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# Urban Driftwood

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and Dan Rabarts

*An Anthology*

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*waking*



## **must be warm**

i take from you  
(i need your heat)  
an abuse  
but ego and delusion are greedy

(need)  
it is fear  
of the labyrinth of self  
chill corridors that spell out my name

(md)

## **Nameless**

From troubled sleep  
And disturbing dreams  
Something wakes;

The Beast stirs.

In the fathomless pale hush  
Of deep water  
Listening to the deep breathing  
Of the Earth  
Formulating fundamental philosophical  
facades

The Beast stirs.

Within circles of contemplation  
Nameless mirror images  
Rise naked though shards  
Prismatic –

The Beast stirs.

Its own silence  
The scream of martyrdom  
Pernicious annihilation  
In a blackened field  
A bitter skeleton grows –

- ... -

An orphan harvests  
The bittersweet misery  
The dust of falling stars  
The rape of childhood –

The Beast stirs.

Like the waiting of a dead language  
On the promises of a dead god  
Like the insomniac's caffeine questions  
In the grey futility of sleepless waiting

Waiting

Waiting...

...Waiting, the Beast stirs.

And the cock crows  
Eager to greet its new death  
In harmonious redemption  
Salvation in dawnlight –

The Beast waits.

Waits for the inevitable circadian cycles  
To turn upon themselves  
And breathe dissent  
Into the deep, troubled earth.

Waits for the distant sound  
Of falling bombs  
Beneath an abandoned horizon  
To fade

fade...

Waiting, the beast fades...

(dr)

## Conversation with the Wasp

Green-leaf hopping hornet, black and yellow  
Wearing stripes the colour of cats and butter.

You fly about our garden with a  
purpose  
we don't own.

Buzzing here, behind my ear  
mistaken for a flower.

Dare I wack you from your flight,  
provoking you to turn and fight?  
To make your stand against me, thus  
and use your sting, one final thrust.  
You'd make the kamikazes proud,  
although you strike for different ends  
- not for honour, glory or one's land,  
but just because I raised my hand,  
because I did not understand.  
Please don't be mad at what I did –

I'm just some frightened, stupid kid.

(sr)

## Hangin' Tough

We decided that we'd demonstrate our machismo with a simple display of hanging. We flung ourselves over the side and used both hands to establish a grip. Far below tiny shapes shuttled back and forth. The wind was quite strong but it wasn't raining.

"Want a cigarette?" the Big Bad Wolf asked me. I nodded, curious to see how he'd manage it. He let go with one hand, his dangle shifting angles, and fished through a pocket til he produced a pair of cigarettes. He stuffed them both in his mouth and reached back down to pull out a lighter. When he pulled the light yellow plastic thing out, his comb came with it. We watched the comb leaf-falling.

"Damn, my comb," Wolf said. He lit both cigarettes and stuffed the lighter back in his pocket.

"Isn't your arm hurting by now?" I asked him, licking my lips.

He grinned around his two lit cigarettes, now with both hands holding on. "What a big tongue you have," he said.

“That’s what Riding Hood’s supposed to say to you, chump,” I replied, shifting my grip then letting go with one hand. I had to swing a bit to reach the cigarette, finally managing to pluck it from his mouth. I hastily put my hand back up, my shoulder aching already.

“That’s what she did say,” Wolf said. “Chop chop.”

“Nah, that’s the woodcutter.”

Wolf looked up at the girls, who were looking bored and not watching us. I tried to forget about what Amy had said to me before. Wolf displayed his teeth and growled at them.

“Please,” Marcia said, backing away. “Cut the crap. Are you going to sing for us or what?”

“If you promise to kiss my fingers,” Wolf said.

“Tell that bitch Amy she can go to hell, by the way,” I said. Something about hanging there made me think I could get away with it.

