

“COTTONMOUTH”



SPIT DICTION

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MISREADING

Claire Potter

I'll say how it's done so the difficult questions can be leavened
into small loaves of bread given in praise of crows.

Let's start at the beginning: under a perilous sun she wore
medallions of clear plastic, pom-poms of summer grass;
I wore fretted blues and feathered kneepads so our scuffle
precluded my bruised knees.

It is true I ripped her earring out which looked more dramatic
than it was.

She did hit me first, by the creek and the single willow
and after that, to my mind, she no longer resembled an orchid.

So yes I pushed her flat into the dirt of this
difficult country; and it is true that I write as I read—
mistaking wreaths for wraiths, spires for spines, girls for orchids

THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY

Dosh Luckwell

You liked the water hotter than I did
yet now I don't even turn the cold tap on.

Since you left, my showers have grown longer with each day.
Soon they'll stretch from morning until midnight.

Should I step out I'd freeze
you trained me to your heat.

I will remain beneath this wash
until the water
someday
stops...

GIN & JAZZ

J.J. Deceglie

The first moment he met her
she was immaculate and drunk.
And he asked her to elope with him
and she didn't say no
but laughed like only she could.
Which possibly meant yes.
She was a slinging lissom arch unconscious with
lustrous blonde tresses
that shone the colour that begins a star.
A masterpiece.
The way she wore it was delightful.
Elegantly confused.
The way she said words got him too.
That eloquence with her diction
over her tongue and teeth.
On foot down clement soft lit streets
trying to kiss him against walls
The ocean in the atmosphere.
First thing she does back
at hers is put some music on.
Later on he discovers she at all times does it.
Her place on a slanted street.
Moon blush making
everything blue.
Dancing back at her place,
eyes closed trying to kiss him,
wishing he could know what she tasted like.
Spilling wine whilst fluent
and choosing which song
she would bop to then and next.
Dodging the undodgeable cause of something
or someone,

and it's hard to know who or what.
Nothing ever felt like this.
Ignoring the real and
longing for the indefinable.
Later on she told him that cold coffee
makes you beautiful.
He wasn't sure if he'd told her anything.
But he felt she'd taste creamy.

The way he was.
Now.
Always.
Some movement of nothingness
blurred with everything.
Some feeling of complete understanding
and of in no way having a clue.
It was a feeling like nothing at all.
As if he'd vanished
yet persisting were entirely necessary.

He wrote this before meeting her:
*the places you arrive in this life
are as useless as the reasons you get there
and at the bottom of it
nothing has explanation
beyond what you can invent.*

He realised she'd never said his name.
That if she had
he would have remembered it
and tried to say it to himself
the way she would.
He would have liked the way
she said it;
the way he liked the way
she said everything.

She'd never said it.
When she did it would
be a like bullet whistling past his ear.
His heart would strike quicker.

Like an itinerant ice-berg
nomadic into her balmy stream,
breaking up swift on impact,
then dancing together as liquid atoms
with whatever the current allowed or was.
She stole time wonderfully,
made the planet spin quicker,
made it go so much
that it went away altogether mostly.
Timelessness.
The loss of the useless.

Their capacity to make
one another suffer
drawing nauseas pangs,
with or without the other.

She said she'd not let him go away.
He understood her.
Insatiable want of skin
and saliva and hair.
Kissing so as to knock out teeth
and make lips bleed.
The only place to really be was with her.
That made sense.

Some time flux that both went
and stayed in lovely hurting fits.
In the mornings waking by her
he thought she was a dream at times.

Some gorgeous blonde muse warm
and curved just right.

Her kisses

like a fresh restoration.

She was part of this dying summer's
elucidation and fecund.

When he wrote words about her
he felt he was spilling hot blood
across the page. And he would expire
if he ever stopped writing.

Sunburst clarity of mornings in

bed with her,

her clear smile

and skin.

This is what is must
be to have strength.

He thought

it had to be.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Tristan Fidler

You're driving but she's in control. Picking her up from a 2pm finish at Caffisimo – her name is Audrey remember? – she's wearing black t-shirt and pants, perfumed with coffee beans. You'd love a takeaway flat white right now, but you didn't ask and she didn't think of it, besides it's thirty-five degrees outside. Okay, you think, she's in the car at least and she's agreeable to an armistice, her terms and her conditions obviously. A minus sign for a mouth and an unlit cigarette between her lips, she's adamant: "Show me where it happened."

You agree but it's ridiculous. "We've gone through this," you say. "I told you what happened."

