

THIS BREATH

2022

A collection of
reflective writing from
young people in
regional South Australia

Writers SA is located on Kurna land. We acknowledge Kurna people as the original storytellers of this place, who have led a culture of storytelling for many thousands of years. We pay our respects to Kurna elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on whose lands we live, work and create. This always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.



Australian Government
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WRITERS SA



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writerssa.org.au/no-limits-young-regional-writers/

FROM THE EDITORS

This Breath is a creative response to a moment in time—this moment in time—by young people living in regional South Australia.

In 2022 Writers SA, through the No Limits program, commissioned nine young regional South Australian writers to respond to this moment in time through poetry, short stories, memoir, essays, comics and other written forms.

For the young writers involved This Breath was an opportunity to reflect and to capture what has been for many a difficult time to breathe—whether it was mass bushfires, #blacklivesmatter, COVID or the ongoing climate crisis, recent years will continue to shape the future of young people for decades to come.

The chosen writers were selected from across regional and rural South Australia through an open call out. Each writer was supported by the Writers SA regional team and professional mentors to craft and polish their words.

This zine brings those words to your hands.

Breathe them in.

- Writers SA regional team



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Take a b r e a t h .
It might be the last one you take.

BREATHE IN.

The air of desolation is sponged out by blackest
black smoke & red skies growing darker

■ *Britnie Hocking*

A storm is coming and clouds careen like fingers,
filling the intoxicating space
which seemed to go forever and now seems so
finite.

B r e a t h e o u t .
Darling.

A storm is coming. Breaking through the hot,
choking air that looms. Once wildness
and fury and running through lands of sand and
rain and grass, now isolation solitude,

Thick and blood-red
tasting more and more of guilt with every
swallow.

Sharp like the point of a blade, breaking the skin,
spilling and spitting, fierceness and frenzy
pouring out. A protruding dagger from an open
wound, draining all what once was and now she -



Breathe out.

Breathe in.

It played with her – teased an end and a beginning.

A tempest and a downpour comes to quench the blaze,

Leaving gnarly, strangling trees. Fractured violence – half spilled blood. Devastated revelation.

Her
devastation,

Begetting the tears from her eyes like the razor-edges of the storm.

Clinging to something that used to smell and taste so sweet but now sours in her mouth.

Anger?

no – pain – no?


Breathe in.

The pain is the fear made solid and thick and raw;

and fear seeps out of the cuts and nicks,
sculpting anger, red hot and greasy.

slick. Anger so hot it fizzles and spits blue and





red, scalding heat like butter from a
pan.

Words that cut and slice like dirty iron. Anguish.
It's the feeling of being angry and sad and in pain and sick
and tired and silent. Tired like exhaustion that finds the
blackness of both eyes and knuckles in the half-light like
violence


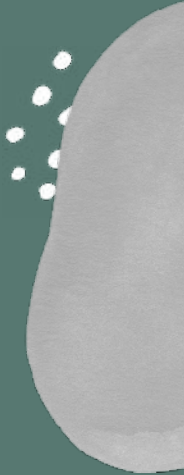
Brutality, scalding and powerful. Viciousness sits on your
lips and gut and heart like tar
- no cure, grating at the smile that carries it in the silence.

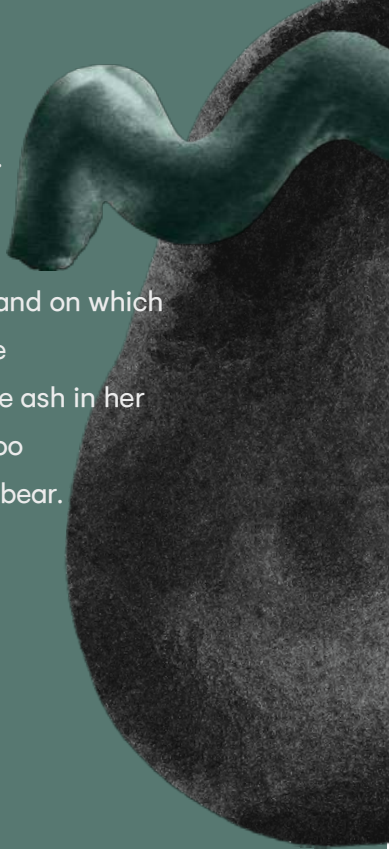
gagging and putrefying radiance.
Holding space for what was, what could be, what will
never be, should be or can be ever again.

Pain is white-hot and screaming through balled-fists and
broken promises that,

made new,
will be broken
again.
Breathe out.

Sadness
comes like waves,
tightness in a chest that fear holds, subsides to make





room for what is ugly and soft.
Sadness.

Blacker than the clouds that threaten the land on which
you stand your stoic heels. She
makes the breath sluggish and painful, like ash in her
mouth. A smile too heavy and too
soon and the laughter too much to bear.




Altogether too much

again.
Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Fight back.
Run faster.
Turn back.
Go back.
Stay together.
Stay

alive.

Anguish is the silence deep within greying clouds of
the storm as
it grows. Thunder pounds like fists on raw iron bars. The
prisoner shrieks.



08.

living in her rib cage.


Sensations of life
begging to break free but cannot.

She
can
not
breathe.

Breathe
in.
Power.
Empower.
overpower.
Infinite in that power.

Power.
Empower.
overpower.
Infinite in *that* power.

Power?
Powerful.
Present?
Presence.
Peace.

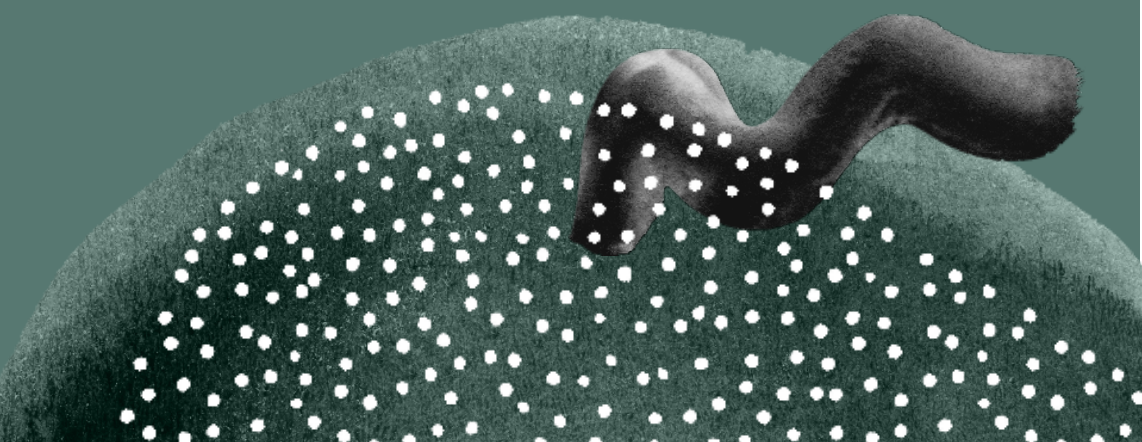


A breath held underwater. If the thunder comes, then so
too does the
lightning. Breathe in.

The force
and the words
and the pain
and the pounding can't be stopped once it's begun.

The vice-grip of anguish holds the sounds back and so
too the lightning. The words are fire.
Unstoppable,
destructive, daring,
devastating.
Darling.