(md)

## Pier

we trod carefully along the moss and spray  
covered pier  
as the freezing southerly sped across the Cook  
Strait  
and threatened to pull us into the vaguely  
occultic waters  
slipping across the antiquated concrete I pulled  
at your sleeve  
in order not to fall and I hoped this wouldn't  
be all  
the contact we would have for the night  
but there would be many more nights to hold  
each others' sleeves  
I reminded myself at the end of that  
particularly wintry season

(je)





*change*



## Scrooge

An impotent Christmas it was,  
running-off as muddy water  
draining down the plug.

I could not help but go through  
the motions of indulgence:  
the giving and receiving of trinkets  
nobody really cared for, really.  
I lost it years ago,  
the ability to get excited  
with the overfed herald of Coke,  
his huge, red frame planted  
on every shop window-sill.  
I am cynical beyond my years  
– not good but necessary  
in this garish age.

How will I be when I am old  
and stuck in my bitter-  
shriveled rut?

Or will I shrink back  
to youthful bliss,  
my brim-filled brain  
winding back the clock, running down  
to the first minutes of my day?

Infantile not by choice,  
but in decay.

(sr)

## Big Gun

The sound of the safety clicking off woke Jack up. He was pressing his gun to his forehead again. He considered his options, blinking his eyes and watching his fingers tight around the trigger.

“Do you think you’re worth it?” he said to himself.

He stole a look at his clock radio. It was two minutes before the alarm would go off. He knew he had to resolve this situation or the sudden burst of music would startle him so much he might shoot himself. That would be pretty bad.

The number changed. One minute.

Outside, someone started yodelling. Jack figured that was as appropriate a time as any to bring up the gap.

“You know,” Jack said carefully, “there is a gap between the muzzle of the gun I’m holding and my head.”

The trigger finger twitched ever so slightly. Jack had to press on. Fifty seconds.

“It’s very small. Maybe millionths of a millimeter. But it’s there.”

The sound changed pitch and suddenly Jack realised it wasn't yodelling at all.

"And when that projectile emerges from that muzzle, it'll have to cross that divide. That may not seem like a long journey. But it is. That space can be divided and divided and divided into an infinite number of steps.

"For the bullet to reach me, it would need to cross an infinite number of steps. And it might be able to cross a million, a million million tiny steps – but can it cross an infinite amount? Of course not. It's impossible.

"So don't bother pulling the trigger. The bullet will never reach me."

Would it work? Only seconds left. Jack squeezed his eyes shut.

He heard the safety click back on and opened his eyes to watch himself lift the muzzle away and put the gun down in the cradle next to the bed. The alarm clicked on and his fingers twitched reflexively. The noise outside mingled with the music. Going to be a good day.

(md)

## Sweet

Cities apart,  
The sun slips swiftly  
Down the wall  
I fell from,  
Maui's ropes straining  
To rein her in;

An angel once walked  
These winter streets,  
Painting a quiet portrait indelible,  
The bitter wind her brush,  
Now bracing about my ears,  
Leaving solitude and the sound  
Of a voice calling after;

Looking back the colours  
Seem so harlequin,  
Silent in desire screaming,  
The picture painted  
So bleak, yet sweet,  
The streets now still and grey.

Shudder, broken image,  
Shiver in the pain exquisite,  
Turn cold in the Cook Strait southerly,  
Auckland Harbour bleeding into dusk.

(dr)

## Between

Between  
like Fitzgerald's narrator both within and  
without  
    birth and death  
I gaze melancholic through the stunted growth  
    The sum of all I am  
at the unfinished building and consider it a  
poor monument.

Outside  
I had thought myself worthy of more, though  
not a pyramid or even international  
    birth and death  
televised coverage of my funeral procession;  
but the ramshackle hut before me  
    that which is not me  
reminds me only of ozymandias, and that  
makes me,  
    oddly,  
    smile.

