Then  
 I get to thinking  
 I cannot write,  
 The poems are too big,  
 The people are too real,  
 The city and the parks and the waterways, the shadows of trees moving past  
 me,  
 And even the damn pigeons, so clucky and cunning and confused,  
 Singing, singing  
 Foolishly  
 Of the sunlight raining  
 Through the holes  
 In my shoes  
 And the dance  
 Of the toes  
 Ready to go  
 And the movements  
 Of things  
 I cannot possibly know  
 Except that  
 Sunlight illuminates  
 Us all  
 And steals us from the stories  
 Of the night.

And if I can  
 Pinpoint  
 A tickling  
 Armpit,  
 Or a sapling surrendered  
 To the roots growing inward,  
 Or a magnanimous, magnificent  
 Moment  
 Where the sunlight primely  
 Distorts into being  
 The abrupt simplicity  
 Of a high-speed collision,  
 The elegance  
 Of a paw of smoke  
 And the immense strength  
 Of winter's cloud  
 Rising in shades of lilac,  
 Well then,  
 Ofcourse,  
 My voice  
 Is always  
 Thinking.

This poetry  
Put simply  
Is overwhelming.

But  
On occasion  
Rare as they might be  
Today perhaps, tomorrow almost certainly,  
There is a sweet and dire connection  
Between the writer and the wordless.  
For when I cannot say it straight  
It comes like hapless poetry,  
The sunlight thrumming through me.

*Tim Loveday is a support worker, writer and poet. His experiences of homelessness motivated his tertiary education in Disability Studies. His work has been published in The Big Issue, Brain drip, Tharunka, Blitz, and by SpitBomb Publishing. He currently resides in Culburra, traditional land of the Jerringa People.*

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**TEXT prose****Susan Presto*****The poethical wager***

At first she thought that if she stood very still for long enough, the plants would resume communication. It began to become apparent however, when no breeze was present, that they never stopped. Through close observation and measurement, grew an understanding of the ways in which this happened. (15)

The only measurement unable to be logged efficiently was that of time. If she looked at the clock as she left the house, and then again when she returned, the hours never added up. Something happened to time that could not be explained by logic or sense.

As her garden began to flourish through her care, she began to neglect appointments and deadlines in a way that was foreign to her life before. Life outside the garden would inevitably require attention, but as the garden's only carer, it's sulky response to her absence made her feel very guilty. In attempts to make up for lost time, she worked harder and missed the first signs. (10)

The beguilement would grow and wane as the patterns of growth and bloom were tamed, but the sense of responsibility never left her. Regularly a new species would be introduced. (4)  
This plant would receive her very divided attention, but special care, until she grew to understand its nuances and how to make it give everything it had in response to her careful manipulation.  
One day her phone buzzed in her pocket, she'd been missing a lot of appointments lately. Instead of finding a phone, she found a beetle buzzing a ring tone in her hand. Things were still so fresh and innocent then, so she passed her suspicion off as hormones and stopped charging her phone.

Soon every space was filled and the line from one plant to another blurred until it became one thing. She felt a charge of power every time her fingers touched the moist dirt to push a seed into its depths, so she kept going. The sense of hope and expectation was heady.

When the first tiny shoots reached up into the sunshine, she took it personally. She barely slept waiting to see if they would live or die. (9)

And the garden inevitably responded to every little touch and consideration. She grew in patience as she experienced the slow burning return of the love she gave.

Every week her compost would produce enough fertiliser to nourish the roots and the leaves. Anything that would enhance growth and vigour would be applied in carefully measured amounts and everything vigorously grew. Insects and bugs arrived in happy numbers, followed dangerously close behind by the birds.



There seemed no maximum capacity.  
Capacity grew. (4)

At first she thought it may have been her imagination, however, she could have sworn the plants leaned towards her as she passed by. (7)  
Each plant grew strong and tall, even for their own characteristics, and she felt their leaves brush against her, reach for her, as she passed.  
She smiled at the thought that they were vying for her attention.  
She could have sworn the crab apple grabbed her sleeve as she went by with a watering can of fish emulsion. Her sleeve had snagged in a branch and before unsnagging, she automatically turned and applied the emulsion to the plant.  
She found herself freed from the branch, and wandered off. It had become an undefinable space with light and shadow and places of dappled brightness that moved, and confused the senses. It wasn't until later, when she went to look for the rip that should have been there, that she began to ponder the relationship she'd been cultivating. She learnt to step widely when passing the crab apple, and stopped wearing clothes.

