

ink

Self-Pub Magazine

Issue 3 October 2023



12

Emerging Writers & Poets

Midnight Intrusion

Mystery Writer

Wake in Fright

STORIES

by Julie Howard

Rob Simes

Jose Nodar

POEMS

by Philip Wing

Laurie Wilson

Foreword

Welcome to ink issue 3. We have a spooky theme this edition as it's Hallowe'en month. [ink](#) is a completely non-commercial, community venture. We hope you enjoy the works featured here, and please feel free to email us if you'd like more information about any of the authors. selfpubaus@gmail.com



The Haunted House

I am a haunted house
If you go through my door
You won't come out again
And will be seen no more

I am a haunted house
My floorboards creak and crunch
Once you cross my threshold
I'll eat you for my lunch

I am a haunted house
The spiders are my friends
All humans that invade my walls
Soon meet their sticky ends

I am a haunted house
I'm built on tainted ground
If you come trespassing in me
Your body won't be found

By Anon



Friday the Thirteenth

A chill wind blew through the
shadowed wood
On May the thirteenth day
She wrapped her cloak and raised
her hood
And crept along the way

The branches lashed with thorny
arms
On May the thirteenth day
She clasped red thread and rowan
charms
To keep the witch away

Strange eyes gleamed from hollow
trees
On May the thirteenth day
And what they were and why they
seemed
To glare, she could not say

The footsteps from behind drew
near
On May the thirteenth day
Her spine ran chill with icy fear
She knew that she must pay

by Anon

Under the Red Moon

by Dylan Butler

Under the red moon, the knight alone
Walked the windless, blackened hills.
Crunch! Underfoot, he crushed the bones
Littered about, through which, he mills.

Under the red moon, roaring silence
Hung heavy over haunted vales.
The faraway shadow of bleakness,
From igneous stone, gothic cathedrals.

Closer loomed the cursed city;
Home to the foes of fairy and man.
Magnificent design left gritty;
Defiled mirror of Fairyland.

Gargoyles freely roamed the sky,
Something that would make the bravest swoon,
Upon the road, writhing adders lie,
Silent, underneath the blood red moon.

Red moonlight flickered off shiny black stone.
Hungry shadows swallow the corners
As the white knight walks the street alone.
Crossing the mires of fresh-cut gore.

Past statues of demented angels,
Past monuments to Satanic kings,
Past the growling, leering gargoyles,
The knight ignored the lurking things.

Proud spires crowned with an inverse cross
Fill the skyline. Giant arachnids
Rested on their webs woven across
The steeples in their unholiness.

Behind the knight, hunters followed;
Savage werewolves with slavering jaws.
Yet calmly, the knight continued
To the tallest cathedral of all.



Artwork by [Kumamask](#)

Far away, a wolf stood on a roof
And let loose a long sorrowful howl.
A canine outline against the moon.
Respond, did the werewolves on the prowl.

Before the knight was a bronzed gate,
Adorned with countless human skulls.
The door was alive with hissing snakes
Slithering through slime-wet porous holes.

Under the red moon, the knight's armour
Shone red, as did his sapphire plume.
He opened the gate with great ardour
And escaped the gaze of the blood moon.

The door slammed with a heavy clash.
Through dusty darkness, the knight could see
The ruler of beasts, darkness and ash:
Nightmareland's fearsome Vampire Queen.

Someone's in my bed

by Jack Fringe

I awoke to a stranger asleep in my bed. Beside me. It can't be, this is my bed and I live alone. Wondering if I was dreaming, I closed my eyes and then slowly opened just one—the eye closest to the heavy breather—a man invading my most private of places.

I hadn't shared my bed with a stranger since my last alcoholic binge a decade ago. No, this person, breathing quite heavily, was no friend of mine. I tried to survey the situation without waking the interloper. He could have a knife or a gun, or something more sinister. He might even be an escapee from a lunatic asylum wanting to hurt me in terrible and unimaginable ways. Every possible scenario crept into my mind. None of them were nice. I froze.

The room was very quiet except for his rough breathing. My hands were under the bedclothes, and I tried ever so slightly to move them. I was still wearing my nightdress and clutched onto it, not sure why, really, but I needed to hold something.

I kept wondering what my best friend Jenny would do in this situation, but I became more distraught when I realised she had probably never been in a situation like this.

I didn't know how to describe his breathing—it was sort of a bronchial sound or like that of a heavy smoker. In and out, smooth and rough, with the occasional gurgle, like wind in the throat clearing some phlegm for an exit.



I opened the other eye, making sure to keep my head as still as a statue. I moved my eyes from left to right, up and down, trying to figure out what to do in this ridiculous and dangerous situation.

Unless you've ever been in this situation, you'd never understand the tension I was feeling. Too afraid to move, too afraid to call out, too afraid to go to the toilet—and I was bursting to relieve myself.

At one stage, I had to move. It was unbearable. The pins and needles in my right arm were spreading. I feared a stroke was coming on. I had to move. So I did. Ever so slightly, I let go of my clutched garment and moved my arm from the side to cross over my stomach. I was sure I didn't make a noise or a sudden movement, but he must have felt it. He grunted and groaned at my slight movement.

Ahhhh, garrrr, urrrrr, haaarrrr. I didn't know how to describe what I heard. But imagine the sounds of a factory where all their equipment runs on steam power. My heart thumped faster than any steam

driven machine. I was sure it shook the bed at every pump of blood.

I'd climb under the bed. Why didn't I think of that earlier? Such a simple and easy way to escape this sadistic beast. In my confusion, I thought he was right beside me, but he wasn't—he was about a foot away. Realising this, I moved my right hand to my side and out a little, with the intention of pushing myself slowly towards the edge of the bed.

Blood. Fucking blood. Once you've felt blood, you never forget it. The texture and feel are dead giveaways.

