

ink

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12+

Emerging Writers & Poets

Shanghai

A Night Out

Rapture

STORIES

by Robert Costa
Conchita GarSantiago
Erica Griffiths

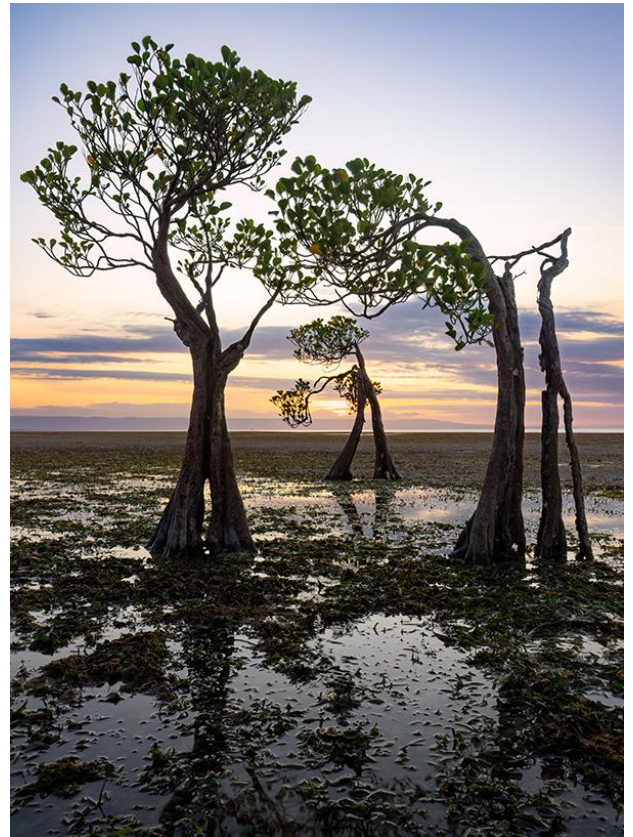
POEMS

by Uma Srinivasan
Julie Howard

Foreword

Welcome to ink issue 5 as spring blossoms into early summer and words flourish on the leaves of a book. With Hallowe'en approaching, we have some works fitting the darker theme, such as Rob Simes' *The List* and Adelaide Hunter's *The Funeral*, as well as a page of cat poems.

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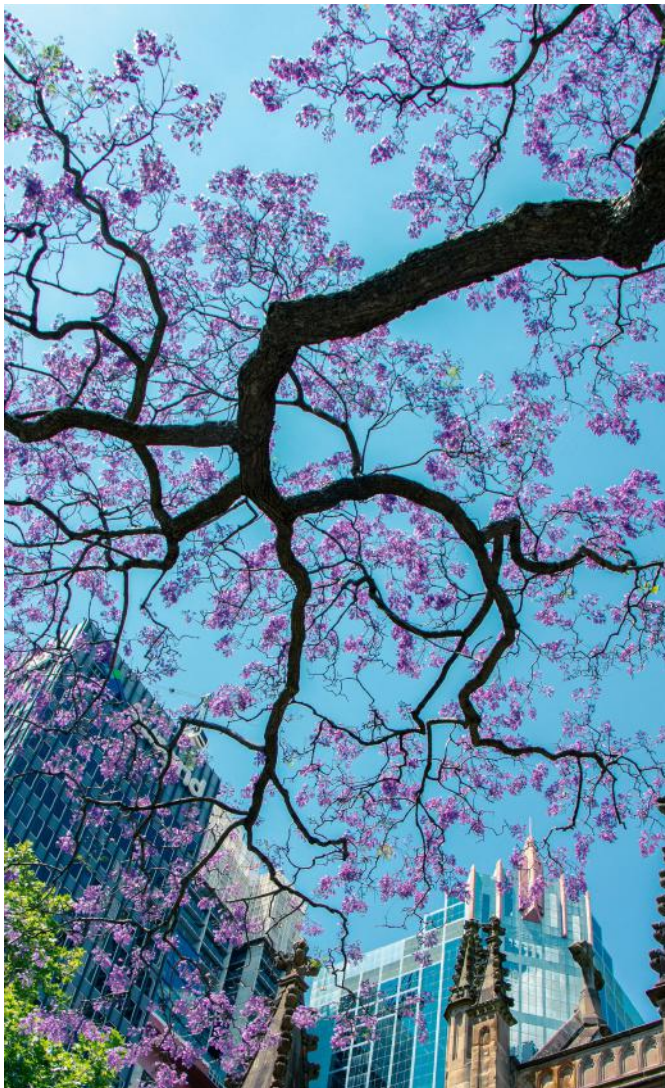
Rapture

I walk along the mangrove cove
 a dark mirror
 reflecting trees and clouds
 and all that stand above the ground.
 A keeper of stories
 of the living and the dead
 buried deep in its murky belly
 like thoughts hidden
 behind doors forbidden.

I stare at the stagnant pool
 ponder about lives lived and lost.
 Wonder when my turn will come
 To twinkle through the clouds
 reflect through the mangrove.

Shh! Pause! Listen!
 To the susurrating cicadas
 The whisper of the petals
 of the purple jacaranda.
 No flower's forbidden
 No star remains hidden
 No need to turn around
 Feel the rapture all around.

By Uma Srinivasan



Unfair

by Erica Griffiths

Skye enjoyed the vibe of university, leaning into her lectures, learning about those momentous early environmental protests. She was captivated by the bravery of ordinary people, standing up against bulldozers and facing down all that fury. Midway through the semester, her solitary sandwich was interrupted by a group of engaging strangers, enchanting her with their friendship and captivating her with their mission. Wow, she thought, this was huge, they knew the science and wanted to do something about it!