Barefoot, she could enjoy the rubbery grasp of parsley and the heavy soporific aroma of oregano as it threw itself under her feet and stained her toes.  
Autumn came and the jacaranda leaves rained upon everything in soft random peltings.

They threw themselves downward, hundreds at a time, on her bent back and arms as she worked. Other times, one random leaf would land, with the lightest of touches, catching her breath. Sometimes she found herself, eyes closed and motionless, mesmerised by the tickly fall of the tiny leaves on her skin, the wavering light and shade making patterns through her eyelids. All thoughts disappeared, and when she finally opened her eyes she had to untangle the sweet peas that had wound tendrils round her toes and ankles.  
Walking back inside, she felt too big for the ceiling and walls and although she was starving, the food she had in her house didn't look or smell like it.  
Friends and family complained, but in disappointment more than anger.  
They weren't worried, but seeds of doubt had been sown inside her.

The breeze rustling the lilies outside her window woke her up.  
They crowded at her widow and tapped on the glass with their heavily veined thick green leaves. Gigantic white single-petaled flowers stood above and separate. At their centre the heaviness of a long thick stamen bobbed around on an unlikely stem. She understood it was their turn for some attention.

Digging at the base of the plant was not easy. The dense growth made for some tough old patches and she threw her back into it. Yanking on a difficult patch which gave way suddenly, found her flat on her back. (9) It was a surprisingly soft landing and she was pleased to see none of the majestic flower-heads had been caught under her.

She got up slowly, enjoying the tug of the leaves on her skin as she dusted herself off. The nodding heads of the lilies tapped at her shoulders and back. She closed her eyes and tried to break down the scents the breeze carried to her. Rosemary was strong, she'd obviously landed on it, and her body was stained with it. Every time she moved it refreshed the intensity. There was the more subtle smell of the ginger plant she must have crushed as she fell. (7) She knew if she moved her foot it would rise again, so she didn't move. The plants around her caressed her skin softly, rustlings and creaking, filled the air gently. She wondered if she could have died and never known about this world, and how much less a life it would have been.

The breeze could have picked up.

She couldn't be sure, she didn't open her eyes, but felt the tap tap tap of the lilies more insistently. She had never denied her garden anything, so of course she stepped back slowly into their embrace. The tapping grew stronger and it seemed as if she was Mother Nature (9) as she bent just slightly to allow the insistent persistence what it clearly wanted. She gave herself over to the sensation, telling herself she was still in charge, and she succumbed to the earth and the sky and the sun, which seemed to have been grooming her for exactly this moment. (10)

She woke when it was dark and watched the plants separate for her as she made her way inside and onto her bed where she slept until the sound of the Jacaranda knocking on the roof woke her up. The bed was covered in rich golden pollen. (10, 9)

There were tiny leaves entangled in her hair and embedded in her skin.

She tried to brush them off but they didn't move. (4, 7, 1, 2, 3)

She plucked a single leaf from her hand, and stopped at the sight of blood and the sensation of pain.

The wind picked up or the branches scratched against the roof and the walls. She looked around at the ceiling and the floors and saw that they had held her in.

She walked back out into the plants and felt their gentle encouragement pushing her along the garden path and out through the gate, and the tiny hairs covering her body captured their essence and took her with them.

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## TEXT prose

### Oliver Wakelin

#### *Island*

Last week I watched the water lap at the bottom of the pylons at the wharf at Church Point while I waited for my brother Andrew. I had questions to ask him. I'd been given the eviction notice. Things were finally serious. The effort to earn the bulk of my income through my creative endeavors no longer seemed possible.

The water was all glittery and sparkling like a sheet of undulating broken glass. All these variegated greens and blues. Below my feet it was crystal clear.

I saw fish swimming down there. Turning abruptly. Just floating. I guessed they were bream and maybe poddy mullet.