My heart thumped, and I was sure he could hear it in the dark, gloomy room. He was going to use my room as a torture chamber. I had knives in the kitchen, scissors in the dressing room, two axes and a rivet gun in the garage, plus an untold number of screwdrivers. He'd use them all. My head would be severed last. I had to escape.

I moved my hand back to my stomach. How odd. My stomach was dry. Little by little, I got the courage to feel around my body. 'Slowly, slowly, slowly.'

He grunted as I moved.

I stopped feeling. But I was dry. Yes I was dry. Except for my back.

It wasn't blood; it was sweat. I was perspiring in buckets. Once you've felt sweat, you never forget it. Honestly, it was a sigh of relief that I had made a mistake. But I was still in the worst situation of my life. At any moment, he could explode and ravage me with a pitchfork.



Yes, I forgot to mention I have a pitchfork in the laundry. Escape. Think escape. I kept reminding myself.

The door? The door? He would've locked it, for sure.

'Slowly, slowly, slowly,' but I moved too fast. He was now awake, he was fucking awake. I'd woken the monster. He tore back the bedclothes and screamed the most blood-curdling howl I'd ever heard in my life.

I screamed, hoping someone, somewhere would hear me. I lashed out at him, that's all I could think to do. And screamed again.

The mattress moved as his huge size vacated my bed. He bellowed like a wolf. Then he raced to the door and crashed through it like an elephant.

This was my moment. This was my time. I needed to move fast before he returned with a butcher's knife. I jumped from the bed and found myself facing the worst sight I'd ever encountered.

My screams spewed forth in uncontrollable repetitions, slashing the air like a frantic swordsman.

It was not my room.

Wake in Fright

by Richard Vasey

Exhaustion was about to take over as Agnes and Richard trudged down the gangway from the plane. Richard's demeanour was not enhanced by the over enthusiastic search by security, which triumphantly unearthed a bottle of mouthwash 50mL over the limit!

The taxi rank snaked along the wet sidewalk, headed by a whistle blowing attendant, who calmly trousered bundles of notes from each passenger as they climbed into the ancient Detroit made cabs. Richard called out "Jiron de la Union 958 gracias" and without a word the cab lurched headlong into the dark, wet streets. The driver was dressed in dark colours, a rather greasy looking puffer jacket with a hoodie underneath. The cabbie grunted back in American English to Agnes' rusty Spanish.

They drew up in front of an impressive colonial building in Plaza San Martin and the sign 'Grand Hotel Bolivar' appeared out of the gloom. "Are you guys sure about staying here... not a good area," said the driver who proceeded to clumsily deposit the baggage on the curb. He defiantly requested double the fare quoted and left in a spray of storm water.

Richard and Agnes gingerly approach the vast entrance door. There were no lights on inside and it seemed an eternity before large bolts were released, the door slowly opened with a comical *creeeeeak!* The vast hallway revealed pictures of Hemmingway, John Wayne and Mick Jagger lining the gloomy walls.



Richard was dumb struck when he noticed their names in the register! They were led through a maze of corridors to a small room with a musty unused smell and dominated by a large timbered bed. Agnes asked how many guests were in the hotel tonight and was shocked to hear **THEY WERE THE ONLY GUESTS!**

Feeling hungry and apprehensive the couple ventured out into the night and found a bar nearby. In the corner there was a large table of boisterous young people. They became "instant friends" and the pisco sour flowed freely. Richard attempted to buy a round of drinks which was ignored. They had forgotten to get some currency and the cashcard system was down.

Sophia drunkenly asked which hotel they were in and when Richard responded "Bolivar" knowing looks were exchanged within the group. Agnes understood it was something about "paranormal activity between floors 5 and 6!"

"What room number do you have?"

Richard responded 506!

ink

Triptych

by Phillip Wing

The triptych of poems is written in the haiku style that emerged in 17th century Japan and was popularised by Matsuo Basho in the second half of that century – the Japanese renaissance.

The poem's three-line structure of five, seven and five syllables were formally known as haiku in the 19th century.

The approach of using three haikus references a collaborative style of Japanese poetry, *Renka*. Different poets would each add a five-line stanza to an existing poem to continue the narrative as a "linked verse". Each poet's extension to the linked verse is based on their individual response to where they first meet the poem.

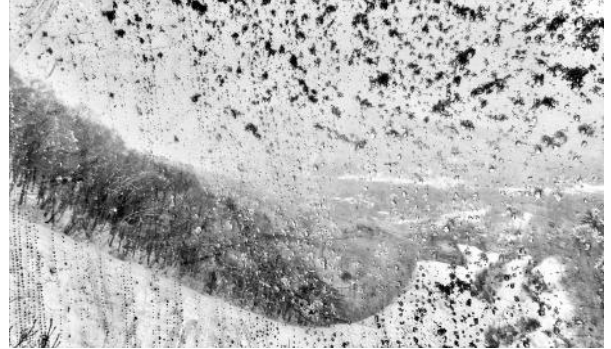
The haikus presented are developed from three different perspectives to an individual's mental health journey.

Accompanying each haiku is an image taken by the poet to visualise the emotion that inspired the verse. This form of symbiotic art is now recognised in Japan where specific image-haiku competitions are now held.

The poet, based in Sydney Australia, has a lifelong gratitude to Japanese culture, literature and martial arts. The focus on haiku serves as both an art form and subliminal expression of emotions.

He was mentioned as the winner of the international section of the Matsuyama Haiku competition in 2019.

Chill winds dull the soul
Mournful sighs too deep for words
Winter's breath is near



Gentle spring ripples
Strum their melody of chance,
Ghostly unknowing



Long summer journey
Pale silver moon draws me near.
Where can peace find me



Walking with the Three Sisters

by Julie Howard

Three pinched faces emerge from the bush. Scrawny necks stretch. Listening. Seeking. Searching.

In the distance, a thin trickle of dust twists into the dimming sky. Limb's twitch. Muscles tighten. Birds call, but three sisters are silent. Watching.