The silence screams and fills choking lungs to spill forth
from empty lips. Overflowing smoke in
the lungs of the animals and the trees and the one who
wants to run but knows they have to stay.



10.

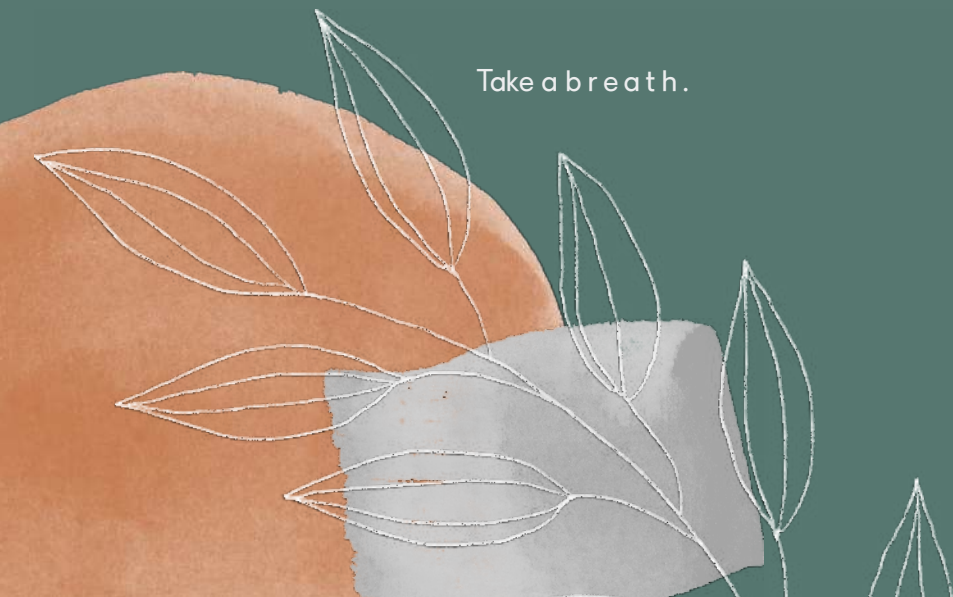
Stand
in the darkness
and in the pain and in the smoke through the front while it
passes.
Burns over.
Breathe out.

Breathe in. Linger
in the haze and the fog that remains when the storm is
over.

When the violent anger and the pain subside and the
smoke remains.
The charred
earth.

Blackening where what is left becomes a bruise. Becomes
a scar.

Take a breath.



IT JUST KEEPS SLIPPING AWAY

■ *Tayla Clarke*

It had been too long since Pilot Lacy J. Fence had stepped foot in a Time-slipper. Nearly five years in fact.

100 years ago, when the technology was invented, she would have been too old, at 45, to go on missions. The giant beast of a machine whirred and grinded as the cabin connected itself to her bio-suit. The gears and emergency release lay by her feet, just in case.

Time travel wasn't nearly as simple as movies and books had made it out to be. For starters, it didn't happen in a flash. When the original Time-slipper was created it took the same amount of time to travel into the past as it took to live through it. The first Time-Pilot travelled 25 years into the past and felt every one of them on the way back. It aged him almost beyond recognition.

The technology has improved since then. Now it only ages the person a quarter of the time they Slip. That's part of the reason it was called slipping. Still, only available to

the wealthy few and government officials, Slipping has its own rules and regulations. Time was now its own nation, ruled by the same thing as everywhere else. Power.

A voice over the speakers broke Fence from her thoughts. *'Fence, do you read?'* called Fence's billionaire, inventor, crazy American friend, Wendy Trickler.

'All the time,' Fence replied with a grin towards the hidden dash cam.

'Don't you get smart with me young lady,' Wendy replied, but there was humour in her voice, *'It's not too late for me to pick someone else.'*

Fence laughed. *'We both know this is too important for anyone else.'*

And it was. Wendy and her team had managed to halve the ageing process of time slipping. Now all they had to do was test their theory. The time they'd chosen for the trip was a safe zone. A time without any kind of turmoil or historical significance whatsoever. 100 years into the past, and she would only be affected by about 12 of them. Fence settled back into her restraints. This was going to be fun.

It took Fence exactly two seconds to realise something had gone seriously wrong. There were two reasons she came to this conclusion. One of them was the loud blaring of several alarms and an animated voice intoning "welcome to March 19, 2020." The second, and much more concerning reason, was the fact that she was hanging upside down, held up only by her restraints. Her long purple hair was dangling into her face, she blew on it to try clearing her

vision. It didn't work and she had to blindly search for the emergency release with her foot. With a hiss and the click of metal, her restraints sprung free, and it took all her years of training not to fall directly on her head. Clinging to her seat with her arms, Fence swung herself out onto the ceiling of the Time-slipper. Taking a deep breath, Fence assessed her situation.

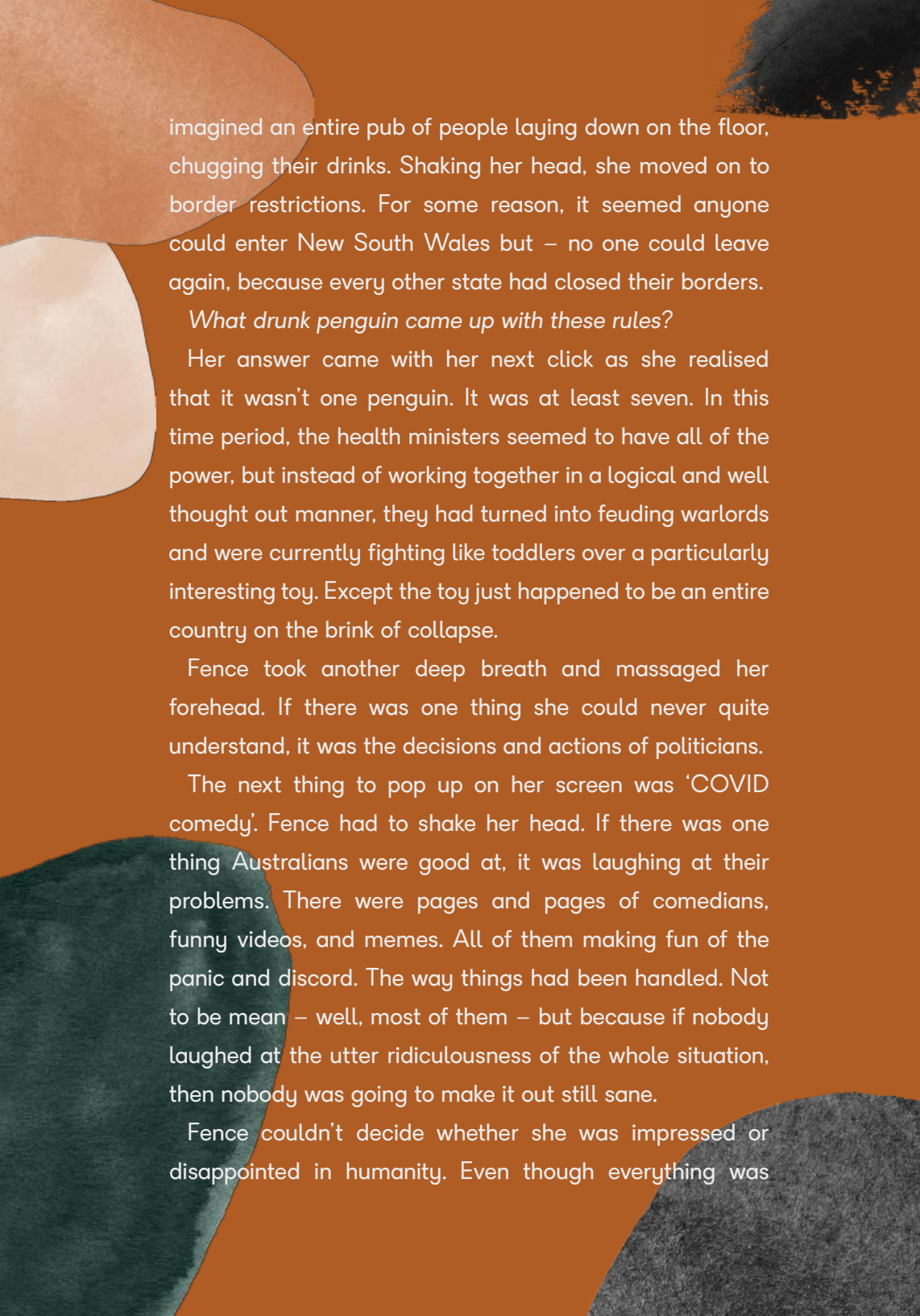
Okay Fence. You are about fifty years further into the past then you were supposed to be. In a time period of a global pandemic and major social and economic unrest. And somehow, just as people started to go really nuts. Again.