Men drank and smoked on the wharf behind me.

I heard the sound that children make. The screams and the laughter. The sudden tantrums.

I looked to my left at the restaurant on the next wharf along. I watched families stumble out of there after boozy lunches. I thought about living life on Pittwater. There were pubs and shops and restaurants around the water's edge. I thought about ferrying around in your own microcosm.

The breeze whipped up and was fresh and cool on my skin. The salty smell of the brine made my mouth water.

I looked at my feet as they hovered an inch above the water. The tide came in slow. I kept a watch on the inch between the soles of my shoes and the little waves.

Time passed and then I heard my brother call out. I turned, heavy with sweat. I watched him bound towards me, full of that bonhomie. A little smile and nod for each person he passed.

We shook hands with our chests thrust out and then looked over the water, hands on hips. We commented on things we could see. The island. The boats. The turquoise water. The canopies of the eucalypts blowing on the island in the on-shore breeze.

We walked to my car. I'd parked by the beach. I pulled my inflatable boat out and we carried it between us onto the sand. I looked up at a rusty runabout in the shallow water that was chained to a buoy. It looked like it had been there for ages, like a picture of a boat on a postcard.

It made me think of the way decay can be romantic. I'd heard at Uni about European aristocrats who had ruins installed on their estates in the

nineteenth century. The way so many literary works are grounded in sadness. So many authors begin their stories with loss. That sweet, melancholy emotion. The ruins gave the sense of life in the shadow of a greater civilisation that had passed. The feeling must have been around a lot in the middle ages.

I started to inflate the little tender using a foot pump. I pulled the boat into the shade of a Norfolk pine. It was easier out of the heat. The air chambers were separated in case of puncture. If you got a puncture only one third was meant to deflate.

I thought of the scene in the film *Titanic* where it's explained that the compartmentalised design of the hull makes the ship unsinkable. I knew creative writing often felt the most stimulating when I sensed I was learning.

I said, 'OK. By law we have to take a bucket, a torch, the anchor, fishing license, a whistle, life jackets and the paddles.'

Andrew said, 'Will we use the anchor?'

'We're supposed to take it. Should be alright without it. I'll put it in the car. We're gonna sit low in the water anyway.'

I took the extraneous equipment back to the car and we took off our shoes and rolled up our jeans. Andrew jumped in and I pushed the boat further and rolled over the side.

I lifted the three horse power motor off the floor and attached it to the plastic transom. I lowered the propeller into the water. I primed the motor and pulled the chord. It started on the second pull.

I knew a part of my consciousness was taking in the details of the day, aware that I might later attempt to capture the moment in a short story.

I lowered the revs and pushed down on the lever that shifted the motor out of neutral. It bit into gear with a clunk and the boat lurched. I sat to the left of the motor and piloted us into the deeper channel between Scotland Island and Church Point. The water cooled and the colour changed from golden, to green, to blue, then darker blues and black.

It was twenty-five degrees in the early afternoon. The tide had begun to turn and the drift was slow. No surging tidal waters to contend with. I had a feeling of isolation. Of *getting away*. Leaving it behind.

I hadn't ever had that feeling more strongly than when I took that little boat out on the water and cut ties with the land, as a captain. The sense of potential adventure. It had something to do with the factors that determined my immediate fate being largely within my control. Whereas on land they seemed vast and untamable. Controlled by central bankers or geopolitical strategists. Perhaps this was also part of the allure of fiction writing: gaining control of all the factors in a world.

It was also the small but niggling feeling of mortal danger that focused my mind, like with skiing. The bond between risk, adrenaline and fun. Things were usually of interest when they were a little bit dangerous, also perhaps true of fiction.

I shouted over the sound of the motor, 'Pittwater's an estuary. So there aren't waves. And the island's stopping them too.'

Andrew nodded, puckered his lips, squinted. I looked at the water that rushed by the side of the tender. I put my hand out and let it drag in the coolness, the water between my fingers.

The outboard performed well. I moved the lever into *wide open throttle*. The roar increased and we sped up.

After we'd made our way halfway round the island I slowed us down and yelled, 'You're lucky if you know what you want.'