(md)

## Lunch

and so there we were  
having lunch at 11.30  
and you told me it was over  
but I had told you that already at breakfast  
and you thought I would be devastated  
but I was so pleased that I wouldn't have to  
marry you

(je)

## Weekend At Oakura

The buck stopped here on the hills  
of New Plymouth.  
Taranaki was hiding as usual,  
not a patch on the warm sea,  
warmer than the stream we bathed in,  
fresh and mountain-fed.  
Willy and Lass barked and swam,  
excited as we were to be here.  
Bales of hay tomorrow, and it was fun  
driving the red ute  
up and down the dusty gravel  
all day long, shaking ourselves down  
with the dirt of a good days work.  
Wish I'd stayed longer.

(sr)



*ritual*



## **Bus**

you had told me that she was your friend not  
mine  
it was drizzling and we caught the Island Bay  
bus home  
and I didn't speak to you and you tried to make  
a joke of it  
but I still ignored you and got off the bus by  
myself

the drizzle had become heavy sheets and I  
wandered to the golf course  
and sat on a tree stump which looked as lonely  
as I was  
and self-pity encompassed me and it was your  
fault  
your fault that I was wet and cold and lonely  
and sad and in love with you

(je)

## Kelson Pilgrimage

It was a hot spring afternoon as I climbed  
towards the top of Kelson hill,  
treading the uneven pavement upwards,  
stopping briefly for an iceblock.

Almost there, I passed a sparrow  
lying lifeless on the curb, struck  
out of the sky like Daedalus.  
And the blanched sun shone down  
upon it, not bothering once  
to hide his light, as a sign  
of respect.

*Poor diminutive bird. At least now  
You're safe, numbered among those  
Who dwell with the Lord.*

I sneered at the rude star and kept  
on my path up the hill.  
The sign-posted pines appeared to  
point upwards, buffeted by the wind's  
unhelpful nudges.  
The hill's edge appeared turreted  
with the style of houses,  
square and angular against

a cloud-whipped sky.  
Outstanding among structures were  
the sentinel figures of concrete  
water-silos rising,  
oddly acropolis against the ridge.

(sr)

## ***Outerlude***

Breathin and breatheout  
there's no words to give out and  
no reason to shout just begin  
and without any thought for what's fought  
for  
we stand for it now and forever more  
nevermore ever thaw

Breathin and breathout we collect what is  
said  
we suggest when we're dead  
that the moon was our head  
at the back slip through cracks in what we  
see  
each sleep sea cross'd stars in the water  
we sought her for slaughter of innocents  
innocence in her since then and  
when all this is done  
we look back in her thread where  
she weaves or deceives in the pattern  
see tapestry can it be me I see

Because is not the end of it  
Because is not the end of it

Breathin and breathout  
Breathin and breathout

Inhale or outhale in the veil in the vale  
veiled tears hide in satin silk  
slip down my throat  
my mind castle eyes moat me  
a mote in my eye is not why  
can't be why can't be why  
when I rise up as dawn comes and survey  
the  
locusts that cluster on windows  
and beat against glass with the heads and  
the  
legs and its all long been said  
now put anger to bed and don't cry or ask  
why  
can't be why can't be why  
daren't ask to put to task what I feel past  
the mask that you wear not in fear or despair  
nothing there  
can it care when it sees work like bees  
all caught up in disease and disorder  
I thought her away but she stayed  
ask her why hear her lie

Breathein and breathout  
Breathein and breathout

Because is not the end of it  
Because just begins

(md)

## Refraction

The sun  
    drops  
        through the sky  
Like a lead weight  
    Louring  
Its eyes across the glaring city.

And I may be that crazy man  
Who walks the streets all night  
Watching the world turn

Greyer.

Spare a penny for my thoughts?  
They say nothing lasts  
    Forever  
Is it my fault that  
There's nobody home?

Let me show you the lucid maniac  
Staring at the faces  
In the candle's flame  
who  
Hears the voices in the razor blade

Dead cheap fix of nicotine  
To kill for –  
Worth dying for;

To cry for –  
Nobody's  
home.