Fence looked at her screens, which, although upside down, seemed to still be in perfect condition. As usual, her monitor had several major news events of the next three days posted across it. The difference was, where usually there were severe weather events and car crashes, the news seemed to be an unusual mishmash of insanity and panic. Somehow this managed to be both funny and almost more depressing than the death and destruction that was reported on daily. This was a time of complete chaos and clearly – Fence paused for a second and zoomed in on a particular image.

Okay... so...

Fence had paused on a list of COVID restrictions for South Australia, where she'd landed. Squinting and tilting her head, she read them again. And again.

No vertical consumption of alcohol. Fence suddenly

The background of the page is a solid orange color. It is decorated with several large, abstract, organic shapes. In the top left, there is a light orange shape. In the top right, there is a dark grey shape. On the left side, there is a large, light cream-colored shape. At the bottom left, there is a dark teal shape. At the bottom right, there is a dark grey shape. The text is arranged in paragraphs within the orange space.

imagined an entire pub of people laying down on the floor, chugging their drinks. Shaking her head, she moved on to border restrictions. For some reason, it seemed anyone could enter New South Wales but – no one could leave again, because every other state had closed their borders.

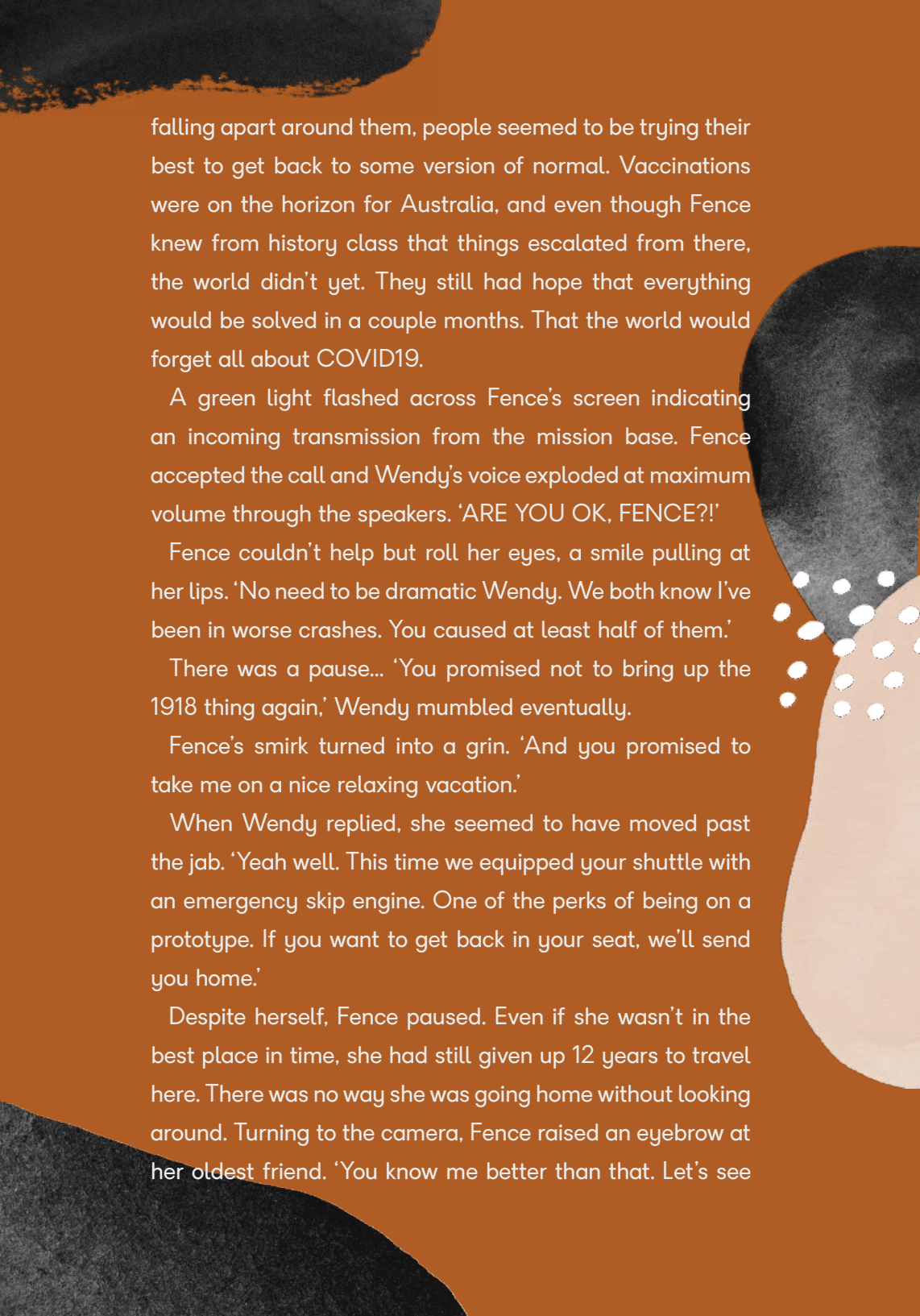
What drunk penguin came up with these rules?

Her answer came with her next click as she realised that it wasn't one penguin. It was at least seven. In this time period, the health ministers seemed to have all of the power, but instead of working together in a logical and well thought out manner, they had turned into feuding warlords and were currently fighting like toddlers over a particularly interesting toy. Except the toy just happened to be an entire country on the brink of collapse.

Fence took another deep breath and massaged her forehead. If there was one thing she could never quite understand, it was the decisions and actions of politicians.

The next thing to pop up on her screen was 'COVID comedy'. Fence had to shake her head. If there was one thing Australians were good at, it was laughing at their problems. There were pages and pages of comedians, funny videos, and memes. All of them making fun of the panic and discord. The way things had been handled. Not to be mean – well, most of them – but because if nobody laughed at the utter ridiculousness of the whole situation, then nobody was going to make it out still sane.