She says, "I need to see where it was done, Max."

So, you're driving down Fitzgerald and you're turning left on Farmer and you're at the lights and neither of you say anything. You ask, "How was your day?" but your words breeze right past her. Car stereo at low volume and you think you hear Adam Ant on the radio, but you're hoping for a more appropriate song for the moment, something that would make her think of the good times. Yet you can't think of a song of that nature at this particular point of time, so maybe 'Ant Music' is appropri-

ate to listen to, maybe? The lights go green. You keep driving.

You're on Scarborough Beach and you're close to the park next to the Mount Hawthorn Town Hall. Surrounding trees providing cover for the playground equipment and a couple of kids swing on the monkey bars. You turn left and circle around, edging slowly into a parking space, brittle leaves crunching underneath the tires. "So, yeah," you say finally. "It was in the park. We were walking back to her car."

"So what happened?"

"You know what happened."

"Yeah," she says. "But again. More detail. Take me through it. Drinks at the Paddo for Warwick's thing and you met this..."

"Madeleine."

Lighter out of her pocket, she rolls down the window. "Then you were walking and she held you down against your will, right?" she says.

"No."

"Because that would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? You, the walking hard-on."

"It was a mistake," you say. Boy, this is going to take longer than you thought. You switch off the engine. "Like, we were there and I was really drunk. I didn't think."

“You didn’t think. You acted. On her.”

“Yes.”

Eyes directed to the middle distance, nothing but grass. “Where?” she says.

“Over there, we were against a tree. Then we were on the ground as it inclines.”

“How did it start?” she says, cigarette aimed at you like a poised dart.

“I, ah, I was standing and nudged her shoulder and she nudged back and we started up. She touched my face. I touched her...”

“Where?” she says.

You take an audible breath. “I grabbed her on the hip and then we kissed, okay, and then we were kissing and feeling each other up. You know.”

“I don’t know,” she says. “I’ve never done it outside before.”

You’re about to correct her, remembering some party, maybe one of your friend Rico’s annual blow-outs, where you went for a wander together and made out by a parked car, leaning on the hood, worrying over whether your bodies had left a dent, and then you think, wait, was that even her? Yes, you’re sure, it was. Anyway, best not to bring it up in case it wasn’t. “I was drunk,” you say, “I can hardly remember what happened.” Of course, even drunk, you’re able to remember it all. You work very hard at holding onto those kinds of details. “I’ve told you before, it was a mistake.”

She flicks ash on your panel and grabs the front of your trousers. “You’re fucking hard now talking about it,” she says.

“Hey now,” you say, as if you were offended by such an invasion of personal space, your mind already racing to the possibility that the hatred emanating off her could lead to a hot and heavy make-up session, but you really need to calm down because her teeth are bared and her eyes are violent. “I’m sorry, just this kind of talk, I can’t control it, you know.”

“That’s more than fucking obvious. Fuck, you’re a complete twat.”

Chances of reconciliation are looking unlikely. Audrey hardly ever uses the “f” word and so on. Well, not in the world, only in bed. Last week, she picked up your phone absentmindedly and read the text messages you saved and the night blew up in your face. Naturally you were both out in public when it happened, walking to Carnegies for a friend’s going-away drinks, and there you are fighting in public while drunken louts commentated, “Oooh, public break-up!” You confessed after she said, “Let’s be honest with each for the first time.” The way she said that, the way she looked at you, well, you somehow thought it would be alright, like she’d confess to her own infidelity if she had one and you’d be square.

“Can we go somewhere else and talk this through?” you say. “Look, I still love you... and...”

“Shut up,” she says. “Take me there.”

“What?”

“To her place,” she says. “I know you’ve been there. I read the messages.” Shit, you can’t even recall what was texted. “If you want us to have a chance, you show me where she lives, this Madeleine, and where else you fucked her around this city. So I know never to go there.”

You stick the key into the ignition and grit your teeth. This is fucked, you tell yourself. Pulling out of the space, you look over your shoulder back at the park and remember how dead the street was, even with the taxis driving past and the stragglers walking down the street. Hidden in darkness, finding warmth inside Madeleine, you recall the overwhelming calm, that nothing made sense but this, rutting in the foliage. After you pulled out and messed across the insides of her legs, all you wanted was sleep, to grab the grass and rip out the earth across your body like a heavy blanket. However, Madeleine demanded her own apartment for bed and shower, so you left with her, back to her place in Scarborough.