The dust trail blooms and dips towards them.

At the sound of splashing water, six eyes swivel. A dusty camper crosses the creek and slurs into view. The woman winds down her window, grins and yells "Whoo Hoo we're here." The man blasts his horn. She leaps out and calls to them. "Hey kids! This is Aranui campsite, right?"

They stare blankly. Then as one slither into the bush.

"Well, that was kind of weird." No answer. She glances over her shoulder. The husband is running his fingers gingerly along the side of the van.

"Weird," he says.

"Yeah, that's what I said."

"No look honey. There's not a mark, not a dint. Nothing!"



She frowns. "I don't get it. We hit a wallaby, right? I mean I've listened to you chuntering on about insurance claims for the last half hour."

"Freaky," he shrugs.

They drive through the encroaching darkness along a curving pathway passing one empty campsite after another.

"How come there's no one here?" she asks. "I thought you said it was all booked out."

In a small clearing the three girls are hunkered motionless around an ebbing fire. There's a low chant of comradeship.

That night she's awakened by a low keening. "Did you hear that?" She hisses.

“Just the wind” he says, but she hears the quiver in his voice.

A filtered sun wakens her. She peers out. A deep coloured wallaby marked with bronze, grazes lazily on the edge of the bush. Smoke rises from campfires. Breakfast smells fill the air. Children shriek, people talk in low comfortable voices clasping coffee cups to their chests.

Where were all these people last night?



Where are the sisters? In the awakening campsite, husband and wife can see no sign of them.

Every day they walk and swim, but memories of the girls invade their thoughts. Finally, a few days earlier than planned, they decide to pack up and leave. The man powers the camper across the creek and up the hill. The woman shakes her hair out of her ponytail, stretches her arms to the

sky and gives a huge ‘YEEEEEE HAAA!’ ”

They pause at the crossroads. A movement in the bush catches their eyes and there they are. Three sisters. Sitting, cross-legged, empty-eyed, listening. They look up. A slow grin lights their faces. As one, their three fingers point and their eyes swivel.

Then they are gone.

The husband and wife sit for a moment listening to the reassuring sound of the indicator before his foot slams on the accelerator taking them to the safety of the highway and local towns.

Eventually, police identify the occupants of the burnt-out campervan. Though the cause of the single-vehicle accident is never identified.

Of course, as many of you will know, no one has visited the campsite for many years but still reports continue of three, blank-eyed young girls sitting at the crossroads, pointing toward the highway and only today I heard on the radio, that this is the highest-ranked stretch of highway for single-vehicle accidents in Australia.

This is based on a story published as part of the Spill the Beans ‘Freaky’ Challenge. Check out more stories on spillthebeans.net.au

“J’Accuse!”

by Rob Simes

Words, letters, phrases, tumbled from the ceiling, slid down the walls, pooled at my feet, gathered by the door, and in the corners. They would bury me, suffocate me. There was a weight to them. They were too many, unless I could give them voice, and so cull their numbers. They made demands, they were fearful masters, or worse still, slaves.



I looked out the window, in the direction of the great city. My friend, who gave birth to me, and would, I am sure, calmly watch my death. Dirty, desperate, riven with disease and debate, but defiantly full of life and beauty.

The morning air was brittle. The winter sun struggled. The cold through the wide-windows made me shiver, and I wrapped the rug a little more tightly around my legs. And my hand obeyed my motto, *Nulla dies sine linea*. (“not a day without a line”)

It was at least clear I had to write, to summon the words, to speak up, to speak out, to defend him, but ...

My pen scratches across the paper, but, the words sag to the floor defeated, fall through the page. Lightning from brain to lungs, up through the chest, forms in the mouth, and dribbles out, defeated.

Their purpose, to soar, to change, to surge, to be crafted lightning. All we have, and action so driven. Our essence, whispered insight, our choice, dare, a brave smith, our only purpose, a modern Hephaestus.

Bright light, revelation, or the dim dark places. Constant clarity, or the calming cloistered cave. Masks to meaning, or careful, considered, choice, never-ending. Mere slogans, or the loving embrace of visions of what might be.

All the shapes, and words, in infinite variety, continue their fall, all around me.

And I felt, in one single moment of blazing damascene clarity, I was a single dot, and my path was entirely of my choosing. Move just a little, and again, and again, and every word and shape was before me, every phrase, every sentence, waiting, for my movement, my hand.

And so, I wrote. And then, I waited, for a title. And, finally, it came, J’Accuse!

And, fearful, and proud, and, mostly, relieved, because the clamour was, at least, lessened, I signed it, Émile Z.

Something's wrong here

by Jim Lemon

A departure from the expected winds up those inner responses conserved by nature's relentless attempts to cull the unfit. Our eyes dilate, our hearing sharpens, and our attention focuses. The effect is even greater when things usually shaped by our preference for order and predictability tumble into unfamiliar combinations. We're good at recognising when the world has departed from its usual behaviour because we wouldn't be here if our ancestors hadn't noticed such things.

Somehow we're aware that danger may have arisen even before we know what it is, and must identify whatever is amiss to calibrate our response. It needn't be a real hazard, only as unexpected as a real one. It was but a young mother and her little child, one among many similar pairs at the shopping centre, who set off my hazard detector. Both were clearly enjoying their attempt to subvert convention as they began their ascent of the moving walkway. It brought me to an abrupt halt at the top of the same walkway going down. It was so far from what usually happened that I looked down to assure myself that the walkway was really moving down.

I was aware that they understood the nature of what they were doing. Whether some irresistible impulse of the toddler or



a burst of maternal whimsy had set them on this challenge, they had both joyfully accepted it. I took a step back and smiled to the mother that I would not block their progress. What wonderful ideas and behaviours might spring from this formative experience?