'What do you mean?'

Andrew is a practical guy in his mid twenties. A PhD candidate at UNSW. His work involves medicine and physics. Working out the forces that apply to the human body or something. That's all I know. I killed the engine.

I said, 'If you know what you want then you can go after it, and feel good when you get it, or feel bad when you don't.'

He said, 'So you don't know what you want?'

I figured he was up for the challenge.

'Yeah, that's what I'm saying, I think. I've come off track.'

It was clear this was an ambush but I was keen for level-headed advice. I stuck a hand in one of the bags and pulled out a packet of larger hooks. I dug a couple out, being careful not to drop them on the inflated floor. There was a layer of plastic on top of the hull, but if one of the hooks fell onto the rubber sides of the tender I reckoned there was a good chance it might pop.

Andrew said, 'Didn't you know what you wanted to do once?'

He removed one of the hand-lines from my blue bucket. It had lots of tiny hooks that were hard to keep track of.

I said, 'Careful with the hooks.'

Andrew said, 'Fishing in an inflatable boat.'

'I know.'

I looked up and watched a huge speedboat about a hundred metres away as it disappeared around the north side of the island. It moved quickly.

I said, 'I thought I knew what I wanted once.'

'Remember when you used to do things?'

'I thought I knew what I wanted then, but it turns out I don't want those things.'

'That's a shame.'

'When I don't want anything, I reckon it's hard to know what to do.'

'You must want some things.'

'Life's all about desire I reckon. If you've got desire you're lucky, because your purpose is obvious. Go after what you want.'

Andrew said, 'Some people just do their best. That's what they've been doing all along. Getting up and doing their best each day.'

'What's my best then?'

'I don't know. Only you know. Could start with getting a job.'

'What if I do my best at something, but then hate it. Work out I don't want it?'

'You have to chose something to want then.'

I asked, 'Does it work like that?'

'It can. You'll have to go big picture. You're not supposed to enjoy every moment of work. That's why it's called *work*. And not *play*.'

'That's called the Cargo Wharf on the maps,' I said and pointed to a reinforced structure by the shore. 'Probably for getting building material onto the island.'

Perhaps it was still operational regardless of its rusted, broken down appearance.

I threaded a good sized hook through the eye of a frozen pilchard and then a second one through its back. I didn't attach any lead.

I dropped it over the side and fed out line for what felt like a long time. I locked off the bail. I grasped the fishing rod tight and wondered if a strike would come quick, as I usually did at new locations. After a minute I handed that rod to Andrew.

'Are you sure?' he asked.

'Yes, of course.'

I loved the appreciation non-fishers – 'lay people' or 'land lubbers' – showed when I handed over operational fishing rods. We both sat and looked at the blue water.

'I wonder how deep it is,' Andrew said.

'I wonder if there's anything really big swimming around at the bottom.'

'Sharks.'

I thought about how writers plumb the depths of the subconscious for dangerous, interesting items. I noticed we were drifting towards one of the rusty pylons and I said, 'Maybe we could have used the anchor after all.'

I felt the bottom starting to go out of things.

I asked, 'What if you choose something and try to get it and then decide you don't want it?'

'Then you'd be where you are now.'

'Exactly. I've done it wrong.'

‘Nah. When you were writing, pursuing the writing, you looked like you were having a good time.’

‘I thought it would lead to something.’

‘Why didn’t it?’

‘I don’t know. It stopped making sense. Couldn’t visualize an audience anymore. Couldn’t remember why it was worthwhile. And I reckon sometimes the closer you study something the less magical it gets. As you understand its rules. It seems more mechanical. Its mystery stops working on you. Like seeing how magic tricks work.’

‘So you don’t like writing anymore. You could still tutor in it or something. You just have to get out there and do something. You’re pretty competitive. You probably need a structured environment. Then you would compete inside it.’

‘Great. A structured environment. That’s what it’s come down to. Six years of tertiary education and I need a structured environment. Do *you* need a structured environment?’

‘Sometimes. You know regular people work to earn money. It’d be nice to spend all day talking about our feelings but some of us suppress that urge in order to buy a house. To support our families and ourselves. Get it? Does that make sense?’