She soon found her tribe among these deeply passionate people, cheerfully attending their sessions, her mind opening to the possibilities. But their sense of urgency was overwhelming, and discussions inevitably moved onto protesting, using the physical power of people to make their point. They marched together in the city with Skye proudly holding her poster - "A serious climate crisis needs a serious response!"

She loved their shared allegiance and was confident the community would embrace their vital message, despite the traffic commotion. But the media coverage was disappointing, just careless critical commentary on individuals with dreadlocks and tattoos, with no mention of the climate disaster. The mood was equally flat in the protest debrief session, but their disappointment was quickly overtaken by distress about the new protestor laws: \$20,000 fines and up to two years in jail, could anyone afford that? It was so unfair! Passion and anxiety were equally high, but the debate eventually resolved that another large scale disruption was needed to focus political attention.

Dan was running late, again. His new site boss was ruthless about starting times. If you missed the safety briefing you'd be denied entry; and if you missed it twice you'd be off the job.

"Come on kids, please try and find your hats, we've gotta get moving."

Dan had not adjusted to single parenthood as easily as he had imagined; in fact, he hadn't adjusted at all. He was angry and confused, and not managing the whole work-kids thing. He was strong but couldn't rely on his physical strength to absorb the unfamiliar and solve every new dilemma. He was juggling their lives but wasn't sure if he was frightened of everything coming down at once or that he'd lost his ability to catch.

Then Liam whispered, "Dad, I can't get my breath."

It was so unfair; Liam was only six when he'd been diagnosed with severe asthma. They'd mostly managed, but every so

often it flared up, due to weather, pollen or God knows what, requiring a crisis dash to the hospital.

“Tilly love, please find your brother’s medicine, we’ll see if we can settle it down.”

The day was heating up as Dan piled Tilly and Liam into the truck and entered the flow of morning traffic. But Liam was now struggling to breathe, and Dan needed to focus. Bugger being late for work, Liam needed to get to Emergency now! As his apprehension grew he began second guessing himself; which was the fastest way to the hospital? He suddenly swerved left and down the ramp.

It had been an early start for Skye, with her petite frame allowing her neck to fit inside one of those solid oval bike locks, now bolted to the car’s steering wheel. She was amazed to be the centrepiece of this vital large-scale protest, but the necessity of their plight had overwhelmed her, compelling her to act. Her group were quick to depart with the keys, leaving Skye alone to block the entrance and exit of the city tunnel, and to livestream their media bites.

The ramp led Dan directly into the traffic chaos building behind Skye’s vehicle. He jumped out to help solve whatever the problem was, but the dim tunnel revealed little of the car’s occupant. Just a gold speck in a nostril and the glimmer of metal. Then the protest banners strung across the lanes caught his eye and the shock hit him. This was a deliberate act! Glancing back, he quickly realised there was no possibility of reversing and driving forward was impossible. Disbelief momentarily paralysed him, before his

parental urges erupted, propelling his anger onto Skye. “Move this bloody car, this is an emergency!”



Skye cringed from the shouting, but the bar preventing her head from moving and there was nothing she could do to shift the car. Instead, she desperately willed her disruptive efforts to be worthwhile and kept her phone messages flowing - “We’re in the middle of a climate emergency, we need action to save the planet.”

Dan retrieved his large wrench from the Ute, his frustration fuelling his actions, smashing her windscreen, pounding the glass and splintering it, with his anger finally subsiding alongside the crumbling fragments. Multiple sirens approached and although he was barely aware of their presence, Dan desperately willed that the police would finally be able to help him.

But their actions had broken rules and both Skye and Dan were handcuffed and led away. It was so unfair!

Shanghai

by Peter Murphy

Standing here looking over the ribbon of the Huangpu River, the Yellow River, a mass of shipping, barges - a whole history weaving between the new and the old. On the eastern side Pudong, skyscrapers of glass and steel, the telecommunications tower, two purple balls suspended on a tripod dwarfing the buildings alongside it.



On the western side, as the moon peers through the mist that has cloaked the river all day, the elegant sweep of the Bund, from north to south, grime encrusted colonial -style buildings, Chinese flags flying from every vantage point, proclaiming a world of decadence and splendour, the “Empire of the East”, long since vanished.

This is Shanghai – the Paris of the East, where everything went and nothing was too licentious, too erotic or too far-fetched, where colonial society danced cheek-by-cheek and poverty danced hand in – hand and where care was cast to the four winds, until the turbulent history threw them out - but their buildings

remain – a sign of something that can never be recaptured.

Behind that elegant façade, the myriad of poor and broken down streets, with their houses, roofs tipped at crazy angles, earthen floors, bicycles and rickshaws toiling amongst the busy traffic, threading through the trees.

The France Whatong Tree – that’s what she called it, as I asked her for directions to the French Quarter, the land that once was.

Barges with no freeboard, creeping lifeless along the river and everywhere the fog, shading in with geometric patterns, the harsh lines of the buildings of Pudong and shrouding in calm mystery, the turbulent past of the Bund, washed by the Yellow River as it winds its way towards the sea.

This city whose river never sleeps, the harsh and mournful sounds of ships” fog horns, sounding a warning as they negotiate the ever flowing Yellow River, weaving their way through unseen currents, the banks shrouded in a fog that barely shows the outlines of the cranes standing, ready to unload and send on their way again - ambassadors to the world

Shanghai, a dichotomy of east and west, neatly broken by the Yellow River. One side a tribute to man’s ingenuity in glass and steel; another a tribute to man’s ingenuity with grace and elegance and now as the city starts to twinkle with red and green, purple and mauve, pink and subdued gold and bronze and iridescent blue, the lights of Shanghai proclaim the night is young, even as grey shapes move at speed along the river, to meet the brightly lit tourist boats with their garish

lights and even more garish and gauche passengers, all agog to see this marvel of modern China.