Fence couldn't decide whether she was impressed or disappointed in humanity. Even though everything was

The background is a solid orange color. On the right side, there is a large, dark grey, irregular shape. Below it, there is a white, irregular shape with several small white dots. On the left side, there is a dark grey, irregular shape at the top and bottom.

falling apart around them, people seemed to be trying their best to get back to some version of normal. Vaccinations were on the horizon for Australia, and even though Fence knew from history class that things escalated from there, the world didn't yet. They still had hope that everything would be solved in a couple months. That the world would forget all about COVID19.

A green light flashed across Fence's screen indicating an incoming transmission from the mission base. Fence accepted the call and Wendy's voice exploded at maximum volume through the speakers. 'ARE YOU OK, FENCE?'

Fence couldn't help but roll her eyes, a smile pulling at her lips. 'No need to be dramatic Wendy. We both know I've been in worse crashes. You caused at least half of them.'

There was a pause... 'You promised not to bring up the 1918 thing again,' Wendy mumbled eventually.

Fence's smirk turned into a grin. 'And you promised to take me on a nice relaxing vacation.'

When Wendy replied, she seemed to have moved past the jab. 'Yeah well. This time we equipped your shuttle with an emergency skip engine. One of the perks of being on a prototype. If you want to get back in your seat, we'll send you home.'

Despite herself, Fence paused. Even if she wasn't in the best place in time, she had still given up 12 years to travel here. There was no way she was going home without looking around. Turning to the camera, Fence raised an eyebrow at her oldest friend. 'You know me better than that. Let's see

what 2020 has to offer.'

'Fence! You're in a red zone! You could be arrested! Do not leave the Time-Slipper!'

Pulling the lever for the door release, Fence called over her shoulder, 'Since when do I play by the rules?' Just before the door closed behind her, Fence raced back inside, 'Whoops,' she yelled, grabbing something from a compartment. 'Forgot my mask.'





THIS LITTLE TOWN.

■ *Anika Parenta*

All my life I have lived in a little town

This little town

I have ridden my bike barefoot down the road at dusk,

Helmet abandoned on the porch,

A gentle summer breeze caressing my
cheeks and playfully tangling my hair.

I have stolen down to the little cove by our house, giggling
friends in tow,

Shivering at the bite of the moonlight-bathed
ocean as we held competitions of who could brave
the cold for the longest.

Memories made in a little town
where nothing ever happens.

The worst danger we face is falling victim to a ragtag group



of amateur thieves,

Attempting to escape the monotony that comes
with living in this little town. We are too insignificant
and isolated for the problems plaguing the rest of the
world.

At least,
That was the way it used to be.

Now,

In this little town,
Where I fall asleep to the rhythmic drum-
beat of rain falling on tin,
Sickness is rife.

Seeping under doors
and stealing through forgotten windows
An unwanted visitor that will not be refused

Fear breeds and spreads,
Faster than the virus itself,
Infecting populations and causing mass
hysteria,
Reverting us to our animalistic instincts to survive

Teeth bared,
Naked claws gleaming under harsh fluorescent
lights,
An unhinged glint in the eyes,
Like that of a cornered stray

But it's ashen shadow cannot be contained
Smoke sits heavy and thick in my mouth,
Leaving behind a chalky taste,
A ghostly fist tightening around my throat

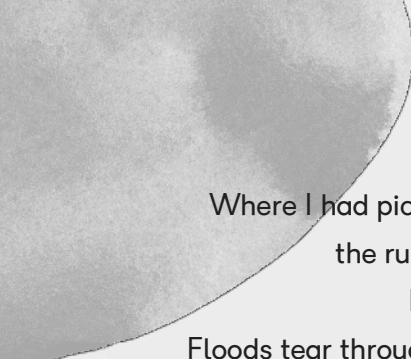
It bleeds into the house,
Colours the sky,
Polluted clouds hanging on an angry red
horizon.

Ash falls like poisoned snowflakes,
Delicate and dead
Twirling gently in the air and raining down on the grass,
A corrupt blanket of snow made from other
people's loss

Lights flicker off and televisions fall silent,
The lull before the storm.
A peaceful state of oblivion,
Before the hum of electricity returns and we are forced to
face the damage

We are lucky —
Not all can say the same.

Fire always takes so much before it can be tamed,
And this little town can still burn.



In this little town,
Where I had picnics at the park and burned my feet on
the rubber mats of the playground,
Rain drowns the streets
Floods tear through,

Watery fingers dragging cars and debris in a violent
dance.

Cars float in their parks,

Makeshifts boats in a churning sea,

The heavy downpour creating craters on the
surface the size of my fingertip

Even the torrential rain cannot keep summer at bay,

Heat radiates through the thick storm clouds,

The humidity uncomfortable and dense on my
skin.

The smell of this rain is different too,

Warmer,

And bitter,

Stinging my skin as it fires down from above.

The grey waters leave a wake of destruction,

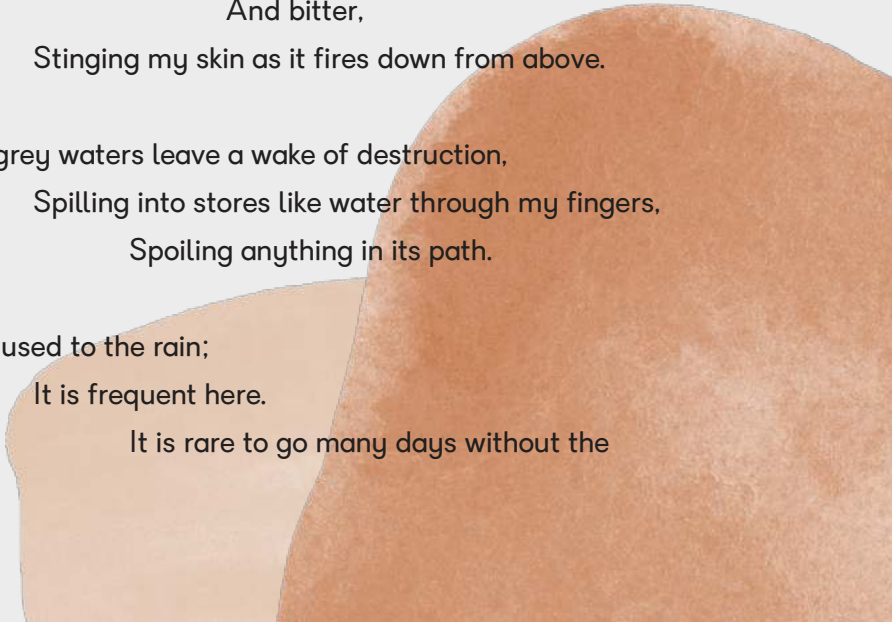
Spilling into stores like water through my fingers,

Spoiling anything in its path.

I am used to the rain;

It is frequent here.

It is rare to go many days without the



familiar pattering of droplets on the windows,
Hours are spent tracing the spidery veins that
trickle down the glass.

But that rain is different,
It nourishes our little town,
Helping it to grow.
Not trying to wash it away.

All my life I have lived in a little town.
This little town.

I have watched the fireworks on the same spot of sand
every summer,
Sparklers in hand and glowsticks stacked up my arms in
neon displays.

I have eaten greasy seafood takeaway, from the same
shop on the corner of the street,
Under the lamppost in a carpark by the water's
edge on a Friday night.