It's not my fault  
Nothing lasts forever the music  
Must have lied –  
Doesn't it smell like...

A promise ?

Too long left in the sun  
Which  
drops  
louring  
As  
the  
world  
turns.

(dr)

## **vive le roi**

I am the lion. I have a place to sit and even the concrete path stays away from that place. I can sit there. The place is a little tree and my sneakers slip on its trunk as I watch the grown-ups rushing. They must be rushing to buy brown trousers. They have filled the hall with people and they are serving food. I cannot go there because there are no seats next to her so what is the point?

I am the lion. One of the old ones beckons me from my place. I am hungry so I think I might eat her. The food sounds nice. I join the queue but most of the food is gone already. The plates are very clean. As I wait in line I look around and there she is. The seats by her are taken. She sees me looking and smiles. When she sleeps I know because I can feel her dreams. They crowd up against me, gently pushing on my lips.

I am the lion. I am all full so I rest and she speaks to people who aren't me. I watch carefully so she will not see. They are talking about an argument from last night. I wish I was there, I would have helped, I would have saved her.

I am the lion. The old ones collect around me.  
I am special but I know that just means  
different. When they cuddle me I do not flinch  
because they cannot change me. Tomorrow I  
will still be the lion.

(md)

## Knowing

Knowing I am hidden  
When you stand alone  
Other's voices echo in my head  
Mount Vic shimmers crying  
I walked here yesterday  
At sunrise  
Thought the silhouettes so beautiful  
Now gaunt I see them rise  
Against the city spill  
So tragic  
Poised between the harbour and the Strait  
'tween love and lust  
I'll burn so cold.

(dr)

## Gone Too Soon

First I heard a shriek of violation,  
my mother's cry of horror  
coming from the laundry.

I came running to find...  
wet hands and yellow  
rubber gloves.

A mouse in the wash,  
sucked through the pipe,  
soak-silken fur cold and glossy,  
drowned in tub of dirty water,  
our dirty water.

Rolled up newspaper  
made good chopsticks, and so I removed  
it to the yellow bucket.

Where was Misty in all of that, I asked?  
The cat was away from the fuss,  
grinning on the roof.

The mouse-trap sat benign  
on the floor, clean as a whistle.  
Burial was short and informal:

Dad in gumboots, with a spade  
and a thing to say about it, washing his  
hands of the entire situation.

(sr)

## Tyrage

The people danced, and Tyrage nodded sagely.  
A pair of doves swirled overhead. This, too,  
sagely. No shadows. The dancers gave love as  
they whispered, and smiles scarred sleep.  
Tyrage rose over all.

Eric.  
My name is Eric  
I am alive-

The faery lit Eric's sight as they cavorted. And  
at their hub, the tall one, eyes like pumice  
burning. A voice, without sound, no echoes. No  
shadows.

-Erci ab raine...

Eric didn't know why.

-Erci ab raine...

He staggered back, his mind swirling, as  
Tyrage rose close to him, and the circle of faery  
blurred, nightmare heavenly

*-Erci ab raine*

Tyrage toothed and crumbled. Blurs ended.  
Erci stood alone in the shadows, in the glade as  
morning came. Behind him his battered Ford  
Escort sat just as he'd left it a few minutes ago  
(*twilight what happened to the night*) to answer  
the insistent pressure in his bladder.  
Vagueness. Lights. Burning eyes.  
Erci, immortal, Tyrage.

(md)

## **Alea Jacta Est**

And the afternoon whipped past  
As afternoons and summers often do  
And he turned to me and

Smiled  
Laughing  
'Where do you come from boy?'  
He was asking  
In hazy euphoria

And the child was taken  
By seven demons of Friendly Anarchy  
Never asking  
Recompense for their services  
'We live to serve'  
They were saying  
'Don't you?'