They tell me that the farmland that was once Pudong, disappeared in a little under ten years. So what hope is there for the remaining farmland, now some five or six kilometres from here, opposite the shipyards. The rapacious need for more and more space in this city of some 15 million people, in a land of 1.3 billion, is never going to rest and everywhere along the river the signs of shipping.

New ships being built and waiting at the fitting out berths, ready for final completion and painting and soon to be on their way, making commercial profits for their owners, profits that are feeding the shipyards of China, with a renaissance of work, such that European yards could never envisage.

Labour here is never a problem and with wages well below what would be expected elsewhere in the world, the cost of manufacture is but a fraction of the cost in other places.

But despite its low-cost labour, what gives Shanghai its edge, is the vibrancy of the people - everyone seems to have a purpose.

I could never have envisaged, when I first came to Shanghai over 50 years ago, that the drab, soulless, vacant wasteland, with scarcely a light to pierce the gloom and darkness, could have evolved into this vibrant, modern city. As night falls, the Bund, becomes a lovers' lane, as everywhere young couples embrace in what in pre-communist times, would have been instant excommunication, prison or even death.

Girls and girls, men and girls, men and men, all are captured by the sweep of the Bund and the ever-flowing river, as they let their emotions take over, clasp each other, lips sealed together, oblivious of those around them.

And watching over all, as it has done for years, the green cone of the Peace Hotel, the bright lights from its art deco windows shining out like a guardian, a fatherly face, smiling over the social revolution that has taken place. Leading away to the west like a neon ribbon, the Nanjing Road, beckons enticingly as the clock strikes 6 o'clock.

This is a country that can only go one way – forward, as its older generation stands back in disbelief.



FORBIDDEN Haiku

Hot summer inflames
Forbidden passionate kiss
A guilty delight

By Julie Howard

Haiku is an unrhymed poetic form consisting of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively

FORBIDDEN Tanka

By Julie Howard

Tanka are traditional Japanese poems containing five lines. Each line has a set number of syllables, creating an overall syllabic pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. Tanka are divided into an upper phrase, containing the first three lines, and the lower phrase, which contains the last two lines.

Is it true she said
Google forbids translation
of Tibetan words
Why would anyone silence
This rich exchange of culture

I Catholic Name

by Conchita GarSantiago

I was born in Franco's Spain, when army and church had lots of power and citizens were powerless. Mum was still in hospital recovering from having me when a priest entered the room with no invitation.

"There are some important people here who want to see you." Mum's bewilderment struck her dumb, not that she was invited to say anything. Through the open door, a procession of priests came in, followed by the archbishop of the town.

"Be grateful, woman, for you have been the chosen one," said the important person.

"What's this?" Mum managed to ask.

"Silence!" ordered one of the priests, as the archbishop lifted me from my mother's arms without asking for permission.

"That's my baby," Mum cried. "What are you doing?"

"Do not worry, woman. It is a great day for your baby and your family."

The doctor entered the room, a fact that put Mum at ease. Well, easier.

"Doctor, what's going on here?"

"Don't worry, nor you or your child are in any danger."

"Your baby will be baptised in the kingdom of God by one of his princes," the archbishop's voice was powerful.

"What?" responded my mother in fear and confusion.



"What name do you want for your daughter?"

"Conchita," responded Mum as calmly as she could.

"That's not a name!" boomed the archbishop, lowering his arms with me in them.

"Well, yes. I know. The official name for that is Concepcion," meekly answered my mother.

"Maria! de la Concepcion," corrected the man in the fancy dress. "But it is not enough."

"Enough for what?" Mum asked.

"Enough for the grand ceremony that awaits her." He gazed at me and after a moment of thinking, he spoke again.

"I've got it! Maria Dominica de la Inmaculada Concepcion."

"That's not the name..."

"Silence!" With that, he took me away.

"My baby!"

"Don't worry," the doctor's words were calm. "They're just going to baptise her."

The Cardinal is coming to Valladolid, and he offered to baptise a few babies.”



“But... I never asked for that.”

“I know...” the doctor was leaving the room. “Don’t worry. Nothing will happen to your baby.”

The grand ceremony was immortalised in a picture with a crowd of people dressed in their best and a big committee of priests and bishops. The Cardinal is holding me up dressed in a long gown as if he were offering me to the Gods. Anonymous faces acting as witnesses can also be seen in the photograph.

I was unaware of my great day, but the consequences of that event have been with me all my life in the form of a cross. The cross of a name I have to carry with me until the day I die.

In Spain, people have their first family name from their father and a second family name from their mother. But occasionally it happens that one parent has a composed family name. As it happened to my mother. Mum’s father wanted Mum and all of us not to lose his

mother’s surname, so he added “de” (of) between his two surnames.

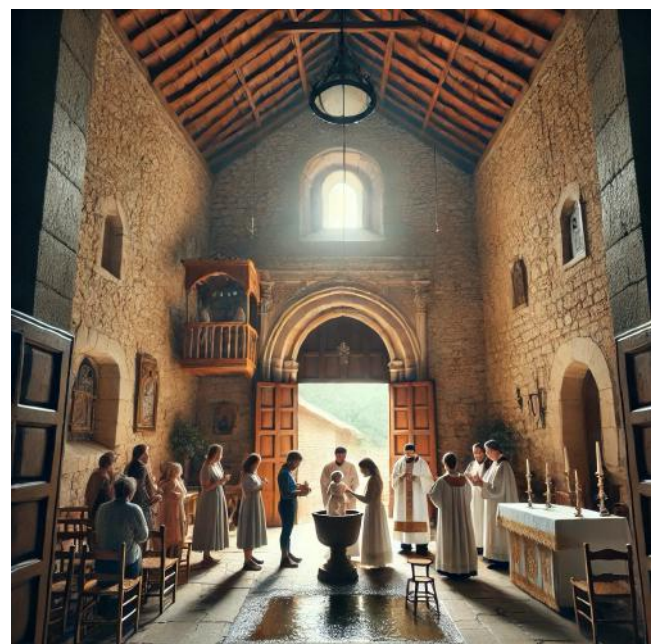
The result of all these naming conventions is that my full name is Maria Dominica de la Inmaculada Concepcion Astudillo Santiago de Olivares.