But,
Time runs on —
Memories remain memories,
Without chance of repetition.

With time,
It is growing harder to tell who is changing

Me,

Or this little town.

I HEAR THIS WORLD IS ENDING.

■ Maddy Nyp

I keep a chain around my wrist. She's decorated in rust and flecks of silver, and, whenever I move, she slowly stains the ground red. Each time I reach my hands above my head, she screams until I sheepishly lower them, and we force a neutral co-existence.

Tonight, I dangle my feet in a river. The moon's glow casts a harsh portrait of trees onto the water and I watch as thin leaves dance sorrowfully with the wind. It's a clear evening, stars like a cat's eye pin-pricking the night sky. If I squint, I can see the river churning through the ground, darting into the night like a frightened snake. A faint smell of storm clings to my nose, and I wonder: when the rain drags me into the river, will my chain float or sink?

Next to me sits a radio, slowly melting into the mud as he screeches out Nine-News. Like the chain, he's all peeling paint and exposed metal— with a crooked antenna his

flailing limb. When water knocks on our door, he'll certainly drown too. Maybe that's why he sings so bitterly.

He clears his throat: *'Tonight on nine news: twenty dead in hospital.. Another sixty tomorrow.. Workers strike in Sydney from digging four-foot-one graves.. Old Mother Earth is getting too hot.'*

Back in the 10s, when *apocalypse* was only the title of Hollywood's newest feature, I avoided the riverbanks. Instead I'd sit inside, waiting patiently for a future I gleaned from teen magazines. And I was a reckless, beautiful young thing- unaware of chains that provoke the sound of thunder. But then the sick started dying, and the world started ending, and I moved to the riverside.

'I think tomorrow isn't going to come.' I say to the radio host. My voice feels rasped, aching from an age of isolation.

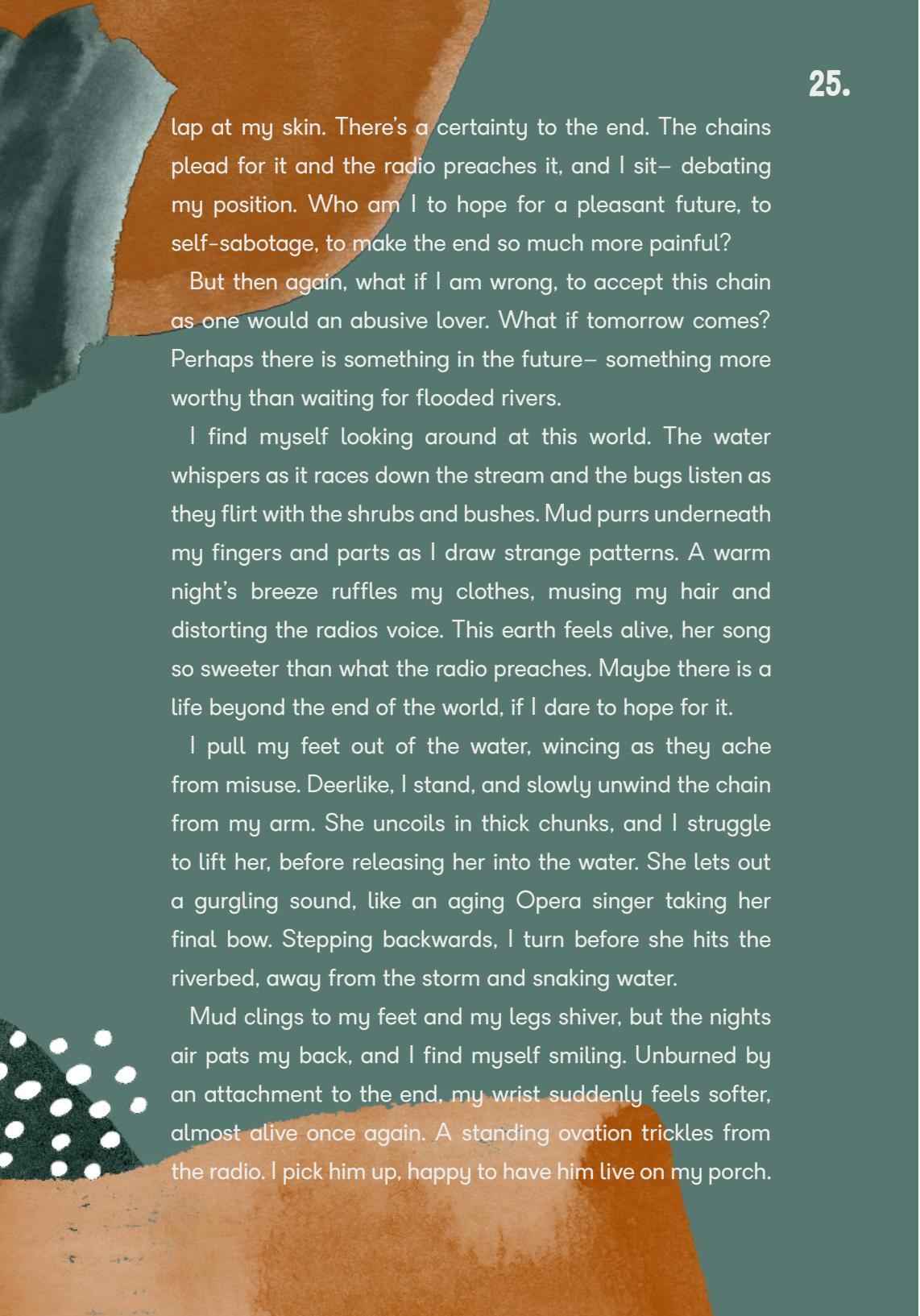
'You have to hope that it will,' The radio barks, 'Look around you, this is not a dying world. Do you truly believe it is ending?'

The storm cracks on the horizon. The radio gulps, and I stare at the mud.

'Hope is a luxury,' I tell the radio, feeling the chain nod in agreement. 'What good is there in fighting for something so penniless?'

'Hope is the human condition,' replies the radio host. 'You are compelled to hope, as you are to swirl your feet in the river. You don't have to be chained to this fear of An End.'