So afternoon being afternoon  
And being raining  
Transmuted gradually into rainy night  
And the child was alone  
Because all his friends were high  
And the child, so alone,  
Was low

And he turned  
Turned to me not the child  
But the demon  
Of gratuitous suicide  
'The moon is a white hole  
I go there to dream laughing  
Won't you come join us?'  
But I was never there.

'I'll do you no harm'  
Sunstroke afternoon whipping past  
Hazy clouds of distortion  
Disorientation  
I was never there.

This moon has been thought to pieces  
In a village inside the wishing well  
Across the bridge  
Across the void  
Where staggering they scrape  
Across the glassy dark  
And turning to me  
Smiling  
Proffer the pieces of the moon  
With autistic delight –  
Like puppets on a string –

To the Fifth Demon  
Who forgot their names  
Laughing  
Who forgot where they came from  
Who didn't ask for this

And the child was lost  
In the belly of the beast  
While Dionysus' children  
Frolic in the garden  
Children of a lesser god  
Angelic Icarus falling in crimson flame  
From a silent, loveless Olympus

Crawling lonely, lowly through  
The swaying streets  
Demon clutching soul  
Madman clutching tightly to his  
Delicate precious sliver of the silver moon  
Which like his own Icarus, fell  
Laughing from stardust Nirvana

Writhing in Promethean agony  
Beneath a bloodsoaked newspaper  
In autumn falling gold and red  
And was that the child or the  
Third Demon who stole your pipe  
– So sorry –  
Hanging you on that broken tree?

The darkening glow of afterthought  
Stains this hydrogen asphyxiation  
This agonising crucifixion  
As you hammer in  
The self-same nails smiling  
Laughing

I remember you laughing  
Long ago  
Before the apocalypse  
Stole your innocence  
And left you hanging  
Bleeding, Dying, Crying, Smiling,  
Out in the rain

Where the afternoon rushes by  
The world rushes in  
And you quiver cower moan cringe  
Laughing  
Unknowing  
Unaware of global revelation  
You search achingly  
For interpretation  
Of songs they say you wrote  
While falling  
Flaming Icarus

I'm with you somewhere  
Though I can't say where  
He turned the child and  
Speaking Latin his words  
Rushed past my ear

*Alea jacta est*

The die is cast  
We cannot hold its fall

Although the dust of days  
May dry our lips  
We'll dip into the wishing well  
To wet our parchéd throats.

(dr)





*ache*



## ***courage***

because that was all there was left for him to  
hold on to he fought MADE it happen.

she falls beyond him and his tears rain *come*  
like shouts like whispers

(shivering beneath / skin against skin arched  
press)

HE didn't want to leave her but his war would  
not wait. Struggling through snipe at the hope  
of others shots crack through skulls a bad  
business his palm heel hard and firm  
connected with her chin neck snap holding her  
clutching her tight she another victim *another*  
*fall* so many fall (So many fall.)

Now dry like the ocean.

Sometimes things have to be done.

(md)

## Epilogue

Look away  
From the bright pyramid of light.  
In the absence  
The silent death-throes,  
The razor calm  
Of what has been,  
Plummeting to the warmth  
Of a shallow grave.

Realisation of betrayal betrothed  
To broken trust,  
Heat that must be found,  
Heating the blade  
Plunging deep through  
Cords discordant yet choral  
And arterial love

Singing sweetly as it flows  
From complex rivers of the soul,  
And blackens  
In the bright pyramid of light,  
The razor calm  
Of what never returns.

Nothing to regret,  
No pain to forget,  
But the betrayal  
Lying hidden  
From the dark descent,  
The clarity of haze –  
There will be  
No epilogue.

(dr)

## Anata

As daylight savings ended,  
so Summer did go.  
Pre-Autumn, that vagrant season,  
came and made itself at home.  
Even so, she still felt sad,  
longing just to look upon  
the garden hues with warmer eyes.  
Something

had

left

her,

her alone.