They were a team, these two miscreants. The child wore that expression of determination that signals a striving for autonomy not yet achieved. The little body spun back and forth like a torsion pendulum in its efforts to overcome the tireless movement of the track below it. The mother held the little hand, cheering the toddler to persist against the machine. Upward they crawled, the walkway mindlessly trying to make them descend while they matched and exceeded its opposition to their goal.

I was sure that if the contest became desperate, the mother would hoist the child and rescue its momentary pride, but it seemed that she really cared about this climb, knowing that a bright light early in life can provide a beacon in years to come. By this time I, too, was silently cheering for the tot, as if the tension of an observer was a necessary part of the exertion that pushed them upward.

Finally, their feet landed on the motionless metal plate at the top of the walkway. The little stumble that attended the cessation of counteracting motion by the walkway smoothed out and they passed before me triumphantly with their mismatched gaits. I only had time to flash a "thumbs-up" and a delighted grin that was returned by the mother. I hope that my gesture was interpreted as intended, to acknowledge the efforts of a determined child and an insightful mother.



Haiku

Afternoon breeze;
a tree shadow
strokes its neighbour

By Laurie Wilson

Fearful of Falling

by Deborah Singerman

It was World Pride in Sydney, a throbbing February, sunny and full of people with T-shirts promising fun and fury. I have not gone to evening cultural performances for years, and certainly no wham-bam parties where sparkle earns you searing nocturnal stares.

To compensate, I enjoyed day-time harmonies from visiting choirs at shopping centres and libraries, films from anywhere and everywhere, and sessions at the global human rights conference.



Nevertheless, I could not resist the throbbing music and community colour-splash of Hyde Park and Oxford Street on the last Pride Day. Even the fast-food joints bopped with trim men and women twirling scarves and laughing a hell-bent joy.

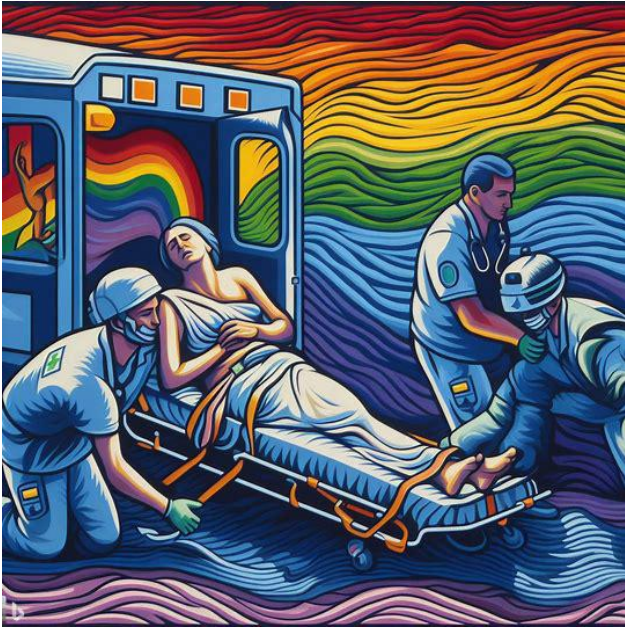


But I knew I was pushing it, wanting the tantalising possibilities but realistically wandering if I could meet them. I was drained and scorched by the sun but kept on as long as I could.

The next day, walking to my local station, I remember looking at a hump in the road and thinking, 'I am not going to make this'. I was right.

I had concentrated so hard to traverse the day-to-day craggy pavement in the neighbourhood that my brain collapsed at this extra gradient. I could not summons the message to my legs literally to rise to the occasion.

I opened my eyes to the concerned face of an ambulance driver. I had collapsed on the pavement and was rushed to emergency. The hospital report frustratingly said only that I had been found by a passer-by, an anonymous but generous one. Thank you kindly.



I have had type 2 diabetes and hypertension for years, with weakening muscles and a stoop from osteoporosis. An endocrinologist eventually diagnosed them holistically as Cushing's disease.

A brain surgeon removed a tumour on my pituitary gland that had been generating excessive cortisol, a classic Cushing's symptom. But my muscles continued to weaken, despite a good diet and daily walks. I was slow and unsteady. Something was still not right.

I had fallen before but the Pride fall shook me so much I agreed to laparoscopic surgery to remove my adrenal glands. These generate the devastating cortisol stress hormones, which perversely we need to stay alive, but in the numbers I had (and probably had had for many, undetected years) can turn sour.

Since the operation, I am stronger, less bent, and can open jam jars, for the first time in at least 20 years without a towel to aid turning. This is one of the rewards for the tiny scars and lumps that line my stomach.

I clutch handrails at stations, hauling myself up and down, concentrating hard on keeping a steady line so people do not nudge me.

My legs vary every day; how stiff, how tingly, pins and needles crawling inside my limbs. I take life-giving steroids monitored by my endocrinologist as they impact on my body.

Emotionally, I am still an open diary, but with a veil of guiding sense and demeanour, when nocturnal stares live in memory alone.

I am learning every day how far and how fast I can walk to keep my fearful heart from pumping loudly in the gnawing anticipation of another fall.



Midnight Intrusion

by Peter Stankovic

Erik's dreams were awash with distant memories as he lay cocooned in the soft embrace of sleep. The night had been calm, the only disturbance the occasional hoot of an owl in the woods behind their modest home. But then, as if summoned by fate, the tranquillity was shattered by a relentless thumping on their front door.



Erik groggily blinked his eyes open, his senses jolted to life by the rude intrusion. He turned his head to the side, his sight obscured by the dimness of the room, and found Rachael, his plump girlfriend, stirring beside him. She was draped in a nightdress that barely covered her girth, the soft fabric barely able to contain the bulge of her fleshy abundance. Her eyes, swollen with sleep, struggled to make sense of the sudden noise.



"What's that noise, Erik?" she mumbled, her voice heavy with drowsiness.