When I was little, my parents somehow could omit “the Dominica” and “the Inmaculada,” but once I grew up and began to travel overseas, I needed a passport. For the passport, I needed my birth certificate, and with that, the hidden names jumped out as if from a Jack-in-the-box.

There’s no doubt that when I show my passport, the officials that examine it believe that my entire genealogy tree is on that page, and in perplexity, they ask me, “But... What is your name?”

And I say, “My name is Maria Dominica de la Inmaculada Concepción Astudillo Santiago de Olivares.” Then I look at their eyes and add, “Not my fault. Or my mother’s. You may blame it on the Catholic Church.”

Nevertheless, whoever is to blame, it is me the one carrying that cross.



Forgotten

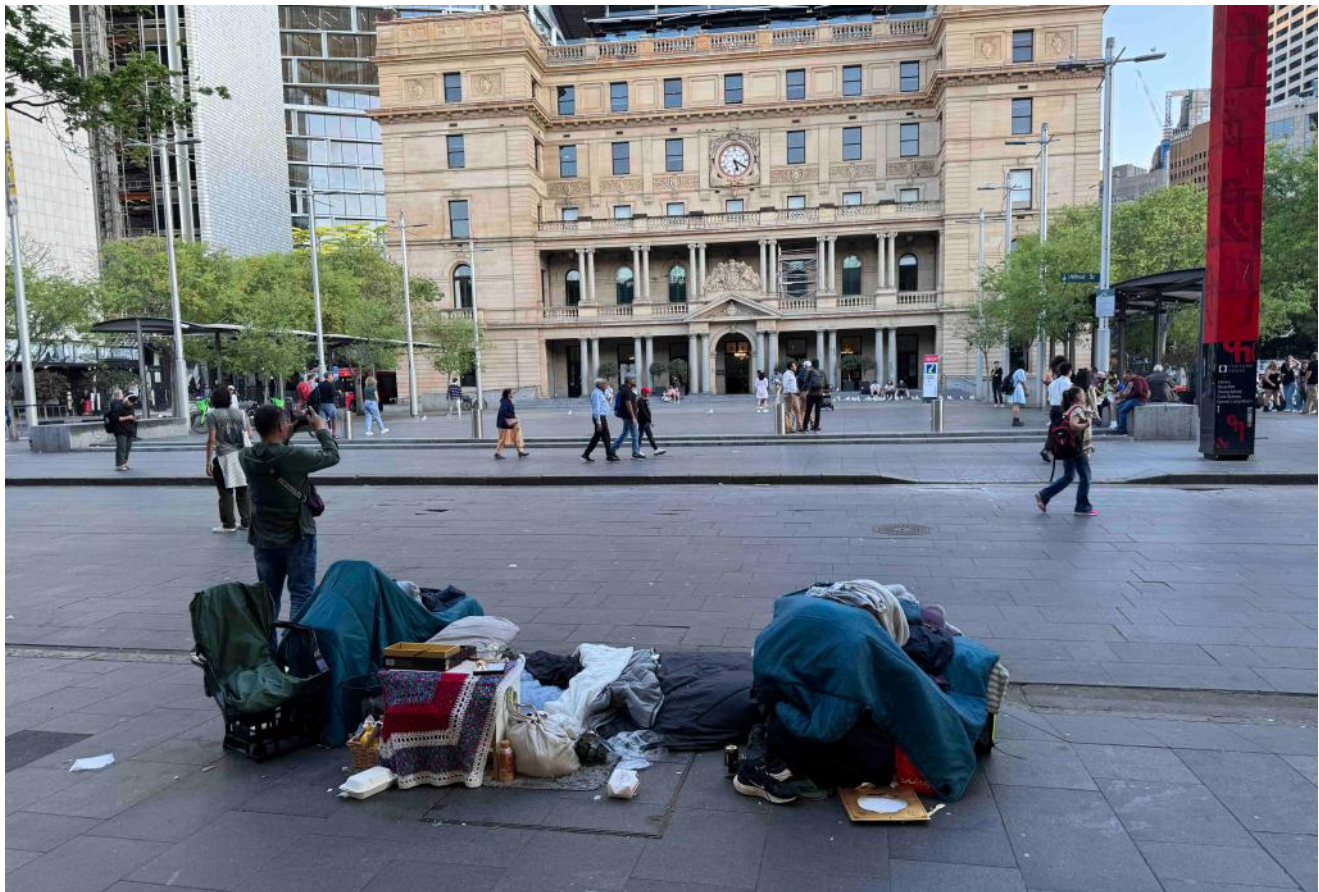
by Robert Costa

Each day slips away quicker than the one before. The hours blur together; I usually can't tell if it's morning or afternoon. Time has lost its meaning out here. I stare off into space, reaching inward, trying to make sense of where I am—or, more often, who I am. I catch fleeting glimpses of the person I used to be reflected in the shopfront I call home today. They are the people who walk by, and I see the version of myself with a home, a name on a letterbox, and people who know my face. But now, that person feels like a ghost, someone from another lifetime. I live 70cm above the footpath but, in reality, just a few centimetres above. My view of the world and its imaginary vistas is buried in my consciousness.