(though others feel her pain).

Grief leaves a ruddy, purple mark  
in Nature's changing room,

(some quiet scribbled words),

amidst the graffiti of former guests,

(and others read it too).

All is not good

but sometimes

faith is all

that remains.

That is her experience,

and hers alone.

(sr)

## Marienberghang 7

So we danced alone. She lifted her wings above me, blocking out the sun, the glare of the clouds. The sanctuary pulsed and breathed, stripping away all need, all pain, desire. The distance whittled away, horizon by aching horizon, drawing all the gales and blizzards of Outside far off in a net of solitude, pulling me closer and closer until we were so near I was alone.

Alone on the cliff-face, that first place of earth and light, that ragged scar separating land from sea and sky. Facing into the rising winds, because to face away would be blindness irreverent. And when you've sought so hard for the light and wind and the barren nakedness of the elements, come so far and fought so furiously, wept so much blood in the search for a new escape...

- to turn and face the wall would be  
blindness irreverent.

- But you're still thinking about her, aren't  
you?

- Could I not?

I don't know how long I waited there, watching the halogen flick over like a stuck record, not even sure what I was waiting for, only knowing that if I left now I'd never find it. There was something beautiful in the irresolution of the

hyacinth, some sort of catharsis born not of that lost but of what had not come to pass, and maybe even the hope which had been left behind; the hope that there would be no more waiting.

- I was hoping you'd come.
- Hoping?
- Hoping.
- Why hoping? Why not expecting, anticipating, demanding?
- Why not waiting?
- Waiting for what?

silence

- Where do you think this will all end?
- In disillusion, I'd imagine. These things usually do.

She swept her hand gently across the dusty labels, all these wines cellared so long and maybe never to be tasted. Beneath her naked feet the broken glass, the corrosive, chromatic remembrance of images unpainted, a small white car crossing a bridge over frozen water, his face rapt in the grey blanket of winter impenetrable and alien yet somehow fascinating; a child far from home. The bare trees looked blankly back across the Ruhr as winter sun carved shadows on the ruins. They walked in the rarity of its warmth, a dream shattering in slow motion...

- Will you be back?
- It's very grey here. Did they think about that?
- It's the colours. Will you?
- How could I say no?
- Oh, you're lying again.

The blanket of snow would've kept them warm. But the miles between drove through the ice like hot knives, twisting in the belly of a sick dog, flying away to that phantom dead doggy world, up among the clouds or under the ferns at the bottom of the garden, where mementoes and fragments of lives are left to soak up the rain, only to be found when all their identity, meaning and agony have rinsed away, visible only in the turning of the leaves above.

- You a musician, man?
- Yeah, kind of *No not really*
- You writing a song?
- Yeah a song *A song?*

I had to walk, escape the smoke and stuttering neons, across the bridge of years, to find a time I used to understand.

- You writing a song?
- *No, just some words, some fragments which I shore against my ruin*

And it begins.

(dr)

## Rain

I think of you  
when the rain hits the glass  
and when the fog on the window is spreading.  
I think of you  
when I look outside  
and see the grey sky  
and the sheets of water falling onto  
my street.  
that's when I think of you.

(je)





*love*



## Immediate Recall

The sun sweeps into the room  
Brushing away the cold, as cobwebs  
In a broom.

My face tingles with the heat,  
A ripening strawberry  
Under harvest moon.

I remember you and I, sitting in  
A darkened carriage, pounding along  
The tracks – our only warmth  
Each other.

Howling gales torment the train,  
Splitting with blustery protests  
As we race on through the night.

(sr)

## Carved

Not your eyes  
Reaching into  
Your eyes reaching  
The fuse has blown  
We venture out into the rain  
Across the sand  
                    to fix it,

These storms are so dismal in the dark  
We share a cigarette  
But neither of us  
                    Neither  
                                Your eyes reaching  
            If it's so cold why don't you light  
the fire?