Glancing down the river, I flex my legs, feeling the water

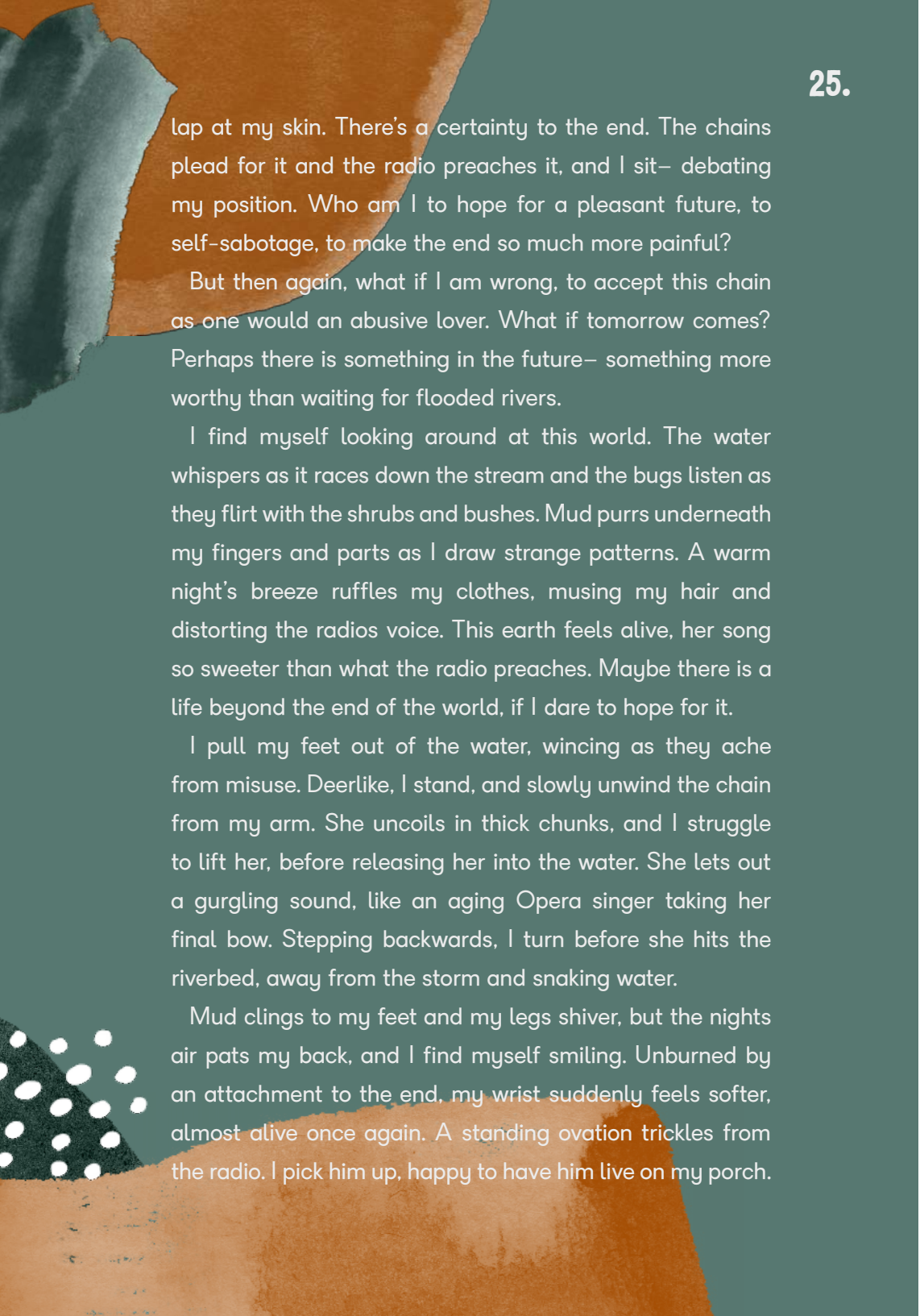


lap at my skin. There's a certainty to the end. The chains plead for it and the radio preaches it, and I sit— debating my position. Who am I to hope for a pleasant future, to self-sabotage, to make the end so much more painful?

But then again, what if I am wrong, to accept this chain as one would an abusive lover. What if tomorrow comes? Perhaps there is something in the future— something more worthy than waiting for flooded rivers.

I find myself looking around at this world. The water whispers as it races down the stream and the bugs listen as they flirt with the shrubs and bushes. Mud purrs underneath my fingers and parts as I draw strange patterns. A warm night's breeze ruffles my clothes, musing my hair and distorting the radio's voice. This earth feels alive, her song so sweeter than what the radio preaches. Maybe there is a life beyond the end of the world, if I dare to hope for it.

I pull my feet out of the water, wincing as they ache from misuse. Deerlike, I stand, and slowly unwind the chain from my arm. She uncoils in thick chunks, and I struggle to lift her, before releasing her into the water. She lets out a gurgling sound, like an aging Opera singer taking her final bow. Stepping backwards, I turn before she hits the riverbed, away from the storm and snaking water.



Mud clings to my feet and my legs shiver, but the night's air pats my back, and I find myself smiling. Unburned by an attachment to the end, my wrist suddenly feels softer, almost alive once again. A standing ovation trickles from the radio. I pick him up, happy to have him live on my porch.

26.

We may coexist.

Before I can change my mind, I march up to the house.
Because the world doesn't end, it just feels like it does.

There might still be hope.



FIVE BLUES FOR BREATHING

■ *Josh King*

I

This breath tastes of
Butter and desire.

The chef
loves the
waitress.

His wife is
on fire.

The pancakes are
desperate and joy is in the
bacon.

There is less sex
in the bedroom than the
air of the
kitchen.

II

This breath hasn't touched
the movies
in ten months, a
Year.

You always feel seen by the
people, looking back at
The people, who have paid to see
lives they can't live themselves.
This is where children can dream, and be
exciting things.
I know I dreamed of Spiderman.

III

This breath tastes like
death,
there are only
so few left.

The chest rattles
rolling pins
inside a
kitchen drawer.

There is urine in the air and
bleach lying on the floor.

The mouth gapes open
and breathes

one,
two,
three,
more?

This one ain't breathing too much
anymore.

IV

This breath smells like
pussy and grapes,
from that picnic we had on the
beach.

Skin against
teeth against
lips against
skin,
and finally,
back to the
skin.

The wind was so
sharp on my
cavities that I almost forgot to
smile, and drove straight
from the sand into
the sea.



V

This breath is Egyptian
air blowing
hard through the desert to the
sun.

The buses have blown
by the side of the road, and the poor
girl is overheating.

There is no shade by Egyptian
roads, only goats and
sand,

goats and sand,
and today a young woman
with a man, and she
will not believe him when he says
they won't die
of thirst and exposure.

There is nothing of pine trees
to prepare you for
Pyramids.

SOLACE IN THE SACRED CLOTH.

■ Isaac Goosay

White ribbons float hypnotically on a gentle breeze; each sheet is so supple, so fragile and yet so dependable. He tries to reach out, to wind some lengths of the precious tissue around his hand like he once did. Like he did before the world went mad.

SMAASSHHH

Lenny woke with a start and was showered with shards of glass. He jumped to his feet, bare back sticking to the leather couch, and stumbled to the shattered window.

‘PISS OFF YOU LOOTING BASTARDS!’

The group of teenagers fled in different directions, amidst blaring car horns and angry mobs, disappearing into the chaos of the streets. Lenny, hands trembling, picked up the brick missile. He felt like he looked, disheveled, his bedraggled black locks hanging unkempt like the weeds that grew through the city’s median strips. His pale blue

eyes were red rimmed and swollen from lack of sleep after a long night-shift driving the garbage truck.

A frenzied knock bashed against Lenny's front door and he clunked back the bolts to reveal his best mate Frank. 'The city's gone mad!' Frank shrieked through a COVID mask that sat crooked on his beard. He yanked Lenny closer to his big frame and eyeballed him frantically.

'You're telling me,' Lenny stuttered, nodding at his demolished window.

'We gotta get outta here mate. You know what I'm getting at - we need to head west.' For a long while, the two had dreamt of leaving the volatile city: a place where neighbours turned on neighbours, businesses crumbled and unemployment rates had skyrocketed. Frank's Aunt Margie lived on the west coast and according to Frank was willing to house them. 'C'mon Lenny, look at this shitbox you live in,' he said, snorting in disdain as he ran his gaze over the tiny space. 'It's less hygienic than a COVID testing clinic. You've got nothing to stay for except a dead end job.'