Erik, his heart now racing, carefully manoeuvred his large frame out of bed, the floorboards creaking beneath his considerable weight. He padded cautiously to the entrance, his mind racing to fathom who could be thumping at their door at two in the morning.

As he reached the door, a cold sweat clung to his brow. He hesitated for a moment, then gingerly cracked it open, the darkness outside offering no clues. Before he could react, the door was flung wide open, and three shadowy figures, clad in hoodies and adorned with a myriad of tattoos, barged in with a brutal force that sent Erik sprawling to the floor.

Panic surged within him as the intruders wasted no time. They rained down punches and kicks on him, relentless in their assault. Pain coursed through his body, every blow serving as a grim reminder of his vulnerability.



Rachael, her senses now fully awakened by the commotion, appeared in the doorway and let out a heart-wrenching scream. But one of the thugs, a towering figure with a menacing presence, closed the distance between them with unnerving speed. He placed his large, calloused hand around Rachael's throat, his eyes locked onto hers, and his voice dripping with menace, he ordered her to silence her cries. 'Shut the fuck up, bitch,' he repeated.

Tears welled up in Rachael's eyes as she gasped for air, unable to speak or scream, her gaze locked with the cold, soulless eyes of her captor. The situation had spiralled into a nightmare beyond comprehension.

In the midst of the chaos, a concerned neighbour, awakened by the commotion, rushed to their open door in an attempt to intervene. But he was

met with a swift and brutal punch that sent him sprawling to the ground, his cries silenced just as effectively as Rachael's.

The intruders, seemingly satisfied with their cruel assault, made a hasty retreat. The leader, a muscle-bound man with a black beard, shouted an accusation as he fled, 'Scammer!' The word hung ominously in the air as they disappeared into the night.

Erik, bloodied and battered, lay on the floor, trying to make sense of what had just transpired. His mind raced with questions, chief among them: How had this man found out?

Rachael, shaken but determined, reached for the phone and dialled the emergency number. The shrill sound of sirens in the distance offered a glimmer of hope as they waited for the police to arrive, their lives forever changed by the harrowing events of that fateful visit.



The Stone

by Maria Issaris

"Look away," she had said, laughing at him and pushing his face away, so he reared back briefly taking another pull at his beer. But he kept his eyes trained on her as she looked down between her breasts, pulled aside her top discreetly and fumbled somewhere into her bra....."Ah, here it is!" she said delightedly, pulling out something small with her fingers. "There, what do you think of that?" His eyes had widened against his will. All his discipline as a lawyer - learning to keep a straight, calm face - hearing things and seeing things that made your eyes water.... But this.

He didn't ask permission - he reached out and took it from her palm - letting it rest in his own - still warm from her breasts where it had been resting. The noise from the pub around them seemed to swell. His mind sped in a dozen directions.

The next morning he was still brushing away the cobwebs of a hangover, fumes of the aged tequila they and shared (at, what was it, bar number three?) still clung to his nose. The Uber driver had dropped him right on the curb at the airport, and the day hit his face. Weak sun, chill air, mid-September in Sydney. Sam rubbed his hands - brought them to his mouth breathing out hot lungfuls of air. Damn this winter. Damn Sydney these past few months. Damn the case he was working on - damn the judge and his life-sucking disinterest. "Mr Sam... Rrrritzzzzz...." the thin jawed judge had drawled first day, as people sometimes

did when they particularly wanted to be arseholes, rolling the rrrrrrr, and hanging onto the zzzzzz until it turned into a snake like sound.



He reached for his iPhone - checked his flight time, thinking that the women he flirted with at the Business Lounge counter every week were very likely to put him on an earlier flight if he asked. Charm, luck, those items that his mother kept tutting "you shouldn't rely on Sam" were handy tools. It was the 15th. Spring. His eyes narrowed in concentration - he wanted to be back before, he checked the moon calendar, the new moon rose at exactly 11.39am. He needed to be home, he needed to check the safe. If what he feared was in play - no, no, it couldn't be. And besides it was just a story, but what did it hurt... if he could get there by then, there was just enough time to... could he reverse it? He didn't know. He bit his lip. He had never read that far into the little wooden box he had been given - he had always thought it was a bit of a tale... until last night.

The bar*guy had come to their table bearing small plates of food - "We have to eat something," she had said. The legal case had been crushing, a simple matter that had blown out and taken him to Sydney every week for three long months. To alleviate the tension he had started playing with a dating app. And this is how he had found himself with this one, who had sat down, taken a long look at him and said, "let me guess...." uncannily reciting elements of his personality that amused him greatly. After which they hadn't stopped talking for a few hours, and he had found himself saying, "And then my grandfather was shot... in the Gaza... but he survived... sent to Egypt, and look..." to his own surprise he had taken out his phone and shown her a photograph. She had sighed and looked at it closely. Black and white, grainy, a pyramid, a camel, young Aussie men in uniform, strapped with firearms....

"It was there, that he got something that he gave to his young bride, my grandmother..."

She had looked up at him - she had this way about her that made him want to say a lot of things without thinking. He couldn't work it out - it was like a type of innocence - the kind of pull that sheer curiosity has - a gap you want to fill.

"And he gave her this..." he said, opening up another photo, which he did almost gently, caressing the glass of the phone as he let it blossom under his finger.

"Ahhhh," she had sighed, as she peered into the glass face taking his phone from him to take a closer look. "It's beautiful," tracing her finger over it.

"It's a carnelian stone," he had said. "Supposedly a sacred stone in Egypt."

She had nodded slowly. "How did he get it?" she had asked, tipping her head a little to the side.

"Grandfather Sam, yes, yes, I'm named after the old codger, was evasive about that! Always said that it was drawn to him as if by a magnet... found it in his pocket he said, straight after he proposed to my grandmother by letter." and Sam had laughed. For years he had seen it hang round the slim neck of his grandmother, and then his mother, warm, vibrant against their pale skins.