The orchestra sat silent  
Would you hurry up  
            Neither of us  
All those little black dots on the page  
What do they mean?  
            Neither of us smoke...

At least not when we were younger  
When there was only one song  
Only one  
            Can you find the fuse? Its  
dark out here

Hold me  
The bowstrings carve a wreath  
of smoke is music  
Blades of light  
The storm outside is muted  
In the bareskin warmth  
Like yesterday  
    bare skin

Hold me -  
    Only one

If I can't fix the fuse  
What use in the dark  
is bare skin  
Carved in music?

(dr)

## The Trip Home

It was early in the morning  
when we slipped the Sounds,  
gentle and steady at first,  
hardly a wake to mention.

Later, as we headed out  
long into the Strait,  
seagull waves began to rock this Cat  
and some of us turned green.

But I did not mind the swell,  
glad in the knowledge  
you were somewhere near,  
below deck and

tucked warmly

in your seat, asleep.

So close and yet I do not say,

“Come stand up here with me  
where sea-spray will soak and lash  
us to the bone.”

My Affection for you  
is secret.

So, as the grumpy urchins mull  
and the rest complain,  
my friends and I hold on tight  
and pretend to waterski  
this morning back to Wellington,  
the Easter moon our bright

and guiding lady.

Coffee and Cookietime

Tasted good to those who were not dead.

There's something special,

leaving late, early in the morn.

Returning to that Mana port,

arriving with the dawn.

I wish I'd said goodnight to you,

Before your ride drove off, too tired.

But I suspect we'll meet again.

(sr)

## The Golem

*A valentine's day story*

I wanted to touch it but feared that it might blister. It was finely cast and delicate, and the hands that had made it had worked with great love. On its clay fingers, the whorls of prints had been etched in line by line, a fine stylus pulled in circles gently. They shaped the air, mountains and crevices, currents swirling.

There were no Jews in the street. Had there been, it might have been more; heightened understanding, or at least meaning. It was a gift. I had never much held with gifts, believing them to be (as someone had once said? The years have made it hard to recall, everything flees now like birds scattering and all my mind can hear is the beat of wings) more traps than prizes, gifts. The world has built symbols around gifts and wrapped days in symbolism, a web of culture whispered into every ear. That being as it was, I was never eager for the punishment of challenge, and so kept my humbugs to myself. I made thoughts instead of gifts and that helped me keep my balance.

I knew that it was meant for me from the way it matched my height. Such a simple thing but

full of promise, the way things should have been. This was how the golem managed to be a better match than you who I was trying to forget. A lack of warmth, a distance made physical; that was the essence of the gift – a summary of sorts, or perhaps an extension, or even more astutely a translation across medium – feelings into carven shapes. An achievement. The new form made itself greater somehow.

It had been given to make me forget. When you worked it you probably did not understand how every action of creation imbued the golem with the very nature I had been drawn to and repelled by. I would have asked for words but none had ever been used, taken only like medicine, for fixing.

It stood and watched (at least its eyes stared out and did not blink) and I regarded it with mixed emotion. I had tricked myself into desire and cornered myself into revealing all. In the nights that followed as I had tried to place myself within myself the golem was being carved. You carved it; this was your solution. I ought to have let it work.

The intersection buzzed in the dusk, cars like flying beetles. Green switched red and back again, casting hue on the overhanging leaves. Shopfronts, back from the road, tried to sleep

through the overpassing lights. This was where we had met. I had waited on one side and you on the other, and the young man in the blue shirt was beside you. He waited for me to cross and I was obligated to speak to him then, and you as well. You did not look pleased. I expect I did not either, but at least I can look back and know I was wrong; you have no such luxury. When we parted I remembered your name.

I wondered if the golem knew its name. Perhaps you had whispered it into the ears as you shaped them. If so, and I said the golem's name, then it would awaken.

I put my hands in my pockets and crossed the road. The light was still red but I was not particularly concerned. Beetles passed me. This was almost where I lived.