I said, ‘It’s different for you. In your field of work things are either correct or incorrect.’

Andrew said, ‘Your first priority is to buy a house. You know, be a man. Provide. Any of this coming through?’

I said, ‘So you think I’m failing? Or I’ve failed?’

Andrew said, ‘It looks like that, doesn’t it? It’s starting to look like that. But it’s not over. You can start any time. The way everyone else – ’

A siren wailed close behind me and made me jump. I turned and watched as a police boat approached. It was a forty-footer, with four enormous engines on the back. It looked like a big toy.

‘Hallo. Fishing are we? Any luck?’ called a young officer on the deck. He was holding a clipboard.

I said, ‘No luck. Any tips?’

The young bloke guffawed. He turned around to look at the officer behind him. The senior man had his arms folded across his chest and dark aviator glasses obscured his eyes. He didn’t laugh. The young man dropped his smile and turned back to face us.

‘We’re just going to perform a couple of checks.’

‘Go for it,’ I said.

The bloke glanced at his clipboard. Then his white pen dribbled out of his hand. It bounced off the side of the bulwark and tumbled slowly through the air before it splashed into the water. We all watched it become fainter, as it swung from side to side.



He said, 'Sorry, Greg. I lost my pen.'

The senior officer sighed. He took a pen from his shirt pocket and handed it over.

'Cheers. Right. You fellas got a bucket?'

'Yep,' I said.

I held up the bucket.

'Nice,' the officer said.

He looked surprised and ticked something on the form.

'Whistle?'

'Yes.'

I pulled the whistle out of the bucket.

'Very nice.'

He looked back at his boss whose face was totally inscrutable.

'Torch? Life jackets.'

'Yes.'

I held them up.

'Good. Not wearing them?'

I said, 'I thought you only had to wear them if you were in the boat by yourself.'

The young man looked back and the senior officer nodded slowly. When the young man turned back around, the senior officer shook his head.

The young man said, 'Very good. I can see your oars. You fellas have done well.'

The older man sighed and came to the edge of the boat. He said, 'Both got valid fishing licenses?'

'I've got one,' I said, pulling my wallet out of my pocket and holding the license out. It would have been difficult to get it to him. We were about five metres apart.

'When does it expire?'

I looked at the date.

I said, 'Last week.'

I looked at Andrew apologetically. He shrugged.

Andrew said, 'Nearly.'

'What's that?' the senior officer said.

‘Just that we nearly made it,’ Andrew said.

‘And let’s see your anchor,’ the officer said.

I sighed.

‘It’s over there,’ I said, and pointed. ‘In the boot of my car.’

He said, ‘This is a four hundred dollar on the spot fine.’

The young officer looked on, lips pulled tight in an apologetic grimace.

‘Damn,’ I said.

We sat in the boat quietly, resigned to whatever came. There was an extended silence. I started to think I was supposed to say something, but couldn’t think what. The silence dragged on. The two officers looked at each other.

The stern one sighed really loud again.

He said, ‘Look, we need to be heading to the other side of the island. We’ll be back within half an hour. If you’re still here we are going to have a problem. You understand?’

‘Yes officer,’ I said. ‘Thank you.’

‘Alright then.’

The young bloke didn’t say anything. He handed back the pen. Tapped his fingers loudly on the clip board.

The old fella walked to the front of the boat and called back over his shoulder, ‘Half an hour.’

The boat started up with a roar and moved off. It left churning eddies in its wake. We watched it go.

Andrew said, ‘We must have looked like a couple of sitting ducks. They didn’t reckon we were going to have a single thing on that list.’

I reeled in the two lines we had out. The police boat disappeared behind the island. Andrew sat on the metal seat in the middle of the tender. I shuffled down to sit next to the motor.

‘So I guess I’ll try to supplement my creative income,’ I said.

‘Everyone’s trying to supplement their income,’ Andrew said.

Andrew had his chin in his palm, and stared towards the island and across to the expensive and sheltered estates in Lovett Bay. I thought about the way something as natural as fishing has so many rules. Was creative writing the same? Did it also have these invisible, counter intuitive strictures? I pushed the choke lever up, pulled the cord on the motor and steered us back towards the beach at Church Point.