"Hm," she had said thoughtfully. "I like the little flaw in the corner of it," pointing to a detail. He had leant in towards her, their heads almost together, the smell of beer and something salty and hot, and her fragrance, all mingled - flowers in the desert, he had thought.

"You might be interested in this," she had said...

That was when she had produced her own carnelian, which she wore in her bra, "because it makes me feel warm and alive." He had stared at it - its shape, the small flaw in the corner like a shadow, like a wound.

The rest of the night had been a blur - and he had found himself having a great philosophical debate with a stranger he shared a cab with on the way back to his hotel.

Michelle at the business lounge had said, "Of course, Sam, here you go," and had swiftly punched out another ticket for him, sliding it with her long curved nails

over the counter. He smiled, thinking he had gained himself a couple of hours.

Sam was trudging out of Ballina Airport - his car parked in the adjoining industrial estate, he had another hour and a half to drive inland to get home, to get to the safe, to get to the box where the stone lay, identical to the one his date had shown him. Time to calm down. Be rational.

Sam's mother had given him the jewel when she had died, along with a little box full of notes; the ink-etched pages from an old journal, roughly pulled out. He had read them fast a few times, unable to make much sense of it all. His grandfather had been delirious when recovering from the wounds. And Sam had a busy life.

"Only when the stone came," said the journal, "did I do what was natural and live true, and vowed I would live true throughout my line. The stone would stay if we..." That was it. That was the end.

His mother was a sensible woman, no flights of fancy. But when she pressed the little box of treasure into his hands she had said, "for your one true love, Sam..." Sam had laughed, shaking his head. She did not understand the modern world. There was no such thing, not in the old way. "I mean it Sam," she had said.

"Otherwise the stone will leave, it will be magnetised by someone else who wants it enough..." Sam had shaken his head, smiled, said he would lock it up and keep it safe, but his mother had held his hand fast. "Take particular care in spring, the first new moon, the one of hopes..."

The old family home had many dusty rooms for the many purposes of an old

lifestyle - which no longer had everyday purpose. In one was an ancient safe - and in it was the stone, encased in silver filigree, with a fine chain in a loop. Beautifully set by his grandfather in an Egyptian jewellery store - "the finest of craftsmen they were, Sam."

Sam's car crunched into the driveway, a gravel made of river stones groaning their resistance as he arced into the garage well off the road. He undid his seatbelt and sat breathing heavily for a few moments. It was 11.40. It was all ridiculous. Of course it was all fine. He had been drunk, hungover. All this was rubbish. He laughed out loud to himself, but all the same he found himself going straight to the door without taking out his bag first. He found himself straining as he pushed the front door open, and rushing through the corridors and rooms to get to the middle room, near the library, where in a corner nestled on a fine table was a safe. He faced the safe, punching his right fist in left open palm, comforted by the sound, forceful and reassuring, like a boxer, practising, one of the only sports he every really practised, and... he opened his left palm where the other stone had lain last night, less than 12 hours ago. It throbbed.

"Let's do it then, Sam," he said to himself. He turned the dial a few times in the right denominations he knew by heart, and heard the click. He looked into the darkness within it, and there lay the small wooden box that held the papers and jewel. He lifted it out as he had many times before, almost weekly as he now reached ins surprise, he didn't know why, it had just given him comfort to see and touch... and opened the curved lid.

Mystery Writer

by Jose Nodar

Gosh, I hate Mondays,' thought aspiring mystery writer Joaquin Navarro as he comes out of his unit above the town's only optician store and walks by its bookstore, Village Books & Stuff. Joaquin looks through the window at the books on display and an attractive cover catches his eye: *Stories to Share with My Partner—Book 1*. He mumbles to himself: 'I might just come in on Thursday after work and pick it up. It looks like a fun book, just by its cover.'

Looking at his watch, Joaquin notices he is cutting close to catch the 7:50 AM, so he picks up his pace. Picking up his pace was not an issue for Joaquin.

He is a junior market analyst for one of the big accounting firms that specialise in venture capital and while he sits in front of a computer for most of the day, he tries to make up for this laxity while at work with a rigorous forty-five-minute workout in the company's gym, followed by a quick shower and a light lunch. After clocking out at 6 PM sharp, Joaquin returns to the gym for a short thirty-minute workout, again a quick shower catching the 7:20PM home, which gets him to his front door at 8:20 PM sharp. Like clockwork.

This precision allows Joaquin to devote several hours after dinner to his mystery writing, which he envisions one day to be displayed in the bookstore below.

But Mondays are always hard.

The weekend, especially Saturday, is his 'R & R' day in which he meets his friends



and sometimes catches up with other local writers to discuss plots, strategies, etc. This leaves him with Sunday to rest, bum around in his unit and just plain get away from his daily life and dream of his current novel and how it is going.

Every day, nothing happens. Joaquin wears his earbuds on the way to work listening to his favourite authors. Cussler, Patterson, Nodar, you know the great ones, and being the middle of winter in Sydney, his overcoat on his daily train trek; he's ignored, and he ignores.

Then one evening, on his way home from another stressful day at the office, Joaquin is startled out of his funk when a frantic Asian man knocks him over at a dead run, then races up the stairs—pursued by two thugs. Joaquin sees the thug raise a revolver, and a shot rings through the cavernous Central station.

They shot the Asian man.

Joaquin, from his position on the floor, watches hundreds of people scatter and crouch behind columns, expecting more shots which do not come. One shot was all it took to bring the Asian man down. The thugs kneel by the Asian man and

start searching him but stop when they hear someone shouting 'Police. Police. They are over there,' and they quickly escape through one of the many exits and just disappear into the street.

Joaquin gets up and starts dusting himself as he watches the police stand next to the body and create a makeshift cordon around it as more officers arrive. As he dusts overcoat, he discovers a small package in the side pocket.