Weeks stretch out before me, a long, never-ending string of monotony. The months pass, too, though it hardly seems to matter. One-twelfth of a year, they say, but out here, those fractions mean nothing. The year becomes a loop, each season blending into the next. Summer fades into Autumn, and the chill of winter bites at my skin, reminding me that time is still moving even if I'm not.

My existence is trapped outside time, where days and nights lose significance. Time is a luxury for those who can measure it with something to look forward to, something to count on. Out here, time is fluid. It's a haze, a fog covering everything, erasing the world's edges. I float through it, unsure if I'm drifting forward or standing still.

My tin cup rattles unevenly on the pavement, echoing through the noise. Today, it's empty, just like it was yesterday. I had hoped for a few coins,



anything to break the cycle, but it seems the streets are as empty as my cup. I shake it once more, and the sound feels final. I wonder if it's the last time I'll try. The weight of it, the tin, my life, my hope, feels too much to carry some days.

Nearby, a note I wrote containing desperate scribbles on a torn piece of carton flutters away in the wind. I'd written it with shaking hands, hoping someone would see it, would stop and ask what I needed. But like so many other things, it vanishes, carried off by the wind. I watch it disappear down the street, tumbling along the footpath until it's out of sight. I wonder if anyone will find it, and if they do, whether they'll care enough to read it.

The dirt and grime underfoot are constant companions, sticking to my skin and clinging to my clothes. They seep into everything, reclaiming it all as if to remind me that the world is always in motion, even when I'm grounded here. The dirt consumes what's left of my possessions, pride, and sense of self. Out here, the Earth always wins. It always reclaims what is rightful hers and promptly forgets.

A tear slips down my cheek, though I barely feel it. It's a quiet, almost invisible thing, lost in the chaos of the street and the wind that blows around me. No one notices it, except maybe the people who pass by without looking. I've become invisible, too, just another figure on the footpath, blending into the background of their busy lives. I wonder how many times they've walked past without really seeing me. A city full of infinite strangers.

Time moves on for them, the people with places to go and things to do. They live in

a world that continues to spin while I remain on the outskirts, watching it all from the fringes. Time has passed for you and me, but we live and die in different worlds.

A stranger reaches down and drops some coins into the tin. The sound startles me as I look up. I can't focus. Years of neglect have taken their toll. I don't respond as I should. I don't acknowledge the person. I stare through him blinded as I wonder if he cares or if that thought is one of guilt, or pity, or shame. I don't care, just pleased to receive something.

I had been here before. Somewhere in a distant memory I know I was that person, that stranger with a few coins.

I died for all of a brief moment.

I was nothing more than a corpse on the street corner.



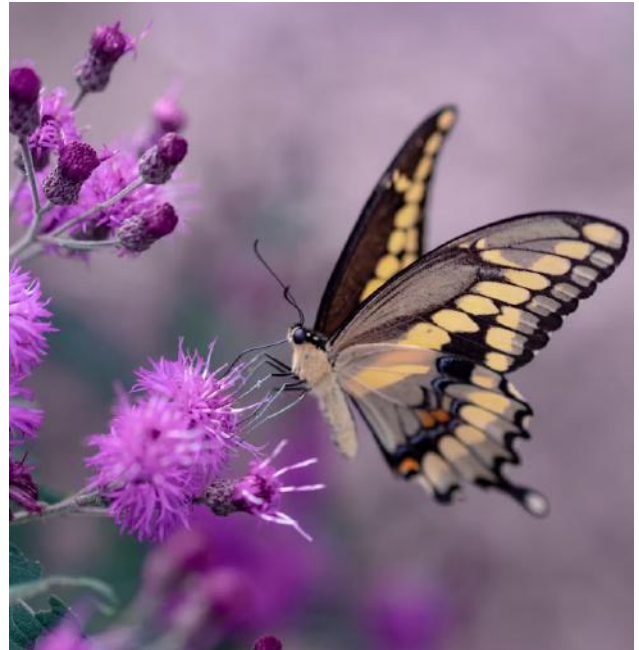
A Symphony Composed by a Butterfly and I

by Rymos

What's your agenda?
Everyone has one.
The wild life of survival.
One is after the good genes.
Most are looking for fortune.
Some only want to have fun.
Whilst in the world of friendly wolves and
vulgar jackals,
Colourful snakes and sophisticated eagles,
**There still is a butterfly chasing the
rainbow.**
Free spirited and lightsome with the shades
of nirvana.

My finger is pointing towards you, for a
day of promise. For the moment you land
there and transform me with your touch to
a free spirited butterfly. Together, we fly to
the colourful crescent around the vapour
of the **waterfall of pure love that
comes from eternity**, I take a sip and
with my burning lips craving for yours,
hold a drop and give it to you. Behind the
waterfall there is a little hallway. The
droplets of life turns us to whatever we
want to be, I want to be your king and
make you my queen, I hold your hands
and direct you through the narrow
opening behind the fall, there is a **little
gate**, your name is on it, once you open it,
you'll see yourself in the palace built in my
heart. Located in a rose garden free of any
beasts, and **free of any agenda.**

The only agenda is love, not a possessive
love but freeing love.
So many lips I kissed
So many bodies I embraced
But none made my heart race.



**In a world full of agendas, I've
stopped trying.** You are holding the key
to the palace. You will appear in my
darkest night, my candle is shrinking drop
by drop, but **you will find my light
before it dies out**, and you will help me
cross the darkest wild. You will transform
me, **you will absolve me from being
me.**

Around our palace, you and I create a
bottomless chalice, filled with love,
once my lips touch that, I scorch for more,
next to the river of everlasting joy, where
we make love. Our children of **wisdom**,
integrity and **truth** are conceived and
they will bring a rise to the ruined kingdom
of the world of the broken man.