*Oliver Wakelin is an Australian, Sydney-based writer who grew up in Dublin, and also lived for a while in London. His novel Aos Si was long listed for the Kill Your Darlings Unpublished Manuscript Award. A short story of his has appeared on the Seizure website, and a poem in Hermes. In 2018 he completed a law degree at University of Sydney, and began work on his third novel. He is currently a PhD candidate in Creative Practice at University of New South Wales, and a fiction reader at Overland literary journal.*

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**TEXT**

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***Boots and Beats:  
Musical Time-travel through Car Boots***

**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

Billy, an adventurous young boy  
George, an elderly vendor  
young woman

Frank, George's younger brother  
Janet, a hippie  
Richard, Janet's friend  
Johnny, a wealthy investor  
old  
Kathy, Johnny's partner

Jenny, a single mother  
Jessica, a middle-class

Gazza, a bogan  
Jay, a wanna-be gangster  
Alicia, an idealist  
Sophia, an eighteen-year-old

Nathan, Sophia's boyfriend

**SCENE**—*A car boot sale in a field. About two thousand people.*

**SCENE I**—*A strip of well-kept old cars: FX and FJ Holdens, Volkswagen Beetles and Ford Prefects, among others. George, wearing a plain polo shirt, leans proudly on his sky blue and white FJ Holden with Venetian blinds—boot packed with vinyl records. Blues music plays through the transistor radio. Billy wanders among the cars.*

*George.* Here, boy! Unless you're buying a record, you ought'a learn how we did things in the '50s.

*Billy.* I don't have much time.

*Enter Frank, sporting a Beatles t-shirt and round glasses.*

*Frank.* That makes two of us.

*George chuckles and clears his throat.*

*George.* Down at an English fair, one evening I was there. When I heard a showman shouting underneath the flare: I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts. Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head. Do you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa? Or is this your way to hide a broken heart? There's a line between love and fascination. For they both give the very same sensation when you're lost in the magic of a kiss. Must I forever be a beggar, whose golden dreams will not come true?

For love may come and tap you on the shoulder some starless night. But April love can slip right through your fingers. So if she's the one don't let her run away. This love will last, though years may go. Last Saturday night I got married. Now me and my wife are parted. We have to learn to live with the good and bad. Together we were happy, apart we're sad. This loneliness is driving me mad.

*Frank.* You're boring the poor boy! The '60s was the real golden decade. You'd rather hear about that, wouldn't you?

*Billy.* I really should go.

*Frank.* A long time ago, when the earth was still green. There were more kinds of animals than you've ever seen. We all live in a yellow submarine. Pretty woman, walking down the street. Pretty woman, the kind I like to meet. I'm a travelin' man. Made a lot of stops all over the world. And in every port I own the heart of at least one lovely girl. Hitch hiker. No special place to be going. I just go whichever way the wind's blowing. Can't buy me love. 'Cause I don't care too much for money. Giving all your clothes to charity. Last night the wife said, 'Oh boy, when you're dead. You don't take nothing with you. But your soul, think!' All you need is love. Just let me hear some of that rock and roll music. Ob-la-di ob-la-da life goes on, bra.

*George.* Enough-a-yer flamin' hippie nonsense. The boy don't care about it.

*Frank.* Hippie? I'm no hippie. There's some real ones around here—the ones who never grew out-a-vit by the '70s. What's your name, lad?

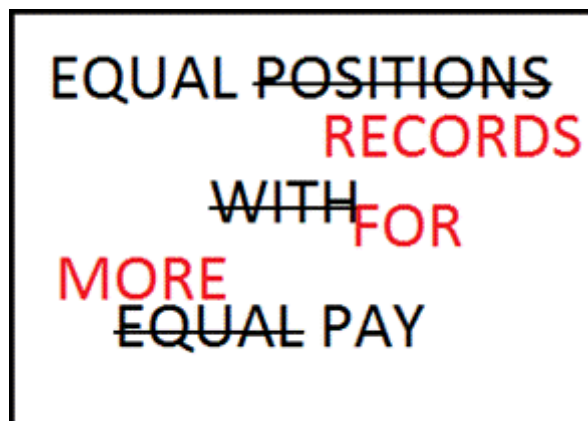
*Billy.* Billy.