'That's more than most,' Lenny retorted nervously. 'At least I'm not sleeping under the overpass eating rats with the masses!'

Seeing the hesitation on his friend's face Frank added, 'Aunt Marg reckons she has toilet paper stockpiled.'

They packed Lenny's sun-worn Ford Falcon, nicknamed Carol after the librarian from whom he bought it, and sped towards the market. She screeched past riot squads and

flaming car wrecks like her namesake between bookshelves.

The market swarmed with desperate bodies and a large mob waited in the loading bay to raid the produce trucks. Lenny pushed to the front and was amongst the first to vault inside a *TLogistics* semi once the trembling driver unlatched the door and dove for cover. He managed to get his hands to on a few bundles of toilet paper before being tackled to the ground. The writhing weight on his back threatened to crush him until the butt of a walking stick descended to pull him from the tangle of limbs. With a wicked grin the old lady at the other end rapped him sharply on the forehead, snatched the rolls, and shuffled away. 'Hehe', she cackled under her COVID mask, 'Bad luck, loser!'

Frank had not fared much better and together they had amassed some measly food stocks. The fruit and vegetables sported bruises to match the lump on Lenny's forehead.

'This won't last a day,' Lenny groaned, as he sanitized his arms.

'Think skinny,' Frank winked. 'Aunt Marg will stuff you full of her famous wild peach pie and then you'll be groaning!'

Barren plains hollowed by salt basins grew into rocky outcrops and ranges of stony hills teeming with wind turbines and zig zagging fences. Eventually, the broken pastoral land gave way to an endless sea of saltbush and mallee scrub, - too dry for most inhabitants bar kangaroos and reptiles. Lenny, enchanted by the emptiness, glued his eyes to the window.

Carol clunked and shuddered as the bitumen deteriorated, then turned to dirt. They passed through a small, neat town of timber and stone where a family played cricket on the street. The parents smiled and their daughter waved as she chased them, laughing as she ran. The chimneys were in their rear view mirror when a strip of saluting cacti marked the end of their journey. The prickly guardians lined a corrugated driveway and pointed to a mud brick shack atop a shrubby hill.

A plump figure clad in thick leather, leaned against a cactus, impervious to the spikes. 'Boys,' she gushed, removing her straw hat to reveal a slick mane of grey hair. 'Ya finally made it. I'm Marg mate, bring it in,' she exclaimed, knocking back Lenny's handshake and pulling him into a warm hug. 'And take those silly COVID masks off. No need for social distancing out here!'

Inside, Margie offered them beer and a house tour. Floral artisan rugs radiated warmth from a corner fire-place which, combined with the sweet smoke of lemon flavoured incense, made Lenny drowsy. He shuffled sleepily behind Marg as she explained her abstract driftwood sculptures that hung haphazardly from the hall. Then, through a doorway of thick timber sleepers, a flicker of white halted him mid-stride. *Could it be?*

The tissue was three ply and patterned with leaves the colour of autumn. Fine workmanship indeed, he thought as he rubbed it against his cheek and felt the supple grains move smoothly over his skin. It smelt of sanitation, freshness

and - was that oak? Or perhaps maple?

'Lenny?' came Frank's concerned query.

'More like Tutenkhamen,' Margie giggled as she eyed the sheets draped over Lenny's shoulders and head. 'It's okay, son,' she cooed, immediately regretting her taunt. 'You and your bum are safe here.'

Past her motherly smile and through an iridescent window mural, he saw nothing but the empty desert and its sentinels - towering cacti. Lenny relaxed his grasp on the sacred cloth.

He believed her.



WE'LL FLY (SOMEDAY)

■ Sarah Herrmann

when we're tired
of feeling
the wind blow –
the socks are falling off,
brains are blanking out
and rooves are caving in
wind blow –
we've got to know:
we'll fly
(someday).

right now, it's
drowning us.
so, roam –
forwards,
backwards,
to inner space.
escape
and laugh always.
don't cry,
shrivel up and die.

go, with gusto,
rummage
and rip.
gather
and soothe
the mind (pretzeled).



patch the heart
(punctured).
release us
from the choking hold.

for healing
lacks
a sunny face,
a pretty place.
healing's feeling –
blood pumping,
comforting.
a reminder:
we were ok
and we will be again.

until it's back
climb
into the filing cabinet.
devour pen
filled with heart
and recognition.
see treasured past
on curling paper
in all its dusty,
rose-coloured glory.

and imagine
being entirely candid
like we were
when living
was just beginning.
seek sincerity
once again.
soak
in a warm,
frothy bath.

pure light
radiates
from good souls –
the teddy bear coach,
and jolliest gardener,
warrior woman and
soothing rocker;
dentist equals friend,
the teary dance judge too.
they are our change makers.

we're captivated
almost unconscious
by a sexy shadow
at the shiniest hour.
the rose garden
from the ageless pages

of a storybook.
laying on the sweet grass
with no mozzies,
no worries.

heaven's art museum:
enchancing stories
of companionship,
fight, and utter chaos.
flowing skirts.
painted canvases.
benny and the jets
in person and on piano.
an eargasmic melody,
nonsense lyrics.

tummies full:
bubbly tomatoes,
9pm buttered toast.
sugary drink burping,
mud cake mess.
a cheese stick
(or three)
in bed.
double bed.
fresh sheets too.

rejoice
in running
gentle fingers
through freshly cut hair.
trampoline jumping!
raucous cards among
reunited friends.
cinema silence.
an honest, crushing
hug.

we'll fly (someday).
there's an hour
to face it –
to be strong
and loud
and articulated.
but today
is not that day.
today is
for belief
and for bliss
and for breath.

SURVIVAL OF THE DISSOCIATIVE MIND.

Jess Weidenhofer

They say when you experience severe trauma, your mind splits. It puts every day life in one box and hides the moments you can't comprehend in another. So you can continue going through the motions of living, eating, socializing, and dreaming without interruption. But it's not a sustainable practice.

The more you live in the box of everyday, the trauma you've filed away grows restless. Agitated that it's not given the same respect; the same room to be seen and heard. To be unapologetically felt. Like a tumour it fattens over time, leaks toxicity into places it doesn't belong. It sours the everyday, until there is no more room to move.

Suddenly – unexpectedly – it explodes. Acid rains down on everything you held dear, and interrupts the cycle of what you can and can't handle. You are thrust into the wrong part of your brain, the part that was meant to remain

unseen, and you are forced to cope with the previously unsurvivable.

Even worse still – or perhaps better, depending on what side of the wall you reside – with long term repeated severe trauma, instead of arranging memories into boxes, the mind fractures into several parts of identity. It's no longer a matter of when you will get the opportunity to heal, but a matter of if you ever will.

One part of you grows up in ignorant bliss. Another part of you is constantly running away, like a stuffed bunny on a greyhound track, destined to barely escape the chomping maws of predators for as long as they live. And another part of you lives in a response of fight. Always alert. Fists at the ready; Ready to tear down anybody who gets close enough to administer pain. There can be any number of identities living between thick walls of dissociation. And you may never truly know how many parts exist. It's extreme compartmentalization – garnished with amnesia – for the long- term endurance of a vulnerable child.

1.3% of the world's population live like this. That's approximately 78 million people. It's as common as people with naturally red hair. Which means, if you've known a ginger, you've also known someone fractured into several identities living in the one body. However, they may not have known themselves. That's the game of dissociation. Uninterrupted unconsciousness.