You are the reason I am in this world, to
unlock my heart and to set me free.

I know the world is full of agendas, but I
don't care about the world when I know
you are my **transformative cog**, that
you will snug within the uneven edges of
my soul and together, with the **frictions**
of cogs and wheels, we make a **massive
fire, burn and clean** all the agendas in
this world.



Every sunset every dawn, I stand on the hill, when the breeze comes I can feel your ecstatic scent. The wind tells me of **your hard journey** to become that amazing butterfly. But I tell you this, I have done **my share of crawling**, I have been a blind worm, struggling in the mud until I saw the reflection of light on the little puddle after the rain. That's when I saw you for the first time. It **wasn't you but a promise of you**.

And since then I have stopped trying. I have stopped struggling. Because I know you'll come.

I am wishing you a very safe journey. Till then, anytime you look up and you see the moon, she will tell you about my tears of joy, when I dream of you. I am not sad but content. I know you are there. And you **will arrive when you are ready**, to set me free of me being me. The bottomless chalice represents us, not me nor you, but **us**, to drink the never ending wine of life, with no hangover and not getting drunk. That is the pure joy of life. The moment of completion. The time of transition. That's when **our symphony is complete** and He will be smiling.

Till then I practice patience.

Autumn's Sun

Life is full of mysteries.
But there are always explanations.
Not knowing the answers, doesn't mean magic,
it is just a lack of light in the dark room.

Being too focused in finding answers,
sometimes brings tunnel vision.
Sometimes you have to let go and it will come
back to you, like a boomerang.

Patience is usually revealing.
And patience doesn't mean being passive.

Life is always moving forward, learning from the
past, learning to observe and learning to make
decisions means catching up with the pace of
life.

Wisdom means seeing, though every seeing is
not seeing. Learning to see is the path to
wisdom.

And that is the light in that dark room. Pure
knowledge. The answer.

Although, no use for the Answer in mundane
life.

Autumn is the season of cleansing. It is the path
to the darkness. A passage towards a
refreshness.

Refreshness is ploughing and making the
garden ready for sowing wisdom and pure
knowledge.

And, that's what I call it, living life to the fullest!

By Rymos

A Night Out

by Peter Stankovic

The sun cast its warm golden hues across the city of Sydney, as Leon's excitement bubbled within him. He had been looking forward to this evening for weeks, eager to share the magic of the theatre with Lisa. Nervous anticipation mingled with hope as he approached her doorstep in Dee Why, ready to whisk her away for a night of laughter and companionship.



Leon's heart skipped a beat when Lisa opened the door, her eyes reflecting a hint of hesitation. He smiled, hoping to ease any lingering reservations she might have.

“Good evening, Lisa,” Leon greeted warmly, extending his hand towards her. “I’m so glad you decided to join me tonight.”

“Come in,” she said.

“Love to but we’re running late,” Leon said, noting how lovely Lisa looked. He wanted to hug her but thought better of it. No need to get too touchy so soon.

Lisa hesitated for a moment, uncertainty dancing in her eyes, before finally offering a shy smile, also shaking Leon’s hand. “Well, after a long day, I figured a night out might be just what I need. Let’s go and see this play of yours.”

Leon, dressed in navy blue trousers, shined black shoes and a cream sports jacket, allowed Lisa to walk in front of him so he could admire her outfit. She wore a strapless dark blue dress with gold-laced high heel sandals.

“Nice outfit.”

“Glad you like it. Went shopping today. Lucky the weather is warm, so I don’t need a wrap,” Lisa said letting Leon slide next to her.

Leon's heart soared with delight, relieved that Lisa had decided to embrace the adventure. He led her to his car, a comfortable silence enveloping them as they settled into the seats. As they began their journey towards the Theatre Royal on King Street, Leon couldn't help but feel a surge of anticipation.

“You knew I was reluctant to accept your invitation when you first asked me two weeks ago, so I was somewhat surprised when you asked again.” Lisa turned towards Leon, her blonde hair falling across her face slightly.

“Me too. I wasn’t going to, but if you recall that night when I was very drunk, I thought “what the hell” and so I tried the invitation again, this time sober, although I shouldn’t have done.”

“You bugger.”

“It’s a joke.”

Lisa thumped his arm playfully.

During the drive, Leon sensed the need to address the delicate matter that had hovered between them. Taking a deep breath, he glanced at Lisa, the streetlights casting gentle shadows on her face.

“Lisa, I need to be straight with you,” Leon began, his voice tinged with doubt. “Before we went out the last time, I was seeing someone. But things have changed, and I ended that relationship. I want you to know that you're the one I'm interested in. Now and always.”

Lisa's eyes met his, her gaze filled with a mix of curiosity and understanding. “Leon, thank you for being honest with me. I appreciate your transparency, and I'm glad we can start afresh.”

A sense of relief washed over Leon as her words echoed through the car. It was a small step, but an important one towards building a foundation of trust and open communication.

He stepped on the gas and the Rav4 responded like the powerful SUV it was.

Arriving at the Theatre Royal, Leon parked under the building and Lisa stepped out of the car, the buzz of the city enveloping them. They made their way into the elegant theatre, the anticipation building as they settled into their seats. As the lights dimmed, the stage came alive, transporting them to a world of laughter and enchantment.

The play proved to be a delightful journey, each scene bringing forth bursts of laughter and moments of introspection. Leon stole glances at Lisa throughout the performance, her laughter and genuine engagement filling him with a sense of warmth and connection.

After the final curtain call, Leon suggested they continue the evening at a nearby pub, where the vibrant energy of the city flowed freely. They found themselves immersed in lively conversations, savouring the shared experience, and relishing each other's company.

“I gather you enjoyed the performance, Lisa,” Leon stated as Lisa started on her third Gin & Tonic.