*Frank.* All right, Billy. Let's go. First, I'll take you to my sale.

*George.* Bing Crosby—*Quicksilver*—limited edition—ten bucks!

*Exit Billy and Frank.*

SCENE II—Frank walks Billy to his car. Aboriginal flags erected. Groups of women together—mostly wearing mini-skirts—with one sign reading:



*Old Ford Falcons, Holden EKs, EJs and EHs. Artistically painted Volkswagen vans also line the strip. Bob Dylan plays through someone's portable stereo.*

*Billy.* Who's that way over there?

*Frank.* Oh, they're the hippies I said before—late onto the scene. Never mind them.

*Billy.* But what—

*Frank.* Say, what's your favourite Beatles album? I'll put it on my record player.

*Billy.* I—

*Frank.* Sorry, impossible question. I know. *A Hard Day's Night* or *Revolver*?

*Billy.* I don't really like the Beatles.

*Frank.* Sure, but I bet your parents love 'em. I'll grab 'em both from the back and give ya a special ten-dollar deal for the two.

*Exit Billy.*

SCENE III—*Adjacent strip parallel to Frank's avenue. Numerous Falcons, Holden Monaros and Chrysler Chargers. More colourful Volkswagen vans, with signs such as*



*and a gazebo between some hippie vans. Richard, Janet and others sit in the shade listening to psychedelic rock through an audio cassette. Long wavy hair, rolled bandanas, tie-dyed t-shirts, harem pants, and the men boast dense beards. Sandals. Bare feet. An aroma of cannabis dances through the air. Some people meditating. Billy stares. Janet invites Billy to join them. He sits. Janet and Richard's friends offer Billy assorted hippie jewellery and clothing.*

*Richard.* Billy, don't be a hero, don't be a fool with your life. Come sing a song of joy, for peace shall come, my brother. Bring a song and a smile for the banjo. Hitch a ride to the end of the highway where the neons turn to wood. Why are you in so such hurry? Look around, then slow down.

*Janet.* Far have I travelled and much have I seen. Dark distant mountains with valleys of green. We were born to be alive. A suitcase and an old guitar. Any way the wind blows doesn't

really matter to me. When the weather's fine we go fishin' or go swimmin' in the sea.

*Richard.* Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion too. Living life in peace. We shouldn't care about the length of his hair. Or the colour of his skin. Imagine no possessions. No need for greed or hunger.

*Janet.* With a friend to call my own, I'll never be alone. You've got a friend in me. We must not close our minds. We must let our thoughts be free. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will be as one. Bye, bye, Miss American Pie.

*Exit Billy.*

SCENE IV—*Johnny has a studded leather jacket and slicked-back hair. Kathy has permed caramel hair, heavy eye shadow, large diamond earrings, and a fur coat. A CD player plays 'Beat It' by Michael Jackson. Singing, strutting, shoulders up, chests out, pointing, twirling, Kathy's buttocks shaking. Billy pockets a pearl necklace and other gold jewellery from their shiny Mitsubishi Sigma.*

*Johnny.* Hello everybody, that's out there in radio and television land. Summer's here and the time is right. Everybody's doin' a brand new dance now. 1-2-3-4.

*Kathy.* I've been to Nice. And the Isle of Greece. While I've sipped champagne on a yacht. I've moved like Harlow in Monte Carlo.

*Johnny.* Aruba, Jamaica. Bodies in the sand. Tropical drink melting in your hand. Goddess on the mountain top. Her hair is Harlow gold. Her lips a sweet surprise.

*Kathy.* I'm gonna put this dream in motion. Never let nothing stand in my way. Take your passion. And make it happen. We can't rewind, we've gone too far.

*Johnny.* Not much between despair and ecstasy. Like a virgin. Touched for the very first time.

*Kathy.* But girls they want to have fun. Take on me. Let's get physical. Will you marry for the money, take a lover in the afternoon?