Sweat drips down the nape of your neck and Audrey seems cool in comparison, her gaze concentrated on the road in front of you. You turn on the air-conditioner, switching up to a level of 3, and dry air blasts into your face, but she kills it.

“Come on,” you say.

“Nothing should be easy for you today,”

she says, puffing away, the smoke and the heat producing a dizzying atmosphere within your two-year-old Holden Commodore, even with the windows open.

You keep driving and you wonder why not escape from something you have already corrupted? Well, firstly, you live together, renting an apartment and splitting the rent. To break up would make all of that really protracted, finding a new place or finding a new housemate. What a nightmare. Then the fact that you have merged CD and DVD collections over the past year and a half, you can’t imagine spending the time sifting through that and reclaiming who actually bought Runaway Jury on DVD, so there’s that. You are also horny and would really like to sleep with her again at some point, so that’s only going to happen if you make nice and play along. So, you keep driving.

“I want to see what this bitch looks like,” she says. “Does she work?”

“Yeah, I think so.” You are trying to remember. You don’t tend to listen when Madeleine speaks. “She works in a hair-dressing salon.” Yeah, you think, that’s more than likely.

“Take me to her place,” she says. “We’ll wait till she returns.”

Your whole afternoon is going to suck. You took off one day at the bottle shop to be put through the wringer? Surely she must see what you are doing for her, being here for her, going through all of this for her. You know that the turn-off is soon,

right at the lights, Madeleine's street opening up next to the Caltex on the corner.

This is daytime soap drama stupidity.

What does Audrey intend to do to Madeleine? Have a complete shit-fight in front of your eyes? You are not going to have sex with these two women ever again after today. No, you don't feel like you will ever have sex again. Well, you think that but are then comforted by the knowledge that what you think is not true and is just something you're thinking in case of anybody is listening in to your thoughts momentarily. You will have sex again in the future. You are idling at the lights, which are green, but there's no right-turn direction light, and you are waiting for traffic to clear, and your hands are greasy, like you've eaten take-out without a wet-wipe, and the skin underneath your clothes is moist, and you see a gap in the flow of traffic. You turn right and as you do so, you look at her and she is looking at you, someone who once said "I love you" when she was on top of you, all sweat-slicked sincerity, and your mind freezes on that moment for a second, right as you turn into the street and the back of your Holden Commodore is struck by a Toyota HiLux swinging out from the parking lot across from the Caltex.

You spin as your foot jams the brake while a horn wails away. You close your eyes and you brace yourself, but overall, you feel relieved, that control is no longer in your hands or Audrey's for the matter, but that centrifugal force is the true com-

mander here. When you open your eyes, she's still there, dazed, cigarette lost to the floor.

Unbuckling your belt, you say, "You okay?"

"Uh yeah," she says. You place a hand on her shoulder and she's in shock, which is good as she's not shying away from your touch, or slapping your hand away or anything like that. You pat her shoulder while you still have the time. Then you undo her seatbelt.

You are both standing there surveying the wreckage. The back of the Commodore is completely crumpled. The driver of the HiLux is there, a tanned and tall drink of water wearing a t-shirt that states "SIZE DOES MATTER" and a battered Perth Wildcats baseball cap on top of his shaved head, and he asks, "You two alright?"

"Yeah," you say. You feel alright. Aches are apparent in the neck and the shoulders, but being out of that car, what an amazing feeling.

Audrey examines the front of the HiLux, which is the clear winner of the contest, banged up with a sizable crater in the grill, but not as damaged as the Commodore. "Didn't you see us?" she says, tears spilling from her eyes. This is even more amazing to you, she's crying now.

"You came in too fast," he says. "I didn't see anything until I was on top of you."

You are listening, but trying too hard to restrain the joy you feel developing inside.

People are standing outside the tuck shop in the parking lot, observing the scene, so too are the attendants in the Caltex. Another person, some middle-aged middle-weight with a monobrow, is entering the scene to check if everyone is fine. “You okay? You okay? Hey, you okay?” he says to everyone. The cars are sitting there and we’re standing there. “Someone should probably call the police or something,” Audrey says.

You place a hand on her shoulder as you dial on the phone, waiting for an answer while the driver of the HiLux inspects the back of your car. He whistles, which is something you’ve never been able to do successfully yourself, and says, “This thing is completely fucked up.”

“Yeah,” you say, waiting for someone to answer on the phone. “I know.”

“Doesn’t look salvageable to me,” he says. “Complete write-off.”

“Maybe,” you say.

“Nah, it’s all fucked up,” he says, spitting onto the ground a globule like a crystal shard, sizzling on the bitumen before your eyes. “Fucked up beyond available recognition.”