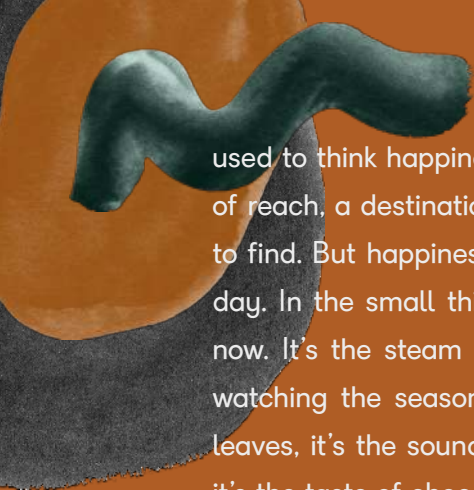
One fateful autumn night in 2018, our partner at the time interrupted the cycle of unknowing and introduced each

of us to our other parts of self. It took years to digest the news. It was like experiencing a deep loss – the loss of the person we thought we were and would become. A period of mourning for the selves who suffered through hell on Earth; for the child within who never grew older; for the one who had only ever known abandonment and isolation; for our inner caregiver who never knew a moment of rest. The seven stages of grief took hold of us in all its glory. The denial and disbelief. The guilt. The anger. The depression.

I'm glad to tell you we have learned to navigate this new normal. Achieved a state of acceptance and peace. It certainly wasn't easy. Parts of me have harmed this body we share, with razor blades, liquor, and heartbreak. I don't blame them. Coping is coping, no matter how unhealthy the means.

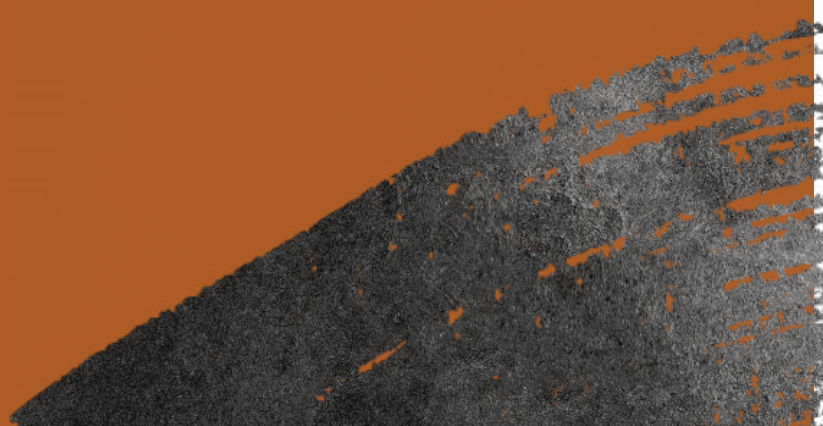
We made friends with the dark. Realised we were born from threats of broken noses, empty stomachs, and the kind of loneliness that etches itself into the core of your being. To rewire our brain to understand that our past doesn't dictate what we do or don't deserve out of life has taken every cell in our soul. When deep damage is all you've ever known, it's hopefulness and the wanting for more that is the most frightful. Taking a stand later in life, telling insecurity and unhealthy patterns to go fuck themselves arguably takes more strength than it ever did to withstand the trauma in the first place.

I am proud we are still here. No longer barely surviving, but thriving under the pressure of flashbacks and scars. I



used to think happiness was always something too far out of reach, a destination I didn't have the skills nor strength to find. But happiness, joy, love – it's peppered into every day. In the small things we take for granted. I know that now. It's the steam dancing above a morning coffee, it's watching the seasons change in the shades of vineyard leaves, it's the sound of water lapping at the river's edge, it's the taste of chocolate and strawberries. And if we ever again experience an everlasting darkness like the one we are born to weather, I'd now know that these moments of peace can never be taken away.

This life we share is messy and confusing and often hurts, but it is always in balance with beauty. I can't control what others do or say to us, but I can choose what to hold onto, and when to let go. My shoulders are forever bruised from taking on too much too young. I know my limits – they have been pushed to breaking point before. Now I have the voice of an adult, the experiences of several lifetimes, and an inner family always ready to fight for our right to safety. If I had to do this all again, I would. Being forced to have our mind fractured, split, wasn't fair. But now they are a part of me. And I love me. Absolutely.





THIS BREATH.

■ *Poppy Moyle-Read*

The sunlight was brighter than our futures the day we had
to face it

Hair up, head down, the teacher asked us to address it

Write a poem, write a story, how is the world going to
take it?

'Shut the borders' it seemed so simple, yet I was told

'Poppy that's racist'

The dancing butterflies in my stomach grew to bees

The hope that once lived inside me now a fragile seed


I know I can't touch yesterday, yet it still touches me

Yes, the sun will rise again, yet it feels all the same to me

Pray for my plans and remind myself whatever will be,
will be

Yet, when will the world go back to how it used to be?


At first, I missed running at Santos, I thought I'll get over
that



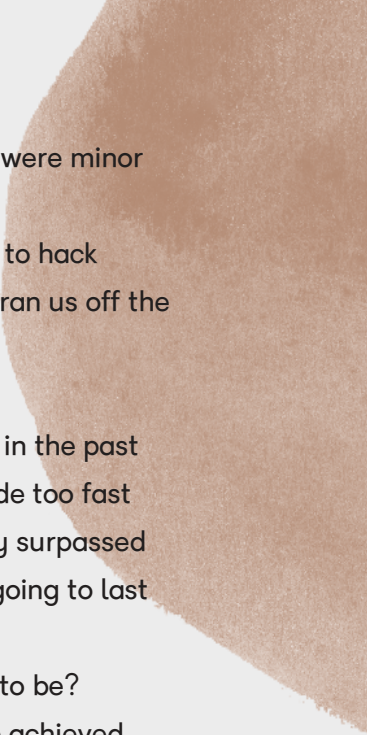
Lost a few more things here and there, they were minor
looking back

Year 10 camp was a blast that we never got to hack
Snow trip hit a tough bump in the road that ran us off the
track


As time moved on I couldn't stay paralysed in the past
Dwelling on opportunities that fell by wayside too fast
Adding it up, one missed chance was clearly surpassed
Yeah all's well that ends well, it's only ever going to last



When will the world go back to how it used to be?
I'm tired of seeing nothing for the things I've achieved
The prospect of it 'turning to dust' always sparks anxiety
And it's robbed my mum of so many precious memories
Chances she'll never get back, glances she'll never see
It's hard, so hard to have hope and continue to believe
That this world will one day be back to how it used to be



I know I haven't had it as hard as some, I'm grateful for
that
Doesn't mean I'm unaware of the things I'm never getting
back
I'm the type to see the glass half full, I'm afraid this one
has a crack
If there was doubt about youthful resilience, this should
put us on the map
5 days, only 5 days was the difference between



47.

One very happy girl and one with crushed dreams

It was never going to work out, that's what it seems

I got my hopes up to watch them fall far beneath

When will the world go back to how it used to be?

We never knew how good we had it, freedom is a blessing

If one good thing has come from disturbing our peace

It's that we've remembered what matters; love and family

Enjoy one thing at a time, gone are the days of certainty

Take a deep breath, you can breathe

When will the world go back to how it used to be?