*Johnny.* Billie Jean is not my lover. I should have known better than to cheat a friend. I'm never gonna dance again. Guilty feet have got no rhythm.

*Exit Billy.*

SCENE V—*A band plays Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Messy hair. Dark t-shirts. Jenny has straight brown hair, black Doc Marten boots, and tattered clothes—*

*jeans and plain blue top. She stands atop a Range Rover, lecturing the crowd in which Billy stands.*

*Jenny.* Old coat for a pillow. And the earth was last night's bed. I am tired of this business. Protection for gangs, clubs and nations. Causing grief in human relations. Don't tell me it's not worth tryin' for. I have lived for love. But now that's not enough. For the world I love is dying. What if God was one of us? We must engage and rearrange. And turn this planet back to one. Police-a them-a they come and-a they blow down me door. The bigger they are they think they have more power. With their tanks, and their bombs, and their guns. When the violence causes silence we must be mistaken. Power and the money, money and the power. The dirt still stains me. So wash me until I'm clean. Don't want your greed. If you wanna be my lover, you have got to give. Taking is too easy, but that's the way it is.

*Exit Billy.*

SCENE VI—*Pulsars, Camrys, Commodores and Falcons.* Alicia, with many small tattoos and facial piercings, wears jeans and a *Rise Against* t-shirt. Jessica is dressed in a modest short dress. Gazza wears football shorts, a Bonds singlet, rubber thongs and has a mullet. Jay has a shaved head, gold chain necklace, Nike t-shirt and sneakers, and baggy jeans. They're talking. Billy thieves an original iPod from a Pulsar.

*Alicia.* Oh I wish I was a punk rocker with flowers in my hair. I was born too late into a world that doesn't care. Minority groups, kids with single mothers. We try to stop terrorism. But we still got terrorists here livin' in the USA, the big CIA. Malcolm X and Bobby Hutton died for nothing.

*Gazza.* I hate the new age guys. I'm a chauvinist. I live on beer and pies. I was gonna go to work but then I got high. Chill out, what you yellin' for? Well if you want Shady, this is what I'll give ya. A little bit of weed mixed with some hard liquor.

*Jessica.* Hey Mr DJ, put a record on. I wanna dance with my baby. Music makes the people come together. Freestyler, rock the microphone. Whoa Black Betty. You better lose yourself in the music.

*Jay.* Hey ya. You can find me in the club. Sipping on coke and rum. I got the X if you into taking drugs. Come give me a hug if you into getting rubbed. Lemme give you that beep-beep. I'm bringing sexy back.

*Exit Billy.*

SCENE VII—*Sophia's BMW.* Billy watches Sophia and Nathan flirt, recalling how they met. Sophia wears a revealing top and short skirt. Nathan has tight jeans, a trimmed beard and combed hair. RnB music through a smart phone. Mazda 6s, Lancers, Getzs, utes. Cars full of clothing, kitchenware and electronics.



*Nathan.* I fell in love with shawty when I seen her on the dance floor. Honey got a booty like pow-pow-pow. Got some boobies like wow-oh-wow. All that ass hangin' out. In my head, I see you all over me, you fulfil my fantasy. You the hottest bitch in this place. I know you want it. Talk dirty to me.

*Sophia.* I got that boom-boom that all the boys chase. And all the right junk in all the right places. Hey, I just met you and this is crazy, but here's my number, so call me, maybe!

*Nathan.* We're up all night to get lucky. If I took you home, it'd be a home run. I wanna do some dirty things to you tonight. Can you blow my whistle, baby?

*Sophia.* Blindfold, feather bed. Can you get it up? Is you big enough? Chains and whips excite me. G-spot. Oh, you turn me on. Can you make me scream? Make my body say ah-ah-ah.

*Nathan.* I just wanna make you sweat. Can you drip, drip, drip?

*Exeunt.*

*Dean Kerrison's tales are mostly travel-related, appearing in Global Hobo, ABC Open and Flourish. A Creative Writing & Literature BA (Hons) graduate from Griffith University, he has spoken at Asia Pacific Writers Conference, and read his work at literary events in Brisbane, Gold Coast, and Chengdu (China) where he lives and works.*

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