“I can still recognise it’s a car,” you say.

“You came in too fast,” he says, not looking at you. “You should have seen me coming.” You want to hug this man for all the considerable good he has done you.

The you hear a couple of beeps on the mobile before an automated voice tells

you, “Sorry, your phone credit is too low to contact the number you have dialled...” Audrey drifts off, her shoulder slipping out from under your hand, backing away from the damaged vehicles, as if wanting to see a wider overview of the wreckage. Your eyes fill with light, the sun is too oppressive possibly, and there is something trickling from your nose, fingers produce a few drops of blood. You stand there, nodding, appearing as if you’ve received an answer from someone who can help everyone here. Except there’s nothing but silence on the other end, and you need to admit, “I’ve run out of credit” yet it’s the hardest thing you’ve had to do today, you feel.

MAX

Jake Dennis

Faint smell of dirt and milk
her paws as soft as cheese.
Ears like two samosas,
white handlebars for whiskers,
her coat coloured like a snail's shell.

She is shifting the waters.
She is scattering the ducks.

Street lights bend towards the road
beneath the dreaming cirrus
where clocks claw the minutes.

She shits on the lily pads.
She purrs like cardamom.
She paws the moon's light.

PUPPY

Karen Murphy

You fell off the edge and crumbled down.
Held by your lead, you dangled between the
Banksia Groves and the muddy river bed.
Your paws were not dirty, brown nose.

Your hair was pulled back across your face,
your mouth open, as you swallowed the wind
and watched the trees in the screen of the river.

Dead leaves flattened around you
like a carpet that was worn and faded—
yellow wattle on your nose.

I held the lead and pulled you back,
onto the faded jarrah floorboards,
withered gum leaves.

We walked back along the short-cropped
grass, the seesaw, and the slide.
Away from the murky river bed,
the crumpled bark, dried eucalypts.

We stopped just for a second,
near the barbecues,
so I could pull the sticks and leaves out from
your coat and walk you home.

A WHILE

Claire Potter

For Robert Adamson

something says
a while
wait
now then
until
bats

three thousand
have blackened your fingers
and strings of sigh
are no longer enough.....
..... when is anything ever
enough? no is surely not
enough

go, wade
backwards across the planks
and arrive at the same coastline tired, dripping
wings broken feathers hanging no Groucho that day in January
but then smoke cleared and-- yellow Yellow--
nail a kiss above my door!

under a tender cloak you walk and dead leaves tremble We eat
but somewhere else whistling you are skinning fish below a jetty
wondering why it is they don't swim anymore

unbroken
between us the language of fireflies--

a slipknot of daffodils caught in a tide
of felty darkness

what I mean to say is

love

doesn't need

bait (or the preface of sticks & bone)

it needs

a line.

CONTRIBUTORS

J.J. DeCeglie is a 29 year old writer from Fremantle. His latest novella *Ennui and Despair* was published by Olympia Press in September 2010. His next one *Princes Without a Kingdom* will be published by Disruptive Press in 2011. He is also working on a poetry collection. Find more at jjdeceglie.com

Jake Dennis graduated from Curtin University with a Bachelor of Arts (Communication and Cultural Studies). *Sitelines*, *Studio*, *Primo Lux*, *Creatrix*, and the *Australian Literary Review* have published his poetry. He has performed at *Voicebox*, *Perth Poetry Club*, and the *Peter Cowan Writers Center*. He was *Grok* magazine's 2009 editor.

Tristan Fidler writes stuff, draws things, talks film in *Heavy Movie Parking Lots*. There's a zine of his you should check out, *I Am Still In Yesterdays Clothes #7: SPACE*.

Dosh Luckwell is a Perth spoken word artist. He writes about sex, death, his mother, and more. Dosh's words roll with a frank and fox-like delivery luring his listeners deep into a world of dark play and illicit encounter. Dosh is tall and his voice is deep. May he elate, transform, and suffocate your understanding of that old dog of diseases - desire.

Karen Murphy is studying a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing at Curtin University and just watched her puppy yelp after biting its own tail and proceed to chase it and run into a wall.

Claire Potter was born in Perth. In 2006, she was awarded an Australian Young Poet's Fellowship and published her first chapbook, *In Front of a Comma* (Poets Union, 2006). Her work has been widely published in Australia and overseas, and her first full-length collection, *Swallow*, was published by Five Islands Press in 2010. She lives and works in London.

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Poster art by tonne gramme

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