Taking the package out, he slowly opens it and finds a fluffy fake rabbit fur key chain with one key attached and an encrypted note with some words typed in lowercase: 4528 Lewis Street, Spring Farm NSW-igygyb!



Surprised at the key chain and the strange note, Joaquin did not notice the police had moved the body. Looking at the spot where the Asian man fell, there was no blood, and he wondered how the police or the train custodians had cleaned up the mess so quickly. Shrugging his shoulders, he goes to the platform just in time for his 7:20 PM train.

Hopping into the carriage and quickly finding a seat by the window, he holds the note in his left hand and reads it again.

It just made little sense.

The key chain was a puzzle because he wonders what the key was for. It looked like any key you might have in the office or in a home. But the note, the strange note with the address and then the letters 'igygyb,' that is strange. A mystery indeed, but then Joaquin says to himself: 'hey, you are a mystery writer, you should be able to figure this out.'

Arriving at his unit at exactly 8:20 PM, like always, he quickly changes, grabs his car keys, and walks down the back door to the car park. Sitting in the car and before starting the car, Joaquin keys in the address into the built in GPS screen of his Mini John Cooper Works Clubman. 'Only thirty-two minutes.' Reversing and quickly accessing the main drag of Northport, he heads toward the southern road and after what seemed less than thirty-two minutes, Joaquin arrives at 4528 Lewis Street Spring Farm.

A beautiful Hampton style with a wrap-around porch presents the single storey building. Joaquin walks up to the front door and rings the doorbell and waits.

Nothing.

No one comes to the door.

He turns to leave and thinks twice about it. He has a key on a fuzzy fake rabbit key chain. Will the key fit this door?

Inserting the key into the lock, he hears the tumbler turn and the door gingerly opens to his hand.

'Hello. Anyone home?'



Walking in further down the long hall, he sees a lot of closed doors but decides not to venture into any of them and continues to what appears to be the lounge where sitting propped up on the three-seater lounge is the Asian man looking lifeless.

‘Oh crap!’ thinks Joaquin to himself. ‘What did I get myself into? My fingerprints are on the door handle. I rang the doorbell. The police are going...’

‘Wait, a minute,’ stopping his thought in mid-air. ‘How did the Asian man’s body get here? The police would not bring him here. They would take him to the hospital or the morgue or somewhere else, but not to his home. Is this his home?’ Joaquin is stumped and moves in closer to have a better look at the body.

Gradually he moves toward the lounge and when he gets within a metre of the body, the Asian man jumps up!

A startled Joaquin almost faints and quickly turns and starts running and he bumps into Harry McDonald, his hot

desk colleague at work who is laughing energetically.

‘Totally worth it. The look on your face, Joaquin. I will never forget it as long as I live. The experience was amazing!’

‘What the...? What is going on, Harry? What are you doing here? Who is this man? Whose house is this?’

‘Relax Joaquin. It is pay-back time, that all.’

‘Pay-back time? For what, Harry?’

‘For all those children’s pranks, you pulled on me in the office. The Whoopi cushion, the dribble cup, the fake dog poop on my chair, the stupid fake snake in the can joke, those fake bug ice cubes at the Christmas party. Need I go on?’

‘Damn it, Harry, I could have given me a heart attack.’

‘In your excellent shape? That would not happen.’

‘Well, I got to go. So, I bid you adieu.’

‘Wait Harry. What in the world is igygyb?’

‘Why I thought you would figure it out, you mystery writer, you. It means I Got You Good You Bastard.’



Interview: Laurie Wilson

How did you start writing?

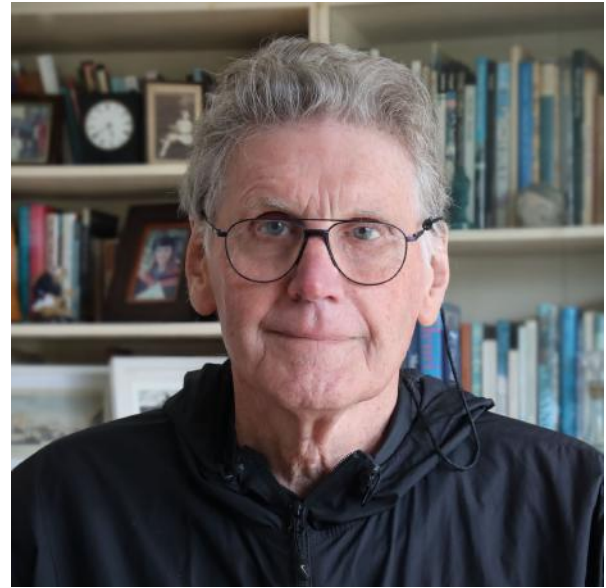
I have now been retired from full-time work for 15 years, after a career as a research scientist, specialising in medical technology. So most of my writing has been scientific papers, and it is only since retiring that I have turned to creative, rather than scientific writing. I feel I have always had a creative side which has only been allowed to flourish after leaving the world of science. I do not consider myself a “poet”, but more as someone who dabbles in writing verse; if anything it is the Australian bush poets that I try to emulate, rather than “capital-p” Poets.

What do you love most about writing?

My verses stick to strict rhyming and scanning rules, and this provides the biggest challenge and also the biggest satisfaction. How do I express what I want to say in a very precise number of syllables and subject to a strict rhyming schemes? Most of my verse is intended to be humorous, which means that the rhymes are also “punch lines”, providing even more constraints. But when the finished product sounds like it just flowed from my fingers onto the computer screen, I am happy. Of course, the ability to complete a project in a few days means that I am unlikely to get discouraged before finishing a more ambitious piece of writing.

What are the most unexpected opportunities that your writing has led to?

During the last year or so I have taken the opportunity to read some of my verse



at meetings of the “Spill the Beans” writing group, or at open mic nights at the local library. My impression is that my style of verse works better being read aloud to group than on paper. They are really songs without tunes. The rhythm, rhyme and humour lend themselves to performance, and it is very gratifying when one of my intended jokes actually causes some laughter.