“I did. How did you know I would.”

“I took a chance,” Leon responded, placing his hand over hers. He guessed he had nothing to lose. If Lisa indicated she wasn't keen for this level of familiarity, he would blame the drinks. But he needed to be bold to assess whether he should take the next step.

Lisa was cool. Leon felt strangely emboldened and would have taken her there and then but this was no place to go further. However, the night had promise.





"Damn" said the Duchess

"Damn!" said the Duchess as she stepped into the hall
 "I really never did expect to find you here at all."
 She flapped her fan and pursed her lips and tilted up her chin
 While everybody waited for the fireworks to begin

"By Jove!" cried the Colonel as he looked at her aghast
 His large moustaches quivering at this spectre from his past
 His cheeks flushed deepest crimson while the sweat beaded his brow
 He had absolutely no idea what words to utter now

By Anon

The old woman who lived in a shoe

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe
 It wasn't convenient as it lacked a loo
 It was such a dilemma, for what could she do
 Every time that she wanted to

Go to the bathroom there wasn't a bath
 There wasn't a fireplace or even a hearth
 There wasn't a kitchen, there wasn't a hall
 No ballroom, no billiard room, no bedroom at all

If this wasn't bad enough, even less sweet
 Was the constant pervasive aroma of feet
 She lit scented candles, she sprayed on perfume
 But the odour of cheese-feet infused every room

In the end she gave up and moved far away
 I have no idea where she's living today
 Perhaps she discovered a comfortable hat
 Or a jacket or handbag and now lives in that

By Anon



The List

by Rob Simes

His slender fingers beat a rhythm on the warm, gleaming mahogany of his desk.

Their dance, like carefully taken footsteps, the only sound in his very large office.

He turned his head, to catch only a glimpse of what he knew was hanging between the two long windows, the vibrant red and angular thrusts of the swastika, that almost always brought such calm and clarity.

He knew who would arrive soon. He knew they would already be waiting nervously outside. He looked at the distance from the door to the carefully positioned chairs. He knew it would provide him valuable seconds to observe their fear. And, he knew he would enjoy it.

He looked at the files, neatly displayed on the desk, the salient details ready to be used, as required, ordered and obedient in his mind.

As his fingers drummed, he stroked his small moustache, and rubbed the bridge of his nose beneath the thin metal of his spectacles, a momentary scowl as he thought of the constant irritant of his failing eyesight.

As the drumming continued, and his left hand checked his collar, the small knot of his black tie, and gently stroked them flat, he looked at his list. And at its very bottom, “Forbidden Books”, the focus of this particular meeting. And some neat annotations, “Prague Museum?”, “Expand the List”, and others.

There was a loud knock on his door. It could only be his secretary.

She entered, tall and slim and blonde. He smiled, and added quietly, “Please, Fräulein.”

He appraised them as they approached. They walked too quickly. Fear. Their heads down. Fear. Files under their arms, hands clasped together, as if to offer comfort, one to the other. Fear. Pale, and a delicate sheen of sweat. Fear. He could almost feel the panicked beat of their hearts.

He nodded, they sat. He looked down, and continued the drumming of his fingers.

In time, he relented, and looked up, and he knew they were ready.

He knew they likely saw a rat. He knew what people said, and what they whispered. And he was not oblivious to the similarities. What no one understood, however, was that he was far from offended. They were cunning, rats, and they had a keen sense of the power of others, of health and sickness, and opportunity.

He cleared his throat, “We must revisit the list of Forbidden Books. Some more burnings are in order. In fact, some we will conduct in the Work Camps. All things forbidden hold a certain dread fascination, and the fear they instil is a powerful tool.”

And the gentle, deliberate drumming continued.



The Funeral

by Adelaide Hunter

“Ready guv?” asked George Grubb, waiting for the older man to get a move on.

“Yep - two ticks and we’re off,” replied a lumbering Fred as he reached for a bag of tools and hoisted them over his shoulder.

The two men made their way up to a patch of earth in the ancient cemetery, heavy boots trudging over the silent Court in the depths below. The Court weighed every thought, word and deed in the balance when the newly deceased was placed on trial.

“Who's the lucky devil this time?” asked George as they reached Lot 341.

“Some geezer called Jim Dravens” said Fred, laying out his tools on the ground around them.

“Jim Drav— you mean *the* Jim Dravens of *Jim and the Druids*?”

When Fred looked blank, George said “You know - the rock band?”

“I don’t know any *Jim and the Druids*,” said Fred, “but yeah, he was in the music game.” Fred sliced through the grass with his shovel pushing on the step of the blade to drive it deeper.

“That’s ‘im then, worth a few quid he was” said George, positioning a wheelbarrow next to the gravesite, “what happened?”

Fred loaded a spadeful of soil into the wheelbarrow, wiped his brow then leant on his shovel.

“Knocked off he was. A blade to the throat, one clean cut, and it’s bye, bye Jim,” said Fred, drawing his index finger across his throat in slow motion while George’s eyes widened. Imparting details of the gory deaths of clients to apprentice grave-diggers was one of the highlights of Fred’s career.



“Do they know who done it?” asked George, leaning in.

“Yeah, but there’s nuffin’ they can do about it... Mafia job,” replied Fred, who had seen the handiwork of many a mob hit. It was always precise, professional and deadly.

“Back on the tools now George, clock’s ticking.”

George shook his head, and shovelled a lump of dirt into the wheelbarrow.

“It’s just not fair.”

“Sonny, there’s no justice in this life” said Fred, wiping a grubby forearm across his forehead, leaving a thick line of dirt behind as if to underline his point.