You were afraid. That had only become clear many years later as I felt my own kind of fears like papercuts inside. You never really changed your mind at all – the story existed within you whole, beginning to end, from the moment I laid my hand against your cheek. You had recoiled then, my hands were cold, and everything was laid down by that movement. The whole of it existed from the start as if we had created it together, produced it from unformed clay, and the golem could not equal

that. The golem was your vision alone, your darkest fears and most fragile hopes, an etching in human shape, devoid of me, a total self-possession. I saw myself reflected in its body, not in terms of shape or figure but in some inner essence, as though through alchemy you transmuted me, but flawed process consumed all – no success is possible with this kind of magic. It alienated me, seeing myself twisted into your perspective, all curved up by hopes and doubts not my own. A funhouse mirror with perfect, smoothened skin.

The words had been uttered. That was the secret that the old Jews knew; words were magic too. They transformed and destroyed and made things; the only true alchemy is the word, which can stamp shape and structure on an unnameable. When my lips had ceased the words stood between us like another presence, like the golem stands now; the golem is your words, its silence your speech.

You had never passed by the café again. I looked though its windows and whispered to myself a greeting for you, barely even hearing, shadowy mothwords dispersing. You had never come despite your promises. I did not really expect it, but I did want it, and wanting something is the surest way to remove it from your grasp. That promise had been a loophole

you could claim and cling to; you were afraid and I loved you all the more for your fear. (Yes, love; I am too old for semantic games, now. What I felt is contained within that word, and I will not fight a battle to free it; a captive notion is enough.) I loved you more because I knew you did not make promises lightly, and you accorded a promise made to be broken the greatest weight of all.

It came into being as though it had always meant to be there; this is what I meant by saying the whole of it existed from the start. I imagine you transforming your bedroom into a workshop, old sheets on the floor and claystains on your overalls, your eyes burn-focused as you make them when there is a task before you; sleeping fitfully, half-awake, light from the window shadowing a malformed shape that grew taller, more defined each night. I imagine your tools about you, knives and edges and brushes for shaping and most of all your hands, the nails filed back and dried clay caught in knuckle creases. There could have been no pens, no paper, no plan. The splatter of water on the covered floor was like your signature. You built it and named it and meant all of it for me.

I sometimes wonder how it would have been if you had recognised then what you discovered

too late, that the trick you had played on yourself had worked too well. I try not to linger on these thoughts, so simple that they burn my inner eye, for things were not that way and could not have been so. The thoughts, however, are pleasant and seductive. That they exist is a comfort, but such simplicity would have been an affront to the oldest God, and abhorred by the divine it would have been forbidden. For you and I to touch at all, complexity had to be invoked, a protective sheath allowing us closer to the sun. Simple things have the character of a furnace. I am afraid to touch it; its skin is delicate and perfectly formed and it will blister at my touch.

(md)

## **Cords**

when I see him dressed  
in all his splendour  
singlet and cords  
I explode with fascination  
and awe  
And when I see that he has tied  
his long brown hair  
back into a bun  
my eyes are overwhelmed  
and are feasting on his  
everything  
I watch him slouch into his chair  
(oh to be that chair)  
as he leans forward and rests his elbows  
on his worn out,  
faded green  
corduroyed knees and  
I tell him I'll see him on Thursday  
and I look away and smile

(je)

## Musings

Sometimes, love is like this:  
An out of control bus, careening  
towards a cliff,  
The passengers terrified  
and the driver,  
Who has just experienced a stroke, lies  
crumpled  
in his seat. Only seconds to avert  
disaster!

Sometimes, love is like this:  
A tune that plays over and over  
in your head,  
And you don't know the  
words,  
But you still sing the song.

(sr)

## Untitled

you  
were so small  
and we woke  
as if we  
had always been  
cupped in my hands  
like water  
no longer  
running

(dr)