As a keen photographer, I would like to combine this with writing, and have written a series of haikus inspired by photographs I have taken. The challenge here is to complement, rather than duplicate what is in the photograph.

What’s your top advice for other writers?

As someone who has taken up creative writing after a quarter of a century of life, my future plans need to be somewhat limited; mainly just to keep going and to extract some benefit from all that life experience. I am encouraged by the many writers in my age group, and the only advice I would give to people in my position is to write like hell, as if your life depends on it. And it possibly does!

Hashtag Famous

You might have heard the rumours
That my fellow baby boomers
Are giving up on ever being famous.
But the path to fame is speedier
Now we all have social media
And we're going for it; I say who can blame us!

No more a timid critter
I have joined the world of Twitter
And my hashtags will in record time go viral.
I suppose I could go trashy in
The style of Kim Kardashian
Pursuing fame, but in a downward spiral.

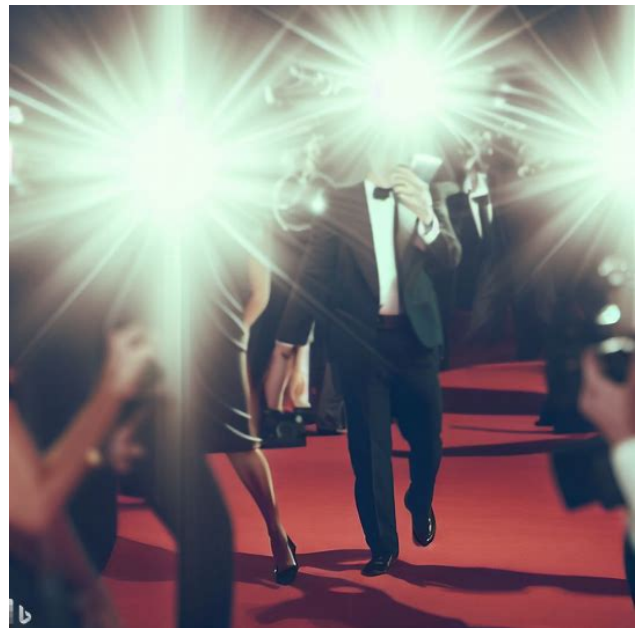
But in a world that teeters
On the brink, there's hope that tweeters
Can resolve these situations highly
flammable.
I'll influence world leaders
And my million LinkedIn readers
By images of all things instagrammable.

My fame is never-ending;
My TikTok posts are trending
And I'm getting a half a million Facebook likes.
I will show a side that's humbler
By my heartfelt posts on Tumblr
Ensuring that my YouTube traffic spikes.

But online fame is fleeting
And despite my brilliant tweeting,
My hit rate's down; it's falling through the
floor.
My Facebook fame has ended
It's sad to be unfriended;
I'm cancelled; I'm a superstar no more.

I'll shut down all my apps,
I'll let subscriptions lapse;
And leave the social media for the nerds,
Embracing the sublimity
Of total anonymity;
The only things that twitter now are birds!

by Laurie Wilson



Featured Writers



Dylan Butler loves all things fantasy, beginning with the stories he made up while building sandcastles when he was eight. He loves writing epic narrative verse and will enthusiastically recite his work on demand. He writes in his spare time in between his work in archaeology.



Julie Howard is the President of writing community Spill the Beans Inc and the author of *Nowt But Drippin* a novel set in Yorkshire in the 1960s. Writing, education, singing, bushwalking, travel and her family are her passions.
[Julie on SelfPubAus](#)



Peter Stankovic is a Sydney-based author who has self-published several contemporary thrillers. He started writing crime fiction and thrillers since retiring from a professional finance career in 2010.

PeterAStankovic.com.au



Rob Simes is a History teacher, now in Sydney and previously in London, a hopeful writer, and a keen traveller. He's currently working on a Historical Fiction novel set in Paris during the Revolution

[Rob on SelfPubAus](#)



Maria Issaris is a journalist, editor and community media specialist, researcher and writer. She founded audiobooks@radio which enables Australian authors to publish their work as an audiobook.

[Maria on SelfPubAus](#)



José was born in La Habana, Cuba, and migrated to the US as a child. He began his writing his debut novel after getting his feet wet in creative writing at a writers' group in Camden New South Wales, Australia.

jfnodar.com.au

Writing Opportunities

Guest author newsletter spots

Author J F Nodar runs a monthly newsletter which features a guest author each edition.

So far 16 authors have taken part in sharing either a short story, a poem, or a chapter of their book. See them at jfnodar.com/authors

J F Nodar would love to hear from established or new authors who want to share their work. Send him a message at info@jfnodar.com.au.



Sydney Authors Inked

Sydney Authors Inked is a group of authors based in Sydney that runs free author talks at The Little Big House in Summer Hill.

The next event is on Sunday 12 November 2023. Authors may have their books available for sale and a light morning tea may be offered.

Authors interested in taking part can email: sydneyauthorsinked@gmail.com



Spill the Beans at Manly Art Gallery

Spill the Beans online writing community is holding an event with local authors, story and poem performances and music.

Spill the Beans current challenge is FREEDOM: send your 400-word story or poem to beanswrite21@gmail.com

Deadline 31st October 2023 (free entry)



Inner West Writers Group

Inner West Writers Group Write Club meets weekly in Marrickville Library, NSW on Saturdays from 10am to 12.

It's run by Maria Issaris, a writer and broadcaster who also produces audiobooks.

Writers and keen listeners wanting to hear new writers are all welcome.

Over time the group has created a hub of activity and information/skill exchange for everyone to help on another on the writing journey. It's all free - all self-help.

Please RSVP each week so the organisers can arrange the right number of Zoom rooms and Library space to ensure good quality feedback.

[MeetUp link here.](#)