The following day at 11am, the Priest and pallbearers appeared, followed by a motley crew of band members and a few old groupies lingering at the edges. They gathered around the gravesite and the priest cleared his throat to begin. He looked up to address the mourners and paused.

A woman dressed impeccably in black with a netted fascinator perched artfully on her sleek blonde bob walked towards them. Blood-red lipstick, a pert nose and the greenest of eyes was her killer combination. The small crowd parted to make way as she tottered up to the grave on stiletto heels, stabbing the lawn with each step. When she reached the edge of the grave, she drew a pristine white handkerchief from her dainty purse, and dabbed her eyes.

“The second Missus,” whispered one mourner to another, “used to be best friends with the first Missus - Cecilia. But

that was before ‘the accident’. After Cecilia died, Jim was a mess - she really was his true love.”

The Priest opened his missal and sprinkled Holy water.

“Anyhow, long story short,” the mourner continued, “that’s when the woman in black stepped in - sister of a Mafia Don they say. Jim was married again before he could play a single riff on his Strat.”

“In the Name of the Father—” began the priest when a scuffle broke out among the groupies.

“It was her that did it!” screamed a scraggly-haired groupie, pointing a bony finger at the woman in black. The accusation ricocheted off the surrounding headstones and reverberated through the ground to the Court below. The woman in black shuddered.

In a flash, the accusation reflected back through the ground, disrupting the smooth lawn near the woman’s stiletto heel. She wavered a little, lost her balance and tipped ever so ungraciously into the freshly dug grave. A collective gasp gushed from the mourners before they rushed to peer over the edge. Dull green eyes stared up at them while the twisted body, legs askew, lay lifeless. Clutched in a well-manicured hand was the almost unrecognisable fascinator.

In essence, the woman in black had exited stage left for a pressing appointment in the Court below. She landed with a thud into a high-backed granite chair surrounded by the strangest creatures she had ever seen, except for one.

“Hello me luvrly,” greeted a grinning Jim Dravens.

My Beloved Cat

I love my cat with all my heart
 Our bond is such, we'll never part
 She's company for me
 When we sit and watch tv
 She meows along when I sing a ditty
 Oh how I love my dear dear kitty

By Cat Lady



While the Cat's Away...

While the cat's away the mice will play
 And raise sheer hell, or so they say
 What they with wicked hearts so black
 Get up to behind her back

Is mischievous and very dark
 They romp and frolic and prank and lark
 They bite the bacon and steal the cheese
 They nibble on whatsoever they please

And when it comes to evening time
 They're drunk on kitty's stolen wine
 The party lasts throughout the night
 Spirits are high and eyes are bright

There's just one thing that gives them pause:
 The thought of sharpened teeth and claws
 But until the cat comes back one day
 The mischievous mice will play and play

By Crazy Cat Lady



Cat, Red, Pyjamas

(from a writing prompt)

There was a fat cat on my bed
 So sleepy I thought he was dead
 When he pounced with a drama
 And ripped my pyjamas
 I have to confess, I saw red

By Craziest Cat Lady



Featured Writers



Conchita GarSantiago is a Sydney-based writer who was born, grew up and studied in Spain. Her stories have been published in different magazines and anthologies, with her greatest achievement her Spanish Civil War novel “A Cry for Home”.

[Conchita at SelfPubAus](#)



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](#)



Rymos is the matryoshkas of stories, poems and philosophical essays. Though the inner doll sometimes is twice as large, only the deep imagination and the literary magics can fit that inside the belly of the babushka.

[Rymos on SelfPubAus](#)



Robert Costa is a retired architect with significant experience as an architect, having performed many roles over 30 years in private practice. He writes to explore new worlds, real and imaginary.

[Robert on SelfPubAus](#)



Peter Murphy is a writer, ship captain, international lawyer and keen watercolour painter. Peter's memoir, *Lands End for Orders*, tells his story of joining the merchant navy in 1961 and travelling around the world.

[Peter on SelfPubAus](#)



Adelaide Hunter is a Sydney-based author from a medical background, who writes in a variety of genres and was recently published in the anthology “Weaving Words” by the collective Women about Women.

[Adelaide on SelfPubAus](#)

Writing Opportunities

Self Publishing service suppliers

At SelfPubAus we've started creating a list of Australia-based people offering Self Publishing services.

From consulting and cover design to publishing and audiobook production, if you need some professional help or technical support with the self-publishing process, take a look at the list:

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If you offer a publishing-related service and would like to be included (listing is free) please email: selfpubaus@gmail.com

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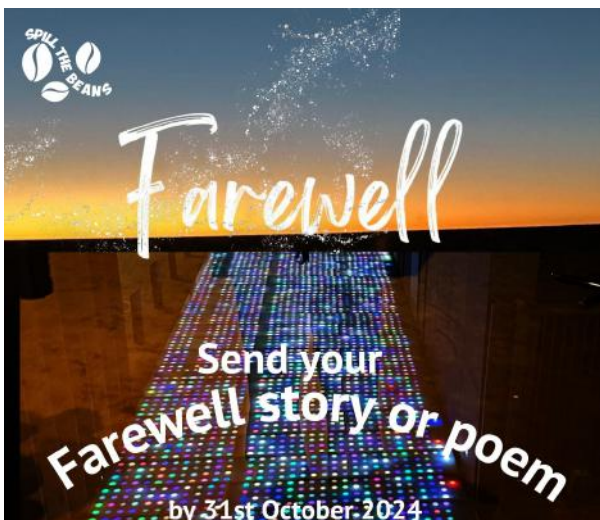
HOUSE OF PROSE

EST 2023

Spill the Beans writing challenge

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

The current **Spill the Beans** challenge is FAREWELL: send your 400-word story or poem by 31 Oct to beanswrite21@gmail.com



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 3 November 2024, from 12.30pm - 2.30pm. 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

